

## CHAPTER 39

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 THE LOW COUNTRIES
 

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C39.P1 THE Low Countries consist of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. They are also known as the Benelux countries, from the initial letters of their names. Within the Benelux Union they cooperate and pursue a common foreign trade policy. Together with France, Germany, and Italy, the Low Countries were in 1958 the six founding members of European Economic Community—the predecessor of the European Union. Although the three countries are all constitutional, parliamentary monarchies, they have rather different national histories. They also differ from each other both culturally and religiously. The Netherlands (17 million inhabitants) and Belgium (11.5 million inhabitants) will be discussed alternately; a separate section is devoted to Luxembourg (600,000 inhabitants) at the end of the chapter.

C39.P2 The Netherlands is probably best known for its struggle against the water, its commercial and moral spirit (the merchant and the divine going hand in hand), and for its religious pluralism and tolerance. Famously, the Dutch Republic was a tolerant haven in an intolerant confessional Europe. In the 1980s Amsterdam became the ‘Gay Capital of the World’. But after the murders of the politician Pim Fortuyn and the film-maker Theo van Gogh (a distant relative of the famous painter) in 2002 and 2004 respectively, things appear to have changed. Anti-immigrant sentiments have grown in the last twenty years and Muslims are often seen as a threat to Dutch identity. Not only extreme right-wing parties, but also liberal and Christian democratic politicians exploit these sentiments.

C39.P3 Belgium became an independent nation in 1830. The population was largely Catholic and the Catholic Church controlled education and poor relief. The dominant bourgeoisie spoke French, whereas in Flanders ordinary people spoke Flemish. In the 1960s the country was divided into three regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the northern part of the nation, French-speaking Wallonia in the south, and the region of Brussels in the centre which is officially bilingual. In the capital with its many European institutions,

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however, French is the dominant language. German is spoken by only 1 per cent in the east of the country. The language frontier between Flanders and Wallonia has deeply divided the country and has had a greater impact than the shared Catholic heritage. The Catholic Church still has a strong position, but the percentage of non-church members has increased rapidly in recent decades.

C39.P4 This chapter is divided into four sections: early history, pillarization, secularization, and Islam and new religious developments. In addition to providing essential information and statistics, the chapter will consider different interpretations of these developments. A final note looks at the situation in Luxembourg.

## EARLY HISTORY

C39.S1

C39.P5 The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 was probably the last major occasion at which public reference was made to the *Res publica Christiana*, the ‘Christian Commonwealth’. This understanding was gradually replaced by the notion of Europe (Davies, 1996). In the early Enlightenment it was no longer acceptable to refer to the community of European nations by their common Christian heritage. ‘Religion’, at this point, became the concept that was used to capture the basic tenets of confessionalized Christianity in a functionally differentiated society. Gradually the term evolved into a broader concept referring to other religions as well. The realm of religion was—at least to some extent—separated from that of politics, economy, and science (Kaufmann, 1997: 93–4). The American and French revolutions led to the formal separation of state and church. This principle was introduced in the Netherlands in 1795 and granted even to minority groups, such as Jewish citizens (Schöffner, 1981), some basic rights and a comparatively large degree of freedom.

C39.P6 The revolt of the Netherlands against Spanish rule in the late sixteenth century led to the division of the northern and southern provinces of the Netherlands (roughly the present-day Kingdom of the Netherlands and present-day Belgium and Luxembourg). Since 1585—when the city of Antwerp was reconquered by the governor of the Habsburg Netherlands—a harsh policy of catholicization was pursued and as a consequence some 150,000 Protestants emigrated to the north. Through the alliance of the absolutist state and the Catholic Church the southern Netherlands became a homogeneous Catholic country (Hellemans, 2011).

C39.P7 In 1581 the northern part of the Netherlands established themselves *de facto* as an independent federation of sovereign provinces. The Dutch Republic (1581–1795), however, was not a monoconfessional state. The Reformed Church was the public church of the nation, but other denominations, such as the Catholics, were tolerated. The new elites were convinced that people should not be persecuted because of their religious convictions. The origin of the Dutch Republic in a revolt against the absolutist and centralizing policies of the Habsburg Netherlands resulted in a new status quo characterized by local and regional differences. In the region behind the front line of the

Dutch revolt, stretching roughly from the south-west to the north-east (Knippenberg, 2005: 97), Catholic initiatives were suppressed, but in areas to the north-west of this strip different religious groups and even non-participation were tolerated.

