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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 38

### **Low Intensity Ethnic Cleansing in The Netherlands**

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# **Low Intensity Ethnic Cleansing in The Netherlands**

Paul Mutsaers & Hans Siebers

## **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 inconvenient truth is no longer avoided in this text.

## **Keywords**

Ethno-territorial homogeneity, low intensity ethnic cleansing, culturism, cultural fundamentalism, 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 (Goražde) properly armed and equipped, the Dutch had sent in their UN troops without the means to defend themselves or the population. As bystanders they watched as Mladić and his troops went along to massacre 7,400 Bosnian Muslims.

At first glance, the connection to The Netherlands seems limited to the fact that the UN soldiers were Dutch. It seems totally out of order to suggest that there is more, such as a connection between Srebreniça and current Dutch migration and integration policies. Even more, any intent to connect such debates and policies to abhorring events like the Balkan massacres or those of the Holocaust, is considered inappropriate in the Netherlands. The dominant Dutch discourse rules out any association.

However, at closer look we can no longer avoid the uneasy question whether there is in fact a conceptual connection between the blue helmets in Srebreniça and current Dutch policies and debates on migrants. The Srebreniça massacre is generally understood as a case of ethnic cleansing, i.e. a deliberate effort to ‘clean’ a certain territory from populations that are defined in ethnic terms (Cordell and Wolff 2011). To be sure, Dutch policies on migrants have not taken any lives so far, it seems (1), and belligerent migrant-hostile voices like Geert Wilders’ are not directly responsible for physical violence, it seems (2). Be that as it may, the Dutch government wants to make social rights dependent on ethnicity, enforces assimilation programmes upon migrants, violates human rights on a large scale and applauds detention camps, the ‘warehousing’ of refugees in border zones of war, and quota policing of illegal foreigners, as we will discuss in more detail below. Do these policies not amount to efforts to ‘clean’ a certain territory from populations that are defined in ethnic terms? Have we reached a stage in The Netherlands where the concept of ethnic cleansing has become applicable?

In this paper we introduce the notion of ‘low intensity ethnic cleansing’ (LIEC) by discussing several methods to achieve ethno-territorial homogeneity in the Netherlands and Europe at large. 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 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) we think that ethnic cleansing comes about in an incremental fashion and needs to be monitored closely at all times.

LIEC is made possible, we posit, by the grounds of exclusion and the extent to which these 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 explains the success of polemics against ‘other cultures’. We concentrate on the theoretical constructions of Stolcke (‘cultural fundamentalism’), Grillo (‘cultural anxiety’ and ‘cultural essentialism’), Schinkel (‘culturalism’ and ‘culturism’) and Vertovec (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 and their translations into policies under the aegis of mainstream governments. This combination in a single study is rare in the Dutch context. We shed light on the ascending culturism in Dutch migrant-hostile politics and examine if this can be studied as a legitimization of LIEC.

## **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 removed from contemporary immigration and integration policies in, let’s say, Western Europe. Only a few scholars do make the connection (Ahmed 1995 or Fekete 2005). However, as the academic discussion of the concept (Cordell and Wolff 2011) shows, it 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 non-violent means. Apparently, ethnic cleansing entails a sliding scale from less-violent and perhaps more subtle forms to outright violent 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](http://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 (LIC) that became operational under the 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 LIC abstains from massive bloodshed. It shares several features with LIEC (3).

First, in both cases there is homogenization under the hegemony of a political power. LIC aims at political homogeneity under imperial reign, in the Nicaraguan case of the United States over Central America, whereas LIEC aims for ethnic homogeneity under the reign of e.g. the nation state or the EU. Second, LIC involves a variety of means (political, economic, informational, military etc.) to achieve this homogenization. Similarly, in the case of LIEC, a variety of means and policies are deployed; not just blunt deployment of force. Third,

compared to outright war, LIC makes relatively few casualties. Although in the Nicaraguan case the *Contras* did kill thousands of farmers, these numbers cannot be compared to the numbers of casualties in the bombing of Vietnamese cities. LIEC does involve the massive deportation of people who are considered to disrupt the ideal of a homogeneous territory, but this does not compare to 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 *Contras* war was financed illegally 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 and integration policies show a similar tendency to derail into illegality. Fifth, LIC 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 actions are 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 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 justified. This is self-defense. In short, both LIC and LIEC 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 LIEC, developed analogous to the concept of LIC, make sense regarding current migrant-hostile policies and voices? In order to answer this question we conducted a two-layered study, focusing on both the European scene and the Dutch case. It must be pointed that – to keep this article at reasonable length – we limited our European study to a literature review. By including the work of scholars from the fields of international relations, legal studies, anthropology, sociology, and political science, we have attempted to deal with our main question on the basis of cross-disciplinarity.

Our analysis of Dutch migrant-hostile politics is more extensive in that it incorporates (1) both government policies and leading political voices; and (2) a diverse set of materials, including 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 materials. We selected and screened these materials on the basis of the concepts in which both migrants and Dutch society are framed and the legitimation and justification work that is going on in these materials.



