Everyday autochthony: Difference, discontent and the politics of home in Amsterdam
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CHAPTER 4
Knowing the Other. Everyday life and the politics of alterity

In the spring of 2010 I visited an 88-year old man named Mr. Vroom who had lived in New West since 1956, thus he had lived in the district since the very beginning. Mr. Vroom had run a bar in Geuzenveld - a neighborhood in New West close to Slotermeer - for twenty-five years. As we were discussing the transformation of the neighborhood, he smiled and got up to get a file with poems his wife had written when she was still alive. There was one poem he particularly wanted to read to me. It was simply called ‘Slotermeer’:

Ja, wijk, je was nog
niet gebouwd
en je bewoners pas getrouwd
Je kinderen speelden
in je zand
Dat zand werd langzaam groen
Er kwamen speeltuin en plantsoen
en boompjes aan de kant
We woonden heel gezellig hier
Hadden met buren veel plezier
Je was ons zo vertrouwd
We werden samen oud
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De kinderen gingen
elders heen
De oudjes bleven
hier alleen
Maar wijk,
hoe is het nu gegaan?
De buren kunnen we niet verstaan
Je bent ons niet meer zo vertrouwd
We voelen ons
alleen en oud.

In this poem Mr. Vroom’s wife captured the feelings of loss and nostalgia for a past ‘home’ that many ‘white’ Dutch residents of this neighborhood - especially when they were older - told me they had experienced, a nostalgia grounded in an emotional sense of lost familiarity, intimacy, and trust. The poem recalls an imagined past in which not only the materiality of the neighborhood was intimately known and familiar, but in which people also had something ‘in common’ with their neighbors. The neighborhood therefore ‘felt’ - according to Vroom’s late wife - ‘familiar’ and ‘trusted’, as denoted in the phrase ‘je was ons zo vertrouwd’. Moreover, this intimate knowledge between neighbors had been sufficient basis to have fun [plezier].

In this narrative immigrants represent a theft of enjoyment (Van der Veer, 2006; Hansen, 1996). Familiarity in the poem is not only located in the past, but also explicitly counterposed to

27 Neighborhood, you had not yet been built / Your people were just married / Your children played in the sand / That sand slowly became green / Playgrounds came and parks / And trees / We were happy here / Had fun with neighbors / You were so familiar, so trusted / We grew old together / The children moved away / The old stayed / But neighborhood, what has happened now? / We no longer understand our neighbors / You have become strange, no longer so familiar / We feel alone and old.
a contemporary situation in which the proximity of ‘strangers’ - whom one cannot understand linguistically and culturally [verstaan] - has led to a decrease of intersubjective trust and fun. In this chapter, I will look critically at this discourse of familiarity and difference in people’s everyday narratives. It seems to me that it plays a key role in the politics of autochthony, which are grounded precisely in the notion that a particular intimacy - a sense of belonging, home, and trust - has disappeared as the result of globalization and immigration.

In the previous chapters I have attempted to demonstrate how culturalist conceptions concerning the alterity of minoritized Others shape people’s perspectives on the world, the ways in which they negotiate and ‘make sense’ of the transformation of everyday life in the neighborhood. In Chapter 2 I have shown how the struggle to stay put, for the ‘right to the city’, has been entwined with a particular sense of autochthonous entitlement. Within the discourse of displacement, sometimes post-migrant neighbors are seen as ‘space invaders’ who are considered less entitled to the city than self-proclaimed original, white Amsterdammers. In chapter 3 I have argued that within discourses surrounding stigma and public space, the ‘allochthonous’ Other is sometimes framed as the agent of decreasing respectability: post-migrant communities - supposedly - have not fully adjusted to respectable values and habit. Post-migrant citizens - physically recognizable - in the eyes of some citizens have come to embody disarray, social disorder, and unwanted social transformation.

In this chapter I flesh out in more detail the everyday politics of alterity in New West. In the Introduction to this book I have already discussed some of the literature on ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec, 2007; Wessendorf, 2014). As I have pointed out, super-diversity is sometimes seen as going hand in hand with a normalization of difference in the public arena. Susanne Wessendorf (2014), for instance, argues that in Hackney people have come to
experience ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity as a normal part of everyday life. Paul Gilroy discusses this phenomenon as ‘conviviality’ - ‘referring to the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas’ (Wessendorf, 2014: 393). Gilroy, to be sure, also argues that ‘conviviality’ does not signal the end of race or racism: indeed he points out postcolonial societies must choose between the racializing logics of postcolonial melancholia and multicultural conviviality, democracy, and pleasure.

As I have pointed out in the Introduction, my findings in Amsterdam New West do not resonate very well with Wessendorf’s analysis in Hackney. While I am not taking issue per se with Wessendorf’s findings in Hackney, my focus is on the culturalization of everyday life and the strong persistence, of cultural, ethnic, and racialized stereotypes within the culturalist common sense - and therefore within the production of everyday life in the neighborhood. I agree with Gill Valentine when she argues against overly optimistic accounts of lived ‘multiculture’ in contemporary cities in Western Europe. Valentine is critical of representations that focus on urban civility and successful interculturalism: ‘Some of the writing about cosmopolitanism and new urban citizenship appears to be laced with a worrying romanticisation of urban encounter and to implicitly reproduce a potentially naive assumption that contact with ‘Others’ necessarily translates into respect for difference.’ Valentine points out that the encounter with difference does not necessarily lead to increasing understanding of, or positive respect for the Other. Proximity does not, per se, lead to more intercultural understanding. I will focus on the various ways in which a culturalist mode of ‘knowing the Other’ is produced and maintained in everyday speech acts, in and through which autochthonous self-understanding comes into being.
Enacting autochthony: change and cultural loss
The rhetorical trope of the autochthonous ‘everyman’ - racialized as white - whose sense of home and place has been undermined by immigration and elite-supported multiculturalism over the years has come to play a central role in Dutch politics (Duyvendak 2011). The rhetorical figure of the ordinary autochthon has moved from the margins to the centre of Dutch political and public discourse with the recent rise of nationalism and culturalism. The idea that immigration is unfair to ‘the everyman’ - always racialized as white - of course is not unique to the Netherlands. Martin Barker was already arguing in 1981 that this common sense notion, central to what he called ‘the new racism’ in Britain, was linked ‘to the defense of a ‘way of life’ against ‘alien invasion’” (Lentin and Titley 2011: 73). The discourse of autochthony – grounded in a peculiar notion of the ‘white’ everyman – rests on what Uitermark, Duyvendak and I have elsewhere called ‘cultural protectionism’ (2014; see also Balkenhol et al., 2015). The mobilization of this figure, whose resistance to immigration is framed as natural and common sense, fundamentally inverts the meaning of racial prejudice. ‘Racism now becomes the very refusal of immigrants to adopt the national lifestyle of their host country’ (Lentin and Titley 2011: 74). In other words, the problem is no longer racism but the alleged lack of assimilation among racialized Others. While this critique is correct, it does not exempt us from the task of analyzing the sense of cultural loss on which the politics and everyday logic of autochthony is built.

