

Trapped by Narcissism: A Disillusioned Dutch Society

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I. Introduction

The arrival of the well-celebrated and revered Sinterklaas on November 21, 2011, was marked by the brutal and cruel beating of a black man, Quinsy Gario of Curacao, who was forcefully dragged and thrown into the streets by the Dutch police for protesting the racist connotations of Black Pete. The man wore a stencilled T-shirt with the words “Zwarte Piet is racism” and, according to Dutch and Antillean newspapers and other media reports, he yelled “Zwarte Piet is racism” as the group of Black Petes passed by. The beating, videoed by a bystander and posted on YouTube,¹ was both stomach turning and heart wrenching. It shows the police dragging Gario along the road, with the knees of two policemen pressed into his body. He cries, “It is my right to protest,”² while “autochthones”³ Dutch stand by and watch. After all, it was they who had called the police in disgust at the protest of their beloved tradition. This image stands in stark contrast to the image of a liberal and cosmopolitan Netherlands. In particular, in the words of the director of Antidiscriminatie, Johan Dinjens, it depicts “a society in confusion,” and which I will also contend is a disillusioned society.

The Netherlands has for years been championed as a pioneer of tolerance, democratic negotiation, and order. Cited in defense of the claim that the Netherlands is a cosmopolitan and liberal nation are its “polder” system of governance; its history of “pillarization,” in which each group of society is allowed to retain its culture and govern itself; and its “open arms” to asylees. These characteristics have made the Netherlands an attractive option as a place of refuge throughout the years. Why is it, then, that a “country that is presented in popular imaginations as ‘tolerant, ‘multicultural’ and ‘modern’ could be impacted by such a divisive and racist force?”⁴ This is a pertinent question because of the intensification of globalization, which has resulted in the concurrent increase in international competition, the restructuring of economies, the increased disparity in wealth, the tensions between the Global North and the Global South, and the rise in migration and ethnic diversity. All these phenomena suggest a shift away from the openness to change of the earlier period. In its place we find a fear of difference and the desire for a homogenous society.

The sovereignty and welfare system of strong nation-states are thus pressured on a number of fronts. The Netherlands and many other European societies have responded with intense nationalism in the face of this pressure. The intense nationalism has been a breeding ground for extreme right-wing politics, xenophobia, stereotyping, and discrimination against non-Western immigrants. The countries have experienced a shift away from multiculturalist policies to a demand for conformity and assimilation, revealing a number of troubling issues to which we must pay urgent attention.

This essay investigates the following question: What has happened to public culture and minority integration in the Netherlands? I argue that the Netherlands is trapped by narcissism, resulting in a decline in the democratic character of civic politics. The narcissism is embedded in a denied history as well as a culture of essentialism and is fuelled by the fear of instability and

loss of sovereignty. It is marked by a dual discourse of citizenship and cultural fundamentalism, engendering increased intolerance of minorities and a privileging of Dutch culture manifested as prejudice and inequality. The society is blinded and crippled with fear and becomes comatose. Civil society in the Netherlands, fundamental to the viability of a democracy, is not civically engaged; it is not interested in debating the issues that perpetuate the “unfreedoms” of not only minorities but also the native Dutch. To ensure democracy, foster dialogue, and effectively tackle the pressures of globalization and issues of identity, the Netherlands must overcome this fear and narcissism through the adoption of a civic multiculturalism. Civic multiculturalism creates a sense of common belonging for all and aims to make certain that all are accountable and considered to be within the realm of humanity.

These inferences are based on four methods of data collection: an analysis of the discourse, observations, interviews, and a situational analysis using secondary scholarly articles. Firstly, I conducted an assessment of the discourse on democracy, racism, and ethnic discrimination. Secondly, observations were performed through the viewing of videos and reading of blogs and responses to magazine articles regarding discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. Thirdly, I interviewed three scholars (Justus Uitermark, Renee Gabriëls, and Johan Dinjens) in order to collect a spectrum of informed and specialized knowledge regarding policy and development in the Netherlands. Justus Uitermark is a scholar who specializes in Dutch politics in relation to society. Renee Gabriëls is well versed on development within the Netherlands and has done work against discrimination as well. Johan Dinjens is the Director of Antidiscriminatie for the Limburg province of the Netherlands. He is very aware of the topic of discrimination within the Netherlands, specifically in the province of Limburg, and he deals with a number of cases regarding immigrants. Lastly, I assessed previous research, surveys, and interviews about racism in the Netherlands and the socioeconomic status of immigrants. Through the reading of secondary sources, I also explore the concept of the “black schools” within Dutch society, the idea of Zwarte Piet, and the manifestations of racism within Dutch politics.

The essay is divided into five sections. The first section examines Dutch culture as tolerant and multicultural through a review of its approach to difference and its efforts to promote multiculturalism and the integration of minorities. The second section gives an account of the history of migration in relation to the shift to a more conformist policy. The third section investigates more closely this shift in policy and assesses the denied history and culture of racism through an evaluation of the Dutch response to ethnic minorities. In particular, it reviews the St. Nicholas tradition and the issue of Zwarte Piet, as well as the concentration of poverty among minorities. The fourth section analyzes how the attitude of the Dutch toward immigrants affects Dutch society, based on three concepts: narcissism, loss of democracy, and reciprocity. The fifth section explores the lessons to be learned from the Netherlands’ narcissism, revealing how it is reflected globally.

