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Omar El Zoheiry

Macalester College, oeizohei@macalester.edu

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The Dutch Political Experiment: Phase Three

Omar El Zoheiry

I. Introduction

In the past two decades, many Western liberal democracies have undergone fundamental political transformations. Faced with the challenges of adapting to globalization and the world's increasingly interconnected financial system, many of these democracies have found it necessary to implement a technocratic form of governance. The distance between the political elite and the people was allowed to grow under these regimes in order to achieve the much-needed efficiency in policy formulation and international integration. This article utilizes the case study of the Netherlands to analyze the implications of this gap, perhaps the most significant of which being the rise of "contemporary populism." It attempts to make sense of seemingly random and unrelated events that have recently shocked Dutch society and politics within a framework of structural change instead of treating these events as temporal occurrences. It demonstrates how such a framework is necessary in understanding the true reason behind these events and why a temporal argument might lead to superficial conclusions.

Before exploring these issues, the article first offers a historical overview of the Netherlands from 1945 to 2011, identifying key political and societal changes. Second, a theoretical explanation of the central concept, populism, is given with the aim of clarifying the many misconceptions that plague the term. Third, the question of how and why populism came to fruition in the Netherlands at the turn of this century is answered. This is linked to a political theory of democracy with the purpose of pinpointing the deeper, structural problems faced by the Dutch system. Fourth, an analysis of declining political trust in the wider context of democratic change is given. Fifth, the position of the environmental sector of civil society within a "populist Netherlands" is analyzed using an interview conducted for this article with the director of a prominent civil society organization. Sixth, and finally, I offer two categorically different lessons I learned from conducting this study and writing the article.

II. The Netherlands: 1945–2000

It is no wonder why historians often refer to Dutch political history in astonishment and describe it in terms of a political experiment. Since the end of the Second World War until the turn of the century, Dutch political elites have tried two very different models of political organization. The first model is the traditional Dutch model of socio-political organization: "pillarization." As the term suggests, under this model, Dutch society was divided into separate segments or *pillars*. Religious denomination and ideological affiliation formed the basis of these divisions, resulting in three main pillars: Catholic, protestant, and social democratic. Each had its own schools, banks, sports clubs, trade unions, and even its own hospitals, as well as its own political parties and newspapers. As a result, members of each of the three segments rarely came into contact

with each other under normal societal conditions. Dutch pillarization survived stubbornly until the late 1960s.

As education levels rose, however, the legitimacy of religious and ideological segregation came under scrutiny and pillarization was eventually overtaken by secular liberalism. The system lost its merit both in politics and in the wider society. It was replaced with a seemingly opposite model: “polder politics.” While the term suffers from ambiguity regarding origin and use, it is commonly deployed to describe the consensus politics of the Netherlands in the 1980s and 1990s. In short, the Dutch polder model is one of cooperation between government, trade unions, and employers, regardless of religious affiliation. Consensus through dialogue is the primary decision-making tool of this model, and off-stage compromise is the intended outcome, making it depoliticizing in nature.

At the heart of the polder model is the notion and practice of pragmatism. This entails transforming heated, problematic issues into non-issues through rational dialogue and accommodation. Professor Justus Uitermark, urban researcher and sociologist, argues that many of the policies and laws that are often treated as symbols of Dutch openness and liberalism are in fact motivated by hardcore pragmatism instead of ideological belief. For example, the Netherlands’ decriminalization of “soft drugs” may be understood by some to mean that the Dutch political elite of the 1970s condoned drug usage. Uitermark would argue that is not the case. During the student riots of the 1960s, Dutch politicians recognized the fact that regardless of legality, a large segment of their citizenry used cannabis-based narcotics such as marijuana. In order to accommodate for this section of society and to avoid the dangers of illegal drug trafficking, a compromise was reached that deemed small amounts of soft drugs tolerable. This decision was taken without explicitly consulting the people, and thus says less about what the average Dutch person believes than it does about the nature of Dutch politics. Other examples of political pragmatism include the legalization of prostitution and the Netherlands’ loose policies regarding immigration and minority groups.

The polder model served the Netherlands throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Political and societal trust during that period was at an all-time high. The Netherlands was considered a beacon for political openness and liberalism. The media played a positive, non-biased role as political watchdog and objective news informant. Internationally, the polder model was the envy of many democratic nations, First and Third World alike.

