Fifteen years later

On 12 September 1991 the Volkskrant published an article I had written about policy on minorities. My article considered three propositions. Firstly, the objective of ‘integration while retaining one’s identity’ doesn’t work because one is at odds with the other. Secondly, Dutch society has a number of fundamental principles which may not be compromised. ‘Not even just a little.’ As examples of these principles I referred to the separation of Church and State, freedom of expression, tolerance and non-discrimination. Thirdly, a civilization which holds fast to these principles is at a higher level than a civilisation which does not. A rejection, therefore, of cultural relativism, about which I will say more later.

The article concluded as follows: ‘A major debate is needed in which all political parties take part, on what is allowed and what is possible, what must be and what otherwise may threaten.’ That debate did indeed arise. At the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Affairs, a summary has been made that refers to 88 articles. Most by far were critical. The SCP outlined the discussion as follows: ‘A storm of protest followed. Bolkestein was accused of gross generalisations, rabble-rousing and electioneering’ (1).

The chief editor of this newspaper asked for my opinion about what had happened during these intervening fifteen years. That is what the rest of this article is about. And that’s quite a lot. We can distinguish the growth in numbers of non-Western ethnic minority immigrants, their integration, the nature of the debate I called for, the murder of Theo van Gogh, the actions of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the war against Iraq and the Muslim
terrorism. An ocean of literature has been published on all this. What follows does not pretend to be an analysis or summary of it, but merely an attempt to highlight a number of important aspects.

Integration map

The number of people from non-Western ethnic minorities who lived in the Netherlands in 1990 was 866,000, or 5.8% of the population. In 2006 this had almost doubled to 1.7 million, or 10.5%. An Integration Map was published last year about their integration into Dutch society. It is a sobering document. (2) It concludes as follows: ‘the differences in performance between native Dutch and ethnic minority pupils are as great as ever. The number of people on benefits is very high among most immigrant groups. As far as crime is concerned, the second generation of ethnic minorities are certainly doing no better than their parents. The majority of this second generation seeks a partner in the country of origin. Dutch culture is often not perceived as suitable, or is even threatening to their own identity.’ In short, the integration of non-Western ethnic minorities is simply not getting anywhere. The problem also remains unsolved because of the many imported brides, whose knowledge of the Netherlands and the Dutch language is negligible so that integration has to start all over again.

There are also two complicating factors. The first is caused by incidents that often attract a great deal of attention. In the Amsterdam Diamond district a couple is harassed out of their home by Moroccan youth. In the Miranda swimming pool a Moroccan lad fell unconscious. A woman doctor who happened to be there and some other helpers were beleaguered by friends of the boy (3). In Amsterdam-Slotervaart, street cleaners are harassed. ‘They simply don’t come anywhere near schools
any more during break times’ (4). Not all particularly serious, perhaps, but they ruin the atmosphere and confirm the bad reputation of young Moroccans.

More serious, because of its structural nature, is the matter of Muslim schools. Fenny Brinkman has written a book about this, entitled ‘Haram’ (5). Haram is what is forbidden under sharia law. The subtitle of the book is: ‘Daily life at a Muslim school.’ That life is not easy. No nursery rhymes or Sinterklaas, nor even a self-made flower. The girls have to have swimming lessons separately from the boys, in large tent dresses. Senior boys may not be treated by a woman dentist. ‘The eyes of animals in illustrations have been cut away because it is haram to see eyes.’ The atmosphere this gives rise to is one of a stuffy backwardness, a fossilised orthodoxy. Brinkman, who began from a feeling of idealism, could not cope with it. No wonder that children who are brought up in such a school go on to misbehave in a swimming pool.

Indeed, there is a Protestant school in Amersfoort where a pupil was excluded because he is allowed to watch television at home and his sister sometimes wears trousers. But everyone had an opinion on that whereas no-one gets worked up about such a Muslim school. Well, the school inspectors do, but how often does an inspector visit such a school and how long does he stay? Does he know what is being said behind his back about the Jews, the holocaust, homosexuals and evolution? And so we have the blessing of the multicultural society: each in his own ethnic corner, and each with his own orthodoxy. We used to call this ‘compartmentalization’.
Muslim schools

The existence of Muslim schools is based on Article 23 of the Constitution, which permits religions to have their own schools. This article was negotiated by Catholics and Protestants in exchange for votes for women’s suffrage. For the CDA party, it is a shibboleth. But what does it still really mean today? In the past, students at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam had to sign a profession of faith. Now everyone is welcome, and there is even a course for imams. Very ecumenical, but also evidence of the lifelessness of Christianity in our part of the world. No, segregated schools are the forerunners of a segregated society. Article 23 of the Constitution is an obstacle to integration and must be amended.

