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An overview of the multicultural situation in the Netherlands

In describing the multicultural situation in the Netherlands we do not intend to give an overview of figures, but we take this multicultural figures as a starting point and try to understand the way of dealing with this situation. We present two articles in which not the position of immigrants is subject of research but especially how in the Netherlands itself is dealt with cultural differences. So our research has a critical approach towards both directions, the one of the immigrants and the one of the autochthons . The first article we present researches the socio-economic position of ethnic minorities. The second describes the political shift of dealing with multiculturalism.

THE POSITION OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE NETHERLANDS¹

- This short overview helps to explain the labor market position of foreign nationals in the Netherlands. The overall position of immigrants in this country is rather under-privileged, although notable differences within the migrant population do exist.
- Non-western migrants, and those from Morocco, Turkey and some so-called refugee countries in particular, take the least favorable positions. As we will see, poor educational backgrounds are largely responsible for this result.
- Yet, other social and cultural factors deserve attention in this field as well. Nowadays, all foreign nationals are submitted to so-called civic integration policies to improve both their language and social skills.

The socio-economic integration of ethnic minorities

- This situation particularly refers to low activity rates and unfavorable labor market performances.
- To begin with, ethnic minorities in the Netherlands have been facing low rates of participation for decades.
- Nowadays, low activity rates continue to account for the Mediterranean groups, but even more for the recently arrived refugee population (Dagevos, 2007; Klaver et al., 2006). In addition, the situation is less favorable for immigrant women, whose participation rate is lower than in almost all other Western-European countries (OECD, 2008)
- Ethnic minorities also face a much greater risk of unemployment as compared to the native labor force. Again, non-Western minorities find themselves in a

¹ <http://www.migrationeducation.org/47.1.html?&rid=117&cHash=df6223f471>

very under-privileged position, a situation which had started with the economic downturns about four decades ago. In the early 1980s, unemployment was extremely high among the Antillean, Turkish and Moroccan labor force, reaching levels of more than 35 percent (Veenman, 1994).

- They are largely concentrated in the very lower echelons of the labor market. Almost fifty percent of the non-western labor force is employed at a rather basic level, compared to little more than a quarter of native employed (Dagevos and Bierings, 2005).
- During the last ten years, average job levels have nonetheless improved significantly among foreign-born employees. Recently, the most unfavorable situation applies to the refugee labor force, of which more than two in three are employed in rather unqualified jobs, notwithstanding their comparatively high levels of education (Van den Maagdenberg, 2004). Not surprisingly, the wages earned by non-western employees are much lower as compared to the native labor force. Indeed their low median hourly earnings coincide with low quality employment, although this finding also holds in comparison with other Western-European countries (OECD, 2008).
Last but not least, self-employment among immigrants in the Netherlands has become an important opportunity to enter the national labor market. In fact, the Netherlands stands out among other countries as the country in which immigrants' self-employment has grown most over the past ten years (EIM, 2007).
- There is a particularly pronounced overrepresentation of immigrants in the hotels and restaurant sector, as well as in recreational, cultural and sporting activities.

The socio-economic position of ethnic minorities explained

- Unanimously, these academic studies come to the overall conclusion that education explains more than any other factor the specific position of immigrants in the Netherlands (e.g. Dagevos, 2003; Dagevos, 2007; Odé and Veenman, 2003).
- After all, skilled immigrants take in much more favorable socio-economic positions as compared to their less educated fellow countrymen.
- What is more, language proficiency constitutes a constant and relevant factor in the understanding of economic performances among the non-western minorities
- Those who have lost contact with the Dutch society at large, are often equally facing a difficult integration process in economic terms. In this respect, we may refer to the significance of helpful social circles, to which large portions of the immigrant population has only little access (e.g. Dagevos and Veenman, 1996).
- At least with regard to low activity rates, the role of culture seems to have a significant impact on the employment rates of women originating from many less developed countries (e.g. Dagevos, 2006; Odé 2002).
- Last but not least, daily practices of discrimination are likely to further deteriorate fair chances of getting a job. There is a great deal of research demonstrating the negative consequences of racial intolerance and prejudice

in the Dutch labor market (e.g. Andriessen et al., 2007; Kruisbergen en Veld, 2002).

Dutch integration policies

For a long period of time, the Dutch government has tried to improve the position of immigrants as much as possible. Principally, initiatives were taken to improve the educational background and employability of the immigrant population, as well as to encourage employers in the Netherlands to attract more foreign-born employees.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the Dutch government hardly interfered in the private lives of minorities. It was generally felt that ethnic minorities would emancipate within their own ethnic groups, which would in the end encourage their engagement in the Dutch society at large (Schinkels, 2008).

Today, we may notice a general shift away from these so-called multicultural policies.

In this changing political landscape and dissatisfaction with the integration situation, a Parliamentary Commission was installed in 2003 with the assignment of evaluating thirty years of Dutch integration policies.. This change has become most evident in the introduction of so-called civic integration programs, including both language and social orientation courses. The main objective of civic integration is that newly arriving immigrants are at least able to find their way in Dutch society and preferably also to enter the labor market or follow regular education

Since 2006, and in addition to the civic integration requirements after arrival in the Netherlands, a new law has been introduced to oblige foreign nationals to pass a basic examination at one of the Dutch embassies before migrating to the Netherlands.