I interviewed Maria (53) and Dora (73), friends and neighbors in the Louis Couperusbuurt district, in Dora’s home in the spring of 2010. Neither was part of the network of active citizens in New West with whom I had been spending a lot of time. I was referred to them by one of their neighbors, Rick, to whom I had expressed my worries that I was only going to meet active – and more or less politicized – residents like himself. He put me in touch with Maria
and Dora. ‘They are just ordinary people, they are not active at all’, he said.

Maria asked me why she had, ‘in God’s name’, been selected for an interview. ‘I know nothing about nothing’ [ik weet niks van niks], she said. She was quite anxious about the interview and – although I had not suggested the topic at all – told me explicitly that she did not want to talk about ‘allochtonen’. ‘If it is about that, I don’t want to participate.’ She felt the issue was too sensitive and disliked the fact that it was so prevalent in her daily conversations with neighbors. I assured Maria that she had no obligation to talk about anything she did not want to, after which she agreed to the interview, emphasizing that she would only talk to me once, that I could not mention her real name, and that the interview had to take place at her friend Dora’s home.

When I arrived, Maria’s anxiety had not abated but Dora’s mood was more or less the exact opposite of that of her friend: she was relaxed and made fun of my research, which she was unable to take seriously – reflecting the cynical views of academia that I often encountered during my fieldwork in New West. Like Maria, Dora had no idea why I would want to interview her. We sat at her table and I was offered coffee in a huge mug while Dora’s small dog crawled on my lap. Before I explained my interest in the neighborhood and my research objectives, I had taken my recording device out of my bag, put it on the table and asked permission to record the conversation. At first both women agreed, but the mood changed when Maria noticed that Dora was going to talk about ‘allochtonen’ after all. She anxiously asked me to turn off the recording device, which I did. She demanded that I repeat my assurance that I was not going to use her real name, and explained why she disliked talking about the ‘multicultural’ aspects of her neighborhood. ‘To be honest, it makes me sick, all that talk about the foreigners [de buitenlanders]. It’s fake, it’s not real (niet authentiek): people are either for or against.’ I did not quite understand what Maria meant,
so I asked her to elaborate. Maria looked at Dora for confirmation as she explained:

Look, people have started acting very strangely, when talking about foreigners. Don't you think so, Dora? Suddenly they are either for or against. For instance, people who would normally just walk by, these days they suddenly feel the urge to pat these foreign children [buitenlandse kinderen] on the head. To show something – to show that they are not against them. Very strange behavior. Niet authentiek! Yes, I hate all this stupid talk about the multicultural society.

It occurred to me that Maria was reflecting on something important - the prevalence of the debate on multiculturalism and ‘integration’ in the public sphere and in everyday life. I asked: ‘Why do you think people act like this?’ Dora responded:

These days everything is multi-culti. Maria is right, in the past nobody talked about that – you did not think in terms of ‘autochtoon-allochtoon’. But, well, that was before we were flooded [overspoeld] [with immigrants – PM]. We used to think they were fun (geinig) – a black child, with different hair. You could pat them on the head; that was nice. (Die aaide je dan lekker over de bol). Yes, we thought it was fun back then. But now of course they are everywhere.

The somatic aspects of cultural difference – the materiality of the bodies of culturalized Others – entered Dora's discourse here. Maria was uncomfortable and did her best to steer the conversation to another topic:
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I thought we were going to talk about the demolition? Because I no longer recognize Amsterdam, and that is not just because of the foreigners. Everywhere they are demolishing and restructuring the city – it gives you a strange feeling.

As I see it, here Maria reflected on the way culturalist discourse imposed meaning on social transformation, how change at the level of lived experience was being discussed daily in connection to migrant alterity and integration. The discourse of discontent surrounding demographic change and ‘integration’ can often be understood as a form of diffused commentary on social transformation and cultural loss in more general terms. In the discourse of many white ‘autochthons’, migrants were represented as embodying unwanted urban change, framed as agents of (or otherwise connected to) a broader sense of cultural loss. As such, the minoritized, culturalized migrant Other became part and parcel of a more general discourse of discontent concerning ‘these times’ that were – so to speak – passing people by.

This, in my view, is how Maria’s point should be understood. The fact that she no longer recognized Amsterdam, she was arguing, was not only contingent upon the proximity of cultural Others. The sense of cultural loss that people commented upon when they expressed discontent with the ‘super-diverse’ character of their neighborhood was about more than the alterity of their neighbors. Maria said:

When I first came here to view the house – almost thirty years ago – there was a neighbor who invited me in! Who invited me in! While she did not know me at all! She showed me her house. I could hardly believe it, because in other parts of Amsterdam that was not something people did anymore. I had grown
up in a neighborhood in which the atmosphere had already become cold. So I had never experienced such hospitality and trust. When I came here the atmosphere was so homey, so cozy... I could not believe it.

Maria thus recalled a sense of homeliness and belonging that, in her memory, had suffused her neighborhood. She continued:

In the past people would sweep the sidewalk here, you know. People were enormously neat. With soap and everything! I have to say, I wasn't used to that at all when I moved in here thirty years ago. I came from a neighborhood in which people did not do that. But I adjusted of course. So I started doing that too. Because people here simply felt this was important. Ha, ha, ha, imagine asking your neighbors that now.

She laughed heartily, and so did Dora. They agreed that the sense of collective purpose and obligation that in their eyes had characterized the recent past would be unthinkable today. In Maria’s memory this social cohesion had always been a peculiar quality of the place to which she had come - the Louis Couperusbuurt in Slotermeer, Amsterdam New West. Less a quality of ‘autochthonous’ culture, homeliness here was construed as a matter of geographical location within the city. The Couperusbuurt was like a little village, Maria said, and should stay that way. It stood in stark contrast to other parts of Amsterdam that in her view were more anonymous and alienating. This is why she opposed the demolition plans, but also why she resisted a reductionist explanation of social change and growing alienation in terms of the autochthonous–allochthonous divide and anti-multiculturalist discourse. Maria generally preferred continuity and had a palpable distaste for change:
Why are they constantly changing everything? Why can’t they leave things as they are? So many things are changing. There are so many activities now. I don’t like activities at all: it only leads to unrest. You are expected to participate…. But all I want is to stroll along the lake. But what have they done? They have taken away my footpath, because people wanted a running path. So they dumped asphalt there. If that doesn’t drive you mad…. And in the past one could swim in the Sloterplas – now that’s forbidden too. That has also disappeared. And everywhere small restaurants pop up. That’s crazy, right? Why can’t people simply eat at home?

It seemed to me that Maria was trying to find a language with which to talk about transformations in the city without taking refuge in the idiom offered by the culturalist framework. However, she could not prevent the conversation from drifting to the question of autochthony and allochthony which was central to her friend Dora’s perspective on things. Perceived transformations at the level of decency and cleanliness were discursively linked to the influx of ‘allochtonen’, and for Dora, neighbors unwilling to sweep the sidewalk were construed as the allochthonous ‘Other’. Following up on this issue, she stated: ‘Hun auto’s houden ze wel bij.’ [They do maintain their cars].

