

Black Europe and a Contested European Union

ABSTRACT: European nations have several things in common, such as notions of geography, religion and race, they also have differences, such as their historical relationship to colonialism, and the constitutional arrangements prevalent in each nation-state. Each of these differences in turn can have a significant impact on the possibilities and the constraints for political mobilization and social mobility of Black Europeans within member states. The European Union (EU) is also a contested project in which multiple ‘stakeholders’ compete or cooperate to defend or advance their position and status within it. The stakeholders include nations, states, political parties, ethnic groups, religious groups, and social and civil movements, each of which has differential access to political power, and to economic and cultural resources.

KEYWORDS: Black Europe, European Union, Populism, Nativism, Social movements

Introduction and Context

The European Union (EU) is a contested project in which multiple “stakeholders” compete or cooperate to defend or advance their position and status within it. The stakeholders include nations, states, political parties, ethnic groups, religious groups, and social and civil movements, each of which has differential access to political power and to economic and cultural resources. The EU is contested in part because although those with vested interests in the project have a relatively clear idea about when it was set in motion, it is not clear that they know where it is heading and when it will end. This uncertainty—and ambivalence—regarding the EU likewise characterizes the position, status, and condition of Black Europeans within the EU. In this article I seek to shed some light on the place of Black Europeans in the EU project. Even mentioning the issue of Black Europeans evokes strong emotions among those who equate “Europeanness” with “race” or whiteness. It can also evoke equally strong and ambivalent emotions among some Black people who question whether they will be allowed to be fully European—to feel European and be treated as European—beyond the

status of possessing formal citizenship in one of the European states. This is all the more so since the notion of Black Europe implies an implicit knowledge and acknowledgement of the existence of an Other Europe of color.

It has become common in academic research and publications, in conferences and in various social media, to speak of Black Europeans (Small; Hine et al.; Pitts; AfroEuropeans 7th annual conference, 2019). This common language recognizes that there are national differences in the Black experience across European nations, but it highlights that there are also some important common dimensions to these experiences (Small 2018). It is important to note that although people speak of Black Europeans, there is in fact no European citizenship. Instead, there are Black people possessing the citizenship of different European nations. In addition, European nations have several things in common, such as notions of geography, religion, and race, while they also have differences, such as their historical relationship to colonialism and the constitutional arrangements in each nation-state. Each of these differences in turn can have a significant impact on the possibilities and constraints for political mobilization and social mobility of Black Europeans within member states.

The first section of this article examines the relationship between nationalism in Europe, the emergence, consolidation, and expansion of the EU, and the implications of both for race and ethnic relations in Europe at present, with a particular focus on Black Europeans. This is followed by an analysis of the relation between populism and nativism. I explore these two important phenomena by raising issues that revolve around notions regarding claims, citizenship, class, gender, and “race.” In the third section, I reflect on the notion of visibility/invisibility that has become an important part of the frame of analyses of the position and status of Black Europeans in some of the literature by Black European scholars and activists (Essed and Hoving; Keaton et al.; McEachrane).

I conclude by arguing that what tends to be classified as populism today may more usefully be considered as a form of nativism. This is all the more so since the conditions that nurtured European nationalism—of which colonialism was a major and consequential component—no longer operate in the same way, and they cannot be reversed. Sovereign nations in Africa and Asia today cannot be recolonized. Nevertheless, the rise of populist movements has put left-leaning political groupings on the defensive, partly because their intellectual tradition tends overwhelmingly to subsume race under class; this, in turn, has directly affected their current assessment of right-wing politics. The right-leaning

political groupings tend to adopt the language of the nativist and “dog whistle” to hold on to what they believe can be salvaged from what is left of their pre–World War II power. The inclusion of race and ethnic relations into political-economic analysis will enhance our knowledge on the making of the European Union.

