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Rethinking governance from the bottom up: the case of Muslim students in Dutch universities

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Abstract This paper discusses the results of a study of faculty and university staff at two major universities in the Netherlands: the University of Amsterdam and the Free University of Amsterdam. I sought to understand how faculty viewed the role of the university in relationship to national and European goals promoting social cohesion and the integration of Islamic minorities in Dutch society. To a person, my informants were convinced that European universities did not, *and should not*, play a major role in promoting social cohesion. Some faculty members were merely indifferent to the problem and the university's role; others were actively hostile to the idea that the university should address what was clearly, in their minds, a state political problem. The paper discusses the governance implications of promoting social cohesion within these challenging institutional contexts, by building social networks among students and reinterpreting traditional policies of pillarization.

Keywords Governance · Immigration · Social cohesion · Organizational change

It has become conventional wisdom in recent years that Europe faces a daunting challenge of social cohesion in the face of increasingly hostile and radical Islamic immigrants residing in European cities. In the year 2006 alone, there were four major books that addressed how the "growing threat" of "radical Islam" is "destroying the west from within" (Ali 2006; Bawer 2006; Berlinski 2006; Buruma 2006). The murder of two prominent public figures in the Netherlands, Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn, have been particularly highlighted as examples of how Islamic fundamentalism has run amok among the liberal states of Europe.

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The Netherlands has thus become a focus of major world concern in what is now commonly termed the "global war on terror" (Fukuyama 2006). Major questions have been raised about the ability of European states to create institutionalized mechanisms that will improve the integration of Muslim immigrants and especially their children, who often feel as if they are caught between two quite disparate cultures. It has thus become a goal in the Netherlands, and within the EU more broadly, to increase the social cohesion of the country using state programmes and resources (European Commission 2004).

Higher education, in particular, is seen by many as a means by which social cohesion can be promoted, by improving the integration of minorities, providing equal access to all students, and providing a location for debates and discussions of major political and social issues. This is true in the scholarly literature as well, which increasingly seeks to elaborate both our knowledge of the benefits of social cohesion and the role of higher education in providing those social benefits (Calhoun 1998; Capshaw 2005; Gradstein and Justman 2002; Green and Preston 2001; Helly 2003; Heyneman 2000; 2003; Mansbridge 1998; Moiseyenko 2005; Neave 2005; Panjwani 2005).

This paper is a study of faculty and research staff at two major universities in the Netherlands: the University of Amsterdam and the Free University of Amsterdam. I sought to understand how faculty viewed the role of the university in relationship to national and European goals that promote social cohesion and the integration of Islamic minorities in Dutch society. To a person, my informants were convinced that European universities did not, *and should not*, play a major role in promoting social cohesion. While some faculty members were merely indifferent to the university's role, others were actively hostile to the idea that universities should address what they believed to be a state political problem.

Considering this faculty resistance, and the power of faculties in continental universities to shape and control university responses, the desire of the Dutch government and the European Union to take a "top-down" approach to promoting social cohesion must be seriously reconsidered. In this environment, government-driven efforts to promote social cohesion may not be the most effective means to meet these important goals. This leads us to examine the assumptions underlying the social cohesion literature, in particular how government-defined goals of social cohesion can be promoted when a certain degree of organizational conflict is both legitimate and inevitable.

Scholarly literature

Social cohesion is an old question in the sociology of western societies. Durkheim (1897), for example, argued that the low degree of social control and integration among Protestants led to an *anomie*, or alienation from social norms, resulting in far higher suicide rates among 19th century Protestants than similarly situated Catholics. The increased integration of people into society provides many benefits to individuals, in terms of their satisfaction, happiness, and mental health, and to society, through reduced conflict, increased productivity, and general quality of life. Education reduces anomie by reinforcing social solidarity, by transmitting a common culture, and by reflecting and serving the division of labour (Durkheim 1893).

Defining social cohesion is not one of social science's simplest tasks. Many scholars have sought to understand the nature of group membership (Parsons 1951; Allport 1962; Friedkin 2004). Festinger (1950) describes social cohesion as "the total field of forces which act on members to remain in the group." Other similar definitions have been used since the 1950s, and later were elaborated by scholars investigating the socializing forces

of the school (Dreeben 1967; Coleman 1987, 1988). The problem with these definitions is that they are so transparently functionalist, reifying the status quo and making it difficult to understand cohesion during organizational conflict.

