Windmills, Tulips, and Fundamentalism

The Netherlands in Crisis

by Don Edward Beck, Ph.D.

Have you ever been in a turbulent thunderstorm on a dark, rainy night when suddenly a bolt of lightning illuminated the hidden landforms and human-made structures? In a flash, for a microsecond, you experienced what had been invisible. You were made aware of the realities that surrounded you, some friendly, others hostile.

The first lightning flash for the Dutch came in 2002 with the killing of Pim Fortuyn, the populist anti-immigration politician. The second, when controversial film maker Theo van Gogh was struck down while riding his bicycle in the streets of Amsterdam and brutally murdered by Mohammed Bouyeri, a self-defined Islamic radical, a holy warrior. It shocked the entire European continent. The Netherlands, as a self-contained oasis of tolerance, prided itself on its mixtures of cultures, a series of separate but equal entities, all supporting what is known as the "polder" society. The "polder" is the land the Dutch reclaimed from the sea. In the collective history it represents a time when all the Dutch had to pull together against their common enemy, the sea. Liberated from religious structures and rigid constraints imposed by social conformity, the Dutch, especially in Amsterdam, the city with red light districts and pot-smoking cafes, reveled in their unique sense of personal freedom and equality.

The February 27, 2005 *New York Times* (page 7) reported that a flood of people, primarily from the middle class, are threatening to leave the country. Especially the elderly are being driven elsewhere by fear. It's as if millions both in the majority and the minority populations are walking on eggs while wearing wooden shoes.

The *Times* queried, "Leave this stable and prosperous corner of Europe? Leave this land with its generous social benefits and ample salaries, a place of fine schools, museums, sports grounds and bicycle paths, all set in a lively democracy?"

"The answer is yes," the editorial concluded.

But the story has a much broader context; one that portends serious trouble across all of Europe as Muslim populations, in search for something better, are flooding into various countries in a major land migration out of Arab and African contexts. We may well be seeing a new chapter in a centuries-long struggle between Christendom and Islam for the domination of Europe. "Many have taken up religion as a way to define themselves against traditional European culture, whose values they reject for economic or spiritual reasons," reported the New York Times on December 26, 2004. Olivier Roy, a French scholar of European Islam, added, "Islam has replaced Marxism as the ideology of contestation. When the left collapsed, the Islamists stepped in." This, combined with the high birth rate in first generation Muslim

families, will potentially, produce new population and power ratios and threats to established "European" cultural cores and beliefs. And, with the possible membership of Turkey in the European Union this in-between country, with its open borders, may become a land bridge into safer environs as more turbulence erupts in the Middle East. Certainly, those whose expectations have been raised and are now searching for the comforts and joys of modernity will be on the move. How do we keep them down on the sand after they've tasted the pleasures of London, Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Par-ee?

Now, if we zoom out even further, out from the Netherlands to Europe to the globe, we see cultural clashes virtually everywhere. *It is ironic that, today, we are more fragmented than ever before as a global population, yet, thanks to migration and interactive technology, we are more interconnected*. Like a huge planetary Rubik's Cube, everything and everybody are now distributed everywhere as national boundaries have softened, social, economic and political migration has been encouraged, and the Internet and CNN give people everywhere access to each other in real time. *We are straining to become more global but without the available models that can handle the mesh of diversities that now exist as close neighbors. We are desperate to discover new forms of social cohesion that can address these explosive mixtures.*

Welcome to Tower of Babel II

Since colleague Peter Merry (who lives in The Hague) and I have been working in Holland for a number of years, we quickly seized the opportunity to address the growing threats and fears from a Spiral Dynamics-Integral perspective. More people per capita have been exposed to Spiral Dynamics in the Netherlands than in any other country. We had long believed that we had encountered more complex thinking among the Dutch (and Northern Europeans in general) than anywhere. We believed that if we could assist our friends in dealing with this crisis within their country, they could discover the models and processes for confronting and dissolving ethnic/religious/cultural conflicts elsewhere. Their collective pain would be everybody's eventual gain.

All elements within Dutch society now appear to be in the throes of dialogue. More "right wing" elements want to send people home and shut down the borders. More "left wing" voices, believing that more integration is essential and that hostility is being stoked by the marginalization of Muslim neighborhoods, are calling for greater patience and tolerance. We noted that the Ministry of Integration recently ordered a number of the more "conservative" Imams out of the country apparently in response to their preaching of hate in the Mosques and religious centers.

