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CHANGING THE RULES WHILE THE GAME IS ON; FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO ASSIMILATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

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In many countries around the world attitudes towards immigrants have toughened in the past few years, but hardly anywhere has the shift has been so dramatic as in the Netherlands. Why is it that a country that had institutionalised the acceptance of difference and that was reputed for its tolerance could shift so quickly to what is perceived as coercive and assimilationist policy? How can such a liberal and politically stable society transform itself almost overnight to one that demands conformity, puts the blame for lacking integration almost exclusively on the newcomers and threatens them with sanctions and fines if they do not comply with the new rules? Why does a country that has long prided itself for its religious tolerance suddenly blame its Muslims for practising a 'backward religion'? Why did all this come so unexpectedly? True, comparable trends can be distinguished in several other European countries, such as

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Denmark or Austria, but the shift in policy and the popular backlash appear more extreme in the Netherlands than anywhere else (Vasta 2005). This is why this chapter makes an attempt to analyse what has been going on in that country and what lessons can be drawn from this for theorising on integration and multiculturalism.

The chapter starts with a brief summary of the immigrant situation in the Netherlands. Next, I will give an overview of the history of public policy regarding immigrant integration with its well-known emphasis on multiculturalism (Entzinger 2003 for more details). I will then describe and discuss in more detail developments in the past few years and try to find explanations for the sudden changes in the Dutch political climate that has led to the fall of multiculturalism and to a strong push for assimilation. Are these indeed signs of a failed integration process, as many observers claim? Has the concept of multiculturalism been ill reflected and is it not suited for coping with situations of relatively large-scale immigration? Or can one claim that the immigrants' integration has been so successful that their presence can not be qualified as a marginal phenomenon any longer, but rather as one that has fundamentally affected and changed Dutch society?

Immigrants in the Netherlands

The recent history of immigration to the Netherlands and the immigrant presence in that country are not drastically different from those in neighbouring West European countries. Currently, about 11 per cent of the Dutch population of 16.3 million people are foreign born and for that reason can be qualified as immigrants. If one includes the second generation the percentage goes up to 20. This means that one in five persons living in the Netherlands is either an immigrant or a child of an immigrant. These figures include people with a background in other EU-countries, in western countries outside the EU as well as in pre-independent Indonesia. The number of residents with 'non-western origins', as official Dutch statistics call them, stands at around 1.6 million, one-tenth of the population. Among these 'visible minorities' – to use a Canadian term - three communities stand out in size: Turks, Surinamese and Moroccans each number between 300,000 and 350,000. The Turkish and the Moroccan communities are legacies of the so-called guest worker policies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which were followed by a rather generous programme of settlement and family reunion. Most migrants from Suriname arrived in the 1970s, when this former Dutch colony acquired

political independence. Since the late 1980s immigration to the Netherlands has generally been on the increase and its origins have become much more diverse. The end of the Cold War led to a significant growth of East European migrants as well as of asylum seekers, some of whom later acquired refugee status. Besides, growing numbers of Dutch and foreign residents find their spouses in other countries. Meanwhile, immigration among the three largest communities, the Turks, the Surinamese and the Moroccans, is continuing, albeit at a slower pace than before. During the past two or three years, however, immigration to the Netherlands has declined significantly. This is believed to be the combined outcome of a stagnant economy and stricter immigration laws and policies.

Foreign citizens constitute only a minority of all people of immigrant descent. In fact, only 4.5 per cent of the population of the Netherlands do not hold a Dutch passport, less than in most nearby countries. This is largely the outcome of a generous naturalisation policy – at least, until recently – and of the fact that nearly all (post-)colonial migrants hold Dutch passports anyway. Yet, unlike many other immigration countries in Europe, citizenship is not generally considered as the primary distinguishing factor between migrants and the native population. Rather, ethnic origin tends to be more relevant in the public perception as a means of differentiating between *them* and *us*. The reasons for this approach and its consequences will be discussed later.

The settlement patterns of immigrants, irrespective of where one places the defining boundary between immigrant and non-immigrant, are quite unbalanced. Again, as in most other countries in Europe, migrants tend to be overrepresented in the larger cities and underrepresented in the countryside. Initially, most migrants came to the cities, where employment and educational opportunities were best. Once migrant communities had settled there, follow-up migrants tended to join these, taking advantage of the fact that the original population had become socially and geographically mobile, thus leaving the least attractive housing stock to the new arrivals. The four largest cities in the country (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) house only 13 per cent of the total population of the Netherlands, but they accommodate over 30 per cent of all immigrants. In Amsterdam and Rotterdam almost half the population has an immigrant background (first and second generation), as do two-thirds of the school-aged children and youth in these cities. Needless to say that in certain neighbourhoods only a small

native population of students and pensioners has stayed behind. So far, however, there has not been a trend towards ghettoisation in the sense that immigrants of one particular ethnic background tend to flock together in specific neighbourhoods, as, for example, in certain American cities. The extensive social housing system in the Netherlands with its relatively 'colour blind' distribution mechanisms has prevented this from occurring.

From multiculturalism to integration policies

The extensive social housing system is only one aspect of the strong welfare state in the Netherlands that has left its marks on integration policies for immigrants. Back in the 1950s, it was mainly through a limited number of well-chosen social policy measures that large numbers of so-called 'repatriates' from Indonesia were encouraged to assimilate to Dutch society, with which they already had a certain familiarity. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, social workers again played a crucial role in the reception and guidance of newly arriving immigrants, guest workers from the Mediterranean as well as people from Suriname. A major difference, however, was that these migrants' residence was seen as temporary, both by the authorities and by most migrants themselves. As a consequence, no efforts were made this time to promote their integration. On the contrary, the migrants were encouraged to retain their own cultural identity. This would help them reintegrate upon their return to their countries of origin. One of the clearest expressions of this approach was the introduction of mother tongue teaching for migrant children in Dutch primary schools as from 1974. The authorities also facilitated migrants in setting up their own associations and consultative bodies.