Economists are increasingly interested in defining the economic and national development benefits of social cohesion (Gradstein and Justman 2002; Heyneman 2000, 2003; Green and Preston 2001). Social cohesion seems to contribute to economic productivity in western countries, and conversely, a lack of social cohesion is a major stumbling block to economic and social improvement (Heyneman 2000). Economic productivity may be improved because social cohesion reduces the social distance between individuals, increasing the efficiency of local markets (Gradstein and Justman 2002). There also seems to be a positive correlation between high levels of trust and social outcomes such as lower crime and economic productivity (Green and Preston 2001).

Increasingly sociologists see cohesion as connections in a social network that can be specified and measured (Moody and White 2003; McPherson and Smith-Lovin 2002; Frank 1996; Frank and Yamamoto 1998). Social networks among students have been shown empirically to improve school attachment (Moody and White 2003) and increase the diffusion of computer use in schools (Frank et al. 2004). Among workers, the ability to find employment has been shown to depend upon embeddedness in a social network, demonstrating "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter 1973, 1985).

If we can make an empirical case for the benefits of social networks, and for the benefits of social cohesion at the national level, then we must ask how government can legitimately pursue these goals. None of the cases described above—school attachment, computer use, employment—were driven by government action. Even in cases where increased trust and other indicators of social cohesion seem to be correlated with economic productivity, there is little evidence that this is the result of government intervention, but rather a kind of "virtuous cycle" where the socializing role of education improves citizenship and inculcates social norms, leading to reduced social distance, lower transaction costs between actors in the market, and increased economic productivity. Economic productivity allows the state to increase education funding, reinforcing the socialization process and eliminating the need for corruption.

Assuming social cohesion is a legitimate government objective, what is the most effective means by which government policy can help meet this objective? Further, what role can higher education play in facilitating this objective? It would be simple to conclude that government and higher education seem to play no role whatsoever, and that the implementation of government policy in social cohesion would be tricky at best. This would be little comfort, however, to developing countries in which a lack of social cohesion had led to corruption, the marginalization and stigmatization of minority groups, and the suppression of knowledge about major health and political issues (Lesko, this volume; Heyneman, this volume).

Method

To investigate the issue of social cohesion within a national context, the Netherlands was selected as the primary site for analysis. In the wake of the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, and terrorist bombings in New York, London, and Madrid, many see the integration of Muslim immigrants as the major public policy issue within Europe. Given statements by Dutch leaders, and those within the EU and the Council of Europe, it

seemed natural to study the role of Dutch higher education in promoting social cohesion through the integration of Muslim students.

This paper relies primarily upon interviews with 17 university faculty members and research staff at the University of Amsterdam and the Free University of Amsterdam, the two major urban universities in the Netherlands. Institutions in Amsterdam were selected due to their proximity to Muslim student populations, and because they vary greatly in their proportion of Muslim students; while few Muslim students enroll at secular UvA, many attend the Free University, which was historically sectarian. Student leaders in the Muslim community were solicited vigorously but none agreed to participate. Nonetheless, faculty and staff hold the power to make decisions over curriculum and admissions, and are therefore a better indicator of the possibilities for university action.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, each of the informants was assured of their confidentiality, and their names, disciplines, and institutional affiliations are not reported here. (The departments are often so small that names could be imputed with enough information, such as gender). In general, faculty in the social sciences and professions were solicited most often, again as the most proximate to the substantive issue being discussed. To reinforce confidentiality, I chose to use handwritten notes rather than asking subjects to record their interviews. This resulted in more honest and candid feedback, but in some instances it was difficult to reproduce full quotes to serve as data supporting the veracity of the assertions made in the paper. As a result, a perspective is only discussed if at least five informants are noted as having the perspective. Quotes are provided whenever possible within the limitations of the interview situation. Documents are used to provide the perspective of national and EU leaders, who were not available to me for direct interviews.

This is data with many obvious limitations. Faculty and staff were selected almost exclusively based on their willingness to participate in the project and their availability during the duration of the project, which could only take place during the summer – a notoriously difficult time to recruit faculty and staff. There are no transcripts, so the data representations are thin and I am forced to paraphrase the perspectives of many informants to ensure that their views are included in the paper. The strengths of the data are that the views are often so universal, and the lack of variation makes the inferences more credible. Nonetheless, I encourage readers to treat these data merely as an illustrative case of the difficulties in implementing social cohesion policy within a specific set of university contexts.

