

## **Prototypical Fascism in Contemporary Dutch Politics**

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“Ur-Fascism is still around us, sometimes in plainclothes. ... Ur-Fascism can come back under the most innocent of disguises. Our duty is to uncover it and to point our finger at any of its new instances — every day, in every part of the world.”

Umberto Eco, *Ur-Fascism* (1995)

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## Introduction

“In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders and his Party for Freedom are the prototypes of contemporary fascism and as such they are nothing but the logical political consequence of a society which we are all responsible for. This contemporary fascism is once again the consequence of political parties that have renounced their own intellectual traditions, intellectuals who have cultivated a pleasure-seeking nihilism, universities not worthy of their description, the greed of the business world and a mass media which would rather be the people’s ventriloquist than a critical mirror. These are the corrupted elites who have cultivated the spiritual vacuum in which fascism can grow large again.”

Rob Riemen, *The Eternal Return of Fascism* (2010)

On the second morning of November 2010, all Dutch Ministers, Secretaries of State and Members of Parliament found a thin, blue booklet in their pigeon holes. *The Eternal Return of Fascism*, by Rob Riemen. Sixty-two pages, and generous margins — so nothing to lose any sleep over. Or was it? According to this thin, blue booklet, MP Geert Wilders and his Party For Freedom are “the prototypes of contemporary fascism.” Slightly disturbing, indeed. A populist, perhaps. But a fascist? In The Hague? In 2010?

In the June 2010 parliamentary elections, Geert Wilders’ Party For Freedom (the PVV) had won a little over fifteen percent of the votes, securing it twenty-four of the 150 seats in Parliament and making the PVV the third largest political party in the Dutch House of Representatives. No matter its size, the PVV didn’t enter government — the liberal VVD and the christian-democratic CDA, with respectively thirty-one and twenty-one seats in Parliament, formed a minority government instead. But a minority government needs a supporting party to deliver it a majority in the House. Therefore Wilders agreed to support the minority government on several points — on his conditions. *Gedooosteun*, as the Dutch call it. In other

words, the Dutch government relies on the support of a party which Riemen claims is the prototype of contemporary fascism (2010, p. 59).

Halfway through August 2011, Riemen repeated this claim in a public lecture at Lowlands Festival — one of the larger Dutch annual music festivals. His booklet and his lecture generated much discussion. Many disagreed with Riemen, but no one convincingly opposed his claims. Some disapproved of Riemen's choice of words, while most seemed confused and wondering what his words meant in the first place.

In this essay I want to provide clarity. What is fascism? And what is prototypical fascism? Is the PVV the prototype of contemporary fascism? Is it not? Or is it more? My method in answering these questions is simple and straightforward. Whether Geert Wilders is a prototypical fascist relies on what is meant by prototypical fascism. Therefore I focus on fascism in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 I examine whether Riemen is right in claiming that Wilders and his movement are the prototype of contemporary fascism. But before going into fascism, I discuss Rob Riemen's claims and his critics more elaborately in Chapter 1, to demonstrate on the one hand that the term 'fascism' needs clarification, and on the other that neither Riemen nor his critics argue convincingly.

Some preliminary remarks: I use the names 'Geert Wilders' and 'the PVV' interchangeably, since there's not much of a difference. Wilders has initiated the PVV after seceding from the liberal party, and he is its leader and only member. The PVV is *his* party — and he *is* the party.

A note on my citations: where no English translations of Dutch sources were available, I've provided them myself. The original Dutch sources are listed at the end of this paper. For my citations of Riemen's booklet *The Eternal Return of Fascism* I have used the unpublished English translation by Michele Hutchison, made available to me by Rob Riemen and the Nexus Institute. The page numbers that go with these citations do refer to the original Dutch edition.

This essay is written in the fall semester of 2011 as a bachelor's thesis for Liberal Arts and Sciences at Tilburg University in the Netherlands.

It is a thesis, meaning it presents a statement and supporting arguments. My thesis is that Geert Wilders and his movement are indeed the prototype of contemporary fascism, and more than that. But I want to stress as well that this is an essay — an attempt to clarify things to myself, as first essayist Michel de Montaigne put it. On top of that I believe that I should clarify things to my readers too, because none of what I put forward in this essay has to be as unclear to anyone as it has been so far. Last but not least: this essay was written under the careful supervision of Jan Jaap de Ruiter, for which I am grateful.

Let me confess, finally, that I have no fixed rule in the use of ‘I’ and ‘we’. I never liked the idea of ‘academic writing’ that excludes the first person singular, and have always preferred the idea of ‘clear writing’ instead. I use ‘I’ when a thought, action or argument is my own, and ‘we’ simply to drag my imaginary readers along.

In writing this essay I do not intend to pass a moral judgment. In the words of Italian philosopher Ernesto Bobbio, “I do not ask myself who is right and who is wrong, because I see no point in confusing a historical assessment with my personal opinions, although I make no secret of which side I feel closer to” (Bobbio, 1994, p. xxiv). It is the philosopher’s task to clarify things that are in need of clarification. That has been my intention in writing this essay.

## CHAPTER 1 — **The Eternal Return of Fascism?**

“[Rieux] knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.”

Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)

In this chapter I discuss Rob Riemen’s booklet *The Eternal Return of Fascism* (2010), his lecture *Why Have We Forgotten What Is Important In Life?* (2011) and reactions to both of them. After reading this chapter it will be clear that the term fascism needs to be clarified and that both Rob Riemen and his critics are unable to argue convincingly in favor of or against the claim that Wilders is a prototypical fascist.

### **1.1 Rob Riemen and The Nobility of Spirit**

Who is Rob Riemen? Born in 1962, Riemen studied theology at what is now Tilburg University in the Netherlands. In April 2011, after giving a lecture at Tilburg University, he told me and my fellow students that as a student he’d struck a deal with his dad: if Rob would pay his own tuition fees, his dad would pay for his books. Not a bad deal, since Riemen spent most of the ten years before graduating reading literature. After graduating in 1991, Riemen started a journal called Nexus. Nexus evolved from a journal into a prominent institute for philosophical debate, bringing “together the world’s foremost intellectuals, artists and politicians, and having them think and talk about the questions that really matter” since 1994 (Nexus Institute Website). Nexus organizes lectures, symposia and masterclasses, featuring prominent intellectuals such as the late Edward Said, Slavoj Žižek and most recently the librarian of Alexandria Ismail Serageldin.



Rob Riemen is a humanist. Man, he claims, should transcend his inner animal by engaging in high arts and culture. “[T]rue nobility is the nobility of spirit. The classics, the sciences, but beauty and form also, exist to ennoble the spirit, to allow human beings to discover their supreme dignity” (Riemen, 2008, p. xxx). Culture to Riemen means *cultura animi* — the cultivation of the soul: “Living in truth, doing what is right, creating beauty — only in these actions is man who he should be, only then will he be free. He who remains a slave to his desires, emotions, impulses, fears, prejudices and does not know how to use his intellect cannot be free” (2010, pp. 13-14). Today, those ideals are losing ground, and they have been for a while — leading, writes Riemen, to a return of fascism.

## **1.2 The Eternal Return of Fascism**

In the corpus of democracy, writes Riemen in *The Eternal Return of Fascism* (2010, p. 9), fascism is always virulently active. And, he adds, Dutch politician Geert Wilders and his movement the PVV are “the prototypes of contemporary fascism” (p. 59). How does Riemen get from A to B? How does he reach this conclusion based on that premise?

In the second chapter of his booklet, Riemen sketches the cultural history of Europe leading to World War II. He describes the mentality of a society in which fascism could emerge, and he claims that this mentality hasn’t changed since 1945. Hence the inevitable return of fascism.

What is this mentality that breeds fascism? According to Riemen it is the mentality of *the mass-man* in a crises-stricken mass society. Since the nineteenth century — Riemen doesn’t pinpoint the exact moment — European civilization has been in crisis. This crisis comprises nihilism and the loss of spiritual and intellectual values, and it has led to the emergence of the mass-man in mass society (p. 16). Who was the mass-man? It was a type of man not interested in cultivating himself, nor in the nobility of spirit. ‘What’s the point?’ the mass-man thought, ‘Why put in the effort?’ The mass-man was a lazy man, vain, spoiled, uncritical and irrational; a materialist and a conformist, and in “the rise of the mass-man ... is a direct threat to the values and ideals of liberal democracy and European

humanism, traditions in which the spiritual and moral development of the free individual form the basis of a free and open society” (p. 16).

In mass democracy, the mass-man was the measure of all things. ‘Elite’ therefore became a derogatory term. “The greatest rancour is directed towards anything difficult. Whatever cannot be immediately understood by all is difficult, therefore elitist, therefore anti-democratic” (p. 22). Hence the loss of spiritual values; of the Good, the Just, and the Beautiful — and in general of everything that the mass-man deemed too complex for the mass-man to understand. Equality, misunderstood, degenerated into material equality; freedom into the absolute license to follow one’s animal instincts. “It is a freedom which will always be violent,” claims Riemen, and it resulted in “a deep-seated *fear of freedom*, and the need to conform to the masses will become enormous — the masses who ultimately want nothing more than to blindly believe in and follow a charismatic leader” (p. 23). It was this mentality that brought forth early twentieth century fascism.

So far Riemen’s exposition on European history until World War II. It is the first premise — mentality  $x$  led to fascism — of his argument for the claim that there is a return of fascism in Europe. The second premise of this argument is that Europe hasn’t learned the lessons of twentieth century history and has therefore not altered its mentality. Hence the inevitable return of fascism, Riemen concludes.

Fascism — “the politicisation of the mentality of the rancorous mass-man” (p. 37) — did not disappear with the end of WWII. What does fascism mean to Riemen? “It is a form of politics,” Riemen elaborates:

used by demagogues whose only motive is the enforcement and extension of their own power, to which end they will exploit resentment, designate scapegoats, incite hatred, hide an intellectual vacuity beneath raucous slogans and insults, and elevate political opportunism into an art form with their populism.

Riemen continues his exposé on fascism later on (p. 58):

[T]here is a charismatic leader; he or she will be populist in order to sufficiently mobilize the masses; their own group are always victims (of crises, the elite or foreigners); and all resentment is directed towards an ‘enemy’. They have no need for a democratic party with members who are individually responsible; they need an inspiring and authoritative leader who is believed to have superior instincts (decisions don’t require supporting arguments), a faction leader who can be followed and obeyed by the masses. The context in which this form of politics can dominate is that of a crisis-tested mass-society which hasn’t learned the lessons of the twentieth century.

In the Netherlands, claims Riemen in chapter six, Geert Wilders embodies all these things and is therefore a prototypical fascist. How does Riemen arrive at this conclusion? Of course Riemen builds on the premises that mentality *x* led to fascism and that mentality *x* is still around, and on the tacit premise that his description of fascism is accurate — something which I examine in the next chapter. But the claim that Wilders and the PVV are the prototypes of contemporary fascism needs supporting evidence. Does Rob Riemen present such evidence? No, he does not. And therefore we cannot conclude that Wilders and his movement are the prototype of contemporary fascism based on Riemen’s booklet alone.

Then how does Riemen arrive at his conclusion? In chapter five, Riemen responds to ten theses which I believe are supposed to represent — believe, for it is not explicitly stated — the ideas of Geert Wilders. An example is: “*We are not fascists because we are a party for freedom!*” (p. 38). In response to this, Riemen refers to Thomas Mann who predicted that future fascisms will come under the disguise of freedom. In response to the supposed ‘Islamization’ of Europe, Riemen writes that Islam is not a threat to Europe — Europe is a threat to itself. In response to the claim that a pro-Israel stance is incommensurable with fascism, Riemen replies that “fascism is not by definition anti-Semitic. Rather, it can’t do without the delusion of the omnipresent ‘enemy’” (p. 43). But none of these responses contain any concrete evidence for his claim that Wilders is a fascist. It is only in response to Wilders’ claim to defend the Judaeo-Christian and humanistic traditions that Riemen provides something that can be regarded as evidence

— a “perverse example” — for his claim that Wilders and the PVV are the prototype of contemporary fascism (p. 45):

In the Netherlands, what the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, also PVV) actually offers is the shameless opposite of the Judaeo-Christian and humanist traditions: vulgar materialism, oppressive nationalism, xenophobia, ammunition for resentment, a deep aversion to the arts and the exercise of spiritual values, a suffocating spiritual bigotry, a fierce resistance to the European spirit, and continuous lies as politics.

