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“Undesirable”

Culturism and low intensity ethnic cleansing in The Netherlands

by

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Culturism and low intensity ethnic cleansing in The Netherlands

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Abstract

This article can be read as a trenchant discussion of current migrant-hostile politics in the Netherlands. Analogous to the notion of low intensity conflict, it introduces the term ‘low intensity ethnic cleansing’ and explores whether it can be applied to improve our analysis of Dutch migration and integration politics. Taking into account both Dutch migrant-hostile *policies* and *voices* of the most outspoken politicians, as well as the broader European context, this text shows an increasing and mainstreamed call for ethno-territorial homogeneity of the European and national space. While comparisons of European migration and integration regimes and signs of cleansing largely fall on deaf ears, the uneasy question is no longer neglected or circumvented in this text.

Keywords

Low intensity ethnic cleansing, culturism, cultural fundamentalism, low intensity warfare, migrant hostility, Dutch migration and integration politics

Introduction

On July 11, 1995, the Bosnian town of Srebreniça fell to the advancing Serbian army commanded by Ratko Mladić. Unlike the British, who sent their UN troops to defend another Bosnian enclave called Goražde properly armed and equipped, the Dutch had sent in their UN troops without the means to defend themselves nor the population. With their blue helmets and berets, they stood by and watched as Mladić and his troops went along to massacre about 7,000 Bosnian Muslim men.

At first sight, the connection to The Netherlands seems limited to the fact that the UN soldiers were Dutch. At first glance, it seems totally out of order to suggest that there is more, such as a connection between what happened in Srebreniça and current Dutch policies towards migrants and migration. Even more, any intent to connect current debates and policies about migrants and migration to such abhorring events like the Balkan massacres or those that happened to the Jews before and during the Second World War, is considered beyond the limits and as inappropriate in Dutch media and politics. The dominant Dutch discourse on migrants and migration rules out any such connection.

However, we argue that at closer look we can no longer avoid the uneasy question whether there is, in fact, a conceptual connection between the Srebreniça massacre and current Dutch policies and voices on migrants and migration. The Srebreniça massacre is generally understood as a case of ethnic cleansing, i.e. as a deliberate effort to ‘clean’ a certain territory from a population that is defined in ethnic terms (Cordell and Wolff 2011). To be sure, Dutch policies on migration and migrants have not taken the life of any migrant so far, it seems¹, and belligerent migrant-hostile voices like those of Geert Wilders are not directly responsible for violence against people, it seems². Be that as it may, the Dutch government wants to make social rights dependent on ethnic background, forces assimilation programmes upon migrants, violates human rights on a large scale and applauds detention camps and other carceral spaces, the ‘warehousing’ of refugees in border zones of conflict and war, and quota policing of illegal foreigners, as we will discuss in more detail below. Don’t these policies amount to efforts to ‘clean’ a certain territory from a population that is defined in ethnic terms? Have we reached a stage in The Netherlands where the concept of ethnic cleansing actually has become applicable, relevant and adequate?

In this paper, we will elaborate on the concept of ethnic cleansing by introducing a specific brand called ‘low intensity ethnic cleansing’ in the light of deportation, detention and other methods of ethno-territorial homogenization in Europe. We argue that ethnic cleansing must be understood in its various (degrees of) manifestations. Rather than treating it as a monolithic phenomenon, it is more apt to place it on a sliding scale ranging from low intensity to high intensity ethnic cleansing, without assuming a fixed route from the former to the latter. Low intensity forms of ethnic cleansing must be studied in their own context without losing sight of that common denominator, i.e. ethnic cleansing. Understanding how certain manifestations of ethnic cleansing turn relatively undisputed or even become generally accepted over time is a crucial assignment for scholars. What appears to be a potentiality at one day may become reality at another. With Bauman (1989) and others (e.g. Paxton 2004) we think that ethnic cleansing comes about in a step-by-step and incremental fashion and needs to be monitored closely at all times.

The steps are made possible, we posit, by the grounds of exclusion and the extent to which these grounds are presented as acceptable or even legitimate. With racism being ever more (politically) discredited in post-war continental Europe (cf. Stolcke 1995), culture-based exclusion has gained popularity. We argue in part four of this text that culturism is professed to be reconcilable with a liberal democratic framework of merit and equality and that this

¹ We cannot be absolutely sure on this point, though. In December 2005, news came out that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND) had made it a standard procedure to deliver information gathered during interrogations of asylum seekers from Congo to the Congolese authorities when these asylum seekers were sent back to Kinshasa. Something similar has taken place in the case of asylum seekers from Syria. Whether these people survived deportation, is unknown.

² We cannot be absolutely sure about that either, as Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 Norwegian citizens on July, 22, 2011, stated in his manifesto that he feels inspired by Geert Wilders.

explains the success of polemics against ‘other cultures’. We stay on a European level for a little while longer and concentrate on the theoretical constructions of a/o Stolcke (on ‘cultural fundamentalism’), Grillo (on ‘cultural anxiety’ and ‘cultural essentialism’), Schinkel (on ‘culturalism’ and ‘culturism’) and Vertovec (on the ‘commonsensical structural-functionalism’ in contemporary culture-based exclusion).

In the subsequent part we come to the Dutch case. We discuss transformations as well as continuations of migration and integration politics in The Netherlands. Our focus is different from other studies as it includes both the migrant hostile voices of the most outspoken politicians (e.g. Rita Verdonk, Geert Wilders, Pim Fortuyn, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali) and their translations into policies under the aegis of mainstream governments. Many others have either focused on the former (e.g. De Landtheer et al. 2011) or the latter (e.g. de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012), but a combination of both in a single study is rare. We shed light on the ascending culturism in Dutch migrant hostile politics and examine if this can be seen as a testimony to low intensity ethnic cleansing.

Low intensity ethnic cleansing

‘Ethnic cleansing refers to the expulsion of an “undesirable” population from a given territory due to religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or a combination of these (Bell-Fialkoff 1993: 110). On the most basic level, it is the deliberate policy of homogenizing the ethnic make-up of a territory. As this definition suggests, ethnic cleansing comprises not only ethnic expulsions and extermination during war, but also policies of ethnic homogenization undertaken during times of relative peace. [...] In sum, ethnic cleansing consists of policies of ethnic expulsion and resettlement, which may be implemented either violently or non-violently. These policies are undertaken with the purpose of achieving ethno-territorial homogenization’ (Jenne 2011: 112).

