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Integrating Migrants in the Netherlands: The Role of Education, Employment, and the Media

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The recent riots in French suburbs have received international attention. In the Netherlands these riots have been explained in two different ways.

The first one is the more or less classical **class interpretation**, in which the outburst of large scale violence is considered to be a signal of social deprivation, social exclusion and economic discrimination.

The second interpretation does not at all refer to classes, but focuses on **cultural differences**. In this perspective the French riots must be seen as a protest of culturally oppressed ethnic minorities, such as northern African Muslims. Assimilation policies could lead to such feelings of oppression as well as to strong protests against 'destroying' cultural identities.

At present it is not my intention to try and analyse the riots in the French suburbs, since I was invited to elaborate on the integration of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. But the aforementioned two explanations of these riots reflect the discussions in policy and in social sciences on the integration of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. To clarify this, I will first invite you to consider the meaning of the concept of 'social integration'.

This somewhat abstract start may help us to better understand Dutch policies on integration, and their relative lack of success. It will also help us to find a way to improve integration policies. To summarise: my intentions during this lecture are: (1) to abstractly present the concept of 'social integration', (2) to describe Dutch integration policies *and* to clarify their lack of success, and (3) to recommend a way to improve the effectiveness of such policies. At the end I will summarise the main findings in three statements.

1. The concept of 'social integration'

In the international sociological literature one can find two perspectives on integration. The **first** relates to society as a whole. The core question in this *classical* approach is how society can exist, and what kind of integration and which degree of integration are required for a society to survive.

I will come back to this approach later on, since I will now elaborate on the **other** view. This more recent perspective focuses on the integration of groups in society. The core question is therefore not on the integration *of* society, but rather on the integration *into* society.

Given the scale and the sometimes problematic character of international migration, this second view nowadays often relates to the integration of immigrants in receiving countries.

The concept of the 'social integration' of groups is usually operationalised with two dimensions, that is: behaviour and attitude or orientation. These two dimensions are interrelated, although there has been much discussion on the causality between the two. I will come back to that later on. Let me first try to describe the concept itself. I will start with the two dimensions that have the following indicators:

formal

participation

informal

social integration

social distance

orientation

cultural orientation

Participation is behaviour, of which

- formal participation means: being involved in society's core institutions such as education, labour market (the two most important socioeconomic institutions), housing, and the political system,
- informal participation means: interethnic contact, particularly with native citizens,

Orientation is attitude, of which

- social distance is the appraisal/evaluation of interethnic contacts,
- cultural orientation is the acceptance of the dominant value system in the receiving country. (In our empirical research it means the acceptance of 'modern' norms and values, e.g. in relation to individualism, authority, secularization, womens' position in society, et cetera.)

The formal participation in education and in the labour market can be described as *socioeconomic integration*, while the combination of informal participation, social distance and cultural orientation indicates *cultural integration*.

2. Dutch integration policies

Now that we have defined and operationalised the concept of 'social integration', we can take the next step: describing Dutch integration policies. We will not go into detail and mention all kinds of measures that have been taken. For our purposes it is more interesting to focus on the main characteristics. Doing this, we can identify three phases. The **first** runs from the 1960s until the beginning of the 1980s and can be described as '*accommodating*'.

It was the period in which the Dutch government and most immigrants alike assumed that immigration was a temporary phenomenon, and that most immigrants would return to their home country. During that period the Dutch government facilitated immigrant groups to create and maintain their own organisations,

supposing that this would keep the immigrants together - which would make it easier for them to return to the country of origin. This policy puts hardly any pressure on the immigrants to learn the Dutch language or to otherwise get more oriented towards the Dutch society. We have to keep in mind that this explicit lack of integration policies relates to the parents of the present second generation youth in the Netherlands.

Dutch integration policies have changed, as it became clear that most immigrants would not return to their home country, not even in periods of high unemployment. Policies then started to target integration. For this reason, the **next** phase is the first one of real interest to us.

It lasted from the beginning of the 1980s until the beginning of the present century. The emphasis of the integration policies during this period is completely on *socioeconomic integration* with large government investments in education to improve immigrants' educational attainments, and in labour market measures to fight immigrants' disadvantaged labour market position.

It was the period in which Dutch Social Democrats had government power, during which e.g. prime-minister Wim Kok said that the main issues for his Cabinet were '*Work, work and work!*' This strong focus on labour market participation is reflected in integration policies that do not at all aim at cultural integration.

On the contrary, during a rather long period the Dutch integration policies were officially described as aiming at '*integration while retaining the original cultural identity*'.