III. The Netherlands: 2000–Present

For the outside observer, it is almost impossible to reconcile the last ten years of Dutch political history with the polder model and the Netherlands of cooperation and pragmatism. The new century ushered in a series of shocking events, centering on a group of colorful figures that would all come to symbolize the beginning of the end for polder politics and the tradition of political pragmatism. These events ranged from the drop in public trust to political assassinations. Dutch multiculturalism went from being a cause for celebration to a cause for concern. News media were no longer seen as information sources, but rather as biased outlets of drama with an economic purpose. The old political agenda was effectively displaced by a list of problems that needed fixing: media accountability, immigration, and decreasing trust. In short, all that was highly acclaimed in the Netherlands of the 1980s and 1990s becomes a symbol for political failure in the Netherlands of the early 21st century, and remains so to this day.

The first of these events was the 2002 Dutch national elections. In the words of political scientist in a think tank for the Dutch Labor Party (PvdA), René Cuperus, “On 15 May 2002

there occurred, to the great astonishment of foreign observers in particular, an unprecedented political earthquake in the Netherlands.”¹ The two parties most represented in parliament, the PvdA and the VVD, lost a combined total of 36 seats in the 150-member National Assembly. Together, the (red) PvdA-Labour Party and the (blue) VVD-Conservative Liberals formed the heart of the “Purple Coalition” that had come to create and symbolize the polder model. “Political scientist Peter Mair has calculated that the 2002 Dutch election was one of the 16 most turbulent in Europe since 1900. It rates fourth in terms of ‘volatility’: the extent to which voters transferred their allegiance from one party to another.”²

The real surprise on May 15 was not the Purple Coalition’s loss, however, but rather the Lijst Pim Fortuyn Party’s victory. Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) was a newly established political party built upon and centering on its charismatic leader, Pim Fortuyn. Many regard this man as the most important political figure in recent Dutch history. Fortuyn was the very embodiment of the new politics of the Netherlands, what some have described as “Postmodern Populism.” Instead of the pragmatic and traditional political style and rhetoric of his predecessors, Fortuyn was emotional and personal in his politics. He constantly attacked the political elite for being out of touch with the “common man” and too focused on the bureaucracy of politics. He also failed to observe taboos and never respected political correctness. He wanted to put a stop to Islamic immigration, calling Islam a “backward” culture on numerous occasions. He was openly gay, which definitely does not fit with the Netherlands’ highly traditional model of political conduct in which the personal lives of politicians were not usually expressed, let alone their sexual orientation.

Pim Fortuyn was assassinated on May 6, 2002, nine days before election results. Nevertheless, the LPF was still able to secure 26 seats in Parliament, landing them a position in the new center-right coalition with the CDA and the VVD. Due to internal disputes, however, the LPF, along with the whole cabinet, collapsed 87 days after coming into power. This was the first of many “aftershocks”³ following the May 2002 earthquake. To the outside spectator, the 2002 national elections and the dramatic months that followed could seem to be a mysterious and temporary shift away from the Netherlands’ pragmatic method of politics that came to a slow wind down with Fortuyn’s death. While such a view could have been credible at the time, it can now be seen that Fortuyn was only the first populist politician of this kind.

“Since Pim Fortuyn’s tragic death and the disintegration of his party in the following months, various new parties have attempted to step into what was often perceived as a political vacuum.”⁴ The two most important examples are Proud of Netherlands (ToN), founded in 2007 and led by retired politician Rita Verdonk, and the Party for Freedom (PVV), founded in 2005 and led by its only member, Geert Wilders. Both politicians are considered right wing and populist. Both strongly break with traditional Dutch politics by employing anti-liberal rhetoric and opinions, most notably against Islam and immigration. Their parties and ideologies gained power under the banners of “honesty” and “courage.” This populist style of politics again proved to be highly successful in 2008 as both parties started campaigning for the 2010 national elections. In fact, and as a result of their success that year, a Dutch network even declared 2008 to be “the year of populism.”⁵ While ToN eventually went down the same road of internal disputes as LPF, Wilders’ one-man party proved successful in the 2010 national elections, winning 24 seats and a spot in the new center-right coalition cabinet with the CDA and the VVD.