II. The Tolerant and Multicultural Netherlands

The Netherlands has a global reputation as the country that spearheaded the formation of contemporary ideas surrounding tolerance. This reputation is attributed not only to the Netherlands’ treatment of immigrants but also, to a large extent, to the organization of the society. The Polder system of governance, with its extremely liberal values, is evident in the legalization of certain taboo practices, including the use of marijuana, same-sex marriage, prostitution, euthanasia, contraception, and abortion. “Cheap drugs, gay sex, easy death”⁵ became the punch line on the global single-page version of the Netherlands. Consequently, by

the 1970s, the Netherlands gained the reputation of being one of the most liberal nations on earth, introducing global symbols of liberal attitudes and modernity.⁶

In the nineteenth century, “pillarization” emerged as a practical way of segmenting society into different groups of varying religious/philosophical beliefs: Catholic, Protestant, socialist, and liberal. Pillarization was thus viewed as a system of tolerance, whereby each group was allowed to maintain its way of life almost exclusively such that society became functionally differentiated along the lines of these groups. The groups were allowed to create their own institutions (education, health care, media, etc.) and to apply for government funding for private schools, television, radio stations, and social welfare. The system allowed for the maintenance of subcultures.⁷

Pillarization extended to immigrant policy. The Netherlands developed a long history of accepting immigrants and functioned as a haven for asylum seekers. An ethnic minority policy was drafted in 1983 and applied to the Turks, Moroccans, Southern Europeans, Moluccans, Surinamese, Antilleans, Romas, Sintis, and caravan dwellers during the late 1970s and the early 1980s, when it was realized that the immigrants had come to stay.⁸

The minority policy, an extension of pillarization, functioned as a welfare policy for certain segregated groups. The policy facilitated the generous funding of new ethnic and religious minority communities and supported their own places of worship, media, and education based on pre-existing, corresponding institutions. Within the legal-political realm, antidiscrimination legislation was strengthened, and, in 1985, voting rights were granted to noncitizens at the local government level. Migrants could have a say as to their position within society, naturalization became easier, and a consultative structure was established.⁹

The socio-economic sphere consisted of three target areas: the labour market/ unemployment, education, and housing. Labour market programmes, special training courses, and education programmes for ethnic minorities were instituted. To help open up more jobs for immigrants, voluntary agreements and laws were set up. In the realms of culture, language, and religion, migrants received the leeway to set up their own institutions.¹⁰

Ethnic minority policy was built on differences between cultural groups and remained grounded in the two ideals of equal opportunity and respect for cultural differences. The Dutch government believed that a flourishing multicultural society required the full and equal participation of migrants in society in order to prevent discriminatory talk and behaviour. The adoption of the slogan “Integration with retention of cultural identity” was adhered to as a defence against the argument that integration required cultural assimilation.¹¹ The subsidization of migrant organizations as a bridge to the gap between the migrants and the native Dutch was seen as necessary for integration. These goals and necessities envisioned in the ethnic minority policy, however, were to be abandoned and replaced by a policy of assimilation; integration with retention of cultural identity no longer applied.

III. Immigration Policy

The “rules of the game” belonging to pillarisation and the related Dutch polder system of governance have often been represented as important lessons for how to achieve stability in deeply divided societies.¹² However, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dutch policymakers were confronted with the faults and failures of their ethnic minority policy. Migrants had failed to integrate into the labour market, immigrant children experienced low educational achievement, and housing segregation became an emerging problem.¹³

Based on the ethnic minority policy, migrants were left alone in the domains of culture, language, and religion to form their own institutions. Teaching in the mother tongue was made available; however, there were few professionally trained teachers and such teaching interfered with the students' time for core courses. Fear of isolation and segregation led the Dutch populace to protest against Islamic-based schools. Similarly, neighbours objected to the establishment of mosques and the emerging problems with municipal zoning and urban renewal policies.

In 1994, the Dutch approach to immigrant policy shifted from an ethnic-minority-focused policy to an integration policy.¹⁴ The new policy aimed to increase the inclusion of immigrants in the conventional services of Dutch society and to move away from ethnic-specific practices previously condoned as part of the policy of multiculturalism. The new policy emphasized integration as a process involving the full and equal participation of individuals and groups in society, stressing mutual respect as a prerequisite for the policy to work.

However, the initiation of a system of sanctions, in conjunction with a focus on Dutch language courses, social orientation, and vocational training, abdicated the policy objectives to foster mutual respect and full participation. The rigid focus suggested sanctions might include cutting welfare benefits for anyone who failed to take the required classes. The newly instituted 1998 Civic Integration Act mandated obligatory programmes for newcomers. It consisted of Dutch language lessons and social orientation courses directed toward a final examination that assessed the level of integration.¹⁵ The classes, however, were far from adequate and failed to meet the needs of special groups, such as unemployed women and individuals with limited formal education. Despite these discrepancies, fines were demanded if attendance norms were not met.¹⁶

The demands of the new integration policy, formally established in 2004, favoured "assimilation." Only upon successfully passing an integration examination would newcomers have fulfilled their integration obligation. If they did not pass after five years, they would be fined by the Dutch government.¹⁷ Integration thus became the order of the day, with different political groups emphasizing varying aspects. The conservatives and populists promoted the imagined ideal of a homogenous nation and, therefore, urged cultural integration, while the social democrats remained concerned about the successful performance of migrants in education and the labour market. Social democrats viewed cultural integration as necessary for socio-economic success.

In general, the Dutch populace and government desired individual adaptation and the conformity of immigrants. Current public discourse on multiculturalism argues that too much diversity undermines social cohesion; immigrants fail to take the responsibility to integrate; the Netherlands has been too lenient and generous to migrants; and multiculturalism leads to segregation, welfare dependency, and the undermining of democratic values.¹⁸ It is claimed that the focus on preservation of ethnic cultures prevents migrants from integrating into the dominant culture and national identity. Multiculturalism is seen as giving leeway to tolerance that is uncritical and gives priority to cultural and group rights over the individual. In sum, the debates on migrant practices emphasize the societal ills attributed to migrants (unemployment, social isolation, and crime) and the importance of integration.

Integration tests demonstrate the shift to a policy of forced assimilation. The tests frame citizenship based on an allegiance to Dutch culture.¹⁹ For example, the integration test asks these questions: What should one do with the front garden for it to be accepted as Dutch? and What should one do when one has a newborn baby? Additionally, questions are asked regarding immigrants' perception and acceptance of the Saint Nicholas tradition as well as homosexuality

(by showing a video of homosexuals kissing). These superficial questions prescribe the acceptance of certain beliefs and directly aim to educate the “backward.”

