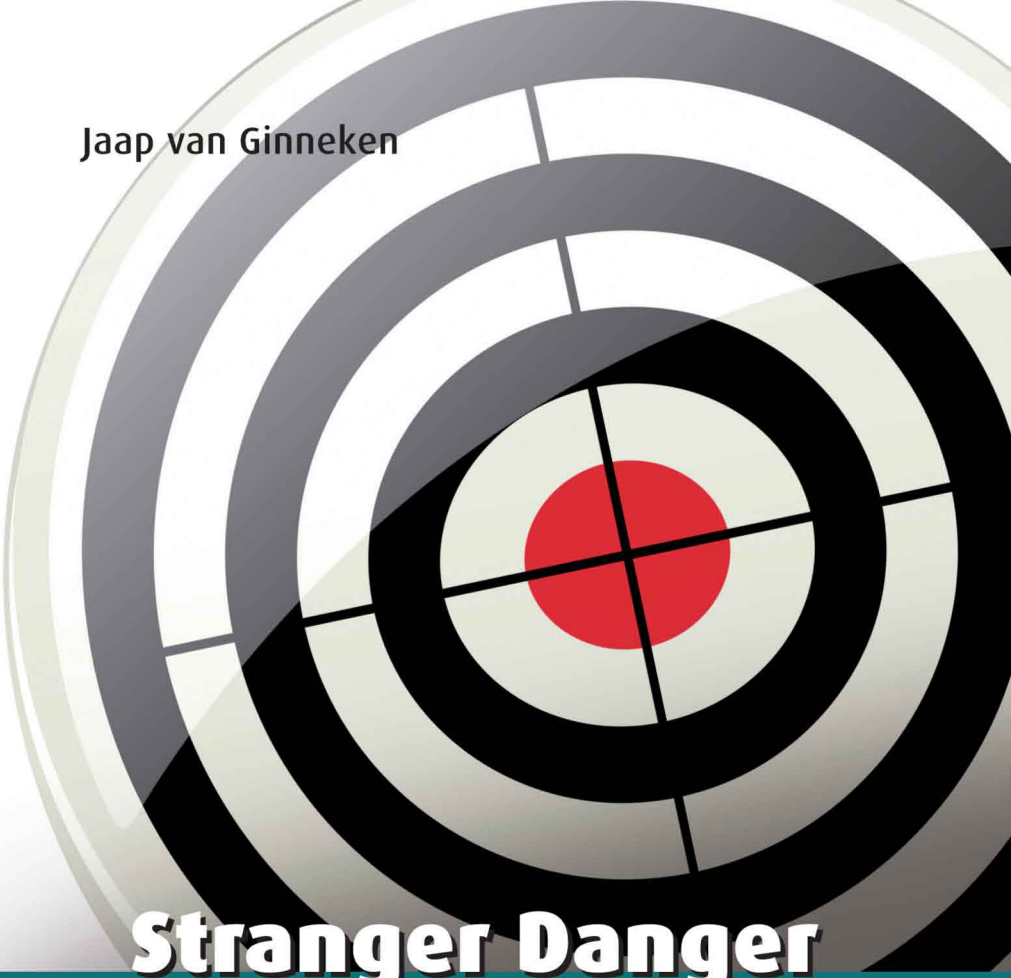
Jaap van Ginneken



Stranger Danger and the Epidemic of Fear

On the Psychology of Recent Western Reactions to Others

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FORUM
INSTITUTE FOR MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS

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FORUM is an independent knowledge institute and centre of expertise for multicultural affairs. The frame of reference in which FORUM operates is one that is rooted in a democratic constitutional state, with social cohesion and shared citizenship. The institute gathers knowledge on the wide field of integration, and disseminates it and applies it to practical methods and products.

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Foreword

It is tempting, and even evolutionary verifiable, to cling to the familiar in times of stress or danger. Our modern times demand a flexible attitude towards changes, as they come to us in an increasing rapid speed. Technological innovation improves our level of comfort in unimaginable ways. It opens up our perspective on the world. Exciting as this may be, it also confronts us with political and societal challenges and crises on a global scale. Provoked by the 24 hours stream of information, we seem to be in severe need of a recognizable frame to feel that we are in control of everything happening around us.

One way of dealing with this, especially in times of global migration, is to explicitly define a collective identity, of which many aspects are based on what we are *not*. We are *not* the Other, the stranger, the newcomer. This is as much understandable as it is counter productive and on some levels even dangerous. Although we feel the safest with the people who are close to us, many studies show that precisely people from our inner circle inflict the most violence upon us. This is not to say that we should fear our loved ones, but it demonstrates that our way of looking is selective and not rarely based on wrong presumptions.

In four elegantly written essays, lauded writer and mass psychologist Jaap van Ginneken explores the psychological dimensions of fear of strangers and relates this to recent political and sociological developments. He convincingly deconstructs the use and workings of enemy images and rightfully calls for a more thoughtful understanding of the diverse cultures living together in our globalized society.

While we are still experiencing the aftermath of a lingering debate on migration and integration of Muslim immigrants in the Netherland, new immigrant groups – Polish, Bulgarian, Rumanian, but also Spanish – present themselves due to economic and political crises. We need to actively reflect upon our perspective on those Others that

inevitably will be, or already are, one of us. Understanding how our psychological tendencies and cultural habits work in relation to others and other cultures is a crucial step towards social stability and shared citizenship.

Sadik Harchaoui
Chair of the Board of Directors FORUM

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Introduction

People do not live in the real world. They live in their *representations* of the real world. That has entirely different implications because these representations are subject to a whole range of biases and fallacies, to a 'selective articulation' of certain facts and relationships. They make certain things stand out as self-evident, and make others disappear from view. Psychology and the social sciences have identified myriad ways through which our perceptions may become distorted, particularly those of different cultures. Some of our fears and irritations about them, our frustrations and aggression, turn out to be entirely disproportionate. The first decade of the new millennium seems to be a case in point. This collection of four essays zooms in on four related issues, at four different levels.

The first issue is that of a generalized 'culture of fear', which a range of scholars has identified, with regard to the Western world as a whole. For some reason, we seem to have become increasingly obsessed with the smallest of risks. This current state of mind seems to contrast with that of earlier ages, and with that of many emerging countries. What are the ingredients and manifestations of this widespread anxiety? Why do we seek to assign personal blame for it? The continued immigration of 'non-Western' foreigners suddenly stood out as one of the most notable aspects of recent social change. But to what extent can they really be held responsible for all the ills of the present day? Why do we experience reality so differently nowadays? Maybe changes in the media also play a role. They have come about so gradually that we failed to notice them and took them for granted. Yet, if we contrast their functioning with that of fifty years ago, it is clear that a long series of revolutions has indeed taken place.

The second essay focuses on The Netherlands: a small or medium-sized country in north-western Europe. The essay is preceded by a small note to familiarize foreign readers with some of the main aspects

of its unique experience with strangers. Its dependence on long-distance trade and its links with overseas colonies resulted in a certain familiarity with different cultures and multiculturalism. But over the last decade or so, there has suddenly been a strong reaction against non-Western immigrants in general and Muslims in particular. Surveys like those of De Gruijter and others produced a long list of grudges against such newcomers' appearances, mentality and behaviours. What part of that laundry list is justified, what part is exaggerated? What is the key to the problem, and how can it be addressed? How has a whole new language about the 'clash of civilizations' evolved, to frame the issues ever more saliently? To what extent has this become a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', where the expectation of trouble contributes to the creation of trouble, by isolating and stigmatizing certain groups?

The third brief essay is about the United States and its war on terrorism. Since its independence, it had never had an outside enemy on its soil. It had some experience with home-grown terrorism, but nothing on the scale of the 9/11 attacks. The plans for a 'Star Wars' missile shield had even created a brief illusion of total invulnerability. But terrorism is asymmetrical warfare, where a small group can wreak great havoc against an almighty enemy, and also instil disproportionate fear. How did the attacks affect the civilian population and result in a call for revenge? How did the 'war on terrorism' work out, and to what extent was it counter-productive and lead to unintended results?

The fourth essay is about the reactions of world public opinion to the protracted military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. To what extent did the United States fall into the trap that Osama and Al Qaeda had set for it? The crude first reactions of Western leaders to 9/11 implicitly tended to equate Islam with primitivism and terrorism. This initially drove large parts of Muslim audiences to sympathize with the radicals and to be critical of American and European intentions. Stereotypical enemy images on both sides took over and made problems get worse. After only a few years into the conflicts did the leaders take stock and shift the emphasis to a more subtle approach. Every single expression of concern needed to aim at

isolating the extremists from the 'silent majority' within their culture. Meanwhile, the two military interventions are estimated to have cost at least $3.3 trillion to the United States alone, and contributed significantly to the financial travails that will haunt us for years to come.

The overall conclusion, therefore, is that we need more sophistication in our knowledge and understanding of other cultures, in order to interact more effectively with them, as globalization is here to stay.

The Current Western Culture of Fear

The Increasing Obsession with Minor Risks

The first question related to the notion of 'stranger danger' is why the highly developed countries of the West have gradually become so extraordinarily fearful. We are safer than ever, yet we seem to have become obsessed with minute or even imaginary threats. Some of them are abstract and anonymous, others are more concrete and personalized. In the latter case, we ascribe the cause of our troubles to the actions of other people. The most convenient scapegoat of all is, of course, the quintessential Other. When we scan our environment to ask ourselves what has changed over recent decades, newcomers and ethnic minorities stand out. Yet only a small part of this observation stems from our own direct experience. A much larger part is seen through the magnifying glass of media experience. The electronic revolutions have profoundly changed our ways of 'being in the world'.

In the wake of multiple migration and terrorism scares, a recent summer saw a Dutch panic about a mysterious 'highway sniper'. In early August, several drivers in the Rotterdam region heard and saw the rear windscreens of their cars crack on a highway, and attributed this to . . . gunshots from behind. As the scare caught on over the following days and weeks, others reported almost 180 similar incidents to the police. The authorities put as many as a dozen detectives on the case, and received 400 tips, after announcing an uncommon €10,000 award.

But after a 4-month investigation, which also considered the possibility of copycat behaviour by others, they concluded that it might

all have been a mirage – as no bullets were ever found.[1] Journalists had meanwhile learned that the major specialized chain in the country repaired well over a thousand broken car shields *per day*. I said at the time that it sounded very much like a notorious case from the mass psychology literature: the Seattle 'windshield pitting' epidemic of more than half a century earlier.[2] But the experts, authorities and media long remained unaware that it might all just be a collective delusion, a fata morgana. Another manifestation of a rising culture of fear, and a recurrent epidemic of scares.

Hypes and Scares

Summer is, of course, the silly season for news, the season for a certain type of hypes and scares. For Dutch media, this is called 'cucumber time'. Here as throughout the rest of the dominant northern hemisphere of the world, it is the season of the long summer holidays. In July and August, many major political and economic institutions are closed for a few weeks or work at half pace, and thus generate less news. But the available media time and space has to be filled somehow. Schools are also closed, and parents profit from the warm and sunny weather to take their children on day trips or camping trips in 'wild' nature reserves and parks, as well as swimming and hiking. They encounter unfamiliar plants and 'wild' animals there, and are easily puzzled by them.

Journalists thus eagerly latch on to the 'unexplained phenomena' that such visitors report – to compensate for the dull, slack, dead season in other news. In The Netherlands, there have thus been nationwide scares about zoological 'stranger danger': first, the supposed threat of a dangerous 'crocodile' in the Rhine river (that turned out to be a large tree trunk, 2001); then sightings of a dangerous 'puma' in the Veluwe national park (that may have been a big cat, 2005); and finally sightings of a dangerous 'wolf' in the eastern part (that may have come from neighbouring Germany, or may just have been an unusual stray dog, 2011).

1 National broadcaster NOS's newsletter & *NRC Handelsblad* daily newsletter, Dec. 9, 2011.

2 Nahum Z. Medalia & Otto N. Larsen (1958), 'Diffusion and belief in a collective delusion – The Seattle Windshield pitting epidemic', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 23, pp. 221-232. Also in: Robert Evans (ed.), *Readings in collective behavior* (Chicago: Rand McNally 1969), Ch. 17, pp. 247–259.

Somehow, everyone falls for such scares time and again. Since the blockbuster movie *Jaws,* the United States has had similar periodic summer hypes on 'a strange wave of shark attacks'. It was even *the* major scary news story of early September 2001, just before terrorism took over.[3] In painstaking empirical research for his doctoral dissertation, Dutch media scholar Peter Vasterman demonstrated in great detail how such media hype works.

A salient incident attracts attention. Suddenly other apparently similar incidents, which might otherwise have been overlooked, attract attention as well, and are grouped together under a new heading. A wave of primary news reports is followed by a wave of secondary news reports, of further background stories and editorial comment. This spike in media attention invites even more media coverage. It becomes a self-reinforcing feedback loop, until the novelty does finally wear off, some observers regain their critical senses, and some 'debunking' sets in.

Such cases of hype may be positive or negative; negative hype may easily turn into collective scares. The dictionary says a 'scare' is 'a cause of terror, something that inspires fear or dread'. This essay focuses on the merry-go-round of such scares, apparently turning faster and faster every year. According to some authors, this is the expression of a more generalized 'culture of fear' – disproportionate fear, of vague and anonymous threats, but also fear of identified others and 'stranger danger', to which we will return extensively.

The media and their audiences, authorities and experts do increasingly seem to look at reality through a fearful rather than a confident prism. It may be related to a generalized sense of crisis, where the Western world seems in danger of losing its unquestioned primacy and control. And where our children and grandchildren will no longer automatically be better off than we ourselves.

Emotions and Moods

Let us first sort out a few relevant psychological notions and processes. Fear can be an emotion or a mood. An 'emotion' is a unique pattern of closely interrelated mental and physical reactions, usually triggered by a specific set of cues. A 'mood' is a less intensive but more enduring

3 Daniel Gardner, *The science of fear* (New York: Plume/Penguin 2009), pp. 179–180.

state of mind. Emotions and moods install filters, which make us see reality in a one-sided way. According to the classical ABC theory, such Affective reactions are one of three components of 'attitudes', mediating between Cognitive notions (perceptions, thoughts, opinions) and Behavioural tendencies (expressions, gestures, acts).

Such reactions may be shared with our social group, and become widespread. Some psychological theories distinguish between primary/universal emotions and secondary/cultural emotions, but authoritative researchers and scholars continue to disagree on this score. One way of representing various emotions and intensities, how they are similar or dissimilar, is through a black-and-white or coloured circle, wheel or cone.[4] In such a representation of eight 'basic' emotions, fear may have more intense shades closer to the centre (terror, panic, fright) or less intense ones towards the periphery (dismay, apprehension, timidity). In them, fear also 'lies opposite' anger, with more intense shades (fury, rage) or less intense ones (hostility, annoyance). Both fear and anger differ from the other basic emotion of trust, tolerance and acceptance.

Emotions and moods play a central role in our mental lives. Our 'triunal' brain consists of three layers: the deepest 'reptile' brain is half a billion years old, the middle 'mammal' brain is some two hundred million years old, some aspects of the highest typically 'human' brain are only a hundred thousand years old. Emotions are managed by the 'limbic system', consisting of the primary fear or anger (freeze/flight/fight) amygdala nucleus, of the hippocampus emotional memory circuit and other parts. Many reactions are reflexive and/or unconscious, the prefrontal cortex is like the rider on a horse struggling to maintain control.

Studies of animal behaviour have shown that such emotions are closely linked to group bonds. Acceptance of group insiders, and rejection of group outsiders, are widespread in nature. This is, of course, particularly true for higher social animals. New studies by the world-famous Dutch ethologist Frans de Waal (who works in the United States) have emphasized that primates such as chimpanzees are perfectly capable of mutual cooperation, altruism and empathy, for instance, whereas he had originally emphasized their rivalry, egotism and aggression.

4 For instance, those developed by American psychologist Robert Plutchik.

Fear and Anxiety

Further refinements make a distinction between anxiety (with a less precise perceived external threat) and fear proper (with a more precise perceived external threat).[5] Furthermore, the external threat may also consist of a presence or of an absence, for example the lack of appreciation or confirmation of the person in question by others. One general way to compensate for this is by elevating oneself (in a relative sense) through the downgrading of others, for instance by emphasizing that one is a true-blooded native citizen, in contrast to newcomer immigrants – with different and inferior customs.

Emotions and moods may easily spread from one person to the next, often in non-reflective and unconscious ways. In everyday interpersonal encounters, we often spontaneously 'mirror' the expressions, gestures and attitudes of those to whom we feel close or seek closeness.[6] This also holds for social categories, both temporary and assembled (crowds), or lasting and dispersed (social movements). Traditionally, such behaviours have been studied within the twin fields of mass psychology and collective behaviour sociology.[7]

Recent research has further shown that thoughts, feelings and behaviours do also 'travel' and spread through social networks to neighbours, friends and colleagues. They affect not only immediate contacts, but also contacts of contacts of contacts – in other words, people whom they will never meet in person. For instance, by the tacit drift of norms and expectations within a society. This turns out to have major implications for environmental and health communication as well as marketing and advertising.[8] The emergence of the World Wide Web has drawn further attention to viral epidemics of

5 The earliest experiments with the teaching of fear to babies were carried out by American psychology pioneer John Watson and a female lab assistant in the 1920s. They famously taught 'Little Albert' (not yet 1 year old) a 'conditioned reflex' of total panic in reaction to nice soft furry animals. There is an ongoing controversy on the real ins and outs, as well as the ethical side of the whole affair.

6 See: Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo & Richard L. Rapson, *Emotional contagion* (London/Paris: Cambridge University Press/Maison des Sciences de l'Homme 1994). The overview just preceded the discovery of specialized 'mirror neurons'.

7 Overview in: Jaap van Ginneken, *Collective behavior and public opinion* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum 2003). Earlier Dutch edition: *Brein-bevingen* (Amsterdam: Boom 2000).

8 Nicholas Christakis & James Fowler, *Connected* (London: Harper 2009); Chip & Dan Heath, *Made to stick* (London: Random House 2007).

new Internet tools and messages. Hoaxes and rumours may travel far and long.

Now let us extend this reasoning to the psychology of society as a whole. Public opinion in a society forms a kind of 'complex adaptive system', characterized by the emergence (and disappearance) of patterns. It is also characterized by 'punk eek' or punctuated equilibrium, meaning that decelerated and accelerated change do often alternate. So-called negative feedback tends to inhibit change and preserve the existing situation. Positive feedback, by contrast, tends to accelerate change and trigger major shifts.

Subjective changes in the way situations are experienced, or in expectations about the future, may thus lead to self-fulfilling prophecies or SFPs (a term coined by American sociologist Robert Merton). Heightened perceptions of 'otherness', for instance, may lead to stigma, to the distancing and rejection of outsiders – such as blacks or Muslims – an exclusion that often helps to promote the very deviations that one claims to fear, such as aggression and crime.[9] Upward or downward spirals in social mood may thus easily spread. A range of social thinkers has claimed in recent years that 'US' and 'WE' (the United States and Western Europe) are increasingly characterized by a culture of fear.

Radiation and Contamination Scares

Before delving deeper into the subject, let us scan a few fields where the rise of fear and the decline of trust have become noticeable, beginning with the seemingly non-ideological and non-cultural domains of new energy and new materials, but also risks of contamination and disease. They are increasingly characterized by fears and scares entirely disproportionate to the number of victims that they have actually made so far. We will later examine other domains that are more closely linked to social tensions and 'stranger danger'.

In advanced societies, large-scale technological projects like nuclear plants are associated with major risks, which are also unequally distributed among citizens. Sociologist Ulrich Beck from nuclear-sceptical Germany, later professor at the London School of

9 See the 1963 classic on *Stigma*, by sociologist Erving Goffman.

Economics, was the first to draw attention to this phenomenon in *Die Risiko-Gesellschaft* (*Risk society,* 1986). On the one hand, recurring catastrophes such as the accidents at the Three Mile Island plant near Harrisburg in the United States (1979), at Chernobyl in the Ukraine (then part of the Soviet Union, 1986), and at Fukushima in Japan (2011), were covered intensely and dramatically by the media. These latter 'strange' names retain a sinister resonance today.

On the other hand, persistent reports of leaks, for instance at Windscale/Sellafield in the United Kingdom, and on various occasions in France and elsewhere, feed constant worries among the public. They link up with the archetypical story of the 'sorcerer's apprentice', who proved unable to control the huge forces that he summoned. This ultimately led a range of major countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Italy to announce their renunciation of further nuclear energy projects. The Netherlands are still hesitating, even though others continue to emphasize, that so far . . . naturally occurring radioactive *radon gas* has silently killed more people than nuclear leaks have, namely, an estimated 20,000 people per year, both in the United States and in the European Union.[10]

Chemical plants are also associated with major risks, but so are minute quantities of 'chemicals'. In everyday life, people speak negatively of 'chemicals', meaning 'synthetic' chemicals, as opposed to 'natural' chemicals. But almost every substance is poisonous if taken in excessive quantities. According to one leading cancer scientist, for instance, 'of all the dietary pesticides people eat, 99.99 percent are natural', as they are naturally produced in 'coffee, carrots, celery, nuts, and a long, long list of other produce', as defences against insects. According to a report by a major cancer society, only 2% of all cancers are the result of exposure to 'man-made and naturally occurring' environmental pollutants.[11] Recurring cancer scares thus arbitrarily became a metaphor for everything people fear about modern life in general.[12]

It is important to note that these recurrent cancer scares are a relatively new phenomenon. More than a century ago, 'when people

10 Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 78.
11 Bruce Ames, at the University of California, and the American Cancer Society, both quoted by Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 225.
12 See Susan Sontag's essay on the subject, in her famous 1978 book *Illness as a metaphor.*

were asked which diseases they feared, only five percent named cancer, while between a quarter and a third drew attention to the scary nature of each of the following ailments: smallpox, lockjaw, consumption and hydrophobia [rabies]. In the fear-stakes, being crushed in a rail-accident or during an earthquake, drowning, being buried alive, hit by lightning, or contracting diphtheria, leprosy, or pneumonia all ranked higher than cancer'.[13]

An analysis of twenty years of cancer stories in major media found that modern-day people ranked 'man-made chemicals' as the primary cause of cancer, with tobacco only second. These causes were followed by 'food additives', 'pollution', 'radiation' and 'pesticides'. 'Dietary choices' came only in twelfth place, 'natural chemicals' even sixteenth. Yet most research tends to show that the lifestyle people choose and . . . mere age are by far the most important contributing causes of cancer.[14]

Meanwhile, both the media and the public seem to take it for granted that cancers in all categories and from all causes continue to rise. Worldwide, this is only unambiguously true for lung cancer – largely resulting from a 'voluntary' habit like smoking. For developed countries, it is true that the lifetime risk of ultimately dying from *some* sort of cancer is continually rising. But at the same time, the risks of dying from most sorts of cancer are continuously *falling* for all age brackets, as treatments are getting better, and therefore few people die from cancer at an early age. Most people dying from cancer do so at an advanced age, simply because treatment for most *other* diseases has been getting better even faster.

More cancer is also being detected at an early stage because of the extensive screening programs put in place.[15] Cosmetic surgery and

13 According to an 1896 issue of the *American Journal of Psychology*, quoted by Joanna Bourke, *Fear – A cultural history* (London: Virago/Time Warner 2005), Ch. I. (Also in Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 221.)

14 Robert Lichter & Stanley Rothman, *Environmental cancer – A political disease?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press 1999). (Quoted in Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 231). They considered American media stories, between 1972 and 1992.

15 Yet in recent years, it has become increasingly clear that premature, invasive overtreatment and unnecessary surgery had silently become the rule for extra problematic (because gender-related) afflictions such as prostate and breast cancers. See early and recurrent reporting about this issue in recent years by the science editors of the *New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune.*

breast implants leading to connective tissue disease also led to repeated scares. The American Dow Corning Corporation was almost bankrupted by a decade-long multi-billion dollar lawsuit, but ultimately the Food and Drug Administration re-allowed their silicone. Only a few years later, however, there was a new scare in Europe when French Pip implants were banned – after health authorities had hesitated about them for years.[16]

Whereas many people continued to associate 'synthetic' chemicals with cancer, few did for . . . leisurely tanning – whether in mountain snow during winter ski-holidays or on white beaches during summer seaside holidays. Yet skin cancer is one of the few types that are indeed rising rapidly.[17] So perceptions of unhealthy conditions are always related to implicit notions of what is 'natural and normal', and what is somehow 'artificial and strange'.

Collective Moods

The recurrence of such events does lead to the question whether nations and cultures might become more vulnerable to such scares during periods of crisis or decline, and less so during periods of revival and expansion. Much has been made of 'la grande peur' preceding the French Revolution, for instance, or of the 'Fin de siècle' mood in Europe a century later. Are collective moods contagious: do they extend from small groups to cultures as a whole? My previous book shows that such phenomena do indeed exist at every single level in between, and how they operate.[18]

It quotes earlier unconventional approaches in hybrid fields such as 'psychohistory' (Lloyd DeMause) and 'socionomics' (Robert Prechter), which have long maintained that societies are subject to 'mood swings' just as economies and individuals are – and that this may influence the course of political events. The former looked at prominent

16 Gardner, *supra* note 3, Ch. V.

17 There was also a scare, however, when researchers reported that immigrant women from southern countries perpetuated their habit of evading the sun in northern climates, as this would supposedly lead to deficiencies in Vitamin D, and related complaints.

18 *Mood contagion.* Dutch translation: *Het enthousiasme virus* (Amsterdam: Business Contact, 2012).

themes in headlines, texts and images carried by the major media, and in speeches of key politicians. The latter looked at the movements in the composite index of major stock exchanges, and how they seem to correlate with a wide range of other social phenomena.[19]

In the present context, some other observers claim that various continents and cultures are currently characterized by different dominant moods, which further feeds the 'clash of civilizations'. Dominique Moïsi, for one, is a top expert on international relations in France. His recent book on *The geopolitics of fear* (2009) drew widespread attention of strategic experts.[20] It claims the West is increasingly characterized by a culture of fear, the Islamic world by a culture of humiliation, and only Asia and 'Chindia' by a culture of hope. Therefore only fifteen years from now, Moïsi warns, Europe may be reduced to 'a kind of Magna Helvetia, a giant Switzerland, still peaceful and relatively prosperous, but bereft of youthful energy' – if fear prevails and it seals its boundaries to badly needed immigrants,[21] as the population of many major countries has already entered a phase of aging and slow decline.

The Ubiquity of Fear

Other authors concur on this strange paradox. 'We are the healthiest, wealthiest, and longest-lived people in history', at least in the present-day developed Western world. 'And we are increasingly afraid. This is one of the great paradoxes of our time', Canadian author Daniel Gardner writes at the beginning of his provocative overview on *The science of fear.* 'So why is it that so many of the safest humans in history are scared of their own shadows? There are three components at

19 One recent overview of this latter approach is the book *Mood matters – From rising skirt lengths to the collapse of world powers* by John L. Casti (New York: Copernicus/Springer 2010).

20 *How cultures of fear, humiliation and hope are reshaping the world* (New York: Anchor/Random House 2009). Dutch translation: *De geopolitiek van emotie – Hoe culturen van angst, vernedering en hoop de wereld veranderen* (Amsterdam: Nw A'dam 2009).

21 One related question is why European unification has not been accompanied by a resurgence of cultural pride. He claims (p. 107) that EU founding father Jacques Delors was passionately opposed to the stirring of such a 'European emotion', as it might result in false patriotism and new animosities. A flag and an anthem were chosen all right, but anti-Brussels sentiment remains widespread, as the initial 'no' votes to a new treaty in France, The Netherlands and Ireland have shown.

work: the brain, the media, and the many individuals and organizations with an interest in stoking fears. Wire these three components together in a loop and we have the circuitry of fear'.

This book and other similar studies are full of telling examples. 'There's the omnipresent marketing of fear, for one. Politicians, corporations, activists, and non-governmental organizations want votes, sales, donations, support, and memberships, and they know that making people worry about injury, disease, and death is often the most effective way of obtaining their goals'. This is because messages and campaigns with negativity, pessimism and dire warnings are the easiest way to get people's immediate attention and make a quick impact on them.[22] According to the U.S. National Institute of Health, anxiety disorders now affect 18% of the adult population (twice as much as mood disorders), whereas the anti-anxiety medicine Xanax has become the best selling psychiatric drug, with 46 million prescriptions per year.[23]

This rise in fears also seems to go hand in hand with a decline in trust. Trust was the invisible ingredient that had gradually made the highly developed continents of North America and Western Europe more efficient and more effective than the less developed continents of the South and East. Trust can be defined as 'The expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community', according to one monograph on the subject.

