

'Het multiculturele drama'. Did Scheffer's intervention create an opening for the rise of Geert Wilders?

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In recent years many countries around the world have been faced with the challenge of multiculturalism, which has sparked controversial debates on how to deal with the tension that may arise from the coexistence of multiple cultures. The shift in opinion in the Netherlands has been dramatic: from a country recognised internationally for its acceptance of difference, to a country promoting a policy of forced assimilation. 11 September and the murder of Pim Fortuyn (2002) and Theo van Gogh (2004) have provoked a backlash against multiculturalism, and these circumstances have tempted leading figures in politics and the media to speak out about the so-called problems that immigrants bring to the Netherlands. Paul Scheffer sparked controversy in 2000 with his article titled 'Het multiculturele drama' (The Multicultural Fiasco) which pointed to high unemployment figures amongst immigrants, the emergence of Islamic schools with high dropout rates, and the concentration of poverty in the large cities. In Scheffer's opinion, the poor integration of ethnic minorities is partly due to passive Dutch policies that do not confront the minorities with Dutch language, history and culture. With the rise in popularity of Geert Wilders and his party, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), many people appear to agree with the points that Scheffer makes, which is changing the political and social atmosphere within the Netherlands. This essay will focus on Scheffer's integration challenges and will investigate if Scheffer may have created an opening for Geert Wilders to promote his extremist ideas and protest against Islam.

Paul Scheffer, a historian and prominent member of the labour party, published the influential article 'Het multiculturele drama' in 2000 claiming that Dutch multiculturalism had failed.¹ He was one of the first voices to risk "the wrath of the established order" and gives many examples to support his opinion that immigrants to the Netherlands are not integrating into Dutch society.² Scheffer argued that, "it is clear that this rapid demographic change will give rise to huge problems of adjustment", adding to the segregation and tension between migrants and the native population.³ These tensions show in particular, according to Scheffer, in the areas of health, education, housing and employment.⁴

Multiculturalism

The concept of multiculturalism is complex and controversial and many key interpretations of the concept are still widely disputed. Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul state that multiculturalism is an ideology where the "ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity should be celebrated"⁵,

¹ Paul Scheffer, (2000), 'Het multiculturele drama' in *NRC Handelsblad*, 29 januari.

² Han Entzinger, (2006), 'Changing the Rules while the Game is on. From multiculturalism to assimilation in the Netherlands', in *Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos: Incorporation Regimes in Germany, Western Europe and North America*, Michal Bodemann & Gökçe Yurdakul, eds., New York: Palgrave MacMillan, pp 121-144.

³ Scheffer. "het is duidelijk dat de razendsnelle demografische verandering enorme aanpassingsproblemen schept"

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I. Bloemraad, A. Korteweg, and G. Yurdakul, (2008), 'Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation and Challenges to the Nation-State' in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 34, p. 159

whereas Colin Clark argues that multiculturalism should not be an ideology at all but a political practise: a country should be serious about including different cultures within its borders.⁶ Van Schendel and Aronstein observe more neutrally that “multiculturalism is perceived as the societal situation in which multiple cultures coexist in a single society” and that these cultures mutually influence each other. They believe that nationality is an important indicator to measure a country’s multicultural status, along with language and religion.⁷ In spite of the diversity of definitions, it is fair to conclude that in its most current use, the concept of multiculturalism tends to reveal tensions between cultural diversity and national identity, and is used as a term to indicate possible concerns about the coexistence of multiple ethnic cultures within a traditionally mono-cultural society. The Netherlands was well known in the 1950’s and 60’s for being open and tolerant to other cultures. Due to labour shortages and demands for post-war reconstruction, the Netherlands recruited ‘gastarbeiders’, which meant it faced an increase of cultural diversity. Until the mid 1990s multicultural politics had always been broadly supported, that means that until then there had always been a clear recognition of the value of different cultures, both on a personal level and as the route to successful integration concisely summed up as ‘integratie met behoud van eigen taal en cultuur’ (integration with the retention of original culture and language). A shift in opinion towards immigration can be traced back to the mid-1990s when national debates on minority policy and migrant workers began to gain more and more attention. Scheffer states in ‘Het multiculturele drama’: “The government concludes that the situation regarding the future is extremely worrying.”⁸ A hostile response towards immigration was felt throughout Europe which gave confidence to anti-immigration parties in the Netherlands. The Centre Democrats, an anti-immigration party, gained three seats in the 1994 general elections, which was three times higher than ever before in The Netherlands.⁹ Although they were not seen as a threat at the time, the results prove that frustration with multiculturalism was on the rise.

