

Radical State

*How Jihad Is Winning Over
Democracy in the West*

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	6
Chapter 2	12
Chapter 3	24
Chapter 4	31
Chapter 5	41
Chapter 6	48
Chapter 7	58
Chapter 8	65
Chapter 9	76
Chapter 10	84
Chapter 11	92
Chapter 12	101
Chapter 13	111
Chapter 14	125

Chapter 15	135
Chapter 16	149
Chapter 17	157
Chapter 18	169
Chapter 19	182
Chapter 20	195
Chapter 21	204
Chapter 22	215
<i>Notes</i>	229
<i>Index</i>	239

Preface

On the morning of January 17, 2005, I received an e-mail with the following subject line: “The Next Victim?” and a link to a conversation on a Webboard about the latest art scandal in the Netherlands: an exhibition of cartoon-like paintings by Rachid Ben Ali, a Moroccan-born Dutch artist, that included images of what seemed to be a Muslim cleric either, as it were, eating shit or speaking it. The phrase “next victim” referred to the murder of another artist, the filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who had been slaughtered two months earlier by a Muslim extremist angered by a film Van Gogh had made about the abuse of Muslim women. The question of the day was, of course, whether Ali would be the next target of a Muslim extremist killing, or whether this was harmless enough that it wouldn’t really matter.

There was a time, not long ago at all, when “the next Van Gogh” was a phrase used to describe an up-and-coming Dutch artist, when wondering who the next Van Gogh would be was about hoping that, in the meager pickings of the Dutch art scene, someone would emerge of international quality and capture the imaginations of the world.

But when Theo van Gogh was shot twenty times by a jihadist, his body stabbed, and his throat slashed open, the phrase gained a whole new meaning.

In the United States, it was Election Day when Theo van Gogh was murdered—the day when the country would choose either to keep in office the man who had sworn to fight Islamic extremism and oppression by spreading democracy across the Muslim world, or to be rid of him. What no one realized was that even before the polls had opened,

whether George W. Bush won the election that day or not, that morning on the streets of Amsterdam, democracy had already lost.

I moved to Amsterdam from New York City because of the canals, because the streets were laid out in a plan that made it difficult to get lost, because you could see time move with the clouds across the sky, so real, so *there*, you thought maybe you could touch it, and if you could touch it, maybe even hold it still. I moved to Amsterdam because, in some ways, time there always *had* held still.

It was summer when I first visited, one of the rare summers when the air is actually hot, and the sun on the canals so bright that the reflections of windows in the water sting your eyes, and the ducks clamor joyously until late into the night because it doesn't get dark until nearly midnight and the entire city—*de gehele stad*—is out on café terraces, or on chairs dragged out to the sidewalk from living rooms, drinking Grolsch and jenever and laughing loud enough to be heard in third-floor apartments, if anyone were home to hear them, which, mostly, they are not. It was the summer before the crash of '89, when everyone was buying art and whoever didn't paint or sculpt had a gallery and traveled country to country, art fair to art fair, buying one another's goods and selling them again. Roy Lichtenstein and Jerry Garcia and Michael Jackson all were still alive. Answering machines were just coming into the market in Holland, and only the coolest people had them. *Dallas* reruns played nightly on TV. At the jazz clubs on the Leidsedwardsstraat, Hans and Candy Dulfer played the saxophone; and in the United States, Ronald Reagan was still the president, and in Berlin, the wall still stood immobile, we thought then, impenetrable, in place.

The other Van Gogh was in the news that summer, with a celebration being planned for 1990 to mark the hundredth anniversary of (of all things) his death. The man charged with organizing it all—from concerts of specially-commissioned symphonies to the launching of a new Van Gogh perfume—took me to lunch at the Amstel Hotel, the most impressive—and expensive—spot in town. He told me about the Van Gogh project. He told me about his own art collection and invited me to visit his home outside of Amsterdam to see it. He told me that the Dutch had an expression he held dear: *vrijheid, blijheid*. It means, he told me, "freedom is happiness."

I decided I was coming here to live.

* * *

Radical State is, in part, the story of how Holland lost that freedom and that happiness to the terrors of jihad. In tracing the events of the fifteen years from 1989, when fireworks celebrated the life and the

achievements of Vincent van Gogh, to 2004, when the artist's great-grand nephew was slaughtered in the street and plans were made to kill the writer of his film, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, amidst the fireworks of New Year's Eve (so the gunshots would not be heard), this book paints a portrait of a thriving democratic nation and the forces that threaten to bring about its demise. It is about a transition in culture from the celebrations of the art of one Van Gogh to the death caused by the art of the other. And in that moment, *vrijheid* ended in the Netherlands: for not only was Theo van Gogh killed for his embrace of the principle of free speech, but in the aftermath of the killing, laws began to change. National IDs became mandatory for the first time since the German occupation. The Parliament debated house arrests for people suspected, but not convicted, of ties to Muslim extremist groups. The integration minister proposed a ban on all languages but Dutch, not only in businesses and schools, but also on the streets. The Arab European League, comprised of political hopefuls aiming to introduce sharia law to the Dutch system, announced plans for candidates to run in the next parliamentary elections—this when radical Islam smolders and flames among Dutch Muslim youth and Muslims are expected to become the majority population in the Netherlands within the next ten to fifteen years. So concerned are Dutch natives now about the radicalization of Muslims here that they have placed support behind any politician willing to crack down on immigrants and Islam, even knowing that such politicians are equally opposed to many of Holland's most proud traditions: welfare, for instance, or subsidies for the arts. So dramatic has the change, in fact, become, that in June, 2005, Filip de Winter, one of Europe's most extreme-right political leaders, declared the Netherlands "the model country for conservatives and the far-right."

And so the question *Radical State* raises—and explores—is in fact a very basic one: Who is really winning here: Democracy—or Jihad?

Why does this matter?

It matters because, according to a Council on Foreign Relations report, Europe hosts some 15–20 million Muslim immigrants and their descendants, and they are radicalizing at an alarming rate. The children of immigrants, born on European soil, are eligible for visa-free travel into the United States—this, while bin Laden, the report states, "has outsourced planning for the next spectacular attack on the United States to an 'external planning' node. Chances are it is based in Europe and will deploy European citizens." Moreover, in the words of Francis Fukuyama, "There is good reason for thinking . . . that a critical source of contemporary radical Islamism lies not in the Middle East, but in Western Europe. . . . Many Europeans assert that the American melting pot cannot be transported to European soil. Identity there remains rooted in blood, soil, and ancient shared memory. This may be true, but if so, democracy in Europe will

be in big trouble in the future as Muslims become an ever larger percentage of the population. And since Europe is today one of main battlegrounds of the war on terrorism, this reality will matter for the rest of us as well."¹

And it matters, too, because Holland is not the only one: America, Canada, England, Germany, and France all wrestle with similar dilemmas, from the creation of the USA Patriot Act to the banning of headscarves in France and the possible official introduction of sharia law in Canada and the United Kingdom. Indeed, some warn that lack of assimilation by Muslims in America—and incidents like the “Virginia Jihad” and Washington sniper cases—may be making the United States vulnerable to its own brand of home-grown Islamic terrorism. It matters because throughout history, Holland has been a bellwether for socio-political change worldwide, from being among the first European countries to accept and integrate the Jews as early as the 17th century to legalizing marijuana, gay marriage, and euthanasia in the 20th. It matters because, in the words of England’s former Home Minister, Mike O’Brien, multiculturalism—the social fabric that holds America and most Western societies together—has become, in many ways, “an excuse for moral blindness.”

