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# Do Crying Citizens Make Good Citizens?

*Mervi Pantti and Liesbet van Zoonen*

The present paper is framed within current debates about the need to rethink citizenship, especially with respect to the question of whether there is a legitimate place for emotion in the public sphere. Emotion has not traditionally been seen as a key to good citizenship, and there has been a fair amount of aversion among media critics towards the “emotionalization” of the public sphere and spectacular outbursts of public emotion. This paper looks at the coverage of the murders of Dutch filmmaker and journalist Theo van Gogh in 2004 and Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002, and shows that the issue is not simply whether emotions should be allowed in the public sphere or not, but rather how they are articulated and how they achieve different understandings of citizenship.

*Keywords* Citizenship; politics; emotions; news; public sphere; national identity

What was commonly thought to be impossible in the “peaceful and tolerant Netherlands” happened in May 2002 when populist right-wing anti-immigration politician Pim Fortuyn was gunned down by an animal rights activist. It was the first political assassination in The Netherlands in over 400 years. Then, a little over two years later, in November 2004, filmmaker Theo van Gogh, an outspoken critic of fundamentalist Muslims, was the victim of a ritualistic killing by an Islamic extremist. Violent deaths have a strong tendency to inflame emotions, and the murders of these highly controversial public figures were followed by massive public reaction, as unpredictable as the events themselves. Dutch politicians, journalists, celebrities, artists, sports heroes and ordinary people expressed, among other feelings, their anger, grief, shock and frustration, in the media and in the streets. These political murders thus brought an unprecedented mixture of emotions and politics to the mediated public sphere and to everyday conversations. They also had a clear and immediate impact on political and cultural citizenship. Pim Fortuyn’s new political party won an unprecedented number of seats, making it one of the biggest parties in the country. On the other hand, existing ethnic and religious tensions erupted into violence after the killing of Theo van Gogh.

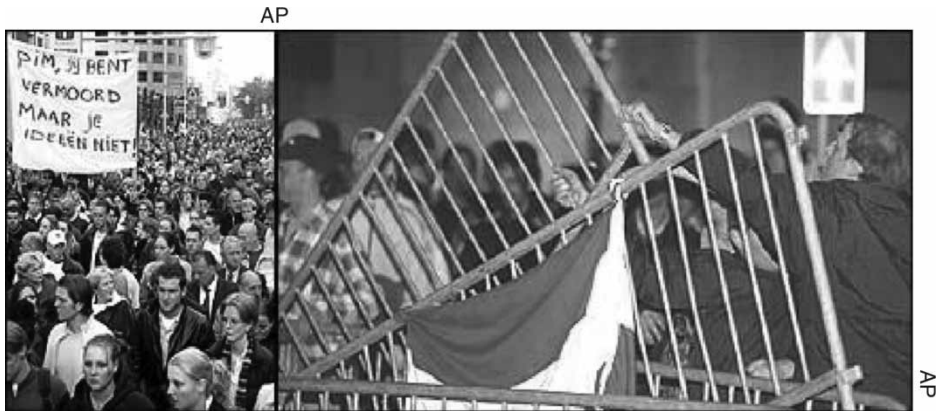
Emotions have rarely been seen as central to political sense-making and citizenship. The standard view is that emotions play a distorting role in the political arena, since being emotional often implies a loss of control and self-mastery. That this view is deeply embedded in culture and language is illustrated by expressions such as “overcome with emotions”, “consumed with anger”, and so forth. In such arguments, mass media are often seen as the main instigators of emotional articulations of public affairs. On the other hand, social and political scientists have increasingly begun to look at emotions as fundamental to political action and decision-making—contributing to explanations of why people do what they do politically—and crucial to the revival of political engagement and the quality of democratic life (for example, Nicholson 1999; Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen 2000; Marcus 2000; Richards 2004). Political apathy among citizens is a commonly noted problem, and political scientists have begun to wonder whether it may have something to do with a lack of passion. In this view, the media are seen as reconnecting alienated citizens and politicians.

Informed by this debate, we present an empirical analysis of newspaper coverage of public emotions following the murders of Fortuyn and van Gogh. We are interested in the work emotions do in the political arena. In particular, we examine which and whose emotions were reported as appropriate to the context. We assume it is possible to read from these reports a notion of “good” emotional citizenship; that is, a citizenship that was considered appropriate to handle the killings and their aftermaths. In the following section, we describe the events of May 2002 and November 2004 in more detail. We then discuss the academic controversies over emotions in politics.

### Murder is Most un-Dutch

Pim Fortuyn was shot in a Hilversum media park on 6 May 2002 as he was leaving a public radio studio where he just had been interviewed. The first political murder in the country since the seventeenth century came as a shock to Dutch society, and it was commonly perceived as an utterly “un-Dutch” event, or a moment when the peace-loving Netherlands “lost its innocence” (see Pels 2003, 41; Pantti and Wieten 2005). However, Fortuyn alive had also been a blow to dominant political values in Dutch society. He had gained extensive media attention and established a large following with his colourful appearance, lavish and openly gay lifestyle, and with his scandalous outspokenness on all kind of political topics, but in particular about immigration. Fortuyn declared that The Netherlands was “full” and campaigned to stop further immigration. He was particularly concerned to close Dutch borders to Muslims because he considered Islam to be an irretrievably backward religion (about Fortuyn’s political style, see Pels 2003).

