



MULTICULTURALISM: THE CASE OF THE NETHERLANDS THE STRUGGLE OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE FACE OF ISLAM RADICALISM

Marites Nijhof Rabelista

Marites Nijhof Rabelista is an immigrant, a former member of the Advisory Council on migrants and an independent translator and interpreter. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism and currently a candidate for the Master of Arts in Diplomacy and International Affairs.

Introduction

The Netherlands is characterised by a relatively high level of immigration that stems back in 1960s. The migrants come from diverse countries of origin, each with their own separate culture, customs, norms and values. Post-war immigration in the Netherlands and the relevant official policies may broadly be divided into three periods. The first runs from 1945 to 1973. This period was characterised by a substantial flow of migrants from the former Netherlands-Indie (now called Indonesia) following the transfer of sovereignty. In 1954, there was a steady flow of immigration from the Netherlands Antilles and Aruba. The immigration from Suriname increased in the years prior to their declaration of independence in 1975.¹ Immediately after the war, the Dutch government promoted the recruitment of unskilled and semiskilled 'guest workers' — the only period during the post-war wherein immigration was governed by the demands for labour.

As the Dutch economy was booming, employers recruited initially Southern Europeans as 'guest workers', later the recruitment was extended to Turkey and Morocco. The idea was that the presence of these so-called 'guest workers' would be temporary. In 1973 when labour migration was put into halt following the oil crisis, the recruitment freeze exposed the existence of a large group of labour migrants, particularly Turks and Moroccans.² It was assumed that the 'guest workers' would eventually return to their homeland; however this assumption was overtaken by events. Those who decided to stay received permanent residence permits and were allowed to let their families join them (family reunification). As many Turks and Moroccans have chosen their spouses from their country of origin (family formation), family migration among these groups has been going on ever since.³

¹ CBP Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, 2003, pp.24,25

² CPB, 2003, p.22

³ CPB, 2003, p.24.

In 1979, on recommendation of the Scientific Council for the government policy WRR, the Dutch government has shifted its approach from 'open door' policy for temporary stay guest workers to a coherent policy aimed at equal participation in the Dutch society for those who decided to stay. This was the beginning of a minority policy coordinated by the minister of Interior Affairs. In 1981, the Ministry of Interior affairs introduced a policy that aims to promote a society wherein the minority groups are given equal chances to fully develop with special emphasis on the 'conservation of own language and culture'. In this context, the immigrants were given the flexibility to develop their own cultural and religious identity. The use of the rights to a separate language, formation of organizations, family formation and reunification were officially facilitated and actively promoted.

To date, roughly six percent (one million) of the country's sixteen million citizens are Muslims. This is the second-highest percentage in Europe after France's, at ten percent.

Multiculturalism versus Islamic radicalism

Andre Krouwel, a political scientist at Amsterdam's Free University once commented that from the 1960s through the 1990s, the official Dutch policy toward its growing population of unskilled Islamic "guest workers" was one of "multiculturalism."⁴

In recent years, the conflict between the Islamic radicals and Dutch right-wingers worsened. In 2002 during the campaigns for Parliamentary elections, the populist politician Pim Fortuyn openly rejected multiculturalism and gained support in his statements about the backwardness of Islam. It is due to him that political discourse around migrants, particularly the Muslim migrants became polarized. Fortuyn was assassinated shortly before the elections. His death galvanized public support that brought his party (LPF) a landslide victory.

In 2004, Theo van Gogh a film maker was murdered by a Dutch-Moroccan radical. As reported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, van Gogh's murderer is a member of young Dutch jihadists who had fallen under the sway of a Salafist from Syria. This preacher worked in a similar way to the recruiters who had sent the two young men to Kashmir. He urged young people to abandon the mosque in favour of home-based religious instruction, where they could be mentally prepared for the violent jihad.⁵ Van Gogh criticized the Islam and its non-democratic values and has called it as being 'a crazy Middle Age culture'. Together with the former Parliament member Ayaan Hirsi Ali, he had produced the short film 'Submission' in which negative quotes from the Quran about women are painted on women's bodies. His death shook up the nation and fuelled mistrust by many against Islam. It also galvanized fears that Islam is dangerous.

At the same time Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Dutch Parliament member received several terror death threats as she stood firm in her criticism on Islam, called Islam a barbaric culture and a threat to the Western democratic values. The Dutch government took drastic security measures to safeguard her life but was eventually forced to live in exile. In 2005, she was feted

⁴ Radio Free Europe: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/11/922941ab-4df5-47ef-87da-1d726d9f1db0.html>

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs : <http://www.minbzk.nl/bzk2006uk/subjects?ActItmlIdt=107442>

by Time magazine as one of the year's one hundred most influential people and has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her courage. She now lives in America.