On Nationalism and the Emergence of the EU

It can be stated that the European Union, as a formal organization, emerged out of the ashes of World War II and formed part of an attempt to deal with some of the challenges that revolved around nationalism, communism, and decolonization. This included key concerns about both European and global security. The creation of the EU was also motivated by important economic goals and interests. With regard to nationalism, Jerry Muller noted about a decade ago that:

A familiar and influential narrative of the twentieth-century European history argues that nationalism twice led to war, in 1914 and then again in 1939. Therefore, the story goes, Europeans concluded that nationalism was a danger and gradually abandoned it. In the post-war decades, *western Europeans* enmeshed themselves in a web of transnational institutions, culminating in the European Union (EU). (2008: 19; my emphasis)

Muller’s observation strongly suggests that the end of World War II is a useful date for periodization to analyze and discuss the *formation, consolidation, and expansion* of the EU. Like all periodization, a narrative can be built backward or forward. This is all the more so since nationalism does not stand on its own; it stands for something or against something. At a certain time in history it stood for notions of European expansion and colonization of non-European territories, while at another time it stood for the containment of communism.

If we take a backward look, it can be argued that nation-states, as we understand them today, emerged after the conclusion of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 (Nimako and Willemsen 2011). The treaty that underpinned the Peace of Westphalia occurred in the context of thirty years of religious wars between different factions of the Christian religious faith in Europe and its conclusion gave rise to Catholic-led nations and monarchs and Protestant-led nations and monarchs. These developments not only established the basis of what we refer to as nation-states, but it can also be argued that the movement toward secularization accelerated after the religious wars and the recognition of national sovereignties under the treaty. This affected the organization of knowledge in the

arena of “secular science” and “secular philosophy,” and both in turn challenged and undermined the authority of European Christian theology. But the moral basis that Christian theology established lingered and it should not be overlooked, though this tends to be denied publicly by those who consider themselves as rational and reasonable, including those who describe themselves atheist.

In addition to containing nationalism, the new security and economic project that was initiated was designed to contain communism and foster economic recovery. Thus, in a quick succession, a political union was formed between Belgium, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands that became known as the Benelux Union in 1948. The relevant documents were initially signed in 1944 by the exiled representatives from Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg at the London Customs Convention as a customs agreement, and they were later ratified as the Benelux Customs Union in 1947, which became a political-economic union in 1948 (Nimako and Small 2009). The Benelux, together with West Germany, France, and Italy formed the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. All of the objectives described above from this union of nations were relevant, but the economic motivation seemed at first glance to be the most important, especially because of the explicit attention to coal and steel.

In 1957, these six countries signed the Treaty of Rome and were renamed the European Economic Community (EEC), a regional organization designed to foster economic integration among its members. In addition to the concerns about keeping communism at bay and facilitating new economic arrangements, these developments also set new parameters for the geography of Europe. These parameters had important dimensions on both sides of the Atlantic. On the European side of the Atlantic, this gave rise to the notions of Western Europe and Eastern Europe; thus, geographically, what had for a long time been widely known as Central Europe, became politically Eastern Europe. At another level, communism, and its containment, served as the demarcation of Europe, and the post-war economic recovery project at home became an all-hands-on-deck project to keep class struggle in check through the welfare state.

In the background of what appeared to be an exclusively Pan-European project, we can identify the interests of those across the Atlantic seeking to develop a robust American military shield, as well as those within Europe seeking to develop a German economic shield. Changes across the Atlantic likewise affected the geography of Europe due to the territories located outside of its immediate physical geography that are either officially component parts of nation-states in

Europe (such as Martinique and Guadeloupe; Sharpley-Whiting 2009) or that are claimed by European countries, such as the Dutch Antilles. Though these territories are often represented as integral and essential parts of European states, they are, in fact, highly racialized in ways that have significant consequences. These issues affect not only nations across the Atlantic in the Americas, but also nations in Africa, because of the widespread and enduring impact of colonialism across that continent. The legacy of these developments can be seen today in the geographic areas referred to as Anglophone Africa, Francophone Africa, and Lusophone Africa.

In the long historical processes described above, it is often overlooked that as European nations met with one another to formalize and operationalize their sovereign nations, they also failed to recognize the sovereignties and humanities of other people (Nimako and Willemsen 2011). One consequence of this is that while nation-state formation on first appearance seems to be exclusively about the physical geography of Europe, it is, in fact, highly implicated in the extension of nation-states' sovereignty beyond the physical geographic location that we currently refer to as Europe.