Fortuyn was assassinated when his popularity was at its peak and the election polls predicted a huge victory for his party, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF). Thousands of people spontaneously took to the streets, not only to mourn the man who had



**Figure 1** Expressions of public emotion following the murder of Pim Fortuyn

spoken “their own language” but also to protest against the ruling purple government coalition (an unlikely but dominant combination of “red” social-democrats and “blue” liberals) see figure 1. People expressed their shock and grief by establishing shrines at the temporary memorial sites—flowers, candles, messages, photographs, teddy bears and objects related to Fortuyn, such as ties, cigars and dog figurines—and by queuing to sign condolence registers in city halls all over the country (for more about mourning for Fortuyn, see Margry 2003). On the day of the televised “national” funeral, crowds greeted Fortuyn’s white hearse with showers of flowers, by clapping and by chanting his name.

Yet alongside these collective mourning practices, which bear close similarities to the mediated mourning following the death of Princess Diana (for example, Walter 1999), and more recently that of the Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh (Pantti 2005; Sumiala-Seppänen and Stocchetti 2005), there were other, more angry, expressions of public emotion. Temporary memorial sites were also scenes of street demonstrations as protestors gathered, for instance, in front of the Parliament in The Hague and the Rotterdam City Hall, and shouted angry slogans against the government, blaming it for Fortuyn’s killing.

Theo van Gogh, filmmaker, columnist and a general *enfant terrible* of Dutch politics and culture,<sup>1</sup> was murdered on 2 November 2004, near his home in East Amsterdam. He was shot, his throat was slit, and two knives were left implanted in his body, one pinning a note to his chest that threatened Western governments, Dutch political figures, and an ex-Muslim member of the Dutch parliament, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Van Gogh had caused resentment and hatred in Muslim communities with his film *Submission*,<sup>2</sup> which examined the issue of

1. Theo van Gogh was also a friend of Pim Fortuyn, whom he liked because of his political courage and outspokenness. He referred to Fortuyn as “*de goddelijke kale*” (“the divine baldie”).

2. *Submission* told a fictional story of a Muslim woman forced into a violent marriage, raped by a relative and brutally punished for adultery. The film was scripted by Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a member of the Dutch parliament and a reknown “ex-Muslim”, who has repeatedly outraged Muslims by criticising Islamic customs and the failure of Muslim families to adopt Dutch ways.



**Figure 2** Amsterdam people protest the murder of Theo Van Gogh on Dam Square by making noise for seven minutes

“enslaved” Muslim women, as well as with his anti-Muslim columns and offensive comments about Muslims. He dubbed Muslims “*geiteneukers*” (“goat fuckers”) and “*kinderverkrachters*” (“child rapists”), and described Islam as a “retrograde and aggressive” faith. Immediately after the murder a leading government minister called his murder an act of war, and ethnic and religious conflicts worsened to the point of open violence, even outside of urban areas. In addition to some large-scale police raids, the next two weeks saw more than 20 arson and bombing attacks and counterattacks on mosques, churches, and other institutions. Furthermore, following the assassination the popular mood has continued to shift sharply against immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

On the night of Theo van Gogh’s killing an estimated 20,000 people took part in a rapidly organised rally in Dam Square, in central Amsterdam (see figure 2). They showed their support for freedom of speech by making noise for seven minutes (blowing horns and clanging pans) followed by a two-minute vigil of silence. Furthermore, a sidewalk shrine with the usual flowers, candles, and notes, together with more unusual memorial objects referring to van Gogh’s persona, such as bottles of beer and cactuses, was established at the spot where he died. Hundreds of people also attended the funeral service transmitted on a giant screen outside the crematorium. Several online condolence registers opened. Almost 50,000 people have signed the national condolence register ([www.condolance.nl](http://www.condolance.nl)), and during the first day the webmaster deleted around 3,500 racist reactions.<sup>4</sup> The main content in those 50,000 postings seemed to be shock and disbelief over another political murder in The Netherlands, as well as a conviction that the country had ineradicably changed due to “un-Dutch” elements, as the following, very typical message (5 November) illustrates:

3. A poll revealed that 40 per cent of the Dutch people hoped the 900,000 Muslim members of Dutch society felt no longer at home, and some 80 per cent wanted tougher policies against immigrants (see [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1358233\\_1,00.html](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-1358233_1,00.html)).

4. *Het Parool*, 2 November 2004, “Websites openen condoleanceregisters”. Available from <http://www.parool.nl/nieuws/2004/NOV/02/p4.html>; INTERNET.

“How silent it has become. Gone is the public discussion in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is no longer the Netherlands. And instead? The life of a prominent Dutchman has been taken. Barbaric!”

### The Emotional Public Sphere

Such massive expression of dissatisfaction and anger about events such as these have, in the past decade, become a well-known form of public protest (Dahlgren 2000; Van Aelst & Walgrave 2001). In their study on the White Marches against the Belgian handling of the Dutroux affaire, Van Aelst and Walgrave (2001, 479) suggest that there is evidence of a new kind of civic participation, driven by emotions and personal concerns.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the authors state that in these “new emotional movements” it is normally the media that mobilise people to participate (see also Walgrave & Manssens 2000). They also notice that all media delivered the same message: “Being present at the White March was heralded as a deed of good citizenship” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001, 478).