'One of the factors contributing to the growth in the number and variety of strangers has been the increasing lack of clarity of the terms on which people relate to each other', a British sociologist says in turn.[24] Trust is the oil in the machine of everyday interactions: economic, social, political or otherwise. It makes things run smoothly.

22 *The science of fear*, pp. 10, 294-295. One might add that the risks are not equally distributed for the rich and the poor, the highly and the poorly educated, within developed countries. One billion people are still malnourished in developing countries. This number tended to go down, but went up again with the latest financial crises, and rising speculation on foodstuffs and other raw materials.

23 Figures for 2010. Daniel Smith (author of *A memoir of anxiety*), 'It's still the "Age of anxiety". Or is it?', *IHT*, Jan. 17, 2012.

24 Francis Fukuyama, *Trust* (London: Hamish Hamilton 1995), p. 26. Quoted by Frank Furedi, *Culture of fear revisited* (London: Continuum 2007), p. 134.

It is 'The one thing that changes everything', according to an American bestselling author on business.[25] But trust may since have even further eroded, precisely as a result of the financial irresponsibility of major institutions and leaders, as revealed by the credit and debt crises.

Contagion Scares

Let us look at some other scares that have become common throughout the Western world. The examples of radiation and contamination have already illustrated that 'invisible' threats seem to be super scary. But things seem to get exponentially worse when a source of contamination is not dead but alive.

A single contagious micro-organism may not only contaminate invisibly but also multiply exponentially. It may spread throughout the continent and the world, before we even begin to notice it. We have ever better measuring instruments, as well as global monitoring agencies. They have discovered that many new epidemics result from monocultures and bio-industry: the massive production of animals and crops in limited spaces, which cause micro-organisms to mutate periodically and jump species.

In 2011, Germany and the rest of Western Europe were in the grip of another food scare about fresh vegetables, which turned out to carry a toxin produced by a variant of the EHEC bacterium. Almost fifty people were killed and hundreds fell ill. For weeks on end, media carried sensational stories, without the culprit being well identified. Fingers successively pointed at Spanish, Dutch and Danish cucumbers, at salad, sweet peppers and tomatoes, at bean sprouts, and finally and conveniently at fenegreek seeds imported from Egypt – although even this link could not be proven. Mountains of produce were lost unnecessarily, and entire categories of farmers were driven to the brink of bankruptcy. There was a bewildering array of voices on the state and national level in Germany, in other countries, and on the European level.[26]

25 'A crisis of trust', in *The speed of trust* (London: Pocket Books/Simon & Schuster 2008), pp. 10–13.

26 Also think of the earlier BSE/CJD scare. See my book on *Collective behavior and public opinion*, *supra* note 7, Ch. 8.

The terminology used for micro-organisms and contagious diseases usually adds to the scare. The words deriving from Latin or even their abbreviations usually form some kind of incomprehensible gibberish. There is also a tendency in the Anglo-American or even West European media heartland to artificially emphasize strange exotic origins in the name-giving of epidemics (Spanish/Mexican, Asian/Hong Kong, etc.).

Virologists have repeatedly warned that new viruses may be hard to contain and may easily begin spreading uncontrollably in a globalized world. There were major scares about outbreaks of 'severe acute respiratory syndrome', or SARS (2002-2003), and avian influenza, or 'bird flu' (2003-2005), but here again the number of victims worldwide was limited to a few hundred. At the same time, there was also a media obsession with even smaller but more serious overseas epidemics, such as Ebola or Marburg in Africa. Hollywood movies like *Outbreak* and *Contagion* further drove the apocalyptic message home: one day, we might all perish.[27]

One particularly revealing recent scare was that about 'Mexican' or 'swine' flu (2009). From the start, it should have been clear that it was much less dangerous than the ordinary winter flu that kills considerable numbers every year, without anyone getting terribly upset about it. It was widely labelled a 'pandemic', but most observers failed to note that the World Health Organization had just changed its *definition* of a pandemic from a widespread epidemic *with high mortality* to merely a widespread epidemic – even with low mortality.

In Europe and elsewhere, therefore, virologists and health authorities sounded the alarm, and spent billions overnight to order vaccines. The medium-sized Netherlands is again a good case in point. A national media monitor did reconstruct variations in the extent and

27 At the same time, there are other industries thriving on such recurring contamination scares: On the one hand producers of soaps and cleaning products, such as Procter & Gamble or Unilever, who stepped up the scary messages in their advertising and marketing, encouraging us to kill the ever resurgent 'germs', in our kitchens, toilets, and living quarters – even if they are perfectly safe. The 'overkill' even turns out to be counterproductive, as it makes bugs more resistant and children less resistant. On the other hand, pharmaceutical companies and insurers promise help against all kinds of newly invented afflictions, further driving the epidemics of fear.

intensity of the scare. Media carried alarming stories about the 'new flu' in three successive waves, it showed, and public worries followed in sync. At the same time, health authorities maintained that those vaccines were very effective and could have no serious side effects. Both claims later turned out to be misleading, which further fed public distrust.[28]

The disproportion in these recurring health scares throughout the developed world becomes clear when one places them against the underreported background of epidemics in the developing world. 'Measles kills almost 300,000 children a year, even though the measles vaccine costs only 16 cents a dose. More than 1.6 million children are killed by easily treatable and preventable diarrhea'. Malaria also 'kills roughly one million people a year, most of them African children'. According to one expert, only $50 billion a year might be enough to make the world a healthier place for them.[29]

Science and Technology

What are the structural causes leading to the identification of ever more minor risks and reasons for acute fear? One paradoxical reason seems to be . . . progress itself. Our instruments of observation and measurement are constantly improving, attracting our attention to ever smaller signs of impending threat – that could not have been perceived before.

Man's predecessors were several million years old, *homo sapiens* is one or two hundred thousand years old. He was afraid of strange gods and ill-understood natural phenomena. Man still largely has the typical Stone Age brain of a hunter-gatherer, as his perceptions of opportunity and threat are largely focused on sudden shifts and obvious contrasts in the environment around him – rather than creeping changes and unnoticeable drifts. Our brains thus evolved in and for

28 Also note the fact that a simultaneous serious outbreak of Q-fever in The Netherlands was long ignored by the same authorities. See the elaborate case description on the flu scare in my recent book about mood contagion. Dutch: *Het enthousiasme virus* (Amsterdam: Amstel/Business Contact 2012), Ch. 8. And also my earlier article in *Psyche & Brein* 2009, No. 6.

29 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 287–288.

a different day and age. Agriculture and urban centres are only a few millennia old, science and technology a few centuries, the general use of personal computers and the Internet a few decades, the wandering web of mobile devices a few years. In a way, then, our minds remain ill-attuned to the modern world.

Only relatively recently have we become able to observe whatever used to be invisible in the natural world. On the one hand, in a macroscopic sense, telescopes have enabled us to study the solar system, the galaxies, the universe beyond, and to notice possible distant threats like solar flares, planetary constellations and distant galaxies – which gave the December 2012 'Maya' apocalypse scare a semblance of plausibility. On the other hand, also in a microscopic sense, microscopes have enabled us to study bacteria, viruses and proteins, and to notice other potential threats of global contagion and pandemics. Computers, furthermore, have enabled us to 'mine' vast amounts of data for even the most marginal of possible correlations or signs of possible trouble.

All this creates an extremely complex picture of interdisciplinary connections: between physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, psychology, sociology, economics, politics and so forth – hard to fathom for the non-initiated. Furthermore, many scientific findings are highly provisional and subject to various interpretations, until confirmation and reconfirmation. They contain a lot of ambiguity. But opposing interest groups exploit a widespread naïve scientism to prematurely 'highjack' provisional findings, declare them clear-cut, and use them for a lobby.

Statistics and Innumeracy

Meanwhile, even educated experts in other domains, news reporters and managers, are notoriously bad with numbers, as pop mathematician John Allen Paulos has demonstrated time and again in bestsellers on 'innumeracy' in various domains – ranging from the media to the stock market. In some respects, other animals do even turn out to be better at calculating probabilities and devising strategies for reward than humans. Because humans have a dual system of judgment, of the

emotional gut and the supposedly rational mind – that often comes up with the wrong reasons for some state of affairs. A range of experiments has shown that humans are often bad with numbers but much better with stories – particularly salient ones.[30]

Most people have had at least some mathematics in school, but few are familiar with the ins and outs of chance, probability and statistics. Many people think, for instance, that a chance of 'one in a hundred' is greater than a chance of 'one per cent'. Almost half of interrogated people did not know how many millions there are in a billion. They also overestimate small chances and underestimate large chances (in lotteries, for instance). They are much more motivated by fear of loss than by an equivalent hope for gains (in the stock market, for instance).[31]

Most are completely unfamiliar with the elementary 'bell curve', with the 'normal distribution' and 'standard deviation', which apply to human height, weight and a vast number of other everyday measures. It is thus easy to alarm them with the story that 'one in six people' is obese, or even that half of all people are heavier than average (which is per definition *always* the case), particularly if this is paired with the suggestion that this is 'only the tip of the iceberg' and that 'things are going from bad to worse'. We are thus often 'probability blind'.[32]

One of the major revolutions of the last few decades in psychology was the discovery that man is not the rational calculator he was always thought to be, and that he does instead have great difficulty in appraising chances objectively, and frequently operates highly subjectively instead, because his emotions get in the way. This whole approach has been elaborated in the 'prospect theory' by Daniel Kahneman, who was the first psychologist ever to receive a Nobel Prize (in 2002, for economics). His co-author Amos Tversky died too early to share it. A third major author in this tradition was Paul Slovic, who also did a

30 Dolf Zillman & Hans-Bernd Brosius, *Exemplification in communication – The influence of case reports on the perception of issues* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum 2000).

31 More about this in my previous Dutch book Mad with money (*Gek met geld*. Amsterdam: Amstel/Business Contact 2010).

32 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 17, 93, 82.

wide range of experiments on such 'heuristics and biases' in chance perception.[33]

Through 'priming' and 'anchoring', it is easy to introduce some kind of numerical reference into our minds, even if it has nothing to do with the subject of our judgment. One can also make people bid higher or lower in a sale, for instance, by having them first write down the last two digits of their (totally unrelated) social security or telephone numbers. Implicit notions of 'representativeness', mental 'availability' and 'salience' also lead us to misjudge the chances of a particular outcome.

One author distinguished ten dimensions in the over- or under-perception of risk: (1) Is it voluntary or involuntary? (2) Does it have an immediate or delayed effect? (3) Are alternatives available or not? (4) Are the risks known with certainty or not at all? (5) Is exposure essential or a luxury? (6) Is it occupational or not? (7) Is it a common or dreaded hazard? (8) Does it affect average or only sensitive people? (9) When is stuff used as intended or misused? (10) Are the results reversible or irreversible?[34] Our views are thus completely distorted.

Most scientific appraisals of risks are extremely complex and layered, and furthermore, ambiguous or even contradictory. One may conclude that the glass is half full or half empty. Once an interested party is able to make one of these two possible views prevail, however, it may easily trigger others to follow suit. It may even start a cascade, whereby ever more people follow the initial example, as we are gregarious animals, with a herd instinct.

Classic experiments in social psychology had already demonstrated that people are afraid of being seen as 'deviant', and tend to conform to the viewpoint of the larger group around them – even

33 Daniel Kahneman has recently published an overview of his work on this score: *Thinking fast and slow* (London: Allan Lane (Penguin) 2011). Dutch translation: *Ons feilbare denken* (Amsterdam: Amstel/Business Contact 2011). Daniel Gardner's book on risk and fear, repeatedly quoted here, also provides an accessible overview of the work of Paul Slovic and others. A fourth noteworthy author in this tradition is Daniel Ariely, with *Predictably irrational*, and *The upside of irrationality* (London: HarperCollins 2008 & 2010).

34 Lowrance &Van der Pligt, quoted in my earlier *Collective behavior and public opinion*, *supra* note 7, Ch. 8. For a more extensive list of 18 factors, see Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 65-66.

if it is patently false. Recent experiments by neurologists have even shown that this is the automatic result of brain processes, rather than of a simple fear of social rejection.[35] So once a culture of fear begins to take hold somewhere, it tends to spread further.

Accident and Disease Scares

Let us review a few further examples of how we focus disproportionately on unfamiliar threats, while at the same time overlooking everyday risks. We are obsessed with 'stranger danger', even though a database on four decades around 9/11 revealed that there had only been an average of . . . *one* victim of terrorism per day *worldwide.* In comparison, in the United States alone, there is also an average of one victim per day from suffocation in bed, another from drowning in pools, and yet another from unintentional electrocution. Yet our own home does not strike us as a particularly scary place. And neither does the convivial family holiday season.[36]

But the most dangerous period of the year in our own homes turns out to be that of . . . the Christmas and New Year holidays. Studies from one major country reported that fires caused by candles increase fourfold during this period, and that Christmas trees started fires in hundreds of homes every year. House fires killed five hundred people during the winter season, injured two thousand more and caused half a billion dollars in damage. Studies from a second major country reported that Christmas tree lights hurt hundreds of people, a thousand more go to hospital after accidents with trees, and another thousand are hurt by trimmings or upon home decoration.[37] Yet we love this season.

Something similar can be said about the summer holidays. In Mediterranean countries, both locals and foreign tourists fear uncontrollable forest fires that may easily trap camping sites and second homes. Yet a large proportion of such fires are caused by tourists

35 Gregory Berns, *Iconoclast – A neuroscientist reveals how to think differently* (Boston: Harvard University Press 2010). More on the herd instinct in my previous Dutch book on The power of swarms (*De kracht van de zwerm.* Amsterdam: Amstel/Business Contact 2009).

36 Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 250.

37 In the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively. Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 76.

themselves. As they continue to unthinkingly throw their cigarette butts away, or clumsily prepare a barbecue. Another large proportion of fires are started intentionally, by sheep herdsmen or project developers who want large areas cleared for their own purposes. But in addition, research from a major country brought to light that many arsonists were . . . volunteer firemen, recruited among unemployed male villagers, who can suddenly earn substantial premiums.[38]

During the mid-winter and mid-summer holidays, we also incur additional risk by driving long distances ill-prepared. We have a slanted view of traffic accidents. In the busiest city on earth, New York, as many people were killed in horse accidents more than a century ago, as there are by car accidents today. Throughout the entire country, even more people were killed in car accidents half a century ago than today. But as the number of miles driven has gone up fivefold, the number of victims per mile has indeed gone *down* fivefold.

Cars have become much safer, with seat belts and all. But journalists invented a new scare: 'road rage' (and later also 'air rage'), even if a study by the automobile association attributed only one in a thousand mortal accidents to angry drivers, and only one in a hundred to aggressive driving in general. Yet over the first decade of the new millennium, the US media still carried an average of a hundred stories per month on the rather rare affliction of road rage.[39]

Ordinary car accidents seldom cross the minimal threshold of national newsworthiness, unless there is a pile-up on a motorway involving a range of cars and a number of victims. As a result of this, and also because they seem to be in control, people usually feel much safer in their own private cars than in public transport. Only under extraordinary circumstances may they come to feel uneasy, for instance on extremely long bridges over sea straits, or extremely long tunnels under the sea straits.[40]

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38 See my article in the June 1993 issue of *Psychologie* magazine, the Dutch equivalent of *Psychology Today.*

39 Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner, *Superfreakonomics* (London: Penguin 2010), pp. 9, 146. Barry Glassner, *The culture of fear – Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things* (New York: Basic/Perseus 2009 updated ed.), pp. 216, 4–5.

40 See my article about the scares surrounding the opening of the 'Chunnel' under the Channel between England and France, in the December 1993 issue of the same *Psychologie* magazine.

Of course, accidents with public transport do much more easily lead to mass casualties and media coverage: whether with buses, trams, metro, trains, ships or planes. Such accidents are thus considered much more tragic than others, as in the case of a mid-March 2012 bus incident in Switzerland, which killed 28 people. They were Belgian and Dutch schoolchildren on a skiing holiday, leading to several days of highly emotional national mourning in those countries. Mishaps at sea or in the air also stir the fearful imagination.

One author on fear repeats the key question: 'We are safer and healthier than ever and yet we are more worried about injury, disease and death than ever. Why?' Another author on fear quotes an inventory made by a magazine writer. He looked at disease reporting in three major daily newspapers throughout the year, and at the numbers they mentioned about people afflicted with heart disease, migraines, osteoporosis, obesity, cancer, brain injuries and more obscure ailments. It turned out they added up to . . . twice the entire population. He concluded 'Either as a society we are doomed, or someone is seriously double-dipping'.[41]

Psychological research has tried to rate negative life events and social readjustment problems. Death of a partner is number one, followed, at some distance, by the death of another close family member or friend. Separation and divorce come second, followed by relationship and sexual difficulties. Being fired is high, followed by stress at work.[42] These are relatively 'normal' occurrences in most people's lives; we used to cope with them through social support and prayer. Today, however, fewer people turn to their immediate environment, and more turn to professional helpers. Mourning is easily redefined as depression, to be treated with some kind of therapy, or pills like Prozac.

Such temporary problems are thus increasingly made the subject of psychological counselling, or even medical treatment. Still another author on fear noted more than a fivefold increase in the membership

41 Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 138, and Glassner, *supra* note 39, p. XX (quoting Bob Garfield, 'Maladies by the millions', *USA Today*, Dec. 16, 1996).

42 Other examples are moving to a different region or country. One of the earliest versions of such scales is quoted in Adrian Furnham & Stephen Bochner, *Culture shock* (London: Routledge 1990), Ch. 8.

of a major national counsellor's association in his country in slightly over a dozen years. He also provided an ABC of new areas for specialized counselling ranging from '[a]buse, alcohol, bullying, career' etc., to 'youth problems'.[43]

Others have spoken of the spread of 'learned helplessness' and the 'triumph of the therapeutic' in this context: the supposed inability of laymen to solve their problems on their own, or with the help of mere friends. They seem to be eternally in need of assistance. Therapists help clients make sense of their life stories, but they increasingly revolve around the central element of victimhood.

One major engine driving this mechanism worldwide has been the post-war development of the 'standard' *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* by the authoritative American Psychiatric Association. Its successive versions are labelled *DSM I* to *IV*; a fifth version is currently in preparation. Although they are primarily an inventory of all kinds of possible symptoms, they also try to identify coherent patterns or underlying syndromes, and are used in effect to track possible causes and treatments. The introduction of new labels such as Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, for unruly children has led to waves over over-diagnosis and over-treatment, as well as billion-dollar sales of new drugs such as Ritalin. These tendencies fuel the culture of fear and chronic insecurity.

A Culture of Fear

The Anglo-American term *Culture of fear* was coined several years *before* the 9/11 attacks on the WTC in New York, but only gained widespread acceptance *after* them. The studies with the greatest international influence were of course written in English – the international scientific language par excellence. Most of their examples come from the United States and the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Yet, there is little reason to doubt that these same phenomena can also be found on the Western European continent, even if both analyses and data are much more fragmented there, because of the mosaic of languages and local cultural differences.

43 Furedi, *supra* note 24, pp. 97–98, 140–141.

The term received currency in the mid-1990s. *Culture of fear* is the title of a 1997 book by Hungarian-Canadian-British sociologist Frank Furedi, with the subtitle *Risk-taking and the morality of low expectation.* It had an extended re-edition ten years later.[44] It is also the title of a 1999 book by American sociologist Barry Glassner, with the subtitle *Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things,* which also had an expanded re-edition ten years later. Both investigate the paradox that the developed Western nations have never been so healthy and secure, but at the same time so easily scared and obsessed with victimhood.

This is in obvious contrast to earlier ages, of heroism and chivalry. Furedi notes: 'At various times, risk-taking was represented as an admirable enterprise'. But 'Twenty-first century Western culture frequently transmits the view that we live in a uniquely dangerous era where humanity faces hazards and potential disaster'. He quoted two historian colleagues who observed that 'The modern era is often cast as an age of catastrophe, of global conflicts, genocides and "ethnic cleansings", disasters of industrial and agrarian change and of technological hubris, and – increasingly – environmental cataclysms'.

We are also afraid of the wrong things, Glassner added. 'Atypical tragedies grab our attention while widespread problems go unaddressed. Politicians, journalists, advocacy groups, and marketers continue to blow dangers out of proportion for votes, ratings, donations and profits'. After 9/11, he added: 'Even so, at least in some regards, there have been changes in our culture of fear. Most notably, foreign terrorists replaced domestic bogeymen as the principal figures in fear mongering'.[45]

Within that same decade, there was a flurry of other studies about similar themes. A 2002 study by American communication scientist David Altheide explored how the news media are *Creating fear.* A 2004 study by American political scientist Corey Robin explored the *political history* of the uses and abuses of *Fear.* A 2005 study by

44 In that same year, Elaine Showalter, an English professor in America, also published *Hystories*, a study on various contemporary scares and *Hysterical epidemics in modern culture* (London: Picador/MacMillan 1997).

45 Furedi, *supra* note 24, pp. 26, 19; Glassner, *supra* note 39, p. XII.

British historian Joanna Bourke explored the *cultural history* of *Fear.* The aforementioned 2008 study by Canadian science writer Daniel Gardner further explored *The science of fear* and of *Risk* in general. He quoted psychological experiments proving 'that so long as the judgments are difficult or ambiguous, and the influencing agents are united and confident, increasing the importance of accuracy will heighten confidence as well as conformity – a dangerous combination'. Fear will gradually grab a hold of us, if we are told day after day that there is every reason to be afraid.[46]

The culture of fear is even reflected in fashion and fads, some authors add. They refer to the popularity of the military haircut among some youngsters, of camouflage themes and military styles in dress, of fortified boots with extra-large rubber soles. The popularity of gas-guzzling S.U.V.s is also surprising as they are not limited to the wild countryside, but visible in highly fashionable city neighbourhoods as well. Finally, there is the growth of the number of 'closed' and 'gated communities', both in the sparsely populated countryside and the densely populated city centres. So even our physical environment does increasingly radiate fear.

Child Abduction and Abuse Scares

So far, we have primarily discussed impersonal and non-moral sources of fear. We have a deep psychological need, however, to attribute them to people out there: to evil people lurking in the dark, even if they cannot be readily identified. This is also the message of much entertainment material. The bad guys are evil categories of people: psychopaths and criminals. Strangers, who may strike in the large-scale anonymous environments of our countryside and big cities, but also in theme parks, and during overseas holidays.[47]

One of the most-publicized cases of a possible child kidnapping in Europe was the disappearance of British Madeleine McCann, almost four years old, from an apartment in 2007, while her parents were

46 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 294–295, 110.

47 At the time of the opening of Euro-Disneyland in Paris, for instance, a Europe-wide rumour spoke of child kidnappings there. It later turned out to derive from similar and older urban legends in America. See the elaborate case in my *Collective behavior and public opinion*, *supra* note 7, Ch. 2.

eating at a nearby restaurant, during a holiday abroad in Portugal. The picture of the little girl was particularly captivating, as she had a subliminal anomaly in the iris of her right eye, resembling a tear. It seemed to be an archetypical case of a child kidnapping by a stranger, and further fed the flames of fear throughout Western Europe. In 2012, to keep up the public interest, the police distributed an updated photo of what she would look like if she were still alive.[48]

The Netherlands and other European countries have meanwhile copied the American system of 'Amber alerts' to draw immediate attention to such missing children. Yet most people have an extremely slanted view of this question. United States reports claimed that every year almost 800,000 children under 18 went missing for any reason. The largest category, however, concerned mere runaways. Another large category concerned 'abductions'. But the vast majority of these were 200,000 'family' abductions, often by divorced parents, which left 58,200 'non-family' abductions.

Here again, the number of '50,000 child abductions per year' turned out to be uncritically repeated throughout the media. But a large number were later returned safely, such as girls temporarily retained by their boyfriends. Only 115 were typical serious abductions by strangers, including parents without children, which is bad enough. Gardner adds that 2.5 times as many drown in swimming pools every year, and 26 times as many are killed in car crashes – often because their safety seats or belts have not been well attached by their own parents.[49] But these subjects get much less dramatic media coverage.

Glassner's earlier study added that the overwhelming majority of crimes against children and adolescents – violent, sexual or otherwise – are not committed by strangers, but rather by people they know from everyday life. A recent Dutch study found that 85% of children dying an unnatural death had been killed by . . . their own parents.[50]

48 Sandy Macaskill, 'Britain says girl missing since 2007 may be alive', *IHT*, April 26, 2012.
49 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 185–187.
50 Doctoral dissertation by Toon Verheugt, Sept. 2007. *NRC Handelsblad*, weekly edition, Nov. 20, 2007.

Similar numbers hold for abuse. According to an official US study, 80% are abused by a parent and another 10% by a caregiver. Furthermore, according to an article in a medical journal, 'a child is about a hundred times more likely to be molested by the *heterosexual* partner of a close relative than by a homosexual'.[51] Dutch research showed that children were three to four times more likely to be abused in foster homes, and ten times more likely to be abused if they were mentally handicapped.[52]

One of the worst child abuse cases of recent years in The Netherlands began in late 2010. The main suspect was Robert M., a 27-year old immigrant from Latvia, 'married' to a slightly older Dutch man. It turned out he may have abused some 141 very young children in Amsterdam, as an employee of a day care centre, and as a freelance babysitter. He had also made pictures of this abuse, put them on encrypted websites on the Internet, and exchanged them through confidential child porn networks around the world.[53]

The extremely serious case again fed an ongoing scare about the slightly different matter of pedophiles prowling the World Wide Web. American, Canadian and British media have frequently carried stories of 50,000 perverts constantly scanning the Web and social media, on the lookout for possible under-age victims. Daniel Gardner tracked down the source of this seemingly precise number to a US attorney general and an FBI agent.

But it turned out their estimates were not based on any serious statistical information but were just wild off-the-cuff guesses, uncritically repeated by all major media. The senator chairman of a congressional subcommittee had also quoted an academic study purportedly saying that 'one in five' children had been approached in some kind of sexual manner through the Internet. But it turned out that the overwhelming majority of these cases concerned the soliciting of teenagers by teenagers, with their own pictures.[54]

51 Glassner, *supra* note 39, pp. 218, 40, XXV.
52 Leaked University of Leiden report, quoted in the dailies *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* (also in its weekly edition May 7, 2012).
53 He was caught when one picture of a young boy with a typically Dutch 'Nijntje' doll was found in the United States, shown on Dutch television and recognized.
54 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 32–34, 205.

Furthermore, the suggestion of such media stories is often that: (1) such child abuse is rising; (2) that it is favoured by new communication technologies such as the Internet; (3) also because they give rise to anonymous environments; (4) they provide new opportunities to migrants, foreigners and other strangers. Yet none of these implicit assumptions has ever been proven. Indeed, large-scale child abuse has been going on for centuries within the trusted framework of families and neighbourhoods, and even within the most traditional and most sacred of white institutions.

While the authorities, the media and parents were disproportionately focused on 'stranger danger' for children, it turned out that a significant part of child abuse had long continued to take place in the very heart of the Western cultural system and organized Christian religion. The Catholic Church had nominally been anti-sexual, and imposed celibacy on its exclusively male priests, who were assigned to holy tasks like celebrating mass and hearing the confessions of lay people, about their sexual and other sins. They also played a key role in education and boarding schools.

For decades, these same authorities, media and parents had categorically refused to believe the children who dared to come forward with their stories. They met with a deafening silence, and were often punished themselves. Meanwhile the Church continued to shield the culprits and simply transfer them to another parish. Interestingly enough, it was in Anglo-Saxon countries like the United States, Canada and Ireland, that the silence was first broken. The Netherlands and Belgium were rather late in acknowledging these horrors, which even involved the forced castration and possible unnatural deaths of a large number of victims. Many Latin countries have still not confronted the issue head-on.

Random Shooting and Senseless Violence Scares

In the spring of 2011, a 24-year-old man opened fire in broad daylight, at a shopping centre in Alphen aan den Rijn in The Netherlands. He killed six people and wounded seventeen, before committing suicide. The shooting spree had an enormous impact. The media discussion later focused on the fact that he had a licence to possess several

firearms and belonged to a shooting club in spite of repeated treatment for psychiatric illness, and his parent's frustrated attempts to warn the authorities. Similar shooting sprees had earlier taken place in other Western European countries, such as Finland, Germany and Great Britain.[55]

The phenomenon had earlier been thought to be limited to the United States. The latest incident was the massacre during the opening night of a new *Batman* movie, in Aurora, near Denver, Colorado, in the summer of 2012. The earlier Columbine High School shooting and subsequent copycat events fed the idea that the nation's schools and campuses were uniquely violent and dangerous. Yet there are more than fifty million kids in American schools, and their chances of being murdered there were one in a million and a half. Youth homicides, in general, had fallen 30% to a record *low*, and three times as many people were killed by lightning every year. But that was not the image the media conveyed.[56]

A typical example of media scares and moral panics are also those around the newly invented category of 'senseless violence' (in Dutch: *zinloos geweld*). It often centres around fights breaking out in the public realm, leaving some wounded or dead, usually brawls between male youngsters, often on weekends, with some drunk or on pills. They often start over some minor friction between individuals or groups, then escalate. There is, of course, always a reason, but they are labelled as unreasonable and senseless. When there are several such incidents in a short period, they get connected between themselves.

