Dynamics of power in Dutch integration politics

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Summary

Movements for cultural protectionism have proliferated in recent years throughout Europe and many other parts of the world. The Netherlands is often considered an exemplary case of a country where multiculturalism has been abandoned in favor of policies that demand and enforce integration. Parties on the left reluctantly accede that immigration causes problems, while right-wing parties adamantly argue that liberal democracies have been too soft, too accommodating, too understanding. I refer to these notions as *Culturalism*, a discourse organized around the idea that the world is divided into cultures and that our (enlightened, liberal, Dutch) culture should be defended against the claims of minorities committed to illiberal religions and ideologies. This dissertation examines the growing power of culturalist discourse in public debates and its effects on the governance of minority integration. The dissertation's central question is: *How and why did power relations transform in Dutch integration politics between 1980 and 2006*? The study first elaborates, in Part I, an approach for analyzing dynamic power relations. The main question is then divided into two parts. Part II focuses on the integration *debate*. Part III investigates the *governance* of integration. Part IV draws together the main findings, answers the research question and explores the study's relevance beyond Dutch integration politics.

Part I: Theoretical framework and research question

Part I discusses previous research on integration politics and introduces the research question. Below the trivial observation that culturalist discourse has grown stronger, *Chapter 1* argues, lurk a number of intriguing methodological and theoretical issues. What is integration politics? What is a discourse? What do we mean by power? And how to explain dynamics of power? *Chapter 2* tackles these questions. It presents a framework for analyzing and explaining transformations within power relations. Drawing on a number of sources – including Bourdieu's field analysis, Alexander's analysis of the civil sphere, Elias' figurational sociology, discourse analysis and network analysis – I develop a relational approach to study integration politics. I view integration politics as a series of struggles within the civil sphere. The stake in these struggles is civil power: the power to define who belongs to the civil community and what its problems are. The approach investigates where particular discourses garner support or encounter opposition. While this research strategy does not

preclude the possibility that one or another discourse will be identified as "dominant," it does invite us to detail when, where, how, to what extent, and to what effect discourses are powerful. The approach is designed to detect power differentials but to simultaneously alert us to the ambivalence and limitations of domination.

Part II: Dynamics of power in the public debate

Part II addresses power relations in the public debate on integration. It focuses in particular on opinion articles published in the broadsheet newspapers *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Volkskrant* and *Trouw*. *Chapter 3* presents the methods used to investigate power within the debate, including discourse analysis, correspondence analysis, network analysis and in-depth interviews. The chapter recasts familiar concepts in political science and political sociology – polarization, leadership, cooperation, power – in relational terms. *Chapter 4* traces the evolution of the Dutch civil sphere. It argues that the contradictions within the minority policy (conceived in 1979 and implemented in 1983) created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a radical alternative to the pragmatic politics that had characterized integration politics up to 1990.

 Chapter 5 analyses the emergence of Culturalism. Culturalism cannot be understood as a "Dutch discourse." The promoters of Culturalism, in fact, sought to redefine the Netherlands and transform its political culture. The chapter shows that Culturalism is a discourse of ascendant elites who challenged the pragmatic political culture and its dignitaries. *Chapter 6* analyses the responses to the rise of Culturalism. The chapter shows that some discourses – notably Anti-racism – were marginalized in the course of time. However, other discourses did not have a zero sum relation to Culturalism. Supporters of Pragmatism – a discourse which emphasizes that differences are real and consequential yet can be overcome with reasonableness and through dialogue – lost some terrain in the debate but consolidated their power in policy circles. Supporters of Civil Islam – a discourse which emphasizes that a commitment to Islam allows or even demands civil loyalty – actually won in power.

 While emphasizing that discursive struggles are not zero-sum games, *Part II* identifies three causes of the growing power of Culturalism. First, culturalists' style – particularly the repertoire of breaking taboos – was increasingly valued as integration politics mediatized; their emotive and hard-hitting discourse easily found its way into the central settings of the civil sphere and achieved much higher resonance than the discourse of their opponents.