The term ethnic cleansing usually draws our attention to the horrors of the Holocaust, Rwanda, Palestine, former Yugoslavia and the like. A simple search on a combination of the words ‘ethnic’ and ‘cleansing’ in scientific search engines keeps us far away from contemporary immigration and integration policies in, let’s say, Western Europe. Only a few scholars do make the connection (e.g. Ahmed 1995 or Fekete 2005). However, as the discussion of the concept of ethnic cleansing in the Routledge Handbook of Ethnic Conflict (Cordell and Wolff 2011), presented in the previous paragraph, shows, ethnic cleansing is not only a matter of kind but of degree as well. It is not only represented by its most virulent manifestations, like genocide and mass murder, but also covers less violent forms that nonetheless aim at transforming a given territory into an ethnically homogeneous entity by using non-violent means. Apparently, ethnic cleansing entails a sliding scale from non-violent or less-violent and perhaps more subtle forms to outright and massive violent and overt manifestations, all having in common the aim of ethno-territorial homogenization.

In discussing this sliding scale, we need to steer a middle course in that we neither stretch the concept so far that it becomes insulting to its worst case victims, nor keep it too narrow so that we underestimate the wretched situations of those who are subject to what Walters (2002) calls an ‘international policing of aliens’. In any case, we should forget at no time that ‘while the concentration camp was the specific outcome of the Nazi’s genocidal dream of racial purity, its horrors [can] not obscure the fact that camps of one kind or another became the routine solution for the domicile of the “displaced persons” by the time of World War II (Arendt 1964: 279) in a large number of European countries’ (Walters 2002: 284-285). Whilst wholesale comparisons of different camps in different times and places for sure point to macro hierarchies of human suffering, their micro instantiations may just as well disclose a number of similarities. It cannot be ruled out that the death of a Somali woman, mother of three accompanied children, who died pregnant due to medical neglect on the floor of the detention centre’s hallway in the Dutch town of Leersum, fits into a framework of deliberate efforts to create ethnic or national homogeneity in The Netherlands (www.vluchtelingenwerk.nl).

But how are we to coin these policies and aims to (re)construct ethno-territorial homogeneity with a relatively low level of violence? We propose the term low intensity ethnic cleansing. It draws on the concept of low intensity warfare or conflict that became operational under the Ronald Reagan administration in the 1980s with its clearest expression in the support this government mobilized for the so-called *Contras* in their fight against the *Sandinista* government in Nicaragua. It is warfare, but low intensity conflict or warfare abstains from outright and large scale war and from massive bloodshed. It has several characteristics that draw a parallel to the manifestations of ethnic cleansing with a relatively low level of violence.³

First, it aims at political homogeneity under imperial reign, in the Nicaraguan case of the United States over Central America, whereas low intensity ethnic cleansing aims for ethnic homogeneity under the reign of, e.g. the nation state or the European Union. In both cases there is homogenization under the hegemony of a political power. Second, low intensity warfare involves a variety of means, including political, economic, informational and military instruments to achieve this homogenization. Also in the case of relatively low-violence migrant-hostile politics, a variety of means and policies are deployed, not just outright and blunt deployment of force as in, for instance, the Rwanda massacre. Third, compared to outright war, low intensity warfare involves relatively few victims and casualties. Although in the Nicaraguan case the *Contras* did kill thousands of, mostly, farmers in the northern part of the country, these numbers cannot be compared to the numbers of casualties produced by, for example, the bombing of Vietnamese cities in the framework of the full-blown US war

³ Cf. United States Department of the Army (5 December 1990), Field Manual 100-20: Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict. http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/100-20/10020ch1.htm#s_9 as well as http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_intensity_conflict

against Vietnam. Low intensity ethnic cleansing does involve the massive deportation of people who are considered to disrupt the ideal of a homogeneous territory, but that is something else than mass murder. Fourth, due to its aggressive (and covered, see next paragraph) nature – it is war after all – it easily crosses the limits of legality. The ways the *Contras* war was financed turned out to be outright illegal as its funds were generated by Oliver North serving the Reagan administration by illegally selling arms to the Islamic Republic of Iran. As we will see below, current migration policies show a similar tendency to derail into illegality and violation of the rule of law. Fifth, low intensity warfare is preferably to be used in cases when there is a serious legitimacy problem. Its protagonists have a problem to justify it and need to go the extra mile to convince the public that the effort is justified. This was true in the case of the US low intensity warfare against the *Sandinista* government that had come to power in a massive uprising against a dictator and was confirmed in democratic elections in 1984. In a similar vein, images of ‘well integrated asylum seekers’ being deported to places where they even might not have been born, or footage of asylum seekers’ children who are put into custody, need an extra effort to convince the public that these policies are nevertheless justified. The central argument here is self-defense in the case of low intensity warfare.⁴ In short, both low intensity warfare and low intensity ethnic cleansing need ideological and propaganda efforts to be stepped up and in the case of the war against the *Sandinistas* cover up operations were initiated by letting mercenaries, the *Contras*, do the dirty work.

Approach

Do these five criteria of low intensity ethnic cleansing, developed analogous to the concept of low intensity warfare, make sense regarding current migrant-hostile policies and voices? In order to answer this question we did a two-layered study, focusing on both the European scene and the Dutch case. It must be pointed that – to keep a reasonable scope and length of this article – we limited our European study to a literature review. By including the work of scholars from the fields of international relations, (philosophy of) law and legal studies, anthropology, sociology, and political science, we have attempted to deal with our main question on the basis of cross-disciplinarity. The work that is included is not meant to be exhaustive but nonetheless covers most of the relevant studies in the field.

Our analysis of Dutch migrant-hostile politics is more extensive in that it (1) incorporates both government policies and leading political voices; and (2) incorporates a diverse set of materials, which lists newspaper articles, governmental acts, political statements, policy papers, NGO reports, notes of parliamentary debates, (semi-)academic literature, films (e.g. *Fitna* and *Submission*), documentaries and television interviews, migration statistics, public speeches, integration/assimilation programmes, and website

⁴ *Ibid.*

materials. We selected and screened these materials on the basis of the concepts in which both migrants and Dutch society are framed; the policy instruments that are proposed (as well as their consequences); and the legitimization and justification work that is going on in these materials.

