BART BRANDSMA

# Polarisation

## Understanding the dynamics of Us versus Them

BB IN MEDIA

# Contents

## A New Approach 69

# This Book Keeps to the Middle

THIS BOOK KEEPS to the middle. On the one hand, it was written as a reference book for my training courses, workshops and lectures in the field of polarisation. I often felt that there is a need for something like this, especially for people attending a multi-day intensive course. In the case of an incident, conflict or polarisation, it helps to clarify situations and refer to specific parts once again. That's why I wrote this book and supplemented it with suitable illustrations and overviews. Anyone who wants to use my cognitive framework in their own professional practice to develop their skills in dealing strategically with polarisation can use it for support. On the other hand, I also wanted to write it as an ongoing story, so that people who encounter this cognitive framework for the first time can discover the argument by following the narrative arc, with a structured line of thought. This is why I sought a balance between subject matter and essay, between teaching and research.

This book also keeps to the middle between practice and theory. As a philosopher, I am happy to borrow insights from academia, from the work of important thinkers such as René Girard. He has furnished us with elegant insights into the motives of people in conflict. The theoretical background given to me by Colin Craig, an old hand in dialogue training, has also been a source. It supplied

me with crucial dos and don'ts from 30 years of Northern Irish conflict mediation. Besides the theory, however, it is mainly my own practical experience I am contributing here. Through my work as a trainer and consultant in places like Northern Ireland and Lebanon, my familiarity with conflict practices in India, Nepal, Congo, Serbia and many situations in the Netherlands where dialogue and conflict, and particularly polarisation, demand attention, I have developed insights that have proven valuable for professional practice. I see this myself in my field assignments, for example, in elderly care, education, police practice, and working with mayors. I get an appreciative response, and through the years this has enabled me to make an ever-increasing use of what people call *'the wisdom of the crowd'*. Practical people have corrected my work; they are my real gurus. Beat officers, police sergeants and commissioners, public prosecutors, crisis managers, safety managers, PR people, counterterrorism and radicalisation experts, mayors, community workers, care professionals, directors and executives, journalists, cartoonists, teacher trainers, lecturers. There really are too many to list. In any event, it means I can dare to say straight out that this is a practical book. It has not developed from theory for practice; it has been written from the perspective of practical situations where polarisation has left a major mark. I started my work with dialogue, conflict and polarisation in 2006, and this book represents the result of ten years' experience. It feels good to do it justice in this way.

This book is about 'learning to keep to the middle'. Every polarisation creates a field of tension with three recognisable points. They are the poles on the right and the left, two opposites that define the extremities of the field of tension, and the third point of note: 'the middle'. This book issues a challenge to make better use of this point, and not simply because the grey area between black and white is preferable. Not because the extremes must be counterbalanced, but because the middle offers opportunities for social cohesion and civilised coexistence. Working on and in the middle is

difficult, but it is the place where we learn the art of practising what I have begun calling 'mediative speech' and 'mediative behaviour'. I invite the reader to try it out with me and to tell me about your successes and setbacks: www.polarisatie.nl. Together, we have an urgent blow to strike.

In the first part, I clarify the ingenious dynamics of polarisation. In the second part, I consider the intriguing phenomenon of conflict, and the interaction it has with polarisation. The two are in the same family, like a big and little brother: inseparable. The third part offers my findings, with strategic solutions to polarisation and the precise instruments I use to deal with it and particularly to 'stick it out' in the middle.

It is my ultimate ambition to achieve a guideline for developing a new discipline: polarisation strategy, that is, the capacity to think strategically and to act effectively when we are confronted with us-versus-them thinking. This is crucial for many professionals. I hope that this book helps the reader find new ways into the issue, and gives adequate answers to polarisation.