The most perverse example of their mendacity is the following comment in the Dutch Party for Freedom’s political program. The following can be read in the chapter ‘Opting for our culture’, under the heading ‘Solutions’: ‘On May 4, we commemorate the victims of (National) Socialism. ...’

It really says that: (National) Socialism! Put the word (National) between brackets and the emphasis falls on... Socialism! Hitler was apparently a Socialist and so the victims we commemorate on May 4 are actually the victims of Socialism, of the ‘Left’ hated by the Party for Freedom. It is an indication of the PVV’s true character: put the truth in brackets, shamelessly twist facts, lie continuously.

This is the only concrete example Riemen offers: the PVV claims that German national socialism was a Left-wing movement. Is Wilders therefore the prototype of contemporary fascism? Riemen’s claim is insufficiently supported. This doesn’t mean that his claim doesn’t hold, but it does at least mean that his claim doesn’t hold based on his booklet alone.

### **1.3 Reception of Riemen’s Booklet**

“Wilders is absolutely not a fascist,” says historian and former liberal MP Arend Jan Boekestein. He and Rob Riemen discussed the issue on national television on the night of the publication of Riemen’s booklet (Nieuwsuur, 2010). Boekestein diametrically opposes both Riemen’s claim that the present circumstances are similar to those that gave rise to fascism in the twentieth century and his claim that Wilders is a prototypical fascist. He criticizes Riemen for misunderstanding fascism. On the one hand, he says, populism and charismatic leadership — present in the case of Geert Wilders — are not sufficient conditions for fascism. On the other hand, “praise of

violence, political dictatorship and racism” are necessary conditions of fascism, and “all of these I do not see in Wilders.” Boekestein does not develop an alternative account of fascism, but adds that “the discussion is not served by labeling Wilders fascistic.”

Eight days later Afshin Ellian, professor of law at Leiden University, responds similarly in *NRC Handelsblad*: “The parallels Riemen draws between Mussolini’s fascism and Wilders are incorrect” (Ellian, 2010). Like Boekestein, Ellian too accuses Riemen of misunderstanding fascism. Unlike Boekestein, Ellian gives an alternative account of fascism, be it a slightly disorganized one: Mussolini wanted corporations to deal with the economy, under his authority with no parliamentary control; fascism was violent from the start; like communism, national-socialism and islamism, fascism is a political ideology; fascism eradicated freedom of speech; and fascism is driven by an organized mass movement. None of this is the case for Wilders, concludes Ellian, and therefore Wilders isn’t a fascist.

The day after Ellian’s article was published, Elma Drayer, columnist for *Trouw*, mockingly points out that although Riemen admitted in *NRC Handelsblad* that defining fascism is complicated (Walters, 2010), he nevertheless concludes that Wilders is a fascist (Drayer, 2010). How can this be? she asks. Drayer too craves for a clearer description of fascism, which she says is missing in Riemen’s booklet.

Former Dutch Minister and European Commissioner Frits Bolkestein calls Riemen’s story “nonsense [which] demonstrates a misunderstanding of the origins of fascism” (Bolkestein, 2010). He offers an alternative account, and like Ellian’s it’s slightly chaotic too: “Fascism started as a cultural phenomenon. Its precursors were intellectuals ... It was an elitist movement based on a denial of universal values. Any child can see this is not the case for Wilders.” Although a child might see it, Bolkestein doesn’t provide the arguments necessary for his adult readers to see it too. He adds that Mussolini was supported by intellectuals and Wilders is not, and he claims that fascism was successful merely because people in the early twenties were bored to death and desperate for something exciting. “The circumstances are wholly different now,” he says. Like Boekestein,

Bolkestein too remarks that it's a *faux pas* to call someone a fascist. "It trivializes true fascism," he writes — whatever true fascism may be.

Boekestein, Ellian, Drayer and Bolkestein were not alone in responding to Riemen's booklet, but they illustrate a criticism shared widely: Riemen doesn't clearly define fascism. Curiously, neither do these critics — the occasional, chaotic description left aside. The emphasis is on fascism, and not on Wilders; and the question whether Wilders is a fascist remains unresolved. Hence this essay. The question now is: can we provide a clearer account of fascism? If we can: is Wilders a fascist? It is to these questions that I turn in the next chapters.

#### **1.4 The Lowlands University Lecture**

Why have we forgotten what is important in life? On the 19th of August 2011, Rob Riemen gives a lecture with that title at Lowlands Festival, one of the larger annual Dutch music festivals. He restates his claims from *The Eternal Return of Fascism*, sketches European history as the history of a decline of spiritual values and concludes that European civilization is in crisis and that fascism is returning in the form of Wilders (2011):

Wilders and his club are much more than mere populists. They are the prototype of contemporary fascism. Of course they will never admit this, they're not that stupid. And neither will they wear silly costumes or wave their arms. These things have little to do with fascism anyway. You recognize the spirit of fascism by their vision of society and their political strategy, comprising inter alia: a superficial materialism; an asphyxiating nationalism and xenophobia; a deep aversion of the arts and intellectual values, and therefore the will to destroy the bearers of culture; aversion of intellectuals, artists, and people who are different; politics of rancor, hate, and permanent lying; fierce resistance of the European spirit and the cosmopolitan Europe of a plurality of traditions and cultures; the anti-democratic mind: there is no internal party democracy and instead of entering serious debate and providing arguments they twitter cries, slogans and propaganda; the aversion of the judicial power. In their language you hear the desire for violence ... — you see it in their aggressive behavior ... Let's not be surprised that the poisonous plant of fascism is once again taking root.

Again, Riemen's message is clear, but his evidence is scarce. Tilburg University professor of finance Harrie Verbon also points this out in an online article. "The evidence that Wilders is a fascist is wafer-thin," he writes (2011). Verbon furthermore believes that the label 'fascist' is a *faux pas*: it is nothing more than a strategy to "corner your political opponent."

Columnist Nausicaa Marbe (2011) writes along the same lines as Verbon in *De Volkskrant*: "Riemen of course doesn't attack the PVV with facts" — meaning she believes there is a lack of factual evidence in Riemen's lecture. Disappointingly, Marbe employs facts nor arguments herself in her attacks on Rob Riemen. She makes one interesting observation, though: "The question has stranded in fascism-relativism. If everyone ... employs his own definition of fascism ... than serious debate is not possible." In other words: we should clarify what is meant by 'fascism'. Only based on a clear understanding of fascism can we scrutinize Wilders words and deeds for signs of fascism.

In this chapter, I provided an overview of Rob Riemen's claims that fascism is returning and that Geert Wilders and the PVV are the prototypes of contemporary fascism. If it was Riemen's goal to start a broad debate on Wilders and fascism — which I believe it was — he succeeded. But to make a stronger case for his claims, Riemen should have provided factual evidence, concrete examples of when and where Wilders acts in a prototypically fascistic manner — and this he hasn't. Neither have his critics: on their side there's a lack of understanding of fascism and a lack of arguments to really counter Riemen's claims.

In the next chapter I go into fascism. What is fascism? Only based on a clear understanding of fascism can we begin to look for evidence in favor of or against the claim that Geert Wilders and the PVV are the prototype of contemporary fascism.

## CHAPTER 2 — What is Fascism?

“Of all the unanswered questions of our time, perhaps the most important is: ‘What is Fascism?’ ... All one can do for the moment is to use the word with a certain amount of circumspection and not, as is usually done, degrade it to the level of a swearword.”

George Orwell, *What is Fascism?* (1944)

“Of all the unanswered questions of our time,” wrote George Orwell in 1944, “perhaps the most important is: What is Fascism?” Not a question to easily answer, for “even the major Fascist states differ from one another a good deal in structure and ideology.” Besides, the term was more often used to insult political opponents than to objectively categorize political movements. Fascism, Orwell thought, was “almost entirely meaningless ... yet underneath all this mess there does lie a kind of buried meaning.”

The question is: what is that buried meaning? Orwell regarded answering that question to exceed the scope of his column and wrote that “all one can do for the moment is to use the word with a certain amount of circumspection and not, as is usually done, degrade it to the level of a swearword.” We will not degrade it to the level of a swearword here. We have to dig up the “buried meaning” of fascism before we can assess whether Geert Wilders and his movement are the prototype of contemporary fascism. That’s what we’ll do now. Let’s dig.

### 2.1 Rob Riemen’s Fascism

But first: let us recapitulate. What was fascism according to Rob Riemen? His critics had one recurrent critique: that Riemen doesn’t define fascism or that he defines it poorly, and that without a clear definition we cannot say that Wilders is a prototypical fascist. That Riemen doesn’t define fascism is true. He doesn’t, because, as he says in an interview with *NRC Handelsblad* (Walters, 2010), “fascism is hard to define, because there’s no ideology behind it.” But he does clearly describe what he means by fascism. As



we've already read — but it's worth repeating — he describes fascism as (2010, p. 37) “the politicisation of the mentality of the rancorous mass-man ... It is a form of politics ...

... used by demagogues whose only motive is the enforcement and extension of their own power, to which end they will exploit resentment, designate scapegoats, incite hatred, hide an intellectual vacuity beneath raucous slogans and insults, and elevate political opportunism into an art form with their populism.

He added to this a list of fascist characteristics (2010, p. 58):

[T]here is a charismatic leader; he or she will be populist in order to sufficiently mobilize the masses; their own group are always victims (of crises, the elite or foreigners); and all resentment is directed towards an ‘enemy’. They have no need for a democratic party with members who are individually responsible; they need an inspiring and authoritative leader who is believed to have superior instincts (decisions don't require supporting arguments), a faction leader who can be followed and obeyed by the masses. The context in which this form of politics can dominate is that of a crisis-tested mass-society which hasn't learned the lessons of the twentieth century.

And in his 2011 Lowlands lecture he complemented this with:

... a superficial materialism; an asphyxiating nationalism and xenophobia; a deep aversion of the arts and intellectual values, and therefore the will to destroy the bearers of culture; aversion of intellectuals, artists, and people who are different; politics of rancor, hate, and permanent lying; fierce resistance of the European spirit and the cosmopolitan Europe of a plurality of traditions and cultures; the anti-democratic mind: there is no internal party democracy and instead of entering serious debate and providing arguments they twitter cries, slogans and propaganda; the aversion of the judicial power.

A sufficient description of fascism to establish whether someone is a fascist, I think — provided of course that there's enough evidence supporting such a statement, which we know by now is absent in Riemen's booklet. But is Riemen's description accurate? That's what we will examine here.

At least in his 2010 booklet, but also in his Tilburg University *Teach-In* lecture of 21 September 2011, Riemen refers primarily to Robert Paxton's book *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004). In this chapter I reread Paxton to find his answer to the most important yet unanswered question of Orwell's time — and of ours too, perhaps. Along the way I point out where Rob Riemen's and Rob Paxton's descriptions of fascism converge.

## 2.2 The Anatomy of Fascism

What is fascism? That's what Robert O. Paxton examines in his book *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2004). In rejection of a growing scholarly intuition that the label 'fascism' has no general meaning at all — an intuition preceded by Orwell in 1944 — Paxton sets out to rescue the term “from sloppy usage ... We need a generic term for what is a general phenomenon, indeed the most important political novelty of the twentieth century” (p. 21).

Rob Paxton — like Rob Riemen — doesn't start from definitions. Definitions are limited and limiting, he writes: “They frame a static picture of something that is better perceived in movement, and they portray as frozen statuary something that is better understood as a process” (pp. 14-15). Fascism “in movement” comprises a cycle of five stages (p. 23): the creation of movements; their rooting in the political system; their seizure of power; the exercise of power; and their eventual radicalization and decline.

In this chapter the emphasis is on the first three stages. Whether or not Wilders is a fascist, he and his movement are not past Stage Three. The PVV has firmly rooted in the political system — it is the third largest political party in the Netherlands — and it has seized a significant amount of power by means of the *gedoogconstructie* (see introduction). Therefore it shouldn't be ruled out that his movement is a fascist movement in Stage Three. I examine that in the next chapter.