Of the six countries that formed the EEC, two (Germany and Italy) had lost their colonies as a consequence of the First and Second World Wars; three (Belgium, France, and the Netherlands) were still colonial powers and they took their colonies into account. In fact, Articles 131 through 136 of the European Economic Community Treaty of 1957 provided for "association" with its colonies and opened up the territories to member states that did not have colonies. But the political irony is that it referred to the colonies as non-European countries and territories with which EEC member states had "special relations." This culminated in the signing of the first Yaoundé Convention on 20 July 1963 between eighteen African states (Association of African States and Madagascar—AASM) and six EEC member states and overseas departments and territories (ODTs), namely, the Dutch Antilles and Suriname and the French overseas departments and territories (Nimako and Small 2009: 217).

In 2019, we are currently dealing with the consequence of these processes, one of the most important aspects of which is that we now have European citizens whose genealogy is located outside the geographic location we call Europe. These Europeans carry nation-state passports, they have many of the rights of Europeans within geographical Europe, they speak the languages of these nations, and they are socialized in the culture of these nations. But they are

racialized in ways that mean that their rights are in practice constrained. One constraint is that they are regarded as permanent strangers (Sivanandan 1982). They carry the burden of the history of non-recognition. Some refer to them now as migrants even if they hold citizenship of European nations, but I refer to them as Black Europeans. We will return to this below. For the moment, suffice it to say that the EEC was further consolidated between 1957 and 1972; its membership expanded to nine when the UK, Ireland, and Norway joined in 1973, followed by Greece in 1981 and Portugal and Spain in 1986. This increased the EEC membership to twelve. In 1995, after the EEC was renamed the EU in 1993, Austria, Finland and Sweden joined and brought its membership to fifteen.

As a result of the end of the Cold War, and by implication the end of the threat of communism, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia became members in 2004, Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and Croatia in 2013. At the time of writing—2019—there were twenty-eight members.

As the number of member nations increased, some key elements of the motivating forces were modified or changed. For example, the renaming of the EEC as the EU in 1993 indicated that economics was no longer the only, or primary, reason for European integration. By 1995, EU leaders were confident enough to enact the Schengen Agreement to regulate free movement of people across EU member states. This, in turn, accelerated the four constituent conditions of EU membership, namely, freedom of movement of goods, capital, service, and labor.

The Schengen agreement was followed by the Dublin Agreement, signed in the Republic of Ireland in 1997. Apparently, the Dublin agreement is a EU Regulation designed to determine which EU member state is responsible for the examination of an application for asylum, submitted by people who seek asylum. Thus, in a way, if the EEC became a shield against communism, Dublin became a shield against decolonization, hence, Fortress Europe. This is all the more so since it made it almost impossible for people outside the borders of the EU to seek asylum through EU airports, and it pushed the boundaries of the EU to the countries that border non-EU countries by land or sea.

The end of the Cold War revealed some of the contradictions in the EU model. After framing the EEC as a security and economic arrangement to withstand nationalism, communism, and decolonization, and building intellectual and state propaganda to underpin it, the EU found that a number of the nations that had been politically labelled as East European countries, formally referred to

as “communist regimes” because they were under Russian occupation, were now knocking on the door of freedom. In fact, this new love of freedom occurred after the nations in question were free already from Russian nationalist or Soviet communist control. All of these developments had implications for the core of what defines Europe, namely, geography, race, religion, and citizenship. For example, after joining the EU, the nations of East and Central Europe, such as Hungary and Poland, complained that there were too many EU rules, including those governing asylum-seeking and refugees. When they were behind the iron curtain, they had sought asylum, but others, it would seem, should not seek asylum in their territories. At the same time, nations under the Federation of Yugoslavia imploded in the process of transition from command economy to deregulated economy.

Reflecting on the social dislocation and human displacement that accompanied such an implosion, *The Economist* noted that:

From 1992 to 1995 Bosnia was the Syria of its day. Some 100,000 people died in the three-way war between the country’s communities: its Orthodox Serbs, its Catholic Croats and its Muslims (often referred to as Bosnians). Unlike in Syria, though, Western powers intervened and eventually ended the shooting. (*The Economist*, 22)

This has given a new meaning to European geography and boundaries. Countries such as Greece, Italy, Hungary, and Poland have now found themselves with the new frontiers of Europe. This, in turn, has bolstered far right and new nationalist movements, such as in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, depending on the geographic location of human displacement due to wars and the role of EU member states therein. These developments all have profound implications for Black Europe, some of which I discuss below.

Populism, Nativism or Racialized Europe?

