

# Unequal Citizenship in the Netherlands: The Caribbean Dutch as Liminal Citizens

GUNO JONES

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses attempts to turn “Caribbean Dutch” citizens into aliens by analyzing (the debates on) a bill initiated by Member of Parliament André Bosman in 2012. The bill in effect proposes the introduction of a distinction between first- and second-class citizens based on descent. If enacted, it would amount to *formal* inequality with regard to the right of settlement, social rights, and street inspections. Furthermore,

a class of deportable “Antillean Dutch” citizens would be created. In the debates on the bill, different readings regarding the meaning of the Dutch Kingdom, Dutch citizenship and its entitlements, emancipation, and the Dutch nation can be inferred. Regardless of whether the bill becomes enacted or not, it conveys the message to *all* “othered” citizens that they are at risk of becoming a class of liminal citizens in Dutch society.

## Introduction

One possible entry into analyzing processes of inclusion and exclusion of “Caribbean Dutch” into or from the Dutch nation is to briefly look at how the lack of gender inclusivity operates on the sub-national scale. Take for instance the academic community: some ten years ago nameplates were still a signpost of gender inequality within the Dutch academic community in that it used to be a common practice within Dutch universities to refer to academics of both genders in a different way. While the name and title of women scholars was preceded by “miss” or “misses” on the nameplates, male scholars were simply referred to by mentioning their title, initials, and last name. As critical social theory reminds us, the accepted members of a certain community are often implicitly normalized, while those “out of place” are often explicitly referred to. Considering “being an academic” for a long time implied “being a man,” the gender of male scholars was not mentioned. This gendered logic implicitly held that an academic was “by definition” a man and mentioning his gender would make no sense. In contrast, a woman academic was apparently seen as an exception to the rule and hence her gender was explicitly mentioned.

Like dominant definitions of the academic community, discourses on the national community depend on both an implicitly normalized, accepted group and an explicitly marked group: the nations’ semi-members. At certain moments, often in times of perceived crisis or for reasons of political opportunity, dominant definitions of the semi-citizens surface. In the process of constructing the “real citizen,” the semi-citizen is defined in contrast. A bill initiated on July 4th 2012 by liberal (VVD) Member of Parliament André Bosman (Kamerstukken II 2011–2012, nrs 1–3), in which Dutch citizens from the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom are explicitly marked as “others,” is a telling present-day expression of the much older phenomenon that I term “citizenship alienism”: the symbolic, social, political, and legal processes wherein status citizens are perceived and treated as if they are aliens or semi-citizens by the polity (Jones, “Biology, Culture”).

This article discusses how the Bosman Bill and its initiator, supported by a part of the Dutch parliament, construct the so called “Antillean Dutch” as “conditional citizens” (Kim). The bill in effect

proposes the enactment of a distinction between first- and second-class Dutch citizens based on descent. Contrary to universalist-inclusive notions of equal citizenship regardless of ethnicity, the bill proposes *formal* inequality with regard to the right of settlement, social rights, and street inspections by applying the criterion of descent. Furthermore, a class of deportable Antillean Dutch citizens would be created if the bill were to be enacted. I will also address the critical responses to the bill by analyzing the perspectives of targeted individuals, the OCaN (*Overlegorgaan Caribische Nederlanders*, an organization that advocates and promotes equality for Dutch citizens of Caribbean background), the Dutch Human Rights Commission and the Standing Committee of Experts on International Immigration, Refugee and Criminal Law (Meijers Committee), and opposing Members of Parliament (indeed, the Dutch parliament was not a monolithic block in its evaluation of the bill). In comparing the perspectives of proponents and opponents in the debates on the bill, different readings regarding the meaning of the Dutch Kingdom, Dutch citizenship and its entitlements, emancipation, and the Dutch nation can be inferred.

I will analyze the bill and the debates surrounding it by addressing in succession the silence surrounding the introduction of the bill, the blind spots in the concept of emancipation (the uni-territorial notion of emancipation that informs the bill), and the ways in which the bill's provisions make aliens out of citizens. Next, I will pay attention to the rhetorical figure of the *kansarme Antilliaan* that legitimizes the introduction of the bill, the legalization of ethnic profiling that would result from its enactment, its apartheid-like nature, and the response of the Dutch parliament to the critics of the bill. Lastly, I will argue that the bill, regardless of whether it becomes enacted or not, rearticulates the message to the nation's "others" that they are at risk of becoming liminal citizens.