An early example in The Netherlands was a scare about 'Coastal violence' (*Kustgeweld*) and a supposed summer wave of nightly brawls on beaches.[57] Later examples concerned city centres. In his aforementioned dissertation on *Media hype* (Ch. 3), Peter Vasterman included an elaborate case study on the typical cycle of amplification (both in scope and intensity), triggered by a number of such incidents around the year 2000. Since then, there have been an average of two to four such cases per year.[58] But the suggestion is often that there is a rising

55 Wikipedia carries an (incomplete) 'List of rampage killers'.
56 Glassner, *supra* note 39, pp. XXII-XXIII; Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 210.
57 Australia had a similar scare about beach violence with an ethnic twist, in 2005. See Mark Earls, *Herd* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. 2009), pp. 139-143.
58 See the list in the Dutch Wikipedia item on *Zinloos geweld* (senseless violence).

threat, that things are going from bad to worse, and that it will affect everybody in the end. This then becomes a subject for television talk shows and everyday conversations.

In fact, this whole phenomenon is of course much older. In an earlier age, youngsters from neighbouring villages would get into a skirmish, often on the occasion of a fair or so. In the newer age, these were replaced by confrontations between groups belonging to different subcultures. British sociologist Stanley Cohen applied it to 'mods' and 'rockers' in Great Britain; Dutch criminologist Wouter Buikhuizen to 'nozems' and 'provos' in The Netherlands. Public outrages about the behaviour of 'modern youngsters' would often take a similar form, and follow a similar logic. This would then trigger a 'moral panic'.

What happens in such cases, according to Stanley Cohen, is that 'A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become identified as a threat to societal values and interests: its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to'.[59] Again, the focus is often on deviants or strangers.

Fraud vs. Street Crime Scares

People do of course commit the crimes that they can. Citizens higher up in political, social, economic and financial hierarchies are in a position to commit fraud, without violence, often for millions or even billions. Citizens lower down in social hierarchies are more likely to be involved in burglaries or street crimes – often involving some kind of violence. Elite and 'white collar' crimes continue to be framed and treated much more leniently by police officials, the justice system, and even the media, than minority and 'blue collar' crimes. This remains true for both Western Europe and North America today. In the multi-billion 'construction fraud' (illegal cartel) case of 2001–2002 in The Netherlands, for instance,

59 Stanley Cohen, *Folk devils and moral panics* (Oxford: Blackwell 1972/1993), p. 9. More on the subject in: Eric Goode & Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral panics – The social construction of deviance* (Oxford: Blackwell 1994).

none of the culprits was ever punished, the companies came off with relatively small fines, and only the whistleblowers were fired.

Two recent criminological research projects have confirmed that this still holds true today. Some crimes receive a lot of publicity. One recent inspection of 500 cases over three years found a marked contrast. In three-quarters of non-violent crimes such as fraud, money laundering and other financial transgressions, such publicity led judges to impose *lower* sentences as the suspects had already been 'punished enough' by this exposure and its effect on their standing and careers. In the case of violent crimes, however, it led judges to impose *higher* sentences instead, supposedly because of the 'inordinate shock' to public trust and the legal order.[60] So extenuating circumstances are applied unequally.

But how to deal with such inner city crime and subway crime? Much has been made of a rapid decline in New York, under previous Republican mayor Rudy Giuliani, his police chief and their 'zero tolerance' policy. The popular turn-of-the-century bestseller *The tipping point* by Canadian author Malcolm Gladwell repeated that they had been able to turn a self-reinforcing negative spiral into a positive one. On the one hand, they had followed the older 'broken windows theory', which claimed that graffiti and other degradations of public space should not be accepted as inevitable,[61] but rather eliminated as soon as possible, as they gave the wrong signal and invited even more damage. On the other hand, fare dodging and street crime should also be confronted head-on.

Five years later, however, the similarly popular bestseller *Freakonomics,* by the self-styled 'rogue' economists Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner, came up with an altogether different kind of explanation. They related the nationwide fall in crime to the famous 'Roe vs. Wade' court case, a generation earlier. As it had resulted in the legalization of abortion in a number of states, there was a dramatic drop in the number of dysfunctional young families, with poorly educated children destined for a life of crime. Another factor was the waning

60 Anne de Groot, 'Klik! En dat is vierenhalf jaar cel', daily *NRC Handelsblad*, digital edition, April 7, 2012, pp. 22–23.

61 Initially formulated by criminologists James Q. Wilson & George Kelling.

of the earlier crack epidemic, they said.[62] Whatever the case, it is true that crime rates dropped, in New York and throughout the United States.[63] But the *fear* of crime did rise, by contrast.

At the same time, data on crime are much more ambivalent and flexible than most lay people think. People in developed countries have become used to a highly pacified public environment, do often not know how to deal with aggression and violence any more, and may therefore increasingly over-perceive and over-report incidents. Certain old-fashioned crime categories (like horse-stealing) silently disappear from public view, whereas newly emerging crime categories (like car stealing) receive widespread attention. Even police and justice statistics on crime reports, identified suspects and people condemned may be subject to considerable biases.

Violence and Murder

'Modern developed countries have become some of the most peaceful societies in human history', one author on fear repeats. 'Of course, this is the opposite from what most people believe, and not without reason', he adds, as crime rates have indeed gone up during periods of accelerated urbanization and migration, but have fallen again later. Long-term historical research shows that the early medieval homicide rates in London, for instance, and the late medieval homicide rates in England, were eleven to fourteen times what they are today.[64]

One major reason for current rates of violence and murder is the accumulation of guns and other lethal weapons in the hands of the general public. Legal possession is further facilitated by affiliation to shooter clubs, and promoted by rifle associations. 'In Great Britain, Australia and Japan, where gun ownership is severely restricted, no more than a few dozen people are killed each year by handguns. In the United States, where private citizens own a quarter billion guns, around 15,000 people are killed, 18,000 commit suicide, and another 1,500 die accidentally from firearms. American children are twelve

62 Compare Chapters 4 of both books.

63 The US National Crime Victim Survey for 2009, based on interviews with 135,000 people, reported the lowest crime rate since it started in 1973. *IHT*, Oct. 14, 2010.

64 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 214–215.

times more likely to die from gun injuries than are youngsters from other industrialized nations'.[65]

Meanwhile, mandatory sentences – also for soft drug possession – have made the prison population in the United States soar from 400,000 to 2.1 million in only twenty years (whites smoke as much pot as blacks, but do get arrested and convicted far less for it). It is higher than in any other country in the world, even those with much larger and poorer populations such as India or China. The annual costs of the US criminal justice system have also ballooned to nearly one hundred billion dollars per year, particularly since large swathes of the entire security system have now been privatized for profit. The largest, most glamorous but near-bankrupt state of California now spends more on prisons than on schools. Young people are incarcerated with adults, are therefore five times more likely to be sexually assaulted and even fifty times more likely to be attacked with a weapon than in a juvenile facility. Once they are released, they have often become more inclined to crime, not less.[66]

Media do of course play a major role in trivializing violence. They use brutality as an easy attention-grabber: from news reports to pulp fiction. It has often been said that the average 18-year-old, first in the United States and now also in the European Union. and elsewhere, has already witnessed several tens of thousands of murders and several hundreds of thousands of acts of violence on television – albeit often merely in a 'cartoonish' context. Crime and other negative stories do not produce a direct or one-on-one effect. But the recurring of similar stories, time and again, may produce a cumulative or 'cultivation' effect, according to American media scholar George Gerbner, as it instills a 'Mean World Syndrome' in people's minds of ubiquitous threats and fears. This is particularly the case among heavy television viewers: the poor, lonely and old.

Crime and Ethnicity: The US Example

There can be little doubt that crime rates are indeed higher among marginalized ethnic minorities and recent immigrants from less-developed economies, both in North America and in Western Europe.

65 FBI and similar statistics, quoted in Glassner, *supra* note 39, p. XXVII.
66 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 203-208; Glassner, *supra* note 39, pp. XXV, 73.

This has been the case on all continents and throughout all ages. The main reason does not lie in one straightforward linear cause, such as their lack of (similar) values. It lies primarily in a vicious circle, which reinforces itself.

On the one hand, such groups experience discrimination and high thresholds to full integration, and make some bear a grudge – particularly young males. On the other hand, this makes a minority of the minority resort to petty crime. This then leads to generalizations and discrimination among the majority, which are addressed only half-heartedly by mainstream institutions. The mechanism thus feeds on itself, and keeps itself in place. European research on this score is again fragmented, but American research is coherent and rather conclusive. There has even been a relapse.

'The recession and uneven recovery have erased decades of minority gains', a recent census concluded. As a result, 'the wealth gap between whites and minorities in the United States has grown to their widest level in a quarter century'.[67] Good schools have become very expensive, and are increasingly off-limits for the poor. But that is only one element; others are present throughout the system as the early school and job career of recent immigrants and ethnic minorities is a constant hurdle race with severe handicaps.

Research shows that both standard intelligence tests and standard school tests discriminate against other cultures and subcultures, costing the candidates a decisive number of points.[68] It is also harder for them to hire a room or a house, get admitted to clubs, and get scholarships or credit from banks as a student. When they write a job letter, both stranger names and stranger pictures lead to fewer invitations for job interviews. Elite universities cost a fortune. Recent research in the United States has shown that black scholars even have a one-third lower chance of getting a medical scholarship from the National Institute of Health than whites with exactly the same

67 Study by the Pew Research Center. *IHT*, July 27, 2011.

68 Both 'the SAT and ACT are fundamentally discriminatory', according to Joseph Soares, professor of sociology at North Carolina University in Winston-Salem, and author of a new book on 'SAT Wars' (*IHT*, Nov. 14, 2011). This also holds for the RAKIT intelligence test widely used in Dutch primary education, according to research by Jelte Wicherts and Conar Dolan of Amsterdam University, published in *Educational Measurement*, autumn 2010. (*NRC Handelsblad*, weekly edition, Dec. 6, 2010).

credentials.[69] Their careers thwarted all along, this pushes minorities to the social margins.

Another study reports: 'In the late 00's, though the statistics attracted little media attention, blacks also had the highest rates of poverty in the United States – 24.5 percent, about twice the rate for the nation as a whole. During the economic crisis of that period, African American homeowners were two and a half times more likely to be in foreclosure than were whites'. And also: 'Black men are significantly more likely to be stopped, searched and arrested by police than are whites, and it is little wonder that African Americans are 13 percent of the U.S. population but 55 percent of the population of federal prisons. At the time of Obama's election, one in nine black men between the ages of twenty and twenty four was behind bars'.[70]

A respected writer on ethnicity, member of the editorial board of the *New York Times,* recently summed up new scientific findings on such matters. Even in the early grades at school 'voluminous data show that children of color are far more likely than their white peers to be suspended, expelled or declared "disabled" and shunted into special education'.

Also, 'darker-skinned blacks are punished more severely than others for the same types of crimes; deemed less worthy of help during disasters', of course 'disfavoured in some hiring decisions; and more likely to be unemployed'.[71] When they commit violent crimes, they run a greater risk of getting the death penalty. 'Killers of whites, for example, are more likely to receive the death penalty than killers of blacks' and 'juries tend to see darker defendants as more "death-worthy" in capital cases involving white victims'.

New research on the psychological processes of 'priming' and 'anchoring' has shown that people are easily triggered by such stereotypes. If one has them read a story about 'elderly people', they will take a few seconds more to walk to the exit, for instance. White majorities tend to associate ethnic minorities with problems and violence, and try to keep them at bay. Just take the 'Implicit Association Test'

69 *IHT*, Aug. 20–21, 2011.
70 Glassner, *supra* note 39, pp. 242–243.
71 Brent Staples, 'Young, black, male and stalked by bias', *IHT*, April 18, 2012.

available on the website of Harvard University. There have thus been repeated incidents where white policemen or security guards automatically took minority youngsters to be criminals or terrorists, the mobile phones or cameras in their hands for guns, deciding to shoot first and talk later. The latest high publicity case was the shooting to death of 17-year-old black Trayvon Martin by a neighbourhood watchman near Orlando, Florida, in February 2012.[72] Victim of the widespread culture of fear and the obsession with 'stranger danger'.

Minority Men and White Women

The American media, particularly television and the film industry, thrive on violence and crime: both in fact and in fiction. City dwellers are scared by the portrayal of random violence in the streets, even close to their homes. We are all familiar with one particular paradigmatic event, which has become standard fare in all introductory psychology and sociology textbooks. According to one professor 'probably no single incident has caused social psychologists to pay as much attention to an aspect of social behaviour'. It was the notorious Kitty Genovese affair.

A white woman by that name was killed by a black man, around an apartment building in New York. There was predictable criticism of the slow response by the police. The police commissioner then had a meeting with a top editor of the major quality newspaper published in the city, claiming that no less than 38 people had witnessed the unfolding event, and had failed to intervene. The *New York Times* then sent a reporter and developed a major article about it, which later turned into a famous book. Recently, a movie has also been made about it. Experts later labelled the entire phenomenon the 'bystander effect'.

But was the oft-repeated claim true? Someone who moved into the neighbourhood much later starting digging into the story and tried to collect testimony from original witnesses – who turned out to have been considerably fewer than originally claimed. It turned out that the incident had in reality had two instalments. The first half had looked like a mere lovers' quarrel, after which both the perpetrator and the

72 *IHT*, 21, 24–27, 30 March 2012. Earlier similar notorious killings took place in London in 2005 (27-year-old Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes) and in New York in 1999 (23-year-old Guinean Amadou Diallo).

victim had walked away. What the witnesses had not been able to see was that he had later returned and finished her off in a closed vestibule – *out of hearing and out of sight*.[73] A similar later archetypical New York horror story was that of the white female 'central park jogger' supposedly attacked and raped by a gang of 'wilding' black youths.[74]

British, Canadian and American studies of fear have also pointed out that there is a strange disproportion in public and media attention for various sorts of perpetrators and victims. 'Young black males, for example, report the largest number of victimizations and the smallest number of fears, whereas older females (both black and white) report the highest level of fear and the lowest number of victimizations'.[75] In the United States 'a black man is about *eighteen times* more likely to be murdered than is a white woman. All told, the murder rate for black men is double that of American soldiers in World War II. And for black men between the ages of fifteen and thirty, violence is the single largest cause of death'.[76]

A crime reporter confirms: 'There's an upside-down logic of press coverage in homicide, where the nature of the news is a man-bites-dog story . . . What you end up doing is covering the statistical fringe of homicide. You cover the very unlikely cases that don't represent what is really happening'. And a criminologist: 'The most common victims of violence according to official crime statistics and victim surveys are poor, young, black males . . . However, they figure in news reporting predominantly as perpetrators'. In Canada, those 'aged fifteen to twenty-four are twenty times more likely to be victims of any sort of crime than those sixty-five and older'.[77] This is again the exact opposite from what most people think.

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73 The 'debunking' is summed up in the bestseller *Superfreakonomics* by Steven D. Levitt & Stephen J. Dubner (London: Penguin 2010), Ch. 3.

74 In 1989. An essay by Joan Didion played a role in the early debunking of the original story. See her collection *After Henry*, 1992.

75 E. Singer & P. Endreny, *Reporting on risk – How mass media portray accidents, diseases, disaster and other hazards* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation 1993), p. 62. Quoted in Furedi, *supra* note 24, p. 24.

76 Ray Surette, 'Predator criminals as media icons', in G. Barak (ed.), *Media, process and the social construction of crimes* (New York: Garland 1994), pp. 131–158, and other studies. Quoted in Glassner, *supra* note 39, p. 112.

77 Robert Reiner, 'Media-made criminality', in *The Oxford Handbook of Criminality* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 2007); Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 192.

Stranger Danger and the White Fortress

When lecturing about risk, I often show audiences a dartboard bearing, in the middle, a red dot with the number (1) and the mention: You. Surrounding this, in ever wider concentric circles are (2) Other members of your household, (3) Further family and friends, (4) People from your neighbourhood and town, and finally (5) Immigrants and (6) Foreigners (see the cover of this book).[78]

Question: What category is statistically most likely to kill you? People tend to respond: the higher numbers of more distant groups, of course. That is self-evident. But after some reflection, they recognize the mental trap, because the exact opposite is true, so much so that you have probably seen your murderer every single day of your life – in the mirror: as you are the most likely killer of yourself. And those immediately around you come next. Yet this is not what we have foremost in our minds, as processes of 'attribution' tend to shift the blame.[79]

Why do we have such blind trust in ourselves, and in those immediately around us? Why do we fear the Other so much? Could this partly be based on misleading psychological processes? Could it be that the *Clash of Civilizations,* predicted in a famous article and book by Samuel Huntington, has become a self-fulfilling prophecy? Making us suddenly look at the same complex and contradictory reality in a clear-cut different way, making us act along those lines – and thereby provoke the very trends we want to prevent? Could it be that it has reinforced a widespread sense of humiliation within the Islamic world and a widespread sense of fear in the West – stirring mutual hostility?[80]

78 In the United States, there is a tendency among 'official sources' and major media to label Latinos as per definition non-whites. Examples: Sabrina Tavernise, 'U.S. looking more Hispanic and Asian, and less white'; and 'Whites become a minority in U.S. births', *IHT*, Sept. 1, 2011 & May 17, 2012. Similarly, in a report from Texas, the America correspondent of the main Dutch commercial channel RTL4 repeated half a dozen times that 'Latinos are replacing whites' (April 20, 2011, 19.30 hrs).

79 There are more suicides than murders, even though the latter receive maybe a hundred times more dramatic publicity than the former. Furthermore, many people are killed by first-degree relatives (partners, parents or children, even brothers or sisters). Similar things hold for other forms of violence and sexual abuse.

80 Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of the world order* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1996). Huntington implied that the West would face a united Orient, but the Arab/Islamic, South and East Asian reactions to it seem to have entirely different dynamics.

Uli Linke and Danielle Taana Smith have edited a book of some twenty chapters with a more ideological and radical critique of the fear of immigrants in North America and Western Europe. Their introductory 'conceptual framework' claims: 'In the neoliberal global order, the economic requirements of mobility, flexibility and deterritorialization collide with the state's political commitment to securitize space. In this context, the imperatives of national security not only restructure the terrain of the biosocial by an appeal to racial hierarchies, but alter the essence of the border regime'.

They add: 'Cultures of fear are founded on a politics of borders that enables the systematic inclusion and exclusion of specific population groups. But the everyday work of terror requires visible signifiers: abject difference comes to be visibly marked. In the public realm, a binary code of race, sex and space (ghetto, slum, camp) is implanted into vernacular looking-relations, used to identify the Other on sight'. The regime of borders implicates the European Union in the explicit construction of a 'white fortress', they say, and 'a bleached politically fortified space'.

They also note that this has led to an 'empire of camps' along both sides of the exterior borders, but the archipelago extends well into the interior. In Western Europe, over fifteen years, there have been 'close to 9,000 deaths of undesirable border crossers'. North America has a similar situation. In Texas, 43,000 citizens have volunteered as 'armchair warriors' and virtual Border Patrol agents, by monitoring the images of the multiple surveillance cameras, and notifying the sheriff's office if they see anything unusual. 'These moving targets, who appear as blips on someone's computer screen, are effectively dehumanized', they add.[81]

Media Influence

Media do not invent all these threats and scares, of course, but they give them prominence and impact. They thrive on them and amplify them.[82] They also increasingly blur the distinction between our direct

81 Ulla Linke & Danielle Taana Smith (eds.), *Cultures of fear – A critical reader* (London: Pluto 2009), pp. 3, 8–11, 13.

82 According to media scholars David L. Altheide & R. Sam Michalowski (1999), 'Fear in the news – A discourse of control', *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 475–503.

and our indirect experience of reality. Several key processes play a role. One is agenda-setting. An agenda is a list of things that demand our attention, in a certain order of chronology and priority. The media may not always tell us what to think, but they tell us what to think *about*. Another key process is framing. By preferring certain words and images over others, they orient our understanding and views.

Journalists' implicit ideas about newsworthiness, furthermore, favour sudden and clear-cut events over gradual and drawn-out processes. This contributes to an emphasis on negative rather than positive developments, as it takes less time for something to be destroyed than to be (re)built. It also contributes to an emphasis on risk and catastrophe in general. Both media and audiences are fascinated by the tiniest of chances for exceptional disasters, rather than significant chances for everyday mishaps.

A British study of news outlets found that most health stories were either on the shortcomings of the national health service or on health scares about such novel threats as mad cow disease, avian flu or SARS, while at the same time largely ignoring lifestyle diseases such as smoking, alcohol and obesity – continually promoted by an avalanche of marketing and advertising campaigns. It calculated the number of people who have to die from a given condition to merit a story in the news. It took only an average of 0.33 deaths from mad cow disease, or CJD, to provoke a story on BBC news, whereas it took almost thirty thousand as many deaths from smoking (i.e. an average of 8,571) to do the same.[83]

An early American study of leading magazines found 'impressively disproportionate' attention given to sudden death by murder, car crashes, and illicit drugs, as opposed to tobacco, stroke and heart disease. A later American study of local television news found that 'deaths caused by fire, murder, car crashes, and police shootings were widely reported; [whereas] deaths caused by falls, poisonings and other accidents got little notice'. Psychologist Paul Slovic concluded that 'the media give disproportionate coverage to dramatic, violent and catastrophic causes of death – precisely the sort of risks that lend

83 According to a 2003 study by The King's Fund, quoted by Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 169.

themselves to vivid, disturbing images – while paying far less attention to slow, quiet killers like diabetes'.[84]

Gardner adds that 'As a result, it's entirely predictable that people tend to overestimate the risk of dramatic deaths caused by murder, fire and car crashes while underestimating such undramatic killers as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease'. The same holds for catastrophe. Every day, there is an extremely rare disaster somewhere in the world. But because lively images of such distant events can now be provided almost live, 'you get the freak show that has taken over much of the media'. All this promotes a generalized culture of fear.

Glassner points to underlying mechanisms: 'Television news programs survive on scares. On local newscasts, where producers live by the dictum "if it bleeds, it leads", drug, crime and disaster stories make up most of the news portion of the broadcasts. Evening news on the major [national] networks are somewhat less bloody', but while the murder rate declined by 20% over the larger part of the last decade of the millennium, murder stories increased *600%* (even without including the massive O.J. Simpson hype).[85]

A search of British newspapers, using the database of the news agency Reuters, also showed a *ninefold* explosion of the use of the term 'at risk' over the last half-dozen years of the millennium. It further illustrates that our media and our culture have indeed become obsessed with risk and fear.[86]

Media Landscape

Modern electronic media have become such an integral part of our lives that the lines between direct and indirect experience have become increasingly blurred. But another reason may lie in the evolution of the media landscape over the last few decades. Since it has taken place gradually, we tend to overlook how radical these changes were. But they are obviously a major factor in the spreading of a

84 K. Frost et al., 'Relative risk in the news media', *American Journal of Public Health* 1997. David McArthur et al., University of California. Quoted by Gardner, *supra* note 3, p. 159.

85 Gardner, *supra* note 3, pp. 159–161; Glassner, *supra* note 39, p. XXIX.

86 Furedi, *supra* note 24, pp. XVII–XVIII.

culture of fear. It is also in this wider context, that the reactions to 9/11 should be understood.

Furedi sums it up thus: 'Compared with the past, people living in Western societies have less familiarity with pain, suffering debilitating diseases and death than ever before. We are far better placed to deal with the outbreak of new disease than was the case in the past . . . However, today, many of our fears are not based on personal experience. They are often shaped by television programmes such as *Fatal contact,* or by alarmist media accounts' of contagious diseases. 'We can neither fight them nor flee from them. They are about dangers that we cannot directly confront, but simply fear passively'.[87] We tend to forget, furthermore, that gradual changes in the media landscape have led to an entirely new situation – along at least half a dozen lines.

First of all, there has been a rapid rise of new media and new formats. On the one hand the time we spend watching media every day, or listening to them (even in the background), has continued to increase. On the other hand, audiences have fragmented. The days are gone when the whole nation watched one or two or three television channels every evening. Now we have twenty at hand, and truly national broadcasting experiences have become increasingly rare. We have split up into a mosaic of little worlds, each with their own preoccupations and views, even if we are obsessed with similar things.

Secondly, the role of overt ideology in the media has receded: first in the United States, then in the United Kingdom, and finally also on the European continent. The Netherlands, for instance, long had a social system with four 'pillars'. Catholics and Protestants, social democrats and liberal-conservatives each had their own parties and unions, women and youth organizations, newspapers and broadcasters. Today, such clear-cut orientations have faded into the background. Even if some media scholars maintain that trends like dumbing down and personalization have contributed to the rise of populism.[88] Furthermore, most media increasingly aim at a 'general audience', which is only divided along socio-economic lines, life-styles and mentalities.

87 Furedi, *supra* note 24, pp. IX–X.

88 For instance, Hajo Boomgaarden, associate professor of political communication, in the Amsterdam university weekly *Folia*, Vol. 64, No. 23, p. 8 (March 11, 2011).

Thirdly, subsidies play only a marginal role currently. Most media have become commercial enterprises, trying to limit their costs and staff, and to maximize their income and profits. Most address citizens primarily as consumers. The portion of sales and subscriptions in their revenue has continued to fall; the portion of advertising and sponsoring has continued to grow. The editorial contents also have to provide an attractive *Umfeld* or environment for commercial messages. The staff needs a good working relationship with corporations and businesses; stock market, investment and similar economic coverage have also become more prevalent.

Fourthly, since more media take aim at similar target groups, competition has intensified. 'Free' media, financed solely by advertising and co-opted by marketers, have driven 'paid' media into a corner. This started with television, continued with the Internet, then affected newspapers and may now even encroach on books, as they all vie for reach and ratings, for immediate and positive attention of the public, by giving it what it seems to want there and then. At least on a superficial level: of easy-to-digest and lively material, of 'chewing gum' for the eyes and ears and mind, of information for conversation, with a privileged role for personalities and celebrities, who seem to form a natural extension of our intimate social circle.

A fifth factor is the following. Only a few decades ago, pictures were still grainy, in black-and-white, often posed and stiff. This was true of both stills on newspaper pages and movies on television channels. Today, lenses and cameras have become lighter and better. They shoot high-resolution multicolour images in split seconds: lively scenes close by. They are no longer registered on film but electronically, can be edited with all kinds of special effects to highlight overviews or details. New techniques are pioneered in Hollywood and television entertainment, but then adopted in news coverage as well.

There is an ongoing drift towards the ever more spectacular and impressive.[89] Media are increasingly chasing emotion, as has also

89 Dutch media scholar Koos Nuijten did a content analysis of the evolution of the evening news on Dutch channels over 25 years, and concluded that the introduction of commercial television had led to more sensationalism, even on the competing public channels. See: *Sensatie in het Nederlandse televisienieuws 1980–2004.* (Doctoral dissertation, Radboud University Nijmegen, defended Sept. 14, 2007).

become clear with the audiovisual coverage and audience reactions to the death of Lady Di and Michael Jackson (or in The Netherlands the death of the folksy singer Andé Hazes). Mediated experience has come to trump the direct experience of such major and distant events, while at the same time recruiting us to participate physically as much as we can.

Finally, another consequence of the ICT revolution is that all media material can now be registered, transferred and rendered as an electronic data file. This has further promoted a 'staccato' culture of immediacy and cacophony, where even a small gap in the continuous flood of images or sounds is considered an eternity. The 'news of the day' is superseded by the 'news of the hour' and 'breaking news'; there is an inordinate emphasis on the 'here and now' and on superlatives of 'the latest' and 'the greatest'. This masks a surprising amnesia, where recurring developments are recycled as 'shocking discoveries' time and again. There is a generalized lack of an appropriate historical and cultural perspective in media and news.

Conclusion

The prominence of scares in the media, and the rise of a wider culture of fear within the Western world, thus seem to be related to structural causes. We have scanned a wide range of domains giving rise to scares, beginning with scares of invisible threats of radiation, contamination and contagion that seem to be closing in on us. One reason for this state of affairs seems to be the very progress in science and technology, which enables us to identify new microscopic and macroscopic dangers and to measure minute changes and mine vast amounts of data. And given the average layman's 'innumeracy', lack of understanding of statistics, and tendency to latch on to salient anecdotes, gross distortions and misperceptions result.

