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Institutionalizing Islam in the Netherlands

A historical overview of the 1990s

This paper discusses Dutch integration policies in the 1990s regarding Muslim minorities. Despite the popular belief that such policies were informed by a multiculturalist ideology and a pillarized system, this paper shows that both influences were minor in shaping the policy response to Muslim claims. Most religious practices in the Netherlands, however, got formalised in a decade when official policy emphasised individual responsibility and socio-economic mobility. Cultural practices by religious organizations were funded insofar as they facilitated this. Islamic schools, on the other hand, received grants within a constitutional framework that supported all denominations.

Dutch immigrant integration policy has often been characterized as multicultural, which in recent years allegedly has undergone a seismic shift towards assimilationism.¹ As Entzinger notes, "wake up any expert on immigrant integration in the middle of the night and ask that person to name a country known for its multiculturalism. Ten to one that the answer will be ... the Netherlands".² The so-called multicultural character of public policy responses to immigrant integration is, in turn, frequently explained by the Dutch pillarisation system.³ Pillarisation in the Netherlands refers to a system where community and political life was organised in separate religious and social pillars with distinct institutions. People with different religious denominations and socio-economic ideologies attended their own schools, had separate political parties, broadcasting organizations, newspapers, hospitals, etc. Interaction between the different groups was practically non-existent. Political elites resolved social issues among themselves. When the

welfare state took further shape, these institutions organized the distribution of services, and as such they were closely involved with the organization and implementation of policies.

Despite the popular belief that Dutch integration policies were an active pillarisation attempt with a multiculturalist character, many authors have consistently argued that its role may have been much smaller.⁴ Maussen and Vink both argue that there is no such thing as an Islamic pillar in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the creation of an Islamic pillar has also never been a policy objective. Although some policy objectives, such as support for ethnic organizations and support for the foundation of Islamic schools, have been offered through the 1990s in the Netherlands, these policies were the remnants of an old pillarized system. Funding religious schools and grants for socio-cultural activities of religious organizations were offered to followers of other religions, too. These provisions could not be denied to the Muslim minorities on the basis of equality before the law. Moreover, minority policies were not informed by a belief in distinct group rights, which is at the core of a normative multiculturalist ideology.⁵ As Penninx argues, Dutch policies could be associated with a welfare state model, which aimed at emancipating disadvantaged groups through cultural support.⁶ In addition, by mid 1980s the pillarized structure of society had been changed thoroughly through constitutional change and secularization. However, still some legal structure such as the freedom of education to found religious schools existed next to social provisions for cultural activities. As I will demonstrate in this paper, it is in this legal and social space that immigrant Muslim communities have made their religious claims in the 1990s, some of which the authorities have granted. I will discuss this trend in the 1990s as the institutionalisation of Islam has mostly taken shape then. Paradoxically, the 1990s also witnessed less focus on group provisions and a more individualist immigrant integration agenda – at least in official language. Although policy makers were very reluctant to finance religious practices, numerous religious organizations have been established then, which in turn have gained more legitimacy as consultation partners in the immigrant integration process.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. I will first briefly discuss the migration history of Muslim minorities to the Netherlands. Then I will examine the integration policies and public debates surrounding Muslim issues in the 1990s. How were Muslim minorities received by the Dutch society and politics? Finally, I will highlight the extent to which Muslim claims have been granted and how much space the authorities

offered them to formalize their identity. How did the Muslim minorities preserve their identities?