BART BRANDSMA
Benedictusberg/Mamelis, the Netherlands, October 2017

# Part I
# Polarisation: How It Works

# 1 A New Approach

To start with, it might help if we do not see polarisation as just a problem. Or, even better, if we do not immediately label it as a cause of discrimination, injustice and violence in the world. Polarisation is more than this. Moreover, a one-sided focus on these serious social problems prevents us from seeing what else the phenomenon entails.

To be able to discover this, we need a different, new and more fascinating approach. Searching for this, I do not mean to avoid the seriousness or consequences of polarisation. We all know only too well that polarisation sets countries and government leaders against each other, that it can split apart entire population groups, whether this is due to competing interests, a religious dispute or simply because people's skin colour differs. Polarisation can easily escalate into violent dynamics, causing people harm, sowing anguish, inciting terror and killing. We know this and so I needn't elucidate it here. A sound answer to polarisation is in itself a serious, urgent matter. But for this I need a new, somewhat lighter approach.

I want an approach that gives room to fathom polarisation, so that the answers we formulate are actually effective. By first introducing a little philosophical aloofness, I intend to provide polarisation – us-them thinking – with a new conceptual framework that also offers new opportunities. A framework that allows us to better evaluate the circumstances at our juncture in time and our own role in them. A framework that raises questions. How does polarisation

work in the interplay between politician and citizen? What impact does *'us and them'* thinking have on the refugee crisis, which has set Europe against the migrant? What is the impact of the us-them dynamics on the quality of our journalism? In our society, what effect does polarisation have on radicalised young people, on the work of the police professional, on the viewpoint a mayor adopts when tensions arise in disadvantaged areas of the city? What does a teacher do if the class polarises into black-and-white thinking and nuance keeps losing ground? Us-them thinking exists in society at the micro, meso and macro levels – the media demonstrate this to us every day – which makes it surprising that up till now we have lacked a sound framework to understand it in depth. We miss a framework of thought that not only simply describes the principles and roles, but also the obstacles and opportunities.

There are indeed useful books on a related phenomenon, conflict. Extensive study on the question of how conflict works has been conducted within a specific subject area to which we can assign the collective name 'conflict studies'. And you can learn the skills to deal with conflict in training courses, because as well as the notion of 'dealing with conflict', we have 'conflict management'. Based on what we know about the conflict phenomenon, as a leader or manager, you can learn to play a role that is effective, supported by scientific insights. In short, we have carefully thought through the principles of the conflict phenomenon and the psychology of the conflict actors. We have learnt to act on conflict.

The same cannot be said for polarisation. Polarisation is often seen as a somewhat larger conflict that has spun out of control. We combat it with the same methods that we apply to conflicts (see Part 2). This results in many shortcomings. In fact, there is a fundamental difference between the two. A conflict features directly involved parties, problem owners, whom you can identify. In the protracted conflict in Northern Ireland, referred to down the years as *'the Troubles'*, practically all of Belfast's residents were involved, based on their religious identity, either Catholic or Protestant. This

is a conflict. *They own the problem*, on one side or the other. Just like a midnight brawl in a pub, we always talk of 'problem owners' and the same applies to conflict. Everyone with a black eye or other physical injury is involved. The characteristic of a conflict is that the actors have chosen a position, because they are participating, whether they want to or not. It is not hard to recognise those involved. The one wants to strike out, another tries to make a quick compromise and a third tries to sidestep the issue: the conflict avoider. But even the last mentioned cannot deny it. They are part of the rising tension; the problem ownership is uncontested.

This is fundamentally different from the polarisation phenomenon. In principle, polarisation – us-them thinking – always involves a choice of whether or not to assume the position of problem owner. Deciding to join in is in itself a crucial choice for 'the actors'. Are we or are we not going to participate in the black-and-white thinking and to what extent? Whether we are talking about the polarisation of 'Muslim versus non-Muslim' that we observe worldwide, the confrontation in America between 'white police and the Afro-American section of the community' or the clash between rich entrepreneurs and poor employees, people often have the choice of feeling part of something or conversely choosing to stay outside. This is a characteristic difference between conflict and polarisation.