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>8</sub> According to a rough estimate only 50 per cent of the population of Haarlem belonged to a church in 1620 (Spaans, 1989). This does not mean, of course, that the other half were atheists or considered themselves not to be Christian. But, whatever the case, the more individual and spiritual ways of belonging to the Christian tradition gradually disappeared during the seventeenth century and at the end of the eighteenth virtually everyone belonged to a church. A respectable citizen had to be a church member. Moreover, the local authorities structured poor relief according to church membership. Thus, administrative measures contributed to a higher degree of participation (van Rooden, 1996, 1997).

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>9</sub> The French invasion in 1795 brought an end to the *ancien régime*. The Netherlands became a vassal state of France with a strong centralized administration. After the final defeat of Napoleon, the Congress of Vienna (1814–15) determined that the Catholic Austrian Netherlands (present-day Belgium) should be united with the former Dutch Republic. The new Kingdom of the Netherlands existed in this form from 1815 until 1830, when the southern Netherlands revolted successfully against William I.

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>10</sub> On 4 October 1830 a provisional Belgian government proclaimed independence, which was accepted by the Dutch in 1839. Belgium had an overwhelmingly Catholic population (99.8 per cent according to the Census of 1846) and the power of the Catholic Church was challenged in the late nineteenth century only by radical liberals and socialists. When in 1879 a *laïcist* (secular) school system was introduced, the Church founded its own private schools, criticizing the parents of children attending ‘schools without God’ (Dobbelaere and Voyé, 1990: 2). Between 1882 and 1914, moreover, Belgian governments were homogeneously Catholic. The polarization between Catholics and so-called ‘anticlericals’, present in Belgium, is characteristic of countries with a dominant religion that tries to establish a monopoly. Spain, Italy, and of course France (‘Les deux Frances’) are good examples of this phenomenon (Hellemans, 2011).

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>11</sub> The (northern) Netherlands, conversely, were religiously mixed, but considered themselves to be a Protestant nation. The remaining Catholics—mainly living in the southern provinces of the country—still comprised some 35–37 per cent of the population in the nineteenth century (Knippenberg, 1992: 169), but were seen as an alien element of Dutch society because of their orientation towards Rome. The former public Reformed Church and the old dissenters, such as the Mennonites, Armenians, and Lutherans, formed a new establishment. The state bureaucracy reorganized the churches and even regulated the payment of the ministers (Kennedy and Zwemer, 2010: 244–6). The Protestant clergy were trained at the universities in their mission to teach and civilize the common people. The dissemination of national sentiment was seen as part of the Christian message. Conversely, Dutch national identity was ‘furnished with religious characteristics, such as a simple piety, strong moral sentiments, and the validation of common sense and tolerance’ (van Rooden, 1997: 142).

C39.P12 This view of the union of religion and the nation was challenged by small groups of mostly lower-class people who left the main ‘Dutch Reformed Church’ to establish orthodox Calvinist churches—mainly in the periphery of the country in the northern provinces and the south-west (the southern provinces were overwhelmingly Catholic). Notwithstanding imprisonment by the state, their number rose from 2 per cent in 1859 to 4.2 per cent in 1889 (Knippenberg, 1992: 70). An important landmark was the liberal constitution of 1848. Whereas in France and Prussia in 1848 revolutions broke out, in the Netherlands the new order was the result of an ongoing process of reform (although the King was alarmed by the events abroad and gave in rather easily). Church and state were separated bit by bit and in 1853 the Roman Catholic Church was able to reintroduce the episcopal hierarchy.

C39.P13 The hegemony of the Protestant establishment started to crumble in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Astonishingly this was largely the work of one man who succeeded in reshaping the Dutch religious landscape: Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). Trained at the liberal Theological Faculty of Leiden—famous at the time for its historical-critical analysis of the Bible and its dismissal of miracles—he became the most influential Dutch politician and theologian of the modern era. He took over orthodox organizations and did something that was almost unimaginable at the time: he forced a split in the Dutch Reformed Church and founded in 1888 the ‘Reformed Churches in the Netherlands’. Only 7.6 per cent of the Dutch Reformed went with Kuyper (Knippenberg, 1992: 95), but his impact was much bigger.

C39.P14 Kuyper was not only a church man, but also a politician, an orator, and a prolific journalist. He founded his own newspaper, his own neo-calvinist Free University in Amsterdam, and the first, modern political party in the Netherlands: the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), which was established in 1879. He was Member of Parliament for ten years and prime minister from 1901 to 1905. His polarizing style was entirely new in Dutch politics and was an affront to the old elites who still clung to the ideals of a consensual and homogeneous state and an inclusive, Protestant people’s church (Molendijk, 2008). The segmented social structures—based on differences of religion and worldview—of the so-called pillarized Dutch society were to a large extent determined by Kuyper. Later, Catholics and socialists followed suit.