To the Dutch this approach of creating separate facilities based on community identities was nothing new. Under the well-known system of 'pillarisation' (*verzuiling*) various religious and ideological communities in the Netherlands had long had their own institutional arrangements, such as schools, hospitals, social support agencies, newspapers, trade unions, political parties and even broadcasting organisations for radio and television. Each community or 'pillar' (e.g. Catholics, Protestants, Jews, but also socialists, liberals, humanists) may set up its own institutions, largely paid for by the state. The state itself can then remain neutral, since it is obliged to treat all communities in exactly the same way. Within their institutions communities are reasonably free to make their own arrangements, which enables them to preserve their specific identity and

to ‘emancipate’ their own members. This approach is based on the subsidiarity principle, or – to use a classical Dutch Protestant term - ‘sovereignty in one’s own circle’, which in a more contemporary variant would be “living apart together”. The unifying element in this institutionalised diversity is to be found at the top: the elites of all pillars meet regularly to discuss issues of common concern and to build coalitions that are needed for majority decision making. Hence the metaphor of pillarisation: the elites constitute the common roof that the pillars support (Lijphart 1975).

Since the late 1960s pillarisation has been losing ground in the Netherlands, partly as a result of secularisation and partly because of the rising level of schooling of the population as a whole. Unconditional obedience to paternalistic leaders, a prerequisite for a proper functioning of the system, could no longer be forced upon the followers. However, it was generally believed that what did not work any more for the population as a whole might be good for the migrants who, after all, were perceived as fundamentally different from the Dutch and as people in need of emancipation. Until about 1980 the promotion of institutional separateness could be justified easily with an appeal on the migrants’ presumed temporariness. However, this institutional separateness persisted even after the Dutch government acknowledged in that year that, contrary to earlier beliefs, most migrants would stay in the Netherlands and that their integration should therefore be encouraged.

The path that was envisaged for integration was remarkably similar to the one that had worked in the past for the religious and ideological ‘pillars’. It was a combination of combating social deprivation through selected support measures, promoting equal treatment and encouraging ‘emancipation’, while aiming at the preservation of the communities’ cultural identity. To this purpose the migrants were labelled *ethnic minorities*, and the policy on their behalf became known as Minorities’ Policy. It was interesting to observe how a country which until then had been remarkably homogeneous from an ethnic perspective, now introduced the notion of ethnicity as a basis for differential policy making. The authorities and a vast majority of the population were convinced that this was the best way to work on the migrants’ ‘emancipation’. However, there were also critics who claimed that stressing ethnic differences would risk perpetuating these and therefore become an obstacle to the migrants’ fuller social participation rather than a catalyst of it. This phenomenon is known in the literature as

ethnicisation or *minorisation* (Rath 1991). Besides, in quite a few cases defining 'minorities' on the basis of their countries of origin disregarded the relevance of ethnic differences that existed within these countries.

In the 1980s the term *multiculturalism* was not as common as it is today. The Dutch government never really used it. In hindsight, however, Dutch Minorities' Policy of the 1980s certainly can be labelled as multiculturalist. In a number of spheres it provided institutional arrangements that ran parallel to existing mainstream arrangements. The special characteristics of the migrant cultures served to justify such forms of separateness. The parallel institutions were generously supported with public funds. Minorities' Policy, therefore, can be seen simultaneously as the hallmark of *pillarisation* and of the welfare state; but did it work?

In 1989 the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), a think tank close to the Prime Minister, published a report that stated more clearly than ever before that Minorities' Policy had not been able to prevent immigrant unemployment from rising to alarming levels (WRR 1989). The restructuring of Dutch industry in the early 1980s had left many low skilled workers without a job and many of them were of immigrant origin. By the end of the decade more than one third of all Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands were unemployed. In contrast to policies pursued by other European countries, such as Germany and Switzerland, most of the Dutch considered it inappropriate to encourage the return of these people, to whom the Dutch economy owed so much. As a consequence, immigration became a growing burden for welfare and social policy regimes, but making mention of this in public was widely considered to be politically incorrect, if not racist.

The Scientific Council's report alone was unable to achieve a turnaround, but under the surface a certain dissatisfaction continued to grow. In 1991 the then parliamentary leader of the opposition Liberal Party (VVD), Frits Bolkestein, triggered a public debate on the presumed incompatibility of Islam and 'western values' (Bolkestein 1991). He did so in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair in Britain and an affair about wearing the headscarf in public schools in France. The debate calmed down after a while, but some uneasiness with the strong cultural relativism that lied at the basis of Minorities Policy remained. Didn't this approach promote the ethnic minorities' isolation from mainstream

society rather than their integration into it? In the 1994 parliamentary elections the Christian Democrats (CDA) were defeated and they remained outside the government for the first time in almost a century. Traditionally, the Christian Democrats had been the champions of pillarisation. This explains why the incoming ‘purple’ coalition of Labour (PvdA), Liberals (VVD) and Democrats (D66), headed by Labour Party leader Wim Kok, was able to shift the focus of its policies from respecting cultural diversity to promoting the immigrants’ social participation[2]. Quite significantly, Minorities’ Policy was rebaptised Integration Policy.