First I discuss Paxton's ideas on fascism and on the possibility of a return of fascism. I focus on the general political strategy and therefore put aside many historical details. The stories you can find Paxton's book, which I highly recommend. I do not refer much to Mussolini and Hitler, because although these two are prime examples of fascist parties taking root, seizing

power, exercising power and eventually radicalizing and declining, any political discussion easily derails by referring to this abominable couple. We should not forget that Hitler and Mussolini's fascisms were highly exceptional cases of fascism. Most fascist movements didn't get past the first stage. Only two got past the third. Only one did "approach the outer horizons of radicalization" (p. 23). Being a fascist is not the same as being Hitler or Mussolini. Calling someone a fascist is not the same as calling someone a twentieth century Hitler or Mussolini. That mistake is easily and often made, and it generates much unnecessary resistance against the use of the term 'fascism' in contemporary political debate. Though we must also not forget that those fascist parties that eventually did exercise power and turned into fascist regimes, started out as small movements, movements which were regarded as mostly harmless at the time, at least harmless enough for the establishment to enter into coalition with them, thereby legitimizing fascist rhetoric, actions and attitude, and creating an opening for the fascists to seize and exercise power. Fascist movements *can* become fascist regimes, we should remember that. Studying fascism therefore is somewhat like taking out an insurance: "we stand a much better chance of responding wisely ... if we understand how fascism succeeded in the past" (Paxton, 2004, p. 220).

### **2.3 Stage One: The Creation of Fascist Movements**

The era of fascism began where that of World War I ended. After the Great War, European states were in economic and political crises and there was little trust that the established elite would solve them. This offered an opportunity for a new political movement to cultivate the discontent spread widely over Europe — to exploit the resentment, in Riemen's words. It was fascism that did so.

The name 'fascism' comes from its Italian franchise. In 1919, a thirty-five year old Benito Mussolini coined the term *fascismo* as a name for his band of rancorous Italians. It is derived from the Latin *fascēs*, which is an axe tied to a bundle of rods, signifying strength through unity. His contemporaries copied the name for their own movements, or they were

labeled as such in retrospect. Hence the general use of the term ‘fascism’. But what is the common denominator?

The fascist formula promised to restore order to the continent — but so did most political movements. Fascists distinguished themselves by their methods: they would solve the crisis by “getting rid of the alien and the impure. ... Master races, united and self-confident, [would] prevail,” the credo ran, “while the divided, mongrelized, and irresolute peoples would become their handmaidens” (Paxton, 2004, p. 32).

Driven by “aggressive nationalism and racism” fascists divided the world along Manichean lines: they imagined a distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between good and bad — between those people that *belonged* to the nation and on its territory and those that didn’t, such as “foreign states ... ethnic minorities ... political and cultural subversives ... carriers of disease, the unclean, and the hereditary ill, insane, or criminal” (p. 36). “Asphyxiating nationalism and xenophobia,” as Riemen called these drives in his Lowlands lecture. Furthermore, writes Paxton, fascist propaganda proclaimed that the “internationalist, socialist Left was the enemy and the liberals were the enemies’ accomplices” (p. 19).

Fascism was “an affair more of the gut than of the brain” (p. 42). In times of crisis, rancor and uncertainty, fascists cultivated a politics of fear. Fascist propaganda spread the apocalyptic idea that the community was collapsing because of decadence and individualism from the inside and because of enemy threats from the outside. “Raucous insults and slogans,” as Riemen puts it (2010, p. 37). Thereafter the fascists promised to solve all these problems by radical but necessary means. It was “Fear Inc.” as Dan Gardner calls it in a recent book on the science and politics of fear: “the marketing of fear for political advantage” (Gardner, 2008, p. 166).

The European twenties were emotional times — and these times created fascist movements. It is of great importance to look at what Paxton dubs the “set of mobilizing passions that shape fascist action” (p. 40). The most important of these passions — we’ve seen them already but it doesn’t hurt to repeat them — are (p. 41):

... a passionate nationalism [and] a conspirational and Manichean view of history as a battle between the good and evil camps, between the pure and the corrupt, in which one's own community has been the victim ... In this Darwinian narrative, the chosen people have been weakened by political parties, social classes, unassimilable minorities, spoiled rentiers, and rationalist thinkers who lack the necessary sense of community.

In simple words: we good and pure, them bad and corrupt, and we victim of them. "Their own group are always victims (of crises, the elite or foreigners); and all resentment is directed towards an enemy" as Riemen puts it (2010, p. 58). But other passions were important too. Paxton calls these the "emotional lava which set fascism's foundations" (p. 41):

1. A sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of traditional solutions.
2. The primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it.
3. The belief that one's group is victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external.
4. Dread of the group's decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences.
5. The need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary.
6. The need for authority by natural leaders (always male), culminating in a national chief who alone is capable of incarnating the group's destiny.
7. The superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason.
8. The beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success.
9. The right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.

These passions paint the following picture: an imagined collectivity — 'we' or 'our group' — believes it is in crisis. This crisis is blamed on another imagined collectivity, or several — a 'them' or 'they' or the 'enemies'. The 'we' should win this battle, for it is a superior collectivity. The 'enemies' must and will be overcome. 'They' must be eliminated. 'We' have a

charismatic and superior leader, who must be trusted, because trust keeps us together. ‘We’ shall overcome. Paxton’s description is accurately reflected in Rob Riemen’s description of fascism (2010, p. 58).

Many of these passions are “as old as Cain” (Paxton, 2004, p. 41). What sharpened them? Besides the economic and political crises in the aftermath of World War I, there were more long-term preconditions (p. 42). One of them was a mass democracy with ever wider suffrage — what Riemen calls the appearance of the mass-man in mass society (2010, p. 16). Fascism knew how to work a crowd and could appeal to the mass-man — the establishment didn’t. A second long-term precondition was a weakened Left. Socialism could also mobilize the masses, but it had already disillusioned the electorate, on the one hand by having had a share in pre-war government, and on the other by the Russian Revolution of October 1917 which many feared would spread westward (Paxton, 2004, p. 44). Socialism was compromised, opening the way for a fascist flowering. But “one of the most important preconditions was a faltering liberal order. Fascisms grew from back rooms to the public arena most easily where the existing government functioned badly, or not at all” (p. 77).

Fascism cannot be defined by any philosophical underpinnings — what Riemen calls the “intellectual vacuity” (2010, p. 37). It was an emotional force, not a rational doctrine (Paxton, 2004, p. 16). This transformed politics into aesthetics. Fascist leaders appealed not to reason but to emotion, “by the use of ritual, carefully stage-managed ceremonies, and intensely charged rhetoric” (*Ibid.*). Intellectual political debate was avoided, if not eradicated. There was no political program, and that wasn’t a secret. Some fascist leaders declared themselves to be the program of fascism. Others said they refused “ever to step before this *Volk* and make cheap promises” (p. 17).

Let’s sum this up. In the aftermath of World War I, crises stricken mass democracies of rancorous citizens generated fascist movements. Driven by nationalism, racism, and other mobilizing passions and emotions, fascists divided the world between a good and pure ‘us’ and a bad and corrupt

‘them’ and proposed to solve all problems by purifying itself and getting rid of the latter. Fascists declared the Left as its enemy. Lacking philosophical underpinnings, fascists avoided if not eradicated intellectual political debate, and turned politics into aesthetics.

#### **2.4 Stage Two: Fascist Movements Taking Root**

In the Interbellum, almost every mass democracy on earth generated some movement akin to fascism (p. 55). Not many persisted. The few that did, did so where liberal institutions failed badly (p. 63, 77, 81). But persisting as a political player didn’t happen by itself.

How did twentieth century fascist movements take root? By building alliances with the establishment, even if that meant compromising their own principles. Not only did such alliances bring fascist into the sphere of power, but they furthermore legitimated fascist nationalism, racism and anti-Leftism. The message that the establishment communicated by allying to fascist movements was: fascism is acceptable, we can work together. And so fascism took root.

Fascists had most success in mass democracies where the established elite had no idea how to appeal to the masses — and could therefore benefit greatly from an alliance to fascism. The pre-fascist elite was used to rely on “social prestige and deference to keep them elected” (p. 78) and had little idea how to deal with mass suffrage. Fascists knew how to work a crowd (pp. 78-79):

... through exciting political spectacle and clever publicity techniques; ways to discipline that crowd through paramilitary organization and charismatic leadership; and the replacement of chancy elections by yes-no plebiscites. Whereas citizens in a parliamentary democracy voted to choose a few fellow citizens to serve as their representatives, fascists expressed their citizenship directly in ceremonies of mass assent. The propagandistic manipulation of public opinion replaced debate about complicated issues among a small group of legislators who (according to liberal ideals) were supposed to be better informed than the mass of the citizenry.

Fascist leaders “managed to promise something for everyone ... targeting different occupations with tailor-made appeals, paying little heed if one contradicted another” (p. 66). These are the “lies” that Riemen refers to (2010, p. 38; 2011).

It is also important to look at the role of violence in the rooting of fascist movements. Not all fascisms were overtly violent, but fascisms which succeeded did so partly because their followers, mostly war-veterans, initiated their own paramilitary regiments. Their violence “was neither random nor indiscriminate. It carried a well-calculated set of coded messages: ... that only the fascists were tough enough to save the nation from antinational terrorists” (Paxton, 2004, p. 84). Imagined enemies were met with violence and doubters were scared into conformity. “The legitimation of violence against a demonized internal enemy brings us close to the heart of fascism,” says Paxton (*Ibid.*).

A last notable characteristic of fascist movements taking root was the construction of parallel structures (p. 85). Once rooted, many fascist parties set up “organizations that replicate government agencies ... parallel structures challeng[ing] the liberal state by claiming that they were capable of doing some things better ... After achieving power, the party could substitute its parallel structures for those of the state.” An important parallel organization was the party police, challenging “the state’s monopoly of physical force.”

Recapitulating: fascist movements took root only in alliance with the establishment. The establishment benefited from fascism’s appeal to the masses, but by doing so legitimized its nationalism, racism, anti-Leftism and violence. Rooting fascist movements were often violent, and once rooted they created parallel structures, challenging the establishment and preparing for a take-over of power.

### **2.5 Stage Three: Fascist Movements Seizing Power**

It was in no way necessary that a fascist party, once it had taken root, would seize power. That happened rarely. Where fascists did seize power, it was



never — as is sometimes believed — by a majority of the votes, nor by an insurrectionary coup d'état. It happened only on invitation by “a head of state in legitimate exercise of his official functions, on the advice of civilian and military counselors ... through cooperation with conservative elites ... [under conditions of] extreme crisis, which the fascists had abetted” (pp. 96-97). Fascists could only seize power where the alternatives — coalition with the Left and opposition by violent fascists — were less appealing or to the establishment and therefore consciously rejected.

Fascism had much to offer the struggling establishment, or so it was believed at the time. It offered “a mass following”, “fresh young faces”, “commitment and discipline in an era when conservatives feared dissolution of the social bond”, and a “nonsocialist force that could restore order” (pp. 102-103). All together, fascist movements offered “a new recipe for governing with popular support but without any sharing of power with the Left, and without any threat to conservative social and economic privileges and political dominance” (p. 104).

Fascism couldn't have seized power without the crises of World War I and the Great Depression. Economies were broken, nations defeated, the “militant Left was growing rapidly and threatening to be the chief beneficiary of the crisis” and conservatives were unable to appeal to the masses without the help of the fascist populists (p. 105). This offered fascism the fertile ground to take root in. Paxton emphasizes the importance of political deadlock for fascism to seize power (p. 106): “no fascist movement is likely to reach office without it.”

In sum, fascist movements rarely seized power. Where they did, they did so on invitation of a head of state under conditions of extreme crisis and with unappealing or no alternatives. Fascism offered an establishment in deadlock a new recipe for governing without the Left.