C39.P15 Kuyper mobilized a constituency that defined itself as a special group in Dutch politics and society as against other groups. This brought an end to the old order that was based on the identification of the nation with a general form of Protestantism, which Kuyper dismissed as lukewarm and even anti-Christian. Politically Kuyper forged a coalition with the Roman Catholics against the liberals. This alliance would form the backbone of most cabinets during the twentieth century and gave the Catholics a clearly visible place in politics and society at large. In the segmented social structures of ‘pillarization’ the decision of the former public church to identify itself with the nation and the ‘general interest’ was self-destructive and led to big losses. Between 1880 and 1970 its membership shrank by some 50 per cent, whereas the various more orthodox Protestant groups as well as the Catholics almost succeeded—partly due to their significantly higher birth rates—in maintaining their proportion of the fast-growing Dutch population.

## PILLARIZATION

C<sub>39</sub>.S<sub>2</sub>C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>16</sub>

‘Pillarization’ is a technical term to denote the politico-denominational segregation of a society. The term (*verzuiling*) was coined in the Netherlands (Molendijk, 2007) and many scholars have argued that Dutch (and to a lesser extent Belgian) society was a prime example of this type of segmentation or segregation. Foreign observers (among them Francis Fukuyama) have been critical of this system of deep societal cleavages which they claimed was detrimental to the integration of different groups in the nation. Conversely, the Dutch political scientist Arend Lijphart began his research by reversing the question: that is, by asking how this system *was able to work* (Lijphart, 1968) The primary answer was that *consociationalism* (as he translated the term *verzuiling*) functioned well, because of the close cooperation between the elites of the various pillars. Nowadays the whole idea of pillarization and the alleged Dutch *Sonderweg* is very much contested, in so far as it suggests deep structures of segregation, which upon closer inspection did not really exist.

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>17</sub>

Although the term ‘heavy communities’ (van Dam, 2011) may be more appropriate, it is doubtful whether it will displace the old term ‘pillars’ any time soon. There are almost as many definitions of pillarization as there are scholars who deal with this complex phenomenon. One of the early and most influential of these was the Dutch sociologist J. P. Kruijt who discerned three circles which—taken together—were characteristic of pillarization (Kruijt, 1957: 17–18). First, there has to exist a plurality of churches (denominationalism); second, there have to be institutions with educational and charitable remits, such as schools and hospitals; and third, Kruijt discerned the many types of organization and institution that develop societal activities (on a religious basis), such as unions, sporting clubs, libraries, political parties, radio and television networks, farmers’ associations, and musical societies.

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>18</sub>

This third circle is crucial according to Kruijt, who argued that the level of participation in these organizations was much higher in the Netherlands than in countries such as Britain, Austria, and Switzerland. Only Belgium is somewhat similar to the Netherlands, where there are ‘two mighty blocks of organizations, the socialist and the Catholic’ (Kruijt, 1957: 17). In the Netherlands it is estimated that in 1956 about 90 per cent of Catholics and orthodox Protestants participated along pillarized lines in primary schools, unions, broadcasting corporations, and political choice (Molendijk, 2007: 266). If the degree of participation had been 100 per cent, the only chance to meet members of other pillars would have been at work, in the army, while shopping (insofar it was not pillarized), and on the street (Kruijt, 1957: 18).

C<sub>39</sub>.P<sub>19</sub>

What is remarkable about the Dutch case is the deep split in reformed Protestantism and the significant role of various Protestant political parties. New social and religious movements emerged in other countries as well, becoming politically influential and creating their own institutions and organizations. Similarly, socialists and ultramontane Catholics were important elsewhere in Europe, but Kuyper’s Neo-Calvinists seem

peculiar to the Netherlands. What all three movements have in common is that they were popular, engaged large numbers of people, and used modern mass media such as daily newspapers, the radio, and mass rallies. They all invoked ritual behaviour (Kuyper even introduced a special pronunciation of the name of God) and presented a distinct ideology that defined them clearly against their antagonists.