The recent (2019) losses in parliamentary elections by Christian Democrats and Labour Parties in favor of anti-refugee groups have brought notions of populism to the fore. Underlying these notions is intellectual bankruptcy and ideological dishonesty. This is all the more so since the issues of immigration, asylum-seekers, and refugees have been conflated. As we noted above, the enactment of the Schengen Agreement increased labor movement within the EU and generated a backlash in some countries, including the UK. This was compounded by the

increased flow of asylum-seekers occasioned by human displacement associated with wars initiated by the US under George Bush in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), and by France under Nicholas Sarkozy in Libya (2011) and Syria (2014).

The anti-refugee groups and the political parties that have consequently emerged from this situation are referred to as populists on two grounds. First, because they were considered marginal but have now found a strong voice as a result of the refugee crisis. Second, because they want to reverse the gains of transnationalism and return to nationalism. In fact, the left likened the right-wing populist parties originating from Conservative and Liberal parties to Nazis and Fascists. The Conservative and Liberal parties adopted the populist language of being tough on immigration. This conflated the issue of immigration with asylum-seekers and refugees, and it is not clear which one they want to address: immigration or human displacement to avoid asylum-seeking or refuse refugee status to those who apply. What is clear is that the language is xenophobic.

This is compounded by claims made by citizens on the state, as well as claims among citizens. Claims also make the distinction between the economic and social issues a false dichotomy because the economic affects the social.

In political campaigns, what matters is who is on the offensive and who is on the defensive. Both the far-left and far-right have now found a new enemy called Brussels; they do not express that capitalism is the enemy, because nobody knows what capitalism is. Left-leaning politicians and intellectuals tend to attribute the rise of the far-right to economic crisis.

It should be noted that many of the individuals who lead the far-right movements and political parties were at a given moment part of the center-right and liberal political parties. But their followers come from all walks of life. What they and their followers have in common is an imaginary notion of who should or should not belong to the “ideal nation.”

Why claims? Because claims are central to social and political change; claims also test the limits of race and citizenship. The claims of citizens tend to be different from non-citizens. The non-citizens at this point in time are largely represented by asylum-seekers. There is also the issue of hierarchy of claims. Whose claim has urgency and priority? Let me explain. Long before the current economic crisis became a household topic, there were sections of the citizenry who were living in perpetual crisis. Governments knew it; trade unions knew it; “civil society” knew it; but those affected did not take to the streets to demand jobs; neither did people take to the street on their behalf. In fact, very many of those

affected by unemployment have even resigned to their fate and have stopped looking for jobs. Again, governments knew it, and still know it, but did not call it a crisis; instead, the order of the day is the criminalization of the Black communities that depend on state safety, also called social welfare.

So, we are back to the issue of the hierarchy of claims. Whose claims have urgency and priority? When the popular image equates citizenship with race, we get nativism. What is nativism? Nativism serves as a powerful force in policing and the regulating of race and ethnic relations. Whereas citizenship “guarantees” equal legal rights in relation to nationality within the state, nativism becomes a conscious or unconscious attempt by groups and individuals considered to be native Europeans to replace overt rights derived from citizenship by covert rights derived from history and skin color. Thus, nativism becomes the structural and ideological attempt by individuals and/or groups to enforce subordination by emphasizing difference and ethnic hierarchy or *ethnarchy* where biology-informed racism, culture-informed ethnicism, and legal-informed citizenship for the same have failed.

This can be clarified further by making clear what nativism is not. Unlike racism, nativism is not based on notions of superiority and inferiority; thus, nativism cannot be legislated for or against. Nativism is based on notions of presumed inherent historical rights, national identity, and national interest. While under certain conditions class can neutralize racism, class cannot neutralize nativism because nativism appeals to deeply embedded notions and beliefs about history, belonging, national identity, and national interest. That said, even those Blacks who are able to find jobs tend to be blamed by others for taking jobs from “natives.” This is what we have elsewhere called nativism (Nimako and Small 2009).