From that moment on culture was largely seen as a private affair; providing jobs to immigrants had become the main objective. Mother tongue teaching was removed from the core curriculum and later disappeared altogether from the schools. Besides, it was recognised that the migrants’ lack of integration was also due to their insufficient familiarity with the Dutch language and society. A programme of mandatory language and *inburgering* (‘civic integration’) courses was launched. These courses were free of charge, but every newly arrived migrant from outside the European Union would be obliged to attend. The initial opposition to these courses (‘why should migrants now be forced to do what has so long been denied to them?’) gradually faded away. In 1997 the Newcomers’ Integration Act (WIN) was introduced. The courses were not an immediate success, largely for organisational reasons. Nevertheless, a considerable number of other immigration countries in Western European have emulated this Dutch example in the meantime, and introduced integration courses in some form or another (Michalowski 2004).

The ambition to improve the migrants’ position in employment, education, housing and a few other significant spheres of society proved to be more successful than the integration courses. During the second half of the 1990s registered unemployment among people of immigrant origin dropped dramatically, though it still remained substantially above the national average. It is generally assumed, however, that it has been the prospering economy rather than targeted government policies that have led to this improvement. Also in education the position of immigrants, particularly the second

[2] This government was actually a coalition of the main liberal parties (in a philosophical sense). In the Netherlands it is commonly referred to as the ‘purple’ coalition, since purple is the colour that results from

generation, improved significantly during the later 1990s. They are still overrepresented in lower forms of secondary education, but their participation in higher education is rising, and school dropouts among immigrants have become a less serious problem. As we have seen before, the housing situation of immigrants no longer differs significantly from that of the native population of similar income levels (Dagevos *et al.* 2003).

However, certain problems that explain the immigrants' marginal position turned out to be more persistent. Rising expectations about the migrants' Dutch language proficiencies could not be met by the still rather amateurish integration courses. Even more worrying were the alarming delinquency rates among certain immigrant communities (Junger-Tas 2002). These were generally seen as a sign of lacking integration, but also of lacking opportunities. Equally worrying, but perhaps less noticed, was the finding that inter-ethnic contacts at a personal level had decreased rather than increased during the 1990s (Dagevos *et al.* 2003: 334-339). To a large extent this may have been an effect of increased segregation in cities, where immigrants continue to take the places of native Dutch who have moved to the outskirts (Uitermark & Duyvendak 2004). School segregation has become an even more serious problem than segregation in housing. In certain neighbourhoods only few native Dutch children are left anyway and the pillarised school system allows publicly funded confessional schools to refuse children of a denomination that is not their own. As a consequence, many schools have become even more segregated than the neighbourhoods in which they are located, although schools with large numbers of immigrants are not automatically of poorer quality than schools with few or no immigrant children. In addition to this, concerns were also growing, though seldom expressed, over the relatively strong reliance on various social policy provisions among ethnic minorities. As we have seen, ten per cent of the population of the Netherlands can be classified as a first or second-generation immigrant of non-western origin. However, forty per cent of those who qualify for social assistance belong to this category, and the gap between natives and immigrants is widening (De Beer 2004).

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the blending of the colours of the three constituent parties: red (Labour), blue (Liberals) and green

Signs of a turnaround

At the start of the new millennium two contradictory narratives began to emerge in the Dutch public debate on integration. One was the 'official' one of a considerable progress that had been achieved on all major indicators, such as participation in the labour market, in education, housing etc.. Overall, the second generation was doing considerably better than their parents, particularly among the Surinamese (Veenman 2002, Dagevos *et al.* 2003). The continuing identification among Turks and Moroccans with their countries of origin and also with Islam was taken as a sign of a successful multiculturalism: institutional integration could indeed go hand in hand with preservation of the original cultural identity. The sharp rise in naturalisations during the 1990s was yet another sign that growing numbers of immigrants saw a future for themselves in the Netherlands. Critics, however, claimed that above all it was the possibility to retain dual citizenship as it had existed between 1992 and 1997 that had caused the rise in naturalisations (De Hart 2004). It enabled the new citizens to claim the practical advantages of having an EU passport without being forced to break their ties with the mother country. The more cosmopolitan part of the nation, by contrast, saw this refusal to choose as a natural expression of growing transnationalism and of globalisation.

The competing view was much less optimistic. Paul Scheffer, a historian and a prominent member of the Labour Party was among the first to voice this view, thus risking the wrath of the established order. In a much-debated article called *The Multicultural Tragedy* published in January 2000 in the leading newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* he stated that Dutch multiculturalism had failed (Scheffer 2000). Instead, a new ethnic underclass was emerging of people who did not feel attached to Dutch culture and society, and who were unwilling and unable to integrate. Scheffer voiced the concern that many Dutch people felt, but did not express about continuing immigration, stagnant integration, increased segregation and a rapidly growing Muslim population. Eventually, in Scheffer's view, this would undermine social cohesion and the functioning of the liberal democratic state, particularly because of the supposedly illiberal ideas of the Muslims among the immigrants. Scheffer accused the Dutch elite of having remained largely indifferent to these developments. Their ideology of cosmopolitanism and their

(Democrats).

cultural relativism had allegedly prevented them from demanding the newcomers to adapt. Respect for cultural difference had prevailed over defending the principles of liberal democracy. The only possible answer, in Scheffer's view, was a 'civilisation offensive', which would include more coercive policy efforts to overcome deprivation as well as stronger appeals on the immigrants to adapt to the principles of liberal democracy. Immigrants should also have a much better knowledge of 'our' culture and history.

