



Everyday Autochthony. Difference, Discontent and the Politics of Home in
Amsterdam

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English summary

This study sets out to examine the politics of autochthony in the Netherlands. It thereby zooms in on the everyday articulation of a metaphoric figure that is central to the culturalization of citizenship and that has come to play an increasingly pivotal role in the Dutch political and cultural imagination in broader terms: the figure of the ordinary Dutch person. The book takes as a starting point the emergence, in the extended aftermath of decolonization and the Cold War and amidst the withering of the Fordist-Keynesian compact in Europe, of what Nicholas de Genova has referred to as ‘the European question’, or the problem of Europeanness. The reanimation of nationalism in Europe, which is expressed in the rise and growing social and political influence of exclusionary political formations, practices, and ideas, calls for an anthropology that turns attention to precisely those European populations construed as native or ‘autochthonous’. The focus of the book has therefore been on ethnographic case studies in which everyday articulations of autochthony and the politics of cultural and social location animating Dutch citizens - categorized as autochthonous - could be studied from a microscopic, ethnographic perspective. I do not attempt to give an ‘overview’ of the plurality of autochthony in the Netherlands, but study its articulation in local dynamics in Amsterdam New West surrounding struggles over the right to the city; the negotiation of respectability and stigmatization; the

politics of self and other; and the interconnections of sexuality, politics, and locality and belonging in Amsterdam New West.

In the introduction, I argue that the rise to political influence of nativist populisms demands an analytic focus on the reconstruction of majoritarian identities in Europe, and the everyday discourses and politics emerging in this context. I show that the Netherlands' political landscape has shifted after the rise and murder of Pim Fortuyn in the early 2000s. Fortuyn had built his political persona around an attack on the established political right for not heeding the widespread frustration with refugees and immigrants, while blaming the left for abandoning 'ordinary people' to the consequences of immigration and what he called 'Islamization'. This discourse built on already existing public and political modes of identifying alterity and associating migrants and their offspring - metonymically but sometimes metaphorically - with social problems and feelings of discomfort and displacement.

I argue that a critical and ethnographic perspective is needed. Once understood as a 'fiction' - in the Geertzian sense, hence as 'something made', 'something fashioned' - the task becomes to explore the performative power and persuasiveness of autochthony, and the ways in which it is materialized in people's everyday life-worlds as common sense and 'really real'. This study is thus concerned with the ethnography of a culturalist common-sense in the Netherlands. Rather than focusing only on the national, discursive frame, I ask how the culturalization of citizenship has played out in people's everyday life-worlds.

Culturalism, I argue, can be understood as a particular distribution of the sensible, as Jacques Rancière has put it: a 'regime' of making (common) sense, of putting things and people in their place and role, while ideologically legitimizing this particular distribution. I show in this dissertation that the construction of autochthony is always already contingent upon alterity - upon the images and emotions that 'adhere' to culturalized and ethnicized

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Others. Autochthony is dependent upon the ways in which the Other is produced as a knowable object. My study focuses on various ways in which this 'common sense', is produced and maintained in everyday discourses by zooming in on discussions surrounding the tangible, material future of the neighborhood and what I have called the discourse of displacement; on the anthropology of disorder, respectability and what I refer to as a nostalgia for the state; on the everyday politics of loss, alterity, and race; and on the sexual politics of culturalism.

Rather than understanding super-diversity in terms of an increasing normalization of alterity, I argue that the contemporary global city is characterized by what Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere have called a 'dialectics of flow and closure': increasing heterogeneity, while sometimes becoming commonplace, also sometimes provokes an ever more powerful focus on locality, belonging, and identity fixture. In a world characterized by flux, a great deal of energy is invested in fixing, controlling, and freezing identities. As I see it, Dutch culturalism is a discourse of controlling and fixing identity in times of urban transformation and global flux. I also argue that the study of Dutch autochthony cannot be an exercise in culturalism only: to understand the emotional impact of autochthony and its - albeit complicated and always contradictory - resonance with people's everyday life, we have to take seriously transformations at the level urban politics and political economy. I argue that the ascent of culturalism must be understood in the context of the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism and the growing influence of neoliberal representations and ideas.