However, from the point of view of nativism, as well as of racism, equality poses more problems than inequality. In other words, both racism and nativism thrive on inequality. But the world has changed. Thus, unlike racism, which can no longer be defended formally, nativism can be defended formally, in the name of “national identity” and “national interest” in response to a changing world. This partly explains why mainstream political parties resort to the dog whistle. For a case in point we can look to the recent (2019) political developments in the Social Democratic Party of Denmark. These changes will affect our notions of citizenship, race, and our claims as citizens to each other and to our institutions. Take a look at the demography of the ethnic composition of some, if not most, of

the prison populations in Europe and you will notice that any talk of color blindness is a delusion at best and a lie at worst.

We can conclude this section with the following: if we operationalize European nationalism to include factors such as wars, national economic interest and development, and colonialism, then many of the current populist parties do not qualify as nationalist. This is all the more so since the international environment is different. Decolonization is complete and will not and cannot be revisited. The EU governments that engaged in wars in Iraq, Libya, and Syria, that opened the floodgates of asylum-seekers to Europe and elsewhere were not populist right-wing extremist parties; they were mainstream governments. The problem is that the populists turn the other way when it comes to mainstream governments waging wars that give rise to asylum-seekers. What populist groupings have in common is nativism.

This raises the question of what should be done? To which my response is the following: democracy and politics as we know them in the EU depend on those who vote and those who do not vote. Politics also depends on who is on the offensive and who is on the defensive. At the moment, the nativists are on the offensive, but it does not mean they are in the majority.

Black Europe, the Public Square, and the Boardroom

Race and inequalities find their expression in notions of visibility and invisibility, and these notions have become recurring themes in Black Europe (Hine et al. 2009). These notions and their many variants have been used for conferences, workshops, and publications. Underlying or hidden in this “now you see, now you don’t” phenomenon are fundamental questions concerning citizenship, the public square, and the boardroom (Simon 2008). At one level of visibility, it is common to observe Black Europeans during major entertainment events, like the Eurovision contest, and at major sports events such as football and athletics.

In fact, Stephen Small correctly speaks of ambiguous hyper-visibility. In his words:

Black people are hyper-visible in a range of highly stereotypical arenas. This includes those at the very bottom—unskilled, low-paid workers, street vendors and beggars, sex workers, the unemployed and homeless, as well as criminals and prisoners. Images of illegal immigrants, and Africans suffering and dying in the Mediterranean are ubiquitous. It also includes hyper-visible

images—so-called positive images—in the music, television and entertainment, and in sport such as soccer and athletics. Some images are of black Europeans—Patricia Mamona, Kaddi Sagnia, Nafissatou Thiam and Katarina Johnson-Thompson. But many of the most popular images are of Black Americans, for example, Oprah Winfrey, Barak Obama, Beyonce and Nicki Minaj, Serena and Venus Williams, and Naomi Osaka. And there are some others too—Bob Marley and Usain Bolt. (2018)

He goes on to note that:

These images are meant to suggest black people are a success, but it's simply not true. They are entirely unrepresentative of black people as a whole; any success that has been achieved is largely limited to a minuscule number of black people; most black people in these industries occupy subordinate roles. And there are also highly sexualized images of half-naked black women athletes. (2018)

What underlines these ambiguous visibilities is that they are based on competitions whose ultimate judges are the broader public. On the other hand, there is invisibility at play that reflects the widespread exclusion of Black Europeans from essential networks that propel social mobility. Again, in the words of Stephen Small:

At the same time, Black people are also subject to hyper-invisibility in the upper echelons of wealth, status and power. No one is surprised when a black woman sings, dances, performs. That's what black women are supposed to do. But a black woman who is CEO of pharmaceutical company, an IT company, a surgeon or Lawyer, and then its WOW? How the hell on earth did she do that? (2018)

As the European Union election of 23 May 2019 approached, the April 2019 edition of *The Economist* gave a quick tour of the major issues under discussion in the election. Under the title "Votes without frontiers," *The Economist* noted that:

The unprecedented wave of crisis and change over the 2014 to 2019 parliamentary term has emphasized Europe's interdependence and with it the role of pan-European politics. The migration surge of 2015 was a European drama, not just a Greek or Hungarian or German one. Terror networks have crossed

borders and attack cities in various European countries. Brexit, Donald Trump's presidency and the rise of China threaten Europe as a whole. The crowd scene have been continental, not national refugees trudging along motorways, pro- and anti-migration demonstrations, the anti-establishment *gilets jaunes* protests and, most recently, environmentalist school strikes. (*The Economist*, 25)

Now that the election has come to pass, I think we can test some of the consequences of the observations by *The Economist*. As the table below indicates, the traditional political parties, namely Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, lost some ground to liberal and green parties, but the gains of the right-wing populists were not as large. Together with the Liberal Conservatives, the Christian Democrats lost 32 seats in 2019. But this was less than the Social Democrats, who lost 39 seats. Some of those losses became gains for the Social Liberals and Conservative Liberals who gained 41 seats in 2019.