Liminality, as Victor Turner defined the concept in his seminal essay, signifies the ambiguous and undetermined "betwixt and between" phase that marks the transition from one social status into another. Liminality is commonly understood as being part of a process of progressive inclusion; as being part of a *rite de passage* that leads to acceptance into a more privileged social status than the initial one.

However, the Bosman Bill signifies a *regressive* trajectory. If the bill were to be enacted, it would turn full citizens into second-class citizens, as I will demonstrate.

Although the extra-parliamentary protest against the bill showed a certain critical potential of Dutch democratic culture in general, it is alarming that proposals which signify second-class citizenship keep reappearing from within the circles of mainstream Dutch political parties. Initiatives such as the Bosman Bill and many other examples of citizenship alienism across the globe question the quality and persistence of the principle of equal citizenship in our enlightened, modern times.

### **The Bill's Silent Introduction**

The public silence that initially surrounded the Bosman Bill is conspicuous if we keep in mind the dramatic effect its enactment would have on the principle of equal citizenship. The formalization of first- and second-class citizenship which the bill implied went almost unnoticed. Initially, national media coverage of the bill was almost absent, as OCaN chair Glenn Helberg states.<sup>1</sup> This absence of national media coverage and public debate effectively made the bill look like an insignificant matter, as if the detrimental effects it would have on part of the Dutch citizenry were of no real interest to the Dutch nation as a whole. This silence regarding the bill in public discourse not only obscured the general universal importance of the principle of equal citizenship, but also neglected the detrimental impact its enactment could have on relationships between Dutch citizens. While silenced in public debate, the dramatic impact the act would have is of great concern to Dutch citizens whose genealogy traces back to the Caribbean parts of the Dutch Kingdom and their organizations. Challenging the disinterest of mainstream media and the general public for the issue, the OCaN tirelessly informed those interested in the detrimental effects of an actual Bosman act on equal citizenship. In fact, only the persistent

---

1. The initial disregard for the bill is confirmed by Glenn Helberg via an email. The structural character of the refusal to cover the bill by the mainstream media suggests its silencing.

critiques of the OCaN, the Meijers Committee, and the Dutch Human Rights Commission, and specialized media coverage such as on the Radio Program *Dichtbij Nederland* [Close to the Netherlands], may have prevented the bill from being silently introduced.

### **Emancipation as Trans-Territorial Movement**

Which, then, would be the detrimental consequences for equal citizenship that critics of the bill called attention to and which the general public almost ignored?

Before elaborating on the details of the bill, it is instructive to note that the right of free settlement in the Netherlands (which would be hindered by the act) is of significant emancipatory value, especially for Dutch citizens on Dutch Caribbean islands. The right of unconditional entry and settlement into the country of citizenship is seen as a basic right of citizens by many scholars (see for instance: Bosniak 111; Benhabib 170). In the case of Dutch citizens from the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom, the spatial movement that this right enables has always been of crucial importance from the perspective of *substantive* equality (rather than only *formal* equality).

This needs brief historical contextualization: As a remnant of Dutch colonialism, the Kingdom of the Netherlands is a territorially dispersed entity consisting of the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean islands of Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Saba, and Sint Eustatius. After the abolition of trans-Atlantic slavery, the entire population of the islands was granted Dutch citizenship. Especially for the formerly enslaved, this “right to have rights” (which they did not enjoy before the abolition of slavery)—and the right of free settlement in the Netherlands that came with it—was one of the conditions for their emancipation. Viewing a social phenomenon as emancipatory is of great political and social significance. If a social movement or phenomenon is deemed emancipatory, it has gained at least a minimal form of social or political recognition and legitimacy. Unfortunately, in Dutch political discourse, the movement to and settlement in the Netherlands of Dutch citizens from the islands was never viewed as such.

In dominant Dutch discourse, emancipation is usually not framed as an entitlement of *all* Dutch citizens within the Dutch Kingdom, but only of those in the Netherlands. Emancipation is reserved for (past and present) social movements pleading for equal rights *within* the territory of the Netherlands, such as Catholics, women, workers, and sexual minorities. Next to the fact that this dominant emancipation discourse (in missing an intersectional lens) usually neglects the self-defined interests of men and women “of color” from a variety of social backgrounds in the Netherlands (cf. Botman, Jouwe, and Wekker), its uni-territorial grammar renders it a phenomenon that involves just one territory of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (the Netherlands) instead of all (the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean and the movements in between). This mostly implicit notion of emancipation obscures (and potentially delegitimizes) forms of social improvement in which many Caribbean Dutch were involved: movement to and settlement in the Netherlands, reversing—as it were—the route the colonizers made during colonialism. In view of a more just and equal distribution of opportunities and wealth among *all* citizens of the Dutch Kingdom, not just those in the Netherlands, recognizing a trans-territorial notion of emancipation that includes these forms of social mobility is imperative.