In a conflict you can identify the conflict owners – whether they want you to or not – and so you can also apply conflict management. It is different with polarisation because here the question is, who is playing a decisive role, who can or should be addressed? Where do you start managing polarisation? After each Daesh[1]

1 Note that I prefer to use the term Daesh (the Arab acronym for Islamic State) instead of Islamic State because that term has an ingeniously applied impact on polarisation. Radicals use it to mobilise the Muslim community outside the war zone and draw them into the battle. I would rather not honour this attempt to associate peaceful Muslims in Europe and elsewhere with the violence of war.

terrorist attack in Europe, Muslims are again asked to dissociate themselves, even if they do not see themselves as either Daesh sympathisers or opponents.

Finding who is responsible, who the key players are (read: problem owners) in polarisation is a tricky business. It is a stumbling-block in developing polarisation management. In serious polarising issues, there is always someone who wants to act as the spokesperson for large sections of the population, but this in itself should be enough to make us suspicious. The polarisation phenomenon always features changing players who interact on each other. Some are faithful to a chosen role, while others are vague and elusive. And while in a conflict you can clearly indicate which parties and interests are at stake, polarisation demonstrates a varying set of actors who in terms of interests sometimes behave entirely illogically. An analysis of interests does not unconditionally explain people's erratic behaviour or the escalations we see in increasing polarisation. It is clear that other principles are at work. To a degree this explains our remarkable powerlessness against polarisation.

Polarisation is a phenomenon with its own dynamics and principles, of which we only have a limited grasp. All kinds of people play a role, stick their oar in, but when it comes down to it, no one assumes responsibility. Who reinforced the polarisation of Muslim versus non-Muslim? Was it Pope Francis? Was it President Erdogan of Turkey? Was it the 9/11 hijackers? Was it the editorial staff of the Parisian magazine Charlie Hebdo? Was it 'Western journalism'? Is it the local 'imam sowing hate' or is it the populist who plays on the extreme-right flanks of the political spectrum? Was it Barack Obama, who spoke with a moderate tone, or is it his successor who continually seeks confrontation? Who is inciting this, or doing something about it? The players are just as active as intangible. We can always step back from polarisation, avoid a personal role in it or deny responsibility. This is a major reason why no earlier

attempt has been made to develop something as complicated as practical polarisation management. That is where we are. Where do we begin and with whom?

## 1.1 Basic Law I – Thought Construct

To begin at the beginning. To fathom polarisation – to understand it in depth – we need to elaborate on three fundamental laws or basic elements of polarisation. The first is that a 'thought construct' plays the lead role in polarisation. It all happens in our head. It involves thinking in terms of 'us versus them'. A thought construct creates whatever you can think up about 'us against them'. You cannot observe polarisation directly; it is something abstract, a concept. It is about words and perceptions and ideas and they are all very different from, say, a physical conflict.

In a physical conflict like the attack on the Bataclan theatre in Paris, you can hear the clatter of Kalashnikovs, and you can see people running away from the attackers yelling 'Allahu Akbar'. Here polarisation is all over the place, but still you cannot actually observe it. If we look behind the direct violence, ultimately there is the thought construct: the idea of us, 'the free West' against them, 'the Daesh and the Caliphate'. Here two abstract identities are fighting each other and each wants to rule the other out.

A few months before Bataclan, the Daesh-*Charlie Hebdo* polarisation set the concept of 'the Free World and democracy' against 'the Caliphate and Sharia'. This conflict ranged over theatre audiences, editorial staff and cartoonists, capitalising on an old, existing polarisation, the one about 'Muslim against non-Muslim', possibly framed as 'faithful Muslims against kafirs or infidels'. Similar things happened on New Year's Eve 2016, after a series of assaults at Cologne Central Station. The polarisation 'German against refugee' quickly developed into a notion of 'civilised Germans with high opinions of the equality of man and woman' against the

'savage chancers of asylum-seekers with outmoded Islamic views about the subordination of women'. From both of these cases we can deduce the abstract concept of 'us against them'.

