

# **The Global Financial Crisis and Public Sentiment towards Immigration and Immigrants in the Netherlands: Implications for Liberal Democracy and Political Culture**

Emma Chippendale

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Supervisor: Prof Pierre du Toit

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## **Declaration**

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## Abstract

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 ushered in a new era of globalisation and with it, intensified levels of global migration. The movement of people across increasingly fluid and penetrable boundaries has altered the demographic profile of European states and this cultural diversity has confronted contemporary Western liberal democracies with a unique set of challenges concerning the integration of diverse groups into society for the purpose of fostering cohesion and domestic stability. The effects of cultural diversity are not limited to demographics however, and this thesis focuses predominantly on the political and public responses that this phenomenon has evoked. The context of the Netherlands provides a particularly enlightening example of the way in which attempts to manage cultural diversity have stimulated intensive debate on immigration and integration topics, which have subsequently become firmly ensconced within public and political discourse. This ongoing debate in the Dutch context has brought to the fore wider questions pertaining to citizenship, national identity and culture. More importantly, these issues have exposed the limits of Dutch tolerance: increasingly restrictionist immigration and integration policy over the last two decades, and in the last 10 years in particular, has appeared incongruous with stereotypical perceptions of the Netherlands as an ultra-liberal and progressive paragon of multiculturalism.

This thesis therefore seeks to rework this image of the Netherlands by observing possible shifts in public attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in the context of considerably less favourable material circumstances, occasioned by the current global financial crisis. Attitudes towards Muslims in Dutch society are of particular interest to this research given the particular cultural and symbolic threat that Islam is considered to pose to liberal values. Realistic Group Conflict Theory provides a useful framework for analysing inter-group competition and conflict stemming from both material and non-material perceptions of threat. Whilst particular focus is accorded to the specific macro-economic conditions of the ongoing financial crisis for observing potentially shifting sentiments, this discussion is situated within a larger national debate about immigration and integration spanning two decades. Linking public perception data to analyses of Dutch integration and immigration policy, patterns of voting behaviour and the real effects of the financial crisis on the Dutch economy, the ultimate intention of this research, then, is to assess the prospects and overall “health” of liberal democracy in the Netherlands. The country’s experiences in attempting to deal with cultural pluralism reveal that liberal democratic norms have not simply been entrenched as “givens” and they are subject to contestation and ambiguity. It is in attempts to address difference and “otherness” in society that the shortfalls of Dutch liberal democracy have been laid bare.

## Opsomming

Met die val van die Berlynse Muur in 1989 het 'n nuwe tydperk van globalisasie aangebreek en daarmee saam, verskerpte vlakke van globale migrasie. Die beweging van mense oor meer toeganklike grense het die demografiese profiel van Europese state verander. Hierdie kulturele diversiteit het huidige Westerse liberale demokrasieë met 'n unieke stel uitdagings gekonfronteer, aangaande die integrasie van diverse groepe in die samelewing met die doel om saamhorigheid te bevorder. Die effek van kulturele diversiteit is egter nie beperk tot demografie nie en hierdie tesis fokus hoofsaaklik op die politieke en openbare reaksies wat die verskynsel uitgelok het. Die Nederlandse konteks verskaf 'n besondere insiggewende voorbeeld van die manier waarop pogings om kulturele diversiteit te hanteer, intensiewe debat oor immigrasie- en integrasie-onderwerpe gestimuleer het, wat sedertdien stewig in die openbare en politieke diskoers verskans is. Die voortdurende debat in die Nederlandse verband het wyer vrae aangaande burgerskap, nasionale identiteit en kultuur laat ontstaan. Selfs van groter belang is die feit dat hierdie vraagstukke die perke van Nederlandse verdraagsaamheid ontbloot het: toenemende inperkings op immigrasie- en integrasie-beleid oor die afgelope twee dekades en veral in die laaste 10 jaar, het teenstrydig voorgekom met die stereotipiese indruk van Nederland as 'n ultra-liberale en progressiewe toonbeeld van multi-kulturalisme.

Hierdie tesis be-oog derhalwe om hierdie beeld van Nederland te ondersoek deur moontlike veranderings in openbare houdings teenoor immigrante en immigrasie waar te neem, teen die agtergrond van aansienlik minder gunstige materiële omstandighede, veroorsaak deur die huidige globale finansiële krisis. Houdings teenoor Moslems in die Nederlandse samelewing is van besondere belang in hierdie ondersoek teen die agtergrond van die beweerde kulturele en simboliese bedreiging wat Islam vir liberale waardes inhou. Realistiese Groep-Konflikteorie voorsien 'n nuttige raamwerk om inter-groep wedywering en konflik, wat spruit uit beide materiële en nie-materiële perspesies van bedreiging, te analiseer. Alhoewel besondere aandag geskenk word aan die spesifieke makro-ekonomiese omstandighede van die huidige finansiële krisis om moontlike veranderings in houdings waar te neem, is hierdie bespreking deel van 'n groter nasionale debat oor immigrasie en integrasie oor die afgelope twee dekades. Deur inligting oor openbare persepsie te verbind met die Nederlandse integrasie-en immigrasie-beleid, stempatrone en die ware uitwerkings van die finansiële krisis op die Nederlandse kultuur, is die uiteindelijke doel van hierdie navorsing om die vooruitsigte en algehele "gesondheid" van liberale demokrasie in Nederland te evalueer. Die land se ervaring van kulturele pluralisme bewys dat liberale demokratiese norme nie verskans is nie en dat hulle onderhewig is aan omstredenheid en dubbelsinnigheid. Die pogings om verskille en

“andersheid” in die samelewing aan te spreek, het die tekortkominge van die Nederlandse liberale demokrasie ontbloot.

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## List of Abbreviations

CBS	<i>Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek</i> (Central Bureau of Statistics)
CD	<i>Centrum Democraten</i> (Centre Democrats)
CDA	<i>Christen-Democratisch Appèl</i> (Christian Democratic Appeal)
CPB	<i>Centraal Plan Bureau</i> (Central Planning Bureau)
CU	<i>ChristenUnie</i> (Christian Union)
D66	<i>Democraten 66</i> (Democrats 66)
Dutchbat	Dutch battalion
EC	European Commission
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
EU27	27 Member states of the European Union
FPÖ	<i>Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs</i> (Freedom Party of Austria)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HICP	Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices
LPF	<i>Lijst Pim Fortuyn</i> (Pim Fortuyn List)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PvdA	<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i> (Labour Party)
PvdD	<i>Partij voor de Dieren</i> (Party for the Animals)
PVV	<i>Partij voor de Vrijheid</i> (Freedom Party)
SP	<i>Socialistische Partij</i> (Socialist Party)
SVP	<i>Schweizerische Volkspartei</i> (Swiss People's Party)
TTI	Transatlantic Trends: Immigration
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VVD	<i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i> (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy)
WRR	<i>Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid</i> (Scientific Council for Government Policy)
WWII	World War Two
9/11	September 2001

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC**

### **1.1.1 Liberal Democracy and the Global Financial Crisis in the Netherlands**

In the wake of communism's demise and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Francis Fukuyama's claim that liberal democracy had ultimately emerged victorious in the battle for ideological dominance was a widely endorsed one. His "End of History" (1989) argument claimed that fundamental ideological debate had ended with growing conformity around the world, particularly in Western Europe and the United States (US), to the set of ideas espoused by Western liberalism (Heywood, 2007: 335). Forward twenty years since the publication of his essay to the present, it is evident that the core values at the heart of liberal democratic ideology have not simply been accepted and entrenched as givens; instead, they are constantly subject to contestation. The subsequent emergence of new ideological forces, such as political Islam, has provided challenges to Fukuyama's conceptualisation of the "good society" and the supposedly "universal" values that underlie it (Heywood, 2007: 336). Liberal democracy's new ideological confrontations have stimulated critical examination of the foundational principles of liberalism in numerous ways and these processes of redefinition and re-evaluation are indicative of the dynamism and flexibility necessary for political ideologies to maintain relevance to ever-changing contemporary contexts and challenges. Liberal democracy's resilience and development as a political system in Western Europe and the US during the twentieth century, and farther afield in the post-Cold War era, is testimony to the ability of this particular set of ideas to adapt and progress. Disillusionment among both developing and developed parts of the world with the social injustices associated with capitalist market ideology, a core feature of liberal democratic regimes, has fanned the flames of future, lively ideological debate (Heywood, 2007: 337). One important example of the way in which these norms have been subject to critical reflection in contemporary European liberal democracies is in responses towards minority out-groups in contexts of greater cultural diversity.

### **1.1.2 Research Problem**

In the last decade especially, events such as the September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks on American soil, the War on Terror, the murder of Theo van Gogh and the rise and assassination of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, have focussed increasing attention on immigration and integration issues in the Netherlands and in Western Europe (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 295). Perhaps more significantly, these developments have had a profound influence on the tone of debate and the way in which these issues have been perceived by the Dutch public and framed in media and political arenas. Whilst much of the

literature on immigration in Europe has accorded focus to policy implications, there is a need for greater appreciation of public perceptions towards immigrants, which have potential implications far beyond the policy arena. As the Netherlands is among the most vocal countries in Europe concerning the sticky questions of contemporary immigration and cultural integration, an analysis of public attitudes in this country makes for a particularly intriguing discussion.

Immigration is an issue of particular contemporary salience and consequence not only for the Netherlands, one of the pioneers of multiculturalism in Western Europe, but also for the European Union (EU) and indeed globally. The significance of this phenomenon is demonstrated by the view that “few issues have had a greater impact on the politics and society of contemporary Western Europe than immigration” (Hollifield in McLaren, 2003: 910). Immigration and questions of minorities’ cultural integration into host societies have increasingly emerged as issues worthy of academic scholarship and are topics that have been much debated, to heated effect. Immigration issues in the Netherlands have increasingly been addressed by mainstream parties in response to the heightened prevalence of this topic in the media and in public and political discourse, and these concerns can therefore no longer be seen as the exclusive purview of the right-wing. The pertinence of this discussion derives from the fact that the Netherlands has traditionally been portrayed as a country synonymous with Enlightenment liberal ideas such as tolerance of individuality and equality. The way in which these almost taken-for-granted and oft-touted “Dutch values” are critically examined in the midst of intensified reflection upon traditional integration strategies, reflects the fact that core liberal democratic ideas are open to constant deliberation and redefinition. In the context of a more visible Islamic presence in Europe, perceptions are rife that these core values may be under threat.

Present-day Europe faces important demographic challenges in terms of rapidly ageing populations and declining fertility rates – the lowest in the world – and migration is now positioned as the principle source of European population growth. Van Nimwegen and van der Erf (2010: 1376) express the likelihood that competition for highly skilled migrants in Europe and globally will increase in response to the twin challenges of ageing populations and labour market shortages. It is predicted that from 2015, the European Union (EU) will be confronted with the reality of a natural population decline; from 2035, overall population decline (van Nimwegen and van der Erf, 2010: 1362). Furthermore, the changing face of the European demographic has broader economic and social implications and managing migration and integration is an ever-greater priority for EU states. It has been suggested that social relations between traditional nationals and immigrants in Europe today present challenges comparable to those that have confronted the United States for the greater part of its history involving relations between whites and

African Americans (McLaren, 2003: 910-911). It is against this contextual backdrop of growing population diversity in Europe, which in turn raises important questions concerning citizenship and civic rights, integration and the prevention of social exclusion, that contemporary responses towards immigration, and immigrants themselves, are being shaped and contested.

In addition to the demographic challenges portended by immigration then, increasing cultural diversity across a variety of European contexts means that states are confronted with the challenges of accommodating diverse interests within a single society to a greater extent than ever before. Issues concerning citizenship, participation in society and politics, as well as the allocation of state resources gain heightened importance as governments seek to integrate communities of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds into society and accommodate the various group-based claims made on the state. Coupled with these increasingly culturally-diverse national profiles are questions pertaining to the tenuous position and fate of Islam in Europe, and its perceived incompatibility with the pervasive secularism and postmodernism that is so defining a feature of European liberal democracies today. Perceptions about the innate “illiberalism” and conservatism of Islam have given rise to an unwillingness to extend the liberal norm of tolerance to those European Muslims who have “failed” to integrate and to assume the dominant values undergirding the societies in which they live. The central problem of this research, then, is that liberal democratic values have potentially come under threat in the context of confrontation with norms and ideas that are deemed decidedly *illiberal* and *intolerant*. Whether these potential threats to liberal democracy have the capacity to fan the flames of violence and civil unrest is naturally of huge consequence and the implication of this ideological confrontation for domestic peace is considered in subsequent chapters, as is the extent of this supposed cultural clash in the Netherlands. The volatility surrounding the issue of immigrant integration in the Dutch context has resulted in the remark from one columnist, that in these particularly “charged” times in the Netherlands, the “threat of murder hangs over the traditionally tolerant country” (The Economist, 2010: 78).

### **1.1.3 Research Aim and Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the changing economic context post-September 2008 has been accompanied by shifting sentiments vis-à-vis immigration and immigrants. The implications of these potential attitudinal shifts for political culture in the Netherlands are of particular interest. The ideological implications of the Dutch immigration and integration debates will be assessed in terms of how public and political discussion of these issues has been framed in relation to liberal democratic ideas. Anti-immigration sentiments in the Netherlands will be identified via public opinion surveys and patterns of voting. Data on public opinion will make use of three consecutive surveys

conducted in 2008, 2009 and 2010 by the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* (TTI) study. The analysis of voting behaviour will observe the electoral outcomes of successive Dutch general elections from 1989 – 2010 in order to examine the trajectory of public support for particular parties and policies over the course of the last two decades. A current, historically-located description of the nature of the immigration debate in the Netherlands will ultimately be presented. The independent variable can therefore be identified as Dutch macro-economic circumstances, specifically the current context of the global financial crisis, with the dependent variables being the character of contemporary liberal democracy in the Netherlands, and Dutch political culture. It is important to stress that this study does not seek to assess the impact of the global financial crisis on attitudes towards immigration and immigrants; it is the possible *shift* in public sentiment towards these issues within less favourable economic circumstances that is of particular consequence to this research.

Whilst Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown's (2011) study revealed a particularly strong relationship between the economy and attitudes towards immigration in the Canadian context, the strength and indeed existence of the association cannot be expected to be similar for countries elsewhere. The authors stress the necessity of identifying the context-specific explanations and circumstances for shifts in attitudes in other national circumstances. Particular attention will therefore be accorded to the role of the ongoing financial crisis in possibly (re)shaping the values and priorities of the Dutch public, reflected in public opinion surveys and political discourse. It is also not the intention of this discussion to suggest that economic-induced perceptions of threat are *the* most powerful explanations of shifts in anti-immigration sentiment in the Netherlands; the possible economic motivations of such perceptions and attitudes are merely considered to be of particular interest, given the context of the current global financial crisis.

Although the chief interest of this study is economic-induced threat perceptions, as opposed to other potentially significant explanations for anti-immigration feeling, this thesis nevertheless considers alternative possible influences of attitudinal shifts. A discussion of the immigration and integration discourse in the Netherlands is incomprehensive if it does not acknowledge the very important cultural and symbolic dimension of this debate. The roles played by particular politicians, political parties and prominent personalities in shaping the Dutch anti-immigration debate will also be examined. The extent to which contemporary Islam is perceived as a threat to distinctly "European" or "Dutch" culture and "Enlightened" values by certain actors is also a central consideration for this study. In the process of accomplishing these intentions for this research, the goal is to answer a number of questions pertaining to some of the core values that undergird liberal democratic political culture, and which are central to the Dutch national "discussion" on immigration and integration. The focus is therefore on norms and



principles including tolerance, equality, religious freedom, state secularism, freedom of expression and anti-discrimination. The specific questions that this research aims to address are:

- Is “equality” about embracing diversity and multiculturalism or does it instead involve efforts to entrench a dominant and homogenising status quo?
- How tolerant is liberal democratic political culture in the Netherlands today, in the context of more restrictionist immigration strategies and integration policy’s turn towards an assimilationist, rather than multicultural, approach?
- How does the principle of a secular, neutral Dutch state and society conflict with an overtly religious and externalised Islamic presence?
- To what extent does the cause for freedom of expression, advanced by the Dutch radical right, undermine the anti-discrimination pledge enshrined in the Dutch constitution?

#### **1.1.4 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The Netherlands has attracted abundant academic attention regarding its integration policies and may very well be “one of the most over-studied cases in the international migration literature” (Vink, 2007: 337). Although traditionally considered a multicultural “ideal-type”, this stereotype has drawn increasing scepticism within the last decade especially as the country’s restrictionist integration policies have come under heightened public and political scrutiny. The most recognised Dutch figurehead today is not likely to be recently-incumbent Prime Minister Mark Rutte, and perhaps not even the country’s own Queen Beatrix; that person is arguably Geert Wilders, controversial leader of the Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid* or PVV), identifiable just as much for his shock of peroxide hair as his outspoken views on immigration. His calls to restrict immigration and to adopt a more hard-line response to Islamism have resonated among the public in the Netherlands and further afield, if electoral results and media coverage are anything to go by.

Immigration is an issue with far-reaching implications, which range from the political, demographic, civic, economic, cultural and social, to the ideological. The present-day context of the global financial crisis positions this enduring debate in the Netherlands and elsewhere in a particularly intriguing light given the re-evaluation of civic and political values that this context of enhanced economic and financial pressure could potentially produce. Shifts in priorities from upholding the inviolable principle of toleration, a cornerstone of liberal-democratic ideology and a value traditionally synonymous with the Netherlands, towards efforts to formally entrench a national, dominant status quo and thereby undermine

the country's minority cultures and multicultural flair – similarly vital features of liberal democratic societies – has important consequences for the future character of the country's political culture.

This study hopes to contribute to the existing literature on the topic by using more recent sources of data. Limited scholarship exists at present focussing particularly on the ideological repercussions of the global financial crisis for established liberal democracies in Western societies. The concerted effort made to consult documents dating from 2008 onwards will render this analysis especially relevant to contemporary global conditions. This study will examine whether a changing macro-economic climate in the Netherlands has been accompanied by shifts in public perceptions towards immigration and certain immigrant groups. In order to draw possible *causal* associations however, this study would need to be complemented with further exploratory research. It is nevertheless hoped that this descriptive and exploratory research will have a foundational purpose in terms of contextualising the current Dutch immigration and integration debate and directing future research towards specific themes or points of interest.

This study assumes a case study approach, using the Netherlands as the context of interest. Though it may be somewhat inappropriate for advancing generally-applicable conclusions, it is necessary to focus on the trajectory of anti-immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment within a single country in order that the complexities of these public attitudes may be appreciated. It is important to bear in mind however that the turn towards a more restrictionist direction is not a development peculiar to the Dutch experience and similar trends are observable across several contemporary European contexts. Where relevant, a comparative approach will highlight those Dutch developments and experiences that are similarly, or contrarily, observable in the contexts of other European states.

## **1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In their study of changing trends in public opinion towards immigrants in Canada, a country also distinguished by its multicultural policies, Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown's (2011: 79) research revealed that the most influential factor in accounting for attitude change was a changing macro-economic climate. Other potential influences such as birth cohort succession and generational differences in perceptions proved to have either negligible attitudinal effects, in the instance of the former, or only a moderate effect in the latter case. Their study therefore points to the significance of "period effects" on opinions towards immigrants that impact the entire population, suggesting that individuals alter perceptions from one

period to the next, irrespective of age, in response to a singular event or because attitudes are reworked in response to changes in the broader socio-economic context (Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown, 2011: 80).

Other authors similarly highlight the role of context in contributing towards perceptions of threat and exclusionary sentiments (McLaren 2003; Coenders *et al.*, 2008). Using Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown's findings to guide this analysis, albeit an alternative context, this thesis will assess whether the global financial crisis has been accompanied by shifts in public perceptions towards immigration and immigrants in the Netherlands. This study is therefore prompted by the works of other immigration scholars in making the assumption that group competition for resources, real or perceived, is a significant determinant of attitudes towards immigration (Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998: 699-700). Heightened perceptions about an out-group threat to the interests of the dominant group are considered to result in higher levels of prejudice and less support for immigrants and immigration by the so-called "in-group" (Quillian, 1995; Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown, 2011: 82).

Smerbeck's (2007) research across 14 European countries found that perceived economic and demographic threat, theorised in terms of Realistic Group Conflict Theory, proved less powerful in explaining support for anti-immigration policies than in-group insularity, which is grounded in Social Identity Theory. The focus for this thesis, however, is centred more on understanding attitudinal shifts towards immigration and immigrants, irrespective of whether less favourable sentiments are subsequently translated into support for particular anti-immigration policies. The chief interest for this research is the economic shapers of perceived threat and negative out-group sentiment, as opposed to Smerbeck's simultaneous interest in looking at in-group insularity. This study will however similarly make use of the hypotheses put forward by Realistic Group Conflict Theory to undergird this research and structure the ensuing discussion. The thinking informing this analysis, that economic conditions may potentially induce shifts in public and political perceptions towards immigration, is a hypothesis neatly encapsulated by this theory.

Realistic Group Conflict Theory seeks to explain how potential for group conflict and hostility is exacerbated in contexts of increased pressure for limited, shared group resources. As a result, a particular minority out-group is identified and perceived by the dominant group as representing a threat to the latter's access to these finite resources (Smerbeck, 2007). Group interests are thus seen as incompatible and access to resources is increasingly viewed in zero-sum terms: that is, one group's access to a resource is interpreted as being at the expense of another group (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 271; Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998: 701, 704). In the context of European welfare states like the Netherlands, periods of

economic pressure often result in so-called “traditional nationals”, the autochthonous native Dutch, blaming immigrants for the latter group’s perceived, and often actual, disproportionate claims on the national welfare pool (Smerbeck, 2007). The ongoing global financial crisis provides the ideal circumstances in which to analyse such group responses and attitudes vis-à-vis immigration and immigrants as the context of economic depression is likely to add impetus to the perception of there being limited access to resources, for particular groups especially (Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998: 702).

Realistic group conflict is traditionally regarded as a particular type of perceived threat distinct from symbolic or culturally-induced perceptions of threat. Chapter Five, which examines this theory in more detail and assesses its applicability to the Dutch context in the global financial crisis, extends the focus of the theory to include symbolic and cultural sources of group competition and conflict. The use of *Realistic* Group Conflict Theory does not require that a veritable competition over resources exists, merely that the perception of such competition is present (Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998: 701; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 271). This theory applies specifically to threat and competition experienced at the group level, rather than individual level, where *collective* interests are perceived to be at stake (Esses, Jackson and Armstrong, 1998: 701). Whilst Chapter Four assesses the real effects of the global financial crisis and economic recession on the Dutch economy, it is not so much the extent of *real* competition over shared resources in the Netherlands that is of interest here, as the *perception* that such competition and economic threat exists.

A changing socio-economic climate has not only been linked to changed public perceptions towards immigration. Chapters Three and Four show how growing electoral support for right-wing parties throughout Europe has also occurred within the context of less favourable macro-economic conditions. Sen (2010: 63) postulates that the recent global economic meltdown provides further impetus for adherence to right-wing values by rendering conditions ripe for authoritarian government and extremism. This study’s decision to accord principle focus to the structural context in which threat perceptions are encouraged and fester is not to dismiss the significance of more ideological and culturally-induced threats to the nation: indeed, it has been argued that in favourable economic climates, concerns about identity are likely to overshadow financial or material anxieties (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 282). Consequently, sufficient attention will also be accorded to perceptions about the particular symbolic and cultural threat that Islam is considered to pose to liberal democratic values.

## **1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.3.1 Research Design**

This study is both descriptive and exploratory and the ensuing analysis employs a distinctively qualitative methodology. The intention for this thesis is to explore whether a changing economic context in the Netherlands has been accompanied by a concomitant shift in public attitudes towards immigration and minority groups, a scenario which would reflect the hypotheses posited by Realistic Group Conflict Theory. Public attitudes are considered important for their reflection of national civic culture and ultimately, the state of liberal democracy in the country. This exploratory and descriptive research should be seen as laying the foundation for future scholarship by hinting at whether possible causal links exist between economic climate – especially periods of financial strain – and the re-evaluation of liberal democratic values born of economic prosperity (Babbie, 2010: 92). Although this research will not serve to contribute new data to the field in the form of statistics and measurements, it is certainly hoped that offering a perspective on Dutch immigration sentiment that takes into account current macro-economic events, assessing their *possible* impact on the state of liberal democracy, will prove useful. This thesis will thus observe and describe some of the possible economic, political, attitudinal and ideological implications of the global financial crisis. The Dutch population will be described using a combination of census figures, data on public perceptions and statistics pertaining to voting behaviour and patterns.

### **1.3.2 Units of Analysis**

This thesis will focus on several units of analysis. Description of public attitudes in terms of voting behaviours and attitudes towards immigration will necessarily take the perceptions of individual Dutch citizens as the point of departure. The combination of individual attitudes, measured by the TTI public perception surveys will provide an indication of larger Dutch in-group attitudes (Babbie, 2010: 99).

This thesis will look at the Dutch context specifically and European context generally. Effort will be made to show how certain experiences of the Netherlands may likewise be seen in the context of other European countries faced with similar social demands and circumstances. Brief mention will be made at relevant intervals of possible similarities or differences between what has been observed in the Netherlands and in European countries elsewhere, in order that these developments in the Netherlands may be located within a larger European context.

This study will also focus on particular political parties in the Netherlands, especially those with anti-immigration agendas. Prominent personalities who have expressed outspoken views on immigration and

integration, such as Geert Wilders, Theo van Gogh, Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, will be analysed for their role in leading and shaping the immigration debate.

### **1.3.3 Levels of Analysis**

In terms of providing data reflective of the effects of the global financial crisis in the Netherlands, this study will make use of macro-level measures pertaining to the Dutch national economy. Examining specific policies relating to immigration, citizenship, multiculturalism and other efforts at fostering cultural integration, also look at strategies at the national level.

A meso-level of analysis is relevant for observing the roles of certain political parties in the Netherlands with regards to their contribution to the anti-immigration debate. The policy proposals and party mandates of such organisations will also fall under this level of analysis.

Individual-level data will also be used in the form of self-reported attitudes towards immigration and minority groups administered by public opinion surveys. A micro-level of analysis is similarly employed when looking at the role of certain prominent individuals in shaping the anti-immigration debate in the Netherlands over the course of the last 20 years.

### **1.3.4 Time Dimension**

This thesis will look at perceptions towards immigrants and political responses within the last 20 years, since the fall of the Berlin Wall when the floodgates to an era of unprecedented globalisation ushered in a period of intensified migration across the entire European continent. The free movement of people across increasingly fluid and penetrable boundaries represents an important feature of this period of contemporary globalisation. The issues of immigration and integration are not specific to the Netherlands alone; such questions are of continental scope and the post-1989 period is thus a significant date in the histories of many European states in terms of their engagements with the rest of the world and experiences in accommodating foreigners within their borders. The thesis will look at events and perceptions from 1989 up until mid-2011.

This research will take the form of a longitudinal study by looking at the evolution of Dutch public opinion and attitudes over the course of the global financial crisis. The rise and fall of political parties and varying patterns of voting behaviour will also be observed, from 1989 – 2010, as will the ongoing debate around immigration and integration over the course of this period. The various immigration policies and integration strategies pursued by successive Dutch governments over the last twenty years will similarly

be considered. The type of longitudinal study applicable to this analysis is a trend study, examining changes within the population over time in terms of specified characteristics. The evolutionary aspect of longitudinal trend studies renders this type of study especially relevant for describing the process of attitudinal adjustment towards immigration and immigrants, which will culminate in a description of the current climate. The development over time of the country's liberal democratic character similarly makes applicable the *longue durée* time dimension of this study.

### **1.3.5 Data Collection and Analysis**

This research will make use of the findings from the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* (TTI) study, carried out by the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Three annual surveys, conducted in 2008, 2009 and 2010, have sought to research attitudinal trends in several European countries, including the Netherlands, as well as in the US, the United Kingdom (UK) and Canada. The first survey was conducted just prior to the onset of the global financial crisis in early September 2008, thereby enabling comparison of attitudes before, and during, the crisis. The two subsequent surveys were conducted in 2009 and 2010. The longitudinal nature of these surveys makes them ideal for the purposes of this research and they purposely seek to gauge the impact of the global financial crisis on public attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. Data permitting, those attitudes towards Muslims and Islam will receive particular attention. It is important to bear in mind that the intention of consulting public perception data is not to examine the extent of public support for a particular statement or policy scenario: the objective of looking at this data is to observe *variation* in attitudes and shifts in levels of support or opposition from one year to the next, within the context of intensified economic and financial pressure.

The findings of these public opinion surveys will be analysed in light of the most recent patterns of voting behaviour in the Netherlands, as well as against the backdrop of increased financial strain on Dutch households and the declining prospects of the Dutch economy. Journal articles on the topics of immigration, integration, the Dutch right-wing, and the position of Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands will form the bulk of the resources consulted for this research. Concerted effort has been made to employ the most recently-published works in order to enhance the salience of this discussion. Demographic statistics of the Netherlands will also be consulted, as will data pertaining to the Dutch economy before and after 2008, with the purpose of determining the extent of the impact of the global financial crisis on the country and of establishing the degree to which a real pressure on job availability and the provision of social services has been experienced, which might account for possible perceptions of economic threat posed by immigrant out-groups.

In order to evaluate the “resilience” or durability of liberal democratic values and institutions in the country, it will be necessary to look at instances where traditional liberal democratic principles have been compromised in attempts to “manage” the immigration question, for example, or where certain liberal principles have been prioritised at the expense of others. Even proposals to push forward a law to ban religious garb in public, for instance, may be taken as evidence of the fact that values pertaining to the liberty, religious freedom and individualism of all Dutch citizens may not be as established or inviolable as expected. In determining the quality and prospects for liberal democracy in the Netherlands then, this analysis will necessarily assume a more qualitative approach. Reference will also be made to the policies and campaign issues of Dutch political parties and how their mandates have been reassessed over the course of the last two decades in an attempt to reflect the concerns and interests of the Dutch public. Consideration of the rhetoric of high-profile politicians and members of society in the context of this national question on immigration and integration seeks to highlight the agenda-setting (which issues are on the agenda) and framing strategies of actors in both the political and media arenas, who strive to present salient immigration and integration questions in a particular light and disseminate a specific interpretation of the issues at stake (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 296). An interpretation of policies will therefore look at what Vliegthart and Roggeband (2007: 297) define as institutional/substantial measures such as laws and budgetary spending, or more symbolic measures which focus on those agendas made visible via symbolic policies such as speeches or interviews. Use of several news sources is justified via the expectation that public opinion is influenced to a large extent by what is read or heard in the news (Brader, Valentino and Suhay, 2008: 961). News sources are important framers of topical issues and have an influential role in setting the tone of debate around a particular subject.

Patterns in voting behaviour, observed in Chapter 4, will be ascertained via consultation of election results. The electoral gains of political parties are influential in fostering legitimacy for a specific immigration or integration frame in parliament and in the media (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 299). The share of electoral support gained by the major Dutch political parties in each general election from 1989 to 2010 will be observed. Fluctuating support for anti-immigration and far-right parties over the course of the last two decades will shed light on the extent to which they have been able to wield influence over (anti-)immigration and integration debates. One would expect that the heightened prevalence of right-wing parties in the Netherlands within the last decade since 9/11 would result in more frequent use of anti-immigration frames in the media and in parliament. Opposition to immigration and immigrants does not necessarily translate into more votes for anti-immigrant parties, as numerous factors are taken into account when choosing to support a particular political party. This thesis will not seek to



measure opposition to immigration and immigrants in the Netherlands, but by providing an analysis of voting patterns in the last 20 years in conjunction with analyses of public perceptions towards immigration and immigrants over the course of the global financial crisis, it is hoped that this study will be able to contribute a meaningful descriptive analysis of such attitudinal trends. Description of public attitudes in terms of voting behaviour and attitudes towards immigration and immigrants will necessarily take the perceptions of individual Dutch citizens as the point of departure. The attitudes of respondents in the TTI public perception surveys enable the formation of an aggregated picture of the larger group these individuals represent: that is, the Dutch population as a whole, giving an idea of *group* attitudes which is applicable to this study's use of Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Babbie, 2010: 99).

## **1.4 CONCEPTUALISATION OF CORE TERMINOLOGY**

### **1.4.1 Liberal Democracy**

Liberal democracy is a type of democratic political rule founded upon the principles of limited government, popular consent and frequently-held competitive elections (Heywood, 2007: 40). Limited government is maintained by a series of checks and balances on governmental power, ensuring that citizens' rights, constitutionally enshrined, are inalienable and safeguarded from the encroachment of the state. Individual rights and civil liberties are considered paramount in liberal democratic regimes. What Heywood (2007: 41) terms the "ambivalence within liberalism towards democracy" is reflected in liberal democracy, where individual rights are often seen to be overridden in the name of "the people's" collective interest. Liberal democratic regimes have traditionally been criticised on the grounds of their majoritarian beliefs and hostility to individual and minority rights. This is an important critique of liberal democracy that is particularly relevant to the interests of this thesis. Since the twentieth century in particular, liberal theories of democracy have emphasised societal consensus, seen as vital for fostering stability in increasingly plural modern societies comprised of disparate groups with potentially conflicting interests (Heywood, 2007: 43).

### **1.4.2 Human Rights (liberal)**

According to liberals, "natural" entitlements are applicable to all people by virtue of their common humanity and equality as individuals. These fundamental, inalienable "natural rights" are commonly spoken of as "human rights", which emphasise the universal quality of these endowments. For John Locke, reference to human rights, the "essential conditions for leading a truly human existence", usually designates three such conditions: the rights to life, liberty and property (Heywood, 2007: 46). The principle of respect for human rights is an underlying tenet of liberal thought and leads to the construction

of the so-called “social contract” between government and citizens: citizens relinquish a degree of individual freedom in order to receive protection from the state, at the same time agreeing to respect and abide by the laws of the (minimal) government (Heywood, 2007: 46).

### **1.4.3 Equality**

A liberal interpretation of “equality” deems that all human beings share a common moral worth. Talk of “universal human rights” reflects this underlying conviction that all people deserve to be treated identically and are worthy of formal equality; that is, politically (“one person one vote”) and legally (equality before the law), in addition to being entitled to equality of opportunity (Heywood, 2007: 33, 34, 107). Although classical liberals in particular oppose the notion of social equality (equality of outcome) and advocate that society be structured along meritocratic lines, rights are nevertheless to be enjoyed by any group, regardless of variables such as race, religion, gender or class (Heywood, 2007: 22, 107).

### **1.4.4 Tolerance**

The willingness to respect and accept difference in others is associated with the principle of tolerance, a fundamental tenet of liberal ideology (Heywood, 2007: 34). Tolerance implies preparedness to put up with and accommodate something disliked, which might otherwise induce hostility were it not for the recognition that forbearance towards the object of aversion is ultimately for the greater good of society (Du Toit and Kotzé, 2011: 100). In some ways, this implies the perception of tolerance being a “necessary evil”, exercised in spite of the source of disapproval, since reversion to *intolerance* could potentially find expression through prejudice or even violence. The domestic pacification of liberal democratic societies is therefore very much driven by the acceptance that one’s “enemies” have just as much right to participate in society on a similar political, economic and cultural level as everyone else. The liberal notion of tolerance is thus rooted in respect for individual autonomy and is linked to a wider space for personal freedom (Mahajan, 2007: 330). The object of disapproval or dislike might be a source of moral, cultural or political diversity entailing attitudinal, behavioural or religious differences (Heywood, 2007: 34). The principal interest of this research is the willingness to accept *cultural* diversity in others: that is, the rights of one’s adversaries to pursue their own ideological or religious beliefs within the limits of what is legally permissible, as equal members within society. Whilst negative tolerance implies an indifference to diversity born of dislike, positive tolerance suggests that mutual forbearance is ultimately necessary (Du Toit and Kotzé, 2011: 101).

### **1.4.5 Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism represents a concerted strategy to address growing cultural diversity and foster societal integration. It essentially represents attempts to nurture cultural difference whilst simultaneously promoting civic unity – “diversity within unity” (Heywood, 2007: 310). Societies that pursue multicultural policies strive to provide multiple groups the space in which to pursue and develop their distinctive cultural identities for the purposes of achieving self-worth and self-understanding within an environment that accords mutual respect for, and acknowledgement of difference (Heywood, 2002: 119). It is thus evident how endorsement of multicultural politics is closely tied in with the concept of toleration. The normative rationale for multiculturalism is that individual cultures deserve to be valued and protected, and that society ultimately stands to gain from the cultural enrichment afforded by such policies. Cultural diversity is thus deemed an asset to society and consensual politics is prioritised as a means to foster open dialogue and understanding between groups (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 301). It is a strategy that has attracted increasing scepticism in the last couple of years especially and this development will be looked at in greater detail in the following chapter.

### **1.4.6 Political Culture**

Heywood (2002: 200, 429) defines this concept as a “pattern of (psychological) orientations” (political attitudes, beliefs, symbols or values) towards political entities in the form of political parties, government or the constitution. Political culture is the product of a long-term shaping of values and is not subject to change in response to the occurrence of a specific event, for instance, in the same way that public opinion and attitudes are renegotiated.

### **1.4.7 Immigrants**

Reference to “immigrants” in the literature is often limited to those foreigners living in the Netherlands who were either born overseas in a non-Western country or have at least one foreign-born parent (born in a non-Western country) (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 119). This definition is the same as that used by Statistics Netherlands and allows for an inclusion of both first-and second-generation migrants into this category, the latter demographic representing a group of increasing research interest with respect to their ability to integrate into Dutch society (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 275). The principle focus of this thesis will be on perceptions towards Islamic immigrants – hailing from Turkey and Morocco specifically – as this group is almost always singled out when discussions about the compatibility of Dutch values and those of foreign cultures take place. However, because the concept of “immigrant” is not always confined to Islamic immigrants in the literature, it is not possible to limit the conceptualisation of immigrants strictly to Muslims here, although this would be the most appropriate conceptualisation for the purposes of this

analysis. Given the European context of this study, the terms “immigrants” and “minority groups” may be used somewhat interchangeably. In the Netherlands, the two labels are likely to refer to the same groups of people; however, every effort will be made to clarify who, or what groups specifically are being referred to throughout the ensuing discussion (McLaren, 2003: 919).

This study’s predominant focus on immigrants that are Muslims is not to suggest that Islamic culture and values represent the greatest source of “threat” to liberal democratic tenets in the Netherlands. Particular focus upon public sentiments towards Muslim immigrants and Islamic immigration specifically, where possible, is motivated by the fact that public and political discourse around immigration and integration in Europe has increasingly come to reflect a distinctively “Clash of Civilisations” discourse. The allegedly inherent incompatibility of Western and Islamic civilisation to which Huntington’s thesis refers is readily employed by anti-immigration and right-wing groups as a paradigm for structuring debate on relations between these supposedly distinct cultural and ideological groups. The anti-immigration debate in the Netherlands focuses almost exclusively on Islamic groups, considered more “problematic” and threatening to Dutch identity than their non-Islamic counterparts (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 272).

#### **1.4.8 Anti-Immigration Sentiments**

Negative attitudes towards immigrants by virtue of their perceived membership to a culturally or religiously defined group will be identified by a combination of voters’ support for political parties that campaign on an expressly anti-immigration platform, as well as via reference to public opinion surveys. Of course, not all anti-immigration sentiments translate into party and policy support, so surveys that publish the results of self-reported anti-immigration attitudes will be used. Those with anti-immigration views frame immigration as a problem and seek to restrict the inflow of immigrants, particularly economically-dependent “marriage migrants”, who are generally presented as “traditional”, “non-emancipated” and “female” (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 301).

#### **1.4.9 Threat perceptions**

McLaren (2003: 918, 925) distinguishes between resource-based (or economic) threats and those more symbolic and culturally-perceived threats to the nation. A similar distinction is made between the different levels at which perceptions of threat occur, namely at the individual and group levels. This study will focus more on group-level perceptions of threat: the use of Realistic Group Conflict Theory to inform this analysis naturally accords focus to group-level attitudes as opposed to those that occur at the individual level. Experience of group threat extends to resources as well as national symbols which include values or the perception that the culture of a society is being denigrated. McLaren’s (2003: 925)

research leads to the conclusion that perceptions of threat to the group as a whole are more powerful in predicting hostility towards immigrants.

## **1.5 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

An important limitation of this research concerns questions of conceptualisation. Key concepts in this discussion may be defined differently from the classifications used by other sources in the literature. Whilst this analysis has chosen to focus the conceptualisation of “immigrants” on Islamic immigrants hailing from Morocco and Turkey, other articles may define the term in such a way as to include settlers from the former Dutch colonies Suriname and the Dutch Antilles, for instance. This is a concern especially with regards to data related to public perceptions towards immigrants where in certain cases the attitudes reflected will refer to all immigrants in the Netherlands generally and not necessarily to attitudes towards Islamic Moroccan and Turkish immigrants specifically. In order to remedy somewhat the pitfalls associated with inconsistent conceptualisations of key terminology, every effort will be made to be as concise and descriptive as possible regarding who and what type of immigration is being referred to. Inconsistent definitions of concepts are a problem encountered by numerous authors regarding the profile of foreign immigrants (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 131; McLaren, 2003: 921). However, this drawback need not be as problematic as those studies seeking to operationalise key definitions for the sake of concise measurement, as the concern of this research is not to draw causal relations between economic environment and public attitudes.

In addition to problems of conceptual inconsistency, limitations concerning data also exist with regard to availability and quality. Discrepancies also occur in terms of the various methodologies and data-gathering techniques employed by researchers. Difficulties regarding documentation give rise to sometimes unreliable sources and the realities of illegal and undocumented immigration to the Netherlands means that statistics can only be considered a vague description of real-life phenomena at best. Where possible, all reported figures will be verified against several data sources in an effort to enhance the reliability of each statistic presented in this thesis.

This study will be delimited to the use of English sources. Although not a significant shortcoming considering that much of the literature, including scholarship by Dutch authors, is published in English, it is necessary to bear in mind that reference will not be made to Arabic or Dutch sources. The focus of this thesis is also on anti-immigration and anti-immigrant attitudes in the Netherlands and not on pro-immigration or pro-multiculturalism perspectives, although these are of course important to the overall

immigration and integration debate and will necessarily receive mention. Therefore, principle focus is accorded to analysing one particular side of this ongoing debate. Likewise, most research interest will be focussed on proponents of restrictive immigration policy, such as those political parties campaigning on an anti-immigration platform. The same applies to other spearheading forces behind the Dutch immigration and integration debates, be they political parties or individuals.