In 1996 the Government felt ‘that the debate about multiculturalism must be conducted based on the principle that cultures are of equal merit’ (6). The NRC-Handelsblad too, in a leading article, stated: ‘The pride of the Netherlands is precisely that we do not find one culture better than the other’ (7). These are ridiculous assertions. To start with, they are unhistorical. Was the Gallic culture equal to that of the Romans? The Roman culture equal to that of the Greeks? They themselves did not think so (8).

Don’t we believe that the culture of the Northern states of the USA before the Civil War was better than the one of the slave-owning Southern states? Is post-apartheid South Africa not better than that of the apartheid regime? Do we believe that the culture of the Taliban really is equal to that of the other Afghans?
Lack of self-confidence

We may rightly ask ourselves what the seedbed is from which these statements arose. I believe that they originate from a lack of self-confidence in Western European culture. The European Commission suffers from a severe degree of political correctness. The EU is currently working on a politically correct dictionary in which the words Islam, jihad and terrorism do not appear. Quite rightly the Lower House held a debate on this in February 2006.

In December 2005 the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Austerlitz was celebrated; one of Napoleon’s greatest triumphs. The French government, always rather keen on commemorating the great Emperor, stayed away because an action committee from its overseas territories had decided that Napoleon was in the wrong. In fact, he had restored slavery in 1802, which eight years earlier had been abolished during the Revolution (9).

In the Jubelpark in Brussels there is a monument against the ‘European and Arab Slave Drivers’. Unknown individuals have removed the word ‘Arab’ (see photo). That word would divert attention away from Western guilt.

It is striking that in the United States immigrants embrace their new national identity wholeheartedly. A solemn naturalisation ceremony is held in the presence of the local congressman. The flag is in the corner, the national anthem is sung and the candidates swear allegiance to the Constitution. None of that in the Netherlands. Until recently naturalisation simply involved a rap of the chairman’s gavel in the Lower House. Now, from 1 January 2007, we too will have a naturalisation
ceremony. But the philosopher Dick Pels believes: ‘As the ceremony is currently presented, it is nationalistic’ (10). No wonder that the Dutch identity is regarded as wishy-washy, whereas the American identity is inescapable and overwhelming.

The Socialist Party in Brussels refuses to call the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 genocide, for fear of losing the Turkish vote. (11) At the end of February this year, Minister Van Ardenne published an article in the Yemen Times in which she considered the Danish cartoon crisis in the light of the contrast between religious and secular culture, rather than a matter of freedom of expression. Theology professor Pieter van der Horst, in his valedictory lecture in Utrecht, was not allowed to say what he wanted for fear of threatening reactions from Muslims. (17) What does this say about our self-confidence?

‘People must have respect for other people’s culture.’ But what does that word ‘respect’ mean? For a culture where honour killings are condoned, women are rated inferior to men and girls are removed from school when they reach puberty? Voltaire said: ‘I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it’. That is respect. Whoever demands respect must also give it. Calling girls in bikinis ‘whores’ and saying ‘Jews should be killed’: is that showing respect?

**Multicultural**

In his brochure ‘The multicultural illusion’ from 2000, the Director of the SCP Paul Schnabel has clearly turned his back on a multicultural Netherlands. ‘In the Netherlands, the chances of achieving a multicultural society in the sense of a general mixing of cultures must be regarded as extremely slim.’ His brochure was ‘a plea against the hope for a
multicultural society as an expression of equal opportunities of other cultures to be able to determine our culture too.’

Schnabel is right, and his ideas are beginning to take hold, even in Canada where it was proposed (in Ontario) giving official recognition to sharia and therefore declaring it applicable to those Muslims who chose for it. Fortunately that disastrous proposal was withdrawn.

