The Leader in Both Directions: Retracing the history of immigration and integration policies in the Netherlands (Part 2)

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Abstract
The present text is the second part of the analysis of the socio-political realities which contributed to the evolution of Dutch immigration and integration policies following World War Two. The first part, which appeared in the preceding issue of this publication (Bunka Ronshu n.41-42) discussed the arrival of the early migrants in the 1950’s and 1960’s, the absence of a cohesive government response vis-à-vis these minority groups, and finally the emergence of the ‘Ethnic Minorities’ policy, a model characterized by government support of the plurality of religious and cultural institutions in Holland. This period, lasting through the end of the 1980’s, was also marked by a high degree of public tolerance of ethnic diversity in the nation and, more importantly, by depoliticized political rhetoric. While this adopted approach was not called multicultural per se at that time, the basic principles underlying governmental policies were congruent with the multicultural ideology. In the following pages I will examine a dramatic shift in the immigration policy throughout the 1990’s as the Dutch policymakers and the general public became increasingly conscious of the shortcomings of the ‘Ethnic Minorities’ policies. The policy shifted further to the right following high profile assassinations in the Netherlands and the attacks of September 11 in the United States. These and other events were catalysts responsible for the paradigmatic changes in the public discourse addressing the issues of cultural diversity in the Netherlands. Yet, has this oft-criticized rhetoric promoting assimilation really translated into a radically different set of government policies?
1.0 The first shift: from the Ethnic Minorities (EM) Policy to the Integration Policy

The EM Policy of the 1980’s can be seen as a logical extension of the tradition of pillarization in Dutch society. The government chose to treat immigrants as another minority. Many ethnic religious and educational institutions received general public funding, the teaching of migrants’ home languages was promoted in schools, and perseverance of cultural identities was acknowledged as a prerequisite for successful integration of newcomers into Dutch society. While one of the stated objectives of this policy was to achieve equality for migrants in the socio-economic sphere, there was relatively little public scrutiny of the reality of migrants’ lives. Questions related to the integration of immigrants, more broadly, and to the successes and failures of the EM Policy, more specifically, received little media attention. However, the evidence of ‘non-integration’ was increasingly present and public concerns grew. Towards the end of the 1980’s it became clear that a large majority of immigrants were economically disadvantaged and marginalized. In urban areas they typically settled in segregated neighborhoods, maintained little social contact with the native Dutch population and worked in low-paying positions. Furthermore, there was no evidence of upward mobility for second-generation migrants. Unemployment, in particular, was of paramount concern. The late 1980’s and early 1990’s witnessed a major restructuring of the Dutch economy, accompanied by a contraction of the industrial sector. Low-skilled jobs, dominated by workers of immigrant origin, were lost and without more advanced skills to function in an increasingly sophisticated Dutch marketplace, these workers found themselves unemployable. By the end of the 1980’s over 30% of Turk and Moroccan migrants were out of a job, becoming a public burden. The overall unemployment levels among migrant groups were significantly higher than among the native Dutch, underscoring the failure of the EM Policy to provide the necessary guidance and structure to ensure migrants’ economic autonomy (Carle, 2006).
The first major salvo at the EM Policy was launched by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) in its report published in 1989. The report stated that little progress had been made in the areas of employment and education. The document further intimated that an overemphasis on the maintenance of the original cultural identity was one of the factors responsible for this deficiency. The paper concluded that paying too much attention to the preservation of the migrants’ home cultures does not accelerate their integration into Dutch society; on the contrary it constitutes a hindrance on their path to acquire competences which would enable them to take full advantage of economic opportunities and to recognize the value of educational options.

The Council’s report by itself did not achieve a major policy transition; however, it was significant in two ways. First of all, this very critical report by an influential government think tank, close to the Prime Minister, pushed the key question of how to manage diversity in the Netherlands into the public spotlight. From now on, this and related issues were no longer on the periphery of the national political arena but very much at the center of the social polemic and of the political debates that ensued. Secondly, the report triggered a shift in public consciousness of what was perceived as politically correct. The EM policy was underpinned by an understanding that migrants have rights – in part stemming from their religious and socio-cultural distinctiveness -- which should be respected by the native Dutch populace. The Scientific Council put a crack in this dictum by recommending that the government place more emphasis on concrete policies aimed at integrating immigrants into Dutch society and invest less effort into the maintenance of their heritage and the promotion of their cultural rights. In brief, the report proposed that the burden of cultural accommodation be shifted more to the immigrants. The language of the text made it clear that more needed to be done to recalibrate the balance between the obligations of the migrants and
their extended rights.