## **1.6 STRUCTURE AND CHAPTER OUTLINE**

Following on from this introduction to the topic and intentions for the research, Chapter Two will focus on Dutch immigration in the last 20 years, providing an overview of immigration policy and integration strategies. The profile of Dutch immigrants will also be described in more detail. Chapter Three will look at the ambiguous position of Islam in Dutch society and the socio-economic marginalisation of Muslims generally. This chapter focuses particularly on the cultural aspect of the immigration and integration debates and considers the possibility of a veritable “Clash of Civilisations” in the Dutch context. Dutch political parties and prominent figures will also be introduced, and their contribution to public and political debate in the country considered. The second section of Chapter Three looks at the rise of the populist radical right in the Netherlands and the extent to which this development may be deemed compatible with liberal and democratic values. Chapter Four provides a brief outline of the real effects of the global financial crisis and subsequent economic recession on the Dutch economy. This section is followed by an analysis of voting behaviour in the Netherlands from 1989 to 2010. Chapter Five then proceeds to distinguish shifts in attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in the Netherlands over the global financial crisis years. The discussion of this chapter is informed by Realistic Group Conflict Theory which is employed in order to assess the possible impact of both economically- and culturally-induced threat perceptions in shifting public attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. Concluding this study with Chapter Six, which draws from the discussions of the previous chapters, an assessment of the prospects for Dutch liberal democratic political culture is made. The conclusion ultimately locates the discussion of the Netherlands within wider global developments relating to growing levels of cultural diversity in contemporary liberal democracies. Certain inherent contradictions within liberalism are highlighted and the research questions pertaining to particular core liberal democratic values that were posed earlier in this chapter will be addressed. Ultimately, the prospects for liberal democracy and multiculturalism in the Netherlands will be considered, in addition to whether a re-evaluation of essential societal values has been witnessed.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has sought to provide a clear outline of the intentions for this thesis, as well as introduce the structure, methodology and theory that will be used to inform this analysis. Effort has been made to incorporate relevant literature into the opening chapter in an attempt to contextualise this introduction both in terms of the existing scholarship on the topic as well as with regards to applicable contemporary developments. The subsequent chapter will provide an historical overview of Dutch immigration and integration policies over the course of the last 20 years, since 1989 to the present.

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The Netherlands has traditionally been portrayed as one of the most liberally progressive and tolerant regimes in connection with its politics of accommodation. Conventional accounts of the country's attempts to manage cultural diversity regularly offer up a tidy historical explanation that locates the Netherlands' distinctive approach to multicultural policy-making within the context of its past experiences in coping with religious pluralism. It would appear that today however, the country has undergone a fundamental turn-around from the days of being a multicultural ideal-type: increasingly restrictionist immigration policy has made the acquisition of Dutch citizenship by immigrants more difficult in recent years and ethnic minorities have been confronted with greater demands to assimilate "Dutch" culture and values. In light of these seemingly drastic policy changes, the ensuing discussion will explore the veritable extent and nature of this alleged "transformation". Another noteworthy shift that has also been witnessed over the last 25 years sees less debate on the topic of general immigration as such, and more deliberation on the position and fate of Islam in the country, particularly the externalised and visible symbols of this religious ideology (Roy, 2010: 67). Dutch integration policy's more symbolic turn of late therefore reflects a lesser focus on the formal integration of migrants into society and greater concern for protecting a distinctively "Dutch" national identity.

Given these developments, this chapter will offer a descriptive account of both migration flows into the Netherlands as well as the policy developments pertaining to integration, immigration and citizenship that have characterised the post-1989 period in particular. This discussion is motivated by the intention to rework both the earlier image of the Netherlands as a paragon of multiculturalism as well as more current (though similarly misleading and one-sided) fixations on the country's recent crackdown on terrorism and adoption of a more hardline, less tolerant attitude towards religious and cultural diversity. As Maas (2010: 229) notes, neither "caricature" encapsulates sufficiently the true evolution of the Netherlands' citizenship and integration policies. This chapter therefore seeks to demystify these two misleading stereotypes about "one of the most over-studied cases in the international migration literature", proffering a more realistic, though perhaps less simplistically neat, interpretation (Vink, 2007: 337).

For liberal democracies today, especially culturally diverse ones, the politics surrounding the accommodation of different groups – ethnic, religious or otherwise – within a single society is of particular salience. In Europe, cultural diversity is not only an attribute of federal states like Germany and



can prove as much a defining feature of unitary states such as the Netherlands. Whilst citizenship-related issues were for a significant time quite decentralised, with provinces and cities assuming chief responsibility for upholding the rights of citizens, the unitary Dutch state that came into existence in 1813 with the retreat of Napoleon's forces witnessed the increasing centralisation of authority. Questions of citizenship have consequently become the purview of central government (Maas, 2010: 231). Along with countries including Switzerland, Belgium and Canada, the Netherlands has historically been regarded as a model of consociationalism, thanks to its legacy of pillarisation and institutional structures promoting the integration of societal groups sharing nationality but differentiated along ethnic, religious, ideological or other lines (Maas, 2010: 233; Lijphart 1968). Consociationalism encourages political appeals to specific groups and elites are obliged to work together in a spirit of mutual cooperation and pragmatism to accomplish political ends (Maas, 2010: 233; Lijphart, 1968: 59). This strategy of group-based autonomy in conjunction with elite compromise was previously identified as the key to securing the domestic pacification of Dutch society (Vink, 2007: 342).

Western liberal democracies confronted with the challenges of coping with immigration and the cultural diversity this implies often look to citizenship policies as a means to tackle the issue, questions of citizenship and immigration being closely connected (Maas, 2010: 227). The politics of citizenship is therefore a theme that features prominently in the ensuing discussion. The granting of citizenship or "naturalisation", entails an individual's full legal inclusion into a sovereign state and is often used as an instrument of integration for established native groups and newcomers alike (Maas, 2010: 227). The Netherlands provides a particularly interesting case study for observing continuity and change with respect to citizenship laws and policies, given the country's history of political and cultural accommodation within its borders and the rapid social and political change experienced in recent decades (Maas, 2010: 227). Although it is not the intention of this chapter to explain why these changes in policy occur – that is, whether they are the result of political changes, cultural preferences, institutional or structural factors – this discussion will nevertheless be situated within a larger analysis of fluctuating migration flows, transformations in attitudes towards cultural integration, as well as the influence of political parties and politicians on the integration debate.

## **2.2 OVERVIEW OF IMMIGRATION FLOWS**

Numerically, the difference between the numbers of people emigrating from, and immigrating into, the country appears negligible. Regardless of whether the Netherlands is officially an "emigration" or "immigration" country – in 2007 the Netherlands was reportedly the only old EU member state that

experienced a negative net migration balance, albeit a slight one – it is sufficient to say that debates surrounding immigration and integration policy feature prominently in the country, to heated effect (Van Nimwegen and van der Erf, 2010: 1362). Perceptions of an immigrant “threat” have the potential to prove politically disruptive and to reconfigure Europe’s political landscape: the steady growth of right-wing movements across a variety of European contexts in recent decades is evidence in this regard. And whereas promoting an anti-immigration agenda was traditionally confined to being a feature of right-wing party policy, this priority is garnering heightened interest within mainstream public and political discourse. The political salience of movements against immigration – “the most volatile” of demographic processes – is looked at in greater detail in Chapter Three (van Nimwegen and van der Erf, 2010: 1367).

This section offers a brief overview of immigration flows into the Netherlands, followed by a description of the basic demographic characteristics of minority immigrant populations (recall that the first chapter stated that the terms “minority” and “immigrant” tend to be used interchangeably, the one group generally corresponding to the other in contexts such as the Dutch one). Although intra-European migration is an important phenomenon that deserves scholarly attention, especially since the enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007 has stimulated labour migration flows from the new into the old member-states, the focus of this chapter, and the rest of this thesis, is on (non-Western) immigration from outside the EU, from so-called “Third Countries” (Van Nimwegen and van der Erf, 2010: 1369). Although this research has chosen to focus upon the longer-term implications of migration to the Netherlands, it recognises that immigration is a dynamic process and is characterised as much by permanence as the temporary in-and-out movement of people. This chapter does not accord focus to the temporality of this phenomenon to the same extent as some authors (see Bijwaard 2010), but is nevertheless mindful not to treat immigration as a “once-and-for-all event” (Bijwaard, 2010: 1242).

### **2.2.1 Historical Waves of Dutch Immigration**

The Netherlands’ early immigration narrative corresponds to general European trends in a post-World War Two and post-colonial era. Along with Germany, the United Kingdom and Denmark, the Netherlands is characterised as an “old” West European immigrant-receiving country, in contrast to those new immigration countries such as Italy and Spain which became targeted migrant destinations at a later period (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 33). The country’s colonial forays resulted in immigration from the former Dutch colonies of Indonesia, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles. In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation in the Dutch East Indies (modern-day Indonesia) in 1949, the Netherlands experienced a series of significant immigration flows in 1949 – 1951, 1952 – 1957 and in the early days of the 1960s, despite efforts on the part of the Dutch government to minimise these influxes which reached an

approximate total of 300 000 Dutch citizens (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 117; Bijwaard, 2010: 1216; Vink, 2007: 339). Immigrants with two Dutch parents were automatically accorded Dutch citizenship and in the case of one Dutch parent, citizenship was optional. Those with Dutch citizenship generally experienced a smooth economic transition to the Netherlands. Because many migrants in the Netherlands originally hail from former colonies, they usually hold Dutch citizenship and may consequently not be represented in statistics of foreign citizenship (van Nimwegen and van der Erf, 2010: 1373). As a result, data pertaining to the overall number of foreigners in the country is often somewhat more conservative than anticipated. The focus of this thesis is primarily on the immigration and integration patterns of non-Dutch citizens hailing from countries that were not former colonies, especially Islamic immigrants from Turkey and Morocco.

In response to national labour market shortages in the 1960s, Dutch industry, like many other firms and agencies elsewhere in Europe during this “golden age”, began to import low-skilled migrant labourers from Mediterranean countries, mainly Turkish and Moroccan men, to work in the growing construction and manufacturing sectors (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 32, 44; Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 117). The intention was that these invited *gastarbeiders* or “guest workers” would remain in the Netherlands for as long as their labour was required; the presence of these foreign workers in the country was therefore considered temporary and it was expected that they would ultimately return to their countries of origin whence they had been contracted (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 269; Bijwaard, 2010: 1214). In light of such expectations and despite the large-scale nature of such labour recruitment strategies, little was done to incorporate these foreign workers into society and invest in their training or integration and migrants were encouraged to retain social-cultural identities (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 34). Scholten (2011: 81) notes that this “phase of denial” was founded upon the normative conviction that the Netherlands was not, and should not be, an immigration country. The idea that this migration was temporary was supported by “powerful institutional interests”: from a social-economic perspective, it was necessary to sustain the purpose of these migrants as a temporary pool of labour and political actors were also keen to prevent the politicisation of this sensitive issue for fear that it would benefit the cause of anti-immigrant parties (Scholten, 2011: 83). In the 1970s, the total influx of immigrants was in the region of 235 000; once the first oil crisis in 1973 had hit, the Netherlands, along with many other countries during this period, discontinued its labour recruitment policy. Many of these single migrants did not return home upon the termination of employment contracts, however, and the mid-1970s saw the increasing influx of non-workers in the form of family reunification migration, whereby Turkish and Moroccan “guest” migrants were accompanied by the arrival of their spouses and children in their newly-adopted countries of residence (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270; Bijwaard, 2010: 1216; Vink, 2007: 339).

As national economies slumped, foreign guest workers all over Europe were perceived to be responsible for the social and economic challenges confronting host countries (McLaren, 2003: 910). McLaren (2003: 910) writes that this period was simultaneously characterised by the electoral gains of extreme right-wing parties throughout Europe, as well as violence against non-natives, signalling widespread discontent with governments' prevailing strategies in addressing immigration. These developments illustrate the potential correlation between periods of economic pressure and intensified anti-immigration sentiment in Western liberal democratic societies, a theme that corresponds to Realistic Group Conflict Theory hypotheses. This period also saw the increasing settlement of people from the former Dutch colony of Suriname, themselves Dutch nationals, and this second wave of around 180 000 Surinamese colonial immigrants occurred after decolonisation in 1975 as well as between 1979 – 1980 (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 117; Vink, 2007: 340). The late 1970s also witnessed the eruption of racial tensions in the Dutch cities of Rotterdam and Schiedam in addition to a bout of terrorist activities perpetrated by Moluccan migrants. These events served to focus greater attention on the question of immigrant integration (Scholten, 2011: 83).

Since the 1980s, immigration from the Dutch Antilles and Aruba also advanced; in contrast to their earlier Indonesian counterparts, however, immigrants from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles have experienced a less straightforward process of integration and are still the intended targets of specific economic policies today. The inflow of Moroccan and Turkish family migrants also continued during this period. Several sources report that in around 2006, over 10% of the Dutch population was either a first or second-generation immigrant with Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans comprising approximately 1.15 million immigrants – some 7% of the total population living in the Netherlands (Vink, 2007: 340; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270; Carle, 2006: 69).

The 1990s was a period of increasing numbers of asylum seekers and political refugees in the Netherlands, from about 1000 in the early years of the 1980s to over 50 000 in 1994 (Vink, 2007: 340). Annual applications for asylum have however subsequently seen a dramatic decrease. Many asylum-seekers hailed from former East European countries, from states further afield in Africa such as Sudan, Ghana, Somalia and Ethiopia, as well as from Iran and Iraq (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270). The period between 1992 and 2001 saw the Netherlands become, together with Sweden and Switzerland, one of the most popular destinations for asylum-seekers in the world per capita and the country ranked third in Europe behind Germany and the United Kingdom in terms of asylum applications (Maas, 2010: 232). In the last decade, the most popular motivation listed for immigration has been family formation (26%), followed by the migration of labour (23%) and refugees (17%) (Bijwaard, 2010: 1220). There are usually

a lot more asylum seekers in the country than reported at any given time, due to the fact that the presence of most is only registered in the Municipal Register of Population once living permission is granted, a process which can take up to 8 years (Bijwaard, 2010: 1221).

In the year 2000, approximately 130 000 people arrived in the Netherlands with the intention of settling (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270). Between 1995 and 2001, the number of newcomers entering the Netherlands each year increased, but from 2001 to 2003 the inflow of non-Dutch immigrants of working age (between 18 and 64 years) decreased from 69 000 to 57 000 (Bijwaard, 2010: 1220). Bijwaard (2010: 1220) attributes this decline to both the Dutch government's more restrictive asylum measures, reducing the number of new refugees entering the country from 15 000 in 2000 and 2001 to 5000 in 2003, as well as to the impact of a slowdown in the world economy. The Dutch economy's deterioration also reduced labour migrant numbers. In 2004, Turks represented the single largest immigrant group in the country with 358 000 people, followed by Surinamese (328 000), Moroccans (315 000) and Antilleans (135 000) (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270). Because even second-generation Turks and Moroccans opt to select spouses from their countries of origin, the process of integration into Dutch society is extended by yet another generation (Carle, 2006: 69; Bijwaard, 2010: 1223). Today, immigration to the Netherlands is dominated by more political refugees and higher skilled immigrants than before and along with Denmark, the country is reported to experience the greatest number of asylum seekers in West Europe at present (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 41 and Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 136).

### **2.2.2 Profile of Immigrants and Position in Dutch Society**

The *Centraal Register Vreemdelingen* (Central Register Foreigners) documents all legal immigration to the Netherlands by foreigners without Dutch nationality, working in conjunction with the *Vreemdelingen Politie* (Immigration Police) and the *Immigratie- en Naturalisatie Dienst* (Immigration and Naturalisation Service) (Bijwaard, 2010: 1219). The Central Bureau of Statistics in the Netherlands (CBS) is therefore able to publish data, linked to the *Gemeentelijke Basisadministratie* (Municipal Register of Population), on non-Dutch immigrants concerning general demographic statistics and the timing of immigration. In terms of the profiling and categorisation of immigrants, the CBS distinguishes between labour migrants, family reunification migrants, family-formation migrants, student immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, and "other" immigrants (a heterogeneous group making up 7% of all immigrants for reasons such as medical treatment, Au Pairing etc), all naturally necessitating different types of visas requiring the fulfilment of different criteria (Bijwaard, 2010: 1219, 1220, 1222). The motivation of the significant number of immigrants exiting the country in the same year they enter is however unknown.

Owing to labour laws stipulating that employers may only contract labour from outside the EU upon the submission of proof that the type of labour needed is not available nationally or in Europe, Morocco and Turkey have become less important sources of labour migrants but are still significant in terms of the family reunion migration that takes place from them (Bijwaard, 2010: 1220, 1223). A high percentage of family reunion migrants hail from states such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and certain Asian countries due to the reunification of asylum seekers in the Netherlands (Bijwaard, 2010: 1223). Recent restrictions on family reunion migration by increasing the minimum age of the migrant, who is subject to proficiency tests, and raising the minimum income of the partner in the Netherlands, will lessen the inflow of (non-Western) family migrants and ultimately decrease their presence in the Netherlands (Bijwaard, 2010: 1243). Restricting the flow of family reunification has been identified as the most efficient way in ensuring that education levels among Turks and Moroccans improve; the continued migration of low-educated spouses will otherwise continue to consign these ethnic groups to the ranks of the least educated and most unemployed in the Netherlands (Vink, 2007: 347). Labour migrants, today generally from within the EU, have the highest mobility rate of all migrants, whereas family migrants (the majority coming from rural areas within Turkey or Morocco) are most prone to staying on in the Netherlands (Bijwaard, 2010: 1243).

Moroccan youths are often singled out as the source of much of the petty crime that occurs in the Netherlands and Turkish immigrants are notorious for being a tight-knit community, establishing their own businesses and effectively forming a “society within a society” (*The Economist* in Carle, 2006: 69). Carle’s 2006 article states that “very soon”, the country’s largest cities including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague will have a “majority minority” population (Carle, 2006: 69). From 1998 – 2008, the number of legal Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands without Dutch nationality is actually reported to have decreased markedly from over 250 000 (about 37% of all foreigners) to under 170 000 (under 25% of all foreigners) (Maas, 2010: 237, 238). This is most likely the result of the attainment of Dutch citizenship by Turks and Moroccans which would naturally exclude them from such statistics (Maas, 2010: 238). In contrast, the numbers and proportions of the largest EU nationalities resident (legally) in the Netherlands are either stable or on a steady increase (Maas, 2010: 238).

Immigrants from the former Dutch colonies Suriname, the Dutch Antilles and Aruba, whilst making up a significant percentage of the overall immigrant population in the Netherlands and despite their apparently incomplete and inconsistent incorporation into Dutch society to date, tend not to be confronted to the same degree with demands to integrate as their Islamic counterparts from Morocco and Turkey. Immigrants educated in the former group of countries are the products of an education system established

by the earlier Dutch colonial power; Antilleans, for example, have education levels comparable to that of the ethnic Dutch population, whilst immigrants from Morocco and Turkey generally possess a “very low” level of education (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 134; Bijwaard, 2010: 1219; Vink, 2007: 347). Immigrants from the ex-colonies also usually have sufficient background of the Dutch language which further contributes to the perception of their being more predisposed to a smoother cultural transition upon migration to the Netherlands (Zorlu and Hartog, 2005: 115, 117).

Nevertheless, all immigrant groups in the Netherlands experience, on average, a far more tenuous position within society than their ethnic Dutch counterparts. Minority groups are typically subject to lesser quality lifestyles in terms of housing, education and employment. Although Reyneri and Fullin (2011: 42) report that today, the share of highly-educated immigrants in West Europe is much larger than it was before, studies have consistently shown that ethnic minority students perform more poorly in schools and that higher unemployment rates are prevalent for minority groups in the Netherlands. This is especially the case among Turks and Moroccans who are reportedly three or four times more likely to be unemployed than ethnic Dutch nationals (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 207; Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 42). Newer immigrants are also at a greater disadvantage than older immigrant groups in this regard, the latter having arrived during a period when the Dutch economy was booming and the huge labour shortages that existed ensured ample employment opportunity. The high unemployment problem of these “new entries” therefore presents a new challenge socially and economically for European states, a situation not experienced previously with older migrant populations (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 44). In many European states, demographic diversity corresponds to socio-cultural diversity, the latest newcomers usually characterised by social deficits vis-à-vis the local population (van Nimwegen and van der Erf, 2010: 1373). The persistence of such social discrepancies over generations, however, is indicative of the failure of strategies to integrate such minorities and may result in a change of policy, as evidenced in the Netherlands by the apparent turn away from multiculturalism.

Unlike the situation in the UK however, the occupational status of immigrants in the Netherlands does tend to improve in accordance with the amount of time spent there. This is certainly the case for admission to intermediate positions if not more specialised, managerial ones as the Netherlands is very much biased towards high skilled jobs and there is a veritable need for more highly skilled workers (Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 47, 49, 50). Coupled with the generosity of the Dutch welfare state, immigrants are more able to wait until a job appropriate to their skill level is found; the labour market penalties need therefore not be as high as in the case of countries such as Spain or Italy. Bijwaard (2010: 1233) remarks upon the correlation between skill level and duration of stay in the Netherlands. Whereas

high-skilled immigrants face numerous work opportunities in a competitive international job market and exhibit less attachment (also dependence) to the Netherlands, those with lower skill endowments remain longer in the country. Ties to ethnic networks play a significant role in reinforcing the attachment of migrants from Morocco and Turkey to the Netherlands, despite perceptions of difference between “Islamic” and “Dutch” cultures and the low “assimilation rates” of these groups in terms of weak fluency in Dutch and high unemployment rates (Bijwaard, 2010: 1233, 1240).

## **2.3 CORRESPONDING RESPONSES TO IMMIGRATION: INTEGRATION STRATEGIES**

This section looks at the importance of “framing” integration issues for policy. That Dutch immigrant integration policy is characterised by “discontinuity” implies the emergence of various, and sometimes seemingly conflicting, frames every so often – approximately once a decade, according to Scholten (2011: 75). Therefore, whilst the Minorities Policy of the 1980s had distinctive multiculturalist undertones, the Integration Policy of the following decade was more “universalist” in character and the 2000s witnessed a decidedly more assimilationist emphasis with the “Integration Policy New Style” (Scholten, 2011: 76). Despite the abundant literature spanning decades on the topic of immigrant integration in the Netherlands, it remains a subject that continues to “defy definition” (Scholten, 2011: 75). Disagreement over the type of emancipation or participation integration should involve (whether economic, political or cultural), or about the specific groups of people integration should target, becomes apparent when observing the policy priorities of a particular period in the country’s history of attempting to deal with and accommodate diversity (Scholten, 2011: 75).

### **2.3.1 The Genesis of Accommodation: Pillarisation**

Although this thesis concentrates on the period from 1989 to March 2011, it is necessary to mention briefly the Dutch tradition of *verzuiling*, or pillarisation. Pre-existing group structures as well as transformations regarding institutionalised group rights help one to appreciate more fully current reactions against multiculturalism in many Western contexts (Winter, 2010: 186). With its origins in the nineteenth century, pillarisation was the country’s first formal effort to institutionalise pluralism and foster stability among potentially conflicting societal groups. Dutch pillarisation entailed the vertical segmentation of society into separate social “pillars” each endowed with their own *publicly funded* social, cultural and political institutions such as community newspapers, clubs, trade unions and other civic organisations (Carle, 2006: 71 and Maas, 2010: 227, 228). These historically-established segments of society were defined in religious-ideological terms: Catholics, Protestants, socialists and liberals consequently coexisted largely autonomously from one another and were referred to as the “four pillars” of Dutch



society (Winter, 2010: 183). The “pillar” metaphor evokes the idea of a Greek temple supported by these denominational and ideological pillars. Affording potentially conflicting societal groups the space to pursue group needs and identities within a relatively autonomous cultural sphere was a strategy to facilitate social stability. Institutionalised harmony was made possible by effectively minimising interaction between these groups and this arrangement was deemed viable for maintaining the values of each group.

In light of the country’s history of pillarisation therefore, it was taken as a given that Islamic immigrants would be accorded their own “Muslim” pillar to realise an Islamic cultural identity within Dutch society (Carle, 2006: 71). Muslim schools, mosques and other Islamic institutions were therefore established by the Dutch government in the 1980s. The thinking that accompanied these developments was that a Muslim pillar would gradually collapse in much the same way that its Protestant and Catholic predecessors had done amidst an increasingly secularised Dutch society characterised by postmodern individualism (Carle, 2006: 71). Despite such expectations, and notwithstanding the highly secular nature of the public sphere, this “fifth pillar” has been perceived to be a particularly resilient one, given what is deemed the incomplete cultural integration of Muslims. The Netherlands, and the larger European context, has today become a major immigration destination for fundamentalist Muslims. The role of Islam in the Dutch immigration debate will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, and the prospect of there being a veritable “Clash of Civilisations” in the Netherlands today will be considered.

Although the pillarisation tradition has effectively become redundant with the rising tide of secularisation and individualism since the 1960s which has removed the religious motivation for this arrangement, it is commonly argued that the legacy of pillarisation is indeed still apparent today, particularly from an institutional point of view (Carle, 2006: 71; Vink, 2007: 342; Maas, 2010: 233). Whilst the real extent of this “legacy” is debatable, these inherited institutional structures are indeed reflected in the continued existence of “community” broadcasting networks and the establishment of state-subsidised denominational schools. Despite the structural reflections of this legacy however, the context within which group claims are articulated today has changed and Winter (2010: 176, 177) writes that there is limited opportunity for non-European and non-Christian *allochtonen* (people of foreign origin) to voice their claims in a context where group power relations favour the largely homogenous society of *autochtonen*, or ethnic Dutch.

## 2.3.2 The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism?

### 2.3.2.1 Minorities Policy 1978 – 1994

For most of the post-war era, no official government policy towards the temporary “guestworkers” or newcomers from the ex-colonies existed and attempts to deal with an increasing foreign presence were somewhat *ad hoc* (Vink, 2007: 340). The publication of a 1979 report on ethnic minority groups by the independent advisory body, the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), criticised both government’s expectations that these minority groups’ presence would be temporary as well as the informal, *laissez-faire* approach that was taken. The Netherlands was recognised as a *de facto* immigration country and the Council warned that failure to draft a comprehensive integration policy for immigrant groups would result in their social dislocation and cultural exclusion (Vink, 2007: 340). This shift in the framing of integration saw the designing of a Draft Minorities Memorandum for what would eventually become the country’s 1983 *Minderhedennota* or Minorities Policy. Laying the foundation for Dutch multiculturalism and reflecting the belief that this approach would enhance tolerance and cultural diversity, this development marked a decisive break from prior resistance towards the construction of such policy (Scholten, 2011: 84; Carle, 2006: 71; Winter, 2010: 173). The technocratic model of the Minorities Policy which involved input from researchers and policy-makers alike was important for the development of the multiculturalist approach to integration and was also indicative of a strong scientific dominance in the way that research informed the structure of policy-making at the time (Scholten, 2011: 84).

The thinking advising the Minorities Policy, which the country was comparatively early in drafting, was that government should strive towards nurturing the equal opportunity and value of the Netherlands’ majority and minority groups and combat discrimination in all guises (Vink, 2007: 340, 341). It was informed by the idea that improving the social-cultural position of migrants would improve social-economic circumstances (Scholten, 2011: 81). The Minorities Policy reflected an acceptance of the country’s multi-ethnic profile and the underlying objectives of the policy – to foster multicultural liberation and socio-cultural emancipation *via the preservation of identity*, ensure juridical equality and promote equal opportunity for all citizens – were recognised as efforts to promote “integration with the retention of identity”, a strategy deemed complimentary to the country’s tradition of pillarisation (Carle, 2006: 71; Vink, 2007: 341; Winter, 2010: 173). The establishment of denominational schools, community newspapers, broadcasting networks and other social organisations for minority groups thus proceeded; a publicly sponsored Dutch Muslim Broadcasting Service has been in existence since 1985 in addition to a

Hindu equivalent since 1995 (Vink, 2007: 341). Islamic and Hindu primary schools have been around since 1988 and to date there are around 40 Islamic junior schools in the country (Vink, 2007: 341).

With the multicultural approach to integration, the Dutch government actively supported the principle of cultural diversity and the right of various groups to practice and realise distinctive social identities free from government interference (Vink, 2007: 338, 341). The Dutch welfare state sponsored the cultural diversity profile it sought to realise by offering generous benefits and strategies to achieve a more proportionate representation of ethnic minorities in the labour market, such as the 1998 Act for Stimulation of Labour Market Participation (Maas, 2010: 228; Reyneri and Fullin, 2011: 43; Vink, 2010: 341). Despite the prospect of economic recession and higher unemployment in the 1980s, the Minorities Policy was not affected by the process of welfare state cutbacks that was implemented: it was recognised that strategies to enhance the position of minorities should not be compromised in the context of an economic slump (Scholten, 2011: 85).

In an effort to enhance the political participation and decision-making power of minority groups, policy as it exists today also makes provisions for several minority organisations and an “institution of consultative bodies”, where government is able to discuss matters of policy relevance with representatives of ethnic minority groups (Vink, 2007: 341). Under the 1997 Law on the Consultation of Minority Policy and the National Minorities Consultation, the Dutch government convenes thrice annually at the very least with eight “official” subsidised minority groups on issues concerning integration policy. Represented are Chinese, Turkish, Moluccan, Southern European, Carribean Dutch, Surinamese and Moroccan interests, in addition to the concerns of refugees (Vink, 2007: 342). The extent to which such a provision represents more than mere symbolic political inclusion and actually amounts to real practical significance is a matter not discussed here. “Multicultural” and “emancipation” frames thus dominated parliamentary framing of integration in the mid-1990s, the latter frame reflecting the perspective of immigrants as “backwards in participation, customs and beliefs”, requiring their more active participation in decision-making and the labour market to achieve “emancipation” (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 301, 307).

The Minorities Policy positioned the Netherlands as a pioneer of multicultural politics in Western Europe with regards to the inclusion of immigrants into society. The 1985 permission of local voting rights to non-nationals after 5 years’ residence was a direct consequence of the Minorities Policy and a 1998 study of minority rights in France, Germany and the Netherlands revealed that the Netherlands was the most progressive and “immigrant-friendly” in terms of rights endowed to foreigners, thanks to this policy (Maas, 2010: 229; Vink, 2007: 340). Along with the 1984 Equal Treatment Act was the 1986 Nationality

Act that ushered in a relatively straightforward process of naturalisation; these measures, along with the acceptance of dual citizenship at one stage, have for certain observers been taken as evidence of efforts to entrench the “permanent multicultural character” of Dutch society (Winter, 2010: 174).

### 2.3.2.2 Integration Policy 1994 - 2003

It is common to see the “fall” of multiculturalism in the Netherlands being attributed to the rise of right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn in Dutch politics or to the series of “shock events” that occurred around the turn of the millennium and which will be elaborated upon further on in this chapter. Although these incidents had a decided impact on both discourse and in practice, it is necessary to be wary of ascribing too much significance to them, as they tend to be too easily credited for affecting a paradigm shift (Vink, 2007: 337). Adopting a more historical perspective on the origins of multicultural discontentment, Vink (2007: 338) traces processes of reassessing state-newcomer relations back to the end of the 1980s already, to a 1989 observation by the prominent WRR that Dutch integration strategies had failed to thwart immigrants’ economic marginalisation (Winter, 2010: 174). It was this new WRR report entitled “Immigrant Policy”, commissioned by the Minister of Home Affairs, which stimulated for the first time wide public debate surrounding immigrant integration. Although not automatically resulting in policy change, it did ultimately contribute to the Integration Policy (Scholten, 2011: 85, 86).

This WRR report situated immigrants’ obligation to participate in society within the broader context of welfare state cutbacks and emphasised the need for a new approach deviating from current policy dialogue by advancing a stricter social-economic attitude to integration. Reference to “integration” as opposed to “emancipation” and to “allochthonous” rather than “minorities” represented a discursive effort to steer away from dominant discourse that signalled out minority groups; emphasis was instead on minorities’ communality with other “citizens” (Scholten, 2011: 85). These paradigmatic or problem framing changes during the 1990s became increasingly evident from a policy perspective. The period between 1992 and 1997 during which dual nationality was permitted, did however represent a divergence from the general trend of this period: during this phase, the view of the political left that naturalisation would succeed in promoting integration and a spirit of civic duty dominated that of the right (Vink, 2007: 346; Maas, 2010: 226). The left considered nationality to be more a manifestation of one’s affiliation with a particular country as opposed to an expression of undivided loyalty; affiliation with more than one state was therefore permissible (Maas, 2010: 230). Political parties on the right, however, maintained that tolerating dual nationality and granting citizenship too easily would not succeed in fostering a sense of national loyalty among immigrants; full legal inclusion should occur only once the intended recipient

exhibit complete integration with the host society (Maas, 2010: 226). During this period, then, naturalisations peaked in 1996 at over 80 000 (Maas, 2010: 226; Vink, 2007: 340).

At the time of writing, however, an almost complete reversal of policy has been witnessed, making Dutch nationality far more difficult to come by and more easily stripped from those individuals who abuse it. The return to single nationality in 1997 and the subsequent series of laws which include the 1998 Law on Civic Integration of Newcomers targeting immigrants' capacity for self-sufficiency, the Law on Benefit Entitlements or "Linkage Act" which more closely associated legal status with access to public services, and the 2000 Immigration Law which hardened asylum policy, are all indicative of increasingly restrictionist policy and a changing climate pre-2001 when Fortuyn arrived on the scene (Vink, 2007: 346). It is however important not to look at citizenship policy in the Netherlands as an entirely rigid indicator of levels of tolerance. Examples of restrictionist policy are not confined to the last decade with the onset of efforts to formally integrate immigrants, and this period is similarly not characterised by restrictionist policy alone. An example of more open policy and willingness to tolerate the continued presence of unauthorised residents was when the Dutch government provided amnesty to thousands of illegal residents in mid-2007. Local councils and mayors were called upon to pass on the names of all applicants satisfying conditions for a residence permit (Maas, 2010: 233).

From the beginning of the 1990s then, it had already become apparent that official policy towards ethnic minorities would need to be re-evaluated in light of significant shifts in public attitudes since the days of the Minorities Policy of 1983. Despite measures to improve the socio-economic circumstances of Dutch Muslims, unemployment among this group still remained high (by 1990, half of all Turkish and Moroccan men over the age of 40 years were unemployed) and a disproportionate number of Islamic migrants were recipients of some form of public welfare (Carle, 2006: 71). The migration of spouses from these migrants' countries of origin, termed "marriage migration", in addition to family reunification strategies, only served to heighten the dependence of this group upon the Dutch welfare system (Carle, 2006: 71). Efforts to address these socio-economic discrepancies, such as offering employment training programmes to Dutch Muslims, were therefore seen as having proven unsuccessful, yielding few intended results.

It was in such a context of social and economic marginalisation that opinions about the alleged incompatibility between "Dutch" or "Western values" and those of Islam became more apparent. Talk of such cultural incompatibility was therefore already being made prior to 9/11, an event which catapulted religious extremism into Western foreign policies as an issue of central relevance. Before 2001, then,

criticism of Dutch multiculturalism was already being made in light of perceived cultural clashes; the September attacks re-introduced the topic of cultural incompatibility into mainstream political debate (Vink, 2007: 338). Ten years before 9/11, however, claims of cultural incongruence seem to have been motivated more by socio-economic discrepancies between Muslim groups and the native Dutch population, rather than arising from threats posed by “Islamic culture” and religious fundamentalism per se.

In 1991, Frits Bolkestein, then-parliamentary leader for the main opposition party, the conservative-liberal People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), delivered a speech expressing the “irreconcilability” of “Islamic” and “Western values” and called for immigrants to adapt to the dominant status quo and subscribe to “Dutch values” (Carle, 2006: 71; Vink, 2007: 338; Winter, 2010: 174). The way that the Islamic debate in the Netherlands has reflected “Clash of Civilisations” rhetoric demands greater attention in Chapter 3. It is however necessary to note here that this appeal marked a distinctive break from the multicultural approach in attempting to deal with cultural diversity, revealing a shift in emphasis towards cultural integration. Although the speech was subject to fierce criticism from staunch multiculturalists, the subsequent growth in electoral support for Bolkestein was testimony to the resonance of his message among the Dutch public. Bolkestein’s success was illustrative of the will of a so-called “silent majority” in the country previously restricted from articulating their true wishes vis-à-vis traditionally contentious and “taboo” topics pertaining to cultural diversity, multiculturalism and integration (Carle, 2006: 71; Winter, 2010: 174). The 1994 parliamentary elections saw the defeat of the Christian Democrats (CDA), the party traditionally in support of the pillarised system, and the formation of a new coalition government comprising of the Labour Party (PvdA), the liberal VVD and the Democrats (D66). This new government marked a shift in the emphasis of integration policy: from esteem for cultural diversity to the participation and integration of immigrants (Winter, 2010: 174). The 1997 Newcomers’ Integration Act obliging new immigrants to participate in civic integration courses is seen as indicative of this policy shift.

Frits Bolkestein’s somewhat unanticipated success led to a review of the country’s ethnic minorities’ policy and in 1994 the Dutch government released a new policy entitled *Contourennota integratiebeleid etnische minderheden* (Ethnic Minorities Integration Policy Outline) that was intended to replace the 1983 Minorities Policy (Carle, 2006: 71). Integration was identified as a process by which to foster the full and equal participation of all citizens within society, “mutual respect” and “identity” being at the core of such civic involvement (Carle, 2006: 71). A new element of this approach was the expectation that all ethnic minorities develop a fluency in the Dutch language. The publication of this document represented a

decisive departure from the Dutch culture of pillarisation, shifting emphasis from multiculturalism to integration. The aforementioned controversy traditionally surrounding the topic of integration was due to perceptions that integrationist attitudes effectively amounted to racism, rendering criticism of multiculturalism messy and difficult. The Minorities Policy with its multiculturalist paradigm was thus “reframed” into an Integration Policy that saw a reversal of the causal relation between socio-economic participation and cultural emancipation: the Integration Policy now posited the alternative reasoning that social-economic improvement would prove conducive to social-cultural enhancement and not the other way round as suggested in the Minorities Policy (Scholten, 2011: 81). The normative thinking about being a multicultural society that undergirded the Minorities Policy was far less influential in informing this new policy and more emphasis was accorded to the association between integrating immigrants and maintaining a functional Dutch welfare state (Scholten, 2011: 81).

This new ethnic minorities’ policy was also distinctive in terms of the “monocultural nationalism” it conveyed, demonstrating a break from earlier policymaking (Carle, 2006: 72; Winter, 2010: 175). Mention of the existence of a “true” and typically “Dutch” culture distinct from the customs of minority groups was more common; minorities were now expected to respect and live within the parameters of this national identity. Politician Pim Fortuyn was particularly critical of multiculturalism’s perceived failure in forging a sense of civic nationalism, national identity and pride, a shortcoming he alleged would result in the denigration of Dutch culture (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 273). It is interesting to note how this nationalist rhetoric and policymaking comes into confrontation with the values of the European Union, which rejects the idea of a coherent national identity for any of its sovereign member states (Carle, 2006: 72). This new nationalist spirit in the Netherlands was what led to the petition against dual citizenship in 1997 by the ruling government, the VVD and the Christian Democrats, resulting in its eventual discontinuation. Reflecting now the perspective of the political right on the matter, it was argued that immigrants valued Dutch passports more for practical purposes than for the reason of symbolically demonstrating national loyalty and pride.

### **2.3.3 Towards Assimilation and the Preservation of National Identity**

Carle (2006: 68) discusses how multiculturalism and secularism in the Netherlands initially proved mutually reinforcing, both being compatible with declining support for religious doctrine and the expansion of cultural expression. Whilst secularists hold that modernity and religion are inherently incompatible, multiculturalists are of the opinion that it is possible for a variety of worldviews and value systems to coexist within a single society (Carle, 2006: 73). Carle (2006: 68) argues that this symbiotic relationship between multiculturalism and secularism changed after a “series of shocks” that took place

during the particularly tumultuous decade that was the 2000s, events that served to shake previously-held assumptions about the country's supposedly intrinsic "liberalism" (Maas, 2010: 228). Key among these events is 9/11, which resulted in growing endorsement of the liberal state and, according to Joppke in Vink (2007: 338), a heightened disinclination to tolerate cultural diversity under the guise of multiculturalism. The political advent of Pim Fortuyn and the posthumous electoral success of his anti-immigration party *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* after his assassination at the hands of an environmental activist, as well as the anti-Islamism vendetta of politician Geert Wilders, are similarly identified as key watershed developments in the country's grapplings with multiculturalism. The 2004 murder of controversial filmmaker Theo van Gogh, great grandnephew of Vincent van Gogh, at the hands of a second-generation Dutch Muslim extremist of Moroccan origin was a similarly crucial watershed in the story of the Netherlands' multicultural experiment. Although van Gogh was himself subject to much censure in the Netherlands as a result of his outspoken views and deliberately offensive comments about all religions in general, his death was met with an outburst of public anger and sense of vulnerability (Carle, 2006: 69). The murder, which took place in full public view in a quiet street one morning in Amsterdam, was an unthinkable occurrence for a country whose politics was often denounced as "boring".

"The Multicultural Tragedy", a 2000 article by the well-known Dutch historian and Labour Party (PvdA) member Paul Scheffer, aroused significant public attention over claims that the values of the Dutch elite were responsible for preventing the adoption of a tough stance towards the "illiberal" ideas of the growing Muslim population (Winter, 2010: 174). Cultural relativism and a cosmopolitan ideal were blamed for dissuading demands on immigrants to conform and adapt to Dutch political culture in accordance with the principles of liberal democracy (Carle, 2006: 72). The price of living in an open, tolerant society was therefore the erosion of *Dutch* language and culture. Scheffer charged multiculturalism with exacerbating socio-economic discrepancies and creating marginalised groups – an "ethnic underclass" – who, as a result of the insularity afforded to them by policies encouraging cultural distinctiveness, had been left excluded from Dutch society (Carle, 2006: 72; Vink, 2007: 339). These so-called "outgroups" were consequently either disinclined or unwilling to integrate, merely perpetuating their marginal positions (Carle, 2006: 72). Whilst Vink finds this article significant for its fearless and open critique of multiculturalism, Winter (2010: 174) accords even greater importance to the article by virtue of its indication of a prevailing "paradigm shift" in Dutch public opinion and policy-making. Scholten (2011: 81) similarly talks about a third framing shift in Dutch integration policy around this time, with emphasis being placed on the question of social-cultural *adaptation* as opposed to social-economic participation. Rather than stressing action and involvement on the part of immigrants as was the case of the Integration Policy of the 1990s, this so-called Integration Policy "New Style" sought to emphasise migrants' common



citizenship with the wider Dutch citizenry (Scholten, 2011: 81). Continuing cultural differences were regarded as an obstacle to both immigrant integration and efforts to preserve a national Dutch identity; the unification of citizens under a common language and common set of values was thus seen as the key to achieving social harmony (Scholten, 2011: 81).

