NIAS Studies in Academic Freedom and Epistemic Diversity

# Citizenship in Nativist Times

Tamar de Waal
Menno Hurenkamp
(eds)

Leuven University Press

Citizenship in Nativist Times

*NIAS Studies in Academic Freedom and Epistemic Diversity*

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Edited by
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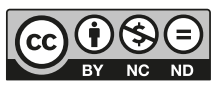


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# Foreword

We live in authoritarian, illiberal times when foundational democratic values, like academic freedom, have been deployed as weapons against universities themselves. Many things we may have too quickly taken for granted as irreversible achievements of democracy are once again being put in question. This forces academics to revisit earlier conclusions. Were they too easy, perhaps even complacent?

In this volume, the valuable work of Jan Willem Duyvendak provides the point of departure for a reflection on key questions of citizenship today. It shows, as Duyvendak himself has argued, that in periods of democratic and rule-of-law erosion, that universities, academics, and scholarship have an essential role to play – not only in producing knowledge, but in sustaining the moral, civic, and institutional conditions of a free society.

This Liber Amicorum honours a scholar who reminds us that academic work, at its best, is a form of citizenship and that the defence of academic freedom is critical to the maintenance of democracy itself.

*Michael Ignatieff*
*Academic, author, politician*
*Former president of the Central European University*

# Citizenship in Nativist Times

*Menno Hurenkamp and Tamar de Waal*

For more than two decades, the erosion of democracy and the rule of law has been a clear global trend.[1] One of its main drivers is the rise of nativist political movements that, often through formally democratic procedures, undermine fundamental rights, minority protections, and the core principles of the constitutional state (Nord *et al.*, 2025). This development raises a fundamental question about the role of citizenship in contemporary democracies. Have prevailing notions of citizenship contributed to this erosion, or is the erosion itself the consequence of a weakening or neglect of citizenship? In other words, in nativist times, is citizenship part of the problem – or (also) part of the solution?

We invited the contributors to this volume to reflect on these questions through the lens of Jan Willem Duyvendak's rich scholarly work. In his oeuvre, we identify four analytically distinct yet interconnected forms of citizenship. These forms overlap and interact. They also frequently come into tension with one another and, at times, actively undermine each other. Together, they offer a framework for understanding the paradoxes and conflicts (for example, inclusion/exclusion, rights/belonging) of contemporary democracies in turmoil.

## Four Citizenships

These four forms are: political citizenship, social citizenship, culturalized citizenship, and academic citizenship. Political citizenship concerns the formal and ultimately legal dimension of citizenship: who is legally recognized as a citizen, who holds civil and political rights, who is entitled to participate in political decision-making, and who is subject to the institutions and guarantees of the constitutional state. It is about membership, inclusion, and exclusion at the level of law and political authority. Political citizenship defines the boundaries of the demos and thus determines

whose voices count, whose interests are represented, and whose rights are protected (e.g., Duyvendak, 2025; Hurenkamp & Duyvendak 2022; Duyvendak, de Haan, & Engelen 2008; Duyvendak 2006; Duyvendak 1999).

Social citizenship refers to the public and institutional conditions that enable individuals to act as full members of society. It is closely connected to the welfare state and encompasses access to social security, healthcare, education, housing, and other state-backed provisions. It is not merely about formal rights, but about the capacity to exercise those rights by having access to public services. Without adequate social security, healthcare, education, housing, or childcare, political citizenship and its promises of equality remain unevenly distributed in practice, benefiting some citizens while leaving others structurally disadvantaged (e.g., Bredewold *et al.* 2018; Ayuandini & Duyvendak 2017; Tonkens *et al.,* 2013; Duyvendak 2017).

Culturalized citizenship addresses the ways in which the political citizenship of different groups is interpreted, evaluated, and experienced in a cultural and symbolic sense. It concerns the implicit and explicit norms, expectations, and narratives that define who is seen as a real, deserving, or fully "integrated" citizen, and who is instead marked as deviant, suspicious, or even dangerous to the nation. Culturalized citizenship operates through political and policy discourse, via media representations and public debates, and through everyday practices (e.g., Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022; De Waal & Duyvendak 2022; Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016; Mepschen & Duyvendak 2012; Duyvendak 2011).

Finally, academic citizenship refers to the role of academics, universities, and scholarship in sustaining and critically reflecting on democratic and constitutional values. It concerns the responsibilities of academic institutions in protecting academic freedom, fostering critical enquiry, defending the foundations of liberal democracy, and educating citizens. Academic citizenship is thus not politically neutral, especially not if liberal democracy itself is under attack: it involves taking seriously the task of safeguarding the constitutional state in times of authoritarian pressure and attacks on knowledge and intellectualism (e.g., Duyvendak 2025; Verburgt & Duyvendak 2023).

We hence asked authors to reflect on current times and the condition of citizenship today – empirically, normatively, and critically – drawing inspiration from Duyvendak's intellectual legacy. The four forms of citizenship are analytically useful but interacting in practice, they are complex and intertwined, so they could not serve as a simple organizational scheme

for the book. Therefore, the chapters were arranged in six arenas, which better capture how citizenship is produced and contested. An arena here is less a physical place than a site where social action happens, who gets to act, under what rules, and with what stakes, highlighting that citizenship is constantly made and unmade (Jasper & Duyvendak 2015, pp. 14–19).

This six-part structure takes citizenship from abstract forms to the concrete, such as public space, the home, welfare institutions, neighbourhoods, media, and academia. After all, if there is any lesson to be drawn from Duyvendak's work, it is that citizenship is best understood not as the expression of clichés like national models (e.g., typical "French republicanism" or typical "Dutch multiculturalism"), but as an institutionally and culturally mediated process of boundary-making, with governance structures, policy debates, and everyday arguments constantly at work to tell us who actually belongs or should have rights (e.g., Bertossi *et al.*, 2012; Reekum *et al.*, 2012; Duyvendak & Scholten, 2011).

Where the four categories define how citizenship can be understood, the six arenas organize the book in a way that makes clear where and how citizenship is produced, experienced, contested – and made. They disaggregate the conflicts that arise when different forms of citizenship interact under conditions of democratic erosion, allowing the volume to track frictions rather than treating citizenship as a stable typology.

## Six Arenas

Part 1, *Nativism and Nostalgia*, empirically probes political citizenship by examining how formally equal legal membership is hollowed out through nativist imaginaries, exclusionary narratives, and authoritarian uses of democracy. The essays testify to the degradation of political citizenship as an inclusive legal status, with democratic procedures mobilized against minority rights and constitutional safeguards. In this way, they expose how formal political membership is often, discursively and increasingly with real-world effects, only conditionally granted through narratives of homogeneity and nostalgia. The chapters do so by focusing both on differences between European countries and the United States and on the unambiguously increasingly autocratic times in which we live.

Part 2, *Promises and Pitfalls of Citizenship*, places culturalized citizenship further under scrutiny, examining how norms, histories, temporalities,

stigma, resilience, and everyday practices shape who can inhabit citizenship meaningfully. Taking cases from the Netherlands, France, and the United States, these chapters test whether culturalized citizenship inevitably reproduces exclusion or can be reconfigured in more pluralistic directions. They inter alia explore the normative core of culturalized citizenship and the context-dependent narratives and practices that value or even foster democratic inclusion without producing new boundaries of exclusion. As in Part 1, however, the undertow is that of a serious societal and political predicament, with authoritarianism eating at the heart of liberal democracy.

Part 3, *Politics of Home*, shifts the empirical focus to lived experiences of belonging. It thereby tests political, culturalized, and social citizenship via "home" as a research concept, as deployed by Duyvendak (e.g., 2011). Starting from home as a contested, relational site with uncanny elements, these contributions assess whether access to social rights and recognition are sufficient for belonging when norms of "being at home" are ill-defined at best and exclusionary at worst. They challenge normative assumptions about belonging by examining whether feeling at home can be decoupled from exclusionary notions of rootedness, heritage, and ownership, and whether social citizenship can compensate for symbolic exclusion. As in the other parts, with home treated as a distinct sociological object (not reducible to housing or place-making) enacted through emotions, moral claims, and social relations, the chapters call for context-specific analyses sensitive to cultural practices, changing policy objectives, and political rhetoric in an inflammable time.

Part 4, *Moral and Emotional Divides*, tests the interaction between culturalized citizenship and its societal underpinnings by examining moral boundaries, inequality, and different types of polarization. On the one hand, these processes work via subtle "normalizing" discourses and everyday interactions, with all their humiliations and alienation as experienced by migrants. On the other hand, they operate through the deployment of highly polarizing moral vocabularies about good citizenship behaviour, which can exist even under conditions of relative socio-economic equality. In addition, the essays investigate societies' emotional and moral hierarchies and the mechanisms by which these undermine solidarity and mutual recognition. The chapters pay particular attention to the risk that overt reliance on so-called objective facts – such as Duyvendak's (2025) *Spookkloven (Ghost Divides)* – sidelines how exclusion operates, with several chapters critically engaging Duyvendak's recent work on social divides.

Part 5, *Social Institutions and the Welfare State*, empirically evaluates citizenship as an institutional and public arrangement. With cases from France and the Netherlands, the chapters ask whether social citizenship still reflects egalitarian principles and examine the degree to which institutions and professionals can contribute to this. By focusing on narratives and myths surrounding the welfare state under duress, the essays test how citizenship is mediated by discretionary institutional practices of frontline workers, care workers, and educators. The gist is that public institutions are not mere implementers of principles, national or local; they make and contest the meaning of citizens' status and rights through routines and discretionary judgements.

Part 6, *Public Sociology*, tests academic citizenship by examining how scholars and universities themselves respond to nativist attacks and authoritarian drift, and reassess their own research agendas. These contributions ask whether academic citizenship can still sustain critical knowledge and democratic norms in hostile political environments, and what it should be oriented towards. Scholars have a responsibility to defend democratic values, and their engagement reshapes the boundaries of citizenship itself. The conditions under which research can exist are at stake here, with attention to the academy itself, the task of activism, and the power of social media.

## In Nativist Times

All in all, this volume demonstrates that the intensified invocation of citizenship in public debate and policy has coincided with democratic backsliding and the normalization of authoritarian logics, rather than countering this. Taken together, these chapters point to citizenship regimes that are increasingly conditional, performative, and unevenly distributed, shaped as much by affective and historical repertoires as by law and policy. A preliminary conclusion, therefore, is that, in nativist times, citizenship is not a stable normative anchor. It is a deeply ambivalent social product: legally formalized yet culturally conditional, emotionally charged yet institutionally routinized, invoked to protect democracy while increasingly mobilized to narrow its boundaries.

At this point in time, representative politics has a serious task in keeping authoritarianism at bay. But liberal democracy is to be defended

not only through electoral politics but also through ordinary life. The contribution of social science lies here, and as far as this volume is concerned it consists of two elements.

First, social science must engage the cultural and emotional infrastructures of citizenship. The chapters collectively show that countering nativism cannot rely on "facts" alone, nor on technocratic corrections of misperception. Instead, the task is to understand how affect, morality, and historical narratives authorize exclusion – and how alternative repertoires of critique and social movements might sustain democratic solidarity. Under what conditions do emotions such as dignity, empathy, care, or even civic pride become politically available without being weaponized against so-called outsiders? Which narratives of home or nation allow for cross-group identification without denying conflict? Addressing these questions is essential if citizenship is to be reclaimed as a plural and future-oriented project.

Second, by systematically mapping the foundations of democratic resilience: identifying where rights become practically usable. Where, in schools, welfare offices, courts, housing markets, newsrooms, or digital platforms, is voice taken seriously? And where is recognition either granted or denied? It comes down to focusing on how small routines and discretionary decisions cumulatively shape political equality.

Hence, the book contributes to the defence of liberal democracy and the constitutional state not by offering a single normative solution or clear-cut definitions of "political", "social", or "academic" citizenship, but by clarifying the conditions under which democratic citizenship, in the broadest sense of the word, can be renewed: through fair institutions, inclusive cultural repertoires, and credible, reflexive public knowledge. Our current citizenship may also be a product of nativist times – but it remains a crucial terrain on which democratic futures are negotiated.

*Amsterdam, February 2026*

## Note

[1] The authors thank Merlijn Olnon for his substantial contribution to the production of this volume.

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# ‘I Have Consistently Found Differences to Be Smaller’ Interview With Jan Willem Duyvendak

*Menno Hurenkamp and Tamar de Waal*

As an introduction to this collection of essays, we conducted a two-hour conversation in which we sought to connect key intellectual developments in Jan Willem Duyvendak’s work to major social and political events in the Netherlands and beyond.[1] The aim was not to provide a comprehensive overview of his entire career or oeuvre, but rather to explore a number of underlying themes that structure his thinking. We began by reflecting on how his work might be categorised over time, moved from there to the core elements of his own understanding of that trajectory, and then turned to his current ideas. We concluded by inviting Duyvendak to offer his reflections on what he would have contributed to this volume.

***Viewed retrospectively, your work – first as a political theorist/philosopher, later more as a sociologist, and as a director – can, we think, be divided into four overlapping periods. From 1990 to about 2000 you focused on social movements (in the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall, neoliberalism, and the Dutch ‘purple’ coalitions). Then, between 2000 and 2010, there was a stronger focus on multiculturalism and the homogenous nation (in the context of 9/11 and alleged ‘failed’ integration of immigrants in the Netherlands). Subsequently, between 2010 and 2020, there was a clear focus on culturalisation and emotions (with research on ‘home’ and the normalisation of populism being particularly prominent). And finally, from 2020 to 2025, increased attention to polarisation and the role of universities (in times of populism in power). What do you think of this periodisation?***

I think it is broadly accurate. I would add three qualifications. First, research on social movements never stopped; it continued both in my own work and in my supervision of PhD candidates. Take, for example, the book series at Amsterdam University Press (recently taken over by

Taylor & Francis) with Jim Jasper, in which we ourselves also published (*Breaking Down the State: Protestors Engaged* and *Players and Arenas: The Interactive Dynamics of Protest*). The study of social movements functioned as a methodological training ground: the analytical insights I developed there have underpinned much of my later work across other research domains, even though my thinking about the explanation of mobilisation has changed. Social movement scholars traditionally attached great importance to structures (political systems; 'hard' political culture) in explaining collective action. This structuralism was criticized in the early 1990s by a number of American sociologists, most notably Jim Jasper: as if one could explain or even predict one-to-one, on the basis of structural characteristics, what kinds of mobilisation would occur in different countries. After that, I too developed more attention for the role of emotions in social movements and for concrete interactions between governments and mobilising citizens. This does *not* amount to a denial of the importance of institutions. Their significance, however, is not unambiguous. It depends, among other things, on citizens' perceptions. In that sense, I have become more attentive to contingency.

Second, the distinction between the second and third periods may be somewhat artificial, since populism has been strongly present since around 2000. Although perhaps my own position also shifted slightly. My tone vis-à-vis majoritarian thinking at the time of the rise of Pim Fortuyn [the first successful Dutch populist, tragically assassinated in 2002] was less alarmed. There was maybe a certain trust based on the fact that we found Dutch society growing tighter together in many respects rather than falling apart; see, for example, Menno's [Hurenkamp, one of the interviewers] and my 2004 study showing that the Dutch turned out not to be as individualised as they thought, and that 'light communities' had to a degree replaced pillarisation. My engagement with the risk of majorities defining themselves in nativist terms deepened later on. But at the same time, if you look at publications, you see that we brought this theme up relatively early. Our book *Het bange Nederland* [*Fearful Netherlands*, 2008], with Ido de Haan and Ewald Engelen, already expressed considerable concern about aggressive nationalism.

Third, social policy is missing as a theme. As professor of 'community development' (*samenlevingsopbouw*) in Rotterdam (1996–2000), I was expected – indeed required – to engage with social policy. Officially, I was to conduct research on 'the foundations of community work', the branch

of social work concerned – among other things – with coexistence between different groups of citizens. I therefore wrote extensively about social professionals, social policy, and the ideology underpinning it. Consider, for example, the history of the Dutch Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sport, which was originally called Culture, Recreation and Social Work. Initially, policies of this Ministry were permeated by an ethos of 'malleability', that is: social engineering, and thus also by paternalism; yet later, it was primarily characterised by the struggle with the accusation of being paternalistic. As a result, my work often revolved around the recurring tragedy that the Dutch Left, in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, embraced an overly radical conception of self-realisation, in which only the citizen could realise themselves – autonomously, without help from others. Indeed, as the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis argued in an influential account, 'heteronomous' interventions by, for example, social professionals would come at the expense of genuine 'autonomy'. In this way, the idea of the 'malleable society' was effectively undermined, and social science itself – especially so-called 'intervention sciences' such as the then field of andragology – was placed at risk.

***Were these different phases in your research career the result of a changing zeitgeist that raised new questions, or were they (partly) more contingent – for example, the result of a new job or time spent at home or abroad?***

They were certainly not all conscious choices. It already begins with the fact that I studied in France. Because I spoke French, I was able to obtain a PhD position with Hanspeter Kriesi at the University of Amsterdam, yet no doubt also because I was very interested in social movements. Luck or coincidence also played a role in my appointment as endowed professor of community development in Rotterdam. I had completed a – rather peculiar and by now long disappeared – BA and MA-programme organised by the University of Groningen in Leeuwarden (the capital of the province Friesland), which focused partly on well-being and social work, especially community work. That made it rather easy to get that position, since there were hardly any academics in the Netherlands who knew anything about it. And because I held that professorship, I also came into view as director of the Verwey-Jonker Institute, specialised in social research, which was a merger of institutions studying various types of social work in the Netherlands.

***Looking back, who were the scholars important for your development?***
Like many of my generation, I was strongly influenced by the epistemological perspectives of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. I studied with Foucault in a packed lecture hall and also with Pierre Rosanvallon – where we mainly read English-language books, incidentally. In terms of more concrete influences on my interest in social movements, belonging, migration and home, I would mention Arlie Hochschild, Jim Jasper, Nancy Foner and Michèle Lamont, among many others.

***By now you are a celebrated 'distinguished research professor' at the University of Amsterdam and an 'International Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences'. But for a while you were also simply 'that integration professor'. How do you look back on that role and this particular debate?***
As scientific director of the Verwey-Jonker Institute, I was involved in the research report for the 'Blok Committee'. This was a committee of inquiry set up by the Tweede Kamer (House of Representatives) in 2002 to assess integration policy in the Netherlands over the previous 30 years. It was truly the *dullest* thing we ever wrote – a source study evaluating policy objectives, historically grounded and closely tracing what policy makers were thinking back in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. In other words, we did not judge from the present but sought to understand the motives and objectives of the time – and whether they were met – which, of course, could conflict with what politicians wanted to hear at the moment. The parliamentary motion by the Socialist Party calling for the inquiry already spoke of 'failed' integration policy before the committee had even begun. We naturally stipulated in advance that we would not engage with such a preconceived conclusion.

Some parties in the House of Representatives did not trust us anyway. We were allegedly not scientists but 'GroenLinks supporters' (supporters of the Dutch left-wing Green party), and similar unedifying criticisms. It was an extremely politicised context, and the parliamentary committee – *not* us – ultimately drew the conclusion that 'integration had succeeded *despite* policy'. Whereas we actually showed that certain policies *had* been effective, such as additional funding for education, extra language courses, or opening social housing to migrants. Indeed, for a long time, newcomers were not expected to fully share 'Dutch norms and values'. There was also no active 'multicultural' policy telling them that they should *not* do so, but

neither were people addressed on this point. That only began in the 1990s under the then Minister of the Interior Roger van Boxtel (D66), and in academia with scholars such as the Rotterdam sociologist Han Entzinger. Only then did genuine 'integration policy' take shape, largely in the form of requirements. But these public policy schemes were directed at individuals, not groups. Yet all this nuance was unacceptable to the House of Representatives. Upon publication of the report in 2004, for example, politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali stated – without possibly having read a single line – that the outcomes 'could not be true'. The political climate was so overheated that everything reduced to the question of whether one was 'for or against the multicultural society'. Absurd, because as researchers we approached this, in principle, agnostically.

In hindsight, perhaps we could have anticipated more how the distinction between socio-economic and cultural integration would come to dominate the debate, and one might ask whether we should have reflected on this at greater length. After all, those expressing the most panic about the multicultural society were primarily motivated by religious objections or concerns about the role of religion. Or perhaps we should have been clearer about the limitations of our report. We focused mainly on the socio-economic dimension – that was the assignment – whereas a reflection on the socio-cultural dimension might have better informed the existing political debate. However, most importantly, I think, is that we were right: our findings have since been reproduced endlessly by others.

***Still, if we look at your inaugural lecture of, say, 2004, populism as a phenomenon and the major contemporary concerns surrounding it seemed far away.***

Becoming professor of general sociology at the University of Amsterdam gave me the freedom to develop research lines that went far beyond 'community development', the subject that had defined my chair in Rotterdam. For instance, I was eager and very much enjoyed putting institutions on the agenda as a topic for both research and teaching. But even then, I was already concerned with the puzzle of homogenisation: the *declining* differences between population groups in the Netherlands, while everyone spoke of increasing distance and greater differences – especially as populism developed. In fact, I have consistently pursued this line of relativising differences, or rather: I have continually investigated them and repeatedly found them to be smaller than most people in media,

politics, and academia claimed. It began with debunking the individualisation thesis by showing that light communities were emerging as a kind of successor to pillarisation. But, by then, we had already experienced quite a lot in terms of political shifts – if nothing else, the alleged failed integration and the proclaimed 'multicultural drama' we just discussed. So, also then, I was concerned about the danger of a majority unwilling to make room for all kinds of minorities. My interest in analysing populism and nativism in terms of claiming 'one's own home' only really developed a few years later, through an encounter with the American sociologist Arlie Hochschild, who – in her own way – examined 'home' in America. That struck me as highly productive to translate into the Dutch debate about 'belonging', in which terms such as 'feeling at home' and 'belonging at home' were increasingly used.

As Hochschild showed, the crisis of 'home' was far greater in the United States than in the Netherlands – in terms of housing, the combination of work and care, gender relations, and also in terms of (non-)belonging. Analysing developments in the Netherlands as a form of 'politics of home' had hardly been done. 'Home' was still sociologically untainted here; social geographers had written quite a bit about it, but psychologists hardly at all, and sociologists certainly not. Yet it proved extremely fruitful to compare different levels of home: street, neighbourhood, district, state. Moreover, the transformation of the welfare state in the Netherlands was practically and discursively very much about home, in the sense that the welfare state became 'domesticated'. The government, for example, continually said it would come 'to the kitchen table'.

***Did that discussion not end up as a defense of social professionals and social institutions against the tide, as they have been under siege ever since?***

Perhaps eventually. I actually hope so. Consider our intervention with fellow sociologist Evelien Tonkens, where we posed the question: 'Who would want to be showered by their neighbour?' It did not sit well with everyone, but the message was clear. The public perception was that anonymous solidarity (by professionals) had completely gone out of fashion and that people no longer wanted this: they wanted to be there for each other. At least that was the prominent narrative in political circles and among policy makers. It was and is incorrect or at least incomplete. People rather not receive intimate care from one volunteer or another,

but from professionals. So, on the one hand, we showed that a great deal of volunteer work still exists and that the Netherlands has a great deal of social capital. On the other hand, we showed that professionalism has value, and that sometimes it is simply better, for example, to be showered by a professional. Here one must, of course, mention again the work of the philosopher Hans Achterhuis, whose book *De markt van welzijn en geluk* (*The Market of Welfare and Happiness*) in the early 1980s did considerable damage to the idea of social professionalism. Professionals came to be seen as paternalists who created their own work. It took a long time for that association to loosen again.

***Mentioning Achterhuis does touch upon a relevant point. Throughout your career, you have quite explicitly 'responded' to public debates – for example, by arguing that there was no 'multicultural drama'. Did that feel like drudgery?***

Now that I have more distance from it, I am less negative about that role. But at the time, it sometimes did feel like drudgery, yes. The term 'multicultural drama' was coined by historian and prominent Labour Party member Paul Scheffer in an op-ed in 2000, which sparked a lot of debate. I think others were quite jealous that he received so much credit for what was, upon closer inspection, a rather limited intervention in terms of originality. The Rotterdam sociologist Han Entzinger and the then-director of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research ([Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau] (SCP)), Paul Schnabel, for example, had said similar things long before; Schnabel had even openly advocated assimilation for years. Yet the debate about their reflections remained limited in comparison to what Scheffer's piece provoked. However, after 9/11, the debate took on a life of its own and became even more vicious. People often asked me why I kept writing against the tide, whether that was not pitiable. Everyone believed that the 'failed integration' thesis was *true*. But the problem, in my view, was that everyone believed two things: first, that Dutch integration policy had been strongly multicultural; and second, that it had failed. However, neither is supported by the facts. Yet, because of these misconceptions, people then concluded that the only solution was monoculturalism. Arguing against that was indeed extraordinarily thankless and met with little resonance.

***This 'debunking' tone recurs in more recent analyses as well, such as 'The Dutch are less polarised than we think' or 'The ordinary man exists only in our heads'.***

There is inevitably a demythologising side to sociology – and that is often the side that attracts considerable attention, as with the book by my colleague Hein de Haas on migration myths. But it is important to emphasise that demythologisation *could* be an effect of what one finds empirically; it should not be the goal. That would be odd, because then one would already know the answer in advance – and risk someone like former Prime Minister Mark Rutte saying that he has 'no need for sociological research' (as he did in 2021), because sociologists always say that things are not so bad. Yet, in my recent research for *Spookkloven* [*Ghost Divides 2025*], I was astonished to find that in eight of the nine 'divides' that I examined, the facts were very different from what many researchers suggested: the actual divides between the Dutch in terms of income, education, opinions, generations, genders, urban–rural, etc. turned out – except for wealth – to be much smaller than what people thought (their perceptions) and what they felt (the affective polarisation *is* very large). I started from what I already knew about one emotional divide, namely attitudes towards people with a migration background, and how large that divide was compared to what was actually going on. I then asked whether emotional polarisation might also be much greater than factual polarisation in other domains. And yes, that turned out to be the case.

It is indeed particularly sobering that, while factual divides in the Netherlands are relatively limited, support for the radical right is as strong as in other countries such as France, the US, the UK or Germany. This, I think, has much to do with what is at times described as a 'fear of failing', to use the term coined by Barbara Ehrenreich – that is, a fear of downward mobility. The Netherlands is almost fully emancipated, with the result that everyone wants to be seen, everyone speaks loudly, and one does not necessarily make much room for others.

I am now giving a rather bleak reading of my own book, while in the public debate I was accused of relativising problems too much. Fortunately, the book received a great deal of public attention, and I am invited at all policy levels to speak about it. Among scholars, however, responses have mostly been limited to the people I address directly. Moreover, in their responses, they often deal with just one of the alleged cleavages, instead of discussing the main finding of the book that the high level of

affective polarisation is not mirroring factual inequality or dissensus. Unfortunately, the sociological field turns out to be thematically highly fragmented, and everyone mainly writes for a highly specialised public in academic English about their own small topic. People thus sit on islands – and then a book like *Spookkloven* surprises because it zooms out and reveals patterns across different fields and through time.

On that account, I remain convinced that different methodological approaches within sociology can all be valuable. What should not be decisive is which method one happens to be good at – quantitative or qualitative – but the research question itself. The odd thing now is that some sociology departments almost always conduct quantitative research, regardless of what is being studied. Such restrictive preferences are problematic. As a predominantly qualitative researcher, I gratefully build on the quantitative work of others. But because I place it in a broader context and especially across time, it apparently falls outside the horizon of some of those who provided the data. With cultural sociologists the discussion is slightly different. They claim that I neglect Bourdieu, because hierarchical distinction among social groups continues to play a major role in far more subtle ways. But what room is still there for such distinctions? Cultural elites have never been as weak as they are now – not so much financial and economic elites, but cultural ones. Consider the enormous impact of the 'ordinary Dutchman' in our current politics: the populist revolt would be impossible without him. On the other hand, I can well imagine that it is irritating for those who have been deeply engaged in a field and a public issue when someone comes along and, in what is not more than an extensive essay, shows that the factual polarization is largely imagined.

***One more question about* Spookkloven*. One divide is not the other. There are deep divides that are easy to step across, wide divides that are very shallow and can be walked through, and divides that are both wide and deep and not easily bridged. By establishing that polarisation is predominantly emotional, perhaps not everything has been said – the popularity of the far right does not diminish when one discovers that we are converging socially and culturally. Have you then identified the right divide, you think?***

If I write a sequel, I would like to think more systematically about the different nature of different divides. Certain divides will always exist – by education, by expertise – and so there will always be groups higher in the

social hierarchy or earning more. The art is to prevent forms of privilege from accumulating, which is essentially the Walzerian argument that advantages in one social sphere should not automatically translate into advantages in others. Nativism, unfortunately, is a divide we will never completely get rid of. I think we should recognise it more explicitly as a divide with a certain right to exist. That means acknowledging that the relationship between newcomers and long-term residents is always an unequal one and will remain so, because there will always be newcomers. Formulated positively, nativism is the need to feel at home somewhere, and that indeed always involves a certain exclusivity. Not in terms of *jus soli* or *jus sanguinis*, but we should examine when and where it is justifiable that residents have slightly more rights than newcomers – and where and when it is not. We conducted research for the municipality of Amsterdam on 'feeling at home in the city centre'. This has much to do with tourism: Amsterdammers find it frustrating that they can never visit the Anne Frank House because of the long queues of tourists, and it would not be unreasonable to do something about that through a priority scheme.

***Is that not a rather small example? When one thinks of home in the city centre, housing prices are surely the first thing that comes to mind – it costs at least a million euros to live there.***

Housing is an excellent example. Where there is new construction in rural areas, priority is already given to the children of established residents over newcomers. That seems to me quite defensible.

***That is not something the Jan Willem of twenty years ago would have said.***

No, perhaps not. But by thinking about 'home', I have realised that it is not only about recognition and redistribution, but also about belonging, about experiences of loss, or of others being favoured. The book on home dates from 2011; it contains a chapter on the Castro, a gay neighbourhood in San Francisco that strongly resisted non-gay newcomers. At the time, I was quite ambivalent about that – surely gay people engaging in exclusion could not be the intention? Now I think they were right to want to keep that neighbourhood for themselves. Back then, my argument was along the lines of 'public space belongs to everyone, and too bad if you cannot walk hand in hand everywhere'. I would no longer say that, especially in light of the emotions of loss of established residents. We would do better to engage

in a discussion about the points that trigger nativist and populist sentiments. For example, the perceived preferential treatment of recognised refugees in housing allocation is one of the major themes for the radical right. And when we see, with Trump, how strongly people react against policies that give certain groups preferential treatment at universities, it is highly advisable to keep quotas – *if* they are justifiable at all – temporary. It remains painful, even when it is unavoidable, that certain groups are favoured because they were discriminated against in the past, since this disadvantages others who cannot help, for example, being white. If a social sphere or institution depends on a strong ideal of equality and is therefore highly sensitive to unequal treatment, we should recognise that criticism of preferential policies does not always amount to a defence of privilege. I indeed do not think I would have said this five or ten years ago.

***In preparation for this volume, we asked contributors to reflect on four forms of citizenship – social, culturalised, political, and academic citizenship – and ideally to identify points where one intersects with another, for example where social and culturalised citizenship, or academic and political citizenship, meet. How do you view this typology, and what would you yourself have written about?***

It is a fine typology, very productive. We have already discussed at length the changes in social and culturalised citizenship. I think it is necessary to dwell longer on academic citizenship, on 'civic formation' within the academy. That is what I would like to have written about more. For instance, the fact that some students hardly know the difference between academic freedom and freedom of expression, as if the university were primarily about formulating opinions rather than understanding reality. Above all, however, I would want to write about how we as academic researchers relate to society and to public funding, about the relationship between science, governance, and citizens. Distance is needed here, in two ways.

On the one hand, the academy becomes vulnerable when policymakers tell science that it must engage extensively with citizens, or when politicians define a national research agenda. In both cases the idea being that science should serve society, or more precise: that science is only of value when it can deal with the major challenges of our times. Such a utilitarian justification of science marginalises many fields and disciplines, and is in sharp contrast to the ideas of NIAS and other Institutes for Advanced

Study, that defend the autonomy of scholars to define themselves what they are working on. Obviously, carrying out commissioned research can be helpful to improve policies. However, in the Netherlands, one of the main threats to academic freedom is that researchers are too dependent on externally financed research, the topic being defined by others.

On the other hand, we also become vulnerable through the focus on specific forms of knowledge, in this case 'experiential expertise'. It is already problematic when social professionals are pressed to rely too heavily on this, instead of their own professional expertise. But it becomes even more complicated when social scientists assume that citizens have the best knowledge about themselves, as if self-knowledge were a superior source of knowledge. Here we see a return of the same problem that emerged from the overestimation of self-realisation in the 1970s. You do not necessarily know yourself best, and experiences are not yet knowledge. To say this is currently not a popular view, but so be it.

Yet, while academic citizenship requires us to keep policy and citizens at a reasonable distance, we must bring journalism and the judiciary closer. In those spheres, too, truth-finding is central, and they are likewise under pressure from the radical right. They should normally be separate, but if we are attacked, we cannot allow one pillar after another to fall. Without an independent journalistic or legal sphere, there is no science – and vice versa.

## Note

[1] We thank Timothey Stacey and Ana Kroon for their serious comments.

PART 1

# Nativism and Nostalgia

# Nativism Past and Present: A View from the United States

*Nancy Foner*

Nativism is a major theme in the writings of Jan Willem Duyvendak, whose impressive career this volume honours. A key contribution is his book, *The Return of the Native: Can Liberalism Safeguard Us Against Nativism* (2022), which analyses the resurgence of nativist narratives in contemporary liberal societies. He has been particularly concerned with contemporary nativism in the Netherlands, where the idea that Dutch people and their culture are being threatened by an internal and "foreign" minority has assumed great significance in mainstream settings and discourse. Although Duyvendak's work on nativism is mainly concerned with the present, it is also steeped in history – emphasizing how, and why, nativism has returned to Western societies in our current era as well as how history has been used in current Dutch debates about nativism and national identity (Bertossi *et al.*, 2022, 2021; Duyvendak, 2020, 2011).

This chapter builds on Duyvendak's scholarship as it takes a US perspective, putting the focus on nativism in American society in both the past and present – a topic I have considered in my collaborations with him in the last few years (Bertossi *et al.*, 2022, 2021)[1]. Following historian John Higham's classic definition, nativism here refers to an intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (that is, "un-American") connections (1955, p. 4). Xenophobia, a closely related concept, stresses the enduring prejudice, animosity, or bias towards foreigners, in which they are demonized as a threat to the nation and its people (Lee, 2019, p. 7–8). Whenever the United States has experienced sharply rising and sustained large-scale immigration, an anti-foreigner reaction has ensued based on perceptions of economic, cultural, political, racial, and religious threats. This was true in the past, and it is true, once again, in the present.

Throughout American history, as historian A.K. Sandoval-Strausz writes, "alarmists have tried to stir up hostility against immigrants whom

they warned would destroy our traditions, radicalize our body politic, mongrelize our population, wreck our economy, or balkanize our culture" (2019, p. 335). Since the mid-nineteenth century, such sentiments have periodically underpinned and bolstered concerted efforts in the mainstream political arena to limit immigration and restrict immigrants' rights.

Looking back to nativism in earlier periods is not only a powerful reminder that it has been with us for a long time but also of the need to be sensitive to the historical contingencies that shape the particular form and consequences of nativist beliefs, politics, and policies in different eras. In discussing past episodes of nativism, I consider four noteworthy examples in the last two centuries that reveal the nature of intense xenophobia and attempts to restrict immigration in previous times: the anti-Catholic Know Nothing or American Party of the 1850s; anti-Chinese hostility and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; the early twentieth-century movement to restrict eastern and southern European immigration, leading to the Johnson–Reed Act (Immigration Act) of 1924; and the mass deportation and repatriation of Mexicans in the 1930s and mid-1950s. In moving to the current period, I examine nativism in Trump's America. In line with the focus of this volume, citizenship is part of the analysis: political citizenship (formal and institutional dimensions of civic membership, including rights), as well as culturalised citizenship (norms and expectations concerning who is a "full" or "real" citizen) as they are reflected in nativist policies and discourse in both the past and present.

## Nativist Movements and Politics in the Past

Over the course of the centuries, nativist movements and politics in the United States have involved many common elements, including creating barriers to immigrants' ability to achieve cultural and political citizenship. At the same time, each episode of nativism is unique, targeting particular groups, taking distinctive trajectories, and leading to different political results and policies.

One of the more well-known nativist movements in America's history, the Know Nothings, was formed by and drew support from anti-Catholic and anti-Irish Protestant Americans in the middle 1800s. By now, Catholics have become so much part of the US mainstream that most Americans forget the deep anti-Catholicism throughout the country's history, which

became especially virulent during the mid-nineteenth century when the United States experienced the first mass immigration of Catholics. The Irish at that time bore the brunt of the anti-Catholic xenophobia. By the 1840s, the Irish had become the largest immigrant group in the country, nearly half new arrivals. Not only did many native Protestants view Irish immigrants as an urban underclass prone to crime and a "love of alcohol", but also as blocked by their religion in assimilating into American society (Gerstle, 2015; Lee, 2019, p. 54). Many White Protestant Americans believed that Irish Catholics, with their "unholy devotion" to the Pope and the Catholic Church, would undermine America's democratic institutions, and a chief concern was that they were highly active politically and making large political gains (Lee, 2019, p. 55). "Catholicism was depicted not only as the enemy of God," historian Gary Gerstle writes, "but the enemy of republicanism. To Protestant Americans, the Catholic Church stood for monarchy, aristocracy, and other reactionary forces that America was seeking to escape. Where the pope ruled, Protestants charged, the people most certainly did not. And, thus, Catholic influence had to be resisted, contained, and even eradicated" (Gerstle, 2015, p. 37).

The "heightened and almost hysterical fear" that Catholic immigrants were intent on taking over the United States found expression in what has been called the nation's first mass nativist movement, the Know Nothing movement, which arose in reaction to the "Irish peril" (Lee, 2019, p. 42; Gerstle, 2015, p. 37). Its roots were in the anti-Catholic secret Order of the Star-Spangled Banner (OSSB), whose members had to be native-born White Protestants and were supposed to reply, "I know nothing" to any questions about the organisation. The Know Nothings' favourite slogan was, "Americans must rule America" – Americans meaning White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. Everything that was great about America, they insisted – its freedom, liberty, and support for civil, religious, social, and personal rights and progress – could be traced back to Protestantism. In contrast, the Catholic Church "represented monarchy, aristocracy, and other forces that were in direct conflict with American ideals and virtues of republican democracy" (Lee, 2019, pp. 53–5).

Not only did Know Nothings believe that Catholicism was dangerous and un-American, but the desire to deny political – not just cultural – citizenship came into play. The Know Nothing party (officially known as the American Party in the 1850s) aimed to curb the rights and influence of immigrants and naturalized citizens, mobilize voters to elect

anti-immigrant candidates, and gain political power (*ibid.,* pp. 43, 62); its national agenda included a twenty-one-year residence requirement for naturalisation and exclusion of foreign-born Americans from holding public office. This agenda was not achieved but, in the 1850s, the party at its peak achieved astonishing electoral success, including more than a hundred members of Congress, eight governors, mayors of Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, and dozens of other local elected officials. In Massachusetts, where four-fifths of foreign-born residents by the mid-1850s were Irish Catholic, the party was especially successful; in 1854, the party captured the governor's office, every one of the state senators, and all but three seats in the state house of representatives (*ibid,* pp. 64, 68; Taylor, 2000). Ultimately, the Know Nothing movement in the nation was short-lived. Although anti-Catholicism continued to have an impact on political life well into the twentieth century, by 1860, the Know Nothing movement had collapsed, done in by splits over the issue of slavery as the United States headed for civil war (Gerstle, 2015; Lee, 2019).

Only a few decades later, the Chinese, who had begun to immigrate in significant numbers to California and the American West in the 1850s, were subject to intense xenophobic and racial hostility and ended up subject to far-reaching immigration restriction. As in the case of Irish Catholics, nativists argued that the Chinese competed with and undercut American workers. Their culture was seen as primitive and backward and a threat to US democratic institutions.

California was, one might say, the cradle of anti-Chinese nativism. By 1880, of the approximately 105,000 Chinese in the United States, nearly three-quarters lived in California (Daniels, 2004, p. 16), where they were singled out for harsh discriminatory treatment. In 1862, for example, a Chinese Police Tax was levied on all Chinese people living in the state, and in the next decade they were barred from testifying in criminal or civil cases or attending public schools. In San Francisco, a "queue ordinance" was aimed at Chinese men who wore their hair in a queue or braid down their back, requiring those convicted of criminal offences to have their hair cut to within one inch of the scalp (Lee, 2019, p. 84). The Chinese were victims of violence from the White population as well. In 1885, to mention one especially brutal incident in the Western United States, a mob of more than a hundred White coal miners and railroad workers in Rock Springs, Wyoming attacked Chinese residents, twenty-eight of whom were killed and fifteen others wounded while the homes and bunkhouses of more

than five dozen Chinese people were set on fire (Lee, 2019, pp. 100–1; Rea, 2014; Luo, 2025).

California-based leaders of the anti-Chinese movement elected to the US Congress railed against the Chinese menace. Senator Aaron Sargent may have introduced in Congress what would become the Constitutional amendment giving women the vote, but he also had a "punishing hatred for the Chinese" (Lee, 2019, p. 89). Chinese immigrants, he argued on the floor of Congress in the 1860s, were "slaves and criminals of strange tongue, vile habits, impossible of assimilation … and swarm by the thousands to our shores like the frogs of Egypt … Chinese as a race [live] upon a lower plane, entirely different from that occupied by our thriving, healthy, prosperous, happy population … They live as Americans cannot" (quoted in Lee, 2019, pp. 89–90). In introducing a bill in the US Congress in 1882 to bar Chinese labourers from entering the country, another California Senator, John Franklin Miller, warned of the dangers of a massive invasion of Chinese, "like a naval invasion", of a "degraded and inferior [Chinese] race" who were a threat to national security (Lee, 2019, p. 92).

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 essentially shut the door on Chinese immigration, and although meant to be temporary was not repealed for another sixty-one years. In barring the entry of Chinese labourers, the act singled out the Chinese as the first group to be excluded from the United States on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality and explicitly prohibited them from becoming naturalised citizens. By 1917 Congress had barred the immigration of most other Asians (adding the Japanese in 1924). It was not until 1943 that Chinese immigrants gained the right to become naturalised citizens and the discriminatory laws affecting Asians began to be relaxed. Only in 1952 was naturalisation eligibility extended to all Asians.

If there is considerable historical amnesia among the general public about the sharp nativist discourse and discriminatory political measures directed at nineteenth-century Irish Catholic and Chinese immigrants, the same goes for the nativism focused on the huge number of southern and eastern European arrivals at the turn of the twentieth century. In the first decade of the twentieth century alone, more than two million Italians were admitted to the United States; in 1910, the census recorded more than one million Yiddish-speaking foreign-born residents (Lee, 2019, p. 118). Nativism and xenophobia aimed at Italian and Jewish immigrants were couched in racial and religious terms. The dangerous onslaught

of "swarms" of Jews and Italians into the country, predicted Madison Grant, the well-known eugenicist and advocate of the superiority of what he called the "Nordic race" from Northern and Western Europe, would lead to the "passing of the great race" and the extinction of the "native American of Colonial descent" (Lee, 2019, pp. 129, 131, 133–4). The popular *McClure's Magazine* printed articles that described Jews as unassimilable aliens who were taking control of New York City's businesses, real estate, and city government. Sociologist and eugenicist Edward Ross portrayed them as immoral and unethical criminals because of their "inborn love of money-making" (Lee, 2019, p. 133; Ross, 1914). For their part, Italians were not only often described as swarthy and dark-skinned but also as violent and criminal, suggesting "the stiletto, the Mafia, the deed of impassioned violence". They were victims of violence as well. In 1891, one of the largest mass lynchings in American history occurred in New Orleans, which had received a sizeable migration from southern Italy. When some of the Italian immigrants accused of murdering the superintendent of police were acquitted in a trial, a mob broke into the jail and killed eleven Italian suspects. "With apparent unanimity," Higham notes, "local newspapers and business leaders blessed the action" (1955, pp. 90–1).

Nativism's political triumph came in the form of restrictive federal legislation in the early 1920s that was deliberately designed to reshape the racial and ethnic makeup of the country. Although groups like the Immigration Restriction League had been working to cut Southern and Eastern European inflows since the 1890s, the first significant general restriction on immigration was not enacted until 1917, establishing a literacy test barring all foreigners more than sixteen years of age who lacked basic reading ability (of some thirty to forty words) in any language. To the disappointment of its supporters, the new test had little effect in stemming the immigrant tide, with only about 1,500 people a year between 1918 and 1921 kept out of the country based on illiteracy (Young, 2017, p. 223; Daniels, 2004, p. 46). The introduction of a quota system based on the national origins of immigrants, first by a 1921 law and then in 1924, was a different story.

The quotas established by the Johnson–Reed Act of 1924 restricted immigration to 2 per cent of the foreign-born population of each nationality living in the United States as of the 1890 census – what some called the "Anglo-Saxon" census because it came before the period of heaviest Eastern and Southern European immigration (Daniels, 2004, p.52; Chishti

& Gelatt 2025). After passage of the act, Germany had an annual quota of 51,000 and Great Britain just over 34,000 while Italy, which sent about two million immigrants to the United States between 1900 and 1910, had approximately 4,000 and the entire continent of Africa slightly over 1,000. As intended, the proportion of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe dramatically declined, from 71 per cent of total immigration between 1900 and 1910 to 19 per cent between 1924 and 1946 (Gabaccia,2002, p. 180). The combined effects of the 1924 law, the Great Depression, and World War II caused the total number of all immigrant entrants to plummet in the 1930s and 1940s.

Another key part of America's history of nativism involves hostility to and prejudice against Mexicans along with campaigns to deport them. Xenophobia focusing on Mexicans living in the United States goes back to the Mexican American War of the 1840s, when, after defeating Mexico, the United States annexed its northern portion and approximately 72,000 Mexicans living in the conquered territories, including present-day California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah, became "Americans" (Van Hook & Bachmeier, 2024, p.60).

By 1930, the Mexican origin population of the United States had risen to an estimated 1.5 million, with about 700,000 Mexican immigrants legally admitted from 1911 to 1930. Migrants were sought by American farmers, mine operators, railroad corporations, and large construction firms, mostly in the Southwest (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, pp. 80–1; Lee, 2019, p. 150). Anglos there, Ngai observes (2004, pp. 131–2), perceived Mexicans, including those born in the United States, as foreigners who "carried the opprobrium of illegitimacy and inferiority". A common view was that they were cheap labourers who took jobs away from deserving American citizens, drained public welfare resources that should be reserved for "Americans", and were a source of crime (Lee, 2019, pp. 148, 175). Many equated Mexicans with seasonal stoop labour and, especially after the establishment of the Border Patrol in 1924, saw them as illegal aliens who had crossed the border without going through formal entry and inspection, which involved "a degrading procedure of bathing, delousing, medical-line inspection, and interrogation" before receiving the requisite visas and certificates (Ngai, 2004, pp. 67–71; 131–2).

Racially, Mexican Americans in the first half of the twentieth century straddled the White–non-White boundary. In that period, with the exception of a one-time Mexican race category in 1930, the Census classified

Mexican Americans as White; no state miscegenation laws existed specifically barring unions between Whites and Mexican Americans; and at a time when Asian immigrants could not become citizens, the federal government accepted Mexicans as White for the purposes of naturalisation. Yet, as sociologist Cybelle Fox and historian Thomas Guglielmo (2012, p. 367) note, "a wide range of individuals and nonstate institutions recognized Mexicans as nonwhite. Many race scientists categorized the vast majority of Mexicans as nonwhite. Numerous Anglos did as well, a point that became most obvious when Mexicans [in parts of the Midwest and especially the Southwest] found themselves excluded from white-only public accommodations, when realtors refused to sell them homes in white neighborhoods, or when school officials excluded them from white schools." Mexicans faced race-based violence, too; one source put the number of mob lynchings of Mexicans in the country between 1848 and 1928 at 597 (Carrigan & Webb, 2003, p. 413).

The politics of anti-Mexican nativism played out in the Great Depression and mid-1950s in what have been called the two most notorious expulsion campaigns in American history (Goodman, 2020, p. 72). In the first campaign, which took place at a time of spiking unemployment, the US Secretary of Labor (from 1930 to 1933), who oversaw the Bureau of Immigration, aimed to rid the United States of Mexicans who had entered without proper documentation as well as to intimidate even US citizens of Mexican descent to leave the country. Between 1930 and 1932, about 24,000 Mexicans were deported, but many more were scared into leaving in the wake of locally organised drives and roundups, which included raids on dance halls, churches, private homes, and a variety of public places. The most ambitious deportation campaign took place in the Los Angeles area, although in other cities, too, those who "looked Mexican" were at risk of being picked up and taken into custody (Lee, 2019, pp. 167–72). Exactly how many Mexicans left the United States in the 1930s is unknown since federal departure statistics do not account for unofficial departures or deportations induced by fear or coercion. In his history of America's deportation machine, Goodman writes that the collective efforts of local, state, and federal officials and the coercive environment they created caused or contributed to the repatriation of as many as half a million Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans between 1929 and 1939 (2020, p. 46).

In the mid-1950s, the campaign known as Operation Wetback sought to remove undocumented Mexicans, who were pejoratively referred to

as “wetbacks”. Border patrol agents and local officials used military style tactics to round up and send back to Mexico several hundred thousand Mexican immigrants (Goodman, 2020; Ngai, 2004; Hernandez, 2006). The goal of the campaign, initiated by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service, was to regulate the flow of Mexican agricultural workers by reducing the number of unauthorized immigrants who came in search of work and increasing the number of braceros, that is, Mexicans on short-term work contracts under the terms of agreements between Mexico and the US that began in 1942 and lasted until 1964. Operation Wetback mobilised and amplified fears that “wetbacks” spread disease, committed crimes, and degraded domestic workers’ labour standards and living conditions. In the Southwest, border patrol officers used light planes to locate immigrants and jeeps and buses to apprehend them while in midwestern metropolitan areas the much smaller number of agents conducted investigations and relied on tips from citizens and informants in piecemeal deportation campaigns (Goodman, 2020, pp. 48, 52–3).

## Nativism in the Era of Trump

Fast forward to the present, and modern-day nativism offers another variation on the themes of xenophobia along with policies that challenge immigrants’ ability to access, and right to achieve, cultural and political citizenship. However, one striking difference from nativism in earlier eras is the role of Donald Trump, who, as historians Carl Bon Tempo and Hasia Diner (2022, pp. 351–2) argue, established himself as the most anti-newcomer president in all American history and stood, as president, at the head of a nativist movement.

Trump essentially launched his political career by promoting the racist “birther” myth that Barack Obama was not born in the United States – and with a virtual drumbeat of attacks against immigrants. Indeed, the birther myth about Obama reflects a nativist belief that someone like him, with a Kenyan father, is not “really” American.

During the 2016 campaign and his first presidential term (2017–21), Trump raised the spectre of an immigrant crime rampage and repeated grisly stories of violent crimes committed by undocumented immigrants, even though statistics show immigrants having lower crime rates than the native-born. Among his better-known statements, Trump said a Hispanic

judge could not be fair in the fraud case against Trump University because "he's a Mexican". Along with Mexican – and other Latino – immigrants, Trump targeted Muslims and Asians. In 2015, for example, the Trump campaign called for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States (Solis, 2018), and although Trump did not attempt this as president, he did place a travel ban on visitors from several majority Muslim countries shortly after he was elected.

Later, during the Covid-19 epidemic, Trump insisted on referring to the "Chinese virus" as he sought to shift blame for his catastrophic failure in handling the outbreak by fanning fears of a foreign threat while also bolstering support from his base through xenophobia. In reigniting old racist and nativist tropes, Trump fuelled and legitimated anti-Chinese sentiments; hate crimes were reported to spike against Asian Americans in the midst of the pandemic, following a long period between 2003 and 2017 when they had been in decline nationally (Foner, 2022). Nor did Black immigrants escape his venom. He was widely reported to refer, in a White House meeting, to immigrants from Haiti and Africa as coming from "shithole" countries. In the summer of 2019, he attacked four minority Congresswomen – American citizens all, three born in the United States and the fourth a Somali-born Muslim – by saying they should "go back" to the countries they came from.

In the 2024 presidential campaign, his demonisation of immigrants became even more extreme, not just, as in the past, calling undocumented immigrants murderers and rapists but also animals ("in some cases they're not people, in my opinion") and saying they are "poisoning the blood" of our country and turning the US into an "occupied country" he would liberate on election day (Astor, 2024). More than sixty million Americans heard him in a televised debate with then vice-president Kamala Harris repeat a racist lie about Haitian immigrants in Ohio allegedly kidnapping and eating people's dogs and cats – something that he, and his running mate J.D. Vance, continued to stress in rallies, speeches, and interviews before the election. There was barely an issue that Trump and the Republican ticket in the 2024 campaign didn't "find a way to turn into an argument about the supposed 'invasion' of immigrants coming to destroy America" as the journalist Paul Waldman (2024) put it. Trump, in a word, went where other politicians, and certainly previous presidents in the modern era, dared not go in their rhetoric, shifting the bounds of acceptable public discourse about immigration in the process and giving nativist and racist

demagoguery the presidential seal of approval (Bouie, 2019; Leonhardt & Philbrick, 2018).

In terms of anti-immigrant policies, not long after taking office in 2017, Trump ended the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) programme established by Obama's executive order, which gave eligible undocumented young adults who had arrived in the US as children renewable work permits and protection from deportation. The programme was only kept alive during Trump's first presidency by court rulings. His administration's "zero tolerance" policy that involved separating Central American parents and children seeking asylum at the southern border was part of a goal to reduce Latino immigration and show his strongest supporters he was being tough in pursuing it even as the policy was harshly criticised by much of the public and the media. The Trump administration sought to make legal immigration more difficult by ramping up background checks and paperwork for those trying to secure immigrant visas and by changing the public charge grounds on which low-income immigrants could come to and stay in the United States. Refugee admissions dropped to approximately 12,000 in the 2020 fiscal year when Trump shrunk the annual refugee cap to 18,000, then the lowest level since the modern US refugee settlement programme began in 1980 (see Bolter et al., 2022; Bon Tempo & Diner 2022, chapter 13).

Campaigning for his second presidency, Trump promised even harsher immigration policies. Once in office, his first hundred days featured a blitz of executive orders and policy memos that aimed to deliver on his promises, ranging from suspending refugee resettlement, an effort to end birthright citizenship for US-born children without at least one parent who is a citizen or lawful permanent resident, a heightened focus on immigration enforcement in the US interior, including arrests in public spaces by masked federal agents, an order for an early end to a Biden-era humanitarian parole programme that allowed about half a million Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans to enter and stay in the country for up to two years, and dispatching deportees to third countries such as Panama, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. Officials in his administration actively propagated fear among the undocumented, hoping to scare them into leaving voluntarily: "If you are here illegally," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem said grimly in an advertising campaign, "we will find you and deport you. You will never return" (Chishti & Putzel-Kavanaugh, 2025; Chishti & Bush-Joseph, 2025; Preston, 2025). Amid "the 'flood the zone' tempo and blizzard

of headlines and legal filings during the [Trump] administration's first 100 days", a Migration Policy Institute announcement noted in April 2025, "it is sometimes difficult to anticipate which actions will have the greatest impact and be most long-lasting" and, as of this writing, to what extent the courts will permit the administration to proceed with many of its policies, including the change to automatic birthright citizenship that has been guaranteed to all those born on US soil by the fourteenth amendment to the US Constitution for well over a century.

## Conclusion

Nativism, as a look back in time makes clear, has a long and sordid history in the United States. A historical lens brings out many ways we have been there before as well as how nativism has appeared in different configurations and with different outcomes in various periods. These range from the Know Nothing party's attempts to reduce the rights and political clout of Irish Catholic immigrants to restrictive legislation that severely cut Chinese and, later, southern Italian and Eastern European, immigration, along with denying Chinese immigrants the right to naturalise for more than sixty years and mass deportation campaigns targeting Mexicans. Today, in Trump's America, discourse at the very highest levels of government vilifies Black and Hispanic immigrants and, on the ground, there have been increased arrests, detentions, and deportations of the foreign born without legal status, even though, as of 2022, 80 per cent of the undocumented had lived in the US for more than a decade. As I write, the story of Trump's nativist rhetoric and policies is still in progress, and it is unclear just how they might change under future presidents. Certainly, we can expect new twists and turns in the future, but as long as the United States continues to have a high share of immigrant residents, including a great many new arrivals, nativism is bound to be a significant force in American society for some time to come.

## Note

[1] This chapter draws on my analysis of nativism in Foner (2026). In that book, I discuss the social and political forces that have produced nativism in American society, including popular anxiety over economic uncertainty, declines, and competition and politicians' weaponisation of racial and ethnic differences for political gain.

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# God Terms and the Fragility of Liberalism[1]

*James M. Jasper*

I write this on the hundredth anniversary of the notorious Scopes "monkey" trial in Tennessee (July 1925), where a high school biology teacher broke a state law banning theories of evolution in the schools. In what proved the highlight of the two-week trial, Clarence Darrow interrogated his opponent, William Jennings Bryan, as an expert on the Bible. A Christian populist and three-time Democratic nominee for president, Bryan attempted to defend some of the Bible's more ludicrous, contradictory statements as literal truth. He looked like a fool, at least to urban reporters such as H.L. Mencken.

To God-fearing Protestants in the Bible Belt, Darrow was the villain, torturing the 65-year-old Bryan to the extent that he took sick and died several days after the trial ended. Scopes was convicted, and indeed Tennessee kept the anti-evolution law on the books until 1967. The trial was not so long ago – my father was alive – but more chillingly, similar efforts have never ceased in American states dominated by Fundamentalists.[2] For instance, in 2023 the same Tennessee legislature banned drag performances as harmful to minors, based largely on ancient lines in Leviticus proscribing "man sleeping with man".

The Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement that is currently dismantling the liberal rule of law in the US has many strands, but the largest and oldest is Christian nationalism. In addition to posing a clear and present danger to liberal rules in the United States, it also challenges the answer that Duyvendak and Kešić (2022) give to the question, "Can Liberalism Safeguard Us Against Nativism?" (subtitle of *The Return of the Native*). Their answer is yes. Mine is no. Authoritarianism and hate are spreading across the globe, yet scholars inevitably end their books on the topic with a glimmer of hope expressed in a short conclusion that follows – sequentially but not logically – hundreds of pages of dire diagnoses.

One of Christian nationalists' favourite targets in the US and elsewhere is anyone who does not fit a heterosexual binary in their sexual orientation

or gender identity. For now, gay and lesbian rights are still mostly intact in the US, but other members of the alphabet acronyms (LGBTQ and its extensions) are under direct attack. Duyvendak's much-deserved ascent to the pinnacles of academia reflects broader gains over the past generation for gay and lesbian rights, gains that just a few decades ago could only have gone to those who remained closeted. His very success now makes him a potential target for more "radical" gender warriors, as a tall, white, cis-gender (and annoyingly handsome) man in a position of power and prestige. He is on the "wrong" side of the generational gay/queer divide. In a truly liberal world, he would not be anyone's symbol; he would simply be Jan Willem Duyvendak. But identity politics on the one hand and Christian nationalism and its nativist cousins on the other must have their victims, heroes, and villains (Jasper *et al.*, 2020). Our lives and allegiances become abstracted, moralised, and furious.

## Liberalism Versus Literalism

Not all religions have canonical scriptures, and even those that do can approach them in different ways. They may simply be thought-provoking sayings, like those of the Buddha, but at the extreme they may be seen as the literal word of God like the *Koran* or *The Book of Mormon*. Dangers arise with literalism, since any overt reinterpretation is blasphemy or heresy. Interpretations do change, of course, and scriptures are translated into new languages, brought to new contexts – but these transformations cannot be admitted. Sacred scriptures are fighting words, powerful rhetorical ammunition to motivate those who believe in them.

Monotheism is especially prone to literalism, expecting there to be one ultimate voice. Polytheisms look instead for multiple truths, and tolerate clashes among them. If you are confident that you have access to the one true god, all others are dangerous pretenders (on the violent propensity of monotheisms, see Schwartz, 1997, and Assmann, 2009). Dualistic religions like Zoroastrianism can logically explain evil. Christianity, while not quite so dualistic, has relied heavily on Satan to account for suffering, malice, and sheer evil (Oldridge, 2012). The world becomes a great battle between Christians and Satan, a struggle to the death – and beyond. The stakes are high. (Compare the more fatalistic views of Hinduism, which explains suffering as the result of bad deeds in past lives, the payback of karma.)

Liberalism, as it emerged in Western Europe in response to the intra-Christian religious wars of the seventeenth century, is suspicious of fighting words, positing instead "the individual", with a set of rights and autonomy that can be used to judge political systems for their violations. It is recognisably Protestant in its origins, but it has found adherents around the world. Individuals and their consciences are sacred, and no one should be punished for holding eccentric or unpopular beliefs. Even idiosyncratic actions are supposed to be tolerated as long as they do not violate the sanctity of other individuals.

The vicious battle between literalism and liberalism reflects a frightening reality: the US does not rest upon some foundational, shared set of moral values, some reference point that might ultimately resolve conflicts or at least set limits on them (Jasper, 2026). From Plato through Christianity, many great thinkers have assumed that there must be an objective order to our moral as well as our physical world. Inspired by Émile Durkheim and elaborated by Talcott Parsons, the assumption of shared values is baked into the DNA of sociology, but other disciplines often rely on similar ideas. Morality has replaced God as a subject of fascination and anxiety, reflecting a widespread psychological need for anchors, meaning, and foundations.

A long line of social scientists, including Georg Simmel, Lewis Coser, and Muzafer Sherif, have demonstrated the benefits of conflict, especially in building solidarity within each group. The emotional power of blame and indignation against outgroups is a tool no political leader could do without, short of religious saints (Jasper, 2026). Recent political theorists such as Chantal Mouffe (2013) admit the world is inherently conflictual, yet still seek rules of engagement that both sides would accept. But what if the disagreement extends to those rules? If a charismatic leader refuses to follow them? What if there is no common ground, no bridge?

We clearly see the conflict between liberalism and literalism in homophobia. To the liberal, consent justifies almost any practice, even one that disturbs other people by its very existence. Literalists see sin as an affront to God, making everyone a victim, where liberals see no victims at all. Difference is to be celebrated rather than feared in a liberal world. Christian literalists can turn to a few words in the Bible – the favourite is, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" – to condemn same-sex relations. Tolerant critics mostly accuse the literalists of poor interpretation and scholarship. How far would they get if they

instead damned the entire project of literalism? Yet the Old Testament clearly condemns sex between men, just as it bans the eating of shrimp. The problem is taking texts written by a series of Jewish men 3,400 years ago to be the literal, inerrant word of God.

Are other hateful nativisms as rigid as Christian literalism? They have been as deadly, certainly, in the Holocaust and its many smaller successors in Asia and Africa and the occupied territories of Palestine. In the US the problem is different: the persistence of hateful beliefs among a minority despite decades of increasing tolerance by the majority. (It was in reaction to modern trends such as greater toleration and biblical "interpretation" that *The Fundamentals* were published, serially from 1910 to 1915, then collected in 1917.) Far from being influenced by popular opinion, the literalists merely take this as a test from God, a temptation by the Devil that they must call out and combat. How might liberals reach out for dialogue with those who see secular humanism as the Devil's work, for whom there can be no compromise?

## Nationalism

As religious ideologies have loosened their grip – slightly – in the modern world, the two main contenders to replace its affective loyalties have been class and nation. Class-based politics has generally leaned to the left, articulated temptingly by Karl Marx, whereas nationalism has mostly leaned to the right, with its apotheosis in fascism. When the two have clashed, as in the outbreak of war in 1914, nationalism has almost always won. In recent decades class politics has all but disappeared.

Like most religious views and formulations of class, the definitions of a nation are malleable, multiple, and contested. The "true" nation, like the true faith, does not line up with borders and legalities, so that internal enemies can always be identified and attacked as not "real" members of the nation, due to their family backgrounds, ideologies, race, nations of origin, or almost anything else, while *true* members of the nation can be found in neighbouring countries (and may need to be rescued). But, like religious literalists, nationalists cannot admit that definitions of the nation change; for them there is an eternal, essential nation. Most collective identities are a "necessary fiction": the more essentialist the identity the more fictitious – yet the more persuasive to the faithful (McGarry & Jasper, 2015).

The most extreme fascisms, like those of Germany and Italy, are not especially favourable towards organized religions: the nation is supposed to *substitute* for them. In other cases, such as Spain, the fascist regime was allied with the Church as well as the army. In Europe, for centuries, Christianity has been a convenient cover for attacking unpopular groups, an added charge to a long list of grievances against Jews and Muslims. Medieval popes consolidated their power by charging opponents with heresy (Moore, 1987). Since the Holocaust, Judeo-Christian "values" are often posited in a similar but more cultural way to exclude Muslims. In the US, Christianity seems more of a genuine driving force, with many right-wing ideas emerging first among evangelical "intellectuals", especially preachers, and often derived from scripture. God turns out to be a bigot.

To me it makes little sense to ask if Christian nationalists "really" believe those Bible verses, or whether West Bank occupiers "really" think God commands them to occupy Judea and Samaria. We all juggle many motivations, pull together multiple rationales for our actions, before, during, and afterward. No one has exactly the same mix. But the confidence that derives from believing or saying you are doing God's will must be strong.

**Charismatic Strongmen**

Charisma referred in the Christian New Testament to those touched by God, conferring a kind of grace, and it retains a bit of that sense of divine intervention today. Most great charismatic leaders in history have been religious figures like Buddha or Jesus, but charismatic political leaders are also credited with a spark or ability that is otherworldly. They are different from normal people, guided by luck or providence to do great things. In myth and legend great heroes such as Herakles and Achilles were typically half-divine, as was Christ.

The far right has a penchant for charismatic leaders that the left largely lacks for a number of reasons (discussed in Jasper, 2027): religious belief includes the possibility that God may work his will through certain individuals, even individuals like Trump who may seem ill-suited for the task; traditional gender ideologies admire strongmen, who constantly perform virility by disparaging and humiliating others, the "losers"; if the world is a violent, dangerous place, we may need violent strongmen to protect us. (It doesn't matter that the strongmen and their minions, before they

gain power, are often the ones perpetrating the violence.) Liberals see the world as complex, full of tradeoffs and dilemmas; but to biblical literalists the world is a simple battle between good and evil – and strongmen are never subtle.

Almost by definition, charismatic leaders break things. They tell us to listen to what *they* say, not to obey the existing, sclerotic rules, laws, and traditions. Ignore the corrupt experts and bureaucrats, who are in fact part of the problem. Charismatic figures are less adept at building institutions to replace the ones they have destroyed: this work is left to their disciples and successors, who struggle to "routinize charisma". The nihilism of the charismatic figure appeals to people who feel alienated or under-appreciated, even cheated, by their society's dominant institutions and their rewards (Hochschild, 2016). His destructive powers demonstrate how admirably strong he is.

Trump's charisma is remarkable. After decades as the butt of jokes in New York City, when he moved to a national stage he found an audience who adored him. He at first lacked any political party or state apparatus to bolster his image, unlike charismatic figures such as Mandela or Mao. Even rightwing media came to idealise and idolise him only later, embracing his success in the 2016 primaries. His television series *The Apprentice* repackaged him as smart, rich, successful, and powerful for national audiences who had missed seeing him as the local New York joke. Perhaps his biggest source of charisma was the fascination, opprobrium, and panic he inspired among the mainstream news media. Americans who despised them found a hero in Trump. He hated what they hated.

A charismatic figure is free to ignore scriptural rules, but his followers may nonetheless interpret him in light of their religious expectations and ideologies. If Trump is a Christian at all, he is a terrible one, yet Christian nationalists see him as selected by God to do his bidding. And he is happy to see himself that way, often comparing his trials to those of Jesus Christ.

Gender is inevitably an obsession with charismatic strongmen like Mussolini and Trump (Ben-Ghiat, 2020). Women are supposed to be available sexually to men, at least to the strongman, and devoted to reproducing the nation. But strongmen have no use for gays and lesbians, who can be banned or eliminated at will. One of their central signs of strength is to harass, seduce, and bed as many women as possible. Although this is a taste for predation not an ideology, and mostly unrelated to Christian sexism and homophobia, it often becomes a way to aggravate liberals and

feminists. Masculine aggression is coded as strong; motherly concern for others is coded as weak – as "gay".

Trump has never seemed especially homophobic, but his Christian followers are. The gay community in the US is spooked. Friends of mine, a lesbian couple, are right now in Spain scouting possible locations in case they emigrate.

## The Ultimate God Term

For many people, especially in the professional middle classes, laws and other liberal protections and processes are a kind of bedrock foundation upon which society is built, and that keep it going. The authority of the law may be based on traditions, on an imagined social contract embodied in a constitution, or on the rationality of expertise and science. It may also be linked to the authority of scriptures, but this is tricky. Both scriptures and laws are probably more open to reinterpretation than other sources of authority.

Students of rhetoric and public discourse sometimes refer to "god terms", the kind of irrefutable reference point that wins an argument (Burke, 1945). As anthropologist Mary Douglas (1970, p.1273) put it, "Time, money, God, and Nature, usually in that order, are universal trump cards plunked down to win an argument." The laws of God and the laws of nature are the two big rivals in the modern world (Jasper, 1992), but "rights" are close behind, what Ignatieff (2001, p. 68) calls "a fighting creed" that demands action. But, in the end, what is a better god term than God himself, or his literal words? The trouble is, we no longer believe in the same god, or in god at all. Worse, God and Nature are often seen as opposed, as in the Scopes trial. Efforts to reconcile them have rarely satisfied either side.

Although we speak of God terms, the Devil usually has more rhetorical power. Whether the goal is to mobilize people, define a social problem, or reinforce solidarities, villain tropes do more emotion work than heroes and even victims (although sympathy for victims is also crucial). Fears and a sense of threat get our attention, while anger, outrage, and indignation encourage action. Effective villains may be secretive, biding their time, but they are never passive. They are always scheming, waiting for the right moment to surprise and destroy us (Jasper et al., 2020). Devil terms

are polarising and largely irrefutable through normal evidence, the very heart of conspiracy theories.

Most powerful of all are moral batteries that *combine* strong positive and negative feelings. "The antichrist is the most dreaded of the obstacles standing between believers and the fulfilment of Christian hopes," observes religious historian Robert Fuller (1995, p. 3). "Even though the Antichrist's tyranny and deceit are to be feared, the prospect of his imminent appearance is also a source of hope and even jubilation, for it is the appearance of the Antichrist that will initiate the sequence of actions culminating in the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth." Even a vicious bigot like the American Charlie Kirk could be transubstantiated into a Christian martyr after his killing, with his widow proclaiming, "the world is evil," but God is "so good".

## Hope?

When Duyvendak and Kešić end *The Return of the Native* (2022) with suggestions of stories that liberals might use to counter nativist narratives, they turn to the emotion that drives most social movements, hope, the emotion that also helped elect Barack Obama. This crucial emotion involves not just a desire but an expectation that what we desire will happen, above and beyond any "objective" evidence or probabilities. Protestors keep going because they hope through persuasion or sometimes even threat to increase their own odds of success, bootstrapping to a better future.

Christian nationalist movements have their own hope, of bringing about God's will on Earth, or at least in the United States, once proclaimed an exemplary, shining "city upon a hill". (But they also work to export their beliefs to other nations: Bob, 2012.) They may number as many as one-third of the US population, and the Republican Party links them to powerful allies, such as extractive industries and a range of politically engaged billionaires. Their cherished hopes are a nightmare for many of the rest of us.

Positive emotions like hope are often paired with negative emotions such as anger, outrage, and resentment, to form a moral battery that propels people in one direction. Heaven and Hell are a pretty extreme moral battery, with "all eternity" thrown in too so as to infinitely increase the stakes. Christians mostly manage their lives without thinking about such things, and there has been a decided tendency over the last couple of hundred years for Christian theology to emphasise Heaven more than Hell, but the stark contrast is at least available when motivation is needed.

We could hope (we must hope) for a giant protest movement against the authoritarian direction of Christian nationalism, but few people really care about liberal protections and procedures *for their own sake*. They care when their own group is being deprived of their rights and due process, not so much when outgroups are suffering in the same way. There have been far more popular movements in favour of censorship than in favour of free speech, and groups like the American Civil Liberties Union are usually founded by handfuls of elites rather than in the context of broad social movements (Jasper, forthcoming). Worse, cynical players abuse rights talk disingenuously to camouflage darker motives and agendas, like the rightwing, anti-immigrant groups in Europe who suddenly discovered their allegiance to free speech in 2005 in defence of Danish caricatures of Mohammed (Bob, 2019, p.74).

The US has seen left-leaning populist movements in the past, although they were usually tainted by racism and xenophobia. Recent efforts by Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have grabbed the imagination of many young voters, but their numbers nationally are miniscule compared to the one-third of Americans who are Christian nationalists and/or Trump supporters. Perhaps a progressive narrative will someday attract larger numbers, but that one-third of the population, as long as they cling to their Biblical literalism, will be hard to reach.

My prognosis has been grim throughout this chapter, and I will leave you with a chilling incident that just occurred (Yurcuba, 2025). At Texas A&M University, an undergraduate student (and Christian activist) secretly recorded a class on children's literature, taught by a tenured English professor. She finally challenged the professor that talking about "gender identity" was illegal, and offered to read Trump's executive order that there are only two genders in the world. This is also true in her Christian view, and she left the classroom. Most remarkable is what happened next. The university president fired the professor, then the chair of her department and, for good measure, the dean of arts and sciences. The president himself was fired soon after. Texas A&M is not a Christian college, but a land-grant institution, meaning it was created by the federal government in the nineteenth century. In the year before this incident, it had banned drag shows, closed the LGBTQ Pride Center, and stripped from its libraries all titles related to LGBTQ issues, such as Judy Shepard's heart-wrenching memoir of her son Matthew – tortured and killed in Wyoming in 1998 – simply for being gay.

## Notes

[1] I thank Tamar de Waal, Menno Hurenkamp, Sarah Rosenfield, and Christine Williams for comments on an earlier draft.

[2] The name "fundamentalist" itself only dates to 1910: it was a concerted effort to combat modernity by publishing essays asserting the literal truth of the Bible. One of the movement's first campaigns was to promote anti-evolution laws like Tennessee's. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), founded in 1920, decided to fight back and advertised for a teacher in Tennessee willing to stand trial.

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# Citizenship, Nativism and Public Space: A Plea for the City

*Philip Kasinitz*

Over several decades, Jan Willem Duyvendak has explored the relationship between belonging, societal membership, tolerance and nativism in the diverse societies of Western Europe and North America. At a time when an often-intolerant populism characterises the politics of many nations, he has asked how liberalism can safeguard against nativism, racism and bigotry (Duyvendak & Kešić 2022). At the same time, he has recognised (and to a degree respected) the deep roots of the longing for communal and national belonging and the "ability to feel at home" for both majority and minority groups (Duyvendak, 2011).