Scheffer's observations, which ten years earlier would have been dismissed as conservative or possibly even as racist now generated considerable support, but also strong criticisms. Initially, it was a debate among the Dutch elite, in which only very few people of immigrant origin took part. Critics claimed that Scheffer seemed to ignore that official policy had already made the move away from multiculturalism, although more so at the national than at the local level. They also pointed to Scheffer's tendency of appealing to the familiar stereotypes of immigrants. Although many immigrants are not Muslims, the stereotype easily makes all of them sympathise with Muslim fundamentalism and reject liberal democracy. Scheffer was accused of ignoring the immense diversity among immigrants as well as their progress in education and employment. He also seemed to ignore that cultures are not static, particularly in situations of immigration. In a survey, for example, among youngsters of Turkish and Moroccan origin in Rotterdam, which we carried out in that same year 2000, we found that many of our respondents indeed experienced a certain tension between Islamic and European values, particularly family values. However, most young Muslims have developed a highly personalised or "westernised" interpretation of Islam, and are in full agreement with principles such as individual freedom and equality, which are fundamental for liberal democracies. Besides, as their educational level goes up and their length of residence increases, their ideas become more liberal and differences with Dutch young people of the same educational background virtually disappear (Phalet *et al.* 2000).

From these research findings we may conclude that Scheffer seems insufficiently aware of the dynamics of integration. Five years later, however, his outcry is generally seen as the beginning of a dramatic turnaround in the Dutch public debate and in Dutch policymaking regarding immigration and integration. Since then, these two issues have

not only risen to the top of the political agenda, but they have also led to vivid debates and a considerable unrest in the country. Apparently, Scheffer and a few others, such as De Beus (1998), Schnabel (2000) and Van der Zwan (2001) had a good nose for an undercurrent in Dutch society, which the major politicians had not been able to sense. Since 2000 public opinion in the Netherlands has become much more sensitive to presumed attempts, particularly by Muslims, to undermine basic values in western society, such as individualism and secularism, or classic freedoms and civic rights. Teachings at the fifty-odd Muslim primary schools in the Netherlands are being followed with great scrutiny. The pillarised system qualifies these schools for full financial support by the state under the same conditions as Catholic or Protestant schools.

In this climate of increased sensitivity regarding immigration in general and Islam in particular, the events of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington could only reinforce the impression that a ‘clash of civilisations’, as first predicted by Samuel Huntington in 1993, would be imminent (Huntington 1998). Around that same time Pim Fortuyn’s star began to rise in the Netherlands. Until then he had been a relatively marginal academic, known for his powerful anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim columns in the right-wing weekly *Elsevier* (Pels 2003). In the post-‘9/11’ climate his radical views and his charisma quickly made him into a media star. He was elected leader of the newly established party Liveable Netherlands (*Leefbaar Nederland*), an anti-establishment party of dissatisfied local politicians in a number of cities. After some pseudo-racist statements in a newspaper interview Fortuyn was quickly dumped and he decided to participate in the May 2002 parliamentary elections with his own party, List Pim Fortuyn (LPF).

Fortuyn’s programme was quite radical and not very coherent in many places, but he appealed to the feelings of dissatisfaction present among the electorate after eight years of ‘left-right’ coalition, that was seen as having swept all controversies under the carpet (Fortuyn 2002). As a consequence, large segments of the electorate had become weary of public authorities and dissatisfied with their policymaking and the provision of public services. This proved to be a good breeding ground for populism. Fortuyn’s views against immigration became a central element in his programme, but not the only one. Fortuyn’s views were different from those advocated by politicians such as Le Pen in France, Haider in Austria or De Winter in Flanders. He was not really against immigrants

as such, but his primary concern was the assault on democratic liberties that might result from the presence of so many people unfamiliar with western values, particularly Muslims. Further immigration, he argued, would only exacerbate these problems (Wansink 2004). In fact, with almost one million the Netherlands has the second highest per capita share of people of Muslim origin in Europe, after France (Phalet & Ter Wal 2004).

Assimilation after Fortuyn

The sudden rise of Pim Fortuyn ended even more abruptly than it began with his assassination on May 6, 2002 by an animal rights activist. In the parliamentary elections, nine days later, his party list LPF obtained 26 out of 150 seats in parliament, thus becoming at once the second largest party after the Christian Democrats. The 'purple' coalition parties were dwarfed and lost their parliamentary majority after having been in power for eight years. In the new right-wing government, headed by Jan Peter Balkenende, the Christian Democrats again took the lead, along with the Fortuynists and the Liberals. Curtailing immigration and promoting a more coercive integration policy were high on the new government's agenda. The predominant view was that it was primarily the immigrants themselves who were to blame for their lacking integration. However, the new government was very unstable, and it fell within three months.

In the new elections, in January 2003, the Fortuynists fell back to only eight seats and a new coalition was formed, again headed by Jan Peter Balkenende, who swapped the Fortuynists for the Democrats as a junior partner. Like its predecessor, this government also opted for a rather populist agenda regarding immigration and integration (De Heer 2004). In immigration policy the fight against illegal immigration has been reinforced and family migration from outside the European Union has been severely curtailed. Asylum policies have become much stricter and procedures for obtaining residence permits have been made more cumbersome and much costlier. Consequently, immigration to the Netherlands significantly dropped in the past three years. In 2004 the country's migratory balance was negative for the first time since 1967. This is the result partly of a decrease in arrivals and partly of a rise in departures among both people of immigrant origin and native Dutch.