Whereas a climate of political correctness was typical of debate on immigration, Islamism and multiculturalism prior to the arrival of Fortuyn on the political scene and the murder of van Gogh, these events inspired greater confidence among the public and in academia to voice opposition to previously sensitive topics. More people began to feel comfortable in identifying with the growing belief that the country's attempts at nurturing tolerance and cultural diversity via multiculturalism had in fact resulted in the avoidance of frank confrontation with the challenges involved in incorporating conservative Muslim immigrants into society (Carle, 2006: 69). The end of the 1990s thus saw a higher prevalence of the so-called "restriction" frame in official parliamentary documents, emphasising the insufficient integration of certain groups within society, particularly Moroccans and Antilleans, and resulting in greater critique of existing policies and integration efforts (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 307). Some are more critical of recent restrictionist policies indirectly targeting particular groups of immigrants, such as family reunification migrants, claiming that these strategies normalise discrimination and make xenophobia "socially acceptable" to Dutch citizens previously able to resist resorting to racism (Vink, 2007: 347). Whereas Fortuyn is often credited with pioneering the multicultural debate, Vink (2007: 339) asserts that he was rather responsible for radicalising a discourse of "new realism" that had in reality been evolving over the last decade.

Fortuyn's unapologetic denouncement of multiculturalism began to strike a chord not only with the Dutch public but also among other political parties, many of whom began to accept the ever-pervasive view that multiculturalism had served to divide rather than unite ethnic groups in the country. Fortuyn singled out Islam in particular for its purported "backwardness" and inability to adapt, compromise and ultimately encourage social cohesion, reflecting a noteworthy divergence from the Dutch tradition of religious tolerance. Islam became symbolically synonymous with many of the social problems associated with immigration and cultural integration, and Moroccans and Turks were almost exclusively targeted in public debate to assimilate. Their purported disinclination to integrate and participate in society positioned these two Islamic groups in particular as a worrying threat to Dutch culture and society in the eyes of Fortuyn and those of an increasing segment of the population (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 274).

### 2.3.3.1 Integration Policy “New Style” 2003 -

It is not surprising then that in an era which saw the publication of Scheffer’s article, terrorist attacks in 2001 and various public figures drawing attention to the limits of multiculturalism, immigrant integration would emerge as one of the most important social and political issues of the new millennium in the Netherlands (Scholten, 2011: 87). The policy characterising this period of the Dutch integration narrative is the assimilationist “Integration Policy New Style” which was adopted from 2003 onwards and reflected the increasing desire to preserve national “Dutch” identity and culture (Scholten, 2011: 82, 87). The early years of the 2000s was a period of heightened sensitivity towards issues pertaining to immigrant *allochtonen*; that is, immigrants and their descendents, particularly Muslims (Winter, 2010: 175). The centre-right coalition government of Christian Democrats, Liberals and the right-wing List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) that came into power after the volatile May 2002 general elections and was headed by Jan Peter Balkenende of the Christian Democrats, was at lengths to dissociate itself from the multicultural project in the Netherlands and led the formulation of the “Integration Policy New Style”. An analysis of why integration policy had proved unsuccessful up until this point was commissioned by a provisional parliamentary investigative committee for integration policy and the subsequent finding that integration had been “relatively successful”, particularly in the education and labour domains, was widely rejected as naïve (Scholten, 2011: 87). The previous publication of the WRR’s third report on immigrant integration in 2001 entitled “The Netherlands as Immigration Society” had also previously been dismissed for its suggestion that minorities would develop mixed identities, which was at odds with dominant discourse at the time and with policy’s growing national focus (Scholten, 2011: 87).

Similarly, the Minorities Reports that had been issued by the Social and Cultural Planning Office since the 1990s and had previously accorded primary focus to minorities’ social-economic participation, gradually began publishing data pertaining to social-cultural integration from 2001 onwards (Scholten, 2011: 88). This research was better suited to public and political discourse’s renewed national focus. Research that legitimised the new assimilationist policy discourse was therefore embraced whilst studies and reports that continued to announce the possibilities for realising multicultural ideals were rejected (Scholten, 2011: 88). Successive Dutch governments over the last decade have therefore been at pains to distance themselves from the “overly accommodating” tones of several reports published in recent years, such as one parliamentary committee’s “Building Bridges” report and the equally ill-timed WRR’s document on “Dynamism in Islamic Activism” (Vink, 2007: 346). From a rhetorical point of view, governments have increasingly emphasised the value of individual responsibility to integrate, belong and participate rather than making condescending pleas to “accommodate” and “uplift” ethnic minorities (Vink, 2007: 346).

In an effort to re-establish a sense of confidence in Dutch politics after Fortuyn's provocations, the centre-right governments that were in power from 2002 to 2007 sought to identify more closely with popular concerns. Particularly in harsh economic times, identification with the economic-related woes of the electorate is politically advisable. Scholten (2011: 88) writes that where once problem framing was shaped by a "logic of minorities" in the 1980s and a "logic of equity" in the 1990s, it was now founded upon a "majorities logic", and the continuing debate over integration in the Netherlands has increasingly come to revolve around "re-imagining the Dutch community" rather than migrant integration. Immigrant integration in the Netherlands has become a question of symbolic politics and increasingly takes into account broader societal interests (Scholten, 2011: 90).

From 1998 - 2007, the Law of Civic Integration for Newcomers came into existence, making classes on Dutch culture, language and society compulsory for all new immigrant hopefuls from outside the European Union (Carle, 2006: 72). Upon the successful outcome of an interview testing language skills and educational level, applicants are then obliged to participate in a series of language courses and training in "social and civic skills and job preparation" (Carle, 2006: 72). March 2006 saw the establishment of a new Civic Integration Abroad Act (*Wet Inburgering Buitenland*) geared towards restricting family reunion immigration and making compulsory a civic integration exam for all foreigners applying for a residence permit. The exam assesses command of the Dutch language and knowledge of Dutch society and obliges participants to watch the film *Coming to the Netherlands* which features images of women sunbathing topless and makes overt references to homosexuality; the point is to convey the message that in the Netherlands, these are all considered "quite ordinary and acceptable" elements of Dutch life (Vink, 2007: 346; Winter, 2010: 175).

The new 2006 Civic Integration Act (*Wet Inburgering*) replaced its 1998 predecessor, the aforementioned "Civic Integration for Newcomers Act" (Vink, 2007: 347). In light of several shortcomings associated with the old Act, involving administrative complexities and long waiting lists for civic integration courses, the new one now requires both new *and* old-comers to embark on the course and sit the accompanying exam (Vink, 2007: 347). This law is applicable to all non-Dutch and non-EU residents between 16 and 65 years old, longer residents that have neither been products of the Dutch educational system nor passed a "naturalisation exam", and even certain Dutch citizens that are recipients of welfare benefits and those of particular religious professions (Vink, 2007: 347). The Civic Integration Act reflects the point of view that non-EU immigrants have a duty to integrate (*inburgeringsplicht*) (Winter, 2010: 175). The onus is put on individuals to select the organisation through which they will participate in the course and the responsibility of seeing the process through, and financing it, is theirs to bear; those

applicants who complete the exam within a period of three years may however qualify for reimbursement (Vink, 2007: 347).

The Islamic focus of these integration measures is evident via the requirement that all imams receive a Dutch education. Similarly, the establishment of theological departments at universities for the purpose of training Islamic prayer leaders has been encouraged by offering subsidies to the institutions concerned (Carle, 2006: 72). A prerequisite for the opening of all new schools is that they pledge to convey “the values of Dutch society” to their learners and Carle (2006: 72) notes that although this policy does not explicitly single out Muslim schools, it is almost certainly geared towards them. The turn of the millennium has thus witnessed a distinctive turn away from valuing diversity, towards a broader recognition that cultural difference is not always an asset to society (Scholten, 2011: 83). In the aftermath of 9/11 and the “War on Terror”, the “Islam-as-threat” frame has therefore become especially central to portrayals of the integration debate, with the restriction and multicultural frames consequently waning in the context of prioritising efforts to tackle Islamic extremism (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 308).

## **2.4 DUTCH INTEGRATION POLICY IN PERSPECTIVE**

The above descriptions of Dutch policy indicate that there has been no single model of immigrant integration. The strategies undertaken were indeed characterised by a “pattern of punctuated equilibrium” comprising various shifting problem frames that gave rise to very different comprehensions and interpretations of immigrant integration (Scholten, 2011: 81). Scholten (2011: 75) also acknowledges how structural changes have been influential in the growth of a more assimilationist immigrant policy frame: whilst scientific research was central to the construction of policy with the technocratic and depoliticised style that prevailed “well into the 1980s”, a more “engineering-like” policy structure has prevailed since the early 1990s favouring political control over the policy-making process and involving the more selective use of scientific expertise to legitimise prevailing policy discourse (Scholten, 2011: 75, 90). Growing perceptions about threats to liberal democratic culture and to Dutch national identity in the form of illiberal social elements seem to have shifted the belief that the solution to securing domestic peace lies in the promotion of group autonomy; instead, social harmony is increasingly deemed attainable via adaptation to Dutch society and via the assimilation of dominant cultural norms. This proclivity to exhibit a lower tolerance threshold for culturally diverse social elements considered contradictory to liberal political culture, has important implications for the country’s overall liberal democratic profile.

Although it is generally accepted that what legacies there are from pillarisation are largely institutional, Vink (2007) is sceptical of how big an institutional influence there is in reality. A comprehensive set of institutions for Muslims encompassing “maternity clinics, hospitals, care homes, swimming clubs, trade unions, pressure groups, housing associations” and the like was not developed, as would have been expected of the pillarisation model and as was indeed the case for Catholic and Protestant communities (Rath *et al.* in Vink, 2007: 344). In terms of the existence of a *comparable* Islamic “fifth pillar” in the Netherlands, therefore, it is arguable whether there ever really was one and it is purportedly this still-fashionable “pillarisation myth” that is to blame for presumptions that Dutch accommodation policies were an extension of pillarisation (see Winter, 2010: 173). Such “comfortable” and “stereotypical” lines of reasoning about how the country’s multicultural forays drew heavily from its previous pillarisation tradition are seen to fit in very well with “naïve” notions about the Netherlands’ lenient accommodation policies and clichéd image as an immigrant-welcoming, multicultural haven (Vink, 2007: 343). It is in light of these conventional, idealistic interpretations then that the discordance between the country’s traditional politics of accommodation and its more restrictive, current outlook on immigration and integration appears all the more out of sync. Scholten (2011: 77) maintains that although the extent of pillarisation’s institutional “path dependency” may be debated, there is little doubt that from a policy perspective the Netherlands did not draw from its past experiences with religious-ideological accommodation, if evidence of problem framing is anything to go by. The fact that the country has chosen to pursue such different trajectories in terms of integration models over the past thirty to forty years suggests that policy-making and research is indeed marked by discontinuity (Scholten, 2011: 77 – 79).

Whilst many authors are also prone to talking freely about the “retreat” or “demise” of multiculturalism (see Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 273; Carle 2006), it has been argued that this so-called decline perhaps marks more a discursive break with the past than any real change (Vink, 2007: 337). The shift to a more restrictive, less openly-accommodating integration policy has often been attributed to the “rightist” turn in Dutch politics as a result of personalities such as Fortuyn, Verdonk and Wilders, resulting in a creeping “repressive liberalism” (Joppke in Vink, 2007: 343). Tracing political dissension with multiculturalism to long before the advent of Fortuyn on the political scene, Vink (2007: 344) is sceptical of this argument and argues that the term “multiculturalism” was originally used in a purely descriptive sense in reference to growing cultural and ethnic diversity as opposed to suggesting any normative ideal. It is this inconsistent use of the “multicultural” concept that is secondly credited with giving rise to the pillarisation myth (Vink, 2007: 344). A 1970 government report stating that foreign workers were entitled to the preservation of their own identities was therefore an effort in pragmatism as opposed to the pursuit of multicultural ideology: it was only in 1979 that the WRR recognised that the “guestworkers” were

officially “here to stay” and up until this point minimal integration into the temporary host society was deemed conducive to a smoother return home (Vink, 2007: 344, 345). Up until this point, the idea of constructing new pillars for minorities was explicitly rejected on the basis that it would provide an excuse for government inaction in managing immigration flows. More “active encouragement” of these newcomers’ participation in society was needed, requiring a more assertive integration policy than that which was offered by pillarisation (Vink, 2007: 344). Referring to government’s aforementioned practice of consulting with minority group representatives within the scope of a specially designated council – charged with reinforcing the “minorisation of minorities” – it is arguable whether the emphasis of Dutch integration policy towards minorities was on “integration” as opposed to the “preservation of own identity” all along (Vink, 2007: 345). Even since the days of the 1983 Minorities Memorandum therefore, policy appears to have emphasised the asymmetrical cultural *insertion* of migrants *into* the dominant, overarching culture entrenched in Dutch society rather than prioritising the inclusion of such groups on culturally equal terms. Recent changes, then, might represent much less a break with the past than is popularly claimed by stereotypical accounts of integration policy in the Netherlands (Vink, 2007: 337).

Observing evidence of continuity in integration policy is not to suggest that there has been no significant change towards managing immigration over the past two to three decades. The fact that right-wing politician Hans Janmaat was found guilty in 1997 for similar anti-multiculturalism rhetoric when Fortuyn was not, is indicative of the different political and social atmospheres in which he and Fortuyn campaigned (Vink, 2007: 345). In the space of 5 years between 1996 and 2001, it would certainly seem that enough had changed regarding immigration and integration discourse to allow Fortuyn to escape similar conviction for his provocations. Geert Wilders was similarly acquitted of hate speech and discrimination charges on 23 June 2011 following his comparison of Islam with Nazism. Whilst Wilders’ statements were indeed acknowledged by Judge Marcel van Oosten to be “crude and denigrating”, the grounds for his acquittal were that his comments formed part of a larger national debate on multiculturalism and immigration policy (Sterling 2011). Despite Wilders’ remarks admittedly causing offense to many Muslims, they were considered to lie within the realm of legitimate political deliberation. Hailed as a “victory” for free speech by Wilders’ supporters, the acquittal naturally came as a blow to groups fearful that the ruling would set a dangerous precedent for other right-wing parties and populist politicians in Europe (Sterling 2011). Despite the “inciting character” of Wilders’ statements, his remarks were not seen to incite *hatred*, as Wilders has never condoned or called for violence against Muslims and has said he has no problem with Muslims that integrate and accept Dutch values. Reference to the Qu’ran as the Islamic *Mein Kampf*, whilst derogatory, was considered to amount to religious critique. The trials of Fortuyn, and now Wilders, for inflammatory speech may well have produced different results had they

taken place 15 years ago. The transformed climate in which integration debates take place currently means that Janmaat's conviction for comparable "offences" – statements that are now quite commonplace – would be a surprising verdict today. Anti-immigration and more assimilationist perspectives have therefore found their way into the political mainstream and into a political space that was "previously suppressed", becoming a more accepted and tolerated feature of the debate (van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 404). This suggests that the parameters for what is appropriate in the context of public and political debate have widened significantly and the political legroom of the right has increased. The next chapter delves more deeply into this "national debate" in the Netherlands, emphasising in particular the contribution of the Dutch right-wing to this dialogue.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has looked at processes of both continuity and change with respect to Dutch integration policy. The influence of various forces and motivations on these policy and framing shifts has been considered and the intention has been to show that although distinctive approaches to integration enable discernment among policy models from one period to the next, the trajectory from pillarisation to multiculturalism, to integration and finally assimilation, is not as clear-cut or stereotypical as is often suggested. These policy shifts are significant beyond the realm of strategy and are ultimately revealing of the way in which perceptions towards the position of foreigners in the country and towards immigrant groups themselves are in constant flux. The constant redefinition of Dutch integration policy also reflects on a wider level something of the state of liberal democracy in the country in the way that multiculturalism, not as an ideology or policy strategy but as a descriptive fact of society's cultural diversity, is approached and welcomed. Although the increasing shift away from multiculturalism as an official tactic in managing pluralism is not in itself telling of the state of liberal democracy in the country, the extent to which certain multicultural *values* continue to be reflected in the political culture of the Netherlands is certainly an important consideration when it comes down to assessing the country's liberal democratic balance sheet. The degree to which norms such as tolerance of societal diversity and respect for the right of all to pursue individual (or collective) identity are realised in conjunction with increased efforts to promote a distinctively Dutch culture, will serve as an important indicator of the "health" of liberal democracy in the Netherlands. The following chapter delves more deeply into this central concern of the research by looking at the anti-immigration movement in the Netherlands as well as the position of Islam in the country, subsequently assessing what these two forces bode for Dutch liberal democracy.

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Increasing electoral support for far-right parties in national contexts throughout Europe reflects public disenchantment with mainstream parties in catering for popular concerns. Perceptions about traditional parties' remoteness from the concerns of voters have eroded the credibility of conventional, middle-of-the-road politics as citizens increasingly look to right-wing parties to represent their interests. This "new wave" of radical right populism is enjoying heightened representation in both national and regional arenas in Europe and the durability and electoral performances of some of these parties suggest that the impact of their political programmes on policy requires serious consideration. This chapter is particularly interested in what the Dutch populist radical right means for liberal political culture in the Netherlands. There is some disagreement about what the populist project bodes for liberal democracy and the ensuing discussion attempts to provide a balanced impression of contending arguments about the extent to which the Dutch populist right-wing can be seen to reflect liberal and democratic principles.

The radical right has been instrumental in fostering intensified public and political debate on the "foreigner's issue", a question traditionally "owned" by the far-right. Islam's centrality to the political motivations of the right implies that discussion of the populist right-wing that fails to address Islam's role in this agenda would lack context and comprehensiveness. To this end, this chapter is as much a discussion of Islam's position in contemporary Dutch society and discourse as it is about the aspirations and implications of the radical right. Particular focus is given to the cultural and religious dimensions of a debate which has come to reflect less concern for the socio-economic deficits of Dutch Muslims vis-à-vis the majority population. Although the ultimate interest of this thesis is economic and demographic-induced perceptions of threat, this chapter discusses more symbolic and cultural sources of negative immigration sentiment that centres on how Islamic minority culture in secular Dutch society is represented as an antithesis to liberal democratic values. It is not the intention, however, to analyse religious fundamentalism and terrorism in the Netherlands, nor to evaluate the degree of Islam and liberal democracy's (in)compatibility: rather, it is to observe the content of the arguments put forward by the radical right and how these themes have come to permeate popular and political discourse.

As the ultimate interest of this thesis is the possible influence of macro-economic climate in shaping perceptions towards immigrants, due attention is paid to the contextual peculiarities in which Europe, and the Netherlands specifically, have witnessed a populist resurgence. This discussion is thus peppered with



examples of the right-wing and Islamic experiences of other European states. The somewhat more comparative approach of this chapter is not to give a diluted account of developments in the Netherlands; rather, it is considered beneficial to the discussion's principal focus on the Dutch situation to contextualise these developments within wider European processes. It is hoped that a better understanding of the Dutch scenario will be gleaned via appreciation of the similarities with, and departures from, general European trends.

This chapter is essentially divided into one section that looks at Islam in the Netherlands and another that focuses on the Dutch populist right-wing. There is however a large degree of “thematic” overlap and reference to Islam and the populist radical right permeates this discussion throughout. The description of Islam's position in contemporary Dutch and European society looks at the socio-economic circumstances of Muslims and the cultural dimension of the “Islam debate” with regards to how ideological discourse is reflected. The section on the Dutch right-wing looks at both general and specific characteristics of this movement with reference to the Freedom Party and List Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands in particular and to populist parties elsewhere in Europe. The influence of the current macro-economic climate on these parties' electoral appeal is considered, and the discussion concludes with a reflection of radical right populism's relationship to liberal and democratic precepts. To begin, a brief introduction to the key political parties is given, including those that have been influential in the Dutch immigration debate.

### **3.2 KEY DUTCH POLITICAL PARTIES IN IMMIGRATION DEBATE**

The latest general elections in the Netherlands were held in June 2010 following the collapse of the Christian Democratic Appeal-led government in February 2010. This resulted in the current coalition government between the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). VVD leader Mark Rutte is the incumbent Prime Minister. This minority government was sworn in on 14 October 2010, controlling only 52 of 150 parliamentary seats; parliamentary support from Geert Wilders' anti-immigration Freedom Party (PVV) guaranteed an electoral majority however, increasing the Rutte government's share of seats to 76 which is the minimum required for approving legislation (US Dept of State, 2010; Ghitis 2011). Not openly included in the new government on account of Wilders' controversial views, the PVV does not hold any cabinet positions and its unofficial yet *de facto* presence is considered a “necessary evil”. In the Dutch spirit of compromise however, the PVV's support of 24 votes and of the strict budget cuts favoured by the VVD has been made in exchange for several new anti-immigration concessions in the government's policy statement. These include reducing family migration, removing financial support for integration classes, possibly

withdrawing residence permits upon the failing of integration exams, banning face-concealing garments and more money for elderly care (Freedom House, 2011; Sterling 2011; The Economist, 2010: 78). Despite all evidence pointing to the crumbling of this unlikely partnership, the coalition has held out against the odds (Ghitis 2011). Wilders and Rutte have been at loggerheads over several potentially destabilising issues including immigration policy, support for North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) operations in Libya and Afghanistan, and the prospect of a bailout for Greece which Wilders firmly rejected along with two-thirds of the Dutch public, affirming his image as the “people’s politician” (Ghitis 2011). When unable to rely on the PVV for support on certain issues, the VVD has often looked to labour (PvdA) on the opposition. Ghitis (2011) writes that the real test of this alliance will come when the proposed austerity plan is devised, whereby the government intends to slash \$25 billion from the national budget. Certain cutbacks will inevitably spark fierce opposition and the government will require support from the PVV more than ever.

### **3.2.1 People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD)**

The most recent general elections saw the conservative-liberal *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) narrowly emerge as the largest political party with 31 parliamentary seats, leading the government for the first time since 1918 and heading the country’s first conservative government in over 100 years (Ghitis, 2011; Wolin, 2011: 61). The most conservative of the main contenders, this centre-right party’s classical liberalism, promoting individual freedom from the government in all spheres, is especially reflected in its economic focus on private enterprise and fiscal conservatism (US Dept of State, 2010; Ghitis 2011). The PVV’s positions on integration, security and anti-immigration were largely shaped by former members Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, as well as by the former LPF’s electoral success (Akkerman, 2005: 344).

### **3.2.2 Labour Party (PvdA)**

The largest opposition party, the *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA), achieved second place in the June 2010 elections with 30 parliamentary seats – only 1 seat less than the VVD. A social democratic, left-of-centre party, the PvdA emphasises economic equality for all citizens although the role of central government in this regard is subject to debate (US Dept of State, 2010).

### **3.2.3 Freedom Party (PVV)**

The *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) was founded in 2005 by present-day party leader, the populist politician Geert Wilders. The PVV was formed after Wilders broke from the centre-right liberal VVD in 2004 due to his diverging views concerning the question of Turkey’s ascension to the EU (Bos and van

der Brug, 2010: 782). The June 2010 elections saw the PVV gain 24 parliamentary seats and 15% of the vote; almost triple its previous total of nine seats in 2006, and thus making it the third-largest party in the Netherlands. The chief priorities of the PVV are anti-immigration, anti-Islam and a nationalist agenda. Campaign slogans such as “Henk and Ingrid are paying for Ali and Fatima”, highlight the party’s position on the failure of the Netherlands’ Muslim communities to integrate (Raymunt, 2011). Economically, the party is seen as “conservatively” left-of-centre (US Dept of State, 2010).

### **3.2.4 Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA)**

The conservative centre-right *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA), a “once-dominant” political force, came in at 4<sup>th</sup> position in the most recent general elections with 21 seats, down from 41 in 2006 (van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 398). A proponent of free enterprise, the CDA sees the role of government as supporting but not displacing collective civic action. Politically, the party positions itself between liberal “individualism” and labour’s “statism” (US Dept of State, 2010).

### **3.2.5 Pim Fortuyn List (LPF)**

Founded in February 2002 by the Dutch populist politician Pim Fortuyn, the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) campaigned on an anti-immigration and anti-Muslim platform in the run-up to the 15 May 2002 general elections. The LPF was established after Fortuyn’s failure to find a niche within any existing political party. After announcing his intentions to run for office in 2001, Fortuyn joined the ranks of *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Netherlands), but was forced to resign as party leader in early 2002 after accusing Islam of “backwardness” (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 651). Two days after stepping down, Fortuyn founded the LPF with himself as leader. Just 9 days prior to the elections, he was murdered in the country’s first political assassination in 400 years by an animal rights extremist resentful of Fortuyn’s scapegoating of Dutch Muslims and the politician’s intentions to remove restrictions on fur farming (Carle, 2006: 72). The LPF went on to achieve astounding electoral success in the May 2002 elections. After campaigning under the name of List Five Fortuyn in the 2006 general elections, the party was dissolved on 1 January 2008. Several breakaway parties of the LPF exist, each claiming to continue its legacy. The Party for the Netherlands and EenNL are most influenced by the Pim Fortuyn movement, but most former LPF supporters have turned to the PVV (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 782).

## **3.3 ISLAM AND THE NETHERLANDS**

It has been suggested that Islam will have a deeper influence on twenty-first century Europe than the United States, Russia or perhaps even the European Union (Savage in Schori Liang, 2007: 22). In 2011,

Muslims comprised 6% of the total European population, up from 4% in 1990. With declining fertility rates and restrictions on immigration, Europe's Muslim population will continue to expand, albeit at a slower rate (European Report, 2011). The Balkans and Russia have large Muslim populations, but they are relatively long-established in comparison to Muslims in Western Europe. Europe's Muslims are comparatively young: 49% of the Muslim population is under 30 years, in contrast to 34% of non-Muslims (European Report, 2011).

European anxieties about immigration before and after the Cold War focussed on immigrants from developing countries that were accused of exploiting Europe's generous welfare systems. Whilst the previous chapter traced the origins of Dutch debate surrounding Islam's ideological (in)compatibility to a 1991 speech delivered by Bolkestein, a more *general* shift in threat perceptions towards Muslim immigrants in particular was witnessed in Europe after 9/11 and today, the terms "Muslim" and "immigrant" are almost synonymous (Schori Liang, 2007: 20, 23). The populist radical right has portrayed Islam as one of the foremost menaces to contemporary European lifestyles and political, cultural and economic security. It is for this reason that Schori Liang (2007: 21) contends that though the "Islamic question" is essentially a subsection of the overall immigration debate, the flurry of frenzied discussion accompanying this topic suggests that it has come to surpass the immigration issue. The example of Kosovo is often used as a warning of what may happen should Muslim immigration into Europe continue unfettered. The struggle between Christian Serbs in defence of their culture and values on the one hand, and Muslim Albanians demanding independence for Kosovo on the other, was dubbed an outrageous attack on Serbian sovereignty and identity by Heinz-Christian Strache, leader of Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ) (Betz and Meret, 2009: 329, 320).

Whilst immigration restrictions continue to feature prominently in populist radical right campaigns, this topic no longer defines the populist right-wing which, as of the "cultural turn" of the 1990s, has come to reflect more of an identitarian movement, pitting those in favour of cultural preservation against those who favour globalised, "culture-less" societies (Schori Liang, 2007: 21, 22). Moreover, whereas anti-immigration and anti-Islam sentiments used to be strongly associated with the conservative right of the political spectrum, the Islam debate in Europe today is increasingly the purview of both right and left interests. Rightist perspectives hold that Islam should be tolerated in Christian Europe in accordance with liberal values such as freedom of religion, but outward manifestations of Islamic faith are to be limited or relegated to the private sphere. Leftist persuasions deem fundamentalism incongruent with European secularism and women's rights: this argument is not so much against Islam as against its alleged undermining of the principle of gender equality (Roy, 2010: 67). Roy (2010: 67) stresses how the

“Islamic question” revolves not only around religion, but is inextricably linked to similarly complex and contentious issues of identity. He remarks upon how the rise of new populist movements has obfuscated the left-right divide on such topics; these movements, Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party for example, have relied upon arguments posited by both sides to advance their agenda.

The “differences” between Islamic immigrant populations in the United States and those that have come to settle in Europe have received ample focus: Europe’s Muslims are less ethnically diverse than their American counterparts who traditionally hail from different geographical areas. American Muslims are also relatively well-off economically and are better educated. Europe’s Islamic population represents a more cohesive, insular group considered more inclined to retaining ties to tradition and ethnic heritage: today, Europe is a top destination for a number of Islamic fundamentalist movements (Carle, 2006: 70, 71). European countries also tend to be dominated by specific Islamic ethnic groups: Turks in Germany, Moroccans in the Netherlands, North Africans in France and South Asian Muslims in the United Kingdom (European Report, 2011). A single religious identity is often seen to override all other individual affiliations or differences and whether or not Europe’s Muslims are more conspicuous for their homogeneity than heterogeneity, blanket references to all followers of Islam in Europe and to the position of “Muslims” in Dutch society naturally overlook the huge variety of individual experience in terms of linguistic, ethnic or cultural backgrounds (Fekete, 2008: 78). A degree of generalisation is however necessary to present an aggregate picture of Islam’s place in Dutch society.

The position of Islam in modern-day Europe is a tenuous and ambivalent one and there are numerous examples of recent confrontations between European and Islamic interests. Germany and secular non-EU member Switzerland are but two recent examples that reflect strong sentiments about Islam’s European presence (Biondo 2010). In 2009 the Deutsche Bundesbank’s Thilo Sarrazin claimed that Berlin’s economic woes were attributed to the large number of Turks and Arabs in the city with no productive capacity; his 2010 book *Germany Does Away With Itself* argued that that Muslim immigrants were having a degenerative effect by making the country “more stupid” (The Economist, 2010: 78). An opinion poll revealed that 60% of participants concurred with his central argument (Wolin, 2011: 61). In 2009, 57.5% of Swiss voters supported constitutionally outlawing the construction of minarets following a successful campaign by the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) in 2007 (Biondo 2010; Betz and Meret, 2009: 325). Similar campaigns in Norway, Denmark and Italy and opposition elsewhere to the construction of mosques and Islamic centres have been justified by claims that they contribute to terrorism by proliferating radical literature and extremist ideas (Betz and Meret, 2009: 327).

Despite Switzerland's advanced secularism, minarets were deemed fundamentally threatening to national and cultural identity due to their alleged symbolic representation of Islamic invasion and victory; banning them was almost a reassertion of the country's Christian and Western values (Betz and Meret, 2009: 313). In the face of an apparent "erosion" of liberal democratic values, far-right and nativist parties in other highly secular countries such as Denmark and Norway have similarly promoted a return to Christian precepts by invoking "Europe's culture of reference" in speeches and party documents; endorsing both secular liberal values and traditional Judeo-Christian principles has enabled these parties to appeal to a wide social base (Betz and Meret, 2009: 327, 328, 333). This illustrates the ambiguity of contemporary "European" culture, where secularists deem the Enlightenment (encompassing human rights, freedom and democracy) to be the true heritage of Europe, whilst more Christian-oriented groups regard the Enlightenment as the portent to communism, atheism and even Nazism (Roy, 2010: 69). A supposed Islamic "invasion" or "colonisation" is commonly referred to by nativist, radical right groups who cast Islam as a religion of conquest and single out Muslims in particular as the greatest threat to Western lifestyles and cultural identity (Betz and Meret, 2009: 319). Islam's "green totalitarianism" is interpreted as a fundamental menace to everything Western liberal democracies uphold and intentions to construct minarets have even been interpreted as proof of Muslims' mounting "self-confidence" and goals to externalise their presence with "aggressive symbols of Islamic power" (Betz, 2005: 35; Betz and Meret, 2009: 325, 326).

Negative sentiments towards Muslims in many Western societies have been the subject of heightened research interest in recent years. "Islamophobia" denotes a specific type of xenophobia towards Muslims arising from fear and prejudice, and has been blamed as the principle barrier to integration and constructive debate (Sivanandan in Fekete, 2009: 1). One such feature of these negative perceptions is that Islam is often dismissed in its entirety for being "extremist" with no distinction made between Islam and radical *Islamism* (Lee *et al.*, 2009: 92, 93; Betz and Meret, 2009: 319). Post-9/11, there has been a greater tendency to confound the two and treating anti-terrorism measures as part and parcel of integration policy suggests that one cannot be both a follower of Islam and European (Fekete, 2008: 19). In this way, unhelpful debates that resort to stigmatisation reinforce the majority's stereotypes – especially about Islamic women that, for instance, surrender to patriarchal culture, are economically inactive and are unable to speak the language of the majority (Fekete, 2008: 17, 18). It is however not only the extreme right that is responsible for the unfortunate linking of Islam to terrorism and mainstream politicians have similarly contributed to the manipulation of public anxieties for electoral ends. Integration is also used a smokescreen for discussing wider social problems that have become associated with immigration like unemployment, crime and poor academic performance, which enhance fears of an

immigrant “other”. Fekete (2008: 25 – 27) blames the media for reinforcing majority “collective hysteria” about an immigrant “other” by focussing disproportionately on minority violence and “ethnic-specific” crimes – thereby creating myths and a cultural-religious paradigm for discussing issues that are essentially socio-economic.

Europe’s tradition of secular liberalism where the strict separation of church and state upholds government’s religious neutrality, ill-equips European states somewhat to deal with religious pluralism. Unlike the United States, the fact that Western Europe’s so-called “civilizational order” is not religiously affiliated is seen to affect a different response towards Islam: a 2007 World Economic Forum report revealed that whilst 70% of Americans welcomed greater interaction between the Western and Muslim worlds, an average of 75% of Western Europeans reported a mounting immigration-induced fear of an “Islamic threat” (Betz and Meret, 2009: 317). This allegedly fundamental peril to Western values and cultural identity makes integration efforts both futile and dangerous from a European nativist perspective (Betz and Meret, 2009: 318). The lack of “formal” recognition of Islam is often cited as one contributing factor to its ambivalent position in contemporary Europe and despite the extreme right’s frequent claims about Europe’s “Islamisation”, in many countries Muslims are deprived of a formal religious infrastructure (Fekete, 2008: 63). When proposals are put forward to construct mosques or erect minarets, it is rare that they receive no public opposition. The “partial secularisation” of the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom may be a factor in the larger prevalence of formal Islamic infrastructure in these countries in contrast to France or Germany (Fekete, 2008: 65). In none of the former group of countries is there an official ban on the headscarf as yet, although the Netherlands has embarked upon discussions to prohibit total covering of the face (Fekete, 2008: 69). Thanks to the Netherlands’ pillarisation tradition therefore, the country has progressed further in terms of the institutionalisation of Islam than some of its neighbours, though the incomplete actualisation of a veritable “Islamic pillar” means that provisions for Muslims are still lacking. One challenge in reconciling the Islam-Europe relationship lies with Europeans’ reluctance to deviate from following a “status quo” approach, demanding assimilation without willingly engaging themselves to redefine the relationship (Schori Liang, 2007: 22, 23).

### **3.3.1 Muslims in the Netherlands**

In terms of real religious power measured by strength of belief and prevalence in public debate, Islam is now ranked first with regards to religious *presence* in the Netherlands (Carle, 2006: 70). Along with the denunciation of Calvinism in favour of sexual and cultural liberation, the influx of “mostly illiterate” Muslim workers is said to have “shaken the foundations of Dutch society” during the last four decades (de Winter in Carle, 2006: 68). The Netherlands has the fourth largest share of Muslims in Europe in

numerical terms after France, Germany and the United Kingdom, with approximately one million Muslims (Fekete, 2008: 4; Vink, 2007: 348). Out of a total population of 16.5 million then, 6% is Muslim and of the approximately 1.8 million “non-Western foreign” people living in the Netherlands, around 44% were of Turkish or Moroccan origin at the start of 2010 (European Report 2011; Sterling 2010; Wolin, 2011: 60; Raymunt, 2011). Forty-four percent of the entire ethnic minority population in the Netherlands live in the four largest cities of Rotterdam, Amsterdam, the Hague and Utrecht and most Muslims acquired Dutch citizenship during earlier naturalisation processes (Fekete, 2008: 14; Maas, 2010: 234).

Religious freedom is guaranteed by the Dutch constitution, although members of the country’s Muslim community have reportedly experienced increasing levels of hostility in recent years, ranging from harassment and verbal abuse to targeted vandalism and arson attacks on mosques (Freedom House, 2011). Despite comprising approximately 6% of the total Dutch population, as well as the fact that the Netherlands has a purely proportional electoral system with a 0.67% (1/150 seats in the lower house) threshold, there is no Muslim political party (Maas, 2010: 234). Considering the relative size of the Muslim population in the country and the simplicity with which votes are translated into seats, this is somewhat surprising – especially in view of the fact that the country even has a Party for the Animals (PvdD) (Maas, 2010: 234). There also appears to be no “common ground of struggle” between older minorities and those arriving later. In light of suggestions that a comparable set of Islamic institutions was never realised as for Protestants and Catholics, immigrant groups arriving in the aftermath of the pillars’ deconstruction have not had the structures through which to make cultural-religious claims (Winter, 2010: 176). This lack of a distinctive Islamic political consciousness could also explain the weak distinctively “Dutch” Islamic identity. Historically autonomous groups have meanwhile come to identify with one another in mutual recognition that each is an established part of the nation-state (Winter, 2010: 177).

In Europe generally, the integration of immigrants from Islamic countries and regions such as North Africa, Turkey and other parts of the developing world is seen as more problematic than the integration of immigrants from Catholic countries like Italy, Spain or Poland, given supposedly more marked ethnic and religious differences (Betz and Meret, 2009: 314). In the Netherlands, it has been suggested that the “adherence” of Turks and Moroccans to Islamic beliefs and identity makes them more “alien” than other immigrant groups (Lucassen in Vink, 2007: 347). Writing on the psychological impact of economic exclusion, educational underachievement and social marginalisation on the younger generation of Muslims, Fekete (2008: 82) warns that the sense of helplessness created may lead to a kind of “counter-culture” and total disengagement from society. Perceptions about the relative underperformance of Islamic schools are commonly mentioned in public discourse and Muslim youth may seek to reaffirm



religious identity in defence against the perceived hostility and closed nature of a society that breeds a lack of self-esteem, the erosion of dignity and alienation (Fekete, 2008: 66, 82, 83). Carle (2006: 74) ascribes this supposed general disinclination among Dutch Muslims to integrate culturally to a sense of needing to cling to a distinctive, “rigid” Islamic identity as a result of social upheavals endured during immigration and resettlement. The importance of ethnic networks for Turkish and Moroccan immigrants in particular is reflected in tendencies – even among the second generation – to select spouses from the origin country (Bijwaard, 2010: 1218). Indeed, the percentage that does so may be as high as 60% among first and second-generation Turks and Moroccans and this has been accused of being a major obstacle to integration, dooming communities to continual underperformance and deprivation (Fekete, 2008: 51). This maintenance of historical ties is thought to influence the decisions of Islamic migrants to stay longer in the Netherlands (Vink, 2007: 347; Bijwaard, 2010: 1218).

The disaffection of Muslim communities from dominant “European” culture and lifestyles has resulted in perceptions about inherited “internal colonies” that conjure up ghetto-like images (Carle, 2006: 70). One Annual Report on Integration published by Statistics Netherlands revealed that 25% of Turks and 25% of Moroccans live in areas where at least half their neighbours are of non-Western origin (Raymunt 2011). Marginalisation and the prevalence of Islamic “parallel societies” tends to be attributed more to cultural factors, seen to be of Islamic origin in particular, than to the role of structural, “objective” factors pertaining to the country’s history of migration. Problems never adequately addressed by Dutch governments include the generally low skill levels of guestworkers, expectations of their temporary presence and the upheavals associated with transition from rural, to urban and Westernised, areas (Fekete, 2008: 52; Betz and Meret, 2009: 326). This internal cohesiveness and seclusion of Europe’s Muslim diaspora is frequently blamed for breeding radical sentiment and aiding the recruitment of young extremists. Questions of minorities’ poverty and social exclusion have been understood less as a social-economic problem and the increase in perceptions that cast “failure” to integrate in a cultural light coincide with the turn to assimilationist discourse over the last decade. Fekete (2008: 20) writes that misdiagnosis of immigrants’ social deficits vis-à-vis majority populations reflects the hypocrisy of “host” countries that require labour but are unwilling to take responsibility for the associated social costs. Decline in the manufacturing sector has sorer implications for less-educated, lower skilled workers where Muslims’ over-representation suggests they will be hardest hit and the first to be laid off (Fekete, 2009: 77; Raymunt 2011). The welfare state is also commonly seen to have a “segregating” effect on immigrants by consigning them to a socio-economic underclass (van der Veer, 2006: 122). Fekete (2008: 77) sees “Muslim” disadvantage more as a class than religio-cultural issue and suggests that material deficits be addressed and that integration assume the socio-economic framework it once did.

Of course, this is not to say that there are no internal factors peculiar to Islamic communities that may contribute towards the integration barrier. Specific attitudes and customs towards women and children in particular may hinder full inclusion or participation in society. Older community members with more patriarchal and clientelist leadership styles may also resist change and stifle the potential for younger generations to realise chances for deeper integration. Poor community leadership may therefore obstruct significantly the efforts of Muslim youth and women to assume leadership roles (Fekete, 2008: 87). Evidence of deeper participation among younger Muslims in civil society, politics and economics in the Netherlands than ever before and advancement into higher education, does however shed light on the positive opportunities and potential for overcoming internal barriers (Fekete, 2008: 52).