Given the strong and one-sided emphasis on socioeconomic integration, it may come as a surprise that Dutch policies were not very successful in this respect. International comparative research shows that immigrants in Britain and France on average acquire higher educational levels and a better labour market position than immigrants in the Netherlands. To explain this result one may think of three variables: (1) differences between receiving countries in immigrant characteristics; the so-called selectivity of migration, or (2) differences in discrimination, or (3) differences in policy effectiveness.

As far as the first variable, 'selectivity', is concerned, research shows that the relatively negative results for immigrants in the Netherlands remain - even when immigrants from the same country of origin are compared internationally. Although selectivity may have its influence on this comparison (e.g. Moroccans in France are different from Moroccans in the Netherlands), this outcome reduces the validity of an explanation on the basis of selectivity.

Looking at the second variable, 'discrimination', we find no indication whatsoever from international research that this phenomenon is more prominent in the Netherlands than in other countries, although discrimination certainly exists in the Netherlands. We can therefore state that this variable too cannot explain the disappointing results of Dutch socioeconomic integration policies.

This implies that the third variable, policy effectiveness, is probably the most important one to explain the relative disadvantaged socioeconomic position of immigrants in the Netherlands. In the literature the opinion can be found that Dutch integration policies were too much oriented towards helping and assisting or even *caring* the immigrants, from birth till death. As a result, immigrants were 'hugged to death' - so to speak. It furthermore could be relevant that Dutch policies did not target cultural integration. We will come to that now.

Partly due to the lack of policy results, there was an increasing and rather strong negative reaction to Dutch integration policies - initiated by politicians such as Frits Bolkestein and Pim Fortuyn. Their success during national elections undoubtedly affected integration policies. We may say that at present the focus in Dutch integration policies is on *cultural integration*: there is a sense of urgency to promote cultural adaptation, also on the assumption that this will further socioeconomic integration. At present we may speak of assimilation policies in the Netherlands, quite contrary to the country's history and its earlier convictions.

The city of Rotterdam, where Fortuyn lived before he was shot down, may be seen as the focal point of this policy (i.e. after the local elections in 2002). But on the national level too we find a strong emphasis on cultural integration and at the same time a qualification of the importance of integration policies that specifically aim at improving immigrants' socioeconomic position.

To illustrate the latter: the Minister of Education proposed to diminish government expenditures on so-called 'black schools', that is schools with a high proportion of immigrant pupils. Another illustration is the way the Minister of Migration and Integration, Mrs. Rita Verdonk, reacted to research results that show very high unemployment rates among second generation youth. I quote: "*This is alarming and needs our attention, ... but we will not take any other measures than we already did*".

Although it is probably too early to give a final judgement on the present Dutch integration policies, we have learned from recent research in Rotterdam that almost 70% of the respondents believe that Dutch natives and immigrants have become more opposed to each other in the last years, while about 40% say that they like living in Rotterdam less than five years ago. Let me add an observation that probably is more important from the perspective of the policy targets: there are clear indications that immigrants (and their descendants) became more aware of their cultural identity and became more attached to it when politicians started to criticise this identity.

From this it seems that policy *pressure* on cultural adaptation may easily have averse effects to what is meant by these policies. We therefore expect this one-sided cultural integration policy not to be effective too.

3. *Improvement of integration policies*

After having described two subsequent types of Dutch integration policies, both being one-sided, we will now try to propose some improvements to these policies. As stated before, we have found two approaches to the concept of 'social integration' in the international literature.

Until now we have discussed only one of them. This approach relates to the integration of groups *into* society. The other approach focuses on the integration *of* society as a whole. We will now turn to the latter.

Since the work of the classical French sociologist Emile Durkheim most scholars agree that the concept of 'integration *of society*' has two dimensions, that is: (1) structural bonds between individuals and groups on the one hand, and (2) a common set of values on the other hand.

social bonds

social integration

common values

This idea of two prerequisites for societal integration may help us to understand that one-sidedness in integration policies is probably not the right choice. Instead, it seems necessary to strive after both dimensions in such policies.

Looking at the empirical findings of sociological research, we find that bonds in society are closely related to involvement in society's core institutions. In his famous work '*De la division du travail social*' Durkheim, for example, stressed the importance of participation in the labour market. The relationships that follow from such participation, also in the abstract way of taking part in the social division of labour, strongly add to the integration *of* society. This is still the case today.

But the presence of such bonds will not be enough, as we have already seen. What is furthermore needed, is a common definition of the situation: individuals and groups need to perceive social reality in about the same way. A common set of values is therefore the second prerequisite for society's integration.

In fact we are talking about the same kind of dimensions that we described while discussing the integration of groups *into* society. When we look at the level of society as a whole, it again seems that the combination of behaviour and orientation is the key to successful integration policies. My conclusion is therefore straightforward: integration policies should aim at the socioeconomic dimension as well as at the cultural dimension of integration. This might be the lesson learned

from the Dutch case.

