

## Part II: THE DUTCH MINORITIES DISCOURSE

## Introduction

Until the 1960s, social life in the Netherlands was largely structured by the four religious and political ‘pillars’ of Dutch society: Catholicism, Calvinism, Socialism and Liberalism. There were Catholic, Protestant and public schools, Protestant, Catholic, socialist and liberal broadcasting companies, sports clubs, newspapers and labour unions. For this reason, the Netherlands were considered a plural society, “divided into clearly identifiable and measurable segments which have their own separate social and political organization” (Lijphart 1984: 11). At the same time, the ethnic make-up of the country was almost completely homogenous. As sociologist Johan Goudsblom noted in 1967: “No less than 96 percent of the people living in the Netherlands today were born there, and for most of them Dutch is their native tongue [...] its national boundaries have real meaning: they mark a well-defined and to a large extent still self-contained social structure” (Goudsblom 1967: 6). Nevertheless, since the early fifties, groups of people from other than Dutch-ethnic descent had arrived. One of the first were the so-called ‘repatriates’: inhabitants from the Dutch East Indies, who came over after the official independence of Indonesia in 1949, including a group of Moluccan ex-soldiers from the *KNIL* (the Royal Dutch Indian Army) with their families.

As the post-war reconstruction of the Netherlands went unexpectedly well, soon a shortage of labour power led industry and government to start recruiting workers from abroad. In 1949, Italian miners formed the first of a growing number of so-called guest workers. They arrived from a variety of countries, such as Spain, Greece, Portugal, The Cape Verde Islands, Yugoslavia, Morocco and Turkey. Quite soon, the group of ‘spontaneous’ workers, those who were hired without governmental mediation, was much larger than the group of workers recruited through the official channels.<sup>1</sup> The overall presumption was that these men (and some women) would, eventually, return to their home country. Housing and other facilities for these invited and economically much needed ‘guests’ were not very hospitable: most workers had to live in scarcely furnished wooden sheds or overcrowded boarding-houses, and made long working-days for relatively low wages. Understandably, few had the gusto to get acquainted with Dutch society or the Dutch language. This inevitably led to social isolation and often discrimination.

From the 1960s, there also was a gradual increase in migration from Surinam and the Antilles to Holland. Since 1954, these colonies had become part of the (Kingdom of the) Netherlands, and inhabitants were free to travel to and fro. Initially, the main reason for people to come over were education and work. However, the prospect of Surinamese independence in 1975 and the expiration of an immigration treaty between the two countries in 1980, triggered off a large-scale process of migration to the Netherlands.<sup>2</sup> To date, the Antilles are still part of the Kingdom, reason that its migration numbers have remained fairly steady.<sup>3</sup>

At the end of the 1970s, the yearly number of newcomers, especially from Surinam, Turkey and Morocco, reached a first culmination point. Next to the economic and political deterioration of Surinam<sup>4</sup>, this was mainly due to the start of family reunions among Turkish and Moroccan workers. This happened in a period when the percentage of unemployment amongst Turks and Moroccans had definitely outgrown the percentage of unemployed among the Dutch indigenous work force.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, these groups could no longer be perceived as passers-by. From guest workers they had become immigrants.<sup>6</sup> The last peak in the immigration balance was reached between 1989 and 1993. To the still ongoing process of family reunion, another significant factor was added, namely the marriage of young (Turkish, Moroccan) men and

women with a partner from their country of origin.

Thus, within a period of some 20 years, the ethnic composition of Dutch society went through a considerable change. In 1992, 84,4% of the (about 15 million) inhabitants of the Netherlands could be reckoned to the indigenous population, whereas 15,6 % were from 'allochthone' descent. These statistical 'facts' are not so unambiguous as they may seem though. The word 'allochthone' (*allochtoon*) became widespread in the Dutch discourse since the early eighties. Initially, it simply referred to people born outside the Netherlands (Verwey-Jonker 1971: 7). Demographic developments, however, impelled to a more sophisticated circumscription. At present, a person is officially considered *allochtoon* when s/he does not possess the Dutch nationality and/or is born outside the Netherlands, or when at least one of his/her parents was born outside the Netherlands (Lucassen and Penninx 1994: 17). For the Dutch situation, the notion of ethnic minority was coined by Van Amersfoort. He reserved it to describe those groups of which the members identify themselves, and are identified by others, as belonging to one particular ethnic or cultural group, while this group systematically occupies a marginal socio-economic position vis-à-vis dominant society.<sup>7</sup>