Our Stone Age brains make us focus on the exceptional, on sudden change, on things 'standing out'; and make us oblivious to everyday dangers, to imperceptible drifts, to apparent 'normality'. They make us afraid of airplanes and cruise ships, rather than of unfastened car seat belts or kiddie seats on the road. They make us afraid of skyscrapers and subway tunnels, rather than household accidents in the kitchen

and bathroom, the garage and the garden, let alone ponds and swimming pools there. We obsess about exotic diseases rather than about endemic ones. We always look in the wrong direction, when we are trying to evade risks.

This is even more obvious in our fear of crimes and violence. Child abduction and child abuse, for instance, are instinctively ascribed to strangers in anonymous environments, whereas the overwhelming majority of such cases occur within the framework of the average family and are committed by family and in-laws, caregivers and even priests. We obsess with 'stranger danger' and wholly unrepresentative excesses. One major reason may be that at least half a dozen structural changes in our media system have made both fact and fiction far more impressive than our everyday lives.

Somehow, dramatic news reports and spectacular blockbuster movies have become so lively that they get increasingly coded as simple extensions of our direct sensory experience. They get etched into our amygdala (freeze/flight/fight) centres, into our hippocampus emotional memory. That might help explain the key paradox of our existence: Western citizens are on average better off than ever before and compared with everyone else, but they are increasingly fearful – particularly of 'stranger danger'.

A Note on The Specifics of the Dutch Situation

For Foreign Readers

The Dutch experience with strangers over the last few centuries is both the same as and different from that of other Western and European countries. These socio-historical roots affect some of the arbitrary definitions of what stands out and what does not. Why have some ethnic minorities been accepted long ago, whereas others are still rejected today? Why have some integration procedures worked, and others not?

The Netherlands is a relatively small nation and language area consisting largely of trading centres in a river delta, at the crossroads of three larger European countries and cultures around it. Immediately after its belated independence (from the Habsburgs and Spain), and during its subsequent 16th- and 17th-century 'Golden Age', it continued to receive a large influx of immigrant talent, and for three decades even became *the* dominant European and world maritime power (a brief 'window of opportunity' between the hegemonies of larger Spain and Great Britain).[1]

A recent bestseller by a Chinese American author thus included it among the major historic world empires that thrived on . . . their cosmopolitanism.[2] At the same time, however, the Republic remained a rather horizontal society, as the re-introduction of a monarchy and a court followed only much later (that is to say, after the defeat of

1 See, for instance, Jan Dubbelman & Jaap Tanja (ed. Anne Frank Stichting), *Vreemd gespuis* (Amsterdam/Den Haag: Ambo/Novib 1987). Herman Obdeijn & Marlou Schrover, *Komen en gaan – Immigratie en emigratie in Nederland sinds 1550* (Amsterdam: Bakker 2008).

2 Amy Chua, *Day of empire – How hyperpowers rise to global dominance – and why they fall* (New York: Anchor/Random 2007).

Napoleon). It was also characterized by a no-nonsense mentality, which may not be very conducive to social subtleties. Yet even after those days, The Netherlands continued to welcome and integrate new waves of political refugees from abroad.[3] So why has immigration come to be seen as such a problem today?

In early 2011, The Netherlands reported 16.7 million inhabitants. Twenty percent are defined as 'non-native' Dutch (*allochtonen* as opposed to natives, or *autochtonen*). After the Second World War, a huge wave of emigrants had left the country for Canada, Australia, New Zealand (and apartheid South Africa).[4] This soon created a labour shortage, and a first generation of 'guest workers' from Southern Europe was invited to fill the gap. They were almost exclusively male, slightly more tanned, and already worries were being expressed over their non-integration and related social problems.[5] But the perception changed soon after their countries of origin joined the European Union, and they implicitly came to be redefined as 'white' insiders rather than 'olive coloured' outsiders.

Today, slightly over half of the non-natives (11%) are widely defined as being of 'non-Western' origin, by contrast. Interestingly, again, the *first wave* of immigrants of non-Western origin is not counted as such, even today. It has officially been pronounced invisible. Those are the people from the former Dutch East Indies who came after independence during the 1940s and 1950s, many of 'mixed blood' and recognizably different. The official story is that they did not have or cause problems; the real truth is that those problems were simply covered up: both by the immigrants themselves and by the authorities. This category also includes people from the Moluccan archipelago and even . . . more recent immigrants from the successor state of Indonesia.[6]

3 After Jews from Spain and Portugal, and Protestants from southern Netherlands (current Belgium), there were Huguenots from France, Jews from Central Europe, refugees from Eastern Europe, etc.

4 Emigration continues today, but considerable numbers return after some years. Educated second generation immigrants have also begun to return to their countries of origin, some highly educated, in a kind of reverse 'brain drain'.

5 For a simple reminder: The Dutch historical television program *Andere Tijden* ('Other times'), particularly the instalments devoted to groups of Italian male and to Yugoslav female 'guest' workers, Febr. 2011.

6 Oct. 2010 Forum factsheet *Etnische diversiteit*, p. 3, n. 3. Christians from the Moluccan archipelago had closely collaborated with the Dutch and were promised a separate independence by the Dutch. This was opposed by the new (largely Islamic) republic of Indonesia. Many Moluccans were brought to The Netherlands to await their proximate return – which never came.

The *second wave* of immigrants of non-Western origin came from former colonies in the Caribbean: from Surinam (Dutch Guyana) before and around its independence around the mid-1970s, and from the Antilles after they were assigned a 'special status' within the kingdom. They too stood out with a darker skin colour and different traits. Upper-class migrants who came to study and stayed seemed to fit in well. There was considerable unrest over the lower-class migrants, by contrast: their lack of integration, social problems and crime at the time. But many had learned Dutch, at least, and had been taught about The Netherlands. A considerable percentage thus surmounted the problems, got jobs, founded families and fitted in.

The *third wave* of immigrants of non-Western origin consisted again of people euphemistically called 'guest workers' from nearer by, but this time from across the Mediterranean, from Morocco and Turkey, which upon reflection turned out to have even more different cultures. It was said that they were reluctant to 'assimilate' completely as they were Muslims, who often referred to the literal text of the Koran, and maintained norms and values from their countries of origin. One should add that most workers were not recruited from sophisticated industrial capitals such as Casablanca or Istanbul, but from the less developed countryside in the Rif mountains and Anatolia. Moreover, they gradually strove to stay, bring or form families, which maintained different identities.

Mutual understanding is therefore limited at best. A third of Moroccans and Turks feel Dutch children do not listen enough to their parents, two-thirds of the Dutch feel Muslims in turn raise their children in an authoritarian manner. Somewhat less than half of all Moroccans and Turks feel Dutch people respect Islamic culture; similar low numbers of Dutch feel most Muslims in The Netherlands respect the culture and customs of others.[7] Some disgruntled Netherlands natives claim Dutch tourists and expatriates adapt when abroad, but that the Muslims apparently do not. Others claim after a successful holiday that the best people have apparently been left behind, and that the authorities in those countries certainly

7 March 2010 Factbook *Muslims in The Netherlands*, p. 31.

know what to do about criminals (i.e. shut them up in primitive circumstances).[8]

Whereas the influx of European immigrants (particularly from the East) still rose in 2010, the influx of 'non-Western' immigrants diminished slightly,[9] partly to a hard core of 'real' political refugees and asylum seekers. It is true that such immigrants still tend to have more children, but over generations those numbers tend to fall slowly to Dutch levels. Should those children (born in The Netherlands and with a Dutch nationality) also somehow be considered 'non-native', as natives do on occasion? If so, the prospects are indeed worrying, particularly as non-Western immigrants tend to concentrate in the four largest cities, and their children form a large part of the younger generation there, both in schools and on the streets.

Some statistics accordingly claim that by the mid-21st century, a quarter of the inhabitants of the country will indirectly be of non-Western stock, particularly because of a new influx from Asia. Interestingly enough, Chinese were at one point defined as 'highly troublesome', but not any more.[10] Yet the question remains: is it wise to accept so many newcomers?

Countries such as the United States and Canada, Australia and New Zealand have of course always profited from ongoing immigration, but do we need it in The Netherlands? The authoritative liberal-conservative weekly *The Economist* claims that we do, and recently carried the telling headline: 'The trouble with migrants: Europe is fretting about too much immigration when it needs even more'.[11]

8 Statements from interviews in Marjan de Gruijter. Eliane Smits van Waesberghe & Hans Boutelier, *Een vreemde in eigen land – Boze autochtone burgers over nieuwe Nederlanders en de overheid* (A stranger in one's own country – Angry native citizens about the new Dutch and the authorities) (Amsterdam/Utrecht: Aksant/Forum 2010), pp. 94, 99, 119 etc.

9 CBS figures for 2010, quoted in *NRC Handelsblad*, Febr. 9, 2011.

10 The Chinese community, concentrated in Amsterdam, used to keep to itself. But police in the capital long felt they could not penetrate it. There was a lot of illegal immigration and exploitation, drug trade and use, gambling and other illegal activities going on – with the Maffia-like Triads controlling a large share. But since all this did not immediately lead to nuisances for the average Dutch, it was not 'problematized' by the media and the public.

11 Nov. 22, 2007. The reason is supposed to be that we need a younger labour force to support a population growing increasingly old, and most of all an educated one.

Management gurus, in turn, increasingly claim that 'diversity' is the key to all innovation and dynamism.

The Question of the Absent Pillar(s)

Hence, many natives are worried, and anti-immigrant parties and leaders frequently refer to 'an invasion' of slightly over 900,000 Muslims, when they really mean 'people originating from predominantly Muslim countries'. Only a quarter (or 225,000) actually go to the mosque to worship at least once a week, whereas half of them never do . . . at all. According to the security service AIVD, the actual Islamic or 'green' peril is said to consist of maybe ten percent conservatives, with 2% possible sympathizers of radicals, and one-tenth of a percent actual radicals – maybe 250 people in all who are kept under close surveillance.[12]

The second largest non-Western religion is officially Hinduism, by the way, with 110,000 people – mostly of Surinamese origin. There, too, only a minority consists of real, regular practitioners.[13] Whereas social problems with Muslims have come to be over-reported by authorities and media over the last ten years, those with Hindus have long been under-reported. Among the first generation, gender inequality, arranged marriages, domestic violence, alcohol abuse and gambling were relatively widespread, but somehow not so much defined as a problem. One can of course speculate about a number of reasons for this.[14]

By the time non-Western and Muslim immigration was identified as a growing problem, The Netherlands had just given up on its

12 2010 Factbook *Muslims in The Netherlands*, *supra* note 96, p. 26.

13 Factsheet *Etnische diversiteit*, *supra* note 6, p. 6.

14 See, for instance, on sex and gender issues: Bea Lalmohammed, *Schade, schande, schuld* (Damage, guilt, guilt. Utrecht: Van Arkel 1995); Usha Marhé, *Tapu sjen – Bedek je schande – Surinamers en incest* (Cover your shame – Surinamese and incest. Amsterdam: Van Gennep 1996). Hindus were initially hardly noticed separately, and often categorized under the label 'Surinamese' or people of Surinam origin. Ethnically black or 'creole' people seemed to have more social problems at the time. (Some believed in voodoo-like 'Winti' practices, but they were not counted as an official religion.)

traditional system of pillars or *zuilen*.[15] This proved a particularly effective way of integrating both new highly educated elites and low-educated 'masses' (social democrats and Catholics; into a society dominated by liberal-conservatives and then Protestants. But a fifth, Muslim, 'pillar' never got off the ground). In selecting 'middlemen' from Muslim-dominated countries (civil servants, social and youth workers, etc.), Dutch authorities more or less preferred to ignore Islam: if not explicitly, then at least implicitly.

That is to say, (1) they preferred secular over emphatically religious middlemen; (2) refused to promote the further education of imams. Thus they unthinkingly promoted a situation whereby (3) imams tended to be imported from the countries (and regions) of origin; (4) often trained and/or paid by foundations from Saudi Arabia and the other ultra-rich but fundamentalist Gulf States; (5) thus handing them a platform for conservative religious proselytizing among otherwise unorganized 'guest workers'.[16] This also inhibited the emergence of a dense independent network of religious, cultural and social associations, which could have served as a communication channel between Dutch authorities and the Islamic 'base'.[17]

Widespread opposition to large and well-equipped new mosques also prevented their overt emergence as cultural and social centres for these communities. In the same sense and comparable to the role churches from the two or three Christian 'pillars' in The Netherlands had played for those populations in the past (including for underprivileged groups of workers, women and youngsters). Only in recent years has this policy been amended somewhat. By contrast, minor

15 Which meant that liberal-conservatives and Protestants, Catholics and social-democrats all had their own network of parties, unions, women and youth associations, newspapers and broadcasters – which succeeded in integrating elites and masses.

16 The Security Service AIVD estimated that there were around 15 'experienced fundamentalist imams' active in The Netherlands, and that their sermons attracted an average of a hundred Moroccan Dutch. Radical Muslim imams were said to be active in around 30 of the country's 475 mosques. (Factbook *Muslims in The Netherlands*, p. 26.)

17 Also see Duyvendak & Scholten, quoted in Bas van Stokkum, *Wat een hufter – Ergernis, lichtgeraaktheid en maatschappelijke verruwing* (What a lout – Irritation, touchiness and social coarsening. Amsterdam: Boom 2010), p. 132.

mosques and Muslim schools have frequently become preferred targets for anti-immigrant militants.[18]

In the current climate, it would seem odd to consider the promotion of a denser network of cultural associations: not only among Muslims, but also among Hindus or other ethnic and religious groups. Whereas the vast majority of Dutch observers claim that the acceptance of separate Muslim and Hindu schools would only lead to further segregation, a small minority (including myself) maintains that psychological research results are not entirely clear-cut on this score.[19]

18 On Nov. 2, 2004, filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in clear daylight by a radical fundamentalist Moroccan youth, in reprisal for his involvement in a documentary with Ayaan Hirsi Ali about the position of Muslim women. Over the next four-and-a-half months, 135 mosques and 29 Islamic schools became the object of threats, smirch, vandalism or arson. After that, similar incidents continued to occur on a regular basis. According to Martijn de Koning, on the weblog Closer, Oct. 15, 2010, quoted by Beatrice de Graaf, *Waar zijn wij bang voor? Veiligheidsdenken en de angst voor een ander* (What are we afraid of? Security thinking and the fear of the other. Utrecht: Forum 2010), pp. 31, 44, n. 61.

19 There used to be a similar debate on the effects of gender separation in schools. If children do not feel fully respected or accepted in a mixed environment, the argument goes, this may create anxiety, underachievement and counterproductive behaviour. If they feel at ease in a familiar environment, by contrast, they will feel stronger, get better test scores and will be better equipped to deal with inequality or adversity in later periods of their lives.

The Dutch Preoccupation with Immigration

On the Psychology of Native European Reactions to Non-Western Newcomers

We have seen that there is a wider 'culture of fear' throughout the Western world. But we tend to ignore abstract threats, to latch on to people who seem to be the root cause of the changing environment, and strangers stand out in this regard. What are the universal psychological processes that contribute to this salient distinction between 'us' and 'them'? What are the specific grudges that some natives claim to hold against non-natives, particularly non-Western or Muslim ones? How does unfamiliarity breed contempt? Why has a society that prided itself on its tolerance suddenly feel the limits have been reached? What part of the reported irritations is arbitrary, what part is real? How have labels and language evolved and helped to further impose a 'problem frame' on the immigration?

The Netherlands is both one of the most wealthy and most egalitarian societies in the world, along with some Scandinavian countries.[1] Dutch adults and children consistently claim to be among the happiest in the world.[2] Statistics for most crimes have gone down or have

1 According to an overview by the director of the 'Social and Cultural Planning Bureau' SCP: Paul Schnabel, 'Nederland is een land van hyperbolen geworden'. Also see: Maarten Schinkel, 'Geen gezeur in het rijkste land ter wereld', *NRC Handelsblad* weekly edition, Sept. 26 & April 11, 2011.

2 See, for instance, *Health behaviour in school-aged children*, a U.N./W.H.O. study held every four years, among 200,000 eleven- to fifteen-year-olds, in 39 countries in North America and Western Europe. Daily *NRC Handelsblad* newsletter May 2 & weekly edition May 5, 2012.

been stable in recent years: this holds for both police-registered crimes and for victim-reported crimes (through surveys).[3] People also report they feel personally safe, and fears of (falling victim to) terrorist attacks have receded considerably since a dramatic assassination years ago.[4] But there is a snag.

Considerable categories of citizens do at the same time claim to feel unsafe in the public realm (*openbare ruimte*), because of possible insults, threats and violence. There is also an 'optimism gap', as they claim society as a whole has become less safe.[5] The key question seems to be: are there more such incidents than in the past, or has our resilience lessened? Some sociologists claim that even middle-class natives do increasingly indulge in rude behaviour towards others. But somehow lower-class immigrants are assigned much of the blame.[6] How has all this come about, and what can we do about it?[7]

Because advanced societies thrive on an essential lubricant. The Netherlands (and Scandinavia) traditionally had the highest levels of trust in the world. It facilitates interaction in everyday life, in the social, economic and political domains. Are we in danger of losing this trust?[8]

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3 Even though different methods lead to different results. Ingmar Vriesema, 'Aan alle onderzoeken en enquêtes naar criminaliteit ontbreekt wel iets', *NRC Handelsblad* weekly edition, Jan. 10, 2011. The main authors on the Western 'culture of fear' quoted in the previous essay come to similar conclusions.

4 Folkert Jensma, 'Objectieve cijfers over criminaliteit zeggen niks over gevoelens van onveiligheid', daily *NRC Handelsblad* weblog, Jan. 31, 2011.

5 After the title of the book *The optimism gap – The 'I'm OK – they're not' syndrome and the myth of American decline* by D. Whitman (New York: Walker & Company 1998).

6 Marjan de Gruijter, Eliane Smits van Waesberghe & Hans Boutellier, report *Een vreemde in eigen land – Boze autochtone burgers over nieuwe Nederlander en de overheid* (Amsterdam/Utrecht: Aksant/Forum 2010). Beatrice de Graaf, *Waar zijn wij bang voor? Veligheidsdenken en angst voor de ander* (Utrecht: Forum 2010/2011).

7 De Graaf, *supra* note 6, p. 39; De Gruijter et al., *supra* note 6, pp. 24/25, 30. Also see: Vivian Sonnega, 'Sociale veiligheid in de publieke ruimte – De moskee', Unpubl. paper for Forum/Expert meeting sociale veiligheid 2010, p. 2. Bas van Stokkum, *Wat een hufter!* (Amsterdam: Boom 2010), pp. 18/19, 24/26, a.o. The latest common research collection from the official bodies CBS & WODC about *Criminaliteit en Rechtshandhaving 2009*, and a recent report on *Veiligheid en vertrouwen* by a commission chaired by Prof. Erwin Muller (Leiden University), seem to confirm these conclusions (Folkert Jensma, *NRC Handelsblad* weblogs Nov. 3, 2010 & Jan. 31, 2011).

8 See: Francis Fukuyama, *Trust – The social virtues and the creation of prosperity* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1995) and Stephen M.R. Covey, *The speed of trust – The one thing that changes everything* (London: Simon & Schuster 1996).

This essay is about the preoccupation of Dutch 'natives' with the influx of non-Western immigrants. Other European countries have similar problems. The perspective of the essay is psychological, social and cultural. It tries to closely examine arbitrary differences and nuances, which might help shed some further light on these questions.

Interpersonal Perceptions of Cultural Difference

Let us first look at the psychology of cultural difference in general: how natives tend to experience immigrants, a rapid influx of them, and its problematic sides. In order to put it in its proper context, it is necessary to recall just a few very basic facts. First of all: the wiring and firing of the brain in both animals and humans evolved for one major purpose. It is highly focused on spotting difference and change (much more so than on tracking similarity and continuity). It is almost obsessive in that regard,[9] although selecting details that are different (over others that are the same) is sometimes a rather arbitrary process, to which we will return.

One example is the chemistry of the senses and the body. Pheromones and hormones play a central role that is still ill understood. Very recent experiments with Dutch students by Amsterdam University psychologist Carsten De Dreu have discovered that the mysterious 'trust and happiness' substance oxytocin promotes not only close bonding (between male and female, mother and child, etc.) but also . . . a stronger rejection of outsiders (in this case Germans and Muslims).[10]

Now let us look at cognition, specifically perception, thinking, memory. The real world is unlimited: many things are related on many different levels. But our understanding is limited: we 'selectively articulate' certain elements and relationships and actively make coherent patterns. These depend on certain things standing out, on our linking them to previous experiences, positive and negative. Even

9 Details: Rita Carter a.o., *The brain book* (London: Dorling Kindersley 2009).

10 Published in *Science* in 2010, and in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in Jan. 2011. See also: Nicholas Wade, 'The love hormone has its limits', *IHT*, Jan. 12, 2011.

direct sensory information is not in any way objective or purely physical, but in many ways subjective and also psychological.

In humans, for instance, the visual sense dominates the perception of people and situations – particularly unfamiliar and new ones. When we encounter new people, split-second first impressions take hold. External markers turn out to play a key role, namely the body of the other: age, gender and ethnicity; skin, hair and eye colour; face and body form. But also make-up and adornments, hair or headdress, clothing and even shoes. We intuitively categorize people on the basis of such cues, and link them to certain 'probable' characteristics to be expected. That is to say, as a consequence of our striving for cognitive economy and efficiency, we discriminate and generalize. We all do this, all the time.

Similarly, when we encounter new situations, we also intuitively look for visual cues of difference and change, in comparison with an implicit standard, for example the cars and other conspicuous possessions of strangers, their front doors and houses, their curtains and windowsills, their balconies or gardens. Are they the same as ours, in what respects do they deviate? Is that better or worse? How do they deal with public space adjacent to their houses and elsewhere: the sidewalk and the street, the square and the park? Since we are not really familiar with the distant backgrounds of culturally different habits or do not care, they can only seem strange. They will stand out, and draw additional attention. Sometimes this is justified, but sometimes not.

In the same way, we have implicit expectations of a 'normal' auditory environment. People talking our own language a dozen meters away will not draw our attention, people talking a different language will, and people talking a very strange language (like Arabic or Turkish with their pronounced sounds) will even more. A radio playing Western music will not draw our attention; one playing oriental music will. Both the talk and the music will more easily be perceived as 'unnecessarily loud'. Again, sometimes this is justified, sometimes it is not. Northerners are used to a primarily indoor and somewhat private environment, Southerners to an outdoor and highly social environment: they often have a habit of talking slightly louder and shriller (even

the average Italian tends to do so more – in public – than the average Dutch).[11]

Although the visual and auditory senses of animals walking upright (such as humans) have replaced the nose-to-the-ground olfactory sense of lower animals, the latter older sense still plays a key and largely unconscious role.[12] It is more 'primitive', but the relevant brain parts lie much closer to the emotional circuits and feed more directly into them. We do not smell constant odours, such as our own, or even those of our own group, but focus on different and contrasting ones. Strangers eat different foods; their kitchens seem to smell more. That can alternately be experienced as titillating (when chosen in a restaurant) or repulsive (when imposed daily by neighbours).[13] The transpiration and body odours of strangers may smell strange, as a consequence of these diets. Even the 'wrong' after-shaves and perfumes used by people from other cultures may put us off. This unnoticeably primes our reactions and interactions.[14]

People from other cultures also implicitly obey different rules with regard to cleanliness (shoes) and purity (taboos), touching others (gender) and embracing them (children), standing close together (personal space) or mindlessly blocking others. People's private 'bubble', upon which one should not encroach, varies widely in size around the world. This sometimes leads to a characteristic dance when people from different cultures talk: with one party unnoticeably taking a slight step back, another taking a step forward in reaction, and so on and so forth.[15] Again, we are largely unaware of all this.

Expressions and gestures, attitudes and postures may differ slightly as well: making bonding through 'mirroring' more complicated and

11 Details on conversation styles, etc.: Fons Trompenaers & Charles Hampden-Turner, *Riding the waves of culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Brealy 1998).

12 Details: Carter, *supra* note 9, pp. 94–98.

13 Several decades ago, I wrote an elaborate piece for the popular illustrated Dutch weekly magazine *Panorama*, with dozens of suggestions on how to make a 'world trip' during the summer holidays, with very diverse activities and experiences from countries on all continents – without spending much and without ever leaving The Netherlands.

14 I remember feeling repulsed by sweetish 'air refresheners' in airplanes and hotels in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, where Westerners would have used fresher smells.

15 On cultural variations in private space, see: Allan & Barbara Pease, *The definitive book of body language* (London: Orion 2004).

uncertain. Non-verbal behaviour may also differ slightly: smiling, lowering the eyes or staring, for instance, are particularly prone to creating misunderstandings about motives and intentions between those higher and lower in a hierarchy. So it is difficult to bridge the cultural divide: the 'fine tuning' may not work well, leaving unease on both sides, even during an assessment or an interview for a job. This may be worsened by 'evaluation apprehension', leading discriminated groups to underperform.[16]

Even habits of everyday greetings on the job, close by or from a distance, may differ slightly – as I realized in France late in life.[17] Paralinguistics differ as well: the intensity and speed of talk, patterns of alternation and interruption, polite conversation styles of 'first establishing a relationship' versus 'getting straight to the point'. Hence, regardless of the actual words that are spoken, all this is a burden on the ease of everyday chit-chat.[18]

All these disparate cues may contribute to the tentative labelling of a non-Western immigrant or a Muslim, for example. This will have a knock-on effect or 'halo effect' on further interaction. It will easily lead a native to perceive the other as a 'potential problem', and trigger evasive behaviour. This will lead to the unequal granting of admission: to discothèques, rooms or houses for rent, internships or jobs. Worse, we will tend to blame the immigrants themselves for the resulting higher unemployment, because of the psychological phenomena of 'cognitive dissonance' reduction, the so-called 'just world' fallacy, and our resulting tendency of 'victim blaming'.[19]

The Symbolism of Male and Female Dress Codes

Back to basics: what is culture? According to one major author, it is a theory 'to which a native actor [or actress] refers in interpreting the

16 Illustrated by an elaborate interview with a highly educated Iraqi, who had long remained unemployed until he finally got a 'job training' in The Netherlands. See *NRC Handelsblad* weekeditie, Oct. 12, 2006. Also see: Jeanette S. Martin & Lilian H. Chaney, *Global business etiquette* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger 2006).

17 In many French workplaces, women and men may warmly embrace and kiss each other on the cheek at the beginning of every single workday, I learned. A Dutchman like myself limiting himself to a vague 'hello' sign will easily be perceived as distant and aloof.

18 More in Trompenaers & Hampden-Turner, *supra* note 11; and in Pease, *supra* note 15.

19 Cognitive dissonance reduction: We strive to keep our thoughts, feelings and actions in line with each other. If one element becomes dissonant, we tend to reconsider the configuration automatically, to realign it. Victim blaming and the 'just world' fallacy are examples. If someone is discriminated against, for instance, although we cannot or will not intervene to change that, we tend to find an additional reason for it: 'it is also their own fault'.

unfamiliar or the ambiguous . . . with which he [or she] creates the stage on which the games of life are played'. It 'may be in large measure unconscious', and thus implicit rather than explicit.[20] This may even hold for our interpretation of some immigrants' dress codes, which may easily provide a trigger inspiring fear and loathing. This may rest on arbitrary definitions, leading to a self-confirming 'circle of representations'. Yet they largely have symbolic meaning, as it is hard to see how these different dress codes directly harm natives. (We will return to behaviours more directly harmful to natives further down.)

In many traditional Muslim societies, for instance, it is widely felt that it is proper and decent for girls and women to cover their hair and heads in public. Even if – upon closer inspection – there is no consensus on whether the Koran explicitly orders them to do so. In most countries, a headscarf will suffice. On the one hand, many girls and women have come to psychologically internalize these customs: they feel better in them – and less exposed to the invading male gaze – particularly in the highly sexualized context of Western cities. On the other hand, fathers and brothers and husbands may impose these restrictions on them. But it is often hard to establish the crucial distinction between voluntary and involuntary adoption. Thus the United States and the United Kingdom have been much more tolerant in accepting such habits than continental Europe.[21]

Some (but not all) people within some (but not all) European countries have thus demanded that the wearing of scarves be forbidden in certain public functions (civil servants, policewomen, court aides, etc.) as 'ostentatious signs' of ideological affiliation (rather than 'neutrality') and also of submission to male dominance. On the one hand, however, other similar signs of other groups had never been forbidden in the past (Christian crosses, Jewish David stars, or even Hindustani saris). On the other hand, parents had always been allowed to

20 Keesing (1974), quoted in William B. Gudykunst & Young Yun Kim, *Communicating with strangers*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill 1992), pp. 12–13.