In Chapter 2, I start developing this approach by zooming in on the transformations of urban politics in Amsterdam, and the ways in which it is contested and negotiated. I argue that these politics offer a good angle and starting point for the ethnographic exploration of new cultural practices like autochthony. This chapter is explicitly grounded in a 'Marxian' understanding

of late-capitalist development - the analysis that contemporary urban transformations signal a process of transformation from a Fordist to a post-Fordist society, associating post-Fordism with the 'condition of postmodernity' and with globalization. The period of the large scale modernist projects of the post-war Netherlands, characterized by a strong belief in social 'makeability' and efforts to enfold the popular classes into middle class morality, order, and affluence, has slowly but surely come to an end. As in other European countries, we have seen the emergence of another mode of regulating populations and organizing economy and society. Developments in Amsterdam New West exemplify this shift to post-Fordism. In this chapter, I zoom in on the perspectives of 'autochthonous' residents in New West, demonstrating how the plans for the demolition and restructuring of the neighborhood opened up a space for the articulation of a discourse of displacement in antagonistic relations with 'Others' - elites and sometimes (post-)migrants.

I have called this narrative a discourse of displacement. In and through this discourse, residents in New West not only express a sense of distrust in (political) establishments, but also express what they see as a lack of democracy and voice. Arguing they have no real voice in decision making processes, they give form and shape to a discourse of resistance in and through which they engage in a struggle for their right to the city: a right to stay put. While contradictory and plural, their narratives resonate with populist discourse in the public sphere.

In analyzing this discourse, I build on and develop a non-essentialist approach to populism, while locating the emergence of populist everyday discourse within a particular context of social and urban transformation. In chapter 3, I continue thinking through the role of the state - and other authorities - by focusing on the question of respectability and (dis)order, and what I have called a 'longing for the state' in the making of autochthony. In the study of the

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culturalization of citizenship, the emotional politics surrounding neighborhood decline have not yet been fully taken into account. Yet, the figure of the pluri-ethnic, popular neighborhood plays a key role in culturalist discourse. Indeed, these neighborhoods are framed as the spaces where a 'multicultural drama' is taking place. In this chapter, I explore the role of the imaginary of neighborhood decline and the politics of respectability in the formation of home and self-understanding in New West. As I demonstrate, people define and defend their home or locality in the face of what they perceive as a growing threat to their way of life and their hard-won respectability. This process is contingent upon people's situated politics in local neighborhoods, as well as upon extra-local, macro-processes of territorial stigmatization and the declining value attached to public housing in our neoliberal era that residents must navigate in order to defend their cherished respectability. People find their self-worth in their ability to be worthy of respect and in drawing boundaries against those who are conceived as lacking respectability.

I zoom in on narratives of neighborhood decline, which reveal a particular emotional practice: nostalgia. To understand this, I use the work of Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan on post-Fordist affect, a concept that provides continuity to my argument throughout this book. In post-Fordist times, the space of experience of 'ordinary people' in a neighborhood like New West is shrinking and no longer fits the horizon of expectation. This is particularly visible in people's delineation of the state as incapable of ensuring order and their nostalgic investment in the state of the past. Using ethnographic evidence, I argue that people are looking to protect a shrinking space of experience that no longer fits the horizon of expectation in postindustrial Amsterdam. Nostalgia might be seen to function as a resource of what Hall and Lamont have called social resilience in a time of neoliberal transformations. By evoking an absent past, people give form and

shape to a contemporary, but diffuse and unstable, critique of the transformation of the role of the state and housing corporations in the life of the neighborhood and the conduct of things.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of the relationship between this politics nostalgia and the question of cultural and perceived, experienced alterity. Focusing on enactments of autochthony, I show that the making and doing of autochthony is always dependent on the figure of the Other. I flesh out in some detail the everyday politics of self and other in Amsterdam New West. As I have pointed out, the contemporary condition of super-diversity is sometimes seen as going hand in hand with a normalization of difference in the public arena. I argue that the encounter with difference does not necessarily lead to increasing understanding of, or positive respect for the Other. Proximity does not in all circumstances lead to more intercultural understanding. The racialization of the figure of the everyman (as white) in this chapter directs my attention to recent academic debates in the Netherlands concerning the relationship between culturalization, nativism, and racialization. As I argue, the influential construction of the Netherlands as post- or non-racial is problematic in a number of ways. First, it is grounded in the premise that a clear distinction can be made between culturalism and ethnocentrism on the one hand and racism on the other. While it may be true that 'race' has, at least among those who have symbolic power, been semantically conquered and that the category of race - once assumed to be scientific fact - has been debunked, it must at the same time be emphasized that the racial has always been cultural. A clear distinction between cultural essentialism and racism cannot be made.