To summarize, the last ten years of Dutch political history sharply deviate from earlier eras. The general changes include the rise of populism and the changing role of the media. Specific incidents include the assassination of Pim Fortuyn by an animal rights and environmental activist, allegedly for his anti-Islamic and, according to some, racist rhetoric. This was the first of

two assassinations on those grounds. The second is that of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh in 2004. The last decade also saw changes in the political agenda. The country went from a political style of accommodation in which all issues could feature in politics to a populist political style in which liberal and progressive values were constantly attacked, making them the sole focus of the political agenda.

What do these changes mean for the Netherlands and the Dutch people? What are their implications for civil society? How do they alter the face of Dutch democracy? Are they, and in effect their implications, temporal or structural? In other words, do these changes mark yet another permanent transformation for Dutch democracy—a “Phase Three” of the Dutch political experiment? I argue that the Netherlands has been undergoing a fundamental structural change over the past ten years in which the aforementioned changes all arise out of a deep-seated deficiency in Dutch democracy. Furthermore, I argue that the nature of this deficiency may be uncovered when populism is seen and treated as an indicator of a political failure rather than one itself. In other words, rather than a disease, populism should be seen as a symptom of the disease. Upon doing so, the root cause of problems, such as declining political trust and the marginalization of civil society organizations (CSOs), may be placed within the wider context of democratic change, rather than explained by a limited set of temporal events and individuals.

This article contributes to the existing debate on the Netherlands’ democratic transformation in many ways. First, it serves as an evaluation of the most pertinent scholarly articles in circulation with the aim of uncovering subtle yet important similarities between them. Second, it contributes to the small but growing literature that argues that populism should not be treated as a pathological disease—a fungus—that afflicts democracies. Third, by treating populism as a signal for change, this analysis highlights the actual problems faced by Dutch democracy and many other Western liberal democracies. Since populism is a central concept in this study, a short theoretical overview of it will now follow. In addition to explaining what it is, this overview is important in explaining what populism is *not*, because the misconceptions looming around the term are what tend to gain it such a negative reputation as an opportunistic malfunction.

IV. A Political Theory of Populism

The phenomenon of populism is by no means intrinsic to the Netherlands. Most commentators agree that parties such as the Austrian Freedom Party, Marine Le Pen’s French National Front, and four-time Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia (now, The People of Freedom) are all examples of contemporary populist parties. These parties are usually referred to as “new populist” parties since there are also “old populist” parties, such as the U.S. People’s Party, which was active toward the end of the nineteenth century and is considered one of the first populist movements.⁶ One could even argue that the notion of populism dates as far back as the old Roman Empire. Due to their reliance on direct democracy (i.e., referendums and people’s assemblies), the *Populares*, an unofficial faction of the Roman senate, strongly resembles modern-day populist parties. The controversy is that while there is general agreement regarding which parties should be labeled populist, there is little to no agreement concerning what makes them populist—i.e., what populism is.

The word “populism” is derived from the Latin word *populus*, which translates to “people” in the English language. The notion of “the people” is thus the first point of reference in most definitions of populism. Unsurprisingly, the vagueness of the concept has received much criticism from anti-populist theorists and thinkers: Who are the people? One critic elaborates,

“The people of the populist propaganda are neither real nor all-inclusive but rather a mythical and constructed sub-set of the whole population.”⁷ It is within the consciousness of this imagined community that the basis of all good politics resides. In other words, according to the populist ideology, politics should be an expression of the wisdom and desire of the common man. It thus comes as no surprise that the second point of reference in most definitions of populist ideology concerns the established power holders, “the elite.” Equally constructed and mythical, the elite in populist propaganda are denounced as the “incarnation of evil.”⁸ They are often portrayed as corrupt and self-interested politicians whose success translates into harm for the people: “Historically, these powerful, shady forces were bankers and international financiers. [...] In contemporary populism a ‘new class’ has been identified, that of the progressive and the ‘politically correct.’”⁹ Hence, contemporary populism stands not only against the elite, but also against the (liberal) views to which they subscribe. In short, contemporary populism is anti-establishment. This is not, however, to be confused with being anti-democratic. On the contrary, and as this study will show in a subsequent section, populists often see themselves as practicing the purest form of democracy.