Migration history Muslim minorities

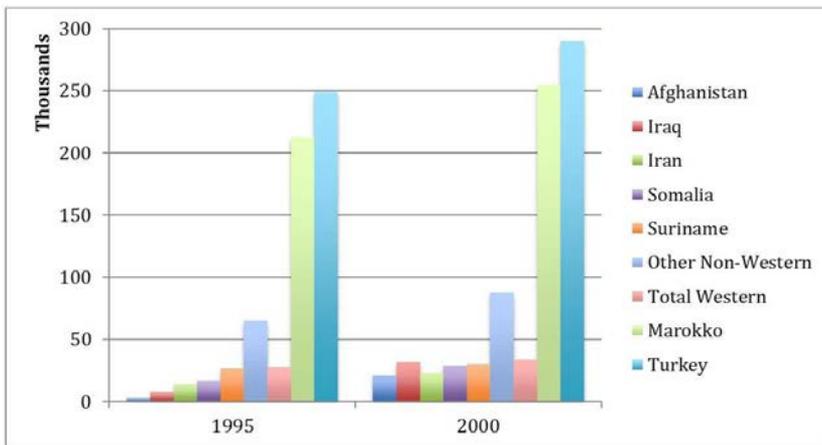
Most Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands came to the country in the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s as "guest workers" (*gastarbeiders*) from Turkey and Morocco, filling up low-qualified industrial jobs. They left behind their families and rural agrarian lives and faced an industrial or a post-industrial setting. The majority hoped to return, an idea that was also shared by the Dutch authorities. Once it became clear that return was less feasible, family reunification was a source of Muslim immigration in the 1970s, favoured by supportive international and national laws.⁷ Family reunification started much later among Moroccan immigrants since their very traditional Rif background impeded the wives to move freely outside the house once they would be in the Netherlands.⁸ In 1985 family migration rose again since most children of immigrants were reaching the marriage age and made use of this provision to have a partner come over from the countries of origin. In the 1980s a wave of Kurdish and Christian Orthodox asylum seekers entered the Netherlands.⁹ The number of non-Muslim Turkish immigrants is, however, very small. In the 1980s and 1990s most other Muslim immigrants arrived as refugees and asylum seekers from countries such as Iran, Somalia, former Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan. It has to be noted that there are some Muslims among the Surinamese immigrants who mostly came to the Netherlands after the independence in 1980.

In 1990 the Moroccan population in the Netherlands was about 160,000, while it grew to more than 260,000 by the end of the nineties. The Turkish population was much larger with more than 200,000 at the beginning of the decade, which grew to nearly 310,000 by 2000. In 2002 around 95% of the Turkish and 98% of Moroccan minorities adhered to Islam as self-reported evidence shows.¹⁰ Statistics Netherlands (CBS) reported that there were around 801,000 Muslims in the Netherlands by 2000.¹¹ The graph below depicts the share of Muslims among minorities from Turkey, Morocco and other countries.

The number of Moroccans and Turkish Muslims would be around 545,000. That would mean that in 2000 around 256,000 Muslims or a third of the total were mostly asylum seekers. However, this figure is (slightly) exaggerated since the data was not collected by asking people whether they

regarded themselves Muslim, but rather researchers had estimated these figures on the basis of the percentage of Muslims in the countries of origin, which has resulted in very crude figures and overestimations. In the case of Iranians, whom mostly fled an Islamic regime, later surveys have shown that only 35-40% see themselves as Muslim.¹² The percentages among Moroccans and Turkish minorities seem to be more accurate, but only 38-36% says to attend a mosque every week. As such, Muslims in the Netherlands seem to have practiced their religion mostly in private, but to speak of a secularizing trend, that would be also erroneous.¹³

Figure 1. Number of Muslims in the Netherlands per country or region of origin (1995 and 2000).



Source: CBS [Statistics Netherlands] 2004

Immigrant policy in the 1990s

While the Dutch immigrant policy in the 1990s was labelled integration policy, previously it was called categorical policy (1970s) and minority policy (1980s).¹⁴ In the 1970s it was believed that migration of Muslim guest workers was temporary. Family migration was on the rise, but policy makers still believed that most newcomers would return. Therefore, they thought it would be best to facilitate that return by supporting group cohesion, hence the term "categorical". Their motto was: 'integration with retention of identity'. From the 1980s onwards the temporary character of immigration lost importance.

Minority policy was thought to combat socio-economic disadvantage, while on a socio-cultural level, the government gave room to the development of migrants' distinct culture in favour of socio-economic mobility. This would be achieved through the support of minority organizations and the development of a consultation framework. The 1990s signalled the beginning of a new era, which was titled integration policy. Inspired by the idea of combating persistent socio-economic disadvantage among minorities as evidenced by educational backlog and rising unemployment, the new policy was mainly aimed at raising educational attainment and advancing labour market participation. While in the socio-economical realm previous policy was continued, in socio-cultural terrain there was a major shift away from group policy towards a policy tailored for individuals with a disadvantage. Moreover, there was a significant emphasis on civic education and language training, on individual responsibility, rights and duties of the immigrant as a citizen. The institutionalisation of pluralism has furthermore become the responsibility of the immigrants themselves. Below I will outline the content of the integration policies, focusing on their socio-cultural aspects.