## **2.6 Stages Four & Five: Exercising Power and Radicalization**

Fascist movements rarely reached Stages Four and Five: those of exercising power and radicalization. That happened only in Germany and in Italy. If

there's any evidence that the PVV is "the prototype of contemporary fascism", then that doesn't mean that the PVV is like the fascist dictatorial regimes in those countries in the Interbellum. There's a difference between fascist movements and fascist regimes, and the PVV is not exercising power. Maybe it will in the future, but for now it is not. I therefore leave these stages out of the current discussion.

Rob Riemen too acknowledges that fascism develops in stages. Riemen compares fascism to a venomous plant (2010, p. 55). If such a plant takes root, it will take a while for it to fully develop its venomous glands. "We are only at the beginning of contemporary fascism and should not compare it to the end of twentieth-century fascism, but with its start." In Paxton's terms: we are only at an early stage of fascist development and should not compare it to a later stage. Riemen's critics seem to have missed this point, when claiming that Wilders is not like Mussolini and that therefore Riemen is wrong and Wilders is not a fascist — which is an unsound argument, as we know by now.

## **2.7 What is Fascism?**

Paxton prefers to present fascism in movement over "straightjacketing" it into a definition (p. 206). The emphasis is on its movement, not on an all-encompassing definition. He nevertheless proposes a definition in his conclusion to "give fascism a usable short handle" (p. 218). What is fascism? Paxton defines fascism as (*Ibid.*):

... a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

This form of political behavior is rooted in an “emotional lava” of “mobilizing passions” which Paxton mentioned earlier on in his book, but repeats in his conclusion to emphasize their importance (pp. 41, 218).

## **2.8 The Eternal Return of Fascism?**

Can there be a return of fascism? Yes, says Paxton (p. 220): “Fascism according to this definition, as well as behavior in keeping with these feelings, is still visible today. Fascism exists at the level of Stage One within all democratic countries. ... Something very close to classical fascism has reached Stage Two in a few deeply troubled societies.” Does fascism at the level of Stage One — a prototypical fascism — exist in the Netherlands? And is the Netherlands perhaps such a deeply troubled society that a prototypical fascism has reached Stage Two? Or Stage Three? That is what we will examine in the following chapter with regards to the PVV.

Before we do so, we might find it instructive to look at Paxton’s notes on the possibility of a fascist revival in the twenty-first century. Paxton writes that we should not expect a future fascism “to resemble classical fascism perfectly in its outward signs and symbols” (p. 174). New fascisms will adapt to their own time and place. He adds that new fascist movements will not label themselves as ‘fascists’, because “an inverse relationship exists between an overtly fascist ‘look’ and succeeding at the ballot box” (p. 184). Riemen says so too in his 2011 Lowlands lecture: “[Wilders and his movement] are the prototype of contemporary fascism. Of course they will never admit this, they’re not that stupid. And neither will they wear silly costumes or wave their arms. These things have little to do with fascism anyway.”

Nevertheless, new fascist movements produce “echoes of classical fascist themes: fear of decadence and decline; assertion of national and cultural identity; a threat by unassimilable foreigners to national identity and good social order; and the need for greater authority to deal with these problems” (pp. 185-186). What is missing however in most contemporary radical Right movements “is a fundamental attack on democratic constitutions and the rule of law ... At most they advocate a stronger

executive, less inhibited forces of order, and the replacement of stale traditional parties with a fresh, pure national movement” (p. 186). What’s missing too is a proposal for “national expansionism by war” (*Ibid.*). And an even greater contrast with the early twentieth century is that circumstances are wholly different. Mass democracy is “no longer taking its shaky first steps” and “Bolshevism poses not even the ghost of a threat” (pp. 187-188).

What does all of this mean? Once again: future fascisms will not resemble classical fascisms in outward appearance; future fascism will present itself as moderate and will certainly not label itself ‘fascist’; and although some classical themes will be missing from their rhetoric, most won’t. Paxton concludes that “the circumstances are so vastly different in postwar Europe that no significant opening exists for parties overtly affiliated with classical fascism” (p. 188). But that doesn’t mean that fascism is gone — it means that contemporary fascism will come in disguise. Can it be that it comes in the disguise of freedom?

## CHAPTER 3 — Is Geert Wilders a Prototypical Fascist?

“The choice before us ... is a simple one: further down the multicultural abyss or the recovery of our traditional norms and values. Choosing for safety or choosing for even more criminality. Choosing for Islam or choosing for the Netherlands. Choosing for *our* flag or for the flag of the multicultural EU-utopia. Choosing for more of the same or choosing for hope and optimism. This is a time to choose. The PVV has chosen.”

Geert Wilders, *The Agenda of Hope and Optimism* (2010)

“Instead of really analyzing what I say, people throw around terms like fascism, xenophobia or racism.”

Geert Wilders, *Interview with Geert Wilders* (2007)

In this chapter I examine — by “really analyzing” what he says — whether Geert Wilders and the PVV are indeed “the prototype of contemporary fascism” as Rob Riemen claims, or even more than that.

### 3.1 Paxton’s Stage One & Riemen’s Prototype

Rob Riemen claims that Geert Wilders and his movement are the prototype of contemporary fascism. What is a prototype? A prototype is “a first or preliminary model of something” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Preliminary means that a prototype precedes “something fuller or more important” (*Ibid.*). Therefore the phrase ‘the prototype of contemporary fascism’ means ‘the first or preliminary model of contemporary fascism’. There is a correspondence here between Riemen’s notion of “prototype” and Paxton’s notion of “Stage One”. Stage One is the stage in which the first model of the fascist movement is created and in many historical cases this model has preceded something fuller and more important — i.e. fascist movements in further stages. In other words: fascist movements in Stage One are prototypes of fascism. Therefore, in order to answer the question

whether the PVV is the prototype of contemporary fascism, we can examine whether the PVV is a fascist movement in Stage One.

In doing so, we should remember that Paxton writes that “fascism exists at the level of Stage One within all democratic countries” (p. 220) and that therefore we shouldn’t be hesitant — as some of Riemen’s critics are — to employ the term ‘fascism’ regarding contemporary politics. Prototypical fascist movements are not identical to fascist dictatorships. Fascism in Stage One is different from fascism in Stage Four and Five. Being a prototypical fascist is not the same as being Hitler or Mussolini.

Is the PVV a fascistic movement in Stage One? If the PVV is the prototype of contemporary fascism, the PVV should correspond to the following description, based on Paxton’s description of Stage One of fascism: Driven by nationalism and racism, and several other mobilizing passions, the PVV divides the world along Manichean lines: it is ‘us’ versus ‘them’. The PVV warns that the Netherlands and the West at large are collapsing because of enemy threats: ‘we’ will collapse because of ‘them’. It promises to solve this crisis by exclusionary policies against the “alien and the impure” (Paxton, 2004, p. 32), of which ‘we’ are a victim. The PVV sees the “internationalist, socialist Left as the enemy and the liberals as the enemies’ accomplice” (p. 19). The PVV is a party more of the gut than of the brain and it has no philosophical underpinnings (pp. 16, 42). By lack of rational arguments and by avoiding intellectual political debate, it transforms politics into aesthetics.

It is my thesis that this description is accurate, and therefore that the PVV is a fascist movement in Stage One. As such, the PVV is the prototype of contemporary fascism. I will demonstrate this in three parts. Firstly I focus on the PVV’s idea that ‘we’ are collapsing because of ‘them’ and on the exclusionary policies that the PVV proposes to battle this threat. Secondly I discuss the PVV’s anti-Leftism. And thirdly I demonstrate that the PVV is a party more of the gut than of the brain, that it avoids intellectual political debate and that it transforms politics into aesthetics. Along the way I refer to the “mobilizing passions” that according to Paxton form “the emotional lava which sets fascism’s foundations” (p. 41).

### 3.2 The PVV's Nationalism, Racism, and Exclusion

Driven by nationalism and racism, the PVV divides the world along Manichean lines: it is 'us' versus 'them'. According to Wilders, the Netherlands, but also Europe and the West in general, are threatened by Islam. We are losing 'our' country to Muslims, he claims. The PVV promises to solve this 'problem' with exclusionary policies towards Islam and therefore towards Muslims.

In *Choose For Freedom* (2005), Geert Wilders tells the story of his break with the liberal party in 2004, and of the foundation of his new parliamentary one-man-group 'Group Wilders' in that same year. He received several death threats in October of that year — “with pictures of me and with Arabic songs” (p. 43). Following the murder of Dutch film director and Islam basher Theo van Gogh by Dutch-Moroccan Islamist Mohammed Bouyeri on 2 November 2004, Wilders receives the highest level of security from the DKDB, the Dutch agency for royal and diplomatic security. Wilders categorizes Bouyeri's crime as an act of Muslim terrorism and wonders whether “the naive Netherlands will wake up when it comes to the fascistic excesses of Islam, a religion intrinsically incommensurable with democracy” (p. 44). Islam is incommensurable with democracy, Wilders claims, and because the Netherlands and the West are democratic, he implies that Islam is incommensurable with the Netherlands and with the West. This sums up the bulk of Wilders' ideas.

Wilders wants to return the Netherlands into a country “to be proud of, with its own values and norms” (p. 59). His nationalism is evident here — taking pride in your country and the idea of owning norms and values being nationalist ideas. Wilders writes that “the problems in the Netherlands are too big to be silent about” (p. 62). All these “problems” have something to do with Muslim immigrants: that “Mohammed Bouyeri is seen as a big hero at schools in the big cities”, that “Moroccans in group 3 [in primary schools] write ‘Fuck you Holland’”, and that “neighborhoods are increasingly more segregated and that black neighborhoods are increasingly growing” (*Ibid.*). Even if these things are the case, the fact that

Wilders lists only problems related to Islam, Morocco and immigration as problems “too big to be silent about” exemplifies his aversion of Moroccans in particular and Islam and immigrants in general.

In his chapter called *Islam, Terrorism and Security* — a juxtaposition suggesting a relation between the three — Wilders criticizes Islam in general and Dutch Muslims in particular (pp. 65-85). He begins with a rather empty statement: he puts forward the *possibility* of abusing the Qur’an for purposes unlawful in the Netherlands: “He who makes himself guilty of for instance antisemitism, suppression of women, marriage with an underaged girl, taking revenge to restore honor or killing an infidel can do this with reference to the Qur’an” (p. 65). It’s a soft statement: indeed, one *can* do all those things with reference to the Qur’an, but one is not obliged to do so — and one can do horrible things too with reference to the Bible or to Batman for that matter; or to Wilders himself, as in the case of Anders Breivik in Norway (De Ruiter, 2011, August 19). Wilders does not provide any numbers specifying how often the Qur’an is abused in this way and where, making it not only a soft statement but also an empty one.

Wilders claims that democracy and Islam are incommensurable — a claim falsified inter alia by democracy in Turkey — and adds that “the Netherlands should be protected against the import of Islamic culture, which will undermine our tolerance and democracy” (p. 66). It exemplifies Wilders Manichean world view: good, tolerant and democratic Holland versus bad, intolerant and undemocratic Islam. The proposal that “the Netherlands should be protected against the import of Islamic culture” is nothing less than a call for a nationalistic policy of exclusion. It reflects some of Paxton’s mobilizing passions: the primacy of the group, the belief that one’s group is a victim and the dread of the group’s decline under alien influences, in Wilders’ case the influence of Islam.

The exclusionary policy Wilders proposes for dealing with those Dutch Muslims threatening “our” Dutch liberal democratic state — “a small percentage of all muslims” according to Wilders — is “to arrest and detain them preventively and if possible to denaturalize them and to evict them” (p. 70). *Nota bene* that Wilders does not propose a similar treatment for non-



Muslim Dutch citizens under the same circumstances. He admits to be willing to offer up individual rights in order to protect the community: “I choose primarily for the protection of the citizen, of Dutch families, even when I — to attain this goal — must take away certain fundamental rights from people whose only goal is to wipe out our Rule of Law” (p. 70). It truly is us against them: “Arrest *them* before they wipe out *our* fundamental rights,” he adds (*Ibid.*; italics added) — which translates into ‘wipe out their fundamental rights before they wipe out our fundamental rights’. Again, we see Paxton’s mobilizing passions reflected: the primacy of the group, the subordination of individual rights to the group, the idea that the group is a victim and that the problem is beyond the reach of traditional solutions.