Citizenship does not subscribe to one specific culture; on the contrary, it stipulates that all citizens are engaged in a mutually beneficial contract that recognizes and protects the diversity of each individual. Therefore, it accepts that not everyone must believe in the same values. Surely not all Dutch accept homosexuality, for example. Citizenship tests should not seek to dictate a way of life but to ensure that citizens are aware of Dutch history, the structure of the Netherlands, and the general tangible aspects of Dutch culture (for example, the food, music, geography, politics, and traditions such as Carnival and Saint Nicholas). Citizens, furthermore, must be able to evaluate and criticize traditions; not all traditions have to be accepted. A seminar discussion with two Maastricht University Dutch students, revealing that they failed to pass the citizenship test, affirms that there is not only one way of being Dutch or interpreting Dutch traditions.²⁰ Among students, the discussion prompted the question: How “Dutch” are the advertised Dutch traditions?

The homogenizing of culture in conjunction with the inability to accept criticism is very dangerous. It leaves room for discrimination, exclusion, and the deprivation of certain fundamental rights, such as freedom of belief and speech. There are no checks and balances on such a culture. The Dutch have become engaged in the mythologizing of their culture.²¹

IV. A Review of Immigration Policy

Professors Gabriëls and Uitermark, along with other scholars such as Ellie Vasta, purport that the Netherlands has shifted away from a policy of multiculturalism and tolerance to a policy of conformity. This shift to an anti-multicultural rhetoric and emphasis on the creation of a homogenous nation is surprising when one looks at the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s in comparison to the 1990s and onwards. The change is stark, but not a surprise. Despite a reputation of openness and liberal social policies, there is now a growing discrepancy between what is claimed by society in general and what many minorities experience.²² Issues dealing with Zwarte Piet and the concentration of poverty among ethnic minorities in the Netherlands reveal this discrepancy, contextualizing the dilemma that currently exists in the Netherlands.

Before delving into these issues, we should examine two major developments within the Netherlands that provide the context for the shift to assimilatory policies and attitudes. First, the history and system of pillarization within the Netherlands must be recognized as one that does not necessarily breed deep tolerance and genuine multiculturalism, but instead the opposite. In the expression of Forst Rainer, pillarization can be interpreted as system of tolerant racism, whereby a paradox arises when a racist curbs his prejudices and becomes tolerant, converting an immoral attitude into a virtue.²³

Highlighting pillarization as a system of tolerant racism, Marlou Schrover argues that pillarization formed the foundation of essentialist ideas. Pillarization was a system of separation and segregation that fostered an in-group mentality and social exclusivity.²⁴ According to Schrover, to be considered for a subsidy under pillarization, group activities needed to be portrayed as “cultural” and “authentic.”²⁵ This action resulted in the reiteration and reproduction of stereotypes by migrants about themselves, and the diversity within groups was ignored. Groups were assumed to be homogenous and differences between them overemphasized, leading to the fossilization of prejudices about minorities.²⁶ Schrover’s arguments become more interesting when collated with those of Justus Uitermark, who contends that the Dutch liberal

laws are based to a large extent on a culture of pragmatic negotiations, not necessarily a desire for tolerance.

It is important to reflect upon events that have pushed many in Dutch society to demand conformity, rendering pillarization and multiculturalism as no longer practical in the face of new fears. Notably, Islamic culture is singled out as a danger to Dutch cosmopolitanism.

In 2004, a Dutch TV show organized a poll to determine the “greatest Dutchman of all time.”²⁷ Surprisingly to observers, Pim Fortuyn was given the most votes: “It was a sign that the Dutch public was looking for heroes who would uphold and reiterate shared Dutch norms and help express respect to local traditions in response to globalization.”²⁸ Pim Fortuyn was a conservative populist who fulfilled this need for the Dutch populace. Notably, after his assassination, the Pim Fortuyn Lijst Party (LPF) was still able to secure twenty-six seats in the elections, just enough to become part of the new centre-right government.²⁹

The ascension of LPF into Dutch government reveals the salience of the political, social, and economic atmosphere in the agenda of Fortuyn. Hence, it is indicative of the Dutch dilemma. Fortuyn’s arguments illustrate a Netherlands uncertain of its culture and paranoid about its demise. He argued for the closing of borders to new asylum seekers and proclaimed Islam to be a backward culture. He also defended freedom of expression as more important than the tolerance enshrined in the Dutch Constitution.³⁰ Fortuyn propagandized that the Netherlands was a “full” country and felt troubled by the cultural relativism in Dutch society. He opined that the Dutch were no longer interested in their heritage or history. For him, the Netherlands was an orphaned society without a consciously experienced identity.³¹ To combat this perceived “loss of identity,” Fortuyn urged the need to fight against the fundamentalism of Islam evident in the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center by establishing some core values. The core values, he maintained, were the separation of church and state and the full equality of men and women regardless of sexual orientation. He painted outsiders and globalization as threatening and emphasized the ease with which culture is subjected to change and thus the need to be critical of Islamic culture.

Fortuyn made sweeping statements in order to create a sense of coherence about Dutch culture. He complained that he “did not want to do the emancipation of women and gays over again.”³² Although appealing to Dutch tradition, however, he himself was far from traditional.³³ In fact, Fortuyn created a sort of liberal nationalism. For example, he appealed to Dutch roots, but gay rights were only a recent accomplishment. Fortuyn also chose to overlook the state support of religious institutions during the twentieth century to claim that the separation of church and state was a quintessential Dutch value. This liberal nationalism mobilized the Dutch populace around his agenda but gives way to the mythologizing of culture by simply equating liberal values with culture, ignoring the debates surrounding the values.