Populism is a “moralistic ideology” that presents a “manichean” worldview in which “there are only friends and foes.”¹⁰ It proposes that the common sense of the people displaces the selfish interests of the elite as the motive for politics. To do so, populists such as Fortuyn and Berlusconi often speak of a third group of people that would be charged with the sole purpose of implementing the people’s desires in politics and law: “the experts.” This group would in no way influence the wishes of the people, but rather implement them.¹¹ Thus, a one sentence definition of the populism (Mudde’s) is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”¹²

In addition to being an ideology, populism is also a style or a technique of political behavior and rhetoric.¹³ In the words of Koen Vossen, populism comes with a set of “flavor enhancers” that serve to strengthen populism’s core feature described above. According to Vossen, there are five of these flavor enhancers: “an inclination towards conspiracy theories, a popular and folksy style, a strong voluntarism and a preference for both plebiscitary democracy and charismatic leadership.”¹⁴ While conspiracy theories are used to demonize the political elite, the folksy style and voluntarist approach are used by populist politicians to separate themselves from the (demonized) world of politics. The reliance on plebiscitary (direct) democracy and charismatic leadership is “the means by which populists aspire to redesign democracy in order to let the people express and impose its will without thresholds and restrictions.”¹⁵ Thus, the main difference between populism and other camps of political thought is that populist can be both an ideology and a description of a set of political techniques or characteristics.

V. Why and How Did Populism Succeed in the Netherlands?

Outside of the world of recently published scholarly works, populism tends to be seen as a pathological disease that afflicts harm on well-functioning democracies. To some degree, there is truth to this claim. As this article will show in a following section, populism can be linked with declining trust and the marginalization of civil society organizations (CSOs). This does not mean, however, that it should be labeled as a democratic “fungus” of no importance to the political theorist or statesman. On the contrary, the rise and success of populism could and ought

to be regarded as an indicator of structural ailments embedded deep within the democratic states in which it flourishes.

According to Margaret Canovan, “we cannot afford to brush these [populist] claims aside, and [...] reactions to populism’s disturbing recurrence in established democracies can help us to a better understanding of democracy’s complexities.”¹⁶ Writing specifically about the Netherlands, René Cuperus shares this view on populism. To him, “the obvious question is: what are the deep-seated roots and causes of this right-wing populist revolution in Europe?”¹⁷ In an answer to Cuperus’ question, this section of the essay will argue that the rise of populism in the Netherlands (and perhaps in all of Europe) is a direct result of the government’s exclusive focus on pragmatism and its lack of emphasis on the ideological, legitimizing aspect of politics. The Dutch polder model practiced a “behind-closed-doors” form of politics in which only output, and not input, mattered. In this form of pragmatic democracy, political debates and ideological opposition (left-right distinctions) were practically nonexistent, resulting in the citizen-voter’s exile from the world of politics. This democratic deficiency, referenced earlier, leads to the rise of populism and can be detected and treated upon populism’s rise and success.

The Netherlands’ long history of political pragmatism reached its climax in the 1990s. Faced with the challenge of adapting to globalization and the new European Monetary Union (EMU), the Dutch government employed a highly technocratic style of politics. This involved “off-stage policy making” and intensified the polder model’s “triangular extra-parliamentary process of collective bargaining between government, employers and trade unions.”¹⁸ As a result, there was no room for the average Dutch citizen in the house of politics at that time. The government portrayed a united vision of the future: that of a multicultural, globalized, and postindustrial Netherlands. The voter simply had to accept this vision. This form of “citizenless” politics is personified by then Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok. “In a famous speech, the Den Uyl lecture, Wim Kok shook off ‘the ideological feathers’ [of politics] and sang the song of pragmatism.”¹⁹

Not only was the average Dutch person locked outside the house of politics, but the blinds were shut too. Competing political parties of opposing ideologies usually have to convince the voter that what they are offering is better than the alternative. In other words, they have to “lay all their cards on the table.” This is especially true come election time. In the Netherlands of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, however, this distinction between left-wing and right-wing political parties was blurred. According to Cuperus, “the political leaders [...showed] little interest in fundamental policy debates. Their maxim has been risk management; they have shied away from more open, intellectual debate [leading to the prevalence of] a pragmatic middle ground.”²⁰ Again, this “middle ground” made no room for the citizen-voter, contributing to his/her exile from politics.

Little did Wim Kok know that within those “ideological feathers” he so willingly “shook off” rested the legitimacy of his regime and of the democratic institution. Little did the whole political elite know that while they were laying down the foundation for the future, a storm of dissatisfaction was brewing, a storm that would later be used by populist politician Pim Fortuyn in order to gain legitimacy and rise to the center of Dutch politics.

