NEW YORK AND AMSTERDAM

Immigration and the New Urban Landscape

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PART III

Is Islam in Amsterdam Like Race in New York City?

In Amsterdam, Islam is a major barrier facing immigrants; in New York City, race operates in a similar fashion. Yet if Islam in Amsterdam is like race in New York City in many ways, there are also profound differences between the two urban contexts.

That immigrants in New York are often seen through the prism of race is not surprising given the history of racial inequality in the United States and the demographics of the city. Race, following Foner and Fredrickson, refers to socially significant differences between human groups or communities differing in visible physical characteristics or putative ancestry that are believed to be innate and unchangeable (2004: 2–3). In contemporary New York, "race" is basically a color word, which is a legacy of slavery, legal segregation, and ghettoization in the United States as well as the long-time presence of a large African American population in the city.

Anti-Islam sentiment, to be sure, is hardly absent in New York. The number of Muslim immigrants from South Asia and the Middle East has grown in recent years; in the backlash after the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center, they have sometimes been victims of discrimination and harassment and occasionally even hate crimes owing to their religion or nationality (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2009). The public controversy in 2010 over a plan to build a Muslim community center a few blocks from the World Trade Center site—a plan that was vocally supported by the Lower Manhattan Community Board and

Mayor Michael Bloomberg, but attacked by many Republican politicians such as former mayor Rudolph Giuliani—also no doubt reflected and reinforced anti-Muslim prejudices among many New Yorkers. Yet divisions based on race are a more central fault line—and more pervasive and persistent—in a city, as Mary Waters notes, that is deeply unequal in terms of race and highly racially segregated.

For much of the twentieth century, a black/white dichotomy dominated New York race relations, dating from the large inflow of African Americans from the South between World War I and the 1960s. The black/white binary has not disappeared, but has proved inadequate in light of the huge influx of not-black and not-white Asian and Latino immigrants in the last five decades. A new racial/ethnic hierarchy has evolved in New York City—in broad strokes, white/Asian//Hispanic/black. These categories are used in official statistics as well as in everyday discourse. Even if immigrants often prefer to be known by their group of national origin, they are often labeled "black," "Hispanic," or "Asian" by others. Ethnic distinctions based on European ancestry—Italian, Irish, and Jewish—have not vanished, yet they have "become so faint as to pale beside other racial/ethnic boundaries" and a common identity has emerged among "Euro-Americans" as whites in opposition to other racial groups in the city (Alba 1999). New York has become what is often called a majority-minority city, in which non-Hispanic whites are now 33 percent of the population; Hispanics, 29 percent; non-Hispanic blacks, 23 percent; and Asians, 13 percent.

Racial minorities may be numerically dominant in New York, but nonwhites, especially blacks and Latinos, continue to encounter barriers whatever their immigrant status or national origin. As the quintessentially racialized Americans, people of African ancestry confront especially acute difficulties, or, as Waters puts it, face more systematic and "brighter" boundaries than Asians and light-skinned Latinos. Black immigrants and their children—about one million New Yorkers—are more residentially segregated from, and less likely to marry, whites than are Latinos and Asians. More than half of the city's public schools are at least 90 percent black and Latino (Kleinfeld 2012). The children of black (and Latino) immigrants generally attend predominantly minority schools in poor neighborhoods with less experienced teachers, more limited curricula, higher turnover, and more dangerous environments

than those that most white and Asian children go to. The New York second-generation study found that most native blacks and West Indians worked in predominantly black work sites, whereas Hispanics and Chinese were more likely to work in racially mixed workplaces (Kasinitz et al. 2008: 198). Drawing on that study in her chapter, Waters shows that native-born blacks and the young adult children of West Indian immigrants reported the most prejudice and discrimination, followed by Hispanic groups, then the Chinese, and then native whites and Russian Jews. Many blacks and Hispanics complained of being stopped and searched by the police and experiencing discrimination in stores and from teachers and school administrators; middle-class blacks and Hispanics were especially bitter about racist slurs and treatment in public spaces, in which they were evaluated on the basis of race alone and their class status was unknown or ignored.