Without much advanced planning, we announced a special four-hour session to address the situation. It was held at a local conference center on January 28, 2005. We expected 50 or 60 people but, much to our surprise, more than 210 people packed into the facility. Energy was high; everybody seemed respectful and open to our ideas. We promised a follow-up, not wishing to offer only a one-off session that viewed the developments with alarm and then adjourned all of us back to our warm, safe homes.

In September of 2004, through the influence of Dr. Maria Jeukens (a very bright lady who works with the Police Academy) I presented the Spiral Dynamics concept to 70 top executives in the Dutch Police and important guests in the security chain. My intent was to warn them of trouble just ahead. My years of experience working within the difficult South African transformation (l981 until 2002) heightened my sensitivity to violence in the making, racial tension and the dangers inherent within an "us vs. them" polarity. Peter Merry, who is deeply involved daily in the Netherlands, was also sending danger warnings to me.

Then came the van Gogh shock wave that set windmills spinning and tulips bowing their heads all over the countryside. In our two-hour presentation, Peter Merry and I made the following four points:

The Spectrum of Intensity of Beliefs and Actions

S- 7 Flame-throwers: aggressive, violent, and predatory, with intent to destroy, attack, and eliminate

S- 6 Radicals: extremists, thrive on edges of chaotic protest, enemies of moderates and compromise

S- 5 Zealots: highly doctrinaire, partisan, fiercely evangelical with causes, makes all-or-nothing demands

S-4 Ideologues: true believers, absolutists, with firm convictions and rigid boundaries

S-3 Moderates: softer beliefs, sees other options, less intense and ego-involved, more open

S-2 Pragmatists: practical and pragmatic, believes what works, advocates the art of the possible

S-1 Conciliator: search for consensus, common ground, place for everybody, inclusiveness for all

First, surface level categories, reflected in our definitional symbols, generate stigmas and stereotypes resulting in dangerous polarization. We introduced a new language of difference in the form of spectrums of styles in order to shift the issues away from monolithic religious, ethnic, and nationalistic definitions of people.

Rather than seeing and defining all Muslims to be the same, and assigning the traits of Flame-thrower, Radical, and Zealot to every member of every Mosque, this Spectrum of Differences allows individuals to escape knee- jerk stereotypes by becoming deeply aware of the *gradations and shades of beliefs*. Since these Degrees of Intensity will exist on the other wing of the continuum as well (anti-Muslim as well as pro-Muslim), much of the interaction between the two sides is really between these Degrees. Each will beget and arouse its psychological twin on the other side of the issue. Typically, Flame-throwers, Radicals, and Zealots are at war, not just with similar Degrees on the other side of the issue, but with their own Ideologues, Moderates and Pragmatists. As these dynamic forces spiral down on both wings, hostility blurs the filters and judgments are made that push both wings onto the slippery slope to more dangerous end positions. This is why the "center" doesn't hold. Even former friends who are not extreme or committed enough are displaced into the camp of the enemy. Slight insults catapult into dramatic and searing attacks. The "either you are for me or against me" position, separates humans into warring camps as both abstract their defenses "in the name of God," or "in the name of Allah". Herein lies the origin of holy wars with ghastly and inhumane acts of oppression and violence. (This conceptual model is called, The Assimilation/Contrast Effect, and is based on years of academic and field research by the late professor Muzafer Sherif, formerly of the University of Oklahoma and Penn State University.)

Second, we sought to uncover what we call the Mother Board: the most basic value system codes that exist beneath cultures and impact the surface level manifestations. These worldviews, mindsets, and complex, adaptive intelligences are awakened in response to life conditions. The Dutch society has reached a level of complexity over time, because of the manner in which these deep, developmental, adaptive intelligences have emerged within their dikes. (See the schematic in Bruce Gibb's analysis of *Collapse* in this issue for a quick definition of these memetic codes.)

As compared to other European countries, the Netherlands can be loosely described as being influenced by the Sixth Level (Green) egalitarian, permissive, and tolerant value system. The Dutch police, for example, pride themselves, and rightly so, on their reputation as innovative,

in-neighborhood policing. In my conversations with the leadership, they reported being reluctant to return to law and order based models of policing, in response to the presence of egocentric acts and purists, absolutist threats. In forming the historic Dutch culture of openness and inclusion, other elements of society sought out immigrants, guaranteed them a certain level of income (in Guilders), and made few demands on them in terms of a whole range of socials issues and of conformity to Dutch standards. *This, of course, drew in multitudes of individuals and groups who believed they could do whatever they wanted in such a fully human rights-oriented, forgiving and affluent culture. As a result, the hard earned and historic attributes that have elevated the Dutch society to such a high level of civilization were under assault.* These "European values" are being rejected by a growing number of immigrant groups who are seeking to reproduce the cultural components and belief systems that dominate the places they decided to leave in the first place. Using the language of biology as a metaphor, we have, here, a virus-like entity with its own peculiar psychosocial DNA code. The virus has fixed itself to a host (the open Dutch society) allowing it to grow and multiply. In our view, this "virus" may well threaten the very future of this stable and open societal structure that was what attracted the "virus" in the first place. Remember, we are not typecasting Muslim beliefs as a whole; rather, we are isolating only one strain of the religious expression. One can find the identical "virus" within Jewish and Christian traditions, or even in militant forms of nationalism. These are universals across all religions, cultures, nations and in fact any group that is contained within boundaries and threatened by those "from the outside".