Table 1
Preliminary 2019 Results by Political Group

Political Group	Name	Seats	
		2014	2019
Christian democrats and Liberal Conservatives	EPP	221	179
Social Democrats	S & D	191	152
Social Liberals and Conservative Liberals	ALDE	69	110
Ecologists and Regionalists	Greens/EFA	50	75
National Conservatives and Sovereignists	ECR	70	73
Far-right and hard Eurosceptics	ENF	36	61
Right-wing populists and hard Eurosceptics	EFDD	48	44
Democratic Socialists and Communists	GUE/NGL	52	41
Non-Inscrits	Non-Inscrits	52	10
Others and new parties	N/A	-	6
Total		751	751

If we do some permutations and combinations, we will notice that the vote increase of the far-right is not as great as it appears. Given the history of European politics, if you group into five on a continuum, namely, Right-wing and Left-wing, we get the following outcome.

At the European Union parliament level, the five right-wing political groupings are EPP, ALDE, ECR, ENF, and EFDD, and they remain the majority of the 751-seat parliament. The left-wing political groupings are S&D, EFA, GUE, and NGL. During the 2014 European Union election the right-wing grouping gained 444 seats (59%); and this increased to 485 (65%) in the 2019 election. This is an increase of 41 seats, and the far-right took eleven of these. On the contrary, the share of the four left-wing political groupings, namely, S&D, EFA, GUE and NGL, decreased from 293 (39%) in 2014 to 268 (36%) in 2019. This represents a loss of 25 seats, of which the far-left lost eleven seats.

What is the relevance of these ideological groupings for Black Europe? In theory, the Right and far-right political grouping is closed to Black Europe (largely because they refuse to discuss race or racism, and they are often directly involved in, or closely associated with, policies that are harmful to Black people's lives and interests). Black people tend to vote for Social Democratic parties. I have heard about Black complaints about Black invisibility in national parliaments; in fact, some of these border on conspiracy theories. A closer inspection reveals that the constitutional arrangements of various European countries can also highlight important sources of such invisibility.

The issue of a race and ethnic relations policy was an object of discussion in the UK far earlier than in other European nations and culminated in a series of laws and policies, along with the establishment of institutions and organizations designed to control immigration as well as promote "good race relations" (Small and Solomos 2006). This includes the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the 1971 Immigration Act, the 1981 Nationality Act, and the 2000 Race Relations (Amendment) Act. It also includes the Race Relations Act of 1976, the Macpherson Report of 1999, and the Parekh Report of 2000 (Small and Solomos 2006). But this type of legislation is far less common across mainland continental Europe.

The Case of the Netherlands

Examples abound across Europe on the issue of Black invisibility (Hawthorne 2019; Small 2018); given limitations of space I will discuss the specific case of the Netherlands. In the early 1980s the Netherlands attempted to follow the UK

example by enacting what it called Minorities Policy. The assumption behind the Minorities Policy is demographic in the sense that the policy target was considered a small group of people in a larger society. However, Dutch demographers observed that by the mid-1980s, for the first time since the end of World War II, immigration was greater than emigration; fewer people were leaving the Netherlands than arriving for settlement (Mullard et. al 1991). As a result, in the tradition of dog whistle tactics, the concept of “minorities” was taken out of the lexicon and was replaced with the concepts of *autochthone* (natives) and *allochthone* (aliens, but not necessarily strangers) (Haney-Lopez 2014). This was followed by a policy to restrict immigration and reduce the budget for the “minorities organizations” that benefited from the policy. But as a result of protests from Black groups, the government replaced the word *allochthone* with the phrase “people with immigration background” in 2016; however, it still has racial connotations and serves as a code word for non-white people.