In integration policy a new approach has been developed as well. The overall idea was that migrants were to blame for their slow integration, while efforts to step up the process should come from their side. Some lip service was paid to the idea that integration should be a two-sided process and that the established population should also leave some space to the newcomers, but concrete policy measures hardly pointed in that direction. Acquiring Dutch citizenship, for example, was made much more difficult and costly, which provoked a plunge in naturalisations. Moreover, a significant change in the mandatory integration courses has been announced. These courses will no longer be offered free of charge by the local government. In line with free market ideologies it will be the newcomer's own responsibility to find a course, to register and pay for it and, eventually, to qualify for a mandatory language-and-culture test that has to be taken within five years after the initial settlement in the Netherlands. Immigrants who fail to pass the test will be fined and will be disqualified from permanent settlement. The government also intends to mandate that potential immigrants to pass a relatively simple Dutch language-and-culture test in the Netherlands embassy in their country of origin before granting them a first entry permit. This is to prevent semi-literate people with dim employment prospects and a high potential for reliance on social assistance from coming. Finally, the government is also planning to introduce mandatory integration courses for certain categories of long-established migrants, including holders of a Dutch passport. These so-called 'oldcomers' will have to attend these courses at their own expenses; failure to pass the final test will also result in a fine (Entzinger 2004).

In many other fields of government policy similarly compulsory measures have been taken or have been announced that aim at stepping up the migrants' integration. In Rotterdam, for example, the stronghold of Pim Fortuyn, an old debate on the mandatory dispersal of immigrants over different neighbourhoods was picked up again (Bolt 2004). It is not clear, however, to what extent this can be implemented as a policy, given the freedom of settlement and the non-discrimination principle. Other policy initiatives, local and national ones, may be violating international obligations, such as the right to family life as laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights. Most of the measures proposed leave little or no room for a public recognition of the migrants' cultural identity. Even the Christian Democrats, the traditional champions of pillarisation and therefore of multiculturalism, emerged from their eight years in opposition as fervent nationalists and as proponents of immigrant assimilation. This led to the paradox that migrants who

initially had been encouraged to preserve their own identity were now blamed for insufficiently identifying with Dutch culture.

Today, acknowledging religious and ethnic diversity is no longer considered a public responsibility, let alone facilitating its institutionalisation. Therefore it is all the more surprising that so many public and parliamentary debates focus precisely on religion. That focus, however, is usually on ways of banning what are seen as undesired practices in Islam, such as genital mutilation, honour killings or incitements to Jihad or terrorism, practices that are not really widespread among Muslims in the Netherlands. Yet, one can only guess what impact the constant linking of Islam, security and immigration has had on public opinion in the Netherlands, both on the native population and on immigrants (Phalet & Ter Wal 2004). Several Members of Parliament and other politicians, including some who are of immigrant origin themselves, have been threatened and are now under constant security protection. Such a situation was totally unknown in a country where ministers were used to cycling to work.

Regular surveys held by the Social and Cultural Planning Office indicate a decline in acceptance of cultural diversity among the population of the Netherlands (Dagevos *et al.* 2003). More than before, immigrant integration appears to be defined in terms of their loyalty to and identification with ‘Dutch values and norms’, rather than in terms of their social and institutional participation. Several observers have signalled a decrease in mutual understanding and acceptance between the native Dutch and the immigrant communities, particularly in situations where the latter are seen as insufficiently loyal to Dutch culture and Dutch society. The killing, on November 2nd, 2004 in Amsterdam of film maker Theo van Gogh, reputed for his powerful anti-Muslim statements, by a Muslim fundamentalist born and raised in the Netherlands led to a public outcry comparable to that after the Fortuyn assassination. It set in motion a countrywide series of assaults against mosques and Muslim schools, thus adding to the pre-existing social and political instability in a society apparently in search of a new identity.

Explanations for the turnaround

For a long time the Netherlands was seen by many as a shining example of multiculturalism and respect for cultural diversity. We have just seen how, in only a few years time, the country has become one of the harshest advocates of straightforward assimilation. What accounts for this sudden shift? It is not so easy to find an answer to this obvious question, particularly not when it is difficult to distance oneself sufficiently from a process that still appears to be in full swing. In what follows I will try to explore some possible explanations.

One of the most obvious explanations is the economy. It is a well-known fact that a downturn in economic growth has a negative impact on feelings towards immigration and immigrants, who easily become scapegoats. The Dutch economy boomed far beyond the European average in the 1990s, but has been almost stagnant since 2001. While employment opportunities increased dramatically for the population as a whole and even more so for immigrants during the 1990s, unemployment has been on the rise again since 2001, even though the gap between immigrants and non-immigrants has not widened. However, the disproportionate reliance on social policy instruments by immigrants is a fact, but has not really become a major issue in Dutch politics. Social security reforms have upset the trade unions, but certainly not to the same extent as in Germany, France or Italy. Some sectors of the economy continue to be in need of manpower, but find it increasingly difficult to recruit people from outside the EU, given the stricter entrance requirements. A common understanding is emerging that more foreign recruitment will be needed in a few years time, when the first post-war baby-boomers will retire. Thus, the economic situation does not seem to offer very convincing explanations for the shift.

Another explanation may be found in the growing numbers of immigrants. Promoting cultural diversity and even institutionalising it may be acceptable as long as minority cultures clearly remain *minority* cultures. At present, however, almost half of the inhabitants in the major Dutch cities are of immigrant origin and many of them are Muslims. In several neighbourhoods the traditional Dutch majority now constitutes a minority. Thus, continuing immigration may have fundamentally changed the nature of the issue. To many people it has become increasingly evident that cultural diversity can