But most of all, it matters because America’s war on terrorism is not just America’s war, but a world war; and it is not just a war against terrorism; it is a war for freedom. It is not just about spreading what we have to places that don’t have it; it’s about merely keeping it alive at all.

And it matters for other reasons. It matters because, before it collapsed, Holland’s brand of democracy was possibly the most-admired (and certainly the most liberal) of them all. And yet, as the Dutch grow more restrictive in their policies, recruits for Islamic jihad there increase, leaving us with the critical dilemma: if tolerance allowed extremism to rise in the first place, and intolerance is causing it to spread, what is the solution?

Holland is not the only example of the clash between democracy and Islam in the West, but it has been the most dramatic one. As David Rieff wrote when describing Euro-Muslim alienation in the *New York Times Magazine*,² the “eclipse” of the “multicultural fantasy in Europe can be seen most poignantly in Holland, that most self-defined liberal of all European countries.” By understanding what the country was—in all its strengths and in the weaknesses that made it fall—we can not only keep democracy safe in the West; we can make it better.

Radical State chronicles the nearly two decades of my life in the Netherlands, incorporating people, places, and reflections on events, both personal and public. Dutch history, at times, occasionally also plays a part in order to provide a comprehensive vision of the cultural foundations

that led to the current situation. Further, I have occasionally drawn parallels where possible with American culture, noting global highlights of the times to lend a further sense of atmosphere and place.

However, the years since 2001 form the emphasis of the book, focusing on the rising conflict between Western and Muslim cultures. The disclosure of extremist groups, of domestic violence, and even of honor killings in Dutch-Muslim families, has forced powerful changes in the Dutch—and consequently, to some extent, Euro-American—understanding of Islam as it is often practiced within democratic society. And in Holland, perhaps more than in any other Western country, that “clash of civilizations” has reached a point some believe to be insurmountable.

Through narrative, analysis, and portraits, I have tried to elucidate the struggle between those who seek to Islamize Dutch culture, and those who will do whatever necessary—including compromising democracy—to preserve it. Ultimately, *Radical State* champions the idea of a supportive, secularized, Enlightenment ideal as it chronicles the rise and fall of a free democracy in a clarion call to America.

INTRODUCTION

There are perhaps as many explanations for Dutch tolerance as there are opinions about it. “The Dutch are open,” some say, “like our land.”

“The Dutch have a history of trade with other lands,” say others, “we have always dealt with other cultures, because we’re on the sea.” (In fact, the so-called *poldermodel*—a socio-economic system based on a program of consensus that was praised especially during the 1990s by world leaders—is said to be based on Holland’s relationship to the sea: only through cooperation and compromise was it possible to reclaim the land that became—and still is now becoming—the Netherlands.)

More cynical types declare there is in fact no Dutch tolerance. “It’s indifference,” they say—a description which might equally find origins in the Dutch landscape: flat. (There are, in fact, few peaks and valleys of any kind in the Netherlands: a socialist economy prevents the kind of disparity in wealth Americans experience, for instance, and even the weather is usually the same, the temperature rarely reaching extremes of either heat or cold.)

All of these are likely true and related to another important factor: The Dutch penchant for *gezelligheid*, a word often translated as “coziness” but for which there is no real English equivalent. In a land where it is often cold and damp, where winter days are extremely short and winter itself unendurably long, the Dutch settle in. More books are read per capita in this country than anywhere else in the world, they say. Evening meals are heavy, comprised of thick pea soup or potatoes mixed with greens and meat. Always thickly-populated, always eager for *gezelschap* (company)—and *gezelligheid*—the Dutch have little choice but to get along

with one another, to make the best of differences, be it by tolerating or by ignoring them.

This is, of course, more true when an entire economy depends on amiable relations—as was the case in the 17th century, Holland's Golden Age, when merchant sailors traveled the globe, mostly to the East Indies, Africa, and Brazil, returning with sugar, tobacco, silks, and spices to trade with the rest of Europe. With a flourishing culture, the city attracted, in turn, immigrants from neighboring European lands, whose presence both instilled and deepened the spirit of "tolerance" across the lowlands. Jews, particularly, found themselves welcomed—or at least, comparatively so: forbidden to join guilds or own shops, Portuguese Jews immigrating to the Netherlands became publishers, physicians, and a primary force in the Dutch diamond trade.

It is not for lack of activity that the century following the Golden Age had little bearing on the formation of Dutch culture, however; if anything, it is for the abundance of it, with wars fought against the Brits, the Spanish, and the French. Strong in business but lousy on the battlefield, Holland found itself tossed like a softball in the schoolyard, alternately taking and capitulating to its various rivals and neighbors: A country that was Spanish on Thursday could be French by Friday and Austrian next month, making it difficult for a cohesive society to establish a true identity.

And so it continued, almost unabated, until Napoleon I annexed the Kingdom of Holland to the French Empire in 1810. When the Empire fell in 1814, Holland regained the independence it had known from 1579, when William I of Orange had freed the country of Spanish rule under Philip I, until 1648. (Some say that American Revolutionaries were inspired by the Dutch 1581 revolution against Spain and the belief, espoused by William of Orange, that a leader could rightfully be deposed.)

Still, it was about another half-century before Holland regained anything near its former glory. Only towards the end of the 19th century, with the flourishing of Dutch Impressionism and the impact of the Industrial Revolution on an agricultural society, did the Dutch return again to the idea of a national identity and principles on which to define their culture. The division of church and state, for instance, provided for in the Constitution of 1848, led to secularized educational systems. New political parties emerged, divided along both political and religious lines, including a worker's party—the Social Democratic Union. This, in turn, forged a greater political liberalism and the beginnings of what would become the economic structure of the current Dutch state and its strong welfare policies.

That kind of idealism colors the modern history of the Netherlands, from its neutrality during World War I to its stubborn hold on the

international gold standard—it was the last country to abandon it—to the fascination with American jazz and fashion of the 1920s. When artist Theo van Doesburg founded the De Stijl movement in 1917, the concept of purity (primary colors, geometric forms, painting pared to its essentials) took on a spiritual, utopian quality, particularly through the art and writings of Piet Mondrian and the architecture of Gerrit Rietveld. “Universal harmony” could, these artists believed, be achieved through purity and the arts. That sentiment in many ways has continued to typify the Dutch: simplicity, directness, and a non-theological spirituality and faith in humanity have shaped Dutch policy as much as Dutch popular culture ever since. Even as Holland fell to German hands under the Third Reich, even as 75 percent of its Jewish population was exterminated during the occupation (1940–1945), even as more Jews died per capita in the Netherlands than anywhere else in Europe outside of Germany, some of that hope remained, manifest in such occurrences as the 1944 rail strike—the only public protest held anywhere in Europe against the persecution of the Jews.

