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JAN WILLEM DUYVENDAK

HOLLAND AS A HOME
RACISM AND/OR NATIVISM?¹

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In recent months, Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch populist Freedom Party (PVV), attracted a lot of attention with a so-called ‘Meldpunt Overlast Midden- en Oost-Europeanen’, a website where Dutch citizens could complain about nuisance caused by immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. Most of them have recently arrived in the Netherlands, coming from EU-countries such as Poland. Many politicians and opinion makers protested against the website by labelling it discriminatory. A few attacked Wilders by claiming that his proposal was ‘racist’, since he was singling out a specific category of inhabitants based on their nationality.

One of the aims I set for myself by writing *The Politics of Home. Belonging and Nostalgia in Western Europe and the United States* was to better understand what (new?) axes of inclusion and exclusion are ‘operative’ in the Netherlands, or broader, in Western Europe today. I was struck by the fact that more often than not populist parties such as the PVV in the Netherlands and the Front National in France did not, or no longer, mobilize around anti-semitism, homophobia or skin-colour racism – at least in their party statements. Instead they found new categories to polarize and discriminate against – particularly the Muslim ‘other’. Hence, new forms of exclusion emerged, mostly associated with culture and religion. The new ‘target’ groups could even be as blond as the Polish immigrants coming to the Netherlands, being depicted as alien to Dutch culture and assumed ignorant of ‘Dutch national norms and values.’

My book analyses how this ‘culturalisation of citizenship’ takes place and what it implies for groups being included or excluded from the Dutch nation. My claim – and that of others (see Geschiere 2009; Van den Berg & Duyvendak 2012; Hurenkamp et al., 2011 & forthcoming; Mepschen 2012; Mepschen et al. 2010; Schinkel 2007; Van Reekum 2012; Verkaaik 2010), is that something rather fundamental is changing in the positioning of various groups in Western European societies. If we want to grasp these shifts, a priori theorising them in ‘old’ terms – such as ‘racist’ – might inadvertently obscure parts of what is going on in societies today. Of course, one can choose to apply the term ‘racism’ to all kinds of group-based exclusion, but then we should start to distinguish different types of racism. The term ‘racism’ would then point towards the issue of exclusion, but without any further analytical significance. Instead I propose to distinguish between various forms of exclusion and inclusion; racism-based-on-skin-colour being one form of exclusion next to other forms of exclusion. The fact that different forms of exclusion always appear to be in collusion only makes it more pertinent to develop sensitive concepts that help to untangle the webs of privilege and subordination. The terms in which partly new forms of exclusion are legitimised seem to be less related to phenotypic traits and pseudo-scientific racial taxonomies and more related to (assumed) cultural differences, often mapped onto territorial divides.

More precisely, it is my claim that it is significant to make a distinction between *racism* and *nativism*. More or less in line with American sociologist Mary Waters, I propose that *racism* can be defined then as the belief that ‘socially significant differences between human groups or communities – differences in visible physical characteristics – are innate and unchangeable’, accompanied by the notion that ‘we’ are superior to ‘them’, while *nativism* can be defined as ‘an intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of the latter being foreign, “xenos”, i.e. un-Dutch’. It is significant to distinguish between these forms of exclusion, because they are associated with quite different political mobilizations and consequences. The assumption of unchangeable difference enables a politics of segregation, even if people live in close proximity and co-dependence. It gives rise to an intricate management of contact with the other, who is irredeemably ‘unclean’. Nativism, however, enables a politics of integra-

tion. What matters in nativist politics (and in political efforts of integration) is not the management of contact between irredeemable different species of Man, but the identification of those who can and cannot be integrated into the national family through cultural assimilation.

My book traces the development of these new forms of exclusion and their resonance all over the political spectrum. As I try to show, the core of the culturalisation of citizenship is a nativist concept of the nation as a home for the Dutch, who are conceived as a culturally homogeneous family that has been living in the Netherlands for a long time and therefore has the 'right to the ground'. Nativism produces a specific form of xenophobia: the Other is constructed in cultural terms as the opposite of the 'real', 'authentic', 'rooted' Dutch citizen. In this perspective, the 'native superior' has rights to the Dutch ground for historical reasons – sometimes ironically including dark-skinned postcolonial migrants in the 'autochthonous' category since they have been part of the Kingdom for centuries. Markus Balkenhol and others have shown that quite a few Dutch Surinamese activists share in this nativist discourse, claiming that they are as autochthonous as the white Dutch, as they are all similarly historically rooted in Dutch soil.