only flourish in a situation where a clear majority is in agreement with a society's basic values and identifies with them. Many Dutch people doubt whether that really is the case for immigrants. About half a million of them do not speak or understand Dutch, although some may have lived in the country for a generation. Numerous satellite dishes in immigrant neighbourhoods are believed to reflect where the loyalties of these people really lie. In our 2000 Rotterdam survey, mentioned earlier, we found that almost three-quarters of all Turkish and Moroccan youngsters – including those born in the Netherlands – identified more strongly with their country of origin than with the Netherlands (Phalet *et al.* 2000). In the long run, a large-scale lack of identification with one's immediate environment is believed to undermine social cohesion and to disrupt social order. This may explain the widespread belief that migrants should be forced into developing a stronger loyalty or, briefly, into assimilation into mainstream Dutch culture.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that it is precisely the successful integration process of many immigrants that has turned them into a social, political and cultural factor that can no longer be denied. In their view, initial ideas of temporary residence, followed by a period of institutionalised multiculturalism along the traditions of pillarisation – briefly, their ethnicisation – had kept migrants and their offspring in the margins of Dutch society for too long. Only after the efforts to promote immigrant participation in mainstream institutional settings had been stepped up, more and better opportunities had emerged for them to familiarise themselves with Dutch society and therefore to become more vocal. Besides, since guest workers had been recruited almost exclusively from rural areas, it took a while, probably a generation or more, before these communities were able to develop a more western oriented, well-educated elite.

In this view, a majority of the second-generation migrants are no longer locked up in their own cultural 'ghettos' – as many of their parents are – but very much familiar with Dutch urban culture and society, which have changed significantly because of their very presence. Of course, that does not prevent some of these young people from also preserving strong ties with their country of origin and its culture and others from being lured into delinquent behaviour or even fundamentalism. From the older integration literature we know that such extremist forms of behaviour may serve as alternative channels for upward mobility in situations where the regular channels are blocked, for

example as a result of persistent discrimination (Sowell 1980). In this view, therefore, the turnaround in the debate on immigration can be seen as a reaction to the growing influence of the second generation and their *de*marginalisation, rather than as a sign of a persistent marginality. That reaction, therefore, is largely conservative and prompted by a wave of nostalgia among people who perceive Dutch identity as being under threat.

One of the peculiarities in the Dutch debate, in comparison to that in other European countries, has been its emphasis on civil liberties, especially in the last few years. Many freedom loving Dutch see their liberties threatened by orthodox or even fundamentalist Muslims, allegedly wishing to curtail freedom of speech and religion or to undermine equality, individualism and secularism by imposing their values on the host society. In the early 1990s Frits Bolkestein already addressed the issue of value clashes between Islam and the West. Apparently, he came too early, but the debate was picked up again, and more successfully, ten years later by Paul Scheffer, Pim Fortuyn, Theo van Gogh, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Liberal parliamentarian of Somali origin strongly opposed to Islam, as well as many others, politicians as well as academics. They fear that non-western values imported by certain immigrants may undermine the foundations of western liberal democracy (Cliteur 2002; Scheffer 2004). Therefore, expressing those values should not be tolerated. Others argue, however, that recognising all values, including strongly anti-liberal ones, is a fundamental characteristic of classical liberal democracies. The underlying assumption here is that democracy is strong enough as a system to eliminate undemocratic elements or to make their adherents change their minds. In fact, in our Rotterdam survey we found no fundamental differences in their adherence to (western) public values between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, in a situation of institutionalised multiculturalism this must not always be so, as it tends to confirm immigrants in their traditional values. This may explain why the debate on this aspect has been sharper in the Netherlands than elsewhere (e.g. WRR 2003).

Of course, in the search for explanations of the sudden shift in the assessment of integration, some people also point at the role of the media, primarily television. The media always take a greater interest in the unusual rather than in the ordinary, in the exception rather than in the rule. Thus, the media have been under fire for depicting immigrants primarily as ‘people of concern’. It was the media that made Pim Fortuyn into a true ‘hype’ by letting him dominate most talk shows during the months prior to his

assassination. A serious analysis of the issues at stake was lacking in many of these programmes. Politics had become entertainment and Fortuyn was a genius in playing on his political opponents (Wansink 2004: 220). True as this may be, I do not think that the media should be blamed for this. The media may act as a catalyst, but does not have the power to set an agenda that is not broadly shared by their audience, i.e. the electorate. Their persistent feelings of dissatisfaction with politics in general and with immigration and integration in particular account for the structural nature of the shift in public opinion over the past few years. The 'new politics', as it is commonly called in the Netherlands, appear to understand that it is the message that matters, not the messengers.

Conclusion: Has integration failed?

All possible explanations put forward in the previous section may have certain validity. In such a complex situation it seems impossible to single out one specific cause. In September 2002, few months after the landslide victory of the late Pim Fortuyn in the national elections, Parliament installed a commission, chaired by the liberal backbencher Stef Blok, to investigate "why the integration of immigrants had failed and why integration policy had been unable to prevent this". In its final report, published in January 2004, the commission qualified immigrant integration in the Netherlands as "moderately successful, notwithstanding government policy". The commission's relatively mild findings were immediately put to the sword by nearly all political leaders. The initial parliamentary verdict had been clear, and facts and nuances were not supposed to trouble the bosses, whose views found large support in public opinion. There was an obvious need to break with the past.

In the analysis of what went wrong a distinction must be made between the *process* of integration as such and integration *policy*. The *process* as such has an institutional and a cultural dimension. Institutional integration refers to in increase in immigrant participation in the receiving society, while cultural integration or acculturation is generally understood as the degree to which newcomers adopt its dominant values, identify with them and let their actual behaviour be guided by these values. Under Dutch Minorities' Policy promoting immigrant participation was an objective, but acculturation was not. In line with Dutch traditions of pillarisation migrants were recognised as separate communities and they were encouraged to develop their own institutional arrangements in certain

fields, generously supported and funded by the authorities. After about a decade it became clear that the two major objectives of Minorities' Policy were hard to reconcile. High unemployment and low educational achievement figures, particularly among the Turkish and Moroccan communities, witnessed that their institutional participation had not really advanced. What had been intended as a respectful acknowledgement of cultural difference ended in cultural 'ghettoisation' in densely populated, somewhat neglected and relatively unsafe urban neighbourhoods.