The publication of this report opened the floodgates to the growing public criticism of the multicultural policies, reflecting a marked change in the way immigrants were perceived by society. This mass anxiety was intensified as the number of Muslim migrants in Holland continued to rise and Islam became a permanent fixture in the Dutch religious landscape. This phenomenon can be illustrated by politicians’ statements, many made for electoral gain. Frits Bolkestein was the first senior politician, leader of the Liberal Party, to denounce Islam. In his speech in 1991 he stated that Islam represented a threat to migrants’ successful integration, and more importantly, that Islam was incompatible with the principles of a liberal democracy.

Bolkestein’s inflammatory speech caused a short-lived furor, largely because it was the first public attack on Islam, and was seen as a rejection of the political correctness and of the self-imposed censorship that prevailed in the Dutch political discourse of the 1980s. The issue of how to integrate a growing number of Muslims living in Holland, many poorly educated and with very limited employment prospects, will remain close to the center of national debates for many years to come, reaching their intensity in the early 2000s, when two prominent Dutch personalities – a populist politician and a filmmaker – were assassinated for criticizing Islam.

The growing recognition that the conciliatory policies of the 1980s did not produce the desired results, and moreover, may have actually promoted social alienation and economic disfranchisement among migrants, has forced the government to take concrete action. Starting in 1994, a new integration policy, focusing on migrant involvement in mainstream institutions, prioritization of Dutch values and norms, and a shift towards a set of compulsory integration mechanisms, was implemented. The stated objectives of this policy were to enable migrants to participate more fully in the labor market of
the host country, to improve their status in society, and to bridge the cultural gap between the native Dutch and the newcomers (Vasta, 2007). This policy can be broadly characterized by the following tenets:

(1) While the EM Policy was directed at all migrants equally, regardless of their socio-economic standing, the new policy identified disadvantaged and marginalized individuals of foreign origin as its main target. Improving employment, housing and education for these groups rather than encouraging them to construct and preserve a cultural niche within a dominant Dutch society represented a turning point.

(2) Inability to attain a higher economic position in society was attributed to the lack of familiarity with the Dutch language and societal norms. A language program to provide basic training in Dutch and a civic integration course were implemented. These state-funded services were offered on a voluntary basis to migrants initially but over the course of the decade they became more compulsory in nature, with various incentives and penalties attached for successful completion and failure, respectively.

(3) Integration of migrants was now much more the privy of the State which was acting as the main agent of this process, whereas the EM Policy was characterized by the reliance on the immigrant structures and community leaders. Consultations with immigrant organizations continued; however the state assumed a more controlling stance with regard to the trajectory migrants were expected to follow after their arrival in the Netherlands. (Bruquetas-Callejo, 2007)

Among a host of government-funded programs intended to fight unemployment and provide migrants with a wider range of marketable skills, two landmark initiatives stand out: Dutch language training and a civic integration course. The central pillar of the Newcomer Integration Law (NIL)
enacted in 1998 was the launch of a 12-month course which combined 600 hours of language training with information about the Dutch lifestyle, accepted behavioral norms and important public institutions. (Entzinger, 2003). In fact, prior to being implemented at the national level, many urban communities with large concentrations of migrants had already made efforts to provide newcomers with toolkits containing Dutch-language training materials and information about the country. The NIL systematized these municipality-led measures into a national policy.

The introduction of language and civic integration courses left a controversial legacy. Some critics argued that this policy instrument represented a shift away from a “live and let live” approach traditionally embraced by Dutch society towards an assimilationist model. They also claim that the policy singled out Muslims, and thereby was discriminatory. (see Kymlicka, Kymlicka and Banting (eds.), 2006 for a full discussion). The evidence these observers present is that the courses were mandatory for all non-EU newcomers into the country and failure to register and to attend these courses was punishable by a fine. What is overlooked in this analysis is that the seemingly coercive nature of the policy was still well within the liberal tradition of the state offering services to diverse ethnic groups under its jurisdiction. The courses were free and fines for non-compliance were very rarely imposed in practice. While the linguistic instruction was not always successful, the problems were more organizational in nature rather than with the policy design. (Entzinger, 2006). (I will return to a more detailed assessment of this instrument in the following paragraph.) It should be noted that the successful completion of the integration courses became increasingly mandatory over the next 10 years reflecting a public mood demanding that migrants make more concerted efforts to adjust to Dutch socio-cultural norms and fulfil their responsibilities as members of the host society.