In this connection, we should remember that as one of the legacies of colonialism, basic needs and opportunities in terms of education and work were (and still are) extremely unevenly distributed between the Dutch Caribbean islands and the Netherlands. In addition, a strong correlation between race and class existed on the Dutch Antilles well into the twentieth century. In this context of unequal opportunities between the Netherlands and the Dutch Caribbean (and within the islands) any notion of emancipation must include using the right of free settlement in the Netherlands for improving one’s living conditions via education, work, and social benefits. While relocation to the Netherlands was for a long time a prerogative of members of the upper classes, increasingly, from the midst of the twentieth century onwards, a cross section of the population from the islands started moving to the Netherlands.

As a result, the emancipatory potential of Dutch citizenship increased. However, from the eighties onwards, the Dutch political class primarily made sense of these trans-territorial relocations—even when taking place *within* the Kingdom—in terms of “migration” or “integration,” not in terms of legitimate forms of emancipation (Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen* 293–331). Influenced by methodological nationalism, many scholars viewed the movement from periphery to center as a phenomenon that potentially threatened “national cohesion” (cf. Glick Schiller and Wimmer; Essed and Nimako), not as conscious and legitimate decisions by individuals aimed at improving their socio-economic position. If we embrace a trans-local notion of emancipation, hindering free settlement in the Netherlands is unacceptable: it would undermine equal citizenship.

### **Making Aliens out of Citizens**

The fact that the settlement of Dutch citizens from the Caribbean in the Netherlands is disconnected from the discourse of emancipation is instrumental in relegating them to second-class citizenship. The logics of the Bosman Bill are in part informed by this disconnection. In a nutshell, the bill reads as follows: Firstly, if the bill is enacted it will end free settlement in the Netherlands of the targeted Dutch citizens from Aruba, Curaçao, and Sint Maarten by introducing a residence permit for a maximum of five years. They would have to apply for this permit after having stayed in the Netherlands for six months (Kamerstukken II 2012–2013, par. 3). Those Dutch Citizens from the islands who do not meet the socio-economic requirements for such a permit (or who do not meet them any longer) would have to leave the Netherlands (par. 6, art. 15). Moreover, the act would enable the expulsion and imprisonment of Dutch citizens lacking such a permit (par. 6, art. 16–17). Once expelled, their future access to Dutch territory would be denied (par. 3, art. 3). Furthermore, the targeted Dutch citizens from the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom lacking such a permit would be prohibited to register at one of the municipalities and excluded from the housing market and Dutch social services.

In effect, the targeted Dutch citizens from the islands would come to be treated as aliens. The bill is a telling expression of a phenomenon I alternately termed “alienage of citizens” or “citizenship alienism” (Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen* 368; Jones, “Biology, Culture” 319). These concepts signify a variety of situations wherein status citizens are perceived and treated by the polity as if they are aliens or semi-nationals. Moreover, the bill is not just excluding Caribbean Dutch citizens from a certain class background, but is explicitly racialized in nature. André Bosman rejected the claim that the bill is an expression of racial discrimination, by arguing that the bill uses the criterion of “national origin.” However, both the OCaN and the Meijers commission pointed out that a distinction based on national origin constitutes racism according to international law.

As the Meijers Committee notes, the bill would “make a *direct* distinction based on race or ethnic origin in the legal sense of these concepts” (Commissie Meijers 3, emphasis added). It would create a legal distinction between two categories of Dutch citizens based on ethnic origin: Antillean Dutch and European Dutch. The so called “Antillean Dutch” would be the target group of the bill, while the “European Dutch” from the islands would be exempt from the bill. As a consequence of the act, two friends who were both born and raised on one of the islands and went to the same schools would be treated differently when planning on further studies and stay in the Netherlands. The one classified as “Antillean Dutch” would have to fit the requirements for a permit, while the “European Dutch” (as a child of Dutch citizens who were born in the Netherlands) could freely settle in the Netherlands.

Adding to the racialized nature of the bill, the “European Dutch” living in other parts of the world (the descendants of Dutch emigrants living in places such as Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada) would not be affected by the act, as the OCaN argued: they are not mentioned as a target group in the bill (“Bosman vergeet dat”). Their right of unconditional settlement in the Netherlands would remain uncontested; like their “European Dutch” fellow citizens on the Caribbean islands, they would not have to carry the burden of proof when relocating to the Netherlands. Only “Antillean Dutch” citizens from the Caribbean part

of the Dutch Kingdom would have to prove that they are worthy of living in the Netherlands.