A much larger group — “between fifty thousand and hundred fifty thousand” (p. 68) — is that of Dutch Muslims “who have chosen for the concept of radical Islam. They have not yet chosen to use violence, but are sympathetic towards it” (p. 67). Wilders has hope for this group — he wants “to try to win them over for the Dutch society ... These people can be put on the right track by developing special programs for them” (p. 72). These “special programs” should lead this group “to endorse the foundations of our Rule of Law.” If we juxtapose this with his earlier statement that Islam is “intrinsicly incommensurable with democracy” (p. 44), then Wilders’ aim with these “special programs” can be taken to be that Dutch Muslims must dissociate themselves from Islam.

On top of his Manichean world view, Wilders proves to be a racist. “Everyone in the Netherlands that abides by the rules is welcome,” he writes (p. 72), “no matter what religion, race, or sexual preference.” We have already seen that this is not true, because in Wilders’ eyes Islam is “intrinsicly incommensurable with democracy” (p. 44). But we should look at the use of the word ‘race’ here. Although Wilders implies otherwise, race isn’t like religion or sexual preference. Religion and sexual preference vary from one human being to the other. But all humans belong to the same hominid subspecies *homo sapiens sapiens* — the human race. To imply that there are various human races is racist, and as Wilders does imply so here, we can conclude that he is a racist. But also if we use the word ‘race’ in its

common sense usage, as a “class or kind of people unified by shared interests, habits, or characteristics” (Merriam Webster Online) we can see that Wilders is a racist. He can say that “everyone in the Netherlands that abides by the rules is welcome, ... no matter what ... race”, but Muslims — certainly a group of people unified in shared interests, habits and characteristics — clearly aren’t.

Doesn’t Wilders nuance himself? Well, he seems to do so occasionally. He claims that because of poor public policy moderate Muslims are often tarred with the same brush as radical Muslims. He regrets that (p. 76). But he is not innocent of doing so himself. He sees Dutch Muslim radicalism as a problem first and foremost of the Dutch Muslim community, and not primarily of Dutch society as a whole. (Is there such a homogeneous and organized Muslim community in the Netherlands? I doubt it.) On two occasions Wilders emphasizes how important it is for the Dutch Muslim community to be “self-purifying” (p. 77 & 83) and he wants moderate Muslims “to grow more backbone” (p. 83) and to publicly dissociate themselves from radical Muslims. By saying that Muslim radicalism in the Netherlands is a problem of the Dutch Muslim community and by adding that the Dutch Muslim community is unable to “purify” itself because it lacks “backbone”, he implies that the Dutch Muslim community is itself a problem and thus he tars moderate and radical Muslims with at least a two very similar brushes, if not with one and the same. With regards to Wilders’ notion of “self-purifying”, remember also that fascists wanted to get rid of the “alien and the *impure*” (Paxton, 2004, p. 32; italics added).

So far we have encountered Wilders’ nationalism, his aversion of Islam and his Manichean world view. His tirade against Islam is continued in his chapter on Turkey and the EU (pp. 87-93). Somewhat tautologically Wilders sees no place for Turkey in Europe because he believes it is not a European country, not geographically and not culturally — but more importantly, because it is an Islamic country. “The EU shares values grounded in christendom, judaism and humanism. I want to maintain these European values and therefore I do not want an Islamic country to become a member of the EU” (p. 88). It’s ‘us’ versus ‘them’ again, but now in

European perspective. Using the metaphors of “a wolf in sheep’s clothing” (p. 88) and “a Trojan horse” (p. 89) to describe Islam, Wilders communicates his belief that Islam is out to conquer Europe, that Europe is under threat, and that the enemy is Islam.

To end this slightly long but necessary discussion of *Choose For Freedom*, a few citations from the final part of the book, where we find Wilders’ “declaration of independence” (pp. 103-132). This declaration again demonstrates Wilders’ nationalism and his Manichean world view. Wilders “loves the Netherlands” and is “proud of how *we* succeeded in building a free, prosperous and safe society.” He resists “the idea that *we* should adapt this society to values and norms of an Islamic culture incommensurable to *ours* ... *We* can shape history, take *our* destiny as a *people* in our *own hands*, and decide independently about the political, cultural and economic organization of *our own country*.” (p. 105; italics added). Again we see Paxton’s mobilizing passions reflected: the primacy of the group, the fear of the group’s decline under Islamic influence, the need for closer integration of a purer community, and a reference to the group’s destiny. “If international treaties hinder *us* in serving *our own interests*, we should change these treaties and cancel them if necessary” (p. 106; italics added). “This battle is about the future existence of the Netherlands as a recognized nation” (p. 107).

*Choose For Freedom* was published in 2005. Question: did Wilders’ views change over the year? Let’s take a look at his 2006 election pamphlet for the PVV (Wilders, 2006, August 25). “The Netherlands is a beautiful country,” it begins. “The Netherlands should become a strong and vivid country again ... proud of its own identity, unafraid to emphasize its own identity and willing to fight for its conservation ... A country tough on street crime and Islamic terrorism.” Answer: his views didn’t change. The patriotism and nationalism are evident: the Netherlands is “beautiful”, the Dutch should be proud of their “own identity” and willing to fight for its conservation. The pamphlet furthermore proposes to give national history and national identity a prominent place in all school curricula. On the one hand we see Paxton’s

passion of the primacy of the nation — *national* history deemed more important than general history — and on the other we see the dread of the group’s decline and the need for a closer integration of a purer community — why else stress the need for national history and identity?

Anti-immigration sentiments are present again: “The amount of aliens that yearly comes to our country is still excessively high. Demographic developments are worrisome: already the majority of young people in the big cities is of non-western origin.” *Nota bene*: Wilders does not say by what consequences these developments are worrisome — they are worrisome in themselves. It is not that immigrants *cause* a problem. They *are* a problem, and the Dutch are their victim. Besides: what are “non-western” immigrants in Wilders’ eyes? The West and Islam are two incommensurable camps. So “young people ... of non-western origin” can be read as “young Muslims”. (He could also mean young Asians, but since Wilders hardly ever says anything about Asian immigrants, I think we can read ‘non-Western’ here as ‘Islamic’. It conforms with the rest of his ideas, too.) Wilders proposes to publish governmental leaflets exclusively in Dutch, to suspend municipal voting rights for foreigners living in the Netherlands and to abolish the Schengen area. He furthermore proposes to “encourage voluntary remigration” which is a nice way to assert that he wants to help immigrants to leave the Netherlands.

More particularly, the pamphlet displays anti-Islamic sentiments. Under the heading “immigration stop / integration” Wilders proposes to ban burqas in particular from the public sphere and headscarfs from public functions. His idea of integration is assimilation. Under the heading “animal welfare” he proposes a tougher enforcement of the ban on ritual slaughter of animals — which by the way not only affects Muslims, but also Jews, who after reading Wilders I thought formed a fundamental part of the Dutch tradition. He emphasizes his zero-tolerance for *Islamic* terrorism, rather than for all forms of terrorism. He proposes to close the border to “non-western immigrants (Turks and Moroccans) for a period of five years” and to change the first article of the Dutch constitution from equal treatment of all and a ban on discrimination based on religion, to stating that the “christian/jewish/

humanistic culture should remain dominant in the Netherlands.” Let me repeat this: not only does Wilders want Islam to be excluded from equal treatment, he wants to fix their subservience in the constitution. He wants to degrade Muslims to second class citizens: Dutch culture, i.e. christian/jewish/humanistic culture, should dominate, and non-Dutch culture should submit. Wilders furthermore wants to stop the building of mosques and Islamic schools for at least the next five years and to enforce Dutch as the only language allowed to be spoken in mosques. Again, many of Paxton’s mobilizing passions are reflected in Wilders’ claims, but most strikingly is the last one Paxton mentions: the right of a chosen people — the Dutch in this case — to dominate others — Muslims — without restraint from any kind of human or divine law — the Dutch constitution or the universal declaration of human rights.

Four years later, and Wilders ideas hadn’t changed. In his *Agenda For Hope and Optimism: A Time to Choose. PVV 2010-2015* (2010), Wilders presents his program for the period mentioned in the document’s title. Again we find nationalism and anti-Islamism, proposals for exclusionary policies, and in general a Manichean view of the world.

His preface alone presents enough examples to drive the point home. “The Dutch are a people that has no equal,” Wilders writes (p. 5):

Our ancestors have transformed a swampy march into something of which the entire world is jealous. Here, behind the dikes, wealth and solidarity have been achieved unlike anywhere else, with freedom for all and with traditionally a tolerance of people who themselves were tolerant. ... For centuries our flag waved over all the seas and it was the symbol of freedom. Of a people that decided over its own destiny. But that was long ago.

Taking pride in your nation’s history is a nationalist sentiment. But soon there’ll be no reason for such pride anymore, if we believe Wilders:

Meanwhile many people feel that we are losing the Netherlands. District after district, street after street, school after school is being Islamized. Mass

immigration will reach a regrettable record this year and will only explode further in the years ahead. Criminality is thriving.

In other words: we are losing our country to Muslim immigrants, if we believe Wilders. Or in terms of Paxton's mobilizing passions: the Dutch national citizenry, direct descendants of the dike builders, have primacy over immigrants, are victimized by immigration, and dreaded to decline because of it. More particularly, Wilders claims that the Dutch welfare state is decaying because of Muslim "fortune seekers ... It has become a take away counter for lazy and idle Muslim immigrants." He adds that "Islam will not enrich our culture but will bring sharia-fatalism, jihad-terrorism and hatred of homosexuals and Jews" (p. 6). With regards to immigrants, Wilders asks: "What are they doing here anyway?" (p. 7). The choice he puts before his readers is: "either further down the multicultural abyss or recovery of our traditional norms and values. Choosing for security or for more criminality. Choosing for Islam or for the Netherlands" (*Ibid.*). It's Manichean all over: either abyss or recovery; either criminality or security; either Islam or Holland; either bad or good.

Under the heading "choosing to fight Islam and against mass-immigration" Wilders proposes a number of exclusionary policies (p. 13). Europe is turning into "Eurabia" because of Brussels, writes Wilders, and therefore the Netherlands should opt out of European immigration policy and close its borders. It should also exclude immigrants from social security for at least the next ten years. Turning the page, we see a page filling picture of balconies with satellite dishes, implicitly saying: this is where *they* live. Turning the page again, Wilders offers his solutions in bullet points — because apparently solving 'our problems' is that simple (p. 15): "Islam is primarily a political ideology and can therefore in no way claim the privileges of a religion / Not one more additional mosque / Close all Islamic schools / ... No more subsidies for Islamic media ... / ... Ban the burqa and the Qur'an, and tax headscarfs / Ban Qur'an courses in schools ... / Contracts of assimilation. Not signing or not complying = Leave the country / ... No employment = Leave the country / ... / And especially: a

complete immigration stop for persons from Islamic countries.” It is evident that all of these are exclusionary policies, and they are aimed at one group in particular: Muslims.

There’s more to say about his 2010 election program, but so far this proves the point that Geert Wilders and his PVV promote nationalism, racism and xenophobia, that they propose exclusionary policies, and that they divide the world between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between good, tolerant and democratic Holland versus bad, intolerant and undemocratic Islam.

This characterization of the PVV is confirmed by the work of another member of the PVV, Martin Bosma’s book *De Schijn-Élite van de Valse Munters* (2010) — which would translate into something like *The Fake Elite of the Counterfeiters*. Bosma is a close friend of Wilders, an MP for the PVV since 2006 and often regarded as the PVV’s party ideologue (see De Ruiter, 2011, May 11; Geurtsen & Geels, 2010, pp. 21, 51). The motto of his book is a citation of Isaiah 5:20: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (King James Version). We recognize the Manicheanism in this citation. Bosma divides the world along Manichean lines: christendom, monoculturalism and ‘the people’ are good, light and sweet, while Islam, multiculturalism, and the Left are bad, dark and bitter. (Ironically, as De Ruiter has pointed out (2012, to appear), Isaiah 5:21 says: “Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!” (King James Version).)