C39.P20

The period between 1917 and 1968 is seen as the high point of pillarization. The ‘Pacification’ (a political agreement between liberals and socialists on the left and Christian democrats on the right) of 1917 brought not only universal suffrage for men (which laid the foundation for the introduction of women’s vote in 1919), but also equal rights for confessional schools, which were to be paid for out of public funds. Up to today ‘special education’ (as the term runs) is financed completely by the state. That means, for instance, that Montessori and Islamic schools are also funded by tax payers’ money, provided that they satisfy government standards of quality. It is true both that mobilization and organization along confessional lines started well before 1917 (it was beginning as far back as the 1870s) and that did it not end once and for all in 1968. That date is chosen, however, to indicate the rise of protest movements which were critical of various forms of authority and have gradually contributed to the demise of a pillarized society. But even now a substantial majority (some 70 per cent) of the Dutch children go to ‘special’ (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or humanist) schools. The reason for most parents is not that their children are to be educated in a secluded environment, but that the school is nearby or has a good reputation.

C39.P21

The term pillarization implies pluralism. The following definition expresses the Dutch situation very clearly:

C39.P22

A pillar is ... defined as a subsystem in society that links political power, social organization and individual behaviour and which is aimed to promote—in competition as well as in cooperation with other social and political groups—goals inspired by a common ideology shared by its members for whom the pillar and its ideology is the main locus of social identification. (Bax, 1990: 104)

C39.P23

But how do the several pillars relate to each other? Does not the metaphor of pillarization suggest a false symmetry and uniformity? It has been a matter of debate, moreover, whether the social democrats and the liberals can be aptly described as ‘pillars’ (Kennedy and Zwemer, 2010: 255–6).

C39.P24

The degree of organization and participation differs to a considerable extent. The liberals were basically against segmentation, as they wanted to represent all citizens. Reluctantly they created their own organizations, which formed a relatively weak pillar, which is sometimes called the liberal milieu. The socialists were much more strongly organized than the liberals and were part of an international movement. The Catholics and the orthodox Protestants had the strongest networks of organizations, which shaped the identities of their members forcefully. Their lives were lived within the pillar. The Catholics were members of one church and one political party, whereas the orthodox Protestants were divided among themselves into various bigger and smaller pillars.

Within orthodox Protestantism there have been countless theological debates, divisions, and separations, as well as some mergers, which make the religious landscape in the Netherlands complex and hard to fathom. The many theological struggles that have energized Dutch believers may be considered in retrospect as a factor that contributed to the alignment within the pillar, as the laity was involved in these controversies.

C39.P25

Given the complexity of Dutch pillarization it is difficult to say what was precisely at stake in these processes. Scholars have pointed to the motives and elements that have played a role. Important in this respect is the emancipation of underprivileged groups, either in a religious (Catholics and orthodox Protestants) or a social (workers) respect. It could also be a combination of both, as was the case with Kuyper's *kleine luyden* (simple folks), lower middle-class orthodox Protestants. Second, the defence against secularizing tendencies—in particular against the 'neutral' state and its monopoly on schools—played a significant role. A third element concerns the wish of the elites to control the lower classes and to soften class differences. Within the pillar you could meet people of different social backgrounds, whereas nowadays the segregation in Dutch society runs along lines of income and education. Fourth, political scholars such as Lijphart were interested in how the elites established political stability in a pluralist society. Negotiating at the top led to peaceful cooperation and political participation such as party membership increased in the process of pillarization.

C39.P26

The concept of pillarization has been successfully applied to other countries as well. Belgium is an obvious example which is both similar to and different from the Netherlands. A study of the Belgian socialist movement concluded that a socialist family lives 'of the Party, within the Party and for the Party' (Hellemans, 1990: 20). As in the case of the Netherlands the 'self-contained worlds' of the pillars extended in Belgium 'into the political sphere (with national political parties) and into the socio-economic realm (with trade unions and a host of professional organizations)' (Hellemans, 2020). During the nineteenth century the Catholic school and education system was considerably expanded, including the re-establishment of the Catholic University in Louvain in 1834. Around 1850 a Catholic political party of dignitaries emerged which would broaden its constituency—including the middle classes, farmers and workers—in the course of the twentieth century. From the 1890s onwards—as the social costs of the process of industrialization became clearly visible—Catholics founded Catholic co-operative societies for sick relief and trade unions. In the twentieth century Belgian Catholic farmers, middle classes, and women were also organized in voluntary associations which promoted their emancipation and well-being. By the 1950s the Catholic pillar included almost all realms of society. Although the liberal and socialist pillars were less comprehensive (they did not have their own schools and only a few hospitals), they had their own unions, mass media, youth movements, as well as a political party (Dobbelaere and Voyé, 1990).