Islam and European politics

In November 2004, a Dutch filmmaker named Theo Van Gogh—the great-grand nephew of the famous artist—was bicycling down Linnaeusstraat in Amsterdam on his way to work, just as thousands of Amsterdammers do every morning. On this morning, however, Van Gogh was stopped, shot eight times with a small pistol, and a five-page note was stabbed into his chest, while Van Gogh begged for his life. His murderer, Mohammed Bouyeri, was himself born and raised in Amsterdam in a moderate Muslim household. He was 26 years old.

Bouyeri was incited by Van Gogh's work on *Submission*, a film addressing the issue of female oppression in Muslim culture. The screenwriter, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, was a Dutch legislator who escaped from Somalia under an assumed name to avoid an arranged marriage. In recent years, Ali has been a loud and powerful voice in the Netherlands, and increasingly around the world, arguing that male supremacy and the oppression of women

is institutionalized in Muslim religion and culture, and is therefore incompatible with Western values (Ali 2006). In the film, the bodies of naked Muslim women, knelt in prayer, are inscribed with verses from the Koran that define the role of women in Islamic society.

Van Gogh's murder was the second major attack in the Netherlands in just over two years, in a country that is famously free of violent crime (Buruma 2006). In 2002, The Netherlands was on the verge of a political revolution, with the nearly inevitable election to the position of prime minister of Pim Fortuyn, a Dutch nationalist vigorously opposed to immigration and openly disdainful of Islamic culture. In a combination of political views nearly unthinkable in the U.S., Fortuyn was a vigorous supporter of gay rights, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia, just as he was equally supportive of highly restrictive immigration policies. He declared Islam to be a "backward culture" and that "wherever Islam rules, it is just terrible" (Buruma 2006).

Fortuyn, like Van Gogh, was assassinated on the open streets, in this case a radio station parking lot in Hilversum, a suburb of Amsterdam. Despite Fortuyn's famous opposition to the growing role of Islam in Dutch society—he was the author of *Against the Islamicisation of Our Culture* (1997)—he was actually killed by a Dutch Christian animal rights activist named Volkert van der Graaf, with Fortuyn's extreme positions against animal rights being named as the cause. Nonetheless, in the Dutch mind the two assassinations are often melded into a single phenomenon that threatens the future of the country and its commitment to liberal Western values.

It is difficult to underestimate the impact of these events on Dutch society. More than two years after the assassination of Van Gogh, the topic of Muslim immigration and integration is clearly the most important national concern, and it dominates national politics. In the political arena, the legacy of Fortuyn has been much stricter immigration policy and hard political talk about the role of Islam in Dutch society.

In recent years, the twin poles of these discussions have been Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a beautiful and passionate Somali with a strong tendency toward self-promotion, and Rita Verdonk, the former Minister of Integration and Immigration in the Dutch government. Verdonk's tough stance on immigration proved popular, although The Netherlands is less strict than some countries, such as Denmark, which have essentially cut off all forms of immigration and routes to citizenship. Ali is more controversial, making sharp statements about Islam in public that are often quietly supported by the Dutch themselves, but presented in a self-promoting way that is quite contrary to the Dutch character.

In light of the developing political situation on the role of Islam in Europe, the European Union has made the improvement of social cohesion a clear government policy objective. The "EU Cohesion Funds" are a major portion of the annual EU budget (Chan et al. 2006). Major leaders in the European Union and the Council of Europe, its academic arm, have made statements declaring social cohesion to be a major priority. The Queen of the Netherlands herself, Queen Beatrix, has declared that the integration of minorities is a major threat to national social cohesion. Social cohesion is considered to be a "major priority" of the Lisbon process, the extension of the Bologna process begun in the 1990s (European Ministers 2005).

According to the Council of Europe, social cohesion is "the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding polarization. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means" (Council of Europe 2004). They acknowledge that social cohesion does not eliminate divisions, but results in satisfactory ways of coping with these divisions. They suggest that social cohesion is improved by acknowledging the civil

rights of all persons, encouraging participation in civil society, and supporting families and assorted other non-controversial measures.