Bosma dreads a decline of the Netherlands under the influence of Islam. “Hopefully this story can contribute in preventing that the journey of Holland ends in Hollandistan,” he ends his preface (p. 12). Later he adds that the PVV will speak out “*against* Islam. *Against* the multicultural project. In favor of stopping immigration from Muslim countries” (p. 37). Bosma claims that Islam will bring nothing but “mutual mistrust, and certainly no multicultural enrichment” (p. 321). Freedom of speech is already compromised by Islam, he claims, because — referring to the murder of Van Gogh, a symbol for the PVV — “what you can say in the

Netherlands is no longer decided by democratically established law, but by consideration of whether by saying something you will risk being ritually slaughtered along a public road. That apparently is the price we have to pay for the multicultural adventure” (p. 130). Bosma says many things about Islam, none of them positive. Interesting examples are his claims that “an above average amount of immigrants has a mental deviation” (p. 165), that “Islam does not tolerate critical minds; every criticism is a criticism of Allah and that produces a health risk” (p. 173), that “Islam primarily aims for worldly goals, such as the introduction of sharia law and world dominance by everlasting war” (p. 178) and that “Islam abuses our freedoms to take root in the West” (p. 183). He ends a chapter on Islam by warning that “Islam is the green danger” (p. 181), which sums up his views: ‘our’ country is threatened and victimized by ‘them’.

I think I have provided sufficient grounds to demonstrate that the PVV, driven by nationalism and racism, divides the world along Manichean lines. The PVV claims that the Netherlands, but also Europe and the West, are under enemy threat, and the enemy is Islam. The PVV promises to solve this problem by exclusionary policies towards the “alien and the impure” of which ‘we’ have been a victim — e.g. by banning the Qur’an and by fixing the subservience of Islam in the constitution.

But there’s more to prototypical fascism than that. Besides the above, a prototypical fascist movement will see the Left as its enemy and will transform politics into aesthetics. It is to the PVV’s view of the Left that we turn first.

### **3.3 The PVV’s Anti-Leftism**

Fascist parties see the “internationalist, socialist Left as the enemy and the liberals as the enemies’ accomplice” (Paxton, 2004, p. 19). The PVV does so too. As Riemen pointed out, through Wilders’ eyes “Hitler proves to be a socialist and therefore the victims we commemorate on 4 May are the victims of socialism, of the ‘Left’ so hated by the PVV” (2010, p. 45). In general the PVV blames either the Left or a coalition between liberals and



the Left — using the shorthands ‘the Left-wing elite’ or simply ‘the elite’ — for what it sees as the main problems of Dutch society: mass-immigration, multiculturalism and Islam.

Before discussing the PVV’s ideas of the Left, we must make a short note to prevent confusion. It is not the case that any party opposing the Left is thereby immediately a fascist party. It is only natural that parties on the Right oppose the Left, and *vice versa* — hence the antithetical terms. The PVV, propagating neoliberalism, conservative nationalism and unequal treatment of Muslim minorities, finds itself on the right side of the political spectrum (Bienfait, 2010; Blommaert, 2011; Bobbio, 1994). Like other Right-wing parties, the PVV opposes the Left, and will present itself and its ideas more favorably than it will represent the Left. That is understandable — or at least acceptable. However, there’s a difference between opposing the Left based on rational ideas and arguments on the one hand and *a priori discrediting* the Left — as an enemy — on the other. Fascist movements did this in the Interbellum. The PVV does so today.

A phrase repeatedly used by Wilders and his colleagues to refer to the Left is ‘the Left-wing church’. In his recent book *The Re-Invention of Society* (2011), Jan Blommaert summarizes this idea of the Left-wing church as follows (p. 13):

For years, the Left-wing church has dominated the debate on multiculturalism; it has sacralized the multicultural society and only praised its benefits, while silencing and covering up its disadvantages and dangers under the blanket of political correctness. The Left-wing church is a highly educated elite living in cosy white neighborhoods and earning well; it has no direct experience with the downsides of the multicultural society. Now is the time to say things as they really are, to break the taboos of the Left-wing church, and to see the multicultural society for what it is: a fiasco, a threat to our values and our way of living, a millstone around the necks of the free and open democracies that we stand for. The moralizing pedantry of the Left-wing church is a threat to our society, because it is their fault that we haven’t forced migrants to adopt our values, and we should end that.

But in reality it is the other way around, writes Blommaert. There is no 'Left-wing church' but there is a 'Right-wing church' (p. 16):

[The Right denies the Left] any form of rationality, objectivity, and good intentions. [The Right claims that the Left] are 'fixed to their ideological formulas', 'are unworldly' and 'want to deceive people' or 'to hush them to sleep' ... Its arguments are not addressed [by the Right], counterarguments are not presented [by the Right], there's no need for that: the Left is simply excluded from the debate, Left-wing opinions are tabooed, and an immediate political correctness discredits Left-wing opinions as false, misleading and malevolent. *Left-wing opinions are thus Right-wing taboos*, and those taboos have their ground in the systematic demonizing of the Left.

As an example illustrating this "demonizing of the Left", Blommaert refers to Wilders' response to a research, commissioned by the Dutch Ministry of Internal Affairs, labeling him and his party as "extreme right" (NU.nl, 2009, October 31). "They are completely mad," responds Wilders. "What an idiocy. We are democrats through and through." In Blommaert's terms: Wilders denies the researchers rationality, objectivity and good intentions. These researchers are bad, prejudiced Left-wing scientists, Wilders claims, and the PVV is made up of good and honest democrats. Wilders' political correctness taboos this research and denies its conclusion. But he doesn't give any arguments to support that denial. He doesn't argue, he taboos and discredits. "This is another disgraceful and crazy attempt of the elite to demonize us and to silence the PVV and all our voters," Geert Wilders adds. "If anything undermines democracy, it is this Left-wing elite, amongst whom these fake researchers, and Islamization."

Another, slightly longer but much clearer example of how the Wilders and the PVV see the Left as the enemy and the liberals as the enemies' accomplice is a speech given by Wilders at the 2008 General Political Considerations in Parliament. Wilders discusses the state of the Netherlands, opposing the Left and the elite to the good, hardworking people, and blaming the former for problems with immigration and Islam (Dumpert, 2008, September 17):

Today we discuss the 2009 budget, a crappy budget made the worst cabinet ever. ... But besides the budget, we also discuss the state of our country. And whoever takes a good look will not be happy. I blame this cabinet for the damage it does to Dutch society.

The Netherlands is no longer the Netherlands we grew up in. There is not one Netherlands, there are two Netherlands. ...

On the one hand our elite, with her so-called ideals. Of a multicultural society, of extremely high taxes, of delusional climate hysteria, of unstoppable Islamization, of Brussels' super state and pointless development aid, the tons of money we throw in the bottomless well known as the Dutch Antilles. The elite thinks everything is okay — as long as government subsidies continue to flow towards the VPRO, Environmental Defense and the art elite. It is the following of Geert Mak, Doekle the *dhimmi*, Eveline Herfkens and Al Gore. It is the Left-wing elite living along the Amsterdam canals, with their soggy little friends. All those so-called ideals of that one Netherlands of the political elite are minority projects. Hardly anyone still believes in these ideals, except for an ever shrinking club of Lefties that are kept alive by tax payers' money and that have secured jobs at subsidy sipping organizations: professional Muslims, professional climate fundamentalists, professional directors, professional lobbyists. ...

There is also another Netherlands. That is my Netherlands. The other Netherlands is made up of the people that have to pay the bill, literally and metaphorically. It is made up of the people that are robbed and threatened. It is made up of the people that succumb to street terrorists. That succumb to high taxes. And that long for a better, a different, a social Netherlands. These are the people that *do not* get it for free. These are the people that have built our country. These are the people who never believed in the Left-wing project of multi-culti-nonsense, of climate hysteria, of our donations to the piña colada mafia at the Dutch Antilles. These are the people that are hardly ever heard here in the House. These people are represented as anti-social, xenophobes or provincials.

This cabinet acquiesces with these two Netherlands. This cabinet chooses for the Netherlands of the elite and not for the Netherlands of the regular folks who have to pay the bills. Anyone who wonders why the Dutch become more and more cynical about politics, should look at these two Netherlands. Should wonder how we can once again have only one Netherlands. Nowhere are the differences between what the people think and what the elites think sharper than for instance on the topic of mass-immigration. ... A hundred billion Euros, that is what the multicultural project costs us. A hundred billion Euros. Think about what we could have

done with that money. ... We could have given everyone a sail boat or we could have, just for fun, bought another country. We could have swam in our money. Instead, we follow the Left-wing dream to bring half the Muslim world to the Netherlands. The more voters for the Left-wing church, the better. Sometimes I think they are taught already in the airplane: ‘You vote Wouter Bos [Labor Party], he give you benefits.’

Wilders again divides the Netherlands in two: the corrupted, malevolent and egoistic Left-wing elite against the regular, hardworking, good people that Wilders claims to represent. He denies the Left good intentions but doesn’t address its arguments in a rational manner. He taboos the Left and pictures it as misleading and malevolent. He demonized the Left.

A much more recent example of how the PVV discredits the Left by denying it rationality, objectivity and good intentions is MP Sietse Fritsma’s comment on European Commissioner Cecilia Malmström’s discussion article on immigrant family reunion. Fritsma calls it “an awful, politically correct piece of crap that doesn’t extend beyond outdated Left-wing dogma’s” (De Volkskrant, 2011, November 18).

In Martin Bosma’s *De Schijn-Élite van de Valse Munters* (2010) we find additional examples of the PVV’s anti-Leftism. Bosma is nostalgic about the old Left, but believes “something somewhere has gone terribly wrong” (p. 39). That somewhere is the year 1968, and that something is the take-over of the Labor Party by “the Young Turks of the new Left” (*Ibid.*). Where the heirs of the old Left were “the first to resist mass-immigration” (p. 44) and “adherents of the thought of remigration” (p. 47), — and therefore ‘good’ in Bosma’s book — the new Left strived to take over education, culture, the media, science and even language itself (p. 67) to spread their political correctness and their cultural relativism (p. 68), leading straight to mass-immigration and Islamization (p. 69):

The policy of open borders is a logical part of the progressive world view. The state is seen as a capitalist vehicle, a pre-eminently Marxist view. With that, all symbols of the state are suspect: the flag, the border, the national anthem — the idea of a nation itself becomes debatable. ... Nationalism, or simply standing up for the identity of one’s country, is by definition suspect.

It ... goes against the idea of the international (cosmopolitan) brotherhood that awaits us. Attracting as many immigrants as possible becomes a cure for backward and old fashioned thinking; it takes us to a higher level. It teaches us that our very own values are relative, if they exist at all. Asserting one's culture quickly becomes suspected ... nationalism, or racism.

Bosma claims that the new Left taboos “backward and old fashioned” national symbolism and group identity, and makes them “suspect”. In return it promotes cultural relativism and cosmopolitanism. Bosma does exactly the same with regards to the ideas of the Left: he makes the “progressive world view” and international cosmopolitanism suspect by implying — like Wilders did at the end of his 2008 General Considerations speech — that the Left has attracted “as many immigrants as possible” as a “cure” against Right-wing ideas and therefore against the PVV and its voters. Bosma doesn't provide counterarguments to the ideas of the new Left. He claims, without supporting arguments, that their ideas led to mass-immigration and Islamization, and adds that this mentality “has determined the mentality of the ruling elite” and that the consequences “are huge” (p. 72), by which he means hugely negative. “It is the most dramatic transformation of the Dutch population: the import of a million Muslims” (p. 75). And it wasn't even democratically decided, according to Bosma: “The Dutch people consistently speak out against mass-immigration. In every opinion poll the influx is rejected” (*Ibid.*). He concludes that the “implantation of a million Muslims in the Netherlands has at most a formal democratic legitimation,” by which he implies it was not legitimized. “Members of the House of Representatives have indeed been democratically elected all those years. But that's all the legitimation there is” (p. 77). This last statement is puzzling. Is there any other legitimization of a House of Representatives than a formal one? What legitimation other than democratic elections does Bosma refer to? As De Ruiter rightfully points out, replacing the word ‘formal’ with ‘informal’ would give the citation “something grotesque. Democratic legitimacy is always formal” (De Ruiter, 2011, June 9).