Were the integration policies of the 1990’s successful? The results based
on statistical data are mixed though there was evidence of significant amelioration in the socio-economic status of immigrants. Considering a plethora of measures undertaken at the local and national levels, including the integration courses, it is difficult to identify which specific instrument was the preeminent agent of change. Greatest progress was evident in the very domain which the policy sought to address: the economic position of the non-Dutch population. Between 1990 and 1995 migrant unemployment declined sharply (Dagevos et al, 2003 cited in Ebtzinger, 2006). As their unemployment rate still remained well above the national average, it continues to be a matter of debate whether this decline is attributable to the effectiveness of government policies or the result of a very robust European economy at the end of the 20th century. Another area of success was education. Dropout rates declined significantly and immigrants were much more represented at the tertiary level than before, though their participation rate still lagged behind that of their native Dutch counterparts. Progress was also noted in housing. Migrants continued to reside primarily in lower-class communities; however these enclaves were less segregated, and immigrants and native Dutch with comparable levels of income lived in housing of similar quality.

There was fear, especially among left-wing critics, that the emphasis on economic integration would come at the expense of cultural uprooting. In other words, the transfer of resources from cultural and religious institutions of migrants’ communities to measures promoting economic participation and social integration would result in an identity crisis for many. The evidence points to the contrary. There was a dramatic increase in naturalizations in the 1990s, particularly among immigrants of Turkish and Moroccan ancestry. While some analysts (De Hart, 2004), dismiss this phenomenon as a desire to take advantage of opportunities available to citizens of an EU member state, this trend does point to a higher degree of psychological identification of immigrants with their host nation.
2.0 Second turning point: integration in the 21st century

Seen in retrospect, the turn of the century ushered in a new ideological climate surrounding the effects of immigrants on Dutch society. Public debates about the integration of migrants became increasingly open, inclusive and vociferous. The issue of diversity, and how to best manage it, became central to most electoral campaigns, at both local and national levels, with a number of political leaders sensing suppressed dissatisfaction among Dutch voters with the status quo. They exploited this sentiment of discontent often with provocative rhetoric aimed at intensifying even more the tone of discourse. While in the 1980’s and (admittedly less so) in the 1990’s, the discussions relative to the effectiveness (or lack thereof) of successive integration policies were limited to a small circle of technocrats and policymakers, in the first decade of the new millennium a much wider spectrum of state actors, from NGOs to intellectuals to migrants themselves, became engaged. Finally, it became politically acceptable to argue against the principles of multiculturalism, to address the deficiencies of policies based on the philosophy of cultural relativism, and to discuss the question of ethnic diversity without the fear of overstepping the boundaries of political correctness. Gloves have come off. If anything, it is coming to the defense of multiculturalism that is now likely to provoke public ire and be perceived as politically gauche. Several developments served as catalysts of this seismic shift. These events were seemingly isolated but interconnected at the deeper level to exert a formidable influence on the public psyche.

2.1 The Netherlands: A Multicultural tragedy

The first, and arguably the most influential episode, was the publication in January of 2000 of an article The Multicultural Tragedy by Paul Scheffer. The article attracted much attention not only for its content and tone but also because this text was penned by a prominent scholar and politician and appeared not in an obscure government publication but in a leading Dutch
newspaper. Essentially, Scheffer declared that multiculturalism had failed as a viable integration policy in the Netherlands. He justified his conclusions by arguing that immigrants had formed a new ‘underclass’, segregated from the mainstream Dutch society. Immigrants, particularly Muslims from non-western backgrounds, shared no common values with the Dutch who were raised on the tradition of tolerance, equal rights, and democracy. As a result of this insurmountable gap, the new migrants were not able, and more importantly, not willing to adjust to the norms prevalent in Holland. Scheffer further accused the government of glossing over the failures of multicultural policies claiming that the authorities had invested too much political capital in the ideology of cultural relativism to have a realistic and unbiased assessment of the problems the country was facing as a result of the growing numbers of immigrants. He especially singled out the Muslim population as the group incompatible with the mainstream fabric of society. Scheffer warned that if the state policies were not radically altered and demanded more of immigrants, Holland risked losing its values and liberal traditions. He also raised the specter of a complete breakdown in social cohesion, with unemployed migrants resorting to crime and overwhelming the national welfare system.

