

**FORUM: HOW ARE EUROPEANS MADE?
DEBATING A NATIONAL MODELS APPROACH
TO IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION**

**The Invention of the Dutch Multicultural Model and its
Effects on Integration Discourses in the Netherlands**

Jan Willem Duyvendak, Amsterdam University
Peter Scholten, Erasmus University

The Netherlands has been internationally known for its ‘multicultural’ approach to immigrant integration. Some even suggest that there is a ‘multicultural model’ that informs Dutch political discourse and policy practices. The basic premise of this model is that Dutch policies have been driven by a coherent and consistent belief in the idea that the recognition and accommodation of cultural, ethnic and religious groups promotes their successful integration into Dutch multicultural society.

However, there is growing doubt about whether the multicultural model has been or continues to be a valid depiction of the Dutch approach to immigrant integration. The multicultural model seems to have been coined retrospectively, in an attempt by politicians to disqualify policies with which they disagreed. These politicians were helped in their framing effort by some social scientists who claimed that there is evidence that certain concrete policy practices reflect a Dutch multicultural model. It is arguable, however, that these policy practices are actually driven by a normative multicultural model rather than by more pragmatic concerns about “keeping things together.”

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Construction of (national) models of integration

The idea of ‘national models of integration,’ inspired by historical-institutionalist thinking, has acquired great resonance in European migration research. Historical institutionalists focus either on models or regimes that are considered rational within specific institutional settings (rational choice institutionalism) or on models that are legacies from the history of a specific country (historical institutionalism). A key trait of these policy models is that they are expected to be relatively stable over fairly long periods of time. This expectation is based on the assumption that the conditions that produce a specific model are unlikely to change rapidly and that models themselves

tend to develop a certain path-dependency or resistance to change.

One of the reasons why models have gained such wide resonance in migration studies (as in various other sectors) is that they help reduce complexity by simplifying the otherwise highly diffuse and contested issue of immigrant integration. Models help to make it possible for international comparative studies to assess the processes of convergence and divergence between various European countries. In this latter sense, Castles and Miller (2003) and in their footsteps, Koopmans and Statham (2000), have extended Brubaker's dichotomy into a fourfold typology of integration models: civic-assimilationism, cultural pluralism, ethnic-differentialism, and civic-republicanism. An important difference with the historical institutionalist modeling of Brubaker is that this fourfold distinction of integration models represents a selection of ideal-types that can be used for studying country cases, and is not taken as representative of national approaches *per se*.

Yet, the danger of modeling is that the models are not only used as tools for international comparisons or for understanding historical periods. When a model begins to shape our understanding and beliefs about policies, the model often becomes more than just a heuristic tool: it may be taken as an accurate historical reconstruction of policy rather than just a model of it. Models then take the place of historical analysis. In social science literature, this has often led to instances where a model is *blamed* for the success or failure of a specific policy approach. For instance, various authors have blamed the Dutch multicultural model for the alleged failure of immigrant integration in the Netherlands.

In addition, models tend to oversimplify policies and overstress their alleged coherency and consistency. Policy practices tend to be far more resilient and diverse than most policy models would suggest. For instance, in Dutch as well as in French literature many have noted the differences between how policies are formulated on the national level and how they are implemented on the local level; some even speak of the decoupling of national and local policies in this respect. In fact, even when policy-makers claim to operate according to a

specific policy model, their reasons for doing so may be more pragmatic and flexible than indicated by the ideal-typical form of the policy model itself.

In spite of these methodological and empirical problems associated with models-thinking in migration research, we should pay attention to models since they are very powerful as a 'performative policy discourse.' A model is not just about being valid, but also about being conceptually and normatively clear and convincing. A model helps in making sense out of the complex social reality that is often associated with issues such as immigrant integration; they are tools for 'naming' and 'framing' the problem and determining adequate paths for policy action. Hajer (1995) speaks in this context of the formation of "discourse coalitions"—actors held together by a shared discourse and not necessarily by coordinated interaction. This can include various types of actors, including politicians and policy-makers, as well as academics, experts, interest groups, journalists, etc.