Allochthonous policy (1990)

The Dutch Scientific Council for Governmental Policy (WRR) wrote an advice in 1989, which marked the new shift to an individualist approach to immigrant integration. Here they firstly emphasised that for an individual to be considered a minority they should not only have an immigration background (recent settlement or parents who immigrated), but they would also have to be in a disadvantaged position. The greatest emphasis of this policy advice was on socio-economic issues. The report was also quite ambiguous when dealing with cultural issues. It still aimed to provide better access to individual, cultural and religious experience, but it only referred to legal constructions such as the freedom of assembly and equality before the law. The initiative for cultural expression lay with the minorities themselves in line with the individualist approach, and it was seen more as a general policy rather than being part of the integration policy. Collective emancipation was, in other words, weakened. The government embraced most of these recommendations in 1990, except the move away from a minority policy. In cabinets' views, the term 'minorities' was internationally accepted and it emphasised a core democratic idea, namely that of respect for difference.

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Integration policy ethnic minorities ('Contourennota 1994')

Just before the elections a new report on integration was presented to the Dutch parliament. In this report the emphasis was still on civic integration. However, it deviated from solely focusing on minorities and addressed society as a whole. Integration was seen as a reciprocal process with acceptance as its pivotal part. Most of the recommendations again involved combating unemployment and improving the socio-economic position of minorities. There was, however, a novel focus on the geographical spread of minorities since they became more and more visible in less affluent parts of large cities. In addition, civic integration and language courses for new immigrants were also new policy recommendations. Participation in cultural activities and in immigrant organizations was addressed in a separate note, which I will discuss below. But the most evident shift in this report was the fact that support for immigrant organizations was seen as less important. Eventually only the Christian Democrats (CDA) opposed this, they later were joined by the Labour Party (PvdA). Liberal parties on the other hand proposed to increase access to general organizations rather than cultural retention, which was more in line with governmental focus on inter-group relations rather than minorities alone.

Investing in integration (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture 1994)

The emphasis lay mostly on youth and women and how to improve their educational performance and labour market participation. There was also some focus on minority organizations. They were deemed important as bridges between different populations and to advance multicultural relations. Religious practices in immigrant organizations were seen as essential only when these would eventually contribute to civic integration in the Dutch society as a whole. Old immigrants could then facilitate the integration of newcomers within their own circles by gradually making them used to the new environment. Immigrant organizations were also regarded to be important in representing the interest of their own groups. As such increasing participation was deemed necessary. Although the government report ("Contourennota") discussed before thought immigrant organizations and cultural retention to be less desirable, here it was seen important insofar as it supported integration. Since the Netherlands had moved towards decentralising governmental provisions, implementing integration policies

were now passed on to the city councils.

Giving opportunities, taking opportunities (1997-1998)

The final policy recommendation in the 1990s was presented after the 1998 elections by the second purple cabinet, which brought together the liberals and the social democrats. Integration policy needed an impulse according to the new government since the old policy was unsatisfactory. The efforts by the majority of the population in absorbing the immigrant population had mainly been missed. Although immigration was seen as advantageous, the new government also associated problems with it. It placed, therefore, greater emphasis on active citizenship, and the responsibility of their place in the society and their future came to lie with the minorities themselves. The government was only responsible to provide the conditions for this active citizenship. Socio-economic integration, education, and creating opportunities for the youth were important issues. Immigrant organizations were still regarded as intermediaries between the minorities and the government, but they were seen less as facilitators of integration.

During the 1990s, polarised debates about integration issues were more or less absent in the Netherlands. Although the 1980s had made the Dutch public aware of the presence of an ever-growing Muslim population, there were almost no debates about their claims apart from reactions from the far-right. However, all political parties avoided a debate with the far-right on the grounds of a *cordon sanitaire*. Clashes between the majority and minority populations seldom occurred. A debate initiated by the leader of the Liberals, Frits Bolkestein, in 1991 about the compatibility of Islam with Western cultural norms, which took place outside the parliament, seemed to be a one-off event. Bolkestein mostly emphasised the backward position of women in Islam and questioned whether Islam would not interfere with their integration. His criticism was aimed at the role of government in financing immigrant organizations, mainly the religious ones, not integration policies per se. It was only at the beginning of the new millennium that more heated debate about the role of Islam in the Dutch society took off.