While Scheffer’s comments were met with some criticism, they were not dismissed as fringe racist remarks. The debate this article generated demonstrated that his concerns resonated with a large segment of the Dutch population. The important question is: Was Scheffer correct in his assessment at a time when the government cited empirical evidence to show the new policies were working?

Scheffer was accused of stereotyping, ‘painting all migrants with one brush’ and not taking into account the immense complexity of immigrant groups and their individual characteristics. The charge of overgeneralization is valid; however, it should be remembered that Scheffer was writing a newspaper article and not an academic essay, and generalizations are common in
journalistic trade. The claim of religious radicalism among the Muslim youth is not supported by evidence. According to the results of the survey conducted in 1999, a majority of 15-24 year olds of Islamic background showed acceptance of the major tenets of democracy: individual freedom and equality. This trend was particularly pronounced among second-generation immigrants (Phalet et al. 2000, cited in Entzinger, 2006).

On the questions of migrants’ economic marginalization, however, Schef- fer’s views were based on a comparison with the native Dutch while the government claimed success by contrasting immigrants with themselves; i.e. looking at the improvement in economic indicators over an interval of time. Through the 1990’s, as stated above, unemployment rates among most minority groups declined. However their participation in the labor market remained weak. While just over 3% of native Dutch were unemployed in 2000, the figure for immigrants with Western backgrounds was 5% and for those with non-Western backgrounds, i.e. predominantly Turks, Moroccans and Surinam- ese, was over 10%. This disparity in fact, widened throughout the decade, with unemployment among non-Western migrants hovering between 10% and 15% (Statistics Netherlands, 2013). Economic inequality was largely a byproduct of poor educational attainment. School dropout rates remained higher for immigrant children than for their native Dutch peers and a much higher proportion of migrant youth, especially from outside Europe, had no basic qualifications (Statistics Netherlands, 2012).

2.2 The rise (and fall) of Pim Fortuyn

The next critical juncture in the evolution of a popular sentiment towards immigrants came with the emergence of Pim Fortuyn on the national scene. Fortuyn was an obscure politician with strong anti-immigrant, and particularly anti-Muslim views, which he expressed through fringe right-wing publications. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States elevated the scrutiny of Muslim communities in the Netherlands and
propelled Fortuyn to prominence. His verbal attacks targeted not immigrants *per se*, as was the case with right-wing politicians in France, Germany and Finland, who made migrants scapegoats for the economic and other ills of their respective nations. Fortuyn criticized the government for ignoring the problems for the sake of ideology. He stressed that Holland simply no longer had the physical or financial resources to accommodate an ever-increasing number of migrants. He also warned against the prospect of Holland becoming an Islamic state. (Penninx, 2006).

In a true populist tradition Fortuyn could sense the mood of the electorate more accurately than the mainstream parties. He initially joined “LiveableNetherlands”, a newly formed party with a strong anti-establishment platform and was elected its leader. The party apparatchiks did not find his views particularly palatable and he went on to establish his own party, modestly christened List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). Without a substantive or innovative political agenda, he campaigned on an anti-immigrant ticket trying to take advantage of the voters’ dissatisfaction with what they perceived as the government’s inability to take a tougher stand on the immigration issue.

Fortuyn’s legacy lies not so much in his political ascent, which largely benefited from the atmosphere prevailing in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, but in how his untimely death and unexpected popularity have influenced the platforms of other political parties in the nation. Fortuyn was killed by an environmental extremist less than two weeks before the elections, yet despite (or perhaps because of) this murder, his party obtained enough votes to become the second largest block in the Dutch Parliament (Vink, 2007). Within a year, following the elections in 2003, LPF lost most of its seats yet its anti-immigrant rhetoric was emulated by many other political parties. Criticism of immigrants, of their inability to integrate and of the government for not applying more coercive measures to newcomers moved from the fringes of political debates to the main arena and mainstream statesmen
joined in the fray.