## **Low intensity ethnic cleansing in Europe?**

Migration has become one of the priorities on 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). The EU and member states distinguish economic migrants from asylum seekers, but strive in both cases 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’ (Cornelisse 2010), 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 their use 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 brought Gibney to speak of a ‘deportation turn’. Detention camps – where undocumented or unauthorized migrants are interned and await admission or deportation – have sprouted throughout Europe and can now be found at several hundred locations (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, i.e. to exclude as many undesirable 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) in their own country, 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’ and foreclose the need for deploying force to deport migrants. In the imitation of their Dutch predecessor (which pioneered in its kind), more and more EU Member States now start to introduce integration programmes at their embassies.

Other strategies for the externalization of EU frontiers (Andrijasevic 2010; Fekete 2005; Karakayali and Rigo 2010) are classified by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in three groups. 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) (4). 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 connotations (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 (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).

The incarceration of those who are politically framed as non-citizens in detention camps does not only physically but also symbolically exclude them from mainstream society by marking them as a threat, as dangerous elements that need to be kept away from law abiding citizens (Anderson et al. 2011). There is an increased tendency to believe in the symbiosis of illegality and criminality (Bosworth 2008; De Giorgi 2010). 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) (5). 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 turn a person illegal (De Giorgi 2010). In the most recent Dutch coalition agreement it is proposed 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) goes together 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 status, are all instances that point to the creation of a *de facto* hierarchy of citizenship with migrants relegated to a subordinated and precarious position. Increasingly, rights that non-migrants can count on are becoming curbed or 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 criminalizing migrants and subduing them into a subordinated position vis-à-vis the state, these policies themselves become illegal.

Evidently, justification and legitimization work is required. 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 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 cultural difference between migrants and non-migrants to justify 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: 158, italics and emphases original) calls cultural essentialism, ‘a system of belief grounded in a conception of human beings as “cultural” [...] subjects, i.e. bearers of *a* culture, located within a bounded world, which defines them and differentiates them from others’. Cultural essentialism presents cultures as bounded, historic, and authentic entities. Culturism (Schinkel 2007) and cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995) go one step further and add the notion cultural incommensurability in a single space.

Rather than ordering them hierarchically, culturism ‘segregates them spatially, each culture in its place’, kept apart for their own good and 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 seemingly 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 culturally other migrants. 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: 245) calls a ‘commonsense structural-functionalism’ is of special importance here. It 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’. 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 a ‘foreign accent’ in the host language may incite employers to turn down promotion applications of refugee

women in The Netherlands (Ghorashi and Van Tilburg 2006). 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 suggests that the concept of LIEC makes sense in a European context. First, the objective is to (re)construct an ethnically homogeneous national or European space. Second, a variety of instruments is deployed, including deportation camps, strict assessment procedures as well as tactics to make citizenship conditional. Third, we have not found reliable figures on numbers of actual casualties, 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 violating basic principles of a liberal democracy, like equality before the law and undivided and unconditional citizenship (and this is by no means limited to the European context; look for an Australian analogy into Every and Augoustinos 2008). Finally, massive propaganda is launched to construct legitimacy for these policies based on notions of cultural essentialism and fundamentalism. Belligerent voices like those of Geert Wilders or Thilo Sarrazin immediately catch the attention, but the basic premises of cultural fundamentalism have already been installed as the ideological foundation for the legitimation of LIEC.

## **Low intensity ethnic cleansing in The Netherlands?**

### *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. Initially, the Dutch government maintained a friendly position towards new immigration, opening doors for family reunification, naturalization, and refugees (Geuijen 2004). In the early 1990s, up to 55,000 asylum seekers a year entered the country ([www.cbs.nl](http://www.cbs.nl)).

The government responded to admitted migrants (*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 institutional participation were targeted as objects of policy and public attention (Rath 1991) and government policies in the 1990s were intended to improve their 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 defined as cultural communities. This definition was predicated upon

a pillarized society (*verzuiling*), which had structured Dutch society 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, media coverage etc. 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 and 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 the notions of cultural essentialism and 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 texts and debates of that period. 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 appeared on the political scene. Anti-immigration propaganda by parties like the *Nederlandse Volkspartij*, the *Centrumpartij* and *Centrumdemocraten* 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.

### *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 an 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 among 'ordinary people' who needed to be listened to (Prins 2002). Like Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders a few years later, he claimed to speak his mind about the 'truth' and the 'facts', and considered such truth-speak 'typically Dutch'. Such essentialist claims as well as his concerns about an incompatibility of Dutch cultural traditions and those of non-

Western migrants (Ghorashi 2010) reflected not only cultural essentialism but also cultural fundamentalism as he introduced the notion of cultural incompatibility.