### **3.3.2 Debate Surrounding Position of Islam**

In March 2008, Wilders released his short film *Fitna* (Arabic for “ordeal”) online, failing to heed warnings from the Prime Minister and others concerned about its public response. The film unobtrusively inferred the “link” between Islam and terrorism by contrasting Qur’anic verses against images of violence (Sterling 2011). Within 24 hours of its release, the film had attracted six million views and despite protests staged in Indonesia, Jordan, Pakistan and several other countries, Dutch Muslims reacted calmly (Lucardie, 2009: 1130). Objections to the release of the movie and to Wilders’ statements against Islam were brought forward, though in June 2008 it was decided that charges would not be pressed (Lucardie, 2009: 1130, 1131). Wilders’ denouncement of Islam in ideological terms as totalitarian, and radical Islamism as the “fascism of the twenty-first century”, reinforces the idea of Islam’s utter incongruence with ideology that is liberal, democratic and just – everything that totalitarianism and fascism are not (Betz and Meret, 2009: 320). In addition to calling for a ban on all Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders has demanded the Qur’an be outlawed on the grounds of its “sick” and “fascist” ideology that promotes the “killing” of everything for which modern Western democracy strives (Betz and Meret, 2009: 320). Whilst targeting violent Islamism is a legitimate task, attacks on Islam and the Qur’an have been denounced as “dangerous stupidity” that only “weaken(s) the civilisation Mr Wilders claims to defend” (The Economist, 2010: 78). This comparison of Islam with Nazism and reference to the Qur’an as the “*Mein Kampf* of a religion that intends to eliminate others”, resulted in Wilders being put on trial for hate speech by the Amsterdam Court in 2009; although prosecutors were initially hesitant to pursue the matter, the hearing proceeded after it was deemed in society’s interest for general “public confusion” over free speech laws to be clarified (Sterling 2011; The Economist 2010: 78). Wilders was subsequently acquitted in June 2011, with the judge ruling that his anti-Islam statements, whilst admittedly offensive, should be regarded as part of a wider, national debate around immigration policy.

Like Wilders, Ayaan Hirsi Ali was a former member of the VVD and a fierce critic of Dutch multiculturalism and Islam. Despite, or indeed as a result of her own Islamic upbringing in Somalia, she was at the forefront of opposition to radical Islam in the Netherlands, particularly with respect to its treatment of women. Her outspokenness had made her the target of numerous death threats, as did her collaboration with filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the 2004 movie *Submission*, a 14-minute film featuring the fictional accounts of four Muslim women victims of male abuse. Clad in see-through burqas, the women's bodies are inked with texts from the Qu'ran, suggesting religious justification for ill-treatment. The movie was criticised for resorting to Orientalism and effectively amounting to a call to "white men to save Muslim women from Muslim men" (Moors in Fekete, 2008: 30). Hirsi Ali dismissed the country's thirty-year dabble with multiculturalism as a "disastrous error" and of being little more than a case of "misplaced guilt" (Carle, 2006: 68). A proponent of assimilation on the grounds that Islam was "reactionary", "pre-modern" and a "backward, 12<sup>th</sup>-century religion...a medieval, misogynist cult incapable of self-criticism and blind to modern science", she demanded an end to the Netherlands' habit of accommodating, and thereby unwittingly nurturing, "illiberal" societal elements in the name of respect for cultural diversity (Fekete, 2008: 30; Carle, 2006: 68). She accused Muslim immigrants of exploiting the openness and liberalism of Dutch society to achieve "illiberal ends", an argument frequently used by members of the European right: Ulrich Schliuer of the Swiss SVP, for example, argued that Muslims exploit religious freedom to deny others fundamental rights such as gender equality (Betz and Meret, 2009: 323; Carle, 2006: 69). How states ought to go about responding to illiberal elements within their societies is therefore an important challenge for liberal democracies generally. Hirsi Ali was especially vocal about patriarchal customs that denigrated women, but despite her advocacy for the rights of Muslim women and children, she was criticised by feminist groups that sought to oppose domestic violence without resorting to attacking Islam (Carle, 2006: 68). It has however been suggested that it was precisely Hirsi Ali's framing of domestic violence as a cultural issue that enabled her to acquire such "celebrity" status (Fekete, 2008: 31; Ackerman, 2005: 345).

In 2006, Hirsi Ali left Dutch parliament for the American Enterprise Institute in Washington after it emerged that she had lied in her 1992 application for asylum to the Netherlands at the age of twenty, in which she stated her father had arranged for her to be married (Freedom House, 2011; van der Veer, 2006: 121; Carle, 2006: 68; Vink, 2007: 338). Fellow VVD member, so-called "Iron" Rita Verdonk, was former integration minister of the Netherlands under the Balkenende II and III governments (2003 – 2007) and sought to withdraw Hirsi Ali's citizenship. Verdonk was notorious for her hard-line stance on immigration and integration and was responsible for introducing Dutch language and culture tests for "marriage migrants" (Vink, 2007: 338; van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 406). She also made several

policy suggestions which ultimately never made it into official policy, including a proposal to prohibit the use of any other language but Dutch in public spaces (Vink, 2007: 346). Verdonk broke away from the conservative VVD in October 2007, founding the *Trots op Nederland* (“Proud of the Netherlands”) movement which became an official political party in 2009.

The media is often seen to favour only one side of the integration debate and Islamic voices tend to be underrepresented; those that are featured prominently, are usually in support of an assimilationist agenda, confirm the view of immigrant culture as regressive, and promote a homogenised European identity instead (Fekete, 2008: 28). In the Dutch context, Ayaan Hirsi Ali appeared to fill the role of “martyr for the majority” with her domination of the integration debate in the media (Qureshi in Fekete, 2008: 29). As the product of an Islamic upbringing, Hirsi Ali was afforded a “privileged” position in the debate: her background as an asylum-seeker lent an air of legitimacy and political correctness to her attacks on Islam and its treatment of women in particular, considering she was “part” of the community she was attacking (van der Veer, 2006: 121).

Fekete (2008: 34) talks about the almost “celebrity status” enjoyed by such critics of integration in the Netherlands. If there was ever a star performer among them however, Pim Fortuyn was certainly that: hitherto a former sociology professor, TV chat show personality, political columnist and gay-rights activist, Fortuyn was well-known for his outspokenness and sense of the extravagant (he owned a Ferrari, a Bentley and was driven around by a chauffeur), even before announcing his intentions to run for the 2002 parliamentary elections (Carle, 2006: 72). A charismatic and flamboyant personality, Fortuyn was as much a politician as an entertainer and coupled with a flair for oratory, he was the ultimate embodiment of the classic populist. His openly gay identity chimed well with the content of his political agenda which included the defence of liberal Dutch sexual freedom against conservative Islamic customs (van der Veer, 2006: 115). Of course, Fortuyn was not unanimously lauded as a defender of Dutch values and the extent of his public condemnation was such that Fortuyn’s supporters often spoke of his “demonisation” (Vink, 2007: 345). His attack of the anti-discrimination clause of article one of the Dutch constitution – the “Holy Cow” provision – represented the most direct challenge to multiculturalism in the country, according to Vink (2007: 345).

Fortuyn was pro-lower taxation, minimal government, abortion rights and euthanasia, but his confrontational stance on immigration won him the most support and media coverage. Fortuyn’s attitude towards Islam in particular brought him much attention and he dismissed it as a threat to homosexual rights and gender equality, ill-disposing its followers to assimilation (Carle, 2006: 72; Schori Liang, 2007:

20). Such claims about Islam's "backwardness", "pre-modernism" and divorce from the experiences of the Enlightenment and Renaissance – instrumental in moulding Christianity and European cultures – are considered grievous misunderstandings by Biondo (2010), who highlights how European contact with Islam in medieval Spain and during the Crusades was in fact influential in stimulating the Renaissance. Modelling himself as a "Dutch Samuel Huntington", Fortuyn warned in his 1997 book *Against the Islamization of our Culture*, that the Dutch indifference to their own cultural identity due to their "advanced individualisation" and tendency to take for granted the rights they enjoyed, made traditional Dutch values vulnerable to attack by Muslims (Maas, 2010: 232). Many have similarly blamed the Dutch culture of tolerance for discouraging necessary frank confrontation with the question of integrating conservative Muslims. Fortuyn also called for stronger assimilation and an end to all economic, Muslim and asylum migration, arguing that immigrants had proved hostile to integration efforts and that "Holland is full" (Carle, 2006: 72; Schori Liang, 2007: 21). Fortuyn's liberal nationalism was militant, especially with regards to his position on Islam where he claimed that Western culture was liberal at heart and this liberalism was only defensible against Islam in the context of a "cultural war" (Akkerman, 2005: 348). The perceived anti-liberalism of Islam necessitated the total rejection of the religion as even liberal Muslims would not accept the separation of church and state, liberalism's founding principle. Fortuyn, Wilders and Hirsi Ali's support of a radically rationalist concept of integration – assimilation – was termed Muslims' "shortcut to Enlightenment" by Hirsi Ali (Akkerman, 2005: 348).

Wilders appears to have moulded himself on the late Pim Fortuyn: this is certainly true of his current position at the forefront of the Dutch anti-immigration movement, his maverick-style bluntness and hard-line attitude towards Islamism. With the establishment of his own political party, Wilders proposed to prevent non-Western immigrants from entering the country for five years; to deport criminally-convicted dual nationals; and to introduce the pre-emptive, "preventative detention" of Islamists where mere suspicion would suffice (Carle, 2006: 73). Wilders also denies the existence of a "moderate Islam" in Europe and his support for the cultural integration and assimilation of Dutch Muslims reflects an unapologetic belief in the supremacy of Western values: Islam and democracy, he has claimed, are incompatible (Carle, 2006: 73). Wilders' candour has however come at a price: numerous threats on his life have necessitated the donning of a bulletproof vest for all public appearances and he lives a virtually imprisoned, privacy-free life under extreme protection (Carle, 2006: 73; Wolin 2011: 59).

### **3.3.3 Death of Theo van Gogh: More than a Murder, but a Clash of Civilisations?**

The brutal murder of filmmaker van Gogh on 3 November 2004 by Mohammad Bouyeri, a Dutch Muslim of Moroccan descent, was the catalyst for a nationwide state of alarm surrounding a supposed "Clash of

Civilisations” in the country and had an even greater effect on public and political discourse than September 2001. Van Gogh’s murder was arguably one of the most significant “shock events” occurring at the turn of the millennium and nurtured the idea of a veritable cultural clash occurring on Dutch soil. In the immediate aftermath of the murder, the LPF announced that “we” are at war with Islamic extremism and mosques across the country were targeted by arsonists. It was feared that the situation could have spun out of control were it not for more “responsible elements” of the state (van der Veer, 2006: 112). Both Wilders and Hirsi Ali, whilst denouncing the violence of extreme Muslims, were also at pains to emphasise their condemnation of attacks on mosques and Islamic schools (Akkerman, 2005: 349).

Van Gogh’s death was significant beyond signalling a supposedly mounting Islamic terrorist threat in the country, however; for some, the event represents the final days of the era of Dutch “cultural transformation” (van der Veer, 2006: 112). Both the murder and the public reaction it stimulated were incongruent with prevailing images of the Netherlands as an ultra-liberal, tolerant society and discourse began focussing on questions of Islam’s inherent incompatibility with fundamental “Dutch” values and culture, not to mention the “lack of humour” on the part of Muslims unable to take van Gogh’s outrageous provocations and wicked satire with a pinch of salt like everybody else (van der Veer, 2006: 112). Van Gogh was infamous for his crude comments towards all religions in general and he referred to Islamists as “Nazis who wear kaftans and hide behind beards” (Carle, 2006: 68). Much focus was accorded to questions of freedom of speech and the Muslim antipathy to satire was considered a sign of “deep cultural backwardness” (van der Veer, 2006: 112). In light of van Gogh and Hirsi Ali’s collaborative project *Submission* (released 3 months before van Gogh’s murder) not being “an especially funny film” however, van der Veer (2006: 112) remarks that the issue that requires greater explanation than the Muslim humour deficit is the disproportionate aggression exhibited towards the socially and culturally marginalised Islamic minority in the Netherlands.

Carle (2006: 69) talks about the public alarm upon the revelation that van Gogh’s murderer was a second generation immigrant, born and raised in the Netherlands and a product of the Dutch education system. The disclosure focussed greater attention on the position of second-generation immigrants in society as a demographic group worthy of greater understanding. Bouyeri’s trajectory from capable student to Islamic militant mirrored the scenarios of other young Muslims in Europe, raising questions about the integration patterns and challenges confronting this particular segment of the population and the unsettling phenomenon of Europe’s “home-grown” jihadists (Carle, 2006: 69). Bouyeri was an Islamic extremist who articulated his religious motivations for the killing in a handwritten five-page letter that he pinned to van Gogh’s chest after slitting his throat (Carle, 2006: 68). Calling for a “holy war” against the “infidels”,

Bouyeri's letter, addressed to Hirsi Ali, warned her that she would be "smashed against the hard diamond of Islam" (Carle, 2006: 68). Bouyeri had previously been a member of the Hofstad group, an organisation comprised of second-generation Islamic militants who had planned *inter alia* a series of political assassinations, an attack on the country's only nuclear reactor and other terror actions in Europe (Carle, 2006: 69). In January 2008, the seven members of the group were acquitted of participation in a terrorist organisation given the conclusion that there was "no question of a lasting and structured form of cooperation, nor of a commonly shared ideology" (US Dept of State, 2010). This verdict was however subsequently annulled in February 2010 by the Supreme Court and the case was set for retrial in Amsterdam (US Dept of State, 2010).

Questions of religious garb and the position of Muslim women have become closely tied in with frames presenting Islam and Muslims as a threat to liberal values and democracy and which complement dominant negative portrayals of Islam. "Victimisation" and "Islam-as-threat" frames have become central to the debate surrounding the position of Muslims in the Netherlands. The first frame portrays Muslim women as "victims" of a patriarchal culture that requires their submission and obedience and the headscarf has come to symbolise female subordination to a religion that "promotes" gender inequality. In addition to focussing on religious dress, this frame emphasises themes of "cultural violence" such as female circumcision or "genital mutilation", honour killings and domestic abuse (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007: 301, 302). The "Islam-as-threat" frame prioritises Islam's alleged incompatibility with Western civilisation and values including state neutrality, freedom of expression, gender equality and tolerance of sexual freedom. Reference to the "Islamisation" of Dutch or European society is common, the external expression of which is considered to be the wearing of Islamic garb in public spaces. In response to Islam's "conquest mentality", proposals include reinforcing state neutrality and relegating religious dress to the private sphere, as well as emphasising assimilation of "Dutch" norms and culture (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007: 302). The authors write that the Islam-as-threat frame became dominant in both parliamentary and media arenas in the aftermath of 9/11 and the ensuing "War on Terror" (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007: 308).

A 2007 study revealed that a "deep conflict of values" existed between the majority ethnic Dutch and minority Islamic population in the Netherlands (Vink, 2007: 348). Requirements that immigrants shed their identities, assimilate Dutch values and culture, provide "proof" of loyalty via citizenship and distance themselves from Islam, certainly do not reflect the EU's conceptualisation of accommodation as a mutual, two-way process (van Bruinessen in Vink, 2007: 343). The risk of a "culture clash" stemming from the general marginalisation and poor integration patterns of Muslims is thought to be greatest in

countries with large Muslim communities such as France, Germany and the Netherlands, giving rise to fears about a domestic security threat in these states (Schori Liang, 2007: 22). Van der Veer (2006: 119) talks about the “politics of enjoyment” that came to characterise Dutch culture with the collapse of the religious-ideological pillars in the 1960s. With a general Western shift towards a materialist culture, the “ingrained frugality” of the Netherlands as a result of its Calvinist heritage made this transition to unfettered consumerism all the more pronounced (van der Veer, 2006: 119). In the 1990s, this enjoyment was perceived to be threatened by globalisation and the Islamic immigration it brought about, where Muslims came to represent an almost “anti-enjoyment” with their strict moral system concerning sexuality and dress. The secularisation and assimilation of Muslims, as opposed to accommodating Islam, is thus widely perceived as necessary for the unity and security of a nation whose ideological foundation is “the shared and recently developed ideas of liberty of choice in consumption” (Van der Veer, 2006: 124). In this light, the Islamic debate in the Dutch context “reflects not so much a perceived challenge to the secularism of the state as a perceived rejection of sexual liberty and consumer values” (Van der Veer, 2006: 124).

It has been argued that radical right identification with liberal values is a “liberalism turned inward, driven by fear” and it appears that attempts to ban religious apparel are informed by a threat logic (Betz and Meret, 2009: 323; Fekete, 2008: 6). The subscription of the far-right to a “Clash of Civilisations” discourse reflects an intrinsic belief in cultural hierarchy, where one culture is deemed superior to another in terms of the values that nurture “democratic governance, social justice and prosperity” (Betz and Meret, 2009: 332). Cultural relativism is portrayed as the “disease” that will rot the foundations of Europe’s liberal democracy and Wilders has warned that unless Islamisation is combated head-on, “we will lose everything; our cultural identity, our democracy, our rule of law, our liberties, our freedom” (Wilders in Betz and Meret, 2009: 333). This turn to more inward-looking discourse emphasises Muslims’ (in)ability and (un)willingness assimilate (Betz and Meret, 2009: 316, 318).

Scheffer’s 2001 article entitled *The Multicultural Tragedy*, discusses tolerance in liberal democracies, which can only exist within distinct boundaries. Cultivating common values is seen as essential for allowing differences in opinion to exist side by side and he writes that immigrants need to accept the “price” of living in an open society, which is that individuals have the right to individual choice and to distance themselves from their “communities” if so desired (Carle, 2006: 72). Arguments about symbols of religious affiliation having no place in the public sphere are informed by the secular division of church and state. Religious garb is thus seen to compromise state neutrality and to represent an outward defiance of integration. Efforts to ban religious paraphernalia in public are justified via reference to incompatibility



with integration, gender equality values or principles of secularism. Van der Veer (2006: 123) writes that the only way for justification of religious dress to be seen as legitimate and to hold weight is for defence of the headscarf to be “phrased in...[the]...secular language of autonomy and freedom” as opposed to resorting to religious and moral reasoning. Many parties have couched attacks on Islam, or the promotion of assimilation, under claims of emancipating Muslim women; the hijab or headscarf, niqab and burqa being the external symbols of such oppression. Targeting Islamic garb in public spaces is however far more than just a symbolic strategy to “free” young women from an “archaic” and “oppressive” religious practice: it is a challenge to Islam’s “external” rejection of the norms and social values of the West (Betz and Meret, 2009: 324, 325). Fekete (2008: 67, 68) argues that “fixations” upon religious clothing in the media and political discourse only stoke the flames of majority intolerance whilst concomitantly heightening minority fears. Instead of promoting social cohesion and stability, social exclusion is the inevitable by-product of measures to clamp down on Islam’s visibility. Fekete (2008: 6) therefore recommends that concerns about analysing whether a veritable “clash” between Islamic and Western civilization exists in Europe today should rather focus on conflict between individuals that support, and those that oppose, a “civil rights framework” for discussing integration.

Nativists’ belief in the essential incompatibility of different cultures has resulted in efforts to discourage policies and programmes aiding the integration of Muslims into Western European societies. Van der Veer (2006: 123) writes that “the real clash comes with the power of the state to enforce equality against the wishes of the Muslim minority”: outlawing head garb is a result of majoritarian democratic politics and “has everything to do with governmentality and little with emancipation”. Protests against the construction of mosques, cultural centres and minarets, highlighted earlier, represent similar efforts to discourage Islam’s integration and render it “invisible” (Betz and Meret, 2009: 325). Attempts to integrate Muslims via accommodation and the institutional provision of mosques, cultural centres and schools, enhance both Islam’s presence and visibility within Dutch society and, quite likely, feelings of threat among Dutch autochthones. It could be that heightened Islamic perceptibility (increasing numbers of immigrants over the last three to four decades and attempts at fostering “multiculturalism”) has contributed to demands for a diminished “external” Muslim presence, the heatedness of public debate and the PVV’s electoral success. Though it would seem that anti-immigration and anti-Islam feelings have been on the rise in the Netherlands, Chapter Four’s focus upon public perception data will hopefully clarify whether these expressions of cultural intolerance are indeed reflective of a veritable increase in anti-immigration sentiment.

### 3.4 RADICAL RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND THE NETHERLANDS

Populism is a political leadership strategy or style of rhetoric that both provokes and feeds off prevailing popular resentments. Established structures of power such as political and cultural elites are commonly the sources of such public disenchantment, as are foreigners, asylum seekers and insecurities surrounding material and personal wellbeing (Betz, 2005: 25, 28). Whilst these types of grievances can, to a greater or lesser degree, be relatively permanent features of contemporary Western liberal democracies, the global financial crisis provides an especially exploitable climate of common resentment for populists. The mobilisation of resentment is a powerful political strategy as bitterness induces a need for action or even radical change (Betz, 2005: 28). By targeting the political establishment as a whole, populist parties are able to tap into general cynicism and an array of different sources of discontent amongst a broad segment of the population. Voters become increasingly attracted to the “politics of exclusion” rather than seeking liberal answers to societal challenges (Schori Liang, 2007: 5). In the Netherlands, the “latent” xenophobia of the Dutch electorate, revealed by attacks on “political correctness”, has been exploited by the PVV, and LPF previously, to glean support for immigration restrictions and an assimilationist agenda (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 404). These parties are often defined by their anti-immigration image though their stances in this regard are part of a wider radical right-wing programme. General characteristics of populist right parties in Western Europe will be described, in conjunction with how these right-wing populist characteristics are manifested in the Dutch case. A brief discussion is made of the contemporary economic context in which many of these parties have achieved recent electoral gains and ultimately the relationship of this movement to democratic and liberal norms is considered.

The current Dutch coalition propped up by the PVV was inspired by the Danish example where the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party has supported the minority government of liberal and conservative parties since 2001. In Sweden in 2010, the far-right, nationalist Swedish Democrats won parliamentary seats for the first time. Though all these parties differ in important ways and are quite distinct from older far-right movements such as France’s National Front and Italy’s Northern league – not to mention more “thuggish” eastern European variants – they are united in their stances on anti-immigration and opposition to Islam in particular (The Economist, 2010: 78). One of the only few “encouraging” examples of political stability in Europe is Germany, where the country’s two highest-profile far-right parties, the *Republikaner* and the *Deutsche Volkunion*, have had largely inconsequential influence (Wolin, 2011: 61).

In terms of the political strategy, style, ideas and agenda of the contemporary right in Europe, Betz (2005: 27) writes that there appears to be a general convergence towards the populist model. Adaption and dissociation from “traditional” images of the radical right as a proponent of biological racism or authoritarian-style governance has meant that the radical right today has transformed into an attractive voting option for segments of the electorate that would otherwise never have considered throwing support behind a right-wing party. This “winning formula”, adopted in the 1990s, enables a populist discourse that promotes broad political support against the political and cultural classes whilst simultaneously advancing a nationalist agenda (Betz, 2005: 27, 28, 34). The cult of personality typical of the populist project promotes the image of a leader that is “one” with the people and who “think[s] with the head of the citizens”, defending the interests of the common man deserted by the elite (Akkerman, 2005: 338; Betz in Schori Liang, 2007: 5). Building upon popular resentment, Wilders – a “consummate demagogue” – has made appeals that sit well with middle-class Dutch disillusioned with the efforts of previous governments to mollify those Muslim immigrants that allegedly thrive off state generosity whilst exhibiting zero inclination to integrate (Wolin, 2011: 59). Anti-Islamism American scholar Daniel Pipes has even hailed Wilders as the “most important European alive today” but, like Fortuyn, he has had his share of “demonisation” in the media: in addition to receiving ardent international criticism, Wilders has been accused of revelling in a “siege mentality” and being a “political embarrassment” for the Netherlands (The Economist, 2010: 78; Wolin, 2011: 59).

### **3.4.1 Characteristics of the Populist Radical Right in the Netherlands**

#### 3.4.1.1 Ideology

A range of terminological categorisations has been employed in reference to politics on the ideological right of the political spectrum. “Extreme right” parties may for instance be characterised as neo-Nazi, neo-fascist, new right, far right, authoritarian xenophobic, neo-liberal xenophobic and neo-liberal populist, all of which refer to different features and have been shown to be influential in explaining differences in electoral outcome amongst these parties (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 779; Schori Liang, 2007: 3). Whilst each of these definitions may be analytically succinct in its own way, *general* characteristics include opposition to established or mainstream political parties and the structures that support political elitism; ethnocentric and xenophobic attitudes; a willingness to tackle sensitive, “politically correct” topics in the name of free speech; support for a Euro-sceptic, and possibly nativist and ethno-nationalist agenda that nurtures national cultural identity; and the promotion of restrictions on immigration and assimilationist integration strategy (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 778). This chapter makes predominant use of the term “populist radical right”, developed by Mudde in his book entitled

*Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, which encapsulates all those parties that contain elements of nationalism, nativism, authoritarianism and populism (Schori Liang, 2007: 3-5). Each of the abovementioned general features is looked at in turn in this section.

Naturally, not all such parties follow the same trajectory in accumulating votes and whilst some reject any association with neo-fascism, others are openly racist and anti-Semitic, in the cases of the British National Party that restricts membership to the “indigenous British” and Hungary’s *Jobbik*, for instance. The PVV campaigns in the “interests” of liberal democracy against a “totalitarian” Islam that threatens the political system. Its stances towards certain issues – immigrants, integration and Islam particularly – are however decidedly anti-liberal. Concerning certain issues, the rhetoric of the PVV does not depart substantially from that of mainstream parties, however “illiberal” these themes: public and political discourse on multiculturalism, integration, immigrants and Islam in the Netherlands has transcended the traditional left-right ideological divide, reflecting a debate that has taken on a more general, national scope. Ghitis (2011) writes that though the incumbent Dutch government may look right-wing, there is deeper ideological debate between the coalition partners. Wilders is commonly referred to as a member of the far-right, but he comes across as more of a populist whose stance is founded on the country’s very liberal, progressive policies. The centre-right VVD, defending individuals’ choice to gay marriage, euthanasia and abortion, also has far less in common with its “right-wing” peers in the rest of Europe and is perhaps more aptly described as a “socially progressive party” (Ghitis 2011).

Despite Wilders’ “occasional flirtation” with certain extremist positions then, much of his political success is due to the maintenance of an acceptable “façade”, whereby an anti-Islam agenda is accompanied by more “respectable” appeals in support of liberal values (Wolin, 2011: 60). Wilders has been compared to other European populists such as the late Jorg Haider in Austria and France’s Jean-Marie Le Pen, but whereas Le Pen was strongly opposed to euthanasia, homosexual rights and abortion, (he proposed illegalising abortion, providing stay-at-home mothers with an income and promoting local, traditional culture), the so-called Dutch “far right” is a fierce proponent of the liberal ideal in which the rights to euthanasia, abortion, and gay rights are tolerated (Sterling 2011; Kulinska, 2010: 55). Wilders thus personally sees himself more in the image of fellow “Toquevillian conservative” Margaret Thatcher than that of the French right-wing politician (Carle, 2006: 73). Wilders’ defence of Western freedoms perhaps positions him more as a “radical liberal” targeting “Islam” (not Muslims, he claims), than as a member of the extreme far-right, in the traditional sense at least (The Economist, 2010: 78). Whilst Austria’s Freedom Party 2010 presidential candidate, Barbara Rosenkrantz, positioned herself as a defender of traditional norms and criticised feminism’s impact upon the family unit and in fostering

“sexless human beings”, the principle of gender equality for the Dutch radical right is the very platform from which attacks against Islam are launched (Kulinska, 2010: 56). Although Wilders supports anti-immigration measures like Le Pen, it is in light of a perceived Islamic threat to *liberal values*, seen as so defining of Dutch political culture, that Wilders’ anti-immigration arguments are shaped. Some see this identification of an “Islamic” and not “foreign” enemy as a strategic move by politicians to shape agendas in the language of “freedom” and not “race”, a rhetorical slant thereby affording a degree of protection from accusations of racism or neo-Nazism (The Economist, 2010: 78).

#### 3.4.1.2 Political Establishment

Populism emerges in response to perceptions of growing distance between political elites in liberal democracies and the will of the people they are supposed to represent. Populist rhetoric thus also typically extends to questions about enhancing the decision-making power of “the people”. The populist nature of radical right parties sees the will of the people as paramount – prioritised even above human rights or constitutional guarantees – and the so-called “pure people” are pitted against the corrupt, self-seeking elite (Schori Liang, 2007: 5). The introduction of direct democracy is frequently proposed as an alternative to the liberal tradition of elite representative democracy in an effort, to translate Jean-Marie Le Pen, to “return the word to the people” (Betz, 2005: 31). Radical right-wing populist discourse seeks to discredit the abilities of the political and cultural classes and substitute them with a “genuine elite” of responsible citizens (Betz, 2005: 31). Discrepancies in terms of what politicians offer and what voters demand are interpreted as elite self-service, moral corruption and incapability in identifying with societal problems; as public frustrations and bitterness intensify, so populism thrives (Akkerman, 2005: 338). In the Netherlands, Fortuyn strongly rebuked mainstream Dutch politicians for having lost touch with the common man on the street and his proposals to diminish the vertical distance between the populace and elected representatives included the direct election of the most important administrative positions such as prime minister and mayor and more contact between politicians and citizens (Scholten, 2011: 86). Established parties were regarded with mistrust and Fortuyn regularly referred to the closed, “incestuous” nature of the political elite in The Hague (Akkerman, 2005: 338, 339; van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 404). In the Dutch context, populism has attacked the consociational political culture and proclivity towards elite compromise (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 404). The successes of right-wing populist parties in Europe over the past decade and in the context of an economic downturn especially, are therefore essentially a reflection of political representation gone awry (Betz, 2005: 27).

This anti-establishment programme is advanced by parties seeking to “set the tone” of political and public debate by promoting issues that are traditionally “owned” by the populist right-wing. This political anti-

conformism is manifested in efforts to promote classic Dutch values and traditions, challenge deeper European integration and in efforts to attack prevailing policies towards managing diversity, which are cast as a failure. The desire to steer clear of unnecessary involvement in international affairs stems from perceptions that typically “Dutch” cultural peculiarities are being eroded and sovereignty lost as a result of immersion into European affairs. Contact with foreign, “alien” culture via immigration is also seen to denigrate culture and associated grievances typically include rising crime rates, the unfettered influx of “asylum tourists” or “bogus refugees”, and abuse of the welfare system at the expense of taxpayers (Betz, 2005: 36). These issues are seen as the responsibility of the political classes who have allowed for an environment in which the country’s liberal order is exploited and who have failed to protect the interests of citizens who bear the brunt of government’s failed integration policies.

Radical right populists also often oppose pluralist democracy as the fragmented politics of competition between diverse interest groups is similarly seen to undermine popular interpretations of democracy that emphasise cultural and political unity (Akkerman, 2005: 339). Necessary “rejuvenation” of the democratic system is achievable via the introduction of reform to salvage the sovereignty of the people from elite corruption, encroaching constitutionalism and dominance by interest groups (Akkerman, 2005: 340). Schori Liang (2007: 5) considers intentions to change the democratic system and shift conceptions of democratic values, albeit *democratically*, to evince an authoritarian nature and to be essentially what makes these parties radical (not necessarily extreme). It is important to distinguish between parties dissatisfied with democratic government and those whose radical stance towards liberalism is informed by their anti-immigration policies; Akkerman (2005: 340) suggests that the latter group, into which the LPF and PVV would belong, should rather be defined as “anti-immigration” than “populist”.

In this regard, the ideology of the right-wing party in question is important. For some, questions of national identity politics are at the core of their ideology, emerging in response to perceptions of an eroding dominant “national” identity and culture in the context of immigration flows over the course of the last four to five decades (Akkerman, 2005: 341). For these parties, questions of immigration and national identity dominate their agenda, rather than a general dissatisfaction with representative democracy. This nationalist focus of anti-immigration parties has been deemed intrinsically anti-liberal as a result of the implied rejection both of universal rights and of the notion that ethnically and culturally diverse communities can coexist. Justifying calls for ethnic exclusion via reference to protecting Western liberal values is deemed a curious and contradictory feature of such parties that often position themselves as the ultimate defenders of the Europe’s liberal Enlightenment heritage (Akkerman, 2005: 341). Akkerman (2005: 341) notes that the “paradoxical defence of liberalism” is associated with anti-

immigration policy in particular and with those parties that are more “liberal nationalist” than populist and campaign in the name of democracy, free speech, the separation of church and state and the equality of the sexes, all against the threat of a boding “Islamisation” of Western European culture.

#### 3.4.1.3 Free Speech and a Hierarchy of Principles

Populist right parties tend to see themselves as the defenders of free speech and the enemies of the political correctness so favoured by the political establishment, viewed as an “assault on truth” and mere “self-deception” (Peters in Betz, 2005: 29). These parties’ characteristic willingness to bring sensitive or “unpalatable” issues onto the agenda is something that risk-conscious mainstream parties are usually averse to doing out of a concern for inciting controversy and supposedly “upsetting the(ir) cosy little agenda” (Peters in Betz, 2005: 29). Radical right populist parties operate on the farthest outskirts of what is legally permissible in terms of discriminatory language. As so-called defenders of free speech and breakers of political taboos, the populist right is cast as the voice of the people, incorruptible by elite self-service. In the event that hate speech trials are pursued, the political establishment is usually accused of hostility to free speech, meaning that the radical right rarely assumes responsibility for incendiary politics and discourse, according to Schori Liang (2007: 6).

Fortuyn’s politics was deemed radical by Akkerman (2005: 34) by virtue of the disregard shown for the “careful and balanced assessment of liberal principles”. A hierarchy of principles saw the opportunistic prioritisation of certain constitutional principles over others. Fortuyn for instance claimed that he would be in favour of abolishing the anti-discrimination “Holy Cow” provision of article 1 of the Dutch Constitution, claiming it was abused in order to restrict freedom of expression, another constitutionally-enshrined right (Akkerman, 2005: 349). He maintained that the only restriction on the freedom of expression was that people should not be incited to violence. Support for freedom of expression stemmed from his belief that political correctness and juridical strictness surrounding ability to discriminate had resulted in important immigration questions being swept under the carpet. Privileging one right over another was also evidenced with respect to the freedom of religion where the LPF sought to emulate the French example of *laïcité*: the principle of a neutral, secular state as “the mother of all constitutional rights” (Akkerman, 2005: 349). Proposals to introduce this law extended to banning religious garb in schools and the civil service and would also be extended to state funding of religious schools. These offensives of the LPF were continued by the VVD even after the January 2003 elections when the LPF’s participation in government ended. The CDA has kept a low profile in the Islam debate, but was nevertheless strongly opposed to liberal attacks on constitutional freedoms of religion and education (Akkerman, 2005: 350). Akkerman (2005: 350) notes that support for a neutral state at the expense of

religious and educational freedoms directly challenges the Dutch heritage of accommodating religious minorities, the foundation of Dutch consensus democracy since 1917.

#### 3.4.1.4 Compatibility with Democratic Principles

Important for the electoral success of the right-wing is the extent to which such parties and their leaders are perceived as legitimate, or democratic, and effective in the sense of being able to affect policy and political processes. Bos and van der Brug (2010: 777) researched the electoral significance of public images of anti-immigration party leaders in the Dutch 2006 parliamentary elections in which four anti-immigration parties participated. Data collected on two parties, Wilders' PVV and Marco Pastors' One Netherlands (EenNL), revealed that public perceptions of leaders' legitimacy and effectiveness were indeed important predictors of support. Even if such parties promote reforms or challenge the political elite, there is little difference between the determinants of success for anti-immigration and mainstream parties, provided the former continue to be seen to support the liberal democratic system and are deemed effective and legitimate (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 779, 780, 791 – 793). Voters may be inclined to support a right-wing populist party if its anti-immigration message is well-received, but more extremist parties seen to reject or endanger democracy will be far less successful than their more moderate counterparts proposing smaller institutional changes (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 778 – 780, 792).

The effect of ideological considerations in determining voter preference for these far-right parties was only significant when perceptions of the party leaders' legitimacy and effectiveness were favourable (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 791). Logically, internal party cohesion and discipline have been shown to have an important influence on electoral outcome for extreme right parties. The role of party leader in organising and uniting the party is particularly significant, given the centralised and populist nature of anti-immigration parties. The importance of effective leadership in generating internal unity was demonstrated after Fortuyn's death: despite the astonishing posthumous success of his party, the LPF was virtually concentrated around the personal charisma of Fortuyn and without him, it gave way to chaotic factionalism and was principally responsible for the subsequent collapse of the government, after only 83 days, in which it was a coalition partner (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 781; van der Veer, 2006: 114). Evidence of party agendas, statements and other documents has indicated that the strong internal coherence of radical right-wing populist parties in Europe renders them an increasingly viable alternative to the dominant programs of mainstream parties and internal consistency has a favourable impact on public perceptions of effectiveness (Betz, 2005: 32). These criteria are naturally applicable to all parties and it should not be assumed that the party-voter relationship of far-right populist groups is any different from that of mainstream parties.



#### 3.4.1.5 Nationalism

Along with a populist agenda that is anti-establishment, at the core of contemporary radical right-wing ideology is ethno-nationalist xenophobia founded upon an “ethno-pluralist doctrine” (Rydgren, 2008: 738). “Ethno-nationalism” and nativism prioritise the survival of “own nation”, whereby the nation is conceptualised as a single ethnic group. Such parties have tendencies towards xenophobia and authoritarianism and apply liberal precepts partially to citizens along cultural or ethnic lines, indicating an “organicist nationalism” (Schori Liang, 2007: 4; Akkerman, 2005: 345). Whilst these attributes are fitting to several West European radical right populist parties, they are less applicable to the Norwegian Progress Party and to the now-defunct List Pim Fortuyn which employed the ethno-nationalist frame to a lesser degree. The same can be said for the PVV today, given its comparable ideology to that of the LPF. Although these Norwegian and Dutch parties do, or did, promote anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalism agendas, their lesser subscription to ethno-pluralist doctrine suggests that their categorisation as “radical right” is debatable (Rydgren, 2008: 738). However, given their anti-immigration frames, similar reasons for electoral success and fulfilment of the same political demand, Rydgren (2008: 738) considers them “functional equivalents” to the new wave of radical right-wing parties in Europe.

Akkerman (2005: 342, 345) distinguishes between different types of nationalism and also considers the LPF more an anti-immigration party promoting a nationalism that was “civic” or “patriotic” rather than “ethnocratic” or “organicist”. Anti-immigration parties like the LPF that exhibit a more civic or culturally pluralist type of nationalism are seen to be more “liberalism-friendly” whilst ethnocratic nationalism is generally incompatible with liberalism. Akkerman (2005: 342) highlights the seeming paradox in the “dynamic and complex” relationship between liberalism and nationalism: one possible form of this alliance is “liberal nationalism” (the LPF) in which nationalist values are central, and the other is “liberalism as a host ideology of nationalism” (Akkerman, 2005: 342). This distinction is deemed essential for assessing the extent to which nationalist parties are either more liberal or more nationalist and radical nationalist right parties are considered to belong to the second grouping. The anti-immigration ideology of Pim Fortuyn focussed on the integration of immigrants and a stop on all future immigration, as opposed to the expulsion of immigrants which has been promoted by parties subscribing to an exclusive, ethnocratic nationalism (Akkerman, 2005: 343). Although both the List Pim Fortuyn and *Vlaams Blok* could be seen as examples of parties that are liberal nationalist, they differ in significant ways. Fortuyn saw himself as a “liberal patriot” in the image of celebrated Dutch patriot Baron Johan van der Capellen, who supported the American Revolution and in 1781 urged the Dutch people to organise against the “regent” class (Akkerman, 2005: 345). In contrast to populist brands of nationalism, Fortuyn’s

civic nationalism was of a utopian nature, inspired by the Enlightenment, and was not motivated by a yearning for the past. The ability of immigrants to integrate, and especially Muslims whose values had allegedly not been shaped by the Enlightenment, was “measured” in terms of the enlightened principles of emancipation, tolerance and freedom of speech (Akkerman, 2005: 346). Much of the LPF’s success is in fact attributed to the party’s rejection of ethno-nationalism.

#### 3.4.1.6 Euroscepticism

Populist fears over a loss of national sovereignty are also reflected in attitudes towards the European Union and questions of European expansion and integration. The recent expansion of the EU to include eight new eastern European members in 2004, and in 2007 Bulgaria and Romania, has been a contentious issue among national populations and one that has been readily taken up by radical right populist parties. Declining support for the EU – from 72% in 1990 to 54% in 2005 – has meant that populist opposition to the “big bang” EU membership has been well received and effectively employed as a political tool (Schori Liang, 2007: 11, 13). Eurosceptics, not outright rejecting the European objective but sceptical of the trajectory pursued by the EU, are commonly among populist ranks. Grievances towards the EU include its lack of accountability, undemocratic make-up in relation to the unelected Council of Ministers, elitist nature of the Brussels political circuit, and the loss of national sovereignty implied by a regional European superstate. In 1997, Fortuyn voiced his opinions in this regard when he referred to Europe as “soulless” and a “distant, bureaucratic monster” (Schori Liang, 2007: 11). In keeping with ethno-cultural proclivities, the populist right supports the existence of a united Europe insofar as it is founded upon the core values of Western and European civilisations – a “Europe for the Europeans” – where sovereignty is not invested at the regional, supra-national, or even state levels, but lies with cultural communities (Schori Liang, 2007: 12).

Thanks to the internet and real-time access to information, the previously marginal populist radical right is able to articulate its message on an equal footing to mainstream parties (Schori Liang, 2007: 6). Growing European mistrust and scepticism for the political establishment has seen voters avenging themselves via “electoral rebellion” against corrupt elites, particularly in Eastern European states (Carle, 2006: 73). A 2006 Eurobarometer report found that of all EU citizens, 32% trusted their parliament, 28% their government, and 14% their political parties (Schori Liang, 2007: 6). Many parties consider EU membership to serve the interests of national governments rather than those of citizens, who themselves are obliged to fund initiatives of which they do not necessarily reap the benefits. The populist radical right has been instrumental in fostering this sense of suspicion and mistrust among electorates.

Like Fortuyn, Wilders is also a Eurosceptic and indicative of his favourable attitude towards a nationalistic agenda, he supports the idea of “old Netherlands” as opposed to a borderless Europe. Wilders was instrumental in leading a successful campaign in the Netherlands against the European Union Constitutional Treaty, which was endorsed by the Dutch government (Wolin, 2011: 60). In a 2005 referendum, 62% of Dutch voters did indeed opt to “Vote No” against the ratification of the treaty, as Wilders’ campaign had urged (Carle, 2006: 73). It was feared that the establishment of a consolidated constitution for Europe would have required further relinquishing of state sovereignty to a regional “European superstate”. Carle (2006: 73) notes that Wilders’ success in this regard reflects mounting distrust towards mainstream politics, evidenced by the fact that many Dutch citizens voted against the draft constitution precisely because their government was in support of it – the same government that had been so adamant that immigration would result in tolerance and a natural convergence of values. The Lisbon Treaty that came into effect in December 2009 is the amendment of earlier treaties and includes many of the reforms proposed by the draft constitution.