If racial inequalities remain deeply entrenched in New York, it is also the case that nonwhite immigrants have profited from the African American presence in ways that are largely absent in Amsterdam. Many immigrant New Yorkers have benefited from federal government policies and legislation, including affirmative action and diversity outreach programs to improve minorities' access to higher education and professional positions. Implemented in the United States in the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, these programs were originally justified as a response to the caste-like status of African Americans and then extended to other groups, especially Latinos. It has become widely accepted in New York that blacks and Latinos should be represented (and improve their representation) in important political bodies, universities, and corporate and government offices. Waters and her colleagues argue that affirmative action and other policies designed to redress longstanding American racial inequalities actually have ended up working better for immigrants and their children than for the native minorities for whom they were initially intended (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

There are additional contrasts with Amsterdam. Whereas immigrants and their second-generation children in Amsterdam are confronted with long established white working- and middle-class communities and structures, for the New York black and Latino second generation, the long-settled populations of African Americans and Puerto Ricans may be a more welcoming presence. Second-generation blacks and Latinos

may feel excluded from white America, but they generally come to feel a part of the large black and Latino minority communities. Indeed, they can take advantage of organizations and programs (such as various ethnic studies programs at colleges and universities) established in post-civil rights America to meet the needs of African Americans as well as Latinos and Asians. There is now a sizable African American middle class in the New York area; incorporation into what has been called the African American middle-class "minority culture of mobility" provides role models and resources for upward mobility for black second-generation immigrants, including black professional and fraternal associations and organizations of black students in racially integrated high schools and universities (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999). The other side of the coin is that immigrants often attempt to distance themselves from native blacks. Given that African Americans are generally seen by New Yorkers to be at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, it is not surprising that immigrants—especially those of African ancestry or close in phenotype to native blacks—often try to set themselves apart to avoid the stigma associated with African Americans and to claim superior status (Foner 2005; Itzigsohn 2009; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1999).

Although immigrants in Amsterdam often claim superior status to those in other immigrant-origin groups on the basis, for example, of having come to the country earlier, the absence of an equivalent native minority group rules out the kind of distancing that takes place in New York with regard to African Americans. It also rules out the possibility of assimilating into a native minority group, something that seems to be happening in New York among second-generation West Indians of African ancestry. Many struggle to have their West Indian identity recognized but find that without an accent or other cues to immediately signal their ethnicity to others, they are seen as African American in encounters with whites. Indeed, a gradual blurring of boundaries between African American and West Indian youth appears to be taking place (Vickerman 2013). At least at the current moment, assimilation into black America (including the growing black middle class) is an inevitability for most second-generation West Indians. Becoming American, to put it another way, means becoming black American (Foner 2011).

For West Indians and other black immigrants, foreignness is an advantage in the context of New York's racial hierarchy. This is in line

with a more general feature of New York City brought out in Waters's chapter—that nativism, or intense opposition to an internal minority on the basis of foreign connections, is not strong. In fact, the city prides itself on its immigrant heritage and likes to celebrate present-day immigrants owing to a variety of factors, among them the ethnoracial and socioeconomic diversity of the immigrant flows there and the long and continuous history of immigration (see Foner, this volume). Members of the second generation, Waters states, experience exclusion based on the color of their skin, not foreignness. In Amsterdam, foreignness is a disadvantage for those of non–Western European origin, and indeed the commonly (and officially) used term "allochthones" (people born abroad or with one or both parents born abroad) often has negative connotations (Lucassen, this volume).

In Amsterdam, Islam (and cultural values and practices associated with it), not color-coded race, is the "bright boundary" and basis for exclusion of many immigrants and their children. Not that color is irrelevant as a symbolic marker of difference, particularly for the large number of Antilleans and Surinamese of African ancestry, who represent a significant share of the immigrant-origin population. Having origins in former Dutch colonies, these groups have recently come to be seen as quite Dutch in contrast to newly immigrated Muslims, whose cultural and religious differences stand out. To further complicate things, the term "black" is not always reserved for those of sub-Saharan African descent. In a practice that would seem strange to most Americans, "black" schools in Amsterdam refer to those where most students have a foreign background, especially Moroccans and Turks, although pupils of Surinamese and Antillean origin may be present, as well. Still, those of immigrant origin in Amsterdam are more likely to be stigmatized on the basis of culture—as Muslims—than color.

Partly this situation has to do with historical developments. Although colonialism and slavery in distant possessions gave rise to racist attitudes and structures in the Netherlands, they had much less impact on race relations there than internal slavery in the United States—and of course there is no large native minority population that has had a powerful role in shaping the social construction of race, and race relations, as in New York. The very term "race"—widely accepted and used in New York across the political and racial spectrum—is a suspect concept

in the Netherlands given its association with Nazi racial laws about the superior "Aryan race" and inferior Jewish "race," and concern that using the term gives legitimacy to discriminatory tendencies by reifying races as distinguishable groups. In any case, Islam is associated in Amsterdam with Moroccans and Turks who not only comprise 28 percent of the immigrant-origin (and 41 percent of the non-Western-immigrant origin) population in the city but also are seen as problematic immigrant-origin groups in terms of poverty, unemployment, education, and crime rates (see Lucassen, this volume; Vermeulen et al., this volume).

