Out of character: debating Dutchness, narrating citizenship

van Reekum, R.

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6. Reactive politics: moments and their men

Already for some time before 2000, discourses dealing with Dutchness articulated the idea that, in politics, there are ideals that demand too much of people, that stretch their tolerance for the other to a breaking point (Duyvendak 1997; Prins 2004; Schinkel 2007). When support for such ideals are demanded of citizens without sufficient consideration for the burdens that such ideals imply, a backlash against these ideals – even if citizens agree with them – comes to be inevitable. Such a diagnosis presents an understanding of politics in which reality and particularly the reality of people’s lived experiences of stress and exhaustion bounds the possible and the reasonable. At a certain point, there is only so much one can ask of the people. At a certain point, the demos strikes back. Political ideals may be praiseworthy and highly attractive, but they can also cloud one’s judgement of what, in reality, is happening and clutter our considerations of the costs at which ideals are realised. Seen through this lens, political realities here and now trump political horizons of idealised futures.

If it is correct that this conception of politics has been important for the ways in which positions become articulated in debates on national citizenship, then I think we should at least concede that this understanding of politics makes a lot of sense. That is, it is doing a lot of work for people in their engagement with public issues. Indeed, it is certainly not just a lay conception of democracy. It also exists as a staple of much political philosophy and science when the ‘preferences’, ‘interest’, ‘attitudes’, or ‘grievances’ of the electorate are used to explain the structure and dynamics of the electoral landscape and the tensions between representation and represented. This landscape is delimited precisely by what the voters are willing to put up with. By saying that this conception of politics makes a lot of sense, I also mean to say that it presents to us a crucial problem of democratic politics and cannot simply be regarded as ill-conceived, ‘reactionary’ thinking. There are some pertinent questions here: how does the relationship between represented and representative work? And what is and isn’t possible in this relationship? How do representatives gain support for their ideals and what will be the boundaries of legitimate decision making? Such questions suggest that the relationship between represented and representative cannot be stretched.
indefinitely; that democratic legitimacy is dependent on popular support; that political parties should or, at least, need to take into account the ideas, grievances and ideals of the citizenry. The governmental and political elites should seek to mirror – at least to some extent – the concerns of the people. There are limits to the sacrifices that citizens are willing to make in order to achieve certain ideals. This conception of politics stubbornly refers to the lived frustrations of citizens, who experience in their daily lives the true costs of political manoeuvring. Especially when decisions by representatives are deemed necessary or inevitable will it entail an unmasking of political rhetoric: representatives are then said to mistakenly or deceivingly act as if there are no alternatives. What we might call reactive politics – the politics of those representatives who speak for citizens that “will not take it anymore” – defines itself through this goal: to effectively demonstrate that there are alternatives, that the burdening weight of misconceived ideals can be lifted after all.

Reactive politics, then, may also be understood as a particular brand of political populism (Canovan 1999). The malaise of democracy and the dissolution of legitimacy is then explained by the fact that representatives have neither been attentive to nor expressive of the troubles and burdens experienced by the people. In this form of populism, ‘the people’ is precisely that segment of society that feels and knows the true costs of public policy and it is they to whom representatives should (re)turn their attention. These people are not merely ‘normal’, ‘average’, ‘simple’ or ‘unpretentious’, but also specifically burdened and threatened. Their burdens are sacrifices for public goods that they are not able or willing to partake in. This enactment of politics brings forth ‘critical outsiders’ who – ahead of the politics to come – warn, criticise and scold the inattentive elites who are isolated and isolate themselves from the costs of their own idealism.

We have here at once a way to understand the relationship between representative and represented at the heart of democracy, while also creating a division of political labour. There are the ‘overburdened citizenry’, ‘the critical outsider’, the ‘self-isolating elite’ and the ‘representatives who speaks for a victimised and neglected people’. Together, this role division helps explain what is happening in politics by suggesting that representatives will have to be brought back in line and curtail their overheated idealism. Moreover, this narrative helps justify the interventions of critical outsiders who are warning the governing elite for an impending backlash. Finally, it enables the role of the populist forerunner who speaks for the people and against the elites.
The moment of reaction

The conception of politics just described is nothing new (see for instance Robin 2011), nor is it in anyway specific to the kinds of discourses through which contestations over Dutchness were articulated after 2000. In fact, a model of reaction is – as we have already seen – part and parcel of problematisations of national identity right from the early 1980’s onward (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). The drama of failing integration was always already conceived to be taking place ‘in the old, urban neighbourhoods’ where conspicuously normal people are confronted with the fall-out of political decisions on a daily basis. This is also true for the worries surrounding on-going Europeanisation: normal, rooted people were said not to identify with the European project in the way cosmopolitan elites did.

What is striking, however, is the way in which the political events of 2000-2002 would come to be conceived as the rupture that would open up the possibility and the need to finally and conclusively bring political ideals back to people’s reality. That is, key events and contestations emerging between 2000 and 2002 came to figure as the backlash par excellence at which popular reaction – finally – materialised and could no longer be denied appropriate recognition. So, even though the motif of popular backlash had been crucial for articulating the problematic of national citizenship and had been enacted recurrently in the years preceding 2000-2002, the explosion of this political moment gained a higher esteem as it appeared to effect democratic legitimacy as such. The events and developments of this period were not only highly disruptive and transformative in hindsight, they were also explicitly and ostensibly articulated in terms of a watershed moment while they were taking place (see also Van Reekum 2012c). In other words, it was not with the passage of time and the possibility of historical distance that the period of 2000-2002 would become remembered as a turning point in Dutch politics. Rather, as events were unfolding they were accompanied and inflected by an articulation of rupture and displacement. The ensuing events of those years were being canonised and endowed with national significance in the moment. Public discussion on these events thereby enacted a commemoration of the national present. The on-going present now instantly became memoire.

Strikingly, Pim Fortuyn, who is arguably the central figure of commemoration during these years, would be chosen as the ‘greatest Dutch person’ by the viewers of a televised election show in 2004.13

13 De Grootste Nederlander was aired on October 14 2004 by the KRO. The format for this program was taken from German and British examples. Brits chose Winston Churchill in the BBC-show Great Britons, while the German audiences elected Konrad Adenauer during the ZDF-show Unsere Besten.
To conceptualise this commemoration of the present is certainly not to suggest that these events are in actual fact unworthy of such nomination or that it is only their constant reiteration in media coverage that granted them the status of transformation. The evocative power of the 2000-2002 watershed cannot be reduced to an escalating media-hype manufactured through the self-referentiality of solipsistic, horse-race media coverage. However, all events are in some way mediated and all events carry in their mediation narratives about why and how such events matter (Wagner-Pacifici 2010; Stengs 2009). What I will argue here is that the period of 2000-2002 became effectively narrated as the moment in which reactive politics finally crystallised and a political culture of consensus, so crucial to what was deemed national in Dutch politics, could no longer be maintained. The already frequently imagined antagonism of ‘normal people’ over against ‘detached elites’ had become a real substance in the world – ‘Pim Fortuyn’ – that one could see, hear and even touch (Margry 2011). This commemoration of the present singled out a moment in time that came to interrupt and cut the flow of normalcy, opening up political possibilities and loading the political period after 2002 with the unbearable responsibility of reacting to its profundity, an impossible task.