Without its legitimacy to protect it, Dutch democracy as represented by the Purple elite was left defenseless against the attacks of populism, represented and personified by Pim Fortuyn. The pragmatic culture of politics in the Netherlands during the first few years of the 21st century provided a fertile environment for populism’s core feature to grow and for the populist style to nourish it. The biggest weapon in the arsenal of any populist politician is the claim that the elite are out of touch with the people. Therefore, all Pim Fortuyn had to do was make the citizen-voter aware of his/her own situation. In order to do so, he employed Vossen’s “Flavour enhancers,”

and easily succeeded. Attributing conspiracy theories to the mystified and far-off world of Dutch politics was not a hard task for Fortuyn. And as stated above, his folksy style and his self-portrayal as a volunteer in the world of politics successfully labeled him as an outsider. His preference for direct democracy further delineated him from the political elite and increased his appeal to the people. In a few words, populism capitalized on an already existing set of problems within Dutch democracy. Had it not been for the citizen's exclusion from politics and the mystification of the political world, Fortuyn's populist political style would not have taken root so successfully. Hence, this article asserts that populism breeds upon certain deficiencies, thereby highlighting them on the one hand, but also exaggerating them on the other.

VI. "The Two Faces of Democracy"²¹

According to Margaret Canovan, democracy has two faces, a pragmatic and a redemptive face, and the source of populism is found in the tensions between the two. Pragmatically, democracy is a form of government, a way of structuring and organizing politics by means of national and local institutions. Democracy is also, however:

...a redemptive vision, kin to the family of modern ideologies that promise salvation through politics. [...] The notion of popular power lies at the heart of the redemptive vision: the people are the only source of legitimate authority, and salvation is promised as and when they take charge of their own lives.²²

What happened in many Western democracies, including the Netherlands, over the past two decades is that the pragmatic face prevailed over and completely ousted the redemptive face, effectively delegitimizing all those in power. In other words, while it could be the case that the political elite of the Purple Coalition were in fact properly running the Netherlands, they were doing so illegitimately as a result of isolating the world of politics from the people. Populism, personified by Pim Fortuyn, was able to capitalize on this deficiency, on the people's hunger for their inclusion in politics.

The tension between democracy's two faces not only explains why the populist ideology succeeded, but also why the populist style was so appealing to the people of the Netherlands. "Pragmatically, democracy means institutions: institutions not just to limit power, but also to constitute it and make it effective."²³ In redemptive democracy, however, there is an anti-institutional sentiment, and a strong inclination towards direct democracy. Again, an important legitimizing factor of any democracy is that political decisions are to an extent an expression of the people's desires. Institutions, however, often give rise to alienation by further divorcing the world of politics from the common people. In contrast, direct democracy's reliance on referendums and a constant appeal to the populace regularly includes the common man's opinions in the formulation of public policy. Thus, when democracy's pragmatic face prevails for decades, as was the case in the Netherlands, this anti-institutional sentiment grows, and so does the need for direct democracy, which is exactly what Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and Geert Wilders in modern-day Netherlands have offered.

Populism in the Netherlands filled the void created by a lack of emphasis on democracy's redemptive face. Hence, at present Dutch democracy is a fusion between the polder model's pragmatic mode of political organization, on the one hand, and populism (to an extent personified by Geert Wilders) as a substitute for the redemptive face of democracy, on the other. The tension between these two faces is much greater than the tension between pragmatic and

redemptive democracy, to the extent that populism may be seen as radical “redemptivism.” It will now be argued that this tension is leading to decreasing confidence in politics and, to a lesser degree, marginalizing certain civil society organizations and designing the political agenda to exclusively focus upon issues of immigration and integration.

VII. Declining Political Trust

In the Netherlands, trust in government dropped from just above 70% in 2002 to just below 40% in early 2004.²⁴ In addition, a similar decrease of trust in political parties and in parliament took place in that time period, by 30% and 10% respectively.²⁵ Furthermore, appreciation for most policy decisions also fell in such cases as health care, environment, social security, and education. Other Western European countries, such as Germany, Belgium, Denmark, and the U.K., exhibited the same general trend, but the Dutch case is unique for two reasons. First, trust in political institutions had been dropping in many Western European countries since the 1980s. In the Netherlands, it was rising during that time period, making the 2002–2004 drop alarmingly sudden and unique. The second difference has to do with the scale (size) of the drop. While trust in government, for example, in the other fifteen Western European countries (including the Netherlands) dropped an average of 10% between 2002 and 2004,²⁶ trust in the Netherlands alone decreased by 30%. It is for those two reasons that the “Dutch Drop” has been the topic of so many academic articles.