The rising tensions towards immigration were brought to the forefront of politics after the 9/11 bombings of 2001. The Dutch Right wing took advantage of the rising negativity towards Muslims resulting from this event, with two politicians taking the lead in the attacks on Islam and multiculturalism: the politicians Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. According to Fortuyn, Islam should be seen as a “backward religion” and the Dutch government should take measures to close the borders for further newcomers. Fortuyn was murdered on the eve of the national elections 2002. Not be what many feared, by a Moroccan Muslim, but by a Dutch Animal rights activist. Hirsi Ali main target was the position of women in Islam claiming they were being oppressed and isolated within society. These two leading figures made use of a general backlash against Islam and paved the way for the populist politician, Geert Wilders who categorically states that the values of Islam are simply not compatible with Dutch values. But let us first return to Scheffer and his views on integration.

⁶ C. Clark, (2010), ‘The Nation-State: Civic and Ethnic Dimensions’ in *Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict*, K. Cordell and S. Wolff, (eds), Abingdon; Routledge. p.48.

⁷ Frank van Schendel and Irene Aronstein, ‘Introduction: Euroscepticism and Multiculturalism’, in *Utrecht Law Review*, Vol. 6, no. 3, [www.utrechtlawreview.org, 06/04/14].

⁸ “het kabinet [in 1994]concludeert dat de situatie voor de toekomst uiterst zorgwekkend is.” All quotations are from Scheffer’s 2000 article and all translations into English are by the author.

⁹ Anass Bendriff and Matthew Haney’ (2004), ‘The politicization of the headscarf in The Netherlands’, *Humanity in Action* [www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/249-the-politicization-of-the-headscarf-in-the-netherlands: 03/04/2014]

Multicultureel drama

The main argument of 'Het multiculturele drama' is Scheffer's conviction that "an ethnic underclass" is emerging, and that this underclass consists of Dutch immigrant groups. Within this group it is the children in particular that are the greatest disadvantage. The emergence of an ethnic underclass will give rise to a segregated society and the more pronounced the differences, the harder it will be to achieve integration. As the gap widens, both the native Dutch population and the ethnic minorities will become more reluctant to associate and integrate with each other. According to Scheffer the government's primary mission needs to be to tackle the economic disparity between the classes before attempting to solve integration issues. It is worth noting that the use of the term 'underclass' in 'Het multiculturele drama' was particularly shocking as Dutch society imagines itself as a classless meritocracy, and therefore the term 'onderklasse' was bound to stir up a new debate.

Scheffer claims that: "on average, children from minorities lag behind in cognitive development and linguistic skills", which diminishes their chances of obtaining a good job in the future thus contributing to the increasing divergence between the different groups.¹⁰ It should be noted that the level of education among ethnic minorities in the Netherlands is improving, but not at the rate that the Dutch population is improving, and therefore efforts should be made to improve the standard of education amongst ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. The persistent inequality within education can lead to disenchantment and demoralisation, and ultimately more school drop-outs. This is a problem that Scheffer highlights in 'Het multiculturele drama': "School leavers with no qualifications at all are found more often in the Turkish and Moroccan communities than elsewhere".¹¹ This disparity in education hinders social integration, and instead promotes social isolation, because students who are leaving school without qualifications are separated from those who have achieved a school diploma and go on to higher education. Achieving social integration between the two circles will become even more challenging.