By definition then, an allochthone is to be distinguished from a member of an ethnic minority group. But the distinction does not always work very smoothly. According to the letter of the definition, for instance, the Dutch queen, whose father was born in Germany, would count as *allochtoon* - which to the majority of the Dutch would be a hilarious inference. And everyday usage is quite unconcerned about scientific definitions. An indigenous Dutch black citizen, born in the Netherlands of parents born in the Netherlands, will in all likelihood often find him or herself referred to as *allochtoon*, whereas a French immigrant may be regarded a foreigner, but certainly not as *allochtoon*. In other words, in daily life, the terms *autochtoon* and *allochtoon* actually are used to distinguish between white Dutchmen on the one hand, and people of colour on the other. Ethnic and racial features are tacitly considered indicative for one's belonging to Dutch society.

Nevertheless, according to the above definitions, only a particular part of the 15,6% of official 'allochthones' in Holland can be counted among the membership of an ethnic minority. Hence, in 1992, only 6,1% of the people living in the Netherlands were considered members of an ethnic minority group (*Rapportage Minderheden* 1996: 16).<sup>8</sup> The definitions matter in so far as the attachment of the label 'ethnic minority' is of crucial importance for the eventual line of governmental policy regarding the group concerned.

Towards the end of the 1970s, Dutch government gradually acknowledged that large groups of Surinamese, Turkish and Moroccan people would settle in the Netherlands, and that this would require a change in policy. Two publications by governmental advisory bodies in 1979 mark the beginning of this new, more systematic concern for the position of ethnic minorities (*ACOM* 1979; *WRR* 1979). A first policy outline was proposed in the so-called 'Memorandum on Minorities' (*Minderhedennota* 1983). Whereas, before, the dominant codewords had been integration, assimilation and absorption<sup>9</sup>, the new credo became: 'integration with the preservation of identity'.

This newly embraced aim of policy required a two-track strategy. On the one hand, effort had to be made to undo existing inequalities. The focus was on employment, education and housing. Rather than fostering policies of affirmative action in the workplace<sup>10</sup>, policy aimed at undoing the rapidly expanding rate of unemployment among ethnic minority groups by improving their starting position, i.e. by providing facilities for training and education. Government put a lot of money and effort in projects which would help

reduce the social, cultural and economic arrears of immigrants. Special cultural facilities and social services were provided, schools subsidized for extra hours of education in Turkish and Moroccan language.<sup>11</sup> This approach was wholly in line with the welfare state in full bloom Holland was at that time.<sup>12</sup> Equal opportunity, accessibility and the fight against discrimination were some of the key terms. On the other hand, the Dutch state was to enable minority groups to actively preserve and develop their own ethnic or cultural identity by providing the material and cultural conditions to make this possible. Consequently, so-called 'categorical' facilities and self-organizations were subsidized. Participatory boards (*inspraakorganen*) were installed for each minority group to have its say in the development of governmental policies.

On the procedural level, one could say that in a short time minority groups were taken up in the collective bargaining culture of Dutch democracy.<sup>13</sup> Ethnic and religious communities made use of the opportunity to found Muslim and Hindu schools which likewise, formally spoken, meant nothing really new for Dutch society. The right to organize oneself in order to preserve one's religion is laid down in the Dutch constitution. This constitutional rule was, and still is, fundamental to the pillarized structure of Dutch society. Provided one meets certain conditions concerning a minimum number of students, qualified teachers, and an officially approved curriculum, Dutch citizens have the right to found a school based on (religious or ideological) principles, to be subsidized by the state.

During the last decades, due to processes of secularization, the four traditional pillars of Calvinism, Catholicism, Socialism and Liberalism gradually lost significance. But they certainly did not disappear. Recently, some even find that the idea of pillarization should be cherished precisely because it offers new (minority) groups the best opportunities for (collective) empowerment, like it previously did to religious minorities such as the Catholics and the Dutch-Reformed. The underlying principle of pillarization, according to one of its most outspoken defenders, then prime-minister Ruud Lubbers, furthers the emancipation of individuals through a strengthening 'within one's own circle' first: "In my political-social analysis, I - Christian-Democrats - am convinced that integration within the larger society is improved when you start with respecting people's roots, with understanding where they come from [...] everything which is familiar, affirmative, emancipatory for one's own group is good till the point where it really causes trouble for others" (quoted in Tinnemans 1994: 381). But many disagree with this suggestion of continuity. Conservative liberal politicians, for instance, never believed in the collectivistic outlook of pillarized society in the first place. They point to the hierarchical structure that existed *within* each pillar, to the fact that it was only the elite of the Catholic or Dutch-Reformed minority that had a voice in the so-called plural society, whereas ordinary members were expected to live as their obedient flock. Social-democrats, on the other hand, object to the comparison between the present-day position of ethnic minorities and the earlier position of religious-political groups because the latter did not really occupy a minority position. Their members, for instance, were all white, hence not confronted with racial discrimination, and they were all Dutch citizens, and as such enjoyed equal political and civil rights.