Second, the range of actors supporting Culturalism widened (a widening that appears more significant than the considerable growth in the number of actors promoting the discourse). Third, and perhaps most remarkable, culturalists cooperated with one another and rallied around their leaders, such as Paul Scheffer and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. The opponents of Culturalism were numerous but they provided neither mutual support nor rallied around leaders.

Part III: Dynamics of power in local governance

Part III addresses power relations in the *governance* of integration. While Part II charts changes in discursive power relations in the national debate, Part III examines how these changes were translated into local strategies for managing minority integration, focusing in particular on the relations between governments and minority associations in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. *Chapter 7* presents the methods for investigating power within governance relations, including in-depth interviews and the analysis of subsidy relations. *Chapters 8-10* investigate the various shifts in Amsterdam's governance figurations. Notwithstanding these shifts, there was also continuity: the Amsterdam government always tried to shape power relations within civil society. Between 1980 and 1995, it supported radical left-wing associations in order to marginalize conservative associations. Between 1995 and 2001, it sponsored managerial discourses and consultant companies in order to marginalize radical left-wing associations. After the attacks of 9/11 and the assassination of Theo van Gogh, the government invested in associations and individuals promoting liberal Islam in the hope of marginalizing radical Islamic discourse. In each of these periods, the privileged partners of the government had no incentive to establish constructive relations with other minority associations or to create large constituencies because their positions depended on support from the government, not from minority communities.

    Chapter 11 shows that relations between the government and minority associations in Rotterdam were much more stable than in Amsterdam, in spite of the fact that an outspokenly culturalist government took office in 2002. The cause for the greater stability is that Rotterdam provided structural (rather than periodic or project) subsidies, which meant that state support did not depend on the extent to which associations adopt the government's ideas. In contrast to Amsterdam, associations received professional support to sustain their organizations, not only for activities that address policy priorities. Whereas selective support of ascendant civil actors reinforced inequality in Amsterdam's civil society, general support of all civil actors created a relatively egalitarian figuration in Rotterdam.

The cases of Amsterdam and Rotterdam were initially selected because their governments supported very different discourses between 2002 and 2006 (Rotterdam: culturalist, Amsterdam: pragmatist) but the inherited governance institutions proved at least as important as government discourse in shaping the relations between minority associations and the state. *Chapter 12* investigates whether the differences in the relationship between the state and civil society also affect the quality of civil society according to a number of predefined criteria. The answer is affirmative: minorities in Rotterdam show higher levels of civil and political engagement, minority associations have a greater capacity for collective action and Islamic extremism seems less strong.

Part IV: Conclusion

Chapter 13, the only chapter of Part IV and the concluding chapter of the dissertation, sums up the main findings and explores their relevance beyond the case of Dutch integration politics. The chapter argues that the findings in Part II may signal a more universal figurational dynamic of discursive transformation. While it has previously been assumed (notably due Elias and Scotson's classic study on *The Established and the Outsiders*) that the established have stronger ties and leaders than the outsiders, my study hints that a different figuration emerges during transformational episodes. This figuration has the same network properties as Elias' established-outsider figuration but with an important difference: the interactions among the established (in this case, ministers, policy researchers and other guardians of the policy field) form a network pattern that Elias associates with outsiders (sparse networks). The challengers, in contrast, exhibit a network pattern that Elias associates with the established (dense networks). We can refer to this variation of the established-outsider figuration as the challenger-established figuration. I hypothesize that this figuration is not unique to Dutch integration politics and will also be found in other cases of cultural or political transformation – future research needs to assess whether this is indeed so. Chapter 13 documents why and how culturalist challengers transformed from a marginal current into a full-blown and very powerful discursive movement. However, it also warns against the temptation to assume that Culturalism has become all powerful. Culturalism has countered considerable opposition in the national debate. Moreover, in cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam, inherited institutions buffer and mediate the impact of Culturalism and new associational networks foster alternative understandings of integration. The case of Rotterdam shows that the power of Culturalism was limited and ambivalent even during the reign of an

outspokenly culturalist government. Culturalism obviously has grown stronger in the Netherlands but the dissertation tried to move beyond this trivial observation by examining the causes, the nature and the limits of its power.