Scheffer focuses on what he believes to be a general lack of understanding and knowledge among ethnic minorities of the Dutch culture, language and history. 'Het multiculturele drama' places strong emphasis on the importance of Dutch culture and language, which Scheffer argues feeds into a "collective memory". He states that children should be expected to have knowledge about Dutch history if they live in the Netherlands and will remain there: "Why shouldn't children who are going to spend the rest of their lives here be bothered with the history of the country in which they live?"¹² Scheffer emphasises the importance of these factors with regards to integration and states that, in general, Dutch people themselves are careless about their national history and language: "we talk too little about our own limits, we cherish no relation to our own past and we treat our language with nonchalance."¹³ In doing this Scheffer claims that there is a loss of national identity and traditions, and with the loss of these important values, the Netherlands no longer has much to offer

¹⁰ "een aanmerkelijke achterstand in cognitieve ontwikkeling en taalvaardigheid"

¹¹ "In Turkse en Marokkaanse kring treft men meer dan elders kinderen aan zonder enig schooldiploma."

¹² "Waarom zouden kinderen die de rest van hun leven hier doorbrengen, niet lastiggevallen worden met de geschiedenis van het land waarin ze leven?"

¹³ "[we] koesteren geen verhouding tegenover het eigen verleden en bejegenen de taal op een nonchalante manier".

newcomers: “A society that disavows itself has nothing to offer newcomers.”¹⁴ Thus Scheffer argues that the lack of understanding of the ethnic Dutch, as well as the Dutch native population not speaking out about limits, not only hinders integration but that it also damages the Dutch national identity, which can offer so much to those visiting or looking to reside there.

Objections to Scheffer

On observation, much can be said to counter argue Scheffer’s thesis. A growing proportion of the minorities residing in the Netherlands are fully integrated into the Dutch education system and many immigrants are making a living through (self)employment. It is also noted that in recent years the unemployment rate amongst ethnic minorities has sharply decreased.¹⁵ The points that Scheffer makes are “not as original as some may be inclined to think” according to Godfried Engbersen.¹⁶ The Dutch government has been trying to tackle integration since the mid-nineties, focussing its policies more on so-called ‘inburgering’ of the vulnerable ethnic minorities through the compulsory learning of the Dutch language and culture.¹⁷ Although attempts have been made to close the gap between minorities and the native population, according to Davegos there still seems to be a general consensus that migrants who have not been socialised in Dutch language and culture struggle to achieve a fulfilling social position.¹⁸ Although it is encouraging that more migrants are integrating into Dutch society, one can argue that integration in fact erodes ethnic cultural identity and the debate will always remain to whether the policy of assimilation is morally right. Therefore there will always be an argument for whether too much or not enough integration is taking place. It is clear which side Scheffer is on: he is adamant that there is more to be done to stimulate integration. Scheffer not only criticises the lack of integration of the ethnic minorities and the government’s “detached and permissive” policies regarding integration, but he also highlights cultural differences for which the Netherlands needs to find solutions if it wants to be a multicultural society.¹⁹

School, mosque and state

Scheffer is critical of Islamic schools. Since 1988 Islamic and Hindu primary schools have been founded and there are currently around forty Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands.²⁰ Scheffer claims that schools based on Islamic principles will profess ideas that cannot “simply be likened to that of the Christian denominations in the Netherlands.”²¹ He makes comparisons with the separation of black and white schools and argues that children who are separated in school “grow

¹⁴ “Een samenleving die zichzelf verloochent heeft nieuwkomers niets te bieden”.

¹⁵ Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, (2001a), ‘Rapportage minderheden: Meer werk’, SCP-publicatie, Den Haag.