The aforementioned series of incidents created a political vacuum; it re-invigorates anti-multiculturalism sentiments and gave birth to Dutch nationalist idealism. "Beneath this rightist discourse in the Netherlands lay particular definitions of "nation" and "culture." What the figures in the Netherlands share is their emphasis on the incompatibility of cultures, the need to protect Dutch culture and identity from cultural invasion, and the need to promote Dutch cultural norms and values. This newly formed exclusionary rhetoric is based on a homogeneous, static, coherent, and rooted notion of culture which Stolcke calls "cultural fundamentalism." Explaining the immigrants' problems through culture is not only naive, it is also a specific form of cultural fundamentalism which weakens the very foundations of the nation".⁶

In addition, the murder of Fortuyn and van Gogh did not stop Geert Wilders, a populist politician on his crusade against multiculturalism. In fact, it strengthens his convictions that the Dutch non-committal integration policy must be scrapped and force those who do not integrate and do not have Dutch citizenship to leave the country. He also urged for the closure of the Dutch borders to non-western immigrants, stop admittance of new asylum seekers and prevent marriage and family migration. He also wants to abolish Islamic schools and impose a ban on wearing Islamic veils while on public functions. Geert Wilders recently calls to ban the Koran, the import of non- Dutch speaking Imams and enforcement of law against Imams who incite terror. Most striking of all is his claim that multiculturalism in the Netherlands is dead while he point fingers on Islamic radicalism. Soon after, many shared Wilder's views.

According to the report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy, majority of immigrants in the Netherlands are quietly absorbed into Dutch society and without any problem. Contrary to what is often suggested, the link between migration and the Dutch multicultural society is therefore not a one-on-one relationship: in the case of the migration to the Netherlands there is a divide between actual or potential problematic migration stemming from former colonial ties. The non-problematic category primarily includes Dutch nationals – i.e. emigrants returning from abroad – and the labour migration of better educated persons and EU citizens. Dutch nationals, EU citizens, and labour migrants (most of whom are well-educated today) account for 60 percent of the total. The debate about immigration, integration and social relations in the Netherlands is not however concerned with these groups but with the (small) groups making up the remainder of the total population.⁷

In this light, credit must be addressed to immigrants who made substantial contributions to the making of Dutch society and have made huge efforts to learn Dutch history and language, and engage in civic society despite encountering social exclusion and racism in practically every area of public policy and practice. Many of whom hold important positions in the society and affording a higher standard of living compared to their Dutch counterparts. The fact is that

⁶ Halleh Ghorashi, "Ayaan Hirsi Ali: daring or dogmatic? Debates on multiculturalism and emancipation in the Netherlands," *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, no. 42 (2003): pp.163-73

⁷ Scientific Council for Government Policy report: *Nederland als immigratiesamenleving*, Rapporten aan de Regering no. 60, Den Haag: SduUitgevers, 2001. (isbn 90 12093384), pp. 22 & 23

these positive developments are overshadowed by the problems inflicted by Islamic radicals. In return, they are stigmatized and undesirably put into unfavorable circumstances.

Majority of immigrants integrate

To find out the reasons why some minority groups are not well integrated in the Dutch society, it is necessary to study their position based on their educational level, chances in the labour market and income compared to the autochthonous Dutch. The aforementioned, are the basic elements of the integration of ethnic minority groups or individuals. Aside from the four big non-Western ethnic groups, the Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans, it is also necessary to study the position of other ethnic minority groups from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia, Ghana, Egypt, Ethiopia, China, the Philippines, Cape Verde, Hongkong, India and Vietnam.

The Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics CBS investigated the position of migrants and the developments from 1999 to 2003 amongst individuals aged 16 to 65, both first and second generation. The results show that those who are not an employee, self employed or an entrepreneur, are receiving social benefits.