The use of the word ‘their’ [hun] is pivotal here because it holds both social and expressive, affective meaning (Besnier 1990: 419): it refers not only to a specific category – allochtonen – but signifies the speaker’s emotional disposition to this category. Dora said:

Recently one of them told me he was going to clean something, but I had misunderstood because they don’t
speak Dutch. That drives one crazy. That language, even when they are born here.... I really hate that. They simply do not speak Dutch at home; well, of course they are never going to learn.

What must be noted here is the commonplace way in which Dora generalized from the particular. She referred to one of her neighbors as ‘one of them’ and later shifted, almost imperceptibly, from the word ‘he’ – referring to a particular neighbor – to the word ‘they’ – referring to the category of allochtonen. The unreflective way in which the figure of the allochthonous Other emerges in everyday speech-acts is of central analytic importance. It signifies the way in which the culturalist framework, grounded in the dichotomy between autochthony and allochthony, has imposed meaning on people’s everyday experience. In other words, it is an idiom of classification that signifies the unreflective, everyday ways in which people live and construe boundaries between self and Other.

Interestingly, Maria countered Dora’s remark, saying: ‘The foreigners whom I know, they speak perfect Dutch. It might be true that you know some who don’t speak Dutch. Fine. But the ones I know, well, their Dutch is perfect.’ Different perspectives on the Other thus abound, but the way the conversation took shape showed that both women had become used to thinking with and through the autochthonous-allochthonous categorical divide that dominates Dutch representations of political and social life. Even if Maria did not want to talk about ‘allochtonen’, nevertheless the conversation moved to the topic.

If language and habits in relation to public and private space were central markers of these boundaries, income and class also played a role. Falling out of character, Maria stated:
Also, they all have a car. Sometimes I think – if my name is not going to be in the book, I might as well say what I think – that the foreigners are always represented as poor, etcetera.... But I don't know one without a car. I think many autochthons are much poorer. The foreign children all walk around in very expensive clothes.

Dora: ‘Yes! They all pay this from their child benefits. Because they all have loads of children. That is simply the truth.’

My conversation with Dora and Maria shows how self-evident boundaries between autochthonous and allochthonous residents are marked and maintained, and how they take shape in and through different registers - somatic differences, class and income, respectability. Moreover, Dora’s remark that thinking in these terms is a new phenomenon suggests that the autochthony-allochthony dichotomy is a relatively novel way of making sense of difference. While the bodily markers of difference had been there before – in the form of the ‘different hair’ of ‘migrant’ children for instance, suggesting a history of racialized thinking – the discourse of autochthony and allochthony appears to be a more recent phenomenon. In other words, it seems clear that the ascent of the culturalist framework, as it has taken shape in recent years in the Netherlands, plays a key role in how the politics of sameness and difference play out in the context of a local, pluri-ethnic and socially diverse neighborhood in contemporary Amsterdam. In the next ethnographic section, I will elaborate on this topic by showing how, in the context of culturalization, a culturalist view of the world seems to become commonplace.

Enacting autochthony: commonplace culturalism
It was a Wednesday evening in October 2010 when I entered an evangelical church in Slotermeer. A straightforward, functionalist building that fitted the unpretentious neighborhood in which it was
located, *De Bron* served this evening as a venue for a debate among residents of New West, enticingly entitled *Amsterdam between Mokum and Mekka*. An emeritus professor of religion, who taught at the Protestant VU University, was going to speak about the topic of Islam and the need for inter-religious tolerance and dialogue. He had been invited by active neighborhood residents assembled in an ‘intercultural’ network in Slotermeer, a local initiative that had begun activities in the late 1990s but had gained momentum after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The district administration, worried about the local fall-out of this global event, had taken an interest in ‘doing something’: more than ever, the feeling was it was necessary to bring people together in ‘intercultural and interfaith dialogue’. One year after 9/11 a revamped and now ambitious network was launched to do that. This particular evening eight years later brought together, at a rough estimate, between sixty and eighty people.

The church hall I stepped into was as sober and matter-of-fact as the building of which it was a part. The austere atmosphere of this Calvinist church building fitted the functionalist aesthetic that characterized Slotermeer. The people gathered here this evening also mostly seemed to fit the sober everydayness that I had become used to in this part of Amsterdam. At first sight Slotermeer, its designation as ‘troubled’ notwithstanding, was mostly a district of respectable people, straight lines, well kept, small gardens. There was little buzz. It was a residential area, really: but one has to scratch the surface.

After I hung up my coat, got myself some soup and had chatted to the Protestant minister who had invited me to the event, I started looking around the room for familiar faces. Steven was there and I went to greet him. He was a neighborhood activist, whom I had met in March 2010, during the election campaign for the Amsterdam and New West electoral district, in which he was a candidate for the ChristenUnie, a small political party of evangelical
and orthodox Protestants. Steven was involved in a conversation with a number of other people. Wart and Ariane were a couple in their fifties who were very active locally and whom I had met several times before. They lived in an alternative, ecological living community in Osdorp, a neighboring district in New West. There were also two people I had never met before, a woman named Els and a man named Stefan.

I was welcomed into the circle of soup-eating people, and they continued their discussion. The topic of debate was the dialogical axiom of the intercultural, inter-religious network organizing the event this evening, the mission of which was ‘to let it come from two sides’. Stefan passionately disagreed with that dialogical command, and his discontent in fact was why he had come to the meeting.

‘It is nonsense. Because it always comes only from one side, from our side,’ he said. ‘We give, they only take. And when we give one finger, they take the whole hand.’ Considering the dialogical mission of this ‘inter-cultural’ event, I mistakenly expected others around the table to protest, but Stefan’s remarks proved less out of place than I had expected, at least at this point in the conversation. Indeed, the remarks were greeted with light approval, while Stefan elaborated how the changes in the neighborhood had frustrated and angered him:

‘Muslims despise ordinary Western people (gewone westerse mensen),’ he argued. ‘They say to us that we are perverse.’ He was also of the opinion that friendship with Muslims was impossible, because ‘they only had regard for themselves’. Stefan argued he was speaking out of personal experience. To my surprise, Wart responded to this by saying that ‘yes’, he thought Stefan was partly right.

They are a bit better at thinking of themselves than we are. But you have to differentiate between groups. We
suffer from Moroccans because they have failed on all accounts. Even when it comes to crime, they have failed. The Chinese, for example, they are not addressed for their lack of integration. Why not? They too have problems. They too are involved in crime; there is exploitation within their own community. They don't speak Dutch. Many of them are here illegally. But they keep it within their own community. Moroccans, however, harass us on ‘our’ streets. That why they provoke so much resistance [weerstand].

Stefan responded: ‘Look, we are being despised. They think we are corrupt [ze vinden ons verdorven]. They came here and they immediately started to curse us.’

When I asked Stefan what he meant and if he had personal experience of this as well, his answer was both simple and effective: ‘Just watch television.’ Echoing narrations with which I had become familiar in the course of my field work in Slotermeer, Stefan said: ‘Even small children [of post-migrant background, PM] say: ‘just wait, in ten years we will be in power here’. When you hear that, you know what kind of language is used at home. Because children speak the truth.’