#### 3.4.1.7 Immigration

The PVV is one of several anti-immigration and anti-Islam parties in Western Europe making gains in a country traditionally associated with a liberal social outlook (The Economist, 2010: 78). Intensified immigration from Eastern Europe, and after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, boosted radical right populist parties’ anti-immigration agendas. Confronting the EU is the fact that a cohesive immigration policy was not developed before opening and expanding borders with the Schengen arrangement and “big bang enlargement” (Schori Liang, 2007: 18). Immigration induces ethno-pluralist fears about the loss of traditional cultural values and these prevalent threat perceptions essentially revolve around cultural issues. International migration is increasingly deemed a security risk and reports on human trafficking and illegal immigration compound negative perceptions of immigration, causing a loss of faith in the capacity of politicians to tackle these problems. Many consider that European immigration levels have reached their point of saturation (Schori Liang, 2007: 18). Extensive media coverage of immigrants and asylum seekers has increased voter support for parties that traditionally “own” such issues and it has been suggested that the populist radical right has achieved its greatest success with regards to the immigration question, obliging even moderate parties to assume more rightist positions on the issue (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 652; Schori Liang, 2007: 19).

Defending a “diluted” national identity has become increasingly politicised, where accommodation of cultural diversity is considered to result in natives becoming a “colonised people” in their own country (Peters in Betz, 2005: 34). Western states’ “new political cleavage” is seen to be this tension between

multiculturalism and national identity, where party competition no longer fits neatly into a succinct left-right divide between Marxism and Liberalism (Betz, 2005: 34; Schori Liang, 2007: 29). Resolving the immigration problem is considered the most effective strategy in preventing the erosion of national identity. The anti-immigration frames of radical right-wing parties frequently refer to immigrants as a threat to national identity; as a significant source of crime, unemployment and social instability; and as exploiters of over-generous welfare states, implying less benefit for “natives” (Rydgren, 2008: 739, 746). Assessing the degree to which these frames reflect attitudes of radical right supporters and whether these frames influence the electorate’s decisions to vote for the radical right, Rydgren’s (2008: 739) study shows that frames associating criminality with social instability are most effective in mobilising electoral support for the radical right. These parties’ anti-immigration stances often lead to conclusions that such attitudes account for electoral success, but anti-immigration belongs to a host of other core right-wing concerns (Rydgren, 2008: 740).

Van der Veer (2006: 115) looks to Dutch cultural politics to explain the public’s embrace of populism in the era of Fortuyn, and now Wilders. This cultural politics is seen to thrive off public desires and anxieties that allegedly render the Dutch incapacitated in managing the forces of globalisation and immigration. The turn from “technocratic politics” to the “emotional side of mass politics” occurred sometime around the end on the 1990s with the interruption of the “collective well-being”: public anger towards the continued socio-economic marginalisation of Turks and Moroccans living off welfare, and increasing numbers of asylum seekers who, upon the rejection of applications, continued to stay in the country as illegal immigrants (van der Veer, 2006: 116). The uniting factor was seen to be Islam and religion quickly became regarded as the cause of these social ailments. With mainstream parties’ reluctance to politicise the issue, the question of immigration was exploited by Fortuyn who recognised the growing backlash against migration and globalisation. In addition to the mainstream’s loss of domestic credibility in dealing with these issues, the country also suffered an erosion of international standing with the 1995 Srebrenica tragedy in which over 7000 Muslim men were killed under the watch of the Dutch UN battalion (Dutchbat), mandated to protect them (van der Veer, 2006: 117). Mainstream Dutch parties had also reached the end of their political tether trying to cope with the economic downturn and the political instability affecting the international economy. In this climate, Fortuyn gained ground by appealing to the festering concerns of the populace.

Fortuyn owed much of his success as a populist to the amalgamation of disparate concerns under the blanket question of the “foreigners issue” (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 404, 405). Topics as diverse as asylum policy, criminality, law and order, the welfare state and Islam’s threat to Dutch identity

and culture came to be seen as a single problem. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the foreigners issue assumed heightened significance. In October 2001, 17% of *Leefbaar Nederland* supporters (Fortuyn's party before founding the LPF) supported more stringent asylum policy; five months later, 52% of LPF voters were in favour of such measures. These tougher public attitudes are indicative of the populist right's ability not only to feed off public discontent, but also to be instrumental in its creation (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 405).

### **3.4.1 The Global Financial Crisis and the Populist Radical Right**

The electoral advances of the new wave of radical right-wing parties in Western Europe need to be contextually situated in terms of fundamental socio-economic and socio-cultural transformations that have jostled entrenched political and institutional structures in liberal capitalist democracies (Betz, 2005: 38). These potentially destabilising processes legitimise the ethnocentric agenda of the populist right, accounting for why electorates in Western European countries have dismissed accusations of extremism associated with such parties and regard them as valid democratic competition (Betz, 2005: 38). Though enhanced socio-economic pressure brought on by the global financial crisis is only one explanation for the populist right's success in recent years, it is a particularly relevant consideration for this thesis in light of the hypotheses expounded by Realistic Group Conflict Theory that inform this discussion. As the previous chapter showed however, debate on Dutch national identity, integration and immigration policy over the last two to three decades suggests more to the growing appeal of the Dutch far-right than explanations of economic hardship. Similarly, some authors are critical of explanations of far-right support that deny the role populist radical parties themselves have in shaping their own success. Party characteristics such as leadership, organisation and ideology are important criteria for success and render rightist parties far more than mere "dependent variables, passively moulded by structural factors" (Mudde in Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 779). It is thus misguided to dismiss this trend purely as an articulation of political dissatisfaction: this "protest explanation" has been shown to be inadequate in accounting for contemporary support for such parties, and both ideological and pragmatic considerations among voters come into play when determining electoral preferences (see Bos and van der Brug, 2010) (Betz, 2005: 32).

As illustrated in the Dutch case, politicians have been obliged to seek new alliance partners in parties that do not share their policy goals; governments of "fractious coalitions" are consequently forced to assume a "hybrid course", formulating policies that do not necessarily correspond tidily with old ideologies and do not reflect clear-cut, left-right principles (Ghitis, 2011). The formation of such "unwholesome new alliances" between centrist and right-wing parties may represent "the most dramatic development of the

2010 electoral season” (Wolin, 2010: 63). The strategy undertaken by the VVD and CDA, to allow the PVV to prop up the minority Dutch government, is considered a more stable approach in that it may ultimately “tame the wilder side of Mr Wilders”, although again it could afford him “power without responsibility” (The Economist, 2010: 78). It has also been suggested that bringing members of far-right parties into cabinet would serve to expose their ideas and personalities to the ultimate tests of reality and public scrutiny, thereby tempering the worst extremities (The Economist, 2011: 78).

In the heat of the global financial crisis, the June 2009 EU parliamentary elections witnessed a record number of protest parties elected, as national governing parties found themselves at the mercy of discontented electorates and experienced significant losses. Increasing support for far-right parties has therefore not only been witnessed at the level of national party politics, but also has implications for the governing of the EU. Whilst economic cost-benefit analysis on the part of voters is certainly a significant explanation – indeed, one of the most dominant – for understanding European voting patterns, it does not fully account for the *way* in which voter dissatisfaction was expressed: via increasing support for centre-right and far right-wing parties rather than the political left, which suffered major setbacks (Cremona, 2010). In addition to the PVV which secured 17% of the Dutch vote making it the largest Dutch political party in the EU parliament, far-right, nationalistic and anti-immigrant parties in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Britain and Finland all experienced significant gains, resulting in a record representation of Europe’s far-right in the European Parliament (Cremona, 2010). Far-right parties also made important gains in Slovakia, Latvia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, France and Italy. The racist British National Party secured two seats and although Austria’s Freedom Party emerged with a mere 13% of the Austrian vote, the October 2010 Vienna city elections saw the party attaining 27% (Wolin, 2011: 61). The noticeably weaker performance of social democratic parties, generally outperformed by their centre-right rivals, prompted the remark from one observer that it was a “sad evening for social democracy in Europe” (Schulz in Wolin, 2011: 61).

### **3.5 DEMOCRACY, LIBERALISM AND THE DUTCH POPULIST RIGHT-WING**

The co-optation of several radical right-wing populist parties into government coalitions in recent years suggests that these groups need to be taken seriously and their impact upon policy critically considered. Both the presence and relative performance of these parties in national and regional politics serve as indicators of the “health” of representative systems: populist mobilisation suggests an erosion of representative democracy where electorates perceive elites as incompetent (Betz, 2005: 26). This indication of overall democratic health is also seen as serving a “healing function” for representative

democracy, where populist expression of dissatisfaction points to potential areas for reform, providing opportunity to strengthen democratic vitality (Akkerman, 2005: 338). This understanding interprets populism as a response to contexts of socio-cultural transformation and as a product of “change, crisis and challenge”: populism is thus not a feature of stable political systems (Schori Liang, 2007: 5). It has also been suggested that (yet another) central paradox to this latest wave of populist radical right and nationalist parties is that their re-emergence has not been a result of liberalism’s shortcomings in the post-communist era, but rather a product of its success (Schori Liang, 2007: 16). “Liberal” efforts to deepen regional cooperation and integration by fostering economic wellbeing under the European Union, and security and democracy under NATO, were portrayed as incontestably desirable and necessary policies by liberal establishments. National citizens were in effect denied the occasion to communicate public attitudes towards such “supra-national” concerns and the resentment this has bred has provided essential fodder for hungry populists (Schori Liang, 2007: 16).

The solution of the populist right to public dissatisfaction and the challenges inherent in liberal democracy has been to advance an interpretation of democracy in the form of a plebiscitarian model for the political system in which the will of the people is paramount (Betz, 2005: 38). The very fact of proposing institutional changes and transformations to the way policy is made is considered fundamentally anti-liberal and anti-system: in liberal democracies where the “system” refers to the “democratic system”, radical right populism is therefore *ipso facto* undemocratic, according to Betz (2005: 26, 38). Populism’s adoption of a “pseudo-democratic charade” and of perverted democratic principles to undermine democracy *with* democracy, are seen as further indicators of threat: coupled with a generally oppositional and belligerent stance, this is suggestive of a destabilising effect on liberal democratic representative systems (Betz, 2005: 26).

However, the perspective that populism thrives off perceptions about political elites being out of touch with the populations on behalf of whom they stand, suggests that populist right parties are less a threat to democracy per se than an important test of representative democracy (Betz, 2005: 27). In the context of the most recent wave of radical right populist parties in Western Europe, Akkerman, (2005: 338) similarly contends that these parties should rather be considered hostile to the “liberal concepts of representative democracy” and not to democracy as such. In addition to rejecting the oligarchic and elitist dimensions of representative democracy, populists oppose pluralist democracy which also challenges the pre-eminence of the “people’s will”. The democratic implications of right-wing “populism” appear less pressing an issue in the Dutch context, however: the PVV, as the LPF previously, has been regarded as more “populist” than “right-wing” and more “anti-immigration” than “populist” (Fennema in Akkerman, 2005:

340). Whilst the LPF's grievances lay more with immigration than democracy, a populist-inspired attack on representative politics has nevertheless informed its anti-immigration ideology (Akkerman, 2005: 340). The contemporary Dutch populist right is "generally compatible" with the basic and formal precepts of democracy: indeed, in the Dutch liberal democratic state, it is a prerequisite that anti-immigration parties be seen to identify with democracy in order to be deemed politically viable contenders (Bos and van der Brug: 2010; Akkerman, 2005: 337).

At the heart of liberal democracies is the conviction that the will of the people needs to be constrained by the rule of law and the constitution, which protect minorities from the "tyranny" of majority "mob rule" (Betz, 2005: 38). These provisions for minority protection are upheld by specialists and the "necessary evil" that is the political elite. When necessary, it is the duty of the courts to uphold the impartial rule of law should the majority push for actions that are unconstitutional: the aforementioned example of Fortuyn's "hierarchy of principles" and rejection of the anti-discrimination article in the Dutch constitution in the name of free speech, is a relevant illustration of unconstitutional tendencies. Prioritising state neutrality and secularism over religious freedom further indicates a strategy of "ordering" one liberal norm above another. Wilders' inflammatory statements about Islam also walk a very fine line between "free speech" and "hate speech". The will of the people and the populists that "represent" it, cannot always be depended on to determine action and policy: demands need to be subject to legal checks. Whilst the people's will is important in theory, it is not of the utmost importance and this inherent tension between the rule of law and the popular will of the people stems from representative democracy's "inherently oligarchic dimension" (Papadopoulos in Betz, 2005: 38).

It is in light of this perceived "imbalance" that populists promote more direct forms of democracy with legislative power to the people. The notion of non-elected judges as a balancing power is thus contrary to the populist idea, which implies populist opposition to a neo-liberal understanding of democracy (Akkerman, 2005: 339). Where the rule of law is based on the will of the people and also performs a constraining function that keeps impulsive decisions in check, the popular and liberal pillars of modern West-European democracies are not necessarily irreconcilable. Although populists tend not to regard the rule of law as supreme, it is necessary to establish whether the implication is that populism is outright anti-liberal or merely represents a challenge to constitutionalism. To the extent that radical right populist parties do not acknowledge the "restraining" function of the rule of law and are opposed outright to the constitutional structure of liberal democracy, favouring instead the direct, unfettered expression of popular will, they are "extremist" and anti-liberal (Akkerman, 2005: 339, 340).



Betz (2005: 36) understands the populist right's fixation on multiculturalism, citizenship and immigration as a fundamental threat to liberal democracy, a threat which is largely obscured by attacks on liberal democracy being made in the name of defending the very norms and values that are undermined: as the Council of Europe put it in a January 2000 report, thereby "using democracy's own weapons to fight it more effectively" (Betz, 2005: 26). As shown previously, debate on these issues in the Netherlands is of national scope and is not the exclusive purview of the right. In an effort to explain the extent to which defending liberal values was a true concern of the LPF, which cast itself as a "guardian" of values such as free speech, the separation of church and state, and equality of the sexes, Akkerman (2005: 337) suggests that the *type* of nationalism espoused by the radical right indicates the degree of compatibility with liberalism. The LPF's civic and culturally pluralist "liberal nationalism", with ideological roots in the French Revolution, was "Jacobin" in the sense of being militant and radical (Akkerman, 2005: 346). This brand of nationalism is considered compatible with liberalism, whereas organicist and ethnocentric nationalism is anti-liberal, extremist and generally *incompatible* with liberalism, despite claims to "defend" core values (Akkerman, 2005: 342). The *Vlaams Blok* and Austrian Freedom Party are seen to fall into this latter category of radical right parties. Whilst the ethnocentric ideology of Belgium's *Vlaams Blok* is reflected in the party's calls to expel immigrants and establish a culturally homogenous nation, the Netherlands' LPF and PVV did and do consider radical integration via assimilation as the only feasible option (Akkerman, 2005: 343). Along with the conservative-liberal VVD (a liberal party in which nationalist priorities assume heightened importance during real or perceived crisis), these Dutch parties are not simply "rightist" parties and are (or were) "leftist" with respect to stances on certain ethical concerns such as abortion, euthanasia, sexual rights and state neutrality.

The LPF was seen to be motivated by a "liberalism of fear": an innate belief that supposedly "universal" liberal principles and natural rights were unrealisable in societies with regimes and ideologies hostile and not dynamic enough to be receptive to them (Akkerman, 2005: 347). The fear of despotism and of Islamic culture, deemed particularly antagonistic to liberal principles, has caused some to moderate liberalism's universalist aspirations and see liberal principles as rooted in the Enlightenment and in the West's Judeo-Christian heritage, which separates the West from Islam (Akkerman, 2005: 347). Fortuyn was one such politician who turned "liberalism inward", causing it to assume a defensive, culturally relativist and nationalist character whereby he defended national borders for fear that a hostile foreign cultural threat would lead to the downfall of Dutch culture and society, not unlike the scenario that led to the ultimate downfall of the Roman Empire (Akkerman, 2005: 347). Contrary to Betz then, this interpretation sees anti-immigration critique of liberalism as a denial of universal rights rather than as a rejection of the rule of law (Akkerman, 2005: 341).

Although the LPF failed as a party, it has had a huge impact on the Dutch political scene and its ideological legacy has influenced both the liberal VVD and PVV. The LPF showed that the combination of a liberalism of fear with militant and radical civic nationalism can be highly effective in mobilising broad support for anti-immigration policies (Akkerman, 2005: 351). Although Akkerman's (2005) research was conducted prior to the emergence of the PVV on the political scene (at the time of Akkerman's research, Wilders was likely still a member of the VVD, having established the PVV in 2005), the categorisation of the LPF as a liberal nationalist, anti-immigration party supportive of a radical civic nationalism appears fitting to the PVV, which has filled the ideological vacuum left by the now-defunct LPF. Extending this analysis to Wilders' Freedom Party, it would appear reasonable to assert that the PVV is similarly compatible with liberalism, and radically so. The LPF and PVV's support for a strictly secular tradition of tolerance is however a threat to the country's tradition of tolerating religious diversity, an almost constant feature of consecutive coalitions in the Netherlands since 1917 (Akkerman, 2005: 351). The ambivalence about the liberal freedoms enjoyed since the 1960s is also reflected in the way that the Dutch value the freedoms afforded to them privately, but want these range of personal options to be accompanied by more restrictive rules in the public sphere. Religious customs, with their overt expression in both the private and public realms, present a challenge to this distinction (van der Veer, 2006: 122).

### **3.8 CONCLUSION**

The political successes of the LPF and PVV, as well as Fortuyn and Wilders' propulsion into the public spotlight in the Netherlands, reflect(ed) a persisting and reckonable grassroots revolt against mainstream parties and political elites too mindful of electoral risks to tackle sensitive cultural identity issues and to stray from a purportedly naïve faith in multiculturalism to achieve social harmony. Whilst the political elite fulfils a crucial function, current tensions in the Netherlands and in liberal democracies elsewhere suggest that politicians need to take greater heed of citizens' concerns. The growing electoral appeal of populism evinces a crisis of political legitimacy and citizens' perceptions that demands can only be heard by turning to charismatic demagogues is an indication that established parties would be well advised to perform better in terms of upholding their end of the "social contract" and representing the very people with whom they enter into this understood "agreement". Far-right populism's anti-Islam motivations are a particularly noteworthy development in a country where the inward-looking and exclusive liberalism that has emerged appears so starkly contradictory to traditional images of the Netherlands not only as a *multicultural* haven, but as a country that has had centuries of experience in accommodating religious pluralism.

Fortuyn and Wilders have ensured that today, the parameters of what is permissible in public and political debate concerning Islam have widened markedly. The Dutch immigration, integration and Islam debates have assumed increasingly cultural and ideological undertones, so much so that Wilders' recent acquittal for hate speech would be almost unthinkable a decade or two ago. This chapter has positioned the discussion of the Dutch relationship with Islam within wider cultural transformations including depillarisation, a shift away from Calvinist frugality to a culture of consumption and permissiveness, and heightened global attention to Islam's perceived incompatibility with liberal democracy and the forces of modernity. This chapter's chiefly ideological focus has emphasised the cultural clash between Islam and Western liberalism, but has also observed competing core values and intrinsic paradoxes within liberalism itself. This examination of the relationship between Islam, right-wing populism and Dutch liberal democratic political culture has distanced itself from suggestions that it is "immigrant culture" that needs to be deconstructed and scrutinised in order to adapt and coincide with dominant values, whilst "majority culture" is a given (van der Veer, 2006: 122). This chapter has instead placed particular emphasis on observing Dutch political culture in a critical light, seeing these values as subject to change and redefinition. The next chapter discusses the economic impact of the global financial crisis on the Netherlands in greater detail, in addition to analysing patterns in Dutch voting behaviour since 1989.

## Chapter 4. The Global Financial Crisis and Patterns of Voting Behaviour in the Netherlands: Economic and Electoral Volatility

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first section of this chapter looks at economic and financial developments in the Netherlands in the context of the global financial crisis. Consideration of the real impacts of the global financial crisis on the Dutch economy is necessary for contextualising the discussion presented in the following chapter, on trends in Dutch anti-immigration sentiments both prior and subsequent to the onset of the global economic meltdown. The theoretical framework employed to analyse these public sentiments, Realistic Group Conflict Theory, emphasises the role of competitive threat perspectives in shaping intergroup attitudes (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010: 318). Perceived threat, stemming from real or indeed perceived competition over scarce group resources, is therefore of central relevance to this exploration of negative intergroup attitudes. The first section of this chapter thus delves briefly into these actual economic and material circumstances in which competition and threat perceptions may be located in the present conditions. Recent trends within the Dutch financial and export sectors are observed, in addition to patterns of growth since the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008. The effects of immigration as such on the Dutch economy, in terms of impact upon natives' wages and employment opportunities, or the access of native Dutch to social welfare benefits, are beyond the purview of this research (see Longhi *et al.* 2010a; Longhi *et al.* 2010b and Zorlu and Hartog 2005 for more information on these effects).

The political implications of this tumultuous macro-economic context are of particular interest to this thesis. Economic issues assumed heightened electoral significance in the political campaigns leading up to the 2010 Dutch general elections, overshadowing somewhat but certainly not displacing public concerns about immigration and integration, which have come to dominate and define Dutch party politics over the course of the last decade especially. The Dutch electorate's mobilisation along both economic and cultural lines has reflected in patterns of voting behaviour and electoral outcomes; the second section of this chapter thus observes voting trends in the Netherlands, from 1989 to the most recent Dutch general elections in 2010. The electoral effects of historical processes peculiar to Dutch society, including pillarisation, secularisation, the rise of the welfare state, and the decline of the traditional "system" parties – or *Volkspartijen* – are also considered.

Examining patterns in electoral outcomes enables appreciation of that aspect of public sentiment that is reflected in trends in voting behaviour and the changing distribution of power among political parties

from one election to the next. Whilst the next chapter looks at intergroup attitudes as reflected overtly in opinion polls and surveys, the ballot sheet offers an alternative platform for the expression of popular sentiment. This explicitly political manifestation of public attitudes is thus considered complimentary to the results of public opinion surveys presented in Chapter Five. Observing trends in electoral support also enables comparison with the results of opinion polls, making it possible to determine whether increasingly negative self-reported attitudes towards foreigners coincide with higher levels of support for parties promoting a distinctively anti-immigration agenda. This demonstrates the way in which public sentiment and politics are reflected in one other in a democracy.

## **4.2 THE NETHERLANDS AND THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS**

The Dutch economy is somewhat exceptional for its “hybrid character”: combining a strong and well-developed welfare state with an “Anglo-American-oriented economy” that subscribes extensively to a neoliberal, market-driven and deregulated model (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 701, 703, 704). The Netherlands’ internationally-gearred economy, where more than two thirds of the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is earned beyond its borders, is characterised by large financial corporations, deep and liquid capital markets, a funded pension system, an export-dependent manufacturing industry and a large services sector that is responsible for more than 70% of total employment (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 702). It has been argued that the recent economic and financial turmoil has confronted the country with a “triple whammy”: a rapid and sheer decline in the contribution of the financial sector to the country’s overall GDP, a crisis to the Netherlands’ extensive funded pension system which affects over 90% of workers, and an abrupt drop in global consumption which has taken a sharp knock out of the country’s export-gearred economy (Engelen *et al.* 2010: 69).

### **4.2.1 A Highly Open and Internationally-Oriented Economy**

The Netherlands was particularly hard-hit by slumps in world trade, contracting export markets, and declining consumer confidence during the global financial crisis (Cremona 2010; Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 2). As one of the most open and export-dependent economies in Europe, the Netherlands has been particularly susceptible to the effects of international economic and market turmoil. The country’s total exports in goods and services account for 80% of GDP, two times the European average, and the relationship between trade and growth in the country is directly proportional (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 3). Absolutely, the country is the largest European exporter per volume after France and Germany and the centrality of the external sector to the Dutch economy has been reflected over the course

of the last three to four years in the way that the Netherlands has been especially sensitive to variation in world trade (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 3).

In addition to the Netherlands' substantial export sector, the country's international-looking financial sector and its elaborate pension fund system have also been heavily influenced by movements in external markets, further heightening the susceptibility of the Dutch economy to global developments. The Netherlands has the largest capital markets relative to GDP of all Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) members – larger even than the United States and the United Kingdom (Engelen *et al.*, 2010: 58). At the outset of the crisis, Dutch banks had the highest exposure in Europe to American financial markets, at 66% of GDP, whilst the average exposure of European banks was under 30% of GDP (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 3). Dutch banks' aggregate foreign claims during this period were in excess of 300% of GDP – the largest in the EU in percentage of Gross Domestic Product and again, more than double the European average of 135% of GDP (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 3). Despite this large foreign financial exposure however, the contribution of the financial sector to the Dutch economy is limited, at 6% of GDP, since the external sector contributes most to the Dutch economy (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 3; Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 701). The Netherlands' internationally-oriented financial sector meant that it was in effect “hit twice”: by the 2008 credit crunch and the subsequent 2009 global economic slowdown (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 701). This impact on the financial services sector resulted in the nationalisation of the Dutch banks ABN Amro and the Dutch branch of Fortis. Support was also given to ING and several other banks, an operation that cost the country almost 40% of GDP (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 701).

The strong downturn in 2008 thus led to a strong policy response by the Dutch government which implemented three recovery packages with several stimulus provisions. The Netherlands' remarkably low government debt at the outset of the crisis gave the country a favourable “starting position” and enabled the Dutch government to pursue ambitious measures to stabilise financial markets, contributing over EUR 80 billion into the banking system (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 705). The first two packages were adopted at the end of 2008 and start of 2009; the third, in March 2009, was almost double the combined size of the previous two. The total stimulus worth of these packages was around 2% of GDP and targeted those areas most susceptible to the crisis, including household purchasing power, employment protection and private and public investment (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2009). Reducing corporate taxes and the social contributions of employees were included to limit the reduction of the economy, support financial institutions and stabilise financial markets (EC Economic Forecast Spring 2009; EC Economic Forecast Spring 2010). Though government assistance to financial institutions was partially repaid at the

end of 2009, financial institutions in the Netherlands are still vulnerable (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). These massive state investments to strengthen the financial system have accumulated substantial budget deficits, necessitating a more restrictive policy approach for the future (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 705, 707). The task of budgetary consolidation has fallen upon the incumbent government headed by the pro-austerity, conservative VVD. From 2011, government intends to terminate the fiscal stimulus package introduced and to promote strong budgetary correction measures (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2010).

The financial crisis led to a considerable decline in stock markets globally. Dutch households' investments were however limited, reaching about 40% of GDP in 2007 which was comparatively low in Europe (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 4). This figure does however discount the indirect holding of stocks via occupational pension funds which are exceedingly high in the Netherlands – indeed the highest in Europe. A strong association between a well-developed funded pension system and deep, liquid and sophisticated financial markets is noted: both total assets and the contribution of pension funds are exceptionally high in the Netherlands (Engelen *et al.*, 2010: 59, 65). Dutch households' large pension savings funds and assets implicate them deeply in the “financialisation” of the country, and they are thus highly dependent on invested savings and insurances (Engelen *et al.*, 2010: 62). In non-crisis periods, this elaborate funded pension scheme is a massive boon, indicating that the country's ageing population is saving for the future. The financial crisis has however had a significantly detrimental effect on these pension fund assets which lost about EUR 70 billion – 12% of GDP – in the space of about one year, a loss of wealth that is indirectly shouldered by households via higher premiums or lower pension disbursements (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 4). Decline in Dutch household wealth via this occupational pension system adversely impacts private consumption and thus economic growth. There has however been a lack of public outcry in response to an impending pension crisis in the country, suggesting a broad acceptance of continued financialisation (Engelen *et al.*, 2010: 69).

Dutch households and corporations are both relatively dependent on bank loans. This high level of indebtedness has seen Dutch banks repeatedly restricting the conditions under which credit may be borrowed, making the process of financing corporations through bank loans difficult. The Netherlands' high dependence on bank credit thus makes the country susceptible to variations in credit conditions (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 4). In 2009, the Dutch housing market did not appear significantly affected, as overvaluation has steadily disappeared during the course of the last decade. Housing prices were reported to have come down by about 5% in 2009, and were expected to be negatively affected by uncertainty about future earnings and wealth, as well as by anticipations that housing prices would

deteriorate (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 5). Whilst the full financial implications of the credit crisis are somewhat difficult to appreciate at this stage, Engelen and Musterd (2010: 705) write that the economic repercussions of the crises are more “clear-cut, straightforward and substantial”.

#### **4.2.2 Patterns of Growth: 2007 – 2011**

Given the Netherlands’ very low unemployment rate, its considerable and stable current account surplus, low level of government debt, as well as its budget surplus at the outset of the financial crisis, the Dutch economy was initially thought reasonably well-positioned to ride out the worst of the storm (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 1, 6). Indeed, it initially appeared largely unaffected by the volatility across the Atlantic, though the fact of the highly open Dutch economy did suggest that it was only a matter of time before the negative repercussions of the turmoil abroad would reflect in bank balances, consumer confidence and domestic demand – areas in which the Dutch economy has been made particularly vulnerable.

Economic growth in 2007 was strong at 3.5% (the average within the euro region was 2.75%), and marked the highest since the beginning of the century for the Netherlands (EC Interim Forecast, February 2008). The main engine behind this growth was a healthy domestic demand and positive international environment promoting strong export growth (EC Interim Forecast, February 2008; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2007). In 2007, the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP), a measure of consumer price inflation, was relatively low at 1.6%, making the Netherlands one of the best-faring countries in the EU in this respect (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2008). The labour market in 2007 was exceptionally tight, with a high unfilled vacancy rate approximately totalling the unemployment rate. Whilst this usually drives wages up, the flexibility of the labour force, comprising large numbers of part-time and temporary workers able to adjust supply to economic circumstance, meant that drastic wage increases were not experienced. Dutch corporations have traditionally battled to attract and retain qualified workers due to this tight labour market and employers have thus been unwilling to let go of labour during periods of decreased demand, giving rise to the phenomenon of “labour hoarding” (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 6; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2010). This has tempered the low unemployment rate, around 3% and the lowest in Europe at the outset of the crisis, at which point the Netherlands also boasted one of the highest current account surpluses in Europe, at 10% of GDP (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 5, 6; EC Interim Forecast, September 2007).



Considerably reduced economic activity was witnessed in 2008. Though average GDP increased by 2.1%, this was principally the result of a carry-over of the unusually high growth experienced in the second half of 2007 (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2008; EC Interim Forecast, January 2009; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2009). The initial effects of the recession into which the Dutch economy slipped in 2008 were therefore obscured at first and were not immediate: the tight labour market performed strongly with the unemployment rate even dropping to 2.8%; regarding public finances, the government budget still reported a 0.7% of GDP surplus (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2008; EC Interim Forecast, September 2008; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2009). The second quarter of 2008 did however report the lowest quarterly growth since 2005 and unemployment rose in the last quarter for the first time since the start of 2005 (EC Interim Forecast, September 2008; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2008; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2009). Substantially increased registration levels at higher educational institutions for the 2008/2009 academic year may have reflected the considerable “discouraged worker effect” in the Netherlands – continued studies serving to postpone labour market participation – although a 1990 baby boom (resulting in an almost 5% increase in the number of births) may also have been a factor, since this age group turned 18 in 2008 (Beets and Willekens, 2009: 8).

The Netherlands’ flexible labour market and low dependency on foreign capital meant that structurally, the country’s economic wellbeing was comparatively good (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 1). In spite of labour market shortages, wage demands were restrained: attributed to government’s offer to lower social contributions in exchange for lower wage demands from unions (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2008). Uncertainty about unemployment further subdued wage demands, as did the fact that prior wage agreements had been conducted during a period when economic growth was assumed to be positive and inflation high (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2008; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2009). Along with low unemployment; high participation in the labour market; current account surpluses limiting dependency on foreign capital; government’s budget surpluses, and low levels of debt enabling intervention in financial markets, the prospects of the Dutch economy making a sustained recovery were considered relatively strong, though the need for substantial and tough fiscal adjustment was recognised (Masselink and van den Noord (2009: 6, 7). From the second half of 2008, the effects of the crisis were felt most keenly in the export sector and its impact on the Dutch economy began to appear more significant than initially presumed (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 701; EC Interim Forecast, September 2008). Traditional strengths of the Dutch economy, such as its funded pension system and strong position in world trade, increasingly appeared to be sources of weakness that heavily compromised consumption and investment. A subdued 2008 consumer price index of 2.2% was largely due to a lag in time taken for higher raw material prices to reflect in consumer prices (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2008; EC

Economic Forecast, Spring 2009). Oil and gas prices in the Netherlands have delayed effects on inflation as energy prices are only adjusted on a bi-annual basis: sudden oil price hikes in the first half of 2008 were therefore not fully reflected in the 2008 inflation rate (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). This delay only had a limited effect on 2009 inflation, being compensated for by the sharp fall in oil prices at the end of 2008 (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2009).

The budget balance benefitted from several measures by the government to up revenue: increasing several taxes in mid-2008 including fuel levies and an aviation tax, raising duties on tobacco and alcohol, as well as increasing social contributions like health care premiums (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2007; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2009). Despite the Netherlands' positive trade balance in 2008 suggesting a favourable competitive position, Dutch price and cost competitiveness had declined since 2000 as a result of unit labour costs increasing more steeply relative to surrounding countries. This was more the result of rising compensation for employees than productivity gains and though wages were moderated in 2004 and 2005, the generally tight labour market in the Netherlands benefitted employees by driving wages upwards (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2009).

Economic activity in 2009 saw a marked contraction of 4%, concentrated within the first half of the year, and the second quarter was the fifth consecutive quarter to witness a drop in GDP (EC Interim Forecast, September 2009). Both exports and imports contracted abruptly as was to be expected given the Dutch economy's sensitivity to global trade developments and variations in international demand: net exports made a negative contribution to growth in the first half of 2009 and a positive contribution in the second half (EC Interim Forecast, February 2009). This rebound in the latter half of 2009 was mainly due to a revival in global trade and the rejuvenation of exports (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 5; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). Negative effects on wealth were considered to impact consumption more significantly in the Netherlands relative to other European states. Until the end of 2008, Dutch consumer confidence levels reflected general European patterns, suffering from the economic slowdown and financial crisis, but began to decrease more sharply at the start of 2009 (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 5; EC Interim Forecast, September 2008). Producer confidence levels in the Netherlands were thought to have experienced a greater fall relative to other European countries, though this has still been higher than the average. These downward trends indicate that Dutch private consumption and investment have taken a greater knock than in other European contexts (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 5).

Households' wealth losses due to falling stock markets and reduced pension fund assets were anticipated to result in higher savings rates (EC Interim Forecast, September 2009; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). An improvement in asset prices, particularly in the stock market at the end of 2009 and first quarter of 2010 did however improve households' financial positions, impacting positively on pension fund assets. These promising trends in the stock market were expected to reduce the need for higher premiums or lower pensions and thus boost private consumption, although the wealth position of Dutch households was still under pre-crisis levels (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). An increase in private consumption was projected to reduce the need for precautionary saving and was associated with the resilient Dutch labour market: despite loosening in 2009 (as seen by the steep drop in the vacancy rate), the low unemployment rate increased only modestly to 3.7% (EC Interim Forecast, September 2009; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2010). Unemployment increases had been moderated by government's part-time working plan, labour flexibility, "labour hoarding", earlier retirement patterns and a drop in labour supply from worker discouragement and continued studies (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2009; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). These factors allaying unemployment growth in 2009 were however generally temporary and unemployment in 2010 increased to 4.5% (EC Interim Forecast February 2010; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011).

Whilst benefiting from a reduced Dutch annual contribution to the EU, the sharpest drop in the Dutch budget was experienced in 2009, with the modest 2008 surplus turning into a general government deficit (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). Measures undertaken by the government to initiate recovery, in conjunction with decreasing gas revenues, partly contributed to undermining the budgetary position within a short space of time (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2009; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2010). In 2009 and 2010, the Dutch government sought to encourage economic recovery by accelerating public works to improve infrastructure (Lucardie and Voerman, 2010: 1099). Options for cutbacks amounting to approximately €35 billion were identified and whereas the suggestion of getting rid of tax relief for housing mortgages was rejected, in October 2009 the cabinet agreed on raising the age for receiving general state pensions from 65 to 67 years (Lucardie and Voerman, 2010: 1099, 1100). Disagreements meant that the issue was however deferred.

After a deep recession, the first signs of a recovery in the second half of 2009 gave greater momentum to growth and positive GDP growth of 1.8% in 2010 was witnessed. The main engine behind this was the external sector, thanks to an acceleration in global trade enhancing net exports, though a weak domestic demand dampened this gradual recovery by contributing negatively to GDP growth (EC Interim Forecast September 2010; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). Net exports thus improved the trade balance,

positively contributing to the current account surplus (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). The third quarter of 2010 did however see GDP growth take a considerable knock from stocks, pointing towards a more modest recovery than suggested. The economy did nevertheless grow again in the fourth quarter due to higher energy consumption during the cold winter (EC Interim Forecast, February 2011; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). Though domestic demand improved significantly in the second quarter of 2010 from investments in equipment, this largely took the form of replacement investment and was not due to capacity increases. Improvements over pre-crisis investment levels were thus not achieved and the recovery outlook was more moderate than investment suggested (EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2010; EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). The annual HICP inflation rate reached an all-time low in the first half of 2010 (EC Interim Forecast, September 2010; EC Interim Forecast, February 2011).

The current account balance in 2010 made a strong comeback, returning to the pre-crisis level of over 6.5% of GDP (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). General government debt mounted from 60.8% of GDP in 2009 to 62.7% of GDP in 2010 and is expected to increase only modestly to 63.9% in 2011, stabilising around this level in 2012 (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). The reason for this modest increase is that banks' repayment of state financial support is expected to tone down the increase in the debt level stemming from a deficit which continues to be high (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). In 2009 for instance, Fortis bank repaid a 34 billion euro short term loan totalling about 6% of GDP (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2009). Dutch public finances have experienced an abrupt decline: the 0.6% of GDP surplus in 2008 resulted in a 5.4% of GDP deficit in 2009 and though it was expected to worsen even further in 2010, the general government balance stabilised at a deficit of 5.4% of GDP (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2010). The most significant reason for the surplus decline from 2008 to 2009 was the combined impact of several delayed effects of the economic crisis which increased government spending, especially the rise in unemployment benefits (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011).

Government's intentions to pursue a budgetary consolidation policy in 2011 are intended to slow the growth of public sector debt by improving the general government balance, reducing the size of government and moderating wages in the public sector in the short to medium term. In addition to the departure from the stimulus package and the implementation of consolidation measures, higher gas revenues are also anticipated to contribute to a much-improved general government balance in 2011, and an ameliorated general government deficit of 2.3% of GDP in 2012 (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011; EC Economic Forecast, Autumn 2010). This general government position has been relatively positive in comparison to other countries in Europe – partly a result of rising gas revenues – and this good

performance has allowed the Dutch government to stoke the economy by increasing the deficit (Masselink and van den Noord, 2009: 6). Although this strategy is successful in boosting demand, it requires necessary and unappealing budgetary adjustment in the future.

Positive but moderate annual growth has been predicted for 2011, at 1.7%, with weakened external and domestic demand pointing towards a significantly slower economic recovery (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). Although growth in domestic demand was once again positive in 2011, this has indeed slowed as anticipated due to fiscal stimulus measures being gradually withdrawn from 2011 and government's embarking upon its grand consolidation strategy (EC Interim Forecast, February 2011; EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). Only in the first half of 2012 is real GDP expected to recover its pre-crisis position, indicating the lengthiness of the recovery process (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). Whilst an additional rise in the oil price could delay global recovery and hence the Netherlands' prospects for economic revival, the more vibrant demand witnessed from emerging markets could improve the growth outlook (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). 2011 has so far witnessed falling levels of private consumption, falling real disposable income from higher inflation and fiscal cutbacks, and declining consumer confidence. Negative real wage growth and negative effects on wealth stemming from the housing and stock markets have also been experienced (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). A more broad-based recovery for the Dutch economy will thus come to depend on resolving the debt crisis to re-instil confidence in the private sector (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). Despite exports being the traditional growth engine for the Dutch economy and the major driver of economic recovery, the positive contribution of net exports to growth did decline in the second quarter of 2011 as anticipated (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). A deceleration in global trade means that export growth will cool off for the remainder of 2011. With an improving capacity utilisation rate and producer confidence, investment also looks set to contribute positively to economic growth in 2011, with a further upturn in 2012 expected when capacity utilisation rates match the pre-crisis rate of 82%, encouraging corporations to make new investments (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). Private investment growth is expected to remain subdued and stricter criteria for approving credit to corporations by banks, as well as hikes in long-term interest rates, do not bode favourably for private investment (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011).

HICP did rise markedly as expected, averaging 2.2% in the first half of 2011 compared to 0.9% in 2010, and it is expected to average 2.5% for the rest of 2011 (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). Inflation in the Netherlands in July 2011 was higher than the average level for the euro-region – recall that at the outset of the crisis, the Netherlands had one of the lowest inflation levels in the EU (EC Interim Forecast, September 2011). This significant increase was principally due to unprocessed food, oil and gas price

hikes, since energy prices have lagged inflationary effects (EC Interim Forecast, February 2011). In light of the extent of the contraction in output experienced, the unemployment increases from 3.7% in 2009 to 4.5% in 2010 are relatively slight and are forecast to decline modestly from 4.2% in 2011 to 4% in 2012 (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). The labour market is thus considered likely to have a positive impact on growth, as unemployment levels in particular have continued to surpass expectations (EC Interim Forecast, February 2011). More positive consumer expectations about unemployment and more unfilled vacancies suggest that the Netherlands will see a gradual decrease in the unemployment rate, though this will still be above pre-crisis levels (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011). The private sector will be the engine behind employment growth as budgetary consolidation measures to reduce government will negatively impact the public sector. Though higher inflation, higher social contributions by employers, and improved labour market prospects are expected to drive public sector wages and unit labour costs upwards, measures to moderate wages in the public sector may spill over into the private sector (EC Economic Forecast, Spring 2011).