Perhaps it was also this combination of optimism and idealism that made Holland so open to the revolutions of the 1960s and the adoption of the Anglo-American rock and fashion scenes. Utopian in its welfare ideals while wracked with guilt over its treatment of the Jews during the war, Dutch society grasped hold of hippie fever with fervor. The Provo movement emerged mid-decade, instituting programs like “white bicycles”—a system whereby free bicycles were placed for public use throughout the city—and advocating large-scale squatting of abandoned buildings, usually by student or artist’s groups. The movement had a profound influence on the political sphere of the Netherlands, not only because of its initiatives but because of the number of Provo-influenced young politicians who emerged in the years that followed. Legalization of hash and marijuana sold in so-called coffee shops, the destigmatization of prostitution, the creation of political programs to support the arts, all find their roots in the spirit of the Provos, and in turn, quite possibly, in the embrace of the new, the progressive, and the “universal beauty” of De Stijl before them.

But somewhere in the 1970s, between the socialist ethic of Provo, the Christian stronghold in the Parliament, and the emphasis on racial integration and civil rights that had swept the United States and parts of Europe, something in the weave of Dutch culture went awry, like a dropped stitch in a knitted sweater, an unsecured stone in the foundation of a great cathedral. It should have all gone perfectly, and for a while, it seemed it did. Immigrants from poorer countries were invited to fill in labor shortages, particularly in blue-collar sectors, as a larger number of Dutch youth began attending university and taking on higher-paying, higher-status jobs. Arriving largely from Turkey and

Morocco with no knowledge of Dutch culture, history, or language, these Muslim immigrants were welcomed with the idea that community builds strength. Rather than force them into an unfamiliar world in which they might well feel ostracized, alienated, even lost, the Dutch created separate neighborhoods where they might live together, open stores that offered the kinds of foods to which they were accustomed, and share their language—and experience—with one another. Mosques were built, and neighborhood schools, some of which conducted all their classes in Turkish or Arabic or Moroccan.

The last fifteen years are the focus of *Radical State*, which traces the Netherlands' decline from a utopian, peaceful democracy to a chaotic, fragmented, increasingly repressive and frightened culture, bracketed by my first meeting with Theo van Gogh in New York City during the summer of 1990 and his death in November 2004. It was a time of optimism and stability at the start: while the U.S. financial situation fell apart, Holland's reasoned economy held strong. It was a culture of "*samenwerking*"—collaboration and cooperation—and "*samenwoning*"—living together—a period of innocence and trust so deeply imbedded into daily life that one rode the trams according to an honor system, punching one's own ticket for the appropriate price on boarding, a time when not only did my roommates not lock the front door to their apartment—they kept it open wide. Visits from repairmen—plumbers, say, or electricians—began and ended with a cup of coffee shared over a kitchen table. At a junk shop on the Vijzelstraat, the aging proprietors offered visitors tea served in china cups and an easy chair to sit in.

But by the time of Theo van Gogh's death, all of that had changed. Stimulated in part by an increasing number of violent incidents and attacks on city transit largely perpetrated by Moroccan youth gangs (most of whom also engaged in fare-beating), conductors were hired to supervise the trams. In 1998, police clashed with young Moroccans on two occasions, leading to riots and rock-throwing. Further demonstrations and conflicts followed. On September 11 and 12, 2001, some Muslim communities openly celebrated the attacks of 9/11. And still, in December of that year, I attended a public forum about September 11 and its significance to the Dutch. A panelist, introduced as one of the country's most "renowned" and "respected" reporters, described his response on the afternoon of September 11 as he prepared to write the story. "I realized," he said, "that as terrible as it was, it was really about America. It had nothing to do with me."

Less than six months later, a flamboyant gay politician by the name of Pim Fortuyn ran for Parliament on a single platform: close the borders. Islam is a backwards culture, he argued, and Muslims do not belong in our democratic nation. Fortuyn became a national hero—the

more so after he was assassinated (by a non-Muslim) in May 2002. His cause became the national cause: Holland has been tolerant enough.

Hafid Bouazza, a Dutch-Moroccan writer and outspoken critic of Islamic extremism, contends that its roots were already burrowing into Dutch soil as early as the 1980s, with the “Muslim Brothers” who, banned by Egypt’s President Nasser, found asylum in Holland during the 1950s. The “Brothers” regrouped in the Netherlands, distributing, by Bouazza’s account, audio and video recordings filthy with “aggressive lectures.” Muslim girls were not to be sent to school, but kept locked in their homes and veiled. By mid-decade, the Muslim Brotherhood had begun encouraging its members to leave their jobs—if possible, to be fired, though in the Dutch system, this is in fact difficult to do—“for no Muslim may work for an unbeliever.” Instead, Muslims should spend as much time as possible in the Mosque, reports Bouazza in the Dutch national daily, the *NRC Handelsblad*.¹ It was, says Bouazza, the “famous ‘back pain period,’” when numerous first-generation Moroccans received disability payments from the state while, in many cases, plotting to destroy the very state that supported them.

By the late 1990s, Saudi Arabia was funding mosques in the Netherlands, along with several of its schools. (Bouazza counted ten of the country’s 32 Islamic schools that were Saudi-subsidized, where extremist propaganda circulated among the students.)

“How naïve can the Netherlands be?” wrote Bouazza in 2002, when the Saudi connection was uncovered. “There is a point where naïveté becomes stupidity, and I fear that Holland is getting dangerously close.”

Was the Netherlands naïve—even stupid? Theo van Gogh refused government protection in the face of death threats because, he said, “I’m the village idiot. No one is going to kill the village idiot.” But they did, and suddenly all of Holland was a village full of idiots, trying to separate idealism from practicality, racism from reality, with some clinging to the libertarian foundations of their culture and others ready to jettison them all and start anew.

Because only through this can the question “What went wrong?”—the very question *Poldergeist* is written to address—be answered. And answering that question is crucial; because to set things right again requires understanding how it all broke apart. And we must set it right, or jihad’s victory over democracy will be complete, and sooner than we may realize.

And one has to ask: If Holland has been this naïve, this stupid, even, then in the United States—the country that was first and most horrifically attacked—have we?

CHAPTER 1

I put the woman I am talking to on hold to take another call.

"Theo is dead."

It is my friend and neighbor Fré who lives just two floors down.

"What?"

"*Theo is dood. Vermoord.*" Theo is dead. Murdered.

"Van Gogh," she adds, to make sure I understand. "Someone just now killed Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam."

I tell her I will be right there and end my other call.