C39.P27

A systematic approach to pillarization has been suggested by the Belgian sociologist Staf Hellemans, who discerns three meanings in relation to pillarization. First, is the organizational pillarization of a part of the population; second, there are examples of a complete segmentation of society with more or less closed subcultures; and third, the

term may refer to the political pacification of these subcultures within a consociational democracy (Hellemans, 1993: 122). Hellemans singles out the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria as examples of countries where pillarization has been the dominant form of segmentation and where the political elites of the subcultures cooperate closely and peacefully (Hellemans, 2020).

C39.P28

Furthermore, Hellemans places pillarization in the broader context of emerging social movements in the nineteenth century. These movements try to mobilize people on a national scale for which reason they create organizations, which may lead to pillarized subcultures. Since 1870 large numbers of people in Europe gradually became involved in super-local networks and activities: economically (in workers' associations), politically (in the extension of the right to vote), and culturally (in the development of primary and secondary education). Hellemans explains the prominence of Catholic and socialist pillars by their orientation towards the collective, whereas liberals and Protestants emphasize the autonomy of the individual. Here he points to the distinction between 'pristine' pillars and secondary pillars, which have to adapt to the new structure to maintain their position. After the 1960s we find no new major examples of pillarization. In the Netherlands some smaller orthodox Protestant groups have tried to build a pillar after the 1960s, but these remained small and are not as extensive as the old pillars. In the 1970s the self-contained worlds of the pillars started to crumble—both in the Netherlands and Belgium.

## SECULARIZATION

C39.S3

C39.P29

Although secularization is a highly contested concept, it is still useful in summarizing significant trends in Dutch religion since the 1960s and 1970s. The decline in institutionalized Christianity from this period onwards can hardly be disputed. In the last forty years of the twentieth century church membership halved (Becker and De Wit, 2000: 24). The speed of this process has, paradoxically, to do with the high degree of engagement in church institutions. Either you **are** an active member or you **are** out. There **is** little space in between to allow for lukewarm participation. A recent survey suggests that the population comprises some 25 per cent church members, 5 per cent Muslims, 2 per cent belonging to other faiths, and almost 68 per cent 'nones' or non-church members. The mainline churches will lose even more members in the future, as younger generations are underrepresented in these institutions (Bernts and Berghuis, 2016: 21–3).

C39.P30

One can point to the rise of spiritual forms of religiosity or to the fact that many people still entertain, for instance, the idea that there is 'something' after death. These are important developments that merit scholarly attention, but this trend implies a fundamental relocation of religion from hierarchical structures associated with pillarization to subjectivized forms of religiosity. It is also true that evangelical and Pentecostal churches attract significant numbers of younger people, but this will not be enough

to compensate for the losses of the old mainline churches. The role of Christian and Muslim immigrants will be discussed in the next section.

C39.P31 Overall, however, the situation remains nuanced. Despite the decline in church membership and church attendance since the 1960s, especially in the countries of north-western Europe, the old continent is not as secularized as one might assume. Three out of four Europeans say they are religious persons and convinced atheists rarely form more than 10 per cent of the population. France, where 15 per cent claims this position, stands out in this respect. In the Netherlands 12 per cent of people still go to church regularly (usually once a week), whereas 23 per cent say they attend a few times a year (Bernts and Berghuis, 2016: 25). In Belgium church membership is substantially higher, whereas only some 8 per cent attend Mass regularly. Catholic baptisms and church weddings are still common practice in Belgium, but over the period between 1967 and 2007 there was a sharp decrease from 93.6 per cent to 54.6 per cent (baptisms) and from 84.3 per cent to 58.4 per cent (church weddings) (Botterman and Hooghe, 2009: 18–20). In Belgium belonging to the Catholic Church is for many people still a way of life, whereas in the Netherlands church membership has effectively become a matter of personal decision.

C39.P32 That said, the late 1960s were a turning point in Belgium as well. Between 1967 and 1973 regular church attendance dropped from about 42 per cent to 32 per cent. In this short period the Catholic Church in Belgium lost ‘a relatively large part of the upper and upper-middle classes’ (Dobbelaere and Voyé, 1990: 3). The self-declared membership of the Catholic Church dropped from 72 per cent in 1981 to 50 per cent in 2009 (Hellemans, 2011). The percentage of people who claim that they do not belong to any denomination went from 24 per cent in 1981 to 42 per cent in 2009 (Dobbelaere, Billiet, and Voyé, 2011: 145). These surveys based on European Values Study 2009 categorize some 2.5 per cent as belonging to ‘other Christian groups’ and 5 per cent as Muslim. Statistics from the Pew Research Center show a higher percentage of Christians (64 per cent), a smaller percentage of non-affiliated (29 per cent), and almost 6 per cent Muslims (Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures, 2010).