Wart seemed to agree with this: ‘We should stop blaming society for the trouble with migrant youths. It all starts at home. That’s where things go wrong.’ Els responded to that: ‘Yes, in the Berber culture. That’s simply a backward culture (een achterlijke cultuur).’ Wart responded to that:

There is no harmony in the family culture. It already starts with marriage. We marry first of all mostly because we love each other. But in these cultures people don’t marry for love. They marry because they are supposed to marry. Moreover, the ten year old son is already
boss in the home, especially because the father doesn’t speak Dutch. When there is no harmony at home, the children go onto the streets. And thus a street culture develops. And that’s when we are confronted with it. That is what we suffer from.

Knowing the Other
Of central importance in this conversation is the self-evident way in which the Other is produced as a knowable - and known - object. The importance of this unreflective sense of knowing - which constitutes a particular gaze and is central to the construction of symbolic boundaries - can hardly be overestimated. The relationship between knowledge and racial discourse of course has been a central topic in the study of race and racism. ‘The scientific thought of the Enlightenment was a precondition for the growth of a modern racism based on physical typology’ (Fredrickson, 2002: 56). The Other comes into being in and through everyday speech acts like the ones discussed above. When hearing such more or less commonplace conversations, I often noted the ways in which the habits, ways of life, and moral worlds of post-migrants were framed and classified: they took on a matter-of-fact, indisputable form, reinforcing an understanding of society carved up in cultural entities, and reducing the Other to a knowable and perceivable essence (Verkaaik, 2009: 17). This indicates what I call a culturalization of social life, which produces, to use Thomas Blom Hansen’s terms, a certain flatness of public perception, leading to a situation in which people are ‘always potentially reducible to a phenotype, a cultural cipher, or a racialized shadow or doppelgänger. The category functions as a constant shadow; every action takes place in the gaze of the other’ (Hansen, 2012: 7). Discussing Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa, Hansen argues that the intense racialization of every aspect of social life there led to a situation ‘in which the categorical doppelgänger, the
stereotype, provided the script and the interpretive grid within which individual action - and anxiety - was situated’ (2012: 7).

Now, the historical development of Dutch racism and the present situation of course is different from South Africa, but in my view the flatness of public perception Hansen discusses increasingly also haunts Dutch society. The Other is encountered within an ideological constellation: before he or she can be known -- and can be distinguished from ‘ordinary’ neighbors - a particular discourse has to be in place: a field of knowledge that enables people to distinguish between neighbors and strangers.

Everyday discourses like the ones discussed in the vignette above are embedded in broader culturalist narratives: they constitute enactments of broadly circulating discourses about the perceived cultural alterity of increasingly proximate Others in the Netherlands, and in Europe in more general terms. Indeed, the construction of autochthony relies on the circulation of discourses and images that become fitted into people's everyday interpretive frames. In the words of Nitzan Shoshan, the pundits of nativist culturalism circulate ‘discursive topoi that have seeped as citations into the situated politics’ (2008: 387) of people like Stefan, Wart and others. As I see it, culturalization is best understood as a process of signification, the imposition of meaning on things in the world that shapes how people look at themselves and others.

Moreover, this process alludes to what Sara Ahmed refers to as ‘stranger fetishism’ (2000): the process through which identity is relationally established through the encounter with alterity. She points out that such encounters are mediated: they presuppose ‘other faces, other encounters of facing, other bodies, other spaces, and other times’ (Ibid.: 7).

Encounters between embodied subjects always hesitate between the domain of the particular - the face to face of this encounter - and the general - the framing
of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism. The particular encounter hence always carries traces of those broader relationships. Differences, as markers of power, are not determined in the ‘space’ of the particular or the general, but in the very determination of their historical relation (a determination that is never final or complete, as it involves strange encounters). (Ahmed 2000; 8-9, italics in original)

‘Autochthonous’ encounters with alterity, in other words, are grounded in an economy of mis-recognition. That is to say, what appears as immediately visible, as tangible and hence authentic or real, is in fact always already ‘culturally and socially conditioned by received frames and schema’s’ (Hansen, 2012: 3). It is within such an economy of mis-recognition that notions of alterity take shape: difference is ‘imbricated in and generated through a web of somatic modalities that incorporate alterity into material things’ (Shoshan, 2008: 381). Within such a perpetual economy of mis-recognition, the multicultural neighborhood becomes to be seen and experienced as a place of encounters with hostile strangers, with ‘space invaders’ (Puwar, 2004) that are held responsible for the symbolic displacement of ‘original’ and entitled autochthonous residents. The culturalist framework has - I propose - been central in producing and normalizing this everyday field of knowledge which produces a particular mode of experiencing alterity, in which the post-migrant neighbors figure as cultural strangers who are out of place. As a peculiar strangeness - composed by the politics of culturalism - comes to adhere to bodies, sounds, languages, smells, and sights, the pluri-ethnic neighborhood becomes to be experienced, by some people, as a site of crisis and peril.

As Ahmed points out, differences ‘are impossible to grasp in the present’ (2000: 9). That is to say, people ‘read’ as Muslim
are encountered by Stefan as perilous strangers because a field of ‘knowledge’ has been established that produces the figure of the Muslim as perilous. It is for this reason that we have to turn our attention to the question of Orientalism - and the ‘grammar of identity/alterity’ that the anthropologist Gerd Baumann has referred to as orientalization (2004). Baumann has proposed thinking of identity and alterity in terms of different modalities of selfing and othering, different classificatory structures - grammars - of ‘attributing identity and alterity to whomever’ (Baumann, 2004: 19). He bases these grammars on three theoretical frameworks - Edward Saïd’s notion of Orientalism; Edward Evans-Pritchard’s notion of segmentation, and Louis Dumont’s concept of encompassment. I want to focus on Baumann’s grammar of orientalization here, which is most relevant to the contemporary politics of culturalization in the Netherlands. The discourse of the participants in this conversation can be understood relatively easily in terms of the grammar of orientalization. Berber and Moroccan culture for instance, was delineated as backward, echoing familiar constructions about ‘raising children’, marriage traditions, and lack of discipline in Dutch-Moroccan families (cf. Van de Berg and Duyvendak, 2012). Interestingly, as the conversation moved on, the important, second element of orientalization also came into focus. As Baumann argues: ‘Orientalism is [...] not a simple binary opposition of ‘us = good’ and ‘them = bad’, but a very shrewd mirrored reversal of: ‘what is good in us is [still] bad in them, but what got twisted in us [still] remains straight in them’ (2004: 20). The grammar of orientalization may entail ‘a possibility of desire for the Other and even, sometimes, a potential for self-critical relativism’ (Ibid.: x).

Indeed, orientalization gains a nostalgic dimension when the figure of the Other comes to embody something that is understood to have been lost. That is to say, within processes of orientalization in the context of contemporary urban multiculturalism, the ‘old’
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figure of the noble savage takes on a new shape (cf. Berliner, 2015). In response to Wart’s remarks about marriage traditions in ‘Moroccan families’, Steven, speaking from his Protestant viewpoint, for instance said: ‘But at least they stay married.’ Els responded to that: ‘And they have a nice little society among themselves, I have to say. I always observe that very extensively. They have certain greeting rituals, etcetera. And they all look alike. One big family, it seems to me.’ Dutch Moroccans emerge here - in other words - as people who - despite all their alleged problems and their allegedly troubling activities - have at least preserved a form of sociality that the Dutch themselves are seen to have lost.