¹⁶ Engbersen, Godfried, *Spheres of Integration: Towards a differentiated and reflexive ethnic minority policy*, Rosemarie Sackmann, Bernhard Peters and Thomas Faist (Eds.) (2003), *Identity and Integration: Migrants in Western Europe*. Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 59-76

¹⁷ WRR (2001), *Nederland als Immigratiesamenleving*, Sdu Uitgevers, Den Haag.

¹⁸ Dagevos, J, *Perspectief op integratie. Over de sociaal-culturele en structurele integratie van etnische minderheden in Nederland*, WRR, 2001, Den Haag

¹⁹ Engbersen, Godfried, (2003), ‘Spheres of Integration: Towards a differentiated and reflexive ethnic minority policy’, in *Identity and Integration: Migrants in Western Europe*, Rosemarie Sackmann, Bernhard Peters and Thomas Faist (eds.) Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 59-76.

²⁰ Vink, Maarten P, *Dutch ‘Multiculturalism beyond the Pillarisation Myth*, University of Maastricht and University of Lisbon, 2007, vol 5, pp. 337 – 350.

²¹ “niet zomaar te vergelijken met die van de christelijke godsdiensten in Nederland” Scheffer, Paul (2000) ‘Het multiculturele drama’; NRC Handelsblad, 29 januari 2000. Found in ‘De vermijding voorbij’; in: RMO (2004), pp.51-90.

up in completely different worlds”.²² Although the separation of Islamic schools in the Netherlands can be argued to be nothing like the separation of education during apartheid, Scheffer makes a valid point that this process separates children from an early age and does not teach them to have the right attitude towards integration. The schools also teach children religion and morals that may not necessarily sit comfortably with the views of progressive Netherlands. Instead, he argues, there should be more done in order to integrate children from different cultural and language backgrounds so they learn more about the Dutch culture and the disparity between the migrants and native population decreases over time.

‘Het multiculturele drama’ also mentions that Islam does not support the separation of church and state; a belief that clashes with that of the Netherlands. Under Islamic law, dissolution of marriage or denial of parental authority would be an offence. In the Netherlands the law is the same for all and thus Scheffer reveals yet another cultural difference between Islam and Dutch society. He speaks of the ideas that imams preach which sometimes oppose those of Dutch society at large” “one hears examples of the rancour borne towards a society of which they are supposed to be a part.”²³ Muslims are forced to choose between their faith and reputation within their community and what is considered unlawful under Islamic law, and following the societal norms in The Netherlands. This decision holds back the process of integration as there are many cultural differences which potentially clash and this can lead to Muslims feeling isolated, which Scheffer believes cannot be ignored for any longer.

Scheffer talks of Dutch nationalism and regularly refers to the unique Dutch system of pillarisation and how “the various pillars of Dutch society all supported one roof.”²⁴ In the debate, sparked by Scheffer, many have pointed to the pillarisation model, particularly under Islam. Although the pillarisation structure has disappeared increasingly since the 1960/70’s, Islam seems to fit in with the organisational structure of the pillars: Islamic groups are interested in building mosques, there is an Islamic broadcast organisations, there are religious schools and halal shops. This appears to be a clear parallel with how the protestant or the catholic pillars were organised. However the organisation of Islam is limited to an extent: there are no Islamic hospitals, political parties or trade unions, which can be argued to be more important organisations. Until the 9/11 bombings in New York, these organisations were seen as a good channel of emancipation²⁵, however nowadays these organisations are viewed with anger and fear. When Muslims began to arrive it was natural for them to build their own Muslim pillar and “be given the chance to emancipate in the context of their cultural identity.”²⁶ The notion of “integration with the preservation of one’s own identity” seemed a natural development within the pillarised structure of Dutch society.²⁷ This classic pillarisation perspective provides a picture of the Netherlands with a very accommodating and immigrant-friendly integration policy. However in recent years immigration policies have tightened and

²² “omdat het onderwijs uiteenvalt in witte en zwarte scholen en kinderen dus van jongs af aan in gescheiden werelden groot worden”.