This insight forces us to come to grips with a number of dilemmas. At a time of globalisation and migration, how is the need for rootedness to be accommodated while maintaining the liberal values of tolerance? In many nations, citizenship is increasingly defined in cultural and historical terms rather than as a legal status (Duyvendak & Schnell, 2024). In societies that are culturally diverse, how is a cultural citizenship to be achieved? Why is it that cultural diversity is perceived by some as an amenity while others see exposure to difference as a burden? How are the joys of public life to be realised in a world in which the cultural consensus of what constitutes membership cannot be taken for granted?

I would suggest that one necessary condition for balancing the comfort of "home" communities (particularly imagined communities, or "communities of light", see Duyvendak et al., 2009) and comfort with difference is a clear notion of public space and a public sphere – be it physical, virtual or metaphoric. And this turns our attention to the deep connection between enlightenment traditions of tolerance and cities.

Being in public and participating in the public realm in the presence of strangers in spaces we do not control is an essential part of the urban experience. Even Habermas, for whom the idea of public sphere is largely metaphoric, points to the origins of "the public sphere of bourgeois

culture" in the urban confines of the eighteenth-century London coffeehouse. In this public setting he points to the creation of a third space, beholden to neither the state nor the family (Habermas, 1962; 1988, p. 51). Of course, as he acknowledges, access to these spaces was limited to bourgeois (white) men. Yet at least among this group it provided a setting where people of different views and backgrounds could come together, discuss the events of the day, engage in critical debate or simply enjoy one another's presence.

Urban life in today's cities might also provide some practical, if prosaic, answers to the problems of intolerant nativism. In their study of European cities in which "persons without a migration background" constitute a numerical majority, Maurice Cul and Frans Lelie (2023) found that mastering the art of living in a diverse, convivial environment can be deeply enriching for people's lives. However, many "native" residents never really manage to do this. Inclusion requires common spaces – metaphoric but also physical, to which all have access and in which diverse people can come together to achieve practical goals while respecting one another's differences. Often this takes place in small ways, in which people who might not approve of increased diversity in the abstract can and do come together to solve the problems of everyday life and perhaps even come to enjoy one another's company.

Thus, not surprisingly, nativism is often anti-urban as well as anti-immigrant. Recent policies of the US Trump administration in which immigration enforcement has been accompanied by literally sending troops onto the streets of American cities in response to completely imaginary civil unrest is but the latest example. By contrast the nostalgic imagining of a "pure" homeland culture is often conceived of as a rural culture. In the US, we often hear that "small town Americans" are the "real Americans", even though few Americans now live in such communities (Brooks, 2008). In the Netherlands we have seen the rise of the Farmers' Party at the time when fewer and fewer people actually make their living from agriculture. Indeed, in many places populism is mixed with a considerable degree of anti-urbanism and sometimes anti-urbanism's close cousin, anti-Semitism.

Yet, if diverse, tolerant societies require convivial public spaces, it is also true that public spaces are not places where one can do whatever one likes. In that sense private spaces offer individuals more freedom. Indeed, at its worst, public life can be highly repressive. How often have lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transexual (LGBT) people, to pick but one example, been told that "we don't care what you do in your private life, but we don't want to see this sort of behaviour in public". Yet public space, with its unspoken rules and emphasis on artifice and appearances, also promises the possibility of social membership and sociability. And this is one reason that inclusion in the public sphere without needing to hide one's identity feels so liberating.

There is a political dimension to this. The Athenian Agora was both a marketplace and a political space. Being allowed there was a marker of societal membership that accorded citizens recognition as truly human. Exclusion from public spaces, as women were from the Athenian Agora or African Americans were in Jim Crow America, is one of the clearest markers of being less than a full member of the civitas. This is one of the reasons civil rights activists and feminists put access to public places high on their agendas, from lunch counter sit-ins to "take back the night rallies". It was not that African Americans were particularly anxious to dine shoulder to shoulder with whites or that feminists saw much benefit sharing the late-night streets with men. Access to the public world signified full citizenship. Exclusion from that world or repression within it was a statement of practical non-citizenship, often enforced by state and extra-legal violence. This is perhaps even more important for those whose presence – and physical safety – requires concealing important parts of their identity when in public. Consider the case of secret Jews in Spain under the Inquisition or of gay people in many times and places around the world.

Yet, at their best, the public spaces of cities provide what might be the clearest model of inclusive, tolerant co-presence with difference. The late Marshall Berman described his ideal vision of what he termed "open minded" public spaces as,

> … open, above all, to encounters between people of different classes, races, ages, religions, ideologies, cultures and stances toward life. It would be planned to attract all of these different populations, to enable them to look each other in the face, to listen, maybe to talk. It would have to be exciting and accessible … with plenty of exit routes and adequate police (in case there is trouble) kept well in the background (so they don't themselves become the source of trouble). (Berman, 1986, p. 484)

Elijah Anderson's notion of the "cosmopolitan canopy" (2011) may be particularly useful here. Anderson argues there are spaces in contemporary

cities where people from different and sometimes hostile groups and backgrounds can and do enjoy coming together. In such spaces (he uses Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market as an example) people who might be at odds in other settings not only tolerate one another's presence but come to see casual encounters with "the other" as not only possible, but normal and perhaps beneficial. Indeed, diversity becomes part of what draws people to these spaces.

It is important, however, not to confuse legally "public" spaces – theoretically open to all, with truly being "open minded" or "cosmopolitan" spaces. There may also be value in what might be termed "parochial spaces", outside of the home and technically open to all but that in practice "belong" to certain groups who feel rooted and "at home" there. A well-known American example are barber shops in African American communities. These spaces are generally Black owned and patronized almost exclusively by Black men. Yet since this form of ethnic exclusivity arises from normal business practices there is no need to deliberately exclude anyone; no need for a sign saying, "no whites or women allowed". Within the confines of the shop friends, neighbours and strangers can come together, discuss and argue the issues of the day or simply enjoy one another's company while taking for granted that they share a common background as black and male. Indeed, in popular culture African American barber shops are often depicted as places in which men discuss the meaning of "blackness" and "maleness". I am not sure what would happen if large numbers of whites or women started to patronise the shops, but the nature of those discussions would almost certainly change. And I suspect the original customers would feel that something valuable had been lost.

Gay bars and nightlife venues might provide a different example of this sort of limited, parochial public space. The corner bar or café in a working-class neighbourhood might be another. Most liberals would be horrified if one of these spaces deliberately excluded immigrants, racial minorities, women or any group who were seen as "the other", and rightly so (in the United States, such segregation would evoke memories of Jim Crow segregation and would probably be illegal). Yet who is not at least a little sympathetic with the Amsterdam-er who suddenly finds, to her horror, that her favourite neighbourhood "brown bar" has been overrun by loud, English-speaking tourists?[1]

This situation is not limited to commercial enterprises. Sharon Zukin (2016) has used the term "moral ownership" to describe how members

of certain groups feel about streets or neighbourhoods they do not legally own but that are still, in some sense, "theirs". People who have experienced exclusion or eviction from their original communities have a particularly strong reason to defend the spaces where they feel rooted and free to be themselves. Duyvendak has written about the importance of the Castro in San Francisco as the symbolic centre for members of the gay community, whether or not they live there. And yet "moral ownership" can be a tricky business. Most progressives (and I count myself as one) are sympathetic to those who would protect the "gayborhood" or the "Black spaces" threatened by gentrification, tourists or other interlopers. We are less likely to be sympathetic with the working-class whites who resent the fact that "their" neighbourhood no longer feels like home when immigrants or openly gay people or other groups move in.

What is true of physical public spaces is even more true in the "virtual" public sphere of cyber space. The norms of civility that generally prevail in "real" public spaces of face-to-face encounters often seem to be missing online. We have all witnessed the fact that when an online discussion group is truly open to all it can quickly degenerate into name calling and insults. Yet if an online group restricts access to the more or less like minded, it can quickly become an echo chamber, spouting untruths and reinforcing the worst bigotries. In such virtual spaces the views expressed often become increasingly extreme, unrestrained by guard rails of civility imposed by physical co-presence. Thus, participants learn little. Instead, they have their biases confirmed. It is not surprising that such virtual spaces have become hot beds of nativism and intolerance.

## When Public Spaces Disappear: What Covid has Taught Us

A few years ago we all learned the lessons of what happens when physical public spaces suddenly disappear. While the Covid-19 pandemic affected people everywhere, its impact was greatest in the cities. As Nicole Gelinas put it, "Covid-19 has hit the cities so hard because of what they do so well: bring people closely together for fun and profit" (Gelinas, 2020, p. A19). In many places Covid accelerated the decline of physical public places (*Agoracide?*) and their replacement by a world of "virtual communities". The pandemic pushed even those of us who were the most sceptical about online activities and discussions into learning how to use the technologies

involved. And once that technical skill was widespread, sheer convenience made it hard to stop using it. I will leave it to readers to decide whether the world of online comments and Zoom meetings, to say nothing of online politics, has served the cause of tolerance or acceptance of "the other". I can say, however, that this has not been my experience.

The everyday activity of shopping presents an illustration of some of the problems of an online world. Zukin and her collaborators (2015) have argued that local shopping streets do far more than distribute goods. They allow urbanites to learn about new and different products and ideas. They help define neighbourhoods and urban communities, converting spaces into "places". They are often points of first contact between diverse people and enforce a kind of limited but nonetheless real civility on these encounters. They create social connections, even between "nodding acquaintances" who do not "quite" know one another, in ways digital communications do not. Delivery services, which have grown dramatically since the pandemic, are extremely efficient at gathering goods we already know we want. But any chance at serendipitous encounters – with products or with people – is gone. These services manage to conduct the core function of the activity – getting things to people – more efficiently by stripping out all of the ancillary but arguably more valuable aspects of the activity. Which is why they make shopping a lot less fun.

What is true for shopping is true of so many other online activities. By removing the chance to encounter the unexpected in public space we may increase the efficiency of the delivery of goods or services. Yet by stripping out the ancillary benefits of face-to-face encounters, they leave the interaction poorer.

In addition, I worry about the effect that withdrawal from public space has on the urban experience. Working from home, staying at home, being entertained at home, means that we spend more time among people very much like ourselves (Duyvendak, 2011). What does it mean for the city when it becomes so easy to avoid people who are different and have ideas unlike our own? In the United States the loss of public encounters and public space has a racial dimension. Thanks to the long struggle for civil rights American workplaces are far more diverse and integrated than in the past. So are spaces of cultural consumption, particularly those frequented by the young, as are shopping spaces. Residential space, however, remains stubbornly segregated, particularly for African Americans. Thus, when residential spaces are converted into workspaces and cultural

consumption spaces and even shopping is done from home, we have, perhaps without realising it, moved these activities from more cosmopolitan spaces into more segregated ones.

## The "Ex-Urban" Dream: Rural Nostalgia in Urban Times

The culturalisation of citizenship has also, in many places, produced a nostalgic longing for what is seen not only as a simpler but also a "natural" and virtuous rural life. This is not new, of course. In the United States in particular, cities have long been seen as corrupt, particularly during times of high immigration or racial conflict. Thomas Jefferson saw cities as "pestilential to the morals, health and the liberties of man", and numerous American political figures have made much of their real or exaggerated rural or small-town origins (Fischer, 1976, pp. 14–15). Yet this disdain for urbanism and embrace of rural life have often been articulated by those whose actual lives were dependent on being in, or at least near, growing cities. Henry David Thoreau's Walden Pond, for example, was (and is) within walking distance of downtown Concord and at most a half day's ride from the centre of Boston. The Hudson River School painters depicted the beauty and power of "natural" landscapes, not in the vast American West, but in the Hudson Valley and the Berkshires, places that even in the mid-nineteenth century were easily accessible from New York City and Boston by road and rail.

Today, in industrialised nations only a tiny part of the population lives a traditional, agriculturally based life. Nevertheless, the idea of a "natural" *looking* suburbia that echoes the image of small-town life has considerable appeal (Rybczynski, 1995). Such communities, often called "ex-urbs" in the US, stand in contrast to the cities they surround as well as to stereotypical sprawling suburbs. They can be imagined as "traditional". They often include carefully restored old buildings, pastures and fields and a few, largely decorative sheep and cattle. More to the point, they are generally far less racially and ethnically diverse than the cities they surround. In a study of one such village about two hours outside of London, Michael Bell (1994) asks how and why upper middle-class residents, often working in the global finance industry, find comfort and solace living under a thatched roof near a twelfth-century church. For them, he argues living close to "nature" provides a source of groundedness and a strong sense of

place-based identity as "country people". A more cynical observer might, however, note the distance they have put between themselves and the ethnic diversity, constant change, and class and cultural conflicts of the urban world on which these dubious "villagers" depend for their livelihoods.

The Internet and the increased popularity of "remote work" in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic will probably increase the appeal of these sorts of communities. This is particularly true in places such as the Netherlands and Belgium in which short distances and a relatively good mass transportation system mean that many ex-urban villages are within commuting distance of the outer edge of metropolitan areas.

## Thoughts in Lieu of a Conclusion

I began this short essay with some questions, raised in part by my reading of Duyvendak's groundbreaking and often courageous work. I fear I don't have many very satisfying answers.

I do believe that inclusive, tolerant citizenship requires "open minded" and "cosmopolitan" spaces (physical, virtual and metaphorical) where all are welcome. Political leaders, planners, social movement activists and even architects should think seriously about how to create spaces that encourage encounters between very different people. Exclusion should be discouraged, and of course violent exclusion can never be tolerated. At the same time, we need to be tolerant and sympathetic to those who value their parochial spaces in which groups can feel rooted and at home. Encounters cannot be forced. Integration is not always an unambiguous good. Perhaps James Baldwin said it best when, in the aftermath of the American civil rights movement, he drew a distinction between desegregation (which he strongly favoured) and "integration", about which he was deeply sceptical, given its negative impact on African American spaces and institutions.

> The Black demand was for desegregation, which is a legal, public social matter: a demand that one be treated as a human being … It was not even a demand for social justice: desegregation was a necessary first step in the Black journey toward that goal … Desegregation demanded that Black people, and, especially, Black children be recognized and treated as human beings by all of the institutions of the country in which they were born. (Baldwin, 1985, p. 22)

By contrast, he writes, integration was not an equal process but one that eventually "smashed every Black institution in this country, with the single exception of the Black Church". Integration "was never considered a two-way street. Blacks went downtown; Whites did not come uptown. This helped Black restaurants … for example, to go bankrupt" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 25).

As important as this often-neglected distinction is, and as right as history has proved much of Baldwin's pessimism to be, I choose to believe, with Duyvendak (and perhaps against my better judgement) that a more optimistic conclusion is possible. I would argue that some of the best examples of how to address the dilemmas of inclusion lie in the everyday life practices of diverse cities. Living together, as equals, in convivial settings and working on practical, even mundane problems, most people are able to find common ground most of the time. This allows people to be different, and to respect one another's differences, without seeing difference as offensive or a threat. Everyday urbanism, for all its limitations, can balance a vibrant public sphere along with respect for the boundaries of the private sphere and, at times, for the need of groups to maintain a parochial sphere. And this may be the best hope for a tolerant future in nativist times.

## Notes

[1] Writing this, I am reminded that about twenty years ago another American social scientist and I were being shown around the Jordaan – not then as gentrified as it has become but already heavily touristed – by none other than the esteemed Professor Jan Willem Duyvendak. The two Americans decided it was time for a beer and made a beeline for an old dark bar that appeared particularly commodious. Jan Willem, however, was hesitant, sensitive to the fact that this was a neighbourhood haunt that might not be completely pleased by a trio of English-speaking outsiders. In the end he succumbed to peer pressure and his own characteristic desire to be a generous host, and I am pleased to report we were heartily welcomed. Looking back, however, I understand his concerns.

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# The Migrant, the Family, and the Rule of Law: On Migration Politics and Authoritarianism

*Saskia Bonjour*

## Introduction

Perhaps the most important thing that Jan Willem Duyvendak has taught me – not because he said it or wrote it, but because he lives it – is to strive to be a "public scholar": a scholar who seeks to pose and answer the questions that matter most, in a particular societal and political moment. The most pressing question in the present moment for a migration scholar like me to engage with, it seems to me, is how migration politics is enabling the rise of authoritarianism. Indeed, migration politics in Europe today represent a threat to liberal democracy and the rule of law. Public and political debates about migration are a driving force of the increasing electoral successes of the Far Right, which embraces a virulent ethnoracial nationalism, coupled to authoritarianism which defines democracy as the rule of the majority, without regard for individual rights or constitutional limitations on executive power. Most worrying, to me, is the blurring of the distinction between the Far Right and mainstream parties, as "mainstream parties have radicalized, moving further towards the (populist radical) right in terms of, first and foremost, immigration and integration, but also law and order, (…) and populism" (Mudde, 2019, p. 90). Jan Willem Duyvendak was among the first scholars to characterise developments in Dutch migration politics as "the rise of authoritarianism", already in his 2011 book *The Politics of Home* (2011, p. 92) .

Jan Willem Duyvendak's work has also taught me to think of the political and the legal as entangled with the social and the cultural – a lens that is less than self-evident among political scientists. His work on the culturalisation of citizenship is an example of how we can and should conceive of the construction of the Nation and its Others as intrinsically connected to the construction of a polity's political and legal institutions.

This essay therefore seeks to understand how ethnoracial nationalism and authoritarianism mutually reinforce each other. It does so by zooming in on a parliamentary debate about the family reunification of refugees which took place in the Netherlands in 2022 and 2023. In several crucial ways, this debate laid the ground for the electoral victory of the Far Right in the national elections of October 2023, in which the Far Right Freedom Party became the largest party in parliament. The debate revolved around a restrictive measure which the centre-Right government decided to implement even though it was clear for all who were willing to see that the measure was illegal. Focusing not on the Far Right but on the discourses of mainstream politicians, I will explore how the discursive Othering of refugee families relates to the discursive legitimation of such disregard for the rule of law.

## Othering the Refugee Family

In 2022, the Dutch asylum reception system was a mess. Staff shortages at the Immigration Agency combined with a rise in number of asylum applications resulted in lengthy delays in asylum procedures (IND, 2022). The resulting pressure on reception facilities was further increased by national housing shortages, as refugees stayed in reception centres for months even after obtaining residence status, because there was no regular housing for them (EMN Netherlands, 2023). By the end of 2022, there were more emergency reception facilities – in sports halls, old cruise ships, and empty hotels – than regular reception centres. The facilities at Ter Apel, where asylum seekers are supposed to register their asylum application, were so overcrowded that people had to sleep outside of the gates in tents for days before being admitted and registered (COA, 2023). Everyone in the Netherlands agreed that the situation was unacceptable, but politicians and commentators were split on the nature of the crisis. For some, the problem was a "reception crisis", caused by government failure to plan adequately for predictable fluctuations in the asylum inflow. For others, the problem was a "migration crisis", caused by excessively high number of asylum immigrants.[1]

Families were central in both discourses. Those who perceived a "reception crisis" focused on the lack of privacy, hygiene, safety, medical care and access to education that families and especially children seeking

asylum in the Netherlands had to endure.[2] Those who perceived a "migration crisis", focused on family as a motor driving up "inflow" – not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of bringing in the wrong kind of people.

This problematisation of family reunification is far from new. Scholars of family migration politics in Europe have shown how "the migrant family" – often: "the Muslim family" – has been represented as culturally and morally deviant through discourses that focused on forced marriage, child marriage, and polygamy, or on parenting styles described as either too authoritarian or too lax (for an overview, see for instance Bonizzoni, 2018). The notion of "chain migration" further reinforced the problematization of family reunification as a potentially infinite flow of inassimilable migrants (Bonjour & De Hart, 2013). In the first decade of the 2000s, the political focus of such discourses lay on "import brides" and "sham marriages", i.e. on marriage migration of (grand)children of labour and postcolonial migrants from Muslim countries. As a result of the rise in asylum applications in Europe in 2015, attention shifted to asylum.

For example, in the Summer of 2022, the conservative and populist newspaper *De Telegraaf* noted a rise in the number of unaccompanied asylum seekers arriving in the Netherlands. The article, with the headline "Children used as spearheads by asylum seekers", reported that refugee families were paying smugglers to bring their children to the Netherlands, against the will of these children, to enable the rest of the family to reunite with them later. Thus, *De Telegraaf* represented these families as simultaneously abusing both their children and the migration system.[3] Rather than questioning the border regime which separates families, Christian Democrat MP Slootweg asked the government to remove "any inhumane incentives to send a minor ahead" by making sure that family reunification was not "easier" for minors than for adults, or "easier" in the Netherlands than in other European countries.[4] Presenting refugee parents as willing to sacrifice their children for their own benefit is a very powerful way to Other refugees and perhaps even to dehumanize them.

Another way in which refugee family reunification was problematised, was the suggestion that refugees were bringing in an excessive number of family members. In the Fall of 2022, newspapers reported that the Immigration Agency was concerned about "stacked family reunification" where "one single asylum applicant brings in many more family members than they are supposed to". The article – which was printed

almost verbatim in several regional newspapers – explains that refugees are entitled to reunite with their nuclear family, but that the Agency is monitoring youngsters who reunite with their parents and then subsequently apply to reunite with their own spouses and children. An Agency spokesperson is quoted as calling this "an improper use of the procedure".[5] In fact, possibilities for bringing in family members beyond the nuclear family are extremely limited in the Netherlands, and each refugee brings in less than one family member on average. Children who are married are not eligible for reunification with their parents, regardless of their age – exceptions to this rule are very rare. Nevertheless, Conservative Liberal party leader Yeşilgöz centred this concern about "reunification upon reunification upon reunification" in her election campaign a year later, repeatedly claiming in televised and newspaper interviews that this involved "lots of people" and even "thousands of people".[6] In July 2023, the Conservative Liberals had broken up the Rutte IV government coalition over their coalition partners' refusal to impose harsh restrictive measures on refugee family reunification. Yeşilgöz's claims about "reunification upon reunification upon reunification" were a deliberate lie, aimed to justify the Conservative Liberals' decision to leave the government coalition and to attract voters on the (Far) Right in the upcoming elections. The suggestion that refugees bring in large numbers of family members appeals to notions of refugees being culturally different in that "they" live in extended families, while "we" live in nuclear families. It also appeals to racist tropes captured in sinister comments on refugees "breeding like rabbits" that I have come across all too often in comments sections and social media. The false picture of the number of refugees growing exponentially through family reunification reminded me in a disturbing way of the exponential spread of a virus – so familiar to the public in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this instance also, refugee families were Othered simultaneously as culturally and racially deviant and as abusing the migration system.

## Breaking the Law

In the Summer of 2022, the Rutte IV government deliberately broke the law, by imposing a housing requirement on family reunification for refugees. The Rutte IV government was split about how to solve the mess in

the asylum reception system. The Progressive Liberal D66 and the Social-Christian ChristenUnie coalition partners perceived a "reception crisis" which they wanted to solve by legally obliging all Dutch municipalities to participate in asylum reception. In contrast, the Conservative Liberal VVD and the Christian Democrat CDA coalition parties perceived an "immigration crisis" which they wanted to solve by restricting asylum immigration. A government crisis was barely avoided through a compromise reached in August 2022, which included the agreement to only issue visa to family members of refugees once housing was available for them.[7]

This measure was immediately critiqued by a host of legal experts for breaking the law.[8] Indeed, it does not require much legal expertise to understand the relevant article in the EU Family Reunification Directive: it straightforwardly stipulates that housing requirements may not be imposed on family reunification for refugees.

How did politicians justify taking this illegal measure? First, they created uncertainty about the illegal nature of the measure. When the opposition demanded to know what legal experts in the administration had had to say about the measure, the government admitted only that they had been warned by civil servants of the Migration Policy Directorate that the "legal tenability of that measure is uncertain" and "fragile".[9] Since then, investigative journalism has revealed that the Directorate of Legislation and Judicial Affairs had not been consulted prior to the publication of the measure but had informed the government as soon as they learned about the measure that it was "legally unjustifiable".[10] The government however never shared this information with Parliament. Instead, Conservative Liberal Deputy Minister Van der Burg argued that "government frequently faces situations where there is no [legal] certainty"[11], while Christian Democrat MP Peters argued:

> I am not a legal expert. (…). You say: that measure is illegal. So you say. But you are not a judge either. You have heard some legal experts say that this is very questionable, but others will say it is possible".[12]

Thus, both the government and the coalition parties in parliament created doubt where they could and should have offered certainty, and denied their own responsibility for knowing and respecting legal boundaries.

Most importantly, government and coalition parties justified taking this illegal measure by presenting it as necessary given the circumstances. In

June 2022, two months before the illegal measure was taken, Conservative Liberal MP Brekelmans had argued that:

> We are in the middle of an asylum crisis. (…) The only structural solution is to bring the inflow down. Otherwise it's like mopping the floor while the water tap is open. (…) We can't go on like this.[13]

Brekelmans asked the government to consider taking further measures "without taboos", including temporarily shutting down access to the asylum procedure or stopping all family reunification for refugees, and to explore the possibilities of using emergency legislation in doing so. Thus, before the Far Right ever entered government in the Netherlands, their playbook tactics of governing through emergency powers had already been prefigured by the mainstream Right.

Christian Democrat MP Peters also argued that "not only do we have a reception crisis – which we do and which is very urgent – but we also have a much bigger problem. The inflow we are going to have is potentially infinite". He argued that:

> You can always invent legal difficulties or questions, but we cannot afford the luxury of leaving it at that. (…) We will have to do something. We can't say: we'll do nothing. The situation [in asylum centres] is terrible. We have to act. This measure [on family reunification] gives me a belly ache and a headache. This is choosing the lesser of all evils.

When asked to seek legal advice from the Council of State before implementing the measure, MP Peters repeated: "We just cannot afford the luxury of waiting a while until we get that advice. This has to happen now, because it is urgent and important; now!"[14] Thus, the Christian Democrats presented respecting the boundaries set by the law as a "luxury we cannot afford" in view of the severity and urgency of the "crisis" caused by "potentially infinite" asylum inflow.

Similarly, Deputy Minister Van der Burg affirmed on behalf of the government that

> "We realize that this is not what we want. We wish it weren't necessary. But we find we cannot pull through without this. (…) This is about taking your responsibility and doing what is necessary".[15]

Van der Burg presented the measure as a "necessary" temporary emergency measure. However, when asked by a member of the opposition what "necessary" meant and how the government would assess at which point the measure was no longer "necessary", the deputy minister was forced to admit: "I do not have a readymade checklist for you. The cabinet has not defined the evaluation criteria".[16] Again we see the mainstream Right deploying a classic strategy from the authoritarian playbook: offering an open-ended definition of the nature of "crisis" that leaves the door wide open to continuously extending and expanding breaches to the rule of law and liberal democracy.

While some mainstream Right politicians went some way to acknowledging a moral dilemma by describing the housing requirement as a measure that gave them "a belly ache", all of them steered clear of words like "family life", "family separation", "parents" or "children" – words that would make the human and moral values at stake tangible. Indeed, they did not even use the word "family reunification". In Dutch political and media debates about refugees, especially since 2015, the word "family reunification" has been replaced by *'nareis'*, literally "travel after". This technical legal term appeared 3 or 4 times a year in parliamentary records of the 1990s, 77 times in 2015, and 255 times in the most recent parliamentary year.[17] By using the legal term *"nareis"* instead of "family reunification" (in Dutch*: gezinshereniging)*, Dutch politicians have quite literally taken the family out of the equation in debates about family reunification of refugees.

In contrast to the coalition parties, the Dutch left-wing opposition *did* articulate their concerns not only in legal but also in moral terms: indeed the moral and the legal appear as two sides of the same coin in these opposition discourses. For instance, Social Democrat MP Piri argued that "people's lives may be traumatically destroyed by this government decision"[18] and exclaimed: "How on earth do you make this up? Knowingly bending the rule of law at the expense of vulnerable people".[19] The Far Left Animal Party argued "this measures tears families apart. (…) So it is wholly justified that everyone says this is incompatible with European law".[20] The Socialist Party said it was "legally suspicious" and "a hard sell in humanitarian terms to keep parents and children separated as long as possible".[21] And minority rights party DENK called the measure "not just contrary to international law, but also inhuman".[22]

Disregarding fierce critique from the opposition and legal experts, the government went ahead and implemented the housing requirement.

Predictably, the government lost every single court case in which this measure was challenged. The government held on to the measure for months, appealing every negative court ruling, until in February 2023, the Council of State ruled that the measure was illegal. Faced with this ruling by the highest administrative court, the government withdrew the measure, six months after it was introduced.[23]

The government that entered office in 2024, constituted of Far Right and mainstream Right parties, appears to have learned from this experience in two ways. First, they tried to disable democratic and legal constraints by claiming emergency powers for the executive – a move that was effectively blocked, at least for now, both by the parliamentary opposition and by Conservative coalition party NSC. Second, and more immediately successful, they proposed ways to restrict family reunification that are probably within the law, reintroducing the distinction between refugee status and subsidiary protection into Dutch asylum law, and making family reunification for those with subsidiary protection almost impossible. This law has passed the Lower House very quickly, with barely any public discussion on the far-reaching restrictions it sets on family reunification for refugees in the Netherlands. At the moment of writing, it has yet to be debated and voted upon in the Senate.

## Discussion : The Migrant Other, the Law, and the Values of Liberal Democracy

The political debate about imposing a housing requirement on refugees' family reunification was just a brief episode in Dutch politics, with no direct lasting impact on Dutch asylum laws. However, this episode is revealing of how the rise of authoritarianism works. In this debate, two intersecting discursive dynamics – talk about the migrant Other and talk about legal norms – together erode the values on which liberal democracies are founded.

Strikingly, the representation of refugee family practices as culturally and racially deviant as well as abusive of the migration system happened in parallel to, but in apparent isolation of, the parliamentary debates about the housing requirement. Discussions about refugee children being "sent ahead" by their families or about "stacked family reunification" took place mostly in the media, with active participation of mainstream

Right politicians. However, in parliamentary debates about actual policy measures, the mainstream Right problematized family reunification only for contributing to "potentially infinite" inflow. I am convinced however that media debates and parliamentary debates reinforced each other. Discussing family reunification only in terms of 'excessive inflow' that must be contained, without regard for the impact of restriction on the families affected, is easier in a context where refugee families are perceived as deviant and abusive. A 2023 survey conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) showed that only 42% among the Dutch public thought that refugees should be entitled to reunite with their partner and children (SCP, 2024, p. 6). While I cannot prove a causal relation between this survey outcome and political discourse, the SCP report emphasizes that public attitudes are significantly impacted by media and political debates. My strong impression is that Dutch politicians have successfully delegitimized family reunification for refugees in the eyes of the majority of the Dutch population. As a result, instead of having to balance their desire for migration control with respect for family life, rightwing politicians allowed themselves to disregard family life, since refugee families were not seen as proper families to begin with.

Rendering people ethnoracially Other expels them from the remit of fundamental values. Jan Willem Duyvendak (2011, pp. 92–94) has explained that the "culturalization of citizenship" implied that "migrants" were expected to "adapt to 'Dutch' norms, values and emotions" or "go home". Very similarly, Bridget Anderson (2013, pp. 3–4) argues that modern nation-states portray themselves as "communities of value, composed of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour" – while outsiders are seen as "not having the same values – which easily becomes not having the 'right' values". In Dutch debates we see clearly that refugees are excluded from the imagined (national) community because they do not share the "right" family values and practices. We also see something else however: being excluded from the "community of values" not only means "they" do not share the same values: it also means "our" values do not apply to "them". As refugees' family life is not valued, the value of family life does not apply to them, and the moral obligation to respect their family life is lifted. Affect – or the lack thereof – plays an important role in exclusion from the remit of values. Duyvendak (2011, pp. 92–93) has called our attention to "the *emotional* aspects of citizenship", i.e. the role that emotions play in construing insiders and outsiders

to the nation. In recent Dutch debates about refugees' families, I see how Othering people's family practices disrupts emotional identification and thus blocks empathy: since "their" family is so different from "ours", "we" don't have to wonder how "we" would feel if "we" were in their situation. This emotional disidentification in turn reinforces moral disengagement. Indeed, emotions like empathy play an integral part in moral appeals to family life: calling measures which separate families "inhuman", as the Dutch opposition did, appeals to the shared human experience of practicing and valuing family. In contrast, Mainstream Right politicians' Othering of refugees' family reunification and avoidance of any reference to "family" allows them to evade the values and emotions connected to "family" entirely. Thus, the discursive Othering of refugee families undermines the fundamental value of respect for family life.

A second discursive dynamic that erodes this fundamental value is the way in which politicians talk about legal norms. When I studied the history of Dutch family migration politics as a PhD researcher, I was struck by the shift from a values discourse to a rights discourse about family migration among mainstream Rightwing politicians. In the 1960s and 1970s, Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals consistently objected to restrictions on family reunification for labour migrants – largely motivated by the interests of Dutch businesses which objected to any measure which limited their access to scarce labour, but also expressing their objections in moral terms. A measure that would result in "foreign workers being separated from their families for at least two years" was called "rather rough, rather rigid, and rather unsatisfactory" and "hardly befitting a social-christian policy".[24] Strikingly, as early as 1962, the Conservative Liberal MP Berkhouwer quoted article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights in full, questioning whether it reflected "respect for family life" to deny family reunification to foreign workers.[25] This may very well have been the first time this article was mentioned in Dutch debates about migration, some twenty years before article 8 ECHR and the Strasbourg Court would start playing any role of significance in migration law and jurisprudence. Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, respect for family life was referred to by the mainstream Right as a self-evidently shared fundamental value – a value which was also laid down in European fundamental rights treaties. By the 1990s, everything had changed. As asylum applications peaked and concerns over migrant integration and social cohesion grew, Conservative politicians no longer

championed family values in migration debates. Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals sought ways to impose income requirements on family reunification for refugees, urging the government to "be prepared to go to any length" in "seeking out the limits of article 8 ECHR".[26] I have often wondered whether the shift to a rights discourse has made it easier to talk about respect for family life, not as a value that politicians themselves or their electorates hold dear, but as a constraint imposed from the outside – a constraint which may legitimately be stretched or avoided (Bonjour, 2009, pp. 70–71 and 223–224).

Political scientists have long identified – and lamented – a trend of "judicialization of politics", which Hirschl (2008, p. 119) defines as "the reliance on courts and judicial means for addressing core moral predicaments, public policy questions, and political controversies". Debates are ongoing about where the boundaries between the political and the legal ought to lie, and whether the blame for this "judicialization" ought to be put on judges, politicians, or the nature of liberal democracy. In an intriguing recent contribution to this debate, Johnson, Thomas and Basham (2025, p. 272) argue that "the juridification of politics marks the abandonment of consciously values-based politics in favour of a reliance upon legal and quasilegal (i.e. rules, norms, conventions, procedures) means to address substantive matters of public policy". They critique the UK Labour Party under Starmer for conducting "unpolitics" by relying exclusively on arguments of efficiency, rules, and laws when attacking Conservative policies – never making substantive ethical or moral claims. According to Johnson and colleagues, this "unpolitics" is not the absence of politics but a deeply conservative politics, which by evading conflict over values and ideas ends up supporting the status quo.

To an extent, the political debate about migration in the Netherlands has been "juridified" in this sense, as Right-wing politicians talk about (European or international) laws and judges getting in the way of what needs to happen or what the majority wants, rather than talking about (personal or national) values. This juridification of political discourse obscures ethical dilemmas from view and absolves politicians from having to explain how they strike a balance between respecting family life on the one hand and controlling immigration on the other hand. However, unlike their colleagues in the UK, the leftwing opposition in the Netherlands *does* bring in moral arguments. Indeed, by discussing their moral objections to the housing requirement in direct relation to their

legal objections, these parliamentarians make it clear that legal norms *are an expression of* fundamental moral values.

This is crucial, because there is significant danger in politicians divorcing law from values. Indeed, as Scheppele (2018, p. 545) has argued, Far Right leaders today increasingly deploy what she calls "autocratic legalism" in using "their electoral mandates to dismantle by law the constitutional systems they inherited". Rather than breaking the law, these Far Right leaders use the law to reform democratic and legislative standards and procedures in such a way that both minority rights and limitations to executive powers are effectively dismantled. Thus, "autocratic legalism" maintains (a form of) democracy and the rule of law, but does away with the values of liberalism. Without their foundation in liberal values, democracy and the rule of law offer no protection against authoritarianism. Constitutions, EU Directives, even international treaties can be changed, emptied of their liberal content, steered away from their foundation in universal human rights. Not everything which is legal is right.

In 2022, the Dutch government did not bend the law to serve illiberal ends: they broke it. Perhaps the bad news is that the Far and Mainstream Right learned from it. The asylum laws proposed by Far Right minister Faber in 2024 contain restrictions which will make family reunification permanently impossible for many refugees fleeing war but which have been adopted by the Lower House without raising any media attention – perhaps because they (probably, just barely) remain within the limits of the law (Spijkerboer, 2024). This is achieved by distinguishing "refugees" from people offered "subsidiary protection": the latter are not protected by the Refugee Convention and offered much weaker rights protection by ECHR and EU law and jurisprudence. People with a "subsidiary protection" status will not be allowed to reunite with their family for the first two years, after which they will have to meet income and housing requirements which we know are extremely difficult to meet for people who have fled war. Perhaps this legal tactic for obstructing family reunification for refugees – which has already been deployed in Germany, Austria and Sweden – could be labelled a form of "autocratic legalism", as it stretches but does not break the law, to disable minority rights.

This is how migration politics contributes to authoritarianism: by undermining the foundational values on which liberal democracy is built. Discursive Othering of migrants justifies narrowing the scope of fundamental values, so that they do not apply equally to all. Discursive

representation of legal norms as cumbersome constraints rather than as the expression of foundational values justifies either breaking the law or emptying the law of its liberal substance.

An antidote for authoritarianism then may be to once again centre the values expressed in fundamental rights law. My plea here is not to end all migration restrictions and even less to end all migration debate: rather, my plea is to highlight the ethical dilemmas at the heart of migration politics. Politicians who call for restrictive migration policies should not be questioned on whether or not the measure they propose is legal, but rather be made to explain how they balance their quest for migration control with fundamental values like respect for family life. Politicians who profess their commitment to defending democracies from authoritarianism should commit to articulating the values that bind liberal democratic communities.

## Notes

1 Eg. Trouw, *D66 distantieert zich in asieldebat van de coalitie*, 16 December 2022.

2 Eg. NRC, *Beschamende opvang voor kinderen en jongeren in asielcentra*, 24 juni 2022.

3 De Telegraaf, *Kind speerpunt van asielzoekers: 'Ze hebben allemaal hetzelfde geprepareerde verhaal'*, 26 augustus 2022.

4 TK 2021-2022 Aanhangsel van de Handelingen No 3978.

5 De Twentsche Courant Tubantia, *Hele families liften mee op één enkel asielverzoek*, 16 September 2022; AD Utrechts Nieuwsblad, *Meeliftersop één enkel asielverzoek*, 16 September 2022.

6 De Volkskrant, *Dilan Yeşilgöz: 'Alles is vastgelopen, de asielinstroom moet naar beneden'*, 18 november 2023; *Op1*, 8 juli 2023.

7 TK 2021-2022 19637 No 2992, Letter from the Deputy Minister of Security and Justice.

8 Eg. BN De Stem, *Kabinet vindt nareis-beperking nodig, maar Kamer hoopt op terugfluiten door Raad van State*, 8 September 2022.

9 Addendum to TK 2021-2002, *Aanhangsel van de Handelingen* No 3940.

10 NRC, *Hoe minister Yeşilgöz in 2022 KPMG inschakelde en interne juristen omzeild werden in de crisis rond Ter Apel*, 14 September 2025.

11 TKT 2021-2022, Plenary 8 September 2022, p. 106-8-11.

12 Ibid, p. 106-4-18 and 106-4-21.

13 TK 2021-2022 19637 No 2949, p. 25-26.

14 TK 2021-2022, Plenary 8 September 2022, p. 106-4-18 to 106-4-21.

15 Ibid, p. 106-8-12 and 106-8-14.

16 Ibid, p. 106-8-22.

17 Results of a search for "nareis" on the government website https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/parlementair.

18 Ibid, p. 106-8-15 and 106-8-16.

19 TK 2021-2022, Plenary 8 September 2022, p. 106-4-5.

[20] Ibid, p. 106-8-15.
[21] Ibid, p. 106-4-1.
[22] Ibid, p. 106-4-4.
[23] TK 2022-2023 19637 No 3069.
[24] TK 1962-1963, Plenary 14 November 1962, B 6900, H6, p. 2080 and H15, p. 3401-3402.
[25] Ibid, p. 2098.
[26] TK 1997-1998 19637 (285); TK 1997-1998 19637 (312).

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# Homogeneity, Harmony, Hierarchy: Nativist Nostalgia in the Netherlands

*Josip Kešić*

Characteristic of the politics of belonging in many Western contexts in the past two decades is the "culturalization" (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016) or "virtualization" (Schinkel, 2010) of citizenship: an increasing weight on "emotions, feelings, norms and values, symbols and traditions" (Duyvendak 2011, p. 92) as markers of belonging and citizenship, "either as an alternative or in addition to citizenship as rights and socioeconomic participation" (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2010, p. 237). At the very heart of this process lies nativism (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022; Sharma, 2020). This essay addresses nativism in the Netherlands, a representative case of nativism is the West, focusing in particular on a central feature of nativist discourse: nostalgia.

Nowhere is the intersection of nativism and nostalgia more pronounced in the Dutch context than in the nativist far-right parties Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV) and Forum voor Democratie (FvD). Far right does not mean marginal. Quite the contrary. The clearest evidence for their mainstream status lies in the electoral success of these overtly nativist parties. FvD became one of the two largest parties in the Senate in the 2019 elections (and is currently the biggest political party in terms of number of members); Wilders's PVV was the top vote-getter in the 2023 national elections, and became a member of the subsequent coalition government, as it had following the 2010 elections. The PVV tied for first place in the 2025 national elections with the centrist D66.

Exemplary of their nativist nostalgia are the election manifestos from 2025. The stance of the PVV, founded by Geert Wilders in 2006, reads as follows:

> The PVV does put the Dutch people first. We will immediately implement a ban on asylum seekers' centres, close them down, send asylum seekers back at the border, deport criminal foreigners – and reconquer the Netherlands [...] This is and will remain our country. Neighbourhoods and streets where Dutch people

> have become foreigners in their own country will become Dutch again. We will also combat nuisance and crime so that they become safe again. We will give the Dutch people back their country. (PVV, 2025, p. 3).

The same nativist nostalgia is prominent in FvD, founded by Thierry Baudet in 2016. Referring to the coming national election, their election manifesto says:

> We need to bring back dynamism, daring and decisiveness. Without woke madness, without self-hatred. […] A country that honours its historical heroes and asks newcomers to adapt to our national customs and way of life. […] An opportunity to break with victim mentality, oikophobia […] unbridled immigration […] It is an opportunity to return to the values that made our country great. To bring back the dreams of our ancestors – and pass them on to our children and grandchildren. (FvD, 2025a, p. 4)

Such far-right discourses have often been understood in terms of Islamophobia, racism, and populism, and rightfully so. However, what these forms of politics of belonging have in common, and what lies at the core of the culturalisation of citizenship at large, is nativism (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022). Inspired by the American historian John Higham, nativism can be defined as "an opposition to an internal minority that is seen as a threat on the grounds of its foreignness" (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022). The constitutive element of nativism is the boundary between nativeness and foreignness. Nativeness (or indigeneity or autochthony) refers to a primordial relationship between people to a particular soil (Malkki, 1992; Sharma, 2020). In contrast, foreignness refers to who is here but not *from* here, *in* the place but not *of* the place and therefore *out* of place. This boundary is the effect of the interplay of various identity markers such as geography, temporalty, race/ethnicity, and culture. The second constitutive element of nativ*ism* is what differentiates it from native*ness*: the notion of threat posed by foreign forces to natives. This perceived threat often consists of an entanglement of interests and identity, based on demographic, economic, emotional themes, and arguments. The notion of threat is often accompanied by its logical consequence, a solution, which ranges from integration to expulsion or extermination.

In the following pages, this essay will first sketch the main ways in which Dutch (and by extension European) nativism problematises the

present, followed by a brief analysis of the main features and functions of nativist nostalgia.

## The Present as Problem

As far as contemporary manifestations in the Netherlands and Europe are concerned, nativism can be dissected into three different but interrelated subtypes, each with their own primary "other" (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019; Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022). The first, *religious nativism*, is predicated on the longstanding hierarchical oppositions between Christianity and Islam, and between modernity and backwardness. Central here is the idea that Muslims are not only incompatible with but also pose a threat to the Dutch, and by extension Western civilisation, not only in terms of safety but in terms of cultural hegemony. The Dutch version of this European pattern is characterised by the prevalence of gender equality and sexual freedoms (homosexuality) in essentialising the difference between the Dutch and Muslims, constructing the latter as a danger for Dutch freedoms and actual safety. What stands out in the Dutch variant of religious nativism is the self-image "*Cultural Christianity*" (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2020): Christianity is stripped of its confessional dimension and reduced to the "heritage" and "cultural identity", primarily defined by being modern, progressive, and secular (Schinkel, 2017). Cultural Christianity is clearly visible in the discursive associations with other religions (Judaism) and secular categories (humanism and the Enlightenment) (cf. Van den Hemel, 2020). Geert Wilders, for example, warns that the alleged European Union (EU) policies to host Muslim migrants will "undermine the Judaeo-Christian and humanistic identity of our nations" that are essentially "free and civilized" (2007). Tellingly, religious nativism ignores the ideas and practices of the orthodox protestants in the Bible Belt – despised when associated with Muslims – because it does not fit the secular self-image.

The second subtype, *racial nativism*, is predicated on the idea that racially marked others present a danger to the native – that is, "white" – Dutch and European populations. This flavour of nativism closely related to racism (Kešić & Duyvendak, forthcoming), has been repeatedly voiced by prominent far right politicians such as PVV's Martin Bosma (who has been speaker of the House of Representatives in 2023 to 2025) and FvD's Thierry Baudet. One of the prevalent manifestations of racial nativism

is the framing of anti-racism as reverse racism against white people. The frame of anti-white racism (deliberately employing "*blank*", with colonial connotations, instead of the more neutral and common "white" [*wit*]) is used to oppose a broad range of policies and social practices such as affirmative action policies; the fields of diversity and equality; scholarly (historical and social science) research addressing colonialism and racism; foreign policy that respects the autonomy of former colonies; humanitarian aid policies; official apologies regarding the history of slavery (e.g., FvD, 2025b).

Specific for the Dutch context is the moral panic around the criticism of the servant of Saint Nicholas Black Pete. The anti-racists who criticise the Dutch tradition of Black Pete for being a racist caricature are regarded by nativists as a threat to the Dutch culture. The anti-Black Pete critique is not only attacked for its supposed reverse racism against whites, but also for undermining not only national unity but also the self-congratulatory self-image Wekker describes as "white innocence" (Wekker, 2016). Nativists experienced anti-Black Pete activism as an insult: "How dare these black foreigners accuse native Dutch of racism!"

Racial nativism has become increasingly explicit, also in recent political propaganda. During the 2025 national election campaign, the PVV used artificial intelligence (AI) generated images of blond women with facial expression of fear as they are chased by black men. Overt racial nativism includes *replacement* theories, narratives that revolve around the idea that native – that is, white – Europeans will become a minority in their own country as a result of a race between so-called non-white races particularly from Africa and the Middle East. (cf. Bracke & Hernández Aguilar, 2024). In this process often referred to as "white genocide", the euphemistic "demographic developments" or Baudet's "homeopathic dilution", metropoles such as London, Paris, and Berlin function as a warning for white Europe as a whole.

The third group deemed a threat to the native population and its identity is the elite. *Populist nativism* problematises the elite for being *alienated* themselves from the culture, experiences, and interests of the ordinary people who represent the native nation at large. Nativists also attack the elite for betraying "their own" people by privileging and celebrating aliens (and other minorities) at the expense of the native population. Exemplary are Baudet's words from an election victory speech: "As with all these other countries of our boreal [white, JK] world, we

are being destroyed by the very people who should have protected us" (Trouw, 2019). One of the main features of populist nativism is the discursive conflation between "the elite" and "the left". Despite the obvious falsity of this association – the last somewhat leftist government in the Netherlands was in power between 1973 and 1977 – it remains a prevalent and powerful trope masking actual power dynamics. Common labels to disqualify the elite are "cosmopolitan", "self-hate", "sick", "auto-immune disease", and "traitors", to name a few.

The pro-European Union elites are one of populist nativism's preferred targets for they are seen as one of the main manifestations of the globalist movement whose perceived purpose is to undermine national sovereignty, cultural identity, and demographic dominance of white Europeans. In the speech "The Europe we want", Wilders presented his view by quoting Orbán: "Europe is a community of Christian, free and independent nations. The main danger to Europe's future comes from the fanatics of internationalism in Brussels. We shall not allow them to force upon us the bitter fruit of their cosmopolitan immigration policy" (Wilders, 2017). It is clear that nativist problematisations of the present rely on history or, more precisely, on nostalgia. What past does this nostalgia evoke? What is the function of the nativist instrumentalisation of nostalgia?

## The Past as Solution

Nostalgia's central position in nativist discourse can be aptly understood through the lens of what Svetlana Boym in her seminal *The Future of Nostalgia* calls *restorative nostalgia*: "a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (2001, p. xviii). She stresses that this reconstruction entails entangling multiple temporalities: "The fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future" (p. xvi). In nativist discourse, this nostalgia not only reinforces the hierarchical boundary between natives and non-natives, but also provides inspiration and justification for potential solutions in the present and future. Through the nostalgic "narrative of rebirth" (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2020), Dutch nativism desires and promises a restoration of the past glory in the future. The clearest discursive evidence lies in the prevalence of words simultaneously referring both to the past and the present, such as "back"/"again" (*weer* in Dutch) (Kešić *et al.*, 2022).

The FvD election manifesto reads: "The Netherlands is ours again [*weer*]. Forum for Democracy wants Dutch people to feel at home in their own country again [*weer*]" (Fvd, 2025a, p. 11). Equally important is the prefix "re-" (in Dutch "*her-*", "*terug-*"): reconquer [*terugveroveren*], bring back [*terugbrengen*], return to [*terugrijpen op*], reclaim [*terugwinnen*], regain [*herpakken*], preserve [*behouden*], protect [*beschermen*], to name a few examples from the 2025 election manifestos for PVV and Fvd.

What characteristics are attributed to the past? The invocation of the past as something positive amounts to idealisation contrasted against the "multicultural" present deemed catastrophic. The idealisation of the distant past in nativist nostalgia comprises mythical notions of *homogeneity*, *harmony*, and *hierarchy*. Homogeneity refers to ethno-racial purity and boundedness of the native population without the polluting presence of racial others. The myth of harmony claims that in the distant past the native population had been characterised by cohesion and cultural uniformity, avoiding all kinds of conflicts and cleavages. On those occasions when nostalgic nativism does mention differences and divides, they are never internal but externalised and mapped on the native–foreign divide. Hierarchy refers to the dominant position of the native population vis-à-vis internal and external foreign forces. It includes the primacy of national sovereignty over foreign interference (such as supranational organisations); the superiority of native – that is, white – Dutch and Europeans over non-Western peoples; and the subaltern position of internal minorities who are granted rights or who question the status quo with the natives at the top. What is the historical timeline onto which homogeneity, harmony, and hierarchy are mapped? What are the contours of nativist nostalgia's temporality?

### *The Perennial Past*

Central in nativism's nostalgia is the juxtaposition between a distant, positive past on the one hand, and a negative present and recent past on the other. As a crucial element in nativist discourse, the distant past remains vague (Kešić et al., 2022). Without references to specific historical periods and events (like the 1389 Battle of Kosovo or Reconquista in Serb and Spanish nativisms, respectively), the beginning and duration of this distant past remain indetermined. However, the end of this distant past coincides with the beginning of the near and negative past (with overlaps

with the present), namely somewhere in early decades of the post-World War II era with the increase of immigrants from so-called "non-Western" cultures.

These myths of homogeneity, harmony, and hierarchy attributed to the vague distant past permeate the subtypes of nativism mentioned above with variations in the weight between these myths and in themes. In religious nativism, the nostalgic idealisation of the distant past becomes visible in the striking bypass of religion-related conflicts. Terms such as "Judeo-Christian tradition" or "humanistic-Judeo-Christian tradition" gloss over a long history of differences and conflicts. It avoids disagreements and hostilities between different religious groups (for example, the exclusion of Jews all of Europe or the mutual animosity between Protestants and Catholics in the Netherlands until recently), and the tensions between Christianity and secularism. Conflating different religions and religion with secularism, the self-image of Cultural Christianity nostalgically suggests a historical harmony that existed until the arrival of barbaric and backward Muslims. Moreover, the employment of gender equality and sexual freedoms (homosexuality) as the main themes to construct the Islamic threat in the present, implies that inequality, exclusion, violence against women or homosexuals does neither exist in the present nor in the distant past. Religious nativism does not only imply a positive past that differs from current Islam through silencing inequality and exclusion. But it often also through explicitly attributing freedom and equality to the Dutch national character and its perennial, positive past. Comic, absurd, and illustrative at the same time are the words of Sybrand van Haersma Buma, party leader of the centrist Christian Democratic Appeal, claiming during the 2017 election campaign that gender equality has been a Christian tradition for thousands of years. Additionally, the defence of gender equality as quintessentially Dutch against both the too oppressive, backward Islam and the unnatural gender fluidity of the "woke" left suggests that there was and is such a thing as the ideal type of female gender that should be restored. The nativists' balancing act between propagating modernity and freedom against Muslims and conservatism against leftists implies a perfect middle ground associated with common sense and Dutch native culture.

Racial nativism's diagnosis of the "multicultural" present – as a cultural, demographic, ethno-racial catastrophe for the white native population – implies better times in the past when whiteness was dominant. This discourse is replete with nostalgic laments for a past in which whiteness

reigned supreme culturally and demographically – a past in which there were no accusations of racism, thus no reverse racism of whites, when native whites were the majority in large cities, when the streets were "recognisable" as "Dutch" (that is, white), when there was no "woke language police" (demanding the usage of "*wit*" over "*blank*", "*zwart*" over "*neger*"), when racist jokes were allowed and considered funny, when advertising and government institutions were not hijacked by diversity and inclusion, when the quintessentially Dutch tradition of Black Pete was unquestioned and pervaded the public space.

Populist nativism suggests that either there were no elites at all in the distant past, or that their cultural affinity and interests were automatically aligned with the nation at large. In the case of the latter, the implied image is that in contrast to the supposed self-hate and alienation of today's elites, the elites in the past were much more patriotic and democratic, and closer to the lived experience of the people who embody authentic Dutchness. In blaming, for instance, pro-European elites for pushing mass immigration of cultural and racial others down the European natives' throats, it is implied that democracy and national interests were much better served before the European Union. How nostalgia informs populist nativism is also evident in the recent support of Dutch farmers by the far right and the historic victory of the recently established Dutch farmers party (the Farmer–Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging) (BBB)) in 2023 provincial (and indirectly Senate) elections. Here, idealised images of the authentic rusticity unaffected by the ills of multicultural metropolitan life play a crucial role. Nativists relied on nostalgic notions of local rootedness, masculinity, and whiteness to juxtapose the authenticity of the rural periphery to the multicultural alienation in the urban centres brought about by the self-hating elite.

### *Celebrating Colonialism*

The central exception when it comes to nativist representations of the past in Dutch far-right discourse is colonialism. Where a vague past is most prevalent, colonialism constitutes a relatively specific phenomenon limited to a demarcated historical period. Nostalgic invocations of the colonial past occur in various combinations of implicit or explicit, celebratory or defensive. The explicitness, frequency, and prominence of the colonial past are among the few differences between the PVV and FvD.[1] In comparison to the FvD, the colonial past in PVV discourse appears both less frequently

and more implicitly, as illustrated by the most recent election manifesto. It includes implicit references to the colonial past through broad but easily decodable terms, employing celebratory and defensive modes:

> The Netherlands is a beautiful country .[…] our rich Dutch history, culture and identity. We want to be collectively proud of our country and who we are again – instead of making excuses for our ancestors' past. No misplaced culture of shame, but cherishing our traditions, the statues of our national heroes and our celebrations such as Christmas, Saint Nicholas with Black Pete, and Easter. (PVV, 2025, p. 27)

Subsumed under broader categories such as "traditions" or "heroes", the colonial past is implied.

In contrast to the PVV, the colonial past plays a more important role in FvD's discourse. Visual references to the Dutch East India Company – a trading company from the seventeenth century onwards and a symbol of Dutch colonial imperialism – are an integral part of FvD's promotional material. FvD's 2025 election manifesto is replete with references to colonialism. The section on the "Caribbean islands and Suriname", former Dutch colonies, expresses a commercial, expansionist ambition in Central and Latin America justified by a whitewashed version of history. Combining a positive and implicit language, it says: "there is a historical connection with Suriname. Forum for Democracy is proud of this shared history and wants to maintain and strengthen ties with our overseas territories" (Fvd, 2025a, p. 77). A defensive stance with explicit language is another prevalent combination in FvD's discourse. "No apologies for the past. We will withdraw apologies for the history of slavery and cease offering new apologies or compensation, so that the government can focus on the future rather than historical guilt" (FvD, 2025a, p. 52). The most explicit nostalgia for the colonial past can be found in the speeches of FvD's founder and former leader. In a speech deeply nostalgic in both substance and style delivered in the Dutch Parliament, Baudet glorifies Dutch/European colonialism. In this "tribute, this final farewell to what once was, this elegy […] words of love for colonialism", he describes it as the

> grand project of beauty and honour that our people, far away on the other side of the world, conscious of their pilgrim status throughout the centuries and filled with their missionary role in the southern parts of the world, have

> taken upon themselves to share with those who, due to geography, genetics and history, have not inherited the blessings of European existence. Indeed: to share with them the superiority, the generosity, I dare say the humanity of Europe [*Avondland*]. That was colonialism. It is the greatest, the most beautiful, the best, in a sense even the only thing we can truly be proud of. (Tweede Kamer, 2023)[2]

The colonial past is glorified for its whitewashed hierarchy with the whites on top, not only in terms of material (economic, military, political) power but also in terms of subjective power (self-image, pride, confidence). Colonialism also serves as an inspiration for the restoration of the racial hierarchy in the future. Although the colonial past marks a specific historical phenomenon relative to others, its function in nativist discourse is equivalent to the one of the vague past. Regardless of the ways in which references to the colonial past are articulated, they are part of a broader defence of native/national culture and therefore the past – particularly the colonial past – against the perceived attacks by "self-hating" leftist elites and post-colonial migrants.

## Conclusion

Nativist nostalgia lies at the heart of the culturalisation of citizenship as it reinforces the boundary and hierarchy between natives and non-natives, and, through the "narrative of rebirth" provides inspiration and justification for solutions in the future, that is, restoration of the past glory of the natives. This nostalgia produces and relies on the temporal distinction between, on the one hand, a negative present and recent past, and, on the other, a positive, distant past that remains vaguely characterised by myths of perennial homogeneity, harmony, and hierarchy.

Another way of summarising nativist nostalgia would be to point out three ironies at play here: for a discourse that is fundamentally predicated on boundaries and justifications based on temporality and history, it is remarkably a-historical for it invokes an idealised, essentialised, perennial past; former colonising nations in Europe such as the Netherlands and France experience people from former colonies (and other non-European regions) as colonisers threatening white native populations; the same nativists who see themselves as part of an anti-colonial struggle against the "invasion" of multicultural ideas and non-Western peoples,

whitewash, defend, romanticise, and glorify the colonial past. While the denial of racism and whitewashing of the colonial past have been deeply ingrained in Dutch mainstream society for decades (cf. Essed & Hoving, 2014), the nativist far-right has taken it to the level of nostalgia in the political service of virulent nativism.

Understanding nativist nostalgia among the far right matters, for it provides deeper insight into the nativist worldview and reminds us of the catastrophic consequences of the nativist logic – not only in the Netherlands but also in other contexts with rampant nativism. Inspired, prepared, and justified by nativist nostalgia, the deportations in the US and the ongoing genocide committed by the state of Isreal tragically but perfectly underscore the importance of the old wisdom, "Whoever does not study rhetoric will be a victim of it."

## Notes

[1] Elitism – an overall difference between the two very similar far right parties – also permeates their respective nostalgia. In contrast to the PVV, FvD often mentions and puts forward ideas regarding the restoration of philosophy, arts, and architecture.

[2] For nativist nostalgia in PVV and FvD from the period 2017 to 2021, see Kešić *et al.* (2022). Symbols of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC)) were also present at the violent anti-immigrant demonstration of the Dutch far right in September 2025, which was inspired by the demonstration in London two weeks earlier.

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PART 2

# Promises and Pitfalls of Citizenship

# In Search of a New Culture of Citizenship

*Timothey Stacey*

On 5 July 2024, Rishi Sunak, the then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, did something remarkable: he graciously and magnanimously conceded defeat in the national election, and wished his incoming opponent well:

> Whilst he has been my political opponent, Sir Keir Starmer will shortly become our Prime Minister. In this job, his successes will be all our successes, and I wish him and his family well. Whatever our disagreements in this campaign, he is a decent, public-spirited man, who I respect.

People's impulsive reaction to my describing this moment as remarkable might be one of bemusement or even dismay. "Surely he was doing exactly what should be expected of the outgoing leader of a democratic country?" you might ask. "Why should we applaud people for doing the bare minimum?" "In any case, his speech was merely a *ritual* intervention with no real consequences."

On the contrary, in this short piece, I will argue that, in fact, the celebration of that which we believe ought to be ordinary is exactly what is required if we are to safeguard democracy: ordinary gestures of concession; the ordinary act of voting; the ordinary patience and magnanimity required to listen and respond to the unsolicited opinions of a stranger. These are in fact quite extraordinary human qualities. And they deserve to be treated as such. They are indeed rituals – that is, performances through which people gesture to the way that they believe the world should and could be (Stacey, 2022, p. 98; 2024, p. 108).

Sunak's speech seems more outstanding if we consider what happens when leaders refuse to concede defeat. This is what happened in the United States on 6 January 2021, when Donald Trump declared the election had been stolen. His supporters stormed the Capitol Building, leading to many deaths and stoking deep political mistrust. He eschewed a ritual and brought a democracy to its knees.

Politics is fundamentally an act of collective faith. This faith is upheld through the celebration of certain ideals, the myths that emerge around these ideals, and the rituals through which they are staged. Seemingly superfluous ritual gestures, then, are fundamental to upholding what is considered politically possible and desirable.

Again, this point can be better illustrated with reference to a moment when collective faith seems to crumble. On 15 March 2025, Ábrego García was arrested in the United States and sent to an El Salvadorian jail. On 11 April 2025, the Supreme Court ordered that the White House must do all within its power to "facilitate" García's return to the United States. When Trump decided to ignore the ruling, it became clear that there was very little that could be done to enforce it. The famously robust constitution in the "home of democracy" turns out to be upheld by the goodwill of office-holders. For a democracy – or indeed any regime – to survive, politicians, as well as wider publics, must have faith in, and be willing to ritually reproduce, its ideals (Ezrahi,2012).

Put more strongly still, these ritual acts *are* political reality. This is why when people complain that politics is *just* theatre, they are missing the point. Perhaps counterintuitively, in moments when the grand edifices of our democratic institutions appear to be crumbling, it is crucial that we return to the seemingly superfluous performances that keep our institutions alive. When things are "getting real", we must turn to drama.

One crucial place to be assessing ritual gestures is in the central institutions and moments that give shape to the political calendar: elections; party conferences; liberation days. Yet democracy is not kept alive in our political institutions alone. It also depends on the countless small, everyday acts of ordinary citizens. As John Dewey once claimed, "democracy is a way of life" characterised by "faith in human nature" and kept alive "in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner to discuss back and forth" ([1939] 2011, p. 3). Similarly, based on her team's ethnographic observations in India, Mukulika Banerjee (2022) stresses that street-level negotiations in rural villages are fundamental in shaping how democracy is understood and practiced. Democracy is kept alive through everyday, street-level interactions between family members, neighbours; colleagues, and total strangers. In this light, it is urgent that we reflect on, and seek to generate, a culture of citizenship fit for the twenty-first century.

It is in aid of constructing a culture of citizenship that I write this piece. Social liberals might be concerned. By speaking of a culture of citizenship,

I seem to be inviting the construction and imposition of a particular way of living one's life and, in so doing, creating the possibility of exclusion and oppression – just what Dewey and other perfectionist liberals have been criticised for (Talisse, 2003; cf. Sarajlic, 2015). This is the first point I turn to address in an extended section drawing on the field-defining work of Jan Willem Duyvendak. My argument is that cultivating a culture of citizenship is perilous but necessary.

My aim in this piece is not to offer the contours of a new culture of citizenship. Nor is it my intention to set out the existential yearnings and political imperatives that such a culture would need to speak to – a task that Duyvendak, Kešić, and I have together addressed elsewhere (2022b). Instead, my aim is to provide others with some conceptual tools with which they can identify and develop new cultures of citizenship. This is the focus of the subsequent five sections; I focus on: 1) moral parameters; 2) dominant symbols, 3) the myths and 4) rituals through which these are given form, and 5) the dramaturgies through which they are filled with content. Without making assertions, but to keep the message comprehensible, I develop a single example from symbol, through myth and ritual, to dramaturgical analysis: that of democracy.

## Against and For the Cultivation of a Culture of Citizenship

Starting in 2010, amidst rising populist and anti-immigrant sentiment, Jan Willem Duyvendak, normally alongside Menno Hurenkamp, Evelien Tonkens, or Peter Geschiere, wrote a series of articles, chapters, and essays under the theme of the culturalisation of citizenship (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016; Hurenkamp *et al.*, 2012). Their central argument was that access to citizenship and belonging were becoming more restrictive, even pernicious, drifting from a question of rights and socio-economic circumstances to one of cultural alignment. Some people, and especially Muslims, were being labelled as not fitting in the Netherlands. Duyvendak was especially adept in pointing out how entrepreneurial the anti-immigrants were – and had to be – in inventing a supposedly historic and unchanging Dutch culture that they deemed under threat from migrants. With the rapid political changes that have unfolded since 2010, Duyvendak's argument has become still more prominent. It has also become more complex, as Duyvendak deftly points to the rhetorical and performative contradictions miring right-wing cultural entrepreneurs.

My own training was quite different from Duyvendak's. I was raised into academia by people whose intellectual agendas align with the very politics that it has been his life's work to critique, expose, and challenge. These were post-liberal philosopher-theologians like John Milbank and Alasdair MacIntyre, who insisted that the decline of Christianity, and the absence of a shared narrative to take its place, was undermining the possibility of social solidarity and allowing neoliberalism to take root. This agenda did not start from an Islamophobic place but it risked endorsing right-wing cultural agendas by conjuring nostalgia for an apparently lost past in which society was homogenous and, because homogenous, solidary – a point that Duyvendak explicitly challenges in his inaugural address at the University of Amsterdam (2004). Inspired by the explanatory power of post-liberal theory but sceptical about where it landed politically, my early research career can be characterised as a search for the cultural foundations of solidarity in diverse societies: I looked to identify the myths and rituals that people mobilise in building solidarity across differences (Stacey, 2018).

It was during this early stage of my career that I first met Duyvendak. He had agreed to supervise me in a bid for a European Research Council Marie-Curie Sklodowska Fellowship. While the bid was unsuccessful, the exchange of ideas that unfolded in the years following were far more valuable than any short fellowship could have been. What emerged from those conversations was a shared belief in what might be called a "cultural third way": whereas seeking to resuscitate a shared identity by conjuring a lost past is clearly exclusionary and dangerous, *some* shared symbolic language is fundamental to maintaining a fulfilling and solidary politics. Moreover, it is *through* developing a vibrant political culture characterised by shared purpose and belonging that we resist the drift towards nativism (see Duyvendak *et al.*, 2022b). This is partly because people require shared points of reference to engage in fruitful relationships. But, more crucially, adopting an explicitly cultural, practice-based approach to citizenship may itself serve as a safeguard against organic discourses of belonging that emphasise blood and soil.

In my view then, there are two criss-crossing paths to be taken by those carrying forward Duyvendak's legacy. One path involves bold criticism of the underlying assumptions of those seeking to characterise national culture. The other involves the far more perilous work of crossing the fourth wall of academic criticism and actively engaging in the

task of identifying and constructing a new culture of citizenship. We will go wrong in this endeavour. But it is my conviction that we must take tentative steps towards it, lest we leave a void to be filled by charlatans and demagogues.

### Set Your Moral Parameters

The first point of order is to be clear about one's moral parameters. On what grounds is it acceptable to construct a new culture of citizenship? It is particularly crucial to answer questions like these because, as will become clear in the following, culture has its own moral inertia. Despite their flexibility, one can become drawn into, implicated in, and shaped by the semantic legacy of symbols, myths, and rituals. The meanings that they carry become our meanings. That culture has its own agency is what makes it so crucial to understand and work with. Yet it is also the reason that engaging with culture is so perilous. Having a clear moral starting point is essential to ensuring that you are interpreting cultural forms, rather than being formed by them. It is the difference, as it were, between waving the national flag in the name of one's cause, and simply being shrouded in and suffocated by the flag, becoming little more than a vessel to be filled with the multifarious meanings that others pour into you.

### Identify the Dominant Symbols

Jeroen Oomen, Jesse Hoffman, Maarten Hajer, and I argue that in any given political culture, there are certain symbols that dominate: in the West, the crucifix and national flags provide good examples (Stacey *et al.*, 2025). Whatever one's political aims, it appears highly effective to engage with these symbols. While adopting symbols that carry problematic historical baggage can feel both opportunistic and morally reprehensible, it is important to recognise that dominant symbols are "stylistically stable but substantively flexible" (Stacey *et al.*, 2025, p. 1). This means that their form has achieved a place of central influence and prominence even as they remain radically open to interpretation. Think, for example, of how, in the United States of the 1960s, the crucifix was employed by both civil rights campaigners and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Or think of how, in recent

years, the American, Dutch, and British flags have been deployed by both anti-immigrant and anti-racist campaigners.

A symbol need not only refer to an image but could also apply to a word like "democracy". Over time, and in the course of events, words like democracy become loaded with multiple, sometimes contradictory interpretations: Ancient Greek democracy, for example, is very different from the republican democracy associated with the United States, which itself turns out to be anathema to the election-deniers now claiming to speak for "the people". Words like democracy begin to contain an energy that transcends any specific articulation of their meaning. It is because symbols have a social power that exceeds any particular, temporary meaning that we offer our tag line: "political radicalism requires symbolic conservatism" (Stacey *et al.*, 2025, p. 15). By this we do not literally mean that people should revalorise romanticised ideals of an apparently lost past – the strong, rural community, for example. Rather, we mean that people need to work with the symbolic language that is already widely accepted.

Still, even this insight can make for uncomfortable reading for many on the left. This is for two reasons. The first has to do with the unbearable lightness of symbols. Many simply do not want to accept that sacred words like democracy are open to interpretation. Far right actors are widely accused of hijacking and falsely representing words like democracy for their own advantage, in the process emptying those words of their "true" meaning. Conversely, taking a social constructivist stance, we suggest that the meanings of dominant symbols are always "up for grabs". The mistake of the left is to take the meaning of symbols for granted. The second criticism comes from the opposite direction: dominant symbols are too loaded. From religious imagery like the crucifix, to national flags, to abstract concepts like democracy, some activists worry that dominant symbols carry with them problematic assumptions about who "we" are and the direction in which we are headed. To make use of them is to become implicated in histories and ideologies we abhor. Yet drawing on cases as varied as Nazism, the Civil Rights Movement, and Occupy, our research suggests that *even if* movements ultimately intend to destroy and replace dominant symbols, there is a crucial stage at which they must lean into those symbols and convincingly reinterpret them. In whatever direction one would wish to take a new culture of citizenship, it is wise to begin with the symbols that already appeal to people.

## Spin Your Myths

Dominant symbols are stable in form but radically flexible in substance. Myths provide a central means through which they take form. My 2022 *Saving Liberalism from Itself* devotes full chapters to the myths (pp. 75–97) and rituals (pp. 98–115) that might save liberalism. In the following two sections, I must be far briefer, focusing on the means by which myths and rituals may be identified. To use the word "myth" can be quite jarring in societies that understand themselves as secular and rational. The word myth is most often associated with either the stories of Ancient Greece (the myth of Hercules); the false narratives that shape public culture (the myth of the criminal immigrant); or the lies spread by populist politicians. Instead, I treat myths as "stories of great events and characters that shape one's understanding of the way that the world is or should be" (Stacey, 2024, p. 107). They are thus 1) existential (they tell us about what it is like to be in the world; 2) moral (they give us clues as to how we ought to behave); and 3) agentive (they shape our lives without our choosing for them to do so).

Myths are agentive on two levels. First, we very rarely select the myths we live by, even if it feels like we do. Instead, they are used to form us through childhood, or else we encounter them at moments of peril, turmoil, or change. Second, the myths we live by "come to us" uninvited in challenging moments. So, we will often hear people say, "I recalled the struggle of Gandhi in that moment" (replace Gandhi with your favoured democratic protagonist).

Identifying myths in secular, rational societies may seem like an unassailable task, but they are crucial in underwriting even liberal philosophies and constitutions. However rational the end product, faith in it, and the willingness to go along with it, are upheld by murkier forces. Building on the example of democracy, the stories of the American and French Revolutions, Civil Rights, and Nelson Mandela have all given this symbol form. The stories have inspired millions of people around the world to fight for freedom and equality. They have also become touchstones for those wishing to defend the constitution, with politicians of different stripes wrangling over who can claim to represent the spirit of these stories.

Yet form does not determine content. Though myths like these are in some sense "true", or based on real-life events, much like the symbols to

which they give form, myths are radically open to interpretation. Take the Mandela myths as a particularly striking example. While the meaning of Mandela's story may seem obvious, the events described recent, and the room for interpretation relatively closed, recent years have seen a striking reinterpretation. Over a series of speeches in 2023 and 2024, Donald Trump compared himself to Mandela, as a fighter for freedom and a victim of political persecution (Sullivan, 2023). The meaning of myths thus cannot be taken for granted. They must be constantly reproduced and reinterpreted.

## Weave Your Rituals

Rituals offer symbols form in three dimensions, bringing them onto the stage where their ideals can be enacted and expressed. I understand rituals as "routines and performances that bring one's character in line with how the world is, should, or could be" (Stacey, 2024, p. 8). They are thus 1) normative (they have a moral purpose); 2) performative (they are consciously enacted, either by the designer, the performer, or the participant); and 3) subversive (they subvert some other way of being). The latter part is intuitively difficult to grasp. Many rituals seem deliberately designed to reinforce a particular order. I agree with this, but then the interesting question is, what is being subverted in order to reinforce that order? A Christian funeral reinforces the idea that one's spirit goes to heaven. But, in so doing, it subverts the intuitive notion that there is just this life and nothing more.

