

# Countering Integration Pessimists

## New Differentiation for the Integration Debates

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In this article Leo and Jan Lucassen's analysis in *Winnaars en verliezers* [Winners and losers] of 500 years of immigration to the Netherlands is reviewed with regard to possible conclusions for the neighbouring country, Germany. Particularly since the recent migration history in both countries has been very similar, the authors' disentanglement of complex migration politics and their differentiated assessment of integration processes in the Netherlands are also useful for the occasionally pessimistic German migration and integration debate. The authors show that prevailing negativist views on the integration of migrants can be countered successfully with more sophisticated analyses of the integration of different migrant groups into different societal realms. Furthermore, their examination of the – predominantly positive – integration history of earlier centuries helps to put current short-term problems into perspective. Nevertheless their analysis has some methodological shortcomings as sometimes (negative) quantitative results are contrasted with (positive) qualitative outcomes. Finally, policy conclusions would have been preferable, for example regarding the question of what can be learned from integration processes in previous centuries for integration problems of today.

### Introduction

In their study Leo and Jan Lucassen analyse 500 years of immigration to the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> The authors' main intention is to put recent integration issues into perspective against the background of historical immigration flows and discussions on integration. Their study thus aims particularly at recent 'integration pessimists' who have drawn a very negative picture of the integration policies of recent decades and accuse assumed left-wing political actors of having launched mass-migration to the Netherlands and of having

implemented a multicultural policy accompanied by cultural relativism. Leo and Jan Lucassen criticise these pessimists for generally presenting opinions while neglecting the facts. The authors themselves intend to counter prevalent pessimistic views by sticking to these facts and evaluating migration and integration policies of the last five centuries.

Thus Leo and Jan Lucassen present their study against the background of a political and societal debate that shows many parallels to recent discussions on migration and integration in the neighbouring country, Germany. As in the Netherlands, primarily ‘integration pessimists’ manage to place their statements prominently in the public eye while more differentiated analyses of integration processes have difficulty being heard and read. From a well-written and readable study on both the gains and losses of (recent) migration and integration processes like the one the authors present, the German debate might thus also benefit.

After presenting the main arguments of the ‘integration pessimists’, in five chapters the authors analyse migration flows and integration policies of five different periods of time, beginning with the most recent history and continuing with periods further back in history. They finally complete their study with a ‘rational balance’ of 500 years of immigration into the Netherlands.

### Complex decision-making processes

The strengths of the study lie mainly in the authors’ efforts of to illuminate the complex decision-making processes in migration and integration policies since 1945, introducing the different political and societal actors that were involved.

Leo and Jan Lucassen disprove the cliché of left-wing launched mass-immigration by presenting the different views of a wide range of actors that were relevant in the 1960s and 1970s, such as political parties, ministries, churches, employers and unions. They illustrate that it was above all an alliance of employers and denominational and right-of-centre liberal parties that supported the recruitment of what were called guest workers in order to compensate for a lack of low-skilled employees on the Dutch post-war labour market during a time of economic growth. In order to keep the labour market attractive (a motive particularly represented by employers and liberal parties) and to keep families together (the basic motive of denominational parties) these (political) actors also favoured liberal regulations regarding family

1 Leo Lucassen and Jan Lucassen, *Winnaars en verliezers. Een nuchtere balans van vijfhonderd jaar immigratie* (Amsterdam 2011).

reunification. On the other hand, social democrats and left-wing parties were somewhat reluctant fearing disadvantages for Dutch employees due to the competition of foreign workers.

Furthermore, in the 1960s an ‘ethical revolution’ that influenced the whole political spectrum was taking place. In this context a societal and political discussion on difficult parts of recent Dutch history was developing, illuminating critically the colonial history and the deportation of Dutch Jews during the German occupation in World War II. The discussion resulted in a political consent favouring equal treatment of all human beings, a sharp rejection of racism and consequently a rather liberal attitude towards migrants.

Finally the authors highlight a liberal paradox of a more restrictive immigration policy that was implemented as a reaction to the beginning of the economic crisis in the middle of the 1970s. As many – former – guest workers now were afraid of not being permitted to return to the Netherlands once they had left, they decided to stay permanently and to ask their families to move there too. Instead of minimising the numbers of migrants in the Netherlands, which was the actual goal of the stricter policy, the new regulations caused the opposite – a decrease in the number of repatriations.

### **Parallel developments in Germany**

The depiction of these complex developments regarding the Dutch migration politics of recent decades is highly relevant to the German discussion too, as several parallels between the two countries can be found. Although there has never been mass immigration into Germany from (former) colonies, which the country had already lost in the course of World War I, Germany’s immigration history regarding labour migrants is very similar to the Dutch. Following the request of employers, a conservative-liberal government started to recruit labour migrants from southern European countries and later from Turkey as early as the 1950s. As in the Netherlands, many of these guest workers decided to stay and reunite their families in the host country.