C39.P33 For the most part, the decline in church membership is interpreted in terms of secularization. In addition, Karel Dobbelaere and Liliane Voyé point to the phenomenon of *bricolage*: even believing Catholics no longer accept a set menu, but ‘pick and choose’ what they believe and practise (Dobbelaere and Voyé, 1990: 4). Similarly, although links between integration in the pillar and electoral behaviour and ideological attitudes still exist, the process of depillarization is very evident in Belgium. Importantly, Christian organizations have loosened their ties to the Christian Democratic Party very considerably (Hellemans, 2020).

C39.P34 The Dutch historian Peter van Rooden has given a convincing account of how the dechristianization of the Netherlands is to be understood. He has pointed to three factors that have contributed to this process (van Rooden, 1998). First, there were internal developments that weakened the significance of being confined within a pillar. Neo-Calvinist and Catholic intellectuals, for example, increasingly began to doubt that it was of ultimate importance to guard the borders of their respective communities. Intellectual developments played a role, but more important was the success of mass

mobilization. Neo-Calvinists and Catholics had gained influence in Dutch society, and succeeded in reaching influential positions. Was there anything else to achieve?

C39.P35

A second factor that van Rooden mentions is probably even more influential. Although mass mobilizations had motivated and engaged people to organize themselves in separate ‘heavy communities’, they also had a very authoritarian character. Catholic clergy as well as Protestant leaders told people what to do. This concerned financial contributions to the churches, but also involved women and families who were pressed to have more children. On 1 May 1954, for example, the Catholic hierarchy issued an official statement that the faithful should vote for the Catholic People’s Party and not become members of socialist organizations (including the Labour Party). Strong boundaries were drawn between clergy and laity, men and women, and between sin and virtue. This whole constellation was undermined by the cultural revolution of the 1960s—an anti-authoritarian movement that rejected a strict sexual morality and traditional gender roles. The Catholics and the orthodox Protestants could not accommodate the new youth culture, in so far as the revolution was directed very precisely against the traditional religious values of these groups.

C39.P36

Besides internal developments and the cultural revolution of the 1960s, fundamental shifts in Dutch society rendered the idea that this society was formed of different and separate groups less plausible. These shifts undermined the possibilities of the pillars to exercise power over their members. For example, Peter van Rooden—together with the sociologist José Casanova—emphasize the transformation that was brought about by the rise of the welfare state. The pillarized organizations were integrated within a national bureaucracy. This entailed a transference of the collective identification ‘of the confessional community . . . to the imagined community of the nation-state’ (Casanova, 2009: 220). A further example is instructive. One of the greatest successes of the Dutch pillarized system had been the way in which it had encapsulated the radio in the 1930s by founding Catholic, Protestant, and socialist broadcasting companies. Television, however, was not that easily confined within the old system. Here a truly national culture found its voice.

C39.P37

Peter van Rooden concluded that ‘the new prosperity, growing mobility, and extraordinarily rapid spread of new suburbs blurred the visible distinctions between people’ (van Rooden, 1998: 40–1). Under these circumstances the idea that one belonged either by birth or by choice to a particular group became less convincing. The rise of the modern Dutch welfare state and the cultural revolution of the 1960s with its stress on consumption and personal self-fulfilment did not square with a pillarized society (McLeod, 2007). The system had always asked much of the individual believer who had to spend considerable amounts of time and money within his or her own pillar. This ideal was no longer attractive. The Netherlands gradually transformed into a society of individuals who were supposed to be tolerant and respectful of different ways of life. More recently, however, this idea of the Netherlands as a pluralist and tolerant country has lost much of its plausibility. After the murder in 2004 of the film maker Theo van Gogh by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim, and the death threats against members of parliament, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Geert Wilders, and Thierry

Baudet, the intellectual climate has hardened. Islam seems to have taken over the old role of the Roman Catholics as a threat to the Dutch nation. Nowadays a strict policy against immigrants is enforced and some politicians are talking as if the Dutch nation will be taken over by Muslims.