After the revolt against Minorities Policy, and its replacement with “aliens’ policy,” the groups that formed the background of the Minorities Policy went their separate ways. The colonial subjects from East Asia (or Moluccans) were offered a job project and a museum; the Muslims became the object of multicultural discourse and ridicule, and later Islamophobia. The welfare organizations of the colonial subjects from Suriname and the Antilles were gradually dismantled, of which more below. For the moment, suffice it to say that in response to vicious Islamophobia and far-right agitation, a new political party called DENK (Think) has emerged among the ranks of people of Turkish descent and Dutch constitutional and proportional representation electoral arrangements facilitated it.

The political party DENK originates with two Turkish members of parliament for the Labour Party. They were sacked from the party and decided not to go quietly. The reader should be reminded that like Wilders (now leader of a far-right political party, Party for Freedom or PVV), the DENK members were sacked on the basis of their party’s top objection to matters related to politics in Turkey; Wilders was sacked from the People’s Party of Freedom and Democracy (VVD) political party for being anti-Turkey, and DENK for being pro-Turkey. They had the choice to vacate the parliament and hand over their parliamentary seats to the Labour Party or remain in the parliament with their seats under a new party. They decided to form their own political party (DENK) and took parliamentary votes from the Labour Party, the very political party that brought them to

the parliament. Thus, three decades later, the Labour Party, the political party that had initiated the Minorities Policy in the name of emancipation, has been revolted against by some of the very “ethnic minorities” who benefited from that policy. In fact, from the perspective of race and ethnic relations, the recent Dutch general election of 17 March 2017 produced three contradictions.

First, DENK (Think) was able to gain an extra seat and thus has three seats in the parliament, two of Turkish background and one of Moroccan background. DENK is a “secular political party” but it draws its support predominantly from Turks and Moroccans. But given the circumstances (among them Islamophobia) in which it emerged, irrespective of its intentions, DENK would be viewed by some people as a Turkish and Moroccan political party; this places limits on its capacity to grow, as well as on its capacity to make coalitions with other political parties and, thus, influence policy in the parliament (Nimako 2018). Thus, in the short term these parliamentary gains may generate incomes for DENK members of parliament but the chances of the party winning more seats in the parliament in the future is doubtful. This goes some way to explain why DENK ran in the European Union election but did not meet the threshold for a seat.

Second, before the election, some of the people who declared their intention to vote for DENK said they had not previously voted. Thus, DENK also appealed to those who did not normally vote but who have experienced racism and Islamophobia; their thinking was that finally someone is defending them against Islamophobia, racist bullies, and institutional racism. This in itself is contradictory because the people who have anti-racist campaign track records in Dutch history are Dutch citizens of African descent, especially those of Surinamese and Antillean origin. But irrespective of what one adds or subtracts, as of July 2019 when this article was written, there is no Antillean or Surinamese (regardless of ethnicity) in the Dutch parliament.

Third, there had previously been Surinamese and Antillean members of parliament; but the 2017 election eliminated Surinamese and Antilleans from the parliament. This is partly because Surinamese and Antilleans tend to vote for the Labour Party, and when the Labour Party lost nearly 75% of its 38 parliamentary seats, it worked to the disadvantage of Black representation in the parliament. It now has nine seats, but it received more votes from Amsterdam Southeast, where the majority of the population that can be classified as Black lives, than from other districts. But due to the constitutional arrangement and electoral system, no Surinamese or Antillean was among the first nine people on the

parliamentary list. Thus, thirty years after the Minorities Policy was initiated and abandoned, no Moluccan, Surinamese, or Antillean, some of the former colonial subjects on whose name the policy was initiated, can be found in parliament at present. Rather, the right-wing People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), the political party that gave the world Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, and indirectly Pim Fortuyn, and that cut funding for the Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy (NiNsee), is now back in control at a time when people of African descent had been negotiating with the Labour Party Minister to release funds for the events around the United Nations Decade of People of African Descent project.

It should be recalled that the revolt against the Dutch state by Moluccans in the 1970s gave rise to the Minorities Policy. Since the 1990s the social mobilization and demands of some Surinamese and Antilleans of African descent have actively drawn public attention to Dutch slavery and its legacies. Similar developments across the African diaspora took place at the international level and culminated in the United Nations World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. Both developments converged and it prompted the Dutch government to respond. The Dutch Minister responsible for Minorities and Integration Affairs announced at the 2001 UN Durban World Conference against Racism that the Dutch state would erect a monument to commemorate Dutch involvement in Atlantic slavery. The monument became a reality in 2002 and, as demanded by Black activists, it was followed by the establishment of NiNsee in 2003.