### **“Disadvantaged Antilleans”: Emancipation Ethno-Nationalized**

The Bosman act would impact all those classified as “Antillean Dutch” on the islands, although it was officially aimed at the so called “*kansarme Antillianen*,” the “disadvantaged Antilleans.” This exclusionary rhetorical figure gained currency in political discourses in the nineties. We should remember that the figure of the *kansarme Antilliaan* does not correspond to some factual social reality, but implies a *political* reframing of people who moved from the Dutch Caribbean to the Netherlands aimed at their exclusion from Dutch territory.

*Kansarme Antillianen* is not about how people out there “really” are, but how they are framed. In every society there are people who, for a variety of reasons—not in the least structural social exclusion from opportunities in society—do not fit into the normalized idea of being a “successful” or “decent” citizen. However, the discursive connection between socio-economic status and origin/ethnic descent was exclusively made for Dutch citizens from the islands, not for other Dutch citizens (consequently, there is no discourse about *kansarme Friezen* or *kansarme Drentenaren*, although many thousands of citizens with a similar socio-economic status exist in these provinces). The trope is connected to a politics of belonging: deprived socio-economic status or deviant behavior of those citizens who are deemed as belonging to the nation-state is never ethnically, regionally, or racially marked; they are simply accepted as phenomena to be dealt with internally. Furthermore, *kansarme Antillianen* is a snapshot judgment, a reification that obscures the fact that the socio-economic position of designated individuals is not static, but may change in the course of life when conditions, such as moving to the richer part of the Kingdom, improve. As Danitza Jacobs, now a successful businesswoman, explains:

Fifteen years ago, I did not view myself as a disadvantaged youngster [*kansarme jongere*], I was someone with opportunities

[*kansrijke jongere*] in a disadvantaged environment [*kansarme omgeving*] (*Pauw en Witteman*, translation mine).

The rhetorical figure of the *kansarme Antilliaan* gained prominence in the nineties. Next to its reifying nature, it signifies a *pars pro toto* mechanism (Elias 12), in which a small percentage of the “Antillean Dutch” is magnified at the expense of the overwhelming majority of people from the Dutch Caribbean, who are readymade success stories according to dominant norms (Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen* 299–304; cf. Schuster). As a consequence, the contributions of the vast majority of the “Antillean Dutch” to Dutch society are currently completely overlooked (“OCaN advies”). This figure of the *kansarme Antilliaan* was preceded by an earlier discourse in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, when the number of citizens from the Dutch Antilles that settled in the Netherlands was relatively small and the more numerous “Surinamese Dutch” that settled in the Netherlands got central attention in political discourse (cf. Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen*; Schuster). In this context, the “Antillean Dutch” were not considered a problematic group and, ironically, sometimes even represented as “calm,” “hard working,” and “exemplary citizens” compared to the “unruly” “Surinamese Dutch.” In these years (the fifties and sixties), politicians in the motherland especially viewed working class “Surinamese Dutch” men and their relationships with white Dutch women as a threat to the Dutch nation (Schuster 119–128; Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen* 270–299). *Kansarme Antilliaan* as a political construction gained currency when an increasing number of Dutch citizens from the islands settled in the Netherlands from the eighties onwards and the “Surinamese Dutch” were no longer in the spotlight of political debates.

The image of the *kansarme Antilliaan* (a term uncritically repeated in political discourses of the nineties) served as an ideological tool for recurrent proposals from politicians to restrict free movement of Dutch citizens from the islands to the Netherlands, even when the Dutch government repeatedly admitted that “the great majority of the Antillean community is doing reasonably well” (Jones, *Tussen Onderdanen* 304–322). Observations like these fundamentally contradict the idea of an inherently problematic group. However, the Antillean community

was completely overshadowed by the trope of the *kansarme Antilliaan*, which gained status as “reality.”

In short, in the figure of the *kansarme Antilliaan*, poor socio-economic status is magnified, reified, and racialized, suggesting that the symbolically alienated “Antilleans” *inherently* pose a greater threat to Dutch society and its norms of decency than other Dutch citizens in similar conditions. As a consequence, the focus is not on creating opportunities, but on exclusion. The Dutch government and Members of Parliament have never framed the movement of the less fortunate from the Caribbean islands to the Netherlands as a phenomenon that contributed to a more just distribution of wealth and opportunities in the Kingdom. Apparently, the opportunities and benefits of the Dutch Kingdom are the prerogatives of those deemed “real” Dutch citizens. In this regard, the bill signified a new phase in exclusionary discourses. In contrast with the nineties, when proposals to restrict freedom of movement of “Antilleans” were legally explored but eventually rejected, the Bosman Bill signified a concrete step in the enactment of unequal citizenship.