Low intensity ethnic cleansing in Europe?

Migration has become one of the priorities of the political agenda, both of the EU and its member states. In 2010, 32.5 million foreigners (6.5%) resided in the EU-27 of which the majority (20.2 million) was a citizen of a non-EU country (Eurostat 2011a)⁵. The EU and member states distinguish economic migrants from asylum seekers, but in both cases they try to be as restrictive as possible in granting access. In recent years, the number of asylum applications in the EU has dropped from 670 000 applications in 1992 (EU-15), 424 200 in 2001 (EU-27), to 258 950 applications in 2010 (EU-27) (Eurostat 2011b). In 2010, only 21.5% of the final asylum decisions resulted in positive outcomes with the grants of a refugee status, subsidiary protection status or authorization to stay for humanitarian reasons (Eurostat 2011b).

If we look at the technologies of immigration and integration law enforcement that are deployed to maintain the ‘territorial ideal’, as Cornelisse (2010) coins it, it is in particular the use of encampment and deportation that catches the eye. For a long time they have been considered secondary techniques for immigration control (Gibney 2008), but the use of detention and deportation as governmental techniques to discipline immigrant populations is now ubiquitous in liberal democratic countries like the United States, The Netherlands, Germany, France, the UK, Canada and Australia (Anderson et al. 2011; Gibney 2008), something which led Gibney to speak of a ‘deportation turn’. Detention camps – where undocumented or unauthorized migrants are interned and await either admission or deportation – have sprouted throughout Europe and can now be found at several hundred locations across the European territory (Wicker 2010). Facilitated by this ‘wide carceral archipelago of detention centres’ (Walters 2002), each year around 100,000 immigrants are detained in Europe (de Giorgi 2010). Together with the images of desperately overcrowded boats trying to cross the Mediterranean, these camps depict the central tenet of government policies, that is, to exclude as many migrants from European territory as possible.

These camps fit into an array of policies that try to (re)create the nostalgic idea of homogeneous national or European societies. These policies also include various pre-departure integration strategies, now adopted by several EU Member States. The Netherlands, Germany and France introduced clauses in their integration acts that oblige migrants to partake in integration courses (France) and tests (The Netherlands and Germany) on their

⁵ The remaining 12.3 million were citizens of another Member State.

home territory, but made exemptions for EU and EEA States, as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea, and the US (Groenendijk 2011).

These pre-departure integration strategies are one facet of what is called the ‘externalization of border control’ and testify to the decreasing willingness of EU Member States to deal with unwanted ‘ethnic others’ on their own soil. As preventive strategies, they are highly effective contributions to the ‘territorial ideal’ (Cornelisse 2010) and foreclose the need for deploying force to deport migrants already present at European territory. In the imitation of their Dutch predecessor (which pioneered in its kind), more and more EU Member States now start to introduce integration programmes abroad to counter the ‘chain of migration’ – as it is called in The Netherlands – that is consequent of family reunification. The combat against ‘import brides’ – as some Dutch politicians offensively call it (cf. Schinkel 2011) – is perhaps most salient in but not limited to The Netherlands.

Other strategies for the externalization of EU frontiers are the so-called ‘warehousing’ of migrants outside EU territory and other forms of ‘outsourcing policies’ (Andrijasevic 2010; Fekete 2005; Human Right Watch 2006; Karakayali and Rigo 2010). Human Rights Watch has made a threefold classification of the EU’s externalization agenda. First, asylum seekers are readmitted to an alleged safe third country nation (TCN) that was part of their migration trajectory. A number of EU Member States have adopted this safe-TCN concept and concluded bilateral and multilateral readmission agreements (HRW 2006)⁶. Second, development aid budgets are increasingly used to warehouse asylum seekers in regions of origin (see also Fekete 2005). Whilst such ‘capacity building’ policies may have positive elements to it (they might decrease the use of dangerous smuggling routes), most EU financial assistance for capacity-building has been spent on the enforcement of border controls (HRW 2006). Third, proposals are made to outsource asylum procedures to countries outside the EU, so that migrants who apply in Member States can be sent to transit processing centers outside the EU for the processing of their application (HRW 2006; Karakayali and Rico 2010). In 2003, the UK proposed the construction of such transit centers for an extraterritorial processing of migrants’ claims, and these proposals were applauded by both The Netherlands and Denmark (HRW 2006). Even though some Member States rejected Tony Blair’s proposals, EU (especially Italy’s) financing of several detention centers for irregular migrants in Libya, for instance, bears close resemblance to such policies of outsourcing (Andrijasevic 2010).

The incarceration of those who are politically framed as non-citizens in detention camps, both in Europe and in third country nations, does not only physically exclude them from mainstream society; it also symbolically excludes them by marking them as a threat, as dangerous elements that need to be kept away from law abiding citizens (Anderson et al. 2011). In this regard, Bosworth (2008) has pointed at the increased use of criminal justice

⁶ Denmark, Sweden, Norway, The Netherlands and the UK have for instance concluded such agreements with Iraq (cf. Fekete 2011).

discourses to depict ‘irregular’ migrants and De Giorgi (2010) refers to an increased belief in the symbiosis between illegality and criminality. In some European countries (e.g. Germany), illegal residence is already a criminal offence (cf. Broeders 2010); in others (e.g. The Netherlands) political pressure is mounting to use criminal law to deal with illegal residents (*Regeerakkoord* 2010)⁷. Such a criminalization of illegal migrants is highly consequential, because the status of ‘illegality’ is everything but stable. Some (e.g. Engbersen and van der Leun 2001) talk about the construction of illegality. For instance, something perfectly legal as losing one’s job may give a person an illegal status (De Giorgi 2010). The most recent Dutch coalition agreement proposes that when a legal foreigner does not meet the required income demands, his or her residence permit will be withdrawn (*Regeerakkoord* 2010). This means that there is ‘the constant threat of drifting into illegality’ (De Giorgi 2010: 159) and an ongoing emphasis on ‘deportability’ (De Genova 2010: 34-36).