It is already for this reason impossible to exhaustively address the dynamic of Dutch politics between 2000 and 2002, a period that started with ever more intense discussion on the failure of integration and Muslim otherness in particular and ended with the fall of the first Balkenende-government, nor do I aim to do so. Instead of attempting to do what so many observers have tried to do already (Chorus & De Galan 2002; Ellemers 2002; Storm & Naastepad 2003; Couwenberg 2004; Pels 2003; Wansink 2004; De Vries & Van der Lubben 2005; Bovens & Hendriks 2008), I will focus here on the two protagonists of reactive politics – Paul Scheffer and Pim Fortuyn – whose problematisations of Dutchness help to understand what the moment of reaction entailed and what significance Dutchness could come to play in resolving the rupture left in its wake. I focus on Scheffer and Fortuyn precisely because the notion of backlash became so strongly associated with their interventions and their personas. While Scheffer may often be given the role of public instigator, staying out of the electoral arena, and Fortuyn became known as the helmsman of a popular uprising, mobilising and organising a concrete political movement, both are significant in teasing out how it was that the moment of reaction had come.

Scheffer’s essayistic alarm
It remains unclear exactly why Scheffer’s essay The multicultural drama became so remarkably notorious, why upon publication it evoked such massive response
The factual substance of the essay in itself cannot explain it. As we have seen, Scheffer and others had throughout the 1990’s published extensively on the topic of national identity, migration, diversity and elite blindness for the gravity of such issues. One of Scheffer’s core claims – that Dutch national culture is weakly and confusingly articulated by elites and needs to be represented more convincingly and explicitly – had been part of his repertoire since the late 80’s. Nor was Scheffer alone in discussing the troubles of multicultural society (for example Theunis 1979; Couwenberg 1982; Van Ree 1995; Lakeman 1999; Ramdas 1997; De Beus 1998; Schnabel 1999; Duyvendak & Veldboer 2001; Fortuyn 1995, 1997; Brugman 1998 to only name a few).

What is clear, however, is the fact that in the preceding years the failure of immigrant integration and the need to better control borders had become one of the central issues in Dutch politics (Fermin 1997; Schuster 1999; Van der Valk 2002; Uitermark 2012). The most tangible outcome of these contentions would be the new, more restrictive migration and asylum legislation introduced in 2000 by then state secretary Job Cohen and the development of civic enculturation policies under minister Roger van Boxtel. Alongside the issue of asylum seekers, racialised school segregation had become indicative of a broader failure of integration. Much like the dichotomous language of autochthony, school segregation was and is discussed as the emergence of ‘white’ and ‘black’ schools. Articulated in this highly charged, racial language, the issue of school segregation had come to exemplify the extent to which a multicultural ideal remained out of reach. The fact that allochthones were not connecting with autochthones – itself a very particular understanding of what constitutes a successful multicultural society – was presented as proof that well-intended tolerance for ethnic others was not producing real world results.

In line with worries about school segregation and language proficiency there was a focus on what were deemed problems of ‘large cities’. The 1990’s saw the creation of ‘large cities policies’ that conjoined problems of urban marginality and cultural maladaptation into a single policy effort: targeting the concentration of social problems in specific areas of the largest Dutch cities (see Van der Wouden 1996; Uitermark 2013; Van Houdt 2014). The idea that ‘large cities’ needed special attention materialised in the appointment of a minister, Roger van Boxtel. Moreover, an endowed chair at the University of Amsterdam had already been set up in 1992 and was specifically concerned with ‘the problems of large cities’. Ethnic segregation and the problems caused by allochthonous youths loomed large in discussions over ‘large city problems’ (see for instance Van den Brink 2001). Finally, there was attention paid to civic enculturation policies that would remedy the contradictions of the earlier minorities approach: instruction, assistance and
enculturation of allochthones were to prevent and turn around their segregation from Dutch society and enable their emancipation (Verkaaik 2009). While this means that Scheffer’s essay entered into a wholly agreeable milieu – much of what the essay contends resonated with established public discussion –, it also means that this milieu cannot explain why Scheffer’s essay could become the object of a watershed moment.

Of course, the fact that a prominent public intellectual of the social democratic left was effectively making an argument strongly associated with the liberal conservatism of VVD-leader Frits Bolkestein and positions voiced by christen-democrats may explain why Scheffer’s gesture evoked such massive response (see Uitermark 2012: 89-90). But this line of reasoning cannot be taken too far. Scheffer’s interventions had been the occasion of debate throughout the 1990’s with Scheffer taking almost identical positions to the ones expressed in The multicultural drama. His essay is a breach of leftist discourse on integration to the extent that certain social-democratic protagonists, particularly prominent party figures, were seeking to depoliticise the issue through rather abstract pleas for tolerance and respect (see for instance Van Thijn 1998). But it was a breach that Scheffer and others on the left had been performing for quite some time, over and over again (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). So the question remains: why did this essay at this moment become commemorated as a watershed?

The fact that there are no clearly definable factors to explain the prominence of Scheffer’s essay may indicate that its role and prominence is the effect and cause of a whole array of factors coming together and producing the opportunity of its notoriety. Left at that, this would be a somewhat vacuous conclusion: the essay just hit the right spot at the right moment. But this way of understanding the essay does give rise to a further question: even though it is probably not possible to exhaustively isolate the external and contextual causes of its prominence – at least not in the context of this study –, we can wonder what aspects of the essay itself enable it to play precisely the role it acquired, namely an essay that suddenly and autonomously seized attention and politicised an issue. In other words, how does the essay effectively enact a breach of political discourse? What is the significance of ‘suddenness’ and ‘autonomy’? This questioning is all the more appropriate as Scheffer himself has indicated that he had been carefully honing his text for some years (Uitermark 2012: 89-90).

Doing drama

The answer to these questions can be addressed by looking closely at the essay’s central rhetorical trope – drama. It is this word that became the brand name of
Scheffer’s persona after 2000. The diagnosis of drama performs two vital aspects of the essay’s assumptive role. Drama thematises the kind of trouble that goes beyond the mere problematisation of an issue. Opinion pieces, news reporting and popular publications had repeated the idea that integration wasn’t succeeding and cultural differences created problems right up to the time of Scheffer’s essay. Yet, The multicultural drama nonetheless articulated the issue in a way that goes beyond a discussion of ‘problems’. Drama refers to the hardship that people, in reality, experience due to immigration and ethnic tensions. But there is more going on here. Not only the title, but the essay as a whole represents the issue in far more disturbing imagery.