A key question is whether the use of allegedly deep-seated cultural differences associated with Islam as justification for hostility and discrimination against immigrants and their descendants is a kind of cultural racism. Scholars who use the term "cultural racism" to describe the reaction to certain new immigrant groups in Europe have argued that race is, in effect, coded as culture, the central feature of this process being that the qualities of groups are seen as fixed, made natural, and confined within a "pseudo-biologically defined culturalism" (Solomos and Back, quoted in Fredrickson 2002: 8). In George Fredrickson's conceptualization, culture and religion can become essentialized to the point that they serve as functional equivalents of biological racism: culture, in other words, can do the work of race when peoples or ways of life are seen as unchangeable as pigmentation (Fredrickson 2002: 8, 141, 145). Others have argued that the hostility toward Muslims is better understood as an expression of nativism, highlighting the supposed foreignness of Islam (Duyvendak 2011). This would imply that the religious barrier is, in the end, permeable.

However Islam is conceptualized—in terms of race, religion, or culture—Muslims are the most stigmatized and disadvantaged group in Amsterdam. Their culture is commonly seen as a barrier to socioeconomic advancement. Muslims are often labeled uncivilized and backward in terms of their values and practices by many in the general public as well as politicians both on the populist right and the more cosmopolitan left. Moroccans, in particular, have been marginalized as criminals, problem youth, and religious extremists (Vermeulen et al., this volume).

What Justus Uitermark, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Jan Rath refer to as a culturalist discourse has been prominent in Amsterdam's public life in recent years, especially in the wake of the World Trade Center

attacks of September 11, 2001, and murder of Theo van Gogh by a Dutch youth of Moroccan background in 2004. Islam is widely portrayed as irreconcilable with and constituting a threat to Western values such as free speech and equal rights for women and homosexuals—which are at the core of what Duyvendak and his colleagues elsewhere have called a progressive monoculture of the Dutch majority that developed in the past few decades. For the Dutch, Muslims' "strict sexual morals remind [them] too much of what they have recently left behind" (Peter van der Veer, quoted in Duyvendak et al. 2009: 138) and, particularly among people on the left, the painful wresting free from the strictures of their own religions (Buruma 2006: 69).

The chapter on Islam in Amsterdam complicates the picture, showing how views and policies toward Islam have shifted among the city's political leadership—and how Islam in the Netherlands has itself begun to change. During his mayoralty from 2001 to 2010, Job Cohen and others in the city government tried to bring Islam more into the mainstream by, among other things, attributing to ethnic cultures an array of beliefs and behaviors disparaged by the Dutch as "uncivil" and arguing that they were antithetical to true Islamic teachings. Many Muslim leaders, moreover, presented Islam as an integrating force counteracting misogyny, delinquency, and crime, and rejected elements of their ethnic cultures concerning, for example, gender relations in the family.

The chapter concludes by noting that the mayor who succeeded Cohen ended attempts to create a cultural center for debating Islam and spoke out against Muslim civil servants who refused to shake hands with members of the opposite sex. There are other clouds on the horizon, including the possibility of stalled mobility—and high rates of unemployment—for Moroccan and Turkish young people and the attraction of some to extremist Islamic groups. Yet there are also some encouraging signs. Islam, as the chapter makes clear, continues to change in the Dutch context in part as a result of actions by many Muslim leaders. Some scholars predict that as members of the second generation assume leadership in religious associations and institutions, they will generally strive for a more liberal version of Islam than their parents practiced, one that is focused on integration into Western European society and viewed more positively by the wider population (Lucassen 2005: 157–58, 207). A study of the second generation in the Netherlands suggests that

most will become less religious altogether. Although the vast majority of second-generation Turks and Moroccans surveyed in 50 Dutch cities identified as Muslim, they reported weaker religious identities and less engagement in religious practices than the first generation (Maliepaard, Lubbers, and Gijsberts 2010). Over time, the native Dutch are likely to grow used to, or at least more used to, Islamic religious observance, especially as Islam becomes more Europeanized. Increased day-to-day interactions with Muslims in schools, neighborhoods, and other social settings are also likely to heighten comfort with people of Muslim background; as the proportion of European-born and well-educated Muslims grows, their participation in mainstream political and economic life will seem more and more "natural."

Predicting the future, of course, is a risky business, and we have to wait to see whether, and to what extent, Islam in Amsterdam—and race in New York—remain barriers for inclusion not only for immigrants but also their second- and third-generation descendants. In Amsterdam, the chapter by Uitermark and his colleagues argues, Islam itself has been undergoing transformation, and it remains to be seen if, and how, racial boundaries in New York City will blur in the context of future developments, including rising rates of intermarriage and opportunities for economic advancement (e.g., Alba 2009; Foner 2005; Lee and Bean 2010).

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