Rituals' distinguishing feature is that they appear, from a materialist perspective, to be entirely superfluous, and yet, through their performance, they have the power to change reality: to console the grieving, to reunite divided parties, and to generate hope. Rituals can be grand, annual events celebrating key historic events, such as liberation days. They can also be cyclical events like democratic transitions of power, to which I referred at the beginning. To understand what makes Sunak's performance so important, we have to understand it as an instance of a recurring ritual in which power is handed over from one set of elected officials to the next.

Equally important for developing a culture of citizenship is to think of the ordinary, everyday rituals through which people keep their actions in line with their idea of what democracy is or could be. One must imagine that Sunak's own ability to perform his role well, that is, to concede

power with grace and magnanimity, came from a lifetime of learning to do just this: from gestures of respect during the cricket matches he loved; to moments of losing at school; to engagements in the community. While Sunak, and the particular practices through which he was raised, are emblematic of the dominance of a particular class, pointing to such everyday practices need not be framed as a plea for maintaining the status quo. Rather, as Dorothea Gädeke (2020) notes in her call for a critical republicanism, recognising the power of these everyday practices can serve as a first step towards criticising and transforming those practices in the name of the causes we hold dear. Seemingly small and ordinary gestures play a crucial role in developing the resilience to reproduce an ideal of social and political reality.

### Craft Your Dramaturgies

Imagine for a moment that politics is nothing more than a movie. Which are the shows that sell the best? What types of performance, staging, scripting, sound, and lighting prove most persuasive? By beginning to engage with these questions, you are beginning to engage with the notion of dramaturgy as an analytic device for understanding how politics becomes persuasive. But now let's go a layer deeper. Because if politics is in a deeper sense nothing more than an act of collective faith, upheld by persuasive performances, then dramaturgical analysis helps us to perceive the very fabric by which social reality is constructed, and can be made otherwise.

More specifically, dramaturgical analysis provides a means of analysing how symbols, myths, and rituals are convincingly deployed to shape public understandings of what is possible and desirable, and offers tools for creatively reclaiming and reinterpreting those symbols, myths, and rituals. Again, each aspect has been discussed in far more detail elsewhere, but it is useful to briefly introduce them here (Stacey *et al.*, 2025).

*Performance* refers to the costume one wears, the voice they adopt, and the emotions they convey. *Scripting* refers to the sequence of events: who stands where, and when? Who says what to whom? *Staging* refers to the identification of a stage, the arrangement of objects on it, and the separation of actors from audience. *Setting* refers to the physical space in which events unfold. *Setting* refers to the wider surroundings in which

events unfold: the physical space. *Production* refers to the policing of who gets access to which stages when. "Whereas autocratic regimes are overt and coercive in determining what kinds of performances are acceptable, by whom, and on what stage, in liberal democracies, the policing is far more subtle, with leaders often publicly celebrating the dedication of protestors, while behind the scenes restricting the kinds of action that are permissible" (Stacey *et al.*, 2025). Finally, *media* refers to the means by which any particular performance in a specific space is communicated to a wider audience. Often what feels electrifying to those immediately present is unappealing and off-putting when conveyed through a particular medium to a wider audience.

With these tools to hand, we can offer a "review" of Sunak's iteration of the ritual of concession. I am under no illusion that his speech will become a touchstone – one of those moments for which each and every one of us will remember "where we were when we saw it". But if our aim is to resuscitate faith in democracy, we should critically explore why this performance failed to land. The first thing to note is that Sunak's performance was characteristically robotic. He has long been satirised for his wooden performance and this speech, while unusually emotional for him, similarly failed to stir crowds. Stage presence is a crucial quality for political leaders.

The scripting, staging, and setting of the event preceded Sunak. The prime minister and his wife step out of their Downing Street home, and walk to a lectern. Behind him, one sees the British flag flying. Journalists from the national press surround him, the bulbs of their cameras flashing as he speaks. In the background, one can hear the faint sound of hecklers at the gates to Downing Street, as well as the hum of London traffic. Perhaps following Sunak's performance, media communication about the event was deeply underwhelming. There must seem like little reason to play with these aspects. Fitting with our theory about dominant symbols and the dramaturgies through which they are captured, these aspects encapsulate a broad cross-section of the British public's understanding of what British democracy looks like and how it plays out. They thus confer legitimacy on Sunak's words. But these points should never be merely assumed. We might ask, for how long will this remain the case? Might there be better scripts, stages, and settings for conveying a graceful transition that speak to society as it is now? Might different political contexts demand different dramaturgical conventions?

## Conclusion

If one were to read from my assertion that we must construct a new culture of citizenship to mean that we can dispense with the many warnings of Duyvendak and colleagues over the years, I would beg to think again. In the foregoing, I have sought to stress that even the construction of the democratic culture I have been hinting at is deeply perilous. One can easily imagine this culture itself being mobilised to exclude people of certain ethnic and national origin on the grounds that they will not and perhaps cannot assimilate. Indeed, work undertaken by Duyvendak, Kešić, and I (2022a) has stressed this very point with respect to political liberalism. Even a philosophy designed to be as inclusive as possible can be wielded against those depicted as incapable of an inclusive outlook. Yet we are cultural animals, willing to die in the name of a strong symbol, skilfully mobilised. Shying away is also not an option.

The question instead should be, how can we cultivate a culture of citizenship that treats the arrival of the other as an opportunity to put one's democratic credentials to the test? While providing examples throughout, I have avoided making assertions about what this new culture must look like. I have stressed the importance of acknowledging symbols, myths, and rituals that already dominate in society, and have stressed that the form can be hard to shift. But I have also stressed the radical flexibility of content. I made clear, for example, that while the notion of democracy and the myths and rituals around it remain relatively stable, interpretations can vary significantly. From this perspective, one would imagine that identifying possibilities for a culture of citizenship not only requires robust research, but also that such research must be constantly revised and adapted.

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# Time for Citizenship: Temporal Practices of Migrants in the Netherlands

*Minke Hajer, Zana Costa Cosac, and Christian Bröer*

What does citizenship have to do with time? We know that sharing a territory is a condition for citizenship. This essay suggests that sharing time is similarly important. Without actively sharing the present or past or working towards a common future, a political community is hard to imagine. To explore the relation between citizenship and time, we look at everyday tim*ing* and future plans of migrants. Instead of approaching time as a quantity or experience, we treat time as a social practice. We zoom in on cases of privileged expats and irregular migrants to show how unequal chances to build a future affect the way migrants time their lives now.

Time is not a direct focus in the work of Jan Willem Duyvendak and his collaborators. He offers a practice-oriented account of citizenship, anchored in the dynamic relations between place, lived experience, and politics. In his analyses of belonging (e.g., Duyvendak, 2011), in- and exclusion (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022), sexual citizenship (Mepschen & Duyvendak, 2012), or protest movements (Duyvendak, 1995), citizenship appears less as a legal status than as something enacted in urban neighbourhoods, political struggles, and national imaginaries. Duyvendak thereby foregrounds the importance of place for citizenship. Time implicitly enters his analyses through narratives of national pasts and nostalgia, through expectations of continuity, and through judgements about who has been present "long enough" to belong. Moreover, legal temporal structures – such as waiting periods, probationary residence, or the gradual accumulation of rights – underpin dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, even when they are not Duyvendak's primary object of analysis. Our temporal practice perspective both builds on and departs from this approach. Rather than treating time as a background translated into spatial judgements, we foreground *timing* itself as a central practice of citizenship, thereby aligning with increasing attention for temporality in migration studies. Our approach conceptualises citizenship as actively

produced through temporal practices: projecting futures, carrying pasts, pacing everyday life, enduring uncertainty, and synchronising or resisting institutional timelines. In doing so, we extend a lived, place-based understanding of citizenship into an explicitly temporal analysis, showing how inequalities in citizenship are not only spatially and culturally organised, but also structured through unequal capacities to wait, to plan, to endure, and ultimately to arrive at citizenship through timing.

## Citizenship Research

Much has been written about the relationship between citizenship and space (e.g., Bauböck, 2003; Lefebvre, 2003; Nicholls & Vermeulen, 2012; Hajer & Bröer, 2020), and likewise about the interplay between space and time (e.g., Harvey, 1990; Lefebvre, 2004; Griffiths, 2014). This essay, in turn, examines the relation between citizenship and time. Research often ties citizenship to shared territories or meaningful places. Similarly, migration research focuses on borders, the territorial exercise of power, and on spatial moves and practices. Our own research indeed pointed to "claim placing" (Hajer & Bröer, 2020) as a practice of activist migrants, claiming places and incrementally claiming citizenship at the same time. In migration studies, recent research has focused on time and the temporal dimension of migration and citizenship policies (Cohen, 2015; McNavin, 2020).

Migration and the acquisition of citizenship are timed processes. Migration can be planned years ahead, for example. Countries of destination have various time schedules governing rights, for instance, concerning the duration of visas or legal procedures (e.g., Jacobsen et al., 2021). Many legal statuses are time-defined. And for all citizens, rights come with age (e.g., Lister, 2007).

Time is a tool of governance (imposed waiting, delaying access) and ground for temporal inequalities (access to visas and to "futures") (Brux *et al.*, 2019; Jacobsen *et al.*, 2021). As Stronks (2022) argues, temporal mechanisms are central tools through which legal systems regulate migrants living within state borders. As migration policies have grown more selective, facilitating easy mobility for some and severely restricting it for others, time has become an increasingly important factor in both selecting and monitoring migrants (Stronks, 2022). Research on migration and time

also often shows migrants' experience of time, describing prolonged periods of waiting and uncertainty, or shows how migrants navigate or resist selective institutional rhythms. Broadly speaking, migration research paints a picture of migrants versus the system, including in terms of temporality and citizenship. Our essay, instead, aims at the temporal practices of migrants that mediate between dominant structural rhythms and everyday skilled attempts to navigate them. We assume that, similar to placemaking, creating shared time is integral to becoming a citizen. To be able to identify the process of "time-making" we approach time as a practice.

The novel concept of temporal practices (Bröer et al., work in progress; Tefera & Gamlen, 2025) suggests moving attention from time to timing as a socio-material practice. Temporal practices are directed at time itself: projecting future welfare and planning day-to-day life towards that goal, for example. But practices are much more than intentions and (emotional) self-regulation. Temporal practice comprises unintended routines, meanings, know-how, technologies, bodies, and other "matter" and is therefore situated between persons rather than within them. To plan migration requires migration and transportation routes and technologies, as well as the know-how to use them within migration networks and histories, for example.

## Time to Be a Citizen

It has often been said that citizenship is not only a set of rights, but also encompasses identities, social relations, and feelings of belonging to a community. We build on this and hold that the capacity to engage with, control, and contest time adds to citizenship the ability to project a future and act on it. Temporal practices, in short, are the infrastructure of lived citizenship. They allow one to pace life according to health, care, or cultural rhythms; the capacity to carry pasts (family, trauma, ritual) into present practices; and the power to time one's life in synchrony with (or resistance to) dominant institutions.

Time, in migration studies, is often seen as control, for example, through enforced waiting in lengthy asylum procedures (Griffiths, 2014). We use a more dynamic model (e.g., Cwerner, 2001; Pekşen, 2025): migrants do not just suffer state time, but work on it, challenge it, and

create micro-temporal zones of autonomy (e.g., community networks, shadow economies, and informal routines). Yet, this view is itself too rosy: the chance of challenging state time is itself unequally distributed. Our approach, both conceptually and empirically, focuses on this dynamic relation and the temporal patterns that emerge from it. This allows for comparative analysis of how migrants "do time" differently, based not only on status but on intersecting conditions (e.g., infrastructures, bodily states, and institutional rhythms). The timing of migration obviously affects most other parts of life: the country of origin becomes a place of the past or a plan for the future, (familial) ties need to be timed anew, and identities become disembedded from the taken-for-granted flow of time. The concept of temporal practices makes this intelligible by pointing out that timing is a meta-practice organising life. We might, indeed, rethink migration as part of a larger timing-of-life process.

In the remainder of this essay, we will compare two categories of migrants in the Netherlands: privileged migrants – often also referred to as expats – and a seemingly opposite group, irregular migrants. While these groups might seem to have little in common, both of them, we see in our research, do not primarily focus on full citizenship and lifetime residence. In both categories, migration seems to be temporary. Yet this outlook is conditioned differently: expats have different paths to different futures at their disposal, enabling them to work towards and schedule different trajectories. Temporariness can be a chosen part of their plan. Likewise, irregular migrants can have different paths and trajectories. Some intend to stay for a short period, for example to work and send remittances, or for an extended period or even permanently, for example people who claim asylum but are ultimately rejected. However, as states do not recognise irregular migrants, they also have very few options to plan and work towards full citizenship. The structural differences between expats and irregular migrants impact the ability to plan for a shared future and to adjust everyday timing in relation to a future. Below, we look in more detail at the way temporariness impacts a shared present. Within each category, we see that temporal practices vary and are thus not just determined by structural inequalities.

We base our essay on research we have done over the last years, and present cases to illuminate migrants' timing. The first research conducted within the I-CLAIM project concerned the living and working conditions of irregularised migrants in Europe, for which fieldwork was conducted

in spring 2025 among irregular migrant delivery and domestic workers. The second research is the longitudinal Sarphati Ethnography, where we follow the everyday life of families from the birth of the first child onwards. Data collection is ongoing. Several families in the panel have a migration background.

### Irregular Migrants Stretching the Present

> Paulo is from Brazil, where he worked in construction. He never imagined going abroad to work. However, after a series of unfortunate events his cousin presented him with the opportunity to come to the Netherlands. He now tells everyone he is in Amsterdam for his 'gap year', even though he has already been in Amsterdam for more than a year and has no concrete plans to leave. After arriving in the Netherlands he soon found a way to be a delivery worker via Facebook groups of Brazilians in the Netherlands. Working for an app instead of an employer makes it possible to circumvent his labour market ban. Delivery work allows him to work many hours and is a way to earn enough money to live in Amsterdam and send money home to support his mother and his two young children. But to do this, he has to work long hours in all weather conditions, splitting his work across multiple platforms. He only goes home to sleep. Working in delivery is a visible activity, leaving irregular migrants exposed not only to the elements but also to risks of policy controls. Paulo has been stopped several times by police who check his documents. He has been lucky to have been let go every time with a warning. His brother, who also worked as a delivery worker, wasn't as fortunate. He had recently been deported after a police officer stopped him for crossing a red light.
>
> At the time of the interview (spring 2025), the platforms were incrementally changing their employment policies following the ruling of the High Court (Hoge Raad der Nederlanden, 2023). This changed employment form would mean he could not work as much, or at all. He already received a message from the platform that these changes were pending. He indicated that if his account were blocked, he would not seek another informal job but would go back to Brazil.

Paulo's story reveals various temporalities. He lives and works in the Netherlands for an undetermined but temporary period. Yet changes in labour market access can affect his livelihood and therefore his stay. His

stay could also end abruptly due to deportation or loss of work, thereby undermining the purpose of his migration. Paulo has very limited options to influence these timelines. Irregular migrant workers have to invent ways to circumvent their exclusion from the labour market (Hajer et al., 2024, 2025; Van Liempt & Hajer, 2025). Paulo's experience is emblematic of how platform-mediated work temporarily stabilises irregular lives, while remaining inherently precarious.

Delivery work functions as an arrival infrastructure for irregular migrants in the Netherlands. As people without a residence permit do not have the right to work in the Netherlands, they must find alternative ways to earn a living. In practice, this means they find employment in the least regulated sectors, where informal work is possible. Irregular migrants most often work in domestic work, construction, and the so-called field-to-fork sector, including agriculture, restaurants and delivery work. From interviews with delivery workers, it became apparent that many found work in delivery almost immediately upon arrival. The platformisation of delivery work brings additional opportunities for informal subcontracting, creating opportunities for irregular workers.

Delivery work itself is a constant dynamic of speeding up and slowing down, as the app gives orders to be picked up. The delivery worker must wait for the order to arrive and for a restaurant to prepare the food and then speed up to deliver the food as soon as possible and do as many deliveries as possible in the least time, to make as much money as possible. This process can only be influenced to a certain extent by delivery workers, mainly by cycling fast. Risks in the sector include delivery workers often working long hours and being under extreme pressure to cycle fast to take more orders (see also Van Doorn, 2023). But there are also specific rhythms over the year where winters, cold or rainy weather mean more orders but fewer workers – ideal for people who want to work a lot. Similarly, Ramadan represents a temporary drop in daytime, as well as overall orders, meaning less work and less money for delivery workers.

Delivery work is not something most people see themselves doing for a long time. Several riders said it felt like being "*trapped in a system that you know is bad for you*". The constant push to work faster takes a toll on physical and mental health. Because the hours are irregular, maintaining relationships and a social life becomes difficult. The flexibility of the job means some riders combine it with other work, holding day jobs and making deliveries in the evenings or at night. This stretches or

maximises working time, but this often leaves little time for recovery or social relations (Van Liempt & Hajer, 2025). Moreover, this temporal order is primarily for the short term. Delivery work does not lead to career advancement or increased compensation, nor does it create avenues for regularisation. Work remains informal and platform-based, with no long-term prospects or job security. In this way, delivery work keeps people stuck in a precarious cycle.

Paulo's story shows how the migration journey can also end abruptly. Deportation is a real fear of many irregular migrant workers, especially delivery workers, who are highly visible during their work, and report relatively frequent interactions with police. Paulo's brother got deported after being checked by the police while doing delivery work. This threat causes some workers to look for different, less visible work. Yet the story also illustrates how, especially when work and migration are closely linked, changes in access to work suddenly change the migration trajectory. For delivery workers, the changes to access to the Uber app following the High Court ruling (Hoge Raad der Nederlanden, 2023) made it difficult to work as delivery workers.

> If Uber Eats stops, it will be difficult for us to work, it was easy to start the work but now they have stopped my account. (interview number 15)

At the time of the interview, the blocking of the account was still pending. Still, Paulo, like many other interviewees, anticipated returning to Brazil if he lost access to the platform.

Irregular migrants like Paulo share a present within the Dutch community: the customers they serve, the platforms they work for, the people they encounter on the streets, their friends, and members of a religious community. Yet various laws, policies, and the organisation of the labour market slow down the growth of substantial social relations and make a shared future insecure. Despite formal exclusion, irregular migrants participate in society; they attempt to make time to create meaningful connections, integrate at least temporarily, and contribute their labour time – a dynamic often described within citizenship studies as citizenship from below, creating substantive citizenship, or acts of citizenship (e.g., Shinozaki, 2015; Isin & Nielsen, 2008). Paulo's example shows how much timing goes into these acts of citizenship and that timing itself can be an act of citizenship. However, despite these forms of citizenship, the lack of

formal citizenship narrows down the options for planning and timing of the future. The risk of deportation creates uncertainty about the future, making it difficult to plan beyond the stretching of the time one is present. In a way, Paulo and other migrants are, to some degree, stuck prolonging the present in the absence of possibilities to schedule steps towards the future.

### Privileged Migrants Timing Possible Futures

Turning to privileged migrants allows us to see how similar hopes for the future lead to different migration trajectories under different formal conditions. These contrasting conditions reveal the unequal institutional distribution of time itself. One migrant may be given time, yet another can never be certain how much of it remains. The case of Camila and Hiromi shows how privileged migrants consider multiple future scenarios, each of which requires different practices in their present.

> Camila from the United States and Hiromi from Japan, live in the Netherlands with their baby daughter. Before the baby was born, they had planned to return to Japan or move to the U.S. After her birth, they decided to stay longer, describing the Netherlands as an easier place to raise a child. Both took six months of parental leave, which is something they said would have been difficult or unusual to get in the U.S. They describe the Dutch work-life balance as "good". In their line of work, it is also common for parents to work fewer hours once they have children. As Camila notes, many of her colleagues work three or four days a week. Their plan is to return to work after six months, but Hiromi is still unsure whether she will actually do so. Currently, Camila speaks English to their daughter, while Hiromi speaks to her in Japanese. If the baby goes to daycare, they expect she will also learn the Dutch language. Their current uncertainty about staying or leaving the Netherlands makes it unclear which language will be most important to her. They talk daily about "what we are going to do". They feel unsure about the Dutch education system and find the language a barrier to understanding how to raise their child here. Hiromi says it is possible to live in the Netherlands speaking English, but doing so would mean they remain seen as "expats or foreigners" which obstructs them to integrate in a meaningful way. If they were to live here long term they would need to learn Dutch, not only for themselves but for their daughter's sense of belonging. At

the same time, they wonder whether an international school might be the best option to ensure a smooth transition if they decide to move.

Camila and Hiromi hold formal residency in the Netherlands and migrated in response to an employment opportunity. Although they express considerable uncertainty about long-term residence in the Netherlands, their right to reside is not constrained by formal time limits. Like many privileged migrants, their formal residency provides a sense of stability and security in everyday life, enabling them to extend their stay while they contemplate future possibilities. For Camila and Hiromi, considerations regarding their personal and professional lives are made in ways that keep various paths open. They imagine their futures in Japan, the United States, or the Netherlands, and their sense of belonging is tied to a combination of places where they have spent time and built familiarity in the past. Their lives are organised through a continuous consideration of past experiences, present circumstances, and future possibilities.

The birth of their daughter triggered them to re-evaluate their present living situation, confronted as they were by the passing of time and the need to decide whether to stay or leave and adjust their present accordingly. They discuss their future "every day" and evaluate time across different contexts and assess where life might unfold in the most desirable way. Such considerations demonstrate how time functions as a resource that can be practised: planned, organised, and stretched. This continuous recalibration, while extending one's stay, constitutes a way of practising time. As we also observed in the case of Paulo, this temporal practice is likewise visible among irregular migrants. In other words, both privileged and irregular migrants engage in daily acts of staying. Each must decide whether to remain, to move on, or to wait.

Alongside this, Camila and Hiromi reflect on the possibility of staying long-term and on the conditions that would make such continuity meaningful. Their hesitation towards a long stay reveals how duration and belonging are closely connected. While they recognise that it is possible to live in the Netherlands while speaking English, they also understand that this choice would place them in the category of "expat" or "foreigner" and limit opportunities for deeper integration. In this sense, time can be understood as an act of citizenship: learning Dutch and connecting to local life are temporal investments that transform residence into rootedness. The fact that they can choose when, or whether, to make such investments

highlights their temporal agency. They have the capacity to control the depth of attachment, knowing that their stay will not be abruptly cut short.

Although all migrants can influence the future of their residency in one way or another, the key difference lies in the degree of control over and predictability of the time available to them. For irregular migrants such as Paulo, time is often institutionally steered and uncertain, as their stay can be interrupted at any moment. Privileged migrants, by contrast, are often explicitly welcomed, and their temporary presence is supported by arrangements such as favourable tax regimes (the 30 per cent facility). As a result, they enjoy formal stability and a wider range of possibilities for shaping future time, as decisions can be made according to preference rather than necessity.

Taken together, these dynamics point to a broader form of temporal privilege among those who hold formal residency. For privileged migrants, formal citizenship and substantial belonging are possibilities rather than wishes or necessities. They can remain "foreign" without losing the right to stay, or choose to invest in linguistic and social integration if and when it suits them. The capacity to pace integration and to decide the depth of attachment reflects a particular control over time. Irregular migrants, by contrast, lack the institutional permission to extend their stay and therefore the security required to plan ahead. Their time is precarious and their belonging conditional, which gives rise to a range of temporal acts of citizenship aimed at stretching presence. What distinguishes privileged migrants, then, is not permanent settlement itself, but the possibility of permanence and the capacity to manage continuity as part of everyday life.

## Conclusion

Citizenship concerns rights, responsibilities, belonging, and political community in a specific territory, and, we add, spending and sharing lived time with people in that place under conditions of dominant institutional rhythms. Citizenship comes to life through temporal practices. For temporary migrants, each day becomes a temporal practice of continuation, a decision to extend one's stay and to remain. While the law defines citizenship through boundaries and deadlines, we point to timing as an act of citizenship.

Legislation may state that one may not stay here as a "non-citizen" or that one has already stayed too long, but, in practice, people stretch their stay. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes spontaneously, and sometimes simply because life unfolds, one day turns into another, and before one realises, a year has passed. To stay is rarely a single choice but a sequence of small temporal acts of remaining, deferring, and continuing.

While place and time are both important for citizenship, looking at the dynamics of timing the future highlights inequalities within substantive citizenship. The two cases in this essay show the different roles time has in (substantive) citizenship. Camila, Hiromi, and Paulo have a shared present, with Dutch society and perhaps even with one another; however, their temporariness makes their participation in a shared future uncertain. For some, temporary citizenship is a choice, while for others it is almost the only option. In this sense, privilege is also the ability to influence one's own timeline(s). Camila and Hiromi not only have the time to contemplate future plans, but they also have a high degree of influence in making these plans a reality. Paulo, on the other hand, has a less clear vision for his future, impacted by the institutionally limited ability to plan for it. While Camila and Hiromi can ponder how long and how to spend their time in the Netherlands, Paulo spends his time in the Netherlands rushing between picking up and delivering food orders.

Citizenship, therefore, extends beyond questions of legal status or nationality. It is also about connection, about how people relate to a place and its people by sharing time, and how that relation develops or is denied over time. Belonging can be claimed through presence in a territory, and it is equally claimed through time spent in that territory. Likewise, exclusion from citizenship can work through the absence of a shared past. Without a shared past, newcomers may face subtle forms of exclusion when their history is deemed an obstacle and when presence in the political community is not yet considered long enough.

We can thus see that demands for "integration" have at their heart demands about commitment to a shared future and a common past. Even among people with formal citizenship rights, a perceived lack of a shared past in the same territory can be a powerful driver of nativism, as suggested by Jan Willem Duyvendak's more recent theorizing of citizenship (Duyvendak *et al.* 2022).

More profoundly, citizenship is not only something we hold but something we build with time: a rhythm sustained, a tempo negotiated, a pulse

shared. To think of citizenship through temporal practices is to imagine a political community not as a fixed territory but as a collective project of synchronising, pacing, and staying together in difference. Equality, then, is also a matter of tempo: who may pause, who must rush, who is allowed to plan ahead, and, most importantly, who has or gets the time to become a citizen.

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# Can Citizenship Break with its Past?

*Rogier van Reekum*

## Citizenship as Problem

Our thinking is always located. We not only think *in* a location, but *from* and *through* a situated problematisation of life. In her now classic text, Donna Haraway wrote: "Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Locatedness, whether temporal, spatial, social, institutional, or conceptual, never merely bounds and limits, but more importantly agitates and projects our attempts to comprehend and articulate. Partial connections with others, in other places and other times, are all too often misrepresented as generalities and universals, as an abstract order that seems to exist outside of history and life (Strathern, 2004). Yet, our common responsibilities can only bear the weight of such abstractions as long as they remain grounded in concrete situations.

Thinking along these lines, we can recognise that *citizenship* is at once an abstraction that, we would be foolish to forget, has a time and a place while it is also itself an attempt to locate and delimit our common responsibilities (Tilly, 1999). No other political project seems to take our rootedness more seriously, while in the same movement to present itself as the seed of universality. Citizenship projects a future of universal recognition that, however incompletely and inadequately enacted, announces itself in the historical present. This is, according to its proponents, what distinguishes it from other categories of social standing and political membership. While much disagreement continues about its exact constitution, the idea of citizenship traces the possibility of recognition in what are assumed to be universally shared faculties of human existence: speech, reason, will, responsibility, and so forth. Citizenship names what, according to its internal logic, belongs to all of us, while at once limiting that universality to a bounded community of political relations. Whether

along the contours of blood or soil, citizenship poses problematically, appropriate to its consequences of life and death, a deeply incoherent bundle of the general and the particular, the concrete and the abstract, the local and the universal.

It is from this point of view that we can learn to resist the mistake of rendering citizenship *either* a blunt tool of power *or* the general measure of our position on the path to emancipation. Unmasking citizenship as a regime, a way of keeping people in their place, is only meaningful in so far as we once believed its apparent promise of liberation. Perhaps we should not have been so optimistic to begin with. Conversely, exploding citizenship's pretences into an universal history of political progress and ranking our actually existing commitments along its increments disfigures the very responsibility that citizenship supposedly organises. If we were to actually believe that a bunch of people living at the western extremity of Asia had fortuitously struck onto the very foundation of political life as such, we would thereby become incapable of accounting for our supposedly transhistorical grasp of politics. How could the "barbarians", those not lucky enough to have shared in our discovery of the universal, ever fully understand what we would be trying to explain to them about this thing we call "citizenship"? We would then begin to believe, obscurely, in a hierarchy of enlightenment. As is so often the case, the critical unmasking and the chauvinistic exaltation of citizenship imply each other, each only possible in the rejection of their counterpart. Both right, both wrong. Is there a way out of this seemingly endless circuit of grandeur and denunciation? Is there something outside of this dialectic between "the right to have rights" (Arendt, 1946) and the exclusionary implications of inclusion (Sharma, 2020)?

Remembering that our thinking is located, we might begin by posing citizenship as neither regime nor ideal but, first and foremost, as *problem*. Not to emphasise its negative side or insist on its detrimental effects, but to attend to its *problematisation*. That is, to approach it as the kind of thing that sociology was specifically invented to address: an incomplete and contested image that precisely because it is unresolved gains the power to organise our common lives (Lury, 2020). It is what, in the tradition of John Dewey and pragmatist engagements with democratic theory, has been called a public issue (Marres, 2007; Dijstelbloem, 2008). In other words, its effects do not emanate from its coherence, from it being like this or that, but rather from its incoherence, from how people struggle over its

resolution. In yet other words, citizenship is a problem that we have not yet learned not to have and therefore continues to return in our midst, especially when we claim to have resolved it. It is this stubborn return of a problem, like a wound that will not heal, which we experience as the necessity and relentlessness of politics.

The moments in which citizenship appears as neither regime nor ideal are when, seemingly as side show, it is discussed and imagined in public. It is in public that citizenship is actively problematised and we can study its existence as problem. Beyond its codification in a legal regime and its idealisation in philosophical discourse, citizenship appears most incoherently and most problematically when it is the object of public storytelling. In public, a wide cast of actors takes it upon themselves to explain and enact what, according to them, citizenship is and should become. Such expressions usually have narrative structures, because they must help imagine a past, present, and future of citizenship that plots the dramatic tension in which "the people" find themselves (Somers, 1995; Alexander, 2006). It is in this public guise that the incoherence of locality and universality is most intensely felt, where stories of primordial dignity get mixed with images of human progress. Were this problem not so unresolved, we would not have to address it so publicly. Citizenship would simply be another piece of legal technology or a purely scholastic concept, and in both cases the responsibility of specialists. Instead, we see how politics revolves around a continuous narration of the citizen at the problematic intersection of the particular and the general (Van Reekum, 2023). Neither legal framework nor philosophical ideal would *make sense* as resolutions of citizenship if they did not relate to its public problematisation in narrative, to legacies of storytelling and archives of imagination that picture, often very diffusely, some living figure standing among equals and capable of demanding recognition.

In this fog of meaning and image that we call publicity is where I would suggest posing the question of whether citizenship can break with its past. According to the principles I just laid out, this means that this question asks if and how citizenship's storytelling and imagination are not merely renewed but actually cut political time into before and after. Can we make sense of actual, historical ruptures in the modes of problematisation through which citizenship is publicly articulated? Are there qualitatively different eras of citizenship or is it all just the same old story over and over again?

This question, I want to suggest, haunts the politics of citizenship, because the figure of the citizen can only fulfil its promise of universal recognition if it can overcome the prejudices of its past (Isin, 2012). Were citizenship to remain the political project of property-owning, weapon-carrying, territory-claiming, polity-governing, family-heading *white men* who, over the course of time, come to understand that others might also be capable of demanding recognition and therefore must be *included* in order to maintain that project, its denunciation should not be a matter of much debate. Inclusion is simply a matter of maintaining control. So, for citizenship to appear as something other than a sophisticated form of racial patriarchy, distances to its past must continuously be performed in public. The question that refuses to rest, however, is if and how those distances amount to a break. This is also how citizenship politics is not only composed of but deeply concerned with political events (cf. Wagner-Pacifici, 2010). Such events continuously agitate the haunting question of citizenship's legacies and archives, appearing as occasions for a break to, finally, take place.

So, from here on out, what will concern us is not a generality – citizenship – but a historical, territorial, and political particular, the specifically national, *Dutch* version and attempt to accomplish political universality: *burgerschap*. Only after this plunge into a particular bundle of narratives will we attempt to return to the question of citizenship as such.

## *Burgerschap* in Rear View

What was *burgerschap*, so far? How was its particularity expressed and how did its particular ambiguity between local specificity, grounded in the muddy soil of a place called the Netherlands, and global universality play out (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016; Van Reekum, 2023)? I will gather together and confirm what especially historians and postcolonial scholars had already described in various ways (Aerts & Te Velde, 1998; Prak, 1999; Rutjes, 2012; Kloek & Tilmans, 2002; Botman *et al.*, 2001; Jessurun D'Oliveira, 2023; Mak, 2024; Heijs, 1995; Hondius, 2016; Jones, 2007; Laarman, 2013; Willemsen & Nimako, 2011; De Witte, 2019; Weiner & Carmona Báez, 2018; Bot, 2022; Fatah-Black & Lauret, 2024). *Burgerschap* projected, before anything else, a moral composure. It indicated a civilised and embodied economy of affect that ensured the combination of deeply personal, often expressly

religious convictions with their public and political moderation. Endless clichés revolve around this central motif. The burgher is the one who has profound moral convictions yet restrains and channels them in order to find pragmatic accordance with others. Thereby, the burgher maintains autonomy from others, but also from their personal, potentially uncontrollable devotions. The burgher is thereby capable of self-government. It is this moral equipment, developed in the storm of history, that nominates someone to the community of equals and forms the dignity recognised as *burgerschap*.

There is nothing singular or special about this narrative motif. It appears in many genealogies of citizenship (Somers, 2008). Yet, qua *burgerschap* it has continued to present that which participants in public contestations, in the present, want to distance themselves from but stubbornly reasserts itself precisely when they attempt to come up with some new conception. The question of a break with its past is most strongly felt when public narratives of *burgerschap* seek to address this core composition of its moral architecture.

Therefore, the most pressing problem, it seems to me, has been *burgerschap*'s stubborn paternalism. The burgher is the one who doesn't need paternal guidance and should therefore reject any paternalistic impulse themselves, yet precisely claiming to have rid themselves of it reasserts their paternal superiority over others who have not yet gained the capacity of moral self-government. The narrative drama of *burgerschap*, the substance of its public contestation, is not predominantly concerned with defence against state terror, allusions to agricultural autarky, angry mobs or even the performance of public reason. Instead, public problematisations of *burgerschap* have continued to revolve around questions of conviction and moderation, of moral guidance and autonomy, of paternal imposition and steady self-government (Van Reekum, 2023).

As long as there were bright and, as seen from the inside, *natural* boundaries to who could and could not claim *burgerschap*, the problem of paternalism could be contained to an embarrassment of riches and laments about small-minded frugality. Right up to the interbellum period, *burgerschap*'s exclusions – denying the colonised, the non-white, women, the poor, and queer people recognition – was, as imagined from the inside, relatively unproblematic. There are of course continuous controversies over *where* the boundary should be drawn exactly and which gradations of rights and duties were appropriate, but that *burgerschap* naturally

implied differentiation and hierarchy could hardly be denied. *Burgerschap* was part of a differentiating grammar of difference (Baumann & Gingrich, 2004), meaning that the struggle over its resolution predominantly concerned how its hierarchies should be set up and maintained.

Paternalism becomes much more problematic as *burgerschap*, due to increasing incursions from its outside, shifts from a differentiating to an encompassing significance. Encompassment implies that many different *kinds of people* can fall under a general category. It is particularly in the aftermath of the Nazi occupation and the succeeding decolonisation of different parts of the empire that *burgerschap* begins to be such a category. Its immediate problem becomes how it encompasses differences, not how it is itself different from what it excludes. Out of the loss of imperial dominance and the horrors of European fascism came the conviction that *burgerschap* was, first and foremost, a technology of co-habitation. Therefore, *burgerschap* begins to call forth distinctly governmental questions of democratic participation and republican prerogatives within a parliamentary monarchy dominated by ideological and religious pillars, rather than evoking images of a specific caste among others whose way of life and moral civility could be presented as the very essence of national character – the *burgerij* lodged between the patrician aristocracy, the gentlemen farmers, and, below, the poor and the landless.

In his treatment of the post-war period, Ido de Haan (1992, 1993) describes how the problem of paternalism nonetheless refused to go away. Succeeding waves of democratisation and ambitious politics of participation laid waste to antiquated ideals of hierarchy and increasingly unbearable images of pillarised servility. The churches, in particular, were effectively pushed aside as sources of moral guidance in favour of the sexual and personal emancipation made available by education, markets, and media. Yet, precisely because new generations of politicians and intellectuals were so successful in replacing the old guard and their ideas, they thereby could not avoid enacting, yet again, a specifically *moral* equipment at the heart of their new, participatory, and expressive image of *burgerschap* (Van Houdt, 2014). The name for this particular version of superiority became *emancipatie*, now clearly referring to individual emancipation and their internal economy of ambition and enjoyment (Mellink, 2014). The emancipated citizen is the one who does not need the pillar, the church, the community, the family, or any form of traditional collectivity, because they find *in themselves* a sensible management of

business and pleasure. These new meanings and images seemed fresh and exciting, yet also to stubbornly repeat a paternalism in liberal-progressive garb. Encompassment through the common process of emancipation still involved the articulation of a specifically moral and affective composure at the crossroads of commodified consumption and self-directed work lives. This citizen still has an Other, who has yet to learn how to conduct their life on a horizontal plane of individuated freedom.

This Other, who could regenerate the differentialist significances of *burgerschap*, began to gain definition in the course of the 1970s. As the economic prospects of expanding social rights became increasingly doubtful, the issue of immigration started to form a nexus of tensions and disagreements concerning the newly minted citizen-as-emancipated-individual (Van Houdt, 2014; Tinnemans, 1994; Uitermark, 2012). While pregnant with economic problematisations, this emerging politics of migration in the Netherlands was dominated by questions of moral, religious, and sexual concerns (Mepschen *et al.*, 2010). The crux of this political trouble was whether immigrants from the non-West, be they post-colonial or labour migrants, could be trusted to replicate the path towards emancipation that had just been established as the predominant conception of what it could mean to exercise *burgerschap*. From the early 1980s onwards, the twin questions of immigrant integration and national identity would pull *burgerschap* back to its explicitly hierarchical significance of an attained and earned position over and against less worthy ways of life (Schinkel, 2007; Van Oers *et al.*, 2010; Van Houdt, 2014).

This is the moment in the story where the work of Dutch researchers like Jan-Willem Duyvendak, myself, and others deliberately sought to not merely describe and reflect but engage and intervene in the existing narration of *burgerschap*'s history. Against a historiography of overly identitarian anti-racism and gullible multiculturalism – for which we continue to claim there is simply no basis whatsoever (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2013; Van Reekum & Duyvendak, 2012) – we sought to show that the resurgent culturalisation of citizenship must be understood in terms of the contradictions and discomforts of a liberal hegemony. The Netherlands did not have a legacy of multicultural policies nor did it feature a distinctly ostentatious anti-racist movement (Uitermark, 2012). Nor were multicultural policies or anti-racism ever championed by the political parties of the left to any considerable extent (Essed & Hoving, 2014). Therefore, a culturalisation of citizenship that called for the protection of national culture and territory

cannot possibly be explained as backlash or reaction to them. As scholars of Dutch political life, we understood our critiques of these fallacies as an active engagement in this politics of national memory with sociological means. We, "social scientists", are and must also be storytellers. Particularly when it comes to questions of membership, remembering is always also re-membering (Pandit, 2022). We, "academics", cannot and should not refrain from actively participating in such a question of re-membrance, of re-writing our common responsibilities.

## Escalating Narratives of Reaction

Indeed, an almost unchartable amount of scholarly work has been published on what happened to *burgerschap* from the 1980s onward. I will insist here, as I do elsewhere (Van Reekum, 2023), that the public and political contestation over *burgerschap* in those decades should be understood in light of its *longue durée* as colonial and patriarchal concept (see also Schinkel, 2017; Blankvoort, 2025; Bot, 2022). This means that the basic narrative motif should be one of *escalation* instead of reaction. That is, what rather unfounded narratives of reaction, in part produced by our colleagues, enacted, was an escalating public controversy that imagined *burgerschap* to be subject to some outside threat.

New forms of "cultural" nationalism and calls for intensified border "control" should not be recounted as reactions to a blinkered ruling class who have imposed their boundless cosmopolitanism at the expense of an increasingly precarious native population. Instead, a wide majority of citizens, particularly those engaged in prestigious forms of public contestation, deeply shared the expectation that their modern way of life, secured through *burgerschap*, marks the correct, if not inevitable direction of history. The apparent polemic is predominantly one between those who express impatience with "newcomers" and those who maintain that, with some assistance and enough time, "they" will learn to live like "us": *without the moral guidance of superiors*. Not only does the problem of paternalism reassert itself here, requiring stronger and more unflinching denunciations that in turn assert a paternal superiority over others, but participation in public controversy became all but impossible without subscribing to this moral narration of *burgerschap*. Escalating alarms and accusations concerning the failures of integration and state-backed

nationalism revolve around a deeply shared image that refuses to materialise yet must be taken as truth: given enough time and freedom, anyone will cultivate the moral equipment recognised through *burgerschap*.

Stories that must be true despite their readily apparent inadequacy are what we call myths (Barthes, 1957). Such stories do not merely claim certain things to be true, but constitute the very capacity to make sense and construct true statements. Therefore, mythic ideas do not themselves need to be true in any direct sense. As mythology, as a set of expectations that refuses to be confirmed, *burgerschap* troubles sociological attempts to engage with them, because a myth is – per definition – resistant to its empirical refutation. We can demonstrate – as many scholars and other writers have – that narratives of reaction are empirically inadequate as ways of remembering *burgerschap*'s past, but the performativity of such engagement by researchers and experts is meagre because myths are not destroyed by debunking them. Dangerous myths that feed violent policies do not require factual correction (even if that never ceases to be useful work in the context of research), but call for narrative *invention*. Only by giving alternative accounts that enable other truths to be spoken can we as publicly engaged scholars hope to contribute to better ways of remembering the past. Violent myths – "Dutch racism is a reaction to unacknowledged social problems" – call for the composition of what we think we have discovered about the past into stories that are, on the whole, less mythic, less violent, and less compatible with government. Stories become less mythic when they require less metaphysical prescriptions and therefore afford more differences the chance to breathe.

From the 1990s onwards, the public narration of *burgerschap* had been tied into a firm knot of liberal exceptionalism: "we" are already emancipated, already morally liberated, already beyond the identitarianisms of anti-racism and identity politics, already capable of speaking freely about sex and death, and *therefore* "we" are superior, are tasked with the burden of imposing "our" way of life on others, must defend what we have, must maintain our, perhaps ill-gotten advantage. Again, participants in public controversies disagreed vehemently about what this deeply shared story required of state policies, but their disagreements thereby acted to confirm the moral superiority implicated in *burgerschap*. Such debates enacted public evidence of what participants in those debates claimed: that *burgerschap* concerned the moderated expression of inner conviction and "we", the citizens, were fully equipped to deal with difference.

Anti-racist feminists in particular had warned early on that this escalating dynamic of self-congratulation-as-polemic would lead to rejuvenated forms of racism and fascism (Essed, 1991; Wekker & Lutz, 2001). They were pushed aside by the overwhelmingly white and masculine participants in these self-declared "debates" over minorities, integration, Islam, asylum seekers, national identity, and borders. The result has been an ever-escalating politics of deservedness and deterrence, in which the newcomer must demonstrate their desire and capacity to take care of themselves as a liberated individual and any lingering dependence on a collective apart from this imagined community of individuals should be abandoned (Schinkel & Van Houdt, 2010).

It is no wonder that a mandatory test – *inburgering* – became the centre piece of governmental action in these decades (see also Blankvoort *et al.*, 2021). The performative crux of such civic enculturation tests is, of course, not that people do actually learn a few things along the way, but that participants are demonstratively put through an arduous and humiliating process as a way to test their resolve and gauge their gratitude. As one of the social-democratic inventors of this policy expressed early on:

> If one demands newcomers to adapt to Dutch society and let them achieve something by employing them, one takes away the odium of profiteers who just come in and use our institutions and provisions. So, that will also have its effect on the citizenry, who will then more readily accept them and feel that this is a just and balanced approach. In this way, people can earn their own presence. (Van der Zwan, *NRC Handelsblad*, 1994)[1]

What matters in these narrations of *burgerschap* is how policies and regulations play out in the internal economy of affect of those who can claim to always already be on the inside. Citizenship politics is, first, a way of managing white rage (Schinkel & Van Reekum, 2024). In this politics, it is up to others to persuade citizens to not be racist patriarchs, to show themselves worthy. That those who had already attained and earned *burgerschap* appeared to disagree so vehemently about all of these matters could come to pose as a sound, indeed *democratic* reason to assert superiority, to vilify Muslims, to bomb several countries, to reject any earnest attempt to remember the colonial past, to constantly invent new ways of immiserating the lives of "non-Western" neighbors, and let migrants drown in the Mediterranean or rot in detention centres.

Haunted by its past of racial patriarchy, *burgerschap*'s problematisation had tragically returned to its differentialist significations. Precisely in attempting to get away from this past did the weight of hierarchy and domination reassert itself. Perhaps the only non-trivial difference was that its boundaries could no longer be imagined as natural contours but, instead, had to be acknowledged as socially produced differences of culture and nationhood. Yet, this could only put the weighty responsibility of their maintenance more fully in the hands of their inheritors.

## Into the Break

What has happened in the story of *burgerschap* since the 1990s can be read as, on the one hand, yet further escalation towards even more contention and cruelty. As Duyvendak has recently argued (2025), there is no good basis for the claim that Dutch citizens are remarkably polarised on issues of *burgerschap*, but as public notion that itself enables dissensus "polarisation" does work to further open up possibilities of state violence and popular anger. It continuously projects a divide to be bridged and distrust to be amended. As they say themselves, politicians are looking for "*draagvlak*" – popular support – by showing the electorate how far they are willing to go to protect *burgerschap*.

On the other hand, this further escalation has been, in part, instigated and disorganised by events and performances that interrupt the ongoing drama. These interruptions come in two fundamentally different forms: first, the reassertion of race and coloniality as not past but present issues of political concern; and, second, the formation of an actually anti-liberal politics of white patriarchy. From the perspective of insiders: race is back *and* fascism is back.

The children of post-colonial and labour migrants have, inspired by similar tendencies elsewhere, found new ways of interrupting the public conversations about their worthiness of access to prosperity and protection sealed by *burgerschap*. They demand a reckoning with the actuality of whiteness and a decolonisation of institutions (cf. Emejulu & Sobande, 2019). Seemingly as reaction, an always marginal and disorganised conservatism, accustomed to but never comfortable with the confines of liberal democratic institutionalism, has been agitated by the escalating drama of performative cruelty in *burgerschap*'s controversies to form an

expanding front of claims in which the ethnos instead of the demos is the one demanding more decisive violence from the state. Above all, these protagonists demand action, as a final chance to assuage the restless mob, and articulate a promise of restoration.

Both these movements and their politics interrupt the narration of *burgerschap* I have reconstructed so far. In terms of publicity and public performance, interruption is a disconcerting event. Something is ruptured, broken, and displaced, yet this does not happen through external intervention by some clearly foreign force but rather emerges from within the community of equals that enacts and narrates *burgerschap*. The drama of interruption consists of the revelation that *beneath the surface* something was rumbling and cracking all along, something that is at odds with the procedural and dialogical nature of liberal politics. What burghers find threatening about interruption is how it renders debate impossible, how it brings in reasons that displace what, to them, can seem reasonable. It prompts the sometimes visceral experience of not being able to speak, either through loss of a position to speak or, more directly, feeling incapable to find the right words and thereby losing the quintessentially political faculty through which citizenship is possible in the world.

So, when various events and controversies, most notably those surrounding the figure of Black Pete as part of the national holiday *Sinterklaas* (Coenders & Chauvin, 2017; Schols, 2019), reconstituted a public language of race and racism, displacing notions of culture and ethnicity referring to demography by categories of racial difference and oppression referring to the lasting legacies of colonial violence and subjugation, these came to interrupt an entire way of speaking and speaking in the name of. Importantly, what becomes displaced is a demographic language that is congruent with state categories and governmental policy making. Moreover, this resurgent language of race and racism profoundly problematises positionalities of speech and directly undermines the assumptions of self-regulation and liberality that are so central to *burgerschap*'s moral equipment. In this language, it is never "I, the autonomous individual" who speaks her mind, but always also a collective history and its repressed violence. And precisely because so much of *burgerschap*'s mythology was premised on the ability to freely express oneself about sensitive topics like race and coloniality, the discomfort if not failure of speech of those who were now asked to account for their white positionality interrupts the story of *burgerschap* as the pinnacle of emancipatory

modernity. If, as the story goes, burghers are post-race, no longer in need of instruction about race and racism, then why would they be so upset about, for instance, the rejection of an imaginary figure – Black Pete – who, according to many of them, doesn't have anything to do with race? Why do burghers, in the face of that rejection, lose their composure?

The language of race and racism found expanding purchase through issues of police conduct, welfare fraud, labour and housing discrimination, media representation and commemorations of the colonial past. As such, it started to render possible a distinctly *reparative* grammar of difference for *burgerschap*, in which *burgerschap* is neither differentiating nor encompassing but instead forms in historical occasions of repair that preserves difference as the living memory of past injustice and a future possibility of increasing hybridity. Recognition of membership to the community of equals would then require concerted effort on the part of the included, as a means of reckoning with its whiteness and its coloniality, instead of maintaining *burgerschap* as an attained moral capacity demonstrated by aspirant-members.

The question remains whether the horizons of repair and inclusion can be reconciled. That is, whether race is not citizenship's endemic problem in that any civic order – founded as moral composure or not – instates a ranking of lives according to territorial or ancestral lines that builds upon processes of racialization (see Wynter, 2003). Du Bois posed this question clearly more than a hundred years ago – "How does it feel to be a problem?" (1903, p. 1) – and as of yet the interference of citizenship and race has hardly been resolved.

The politics of repair is itself deeply problematic. It takes place through contradictions that transverse *burgerschap*'s edges. Sometimes it appears as suture of *burgerschap*'s inadequacies and decidedly lays claim to inclusion. At other times, the problem of race acts as a disruptive force that calls into doubt the very prospect of suture, where the survival under historical violence that race recalls can only possibly be repaired if citizenship is dismantled. Indeed, a politics of repair is only different from that of encompassment so long as this latter possibility – the disassembly of citizenship – remains open.

In ostentatious reaction to the problems of race, coloniality, and the politics of repair, there appears another option, one that continues to haunt citizenship and those who claim to have it. There is the option of *decisive* violence. As the language of race and racism found expanding expression

in controversies over *burgerschap* so did, seemingly as mirror image, the language of democratic despotism in which citizenship is no longer a way of organising difference but of eradicating it. Here, citizenship's differential grammar of hierarchy or encompassing grammar of pluralism become merely means to an end. The attempts to distance citizenship from its past are proudly abandoned in exchange for citizenship as the brute fact of domination, of continued occupation, of taking up space and claiming a future at the explicit expense of others. This is an eliminationist grammar of difference, where the politics of citizenship is about clearing away those who are "too much", for whom there is not enough "support", for whom "our country" or indeed the planet lacks sufficient "carrying capacity", who are not "supposed to be here", those whose stubborn persistence of survival can only mean that they are a security threat. This eliminationist grammar resolves *burgerschap*'s problematic relation to its past by simply claiming outright that citizenship *is* the politics of white patriarchy and was never going to become anything else. It only breaks with past narrations of *burgerschap* by maintaining that a break is neither possible nor wanted.

Isabelle Stengers has suggested that we put our problematisations to the *test* of our present (2021). It is striking how she uses the same term – test – as Du Bois did when he raised the question of Black life within "the great republic" (1903, p. 7). In our present, *burgerschap* can be understood along similar lines. We sense acutely how *burgerschap*'s relation to the past constitutes a test, especially for those who presume to speak on its behalf. To oppose and antagonise the eliminationist solution, *burgerschap*'s reparative capacities must be demonstrated and multiplied. Dutch voters and their parlement seem not at all ready or willing to move in this direction. Yet, the test of *burgerschap*'s problematisation will take place one way or another. Every day we see solid evidence for the conclusion that *burgerschap* can never be anything but a mechanism of defence against a reckoning with history. Any evidence to the contrary can only be produced if those who are already members show themselves prepared to lay down their *burgerschap* if that is what the repair of history requires. We can only hope to test our problematisations if we are prepared to wager our protections.

## Note

[1] Translation by Rogier van Reekum.

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# Between Stigma and Moral Comfort: Engaging Men in Violence Prevention in Times of Sexual Nationalism

*Mischa Dekker*

In *The Politics of Home* (2011), *The Culturalization of Citizenship* (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016), and publications on sexual nationalism (Mepschen *et al.*, 2010) Jan Willem Duyvendak and colleagues analyse how gender-based inequalities and violence have become central tenets of the politics of belonging. The Netherlands in particular is an illustrative case for how acts of gender-based violence become politicised not only to further feminist goals, but also to reinforce boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In Dutch politics as elsewhere (Fassin, 2006; Guénif-Souilamas, 2006; Puar, 2007), gender equality has become a measure of modernity, defining who is seen as enlightened, moral, and safe, and who is cast as backward, dangerous, or in need of moral rescue.

Since #MeToo, debates on gender-based violence have increasingly emphasised the need to involve and address men and masculinities (PettyJohn *et al.*, 2019). Slogans such as "violence against women is a men's issue" have become widespread on social media, in civil society, and among policymakers (Flood, 2019; Reinicke, 2022). The desire to involve men in gender-based violence prevention signals a shift relative to previous policies and societal debates, which tended to focus primarily on women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex plus (LGBTQI+) people as (potential) victims (Flood, 2006; Macomber, 2018). Effective violence prevention requires fostering a sense of collective responsibility among men (Berkowitz, 2002; Dobash & Dobash, 2001; Sukhu, 2013). Responsibility does not necessarily imply that men have perpetrated or facilitated sexual violence themselves; rather, it refers to recognising sexual violence as a problem within one's own social environment and understanding that one can play a role in preventing it (Gusfield, 1981).

In this chapter, I apply the conceptual tools from Duyvendak's work on belonging, sexual nationalism, and cultural citizenship to analyse this

shift. I examine the forms that initiatives to involve men in the politics of gender-based violence take in the Netherlands, both in media discourse and policy. Moreover, I explore how politics of inclusion and exclusion shape men's capacity and willingness to reflect critically on their role in facilitating or reproducing gender hierarchies or to engage in efforts to reduce them. Drawing on current and past research projects, this chapter shows how the prevalence of racialised narratives through which gender-based violence is Othered as primarily a problem caused by minority or migrant men complicates efforts to foster a sense of collective responsibility for this problem among men.

The analysis highlights processes of deflection of responsibility for gender-based violence among different demographics of men. How do dominant narratives about Muslim and racialized minority men as perpetrators of violence shape the willingness of those men to engage in discussion about this social problem? And what does the self-representation of white Dutch men as part of a progressive, gender-equal nation do to their readiness and ability to critically reflect on their own role in perpetuating and facilitating gender-based violence and harmful narratives about it? Following a comparison of the politics of masculinity within these two demographics, the chapter concludes with reflections on strategies, effective and ineffective, to foster a sense of responsibility for gender-based violence as one's "own" problem among all men.

## Sexual Nationalism and the Politics of Gender-Based Violence in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, discourses surrounding the protection of women from violence – whether domestic abuse, forced marriage, or "honour killings" – have become powerful symbols in defining what it means to be a civilised citizen (Mepschen *et al.*, 2010). The subject has become central to the "culturalization of citizenship", a broad shift in European politics where citizenship is defined less by legal rights or economic participation and more by cultural and moral conformity (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016). Gender-based violence, as a moral and emotional issue, has been culturalised: transformed from a universal problem of gender inequality into a marker of cultural difference and pathology of specific groups. In the Dutch context, this shift emphasises gender equality and sexual freedom

as core elements of national identity. As incidents of gender-based violence within migrant or Muslim communities are framed as evidence of a failure to integrate or of a fundamental incompatibility of the culture of specific migrants with the norms and values of the Netherlands, the protection of women becomes a justification for policing the boundaries of national belonging (Butler, 2008; Uitermark *et al.*, 2013).

Duyvendak's work reveals the emotional logic of this dynamic: fear and outrage over violence against women are mobilised to reassert a sense of home, safety, and moral order for the majority population. This dynamic is part of the broader "emotional politics of home", as citizens in late-modern societies often experience a sense of dislocation and insecurity – a feeling that "home" is under threat from social change, migration, and globalization (Duyvendak, 2011, pp. 5–7; Hurenkamp *et al.*, 2012). This construction of difference produces a new form of sexual nationalism – a nationalism that defines itself through the language of gender equality and sexual liberation (Mepschen *et al.*, 2010). This rhetoric, as Jasbir Puar (2007) and Sara Farris (2017) show in their work on homonationalism and femonationalism, allows states to deploy feminist language to justify anti-immigrant and assimilationist policies.

Sexual nationalism channels responsibility selectively: some men are blamed and held accountable for preventing violence, while others are effectively absolved. My own research on preventive policies and awareness-raising on street harassment illustrates these effects of sexual nationalism on men's concrete responses to prevention initiatives. In the next two sections I draw on fieldwork conducted on awareness-raising campaigns (Dekker, 2023) and educational programmes (Dekker, 2024), and in particular on their reception by boys and men. The findings of these studies demonstrate how the Othering of gender-based violence facilitates deflection of responsibility, both on the part of racialised minority and white men. Boys' and men's intersectional identities (in terms of race and class) inform how they might fail to see gender-based violence as "their problem", thus placing responsibility for preventing or mitigating this social problem elsewhere. I distinguish between defensive and offensive deflection, showing how sexual nationalism provokes the former type of deflection of responsibility among racialised minority men and the latter among white Dutch men. This, in turn, shapes how they respond to awareness-raising initiatives on the subject.

## Sexual Nationalism and Stigma: Defensive Deflection among Racialised Minority Men

As in other national contexts (Gayet-Viaud & Dekker, 2021; Lieber, 2021), Dutch politicians and journalists heavily linked street harassment to racialised minority men and migration. Dutch right-wing parties such as the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) (liberal conservatives) and Leefbaar Rotterdam (Liveable Rotterdam) (populist right) spearheaded efforts to politicize *straatintimidatie* (street harassment in Dutch), focusing on the introduction of regulation to criminalise street harassment. These parties emphasised alleged overrepresentation among perpetrators of men with specific immigration backgrounds (mainly Morocco, Turkey, and the Dutch Antilles), as well as asylum seekers and refugees. Dutch media coverage of street harassment similarly focused on racialised minority men as perpetrators (Dekker & Duyvendak, 2024).

This media and political landscape influenced how awareness-raising on this issue was received at the classroom level. During the fieldwork I conducted on awareness-raising on street harassment, antagonistic or negative reactions were more common among racialised minority than among white men and boys. Interviews conducted with high school students after training sessions suggest that such negative response often reflected feelings of being singled out or stigmatised, rather than a lack of feminist values (Dekker, 2024). These findings illustrate how the prevalence of racialised narratives may trigger defensive deflection: racialised minority boys and men confronted with sexual violence awareness campaigns often experienced them as accusatory, interpreting them as collective moral judgements rather than invitations to reflection. In response, they often deflected responsibility for street harassment to racist stereotypes in society; which, according to them, inform how (white) women and girls interpret interactions with them. Such deflection of responsibility to racism in society sometimes prevented racialised minority boys from condemning harassment committed by their classmates or from reflecting on their own role in perpetuating narratives that put the blame for harassment on victims.

Even when a training programme avoids racial stereotypes, the dominance of certain narratives in the media can reinforce feelings of being targeted. Training attendees often referred to statements by politicians or journalists who linked street harassment to migration. These prevalent

narratives amplified racialised minority boys' concerns that this was just another attempt to put blame for societal problems on them. The abstract remarks made by trainers of such sessions that they opposed racist narratives about sexual violence and emphasis on how harassment happens across all groups were often insufficient to fully alleviate these concerns.

*The Politics of Home* illuminates the emotional roots of such responses: defensiveness may result from a context where minority men are already framed as outsiders who must constantly prove their belonging. When belonging becomes a matter of demonstrating the "right" emotional and moral dispositions – such as respect for women, tolerance towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning plus (LGBTQ+) people, and endorsement of gender equality – minority men are continually interpellated as "at risk" of failing those moral tests. In this context, participation may feel like confession, paradoxically deepening distrust. As racialised minority and migrant men are positioned as the *problem subjects* of gender inequality, this fundamentally complicates efforts to engage those same men in preventive or reflective work around gender-based violence (Crenshaw, 1991; Ferguson, 2019; Keddie, *et al.*, 2022).

## Othering and Moral Comfort: Offensive Deflection among White Dutch Men

A less explored, but equally important, question is how the Othering of gender-based violence shapes the responses of men who are not part of racialised minority or stigmatised groups. My own work on the reception of awareness-raising sessions illustrates how the dominance of racialised framings may encourage processes of "offensive deflection" – where (in this case, white and upper-middle class) men deflect responsibility for gender-based violence by associating this crime with racialised Others.

During training on street harassment, boys (mostly white) at schools in more affluent areas tended to respond supportively to the trainers' message about street harassment, but in doing so illustrated that they mostly thought of this as a crime committed by boys or men from disadvantaged backgrounds or racialised minority communities. By conceiving of gender-based violence as a problem primarily caused by other men elsewhere, these boys relieved themselves of any responsibility for this problem. One boy, for instance, stated that it is "awful that this happens

to girls. I'm glad that at least here in our school we're all pretty aware of these things." The training thus missed an opportunity to make gender-based violence "their problem", by encouraging boys to reflect on the salience of this social problem within their own social context and what they can do to help prevent it. This deflection was facilitated by prevalent media portrayals of street harassment.

Media coverage and political responses to the 2025 murder of a young woman named Lisa illustrates how this logic operates at the national level. As news spread that the suspect was an asylum seeker, public discourse quickly folded the tragedy into a broader moral panic about the threat of migrant men for women's public safety. Using terms such as "male solidarity" or "male alliances" (*mannenalliantie*), groups of men started organising "neighbourhood watches" to ensure women's safety at night. However, such attempts at male solidarity externalised gender-based violence, instead of encouraging men to reflect on how this may be a problem within their own social group. If gender-based violence is what *others* do, then self-scrutiny becomes unnecessary (Wekker, 2017).

Duyvendak's (2011) work on the emotional politics of home helps explain this mechanism: national belonging is experienced through feelings of security and moral superiority. As the media gives disproportionate attention to violence committed by racialised Others, problematic masculinities are then treated as foreign, exceptional, or culturally specific problems. The same process of culturalisation that renders the Other hypervisible simultaneously produces a self-image of white and upper-middle class Dutch men as already emancipated, gender-equal, and safe. Such moral comfort then exempts the latter from the responsibility for self-reflection or fostering change among their peers.

## Conclusion

The Dutch self-image of progressiveness enables deflection of responsibility, as gender-based violence is treated as a marker of cultural difference rather than as a structural or universal social problem. The findings on offensive deflection among white and upper-middle class men illustrate the importance of rethinking how preventive policies can address the personal experiences and cultural specificities of men who do not suffer from systematic discrimination and oppression – a subject that has

received less systematic attention than interventions for minority or disadvantaged men (Ferguson, 2019; Keddie *et al.*, 2022).

Dutch public campaigns, eager to avoid stigmatising messages, often universalize their slogans – "violence against women is everyone's issue" – yet, in doing so, they leave intact the implicit assumption that the mainstream population already embodies gender equality. Prevention is more effective when it engages men in their concrete lifeworld and experiences, rather than treating the subject of masculinity in abstract or generic terms (Flood, 2019; Lwambo, 2013; Viitanen & Colvin, 2015).

Fostering reflexive citizenship – a form of belonging that recognises its own cultural and emotional biases – requires more than moral condemnation of others or of male domination in an abstract sense. It necessitates critical examination of how Dutch society constructs danger, protection, and virtue, and how in turn this may facilitate processes of deflection of responsibility. Reflexive citizenship consists of practices that invite majority members to question how their feelings of security and tolerance depend on others' exclusion. Effective interventions unsettle these comforts of belonging.

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# Racialised Assimilationism, Cultural Citizenship, and Migrants' Self-Denial of Racist Experience

*Yannick Coenders and Sonia Planson*

"I tell my children this is the best country in the world to be black – because it's a country that sees people, not labels." – Olukemi Olufunto Adegoke Badenoch, Leader of the Conservative Party in the UK[1]

"We had plenty of racism that we had to deal with. But my parents never said we lived in a racist country, and I'm so thankful that they didn't. Because for every brown and Black child out there, if you tell them they live or are born in a racist country, you're immediately telling them they don't have a chance." – Nimarata Nikki Randhawa Haley, former Governor of South Carolina and US Ambassador to the UN[2]

"Just because we're the sons of immigrants or workers doesn't mean we have less chance to succeed, and I always thought that Bourdieu was talking absolute bullshit." – Gérald Moussa Jean Darmanin, Minister of Justice of France[3]

## Introduction

Describing Western Europe and to a lesser extent the United States, scholars have discussed the centrality of assimilation in the politics of immigration (Back et al., 2002; Bonjour & Duyvendak, 2018; Brubaker, 2001; Keaton, 2005; Schinkel & Van Houdt,, 2010; Vasta, 2007), some emphasising its racist presumptions (Ramírez, 2020; Schinkel, 2018). Simultaneously, a critical tradition of scholarship has identified how in Western Europe the mobilisation of supposed cultural differences produces essentialist accounts of non-white groups, naturalising their subordination and justifying white supremacy (Balibar, 1991; Lentin, 2005; Wren, 2001). As reflective accounts of sociological scholarship combining insights from both strands

have pointed out, the centrality of the assimilation concept (as well as its conceptual sibling "integration") in migration studies has contributed to this naturalisation of cultural differences (Jung, 2015; Schinkel, 2017, 2018). Setting aside the question of whether assimilation or integration are useful descriptors of empirical processes of cultural change, we build on these insights to conceptualise the relationship between racialised assimilationism and the racist practices it so often accompanies and structures. We define racialised assimilationism as a discursive formation that both essentialises purported cultural differences between those belonging to the West and those who allegedly never will, and that demands supposed outsiders erase their alleged cultural deficiencies, holding out an ever-deferred promise of full admission into the imagined national community. We suggest that assimilationism results in part from the increasing culturalisation of citizenship that Marieke Slootman and Jan Willem Duyvendak define, referring to the Netherlands, as "a process in which norms and values and symbols and traditions (including religion) have come to play a pivotal role in defining what can be expected of a Dutch citizen" (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015, p. 151).

Racialised assimilationism is part and parcel of a nativist outlook that continuously perceives the nation as being under threat by a foreign presence. Jan Willem Duyvendak has highlighted how a nostalgic quest for national unity tends to emphasise and construct cultural difference in Western Europe (Duyvendak, 2011, 2021; Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022), creating essentialised distinctions between those who belong and those who do not, often with norms and views about gender and sexuality as a focal point distinguishing between supposed Westerners and others (Coenders, 2024; Mepschen et al., 2010). Beyond invoking cultural difference that racialises those seen as non-European, racialised assimilationism is also about proactively insisting on conformity from migrants attesting to their adherence to the norms of the imagined white majority. In a post-World War II and post-Civil Rights context, not being racist has become central to such nationalist imaginaries across Western nations (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Lentin, 2005, 2008; Wekker, 2016). Yet, rather than institutionalising anti-racism, the concept of race has been discarded altogether from Western European contexts and colour blindness came to be a dominant ideology in the United States (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Perversely, this has had the consequence of demanding that migrants and non-white minorities

do not give voice to their experiences of racism and actively deny its existence.

In this essay we show how assimilationism structures the experiences of migrants at the micro-level through what Philomena Essed has aptly termed everyday racism, highlighting the repetitive and mundane aspects of white dominance. Given nationalist discourse that imagines Western nation-states as free from racism, we are particularly interested in non-white residents' disavowal of racist experiences as instances of racism. We argue that this self-denial results in part from racialised assimilationism imbricated with the politics of nativism and the culturalisation of citizenship. On the one hand we aim to contribute to the phenomenology of racism, showing how its experience is often marked by ambiguity and insecurity that comes with the ever-deferred promise of national inclusion (Du Bois, 2021; Essed, 1991; Çankaya & Mepschen, 2019). On the other hand, we contribute to a sociological account of the obsession with integration of racialised Others and its supposed failures in Western Europe by documenting how it impacts migrants (Van Reekum et al., 2012). Beyond essentialised cultural differences, we argue the pressures to culturally conform that characterise assimilationism include the denial of racism. As philosopher Sara Ahmed (2010, 2012) has argued, non-white individuals' complaints about racism amount to their self-exclusion from the national community and waiving of responsibility for their own well-being. In this context, disarticulating one's own experiences of racism from anti-racist frameworks comes to signal proper assimilation. Central to nationalist conceptions of self in the West are mythologies of racial innocence imagining racism as being left behind in the past (Ahmed, 2010) and as being contained to aberrant individuals and isolated events (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). We examine how minimising or denying racism can become a strategy of non-white individuals who seek ways to be included in an imagined national community and to gain access to the promise of full citizenship and concomitant social mobility. Understanding the sources and circulation of self-denial is consequential as white majorities can mobilise them by juxtaposing them to anti-racist activism (Coenders & Chauvin, 2017), but even more crucially for the possibilities of anti-racist resistance and non-white solidarity.

## Responsibilisation and the Pedagogy of Disavowal: A Case Study in Chicago

Drawing on an interview study conducted by Sonia Planson who interviewed 94 individuals in Chicago and Paris in 2019 to 2021 to understand experiences of racialised assimilationism, we analyse her interview with Olusesan Toluwalope (pseudonym), a 52-year-old Nigerian-origin businessman living in a majority-white town of Chicago's suburbs. We refer to our article in Ethnic and Racial Studies for accounts of assimilationism that pertain to the Netherlands and France as well. In the article we highlight similarities between the experiences of non-white migrants in the three countries between which, as Jan Willem Duyvendak has noted in the context of various studies on citizenship and nationalism (Bertossi et al., 2021; Duyvendak, 2011; Van Reekum et al., 2012), differences have often been overplayed. Yet, for the purpose of this chapter, we strategically focus on a single interview conducted with a Black US immigrant. Critiques of assimilationist politics in the context of France and the Netherlands have tended to underplay similar tendencies in the US. Conversely, anti-racist expression has often been deemed absent in Western Europe due to a lack of racial literacy, while such literacy is often assumed to circulate widely in the US. Not denying differences between these contexts, we find it useful to discuss racialised assimilationism and the denial of racism in the US – showing how assimilationism can mark the lives of racialised individuals across the Atlantic, leading them to downplay or expressly deny their own experiences of racism.

In the interview we identify the interlinked processes of 1) responsibilisation, and 2) the pedagogy of disavowal that are central to racialised assimilationism. Following the logic of assimilationism, individuals are responsible for erasing their cultural difference and beliefs to adhere to dominant norms – including the norms that problematise difference as basis for exclusion. If responsibilisation of non-white populations for their unequal treatment is one side of the assimilationist coin, a pedagogy of disavowal is the other. Assimilationism not only directly creates pressures to assimilate and cultural isolation; it also produces adherence to dominant racial ideology itself – that is, the denial of racism. Hence, assimilationism is in part about teaching non-white populations to let go of their victimhood – rather than to recognise racism as a matter of power. Elements of both processes can be discerned from this vignette.

Olusesan explained that neither his children, his wife, nor himself were "colour oriented" because he believed people's outlook on racism is what determines it. He contended that "the people who complain about racism are the greatest racists that [he had] met" and that the exclusive consumption of cultural programmes geared towards Black audiences (such as TV channels) are "encouraging racist agendas". Therefore, he consciously limited his children's exposure to such content and to interactions with Black people, which, he believed, would socialise them into racist and limiting worldviews.

> You see, they think it's them looking out for themselves, but they do not realize that it is them encouraging racist agendas. Now your son sees himself as a Black man and the white man or the red man is the enemy. My own son does not see himself as a Black man, he sees himself as a man… I can tell you clearly that my son has never brought a Black man home as a friend, neither has my daughter, because nobody taught them that way. If I said to them we're going to a friend's house and … the first friend is a Black man, second one, also a Black man. Then I'm limiting their focus to thinking these are the kinds of friends that I have. Then I also put them in schools where everybody's majority Black. Then I have limited them to a world, everything has become Black in their eyes. No, that's not how I have brought up my kids. Am I denying that there's racism in the world? No, I'm saying why must I encourage it by bringing up my children to be racists?

While Olusesan did not deny the existence of racism, in his understanding the maintenance of distinct racial identities through socialisation is precisely what contributes to racism. This view is informed by a similar logic to what Essed (1990) described as the belief in discrimination as a self-fulfilling prophecy, a view that casts responsibility for discrimination on its victims who are calling it into being.

In Olusesan's case, he clearly stated that he had experienced discrimination – however, asserting that "nobody gets away with it with [him]" because he typically does not recognise it in the moment and "pushes his way through". He talked of examples where he realised only in retrospect that someone was "trying to discriminate against [him]" although it ultimately was "not a big deal" since he wouldn't let them. Olusesan used colour blindness to avoid being impacted by discrimination, which he purposefully instilled in his children so that they would not realise if they

were ever discriminated against: "They will not think that somebody did this to them because of their colour, they'll just think you did it because you are wrong and they push back. You can teach people to push back without necessarily teaching them that this is happening to you because you are different." Olusesan insisted on the socialisation and generational difference between himself – being born in Nigeria only a handful of years after decolonisation – and his US-born children.

> It's always in retrospect that I realize that "Oh, that must be racism" or things like that. The only reason why I really realize it is because deep down inside of me it's not wiped away. These are things that people have talked about, have influenced me growing up and all of that, but my children don't think like that because we brought them up in a different way. Even if they go back in retrospect, they would not realize that somebody treated them that way because they were different, they would think you are just nasty. I would be able to say "Oh that was racism that happened because I was a Black man" in retrospect because somewhere inside, that definition is still there, but I don't think my children are like that, so that doesn't exist in them.