The essay lacks any clear culprits or actions that are directly causing problems. It doesn’t attack anyone or thing in particular. Instead, the essay articulates a critical, almost nervous socio-analysis. The principles that guide Dutch society at large are at the centre of this analysis. Troubles in society are not attributed to the intended or wrong-headed actions of particular people, organisations or powers, but to a society-wide drama. That is, the essay represents the drama as the consequence of the very principles through which Dutch society is able to perceive and govern itself. The horrible circumstances into which Dutch society is all-too-quietly wandering are thereby much more shocking: the drama is not caused by clearly definable mechanisms, but is the consequence of a general and self-inflicted loss of control and an evaporated will to seriously ameliorate society. The drama is happening because society only superficially functions according to its ideals and behind its empty gestures an overall disengagement and surrender reveal themselves. ‘Drama’ indicates how societal ideals have become visions without any coherent sense and have thus precipitated a blind fall into societal disintegration. The sense of inaction that persists throughout the text heightens the need for alarm. Society isn’t so much threatened by danger as it is already falling without its leaders acknowledging it. The essay’s header introduces an entire vocabulary of passivity:

As energetically as the Netherlands attacked [te lijf ging] the ‘social question’ of yesteryear, so torpid are the reactions to the stagnation of entire generations of allochthones and the formation of an ethnic underclass today. Why do we think we can afford to see generations of immigrants fail and to leave a presumed reservoir of talent unused? And how do we gain the assurance that everything will land on its feet? The societal peace is severely threatened, according to Paul Scheffer. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad, italics added) (#85)

Scheffer’s drama is one in which a society has lost its breath and exuberance. Instead, there is a decadent passivity that affords an indifferent fall into societal
disorder. The drama is caused not by mistakes or confusion, but by a deeply tragic passivity. Scheffer’s explicit goal, then, is to create urgency and awareness; to jolt public discussion into a sudden, energetic expression of real concern and engaged activity. The drama of a blind fall inevitably creates its opposite: a somewhat lonely, yet immensely energetic outsider who strikes the alarm.

In 1994 the government still expressed urgency regarding ethnic minorities: ‘The government concludes that the prospects are very worrisome. Reasons for concern are stagnating economic development, persistent immigration – of asylum seekers in particular – and the considerable impact of these developments on the public legitimacy of policy’ (White paper on integration policy of ethnic minorities). It seems that this urgency has evaporated in the bliss of the polder model [corporatist welfare reforms]. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#86)

The diagnosis of drama is as much about what is happening in society as it is about the function of the essay and Scheffer’s purported role in public debate. The text speaks about itself in such a way that its publication and its author’s positioning can become moments in the very drama that the essay analyses. This performative continuity between the drama in society and the development of a debate already enacts what the essay might become in the future: a moment of alarm that breaks through the torpor and suddenly awakes society to its fall.

Scheffer’s text heightens a familiar theme in the contention over diversity and nationhood to great intensity. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, such discourses were recurrently about the possibilities for and boundaries of debate as public expressiveness became a crucial typification of Dutchness. Scheffer’s earlier interventions were instrumental in this respect. The multicultural drama, however, not only reiterates the imperative to debate, but inflates this imperative to even greater significance. Public expressiveness is not only performative of Dutchness, but acquires a redemptive quality. Only an alarm in the form of public debate will save society. No longer just the answer to a specific concern – who are ‘we’? –, the need to raise awareness and evoke urgency becomes a question of preventing a societal catastrophe. By folding the argument around the notion of drama – a blind fall instigated by decadent passivity – the essay itself gains an immense responsibility. The diagnosis of drama already means that the problem cannot be solved without a moment of rude awakening, without a sudden realisation among the interpellated public that it is falling and needs to break out of its passivity. Again, the essay is as much a diagnosis of societal problems as it is a declaration of responsibility and engagement by its author and, presumptively, its public. This rhetorical structure in itself cannot explain the essay’s notoriety, but it does explain why it was a very appropriate candidate for
such prominence. The essay’s rhetoric proposes that its publication will be the moment at which passivity will be breached. Any responses, be they positive or negative, will affirm the role it has already assumed.

Before we look at the significance of these responses, we will have to look at the way in which Scheffer’s drama may be remedied. Here, the essay’s significance for discourses on Dutchness is even more pronounced. The lack of urgency is tied to the legacy of consensus-seeking in Dutch history:

What is the value of the age-old method of peaceful coexistence in entirely new circumstances? Will it function in the same way? Is it a mark of self-confidence not to emphasise the distinctive identity [het eigene] of our society? The cultural commonality, within which difference could be lived, is now far less at hand; there aren’t many sources of solidarity. The comparison with pillarisation doesn’t match up. Segregation of schools in black and white schools is, of course, of a completely different nature than the distinction between public and denominational schools. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#87)

Scheffer reiterates the idea that liberal values are at the core of the national ethic.

There ought not to be space in public life for movements that want to discontinue the separation of church and state or the equal rights of men and women. Religious symbols like headscarves belong to the private sphere and not to a public office such as the police. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#88)

This liberalism is not only rooted in the cultural history of the Netherlands, but should be imagined as such through a collective, national identity. The drama, however, is that an overly accommodative and pacifying cosmopolitanism has prevented Dutch society from firmly and clearly imagining the values that integrate national community:

The culture of toleration, which now bumps up to its limits, goes hand in glove with an unrealistic self-image. We need to get away from the cosmopolitan illusion in which many wallow. The denunciative way in which we have dealt with national consciousness in the Netherlands isn’t welcoming. We pride ourselves in having no national pride. This boundless attitude of the Dutch doesn’t contribute to integration, because more often than not, it conceals a detached and heedless society. Today, the postmodern historical vision dominates in which every ‘we’ is immediately suspect. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#89)

A happy-go-lucky [gemakzuchtig] multiculturalism is spreading because we are not able to explicate what keeps society together. We say too little about our borders, don’t cherish a relation to our own past and treat our language nonchalantly. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#90)

Thorough explication of a national self-image – as opposed to a blissfully unengaged multiculturalism – will provide a national narrative, an encompassing
identity that ties together citizens. Contrary to the Dutch tendency to shy away from any form of national imagination, the debate about integration should make it clear who ‘we’ are. According to Scheffer, the notion of ‘maintaining one’s identity’ cannot provide the basis for this new national image. In reaction to his critics, Scheffer writes:

In the Netherlands a self-image is cherished in which tolerance and indifference have become strangely intertwined. […] Clearly, many take the critique of the slogan ‘integration while maintaining one’s identity’ as a sign of poor appreciation of other cultures. There is no reason to speak disrespectfully about other cultures, but this slogan is susceptible for critique because it misrecognises the experience of migration. It is an appeasing statement, while nobody should underestimate how rough a farewell from hearth and home can be. (March 25 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#91)

In what can now be called a defining gesture of Scheffer’s discourse, he entangles the words of Johan Huizinga, the Netherlands’ most renowned narrator of national history, into his analysis of the guiding self-image of Dutch society. Huizinga’s words become a beacon as they provide a prescript for the much needed explication of national identity. Strikingly, this beacon is not formed by a substantive moral or cultural commitment. Rather, Scheffer mobilises a quote that is concerned with the intensity, style and emotionality of self-imagination:

The historian Johan Huizinga wrote in his beautiful essay Nederlands Geestesmerk [Dutch Mental Character] (1935): ‘As a nation and state we are in a certain sense enduringly satisfied [content] and it is our national duty to remain so.’ He formulates a paradoxical task: all effort should be focused in order to remain at ease. This is also what is at stake today: how can we deal with new forms of inequality and segregation in such a way that the country remains uninhibited in its relations with immigrants? (March 25 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#92)

Being at ease and undisturbed is presented as being unmistakably Dutch, a crucial part of Dutch self-awareness. The troubling developments in the multicultural present must be urgently addressed to retain a relaxed society in the future. Only by going beyond the passive indifference, evasion and negligence of the past can a better, more relaxed future become reality. If the multicultural drama consists of an all-too satisfied self-awareness that has lapsed into passivity and indifference, the remedy to that drama is found not in a rejection of that national awareness but in its reinvigoration. Like Huizinga, Scheffer seeks to extend a civic burgherliness that is, at heart, satisfied and uninhibited. In contrast to Huizinga who still speaks to the problematic of national character, such a project will crucially involve a breach of public discourse and a reinvigorated imagination of liberal values as the effort has become one of national identification.
Reactions to a call for reaction

If Scheffer’s essay is rhetorically well-endowed to assume the role of a sudden and autonomous intervention, the reactions it invoked are part and parcel of its performative flow. Public reactions further performed what the essay already prepared. The entire ensemble – intervention, reactions, public dissensus – affirms the analysis of drama in the essay: a sudden awakening is needed to breach society’s fateful passivity.

Much like Scheffer’s initial intervention, the substance of reactions to it were not unusual or strikingly different from the already established guidelines of debate over immigrants and their integration. Positions for and against were taken up. A whole series of op-eds and commentaries emerged that explicitly set out to react to Scheffer’s essay. Piece after piece responded explicitly to Scheffer, thus affirming its evocative status. Peter van der Veer, who had so strongly contradicted an orientalist reading of the Rushdie-affair years earlier, is one of the first to publish a response. It is indicative of the critical responses as they tended to agree with Scheffer’s worries albeit in less alarming terms, but contradict his suggestions for reinvigorating national identity: ‘Scheffer’s article is focused too much on a national, if not nationalistic, perspective on Dutch culture and the assimilation of other cultures to it.’ (February 5 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#93). Sociologist De Jong expresses a similar concern: ‘Scheffer repeatedly demonstrates a limited, static and monolithic perspective on cultures, in which a traditional part stands for the whole.’ (February 5 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#94). Robbert Bodegraven, editor of a magazine on multicultural society, summarises the discursive situation in his response:

With his article ‘The multicultural drama’ […] Paul Scheffer positions himself among illustrious company of those who have set off the emergency alarm over multicultural society. Paul Schnabel, J. L. Brugman, Heleen Dupuis and of course Frits Bolkestein preceded him. They all call for the protection of the [eigen] cultural heritage and warn against the cultural values that newcomers – read: muslims – want to impose on us. Scheffer now also sees this danger and suggests as a defence the re-emergence of national awareness. Scheffer relates the huge problems associated with the integration of immigrants to a ‘false self-image’. The Dutch don’t know (anymore) who they are, from whom they are descendants and how they have become what they are. This is questionable. Scheffer may be bothered by the inattention with which Dutch people discard their national pride, but proclamation of a national identity doesn’t necessarily lead to better circumstances for the integration of newcomers. (February 10 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#95)

Hans Wansink, prominent editor at *De Volkskrant*, also expressed scepticism:

I tend to see the failing integration of newcomers less as an issue of Dutch [Hollandse] abnegation than Scheffer. Although it is true that we are apprehensive in transmitting our own traditions and
history onto migrants, we also don’t grant the space to live out their freedom of religion and education. (February 12 2000, De Volkskrant) (#96)

Interestingly, Koen Koch – one of Scheffer’s most prominent critics – reiterates his position:

Might Scheffer be a civilised version of Haider? It’s too silly for words, but the idea demonstrates the complexity of the issue and the inability to deal with it. In this context, it is because Scheffer chooses to defend liberalism and tolerance as typically Dutch that large groups of allochthones who seek personal liberation from repressive social bonds, are alienated from him. This is regrettable and counterproductive as mechanisms of in- and exclusion are activated all the same. The opposition is not one of Dutch and non-Dutch, but of liberal over and against traditional. The shape that universal values of liberalism and tolerance take in Dutch society is constantly changing, in part because of our immigrants. This demonstrates the vitality of these values. There is no need for sweaty hands and clenched buttocks. (March 11 2000, Trouw) (#97)

Pushback also came from intellectuals and politicians who approached the issue from a decidedly pluralist perspective. In an interview with Trouw editor Marcel ten Hooven political scientists Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie were invited to respond to Paul Scheffer’s essay and a piece by Paul Schnabel (1999) that was deemed to follow Scheffer’s line. Fennema and Tillie argued that their research showed how ethnic communal ties in fact precipitated integration:

‘What surprises me is the fact that there is hardly any empirical data in their pieces’, says Tillie. ‘They rather bluntly pronounce that everything will be in order if we work towards a Dutch monoculture. Instead, research shows that the particular cultures of minorities do not hinder integration.’ (February 28 2000, Trouw) (#98)

GroenLinks parliamentarian Mohammed Rabbbae, another regular to the debate about integration, criticised Scheffer and Schnabel quite directly:

It is remarkable that two progressives like Paul Scheffer and Paul Schnabel want to celebrate a kind of nationalistic revival over the backs of immigrants. (March 16 2000, Trouw) (#99)

Finally, social scientists Ruben Gowricharn and Jan Willem Duyvendak problematised the effects of Paul Scheffer’s intervention as they stated:

We agree with Paul Scheffer on one issue: it is crucial that the autochthonous elite is concerned about the social-economic lag of (some) migrants, in part because colour and class increasingly coincide. But, alas, this is where our agreement ends and we have to conclude that his analysis and his solutions, in so far as they are given, don’t make a lot of sense. Particularly the causal relation, suggested by Scheffer, between the social-economic position of allochthones and their culture has

14 Wansink is referring here to the constitutionally protected right of associations of parents to create schools according to their own religious and philosophical world view and educate their children.
been rightly criticised. Developments in France show convincingly that – forced – cultural assimilation does little to amend social-economic issues. This ill-conceived relation brings Scheffer to only put ‘allochthones culture’ up for discussion, while the autochthones culture is elevated above any discussion [boven iedere discussie verheven] and should be manifested more emphatically and more ‘nationally’.