2.3 The murder of Theo van Gogh

The third personality to shape the immigration discourse was a Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. He was known for his strident anti-Islamic personal views which he expressed through this work. He accused Muslims of being intolerant of views and values different from their own, of mistreatment of women and of curtailing personal rights and freedom of choice. In 2004 van Gogh was brutally murdered by a second-generation Moroccan-Dutch. The crime was clearly retribution for the filmmaker’s criticism of Islam -- the assassin pinned to his victim’s chest a death threat to Hirsi Ali, a Dutch politician of Somalian origin. She collaborated with van Gogh on the creation of a movie which was critical of the way women were treated under Islam. The murder committed in broad daylight by a person born and educated in the Netherlands elevated the already polemicized issue of migrant integration to a new level of emotional intensity. The crime was interpreted by many as irrefutable evidence that the multicultural approach had failed and that encouraging migrants with diverse backgrounds to preserve their value systems was not compatible with the expectations of a Western democracy. The killing of van Gogh was followed by persistent calls to curtail public support of Islamic schools on the grounds that Islam was not a religion but a political ideology. (2008 government report cited in Velhuis and van der Maas, 2011)

3.0 Instruments of change

The 2000 – 2012 period, punctuated by two high-profile murders, attacks in the United States, a steady increase in the numbers of migrants (particularly from non-Western origins) and the economic recession in Europe, saw growing impatience among the Dutch with the demands a policy of multiculturalism imposed on them. The calls for shifting the burden of adjustment to the immigrants and preserving the traditional values of the dominant ethnic
groups were frequent, loud and urgent. So, what was the government’s reaction, or did these calls remain just that: belligerent rhetoric without any reflection in the policy instruments?

3. 1 New Style Integration Policy

To ensure political survival in the social climate of the day, the successive Dutch governments had to act. In 2004, Rita Verdonk, the Minister of Integration, launched a new set of policies aimed at making the integration process more controlled and prescriptive. The central mechanism of this policy was a mandatory civic integration test. It was composed of two parts: a Dutch language exam and a test of the knowledge of Dutch culture and society. While language training had long been provided by Dutch municipalities, this represented a significant departure from an earlier model. First of all, training was no longer offered for free. Immigrants were provided with relevant guidance but it was their responsibility to undergo training and pass the exams within a fixed time period, typically five years after arrival in the Netherlands. Repeated failure resulted (at least technically) in the individual being denied permanent residence status. Access to naturalization was also contingent on passing the test. Overcoming this threshold promised a number of financial incentives (Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, 2010).

The two principal controversies about this measure related to its imposition on persons still residing outside Holland and to the fact that this requirement did not apply uniformly to migrants of all origins.

The Netherlands was the first European state to require language proficiency and knowledge of Dutch culture of those applying for residency. Anyone wishing to obtain a long-term visa, including those seeking entry for family reunification purposes, had to pass the test to qualify. This relatively expensive test (350 Euros) could be taken at any Dutch mission. Holland
became the target of criticism by many international groups who perceived this reach of the law, extending beyond Dutch borders, as a sign of rising intolerance of outside values, if not of outright xenophobia. Civic integration policy clearly targeted non-Western immigrants. This requirement did not apply to the holders of passports of EU member states (or Switzerland), prompting accusations of selective, racist application (Kern, 2011). In 2011, the exam was made more difficult, with the Dutch language section being expanded to incorporate reading and comprehension skills components. The passing bar was raised as well, from A1- (according to the CEFR taxonomy) to A1 and to A2 for naturalization.

A number of other changes were adopted in line with the overriding policy to compel migrants to make more diligent efforts to conform to Dutch norms and in doing so, to weaken their identification with their home cultures. This was particularly apparent by the push to make dual nationality illegal. In 2011, Piet Donner, Minister of Interior and Kingdom Relations, stated,

“The government would, wherever possible, like people to have one nationality only. …anyone wishing to acquire Dutch nationality will need to relinquish the nationality of their country of origin.” (Donner, 2011)

Other measures included the termination of special subsidies to Muslim groups and institutions, as the government decided to de-focus its attention from specific ethnic minorities and apply a more general integration policy. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, 2011).