The second *WRR* report, published in 1989, for that matter, solves this problem of terminological confusion by replacing the notion of ethnic minority with the term 'allochthones'. The change is significant insofar as this report advises government to take leave of the perspective of rights and care, and instead put more emphasis on the individual responsibilities and obligations of allochthone citizens.

Such differences of opinion and gradual shifts in governmental approach notwithstanding, the overall political consensus still is that the Dutch state is responsible for the social and economic position of its ethnic minorities or 'allochthones'. In order to make good governance possible, politicians and administra

tors feel the need to become more knowledgeable about these groups. Not that, before, one had not been interested. Since 1945, studies appeared about for instance Surinamese migrants, Ambonese refugees, Antillean fellow citizens, repatriates from the Dutch East Indies, or Turkish guest workers. But in those days, focus was on such groups in their quality as 'strangers', regarding whom the main question was how they managed during the time of their stay.<sup>14</sup> Since the 1980s, minority studies have become more alive to the Netherlands becoming a multi-ethnic society. Most of these studies are initiated and financed by ministries and other governmental bodies. They attempt to acquire insight into the extent to which different minority groups manage to integrate into Dutch society, both in the socio-economic sense and regarding their cultural orientation. Subsidizing bodies are interested in the obstacles and bottle-necks for such processes of integration or emancipation. Researchers are asked to give expert advice and recommendations about how to remove them - not only for the good of the people involved, but also for reasons of management and control. For a growing 'underclass' means more people becoming dependent on welfare, hence a heavy weight on the state budget, whereas feelings of frustration could grow into a potential threat to the stability of society at large.<sup>15</sup> The large governmental investments in social research projects testify to a strong belief in social engineering, in the 'makeability' of Dutch society.

Next to this vast expansion of governmental concern and intervention, in the 1990s there is a growing number of initiatives directed at emancipation and empowerment 'from below', such as the organization of black and migrant interest groups, action committees against racism and fascism, magazines for people of colour, or the establishments of for instance an employment agency for people of colour, an Islamic broadcasting company, a Centre for black and migrant women.

## Notes

1. Between 1964 and 1966, for instance, 15.000 workers were recruited through governmental mediation, but the Ministry of Social Affairs issued no less than 65.000 staying permits for foreign workers (Tinnemans 1994: 64).
2. One of the reasons was a failure of trust among many Surinamese in the economic and political prospects of their country. As it was arranged that anyone living in the Netherlands at the date of Surinamese independence would retain the Dutch nationality, many made use of this opportunity to secure a better future. Ultimately, two-third of the Surinamese population moved to the Netherlands. In 1990, 237.000 people of Surinamese descent lived in the Netherlands, which increased from 263.000 in 1992 to 278.000 in 1995. In 1992, 96% of them has Dutch nationality (*Rapportage minderheden* 1996: 16-19).
3. The island of Aruba, in anticipation of its official independence in 1996, was granted the so-called *status aparte* in 1986. In the meantime, however, the Aruban government revised its assessments of the actual effects of autonomy. It seems now that the constitutional bond between Aruba, the Antilles and the Netherlands will be consolidated through a new relationship of commonwealth. Inhabitants of the Antilles are Dutch citizens. They can travel freely between the different areas (Heijs 1995: 197-198). In 1990, 81.000 Antilleans lived in the Netherlands, in 1992 they were 91.000, in 1995 93.000 (*Rapportage minderheden* 1996: 16-17).
4. After the military coup in February 1980 and the so-called 'December murders' in 1982, many Surinamese asked for political asylum in the Netherlands.

5. This was partly due to a downfall of Dutch economy during the oil crisis of 1973. However, in this period Dutch government still recruited workers from the Mediterranean. In 1974, 2% of the foreign workers were unemployed, compared to 5% of the Dutch labour force. Only a couple of years later the tables were turned: in 1978, 9,2% of the foreign workers were unemployed, against 5% of the Dutch (Schumacher 1993: 33).