The strategy for improving social cohesion seems to consist exclusively of extending the welfare state: more housing, better social security, improving access to employment, and eliminating child labour. It is not difficult to see the flaw in this approach—it is entirely disconnected from reality. Child labour is evil, but it is not why Muslims feel alienated from European society. Fundamentalist Muslims are largely opposed to most of the major components of the liberal welfare state, and have no interest in seeing it extended. This is not a problem for the document, however, in that it never acknowledges that the "social cohesion problem" has anything to do with Islamic fundamentalism. In fact, none of the documents acknowledge this; it is simply asserted as a social problem.

Results

Based on the interviews conducted with faculty in Amsterdam, three clear themes emerged in relationship to the state's role, social cohesion, and the possible impact of higher education. In each of the three themes, informants defined the problem in such a way as to make it impossible, or highly improbable, for the university to take any significant action to address the problem.

Although I was primarily interested in social cohesion, the specific issue to be discussed was the integration of Muslim students into universities. Based on the interview protocol, three major areas were to be covered. First, there is the question of whether the university or the state should have special access policies for Muslim students, considering that these students tend to come disproportionately from low SES families. Because Dutch universities are open to all students who meet the secondary school qualifications, this is generally defined as a financial issue. In the entire country, there is a single scholarship programme for minority students, a doctoral fellowship for students of Turkish background.

Second, there is the question of whether the curriculum should incorporate topics related to the integration of Muslims into Dutch society, or simply Islam or Muslim culture in general. Subsumed in this topic is whether the university should sponsor extracurricular learning opportunities, such as speakers and invited professorships. Finally, there is also the issue of whether the university should engage the affected communities directly, through recruitment, speaking opportunities, or visits to elementary and secondary schools. This would also include the development and support of student organizations, and determining the degree of political mobilization and community engagement of these groups.

Based on the interviews covering these topics, and with a few notable exceptions, the informants expressed at best indifference and, at worst, open hostility to all of these ideas. This paper seeks to enhance our understanding of why faculty and staff tend to react this way to these ideas, in order to shape our ideas about policy implementation in relationship to social cohesion.

The university as a unitary actor

The interview subjects were openly hostile to the idea that the university had any role, or should have any role, in addressing the issue of Muslim integration or social cohesion more broadly. This feeling was so institutionalized across the faculty that it was taken for granted, and the response often began with a mild chuckle. The questions themselves

characterized me as an impossibly naïve American with no understanding of how universities operate in continental Europe.

This often led to a brief lecture from the interviewee on how academic power is decentralized in the faculties of the university, rather than within a central administration. They often described how nearly all major academic decisions are made within the faculties. Of course this is not very different from how an American research university operates, and a number of the informants caught themselves in mid-sentence. “This is how it is done in America, no?” one staff member asked.

The difference between the two systems is that faculty in the Netherlands do not see “the university” as a singular entity, but rather as a more federal configuration or even as a group of separate colleges that are little more than co-located. (Yet this too recalls the famous quip that American research faculty are united by nothing more than their common desire for better parking.) When I asked one faculty member whether the campus administration should do something to address the problem, my informant laughed quite loudly. “You don’t understand,” she said, shaking her head. “The administration doesn’t do *anything* around here.”

The issue is whether the university is itself a unitary actor with its own interests and goals that are somewhat separate from the interests and goals of the faculties. This is a classic organizational problem around conflicts in goals and objectives (Cyert and March 1963). For my informants, the university was simply a collection of faculties, and the university’s objectives were the collective objectives of the faculties. In this model, any other conception of goals by the university administration or the state is seen as an intrusion upon academic prerogatives. Thus even if the goal is worthy, and most of the informants seemed to pay at least lip service to the idea that Muslim integration was a worthy goal, their conception of the legitimate role of the university as an organization made almost any action distasteful.

Conflicting conceptions of social equity

Most of my informants had a rather conflicting sense of the social equity issues involved with Muslim integration. They were well aware that there are vast differences in socioeconomic status between Dutch Muslims and Protestants, and that these differences seem to persist over multiple generations (Crul and Doomernik 2003; Driessen 2000; Guiraudon et al. 2005; Van Ours and Vennman 2003). These differences are clearly linked to differences in elementary and secondary school preparation. The schools attended by Dutch Muslims are underfunded and have far lower achievement than their Protestant counterparts (Rijkschroeff et al. 2005; Vedder 2006).