Ethical motives have influenced German migration politics too, particularly concerning the admission of refugees and asylum seekers. Against a background of the German history during the Third Reich, in 1949 a fundamental right of asylum that guarantees protection for foreigners who are oppressed for political reasons was established in the constitution (Art. 16). However, this background was widely neglected during a controversial debate on the asylum law at the beginning of the 1990s, which resulted in the fundamental right being restricted in 1993. As the numbers of asylum seekers had risen to a few hundred thousand per year since the beginning of the decade, a majority of asylum seekers was suspected of applying for merely economic reasons. Arson attacks on homes for asylum seekers caused

shocked reactions worldwide and provoked memories of the darker aspects of recent German history. Neither during the asylum debate nor in recent discussions about Turkish migrants have the factors causing immigration been sufficiently taken into account. Leo and Jan Lucassen show convincingly the benefits of revealing decision-making processes in migration politics and thus detecting the actual reasons for migration inflows.

### **Assessment of integration processes**

However this purpose is only subordinate to the main aim of their study – to balance the effects of immigration to the Netherlands and evaluate Dutch integration policies. Unlike Germany, the Netherlands implemented a coherent integration policy as early as the beginning of the 1980s, the so-called Minority Policy. Leo and Jan Lucassen firstly intend to disenchant the ‘multicultural myth’ that has been attached to Dutch integration policy since this time. The authors argue that the motto of the ‘preservation of one’s own identity’ had rather symbolic meaning as a statement against racist incidents that had taken place in the Netherlands in the 1970s. According to them, the minority policy implemented at the beginning of the 1980s above all tried to improve the socio-economic position of migrants, while only a few parts of it aimed at the preservation of their original cultures. Even these parts lost their relevance by the end of the decade when the focus of the integration policy shifted from minority groups to individuals and their socio-economic status within Dutch society.

The authors then try to show that describing the integration policies of recent decades as a total failure is not sufficient, that there have been positive developments as well and these deserve to be acknowledged. They underline the importance of differentiation not only between the host society and immigrants, but also between respective subgroups and finally between different aspects of integration processes touching the economic, social, cultural or political realms. By doing so they try to draw a more sophisticated picture of the Netherlands’ recent migration and integration history, avoiding simple conclusions like ‘total failure’ or ‘complete success’.

### **Methodological shortcomings**

Nevertheless the authors have difficulty fulfilling their ambitious intentions – particularly due to methodological problems. The more realms and immigrant groups they take into account, the less they are able to go into detail. Consequently the analysis becomes somewhat superficial in some parts. Furthermore, the comparison of negative and positive outcomes of integration processes is not always convincing as the authors contrast results



▲ Eighteenth century print with the 'smeus met uijen' [smous with onions]. Jews were excluded from almost all professions and therefore were forced to make a living as itinerant traders, according to the maker of this print by selling onions. German Jews were frequently known derogatively as 'smous'. Rijksmuseum, Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam.

that sometimes lack comparability. They occasionally present statistical data indicating integration problems of particular migrant groups, such as a table showing that immigrants of particularly Antillean or Moroccan backgrounds are much more often suspected of a crime than native Dutch people (47). On the other hand, they repeatedly try to counter bad statistical outcomes like these by enumerating single cases of persons with a migration background who managed to become successful first and foremost within the cultural realm – for example popular authors of Moroccan origin (60). Referring to positive single cases might be important, but it is surely not sufficient to counterbalance bad statistical outcomes. The authors are more convincing when comparing data of immigrants with those of Dutch natives of the same social background, indicating that there are almost no differences between these groups. Thus, many integration problems still existing are connected to the social rather than the ethnic background of the respective person (48).

### Encouraging lessons from history

Irrespective of their methodological shortcomings, Leo and Jan Lucassen's findings encourage us to see the future of the Netherlands as an immigration and integration country to be less dark than the 'integration pessimists' do. Despite all the persistent difficulties, the integration of particularly the second and third generations has made progress.

Leo and Jan Lucassen argue that the immigration history, especially that of former guest workers and their descendants, is still too young to expect better results. The authors try to support this argument with the aid of their chapters on immigration processes between 1550 and 1945. Like Muslim migrants today, in earlier centuries immigrant groups like the Jews were perceived to be culturally too different from the autochthonous population to be able to integrate successfully. Nevertheless these prognoses proved to be wrong, as the authors underline in their concluding chapter: 'The history of Dutch immigration shows that integration over two or three generations is the rule, and takes place by an active participation in the labour market' (235).<sup>2</sup>

The historical perspective is indeed helpful in putting recent integration problems into perspective and conceiving of them as less dramatic. On the other hand, the strong reference to current integration debates is also a shortcoming of the two historical chapters that go back

2 'De Nederlandse migratiegeschiedenis toont namelijk aan dat integratie over twee, drie generaties de regel is, en wel uitdrukkelijk via actieve deelname aan de arbeidsmarkt'.