[...]
The tone of the current debate over multicultural society has up to now been set by a few white men from the baby boom generation born shortly after WOII; Pim Fortuyn, Jan Brugman, Pieter Lakeman, Paul Schnabel en Paul Scheffer. This not only makes this gentlemen’s debate elitist, it also means that the debate refers to values and experiences that were and are important to that generation. These authors are committed to a culturally homogenous and more or less closed nation-state, which is accompanied by a blind spot for transnational cultural ties. They are also guided by a rejection of pillarisation and group ties, leading to a strong desire to culturally white wash allochthones. Was it Kossmann who said that Dutch identity was characterized by a good discussion? That is precisely what should happen now: a good discussion. With all of the many divergent voices of allochthones included. (March 23 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#100)

The point here is not to suggest that Scheffer was only criticised – he wasn’t – or that Scheffer’s critics tried to defuse his alarmism. In fact, almost all reactions concurred explicitly with his worries about societal tensions. The point is to see how a discursive turning point comes about not simply from the introduction of novel rhetorical inventions and performances, but is enacted across an entire ensemble of interventions that together make up a particular public event. Together they make real what Scheffer’s essay assumed to be the case: that his intervention would provoke much turmoil, but that this was the only way to start facing the reality of what was happening. Reflections on the debate by journalist Mark Kranenburg show how the string of publications was already being mediated as a turning point in the moment. On February 17, he writes in the NRC Handelsblad:

Just like Bolkestein before, Scheffer has not done more than to list a number of known facts and formulated some penetrating questions. And just like Bolkestein’s piece before, Scheffer’s article has evoked an avalanche of reactions. A clear case of what Americans call ‘the big mo’, the right moment. Yet it still is strange. It means that the general recognition to implement forceful policy, which emerged nine years ago when Bolkestein rocked the boat, has slowly but surely faded out. While in fact the problems that were identified have only grown in size. The influx of allochthones has continued in a higher rate and the same is true for segregation: the black schools of nine years ago have become even blacker. […] Scheffer speaks of a multicultural drama. But there is also an adjacent politico-cultural drama that leads to the fact that the necessary and continued debate on minority policy is being held not at all or on a pathetic level. (February 17 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#101)

Although many contradicted Scheffer’s push for national awareness, they certainly did not contradict the notion that liberal values and openness towards others was at the heart of Dutch culture. Christen democratic politicians did indeed plea for tolerance of public religious expression, but they did not contradict liberalism’s centrality. The question was to what extent and how liberal values can best be
propagated and reframed. On this point, there is no substantive dissensus about what constitutes the difference between allochthonous traditionalism and Dutch culture. The image of liberal Dutchness acts as a shared means of disagreement. For Scheffer, the problem lies in the style through which Dutch liberalism could or should be presented. In line with this argument many of the reactions explicitly note how Scheffer’s intervention was affecting the debate. They again make explicit what Scheffer’s essay already assumed: that his intervention would usher in a new mode of debate, a new style of speaking that was to be more ostensive and outspoken. When, for example, Gowricharn and Duyvendak studiously analyse the discursive consequences of Scheffer’s provocations they may lay bare some, indeed, worrying aspects of public discourse, but they also affirm the notion that Scheffer’s essay had breached the boundaries and possibilities of debate. Moreover, they go on to reiterate Kossmann’s idea that Dutch identity is a matter of discussion.

Scheffer finalised and, in a sense, perfected the enactment of a turning point by publishing a reply to the many reactions, titled The multicultural drama, a reply. He writes:

The past two months have been an exploration journey in my own country, call it a civic enculturation course. The wave of hundreds of conversations, letters and critical commentaries in reaction to my article demonstrate that many people are affected by living together with so many cultures on such a small territory. Through the shock of immigration Dutch society is prompted to be inventive. Some are better at that than others. However, the feeling of uncertainty is not easily brushed off. In the end, the many reactions, however hard-nosed, provide hope. In the preceding years it has often been said that the multicultural multitude is not susceptible to public debate. Immediately, there would emerge dissonant tones and improper clichés. Although an emphasis on disadvantage [achterstand] can all too easily regress into stigmatisation of entire segments of the population [bevolkingsgroepen], overall this hasn’t happened. It turns out it is possible to speak in a somewhat unprejudiced [onbevangen] way about the many pitfalls in which we, of course, all too often stumble. (March 25 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#102)

Many political leaders and high level administrators – Hans Dijkstal, Ivo Opstelten, Eimert van Middelkoop, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Ab Klink – responded. Roger van Boxtel, the minister responsible for ‘problems in large cities’, published an extensive reply in which he agreed with Scheffer’s analysis of the problem, but did not agree with the ‘sense of defeat that emanates from Scheffer’s piece’. In late April of 2000 a parliamentary debate was held in lieu of the public controversy. Trouw wrote in their editorial column that:

The parliamentary debate has, without a doubt, contributed to a more balanced approach, more clarity and, not in the least, to a normal pitch. This may prevent the issue from becoming a raw nerve of society that plays up with the lightest touch. (April 21 2000, Trouw) (#103)
Discussion over national identity, Muslim others, multicultural troubles and, particularly, the need for a better debate and a governmental response persisted. Once again, debate is articulated as much more than a political disagreement playing itself out in public. The idea of changing speech rules were attributed a non-political, societal significance. Debate is foremost taken to be expressive of deeply held moral commitments expressed in public. A particularly effective summation is given by public intellectual Bas Heijne, who writes in a distinctly ironic-yet-earnest style:

Of course, all these Dutch debates, with Koran-waiving imams, Nietzsche-quoting philosophers, doubting directors and crazy architects, don’t produce anything concrete, also because politicians emphatically ignore them. That’s not the point. The debates are in essence a kind of civic enculturation course, not just for allochthones, but also for the Dutch themselves. Finally, people can proclaim all kinds of things on issues about which Dutch politicians are too obtuse or afraid to do so. Finally people can speak about the Netherlands as a country to which you really feel attached.