## ISLAM AND NEW RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

C39.S4

C39.P38

The first report on the presence of Islam in Belgium was prepared by the Turkish consul in 1829 and estimated the number of Muslims at 6,000 at the time. Their visibility was probably rather limited—something that started to change in the mid-1960s, when migrants from Maghreb countries and Turkey were employed in low-wage jobs in the mining, steel, and car industries (Fadil, El Asri, and Bracke, 2015: 224). Later these so-called guest workers were encouraged to bring their spouses and children to Belgium. But with rising unemployment in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis the borders were closed to manual labour immigrants. In 1974, however, Islam was recognized as an official religion in Belgium. The majority of Belgian Muslims (some 5–6 per cent of the Belgian population in 2019) are descendants of these migrant workers.

C39.P39

Their presence has grown significantly in recent decades. Halal shops and mosques have transformed the shape of the big cities, especially the capital Brussels, where Muslims comprise approximately 17–25 per cent of the population (Fadil, El Asri, and Bracke, 2015: 222). This transformation has provoked unease and right-wing parties such as Vlaams Belang (formerly Vlaams Blok) have put the ‘migration question’ at the centre of the political agenda. The attacks of 9/11 in the United States and the 2016 bombings in Brussels that killed thirty-two people encouraged the negative image of Muslims. Nowadays much research is policy-oriented and focuses on immigration and issues of security. In 2011 Belgium was the first European country to ban full-face veils (niqabs and burqas) in public space. In 2018 the Netherlands and Luxembourg followed suit with a ban on face-covering veils in specific public places such as schools, hospitals, public transport, and government buildings.

C39.P40

In the colonial era the Netherlands was sometimes called the biggest Muslim country in the world. The possession of the Netherlands East Indies (present-day Indonesia) with its huge Muslim population was deemed to substantiate this claim. Currently, however, relatively few Muslims in the Netherlands come from former colonies, such as Indonesia, Surinam and the Netherlands Antilles. Most Muslims have a Moroccan or Turkish background. These individuals arrived in the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards to do the ‘dirty work’ and were perceived as ‘guest workers’, who would eventually return to their country of origin. But after the oil crisis of 1973, they were seen as ‘ethnic minorities’, who would settle in the Netherlands and be reunited with their families on Dutch soil. In the late 1990s, however, a further shift took place. As Islam became publicly and clearly visible (veiled women on the streets, mosques and Islamic schools) and terrorist incidents spread fear—Moroccans, Turks, and other immigrants

were increasingly termed ‘Muslims’. It is equally clear that such attacks played a significant role in this reframing (Berger, 2015: 202).

C39.P41 Thus, the marked increase in the Dutch Muslim population is due to immigration. Although there are a number of methodological problems in these assessments, it is more or less accurate to say that some 5 per cent of the Dutch population of 17.2 million people (in 2017) are Muslim. Previous overviews came to a higher percentage, largely because they took the percentage of Muslims in the country of origin as point of reference, whereas new research has shown that this leads to an overestimate. For instance, not 98 per cent, but only some 40 per cent of the Iranian refugees in the country claim to be a Muslim (CBS, 2009: 36). From 1996 to 2015 more than 2 million people migrated to the Netherlands. Most of them came from Poland (191,900) and Germany (129,800), but large groups also came from the UK, China, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The Netherlands Antilles ranks third (92,400), and Turkey and Morocco take the fourth and eighth places, with 92,000 and 67,600 people respectively.

C39.P42 It is clear that Christian immigrants outnumber Muslim immigrants (54 per cent against 26 per cent); 8 per cent of the immigrants belong to another religious group; and 12 per cent are ‘nones’ (van Dyke, 2017). It is very hard to get up-to-date and precise data about non-Western Christian immigrants. In 2008 the sociologist Hijme Stoffels calculated the number of Christian immigrants from Latin America, Africa, and Asia at about 500,000 people (Stoffels, 2008: 15–16). The substantial rise of evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands is related to this development, but it is even more difficult to get reliable data here. It has been estimated that migrant churches in Amsterdam attract substantially more people than the old mainline Dutch Protestant Church: on an average Sunday some 25,500 against fewer than 2,500 participants (de Hart, 2014: 110–11).

C39.P43 Other religions have relatively small numbers of adherents in the Netherlands. Hinduism and Buddhism are well under 1 per cent, whereas the Jews represent a tiny 0.1 per cent of the Dutch population (during the Second World War 75 per cent of the Jewish population were deported and murdered). Strikingly two-thirds of the Dutch say that they don’t belong to a church (Schmeets, 2016: 5), but that does not imply that they are not interested in questions of life and death or meaningful existence. Much depends, however, on how researchers define these groups and which terms are used to describe the growing number of ‘spiritual seekers’ (to take but one example). The ‘spiritual turn’ is a major development in late modern Western religious history, but it is hard to establish the exact size and impact of these new groups, which have little social cohesion and are even more subjectivized and individualized than older forms of radical Protestantism.

