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Contested Citizenship: False Claims and 'Double Dutch'

A reply

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Having been central to the research programme that culminated in this publication for more than a decade, I think I have pretty much heard every objection to approach and method that it's been possible to hear. Indeed, responding to criticisms contributed to refining and developing our perspective, which is how the academy ought to work. Other reviews for *Contested Citizenship* engage in a way that critically unpacks the book's contributions and arguments, and offer alternative viewpoints and critical commentary with regard to key issues.[1] By contrast, the reviews of Engelen and Kastoryano, are strewn with factual errors and misrepresentations. Disappointingly, our book simply serves as a vehicle for them to assert their own opinions on pet topics.

It would be tiresome to go through systematically and correct the factual mistakes and misrepresentations of our study. An edited highlights includes: Engelen saying that we find more cultural group rights demands in the Netherlands and the UK than France, whereas the whole point of Chapter 4 is the reverse, that they are equally (and unexpectedly for institutional channelling approaches including our own past research) present also in France. Kastoryano fails to notice that our two-by-two diagram (p. 10) for

political space presents four options, not three (and fails to label them correctly), she claims that we say that the UK approach encourages identification with 'homeland politics' (evidence shows emphatically the reverse!), and that we don't mention the French Council for Muslim Worship (see discussion pp. 65 and 156).

Obviously, we have two unhappy reviewers. Kastoryano considers her work 'interestingly ignored' by us. In the face of little evidence for the post-national argument, she simply tells us that it exists in supranational norms that shape people's actions at all levels, a conveniently unproven/non-provable thesis. On method, it needs restating that claims-making analysis does not attempt to gather the whole universe of actors' political claims; only those that become sufficiently controversial to cross the threshold of significance to be reported by the media and appear in the public domain. This excludes claims-making acts invisible in the public sphere (e.g. insider lobbying) and those made in partial public spheres (e.g. parents' claims directed at school boards). So our data is on publicly visible 'contentious politics'. That's how we use it when interpreting immigration and ethnic relations politics. Incidentally, our data actually capture many cases of the earlier waves of riots by youths from the *banlieues*, which Kastoryano claims a contents analysis of the media is too limited to catch.

More brutally, and in a surprisingly personalized tone, Engelen claims that we are researchers lacking in integrity who spent a decade researching five countries with the purpose of trashing Dutch multiculturalism. For him, our work 'raises the suspicion of being prejudiced against a certain outlook, in this case multiculturalism à la Dutch'. Our research collaboration over the last decade has been comparativist, explicitly focussed on five countries, and based on original data. The study applies systematic comparison with the aim of adding to knowledge on the basis of original evidence rather than simply trotting out 'normative stories' about each country. One can always interpret evidence differently, or alternatively bring new evidence to the table that would disprove our findings, or even attempt to advance theory. That would potentially add to debate. How then to explain Engelen's vehement response, to a study whose findings, naturally relativized by the comparative approach, are in fact relatively 'middle of the road'?

Well, the cheerleaders of Dutch multiculturalism, formerly well politically networked and government-funded to provide the good news, have been hard hit by the cataclysmic transformation of Dutch politics and the swift sharp shift to the right. My collaborator Ruud Koopmans has been prominent in Dutch public debate, and saying things that from the perspective of a British or a French observer seem perfectly mainstream, has faced the wrath of proponents of Dutch multiculturalism. Our book has therefore been treated entirely differently in the Netherlands than elsewhere, both in academic and newspaper reviews. What these detractors fail to appreciate is that if no space is made available for a critique of multiculturalism, on

the basis of its measurable achievements, the middle ground disappears. One is left with polarized polemics and few arguments or substantive findings that can feed into practical policy solutions which address the life opportunities of migrants. *Contested Citizenship* is not about the Netherlands, but about five countries, trying to deal in different ways with similar dilemmas, with varying degrees of success and failure.