(February 17 2001, NRC Handelsblad) (#104)

If the ensemble of Scheffer’s alarm and the public reactions to it appeared to have instigated a breach of speech rules and an opening of political opportunities, the figure of Fortuyn came to actually occupy the political space thus created and further inflect the need to reinvigorate Dutchness. What became almost instantly named ‘the Fortuyn revolt’ (see in particular Ellemers 2002; Wansink 2004; Couwenberg 2004) forms the central spectacle through which a pivot point in political time was performed. While the importance of Pim Fortuyn’s entry into party political conflict in the Netherlands can hardly be underestimated, the significance of his platform for debates on Dutchness should not be. As I will argue, the problematic of Dutchness was not radically rewritten through the rise and fall of Fortuyn. After Fortuyn’s moment, articulations of Dutchness did not look much different than before. Yet, ‘national culture’ became an immensely important policy issue in lieu of Fortuyn’s ‘revolt’. How is this possible?

**Fortuyn’s politics of embeddedness**

Fortuyn’s actions would have a major effect on Dutch politics. He demonstrated that a whopping 26 parliamentary seats could be assembled around a revanchist agenda of safety and order, anti-bureaucratic reform of the welfare state, a forceful and demanding integration policy, far-reaching restriction of immigration and an optimistic plea for societal renewal (Fortuyn 2002). Moreover, he was able to do so practically overnight: entering the political field as the new leader of *Leefbaar*
Nederland in the summer of 2001 and being brutally yanked out of it in the spring of 2002, just before the elections.

The idea that the political events of 2000-2002 constituted a moment of reaction, in which suppressed grievance could finally manifest themselves in public, is associated most intimately with the figure of Pim Fortuyn. His shift from ex-Marxist sociology professor and public intellectual of the entrepreneurial classes to political leader of an insurgent movement of discontent and revival would turn out to deeply inflect issues of nationhood and diversity. Yet, we should take care not to rush to any conclusions about the importance of Fortuyn. What did his politics actually bring to the moment of reaction?

Fortuyn’s writing on Dutchness resonates with the counter-tradition of ‘cultural nationalism’ that can also be found in S. W. Couwenberg’s work. But nothing like a turn towards that brand of ‘cultural Dutchness’ took place in response to Fortuyn’s popularity. That is, the idea of ‘the Dutch’ as a category should be understood first in terms of a cultural ethni and only in a second instance as a territorial and political community did not find any expanding articulation. This notion of Dutchness, which implicates other culturally Dutch peoples beyond or irrespective of state territories and memberships, was and is of marginal significance for the succeeding contentions over Dutchness. Of course, such articulations of Dutchness do exist in many contexts (Margry & Roodenburg 2007; Guadeloupe & De Rooij 2007; Stengs 2012), but they are rarely the subject of political contention or policy justifications. Nor did it come to play any dominant role in the debates succeeding the ‘Fortuyn revolt’.

Fortuyn did not become notorious by proclaiming a fraternisation with the Flemish in neighbouring Belgium, the Dutch New Zeelanders, emigrants in Canada, the Afrikaners of South Africa, or the preservation of ethnological heritage. His attack on the ‘leftist church’, a fantastically layered expression that galvanised Fortuyn’s disdain for the corporatist establishment and the social-democrats in particular, was concerned with the immigration of culturally other-cum-backward people who were held responsible for crime, welfare dependence, alienation among the natives and the spread of antiquated values in a modern, enlightened country (Lucardie & Voerman 2002; Pels 2003; Sunier & Van Ginkel 2006; Oudenampsen 2013). Fortuyn reiterated – to great effect – an already established distinction between enlightened Dutchness and backward islam. Apart from wonderfully evocative language and performances – not unimportant – Fortuyn did little to innovate the manner in which nationhood could be problematised. The significance of Fortuyn’s distinct ‘cultural nationalism’ lies elsewhere.
In order to demonstrate this, we need to take into account the importance of anti-statist ideas in the evolving politics of Fortuyn. Recurring throughout his writings is the idea that the contemporary world is characterised by processes – Europeanization, globalisation, migration, the ICT-revolution, rapidly raising levels of education and individual autonomy – that, first, undermine the always already contested governance of centralised state bureaucracies and, second, provide opportunities for quickly evolving, networked structures of self-government by increasingly rational and empowered citizens. The sociologist Pim Fortuyn was, in many ways, a right-conservative Manual Castells. In his book To the people of the Netherlands: the contract-society, a political-economic drama of morals – a reference to a canonical political pamphlet by Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol associated with the civic insurrection of the so-called patriots at the end of the 18th century – Fortuyn concurs with far-reaching cooperation in Europe, but holds that this will not create a federal Europe:

The underlying structure is far older [older than European state formation] and, time and again, proves to be of immense importance. This underlying structure is that of regionality [regionaliteit]. A region is a survey-able geographic whole, in which economy and culture found their natural course [bedding] for centuries. An important expression, if not the most important, of that culture is language. The language binds people into a people [volk], into a nation. […] Frisians and Limburger are worlds apart, not to mention the Hollanders. And how much do differences between Walloons and inhabitants of Flanders mean, or between Catalans and Basques, or between Sicilians and Northern Italians, or between the Parisian and the Breton? After WOII we were able to think for a large number of years that these differences didn’t matter anymore. The politics of many modern, centralised states was geared towards diminishing regional differences. […] However, in the last ten years there has been a shift in thinking about regions and, even more importantly, the regions are acting much more self-confidently and autonomously. An important contribution to this changing attitude comes from the policy of the European Commission. […] The dependence upon the central government led to insular regions. The only way to maintain their particularity was to concentrate on their own culture and folklore. With the diminishing position of central government the region could become much more open to the outside. […] It will become increasingly difficult for national governments to maintain their monopoly positions with regards to the region and the conglomerate urban areas. This is true not only for the monopoly on taxation – both region and urban areas are already long underway in becoming distinct spaces of taxation – but also for such varying domains as health care, education, economic development and infrastructure. […] When I think of new fascism, I don’t particularly think of Le Pen, Schonhüber, the Flemish Block or in our country Janmaat, with their escalating, primitive xenophobia. […] Consumer society implies that people constantly want something new. They’ll quickly get bored with such ladies or gentlemen. No, when I think of new fascism, I think of diligent technocrats… (Fortuyn 1992: 24-28) (#105)

Fortuyn’s notion of nationhood clearly resonates with the tradition of ‘cultural nationalism’, yet it is of a particular bend. The crucial point is not the preservation of distinct (national) cultures, nor is the national state all that important. Fortuyn routinely uses naturalising and essentialising language to speak about difference,
but the rationale for doing so comes not from an adherence to ethnic purity or primordial roots. It is not a matter of preservation, of claiming that certain cultural particularities are unchangeable and will resist amendment or mixing. Nations even appear to be highly diverse conglomerates of regions. The notion of one, homogenous national culture is untenable here. Rather, Fortuyn juxtaposes artificially constructed state institutions, particularly national ones, over and against locally lived worlds of meaningful expression and entrepreneurship that constitute the real social bonds from which national states are merely temporary extensions. Political pre-eminence therefore lies with the survey-able world of the region. Culture and economy constitute the energy, engagement, pleasure and dynamism of people’s lives and thus form the locus of value. State politics should be a tool to attend to the fears, hopes and dreams of regionally embedded citizens. National government is a means to an end: the coordinated interaction of highly diverse people embedded in their own cultural locality. Thus, the national state should never be allowed to create its own necessities, its own needs, apart from the people that have built it. In fact, Fortuyn foresees the EU taking up the task of such coordination, while regions acquire more and more means of self-government. Thereby, the national state gradually becomes marginalised, yet elites who depend on their position in national state bureaucracies resist this process with all they’ve got. For Fortuyn, new fascism comes from Weber’s bureaucratic iron cage, not Herder’s lived ethnos.