	Employee		Self-employed	
	1 st gen.	2 nd gen.	1 st gen.	2 nd gen.
Autochthonous Dutch	66,5	66,5	7,7	
Western ethnic minority	49,4	63,6	5,3	6,9
Muslim Countries				
Afghanistan	30,7	x	1,9	x
Somalia	25,8	x	0,3	x
Iraq	26,5	57,3	2,8	x
Turkey	42,2	52,1	5,5	2,9
Morocco	41,9	51,2	2,5	1,3
Ethiopia	39,9	44,2	1,5	x
Iran	39,1	53,6	4,5	5,8
Pakistan	37,1	43,2	10,9	3,2
Egypt	35,8	50,5	19,9	2,8
Non-Muslim Countries				
Philippines	54,0	57,2	2,4	1,4
China	32,0	56,0	16,6	6,2
Hongkong	50,1	60,5	17,9	3,1
India	48,6	55,7	10,7	4,0
Vietnam	53,5	47,6	7,1	0,8
Cape Verde	70,7	54,6	1,2	1,2
Ghana	61,7	33,6	2,0	x
Surinam	62,8	55,7	3,4	2,5
Net. Antilles/Aruba	53,5	61,5	1,8	3,3

Source: CBS Integration Monitor 2005

The second generation is doing much better in the labour market than the first generation. For the first generation's personal backgrounds, migration motives, individual skills upon arrival in the Netherlands, residency status, age and work motivation may affect the opportunities for participation in the labour market. However, these do not apply to the second generation who were born and grown up in the Netherlands. The figures below shows that 60,5 percent of the children of the first immigrants from Hongkong are employed, followed by Iraq , Philippines, China, India, Surinam, and Iran.

Participation in the labour market of non-Western ethnic minorities

Second generation of the relevant population group

1.	Hongkong	60,5 %	8.	Turkey	52,1 %
2.	Iraq	57,3	9.	Morocco	51,2
3.	Philippines	57,2	10.	Egypt	50,5
4.	China	56,0	11.	Ethiopia	44,2
5.	India	55,7	12.	Pakistan	43,2
6.	Surinam	55,7	13.	Afghanistan	x
7.	Iran	53,6	14.	Somalia	x

Conclusion of CBS statistics: Integration Monitor 2005

Based on this ranking, two Muslim countries namely Iraq and Iran are among the best employed non-Western ethnic minorities. Whereas, seven Muslim-countries are among the least employed non-Western ethnic minorities.

With regard to the four big non-Western ethnic groups, there is a relatively high rate of unemployment among the Turks and Moroccan men. This seems to lead to the conclusion that immigrants from Islam dominated countries are behind labour integration and thus behind social integration in comparison with immigrants from non-Muslim countries. However, it is not clear for what reason the immigrants from Muslim countries such as Iraq and Iran are an exception to this.

Social security benefits

The question of whether or not an individual is receiving social security benefits gives some indication of the extent to which people are able to build up an economically independent existence which is important in integrating into the Dutch society. Being employed means social contacts with the Dutch autochthonous whereas, being unemployed is a risk of social isolation — thus, non integration. However, stereotyped remarks that immigrants from Muslim countries are discriminated on the labour market are not accurate considering the high employment rate of Iranians and Iraqis.

In 2003, the percentage of benefit recipients amongst individuals from non-Western ethnic minorities was more than 6 times higher than the autochthonous Dutch counterparts in 1999 as well as in 2003. Amongst older individuals (age category 55 – 65) this percentage is 9 times as high. Amongst the four big origin groups, the highest benefit recipients percentages can be found amongst older Moroccan women at 44 percent (age category 55-65) and at 33 percent

(age category 45-55). These percentages stand in shrill contrast to those of their Dutch native age category counterparts at 3 percent benefit recipients in 2003.

Individuals aged 35 to 65, receiving social benefits, year 2003

Percentage of the relevant population group

Aged 35 to 65	women	men	total
Autochthonous Dutch	3,4 %	1,8 %	2,6 %
Turkey	22,5 %	15,8 %	18,9 %
Morocco	35 %	21,8 %	27,1 %
Surinam	17 %	11,2 %	14,4 %
Neth. Antilles/Aruba	26 %	16,0 %	21,6 %

Source: CBS Integration Monitor 2005 p.44

Amongst first-generation Turks who have been in the Netherlands for 18 years or longer, 45 percent are receiving social security benefits; amongst Moroccans this is 43 percent; amongst the Surinamese 30 percent and amongst the Antilleans / Arubans this is 28 percent.

In 2003, the percentage of individuals receiving disability benefits (*Arbeidsongeschiktheid*) amongst the autochthonous Dutch population was 8,4 percent. The highest disability percentages can be found amongst Turks (14,5 percent) Moroccans (11.1 percent) and the Surinamese (10,1 percent).