This precarization is, as De Giorgi correctly observes, a powerful reminder of migrants’ subordinate position. Peutz and De Genova (2010: 18) write about a logic of deportation undergirded by ethno-national biopolitics through which the state’s deportation regime fashions its citizenry only by sorting and ranking the greater or lesser “foreignness” of various migrant others. ‘Cleansing our [societies] of those with undesirable qualities’ (Kanstroom 2000: 1892) coincides with the liberalization of cross-border business movement, something which led Sparke (2006) to introduce the notion of ‘business class citizenship’. In the words of De Giorgi’s (2010: 151):

Although virtually no longer in existence for financial capitals and for a restricted global élite of cosmopolitan ‘tourists’ (Bauman 1998: 77), borders have thus resumed all their symbolic and material violence against specific categories of people (underprivileged, non-western, ‘Third-World’ migrants) who, as a consequence of the marginal position they occupy in the transnational circuits of production, are locked in the lowest regions of what Zygmunt Bauman (1998: 69-76) has called ‘the global hierarchy of mobility’. The unauthorized mobility of this ever more globalized proletariat, its actual or potential trespassing of the many ‘walls around the West’ (Andreas and Snyder 2000), are once again the target of punitive strategies of criminalization and illegalization.

The point here is that the criminalization of migrants on European territory, the hierarchization of ‘foreignness’ and thus the right to belong to the national or European community and the steeping up of extra demands put onto those migrants who do have a legal

⁷ De facto, criminal law is already applicable to illegal migrants in The Netherlands. When illegal migrants are apprehended several times, they can be declared ‘undesirable aliens’, by the Dutch State. Continued residence of undesirable aliens is seen as a crime against the State and punishable with six months imprisonment (Broeders 2010).

status, are all instances that point to the creation of a hierarchy of de facto citizenship with migrants relegated to a subordinated and precarious position. Increasingly, rights that non-migrants can count on are becoming curbed or made conditional for migrants. Thus the basic principle of the rule of law in a liberal democracy, i.e. equality before the law, is de facto violated by these policies. Apparently, by criminalizing migrants and subduing them into a subordinated position vis-à-vis the state, these policies themselves violate the law and become illegal.

Of course, justification and legitimization work is required here. The legitimacy of the measures that are increasingly taken by the EU and its member states against unwanted migrants is sought to be restored by an imagination of the ‘cultural other’ who is said to hold on to cultural values and practices that are incompatible with those of ‘the West’. The severity of the ‘deportation regime’ (Fekete 2005; De Genova and Peutz 2010) and the consequent hardship that ‘unauthorized’, ‘undocumented’, ‘illegal’, or ‘irregular’ migrants face, could not be accounted for by migrant hostile politicians if it would rest on racism. With racism being (politically) discredited in post-war continental Europe and obviously being in blunt opposition to the principles of a liberal democracy (Stolcke 1995), culture has gained in strength as an exclusionary power.

The construction of difference between migrants and non-migrants based on cultural arguments to justify the above mentioned exclusionary policies towards migrants – Schinkel (2007) writes about ‘culturism’ here – tends to frame cultures as equal but incommensurable or incompatible. It is based on what Grillo (2003) calls cultural essentialism, defined as ‘a system of belief grounded in a conception of human beings as “cultural” [...] subjects, i.e. bearers of *a* culture, located within a boundaried world, which defines them and differentiates them from others’ (p.158, italics and emphases original). Cultural essentialism presents cultures as bounded, reified, historic, rooted and authentic entities. Culturism (Schinkel 2007) and cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995) go one step further and add the notion that those cultural entities and those that represent them are incommensurable or incompatible, they cannot coincide in one space.

Rather than ordering them hierarchically, culturism ‘segregates them spatially, each culture in its place’, kept apart for their own good and for their preservation (Stolcke 1995). So, to cover up de facto hierarchization of access to citizenship, de forma cultural differences are basically framed on a horizontal basis that de forma fits very well into a liberal democratic framework of equality before the law. After adding that those cultural differences are incompatible on European territory, an argument is provided for keeping out migrants as much as possible. Moreover, de forma cultural boundaries are kept open for those migrants who cannot be expelled as, in theory, cultural boundary crossing is facilitated by offering an array of civic integration programmes to those migrants. If migrants wish to live in ‘our midst’, they can assimilate culturally (Stolcke 1995: 8). Culturism is presented to be compatible with a liberal democratic framework of equality and merit, in the sense that

Western societies claim to be receptive if the individual bearer of a migrant culture takes responsibility to assimilate.

De facto, however, such boundary crossing is immensely difficult if policies continue to construct classifications of 'migrant others' in terms of cultural distance. Such groupist thinking (Brubaker 2002), in which culture is seen as a designator of (ethnic) group affiliation, makes it very difficult for individuals to cross. The invitation to cross cultural boundaries may not be very convincing to migrants if they have been constructed as the cultural other by the very same policies in the first place. This may be particularly so when migrants' cultural make-up is conceived of as an integrated whole of values, practices and social institutions that together are alleged to determine the whole of an individual's being.

What Vertovec (2011) calls a 'commonsense structural-functionalism' is of special importance here. This popular structural-functionalism causes people to see 'all values, cultural practices, and social institutions as part of an integrated whole, a cohesive system based on the necessary interdependence and equilibrium of its parts. If one part is perceived to be vulnerable or expunged, the integrity of the entire system is considered to be in danger' (p.245). Such structural-functionalism not only explains why people may fear a loss of culture (Grillo's 'cultural anxiety' is applicable here) when any cultural element seems to get lost – since that element is understood as constituting a necessary part of cultural integrity; it also helps to explain the persistent tendency to account of any lack of migrants' (socio-economic) institutional participation by pointing to their cultural systems. The slightest sign of speaking the host country language with a 'foreign accent' may incite employers to turn down promotion applications of refugee women, as several of them experienced in The Netherlands (Ghorashi and Van Tilburg 2006). Thus, migrants' supposed lack of assimilation into (an assumed homogeneous) host culture is utilized to explain lower levels of institutional participation. In other words, an integrationist perspective fuels the inclination to blame socio-economic deprivations like unemployment, delinquency, and social service dependency on immigrants' lack of 'our' culture (cf. Stolcke 1995).