Geert Wilders of the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV) continued the creation of this liberal nationalism. Like the LPF, the PVV became established within Dutch politics, gaining 24 seats in the 2010 election.³⁴ However, Wilders’ rhetoric differs from that of Fortuyn. Wilders’ harsh rhetoric focuses on issues of migration and integration in direct relation to Islam. He claims the Netherlands is in danger of being taken over by Muslims. Wilders bases the threat of Islam and the “Islamization” of the Netherlands on the idea that there has been a tsunami of Muslim immigrants, that Islam has no respect for women’s rights, and that there is a problem of violence among Moroccan youth. However, the Islamization of the Netherlands is an exaggerated myth when considering that more than half of the ethnic minorities are Westerners³⁵ and that Muslims’ efforts to unify have failed. For example, the Islamic Party only gained 0.2 percent of all the ballots cast in the 2006 elections; most Muslims voted for mainstream parties.

In addition, Theo Cookson, a member of the Rotterdam city council, claims that, “a lot of people who call themselves ‘Muslim’ are very secular...no Turks will vote for a Moroccan.”³⁶ The Netherlands’ lack of tolerance for Muslim culture or for ethnic minorities in general is revelatory in both the rhetoric and controversy surrounding Wilders. Wilders’ rhetoric reveals a political disposition aimed at privileging the native Dutch. It ignores the diversity within Dutch culture while homogenizing other cultures.

Wilders’ highly publicized trial for hate speech illustrates the dilemmas associated with privileging native Dutch people. Wilders was acquitted of inciting contempt through hate speech. The Dutch courts found that his speech was simply “belittling.” However, one is forced to question the court’s verdict when we examine Wilders’ statement:

[W]hy are we afraid to say that Muslims should adapt because our norms and values are of a higher, better, nicer and more humane level of civilisation? Not integration, assimilation! And if the headscarves will protest on the Malieveld, let them come. I’ll have them for breakfast...If it ever may come to racial riots, which I really don’t want, then this doesn’t necessarily have to have a negative result.³⁷

Wilders’ remarks frame Muslim culture as inferior and threaten Muslims to assimilate, otherwise they will be killed. Hatred for difference is harboured such that native Dutch are encouraged to kill Muslims if they remain different from the Dutch. Therefore, the court’s decision to label Wilders’ speech as simply belittling illustrates the denial, if not hypocrisy, of the Dutch society and the state. Wilders’ remarks are incontestably xenophobic. Wilders’ party, the PVV, is clearly based on the premise that non-Westerners have no place if they do not adapt to Dutch society.³⁸ When the results of the trial are collated with the Sinterklaas events of November 21, 2010, it seems that, “the protections afforded by free speech are only available to those the state deems free in the first place...it makes clear that the law will protect the right of white Dutch people to be racist without consequences.”³⁹

The rise of populist parties against immigration is not simply rhetoric. The establishment of radical right-wing parties in politics uncovers the plight of the Netherlands to establish policies and an identity that confronts the pressures of globalization and the inequalities of the past (such as colonialism and slavery). The exaggerated rhetoric of radical right-wing parties has serious implications: it threatens the democratic nature of the Dutch state. The history of the Netherlands, though allegedly one of tolerance, is in fact one that is essentialist. The racialised tradition of Zwarte Piet and Sinterklaas, the response of the society to allegations that it is racist, and the concentration of ethnic minorities within the lower classes of society all reveal Dutch essentialism.

V. Zwarte Piet

Santa Claus, Sinterklaas in the Netherlands, was developed based on the legend of Saint Nicholas and is celebrated separately from the traditional Christmas holiday. Today the Dutch Sinterklaas comes from Spain by boat with a team of black servants referred to as Zwarte Piets (Black Petes). A few weeks before the celebration of the official holiday, Sinterklaas arrives with all his Petes on a steamboat into the city from Spain, with all the presents that were prepared during the year. His arrival is marked by a celebration. Adults perform for the children, the event is broadcasted on television, and the Mayor of a given city welcomes Sinterklaas while schools

and families welcome the Black Petes. Before December the 5th, children put their shoes in front of the fireplace in expectation of a visit from Sinterklaas, who, it is believed, travels by horse to all the houses while the Black Petes enter the house via the chimney and put little presents in the shoes.⁴⁰

The tradition is fun and festive, especially for the little children. However, the status and portrayal of Black Pete are reminiscent of colonialism and how blacks have been perceived historically. After the involvement of the Netherlands in the transatlantic slave trade, the literal blackness of the figure of Piet was associated with skin colour. Leading up to WWII, Zwarte Piet's responsibility was to find out which children had been bad and to either punish them by taking them away in his sack or whipping them. Today the image of Black Pete represents entertainment for other's enjoyment. He no longer punishes the bad children, but helps Sinterklaas deliver presents.

Dutch scholar Jan Nerderveen Pieterse affirms that the tradition of Black Petes and Sinterklaas clearly points out vestiges from Europe's colonial past and in general its view of the "negro" over time.⁴¹ He describes the relationship as one between Europe and the "savage." Pieterse explains the discourse on the relation between the savage and Europe colonialism in three ways. First, Pieterse pinpoints Europe's view and portrayal of the African as the enemy. He purports that the framing of the black man as a threat to European order and civilization was very deliberate and strategic, hence the use of Black Pete to punish bad children. Pieterse interprets the need to create an enemy as a part of an increasing class struggle in Europe, evidenced in "the development of nationalist and racial propaganda as a means of neutralizing the class struggle and transforming class solidarity into national and racial solidarity which would not be controllable from above."⁴² According to Pieterse, the "brutal savage" took the role of Europe's enemy, replacing the European elite as the enemy of the underclass.

Second, Pieterse outlines Europe's patronizing and paternalistic view of the African. With the advent of colonialism, the black man as a political subject was constructed as "childlike, unintelligent, harmless and content with colonial rule."⁴³ Africans were, therefore, like children who needed care. Pieterse claims this was necessary as a justification for colonialism. Eventually, the African was viewed as a spectacle and as entertainment to be used for the enjoyment of Europeans.