21 It is interesting to note that in spite of this, girls tend to do better in education than boys today: both immigrant and native girls. Girls are almost a full year ahead in physical maturity at the beginning of secondary school, but today also more focused and disciplined on average. By contrast, boys tend to be increasingly confused about their roles. Thus girls have recently surpassed boys in higher education, in the United States and elsewhere, both in numbers and in grades. This even holds for an increasing number of exact sciences, starting with medicine.

decide what their adolescent daughters should wear. It seemed odd to forbid such prude coverings of girls, while at the same allowing the provocative and sexy un-coverings of mini skirts, belly button shirts, plunging necklines and more by adolescents.[22]

With regard to the niqab and the burqa, covering the whole face or just revealing the eyes, there were additional arguments. They hampered communication, it was said, made people unrecognizable and anonymous, and might potentially even pose a security threat as the women might hide bombs or suicide vests under their long robes, or might even be disguised men doing that. The problem with these claims in The Netherlands was that they were extremely exaggerated, as the actual number of girls and women wearing burqas or niqabs was only 1% or 2% of what natives thought them to be.[23]

Furthermore, there had not been a single significant terrorist event linked to such concealment within the Western world. Quite the opposite, as such people would attract undue attention to themselves. Most terrorists had, on the contrary, been dressed as average Westerners; after having been raised, schooled and/or having worked as average Westerners. So the over-perception of head coverings as a threat was largely a mirage, the result of unfamiliarity with them – within the context of a traditional European monoculture.[24]

Similar observations can be made about the dress codes adhered to by some Muslim men. Only a minority of recent or traditional immigrants grew untrimmed beards, also invoking the Koran, and

22 Interestingly enough, studies of Western popular culture have identified a tendency to emphasize sexual eagerness and 'surplus libido' in non-Western peoples: both in colonial times and after. See the elaborate discussion of this theme in blockbuster movies in Van Ginneken, *Screening difference* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2007), Ch. 6.

23 In a 2008 'Top X' web poll in The Netherlands, more than one in six people estimated that there were more than 20,000 women in the country wearing the veil. Almost a third thought there were 10,000, and almost half that there were more than 5,000. So almost all had a completely wrong estimate, as realistic estimates were that there were 200 to 400 at most (according to a study on such veils by Annelies Moors, quoted by Beatrice de Graaf, *supra* note 6, p. 33, n. 69). According to this reasoning, motorbike helmets and carnival masks should also be forbidden as a security risk (and sometimes have been forbidden in certain contexts since).

24 However, I remember that in the 1950s, girls were also long supposed to wear headscarves and prudish dresses, not only on Sundays, and to church, but on other occasions as well. Note that the adored Virgin Mary also covers her hair and head.

dressed in long clothes (derogatorily called 'desert garb' by natives). They were similarly perceived as 'threatening', and there were reports of a wide range of fake incidents in streets and buses, stations and trains, airports and planes. Where bystanders had reported them as 'suspicious' to the police, they had been arrested, interrogated and detained before being released again. Sikhs wearing turbans do not always attract such attention, as they are not immediately associated with terrorist threats in the West today. Even youngsters from other minority groups wearing baseball caps (often backwards), or 'gangsta rap' outfits, attract less attention.

The Symbolism of Child and Adult Behaviour

Age may also play a different role in non-Western societies, leading to situations that strike us as odd, but are not overly dramatic in themselves – if not immediately linked to other negative events. In a context of higher child mortality in less developed nations, toddlers are seen as vulnerable and often spoiled at first, particularly boys, since they will carry the family line, but may also provide for the elderly in old age – in the absence of any social security or pension system.

Dutch people also reported shock in the past when they saw Surinamese mothers offer an empty seat to a very small boy, rather than to an elderly lady standing nearby. Anthropologists and psychologists have noted that such cultural patterns are deeply connected to spontaneous emotional reactions.[25] They may become 'relatively autonomous', and persist in new generations and different situations, for instance after migration.

But soon, in some cultures, there is often a complete reversal in a boy's life. Suddenly, fathers begin to severely discipline them, in an authoritarian manner, even to the extent where they ultimately fail and lose control – particularly if there is a contrast between the strict culture at home and the lenient culture outside. Northern people also report shock today when they see (and hear) children play outside late at night, but they seem unaware that this may be a leftover habit

25 Agneta Fischer, *De zin en onzin van emoties* (Amsterdam: Bakker 2010).

from Southern climates and schedules as well, rather than a sign of parental irresponsibility.[26]

Moreover Dutch families, even of modest means, strive to assign their limited number of children private rooms for play and homework as well as they can. Immigrant families of modest means, by contrast, often have more children with less private space for themselves. They more frequently resort to playing outside, as they did in their country of origin, and in a different climate. It further contributes to youngsters and adolescents hanging around in groups, with nothing in particular to do.

This need not necessarily lead to mischief, but is often seen as such. According to one neighbourhood source, 'If a group of ten Dutch boys is standing there, that's too bad. But if a group of ten immigrant boys is standing there, they must be dealers, there is a suggestion of trouble and criminality. That is because of image making. Inhabitants immediately call the police'.[27] Even the inhabitants' dogs may similarly overreact to immigrants in the street, bark and growl, as they easily pick up the unease of their owners, or of the immigrants themselves.[28]

So immigrant youngsters are frowned upon if they wear a scarf or a beard, but also if they wear overly fancy clothes and accessories. They may be perceived as stepping over status lines, although it may be the logical reaction of a group that fears rejection and discrimination and longs for acceptance and respect from others. Dutch people also frequently express surprise that many immigrants seem to have a preference for fancy car types.[29] Similarly, the widely repeated story of

26 Dutch dinners usually start at six or seven, no later, after which the smaller children will soon be put to bed, and the evening commences for adults. Mediterranean dinners do often start at ten or eleven, particularly during the summer. I remember feeling shocked recently when I saw all children of a small town in Northern Italy playing outside *en masse* at . . . midnight.

27 De Gruijter et al., *supra* note 6, p. 38. For a more general discussion, see: Monique Koemans, *The war on anti-social behaviour*, Leiden univ.: Doctoral dissertation 2011.

28 In their countries of origin, many dogs do not have owners any more, freely roam the streets, are dirty and sometimes mean. The same holds to a lesser extent for cats. The intimacy of Westerners with their pets – perceived as 'unclean'– is surprising and repulsive to many immigrants.

29 Such as Mercedes. For average Dutch people, that is a rather expensive and fancy brand. But immigrants (particularly Turks) mostly buy them second-hand since they see them as solid because they are German and as large enough to carry a large family and/or plenty of goods, even over long stretches – sometimes all the way to the country of origin on holidays.

the newly arrived immigrant taking a taxi on his first visit to the social service may rest on a similar cultural misunderstanding.[30]

Finally, natives will frown upon the exterior of immigrants' houses, commenting even on the type of curtains and the absence of the familiar plants in the windowsills. 'It is just not normal'.[31] The sight of satellite dishes all around, used to capture Turkish, Arab or other satellite channels in their original language, also attracts adverse comment: 'It is not aesthetic', the natives would claim. 'Why don't they watch normal television like we do?'[32] It is true that immigrants might integrate more easily if they did, but in other circumstances (i.e. Dutch or German expatriates in Southern France), we might easily overlook such details.

The Symbolism of Churches and Mosques

Another question is of course that of churches and mosques. Since their youth, natives have been familiar with the omnipresence of Christian churches with towers, clocks and bells, and in some cases regular carillons in the centre of old towns. In a few cases, neighbours occasionally protest the noise they make, especially during the early morning hours. But throughout Europe, Christians are deserting the traditional religions, replacing them with highly personalized new forms of spirituality, or with mere secular humanism. Many churches have been closed, or transformed for other uses rather than torn down. Whenever there are proposals to turn one into a mosque, this provokes shocked reactions – even among secularists.

Yet while Christianity is shrinking in Europe (and worldwide), Islam is still expanding – particularly among the underprivileged overseas, albeit with the help of the overprivileged (i.e. Saudi Arabia

30 In their countries and regions of origin, reliable and frequent public transport is often unknown. They are completely unfamiliar with its maps and schedules. They are used to hailing cheap collective taxis or minibuses along the major thoroughfares. If they have to go to an unknown address on the outskirts of an unfamiliar city, they will often see no other choice than taking an individual taxi, and will in turn be flabbergasted by the price to be paid.

31 See, for instance, such observations in De Gruijter et al., *supra* note 6.

32 According to surveys, over 60% of Turks and over 40% of Moroccans watch television from their countries of origin on a daily basis. (2010 Fact book *Muslims in The Netherlands*, p. 22.)

and some other Gulf states). As long as Muslims worshipped unseen in back rooms or abandoned halls, this did not seem to be so much of a problem, though in France there was recently a row over the fact that (as these spaces often turned out to be to small) the surplus of praying believers tended to move into adjacent streets and squares – as they might have done in their countries of origin – which was experienced as 'untoward' by native neighbours.[33]

Yet the Muslim-financed building of large new mosques with characteristic oriental domes and minarets in major European cities has long run into strong local opposition. Even if they refrain from loud calls to prayer, through muezzin and loudspeakers. Somehow, the issue is highly emotional for many people, and experienced as symbolically sealing the takeover of the Old Continent by an alien culture. Voltaire – one founding father of the Enlightenment – had already seen this differently.[34]

So all these unfamiliar exterior signs stand out: the dress codes, the everyday behaviour of children and adults, the houses with their satellite dishes, the mosques. All this apparently also contributes to a vague impression of a 'foreign invasion'. At the same time, the natives do not have access to the internal mental world of the immigrants, which makes all this have some sense.

In this context, it is important to get one thing clear. Migration is never undertaken lightly; it always involves 'blood, sweat and tears' on the part of the first generation. Homesickness is only a trivial part. Moving to other regions over large distances, let alone to another country or another culture, is very high on the list of 'most stressful' life events, according to psychological research. Today, this is widely recognized for expatriates, but hardly for immigrants. Yet the only difference is that the former are usually much better equipped to deal with the social and psychological consequences than the latter.[35]

33 Who would not frown upon a Catholic procession, for instance. One such row in Paris was reported in the Dutch daily *De Volkskrant*, March 5, 2011.

34 He observed that there were plenty of Christian churches in Muslim lands, but hardly any Islamic mosques in Christian lands. See Dominique Moïsi, *The geopolitics of emotion* (New York: Anchor/Random House 2009), p. 74.

35 See, for instance, Audrey T. McCollum, *The trauma of moving* (Newbury Park, Cal.: Sage 1990); Adrian Furnham & Stephen Bochner, *Culture shock* (London: Routledge 1990).

Making Sense of the Social Environment

Let us continue our reasoning. All inputs – from sensory information to non-verbal behaviour – are thus used by us to continually 'sort and re-sort people' within the social environment around us: every day and hour, every minute and even second. Most of all, they help us in the ongoing social categorization and re-categorization of 'us' versus 'them'. 'Us' are social categories that we ourselves seem to belong to. Obvious ones such as age, gender and ethnicity, but also inferred ones such as native language, nationality, religion. Every unthinking use of the term 'we' or 'us' brutally chops humanity in half.

As a result of this, our identities are partly 'imposed' upon us by our personal histories and by others in the society around us, and only partly chosen and adopted freely. Identification means being or feeling 'one' with others. In theory, this seems to depend on a positive definition of what we are and want to be. In practice, however, research shows that it largely depends on a negative definition of what we are certainly *not* and cannot pretend to be.

Most of the time, youngsters do not want to seem old, straight people do not want to seem gay, and whites do not want to seem of mixed blood. Natives do not want to seem foreigners, believers do not want to seem heathen, democrats do not want to be seen as sympathizers of 'extremist' movements in the past or present. We are afraid of ambiguities in this domain. Animosities towards quintessential others and 'enemy images' thus form an essential part of our identities.

In this context, we continually engage in splitting operations: alternating mental and social ones. We are manichaeist: we have a tendency to want to reduce all shades of grey to whites and blacks. Redefinitions do regularly occur, however, without our even being aware of it. We are even able to make a complete flip-flop, if our social or national interests and alliances change. Enemy images changed almost overnight when the Second World War faded into a Cold War, or later when the monolithic communist bloc began to fall apart.[36]

36 In the former case, former allies Russia and China suddenly became our enemies, while Japan and (West) Germany suddenly became friends. In the latter case, after the emergence of the Sino-Soviet rift, the bloc disintegrated into a checker board of alliances with the two communist superpowers (some tried to take a 'neutral' stand, and even looked for assurances from the West).

The interaction between ourselves and enemies is further complicated by our naive 'folk psychology' and 'theory of mind' (TOM) gradually uncovered by psychologist Fritz Heider and successors.

They discovered that we all tend to 'attribute' seemingly obvious causes and consequences to events, as well as motives and goals to the actions of others. It is important to recognize that this is a highly spontaneous, automatic, but also somewhat arbitrary, process. Research in recent years has demonstrated that it is characterized by one dominant tendency: the shielding of the individual and the collective ego and self-esteem. That is to say: the appropriation of positive traits for ourselves, and the projection of negative traits onto quintessential others. That is to say, the creation and consolidation of a simple in-group versus out-group grid of superiority versus inferiority – usually primarily in a moral sense, but sometimes also in others. But we need to learn to reflect on them, and if need be, to correct ourselves.

In somewhat ambiguous everyday life, then, this tends to work roughly as follows: if I, or someone from my group or category, does something good or well, I automatically tend to 'attribute' this to my or our inherent characteristics. If I, or someone from my group or category, does something bad or poorly, however, I automatically tend to 'attribute' this to an exceptional concurrence of circumstances. By contrast, if someone from a quintessentially different – let alone antagonistic – group or category does something good or well, we automatically tend to 'attribute' this to an exceptional concurrence of circumstances. If someone from that group or category does something bad or poorly, we automatically tend to 'attribute' this to their inherent characteristics. These split-second processes of sorting and re-sorting continually help us to make high-speed sense of a complex and contradictory social environment.

This also holds for our own and opposite ideological groups. The word 'ideology' should be understood as a descriptive term, not as the negative value judgment it is taken to be by some. An ideology is simply an elaborate system of ideas that helps define our place in the universe and nature, in history and society, with regard to spirits and Gods, predecessors and descendants – and thereby guides our actions

here and now. We all have ideologies, political or religious or otherwise, although they are often complex and evolving.[37]

Our central political ideology of liberalism, with its free market and democratic elections, separation of powers and human rights, has battled fascism and communism for fifty or a hundred years. The Dutch national ideology of patriotism has successively battled with three much larger neighbouring states over several centuries. Our religious ideology of Christianity had battled Islam for over a millennium, by contrast: our history, literature and art are full of a residue of archetypical images of that animosity.

Today, as a consequence of recent labour migration, however, north-western Europe suddenly finds itself with a significant minority of Muslims – for the first time in its very long history. It is also the first minority in recent years, which has brought its own coherent and detailed ideology and mores with it, even if there are huge cultural differences between Turkish and Moroccan, Iranian and Somali, Surinamese and Indonesian Muslims. (Few people realize that the latter, and other South Asian nations are the largest Muslim countries in the world.) Yet their unprecedented refusal to simply assimilate may be experienced as a personal rebuff by us. Furthermore, we have often personally 'lived through' the difficult emancipation of women and gays during our own lifetimes: should we simply give this up again, in the name of cultural relativism and political correctness – because a significant group of Muslim or non-Western immigrants does not (yet) share those values?

This throws light on an additional element. In times of crisis and confrontation, we try to pump further meaning into the 'here and now' by putting it into a more articulate perspective. If we represent the past, present and future by little circles (which might intersect or not), the emphasis changes from a sequence of oOo to OoO. In the first instance, the present is aggrandized, the past and future

37 The Torah, Bible and Koran can easily be demonstrated to frequently contradict themselves: suggesting one rule here, and its complete opposite elsewhere (for instance, with regard to legitimating violence). At the same time, certain rules are common to many major religions, such as the 'golden rule' of 'ethical reciprocity': 'one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself'.

diminished. In the latter instance, the present is diminished, the past and future are aggrandized to make additional sense.

We also invent traditions, and selectively articulate past glory, not shame. This already begins with the strange nostalgia for the 1950s, as if those years were happy and problem-free. A past period of flourish during earlier centuries is implicitly used as a yardstick by both sides (the 'Golden Age' with its East Indies Company for the Dutch, the medieval empires with their world-class knowledge and wealth for Muslims).[38] A future period of degeneration is emphasized as an appalling threat (a nation taken over by foreigners for the Dutch, a great civilization disappearing for Muslims).

Substantial Grudges about Bad Manners and Vandalism

No one questions today the fact that too many immigrants from too different other cultures flowing into the country to stay has led to major frictions and grave problems. For a long time, politicians and policy-makers largely presumed these problems would spontaneously die down and go away after some time. They did, not only on the political left, which is widely blamed, but also on the right, it should be added. In retrospect, the unprecedented 'purple' (red plus blue, left plus right) 'broad consensus' coalitions of the later 1990s in The Netherlands did indeed mark the high point of relative 'insouciance'.

The WTC attacks of 2001 thoroughly changed the climate throughout the Western world, however. In The Netherlands, the killings of anti-Muslim politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo van Gogh, followed by the rise of new anti-immigrant politicians Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders, marked the watershed years.[39] Today, there is a broad consensus that immigration problems should be identified and

38 Remember the revealing slip of the tongue of the long-time Prime Minister, Jan Peter Balkenende, who called for a revival of the enterprising mentality of the East Indies Company – apparently unaware that it widely engaged in robbing and plundering, whereas its twin, the West Indies Company, in turn got rich through the slave trade.

39 Fortuyn was killed by an animal activist, though, and only Van Gogh by an Islamic radical. Yet first Verdonk and later Wilders needed high-security protection, as did Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

confronted head-on. Suddenly, a long laundry list of grudges is recognized to be legitimate. Let us briefly review some.[40]

A number of complaints by native citizens focuses on different types of nuisances attributed to 'foreigners', particularly Muslims and other non-Western immigrants: presumed incapability or unwillingness to 'simply' learn ordinary Dutch, making everyday communication unnecessarily difficult (as well as finding work, supposedly); unfamiliarity with the unwritten rules of everyday interaction in Europe; a lack of polite discipline in queuing in shops and for public transport, for instance; loud talk or music, screaming and fights (also outside immigrant coffee houses or 'shoarma' restaurants, late at night).[41]

There are other complaints as well. Public space in many non-Western countries, in outlying neighbourhoods of the big cities, and particularly in outlying regions of origin (such as the Rif in Morocco and Anatolia in Turkey that we have already mentioned) seems to be more plentiful and less closely managed. It is not so much considered public space or a 'commons' to be respected there, but rather a non-private waste land that is not actively claimed or guarded by anyone in particular – as in the West at an earlier stage. Immigrants may take related habits with them, and only adapt over time.

The environmental awareness that has carefully been nurtured over the last few decades within the highly urbanized areas here is often lacking 'over there'. Hence, complaints by Dutch natives that staircases and sidewalks adjacent to homes are not kept properly and that waste and garbage is more easily deposited just outside homes or simply dumped in the streets. 'They put out their bins too early.' (In many municipalities, mandatory hours have been introduced in recent years.) 'A car driver has just emptied his ashtray in the street.' Children and youngsters do not sufficiently respect plants and gardens, parks

40 One inventory among many is the recent study *Een vreemde in eigen land* (A stranger in one's own country) by Marjan de Gruijter and others, which we have already quoted. It is based on a limited number of qualitative interviews with angry native citizens in problem neighbourhoods about immigrants and the perceived (lack of) action by the authorities.

41 Implicitly claimed to be more irritating than for equivalent Dutch bars and fast food outlets, which are thought to obey the rules.

and playgrounds, it is said. 'They' treat them as just wild outgrowths rather than well-kept greens, and all too easily vandalize them.

Some non-Western immigrants also bring along bad manners in everyday traffic, according to some Dutch natives. Groups may block the sidewalk rather than step aside for passers-by. Youngsters on mopeds or scooters drive too fast in residential areas. Drivers park double, or block the road while talking to each other, or when taking things in and out of the car. Rules, in general, seem to be broken more easily. 'And if one makes an observation about this, it provokes insults and threats. It is scary.'[42]

Substantial Grudges about Gender Roles and Young Males

Somehow, the psychologically salient issue of gender roles and family 'honour' has come to occupy a central place, particularly in the relations with Muslims – or, one should rather say, 'with people from predominantly Muslim countries and cultures', as, upon closer inspection, the issue often seems to be rooted more in the non-Western cultures in question than in the religious texts themselves that are routinely invoked (by both sides, one should add).[43] Why has this become such a big issue?

According to the most famous and almost classical research project comparing cultures, Dutch (and Scandinavians) have the lowest scores on the dimension of gender inequality.[44] Many non-Western immigrants, by contrast, come from countries and regions characterized by high gender inequality. Girls are often constantly supervised by the elderly males of their own families, and submitted to all kinds of arbitrary rules.

In The Netherlands, there have been controversies over mixed swimming lessons, medical treatment of female patients by male

42 De Gruijter et al., *supra* note 6.

43 As there is an ongoing debate as to the extent to which these gender rules (1) are categorically imposed by the unequivocal text of the Koran, (2) are ambiguous in their original wording, traditional translation and standard interpretation, or (3) can be re-interpreted for the context of non-Islamic countries and/or modern times. Of course, it is widely claimed that the text should be taken and obeyed literally. But until recent times, a majority of Christians claimed this was also true for both the Old and the New Testaments (and a minority still does).

44 See: Geert Hofstede, *Culture's consequences* (Beverly Hills: Sage 1980) and *Cultures and organizations – Software of the mind* (London: McGraw-Hill 1991). He calls this the 'femininity' (versus 'masculinity') dimension.

doctors, and even a highly publicized incident of an adult man refusing to shake the hand of an adult female (who happened to be a noteworthy anti-immigration politician at that). Another important dimension of cultural difference is that of individualism versus collectivism, also linked to matters of 'face' and 'respect', because an even graver problem is that of so-called 'honour killings' of girls who had refused or deserted arranged marriages, thereby supposedly bringing shame on their families.

Many non-Western cultures, and particularly Islamic ones, are still characterized by machismo or a cult of strong masculinity, rooted in entirely different contexts.[45] Adolescent males who are still insecure over their sexual identities often tend to overcompensate by fiercely rejecting homosexuality. In their countries of origin, homosexuality is often practised but not acknowledged. In Western countries (groups of) immigrant youngsters often indulge in taunting and bashing gays. This has become a real problem, particularly in Dutch cities where gays had meanwhile become used to widespread social acceptance.

At the same time, such young males may implicitly feel isolated or rejected, and tend to flock together in public spaces. They may come to compete with each other in provocative or aggressive behaviour, and finish by 'stepping over the line'. In immigrant countries of origin, they are often held in check by other males in the public space, rather than by uniformed police. Violence within families, neighbourhoods and between strangers is more common there and often seen as a mere fact of life. This also used to be the case in the West, but today, native citizens have become used to a highly pacified public space, and many do not even know how to effectively deal with trespassers on their own.

Since rule-breakers remain uncorrected, they may go from bad to worse. Dominating girls may lead to exploiting girls.[46] Drug use may

45 Id.

46 Think of the issue of 'lover boys' faking it and tricking under-age girls into prostitution. The issue is real. But there was a major controversy over former schoolgirl Maria Mosterd claiming in a bestseller book to have been flagrantly abused in such a way over a long period of time, without her mother or her teachers ever having taken notice *(Echte mannen eten geen kaas)*. Crime journalist Hendrik Jan Korterink later debunked the story as largely invented *(Echte mannen eten wel kaas)*. A March 2012 moral panic and media hype was about 'banga' or 'easy slut' lists that minority students were said to circulate in schools.

lead to drug dealing, which is a tempting way to make an easy buck for conspicuous consumption – particularly if other routes appear blocked. Street robberies may lead to hold-ups or burglaries.

There is no question that new immigrant groups are much more involved in such violent crimes (and always have been, throughout the world and history). Young Moroccans are four times and young Turks twice as much suspected of crimes as natives – although the differences tend to disappear as they get older.[47] Natives complain that the tracking and punishment of such criminals are ineffective and soft, and demand that such people be sent back to their 'countries of origin' – even if they have meanwhile (also) acquired Dutch nationality.[48]

But there is another side to this too. A recent analysis by legal experts of well over 500 cases judged in 10 different courts in The Netherlands found that suspects with a 'foreign appearance' have a fivefold higher chance of getting an unconditional prison sentence than an alternative sentence or a mere fine. If they do not speak Dutch, this chance is even twenty times higher. It made no difference whether they expressed remorse or not. Here again, the larger part of these differences is not the result of explicit or conscious discrimination, but of implicit or unconscious discrimination, of automatic associations and stereotypes about 'us' and 'them'.[49]

Some Additional Observations on Questions of Immigration

Native grudges are aggravated by an obvious absurdity, one could add. The non-Western immigrants have been 'invited' or allowed in by those higher up the social ladder: politicians and civil servants (or even employers seeking cheap labour), now taking a facile 'cosmopolitan' or 'multicultural' pose. But those higher ups are largely well shielded from trouble, by subordinates in the workplace and by spacious, well-serviced and secure neighbourhoods at home.

47 Factbook *Muslims in The Netherlands*, p. 25. *NRC Handelsblad* weekeditie, Sept. 13, 2010 carried interesting comparative graphs of how such criminality subsides with age, for all ethnic groups.

48 De Gruijter et al., *supra* note 6, p. 132.

49 Research by Hilde Wermink and two colleagues from Leyden University. Reported in the digital newsletter of the daily *NRC Handelsblad*, March 14, 2012 and its weekly print edition March 19, 2012.

Those higher-ups may have both the material means and the education to confront such problems. But the problems are literally dumped on the doorstep of those already worst off in society, who are portrayed as bigots and left to fend for themselves. No wonder they have grudges and turn to populist parties. Anthropologist Giselinde Kuipers speaks of a kind of 'social curdling' in this context, where two ingredients of society separate.[50]

But there is worse. Some civil servants and social service functionaries had become so afraid of being accused of discrimination, some natives charge, that they tended to 'lean over backwards' to favour immigrants, in particular refugees, but people may not notice the distinction. Instances of such favour include assigning houses with low rents, or even subsidizing basic furniture and appliances for newcomers (all unavailable to locals or their offspring), subsidizing 'black' (i.e. immigrant-dominated) schools, even extra lessons or club memberships for immigrant children, day outings or complete holidays. There were several rows over supposed subsidies for a boating trip or even overseas travel, for problem youths and even prison inmates. 'Today, immigrant groups go so far as to demand their own homes for the elderly', natives claim. All this has gone much too far, they say.[51]

But some further observations should be made here. The first relates to the widespread suggestion that most non-Western immigrants create trouble, which is obviously true to a certain extent. But there is an interesting phenomenon of terminology and definitions here. We have noted that de Gruijter et al. (2010) had qualitative interviews with people from problem neighbourhoods. Several respondents said they did of course know examples of non-natives who spoke the language well, held normal jobs, and fitted in easily with their Dutch

50 In her acceptance speech (*oratie*) as professor at Erasmus University in Rotterdam. In their *Diploma-democratie*, Mark Bovens and Anchrit Wille have noted that meanwhile Parliament has become increasingly dominated by university-educated people. *NRC Handelsblad* weekeditie, Jan. 24 and Febr. 7, 2011.

51 So far, there seems to be at least one concrete project for people of Hindustani (Surinamese) origin. Of course, Dutch people have long preferred to join homes where their own group is well represented (region, culture of origin, faith, etc.). The key question is whether those homes cost more to the taxpayer, or whether the extra burden (if there is one) is carried by the people themselves.

environment – after which they added something like: 'I do not consider them non-natives (allochtonen), of course'.[52]

Thus the category of non-natives who are *not* linked to problems is often mentally (and socially) made to disappear, thereby further inflating the link between immigrants and problems. There seems to be an extreme plasticity of terms such as 'immigrants', 'non-natives' and 'foreigners': the problems created by 10% of non-Western immigrants may easily be made to apply to 90% of them. Another interesting observation by de Gruijter et al. is that in their expectations about immigrants, natives implicitly use the asymmetrical frame of 'hosts' receiving 'guests': 'we welcomed them here, but they do not behave well'.

This brings us to another related question: what happens to those second-generation children of non-natives who prove rather well-adapted, who acquire a good education, find decent work, start a career, find a partner, found a family and have children? Most of them move out of the original problem neighbourhood, out of sight of the grumbling natives, and dissolve into a 'normal' neighbourhood elsewhere. This once again draws our attention to questions of 'selective articulation', of high and low visibility, of over- and under-representation of trouble.

A Catalyst of Wider Structural Problems and Unease?