In short, this brief overview of current policies regarding migrants and migration in Europe based on the relevant literature suggests that the concept of low intensity ethnic cleansing makes sense. First, these policies do aim at constructing an ethnically homogeneous national or European space. Second, they deploy a variety of means and instruments, including deportation camps, both in Europe and in third countries, strict assessment procedures as well as civic integration programmes. Third, we have not found reliable figures on numbers of actual casualties involved in these policies, but they certainly do not amount to the numbers one would associate with genocide. Fourth, these policies operate on the verge of legality, in some respects even de facto violating basic principles of a liberal democracy, like equality before the law and undivided and unconditional citizenship. Finally, massive propaganda is launched to construct legitimacy for these policies based on notions of cultural essentialism, culturism and cultural fundamentalism. Here belligerent voices like those of

Geert Wilders or Thilo Sarrazin catch the attention, but the basic premises of cultural fundamentalism have already been installed as the ideological foundation for the legitimization of low intensity ethnic cleansing.

Low intensity ethnic cleansing in The Netherlands?

We only need to take in mind the Flemish merchants, Portuguese Jews, French Huguenots and many others who have vitalized the Dutch economy and inhabited substantial parts of cities like Leiden and Amsterdam in the 17th century to realize that migration into The Netherlands has a long history. A boost of immigration occurred after 1945, when 400,000 people of the former Dutch East Indies fled from Indonesian independence. Apart from those who lived on the Moluccan Islands, they relatively successfully established themselves in Dutch society with state-sponsored housing provisions and employment in the post-war economic boom (van Amersfoort and van Nieuwkerk 2006). Many had worked in the colonial administration and the army, so their loyalty to the Dutch state was considered beyond doubt. ‘Guest worker’ (*gast arbeider*) migration advanced in the 1960s and 1970s when recruitment took place of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants for Dutch industries. Ever since, migration from these countries has continued – for a substantial part due to family reunion – and has been supplemented by migration flows from the ex-colonies Surinam and the Dutch Antilles, an influx of asylum seekers and refugees from all around the world, and a substantial number of EU residents after Schengen. Successive enlargements of the EU have given residents of several CEE countries⁸ freedom of movement to The Netherlands, making Polish migrants the largest group of ‘newcomers’ in 2010 (www.cbs.nl).

1980s and 1990s

Due to an economic recession and de-industrialization causing mounting employment rates among migrants in the 1980s, migration became an issue in Dutch politics. At first, the Dutch government maintained a friendly position towards new immigration. It opened doors for family reunification, created opportunities for naturalization and was willing to deliver its share to host international refugees (Geuijen 2004). In the early 1990s, up to 55,000 asylum seekers a year entered the country (www.cbs.nl).

To those already on Dutch territory, the government responded – (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 1983) – by pursuing equal treatment, proportional representation in (civil) society, and maintenance of migrants’ ‘ethnic-cultural identities’ (Entzinger 2003). Only those who lagged behind in terms of institutional participation were targeted as objects of policy and public attention (Rath 1991). The policy terms ‘non-Western allochthones’ and ‘ethnic minorities’ came into use to refer to those groups (now 1.7 million people, www.cbs.nl) with low participation in society’s key institutions like education and the labour

⁸ Central and East European

market. These policy terms included migrants coming from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, former Yugoslavia, the Middle East and Asia, with the exception of those from Japan and the Dutch East Indies, whose 'integration' was considered successful. Moluccans, on the other hand, were included in this category after some of them had taken violent action in the 1970s in several hijacks and occupations. Government policies in the 1990s were intended to improve their institutional participation (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken 1994). Legal obstacles to participation were removed, soft affirmative action legislation was launched, and the government concluded contracts in which more than 110 large firms and the SME branch organization pledged to take measures to increase the numbers of ethnic minorities in their labour force. These measures were inspired upon an advancing Dutch welfare state.

Apart from being categorized in terms of (deficient) institutional participation, non-Western migrants were also categorized in cultural terms and defined as cultural communities. This definition was predicated upon a pillarized society (*verzuiling*), which had structured Dutch societal differences until the 1960s/1970s in a relatively successful way. Each of the four pillars (Protestant, Catholic, Socialist, and – somewhat less salient – Liberal) had its own political party and/or church, trade unions, employer associations, schools, sport clubs, newspapers, broadcasts etc. They constituted micro societies ruled by their own religion or ideology. Ethnic minorities were understood as new varieties of such pillars, defined by their own norms, traditions, religion and language. The government financed special education in their own language and culture to support their cultural life (Entzinger 2003). Within this multicultural framework, individual migrants were framed as members of reified cultural communities, a membership that defined the essence of their being. Cultural relativism ruled relations between these communities. Each cultural community had to be seen in its own terms, so cross-communitarian communication – let alone criticism – was basically ruled out (see Prins 1997 for The Netherlands and Wikan 2002 for similar notions in Norway), except for folkloristic admiration of each other's habits.

We can invoke Grillo's notion of cultural essentialism – as well as Schinkel's notion of culturalism – to characterize Dutch multiculturalism of the 1980s – 1990s. Ethnic minorities were largely understood as reified, static and bounded cultural groups and such notions have contributed to the 'othering' of migrants (Ghorashi 2010). However, Vertovec's structural-functionalism cannot be discerned from policy texts of that time. Socio-economic institutional life was sharply distinguished from migrants' cultural life and – by and large – governmental intervention was meant to enhance both. Employing the term culturism (or cultural fundamentalism) is even less obvious, as territorial closure and migrant hostility had not yet entered the political landscape. Anti-immigration propaganda by parties like the *Nederlandse Volksunie* (NVU), the *Centrumpartij* (CP, later renewed as CP'86) and *Centrumdemocraten* (CD) was effectively sidetracked from the public by mainstream politicians (van der Valk 2003) or outlawed by court decisions. These parties were in

principal incapacitated on the basis of their racist ideas (e.g. their campaigning against interracial marriages for the sake of preserving racial purity).