More often, however, from the point of view of citizen engagement, emotions and the media have been seen in a less favourable light. The accusation has been that the media, via their growing emphasis on sensation and personalities, are neglecting both their duty to guarantee informed citizens who can participate in a democratic society, and their duty to offer a forum for democratic participation by providing outlets for voices from all strata of society (Dahlgren 2003, 151). Furthermore, in the news media, the emotionalisation of the content has often been coupled with other trends, particularly commercialisation. The message has been that instead of systematic analysis of events the media are offering the highly emotionalised accounts of sentimental individuals. As, for instance, Scherer (2001, 137) describes, “rather than analyzing the structural sources of discontent that have led to a strike, news shows will often interview an angry worker who speaks his emotion.”

These contradictory claims of emotional responses as either key or detrimental to good citizenship have only recently become subject to academic theorising and research. This late interest is partly due to an old division of labour within media research, between attention to cognitive communications in the public sphere, and attention to affective communications with regard to the pleasures of popular culture (Dahlgren 1995, 109). For instance, political communication scholarship has until recently been largely confined to cognitive matters in their focus on the public sphere and rational–critical debate, and much criticism of “dumbing down” is connected to a normative ideal of the citizen as a “rational–critical actor”. According to Jones (2005, 18) this ideal model of citizenry does not meet the empirical realities, and what is more it fails

5. In White March, taking place 20 October 1996 in the aftermath of the Dutroux case (about multiple child abuse and child murder), 300,000 citizens (one out of 30 Belgians) marched silently through Brussels’ streets, dressed largely in white and holding white balloons, protesting against the incompetence of the investigating and prosecuting authorities.

to “represent the multitude of ways in which people exchange, process and engage with political material in their day-to-day lives, ways that can just as easily be crude, limited, dismissive, trivial, playful and emotional as they can be thoughtful, wide-ranging, generous, complex, rational, serious, and high-minded”.

The past decade has therefore witnessed a growing interest in emotions in the study of politics and public life. This literature (for example, Barbalet 2002; Goodwin and Jasper 2003) argues against equating irrationality with emotionality. Instead, it strives for a reconceptualisation of emotions as providing an essential basis for practical rationality, and as necessary for collective action. While some authors stress the neuropsychological origins of the articulation of emotion with rationality (for example, Marcus 2002), others emphasise the importance of historical and cultural contexts (for example, Ahmed 2002; Berezin 2002; Gould 2002; Harding and Pribham 2002). This new understanding of emotionality assumes that emotions do not merely offer temporary and comforting communities of feeling (for instance, in the “seven minutes of noise” to honour Theo van Gogh) but can also trigger public deliberation and public actions, for the latter only survive if held up by firm emotional commitment. In their study on American presidential campaigns, Marcus and MacKuen (1993) demonstrate that emotions (for instance, a sense of threat), instead of distorting political reasoning, add to political attention and therefore contribute to the quality of political life.

Besides motivating citizens to learn about and participate in politics, emotions are fundamental to self-identification and are involved in the social bonds that make groups and nations possible (Sunny 2004). National identities certainly have an important emotional dimension; citizens are expected to “love their country”, and are routinely reminded of nationhood through daily discursive practices (for example, Billig 1995). However, positive feelings of “deep horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1983, 7) can be replaced by unpleasant or violent feelings such as hate, fear, anger, humiliation and shame, which, as seen often enough in the contemporary political scene, can lead to murderous violence when magnified by ethnic leaders and/or existing myths and symbols (Sunny 2004). Emotions may join individuals to others, or they may separate them: the flipside of the “love of country” is the hatred of its designated national enemies. As Morley and Robbins (1995, 193) write: “[T]here is another aspect to community, that in which it is held together not by what it avows as its collective values, but by what it collectively disavows”.

The role of the media in constructing a national unity from public reactions following tragic events has been discussed quite widely. There are, for instance, several studies on the mourning for Princess Diana (for example, Walter 1999; Turnock 2000; Thomas 2002), which demonstrate that despite the media rhetoric of people “united in grief”, many people were not personally affected by her death. Thomas (2002, 99–115) illustrates that nationalism was central both to the media coverage and the lived experience in Britain during the week following the deadly car accident: time after time, coverage conjured up an imagined

community of grieving and crying people. The death of Princess Diana belongs to those many tragic events that are represented in the media as moments of national consensus and unity, born out of collective mourning (for example, Linenthal 2001; Kitch 2003; Turnock 2000; Thomas 2002; Pantti 2005; Pantti and Wieten 2005).

Pantti and Wieten (2005) have demonstrated how the coverage of the murder of Pim Fortuyn in television news was implicated in the construction of a national, multicultural consensus, through the discourse of sameness, defining the nation and all the people in mourning. This study shows that the news, in an attempt to restore the shaken social order, focused on the grief, and suppressed the signs of anger (a more divisive and action-orientated emotion) or interpreted expressions of rage—such as chanting against the political establishment and crying “death to the Prime Minister”—as belonging to excessive mourning practices. In this case, the desire to manage the public mood and outbursts of emotions came from a government that was worried about the possibility that the murder might create undesirable emotional responses, turning emotional crowds into mobs. The need of the Dutch government to control the emotional state of citizens highlights the central role that emotions play in the political arena. Different kinds of “political emotions”, however, should be distinguished from one another: anger, fear and hatred do different things in political life than, for example, compassion and grief (Ahmed 2002).