Chapter 5 continues my critical investigation of the dynamics of culturalization. In this chapter, I foreground the complex interplay of religion, secularism and sexuality in the 'making' and 'doing' of autochthony in an everyday, local context, a complexity that is lost

in much of the existing analyses of Dutch multiculturalism and sexual politics. In recent decades the Netherlands has witnessed a quite remarkable shift in the social location of gay politics as they relate to the rise of anti-multiculturalism in Europe. LGBTIQ rights and discourses are employed to frame 'Western' Europe as the 'avatar of both freedom and modernity' while depicting especially Muslim citizens as backwards and homophobic. This symbolic representation at the level of the nation also plays out at the level of geographical space in Amsterdam: whereas the city center is produced in public discourse as modern, 'secular' and as possessing gay capital, its racialized peripheries are often represented as religiously conservative, intolerant, homophobic and perilous for LGBTIQ people.

These representations of the entangled relations between sexual politics, religion and the racialization of young, post-migrant men are inscribed in the urban fabric. That is to say, the 'gay capital' of the city – the visibility and cultural and commercial presence of 'gayness' in Amsterdam that plays such a key role in the city's global iconography – is unevenly distributed across space, with areas that possess more 'mainstream' gay capital represented as more Dutch. While Amsterdam's city center and some of its surrounding affluent neighborhoods are seen to have a large amount of gay capital, the less affluent and more peripheral neighborhoods are represented as potentially homophobic and dangerous. We can thus identify a dynamic in which Dutch homo-tolerance and Amsterdam's 'gay capital' come into being in and through a process of peripheralization of urban spaces marked by greater ethnic or racial diversity; as homo-tolerance and gay capital come to be associated with the cultural and spatial center of the city, homophobia becomes tied up with imaginaries of the city's culturalized and racialized peripheries. Amsterdam New West, I suggest, is one of these racialized peripheries, a post-migrant space deemed perilous for LGBTIQ subjects.

The debate on sexual emancipation and gender equality has had a strong impact on how some self-identified liberal Muslims have discussed the situation concerning people categorized as Muslim - and as perilous to the moral integrity of the post-progressive nation - in the Netherlands. First of all, pragmatists are drawn into the logic of neoculturalism, which represents Dutch society in terms of an opposition between sexual progress and Muslim moralities. The investments of pragmatists and social-democrats in the discourse of sexual and feminist progress have made it increasingly difficult for pragmatists to find a language to negate culturalist framings of Muslims as traditional and intolerant. Second, the position of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders and women within Muslim communities has become a rallying point of liberal Muslims, like Ahmed Marcouch, for whom LGBTQ-issues offer 'ethical moments' in and through which they refashion their moral and political selves.

What holds these different articulations of the relationship between homosexuality and Islam together is a particular, homogenizing culturalism: within culturalist representations, 'homosexuality' emerges as a singular and universal category. I argue, however, that sexuality is not singular, but asymmetrical and plural. This is a crucial insight for the analysis of LGBTIQ-practices and identities in a globalizing world. The culturalist framework overwrites these complexities.

In the concluding chapter of this book, I return to some of the central premises of my argument by reflecting on the multicultural city. I make use of Richard Sennett's analysis in his landmark *Flesh and Blood* to think through on the lived multiculturalism: the consequences of super-diversity in everyday life. Sennett's call for a particular, 'progressive' sensuous community - in which the body has been brought to moral sensate life and people embrace difference - stands in contrast to the autochthonic sense of community that I encountered among white Dutch people in Amsterdam New West.

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The crisis of multiculturalism in the Netherlands is associated not with a lack of 'physical awareness', but with a strong awareness of the 'bodies of others' and a politicization of difference, which has its effects in the realm of the quotidian. Both Sennett's agenda for the multicultural city and the culturalist dissatisfaction with difference and diversity are concerned with 'lived experience' - and with the ways in which proximate Others are encountered. Moreover, both perspectives rely on the fact that human beings are endowed not only with the gift of language and knowledge, but with a sense for sensing. We can argue that what presents itself to sense experience and how alterity is perceived, is structured by the political field and public discourse.

In the conclusion, I also return to some other central debates I engage with in this dissertation. I have developed a non-substantialist approach to the 'autochthonous majority, focusing - ethnographically - on everyday practices in and through which culturalist discourses are appropriated, negotiated, and sometimes contested. The everyday narratives that people develop cannot simply be seen as reflections or effects of a dominant discourse, but must be understood as productive of alternative narratives, forms of social resilience, and sometimes as more or less articulate forms of resistance. In my view, the culturalization of politics we are experiencing today is intimately tied up with the particular moment in the history of capitalism in which we are living right now. I have tried to place the culturalization of citizenship in a broader social, political, and socio-economic context: the transformation of Dutch society from a Fordist, industrial and modern society to a post-Fordist, postindustrial and postmodern society.