“Ain’t I a Dutch citizen, entitled to emancipation?”; this is how the response of the targeted Dutch citizens from the Islands who were critical of the bill may be summed up. A debate on the television program *Pauw en Witteman*, broadcast on the 10th of March 2014, is a telling example of the different perspectives on the bill. During this program, opponents of the bill Quincy Gario and Danitza Jacobs entered into a debate with its initiator, liberal (VVD) MP André Bosman (*Pauw en Witteman*). After Bosman explained the intention of his bill (excluding the *kansarme Antillianen* for residence in the Netherlands based on insufficient “income, educational level, housing, financial means”), host Jeroen Pauw turned to Danitza Jacobs:

Pauw: “Danitza, if this bill was introduced fifteen years ago, you would not have been sitting at this table right now, I guess.”

Danitza Jacobs: “That is correct. I came to the Netherlands as a twenty-year-old. At the time, I did not have an education, certainly not a business, nor a job. I came to the Netherlands

because I saw little prospects while on Curaçao [...]. Now here I am, a successful businesswoman [...]. I am also a taxpayer, Mister Bosman.”

Pauw: “Mister Bosman, here is an example of someone who could not have reached this success if the bill were already enacted.”  
(translation mine)

In response, André Bosman stated that people from the islands should not “try their luck” in the Netherlands, but instead look for opportunities “on the islands.” Jacobs: “I am a human being, a Dutch citizen. I enjoy the same rights and duties as every other person [...]. We are all part of one Kingdom. This bill makes a distinction based on ethnicity.” In defense of his bill, Bosman, besides referring to the aim to exclude the *kansarme Antillianen*, pointed to similar conditions the islands have set for Dutch citizens in the Netherlands who want to settle on the islands (the so called *Landsverordening Toelating en Uitzetting* [Country Ordinance Admission and Expulsion]). However, Bosman overlooked the very different rationale for the regime on the islands and his bill: *scale* versus *race/ethnic* descent. Bosman neglected the fact that the huge differences between the Netherlands and the Caribbean islands with regard to scale (population, geographical size, and economy) is the rationale for the LTU. As Danitza Jacobs put it: “If sixteen million people were to move from the Netherlands to the islands, the islands would sink.” The bill, in contrast, is not about scale; instead, it is racialized in design and effect.

Here, two very different perspectives on the meaning of the Kingdom in relation to emancipation, freedom of choice, and equal citizenship collided. Danitza Jacobs’ statement implied a trans-local and de-racialized definition of emancipation, a striving of citizens to be realized by moving from the poorer part to the richer part of the Kingdom. To her, equal treatment implied recognition of her Dutch citizenship as a route to improvement by moving to the Netherlands, regardless of ethnic background. In contrast, André Bosman, neglecting the Dutch citizenship status of so called *kansarme Antillianen*, implicitly promoted a uni-territorial as well as racialized definition of

emancipation and nation. This is about the simultaneous operation of a uni-territorial notion of emancipation and race: opportunities for social improvement in the richer part of the Kingdom were to be reserved for the “European Dutch” not for those classified as Antilleans. Freedom of choice for self-betterment, a principle which the Liberals hold so dearly, will become a prerogative for “European Dutch,” whether they are disadvantaged or not, if the bill were to be enacted. Moreover, this proposal to enact second-class citizenship is not far-right symbolism (as per usual), but is firmly situated in mainstream Dutch politics: at the time the bill was initiated, the liberal democrats (VVD) were the largest party within the coalition.