Thus, Olusesan is intently trying to wipe away the racial lens he was brought up with and to raise his children to be completely colourblind and unable to identify instances of everyday racism. According to him, his own ability to identify racist experiences is a remnant of his own upbringing, which he must make sure to avoid transmitting to his children. He substitutes a supposedly faulty discourse of race acquired in Nigeria for what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) has referred to as the dominant racial discourse in the United States. More than simply a denial of racist events, a pedagogy of assimilationism here encourages Olusesan's children to not understand themselves as racialised subjects altogether, making them thereby immune to racist experience. Here, dimensions of responsibilisation and pedagogy are intertwined. Not only does Olusesan consider himself responsible for his own experiences with white majorities, he also sees himself as responsible for enforcing a pedagogy of disavowal on his own children. For Olusesan, disavowing racism consists both of rejecting the racial discourse he grew up with and actively rejecting the politicisation of racism he encounters through US-based anti-racist discourse. Indeed, he describes his visceral rejection of such discourses coming from Black people in the United States in particular:

> Sometimes I've seen people who patronize me, who want to talk about how Black people are not getting the best and all of that. I'll be like, "You know I don't believe all what you are saying." They'll be like, "Oh Black man who doesn't believe" – I'm like, "Listen, as far as I'm concerned, why are you waiting for anybody to hand anything to you? Nobody gives you anything in this world, it's not just whether you're Black or you're White or anything"… . I tell you, nobody could have taken the Black man away from Africa without the Black man's help. That's the truth, and people are like "No, but you know the White man came." I say, "Yes, the White men came, but they needed certain Black people to help them do whatever they did. Why are you laying blame on the White man?" People try to patronize me like that, they find out that I'm not an easy customer.

While aware of counter-hegemonic interpretations of racist experience, Olusesan explicitly won't "buy" the counter-narrative that he is offered by Black Americans about the nature and roots of racial inequality in the United States. Drawing on dominant narratives dismissing racism, Olusesan mobilises two denials rejecting Black anti-racist accounts. First, he challenges the very claim that Black people suffer from unequal resources and opportunities, with the notion that they "wait" for things to be "handed" to them. He draws from narratives that imply that any existing inequalities result from individuals' own fault. Simultaneously, he naturalises the idea that "nothing is given in this world" as a general condition of human nature and not a matter of (racialised) power. Second, he counters discourses that situate the historical roots of racism and racial inequality in slavery with an argument distributing equal blame on Black Africans and Whites. Ultimately, Olusesan depoliticises racism by pushing back with a colourblind framework and an astructural, ahistorical reading of US racism.

Thus, this vignette shows how in the US context, a Black immigrant "assimilates" by actively developing and passing on a colourblind lens as a way to supposedly circumvent racism or remove themself and their children from racist situations and structure. This goes to illustrate assimilationism's tendency to responsibilise minorities for their own racialisation, and processes of containment limiting anti-racist resistance. Essed (1991) asserts that without general knowledge of racism, it is difficult to tie racist encounters in one's own life to broader structures of inequality and domination. In her comparative interview study, Essed points out that her Dutch respondents, in contrast to her US respondents, lacked a

framework to understand and explain their experiences of racism. We agree with her analysis but wish to emphasise that the experiences of non-white populations in the United States can be fairly similar to what is in critical scholarship often understood to be distinctively European. Thus, we contend that both the learning of what racism is and what constitutes a legitimate complaint about racism are themselves part of the structure of everyday racism non-white populations experience in both Europe and the United States.

## Conclusion

Assimilation ostensibly hinges on the ability to disavow racism, which charges minorities with the responsibility of letting go of their cultural and anti-racist baggage and of including themselves. Ultimately, it depoliticises racialised relations of power by making individuals responsible for their positioning on the racial hierarchy. Intertwined with casting the responsibility for racist experience on those subjected to it is a racial pedagogy teaching non-white populations how to be less different and how to interpret instances of everyday racism. Not in the least, such pedagogy centres on muting resistance against racism by clarifying to non-white minorities that to become members of the nation they should refrain from complaining about it.

Macro-level accounts of assimilationism, alternatively conceptualised by Jan Willem Duyvendak and others as the "culturalization of citizenship" have highlighted the centrality of cultural homogeneity and superiority in nationalist ideology and immigration policy (for example, Mepschen et al., 2010; Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). While there may be variation between different countries' dominant racial ideologies, assimilationism presents a common thread structuring the logic of everyday racism across various contexts. Here we illustrated this presenting an interview vignette from the United States as an alternative to the frequently discussed cases of France and the Netherlands. Indeed, regardless of their formal citizenship status, non-white populations in Western countries are routinely reminded of the permanent conditionality of their national belonging, which sociologist Jean Beaman (2023) marks as a structure of "suspect citizenship" integral to the culturalisation of citizenship (Beaman, 2017). We argue that central to this structure is a discursive formation that

we conceptualise as racialised assimilationism, which continually re-emphasises and essentialises cultural differences through an unspoken preference for sameness and homogeneity (Essed & Goldberg, 2002), thereby casting non-white populations as perpetually aberrant and suspect of violating national integrity. Through our analysis of the vignette we highlighted how assimilationism, by making racist experience an inevitable consequence of cultural difference, responsibilises migrants for their own racial subordination. Indeed, in a context of culturalisation of citizenship, assimilationism becomes instrumental in justifying racial hierarchies with the subaltern position of non-white migrants a natural result of their failure to assimilate.

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## Notes

1 https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/kemi-badenoch-tory-conference-woke-b2422950.html [Accessed 4 June 2025].

2 https://edition.cnn.com/2024/01/16/politics/nikki-haley-says-us-not-racist-country/index.html [Accessed 4 June 2025].

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# Informality and Everyday Citizenship: Belonging Through '*Tolerantie*' and '*Égalité*' in Marginalised Neighbourhoods in the Netherlands and France

*Simone van de Wetering*

## Introduction

> When I biked from the French banlieue town in Seine-Saint-Denis to the city centre of Paris, I was greeted by Biggie Smalls and Tupac. A graffiti artwork that portrayed the two hip-hop legends, surrounded by drawings of the words 'respect' and 'R.I.P.' was painted just beneath one of the bridges crossing the Canal de l'Ourcq. It reminded me, every bike ride again, of the importance of hip-hop culture in the lives of the French citizens I had come to know. They told me how hip-hop was 'a way of thinking, a way of living'. And that hip-hop taught them 'that respect is bigger than only respecting your family, it is with everyone around you'. Hip-hop was a way for them to claim space: literally by painting on public walls, and figuratively, as it shaped their ways of living in a country in which their identity, as residents of the highly stigmatised French banlieues, was often portrayed as a 'threat' to the nation's unity.

In today's France, the topics of French national identity and citizenship are surrounded by tensions. A part of the French population is portrayed in political and public discourse as deviant from and a threat to 'the' French national identity. This 'abnormalisation' is increasingly normalised in public and political discourse (Dikeç, 2007; Beaman, 2017; Van de Wetering, 2020). Despite the nation's motto '*liberté, égalité, et fraternité*' and the official equality of all citizens, not being recognised as 'normal' French citizens is a daily reality for many of them (Beaman, 2015; Bouteldja, 2025). This discursive 'othering' is most prominently expressed by the far-right party Rassemblement National (RN) and focuses explicitly on Muslims and (different generations of) migrants, many living in the French *banlieues*.

Not only in France is this distinction drawn between citizens who do and do not belong to 'the' national identity dominant in political and public discourse. Across many Western European countries, a nativist logic is increasingly normalised: certain groups and behaviours are seen (or portrayed) as 'native' to the soil and, with that, others as 'foreign' and a threat (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019; Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022). Also in the Netherlands, politician Geert Wilders promises to 'give Dutch people back their country' when he will be in power, suggesting that the Netherlands is currently under threat by non-Dutch citizens (PVV, 2025). While for a long time most prominently expressed by Wilders' Party for Freedom (Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV)), this 'othering' has entered mainstream political and public discourse. The problematisation of an 'other' is often spatialised and, similarly to in France, attached to highly stigmatised 'priority' or 'focus' neighbourhoods (Pinkster *et al.*, 2020).

Remarkably, in both the Netherlands and France, the 'discursive violence' in political and public debate about who is 'being recognized symbolically and emotionally as co-citizens' (Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2016, p. 1) coexists with national beliefs in equal citizenship and unity, defended as tolerance ('*tolerantie*') in the Netherlands, and as equality ('*égalité*') in France. In the Netherlands, this self-image of the Dutch as progressive and tolerant, of a 'non-racist national Self', continues to coexist with a highly 'differentiated Other' (Çankaya, 2020; Ghorashi, 2023, p. 18). In France, despite the Republican values of *égalité, liberté et fraternité* and the state's supposed 'colour blindness', not all French citizens 'belong' (Bertossi, 2016; Beaman, 2015; Beaman & Petts, 2020).

Differences between 'us' and 'them' take central stage in political and public debates, suggesting that this division is what marks current times. At the same time, however, we see resistance to this division, solidarity, community, and 'in-between' ways of working across divides between 'us vs. them', city vs. *banlieue*, government vs. citizen (Kaulingfreks, 2023; van de Wetering, 2024). Therefore, inspired by Jan Willem Duyvendak's work on nativism (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022) and the politics of home (Duyvendak, 2011; Duyvendak, 2017), I explore in the remainder of this essay how 'othered' citizens who live in marginalised neighbourhoods in the Netherlands and France 'belong': to their neighbourhoods, communities, nations, and to 'the' national identity. I use Duyvendak's conceptualisations of the 'nation-as-home' and the 'hybrid home' (Duyvendak, 2011) to understand how informal and everyday practices of citizenship are expressions of belonging

and to evaluate how these practices may forge new political communities (Bouteldja, 2025) and political possibilities (Van den Berg, 2025) amidst the continuing and omnipresent 'discursive violence' of division.

## *Tolerantie* and Belonging

Emma[1] is a woman in her thirties who lives in a so-called 'priority area' in the south of the Netherlands and who has become a spokesperson for her neighbourhood. As neighbourhood resident, she is board member of her city's official governance programme to tackle inequality of opportunity ('*kansenongelijkheid*') in marginalised neighbourhoods. Part of her role is to participate in meetings with other board members, directors of housing corporations, aldermen, and the mayor to discuss what should be done to 'improve' her and other marginalised neighbourhoods in the city. In this role, she also lobbies with neighbourhood partners, policymakers, and in city hall to have resources, money, and time allocated to where she believes it is necessary. Part of Emma's work for her neighbourhood is formalised in her role as board member for which she is specified a certain amount of time, and for which she gets a modest reimbursement. Even more so in her everyday life, she engages in informal and relational work for the neighbourhood and its residents.

Besides her 'official' duties as citizen representative and board member, Emma settles disputes when her neighbours are fighting at 11 pm, reprimands youths on fatbikes[2] (who call her 'buufie', a neighbour nickname) when they make a mess of the neighbourhood and manages a Facebook group where updates about the neighbourhood are shared: from a lost cat to a Halloween event. She helps to paint the new location of a neighbourhood association and brings groceries to a street event. When we walk or bike through the neighbourhood together, Emma greets people she does and does not know. She discusses the school-dropout of a child whose mum she encounters in the shopping centre. She has a brief talk with her neighbour who, she explained to me, blasted awful music every day until she asked him, jokingly, to please mix his Dutch sentimental songs in a more varied playlist. She greets an unknown woman walking her dog, strolling by in the park.

Emma's everyday practices forge relationships across differences. She feels she belongs to this 'priority area' where many residents are 'othered'

*and* realises that she has a different position than many of her neighbours. She shares with me the discomfort that comes along with her appointment as board member. Because of her personal position, Emma explains to me she *can* represent the neighbourhood. As she compares herself to her neighbours, she stresses that she is able to do the work because her family has a steady income, that she is listened to and taken seriously because she is a white woman, that she can make noise, ruffle some feathers, and get away with it because of her last name. Why me, she asks, and not the neighbourhood resident who has been organising activities for Muslim women for years?

Emma is part of a neighbourhood community that she highly values and identifies with. Not because she and her neighbours are the same or tolerate one another's differences. Rather, she feels belonging to a local community she gives shape to together with others, across differences in religion, cultural background, and socio-economic position, as they help one another out and simply share their everyday lives.

## *Égalité* and Belonging

Amin and I worked together at a social centre in a small town in the *banlieue* department Seine-Saint-Denis (well known in France as the notorious '93'), north-east of Paris. He was like a big brother for the children whom we tutored together, joking around when possible, strict when needed. At the time Amin and I met, he was studying, next to his work at the social centre. He lived in the same neighbourhood as the children we tutored. He knew their mums and dads and grew up similarly to them.

When we talked about growing up in the *banlieue* he told me that everybody was poor, but that for him as a child it just meant they shared their stuff as one big family. When one of them bought a sandwich, they would eat it together, splitting it half–half: '*moitie moitie*'. He also explained to me the obviousness of being stopped, checked, and searched by the police as a Black or Arab young man. Still, he stressed to me, in Paris life was much worse: there, people did not look out for one another, contrary to the situation in his neighbourhood where everybody was different, but they lived together.

The 2015 terrorist attacks at Charlie Hebdo took place during the time we worked together. When I saw Amin for the first time after the attacks

for our next tutoring session, we consulted on how to discuss it with the children. All over France, people were claiming, '*Je suis Charlie.*' Amin explained to me that here, it wasn't that straightforward. This appeared from the conversation with the children, too. Yes, everybody condemned the brutal attacks, but they condemned the islamophobia that resurged in the responses to it, too.

Working with Amin showed me what it means not to conform to 'the' norm in France as a young, Muslim man with North African roots, living in the *banlieue.* How your everyday life is political as you navigate territorial and racial stigmatisation: being seen as a suspect by the police or being rejected because of your last name or address when applying for a job. It showed how equality, for him, is a myth as the 'equal citizens of France' are divided by deep cleavages that run through France that challenge this idea of equal citizenship on a daily basis.

Amin's story also illustrates the informal, relational work he did for his community. Like the story of Stephan, a dance teacher who crossed the Île-de-France region to teach youngsters hip-hop and respect. Or the stories of the artists who drew Biggie and 2Pac under the bridge, of the youths who bought and delivered groceries for their elderly neighbours during the Covid-19 pandemic, and of the mothers who gathered weekly to share meals together. Like the stories of the anonymous people whose work I encountered from the *banlieue* streets to the Parisian boulevards, every time I visited the region in the past decade: the tagged names of citizens lost to police violence and the posters with their pictures, from Bouna and Zyed (2005) to Nahel (2023). In everyday practices, people claim their neighbourhoods, share what is important in their lives, express their belonging to a community, and build relationships.

## Belonging as Everyday Practice

The stories of Emma and Amin show how people live their everyday lives in the Netherlands and France, in times of increasing prominence of nativist discourse. The conceptualisation of 'nativism', as most elaborately developed by Duyvendak and Kešić in *The Return of the Native* (2022), helps us to understand what such nativist narratives entail, how they are employed, and how they have become part of political and public discourse across the political spectrum, albeit in different ways.

The authors specify that nativism should not be understood as an ideological substance but rather as a logic with three characteristics: certain groups and behaviours are seen as native to the soil and thus others as foreign; this foreignness is seen as a threat; and exclusion is the 'best means of coping with this threat' (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022, p. 7). We recognise these elements as contextual factors in the stories of Emma and Amin: both are stories about in- and exclusion, spatial and racial discrimination intersecting with belonging to the nation, to its soil. Emma stresses that her whiteness and last name allow her to speak up: she is rooted here, not 'foreign', not a threat. Amin explains how he is immediately questioned as being 'truly French' after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks. Both Emma and Amin are well aware of the racist and Islamophobic sentiments in their countries, and the fact that the discursive division by political leaders and their fellow citizens between 'us' and 'them' is based on who and what is seen as native Dutch and French.

At the same time, Amin's and Emma's stories are not necessarily stories of active resistance against this 'nativist logic'. More modestly but, as I will argue, not less importantly, these stories show that everyday practices of belonging coexist with such nativist narratives. Where Duyvendak and Kešić focus their work on nativism on identifying and deconstructing the narratives in public and political discourse (2022, p. 18), my aim is to explore not *narratives* but the meaning of *practices* within this violent discursive context. To that end, I go back to Duyvendak's earlier work on 'belonging' and 'home', two concepts that are also central to the theorisation of the nativist logic, but that may provide alternative directions, too. More specifically, I build on Duyvendak's *The Politics of Home* (2011) to demonstrate that while in nativist discourse in Western Europe the notion of the 'nation-as-home' may play a central role, in Emma's and Amin's everyday practices I see the contours of a 'hybrid home' – which allows us to further theorise this notion.

### *The Nation-As-Home*

In *The Politics of Home* (2011) Jan Willem Duyvendak interrogates the politicisation of 'home' in the context of globalisation, migration, and the gender revolution: what do these global developments mean for the right to belong and the ability to feel at home? Comparing the United States and Western Europe, he explores the increasingly dominant framing in

Western Europe of the nation in terms of 'home'. In this 'nation-as-home', belonging is connected to a territory with a historically rooted national identity. To not have certain roots, you are not only not 'home' but a threat to others feeling 'at home' as well. The nation-as-home then works highly exclusionary – if you have not experienced the same national history, you can never belong: 'us' and 'them' are fixed.

The 'nation-as-home' is mobilised to exclude people indeed: when 'native' traditions or values are presented as being 'under attack', or people are told to 'go back to their country' when not adhering to 'our norms' – all key phrases in nativist narratives. It is a notion of home that prescribes homogeneity. Duyvendak identifies in Dutch political discourse the idea 'that people can only feel at home with those who have been part of that home for a long time and who share the same norms and values' (2011, p. 97). In France, this manifests in the need for 'neutral' public spaces according to the French 'Jacobin Model' that holds 'that only neutral public spaces can guarantee social peace and that deeply ingrained feelings of belonging have to remain restricted to private life' (p. 118). Neutral, however, means according to the dominant norm, of course. These are the 'shadow sides of exclusionary individual, private and homogeneous forms of belonging' (p. 124). We, then, need an alternative.

### *The Hybrid Home*

Duyvendak concludes *The Politics of Home* by proposing what inclusive ways of feeling at home may look like: 'Feeling at home in the nation state, then, is the capacity to experience comfort among relative strangers [… a …] daily reality of an evergrowing group of grounded people living their home feelings "lightly"' (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 124). What it means to live home feelings lightly is less elaborately discussed with empirical examples, but described, in my reading, as a move away from a 'thick' understanding of home in the nation state (with a shared, territorial, historically rooted national identity, customs, and values), to a 'light' variant. Light is not the opposite of thick, but rather an alternative: from the nation-as-home to a hybrid home with three key elements.

First, rather than (static) 'roots', (dynamic) relations and relational work (engaging with others) form the basis of belonging. The 'right' to feel at home is not a formal but a moral one, with a corresponding duty to help others feel at home as well (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 121). Connected to that,

second, an understanding of home as hybrid acknowledges that 'home' is both public and private at the same time. Home feelings are not limited to the individual and private sphere: home is plural, a place to share with others. Third, empathy, rather than 'tolerance' or '*égalité*, is central to this sharing of 'home' with others: 'Space for the public expression of feeling at home by different groups [...] only emerges when citizens empathize with the desire of others to belong. [...] The basis of a harmonious society is therefore not forced assimilation into one notion of "home" but recognition that everybody wishes to belong' (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 121).

While in 2011, Duyvendak doubts that there is space for such hybridity because of the nationalist sentiments and policies in Western Europe, the stories of Amin and Emma suggest that, in everyday life, such space is in fact claimed.

### *Everyday Practices or Living Home Feelings Lightly*

Amin and Emma, together with many others I got to know both in the Netherlands and France, are, I believe, part of 'the evergrowing group of grounded people living their home feelings "lightly"' that Duyvendak described in 2011 (p. 124). First, both Amin and Emma express a sense of belonging in their relational work in their neighbourhoods. Through (dynamic) relational agency, rather than (static) roots (only), they build connections with others. They feel discontent with 'the' Dutch or French historically rooted national identity, and build belonging with the people around them in their neighbourhoods: by growing up together, caring for one another, helping each other to feel at home. We can understand these practices as what Van den Berg calls 'making possibilities': possibilities for love and solidarity that are actively built, set in motion through acting them out (2025, p. 114). In their everyday lives and their day-to-day practices, Amin and Emma practice care, practice being there for one another, which in itself can be seen as 'an answer to the darkness of our time' (Van den Berg, 2025, p. 136).

Second, in Emma and Amin's lives, public and private spheres are not separate domains. Emma works to create and keep alive private public spaces for Muslim women. She plays a public role, but often from the front steps of her own home. Amin is a big brother for the neighbourhood children. In line with Haraway's notion of 'making kin', the meaning of family in both Emma's and Amin's everyday lives reaches beyond familial

relations as born (static), to a family made (dynamic) (Haraway, 2016) – also here with an accent on the practice of 'making'. The relationships that Emma and Amin forge are not public *or* private, and the relational work they engage in does not happen in a public *or* private place. It takes place on city streets, in homes, at work, in supermarkets, and social centres: in a public and collective hybrid home.

Third, Emma does not feel at home with her neighbours by 'tolerating' them, nor does 'equality' as colour blindness or same-ness define Amin's feelings of belonging in his neighbourhood. Both acknowledge, put central even, diversity and difference, and work to create a community in which people live together and belong in this diversity. As such, they practice what can be seen as a new (or is this *new*?) political community (Bouteldja, 2025). They work to understand another and make space for another – as Emma asks her neighbour to mix in a different tune in his playlist once in a while, or as Amin grows up with people 'from around the world' like brothers. In their relational work, Emma as board member and neighbourhood *buufie*, Amin as tutor and '*grand-frère*', they not only respect their neighbours' (moral) right to feel at home but actively try to make them feel at home too. They empathise with their neighbours' desire to belong.

Amin's and Emma's stories show how citizens practice belonging in their everyday informal activities. These practiced realities can be interpreted as alternatives to nativist discourse: everyday practices or living home feelings lightly forge new political communities and make possibilities. Maybe not in public political discourse and nationalist policies that may be even more populist than fifteen years ago through the continued culturalization of citizenship, but in the everyday life of citizens, space for hybridity is claimed, indeed, moving away from a thick notion of the nation-as-home for a particular group (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 121).

## Conclusion

Informal practices, like settling a street dispute, drawing a mural, or buying groceries for your elderly neighbour, have value. They build relationships and communities. Still, such everyday practices are often not valued or answered to by politicians or other state actors as expressions of civil engagement, of 'active citizenship'. But everyday life has political

significance (Bayat, 2013), especially when being who you are is controversial – when you are seen as deviant or foreign, and you are not recognised, symbolically and emotionally, as co-citizen. People claim and make their space by living their lives, by 'being there' (Slooter, 2019; Kaulingfreks, 2015, 2023).

These 'micro-practices' may seem to stand alone, to be insignificant or fragmented vis-à-vis the discursive violence of 'us vs. them', of citizens who do and do not belong, that is currently so dominant in public and political debate. They may seem highly localised practices, of value in and to specific neighbourhoods only. But these practices do have political value, also beyond their local embeddedness, as they provide community and solidarity as alternative realities.

The French-Algerian author and activist Houria Bouteldja writes about '*égalité*': 'Is it a reality realized by the Revolution, or is it a projection, an ideal to strive for? We know the answer, but the French leftwing citizen, and sometimes even the rightwing citizen, is quite proud of the word' (Bouteldja, 2025, p. 112, translation by the author). We have come to understand the complexity of equality in France and of tolerance in the Netherlands, of how narratives of 'us' and 'them' are formulated, are used, and have impact – and this understanding is greatly due to the work of Jan Willem Duyvendak.

In the face of rising, or even consolidating, nativist logics across Europe (and beyond), we need to develop new conceptualisations of the practices that stand a chance against them. In this essay I have tried to demonstrate how Jan Willem Duyvendak's work on nativism, but also on 'home' and 'belonging', can and should continue to aid us in doing so: to understand how current everyday and informal practices of citizenship may play a role in shaping 'political communities' (Bouteldja, 2025) and 'political possibilities' (Van den Berg, 2025), and to further explore how these are, or can become, part of new narratives of change.

## Notes

[1] *Names are pseudonymized.*

[2] A fatbike is a specialised bicycle with oversized tires.

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# Resilience and the Politics of Citizenship

*Stefan Dudink*

Studies of the dynamics of citizenship in recent Dutch history have shown little to no interest in fighting as an aspect or form of citizenship. This should not come as a surprise. Fighting as a prerequisite for or manifestation of citizenship does not seem to have played much of a role in the conflicts over secular and progressive values regarding gender and sexuality that a lot of this research has concentrated on. A change of focus might be needed, though, in view of the rise to prominence of 'resilience' ('*weerbaarheid*') in current Dutch political culture and the calls for militant citizenship that it has come with. How do resilience and militant citizenship relate, currently and historically, to each other and to other forms of citizenship, political citizenship in particular? Are the given frameworks for understanding the dynamics of citizenship sufficiently equipped to make sense of the current moment of resilience and calls for militant citizenship?

## Resilience

From the late 1990s until quite recently, the concept of resilience held a modest, yet significant, place in Dutch political language. Although not used very often, resilience was a meaningful concept, for it represented key transformations that occurred in Dutch political culture around the turn of the century. Two opposite, but connected, political arguments shaped the meanings it carried.

Emerging populism called for resilience in the face of a Dutch, and a more generally Western, inability to defend itself against the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. In a 1997 interview, Pim Fortuyn, leader of the first phase of the Dutch populist revolt, claimed that cultural relativism and an inability to articulate the core values of Dutch culture made the Dutch nation vulnerable to a religion that had no doubts whatsoever

about its values. He advocated for 'resilience' that, building on a strict definition of Dutch national culture, would result in a steadfast defence of shared values over which no negotiation was possible (Sinnema, 1997; Fortuyn, 1998, p. 24).

Resilience was called for as well in critiques of populism that perceived this new political movement as a fundamental threat to democracy. In a 2002 opinion piece, journalist Anet Bleich (2002) took politicians and fellow journalists to task for accepting as legitimate positions in democratic political debate, ideas like those of Fortuyn – ideas that she regarded as undermining fundamental democratic principles. The protection of non-negotiable core values such as religious toleration, asylum for political refugees, and the acceptance of cultural differences required, Bleich argued, 'democratic resilience'.

In these two, interlocked, senses, 'resilience' would continue to appear with moderate frequency in Dutch political language for the next near quarter of a century, testifying to the depressingly static nature of some features of political debate in these years. In a programmatic text published in 2025, the FarmerCitizenMovement (BoerBurgerBeweging), the latest party-political incarnation of Dutch populism, stressed the importance of 'resilience' against the absolutism of 'Islamic extremism'. Presenting what was in fact a rhetorical echo as an original utterance, the piece demanded 'ideological resilience: the courage (…) to defend actively our core values' (BBB, 2025).

In the same year journalist Bas Heijne (2025) castigated colleagues and other observers for their failure to acknowledge how deep the hatred of liberal democracy is among an international caste of increasingly successful and aggressive populist leaders. Using the same vocabulary Annet Bleich had turned to 23 years earlier, but applying it to an international rather than exclusively Dutch context, Heijne concluded that 'what matters from this point on is resilience'.

The frequency of use and the meaning of resilience as a *political* concept may have remained relatively stable for some time, but from 2020 on there was lot of movement concerning resilience in the wider linguistic field in which it appeared. Its use in *general* Dutch public speech rose sharply after 2020 and the word found its way into a wide variety of contexts. It could refer to a desirable state of mind of professional football players or workers in a neo-liberal platform economy. It could also represent what is needed for collective survival under conditions of

climate change or technological dependency.[1] Amidst all this movement, one development is relevant in particular for the subject of this essay: the emergence in recent Dutch political language of resilience as the ability and willingness to fight for one's country.

In December 2024 the Dutch government announced it had started to work ´to increase resilience against military and hybrid threats´ (GotN, 2024). The government pointed to Russian aggression and its extension beyond Ukraine and spoke of 'great urgency'. Where the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 (MH 17) in 2014 had resulted in a measured increase of assertiveness towards Russia, the war in Ukraine inspired a stronger stance. The government argued that 'what was unthinkable for a long time has become possible'. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and therefore the Netherlands, 'could become directly involved in a large-scale armed conflict'. In view of this, the government had begun to identify what was needed to become resilient against a threat of this nature. A policy paper for Parliament that followed a year later demonstrated that making a country resilient against military and hybrid threats is not a minor task (NCTV, 2025). The ministers of Defence and of Justice and Security wrote that the government aimed at increasing the resilience of both (civil) society and state. This involved, among many other things, securing the supply of food, water, energy, and healthcare, protecting transportation and digital infrastructure, guaranteeing the continuity of public services, government, democratic processes, and the rule of law, building an economy capable of delivering vital goods in times of conflict, and reinforcing military preparedness. The latter required a substantial reallocation of money and land, the recruitment and training of military personnel, and investing in the arms industry.

The wide scope of the task the government set itself was reflected in the language of the paper, which drew on every ideological position on the relation between state and society of the last 150 years. The need for state intervention in society, the power of private enterprise, the productivity of public–private partnerships, the importance of civil society, and the value of citizenship – a resilient country, the paper suggested, requires them all.

The word 'resilience' and its derivatives appeared on every page of the policy paper, that, in true policy paper style, also spawned a wealth of new compounds and new names for new government bodies, including resilience task (*weerbaarheidsopgave*), resilience objectives (*weerbaarheidsdoelstellingen*), resilience approach (*weerbaarheidsaanpak*), Council

for Geopolitics and Resilience (Geopolitiek- en Weerbaarheidsberaad), and Coalition for Resilient Healthcare (Coalitie Weerbare Zorg).

Amidst this explosion in the use of the word, one shift in meaning was crucial. Politically, resilience had from the turn of the century signified steadfastness in defending one's culture and/or political beliefs. Now it returned to a set of older meanings, which the English 'resilient' does not really evoke, but the Dutch '*weerbaar*' does: to be equipped for and capable of armed defence; militant; combative (WNT, 1989, s.v. 'weerbaar'). In the government's policy paper, resilience came to stand for a country's ability and willingness to fight for its continued existence. When it summed up what the wide effort to increase resilience aimed at in the end, the government did not mince words: the aim was credible deterrence, based on the ability to fight a prolonged conflict and, eventually, win it.

## Citizenship

This mini history of meanings of resilience in recent Dutch political culture is also a mini history of citizenship in that culture. Resilience in all political meanings discussed above functioned as a set of norms for good citizenship. Political citizenship was obviously at stake in the call to resilience of populists and their critics. It is perhaps less immediately clear that the government's policy paper was also about citizenship, concentrating as it did on large institutions and societal structures. The government, too, however articulated standards for good citizenship. They ranged from relatively minor forms of citizens' participation in civil society initiatives, which aimed at increasing resilience at the level of local neighbourhoods, to serving in the reserves or the regular forces of the military. And ultimately, of course, the realization of the government's 'resilience objectives' depends on their incorporation into the political self-understanding of Dutch citizens and its expression at the ballot box. Whether the government succeeds in its 'resilience task' depends on the nation's willingness to adopt a militant notion of citizenship.

It is too early to tell whether the emergence of a militant citizenship of fighting for one's country will amount to a break in the recent political history of citizenship in the Netherlands. We may be witnessing a shift in the relative importance of political citizenship and militant citizenship. But when we look at the instances of political and militant citizenship

referred to earlier in this essay, other relations between them are plausible as well.

Perhaps the calls to resilience in the sense of political steadfastness paved the way for the rise of resilience as fighting for one's country. The long conflict between uncompromising populists and their equally uncompromising critics may have contributed to giving resilience political legitimacy in general, detached from specific political positions, making it available for appropriation by a programme for national unification and defence of the nation. From this perspective, the emergence of militant citizenship has been enabled by changes in notions of political citizenship, rather than constituting a break with them.

The instances of political and militant citizenship in this essay are perhaps also similar rather than different in the way they understand a crucial aspect of resilience. In all cases discussed, the call for resilience implied that things had become serious. Business as usual is no longer an option, resilience denotes, for existential matters are at stake now. Calls for resilience follow a diagnostics that has come to the conclusion that political conflict has intensified so much that regular politics no longer suffices to deal with it. Resilience then signifies the thing required to engage adequately with the seriousness of the new political situation. To be sure, steadfastness in politics is not the same thing as taking up arms to defend one's country. But the link of both these things to calls for resilience points to a relation and certain similarity between them, rather than to categorical difference.

There is a figure in the history of citizenship in whom political citizenship, militant citizenship, and an awareness of the seriousness of the political situation come together. That is the citizen-soldier of classic antiquity, who, reinvented in Renaissance and early modern political thought, continued to assume his duties deep into modern political and military history (Pocock, 1975). Having become aware of the possibility that the liberty of his republic might fall prey to aspiring despots from within or enemies from without, the citizen-soldier takes up arms to defend the continued existence of his free political community. In doing so he demonstrates virtue, a disposition consisting of a manly commitment to the common interest. Virtue also comprises an ascetic contempt for the desire for pleasure and luxury, which make citizens, and their republics, effeminate and weak, and turn them into easy prey for internal and external threats to their liberty. The morality tale of the manly citizen-soldier

who virtuously takes up arms in defence of liberty has reverberated throughout Western political and military history since the Renaissance up until the present day. That is, admittedly, a long and wide history. We can, however, bring it home and try to make it shed some light on militant citizenship, and its relation to political citizenship, in the present.

## Citizen-Soldiers

Classical republicanism was one of the founding languages of the Dutch Republic.[2] Parties in conflict appealed to it time and again, also during the Republic's final years in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. The political history of the Republic had largely been a record of continuous struggles over privileges and power between the successive Stadholders – Princes of Orange – on the one hand and the provincial estates and Estates General on the other hand. From the early 1780s onward, these conflicts changed character. Calls for the protection and restoration of old privileges, which the estates and other local bodies had traditionally voiced, became entwined with political arguments of a more radical, democratic nature.

The so-called 'Patriot movement' took up the complaints about the economic and moral decline of the nation, which had circulated in Dutch enlightened public opinion for more than fifty years, and rephrased them as political critique. Accusing the Stadholder of usurping and abusing power that belonged to 'the people' and its proper representatives, the Patriots pointed to the Stadholder and his clients as obstacles on the road to national recovery. They called for democratisation as part of a wider programme to regain economic prosperity and international power. In the course of the 1780s the Patriots transformed Dutch political culture and led a revolutionary movement that came close to overthrowing the Republic's *ancien régime* (Aerts, 1999; Israel, 1998; Jacob & Mijnhardt, 1992; Rosendaal, 2003, 2005).

In 1781, an anonymously published pamphlet was circulated widely in the Dutch republic. *To the people of the Netherlands* (*Aan het volk van Nederland* – a title eagerly appropriated by Pim Fortuyn in 1992) is often credited with having sparked the Patriot revolution. Its author, Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, tried to impress upon his readers the seriousness of the situation. He presented his text to his fellow-citizens as

a final attempt to save their free republic from the despotic ambitions of their Stadholder, who, Van der Capellen claimed, would not rest before he wore a crown. That moment, he claimed, was not far away, since the Stadholder had effectively obtained control over the military (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1781/1987, pp. 18, 84).

Serious times called for serious measures. Central to the pamphlet's argument was a call on Dutch citizens to take up arms. In addition to protect the country against outside aggression, this was needed to counter effectively the lust for power of the Prince of Orange: 'an unarmed, defenceless people can do nothing against this … Therefore, a people that wants to act wisely and prudently, should always take care to remain the strongest party in the country.' In order to do so, citizens had to obtain a gun with bayonet and a sabre, and learn to handle these. They should organize themselves in regiments and companies, elect their own officers, and exercise. 'Take up arms, all of you,' the pamphlet ended (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1781/1987, pp. 35, 36, 92).

This call did not fall on deaf ears. In the years that followed the pamphlet's publication Patriots took over and revitalized existing militias and established new free corps throughout the country. By 1786 there were several hundreds of these in the Republic's major cities, smaller towns, and villages in the countryside. Their members acquired weapons, often wore colourful uniforms, exercised after Sunday church, and made their presence felt during public ceremonies. Political as much as military in nature, militias were deployed when Patriots tried to overthrow and replace local governments. National and provincial conventions of militias resembled meetings of representative assemblies and seemed to constitute a shadow-government. Organised democratically, the militias choose their own officers, and were open to members of all religious communities—practices that were presented as blueprints for wider political reform to come (Israel, 1998, pp. 1101–1107; Klein, 1995, pp. 167–194; Van Sas, 1992, pp. 113–115; Zwitzer, 1987).

This self-transformation into citizen-soldiers revolved to no small degree around shaking off a debilitating effeminacy and acquiring a virtuous masculinity worthy of the true citizen. A Patriot weekly published a poem that spelled out how important the regaining of manliness was to becoming a citizen-soldier. 'Dolled up noblemen,' the poet wrote, paraded in front of 'women's mirrors', but the citizen-soldier caught the reflection of his 'manly' countenance in the shining blade of his sabre (Bellamy, 1783, p. 1188).

The citizen-soldier continued to leave his mark on Dutch political culture, also after the Patriot movement had collapsed and the Dutch Republic had given way to a monarchy headed by the House of Orange. Calls to arms from 1813 and 1814 were not about men voluntarily joining local militias that expressed, and fought for, sovereignty of the people. They justified the establishment of a national standing army under the monarch and of a system of local militias on the basis of conscription. Also, this time around the enemy was decidedly external: Napoleon's France. And yet, the treatises, pamphlets, and poems that called Dutch men to arms were full of references to internal and external liberty, the dangers of selfishness and weakness, and the importance of manly virtue in times of a serious threat to the existence of a state that had only just been established (Dudink, 2007).

The vicissitudes of the Dutch citizen-soldier around 1800 may help us understand the moment of resilience in current Dutch politics and the relations between political and militant citizenship that unfold in it. Obviously, they provide the current moment with a history and point to that history's structure. The adventures of the Patriot citizen-soldier help us see the present as a part of a series of moments that are akin to our moment of resilience. There are elements of continuity and repetition here, but never identity. The citizen-soldier represents a set of concepts and practices, and relations between them, that are re-articulated and re-configured over time. There is, in other words, change and difference, the history of which is yet to be written. To make a start: in 2025, the Dutch Ministry of Defence launched a recruitment video for the newly established National Resilience Training (Nationale Weerbaarheidstraining), a ten-week training programme for civilians that prepares them for serving in the reserves (MoD, 2025). In the video the character who represents the transformation of civilians into (part-time) soldiers is a young woman, suggesting the possibility of a fundamental change in the relation between 'virtue' and gender.

In a similar way, the history of the citizen-soldier also helps to conceptualize the relation between political and militant citizenship in the current moment of resilience. The way in which Patriots transformed themselves from citizens into citizen-soldiers suggests it is not helpful to think of the rise of militant citizenship in terms of a shift away from political citizenship. We are not dealing here with two separate forms of citizenship, but with different manifestations of the same virtue. Militant citizenship is latently present within political citizenship and can be made

manifest when things get serious. Just as an older set of meanings of *weerbaarheid* (resilience) linked to fighting and war have recently resurfaced, the citizen-soldier has reported for active duty again, and in doing so does not abandon political citizenship, but enacts it differently, drawing on a historically defined potential. The unity of political and militant citizenship also helps explain why it is not easy to come up with an unequivocal political evaluation of the current moment of resilience. Virtuous citizenship and the horrors of war cannot always easily be separated.

## Culturalization of Citizenship

The concept of 'culturalization of citizenship' (Duyvendak et al., 2016) has become quite influential in studies of the dynamics of citizenship in recent Dutch history. It suggests that 'culture has come to play a central role in the debate on what it means to be a citizen, either as alternative or in addition to political, judicial and social citizenship' (Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2016, p. 3). Concretely, the culturalization of citizenship has meant that 'citizens are expected to embrace liberal democracy, secularism and progressive values regarding gender and sexuality' (Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2016, p. 9). This requirement has predominantly affected immigrants. They are denied full citizenship because of their presumed failure to embrace these values and to adhere to the new 'feeling rules' that demand they feel at home in a country that prides itself on these values. The concept has proven to be highly productive and has helped identify and analyse a wide range of cases where the new cultural norms for citizenship are at work.

Perhaps a culturalization of citizenship is also at work in the rise of resilience and militant citizenship. We could argue that a new feeling rule has emerged that demands intense attachment to either Dutch culture or democracy – or both – and that this rule combines with cultural norms and expectations about the willingness to defend Dutch culture and/or democracy in a steadfast manner. In a volatile international context, all of this culminates in the incorporation of resilience into citizens' political self-understandings, producing the conditions for the rise of a militant notion of citizenship.

This is plausible, but there is also a problem. The new cultural norms and feeling rules that belong to the moment of resilience emerge *within*

political citizenship. They do not, as the notion of the culturalization of citizenship would have it, constitute a separate form of citizenship 'as alternative or in addition to' political citizenship. This suggests that cultural norms do not constitute a specific form of citizenship. Instead, they are at work in other, and perhaps all, forms of citizenship, where they define who are the legitimate subjects of the civil, political, and social rights at stake and explicate what is expected of them in relation to the political community to which they belong. This has long been recognised by historians of citizenship. It begs the question what exactly is specific about the culturalization of citizenship. Feeling at home with secular and progressive values regarding gender and sexuality is certainly a historically specific cultural requirement for citizenship – but perhaps it is not a specific form of citizenship.

A second element of the concept of the culturalization of citizenship that requires some rethinking if we are to make it useful for analysing the moment of resilience concerns the collective subject of militant citizenship. To whom are the calls to become resilient and take up arms addressed? In analyses of the culturalization of citizenship, the people who are to be subjected to the new cultural norms and feelings rules of citizenship are immigrants and their descendants. In terms of an us-versus-them distinction, the focus is on 'them' – both in the new cultural requirements for citizenship and in the analysis of these.

In current calls for resilience and militant citizenship, however, 'we' are at the centre of things. We are to become resilient, to take up arms or enable others to do so. Undoubtedly this will come with criticism and perhaps exclusion of those among us who refuse to abide by the new norms or do so insufficiently. This, however, is not where the major line distinguishing us from them is drawn. In the moment of resilience and militant citizenship, them refers primarily to an external enemy, across the border. What defines calls for resilience and militant citizenship, in addition to an exclusive focus on us, is that potentially, ultimately, nothing is expected anymore from them in relation to us. In the end the enemy is to be defeated. The analytical framework of the culturalization of citizenship is highly critical of categorical us-versus-them distinctions. It may conceptualize citizenship as engaging in a practice characterized by internal and external conflicts and struggles for power (Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2016, p. 7). But the preferred outcome of such fighting is that those engaged in it learn a form of citizenship that consists of citizens

'co-existing' together (Tonkens & Duyvendak, 2016, p. 8). It remains to be seen what such an approach can make of a notion of citizenship that assumes that defeating enemies might be a precondition for us to co-exist with them in the future.[3]

## Notes

[1] For this paragraph I rely on statistics on the number of times the word 'resilience' occurred between 1995 and 2025 in Dutch newspapers included in the database Nexis Uni. Between 1995 and 2020 this number rose steadily, but slowly, from 203 to 1977. It then increased sharply to 6494 in 2025.

[2] The following paragraphs on the Patriot movement have been slightly adapted from Dudink (2014).

[3] For a discussion of the way in which moral and political assumptions about violence, inevitably, shape the analysis of episodes of violence in Dutch political history, see Aerts (2010).

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PART 3

# Politics of Home

# The Lost Home: Occupation, Domicide and the Uncanny

*Ido de Haan*

In *The Politics of Home*, Jan Willem Duyvendak observes that feeling at home is an emotion that in all of its complexity has positive connotations. It refers to feeling "at ease", "safe", "secure", "comfortable", "at peace", to a place that is "familiar" (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 27). Beyond the individual home as a safe and private haven, home also has a symbolic and collective meaning, as the "public place where one can collectively be, express and realize oneself; where one feels publicly free and independent. Home here embodies shared histories; a material and/or symbolic place with one's own people and activities" (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 38). Viewed from this perspective, home is a precious good that needs to be protected. It might give cause for the exclusion of unwelcome guests and xenophobic policies against alien invasions. But it remains the object of competing desires, a scarce commodity and, in the end: a good place. In this contribution, these cosy connotations of home will be contested, by arguing that coming home often means confrontation with unexpected occupants. Claiming a home might involve in fact an occupation, or even destruction of another's home. Both home invasion and destruction have material and symbolic aspects, as a result of which the home can become an uncanny place, or as it is called in the German original of Sigmund Freud's study of the uncanny, "das Unheimliche" – the unhomely (Freud, 1963 [1915]).

## Coming Home

One person's homecoming can be another person's destruction. This becomes clear in one of the most famous stories of homecoming: the return of Odysseus to Ithaca. After his peregrinations, Odysseus is left on the shores of Ithaca, "asleep in his own land, woke up. / He did not recognize just where he was. … / and then cried out in sorrow: 'Where

am I now? / Whose strange country have I come to this time? Are they violent, unjust, and cruel, / or do they welcome strangers?'" (Homer, 2006, Book 13: 188–234). In fact, his home was occupied by the suitors of his wife Penelope, who "fill up our home day after day, / butchering our cattle, fat sheep, and goats, / carousing and drinking our gleaming wine / without restraint. Much of it is wasted. / There's no one like Odysseus here who'll guard / our house from ruin" (Homer, 2006, Book 17: 535–540). Yet Odysseus had also changed beyond recognition, as he was disguised as a beggar – without proper clothes or property. In the end, Odysseus, together with his son and friends, butchered the suitors, and lastly his unfaithful servant Melanthius. His nose and ears, hands and feet were cut off, and his genitals were fed to the dogs (Homer, 2006, Book 22: 475–478). After this violent restoration of order, concluded by a purge of the house by fire, Odysseus' old nurse Eurycleia brought him "clothing, a cloak and tunic, / so you don't stand like this in your own hall / with nothing but rags on your wide shoulders. / That would be the cause of some dishonour" (Homer, 2006, Book 22: 488–489). Only after this rehabilitation – literally and metaphorically – was Odysseus able to embrace his loved ones, "to sigh and weep, for in his heart he knew them all" (Homer, 2006, Book 22: 500).

Like all of *The Odyssey*, the story of Odysseus' homecoming is something like a foundational myth, revealing a pattern of alienation, occupancy and destruction, violence and rehabilitation, that is visible in other contexts as well. Take, for instance, the short story "Terugkeer (Return), by the Dutch author Marga Minco (1966). After years in hiding on a farm in the Dutch countryside, two Jewish survivors of the Holocaust – Mister Goldstijn and his wife Rosa – walk outside on the day of the German capitulation: "'Here we now walk', he said, 'just outside. We can go wherever we want'. He listened to his own voice. It was like he had not spoken aloud for years" (Minco, 1966, p. 7). As a stranger to themselves, but also in a landscape that was unfamiliar, "like we are on holiday", he watched his wife Rosa – skimpy, pale skin, grey hair, lumpy shoulders – and saw himself in a shopwindow: "An old man, in an ill-fitting suit … A man with thin hair, bags under his eyes." After their return to their hometown, it became clear that "three families were now living in their house" (Minco, 1966, p. 9). After a while, they found a new home, much smaller than the old one, and it never felt alright: "In the beginning, Rosa had still asked how to create enough room for beds when the children would return. He had no answer

to that" (Minco, 1966, p. 9). Nothing was left of the old community. The synagogue was turned into a warehouse: "The backwall, where the Tora ark had been, was now covered by scaffolding" (Minco, 1966, p. 11). One day, he passed by his old home, "feeling like he was someone else, not the man who had lived there. … I try to see how it is now … Because we have come back. Because everything goes on as normal" (Minco, 1966, p. 12). In this case, the restored order also remained uncanny. Back in their new home, mister Goldstijn heard their neighbour whistling in the garden. He recognised the song, „'Die Fahnen hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen, SA marchiert…'" (Minco, 1966, p. 17). He concluded it must have been a mistake, "people do the strangest things. … But what did it matter that he had been mistaken. It would not change anything. In the garden, the lights went finally out. The whistling continued for a while" (Minco, 1966, p. 18).

In some cases, there is nothing left to come home to. After the ceasefire in Gaza, in early October 2025, the 26-year-old Sabah Abu Ghanem returned with her family to Gaza City. One of the first things she did, as reporters of *The New York Times* wrote, was "to walk through the shattered remains of her neighbourhood to see if she could recognize anyone or anything. 'There was no one at all around,' she said" (Stack *et al.*, 2025). While most of their old neighbourhood was destroyed, "the cement skeleton of their home was still standing, so they decided to live in one of the damaged rooms. … 'At least, this piece of land is ours … This rubble I can call mine'," Abu Ghanem said to the reporters of *The New York Times*. But, for the sake of her children, she hoped to leave soon: "Gaza is not a place for life or dreams." Even less fortunate was Majdi Nasser, who in vain returned to his home in Jabaliya: "'I could not find any trace of the building where I had an apartment, not even the rubble,' he said. 'Everything is gone.'" (Stac *et al.*, 2025). Fatima Abu Steita and her husband Abdallah Abu Nada also found out that nothing was left of their home: "'Rebuilding life here feels like trying to plant a tree in stone … It's a return to nothing, yes,' she said. 'But it's also saying: "We are still here"'" (Stack *et al.*, 2025). The destruction of the homes of the people of Gaza and the genocidal violence that left more than 69,000 Palestinians dead, was accompanied by an enhanced violence against Palestinians on the occupied West Bank. In October 2025 alone, the United Nations (UN) reported 260 attacks on Palestinians leading to casualties and destruction, a sad highpoint since the UN started recording these attacks in 2006 (Burke, 2025). Next to physical violence and destruction, the administrative occupation of the West

Bank reached an all-time high in 2025, for instance via the record number of tenders awarded to build 5,667 housing units for approximately 25,000 new settlers. As the Israeli Minister of Finance Bezalel Smotrich declared: "The Palestinian state is being erased from the table not by slogans but by deeds. Every settlement, every neighbourhood, every housing unit is another nail in the coffin of this dangerous idea" (Sharon, 2025).

## The Lost Home

Each of these stories forces us to rethink our concept of home. The examples of Odysseus, Jews in 1945 and Palestinians in 2025 make first of all clear that returning home does not mean that you return to the place you left. The idea to find your old home in a pristine state is a nostalgic illusion. At an individual and material level, it neglects the erosive effect of time: not just the house and its furnishing, but also the social context of people and their institution have aged and decayed, or have been renovated or even replaced. Coming home is therefore returning to a strange land, at best something like a holiday, but in many cases a deception. But also the people coming home are not the same: not only have they made a journey that had a deep and often devastating impact on their personal identity, but their departure was in many cases involuntary and violently enforced. The longing to come home thus requires an idealisation, a projection of an imaginary home, stripped of the characteristics that were reasons to leave it behind in the first place. This happens first of all at an individual level, as Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer demonstrate in *Ghosts of Home*. The book, partly memoir, partly academic study, gives an account of Hirsch's return to Czernowitz, from where many of Hirsch's Jewish relatives were deported. At the time it was a Rumanian city, but now it is the south-west Ukrainian city of Chernivtsi. Her family remembered it as a multicultural utopia, yet it was also the cradle of their demise. Revisiting the place was like "a spectral return emanating both seductive recollections of a lost home and frightening reminders of persecution and displacement" (Hirsch & Spitzer, 2010). But the ambivalent idealisation of a lost home is also a collective phenomenon, for instance in nativist accounts of a national home that needs to be restored. What is depicted in nativist accounts as a lost Eden, a nation that is "free from foreign blemishes" (as it was phrased in the national anthem sung in the Netherlands until

1932), actually refers to a sanitised past, from which injustice, exploitation, expulsion and violence are erased (Poortier, 2014, pp. 188–232; Kešic *et al.*, 2022). A lost home is lost forever.

The home one aspires to return to becomes an even more complicated notion when its destruction is part of an intended policy. To analyse this phenomenon, the social geographers J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith have suggested the concept of domicide: "the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims" (Porteous & Smith, 2001, p. 12). In their view, domicide is a global phenomenon and it concerns wide-ranging practices, some related to destruction of houses by the hand of ruthless urban planners and project developers, other related to colonial practices, in which the area that is targeted for exploitation is viewed as a clean slate – or if it is inhabited by others, as is usually the case, as a region that needs to be ethnically cleansed. Domicide is thus an integral part of genocidal practices (Porteous & Smith, 2001, pp. 64–105). It happened in the Holocaust, when complete neighbourhoods like the Warsaw ghetto were razed, and the homes of the deported were looted and occupied (Fogg, 2017; Backouche *et al.*, 2025). It was also part of the genocidal attempt to destroy the Bosnian nation in the post-Yugoslav war of the 1990s (O Tuathail & Dahlman, 2006; Grujić, 2025). And it is an ongoing aspect of Israeli policies against the Palestinian population, recently in Gaza, but already much longer and on a more systematic scale on the West Bank. When the American president Donald Trump suggested that Gaza should be seen as an area that could be redeveloped into a beach resort, it was met with horror, but ultimately with disbelief (Holmes, 2025; Hall, 2025). But, in the response, it was overlooked that the link between ethnic cleansing and real estate development, not just for the fancy few but also for social housing, is already for a long time on the table (Margalit, 2014; Stagni, 2025). As the radical right-wing Israeli politician Bezalel Smotrich indicated in 2017 in his plan *One Hope*, "the development of Israeli settlement in Judea and Samaria in a sovereign and established manner will also contribute to solving the housing shortage in the State of Israel" (Smotrich, 2017).

As already acknowledged by Raphael Lemkin, who coined the notion of genocide, vandalism is one of its main components, not just because of the material destruction of the conditions of life, but also because material artefacts are carriers of the identity of social and cultural groups. Genocide does not need to entail complete biological destruction of a

group. Ravaging the material infrastructure that supports its existence generally suffices to destroy it (Lemkin, 1944, p. 79). Porteous and Smith also emphasise how domicide is often linked to the "loss of historical connection; and partial erasure of the sources of collective memory, dreams, nostalgia, and ideals" (Porteous & Smith 2001, p. 63). The destruction of homes as an erasure of memory is deadly reversal of the classical art of memory, in which the past is remembered by creating the spatial structure of a memory palace with many rooms, each containing memorialised aspects of the past (Yates, 1999; Assmann, 1999). The destruction of homes erases not just the stone, but also the social structure that supports the memory of the place, the people and their historical experience.

## Occupied and Uncanny: The Unhomely Home

Yet in many cases of domicide, the house remains intact, but the occupants are replaced. Again, this has an individual and collective dimension, as occupation of a country often is accompanied by confiscation of homes and expulsion of its occupants. Moreover, consecutive material and spatial occupancy also is a mental occupation, or as Sigmund Freud argued, it involves a *Besetzung*. According to Freud, the concept of *Besetzung* ("cathexis" in the English translation) has a psychodynamic, as well as a topographical and economic connotation, in the sense that emotional energy is invested in an idea, object or place. The repression – or as Freud calls it: expulsion – of that desire does not mean that the object simply becomes vacant; instead, it becomes an object of an anti-cathexis – a *Gegenbesetzung*. And it is even "quite possible that the cathexis withdrawn from the idea is the very one used for anti-cathexis" (Freud, 1963 [1915], p. 130). One of the most excruciating examples of this mechanism is visible in the conflict between the Jewish and Palestine claims to a homeland. The Zionist idea that the Jews needed a homeland was a response to the repression of Jewish life in the European diaspora, yet in an ideological anti-cathexis forged on the basis of the notion of the ethnically pure national state that was a main cause for the persecution of the Jews. Many of the Jews who survived the Nazi occupation of Europe subsequently directed their energy to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, thus occupying the place, destroying the homes, villages and olive orchards of Palestinians. And again, this occupation, justified by the desire to escape

from Nazi persecution, was rejected by Palestinians, contesting not just the land, but countering the Jewish claim to victimhood by comparing the Jewish physical and mental occupation of Eretz Israel to the Nazi persecution of the Jews (Yiftachel, 2006). This conflict dynamic resulting from consecutive and interactive material and mental occupations, of traumatic *Besetzung* after *Gegenbesetzung*, only received its latest instalment after 7 October 2023, continuing an endless competition over victimhood and homeland (Chaumont, 1997; Sayigh, 2013; Bashir & Goldberg, 2019); Klein, 2024; Kendall-Tackett, 2025).

Needless to say: the Israeli/Palestine conflict is very violent. In this respect, it is no different from earlier episodes of conflicting claims to an individual and national home. Finding the place one calls home to be occupied led not only Odysseus to butchering the unwelcome guests. Even if in the end he was fully rehabilitated and able to embrace his loved ones, not even the purge by fire could make us forget that he restored order in the most violent way. The traces of violence also remain visible in other cases. As Holocaust scholars Natalia Aleksiun and Karolina Szymaniak (2023) have argued for Jews in Poland, the violence to their homes made what once was familiar and cosy into an eerie and haunted place. As once again Sigmund Freud helps us to understand what is at stake: *das Unheimliche* "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression … something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light". As a result, the home one returns to is not only no longer the same place, but it might never feel like home again. For some there is no longer any place to feel at home. Seen in a positive light, this might be understood as an embrace of a diasporic existence and an active embrace of cosmopolitan values (Boyarin & Boyarin, 2002; Lévy and Weingrod 2005). Yet, in many other cases, it means that the home is never again a safe place, but a dwelling haunted by the ghosts of the pasts, where the voices of former occupants and the whistling of old tunes remain audible.

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# Hospitality, Xenophobia and the Politics of Home: Insights from Greece

*Apostolos Andrikopoulos*

Over the past three decades, significant demographic and economic shifts in Greece have profoundly reshaped living conditions and the composition of the population. In the early 1990s, following the end of the Cold War, Greece – traditionally a country of emigration – became, for the first time, a country of immigration, receiving large numbers of migrants from former socialist states. In the years that followed, until the early 2000s, the Greek economy appeared to expand and perform strongly. However, the 2009 financial crisis struck with devastating consequences for living standards. Unemployment soared to 30 per cent overall and nearly 60 per cent among young people. Around 2015, as many Greeks once again migrated abroad in search of better prospects, Greece simultaneously became one of the main gateways for migrants entering Europe, most hoping to reach Germany and other Western European countries to seek asylum.

During these years, Greek responses to incoming migrants made international headlines: some drawing attention to rising xenophobia, others praising the hospitality of ordinary people towards those seeking a better future. On the one hand, anti-migrant, xenophobic, and overtly racist discourses gained political traction. Mainstream parties shifted their agendas towards stricter migration policies, while populist and ultranationalist movements surged. The neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn entered Parliament in 2012, marking its debut in national politics, and went on to become the third-largest party in the 2015 elections. Its vigilantes organised attacks on migrants, destroyed their property, and cultivated a pervasive climate of fear. On the other hand, social movements expressing solidarity with migrants flourished, and the left-wing party SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), advocating a more humanitarian approach to migration, rose to power. Across the country, many Greeks – despite the hardships of the economic crisis – offered hospitality to migrants in transit. In 2016, an Avaaz petition with more than 600,000 signatures supported the nomination of Greek

islanders for the Nobel Peace Prize, noting that they "opened their homes, shared their food, cared for the sick, and dove into treacherous waters to save those fleeing war and terror[1]. Similar nomination letters by academics, public figures, and politicians celebrated the "empathy and self-sacrifice" of volunteers and residents on the frontlines of the refugee crisis (Boffey, 2016).

For many external observers, the oscillation between xenophobia and hospitality – and at times their coexistence within Greek politics and everyday practices – appeared paradoxical. Some sought to explain it as a cultural peculiarity of the Greek context. While understanding these dynamics indeed requires attention to their cultural and historical specificities, the key to interpreting the shift from hospitality to xenophobia (or vice versa) lies in recognising that the two are not polar opposites but share important continuities.

As anthropologist Evthymios Papataxiarchis (2014, pp. 49–50) argues, *hospitality and xenophobia are two sides of the same coin*. Both constitute hierarchical relationships – between hosts and guests, or between xenophobes and foreigners – in which belonging, or the denial of it, determines one's position in the hierarchy (Andrikopoulos, 2017). Hospitality and xenophobia are premised on the notion of home, which anchors the boundary between insiders and outsiders and underpins the perception of the national territory as the collective home of the national community. While xenophobia is more readily understood as grounded in nativist claims, popular discourses of hospitality – as a moral obligation or a national virtue – often obscure the hierarchical character of the host–guest relationship and the similarly nativist claims over belonging to the national home. Nativism legitimises the boundary between insiders and outsiders and renders it self-evident. Xenophobia and hospitality do not contest this boundary; they depend on it and reproduce it.

The major difference between hospitality and xenophobia in relation to migration lies in their opposite orientations: xenophobia is about closure and social exclusion, whereas hospitality entails openness and social incorporation (Papataxiarchis, 2014). Yet the inclusion produced by hospitality is always hierarchical. It remains structured by asymmetry: the guest's social and cultural practices are constantly monitored, evaluated, and disciplined by those who claim the status of hosts. Hospitality, in this sense, is not the antithesis of xenophobia but its complementary form – an inclusive gesture that sustains the very hierarchies it appears to transcend. Without dismissing the moral framings of hospitality and

their cultural significance, I find it analytically productive to approach hospitality primarily as a power relation between hosts and guests and as a mechanism for regulating social behaviour and cultural production (Andrikopoulos, 2017).

Attending to the similarities between hospitality and xenophobia – and their shared grounding in nativist claims – helps us understand how these two modes of relating to the Other can coexist and intersect. Yet it remains unclear when and how one gains prominence over the other, and whether such interchanges and overlaps are connected to shifting politics of home and the dynamics of nativism. Jan Willem Duyvendak's work on the rise of nativism is particularly helpful in this regard. For Duyvendak, demographic changes – such as increased migration – and deteriorating economic conditions provide an important context for the resurgence of nativist sentiments. However, he cautions against treating these measurable conditions as direct causes. Instead, he advocates an interpretive approach that foregrounds how such developments are experienced and perceived (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022; Duyvendak, 2025).

This chapter builds on and extends Duyvendak's critique of objectivist explanations of nativism. Objective developments such as rising migration flows or economic downturns not only fail to adequately explain the rise of nativism but also cannot account for why nativism manifests at times as hospitality and at others as xenophobia. To develop this critique, I take Greece as a case study. Drawing on ethnographic material from fieldwork conducted in pre-crisis Greece and in combination with a critical review of socio-political developments in recent decades, I argue that native-born Greeks' attitudes towards migrants are shaped, in part, by how they perceive themselves and their country in relation to Europe and the "developed West". As these self-perceptions have been questioned and destabilised in recent years, they have also influenced the ways Greeks relate to migrants. My analysis underscores the significance of political framings in shaping subjective interpretations and everyday practices. However, this is not a simple top-down process as local practices often diverge from official discourses and articulate alternative understandings of the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

My ethnographic material originates from ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in the area around Antheon Street (pseudonym) in Thessaloniki, the second largest Greek city. I lived in that area from 2001 to 2006, but systematic ethnographic fieldwork was conducted for eleven months

during 2004 and 2005. Apart from my participation as a resident in the social life of the neighbourhood, I interviewed native-born and migrant residents. Migrants in Antheon originated from Albania, countries of the former Soviet Union (most of them of Greek ethnic origin) and West Africa (see also Andrikopoulos, 2013, 2018).

## Philoxenia, Xenophobia, Xenomania

Before the 1990s, collective representations of Greekness were constructed in juxtaposition with both Western Europe and Turkey. The contrast with these national "others" was primarily rhetorical, with limited direct encounters – apart from tourism – that brought Greeks into physical interaction with foreigners. Yet the two "others" occupied very different positions in Greek imaginaries: Western Europeans were perceived as hierarchically superior and therefore worthy of imitation, while Turks were positioned as cultural inferiors and political rivals.

The Greek word *xenomania* – literally "mania for the foreign" – captures this ambivalent admiration for the *xeno* (the foreign). In practice, *xenomania* referred not to all forms of foreignness but specifically to the West and its association with modernity. To be "modern" meant to emulate Western ways of living, consuming, and thinking. This long-standing aspiration structured Greece's sense of belonging to Europe as a project of imitation – a desire to close the perceived gap between a "backward" periphery and a "civilized" West (Bakalaki, 2005).

During this period, direct contact with foreigners (*xenoi*) in Greece occurred mainly through encounters with Western tourists. These visitors were generally received with openness and generosity, and Greek national discourses incorporated the ideal of hospitality (*philoxenia* – literally "love for the stranger") into self-representations of national character. The symbolic status of the guest, and of the group the guest was seen to represent, defined the terms, motivations, and expectations underpinning relations of hospitality.

As Herzfeld (1987) describes, Western tourists in Greece were offered generous hospitality and encouraged to act "as in your own house" (*san sto spiti sou*). Recognition and gratitude in return for such hospitality were highly valued, especially when they came from Western tourists perceived as representatives of powerful and wealthy nations. Yet, as Herzfeld notes,

hospitality "signifies the moral and conceptual subordination of the guest to the host. In this way, it 'englobes' the visitor, substituting moral advantage for political subordination" (1987, p. 77). Within the broader global hierarchy – where Greece remained under the shadow of the West – the act of hospitality towards European and North American tourists subtly contested existing power relations, positioning these visitors as inferior to their Greek hosts and symbolically reversing, even temporarily, Greece's political and economic dependency on the West.

The demographic transformations of the 1990s marked an important transition in practices of hospitality and imitation – and in how these structured Greek self-perceptions in relation to others. The arrival of migrants from Eastern Europe brought Greeks into direct, daily contact with foreigners who were not citizens of nations perceived as wealthy, modern, or morally superior. These foreigners, understood as "guests" in the home of the Greek nation, were expected to adapt to the social and cultural life of native-born Greeks. This signalled a reversal of imitation: whereas in the past Greeks had imitated Western Europeans, they now became, through *philoxenia* (hospitality), the ones to be imitated. The arrival of immigrants thus positioned Greeks as hosts and moral exemplars, reversing the direction of emulation. Native-born residents of Antheon expected immigrants not only to respect what was seen as Greek life but also to adopt it. Learning Greek was essential, and conformity to local norms was closely monitored.

One of my neighbours, a woman from Georgia, recounted:

> When my sister came from Georgia, she always spoke to me in Russian. I told her, "Please don't talk to me in Russian! When we're outside, only Greek." Once on the bus, I was speaking Russian on the phone, and a woman asked me angrily, "What language is that?" I felt so ashamed. Now I never answer calls on the bus – or if I do, only in Greek.

Similarly to the woman on the bus, many native-born Greeks felt entitled, as members of the host nation, to correct and discipline migrants. As guests in the national "home", immigrants were expected to show gratitude and make visible efforts to assimilate. The moral economy of *philoxenia* thus imposed cultural conformity as a condition for hierarchical inclusion.

These expectations point to a broader process that has been described as the culturalisation of citizenship (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016). Migrants'

access to belonging was assessed not primarily through legal status but through everyday conduct: speaking Greek, adhering to dominant moral norms, and demonstrating respect for the social order of the host society. Hospitality thus functioned as a culturally conditional form of inclusion, in which migrants were incorporated as quasi-citizens only insofar as they conformed to prevailing understandings of proper behaviour.

A particularly common practice during this period was the formation of spiritual kinship ties between recently arrived migrants and settled Greeks. As observed elsewhere (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak, 2020), such new forms of kinship often became vital resources for migrants seeking to settle and incorporate themselves – though always in hierarchical terms – into their new social surroundings. Most often, Greeks became godparents (*nonnos*, m.; *nonna*, f.) to migrants' children baptised into the Orthodox Church, and sometimes to adult migrants who converted to Christianity. In the Orthodox church of Antheon, between 2000 and 2005, 301 baptisms involved migrants or their children; in 260 cases (86 per cent), the godparent was Greek (Andrikopoulos, 2017, pp. 285–286). Godparents were expected to care for the baptized person and provide moral guidance and mentorship – a role that conferred respect and gratitude upon them from the newly baptised and their families.

"I was very lucky because I met Greeks who helped me a lot, like my godmother and my godfather who baptized me when I was little and helped my family as well," said Claydee, a well-known musician and child of Albanian migrants in Greece, capturing the feelings of respect and appreciation migrants often expressed for their godparents. He continued: "Greeks are a very hospitable people. For good people and those who want to do things with their lives, Greeks are certainly there to help them. This exists."[2]

Yet the relationships between migrants and Greeks were not always harmonious or expressed through idioms of kinship. In Antheon, many Greek residents complained that the arrival of migrants had damaged neighbourhood life. They resented that they no longer felt safe letting their children play outside and that "foreigners" were poor, disturbing, and potentially dangerous. One Greek woman, whose seventeen-year-old son had been injured in a fight with a migrant, told me:

> Greece opened its doors to them, and they must appreciate this. They must understand that they are guests here. (But) they came here and want to impose

> their own rules, their moral rules. But this can't happen. We have squeezed our legs so they can stretch their dirty feet!

Perceiving the neighbourhood as their "home" – as part of the territory of the Greek nation – legitimised native-born residents' sense of entitlement to act as hosts and to relate to migrants as guests within their own house. (Some) migrants' non-compliance with expected forms of behaviour was interpreted by native-born residents as a breach of hospitality and, even worse, as diminishing their own feeling of being "at home" in the nation, as Duyvendak (2011) has observed in the Netherlands. In the neighbourhood I studied, this sense of insecurity associated with migrants' presence was intertwined with a feeling of superiority: Greeks saw immigrants as both threatening and needy, thereby reinforcing their own perception of relative privilege.

Residents often claimed that their neighbourhood had "become a ghetto". "We became a ghetto with all those foreigners! You're afraid to walk outside," people told me. One middle-aged man observed indignantly, "We've become like the ghettos in America – the ones you see in the movies." Interestingly, while "ghetto" functioned as a term of decline, its reference to American urban spaces symbolically situated their neighbourhood within the "modern" developed world. The name of a local bar, Ghetto Lux, with a poster reading *"Road to Detroit"*, captured this ambivalence perfectly: fear of decline coexisted with an aspirational identification with Western modernity.

In reality, Antheon was far from a ghetto. Immigrants represented less than 20 per cent of its 2,400 residents – who were mostly white and employed (Andrikopoulos, 2017, p. 285). Yet the stereotypes of the "immigrant as thief" and the "neighbourhood as ghetto" enabled Greeks to see themselves as modern Europeans besieged by non-modern outsiders. As Bakalaki (2003, p. 219) observes, the belief that foreigners migrate to Greece "to seek a future" affirms that "the distance between Greece and the West has been shortened". In other words, the presence of immigrants allowed Greeks to imagine themselves as part of the modern, developed world.

This sense of confidence, shaped by everyday interactions with migrants, was further reinforced by broader developments during that period. The Greek economy appeared to be performing well as a member of the Eurozone, and Greece seemed to have finally reached

parity with other European economies. Prime Minister Costas Simitis (1996–2004) celebrated the country's modernisation (*eksynchronismos*), declaring that Greece was no longer "Europe's poor relative". At about the same time, a series of national achievements – the successful organisation of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, the Greek football team's victory in the 2004 European Championship, and Greece's triumph in the 2005 Eurovision Song Contest – drew international attention and fuelled a renewed sense of national pride.

## Hospitality and Xenophobia in Years of Crisis

The illusion of belonging to the developed West collapsed only a few years later with the onset of the sovereign debt crisis (2008–2009). Greece's dependence on loans from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) made its subordinate position within Europe starkly visible. As the country's status in the European hierarchy deteriorated, so too did the moral hierarchies that had structured everyday interactions with migrants.

These shifting self-perceptions profoundly affected how Greeks related to immigrants. The same people who once saw themselves as entitled hosts and models for imitation began to feel humiliated, excluded, and dependent. The reversal of Greece's position – from aspiring member of the developed West to indebted periphery – had a clear impact on the symbolic hierarchies that informed daily interactions between Greeks and migrants. The wounded national pride that followed gave rise to two opposing but interconnected responses: hostile xenophobia and generous hospitality. In both cases, the treatment of migrants became a means through which Greeks renegotiated their relationship with Europe and, ultimately, with themselves.

In the first years of the crisis, the coalition government led by the conservative New Democracy party adopted exclusionary rhetoric towards migrants and employed a militaristic vocabulary. Antonis Samaras, then party leader and later Prime Minister, vowed that his government, if elected, would "retake our cities from the immigrant ghettos". Shortly after forming a coalition government, Samaras oversaw a series of large-scale police operations aimed at arresting and deporting undocumented migrants. Ironically, these operations were named "Xenios Zeus" – after

the ancient Greek god of hospitality – a choice that starkly reveals the possible overlap of hospitality with xenophobia.

In a televised interview, Nikos Dendias, then Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, explained why the operations were named after the god of hospitality – an explanation that again illustrates the porous boundaries between hospitality and xenophobia:

> The country, the society, has the right to offer hospitality to those it wants to host. That's the meaning of the name. We are not obliged to offer hospitality to anyone who wants to cross the borders illegally.[3]

While such rhetoric characterised mainstream political discourse, smaller nationalist, populist, and neo-fascist parties – until then politically marginal – also gained prominence, placing anti-migrant themes at the centre of their agendas. These discourses flourished in a climate of widespread disillusionment with mainstream parties. Although anti-migrant narratives could not explain Greece's economic collapse, they targeted migrant workers as competitors of economically struggling Greeks. In essence, the rhetoric of nationalist and populist parties did not fundamentally challenge the government's stance but rather amplified it through more extreme, explicitly racist, and xenophobic language.

Both government and opposition discourses drew on pre-existing nativist ideas, seeking to restore the damaged pride of Greeks who had come to recognise their country's subordinate position in the global hierarchy. Xenophobic projections of migrants as truly inferior offered reassurance that, despite the collapse of the national economy and status, Greeks themselves were not at the bottom of the global order. The statement by Minister Dendias that Greece was unfortunate to host "immigrants of tragic quality" epitomises this new wave of anti-migrant rhetoric – an attempt to reassert moral superiority amid economic dependency and national humiliation.

Yet while xenophobic discourses appealed to many Greeks and fuelled hostility towards migrants, narratives of Greek hospitality gained prominence at the same time. When the left-wing SYRIZA party came to power in 2015, it promoted a discourse centred on solidarity and humanitarianism rather than exclusion. SYRIZA supported the nomination of Greek islanders for the Nobel Peace Prize and regularly celebrated acts of kindness and support towards refugees as expressions of national virtue. Whereas

for New Democracy and smaller nationalist parties xenophobic rhetoric served as a means for Greeks to cope with the collapse of their illusion of equal membership in Europe, for SYRIZA appeals to hospitality and generosity functioned as a moral counterbalance to economic humiliation. The self-image of Greece as a hospitable nation allowed citizens to reassert a form of moral superiority vis-à-vis Western Europeans: even if Greece was economically weakened, the moral dignity of its people set it apart.

These dynamics were vividly illustrated in an incident widely reported in the Greek media. A German journalist in Idomeni interviewed an elderly Greek couple who regularly opened their home to refugees for fresh drinking water and a shower. As the interview was being recorded, a young woman wearing a headscarf approached, sought the camera's attention, and kissed the couple's hands. This act of gratitude moved everyone present to tears. It was directed not only towards the couple but also – through the deliberate gaze into the camera – towards a European audience. In the following days, the couple appeared in multiple Greek media outlets, celebrated not only for their compassion towards migrants but also for demonstrating to the world, and notably to a German journalist, the enduring value of Greek hospitality.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have argued that hospitality and xenophobia share a common grounding in nativism, and that political framings and global hierarchies have played a decisive role in shaping both attitudes and the oscillation between them. Yet focusing solely on such top-down processes risks obscuring the complexity of how these dynamics are lived, contested, and reinterpreted in everyday life. Ethnographic material from Antheon presented elsewhere (Andrikopoulos, 2017; see also Pratsinakis, 2014) suggests that local practices do not simply mirror national discourses but interact with them in intricate and sometimes unexpected ways. Tracing these entanglements – how the local, the national, and the global mutually constitute one another – requires a more detailed discussion that lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

The Greek case exemplifies how the politics of home and belonging – central to Duyvendak's (2011, 2022) analyses of nativism – are experienced and negotiated amid shifting global hierarchies. Rather than viewing

nativism as a fixed ideology or a direct response to demographic or economic change, it is more productive, following Duyvendak, to understand it as a dynamic process shaped by how people experience proximity, loss, and displacement in relation to imagined homes. In Greece, the collapse of the illusion of belonging to the "developed West" profoundly reconfigured the ways the national home was imagined and inhabited. When Greece appeared to have reached parity with Western Europe, Greeks saw themselves as confident hosts – moral exemplars offering hospitality to migrants who were expected to emulate them. When this self-perception was shaken by economic dependency and political subordination, the same moral hierarchies that had sustained hospitality gave way to xenophobia and exclusion.