The significance of Fortuyn’s cultural nationalism was not that it breached the hegemony of a liberal or civic nationalism, much less cosmopolitan pluralism which was never hegemonic to begin with. Rather, it informed a particular assessment of and engagement with national politics. The point of Fortuyn’s nationalism is an all-out attack on the irrationalities of technocratic, bloodless government. In this regard, greater European coordination would release people’s cultural and economic vitality from the grip of centralised, national conformity. It is here that the established management of immigration and diversity creates problems according to Fortuyn. That is, the problem is not cultural diversity itself, which in Fortuyn’s cultural nationalism is a normal condition for nations, but the attempts by state administrators to bloodlessly impose a way of dealing with diversity onto its citizens. For instance: while Fortuyn’s approach to issues of difference is one that is deeply marked by cultural relativism, he – like many others – used the term as an epitaph for indifference to lived experience and historically engrained meaning as, apparently, exercised by disaffected technocrats. Fortuyn criticised the political establishment, invested in the out-dated structures of
centralised governance, for being *bloodless* cultural relativist as they disregarded the lived troubles of immigration.

Fortuyn moves without hesitation between a pre-statist Herderian notion of culture and a distinctly statist approach to Dutchness, implying state responsibilities for guarding access to citizenship on the basis of politico-cultural values. The problem with Muslims and their lacking integration was not that they don’t take to raw haring or introduce yet unknown customs, songs and products into a familiar cultural milieu. Fortuyn’s regard for the diverse cultural life of people is at the heart of his cultural relativism. The problem lies squarely in the inability of newcomers to cooperate with and participate in the practices of public interaction and political decision-making. Unlike Dutch citizens, they are not yet empowered and emancipated, equipped to claim self-governance over against an overbearing technocracy. Through this public and political inaptitude they come to rely on the technocratic state, thereby empowering the bloodless government of established state officials. According to Fortuyn, the bloodless management of diversity by established political elites disabled effective confrontations over cultural differences and discourages natives and newcomers from expressing their cultural particularities. A bloodless cultural relativism imposed by national government thereby precludes the civic maturation of the immigrant.

It is this political diagnosis that became most important in the controversies surrounding Fortuyn’s rise to prominence. Like others before him, Fortuyn often repeated that natives felt like foreigners in their own country. Yet, Fortuyn never explained that feeling by arguing that culturally different peoples could not live together; that nations could not be diverse; that a nation and a culture should coincide. The problem is conceived outside a schema of un-mixable substances. Instead, Fortuyn argued that the cultural history of Jewish, Christian and humanist civilisation, as developed in the West, equipped the Dutch with the means to live together and deal with their cultural differences. Conversely, the backward, Islamic cultural formation disabled Muslims to live in the world of modern, emancipated citizens (Fortuyn 1997). The problem is not cultural diversity itself, but the inability of specific groups to be successful without technocratic assistance, and, even more importantly, the hesitations of the political establishment to grapple with that problem.

Arguing for the importance of a judeo-Christian-humanist tradition in developing a liberal democracy and an open public sphere was not exactly a gesture that many in Dutch politics were in a position to convincingly disagree with. On this issue, Fortuyn merely articulated in accusatory language what was already self-evidently Dutch, namely the liberal capacity to organise difference in
Fortuyn became most notorious for expressing precisely what his opponents also said to believe about the Dutch and their identity: they are enlightened, emancipated, modern, autonomous, liberal, civic, sexually permissive, tolerant and a bit blunt. These were the qualities of lived culture and enterprise that Fortuyn deemed best promoted by a self-assured affirmation of Dutch identity and a restriction of undesirable immigration of unequipped others. Fortuyn’s notion of cultural difference is relevant here because it helps to understand how he sought to articulate a distinction between the bloodless defence of Western liberalism by the political establishment and his own passionate expression of it. In Fortuyn’s politics, the latter is crucial to the way politics should be done. It should aspire to express energetically the lived values and experiences of culturally embedded people. This vocalisation of deeply held convictions and experiences is the proper role of the representative as he should derive his politics from embedded concerns and desires. As soon as the representative severs the link between himself and everyday life he will only be able to vocalise the artificial necessities of political engineering. This is the pathology that Fortuyn diagnosed in the stale corporatism of the purple-coalition government: a politics without life.

When critics chose to attack Fortuyn for taking anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant positions they may have been expressing genuine concern about rising animosity against immigrants, but they were also demonstrating precisely what Fortuyn deemed to be the problem: a self-inflicted discomfort with articulating one’s cultural differences to others, an ineptitude for expressing one’s embeddedness. This analysis of the problem is hardly unique to Fortuyn’s distinctive cultural nationalism. It resonates almost verbatim with problematisations as they were articulated from the end of the 1980’s onwards: the Dutch are tolerantly multicultural to the point of neglect and indifference, which makes them susceptible to incursions by cultures that are less open and pluralistic. Fortuyn was never completely trapped in the position of a cultural nationalist who expounded racist ideas about a pure, Dutch ethnos. Indeed, his positions on Dutchness were neither limited to nor primarily concerned with the preservation of said ethnus. Rather, they informed his critique of technocracy and his focus on a passionate, lively expression of political convictions.

In line with Fortuyn’s own diagnosis, his personal commitment and passion became hugely significant for the political effects of his appearance and assassination (Pels 2003; Koopmans & Muis 2009). As shall be demonstrated further in the chapters to come, it is not tenable to suggest that with Fortuyn a turn to cultural nationalism took place. However, Fortuyn’s cultural nationalism and the associated critique of technocracy did enable him to radicalise the already
established contestation over Dutch identity. Indeed, his writings and his public interventions contain many allusions to national imagery and the widely expressed notion that the Dutch should feel unrestrained in expressing their particular cultural singularity. What Fortuyn’s appearance added to the already established contention was the idea that the public struggle taking place was about him, about the persona of the public representative. Fortuyn’s persona and personal commitment to his attack on established politics in the Netherlands became highly valorised (Pels 2003; Sunier & Van Ginkel 2006; Muijs 2012). The fact that he paid for his efforts with his life was thereby all the more significant.