Downstairs, we watch the news reports come in over her TV, describing an incident that has taken place just moments past, and just a few short streets from where we live, where we are standing now. Her eyes fill.

"In *Nederland*," she says, her voice husky in its disbelief: In the Netherlands. I put my arm around her, knowing. "You wonder where your country is now," I tell her, and she nods in recognition.

"This is your 9/11."

I know. I live in Amsterdam, but I am a born and bred New Yorker and I was there, in uptown Manhattan, on that clear, earthshaking September day. Upstairs, my own TV is turned to CNN, where I expect to hear the ongoing coverage of the U.S. presidential vote: It is November 2, 2004, and my country's future, too, lies in the balance.

The news pours in: gunshots, stabbings, Moroccan immigrant—no, the son of Moroccan immigrants, Dutch-born. Theo, heard by witnesses, hordes of them on the street as the killing went on at the height of morning rush hour, 8:43 A.M., in fact—the moment the first plane

had hit the World Trade Center tower three years earlier. “Don’t do it!” he had cried out, running from the bullets, from the calm and unaffected man continuing to approach him, undeterred. “Don’t do it! We can talk!”

But Theo’s killer didn’t want to talk. Everything he had to say, he’d already put in writing in a five-page letter, a manuscript penned in venom and in hate, wrought with threats and indignations, and warnings of what was yet to come; and when Theo collapsed, at last, falling face-up on the sidewalk, his attacker drew a kukri knife and, in a failed effort to behead him, sliced his throat. Then he stabbed the letter into Van Gogh’s corpse, as if pinning a “For Sale” sign on a wall, and calmly walked away.

Just like that.

* * *

I remember the night I first met Theo. It was in New York City, 1989. I was 29, he, 32. The Dutch government owned a loft in Tribeca that it handed out to artists for two-week intervals as a kind of fellowship. Theo made films—some said gruesome, anti-Semitic films, or in any case, controversial—and was living there then, which was where my friend Stephen took me to meet him. I remember wall-length windows, wooden floors, and a view across the water. Then we all went out to dinner.

I remember Theo then already was what the Dutch call *slordig*—sloppy, messy, rumped, his T-shirt wrinkled and too small for his oversized belly, his face unshaven, his hair—blond and curled—uncombed. I remember thinking he had the face that you imagine when you hear a man is Dutch: round and peasantlike, innocent, even, with ruddy cheeks and wide blue eyes and a bit too small a mouth. I remember staring at his hands and thinking the entire evening: Those are the hands of the hands.

Theo’s great-great uncle was the painter.

I could not get enough of looking at those hands.

When Theo died, his hands, his mother later said, were positioned by his face, “like a baby.” Later, she told a newspaper reporter, “I only hoped he wasn’t cold.”¹

* * *

Fré and I absorb the details of the murder as they arrive on radio and TV reports, in phone calls we field from friends, and updates that come by e-mail from the papers. Immediately, my thoughts go to my friend Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali refugee now in the Dutch parliament

who wrote the screenplay for *Submission*, the film that was, we all know from the start, the reason Theo van Gogh was killed. Theo had directed the film, an 11-minute drama emphasizing the abuse of Muslim women and the violence against them prescribed in the Koran. Where is she? Is she safe? She is already under guard, a response to death threats she began receiving in the fall of 2002. (This, we will learn later, is in fact why the killer went for Theo: Ayaan was out of reach.)

"I can hear him," I tell Fré as we stand in shock together. Van Gogh's falsetto voice is famous in the Netherlands.

How can it be silent now?

Someone else performs the math: this day, November 2, 2004, marks exactly 911 days since Holland's last political murder, the slaying of right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn on May 6, 2002.

"My God," I say, and the words rise from deep within my throat. "To have planned it all so carefully, so systematically, a math problem, a calculation, like at school. Like homework."

* * *

This is our Holland. But there is another, parallel Holland, where the response plays out quite differently. From the moment the first news releases interrupt regular programming on TV, messages fly on online bulletin boards for the Dutch Moroccan (and Muslim) community. At www.moroc.nl, "Berber 21" giggles, "Terrific! A great day—let's party! My treat."

"Dorian" is less certain. "Is the pig really dead," he asks, "or is this a bad joke?"

"Whoever did this," posts someone with the screen name "Grendel," "Thanks."

Eventually Dorian is convinced the "pig" is really, truly dead. "And so," he writes with triumph, "will the Zionists and their servants come to their bloody end."

In our Holland, the one I live in, have lived in since the fall of 1990, the one where we are not, now, celebrating, it takes little time to get the word out: Van Gogh's colleagues will hold a demonstration at the Palace on the Dam tonight at 7:30. It is not to be a quiet wake, as is the custom, but a loud one: Van Gogh stood for free speech, his friends declare, and so tonight, Holland must make noise. The news spreads through the Internet to millions of Dutch homes and families throughout the country: Be there.

"I'm going," Fré tells me resolutely.

"I'm not," I say. There is too much anger. I am certain riots will erupt: angry Dutch, angry Muslims, battles on the streets of Amsterdam. I'll have a better view of it on TV, anyway.

It is testimony to the power of the Internet that only hours after the idea is first conceived, 20,000 Hollanders stand, determined, at the plaza behind the Palace, the World War II memorial rising, stark and white, amongst the huddled families, the tearful faces and the angry ones, children as young as two years old, adults as old as 90. From the podium, Van Gogh's colleague Lennart Booij speaks to all of Holland: "Theo would not want silence. Theo would want people to be heard. Amsterdam: *make noise!*"

And they do: 40,000 stomping feet, 40,000 clapping hands, 20,000 voices. Pots and pans and spoons and bongo drums all bang in unison and cacophony. Someone lights firecrackers. Engineers of trains entering and leaving the city from all directions sound their horns.

And then the politicians speak: Job Cohen, the city mayor; Rita Verdonk, Minister of Immigration and Integration. Cohen is icy. "He had his opinions," he says. "He also had his opinions about me. This is permitted in the Netherlands."

Verdonk is not so philosophical.

"We know two things," she says, her expression cracking with its fury. "Theo van Gogh was murdered this morning. And the man who did it is Moroccan."

Rita Verdonk does not like Moroccans. The Minister of Immigration and Integration confronts a country where the integration of nearly a million Muslim immigrants—particularly Moroccans—has failed.

"To here," Minister Verdonk spits into the crowd, "And no further." Amsterdam applauds.

At any other time, such words would sound menacing. Not now. On this lost and shocked and fury-filled night, we welcome them. The limits of tolerance have been reached. And we are angry.

We are angry because Theo van Gogh, for all his insults and his name-calling ("goatfuckers," he called the Muslims of the Netherlands; he'd made equally nasty statements about the Christians and the Jews), was innocent, really, of any harm. His tongue was acid and his pen, when he wrote, acerbic, but he himself was a gentle man, the father of a now fatherless 13-year-old boy, a man who hated hate and loved women and art and, above all, freedom. (For this reason, he also loved the United States, and planned to move there when his son, Lieuwe, was older.) He spoke against the Muslim boys in Muslim-only ghettos and then hired them as actors, sending them off with the promise of a future no one else would give them.