In Stefan’s eyes, however, the sense of community that Els attached to the Other - something the ‘autochthonous’ Dutch had lost - was yet another indication that Muslim Others posed a threat: ‘Yes, yes, they are very friendly. With each other! But when we interact with each other that way, we are immediately seen as a bunch of faggots. That’s the plain and simple truth. (Zo is het ook nog wel eens een keer.)’ To my surprise, Wart once again agreed with Stefan: ‘Yes, I must admit, this is true.’ Els now intervened, trying to put things in more perspective. She said:

But listen, you mustn’t put everyone in the same box. (Je moet niet iedereen over één kam scheren.) The Turks are much more diligent (ijverig) than the Moroccans. And the Moroccan girls are much more diligent than the boys. That’s because they are kept at home and thus have time to do their homework. And because finishing an education means freedom for these girls, of course.

Stefan’s constructions of post-migrant, especially Muslim, alterity functioned as a starting point of a dialogue about the perceived alterity of post-migrant neighbors among these ‘white’, ‘autochthonous’ residents of Slotermeer who saw themselves
as ‘knowing’. Most of the participants - although not Stefan - considered themselves more or less progressive opponents of the nationalist populism of the likes of Geert Wilders and his PVV and tried to point this out a number of times. Wart and Els, for instance, expressed this by arguing that ‘you must distinguish between groups’ and ‘you mustn’t put everyone in the same box’, but their speech acts reproduced the culturalist interpretive frame, as opposed to negating the substantialist carving up of society into discrete cultural entities. Moreover, while I was initially surprised by the conversation, which seemed out of place at this particular ‘multiculturalist’ event, with hindsight I realized that in fact it remained well within the boundaries set by the substantialist premise inherent in the notion of intercultural dialogue as propagated by the event’s organizers, which relies precisely upon an imaginary of fixed and discrete cultural entities (see Brubaker, 2005; Emirbayer, 1997).

Ariana and Wart told me later that evening that in fact they were embarrassed ‘the racist’ turn Dutch politics had taken. Contradicting his earlier remarks, Wart told me: ‘In the end, these problems [with post-migrants youths, PM] are all social problems. Multicultural society is already a fact. We must think of these things as social problems, not as cultural problems, I guess. Yes, that sounds better.’

This embarrassment with the culturalist field of knowledge notwithstanding, the culturalist ‘perspective on the world’ (Brubaker, 2005: 65) by which the habits, ways of life, and moralities of post-migrants were framed, interpreted, discussed and classified, took on a matter-of-fact, indisputable form during the conversation considered above. The common sense articulation of these stereotypical languages unveils a deeply ingrained cultural essentialism that simplifies reality by creating an illusion of homogeneous cultural entities, reducing the opponent to a knowable and perceivable essence (Verkaaik, 2009: 17). At
the same time, however, the inconsistencies in the debate, and Ariana and Wart’s change of tone and view afterwards, signifies the instability and fluidity of such perspectives. As I will argue in the conclusion of this chapter, autochthony is plural, not singular and, as the title of the evening under discussion suggests and as we will see below, pluralist views embracing (elements of) contemporary super-diversity also prevail in New West. Before I turn my attention to the pluralist position however, I want to explore the politics of everyday orientalization - and commonplace Islamophobia - more extensively by zooming in on my conversations with Stefan.

**Racializing the city**

One of the central questions that emerge when we think through the performativity of the culturalist framework is: why do these narratives or scripts to negotiate difference make sense to people? In this section, I turn the attention to my conversations with Stefan - as a way to illustrate how culturalist narratives become enfolded into people’s personal and social biographies, woven into everyday symbolic knowledge and judgments, and thus come to ‘channel social interactions and organize commonsense knowledge and judgments’ (Brubaker, 2006:11). These conversations suggest some possible answers to this riddle and at the same time force us to think through the complex intersections of cultural and religious alterity, sexuality, and secularism, or - more precisely - secular passion (cf. Verkaaik and Spronk, 2011). To understand Stefan, we must begin with the fact that he is gay and comes from a strict, Roman Catholic background. His identification as a gay man takes place in the context of his life in a pluri-ethnic, multi-religious neighborhood which is marked as poor, troubled, and perilous, and in which the religious alterity of neighbors is visible in and through somatic and material particularities, like the hijab, the djellaba, the mosque, and satellite dishes.

I went to visit Stefan in his home. I had called him after our
meeting and he was eager to talk to me. I was excited yet troubled by his eagerness to participate in my research. I felt uncomfortable with becoming complicit in his discourse surrounding white voicelessness and post-migrant viciousness. Nevertheless, I wanted to understand him better. Stefan lived on the fourth floor of a 1950s building at the edge of the small neighborhood in which I was working, the apartments being above a number of kebab places and bars, an evening shop, a small greengrocer run by a Dutch-Moroccan man and a shop with North African wedding dresses. It was one of the few relatively lively corners of this otherwise extremely residential and quiet part of Slotermeer. It was the corner’s liveliness that also gave the area a bad reputation. Early on in my fieldwork, while looking for a temporary place to live in Slotermeer, people warned me to avoid this particular part of the area. The atmosphere in the kebab place I sometimes visited was buzzy and noisy, a TV-set thundering in the corner, teenage boys running in and out, joking with the man behind the counter. It was somewhat different from the working class domesticity and respectability of the rest of the quarter.

Stefan’s apartment was on the top floor of a four-story building and was inexpensively decorated with brown carpeting, a number of old couches and chairs, a seventies coffee table, and a lot of knickknacks everywhere. The walls were decorated with some mildly homo-erotic drawings. Stefan had been living on disability benefits for years - the result of depression in the past - and had to survive on a relatively low income, like many of his neighbors in this part of Amsterdam. A couple of days a week he worked as a volunteer in the local hospital, a ten minute bike ride away. He had prepared himself well for my visit. He had even typed up four pages of notes so as not to forget anything he wanted to tell me. He had looked me up on the Internet, and had found things out about me. He now saw me as an expert to whom he could pass on his ‘knowledge’ of the neighborhood, a ‘knowledge’ that he
complained he was not permitted to narrate because of a leftist political correctness ‘destroying everything’ (dat alles kapot maakt).

Stefan’s story started in the 1950s in the Dutch Catholic south where he grew up with an orthodox Catholic father, who was a laborer in the textile industry, and his mother, who was a housewife. His father was, as Stefan put it, ‘possessed [bezeten] with religious fanaticism.’ This was to have a strong formative influence on how he acted and looked upon the world. His distaste for organized religion and religious and sexual conservatism was palpable:

My father was always like: God this, God that. Terrorizing. God as a bogeyman. It wasn’t nice. It was like a heavy yoke. You always were afraid: what would God think? I remember going to kindergarten for the first time, but I was afraid of the nuns who were the teachers. So I ran away. And I have this vivid memory… of those devilish nuns running after me.