In both moments, however, the boundaries of the national home and the moral authority of the host remained intact. This duality reveals that hospitality and xenophobia are not opposites but relational expressions of the same nativist logic: both reaffirm a sense of ownership over the home and the right to determine who may enter and under what conditions. Attending to how these sentiments are lived and articulated – in the streets of Antheon as much as in public discourses – reveals that the politics of belonging are not only about borders and formal citizenship, but also about the cultural and moral practices through which membership in the national community is enacted and evaluated in everyday life.

## Notes

[1] https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/nobel_to_greek_islanders_31/

[2] Claydee, interview by George Satsidis, *Movies and Stars*, MTV Greece, 26 September 2012.

[3] Nikos Dendias, interview by Antonis Sroiter, Autopsia, Aplha, 4 October 2012.

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# Roots Are Made Not Given: On Home As a Verb

*Bernike Pasveer*

In the narratives of critical home-thinkers like Duyvendak lingers a double default: of home as stable and place bound, and as an individual affect/emotion of haven- or heavenly bliss. "Feeling at home … is about contexts that generate not only a feeling of familiarity … but [that] also afford a the concurrence of the person and their environment" (Duyvendak, 2017, p. 21, translation BP). So, home/belonging is the blissful and place-related situation in which the individual and their environment feel they fold together. This imaginary of home as a stable h(e)avenly state of affective bliss seems somehow to resemble that of nativists. Given the importance and urgency to forcefully contest the nativist idea that some would have more natural rights to own up to that affect than others and claim places (nations, neighbourhoods) as "their own", it might be worthwhile to question this shared referent of home. And so part of the conversation concerns whether or not, and when and how some can claim they "naturally" or "historically" belong to a place/a place belongs to them, and use that claim to then deny home and belonging to others. Territoriality and sedentarity then seem to be the implicit cornerstones of the arguments on home of both nativists and their contestants.

I would like to approach home (and belonging) as always already about movement, and thus to study home from the default of mobility and process. Not to stipulate that home-as-a-place does not matter, but that it is a (potential and temporary) outcome, an effect of work almost any of us (and our more-than-human companions) undertakes at some or more points in life, more and less voluntarily.[1] These mobilities themselves are very unevenly distributed, and so are the possibilities to effectuate home and root in new places (see https://nias.knaw.nl/conference/); Duyvendak's work has consistently engaged with these unequal possibilities to make home. Still, this is what people (and other species) engage with incessantly, and I would suggest that home-*making* is as much part of home as are the temporary territorial or sedentary results it may

generate. Un-blackboxing home like this may generate a sense of common ground – roots are made, not given.

With Douglas I like to think of home as "bringing some kind of space under control" (Douglas, 1991, p. 289) – control that is always temporary and partial, and that can and will have to be negotiated all over again when new members to an assemblage report themselves. Home, then, becomes a verb. Making home is about putting relationships, infrastructures, anticipations, materialities, politics to work so as to maybe achieve some temporal stability and control. Obviously, this effect/affect of home as a more or less stable folding of life and place matters tremendously – hence our common quest to achieve and then cherish it. But it matters just as much to unpack the work it takes to (try to) achieve home.

I want to look at that work by way of two stories from a hospice in which I did fieldwork in the late 2010s (Pasveer, 2018, 2020). Hospices are obviously not people's "home", but, like many other kinds of care-institutions, they present themselves as homely and they invite their residents to make themselves at home. In that they obviously differ from situations where "newcomers" are not invited and not welcome(d), but they do offer a possibility to unpack how home is done and to shed light on the contestations that are made to matter on a daily (but eternal) basis and on a small (but large) scale.

The hospice of my fieldwork is one of many small-scale institutions that offer a "home away from home" to terminally ill people who cannot or do not wish to die at home or in hospital. Hospices promise to contribute to facilitate a "good end of life", and my fieldwork at the hospice was to enquire what infrastructures this. And given the assumption/assertion that "feeling at home" is presented as a key ingredient to that, I was also curious to see how this worked within the walls and confines of such institutions. How does home work in mixed home/care institutions (see Pasveer *et al.*, 2020)?

Hospice stays are formally maximised at three months, but most people die within the first weeks after their arrival. Most hospices are staffed by a combination of professional nurses and volunteers who take shifts in caring for the residents. In Dutch hospices, residents usually have a private room with a high-low (adjustable) bed and a bathroom. In "my" hospice a big TV screen hangs on the wall opposite the bed, and all kinds of action-at-a-distance can be undertaken from the bed by way of a smart screen. Thus, residents can operate the TV set and the curtains or call staff

to their room. Interestingly, however, they can't open or close the door to their rooms. Other pieces of furniture and decoration can be provided or can be brought in from residents' homes. Like most hospices, this one too has a large and cosily decorated living room, a well-equipped kitchen (only used for heating food though), and two small outdoor patios, where residents usually go to smoke. In such care-home places, care-ability and homeliness don't always easily fit. While my hospice offers what it considers to be homely public spaces, these are not to be filled with personal items (of staff or residents), that is, they are not to be privatised, but they still need to invite for specific "homely" uses: sitting at tables, eating or watching TV together, hanging out, or playing games. Yet it is a homeliness that wants to be "neutral" – cosy but not marked by personal tastes and items, and always easy to restore back to basics after an intervention, such as a meal, a party, visitors being around, or a death occurring. All spaces must thus always afford both proper care *and* a semblance of home. So, how do residents take up the invitation to *make* themselves a(t) home?

## Front Doors and More

Enter Inne, a former taxi driver – a large, loud, and lively man with a terminal brain tumour. While often residents move in from other care-institutions, Inne moved into the hospice from his house. Most residents just bring some family pictures, but not so Inne. He brought an electric guitar, which he liked to play just a touch loud and a few quite big remote-controlled trucks and lorries he would drive in the corridors, and he liked to leave unfinished games of chess on the living-room table – to finish at some other time, just as, perhaps, one would do when at home. And then, after some time, a big wooden sign that says *Home* appeared on the door of his private room to be seen by everyone who lived or worked in the hospice.

Without exception, staff and volunteers all read the wooden sign as a statement, either positively – "Wonderful that he feels so at home here" – or as a provocation – "He's constantly trying to see how far he can go". While doors to private rooms are a constant topic of discussion among staff and volunteers (whether and if so when to knock, whether to enter all rooms at the start of a new shift, etc.) but these discussions indicate that while residents' rooms are considered private, the front doors are not and policies are up to staff to design. It is with this ordering that Inne's HOME

interfered: from a door singularly and asymmetrically porous to care in his private room, it became a door through which his home extended beyond the confines of his room.

These rules had the place under control: people would not clutter the living room with private stuff (for more on clutter, care, and home, see Lovatt, 2018; Lutz, 2016); the corridors would be quiet and always accessible for staff; and behaviour, whether in public or private spaces, would always be respectfully not loud. But of all Inne's provocations, his front door is an enigma to staff. Where does "home" stop, or in what ways is "home" a collective/communal endeavour? How to mark or articulate boundaries? Who can operate these? Where does Home begin/end?

And so Inne is actively taking up the hospice's invitation to make himself at home. And although at first sight he seemed to be the only resident to engage in this, when I looked more closely at other inhabitants, it occurred to me that everyone would use the invitation to make themselves "at home" as an invitation to tinker with what that could entail: how they could "bring the space under control" while at the same time amending that very space?

Eventually, Inne had to move to a rather big nursing home where possibilities to "make home" were practically non-existent. He died soon after. And so the sign and all his other stuff and his loud presence disappeared from the hospice. But whether or not he ever "felt" at home in the hospice, his work to "make home" was remarkable in how it articulated what was at stake when "doing home", as well as in how it recalibrated, for some time to come, how staff would understand and afford residents' home-making whereabouts in the hospice.

### A Sewing Machine and More

Agnes was another resident of the hospice during my fieldwork. She had breast cancer and, like Inne, she was still up and about quite a bit. During her stay, she was forever moving herself and all kinds of objects and habits back and forth between the house where she (had) lived with her husband and the hospice. I read this moving of stuff as efforts to investigate or perhaps even to make proper fits. She would bring her own bedlinen and go back home to eat and sometimes even sleep the night, clutter spilling over from her house into her hospice room and back, including her sewing machine. It is as if she was looking to *continue* home in hospice – just

like the hospice invited her to. But context matters, and Agnes' work with objects rearticulated and recalibrated what "home" could be(come), both to herself as in the hospice.

Agnes did home-in-hospice largely by way of the objects she moved over and around and back and forth. Unlike Inne, her tinkering with home does not enter the hospice's public living room; her own room is the site of experimentation. While most residents only bring some family photographs to decorate their rooms (with the other exception of Will who brought and put up a large collection of paintings), Agnes moves around her whole life, or so it seems. She liked to draw, to make and repair clothes, to collect recipes. Her hospice room was brimming with things, with life, with new possibilities ("At home I die," she told me during a short walk over the market, "it's all so predictable there. Here in the hospice, I sometimes feel I come to life").

While some of the objects Agnes brought in – like her own bedlinen – seem to fit home and hospice unquestionably, the clutter (notes, clippings, sewing materials) in Agnes' room generated unease with staff. "We can't clean properly with all that stuff lying around," said a nurse. "It's dangerous, too, like she could trip over things." That Agnes' cluttering brought about worries over uncleanliness made some staff question how much home can enter in a care-place without de-prioritising its care-identity. Staff's assigning singular qualities to objects also manifests around Agnes' act of bringing her sewing machine to the hospice. "I'm shrinking you know," she explained to me, "and I don't want to buy new clothes, so it makes sense to adapt the clothes that I have, so I can still wear them later on." This futuring triggered the staff. "Agnes brought her sewing machine in," one of the nurses said over coffee. "What on earth is that about??" When I asked why we should think something of it, she says: "I think that it shows that she denies where she is, why she's here," says the nurse. Her response articulates two assumptions. First: "here" is a place where lives end, not continue, where futures are more or less non-existent. And second: some objects just don't fit in this hybrid space, as they're exclusively for living. For Agnes the technology with which she could do familiar and ordinary things at home might become a care technology in hospice, one that could assist her in "finding out" where she is and to still have a future. For staff, the objects with which Agnes "did home" indicated that she misunderstood where she actually resided – not a home, in the end, but a care-place.

## Conclusion

And so I like to think of homemaking as experimenting with heterogeneous elements (that is, other people, objects, infrastructures, senses, emotions) to construe, whether and how they can be made to fit. When such fits are made, something of the blissful folding of individual and environment may emerge – home as an effect and an affect. But studying home is just as much about articulating the hard and heterogeneous work it takes to try to *make home*, to bring some space under control, a state in which one blissfully folds with one's environment. The home that sometimes results is then always potentially temporary, and situated, and it can always also be undone or challenged by others in need of a home, too.

This is where some hope may lie. If we continue to work from the imaginary of home as a place of "full and unquestioned belonging" over which nativists and others then fight, we fail to see the *work* to home (as a verb). If we approach home as a verb – as something one, anyone, at any time, has and may have to engage in to eventually and temporarily find some peace and comfort – we may be able to move away from the (nativist) default of home as sedentary and territorial. Home may be a place, but it is, always already, a place made. The contestedness and never-endedness of that work of making home itself is what qualifies home.

## Notes

[1] Rotterdam recently opened Fenix, an art museum on migration, in which this mobility presents itself as humanity's normal. www.fenix.nl

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# Home as a Sociological Matter: Promises and Pitfalls of a Concept for Majority–Minority Relations, and Beyond

*Paolo Boccagni*

## Introduction

When I first glimpsed *The Politics of Home* in the shop window of an Amsterdam bookseller I felt a curious need to get in, browse through the agile volume, and eventually buy it. The match between politics and home in the title, on which I had never reflected before, looked as weird as revelatory. The picture of a little house skeleton built up with matches and already about to burn was equally powerful. The house seemed under threat, or maybe it was only revealing its constitutive frailty. Reading the book, and then starting an ongoing conversation with the author, has made a difference for my own research pathway into the study of home on the move, from the margins, or after displacement (Boccagni, 2023).

Over the fifteen years since the book's publication, the scholarly production about home has grown so large and diverse as to fully justify an attempt to assess its significance from a sociological perspective. Such an effort, I contend, is critical to unpack the mechanisms of social construction of citizenship and the underlying emotional constellations, among other key political and societal questions. Building on Duyvendak's work, in conversation with an expanding interdisciplinary literature, my contribution starts from a detour into the social study of emotion and of the urban and public space(s) associated with home. While *The Politics of Home* has been groundbreaking in both respects, there are at least two other domains of analysis on which a sociological understanding of home holds a promise for advancement: on the one hand, the tensions associated with the past-oriented and origin-focused repertoire of home, as most productively discussed in the settler colonialism scholarship; on the other, the metaphorical uses and mobilisations that the notion of home can also elicit among different publics, for different interests and

purposes. Throughout, this chapter makes a case for the distinctive value of an emerging sociology of home.

## Home as a Sociological Question: What, Why, How

Prior to *The Politics of Home*, the bulk of social research on home had involved environmental psychology, social geography, or socio-cultural anthropology (see, for an overview, Blunt & Dowling, 2022). One of the merits of Duyvendak's book lies in its compelling case for the autonomous significance of home, as a concept and a multi-scalar empirical field, for sociology too. This, in turn, has contributed to interdisciplinary recognition of home as a distinctive research subject rather than a secondary concern within more institutionalised domains, such as belonging, housing, material culture, architecture, or place and place-making in general.

Conceiving home sociologically, distinct from (if complementary with) other disciplinary backgrounds, invites a dual transition: in space, as the array of views, emotions, and practices associated with home does not necessarily rely only on the narrow sphere of the domestic, and can actually play out on multiple scales; in materiality and infrastructure, as this variety of relationships, emotions, and moralities, and the practices that substantiate them (that is, homemaking), matter in themselves, regardless of the underlying housing infrastructures, if any (which is not to dismiss the subtle interdependence between house and home). Home, sociologically, is a very special place – one that exceeds basic attributes such as "geographic location", "material form", and "investment with meaning and value" (Gieryn, 2000, pp. 464–465). However, it is also an *emplaced* relationship, which is precisely what makes it special.

By way of generalisation, home involves all endeavours to enact meaningful social relationships with(in) one or more distinctive settings, with all of the aggregate consequences, from the micro to the societal level. As a social experience, home is defined less by one site in particular than by the tentative attribution of emotions that articulate the need and desire to make it "more of one's own". This also reveals an ongoing struggle for security, familiarity, and control – in short, for feeling at home – along lines of cooperation or conflict, within and between groups, based on nativeness, length of stay, gender, sexual orientation, religion, lifestyles, and so forth (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2020). Parallel to that, the promise

of home lies in its heuristic power to facilitate access to other research fields, as long as these reflect contrasting forms of space attachment and appropriation, from different social actors, unequally positioned within the main societal hierarchies (Boccagni & Kusenbach, 2020).

## Feeling at Home as a Meaningful, Ambiguous, and Hard-to-Escape Emotion

Home, Duyvendak (2011) reminds us, is also associated with a strong, situated, and very selective emotion – one that "eludes words" (p. 27). Feeling at home articulates a sense of comfort, privacy, and security, along with other demographically and culturally variable emotional states. However, this normatively positive tone is not without its downsides. It is also conditional on certain boundaries being (re)traced, materially and socially, between someone, or at most a group of people akin to one another, and everybody else. The emplacement of this emotion requires a division of space between insiders and outsiders, legitimate and less-than-legitimate inhabitants, or, in its bluntest variant, us versus them. This means that, as intimate and poignant as the emotion is, it has a remarkable intersubjective side – and an exclusionary after-effect. Intentionally or not, feeling at home is bound to feed into a deeply political question. Who feels at home in a certain place, in relation to those around them, and who perceives and claims a certain territory as their own, and why? Who, instead, does not, and what accounts for the difference between the former and the latter?

Importantly, the register of home has to do with emotion and morality, rather than with formal rights or law provisions. It articulates a sense of being (and being regarded) in place – or instead, out of place – on apparently pre-political, almost natural(ised) grounds. This shifts the debate on belonging from the ordinary field of formal entitlements, or lack thereof, to an opaquer, if deep-rooted and pervasive terrain of feelings, based on habituation to place, but also on perceived distance between a majority and its outsiders. Belonging itself, from a local to a (supra)national scale, becomes less a matter of formal entitlements than a situated combination between self-attribution (feeling to fit in a place, or with a group) and hetero-categorisation (being expected, or even allowed, to fit there, by someone who holds the power to mark the boundaries of the field). Far from being only a spontaneous and context-dependent emotion, feeling

at home risks being forcibly turned into a sort of obligation. This may be difficult to meet for individual subjects or the groups who do not align with the mainstream along the most visible lines of social differentiation – especially immigrants, especially from certain racial or religious backgrounds.

In short, the selective and inherently exclusionary emotions associated with home can be easily mobilised by some political actors, as an apparently natural requisite for membership or even for citizenship. This is more likely to be the case, the more the imaginary of a collective and homogeneous home is cultivated and scales up from the local community to the city, the nation, and beyond. Which, in turn, may operate as a backlash to societal diversification, as a historical process that stems from international migration, but also from the institutionalisation of diversity and the acknowledgement of non-mainstream identities in religion, sexual orientation, lifestyle, and so forth.

## Home in the Public as a Critical Political Field

What feeling at home means, in relation to the larger societal contexts one lives in, is then a public and political question that feeds into emerging debates like the one on the emotionalisation and culturalisation of citizenship (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016), or on the nativist turn in liberal societies (Duyvendak & Kesic, 2022). Questions about the reach, determinants, and implications of a sense of home beyond the domestic have also attracted resonance in urban and migration studies across Western countries. This has primarily been in a bottom-up perspective, through ethnographies on urban spaces as potentially home-like environments for (some of) their inhabitants. Blunt and Sheringham's (2019) study of "home-city geographies" in East London has probably been the most effective case in point. This has been paralleled by a number of local case studies on the interplay between the extension of a sense of home to a neighbourhood or city scale, for long-term residents, and the myriad ways in which outsiders like international migrants struggle to achieve visibility, recognition, or even only ordinary access to supposedly universalistic public spaces.

On the one hand, certain urban regions and infrastructures – squares, streets, malls, bars, parks, etc. – are more likely to nourish a sense of extra-domestic domesticity for the local inhabitants, as a part of their

emotional geographies, and for sheer habituation. On the other hand, and especially for stigmatised immigrant minorities, the public space, or selected portions of it, can host forms of conviviality based on food production or consumption, sport activities, religious celebrations, gardening practices, and so forth. These are also, implicitly, channels for them to (re) make home – that is, for creating atmospheres more familiar, inclusive, and comfortable than in the surrounding, majority city. Indeed, some outsiders may be more successful in making themselves at home through these minor tactics, if only for limited fragments of time and space, than in their own housing environments, as long as they have any (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2017).

Again, though, the notion and the experience of homemaking in the public comes with tensions and dilemmas in managing the interaction between mainstream and minority or minoritised ways of homemaking in the common, collective urban environment (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021). And, again, exploring questions of home opens up the field for critical reflection on inequalities related to legal status, age, gender, or race (see, e.g., from a critical geography background, Fathi & Ní Laoire, 2023; Gerhard & Malachuk, 2025).

## Home as Origin and the Contested Genealogies of "Being In"

While the conceptual and empirical scope of research on home has expanded significantly, there are at least two interdisciplinary fields that would deserve more elaboration through this notion. The first starts from the commonsense understanding of home as the place of origin, but revisits it in a critical and original fashion. This is not simply to highlight the ambiguities and pitfalls inherent in overly place-based and sedentarist views of home, as a matter of primordial attachment to an immutable, idealised (home)land. It is rather meant to explore the ways in which a land-based understanding of home has been historically evoked and mobilised as a part of the clash between native societies, including indigenous ones, and newcomer groups, including far more powerful colonial settlers.

As the scholarship on settler colonialism has shown (Veracini, 2010; Handel & Kotef, 2023), the struggle of pre-existing resident groups against colonial settler forces has also taken the lexicon of home, as intimate attachment and belonging to an ancestral land. However, the collective

narrative of their counterparts has precisely been meant to deny this. The purported absence of any previous home, or the redefinition of indigenous land as *terra nullius*, has been instrumental to legitimise the permanent settlement and "self-indigenization" of colonizers, at the expense of previous inhabitants (Moreton-Robinson, 2003). As a matter of fact, any institutional form of settler colonialism, as a collective project of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, has necessarily to do with home; that is, with the struggle to exert a sense of attachment and appropriation over a new space, regardless of or against those who used to inhabit it before (Wolfe, 2006). By getting settled in a territory, and coping with its erstwhile inhabitants in one way or another (from assimilation or segregation to extermination), the outsider colonial group aims to turn it into its new home – hopefully a better one, relative to the past. This typically demands an effective repression, negation, or oblivion of all ways in which that territory used to be home *for*, or arguably *of*, somebody else.

Moving forward, these specular, if unequally powerful and successful claims to the home(land) could be further revisited by engaging with the emotional and moral work home "does" in underpinning alternative claims for inhabitation of a certain environment. This should also unpack the ironical parallel than can be traced, from very different historical trajectories, between the essentialised use of home as a political idiom in current nativist stances against immigrants, and in indigenous nations' struggles for resistance to, and acknowledgement from, settler-colonial nations.

## Unpacking the Mobilising Potential of Home as Metaphor

Following the remarks in the previous sections, it is worth noting that the sociological significance of home does not rest only on its being a special place, and on the field of relationships, emotions, and struggles for attachment or appropriation associated with it. As relevant is a sociological exploration of the ways in which home circulates as a word in itself, or as a category of practice, across different discursive fields. This includes the use of home as a metaphor; that is, a familiar, emotionally warm word meant to replace, and in fact domesticate, something more complex, ambiguous, inconvenient, or hard to capture.

Home, for instance, can well be taken as (supposedly) equivalent to notions such as country, or nation – a metaphor that lies at the core of

Walters' (2023) so-called domopolitics. This is a discursive repertoire, and a mode of governance, that draws on the imaginary of home to project it on more-than-domestic territorial scales. In doing so, it effectively replaces the register of citizenship with that of *hospitality*. Under this apparently benign representation, foreign nationals are reframed as mere "guests" to be arbitrarily admitted, based on the "host" selective benevolence rather than on grounds of formal rights and obligations. More in general, reframing a certain geography as home, potentially on any scale from one's individual body to the entire world, is instrumental to mark a boundary between that fraction of space and all that lies out of it.

By drawing a parallel with the ordinary experience of a (normative, middle-class, gendered) home, this metaphor repertoire yields opposite and coexisting meanings and expectations: a demand for care, protection, comfort, and control over whatever lies inside the boundary (environmentalist appeals to planet Earth as common home being an obvious case in point); and parallel to that, a distinction between in-home and outer environment that may easily end up in an exclusion of the latter, or in attribution of lesser value to it. If the "outer environment" is made of people other than the ingroup, the exclusionary effects of this metaphorical account are as consequential as hard to contrast. There is an inherent ambivalence to the metaphor of home. This parallels the ambivalence many of us encounter whenever the place we habitually call home engenders a sense of estrangement, danger, or threat, thereby demanding new forms of (un)making, all the way from minor recalibrations in family life to major biographical disruptions out of it.

## Sociological Ways Ahead for Home Studies

To sum up, the emerging sociology of home invites us to take seriously the lived experience of place and the unfolding of ingroup–outgroup relations as a negotiation of who is "in place" and has a right to belong, on multiple scales. This leaves us with several ways ahead for research, but also for productive application of a home perspective in practice.

On the one hand, the environmental, relational, emotional, and sensuous conditions associated with (not) feeling at home, and with different ways of interacting with place accordingly, are highly variable across cultural and political backgrounds. However, they are also shaped by

demographics and life course position. This situated and diverse constellation of factors demands large-scale and comparative analysis through survey-based data, also as a precondition to uncover the underlying structures of inequality. Likewise, in a diachronic perspective, the range of tactics whereby people and groups unequally (un)home themselves, and the combination of factors that facilitate or inhibit the process, are still in need of systematic analysis and elaboration – in terms of subjacent sociological mechanisms – across housing and living circumstances. If home is, in essence, a special relationship with place, further analysis is due of the social forces and processes that account for that specialness and for its changing contours over space and time. How do different social actors nourish and emplace a sense of home or not, and on which scales, given their room for manoeuvre and their affective and moral geographies? What social hierarchies and societal stratifications emerge as a result? These are not merely academic questions. Rather, they directly address the external political conditions, as well as the inner biographical ones that make homemaking a more or less extended, enduring, affordable, and meaningful process.

On the other hand, while the proposed understanding of home has been increasingly applied to fields ranging from architecture and housing to welfare, ageing, and social work, a case can be made – again – for further appreciation and elaboration of its potential. The conceptual and methodological repertoire of home studies can illuminate the (in)tangible factors that make a place more or less inhabitable, and fundamentally meaningful, to an arena of potential dwellers, given its (dis)continuities with their housing pathways and home cultures, and the resources they have access to. This becomes especially salient for all those who enter new dwelling spaces, or struggle to achieve them, out of necessity rather than choice, whatever the reasons for that – due to a lack of economic and social resources and entitlements or, more radically perhaps, after losing autonomous living abilities. A vast spectrum of heteronomous housing arrangements, including shared ones, can be explored accordingly. A *fil rouge* across them lies in the promise of an *as-if-it-were home* approach. How far, and to the (dis)advantage of who, is a housing configuration meant to be home in a normative sense – rather than a shelter, or a roof over one's head – for its inhabitants? How far does it live up to that standard, and why? Such a reflexive stance can productively inform the continuum between designing, monitoring, and evaluating a variety of

housing schemes or initiatives, including informal and temporary ones. This, in turn, would illuminate the lived experience of place, both top-down and bottom-up: whether a non-traditional housing configuration could or should imitate a mainstream domestic one, if at all; and whether residents themselves can be expected to invest meaning, attachment, and care for it, or not (refugee accommodations being a typical example of the latter case – Beeckmans *et al.*, 2022).

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PART 4

# Moral and Emotional Divides

# Reflections on the Experiences of "Homing", Cultural Intimacy, and Recognition for the Study of Symbolic Boundaries and Inequality

*Michèle Lamont*

There is an intriguing convergence between the writings of Jan Willem Duyvendak on the topic of "homing", the work of anthropologist Michael Herzfeld on cultural intimacy, and my own writings on recognition. In different ways, these contributions focus on belonging as experienced by insiders or outsiders (or both) – that is, sharing or not sharing a common sense of what is valued in a group and of having or not having the requisite attributes, and deep familiarity with normative expectations as well as idioculture (Fine, 1979).

While Duyvendak approached these questions by examining how "natives" understand what it means to belong and what nativists perceived as threatened by social change, he studied how these feelings enter the public sphere and become the focus of politicians and social movements, as well as how refugees develop the feeling of being "at home" after displacement (Duyvendak, 2011; Boccagni, 2022). Thus, he understands and studies "homing" as a cultural process, or a collective social accomplishment, more than as an actual physical site or place.

I view this to be a pathbreaking conceptual contribution, since Duyvendak grounds his theorization of homing in an understanding of time, hope, and perceptions of possible futures as key conditions for what allows people to "feel" at home. For instance, he describes how refugees can make a new site "home" only after they understand that they can stay in place for a foreseeable future. By conceptualizing "homing" as a process unfolding in time, Duyvendak opens the door for comparisons with other intersubjective cultural processes such as identification, stigmatization, or gentrification (Lamont et al., 2014). Thus, he paves the way for important future developments in a sociological understanding of process-tracing – a mode of social science explanation grounded in a comprehensive (*verstehen*) (see Collier, 2011).

For his part, Michael Herzfeld has studied cultural intimacy as a complement to the canonical literature on nationalism (e.g., Benedict Anderson's (1983/2016) "imagined communities") with the goal of highlighting how ordinary people understand what they have in common, as expressed through humour, shared secrets, and other daily exchanges. He is also concerned with shame and pride as dimensions of national identity – shared understandings of the negative traits that members of a group believe they have in common. This includes national stereotypes, such as the "stiff upper lip" valued by the British. It also includes positive traits, including self-glorifying collective memories (Herzfeld, 2016, 2020). This approach focuses on a sense of shared sociality and cultural belonging often operating in the gap between official state rhetoric and everyday practice – related to manifestations of "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995).

In my case, in collaborative work I have focused on experiences of being disrespected and of incidents of stigmatization and discrimination for individuals with marked identities (whether ethno-racial or class-based, Lamont *et al.*, 2016). My co-authors and I documented how marked groups respond to incidents, such as confronting, or engaging in impression management. This line of work was developed in various publications focusing on recognition work and strategies that contribute to broadening cultural membership (Lamont, 2018, 2023). For instance, I studied the production of narratives promoting recognition at the meso-level (for instance, by stand-up comics and Hollywood creatives), and how they can contribute to the production of social inclusion. With time, I have grown more interested in the place of emotion in boundary work and the strategies for recognition and stigmatization and use this opportunity to reflect on possible paths forward.

Despite their differences in emphasis, these three approaches converge in that they are all concerned with capturing a common way of being that is acquired through the shared experience of belonging to a group. This common way of being can be described as a habitus or "group style" that involves developing a nuanced understanding of shared worldviews, and a common social and spatial world that is gained over time, through repeated in-group interactions and through exposure to "the outside" (Eliasoph & Lichterman, 2003). This is manifested in a feeling of being "at home" with "our own" (to use Elijah Anderson's (2022) term) as well as in feelings of being an outsider, a stranger, a bystander, who does not or cannot partake in such feelings of togetherness and inclusion. This individual can feel

indifferent, invisible, irrelevant, and/or alternatively, excluded, overlooked, misunderstood, underestimated, or threatened. These are the feelings that accompany boundary work, which have been taken up by various generations of sociologists (Simmel, 2009; Becker, 1963; Elias & Scotson, 1965).

Most recently, the more negative feelings have been documented by Emily Walton in her 2025 book *Homesick: Race and Exclusion in Rural New England*, where she describes how members of visible minorities living in New Hampshire, one of the whitest states of the United States, experience misrecognition in their daily life, and how this affects their mental health. Shared experiences include facing expectations that one should assimilate, downplay differences, and encourage colour-blindness. They also include explicit racism, social distance, and enduring provisional acceptance, which results in feelings she describes as "homesickness" (feelings of being isolated and alone), insecurity, anxiety, and exhaustion. These feelings are fed by the ongoing experiences of not being deeply familiar with shared rules and norms. Examples include not being able to partake in the shared "taken for granted" that typically develop in social groups, and experiencing being perceived as an outsider/stranger because one is a "visible minority". Such experiences feed negative health outcomes (anxiety, depression), just as the experiences of class and racial inequality and that of being disrespected affect subjective and physical well-being (Andersson & Link, 2025; Aranguren, forthcoming).

Too rarely are the "belonging" and group membership aspects of boundary work considered together with the experiences of exclusion – the other side of the coin. One of the future objectives of a more comprehensive sociology of boundary work should be to analyse how these two aspects evolve in relation to one another, that is: 1) how group members use the positive attributes of their own group membership to buffer themselves from stigmatization and exclusion (as illustrated by Afro-utopianism for instance, Benjamin, 2022); 2) how expressions of togetherness and shared culture can be mobilized by insiders to stigmatize outsiders (as shown in *Homesick*); 3) how such expressions generate feelings of outsider-ness for the outgroup; and 4) how these dynamics relationally feed off one another. Social psychologists have taken up some of these questions, but only exceptionally have their findings been put in conversation with the growing literature on symbolic boundaries (Bloemraad *et al.*, 2019). The same can be said about the growing European literature on politics and social cleavages (Bornschier, 2024; Zollinger, 2022, 2024).

For their part, the literatures on social capital, social cohesion, belonging, and assimilation have typically evolved on separate tracks from the literatures on exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization. These bodies of work capture two complementary dimensions of social relations and groupness that should be conceptualized relationally, to gain a better understanding of their dynamic interactions and their impact on inequality (Mische, 2011; Emirbayer, 1997; Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2018).

The analytical lenses of "homing", "cultural intimacy", and "recognition" should prove useful in this respect, to comprehend crucial aspects of the lifeworld of groups – groupness being expressed not only through boundary work, but also through shared collective feelings of togetherness, habitus, and group style (in addition to their social structural/network dimensions such as spatial segregation and homophily, which are manifestations of social boundaries (Lamont *et al.*, 2016[1]. This would be particularly crucial for understanding the integration of immigrant groups, as these dimensions are still often overlooked by the assimilation literature, despite abundant criticisms (Alba & Nee, 2015; Drouhot, 2024; Favell, 2022; Vertovec, 2021). The need for this is evident when considering the dialogue between the literatures on immigration and group boundaries (Bloemraad *et al.*, 2023).

While the study of micro-experiences and rules of close interactions is the specialty of conversation analysts and ethnomethodologists, they have rarely looked at such rules from the perspective of social integration and belonging or feelings of alienation and exclusion. Recent developments in the sociology of boundary work are more concerned with these aspects of social life, just as the sociology of inequality, mobility, and poverty is being more systematically extended to the study of subjective experiences in recent decades, in the wake of Bourdieu-inspired scholarship (see Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu *et al.*, 1999). This is particularly true for experiences of precarity analysed by sociologists such as Nicolas Duvoux (2025) and Elena Ayala-Hurtado (2021, 2025), among others. Understanding how individuals make sense of their experience of "being at home" or of exclusion and inequality adds an essential dimension to our understanding of how they imagine and can enact paths for action given the constraints they face. Connecting such subjective dimensions of inequality to meso and macro processes should be the next step in the development of a more ambitious sociology of inequality (a perspective developed in Lamont & Pierson, 2019).

Similarly, the political sociology of populism and anti-populism is also making more room for consideration of the range of feelings involved, whether "anxiety, hope, disgust, fury, self-confidence, joy, gratitude, fear, love, timidity, and contempt" documented via in-depth interviews (Tuğal *et al.*, 2026a), or by drawing on literary work to document feelings in politics, such as shame, disappointment, and envy, as in the important recent work of Eva Illouz (2026; Sicron & Illouz, 2024). A systematic review of these literatures is much needed, including in relation to their impact on well-being.

Finally, the study of "racialized emotion" also needs to be connected to these different agendas – including the study of "white emotionality" grounded at the centre of the exercise of power, such as "feelings of superiority" (Zembylas & Matias, 2023) as well as the study of how emotions contribute to the maintenance of racial domination, developed by critical race theorists such as Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2018) and others (Tuğal *et al.*, 2026a).

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I conclude with a short reflection on how my personal experience is shaping my understanding of these issues, and how it connects with my earlier work on patterns of symbolic boundaries in France and the United States that are grounded in moral boundaries (my books *Money, Morals, and Manners* (1992) and *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (2000) on patterns of national boundary work did not consider explicitly the role of emotions such as envy, fear, and disgust in grounding such boundary work).

As an immigrant who has lived outside my place of origin (Quebec) for more than 45 years, I have experienced up close what it means to be a Simmelian "stranger" who has become deeply familiar with where my daily life unfolds, as I maintain a certain distance (emotional and analytical) from this environment. With this state of strangeness comes the feeling of not truly "partaking" and belonging, even if by some accounts, as a tenured Harvard professor, one could consider me a deep insider (to my university, my professional networks, and even my broader community – whatever this means).

I often understand myself as mostly a detached observer, as illustrated my reaction to the ascendency of Donald Trump over American politics

(among others), even as I do my share to fight back through my public sociology writings (e.g., Lamont, 2025; Lamont & Cornfield, 2025). By some measure, I am still not fully at home here, because I have a way out if needed – an alternative awaits if needed.

My children have remarked that I am not truly the same person when I am in Quebec and interact in French with family and my network of old friends. I never laugh so heartedly as when we use the nuances of "*joual*" (French Canadian dialect) to joke around, poke fun at one another, and comment on the events of the day. The shared taken-for-granted allows for layers of nuances that generates a feeling of deep familiarity. The same may hold when Gen Z communicate using their ever-emerging distinctive idioms or for Black Americans using the African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). These are authentic manifestations of "homing" that cannot be artificially produced and that manifest themselves in emotional bursts.

Here again, Duyvendak's notion of "homing" is powerful, because it captures so perfectly the feeling of sharing cultural intimacy that Herzfeld writes about. This is often missed by the literature on the life of immigrants, bifurcated as it has often been between assimilation and, more recently, stigmatization. There is an important theoretical space there that still begs to be fully analysed and understood. This has the potential to become an essential element to a fully comprehensive sociology of immigration via boundary work that analyses relationally the lifeworld of insider-hood and outsider-hood analysed relationally.

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My second book, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (2000), focused on identifying why contrasting definitions of belonging are at the centre of major tensions between ethno-racial groups across advanced industrial societies. In it, I argued that alternative logics of social segmentation were at work in these two societies, and that they could be identified by focusing on categories through which members view one another as significant others who share fundamental moral worldviews and/or cultural traits. More specifically, I suggested that these can be identified through the symbolic boundaries that individuals trace when they are asked to describe the kinds of people

they like and dislike, whom they feel inferior and superior to, and whom they are like and different from. Thus, differences that are at the centre of individual maps of perception emerge, as well as the differences that are not salient in the way people discuss worth, status, and, indirectly, community membership, revealing contrasted patterns across groups. The result was a comparative analysis of somewhat objectified patterns of inclusion/exclusion that operate based on different status cues, such as colour, class, and immigrant status.

Published in 2000, this book compares institutionalized national "models" of social segmentation, and reveals contrasting patterns in France and the United States. Drawing on in-depth interviews with white and African American low-status white collar workers and blue-collar workers living in and around, New York, and with their white and North African immigrant counterparts living in and around Paris. I showed that the "French model" combined strong external boundaries with weak internal boundaries. For French workers, "us" includes all the French, but with increasing frequency, "*les français de souche*" only, with many viewing immigrants – particularly Muslim immigrants – as unable to assimilate to a universalistic French culture. In the early 1990s, low-income people "Blacks" were still included in the definition of the French "us", as understandings of the social bond structuring French society downplayed internal divisions to emphasize humanitarianism, collective responsibility towards indigent fellow citizens, as well as a certain universalism qua republicanism. By the late 2000s, under the influence of neoliberalism, the boundaries drawn towards low-income groups had become more rigid in France, as they did in large segments of Europe. Boundaries regarding Muslims and "Blacks" had also rigidified (Lamont & Duvoux, 2014).

In contrast, in the early 1990s, American workers already drew strong internal boundaries against low-income people and African Americans, largely on moral basis – in the name of work ethic and responsibility. Their external boundaries were more mixed: immigrants who partake in the American Dream were more easily made part of "us" than African Americans, but strong boundaries were also present with respect to illegal immigrants.

By 2010, after thirty years of neoliberalism, boundaries towards the low-income people had also become more acute. This was manifested, for instance, in data from the American National Election Survey showing that many more college-educated blacks oppose government spending

for the poor in 2012 than in 1980 (Lamont & Duvoux, 2014). Although a culture of diversity had become more broadly diffused and institutionalized (Berrey, 2015), discrimination against African Americans has remained persistent and a strong boundary separating non-blacks and blacks remains a dominant feature of American society (Gans, 1999). The enormous anti-immigration wave that the United States is experiencing at this writing certainly challenges the "American model" that was identified in this book. Nevertheless, understanding patterns of boundary work was particularly urgent in a context of mounting neo-liberalism and xenophobia, which both entailed a narrowing of bonds of solidarity. I argued that both models involve exclusion, and yet, that symbolic boundaries were structured differently across cases. In particular, the relative decoupling of racism and blackness in the French case in the early 1990s shed light on the American case by putting it in perspective.

This book also argued that the "imagined communities" are not necessarily primarily framed in political terms: in France as in the United States, individuals use moral and cultural arguments about differences and similarities to define "people like us". They refer to the struggles of their own daily lives, which are central to their own concept of self, and judge negatively others whom they perceive as not meeting basic moral standards (in terms of work ethic, sense of responsibility, perseverance, etc.). In the worldview of many of these workers, moral, racial, and class boundaries worked hand in hand to provide them with a space for self-worth and dignity.

In this early line of research, I did not consider the role of emotions in boundary work, but this topic was taken up by some of my students, such as Christopher Bail in his book *Terrified* (2016), which focus on the use of negative emotion such as fear in the framing of Muslims in the public sphere. Since, many scholars are considering different aspects of this emotional connection to boundary work (Tuğal *et al.*, 2026a). We are learning that emotions are central in the moralization of immigrants and other groups (Simonson, 2025; Davies, 2021), drawing connection with media framing and public opinion. This is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of recognition processes as they unfold at the meso level, beyond the simple mobilization of narratives. More attention needs to be paid to the reception end of the process, thus complementing the focus on production, which was at the centre of my book *Seeing Others* (2023) based on interviews with agents of change (as in

the work of cultural resonance for instance, Wry *et al.*, 2011; Rostbøll, 2023; Carbone & Vandenbosch, 2024). We need to zoom in on the existential experience of immigrants and workers, on what it means to them to feel "at home" or like an outsider. We also need a better understanding of the emotional appeal of the radical right in various contexts and with how it resonates with these populations.

A myriad of emotions have been linked to the growing popularity of the radial right, including nostalgia, racial resentment, loss of status, humiliation, feeling displaced, and deservingness. Affective polarization happens on the left and the right, while many stay away from politics because they associate it with toxicity, drama, corruption, and fear (Lamont *et al.*, 2025). A multidisciplinary perspective will be needed to pursue this agenda. This should consider the transformation of the media ecosystem (with the role of social media) and connect findings from social psychology (including on emotional capital) (Cottingham, 2016; Cottingham & Evans, 2025; Flam, 2024) and political sociology with the sociology of emotions and cultural sociology, to examine the various dimensions of boundary work. This should be an important step in understanding the challenges of our day, and where the contribution of Jan Willem Duyvendak in the study of the experience of "homing" will be of crucial importance.

## Note

[1] This approach to groupness needs to be contrasted by the one developed by Brubaker (2006) that centres on social categorization, institutional routines, and political discourse, but downplays some of the symbolic boundaries documented in "Getting Respect".

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# Can a Second-Class Citizen Ever Belong?

*Halleh Ghorashi*

## Introduction

Duyvendak has contributed significantly to discussions on home and belonging, particularly regarding the increasing culturalisation and emotionalisation of citizenship in the Netherlands. Here, I engage with his work on these topics and explore the specific challenges faced by citizens who, due to their migration background, are not perceived as fully belonging to the nation. I then reflect on my 30 years of work with refugees and migrants in both the Netherlands and the US, situating my experiences within broader academic and policy discussions on home, belonging, and citizenship (including Duyvendak's). Furthermore, I argue for the importance of experiential knowledge in research and in society when addressing the complex societal issues we are facing in late modern societies. I situate this argument in Duyvendak's most recent Dutch publication (2025, p. 110) in which he argues that "emotionalization of society has gone too far".

## Paradox of Homogenisation and Polarisation

Paradoxically, two dominant social patterns today are homogenisation and polarisation. Individuals (regardless of their diverse backgrounds) seem to be becoming increasingly alike while simultaneously belonging to groups that are increasingly at odds with one another. These developments are characteristic of the current era. Leading sociologists have formulated various terms to describe this era: fluid modernity (Zygmunt Bauman), mobility (John Urry), the era of increasing reflexivity (Anthony Giddens), network society (Manuel Castells), and risk society (Ulrich Beck). According to these critical sociologists, one significant condition distinguishes early modernity from late modernity and that is how power

manifests itself. Rather than visible and coercive forms of domination or suppression, normalised structures and discourses of exclusion are more at play. The power in these normalised or discursive structures lies particularly in their tacit impact regarding positioning through the often taken-for-granted disciplining of individuals' actions and interactions. For example, when negative images of categorised others are ingrained in everyday interactions and considered as facts, these normalised images of self and other greatly affect the shape and quality of interactions in public spaces. Thus, normalised structures reproduce exclusionary practices in which othering and inequality are intertwined. It is particularly the taken-for-granted nature of power that severely limits the possibilities of resistance.

This is the pitfall of our time: people take the idea of freedom so much for granted that they no longer reflect on less visible and subtle homogenising patterns and ideas. Digitisation, for example, has played a major role in these processes of homogenisation. Through digitisation and social media, cultural and social distances have become much smaller, causing individuals' tastes, preferences, and opinions to become increasingly similar. People's ideas about what constitutes a good life or a successful career have thus become more homogeneous. We consequently seem to be more alike in our preferences, our insecurities, and our fears, and also in the way we communicate. It is therefore fair to conclude that the invisible disciplining power of new technology (such as transport and communication) has somewhat flattened the sources of originality and imagination, and thus also of diversity.

However, this homogenisation process goes hand in hand with an increase in segregated communities. This estrangement process strengthens the need to stay in one's comfort zone and keep it pure from intrusion by others. These, often unintentionally shaped, purified, and homogenised societal zones create conditions for an increased sense of uneasiness or even threat towards diversity. These processes have diverse impacts on societal interactions. First, individuals socialised in homogenised environments develop language clumsiness when interacting with individuals from other backgrounds because they lacked the chance to develop language sensitivity through practice in diverse environments. Second, this cultural and social distance results in feelings of strong dis-identification instead of in learning to identify with others in a variety of spaces that many people with different backgrounds share. Third, if these feelings of uneasiness and

fear are not countered, they could lead to experiences of mistrust and envy towards others that result in various forms of conflict regarding the right (1) to distributed resources (hierarchies of access) or (2) to belong in certain places (hierarchies of belonging). Thus, processes of homogenisation through normalising power go together with othering practices based on "normalised assumptions of difference" presented as facts.

What is the most effective way to counter these assumed facts that are shaped by a normalising power that informs exclusionary practices? Is it enough to present "actual facts" to unsettle these "normalised assumed facts"? In his recent publication in Dutch, Duyvendak (2025) claims that the Netherlands is less polarised than often assumed. His book starts by presenting some of the gaps that are assumed to exist, such as between high and low income and education, the gap between generations, and between Dutch nationals with and without migration backgrounds. He explains that in radial-right circles the gap between "de gewone Nederlander" (the ordinary Dutch) and the elite dominates the conversation, leading to dramatisation and exaggeration of these assumed gaps. Duyvendak then argues that "the objective facts" (based on statistics) show a different reality than often presented polarised society in public space. He writes: "there is a significant *mismatch* between objective gaps – which are limited and even shrinking – and the (mis)perception of them" (p. 13, my translation). Although it was illuminating to see some factual presentation of the ways that societal gaps have decreased, I was less convinced, even surprised, by the strict binary division between "objective facts" and "perception and feelings". My surprise was mostly due to Duyvendak's situatedness within social movements, particularly gay and feminist movements. Even more, I first met Duyvendak in the mid-1990s when I started my PhD research at the Center for Women Studies in Nijmegen, where Duyvendak was an assistant professor of gay and lesbian studies. I therefore would have expected more acknowledgement of feminist epistemology and feminist standpoint theorists' critique of academia's claims of objectivity. Black feminist scholars furthered this critique by arguing the importance of situated knowledge, which is influenced by both individuals' and academics' intersectional positioning.

Recently (Ghorashi, 2024), I criticised the limitations of so-called objective knowledge that has reproduced the dominant deficit approach to refugees and migrants in public debates and policy on integration. I argued that problematic assumptions within policies that view integration

as a linear process, fixate on minorities' deficits and unquestioningly consider the mainstream majority as the norm. Duyvendak (2011) previously wrote about this process as the "culturalization of citizenship", in which migrants and refugees are required to embrace Dutch "progressive values" assumed to be at the core of Dutch identity. Along with culturalisation, Duyvendak (2011) mentioned "the emotionalization of what it means to be a [Dutch] citizen", that is, the demand to prove loyalty to the Dutch nation-state. Thus, Duyvendak criticised the growing emphasis on the emotional aspect within integration debates, expecting that migrants and refugees *must* feel a sense of belonging and commitment to Dutch society. This was a very needed addition to the debate on integration. However, less attention was given to how this dominant discourse affected migrants and refugees themselves. This brings us back to the paradox I started my essay with: how does it feel for migrants and refugees to show a high level of integration in Dutch society and yet constantly be treated as second-class citizens? In other words, what does it mean to factually become more the same but remain treated as the other? In an earlier publication, I showed that this contrast between refugee women's actual achievement and the growing othering discourse in the Netherlands led to feelings of humiliation (Ghorashi, 2021a). How then does presenting actual facts about these former refugees' integration help to capture their feelings of alienation? Even more, how does a binary presentation of facts versus emotion/experience help us to counter the strong othering practices that have become explicitly racist in the past decade?

## Fitting the Facts But Not Quite

I became politically active a year before the 1979 revolution in my homeland, Iran. As a 17- year-old high school student, I started to feel what it meant to be a revolutionary. Temporary freedom due to a power vacuum meant that forbidden books became available and Tehran's streets became filled with political activism (book markets, political discussions, lectures, demonstrations, etc.). I was exposed to books and information about social movements around the world and felt I was part of a large global movement for justice. But these experiences were shattered with the extreme suppression that came when the Islamic regime established its absolute power. Those contrasting years of freedom and political

oppression were essential in making me who I am. Ideals of a utopian future became an existential part of my being and have continued in my work as an academic. My current position as a full professor at a Dutch university as a woman with a refugee background is an example of a successful integration. Despite starting my studies in the Netherlands at age 27 and having a 13-year gap between my high school diploma in Iran and my master's degree in the Netherlands, I was able to achieve the highest academic position. Yet this factual information comes with many moments of extreme disillusionment in academia and society.

During my first years in the Netherlands, I was often asked if I felt culture shock when I arrived. My answer was, "No, but I felt image shock." My self-image as a freedom fighter and activist clashed with the image of refugees like me in my encounters with the Dutch and in the media. I was a woman from an Islamic country, so most probably not emancipated, and I was a refugee woman, so probably vulnerable and in need of help without much to offer Dutch society. These images were also produced by academics who offered a homogenising presentation of refugees based on a "damage-centered" (Tuck, 2009) approach that considered unprivileged communities solely as damaged and needing repair. To counter these images, I decided to use a narrative research methodology aimed at showing the complexity of refugee women's life stories: so, the people behind the numbers. However, Dutch policymakers' and media's fixation on "representative objective facts" left little space for the lived experiences of the people behind those "objective facts". Most importantly, those "objective facts" were gathered and presented by academics who had never experienced being a refugee. The same goes for policymakers. Most policies were therefore shaped according to these objective facts, and thus, despite best intentions, they did not match refugees' needs and capabilities but actually contributed to the negative images of refugees as "walking deficits".

Choosing a narrative research methodology did not help me fit the academic mainstream norm. From the start, I chose to use my activism in Iran and my experience in exile as an asset in my academic research. Inspired by feminist epistemology, I used my personal experience as a source of connection and reflection in my research. I was therefore often criticised – not always explicitly – for being too involved in my research and not having the necessary academic "objectivity". The double jeopardy of having a gap in my CV and using a narrative (and sometimes

autobiographical) methodology obstructed my opportunities for research funding for many years. Nevertheless, I developed a strong public profile as an academic, which helped me to secure an endowed professor position with high public exposure in 2005. My dream was coming true, not only because I had become a professor but because I was visible as a public intellectual. I could now make a proper connection to my past ideals of contributing to a better world but with much more impact. Despite not feeling acknowledged by Dutch migration and refugee scholars in the Netherlands, I was happy to get some public recognition.

This recognition, however, came with hate mail and even physical threats. Because of my somewhat critical analysis of Dutch society, complete strangers wrote to tell me that I should be more grateful for the opportunities that Dutch society had given me. By saying that, they created a hierarchy between me, as a grateful receiver of help, and Dutch society, as the provider of that help. This hierarchical condition delegitimised both my position as a scholar and my critical analysis of the society. Any claim of being considered a full citizen – and not a second-class citizen who always has to be careful about what she says because she needs to be grateful – backfires. And this critique itself can be used as another example of what I am accused of: as ungrateful for the help I received. There is no way out of this vicious circle as long as the assumption of gratefulness for help provided remains intact. The migrant or any other recipient of help remains the loser.

Unfortunately, given recent developments, it is not only public intellectuals with migrant and refugee backgrounds and progressive ideas at the centre of attacks. The recent hate campaigns against Labor and Green Left party leader Frans Timmermans are a painful example. Yet, these attacks, however damaging, do not touch the core aspect of Timmermans' existence as a Dutch citizen. While for migrants and refugees and their children, these attacks are deeply interlinked with their migration background and their images about their Dutch citizenship. I remember when my dream of becoming a public intellectual was shaken. It was not when I was threatened with death, but when I was made to feel – deeply – like a second-class citizen because of my refugee background. This happened in 2008, when I together with Thomas Spijkerboer (a critical white male professor) published a piece about racism in de *Volkskrant*[1]. I received the usual hate mail. Spijkerboer, however, received no negative responses. I realised then how my refugee background made me vulnerable as a critical

public intellectual. This realisation became even more painful when I met a kindred spirit, Imtiaz Ahmed, a university professor in Bangladesh. As we discussed our experiences as public intellectuals, I realised the difference between being attacked or even prosecuted because of one's political ideals or because of one's existential identity (such as migration background or racial/ethnic identity). My claim of lack of recognition as an unapologetic public scholar might seem somewhat exaggerated considering my academic position in the Netherlands; however, this deep feeling of not being a fully-fledged public intellectual despite my position is strengthened by the extreme dominance of scapegoating asylum seekers and refugees in the public domain. Essed (2016) refers to this feeling as "dignity hurt". And it is a clear example of how "facts" and "emotion" are intertwined.

## What About Experiential Knowledge?

Duyvendak's recent book situates what he refers to as "emancipation of emotions" (2025, p. 108) within various social movements centring marginalized groups' voices. He argues that the revolts of the 1960s and 1970s had "a crucial role in re-evaluation of public manifestations of emotion, specifically for groups who felt misunderstood and were approached as 'The Other'" (p. 107, my translation). However, he claims that the emotionalisation of society and politics has gone too far. According to him, this is both because of the current heavy weight of emotion in the political sphere and because it is dominated by "limited inclusive emotions" (p. 110). What Duyvendak profoundly shows is that even when the political discussion might be about an assumed positive emotion (like feeling at home/*thuisgevoel*), it can have an exclusionary result, as I discussed earlier in this essay in relation to the integration debate. This becomes especially problematic when politicians talk about Dutchness and feeling at home, highlighting that the "real Dutch" have the right to emotions that exclude those who are not considered "Dutch enough". In this way, Duyvendak shows a shift: while the emotionalisation of politics initially had a democratic purpose, by now it has lost its initial purpose because of its exclusionary component. Although I do agree with Duyvendak that there is danger in the emotionalisation of public debate in a time that hate and attacks on dignity have become so overwhelmingly dominant,

however, in the context of the existing attack on the "elite" by radical-right parties, with the accusation of distance from "ordinary people's" life experiences, presenting facts or rationality in the public space to counter exclusionary emotions often backfires. The more that rationality and facts are emphasised, the stronger racist emotions become. The way that Frans Timmermans, one of the most dignified and knowledgeable politicians, has been hatefully attacked in the public arena is a clear example of this.

I have previously argued that the most effective way to counter negative emotions is to stimulate positive emotions as a possibility for (re)connection[2]. Populist and racist politicians fuel the emotions of societal groups who think everything is being taken from them. Scapegoating groups, such as asylum seekers currently, for societal problems is the favourite game of these politicians, a practice normalised by many people to varying degrees. Producing factual information about the reasons behind societal problems is essential: for example, that housing shortages are partly caused by the decades of neoliberal policies and lack of investment in social housing. Yet, these arguments are not that present in the media and are often dismissed as elitist in the public arena. Using rational arguments as the sole response to negative emotions does not seem to work. Investing in strengthening societal connections across groups is also needed. Sharing narratives and creating shared imaginations for the future is essential and has been the focus of many recent bottom-up, inclusive societal movements. My colleagues and I have previously shown the importance of inclusive grassroots movements during the governmental crisis regarding refugees (see, e.g., Ponzoni *et al.*, 2020; Rast & Ghorashi, 2018). That crisis has taken several shapes but has never ended, partially because of the lack of recognition for societal initiatives' important contribution and their humanising impact.

My interest in the power of stories was greatly inspired by Patricia Hill Collins's (1991) work. Collins analysed the importance of creating safe spaces for black women to produce narratives countering the dominant framing of black women in the US. Through producing narratives based on their experiences, imaginations, and aspirations, they re-enabled the epistemic value of specific experiences and knowledges. They used the diversity and richness of their experiences to produce such stories without the pressure of conforming to the norm. They also engaged with various expressive means, including oral self-narration of the past, literature, and music, particularly blues (Collins, 1991; Janssens & Steyaert, 2001). Novels,

such as those by Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde, or the pain in Maya Angelou's poetry, increased the imaginary power of society. The power of black women's various forms of narrations reveals a different world of experience and emotions that cannot be captured in numbers.

Collins argued that black women, through their unique experiences with multiple, intersecting forms of oppression by both (black) men and white women, offer a unique perspective on the workings of power and social relations in our societies. Even more valuable is her claim that black women's marginal position as "outsiders within" has epistemic value in producing specific forms of knowledge. In her view, the marginality of the insider/outsider position creates the necessary distance from the status quo to allow the potential of originality. This distance, combined with the intimate knowledge of a specific way of life and history, makes this form of knowledge distinctive for studying societal issues. "Black feminist critic bell hooks captures the unique standpoint that the outsider within status can generate. In describing her small-town, Kentucky childhood, she notes, 'living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out … we understood both'" (Collins, 1986, S15).

I have also argued (Ghorashi, 2021b) that sharing stories in a space empty of judgement (daring interspaces) can bridge differences often considered as being too different. Stories have a strong potential in a comprehensive understanding of individuals' lives, which are far more layered than what categories can represent. The stories shared can contradict a singular, essentialised, and static presentation of the other as deviant from the self and can thus provide access to the multiple, dynamic, and layered images of both the self and the other, creating possibilities for connections. There are always moments in stories (moments of pain, joy, powerlessness, success) that others identify with, no matter how extreme the assumed difference at the beginning. These emotional moments of identification are crucial for communication with and through difference, particularly when these differences are judged as unwanted. Rational deliberations are not strong enough to counter emotions of fear, distrust, and blame that are dominant sources of disconnectedness and othering in today's societies. Moments of emotional identification, however, provide opportunities to see the other as the same despite major differences of opinion. They open doors for connection that are generally closed because of judgements informed by negative emotions embedded in dominant discourses. A kind

of connectedness is created that goes beyond legal citizenship and occurs below rational forms of deliberation. Through moments of experiencing sameness through emotional identification, even negatively perceived difference can be accepted; in contrast, "unwanted" difference without sameness is often rejected because of an assumed threat.

## The Elephant in the Room

And then of course I need to address the elephant in the room: Do we need to acknowledge exclusionary emotions? And what do we do with the growing focus on experiential knowledge that is undermining democracy?

In the Dutch context, policymakers are increasingly favouring individual stories over collective representation. In many contexts, sounding boards are being created. However, decision-making that does not value experiential knowledge risks a "democratic tick box" or "box-ticking" effect. As long as someone with experiential knowledge is at the table, it's fine. This places a strong emphasis on the label "experiential expert" and risks having too little attention paid to the stories' substantive value. Another risk is the community perspective being reduced to an individual story, one considered interchangeable with any other individual story and dismissed as an anecdote because it is too disruptive.

This does not mean that experiential or community knowledges will de facto produce alternative discourses. However, as mentioned earlier, marginalised groups' "insider knowledges" have specific epistemic value that is often ignored by people in decision-making positions (be it scholars or policymakers). The combination of distance from the status quo and intimate knowledge of a specific way of life and history makes insider knowledge distinctive for studying societal issues or making targeted policies. Acknowledging the relevance of a multiplicity of knowledges also means including more perspectives in knowledge production. Thinking in multiplicity enables *thinking thick*, which means engaging with a diversity of knowledges, adding layers of knowledge so that knowing becomes *thicker* than it initially was (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012). Such an approach unsettles comfort zones and considers the uneasiness that comes with epistemic multiplicity. This is the only way we can break through the "empathy walls" that limit a deep understanding of the other with varying backgrounds and convictions (Hochschild, 2016).

In the era that normalising power created homogenised zones and fuels negative emotions, it is essential to invest in shared interspaces, focusing on constant caring and nurturing of receptivity and sensibility towards otherness. Through a balancing act of shared concerns (commonalities) and differences is positionality (without hate speech), individuals develop sensitivities towards otherness that enable them to identify with the sense of injustice experienced by others. This might be the only way to counter the emotional segregation and approach to difference in societies that are becoming increasingly antagonistic. For that reason, I argue that we need to continue to emphasise the importance of embodied and experiential knowledge at individual and community levels to create emotional connectedness as alternative to negative emotionalisation of public space, in line with the achievements of (black) feminist epistemology and indigenous knowledges (Ghorashi 2025). This would be a tradition and a place that I would belong as an engaged scholar in which being an academic and a public intellectual are merged (Ghorashi *et al.*, forthcoming).

We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater and let radical-right politicians highjack the achievements of social movements. I would like to end my essay with a quote from Duyvendak's book that makes a differentiation between inclusive and exclusionary emotions: "The question is not whether politics should be emotional (or not); the debate should be about which emotions play a role, what place emotions have in relation to (other) arguments, and which groups use those emotions for inclusion or exclusion – in favor of incorporating the other or as a vehicle for his or her eternal banishment?" (2025, p. 115, my translation).

## Notes

[1] Nieuw: racisme zonder ras | de Volkskrant, last accessed 9 November 2025.

[2] Genderview herfst 2017 Halleh Ghorashi, last accessed 9 November 2025.

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# Polarisation Between Distance and Proximity Ethics

*Evelien Tonkens and Tsjalling Swierstra*

In his latest book *Spookkloven*, Jan Willem Duyvendak (2025) warns against "emotional polarization" based on phantom divides between citizens. Emotionally, Dutch people feel polarised even though there is no empirical ground for it, he argues. If you look at the classic demographic factors like income, education, urban–rural life, age, gender, migration background and religion, there is convergence rather than polarisation. Yes, there are differences between groups at most, but no real divides. Even ideological polarisation has been declining in recent decades. "Many progressive values are even considered typically Dutch" (Duyvendak, 2025, p. 15). The majority has grown more tolerant of moral issues relating to sexuality, life, and death and is moving in the same direction. Some other Dutch researchers concur, such as Quita Muis (2024), Paul Dekker (2022), or Tom Nijs (2025): the problem of polarisation is overrated, and polarisation worry is a more serious problem than polarisation itself. So, says Duyvendak, we shouldn't be so emotionally polarised.

It may be true that there is no ideological polarisation based on demographic factors, but that is not the only form of ideological polarisation that matters. In this chapter, we identify a worrying ideological polarisation between two radically different types of ethics, which we will refer to hereafter as *distance ethics* and *proximity ethics*. *Distance ethics* maintains that we bear responsibility for what is far away in temporal, spatial, and social terms: for what will happen later, elsewhere, and/or to other groups. *Proximity ethics* advocates that we are only responsible for what is close by: for what happens now, here, to our own team. We will elaborate this distinction in the next paragraph.

This polarisation is as much ideological as it is accompanied by intense emotions. Demographic factors do play a role, but there is no direct relationship with the types of ethics. For example, women do not adhere to the

distance ethic more or less than men, nor do young people in comparison to older people, or Muslims compared to non-Muslims.

This form of polarisation focuses on the norms that are derived from the two types of ethics. Indeed, in terms of their general opinions on societal problems, people do not differ that much. For example, three-quarters of the Dutch population is concerned about the climate (Versantvoort *et al.*, 2024). There is also hardly any polarisation in terms of actual behaviour. Ironically, most people attach little or no consequences to their climate concerns. They tend to continue to consume and produce the way they always did. They keep on eating meat, flying, buying non-essential consumer products, and driving in gasoline-powered cars. Rich and highly educated people do this even more than poor people with shorter or more practical educations, despite being slightly more concerned about the climate (Versandvoort *et al.*, 2024, p. 9). But when it comes to norms, on what the consequences of our general opinions should be, the ideological as well as emotional polarisation is huge.

## A Moral Turning Point

Let's first take a step back and reflect on where we stand today. We are living at a moral turning point (Scheffer, 2025) in history. We are heirs to two centuries of mainly progress. Industrialisation and democratisation have led to better living conditions and medical care worldwide. The world population grew from 1.08 to 7.35 billion between 1820 and 2015. The percentage of people living in absolute poverty fell from 89 per cent to approximately 10 per cent of the world population in the same period (*World Population Living in Extreme Poverty*, n.d.). So, in absolute terms there is less poverty than at the beginning of the measurement period! Life expectancy rose from 28.5 years in 1770 to 73 years in 2022 (Dattani *et al.*, 2023). Even if we consider that industrialisation also created exploitation and subjugation on an unprecedented scale, and world wars of unimaginable brutality, the overall picture of progress remains. But the twenty-first century is now confronting humanity with the bill. A huge bill indeed.

In short, humanity must find solutions to three clusters of immense problems, all three resulting from the industrialisation and democratisation that brought us so much good. Industrialisation has turned technology

into the most important production factor. Technology has increased our dominion over nature to such an extent that our present actions determine the conditions of existence for future generations. Current generations will have to adapt their behaviour and make concessions to allow a future for later generations. This first cluster therefore revolves around sustainability. What are current generations willing to do to leave a habitable Earth for their children?

Second, as a consequence of technological advances what happens on one side of the globe now has consequences for the survival of people and ecosystems on the other side. Thanks to the vastly increased mobility of people and goods, the earth has become increasingly smaller, and the lives of people all over the world have become deeply intertwined. This intertwining as such is not a problem. But it becomes one in the case of huge power differences. Rich countries keep the benefits of their lifestyle for themselves, while offloading the burdens to poor countries far away. Think of profiting from too cheap labour, too cheap raw materials, and from us dumping waste there. The raw materials and products from the Global South can only be so cheap because all kinds of ecological and human costs are not included in their price. Rich countries profit from the destruction of nature and the exploitation of people there. They are passing the buck, not only to future generations, but also to people and animals outside their direct view.

Third, emancipation and democratisation have led to increasing calls for recognition and equality. Where people used to accept their fate and "knew their place", even if that meant that they remained second-class citizens, those same people are now protesting loudly. Protests against hierarchy and dominance are as old as humanity itself, but the demand for equal rights, for recognition, and for apologies and compensation for injustice done, has grown more impatient than ever before. And it comes from more and more quarters. Whether it concerns low educated people, women, people who deviate from the heterosexual norm, people in former colonies, or (children of) migrants they all demand equality, recognition, and respect.

Again, that is not a problem as such. In fact, emancipation is a basic form of moral progress because it expands the moral community. But it does become a problem when the emancipation of one group comes at the expense of the privileges and moral certainties of others. Then the emancipation of one group is bound to provoke resistance from another

more privileged one, resulting in social unrest in which emotions such as fear, anger, envy, and resentment predominate.

## Distance and Moral Responsibility

These three clusters of problems may seem different, but they do have a common denominator. All three revolve around *distance*. In the case of sustainability, it is about the distance between the *now* and the *later*, about distance in *time*. In the case of global justice, it is about the distance between *here* and *there*, about distance in *space*. In the case of the increased call for recognition and equality, it is about the distance between *us* and *them*, about distance in *social identities*.

For a long time, these temporal, spatial, and social distances were not a problem, but instead functioned as helpful boundaries that kept one's world manageable. What happened far away – in time, in space, in other groups – could be safely ignored. During most of the (at least) 300,000 year-old history of Homo Sapiens, mainly the now, the here, and one's own group counted. If you don't know whether you'll have something to eat in the evening, you're not going to worry about next year. If you hardly ever leave your village, you won't worry about people far away. And if there are no laws, police, or judges, you depend on your own family or tribe, and other groups are more likely to be a threat than an object of concern. This threefold limitation is expressed in popular sayings such as, *Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself* (temporal distance, Matthew 6:34), *Out of sight, out of mind* (spatial distance), and *Blood is thicker than water* (social distance).

However, today such ignoring of what is happening far away has become impossible. What was absent, because it was removed in time, space, or identity, now inescapably imposes itself. If you don't want to know what is happening later, elsewhere, and to others, you must actively look the other way. For not seeing climate change, you must decide to become a climate denier. And everyone knows all too well that there is no fair distribution of benefits and burdens, of advantages and costs, between rich and poor countries. And you must close your ears and eyes tightly to remain deaf and blind to the demands for recognition and equality.

At its core, the question is how far our moral responsibility extends in the twenty-first century. Should we or should we not consider the

consequences of our behaviour for people and animals later, elsewhere, and outside our own group? Do they weigh-in when we think about how to act? And when we consider good and bad, praiseworthy or condemnable, permissible or forbidden? In the debate about these questions, two radically opposed ethical attitudes vy for supremacy: *distance ethics* and *proximity ethics.* Distance ethics states that we bear responsibility for what is far away in temporal, spatial, and social terms. In its most radical form it tells us to consider everyone, forever, everywhere. Proximity ethics, on the other hand, advocates a small scope: we are only responsible for what is close by: for now, here, and ourselves.

The opposition between distance ethics and proximity ethics is at the core of Duyvendak's discussion of the politics of home in his book *Thuis* [*Home*] (2017). In this book he criticises political ambitions to promote feeling at home in the Netherlands, both at the local and the national level. When he wrote this book, the municipality of Amsterdam had even formulated targets for the increase of its inhabitants' feeling at home in the city. Duyvendak is critical of this kind of politics. He argues that feeling at home is a highly selective emotion that we should not expect to experience in the public domain but only in the small circles of like-minded people such as close friends. In our terminology, feeling at home belongs to the sphere of proximity ethics, in which loyalty is a crucial moral emotion. Duyvendak simultaneously criticises a "happy cosmopolitanism" that argues that "we should not lock ourselves up in clans and nations that do not grant each other anything" (2017, p. 27), instead suggesting that everyone can feel at home anywhere. He dismisses this cosmopolitanism as naively unrealistic ("*wereldvreemd*").

We fully agree: granting a monopoly to the ethics of distance ignores the vital importance of proximity ethics. We need both. We should and can care about global justice, but this cannot mean that we should discard our care for what is close by. Feeling at home is rightly exclusive and depends on feelings of loyalty, and as such it is different from our concern for global justice, which is a form of solidarity with who or what is distant.

## Distance and Proximity in Political Polarisation

As opposed to what Duyvendak argues in *Spookkloven*, we maintain that political polarisation is a serious problem, where distance ethics

and proximity ethics are the sources of polarisation. The Party for the Animals (Partij voor de Dieren (PvvD)) represents those who most radically embrace distance ethics. For example, their 2023 election manifesto states that concerning sustainability, the PvdD

> does not focus on the short-term interests of wealthy people and their money, but makes choices from the broad perspective of a liveable Earth. (…) Eco-centric instead of ego-centric.

More specifically regarding the spatial dimension, the PvdD wants

> the Netherlands, as one of the richest countries in the world, to take its responsibility and work together with well-meaning citizens worldwide to protect everyone's need for a safe and healthy future.

And with regard to the social dimension, this party explicitly extends its solidarity not only to people living in distant places or times but it also to animals – the cuddly and the non-cuddly alike.

> [A]nimals are seen as living beings with feelings, not as things as is currently stated in the law.

The other side of the moral and political spectrum is occupied by the Party for Freedom (Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV)). Their 2023 election manifesto, for example, argued about sustainability, or temporal distance:

> We will stop the hysterical reduction of $CO_2$, with which we as a small country wrongly think we can "save" the climate. (…) We have to fly less, eat less meat; it just doesn't stop. The PVV says: no, we are definitely not going to do that! The Climate Act, the Climate Agreement and all other climate measures will go straight through the shredder. No more wasted billions on pointless climate hobbies, but more money for our people.

And about global justice, or the spatial dimension:

> We choose the Dutch interest. And no more Dutch euros will go to Brussels, Italy, Africa or any other redistribution fund.

And about the social dimension: the call for recognition of people who are not white, male, heterosexual, and Dutch:

> We must reclaim the Netherlands. Closing our borders to even more fortune seekers from other cultures is necessary. And real refugees should no longer be accommodated here, but in their own region.

The anti-Islam rhetoric of the PVV sometimes gives the impression that this party is actually standing up for the recognition of women and for people who do not conform to the hetero norm. However, a quick look at the voting behaviour of this party shows otherwise (Van Loon *et al.*, 2023). For example, in 2016 the party voted against the Istanbul Convention, an international treaty that regulated prevention, victim support, and prosecution of perpetrators. And when the PVV was in government, the government programme (of 2024) also contained virtually nothing about tackling violence against women. In most cases, the PVV opposes all kinds of "newfangled" emancipation demands. In 2017, the Speaker of the House of Representatives Martin Bosma even submitted an initiative proposal to make the traditional Black Pete mandatory at Santa Claus activities:

> According to this proposal, Black Pete must meet a number of characteristics: A uniformly black or dark brown face, red painted lips, black curly hair and gold-coloured earrings, and must be dressed in a velvety suit with baggy trousers and a headdress with a coloured feather. Replacing the traditional Black Pete with soot-smeared, rainbow, syrup-waffle or other Petes is seen as an attack on Dutch identity.

This polarisation between distance and proximity ethics is serious, and hard to combat. It is relatively clear what distance ethics demands. We stop favouring current generations over future generations. We weigh our interests and theirs impartially against each other. This results in a radical choice for sustainability, as defined by the United Nations (UN) in 1987: "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations, both here and in other parts of the world". Of course, this has consequences for our economy: we will have to produce differently and less, and also consume differently and less.

Choosing global ethics also means the end of the *externalisation society,* in which rich Western countries externalise the costs of their wealth

to the global south, by plundering other countries' resources, exploiting cheap, unregulated labour, and dumping waste (Lessenich, 2019). Instead, the polluter should start paying, and it should no longer be possible to enjoy the benefits and let others pay the costs. Human rights and the distribution of wealth should form the foundation of international relations.

Distance ethics also demands that we put an end to any form of discrimination and embrace human diversity and that the privileged give up their privileges. In short, we should see the world as a community of fate, in which everyone's fate is ultimately linked to that of other people and non-people. All this under the direction of a supranational body, such as the United Nations.