We are angry. We are angry at the utter brutality of knifing a man, of shooting him, and knifing him again, and then before departing, taking the time to slit his throat.

We are angry with a fury that has been gathering for years, and our helplessness in the face of a murder it is now too late to stop: not just

of a 47-year-old filmmaker, but of a centuries-old culture that for so long led the world in democracy and freedom, and has ended, just this morning, silenced and red and bleeding on the streets of Amsterdam.

And still, on the morning of November 3, a photograph stretched across the front page of national daily *Trouw* revealed a crowd of tearful faces, and hands all raised in unison forming the letter V, for peace.

* * *

Nonetheless, the days, the weeks, in truth, the years after Van Gogh's slaying were—and remain—times not just of anger but of blame and finger-pointing. It was Theo's own fault, most Muslims insisted, for saying things he never should have said, for producing a film like *Submission*, in which the words of the Koran appeared on the bodies of naked women. It was Hirsi Ali's fault, said others of the film's creator: she knew what she was getting him into, but didn't care. The Left blamed the Right—they antagonized the Muslim population. The Right blamed the Left—they had so catered to the Muslims that the Muslims of Holland had never had to learn or adapt to Western norms of tolerance and freedom. Journalists blamed the secret service—the AIVD (Algemene Inlichting En Veiligheids Dienst)—who (it turned out) knew an attack on Theo van Gogh was imminent, and still allowed him to fire his state-provided bodyguards without advising him of the severity of the risk. ("I'm the village idiot," Van Gogh would say. "Who would kill the village idiot?") The public blamed the journalists for creating a hype about the so-called "Muslim problem" in the first place.

Mostly, everyone blamed the Muslims.

And the Muslims blamed them back.

Eight hundred acts of racial violence took place in the three weeks following the murder of Theo van Gogh, including attacks on 104 mosques, 37 churches, and 25 schools—16 Muslim, nine Christian. As early as November 6, the newspaper *Volkskrant* led its front page with the words, "Murder Begins Holy War in The Netherlands," and an article by reporter Janny Groen, "Jihad Fighters Under Our Very Eyes," noted, "Mohammed B. [as he was called in the Dutch press] is not alone. The jihadists have been among us for a while; they are recruited and trained before our very eyes." Were these exaggerations, hysterical responses from a society taken by surprise? Or had Holland finally awakened to a truth it had, despite the insistent ringing of numerous alarms, ignored, longing to hold, instead, to the comfort of what was, in fact, a dream?

They had closed their eyes to too much, the Dutch: the honor killings of Muslim women that they wrote off for decades as accidents or suicides; the distribution of books like *How to Be a Good Muslim* at mosques

and community centers and even schools, which call for homosexuals to be thrown off the tops of buildings and then stoned (lest they survive the fall); the abused, lost, neglected children, who, as Ayaan once noted, “everyone ignores until they start acting out, stealing from the local grocer or getting into fights—and by then, it’s far too late.”

“The World Trade Center,” I wrote in my notes at the time, “was the socket of America’s eye. Theo van Gogh was Holland’s cheek. And Holland will not, does not, turn the other one.”

* * *

Mohammed Bouyeri, we soon learn, did not act entirely alone: he was one of a group of radical Muslims known as the Hofstadgroep, which is usually translated as “The Capital Group” but which I’ve always rather associated with the CNN talk show, *The Capital Gang*. His letter, knifed to Van Gogh’s heart, had spelled out everything the Hofstadgroep essentially stood for, though he wrote it speaking only for himself:

I surely know that you, O America, will be destroyed
 I surely know that you, O Europe, will be destroyed
 I surely know that you, O Holland, will be destroyed

At Van Gogh’s cremation on November 8, his friends offer a letter in response. (“When someone writes a letter to you,” says Van Gogh’s friend, writer Theodore Holman, “the proper thing is always to write back.”) They ask him how his leg is doing, as he heals from the gunshots fired by police—gunshots he had hoped would kill him, provide him martyrdom and a paradise of virgins, but—in a great twist of karma and divine justice, did not. “Hang in there,” the letter reads. “You’ll be needing your sense of humor now.”

So, too, would the rest of us.

CHAPTER 2

Though you're not likely to see it stated in the guidebooks, there is perhaps nowhere quite so Dutch in all of Holland as Amsterdam's Westerkerk. Lording over the Prinsengracht, its tower marking the highest point in the city center—and so, casting the longest reflection in the canal waters—the church bears the crown of Austria's Emperor Maximilian—a gift from the ruler to the city in 1478, and the origin of the triple-X insignia that has become the hallmark of Amsterdam. Rembrandt lies buried here, though no one knows precisely where, as does Titus, his son. Footsteps away is the house where Anne Frank and her family hid from Nazi troops, and at its base stands the Homomonument, originally built to commemorate the homosexuals who suffered, too, under the Nazi regime, though now it is considered a monument to gays worldwide who have suffered the effects of homophobia and AIDS. And at its altar, both the wealthy and the poor have prayed, together.

But it's the crown most people notice, and no wonder—canary yellow, crimson red, and cobalt blue, the color of the Dutch pottery known as Delftware, or *Delfts blau*—Delft blue. That these then became the colors associated with Piet Mondrian's De Stijl and, consequently, with characteristic Dutch design, is hard to miss, whether accidental or (unconsciously) deliberate, whether meaningful or not.

And it's the bells, the Westerkerk bells, bells that ring across the city on the half hour, every hour, and if you should happen to live in the neighborhood, as I did from 1990 to 1992, you realize that the melody is not always the same; at some unannounced moment every now and

again, the carillon that has echoed across the carved gables of the Jordaan 48 times a day for months will disappear, replaced by different rhythms, different baritones. It is a big event, this changing of the bells; in the counting of time passing, one is reminded: time is passing.

My first apartment stood within the shadow of the Westerkerk. "It is the Dutch Quartier Latin," is how a friend had previously described the area known as the Jordaan, though my orientation placed it more along the lines of New York City's SoHo, thick with chic bohemian boutiques and young designers, and with people riding home from the bars by bicycle at night, whistling things like Fur Elise or Chopin mazurkas in between the ringing of the bells.

I visited the Anne Frank Huis once, with my parents and my sisters in the summer of 1965. I've not been back: there's been no need. I remember it too well. These are the two things I remember best: a yellowing photograph tacked up to a wall (my mind's eye sees a photograph of Anne herself, but it might as well have, in fact, been anyone) and the growth chart by the kitchen door. I had never seen or heard of a growth chart before. My father patiently explained the way it worked, how Anne and her sister would stand against the wall and their mother draw a line at the height at which they stood. I want a growth chart, too, I said, when we go home to New York; but I never got one, and I realize now it's just as well, or I would have confused myself with Anne. We have shared enough of the same memories as it is.