### Legalizing Ethnic Profiling

It should be emphasized that the Bosman Bill would not only have an impact on the designated “Antillean Dutch” citizens in the overseas parts of the Kingdom who aspire to settle in the Netherlands, but also on Dutch citizens in the Netherlands who do not fit the somatic norm image of the “real” Dutch. The bill grants the police and the military police the right to stop and check people of whom there is “reason to believe” that their presence is not in accordance with the bill, in order to establish their “identity, nationality, and residence position” (Kamerstukken II, 2012–2013, par. 4, art. 13). In this regard, the OCaN, the Dutch Commission for Human Rights, and the Meijers Committee argued that the act would result in ethnic profiling. As the Meijers Committee argued:

The provision [...] in article 13 creates clear risks for all Dutch citizens with a dark complexion to be stopped and checked by the police. How may the police otherwise recognize the relatively small group of Antillean Dutch Citizens without the necessary permit on the streets? This risk for many hundreds of thousands Dutch citizens is taken for granted. White Dutch citizens will never suffer from this practice. (Commissie Meijers 9)

In effect, the act would have an impact on all Dutch citizens in the Netherlands who were perceived to be “of Caribbean origin” by the police. Those Dutch citizens who are perceived to be “real” Dutch citizens would be exempted from the gaze, from the scrutiny, and from the inspection of the Dutch state. Ethnic profiling as a consequence of the bill’s enactment is not only theoretical, but very real, since it is already a common practice among the Dutch police. A 2013 report by Amnesty International and the Open Society Institute, *Equality Under Pressure: The Impact of Ethnic Profiling*, has revealed the practice of ethnic profiling by the Dutch police. The report portrays ordinary Dutch citizens who were stopped by the police without any reason other than the way they looked. One of the portrayed is a black police chief inspector, Sidney Mutueel, who was stopped by his colleagues while off duty: “Once I take off my uniform I become a citizen... and get stopped by my colleagues. I’ve been approached in a really impertinent, unfriendly way, and that has an effect on me” (“Equality under Pressure,” translation mine). Research done by critical race scholars has demonstrated that racism (in its many expressions) is systemic in the Netherlands, rather than an anomaly that may be attributed to individual psychology (see Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism*). The report on ethnic profiling strongly supports this thesis. However, just like the research that preceded it, the findings of the report were largely neglected by the Dutch media. This may well be informed by the cultivation of moral righteousness and innocence in dominant discourse (Essed and Hoving 9–30). Such a discursive climate may have resulted in a lack of critical awareness among the public and politicians about proposals such as the Bosman Bill. Whatever the case, if the bill were to be enacted it would legitimize and intensify an already existing pattern and practice of unequal treatment within Dutch society based on somatic characteristics. In that sense, the impact of the act would be much broader: it would legalize inequality.

### Apartheid

Ending free settlement of “Antillean Dutch” citizens, while welcoming “European Dutch” citizens; excluding “Antillean Dutch” citizens from

the housing market and social services while including the “European Dutch”; street inspections of Dutch citizens based on ethnic profiles, while leaving white Dutch citizens unchecked; creating a class of deportable “Antillean Dutch” citizens, while exempting “European Dutch” citizens: it is not outlandish to compare the bill with apartheid, as the OCaN did (“OCaN advies”). However, the Bosman Bill did not get the widespread public attention that, for instance, the passing of Nelson Mandela received in the Netherlands. Everyone praised Nelson Mandela and his struggle against apartheid, but the formalization of second-class citizenship proposed by the Bosman Bill did not lead to widespread public indignation. It was extremely difficult for the OCaN to get the attention of the national media for the apartheid-like Bosman Bill.<sup>2</sup> There is a conspicuous discrepancy between the dense public discourse concerning inequalities and human rights abuses in a wide variety of foreign countries, and the relative absence of moral reflection on internal Dutch injustices in the present and the colonial past. The OCaN, in an attempt to persuade the parliament to reject the bill, argued that the bill contradicts the constitution (article 1, the prohibition of discrimination), the EU-law, the EU directive against racism, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. Both the Dutch Human Rights Commission and the Meijers Committee have resolutely and extensively rejected the act on similar grounds.

Only after the fundamental criticism expressed by these organizations did the attitude of the majority of the Dutch parliament change. In a plenary debate on the bill on the 12th of March, 2014, the liberals (VVD) stood by the bill: excluding *kansarme Antillianen* was a good thing, and would have a positive effect on “Antillean Dutch in the Netherlands.” Furthermore, the party did not expect a negative impact on Antillean–Dutch relations. Also, the party did not see legal obstacles regarding unequal treatment based on race and ethnic profiling (Handelingen II). The populist party (PVV) and the Reformed Christian Party (SGP) strongly supported the act. The christian democrats (CDA) occupied the middle position: although the CDA argued that “we