Another example. Men and women exist; that is an observable and biological fact. Polarisation only exists if we assign specific characteristics to the opposite poles 'man' and 'woman' We can set them sharply up against each other by charging the identity of the opposite poles with meanings on top of the neutral biological facts. What it means to be a woman or a man is determined socially and culturally; the identities of both become charged. Being a woman in the fashion world is different from being one in politics. Being a woman in Zimbabwe is different from being one in Sweden. And similarly, worldwide – again by way of example – there are people from 'the West' and people from 'the East'. This is unmistakably the case. We can also document this concretely, by investigating the municipality in which individuals are registered. But polarisation (the thought construct) begins when we know with great certainty that, for example, one pole is extremely materialistic while the other is exceptionally spiritual. One is individualistic and expressive, while the adversary is an indirect herd animal who prefers to wait.

In polarisation, two identities are always set against each other. They are both obvious, presented as facts. Men against women, black against white, politicians against citizens. The shift to polarisation is only made by charging these distinctions with meanings that the identities could have. Then men, for example, are active and good at technical things, whereas women are passive and mainly out to have a good conversation. Black people are oppressed and have a victim mentality and whites need to watch out as far as their colonial past is concerned, they are the descendants of oppressors. Politicians are accused of being the 'elite who like the taste of power' and the citizen can suddenly be called the 'man in the street who knows what is really going on and who won't let anyone pull the wool over his eyes'.

With this first fundamental, it is important to see that inherently neutral antitheses – direct opposites – become charged with meaning. It could be a negative or indeed a positive charge, it makes no difference. In fact, every charge reinforces the polarisation by confirming the two poles, presented as opposites, in our minds. The remark 'women are good at multitasking' (positive) is just as polarising as the remark 'women cannot reverse park' (negative). In both cases, the polarisation is reinforced: one identity (man) is put in contrast against the other (woman), as an opposite pole. The result is a focus on the other person's otherness and the emphasis on identity is made relevant.

This holds both bad and good news. The bad news is that we cannot cope without polarisation. We make distinctions – we think in terms of us versus them – and we have a strong tendency to hold on to these distinctions. As I live in the countryside, I distinguish myself from people with an 'urban mentality'. This is reinforced the more I think about it, the more I start to value my garden and the meadows around me. And that is why ex-smokers feel a gulf between themselves and people who do not have the good sense to give up cigarettes. We build on images of opposite poles, and by assigning characteristics to the 'other', we also define who we ourselves are. Polarisation is closely associated with making or confirming one's own identity. Polarisation is an identity creator and that's why we need it. We keep doing it, incessantly.

But there is good news too, because in polarisation we are looking at concepts, at 'frames' within which we think. We can influence them, direct them and even manipulate them. Frames are malleable to a certain extent. Sometimes they can be altered, broken down or even replaced completely. Sometimes it takes a lot of searching, but another time it is obvious or even comes to you without effort. The polarisation between the rival Dutch cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, by extension their football teams Feyenoord and Ajax, evaporates when the Dutch national team has to play a foreign

one. Particularly if the opposition is the eternal Dutch rival and neighbour Germany. Also – and this is culturally far more important than the football example – you can look at the transformed man-woman distinction. In the first half of the 20th century this distinction had a charge that was heavily contested by the women's movement. Married women were not allowed to work; they entered the 20th century without voting rights, and their primary role in life was that of mother. The contrast with the man, the breadwinner and head of the family, was huge. In the polarisation that raged strongly through the feminist wave of the seventies, much was gained – though by no means everything – to allow the man versus woman frame to be altered. Even age-old contradictions – certainties about identities – can crumble away. It is good news that polarisation is a thought construct. We are not powerless.