## A NOTE ON LUXEMBOURG

C39.S5

C39.P44 The present-day state of Luxembourg was founded in 1815 by the Congress of Vienna. The Grand Duchy is one of the smallest sovereign states of Europe, but is the seat of

the European Court of Justice, the highest judicial authority in the European Union. The official languages are French, German, and Luxembourgish. Like Belgium it was and still is very much a Catholic country. Luxembourg is now a secular state, but until very recently the relationship between the state and religious communities, especially the Roman Catholic Church has been close. In 2015 a decision was made to sever these ties and to introduce, among other things, a common ‘values education’ class in public education.

C39.P45 According to recent statistics, some 68.7 per cent of the population are Catholic, and 1.8 per cent Protestant; 2.6 per cent belong to a non-Christian religion, and 24.9 per cent are unaffiliated (Borsenberger and Dickes, 2011: 6–7, 27). The rise in the number of Muslims in the period between 1999 and 2008 from 0.7 per cent to 2 per cent is due to the arrival of immigrants from former Yugoslavia. Foreigners account for almost half of the Luxembourg population. The largest group are the Portuguese, comprising 16.4 per cent of the total population (migration started in the mid-1960s), followed by the French (6.6 per cent), Italians (3.4 per cent), Belgians (3.3 per cent), and Germans (2.3 per cent). Although there is clear evidence of secularization (weekly participation in religious services has dropped to 13 per cent in 2009), the balance between affiliated Christians, nones and practitioners of other religions is predicted to remain stable (70 per cent, 26 per cent, 4 per cent) over the next twenty-five years (Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

C39.S6

C39.P46 Luxembourg today (2021) is the most religious—that is Catholic—nation among the Low Countries. The Grand Duchy has a relatively small minority of Muslims (some 2.3 per cent), whereas in Belgium and the Netherlands some 5 per cent of the population claim to be Muslim.

C39.P47 From its foundation in 1830, Belgium has been predominantly Catholic, whereas the Netherlands claimed to be a Protestant nation, notwithstanding a large minority of Catholics who were marginalized from national life. At the end of the nineteenth century self-contained worlds (‘pillars’) emerged in both countries. Especially the Catholics in Belgium and the Netherlands and the Dutch orthodox Protestants used their many-branched pillars of societal organizations to emancipate and mobilize their respective constituencies. The late 1960s proved to be a turning point. The pillars started to crumble and the number of non-affiliated rose to 68 per cent in the Netherlands, 42 per cent in Belgium, and 27 per cent in Luxembourg.

C39.P48 The old ideal of integrating differences by pillarization is no longer viable in a society faced with new questions. Radical Islam is currently seen in the Netherlands as *the* ‘religious group disturbing the unity of a moral nation of civilized and tolerant individual citizens’ (van Rooden, 1997: 153). The modern ideal of self-fulfilment has primarily to do with questions of gender and sexual identity, especially the acceptance of homosexuality

and female emancipation. Muslims, however, claim that the idea of autonomous self-realization entitles them to their own views and practices (such as wearing a veil). The controversies about Muslims and their place in secular societies centre on key concepts such as self-realization and autonomy. These ideas are crucial to modern—especially Dutch—self-understanding, but what exactly do they mean in a plural society? Thus the discussion is not about the introduction (or not) of the Shari’ah, but about the implementation of key concepts in a situation, where the status quo is challenged by new arrivals.

C39.P49 Despite the immigration of large groups of Muslims and Christians on the one hand, and a growing and flourishing market of spirituality on the other, both Belgium and the Netherlands have become very secularized. This trend is likely to continue. In the Netherlands, for example, the number of Christian church members is expected to decrease further, from some 25 per cent of the population in 2015 to 20 per cent in 2030. The dechristianization of the Netherlands, however, does not lead necessarily to a more tolerant society. Many Dutch citizens are dissatisfied with their situation, economically and culturally. It is easy to blame immigrants or Muslims or the European Union for this, whereas global economic forces are likely to be more important for the loss of jobs and income and a sense of alienation. For all these reasons the image of the Netherlands as a tolerant nation that handles religious pluralism with ease and grace no longer corresponds to the realities that the Dutch are facing.

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