We approach emotions in the study at hand as intimately connected to culture and society. According to Denzin (1984, 54), “many of the feelings people feel and the reasons they give for their feelings are social, structural, cultural, and relational in origin”. The fact that emotions are attached to historically and culturally variable values and moral norms means that some feelings, and ways of expressing and managing them, are always socially approved, while others are stigmatised (Craib 1995, 154). Hochschild (2003) uses the notion of “feeling rules” to refer to culturally and historically determined understandings of when and to what extent spontaneous emotions can be publicly expressed. As Hochschild states, “We can offend against a feeling rule when we grieve too much or too little, when we overmanage or undermanage grief” (2003, 64). According to Jagger (1985) these rules of feeling are part of a hegemonic discourse that keeps the political, cultural and social elite in dominance—where they are almost invariably aligned with reason and restraint—while subordinate groups are associated with uncontrolled emotions. Inevitably, this discourse operates visibly and powerfully on men versus women, but it is also present in upper versus lower class, and white versus black.

Working from the assumption that the articulations of emotions and politics take place in particular historical and cultural settings, and that they are embedded in a discursive network of power relations, we will try in this chapter to uncover the implicit rules of feeling that emerged around the two killings. We will examine in what kinds of contexts and for what kinds of people, particular emotions were permitted while others were disallowed. We also aim to show what was achieved for whom by these rules (and by the deviation from them). By



focusing on these rules of feeling we hope to arrive at an understanding of what “good” emotional citizenship meant at the time of the killings and to contribute to the development of theory in this area by producing an empirical understanding of concrete events.

### Methodology

We conducted a qualitative content analysis of articles from four Dutch newspapers: *Trouw*, *Volkscrant*, *Het Parool* and *Telegraaf*. The first two are considered quality papers, the third one is the local Amsterdam paper, and the final one is the most popular (in terms of number of readers and style) in the Dutch newspaper landscape. In the case of Fortuyn, we analysed news articles that appeared on the day after the murder and on the day after the memorial (7 and 11 May 2002). For van Gogh, we looked at coverage on the day of the murder and after the murder, as well as on the day after the memorial (2–3 and 10 November 2004).

We have chosen the day of the assassination as the first significant moment for the articulation of emotions in politics because we assume that at that time the shock of the killings was so overwhelming that an unmitigated and unrestrained expression of feelings may have taken place. In addition, media research has shown how the first frames of news coverage direct later ones. Hall et al. (1978) speaks in this respect of “primary definitions” and “primary definers”. Secondly, we have selected the days of the memorial services that took place about a week after each of the killings because these were the moments when, in some sense, a closure was achieved for most actors involved. The articles were collected using a Lexis-Nexis search for Pim Fortuyn or Theo van Gogh on the particular dates of the analysis. The Lexis-Nexis database has the disadvantage of showing text only, without photographs and lay-out. The advantage of the database, however, is its completeness and its practical ease. The search generated 455 articles in total, divided over the two events and the days (see Table 1).

Because we are primarily interested in the rules of feeling for different groups of people, we focused on the emotions of the actors involved: the perpetrator, the victim,<sup>6</sup> family and friends of the victim, politicians, police, journalists themselves, celebrities and the general public. We used a lexical decision

**Table 1** Collected material

	Pim Fortuyn	Theo van Gogh
Day of assassination	128	130
Day of memorial service	136	61

6. Some of the comments and articles, particularly those about Pim Fortuyn, address the question of how Pim would have felt, what Pim would have done, and so forth. “In the spirit of Pim ...” was a common expression at the time for his supporters.

criterion to code all expressions of emotions and descriptions of emotions; thus, if words such as shock, anger, grief, rage, and so on, or references to the bodily expressions of emotions were used, we included the particular text fragment in our data. We employed MaxQDA, a software program for the management of qualitative data and the coding of the articles. We then used the method of constant comparison between text fragments to reconstruct the rules of feeling present in the newspaper coverage (cf. Boeije 2002).

### Political Assassinations and Public Emotions

Our analysis enabled us to reconstruct three distinctive discourses through which the public emotions following the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh were expressed. First, there is a discourse of restraint and solidarity in which horror and bewilderment are key descriptors of feelings, in which sympathy and condolences for the family are expressed and in which, simultaneously, a call for public restraint and solidarity is made. This is the discourse used by the Dutch and foreign governments, political representatives, non-governmental organisations and other official spokespeople. Secondly, there is a discourse of anger, in which the main descriptors are rage and revenge. This is a discourse used by extreme-right politicians and their supporters, and by many people “in the street”, to express their anger at those they held responsible: politicians in general, and some specific ones in particular, Muslims, migrants, and the media. Thirdly, we found a discourse of shock, in which the key terms are disbelief and dismay, expressed by the families and friends of the victims, celebrities and many members of the public. There is neither a call for restraint nor for revenge in this discourse, just a general shock and sorrow about the “unthinkable”. Obviously, as we will see in the more detailed analysis of these discourses, they overlap and are carried by different actors.