## 1.2 Basic Law II – Fuel

Polarisation needs fuel. It works like an open fire that cannot be left unattended for too long. You need to keep coming back and putting on another log. If you are too late, it is a big job to relight the fire. If you stop supplying fuel, the polarisation collapses. It diminishes in intensity, ultimately extinguishing entirely.

A certain degree of us-them thinking exists between the Norwegians and the Lapps in the northernmost parts of Scandinavia. The Norwegians know that the Lapps are a bad lot. They drink too much alcohol and don't keep their promises. It is inherent in the Lapp identity – Norwegians repeat time after time – as they think of themselves as more Lapp than Norwegian. With statements about the Lapps' identity, they pour fuel on the polarisation that has been dragging on for so long. Lapps are opposed to Norwegians, and the Lapps also know exactly why: 'Norwegians just think they are so superior, they want to impose rules on us that are not ours, and when push comes to shove, you cannot trust them! Then they make promises that they fail to keep. In fact, we don't want to be called

Lapps. That is an insult, we are called Sami.' Each statement about the identity of the opposite poles – Sami or Norwegian – supplies fuel for this ongoing issue.

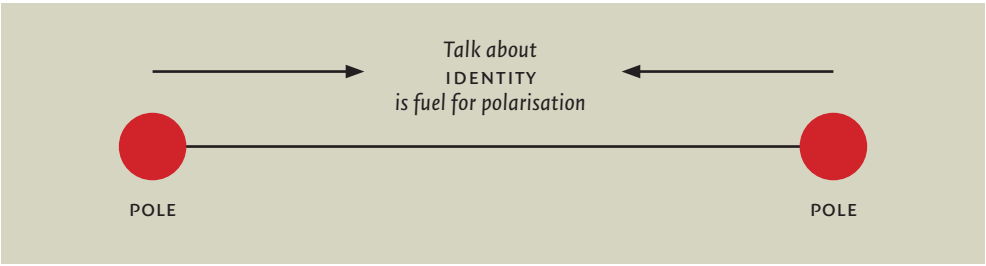


*Figure 1.* *The field of tension*

But this can also happen in a short time frame. At one of my polarisation courses, I had arranged to train two groups on the same day. The changeover was at midday around lunchtime. An excellent lunch. The first group tucked into the ham and cheese sandwiches and left, and then the second group arrived. But there was not enough food left for them. So then the polarisation started: the afternoon group knew that the morning group was antisocial. Someone concluded that they came from a department that was inherently selfish. The afternoon group would never have entertained the idea of stuffing themselves full at someone else's cost! The identities of the two parties involved in this 'morning versus afternoon' polarisation were effortlessly fed with fuel. This example quickly reveals the characteristic by which we can recognise fuel. The identity of the other is made central, and people make statements about this identity (morning group, afternoon group, Sami or Norwegian). Positive, negative or neutral; the pattern is the same, they are that and we are this.

Refugees are opportunists, asylum-seekers are testosterone bombs, right-wing politicians are egotistic, left-wing politics is naive, Serbs are aggressive, Bosnians are crafty, Berbers are backward, Turks are not open, the police discriminate, politicians only

want to score, bankers are money-grubbers, Poles are profiteers, Poles are good tradesmen, Obama is good, Trump is bad, Catholics are hypocritical, Protestants are on the level. Around the Mediterranean everyone is hospitable and easy-going, in Scandinavia people are depressive and it takes ages before you make real contact with someone. None of these statements are true to the identity of the other, but do, however, fuel a certain polarisation. Denials do exactly the same: refugees had no alternative but to leave their home, asylum-seekers are ordinary family people, right-wing politicians strive for their ideal of freedom and non-dependence, left-wing politicians feel their hearts quicken for their fellow man, the police always act without prejudice... For every negative statement you can formulate a positive counter, tying in with how we might think about the other. However, it makes no difference as fuel for polarisation. If the identity of the other is central, linked to an assertion about the nature of that identity, we are feeding polarisation; it is us-them thinking. In this regard the statement 'homosexuals are perverts' is equivalent to 'homosexuals are in fact often good-natured and sympathetic'. Both statements supply fuel. Well- or ill-intended, they are simple statements about the identity of the other.