On the surface, the link between populism and declining political trust in the Netherlands is obvious. Being inherently anti-establishment, populist rhetoric thrives on discrediting the active political elites in any given country at any given time, thus leading to a drop in trust. This explanation is, however, very simplistic, as there are more factors at play than just words. The following section of the article will present multiple intertwined explanations as to why political trust declined in the Netherlands at the beginning of the century and why such a decline is of a structural rather than temporal nature. In doing so, specific reference shall be made to two articles written in 2008 and 2009 in *The International Review of Administrative Sciences*. My conclusion is that there are two layers of explanations concerning the Dutch Drop of 2004: a surface layer regarding the events themselves and a structural layer related to the aforementioned deficiency within Dutch democracy’s redemptive face.

Professors Mark Bovens and Anchrit Wille seek to explain why political trust in the Netherlands is declining. The two main enquiries of the article are (1) why did political trust suddenly decline at the turn of the century and (2) is this drop temporal or does it signify a permanent change in Dutch politics?²⁷ Bovens and Wille describe their method as, “a provisional meta-analysis of the literature and other evidence.”²⁸ More specifically, they evaluate ten explanations already embedded within national and international scholarly discourse. Based upon the “timing, generalizing capacity, and empirical plausibility”²⁹ of each, they assess the overall likelihood of each explanation as the reason for declining political trust in the Netherlands. Their conclusion is that, “in the case of the Dutch drop, the most plausible explanation is a combination of an economic decline, combined with high political instability and contestation during the first Balkenende cabinets.”³⁰

Bovens and Wille divide their ten possible explanations into two categories, with five endogenous to Dutch politics (i.e., directly related to politicians and public institutions) and five exogenous to the political sphere.³¹ Almost half of the ten explanations failed in fulfilling any of the three criteria, four fulfilled two out of three, and only one fulfilled all three: changing political culture.³² This explanation refers to the nature of politics in the Netherlands and the

manner in which it is conducted. “Past research...suggests that the public comes to support government authorities and policies when political elites are generally in agreement,”³³ which was the case in the Netherlands up until the turn of the century, with the rise of what Bovens and Wille call the “politics of conflict.”³⁴ Disagreement is not the problem in and of itself, “but [rather] the growth of negative political campaigning and advertising that has contributed to the public’s growing cynicism.”³⁵

Bovens and Wille highlight the importance of Pim Fortuyn as one of the main reasons for the change in political culture that took place in the early 2000s.³⁶ For decades, Dutch politics was a model for consensus seeking and pragmatism. However, due to the rise of this populist politician who broke civil taboos with his emotional rhetoric and flamboyant personality, Dutch politics seemingly underwent an intense transformation “from polder politics to polarization.”³⁷ The question then becomes: was this change a temporary historical phenomenon (due mainly to Fortuyn) or does it indicate a structural change in Dutch politics? Bovens and Wille do not provide a sufficient answer to that question. They state, “It is too early for definite conclusions, but polder politics seems to be quite resilient.”³⁸ Hence, they seem to gravitate toward the temporal side of the argument. However, with the rise of Geert Wilders to the center of the Dutch political arena in recent years, this question of changing political culture deserves much closer attention.

Writing a year after Bovens and Wille, Frank Hendriks asks the same questions. His article is written as a follow up to Bovens and Wille, and is entitled, “Contextualizing the Dutch Drop in Political Trust: Connecting Underlying Factors.” He criticizes Bovens and Wille for analyzing the Dutch Drop as a temporal phenomenon, explainable by a set of static events. He also criticizes them for not simultaneously connecting their ten explanations and seeing if they have a joint effect on trust.³⁹ Hendriks argues:

...the Dutch system is facing a fundamental, more-than-episodic problem. The structural problem facing the system is primarily a problem of legitimacy. [...] In my interpretation, the legitimacy problem springs from a fundamental mismatch between rational patterns that are an integral part of the dominant consensus democracy on the one hand, and shifting expectations and perceptions that are related to the rise of an emotional culture and an increasingly perceived risk-society on the other.⁴⁰

The notion of consensus democracy in this case is no different than—and is in fact synonymous with—the model of pragmatic politics the Purple Coalition practiced under the polder political system. Hendriks explains that, “Citizens have become less likely to confidently observe their representatives and guardians; elite decision-making is increasingly criticized for being too paternalistic and patronizing; [...] citizens want to be part of the action; they want to put crucial decisions to vote.”⁴¹ In other words, they want to revitalize democracy’s redemptive face. Writing almost ten years apart, Hendriks and Canovan are essentially saying the same thing. Hendriks explains that tension arises between the old and new political methods that now simultaneously characterize Dutch politics. The first is the traditional model of polder politics. The new paradigm is the politics embodied by Fortuyn and other populist politicians (emotional, “honest” and idealistic).