There is another hypothesis that has been formulated by some social observers. The unease is particularly prominent among lower middle-class and lower-class native groups that somehow also feel threatened by a wide range of other structural changes. Immigration is just the most visible part, for which one can plausibly assign personal blame, upwardly, to politicians and policy-makers, and downwardly, to an underclass of maladapted newcomers themselves.

During the late 19th century, similar trends of internal migration, in the wake of large-scale industrialization, already gave rise to the emergence of social science as such, and in particular to sociology, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and on the European

52 Section 6.3, pp. 89/90. Also see pp. 40, 105, 145/146.

continent. French pioneer Émile Durkheim discussed anomie or normlessness in society and the importance of collective representations to hold social groups together. German pioneer Max Weber discussed alienation as a result of ongoing rationalization and bureaucratization, and also the rise of charismatic movements and leaders in occasional reaction to it. Austrian pioneer Sigmund Freud coined the phrase *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Civilization and its discontents).

Today, such observations about anomie, alienation and similar phenomena are repeated, displaced and compressed, in the arch-opposition between two mythical eras. On the one hand, the Second World War, during the 1940s, and particularly post-war reconstruction when stern education and hard work prevailed and traditional values still seemed to make sense. Nostalgia for the 1950s has become a hidden reference point. On the other hand, there was the cultural revolution with the arrival of the baby boomers on the scene during the 1960s, with the subsequent *Umwertung aller Werte* in the 1970s: the triumph of the consumer culture under the flag of post-material values. Interestingly, the 'no nonsense' restoration of the 1980s and the embrace of neo-liberalism during the 1990s are hardly ever blamed, although they clearly also contributed to our current travails.

Meanwhile, there was a whole range of non-ideological trends that profoundly changed our lives: the continuing growth of the population, its concentration in ever more limited spaces through urbanization, the split between glamorous city centres with their department stores and nightlife, on the one hand, and the dull neighbourhoods and suburbs with uniform houses and blocks that were massive, dense and grey, on the other hand. This also brought a kind of psychological disinvestment from the 'no man's land' of the large anonymous public spaces in between. A desertion that tended to spread from there, and had to be compensated by additional security measures (more below).

Similarly, extended multi-generation families have shrunk to nuclear families, which have shrunk to one-parent families, which have shrunk to one person households. Some such people feel increasingly isolated and alone in this context: particularly the elderly, the sick, and the unemployed. Some youngsters resort to alcohol or drugs, creating further problems in the public realm. Many elderly remain glued to

their television sets at home.[53] Familiar celebrities become stand-ins for intimate contacts (a phenomenon known as 'para-social interaction'). But lonely citizens are even afraid in their own homes and barricade themselves at night, expecting no help from their neighbours if anything untoward happens.

As a result of such changes, and even without the arrival of strangers from abroad, everyday manners in public spaces have deteriorated. When citizens make an observation, or try to correct someone in the public realm – people say – they risk abuse and threats, intimidation and violence. A sociological study speaks of the spreading of boorish and loutish behaviour (*verhuftering*): not only among the lower class, but also among the middle class.[54] Citizens react by retreating further into their private sphere, and the better-off into gated communities. They do not see how the tide could be turned.

Theories of social unrest have long indicated that the most tricky situations are those where a period of continuing improvement is immediately followed by a short period of deterioration, because upon such occasions, the discrepancy between expectations and realizations may grow very quickly and even exponentially. This is known as the J-curve (inverted, and on its back).[55]

The first decade of the new millennium seems to have these characteristics, at least for the Western world. Suddenly, people realize that their children may not automatically be better off than themselves. There is resentment over these trends, followed by attempts to redefine social hierarchies: by demoting some (the political class and immigrants), and promoting others (the 'ordinary' native citizens).

53 The television set, and recurring familiar faces on it, are increasingly experienced as additional family members. Gossip and other glossy magazines give us a peek into their personal lives. The imagined close personal bonds with them spill over into public space upon premature tragic deaths and dramatic funeral ceremonies (Lady Di, Pim Fortuyn, André Hazes). News soaps and reality TV do both help to bridge the gap. See, for instance, Irene Costera Meijer & Maarten Reesink (eds.), *Reality soap* (Amsterdam: Boom 2000); and Jaap van Ginneken, *Verborgen verleiders*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Boom 2011).

54 Bas van Stokkum, *Wat een hufter! – Ergernis, lichtgeraaktheid en maatschappelijke verruwing* (Amsterdam: Boom 2010), Ch. 6.

55 About the original theory, see: James Chowning Davies (ed.), *When men revolt and why* (New York/London: Free Press/Collier MacMillan 1971). Or: Ted Robert Gurr, *Why men rebel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1971).

People also turn to seemingly charismatic leaders, who pretend to know a way out. There are new heroes and martyrs.

Thus until recently we may have become wealthier than ever, but also more fearful than ever, as there seems to be an accelerated ideological disorientation on other levels and a sense of loss of control. The state used to be the central location for decision-making, but it seems to have sold out to globalization, internationalization, Europeanization, where the declining Northerners and Westerners are in the process of losing out to the rising Southerners and Easterners. Within the framework of Marshall McLuhan's much-touted 'global village', we also seem to lose our 'sense of place'.[56]

An Intermezzo on the Ambiguity of Social Reality

At this point, let us remind ourselves that social reality may present itself as clear-cut, but is usually infinitely ambiguous. We use seemingly self-evident frames to 'make sense' of it. A familiar example is that an optimist automatically sees the glass as half full, a pessimist as half empty. So we do not live directly in social and cultural reality, but in our *representations* of it – and that has entirely different implications. We weave events into our habitual narratives. New issues may thus come and go, but their true meaning is subject to ongoing negotiation.

Some social problems are implicitly defined as an inevitable 'fact of life' that will never disappear (i.e. inequality or prostitution). Some other social problems are, by contrast, defined as going 'from bad to worse', and in need of an urgent solution (i.e. the over-expansion of credit). Who are the heroes, who are the victims in such narratives? Who is said to be the cause of a social problem, who is responsible for having it addressed? Have the 'war on poverty' and the 'war on drugs' really solved much, or have they just displaced problems from one spot to the next?[57]

56 Joshua Meyrowitz, *No sense of place* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press 1986).

57 A highly stimulating early elaboration of these themes can be found in the works of Murray Edelman: a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin, and head of the Institute for Research on Poverty. He published illuminating studies like *The symbolic uses of politics, Politics as symbolic action, Political language* and *Constructing the political spectacle.* William Gamson did further research on how citizens discussed major issues, in *Talking politics.* See: Van Ginneken, *Strijden om de publieke opinie*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Boom 2008), pp. 182–185.

Similar things can be said about the 'war on terror' and the call for a 'halt to immigration'. First of all it is important to recognize that there is no panacea; it is unrealistic to expect simple and straightforward solutions for complex and very convoluted problems. It will take the sustained efforts of governments on all levels and of non-governmental organizations, from decision-makers to ordinary citizens, to address the 'culture of fear', in general, and the fear of some cultural others, in particular.

But secondly, it should be noted that policy-makers and managers continually tend to regress to extremely simplified images of problems and solutions, causes and effects, to illusions of the day (*waan van de dag*). Those images are usually derived from the physical world: there is a tendency to reify factors, make them into 'things', for instance unwelcome opinions and attitudes, which can supposedly be easily measured and then changed. There is a tendency to adhere to a billiard ball view of causation: one cause is supposed to have one major effect, rather than a whole range of minor and side effects, petering out into minute and almost invisible ones. There is a tendency to implicitly stick to a mechanical view: with a proportional relation between policy input and output, rather than exponential or even non-linear ones, where all details may count.

Thirdly, and most of all, we imply that causes and effects can easily be separated at all. In real life, however, the most persistent problems are caused by highly intractable loops, where effects may become their own causes.[58] Change may become entirely blocked through 'negative' feedback loops, for instance, where every movement is immediately neutralized by a reaction. Change may alternatively become uncontrollable through 'positive' feedback loops, where minor movements are amplified to huge waves. All this is particularly true for collective moods, climates and cultures alternately fed by upward spirals of confidence and trust, or downward spirals of fear and suspicion.[59]

58 See: Richard Farson, *Management of the absurd – Paradoxes in leadership* (New York: Touchstone 1996).

59 More in Jaap van Ginneken, *Collective behavior and public opinion* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum 2003).

The Limits of Security

Recent decades have also shown the gradual emergence of a whole panoply of new approaches to security in the public realm, both within the Anglo-Saxon world and on the European continent. There is a call for more 'blue in the streets', that is uniformed and highly visible police, on mountain bikes and Segways, armed with mobile phones and computers, ready to intervene, sometimes in couples, rather than having them complete forms and reports behind desks in their offices.

The emergence of a whole new army of voluntary or professional helpers was also notable: from school crossing patrols to traffic wardens, as well as private security guards around shops and malls. In many towns, it has been made easier to draw the attention of the city council to problems or vandalism, through email and websites. One recent newspaper report made an inventory of no less than 14 (!) national 'snitching lines' in The Netherlands.[60]

There is also the whole question of architecture. Pre-war small-scale building bred 'natural' social surveillance of the limited open spaces in between; post-war large-scale building creates huge gaps that increasingly demand artificial technological surveillance through cameras and microphones – linked to distant central monitoring rooms. New analytical techniques immediately signal 'abnormal' sounds and images, zoom in on them or dispatch help.

The City, London and England have become European forerunners in this respect, with huge amounts of closed circuit TV cameras. Face recognition and automated tracking of fleeing trespassers from camera to camera are under development. Paris and France, in turn, are in the process of tripling camera surveillance in the space of only two years' time.[61] Producers and marketers of the gear approach municipalities with complete equipment. They also push a re-labelling of the systems from 'video-surveillance' to the friendlier sounding 'video-protection', 'video-tranquillity' or 'video-prevention'.[62]

60 Daily *De Pers*, Jan. 20, 2011.

61 Nice on the Côte d'Azur will soon be the second most supervised city in the country. Monaco is already far ahead, and aims for the lowest criminality rates on the continent. (Street criminality, that is. Tax criminality is an altogether different affair, of course.)

62 Oliver Zanetta & Christophe Rigaud, documentary *Camera city* (2010), broadcast on LCP (the channel of the French parliament), Febr. 6, 2011.

But there are downsides to the rise of such an urban security culture. First, they often lead to a lowering of vandalism and crime in some areas, but a subsequent rising elsewhere: they simply push troublemakers elsewhere. Secondly, they may reassure some citizens there and then, but may also contribute to a generalized climate of fear in some way. It has long been known that a street at night with rolled down grey metal shutters all around may paradoxically invite more vandalism than one embellished with vulnerable flowers in plant boxes.[63] Thirdly, the measures may further push citizens to dissociate themselves from the active guarding of law and order, to take a purely passive 'consumer' attitude.

Finally, this may further contribute to unrealistic expectations of what authorities can accomplish on their own. Such observations seem to be confirmed by a small-scale survey on such security measures in nightlife areas of two Dutch provincial towns.[64] Fear breeds security measures, but security measures also breed fear. The same holds for the generalization of security locks, movement detection lights, burglar alarms, panic buttons and the like – in and around the house.

Building and Managing Communities

There is progress, however. There was a time when authorities and managers generated ever more rules, but kept at a distance from problem neighbourhoods and were largely out of touch and invisible. Fortunately, this has changed in recent years; there is a shift to a 'hands on' approach.

Municipalities often assign contact persons or even 'neighbourhood managers'. The former building societies, now privatized 'corporations', have re-instated 'house masters' and/or concierges for large

63 More about such 'environmental psychology' in Jaap van Ginneken, *Waarom doet U dat?! – Beïnvloeding van gedrag in het dagelijks leven* (Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger 1992), and the subsequent 1995 series of NCRV television programs with the same title inspired by it.

64 Irina van Aalst & Tim Schwanen, 'Omstreden nachten – Angstgevoelens van jongeren in de uitgaansgebieden van Arnhem en Apeldoorn', in Hans Boutellier et al. (eds.), *Omstreden ruimte* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep publ./*Tijdschrift voor Sociale vraagstukken* 2009), Ch. 9, pp. 157–178. Also see Hans Boutellier's earlier, *De veiligheidsutopie* (Amsterdam: Boom 2006).

complexes. They sometimes organize (common) 'porch or stairway talks' between neighbours, to create some consensus about (the interpretation and keeping of) rules. Police have assigned special neighbourhood cops (*wijk-agenten*), to stay better acquainted with local people and conditions. They are sometimes assisted by neighbourhood watches, from adults to youngsters. On occasion, elderly males with authority (*buurt-vaders*) are made to play an additional role.

At one point, there was much talk of 'community building' in problem neighbourhoods, but maybe too much was initially expected of it. Youth and social workers tried to facilitate meeting places and events: to keep adolescents off the streets, and to get adults talking across ethnic lines. Local associations sought out local shops to sponsor their events. Every other early summer, European or World soccer championships result in popular street parties – particularly if The Netherlands is in the final selection (with the help of a significant number of ethnic minority players). If ethnic minorities were also involved in such majority street events, that was of course a bonus. As research shows, non-Western immigrants identify more easily with their concrete immediate neighbourhood or town than with the larger abstract country of residence.[65]

Further research indicates, however, that even today very few native Dutchmen are closely acquainted with non-Western immigrants in their own neighbourhoods, and vice versa. The exceptions are mostly immediate neighbours (in a limited number of cases) and colleagues at work. In those contexts, the contacts are not gratuitous but have a practical ground. Intermarriage also plays a positive role, albeit marginal.

It is thus wishful thinking to suppose that intercultural friendship networks will easily spring up out of the blue. Observers have noted that it is not even the point. The aims should be much more modest, for the time being, namely to just facilitate normal polite interactions and 'sidewalk contacts' so that minor inconveniences can be discussed and resolved, rather than having them evolve into major sources of friction and conflict, provoking fear and anxiety. The empowerment

65 As opposed to the country of origin, its culture and religion. See: 2010 Factbook *Muslims in The Netherlands* , p. 30.

of women on both sides, particularly those with children, may create useful *trait d'unions*.

Finally, it might be useful to seek more input from liberal professions in neighbourhoods about how both ordinary natives and immigrants deal with the current climate of mutual fear – on the one hand, health professionals such as general practitioners, neighbourhood nurses and other service providers and on the other hand, mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists.

Such input would help answer questions about the flagrant underuse of mental health facilities by immigrant problem youths, which further contributes to their over-representation in crime and prison statistics.[66]

The Central Problem of Poorly Educated Young Immigrant Males

Analysis of the grudges against non-Western immigrants shows several things. First of all, the fears of natives focus most of all on one rather limited category, namely poorly educated adolescent males (including pre- and post-adolescent ones). Most vandalism and crime is attributed to them, and the statistics seem to bear this out. Secondly, many other fears (regarding women, gays, etc.) are closely related to them. Thirdly, they are most feared when they are hanging around in pairs or groups, which seem to spur each other on in 'testing the limits'. The radicals making threats also belong to this category (even though some female adolescents do occasionally join in as well).

Hence, this category seems to play a disproportionately large role in both problem behaviour and in natives' fears, even if the emphasis has shifted over the last five decades from some ethnic or religious groups to others. Dealing with these categories of poorly educated

66 Psychologist Albert Boon, for one, contributed a series of interesting articles to journals such as *Kind en Adolescent*, the *Epidemiologisch Bulletin* and the *Maandblad Geestelijke Gezondheid* in 2010. These were about minority youths and their parents from mixed neighborhoods hardly ever seeking mental help if they have problems, whereas majority youths and their parents from 'white' neighbourhoods do. A 2004 dissertation by Coby Vreugdenhil had already zoomed in on the fact that a huge proportion of prisoners belong to an ethnic minority, are relatively young, have untreated psychiatric problems and may therefore become repeat offenders. See: daily *NRC Next*, Sept. 23, 2010 & May 10, 2012.

male youths, therefore, is and should remain a priority on all levels of policymaking: neighbourhood, local, regional and national.[67]

It is important to recognize, however, that this problem behaviour is also both a cause *and* a consequence of discrimination, as it seems to legitimize it *and* seems to be legitimated by it. As long as even a significant part of such groups feel they do not get a fair and equal chance in society, they will persist more easily in showing troublesome behaviour. Racism research shows that half of all Moroccans and Turks claim to have experienced discrimination over the last year alone. Most natives do, of course, claim they do not discriminate: maybe only a minority does so unambiguously, but a majority may well do so unconsciously.[68]

Types of discrimination vary, but on the whole they do not appear to recede very much. More importantly, even proven cases of discrimination (refusal of admission to discotheques, of rent of rooms or houses, of invitations for internship or job interviews, etc.) almost never lead to sanctions, and when they do very little publicity is given to them – even in relevant minority media. Apparently, authorities fear that this will only aggravate native grudges. It does send the wrong signal to immigrant youngsters, however, and fails to bring them 'back into the fold'. It is a clear example of a self-perpetuating feedback loop, which needs to be broken up.

There are also a number of 'blind' mechanisms in image-making that contribute to an undue emphasis on incidents and problems with precisely these poorly educated adolescent male immigrants. If most of the reporting on immigration issues is on those negative tendencies, and on them alone, this slants the picture and further contributes to fear. What about immigrants' babies and toddlers? What about girls and women – with scarves or without? What about the middle-aged

67 One interesting project would be to try and track down people that once belonged to such typical 'troublemaker' groups twenty years ago, and had run-ins with the law. Have they remained marginal, or have they somehow succeeded in 'wisening up', after finally finding a job and starting a family? What has made this easier or more difficult for them?

68 Only a small part of these cases are reported to the police, because victims feel there will be no effective follow-up. There is no central registration of complaints. Wiens Diensbach, Jaap van Donselaar, Peter R. Rodriques (eds.), *Monitor rassendiscriminatie 2009* (Rotterdam: Landelijk Expertisecentrum van Artikel 1 2010), Ch. 1.

and the elderly? What about the steady growth of the category of immigrant youngsters who *do* complete an education and are successfully starting a career? They turn up occasionally, but too little.

Until relatively recently, successful immigrant individuals also received little media exposure. Over the last half a dozen years, however, many talents have been 'discovered' that also serve as positive examples of what can be achieved in spite of all the odds. It is no longer soccer players and other sports people alone, but also artists, intellectuals and business people. At the same time, however, native citizens have remained largely unaware of how many of their own traditional cultural icons – dead or alive – have in fact also been born abroad and/or have immediate forebears overseas.[69]

Thus, it is important to emphasize that immigration from other cultures creates problems that have no easy solution. But equally, considerable numbers of such immigrants work hard to overcome obstacles on a daily basis and have families and jobs just as the natives do. This is a story that is not told often enough. There is not only stagnation, there is true progress on some scores. Second generation immigrants are in the process of catching up with natives in higher education, for instance, particularly girls.[70]

A Further Word on the Key Role of Media and Language

We have already seen that a key role in the amplification of fear in recent decades seems to have been played by the media – albeit, again, largely unintentionally. Traditional and classical media materials often continue to have ethnocentric overtones, but that has long been a given.[71] A series of (not directly related) other trends seem to have

69 It might be interesting to have someone make a 'top hundred' inventory of such household names. In France, similar inventories have demonstrated that a considerable part of the widely accepted heroes of Gallic culture were in fact foreigners or of immediate foreign descent.

70 *Jaarrapport Integratie 2010* (CBS). Quoted in *Forum Magazine*, Dec. 2010.

71 Classical children's books and comic books often date back to the days of colonialism and segregation, and the same themes do often continue to run through Hollywood blockbuster movies. The global media and news industry is heavily dominated by Western frames. The same holds for education in history and geography, in spite of the marginal changes that have been made. (Details in my books *Screening difference* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2007), and the earlier *Understanding global news* (London: Sage 1998).)

unnoticeably crossed critical thresholds, however, around the turn of the millennium. But we have noted at the end of the first essay that a whole range of separate quantitative and gradual changes seem to have coalesced, and led to a qualitative and fundamental leap. As a result, the distant world 'out there' seems to have become much more dramatically intertwined with the everyday world 'closer by', leading to fundamental changes in the way the everyday world is subjectively experienced.

The language about immigrants has fundamentally changed. In order to keep up with the barrage of lively sounds and images, also from marketing, news language had to become more colourful. One way to capture the imagination and evoke reality in a salient way, 'to get it behind the eyes and between the ears', is to invent new words or neologisms (often a provocative new combination of old terms). In previous years, this had been the privileged domain of stand-up comedians in broadcast sketches.

As newspapers began to carry ever more columns with articulate opinions, such chroniclers joined the fray. Finally, populist politicians emerging after the turn of the millennium (from Pim Fortuyn to Geert Wilders) discovered that 'creative language' sticks. The annual inventories by language historian Ewoud Sanders and others show that there was a steady stream of influential new words, with regard to social problems, in general, and non-Western immigrants, in particular. 'Wordsmith' Jan Kuitenbrouwer, in turn, recently took pains to dissect the anti-immigrant discourse and rhetoric of populist Geert Wilders in great and telling detail.[72]

Such studies also illustrate that populist politicians have also learned through recent experience that 'pushing the envelope' will

72 Some neologisms from Sanders' annual overview articles in *NRC Handelsblad*, and subsequent books (published by Veen & Prometheus in Amsterdam): Aboutalisme, Apologie-verbod, Breek-team, Calamiteiten-spreekuur, Coma-drinken, CT infobox (counter-terrorism databank), Dreig Dvd, Gedoog-regering, Geiten-neuker (Goat-fucker, for Muslim), Happy slapping, Jan de Loodgieter (Joe the Plumber), Keet-drinken, Kopvodden-taks, Lawaai-wake (after the murder of Theo van Gogh), Lokhomo/Lokjood, Luistercamera, Nederland van Ooit (ascribed to Ayaan Hirsi Ali), Opvoed-poli, Pracht-wijk, Smul-bos (for non-natives), Tokkie-toets, Uitbreidingsmoeheid (EU), Voice-bom (against false alarms). Also see: Jan Kuitenbrouwer, *De woorden van Wilders – En hoe ze werken* (Amsterdam: Bezige Bij 2010).

bring automatic media attention. So they invent ever new, quasi-colourful insults that keep breaking ever new taboos. Some of these are metaphorical. New studies of political language in the United States have shown that such 'creative language' is particularly effective in capturing the mind, in pre-defining issues, in setting the tone for debate and the mood of the country.[73]

The problem with such communication trends is that they derive from macro-changes in society and technology. They cannot easily be confronted by their opponents, let alone wished away. One can only draw attention to them, and try to enlist journalists for a further consideration of both their causes and consequences: from journalism schools to professional societies. The Dutch national journalists association NVJ already had a 'working group' on 'media and migrants', but it is useful to keep returning to these themes.[74]

Hence, we have to find our way between two extremes. On the one hand it is true that immigration of non-Westerners has long been taken too lightly. Issues of integration should be addressed head-on. On the other hand, The Netherlands and the European Union see themselves as tolerant towards other cultures, and as the original homelands of universal human rights. Border and admission policies should be humane. The obsession with 'stranger danger' should not be allowed to get the upper hand.

73 Drew Westen, *The political brain* (New York: Perseus/Public Affairs 2008); George Lakoff, *The political mind* (New York: Penguin 2009). Also see: JvG, 'Campagnes en het politieke brein', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, June 3, 2010.

74 See the essay 'Een gekleurde kijk?!' I wrote for the NVJ Bureau Media en Migranten, on <www.beeldvorming.net>.

American Society, 9/11 and the War on Terror

Attitudes towards Violence and Retaliation

The United States is widely considered to be the leader of the Western alliance. Yet its experience with war and violence differs profoundly from that of its allies in Europe and elsewhere. Its territory long seemed to be invulnerable to foreign enemies, but the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, in New York, changed all that. The country had some experience with home-grown terrorism, but the unprecedented Al Qaeda actions shook the nation to the core. So it was obvious that there would be reprisals. But how effective were they?

The 9/11 attack seemed to come as a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky. After the horror had sunk in, the Bush government declared a further worldwide 'war on terror', followed by military invasions, first of Afghanistan, then of Iraq. But it is important to see not only that terrorism came from abroad, but also that it had indigenous roots at home.

Even in peacetime, the culture of the United States is much more violent than that of any of the other Anglo-Saxon settler nations such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and also much more violent than that of its allies in Western Europe or Japan. The First Amendment of the Constitution proclaims free speech; but the Second Amendment proclaims the right to bear arms, right after that. It was originally related to the need for citizen militias to supplement the regular police or army in emergencies. But it was gradually reinterpreted as the right of individual citizens to defend themselves against threats.

The United States has some 300 million inhabitants today, but also some 250 million guns in private hands. The right to bear arms

is defended by the 4.3-million-member National Rifle Association, founded soon after the Civil War had ended. In recent years, it was presided over by the popular actor Charlton Heston (who had also played the role of the archetypical law-giver Moses in the Bible movie *The Ten Commandments*). Some 300,000 guns are stolen every year: more than the number of legitimate guns other countries have. Some 35,000 people are killed by guns every year: through murder, suicide and accidents. Twice that number is wounded.[1]

The entire firearms culture in the United States was originally promoted by the myth of 'The Frontier', which spilled over from 19th century 'Cowboys and Indians' lore to the 20th century entertainment industry: pulp novels and comic books, Hollywood blockbusters and television series, but also crime news. It permeated Washington politics, for instance through the movie-inspired rhetoric of actor-president Ronald Reagan, as shown in detailed studies such as Richard Slotkin's *Gunfighter nation.* Attacks on political opponents are a relatively common occurrence. Since the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King in 1968, more than 1 million (!) people in the United States have died from gunshot wounds.[2]

At the same time, such political assassinations thrived on rumours about convoluted plots. Already after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the nomination of ultra-conservative Barry Goldwater as the presidential nominee for the Republican party, historian Richard Hofstadter had published a classic article on *The paranoid style in American politics.* It was later labelled one of the most influential essays published in the more than one-and-a-half centuries of the existence of *Harper's Magazine,* and went on to become the leading piece in a well-known book with the same title. It is still highly relevant today.[3]

1 Barry Glassner, *The culture of fear – Why Americans are afraid of the wrong things* (New York: Basic/Perseus 2009 updated ed.), pp. XXVII, 232.

2 Bob Herbert, 'A flood tide of murder', *IHT*, Jan. 12, 2011.

3 Recent examples are the paranoid myths persisting about (half) black Democrat leader Barack Obama. Several years into his presidency, 45% of Republicans continued to believe that he was born abroad and was not really an American citizen, that he was a Muslim and not a Christian, that he and his wife had many close radical friends and sympathies, etc. Others continue to depict Health Care Reform and similar social security proposals as sneaky attempts to impose an all-powerful federal state and . . . Soviet style 'socialism'. See the NYT/CBS poll quoted in 'The psychology of the "birther" myth', *New York Times*, April 21, 2011.

Homegrown Terrorism

Hofstadter argued that American politics, mostly (but not always) on the extreme right, was often the arena of angry minds – characterized by heated exaggeration, suspiciousness and conspirational fantasy. Its apocalyptic spokesmen were always manning the 'barricades of civilization' against 'a threatening sell out', particularly against newcomers, minorities or foreigners.

Estimates about the membership of armed militias range from 20,000 to 60,000. On the one hand, they continue to adhere to the frontier myth of armed survival, by autonomous individuals or groups in the wilderness, after hostile forces have taken over the government. On the other hand, a number of these so-called patriots are also white supremacists and/or Christian fundamentalists.

There was a major confrontation when the FBI besieged an autarkic community of the 'Branch Davidian' charismatic sect around David Koresh, at Mount Carmel, near Waco in Texas in 1993. Ten people were killed by bullets during a first assault and 76 more were killed when a fire broke out during a second assault. On the second anniversary of this dramatic event, there was a bomb attack on a federal building in Oklahoma. Large parts of the building collapsed, 168 adults and children were killed and 400 more wounded.

This was briefly after Al Qaeda fundamentalists had killed 6 people in a first failed 1993 attempt to blow up a World Trade Center in New York through a truck filled with explosives. So authorities and politicians, media and citizens immediately thought Arabs and/or Muslims were also behind the much more murderous Oklahoma attack. 'Knowing that the car bomb indicates Middle Eastern terrorists at work, it's safe to assume that their goal is to promote free-floating fear and a measure of anarchy', a *New York Post* editorial said. 'Whatever we are doing to destroy Mideast terrorism, the chief terrorist threat against Americans has not been working' an editorialist in the *New York Times* asserted in turn.[4]

Television broadcasters followed suit, as 'major American networks were quick to draw attention to a man of "Islamic appearance"

4 Glassner, *supra* note 1, p. XXI.

seen in the area. Arab Americans endured over 300 hate crimes in the aftermath of the bombing, and there were public calls for a pre-emptive strike on Middle Eastern states. Many Americans found it extremely disconcerting when Timothy J. McVeigh, a clean-shaven former GI, was arrested'. He and an accomplice turned out to belong to a right-wing militia. They had meant the attack as a 'reprisal' against the earlier FBI assault on fundamentalist Christians.