Once a discourse becomes dominant and is supported by a sufficiently large or strong group of actors, it can prove difficult to change. Challenging a discourse means also challenging the beliefs and interests of the groups involved in the discourse coalition. Furthermore, discourses tend to be easily taken for granted; indeed, even members of a discourse coalition may be unaware of their tacit beliefs and the presence of alternative beliefs. This is very much what happened in the Netherlands: a coalition of social scientists and political actors developed the idea that a multicultural model informed Dutch policies for a long time (perhaps, until today) and at all levels. And, even though we can prove that this is totally historically inadequate, this does not matter for its performative effect. The belief that the Dutch have historically favored multicultural policies is sufficient to legitimate new policies, in this case assimilationist ones.

The Dutch 'multicultural model' and other public discourses on integration

A key trait of the Dutch multicultural model

is its tendency to institutionalize cultural pluralism in the belief that cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society. This reflects a rather uncontested acceptance of the transformation of Dutch society into a multicultural society. Moreover, with regard to the latter, a connection is often made with the peculiar Dutch history of pillarization, referring to the period from the 1920s to 1960s when most of Dutch society was structured according to specific religious (protestant, Catholic) or socio-cultural (socialist, liberal) pillars (Lijphart, 1968).

A recent study by Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007), *When Ways of Life Collide: Multiculturalism and its Discontents in the Netherlands*, explicitly qualifies the Dutch approach in terms of a multiculturalist model. The authors claim that the labeling of collective identities has inadvertently deepened social-cultural cleavages in society rather than bridging these differences. They take the Netherlands as their single exemplary case to found their claims. They root the Dutch approach back to the history of pillarization, arguing that the “Netherlands has always been a country of minorities thanks to the power of religion to divide as well as unite”(13). In addition, they assert that the “collective trauma of World War II where the Dutch failed to resist the massive deportation of Jews would have contributed to that immigrant minorities have been seen in the light of the Holocaust...or that critical views of immigrants are labeled racist and xenophobic”(15). And it is due to these historical circumstances that the multiculturalist model took root in the Netherlands.

Also among some Dutch scholars, thinking in terms of the Dutch multicultural model has acquired great resonance. Koopmans (2007) roots the Dutch approach to immigrant integration clearly in the history of pillarization in which ethno-cultural cleavages were stressed in a similar way to multicultural policies. He claims that the application of this model on new immigrant groups has had strong adverse effects, as multiculturalism “offers new ethnic and religious groups a formal and symbolic form of equality, which in practice reinforces ethnic cleavages and reproduces segregation on a distinctly unequal basis” (2007, 5). Koopmans points in particular to the ‘path-dependency’

in terms of policy practices. Although he more and more acknowledges that formal policy discourse and public discourse have changed in their actual way of dealing with ethno-cultural diversity, he also argues that the Dutch have remained accommodative. “The Netherlands,” writes Koopman,

is still an extreme representative of a ‘multicultural’ vision of integration....Outside the limited world of op-eds in high-brow newspapers, the relation between Dutch society and its immigrants is still firmly rooted in its tradition of pillarization...[O]rganizations and activities based on ethnic grounds are still generously supported – directly and indirectly – by the government. Whether people want it or not, ethnicity still plays an important role in public institutions and discourse (Koopmans, 2007: 4).

Obviously, almost all scholars who use the term ‘multicultural model’ do this in a normative and pejorative way. The label is used to disqualify policies that allegedly have been a failure. However, this strong empirical claim—that the Netherlands have embraced a static multicultural model that has led to pernicious policy measures—can easily be tested. For we may ask, to what extent can we indeed recognize this multicultural model in the integration policies that have been developed over the past decades?