Migrant-hostility on the rise

It was a mainstream politician – Frits Bolkestein, leader of the right-wing liberals (VVD) – who first broke the silence between cultural communities imposed by cultural relativism and stated that minorities’ ‘integration’ was in a deplorable state (*De Volkskrant*, 12 September 1991). Bolkestein and other spokespersons started to represent a slowly but steadily emerging discontent in politics with migrants’ isolation (Rath 1991) and their ‘bastard spheres of integration’ like crime and welfare dependency (Engbersen and Gabriëls 1995). Bolkestein contended a debate was going on, underground, among ‘ordinary people’ who needed to be listened to (Prins 2002). Like Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders a few years later, he claimed to fully understand ordinary people’s concerns and to have the courage to speak his mind about the ‘truth’ and the ‘facts’, something he considered typically Dutch. Bolkestein’s talk about something ‘typically Dutch’ as well as his concerns about an incompatibility of Dutch cultural traditions and those of non-Western migrants (Ghorashi 2010) reflect not only cultural essentialism, but also cultural fundamentalism as he introduced the notion of cultural incompatibility.

Such expressions did not only reflect an ascending cultural anxiety – a fear of cultural loss. The call for a revival of ‘Dutch national awareness’ (initially coming from a social-democrat, Paul Scheffer, see *NRC Handelsblad* 29 January 2000 and Vasta 2007) and the accompanying discourse of national heritage and canonization for a wider dissemination of national awareness were also meant to reinforce the assumed Dutch culture and nationalism as a prerequisite for dealing successfully with migrants’ deficiency in institutional participation. Dutch migration and integration politics increasingly started to fall under the spell of a commonsense structural-functionalism, conflating cultural and (socio-economic) institutional life. In this vein, the 2003-2006 integration minister Rita Verdonk reiterately stated that migrants’ problems in the labour market correlated with their deviating norms and values.

The current government has fully appropriated this presumption. The social affairs minister Henk Kamp recently proposed to make citizens’ right on social security conditional upon Dutch language proficiency, with the objective of reducing the number of ethnic minorities on benefit (*NRC Handelsblad*, 29 January 2012). *De forma* such legislation will apply to everyone, but *de facto* it will only curtail state benefits for migrants, as it is explicitly stated that the language norms for the civic integration exam will be used. Such a culturalization of social rights may deprive migrants completely of social security as cutbacks to zero benefits are proposed. In this line, the incumbent government also proposes to deny, curtail, or cancel social benefits when a job seeker’s behaviour or clothing decreases his or

her employability (*Regeerakkoord* 2010). Whilst similar proposals by the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) a few years earlier (*NRC Handelsblad*, 3 April 2004) met considerable hesitation, a culture-based conditionality of social rights now seems to become commonplace. Fuelled by an integrationist perspective, language, norms, values, clothing and behaviour (in other words, culture) and institutional life are treated as an integrated whole.

With Dutch culture set as the norm, governments have launched initiatives to reinforce this culture along nationalist lines, answering Scheffer's call for national revival. These initiatives include the nationalist rewriting of official history textbooks for schools and the official proclamation in Parliament of a canon of Dutch history. Advised by the communitarianist writer Amitai Etzioni (2001), christian-democrat Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende (2002 – 2010) made the revitalization of Dutch norms and values a key policy objective. Cultural fault lines are no longer accepted and migrants need to identify with what is typical to Dutch society, its rituals and key values (*Ministerie van VROM* 2007a: 14-17). The 2003-2006 integration minister Rita Verdonk proposed in vain to express migrants' degree of cultural assimilation in specific vignettes. She did succeed, however, in the introduction of a naturalization ceremony, considered a keystone in the culturalization of citizenship (Verkaaik 2010).

Earlier vain proposals by the LPF to ban double nationality (double passports) – despite being a constant issue for politicians of questioning migrants' loyalty to the Dutch state – are now contemplated by the coalition agreement, which promises the introduction of a law that prohibits double nationality. Similarly, LPF ideas to oblige migrants to sign a contract symbolic for their loyalty to the Dutch state stayed confined by the boundaries of the party (*NRC Handelsblad*, 3 April 2004). Now, however, the government intends to introduce an admission exam that tests whether family reunion migrants affiliate stronger with The Netherlands than with any other country (*Regeerakkoord* 2010). In terms of spatial control, cultural assimilation policies like *Spreidingsbeleid* are intended to disperse migrants over national territory and over neighbourhoods to prevent or disrupt 'ethnic community building' (Gijsberts and Dagevos 2007). Local initiatives too have been developed to force migrants' assimilation. Concluding the 'Islam debates', the local authorities in Rotterdam have launched the Rotterdam Code that obliges migrants to talk Dutch in public spaces and to raise their children in Dutch language and culture (*NRC Handelsblad*, 20 January 2006). Special officers are authorized to intrude in migrants' private spheres to see to it that they behave according to Dutch norms and values. War-like language is used, calling these officers 'city commandos'.

These various shifts from the margins to the centre of proposals of leading migrant-hostile voices indicate that those voices and actual government policies have become very much intertwined. It was under the aegis of mainstream governments that migrant hostility as expressed by spokespersons like Pim Fortuyn or Geert Wilders has successfully been translated into policies. For sure, extreme statements from Pim Fortuyn to depict of Islam a

‘backward culture’ and call for the abolition of the constitutional article that bans discrimination (*De Volkskrant*, 9 February 2002), or Somali migrant and VVD Member of Parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali making Islam responsible for massive violence against women (Ghorashi 2003) in the film *Submission* that she produced with Theo van Gogh who repeatedly called Muslims ‘goat fuckers’, or Geert Wilders’ references to Muslims as ‘Moroccan street scum’ and to headscarves as ‘skull rag’ calling for a tax on wearing them as well as his labeling of the Koran as a fascist book; all these extreme voices have not been approved of by official government proclamations. In some cases the government felt quite uneasy with the tone and possible consequences of what was said and done. Nevertheless, these voices are in line with the basic tenets of government policies regarding migrants and migration that have emerged basically since the turn of the century, as we will show in the next section.