4. 0 Has multiculturalism in the Netherlands been destroyed?

As we have seen, integration policies in the Netherlands underwent a number of very fundamental changes since the 1980’s. Many observers (see
Entzinger, 2003; 2006; Vink, 2007; Joppke, 2004; 2007) seem unequivocal in their conclusion that multiculturalism in Holland is in retreat. By and large, they base their analyses not on the examination of specific policy instruments, including the impact of relevant laws and regulations that have been passed, but on the statements made by high-profile politicians which may or may not have translated into concrete action. So, what is happening in the Netherlands today? Are we witnessing the rise of a ‘repressive liberalism’ with the county succumbing to the most dictatorial variant of civic integration, as Joppke (2007) argues. In this section I propose to look at various subcategories of multiculturalism and see where the country stands now.

4.1 Civic integration test: a repressive measure?

By making the test mandatory, the government seeks to ensure that immigrants wishing to settle in the Netherlands are equipped with the necessary linguistic and practical knowledge to be able to function in society. Lack of basic knowledge of the Dutch language does impede participation in the labor market and educational attainment. While the proficiency requirements have been raised, the expected output is still at the beginner level (A1 or A2), thus not especially onerous. Fulfilling this requirement does oblige the applicant to be able to carry on a very basic conversation in Dutch and be familiar with the workings of Dutch institutions. This requirement is practical in a sense that it forces the migrant (whether prospective or resident) to be prepared to conduct everyday activities in the local language. It should be also noted that the cost of taking the examination (350 Euros) can be fully reimbursed in many cases, provided the person passes it within three years of settlement. Finally, the exam does not apply to the families of those granted asylum in the Netherlands, and to a number of other groups. The law does target migrants from non-Western backgrounds who have been disproportionately relying on public assistance, largely due to language and skill limitations. In summary, the civic integration test represents an attempt to provide immigrants with the necessary skills to facilitate their entry into
Dutch society, and to do so within an institutionalized context. More studies are certainly warranted to investigate the effectiveness of this instrument of integration, namely: does passing the test have an effect on one’s earning potential? does the test really equip the takers with the skills needed to function at the early stages of their settlement in the Netherlands? and how does the test influence the identity of migrants, mainly their psychological sense of belonging to the host country?

4.2 Dual citizenship: a red herring

As was mentioned earlier in this paper, key policy makers (Wilders, 2007; Donner, 2011) have proposed a formal ban on dual citizenship. Today, in principle, all those obtaining Dutch nationality through naturalization have to renounce their other citizenship. However, we encounter the case of practice not conforming to the letter of the law. While dual citizenship is *de jure* illegal, it is very rarely enforced in practice. The revised Kingdom Act on Dutch Nationality of 2003 stipulates a number of exemptions from the formal requirement to renounce prior citizenship, making this legal provision virtually unenforceable.

4.3 Public Islamic schools

The Dutch constitution guarantees the right to set up denominational schools and, more importantly, to receive public funding. This Freedom of Education Act became highly contested following the inspection of Islamic schools in 2008. The audit found widespread financial irregularities, non-compliance with the relevant Dutch laws, and a very poor level of teaching quality compared to the competences displayed at Dutch schools. Yet, despite the public outcry and the repeated demands by politicians to close these schools the Dutch government has not only been reluctant to interfere in the running of such schools but has continued to provide subsidies (Balkenende, 2006 cited in Veldhuis and van der Maas, 2007). Closing Islamic schools, on whatever grounds, would necessitate a constitutional amendment, and the
government is clearly not prepared to undertake a step of this magnitude.

4. 4 Influence of ethnic advisory bodies

In the 1970’s and 1980’s the Dutch government provided regular funding to ethnic organizations. This funding still exists though it has become more limited and less focused. While in the past it was provided to individual ethnic groups, since 2011 support has been available generally for more inclusive activities. In the 1980’s and 1990’s ethnic groups were given funding to establish advisory bodies. These entities had considerable weight and the governments at the local and national levels were obliged to take their input into consideration in the area of policy formulation. This consultative process continues to exist although arguably the power of ethnic advisory councils has declined.