6. The number of Turkish immigrants increased from 206.000 in 1990 to 241.000 in 1992 and 264.000 in 1995. The Moroccan community counted 168.000 in 1990, 195.000 in 1992, and 219.000 in 1995 (*Rapportage minderheden* 1996: 16-17).

7. See van Amersfoort 1974: 17-37; Lucassen and Penninx 1994: 101-105.

8. Of these 6,1%, 28,5% are from Surinamese, 26,1% from Turkish, 21,1% of Moroccan, and 9,9% of Antillean descent. Among the remaining 14,3% are Tunisians, Cape Verdeans, Greeks, Italians, Spaniards, Portuguese, Moluccans and gypsies.

9. Van Praag, for instance, defines 'absorption' as a neutral term, referring to the kind of process in which members of allochthonous groups inevitably get involved, and which may have various outcomes, ranging from 'total assimilation' to 'a considerable degree of segregation' (Van Praag 1971: 23). Verwey-Jonker clearly favours processes of integration, i.e. "a 'normal' functioning", and assimilation - of which "the end point [is] the unrecognizability of the alien group as such" (Verwey-Jonker 1971: 10). For Van Amersfoort, finally, 'absorption' refers to the extent to which migrant groups participate in society equally and on an equal level without this leading to a total merger (Van Amersfoort 1974: 48-49).

10. In 1986 the Advisory Committee for Minority Research, the *ACOM*, did propose affirmative action measures. The report, written by Frank Bovenkerk, met with a lot of resistance, although Bovenkerk's proposals were fairly modest. After a consideration of the applicability of foreign models of affirmative action for the Dutch situation, he concluded that moderate forms of affirmative action (for instance to work only with target numbers) would be preferable over and against the assignment of compulsory quotas ('positive discrimination', in his terminology), as happens in the United States. Bovenkerk argued that to appoint members of minority groups only to reach a quota, even when this means lowering standards of quality, would be inefficient (i.e. lower productivity), and have a negative effect on (the image of) minority groups. In other words: Bovenkerk envisioned a form of affirmative action which would nevertheless require applicants to meet certain set standards for the job in question (Bovenkerk 1986). Although he acknowledged the existence of 'indirect discrimination', Bovenkerk rejected the view that the marginal position of minority groups on the labour market would be due solely to Dutch 'institutional racism' - to be repaired only through the most radical, unconditional form of affirmative action (Bovenkerk 1988). In 1989, the Scientific Council for Governmental Policy, the *WRR*, came with a new proposal. According to the Canadian model, employers were asked to report yearly about the ethnic composition of their workforce. In 1990, a covenant was made between labour unions and employers' organizations. As this had very little impact, in 1993 parliament accepted a law which imposed the rule that companies with more than 35 employees should do their utmost to have proportional representation of members of ethnic minority groups among their personnel. Resistance against this law was, and still is, considerate. Many employers have great (organizational, but sometimes also moral) problems with the obligatory registration according to ethnic descent which is a substantial part of the law. In 1996, only some 22% percent of the concerns concerned had handed in their public report (*Rapportage minderheden* 1996: 140-142).

11. The assumption was that children thus would not get estranged from their own culture and mother tongue. However, for most children from Morocco, it meant that, beside Dutch, they just had to learn another foreign language: the official

Arabic taught at school is completely different from their actual mother tongue, which is a Berber language.

12. In Dutch, the welfare state is referred to as the *verzorgingsstaat* - literally: the 'caring' state.

13. Although this quick overview suggests a too peaceful process. The first participatory board, installed in 1976 for the Moluccan community, was actually enforced by a violent political action, i.e. the high-jacking of a train by Moluccan youngsters in the winter of 1975.

14. The editor of one of the first (social-scientific) publications on guest workers, for instance, proposed to speak about foreign guest workers as 'international commuters', and predicted that the large majority would return home within two or three years (see Tinnemans 1994: 72-81; the publication referred to is Wentholt 1967: *Buitenlandse arbeiders in Nederland*).

15. Since the early seventies, several (small) extreme-right political parties saw the light of day. In 1982, one of these, the *Centrumpartij*, managed to get a seat in parliament. Since then, the extreme-right is getting more support, especially in elections for the councils of larger cities, such as Rotterdam, Amsterdam, or Almere. After the loss of their parliamentary seat in 1986, the party of the *Centrum Democraten* returned in parliament in 1989 with one seat. Although until now the extreme-right cannot boast of a large number of followers, the feeling of many, and especially of 'allochthone' citizens is that the general atmosphere in Holland is growing more hostile towards ethnic 'others'.