Ex-Muslims versus Islamic radicalism

After Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a handful of ex-Muslims urged by the necessity to form a counterweight to Muslim radicals eventually ventured to speak out. One of them is Eshan Jami, a 22-year-old local Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) politician and chairman of the committee for apostate Muslims. According to him, the committee has to date only two members because other ex-Muslims are afraid to identify themselves with the committee for fear of reprisals. Jami was recently molested by Muslim radicals due to his harsh criticism about the Koran and the prophet Mohammed. Prior to the molestation he received death threats but was denied of police protection and support from his own Party. On the contrary, the Labour Party wants Jami to reconsider his moves and the fact that it will cause electoral damage and provoke enraged Muslims.

According to figures of the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS), the Netherlands at this moment counts about 920,000 Muslims. The largest groups are Turks (319,000 persons) followed by the Moroccans (285,000 persons). Then followed by the Iraqis (41,000), the Afghans (34,000), the Iranians (28,000) and the Somalis (28,000). The Muslim community comprises approximately percent of the Dutch population.

Recent survey undertaken by Foquz Etnomarketing for Nova TV indicates that more than forty percent of the Muslims disapprove apostasy, 24 percent breaks contact with ex-Muslims and six percent find that the use of violence against someone who renounced religion and Islam

is righteous. The President of the Dutch Muslim Council, Abdelmajid Khairoun is alarmed by the number saying that this is an indication that many Muslims do not know their religion by heart.

Meanwhile, Eshan Jami found support from ex-Muslim organizations in Germany and Great Britain. Such groups are on the rise in France and Switzerland. According to Mina Ahadi, founder of the Central Council of Ex-Muslims in Germany, there is routine consultation with the sister organizations in the U.S and Canada. She believes that a joint global force will be most effective to counter global Islam radicals. To quote Mina Ahadi:

“We're waving a flag that says, Stop! Not in our name. We don't believe that the Muslim organizations represent the people from Iran, Turkey, Iraq and so on. They themselves are the problem. They represent political Islam. We have turned away from religion and from Islam because Islam is very problematic and is a movement that meddles in our lives and in politics. That's why we've decided to take this path and be provocative, and we've been successful”.⁸

Although the Committee chaired by politician Eshan Jami has only two members that includes writer Nahed Selimde and himself as a chairman, the Support Committee which is established in April 2007 rallies behind their cause. The Support Committee has fourteen members of which majority are Dutch professors and journalists. All activities of the Support Committee are focused on the prohibition of apostasy within Islam. The Support Committee aims to fully support the ex-Muslim Committee established by Ehsan Jami and stand up for the rights of ex-Muslims and upcoming ex-Muslims who feel intimidated. To re-introduce in the Netherlands and in the European Union of the individual freedom of religion and philosophy of life, thereby including the right to change religion and life philosophy and openly speak out.

On the 11th of September, the committee of ex-Muslims in the Netherlands was formally presented by Eshan Jami as its chairman. He was joined by two other ex-Muslim committees chairmen namely Mina Ahadi (Germany) and Maryam Namazie (UK).

Three members of Dutch Parliament have signed a Declaration of Support on the occasion of the establishment of the committee of ex-Muslims. They are as follows: Mark Rutte of the Liberal Party(VVD), Geert Wilders of Party for Freedom (PVV) and Marianne Thieme of Party for Animals. Well-known politicians, professors and writers support Ehsan Jami at the establishment of its committee of ex-Muslims. The names of the seventy signatories who expressed support was published in the newspapers and internet. Among other signatories includes Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Dutch Parliament member and currently a researcher of American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, Washington DC.⁹ Eshan Jami's party, the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) remains unsupportive.

⁸ Deutsche Welle: <http://www.deutsche-welle.de/dw/article/0,2144,2370278,00.html>.

⁹ Steuncomite ex-Muslims: Declaration of Support, <http://www.steuncomite-exmuslims.nl/english/steunverklaring.html>

Current Developments

Multicultural student organizations

Amidst political debates and uproar on the alleged failure of the Dutch ‘multicultural’ society, an increasing number of student ethnic organizations nationwide particularly in the area of Rotterdam is on the rise. The first student ethnic organization was founded in the 90’s. In the last ten years the number of ethnic organizations has increased. According to Center for diversity policy (ECHO), this development does not necessarily mean a threat to integration. On the contrary, diverse student organizations prefer to be called ‘multicultural’. Openness is their main objective wherein everybody from different cultures are encouraged to meet and mix. This is a healthy sign that the multicultural society gears up towards emancipation.¹⁰ A Moroccan student organization called Dynamica in the Hague promotes activities to address social problems. According to its chairman, Dynamica aims to help students who specifically want to contribute to the society.