#### Discourse of Restraint and Solidarity

Government leaders, politicians, public officials and other spokespersons expressed their emotions mainly in a discourse of restraint. The official comment of Prime Minister Kok immediately after the murder of Pim Fortuyn, reported verbatim in all newspapers, is typical:

There are no words. I am really devastated. I am really devastated about what has happened in this country today. An assassination. Pim Fortuyn is dead. It is deeply tragic. I am bewildered. It is deeply tragic, for the family, for his loved ones. It is also deeply tragic for our country—for our country and our democratic state. What has happened is indescribable. These are my personal reflections, I cannot say it differently, I am devastated. But I felt an urgent need to say this to you and let me say something else too: let's stay calm for God's sake, let's stay calm at a moment when you could be furious and angry. That is the most dignified

way to honour our constitutional state, democracy and the memory of Pim Fortuyn. (*Trouw*, 7 May 2002)

This simultaneous expression of intense emotions and appeal for composure also typifies the reactions of other public officials. A prominent member of Fortuyn's party was, for instance, quoted as saying: "Pim is dead, let's please take that in first. I appeal strongly to stay calm" (*Trouw*, 7 May 2002). The mayor of Rotterdam, home city of Fortuyn, was described as very emotional and "weighing his words even more carefully than usual" (*Trouw*, 7 May 2002). Official spokespeople of the Dutch Moroccan communities expressed their feelings similarly, stating that the murder was "a disgrace for democracy" and a "disaster" (*Parool*, 7 May 2002).

These articulations of shock, self-control and a soothing appeal to the public were generally met with approval and praise. Newspaper comments and government leaders applauded the calmness of those waiting to sign for the public condolence registers, and the restrained behaviour of the crowd at Fortuyn's funeral. There was no difference among the newspapers in this respect. The *Volkscrant* (11 May 2002) said, for instance:

After the violent death of Fortuyn, the dissatisfaction of citizens threatened to radicalize into mass rage. The decisive and cautious conduct of Prime Minister Kok and Mayor Opstelten of Rotterdam were part of the reason why this danger has as yet been averted.

The same *Volkscrant*, however, also reported the more popular reaction to the discourse of restraint with a much less appreciative tone:

"Established" politicians—there is nothing more contemptible at the moment—are totally shattered. For the time being they can hardly please anyone. Read the letters to the editor in the newspapers, see the mourning of Fortuyn's supporters and hear them clapping in their silent marches. (11 May 2002)

In retrospect, one can assume that the discourse of restraint only worked well because the assassin turned out to be a white, Dutch radical environmental activist. The murder of Theo van Gogh by a radical Muslim (of joint Dutch/Moroccan nationality, raised in Amsterdam) was much more incendiary in that respect and led to different reactions among the political and journalistic elites. Prime Minister Balkenende issued the following short statement:

In great horror I heard of the shooting of Theo van Gogh. Our thoughts and compassion are with his family, his friends and his colleagues. (*Volkscrant*, 3 November 2004)

The Prime Minister tried to console and calm the public by visiting different sites in the country but received quite a bit of criticism, especially from the Amsterdam community, for his ostensible lack of concern and for his failure to keep the country together. This failure was exacerbated by the outburst of his

Deputy Prime Minister, who stated after the killing “this country is at war now”.<sup>7</sup> That statement seemed to incite even further the already vehement anger against Muslim communities. This was notwithstanding the general shock and disapproval of Moroccan and Muslim organisations, and of Moroccan youth, who expressed their indignation about the killing, saying that the assassin could not have been a true Muslim, and that he had not acted on behalf of Muslims.

As with the murder of Fortuyn, Muslim organisations also called for moderation and mutual respect. The unsatisfactory performance of the cabinet, and the manner in which some of its members lost their self-control, was heavily criticised by newspapers and by fellow politicians. An editorial comment in the *Trouw* (3 November 2004), for instance, said:

All responsible people ought to bring primary feelings of distrust, resentment and revenge under control as soon as possible. A society that has become multi-ethnic in many cities cannot build on racial distrust or religious resentment. When a community has a fanatical killer in its midst, it does not mean it is an overflowing reservoir of death and destruction.

Similarly, one of the cabinet members, in looking back on the aftermath of the van Gogh killing, implicitly criticised her colleagues: “If we compare this with what happened in New York under Giuliani, we see that his message was don’t get depressed, don’t retaliate against Muslims, let’s be proud of America and start rebuilding. I missed that conviction in the Netherlands” (Melanie Schultz, *Volkscrant*, 2 July 2005).

Reactions to the killing of Fortuyn were characterised by moderation and calls for togetherness, and were praised by the political and journalistic elites. The official reactions to the assassination of van Gogh were more mixed: Prime Minister Balkenende expressed mainly grief and tried to console the country, whereas his Deputy Prime Minister Zalm primarily expressed anger, pushing the already tense ethnic divisions to the limit. Both Balkenende’s and Zalm’s reactions were considered unsatisfactory by other politicians and journalists. Yet both reactions matched the emotional expressions of other groups rather well. Balkenende’s performance fits well in the discourse of shock, whereas his deputy prime minister joined in the populist discourse of anger.