As I argue, the culturalisation of citizenship might be most pronounced among populist parties – both among the left and the right. In the Dutch case, the PVV and the SP claim attention, but even 'liberal' left-wing parties share in nativist assumptions. Let me give one example. GreenLeft has been mobilizing in the past months to stop the expulsion of young asylum seekers (the case of 'Mauro' being the most famous). GreenLeft is right to criticise the asylum policies of the Dutch government. The argumentation given, however was surprisingly nativist. The children – threatened by expulsion – had the right to stay in the Netherlands since, as GreenLeft claims, they are 'Limburgser dan Vlaai. Noordhollandser dan kaas. Frieser dan de Elfstedentocht. En Zeeuwser dan het meisje', meaning so much as that they exceed the native Dutch in terms of being assimilated, rooted, and stereotypically Dutch. Even for this liberal political party, cultural integration is the most important dividing line between the right to stay or the obligation to leave.

Does my focus on nativism mean that racism as a social phenomenon has disappeared? Of course, this is not the case: discrimination is rarely a zero-sum game... the emergence of other kinds of xenophobia does not automatically mean that skin colour has become irrelevant. However, I do think – and data seems to corroborate this – that the situation of the Dutch Surinamese has changed quite dramatically in the past twenty years, partly in relation to the rise of nativism and Islamophobia. The ethnic hierarchy of today is not the same as before, since differences in skin-colour play a less predominant role in the construction of the 'Other', the non-native Dutch (see for instance the rise in marriages between Surinamese and 'native' Dutch). I here somewhat echo the famous thesis of William Julius Wilson in *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978) but let me be entirely clear: my claim is not that we live in a period of colour blindness or 'post-blackness' (cf. Touré's *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What It Means to Be Black Now*, 2012) nor do I share in the self-congratulatory attitude among native Dutch who claim that 'we' are beyond discrimination based on skin colour. Data shows that young Dutch Surinamese feel only slightly less discriminated against than Dutch Moroccans and Dutch Turks, the biggest difference being that there is no increase in experienced discrimination among the Surinamese whereas the Dutch Turks and, particularly, Dutch Moroccans, report a strong increase in their experienced discrimination in the past years (Van der Welle 2011: 165-167). Discrimination is not zero-sum, religion is not the new 'race', nor has 'race' become insignificant. But the phenomenon of exclusion has become much more multi-layered, to say the least.

My interlocutor, Pooyan Tamimi Arab, suggests that my understanding of new forms of xenophobia in terms of nativism is part and parcel of the taboo among intellectuals to openly discuss racism in Dutch society, to acknowledge racism as part of the Dutch daily life. I object to this. My analysis of the actual situation in the Netherlands shows that processes of exclusion have various grounds these days: next to the traditional sources of alterity (such as skin colour) – to which 'racism' refers – new dividing lines have developed, particularly religion (Islam) and culture (Polish people who are depicted as noisy alcoholics). In other words, there is a broadening of the grounds of exclusion to anti-Muslim and anti-Europe. Is asking the question what these *new* dividing lines mean for the *old* 'ra-

cist' cleavage, necessarily downplaying 'everyday racism' and reinforcing the alleged taboo on racism in the Netherlands? I don't think so, and I do not want to leave that impression. I guess and hope that by disentangling various sources of exclusion, we are confronted with the discomfoting reality of the Netherlands today, in which so many groups are 'Othered' through an all-too-often unrecognised nativism.

For Pooyan Tamimi Arab 'it is absurd to sharply distinguish nativism, culturalism, and racism', since 'culturalism, nativism, and racism are intimately intertwined in the European context'. I agree that they can be intertwined. Moreover, I want to avoid the distractions of a nominalist discussion about the exact terms we use. But I think that, as social scientists and social philosophers, it is our task to distinguish various forms of exclusion as sharply as possible. If not, we won't even know where to start fighting.

Jan Willem Duyvendak is full professor in Sociology at the University of Amsterdam since 2003, after he had been director of the Verwey-Jonker Research Institute for Social Issues (1999-2003) and Professor of Community Development at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. With regard to his background training, he received his master's degrees in both sociology and philosophy at the University of Groningen. Moreover, he did his doctoral research in Paris and Amsterdam which dealt with new social movements in France. His main fields of research currently are belonging, urban sociology, 'feeling at home' and nativism.

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