Secondary schools in the Netherlands are often split into “white” schools and “black” schools (Vedder 2006). The “black” schools are those populated largely by immigrants, and they are assiduously avoided by the native Dutch population. (A pair of my informants admitted this, with some shame.) When it comes to religion, the country has a policy of *pillarization*, which provides equal funding to civic institutions. There are separate Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim schools, community organizations, and even broadcasting stations. Nearly two-thirds of schools are religious in origin. Even the Protestant and Catholic churches in the Netherlands are funded in part by the state, and Muslim communities are increasingly laying claim to these funds, based on the pillarization policy.

Yet the Dutch are clearly in conflict over the claims being made by Muslims and migrant communities more broadly (Koopmans 2004; Koopmans and Statham 1999;

Rath et al. 1999; Statham et al. 2005; Tillie 2004; Uitermark et al. 2005). Although pillarization has historically defined policy, Dutch society today is almost aggressively secular. The schools and radio stations may once have been associated with a particular religion, but today they are virtually indistinguishable from each other. Thus Muslims are making claims to a policy that is highly legitimate from a traditional perspective, and yet decidedly out of tune with the realities of contemporary Dutch society.

My informants see these complicated issues of equity and policy, but are reluctant to see a role for higher education. Because admission to the university is largely open, my informants deny that any "access" issues exist. They acknowledge that students from black schools are far less likely to have the training, qualifications, or financial resources to succeed at the university, but they do not see any appropriate role for the university to address the problem. "This is a problem for the schools to fix, or maybe the government, I'm not sure," one informant said.

According to my informants and my own research, only one scholarship programme for immigrant students seems to exist, a single fellowship for a Ph.D. student of Turkish origin provided by the Dutch Research Council. To my amazement, even this symbolic programme was deemed problematic by one of my informants. "I came from a poor family, and I had to find a way to make it through graduate school," he said. "I don't see what makes this student any different."

Defining integration as a political problem

Despite my preconceptions of Muslim immigration and integration as largely a social problem, and thus one amenable to the kinds of interventions that are provided by universities and educators, my informants again and again recast integration as a political problem. This is problematic, as there are deeply held beliefs that the university faculties should "stay out of politics," although in practice the relationship between university faculty and the political sphere is quite complicated, almost paradoxical.

When we discussed the political role of the university, one of my informants spontaneously brought up an incident at an American disciplinary conference that he had attended. At the meeting, he wandered into a heated discussion about whether the disciplinary association should take a stand in favour of same-sex marriage, in light of recent debates over the U.S. Defense of Marriage Act preventing federal recognition of same-sex marriages. The discussion left him aghast. "The whole thing—the idea of [the discipline] getting involved in this!—is just.... preposterous!" he exclaimed. When I suggested that the discipline might be trying to provide its professional expertise to inform the public debate, he stopped me in mid-sentence. "No no no!" he nearly shouted. "It was purely political!"

On the flip side, this same informant expressed pride that senior faculty members from his discipline, one that does not have much public currency in the United States, are broadly influential in a number of areas of social policy. Members of his faculty serve as paid and unpaid consultants to political leaders and state ministries, and they appear on popular national talk and news shows to discuss contemporary issues and engage in political debates. Obviously, there is little discouragement for individual faculty to "stay out of politics."

One extreme and public case recently involved the political science faculty at the University of Amsterdam. The faculty has long been viewed as a bastion of the liberal Social Democratic party in Holland, which largely controls politics in the city of

Amsterdam. In recent years, faculty involvement had escalated to the point where certain faculty were responsible for writing campaign literature and composing the Social Democratic party platform. Students in the department, believing that a single ideology was being imposed on the department, circulated a petition against the faculty's political entanglement, a controversy which, according to one of my informants, roiled the department for nearly two years.

Clearly a distinction needs to be made here. The political activities of individual faculties are accepted and even encouraged in certain cases. The problem is when any particular political position is associated with a department, faculty or the university more broadly. This would not seem very different than the case in the U.S., except for the lengths to which the university must retreat from these perceived entanglements, and the degree to which social problems, if they are in any way connected to policy, are reinterpreted and reframed as political problems. Thus the stance of the University of Michigan in favour of affirmative action, for example, would be highly illegitimate in the Dutch context.