The event already stirred fears of terrorism. 'Two years after the Oklahoma City bombing, a fifth of the children living 100 miles from the bombing were diagnosed as suffering from "bomb-related difficulty functioning" or PTSD' [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder].[5] A number of years later a disturbed white guy detonated an identical bomb outside a packed stadium at the University of Oklahoma, and still later police arrested militia members planning an attack on Hispanics in Alabama. By that time, 'the media weren't interested', as 'it didn't fit the narrative', as one observer put it. It was thus 'treated as a minor local story' and essentially ignored.

'But a week later, when a group of six Muslims was arrested for conspiring to attack Fort Dix, it was major international news' again.[6] Because now, the full focus of the world's press was on foreign terrorism originating from the Middle East.

The Road to 9/11

The alarm had been sounded much earlier. In her *Fear – A cultural history,* Joanna Bourke reports: 'In 1980 the CIA dramatically raised the estimate of the number of terrorist incidents affecting Americans [during the previous decade] between 1968 and 1979 from 3,336 to 6,719'. This doubling was produced by a mere afterthought, however, namely the ex-post-facto inclusion of mere threats and even hoaxes in the *definition* of terrorist incidents. 'Despite the fact that only seventeen people were killed by terrorists in America between 1980 and 1985, the *New York Times* published an average of four stories about terrorism in each issue. Between 1989 and 1992, only thirty-four

5 Joanna Bourke, *Fear – A cultural history* (London: Virago/Time Warner 2005), pp. 374–375.

6 Daniel Gardner, *The science of fear* (New York: Plume/Penguin 2009) , pp. 171–172.

Americans were killed by terrorists throughout the world, but over 1,300 books were catalogued under the rubric "terrorists" or "terrorism" in American libraries', she said (pp. 365–366).

The Cold War had finally ended in 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communist East Germany, of the Soviet Union, of the Warsaw Pact military alliance and also the fading of 'proxy wars' between East and West throughout the so-called Third World. Soon thereafter, an influential book by Francis Fukuyama thus proclaimed *The End of History* (1992), with the definite triumph of liberalism, markets and democracy. To the surprise of many, however, it was at this precise moment of unchallenged supremacy that history took a dramatic new turn, as Muslim terrorists now planned to bring the Middle-Eastern conflicts home to the United States, and to the rest of the Western world.

In 2001, Al Qaeda thus returned to the WTC for a second attempt with more formidable means, that is airplane attacks on the same Twin Towers in New York, but now also on the Pentagon, in Washington, and possibly aiming for the White House as well. Ironically, both the form and the targets of the attacks were probably co-inspired by a succession of spectacular Hollywood disaster movies on similar themes with patriotic overtones.[7] They were clearly devised to have maximum and lasting impact on media and public opinion, and they definitely succeeded on this score. It was immediately clear that this was going to be a major 'tipping point'.[8]

The attack did of course have a huge impact on the US public. Overseas enemies had never succeeded in striking the American mainland on such a scale, since Independence … more than two centuries earlier. It also shattered new illusions of invulnerability, created by ongoing plans for a sophisticated missile shield SDI. Terrorism is asymmetrical warfare, where a weak enemy may hit a very much stronger one with

7 *Independence Day* (1996), *Air Force One* (1997), *The Siege* (1998), and *Deep Impact* (1998) come to mind – as well as the much older *Towering Inferno* (1974) and many others. See: Van Ginneken (2007), pp. 166–175, which also dissects related subsequent movies such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), about the Somalia intervention, and *Saving Jessica Lynch* (2003), about the Iraq invasion. Jack Shaheen wrote a book and compiled a documentary about movie images *Reel bad Arabs*.

8 Jaap van Ginneken, Amsterdam daily *Het Parool*, Sept. 13, 2001.

relatively simple means, to create a climate of anger and fear. And anger there was: 'After the attack on the Twin Towers a thousand people thought to be "Arab" were assaulted and at least six murdered'.[9]

One study on the culture of fear soon reported: 'It was widely estimated that around 75,000 children in the five boroughs of New York City suffered multiple symptoms of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome] as a result of the attack on the WTC, while another 190,000 suffered from at least one of seven other mental health disorders. In another survey of schools in Manhattan, a quarter of children were diagnosed as showing "significant symptoms" of psychiatric disorders traceable to the terrorist attack. This proportion doubled among children in schools close to the WTC'.[10]

Medical doctors did, of course, find an explosion of PTSD in emergency personnel called to the WTC disaster scene, and among ordinary citizens in Lower Manhattan. More surprising was that they also found such symptoms in adults and children in the other boroughs, the larger City and the State, even the mid-West and the rest of the country, immediately after, but also much longer after, the facts. The *New York Times* had first called an academic PTSD specialist barely an hour after the attacks. A decade later, the American Psychological Association reported that no less than 350 scientific studies had been published on the subject. It turned out that people elsewhere had been affected in so far as they felt similar to, and identified with, the victims on the spot.

But several studies also found a direct relation between the seriousness of those complaints, the number of hours people had watched television reports about the events, and the intensity of those endlessly repeated images, particularly in those cases where the onset of symptoms did not occur immediately, but only much later. Terrorism even catapulted to first place among the 'top ten' fears of adolescents throughout the country.[11] Of course, terrorist attacks and their media

9 Bourke, *supra* note 5 pp. 373–374.

10 Bourke, *supra* note 5, pp. 375–376.

11 K.T. Bernstein et al. (2007), 'Television watching and the risk of incident-probable PTSD', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Vol. 195, No. 1, pp. 41-47. Also see: M.A. Schuster (2001), *New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 345, No. 20, pp. 1507 ff.; W.E. Schlenger et al. (2002), *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 288, No. 5, pp. 581-588; G. Fairbrother (2003), *Ambulatory Pediatrics*, Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 304–311, etc.

coverage do shift public behaviour not only during and immediately after the events, but also days and weeks, months and even years later. People stay away for some time from places they perceive as extra risky, such as high skyscrapers or underground subways.

During the months immediately after 9/11, many people were also afraid of flying and thus took to driving instead, even long distances and in cold weather, on the occasion of traditional family reunions such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. According to a 2005 study by three associate professors in management and economics at Cornell University in Ithaca near New York, this led to an estimated extra . . . 2,170 driving deaths in a few months, on top of the 2,604 that had been killed in and around the Twin Towers. Stress and anxiety do apparently play a further hidden role.[12]

The Strange Anthrax Scare

A week after the WTC attacks, there had been another terrorist attack on a much smaller scale, but also with a very large impact on public opinion. It consisted of five letters, sent to two popular newspapers and the three major television networks. A week later, two more were sent to Democratic senators. The letters also contained a brownish powder, which turned out to be anthrax: a deadly organism that occurs naturally in some soils, but is also a well-known biological warfare agent. Five people died, eleven were seriously infected. According to the postmark, the envelopes had probably been dropped in a mailbox just outside Princeton University in Trenton, New Jersey. There was a scramble to intercept them in mailrooms, before they would be opened.

There was a generalized scare, further exacerbated as hundreds of people in the United States, and thousands around the world, joined in by also sending threatening letters with some kind of powder. Some were apparently fanatics intent on adding to the panic, others practical jokers pulling a trick on family and friends. As many as 37 black

12 According to a 2004 study by an American and an Israeli researcher, terrorist attacks in Israel proved in turn to be followed by a temporary lull in light accidents, and then by a 35% spike in fatal accidents three days later, as it supposedly takes some time for the media to come up with extensive reports, and for them to 'sink in'.

boxes with the word 'Fear' written on them were found in subway stations, causing the police to shut them down and wait for the bomb squad. It turned out to be a 'project' by a 25-year-old freshman at the Manhattan School of Visual Arts, who was then prosecuted on charges of 'reckless endangerment'.[13]

There had already been much official talk about the dangers of terrorists acquiring such WMD for ABC warfare (weapons of mass destruction for atomic, biological or chemical warfare). The CIA had earlier secretly tested how they would spread in a subway system, for instance. At one point, the Department of Homeland Security advised the American people to buy duct tape and plastic sheeting as a barrier against such attacks with airborne and 'invisible' agents.

The FBI, CIA and Pentagon did, of course, scramble to try and identify the origin of the letters. The accompanying texts had suggested a Middle Eastern connection as they exclaimed, 'Death to America' and 'Death to Israel' and added 'Allah is great'. But the anthrax spores turned out to be of an extremely sophisticated variety, specially developed for efficient and effective biological warfare. There was no indication, however, that they came from Russian or Chinese stocks.

As the investigation failed to progress, and it seemed impossible to solve the mystery, media interest waned. 'In October, following the outbreak, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ran 1,192 stories mentioning anthrax, and in November 886 stories. In December, however, that number plummeted to 400; by February, anthrax tallied a mere 140 mentions' (p. 17).[14]

The riddle was to remain unsolved for another seven years. Only then was an American scientist officially accused of having staged the anthrax attacks, to draw attention to the importance of his own research on such agents, and to get more funding. He had worked with the U.S. Army Biological Warfare facility at Fort Detrick. According to official treaties, it did only defensive, not offensive, work – but the

13 *New York Times*, Dec. 18, 2001. Quoted by David Altheide, 'Terrorism and the politics of fear', Ch. 4 in Ulla Linke & Danielle Taana Smith (eds., 2009), pp. 58–59.

14 Corey Robin, *Fear – The history of a political idea* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2004), p. 17. Also see my observations about the scare in the Amsterdam University weekly *Folia*.

distinction is highly theoretical and non-practical. The man committed suicide, and the painful chapter was eagerly closed.

A Rising Climate of Fear

In the wake of the 9/11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks, primal fear throughout the United States rose to unprecedented heights. According to a Gallup poll, 40% of Americans said it was 'very likely' there would be more terrorism, and another 45% said it was 'somewhat likely'. After the Afghanistan invasion, this number went down somewhat, but after the Iraq invasion it went up again, and stayed at a high level.[15] Terrorism even became the worst fear of adolescents between 13 and 15 years of age, worse than the rest of the 'top ten' – death in general, criminal or gang violence, ordinary or nuclear war; worse than being alone, or a failure, or worse than a fear of the future in general; worse than a fear of spiders. Yet the chance of falling victim to terrorism today is of course infinitely smaller than falling victim to criminal or gang violence in America's inner cities.[16]

Gardner adds: 'According to the Rand-Mipt terrorism database – the most comprehensive available – there were 10,119 international terrorist incidents worldwide between 1968 and April 2007. Those attacks took the lives of 14,790 people, an average annual worldwide death toll of 379' (or approximately one per day). Most terrorist acts occurred in connection with the Middle East, another part in connection with ethnic strife in South Asia. Of the victims, only a third fell in the West, as slightly over a quarter, or 3,765, died in North America over these 40 years (most on 9/11), and slightly under a 10th, or 1,233, in Western Europe. For comparison, he gave other numbers: 'In 2003, in the United States alone, 497 people accidentally suffocated in bed; 396 were unintentionally electrocuted; 515 drowned in swimming pools; 347 were […] killed by police officers'.[17]

The disproportionate fear-mongering about terrorism and war in the United States can also be illustrated with other figures. More military personnel died through accidents in peacetime (namely 2,100 per

15 Gardner, *supra* note 6, pp. 246–248.

16 'What frightens America's youth?', *Gallup Poll*, March 29, 2005. Fear of terror attacks was put in the top spot by 8% (or approximately 1 in 12 youngsters).

17 Gardner, *supra* note 6, pp. 250–251.

year) than through enemy fire in Afghanistan and Iraq (an average of 1,643 per year).[18] The vast majority of victims of those wars, meanwhile, were local men, women and children – many as 'collateral damage' of the 'war on terror'. The recurrent scares also drove a wide range of preventive measures.

US Congress had originally identified 160 sites as potentially important national targets for would-be terrorists. After the second invasion, however, the number was expanded 12-fold to 1,849. By the end of 2004, it was expanded 15-fold to 28,360; by 2005 to 77,769; and by early 2007 to some 300,000, or almost 2,000 times the original number. In the end, it included such events as … the Illinois Apple and Pork Festival. No single city or activity seemed to be safe from the Muslim threat.[19]

Both the administration of American President George W. Bush and of his prime ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, 'cherry picked' unconfirmed rumours about the impending dangers, and actively added misinformation.[20] On the eve of the invasion in Iraq, a majority of the American people thus believed the flagrantly false stories that Saddam Hussein had helped Osama Bin Laden with the 9/11 attack, that he was secretly a fundamentalist Muslim, that he possessed weapons of mass destruction, and that he had recently tried to buy yellow cake or uranium concentrate in Niger. Insiders knew these stories to be contrived, but kept that to themselves. A majority of the public thus supported the Iraq invasion in polls. But if one discarded the answers of people who were obviously misinformed, this left only a minority of consenters.[21]

Of course, both terrorism and war spiked the popularity of the highest political leaders. The eternal changes in the newly introduced

18 Levitt & Dubner, *Superfreakonomics*, p. 87.

19 Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Terrorized by "War on Terror"', *Washington Post*, March 25, 2007.

20 See the detailed study by the former British foreign minister David Owen, *The hubris syndrome – Bush, Blair and the intoxication of power*, rev. ed. (York, UK: Methuen 2012).

21 Gardner, *supra* note 6, pp. 266. On the eve of the invasion, I wrote an article on the misinformation campaign for a special issue on psychological warfare, published by the Dutch scientific journal *Informatie & Informatiebeleid*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (April 2003), pp. 28–34.

terror alerts, with green, orange and red like a traffic light, kept people on their toes – just like the monthly siren alarms had done during the Cold War. A psychological experiment found that reminders of death or 9/11 increased support for the president.

A statistical analysis by a graduate of Cornell University found a 'consistent, positive relationship' between new terror alerts and the president's approval rating. The first director of the newly founded Department of Homeland security thus reported in his memoirs 'that senior members of the administration had pressured him to raise the terrorism threat level at key moments during Bush's re-election campaign'.[22]

Scepticism about the 'War on Terror'

All this further contributed to a worsening of the national mood. The 9/11 and subsequent events were exploited by President George Bush Junior and his inner circle (Vice President Dick Cheney, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and their respective staffs) – even according to the rather hawkish national security adviser of his predecessor Carter. He wrote: 'The 3-word mantra of the "War on Terror" has created a culture of fear, and has had a pernicious impact on America's psyche. The damage is a self-inflicted wound that has actually undermined our ability to confront the real challenges'.

The top security man continued: 'The vagueness of the phrase was calculated by its sponsors, it made it easier for demagogic politicians. The administration created a false historical narrative that could even become a self-fulfilling prophecy'. Comparing Al Qaeda to first-rate military powers such as Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, it could plunge America into protracted conflict, even with Iran and perhaps also Pakistan.

He concluded: It is like a genie that has been let out of its bottle. It has led to five years of almost continuous national brainwashing.

22 Philip Zimbardo, 'Phantom menace', *Psychology Today*, May/June 2003. Sheldon Solomon *et al.* (2004), 'Fatal Attraction', *Psychological Science*, Vol. 17, No. 10. Rob Willer (2010), 'The effect of government-issued terror warnings', *Current Research in Social Psychology*, Vol. 10, pp. 1-12. Tom Ridge, *The test of our times* (New York: Dunne 2009). Also: Glassner, *supra* note 1, pp. 239–240, 296; Gardner, *supra* note 6, pp. 267, 331.

The fear-mongering, reinforced by security entrepreneurs, the mass media and the entertainment industry, generates its own momentum. Government at every level has stimulated the paranoia. TV serials and films stimulate Islamophobia. The evil characters have recognizable Arab features – at times rendered in a manner sadly reminiscent of the Nazi anti-Semitic campaigns. These were the words of former presidential security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the immediate successor to the better-known Henry Kissinger.[23]

A psychological explanation for this whole tendency to exaggerate fears and blame others is Terror Management Theory, formulated by Sheldon Solomon and others (building on earlier reflections by Freud, Rank, Fromm and Becker). In this view, clinging to our own culture is the means par excellence to provide transcendence (that is to say, provide collective meaning beyond mere individual existence). This identification is intensified by immediate confrontations with death, as in the case of the eternal repetition of the most shocking and bloody images of 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks.

Hundreds of TMT experiments have tended to demonstrate that a confrontation with such salient events tends to reinforce group identification and chauvinistic reflexes, stereotypical thinking and outsider rejection as well as a call for strong leadership, strict order and severe punishment of trespassers. Within the United States, the emergence of new anti-immigrant groups and the Tea Party are clear expressions of this trend.

It is thus not surprising that President George W. Bush and his Government had soon decided to retaliate against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. What is surprising, however, is that from day one a powerful lobby also tried to implicate Saddam Hussein and Iraq. They fantasized that American troops would be welcomed by crowds with flowers in the capital, Baghdad, that it would be relatively easy to install a freely elected regime (in spite of the recurring tensions between

23 Adviser to President Jimmy Carter. His op-ed article 'Terrorized by "War on Terror"', appeared in the *Washington Post* on March 25, 2007. Since literal quotes would be too long here, the argument has just been condensed. But the exact terminology remains entirely Brzezinski's.

Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds), and to make this the cornerstone of a new democratic, pro-western and oil-rich Middle East.

The way in which these plans were presented and carried out, however, provoked an anti-American backlash throughout most of the Muslim world, promoted the further rise of political Islamism and often had the exact opposite effect.

World Public Opinion on the Afghanistan and Iraq Interventions*

The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

The 'war on terror' led to large-scale, long-lasting military invasions in the Middle East. The idea was to crush Islamic fundamentalism and violence, to turn these countries into beacons of liberal democracy. They were to sway the entire Arab world and change the strategic equations there. Ten years on, the question remains how effective these military solutions have been, or how counterproductive. It is still not clear today whether the countries in question have really been stabilized over all these years or whether the astronomic sums spent have in turn contributed to the financial destabilization of the entire Western alliance. Let us take a close look at opinion polls and social surveys that throw further light on the reactions of outsiders and bystanders to these initiatives.

A year after the so-called 'Arab spring', the ongoing Global Attitudes Project of the Pew Research Center held another series of surveys in half a dozen countries with large Muslim populations. It found that, for majorities or pluralities, the desire for a 'strong economy' still exceeded the desire for a 'good democracy'. But they also said that the United States was an opponent of democracy, that their nations' laws should be based on the values and principles of Islam, or even 'strictly

* This is a further elaboration and update of an earlier essay on '9/11 as a trigger for long-term shifts in world public opinion', published in the *International Communication Gazette*, Vol. 69, No. 4, pp. 324–333.

follow the teachings of the Quran'. So after a full decade, the Western military interventions seemed to have had little success in winning the 'hearts and minds' of the people in the region.[1]

Over the last ten years, there have been all sorts of opinion polls concerning the 'war on terrorism' in the United States and in the European Union, but also throughout the rest of the world. Some of the reported results are disheartening. They suggest that many of the early overreactions of Western leaders to 9/11 have in fact been counterproductive, insofar as they fell into the trap Osama had set for them, identifying Islam with terrorism. They reinforced stereotyping and discrimination, albeit mostly unintentionally, and initially led significant parts of well-meaning Muslim populations to sympathize with some of the terrorists and their actions. Only much later was there a change in approach.

No one foresaw 9/11. Yet it decisively changed the course of world history. Many such events do. That is one reason why we should always make forecasts or even scenarios about the future, but never really believe they will come true in those forms. This is because a closer look at the military, political, social, economic and technological events of the recent and distant past reveals that they often introduced completely unexpected turns and triggered a drift in previously unforeseen directions.

This was true not only in how they affected the material world, but also (and maybe even more) in how they affected the *mental* world of everyone concerned, our frames and references. They made us look radically differently at the same old reality, and thereby fundamentally changed our course of action. This was in line with the famous theorem of American sociologist William Thomas: if men define something as real, it becomes real in its consequences. For instance, because it may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, a notion elaborated by American sociologist Robert Merton. Today, this seems to have been the case with the 'clash of civilizations' concept proposed by Samuel Huntington – relabelled the 'clash of villainisations' by critics. Because psychology has shown how we tend to eagerly embrace such simplified, self-flattering and misleading views of others and also because

1 Radical views were generally held in Pakistan and Jordan, in-between views in Egypt and Tunisia, moderate views in Turkey and Lebanon. See: <www.pewglobal.org/2012/07/10/most-muslims-want-democracy-personal-freedoms-and-islam-in-political-life/>.

of our extremely cursory understanding of complex and varied other cultures and religions. Sociology, on the other hand, has shown how many of the actions deriving from them may have unintended consequences, even leading to opposite results. I propose to consider one particular subcategory, that of the 'sorcerer's apprentice' syndrome.

During the 1980s, the Americans and their local Saudi and Pakistani allies were entirely focused on turning Afghanistan into 'a Russian Vietnam'. It worked well and the defeat contributed significantly to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact thereafter. Billions of dollars were spent to set up, train and equip a vast network of Muslim fundamentalist volunteers – mostly recruited from Sunni countries all around.[2] But in the end, all this also spurned the Taliban and Osama. The United States could not possibly have realized that these same networks would turn against themselves over the next decade, resulting in the 1993 and 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre.

This essay looks closely at the evolution of world opinion since the subsequent American-led invasions in Afghanistan, to get rid of the Taliban and Osama again, and in Iraq, to get rid of Saddam Hussein. The essay harks back to the two main strains in the author's previous academic work. One strain is related to mass psychology and the oft-capricious nature of public opinion, which may alternately show radical overnight shifts and stubborn decade-long immobility.[3] The other is related to stereotypical representations and images of non-Western cultures, which still guide many major Western media and policy-makers thinking of themselves as well informed and cosmopolitan.[4]

The rest of the discussion will therefore review information about the results of opinion polls and similar representative data. It throws

2 Over that decade, Saudi Arabia alone spent $75 billion for the promotion of the ultra-conservative creed of Wahhabism, according to Thomas L. Friedman, 'Bad bargains', *IHT*, May 12, 2010. PM. I have used the *International Herald Tribune* as the main daily journal of record for these twelve years. Franco-American in origin, it calls itself a 'global newspaper' today and is published by the *New York Times* (previously in tandem with the *Washington Post*).

3 See my books on *Crowds, psychology and politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992) and on *Collective behavior and public opinion* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum 2003). The latter applies a new 'chaos theory' and 'dynamic systems' approach to these fields.

4 See my books *Understanding global news* (London: Sage 1998) and *Screening difference* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield 2007).

some light on the complexity and dynamics of public opinion resulting from the unexpected turnabout of the fundamentalist networks throughout the world as a whole, but also in various relevant countries and blocs; among general populations but also among professional elites. It turns out that the drift is indeed largely an 'unintended consequence' of earlier policy gambles, and cannot easily be corrected through mere public relations exercises (as some American policymakers long continued to think).

The Resurgence of Anti-Americanism

Since the Second World War, the United States has de facto been at war in one form or another for all but 14 years, and the influence of the wide-ranging military-industrial complex on the major candidates, parties and administrations (that General-President Eisenhower warned against) has remained particularly strong. With 4.5% of the world population and about 20% of global production, the United States accounts for almost 50% of world military spending – six times as much as the next major power, China. It has 560 military bases around the world.[5]

Some of its interventions are open, some are secret. There is hardly a country in the world where its covert operatives have not meddled over these same 'post-war' years. It is not entirely surprising, then, that there is widespread anti-American sentiment abroad. At some points it subsides, at others it resurges. But it has definitely worsened during the eight George W. Bush years, particularly because of the ill-considered and unnecessarily confrontational policies towards the Muslim world *as a whole*.

A key question is how these events affected attitudes towards the United States. A survey by the U.S. Travel Association found, for instance, that foreign travellers rated US borders 'the least welcoming in the world', that they were 'more afraid of U.S. immigration officials than of terrorism or crime', and two-thirds feared being detained for 'minor mistakes or misstatements'.[6] Since the Second World War, the United States has systematically kept track of foreign

5 Nicholas D. Kristof, 'The big (military) taboo' & Paul Kennedy, 'The U.S. defense dilemma', *IHT*, Dec. 12, 2010 & March 16, 2012.

6 Mark Vanhoenacker, 'How not to attract tourists', *IHT*, March 17-18, 2002.

reactions to its policies, through ongoing worldwide public opinion research.[7] Today, the key player in this field is the Pew Global Attitudes Project, one of seven projects run by the Pew Research Center, based in Washington. It is financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts, a multi-billion non-profit NGO, deriving from the Pew family oil fortune.[8]

Three months after 9/11, the Pew Research Center published the results of the first poll among 275 'opinion leaders' in 24 countries. They came from government and politics, business, media and culture; the sample may have slightly favoured pro-Western voices. Even at that point in time, it revealed a sharp contrast between American and non-American views. One question was whether many or most ordinary people considered US policies to be 'a major cause' of the 9/11 attacks. A small minority of fewer than one in five Americans felt this was the case, against a substantial majority of three in five in the rest of the world. Two-thirds in the rest of the world even said that it was 'good that Americans now know what it's like to be vulnerable'.

Not a single American felt that the US attacks on Afghanistan would be widely considered as an overreaction, against four in ten non-Americans, and even six in ten people in Islamic countries. Five in ten Americans felt that countries like Iraq and Somalia should also be attacked 'if they were found to have supported terrorism', against only three in ten elsewhere. The poll showed there was support for the US 'war on terrorism', particularly in Europe. But it also showed a strong feeling that the United States was acting 'mainly in its own interests' and not taking its partners' interests into account.[9]

Domestic support for the military intervention in Iraq had been drummed up by manipulating information, making citizens believe that Saddam had supported Osama and the 9/11 attacks, or that he had weapons of mass destruction. Opinion polls showed that 'among

7 More on this in my chapter on opinion and attitude research in J. Jansz & P. van Drunen (eds.), *A social history of psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell 2004). And in my older Dutch study *De uitvinding van het publiek* (The invention of the public. Amsterdam: Cramwinckel 1993), Ch. 3.

8 Early beneficiaries of the Pew Charitable Trusts were the ultra-conservative John Birch Society, the American Liberty League and the American Enterprise Institute. Today, it is a 'non-ideological' mainstream organization.

9 Brian Knowlton, 'How the world sees the U.S. and Sept. 11', *IHT*, Dec. 20, 2001.

those who did not hold false beliefs, only a small minority supported the decision to go to war'. Well over 90% of the television network stories on Iraq had originated at the White House, the State Department and the Pentagon. Three-quarters of the guests on their talk shows were current or former government or military officials, and only one (Ted Kennedy) expressed scepticism. One major anchor (Dan Rather of CBS) acknowledged the pressure to comply with official propaganda.[10]

But what about non-Americans? Five years after 9/11, the same Global Attitudes Project published the results of a major international survey that fathomed the impact of the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as of the first revelations about human rights abuses there. The survey found that out of 17,000 people who were interviewed in fifteen countries, a surprising 1 in 4 Americans had still not heard about the abuses in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, whereas only one in ten Europeans or Japanese had not. Goodwill toward the United States turned out to have further *declined* in the vast majority of the countries over the previous year. Even in Great Britain, its closest ally, it had declined from 75% before the Iraq war to a mere 56%.

India, Nigeria and Russia were exceptions to some of these trends, as they had their own persistent problems with Islamic extremists. Only in India and Nigeria did majorities still express confidence in the American President at the time, whereas in Spain only 1 in 14 people did and in Turkey one in thirty-three. Only India and Russia still had majorities unequivocally backing the 'war on terrorism', whereas support completely collapsed among close allies such as Japan and Spain.

The Pew Center study also showed that vast majorities in twelve out of the fifteen countries felt the war in Iraq had made the world a *more dangerous* place rather than a safer one. Apart from the United States, the only exceptions were again India and Nigeria. All countries except the United States and Germany saw the US presence in Iraq as posing a 'greater threat to world peace' than even Iran with its uranium enrichment programme (at that time). Still, the percentage of people in Britain, France and Spain who viewed Iran and its possible

10 Media scholar David L. Altheide, 'Terrorism and the politics of fear', in Uli Linke & Taana Smith (eds.), *Cultures of fear* (London: Pluto 2009), Ch. 4, pp. 60–61.

nuclear arms as a threat had almost tripled over the previous three years, even though Iran retained the strong support of most Muslims, both in Europe and elsewhere.[11]

According to another survey, support for the Nato alliance among Europeans had fallen to a small majority of 55% in 2006 (as opposed to a robust 69% only four years earlier). These data are drawn from Transatlantic Trends, an annual overview of relevant polls taken by the German Marshall Fund of the United States.[12] Even in Poland, support fell to a mere 48%, as opposed to the earlier 64%. By contrast, support for a more independent European approach to security and diplomatic affairs rose to 55% (from 50%) over this same period.