Hence, the temporal events and factors explained by Bovens and Wille are only “the tip of the iceberg.” Beneath them lies the structural problem identified by Canovan, Cuperus, and Hendriks. Populism’s role in declining political trust was to activate the people, to come in as a

replacement for democracy's redemptive face and set in motion these tensions. The temporal factors that Bovens and Wille identified were merely catalysts for an inevitable movement against an old political elite that had lost its legitimacy a long time before. Pim Fortuyn made the Dutch realize it. Populism did not create the need for heated and emotional debate in the Netherlands, it simply obeyed it.

VIII. Marginalization of Environmental CSOs

Wilders exploited the PVV's position in the majority coalition with the VVD and CDA to give his anti-Islamic and anti-immigration opinions a place on the political agenda. Through a Parliamentary Support Agreement between the three parties, Wilders can count on CDA and VVD support on certain issues, and they on his. It comes as no surprise that more than half of this agreement centers on issues of immigration and integration. Wilders and the PVV effectively made the Netherlands a monothematic country when it comes to politics. Wilders had a partner in doing so, however: the media. Just as "60 per cent of all TV coverage of the election campaign was devoted to Fortuyn"⁴² during the 2002 elections, Wilders was also able to count on constant media attention in 2010 by employing many of the same general opinions and anti-progressive rhetoric.

With the rise of populism in the Netherlands and the shifting focus of the political agenda to issues of immigration and integration, certain civil society organizations and whole groups are now finding it hard to appeal to both the public and the government. Due to the lack of scholarly work and empirical data, this last section of the article will rely on an interview I conducted with the director of Milieudefensie, Mr. Hans Berkhuizen. This interview confirmed my suspicions that the Netherlands is undergoing a structural change that is leaving the issue of the environmentalism in the background.

Milieudefensie is a grassroots organization that focuses upon the issue of environmental sustainability with the aim of placing it on the political agenda, mainly through activism and lobbying. Historically, Milieudefensie has had better ties with left-wing political parties: "they are more eager to know about our opinions than others," says Mr. Berkhuizen. While Milieudefensie still has good political ties with the government, their relationship has deteriorated over the past ten years. Subsidies have been cut down and politicians have become less receptive than before. Mr. Berkhuizen explains, "this is a tendency which occurred before this [Mark Rutte] cabinet was installed." He continues to say, "there is a movement to the right wing throughout all political parties, and the left wing somehow had the idea that they had to go along with it." This claim is in line with Cuperus's assertion that, "Even where populist right-wing parties are not in power, they still largely set the agenda."⁴³ Mr. Berkhuizen thus believes that the problem is structural, and fears that an environmental catastrophe will have to take place for the issue of sustainability to reach the political agenda.

Mr. Berkhuizen went as far as saying that some form of conspiracy theory is taking place, in which politicians are trained to dodge the issue of the environment and focus on more inflammatory issues, such as immigration. The prominence of the issue of immigration in effect marginalizes that of the environment. The media role in this cannot be emphasized enough. My informant declared, "the politicians were building up this kind of mindset into the media and into the civilians [...] somehow they made the economy and immigration issues [...] big." To deal with their increasing marginalization, many CSOs from the environmental sector have formed coalitions of their own, including Milieudefensie. The aim is "agendizing" their issues through

changing how they are communicated to the people: “working with other means of reaching people.”

IX. Conclusion and Lessons Learned

This article was written with the aim of explaining certain changes of a political nature that took place in the Netherlands over the past decade within the wider context of Dutch democratic transformation. It finds that the Netherlands is undergoing a structural democratic change in which populism displaces redemptive democracy as democracy’s second face. This came as a direct result of the Purple Coalition’s exclusive focus on the practice of pragmatism, in which the citizen-voter was divorced from the political elite. This democratic transformation is marked by decreasing levels of political trust and the marginalization of certain factions of society due to the focus on issues of immigration and integration. It is not clear what the future holds for the Netherlands and other democratic institutions undergoing the same or similar changes. It is clear, however, that if the Netherlands wants to move past this turbulent phase in which it currently resides, it needs to take populist claims to legitimacy seriously.