Despite the rich history of student activism in continental Europe, Muslim students themselves struggle to attain any sense of political mobilization. To gain legitimacy as student organizations, they reject political action and instead embrace a community or cultural identity. Perhaps even more influential is the ideology of multiculturalism that pervades Dutch society and policy, which acknowledges the diversity and complex, overlapping identities of Dutch citizens, but strongly resists identifying or reifying the identity of any particular group (Statham and Koopmans 2004; Uitermark et al. 2005; Joppke 2004). It is thus very common to read documents that discuss multiculturalism and the need for social cohesion, without a single instance of the struggles or special needs of any one particular ethnic or religious group. This is a phenomenon that is not limited to the Netherlands, as EU documents on social cohesion reflect.

Student organizations in Amsterdam universities, when they exist at all, seem to have accepted this approach. The mission statement of Khmisa, the Moroccan student organization at the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, seems typically conflicted, as this rough translation shows.

> Khmisa, a student association, has been aimed at Moroccan culture, standards and values. We emphasise that we are not a Moroccan student association. We want to communicate thus that we are open for diversity. This may be related to religion, education, culture or sexuality. We thus want to emphasise the equivalence of people, in spite of or even thanks to these differences.

This suppression of ethnic identity, or its political importance, does not seem uncommon among the embryonic student groups that exist. Anatolia, the Muslim student organization at the Free University, declares that it exists to support the entire Muslim population at the Free University, and that no one group is more important than another. Yet the Turkish origins of the group's name would clearly signal otherwise.

Interestingly, last year Anatolia did petition the biology department at the Free University to teach creationism in addition to evolution. In 2004, seven Muslim students refused to write a short paper on evolution, instead arguing that mankind had been created by Allah, using an argument quite similar to Christian creationists in the U.S. (Van Raaij 2005). A debate over evolution and creationism was sponsored by Anatolia on campus in 2005, but the discussion quickly devolved into a debate over religious beliefs. Nonetheless, this event may signal more political mobilization by Muslim student groups as their power and numbers grow.

The influence of students should not be overestimated, though. The number of Muslim students remains so low at the University of Amsterdam, for example, that not a single Muslim or immigrant student organization even exists. The only recognition of a Muslim student population is a single tiny room for daily prayer buried in the halls of the Amsterdam School for Social Research.

Conclusion: rethinking social cohesion from the bottom up

The purpose of this paper is not to castigate the faculty for their resistance to social cohesion policy. It is quite the opposite – it is to identify and describe major cultural and structural barriers in the university to the imposition of policy through external governance. In light of these responses, the development of policy to promote social cohesion seems quite naïve in its inattention to major stumbling blocks to implementation. Considering that national and European leaders were largely educated in these schools, and should be well acquainted with their cultures and traditions, it seems more likely that they are aware that their actions have been largely symbolic, the only actions possible in the face of a seemingly intractable social problem.

From a governance perspective, the top-down approach to social cohesion does not seem likely to succeed beyond its symbolic value. This is a classic problem of policy implementation in the social sciences. I have chosen to analyse the institutionalized values held by those with academic power in the university; a political scientist might highlight the interest group mobilization of faculty or their role as street-level bureaucrats, while an economist might point out the lack of incentives for change and the principal-agent problems embedded in the university governance structure. Each of these would provide compelling explanations leading toward the same conclusion.

The empirical data on social capital points the way to possible solutions. Although sociologists have discussed the important socializing role of schools at least since the 1960s (Dreeben 1967; Coleman, 1987; 1988), this does not necessarily provide clear solutions from a policy perspective, beyond, say, the inclusion of Muslim perspectives in history textbooks. We do have empirical support, however, for the idea that social capital, as represented by embeddedness in networks of peers, can play a role in increased attachment to school, use of computer technology, and other positive educational impacts (Moody and White 2003; Frank et al. 2004). Recent work also suggests that peer effects can have positive impacts on academic achievement (Winston and Zimmerman 2003; Zimmerman 2003). If this work proves to be valid, how can governance play a role in improving social networks, and thus improving social cohesion? This would suggest a bottom-up approach to policy development.