Reflecting the country's tradition of technocratic policy-making discussed in Chapter Two, all political parties in the Netherlands submit policy proposals to the Central Planning Bureau (CPB) for review, the body advising government on economic issues (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 4). In 2010, the role of the CPB in limiting the scope of policy was even more pronounced in the context of the global economic and euro crises and CPB figures featured prominently in election debates. Cutbacks and austerity measures totalling €30million were presented as inevitable policy and this need for significant budgetary cuts, a result of economic crisis and aging population, dominated the policy framework for the 2010 electoral season (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 4, 5). So whilst questions of immigration and integration have continued to play an important role in election campaigns, anxieties about the Dutch economy have overshadowed these issues to a certain degree (RFE/RL 2010). The centre-right conservative-liberal VVD was the party most in favour of implementing harsh austerity measures, standing for large budget cuts, cutbacks on Dutch contributions to the EU, smaller government and reducing welfare benefits for immigrants (RFE/RL 2010). The 2010 elections were thus very much about voting for the party most able to assume the reigns in stimulating economic recovery and it is noteworthy that the party favouring the most stiff austerity measures ultimately drew the greatest confidence of the electorate. This reinforces the sentiments of the party's financial expert, Frans Weekers, that the Dutch electorate fully appreciated the necessity of making sacrifices to achieve economic revival (RFE/RL 2010).

### 4.3 VOTING OUTCOMES OF DUTCH GENERAL ELECTIONS: 1989 – 2010

Recent changes experienced in Dutch politics are most conspicuous when observing patterns of electoral behaviour. Whereas election outcomes were traditionally quite predictable and “boring”, instability and rapid transformation have become quite characteristic of politics in the Netherlands (De Vreese, 2008: 147). The country has a multiparty system of proportional representation and as no party has ever come close to achieving a parliamentary majority, coalition governments define the post-war Dutch electoral system (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 5; Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 647). In addition to the large number of parties usually represented in parliament – since WWII, 7 to 14 parties – the possibility of electoral volatility is great (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 5). The Pedersen Index measures electoral volatility by calculating the net percentage of voters changing their vote from one party to another: if all parties maintain levels of support, the index is 0, whereas a complete change of voter support (new parties replacing existing parties), will yield an index score of 100. As *aggregate* shifts are measured, an equal number of voters shifting from one party to another and vice versa will produce a net electoral change of 0 (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 5). Whilst the Pedersen scores for successive Dutch parliamentary elections from 1959 to 1989 show relative electoral stability, elections in the post-1994 period have been more volatile (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 6).

This section therefore looks at patterns of voting behaviour from the 1989 general elections to the most recently-held elections in 2010. How particular issue frames become prioritised is highly dependent on the make-up of government and the distribution of parliamentary seats. Each successive election held over this last twenty-year period will be looked at briefly, in terms vote share among the major political contenders and the particular make-up of the coalition government formed. Elections in which major upsets were experienced will necessarily be accorded greater focus. Broader trends in voting behaviour will make particular reference to the electoral impact of depillarisation and secularisation; the decline of the major “system” parties and increasing fragmentation of the electorate; as well as the heightened electoral volatility of recent years. The ideological implications of these developments for the balance between left and right is of particular interest: whilst the relative distribution of power between these blocs does reveal increasingly little about levels of tolerance in the country or the extent to which liberal democratic values are upheld, shifts along the political spectrum do say something of the overall political self-understanding of the Netherlands. This ultimately has implications for how the country sees itself and even more importantly, how it perceives “others” and the wider question of diversity.

#### **4.3.1 1989 Lubbers III (CDA-PvdA)**

The general election of September 1989 saw the CDA gain the most votes, followed by the PvdA, VVD and then the D66 (Democrats '66). This outcome led to the formation of a so-called “Roman-red” coalition government in November 1989 between the CDA and PvdA, headed by Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers of the CDA for the third time since 1982. Right-wing Hans Janmaat’s Centre Democrats (CD) obtained one parliamentary seat.

Considered the third major political force in the Netherlands after Christian democracy and social democracy, conservative liberalism represented by the VVD made important advances in the 1990s. The early years of the decade saw the “foreigners issue” first being introduced on the political agenda under Bolkestein’s leadership of the VVD (1990 – 1998) whilst still an opposition party, indicating that the VVD had come to recognise the electoral advantage of politicising the issue (van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 400, 401). Mobilisation around discontentment with prevailing strategies to manage diversity thus only commenced once the opposition VVD had begun to appreciate and tap into the electoral potential of this public disenchantment, pushing for greater immigration controls. The VVD was however obliged to temper its anti-immigration outlook so as not to alienate the business community that favoured a supply of cheap labour, or the party’s more libertarian wing (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 402). Mounting voter dissatisfaction with mainstream party strategies to tackle immigration, the EU, multiculturalism and integration thus led to the two chief ideological forces in the Netherlands experiencing a gradual loss of votes: for the CDA, this had already begun in the 1960s and as of the late 1970s, the PvdA started to experience a similar trend of downward support (van Kersbergen and Krouwel (2008: 401).

#### **4.3.2 1994 Kok I (PvdA-VVD-D66)**

The 3 May 1994 general elections saw the defeat of the traditional supporter of pillarisation, the CDA, prevented from entering government for the first time since 1918 after having been part of successive government coalitions for a century. This reflected the declining electoral significance of religious identity (van der Veer, 2006: 115). Both previous governing parties suffered significant losses: the CDA lost a record 20 seats from a previous total of 54 and the PvdA lost 12 of 49 seats. These elections are thus noteworthy because it was from this point on that all subsequent elections witnessed marked levels of electoral change and volatility. The right-wing CD succeeded in increasing their share of seats by 2, occupying 3 seats in parliament.



The new government coalition as of August 1994 was formed between the PvdA and the two liberal parties, the VVD and progressive Democrats (D66). Termed a “Purple Coalition” (comprising of the social democrat “reds” and “blue” liberals and excluding the Christian Democrats), the new cabinet under Kok witnessed a marked shift in policy: previously unquestioned respect for cultural diversity was replaced by greater emphasis on immigrants’ integration and societal participation. This election outcome provides a good example of how political change can be influential on policy change: whilst the CDA was part of government, a multicultural approach was supported, but with the party being forced out in the early 1990s, a more noticeably social-economic approach was pursued (Scholten, 2011: 77).

#### **4.3.3 1998 Kok II (PvdA-VVD-D66)**

The PvdA and VVD led by a large margin in the May 1998 general elections at the expense of their junior cabinet partner, the D66. The largest opposition party, the CDA, came in at third place with a reduced number of seats. These elections thus consolidated the previous coalition’s majority, where the good economic performance of the “purple coalition” between 1994 and 1998 meant that support was retained and even enhanced. The new Kok II cabinet came into effect from August 1998. Achieving only 0.6% of the vote and losing the three parliamentary seats achieved in 1994, the right-wing Centre Democrats did not return to parliament (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 643). The meagre success of the CD at this time is often attributed to the fact that unlike Fortuyn who enjoyed the image of a “normal democratic politician”, Hans Janmaat was deemed too politically incorrect to win public legitimacy (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 649).

The convincing performance of the social democrats meant that for the first time, the left and right blocs were completely in balance. This deviated from the norm in Dutch party politics where the right-wing has generally had a majority vote share (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 9). The PvdA’s campaign had a strong socioeconomic character and a recognisable leader in Wim Kok who identified with the middle class (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 9). Since the 1998 elections however, support for progressive parties in the Netherlands has declined, reaching a record low in 2002. The electoral gains of the liberal right in the 1998 election saw an increase in the restriction frame in parliament and the media (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 313). As highlighted in Chapter Two, a shift from multiculturalism to more restrictive immigration policy was already well underway in the 1990s whilst the PvdA was in government.

The somewhat “quiet shift” towards the “Third Way” approach with the PvdA entering into coalition with the conservative-liberal VVD and more progressive-liberal D66, was not motivated by pressure from the radical right, whose support faltered during this time (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 416). Both the VVD and PvdA

had moved towards a more restrictive stance on immigration policy quite independently. Though labour was reluctant for the foreigners issue to increase in salience, VVD leader Frits Bolkestein was influential in promoting and intensifying the anti-immigration and anti-Islam agenda. Left-right political contestation increasingly assumed more cultural than socio-economic undertones. Like Fortuyn at a later stage, Bolkestein framed minorities' failures to integrate in a cultural light in terms of language, religion and social behaviour as opposed to looking at "objective" socio-economic factors such as education, income and labour market opportunities – the issue frame naturally encouraged by the PvdA (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 416). From 1994 to 2001 the VVD was in coalition with the social democratic PvdA, who traditionally draw a large immigrant vote, and in order not to estrange their alliance partner, the extent to which Bolkestein could point the VVD on a more anti-immigration, Eurosceptic and mono-cultural course was limited (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 402). VVD-CDA relations also constrained the VVD's conservative and nationalistic direction, since the CDA was the traditional defender of pillarisation and supporter of multiculturalism. In light of such considerations therefore, the VVD was unable to solicit the anti-immigration vote unreservedly, opening up the political space for populist parties to tap into this strong electoral base of anti-immigration voters (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 402).

The 1990s had been a period of strong economic growth and a general political and economic convergence about the direction of policy (van der Veer, 2006: 115). Strongest opposition was from peripheral radical left parties and the "largely impotent" Christian Democrats which were not expected to provide a reckonable political challenge (van der Veer, 2006: 115). The two successive purple coalitions thus brought together labour and the conservative liberals in a secular government. It has been argued that the coalition partners' efforts to achieve consensus and not to politicise differences resulted in parliamentary debates becoming "boring" and by the end of the 1990s, socialist prime minister Wim Kok complacently declared that the Dutch welfare state had been fully realised – only trivial "technical difficulties" were left to iron out via political discussion (van der Veer, 2006: 115). In light of the electoral upset that was to occur in 2002 with the astounding gains of the LPF, van der Veer (2006: 115, 116) writes that the era prior to the 2002 elections indicates how technocratic politics is susceptible to disregard for the "emotional side of mass politics". By the end of the decade however, mainstream parties had reached the end of their tether in attempting to deal with the global economic downturn. Ignoring brooding public uneasiness around immigration, globalisation and Islam was increasingly difficult.

#### **4.3.4 2002 Balkenende I (CDA-LPF-VVD)**

The May 2002 general elections in the immediate wake of Fortuyn's murder saw the CDA emerge victorious, followed by the newcomer LPF. Fortuyn's party achieved an astounding 17% of the vote and

26 of 150 parliamentary seats, making it the second largest party in the newly-elected Parliament. This was unparalleled for a new political contender in the Netherlands, let alone one peddling a distinctively radical right-wing agenda, the key issues of which were “sending back asylum-seekers” and “foreigners should adapt” (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 273; Carle, 2006: 73; Maas, 2010: 232). The VVD achieved third position, trailed by the PvdA. The surprising performance of the CDA, upping its number of seats from 29 to 43, saw the party redeem its place in government after 8 years in opposition. The CDA’s success was due in large part to the popularity of party leader Jan-Peter Balkenende who became prime minister, and to the party’s neutral stance towards the LPF. *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Netherlands), Fortuyn’s old party, made it into parliament for the first time. The centre-right Balkenende I coalition government that came into effect from July 2002 was comprised of the CDA, LPF and VVD. It was to be a short-lived coalition, however: internal conflicts within the LPF after the demise of its leader ultimately led to the fall of the first Balkenende I cabinet after a mere 83 days (Bos and van der Brug, 2010: 781).

This election has been ranked as the fourth most volatile by the Pedersen index of electoral volatility of all West European general elections since 1900 (behind Italy 1994, Germany 1920 and France 1906), with the high percentage of aggregate party electoral gains and losses, 30.7%, being unmatched previously (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 643). Political commentators remarked upon the need to understand better this significantly altered Dutch political milieu after years of predictability; even newly-incumbent Prime Minister Balkenende admitted that striving towards the multicultural society was no longer a desirable goal (Maas, 2010: 232; Vink, 2007: 345). The 2002 election thus upset the country’s once-stable political situation and represented a significant break from the usually poor electoral performances of radical right parties (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 642). A heightened prevalence of integration and immigration issues in the media accompanied the rightist LPF’s entry into government and these topics drew even more media coverage during the 2003 elections; in 1998, these issues barely featured in the campaigns of political parties (Vliegthart and Roggeband, 2007: 311).

Whilst structural conditions are worthy of academic interest when looking at the context in which radical right parties achieve electoral success, the role of long-term and relatively gradual processes such as political, institutional or value changes is insufficient in accounting for explosive electoral performances and dramatic transformations in public opinion and the media (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 644). One of the most important factors for increased electoral support for the LPF is considered to be the political space, or opportunities, afforded to the party to voice its claims publicly (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 658). A policy vacuum afforded the radical right the opportunity to take advantage of unaddressed issues and exploit this “electoral niche” (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 658). The fact that the VVD and PvdA had

previously been brought together in a single “purple coalition”, meant that there was a substantial degree of concurrence around the policy stances of the political mainstream. However, this factor, along with explanations about perceptions of ethnic threat and grievances towards the political establishment (as well as more long-term socio-economic factors and the post-pillarisation decline in party loyalty), fails to explain why the electoral potential of the radical right lay unexploited for so long before the LPF filled this gap (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 658, 659). Fortuyn’s explosive posthumous electoral success and ability to mobilise support are attributed to an “appealing media performance” where his public exposure, media visibility and the resonance of his rhetoric had a profound impact on public opinion (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 642). As his support in opinion polls rose, more media space was afforded to Fortuyn to air his views and publicly articulate claims and expressions of political demands (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 651, 659).

#### **4.3.5 2003 Balkenende II (CDA-VVD-D66)**

Following the resignation of the Balkenende I cabinet due to internal conflicts within the LPF, new general elections were held in January 2003. The factious LPF experienced massive losses, with its number of seats shrinking from 26 to 8. The CDA won by a slim margin, followed by the PvdA and VVD. Balkenende continued as Prime Minister, forming the new centre-right “Balkenende II” cabinet in May 2003 with the VVD and D66. This time around, the right-wing Liveable Netherlands did not succeed in achieving any parliamentary seats. Despite losing heavily in these elections, the LPF’s anti-immigration rhetoric and its anti-Islam message have continued to resonate among the Dutch public.

#### **4.3.6 2006 Balkenende III (CDA-VVD) and 2007 Balkenende IV (CDA-PvdA-CU)**

Following the fall of the Balkenende II cabinet, the centre-right Balkenende III minority interim cabinet took over in July 2006, composed of the CDA and VVD. An early general election was called in November 2006 and the CDA continued to lead. The elections witnessed significant electoral shifts: the main opposition party, the PvdA, saw its share of parliamentary seats shrink, as did the VVD and D66 which both suffered considerable losses. The Socialist Party (SP) however made the most gains, increasing its number of seats from 9 to 25. Two new parties, Geert Wilders’ PVV and the Party for the Animals (PvdD) were both successful, winning 9 and 2 seats respectively. These elections resulted in the centre-*left* Balkenende IV cabinet between the CDA, PvdA and the Christian Union (CU ) as of February 2007.

After going into opposition in 2002 then, the PvdA lost even more support in the 2006 elections. The party did however still make it into government by entering into a coalition with the CDA and the

conservative Christian Union (CU). The social democrats' strategy towards immigration and integration was shaped by the populist radical right and by the reactions of other mainstream political parties on the right and left: at least one of the main centre-right parties responded to the populist right by adopting its agenda, thus obliging the PvdA to take a similarly tougher stance on these issues. Party unity impacted upon labour's performance as did the SP's reaction to the radical right, being better poised than Labour to respond to voters' concerns about migration and multiculturalism. Labour thus suffered credibility and competitiveness losses, not to mention a leakage of votes to left libertarians, left traditionalists as well as to the right and centre-right (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 421, 422).

The integration policy of the coalition government that came into power appeared to be slightly more in line with stereotypical interpretations of such strategies in the Netherlands (Vink, 2007: 348). Although Vink (2007: 348) stated his expectations of a "more relaxed immigration policy" from Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende and his cabinet at the time, the possibility of marked changes in the existing restrictive situation seemed doubtful: the decision to naturalise approximately 25 000 asylum seekers residing illegally in the Netherlands since the 1990s was the product of "hard bargaining" between an unenthusiastic CDA and its coalition partners. It therefore appeared that more of the same was expected from the fourth Balkenende government, albeit with a "slightly softer touch" (Vink, 2007: 348). With the deepening effects of the economic crisis in the Netherlands, the newly re-established confidence in the Dutch government, reflected in the autumn 2008 Eurobarometer, vanished. Parties such as the D66 and PVV that clearly articulated and defined their positions towards multiculturalism and Europe achieved substantial electoral support in the European parliamentary elections of 2009 (Eurobarometer 71, Spring 2009). Mainstream parties such as the PvdA, increasingly seen as ambivalent, suffered considerably.

#### **4.3.7 2010 Rutte Cabinet (VVD-CDA with PVV)**

The Balkenende IV cabinet collapsed in February 2010 after PvdA ministers resigned over differences about continuing the Dutch military mission in Afghanistan. A general election was held in June 2010 and after lengthy coalition talks to establish a purple coalition with the PvdA and other left-wing parties, a right-wing minority coalition government was established in October between the VVD and CDA instead, headed by Mark Rutte of the VVD. Labelled a "political earthquake" by several newspapers, the 2010 elections heralded a "miraculous comeback" for the VVD which had struggled to compose a successful political strategy (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 3). The current VVD-CDA coalition receives parliamentary support from Wilders' PVV to achieve a "vulnerable" parliamentary majority of 76 seats, only one above the 75 majority threshold (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 12). Rutte is the first conservative-liberal Dutch prime minister in 93 years, since 1918, and though the VVD emerged with the most seats,

the “big winner” of the 2010 elections was Wilders’ PVV: the party almost tripled its seats from 9 to 24, outperforming the expectations of pre-election polls which forecast that the party would double its seat total (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 8; RFE/RL 2010). The PVV campaigned for conservative values, left-leaning stances on social and economic questions and the prevention of the “Islamisation of the Netherlands” (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 9; RFE/RL 2010). Like its more extreme politics, the PVV draws much of its support from geographically peripheral regions where perceptions about alienation from central government are likely to be most pronounced. Significant PVV support came from Wilders’ own region of Limburg (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 6).

Unlike the PvdA, both the CDA and VVD indicated during coalition talks that they were open to the possibility of collaboration with the PVV, even though the Christian Democrats did cite concerns about Wilders’ criticisms of religion and Islam in particular (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 13). Potential cooperation with the PVV was a sensitive issue and several policies of the party were criticised for being contradictory to the Constitution: there were therefore concerns that the Dutch government would risk tarnishing its international image by cooperating with an “extreme right” party. Employers’ organisations, traditional supporters of the VVD, were especially vocal in their reservations about the prospect of including the PVV in cabinet, arguing that the move would not bode well for international trade or the Netherlands’ reputation (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 12, 13). The parliamentary support offered by the PVV to the eventual VVD-CDA coalition is a somewhat unorthodox response to the electoral outcome, though the economic crisis did heighten the sense of urgency in forming a new government. To his credit, Wilders showed during coalition talks that he was open to compromise and one day after the election, his party expressed its willingness to consider increasing the retirement age, a notion that the PVV had firmly discarded during the electoral campaign (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 13). The exceptional economic context in which this most recent election took place implies that regardless of the specific make-up of the coalition, the next years will necessitate “painful measures” and a general framework will need to be agreed upon even if all the creases between the coalition partners and the PVV have not been ironed out (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 13). The new government will have to obtain *ad hoc* parliamentary majorities for reforms as it goes along and trust among the cooperating parties will be imperative (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 13).

#### **4.3.8 Voting Patterns in Perspective**

The Dutch party system has undergone fundamental changes over the course of the last four to five decades. With the rise of the welfare state in the Netherlands from the 1950s and the onset of depillarisation and secularisation, the country’s once predictable and stable electoral structure has become

increasingly fragmented and volatile. These developments have had hugely significant implications for the political prospects of those traditional parties (the three so-called *Volkspartijen*: the CDA, PvdA and VVD) that once represented the interests of the established social pillars and which dominated the Dutch electoral landscape. The rise of new political contenders appealing to more specific interests has meant that established parties have had to rework fundamentally their political strategies, policies and ideology in order to remain politically viable competitors. Traditional “system” parties’ focus upon making grand compromises with diverse coalition partners and their attempts to advance an internationalist direction, uphold the principle of an open, tolerant society and bring together the elites and masses, have produced considerable difficulties. Smaller parties that have honed in on particular group interests and voter issue concerns have meanwhile increasingly reaped electoral rewards (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 8). These developments ultimately have important repercussions for the left-right ideological balance in the Netherlands.

#### 4.3.8.1 The Electoral Effects of Depillarisation and Secularisation

Prior to 1967, the year in which the D66 participated in its first Dutch general election, the Netherlands was categorised as a “frozen party system” (Rokkan in Anker *et al.*, 2011: 6). Elections effectively served as a “glorified census”, reflecting the relative size of the different societal pillars: it was along these religious-ideological divisions that the electorate voted (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 6). Merely observing figures on religious group and class numbers thus enabled fair prediction of voting outcomes. From 1967 then, the secularisation and depillarisation of Dutch society has resulted in a declining share of support for religiously-affiliated parties and a leaking of so-called “system” parties’ core electorates: party support is increasingly determined by individual preference and no longer by group membership or communal religious-ideological identity (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 402; de Vreese, 2008: 146; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 6). It has therefore been remarked upon that it was with the twin processes of depillarisation and secularisation that Dutch voters finally began to “choose” (Rose and McAllister in Anker *et al.*, 2011: 7). Becker and Cuperus (2010: 9) suggest that the mainstream party to have benefitted most from depillarisation is the VVD.

The rise of the Dutch welfare state in the 1950s and the expanding range of available social provisions meant that citizens became less dependent on their communities as a basis of support (van der Veer, 2006: 119). Religious and ideological associations performed a progressively less necessary social function. Independence from societal pillars as foundations of group support has proved especially detrimental to the fortunes of social democracy: once uniting the working and middle classes, the traditional working class electorate has increasingly turned its back on this ideology for both cultural and material reasons. In

some instances, the VVD, PVV and SP have proven more capable in appealing to working class concerns than the PvdA (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 12). Whilst many explanations for social democracy's decline look to non-conventional factors, citing for instance the increasing salience of cultural cleavages, materialistic reasons are still important. Though the context of the global financial crisis makes a shift away from the original proponents of the welfare state somewhat surprising, perceptions about social democrats being lenient towards immigrants, supporting excessively high taxes, overly relying on deficit financing and cosseting public sector employees with generous benefits, have eroded confidence in social democratic parties (Wolin, 2011: 62). Conservative parties are seen as more risk-averse and have been the principle recipients of voter trust. There is of course also an important anti-establishment aspect to this shift away from the mainstream left. With the exceptions of Spain and Portugal where social democratic parties still preside, most governing coalitions are between liberal and centre-right parties. Dwindling support for the PvdA, as well as the internal divisions that have come to haunt it, is thus a story not peculiar to the Netherlands alone, but illustrates a more general European trend (Wolin 2011: 61).

Whilst the decline of pillarisation has meant that voting behaviour and electoral outcomes no longer reflect religious-ideological cleavages, sociological factors and class lines have made a reappearance in the cases of the D66 and PVV, which appeal to almost polar opposite electorates (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 11). A new cultural cleavage in voting patterns in the Netherlands has emerged around issues including European integration, immigration and integration, crime and domestic security, the nation and globalisation. This cleavage is seen to separate those of different educational levels, to divide optimists from pessimists, and to split those individuals that have benefited from "the new economic order" from those who have been marginalised by it (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 11, 12). Public attitudes have also assumed heightened significance for political behaviour in this new cultural-orientated context. In addition to globalisation, global trends such as liberalisation, immigration and the development of new technologies and knowledge all impact upon society and heighten the discrepancies between different classes in terms of opportunities available to those that are "connected" and those that have been cut off (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 11, 12). Rising voter volatility since the 1990s coincides with the increasing salience of cultural issues in determining voting behaviour, although left-right ideological considerations do continue to shape support. Though this non-material dimension is not a new phenomenon and was an important political factor in the sixteenth century with the cleavages between the Calvinists and libertarian bourgeoisie, it has assumed greater prominence over the last two decades with regards to dividing those favouring cultural liberalism from those seeking more restrictive immigration policy (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 408). The shift in traditional left-right party competition from socio-economic to more "non-material" and cultural issues, popularised by the likes of Fortuyn and Wilders,



has also contributed to party fragmentation and centre parties have battled to politicise the foreigners issue to their electoral advantage.

#### 4.3.8.2 Declining *Volksparteien* and Fragmentation of the Dutch Party System

The latest general elections point to several structural trends: the decline of the two main *Volksparteien*, the CDA and PvdA, as well as the social democrats' loss of dominance on the left since the traditional working and lower middle classes appear to have turned their backs on social democracy and the once-hegemonic PvdA (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 11; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 8, 9). This loss of PvdA hegemony among the progressives has however not been accompanied by a decrease in party support for the left or right, as support for each bloc has generally remained stable. It has merely meant that the left is increasingly fragmented by more pronounced differences among the electorate in the context of declining support for the *Volksparteien*, which have been unable to accommodate these splintering preferences (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 3). The 2010 elections saw the PvdA achieve 30 seats in comparison to the more radical Socialist Party that won 15, the GreenLeft that secured 10, and the D66 also with 10.

This fragmentation of the Dutch left in particular points to important divergences between the liberal, cosmopolitan progressives and the more conservative left (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 10; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 10). The former group focuses on reform (especially in the labour market to open access to outsiders), raising the retirement age and advancing the cause of knowledge and empowerment. This side, represented by the GreenLeft and D66, also values the advantages wrought by globalisation and international migration, and typically draws support from educated professionals, urban middle classes and students (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 10; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 10). The latter, more traditional left stream values the advancement of the welfare state, opposes introducing market forces in the public sector, draws most support from workers in the healthcare and industrial sectors and is represented by the Socialist Party. The PvdA has battled to charter a definitive path and accommodate both the “optimistic story of change, reform and progress” advanced by the liberal left and the “story of social security, protection, public services and defence of rights” promoted by the traditional left (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 12). Given these considerable differences among parties on the left, it is not surprising that there has not been more left-left cooperation.

Since 1990, all three traditional *Volksparteien* have witnessed declining levels of support as well as a loss of control over establishing government coalitions (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 7). In the 1950s, the *Volksparteien* were able to attract 90% of the vote, but today the percentage of their accumulative support is just above 50%, a development that Anker *et al.* (2011: 8, 11) refer to as the “systemic meltdown of the

postwar Dutch party system”, which centres increasingly around “intermediating people’s parties”. Indeed, not since the beginning of universal suffrage in 1919 has the country’s largest political party been as small as the VVD is today, a fact that points to the Dutch electorate being more fragmented than ever – the “main result” of the 2010 election according to Becker and Cuperus (2010: 12). This fragmentation is demonstrated by the VVD’s inordinately narrow victory and the country’s first minority government since the Second World War. There is therefore no single party currently that unequivocally dominates the Dutch political system and winners are not clear-cut. The two strongest parties attract a mere 20% of total voter support whilst the next two strongest account for 14% to 16% and the three runners-up draw between 7% and 10% of the vote (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 7; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 11).

This situation of political fragmentation – the “Balkanisation of Dutch politics” – makes the formation of a stable coalition government and the achievement of majority support for the cabinet in parliament all the more challenging (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 8). The task of forming a cabinet in 2010 was compounded even further by the context of the global crisis and the very divergent views on both sides of parliament as to how the crisis should be approached (RFE/RL 2010). The previously stable, rigid system made up of only a few major *Volkspartijen* has thus shifted to a fluid party system where party support is determined by individual preference. The implication is that more parties are required to form a coalition in order to achieve majority support: whilst two parties were traditionally sufficient for this purpose, three-party governments have become the norm since 1994 and as of 2010, there was serious consideration of a four- or even five-party coalition (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 8).

A comparable pattern of leaking support was experienced by centre parties in the 1970s, and Becker and Cuperus (2010: 7, 11) note that a similar cycle today sees the periphery on both the right and left accumulating strength: the CDA and PvdA have suffered a multi-directional loss of votes to the liberal left (D66), the traditional left (SP) as well as to the radical right populists (PVV). Increasingly, mainstream parties have come to recognise the advantages of aligning with the electorate’s disenchantment with accommodating and supporting foreigners. The extreme right is not exceptional for promoting a xenophobic policy frame and stigmatising immigrants and this has ever more become the strategy of the political mainstream (Fekete, 2008: 36). It would therefore be a mistake to perceive the European right-wing as operating on the sidelines with minimal influence on middle-of-the-road politics: in many instances, the radical right has been instrumental in shifting the debate towards its once “marginal” agenda (Wolin, 2011: 62).

These developments have important ideological implications for party politics, competition, and the political programmes of established mainstream parties on both the left and right of the political spectrum. In addition to mounting electoral pressure and competition from the radical populist right that has successfully lured away voters, the increasing electoral salience and politicisation of the so-called “foreigners issue” has fundamentally impacted the programmes and policies of Dutch centre parties: both the CDA and VVD on the centre-right have seen shifts towards more restrictive immigration and asylum policy (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 398; Bale *et al.*, 2010: 411). As these parties traditionally “own” law and order and nationalist issues, they are well-positioned to benefit strategically from linking immigration to questions of domestic stability. The adoption of a more hard-line profile that is anti-immigration, Eurosceptic and nationalistic and that strays from the multicultural ideal could however be deemed contradictory to traditional centre-right values and may ultimately ward off voters (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 398). Being seen as too extreme or hard-line could mean a loss of votes and running the risk of factionalism: the politicisation of the foreigners question is thus something of a “Catch-22” scenario for the centre-right.

Following Fortuyn’s offensive, both the VVD and CDA have reworked their respective policies towards immigration and integration, though the parties have emphasised different approaches to integration: whereas VVD policy focused on individual responsibility and a formal, bureaucratic stance, the CDA highlighted participative citizenship, values and beliefs (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 406). Freedom of religion is central to CDA policy and the party supports religion’s public presence and the right to found religious schools; the VVD however promotes the mingling of different religious orientations within a single school to achieve integration (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 406). The VVD in particular has struggled in the past to establish policy coherence, and attempts to pursue a conservative and nationalistic path (promoting monoculturalism, Euroscepticism and tighter immigration and asylum policy) whilst simultaneously chartering a more libertarian course (in support of multiculturalism, individual freedoms and economic liberalism) have proven electorally unattractive, pitting supporters of each wing within the party against one another in an “uneasy coalition” (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 3; van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 399, 411 – 413). This has had serious implications for the social cohesion of the party and internal tension was especially reflected after the VVD’s electoral losses in the 2006 elections and the subsequent leadership struggle that took place between libertarian Rutte and the more hard-line conservative Verdonk, culminating in Verdonk’s expulsion and the establishment of her *Trots op Nederland* party (van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 400).

Despite fierce challenges from the right to the leadership of the VVD, Rutte has been successful in restoring party stability and his performance in election debates went a long way in salvaging the position of the conservative liberals (Becker and Cuperus, 2010). The VVD increasingly appeals to a more representative support base, which not only includes established elites, but also the middle stratum and parts of the working class (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 9). Voters among the old working class that have risen in social standing have become gradually more conservative and the VVD's campaign focussing on tackling the budget deficit, adopting a stricter attitude to immigration and challenging bureaucracy, sat well with this segment of the electorate (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 9).

Another noteworthy outcome of the latest Dutch general elections involves the much-reduced levels of support for the CDA, whose number of parliamentary seats shrank from 41 to 21. The CDA's losses have been even more drastic than the loss of support suffered by the social democrats. The current coalition is the first time that the CDA has participated in a government alliance in which it was not the dominant party. Growing support for the right-wing PVV is one reason for the Christian Democrats' dismal performance and Balkenende's long eight-year tenure in office gave rise to perceptions that change was needed: the former prime minister showed himself incapable of assuming control when trying periods demanded assertiveness and authority from him, such as in the debate surrounding the Dutch commitment to the Iraq War (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 7). Between 1917 and 1994, the CDA dominated the Dutch political system as a result of its sheer size, which ensured a majority. The party thus enjoyed influence over government formation and wielded the power to determine whether to govern with labour on the left or the centre-right (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 7). After being excluded from the "purple coalitions" of 1994 and 1998, the CDA was able to recover in 2002 from its weak position in the nineties, heading government once again after being stuck in opposition for eight years. In 2010, the CDA was outperformed another time, achieving fourth place after losing in major cities and especially in the countryside. The VVD has increasingly performed better in those rural regions where once the CDA had its stronghold and the province of Brabant in particular, something of an economic centre, has witnessed large numbers of ex-CDA supporters turn to the VVD in recent years (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 6; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 8).

Whilst the CDA has not experienced a leadership struggle similar to that of the VVD, tensions have arisen on a lower level among those party members against a tougher position on immigration, integration and multiculturalism (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 400). The CDA has proved particularly flexible in terms of adapting its policy to the increasing politicisation and mobilisation around immigration and integration: the party toned down its Christian identity in the 1980s and 1990s in response to the

overarching movement towards neo-liberalism, but around the turn of the millennium it re-emphasised its “moral agenda” in defence of societal values, welcoming the shift in party competition towards more cultural issues (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 405). The CDA’s move towards a more neoliberal direction economically and a more neoconservative direction culturally has resulted in the Protestant leadership of the party distancing itself from progressive factions of the CDA, alienating more traditional Catholic voters in the south (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 8). It has also been suggested that the party has lost ground not only as a result of secularisation, but also because it no longer needs to mediate between different social groups (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 8). The CDA is likely to be torn between assuming a more neo-liberal, right-leaning and nationalistic character, so as to appeal to a more right-wing vote, whilst at the same time attempting to retain the support of the many that favour socio-economic redistribution, and among whom the Christian Union has already started making inroads (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 411).

Like the Dutch centre-right, leftist parties have similarly undergone important policy readjustments in response to the populist radical right. The PvdA has pursued a number of strategies in an attempt to remain politically viable and to keep abreast of electorally-salient voter concerns. Labour has however struggled to articulate a concise political programme and to match up to the performances of its electoral competition. Although generally successful in participating in coalitions since 1989, the PvdA has been less successful electorally. Whilst still the dominant force on the left, this position is eroding and the PvdA has battled to establish an authentic position and unique project among its fellow progressives (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 22, 24). Like the VVD, the PvdA went a long way in improving its electoral position. At the start of 2010, polls indicated that the social democrats were likely to achieve 13 to 15 parliamentary seats in the pending general elections, drawing 9 to 10% of the vote – a stark contrast to the spring of 2006 when support for the PvdA was at 40% and 60 parliamentary seats (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 3; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 2). The February 2010 resignation of several PvdA ministers over differences about continuing the Dutch military mission in Afghanistan led to the collapse of the unpopular Balkenende IV cabinet (2007 – 2010) and three weeks later, Wouter Bos stepped down as leader of the PvdA (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 2). These events set in gradual motion the social democrats’ recovery process and whereas the “famous rule in Dutch politics” holds that the party to blame for a coalition’s breakdown will suffer in the following elections, this did not hold true for labour (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 3). Job Cohen, the well-liked former mayor of Amsterdam, was named Bos’s successor and Cohen’s candidacy for prime minister in the 2010 elections sparked an almost “Dutch Obama effect” with unofficial campaign slogans like “Yes we Cohen” (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 2). This momentum generated during the campaign was however not maintained and the PvdA and VVD were neck-and-neck on election night

until it finally emerged that the conservative liberals were the ultimate victors, by one parliamentary seat (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 2).

There has not been a uniform response by the social democrats to the populist radical right. Whilst the PvdA has attempted to reach out to both blue-collar workers and professional elites by promoting the welfare state and the progressiveness of society simultaneously, professionals and labourers have not converged on a shared project (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 10). Core constituencies of the PvdA have leaked to the GreenLeft which still supports traditional multiculturalism, to the populist left (Socialist Party), to the D66 on the liberal left and even indirectly to the right-wing populist PVV, all of which have appeared less politically ambivalent and fickle (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 417; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 8, 24). Since the rise of the LPF in 2002 then, the PvdA has sought to reclaim its “lost” electorate, although proposals to adopt a tougher stance on immigration and integration have divided the party and its constituency, leaving the social democrats in an uncertain position (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 23). Despite labour’s eventual attempts to adopt a tougher stance on immigration and a more mono-cultural outlook, the mobilisation of both left and right dissatisfaction by the radical populists could not be averted and the PvdA’s attempts to compensate for its association with multiculturalism have been interpreted as weak and apologetic (Fekete, 2008: 20). Fortuyn’s condemnation of PvdA support for expanding the welfare state sat well with the traditional left who considered ethnic minorities to profit disproportionately from benefits and this attack from the right has been continued by the PVV and Verdonk’s *Trots op Nederland* movement (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 416). The PvdA’s inability to “defuse” the foreigner’s issue promoted by the right and to reset the agenda by encouraging instead a distinctively centre-left frame, resulted in internal dissension within the party between those eager to abandon the party’s “political correctness” and those wanting to “stick to their guns” (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 416). The additional populist challenge to the social democrats from the left, presented by the SP, contributed to the PvdA’s internal divisions: campaigning on a more left-wing, mono-cultural and Eurosceptic platform, and combining classic social democracy vis-à-vis the economy and welfare with a more conservative cultural attitude, socialist policy has been more attractive to traditional left voters (Bale *et al.*, 2010: 417).

#### 4.3.8.3 An Increasingly Volatile Dutch Electorate

In addition to being increasingly fragmented, the Dutch electorate is also more volatile. Despite the consensual nature of Dutch politics implying that government changes are characterised by continuity and do not typically result in drastic foreign or domestic policy changes, electoral volatility in the Netherlands has been on the increase since the 1990s, measured by the number of seat changes per party per election (US Dept of State, 2010; Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 402). The processes of depillarisation,

secularisation and the increasing individualisation of voting behaviour have been reflected electorally by higher voter volatility: from 1919 (the introduction of universal suffrage) to 1967 when the D66 first participated in the elections, party support was stable and the Pedersen index score was low. From 1967, the Pedersen scores are slightly higher, around 10, indicating that with each election, a net 10% of seats would shift from one party to another. In 1989 the Pedersen index was 5, but in 1994 the score was 22 (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 6, 7). Thus, whereas pre-1989, elections typically resulted in about 10% of parliamentary seats changing to other parties, since 1990 this percentage has increased to between 25% and 30% (de Vreese, 2008: 147). Almost half the number of seats in the Second Chamber changed parties from the 2006 to the 2010 elections – a total of 68 seats out of 150 (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 5).

Weaker party loyalty, resulting in an “open model of electoral competition” as opposed to a structured model, means that whilst voting preferences are flexible, this may also make for volatile elections (Andeweg and Irwin in Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 645). The trend towards voting according to individual preference was particularly evident during the “exceptionally volatile” 1994 elections, where significant electoral shifts took place as a result of campaign issues surrounding the welfare state and austerity measures (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 645; Anker *et al.*, 2011: 7). Since the 1960s, research on Dutch voting patterns has shown that multiple party identification is common and electoral support oscillates between parties on both the left and right of the political spectrum, although the balance of power between these left and right blocs tends to be stable, with voters voting either among the SP, GreenLeft and PvdA on the left, or among the VVD, CDA and one radical right populist party on the right.

This balance of power is in fact slightly in favour of right-wing parties, indicating that changes in voting behaviour occur mainly within these ideological blocs and not between them (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 6). Leftist parties typically draw 40% to 45% of the vote and have thus always relied upon the support of a party on the right such as the CDA or VVD, even when the liberal left D66 is part of the left-wing bloc (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 9, 10). Party competition *within* the left and right-wing blocs has also become fiercer, meaning that the possibility of leftist parties cooperating with one another to achieve dominance is doubtful (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 11). Despite the Netherlands’ international image as a permissive, liberal and tolerant society then, there is actually no progressive majority in the country and barring the 1998 general elections when both sides were in balance, right-wing parties have always had the majority share of the Dutch vote (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 3, 9). The old left-right distinction reveals little about the extent to which political parties are “democratic” or “liberal” in the Dutch context (Ghitis, 2011). The 1998 and 2002 elections produced the greatest change in share of support for the left and right, where 1998 saw

considerably higher levels of support for the left, and 2002 tended towards more support for the right. The subsequent 2006 and 2010 elections show that left support has returned to pre-2002 levels and though the decline of the *Volksparteien* has not affected vote share of the right and left, this decline has made coalition-building more challenging (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 12). The individualisation of electoral choice does however suggest that voters may increasingly come to choose *between* right and left, affecting these relatively stable levels of ideological support (Anker, 2011: 12).

Accompanying the incidence of higher voter volatility since the 1990s has been the phenomenon of “floating voters” that have featured prominently amongst the Dutch electorate (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 5). Around 20% to 25% of Dutch voters generally abstain from the electoral process, although their mobilisation is possible, populist-style, when it comes to questions of immigration and integration (van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008: 404). During the nineties, major shifts in the vote occurred within the traditional party system, amongst the *Volksparteien* and within the left and right blocs, but from 2002 it has been the “new political entrepreneurs of populism” outside this mainstream party system that have gained most from floating, “footloose” voters: the LPF in 2002, the SP in 2006 and the PVV in 2010 (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 7; Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 5). The traditional centre parties PvdA, CDA and VVD have increasingly proven unable to accommodate the growing individualisation of voters’ preferences, something for which new parties have demonstrated greater talent. Regarding the most recent 2010 elections, approximately 40% of the Dutch electorate is reported to have been undecided about their voting choice up until just before, or even on, actual Election Day, compared to 20% before 1990 (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 4; De Vreese, 2008: 147). Voters born between 1978 and 2000 were most likely to determine their voting decision late into the election campaign and more than 70% of voters from this group made their choice during the last weeks of the 2010 electoral campaign (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 16). The most recent elections also stood out with regards to the frequent use of polling as a weekly indicator of voter preference and this has assumed heightened influence over the campaigning process. Many voters made use of internet voter guides such as *StemWijzer* and *Kieskompas* to assist in determining their electoral choice, which allegedly have a disproportionate influence over voting behaviour in the Netherlands and are biased towards more extreme parties because electoral platforms can be favourably manipulated (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 4). Of those voters born between 1978 and 2000, almost 70% made use of these guides in the 2006 elections, indicating a willingness to “shop around” (Anker *et al.*, 2011: 16). Voter turnout in 2010 was also noticeably lower than previous election years.

The instability of recent elections is thus quite exceptional in the history of the Netherlands and de Vreese (2008: 147) notes that whilst this development might be a thorn in the side for mainstream political



parties favouring a predictable and stable electoral process, recent electoral change and instability offer a “healthy antidote of choice and competition in an otherwise stable democracy”. Election outcomes tend however to be conservative and generally in keeping with historical patterns: although voter volatility may imply greater unpredictability, this does not necessarily entail greater support for right-wing parties and it is also not uncommon for “floating voters” to side with mainstream parties – as was the case in 2003 for the social democrats (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 645). Increased electoral volatility and declining party identification does however mean that voting behaviour is increasingly shaped by internet guidelines for voting and is sensitive to media portrayals of parties and their representatives (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 5). Public scrutiny of party leaders’ radio and television debates has contributed to the perspective that the Dutch political system is a “spectators’ democracy”, where debating skills have almost become a prerequisite for leaders, from whom voters expect a shining performance (Becker and Cuperus, 2010: 4).