The Netherlands did not develop a policy aimed at immigrant integration until the early 1980s, when it was recognized that migrants were to stay permanently. During the 1980s, an Ethnic Minorities Policy was developed that targeted specific cultural or ethnic minorities within Dutch society, such as the foreign workers, the Surinamese, the Moluccans and the Antilleans. Migrants were framed as ‘minorities’ in Dutch society instead of temporary guests, and the government decided to focus on those minorities whose position was characterized by an accumulation of cultural and social-economic difficulties, and for whom the Dutch government felt a special historical responsibility (Rath, 2001). The Ethnic Minorities Policy expressed the idea that an amelioration of the social-cultural position of migrants would also improve their

social-economic position. The policy objective was to combat discrimination and social-economic deprivation and therefore to support social-cultural emancipation. These policies were not developed to celebrate all kind of cultural differences—it did not include well-off migrants, but just those who were socio-economically very weak. However, within this perspective, government respected the preservation of cultural identities. At first sight, this seems to reflect somewhat the Dutch tradition of pluralism through ‘pillarism’ or the institutionalization of “sovereignty within one’s own sphere” for each minority group (Lijphart, 1968).

This alleged connection between Dutch Ethnic Minorities Policies and the history of pillarization has, however, to be put in perspective. First of all, Dutch society had been de-pillarizing in many sectors already by the 1950s and 1960s. Pillarization especially seems to have been powerful as a ‘discourse.’ The framing of migrants as minorities resonated with the framing of national minorities that the Dutch were already used to. Vink (2007) speaks in this context of a “pillarization reflex,” which means that, when faced with the issue of immigrant incorporation at the end of the 1970s, Dutch policy-makers resorted to the traditional frame of pillarization for providing meaning to the new issue of immigrant integration. This pillarization reflex strongly resembles how in France the Republican model was re-invented in the domain of immigrant integration in the early 1980s (Fassin, 2000).

Others have added that it was not so much the integration policy *per se* that was inspired by pillarisation. Rather, there was the influence of more generic institutions in Dutch society that were still to some extent pillarized, such as the Dutch institutions of state-sponsored special (religious) education and a pillarized broadcasting system and health system. In this context, cultural pluralism was a right of Muslims as

it would be for any other group in the Netherlands. This pluralism had nothing to do with integration policies as such, but was the consequence of the institutional heritage of pillarization. Integration policy itself has never been oriented toward the construction of minority groups as pillars.

Minority groups also never achieved the level of organization (and separation) that national minorities achieved in the early 20th century. According to Rath (2001: 59): “in terms of institutional

arrangements, there is no question of an Islamic pillar in the Netherlands, or at least one that is in any way comparable to the Roman Catholic or Protestant pillars in the past.” In fact, we would emphasize that there never really was a national multicultural model, as defining slogans as “integration with preservation of cultural identity” had been rejected already at this early stage; only later would this slogan be projected onto this period in public and academic discourse. Indeed, neither pillarization nor multiculturalism was really embraced as a normative ideal; statements of multiculturalism instead referred in a more descriptive sense to the increase of diversity in society. In fact, to the extent that references to pillarization or multiculturalism were used at all (the first time ‘multiculturalism’ as a term pops up in politics is in 1995!), these seem to have been much more pragmatic than normative. Our conclusion therefore is that multiculturalism is actively co-produced by politicians and social scientists in order to disqualify policies of the past.

Besides the contested continuity between pillarization and the alleged Dutch multicultural model, it is also obvious that this ‘model’ has not been very consistent over the past decades. Since the late 1980s, the Ethnic Minorities Policy has been subject to fierce controversy. In 1989, the authoritative Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy issued a report in which it denounced this policy model because it focused too

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much on “culture and morality” and tended to make minorities too dependent on state facilities organized to serve group-specific measures (WRR, 1989). According to the WRR, the institutionalization of cultural pluralism, even in its instrumentalist orientation, was no longer to be considered an independent policy objective. Rather, government was encouraged to focus on stimulating individual migrants to be able to stand on their own feet.