Anne Frank wrote about the Westerkerk in her now-immortal diary, "Daddy, Mummy, and Margot can't get used to the Westertoren clock yet, which tells us the time every quarter of an hour. I can. I loved it from the start, and especially in the night it's like a faithful friend."

The same clock that marked the hours of her last days in Amsterdam marked, too, the first of mine.

* * *

A funny thing happens to expats on the way across the Atlantic: they become more of wherever it is they're from. In the summer of 1990, just before I made my final and official move and was living with my friend Karin on the Stadhouderskade (the Heineken brewery was just across the street), I held a Fourth of July party. There were two Americans; everyone else who came—and there were well over 50 of us—was Dutch. We hung up posters of American flags and a copy of a Jasper Johns version we found in one of Karin's books. We served hot dogs out of jars (it was the only way to get them), fried chicken a Dutch farm girl cooked up in our kitchen, and hamburgers and potato salad. We toasted the United States and played old Motown tunes.

I went to bed at three A.M., and when I woke again at eight, some guests still remained gathered at the kitchen table, talking. "God bless America," someone said, and toasted me with his tea.

Thanksgiving brought the next occasion, by which time I was already living in the Jordaan. I invited two Americans I knew and the two men who ran a contemporary art gallery I often hung out in on the Binnenkant. One could not buy turkey, not even ordering it from the poulier on the Rozengracht several days ahead. I roasted a chicken and found Ocean Spray cranberries in a corner of the freezer at a health food store and baked an apple brown betty for dessert, and we all sat around the table and drank too much wine with dinner and Courvoisier when it was over and were thoroughly, blissfully, *gezellig*. It was years before I learned one didn't do such things in Holland—invite people to your home for dinner. That was something only foreigners did, or people who had lived abroad. One invited people individually, usually, for coffee and *gebak*—baked goods—like little pink frosted cakes, or waffle cones filled with whipped cream shaped like a tornado. It was another thing that marked us as both exotic and as outsiders, as curiosities of a sort. In the years that a Mexican-American photojournalist friend lived here, she threw such parties nearly every week. Her guests hailed from Brazil as often as from Bulgaria, from the former East Berlin, from Tokyo, from Texas, from New York. They were pot-luck events for which she inevitably made a Caesar salad and a bowl of guacamole, and there was never a Dutch morsel in the lot. "She's crazy," people said about Diana, shaking their heads at the chaos and disorder of it all.

Everyone always had a wonderful time.

* * *

But there are moments in the Netherlands when conviviality reigns, and voices call out festively from balconies and streets. As a Dutch artist friend said to me on one of my early visits here, "The minute the sun comes out, the Dutch think they're on the Riviera." Couches are hauled out to the sidewalk from first- and ground-floor living rooms, or card tables and chairs, and on warmer evenings, full sets of silverware and dishes. I have, on occasion, walked along the Brouwersgracht to find it transformed into an outdoor dining hall, with another table at every doorstep. I study a photograph Diana once took of boats on the canals—teams of them, and on each, a gathering of friends. Look closely, though, and you notice everyone is wearing overcoats. But the sun shines over the city, and that is all that matters.

If one doesn't have a boat in Amsterdam, one has at least one friend who does, and mine were a couple I'd met through an artist in

New York City—Gijs, a wealthy art collector, and his stunning, younger wife, Jacky, an art historian whose dissertation about medieval manuscript illumination she somehow never did complete. Their apartment on the Keizersgracht encircled an enormous private garden, with a living room at its base and a glass-enclosed master suite—with Jacuzzi—at its top. Their boat had been a fire department vessel in the 1930s, large enough to carry six of us quite comfortably with a cooler full of wine.

In the summer of 1991, the big debate in Amsterdam circulated around the Café de Jaren, a new, designer café popular with twenty-somethings, the terrace of which extended out onto the river Amstel, causing uproar among conservationists and others who were less than keen about having a big, post-modernist, commercial *thing* at the center of one of the city's most gracious corners. We drove the boat along its banks, admiring the sun refracting off the windows, and wondering what the fuss was really all about. "These are people," said Gijs, "with nothing at all to do all day but count their pension. There are uglier buildings all over Amsterdam."

"It's a landmark location," his wife countered, "People want it left unspoiled."

Students in large groups crowded the café tables, some having already had too much to drink, others racing to catch up. Most waved. We waved back.

"You'd think," someone said, "they'd have taken this up before the thing was built."

Yesses all around.

Who would pay the cost of its removal, Jacky wondered. The café? The city? Those who'd started the motion against it in the first place? We sputtered past, Gijs, dark-eyed and tan and holding a glass of Beaujolais in one hand, steering the boat around the bend and out onto the river, then turning west toward the Red Light District, which, he assured us, is "extraordinary" from the water.

Whores in windows, Amsterdam accepted with contentment. Cafés on the Amstel were something altogether else. Hence a referendum had been called—at what cost, I do not know—to determine the fate of Café de Jaren.

"People have to understand," said Jacky the art historian, who was clearly not taking sides in this debate, "that what they decide about de Jaren, they decide about the future architecture of this city. And if they call a referendum over architects, what next? Will the entire country vote on every museum acquisition?" For my part, though I didn't say so, secretly I was thrilled by the whole thing: A referendum! To ask the people what they think about a café! To choose so democratically! What glory this country was.

We will have aesthetics by majority rule, somebody suggested.

But the truth was it wasn't very likely. At a time when the postal service ran a department of aesthetics whose role it was to commission artists for the design of phone booths and postage stamps—true, all ratified by consensus, but with an eye toward stimulating, not repressing, experimentation in design—consensual art was not exactly looming on the horizon.

We steered the boat along the Prinsengracht, into the shadow of the Westerkerk, and kept on.

* * *

If a referendum to decide the fate of a café seemed to me progressive, other aspects of life in the Netherlands at the time were not. What they were, however, were equally basic, honest, filled with common sense. In those days, you could not buy furniture cleaner in spray bottles: you used soap and water and a bucket and a sponge. Toilet paper was gray and harsh, and there was no such thing as "instant rice." Broccoli was something exotic, peculiar, new. You bought pantry goods at the supermarket, like coffee, tea, and mayonnaise, and cheese at the cheese store and bread at the baker and fruit at the fruit market. When you did buy produce from the grocer, you weighed it out on scales that issued a sticker with the price long before you reached the check-out line. I mention this because it implied a trust, an honor system in which one would never even think to weigh three apples in a bag, price it, and then add another one "for the road."

No one uses this system anymore.

It is important to understand all this: here was a country planted firmly in the West, the paragon of democracy and model for the modern world. And yet, it was in so many ways riveted to the past, skittish about progress, innovation, change.