Statements such as those by Schnabel and articles such as those by Paul Scheffer (also from 2000) indicate that the tone of the debate has changed considerably since September 1991. No longer does the cartel of experts decide what opinions are permissible. Actual developments, especially in Rotterdam, have contributed to this. The discussion is now much more businesslike, which of course does not mean that the problems have been solved. But a realistic discussion is indeed the start of a solution.

In December 2005, Wouter Bos argued for ‘great caution in admitting those who, because of a too disadvantaged position, will not have any chance of success in Dutch society’ (12). His predecessor Jacques Wallage would never have been allowed to say such a thing ten years ago.

Wouter Bos also argued for ‘an active defence of values we hold dear’ (13). These values originate from the Enlightenment, the core of which is expressed in the words of Kant: ‘Dare to think’, i.e. don’t accept anything purely on the authority of another.
Enlightenment

There is something strange going on with this Enlightenment, because recently the term ‘Enlightened fundamentalism’ has emerged. This word is of course internally contradictory, because it is impossible for a follower of the Enlightenment to be a fundamentalist, who precisely accepts things on the authority of another. For example, the British professor John Gray believes that all modern wrongdoings are a product of the Enlightenment: not only communism, and with it the Gulag, but also national socialism. One would think that if there is one person who turned his back on the Enlightenment it is Hitler. But Professor Gray perceives in communism and national socialism attempts above all to transform society into a blueprint, into an Intelligent Design, one could almost say. Well, it cannot be denied that some individuals during the French Revolution had ideas along those lines. But to reduce the Enlightenment to Saint Just and Babeuf is grotesque. The thousand-year Reich as the ultimate consequence of Voltaire? Ridiculous.

What does our Minister of Justice, Piet Hein Donner, mean, when he says ‘The Enlightenment, the concept that there is no more than what you see or understand with your power of reason, is also a belief’ (14). So, according to him Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and the Enlightenment are all the same thing, all four of them a belief. While in fact the Enlightenment precisely wants to subject each belief to critical examination, and therefore precedes such a belief.

Islam used to be an enlightened religion, during the powerful Abbasid and Umayyad caliphates, more enlightened than we were at that time. In a comparison between Baghdad and Aachen in the year 800 AD, Aachen certainly does not come off very well even though it was the capital of
Charlemagne. It is undoubtedly true that the Arab culture in those glory years was a source of scientific knowledge and tolerance. Moses Maimonides was able to pursue his work undisturbed in Cordoba. After the *reconquista* all the Jews were converted or exiled.

After the death of the philosopher Averroes in 1198, this magnificent culture collapsed, for reasons that are not entirely clear to me. Was it because of the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1256? The shift in the trading routes? Or the prohibition of *ijtihad*? This is a meeting of the faithful with theologians who debate a point of doctrine, after which the faithful vote on who is right. A splendid example of Kant’s statement ‘dare to think’ and of reason which Minister Donner does not really like. The abolition of the *ijtihad* has led to the development of an inflexibility in official Islam which persists to this day.

One must make a distinction between Islam and Islamic culture. The fact that in Islamic culture women are considered inferior to men is clear. Whoever denies this has his eyes very firmly shut. Why is it that women’s refuge centres are full of Muslim women?

*Ayaan Hirsi Ali*

It is this inferiority that Ayaan Hirsi Ali opposes, and she is right. Her film ‘*Submission*’ pillories the injustice that is done to some Muslim women by invoking the Koran. She rejects forced marriage because she herself was a victim of it. She wants the emancipation of Muslim women. The fact that this goes hand in hand with much gnashing and protest is normal. The same could be heard during the battle for women suffrage, when the suffragettes chained themselves to the railings of Parliament in
London. Then too, the protest against this hubbub was largely from women who had internalised this inferiority.

Critics accuse Ayaan – and her colleagues Paul Cliteur and Afshin Ellian – of a ‘universalist missionary zeal’ because they identify points where traditional Islam is in conflict with fundamental Western values. They are known as ‘enlightened fundamentalists’. Consequently they are accused of an ‘intellectual jihad against Islam’. Historian Han van der Horst writes that ‘Ayaan and her friends are the spiritual descendants of Robespierre’ (14). Geert Mak has the nerve to compare the film ‘Submission’ to ‘Der Ewige Jude’ by Joseph Goebbels. Why do these people not get worked up rather about the fact that an elected representative needs police protection, which is a gross scandal?