"While there are obvious differences between the fanatical Christian, the fanatical Mohammedan, the fanatical nationalist, the fanatical Communist and the fanatical Nazi, it is yet true that the fanaticism which animates them may be viewed and treated as one."

-- Eric Hoffer

Third, we offered a challenge to the audience, asking them to search for the basis of a new synthesis, a fresh model that can provide the social cohesion essential if any country is to meet the needs of its people and guarantee opportunity and justice for all. This is no easy task. We examined, for example, cultures that are order-based with some manifestation of a rank system, or *Hierarchy,* where the privileged, the elitist, the anointed, those with the biggest sticks, or the lucky few, get to rein and rule. Further, we illustrated some of the positive qualities of *Egalitarian-Pluralistic* systems where every experience of life is given equal value, free from discrimination, judgment, or isolation. Unhappily, this egalitarian social contract is now under attack. In the case of the Netherlands, it has been unable to handle the new volatile mixtures forged by the asymmetry as a result of who is emigrating from where. This is not because the new immigrants are of darker skin, or speak Arabic or worship Allah. It is because of the diverse Degrees of Intensity and the underlying value systems codes that create physical, psychological, and cultural separation into hard-edged enclaves. This is clearly undermining the uniqueness and elegance of the Dutch and European experience and is, in fact, appearing all over the planet. As has been the experience of many societies that have integrated differences over time, the hard boundaries and exclusive beliefs of immigration groups, will ultimately mesh and meld into the mainstream of the powerful social system. This is happening rapidly in the United States as African Americans are assimilating the common values held by the dominant society. As this happens, differences based on skin color and pigmentation, unique accents, food preferences, dress styles and even religious-spiritual preferences all begin to morph and blend into a more cosmopolitan society.

Fourth, we introduced a new organizing principle, Societal MeshWorks. A MeshWork involves the integration, alignment, and synergy of multiple elements, entities, interests and motives, all woven together to create healthy, dynamic, and comprehensive solutions to complex problems within rapidly changing and complex environments. MeshWorkers see the cohesion in fragmentation, the simplicity in complexity, and the order in chaos. They function more as Integral Design Engineers and do not rely exclusively on conflict management or dialogue facilitation. In this arrangement, there are elements of both *Hierarchy* and *Egalitarian-Pluralism*, but each element is plugged into the Mother Board that itself contains a

spiral of emergence at its core. For it to work, this overall metaphor for dealing with complexity, differences, and change, requires sophisticated leadership, at national and local levels. There must also be an acceptance of superordinate goals that overarch the entire society, and the mutual sharing of accountability and responsibility. This common ground -- the new Dutch Synthesis (actually it's a spiral) can be the basis for resolving differences, mediating conflicts, enhancing sustainability while facilitating our inevitable emergence. A MeshWorks will facilitate the vertical inclusion of the Pre Modern, Modern, Post Modern, and now, Integral stages. In a horizontal sense, it will show how to both tolerate and enhance multiple expressions of culture, religion, life style, and personal choice. In all cases the overall needs and interests of the new Dutch polder must have the highest priority, and provide the touchstone for decision-making.

The intent will be to seek the power of the Third Win (both parties and the world society win) and embrace those universals that flow through all healthy and responsive social orders and combines. This will not come easily and it may take decades for it to be realized. Yet, in this microcosm of human cultures in a small land area in Europe, we may well see serious and mature attempts to turn potential cultural tidal waves into synergistic flows that will benefit all. Obviously the Dutch are world famous for their understanding of how water moves and what happens when dams break, or holes appear in the dikes.

Peter and I have planned a follow up session for April 29th. We are calling it Dutch Summit II. While we believe it will be up to our many friends and colleagues in the Netherlands to create a new Dutch Charter for Rights & Responsibilities, we believe, that as they do so, they will be in a position to teach the rest of us. We hope it will not be too late.

For further developments contact peter@engage.nu and join the Kosmos e-mail list by clicking here.

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