The establishment of non-profit organizations and mosques

One of the main channels through which Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands have been able to express their identity is by the foundation

of organizations and more specifically the establishment of prayer houses and mosques. The Dutch government has unintentionally played a role – albeit not too pivotal – in institutionalising Islam through supporting their activities from 1970s onwards. What seems crucial in this respect was the legal space and remnants of pillarisation in the constitution rather than an active multiculturalist policy per se. Notably, from 1983 the Dutch constitutional reform removed most of the provisions for religious maintenance by the government.¹⁵ However, it still offered the principle of equal treatment and non-discrimination (article 1), religious freedom (6), and freedom of education and equal funding of denominational schools (article 23) to all its citizens. Muslim minorities thus were able to establish religious organizations, a Muslim broadcasting organization, and Islamic schools. They also held important consultative positions in advisory boards to represent their interests.

In most of the 1970s the Dutch government played a very passive role towards facilitating the cultural and religious needs of the guest workers.¹⁶ From 1983 the Dutch ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture had decided not to a priori exclude religious organizations from subsidy if the funds were to support socio-cultural activities aimed at integration. The ministry thought it would be discriminatory to do otherwise. The novel integration policy of the 1990s departed from the old policy by emphasising that nationality, ethnicity, and religion were less important for subsidy provision.¹⁷ This shift was in line with more focus on socio-economic integration rather than the socio-cultural needs of the minority groups. However, initial policy revisions were again amended, this time in favour of more funds to religious and ethno-national organizations since they were deemed necessary for the integration of new minorities. This would enable them to first get used to the Dutch society in their own circles. Thus in practice ethno-national and religious organizations still were receiving funding for their cultural activities from the national and local governments throughout the 1990s despite the rhetoric of responsibility and the individualist tone in the policy reports discussed earlier.

By 2003, the Dutch government had supported minority organizations with two million Guilders (900,000 Euros) in total.¹⁸ The activities to receive grants were research, providing information, knowledge transfer, work development, education and professional qualification, consultation and acting as a platform. As such, the government did move away from subsidizing socio-cultural activities. There were several stringent conditions

set to be eligible for subsidy. After three years the regulations for subsidy provision were evaluated. It turned out that only nine organizations were successful in their applications. Therefore, some of the rules were relaxed and another eleven organizations received funds later. The minister in charge also revealed that it was a lot to expect from organizations to act as facilitator of integration, but they would nevertheless be important for civic participation of minorities.

Turkish minorities seem to have set up most of their organizations in the 1990s.¹⁹ In 2000 there were about two hundred Turkish mosques in the Netherlands.²⁰ The majority of these organizations represent the secular Turkish Islam and are associated with the Presidium of Religious Affairs (Diyamet İşleri Bakanlığı) in Turkey. Other umbrella foundations, which do not represent the official Turkish Islam, have founded their own organizations (Milli Görüş and Süleymanlı). These blocs often clashed, especially since the second generation was more attracted to the Milli Görüş group, which recently has become also more open to modern norms and Dutch society.²¹ This partly had to do with the board of the organizations becoming younger. Nevertheless, the Turkish minorities worked better together. However, collaboration with other ethno-national organizations was practically absent. Moroccan religious organizations have often been founded in parallel, which also did not collaborate well with other Moroccan organizations. Village, regional or political conflict that predated their settlement in the Netherlands, often divided them.²²

Overall, a successful wave of minority organizations was established in the 1990s, which functioned as refuge for new immigrants.²³ Local authorities started to fund organizations more than the national government did. They often necessitated that the organizations would offer information rather than pastime activities, which clashed with the demands of the members. Religious and political organizations that would focus on the country of origin started to lose ground among minorities in the '90s. By the end of the decade less people were getting involved in mosques than previously.²⁴ Despite the growing number of Islamic organizations, religious practices seemed more and more a private affair. Many organizations were also focusing on local issues such as supervising students with their homework, the participation of the elderly in language courses, the development of imam courses in order to focus their orientation on the host society, etc. This would be more in line with the guidelines of the local government who were increasingly charged with providing grants. However, only a quarter of the organizations received

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funding, with about 40% for accommodation and around 60% for projects.²⁵ By the end of the 1990s most organizations mentioned explicitly that cultural and identity-oriented activities were not among their key activities.²⁶