The striking thing is that many of these critics are to the left of the political spectrum. They are people who as far as the Netherlands is concerned have always criticised clergymen and pastors; who have been ardent supporters of feminism; but when it is about Islamic culture they then accuse critics of an ‘aggressive universalism’. The only conclusion can be that, in their eyes, the dogma of multiculturalism takes precedence over the emancipation of women. They are critical at home, but conformist abroad. In other words: the mote in their own eye is more important than the beam in the eye of the other.

Has Ayaan insulted Islam? How do we know what is insulting? Were Luther’s 95 theses an insult to Catholicism? Was Molière’s ‘Tartuffe’ also? When Darwin carried out his research into evolution, many believed that to be an insult to Christianity.
Is my view that official Islam is withered an insult? We have had five hundred years of criticism of the Bible. Why cannot there be any criticism of the Koran? In the time of the *ijtihad* that was indeed allowed.

**Terrorism**

The murder of Theo van Gogh is a miniature of the attacks on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001 and those in London and Madrid. Muslim terrorism can only be defeated with the help of the Muslims themselves. That is why the American war against Iraq is so unbelievably stupid. It is incomprehensible that the government has let itself be dragged into it, led by Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, now the Secretary-General of NATO.

Bringing democracy to Iraq with the aid of tanks? Only intellectuals could have thought up such a thing. It is typical that none of the American neo-Conservatives has ever had to go through an election campaign. During the Vietnam war that also was true of ‘The Best and the Brightest’.

What is the cause of this terrorism? According to some, it is the Palestinian question. That is certainly a complicating factor. But even if this were to be solved, terrorism would remain. It is in fact targeted towards the West, not because of what it does but because of what it is.

Christianity began as a religion of the proletariat, Islam as the religion of conquerors. In a short time it had conquered a large part of the world, even as far as Poitiers. At that time the countries of Islam were cultivated, rich and powerful. That is no longer the case. Why? Either because the present rulers have deserted the path of pure belief, or because it has been purloined by the West.
That is the reason for the victim culture in the Middle East, where terrorist anger is the flip side. This anger will not be readily assuaged because it will take a long time before the Islamic world catches up.

The Arab Human Development Report of the Egyptian sociologist Nader Fergany is clear. Muslim backwardness is due to three faults: a lack of freedom, knowledge and female power. In the thousand years since Caliph Mamoun, the Arab world has translated as many books as Spain has in a year. No wonder that many, particularly young people try to leave: “Yankee go home but please take me with you.”

The future

Defeating Islam and a finding a way to live together with the Muslim minority are two different problems, although they do overlap. These problems will be with us for a long time. Every two years the CBS draws up a forecast of the population composition in the year 2050. In December 2002 the CBS estimated that the number of non-Western ethnic minorities in the Netherlands would be 3.5 million; two years later the estimate was 2.7 million, or 17% of the population. This considerable difference is explained by the reduced immigration as a result of Minister Verdonk’s policy. A major population group nevertheless, which will certainly exercise political influence.

The population of Europe is shrinking and ageing. That of Africa is growing and becoming younger. According to the UN, the population of West and North Africa will grow between 2000 and 2050 from 400 to 876 million. (15) This year, already 9000 illegal African immigrants have landed on the Canary Islands: more than double the number in 2005 as a
whole. The EU now wants a ‘rapid reaction team’ to deal with this immigration. (16) It is child’s play compared to what is to come.

Frits Bolkestein, August 2006.
Notes


(3) HP/De Tijd, 30-6-2006.

(4) Maria Goos in the Volkskrant Magazine of 1-7-2006.

(5) Uitgeverij Balans, 2005.

(6) SCP 1998 page 266.


(8) Graecia capta Roman victorem cepit.

(9) NRC-Handelsblad 1-12-2005.

(10) ‘Met vlag en volkslied’ (With flag and national anthem), Volkskrant 21/22-1-2006


(12) Wouter Bos: ‘Dit land kan zoveel beter’ (This country can do so much better) (Bert Bakker), pages 144/145.

(13) Wouter Bos: quoted from page 145

(14) Volkskrant, 8-9-2005.

(15) UN ‘The World’s population prospects’ (2002 Rev)

(16) FT, 20-7-2006.

(17) Volkskrant, 1-7-2006; HP/De Tijd, 30-6-2006