And Bosma isn't even right about the causes of immigration — or “at least” he is “crooked” about it (De Ruiter, 2011, June 9). In the period

when the supposed “mass-immigration” and “Islamization” began — circa 1960-1990 — the Left had no substantial share in Dutch government. “Bosma knows the history damned well but he rigidly sticks to his thesis that the Left has caused the problems of mass-immigration, multiculturalism and of course the presence of Muslims in our country” (*Ibid.*). In line with this, Labor Party (PvdA) MP Martijn van Dam writes in *De Volkskrant* that “in contrast to what people have started to believe, migration in the sixties was not Left-wing, but Right-wing policy” (Van Dam, 2011, October 11). Liberal and christian-democratic government parties promoted immigration and thereafter family reunion of Turkish and Moroccan workers, he claims, and the Left was very critical of this. Van Dam bases his claims on “several historical researches” such as one by the brothers Jan and Leo Lucassen. In a reaction to Van Dam in *Nieuw Amsterdams Peil*, Jan Lucassen says that he points his finger at neither the Left nor the Right: “The Left-wing church or the Right-wing church would be to blame for mass-immigration: both these claims are examples of conspiracy thinking. Me and my brother Leo don’t like that. For us it’s not about who’s to blame. We just want to bring the facts in the political debate” (2011, October 21). Nevertheless, two of these facts are that the Left was indeed critical, and that immigration wasn’t caused by a Left-wing conspiracy. (And by the way: two other facts are that there is no mass-immigration and no Islamization.)

Bosma furthermore discredits the Left — and also Islam — by associating it with Hitler and German national socialism. Riemen already pointed out that the PVV in its 2010 election program (Wilders, 2010, p. 35) says that “Hitler proves to be a socialist and therefore the victims we commemorate on 4 May are really the victims of socialism, of the ‘Left’ so hated by the PVV” (Riemen, 2010, p. 45). De Ruiter finds this message in Bosma’s book too: “The current Left is the heir of Hitler and his band, and of the guilt of the many deaths of World War II” (De Ruiter, 2011, June 9). To be clear, my point is not that the PVV is mistaken — although I think there are reasons to believe they show poor judgment here. My point is that the PVV associates the Left with the absolute benchmark of evil, Adolf Hitler, in order to discredit it. Yes, Bosma admits, Nazism was comprised of

nationalism, racism, authority, hostility, and militance, but these — contrary to what the 1968 generation of new Leftists has made us believe — are not “the real lessons of the war” (p. 246). Economically, Hitler was a socialist and therefore a Left-winger. Moreover, Hitler “had great sympathy for Islam” (p. 251) and was good friends with the mufti of Jerusalem, the leader of what is now Palestine and thus the precursor of Yasser Arafat. It all fits in with Bosma’s motto, Isaiah 5:20: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” The PVV is represented as good, light, and sweet; the Left and Islam as bad, dark, and bitter.

There are plenty more examples of the PVV’s anti-Leftism. In the introduction to the “declaration of independence” of Group Wilders (Wilders, 2005, pp. 103-107), Wilders writes that the Netherlands is the victim of a progressive mentality (p. 104): “The so-called progressive spirit has for the past thirty years kept the Netherlands under the reign of political correctness, a megalomaniac government, multiculturalism and submission to bureaucratic Brussels.” We recognize again the narrative of the Left-wing church. The progressive spirit is “the main cause of our problems” adds Wilders (p. 106). And in the preface to his 2010 election program *The Agenda of Hope and Optimism*, Wilders again blames the Left for what he regards as the main problems facing the Netherlands, i.e. immigration and Islam: “The blame is with the Left-wing elites that think the world looks like Woodstock” (2010, p. 7).

The blame is with the Leftist elites that think the world looks like Woodstock. It is clear that Wilders and the PVV do what they can to a priori discredit the Left, to deny the Left rationality, objectivity, and good intentions, to exclude the Left from the debate, to taboo Left-wing opinions, and to cultivate a political correctness denouncing Left-wing opinions as false, misleading, and malevolent. It is what Blommaert calls “the systematic demonizing of the Left” (p. 16), it is what Wilders does, and it is prototypically fascistic behavior. Why does Wilders do it? Because if the Left loses, he wins. But more importantly: he does it to avoid intellectual

political debate. By a priori discrediting the Left, Wilders does not a posteriori have to address the Left's arguments. The Left is excluded from the debate, and the debate itself is excluded from the political sphere.

As Paxton puts it, “fascism was an affair of the gut more than of the brain” (p. 42) and it is set on a foundation of “emotional lava” (p. 41). So is the PVV. By a priori discrediting the Left, the PVV avoids rational intellectual debate, aims at emotion rather than reason and turns politics into aesthetics. That is what we will address now.

### **3.4 The PVV's Politics of Aesthetics**

So far we've seen the PVV's nationalist and racist Manicheanism and its anti-Leftism. But prototypical fascist parties had another characteristic: they were an affair more of the gut than of the brain, with no philosophical underpinnings, placing form above content, and thereby transforming politics into aesthetics. The PVV's is such an affair too. By avoiding intellectual debate, by stirring emotions rather than reason and by focusing more on its appearance in the media than on the soundness of its arguments, the PVV transforms politics into aesthetics.

Again, a short note to prevent confusion: a focus on media-appearance doesn't make a fascist. All political parties focus on media-appearance since media-appearances can make or break a party. Form is important. But content is important too — more important than form, I believe. By focusing solely on form and by refusing to enter into intellectual debate on content, the PVV transforms politics into aesthetics. Twentieth century prototypical fascist parties did this too.

In September 2009, Dutch journalist Karen Geurtsen infiltrated the PVV. She worked as an intern for Raymond de Rooy — the MP that in November 2011 was refused a visa to enter Egypt (De Volkskrant, 2011, November 8) and that stated that he expected Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Rosenthal to support Israel because Rosenthal is Jewish (NU.nl, 2011, November 23). In their first meeting, De Rooy informs Geurtsen on her tasks, saying that “it is actually very simple. Don't go too deep into the material; it's about the



media attention you can get with something. Islam is bad, the government is bad, other political parties are bad. And the PVV is of course good. That is the starting point. Internally, perhaps we can discuss things with nuance, but to outsiders we don't. Everybody will fall asleep, and journalists first. Got it?" (De Roon, quoted in Geurtsen & Geels, 2010, pp. 36-37). Later, he tells her that the PVV "does not ask questions [in Parliament] for the purpose of being critical towards government policy. It is mainly for the public: for the media and the *bühne*" (*Ibid*, p. 41).

The PVV does a lot for the *bühne*. If it gets the media's attention, the PVV will probably do it. During the 2009 General Political Consideration in Parliament, Wilders proposes a tax on headscarfs in order to "clean our streets" (Kuitenbrouwer, 2010, p. 33). He calls it a '*kopvoddentaks*' — meaning a 'head rag tax', but using the Dutch word '*kop*' for head, which in the Netherlands is used only for animals. It has a huge impact on the media — too huge, perhaps. For many, Wilders crosses a line. Only the far Right cheers for this proposal and Wilders loses two seats in the polls. A week later, when asked by the socialist party whether there was any news on the 'head rag tax' proposal, the PVV pretended it never happened (p. 36).

Jan Kuitenbrouwer analyzes Wilders' rhetoric in his Dutch book *Wilders' Words & How They Work* (2010). Wilders uses "short, clear sentences, everyday language and he introduces protagonists of flesh and blood" (p. 41) — i.e. his famous couple Henk and Ingrid, the first not to be confused with the author of this essay — and "almost every sentence contains a hyperbole" (p. 43). "Exaggeration seems to be Wilders' second nature" (p. 44). He wants to reach people at an emotional level. "He doesn't provide a single argument," says Kuitenbrouwer (p. 47).

Wilders taps from emotional barrels already opened. In economic crisis he loudly asks for the *costs* of immigration. When facing terrorism he continuously speaks of Moroccan *street terrorism*. In environmental crisis he wants to counter Islamic *pollution* by taxing head scarfs. And faced with the fear of European civilization collapsing he wants to stop immigration *while we still can*, while it is *five to twelve*, because Islam will mean *the end*

of Western civilization (pp. 51-52). How do Geert Wilders' words work? It's the emotions, stupid.

The PVV does not provide any arguments too complex or theoretical, nor does it address the arguments of the opposition. "Complex argumentations are simplified and rejected," writes Jan Blommaert (2010, p. 7), "not only because they require a political and intellectual effort and undermine their own point of view, but also because *in themselves* they are an illustration of *the politics one rejects*: a politics based on argumentation." This is why Wilders does most of his publicity through his blog and his twitter account: messages are fast and short. As Riemen puts it in his Lowlands lecture, "instead of entering serious debate and providing arguments they twitter cries, slogans and propaganda" (2011). This allows for "an immediate, reflexive reaction to an event – a brief, powerful one-liner straight from the gut, an unfiltered, raw opinion" (Blommaert, 2010, p. 7). But it does not allow for logical arguments, nor for in-depth intellectual, political debate — "one would not normally twitter a treatise," as Blommaert puts it:

In the first place, their user [of twitter] no longer has the duty to present arguments, since there is simply no space for them. In the second place, they enable the use of effects through 'aesthetics'. Aesthetics: powerful, sharp, clenched, violent messages appear, for these are the very elements which make up the aesthetics of authenticity. Anyone who speaks in that way is honest, direct, straightforward, not a sycophant or a bighead but an honest person, a real person who belongs to 'the people'. After all, 'common people' get angry and excited too, sometimes they swear, and they are as good as their word. Precisely because of this, they have the right to stand up against any intellectual and to reject arguments by means of some good, solid swearing.

Wilders and Bosma avoid intellectual debate. Where other politicians regularly appear on television or in other media for intellectual debate, Wilders and Bosma never do. They avoid critical media. In a Dutch documentary called *Wilders, The Movie* (2010), directors Joost Van Der Valk and Mags Gaven follow Wilders for seven months until the

parliamentary elections of June 9, 2010. For seven months, Van Der Valk and Gaven are unable to interview Wilders, despite several and persistent attempts. When Van Der Valk approaches Wilders at public appearances and asks him questions, he is simply ignored. Wilders walks past him as if Van Der Valk doesn't exist. Other PVV MP's do sometimes appear on national television — for instance Dion Graus in *Pauw & Witteman* on October 4th and November 14th, 2011, and Hero Brinkman in *De Wereld Draait Door* on November 15th, 2011 — but primarily to discuss marginal issues such as animal cops or plans for the foundation of a PVV youth movement.

Recapitulating: by avoiding intellectual debate, by stirring emotions rather than reason and by focusing more on its appearance in the media than on the soundness of its arguments, the PVV transforms politics into aesthetics. It is a prototypically fascist characteristic.

### **3.5 The PVV is the Prototype**

I have endeavored in this chapter to demonstrate that Wilders and the PVV are the prototype of contemporary fascism. Driven by nationalism and racism, the PVV divides the world along Manichean lines, claiming that the Netherlands and the West are severely threatened by Islam. It promises to solve this crisis by exclusionary policies such as banning the Qur'an and codifying Dutch dominance and Islam's subservience in the Dutch constitution. The PVV regards the Left as its enemy and continuously attempts to discredit it, so that it doesn't have to address the Left's arguments or provide arguments itself. The PVV is a party of the gut with no philosophical underpinnings, avoiding intellectual debate and critical media, and aiming to appeal to voters' emotions rather than reason. This is what fascist movements in Stage One did, according to Paxton. This is what the PVV does. The PVV is therefore a fascist movement in Stage One, and as such it can rightfully be called the prototype of contemporary fascism.

### 3.6 The PVV is the Selling Model

The PVV is the prototype of contemporary fascism. It has the characteristics of a fascist movement in Stage One. But is that it? No. We must look beyond Stage One. The PVV has rooted in the political system, and it has seized a significant amount of power by means of the *gedoogconstructie* (see introduction). Therefore we should look at Paxton's Stage Two and Three, to see that the PVV is more than the prototype of contemporary fascism. Was Riemen's claim strong enough?