The black man as a spectacle is evident in the depictions of Black Pete as an acrobat, arguably a monkey running and jumping around performing different stunts. Like the depictions of Black Pete, the media and even children's books (based on the research of Bianca Berend) negatively portray black people as unintelligent, idle, and clownish.

Third, Pieterse pinpoints the distinction between servant and master during colonialism, clearly evident in the tradition of Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet. Sinterklaas, as the director, has control over the actions of Black Pete. Black Pete is hired by Sinterklaas, who tells Black Pete to give him his book or hold his stick. Black Pete always stands while Sinterklaas sits, holding the sack of presents in one hand.⁴⁴ In summary, the tradition's depiction of the Negro as a savage and an inferior, according to Pieterse, is directly related to the Eurocentric belief that technology and industrialisation are symbols of whiteness and Western culture, excluding the "other" civilization.⁴⁵

Many Dutch fail to recognize the discriminatory connotations in the depictions of Black Pete. In a *Humanity in Action* report, Brown and Tavares assess the recurring argument in defence of the Dutch Saint Nicholas tradition as "Why do we have to change tradition? We've been celebrating it this way for years...furthermore it is for children who love him and therefore it is not racist."⁴⁶ Justifying Zwarte Piet as a non-racist tradition, the Dutch argue that children

interpret things in less advanced ways than adults and thus children are unable to comprehend differences between Zwarte Piet and Sinterklaas. However, Bianca Berend, in studying image building in the Sinterklaas and Zwarte Piet stories, asserts that the tradition does indeed affect how the Dutch society views blacks. Despite the effect of Zwarte Piet on children's views of blacks, Berend maintains that Zwarte Piet cannot be interpreted as racism because it is not explicitly racist. In response to Berend, Brown and Tavares challenge the Dutch society to think carefully about the tradition and the meaning of racism.

Reflecting on the challenges Brown and Tavares present to the Dutch, the seriousness of the racist connotations of Zwarte Piet and the response of the Dutch society are emphasized in the incident of Saturday, November 21, 2011, in which a man was brutally beaten for peacefully protesting the racist connotations of Zwarte Piet. This incident is explicitly racist. Brown and Tavares ask whether the Dutch's adamant denial of racism is due to ignorance or a fear of one's own demons. They also question why the issues of racism have not been brought up before and challenge the view that racism must be explicit. They argue that many times those who claim to be free from prejudice are actually influenced by it.⁴⁷ Racism does not have to be explicit and open to be harmful. In fact, Brown and Tavares argue that by denying the existence of racism, another form of racism is created. The realities of oppressed peoples are dismissed, their conditions are judged, and they are blamed for their condition, bringing them further harm. The need to protect one's ego and comfort, they contend, may very well be the situation that Holland is experiencing. It is argued that something so obvious should not be so difficult to recognize. The adamant denial of racism makes the Dutch unable to recognize or understand the intricacies and impact of institutional racism in an open and objective way. Brown and Tavares advertise that a new form of consciousness must be adhered to, not because one is against something but because one is free from it.⁴⁸

In response to those people who only recognise Sinterklaas as an old Dutch tradition, Brown and Tavares urge us to ask if they believe that people of different cultures who come to the Netherlands should adhere to their religion regardless of anything else. They challenge outsiders to show the Dutch their hypocrisy. When they say that it is tradition, they should respond, "so is racism."⁴⁹

VI. The Concentration of Poverty among Ethnic Minorities

The study results of the Dutch Social and Cultural Planning Office (SCP), 1997 to 2003, reveal that non-Western ethnic minority households tend to occupy the bottom of the income distribution due to unemployment and low job skill levels. Of particular concern to the SCP is the fact that members of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands appear to be worse off relative to those in other European countries.⁵⁰ The SCP report provides poverty statistics among the households of non-Western ethnic minorities: Moroccans are at 38 percent, Antilleans 32 percent, the Turkish 30 percent, the Surinamese 27 percent, and "other" non-Western ethnic minorities make up 40 percent. This is in comparison to native indigenous households, in which poverty accounts for 11 percent.⁵¹ For the last four years, 14 percent of ethnic minorities have been low income in comparison to 5 percent of the indigenous population.⁵² With regard to the number of individuals below or just around the statutory minimum income, non-Western ethnic minorities account for 24 percent while indigenous households account for 8 percent.⁵³

Particularly significant are the enormous differences between non-Western ethnic minorities and indigenous populations who share the same characteristics. For example, of non-active ethnic minorities, 71 percent are found to be low income, compared to 21 percent of native

Dutch.⁵⁴ Of the retired population, 53 percent of non-Western minorities are in the low-income group, compared to 14 percent of the indigenous population. Comparing the percentage of the population on benefits, 74 percent of minorities are poor compared with 45 percent of indigenous Dutch claimants.⁵⁵

The low-income population is concentrated within the same categories, but poverty seems to be more severe among minorities within the categories. SCP attributes this to the social position of minorities.⁵⁶ Generally, among Turks and Moroccans, only 40 percent have a primary school education. However, in cases in which the Turks and Moroccans are more educated than the native Dutch, they are still disadvantaged. For example, there are more unemployed Moroccan or Turkish workers from a variety of education levels compared with the native Dutch workers with the lowest level of education, who are over-represented in registered employment.⁵⁷

A number of factors explain why ethnic minorities, particularly Turks and Moroccans, suffer from poverty and the least opportunities. First, the Dutch economy has undergone intense restructuring and skills upgrading. Guest workers (Turks and Moroccans) have not been able to live up to these standards. Like with native low-skilled Dutch, this has resulted in unemployment, early retirement schemes, and increased disability benefits. Big disadvantages in job level, participation level, and unemployment can be attributed to less schooling. In general, ethnic minorities have a low position in the labour market; thus, unemployment is substantially higher. Turks, Moroccans, and refugees mostly occupy lower grade jobs. Moreover, the level of benefits received is based on money earned in one's previous job.