### Discourse of Anger

Unlike the discourse of restraint calling for togetherness, tolerance and calm primarily used by the political elite and the spokespersons of ethnic and religious minorities, the discourse of anger had a populist character. It represented the ignored voices of the people and reflected the discrepancy between public emotion and official politics. The keyword was “*volkswoede*” (mass rage), which

7. He said this in a comment on television after the weekly meeting of cabinet ministers (ANP, 5 November 2004, National Dutch Press Agency).

swelled up against the government, the police, and the media. After Fortuyn's assassination, his supporters claimed he had been demonised by the Dutch political establishment and (leftist) media who had accused him of being a racist, a fascist or a far-right extremist, and compared him with French extreme right-wing Jean Marie Le Pen and his Austrian counterpart Jörg Haider.<sup>8</sup> A columnist of *Trouw*, for instance, linked Fortuyn to the names of Himmler and Hitler, and wrote:

You live on hate and that is why I hope you will get Aids in your dark rooms as soon as possible (reported in *Volkskrant*, 7 May 2002)

The newspaper subsequently apologised, but columns and comments like these gave credence to the accusation of Fortuyn's supporters that the establishment had demonised him. Angry crowds also attacked journalists:

A man is fuming when he sees the cameras. "This is your fault too," he shouts. "You created this, you saw this coming." (*Trouw*, 11 May 2002)

Immediately after his killing, groups of young men gathered in vehement protest on the Binnenhof in The Hague (the seat of Dutch Government). Cars were burnt and politicians threatened. Cries such as "dirty leftist rats", "dirty killers", "Kok perpetrator, Fortuyn hero" called for revenge against those who had participated in the "hate campaign" and were thus thought to have created the climate in which it became possible to kill Fortuyn. The social-democrat leader of the time, Ad Melkert, became the symbol of the anti-Fortuyn establishment and, together with other left wing politicians, received numerous death threats:<sup>9</sup>

"He is a killer", someone shouts. "He compared Pim to Le Pen, so he's asking for it" someone else says. "Ad, you piece of shit, I'll tear your head from your shoulders. This country is going down the toilet". Kok also gets a rough time. "Kok, you lefty heap of shit, come down here from your tower". (*Het Parool*, 7 May 2002)

Beside the politicians and the media, Muslims were the prime targets of the revenge and rage. The ethnicity of the killer was not immediately known, but the angry crowds, as well as the general public and the media (see also Pantti and Wieten 2005), expected or feared him to have an Islamic background:

Don't we all hope passionately that the perpetrator turns out to be a lunatic who comes from a family of farmers who have lived in the Noordoostpolder since its

8. Fortuyn himself, in a talk show interview shortly before his death, repeated on the news after his death, had claimed that the government had "demonised" him and it would have to be held responsible if something happened to him.

9. The damage to Ad Melkert's reputation and the threats to his life were such that, relieved, he accepted a post at the World Bank in Washington.

reclamation, a blond, blue-eyed man who stands for God, Orange and Country. (*Volkscrant*, 7 May 2002)

When rioting in front of the Parliament on the night of the assassination, people demanded to know the nationality of the murderer. The announcement that the killer was a Dutch-born white male did not appease everyone, as the following report illustrates: "There are also hooligan yells: 'Hamas, hamas, all blacks to the gas', shouts a boy wearing a baseball cap and a Dutch flag around his shoulders" (*Trouw*, 7 May 2002). Angry mobs considered Muslims to be guilty of destroying the country, of taking it away from the Dutch people. Muslims were seen as a threat both to the freedom of speech and to personal and social well-being and safety.

In the case of van Gogh, the fact that the killer was a fundamentalist Muslim, who conducted slaughter rituals on his victim, strengthened the anger and aggression. The murder was followed by violent attacks on mosques and Islamic schools. The official racism registration bureau received numerous complaints, and—as already mentioned—the online condolence registers had to be cleaned of a large number of racist expressions immediately after it was opened. All four newspapers condemned the revanchist and racist expressions after both killings in strong terms. Here is one example:

After the shock, dismay and the disbelief over Fortuyn's killing came the shock, dismay and disbelief over the reaction of Pim's supporters. For most of them, freedom of speech has a strange meaning. Pim said what he thought and therefore became popular, established politicians and journalists said what they thought and were sworn at, threatened and one or two of them even assaulted. (*Volkscrant*, 11 May 2002)

Prominent members of Fortuyn's political party who had encouraged and joined in disseminating rage and revenge were also criticised, not least by intimates of Fortuyn such as his brother and a close friend:

That the spokesman of List Pim Fortuyn initially spoke in similar terms is highly unfortunate. Fortuyn's colleagues have the responsibility to tell their supporters that there is no resemblance whatsoever between the shooter in Hilversum and the politicians in The Hague. (*Parool*, 11 May 2002)

But outside the political and journalistic elite there was also strong opposition to the exclamations of hate and revenge: some ordinary people said that they were more shocked about the salutation of Fortuyn and Van Gogh and by how some people behaved than they were by the murders. A reader of the *Volkscrant* (11 May 2002), for instance, wrote:

I sincerely hope that the hatred against the establishment and social politics has reached its zenith and that people start to realise that we really have to pull together.