This insight – I have often observed – only sinks in slowly. I associate this fact with the third basic law we need to consider in order to fathom the dynamic of polarisation. Fuel statements easily evoke the suggestion that we are exchanging facts with each other, that by agreeing or disagreeing with statements about identities we can elevate the debate to a higher level. Using a sketch of the identity of the other – our opposite pole – we want to share our knowledge about the other, we are making as strong as possible an opening move in the discussion. And thus it would seem that we are acting within the domain of reasonableness and dialogue. This is an illusion. It is not the case with polarisation.

## 1.3 Basic Law III – Gut Feeling Dynamics

Polarisation is instinctive, a dynamic of gut feeling. With increasing polarisation, the amount of conversational material – the debate and the discussion – increases, while the level of reasonableness declines. Polarisation is gut feeling dynamics through and through. The philosopher would say that – as modes of persuasion – 'logos' (the appeal to logic) does not count, it is 'pathos' (the appeal to emotion) that matters. This partly explains the powerlessness we experience. Mayors, politicians, teachers, etc. would love to be able to restore the calm with a single, well-aimed word. No matter how well-picked their restraining words are, they do not land. They do not reach the mind. In most cases they are more likely to strike in the gut.

A good example of this is the murder case involving Marianne Vaatstra, a young girl in Friesland (in the far north of the Netherlands) who was found raped and killed in May 1999. The culprit was unknown. This crime created a polarisation between the locals and the residents of the nearby asylum-seekers' centre that was rife for years. The locals had a firm conviction that someone from the centre had committed the crime. People fought about this for years; the locals wanted to ensure that the culprit(s) were no longer shielded. The us-them thinking gained the chance to become deeply entrenched. But then, years later, the real culprit was arrested. The facts were undeniable. DNA material proved that the culprit was a local, a white, middle-aged cattle farmer, who lived only a mile and a half away from the scene of the crime. How strong does the evidence need to be? For people who had invested in their image of the enemy for years, it was not strong enough. In the gut feeling dynamics of polarisation, facts are not enough. Even today there are people in Friesland who remain convinced of one thing: an asylum-seeker actually committed the murder.

This third insight has its consequences. Reason (thinking logically) only provides a limited answer to polarisation. Exchanging knowledge about the identity of the other, building up an understanding of the opposite pole's viewpoints has a very limited effect. Because polarisation is just not reasonable. The gut's fickleness has its own influence and we are all exceptionally sensitive to it. Thinking in terms of enemies and friends is stubborn and impervious to hard evidence. And even if the facts demonstrate the opposite, there is always the conspiracy theory.

The increasing number of conspiracy theories in classrooms, for example, is a good indicator of polarisation. The conspiracy theory is the escape route that allows you to be right and hold on to your view when all the facts demonstrate the opposite. A conspiracy theory is needed to uphold that Marianne Vaatstra was murdered by a refugee. This phenomenon is, for example, also present in the Israel-Palestine polarisation. The 'Jewish conspiracy' is an old familiar; here we are supposedly being manipulated by a global plot. And 9/11 must also have been a conspiracy; here America sacrificed its own citizens in order to create an image of the enemy. The conspiracy theory is the escape that some young people use to maintain the idea that all Muslims are peace-loving and could never cause something like 9/11. They seek evil elsewhere. It is the ultimate attempt to hold on to a polarisation in which we can continue to justify ourselves and our extreme images of the enemy.