Second, and most important, are hiring patterns and the discriminatory preferences of employers. Mediterraneans are less likely to be hired than Surinamese and Antilleans. At a 48.6 percent chance of being hired, the Dutch have the best likelihood.⁵⁸ This is due to the demands of the employer: good language proficiency, length of stay as an indication of the level of assimilation, and age and education as an indication of experience. Discrimination is the largest contributing factor to the difference in employment possibilities (more than half) between the Dutch and ethnic minorities. Indigenous Dutch occupy far more jobs with more promotional opportunities.⁵⁹

It must be noted that the practise within the system of pillarization of allowing immigrants to maintain classes in their own language, along with the choice of attending schools and other institutions with only individuals of their own culture, affects their Dutch language proficiency and assimilation into Dutch culture. For an ethnic minority, the probability of gaining a job, whether high income or low income, is thus lowered.

VII. Effect on Dutch Society

There has rarely been any open public debate in Holland about the continual racism experienced by some ethnic minorities or the exclusions (inequalities) they experience in the labour market and educational system. What the sparse debate highlights is the appeal for sameness that for many seems to be an immediate antidote to the anxiety that is created by economic and political uncertainty. An intense fear of difference has emerged in the Netherlands, such that the "other" is made out to be an enemy and what is Dutch is construed to be the gold standard for humanity. The effect of this shift to a policy of conformity and assimilationism can be examined using three concepts: narcissism, democracy, and reciprocity.

VIII. Narcissism

In his book *White On Black*, N. J. Pieterse emphasizes the following:

...in a world that is becoming smaller and societies that are becoming multi-cultural, it may be time for western culture to examine itself critically in terms of its view of others cultures; for how much of western culture is made up of the prejudices about other cultures, how much of western identity is constructed upon the negative identity of others.⁶⁰

The movement to construct a Dutch national identity is based on the negative identity of the “other.” The Netherlands has characterized its identity as modern and tolerant while framing Muslim culture, the “other,” as backward and intolerant. Manipulating the negative stereotypes of the “other” is not a viable foundation upon which to construct a national identity, and, as such, the Netherlands will have to face the consequences of inequality and racism.

The fear and insecurity caused by the economic pressures of globalization—the increased social distance, the focus on the individual, and market competition—have manifested themselves in an intense form of nationalism resulting in the overvaluing of what is “Dutch.” These fears are so pervasive that the society is unable to step outside of itself to recognize its problems and the validity of the “other.” Michael Ignatieff vividly explains this phenomenon, referring to the tendency within a nationalist movement to construct a new identity that is developed out of fear.⁶¹ Fear connects to the need to preserve oneself and thus to join together. Therefore, nationalism, according to Ignatieff, is a fiction that necessitates “a willing suspension of disbelief,”⁶² a collective amnesia, and the overlooking of certain realities.

The xenophobia witnessed through the rhetoric used by populist parties and manifested as discrimination is a part of a language game to break down the “other.” The multiplicity and heterogeneity of the “other” is denied, and the primacy of national belonging comes to the fore.⁶³ The notion of Hobbesian fear and nationalist paranoia take over and the feelings of fellowship, empowerment, and human solidarity are rejected.⁶⁴ Neutral facts, as witnessed in the arguments of Pim Fortuyn, are put together to create a narrative, to reify the concept of the nation and, thus, of self-determination. The people begin defining themselves based on these neutral facts and traditions, which may or may not hold great truths.⁶⁵ Often this leads to a view of oneself as constructed based on one axis of identity, thereby developing a narcissistic self-regard. To elaborate, “Group pride is activated exacerbating intolerance. The overvaluing of self leads to a devaluing of strangers and outsiders. Closed-mindedness emerges through the constant referral to self.”⁶⁶ One becomes unable to look outside of oneself and reflect. The thought of oneself as being superior legitimizes the intolerance of the “other.” “A fantasy of purity”⁶⁷ is developed such that one is always right and the other is always wrong.

Within the Netherlands, the focus on what is Dutch and the importance of Dutch loyalty serves to construct Dutchness as a position of power, privilege, and neutrality. Within the nationalist movement, the only option of what is a respectable way of life is what is Dutch. White Dutch are framed as the real Dutch, “autochthones.”⁶⁸ Any non-Dutch, non-Westerner lies outside the periphery of what is Dutch and is framed forever as an “allochthone.”⁶⁹ No room is left for the “hyphenated” Dutch, such as the Dutch-Moroccan. A duality of citizenship develops because citizenship has become “cultured,” resulting in a cultural fundamentalism in which the Dutch culture, and in particular Muslim culture, is homogenized and individuals are judged based on

predetermined stereotypes. The logical outcome is not only the exclusion of minorities but also of the native Dutch by silencing certain viewpoints and leaving no room for discussion.

IX. Democracy

Halleh Ghorashi suggests that Dutch society as a democracy is jeopardized by the cultural fundamentalism that has arisen in its nationalist movement.⁷⁰ Using Forst Rainer's four conceptions of tolerance, it can be argued that tolerance within the Netherlands has become framed by a "permission conception of tolerance," whereby the majority tolerates the minority and sets the rules on the limits of tolerance. A permission conception of tolerance is anti-democratic because ethnic minorities are not included in negotiations nor are they considered part of the social contract. Hannah Arendt illuminates this concept when she asserts the necessity of political participation by the citizenry. In other words, an exchange and discussion among perspectives such that one puts aside one's own perspective to listen to the "other" is vital to democracy.

Referring to democracy and human rights, David Beetham labels a permission conception of tolerance as the tyranny of the majority. Within a democracy, according to both Rawls and Beetham, one culture or group of people should not be privileged over another. Everyone has the right to be heard. These rights have been breached in the Netherlands, as evidenced by the incident of Saturday, November 21, 2010, and the Geert Wilders acquittal for hate speech. It is the non-Westerner (non-Dutch) who is presented as unworthy of recognition; he is not to be seen or heard and is required to conform to Dutch beliefs.