Stefan’s views on the ‘horrible, horrible changes’ in Slotermeer since the influx of post-migrants in the neighborhood were deeply colored by his distaste for religion in general and Islam in particular, which he saw as a threat to his sexual identity as a gay man. The presence of Muslims in the neighborhood made him uncomfortable, bringing back, he said, his religious trauma. He constructed his post-migrant neighbors as a more or less undifferentiated group of conservative and hostile Others, who were not to be trusted and whose fundamental alterity and grim conservatism was somatically identifiable by means of dress, bodily posture, habits, and sounds. He spoke accordingly:

The children are always crying, always loud. The family in the apartment below, to give an example. The children running, boom boom boom. [...] I always call
them the noise people (*het lawaaivolk*). They just never shut up. They make a lot of noise.

This somatically identified alterity was counterposed to an idealized notion of autochthonic, middle class Dutch conviviality, which seemed far removed from Stefan’s everyday life-world. For Stefan, this world was characterized by the proximity of poor, working class post-migrants, noisy children, and young men marked as threatening and dishonest:

> Just the other day, I was walking in the park, a bit further down, you know, where those expensive, detached houses are. A completely different kind of people lives there! It’s really beautiful there! Their kids were also playing, but it was really nice. Not like it is here. It was peaceful. There was chocolate milk, everything... Nice! But these were genuinely Western people (*echt westerse mensen*). [...] Over here, the atmosphere is grim (*grimmig*), also among children. They are always fighting, they are loud and aggressive.

This narration illustrates a dynamic that Shoshan calls ‘the somatic weaving of an ethnicized urban landscape’ in which ‘sensualities of otherness weave political significations about ethnic groups [...] into the tangible fabric of the multi-ethnic city (2008: 378)’ The urban landscape that emerges in this perspective on the world is a deeply culturalist and classed one, in which sensorial Otherness comes to be delineated as morally and politically significant.

Here, the ‘loudness’ of the neighbors comes to be culturalized, imagined as a cultural and religious problem. When he sees women wearing the hijab or a man wearing the djellaba on his way to the mosque, he interprets this as an attack on his way of life, sexual identity, and personal moral values. As he told me:
It’s not that women are not allowed to wear a headscarf. In the past, old women in the Netherlands also used to wear a headscarf. But it’s the message that they want to convey. ‘We are pious, you are bad.’ They see all Western women as whores. The message is: we are the good ones in a corrupted world.

This moral superiority that Stefan saw as woven into the aesthetic disposition of ethnicized Others became construed, in his narrative, as an attack on his gay identity and sexuality. Stefan delineated it as ‘unbelievable’ that he was confronted, on a day-to-day basis, with what he perceived as the visible signs of orthodox religious homophobia. Had he not escaped his own religious past? Had his friends not fled the orthodox Calvinist Dutch Bible Belt? ‘We live in a world city, for crying out loud, and we are still under that backward yoke! Isn’t that incredible?’

Stefan’s narrative thus brings together pivotal elements of a new anxious politics surrounding LGBTIQ-identifications and the politics of cultural alterity in urban space, in which racialized, migrant Others - associated with religious conservatism - come to embody a more generalized heteronormativity. These issues, surrounding sexuality and cultural alterity, will be the central topics in the next chapter. In the last ethnographic section of this chapter, I want to shift the focus one more time, to a different mode of negotiating super-diversity - the register of culturalist pluralism.

**Enacting autochthony: culturalist pluralism**

I met Milena while I was preparing field work in 2009. She was a volunteer at In Kracht, a neighborhood organization focusing on conflict resolution at the neighborhood level. She fascinated me because she seemed somewhat out of place in Slotermeer, a white, middle class woman who ‘looked’ different and talked differently - in terms of style and posture - from other ‘autochthonous’ residents in the neighborhood. Milena and her husband lived in a nicely furnished, comfortable apartment with a balcony full of plants and flowers, lots of books, great coffee, and very nice Dutch design chairs around the dining table. This clearly was the house
of a middle class, educated, relatively affluent, Amsterdam couple, in many ways the future dreamed of by consumer/residents of the quarter. I also felt personally comfortable with Milena and her husband: at one point Milena indeed referred to me as ‘one of us’: [jij hoort toch ook bij OSM [ons soort mensen]]. She had lived in the city center - the Egelantiersgracht in the formerly working class, now gentrified Jordaan area - in a rented apartment until 12 years ago, when she and her husband decided they wanted to ‘invest in their future’ and buy a place. As already discussed in chapter 2, buying a home in Amsterdam is very expensive and while the two were not poor, as a result of gentrification, they did not have the money to buy a home in the city center. They were drawn to the apartment in Slotermeer, which was affordable and moreover located in a green area, which appealed to Milena. However, she did not really look into the neighborhood she was moving to, which was - she said - perhaps a mistake.

The move felt like a deportation, Milena told me. She repeated the word, on purpose: deportatie. ‘I am not exaggerating!’ The community ‘felt strange’. ‘Nobody with whom I had anything in common, or with whom I had to deal with in everyday life, lived in Slotermeer’. In her own social circle people were deeply skeptical about the couple’s move to ‘the ghetto’ - ‘how could you have done that; we could never live there’. For them it was also very difficult, Milena told me, to get into ‘tram 14’ to visit them. Mimicking an upper middle class accent, she asked: ‘Does one have to go all the way through satellite dish city [schotelcity]?’

Milena laughed about the ignorance of her middle class friends, but admitted that when she had just moved in she herself had had her doubts. She felt she was ‘becoming racist’ as a result of her annoyance with the behavior of many of her post-migrant neighbors. The ‘noise’, the trams that were always extremely full and noisy, the fact that everybody drove a car and so few people used a bicycle were all issues that annoyed her. Milena especially noticed men ‘spitting’ on the street, in public - something she associated

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28 Satellite dishes are seen as an index of migrant demographics.
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with ‘working class culture’ but also with ‘a different attitude’
toward public space of cultural ‘Others’. It also infuriated her.

What kept her going, she said, were her deeply felt political
convictions. She did not want to ‘become racist’. She hated herself
for it - yes, she felt out of place in the neighborhood but did not
think it was right for her to feel like this. As a social-democrat and
as someone who had always defended multicultural society against
attacks from the right, she felt it was wrong for her to ‘become racist’,
even though her feeling of being out of place - of not belonging in
the neighborhood - had a great impact. As she said: ‘In the Jordaan,
the community outside had been an extension of the pleasure of
living inside the home, but this was not the case in Slotermeer.’
Milena felt alienated, separated, from the neighborhood and most
of the people in it. She did not feel at ease, comfortable, with the
various post-migrant populations, and she felt perhaps even more
uneasy with her autochthonous, ‘racist’, neighbors.