## 1.4 Summary

In a polarisation, opposite poles are defined: us against them. So here we are dealing with a concept. One pole is set against the other and charged with meaning. It involves us-them thinking. You cannot observe polarisation. It exists, but only in our mind. This thinking can persist – gain a grip on us – as long people are supplying the fuel. Polarisation continuously needs fuel, and this

fuel consists of simple assertions about the nature of the opposite pole's identity. In its simplest form: we are right, they are wrong. This whole thing results in gut feeling dynamics to which everyone is susceptible. It speaks to our gut feelings. A sensible or rational rebuttal to polarisation rhetoric has limited effect.

# Afterword

Here I would like to thank one person, one group and one organisation for their contributions to my work. The one person is Paulo de Campos Neto. He is a Dutch police officer with whom I have worked regularly for many years because we believe in the same things: keeping an eye out for diversity, the need for depolarisation, building up mediative behaviour. For many years Paulo and I did not earn a cent from this work; our ideals took priority and we sought each other out again and again, looking for opportunities to make a difference. Together, we knocked on doors.

Paulo loves the job of police officer and wants only one thing: to contribute to a future in which the Dutch National Police 'belongs to and is for everyone' – without violating Article 1 of our constitution. No American conditions here! His perseverance and skill in staying connected are things I greatly admire in Paulo. Also, he keeps on believing in the worth of my philosophical contribution to the police and persevered with it, even when hardly anyone was listening. Since then we have reached thousands of police officers with our valuable offerings.

Paulo is a member of the Parrèsia group (Greek for 'speaking frankly'). This is the one group I want to thank for their welcome, for listening to my body of thought, for their attention, critical capacity and team spirit, and above all for their clout in putting polarisation on the National Police agenda so quickly. When we sat

down together in Driebergen, after the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 and when the refugee crisis was dominating the news cycles in papers and TV, this group just cleared their agenda for our report on us-versus-them thinking which we shared with all the police forces in the country. Our report covered questions like, what is the role of the organisation with regards to us-versus-them thinking? How can we use the cognitive framework on polarisation most effectively? How do we build on a diverse force to make the right connections with society? Since then, our work with and on the polarisation cognitive framework has spread widely through the Netherlands, from the deep south to the far north, from Rotterdam to Groningen, from the intelligence organisation, the 'triangle' of the mayor, public prosecutor and chief of police, through to the officers on the beat.

The openness of the Parrèsia group is special. It's evidence that a small group can achieve a great deal when individual members don't just focus on their own interests. I already knew that in theory, but with the Parrèsia group I have experienced it in practice. It was great for me – being on such a team – and so my thanks are due to Max Daniel, Jan Bart Wilschut, Sharif Abdoel Wahid, Alfred van Dijk, Mohamed Sini, Marjolijn Dolfin, Humphry van der Lee, Arthur Barendse, El Rahmani, Rob Westdijk, Ilse Vogelzang, Fatima Elatik, Paul van der Hove, Jamil Meusen and Wilbert Mossink.

The organisation I want to thank is the Dutch National Police. The great thing about working with professionals who work for the police is that I get to meet a combination of skills that makes me the happiest: the capacity to reflect, coupled with the urge and ability to act. I love how fast we can achieve this at times. Philosophy is important, but what are we actually going to do? Science is necessary, but what can we do with it? It is a matter of finding a midpoint between theory and practice. The police are to the core an organisation devoted to finding the midpoint.

Being the police for one and all, staying neutral and independent, between thought and deed, between left and right, between... It does not always work the way it should, but mastering the art of the midpoint will always be the feat that this organisation must achieve. In the meantime, I have begun working with police professionals in neighbouring countries, from Austria to Belgium, from France to Norway. Admittedly, our Dutch police still have much to learn, but of all the national forces in Europe I think they are naturals at the 'art of the midpoint'. I would like to thank the National Police for the modest contribution I have been able to make and for the insights I have gained through them that have benefited this book on polarisation.

BART BRANDSMA

www.polarisatie.nl