The rejection of the popular rage did not imply a denunciation of anger altogether. Anger could be rightly expressed (such as the noise memorial that was held for Theo van Gogh and free speech in Dam Square on the evening of the murder) and rightly targeted; that is, towards abstract ideas such as the violation of human rights and freedom of speech, but not towards concrete institutions (ruling government and its members) or some factions of the society (Muslims and immigrants). Unacceptable angry reactions to the killings of Fortuyn and Van Gogh were characterised by blaming and shaming, calls for revenge, death threats to the political and media establishment, and actual assaults on Muslim institutions. Some members of the LPF (Fortuyn's political party) joined in this rage; after the killing of Fortuyn in particular, but also after the murder of Van Gogh. As said earlier, after Van Gogh's assassination, the Deputy Prime Minister also borrowed from this discourse by publicly exclaiming that the country was now at war. The media ascribed this kind of discourse to populist gut feelings. In some articles these feelings were presented as understandable, in others they were described as despicable populism stemming from the extreme right, hooligans and riot prone youth. In both cases, most politicians and journalists condemned them as inappropriate and too violent for the circumstances. When members of political parties expressed their emotions in the same manner, they were especially held responsible for stirring up trouble and mass anger.

### Discourse of Shock and Sorrow

The most common way to express one's reactions to the killings was through a discourse of shock and sorrow. Of course, these two emotions are present in other discourses as well, but accompanied by a call for restraint or a call for revenge. In the discourse of shock and sorrow, the grief for unexpected loss and violence is central. People expressed their condolences and grief over the loss of two significant public persons who often seemed to have made a very personal impact. Individual comments were characterised by a high degree of personal grief. Fortuyn and van Gogh were identified as "one of us", or a special friend or "father figure". On many occasions the sorrow was expressed in a very personal and poetic way:

If I see him on television, an iron fist grabs my chest. Look away. Literally. Am I the only one? I don't think so. I have since met a couple of men, serious men who usually control their emotions, who confided they had cried at Fortuyn's death. I myself live under a grey cloud of sadness. (*Trouw*, 11 May 2002)

Next to such individual sorrow, the main shock seemed to be that the murders—and in particular Fortuyn's—were events that changed The Netherlands; events that nobody expected to happen in "our country". The safety of the past, the open debate, and the old democratic way of doing politics without violence seemed suddenly to be over. There was with both killings an obvious

need to share that shock, as can be recognised in demonstrations of grief and the spontaneous shrines that were set up at the sites of the killings, the houses of the victims and national memorial sites such as Dam Square in Amsterdam. Instead of shouting and cursing mobs, newspapers witnessed silent and patient masses as well as individual people in decorous mourning, often described as left speechless by grief:

Long rows of dignified people full of sorrow, with only flowers, a goodbye letter, or a teddy bear as weapons. Hours of waiting to reach a pencil and a condolence register, to leave flowers at a fence, to pay respect in a cathedral. Sometimes also full of anger but almost always civilized, without hatred. Silent and solemn behind their mayor in the streets of Rotterdam. (*Trouw*, 11 May 2002)

Because Theo van Gogh himself had repeatedly ridiculed such displays of public grief, on the request of his family and friends, his memorial event was organised as an hour of noise: some 20,000 people came to Dam Square with pots, pans, and whistles to make as much noise as possible.

The expressions of shock and anxiety also created a bridge between ordinary people, the political elite, celebrities and experts. “This is not our Netherlands”, said one political leader after the second political assassination (*Telegraaf*, 2 November 2004). A best-selling Dutch author and friend of van Gogh, exclaimed to be “devastated, sad and bewildered”. Referring to the killing of Fortuyn, he stated:

That one incident now appears not to have been an isolated incident. We have to think hard about what’s next. I have the feeling that this country is going down the drain. (*Telegraaf*, 2 November 2004)

Fear for the future was present in many other comments as well, and often centred on the position of ethnic minorities. Indigenous Dutch were afraid of increasing and uncontrollable tensions, while ethnic minorities feared for their future:

An Indonesian woman cries that she wants to leave “our off the rails country”. “But my children and grandchildren live here; they await a terrible future”. (*Telegraaf*, 2 November 2004)

The newspapers collectively created a suggestion of a country united in grief and it was rare to read criticism of these public displays of emotions, or to find quotes from people who did not feel deeply affected. Yet some of this was present:

Fortuyn’s death is tragic, but today’s “white marches” represent the emotiona-  
lization of an event, which signifies its complete depoliticization (*Volkskrant*, 11  
May 2002)



In *Trouw* (11 May 2002) a young woman expressed her frustration with the ongoing media event of Fortuyn's death: "All the time these vehement emotions and speculations about the perpetrator. If I turn on the television these days, I think people, stop it. This man is now so extolled. As if he has become a kind of saint after his death."

The discourse of shock and sorrow has become increasingly familiar on the occasions of disasters and deaths of public figures. The media illusion of unity in grief is not unique to these two Dutch cases. Bereaved people, public rituals of mourning such as bringing flowers and candles to the murder and memorial sites, and participating in silent marches now provide common and publicly accessible rituals of mourning that belong to such events. The emotional citizenship performed on these occasions is totally different from the one represented in the discourse of anger. These feelings are presented, with one or two exceptions, as legitimate, as long as they include subtlety and restraint. It easily overflows into the discourse of restraint carried by the political and journalistic elites, but is supported by aspects of the popular reaction as well.