4. 5 Ethnic media presence

A number of hours on the Dutch national broadcasting company are set aside specifically for programming by Muslim, Jewish and Hindu organizations in various languages. While there is no government requirement for media organizations to allocate a certain segment of broadcast time to covering issues related to multiculturalism, there are numerous TV and radio programs catering to minority groups (Multiculturalism policy index, 2009)

4. 6 Ethnic dress code

While a ban on full-body covering burqas was proposed by the government (Donner, 2011), it never became law. Such legislation would have made the Netherlands the third country in Europe, after France and Belgium, to outlaw niqab, but the change of government nixed the proposal.

5. 0 Conclusion

According to the census of 2012, approximately 20% of the Dutch population were of immigrant origin, including 9.3% of immigrants coming from
neighboring EU states and 11.6% arriving from non-Western countries. This represents a significant increase compared to a decade earlier, particularly among the migrants with non-Western backgrounds (Annual Report on Integration 2012). It is natural that a demographic shift of such proportion would provoke a heated debate about the survival of the dominant culture, about the clash of values and about the need to consider measures to stop, or at least reduce, the influx of immigrants. The debate rhetoric captures the highlights in the media, and often it is the tone and the intensity of the discourse, rather than the concrete government policies that become the focus of academic analysis. In this paper I have argued this is what is actually happening in the case of the Netherlands.

Over the past 50 years, the relationship between the Dutch state and its non-native residents / citizens has gone through a series of fairly distinct phases. Prior to the 1980s this interaction was best characterized by an absence of a pragmatic approach to the needs and challenges of mainly labor migrants. Once the authorities came to an overdue realization that most of the immigrants were determined to make Holland their permanent home, the resultant policy put priority on the maintenance of the migrants’ cultural and linguistic identity. The publication of the report in 1989 which highlighted enormous inequalities in employment and education between migrants (particularly those of non-European origin) and the native-Dutch, alarmed the nation and paved the way for a policy focusing on the improvement in the socio-economic status of migrants. Various integration measures to facilitate their entry into the Dutch labor market, including languages courses, were implemented. During the last decade these measures have become more rigid and prescriptive, with the public demanding that migrants fulfil their ‘duties’ as functioning members of society first and foremost, before taking advantage of the rights accorded to them.

The Dutch integration debate has taken on a progressively anti-Islamic
posture, with politicians like Geert Wilders speaking openly about the ‘Islamification’ of Holland. The fact that his words seem to resonate with the voters (his Party for Freedom has the third largest number of seats in the Dutch parliament) prompted many analysts to declare multiculturalism dead in the Netherlands. However, such categorical conclusions are not supported by evidence.

Many policies promulgated in the 1990s are still practiced today. Certainly, in some areas, notably the provision of mother tongue instruction, the state has taken a step back. The preservation of one’s linguistic identity and more broadly, of one’s cultural heritage has become a private affair, though even in this domain the state continues to provide subsidies in support of cultural activities, advisory bodies, and ethnic broadcasting in the media.

While the dialogue remains very polarized, several recent surveys point to a very tolerant attitude among the Dutch towards immigrants. The results of a Eurobarometer Survey conducted by the European Commission Directorate-General in 2011, showed that among the 27 EU member states, Dutch respondents are consistently among the most positive about the effects of immigration on their country: 67% believe that immigration enriches the country, while 85% support equal rights for immigrants and national citizens (Awareness of Home Affairs, 2011). A survey conducted among Dutch college students in 2011 found that young people, by and large, welcome the presence of multiple cultures around them. Roughly 85% believe that diverse cultures benefit the country as a whole. On the issue of a rapid increase in the number of Muslim immigrants, approximately 80% replied that Dutch cultural norms are not threatened by this phenomenon (Ray, 2012). Based on the above, I believe it is premature to say that multiculturalism in the Netherlands is dead.

What is perhaps very symbolic of the ambivalent state of the immigra-
tion debate in the Netherlands today, where words speak louder than actions, the same survey (Ray, 2012) contains an interesting parallel: an overwhelming majority of young Dutch seem to support diversity in their midst, yet an even larger majority (92%) believe that immigrants in the Netherlands (especially Muslim immigrants) should integrate as soon as possible. National policies continue to reflect this contradictory public attitude through largely tolerant measures but attention-grabbing tough talk.

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