All great. There is only one problem: We are not very successful in putting all this into practice. The Dutch Party for the Animals (Partij voor de Dieren (PvdD*))* only gained 3 of the 150 seats in the last election for the Dutch Parliament, and other (left-wing) parties that promote distance ethics are also a clear minatory. The problem with distance ethics is that it does not motivate us enough to really change course. People do not live their lives in an abstract, indefinite space among strangers. They are rooted in place and time. The future only matters if we get through the present well, so it is entirely understandable that we tend to prioritise the present and to postpone the future. Our lives are played out in certain places with which we have emotional ties, among family and friends with whom we share our lives, for whom we care, and who we know will take care of us when it comes down to it. Compassion and care for one another are bad at travelling great distances. People are, in the terminology of David Goodhart (2017), not *anywheres* but *somewheres*. Distance ethics always feels like a strange coat in which we never feel completely at home. And, as Duyvendak has reminded reminds us in *Thuis* (2017), we should not aim to feel at home anywhere and everywhere; the ambition to do so expresses the naïve cosmopolitanism that he criticises.

The lack of support for distance ethics is reflected in politics. There is hardly democratic support for it. A party that drums loudly about distance ethics, such as the PvvD, condemns itself to the margins. Distance ethics seems condemned to powerlessness. While we certainly can't say the same about proximity ethics. Proximity ethics has no reason to complain about democratic support. The parties that profile themselves on the here, now, us, are very successful. Distance ethics forms the moral core of the populism, nationalism, and nativism that are advancing all over the globe.

Countries such as Russia, China, and the United States are working hard to position themselves well in the global power struggle for scarce resources and space. International legal rules and institutions are under pressure from all sides, because countries are pursuing their own interests. If you want Ukraine/Taiwan/Greenland, just take it by force. Within the European Union (EU) too, the populist message that we must concentrate on now, here, us is spreading like wildfire. It gave us Brexit, but also the election of politicians such as Orbán, Meloni, and Wilders, and the rise of extreme right-wing parties in Austria, Germany, and France. Duyvendak (2017) is particularly worried about their nativism, which maintains that only "natives" are entitled to feel at home, thereby denying citizenship to citizens who(se parents) come from elsewhere.

The rise of proximity ethics is not limited to politics. In the business world, for example, we see that companies are also focusing more on the short term, under pressure from shareholders who want to see a quick profit and therefore loudly protest against what they now call *woke capitalism* but was only recently referred to as "socially responsible entrepreneurship" or "corporate responsibility". Pension funds are under pressure from their clients to rake in as many short-term profits as possible.

In short, even though many people in general agree that distance ethics is needed to solve some serious problems, proximity ethics is on the rise. In contrast to distance ethics, it apparently fits in well with widely held moral intuitions and self-evident beliefs. In contrast to distance ethics, proximity ethics is democratically supported – even if that democratic support leads to support for all kinds of parties and movements that have little patience for the – national and international – constitutional state on which the liberal, pluralistic democracy of the twentieth century was based. Proximity ethics offers absolutely no solutions to the three clusters of long-distance problems we indicated above.

## Remaining Inequality

The social (as opposed to temporal and spatial) dimension of the contrast between proximity and distance ethics – us versus them – has been the main object of study of Duyvendak's impressive list of publications. That is also the dimension we will focus on in the remainder of this article, as

that is also where we disagree with Duyvendak concerning the degree and contents of current polarisation.

Duyvendak has repeatedly argued, always based on thorough empirical data, that (Dutch) citizens as well as policy makers tend to overrate differences between (ethnic or religious) groups and thereby create polarisation and exclusion. In *Spookkloven*, he repeats this argument with more force, based on a rich array of statistical data. He shows that Dutch people with different migration backgrounds, religions, or differing in terms of gender, educational level, and age, have grown closer and now worry unnecessarily about the remaining small differences. They no longer tolerate inequality. And so they get very worked up about almost nothing. Public perception has become distorted:

> This distorted perception appears to be linked to the changed experience of inequality: fewer and fewer people in the Netherlands find inequality acceptable and therefore have little tolerance for remaining differences. We are increasingly angry about the gaps that still exist, which is one of the reasons we think they are very large. This strong emotional involvement in remaining inequality distorts our view of the actual differences. (Duyvendak, 2025, p. 14)

Is Duyvendak arguing that the remaining inequalities should just be accepted? Given his long track record as a champion of all possible forms of emancipation, that is not likely. In *Spookkloven*, he also argues that there still remain a few serious divides, especially a wealth gap, which is very large in the Netherlands but weirdly hardly causes public concern. And there is an increasing percentage of people, now 64 percent, who experience major tensions based on religion. Reflecting on such remaining divides, he states:

> There is still plenty to be done. But it is also important to recognize that much of the discontent is the result of a long process of emancipation in which no one lets anyone tell them what to do and as a result of which we no longer tolerate any form of unequal treatment. (Duyvendak, 2025, p. 82)

The last sentence suggests that we should tolerate unequal treatment if it is not too much. We do not think Duyvendak actually means to say this. It is more probable that he thinks we should still make efforts to reduce inequality, even if it is only slight, but that we should do so calmly and

confidently. Confidently, because we have already come such a long way and achieved so much, and calmly because we are moving in the right direction, provided we do not get too worked up about it.

However, although people have grown closer is some respects, they often experience the remaining distance as intense. Moreover, we think they do so for good reasons. Because the remaining differences concern the question of what true, full equality means. The remaining differences between the positions of white people and people of colour, or women and men, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (or questioning) plus (LGTBIQ+) versus straight people or Muslims and non-Muslims may seem small, but symbolically they are still very meaningful. They symbolise that being allowed to participate is no longer considered sufficient by those who are emancipating. The demand for emancipation has now been radicalised to claiming the right to challenge hegemonic norms themselves, to end remaining privileges and to make room for others. There has always been oppression and exploitation – both between groups and within groups. And there has always been some degree of resistance to that hierarchy. But the scale on which equality is now demanded, and its radical character, is new. This can ultimately be traced back to the fact that the moral legitimacy for many well-known hierarchies has fallen into disarray in recent decades. Hierarchy and dominance can only be stable as long as they are accepted as morally right, natural, and unchangeable. This is no longer the case.

Of course, one can still try to enforce hierarchy and dominance using pure violence. But the outcome will be perilous, and probably not long-lived. Our history is one of subjugation, but also of emancipation. And that emancipation seems to be gaining speed in modern times. A shift from “favour” to “right” is at the heart of all emancipation movements, because it frees people from submissive dependence on the ruling party. In case of a favour, those with power and privilege pull the strings and expect gratitude. By contrast, in the case of a right there is no obligation to be grateful, and people relate to one another as equals. Freedom is not a favour but a right. For example, feminists no longer accept soothing talk about “equal appreciation”. They demand equal rights and therefore equal distribution of economic, political, cultural, and social power – with or without the approval of the dominant sex.

Now emancipation has gained momentum, there is a cacophony of voices demanding recognition and respect, equality and justice, and

sometimes also apologies and compensation. All these demands are just so many knocks on the door: open the door and let us in! We want to participate on an equal footing! A common definition of moral progress is that it occurs when more people, and animals, are admitted as members of the moral community. That is to say: when people and animals receive compassion, recognition, respect, and justice in equal measure. Not as a favour for which you have to say thank you, but as a right that can be claimed.

For those who lose privileges, revision of the moral order can be shameful and painful. Populists' hostile version of proximity ethics invites the privileged to defend their own privileges and push others back into their box. But their opponents are not going to let that happen. The moral stories that motivated and legitimised their previous submission have lost all credibility. Unlike in the past, there are no longer scientists who seriously claim that women are dumber than men, that there are major genetic differences between different races, or that homosexuality is an aberration that does not occur in nature.

So, populists can try to defend sexism, racism, and homophobia, but the chance that the others will accept the old subordinate role again is negligible. They are part of a cultural backlash that surely stirs up polarisation (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018), even though this backlash mostly appeals to older generations (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Moreover, almost everyone is the product of some emancipation process, which means that their stance towards emancipation is ambiguous. Someone may think that gay people should be grateful for not being discriminated against, and as a sign of this gratitude not flaunt their gayness. Such a person merely grants tolerance as a favour, and thus does not subscribe to the principle that people have a right to their own sexual identity. But the same person will not dream of giving up his own hard-won rights as a voter or worker, humbly thanking the rich for the crumbs that the rich throw at him. The point is that things will never be the same again. The clock cannot be turned back.

The remaining differences may be small, as Duyvendak rightly argues, but their size is not what matters. And while he does make a persuasive case that the remaining differences are much smaller than ever before, people not only compare their position with generations before them, but also, and possibly with more emotional energy, with people who live now and whose lives are comparable to ours (Illouz, 2026). The polarisation involved is not about the size or comparison with the past, but about the

character of these differences and comparison with others who live now. They signify the demand for full equality, that challenges the dominant norms of how we live together and how we respect one another. For full equality, the details matter greatly. Black Pete, #Metoo, the LGTBIQ+ Pride, and Black Lives Matter are all examples of this demand.

## Emotions

Second, we disagree with Duyvendak's analysis of the role of emotions in current polarisation. Emotions always drive emancipation struggles. In *Spookkloven*, Duyvendak argues that emotions nowadays play a polarising role in today's public discourse. They unnecessarily inflame the debate. Populism is dangerous because it emotionalises politics by whipping up negative emotions such as anger, fear, desire for revenge, envy, and nostalgia. Emotions are increasingly replacing arguments and fact-based truth claims, thus making political debate virtually impossible. He admits that emotions sometimes do have an emancipatory effect, but nowadays emotionalisation has gone too far. Rather than reducing inequality and including new groups, it causes the exclusion of minorities and the widening of divisions. He therefore tries to cool down those emotions by pointing at the sober facts:

> While most contradictions and divisions in the Netherlands have actually decreased or remained stable in recent years, it is primarily emotional polarisation that is increasing. This affective polarisation, in turn, influences how we view other contradictions; it colours our perception so that we overestimate contradictions and are blind to similarities. In this way, we create phantom divides; we think that the emotional divide we experience actually exists to the same extent. (Duyvendak, 2025, p. 112)

Conversely, a distorted image of a supposed divide can contribute to emotional polarisation, Duyvendak argues. If people think there exist large divides, they may well become afraid of others and be less likely to show solidarity.

But, so we want to argue, emotions are not primarily detrimental. For one thing, there can be no morality without moral emotions. There are positive and problematic emotions, and there are positive and

problematic ways of dealing with them. Rather than being rejected in favour of facts, emotions deserve careful investigation. In line with the famous analysis of De Tocqueville (2003) about equality and democracy in the United States, sociologist Eva Illouz (2026) analyses populist anger as a response to an egalitarianism that fails to live up to its promises. Modern societies, she argues, promise fair distribution of wealth and status on the basis of fair competition. Their consumer cultures constantly invite us to compare ourselves to others, and to desire what others have. But in reality modern societies are still based on invisible power mechanisms that undermine equal opportunities. And rather than seeing others as equals, many people try to safeguard their self-respect by defining other groups as inferior. The result is anger based on envy. Envy, Illouz argues, is particularly explosive when the object of envy is considered inferior but is nevertheless doing better than the subject herself.

This envy can lead to destructive anger. Philosopher Owen Flanagan (2021) distinguishes between two types: *payback anger* and *pain-passing* anger. The goal of payback anger is to cause others physical or mental pain and suffering, and/or damage their status, because they have hurt you – for example, by despising you or getting in your way. Payback anger is deliberate, vengeful, and cruel. Pain-passing anger, on the other hand, is self-centred and often thoughtless. You want to hurt someone else because you feel anxious, hurt, and depressed, even though you know that the pain was not caused by that other person. But in your own misery you simply attack someone else. You want to hurt that person so that she feels your own pain. According to Flanagan, both forms of anger are destructive and both have increased significantly in recent times. Partly this is due to the fact that we have come to believe that it is healthy to express negative feelings. As a result of this relatively new belief, we now too easily accept that negative feelings hurt others.

Applied to current politics, the far right directs payback anger at the elite, and pain-passing anger at migrants. The elite must pay back, because its members torment hard-working citizens with contempt, know-it-all attitudes, and paternalistic talk about good behaviour that the hypocritic elite itself does not even adhere to. And asylum seekers and migrants are the ones to whom pain may be passed on: all that preferential treatment must now come to an end; now the hard-working citizens must come first, and then the others will see how unpleasant it is to end up at the back of the waiting list for things like housing!

Flanagan (2021) contrasts both destructive forms of anger with what he calls *loving anger*. Loving anger is motivated by love for a person or community, and is aimed at improving (your relationship with) that person or community. An example is the anger about Black Pete we pointed out above: it is anger directed at improving the relations between Dutch citizens towards equality. Loving anger can also cause pain, but it aims to restore a balance or improve a person, a community, or harmful practices or institutions. It is motivated by love and compassion for the object of anger. This is in contrast to payback anger and pain-passing anger, where the person who is angry closes herself off to the consequences of their anger on others and is only interested in their own feelings. According to Flanagan (2021), loving anger is nowadays sadly infected by both destructive forms of anger.

In sum, these two authors show us how emotions signal ongoing inequalities as well as destructive and constructive ways to deal with them. Therefore, emotional polarisation cannot be undone by showing facts. The emotional dimension is too real itself. And negative emotions can probably more effectively be replaced by positive emotions such as loving anger, than by facts. Duyvendak's *Spookkloven* is itself a beautiful example of loving anger. He wants us to appreciate what we have achieved and from there move forward in optimism and love for the world, as he has effectively done in so many of his great publications.

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# (Un)Successful Crisis Mobilisation: Migration Versus Climate Change

*Thijs van Dooremalen*

## Introduction

In the last decades, calling out a migration crisis has been an attractive discursive move for politicians in Western countries (Van Reekum *et al.*, 2012): it often brings them both media attention and electoral success. A big part of Jan Willem Duyvendak's work of roughly the last 25 years has focused on understanding this attraction and its effects: why does the migration crisis claim to resonate so much, and what are its political and societal consequences? Calling out a climate crisis, on the other hand, often resonates way less strongly in the same societies. That is, many citizens and political parties agree that climate change is a significant problem, and policies to tackle it have been developed. But the idea of it as one of today's biggest crises and the willingness to implement measures with the same level of urgency as in the case of migration are often lacking. Or, to put it into the vocabulary of this book: it is currently easier to *culturalise* than to *climatise* citizenship.

What can explain this discrepancy? I wrote my PhD thesis on responses to the Islamic-inspired terrorist event 9/11 (Van Dooremalen, 2019), and have in recent years expanded my research to the effects of extreme weather events (e.g., Van Dooremalen & Smith, 2025). A key reason for this expansion is that these two types of events embody the discrepancy: whereas Islamic terrorism is usually considered a clear call for stricter immigration and migrant integration policies, extreme weather hardly ever turns into a reason to intensify climate policies. Jan Willem Duyvendak has written surprisingly little about climate politics. He has published a bit about the environment (Koopmans & Duyvendak, 1995; Duyvendak, 1996), but not much in the last decades. And on the specific topic of climate change – as far as I know – basically nothing. However, his work on topics such as mobilisation and framing does offer several explanatory clues for why

crisis claiming does (not) turn into a success. In this chapter, I will engage with this work to unravel the discrepancy of (un)successful crisis claiming between the cases of migration and climate change.

## The Objectivist Fallacy

A first obvious explanation would be to consider the objective nature of the two problems. The reasoning then would be: migration problems are all over the place in most Western societies. New flows of refugees keep coming, and migrants and their children cause all kinds of nuisance, such as unemployment and crime. One could therefore say: this problem is objectively a very serious one, worthy of crisis claiming. This kind of reasoning is currently a very prominent one outside of academia. But it also continues to gain traction within it. For example, in a recent book on the 2015 European refugee crisis, Kriesi *et al.* (2024, pp. 73–77) use what they call "problem pressure" as a measure of national crisis severity: the larger a country's number of incoming refugees, the greater its crisis.

However, an argument that was already present in Duyvendak's early work is that objective problem conditions on their own can never explain the level of concern they raise among citizens. Nor can they account for the number of protests held or policy proposals formulated to address them. For example, in 1996, Duyvendak wrote about the environmental movement (originally in Dutch, my translation): *Whether an environmental organisation takes action and what resources it uses to do so depends not on the «objective» severity of the environmental crisis, but on the organisation's subjective perception of this crisis. This perception, in turn, is colored by the opportunities for addressing the situation – in other words, by the political context* (Duyvendak, 1996, pp. 144–145).

Many empirical examples demonstrate that "objectivist" crisis explanations do not hold. Why, for example, would the objective conditions of migration problems create such severe crisis feelings, while the objective nature of climate problems, which are extensively documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), do so to a much smaller degree? Or why did the claims about the "multicultural drama" (Scheffer, 2000) gain widespread acceptance in the Netherlands at the turn of the century, while the integration of Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch was actually improving during this period? And why do the current migration

debates in many countries often focus so much on refugees, when they generally constitute the smallest group of migrants, and the larger group of labour migrants also causes all sorts of social problems (De Haas, 2023)?

In other words, even if we could say that one problem is objectively worse than another, then that *as such* could never explain differences in (un)successful crisis claiming. A counterargument for the specific comparison of migration versus climate change could be that citizens simply know more about the former problem. This is a common argument in climate change discussions: if people only knew about its severity, then they would automatically start caring more. However, research shows that in a lot of Western societies, many citizens have sufficient knowledge about the effects of climate change (Norgaard, 2011, pp. 64–73). Moreover, in most of them, the number of climate change deniers is decreasing (Bretter and Schulz, 2023). In short, the discrepancy does not stem from a lack of public climate change knowledge.

Another counterargument might be that most Western citizens are simply more concerned about migration than about climate change. Yet, that is not a real explanation. It still begs the question: why is this the case?

## Two Explanations: Opportunities and Framing

So, how do crisis perceptions then come into being? Duyvendak's work leads us to two answers: opportunities and framing.

On the topic of opportunities, a rich literature has been written over the last decades. Initially, the focus was on "political opportunity structures". For instance, a Western European research project, which Duyvendak participated in, indicated that the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s primarily gained political influence in countries that offered, among other things, favourable electoral systems (Kriesi *et al.*, 1992). The Dutch proportional system, which is very welcoming to newly founded political parties, gave parties that embodied the "spirit of 1968" the opportunity to directly enter Parliament, whereas within the French majoritarian system this proved much more difficult (Duyvendak, 1995). While revolutionary claims were widespread on the streets of Paris, they never really found their way into the centre of French politics. Later, the focus in the literature shifted to "discursive opportunity structures": which ideas are considered (un)acceptable in public debates, and what are their inclusive and

exclusive effects? Supporting gay rights in the Netherlands, for example, became part of mainstream discourses when it turned out that this allowed for "othering" Muslims as homophobic (Hurenkamp *et al.*, 2012). Thus, according to the opportunities literature, explanations for successful crisis mobilisation must be sought in the (un)willing pathways that institutions like politics and the media provide for the rise of crisis perceptions.

Yet, this is not the whole story. In Duyvendak's recent work, there is more emphasis on the power of actors to, through clever framing actions, exploit political or discursive opportunities in such ways that their claims have more impact. As Broer and Duyvendak (2011) demonstrated, actors are not only *confronted* with structures that may or may not offer opportunities for success. They can also *reflect* on these structures and, through confrontation, *learn* how to use them to the benefit of their cause.

Obviously, some actors are better at this than others. *The Return of the Native* (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022) shows how, in particular, right-wing populist politicians skilfully deploy and innovate a nativist discourse to pit citizens against one another and win elections. The last part of this book consists of a call to action, urging progressive politicians to reclaim the nation with a new, counter-nativist discourse.

## Opportunities for Crisis Mobilisation

How can we, based on these explanations, understand (un)successful crisis mobilisation for the cases of migration and climate change? To start with, we can consider opportunities: what do these offer in many Western societies for mobilising concerns about these topics?

To explain the ease with which migration crises are currently being declared, we have to consider the fact that we still live in an era in which the nation-state remains a key reference point for many citizens. Through socialisation in institutions like schools and through media, they often develop the idea that their nation is an important part of their identity (Kuipers, 2013). As a result, it feels natural for many citizens to draw clear, culturalising boundaries (Lamont, 2000) between themselves and citizens from other countries. Hence, national identity often runs very deep; it is a "semiotic code" (Swidler, 2001) that cannot be adapted easily. Beautiful things can arise from this identity, as seen, for example, in Ukraine's nationalism-inspired resistance against the Russian invasion. But it also

provides the grounds on which right-wing populists often build their claims, with migrants being framed as the ultimate threat to this identity (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2022).

Yet, the nation-state is not only a strong semiotic code, but it also offers a very attractive model for the good life to citizens in many Western societies. Belonging to a Western nation generally means having access to prosperity, a welfare state, and a high-status national identity. Having to share all this with migrants can feel threatening (Hochschild, 2018). These two discursive opportunities – the Western nation-state as a strong identity and as an attractive model – may explain why migration crisis mobilisation is often so successful.

If we compare this to opportunities for climate crisis mobilisation, the story is very different. For many citizens of Western societies, perceiving climate change as a big problem does not lead to preserving something attractive, but rather having the foresight of something rather unattractive. A world in which governments fully face climate change and take all sorts of measures to tackle it will imply that Western citizens have to give up many of the joys of their current lives, such as flying, eating meat, and so on. As Rebecca Elliott (2018) put it: it is a story of loss. Moreover, if we extend the comparison, the cause of the migration crisis can always be directed at the Other: refugees and ethnic minorities. Declaring this crisis does not harm the "own" native population. Coming to terms with the climate crisis, on the other hand, points the finger towards all citizens, requiring an overhaul of everyone's lives. Therefore, it is not an attractive crisis to sell or buy.

Lastly, a parliament of people from the future does not exist. Thus, the political opportunity structures here also work against the development of real climate citizenship. The migration crisis feels nearby; the climate crisis is currently not yet as palpable as it will be in the future. And so, many citizens and politicians continue to live in a state of what we might call "soft denial": they recognize that climate change is a problem, but its full consequences are not yet felt thoroughly. It remains "background noise" (Norgaard, 2011).

## A different Playbook

But this is not the end of the story. As the part above on framing showed, there are always possibilities for actors to innovate existing discursive

opportunities. Right-wing populists were not always so electorally successful. They have become increasingly good at playing with the nativist narrative, which they more and more present as the only true narrative about their countries. This is often referred to as the "right-wing populist playbook" or "perpetuum mobile" (Wodak, 2015).

These days, it sometimes seems as if this is the only political playbook with potential for success. But would it not be possible for other political entrepreneurs to create a "climate crisis playbook"? In *Climate Change as Social Drama* (2015), Phil Smith and Nicolas Howe argue that the story of the climate crisis is often told through the wrong genres. A bureaucratic-scientific genre predominates (see also Hajer and Oomen, 2025), which is full of boring facts and stories from scientists and climate conferences. Facts matter (Duyvendak, 2025), but on their own, they do not offer a compelling narrative that will mobilise citizens. They have to be combined with other discursive elements.

Today, this is often an apocalyptic genre: stories of doom are being mobilised by climate movements such as Extinction Rebellion and Fridays for Future. However, on their own, doom stories are not enough either, as they often result in apathy. They should be combined with a more romantic or at least a positive genre, in which the climate crisis is the starting point of something beautiful. The genre should offer citizens a glimpse into a bright, sustainable future, as the nation-state narrative has been doing for centuries.

What such a narrative could more concretely look like and how it could gain traction is food for thought for another piece. It might seem overly optimistic to assume that it could actually become a success. However, if I have learned one key lesson from Duyvendak's work, then it is that people's worldviews are through and through socially constructed. Thus, there is always the possibility that they can be turned upside down.

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PART 5

# Social Institutions and the Welfare State

# Institutions, Belonging, and the Making of Citizenship in Contexts

*Christophe Bertossi*

## Introduction

This chapter reflects on an intellectual collaboration that has been both formative for my own work and deeply intertwined with the scholarly trajectory of Jan Willem Duyvendak. When it started 20 years ago, our collaboration did not begin with the intention of producing a shared theory of citizenship. Rather, it emerged from a series of empirical and conceptual dissatisfactions we had in common – most notably with the dominance of "national models of integration" in European debates on migration, Islam, and belonging.

Over time, however, our joint work contributed to a reorientation of how citizenship is conceptualised: away from static national traditions and towards more historically dynamic, institutionally embedded, and culturally mediated processes of boundary-making. Contributing to the present volume offers an opportunity to reflect on this long intellectual companionship I shared with Jan Willem Duyvendak – and John Bowen, with whom we jointly developed this research agenda.

Rather than presenting our collaboration as a discrete intervention in the field, I approach it as an ongoing dialogue – one that brought together my interest in institutions, public policy, and comparative political sociology with Jan Willem Duyvendak's sustained engagement with belonging, cultural norms, and the moral dimensions of citizenship. This dialogue proved remarkably generative, reshaping how both of us came to think about integration and citizenship.

In this chapter, I trace our collaboration through three interrelated moments: the critique of national models; the turn to institutional contexts; the articulation of a boundary-centred conception of citizenship with the emergence of nativist nostalgia. Throughout, I emphasise how

this collaboration fed into Duyvendak's broader intellectual agenda and contributed to his enduring influence on citizenship studies.

## Reframing Comparison Beyond National Models

Our collaboration emerged in a context where national models of integration had become both analytically dominant and politically consequential (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2009). France, the Netherlands, and other Western immigration societies were routinely described through ideal-typical frameworks that claimed to explain their respective approaches to diversity. French citizenship was discussed as a colour-blind "philosophy" while the Netherlands embodied a supposedly ultimate form of multiculturalism, what an author like Koopmans coined as "an extreme representative of a 'multicultural' vision of integration" (Koopmans, 2007, p. 167; Koopmans *et al.*, 2005).

This was by then a dominant view, including among social scientists. The conclusion these authors drew was that the application of the Dutch multicultural model on new immigrant groups had had strong adverse effects, as multiculturalism "offers new ethnic and religious groups a formal and symbolic form of equality, which in practice reinforces ethnic cleavages and reproduces segregation on a distinctly unequal basis" (Koopmans, 2007, p. 168). It was clear to us that, through such claims, these national models were not merely academic heuristics: they were embedded in national politics and self-understandings.

The stakes of this discussion directly concern the real autonomy of social science discourse vis-à-vis public and political debate – indeed, all the more so today, in a context of democratic breakdown. The risk lies in conflating the language of knowledge with the language of power, the scientific description of social reality – for example, of racism or civic inclusiveness – with the political rhetoric that feeds and sustains it. In other words, behind the discussion of models – but also, in the most recent French scholarly debates, behind disputes over the articulation between "race" and class (Beaud & Noiriel, 2021) – the central question is whether it is possible to produce a scientific description of a social problem – here, French republicanism, Dutch multiculturalism, or, more broadly, racism and citizenship – by appropriating the public semantics that contribute to producing that problem and legitimising it politically.

In this case, this involves injunctions to *laïcité* in France and to assimilation in the Netherlands, and some sorts of moral and cultural conformity expected from "immigrants" in the name of democracy. Over the past two decades, Western European states have increasingly sought to define national identity as a repository of civic values – such as Dutch values, French *laïcité*, Danish identity, Britishness, or Italian national culture. In doing so, they have effectively transformed principles once associated with liberal citizenship into markers of cultural distinctiveness. To a significant, and possibly growing, extent, these nationalist cultural claims are conflated with assertions about the fundamental principles governing each country's political and social order.

Social scientists studying France often invoke *laïcité* to account for specific laws and policies, treating the concept as if it possessed a fixed and widely shared meaning. Similarly, regarding the Netherlands, scholars have argued that "multiculturalism" once functioned as a national model, a claim that aligns closely with the way the term is employed in populist and nationalist political discourse. Debates over the future of "British multiculturalism" follow comparable patterns. In such cases, it becomes difficult to distinguish national ideological narratives from analytical frameworks. More broadly, both political and academic discussions of citizenship are shaped by a shared concern with the so-called "multicultural crisis" of European immigration societies, particularly focusing on Islam and Muslim populations. In these debates, national idioms of citizenship serve simultaneously as the lens through which the crisis is evaluated, explained, and ultimately addressed.

From my own work on France, I had become increasingly aware of how French republican universalism functioned less as a coherent institutional logic than as a repertoire of justifications mobilised selectively in political and public debates. My research on the incorporation of French nationals originating from postcolonial immigration into the newly professionalised French military emphasised forms of what was usually labelled as "reasonable accommodation", despite the French claimed "colour blind" or assimilationist approach to diversity (Bertossi & Wihtol de Wenden, 2007). For example, the French military is the only Western military institution that organised the annual pilgrimage of its Muslim soldiers to Mecca at the end of the 2000s and for several years, "despite" the French "separation" of State and Church and assimilationist model widely used by comparative social and political scientists (see Bertossi, 2016).

Jan Willem Duyvendak, drawing on his research on belonging and social cohesion in the Netherlands, expressed a similar scepticism towards the multiculturalism narrative, particularly as it persisted long after Dutch policies had shifted towards cultural assimilation (Duyvendak & Scholten, 2009). He very convincingly demonstrated that being empirically stretched into the days of "pillarisation", this view of a Dutch multicultural model was a mere rewriting of history, a view shared by a few other scholars (see, for example, Vink 2007).

We shared the same reservations about the insufficiently reflexive use of "culture idioms" (Sckocpol, 1985; Brubaker, 1992) in comparative migration research (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2012, 2018). However, what ultimately brought us together intellectually was a common intuition: that national models were far less valuable as explanatory frameworks than as objects of analysis in their own right (Bertossi, 2011). This means that it is insufficient to dismiss national models simply because empirical reality does not conform to them.

Our claim was rather that social life is in fact saturated with "modelised" reasoning and "modelising" practices. Social actors themselves widely believe in the existence of national models – such as a French model rooted in revolutionary principles or Dutch and British models of multiculturalism and liberal tolerance – and actively invoke them across a wide range of settings, from everyday institutional spaces to public and political arenas. National models are discussed, debated, and mobilised in workplaces, schools, welfare offices, police stations, civil society organisations, media forums, and transnational policy venues.

National models therefore warrant analytical attention not as stable or coherent frameworks, but as objects of belief, contention, and negotiation. A key analytical task is thus to examine how models circulate and are contested, how their meanings shift, and how misunderstandings and conflicts arise around them. In this respect, the cognitive turn in the sociology of ethnicity – conceiving ethnicity, race, and nation as perspectives on the world rather than entities in the world (Brubaker et al., 2004) – offers a productive way to reposition national models of integration. This approach avoids positivist accounts that reduce national models to institutional logics or ideal-typical structures shaping actors from above and instead foregrounds actors' interpretive agency.

From this perspective, national models are not pre-given normative templates that guide action ex ante. Rather, they are produced and

reshaped through practice. Social actors contribute to their construction by defining agendas, problematising issues, categorising populations, and engaging in moral entrepreneurship (Becker, 1963). Through these processes, models acquire content – normative orientations, justificatory frameworks, classificatory hierarchies, and moral judgements (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Lamont, 2000; Bowen, 2009). National models thus emerge as contingent, polysemic, and often contradictory outcomes of boundary-making processes, particularly within institutional settings where questions of belonging are routinely negotiated.

Rather than asking whether a given country conformed to "its" model, we focused on what these models *did* – how they structured public debates, legitimised policy interventions, and shaped expectations towards, just as much as from, minorities. This shift marked the beginning of a performative critique of national models that would come to underpin much of our subsequent collaboration.

## Institutional Practical Contexts

A decisive step in my collaboration with Jan Willem Duyvendak was the shift from national models to institutional contexts. This move found its most systematic expression in *European States and their Muslim Citizens. How Institutions Impact Perceptions and Boundaries* (2014), co-edited with John Bowen and Mona Lena Krook. Although the volume was not conceived as a theoretical manifesto, it became a pivotal moment in our shared intellectual trajectory, crystallising a set of analytical intuitions that had been developing through earlier exchanges.

The starting point of the book was a simple but consequential claim: the relationship between states, citizenship, and people identified as Muslim cannot be adequately captured by reference to abstract national traditions such as republicanism or multiculturalism alone. Rather, it requires a relational and institutional approach, attentive to the specific arenas in which this relationship is actively produced, framed, and governed.

I was developing this agenda at the crossroad of three recent currents in sociology, namely, French political sociology and its focus on institutionalising processes (Lagroye & Offerlé, 2010); French pragmatic sociology, drawing from the work of Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thévenot, Nicolas Dodier, and others; and US cultural sociology and, more particularly,

the work of Michèle Lamont and the prolific scholarship she initiated on boundary-making. John Bowen's work on public reasonings and Jan Willem Duyvendak's breakthrough in the field of belonging studies completed our toolkit. From there, we focused analytically on the legal frameworks, institutional routines, and policy instruments through which states recognise, regulate, and engage with people who identify or are identified as Muslim, highlighting how these institutional practices simultaneously constitute and delimit the boundaries of citizenship.

This approach had several important implications. First, it allowed us to move beyond the reified opposition between "inclusive" and "exclusive" models of citizenship (cf. Banting & Kymlicka, 2006, 2013; Koopmans *et al.*, 2012), a dichotomy in which, more often than not, migration research had been trapped (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2013). By focusing on institutions, we revealed a far more fragmented and situational reality, in which inclusion and exclusion frequently coexist within a single national context. Second, it enabled a more fine-grained form of comparison: rather than contrasting countries as undifferentiated wholes, we examined institutional logics across specific policy domains, including health, education, defence, electoral politics, and law, looking at domain-specific forms of citizenship engagement.

For my own work, this turn towards institutionalising processes represented a way of reconnecting normative debates on citizenship with empirically observable state practices. It highlighted how principles such as secularism or neutrality acquire meaning through their contested enactment within institutional contexts. For Duyvendak, the volume offered a concrete entry point for linking his long-standing concern with belonging and cultural norms to the material operations of the state. Institutions appeared as sites where cultural and moral expectations about citizenship are actively produced and disputed. The volume demonstrated that culture does not simply "enter" politics from the outside; it is actively shaped by institutional arrangements that define which differences matter, how they should be governed, and what practical principles ought to be negotiated.

Likewise, institutional practices do not flow from uniform rules but from context-specific roles, norms, and "grammars of justification" (Dewey, 1924). As a result, members of different social locations within an institution will arrange very differently the interplay between the institutional identities they claim their institution be based on (the school

system, the military, the hospital), what they see of their institution's social function in the national society they argue they play (e.g., national integration), and the place the institution offers for the expression of religious or cultural diversity (which can be dissonant with the dominant politics of diversity).

To come back to the military example, armed forces are commonly understood as a "total institution" that de-emphasizes cultural, ethnic, and religious identities (Goffman, 1961; Pinto, 1975). Yet, my research showed it faced two key challenges during the early times of military professionalisation in France: securing sufficient manpower and maintaining social legitimacy by reflecting broader society rather than remaining insular. Minority inclusion can serve both aims, reshaping the traditional image of the predominantly white, heterosexual, and Christian officer. This may lead the institution to create visible accommodations for diversity through targeted recruitment, symbolic representation, or provisions such as halal food and Muslim chaplaincy. Such adjustments often stem from internal transformations, in this case the shift from conscription to all-volunteer forces, and may occur independently of national citizenship models. Analytically, the key issue is how institutional actors interpret these changes and connect them to wider public debates.

Institutions thus actively shape, rather than merely implement, national principles of citizenship and belonging. Institutional actors are engaged in a continual interplay between the constraints and facilities offered by institutional structures, on the one hand, and their ideas of what they want their institution to be, on the other (Lagroye & Offerlé, 2010, p. 17). The belief in an overarching institutional order can have as much of a performative effect as national ideologies.

From this perspective, boundary-making emerged as a more analytically robust lens. Citizenship, in this view, operates through distinctions – between acceptable and unacceptable forms of belonging, legitimate and suspect identities, and so on. This move towards boundary-making also reframed the role of institutions now seen as actively participating in drawing and enforcing boundaries of belonging. Citizenship thus becomes conditional and performative, requiring ongoing demonstrations of conformity to normative expectations within institutional settings. I proposed the notion of "tests of belonging" ("*épreuves d'appartenance*") (Bertossi, 2016) to describe and analyse this process, which is embedded in the everyday routines and practices of institutional life.

Eventually, the focus on institutions also reshaped our understanding of Islam as an analytical object. Islam was not treated as a homogeneous social phenomenon, nor as an external challenge to liberal democracies, as other authors would claim. Instead, it functioned as a relational category, constituted through interactions. In this sense, Islam exposed tensions within liberal citizenship itself: between universalism and particularism, neutrality and normativity, inclusion and suspicion.

Through this reformulation, we aimed to convince about the importance of moving beyond static, heavily normative national typologies. The perspective we offered was institutional, non-essentialist, and reflexive; one that captures the negotiated nature of citizenship. By situating citizenship in the dynamic interplay between institutional settings and social actors, including members of minority groups, it became apparent that inclusion and exclusion are not artificial properties of national political traditions but emergent effects of institutional practices, discursive frames, and everyday governance.

## Identities at Times of Political Nostalgia

From there, we developed a third line of collaboration examining how the rise of nativist discourses in contemporary migration politics reshapes representations of the past through nostalgia for a pre-immigration era, and whether this political nostalgia functions as a form of boundary-making.

Nostalgia for a past preceding postcolonial immigration, or more generally immigration from the Global South, runs through debates across Western democracies. In the United States, nativism embodied by Donald Trump is based on a comparable nostalgia: that of a white society prior to the 1960s, before the civil rights movement, the end of segregation, and the opening to non-European immigration in 1965. Contemporary American nativism presents itself as a narrative of restoration, promoting a lost collective greatness that must be recovered lest one "disappear" or be "replaced". This logic is condensed in the slogan *Make America Great Again* (MAGA), which propelled Donald Trump to the White House in 2016 and again in 2024. The past thus becomes a reference point for rebuilding the future, for returning to what "we were before" immigration or multiculturalism, and for treating the democratic experience and its struggles as a mere historical aside. This pattern is also evident in Europe: in the

United Kingdom with Brexit, in the Netherlands through the proclaimed abandonment of multiculturalism, and in France in the recent debate over so-called "Muslim separatism".

Nativism is understood here as a strong opposition to internal minorities perceived as threatening the nation because of their alleged "foreignness", as Jan Willem Duyvendak and his colleagues have successfully conceptualised it, drawing on John Higham's seminal definition (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022; Higham, 1955). Nativism is frequently articulated through calls to restore or re-enact a particular version of the past. The outcome is what can be described as a nostalgic mood structuring public debates on migration, integration, and national identity. This nostalgia tends to translate into essentialised and culturalised understandings of national citizenship.

As we have argued with Duyvendak and Foner, while majority populations often emphasise national distinctiveness when defining who they are, striking similarities exist across countries in the ways the past is mobilised in nostalgic narratives of belonging. We decided to analyse how such culturalised notions of national citizenship are promoted through selective invocations of the past in contemporary debates on immigration and immigrant integration (Bertossi et al., 2020). This line of research invited us to reconsider cultural and historical repertoires as resources mobilised in processes of boundary-making, particularly within institutional settings.

In her work on symbolic boundaries in France and the United States, Michèle Lamont (1992, 2000), together with her co-authors (Lamont *et al.*, 2015), identifies cross-national cultural differences operating at discursive and interactional levels. These differences are explained by the relative weight of these repertoires in each national context that is, by the existence of what these authors define as "national cultural or historical repertoires" (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000, p. 8).

The relative salience of repertoires (say free market versus civic ties) configurates national culture and shows, for example, that "cultural repertoires prevailing in the United States make market references more readily available to Americans (…), whereas the French repertoires make principles of civic solidarity more salient" (idem, p. 9). However, "cultural" and "historical" repertoires are used here as synonyms by these authors. This suggests that culture is rooted in historical repertoires that relate to "a few central historic themes that define the traditional national values and ideologies of American and French society" (Lamont, 1995, p. 136).

While comparative cultural sociology is attentive to the risks of essentialisation and avoids reifying national differences (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000; Wimmer, 2009), historical-cultural repertoires in this literature are often implicitly anchored in stable national frameworks, thereby displacing rather than overcoming the problem of culturalist essentialisation that we identified in our discussion of models. Unintentionally, but problematically, this echoes the notion of "national models" we criticised, which sit uneasily with a view of culture as a situated and practical process. The problem is that this deductive solution is hardly satisfying for cultural sociologists who are interested in "documenting empirically and inductively the plurality of criteria of evaluation that individuals use" (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000, p. 5).

Addressing "history" as an entity that remains beyond the reach of individuals' competence and their realm of action sits uneasily with how cultural sociologists see culture as a tool kit (Swidler, 1986) or a valuation and evaluation process (Lamont *et al.*, 2015). Something seemed to be missing here. My contribution was to propose to situate "history" at the level of these valuation and evaluation cultural processes. I drew on Ricoeur's (1983) conception of "historical experience" as a configurational process. I proposed that conceptions of the past can be understood as embedded in practices of boundary-making through this configurational perspective.

For Ricoeur, this process involves three operations. The first operation is called "prefiguration" (or what he labels "Mimesis I") and concerns the ability of anyone to "pre-understand" what is involved in an action (that is, its meanings, symbols, temporality, and sequencing). The second is called "configuration" (or "Mimesis II"), by which the succession of events is transformed into a meaningful whole and takes the form of a coherent narrative. The third and last one is the operation of "re-figuration" ("Mimesis III"), which Ricoeur describes as a dynamic interplay between the world of narratives and the lived world of the reader (Ricoeur, 1983, pp. 85–128). Hence, Ricoeur suggests that history belongs to the sphere of practical experience through the competence individuals have to relate their world to the world of narratives, along the ongoing dialectic between Mimesis I, II, and III. The three phases are not a linear process, and any re-figuration phase possibly becomes the basis for a new phase of pre-figuration, and so forth (Cefaï, 2012).

This conception of history as experience offers several advantages. It complements the view of history as enduring legacy, which emphasises

its prima facie stability and durability. The relationship between past and present is not a mere external variable of the process by which individuals produce symbolic meanings, but one dimension of the meaning-making. The power of "history" is not simply related to its pre-configuring effects in providing access to certain particularly salient repertoires and not to others because it does not end on the threshold of Mimesis II. On the contrary, it impacts the whole sequence of Mimesis I, II, and III, and can be viewed as an internal dimension of the cultural process that fabricates national repertoires. This attention to "history" as a configurational process also opens a field of empirical enquiry about the way various actors and discourses impact how national repertoires are crystallised in certain conjunctures and mobilised as cultural resources.

This approach has several implications, which call for further discussion. First, the configurational process of "history" is not a continuous unfolding of the past; rather, it produces changes, ruptures, and shifts in the meaning of so-called "traditional values". Research on historical repertoires can reveal these discontinuities and transformations, rather than permanence. Second, this process is inseparable from the evaluative and justificatory criteria present in society. It is embedded in boundary-making, adding layers of evaluation and justification to decisions about who belongs and who does not.

Disputes about the past are also disputes about who is entitled to belong and under what conditions. From this particular perspective, "history" can be viewed as one dimension of the broader notion of "cultural processes", defined by Lamont and her colleagues as "ongoing classifying representations/practices" in the form of "shared representation systems involving dominants and subordinates alike" involved in processes of identification (such as racialisation and stigmatisation) and rationalisation (standardisation and evaluation) (Lamont *et al.*, 2014, p. 586).

From there, we could identify three dominant repertoires about how past and present articulate in contemporary migration debates across France, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, Greece, and Hungary (Bertossi & Duyvendak, 2020). The first is teleological, portraying the nation as morally or culturally superior throughout history, with past, present, and future forming a harmonious continuity that must be preserved. The second is urgent, framing the nation as having declined from a Golden Age and threatened by internal minorities, requiring immediate action to avoid collapse. It emphasises existential and civilisational threats.

The third is reflective, viewing the past as a series of trials enabling collective learning. It is often used by a "left-wing nativism" that criticises identity-based exclusion while invoking shared national experiences to support inclusive policies, as seen in the UK with the Windrush scandal or in Germany during the 2015 refugee crisis.

## Conclusion

In this 20-year companionship, Duyvendak and I learned to see citizenship differently: as something made and remade through institutional contexts, multiple narratives, and everyday practices of boundary-making and belonging. This perspective, I believe, stands as one of Jan Willem Duyvendak's most enduring contributions to the field – and one I am grateful to have helped develop alongside him. This research agenda offers new perspectives on how processes of inclusion and exclusion are shaped in immigration societies amid profound turbulence around equality, diversity, shared belonging, and today's shrinking of democratic spaces worldwide.

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# Social Citizenship in Nativist Times: Is the Welfare State Under Pressure From Migration?

*Monique Kremer*

"It's just obvious that you can't have free immigration and a welfare state." This quote from economist Milton Friedman appears in every textbook on the topic. Migration and the welfare state are incompatible; it's a zero-sum game. This is also an increasingly common refrain in political debates, especially among right-wing radical parties. In the Netherlands, Party for Freedom (PVV) leader Geert Wilders, for example, says: "Close our borders and save the welfare state!" And: "The entire welfare state we have… is collapsing under mass immigration."

It is only in recent years that Wilders has positioned himself more explicitly as a defender of public pensions and healthcare, in addition to being anti-Islam and anti-migration. This combination of being pro-welfare state and anti-migration turns out to be a golden couple: he gained more and more votes, just as his counterparts in Europe (Careja & Harris, 2022). Many of the potential constituents of right-wing populist parties have an interest in a robust welfare state that protects them in times of uncertainty and globalisation. Similar populist parties in the Netherlands (Forum for Democracy (FvD), the Conservative Liberals (JA21)) are also opposed to immigration but do not harp on the importance of good healthcare or pensions, so they remain relatively small.

Yet the link between migration and the welfare state does not come only from the radical right. In 2016, when Europe was faced with a high number of refugees from Syria, Jeroen Dijsselbloem of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA) argued that the welfare state would collapse under the weight of too many refugees. He was heavily criticised for this at the time. However, there are increasing calls from left-wing circles for social democracy to come up with a better narrative on migration in order to win back less educated voters. Denmark is often considered as an illuminating example, as the social democrats have grappled with the difficult relationship between the welfare state and migration. While Denmark is known for

its anti-immigration measures, social rights have also been affected. Since 2002 measures have been in place to reduce social assistance for refugees: requirements are imposed on the number of years a person has been in the country. Although these measures were purely "nativist" in nature (see Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022, on nativism), the principle of equality now means that anyone who has not lived in Denmark – including returning Danes with a Danish passport – has fewer rights. As a consequence, their labour participation decreased whereas poverty increased (Allen *et al.*, 2025).

In this paper, I address the question of whether immigration and social rights are truly incompatible by discussing five propositions that consistently emerge in political, social, and academic discourse. Are these theses accurate, or is the reality somewhat different? With a nod to Duyvendak's (2025) recent work on "Spookkloven" in which he evaluates the existence of social gaps between groups, such as the educational gap or gender gap, I will show whether migration/welfare state propositions are realistic, shifting, or imagined. I conclude with a last thesis that receives far too little attention in the political debate, namely: the welfare state as a buffer against right-wing radical nativism.

## The Welfare State as a Migration Magnet

The first thesis, that the welfare state acts as a magnet, is the underlying assumption of Milton Friedman. Even people who have no intention of moving would be attracted by a system of benefits that they can simply call upon. This idea is often presented as a law of nature. Just as water always seeks the lowest point, people will always seek a life with the best prospects, that is, a country with a welfare state. Research into the welfare magnet has mainly been conducted in the US, where people do indeed move to states with better systems (Borjas, 1999). But people are not eager to move across borders: there are many more people who do not immigrate than those who do. Whether there is sufficient empirical evidence that people actually move because of the welfare state – sometimes labelled as "welfare tourism" – is still the subject of scientific research. The jury is still out (see for instance, Razin & Wahba, 2015; Martinsen & Werner, 2019; Ponce, 2019; Agernsap *et al.*, 2020).

What is clear is that people do not necessarily migrate to countries with the most generous social systems. The European Union (EU) provides

a major natural experiment through its policy of free movement. Contrary to common fears, this has not led to a weakening of welfare states. When social rights were curtailed, this was rarely a consequence of open borders; rather, it reflected broader liberal ideological shifts. In fact, many welfare states have become stronger or more expansive, with increased spending on healthcare and pensions – for example in the Netherlands, but also in Poland (see also Allen *et al.*, 2025). Thus, contrary to Friedman's claim, empirical evidence shows that open borders can coexist with a robust welfare state.

The European experience also reveals that welfare generosity is not the primary driver of migration. Prior to Brexit, the UK proved far more attractive to Eastern European migrant workers than Ireland, despite the latter sharing the English language, experiencing strong economic growth, and offering a more generous welfare state (Corrigan, 2010). The key determinants of migration are employment opportunities and social connections. Migrants tend to move where jobs are available and where they already have social ties; social relations are crucial (De Haas, 2023). This pattern holds for labour migrants – such as Romanians moving to Spain – as well as for asylum seekers. It helps explain why Somali communities are relatively large in the UK, while Palestinians are more numerous in Germany and Sweden.

What may be true, however, is that migrants may stay longer if there is a well-developed system (Entzinger, 2007). When migrants make use of benefits – such as social assistance or disability benefits – this may be a barrier to returning to their country of origin, for example if the country is safe again (Syria) or if there are many job opportunities (Poland). The fact that many guest workers from Morocco and Turkey did not return may also be partly explained by welfare systems that offered them security instead of vague future prospects.

However, there is a category of migrants who are attracted by the welfare state, namely the migrants we call expats. Although, as with all migrants, a mix of factors plays a role in the choices people make – can they take a step up the career ladder, what is the language like, is there a safe and stable living environment – the quality of education for children, healthcare, leave provisions, and pensions also play a role (De Jong *et al.*, 2020).

In short, although the welfare state, among other factors, can keep people in a country and good welfare facilities may attract highly skilled labour migrants, the welfare magnet is largely a theoretical construct:

people are not simply drawn to a country because it has a welfare state. People move to countries where they know people and can find work.

## Migration is Financially Undermining the Welfare State

The second argument that is often put forward is that migration is financially undermining the welfare state: immigration is a drain on the treasury. This academic and political discussion is already 30 years old (Allen *et al.*, 2025). In some countries – such as in the Netherlands – the fiscal debate has been recently hijacked by right-wing politicians, fuelled by studies of Van de Beek (2024, p. 210), who argues pessimistically that the welfare state will not survive: "Immigration insidiously undermines the welfare state, because allowing immigration that costs money net amounts to entering into long-term fiscal commitments."

It is indeed important that the welfare state remains financially healthy. Yet, there is an overall consensus that the net result of immigration is modest (OECD, 2021; Allen *et al.*, 2025). In the UK, for instance, the fiscal impact of immigration has remained relatively small, estimates within a range of ± 1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Vargas-Silva et al., 2024).

Evidence from the Netherlands, most European countries, and Australia indicates that labour migrants tend, on average, to make a net positive contribution to public finances, whereas asylum seekers initially represent a fiscal cost (OECD, 202; MAC, 2025). This suggests that the fiscal impact of migration depends strongly on the *type* of migrant, as well as on age, wage level, and labour market participation. From a purely fiscal perspective, governments aiming to maximise public revenues would therefore prioritise the admission of young, well-educated migrants who were trained in their country of origin, enter well-paid employment, and contribute taxes over a long period, while limiting long-term expenditure on pensions and healthcare. Taken to its logical conclusion, this utilitarian reasoning would also imply restricting the admission of asylum seekers unless they are expected to contribute above average to the economy. While such an approach may be internally consistent from an economic standpoint, it raises important normative considerations.

Fiscal analysis tends to be based on the assumption that only people who contribute more than average are beneficial for the welfare state.

This then applies to everyone who does not "reach the average", such as people with disabilities, people with a vocational education, and probably women as well. They work less, take maternity leave, and also live longer. The latter immediately reveals that all these calculations use a narrow definition of contributions to the welfare state. Unpaid work is not part of it. Moreover, such fiscal studies do not take into account the contribution of immigrants as personnel of the welfare state – especially in health services – nor to the broader economy. It is primarily an accounting method (Kremer, 2013; Allen *et al.*, 2025).

Furthermore, fiscal studies are sometimes used by radical right political parties to argue for restricting asylum migration, such as limiting or abolishing the right to asylum. But asylum migrants are not welcomed because of their fiscal contributions to the welfare state. They are accepted for international obligations and humanitarian reasons. The fiscal costs are the price host countries pay for compassion and international solidarity.

In addition, instead of focusing on one side of the policy – "admission policy" – attention could also be given to the question of how we can reduce the fiscal burden and make the welfare state more migration-proof. For example, by reducing reception costs and investing in labour market policies, such as immediately activating asylum seekers and family migrants and guiding them towards better-paid jobs. This will visibly increase their contributions to society and the welfare state.

In short, the thesis that migration can be a fiscal burden contains a grain of truth, but it depends on which migrants you are talking about, asylum seekers or labour migrants. Moreover, policy attention can also be shifted from a one-sided focus on asylum admission policy to a more migration-resistant welfare state.

## Migrants Are Gaining Social Rights More Quickly; They Are Jumping the Queue

Until about 2015, there was a debate about migrants "taking our jobs", but now it is about migrants "taking our homes". Due to shortages in many European labour markets, the argument about work has been displaced by housing. Moreover, migrants are "using our health systems" is also a more recent claim, especially in the UK and Germany.

In the Netherlands, there is a particularly fierce debate about the priority rules for housing "status holders" (recognised refugees). Whereas in the past municipalities were obliged to give them priority, now the national government wants to ban any form of precedence. Appealing to nativist arguments ("we were here first"), status holders must now join the back of the queue, otherwise it is considered "unfair". This policy shift has been supported by polls among Dutch citizens who think it's unfair as refugees "jump the queue". The fact that status holders constitute a relatively small group within Dutch social housing (10 or 17 per cent, depending on the comparison) does not constitute a valid argument. Moreover, it obscures the main issue, which is the structural shortage of affordable housing due to liberalisation of social housing.

In *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* sociologist Arlie Hochschild (2018) travels around the US to understand why people do not think like her and see Trump as a political saviour. She beautifully describes how the greatest pain is exposed when people feel that others are "jumping the queue". That is, for instance, why positive action causes so many negative emotional reactions in society. Positive action as well as the priority rules are what Steffen Mau (Mau *et al.*, 2023) calls *Triggerpunkte* in society (also quoted with approval in the book *Spookkloven*). According to him, politicians are "polarization entrepreneurs" as they are looking for points where they can trigger feelings of annoyance or injustice.

So, right-wing populist politicians in many European countries often propagate the idea that immigrants have more rights. But, in reality, they do not have more social rights; sometimes they have even fewer social rights, also depending on their country of origin: EU-citizens, in general, have more social rights than "third-country nationals".

A clear example is seen in pension schemes. Many immigrants face severe financial hardship when retiring: the "migrant pension penalty". Based on research in 16 European countries, there is an average gap of 28 per cent in retirement income between migrants and non-migrants. This is partly the result of immigrants' labour market position and trajectories, such as working on a low wage, but the "penalty" also relates to institutional factors, such as the rules and regulations of pension schemes (Veldman *et al.*, 2025).

One example of a discriminatory rule can be found in the Dutch state pension system, where the amount of pension a person receives depends

on the number of years they have lived in the Netherlands. Pension rights accrue at a rate of 2 per cent per year, meaning that a full pension requires fifty years of residence. This system disproportionately disadvantages many migrants, including people of Dutch descent who have spent part of their lives abroad. Those who move are thus effectively turned into "eternal migrants". The result is widespread, largely invisible poverty among older former "guest workers". Yet hardly anyone is raising the alarm; it has not become a political or societal "trigger point".

In addition, many migrants are unaware that they have social rights; the non-take-up of social security and benefits is often low (Seibel, 2023). Distrust plays a role, too – sometimes justified. The Dutch childcare benefits scandal illustrates this starkly. More than 30,000 citizens were wrongly accused of fraud; approximately 70 per cent had a migrant background, with people of Surinamese origin, single parents, and those receiving social assistance being most severely affected. The overlap of dual nationality with class, gender, family situation, and religion significantly increased the likelihood of being targeted. This intersectional discrimination reveals the racialisation of welfare state policy in particular, as Samir Achbab (2024) argues. Anyone who deviates from the perceived "norm" can be categorised as a potential fraudster. In a reluctant migration society, migrants are quickly cast as "the other" within the welfare state.

In short, the idea that migrants are jumping the queue always causes a great deal of social pain, but "positive action" is fairly unique: in the welfare state, migrants have either the same or fewer rights. This is thus a perceived thesis – and a trigger point – that has little to do with welfare states' realities.

## Migration Puts Solidarity Under Pressure

Welfare states are based on solidarity: while everyone contributes to the system, some people benefit from it more than others. Solidarity is elastic, but it can snap. Scholars such as Banting and Kymlicka (2017) argue that solidarity is traditionally stronger within homogeneous communities: people are more likely to feel responsible for their "equals". You have to recognise the other person to be able to identify with them. Increasing diversity can undermine this natural sense of shared destiny.

Tension arises particularly when one group receives a lot and the other gives a lot, that is, the "redistribution paradox". This is why there is

so much concern about asylum refugees who make disproportionate use of social assistance, or, in the past, guest workers who received disability allowances (see also Stavenuiter *et al.*, 2003). "If the welfare state is only for the poor" – or in this case, migrants – then, as a popular scientific saying goes, "it becomes poor itself". If the feeling arises that "we are paying for them", this puts pressure on solidarity.

So, yes, immigration – and specifically – the diversity it brings with it, puts pressure on solidarity; that is a "sociological fact". But it depends on the composition of the welfare state how much pressure migration gives. Robust welfare states that also include the middle class are most migration-proof. In their laws and regulations, they ensure that everyone has an interest and that there are reciprocal obligations, such as working first in order to receive benefits. Welfare states with little reciprocity – liberal welfare states such as those in the UK and the US – will therefore be least migration-proof (Kremer, 2016).

Wat is known as "welfare chauvinism" may be more problematic for a sustainable welfare state. This is the idea that social benefits and services, such as healthcare or social housing, should only be available to "native" people and not to immigrants, refugees, or ethnic minorities. Or, to put it differently, welfare for "us", but not for "them". Right-wing populist parties such as Wilders' PVV, as we have just seen, are increasingly using this frame, which also affects the attitudes of the broader public (Haenraets & Roosma, 2024).

The term "welfare chauvinism" is well chosen for this populist political strategy. But to call all citizens who believe that immigrants should not immediately receive the same rights is derogatory. When asked, people seem to understand all sorts of things by it (Lindner *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, there are major differences between people who say that migrants should never have social rights (known as "hard welfare chauvinism") and people who attach conditions to it, such as paying taxes or working ("soft welfare chauvinism"). For the latter, selectivist or conditional welfare is a better term. And if selectivism is based on country of origin, welfare nationalism may be a more appropriate term.

In North-West Europe, very few people are in favour of completely excluding migrants, although most people do believe that requirements should be imposed (Van Oorschot & Reeskens, 2012; Lubbers & Seibel, 2022; Haenraets & Roosma, 2024). Migrants must first pay taxes and work before they can claim welfare benefits – which is mostly the way North-West

European welfare states function. In addition, people have different views depending on the areas of the welfare state, such as pensions (money) or childcare (in-kind services). The latter must be available to everyone immediately, because they benefit us all (Lubbers & Seibel, 2022). Once again, the rules and structure of the welfare state matter.

It is striking, however, that in the Netherlands in particular, Dutch citizenship is often mentioned as a condition for social rights (by almost half of the people), while in practice no social rights are based on that passport. In the Netherlands, migrants – and their children – have a hard time becoming included because of the continues identity politics of the majority, according to Duyvendak (Duyvendak & Kešić, 2022)

Who, then, are more likely to be in favour of selectivism? Mainly people with lower perceived material well-being and perceptions of economic risks and threats, research shows (Heanraets & Roosma, 2024). Similarly, Kros & Coenders (2019) argue that people who are very uncertain about their own situation and financial future see migration as a threat and are also in favour of a chauvinistic welfare state. Yet, people who receive benefits themselves do not consider migrants as a threat and do not express welfare state chauvinism. They are in fact on the side of extending social security for all, including to migrants.

Immigrants themselves also believe that immigrants should not be able to immediately claim welfare benefits – another reason why the term welfare chauvinism is inapt. "Just living here is not enough, you must have contributed", said an immigrant during an interview on the welfare state (Kremer, 2016). A recent survey study among immigrants showed similar conclusions. Immigrants should have access to healthcare and childcare immediately after registering as residents, but not to social security, such as social assistance, unemployment benefits, and pensions: immigrants should first work and pay taxes before being eligible to access these resources. In addition, immigrants themselves also express "welfare nationalism": EU immigrants in particular believe non-EU immigrants should have fewer rights than EU immigrants (Lubbers & Seibel, 2022).

In short, the notion that migration undermines solidarity could be called a "shifting thesis". And there are (as yet) few people who want to exclude migrants altogether; they want migrants to receive "services" quickly but to "grow into" social security – just like immigrants themselves. So, welfare states that have a reciprocal structure – which is the case in, for instance, the Netherlands and Germany – are reasonably protected

against anti-solidarity. As T. H. Marshall (1950) wrote, the expansion of social rights requires a national community bound together by citizens' reciprocal obligations.

## The Welfare State Acts as a Buffer Against Nativism

Negative sentiment towards immigration will always be part of society, especially in times with relatively high immigration rates. Additionally, migration is easily linked to discussions about national identity – a trigger point in Dutch society.

Yet, a robust reciprocal welfare state may appease people worried about immigration more. Surveys show that people who are concerned about migration are also concerned about social problems, such as the lack of affordable housing or the future of healthcare in the light of the greying of society (Kunst *et al.*, 2025). If the housing problem was solved, people may not be so worried about immigration. If the healthcare system functioned well, people may not be so worried about immigration. Moreover, an extensive and stable welfare state can offer people more security and more control over their lives. Migration makes people with insecure lives feel they are losing control.

A welfare state that focuses on meeting also acts as a buffer against nativism. For solidarity in a welfare state, it is necessary that people can somewhat identify with one another – that there is mutual trust and that they can rely on the fact that people fulfil their obligations when they use the system. In diverse societies contact is therefore necessary. Some scholars break a lance for what they call "light communities", engendering contact without getting caught up in obligatory inclusion (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004). Schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and libraries can be places where mutual contact can take place, often requiring good professionals, such as teachers, team leaders, and community workers.

Besides meeting, mobility is a crucial concept for migration-proof welfare states. Mobility entails that the welfare state ensures that migrants work to the same extent as people who are already there. Halleh Ghorashi (2004) explains how refugees in welfare states are treated as pitiful and talked into accepting social assistance instead of being seen as responsible individuals with talents who can start working immediately. It is important not to allow potential trigger points to exist.

The laws and regulations of the welfare state can also act as a buffer against nativism. Social rights are not reserved exclusively for "real Dutch people". On the contrary, as argued earlier, Dutch citizenship is largely irrelevant within the welfare state. Migrants who are legally resident in the Netherlands can claim certain social rights (such as social assistance, healthcare, and social support), while those who have built up a work history are entitled to contributory benefits (such as unemployment benefits and pensions).

Moreover, European migrants are able to carry their social rights with them across borders. For example, Polish workers can count their employment history in Poland towards eligibility for unemployment benefits in the Netherlands. Social rights can also be exported when people leave the country. This applies not only within the EU, but also to the many countries with which a country has concluded social security agreements. Dutch pensioners can for instance take their pensions to the Spanish coast, the Turkish mountains, or even to the vibrant city of Bangalore (Kremer, 2013). In short, the welfare state institutionalises – perhaps unexpectedly – a robust form of transnational citizenship.

To conclude: the thesis that the welfare state also functions as a buffer is not sufficiently part of the social and political debate, but that does not make it any less real. In times of nativism, many European welfare states are in practice quite transnational.

## Conclusion: Beyond False Oppositions and a Migration-Proof Welfare State for All

In debates about the welfare state, arguments are often framed as a zero-sum choice: do we want immigration or a welfare state? Unsurprisingly, many people would then choose the latter – including people who have migrated themselves. Yet this opposition is false. Whether immigration and the welfare state can coexist successfully depends on which migrants are involved, which welfare state arrangements are in place, and which domains of the welfare state are concerned. Although most positions in the welfare state debate contain a kernel of truth – except for the claim that migrants are "jumping the queue" – many miss more important insights. There are alternative, more nuanced narratives that deserve greater attention.

Welfare states do indeed require boundaries in order to sustain solidarity, but this makes it all the more necessary to have a serious public debate about where those limits should lie and on what principles they ought to be based. The final thesis – that a welfare state can also address the concerns of those who are anxious about migration – has scarcely entered political or public debate. Strengthening the welfare state to reduce feelings of insecurity, grounded in clearer and more visible reciprocity and aimed at facilitating intergroup contact, may offer a far more fruitful path than the Danish approach discussed earlier, which combines immigration restriction with cuts to social assistance. Such investments in the welfare state can also function as a buffer against nativism.

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# History in the Making of Contemporary Social Work

*Thomas Kampen*

Social work today operates within a moral and institutional landscape in which certain policy ideals have come to seem almost beyond dispute. Central among these is the expectation of self-reliance in two closely related senses: economic independence through paid work, and the ability to mobilise one's own network before turning to public services (Bredewold *et al.*, 2018). Together, these expectations define what counts as "responsible" citizenship and shape how professionals are expected to interpret the lives of those they support: work becomes proof of worth, informal care the preferred safety net, and public assistance a residual last resort.

Yet policy's portrayal of self-reliance as a neutral, commonsensical ideal is itself a historical construct – one with profound implications for professional practice. As Duyvendak showed as early as 1997, the radicalisation of autonomy in the 1980s recast professional support as potentially paternalistic, obscuring autonomy's relational character and reframing responsibility as an individual trait. This moral shift paved the way for today's interpretations of self-reliance as behavioural compliance and personal virtue. Consequently, structural inequalities are routinely framed as matters of motivation or effort, rendering current expectations seemingly self-evident while masking their historical contingency.

A similar dynamic shapes public understanding of belonging. Societies rely on selective historical narratives to determine who qualifies as a full member (Bertossi *et al.*, 2021). These narratives draw moral boundaries between insiders and outsiders and naturalise particular forms of participation – paid work, self-reliance, behavioural conformity – as markers of legitimate membership. Social workers encounter these boundaries daily in assessments of need, motivation, or capacity, where assumptions about who is "at home" in the welfare state subtly guide professional judgement.

Together, the logics of self-reliance, belonging, and deservingness form part of a broader historical repertoire through which citizenship

is constructed and repeatedly reshaped – yet each era's ideals appear self-evident in their time. As I will argue, recognising this genealogy is indispensable for social workers. Only by situating contemporary practices within their historical trajectories can practitioners identify the moral and political assumptions that shape their work. Historical understanding prevents the profession from reinventing old patterns of moralisation in new language and enables a more critical engagement with the power structures that define contemporary social work. Without such awareness, structural causes fade from view, inequality becomes individualised, and professional discretion is constrained by policy frameworks that present themselves as inevitable.

In the remainder of this chapter, I therefore trace the development of social citizenship – its shifting moral logics, institutional forms, and the evolving role of social workers within them. This historical overview provides the foundation for understanding what is at stake today and why critical, historically informed practice is essential.

## Lack of Historical Awareness

Across countries, including the Netherlands, research consistently shows that social workers possess limited historical knowledge (Abramovitz *et al.*, 2024). This reflects not individual failings but the profession's long-standing orientation towards action and problem-solving over abstract reflection. Several authors attribute this erosion of historical awareness to social work's embedding within managerial logics – such as market tendering, performance indicators, and short-term policy programmes – a trend widely documented in analyses of neoliberal transformations across education, welfare, and research (Abramovitz *et al.*, 2024; Wright *et al.*, 2021). As early as the late 1970s, an encroaching market ideology reshaped the care sector, steering it towards competition, efficiency, and managerial control (Duyvendak, 1997). In this context, historical reflection gave way to an emphasis on specialist expertise and measurable outcomes. Subsequent neoliberal reforms deepened this shift, linking legitimacy to productivity and accountability metrics while curtailing the time, discretion, and mental space available for genealogical analysis. Paradoxically, these very institutional pressures make historical awareness more necessary than ever.

These dynamics extend into social work education. Historical perspectives have never held a stable or central place in the curriculum; studies indicate that while history has appeared implicitly at times, systematic engagement with the historical development of social work and social policy has remained marginal – and has declined further over recent decades. Curricula increasingly emphasise competencies, evidence-based interventions, and policy-oriented skills, while historical and normative dimensions recede (Abramovitz *et al.*, 2024). Students receive strong training in methodological and organisational competencies but little grounding in the historical foundations of their field. Dutch programmes largely mirror this development (Witte, 2022).

Finally, the research domain has undergone a parallel transformation, with social work being no exception (Fisher & Dybicz, 1999). Funding structures prioritise projects aligned with policy agendas, demonstrable impact, and short-term deliverables (Spolander *et al.*, 2014). This favours evaluative research – asking whether policy works – over genealogical enquiry into how particular problem definitions and interventions emerged. As a result, historical and critical scholarship is systematically marginalised by productivity and accountability criteria. The loss of historical consciousness is therefore not simply a knowledge deficit but a symptom of broader institutional dynamics. Education, research, and policy reinforce a culture oriented towards immediate effectiveness rather than historical understanding, leaving the profession without a sense of where its assumptions come from or what they serve.

## Consequences of Historical Inertia

The erosion of historical awareness in social work has three major consequences. First, it fosters presentism (Reisch, 2019) – a loss of temporal perspective. Social workers tend to focus forward on innovation, efficiency, and measurable outcomes, rarely looking back at the moral and institutional developments that shaped the profession. This presentism reduces social issues to mere policy cycles and project logics. What social work needs is a "history of the present": situating contemporary practice within its long genealogies of poverty governance, moral judgement, and institutional change (Skehill, 2007). Second, the absence of historical reflection impoverishes the profession's moral vocabulary. Historical ignorance narrows the

capacity to recognise alternative meanings of care, solidarity, and justice (Witte, 2022). Third, diminished historical understanding weakens the profession's critical and reflexive capacity. Social workers unfamiliar with the history of their field struggle to identify contemporary forms of exclusion or institutional racism as part of a longer trajectory (Abramovitz *et al.*, 2024). Neglecting the histories of non-white and non-Western social work contributes to the whitewashing of the profession, reducing its political imagination and democratic sensitivity (Wright *et al.*, 2021). For these reasons, historical awareness is not a luxury but a precondition for ethical practice.

To understand how historical awareness matters for social work practice today, we now turn to the genealogy of social citizenship. Reconstructing this history reveals how historical repertoires are shaped, institutionalised, and translated into social work practice – and offers key lessons for the contemporary profession.

## The Development of Social Citizenship

Classic analyses, from Polanyi's account of the social protection countermovement to Marshall's formulation of civil, political, and social rights, show that welfare entitlements emerged through protracted struggles over dependency, solidarity, and state responsibility. Titmuss's later notion of the "social division of welfare" captures how these struggles continually redefined who was judged worthy of collective support. Societies repeatedly distinguished between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor – a pattern visible in historical studies of poor relief and in contemporary analyses of deservingness. Fraser and Gordon's genealogy of dependency similarly demonstrates how shifting notions of autonomy, responsibility, and entitlement have structured the boundaries of citizenship over time (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). These historical considerations underscore that the concept of social citizenship is not static but rather a fluid construct, continually negotiated and contested through societal power dynamics and evolving moral frameworks, with direct implications for social work's foundational principles (Pierson, 2021). Reconstructing this development is essential for understanding the position of social workers. As Pierson's long-range history of the profession shows, social work has never simply responded to social conditions; it has been a key site where moral logics about poverty, responsibility, and civic worth were translated

into practice. It is therefore necessary to trace the historical evolution of social citizenship in more detail. The following sections reconstruct this trajectory across distinct historical periods, each time examining how notions of deservingness shaped social citizenship, the evolving role of social workers within these frameworks, and the specific lessons these developments offer for contemporary social work practice.

## The Era of Early Moralisation

From the late Middle Ages through the nineteenth century, poverty was viewed primarily as a moral failing rather than a social or economic issue. As De Swaan (1989) demonstrates, early poor relief was never purely charitable; it served broader collective interests. Fears of disorder, disease, and labour shortages prompted local elites to regulate poverty in order to preserve social stability. Consequently, assistance was inextricably linked to surveillance and correction, positioning deservingness as a governance tool for mitigating community risks rather than a simple moral judgement. These judgements determined not only who received aid but also the behavioural expectations attached to it. Such principles became institutionalized in church Diaconates, almshouses, and municipal poor boards, where aid was granted only after private resources were exhausted and routine household inspections and moral scrutiny were standard practice. Foucault (1977) and subsequent social policy historians have shown how support functioned as a mechanism for instilling labour discipline and social order. European poor-relief systems consistently distinguished between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor – categories rooted in assumptions about virtue, discipline, and work.

The forerunners of modern social workers – deacons, almoners, visiting sisters – stood at the centre of this regime. Their work blended care with oversight: they distributed aid while evaluating conduct, work habits, and household management. De Regt (1984) has shown how in the Netherlands nineteenth-century charitable organisations systematically distinguished between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor through detailed home visits and moral assessments, using relief as a means to enforce behavioural discipline. As Pierson (2021) notes, these practices formed an embryonic version of social work in which the intertwining of care and control was already visible.

Understanding this early moralisation is crucial for contemporary social work. Many of its core logics – categorising clients, linking support to behavioural expectations, combining assistance with oversight – continue to structure today's practices. Recognising these continuities makes it possible to see these logics not as a given but as inheritances from a much older moral regime. This historical perspective makes clear that the evolution of social work has been intertwined with societal anxieties regarding poverty and deviance, leading to interventions often characterised by moralistic judgements and social control (Ioakimidis & Wyllie, 2023).

## The Coming of Collective Responsibility

At the start of the twentieth century, industrialisation and urbanisation exposed large groups to unemployment, illness, and labour-market volatility, making poverty seem less like a personal failing and more like a structural risk. Classic analyses of emerging social policy – by Beveridge, Marshall, and Titmuss – show that this period marked a decisive shift: poverty became a collective vulnerability requiring coordinated public action. De Swaan's historical-sociological analysis explains this transformation as arising from growing interdependencies in industrial societies. Early social insurance schemes, municipal relief systems, and the Dutch Armenwet (Poor Law) of 1912 institutionalised this new logic, expanding public responsibility beyond charity – even if benefits remained conditional. Yet the older moral distinctions did not disappear. Eligibility continued to hinge on assessments of character, willingness to work, and household discipline (Pierson, 2021; Smolenaars, 2007). Work-relief programmes of the interwar years epitomised this hybrid logic: assistance was offered as a route to moral improvement, while close monitoring and behavioural expectations persisted. Bureaucratisation softened the language of morality but did not remove its influence.

Within this shifting landscape, the emerging profession of social work assumed a dual, often tension-filled, role. Trained practitioners such as community workers, district nurses, and family welfare workers sought to introduce more scientific and humane approaches, emphasising dignity and social reform. At the same time, they operated within institutional frameworks that still relied on inherited moral expectations. As Pierson

(2021) notes, social workers became intermediaries between expanding public responsibility and enduring behavioural norms, advocating for clients while reinforcing expectations of industriousness and propriety. This widened the tension between empowerment and normalisation. Social work was becoming modern and professionalised, yet its tools and mandates remained rooted in older moral foundations.