Policy development

It was already in 1998 and 2000, when migrant hostility in politics as we know it now was still *in statu nascendi*, that respectively the Civic Integration Newcomers Act (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*, WIN from here on) and the Aliens Act (*Vreemdelingenwet*) were issued. WIN reflected a shift from a by-and-large state-supported ethnic infrastructure (the fifth pillar) to an obligation for non-EU newcomers to take a 12-month integration course, that is to say, 600 hours of Dutch language training, civic education and preparation for the Dutch labour market (Jopke 2007). Though this was still state-paid service, financial penalties followed non-compliance. In the wake of the murder of Pim Fortuyn, integration policies adopted a more coercive character and shifted attention from civic to cultural integration; i.e. applicants were come to be assessed by taking dominant Dutch norms and values as central criteria (Jopke 2007). The goal of civic integration is to incorporate migrants into ‘the Dutch society, language and culture’ (*Ministerie van VROM* 2007b: 5) and civic integration exams include questions about manners of behavior and norms and values. After a revision of the Act in 2006, migrants were also expected to take financial responsibility, which is synonymous for their obligation to pay for the courses in full. While the government did initially not succeed in extending the integration test to the 800.000 admitted migrants, it did get away with making the acquirement of a permanent resident permit conditional upon the passing of integration tests.

This was a landmark step in the development of policies favouring territorial closure, making it possible for the first time to withhold permanent residence rights on cultural grounds. On 1 January 2007 the WIN was replaced under the aegis of the integration minister Rita Verdonk and justice minister Ernst Hirsch Ballin by the WI (*Wet Inburgering; Integration Act*), which compels admitted migrants to take integration tests as well (*Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken* 2011). The current government repeatedly proposes in

its coalition agreement to revise or disregard European law to further stricter migration and integration legislation and to blur a distinction between the two to the point of dissolving the latter in the former. Previously, migration control and immigrant integration belonged to different policy domains, but ‘now the lack of integration is taken as grounds for the refusal of admission and residence’ (Jopke 2007: 8).

The negotiations for another revision of the WIB, needed to legitimize the deployment of integration policy instruments to select and exclude migrants from admission, cumulated in the WIB (*Wet Inburgering Buitenland*; Integration Abroad Act) that was issued in March 2006 (Bonjour 2010; Groenendijk 2011). The WIB takes the fusion of migration and integration control to a whole new level (Bonjour 2010). In 2004 a bill was already presented that mandated pre-departure language tests for all migrants coming to The Netherlands (family-reunion migrants included). The bill was initially contested on grounds of validity of the language test (considered questionable) and the arrangement of facilities to learn Dutch in the countries of origin (considered insufficient) (Groenendijk 2011). Moreover, advisory committees concluded that civic integration could not be measured abroad.

Nonetheless, integration minister Rita Verdonk brushed aside all critique. All major parties, the Green Left excluded, voted in favour of the act (Bonjour 2010; Groenendijk 2011). The bill was signed into law and from March 2006 onwards, not only labour migrants but family reunion migrants as well need to take an admission test in their home country that assesses their knowledge of the Dutch language and customs, before being entitled to admission. Political rhetoric has it that the test is meant to facilitate the integration of new migrants, but the WIB is highly selective since family members of people from EU and EEA States, as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and the United States are exempted (Groenendijk 2011). Human Right Watch has denounced the Dutch government for systematically violating human rights with the enactment of WIB. In its report ‘The Netherlands: Discrimination in the Name of Integration’, Human Rights Watch states that ‘while international human rights law does not prohibit states to differentiate between citizens and non-citizens in immigration policies, states cannot discriminate on the basis of nationality or ethnicity (aside from a narrow exception for EU citizens) even in this sphere’ (Human Rights Watch 2008). Likewise, the European Court of Justice, citing the European Convention on Human Rights, reproved the new Dutch policies on immigration and integration (de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2012: 203). Ignoring such denouncements, the Dutch government has made the test more difficult and now suggests modifying the EU Family Reunification Directive (2003/86) in order to come with stricter demands (in terms of age, income etc.). It is openly stated that the cabinet will optimally use its juridical leeway to make its family reunification policies as strict and selective as possible (*Regeerakkoord* 2010: 21).

In the wake of the *Vreemdelingenwet* of 2000, issued by the social-democrat state secretary Job Cohen, asylum seekers too are increasingly worse off in The Netherlands. The

number of asylum applications has significantly dropped from 55.000 in 1994 to 9.700 in 2007 (www.cbs.nl) and less than half of the applications are eventually granted after procedures of many years (according to the national Ombudsperson, the government has refused to carry out sentences of the judiciary in more than a thousand cases; see *Zembla* 21 May 2006). Any drop in asylum applications is welcomed by the minister in charge. International institutions like Human Right Watch (*Trouw* 9 April 2003), The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (*de Volkskrant* 28 October 2006) and The European Court of Human Rights (*de Volkskrant* 12 January 2007) have recurrently denounced the Dutch government for systematically violating the human rights of asylum seekers.

Recently, the ministers of Immigration, Integration and Asylum (Gerd Leers) and Security and Justice (Ivo Opstelten) have made legislative proposals for quota to expel illegal foreigners. If the bill passes, undocumented foreigners who stay on Dutch territory will be proactively tracked by the Alien Police and expelled, whether they are offenders or not. The police is instructed to use ethnic profiling, i.e. to focus their surveillance particularly on those who can be identified as foreigners. In this line, the current government intends to penalize illegal stay on Dutch territory (*Regeerakkoord* 2010). It also intends to give priority to the deportation of families *with* children, to rest the onus of proof even more with the applicant, and to deport those who are criminally prosecuted, whether they are illegal or not. In line with Europe's externalization agenda, proposals are done to transfer parts of development aid budgets to develop warehousing facilities in conflict regions (*Regeerakkoord* 2010).

All of these government plans are meant to expel the alien poor and reflect the ongoing shift in emphasis in the Dutch asylum seekers debate from a human rights perspective to stressing the need to keep out 'fortune hunters' (Geuijen 2004). Rejecting as many applications as possible and maximizing the number of asylum seekers that can be sent back have become prime policy objectives. Such target policies to reduce the number of asylum claims, signify a bypass of the humanitarian principles of the Geneva Convention (Fekete 2005). How, we are morally obliged to ask (as Fekete 2005: 65 does), can individual asylum claims be objectively assessed and refugees displaced by war effectively protected, if the asylum process is predetermined by quasi-quotas?