When a friend in the United States investigated the possibility of introducing a new, less-costly way to ship flowers to and from the Dutch flower auctions—the center of the world floral market—another friend in Holland cautioned me that he'd have trouble finding takers. "Generally speaking," my Dutch friend said, "people take things like this skeptically. They assume that if it's not being done already, there's a reason—and if it were a good idea, someone would have thought of it already." Even Ab (Albert) Heijn, heir to the Albert Heijn grocery chain and director of its international holding company, Royal Ahold—a firm with assets in the \$25 billion range—told an interviewer in 2007, "I am no fan of big steps." And echoing a popular expression in the Netherlands, he added, "*Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg*": Be normal; that's acting crazy enough. Even the Dutch government

resisted advances in technology and culture: it took the privatization of the telecommunications system in 1989 and deregulation of the industry in the late 1990s¹ to get call-waiting introduced—a technology long in place in the United States. Holland's leaders had rejected it: they feared (and rightly so) that it would speed things up too much, increase the pace of daily life.

And even television felt antiquated then: With only three TV channels, the Dutch often tuned in to Belgian stations and the BBC—and on occasion, to the newly-invented CNN. We watched *Dallas* reruns and *The Golden Girls*, and last year's season of *Oprah*, which aired twice a day in Holland and in Belgium every night. We watched a popular Australian soap opera titled *Neighbors*, two-year-old episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful*, and a Dutch show called *Good Times, Bad Times* with some of the worst acting I have ever seen.

It was all so *gezellig*.

* * *

Amsterdam is a young city, being a college town and a haven for young tourists from abroad intrigued by the so-called “coffeeshops” where it is legal to buy—and smoke—hash and marijuana. In the 1990s, while “yuppies” took the front seats in the U.S., generous government subsidies for students and for artists kept Holland in the throes of a hippie culture, where more books were read per capita than anywhere else in the world, and artists squatted houses throughout the city while the government, for the most part, looked away.

The apartment I lived in then was a sublet, found through a family friend, facing a canal with balconies both front and back. It was an idyllic first apartment for an American in Amsterdam; and in truth, I was lucky to have found anywhere to live at all. (“Don’t worry about work,” friends told me when I announced my plans to move there. “Find a place to live.”) Housing in Amsterdam was—and remains—competitive and scarce, most of it incorporated into what was then a government system through which—unlike such arrangements in the rest of the world—low-cost housing was available to those of all income brackets. It was therefore possible to earn the equivalent of \$50,000 a year and pay \$100 a month for an apartment, while next door, someone earning \$25,000 might pay as much as \$500 for a home virtually indistinguishable from the first. In addition, the government regulated rents outside the housing system, and laws almost uniformly favored tenants, not landlords: evicting tenants was, for the most part, virtually impossible. (In fact, though I didn’t know it at the time, I could have taken over the apartment simply by dint of the fact that I had lived there. I had only to refuse to leave: finders, keepers.)

In a country already overcrowded—Holland boasts more people per square meter than any other country in the world²—housing shortages inevitably resulted, especially in the more desirable areas—like Amsterdam’s center, or “Centrum.” Waiting lists for subsidized housing in my neighborhood stretched to more than five years. Consequently, despite the country’s growing Muslim population, most residents of Amsterdam’s Jordaan were native Dutch.

Exacerbating the situation, the intricacies of a complicated housing system even now gives priority to those who have already lived for a period of time in social housing (as any houses not on the free market are called) seeking to relocate. A woman who has lived alone for 10 years in a social housing flat and then marries, for instance, may apply for a larger apartment. Those who have lived in social housing for longer than 10 years and who are also seeking more space will be offered the better apartments first, leaving her the lesser choices—and so, most likely, a continued wait.

Consequently, while social housing was indeed available in the best neighborhoods, such homes largely were reserved only for the Dutch; immigrants, unless they could afford open market rates, were forced to settle in outlying areas and less attractive portions of the city. And there they stayed.

There were also other reasons for this. When the first immigrants arrived in the 1960s from Turkey and Morocco, they were not expected to remain: they came as guest workers, and as such, were provided basic accommodations to suit their needs.

But they did stay. And over the years, halal food shops opened selling imported foods from their homelands and homemade baklava, dolmas, and bread; boutiques sold headscarves and long dresses appropriate for Muslim women. By the time a Muslim family was likely to be registered for social housing and to be eligible for an apartment in an area like the Jordaan, moving would seem almost like relocating to another city—even another land: in a kind of vicious circle, few Muslims in the Centrum meant little need for Islamic shops, and the lack of such shops made the area unappealing to Muslim immigrants. Moreover, commercial rents were high in Amsterdam’s center. The Jordaan hosts mostly restaurants, cafés, and chic design boutiques. From the houseboats along the banks of its canals to the tobacco-stained brown bars that faced them, Amsterdam had, in any number of ways, little changed since the days when Rembrandt and the philosopher Baruch Spinoza walked its streets.

This began to change when I arrived in 1990.

In 1989, a number of revisions in economic policy aimed at relieving a growing national debt had begun a privatization of the housing sector, along with cutbacks in rent subsidies provided to families unable

to afford even government housing prices. As better housing commanded higher rents (as much as 10,000 guilders per month or more on the so-called Golden Bend of the canal belt, or about \$5,000 at the time), people who could do so began buying homes. The result? More stratification. In the nearly two years I lived in the Jordaan, I did not meet a single Muslim, and in fact, only encountered the occasional Moroccan or Egyptian man outside the newly built Fatih mosque on the Rozengracht. Rather, in my apartment on the Egelantiersgracht, I lived among artists and families with small blond children. (Though, granted, family reunification programs and high birthrates further made the small apartments of Amsterdam's center unsuitable to Muslim immigrant families, anyway: there simply was almost nothing large enough to house them.)

This, however, would change in the later part of the decade, as a result in large part of the tremendous growth in the Muslim population nationwide—from just over 400,000 in 1990 to 800,000 by 2000, reaching nearly 6 percent of the population by 2004.³ And with that migration, tensions would mount accordingly.

But in 1990, things had not yet come that far.

* * *

What did begin to change as early as the fall of 1990—before the Gulf War, before CNN had brought the images of life under Saddam Hussein into our living rooms—was the coming of the mosques.

Though an estimated 300 mosques already served the Muslim population in major Dutch cities, most were too small, or were ad hoc praying rooms set up in schools, offices, even churches. Plans to replace them with new buildings spun through parliamentary proceedings and city planning groups, who must account for the traffic caused by the arrival, every Friday afternoon, of hundreds of Muslims into the areas. Sites had to be designated and buildings designed to allow the faithful to face toward Mecca—a feat not always feasible in the makeshift spaces. In a 1991 article in the *NRC Handelsblad*,⁴ art critic Bianca Stigter cited plans for five new, large mosques in Rotterdam, aimed at replacing the 30 small ones scattered in abandoned buildings and shops throughout the city. One of these would later become the center of long political battles: the Moroccan Essalam Mosque, designed to be one of the largest in all of Europe—much to the horror of the native Dutch, who found it inappropriate that the largest religious building in the country would be Islamic, not Christian. Not only that, but with 50-meter-high minarets, the building would be the tallest in the city, dominating a town with a strong international reputation for its architecture and its status as “the port of Europe.”