²³ “hoort men voorbeelden van haatdragenheid tegenover de samenleving waarvan ze geacht worden deel te zijn”.

²⁴ “de zuilen droegen één dak.”

²⁵ Engbersen, (2003).

²⁶ Carle, R. (2006) ‘Demise of Dutch Multiculturalism’, *Society*, 43 (3), 68—74

²⁷ Vink (2007).

integration policies have become more demanding.²⁸ 'Integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit' has been replaced with the requirement of minorities to integrate into Dutch society. Scheffer subtly brings the pillarisation argument into his thesis, and raises questions about whether multiculturalism can support the roof of Dutch society, or whether the native population of the Netherlands continue to live in "an anonymous society."²⁹ It is clear that the classical 'pillarisation' policy of the Netherlands has been declining for many years, and can no longer serve as a model for Muslim integration. It is populist politicians such as Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders who have changed the political climate in the Netherlands in the direction of repressive liberalism.³⁰

Wilders effect

In more recent years multiculturalism has been criticised by many political parties all around Europe. On the first anniversary of the London Bombings, 7th July 2005, a debate took place in the United Kingdom triggered by the *Daily Mail* headline: "Multiculturalism is dead".³¹ Similarly in Germany, in 2010, Angela Merkel publically dismissed multiculturalism as having "failed, failed utterly."³² Rarely do the politicians that reject multiculturalism indicate what they mean by this term before they so readily dismiss the policy. But within the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, leader of *Partij Voor de Vrijheid*, the Freedom Party, does not tiptoe around the issue: he has taken a leading stance against multiculturalism, which he presents at best as mindless cultural relativism or at its worst as a suppression of integral Dutch cultural values such as gender equality and tolerance. Wilders has made no apologies for arguing that Christians "should be proud that our culture is better than Islamic culture" and he continues to criticise Islam and the Koran.³³ The integration of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands is often discussed with the policy of assimilation, a policy that ensures that minorities adopt every aspect of the dominant culture, an ambition supported by Geert Wilders.

This concept is also supported by Scheffer in 'Het multiculturele drama' when he writes "Integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit is een vrome leugen, die niet zoals nu door de overheid moet worden aangemoedigd." Both Scheffer and Wilders argue that integration whilst maintaining one's own culture and identity is impossible. But there is a clear difference: for Scheffer lack of integration is the result of a lack of interest on behalf of the *Dutch* government and many *Dutch* citizens who under the guise of tolerance are simply not interested in the newcomers. Wilders however puts the blame and the responsibility entirely on the newcomers whom he accuses of a lack of willingness to adjust and fit in. This reluctance to integrate Wilders pins on a religion that he believes to be fundamentally at odds with Western societies.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "een anonieme stadssamenleving"

³⁰ Vink (2007).

³¹ Wessendorf, Susanne and Steven Vertovec, (eds.) (2009), 'Introduction: Assessing the Backlash Against Multiculturalism in Europe', in *The Multiculturalism Backlash*, Göttingen, p. 1.

³² Siebold, Sabine, (2010), 'Merkel says German multiculturalism has failed', *Reuters*, 17 November [http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/10/16/us-germany-merkel-immigration-idUSTRE69F1K320101016, 09/04/14]

³³ Walter Mayr and Rene Pfister, (2010), 'SPIEGEL Interview with Geert Wilders: "Merkel Is Afraid"' in *Spiegel online International*, 9 November [www.spiegel.de/international/europe/spiegel-interview-with-geert-wilders-merkel-is-afraid-a-727978.html, 09/04/2014]