That the PVV has taken root is evident. In the November 2006 general elections to the House of Representatives of the Estates-General, the PVV won 5.9% of the votes, securing it nine seats in Parliament. In the June 2010 general elections it got 15.4% of the votes, corresponding to twenty-four seats. The Dutch minority government, with only fifty-two seats in the House, relies on the PVV to reach a majority when voting on several pre-agreed issues — the *gedoogconstructie*, as the Dutch call it. In the 2011 elections for the Dutch Senate, the PVV secured ten seats, making it the fourth largest party in the Senate. Therefore we can rightfully say that the PVV is firmly rooted in the political arena, and that it has seized significant power. The PVV is past Stage One.

What parallels are there between the PVV and Paxton's description of fascism in Stage Two? Paxton writes that prototypical fascist parties took root in alliance with the establishment, and only where liberal institutions failed badly. Wilders himself took root in the political sphere as a member of the liberal party. He was already part of the establishment — indeed 'the elite' which Wilders and the PVV so vigorously oppose — before founding Group Wilders and the PVV. However, in the 2006 general elections, the PVV won almost six percent of the votes on its own, without allying to the establishment — rather by opposing the establishment — and in the 2010 elections it did so again and won over fifteen percent of the votes. On the other hand, the *gedoogconstructie* is an alliance between the PVV and the establishment, and it firmly roots the PVV in the political ground closest to power and legitimizes its extreme views and overall

attitude. Although the minority government has distanced itself from Wilders' views on Islam, it nevertheless cooperates with the PVV.

A note on violence. Paxton writes that violence had a major role in the rooting of twentieth century fascist movement. Imagined enemies were met with violence and doubters and critics were scared into conformity. "It carried a well-calculated set of coded messages," he writes (p. 84), "... that only the fascists were tough enough to save the nation from antinational terrorists." As some of Riemen's critics rightfully claimed, the PVV does not use physical violence against Islam, nor against the Left. There are no black-shirted PVV squads, nor does Wilders have a private militia army. But this doesn't automatically disqualify Wilders from being a fascist, as Riemen's critics incorrectly imply. If Paxton writes that violence had a major role in the rooting of twentieth century fascist movements, he implies that violence was not a necessary characteristic of fascists. First there were fascist movements, then their violence had a major role in their political rooting. Paxton doesn't mean that there is no other way for prototypical fascist movements to take root. Prototypical fascist movements are not necessarily violent.

Wilders rhetoric however, if not overtly violent, is at times highly militant. It carries the same message as early twentieth century fascist violence: that only Wilders and the PVV are tough enough to save the nation from antinational terrorists. Islam is "a Trojan horse". Holland should not "kneel for Mecca" nor "capitulate". The Netherlands needs "more Churchills and less Chamberlains. In short, we have to go on the offensive and start fighting back" (Kuitenbrouwer, 2010, p. 50). On other occasions Wilders has proposed that the army should be deployed against "street terrorism" (Wilders, 2005, p. 118) and that the police should be able to shoot at rioters preventively (De Volkskrant, 2007, May 30). It is true that words are not deeds, but militaristic rhetoric can give Wilders' followers the idea that there is indeed a war going on between the West and Islam, or that there should be, and that violence is legitimate. The Norwegian Right-wing extremist Anders Breivik, who on the 22nd of July 2011 murdered 69 people at a holiday camp of the Left-wing Workers' Youth League, certainly

believed so. Breivik mentions Wilders over thirty times in his manifest (De Ruiter, 2011, August 19). “The legitimization of violence against a demonized internal enemy brings us close to the heart of fascism,” writes Paxton (p. 84). If Wilders’ violent rhetoric legitimizes violence against a demonized enemy, Wilders and the PVV are close to the heart of fascism.

In 2010 and 2011 Wilders had to stand before court after being accused of spreading hatred and discrimination. Wilders was acquitted, but the court commented that some of Wilders’ statement qualify to be described as “inciting discrimination”, “rude and condescending” and as having an “inflammatory character”. Wilders was acquitted because his statements are “on the border of the permissible” and not over it (De Volkskrant, 2011, November 6). Legally speaking this may be so, but his “rude and condescending” attitude to Islam can nevertheless be insulting to Muslims, and is in obvious contradiction with the Judaeo-Christian and humanistic traditions which Wilders claims to guard.

A last defining feature of fascist movements taking root was the construction of parallel structures. Fascist parties challenged the established elite by setting up “organizations that replicate government agencies ... parallel structures challeng[ing] the liberal state by claiming that they were capable of doing doing some things better ... After achieving power, the party could substitute its parallel structures for those of the state” (p. 85). Geert Wilders and the PVV have not set up parallel structures yet and it remains to be seen whether they ever will.

On the whole, I think the important thing is not so much *how* the PVV has taken root, but *that* it has taken root. On top of that it has seized a significant amount of power through a *gedoogconstructie* with the minority government. As Paxton writes in his discussion of fascism in Stage Three, fascists could only seize power where the alternatives were less appealing and consciously rejected. That is what has happened in the Netherlands: the minority government apparently had no appealing alternatives but to work with Geert Wilders’ prototypical fascist party the PVV.

Having thus established that Wilders and the PVV are the prototype of contemporary fascism, that the PVV has firmly taken root in politics and that it has seized a significant amount of power by means of the *gedoogconstructie*, we can now say that Geert Wilders and the PVV are past Stage One, and as such are more than the prototype of contemporary fascism. Geert Wilders and his movement are the selling model of contemporary fascism — my coinage — and so far they are selling well.

### **3.7 The PVV is a Fascist Movement**

Paxton doesn't define fascism at the outset of his book, but prefers to study it in movement through its various stages of development. In this essay I have chosen to follow that line. In his conclusion, after having discussed the movement of fascism, Paxton defines fascism to give it "a usable short handle" (p. 218):

[Fascism is] a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.

Not all of this accounts for Geert Wilders and the PVV, but most of it does. The PVV is a party obsessively preoccupied with community decline and victimhood. The PVV is a mass-based party with nationalist and anti-Islamist views, working in uneasy collaboration with a minority government of traditional elites. The PVV is a party striving to unite, energize and purify the Dutch community. The PVV is a party that is willing to abandon democratic liberties such as individual rights in order to protect the community from alien threats. The PVV is not a party of militants, nor a party pursuing internal cleansing and external expansion with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraint. But the PVV is a party that employs militant rhetoric and that proposes exclusionary policies, e.g. to

suspend the freedom of religion and to ban the Qur'an. In other words:  
Paxton's "short handle" fits the PVV pretty well.



## CONCLUSION

In this essay I have endeavored to answer the question whether Geert Wilders and his Party For Freedom are the prototypes of contemporary fascism, as Rob Riemen has claimed.

In Chapter 1, I have discussed Riemen's booklet *The Eternal Return of Fascism* and his Lowlands lecture *Why Have We Forgotten What Is Important In Life?* Both of these lacked factual evidence supporting the claim that Wilders and the PVV are the prototype of contemporary fascism. Riemen's critics were dissatisfied with Riemen's description of fascism, but they didn't provide a clear and structured alternative. Neither did they argue convincingly that Wilders and the PVV are *not* the prototype of contemporary fascism. Two questions emerged from this discussion. First: what is fascism? And second: are Geert Wilders and his PVV indeed the prototype of contemporary fascism?

In Chapter 2, I addressed the first of these questions: what is fascism? Although Riemen — as his critics stressed — didn't provide a concise definition, he did clearly and unambiguously describe what he meant by 'fascism'. To examine just how accurate this description was, I discussed Robert Paxton's book *The Anatomy of Fascism*. Rob Riemen's description of fascism has withstood the test.

Paxton aims to rescue the word 'fascism' from sloppy usage — an ambition that should appeal to Riemen's critics. Paxton, like Riemen, prefers describing fascism over defining it. He discerns five stages in the development of fascist movements: the creation of fascist movements, their rooting in the political system, their seizure of power, the exercise of power, and their eventual radicalization and decline. I discussed these stages with an emphasis on the first three, for these — by which I did not prematurely want to suggest that the PVV is indeed a fascist movement — run parallel to the development of Wilders' party so far.

Recapitulating: fascist movements in Stage One are characterized firstly by a Manichean world view of a good but victimized 'us' against a

bad and threatening ‘them’, a view comprising nationalism, racism and exclusion; secondly by a hostile anti-Leftism; and thirdly by a lack of philosophical underpinnings, the avoidance of critical media and intellectual debate and placing form high above content, thereby transforming politics into aesthetics. Early twentieth century fascist movements reached Stage Two only when liberal institutions failed badly. By allying to the establishment, fascists found a fertile ground to grow in, because their words, views and attitude were legitimated by such an alliance. Fascisms that reached Stage Two did so partly, but not necessarily, by violence and intimidation. Fascist movements rarely reached Stage Three, that of seizing power. Where they did, they did so under conditions of extreme crisis and with no appealing alternatives. Stages Four and Five have only been only reached in Germany under Hitler and in Italy under Mussolini. Since the PVV is not exercising power nor in a process of radicalization, I have left these stages out of the discussion.

To give it a usable short handle, Paxton defined fascism as “a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion” (p. 218). Behavior in keeping with this definition is still visible today, he added, although contemporary and future fascisms will not resemble classical fascism in outward signs and symbols.

In Chapter 3 I was ready to take on the initial question of this essay: are Wilders and the PVV the prototype of contemporary fascism? As fascist movements are formed in Stage One, I have taken this stage to correspond to Riemen’s “prototype”. I have reached the following conclusions based on a wealth of factual evidence:

1. In the Netherlands, Wilders and his Party For Freedom are indeed, as Riemen claims, the prototype of contemporary fascism. Driven by nationalism and racism, the PVV divides the world along Manichean lines: it is ‘us’ — the Netherlands and the West in general — against ‘them’ — meaning Islam and therefore Muslims. The PVV proposes a vast amount of exclusionary policies to solve this ‘problem’, *inter alia* a ban of the Qur’an and a change of the Dutch constitution to make discrimination against Muslims possible. The PVV sees the Left as its enemy and the elite in general as the enemy’s accomplice. The PVV endeavors to discredit the Left *a priori*, tabooing its opinions in order to exclude it from the debate and to avoid having to address its arguments. The PVV is an affair more of the gut than of the brain, with no philosophical underpinnings. By avoiding critical media and intellectual debate, by placing form above content and by stirring emotions rather than reason the PVV transforms politics into aesthetics. These are all characteristics typical for prototypical fascist movements and Geert Wilders and his PVV can therefore rightfully be called the prototype of contemporary fascism.

2. In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders and the PVV are more than the prototype of contemporary fascism. They are its selling model, and they sell well. The PVV is past Stage One and has entered Stages Two and Three. The PVV has firmly rooted in Dutch politics and it has seized significant power by means of the *gedoogconstructie* — the construction by which the Dutch minority government relies in various ways on the PVV’s support. The PVV took root partly on its own and partly in alliance with the establishment, an alliance that has legitimated its particular views and general attitude. The PVV does not use physical violence, but its rhetoric is at times highly combative. It carries the same message as early twentieth century fascist violence: that only the PVV is tough enough to save the nation from hostile threats. Such militant rhetoric can give its supporters the idea that violence is justified, and

regrettably it has done so in the recent past.

3. The PVV is a fascist party. The PVV exhibits political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline and victimhood. The PVV is a nationalist and anti-Islam party working in uneasy collaboration with a minority government of traditional elites. The PVV is a party striving to unite, energize and purify the Dutch community. The PVV is a party that is willing to abandon democratic liberties in order to protect the community from alien threats. The PVV is not a party of militants, nor a party violently pursuing internal cleansing and external expansion. But the PVV is a party that employs militant rhetoric and that proposes exclusionary policies, e.g. to deny Muslims freedom of religion and to ban the Qur'an. Paxton's "short handle" of fascism fits the PVV very well.

4. The PVV is a fascist party and its leader Geert Wilders is a fascist.

This is my bachelor's thesis. In this essay I have endeavored to clarify, to myself and to my readers, something in serious need of clarification. My only hope is that I have succeeded in doing so.

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