Research has indeed pointed to the increased personalisation of media coverage in the Netherlands come election time, suggesting that the media performances of politicians are an increasingly relevant consideration when looking at explanations of electoral support, particularly when this is sudden or explosive. Whereas there was a balanced coverage of political parties and political candidates in the 1994 and 1998 elections, by 2002 65% of news reporting focussed on the candidates specifically (De Vreese, 2008: 151). During the 2002 election campaign, Pim Fortuyn was the most frequently mentioned politician in the media, drawing 24% of all media focus – roughly equal to the amount of press coverage received altogether by the politicians of the parties that secured second, third, fourth and fifth positions (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 643, 658). It was found that public discourse had a significant impact on electoral support for the LPF, as did “discursive opportunities”: the degree to which Fortuyn’s claims were visible publicly, as well as the extent of public concordance with his rhetoric (Koopmans and Muis, 2009: 654, 655). Electoral competition in the Netherlands therefore increasingly seems to demand a radiating performance from party leaders, suggesting that populist mavericks and political entrepreneurs would stand to gain the most from this turn towards political theatricality.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

The collapse of the Wall Street investment bank Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008, prompting the outbreak of the current global financial crisis, has resulted in important challenges to the previously pervasive belief and trust in US-style economic liberalism (Callinicos, 2010). As seen, these financial and economic crises have necessitated a more interventionist role for the Dutch state which is reasserting

itself in a way that is almost diametrically opposed to the process of state withdrawal witnessed during the “neoliberal age” of the 1980s and 1990s. This reassertion of the state is however not motivated by ideology, but by economic necessity and pragmatism (Engelen and Musterd, 2010: 707). The intention of this chapter has been to contextualise the Dutch economy within the global financial crisis, observing the effects of these global developments at the national level. Although the Netherlands has fared better than some of its neighbours with regards to several important performance indicators, not least as a result of its favourable “starting position” at the onset of the crisis, the openness of the Dutch economy has rendered the country especially sensitive to global economic and financial turmoil.

The analysis of voting behaviour in the Netherlands following on from the discussion of the Dutch economy highlights the increased volatility and fragmentation of the Dutch electorate in the aftermath of important societal processes including depillarisation, secularisation and the rise of the welfare state. In addition, the decline of the *Volkspartijen* indicates how these traditional “system” parties have been especially hard-pressed to retain their core constituencies and remain politically competitive in the face of shifting popular concerns and the rise of new, formidable political contenders. The effect of the Dutch far-right on the politics and electoral position of the centre is highlighted by the way in which the LPF and PVV have impacted especially upon the electoral prospects of the VVD and CDA on the centre-right, and the PvdA on the centre-left. The 2010 electoral performance of the economically conservative VVD reflects real public support for fiscal responsibility and austerity. Meanwhile, the PVV’s vast improvement over its previous position and vote share, achieving third place on a strongly anti-immigration platform, indicates that the public’s cultural concerns about foreigners and protecting a distinctively “Dutch” way of life have by no means been marginalised by economic concerns in the present macro-climate. The next chapter looks in greater detail at the dynamic interplay between these cultural and economic concerns in shaping perceptions of intergroup threat and competition. These perceptions ultimately have important implications for intergroup attitudes in the Netherlands.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Understanding what motivates negative sentiment towards out-groups is important for devising the appropriate strategies to ease intergroup hostility and discrimination (González *et al.*, 2008: 668). Whereas the previous chapter observed patterns of electoral support as one manifestation of public attitudes, this chapter will look at the expression of Dutch public sentiment towards immigration and immigrant out-groups as reflected in public opinion surveys. Although a fair number of studies explain cross-national variance in public attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, there is a dearth of research on longitudinal changes in attitudes: what comparative work there is on the topic is “overwhelmingly geographical rather than temporal” (Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown, 2011: 80). This chapter does not wish to observe trends in Dutch public opinion in isolation; observations of attitudinal change will thus be located within the context of the economic and financial developments discussed in Chapter Four and will also take into consideration recent patterns of electoral support.

The global financial context is not observed here as a possible *determinant* of anti-immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment. Whilst many studies consider the influences of economic and cultural factors on group attitudes, very few studies look at how or why opposition to immigration and sentiments towards immigrants shift (Brader *et al.*, 2008: 960). The intention for this discussion is to observe whether less favourable macro-level structural conditions have been accompanied by *shifting* sentiments towards immigration, integration and immigrant out-groups. Public opinion is not static, suggesting that the conditions in which popular sentiments are readjusted are important, in addition to the underlying motivations for attitudinal shifts. This chapter therefore emphasises the role of social context and structure in understanding shifting responses at the group level towards ethnic minority out-groups, where intensified concerns about material and economic well-being, as well as about seemingly conflicting identities and values, could induce more negative inter-ethnic relations (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 283).

Though causal links are not drawn, this chapter does explore some of the potential motivations underlying the attitudinal shifts observed. In order to examine the way in which possible shifts in Dutch public attitudes may have been motivated by economic and material considerations, changes in levels of public support for allocating immigrant out-groups certain finite, common material resources are observed. Changes in the evaluation of immigrants’ cultural impact on Dutch society from 2008 to 2010 is considered to suggest something of the way in which shifts in Dutch public attitudes may have been

motivated by cultural and non-material considerations. Realistic Group Conflict Theory is relied upon to structure the discussion on threat perceptions arising from inter-group conflict and competition over scarce resources, which are conceptualised here – somewhat unconventionally – in both economic and cultural terms. The emphasis here is therefore not on explaining negative group attitudes, or how they come to be formed; the focus is on whether they change in the context of enhanced economic and financial pressure, what the extent of the shift is, and what the possible motivations for these shifting perspectives could be. Studies on intergroup perceptions in the Netherlands have in fact been largely consistent in finding that cultural explanations relating to national identity considerations are more pertinent predictors of negative out-group sentiment than considerations of economic or material wellbeing, especially where Islam and Muslim immigrants are concerned.

This chapter therefore first presents the most pertinent findings of the public opinion surveys over the course of the 2008-2009-2010 period. The theoretical considerations that follow are intended to provide a framework for understanding the attitudinal trends highlighted. Though no conclusions will be drawn regarding the extent to which economic or cultural factors may have affected attitudinal change, the ensuing descriptive analysis about explanatory studies will evaluate the likely impact of material or non-material considerations on shifting public perceptions towards immigration and immigrants in the context of the global financial crisis in the Netherlands.

## **5.2 ANTI-IMMIGRATION SENTIMENTS**

In an effort to examine the extent to which attitudes towards immigrants and immigration in the Netherlands may have deteriorated in the context of the ongoing financial crisis and economic recession, especially with regards to Islam and Muslims, this chapter consults the findings of a series of three public opinion surveys from 2008, 2009 and 2010 carried out by the German Marshall Fund of the United States. The *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* (TTI) study is one of the few surveys measuring longitudinal trends in public opinion towards immigration and integration policies in several European countries and in North America (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 974, 975). Also included are respondents from the United Kingdom and Canada. These surveys' express intention to gauge shifts in public attitudes towards immigrants and immigration – that is, attitudinal *change* over time – is especially well-suited to the purposes of this research. As the first survey was carried out in early September 2008, just prior to the outbreak of the global financial crisis, the surveys enable comparison between attitudes before and during the structural climate of financial and economic pressure. The 2009 and 2010 surveys accorded particular focus to the effects of the crisis on attitudes (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 975).

Evaluating longitudinal time trends in public perceptions necessarily demands consistency in terms of conceptualisation, use of attitudinal measures, and regarding questions posed. A number of specific questions therefore feature repeatedly in each of the three successive surveys, enabling the comparison of responses between years and thus enhancing the perceptibility of attitudinal shifts. Certain relevant questions were however not posed consistently each year, meaning that some observations are not possible across the entire 2008 – 2010 period. It is important to bear in mind that the intention of consulting public perception data is not to examine the extent of public support for a particular statement or policy scenario; it is to observe *variation* in attitudes and shifts in levels of support, or opposition, from one year to the next.

### **5.2.1 Transatlantic Trends: Immigration**

To assess the extent to which publics were generally optimistic or generally pessimistic about immigration in their respective countries, the 2008 *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* survey asked respondents whether they viewed immigration as more of an opportunity or more of a problem. In 2008, 47% of European respondents (from the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Poland) considered immigration more of a “problem” than an “opportunity”, whilst American respondents were split on this topic. In the case of respondents from the Netherlands and France however, majorities considered immigration more of an opportunity: that only 36% of Dutch respondents in 2008 considered immigration to be more of a *problem*, meant that the Netherlands was the most optimistic country about immigration at the outset of the crisis (TTI 2008). Whilst a larger share of respondents in every country polled saw immigration as more of a problem in 2009 than in 2008, 45% of Dutch respondents considered immigration more a “problem” than an “opportunity” in 2009, meaning that the Netherlands experienced the greatest increase (9%) in the percentage of respondents who perceived immigration more negatively from 2008 to 2009. This indicates that less favourable economic conditions were accompanied by less positive public evaluations of immigration within the first 12 months of the crisis, though evidence of the economic crisis’ *impact* on public opinion towards immigration was limited. From 2009 to 2010, a smaller share of Dutch respondents evaluated immigration negatively and the percentage of those deeming immigration a problem fell to 39% (recall that at the outset of the crisis this percentage was 36%), making the Netherlands one of the most pro-immigration countries (after Canada) in the survey once again (TTI 2010).

Gustin and Ziebarth (2010: 987) suggest that the increase in the number of Dutch respondents considering immigration more of a problem than opportunity from 2008 to 2009 may be due to the “explicitly anti-Islamic” PVV’s political ascendancy over the course of this period. Wilders’ various demands, including

the unheeded call to tax Muslim headgear, certainly intensified public and media debate around immigration and Islamic issues and may partially account for the negative direction of Dutch attitudes towards immigration from 2008 to 2009 (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 987). It is interesting however that the period from 2009 to 2010 saw more favourable attitudes, given that this survey was conducted in the build-up to the June 2010 general elections. This context would have seen political campaigns focussing greater attention on immigration and integration concerns, heightening the salience of these topics in the media and in public discourse. Nevertheless, considerably less favourable perceptions of immigration from 2008 to 2009 suggest an association with a less favourable macro-economic climate; whether this context was responsible for inducing perceptions about a heightened cultural or economic threat is something that will be discussed at a later point in this chapter. Gustin and Ziebarth (2010: 987) maintain that neither economic nor cultural perceptions of threat *alone* explain heightened levels of Dutch immigration scepticism from 2008 to 2009: instead, it is suggested that the enduring debates in the political, public and media realms about immigration, immigrants and integration, may more pertinently account for Dutch attitudinal shifts over this period.

A degree of proof of greater immigration scepticism from 2008 to 2009 was witnessed by all respondents generally, declaring that they were more anxious about legal immigration in their respective societies if their household financial situations had deteriorated over the course of the 12 months between 2008 and 2009. Though attempts were made to connect these higher levels of scepticism to the deepening effects of the global financial crisis, and though these levels may indeed be attributed to the economic crisis, the TTI data did not provide irrefutable confirmation to support this (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 975, 976).

Evidence of a measurement effect was however found, whereby the actual process of answering survey questions impacted upon the attitudes of respondents towards immigration and immigrants. To gauge whether responses towards immigration had been affected by participation in the 2008 survey, some respondents were asked whether immigration presents more of an opportunity or more of a problem at the outset of the survey, whilst others were asked this same question upon completion. Other respondents were asked this question twice: once at the beginning and then again at the end. The Netherlands showed a large degree of discrepancy in this regard: the percentage of people considering immigration more of an opportunity at the end of the survey was 11% higher than when this question was asked at the beginning. Whilst this was true for all countries to a certain extent, it suggests that respondents in the Netherlands in particular do not have clearly-defined opinions about whether immigration poses more of a problem than an opportunity. Public perceptions towards these topics are thus highly complex and nuanced, and scepticism about the repercussions of immigration is “mixed with optimism” (TTI 2008).

In 2008, Dutch respondents were divided on perceptions about whether most Muslims arriving in the Netherlands have an interest in integrating culturally or not (47% vs. 44% respectively) (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 987). Just over half (54%) of Dutch respondents in 2009 believed that unwillingness on the part of immigrants to integrate was the principle barrier to integration, whilst 30% were of the opinion that discrimination by Dutch society was the major culprit. That the greatest barrier to integration was considered to be immigrants' unwillingness was a finding that applied across the political-ideological spectrum, across age groups, and even across the education levels of respondents (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 986). This indicates broad societal consensus in the Netherlands that the responsibility for failure to integrate lies with immigrants themselves. The majority of Dutch citizens in 2009, 56%, favoured permanent labour migration over temporary migration – a percentage that remained exactly stable since the 2008 survey. For a majority of Europeans generally (54%), the main rationale for favouring permanent over temporary migration was that permanent immigrants are better able to integrate into society (TTI 2009). In 2010, the majority of Dutch continued to support granting legal labour migrants the opportunity to stay in the country permanently, although since 2008 the European average in support of this measure has declined slightly: 10% of European respondents asserted that the answer was context-dependent, suggesting that European publics are starting to lean towards the differentiation of labour migration policies. The Dutch were however the most pessimistic about the extent of immigrants' integration in 2010, with only 36% agreeing that immigrants in general were integrating well (TTI 2010). This percentage was the same for evaluations of Muslim integration specifically, implying that Dutch respondents do not distinguish between the integration patterns of Muslim immigrants and immigrants in general. Perceptions about second-generation immigrant integration did however differ: a majority (66%) considered second-generation immigrants in general to be integrating well, whilst 56% evaluated the integration of Muslim immigrants' children positively (TTI 2010).

In 2009, an exaggerated immigrant presence in the country was perceived: the estimated percentage of immigrants in the Netherlands was 25%, whilst the actual percentage is 11% (TTI 2009). However, the high number of naturalisations in the Netherlands means that the number of *de jure* immigrants, as reflected in official statistics, is not revealing of the perceptible foreign presence in the country. However, in comparison to other respondents, the Dutch were not inclined to perceive an excessive non-European immigrant presence in their country – only 32% thought this was so in 2009, decreasing to 27% in 2010 (TTI 2009; TTI 2010).

In 2008, the Netherlands had one of the highest percentages of respondents (83%) who considered that immigrants should be given the same access to social welfare benefits as the native-born population (TTI

2008). Whilst 74% of Dutch in 2009 supported extending to legal immigrants the same social benefits as native-born Dutch, this percentage had dropped considerably over the preceding last 12 months, from 83% in 2008 (TTI 2009). In 2009, legal immigrants were considered a lesser burden on social services than illegal immigrants, and less likely to pose a terrorist threat (TTI 2009). In 2010, 58% believed that health care should be made available to all immigrants, regardless of legal status, with 81% supporting across-the-board access to emergency healthcare (TTI 2010). In 2009, the Netherlands had the lowest percentage of public support (61%) for according immigrants the same rights to political participation as Dutch citizens, witnessing the greatest drop in support for this measure, from 68% in 2008 (TTI 2009). This period from 2008 to 2009 also saw a massive drop in levels of support for extending to legal immigrants the right to vote in local elections: from 76% supporting this right in 2008, to only 49% in 2009 (TTI Topline data 2008; TTI Topline data 2009). In 2010 however, a majority (56%) of Dutch respondents supported extending local voting rights to legal immigrants (TTI 2010). Forty-two percent in the Netherlands in 2010 contended that access to state-run public schools should be made available to all citizens, including both legal immigrants and illegal immigrants (TTI Topline data 2010).

In 2008, the Dutch were also the most optimistic about the cultural effects of immigration (72%). Despite a fair share of Dutch respondents agreeing that “Muslim” culture had important things to offer “Dutch” culture, the gap of 31% between evaluations of the positive cultural effects of immigration in general (72%) and Muslim immigration specifically (41%), was the largest of all the countries surveyed (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 986). Though not an unexpected finding given the impassioned nature of the Islamic debate in the Netherlands highlighted thus far, this attitudinal discrepancy does provide important *empirical* evidence of the fact that the Dutch public evaluates the cultural benefits and threats of particular groups differently. It is therefore necessary that data on public opinion differentiate the various cultural and religious backgrounds of the immigrants referred to in surveys. Although most respondents also concurred in 2009 that immigration contributes favourably to national culture, and a majority supported policies to extend to immigrants equal social benefits and rights to political participation, there was considerable disapproval with the notion of government paying for language courses to facilitate integration (TTI 2009). Attitudes about immigrants’ cultural enrichment potential for Dutch society were however somewhat less positive in 2010. Only a slim majority of Dutch respondents in 2008 (53%) considered Western European and Islamic lifestyles to be reconcilable, generally corresponding to the sentiments of other respondents (TTI 2008).

In terms of whether European publics favoured immigrants who were more disposed to cultural adaptation, or whether finding employment was of greater importance, it was found that all respondents in



2009 prioritised both the cultural and economic integration of immigrants. In the Netherlands, however, a considerably larger share of respondents emphasised cultural adaptation (TTI 2009). In 2010, the Netherlands was once again an outlier for placing high priority on common cultural values as a precondition for citizenship, with 33% saying that shared cultural values were most important. Thirty-seven percent considered the most important precondition for citizenship to be speaking the national language, with 27% highlighting respect for political institutions and laws. This suggests that cultural adaptation is a prime priority for full immigrant integration into Dutch society. In the Netherlands, culture and language are considered highly important criteria for integration and citizenship and this emphasis on language and cultural values should serve as a guideline to policymakers designing naturalisation conditions (TTI 2010).

One of the key interests of the TTI survey in comparing attitudinal trends from 2008 to 2009 was the possible effect of the global financial crisis on attitudes towards immigration (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 975). Unlike the 2008 study however, there were no questions referring explicitly to perceptions towards Muslim minorities in the 2009 TTI survey. It was found that concerns about the economic crisis overshadowed all other concerns in the countries surveyed, including issues of immigration. Although greater levels of moderate scepticism about immigration were found for all countries polled, with more respondents viewing immigration as a problem than an opportunity, the fact of Dutch respondents' considerably more negative attitudes in this regard in 2009 than in 2008, was identified as one of the key trends over the course of this 12-month period (Gustin and Ziebarth; 2010: 974, 975). Despite the generally unimpressive variation in attitudes towards immigration, the context of financial and economic crisis in which more negative sentiments towards immigration were witnessed among Dutch respondents does suggest that these structural conditions had some influence on this more negative attitudinal shift. As section 5.3.1.1 will show however, there is not much evidence of intensified perceptions of *economic* threat.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Dutch economy in 2009 had shown signs of recovery and attitudes among respondents in the Netherlands towards the economic prospects of the national, EU and global economies, as well as towards the domestic labour market, were reported by the European Commission (EC) to have shown the greatest improvement of all the EU27 countries polled since 2008 (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 984). In spite of this lack of evidence for economic-induced anxieties about immigration in the Netherlands, there was stronger support for tightening immigration controls among Dutch respondents from 2008 to 2009: the percentage of those favouring easier entry into the Netherlands for work or study purposes decreased from 64% to 55%. Similarly, despite the fact that the number of

foreign-born residents in the Netherlands has in fact remained reasonably stable in recent years, in the region of 10%, the TTI studies of 2008 and 2009 reflect increasing scepticism among the Dutch about immigration and integration issues (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 983). This suggests that explanations of attitudinal shifts in the Netherlands via reference to out-group size and recent increases in foreign numbers are insufficient. Gustin and Ziebarth (2010: 984) also suggest that given the inadequacies of economic threat perceptions in explaining this “increasingly restrictive mood” in the Netherlands, consideration of *cultural* concerns may be more helpful.

The 2009 survey did find that enhanced personal financial pressure experienced by respondents in general had a certain effect on their immigration attitudes. In all the countries polled, excluding the United States, respondents whose household financial situation deteriorated over the preceding 12 months were more likely to express anxiety about legal immigration than households whose financial situations had either stayed the same or improved. Thirty-six percent of those Dutch respondents who reported that their household financial situations had deteriorated over the course of the last 12 months were worried about *legal* immigration; of those whose household financial situations had either improved or been stable however, 30% were worried about legal immigration (TTI 2009). The 2010 TTI survey also found that in general, respondents’ personal economic, employment and financial statuses were important in shaping attitudes towards immigrants’ impact on *labour markets* (TTI 2010). In 2010, 43% of European respondents who reported being unemployed were also of the opinion that immigrants take jobs away from European nationals; 35% of *employed* respondents, by contrast, thought the same. Similarly, of those Europeans whose household financial situation worsened from 2009 to 2010, 39% asserted that immigrants took jobs away from citizens; of those whose financial situation improved or remained stable, 32% shared this opinion. The results for the Netherlands correspond to this aggregate European trend and there thus appears to be a certain effect of personal financial situation on *changes* both in attitudes towards legal immigrants and in evaluations of the labour market impact of immigrants (TTI 2010).

In addition to this slight effect of household financial situation on fears about legal immigration, respondents’ political inclinations had a considerably greater effect on perceptions towards immigration, indicating a degree of politicisation of immigration attitudes generally (TTI 2009). For all six European countries polled in 2009, right-leaning respondents were considerably more inclined to view immigration as a problem than respondents associating with the left (TTI 2009). Whilst the immigration attitudes of those on the left and in the centre remained relatively stable from 2008 to 2009, right-leaning European respondents were considerably more inclined to see immigration as a problem in 2009 compared to 12 months prior (TTI 2009). Of those European respondents identifying with the right, there was a 7%

increase from 2008 to 2009 in the percentage that deemed immigration more of a problem than opportunity; the European left witnessed a 2% increase whilst the centre saw a 1% increase over this period (TTI 2009).

A majority in the Netherlands (71%) in 2009 maintained that most of the immigrants in the country enjoyed legal status, though the majority of respondents also expressed anxiety about those immigrants in the country illegally (33% reported being worried about legal immigration whilst 58% reported being anxious about illegal immigration). Thirty-nine percent of Dutch respondents (up from 37% in 2008) also supported the legalisation of illegal immigrants, comparatively low in contrast to the responses of other countries. All countries surveyed in 2009 indicated more negative perceptions of illegal immigrants than legal immigrants (TTI 2009). Since 2008, the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* surveys have shown more favourable perceptions towards *legal* immigrants across the board (TTI 2010). Perceptions that legal immigrants increase crime in society deteriorated markedly from 2009 to 2010, from 54% to 45% respectively; perceptions that illegal immigrants increase crime also decreased, from 69% of Dutch respondents supporting this view in 2009, to 66% in 2010 (TTI Topline data 2010; TTI Topline data 2010). Sixty-six percent of respondents in the Netherlands supported the immigration of environmental migrants affected by natural disasters, similar to the European average of 68%. The 2009 *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* report therefore suggests that many of the negative stereotypes about immigrants today refer to illegal immigrants specifically and distinguishing between legal and illegal immigrant status in surveys is important (TTI 2009).

The TTI survey recognised 2010 as a noteworthy year for immigration questions in both Europe and the United States. Like the 2009 survey, the primary intention was again to establish whether public perceptions of immigration had shifted in the context of economic anxieties in the countries included in the report: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands (TTI 2010). One of the key findings was that general attitudes about immigration, in terms of presenting more of a problem or opportunity, appeared to have stabilised. Though more pessimistic perceptions of immigration were seen in 2009, the possible effects of the economic crisis in heightening immigration scepticism were acknowledged to be “complex”: though majorities did not rate the economic implications of immigrants on natives’ employment opportunities and wage levels as particularly significant, households that experienced greater financial pressure from 2008 to 2009 did indicate a greater propensity to display anxiety about legal immigration than those who were not adversely affected. Gustin and Ziebarth (2010: 975) consider this the only conclusive result of the 2009 survey. The 2010 study similarly concludes that the economic crisis *may* have influenced perceptions towards immigration:

respondents whose personal financial situations deteriorated from 2009 to 2010 were more inclined to view immigrants as posing a competitive threat to labour market opportunities. As Gustin and Ziebarth (2010: 983) write, greater consideration of Dutch respondents' economic and cultural perceptions is a good starting point for understanding both heightened concern about immigration as well as the complexities surrounding public attitudes towards this phenomenon.

### **5.3 THREAT PERCEPTIONS AND ETHNIC COMPETITION THEORY**

It has been said that the “perception of threat is the most powerful and consistent indicator of political intolerance across Europe” (Duch and Gibson in Cremona, 2010). Attempts to explain prejudice have often looked to personality factors; processes of categorisation via in-and out-group identification; membership to a particular social group; perceptions of cultural difference; and the defence of traditional values and those norms considered to “define” a particular group (González *et al.*, 2008: 668). Increasing research interest has been accorded to the role of value differences and conflicts between groups in inducing prejudicial sentiments, where perceptions arise about cherished group principles and ideals being violated by the opposing beliefs of another group (González *et al.*, 2008: 668). Much has been said of the link between prejudice towards out-groups and perceptions of threat and fear, and previous research has distinguished four basic types of threat, real or perceived, that can potentially result in prejudice: realistic threats, symbolic or cultural threats, negative stereotyping and intergroup anxiety (Stephan *et al.* in Zárate *et al.*, 2004: 99; González *et al.*, 2008: 668, 669). These threat perceptions may occur at either the individual or in-group levels, though this discussion is predominantly concerned with perceptions of symbolic and realistic threats at the group level, rather than at the level of the group members themselves.

Even before the onset of the global financial crisis, it was shown and indeed widely accepted that inter-ethnic relations in the Netherlands had evolved in an increasingly negative direction over time (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270). The work of Semyonov *et al.* (2006) is one of the few studies examining longitudinal trends in attitudes towards foreigners. Investigating the development of anti-foreigner sentiment in 12 European societies (including the Netherlands) from 1988 – 2000, the authors find considerable increases in anti-foreigner sentiment for all the countries observed. Corresponding to general trends, a steep increase in negative sentiment in the Netherlands was witnessed from 1988 to 1994. From 1994 to 1997, a slight decrease in anti-foreigner sentiment was found, after which negative out-group sentiments again increased, albeit mildly, reaching 1994 levels in the year 2000 (Semyonov *et al.*, 2006: 436). Relative to the other European countries observed over this period, levels of anti-foreigner sentiment in the Netherlands appear to be middling. These findings, interestingly, corroborate those of Coenders *et al.*

(2008) who looked at shifting ethnic attitudes towards ethnic minorities in the Netherlands from 1979 to 2002. Almost half the Dutch respondents surveyed (47%), endorsed ethnic discrimination in 1979 (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 275). Forward seven years, this percentage decreased markedly to 25%, although from 1986 the share of ethnic Dutch favouring ethnic discrimination increased consistently up until about 40% in 1992. A slim fall in support was witnessed until 1996, after which a sharp increase in support for discrimination was seen in 1998, attributed to greater endorsement of discrimination in the housing market (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 275). Since then, and up until 2002, the authors note that levels of support for ethnic discrimination appear to have stabilised at a level relatively similar to that in the early nineties. An important shortcoming of much of the data on public perceptions is that they are highly time-specific and data gathered prior to September 2001, if not used in conjunction with more recent studies to determine trends and variance, provide an incomplete picture (Savelkoul *et al.* 2010: 2)

The two main explanations for intensified hostility towards out-groups look to anxieties surrounding economic and material concerns and concerns about clashing identities and values. Explanations of material and non-material sources of threat are typically seen to correspond to Realistic Group Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory respectively (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 270, 271). This discussion is not concerned so much with the determinants of anti-immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment as it is about understanding attitudinal *shifts* witnessed in the current economic context. To this end, the extent to which particular trends in public responses in the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* surveys may have emerged in response to material or non-material sources of threat is explored. Particular reference is made to shifts in attitudes towards Muslims and Islam, data permitting. The principle theoretical interest here is group conflict and competition, though other common explanations for inter-group attitudes and behaviour are highlighted. Briefly discussed below are the hypotheses of Ethnic Competition Theory, encompassing the complementary premises of Realistic Group Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory. The hypotheses of Intergroup Contact Theory also receive mention (Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 18; Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 2).

Central to Social Identity Theory is the role of group definition and categorisation in shaping attitudes, via the mental process of “social identification”. A supposedly inherent need to perceive one’s own in-group positively, and sometimes more favourably and superior to other groups, results in negative attributes being applied to outsiders (Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 18; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 273). Unfavourable sentiments on the part of the in-group are then generalised to the entire out-group level via “social contra-identification”; evaluating out-groups negatively is however not a given part of the process in cultivating a positive in-group identity and is said to depend on the extent of group identification, normative views

about group differences, as well as the political and ideological context in which social identity processes take place (González *et al.*, 2008: 670; Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 3, Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 18; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 273). Those identifying more strongly with the in-group, then, are considered more prone to being sensitive about potential threats to the wellbeing of the group (González *et al.*, 2008: 670).

Therefore, whereas realistic conflict focuses on “social-structural sources” of group variation, with economic competition serving as the central explanation for negative intergroup relations, social identity focuses on group membership, categorisation and identification (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 36). The chief interest for this research however, is not in-group insularity and the (social-) psychological dimensions of negative attitudes towards out-groups. With the global financial crisis providing the contextual backdrop to this discussion, the suppositions of Realistic Group Conflict Theory are more pertinent to this attempt to assess whether increased economic and financial pressure in the Netherlands has been accompanied by intensified anti-immigrant and anti-immigration sentiment among a native Dutch in-group. Although theoretically distinguished here, Realistic Group Conflict Theory and Social Identity Theory are not mutually exclusive and both are useful for understanding the underlying processes of group identity formation and ways in which negative sentiments towards immigrant minorities or other “out-groups” may be induced.

Ethnic Competition Theory therefore combines the “dispositional notions” of Social Identity Theory as to why people possess a general predisposition towards viewing other groups negatively to begin with, and the “situational notions” of Realistic Group Conflict Theory. This gives rise to the hypothesis that in situations of intergroup competition or where perceptions of ethnic threat are prevalent, the twin processes of social identification and contra-identification will be heightened (Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 3; Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 18; Schneider, 2008: 54). Negative sentiments towards out-groups, prejudice and proclivities towards ethnic exclusionism (entailing opposition to extending civil rights to legal migrants), are then evoked (Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 18; Schneider, 2008: 54). Ethnic Competition Theory holds that membership to particular social categories necessarily makes some in-group members more inclined to perceiving ethnic threat than other individuals within different social strata, implying that some individuals are more predisposed to harbouring exclusionary tendencies than others, especially within ethnically overlapping “economic niches” (Schneider, 2008: 54, 55). Therefore, those in disadvantaged socio-economic positions are expected to perceive more ethnic threat from immigrants when out-group members are of a similarly marginalised socio-economic position, as is the case for Muslims in the Netherlands. This theory clearly focuses on individual-level predictors of ethnic threat, albeit within a larger structural context, and is for this reason not appropriate to this express interest in *group* threat.

Another common explanation for negative out-group sentiments, though one that determines micro, individual-level variation in attitudes towards out-groups, is Intergroup Contact Theory which proffers a contradictory hypothesis to that of Ethnic Competition Theory. Whereas the latter considers a higher foreign presence to *induce* threat and negative sentiment, the former suggests that a more prevalent foreign presence heightens opportunities for exposure to cultural difference, enhancing the likelihood of in-group familiarisation with an immigrant other. Pre-conceived notions and stereotypes about the extent of inter-ethnic difference are thereby challenged and prejudice and perceptions of threat are ultimately *reduced* (González *et al.*, 2008: 671; Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 2, 4). The size of the out-group is thus often used as a measure not only of competition, but also of opportunities for intergroup contact (Schneider, 2008: 53, 54). The contact hypothesis both explains hostility or prejudice towards a socially defined (out-) group, as well as suggests how this prejudice may be reduced via opportunities to perceive members of an out-group as more similar in terms of morals, beliefs and attitudes, for instance, than initially anticipated. Allport (1954) was instrumental in identifying four criteria for optimum contact between groups. Unless a proclivity towards prejudice is deeply imbedded in an individual's character, it is argued that prejudice may be reduced provided majority and minority groups approach one another as equals in the pursuit of common objectives. This effect will be buttressed by a supportive institutional and structural environment (laws, customs, norms and the general social milieu) and is conditional on whether contact is of such a nature that it provides opportunities for "acquaintance potential", resulting in perceptions of common interest and humanity between groups (Allport, 1954: 281). The assimilationist turn in the Netherlands is evidence that the Dutch in-group and Muslim out-group are not accorded equal status in their engagement with one another. The requirement that Muslims discard visible symbols of their Islamic identity and assume Dutch cultural norms reflects a decidedly asymmetrical strategy for integration. It appears then that in the Dutch context, a key criterion for prejudice-reducing contact is absent.

Realistic Group Conflict Theory emphasises the impact of contextual circumstances in shifting responses towards ethnic out-groups. The research of Coenders *et al.* (2008: 271) on changing ethnic attitudes in the Netherlands corroborates the centrality of structural and ideological context for understanding shifting public reactions towards minority groups. It is shown that the various integration strategies undertaken in the Netherlands have had important consequences for interethnic attitudes and Dutch attitudes towards Muslim groups have reportedly been less favourable in an assimilation, as opposed to multicultural, context (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 269). Over the course of a shifting ideological milieu from 2001 to 2004, the attitudes of ethnic Dutch towards Islamic out-groups (Turks and Moroccans) deteriorated, whilst public perceptions of Antilleans and Surinamese did not differ significantly (Coenders *et al.*; 2008: 282). Dutch respondents also perceived all ethnic out-groups more unfavourably in an assimilation ideological

context as opposed to a multicultural ideological context – effects which were more pronounced for Turkish and Moroccan out-groups, but were still also found for attitudes towards Surinamese and Antilleans (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 282). As highlighted in Chapter Three, concerns about group identity in the Netherlands focus particularly on Turks and Moroccans by virtue of their Islamic religious-cultural identity, whereas other minority groups are perceived as less “problematic” to Dutch identity (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 272). The turn from multiculturalism towards assimilation thus appears to have resulted in more negative sentiments towards Islamic groups in particular and these findings do suggest that a shifting ideological context is relevant for understanding attitudes towards out-groups. The possibility of alternative explanations other than ideological context for less favourable attitudes towards Muslims over this period is acknowledged by the authors, but they fail to mention specifically the significant series of “shock events” occurring between 2001 and 2004 that have had a lasting influence on public debate in the Netherlands, such as 9/11 and the murders of Fortuyn and van Gogh.

“Situational” triggers (contextual features) and predisposing factors (individual characteristics) may have an interactive effect on exclusionary reactions, where contextual triggers may either spur those already predisposed towards supporting a particular policy (by virtue of their status in society or political-ideological inclinations, for instance), or mobilise more general, broader public support (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 46). Public support for exclusionary policies may therefore either be intensified or generated, the latter enlarging the share of public support for exclusionary policies over and above that core of the electorate already inclined, dispositionally, to support them (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 36). This thesis has so far considered the cultural and social conditions in which inter-group relations in the Netherlands have taken place: it has been observed, for instance, how an ideological shift from multiculturalism to cultural assimilation, rising secularism, and the demise of a strong Calvinist tradition have shaped popular consciousness and ideas about contemporary “Dutch” identity. The particular interest of this chapter, however, is the role of expressly *economic* period effects in affecting attitudinal shifts over time in the context of the global financial crisis.

Contextual-level theories look at structural conditions and why in-groups are inclined to develop specific views towards out-groups in certain settings (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010: 317, 318). The most common theoretical perspective in this regard is that of group threat, where the intergroup competition that results in unfavourable attitudes is regarded in zero-sum terms. Whether the competitive circumstances giving rise to group hostility need to be real or perceived is debatable; irrespective, exclusionary and prejudicial responses by the in-group are believed to materialise under conditions of (real or perceived) competitive threat to the collective economic, cultural or religious interests of the in-group (Ceobanu and Escandell,



2010: 318). This discussion is especially interested in why group attitudes vary over time and not why attitudes vary across individuals (Wilkes and Corrigan-Brown, 2011: 94). Economic conditions in the wider context of the global financial crisis provide the macro-level setting in which the evolution of attitudes towards immigrants and immigration are observed. In line with Realistic Group Conflict Theory, less prosperous economic periods which intensify real or perceived intergroup competition are anticipated to be more conducive to the intensification of negative attitudes, though the literature has shown that the attitudinal effects of economic conditions are contested (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010: 322).

Quillian's 1995 cross-national comparative study of anti-immigrant attitudes, using Eurobarometer data on 12 European countries, was instrumental for using both individual and contextual-level predictors. His research results support the perceived group-threat hypothesis which, like Ethnic Competition Theory, asserts that relative out-group size has a positive effect on anti-immigrant prejudice. Average levels of prejudice in European Economic Community (EEC) countries were strongly associated with in-group perceptions of threat. Perceptions of economic competition and threat were dependent on a country's economic situation (in terms of 5-year GDP per capita) as well as out-group size (percentage of non-EEC citizens), which strongly influenced prejudice levels (Quillian, 1995: 601, 605, 606). The author's intentions to advance an expressly group-level explanation of prejudicial attitudes were buttressed by the finding that micro-level variables, such as individual characteristics, were insufficient on their own in explaining cross-national variation in prejudice (Quillian, 1995: 599). McLaren (2003: 925) similarly found that a sense of *group* threat to resources or national symbols resulted in a willingness to expel immigrants. Willingness to oust immigrants was mainly motivated by perceptions of cultural and religious threat to the nation, and by threats to the economic well-being of other citizens and society as a whole (group threats) – not so much by anxieties over personal well-being (McLaren, 2003: 925). Like Quillian, it was found that individual threats were either fairly weak or insignificant predictors of exclusionary sentiments in most European countries, coinciding with findings that self-interest has little direct influence on voting behaviour and that concern for one's country or society is important (McLaren, 2003: 925). The next section examines group-level competition and threat perspectives further, within the framework of Realistic Group Conflict Theory.

### **5.3.1 Realistic Group Conflict Theory**

Competitive group threat perspectives are especially salient to Realistic Group Conflict Theory, which maintains that competition among social groups over finite common resources results in conflicts of interest and negative attitudes towards out-groups (Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 2; Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 18; Zárate *et al.*, 2004: 100; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010: 318). Circumstances of heightened competition

over scarce resources are important to this theory, and are considered to foster perceptions about group interests and goals being incompatible, thereby heightening levels of perceived group threat and giving rise to negative reactions towards out-groups (Esses *et al.*, 1998: 701; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 271). In-groups are said to develop notions that they have a proprietary claim on certain resources, which reflects a clearer sense of social position vis-à-vis other groups resulting from historically asymmetrical power relations (Quillian, 1995: 588). When a dominant group perceives challenges to resources that it had come to regard as its own, defensive reactions to protect majority in-group interests are prompted towards those out-groups identified as the source of threat to this “exclusive claim to privileges” (Quillian, 1995: 588; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 281). Whether this response manifests in prejudice or hostility depends on the extent of threat perceived or experienced (McLaren, 2003: 915). Quillian (1995: 588) refers to this as “group-threat theory”, of which Realistic Group Conflict Theory is considered an adaptation, and which stresses the relationship between perceptions of threat to in-group prerogatives and expressions of prejudice towards out-groups. The chief assumption of Realistic Group Conflict Theory then, is that intergroup relations revolve around in-group attempts to maintain a dominant position in economic and resource terms; this thesis argues that this similarly applies to desires to maintain a dominant cultural position with regards to values and identity (Schneider, 2008: 54).

The connection between less favourable economic conditions and prejudice is seen to stem either from the transferral of responsibility for economic hardship to out-groups in line with scapegoating tactics, or from competition experienced between groups over finite resources (Quillian, 1995: 590). This thesis discussion conceptualises these finite resources in both economic and cultural terms. Shifts in attitudes among the Dutch public during the global financial crisis towards the allocation of both economic and cultural resources to immigrant out-groups are therefore examined. Whilst competition or the transferral of blame may occur between individuals, the collective threat hypothesis says that deteriorating economic conditions among a *few* in-group members will heighten prejudice among *all* group members and not only among those experiencing competition from immigrants directly; correspondingly, when economic conditions improve, weaker perceptions of competition diminish the sense of group threat (Quillian, 1995: 590).

Though perceptions of competition and threat may occur at the individual or group levels, Realistic Group Conflict Theory focuses upon conflict occurring at the group level and how the wellbeing and interests of the group and society at large are perceived to be at stake (Esses *et al.*, 1998: 701). Perceptions of collective threat do not necessarily correspond to the interests of individual group members and the prejudice arising from threats to established group privileges is understood as a collective phenomenon,

with group relations ultimately influencing individual attitudes (Quillian, 1995: 586). Important in inducing this sense of collective threat is the perception that resources are under pressure and are potentially not available to all groups in adequate measure; group competition therefore represents a “zero-sum” game, where one group’s gains imply losses for the other (Esses *et al.*, 1998: 704; McLaren, 2003: 915). Potential contenders for these scarce resources must thus be perceived as “competitive” by the in-group: that is, comparable to the in-group with regards to certain relevant qualities or aspects (Zárate *et al.*, 2004: 100). To be considered a threat then, potential “competitors” must be considered *similar* to the in-group in terms of certain “relevant” dimensions (educational or occupational level, for example); for “irrelevant” dimensions pertaining to characteristics such as ethnicity or religion that are unrelated to the ability to attain resources, the more the out-group is perceived as *dissimilar* from the in-group in terms of cultural criteria such as morals and values, the more likely perceptions of competitive threat will be (Esses *et al.*, 1998: 704; Zárate *et al.*, 2004: 100). The extent to which a certain out-group is considered to pose a competitive threat therefore depends on perceived sources of similarity and dissimilarity with the in-group in terms of relevant and irrelevant dimensions. This gives rise to the important hypothesis of Realistic Group Conflict Theory that perceived out-group threat is greater among in-group members who perceive their own status as similar to that of the majority of out-group members where relevant work-related dimensions are concerned.

Realistic Group Conflict Theory reflects the materialistic assumptions of Marxist theory, emphasising the link between *real* in-group interests and *perceptions* of what constitutes group interests (Bobo in Quillian, 1995: 588). Despite the theory’s explicit reference to “realistic” group conflict, suggesting in-group prejudice as a reaction to collective threats to the *real* interests of the in-group, Realistic Group Conflict Theory has been revised to include both actual and perceived dimensions of group competition and threat. Previous research has shown how perceived competition can serve as a strong predictor of perceived threat – indeed, that perceptions of threat are responsible for most directly determining unfavourable attitudes vis-à-vis ethnic minorities (Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 2). This brings to mind the words of American sociologist William Isaac Thomas that “when people define situations as real, they become real in their consequences” (Bauman, 2011: 83). Ceobanu and Escandell (2010: 318) similarly comment upon the potential of perceived group threat to be as powerful as actual group threat, both when material, tangible resources come under pressure, and when nonmaterial commodities are at stake.