For contemporary social workers, this era shows that structural explanations of poverty and behavioural judgements have always coexisted. Recognising this hybrid logic helps practitioners understand why today's welfare systems continue to oscillate between support and conditionality, and why reforms that appear progressive often preserve older distinctions in new institutional forms. This oscillation is particularly evident in the ongoing debate on the obligation to reciprocate, reflecting a dynamic moral economy where the terms of welfare provision are constantly renegotiated (Kampen, 2014; Sevelsted, 2017).

## The Post-War Settlement

The post-war decades marked a profound moral and institutional shift. In the aftermath of war and economic disruption, Western European societies embraced the idea that social security was a right rather than a charitable favour. Classic accounts, like Marshall's conception of social citizenship, Titmuss's analysis of welfare institutions, and Beveridge's reconstruction blueprint, show how poverty was reframed as a collective risk inherent to modern economies. Support became grounded in solidarity, equality, and dignity. In the Netherlands, this new settlement crystallised in the 1965 Social Assistance Act (Algemene Bijstandswet), which granted all citizens a legal entitlement to a minimum income independent of moral judgement. The state became responsible for ensuring basic security, replacing the earlier patchwork of local charity and conditional relief.

This transformation also redefined the role of social workers. Practitioners shifted from moral overseers to intermediaries of social rights (Pierson, 2021; Smolenaars, 2007). They helped citizens navigate expanding welfare institutions, access benefits, and participate in community life. Professional authority increased through specialised training, codified knowledge, and the legitimacy of the welfare state itself. In this way the post-war welfare state expanded the emancipatory potential of

social work while simultaneously embedding subtler forms of normalisation. Rights widened the scope for support, but administrative expectations narrowed how those rights could be exercised. The long-standing tension between empowerment and regulation was not resolved, only reframed. Paternalism did not disappear; moral judgement was redistributed through administrative routines carrying implicit assumptions about responsible behaviour, family stability, and responsible citizenship. Frontline professionals continued to assess motivation, compliance, and conduct, even as overt deservingness categories receded (Pierson, 2021).

For contemporary practitioners, this period offers a crucial insight: while the post-war era heralded the formal recognition of social rights and expanded professional autonomy, it simultaneously demonstrated how the tension between care and control simply *reconfigures* rather than disappears. This teaches social workers to remain critically vigilant: even in systems designed for universal provision, the latent power to categorise, assess motivation, and enforce compliance persists. Understanding this dynamic is vital to prevent the uncritical acceptance of administrative frameworks that, under the guise of neutrality, continue to exert moral control.

## The Age of Activation

From the mid-1970s onward, the post-war welfare settlement came under sustained pressure. Economic recession, rising unemployment, and concerns about bureaucratic inefficiency fuelled the view that generous welfare provisions discouraged work and personal responsibility. Scholars identify this period as a shift from welfare expansion to retrenchment, marking the rise of the "activating" or "enabling" state (van Kersbergen & Hemerijck, 2012; Tonkens, 2011), in which social policy increasingly sought to promote employability and behavioural compliance through incentives, obligations, and sanctions (Morris, 2019); instruments of "advanced liberal" governance (Dean, 2010) by which individuals are compelled to internalise norms of self-reliance and entrepreneurial citizenship. In the Netherlands, the Work and Social Assistance Act (WWB, 2004) and the Participatiewet (2015) exemplified this trend by linking entitlements directly to demonstrable effort and labour-market participation (Kampen *et al.*, 2019).

This shift fundamentally reoriented social work. Practitioners were increasingly expected to act as agents of activation: motivating, monitoring, and – when required – disciplining clients (Pierson, 2021). The professional lexicon shifted accordingly, from empowerment and emancipation to participation, employability, and self-reliance. This reorientation often placed social workers in a paradoxical position, requiring them to balance advocacy for their clients with the enforcement of conditional welfare policies. It intensified long-standing tensions within the profession, as social workers were asked both to assist clients and to enforce behavioural standards. This tension is particularly acute in policies requiring welfare recipients to undertake unpaid work or volunteering, known as "workfare volunteering", which blurs the lines between civic participation and enforced labour (Kampen & Tonkens, 2018).

For social workers today, the activation era illustrates that expectations of self-reliance, employability, and behavioural compliance are not neutral norms but recent highly moralised policy constructs. Understanding this historical genealogy enables practitioners to recognise when they are positioned as instruments of behavioural governance rather than agents of support – and why longstanding tensions between care and control have intensified.

## In Times of Trust?

By the early 2020s, political pressure mounted against punitive welfare systems, amplified by the Dutch childcare benefits scandal, which exposed systematic administrative injustice and triggered a broader reckoning with rigid legalism, excessive sanctioning, and discriminatory practices. The Parliamentary report on the scandal (2022), stressed that these failures were not incidental but were symptoms of a governance regime premised on control, suspicion, and strict rule enforcement. A report by the Dutch Scientific Council (WRR, 2023) reinforces this concern by demonstrating that sustained insecurity, procedural complexity, and lack of control undermine citizens' trust in institutions. Empirical studies by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP, 2024) show that strict enforcement regimes in social assistance – sanctions, behavioural obligations, and conditionality – undermine the relational trust required for effective cooperation. Sanctioning practices erode dignity, inhibit

openness towards caseworkers, and constrain social workers' ability to build supportive relationships. Against this backdrop, policy institutions have emphasised the need to restore trust-based approaches in public administration.

However, despite policy institutions emphasising the need to restore trust-based approaches, it remains unclear to what extent genuine trust is being re-established. Scholars of governance caution that moral shifts like these rarely translate into structural transformation. Classic analyses of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1980), audit regimes (Power, 1997), and institutional mistrust (Sennett, 2012) show how performance indicators, risk-based categorisation, and data-driven monitoring embed deep organisational logics that are almost resistant to change. These dynamics echo patterns familiar from earlier welfare regimes, where new moral vocabularies – solidarity, empowerment, participation – were introduced while older assumptions about responsibility and deservingness persisted beneath the surface. This historical continuity of control, alongside research indicating the tenacious presence of disciplinary mechanisms despite reforms, casts doubt on the depth of the current transformation. Moreover, the increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into administrative processes, often for efficiency and risk management, adds another layer of concern, potentially introducing new, opaque forms of algorithmic control that further undermine relational practice (Ottmann & Noble, 2026).

This creates a paradoxical mandate: to embody trust in systems that do not structurally enable trusting practice. Understanding the current turn towards trust as part of a longer historical trajectory helps social workers distinguish between rhetorical innovation and structural continuity. It highlights the persistence of older moral repertoires within new policy language. Such awareness is essential for reclaiming professional agency: it enables practitioners to articulate the institutional conditions required for genuine trust-based practice rather than accepting moral renewal at face value.

Taken together, these historical trajectories reveal that each era presented social workers with a unique blend of moral expectations and institutional demands, each shedding light on a distinct aspect of the profession's persistent tension between care and control. The era of early moralisation underscores how profoundly the deserving–undeserving distinction is embedded, even in contemporary technocratic discourse. The

move towards collective responsibility shows that structural accounts of poverty have long coexisted with behavioural judgements, reminding us that ostensibly progressive reforms often recycle older moral categories. The post-war settlement demonstrates how rights-based frameworks both expanded professional autonomy and introduced subtler mechanisms of normalisation. The activation paradigm illustrates how easily social work can be recast as a tool of behavioural governance, heightening tensions between support and regulation. These insights caution that the current pivot towards trust is precarious as long as institutional structures continue to incentivise compliance, monitoring, and risk management.

## Historicizing Social Work

The historical trajectory traced in this chapter shows that the dilemmas confronting social workers today are neither accidental nor purely contemporary. They arise from long-standing moral repertoires through which societies have governed poverty, responsibility, and citizenship. While each era introduced new vocabularies – charity, collective responsibility, rights, activation, trust – these shifts rarely displaced earlier assumptions; they reconfigured them. As a result, the profession continues to operate in environments where behavioural expectations, assessments of deservingness, and subtle forms of normalisation remain deeply embedded in institutional practice.

This continuity has significant implications for professional judgement. When historical awareness erodes, social workers risk absorbing these assumptions as self-evident truths. Presentism narrows the interpretive horizon to the immediate demands of policy cycles, performance indicators, and behavioural protocols. Under such conditions, structural inequalities appear as individual deficits, moral categories re-emerge dressed in technical language, and the profession's moral and political agency diminishes. Social workers come to implement rather than interpret, adjust rather than question, and manage rather than challenge the logics that shape their work.

Therefore, I call for historicising social work. A growing body of contemporary scholarship underscores that social work cannot be understood as a neutral, technical endeavour but is inherently embedded in political structures and power dynamics (De Brabander *et al.*, 2021) – often referred

to in the Netherlands as "politicising social work". This understanding demands that practitioners not only provide individual support but also engage in advocacy, contest systemic injustices, and contribute to shaping policy – activities essential for realising the profession's commitments to social justice and human rights (Boone *et al.*, 2022). Politicising social work draws attention to the injustices and exclusions generated by present-day arrangements. However, politicising without historical depth risks reducing critique to moral indignation without explanatory grounding. Historicising social work addresses this limitation by revealing how current injustices became normalised through historical processes – how past reforms were implicated in exclusionary practices, how earlier moral logics sedimented into contemporary routines, and how the profession has been historically entangled in both emancipation and regulation (Ioakimidis & Trimikliniotis, 2020). Without historicising, politicising lacks depth; without politicising, historicising lacks purpose. Together, they form a mature professional posture that combines analytical rigour with ethical commitment.

Such critical professionalism requires recognising that history is never absent from social work – it is simply mobilised selectively. As Duyvendak (2021) argues, actors do not lack history; they wield it strategically. Policy documents, political speeches, and organisational narratives often employ selective historical references to legitimise particular agendas or moral claims. Social work, too, is shaped by these strategic mobilisations. A critical historical consciousness equips practitioners to identify these selective narratives and articulate counter-histories grounded in empirical evidence and professional experience. This capacity to contest and reinterpret dominant narratives is central to strengthening the profession's political and ethical agency.

However, historical consciousness cannot flourish as an individual intellectual preference. It requires supportive institutional and educational infrastructures. As noted earlier, history has long been marginalised in social work curricula, producing generations of practitioners with limited capacity to contextualise contemporary dilemmas. To cultivate a truly historicised practice, social work education must integrate historical analysis as a core dimension rather than an optional supplement. Comprehensive historical training provides students with the analytical tools to recognise how today's problems are rooted in longstanding moral and institutional patterns, enabling them to enter the profession with a broader and deeper interpretive horizon.

At the same time, organisational conditions must also change. Appeals to trust, humanity, or discretion will remain hollow if practitioners continue to work within systems structured by risk-management logics, sanctions, algorithmic oversight, and audit regimes. Critical professionalism requires time for reflection, discretion in decision-making, and institutional support for deliberation. Without such conditions, even historically literate practitioners will be drawn back into the gravitational pull of behavioural governance, unable to exercise historical insight in meaningful ways.

Historicising social work is therefore both an intellectual and a political project. It calls on the profession to reclaim its interpretive authority by situating contemporary practices within their long genealogies, to resist the normalisation of policy imperatives that present themselves as inevitable, and to make visible the value-laden assumptions embedded in everyday interventions. A profession that cultivates its own historical consciousness strengthens its capacity for critique, enriches its moral vocabulary, and expands its democratic imagination. Only by understanding its past can social work determine, with clarity and conviction, the direction it wishes to take.

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# Frontline Workers as Citizenship Whisperers

*Imrat Verhoeven*

## Civic Initiatives, Citizenship, and Frontline Worker Support

One of the most striking developments in Dutch citizenship over the past twenty years has been the surge in civic initiatives (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2022). Citizens set up homework assistance programmes for children, work together on neighbourhood gardens, resist gentrification, and develop alternative plans for wind turbine locations. These civic initiatives often aim to collectively solve public problems, such as addressing learning deficits, maintaining liveable neighbourhoods, and promoting sustainability. Citizens may take up such problems due to dissatisfaction with government solutions, governments not having the problem on their agenda, or governments having withdrawn as a result of austerity measures (Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016). The rise of civic initiatives is part of a new wave evident in various European welfare states, including Germany, England, Italy, and the Netherlands. This wave is comparable to an earlier one at the end of the nineteenth century, when civil society initiatives attempted to alleviate the needs of the working class (Healey, 2015; De Moor, 2013; Edelenbos & Van Meerkerk, 2016; Rosol, 2010; Muehlebach, 2012; Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2018).

Although they clearly demonstrate citizenship in the sense of citizens recognising and taking ownership of collective problems, civic initiatives offer a different mode of self-expression to that suggested by much of the citizenship literature. There are three reasons why civic initiatives cannot be understood as unambiguous practices of civil, political, or social citizenship, nor can they be unequivocally traced back to republican or communitarian approaches to citizenship (see Isin & Turner, 2002; Heater, 1998). First, civic initiatives can be both social and political in nature. They may focus on social goals, such as improving neighbourhood safety or bringing people from different cultural backgrounds together, and they can pursue political goals, such as pushing back against Airbnb, or combating energy poverty. Second, civic initiatives provide citizens with

the opportunity to volunteer in ways that align with their personal capabilities, limitations, needs, and interests (Hustinx, 2009), within informal and loosely structured communities (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004; Wuthnow, 2002), as opposed to the more formal and structured social or political communities envisaged by communitarianism and republicanism (Etzioni, 2014; Heater, 1999). Third, civic initiatives almost always involve a form of 'blended action', where civic engagement and government support reinforce each other (Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2018; Verhoeven and Tonkens, 2018), which differ from the ideals of immaculate civic action advocated by communitarian and republican approaches to citizenship (Etzioni, 2014; Heater, 1999). Despite this cooperation with governments, civic initiatives can still be regarded as forms of citizenship because the initiative originates with citizens, while governments play a modest role.

In this chapter, I will focus on the frontline workers who support these civic initiatives, referring to them as 'citizenship whisperers'. Whispering here pertains to having a modest professional presence based on providing support where necessary, and adopting 'democratic professionalism' by being open to the influence of civic initiators and, at the same time, limiting them when they act unreasonably or unethically. Such efforts are undervalued because frontline workers are often accused of taking over or suppressing civic initiatives. While this is a genuine risk, I will demonstrate, based on previous research in Amsterdam, that frontline workers as citizenship whisperers are essential for civic initiatives to flourish. This is particularly true in underprivileged neighbourhoods, where these initiatives can make an important contribution in addressing long-standing social problems. In both the Netherlands and other countries where civic initiatives are on the rise, the combination of a modest approach with democratic professionalism could be the next step in developing frontline work as citizenship whispering.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly explain Dutch policy and demonstrate that, in terms of citizenship theory, there is a liberal gaze intended to protect civic initiatives from excessive government intervention. Then I will summarise a number of empirical insights from previous research into the modest forms of support of civic initiatives by frontline workers in Amsterdam. Finally, I will advocate for democratic professionalism as a means of emphasising equality-based support between frontline workers and civic initiators. I will conclude with a brief reflection on how frontline workers can become citizenship whisperers.

## The Liberal Policy Gaze

In 2007, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior published a booklet entitled *Help! A Civic Initiative* (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2007). The booklet presented a wide range of civic initiatives in the Netherlands. The title implied that public authorities were unsure how to handle civic initiatives because, in contrast to top-down public participation in policymaking, it was no longer their turn to take the lead. The booklet argued that the initiative should remain with citizens, and that governments should support their initiatives. This presented an enormous challenge for frontline workers, as evidenced by a learning trajectory reported in the booklet. One frontline worker, for example, said:

> We civil servants do listen to the citizen (sic!), but we prefer to remain at the helm ourselves. Or we embrace initiatives, but we don't realise that our embrace can be suffocating. (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2007, p. 25)

As a solution to this inconvenience, the booklet advocated a 'facilitating governance style' characterised by 'providing support' with 'time, money, knowledge, expertise and material resources' (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2007, p. 17). However, facilitating involved more than just offering sporadic support, as we read in the booklet. It was also about adopting a different attitude characterised by reliability, listening, paying attention, thinking along with others, effective communication, letting citizens take the initiative, connecting initiatives where necessary, ensuring a fast and accessible bureaucracy, breaking down silos by looking beyond one's own boundaries, and adopting a solution-oriented approach (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2007, pp. 40, 45).

This booklet laid the foundation for a liberal policy gaze in dealing with civic initiatives that is very similar to liberal approaches to citizenship. A typical feature of the latter is their critical stance on government power:

> The state (…) constantly and remorselessly seeks to expand its authority and resources, driven by the self-interest of politicians, bureaucrats and private groups that stand to gain by increasing state power. (Schuck, 2002, p. 136)

The key point is that the exercise of authority is limited by giving citizens more freedom to solve public problems with minimal government

intervention (Schuck, 2002, p. 136). In civic initiatives, we see this authority issue reflected on a small scale in the struggle of frontline workers who either want to maintain control over their work by neglecting civic initiatives or threaten to stifle them with their support. The solution of a facilitating governance style demonstrates a liberal perspective on citizenship because it counters the retention or expansion of authority in the interaction between civic initiators and frontline workers. As such, the booklet can be seen as prefiguring the idea of frontline workers as citizenship whisperers.

Since 2007, Dutch policy has advocated the development of a facilitating attitude under various names, such as 'third-generation citizen participation' (Van der Heijden *et al.*, 2007), 'do-democracy' (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 2013) and 'government participation' (Van der Steen *et al.*, 2014). Important government advisory councils have also published reports promoting a different approach to civic initiatives with titles such as: *Letting Go in Confidence* (Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur, 2012); *Stepping Back is Looking Ahead* (Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, 2013); and *Trust in Citizens* (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid, 2012). These reports essentially argued that governments should trust citizens more by exercising less control over the resolution of public problems, and that they could achieve this by letting go.

This liberal gaze culminated in the development of what Evelien Tonkens and I called the 'modest approach' to civic initiatives. A central tenet of this approach was to empower civic initiatives by giving them the room to address problems they deemed important. Local authorities had to drastically reduce their ambitions and tendency to control everything in order to function as reliable partners for these initiatives (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2022; Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 2013). Within this modest approach, Dutch authorities developed two strategies: a 'reactive' one to support existing initiatives when necessary and a 'proactive' one to stimulate new initiatives by allocating budgets and offering support to citizens willing to act. My focus here is on the proactive strategy, because the more intervention there is, the greater the temptation to abandon the modest approach and exercise control. Therefore, proactive strategies are a good way to test the sustainability of the modest approach.

## Supporting Civic Initiatives in Amsterdam

Between 2008 and 2011, Evelien Tonkens and I investigated how the proactive strategy worked in practice in underprivileged neighbourhoods in Amsterdam, where subsidies were available to stimulate civic initiatives. Many of the policies and professional practices of that time were later institutionalised, ensuring that our findings remain relevant to this day (Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2018; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2018; Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2022). Here, I will summarise only the most important findings.

A survey of 289 initiatives in the city revealed a highly diverse group of participants, including many women (61 per cent), people with lower and mid-level education (50 per cent), a relatively large proportion of people under 50 (48 per cent), a considerable number of first- and second-generation migrants (40 per cent), and a sizeable group of people on low incomes (32 per cent). This diversity contrasts with the stereotypical image of older, higher-educated white men being the main participants of top-down forms of citizen participation (Tonkens & Verhoeven, 2018). Forty percent of the initiatives focused on connecting with and meeting residents, 13 per cent on providing education and information, and 11 per cent on supporting young people (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2018). The initiatives had a strong focus on social problems, such as anonymity, isolation, and nuisance.

Frontline workers mobilised civic initiators through public information campaigns and direct contact. They also reminded them of old plans that had previously been deemed financially unfeasible (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2018). This process saw frontline workers putting particular effort into reaching out to a wide range of citizens. However, this approach sometimes led to dissatisfaction among active citizens who missed out on subsidy opportunities. Language barriers and the need for longer conversations to discuss citizens' plans for their neighbourhood made this process time-consuming. Once citizens were mobilised, frontline workers assisted them in drawing up a budget and writing a small plan for their initiative. Although many initiatives mainly sought support from other citizens, frontline workers sometimes helped with the implementation of plans that had been approved. They also established links between initiatives with similar ideas and ensured connections with departments within the municipality that were needed to advance an initiative. Finally, they attempted to remove or smooth out bureaucratic barriers (see Tonkens &

Verhoeven, 2018, for examples and quotes). Frontline worker support was greatly appreciated by civic initiators, who gave it an average score of 8.1 out of 10. Furthermore, 63 per cent of civic initiators developed a more positive attitude towards the local government and 53 per cent towards community work organisations (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2018).

Regular and informal contact resulted in the formation of personal bonds, with frontline workers being regarded as partners and collaborators. This created expectations among initiators concerning authenticity in personal contact and a continued presence during the implementation of an initiative. If civic initiators did not experience this authenticity and presence, they quickly became disappointed or critical of the treatment they received. Frontline workers indicated that being present was very time-consuming. Even after initiatives had been implemented or completed, they tried to be present and acknowledge and praise the civic initiators, sometimes even in their own time (see Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2018 and 2022, for details and quotes).

Frontline workers were frequently present in neighbourhoods and showed interest in the initiatives because they had become firmly convinced of the merits of a modest approach. They had learned to trust citizens, recognise the relevance of their initiatives, and express their appreciation. At the same time, however, they were also well aware that they should not take over the initiatives unless they had to restrict them, for example if the civic initiators made unreasonable demands. It took time for the frontline workers to learn these lessons. Contrary to the civic initiators' expectations, some dropped out as soon as the budget was approved. Others continued to support the initiatives, initially too intensely, which resulted in them taking over the initiatives. Later, they gave the civic initiators more room. Through trial and error, the frontline workers developed the right attitude to fit the modest approach (see Verhoeven & Tonkens 2018 and 2022, for details and quotes).

## A Plea for Democratic Professionalism

Frontline worker support of civic initiatives in Amsterdam exhibits many characteristics of democratic professionalism. A defining feature of democratic professionalism is that frontline workers open up their professionalism – seen as values, knowledge, skills, and experience

(Evetts, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2016) – to citizens' influence by sharing power and responsibilities with them (Dzur, 2008, 2019). In the Amsterdam study, we observed this in the trust that frontline workers developed in initiators, their engagement with the initiatives' content, and their vigilance in avoiding taking over initiatives. Similarly, civic initiators regarded frontline workers as partners and collaborators, with corresponding expectations of authenticity and continued presence. Without a sense of equality, civic initiators would not view frontline workers in this way or value the collaboration so highly. We also observed frontline workers restricting initiatives where necessary. According to Dzur (2008), frontline workers should not stop working from a position of responsibility and authority, but should always do so with a focus on sharing power.

Building on Dzur's work, Evelien Tonkens and I have developed a more concrete elaboration of what democratic professionalism through power sharing could involve (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2025; Verhoeven, 2025). Frontline workers can achieve this by recognising, resisting, deliberating, representing, and bridging and connecting. At the core of this approach is 'recognising', whereby frontline workers try to understand the world from the perspective of civic initiators. Active listening is paramount here, involving focusing one's attention on the other person and setting aside one's own thoughts or judgements while they are speaking. Through active listening, frontline workers can build relationships and foster a sense of community. This is indirectly reflected in the Amsterdam findings on partnership and the need for continued presence among civic initiators. At last, civic initiators experienced someone who listened to them and took them seriously, leaving them wanting more. During active listening, it is important to pay close attention to 'who' is being listened to, 'where' they are being listened to, and 'what' is being listened to (Verhoeven, 2025). Frontline workers in Amsterdam succeeded in listening to a very diverse group of citizens in all kinds of neighbourhood locations and were open to all ideas that citizens proposed. In doing so, they laid the foundation for power sharing with civic initiators.

'Resisting' refers to frontline workers who actively oppose formal and informal rules and discourses within organisations that disempower citizens or trivialise their knowledge (Dzur, 2019). This can involve ignoring, bending, or reinterpreting rules during interactions with civic initiators, as well as adapting or reinterpreting the organisation's prevailing discourses during conversations with them (Verhoeven & Tonkens,

2025; Verhoeven, 2025). The Amsterdam study yielded no findings on this subject. 'Deliberation' involves exchanging arguments to clarify and sort out preferences, without necessarily leading to a decision (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2025; Verhoeven, 2025). By deliberating in this way, frontline workers can clarify what civic initiators want and help them turn this into plans, as happened in Amsterdam. Additionally, frontline workers can encourage deliberation among civic initiators so they can get to know, appreciate, and sort out one another's preferences.

'Representing' involves practices 'in which one agent stands, speaks or acts for another', and ensures that those who are represented feel empowered and included because they can hold the representative accountable (Warren, 2017, p. 48). If civic initiators find it difficult to do so themselves, frontline workers can represent initiatives towards authorities or other initiatives. It is crucial that they are accountable to the civic initiators they represent. The Amsterdam study yielded no findings on this subject. Finally, 'bridging and connecting' refers to frontline workers building bridges between civic initiatives and connecting them with authorities (Verhoeven & Tonkens, 2025; Verhoeven, 2025). In Amsterdam, we observed bridges being built between civic initiatives when civic initiators with similar plans were connected. We also observed connections being established with authorities when civic initiators were introduced to municipal departments that could provide additional support for their initiatives.

Together with the modest approach this further elaboration of Dzur's ideas on democratic professionalism provides a solid basis for frontline workers acting as citizenship whisperers that enable civic initiators to express themselves as citizens in the public domain. According to Dzur (2019), this involves not only democratising one's own professionalism, but also mitigating the dehumanising effects of public authorities thinking 'for' or 'on behalf of' citizens rather than 'with' them. By collaborating with civic initiatives, public authorities receive more direct input, which can democratise policy thinking. The prospect of democratising professionalism and policy thinking aligns well with the liberal citizenship perspective, as it curtails the power of governments and creates more opportunities for citizens to engage with public problems through civic initiatives.

## Becoming Citizenship Whisperers

By acting as citizenship whisperers, frontline workers can have an empowering effect on civic initiatives, especially in underprivileged neighbourhoods where many residents distrust institutions. Acting in this way does require some adjustment of current work practices, but should not be seen as either a process of de-professionalisation or a process of re-professionalisation (Duyvendak et al., 2006). Instead, to become fully fledged citizenship whisperers, it is important that frontline workers ask themselves: how can I develop a modest approach combined with democratic professionalism and what do I need to do differently? Asking these questions is a start, but practising is also required. Frontline workers can help themselves by committing to what Zacka (2017) calls 'the gymnastics of the self' through: 1) engaging in self-examination to uncover their own preferences and prejudices, 2) calibrating the distance between themselves and citizens, and 3) reflecting on the degree of care and empathy with which citizens are treated. By doing so, frontline workers develop greater self-awareness of their own conduct and of the conflicting demands placed on them by public organisations. This allows them to develop themselves as effective citizenship whisperers while continuing to be dedicated professionals.

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# Some Notes on the Citizenship of Children and Immigrants: Culturalisation, Civilisation

*Rineke van Daalen*

In the twenty-first century citizenship acquired a new significance. This article aims to explore several theoretical approaches in the research on citizenship. It will focus on the work of: Jan Willem Duyvendak in the large collaborative project on the culturalisation of citizenship (Duyvendak *et al.*, 2016); of Iris van Huis and Ali de Regt (2005) on the enculturation of immigrants in Dutch society; and of Ali de Regt (2010) on the introduction of lessons in citizenship in primary and secondary schools. In both cases the transformation of newcomers into citizens is at stake, but where Duyvendak *et al.* called the processes they studied the 'culturalization' of immigrants, De Regt analysed the enculturation of immigrants and students as processes of 'civilization'. What do these different labels indicate? Do they point to different theoretical perspectives?

## The Start

Increasing anxiety about the state of Dutch society and its citizens was characteristic for the start of the twenty-first century. Paul Scheffer (2000) was one of the whistle-blowers. He wrote an alarming portrayal of Dutch society as individualised and fragmented, with citizens who were unaware of their shared past and uninformed about their civil rights and duties. He focused in particular on the problematic position of immigrants and refugees, and spoke of 'the multicultural drama'. That term referred in particular to the lagging behind of young generations of immigrants. Scheffer warned against the falling apart of society in separate sections, and against the genesis of an ethnic under-class. He wondered about the lack of public concern with these issues, and about the absence of a feeling of urgency to tackle these problems. So, Scheffer's worries not only referred to the behaviour of immigrants, in particular to the offspring of

immigrants, who were presented as evildoers and who were a target of public debate and anxious consternation. He also criticised the indifferent behaviour of Dutch citizens towards immigrants, and their unwarranted optimism about the possibility of multiculturalism.

Scheffer's article received much attention and a strong response. The times were tense, and the tensions in Dutch politics even intensified when the charismatic politician Pim Fortuyn was murdered in 2002. Politicians and policymakers were searching for suitable political translations of the anxieties of the day. They were rethinking the position of citizens, specifically the position of outsiders like minorities and youngsters in Dutch society. Dutch culture and Dutch identity should be protected, and education was seen as the method to reach that aim. Children, young people, immigrants, and outsiders in general were seen as candidates for a national campaign to promote citizenship. To become established citizens, these outsiders had to become familiar with Dutch culture, not only at a cognitive level but also emotionally. Starting from the work of Jan Willem Duyvendak *et al.* (2016), Ali de Regt (2010) and Iris Van Huis and Ali de Regt (2005), this article gives an impression of the content of these processes of civilisation/culturalisation.

## Parallel Processes of Civilisation: Schoolchildren and Immigrants

Public anxiety in the 1990s pointed among other things to failing schools. Schools were seen as unsuccessful in two respects: Children didn't acquire basic competences like reading, writing, and arithmetic, neither did they receive the necessary moral education. Schools were considered to disregard both functions. Young people were presented as self-centred, without civilised manners, not observing the law, staying away from school, and using alcohol and drugs. Such loose behaviour was regarded as symptomatic for the contemporary egalitarian relations with adults. But there were more problems.

Children of immigrants, especially boys, had difficulties with the authority relations at school. In the interactions with their parents they were used to a stricter hierarchy than at school. At home affect management by control ('*bevelshuishouding*') was demanded from them. But at school they were confronted with more egalitarian relationships and with affect management by negotiation ('*onderhandelingshuishouding*'). The last modus demanded more self-control of them (De Swaan, 1990 [1979],

pp. 150–161). Immigrant boys had difficulties in bridging this cleavage, which impeded their integration in Dutch society. Such problems were considered to be especially characteristic for the children of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. The educational problems were seen as specifications of the moral panic and the more general agenda, as sketched by Paul Scheffer (2000) in the 'multicultural drama'.

Ali de Regt (2010) places the moral upbringing of children at school in a long-term perspective. In the Netherlands in the Onderwijswet in 1806 a national school system was established. National schools were treated as suitable vehicles to mould students into national citizens, able to function in a modern industrialising society. Children should be literate, and classes like 'history of the fatherland' ('*vaderlandse geschiedenis*') or geography were the places to learn national virtues. In such lessons the national past and national heroes were praised, to give children models of identification at the level of the national society and the national state. National virtues were seen as components of civilised manners.

This nineteenth-century education underwent several transformations in the first half of the twentieth century. First, a new educational agenda was formulated by school reformers like Maria Montessori and the Dalton Plan. They introduced more egalitarian relationships and new pedagogical ideals like autonomy, responsibility, and self-development, focusing on competences like social and emotional functioning, curiosity, cooperation, and creativity. Developing the talents of individual students became the core of their educational programme. Later in the twentieth century such ideals spread and became also incorporated in regular schools (Van Daalen & De Regt, 2003).

De Regt (2010) describes also how nationalism lost its appeal as a political yardstick, in particular after the Second World War: Glorifying the nation state became associated with the war and became less articulated at schools. But in the twenty-first century the absence of shared historical knowledge about the Netherlands as a nation became a cause for concern. This lack of national identification became a reason to promote active citizenship and to introduce a historical canon, covering the historical basics every adult citizen in the Netherlands ought to know. The expectation was that a common stock of culture could function as a model for Dutch citizenship, encouraging the integration of everyone.

In 2006 the furthering of active citizenship and social cohesion was legally regulated in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools.

The social integration of immigrant children was mentioned as one of the objectives of the new policy. The aims of the law are not specified; schools are free in their interpretation of the content of citizen education and in the methods they want to choose. Good citizenship at school implied respect for the basic principles of democratic rule of law, and the knowledge and social competences that were necessary conditions to be able to participate as responsible citizens in a democracy. Think of honesty, the capability to think critically, to reflect on your own behaviour, and to act with empathy. Children should become active citizens, living tolerantly in a multicultural society, together with people from other countries, with different religions, languages, and customs. They should embrace democracy and they should accept values like equality of men and women and the normality of homosexuality – values that are incorrectly imagined as the age-old core of Dutch culture (De Regt, 2010).

In tandem with this development immigrants from outside the European Union were from 1998 legally obliged to participate in so-called '*inburgeringscursussen*'. In these courses they could obtain the basics to function as responsible citizens of the Netherlands. Immigrants had to learn the Dutch language, and they had to gain an understanding of the working of Dutch society. These '*need to know* courses' (*Maatschappijoriëntatie, Beroepenoriëntatie*) informed them about the Dutch educational system and about the Dutch labour market. Such knowledge made them able to stand on their own feet, but that was not enough. There was also a '*nice to know*' part of the curriculum, about manners and customs, which was considered to be just as important. Iris van Huis and Ali de Regt did research on this non-obligatory, cultural, and normative part of the programme. They wanted to know which elements were seen as appropriate to teach the immigrants, and which methods were used to instruct them. They analysed study books, they observed lessons, and they interviewed teachers. Informally, they interviewed students as well, but unfortunately, they didn't use that material (De Regt & Van Huis, 2005, pp. 382–385).

So, the immigrants should have a job, they should be well informed about Dutch politics and constitutional principles, about democracy and the tax system. They had to be knowledgeable about basic rights in the Netherlands, like freedom of speech, or the right not to be discriminated. They obtained instruction about family relations and gender relations in the Netherlands, think again of equality of women and men, tolerance

towards homosexuality, and towards cohabiting unmarried. Besides, immigrants had to learn everyday manners, like salutations and forms of dress, often in an idealised form. They had to learn about standards of privacy and about interactions with neighbours. And, last but not least, they had to become familiar with Dutch national identity, to identify with Dutch society (De Regt & Van Huis, 2005).

This long list of *need-to-knows* and *nice-to-knows* shows many similarities to the citizenship lessons at schools. In both cases the aim is to make citizens of the Netherlands familiar with its history and identity, and to enlarge their national pride. Van Huis and De Regt also studied the methods of the '*inburgeringscursussen*', and they found that the teachers didn't want to teach manners, emotions, and morals in a paternalistic way. They presented these morals as diverse and changeable, and they also pointed to the pluriformity among Dutch people. Instead of prescribing they preferred to discuss the Dutch norms and values, with the aim to let immigrants think for themselves (Van Huis & De Regt, 2005: 400–405).

## The Culturalization of Citizenship

In *The Culturalization of Citizenship* Jan Willem Duyvendak *et al.* (2016) also studied citizenship as a concern that was newly defined. They found that the behaviour standards that were demanded of immigrants came to cover a broader domain than before. To enjoy the legal rights that come with citizenship was no longer enough to be accepted as a full-fledged citizen. Citizenship came to include also symbolic and emotional elements, in terms of Van Huis and De Regt's *the nice to knows*, the many forms of contemporary self-control. Duyvendak *et al.* describe this process as the 'culturalization of citizenship', 'a process in which what it is to be a citizen is less defined in terms of civic, political or social rights, and more in terms of adherence to norms, values and cultural practices' (2017, p. 2). Nations became framed as 'home', as places where the right to belong is in question – think of the ability to feel at home both for the Dutch population and for immigrants. And belonging had more emotional components than civic, political, and social rights.

This turn in the content of citizenship can be understood as part of a situation in which the national culture is experienced as disputed, and in which the traditional cultural heritage is seen as threatened and has to

be defended. Immigrants are not only urged to acquire Dutch nationality, represented in a Dutch passport, but their participation in education and in the labour market is not sufficient. Demonstration of feelings of attachment, belonging, and loyalty, and the embracement of Dutch customs, manners, and emotions, are seen as necessary conditions for the transformation of immigrants and for their recognition as co-citizens (Duyvendak, 2011, p. 84–105). This incorporation of additional symbolic and emotional qualities in citizenship touch on deeper levels of someone's personality, which makes integration into society more difficult for newcomers.

## Interpretation and Discussion

The research in the edited volume *The Culturalization of Citizenship* (2016) covers a large domain, geographically and as regards topics and methods of research. But as far as the research of Jan Willem Duyvendak *et al.* and Ali de Regt and Iris van Huis focuses on the political and public debate, there is much in common: their research topic, some of their methods of research, and research materials – mostly public discourses like media expressions, government reports, and policy documents. It is not surprising that the results of their research on the content of Dutchness bear resemblances. The emphasis on public discourse demonstrates in both cases something else: the limitations of studies on public discourses and on conceptualisations. That focus takes the civilising/culturalising institutions as a starting point. It doesn't pay much attention to the perspective of the immigrants and the children, not to their ideas, not to their response in classes, courses, and other places in the public domain. Therefore, tensions, resistance, and effects do not get much room. Processes of 'civilisation' and 'culturalisation' are, however, always contested, as Keith Thomas demonstrates in *In Pursuit of Civility. Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England* (2018). Ideals of civility and civilisation are not universally accepted; they are always subjected to criticism (Thomas, 2018). That is certainly the case in the Netherlands, where the presence of immigrants is more and more problematised, dominating the public debate, while democratic values are increasingly and internationally under pressure. As the awareness of being part of global networks became even larger, in growing circles the need to protect the Dutch culture and the Netherlands as a country is felt more urgently.

Does the use of different labels, 'civilisation' and 'culturalisation', make a difference? In the introduction of *Vuur en beschaving* (1992) Joop Goudsblom argues that 'civilization should be the dynamic equivalent of culture' (Goudsblom, 1992, pp. 15–27). He points to the sociological definition of 'culture' as 'the acquired behaviour repertoire that people who belong to a certain group or society share with each other' (Wilterdink & Van Heerikhuizen, 2012, p. 392). Interpreted in that distant, scientific, technical, sociological way 'culture' is used as a concept that is appropriate for all humankind and all human history. It doesn't have the connotation with superiority or ethnocentrism that sticks to 'civilisation'. Goudsblom therefore argues that one should use 'civilisation' in the same technical way as 'culture'. But in my opinion the appraising elements in the concept of 'civilisation' are so strongly rooted in everyday speak that they make it difficult to use 'civilisation' as a technical concept like 'culture'. From that perspective one could prefer 'culturalisation' as the dynamic pendant of 'culture', as Duyvendak *et al.* did. The concept of 'culturalisation' could then function as the dynamic variant of the sociological definition of 'culture'.

In my opinion 'civilisation' and 'culturalisation' are in the above-mentioned studies interchangeable. The behaviour characteristics that are seen as characteristic of Dutchness and for good citizenship can just as well be labelled 'civilisation' or 'culturalisation'. Liberal democratic, secular, tolerant, pluralist, progressive regarding gender and sexuality are the features of the 'modern' attitude that is seen as typical for the contemporary Dutch culture, and that is expected of Dutch citizens and also of immigrants. The normalising of homosexuality and the equality of women became part of this 'culturalisation' or 'civilisation' of citizenship.

## The Thesis of Ali de Regt

In her thesis *Arbeidersgezinnen en beschavingsarbeid* (1984), Ali de Regt demonstrates how research on the relationship between established and outsiders can be made larger than discourse analysis. De Regt studied changes in working-class families in the Netherlands between 1870 and 1940. During this period Dutch working-class family life changed towards a more balanced, more even, and more encompassing regulation of family relations, intimate life, and emotions. De Regt understood these changes in socio-economic terms, but also in relation to the civilising work of

bourgeois groups with a focus on family life. She described the activities of these bourgeois actors with a civilising mission as civilising work (‘*beschavingsarbeid*’) and she spoke of civilisation offensives (‘*beschavingsoffensieven*’). Civilisation offensives were intentional, and therefore hard to fit in Norbert Elias’ theory of civilising processes as unintended, unplanned, and the result of shifting power balances and interdependencies, with imitation and distinction as motors of change. ‘People force each other towards more civilized behaviour in reciprocal competition to distinguish themselves from each other; imitation of that behaviour by lower groups leads to further refinement of standards and self-control by higher groups. A civilising offensive, however, is an intended and planned initiative to change the behaviour of lower groups’ (De Regt, 2015).

In her thesis De Regt shows a keen eye for the tensions that are implicit in civilising offensives. She drew a difference between civilisation offensives and their effects. Some people from the working class accepted the new behavioural standards or even actively aspired for certain interventions. But other people resisted. They tried to manipulate the moral advocates, or they were indifferent to their activities. De Regt demonstrates that civilising offensives and conflicts came in tandem with processes of distinction and imitation, blending in complex practices of social integration.

For me De Regt’s thesis illustrates the merit of making the research design larger than discourse analysis, combining it with other perspectives. The disputed relations between established and outsiders in the case of citizenship could be understood better by focusing on issues of conflict and belonging in daily interactions. How do immigrants react to the ‘*inburgeringscursussen*’? Do they try to imitate the established Dutch citizens in an attempt to belong to them, or do they object to the courses? Do the established try to distinguish themselves from the newcomers in an attempt to keep distance? Such conflicting contacts are best understandable when they are simultaneously analysed on different levels: on the level of interdependencies, of interactions, and on the level of the self (Elias, 1971 [1970], pp. 176–177). Research of the interactions in several arenas – in school classes, ‘*inburgeringscursussen*’, but also in shops, or other places in the public domain – would open a large range of topics that can enlighten the tensions of today. In that arena established and outsiders struggle for their position in relation to each other.

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# Home's Best: Dutch Discourse on Care and Independent Living*

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According to the relevant early twentieth-century entry in *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* – the Dutch equivalent of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* published from 1864 to 1998 – *burger* has three meanings. The first, which dates from feudal times, is: resident of a city, enjoying all the rights that come with that status (cp. *bourgeois* in French). The second, which dates from the late eighteenth century and has gradually displaced the first, is: inhabitant of a state, enjoying civil rights (cp. *citoyen* in French). The third is derived from both the latter and the former but refers to something other than rights: "someone is called a citizen of the place where they live permanently or where they feel completely at home" (INL, 1902, s.v. "burger"; all translations in this essay are my own, unless otherwise stated). This third meaning is not reflected in the Dutch word for citizenship (*burgerschap*) but is in the verb *inburgeren* and the related noun *inburgering*. The latter is nowadays commonly translated as "civic integration" but besides getting accepted, settled or established somewhere (cp. *Einbürgerung* in German) also means growing accustomed to a place, so that one no longer feels, or is felt to be, a stranger (INL, 1909, s.v. "inburgeren").

Interestingly, it was in this context that the everyday word "home" was first used in a post-war Speech from the Throne – the annual speech at the opening of the parliamentary year, delivered by the Dutch monarch, but largely written by the ministers. "Over the past year," Queen Juliana read in 1958, "37,000 compatriots have repatriated [from Indonesia: the former Dutch Indies, djb]. Many people are making commendable efforts to make them feel at home here and to find new employment for them here and elsewhere." It was not until 1973 that the word was used again in a Speech from the Throne – the first under the responsibility of the legendary left-wing Den Uyl Cabinet.

> The government aims to reduce inflation, cut unemployment and reduce existing inequality and deprivation. To achieve this, far-reaching measures are needed. It [i.e. the Dutch government] proposes these measures in the conviction that while sacrifices are asked, the prospect of a society in which people can feel more at home is also offered.

Put negatively, the newly sworn-in cabinet seemed to suggest that beside people who came from the other side of the world, citizens who were born and raised in the Netherlands might not feel quite at home either – and therefore benefit from government interventions aimed at "spreading knowledge, power, and income". A distinctly different basis for "feeling at home" was given centre stage ten years later, in 1983. In the very first Speech from the Throne under the responsibility of a cabinet led by the Christian Democrat "Ruud" Lubbers – prime minister from 1982 until 1994 – civil society and citizenship were put in the spotlight.

> Maintaining a strong constitutional state [or "rule of law"; Dutch: *rechtsstaat*], which is essential for preserving our democracy, is one of our primary tasks. However, the constitutional state can only thrive in a society where all citizens have the opportunity to develop, where emancipation can be achieved, where national and group traditions can be practiced and where groups with different views and customs tolerate and appreciate each other. The feeling of uncertainty and lack of security, and sometimes even a feeling of aimlessness, are certainly not solely attributable to the economic downturn. That is why the fabric of society, from the family to the neighbourhood, from local associations to the richly varied media, is so important, as it allows people to feel connected and at home.

This glorification of civil society – a tried and tested theme of Dutch Christian Democrats, who were not averse to preaching communitarianism – seamlessly transitioned into sounding central government's retreat.

> Our constitutional state also benefits from better administrative relations, with decision-making as close to the citizens as possible. With this in mind, we will continue on the difficult path of decentralisation. The quality of society must be determined by the attitude and efforts of its citizens.

Later Speeches from the Throne occasionally mentioned "home care", "home situation", and "homeless people", but the discursive association with *feelings* only reappeared in 2000, when the government of the day stated: "Cities must remain vigorous [Dutch: *vitaal*] and livable, offering a residential environment where citizens can feel at home." One year later, that same government – the second Purple Coalition, so called because it consisted of social democrats, free-market liberals and social liberals – went a step further: "It is essential that European decisions are democratically controlled and that citizens identify with and feel at home in Europe." This Speech from the Throne was delivered only seven days after 9/11 but had probably been written well before that – and certainly before the political assassination of Pim Fortuyn that would spark a populist uprising with outspoken nationalist, nativist sentiments.

Since then, the discursive association of citizenship with "feelings" (instead of rights) and "home" has gained political pertinence. As Marieke Slootman and Jan Willem Duyvendak (2015) have demonstrated, citizens with roots in "non-Western" countries are nowadays required to "feel Dutch", so that established, ethnic majority citizens can "feel at home" in their (!) country, city, or neighbourhood. However, there is also a substantially different discourse that links citizenship to home – not as the proverbial castle where citizens, by virtue of their fundamental rights, can keep the state at bay, but as a safe haven where "active citizens" are expected to compensate for the devolution of the welfare state (cp. Tonkens, 2011). The Netherlands' 2007 Social Support Act (Wmo, revised in 2015) has relegated a great deal of long-term care for the frail elderly and people with psychiatric illness, physical or intellectual disabilities – which used to be largely provided by professionals, in institutions – to "the community" and, more specifically, to the private sphere par excellence: home. In policy discourse, this is often presented as a return to a "normal", "natural" state of affairs, bringing long-term care back to the social setting where it supposedly belongs (Duyvendak, 2017; Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2018).

## Home Sick

For centuries, it went without saying that home was best for people in need of care because the alternatives were unattractive. Hospitals (*gasthuizen*) were terminal stations for paupers, as were other "intramural centres

for the detention and treatment of the invalid and not so able-bodied needy" (De Swaan, 1988, p. 47), such as the massive "New Workhouse" on Roeterseiland, opened by the city magistrate Amsterdam in 1782. Inmates were kept off the streets, given a bed, food, and (uniform) clothes but bore the stigma of charity and the yoke of institutional discipline, which entailed forced labour (Verhagen, 1972). Most needy people therefore preferred receiving support without residence in an institution. In English, they were called "outdoor paupers" or "outdoor pensioners" (OUP, n.d., s.v. "Outdoor"), in Dutch, by contrast, *huiszitten* or *huiszittende armen* (literally: "home-sitting poor"). Wealthy citizens who were ill or frail avoided hospitals like the plague, and instead hired live-in nurses.

This changed in the nineteenth century when, in conjunction with the professionalization of doctors, hospices gave way to hospitals in the present-day sense: centres for medical diagnostics, treatment, and nursing. In the Netherlands, this development was accelerated by the introduction of compulsory health insurance in 1941, which gave all employees and their families access to professional health care. As a result, not only were general practitioners – known as "home physicians" (*huisartsen*) in Dutch – consulted much more often, by many more patients, but the relative number of hospital admissions also rose rapidly (Jaspers, 1985, p. 115).

Shortly after the Second World War, the Dutch government attempted to curb the growth of inpatient healthcare by only permitting the construction or expansion of hospitals on a limited basis. But from the late 1950s – when the Catholic party exchanged its post-war cooperation with social democrats for coalitions with free-market liberals – civil society organizations and construction companies were given free rein. By 1970, there were almost one and a half times as many hospital beds per thousand inhabitants as thirty years earlier (Juffermans, 1982, p. 223).

This expansion seems to contradict the aforementioned preference for home as the location for providing or receiving care. However, until the 1970s, Dutch debates on healthcare – a social sector dominated by faith-based or otherwise ideological civil society organizations – did not revolve around the contrast between home versus institution or outpatient versus inpatient, but rather around that between government and "private initiative" (non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and companies). Inpatients or inmates were obviously not *literally* at home but often still found themselves in their own circle – especially if they were religious. In 1950, 45 per cent of all Dutch hospitals were Catholic – not surprising

given the large labour pool of nuns – and 17 per cent were Protestant (Juffermans, 1982, p. 170). At the time, an important criterion for "good care" was that it was based on religious or ideological principles that matched those of the patients, residents, or inmates. Even in a hospital or similar residential care facility one could feel at home then.

In addition to Catholic, Protestant, and "neutral" associations that ran hospitals, there were others that enabled the sick and infirm to literally stay at home by providing social and health services that are now usually called "home care", but that were then referred to as "community nursing" or "district nursing" (*wijkverpleging*) (Huige 2011). It entailed professional care at home – a middle ground between admitting the patient to hospital and hiring a live-in nurse. Even the happy few who could afford the latter were reluctant to do so because of the intrusion into their private lives. For the nurses, most of whom were (young) women, living with a sick person was also challenging, as it required adapting to domestic relationships and habits. Around the middle of the twentieth century, however, it was generally believed that such a care arrangement was best in at least one case: childbirth and maternity care.

## Born at Home

Until well into the nineteenth century, it was customary throughout the world for women to give birth at home, with the help of (female) neighbours, a midwife, or "dry nurse" (so called because she, unlike a "wet nurse", did not breastfeed the baby). This changed with the professionalization of doctors and the associated rise of modern hospitals. These two processes also took place in the Netherlands but did not immediately lead to a mass shift from home births to hospital births, nor to the replacement of midwives by doctors (Kateman & Herschderfer, 2005).

Here too, however, "lay people" were sidelined. To keep incompetent neighbours and unskilled dry nurses away, general practitioners and gynaecologists around 1900 advocated training dry nurses (*baker*s) or maternity nurses (*kraamverzorgsters*). In some places, training programmes were indeed started, but it was not until after the Second World War that so-called "maternity centres" were established (Van Teijlingen, 1996). These centres preferably offered "in-house maternity care" by nurses who lived with a family for about ten days. Just like other live-in

nurses, they had to put up with a lot, but were paid quite little – and yet this form of maternity care was expensive. For this reason, it was eventually replaced by "district maternity care" (*wijkkraamzorg*), provided by a professional who visited twice a day to wash and care for the mother and her newborn (Huige, 2011, pp. 215–227).

While the aforementioned introduction of compulsory health insurance led to a shift towards clinical, specialist medical care, it actually strengthened the position of midwives, who were given a monopoly on "normal deliveries". Only if no midwife was available could the family doctor be called in, and hospitalization was only reimbursed in case of complications (Abraham-van der Mark, 1996b). Until the introduction of "short-stay" hospital births in 1965, most new mothers remained at home throughout the entire maternity process (Van Daalen, 1996, p. 78). Over the years, insurance agencies became more flexible and gradually more women gave birth in hospital, but even in the early 1990s a third of Dutch women still gave birth at home (cp. Duyvendak 2017, pp. 37–39). According to the editor of a collection published at the time, they were perfectly right.

> When a woman gives birth at home, the doctor or midwife is her guest: the woman must remain in control of her environment and be the center. An unfamiliar setting, such as the hospital, diminishes the woman's autonomy and self-confidence. She becomes a patient and is required to adjust to the rules of the institution. In a hospital, the medical personnel are in control, and the easy availability of drugs and medical technology promote unnecessary intervention. Home birth, on the other hand, assumes that giving birth is normal. […] Contrary to the image of the passive woman, whose clinical delivery is managed by a team of professionals, the practice of home delivery is based on the model of an active woman who retains control of her body and her baby. […]. Close friends, relatives or neighbors may share the event of birth or come to the house directly afterwards. Birth is considered a family event. (Abraham-Van der Mark, 1996a, pp. 1–3; orig. English)

In this ode to home birth, the difference between home and hospital is rhetorically equated with a whole series of other contrasts: family, friends, and neighbours versus the "unfamiliar", "autonomy and self-confidence" versus "adjustment", "active" versus "passive", "woman" (or "person") versus "patient", "normal" versus "medical" or "clinical", "nature" versus "drugs" and "technology", "lay" versus "professional". Many of these

binary oppositions are found not only in the discourse on pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity, but also in that on other forms of care and social support – notably for the elderly and people with psychiatric illness.

## Far Gone

Criticism of "asylums", where people were "locked away", is as old as psychiatry itself (Bartlett & Wright, 1999; Suzuki, 1999) but really took off in the 1960s and 1970s. After Michel Foucault's *Folie et déraison* (1961; transl. *Madness and Civilization*) and Erving Goffman's *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (1961) many other authors criticized psychiatric institutions, arguing that they did not serve to cure patients but rather to maintain social order by suppressing deviant ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving (Porter, 1998).

Although "critical psychiatry" found a receptive audience in the Netherlands, it did not lead here – as it did in Italy, the United States, and Great Britain (Torrey, 1997; Barham, 1998; Payne, 1999) – to mass closure of the much-maligned institutions. To date, psychiatry in the Netherlands is much less "deinstitutionalized" or "de-bedded" than in many other Western countries (Ingleby, 1998; Blok, 2004; Van Hoof *et al.*, 2012; cp. Davis *et al.*, 2012). The Dutch term *hospitalisering* also means something slightly different from hospitalization: not so much admission to, or residence in a hospital or institution, but rather the passive, dependent behaviour to which this can lead. *That* was what was wrong with the institutions and "the medical model", according to many Dutch supporters of critical psychiatry in about 1970. The "social model" they advocated did not so much involve a return to "the community" and to informal or at least ambulant care, but rather to a more intensive form of clinical treatment – with fewer restrictions, fewer pills (and certainly no "shock treatment") but more, *much* more, talking (Blok, 2004, p. 35).

While the early 1970s saw the formation of a system of outpatient alias ambulant mental health care that was unparalleled in terms of scope, diversity, and accessibility (Van der Grinten, 1987), Dutch critical psychiatry remained predominantly intramural. This was partly because outpatient mental health care was largely intended for people with mild "life problems" and partly because the number of therapists in inpatient care was also increasing. Characteristic of "the social model" was not so

much the rejection of professional clinical care, but rather the acceptance of non-medical therapies aimed at promoting openness, independence, and responsibility (cf. Tonkens, 2011). It was not until the 1970s that Dutch adherents of critical psychiatry called for the closing of psychiatric hospitals (Blok, 2004, p. 167). "Clients" alias "lunatics" – as some activists called themselves – should be recognized as autonomous, responsible citizens who had the right to live in a regular house in an ordinary neighbourhood (Verplanke & Duyvendak, 2010; Newman & Tonkens, 2011).

In 1983, Dutch Parliament voted for a moratorium on the construction of new psychiatric hospitals, and four years later began the dismantling of Santpoort, Amsterdam's "asylum in the dunes" (Vijselaar, 1997). It is not easy to say where the patients alias residents ended up. Some moved to smaller intramural facilities; others were housed in some form of "protected", "sheltered", or "assisted living", and still others were deemed eligible for "independent living". Not before long, a small but noticeable part of each of these groups ended up on the streets or behind bars (Schnabel, 1995). Although this was much less common in the Netherlands than in the United States, some argued that the closure of psychiatric hospitals had been a mistake.

> Due to the nature of their psychiatric disorder, many seriously ill people are unable to demand the reopening of institutions such as Santpoort, even though this would undoubtedly be beneficial for them. (Bakker, 2002, p. 1029; see also Van Eijk-Osterholt, 1984; cp. Heerma van Voss, 2007)

Others responded that "deinstitutionalization" was only half the battle. What really mattered was "socialization" (*vermaatschappelijking*) (Kwekkeboom, 2004), "rehabilitation", and "reintegration". The national government agreed that "clients" had to be enabled to "live fully or partially independently in society and find activities or work" (Wennink *et al.*, 2001, p. 923). Those who could not stand entirely on their own two feet should be enabled to live "in the neighborhood", embedded in a "social support system" (Van Weeghel & Dröes, 1999). However, the neighbourhoods where many people with intellectual disabilities or psychiatric illness ended up proved to be far less welcoming, homely, and supportive than policymakers had imagined (Boon *et al.*, 2004). Many people proved unable to build or maintain a social network and became hopelessly isolated (Verplanke & Duyvendak, 2010).

By the way, it is noteworthy that in Dutch the term *de wijk* ('the neighbourhood") was used instead of "the community", which is customary in English. Perhaps the equivalent Dutch word (*gemeenschap*) was too reminiscent of the reviled era of the pillarization, when Dutch civil society was divided into separate religious or ideological subcultures with a high degree of internal social control.

## Moving Senior Citizens

From 1975 onwards, a shift from intramural to extramural, "independent" living also became noticeable in elderly care. Whereas in 1975, 9.1 per cent of all people aged 65 and over lived in a retirement home, this figure fell to 8.4 per cent in 1980 and to just 6.7 per cent in 1990 (CBS, 1994, p. 14). In the years that followed, this decline continued. While the Netherlands was aging, even the absolute number of residents in care homes and nursing homes fell by a quarter between 1995 and 2012.

This drastic deinstitutionalization is all the more remarkable given that *before* 1975, the aforementioned proportion had risen rapidly, from 3.7 per cent in 1950 to 5.5 per cent in 1960, 8.0 per cent in 1970, and – as said – 9.1 per cent in 1975 (CBS, 1994, p. 14). In 1969, the Netherlands had 546 retirement homes, with approximately 101,000 places (Mol & Van Lieshout 1989, p. 32). About two-thirds of those "beds" were built after 1945, at an increasingly rapid pace.

**Table 1: Number of new "beds" for elderly people, 1945–1968** (*Source*: VROM, 1997)

| | N | of which in retirement homes *(bejaardentehuizen)* | % | of which in individual bungalows *(bejaardenwoningen)* | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1946-49 (4 y) | 678 | 128 | 18.9 | 550 | 81.1 |
| 1950-54 | 14,360 | 6,849 | 47.7 | 7,511 | 52.3 |
| 1955-59 | 34,237 | 14,231 | 41.6 | 20,006 | 58.4 |
| 1960-64 | 44,428 | 19,366 | 43.6 | 25,062 | 56.4 |
| 1965-68 (4 y) | 63,602 | 22,847 | 35.9 | 40,755 | 64.1 |

Meanwhile, many warned that this was unwise. A large-scale survey of elderly people revealed that most of them did not feel like moving to a

retirement home (Diederich, 1958). Moreover, contemporary observers pointed out that these homes were expensive. Why then were so many built? One possible explanation – which is still widely believed today – is that retirement homes were "promoted by the government in order to free up housing for young families" (De Wolf, 1977, p. 251; cp. Van den Heuvel, 1997). This sounds plausible, given the severity of the post-war housing shortage, which many elderly people experienced firsthand. In 1960, one in ten lived in with others, and two in ten had lodgers themselves (Van de Poel *et al.*, 1970, p. 14; see also Wiggers *et al.*, 1993, p. 42). When they moved to a retirement home, younger generations did indeed gain more space. But did the government envision this? There is no evidence to suggest this – rather the opposite.

It was not until the early 1960s that the national government became directly involved in residential elderly care, and its involvement was initially not aimed at expansion but at improvement. In 1962, Minister of Social Work Marga Klompé – the country's first woman government minister – presented a bill on retirement homes. It was prompted by reports of abuses in commercial homes and boarding houses, where residents were often placed in a ward.

> Personal belongings can rarely be brought along, as there is no space for them, unless one has rented a room. Individuals who are unable to pay for themselves have virtually no personal belongings around them. These have often been sold by the agency that pays [for their stay]. In some cases, there is not even room to display a portrait. (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1961–1962, p. 6621, Wet op de bejaardenoorden, Memorie van Toelichting [explanatory memorandum], p. 2)

Despite the seriousness of the wrongs, the national government took a cautious approach. The new law, which was to come into force in 1964, only obliged the authorities to supervise retirement homes (Van Overbeek, 1983, p. 13), paying particular attention to "the freedom of the elderly to organize their lives as they see fit" (art. 7, par. 2.a).

Klompé emphasized that instead of retirement homes she preferred extramural alternatives such as "family care and family assistance", "open elderly care" (meal service, house calls, neighbourhood activities, etc.; see Wentholt 1964), and the construction of independent housing for the elderly. The latter in particular deserved expansion: "After all, it is important that the elderly can remain in their own homes for as long as

possible." Indeed, in addition to retirement homes, many bungalows for elderly couples or individuals (*bejaardenwoningen*) were built in the 1950s and 1960s (see Table 1). A large proportion (35 per cent of the "beds") was commissioned by municipal authorities and a significantly smaller proportion (24 per cent) by Catholic or Protestant foundations. Interestingly, the opposite was true for retirement homes, most of which (59 per cent of the "beds") were built on behalf of faith-based civil society organizations, and only a small proportion (14 per cent) on behalf of municipal authorities (VROM, 1997, p. 5). The rapid expansion of retirement homes between 1950 and 1975 therefore seems to have been a consequence of the eagerness of these "pillarized" organizations to create facts on the ground. The government inadvertently encouraged this by granting building subsidies, but did not actually strive for moving elderly people from their homes to *a* home.

Some civil society actors, however, did. "For many elderly people, retirement homes are a real boon," enthused a mainline Protestant psychiatrist (Plokker, 1958, p. 85) in an edited volume titled *Working with the Elderly, a Task for the Church*. One of the other contributors argued that the traditional extended family was not suited for bringing about an "organic connection" between old and young.

> One should consider that grandparents, parents, and children all live together in one home [then], which will cause friction and restrictions to a greater or lesser extent, especially for the oldest and youngest groups. For each of them, this means less freedom, a less open lifestyle, and a curtailment of their independence. (Kiers, 1958, p. 93)

It is difficult to say exactly what this author had in mind for the elderly. On the one hand, he emphasized "that their independence and therefore their ability to remain in independent housing be guaranteed for as long as possible" (Kiers, 1958, p. 94). On the other hand, however, he provided detailed guidelines for the construction and design of retirement homes.

> In every apartment for the elderly, the washbasin must be equipped with both cold and hot water. […] A toilet for a single person or a couple is desirable for reasons of social hygiene. The corridors should have rooms on [just] one side should and their width should be set at 1.50 m. (Kiers, 1958, p. 98)

Elderly people's independence apparently depended not so much on whether they lived "at home" or "in *a* home" as on the layout of their accommodation. Safety and comfort were important, of course, but so was the possibility of avoiding others. In other words, independence was not primarily regarded as the ability to take care of oneself – without resorting to professional care – but rather as the freedom to live without being patronized or interfered with. This freedom had seriously lacked in the pre-war "old people's homes", and it was also hard to find in many commercial retirement homes and boardinghouses (Schneider, 1955; Van Velde, 1953). In 1970, quite a stir was caused by a series of television programmes on the abuses in such places: deprivation of liberty, neglect, intimidation, and even physical violence. The subsequent public outrage forced the national government to cooperate in the further expansion or at least renovation of non-profit retirement homes while it actually preferred other ways of housing the elderly.

## A Burden on the Children

Some professionals, too, advocated intensifying intramural care for the elderly. In 1969, F. J. M. Tonino obtained his doctorate with a social medicine study of four hundred elderly people, almost all of whom lived "at home". More than a quarter of them were found to need a different form of housing: a bungalow or service flat, a retirement home, or a nursing home. However, many of them proved unwilling to move: they showed "resistance" (Tonino, 1969, p. 148). By "need", that is, the author did not mean the *wishes* of the elderly but an *objective* necessity, which could be demonstrated by a person's "social incapacity". Hence his second proposition: "Good elderly care should begin with a targeted assessment of the latent needs of the elderly."

Tonino's third proposition refers to another phenomenon that may explain why residential care for the elderly grew so rapidly in the 1960s and early 1970s: "Any elderly person who receives only an old age pension can currently apply for and receive welfare." This did not follow from his research, but apparently he felt that this possibility was insufficiently known. In itself, this was not surprising, as the General Assistance Act – *Algemene bijstandswet*, the capstone of the post-war Dutch welfare state, drafted under Minister Klompé – had only been in force since 1965.

The bad reputation of traditional, pre-war "old people's homes" was not only due to the way they were equipped and run, but also to the way they were financed. The costs were usually covered by a civil or ecclesiastical poor relief board, which, however – under the 1912 Poor Relief Act – could seize residents' meagre possessions and even recover expenses from their children. This so-called "retrieval recourse" (*verhaalrecht*) was the most hated part of poor relief before the 1960s; "a source of misery in family relationships, a heavy burden on young, growing families" (D. Heroma-Meilink, quoted in Mostert 2011, p. 304; see also Van der Valk, 1986, p. 202).

As early as 1958, Minister Klompé proposed to limit "retrieval recourse". Her bill on this matter amounted to the government taking over the obligation to maintain the elderly from their adult children. Some of Klompé's fellow ministers balked at the costs, and others predicted that this would weaken the unique bond between parents and children, but one of her political associates, Prime Minister Jan de Quay, noted that this bond was actually being damaged by the right of recourse (Bos *et al.*, 2007, p. 122). After the bill was passed, Klompé later recounted, the director of the Amsterdam social services department told her:

> The law you created has had a tremendous impact on mental health. Because what has happened now that the pressure on children to pay for their parents has been removed? Openness has returned to families. They [i.e. adult children, djb] are helping their parents again. A human relationship that had actually disappeared is returning. (Mostert, 2011, p. 306)

The 1965 Social Assistance Act assumed that parents and adult children – even if they lived together – were not responsible for each other's livelihood. This was not because the government regarded them solely as individuals, but precisely because it wanted to protect the emotional bond between family members from the corrosive influence of material dependence. Henceforth, the relationship between parents and their adult children could be entirely voluntary, unburdened by material obligations (cp. Bussemaker, 1993, p. 162). But with that freedom soon came a new sense of unease. Whereas in the past, destitute elderly people had avoided moving into a retirement home to spare their relatives financially, they now often cited something *seemingly* similar as their motive for moving out: "We don't want to be a burden on our children."

## Integration of the Elderly

In the 1970s, as mentioned above, the trend of moving elderly people to a home gave way to a movement in the opposite direction. The 1970 Policy Memorandum on Elderly Care emphasized "that too little attention has been paid to independent elderly people until now". New policies should be based on "the fundamental principle of optimal integration into society and avoidance of isolation" (Van de Poel *et al.*, 1970, p. 16). The memorandum therefore called for more bungalows for the elderly, more "family helps" (*gezinshelpsters*) and more nursing homes (*verpleegtehuizen*), but fewer retirement homes (*bejaarden[te]huizen* alias *verzorgingshuizen*). The latter policy shift was elaborated in the 1975 Policy Memorandum on Elderly Care, presented by the aforementioned Den Uyl Cabinet. Faced with the financial consequences of the first oil crisis, it decreed that the construction of new retirement homes would henceforth only be permitted in regions where there were beds for fewer than 7 per cent of senior citizens. Although this decision appears to have been primarily driven by budgetary necessity, it was justified on socio-psychological grounds.

> Elderly people are clearly even less inclined to move than other age groups. […] For many, downsizing means saying goodbye to pets and hobbies, collections, and beloved pieces of furniture. Moreover, the parental dwelling [*ouderlijke woning*] can then less function as a parental home [*ouderlijk huis*]. Leaving the neighborhood causes detachment from a network of connections, loss of function and of a lot of sociability [*gezelligheid*]. The prospect of being put away in identical residential boxes [*woondoosjes*], surrounded by companions in adversity does not appeal to many elderly people. An important element of housing policy for the elderly should therefore be to help those who dwell normally [*normaal wonende bejaarden*] to continue living independently for as long as they wish. (Meijer *et al.*, 1975, pp. 75–76)

This lengthy quotation indicates a semantic shift. Whereas in the 1950s, "independent living" had meant that one could avoid others, it was now understood as the ability to maintain social relationships. "Home" was no longer presented as the private space par excellence, but rather as an opportunity for social interaction and thus for social functioning – for "participation" or "integration". Not only one's own dwellings, but also one's street, neighbourhood, or district was "familiar", and therefore in

a sense "home", which deserved to be preserved for as long as possible. Senior citizens were expected to stay at home, then, but precisely because this enabled them to go out and socialize.

The 1970 memorandum had already stated "that it is one of the government's policy tasks to offer aging people the opportunity to continue participating in societal development". The elderly should keep up to date, for example through "additional training or retraining" – especially with a view to "playfulness, creativity, and recreation" (Van de Poel, *et al.* 1970, p. 16). In short: "Care must be taken to ensure the optimal integration of the elderly into Dutch society." (p. 34). In the second memorandum, this became the main focus: "The policy aims at promoting integration into society" (Meijer *et al.*, 1975, p. 6). Consequently, the most detailed chapter was the one on integration, "participation in interpersonal contacts and in the cultural life" (p. 101). The authors concluded "that elderly people lag far behind in terms of socio-cultural participation and opportunities to participate. Probably more so than other so-called disadvantaged groups" (Meijer *et al.*, 1975, p. 127). However, promoting "integration" (alias "participation") was deemed only partly a government task: "It is the mentality of our society, including that of the elderly themselves, that needs to change" (p. 117). Efforts had to be made to expand "the opportunities for elderly people to remain active in any way they wish and to form new interpersonal relationships" (p. 115), which was easier when people still lived "independently" or "normally", embedded in a "natural" social environment. Residents of retirement homes were cut off from all this; they lived in an "isolated collective", while they actually needed "a more differentiated range of interpersonal contacts" (p. 122; cp. NFB, 1978, p. 19).

The 1977 Decree on Admission to Homes for the Elderly stipulated that senior citizens could only be admitted if an assessment committee had determined that they were no longer able to live independently (Van Overbeek, 1983, p. 18). Government should delay this by improving extramural care and stimulating informal care. The Dutch word for the latter, *mantelzorg*, coined by a professor of "hospital sciences" in the early seventies (Hattinga Verschure, 1972) became a household expression in these years.

As we saw earlier, the percentage of "institutionalized" elderly people did indeed decline after 1976. Did this mean that policy makers had succeeded in convincing senior citizens of the aforementioned benefits of staying where they were? Most elderly people want to continue living

independently as long possible, wrote the author of a policy evaluation, but only under certain conditions: "If living on their own [*zelfstandig wonen*] leads to complete dependence on daily help from others, then people will prefer being admitted to a retirement home after all" (Van Overbeek, 1983, p. 78). Apparently, they understood that staying out of a residential care facility was not the same as "independent living" – especially now that drastic cuts to professional home care were looming.

These retrenchments provoked a great deal of protest, notably from women's organizations: "It is believed that the cuts in extramural care are being passed on to women" (Van Overbeek, 1983, p. 82). This short, sober sentence refers to an aspect that had hardly been discussed until then: the gendered nature of home. While for many (heterosexual) men this was primarily a place where they were at ease and enjoyed some of their civil liberties, for many women – who often did not have paid jobs at the time – it was rather a place where, day in and day out, from early morning until late at night, a great deal of "shadow work" had to be done. From the late 1980s onwards, many more Dutch women found paid employment but in most households, they remained primarily responsible for domestic chores, emotion work (Hochschild, 1979) and informal care outdoors.

## Conclusion: Home Alone

Michael Billig's sharp and witty *Learn to Write Badly: How to Succeed in the Social Sciences* ends with six recommendations. The most important one may be this: "As social scientists, we should aim to populate our texts – to write about people rather than things. […] We should be suspicious of unpopulated writings which seem to depict social worlds full of things and empty of people" (Billig, 2013, p. 315).

Reflections on (long-term) care do not seem particularly susceptible to this flaw, as they tend to be full of real people with equally real needs, limitations, hopes and fears, desires and disillusions. But as soon as they refer to "home" – or "the neighbourhood", "the community" – they risk getting lost. For however familiar the word may sound, however warm the feelings it tends to evoke, and however replete it may be with sublime ideals, values and virtues, "home" is a hollow concept that leaves in the dark who is there.

As Jan Willem Duyvendak has repeatedly pointed out, so much is expected of and attributed to "home" these days that it is in danger of collapsing under the weight of it all – all the more so because it has become increasingly quiet in recent decades. Is anyone actually at home? Can and will that person open the door, and can one expect any care from him, her, or them? Or is the occupant yet another person in need of care but left to their own devices?

## Notes

* This essay is an adaptation and translation of Bos, Wekker, & Duyvendak (2013). The first two and a half pages are entirely new. An abridged version, with less historical detail, but more attention to present-day developments was previously published as a chapter in Duyvendak (2017).

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PART 6

# Public Sociology

# Reactionary Social Media

*Justus Uitermark*

Digital technologies were once widely regarded as harbingers of cosmopolitan citizenship. Early Internet enthusiasts believed that in "cyberspace" we would connect as equals, reaching across the social divides that separate us in "the real world". Commentators and academics hoped and thought that social media would undermine the power of corporations and states to control and manipulate populations. In the first two decades of the millennium digital technologies seemed to deliver on the promise; from Wikipedia and WikiLeaks to the "Facebook revolutions" and #occupy: digital technologies powered progressive social movements and frightened conservatives and elites.

Fast forward to 2026. The initial enthusiasm for digital society has morphed into dark pessimism. Social media have not just failed to deliver emancipation and liberation; they appear to play an active role in polarising populations and power the backlash against progressives and their causes. At the very least, social media turn out to be more complex and ambiguous than had been anticipated by early theorists of the information society.

This essay examines how social media facilitate progressive social movements as well as backlash. I present snippets of research projects at the University of Amsterdam that extended Jan Willem Duyvendak's research agenda on citizenship, social movements, and political cleavages into the digital realm. In fast succession, I look at the rise of social media, hybrid mobilisations for immigrant and civil rights in the United States, the transformation of Anonymous as chaotic to a reactionary movement, and Instagram's role in recreating status hierarchies.

## The Progressive Promise of Digital Technologies

The platform society, as it would come to be called (Van Dijck *et al.*, 2018), began to develop in earnest at the beginning of the third millennium. Facebook was launched in 2004 and experienced a meteoric rise. In 2006, Twitter, now X, was launched. Instagram followed in 2010. These platforms were deliberately designed as complex systems that thrive on self-organisation and bottom-up emergence: users were not passive consumers but actively participated in the creation and curation of content. Because of this participatory dimension, the platforms were seen as a democratic and revolutionary alternative to legacy media, the market, and the state. As Manuel Castells remarked in 2007:

> Mass-self communication is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with many… The emergence of mass self-communication offers an extraordinary medium for social movements and rebellious individuals to build their autonomy and confront the institutions of society in their own terms and around their own projects. (Castells, 2007, p. 29)

Castells' optimism was typical of the time. What would become known as "social media" were seen as crucibles of new forms of democratic, egalitarian, cosmopolitan citizenship. On social media, there were no gatekeepers, no central authorities, no bureaucracies.