Not surprisingly, civic integration programs are at the very heart of modern Dutch integration policy. Nowadays, the immigrant population is expected to benefit from activation and employment policies, which are meant to support all residents who depend on a social security scheme. Municipalities may also pursue different so-called diversity policies, in order to make their own organizations and departments better accessible for all kinds of minority groups.

. It is true that non-western minorities in the Netherlands are generally facing a more favorable socio-economic position as compared to one or two decades ago.

Another positive factor is their enhanced educational achievements in relation to the recent past. All the same, national labor market performances in this country seem to be most relevant in the understanding of the social position of the immigrant population. During a strong increase of employment, ethnic minorities sooner or later benefit from this positive business cycle as well. However, when the labor market reveals a decreasing rate of employment growth, ethnic minorities are in very vulnerable positions indeed.

CHANGING THE RULES WHILE THE GAME IS ON. FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO ASSIMILATION IN THE NETHERLANDS²



- 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 institutionalized the acceptance of difference and that was reputed for its tolerance could shift so quickly to what is perceived as coercive and assimilation orientated policy?
- True, comparable trends can be distinguished in several other European countries, such as 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 analyze what has been going on in that country and what lessons can be drawn from this for theorizing on integration and multiculturalism.

From multiculturalism to integration policies

- 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.

² © Netzwerk Migration in Europa e.V.

- Under the well-known system of 'pillarization' (verzuiling) various religious and ideological communities in the Netherlands had their own institutional arrangements, such as schools, hospitals, social support agencies, newspapers, trade unions, political parties and even broadcasting organizations for radio and television.
- This approach is based on the subsidiary 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 institutionalized 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 pillarization: the elites constitute the common roof that the pillars support (Lijphart 1975).

Since the late 1960s pillarization has been losing ground in the Netherlands, partly as a result of secularization and partly because of the rising level of schooling of the population as a whole. 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 labeled ethnic minorities, and the policy on their behalf became known as Minorities' Policy. these countries.

In the 1980s the term multiculturalism was not as common as it is today. Minorities' Policy, therefore, can be seen simultaneously as the hallmark of pillarization and of the welfare state; but did it work? Traditionally, the Christian Democrats had been the champions of pillarization.

In 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.

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). 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 the incoming 'purple' coalition of Labor (PvdA), Liberals (VVD) and Democrats (D66), headed by Labor Party leader Wim Kok, was able to shift the focus of its policies from respecting cultural diversity to promoting the immigrants' social participation. Quite significantly, Minorities' Policy was

rebaptized Integration Policy. From that moment on culture was largely seen as a private affair; providing jobs to immigrants had become the main objective.. The courses were not an immediate success, largely for organizational reasons. Nevertheless, a considerable number of other immigration countries in Western Europe 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. Also in education the position of immigrants, particularly the second 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).

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 neighborhoods only few native Dutch children are left anyway and the pillarized 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 neighborhoods in which they are located
- As we have seen, ten percent of the population of the Netherlands can be classified as a first or second-generation immigrant of non-western origin. However, forty percent of those who qualify for social assistance belong to this category, and the gap between natives and immigrants is widening (De Beer 2004).

Signs of a turnaround

At the start of the new millennium two contradictory narratives began to emerge in the Dutch public debate on integration.

1. One was the 'official' one of a considerable progress that had been achieved on all major indicators, such as participation in the labor 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. transnationalism and of globalization.

2. The competing view was much less optimistic. Paul Scheffer *The Multicultural Tragedy*, 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. 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 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 'civilization 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.

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 personalized or "westernized" 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.

- o 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.
- o Pim Fortuyn's star began to rise in the Netherlands. 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. The predominant view of CDA and Fortuynists 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. 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.
 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. Today, acknowledging religious and ethnic diversity is no longer considered a public responsibility, let alone facilitating its institutionalization. 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, honor 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).
 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 signaled 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?

- 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.
- Another explanation may be found in the growing numbers of immigrants. Promoting cultural diversity and even institutionalizing 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 neighborhoods the traditional Dutch majority now constitutes a minority

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 institutionalized multiculturalism along the traditions of pillarization – briefly, their ethnicization – had kept migrants and their offspring in the margins of Dutch society for too long.

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 behavior or even fundamentalism. From the older integration literature we know that such extremist forms of behavior 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 demarginalization, 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.
- 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).

- Others argue, however, that recognizing 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 institutionalized 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 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".

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 an 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 behavior 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 pillarization migrants were recognized 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 'ghettoization' in densely populated, somewhat neglected and relatively unsafe urban neighborhoods.

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. 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. 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.

- 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

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, 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 realized 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 globalization, 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.

How to deal with this multicultural situation has become the challenge of the Dutch Tickle team. We, the members of the Dutch team are aware of the fact that the right answers do not exist but we have made our own choices:

Dealing with diversity, based on the concepts of inclusion and interculturality.