Moreover, the intense denial of being racist gives birth to another form of racism that denies the existence of struggles by ethnic minorities. The discrepancies within the Dutch system of government are unrecognized, and minorities are blamed for their lack of integration. Their right to proper access to the services of Dutch society, for example employment, are based on how integrated, how "Dutch," immigrants have become. Based on the rights of a person in a true democracy, the religious or cultural affiliation of an individual should not determine the rights they are afforded. Rarely included in the debate about the failure of some migrants to integrate is the marginalization of various immigrant and ethnic minority groups. In the Netherlands, Ghorashi explains:

...the discursive assumption is that once immigrants have distanced themselves from their culture and assimilate into Dutch culture, their social and economic problems will be eradicated. Immigrants, if they remain strongly attached to the cultures or religions of their home countries, are not seen as integrating into the host society and are therefore blamed for their status.⁷¹

These ideas provide a breeding ground for racism and discrimination.

Inequality is masked through the concepts of individuality and meritocracy. According to Beetham, the task of the democratic debate is to create a balance between collective and individual rights. In the Netherlands, this balance is not being maintained because there is no negotiation. Dinjens agrees that the rhetoric used by populist parties is part of a democratic debate, but the problem within the Netherlands is that the citizens do not debate. If we are to concur with Arendt's viewpoint that the participation of citizens through continual dialogue is a fundamental part of democracy, then something is fundamentally wrong.

A study by Menno Hurenkamp, Evelien Tonkens, and Jan Willem Duyvendak on the conception of citizenship within the Netherlands concluded that the Netherlands is in desperate need of an avenue to debate citizenship—not just unity and similarities but also dissension and difference.⁷² The study ascertained that citizenship within the Netherlands has become a social affair, such that citizenship is considered only as an identity and thus primarily a cultural matter.⁷³ The civic aspect of citizenship is not given priority; it comes in at a distant second. Many Dutch citizens are not interested in engaging in debates, meetings, or participating in society. Therefore, society becomes inert and disillusioned, as the citizens do not actively engage in how they are governed or take stances on issues. Most citizens recognize their duties not as absolute but as a result of a reprisal-based system of cooperation with the government, other citizens, and civil society.⁷⁴ Both native Dutch and ethnic minority citizens are unwilling to debate and negotiate. They have very low political expectations and prefer to opt out of conflicts rather than talk them through,⁷⁵ thus compromising the Netherlands' democratic values.

Ellie Vasta, using the Netherlands as an example, asserts that a neo-authoritarian drift that affects social cohesion and solidarity has developed within Western democracy.⁷⁶ Through its shift to policy conformity, the Netherlands is creating more divisions within society. Vasta argues that there are two sides to the argument of social cohesion. The nationalist movement in the Netherlands has failed to take into account that social “cohesion can lead to domination and exclusion, leading to the creation of in-groups and out-groups that in turn can lead to inequality. Solidarity cannot be romanticized to exclude difference (class, gender, ethnicity, age) and other forms of social exclusion.”⁷⁷ Dinjens agrees with the romanticism of solidarity, stating that intolerance in the Netherlands is framed such that only ethnic minorities are capable of being intolerant while Dutch culture is seen as inherently tolerant. He pronounces this to be false in reality because there are numerous incidences of Dutch intolerance against minorities, disabled native Dutch people, and homosexuals.

Through the overvaluing of self and a strong belief in their own tolerance, the Dutch fail to question how their structures may be discriminatory, marginalizing both ethnic minorities and natives. The Dutch use the minorities to sidetrack real issues within the nationalist movement, creating a serious problem. The problems of globalization cannot be escaped. Equality is an important part of a democracy. It is therefore necessary that unequal power relations be dealt with; if not, social cohesion cannot be achieved. Inequality and prejudice affect the viability of the nation.

X. Tolerance

Gabriëls argues that the Netherlands (and all societies) should develop a respectful conception of tolerance for the “other,” even though we may not agree with his or her beliefs. There must be dialogue with others so that some form of agreement may be established about what is necessary for the common good. Through understanding each other, we can overcome our fear of difference and challenge the existing system. The Netherlands must be willing to debate.

Applicable to the debate on developing a respectful conception of tolerance in the Netherlands is the question: Does being liberal (or claiming to be liberal) and modern automatically mean that one is incapable of intolerance? Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonken ask us to question the issue of sexuality (equating views on sexuality, gender, homosexuality, and gender equality, to cultural identity) and liberal nationalism emerging from the campaigns of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders. The scholars question the “instrumentalisation” of liberalism and the genuineness of the Netherlands' liberal values, in particular its allegiance to homosexuality.

The Netherlands' stance on homosexuality is used as a strong argument against Muslims to legitimize the claim that Muslims are backward and homophobic. In the utilization of this argument, these scholars contend that gayness is constructed as normal, such that "the articulations of lesbian and gay identity...no longer threaten but replicate and underscore heteronormative assumptions and structures."⁷⁸ Thus secularization and the proclaimed liberalization of the Netherlands do not automatically mean that a society is tolerant. Liberalism and democracy are fabricated as the antithesis of multiculturalism. This is problematic as it is used as a means of control and exclusion. It mutually excludes cultural and sexual representations. This is a valid concern. For example, the president of Anti-discriminatie, in the province of Limburg, still thinks that the Netherlands has a long way to go in achieving gay rights. Dinjens maintains that discrimination against homosexuals is not only a problem among Moroccan youth, as is commonly argued in the nationalistic movement, it is also a problem among native Dutch.