The allochtonen weren’t interested in me, and I wasn’t
interested in them. We had nothing in common. But
the autochtons in the community were typical, old
fashioned Amsterdammers, racists if you ask me,
who tried to involve me in their racism! That was just
terrible. It made me feel uncomfortable... as if they were
forcing me to say things that I did not want to say [...]…
I was considered an insider at first - when I confronted
them, when I started a discussion, you will not believe
what I heard: ‘You probably have them in your house’;
‘You probably like them, the brown men.’ ‘You probably
fuck them, the allochthones’; ‘You must think they are
hot...’ That’s the kind of thing they would say... I am
not exaggerating’

There was nobody from her own milieu, white, middle class and
respectable Amsterdam progressive ‘liberals’ - which augmented
her sense of being out of place.

When she quit working in 2005, Milena felt she had to
make a change, to start - as she put it - ‘really living here’. In her
view this meant confronting her sense of alienation and distaste for the neighborhood by becoming active. This is why in 2005 she started with a course in language development for children in a neighborhood school - ‘a very, very bad school’ she told me - across the street. She also became involved in various activities in the neighborhood. She became well-known by others active in the community and felt increasingly valued by the young men and women - mostly of post-migrant background - with whom she was now working with. It gave her a sense of pride: ‘I think I know why they consider me important. They need someone like me, an older, well educated woman.’

Milena was convinced that her experience as a medical social worker in the Amsterdam academic hospital, AMC, was of central importance to the work in the neighborhood she now did. It had prepared her to adjust to changing situations and to differences among people. However, Milena also felt she would never have chosen that line of work had she not had the right kind of character: she was able to talk to anyone anywhere.

Although there are boundaries of course’ she added: ‘some people are almost like fascists. I despise that. I have no time anymore for racists […] But it is true, the autochthonous people feel excluded - I think they do not get enough psychological attention. They are not heard.

Now that Milena no longer holds a job, she has more time and energy to negotiate public space - ‘to block out’ certain things in the neighborhood. There were certain streets and squares she now simply avoided; and she avoided traveling by tram as much as possible because it was such a tense experience for her. She adjusted, to use her own words: she blocked out what irritated her most, certain streets and quarters, the tram, and she began walking ‘around the mess’. When she was still working it was harder for her to adjust: she was always on top of things at work, but almost always tired when she was in Slotermeer. She had no resilience, she said, which was something one needed if one wanted to live in
Slotermeer. Even now she sometimes still thought of leaving, even discussing the possibility with her partner. Milena felt guilty about it, but living in Slotermeer was still rather difficult for her.

All of these issues have taken their toll because Milena felt guilty. She felt her ‘political consciousness’ was out of synchronization with her feelings. ‘All these autochthonous Dutch people here, who complain all the time, don’t have that problem; they don’t feel guilty.’ Milena had been a member of the Labor Party (PvdA) for 35 years, but in 2007 she had left the party although, as she said, it was still part of her. She had left because she felt the party had moved to the right, especially on the issue of migrant and post-migrant integration. The hardening stance [verharding] on immigration had not met with Milena’s agreement.

In addition to her antiracist convictions, Milena was convinced that her personal experience of being an outsider - at the level of class and status - was central to her decision to become involved with those less fortunate, post-migrant youth especially. She had grown up in a milieu that she called a ‘middle milieu’ [een middenmilieu]- neither working class nor middle class. ‘But we were in a way even poorer than the workers, because my father drank.’ It was an unstable family - her parents could not deal with life, Milena said. When things got out of hand, she was ‘transported’ to a foster family, an educated, leftist, Labor Party family.

Milena had grown up in Helmond and had a vivid memory of the small town’s class politics:

There is a very typical class thing that dominated the city - it still does.... A canal runs through the city, you know, and the canal separated the residents. On one side lived the ‘plebs’, on the other side what we called the red bump (rode bult) - why they were called red nobody knows, because they certainly weren’t ‘red’. But on the red bump - or ‘the other side’ - lived the rich people [....] So you understand that I grew up with this consciousness: that there are class differences (standen en rangen, een klassenscheiding). People accepted that reality, so there was no struggle - but at school, well, the
nuns were very class-conscious, everybody knew that. The girls from the other side had a first name, but for me, there was only a last name. That has stayed with me for a long time - even today. [...] The class inequalities; it has politicized me I think.

PM: So, this is why you joined the Labor Party?

Yes, of course. But I never became active. I tried that - I wanted to become part of the Rode Vrouwen29 - but in Amsterdam that group was dominated by ‘another kind of people’... Well, there was no way that you could become part of that. [Daar kwam je niet tussen]. And I had an occupation of which they thought: ‘well, a nurse, what can a nurse do.’ One had to have an UvA-education, at the least. It was an elite party at the time, you know. Not many people know this, I guess.

Her work in the AMC as a consoler for hospitalized people had also reminded her everyday of status and class inequalities: while she had loved her job, it had been a highly status conscious environment in which she had often felt mildly marginalized. Milena’s notion that inequality mattered - that it was productive - drove her to become active, her lack of recognition in the neighborhood and the people who lived there notwithstanding. What was needed in her neighborhood to make it more bearable for people like her was what she called the ‘right kind of mix’. As soon as she spoke these words, however, she reflected upon them:

At the same time, I don’t know, there are many problems with this idea of mixing. It’s social engineering, I am against that.... It makes me feel uncomfortable. Most of all I believe in education - when people are educated

29 The Red Women - the feminist women’s organization inside the Labor Party.
you can deal with them. For instance, I told one of my colleagues in *In Kracht*: ‘You have to go to speech therapy’. Because he has such a clear, Moroccan accent, you know? People cannot understand him. Why not do something about it? Yes, yes, education is basic. [...] The strange thing is, I feel responsible somehow: for upgrading people. Even in the mid-seventies, when you started seeing Surinam people everywhere, I remember that I always thought: ‘I hope he doesn’t do something strange or stupid.’ Because that will increase people’s racism. Because I wanted to protect them from the racists, you know?

Milena’s story complicates the culturalist framework but does not negate it: her narrative of New West is still firmly informed by the discourse of autochthony - the point is that she enacts autochthony differently: the self-understanding that takes shape in Milena’s construction of Slotermeer is as much colored by the so-called allochthonous Other as it is by the working class autochthonous Other, whom she considers to be unbearably racist. However, as a social-democratic leftist with a low-status background and experience of status hierarchization, she sympathizes with marginalized Others, whose alterity is understood by her not only in cultural, but also in class terms.

**Conclusion**

The transformative diversification of Slotermeer and other popular neighborhoods in the Netherlands is often misunderstood and misrepresented as a shift from homogeneity to heterogeneity. This sense of rupture is politically mobilized in contemporary struggles over the future of the ‘multicultural’ Netherlands: but it is not accurate. From its beginnings in the early 1950s New West has been a religiously and socially diverse area (Hellinga 2005; Heijdra 2010). One reason was the role of pillarization in the construction of neighborhoods. The housing corporations in the Western Garden Cities were themselves ‘pillarized’, and quarters were constructed along confessional and ideological lines: Catholic corporations built
‘Catholic’ neighborhoods, while social-democratic corporations built mostly for people aligned to the social-democratic movement. A relatively high level of socio-economic heterogeneity, the influx of postcolonial migrants from Indonesia and ‘migrants’ from the rural North of the country, further increased the cultural and social diversity of the district in the 1950s and 1960s. Indeed, the sociologist Van Doorn as early as 1955 called for an aggressive ‘integration policy’ regarding rural migrants in the district (Heijdra, 2010). Culturalization is nothing new.