The 'purple' coalition, which took office in 1994, opted for a different approach. It defined integration primarily in terms of institutional participation, and it considered culture to be a private affair. For the first time, citizenship also became an issue in Dutch integration policies. Under Minorities' Policy immigrants had not been encouraged to opt for Dutch citizenship, as this could have been taken as an assault on their identity. Instead, special provisions were created to enable non-Dutch residents to participate in public life. The granting of local voting rights to foreign residents, introduced almost without any debate in 1985, should be seen in this perspective as well as the establishment of large numbers of consultative bodies. The 'purple' coalition did not primarily perceive of citizenship in its legal meaning, but rather took it as an incentive for immigrants to identify more strongly with the Dutch political community and to take part in decision making. It introduced mandatory 'civic integration' (*inburgering*), largely consisting of Dutch language courses. Consequently, the focus of immigrant incorporation policies shifted from the group to the individual, from ethnic minorities to individual migrants, from culture to citizenship or, in terms of political philosophy, from a predominantly Christian Democratic communitarian approach to a liberal individualistic approach.

During the 1990s the migrants' integration at the institutional level progressed substantially, largely as an effect of the booming economy, but a clear shift in their cultural and civic orientation did not occur. The 'purple' coalition with its liberal outlook remained rather indifferent on this. It argued that culture was 'free' and that a culture shift required time. However, the general public began to be annoyed by the growing numbers, both of 'regular' migrants and of asylum seekers, by their increased appeal on welfare state provisions and by certain 'strange' habits. Policies of affirmative action in a number of fields reinforced the impression among parts of the native population that it was *them* who were put at a disadvantage. Initially, openly expressing such feelings of

dissatisfaction was not considered appropriate or politically correct, but the Scheffer debate and, later, 9/11 and the emergence of Fortuyn served as pretexts "to say aloud what so many people had felt, but not dared to speak up about". Consequently, the definition of immigrant integration changed once more in the early years of the new millennium. Institutional participation alone was no longer enough as an objective, but immigrants were also expected to behave in line with Dutch habits – most of all to speak the language - and to identify with Dutch values and with the Netherlands in general. The cultural dimension had gained renewed significance as a factor in the incorporation process, but the policy objectives had become diametrically opposed to those of the days of Minorities' Policy: assimilation to Dutch mainstream culture, rather than preservation of the communities' cultural identities.

Thus, in the past twenty-five years the main objectives of Dutch *policy* for migrants changed three times in a very fundamental manner. This makes it understandable why in 2002 Parliament decided that "integration had failed". The better analysis, however, would have been that the integration *process* had been steadily progressing, but that the standards by which integration is measured had been changed repeatedly because of changes in integration *policies*. This was also the conclusion of the Blok Parliamentary Investigation Committee, albeit in different wordings (Onderzoekscommissie 2004). However, this still does not fully explain the actual reasons for the changes in policy. Thränhardt (2004), a German political scientist familiar with the Netherlands, has suggested that, all things considered, the Dutch welfare state ideologists have had too high expectations of the outcomes of their social engineering efforts. Formulating policy objectives is not the same as achieving them, while certain processes, such as immigrant integration, may also take place without any specific policies, as many classical immigration countries have experienced. Others have pointed at 'democratic impatience' as an explanation: politicians need to show quick results of their policies (Vermeulen & Penninx 1994). However, integration processes are nearly always long haul and, therefore, integration is an unattractive field for scoring. Dutch politicians, used to thinking in terms of social engineering, may have underestimated this at first and, once they had realised it, decided to further neglect the issue.

As a consequence of this, popular dissatisfaction with immigration had remained largely unnoticed until it came to an outburst around 2001. What has happened since then bears many signs of an identity crisis in Dutch society: Who are we, what makes *us* different from *them*, and why do *they* not want to be like *us*? As we have seen, religion plays a central role in the debate, which is not uncommon in the light of Dutch history. However, the debate is strongly biased towards the perceived threats of a militant Islam. Even cabinet ministers have recently argued in public that "Muslims are more sensitive to criticism than Dutch are, and that they must change such practices" or – to explain the shortage of organs for transplants - that "Islam forbids Muslims to donate their organs, but not to accept organs from non-Muslims". Vasta claims that the current debate on Islam in the Netherlands shows signs of racism. She argues that economic and security issues have been translated into cultural and religious ones, so that an outcry emerges against 'different values' and 'backward religions' (Vasta 2005).

The renewed interest in national history and the perpetual debate on what is to be understood by 'Dutch values' are equally illustrative for the current crisis (RMO 1999). However, such a crisis is not unique to the Netherlands. In the past years, other European countries have experienced similar debates, such as Germany on its presumed *Leitkultur* ('guiding culture'), France on *laïcité* (i.e. the relationship between church and state) and Britain on a national curriculum in her schools. Apparently, European societies feel a need to reaffirm from time to time who they are and where they stand. Therefore, it is quite possible that other European countries will experience similar shifts in their debates on immigration and identity as the Netherlands has, even though the positions taken in this country seem to be more extreme than elsewhere. It has been suggested that international factors such as continuing globalisation, the ever-advancing European integration process, international terrorism, Muslim fundamentalism, along with the perceived inability to control international migration effectively have all given rise to feelings of anxiety, threat and insecurity among the Dutch. These feelings have been projected on the immigrants and their presumed unwillingness to become like 'us'. Ethnocentric views covered up the fact that immigrants had never been invited, let alone encouraged to actually do so. Initially the policy focus was on separateness; later it shifted to institutional integration and only very recently assimilation has become the norm. In fact, the rules were changed while the game was on.