First, it seems clear that the traditional Dutch policy of pillarization, as it applies to public schools, is a recipe for social disaster. In the city of Amsterdam, housing itself is highly segregated (a non-faculty informant openly denigrated one east-side neighbourhood as “Africa Town”), and immigrant students are disproportionately assigned to black schools (by definition), which are growing in number (Vedder 2006). While in some cases segregation has led to highly successful ethnic enclaves – the polar opposite of the social capital hypothesis – there is no evidence that segregation is leading to anything except increasing distrust and inequality.

We must acknowledge, however, that the desegregation of Dutch schools would require nothing less than a revolution in governance and funding. As it stands, two-thirds of schools are religious in origin, and only one-third are secular. In addition, Muslim

communities themselves are not agitating for desegregation, but rather the opposite; they want to use the funds provided through pillarization to establish their own schools, churches, and civic organizations. These traditional values in Dutch policy are a powerful force driving segregation forward. Moreover, even in a society that is known for its liberalism and tolerance, we should not undervalue that fact that many white parents have no interest in seeing their children placed in a sub-standard school in an immigrant neighbourhood. Although pillarization has not been implemented to the extent that Muslim schools are funded by the state, a system of de facto pillarization exists in Amsterdam and Rotterdam through the divide between black and white schools.

Higher education cannot contribute to social cohesion without increasing the educational attainment of immigrant populations. The increasing numbers of minority students enrolling at the Free University are a positive indicator of the possibilities for the future. To move forward, increasing enrollment may lie in improving the transition from secondary schools to the universities and vocational schools (hogescholen). Although this was not the focus of my study, there do not seem to be any strong efforts to recruit students from historically underrepresented groups, or to improve the quality of information they have about the academic and financial requirements of attending and succeeding at the university level. Ultimately, the benefits of social capital can only accrue if there is a critical mass of students in the university system to benefit.

Finally, social cohesion cannot be improved by an official ideology that suppresses group identity. Ultimately, the government seems to hope that by embracing a vague multiculturalism, by providing affirmations of social diversity, by asserting the equality of all, integration will be the result. This ideology suggests that suppressing group identity is needed to prevent divisiveness or competition among ethnic groups, and that a multicultural state identity will embrace everyone, providing a sense of cohesion for all. The evidence throughout the world, however, is that group identity is a powerful uniting force that is not easily ignored. Indeed, attending to the specific needs and struggles of particular ethnic groups is the best way to ensure that minority groups feel integrated and affirmed as part of a broader national culture.

A partial solution lies in the reconceptualization of pillarization, one that discourages pillarization *among* schools and instead encourages pillarization *within* schools. For the educational system, this means the encouragement, official or otherwise, of student organizations that embrace ethnic and religious identity. These groups need not be divisive, bur rather provide a means of expression and community development, serving both democratic ideals and providing the supportive elements of ethnic enclaves. Although the ethnic and racial student organizations that proliferate throughout U.S. higher education are often a source of controversy, ultimately most scholars conclude that they provide crucial peer support for students within their community (Tatum 1999), without precluding the development of diverse friendship groups that bridge racial and ethnic divides (Antonio 2004). Ultimately, providing “sovereignty within their own circle” inside of schools, instead of among them, allows for the development of racial, ethnic, and religious identity while simultaneously ensuring a degree of integration and cross-cultural communication (Nasir and Al-Amin 2006).

For faculty, funding for research projects and curricular programmes addressing the emerging problems of immigration and integration in society is one means to improve our knowledge of these social challenges and to affirm that these challenges are of national importance. The Dutch universities are a model for supporting and promoting public intellectuals who engage major political and social issues in the media and other public

locations. We are also seeing the beginning of some curricular changes, such as the imam training programme that has begun at the Free University.

Any one of these suggestions may or may not prove feasible. The idea is to turn the usual thinking about social cohesion upside-down: the use of policy to support building social networks by students, faculty and staff in order to yield the associated social benefits. It also seeks to undermine the assumption that cohesion can come only through consensus, by also providing legitimate mechanisms for conflict and debate, which are the hallmarks of a democratic society. An effective system cannot rely only on a heroic model where individual or groups of faculty work to move initiatives forward; we need a more prosaic model of governance that supports broad social goals.

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