4. Causality

At this point it is of interest to elaborate on the relationship between the socioeconomic and the cultural dimension of integration. As already mentioned these two dimensions are interrelated, although there has been much discussion on the causality between the two. In the international literature two points of view can be found. The **first** one states that cultural integration determines socioeconomic integration. It is the basis of the widely held and rather populist view that '*they (i.e. the immigrants) should adapt to our culture to be able to participate*'. It is most probably also the basis of the present Dutch government's ideas about immigrant integration.

The **other** view on the contrary states that involvement in society's core institutions is the key to cultural integration. The bottom line here is that those who are well educated and have a secure labour market position are less reluctant and more able to adapt to the Western value system.

In multi-variate analysis on Dutch data we found that the relationship is complex and reciprocal. But when 'educational level' was separated from other socioeconomic variables, the picture became quite clear: education positively affects both labour market chances and cultural adaptation. In general: those with higher education have a more secure labour market position as well as 'modern' norms and values. This applies to both immigrants and Dutch natives.

What we see here, is the multifunctionality of the educational system. On the one hand it prepares youngsters for the labour market (the so-called 'qualification function' of education), on the other hand it prepares them for participation in society as a whole (the 'socialisation function' of education). The German sociologist Fendt spoke of '*Sozialmachung*': the transformation of youngsters into social beings - so to speak.

One remark should go with this emphasis on the important role of education. In the present educational system increasing emphasis has been put on cognitive aspects. This may well be in the disadvantage of the equally important cultural aspects. If we therefore wish to make the most of education, also in relation to integration; we should pay more attention to its cultural function.

In this way the educational system (integration programs inclusive) really becomes the core institution for integration: it both prepares for labour market participation and takes care of the transfer of culture - not by pressure, but simply by giving 'newcomers' the chance to get acquainted with Western culture and by explaining how this culture came into existence.

5. *The role of the media*

Before I will summarise the main conclusions in three statements, I would like to add some words on the role of the media - simply because I was asked to pay attention to this aspect too.

If you would talk to journalists and ask them whether they are actually affecting integration processes, they will probably reply negatively and tell you that they do nothing more than just give information on facts. We know better, however, on the basis of a variety of research publications on 'the construction of news'.

Journalists do not simply describe the facts, they rather make a selection of facts, then give their own interpretation of these facts and finally comment on the facts on the basis of their interpretation. By doing this, they can easily affect public opinion as well as policy making - positively as well as negatively. As far as immigrant integration is concerned, the situation is not different. For this reason the media are an actor, and not the least important one, in the field of immigrant integration.

I can illustrate this with the case of the Antillean immigrants in the Netherlands. Recently, during the last five to ten years, an increasing number of young Antilleans came to the Netherlands to escape poverty on the Antillean islands. Most of them are lowly educated and hardly speak the Dutch language. Many of them therefore have very limited job chances. This might well explain the very high criminality rate among these Antillean youngsters.

These facts are well known in the Netherlands, mainly because the media paid a lot of attention to the negative characteristics of the recent Antillean immigrants. At the same time they completely neglected the fact that the second generation, being the children of the first immigrants from the Antillean islands who came for higher education, were the only ones among the immigrant groups able to close the gap with the native Dutch contemporaries within one generation.

While both facts are meaningful, the media only elaborated on the negative developments and not at all on the positive ones. This added to the negative image of all Antilleans in the Netherlands, which might well affect their integration chances.

This outcome confirms the research findings of recent Dutch-American social-psychological experiments from Louk Hagendoorn and Paul Sniderman who found that the media actually affect stereotypes and prejudice. From our own research we know that general images, also created by the media, affect employers, and as such the selection processes on the labour market. We therefore cannot say that the media's influence is harmless.

In relation to integration policies this implies that politicians have to be well aware of this influence, and sometimes have to try and fight against the negative images of immigrants that are based on media reports. This is not a 'mission impossible', since Hagendoorn and Sniderman found in their experiments that stereotypes and

prejudice are also affected by experts - like you and me.

6. *Conclusions*

Apart from this optimistic conclusion, I would like to summarise the main conclusions of this lecture in three statements:

1. Dutch integration policies were until now not very successful because they were one-sided, *either* by focusing completely on socioeconomic integration *or* by focusing on the rather neglected dimension of cultural integration, to which I could add that pressure on cultural adaptation probably has reverse effects.
2. Integration policies should not be one-sided, but have to aim at the socioeconomic dimension as well as the cultural dimension of integration.
3. Education is the core institution for integration, since it both prepares for labour market participation and takes care of the transfer of culture.