Such statements did not only express 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 explicit objective of reducing the number of ethnic minorities on benefit (*NRC Handelsblad*, 29 January 2012). 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 curtail 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 (i.e. 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 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 – despite being a constant issue for politicians of questioning migrants’ loyalty to the Dutch state – are renewed by the coalition agreement, which promises the introduction of a law that prohibits double nationality. Similarly, earlier LPF ideas to oblige migrants to sign a contract symbolic for their loyalty to the Dutch state were dismissed (*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 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 guard 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 is under the aegis of mainstream governments that migrant-hostility as expressed by spokespersons like Pim Fortuyn or Geert Wilders is being successfully translated into policies. For sure, extremist proclamations by Fortuyn (Islam as a ‘backward culture’, ‘the abolition of the constitutional article that bans discrimination’), Hirsi Ali (in the film *Submission*, making Islam responsible for massive violence against women), van Gogh (repeatedly calling Muslims ‘goat fuckers’), and Wilders (referring to Muslims as ‘Moroccan street scum’, calling for a taxation of ‘skull rags’, headscarves, and labeling the Koran a fascist book) have not been approved of by mainstream government officials. 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.

### *Policy development*

It was already in 1998 and 2000, when migrant-hostile politics as we know it now was still *in statu nascendi*, that respectively the Civic Integration Newcomers Act (*Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers*, WIN) 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, i.e. 600 hours of Dutch language training, civic education and preparation for the Dutch labour market (Jopke 2007). Though this continued as a state-paid service, financial penalties followed non-compliance. In



the wake of the murder of Pim Fortuyn, integration policies became more coercive and shifted attention from civic to cultural integration, i.e. applicants were come to be assessed on their appropriation of Dutch norms and values (Jopke 2007; *Ministerie van VROM* 2007b). After a revision of the Act in 2006, migrants were also obliged to pay for the courses in full. Whilst 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 compelled 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, necessary 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. 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).

Nonetheless, integration minister Rita Verdonk brushed aside all critique. All major parties, the Greens excluded, voted in favour of the act (Bonjour 2010; Groenendijk 2011). The bill was signed into law and from March 2006 onwards, specific groups of migrants need to take an admission test in their home country that assesses their knowledge of the Dutch language and customs, before applying for admission (cf. Suvarierol 2012). Political rhetoric has it that the test is meant to facilitate the integration of new migrants, but the WIB is highly selective since people from EU and EEA States, as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea and the United States are exempted (Groenendijk 2011). HRW (2008), in its report ‘The Netherlands: Discrimination in the Name of Integration’, has denounced the Dutch government for systematically violating human rights with the enactment of WIB.

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). Ignoring such denouncements, the Dutch government has made the examination stiffer 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 government will optimally use its juridical leeway to make 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](http://www.cbs.nl)) and less than half of the applications are eventually granted after procedures of many years. Any drop in asylum applications is welcomed by the minister in charge. International institutions like HRW (*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 will be proactively tracked by the Alien Police and expelled, regardless of criminal offense. 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 motivate expulsion of the alien poor and reflect the ongoing shift of a human rights perspective to stressing the need to keep out 'fortune hunters' (Geuijen 2004). 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 embassies, only provide information on an aggregated level, not on whether a particular asylum seeker's life is in danger or not. This procedure tolerates

arbitrariness in decisions about asylum applications. Even more, those facing failed application can often not be ‘returned to sender’ (Broeders 2010) because that ‘sender’ often refuses re-entrance. As a result, people are pushed into illegality and if they subsequently are caught by the police, they run the risk of being detained in prisons where their health is protractedly undermined (*Zembla* 20 January 2012).

## **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](http://www.pvv.nl)) essentially corresponds to 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 leaving them two options: assimilate or leave. 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 aligns with the first criterion of LIEC discussed above.

We can readily see that the second criterion, i.e. the deployment of a variety of policies and instruments, is met too. The actual use of force is only a minor component although it is on the rise, as the Dutch police is instructed to arrest a certain quota of ‘illegal aliens’ and to imprison them until their final expulsion. This can *de facto* mean life-long imprisonment (interrupted by short periods ‘on the streets’), since return is often impossible (e.g. De Genova and Peutz 2010).

Nevertheless, genocidal proportions have clearly not been reached, so the third criterion of LIEC is also met. The same holds true for the fourth one: derailment into illegality. Both Dutch assimilation and immigration policies have been denounced for systematically violating human rights by almost all important international human rights agencies and courts. 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 undivided citizenship. 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 space.

We posit that present-day cultural fundamentalism builds upon the cultural essentialism in multiculturalism of the 1980s/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’ (stressing notions of hierarchy and superiority), 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 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, (acceptation of) crossovers become(s) *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 for those who legally stay on Dutch territory, or contributes to a territorial lockout 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 LIEC and apply it to current migration and assimilation policies and debates in The Netherlands as part of a more general pattern in Europe. 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 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 LIC and LIEC suggests a main divergence. LIC assumes a rather centralized command structure stemming from places like the oval office or the Pentagon, whereas LIEC 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 imperative to understand in more detail the commonalities and differences between LIC and LIEC.

## Notes

- (1) We cannot be absolutely sure, 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.
- (3) 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](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/100-20/10020ch1.htm#s_9)
- (4) Denmark, Sweden, Norway, The Netherlands and the UK have for instance concluded such agreements with Iraq (cf. Fekete 2011).
- (5) *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).

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