What the new mosques pointed to, of course, was the growth and establishment of the Muslim community, its official participation in the life of the Netherlands, and its increasingly apparent permanence. It is one thing to have Muslim immigrants renting apartments in the next neighborhood. It is something else again entirely when they start building new—and costly—houses of worship down the street. What would that mean for Christians? How big a role would Islam have—not just Muslims, but the religion itself—in Dutch life? Would we soon be hearing prayer calls at dawn?

Only a few steps separated the Fatih mosque on the Rozengracht from the crown of the Westerkerk and the ringing of its bells. The truth was, it wasn't just the fact that the cityscape would look different. Something about it was starting to *feel* different, too.

* * *

It was a ritual as common to Amsterdammers as stealing hotel ashtrays, or buying "Louis Vuitton" pocketbooks in New York City's Chinatown: the buying, stealing, and repurchasing of bikes. Bicycles remain the preferred form of transportation for the Dutch: city streets include bicycle lanes, and sidewalks are often crowded by stalls in which to park them. The bicycles themselves one bought used on Dam Square for 10 guilders each: it was the lock you spent your money on, though even the most expensive was rarely good enough. Inevitably, the evening would come that you left a restaurant having had a bit too much to drink, giddy from the company of friends, only to have your joy shattered by the realization that your bicycle was no longer there. Sometimes the chain would still remain, loosely waving, its links brushing against the metal pole to which you'd locked it, sounding lost and empty across the blackness of the canals.

But within a day or two, you'd head over to the Dam again, where a junky, usually a foreigner from England or from France, would offer you another. And so the cycle of the bicycle in Amsterdam continued.

To Dutch officials, bicycle theft constituted part of Holland's criminal activity. Statistical reports came prefaced with cautions about the rising crime rates in the cities, in which bicycle theft—and the stealing of radios from cars—prevailed. Methadone and needle exchange programs in Holland kept the rate for break-ins, violent crime, and major household theft reasonably in check. And while in New York City the murder rate for 1990 reached an all-time high of about 2,260, or 25 per hundred thousand, in the Netherlands entire the official murder count per hundred thousand people that year—also a historic high—came in at 1.2.⁵

But in the neighborhoods outside the center, this, too, began to change.

In 1988, a report on criminality among Moroccan youth in Amsterdam leaked to the press and was reproduced in its entirety in the daily

broadsheet *Het Parool*. Crime rates had been rising throughout the 1980s all over Europe; now the Dutch had somebody to blame—and not without reason. Thirty-two thousand Moroccans lived in the city in 1989, 3,500 of them between the ages of 13 and 25. By 1989, newer press reports noted that 33 percent of those youth had had contact with the police.⁶ Any unspoken resentments, the frustrations of those Dutch families who had seen their neighborhoods change with the coming of Muslim immigrants—those in the Pijp, or in Amsterdam Oost, the Eastern section of the city, and in the outlying, mostly working class areas—could now be said aloud. It was in the newspapers, after all. There had been research.

The Netherlands often boasts of its “openness” to foreigners, the arrival of Portuguese Jews in the late 16th century being a particularly popular example. But the country has never had to absorb an immigrant population quite as large—and as different—as this one. They had known the Jews were staying, and planned for it. The gradual rootings of the Muslims into their society, by contrast, took them by surprise. Moreover, the Portuguese Jews had been relatively financially independent, becoming moneylenders, merchants, patrons of the arts. Muslims, however, have lived largely on the generosity of the Dutch welfare system. Most of the women who arrive here do not speak the language and are barred from taking jobs by their religiously conservative husbands—even if they wanted to. And how does one form neighborly relations with neighbors with whom one cannot converse? And then there were the children who immigrated here, children who fell behind in school (and still do), deterred by social and language barriers, and lacking the support of parents who could guide them either through daily life in Western Europe, or the homework that they struggled with each night. Many dropped out. That they became involved in drugs (particularly through the active hash trade with Morocco) and crime should have been entirely predictable.

And yet, somehow, it wasn't.

For various reasons, too, the problem centered around the Moroccan population in particular. Handfuls of researchers have proposed reasons for the fact that, by and large, Turkish immigrants to the Netherlands have assimilated better than their Moroccan counterparts (though this trend may be reversing). But what few have ever been willing to acknowledge are the fundamental differences in the cultural norms of their respective homelands—and not just those between their homelands and the West—differences that go beyond religion-based oppression of women, persecution of homosexuals, barbaric doctrines of sharia law that call for such things as the death by stoning of women suspected of adultery, or chopping off the hands of thieves. A friend of mine at the time worked as a criminal attorney, and he had studied

Dutch Moroccan criminality at university. Once, as we drove together to visit a mutual friend in Arnhem, he explained to me his findings: Moroccans, he said, come from a more heated, violent culture than ours.

"If you are in a movie line," he suggested, "and someone cuts in front of you, what do you do? You might ignore him. Or you maybe tap him on the shoulder and say something like, 'excuse me, the line actually goes to there' and point to the end of the line. And probably he will say 'oh, sorry,' but okay, let's say he doesn't. Let's say he says, 'yeah, and?'"

Well, you might say something sharper to him. And then he would say something and you would say something.

But with a Moroccan, in their culture, if someone steps in front of you in line, you push him. And then he turns around and pushes you. And then a fight starts.

But we haven't been prepared for that," he said, "and we also haven't taught them that it doesn't work that way here."

These words have stayed with me all these years. And yet I've never once heard anyone else express a similar observation.

I have always wondered why.

* * *

In January 1991, I returned to New York City to visit family and friends. On the night of the 16th, my friend Robert, an art critic and Moroccan Jew who had come as a small boy with his family to the United States, invited me to a press preview of a new Japanese film, attended by minor celebrities like Mathilde Cuomo, wife of the then-Governor of New York. Just before the film was about to start, a man appeared at center stage.

"For those who have not heard," he announced, "we want to inform you that hostilities have begun in the Persian Gulf."

Robert gasped. We sat together, clutching one another, silent. The film was about Samurai warfare. No one could bear to watch it.

Afterwards, we walked on Second Avenue, feeling the chill of a damp and frightened night. Police blockaded the UN, with ambulances at the ready. The homeless lay on the rain-soaked sidewalk, blankets pulled up over their heads, searching in the dark for sleep. On 42nd Street, peace demonstrators had already begun: one man tossed a garbage bag into the street, another returned it to the sidewalk, and one called out to us, "it's your conscience." On the subway, men sat with grim faces and with furrowed brows. No one spoke a single word.

Days later, I returned again to Amsterdam, noting in my journal as I waited for departure from JFK: "Security is high; guards check

passports regularly at doorways. Another checks passport photos against faces at the boarding gate. A salesgirl at the Duty Free tells me a bomb was found earlier at Pan Am.

It's a different world, now."

The canals all froze that winter, and we walked on them, as far as to the Rembrandtplein, and back again.