A theoretical post-script

The remaining question is what academics can learn from developments in the Netherlands for their theorising on phenomena such as multiculturalism and integration. We may conclude that Dutch multiculturalism, modelled after the pillarisation experience, was ill reflected. Pillarisation had fostered the emancipation of indigenous religious and ideological communities. It had worked not only because the minorities needed one another to build majorities, but also, and primarily, because there existed a common ground for mutual understanding. Notwithstanding their institutional separateness all communities shared the same language, the same laws and national symbols and, to a large extent, the same history. Pillarisation was possible thanks to a paternalistic way of seeking consensus at the top of what Lijphart (1975) labelled a 'consociational democracy'.

For the immigrants the situation was very different. The Netherlands had acknowledged only reluctantly that most of them were to stay for good and their numbers were not relevant for majority building. Institutional separateness was presented as a sign of respect for cultural diversity, but in reality there was a strong undercurrent of indifference, if not ethnocentrism (Scheepers *et al*. 2003). In practice, therefore, it served as a means of excluding immigrants from mainstream society. The Dutch multicultural model failed to achieve incorporation because the native population had too little in common with the newcomers, who in return did not identify sufficiently with their new country and who were not asked to do so either. This is why Castles & Miller (2003: 44) are right when they claim that in immigrant societies multiculturalism only works if the migrants' primary loyalty lies with the place where they live.

Given a growing transnationalism among migrant communities, the search for new and different models of incorporation seems urgent (Engbersen *et al.* 2003). Such models should no longer be based on the idea of an exclusive loyalty to one nation-state. This is probably why classical immigration countries such as Canada and the United States – and to a lesser extent Australia – have been more successful in incorporating their newcomers while recognising the value of cultural difference. Their definition of what constitutes a nation leaves more room for ethnic and cultural diversity than most

European definitions do. Adherence to certain cultural values and membership of a state (i.e. citizenship) are not as closely linked to one another, as is the case in most European countries. Kymlicka may be right when he argues that Canada's multiculturalism has been less disputed than its European counterparts, at least so far, since in that country diversity has become an unalienable element of nation building (Kymlicka 1998). This is not so in Europe where, historically, most nation-states define themselves in 'ethnic' rather than in 'civic' terms (Brubaker 1992).

However, irrespective of the way it is being institutionalised, there are obvious limits to the degree of diversity that a country can cope with. Institutionalised multiculturalism must not necessarily fail, but it is likely to be more successful as

(1) The cultures concerned have more in common with each other;
(2) The role of the state is more limited, so that there is less need for a codification of cultures in a vast range of policy areas; and
(3) It is inclusive rather than exclusive, which means that it must be based on principles of equal rights and non-discrimination.

All these conditions were not met in the Netherlands during the early days of immigrant incorporation. Later, the need for certain commonly shared values, for some form of linguistic assimilation and for an effective anti-discrimination policy has become more generally recognised (RMO 2005: 54). This recognition may have come too late, not because the migrants had become 'inassimilable' in the meantime, but because the Dutch had come to see them as such.

Dutch multiculturalism thus helped perpetuate the migrants' marginal situation in society, but it was not the only mechanism of exclusion. The low employment and educational levels had fostered the migrants' dependency on public support. Of course, welfare benefits and other social policy instruments guaranteed them a reasonably decent standard of living, but only in the margins of society. Actually, it can be argued that it is precisely the generous welfare system that has trapped many migrants in a quasi-underclass position. Returning to the countries where they felt were home would imply losing their only source of income, but staying on led to a further marginalisation, a dilemma that others have also pointed at (e.g. Brochmann & Hammar 1999, Bommes 1999). In the Dutch case, however, it may have manifested itself more strongly than elsewhere, since it was superseded by the dominant multiculturalist ideologies that

equally promoted the migrants' isolation.The combination of these specific circumstances may also explain why the assimilative response has been stronger in the Netherlands than in other European countries (Koopmans 2003).

What type of assimilation are we thinking of here? In his comparison of changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany and the United States, Brubaker concludes that a new form of assimilation is emerging (Brubaker 2003). In all three countries he observes a shift from "an overwhelming focus on persisting difference, to a broader focus that encompasses emerging commonalities as well" (Brubaker 2003: 51). True as this may be, also for the Netherlands, the accent on commonalities has become so strong in the current Dutch political and social discourse that it can almost be qualified as what Brubaker calls "a return to the bad old days of arrogant assimilationism". This form of assimilationism sees populations of immigrant origin as mouldable and meltable. Brubaker qualifies this type of assimilationism as *transitive* ('to *make* similar'), whereas he rather advocates an *intransitive* understanding ('to *become* similar') of the process. Intransitive assimilationism, according to Brubaker, is a characteristic of social processes at an aggregate level, rather than something that takes place at the level of individual persons. It designates a direction of change, not a particular degree of similarity. As such it is largely unintended and often invisible. It is not something *done to* persons, but rather something *accomplished by* them.

In a liberal democracy transitive assimilation seems hard to achieve and against fundamental principles. Forcing *'them'* to become like *'us'* in the old-fashioned assimilative way is not only counterproductive, but it may also provoke a re-ethnicisation, as can be observed in the Netherlands today. The better way, therefore, seems to encourage newcomers and minority members to participate on an equal footing in a society's mainstream institutions and to facilitate them in doing so. Intransitive assimilation will then occur more or less automatically, even though it may take some time. This was the dominant view in the Dutch integrationist approach of the 1990s, but it was thwarted by the Fortuynist revolution. True liberal democracies may still find it more appropriate to strive for this than to force old-fashioned forms of transitive assimilation upon their new citizens, as the present Dutch approach advocates.

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