### Emotional Citizenship?

The newspaper coverage of the two political murders was strikingly similar in the rules of feeling that were reported and constructed. It is clear that there are unwritten rules for official reactions to such events, which should include preferably visible but contained horror and bewilderment, compassion for the relatives, and the voice of reason. Political and newspaper elites expect the authorities to plead for composure and solidarity, to express faith in the future, and not regress into anger, revenge, or mere disbelief and shock. The latter, however, was perfectly legitimate, even expected, of the average citizen confronted with these horrendous murders. Newspapers had a ready-made frame to interpret this kind of public mourning by referring to, among other things, the Belgian White Marches, and the death of Diana. Yet, in one or two articles, some disdain for this ostensibly pre-formatted behaviour occurred: "A new exercise in public mourning" (*Volkskrant*, 11 May 2002). A more common concern in the case of Fortuyn, however, was that the grieving people would allow their vote in the national elections to be influenced by the murder and the ensuing emotions. *Het Parool* (11 May 2002), for instance, wrote: "Let's hope that on Wednesday not too many people will vote for Fortuyn because of their emotions. But the worst should be feared." Similar comments were made in the other newspapers, which predicted that "a normal outcome cannot be expected", and that "the rage and anger about his death... will leave their traces next week" (*Telegraaf*, 11 May 2002).

The elections that took place on 15 May, some 10 days after Fortuyn's assassination, indeed produced a massive victory for his brand new party, which entered parliament with 26 seats (out of a possible 150) to become the second largest party in Dutch parliament. The posthumous electoral success of the Pim

Fortuyn List signalled the end of the Purple coalition and prepared the ground for a right-wing government consisting of the Christian Democratic Party and the LPF (regarding Fortuyn's electoral success, see Bruff 2003). However, less than one year later the cabinet fell, and in the new elections LPF lost 18 seats in parliament. The rise and fall of Pim Fortuyn's party has been taken as evidence by newspapers and political elites that emotions should have nothing to do with political citizenship. Even though both Fortuyn's and Van Gogh's killings were politically motivated, the rules of feeling present in the newspapers suggest that the resulting emotions cannot and should not be made political. The verbal and physical attempts of the fuming protesters, letter writers, participants in online forums, and people in the street to silence the political and media establishment were other rejected articulations of emotions and parliamentary politics.

In so far as the rules of feeling we reconstructed allow for emotional citizenship, it would instead be a citizenship that is articulated with (national) identity politics; a cultural citizenship of belonging to a national community, holding it in respect and being held in respect by it. When a disaster such as a political murder occurs, such communion is typically achieved through news media, which can create and convey a feeling of temporary national consensus in an otherwise fragmented society. Our study, however, has shown that such a "feeling consensus" hardly emerged, despite constant calls for togetherness and emotional self-control by the political and journalistic elites. The angry voices were too loud to ignore and smother; the concrete death threats and assaults on Muslims could not be defined away as peculiar excesses of public mourning rituals (cf. Pantti and Wieten 2005). Ethnic and class division, rather than national unity, came out of emotions evoked by the murders. Both were devastating for the most cherished value of Dutchness: a tolerance of different cultures and religions that dates back to the sixteenth century. In the case of Fortuyn the rift between different groups, and especially between the political elite and the people in the street, became visible, and the objects of friction were immigrants and Muslims. With a Dutch/Moroccan, fundamentalist Muslim killer in the case of van Gogh, all Muslim communities and individual Muslims unwillingly became actors in the ensuing tensions, most of them siding with the voices of reason and sorrow, but some expressing sympathy and sometimes even praise for the assassin.

In terms of cultural citizenship, two contesting ideals of Dutchness battle for dominance in these emotional confrontations: a nationalist, restrictive notion of Dutchness that is built on fear of "un-Dutch" elements such as Islam and immigration, and a tolerant, inclusive Dutchness, which respects other cultures and voices, including those of Fortuyn and Van Gogh. We claim that Fortuyn's and Van Gogh's murders marked a serious challenge to what it means to be Dutch and, specifically, to the ideal of tolerant Dutchness. The paradox here is, of course, that the majority of Muslim and immigrant organisations publicly adhered to this ideal, while Fortuyn's white Dutch assassin and his angry white Dutch supporters could only proclaim "the" Dutch identity by eradicating its core value, namely tolerance and freedom of speech.

Our inevitable conclusion, then, is that the emotions that followed the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, expressed through the discourses identified here, did nothing to revive or promote citizenship, either in its political or in its cultural dimensions. The Dutch did not change their political habits in any enduring way. Patterns of cultural inclusion and respect were disrupted rather than enhanced. Given the overall restrained performance of newspapers and their journalists, regardless of their serious or popular nature, it is also impossible to claim that the newspapers intensified or incited emotional responses. On the contrary, they were part of the discourse of restraint, and were attacked because they were seen as part of the establishment rather than as the carriers of popular emotions.

Our results thus modify both existing optimistic theorising about the new emotionality and pessimistic perspectives on the media as the cause of all public emotional trouble. We found highly responsible newspapers, calling for reason and restraint instead of jumping on the bandwagon of general excitement, inciting and exaggerating emotions for commercial or readership appeal. We also found that public emotions do not inevitably have a unifying effect, as other authors have claimed—not because emotions in themselves should not have a place in public life or in the national community, but because they are different and contradictory, and built from a substantial disagreement about what it means to be Dutch, and what democracy and politics should be. It is this diversity that disables their potential for inclusive political and cultural citizenship. However, the first and most obvious effect of these two political murders was to raise powerful emotions that motivated and justified certain kinds of actions, both constructive and destructive: even if only temporarily, emotional citizens were actively participating in the political process.

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