XI. Expansion of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism should be mutually accommodating. It must include the whole society and not just immigrants. It should foster equality and full participation, and seek to understand racism through engaging with it as an underlying social phenomenon deeply rooted in the histories, cultures, traditions, and institutions of Western democracies.⁷⁹

Based on the argument of Rainer Baübock, mutual accommodation involves the adaptation of the inserted group into the existing conditions. It entails a change in the structure of the larger society and a redefinition of cohesion. With accommodation, differences become internalized, such that the distinctions within social positions and membership groups in society are accepted.⁸⁰

Multiculturalism should be good for the whole society. Through the creation of a multicultural national identity, one can eliminate the fear and the view of multiculturalism as segregationist and tribal.⁸¹ It helps to promote the philosophy that multiculturalism is about the acceptance of immigration and cultural diversity by the society and its institutions, through recognizing immigrants and their children as legitimate citizens.⁸² Through the adoption of this philosophy, the fluidity of national identity will be recognized and the idea of national identity as something that must be homogenous is laid aside.⁸³ Only through establishing mutual accommodation and multiculturalism for all can equality and full participation arise.

XII. Lessons

The Netherlands' struggle with narcissism teaches six concrete lessons. First, it exhibits the need to be aware that even the powerful can become confused and overpowered. The phenomenon of globalization is not one-dimensional. It affects both the poor and the rich, the Global North and the Global South. Globalization is thus an independent force to which all must be held accountable and respect.

Second, it illustrates that there is a difference between essence and actuality. For example, the "essence" of the Netherlands is that of ultimate liberalism, democracy, tolerance, and freedom—but this is not how Netherlands is in actuality. Therefore, it is important to know that things are not always the way they seem.

Third, identity is central to the way societies are organized. The fulcrum of a nation is its identity. When a nation's identity is at stake, the essence and viability of the nation is at stake. A

nation must not only be aware of its identity but must also be involved in constant debates about its identity in order to maintain its central values and objectives.

Fourth, no society begets itself, and globalization is both old and new. The Netherlands must confront both its history of colonialism and slavery and the pressures of globalization. The old and new aspects of globalization cannot be separated. In the Netherlands new aspects of globalization must confront the old in order for the country to maintain stability and prosperity. There must be coherence within society. Therefore the Netherlands cannot claim to be liberal and democratic, yet continue to be intolerant. Native Dutch have to communicate with immigrants. Not only do immigrants occupy vital jobs on the lower rungs of society that are not being occupied by native Dutch, they also provide hope of sustainability within an aging Dutch society. The continued discrimination against immigrants will cause the standard of living, peace, and development within the Netherlands to decline.

Fifth, the struggle for collective rights can undermine individual rights. Thus, a balance must be maintained between individual and collective rights. Arguably, in some instances, to the extent that fundamental rights are violated, individual rights trump collective rights. Ironically, the Netherlands faces this dilemma in two ways. The Netherlands' fear of Islam's intolerance of homosexuality, for example, is because the Dutch claim they value individual rights. However their fear, expressed in the nationalist movement, not only threatens the individual right of a Muslim to have his or her own beliefs but also the respect for homosexuals is compromised because of the instrumentalisation of sexuality in national politics.

Sixth and last, in the words of Michael Ignatieff, "globalism scours away distinctiveness at the surface of our identities and forces us back into ever more assertive defense of the inner differences: language, mentality, myth and fantasy"⁸⁴ that escape the surface scouring. As globalization brings us closer together, we become neighbours and old boundaries of national and regional identity are destroyed. In response, individuals cling to the remaining margins of difference.

XIII. Conclusion

With the intensification of globalization, Europe has been forced to confront difference brought about through increased migration. This confrontation is made even more difficult due to phenomena like increased financial difficulties, regionalization via the European Union, instability within the economy, an increase in migrants, political and social tensions, heightened underdevelopment and turmoil in the Third World, change in types of work, the greater use of technology, and increased individualism. Dutch society is pressured by and fearful of these sudden changes. The fear of a loss of power and identity has resulted in a shift to integrationist, assimilatory, and conformist migrant policies.

A dual discourse of citizenship and cultural fundamentalism has developed whereby only the "real" (white and Western) Dutch constitute civilization and open-mindedness while the non-Dutch (the unwanted non-Western ethnic minorities) are considered backward and intolerant. Dutchness is not only constructed in a narrow way but as a privilege, the standard for humanity, while what is non-Dutch falls outside the realm of humanity. Within this narcissistic rhetoric lies a deep oxymoron: the instrumentalisation of liberalism and so-called democracy creates a society that is inherently unjust and undemocratic. The Dutch society is not an active civil society concerned with rights or the active reshaping of the Netherlands and the importance of keeping the government accountable.⁸⁵ Moreover, by only recognizing the "wrong" in the "non-Dutch,"

the Dutch fail to acknowledge their inherent prejudices that are not only detrimental to the “other” but also to the native Dutch themselves.

This essay reveals the problems with identity that continue to trap both ethnic minorities and natives today. Overcoming the challenges of difference and globalization affects how we move forward in the world. As Manuel Castells explains, “Racism is a threat, not only to immigrants themselves, but also to democratic institutions and social order. Analysis of the causes and effects of racism must therefore take a central place in any discussion of international migration and its effects on society [politically and socially].”⁸⁶

Professor Frank Lechner paints a portrait of the Netherlands as a country in constant motion with the world, while struggling toward coherence. He argues that the Netherlands has experienced major changes, many of which stem from globalization. This period of globalizing change, he purports, has triggered a national rebuilding phase. The confluence of external change and domestic turmoil, as well as uncertainty among the elite, has caused cultural confusion within the Netherlands. Lechner emphasizes that the need to be self-aware and open in controlling the effects of global pressures is a way of “being at home in the world.”⁸⁷ A nation must realize that its national identity is not static but must be flexible in order to be of any global significance. Lechner further asserts that it makes no sense to turn the “national ‘shell’ into a bulwark to be preserved at all cost.”⁸⁸ Instead, what proves to be the most important underlying factor for the Netherlands is the search for a cosmopolitan brand of nationalism, a goal that can only be achieved through the pursuit of a civic multiculturalism.

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