To be sure, this is not to suggest that Fortuyn invented or introduced personal politics into the Dutch context (cf. Pels 2003). Personalities, mediated across ever changing technologies, have long since been part and parcel of the relationship between leaders and publics in the Netherlands (Te Velde 2010; Brants & Van Praag 2006). Fortuyn’s appearance brought the importance and significance attributed to persona to a higher pitch. His persona and the effect it could have on audiences became the subject of public discourse itself. With Fortuyn it became effectively impossible to deny that ‘screen presence’ mattered in and of itself (see also Van Reekum 2012b) and the idea that personality matters was itself a crucial part of Fortuyn’s platform. Thus, the need for and power of personal connections between political leaders and electoral audiences became a matter of concern: did politicians take care of their relationship with their audiences in the right way? Why could Fortuyn do what others couldn’t? The attention-arousing and image-mediating character of modern democracy became a crucial point of discussion (Elchardus 2002; Tiemeijer 2006; Bovens & Wille 2009).

The idea that representatives should listen to the people has been an insurgent concept from the 1950’s onwards (De Haan 1993; Zahn 1989). It basically says that public opinion emanates from below and should be recanted by those in positions of leadership. Over and over, various generations of politicians and public figures had consecutively attacked each other for not really representing public opinion. What the presence of Fortuyn now added is the idea that the disembedded elites could only really be unmasked by someone who put his entire personality into his political mission. Only a person who craved an intimate relation with the public would be able to speak its mind. With Fortuyn, the narrative of participatory democracy was cast in the mould of an intimate and direct relationship between representative and represented. Critique of Fortuyn’s performative prowess – for being vulgarly populist and playing on base sentiments, particularly when it came to problems caused by allochthones – only came to
affirm the intimate connection that Fortuyn’s political movements apparently embodied.

The spectacle of Fortuyn’s rise, notoriety and assassination did little to displace the already established conception of the problem with Dutch identity, nor did it effectively introduce a counter-narrative of Dutchness into public discussion. The pushback from other parties against Fortuyn and his shocking assassination did become an immensely affective enactment of the notion that certain opinions were systematically repressed and could not be freely expressed in public (Prins 2004; Van Stokkom 2008). Thus, the troubles with Dutch identity acquired an immense weight: at stake was the very connection between ‘people’ and ‘government’. Even though Fortuyn himself added little to the on-going articulations of Dutchness, the fact that his politics were so strongly connected to his person and his leadership meant that his persona became a focal point of concern. Quite in line with reactions to Scheffer’s essay, Fortuyn rise and murder enacted a breach of public discourse and governmental policy. Yet, this breach can hardly be found in the way in which Dutch identity was approached or imagined. Both Scheffer and Fortuyn’s moments of reaction solidified and radicalised the existing image of a civic, liberal, enlightened nation.

**Dutchness after the breach**

Taken together, the interventions of Scheffer and Fortuyn constituted at the beginning of the new millennium a particular call to action. It is impossible to suggest that Scheffer and Fortuyn were the authors of the post-2000 politicisation of Dutchness. A host of other developments should always be taken into account, not in the last instance the reverberations of 9-11. However, through the way in which they helped articulate a moment of reaction in political time we can better understand what would be at stake in the attempts to translate a problematised nationhood into specific policy efforts. Two aspects seem of crucial importance.

First, Dutchness after the breach would be that which was lacking before. It is not only presented as the solution that will – finally – allow government to fix that which was broken, but it figures as the cure that had not yet been tried. ‘Dutch culture’, ‘Dutch identity’, ‘Dutch distinctiveness’ carry the promise of a last resort: now that all else has failed, we might try it. As the political turmoil of the 2000-2002 period had demonstrated, it was now time to finally do what had been postponed for so long: to turn to Dutchness in a way that the imaginary of Dutchness itself so thoroughly disabled. To *turn to it* in an emphatic, whole-hearted and authentic manner, to mobilise it without reserve. It would no longer be enough to prop it up as an abstract principle: debate, image, construction, openness,
toleration. It would need to be used, applied, implemented, effectuated, put into action. Governmental policies would have to make of Dutchness no longer just its vague goal at the horizon – ‘integration’ – but its instrument at hand. Dutchness could no longer just be the end result of policy. It should be yielded as an instrument of policy. As I have argued, the watershed of 2000-2002 cannot be reconstructed as a moment at which a cultural turn took effect. That would first of all presume that public discourse and governmental policy were not concerned with culture before. Moreover, one would assume that innovative and dissonant articulations of Dutch culture can be found in the interventions of the main protagonists of such a cultural turn. I have tried to show why it is much more appropriate to understand the significance of the watershed and the roles of Scheffer and Fortuyn along other lines.

Scheffer and Fortuyn did not invent new discourses of Dutch culture, but rather new ways to articulate the inevitable coming of backlash. Not only did they themselves figure prominently in these narratives of reactive politics, the already well-established motif of tensions between ‘multicultural idealism’ and ‘multicultural reality’ was given a far grander significance. Scheffer and Fortuyn, each in their own way, invented ways to relate this tension to the very legitimacy of democratic representation itself. The subsequent rupture of representation did open up space for a new politics of Dutchness, namely one in which Dutchness would become a governmental instrument as much as the governmental goal it was already.

Dutchness after the breach would be that which renews the connection between embedded citizens and their representatives. In their wielding of this new instrument, those in government would need to rediscover what it means to be Dutch and, thereby, restore its relationship with the citizenry. The politicisation of Dutchness is not just about finally instrumentalising it, but at once about acting on the behalf of an embedded public. Using Dutchness as a policy tool is not just a matter of using the right tool for the right job, but also a matter of listening to the people. To a certain extent we might even say that Dutchness becomes the right tool for the job because the people desire it so. What in policy science are called ‘outcomes’ become conspicuously irrelevant. What matters most are not the actual consequences of policy – better scores on indicators of integration –, but whether government is capable of instrumentalising Dutchness in policy.

Indeed, this amounts to a somewhat contradictory mission. On the one hand there is a focus on instrumental action and the hope for real solutions. Results are what matter, not the empty rhetoric of lofty ideals. On the other hand there is the audience of government. It apparently wants Dutchness to be instrumentalised
quite irrespective of the results as it demands representatives who listen to it. This tension provides the space in which the post-2000 politicisation of Dutchness would manoeuvre: Dutchness should be turned into an instrument and it should thereby be enacted convincingly in view of an embedded public. How can both be achieved? As we move now to the two foremost lines of instrumentation, it will become evident how difficult it became to enact such instruments of Dutchness convincingly.