One of the benefits of an empirically informed approach is that it is able to put issues in context. Our research on claims making shows importantly that demands for cultural group rights and recognition account for roughly a fifth of migrant's claim making in Britain, France, and the Netherlands, and a 20th in Germany and Switzerland. Also the issue of group demands accounts for between only 1.2 and 7.7 percent of all claims in migration and ethnic relations across the countries. Thus, from the viewpoints of both migrants and their societies of settlement, immigration and ethnic relations politics is about much more than group rights and multiculturalism. Such evidence questions the validity of the Huntingtonian doomsday scenario of societies pulling apart at the cultural seams, or its multiculturalist counterpart about the centrality of group-identity claim making. Instead, it empirically demonstrates that the assumed 'culture clashes', albeit important, are only part of, not the whole of the story for western Europe at least during our time period. In addition, we find that group demands are almost exclusively by Muslims, which we explain by referring to the public nature of that religion and its resilience as a form of identification – again a finding drawn from comparative analysis. Our conclusion is that the position of Islam is a distinct case within liberal democracies, and our findings show that groups with Muslim identities are the key source of group demands in our countries. In this sense, to the limited extent that it exists, the challenge of group rights is the challenge of Islam for our countries. This is not an insurmountable challenge, however. We even point to the historical precedents of the Jews and the Irish in Britain, as 'culturally different' groups facing similar situations who over time achieved political accommodation.

After briefly discussing substance, it is necessary to address Engelen's claims that we are guilty of a 'causal fallacy' by drawing socioeconomic conclusions from data on political claim making. He states: '[f]or the unwarranted claim is that Dutch multicultural policies are to blame for the difficult incorporation of Islamic immigrants, implying that multiculturalism has *caused* worse school performances of immigrant kids and higher immigrant unemployment'. We do not make this claim. Our stance is more nuanced, measured, middle of the road and relativized by pursuing five countries. Virtually all of the pages cited as evidence by Engelen are actually discussions about our own data and not external socioeconomic data. We are explicit about the limits of our approach, and what can be drawn from our data. Our research in this book is about claims-making and

draws only on secondary findings and to a limited degree with regard to socioeconomic data. We even conclude that:

> an important direction for future research would be to apply the kind of theoretical framework that we have developed in this book to cross-national analyses of socioeconomic indicators on the positions of migrants in systems of education, employment, housing and welfare. (p. 252)

So we do not already claim to have done this, nor is it the primary basis of this study.

A real 'fallacy' is Engelen's bizarre apologism in blaming societal discrimination for Mohammed B's murder of Theo van Gogh. Is it really an adequate explanation that an individual decides to intentionally slit another's throat for the reasons Engelen gives? In his words:

> One can only imagine what the mixture of frustration born out of bureaucratic obstruction, post-9/11 religious and ethnic polarization, and increasing socioeconomic isolation – Mohammed B. was unemployed and received social security benefits – must have been like that was behind the gradual radicalization of Mohammed B. and his friends.

Here we witness what happens with a method (?!) of taking one notorious case, interpreting it in a one-sided way, and raising it by assertion to a general explanation. This isn't slippage, it's rewriting history. In reply: First, if post-9/11 is to blame, then his radicalization was not very 'gradual'. Second, how can one explain why his response took on the form of a religious radicalization rather than joining groups that, for example, campaign for social justice and equality or antidiscrimination? And, if societal discrimination is really an adequate general explanation, then why do not all people facing such conditions rise up and slit perceived opponents' throats? He asks what would our study make of the Mohammed B. case? Well, it would appear as what it is: a highly exceptional and unusually violent act in a country that is usually more pacified and less violent than others.

Comparison militates against the tendency for intellectual, topical and natural parochialism and can thereby feed back insight into understanding. Our study concludes that there is no 'golden bullet' policy approach nor a story with a 'happy end' in any of our countries.

Finally, I would argue that multiculturalism has substantially more to offer intellectually, when it stands for more than a rhetorical dogma or 'sacred cow'.

Notes

1 If anyone wishes to read reviews that assess our book as a five country cross-national empirically based study, locating it critically within the literature, and pulling out policy-relevant points, I would suggest those by John Torpey in

Contemporary Sociology (2006) or Philippe Couton in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology Online* (2006).

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