Summary

This dissertation describes the rise, peak and fall of organized fascism in the Netherlands in the years from 1923 to 1945. The three main research questions are: What was the nature of Dutch fascism? What forms did Dutch fascism take? To what extent did Dutch fascism differ from generic fascism? The research focuses on the nature of Dutch fascism between 1923 and 1945, and how it is similar to and different from generic fascism. My starting point was that Dutch fascism should be seen as a fully fledged component of generic fascism. By considering Dutch fascism in this way, this study can help to strengthen the foundations of the concept of ‘generic fascism’, based on the assumption that the increasing diversity of research into national manifestations of fascism can reinforce the theoretical foundation of generic fascism.

The argument is structured as follows. Besides presenting and explaining the research questions, the first chapter describes the background to the many decades of discussion between historians in search of a usable operational definition of the concept of ‘generic fascism’. The question is also addressed whether it is indeed possible to define fascism at all and, if so, how.

Chapter two provides a historiographical summary of the problem of defining fascism. This section concludes with the following definition (by Roger Griffin) of generic fascism that serves as the basis of the comparative research conducted in this dissertation into the relationship between Dutch and generic fascism: Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism. This is followed by a overview of international research into fascism in recent decades, in the form of a descriptive and critical review of the secondary literature. A summary is then given, on the basis of certain selected topics, of a number of relevant characteristic properties of generic fascism, such as background, the conditions under which it can flourish, its manifestations
and origins, its strong palingenetic aspect, the ambition to change society to achieve a form desired by the fascists (social engineering) and, finally, the revolutionary aspect of fascism. This is followed by consideration of the two most prominent manifestations of generic fascism: the Italian fascism of Benito Mussolini and the German national socialism of Adolf Hitler.

Chapter three aims to describes the various facets of Dutch fascism, first of all by focusing on those who were involved from its early beginnings, both in practice and in theory, and then by examining what earlier Dutch and foreign researchers have written about it. This is followed by a closer substantive study of Dutch fascism, where the years from 1918 to 1945 prove to fall into five distinct periods: 1918-1922 (proto-fascism), 1923-1928 (first steps), 1929-1933 (growth and peak), 1934-1939 (radicalization) and 1940-1945 (on the German leash). This section provides as full a picture as possible of all fascist parties that existed in the Netherlands. The fascist parties which emerged in the Netherlands from 1923 onwards had their origins in individuals, parties and movements that were already present and which were generally speaking anti-democratic, authoritarian, anti-Marxist, anti-anarchist, reactionary-conservative and strongly revolutionary-nationalist. To acquire a clear insight into these parties, this study devoted attention to the people and organizations that preceded them. This section can also be seen as an overview of the developments that led to the emergence of Dutch fascism. Besides a summary of the most well-known parties and movements, I also provide information on the many partial and full initiatives taken between 1923 and 1940, about which very little has been known until now. Subsequently, on the basis of four selected topics, I examine the similarities between conservatism, fascism and national-socialism, with a special focus on the development path followed by many Dutch fascists, from conservatism through fascism to national socialism. The study then examines the possible reasons why Dutch fascism never succeeded in becoming a broad political and social movement, as in Italy and Germany. This section concludes with an attempt to explain why Dutch fascism failed to achieve almost all of its objectives.

Chapter four draws a comparison, on the basis of the operational definition of generic fascism chosen earlier, between Dutch and generic fascism. It does this by examining the four significant components of that definition individually: revolution, palingenesis, populism and ultra-nationalism.

The fifth and last chapter contains the conclusions and the answers to the research questions outlined above: What was the nature of Dutch fascism?
What forms did Dutch fascism take? To what extent did Dutch fascism differ from generic fascism? Dutch fascism proved not have been a success. Its various forms are presented as completely as possible on the basis of an overview of relevant figures and a chronological summary of almost all fascist political parties active in the years from 1923 to 1945, whereby the years from 1918-1923 are also examined as a ‘run-up period’. The answer to the third question is provided in the form of a conclusion: that, in terms of palingenesis, populism and ultra-nationalism, Dutch fascism differs hardly, if at all, from generic fascism; only in terms of the revolution component does Dutch fascism fundamentally differ from generic fascism.

The case of Dutch fascism shows that political parties or movements can be fascist without being revolutionary. Dutch fascism proves to have differed substantially from the chosen operational definition of fascism on one of the four criteria, meaning that Dutch fascism as a whole differs from generic fascism. Griffin’s definition therefore needs to be corrected, as not all of its components are equal. Consequently, I propose modifying the definition as follows: Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of sometimes revolutionary populist ultra-nationalism.