Political representation

The 1990s were also important for incorporating ethno-religious organizations as political representatives of ethnic minorities. As of 1997 the consultation committee that brought different ethnic minority groups together became a legal entity, which obliged the government to consult this committee before implementing any minority related policy.²⁷ Although the committee's recommendations have no binding character, the idea rose that if any policy had to be successful, the opinions of minority groups should weigh on the decisions. The consultation committee had seats for umbrella organizations representing the largest ethnic groups (Turks, Moroccans, Tunisians, Southern Europeans, Caribbean minorities, Surinamese, Moluccans, and Refugees). The Turkish umbrella organization Consultation Board Turks ('Inspiraakorgaan Turken') embodied nine Turkish foundations, which represent major Turkish Islamic groups, Alevites, sports and cultural organizations, a labour union, leftist groups and women's groups. The Turkish minorities and their Islamic organizations were best represented in this committee. The government realised that for this consultation committee to be successful, it needed the religious organizations to take part; although it had a difficult time creating a place for religion in the policy framework since the Dutch society was becoming increasingly secular. It should, however, be noted that this consultation framework was mostly an infrastructure representing ethnic groups rather than a Muslim council.

Islamic schools

The creation of Islamic schools was another delicate issue in the 1990s. As argued before, the Dutch constitution, which already had undergone some reforms, still allowed faith-based schools to be founded and to receive government funding. What is crucial to point out is that non-profit religious organizations would not be eligible for funds, other than for organizing non-religious socio-cultural activities, but schools would qualify for funding under article 23. This resulted in the foundation of the first Islamic primary school in 1988.²⁸ By the end of the 1990s there were more than thirty Islamic

schools in the Netherlands.²⁹ While many opposed the foundation of such schools fearing the creation of parallel societies and 'ghetto formation', the foundation of these schools was in accordance with freedom of education. Facilities offered to Christians and Humanists could not be denied to Muslims. There were several statutory requirements before a religious school can be founded – all to comply with national regulations.³⁰

Just after the establishment of the first schools, the Dutch ministry of educations commenced an investigation in 1990 into the schools' fundamentalist character.³¹ There were only six schools then. The inspection concluded that most of the national regulations had been met and that the curriculum did not differ from an average primary school in the country. Another study into the political character of the schools was conducted in 1998. The National Security Service investigated Islamic schools in order to find out whether foreign countries (such as Saudi-Arabia) would not interfere with the contents of the education. The secret service's premise was not completely unfounded. Some schools were indeed receiving funds from an ultra-orthodox organization (Al-Waqf al-Islami), which was used for teaching materials. However, the secret service concluded that the number of radical Muslims in the Netherlands was so small then that this organization did not pose an immediate threat. Yet another report showed that although the quality of the education was lower than on an average school, in mathematic achievements and final examination these schools did outperform other schools with a comparable socio-economic population.³² While the Dutch government was very reluctant in supporting religious claims during the 1990s, it had to accept the constitutional space, which allowed minorities to establish Islamic schools. If there was any area where former pillarisation policies were resonating, it was in the educational realm.³³

Conclusion

The arrival of Muslim minorities in the thirty years prior to 1990 resulted in a relatively large Muslim population in the Netherlands, with people who were organizing themselves along religious lines to preserve their identities. Although the government had started to formulate a stricter policy in favour of individual socio-economic integration and was reluctant to fund religious activities in the 1990s, a kind of domino effect occurred. "Islamic organizations were set up and recognized in one social sphere after another."³⁴

However, as argued in this paper this had less to do with the multicultural character of the Dutch immigrant integration policy and was only partly due to the pillarized laws and structures, which the Dutch society had not shed yet. The local and national authorities did recognise some of the Muslim claims by incorporating them into a consultation framework, supporting non-religious activities of their non-profits and financing Islamic schools. It has to be emphasised that all denominations including Muslims would receive such support, or else the government would be discriminating. Moreover, the efforts of the immigrants themselves in formalising their institutions should not be underestimated, as the financial support from the government was unsubstantial. Koopmans summarises these efforts elaborately by stating: "the Muslim identity is especially resistant against state attempts to channel migrant identities".³⁵ As a result, Islam in the Netherlands has been accepted and acknowledged as a religion in the 1990s. However, a recent report on the occurrence of Muslim discrimination in the Netherlands has found that more than a third (39%) of all mosques has experienced one or more discriminatory incidents in the past ten years.³⁶ Individual acceptance of Islam is thus still lagging in 2015.

Notes

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