Neither Social Identity Theory nor Realistic Group Conflict Theory adequately account for *cultural* conflict and competition in the same way that traditional interpretations of Realistic Group Conflict Theory explain economic-induced rivalry over tangible resources. Social Identity Theory focuses on the

projection of favourable and unfavourable attributes onto particular groups as part and parcel of the process of group identity formation; the way in which the construction of social identities can give rise to culturally-motivated conflict and competition is however underemphasised. That conventional interpretations of Realistic Group Conflict Theory do not explain non-material conflict, is considered a serious shortcoming, and the theory's preoccupation with material explanations limits its overall explanatory power. Group conflict is considered here to have as much a cultural dimension as an economic or material component. In an effort to emphasise the contestation between *values, ideals and identities* that are perceived as incompatible and irreconcilable, the use of Realistic Group Conflict Theory in this discussion will focus on cultural and symbolic sources of threat in addition to the consideration of conventional group conflict explanations that look to economic and material motivations. This discussion therefore takes the liberty of amending Realistic Group Conflict Theory somewhat, to the extent that the focus is not overwhelmingly on material sources of conflict. Schneider (2008: 54) similarly extends the dominantly material focus of Realistic Group Conflict Theory by including conflict over perceived value differences in her definition of the theory: indeed, her research on anti-immigrant attitudes in Europe ultimately supported a cultural, and not economic, interpretation of Ethnic Competition Theory.

Distinguishing between different dimensions of competition and sources of threat allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the origins of ethnic threat perceptions and what contributes towards them, thereby enabling the devising of appropriate strategies and policies to assuage threat-induced prejudice and negative group attitudes. The fact that competition and conflict can occur just as much within the realm of the intangible and immaterial, as that of the tangible and material, suggests that Realistic Group Conflict Theory is appropriate for explaining threats to national identity or culture. Depending on the circumstances in question, economic competition or group identity concerns may vary in their relevance for explaining negative intergroup attitudes – or, as is the express intention of this thesis, explaining possible *shifts* towards more negative sentiments (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 282). Sniderman *et al.* (2004: 36) support this notion about the fluctuating significance of material and non-material factors for group attitudes, contending that citizens' concerns about economic and cultural issues are not continuous: these issues assume heightened salience in the “right” circumstances and when particular risks to economic or cultural identity prospects become prominent. As indicated, numerous studies have pointed towards the relationship between perceptions of collective group threat and prejudiced attitudes; in order to understand more about the sources of threat undergirding this relationship, it is necessary to consider the material and non-material dimensions of perceived threat in greater depth. Group competition stemming from perceptions of rational and economic threat is observed

first, followed by that group conflict which is motivated more by cultural and symbolic sources of perceived threat.

#### 5.3.1.1 Rational and Economic Threat

Although the Netherlands occupied a more favourable “starting position” compared to its neighbours at the outset of the global financial crisis, the relative economic and financial decline experienced since 2008 has enhanced the salience of economic concerns, as evidenced by the heightened priority accorded to these issues during the 2010 electoral campaign. The 2009 and 2010 *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* surveys indicated that respondents in the Netherlands listed “the economy” as the most important issue in the country, overshadowing all other concerns including immigration (TTI Topline data 2009; TTI Topline data 2010). Further indicating the prioritisation of economic concerns in this context is the fact that support for raising the legal retirement age in the Netherlands increased dramatically from 2008 to 2010, from 28% to 43% – the greatest increase in public endorsement for this measure of all the countries polled (TTI Topline data 2010). The preponderance of economic and financial concerns was also demonstrated by the outcome of the 2010 Dutch general elections, where the VVD – the party most in favour of harsh austerity measures to tackle the budget deficit – achieved the largest share of electoral support. It is therefore evident that less favourable economic conditions in the Netherlands have been accompanied by the enhanced salience of economic concerns. However, the extent to which greater economic concern may have induced perceptions of *out-group threat*, thereby heightening levels of prejudice and negative sentiment towards immigrant groups and immigration, is not so clear-cut.

As indicated by the surveys, those respondents who experienced greater household financial pressure did indicate greater anxiety about legal immigration than those who were reportedly not affected by negative economic circumstances. This finding is relatively self-evident: it is to be expected that the extent of economic competition experienced varies according to social category, where in-group members whose social position is similar to that of most ethnic minority members will be subject to higher levels of out-group competition and will thus be more predisposed to ethnic exclusionism (Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 19). Because a large share of immigrants and Muslims occupy a socio-economically marginalised position in the Netherlands, they will necessarily pose a greater economic and social threat to “lower-strata members” of the ethnic Dutch majority; in-group members with similarly low educational and income levels, who are unemployed, perform manual labour and live in urban areas, will face more competition on average in the labour market and elsewhere from ethnic minorities than other Dutch citizens (Scheepers *et al.*, 2002: 19). Scheepers *et al.* (2002: 19) write that these very real competitive conditions may reinforce in-group-out-group social identification, inducing more support for ethnic exclusionism.

Recall that hypotheses about economic threat describe how in-group perceptions about out-group members possessing similar skills and “relevant” attributes will heighten the sense of threat to in-group job and financial security (Zárate *et al.*, 2004: 104). Though this constitutes a micro-level perspective of in-group threat, and the focus of this thesis is not to look at variation in perceptions of threat and competition across individuals, Quillian’s (1995) aforementioned study did highlight the interaction between individual- and group-levels of competition. Perceptions of threat to the group trickle down to the individual level, resulting in perceptions of threat to the well-being of the person or household. Importantly, perceptions of threat among a few in-group members can also be interpreted as a collective threat to the interests of the dominant group as a whole.

Despite the context of the global financial crisis showing more negative sentiments towards *immigration* (more of a “problem” than “opportunity”), the surveys do not seem to indicate intensified perceptions of economic threat towards *immigrants* themselves. For example, the percentage of Dutch respondents of the opinion that immigrants take away jobs from native workers in fact decreased from 27% in 2008 to 23% in 2009, (increasing marginally to 24% in 2010), indicating that immigrants were not considered *more* of a threat to the native labour market in a less favourable economic climate (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 983, 984; TTI Topline data 2010). In contrast, in both the United Kingdom (50%) and United States (57%), majorities maintained that immigrants negatively impact natives’ job security. Two-thirds of Dutch respondents in 2009 did not believe that immigrants brought wages down – the largest percentage of all countries polled for this survey (TTI 2009). The share of Dutch respondents blaming immigrants for having a negative effect on the wages of natives actually decreased: whereas 27% of respondents in 2009 considered immigrants to have a downward effect on native wages in 2009, 23% held this opinion in 2010 (TTI Topline data 2010). A greater share of respondents in 2010 (51%) than in 2009 (43%) also recognised the employment-creating potential of those immigrants that set up new businesses in the Netherlands (TTI Topline data 2010).

In 2008, the Netherlands had one of the highest percentages (83%) of respondents who considered that legal immigrants should be given the same access to social welfare benefits as the native-born population; the share of respondents who supported this in 2009 did however decrease to 74% (TTI 2008; TTI 2009). In 2010, 58% believed that health care should be made available to all immigrants, regardless of legal status, with 81% supporting across-the-board access to emergency healthcare (TTI 2010). The fact that the perception that immigrants benefit from Dutch health and welfare services over and above what they contribute in taxes actually decreased from 2009 (52%) to 2010 (41%), indicates that resentment towards immigrants benefiting disproportionately from the welfare state did not seem to increase over this period

(TTI Topline data 2010). Respondents in 2010 also showed a large degree of divergence on this matter of immigration's fiscal impact on the Dutch economy: 41% deemed immigrants a "fiscal drain" whilst 24% considered immigrants a benefit and 25% indicated that they were unsure of immigrants' fiscal impact (TTI 2010). Perceptions about legal and illegal immigrants being a burden on social services also decreased from 2009 to 2010, from 45% (legal) and 60% (illegal), to 40% and 53% respectively.

The TTI surveys therefore reveal that the Dutch public generally does not appear to attribute greater personal financial pressure to the impact of immigrants on natives' wages and employment opportunities. So whilst the economic concerns of the Dutch public have become considerably more salient, there is not much evidence of Quillian's (1995) scapegoating tactics in the Netherlands, in the economic sense at least. The heightened salience of economic issues does not appear to be accompanied by the *collective* blaming of immigrants for the economic and financial woes of those in-group members whose personal and household financial positions deteriorated in this context, as suggested by the aforementioned group threat hypothesis described by Quillian (1995). In the Netherlands, there does not seem to be a significant degree of *group* threat stemming from perceptions about Muslim immigrants possessing similar work-related credentials and competing for similar labour market opportunities as the ethnic Dutch population. It is logical to expect that among those native Dutch with similar educational or skills levels to the majority of Muslim immigrants, a greater degree of economic and material threat is perceived and experienced. On the aggregate, group level however, where Muslims in the Netherlands occupy a more marginal socio-economic position vis-à-vis the majority ethnic Dutch population, explanations about real and perceived economic threat do not seem sufficient for making sense of greater Dutch immigration scepticism.

Even in the context of the global financial crisis then, debates on immigrants and immigration appear to have remained predominantly cultural and have not taken on economic undertones. Despite enhanced economic and financial pressure, Dutch respondents show a considerably higher preference for cultural, rather than economic preconditions for immigration and citizenship. This reflects the fact that concerns about immigrants and immigration continue to be predominantly about cultural difference, even in less favourable economic circumstances. Worsening economic and financial conditions do not appear to have been accompanied by more negative sentiments towards immigrant out-groups, or by a greater desire to reduce immigrants' access to economic resources in the form of social benefits. In addition, perceptions about immigrants' negative impact on the financial prospects of Dutch natives, in terms of influencing wages and access to jobs, decreased in the context of economic recession. This suggests that Dutch perceptions about immigrants posing an economic threat to the material well-being of the dominant group

have in fact decreased during the financial crisis, contrary to the material hypotheses of Realistic Group Conflict Theory.

#### 5.3.1.2 Cultural and Symbolic Threat

Attitudes towards out-groups and their members are not motivated by economic or material self-interest only and may be driven by a desire to protect the social welfare and certain defined cultural symbols of the in-group (McLaren, 2003: 916). Perceived threats to group national identity and culture are intrinsically of a collective nature. Prejudice stemming from symbolic factors is a form of resistance to change to the status quo, guided by “moral feelings” that out-groups are responsible for undermining traditional in-group values (Kinder and Sears in McLaren, 2003: 916). As previously discussed in Chapter Three, perceived threats to “Dutch” values from Islam in particular may for example stem from the incongruity of an overt and externalised religious presence in secular Dutch society; the threat of a “patriarchal culture” to the principle of gender equality; or from the clash between a “cohesive”, communitarian group identity and the highly-valued spirit of individualism in the Netherlands. Therefore, though stereotypical and misinformed perceptions of “otherness” and difference contribute towards tension between a Dutch majority and Muslim minority, there are nevertheless fundamental and very real points of division around particular values (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 47). The extent to which identity concerns and symbolic threats influence issues related to immigrants and immigration is said to be dependent on the “prominence” of group distinctiveness, which promotes perceptions about intrinsic cultural identity differences along the lines of those cherished group values, morals, beliefs and symbols that make up a particular “worldview” (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 36, 37; González *et al.*, 2008: 669; Zárate, 2004: 100).

Sniderman *et al.* (2004: 47) write that culture is essentially a “concentration of shared convictions”: a collective understanding of what is morally right or wrong and what should be protected and prioritised, or outlawed. The perception that an out-group promotes a contrasting worldview to that of the in-group is considered threatening to a supposedly “coherent” dominant cultural identity. The in-group consequently fears the displacement of an “established” and given way of life, prompting negative reactions towards the out-group (González *et al.*, 2008: 669; Zárate *et al.*, 2004: 100; Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 272). Studies have shown the connection between perceptions of threat to in-group values and more hostile attitudes towards immigrant and minority out-groups (González *et al.*, 2008: 669). McLaren’s (2003) study on 17 European countries, for instance, revealed that perceived threats to national and cultural identity were associated with anti-immigrant attitudes among the in-group. Schneider’s (2008: 53, 63) cross-national study on 21 European countries revealed that immigrants’ non-Western background contributed more to



average levels of perceived ethnic threat than the economic status and educational levels of immigrants: lack of familiarity and fears about clashing values and culture offered a more plausible explanation for the relationship between size of the out-group and anti-immigrant attitudes, than economic and social competition between groups (Schneider, 2008: 53). Similarly, Sniderman *et al.* (2004: 43) found that concerns surrounding Dutch national identity and culture had a more significant impact upon ethnic attitudes and behaviour than economic concerns, and immigrants' lack of cultural integration was of considerably greater significance than a lack of economic integration with regards to evoking opposition to immigration.

Identity issues are at the heart of many ethnic conflicts and anti-immigrant attitudes globally, and during relatively good economic conditions, concerns about conflicting group identities and values may overshadow economic and material concerns (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 282). Several studies have revealed that concerns about national identity have increased substantially in the Netherlands since the turn of the millennium, with the majority of public discussion surrounding threats to Dutch identity and culture focussing on Islam in particular, which has come to be identified as a symbol of the challenges associated with ethnic minorities and cultural diversity (Coenders *et al.*, 2008: 282). As mentioned in the previous section, the economic marginalisation of the Muslim minority in the Netherlands and their social deficits vis-à-vis the majority Dutch population suggest that Muslims represent less an economic threat in terms of competing over scarce resources such as houses and jobs, and more a symbolic and cultural source of competition. Therefore, there is not so much evidence of economic competition between an ethnic Dutch majority and Muslim minority, as there is evidence of cultural conflict over norms and values and concerns about identity (Savelkoul *et al.*, 2010: 4).

The research of Sniderman *et al.* (2004: 45, 46) on the Netherlands similarly found support for the hypothesis that cultural conflict is the main factor in inducing negative responses to immigrant minority out-groups. Though economic threats at both the personal and national level were a significant source of hostility towards all immigrant groups, concerns about national identity and perceived threats to Dutch culture were substantially stronger predictors of hostility and exclusionary responses towards minority groups, regardless of whether the group was Muslim or not (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 40). The data used for these analyses were however gathered between 1997 and 1998, before September 2001 and the murders of van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn – events which were influential in steering the Dutch immigration and integration debates in a more restrictionist direction, centring greater attention on Islam and Muslims.

According to the 2008 TTI survey, the Dutch were the most optimistic about the cultural potential of immigration (72%) to improve Dutch society via exposure to new ideas and customs. Over the course of the first year of the financial crisis however, Dutch perceptions about the positive cultural influence of immigration decreased markedly: 60% of respondents evaluated immigration's cultural influence positively in 2009, after which the level of these attitudes remained stable, at 59% in 2010 (TTI Topline data 2010). This finding does suggest, interestingly, that economic conditions may well have an influence on *cultural* evaluations of out-groups. This trend also largely appears to mirror the aforementioned shift in Dutch sentiments about whether immigration presents more of a problem or opportunity: a strong decrease in positive evaluations from 2008 to 2009, after which the period from 2009 to 2010 does not see a marked shift in attitudes. In 2009, of those considering immigration more of a problem than opportunity (45%), a majority (58%) considered immigration to impact Dutch culture negatively, suggesting that the majority of those with anti-immigration sentiments are motivated by perceptions of *cultural* threat (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 985). The implication is that the Dutch public's perceptions of immigration in general are closely connected to *cultural* evaluations of this process. Perceptions about the cultural credentials of out-groups are important not only for overall evaluations of immigration, but also for understanding *changes* in the extent to which immigration is perceived in a positive light, or with greater scepticism. The negligible change in perceptions about the impact of immigration on the Dutch labour market from 2008 to 2010 (in terms of immigrants' perceived impact on wages and the employment opportunities of natives), thus lends credence to this possibility that the shift towards greater Dutch scepticism vis-à-vis immigration during the financial crisis is associated more with less favourable *cultural* evaluations of immigration, than less favourable economic evaluations of immigration.

Whilst this discussion has distinguished between the material and non-material determinants of negative group sentiment, threats to cultural identity and economic self-interest are not mutually exclusive and considerations of material and non-material threats are very much "entangled" (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 41). It has been suggested, for instance, that perceptions of threat to the national economy have a "strong symbolic component", where an essentially economic sense of threat can translate into a threat to national identity (Sniderman *et al.*, 2004: 42). Material and non-material concerns occupy a dynamic place in public discourse and are constantly shifting: whereas a particular period may result in public prioritisation of non-material and symbolic concerns related to national identity and culture, other circumstances may see material and economic concerns hold greater sway over attitudes towards immigrant out-groups and immigration. The relative importance of economic and cultural threats in contributing to negative perceptions is therefore context-dependent. Sniderman *et al.* (2004: 47) found that when the issue of culture assumes heightened significance, it generates as powerful a response proportionately among those

least concerned about a threat to Dutch culture, as it does among those most concerned about this issue. This demonstrates the mobilisation potential of cultural and symbolic concerns in Dutch society generally, even among those for whom the issue is not a perpetual concern. Even in the context of economic recession in the Netherlands, where public prioritisation was indeed accorded to issues pertaining to the national economy, perceptions of immigrant out-groups and immigration appear to be dominated by a cultural logic.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter therefore finds some support for the Realistic Group Conflict Theory hypothesis insofar as perceptions of cultural and non-material threat are concerned. The economic dimensions of this theory however are less relevant to the Netherlands under the circumstances of the global financial crisis: despite the less favourable economic conditions in which attitudinal shifts towards immigration and immigrants were observed, there is not much evidence from the *Transatlantic Trends: Immigration* studies to suggest that immigrants have been perceived as a greater economic threat to in-group interests. This implies that the considerably more negative sentiments towards immigration witnessed from 2008 to 2009 were not motivated by perceptions of material threat. As questions pertaining to immigration and integration in the Netherlands appear to be evaluated more from a cultural than economic perspective, an association between economic conditions and *cultural* evaluations of immigration and immigrant out-groups is more likely. The “failure” of Islamic groups to integrate into the Dutch labour market, for instance, is considered a question of cultural difference. From this perspective then, the economic marginalisation of Dutch Muslim reflects unsuccessful *cultural* integration patterns (Gustin and Ziebarth, 2010: 984). This possible association between less favourable economic conditions and heightened perceptions of cultural threat is deserving of greater exploratory analysis.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

At the heart of the debate surrounding immigration and integration in the Netherlands, especially where this concerns Muslims and Islam, are questions about norms and values. Indeed, Akkerman (2005: 346) comments that “the extent to which the debate about integration and immigration in the Netherlands has been dominated by the Enlightenment framework is remarkable”. This “Enlightenment lens” was already developed in 1991, when Frits Bolkestein, then-leader of the VVD, attacked the political correctness of the Dutch left and warned against the denigration of enlightened Western principles. This framework for approaching integration and immigration topics was employed more dominantly when the LPF took the reins of this discourse (Akkerman, 2005: 346). Research has consistently shown that the Dutch are among the most concerned Europeans about cultural integration issues, and immigrants’ subscription to national values and norms is prioritised over all other preconditions for citizenship. This chapter offers a discussion of some of the core liberal values espoused and cherished by Dutch society and concludes with a consideration of liberal democratic political culture in the Netherlands in this age of cultural diversity.

### **6.2 A RE-EVALUATION OF ESSENTIAL LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC VALUES?**

The intention for this section is to provide answers to the research questions posed in Chapter 1, by drawing from the discussions and conclusions presented in the preceding chapters. Qualified answers will be given to questions about key liberal democratic values such as equality; tolerance; secularism; the freedom of religious expression; free speech and anti-discrimination. The overall intention is to ascertain what the Dutch experience in terms of its citizenship and integration policy, religious pluralism, patterns of voting behaviour, and rising levels of support for the populist right, reveals about the state of liberal democracy in the Netherlands.

#### **6.2.1 Equality**

*Is “equality” about embracing diversity and multiculturalism or does it instead involve efforts to entrench a dominant and homogenising status quo?*

Along with countries such as the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden, the Netherlands is considered to have a deeply-entrenched sense of superiority about the way in which society has been organised in accordance with a distinctive set of “Dutch” values (European Commission, *Perceptions of the EU*,

2001). As shown in Chapter 5, Dutch respondents in public opinion surveys are consistently the most ardent supporters of immigrants' conformity to national cultural values as the most important precondition for citizenship. Such notions about "Dutch" cultural superiority indicate an ingrained sense of cultural hierarchy among the majority. Equality between societal groups, irrespective of whether they constitute a majority or minority, is essential for genuine integration. Aside from the practical challenges associated with identifying the best manner in which to go about facilitating integration, there appears to be a fundamental problem with how integration is conceptualised in the Dutch context. The turn towards an assimilationist strategy heightens the asymmetrical nature of this process, and requirements that immigrants shed their identities, assimilate Dutch values and culture, provide "proof" of loyalty via citizenship and distance themselves from Islam, certainly do not reflect the EU's conceptualisation of accommodation as a mutual, two-way process (van Bruinessen in Vink, 2007: 343). The EU's understanding of integration implies concession and compromise on the part of all groups for the achievement of social cohesion and broad-based societal participation – and not merely the assimilation of out-groups into the overarching, dominant "culture" of the majority.

The implication of requiring that minority cultural identity be relinquished and that immigrants don the cultural norms of the majority, is that groups do not approach one another as equals. As long as immigrant integration takes place within a context of perceived group hierarchy and on asymmetrical terms, genuine integration can only ever be partial. Central to the question of equality however, is the level at which this is to be accorded to all within society, since the goals of individual equality and group equality cannot be pursued simultaneously. From a strictly liberal perspective then, the principle of individual equality cannot be reconciled with Muslim demands for group rights, as the latter are seen to encroach upon the rights of other individuals and to transgress the private boundaries of cultural autonomy (Fukuyama, 2006: 16). The call to ban the headscarf in the Netherlands is one example of a formal effort to entrench – or perhaps more aptly, enforce – individual equality.

### **6.2.2 Tolerance**

*How tolerant is liberal democratic political culture in the Netherlands today, in the context of more restrictionist immigration strategies and integration policy's turn towards an assimilationist, rather than multicultural, approach?*

It has been said that Dutch voters are starting to "reconsider...their famous tolerance" in light of cultural anxieties about immigrants not necessarily sharing the same values (Sterling 2011). The Dutch pride themselves in their long history of tolerance, but this tradition was part of a wider strategy of non-

interference with other religious-ideological pillars; in the private realm, the Dutch are considered rather socially conservative (van der Veer, 2006: 118; Fukuyama, 2006: 14). The ability to display tolerance towards cultural diversity is considered a function of the particular “self-understanding” of the dominant culture of a society: whilst no community is inherently “tolerant” or “intolerant”, the extent to which the majority thinks of itself as tolerant is important for structuring group behaviour (Mahajan, 2007: 328, 329). Dutch society’s experience in accommodating religious-ideological pluralism has been instrumental in shaping a collective consciousness about “Dutch tolerance”, which is regularly invoked in public and political discourse and in discussions about the Netherlands. The pervasiveness of the notion of “Dutch tolerance” makes the recent turn towards restrictionist immigration policy and assimilationist integration strategies all the more seemingly contradictory to the “Dutch way”. The extent to which this idea about a tolerant Dutch “self” has been able to constrain negative reactions towards immigrant out-groups is difficult to determine. This vision of tolerance has however been challenged by the Dutch right, the rise of which has occurred not only in spite of a tolerant self-understanding, but largely as a *result* of it. The traditions of political correctness and cultural relativism in the Netherlands are two ways in which perceptions about Dutch tolerance have manifested themselves. Pim Fortuyn was especially vocal in his criticisms of Dutch political correctness, which he blamed for promoting a naïve vision of society and for enabling avoidance of sensitive, albeit critical, issues pertaining to immigrant integration.

The reassertion of “Dutch” national identity and culture of late evinces a less-tolerant self-understanding in the Netherlands. Tolerance of cultural diversity is inextricably linked to multiculturalism and the turn towards an assimilationist policy frame for integration also suggests an altered Dutch self-perception that has been less able to keep in check the cultural nationalism of the Dutch majority. It has been suggested that the character of societal tolerance is important for multiculturalism’s resilience within a particular context, and for the way in which cultural diversity is approached. Mahajan (2007: 329, 330) distinguishes between a liberal and Orientalist conception of tolerance: the former prioritises individual autonomy, whereas the latter sees the individual as rooted within a particular community – a “situated self” – which teaches tolerance of other communities and their different interpretations of the “good life” irrespective of the content of these interpretations. The Orientalist conception of tolerance and a so-called “situated self” is therefore considered more amenable to the toleration of other communities and their distinctive worldviews than the liberal conception of tolerance and the autonomous self. Though tolerance stemming from a strong sense of “situated self” is not necessary in order for multiculturalism to thrive within a particular society, it is thought to restrain an “assertive cultural majoritarianism” from encroaching on the cultural space of communities (Mahajan, 2007: 332). From the perspective of a liberal conception of tolerance, those choices that do not reflect “the ideals of autonomy”, and which are

informed by a group logic, cannot be supported: the liberal notion of tolerance therefore operates within limits and does not universally embrace all conceptions of the “good life” (Mahajan, 2007: 333).

Whilst tolerance cannot be enforced, it appears that setting the boundaries of tolerance in the Netherlands is critical and ultimately, inevitable. This would involve the state playing a more active role in creating a “facilitating environment” and setting the parameters for more meaningful, understanding, and respectful social relations. The state and its institutions do have a responsibility to ensure peaceful and constructive cross-cultural engagement. The promotion of tolerance is possible by defining more clearly the limits of permissible debate and mediating, legally if need be, between potentially conflicting group demands in the wider interests of social harmony and the achievement of the “good society”. Though judicial intervention may appear incompatible with the notion of tolerance in most Western liberal democracies, a degree of mediation is necessary for addressing the inevitable conflicts that arise within multicultural contexts (Mahajan, 2007: 334).

### **6.2.3 Laïcité vs. Freedom of Religious Expression**

*How does the principle of a secular, neutral Dutch state and society conflict with an overtly religious and externalised Islamic presence?*

The extent to which religious expression and visibility is acceptable within secular Dutch society is also undefined, and leads to overblown and hysterical anxieties about an impending “Islamisation” of the Netherlands. Fukuyama (2006: 15) writes that cultural diversity in Europe, the United States and Canada was initially conceived as something that would operate within the private realm, ensuring that the practice and pursuit of cultural diversity would not result in conflict with other individual freedoms or with the overarching liberal social milieu. It is considered the responsibility of the secular state to ensure that all citizens are presented with the same range of choices, to the extent that these do not restrict the scope of choice of any other citizen (Sivanandan in Fekete, 2008: 70). In Europe, the “intrusion” of cultural diversity into the public space has been interpreted as a fundamental threat to liberal democracy, and the liberal principle of religious toleration refers to the idea that religious objectives cannot be pursued in the public realm insofar as they impinge on the religious freedom of others. Prior to Muslim immigration to the Netherlands, those legacies of pillarisation that did persist were “quite harmless” in secular Dutch society; as Muslim numbers in the country grew however, the enduring religious infrastructure set a precedent for this new religious identity (Fukuyama, 2006: 16). The legacy of providing space in Dutch society for community organisation is therefore expected to continue to challenge efforts at separating church and state. Like the blurred boundaries of tolerance, so the extent to

which the freedom of individual religious expression can acceptably encroach upon the rights of those belonging to a particular religious grouping has been left unaddressed (Fukuyama, 2006: 7). Western liberalism has therefore traditionally been conceptualised as freedom at the individual-level: the freedom of particular cultural communities to defend their own group identities is only now increasingly being recognised as a central issue (Fukuyama, 2006: 7).

#### **6.2.4 Freedom of Expression vs. Anti-Discrimination**

*To what extent does the cause for freedom of expression, advanced by the Dutch radical right, undermine the anti-discrimination pledge in the Dutch constitution?*

Van Gogh's outrageous and derogatory provocations about religion walked a fine line between exercising freedom of speech and causing undue incensement – the same goes for the discourse employed by Fortuyn and Wilders. The extreme offense that van Gogh's statements caused Muslims in particular, though acceptable from a liberal perspective in the name of free speech and the freedom to criticise, is an example of liberty pushed to the brink – the consequences of which, as seen, can be fatal. Mahajan (2007: 334) writes that European democracies tend to overlook the “feelings and sentiments” of individuals in society as well as the potential for confrontation that can be injurious to relations between individuals and societal groups when the freedom to express is taken too far. Failure to take into consideration the sensitivity surrounding specific topics for specific groups has the potential to be seriously harmful to social harmony. This was seen, for instance, in several European contexts after the publication of the cartoons of the Prophet (Mahajan, 2007: 334). The extreme to which Wilders has chosen to exercise his own right to speak his mind has come at the expense of his personal liberty. Though clearly a sacrifice Wilders has chosen to make in the name of his particular conception of the “good life”, this raises questions about the costs of pushing liberalism to the limits. Perhaps the important question is not so much whether the freedom to express undermines anti-discrimination efforts, but what the implications of unfettered free speech are for social harmony. Wilders' recent trial for hate speech went ahead as it was deemed in society's interest for there to be greater clarification about free speech laws, given general public confusion surrounding the topic. Wilders' subsequent acquittal has however only widened the parameters of acceptable debate in the Netherlands: the boundaries between free speech, offence and disrespect – if not quite “hate” speech – have been blurred even further.



## 6.3 PROSPECTS FOR DUTCH LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

### 6.3.1 The Paradoxes and Limitations of (Dutch) Liberal Democracy

This thesis has highlighted a number of inherent contradictions within liberal democracy. Legitimate debates surrounding the nature of democracy (direct democracy versus representative and pluralist types), the position of religion within society, and the preponderance of the rule of law over the will of the majority, are all contentions that the Dutch national debate on immigration and integration has brought to the fore. Furthermore, certain “core principles” of liberal democratic ideology seem to contradict other similarly central precepts, prompting debate over which tenet should be prioritised in circumstances when they appear to “clash”. This is evident regarding the tension surrounding the right to express freely and to criticise, versus concerted measures to combat the incidence of discrimination. It would seem, therefore, that problems arise with a lack of conceptual clarity and common understanding of what it means to be “tolerant” or to foster “equality”, for example. It also appears that these principles have boundaries and that it is important that the limits of tolerance and limits to which religious affiliation may be expressed publicly are defined and more importantly, are collectively understood and respected. The development of a coherent political culture is important in this regard, seeing as these limits cannot in reality be enforced or formally restricted without compromising the very freedoms that liberal democracy seeks to promote. The emergence of the populist radical right is very much a reflection of these contradictions. Peripheral parties have been able to capitalise upon and exploit these inconsistencies to their electoral advantage, by advancing a selective agenda that amounts to a partial pursuit of liberal democracy.

An important paradox of liberal societies relates to the tension between endorsing autonomy and personal choice, and the reluctance to endorse preferences to participate in a way of life centred on the community (Mahajan, 2007: 332). Fukuyama (2006: 6) similarly talks about that “hole” in liberal democratic political theory that is the liberal conception of political freedom in terms of the state versus the individual, as opposed to the state versus particular societal groups. The accommodation of different lifestyles is thus considered more difficult in liberal societies than in contexts where individual liberty is *not* preponderant and where the expression of community and group identity is *not* regarded as threatening. In liberal societies, the “social contract” exists between individual citizens and the state as a means to curb the relentless pursuit of individual self-interest. Societies in which individual freedom is left unfettered will dissolve into a “state of nature” characterised by perpetual civil war (Heywood, 2007: 36, 37). Many of the central paradoxes within liberal democracy stem from this tension between individuals’ “inner and outer selves” and the disjuncture between individual freedoms and the ideals of the group or community (Fukuyama, 2006: 8). It is not enough then, in the contemporary age, to recognise rights to dignity,

respect and equality at the level of the individual only: modern identity politics increasingly demands recognition at the group level. Immigrant groups in the Netherlands, and Muslims especially as the most marginalised out-group vis-à-vis the Dutch majority, need to be incorporated into Dutch society on an equal footing not only as individuals, but also as a cultural community deserving of the same respect and rights to recognition as the Dutch majority. We therefore witness groups in liberal societies demanding the same rights to recognition as those rights that are accorded to the individual.

Though the Netherlands perhaps needs to rethink the role of the group in integration, liberalism cannot ultimately be centred on group rights, as not all groups subscribe to liberal precepts. It is impossible for liberal democracy to be culturally neutral as liberal societies espouse their own set of values which are centred on the equality and dignity of all individuals (Fukuyama, 2006: 15). Indeed, it has become apparent within the last two decades that the liberal state does not advance a wholly neutral, or universal, conception of the ideal society (Mahajan, 2007: 317). For all the claims of liberalism's "universalism", and the fact that this ideology has so permeated Western societies and lifestyles that it has assumed an almost "given" rank as the "natural" state of affairs, increasing challenges to the liberal state have necessitated more critical and questioning perspectives towards this ideology. Global terrorism, the relentless advancement of globalisation bringing into contact different cultures and ideological systems, and greater cultural diversity, are some of the challenges to this notion of liberal "neutrality". It has thus become increasingly apparent that the liberal state does indeed peddle its own, very much *situated*, conception of the "good life" – a conception that is not necessarily universally applicable, or one to which different groups commonly aspire. In this light, Fukuyama (2006: 15) maintains that basic liberal principles should be regarded as the condition for all cultures seeking participation and protection in modern liberal democracies and that all deserve equal treatment as *individuals*, not as members of cultural groups. This harkens back to the idea of needing to define and set the limits of inclusion and acceptable behaviour in liberal democracies. This is especially important for an ideology which is very much about being "anti-extremist", for it is within delineated boundaries that the maximum extent of tolerance, equality and freedom can be realised.

### **6.3.2 Liberal Democratic Political Culture in the Age of Cultural Diversity**

The challenges to liberal democracy have become more apparent in the twenty-first century. Multiculturalism in Western liberal democracies has come "under siege" from global terrorism, which has cast doubt on the desirability and appropriateness of the multicultural logic of acknowledging and accommodating cultural diversity (Mahajan, 2007: 317). Radical Islamism has given rise to more prevalent "othering" processes and to the "demonisation" of cultural difference in societies where a

“cultural fault-line” has become more apparent, particularly post-9/11 (Mahajan, 2007: 317, 318, 323). Aside from the security threat this phenomenon poses in the contemporary “age of terror”, the fundamentally anti-liberal ideology of radical Islamism is problematic for liberal democratic states. These circumstances have seen the cultural sphere emerge as the new “arena of conflict in liberal democracies”, which has important implications for the survivability of multiculturalism and indeed the whole question about whether liberal democracies should strive towards the accommodation and fostering of cultural diversity in the first place (Mahajan, 2007: 318). Terrorism is seen to strike at the very heart of democracy and multiculturalism: a so-called “culture of silence” reduces citizens and politicians to agency-less “spectators” in the public sphere where leaders’ agenda-setting powers are undermined along with their capacity to determine the conditions of debate and discourse (Mahajan, 2007: 321). Global terror also fans stereotypes and provides justification for the demonisation of the “other”, further weakening the prospects for fostering a multicultural society (Mahajan, 2007: 321).

Whilst acknowledging the considerable ideological and security threats posed by fundamental Islamism, Fukuyama (2006: 5) asserts that a more critical and long-term concern confronting liberal democracies in the twenty-first century is the challenge of integrating immigrant minority groups – especially Muslims – into European societies. European democracies are considered to have become both the “breeding ground” and “battlefront” in the clash between radical Islamism and liberal democracy – a struggle not resulting from tensions between traditional culture and the forces of modernity, but instead stemming from the fact of radical Islam being a thoroughly *modern* expression of identity politics and very much a consequence of the modernisation process (Fukuyama, 2006: 6, 10). For all the talk of a “cultural clash” between radical Islamism and Western liberal democracy, the former does not stem from inherent “cultural” traits within Islam, but is a product of a “deterritorialised” Islam in the modern age of globalised migration (Fukuyama, 2006: 10). In Western societies, Islamic identity is not supported by the external environment and pressures to conform to dominant cultural norms result in a dislocation between Muslims’ “inner” identities and “outer” behaviour in society. Radical Islamism is therefore rooted in the “quest for identity” that this cultural dislocation and alienation induces: jihadism, with its universalist ideology, is thus considered attractive to many second- and third-generation European Muslims (Fukuyama, 2006: 10, 11).

The Dutch public accords huge priority to questions of integration, though dissatisfaction with integration efforts is manifested more in hostility towards the government in failing to manage this issue, than in negative sentiments towards immigrants themselves. Though the nature of public debate, patterns of voting behaviour and integration strategies in the Netherlands all point towards more public support for

restricting immigration and emphasising the cultural assimilation of immigrants, there seems to be general acceptance of the fact that immigrant and foreign communities are a permanent feature of Dutch society. The LPF and PVV have both firmly rejected the option of expelling immigrants and the content of their political demands focus, or did focus, on integration topics. The central debate in the Netherlands thus seems to be how to manage and respond to a distinctively Islamic presence in particular – especially in light of perceptions that many Muslims are “unwilling” to integrate. This salient immigrant integration issue in the Netherlands has strong cultural overtones, particularly since the shift towards assimilation accords less focus to the socio-economic integration of immigrants and more attention to incorporating foreigners into society on a cultural level, as discussed in Chapter Two. Indeed, as shown in Chapter Five, the pervasiveness of symbolic and cultural concerns among the Dutch public towards immigration and integration over the course of the last two decades – and in the last 10 years especially – has meant that despite considerably less favourable economic conditions in the Netherlands in the context of the global financial crisis, perceptions of immigrant out-groups and immigration appear to be dominated by a cultural logic.

As evidenced by the Dutch context, the inadequate integration of its Muslim population has already erupted in violence, as well as a considerable backlash from the populist right (Fukuyama, 2006: 15). However, it is not only the root causes of these outbursts stemming from unsuccessful integration strategies that require addressing, but also their *provocations*, which have drawn far less research interest. Behavioural changes from both sides – Muslim groups as well as the dominant Dutch population – are necessary to resolve the question of how better to integrate Muslims in the Netherlands. Fukuyama (2006: 15) proposes more active efforts to integrate non-Western groups into a common liberal culture which accords less emphasis to group recognition and rights – unlike the style of the multicultural model which allowed cultural groups excessive authority to set their own guidelines for members’ behaviour, out of a “misplaced sense of respect” for cultural diversity. The increasing fragmentation of the Dutch electorate, discussed in Chapter Four, implies that coalition governments in the Netherlands will increasingly come to depend upon the support of smaller parties, which appeal to more specific voter concerns. This suggests that minority interests may come to assume greater electoral salience, and that future coalition governments will be obliged to pay greater heed to minority concerns. Minorities may then come to wield greater control over politics in the Netherlands, demonstrating the way in which the process of democratic politics may serve to “bring minorities within the main fold” (Mahajan, 2007: 326).

Europe’s lack of a distinctive, cohesive identity has spurred claims that Europeans are “afraid” and unsure of their own identity and as a result perceive Islam as a threat: the somewhat “remarkable” reaffirmation

of Europe's Christian heritage has been one response to the growing demographic reality of Islam in Europe (Fekete, 2008: 16; Schori Liang, 2007: 21). Popular culture has traditionally been subject to criticism by liberals, as it is seen as a source of conformism which undermines individual autonomy (Heywood, 2007: 317). Despite liberal societies generally being recognised as having weak identities, and some argue that this is in fact a source of strength, a sense of national identity does nevertheless prevail in the majority of modern liberal democracies (Fukuyama, 2006: 12). In a comparison of American and European identity, Cremona (2010) maintains that American culture is a "political culture" in the sense that it is both shaped and constrained by political institutions, thereby keeping "forces of cultural intolerance" in check. Despite attempts to forge a continental and coherent "European" identity founded upon tolerance and political pluralism, this is in reality "much more confused" than the American version, and is described by Fukuyama (2006: 13) as something that "comes from the head rather than the heart". The lack of a comparably robust and coherent political culture in Europe, shared by all European citizens, has allowed mobilisation of national populations along anti-immigration lines. This has to a large degree been the result of perceptions of threat that have materialised in the aftermath of expansion and increasing levels of immigration (Cremona, 2010). Although European cultures are by no means inherently intolerant, the mutual exclusivity of politics and culture prevents cultural orientations from being reigned in and indirectly enables a culture of intolerance and political extremism. The inseparability of American politics and culture and the combination of political and civic values accessible to all Americans, has served to unite a vastly heterogeneous population by their politics, meaning that political extremism is simply anathema to the "American way" (Cremona, 2010; Fukuyama, 2006: 12). Wolin (2011: 65) similarly emphasises the role of European political culture in nurturing these universal norms to act as a counterweight against the "seductions and temptations of the new illiberalism". Political culture is therefore just as important as a normative guideline for behaviour as it is in serving a "constraining" function.

The recent resurgence of parties endorsing national identity sentiments is evidence of deeper engagement on the topic of what constitutes "Dutch" or "European" identity. This is indeed a necessary discussion in the context of increasing cultural diversity. The achievement of consensus around core liberal values is desirable in order to persuade populations of particular principles to secure social harmony and accommodate public preferences – democracy is not about dodging the will of citizens, as has commonly been the case in efforts to balance liberalism and democracy in Europe (Cremona, 2010). Evidence of more frank and honest discussion in the Netherlands is a positive development and the degree of public engagement in the immigration and integration debates is considerable. Despite the "valuelessness" of contemporary postmodernism, societal values and norms appear to have assumed heightened importance

in the context of mounting cultural diversity in the Netherlands and further afield (Fukuyama, 2006: 18). This enables populations to affirm common values and to construct and advance shared conceptions about the content of the “good life”. In increasingly pluralistic societies, a more robust sense of identity is necessary in order that populations do not, in Fukuyama’s (2006: 19) words, become “overwhelmed by people who are more sure about who they are”.

## **6.4 CONCLUSION**

The intention of this concluding chapter has been, primarily, to answer the research questions posed at the outset of this thesis, in light of the discussions and conclusions presented in the preceding chapters. Whilst observation of the Dutch context does not lead to the conclusion that a fundamental re-evaluation of essential societal values has taken place, it has been emphasised that greater definition, and delimitation, of core liberal democratic values is needed. This chapter has additionally situated this discussion of immigration, integration and liberal democracy in the Netherlands within a wider present-day context that reflects upon the implications of cultural diversity for modern identities in contemporary liberal societies.

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