---

2. Personal information by Glenn Helberg, chairperson of the OCaN.

should not under-estimate the problems” (of “vulnerable youngsters”), the party expressed doubts about the legal feasibility of the bill. The “ChristianUnion” (CU), social liberals (D66), “Greenleft” (GroenLinks), socialists (SP), and social democrats (PvdA), many referring to the Meijers Committee and the OCaN, were critical of the bill. While they all mentioned “the problems we face with these youngsters,” uncritically rearticulating the trope of the *kansarme Antilliaan*, they were much more sensitive to the argument that the bill was inconsistent with international law because it constitutes a distinction based on race. The CU, SP, and GroenLinks even argued that the bill would amount to “second-class citizenship,” while pleading for “undivided Dutch citizenship.” The social democratic party PvdA (the coalition partner of the VVD in the current government) were critical of the bill; the party did not support the bill in its current form because of its use of the criteria descent and birthplace of parents. However, the party was in favor of a revised bill that would exclude “people without education or with a criminal record” from the Dutch Antilles, thereby still neglecting the Dutch citizenship of these people and conforming to the uni-territorialism of the bill. Because of the “legal obstacles” that many Members of Parliament noted, the bill was postponed until further notice (see *Handelingen II*).

Strikingly, this was not a heated debate in which the Members of Parliament showed great indignation about this introduction of second-class citizenship. To be sure, the bill was criticized, but remarkably most Members of Parliament pleaded for amendment of the bill instead of resolutely rejecting it for its racialized logic and intent. Furthermore, just like *Bosman*, no Member of Parliament accounted for the broader impact the bill would have on Dutch society and the messages it already delivered. As the Meijers Committee observed:

[...] not a word on the negative message this bill carries for all Dutch citizens of migrant background with regard to the proposal to make a distinction between Dutch citizens and the ending of unified Dutch citizenship. How can Dutch citizens of Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese, Iraqi, Iranian, or Somalian background be assured that the Dutch government will not make similar

bills that deprive them from essential rights based on descent, while other Dutch citizens keep them? (Commissie Meijers 9, translation mine)

### **Conclusion: the Risk of Liminal Citizenship**

The Bosman Bill is inconsistent with a conventional, universalist-inclusive notion of citizenship. The bill demonstrates that citizenship status does not guarantee minimal inclusion into the nation-state *per se*. Rather, citizenship is potentially a *regressive* status when citizens are constructed as not “really belonging” to the nation; citizens may be deprived of rights that are considered to be inherent to citizenship status.

The bill is an ominous example of “citizenship alienism,” of perceiving and treating citizens as though they are aliens. The existence of the remnants of the Dutch empire (the Dutch Kingdom is characterized by citizens living in distant territories across the ocean) is a condition of possibility for citizenship alienism. However, it does not sufficiently explain initiatives such as the bill, since “European Dutch” from the islands and from elsewhere are exempted from it. The broader message of the bill is that all citizens who do not fit the normalized and racialized idea of the Dutch nation should be mindful that their citizenship is not safe. Jean Claire Kim, reflecting on Asian Americans in the US, has termed this predicament “conditional citizenship”: “formal citizenship whose meaning is contingent upon variable forces in a given place and time [...]. Unlike the unconditional citizenship typically enjoyed by whites, conditional citizenship is always on the verge of being compromised” (Kim 157). The Bosman Bill creates a class of conditional citizens in the Dutch context. What is more, while the bill establishes the conditional citizenship status of the “Antillean Dutch,” it in fact sends a message to *all* “othered” Dutch citizens that their citizenship status is conditional. Initiatives like these question the meaning of citizenship for inclusion in society: the possession of citizenship status does not guarantee anything in itself; citizenship is a floating signifier. Many citizenship scholars assume that formal membership (to hold nationality status) guarantees equal treatment

and certain inalienable rights and protections, such as the right of free movement and settlement into the country of nationality. In contrast, the bill testifies that the meaning of Dutch nationality depends upon dominant ideas about the Dutch nation. Centuries of Dutch citizenship have not protected the “Antillean Dutch” from being alienated by far-reaching exclusionary initiatives such as the bill.

The conditional, unstable meaning of the Dutch citizenship status of the “Antillean Dutch” that the bill exemplifies brings to mind Victor Turner’s conceptualization of liminality. Turner, expanding on the work of Arnold van Lennep on *rites de passage*, distinguished between the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal phase that marks the transition from one social status to another in a variety of contexts. Turner defined liminality as “the betwixt and between” position, “a period of margin,” an “inter-structural position” of “transformation” and “becoming” and of relative “invisibility of the liminal personae” (Turner 4–6). Of particular interest in this context is that liminality is tacitly understood as being a transitory phase in a process of *progressive* inclusion: it is assumed to be followed by acceptance into a higher rated or more privileged social status. However, when applying the concept of liminality to the Bosman Bill, a *regressive* liminality with regard to citizenship is at work. If the bill were to be an act, it would *de jure* turn full Dutch citizens into semi-citizens. Under this regressive trajectory of liminal citizenship, “Antillean Dutch” would—in certain crucial respects—be treated as legal aliens. This risk of becoming a liminal citizen regards *all* citizens who do not fit into dominant constructions of “real Dutchness.” Therefore, a de-essentialized definition of what it means to be Dutch is a necessary condition for creating equal citizenship in the Netherlands. A critical majority is needed to prevent the enactment of unequal citizenship in this country.