Integration ist möglich!!

▲ Sarrazin and his (presumably) Islamic ancestors. This cartoon, drawn by Klaus Stuttmann and published in the German daily newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* (28 August 2010), refers to Thilo Sarrazin's book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany abolishes itself) and his warning of Germany's decline due to an increasing number of poorly educated Muslim immigrants. Given Sarrazin's name Stuttmann implies that the author himself has an Islamic background (during the Middle Ages 'Sarazene' was a common term for 'Muslim' in Europe). Consequently, Sarrazin himself forms an example of successful integration (albeit not in a positive way as he shares the widespread perception of Islam being a threat) and thus disproves his own statements.

farthest in time as they threaten to be merely auxiliary chapters and their contents only subordinate. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the authors sum up developments of nearly 400 years (1550 to 1945) in about seventy pages so that the analysis of these centuries becomes unavoidably somewhat superficial. Furthermore, the authors cannot explain adequately how integration processes actually took place in earlier times; or referring again to the quote on page 235, why exactly has integration after two or three generations been the rule? If the labour market has been the key, what have been the conditions for the successful incorporation of immigrants into it? What exactly can we learn from historical integration processes – except for the fact that they need time and we have to be more patient?

Due to the shortcomings mentioned the authors in the end cannot achieve completely their ambitious goal to present a differentiated balance of 500 years of immigration into the Netherlands. Their study can thus be described rather as a balance of immigration flows and integration policies since World War II – put in perspective by looking at the immigration history of previous centuries. Nevertheless their study is an important contribution to the integration debate as it shows that migration and integration processes are complex issues that cannot be evaluated as merely being a success or a failure.

### Countering integration pessimism in Germany

This conclusion is also of special relevance for the neighbouring country, Germany, where the discussion has also recently been influenced by negativist points of view. In contrast to the Netherlands, Germany did not accept the fact of being an immigration country before the turn of the century. However in 2000 a liberalised naturalisation law was implemented, which was followed in 2005 by an immigration law containing an integration programme. The government established advisory institutions like the Integration Summit (*Integrationsgipfel*) (since 2005) and the German Islam Conference (*Deutsche Islam Konferenz*) (since 2006), where representatives of the state negotiated with migrant and Muslim organisations. At the same time the integration particularly of (Turkish) Muslims has occasionally been the subject of controversial debates. In 2010 the publication *Deutschland schafft sich ab* [Germany abolishes itself] by Thilo Sarrazin, then board member of the German Central Bank, caused an intensification of the discussion. In his book Sarrazin predicts the failure of the integration of primarily Muslim migrants. Using bio-logistic argumentation patterns the author argues that descendants of former guest workers with a low level of education and thus – according to him – less intelligent, will not be successful within the German education system. He finally forecasts Germany's decline because of growing numbers of inhabitants with a low level of education, accompanied by a decrease of the well-educated, above all autochthonous part of the population. During the



Sarrazin-debate German President Christian Wulff caused further controversy by arguing that Islam had become a part of Germany – a statement provoking contradiction by parts of the population and conservative politicians.

Although criticising Sarrazin's assumptions conservative politicians made urgent statements too, claiming 'Multikulti' to have 'failed' (Chancellor Angela Merkel) or warning of further immigration from 'culturally alien areas' (Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer). However, like 'integration pessimists' in the Dutch discussion, representatives of negativist views in Germany often barely stick to the facts: Sarrazin has created demographic horror scenarios while neglecting a decline of birth rates that has also taken place in migrant groups, and disregarding tendencies of adaptation that have shaped Muslim migrants into being more 'German' or 'European'. Merkel declared the failure of an integration model that has actually never been implemented in Germany. Seehofer concealed the fact that in recent years Germany has again become a country of emigration and some industrial sectors already face a lack of skilled employees, for which it will soon have to compensate by recruiting specialists from abroad – no matter where these specialists come from.<sup>3</sup> All German integration pessimists finally tend to neglect the fact that Germany has had a long history of immigration too, and many decades and even centuries ago successfully incorporated migrant groups who had also been perceived as not being capable of being integrated – like Polish labour migrants in the Ruhr Area or Jews before 1933. These examples show that studies providing differentiated pictures of migration and integration processes are all the more important – in the Netherlands as well as in other immigration countries. Leo and Jan Lucassen's book makes helpful suggestions how to do this. ◀

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3 According to the Federal Office of Statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt) in 2009 721.014

persons immigrated into Germany, while 733.796 left the country, a surplus of 12.782 ([www.destatis.de](http://www.destatis.de)).