In the early 1990s, formal government policy changed in several important regards. In the early 1990s, the Ethnic Minorities Policy was reframed into an “Integration Policy” that stressed the social-economic participation of immigrants as citizens, or *allochthonous* (a difficult to translate Dutch term to refer to first and second generation immigrants), rather than emancipation of minorities. Promoting ‘good’ or ‘active’ citizenship became the primary policy goal, stimulating individual migrants to live up to their civic rights as well as their duties and to become economically independent participants in society.

Later, just after the turn of the millennia, an assimilationist turn took place in Dutch integration policy. In fact, a (second) broad national debate occurred in 2000 in response to claims that Dutch policy had become a “multicultural tragedy.” Also, the populist politician Fortuyn made the alleged failure of the Dutch integration approach into one of his central political issues. This set in motion a gradual assimilationist turn, which was codified in an “Integration Policy ‘New Style.’” Whereas the Integration Policy had stressed ‘active citizenship’, the Integration Policy ‘New Style’ stressed rather the ‘common citizenship’, which meant that “the unity of society must be found in what members have in common... that is that people speak Dutch, and that one abides to basic Dutch norms” (TK 2003-2004, 29203, nr. 1:8.). Persisting social-cultural differences were now considered a hindrance to immigrant integration. It was in this period, that the framing of the multicultural model took place as a ‘counter-discourse’ against which new policy developments were to be juxtaposed. This assimilationist turn has contributed to a discursive reconstruction of the history of integration policies that put much greater stress on its alleged multiculturalist

traits.

Clearly there has not been one dominant model or discourse in the Netherlands. Indeed, there has been a Minority Policy which Vink (2007) links to the ‘pillarization reflex’. But in spite of the singular image of the Netherlands as representing the multicultural model, Dutch policy has been inspired by at least two different discourses. One of these competing discourses is the more liberal-egalitarian (social-economic) discourse, which became particularly influential as early as the 1990s. And the other is the more assimilationist discourse that emerged during the 1990s and become more prominent after the turn of the millennium.

Conclusions

Both in national and international literature, Dutch integration policies are often described in terms of the ultimate multicultural model, which involves a tendency to institutionalize cultural pluralism in the belief that cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society. This article disputes the idea that there has been a dominant Dutch multicultural model of integration, arguing that, at best, it was one of several discourses—beyond multiculturalism, liberal-egalitarianism and assimilationism have also been powerful discourses in the Netherlands. In fact, when it comes to official policy discourse, the Ethnic Minority Policy-frame—which comes the closest to a form of multiculturalism—was already abandoned in the early 1990s, and there is ample evidence that even in the 1980s this Dutch policy discourse was much less ‘multicultural’ than is often suggested by politicians and some scholars. Moreover, many practices were actually not inspired by a normative belief in multiculturalism, but by more pragmatic concerns about “keeping things together.”

Moreover, this brief article has indicate that social scientific research often played a central role in the development or ‘co-production’ of these discourses on immigrant integration. In the late 1970s and in the 1980s, a technocratic symbiosis brought together a small network of policy-makers and researchers that

co-produced the so internationally renowned Ethnic Minority Policy frame. However, research also played a role in punctuating this symbiosis along with the agenda-setting of a new type of (liberal-egalitarian) discourse in the late 1980s. In both episodes, social researchers formed a central part of the discourse coalitions that sustained alternately the Ethnic Minority Policy-frame in the 1980s and liberal egalitarianism in the 1990s. Moreover, researchers also played a role in the discourse coalition that triggered the assimilationist turn in Dutch policy discourse after the turn of the millennia. Though the assimilationist turn

was associated with growing cynicism toward social research, which was considered to be biased in favor of 'multiculturalism' and too much involved in policy developments over the past decades, soon sociologists joined the 'realist' discourse coalition (Prins, 2004) by retrospectively labeling Dutch integration policies as 'multiculturalist.' Obviously, this was a rather specific form of co-production of policy makers and scholars: it was the invention of a tradition (Dutch multiculturalism) designed to support the legitimacy of the assimilationist turn in Dutch integration politics.

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