That is not to say that transformations have not taken place more recently: the feel, the aesthetic, the phenomenology of Slotermeer have shifted since the 1980s. Turkish-Dutch residents, for instance, have taken over large parts of the retail trade in the neighborhood, significantly changing the range of shops (Nio et al., 2008). The central market in Slotermeer has come increasingly to cater for the poorest, mostly post-migrant layers of residents in the quarter, causing a sense of alienation and discontent among more well-to-do working class whites, who now often prefer to shop elsewhere. Indeed, one of my interlocutors told me he always looked forward to his weekly shopping trip to Amstelveen - a relatively white town on the outskirts of Amsterdam. It felt like ‘coming home’, he said. However, the point is that these demographic transformations cannot be simply understood as a shift from homogeneity to heterogeneity. These changes constitute complex shifts that take place not only at the level of social, cultural, and demographic diversification, but are linked to the modern human condition in more general terms: ‘the consuming feeling born of the realization that human temporality is irreversible’ (Angé and Berliner, 2015: 6). The culturalist common sense, in other words, is linked to the question of nostalgia.

In the context of culturalization however, nostalgia, understood as a cultural practice - while part and parcel of modern life in more general terms - is molded and politicized in culturalist form. That is to say, these transformations have increasingly become displaced upon the bodies and cultures of migrants and thus delineated in culturalist terms. Many of the people that Nio et al. (2008) refer to as the ‘original city dwellers’ (oorspronkelijke
stedelingen) - working and middle class whites over fifty - speak of these transformations in terms of decline, loss, and discomfort, the ‘shrinking’ of their ‘autochthonous’ life-worlds, and a lack of recognition and voice. Hence, the discourse of autochthonous displacement that has taken center stage in the Netherlands in recent decades of political culturalization.

The racialization of the figure of the everyman (as white) also directs my attention to recent academic debates in the Netherlands concerning the relationship between culturalization, nativism, and racialization. In a recent contribution, the anthropologist Pooyan Tamimi Arab (2014) mobilizes Ash Amin’s notion of the everyday ‘doings’ of racism (cf. Mcharek, 2010; 2013). I agree with Tamimi Arab that such a focus on ‘doing’ is necessary, especially in light of the strong conviction - apparent in public discourse as well as in parts of academia - that Dutch society is beyond race and racism. This highly influential construction of the Netherlands as somehow post-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 (Young, 1995: 28; cf. Lentin and Titley, 2011). A clear distinction between cultural essentialism and racism cannot be made.

Indeed, the historical anthropologist Ann Stoler makes a crucial point when she argues: ‘Racial taxonomies vary in time and space. They slice up differently what constitutes a ‘racial type’ and who belongs to which category’ (1997: 103). One only has to look at the plethora of national, social, religious, and ethnic groups that have been racialized at particular moments in modern history - the Irish, the Italians, the Jews, the Hungarians, the Poles, and the Roma and Sinti, for instance - to understand that processes of racialization are historically contingent and fluid. It is precisely because race is a socially constructed, collective representation and fantasy - and not a scientific ‘fact’ - that the concept of racism
continues to be relevant to our understanding of culturalism and autochthony in the Netherlands today.

Moreover, Stoler has pointed out that biology has always been only a small part of the definition of race. It has often been assumed, she argues, that the core of racism has been biological and that with the decreasing respectability of biological racism since WW2, a new racism has come into being that can be called ‘cultural racism’. Stoler notes that this is a ‘completely erroneous’ notion of how race has developed as a category. From the very beginning, race has been about cultural competencies, about respectable behavior, and about being ‘part of Europe’. Following this line of thinking, Stoler argues against the notion that contemporary racism is somehow softer or more complex. Contemporary racism, for Stoler, is very similar to ‘that configuration of the biological, the cultural, and the sensory’ that defined the modern category of race.

If one takes an ethnographic approach to the everyday enactment of culturalism, it becomes clear that this configuration of the biological, the cultural, and the sensory is still in place. As Tamimi Arab also points out, there is an everyday anatomo-politics involved that we cannot ignore: the alterity discursively construed in and through nativist and culturalist discourses is read off bodies. In other words, the discursive focus may be on the religious and cultural alterity of peculiar, culturalized groups, but if we shift attention to everyday life, this alterity is ‘read off the body, skin color, dress codes, gestures, and so forth’ (Tamimi Arab, 2014: 402). If we take seriously the everyday doing of culturalism, we cannot ignore the complex configuration in and through which race is construed and enacted.

A focus on enactment is not only important because it unveils how sensorial, somatic difference is operative within the everyday politics of culturalism, but also because it helps us

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30 Stoler discusses these and other issues related to race in a recent podcast on Archipelago, the podcast platform of The Funambulist. See URL: http://the-archipelago.net/2014/08/21/ann-laura-stoler-the-colonial-administration-of-bodies-and-space/
understand autochthony as multiple and dynamic, as opposed to singular and static. Autochthony is not a thing with of substance - not a pre-given, homogeneous identity that has come to public life when ‘autochthonous’ people were confronted with cultural difference as the result of the influx of postcolonial migrants and migrant workers - but an *articulation*. Laclau and Mouffe define the notion of articulation as follows: ‘any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as the result of the articulatory practice’ (2001 [1985]: 105, quoted in M’Charek, 2010: 310). As Amade M’Charek points out:

> Differences and similarities do not lie out there for us to be collected or uncovered, so as to give colour and contours to a social landscape. They are not given, but enacted in moments of tensions [...]. Differences and similarities may be stable or not, depending on the maintenance work that goes into the relations that help to produce them [...]. Differences are relational. (2010: 311)

Everyday culturalism therefore cannot simply be understood as an effect of public debate. That is to say, I am not able to make the causal argument that local articulations of autochthony are the effects pure and simple of a dominant ideological construction of it. Rather, I argue in favor of an ethnographic focus on the enactment or ‘doing’ of autochthony, which is necessary to understand how various, contrasting but interconnected articulations of it come into being in and through different social relations. As I have pointed out in this chapter, these social relations cannot be understood in ahistorical, local terms. That is to say, they have histories: everyday encounters carry traces, as Ahmed says, of broader relations: but the focus on the relational ‘character’ of differences and similarities offers a productive way of looking at the everyday construction of autochthony without re-esentializing this particular subject-position. Autochthony - as a political discourse and a performative mode of social categorization - has gained a large amount of self-evidence, stability, and endurance. This has to do with its
naturalizing capacities (Geschiere, 2009) and - following M’Charek’s comments above - the great amount of maintenance work that has been invested in it: but taking an ethnographic approach also brings to light the variety of ways in which it is articulated and shapes self-understandings. If differences and similarities cannot be uncovered, but must be analyzed in processes of enactment in moments of tension (M’Charek, 2010: 311), an ethnographic approach has been shown to be useful to chart and flesh out the multifariousness of autochthonous boundary constructions.