There are two main lessons I derive from conducting and writing up this study. When I first proposed my independent project, I wanted to investigate the relationship between civil society and the state in the Netherlands. This was in hopes of deriving democratic lessons for my home country, Egypt. I was acting under the assumption that the Dutch political system was without fault, and could thus be used as a template for democratizing countries like my own. In other words, I was influenced by the “hype” surrounding the Netherlands of the 1980s and 1990s, which at the time was acclaimed as an almost flawless political system. When I recognized the fallacy of my assumption, I decided to investigate further, a curiosity that eventually shaped this article. I still believe, however, that in conducting this study, I extracted many transferable lessons. For example, this study has helped me make sense of many surface-level events in my own country, such as the media’s changing role within a framework of structural (rather than temporal) change. Furthermore, my understanding of populism as a style as well as an ideology made me aware of the many populist elements that sprung out of the 25 January movement. I plan to continue applying the knowledge I gained from conducting this study to the Egyptian case whenever possible.

A second lesson has to do with the major theme of the program for which I conducted the study: globalization. As stated in the introduction, the change to technocratic governance in the Netherlands was triggered by the need to adapt to globalization. In the fast-paced world of today, governments can no longer consult the people on all matters that affect them. There are simply too many (changing) issues on the agenda. Hence, there is a need for at least some degree of authoritarian rule when it comes to less prevalent or contentious issues. If the Dutch case has taught me anything, however, it is that decisions made away from the public eye could be resented, regardless of merit. The question then becomes: where should democracies draw the line? Which matters should be decided in parliament and which through referendums and voting? The answers to these questions could easily change our definition and understanding of democracy. Therefore, this study has made me aware of one of globalization’s less obvious implications. With this awareness, I am in a better position to ask the right questions and properly direct future research.

I also believe that my own understanding of globalization was refined as a result of this study. In the fall of my sophomore year (2011), I wrote a short paper responding to the question: Is the sovereign nation-state obsolete? It was hard for me to fully understand the reasoning behind

such a question. Why *would* the sovereign nation-state be obsolete? In analyzing the complex challenges posed by globalization to the Netherlands of the early 21st century, not only did this question start making more sense, but I also started formulating a more thorough answer for it. I now understand why some would argue that in the era of globalization, states can no longer exercise as much control over even the most domestic of matters as before. States need to be more flexible and reflexive when it comes to globalizing forces of change. This, in turn, requires a nation of global citizens. In short, I now understand that the issue of global citizenship, with its global awareness, has now escaped its purely academic shell and forced itself upon the world as a necessary reality for states and individuals alike.

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Notes

1. R. Cuperus, "From Polder Model to Postmodern Populism: Five Explanations for the 'Fortuyn Revolt' in the Netherlands," *Akademie fur Internationale Politik* (2003), p. 2.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
4. K. Vossen, "Populism in the Netherlands after Fortuyn: Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders Compared," *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, no. 1 (2010): 22.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
6. C. Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics* (2004), online at works.bpress.com/cas_mudde/6, p. 548.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 545.
8. Vossen 2010, p. 24.
9. Mudde 2004, p. 561.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 544.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 547.

12. Ibid., p. 543.
13. Vossen, 2010; Linda Bos et al. 2010.
14. Vossen 2010, p. 24.
15. Ibid., p. 25.
16. Canovan 1999, p. 2.
17. Cuperus 2003, p. 2.
18. Ibid., p. 8.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Canovan 1999, p. 10.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. F. Hendriks, "Contextualizing the Dutch Drop in Political Trust: Connecting Underlying Factors," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 75 (2009): 477.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. M. Bovens and A. Wille, "Deciphering the Dutch Drop: Ten Explanations for Decreasing Political Trust in the Netherlands," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 74, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 286.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 289.
30. Ibid., p. 283.
31. Ibid., p. 287.
32. Ibid., p. 299.
33. Ibid., p. 295.

34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., p. 296.
37. Ibid., p. 295.
38. Ibid., p. 296.
39. Hendriks 2009, p. 479.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p. 482.
42. Cuperus 2003, p. 12.
43. Ibid., p. 1.

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