## WORKS CITED

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Benhabib, Seyla. <i>De rechten van “anderen.”</i> Kampen: Ten Have, 2007. Print.</p> <p>“Bosman vergeet dat discriminatie</p> | <p>op grond van nationale herkomst ook racisme is.” <i>OCaN</i>, 18 Dec. 2013. Web. 8 Oct. 2014.</p> <p>Bosniak, Linda. <i>The Citizen</i></p> |
|--|--|

- and the Alien: Dilemmas of Contemporary Membership.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.
- Botman, Maayke, Nancy Jouwe, and Gloria Wekker** eds. *Caleidoscopische visies: de zwarte, migranten- en vluchtelingen vrouwenbeweging in Nederland.* Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 2001. Print.
- Commissie Meijers.** “Notitie over het wetsvoorstel Bosman (VVD) tot regulering van de vestiging van Nederlanders van Aruba, Curaçao en Sint Maarten in Nederland (TK 33325).” *Commissie Meijers*, 3 Febr. 2014. Web. 8 Oct. 2014.
- Elias, Norbert.** *Gevestigden en Buitenstaanders.* Amsterdam: Boom, 2005. Print.
- . “Equality under Pressure: The Impact of Ethnic Profiling in the Netherlands.” *Open Society Foundation* Nov. 2013. Web. 12 Oct. 2014.
- Essed, Philomena, and Isabel Hoving.** “Innocence, Smug Ignorance, Resentment: An introduction to Dutch Racism.” *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race* 27.4 (2014): 9–30. Print.
- Essed, Philomena, and Kwame Nimako.** “Designs or Designs and (Co)Incidents: Cultures of Scholarship and Public Policy on Immigrants/Minorities in the Netherlands.” *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 4 (2006): 281–312. Print.
- Essed, Philomena.** *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory.* Newbury Park: Sage, 1991. Print.
- Handelingen II, 2013–2014, nr. 62, item 3.
- Jones, Guno.** “Biology, Culture, ‘Postcolonial Citizenship’ and the Dutch Nation, 1945–2007.” *Thamyris/Intersecting Place, Sex and Race* 27.4 (2014): 315–336. Print.
- . *Tussen Onderdanen, Rijksgenoten en Nederlanders: Nederlandse politici over burgers uit Oost & West en Nederland, 1945–2005.* Amsterdam: Rozenberg, 2007. Print.
- Kim, Claire Jean.** “The Usual Suspects: Asian Americans as Conditional Citizens.” *The State of Asian America: Trajectory of Civic and Political Engagement. A Public Policy Report.* Ed. Paul M. Ong. Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute, 2008. 137–163. Print.
- Kamerstukken II, 2011–2012, 33325, nrs. 1–3.
- Kamerstukken II, 2012–2013,

33325, nr. 5.  
 “OCaN-advies aan de Tweede Kamer betreffende wetsvoorstel vestigingseisen ‘Antillianen’: groot bezwaar tegen raswetgeving.” *OCaN*, 29 Aug. 2013. Web. 8 Oct. 2014.  
*Pauw en Witteman*. VARA. 10 Mar. 2014. Television.  
**Schuster, John.** *Poortwachters over immigranten: het debat over immigratie in het naoorlogse Groot-Brittannië en Nederland*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1999. Print.  
**Turner, Victor.** “Betwixt and

Between. The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage.” *Betwixt and Between. Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*. Eds. Louise Carus Mahdi, Steven Foster, and Meredith Little. La Salle III: Open Court Publishing Company, 1987. Print.

**Wimmer, Andreas and Nina Glick Schiller.** “Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology.” *International Migration Review* 37.3 (2003): 576–610. Print.

#### BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Guno Jones is currently a lecturer of Research Methods and Ethics at S.I.T Amsterdam. He is affiliated with the Social Sciences faculty of the University of Amsterdam, where

he has researched and published on decolonization, postcolonial migration, citizenship, identity formation, and the politics of memory and heritage.