Current Government initiative

The Government has recently released a budget of 28 million euro to counter Islam radicalism and 460 million euro for the Delta integration plan for ‘integrated society’. On her speech Minister Vogelaar says “I see the increasing diversity of our societies as a positive development, but with strings attached. If views on how we should lead our daily lives differ too widely, and if we don’t all understand the same language, we run the risk of segregation and polarization. And this is a real threat to effective integration and participation. That’s precisely the reason why my policies center on social cohesion. What I observe, most of all, is that people long for cooperation. People are tired of the eternal us versus them anti-thesis. Both natives and persons from ethnic minorities want to come into contact more, engage with each other. In their experience this can be very confronting at times, but it eventually leads to an improved mutual understanding”.¹¹

Meanwhile, the Dutch Labour Party is reshaping their approach. They believed that the government’s official dialogue partners are mainly conservative Muslim men. Labour Party aims to initiate a dialogue with the progressive young, particularly women Muslims and with the Islamic student organizations where interesting debates on social issue take place.

Conclusion

Today, the Netherlands as an immigration society is highly divided and continues to face the challenges brought about by the complexity of immigration issues. There are differing voices of concern, on the one hand the right-wing movements claim that multiculturalism is a failure while they point fingers on Islam radicals and on the other, the left-wing movements believe

¹⁰ ECHO works in cooperation with the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) in organizing trips for students to Washington D.C. under the theme “Investing in the educational pipeline, improving access, retention & research in a context of social transformation”.

¹¹ Speech by Minister Vogelaar at the informal EU Conference for Integration Ministers. Available at <http://www.sharedspaces.nl/pagina.html?id=10812>

that integration is not an illusion but a reality. Migrants who successfully integrate and do well, proved how valuable they are for the society as a whole. They enriched the society with their own knowledge, experiences and background. The successful and substantial contributions they made to the making of Dutch society are a proof that striving towards an integrated society is significant and has perspective.

Whereas, according to mainstream opinion makers, “the murders of the prominent Dutch figures mark the failure of Dutch tolerance and of Dutch multiculturalism in the face of Islamic violence. As a result the Dutch are both facing an identity crisis, needing to reconsider their society's essential principles, and are turning to less tolerant, more authoritarian and more nationalist means of addressing the challenges created by the diversity in their midst”.

Most striking of all is that those who claim that multiculturalism in the Netherlands is a failure clearly put the blame on Islam radicals. Apparently a clear distinction of the key instigators of the ills of the multicultural society has been made — that is the Islam radicals. Meanwhile, mainstream opinion makers fail to claim openly that Islam radicals alone does not constitute the ‘multicultural’ Dutch society, therefore statements as such has to be reinstated.

The establishment of the committee of ex-Muslims is a positive addition to the political debates in the Netherlands. This marks the end of the migrant’s (ex-Muslims) tolerance of the uncivilized actions of the Islam radicals. As one of the ex-Muslim committee chairman said: “We're waving a flag that says, Stop! Not in our name”.

It is apparent based on the aforementioned that forces are geared towards a common adversary that is: Islam radicalism. According to Brian Barry, some forms of multiculturalism can divide people, although they need to unite in order to fight for social justice.

Taking this into consideration, the time is high for people to consolidate forces to combat a common adversary and to work towards a harmonious ‘multicultural’ Dutch society in the 21st century. To quote Minister Vogelhaar: “What I observe, most of all, is that people long for cooperation. People are tired of the eternal us versus them anti-thesis. Both natives and persons from ethnic minorities want to come into contact more, engage with each other. In their experience this can be very confronting at times, but it eventually leads to an improved mutual understanding”.

References

Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, 2002
Sylvain Ephimenco, *Het land van Theo van Gogh*, 2004

Pim Fortuyn, *De islamisering van onze cultuur: Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*, 2001
Margalith Kleijwegt & Max van Weezel, *Het land van haat en nijd: Hoe Nederland radicaal veranderde*, 2006

Jeroen Doormernik, *The State of Multiculturalism in the Netherlands*. University of Amsterdam publications.
Available at: http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/imes/publications/documents/1583_JDoomerni1.pdf

Tubergen, Frank van, *Immigration Integration: A Cross-National Study*, (2006).

CBS Integration Monitor 2005