Wilder's extreme views have attracted many opponents, but he has also managed to attract a considerable proportion of the Dutch electorate. From the 2010 elections it was Wilders' PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) that emerged as the winner, increasing its base from 5.9% to 15.5%.³⁴ Wilders' opposition towards Islam is clearly a welcome message. Wilders identifies Islam as the main cause for societal problems, such as youth criminality and a high percentage of unemployed and school drop-outs amongst Muslims. Wilders therefore believes that the government should insist on complete assimilation of Muslims and cultural elimination of Islam in the Netherlands. Although Islam remains the main enemy, according to Vossen, Wilders and his fellow PVV MPs are "increasingly aiming their attacks at other groups of immigrants, such as Polish, Bulgarian and Romanian workers, and immigrants from the Dutch Antilles."³⁵

One could argue that unwittingly it was Scheffer who 'created' Wilders. Scheffer's sharp article in a national Dutch newspaper opened a debate that has not stopped since. Scheffer was the first left-wing politician to name the problem of a lack of integration. His focus on why the integration problems are occurring lie with education, with a lack of understanding about Dutch language, history and culture. According to Scheffer this creates a class divide within the Netherlands, which hinders social integration. Scheffer does make an important point that it is not solely the fault of the ethnic minorities that integration is not making place, but some of the native Dutch population are fearful and angry towards Islam, particularly after the bombings in New York (2001) and London (2005) and the murder of Pim Fortuyn. Wilders has taken this worry over rapid changes in the make-up of the Dutch population, particularly in the bigger cities, and takes things a step further. His Islamophobic stance finds resonance with many Dutch citizens who long for a time when the Netherlands appeared to be a mono-cultural society.

Has anything changed nowadays?

The question as to whether Scheffer's points still remain valid 14 years on is debatable. Signs that the political climate towards multiculturalism in the Netherlands was changing could be seen back in 1992 when the government abolished the requirement to denounce foreign citizenship. This was reintroduced in 1997.³⁶ This specific example reveals how circumstances can alter in just five years. Today the government has introduced procedures to help, or force, ethnic minorities integrate before they even arrive in the Netherlands. According to the Dutch government's website, "Non-EU migrants aged 16 to 65 are in principle required to follow a civic integration process. This helps them to integrate more rapidly in Dutch society through employment or a course of study."³⁷ In preparing for the Civic Integration exam they learn how to enrol children into a Dutch school, find a job or make a hospital appointment. On 1st January 2013, regulations for civic integration became stricter again and newcomers after this date are responsible for their own integration and pay for it themselves (those who do not have the means to fund it qualify for a special loan). Apart from the Civic Integration course and exam, the government demands integration in other ways. Clothing

³⁴ Vossen, Koen, 'Classifying Wilders: The Ideological Development of Geert Wilders and his Party For Freedom', in *Politics*, Vol 31, No 1, pp. 179-189.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Hoofdafdeling Privaatrecht afdeling Nationaliteit en Burgerlijke Staat (Main Department Private Law department Nationality and Civil Status), 10 March 1977, *Staatscourant* (Government Gazette) 9 July 1977, no. 128, p. 7.

³⁷ <http://www.government.nl/issues/integration/integration-in-the-netherlands> [15/04/2014]

covering the face is banned in all public places, such as education and public transport, for the purposes of identification. Those who do not comply are not entitled to social welfare. Along with this, the government monitors integration carefully, and those who do not make sufficient effort will lose their residency permit (apart from those who are holding asylum residency permits). Although these policies look pro-active on paper, it is doubtful whether they are effective in practice. Is it possible for the government to monitor every migrant's integration? It leads to the question to what extent someone is integrated into society and who decides how much integration is enough? Where does encouraging integration turn into oppression?

It is clear that a lot has changed since Scheffer wrote 'Het multiculturele drama' in 2000. Looking away has turned in constant surveillance or, to put it more positively, the government has now recognised the problem and is doing more to promote integration. This may have prevented the economic disparity in Dutch society from becoming wider; it has not managed to eradicate the 'us and them' categorisation, which is still rife. It appears that it will take longer to deal with the fear and distrust, the 'onderbuikgevoelens' associated with the topic of integration and multiculturalism in The Netherlands.

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