Turkey seems to be a particularly interesting 'in-between' case, as a largely Muslim candidate for the European Union that feels increasingly rebuffed by its Western partners. 'Warmth' towards the United States declined to only 20° on a 100-point scale (from 28° two years earlier). Warmth towards Iran, on the other hand, further increased to 43° (from 34°) over the same period. Support for Nato (of which Turkey used to be a staunch supporter) dropped to a minority of 44% (from a majority of 53% two years earlier). Positive feelings towards Europe also plummeted to 54% (from 73% two years earlier).[13] So the two invasions and their aftermath led to less support and more anti-American sentiment there.

How did the world historic event of 9/11 come to be represented in the school curriculum around the world, by the way? In the United States, most textbooks of the early years 'portrayed the attacks as an occasion for patriotism and heroism . . . many using the Iwo Jima-like photo of three firefighters raising a flag in the rubble of ground zero . . . But a decade later, US textbooks are starting to use more graphic images of a plane slamming into the twin towers and erupting into a fireball, or panic in the streets as New Yorkers fled the roiling dust cloud that followed the towers' collapse'. An analysis of nine major high school textbooks by an American education professor concluded

11 Brian Knowlton, 'Image of U.S. falls again – War continues to alter Global perceptions', *IHT*, June 14, 2006. Original survey: <pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.

12 'Americans, Europeans share increased fears of terrorism'. At <www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/index.cfm?id=50>.

13 Judy Dempsey, 'Turkey and Europeans turn cool to Nato', *IHT*, Sept. 7, 2006.

that 'they provided little information' so that 'it's hard to make sense of why this happened'.[14] Again, information levels among the US public, or a self-critical attitude, seemed to be problematic.

Another study that compared fourteen countries found 'many European textbooks used 9/11 to highlight the perceived threat of Islamic extremism'. But it found emerging 'third world' powers such as Brazil, China and India were 'more apt to use 9/11 to criticize the U.S. dominance in world affairs, and emphasize the importance of multilateralism'. In the large and key Muslim state of Pakistan next to Afghanistan, the government-approved textbooks gave 9/11 only the briefest of mentions, whereas in the largest Muslim state of Indonesia it had no place in the curriculum at all.[15]

So there was a stark contrast between what youngsters in the West and those in the non-West learned about the event. The American lobby group Business for Diplomatic Action (BDA) added a further survey among teenagers in thirteen countries and found that anti-Americanism might even begin to hurt trade, as they no longer mentioned US brands among their top three favourites.[16]

US Opinion

Now let us take a closer look at public opinion in the United States itself, and more particularly at two groups: on the one hand, the top policy-makers in Washington, and on the other, the Muslim minority. The Center for American Progress held a survey among the top foreign policy elite, resulting in a 'Terrorism Index'. It interviewed more than 100 well-respected top-level foreign policy and national security experts, including a former secretary of state, a former assistant secretary of defense, a former national security adviser and a former CIA chief.

14 Study by Diana E. Hess, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, quoted in Tamara Lewin, 'A changing narrative', *IHT*, Sept. 10-11, 2011.

15 Study by Elizabeth D. Herman, a Fulbright scholar based in Bangladesh, ibid. Meanwhile the book *The looming tower* by American author Lawrence Wright claimed that 90% of the worldwide expenses for the propagation of Islam and Islamic education were traditionally covered by Saudis (possibly seconded by other Gulf states), and favoured very conservative views.

16 Brian Knowlton, 'Combating the image of the Ugly American', *IHT*, August 16, 2006. The BDA 2006 Trust Barometer can be found at: <www.businessfordiplomaticaction.org/news/press_release.php?id=1162>.

The vast majority felt the administration of George W. Bush was completely on the wrong track. A stunning 86% also said that the world was becoming *more* (not less) dangerous for Americans, 84% that the United States was *not* winning the war on terror, and 80% feared that an attack on the scale of 9/11 'was likely within the next five years'.[17] The subsequent uncovering of a plot to simultaneously blow up ten passenger aircraft over the mid-Atlantic seems to have been a close call.

Meanwhile both lower-level politicians and citizens of the United States seem to have been slow to become aware of this situation. A sizeable portion of public opinion still believed Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and was behind Al Qaida and the attacks of 9/11 on the World Trade Centre. Most American citizens depend largely on the evening news of the television networks for their information today, but their everyday coverage of foreign affairs and foreign bureaus has shrunk to an all-time minimum as their corporate owners think entertainment is more profitable than (backgrounds to) international news.[18]

Yet reality eventually caught up with the American public as well, and the year 2006 seems to have been the watershed. Just before the fifth anniversary of 9/11, CNN held a poll showing that only one in four citizens felt the United States was winning the war in Iraq, whereas almost one in eight felt the insurgents were winning instead.[19] The Pew Center conducted a poll showing that 45% now felt *decreasing* (rather than increasing) the military presence abroad would reduce the threat of terrorist attacks.[20] On the first anniversary of the attacks four years earlier, this figure had been only 29%.[21]

17 Bob Herbert, 'The wreckage in the China shop', *IHT*, June 30, 2006. For the original report see: <www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_julyaug_2006/TI-index/index.html>. 'The terrorism index' June 14, 2006 can be found at: <www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/06/b1769267.html>.

18 On the eve of the invasion of Iraq, 55% falsely believed Saddam supported Osama (according to an ABC poll), and 42% falsely believed he was behind the 9/11 attacks (according to a CBS/*New York Times* poll), cited in Maureen Dowd, 'Bush's call to war is incoherent', *IHT*, March 12, 2003. More about this in my Dutch book on 'hidden persuaders' *Verborgen verleiders*, 3rd ed. (Amsterdam: Boom 2011).

19 At: <www.pollingreport.com/iraq6.htm>.

20 'Diminished public appetite for military force'. At: <people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=288>.

21 Jim Lobe, 'Poll finds waning faith in military interventions'. Othernet/Ips news agency, Sept. 7, 2006.

Now what about the Muslim minority in the United States? There were some three million Americans of Arab descent (whereas some one million Americans had fought in the Middle East and the Gulf for longer or shorter periods of time, and 100,000 Americans continued to work and live there). A sample of Arab-Americans (and also of the law enforcement personnel, both federal and local, they faced) was interviewed by the Vera Institute of Justice (a nonprofit policy research centre based in New York), for a study funded by the National Institute of Justice (a research agency of the US justice department).[22]

The Arab-Americans reported widespread victimization, suspicion and surveillance threatening their civil liberties, as a result of the 'Patriot Act' and the 'Special Registration' programme (which fingerprinted, photographed and questioned no less than 80,000 immigrant men). The study reported that 'these measures threatened to harm decades of work by police departments to build trust in their local communities, especially among immigrants'.[23] This severely reduced the effectiveness of the agencies in infiltrating and isolating radical groups.

Yet a 2010 poll among a representative sample of Americans, by the authoritative Gallup agency, found that a majority in all religious groups recognized that Muslim Americans did *not* sympathize with Al Qaida, and nine out of ten Muslims agreed. A 2011 book about *The missing martyrs* therefore asked the question: Why are there so few Muslim terrorists (in the United States)? A further study by Charles Kurzman, a sociology professor at the University of North Carolina and the Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security concluded they posed only 'a minuscule threat to public safety'. As 'of about 14,000 murders in the United States last year, not a single one resulted from Islamic extremism', even though a few dozen Muslims had been charged for violent plots or attacks over each previous year.[24]

22 At <www.vera.org/project/project1_1.asp?section_id=2&project_id=71>.

23 About 100 Arab Americans and 111 law enforcement personnel were interviewed (through personal interviews and focus groups) from 2003 to 2005. Andrea Elliott, *New York Times/IHT*, June 13, 2006.

24 Laurie Goodstein, 'Poll contradicts many stereotypes on Muslims in the US', *IHT*, Aug. 3, 2011; Scott Shane, 'Fears of Muslim American terrorism prove unfounded', *IHT*, Feb. 8, 2012.

A Further Aside on Information Levels

After 9/11 and the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the interest of the American public in serious information about 'foreign affairs' had spiked, but the trend soon waned again. An overview article in the 2011 winter issue of the *American Journalism Review* observed that many major media groups had again closed their overseas bureaus and were again 'Retreating from the world'.

According to another 2011 Pew Center Survey, two-thirds of Americans claimed they relied on television for most of their national and international news. The authoritative annual *Tyndall* report on television took a closer look at the 15,000 minutes of evening news on the three major networks over the previous year. Only 2.7% of that was nominally devoted to Afghanistan, and 0.6% to Iraq. But that news often came out of Washington, the United States or other Western capitals, not out of the countries in question.[25]

Even at the height of coverage, immediately after 9/11 and the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, reports were more sensational than informative. The result was that voters in this country with by far the largest presence and the greatest power in the world often lacked the most elementary knowledge about that same world. This was particularly true for young Americans of military age, 18- to 24-years old, that is to say, those who were to be sent to overseas battlefields. This emerged from the Geographic Literacy Surveys that the authoritative Roper agency regularly did for the National Geographic Society.[26]

After five years of almost daily television coverage, a stunning 88% of them turned out to be unable to locate Afghanistan on a world map, and 63% could not find Iraq. After seeing hundreds of dramatic news items with explosions and blood, they still did not have the faintest idea of the languages spoken or the religious beliefs held there, or even the general nature of the societies. In an earlier version of the survey, far more people turned out to know that the 'reality' television show 'Survivor' was filmed in the Pacific than could locate

25 Jim Lobe, '2010 TV News', Soros Other net/Savio's IPS newsletter, Jan. 6, 2011. And: <http://tyndallreport.com/yearinreview2010/>.

26 'Young Americans geographically illiterate, survey suggests'. At: <news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/05/0502_060502_geography_2.html>.

even . . . America's close ally Israel on a map. Africa's largest country and major Islamic trouble spot Sudan was placed in Asia by 20%, and even in Europe by 10%.

How was this abroad? The previous version of the survey also compared Americans with youngsters from eight other countries.[27] Americans and Mexicans turned out to be the least informed of them all. Almost one-third of the Americans believed that the United States had between one and two billion inhabitants (rather than a mere 300 million)! Three quarters believed English was the most widely spoken native language in the world (whereas Chinese Mandarin and Indian Hindi obviously are).

Only one in seven believed speaking another language fluently was a necessary skill. Only 22% currently held a passport for travel abroad, and only 20% had travelled abroad over the last three years – including to neighbours Canada or Mexico. [President George W. Bush himself had hardly been abroad at all before he became president]. In the three European countries included (apart from Britain and France), by contrast, 70% had travelled abroad over the last few years, and the majority spoke at least one foreign language.[28] This may be another reason why so many Europeans and their leaders proved more reticent about interventions in completely different cultures such as Iraq.

A later Pew survey on religious knowledge found that half of all American Protestants did not know that Luther sparked the Reformation, that the Koran is the Islamic holy book, or that the Dalai Lama is Buddhist. A commentator on religious affairs said: 'It is not just embarrassing; it's dangerous'. Best informed about religion were . . . atheists.[29] The average American also thinks that huge amounts of money go to foreign aid, whereas the percentage is minute.[30]

Since so few Americans are familiar with a truly global perspective, this also profoundly affected the (in)effectiveness of government

27 Bijal Trivedi, 'Survey reveals geographic illiteracy', *National Geographic Today*, 20 Nov. 2002. At: <news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2002/11/1120_021120_GeoRoperSurvey.html>.

28 <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news> (*IHT*, May 13–14, 2006).

29 Nicholas D. Kristof, 'Test your savvy on religion' & James Carroll, 'Ignorance of religion', *IHT*, Oct. 11 & 20, 2010.

30 Fareed Zakaria, in his programme GPS on CNN, March 25, 2012.

institutions in dealing with Muslims. They had to scramble to find and share the few speakers of Arabic or experts on Islam. It is true that the United States has a few of the best universities and scholars in this field. But outside a small community of academic insiders, general knowledge among professionals and within bureaucracies is extremely sketchy. This holds for police departments, even in the major cities and the major federal agencies. It even holds for average staffers at the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon and the intelligence agencies.

They often share a comic strip image of 'good guys' versus 'bad guys', and are incapable of understanding strange cultures, let alone empathizing with them. Cultural analysis and 'human intelligence' (from infiltrators) had withered away in recent decades, even within the CIA itself, only to be replaced by 'signal intelligence' (through electronic surveillance) by the NSA. Hence, the consistent misappraisal of persistent substantial support for the Taliban, the Ayatollahs, the Salafists, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Europe and 'the Rest of the West'

Polarization is fed by constant and disproportional fear-mongering in the United States, Europe and elsewhere. A previous round of the Pew centre's *Global attitudes* project had already shown that people throughout the West worried about the rise of Islamic terrorism in their own countries.[31]

These ranged from 'only' 56% in Canada to some 70% in the United States, from 'only' 36% in Poland to some 84% in Germany. The Netherlands were in between with more than three-quarters worried. At the time, soon after the killing of filmmaker Theo van Gogh by an Islamic fundamentalist, the Netherlands was the only country with a majority that was negative about Muslims and their immigration. As many as nine out of ten people said 'they' had [too much of] a strong identity, and failed their integration.[32]

31 'Islamic extremism: Common concern for Muslim and western publics'. At: <pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=248>.

32 Brian Knowlton, *IHT*, July 15, 2005.

Contradictory forces seem to be tugging at Muslims resident within the European Community. At one point, the Pew Centre project also took larger and special samples of Muslims living in Britain, Germany, France and Spain. It found that they did indeed think of themselves first as Muslims and only then as citizens of their countries (81% against 7% in Great Britain, 46% against 42% in France). By contrast, 'natives' first thought of themselves as national citizens, and only then as Christians (59% against 33% in Germany, 60% to 14% in Spain) – although this may partly have been an artefact.[33] Americans again proved to be much more emphatically religious than Europeans.

But the survey also found that the majority of European Muslims did 'show signs of favouring a *moderate* version of Islam' and *welcomed* 'the entry of women into modern roles'. The majority was 'generally *positive* about conditions' in their countries of residence, and did not even see 'many or most Europeans as hostile toward Muslims'. Only a minority said they had had a 'bad experience' (with discrimination) over the previous two years, attributable to their 'race, ethnicity or religion', ranging from 19% in Germany to 37% in France. Yet considerable numbers still sided with the radicals. In Great Britain some 15% (or almost one in six) said that violence against civilian targets could 'sometimes' be justified.[34]

Yet such numbers might well be considered worrying. Just before the first anniversary of the subway attacks in London, a survey published by *The Times* concluded that 13% (or one in eight) of British Muslims (many of Pakistani origin) believed the July 7 bombers should be viewed as 'martyrs', and 7% felt that suicide attacks on civilians could be justifiable.[35] The Netherlands was completely taken by surprise by the killing of filmmaker Theo van Gogh, who had his

33 As the Muslims in question were cultural minorities, they may have felt the need to mark their religion, whereas the Christians in question were cultural majorities, feeling this was self-evident.

34 David Rampe, 'Muslims and Europe: Surprisingly positive – Pew survey finds change in attitudes', *IHT*, July 7, 2006. The study can be found at: <pewglobal.org/reports/display.php?ReportID=252>.

35 Burhan Wazir, 'One year on', *The Times*, July 4, 2006 <www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article682404.ece>. Also see: *IHT* July 5, 2006. And the articles by Peter Bergen (author of the book *Holy War Inc.)* & Zachary Shore (author of the book *Bigots and Bin Laden)*, *IHT*, July 9-10 & 15, 2005.

throat slit in broad daylight, on the streets of Amsterdam. In an earlier study, I analyzed in detail how the killer and the so-called 'Hofstad' group of young Muslim immigrants had psychologically evolved from mere dissatisfaction to terrorist violence.[36]

The Muslim World

So far we have looked primarily at various components of public opinion in the United States, the European Union and 'the rest of the west'. But what about the Islamic world itself? It is crucial to look at how the supposed 'clash of civilizations' was perceived there: by elites and masses, by men and women. It turns out Western policy-makers have long nourished illusions about how the 'war on terrorism' was experienced there, both by those supposedly at the top and by those supposedly at the bottom of the social ladder.

After 9/11, the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq, the American Council on Foreign Relations therefore did a major qualitative survey among educated elites in the Western-most, central, and eastern-most countries of the Islamic world, namely Morocco, Egypt and Indonesia. It had fourteen focus groups of university-educated people talk about relevant subjects. It was surprised by how deep the anger against the United States ran. American media for the Arab world, which had been specially set up to turn the tide – such as *Sawa* radio and *Al-Hurra* television – turned out to have been completely ineffective, contrary to what had previously been thought.[37]

A few years later, the director of the Center for Journalism and Research at the American University in Cairo and US colleagues did a further survey among more than 600 journalists in the Middle East. It found 89% held an unfavourable view of US policy, 77% of the United States in general, if only 38% of the American people themselves. Eighty-three percent felt the US role in the Middle East was negative, 76% said no benefits could justify the US role in Iraq, although 46%

36 Jaap van Ginneken, Ch. 5, pp. 114–139, in Sadik Harchaoui (ed.). *Hedendaags radicalisme* (Present-day radicalism. Apeldoorn, Neth.: Spinhuis publ. 2006).

37 Report by Craig Charney & Nicole Yakatan, *A new beginning* (Special Report, Council on Foreign Relations, May 2005). Brian Knowlton, *IHT*, May 19, 2005.

added that Western interference might be justified if it did indeed lead to benefits. But 34% said US policy was the *greatest threat* facing the Arab world, *well before* 'lack of change' and 'human rights'. Only 14% said the United States was sincere on Palestine, and only 12% felt it was sincere in its support for democracy.[38]

Apart from that, the longing for Western-style democracy in the Islamic heartland turns out to have often been overestimated. The Internet search machine Google, for instance, was at one point queried about how frequently people in Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia had been looking up the key word 'democracy' in order to see what it means in present-day western theory and practice. The answer: 'Your terms – democracy – do not have enough search volume to show graphs.'[39]

That Arab sentiment about President George W. Bush was negative may be understandable. But that Arab sentiment about President Barack Obama got *worse* may be more surprising, as considerable numbers of Americans continued to believe that he was a Muslim.[40] After his Cairo speech, many people had had high hopes that he would take on the Palestine issue, but it soon became clear that he was not willing or able to do anything substantial (at the time). An American poll held among 4,000 Arabs in half a dozen countries in 2011 found that favourable ratings of the United States had *fallen* by an average of 9% over the two previous years. Obama's personal ratings were by then *lower* than those of the leaders of four other countries included: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran (!) and France.[41]

But what about emancipation and gender equality then? Another authoritative pollster, The Gallup Organization, held face-to-face interviews with no less than 8,000 women, in eight predominantly Muslim countries, for a study on 'What women want: Listening to the

38 Lawrence Pintak a.o. in *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, July 2008.

39 'Google reveals what the world is searching for on the Internet', *IHT*, May 13–14, 2006.

40 The 'birther' controversy actually made these numbers rise. Halfway through his first term, 18% believed he secretly was a Muslim; well over 20% thought he was not born in the United States. Sheryl Gay Stolberg, 'Misperceptions stick', *IHT*, Aug. 20, 2010.

41 The survey was carried out by a reputable polling agency headed by John Zogby, and paid for by the Arab American Institute headed by his brother James Zogby (also the author of a book on *Arab voices*). Naseema Noor & Jim Lobe, 'U.S. standing plunges across Arab world', Soros' Other net/Savio's IPS *Newsletter*, July 13, 2011.

voices of Muslim women'. The report concluded they 'did not see gender issues as a priority, because other issues were more pressing' (i.e. political, social, and economic ones). To the surprise of the researchers, the answers to the open-ended questions *never ever* mentioned the hijab (headscarf) or burqa (covering garment) as a problem, even though these are widely presented as a 'sign of oppression' in the West. By contrast, the majority said it 'did not think adopting western values would help', as it associated them with 'moral decay' and 'pornography'.[42]

Iraq

Now let us take a closer look at the evolution of public opinion in Iraq, which came to be at the heart of events. Researchers from the prestigious Johns Hopkins University had held household surveys and concluded that the war had caused between 400,000 and 650,000 'excess deaths' there, that is to say, 12 to 22 times as many as the 30,000 that Bush had mentioned.[43] Sampling and interviewing in the aftermath of such a war are of course notoriously difficult, but <WorldPublicOpinion.org> was able to hold a poll in Iraq around the same time in 2006.

The good news was that two-thirds said that the country was now headed in the right direction. [Even though investors seemed less convinced, and the Baghdad stock market index lost almost two-thirds of its value between the spring of 2005 and 2006]. But the bad news was that 80% of the public was convinced that the United States sought permanent military bases, whereas 70% were said to be adamantly opposed to that and instead demanded their complete withdrawal within no more than two years. This was particularly true for the Sunnis, who had lost control to the Shiites throughout much of the country as a result of the intervention. No fewer than 88% of them said they supported violent attacks on US troops at that point in time.[44]

Three-quarters also said that ousting Saddam had been worth it, but overseas many in the Western and non-Western world questioned the fairness of his trial in Baghdad. An early 2006 international

42 Helena Andrews, 'Surprises in survey of Muslim women', *IHT*, June 9, 2006.
43 John Tirman, 'The forgotten wages of war', *IHT*, Jan. 5, 2012.
44 Nicholas Kristof, *IHT*, Febr. 15, 2006.

opinion poll was conducted by the reputable international Ipsos agency in nine different countries around the world.[45] It found that although three-quarters of Americans felt Saddam Hussein was getting a fair trial, less than half of the French did, and a third or less in developing countries ranging from Mexico to South Korea.[46] This sentiment persisted after he had been executed.

Among the American troops on the ground, too, there appeared to be rising doubts. This emerges from an exceptional survey on the question of 'How long should US troops stay in Iraq?' among almost a thousand soldiers there. The study was done by the aforementioned Zogby polling agency and Le Moyne College, and published in the early spring of 2006.[47] Almost three-quarters said that US troops should be pulled out within a year, and almost one quarter even said 'immediately'.

The majority also felt the insurgency they confronted depended not so much on foreign fighters (as they had originally been told) as on discontented native Sunnis. It could therefore only be contained by a doubling of the ground forces and the air attacks, they felt, which seemed to have become completely out of the question.[48] Around the same time, a poll in the *Washington Post* said that half of the American public also felt the United States should begin withdrawing troops, whereas one-third felt a civil war in Iraq was 'highly likely'.[49]

A Pew poll found that only a third of all people who had served in Afghanistan or Iraq felt the wars had been worth it. Well over a third of the veterans suffered from post-traumatic stress, and their suicide rates were three times as high as among others.[50] Withdrawal was finally proclaimed in December 2011, although the US embassy in the Green Zone still employed . . . 15,000 people. There is still a significant risk of the country falling apart in three ethnically and culturally

45 'Americans want execution of Saddam if convicted, while allies prefer life sentence'. At <www.ipsos-na.com/news/pressrelease.cfm?id=3001>.

46 'Poll finds U.S. is at odds with 8 nations on Saddam', Associated Press, *IHT*, March 9, 2006.

47 'US troops in Iraq: 72% say end war in 2006'. At: <www.zogby.com./news/ReadNews.dbm?ID=1075>.

48 Nicholas Kristof, *IHT*, March 1, 2006.

49 *Washington Post*, March 7, 2006. Cited in Maureen Dowd, 'Hollywood on the Potomac', *IHT*, March 9, 2006.

50 Timothy Egan, 'Help the 1 percent', *IHT*, March 17–18, 2012.

different zones, or even a civil war at one point. Under the new Shiite domination of Baghdad and the centre, furthermore, the country ceased its hostility to Iran. None of this matched with the lofty initial goals of the intervention.

Mirror Images

A few months before the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, Osama had finally been tracked down and killed by American special forces intruding into Pakistan. By that time, however, his popularity in the Islamic heartland had already faded – according to the same Global Attitudes Project of the Pew Research Center.

Around the time of the invasion of Iraq more or less half of the people in Jordan, Pakistan and Indonesia had still expressed the feeling that he would 'do the right thing in world affairs'. Half a dozen years later, this had already fallen to more or less a quarter, and after his death it fell further. But Al Qaida had of course never been the hierarchical worldwide organization it had been made out to be by American and other western leaders. Most later and smaller terrorist attacks had only been inspired by it, and carried out by local Muslims elsewhere – often Westernized or converted ones.[51]

Al Qaeda may not have spent more than half a million dollars on the 9/11 attack, but Osama gloated in a later video about his plan of 'bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy'. On the tenth anniversary of the attack, the *New York Times* calculated the US 'cost of reacting and over-reacting', in billions. Toll and physical damage amounted to 55 billion; economic impact to 123 billion; homeland security and related costs to 589 billion; war funding and related costs to 1,649 billion ; war funding over the next five years to 277, and future care for veterans to 589. Grand total: $3.3 trillion – that is to say, a significant part of America's excess debt. The newspaper concluded: 'For every dollar Al Qaeda spent to pull off the attack, the United States has spent an astonishing $6.6 million in response'.[52]

51 'The death of an icon', *IHT*, May 5, 2011. By Richard Bulliet, history professor at Columbia University and author of a book on *The case for Islamo-Christian civilization*.

52 Amanda Cox & David E. Sanger, 'Grim decade's huge cost', *IHT*, Sept. 10-11, 2011.

Conclusion

The oft-ignored discipline of 'polemology' or conflict-studies (partly revived under the heading of 'mediation') had long explained how such confrontations between nations and religions and ethnicities and cultures, tended to go from bad to worse. One party has grievances and attacks the other. The other responds, but just slightly more, in order 'to teach them a lesson' and because 'they only understand violence'. Soon, the escalation spiral cannot be stopped any more. It is accompanied by increasingly stereotypical 'enemy images', some of which show . . . a somewhat identical pattern on both sides.

The Pew Center project, for instance, revealed that some of such 'mirror images' play a role here. Among those who said Muslim–Western relations were bad, for instance, vast majorities in Muslim countries blamed the West, whereas Westerners blamed Muslims. Nigeria once again turned out to be evenly divided: Muslims there blamed the West, whereas Christians there blamed the Muslims.

Muslims outside Europe also claimed the West was violent and immoral, whereas Westerners felt Muslims were. (Muslims in Europe were in between.) One particularly revealing question about key cultural values was: Are Muslims [resp. Westerners] 'respectful of women'? Considerable majorities in the United States and among Western Europeans claimed that Muslims were not. Considerable majorities in the major Muslim countries, by contrast, claimed that Westerners were not. Only Nigeria, Turkey and Muslims in some European countries were more evenly divided.[53]

The whole 'clash of civilizations' therefore does indeed seem to have become a self-fulfilling prophecy with unintended consequences. Five or ten years may have been lost because Bush fell into the trap Osama had set for him, because many of the issues involved are complex and ambiguous by their very nature. Who started the animosity, where do you 'cut off' the previous relevant history? At the crusades? What is the 'minimal meaningful context' of the current problems? Does it include colonialism, interference and ongoing

53 Meg Bortin, 'For Muslims and West, Antipathy and mistrust – In global survey, both see each other as violent and disrespectful of women', *IHT*, June 6, 2006.

discrimination? Who can be held responsible on the other side? Just some isolated leaders or entire civilian populations?

It is important to see that such 'definitions of the situation' are highly arbitrary and changeable. If you put on coloured glasses, it seems they can only be resolved through massive and consistent violence against 'threats' (too) broadly defined. If you take those glasses off, it turns out that much can be resolved through tenacious and widespread attempts at dialogue with well-meaning majorities. What is needed is a strenuous effort to really reach out and build bridges with them, while isolating and combating the real enemies. Superficial exercises in mere public relations will not do.

About the Author

Jaap van Ginneken studied social psychology at the University of Amsterdam, did a Ph.D. with distinction, and long remained a part-time associate professor at its International School and at its Communication Science Department. His work has two major themes.

One theme is political and mass psychology, as in English-language academic studies such as *Crowds, psychology and politics* (1992), *Collective behavior and public opinion* (2003), and *Mass movements* (2007) as well as Dutch-language general interest books about swarming and self-organization (2009), financial psychology and crises (2010), and mood contagion in a hyper-connected world (2012).

Another theme is images of other cultures, as in English-language academic studies such as *Understanding global news* about the reporting of current events abroad (1998) and *Screening difference* about fictional Hollywood blockbuster movies (2007) as well as Dutch-language general interest books about classical comic strips (2003) and about everyday interaction with strangers (2008).

Meanwhile he has also contributed to a wide range of dailies and weeklies, radio and television programmes, ongoing exhibits and one-day public events. Today, he is a writer and speaker based in France.