The idea that digital platforms would undermine hierarchy got a major boost during the so-called Arab Spring, the series of revolts and revolutions that challenged and, in some cases, overthrew autocracies in the Middle East. Sometimes referred to as "Facebook revolutions", these mobilisations seemed to lack organisational structure or central leadership. The digitally powered revolutionary sentiment spread from the Middle East to Spain where millions took to the streets to protest the government's complicity in the morally bankrupt financial system. Inspired by these mobilisations, Occupy was launched in New York in 2011. Protesting the bailouts of banks and the corporate domination of politics, protesters sought to reclaim the streets and country in the name of the "99 per cent". Again, fuelled by digital communication, Occupy expanded rapidly, both in the United States and worldwide.

Social media were critical in these mobilisations. Never before was it possible to organise at such speed and scale. But social media were more than just carriers of information; they seemed to embody a different way of doing citizenship and politics. At the interface of digital platforms and public spaces, protesters experimented with models of deep democracy and consensus-building. These democratic promises extended far beyond social movements. Businesses, governments, and organisations all embraced, at least rhetorically, openness, self-organisation, and emergence. Digital platforms captured the "new spirit of capitalism" (Chiapello & Boltanski, 2005) and the new spirit of democracy. Gone were the days of tycoons or autocrats, or so it seemed.

## Social Media and Social Movements

I became interested in digital platforms because of my research into social movements and my position as a professor of Community Development – a position Jan Willem had fulfilled before (Uitermark, 2015). I was interested in cities and societies were reimagined and reshaped around the promotion of civic initiatives and networks – a line of research that was inspired by and extended Duyvendak's research into individual self-development as a goal and technique of liberal governance (Duyvendak, 1999). After my return to the University of Amsterdam, I began to study the interface between platforms and citizenship, with Jan Willem as a supportive colleague and mentor to myself and to a number of PhD candidates.

Sander van Haperen was the first PhD candidate who worked on this agenda. His mission was to extend research on immigrant rights mobilisations and civil rights movements into the digital realm. Sander's first study was into the "Not one more campaign", a mobilisation spearheaded by immigrant rights activists in Los Angeles (Van Haperen *et al.*, 2018). The campaign's basic demand was an immediate and complete moratorium on deportations of undocumented immigrants. Walter Nicholls (2003) had studied the formation of networks in the immigrant rights movement offline and thanks to Sander's computational acumen we could now systematically study how the movement crafted digital networks.

Our findings showed how geography mattered to online mobilisations. The major hubs for online activism were rooted in tight-knit activist clusters rooted in cities. This was significant since most research up to that

time had largely neglected the geographical bases of digitally powered social movements. We could show that local networks still mattered. While these activist clusters were important, we also found that much of the activity around the #not1more hashtag was seemingly spontaneous. The hashtag served as a communicative device for disparate individuals and fleeting groups. We developed a sense of the anatomy of online organisations. The core consisted of tightly knit and durable clusters based in the major cities; an outer ring consisted of activists who had incidentally joined the campaigned; and a periphery consisted of a very large number of incidental users who expressed support or made comments without further engagement. While this latter group could be regarded as poorly committed "slacktivists", we thought of them more as a distributed communication network that connected geographically rooted clusters to wider and more remote networks (Van Haperen *et al.*, 2018).

Davide Beraldo was another PhD candidate who worked on social movements and social media under supervision of myself and Jan Willem Duyvendak. Davide used the cases of Occupy and Anonymous to rethink the methods and concepts for the study of social movements (Beraldo, 2022). He noticed how digital movements are bound together by symbolism that proves remarkably flexible and adaptable. Occupy travelled far and wide, adjusting to local circumstances with apparent ease. Anonymous provides a more extreme example. The moniker Anonymous, conceptualised as a "contentious brand" by Davide, is used for an amazing diversity of protest campaigns. The campaigns, called "operations" in Anonymous' vocabulary, cover just a seemingly endless variety of topics and regions. A wide range of political positions is articulated in conjunction with the hashtag, to the point that it is not uncommon for different segments of the movement to take on contradictory positions on the same topic.

These findings showed how digital platforms aided social movements to extend their activism: they fostered ties across different movement segments and places, recruited new members to take action locally, and conveyed their message to wider audiences – Castells' progressive promise materialised. However, it was also readily apparent that even hashtags introduced by movement participants did not only index progressive mobilisations. Anonymous, in particular, was ambiguous: racism, sexism, and homophobia were present from the outset of the movement and occasionally erupted onto the public stage. Nevertheless, the first decade following the introduction of social media platforms was

a period of optimism and hope. Granted, there were reactionary currents on social media, but the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement seemed much more expressive of the new communication context. Across different fields – from science and urban design to social movements and volunteering – there was a sense that platforms would enable connections across old divides.

## Reactionary Social Media

As we were carrying out our research, however, the understanding of social media platforms and progressive politics started to shift. Some scholars argued that digitally powered movements were often fragile and fragmented: movements such as Occupy rose spectacularly fast but also collapsed quickly (Tufekci, 2017). Another line of research questioned the very idea that social media's participatory technologies aligned with progressive causes. For instance, Jessie Daniels (2009) studied the remarkable resurgence of the far-right, both in its own "echo chambers" of hate (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2024) and – through algorithmic reinforcement – on large platforms such as X/Twitter (Daniels, 2018).

These accounts suggested that it would be wrong to assume that movements could simply use social media platforms to extend their activism – digital platforms were not just conduits but battlegrounds. This posed methodological challenges for relational analysis since network scholars had assumed that relations were inherently positive. Computational scholars seeking to map social movement spaces on X/Twitter typically lumped together all posts containing the movement's hashtags. However, as was readily apparent to more qualitatively minded scholars who looked into the content of what was being said, those hashtags are also used by opponents who seek to discredit progressive movements. This was also the case for the movement for Black lives: the movement's hashtag – #blacklivesmatter – was not just used to express support but also for criticisms, derogatory comments, and downright racist vitriol; lots of it, in fact. We could no longer sustain the assumption that use of the hashtag signalled support and therefore Sander van Haperen developed a method to distinguish positive from negative comments.

The pattern we were able to find with this method was remarkable. As expected, Black Lives Matter activists used the technologies to extend

their grassroots activism into the digital realm; the movement operated in hybrid fashion. Black Lives Matter's extreme-right detractors, however, were only at home in the digital realm. These detractors lacked local grounding. They usually didn't include their location in their profiles. When they did (enabling us to locate them geographically), they did not disproportionately communicate with others in their locality. They operated not in a grassroots fashion but as a digital swarm, using digital technology to synchronise across space and collectively descend on targets (Van Haperen *et al.*, 2023).

The movement that perhaps best exemplifies the reactionary turn of social media is Anonymous. People using this moniker – usually young White men – had often been racist and sexist in chat channels or message boards during its heydays in the 2010s but the movement had several large-scale and spectacular campaigns in support of progressive causes (Coleman, 2015). One major battle was against the business model, intimidation tactics, and secrecy of the Scientology Church; another battle was for the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks. Anonymous further strongly supported the revolutions of the Arab Spring as well as Occupy. But a reactionary current was brewing (Tuters & Hagen, 2020). When Donald Trump rose to prominence as a presidential candidate, many Anons saw him as the ultimate Internet troll and prankster, that is, as their hero. They harassed Trump's opponents and many took a conspirational turn (De Zeeuw *et al.*, 2020). The idea that the US government is run by Satanist paedophiles led by the Democratic establishment originated on anonymous message boards and – through other social media channels – ultimately went mainstream (Törnberg & Uitermark, 2025).

## Social Media and Social Cleavages

While a growing literature examined the rise of reactionary and extreme-right movements online, another body of work departed from the assumption that digital platforms amplify both the left and right. With concepts such as "filter bubbles" or "echo chambers", commentators suggested that social media platforms transform small differences of opinion into deep social cleavages. Social media platforms, so they believe, were deepening rather than bridging cleavages, creating a society that was more divided than ever before. Is that really the case (Duyvendak, 2025)?

Livia van Vliet – co-supervised by Jan Willem, Petter Törnberg, and myself – embarked on an ambitious project to answer this question for politicians: do we find that political polarisation on social media? She compiled a database of parliamentarians and their interactions on Twitter/X in 17 countries (Van Vliet *et al.*, 2020). We did indeed find that political Twitter networks are highly polarised in several countries, including the United States. In most other countries, however, the cleavages and alliances followed a different pattern: some countries were rather cohesive (for example, Norway and Switzerland); others showed complex fragmentation instead of a neat division into two opposing camps (for example, Belgium and Italy). In the Netherlands, at the time of our research, we observed that one party, Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV)), was isolated from the others; its parliamentarians rarely retweeted parliamentarians from other parties nor were they retweeted by them. The other parties, however, exhibited a complex pattern, with retweets across party lines drawing them: Lijphart's cross-cutting cleavages were alive and well in this new communicative environment (Van Vliet *et al.*, 2021).

Research I did with John Boy further complicated the echo chamber hypothesis (Boy and Uitermark, 2024). While much research at the time looked at political communication on Twitter, we focused on Instagram. And we looked at all interactions taking place within the city, not just politically salient messages. Did we find polarisation? Analysing the data, we indeed found that Instagram works as a segmentation regime: when we parse networks and plot social media activities, we can discern lifestyle clusters. However, most of the interactions occurred not *within* but *between* clusters (and note that so-called community detection algorithms used in network analysis are created through algorithms that maximise internal and minimise external ties). The overall network structure of likes and comments is not bipolar but looks like a hairball: we find many ties across different social communities. When we look at what Instagram users post, the idea that social media results in political polarisation is further complicated: people much more often show off consumption (food, fashion) than make political statements. Instagram is less a platform for debate than a stage for status displays that has over the recent decade become heavily infused with advertisements and sponsoring.

## Conclusion

In hindsight, it is easy to see that millennial promises of social media's participatory democracy were overstated and one-sided. In the future, it could well be that the present pessimism regarding social media's progressive potential seems exaggerated. Nevertheless, within two decades, a remarkable development has taken place: once regarded as harbingers of more progressive and egalitarian projects, digital platforms have become key vehicles for the incubation and propagation of reactionary politics. The effects are felt throughout society. As carefully documented by Renee DiResta, established democratic institutions, including science, are vulnerable to online accusations and intimidation, especially when fringe actors conspire with established politicians (DiResta, 2024). In the United States, government agencies and research institutes have been slashed after ill-supported or patently false claims went viral and informed actions of the executive and juridical branches of government.

How to account for this remarkable shift? One reason is likely that initial assessments were somewhat naïve and glossed over the reactionary currents that were there from the beginning. But there is also reason to believe that social media have indeed substantively and substantially changed. When Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter started, they were operated by start-up companies and budding entrepreneurs. To grow, platform corporations did what they could to attract more people to their platforms – social media users did not have to pay for the service nor were they bombarded with advertisements. In this context, progressive revolutionaries and movements could occasionally claim these platforms for their own purposes.

Today's landscape looks very different as commodification aligns with an autocratic turn. Facebook and Instagram have become inundated with advertising – algorithmic visibility was never straightforwardly about what people were most interested in but now it is to a very large extent decided by sponsorship. Musk's takeover of Twitter did not just inaugurate unprecedented monetisation of algorithmic visibility on the platform (paid subscribers are pushed up on timelines) but also created more space for right-wing opinion leaders and especially Musk himself. Platform corporations have not only grown into some of the most valuable and powerful businesses in human history, they are now also much more directly aligned with geopolitical projects, both in the United States and

China. In this configuration, digital environments – including platforms and now also artificial intelligence (AI) – will be tweaked to create a communicative space tilted towards commercial interests and illiberalism. Whereas the platform society eventually evolved into an oligarchy, the ascendant AI society is growing out of it and bears its imprint (Törnberg and Uitermark, 2026).

At the time of writing, the potential for progressive politics is more difficult to decipher than that for reactionary politics. However, generalisations and predictions are inherently pernicious since social media contain the seeds of both progressive and reactionary politics. What is certain though is that digital technologies will play a crucial role as terrain and stake in politics.

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# Three days in September: Belonging in academia in times of nativist attacks

*Olav Velthuis*

## Introduction

On a Friday morning in September 2025, I receive a message from a colleague at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), alerting me to an article that day in the Dutch conservative-populist newspaper *De Telegraaf*. In it a Jewish UvA law student is interviewed about antisemitism on campus. My colleague points out one specific sentence: "A sociology student was told that her paper on antisemitism would not get graded because her lecturer did not consider antisemitism as a form of racism."

In this contribution, I reflect on the way a Dutch university like UvA juggles various goals, such as making increasingly diverse student and staff populations feel at home and protecting academic freedom, while facing nativist attacks, frequently channelled via right-wing, populist media.

Apart from the piece in *De Telegraaf*, I focus on two other media events, unfolding in less than a month in September 2025: a news item that the Dutch populist broadcasting company PowNed made on campus about students' views on the killing of Charlie Kirk; and the unannounced campus visit, later in September, of self-proclaimed TERF (trans-exclusionary radical feminist) Lydia Daniël, inviting students to debate her, again with a film crew following in her footsteps. In this cascade of events, a number of recurring themes in Jan Willem Duyvendak's work come together: the rise of nativism (Kešić & Duyvendak, 2019), the politics of home (Duyvendak, 2011), and the meanings of academic freedom (Verburgt & Duyvendak, 2023).

This contribution is based on my own everyday experience as head of the department of sociology at UvA. In that sense it has a very different approach than the analyses and reflections on academic freedom presented in, for example, the reports of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (2021, 2025) or the Stolker committee (2023).[1] While highly valuable for guiding public debates and policy making on the topic, they

are at some remove of the everyday life of university administrators – the everyday life that Jan Willem, as director of the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIAS) in times of the Hamas attack on Israel, the genocide in Gaza, and the waves of dismay, critique, activism, protest, and counter-protest it generated, knows only too well; the everyday life that is emotionally charged, rife with identity politics, prone to polarisation and fracturing dynamics within universities; the everyday life in which time for reflection is limited, compromises need to be found, strategic choices made, bureaucratic hurdles taken, and care provided.

For the sake of clarity: I feel uncomfortable writing this contribution from a first-person perspective. It may suggest an ability to shape the course of events, which in practice only partially exists – in particular in this period, I have come to experience the power of middle management, in between the proverbial work floor and the university's executive board, as limited. The first-person perspective also fails to do justice to the many forms of collective decision making, informal consultations, and collegial deliberations that were involved in responding to the events that this contribution focuses on. Lastly, I do not want to suggest that the decisions that I and others made in responding to the media attacks were the right ones. No post-hoc justifications from my side.

Nevertheless, I do believe that a proper response to such attacks on academia (and surely more of those are to come) requires not just theoretical musings on the meanings of academic freedom or feeling at home, but also an insight into and reflections on the complexities and contradictory demands that middle management faces in such situations. On the basis of these reflections, I will propose some recommendations at the end of the article.

## Accusations of antisemitism

More than within many other departments of Dutch universities, the 7 October attack by Hamas on Israel, Israel's military response, and the ensuing genocide in Gaza have resulted in activism, protests but also tensions within the UvA's department of Sociology. To fully unpack this goes beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that several staff members as well as students were highly visible and vocal in the Pro-Palestine

movement, using the term "genocide" from early on, demanding that the university would take position, and advocating for an institutional boycott of Israeli universities. Some staff members were on or close to the barricades when protests erupted in the spring of 2024; they put pressure on the university's board to meet their demands via petitions, op-ed pieces, or by speaking out in national and international media. It was also clear that not all staff agreed with the protests, and neither did all students.

It is hard to say to what extent "Gaza" entered the classroom; when the protests erupted most ferociously in the spring of 2024, it was hard to keep politics out, but to have politics in the classroom was not easy either. The directors of the bachelor and master programmes instructed lecturers to be highly cautious in presenting their own position, at the risk of putting pressure on students to think one way or another. Staff were asked to inform students explicitly that, when, for instance, pro-Palestine protests or walk-outs would take place on campus, they were free to join, but should not feel obliged to. Students in other words had to feel reassured that their own politics would not have any impact on their assessment, in particular when their politics did not align with those of the lecturer. Meanwhile, pro-Palestine activists made clear that they would not blame Jewish or Israeli citizens for the war crimes of the Netanyahu government.

Was this sufficient for Jewish and Israeli students? Did they feel at home in the sociology classroom? It is not that easy to say. On the one hand, at the department we hardly received signals, from, for instance, staff, students, study advisors, or the ombudsperson, that sociology students did not feel safe on campus (among staff members this was different). Let alone that we received complaints from them about antisemitism. Some of the colleagues were sceptical of such signals a priori. They warned of abuse of the term "social safety", and how it risked getting weaponised in order to smother critical voices. According to these colleagues, when students said they were not feeling socially safe, they may have actually felt "uncomfortable", and in highly loaded matters like these, uncomfortable feelings were simply inevitable. And, they continued, the university's role was not necessarily to make people feel at home.

I was not convinced. Would all Jewish students really feel safe to identify as such in the classroom and to voice criticism about the destructions of university property during the protests? Would they dare, for instance in the large WhatsApp groups with their peers, to question the use of the term "genocide" (this was early on, when a consensus among legal

scholars had not formed yet) or to bring up the lack of empathy that they had experienced after the 7 October attack? An experience that a Jewish friend, herself very active in the pro-Palestine movement, had shared, made a deep impression: her daughter, critical of Israel while wedded to her Jewish identity, no longer dared to wear her David-star when she went out. Several colleagues within the department had shared similar experiences.

So, when the article in *De Telegraaf* came out, I surely took it seriously. I had not heard about an issue with a Jewish sociology student's paper allegedly not getting graded, and did not have any idea which staff member it could have concerned. I had doubts if something like this had happened, but I would not have been surprised at all if Jewish sociology students would have indeed felt isolated, alienated, and far from "at home" on campus.

My first response was not, however, to try to contact the law student who was interviewed in the newspaper article. Instead, I contacted the faculty's dean and the university's rector magnificus, who had most likely been alerted to the article as well. Apart from soul-searching, there was strategy to be taken care of. After all, the reputation of the department was at stake. The fact that some department members played a prominent role in the pro-Palestine movement on campus was surely known among the university's executive board members. I had gathered from subtle remarks during management meetings that our department was seen as somewhat troublesome. Some department members had on several occasions been invited for meetings with the dean. As protests continued, the pressure gradually increased to keep staff in line. After an event on campus with the Dutch Defense secretary Ruben Brekelmans had been – allegedly violently – disrupted, the rector had said in the media that he wanted to see if students and staff who had been present could be suspended.[2]

As NIAS director, Duyvendak knows about the pressures involved; Hebrew University threatened the institution with a lawsuit after NIAS had announced that it would severely limit cooperation with Israeli counterparts. Among others: NIAS staff would no longer travel professionally to Israel; Israeli officials would not be invited to its events; NIAS would not accept bilateral funding from the State of Israel, Israeli universities or institutes.[3] Duyvendak described the legal threat in the media as a form of intimidation.[4]

So, for strategic reasons, it only felt natural to let the dean and rector know right away that I was on top of the allegation against a sociology staff member made in *De Telegraaf*. Later that day I discussed a course of action with the university's secretary general. With hindsight, I wonder if this amounted to a politics of fear. In the end I don't think so. Apart from the meeting mentioned above, the role of department members in the pro-Palestine movement never became a concrete issue in the managerial hierarchy – I was, for instance, never asked to identify protestors, threatened with some form of consequences, or experienced other forms of repressive politics. To some extent I found the absence of such measures surprising: although I did not know which shape this took concretely, it was not hard to imagine the immense political pressure that the university's board itself was under. After the chaotic campus protests in May 2024, which involved violent clashes with the police and destruction of UvA-property, many politicians, in particular from the right, had responded strongly, using terms like "disgusting" and "unacceptable", and blaming universities for an alleged lack of social safety and antisemitism on their campuses. The executive board was seen as not acting forcefully enough and giving in to the demands of activists. Annabel Nanninga, senator for the right-wing populist party JA21, wanted the Dutch Secretary of Education to cut budgets of educational institutions like UvA that "cannot or will not guarantee the safety and dignity of Jews and Israelis".[5]

My impression is that the UvA's executive board cushioned a lot of this political pressure, rather than passing it on directly to middle managers like myself.[6] Nevertheless, in the light of this ongoing political and media campaign against universities, it was all the more important to find out what could be verified about the article in *De Telegraaf*. And what could not: while I had substantive and strategic reasons for wanting to know what had happened with the Jewish sociology student, I was sceptical at the same time, and so were some of my direct colleagues who got involved. After all, the populist, right-wing political response to the pro-Palestine campus protests seemed part of a broader attack on universities and academic freedom – most clearly, of course, in the United States, where the Gaza protests and allegations of antisemitism on campus were aggressively used by President Trump to gain control over so-called "leftist" or "woke" universities. In the Netherlands, right-wing media such as *De Telegraaf* were happy to give right-wing populist politicians a platform; conservative *Telegraaf*-columnist Wierd Duk accused university managers of being

cowards, claimed that campuses in the Netherlands were dominated by "intimidation and terror" ever since 7 October 2023, and wrote that academic freedom was threatened by the – in his opinion – leftist academics who dominated campuses (Bracke, 2024).[7] It was important to resist such attacks, to protect academic freedom, and to make sure academics would be allowed to take a critical rather than a neutral position when, in the case of the genocide in Gaza, few institutions did so (Bracke, 2025).

So, there were plenty of reasons (substantive, strategic, and sceptical) to find out what was true of the allegations made in *De Telegraaf*. We contemplated sending out a general message to the sociology staff, but quickly decided against it because we did not want to play into the populist playbook. If the allegations were baseless, such a message could have an unwarranted chilling effect. Instead, the director of the College of Social Sciences tried to get in touch with the law student who had been interviewed. Via various channels, the director sent her a genuine, warm, and caring message, and asked her to extend an invitation to get in touch with the sociology student she had referred to in the newspaper. No response. Later, the dean stepped in and managed to schedule a conversation with her and a fellow Jewish student. Once again, the dean and the college director asked for more details and made clear they wanted to get in touch with the sociology student. Again (at least at the time of writing this contribution, more than four months after the piece in *De Telegraaf* appeared): no response.

## In the aftermath of Kirk's Assassination

It would not take long for the next incident to happen. After the assassination of conservative influencer Charlie Kirk on an American university campus on 10 September 2025, a journalist of the Dutch populist right-wing broadcasting company PowNed visited the Roeterseiland campus. Probably the journalist was hoping to record cheerful responses to Kirk's assassination, like the many that had been voiced on social media in the days before. He managed. On camera, at least three students expressed positive views, stating among others that "I think he deserved it" and that "the world is better off without him".[8] They claimed that his views should not get a podium – at least not at universities – and suggested that freedom of speech did not apply to conservative views like Kirk's. PowNed

also reported that in a large-scale, student WhatsApp group, some had responded cheerfully to Kirk's assassination as well.[9]

The morning after the item was released, everybody in middle management positions within the faculty was alerted by the dean. Later that day the UvA published an official response, which is worth quoting at length:

> It is shocking that several UvA students endorsed the political assassination of Charlie Kirk in a PowNed video. The fact that some students seem to believe that freedom of speech does not apply to people with different views is diametrically opposed to everything the academic community stands for. We condemn the glorification or condoning of violence. Violence is never a solution and goes against the core values upheld by the UvA: respect, critical thinking, and a safe environment for everyone. Freedom of speech is a great asset, but it also entails responsibility. Approving violence undermines an open and constructive society. We ask lecturers to explicitly address this issue and to discuss the value of the democratic constitutional state, citizenship, and the need for respectful interaction with differences in their teaching. Only by actively engaging in this conversation can we work together towards an academic community in which respect and safety are paramount.

I wholeheartedly agreed. But did our students do so as well? And how about staff? Once again, I was not sure. At least I did not agree with those who were not willing to give those with a diverging – read: conservative – view a platform on campus. In particular the list of cancellations for Room for Discussion, a platform run by economics students, was long: former Shell executive Jeroen van der Veer (withdrew himself after several activist groups had protested his visit); NATO officer Rob Bauer (debate disrupted by protesters; continued behind closed doors); Defense Secretary Ruben Brekelmans (likewise); Defense Secretary Kajsa Ollongren (cancelled twice due to the risk of disruption); Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema (moved to the city hall because of security risks). And on "Gaza", most academic events that have been organized on campus were a form of preaching to the choir, without any dissenting or opposing voices.

I was nevertheless relieved to hear that PowNed's students were not from sociology. We enquired if in our own sociology students' WhatsApp group similar cheers for Kirk's assassination had been expressed. When

this turned out not to be the case, I made a point of informing the dean and college director.

Scepticism about the news item remained, however: how many students had PowNed interviewed? How had the journalist introduced himself? Was it no coincidence that only foreign students, who probably had no idea about the broadcaster's reputation, had taken the bait? And just like the piece in *De Telegraaf*, PowNed's item seemed part of a wider nativist campaign against universities as one of the pillars of free, open, democratic societies. The item, which was subsequently widely covered by other Dutch media, prompted Lidewij de Vos, the new leader of the extreme-right party Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy), to ask the secretary of Justice & Safety to respond by, among others, withdrawing the residence permit of the students involved.[10] As one colleague remarked wryly: "Ai, this is surely going to be politically exploited to the very last drop."

## Insufferable Indeed

Less than two weeks later, another media incident ensued. On a Wednesday morning, posters were put up on campus, stating: "Proof me wrong. Trans women are men. Debate Lydia Daniël, a.k.a. the insufferable TERF. From 10:45 onwards. Main entrance UVA [*sic*]." Taking her cue from Charlie Kirk, who brought his conservative ideas to American campuses and challenged progressive students with them, Daniël's thinly veiled goal was to demonstrate that the university is not the free place for ideas it purports to be, but instead a narrow-minded place where students and staff are unwilling to question their own position – in this case support for transgenders. She planned to document this with a film crew of *Ongehoord Nederland*, another right-wing populist broadcasting company (which has been repeatedly accused of antisemitism and racism, prompting the Dutch broadcasting system's administrative body NPO to ask the government to revoke its licence).[11]

Daniël's visit was not announced; it took the university by surprise.[12] The university's official media policy states that filming on its premises can only be done with permission; this permission had not been requested by Daniël. When she nevertheless started filming on campus, a lecturer asked Daniël to leave, stating that her call for debate was hurtful. To which

Daniël responded provocatively: "I also find it hurtful when a man tells me: 'I am a woman.'" Daniël then positioned herself in front of the building. The video clip that she posted of her action shows that she was not nearly as effective as Kirk – the vast majority of students simply ignored her, one or two agreed to talked to her, many looked puzzled, while some told Daniël, in a measured way, that "you need to be aware that this will hurt some people". At no point did a critical mass gather around her – a sharp contrast to Kirk's performances, which could electrify larger groups of – often polarised – students. Unexpectedly Daniël concluded in her video that she was "pleasantly surprised" about the responses she got, and that "a conversation is possible". Watching this video, I proudly saw students on camera who controlled their emotions, exercised a politics of restraint, and avoided stepping into the far-right trap that Daniël had laid out for them.

But this positive outcome notwithstanding, the visit had a strong impact, including on trans or non-binary students and staff, whose identity or, one could say, whose very existence was being questioned and undermined by Daniël. Once again, as middle management we contemplated an official response: a message to the entire community stating that there is no place for transphobia on campus. But also this time we decided against it, because we did not want to follow the extreme right, transphobic playbook, and wanted to avoid running the risk that such a message would leak and fuel renewed right-wing mockery. Daniël's discursive violence mostly prompted a politics of care: many people, from within various layers of the university bureaucracy, sent warm, supportive messages to the staff members who we knew had been affected; the incident was discussed carefully and productively with students in class.

## Conclusion

In its most recent report on academic freedom, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) argued that it is

> the responsibility of university boards and individual scientists (…) to ensure that, especially during debates and demonstrations, scientific knowledge and scientific opinions can be shared freely, especially on complex and sensitive topics. Lively debates and tensions are not a problem in themselves, but the

> way in which they are addressed is. In their societal role, knowledge institutions must not only provide society with scientific knowledge but also facilitate dialogue, especially when it concerns controversial issues, such as the war in Gaza. (KNAW, 2025, p. 31)

In this article I have reflected on the complexities of putting this into practice. Even providing a definition of the situation can prove difficult: for instance, is the article in *De Telegraaf* a scream for help from a student who feels excluded and marginalised; is it a thinly veiled threat to academic freedom; an alert that antisemitism takes place on campus; or, to the contrary, an instance of the weaponisation of antisemitism? The right response to such a situation, which usually needs to be delivered almost on the spot, is equally hard, because ethical concerns, a duty to care, diverging understandings of the societal role of an academic (neutral versus socially engaged if not activist), worries about reputational damage, and other strategic concerns are often hard to disentangle.

So far, no convincing response has been formulated to nativist attacks on academic freedom, on the university as a home to scholars, and on academia as a core institution of open, democratic societies. And ignoring these attacks is a luxury that universities cannot afford, as they are not likely to stop any time soon. I hope this contribution has provided some building blocks for a response.

First, the role of middle management is crucial, as they are usually among the first in the line of fire, or at least among the first to respond to attacks in everyday academic life. They should be prepared. Rather than relying on a manager's individual goodwill and capabilities, preparation means access to effective scripts, communication strategies, and caring practices for those who suffer from the attacks the most. Second, the resilience of students and staff should be invested in, which means concretely that they should exercise in not letting themselves be provoked. And third, while there is no room for hateful speech on campus, more room should be created for dissenting voices. Currently, in my experience few of the aforementioned "lively debates" on sensitive issues envisioned by the KNAW, in which scientists with different "scientific opinions" engage in a meaningful exchange with one another, actually take place. The willingness of at least some fractions within the academic community to engage with scientific opinions different from their own is rather limited; instead, preaching to the choir is frequently preferred (Mounk, 2025). If we want

to convince "The Hague" that universities are places where academic freedom reigns, if we want to truly foster inclusivity, and if we believe that the most original and powerful ideas and theories are generated through interaction with critical opposition, this needs to change.

## Notes

1 See https://open.overheid.nl/documenten/bd455d38-71f9-44d7-a9c3-063c9ee72450/file; https://www.uva.nl/binaries/content/assets/uva/nl/nieuws-en-agenda/krachtig-en-kwetsbaar---rapport-commissie-stolker.pdf?1688043194402; https://storage.knaw.nl/2022-05/20210217-webversie-advies-Academische-vrijheid.pdf

2 See https://www.at5.nl/nieuws/230869/uva-onderzoekt-schorsing-voor-demonstranten-die-interview-minister-verstoorden

3 https://nias.knaw.nl/news/nias-and-equal-rights-for-all-scholars/

4 https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2025/01/14/israelische-universiteit-dreigt-met-stappen-tegen-nederlands-instituut-dat-niet-wil-samenwerken-wegens-oorlog-in-gaza-a4879487; https://www.erasmusmagazine.nl/en/2025/01/17/israeli-universities-threaten-legal-action-over-boycott/

5 https://www.eerstekamer.nl/plenair/20250325/nanninga

6 More generally I have come to cherish the trust and autonomy that middle-level management is awarded at the university. Given the legal framework for university governance (the so-called MUB in Dutch, an acronym that stands for Modernisation of University Governance, implemented by law since 1998), which puts decision-making power squarely in the hands of executive boards and deans, limits democratic governance, and stipulates top-down management (van Berckel Smit & Flipse, 2020), this autonomy is far from self-evident.

7 See most recently: https://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/kritische-wetenschappers-eisen-academische-vrijheid-terug-de-balans-is-zoek/104209915.html

8 https://www.*PowNed*.tv/article/knettergekke-studenten-juichen-moord-op-charlie-kirk-toe-hij-verdiende-het~4591/

9 Such app groups, with often hundreds of students, provide fresh dilemmas to universities more generally, as the PowNed item demonstrates: these app groups are not initiated or maintained by the university but by students themselves, usually for university-related communication. While they are therefore not the university's responsibility, what happens in them can be seen as a form of virtual campus culture, which can have a strong impact on traditional campus culture and the classroom.

10 The minister responded that these expressions are covered by freedom of speech, and that only in the case of violation of the law could a residence permit be revoked. See: https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/kamervragen/detail?id=2025Z16866&did=2025D46285

11 https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/besluiten/2023/12/19/definitief-besluit-verzoek-npo-tot-intrekking-voorlopige-erkenning-ongehoord-nederland

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# Political Freedom Rights for Citizens and Contemporary Tolerance

*Kees Schuyt*

## Freedom of Conscience as a Human Right

Freedom of conscience is one of the most precious values of modern society.[1] But if conscience is an enigmatic phenomenon, does conscience has a seat and, if so, where is it located? In the mind or in the hearts of people? Where and when is conscience shaped, formed, and developed? In youth or in the wisdom of the aged? How is it related to a personal self and to the societal context, in which conscience operates, sometimes in accordance with social norms, very often in opposition or even in straight conflict to these norms?

Perhaps because of the fragile and enigmatic nature of conscience, freedom of conscience as a human right has not been discussed as much as the other political freedoms have been. Freedom of speech, the right to privacy, and freedom of religion are almost taken for granted as the most elementary political freedom rights, but each of these rights is in a very complex way closely related to freedom of conscience. Personal conscience cannot be formed nor developed without moments of and room for privacy. An appeal to conscience cannot be expressed without an existing culture of freedom of speech.

Free conscience is one of the strong pillars of political freedom (Strohm, 2011, p. 24). As Tomothy Macklem has extensively argued in his study *Independence of Mind* each of the above-mentioned political freedoms "plays its distinctive part, not merely in securing freedom to be ourselves, that is our freedom to act in accordance with our personal convictions, but more fundamentally *in securing the conditions* under which we can become ourselves" (Macklem, 2006). To become the person we are capable of and are willing to be, to live up to our personal convictions, freedom of conscience is crucial. As such, freedom of conscience is related to personal integrity, which can be described as "doing the right thing, even when

nobody is watching" (Lewis, 1962, pp. 146–147), that is to act according to your own commitments and not because of social pressure. Freedom of conscience is also related to the much more debated issue of "conscientious objections" (Macklem, 2006, pp. 92–98) either in the form of legally regulated exemptions from state duties, for instance, the draft, or in the form of the topic of civil disobedience. The history of civil disobedience has always been written in the key of an appeal to conscience and to political obligation, and of the often hotly debated limits to conscientious political dissent (Schuyt, 2009a, pp. 153–170).

Nowadays the place of conscience comes up again, especially in the debate on tolerance in a secular society and in the newly raised discussions on the ranges and limits of religious tolerance (Nussbaum, 2008, 2012; Dacey, 2008; Rubens, 2008), given the appearance of fundamentalist religions in many modern and secularised Western societies.

In this contribution I will consider, first, what in a modern, secular, and pluralist society as the Netherlands can be understood by the enigmatic concept of "conscience" and, second, how freedom of conscience can be grounded and can flourish in a common culture of tolerance, which also has a clear and sharp view on the limits of tolerance.

## The Place of Conscience in the Dutch Cultural Tradition

The Netherlands has developed a long tradition of plurality in religious beliefs and in political convictions. Religious tolerance originated in the Dutch republic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, during which period religious minorities of all sorts and manners have been secretly tolerated or connived at. In 1984 the historian E. H. Kossmann gave the Coornhert Lecture in Gouda, under the title "Tolerance Then and Now". He described the situation in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Kossmann, 1987, pp. 1–20), showing clearly that "the Dutch Republic was regarded at the time as an island of tolerance" (p. 17). Freedom of speech was greater than elsewhere in Europe, there was no state church or unity of religion, and Catholics, albeit with caution, were able to practice their religious rites. Moreover, "the whole organization of the Republic was so complex and fragmented that it was not difficult for believers and unbelievers, writers and printers of books to slip through the net of legislation, all the more so since municipal and provincial

administrators showed little inclination actually to implement provisions they had made out of respect for the Calvinist church" (p. 17). And examining the commercial interests of a tolerant administration, Kossmann asks, "How could a metropolis like Amsterdam, the commercial centre of Europe with its staple market and its worldwide relations, impose uniformity on the multifarious population contained within its walls?" (p. 18).

In this description it is tempting to see a direct parallel with Amsterdam in the year 2025. For, with the exception of the staple market, all the features seem to apply to the present: a disparate collection of inhabitants, a wide variety of religions and churches, the loosely woven net of justice and permissiveness. Yet, in Kossmann's view there is "no point in comparing the tolerance of those days with that of today" (ibid.). The power of the state was much less than it is now. There was no unity in community and culture, but the fact that central government could not do much had the favourable consequence that, unlike in the surrounding countries, it also had fewer resources for being intolerant.

One common feature between the situation then and now remains emphatically present, namely pluralism – a multiplicity of groups, views, nationalities, and ways of life crowded into a relatively small area. Tolerance thrives in such a pluralistic situation, but there is also a precondition – the original religious tolerance, tolerating and respecting other faiths, issued historically in the establishment of democratic rights. A modern democracy with its diversity of views, behaviour, and lifestyles creates a climate for modern tolerance, but, with its strict defence of individual rights, also marks the limits of tolerance. Analogously to the citizens of the French Revolution, ethnic minorities do not want to be tolerated but want their right to existence to be recognised. At the same time a multicultural society does not go to the extent of allowing each group its own pattern of behaviour if that behaviour conflicts with existing rights and freedoms.

In this democratic setting of the twentieth century, however, this Dutch culture of accommodating sharp differences in value orientations lasted long, as can be demonstrated by some examples. After some political struggle the right to cremation was established in 1910, despite religious objections to it. Conscientious objection to compulsory education (1900) and to the draft (1923) has been made legally possible, albeit under some strict conditions. The same objections on behalf of conscience was allowed to compulsory social security insurance (1913 and 1922) and to the legal duty of vaccination in 1928 (Vermeulen, 1989, pp. 75–91, 93–99).

In other words, within one legal order for some public legal duties exemptions to the rule have been made, as the result of a distinctive political culture, well known as "pillarisation" and of a "politics of accommodation", which lasted until the mid-1960s (Lijphart, 1968). Lijphart recommended this model of accommodation politics for the many ethnically pluralistic countries in the world, like South Africa, Canada, and the Eastern European democracies (Kymlicka, 1997). But at the time of pillarisation religious plurality co-existed with a highly homogeneous population (white, Christian denominations). The intriguing question nowadays is whether or not the same impact can be expected in a new religious setting of fundamentalist religions and in a more heterogeneous population, caused by streams of immigrants from former colonies, of labour migrants, and asylum seekers. On the one hand, Dutch society has been more and more secularised; on the other, more adherents of fundamentalist religions have arrived, which means that religious freedom and appeals to conscience come on a new footing. A wild variety of convictions, lifestyles, religious beliefs, and practices live alongside one another and clash, especially on issues of homosexuality, same-sex marriages, rights of women and children, and religious obligations. Can they all live together in peace and welfare? What is the role of freedom of conscience is a pluralistic society?

## The Concept of Conscience

"Conscience refuses any settled or unvarying content. It can justify generous self-sacrifice, but selfish individualism as well. It can motivate an act of charity or an act of terror. The dictates of conscience can be Christian or pagan, divinely based or resolutely secular, selfishly nationalistic or generously international" writes Paul Strohm (2011, p. 24). Perhaps because of this impalpable characteristic of the concept, the topic of conscience itself is often neglected and if it is given full attention many authors avoid carefully providing a clear definition (Vermeulen, 2007).

When I want to know more about conscience the following questions come up: does conscience has any substance and, if so, what is the stuff conscience is made of? Where is it located or seated: in the heart, in the minds and actions of people, in the social relations between people or between people and social institutions, or in the incomprehensible, divine, relation between God and man?

Two studies, however, have formulated some new insights. Langston in his *Conscience and Other Virtues* starts etymologically: con – science is "sharing knowledge with others and to do an appeal to others" (2001, p. 8). A second, more individual meaning of conscience consists of what an individual should do, that is, it deals with a personal and pressing notion or sense of good and evil. Langston observes that the modern concept of conscience had developed badly. Most people in modern society associate conscience with a condemning and punitive character. Conscience in his phrase judges the worth of someone's actions, behaviour, and feelings of guilt. Due to Freud's influence in modern societies conscience has become the internal judge, a super-ego (Langston, 2001, pp. 87–91).

This is quite different, as Langston argues, from older periods in our culture. He points back to classical virtues in Greece history and to the place of cardinal virtues in Medieval times and in the writings of Christian thinkers such as Aquinas. In these periods conscience flourished as a virtue amidst other virtues. Conscience like other virtues urges to a conscious life and lifestyle and insists upon a courageous and moderate moral action (pp. 135–150). This approach, I fully agree upon, will be fruitful for a better understanding of conscience in present-day society: conscience is a meaningful appeal to a conscious choice, as far as lifestyle and life's conviction are concerned, and related to questions of good and evil. Conscience is not a metaphysical, incomprehensible, or merely religious phenomenon, nor an elusive psych-analytical category, but just a personal sense of good and evil, which gives a limit to our actions towards the actions of other people and towards social institutions; it says, "Until this far and not any step further."

A second modern approach to conscience, by Lucas Swaine, gives a narrow definition of present-day conscience: "a distinct capacity to identify and bond notions of what is right and wrong" (Swaine, 2006, p. 47). Swaine tries to reformulate the unclear relation between today's religions, by starting with freedom of conscience as a ground for freedom of religion. With an appeal to freedom of conscience one can hope to convince religious fundamentalists – who deny your religion the right to existence, but with a claim to their own conscience at the same time – of the necessity of the freedom of religion. In Swaine's definition conscience has a cognitive and an affective dimension. It gives room for (a) strong conviction, (b) a commitment to some cause, and (c) a capacity to cultivate and learn (ibid.).

Conscience is in both approaches, the one by Langston and the one by Swaine, neither a whim of the will nor inconstant; it consists of a strong personal conviction and commitment, on the basis of which one comes to action concerning good and evil. It has an internal forum, an inner conviction, and an external forum, the action taken according to one's conscience (Vermeulen, 1989, pp. 184–192).

Surprisingly these two new approaches to the concept of conscience can historically be traced back to the Dutch tradition of freedom of conscience and of freedom of religion, especially as we find this tradition in the writings of the D.V. Coornhert (1522–1590), a follower of Castellio (1515–1563), the founding father of religious tolerance in Europe. Castellio was the first to protest in 1554 against the burning of heretic Servetus in 1553, in the totalitarian ruled city of Calvin's Geneva.

In the Netherlands, in order to justify the revolt against Spain, an appeal was made to freedom of conscience and accordingly in the Union of Utrecht (1579) this was recognised as the ideological foundation of the seven Northern provinces. But as soon as the Calvinist Church took control, it banned Catholic Church services and persecuted the smaller sects and religious dissidents. In this precarious and uncertain situation Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert (1522–1590) developed into the proud advocate of freedom of religion and showed himself a fierce opponent of religious intolerance. Brought up as a Catholic, he felt at home with all other religions or with none at all if they claimed to have a monopoly of wisdom. In his view the truth of Christianity resided with God himself (Bonger, 1954). Coornhert's principal motif was: everyone thinks he has the true faith, but there is no unbiased judge. Man himself is a participant, and so are the representatives of the churches (Bonger, 1954, chapter 3).

Coornhert's book *Synodus van der Conscientien Vrijheydt* (2022) (Synod of the Freedom of Consciences) appeared in 1582. Coornhert meant in it that men must not judge themselves before their time; men cannot know whose interpretation of God's Word is the right one. Only God knows. This was Coornhert's decisive motif against the death penalty for heretics, following Castellio in 1554. Even the inner convictions of heretics might not be suppressed, because God alone knows the real and right ones, not men. So, conscience becomes an inner conviction, which may and can't be compelled by brute force. As he formulated it in his *Ethics* (1586): "no man on earth has the power, jurisdiction or rule over another man's conscience" (Bonger, 1954, p. 47).

This early apology for freedom of conscience accords both to modern opinions on the *internal* forum (Coornhert's belief and faith) and to the *external* forum (Coornhert's exercise, acting, and practicing of religion). It comes near to Swaine's definition of conscience, mentioned above. I would like to conclude with a concise definition of conscience, which can function quite well for the grounding of tolerance in the modern, present-day, pluralist society:

> Conscience is
> (a) a personal inner conviction on questions of good and evil, which can be upheld and improved; and
> (b) a readiness to act upon and in accordance to this inner, personal conviction.

## Freedom Rights for Citizens and Contemporary Tolerance (Schuyt, 2006, pp. 280–284)

In the classic definition by Preston King is tolerance described as: "the suspension of a negative reaction to an idea, person, personal conviction, group, or organization experienced as negative, in short to anything one disapproves of" (1976, p. 21). If we take this combination of objection and acceptance as essential of tolerance, we can describe intolerance as "the conjunction of a *negative attitude or motive* and a *negative act*, wherein the latter may range from smirks to insults to discrimination to physical abuse to extermination" (p. 55). The distinction *between attitude and act* is essential for understanding the present-day growing intolerance and forms of polarisation in democratic societies. In my own definition: "Tolerance is the suppression of the inclinations to suppress others" (Schuyt, 2023, p. 8). New autocratic tendencies and decline of tolerance can be observed in countries such as the United States under Trump 2.0. and in many European democracies (for instance, France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, and the Netherlands). Citizens' rights are in danger.

If one holds on to this precise definition of the concept of tolerance, it is possible to demonstrate a certain historical continuity running from religious tolerance in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries (Erasmus, Coornhert, Spinoza) right up to contemporary secularised expression of tolerance in a pluralist society. Tolerance offers us the option of suspending a final judgement (provisionally). Other moral attitudes do

not have this quality. There is a constant tendency to react to difficult situations and strange practices in terms of a dichotomy: good/bad, right/wrong, ethical/unethical, left wing/right wing, racist/non-racist, and so on. The social reality of a pluralist society is complex and requires a huge amount of understanding from its citizens. Tolerance can help allow this complexity to continue. It can prevent the complexity of social life, with all sorts of – contradictory – appeals to conscience and to the right to a personal lifestyle, from being reduced to simple stereotypes, prejudices, and morally charged group distinctions (where the virus of intolerance lurks). To better understand this social function, one needs an analysis of contemporary tolerance in a pluralist society, in which the four political freedoms, that is, freedom of conscience, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the right to privacy all come together.

Pluralism and tolerance go hand in hand. The parallel with the past is that today too there is a degree of scepticism about the possibility of the absolute correctness of moral and social judgements. Even if one adheres in principle to the same moral principles, it becomes difficult to proclaim the various interpretations and practical applications with absolute certainty. The conclusion drawn by the American philosopher John Rawls is generally accepted:

> We must draw the obvious lessons of our political history since the Reformation and the Wars of Religion, namely that we must recognize and accommodate the plurality of conflicting, and indeed incommensurable conceptions of the good affirmed by the members of existing democratic societies. (Rawls, 1999, pp. 421–448)

In such a situation, indeed, it becomes uncertain what is actually to be understood by tolerance, and many meanings of this attitude – still generally regarded as a virtue – exist alongside one another. Tolerance itself is therefore constantly subject to varying interpretations and is adduced in support of many very disparate interests. There is no fixed explanation or justification; different theories of tolerance are played off against one another, consciously or unconsciously, on many occasions.

This becomes clear, for example, in the discussion on whether the trade in (soft) drugs should be permitted. In this debate arguments are used that derive from Lockean theories on individual autonomy and the right to make one's own choice. J.S. Mill-style arguments can be found in the

adage “examine everything and keep what is good” and the principle of harmlessness. As long as a person does no harm, that person must choose and decide for himself or herself. Modern happiness-based arguments alternate smoothly with the pragmatic arguments derived from history: repression of drug use creates a greater evil, the public health threat is less under a permissive than under a repressive regime.

There is no consistency in the theory and practice of modern tolerance. In contrast to the situation abroad, despite our national pride at being a tolerant nation, scarcely any serious political and theoretical or philosophical analyses are made of tolerance in the Netherlands.

In a number of other fields, however, it is clear that there is an ongoing discussion on the practice and limits of modern tolerance, for example in testing the limits of freedom of speech, in the discussion of a pluralism of values and the role of the state, in the revival of nationalistic feelings and the influence of immigration, and finally in the sometimes rather diffuse debate on the “multicultural society”.

Insults usually represent an initial negative reaction to the presence or behaviour of unappreciated or unwanted persons or groups, such as foreigners or dissidents. Refraining from insults is an expression of tolerance, insulting itself the beginning of intolerance. After the Second World War sensitivity to public insults became greater, while at the same time, as a result of the huge take-off of the media, freedom of thought and expression increased. As a result, conflicts were bound to occur. Journalists insult orthodox Christians (“Christian dogs”); orthodox Christians and an Islamic imam insult homosexuals. In each of these and similar cases the question arises as to the extent to which one is defending the right to freedom of speech and where (illegal) defamation begins. How tolerantly should those insulted behave? How tolerantly should the state, in this case the public prosecutor, behave, in not intervening at every grumble (for example, with emotional reactions to a centre for asylum seekers)?

In these cases, the limits are always decided by the courts, on the basis of existing laws, and in the Netherlands the courts observe a wide margin of tolerance. However, the set boundaries of freedom of speech in modern democracies are constantly moving, and the classical distinction between thinking, expression, and behaviour is clearly no longer adequate. When does “filthy speech” fall under freedom of expression and when does it become incitement to xenophobia or racial hatred? In Germany, denying the Holocaust in speech or in writing is an offence, but in the United States

is protected by the First Amendment. The advent of the Internet has in fact made it impossible to control malicious rumour, insults, and dissemination through images or in writing of indecent or intimidating statements. Has this made tolerance an outdated concept? If everything is acceptable, there is no one left to tolerate or be tolerated.

The discussion on the role of tolerance in the plurality of values is for the time being on firmer ground. Given the enormous variety of conscience, views of life and attitudes to people in modern society, belief in the correctness of each of these views is undermined. Relativism and scepticism are obvious responses. In this situation one can discern at least two tolerance theories. The first conception of tolerance attaches closely to the individualistic view of Locke and Mill: Each individual decides what judgements are the right ones for him or her. Because other individuals have the same right to shape their own conscience and opinions, each person's individual views should be approached with respect. In that case tolerance consists of the right to one's own judgement and respect for others' opinions and expressions of opinion, however strange or different they may be. As separate units in a society, citizens have little in common, except their individual rights and their respect for one another. In this way a large zone of indifference emerges in a sea of individual rights. For a number of writers, including Ignatieff (1999), this is the logical outcome of the development of modern society, which in this way can restrict violent conflicts or internecine disputes to a minimum. But indifference is not tolerance, as was clear from the definition of tolerance. If almost nothing is felt to be "bad" any longer, there is nothing left to tolerate or fear.

Opposed to this liberal-individualistic view there is a more communitarian view of tolerance, defended by among others MacIntyre (n.d.) and Kymlicka (1996). If individuals are to develop into independently thinking and judging people, it is necessary for them to belong to a social group with its own norms and values. Only on the basis of the morality of a group, to which one voluntarily belongs and wishes to continue to belong, is it possible to acquire an identity. Family, extended family, religious communities, and other voluntary organisations form the web of society. In this view society is not a collection of separately existing cells, self-contained and unconnected (Tinder, 1995). Tolerance in this case does not mean stressing individual autonomy, but respecting different moral communities, such as a Catholic, a Jewish, or a Muslim community. Non-religious communities could also serve as examples: professional groups,

artists, environmental groups, campaigning groups. The prevailing norms and values in those communities may be totally different from those in other communities, but one does not presume to judge internal group norms. Society is constructed as a community of such communities.

These two visions of tolerance, both of which are sometimes advanced as the "modern" view of tolerance, are in principle difficult to reconcile. The views on the role of the state differ widely. In the liberal-individualistic vision the state is substantively neutral with regard to all individual judgements. The state's function is to protect that individual autonomy. From the communitarian perspective the job of the state is to facilitate the flourishing of the communities and even to provide them with group rights. In this scenario the state is never neutral. The state permits divergent rituals and dogmas without threat of legal sanctions.

In numerous questions where tolerance is required in contemporary society these two visions clash. The most dramatic example of this was the Salman Rushdie affair, where the writer appealed to a completely free, autonomous, and unimpeded pursuit of his art, and where a community demanded respect for values not shared by the artist. The Rushdie affair was one of the most extreme in a number of dilemmas faced by contemporary tolerance (Horton, 1993). Viewed from the freedom of art, there was no dilemma at all. But the murderous danger remains.

The wave of immigration into Western countries has sparked a revival of nationalism. Ignatieff advocates a reduction in nationalistic feelings in favour of a globally practiced individualism, which is able to survive with the necessary tolerance and indifference (cynicism?) (Ignatieff, 1999). Community thinkers support a (moderate) nationalism that precisely through common norms and values makes a case for defending humanitarian values. Ultimately the community vision is based on the recognition of human rights and respect for the fundamental rules of liberal-democratic society.

Finally, the debate on multiculturalism is complicated by the non-transparent and essentially insoluble tension between the two modern views of tolerance. In the communitarian vision multiculturalism should be promoted as far as possible in a society. Sometimes using the lowest common denominator of tolerance, every opinion, every form of expression and lifestyle is welcomed and acclaimed: all the more, the merrier. A negative or even an aloof neutral attitude to minorities is regarded as a lack of tolerance. But despite the echo of Mill that can be heard in this view, this

is stretching the concept of tolerance too far: what is welcomed cannot be experienced as negative (*tolerantia non est nisi in malis*). Applauding as great as possible a diversity is surely something different from accepting or tolerating it. The liberalindividualistic view of the origin of a multicultural society recognises the multiplicity of incompatible norms and value patterns. And yet this tolerance is not moral indifference or "anything goes" (Kekes, 1993). One definitely has one's own moral criteria for behaviour. Tolerance ends where it is not possible to stop by persuasion what cannot or can no longer be endured. The limit of this tolerance is marked by the infliction of physical harm and injury or severe mental damage (Mill's "harm-principle"). Where human beings and human life are in danger, there is no room for resignation to a cultural relativism that accords equal value to every type of behaviour. For this reason, a number of child-rearing and marital practices in multicultural societies cannot be accepted in the liberal-individualistic view.

Fundamental human rights do not render tolerance superfluous. They make it a complementary precondition for a human, decent society. Contemporary tolerance, in both views, creates the useful possibility of reacting to social situations that are difficult or are perceived as difficult with flexibility and openness. The wearing of headscarves at school and at work can, as in France, be turned into a national controversy, with a heavy symbolic charge ("separation of church and state"). It can also, as it is in the Netherlands, be seen in its true proportions. In the liberalindividualistic view the wearing of headscarves does no harm and contravenes no rules or rights of others. In the communitarian view it can be seen as a group right, to which the minority group has a fundamental entitlement.

The Netherlands has maintained a tradition of tolerance in varying degrees and always with a diverse content, and with the emphasis lying more on the practice of tolerance than on the theory. But theory can help these practices to continue.

## Tolerance in Times of Political and Social Polarisation?

Social changes in modern pluralistic, democratic societies can best be described by contrasting the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom of 28 August 1963 with the outspoken hope of M. L. King, to the Charge on

Capitol, 6 January 2021, with a prepared attack on democracy and the rule of law. In the last two decades of the New Century political polarisation in the United States and in Europe as well has shown us the decline of tolerance, all over. Is tolerance becoming irrelevant as the buttress of democracy and the rule of law?

Against the background of gerrymandering in the United States the traditional crossovers between parties has been changed in more and more extremist candidates and Republican representatives (De Foer, 2024). Political opponents henceforth have been named so called "enemies within". Political rhetoric changed the cultural landscapes in many pluralist societies into a verbal war and screaming fights.

In the Netherlands the traditional, although socially segregated, *pillarised* tolerance between religions transformed into a heavily opposed political *polarised* society. All the characteristics of polarisation have been used by the Freedom Party in order to pull down existing social institutions like the "so called" parliament, the "biased" judiciary, the journalistic "scum". Such as: overgeneralisation ("we", the people's voice), generalising social categories (for instance, black people, all refugees, all Islamic, exil-seekers, leftist scrum); scapegoating for all sorts of societal problems, etc. With admiration for Putin as well as for Trump many members of the Dutch rightist parties started using hyperbolic language ("Trump the best president ever in the whole history of the United States"), interlarded with fake news or Orwellian new-speak. All this rhetoric was mixed up with a nostalgic nationalism, anxiety for internalisation and European integration, and with a sometime violent fanaticism (especially against newcomers and newly built *asylum seekers centres*). Fanaticism ending in group-coercion: "One, who isn't pro me, is against me", a longtime noble biblical proverb.

This new cold political climate asks for an answer to the paradox of tolerance: do we need to tolerate the non-tolerant? And also the next paradox: can democracy tolerate anti-democratic political parties and autocratic political leaders? The answers to these two urgent paradoxical situations and questions do not lead to the ending of tolerance, but make the discussion of the limits to tolerance most needed. Democracy cannot bear a violent attack by anti-democrats; tolerance cannot bear the intolerable, like the situation in Europe in 1933: discrimination of several groups by the State, violent takeover of democratic procedures, expulsion or incarceration of political leaders and representatives of opposing political parties and worse and worst.

At the moment of an autocratic or totalitarian rule, either in the United States or in any country in Europe, the urgencies of the right to freedom of conscience and of conviction, the right to freedom of expression, of religion and independent scientific research and writings, are all at stake. And what about tolerance in these urgent situations?

We have to begin again. We will be remembered to the beginnings of tolerance, when Sebastian Castellio appealed to tolerance and freedom of conscience and religious conviction for all citizens and other living men and women, protesting against the first execution to death by burning.

As the English philosopher P.M.S. Hacker reminds us regarding the idea of Tolerance:

> The idea that human beings should not be hounded and burnt for their beliefs on matters of opinion and interpretation (advanced by Sebastian Castellio against Calvin) was as deep as it was revolutionary. It was a passionate appeal for tolerance that anticipated the Enlightenment. But the idea of tolerance of beliefs is a form of respect for human dignity and freedom of thought. The struggle for freedom of thought and for toleration of disagreement is unlikely to cease. It goes against the herd instinct, the sense of identity derived from consensus, and hence the fear of new ideas. So it wars with populist and demotic rule. It also wars with autocracies, theocracies, totalitarian regimes and dictatorships that fear criticism and opposition. But the principles are now evident and perspicuously articulated and defended. (…) The very late emergence of ideas of formal respect for and the formal dignity of human beings are fundamental insights into human nature, on the one hand, and into the nature of the good and the rights, on the other. (Hacker, 2012, pp. 61–62)

## Notes

[1] Essay in honour of Jan Willem Duyvendak.

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# The Engaged Sociologist: Three Lessons From W.E.B. Du Bois on the Practice of Scholarship in Times of Fascism

*Jacob Boersema*

"Jan Willem Duyvendak is the best that Dutch sociology has to offer," I sometimes quip to American colleagues when we discuss the differences between sociology in the Netherlands and the United States. His blend of accessible sociological analysis with cultural criticism, emotional insight, and a wealth of empirical data, I have found rather unique in the Netherlands. His work has therefore long been a model to aspire to – and not just for me. There is much to admire about the breadth of his scholarship, the practice of his engaged sociology, and his modesty regarding his own achievements. Perhaps Duyvendak's work truly remains the best that Dutch sociology has to offer.

But is it enough?

This question feels urgent at a time when the Trump regime is dismantling higher education here in the United States. Duyvendak's call for factuality, calm reasoning, and historical awareness is, in a moment when fascism is gaining ground around us, a sympathetic argument – one many would find reassuring. Yet for those of us who value social science for its capacity to confront fascism, racism, and the excesses of capitalism, such an appeal increasingly feels inadequate. To continually call for sanity in a time of escalating insanity becomes, in its own way, a form of absurdity.

In 2018, I attended a conference at Harvard University marking the 150th anniversary of the birth of its most famous African American student, the sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963). One year earlier, Aldon Morris (2017) had published his groundbreaking book on Du Bois's foundational role in the creation of modern sociology. Since then, a group of Du Boisian sociologists has drawn on his writings and strategies to practice sociology in the service of combating racism and critiquing racial modernity. Born in western Massachusetts, Du Bois witnessed an extraordinary sweep of African American history – from five years after

the Emancipation Proclamation to the eve of the March on Washington. A visionary ahead of his time, he was a pioneering sociologist, civil rights activist, and outspoken public intellectual.

For my contribution here, I want to place Du Bois's ideas about the relationship between sociology and history in dialogue with Duyvendak's thinking. I found it especially fitting to draw on Du Bois's second autobiography – he eventually wrote three – *Dusk of Dawn! An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Du Bois, 2017). He began writing it at the same age Jan Willem is now, and it was published in 1940, on the eve of the Second World War. As Du Bois explains at the outset, the book is not a conventional autobiography. Instead, he uses his experience as a Black man as the vantage point from which he analyses American society and the wider world. It is also a book steeped in the anxieties of the late 1930s and the rise of fascism.

At one level, Du Bois's lessons are straightforward: take racism seriously; recognize that racism is not rational; and understand that fighting racism and fascism requires more than sociological facts alone. At another level, his work pushes us towards more difficult questions – ones that cannot be fully answered in this short piece: What is Dutch sociology's relationship to racism? How do we confront racism if it is not rational? And what does it mean to practice sociology in a time of the return of fascism?

## Racial Modernity

Since the early 1990s, the Netherlands has been caught in a national debate about the supposed failure of the multicultural society. Immigrants, it was argued, struggled to integrate because they did not know what they were expected to integrate *into*. According to critics, the left-leaning elite had become too cosmopolitan to articulate a coherent national identity. The proposed solution, repeated endlessly, was that a stronger embrace of the Dutch heroic past would lead to better integration. This debate rested on the assumption that the Netherlands had always been a welcoming, tolerant, and liberal country (Shorto, 2014). Although initiated by the new right, the left readily participated in it (Oudenampsen, 2020).

Duyvendak in his work has challenged both the framing of the problem and the prevailing interpretation of the Dutch past. He argued that the attack on the multicultural society was built on myths and

misunderstandings: Dutch integration policy was not failing (*Parlementair onderzoek integratiebeleid | Parlement.com*, n.d.); the Netherlands had never had a genuinely multicultural policy (Duyvendak & Scholten, 2009); and a deeper understanding of national history would not miraculously resolve present-day issues of integration.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, few immigration scholars connected these debates to the Netherlands' much longer history of colonialism and racism. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement changed this. For decades, postcolonial immigrant groups had pushed for recognition of the Dutch history of slavery, and, more recently, anti-racist activists successfully advanced the *Zwarte Piet is Racisme* campaign. But the global anti-racist movement added new momentum. Scholars such as Gloria Wekker (2016) exposed how the Dutch relied on "White Innocence" as a narrative strategy to avoid confronting their colonial, slavery-related, and racist past. Politicians like Sylvana Simons pressed the Dutch government and the king to issue a formal apology for the nation's involvement in slavery (De Koning & Aharouay, 2023). As a result, the global anti-racism movement forced Dutch society to reckon with its long-standing racist history and the enduring consequences of colonialism.

Du Bois would have appreciated these developments, yet Duyvendak appears doubtful about their sociological significance. In a series of essays for *De Groene* in 2021, he explored the role of history in the sociological imagination (Duyvendak, 2021). He suggested that certain forms of discrimination – such as anti-semitism and racism – seem almost "indestructible", a strikingly pessimistic claim for a sociologist. He emphasized what he saw as "new" forms of exclusion, such as Islamophobia. "Especially in that case," he wrote, "it's highly questionable whether distant history can teach us much about understanding the current aversion to Muslims. Should we adopt a *longue durée* perspective – should we start with the fear of the Moors?" The rhetorical nature of the question reveals his scepticism.

Du Bois would have responded: *yes, absolutely!* Over his lifelong struggle against racism, he became convinced that American ideas about African Americans and race were deeply rooted in Western conceptions of Africa. Colonial knowledge systems had cast the continent as lacking civilisation and history (Du Bois, 1947). For Du Bois, one could not comprehend the modern world – or its racism – without understanding colonial history.

To Indonesians, it might be surprising to hear a Dutch sociologist describe Islamophobia as a new phenomenon for the Netherlands. After

all, the Dutch colonised the Indonesian archipelago, a majority-Muslim region, for nearly 350 years. Duyvendak argues that "Muslims suffer specifically from recent changes in the Netherlands. The majority has rapidly become secular and liberal and looks back with disgust at the days of pillarization and religiously inspired conservatism." Yet what stands out is not the novelty but the continuity of Dutch colonial and post-colonial Islamophobia. In the past, it was justified through white Protestant supremacy; today it is framed through white secular supremacy.

Notably, the academic roots of Dutch virulent Islamophobia have remained remarkably consistent, emerging from the same university – Leiden. Anyone reading Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje's 1888 *Mecca* alongside Paul Cliteur's (2021) recent critiques of Islam will be struck by the continuity and durability of these intellectual traditions.

Du Bois conceptualized modernity as fundamentally shaped by racism and colonialism (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2020). Europe and the United States were part of a global system structured around these forces.

Du Bois's anti-racist political project – rooted in decolonisation and the Pan-African movement – was driven by his critique of Western society's failure to create a political world in which Black people could be modern. By constructing the colonial "other", Europeans created a standard against which they measured their own progress, ambitions, and level of civilisation. Modernity acquired meaning through this comparison. Race and racism shaped the entire world: not only the United States, but also Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and, of course, Europe.

This system began with colonialism. From the moment the colour line became profitable – through the colonisation and exploitation of Africa and Africans from the fifteenth century onward – race has been central to world history. African poverty and the wealth of the colonial empires of England, France, and the Netherlands are inextricably linked to colonialism, imperial domination, and the extraction of wealth from the "darker races" of the world.

Duyvendak asks: "Is knowledge of a long and sad past a prerequisite for addressing inequality in the present?" Du Bois's answer is unequivocally yes. His thesis is clear: racism is central to colonial modernity. It is a global, historical project tied to colonialism and imperial rule. Therefore, racism must be central to historical sociology – the study of displacement, dispossession, genocide, slavery, the coercive exploitation of people of colour, and the racialised lens through which the world has been understood. His sociology

was not simply a sociology *of* racism, but a critique of racial modernity itself – an attempt to analyse, expose, and ultimately dismantle it.

## The Limits of Empiricism

At the beginning of his career, Du Bois believed in the progress of the existing social order, even as he questioned the position assigned to people of colour within it. Over time, however, he became a critic of racial and colonial capitalism itself. Early on, he still trusted in the possibility of convincing the American and European white elite that they were on the wrong course. He believed people wanted to know the truth. As he put it, he assumed it was "axiomatic that the world wanted to learn the truth, and if the truth was sought with even approximate accuracy and painstaking devotion, the world would gladly support the effort" (Du Bois, 1940, pp. 34–35). If he could scientifically demonstrate that racist barriers were hindering the advancement of Black people, he believed the white elite would be compelled to remove them.

But the intellectual habits of the time made this nearly impossible. As he observed:

> The widespread habit of studying the Negro from one point of view only, that of his influence on the white inhabitants, is also responsible for much uncritical work. (p. 14)

He also warned of the harm done when scholars either avoided the truth or pursued it carelessly:

> If they do the work in a slipshod, unsystematic manner – if they dally with the truth to humor the whims of the day, they do far more hurt to the good name of the American people; they hurt the cause of scientific truth the world over… (p. 10)

For Du Bois at this stage, white racism was fundamentally a problem of ignorance:

> The world was thinking wrong about race, because it did not know. The ultimate evil was stupidity. The cure for it was knowledge based on scientific investigation. (p. 30)

Once these barriers were removed, he believed the Black elite – scientists, activists, and professionals – could help elevate the Black majority.

A high point of this empiricist phase came in 1929, when Du Bois debated Theodore Lothrop Stoddard, a Harvard PhD and one of the era's leading popularisers of what is now called the "great replacement" theory (Taylor, 1981). Stoddard argued that only a white America could sustain Western civilisation, claiming "modern science" as his authority. Du Bois countered that the so-called scientific definitions of Black inferiority were unfounded assumptions, produced through flawed methods and interpreted by biased investigators. Black people were not who American science claimed they were.

Yet by the early 1930s, even as the most formidable opponent of scientific racism, Du Bois grew increasingly doubtful that scientific data and rational argument would ever convince the white elite.

I found myself thinking about this while reading Duyvendak's most recent book, *Spookkloven* (*Ghost Divides*), published in 2025. In it, he offers a sharp and empirically rich demonstration that the Netherlands is far less polarised than many believe. Politicians, journalists, and scholars constantly identify divides: urban versus rural, highly versus less educated, rich versus poor, men versus women, religious versus secular. But how large are these differences really? Drawing on numerous datasets, Jan Willem shows that people routinely exaggerate these contrasts. He argues that emotionalised political debate fuels these "ghost divides": dramatic narratives that obscure reality. The divided society, he suggests, is largely a collective delusion.

It is a brilliant piece of sociology, empirically grounded and analytically incisive. Duyvendak dismantles one of the most persistent myths of our day and age: that we live in uniquely polarised times. His work is a compelling call to trust in our collective capacity to coexist, despite differences, without succumbing to unnecessary drama. It is sociology at its best, offering guidance in unsettling times.

Yet, as I read the book, I was struck by Duyvendak's persistent faith in the power of facts, in rationality, and in our collective ability to contain the emotional genie that has escaped the bottle.

By the time that Du Bois turned sixty, he no longer shared that faith. He realised he would never persuade the white elite with evidence alone. Whether white academics were predicting "the probable extermination of Negroes", insisting that Black people were physiologically inferior,

defending the failures of Japanese imperialism, or claiming India was incapable of self-rule, Du Bois concluded that racism was sustained not by lack of data but by a corrupt knowledge culture. As he wrote in 1940:

> When in other days the world lied, it was a world that expected lies and consciously defended them; when the world lies today, it is to a world that pretends to love the truth. (p. 77)

Du Bois had long explored methods beyond social science to educate the public about racism. In 1911, he published his first novel, *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, an early and experimental attempt to use the American novel's conventions for political ends (Lee, 1999). Though some critics saw it as contradictory or confused, it was in fact a strategic effort to fuse romance, realism, and political critique. But, by the 1930s, Du Bois realis that America's most potent national myths were not being crafted in ; they were being produced in its history departments.

One myth particularly drew his attention: the dominant narrative of Reconstruction, the brief period after the Civil War when formerly enslaved African Americans could first exercise political agency. In *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), especially in the chapter "The Propaganda of History", Du Bois showed how historians had falsified Reconstruction to spare the nation's conscience:

> The South was ashamed because it fought to perpetuate human slavery. The North was ashamed because it had to call in the black men to save the Union, abolish slavery and establish democracy.

Du Bois teaches us an important lesson about the power of myths and the strong connection between racism and historical myths. This remains the paradox of our time: we imagine ourselves receptive to rational argument, yet our politics is increasingly governed by myths and racial fantasies. The United States at this moment is very much reliving a moment where racism reigns supreme and history is rewritten. A call for more factualness will not do.

## The Role of the Academic

The brutal 1899 lynching of Sam Hose, a young Black man in Georgia, shocked W. E. B. Du Bois. Accused of killing his armed employer in self-defence, Hose fled but was hunted for ten days by white mobs. After his capture, newspapers promoted his execution, which drew about 2,000 white spectators who watched him be tortured, killed, and burned, while parts of his body were sold as souvenirs. Reflecting on this event, Du Bois wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*: "One could not be a calm, cool, and detached scientist while Negroes were lynched, murdered, and starved" (1940, p. 40).

Today, ICE again is lynching people on the streets. In times of crisis and conflict, the call for scientists to speak out publicly, to engage, and to actively connect with the world grows louder. Thinkers like Du Bois and Duyvendak have always engaged. The essential question is: how must we engage?

Du Bois was never simply a sociologist; he was an emancipator of Black people. Debates over the proper place and role of the academic might have amused him. His career ranged from traditional academic work as a professor, even though white academia never embraced him, to alternative roles as an activist and editor. He moved between institutions, associations, and academic disciplines, never viewing the role of custodian of knowledge as limited to the academy. Du Bois was an active activist from an early age, writing novels and deepening his empirical studies with a strong dose of history. As he began to lose faith that he could convince the white elite with scientific data and reasonable arguments, he increasingly expanded his arsenal. He began writing for a wider audience, developing a global approach to the problem of racism, and building an international Pan-African movement. He never abandoned scholarship, but it was always in the service of broader political goals.

Du Bois's social science consistently served the higher purpose of Black emancipation. The place and objective of his knowledge production – including his academic work – in his broader political project was always clear. As a progressive white male Dutch academic – whether I refer to Duyvendak or myself – a similar positionality is neither possible nor desirable. If the goal of our research is to fight racism, must we position ourselves as allies? I think Du Bois would say yes. He had an early, keen eye for the importance of allyship. In 1909, he wrote a historical biography of John Brown, a white guy who championed the freedom of Black Americans and literally fought against slavery in Kansas.

If I look at Duyvendak's popular writing, I think he imagines himself not as an emancipator but as a bridge builder. In his article analysing contemporary identity politics and the role of history in the Netherlands, he writes: "Groups engaged in identity politics – both on the left and right – often use history to justify their position. As a result, our shared past doesn't unite us, but rather divides us." He frames identity politics as a problem because it "leads to division, to painful confrontations, and sometimes to the petty exaggeration of one's own position". Duyvendak attempts to understand identity politics and the uses of history as a general phenomenon, practiced by both majorities and minorities. This perspective is admirable, but, in the process, he fails to grapple with power relations and the fact that supposedly neutral knowledge production often legitimises existing structures.

The is a move not uncommon among social scientists who try to position themselves as arbiters and explainers, rather than partisans and activists. The problem is that the arbiter and explainer use their knowledge to lecture from above, not to support from below.

It is politically ineffective. In *Spookkloven*, Duyvendak concludes that contemporary politics suffers from an excess of emotion and makes a moral appeal to tone it down. It would be remarkable if an extreme right-wing politician like Wilders took this advice and moderated his rhetoric, but this is unlikely. As a result, the call effectively targets only the centre and the left. Is Duyvendak suggesting that we should be less passionate or alarmist in the face of rising fascism? Does he believe a calmer, more measured approach can better counter these forces? Perhaps this is his view, but he neither substantiates nor clearly explains it in the book. And I doubt it is true. If anything, to be politically effective against fascism we need more political courage and bravery – the kind that Du Bois demonstrated during the McCarthyism of the 1950s by never betraying his friends and paying dearly by having no passport for years.

Du Bois would argue for less neutrality and more solidarity. Is science that does not seek to change the world truly worthwhile? As freedom comes under real pressure, academic citizenship requires engaging in political struggles, not hovering above them – neutrality will not save you. A clear example is the many US scientists who remained silent when Trump and Make America Great Again (MAGA) attacked so-called "woke" academics, only now awakening to the complete Republican assault on science itself.

Sociologists must use their knowledge to support threatened communities, not to lecture them. The necessary shift is from supposed objectivity to engaged solidarity: supporting, collaborating, and building resistance. Much of the progress made since Du Bois is currently being torn down with lightning speed. Are we going to sit and watch the carnage or get up, think and fight?

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