Moreover, the main grounds on which asylum applications are assessed, the so-called *Ambstberichten* of the Dutch embassy in the country the asylum seeker comes from, only provide information on an aggregated level, not on whether a particular asylum seeker's life is in danger or not. This procedure opens the door for arbitrariness in decisions about asylum applications. Even more, those whose application has been turned down very often cannot be sent back to their country of origin because that country often refuses re-entrance. As a result, they are often forced to disappear into illegality. If they subsequently are caught by the police, they run the risk of being detained in prisons in which their health is protractedly undermined (*Zembla* 20 January 2012).

The undesirables: Discussion and conclusion

We argue that extremist migrant hostile voices are in line with the basic objectives and premises of Dutch government policies since the turn of the century. For example, Geert Wilders' calls for mass deportation of Muslims (www.pvv.nl) is not very different from the official deportation regime. His calls for taxing 'skull rags' are in tune with official civic integration policies that force migrants to assimilate. Both these voices and official government policies since the turn of the century define migrants in cultural terms and prescribe their cultural assimilation as a condition for participating in Dutch society, even as a condition for being on Dutch territory. Thus their assumed 'own cultures' are defined as incompatible with assumed Dutch culture so they either have to leave or assimilate. In other words, both voices and policies aim at ethnic homogenization on Dutch territory. That holds true for efforts to keep as many migrants as possible from entering the country, to deport as many of them as possible and to force those who cannot be deported to assimilate into 'Dutch culture'. This corresponds to the first criterion of low intensity ethnic cleansing discussed above.

We can readily see that also the second criterion, i.e. the deployment of a variety of policies and instruments, is met. The actual use of force is only a minor component of the wide array of measures that also include Dutch language courses and naturalization rituals. The use of force, and even violence, is on the rise, though, as the Dutch police is instructed to arrest a certain quota of 'illegal aliens' and to imprison them until their final expulsion. The latter can *de facto* mean life-long imprisonment (interrupted by short periods 'on the streets') as many of them simply cannot return, as their countries of origin refuse to take them back.

Nevertheless, current ethnic cleansing clearly has not reached genocidal proportions, so the third criterion to call this 'low intensity ethnic cleansing' is also met. The same holds true for the fourth one: derailment into illegality and violations of the rule of law. Both Dutch assimilation and immigration policies have been denounced for systematically violating human rights by almost all important international human rights agencies and courts, as indicated above. It has become standard procedure for the Immigration and Naturalization Service to simply ignore sentences by the Dutch judiciary. Moreover, the *de facto* creation of second class citizenship for migrants and the hierarchization of access to citizenship rights based on cultural arguments violate basic notions of equality before the law and undivided citizenship of a liberal democracy.

Consequently, there is a strong need for legitimation and justification work. In doing so, both extremist voices like Geert Wilders and official Dutch government policies deploy notions of cultural essentialism – framing migrants as bearers and representatives of a different culture – and of cultural fundamentalism – the notion that cultures are incompatible and incommensurable and that representatives of different cultures cannot live together in one and the same territory.

We posit that present-day cultural fundamentalism builds upon the cultural essentialism in multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s and that this carry-over is one of its key success factors. Another success factor – emphasized earlier – is cultural fundamentalism's ostensible compatibility with a liberal democratic framework of equality and merit. We can now see that this entails two sides of the same (neo)liberal coin. On the one side, people like Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Theo van Gogh called Islam a 'backward culture' (out of which notions of hierarchy and superiority can be inferred), but defended themselves by claiming the right to feel this way just like any other person has the right to a personal opinion in a democratic and egalitarian society, in an effort to reconcile their views with democratic equality before the law. On the other side of the coin we have the argument that cultural boundaries can in principal be crossed by individuals, if they 'take their responsibility'. Nonetheless, this is merely a false pretence. As long as migrants are initially located outside of 'Dutch community' and the norms and values they should adopt remain to be casted as belonging to this community only, and as long as migrants' cultures are proclaimed to be the essence of who they are, crossovers become *de facto* very unlikely.

Culturism's or cultural fundamentalism's third success stems from its assistance by a commonsense structural-functionalism that accomplishes a fusion of cultural and economic arguments to exclude migrants. Instead of the ramshackle and multifaceted institutions, values and cultural practices in various domains of society that together make up the framework within which non-migrants and migrants work out their differences (cf. Freeman in Vertovec 2010), a coherent whole is assumed in which institutional or economic and cultural life are bound to be interlinked. It is in this light that we must understand Wilders' calculations of the 'costs of migration'. This economic rationale does not supplant but supplement a cultural rationale: on top of the alleged incompatibility of Dutch culture and (non-Western) migrant cultures, an institutional laziness is assumed to be inherent to the latter. The economic jargon ('fortune hunters', 'asylum shopping') depicts migrants as profiteers of the welfare state, which either results in a culturalization or even ethnicization of welfare (see the examples discussed above) for those who legally stay on Dutch territory, or contributes to a territorial lock out for those who planned or were forced to migrate to The Netherlands.

In short, we argue that there are good reasons for introducing the term low intensity ethnic cleansing and apply it to current migration and assimilation policies and voices in The Netherlands as part of a more general pattern in Europe. These policies and voices certainly disclose efforts to (re)construct notions of ethnic homogeneity and thus fit into the definitions of ethnic cleansing discussed above. The borrowing of the idea of 'low intensity' from the concept of low intensity conflict or low intensity warfare also makes sense to characterize a kind of ethnic cleansing that is relatively low-key in overt violence, with its ensuing tendencies to derail into illegality and violation of the rule of law and strong needs for justification and legitimation work. A first exploration of the main differences between low

intensity warfare and low intensity ethnic cleansing suggests a main divergence. The former assumes a rather centralized command structure stemming from places like the oval office or the Pentagon, whereas the latter does not necessarily entail a centralized orchestration. In the Dutch case there does not seem to be any coordinating mechanism involving both policy makers and extremist voices. Further research is called for to study in more detail the commonalities and differences between low intensity warfare and low intensity ethnic conflict.

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