But NiNsee did not receive structural funding from the state. Thus, like the Minorities Policy of the 1980s against which there was a revolt after five years, funding for NiNsee was cut eight years after it was founded. As a result, NiNsee lost its research and public history education capacity and, consequently, its institutional capacity to produce knowledge.

Although it was short-lived, NiNsee has played an important role because it created an institutional space for many Black people to meet, discuss, and share knowledge. It also raised a number of enduring issues that resonated with issues of memory and museums—issues to do with past and current racism, inequality, and opportunity, with racial discrimination and lack of political representation. And it began a momentum that continues today, that seems to be growing in strength, and that has actively linked Black people campaigning for equality in the Netherlands with Black people fighting for equality and social justice in other nations across Western Europe (Small 2018). For instance, at the annual

commemoration of abolition of Dutch slavery held in Amsterdam on 1 July 2011, Quinsy Gario produced T-shirts with the inscription “Zwarte Piet is Racism” (Black Piet is Racism) and circulated them to raise awareness about the racist character of the Zwarte Piet figure in the Dutch Sinterklaas.

In the early phase of public manifestations of Black opposition to Zwarte Piet, Quinsy Gario and Jeffrey Afriyie were arrested in November 2011 at a Sinterklaas event at the city of Dordrecht for wearing the T-shirt that Gario had developed. In the process of their arrest, they were physically assaulted. But a woman of Antillean descent recorded the arrests and assault and posted the video on the Internet; it went viral. These developments have thrown the legitimacy of Zwarte Piet into crisis. But there are some Dutch people, including intellectuals, who still strongly believe that the Black people who oppose Zwarte Piet are strangers who do not understand Dutch society and its traditions.

Yet in recognition of the protests against Zwarte Piet, on 16 December 2014, the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and Malin Björk, a Swedish Member of the European Parliament of the Democratic Socialist and Communist grouping (GUE/NGL, Sweden), organized a debate on “Afrophobic stereotypes vs. tradition: the case of Zwarte Piet in the Netherland” in the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Some Dutch right-wing MEPs (Members of the European Parliament) were dismissive of the event. At the end of the presentations, one Dutch MEP of the far-right populists and hard Eurosceptics, Olaf Stuger (PVV), became irritated and expressed his feelings in the following terms to journalist Kevin P. Roberson:

I am very disappointed by the debate. The discussion takes the joy out the Sinterklaas holiday for children. I do not think Europe should be having debates about Zwarte Piet. I think *we have a lot more important issues to discuss, in the world.* And also, in the Netherlands. For me, Zwarte Piet is a Dutch tradition. I think that not a lot of people are bothered by Zwarte Piet. There is a small group of activists, which you saw at this meeting. They’re really mad and bitter. I notice this, because the holiday is very joyful and its joyful for me. (my emphasis)

He went on to state that:

When I am in Curacao or in Suriname, where my ancestors come from, I don’t see anyone protesting and everyone thinks it is a nice holiday. There is a small

group, that has problem with this. They are venting their frustration, with the hope that it will get them publicity. This is unfortunate for the children who do enjoy the holiday (Kevin P. Roberson; *The Roberson Report Medea Media* 2014; ENAR and MEP Malin Björk discuss Afrophobia in the European Parliament)

Apparently, the PVV MEP has revealed that he and his colleagues have other priorities, and that racial equality and the emancipation of Black people is not one of them. The idea that the European parliament has important things to do should not be taken lightly. Here the Dutch MEP was ignoring the fact that the protesters were Dutch citizens (Nimako 2013). It should be added that the PVV lost their four seats in the European Parliament during the election of 23 May 2019; three of the seats went to a newly formed far-right political party, the Forum for Democracy.

But there is more to this than meets the eye, and that is why Black mobilization continues. For example, in response to the UN declaration of the Decade of People of African Descent (2015-2024), which is an extension of the 2011 Durban Conference, the Dutch state responded and allocated some resources that raise awareness about the conditions of people of African Descent in the Netherlands. A number of Black organizations sought funding for their projects, but it is likely that most will return home empty-handed because like NiNsee, there is no space in the Dutch bureaucratic tradition for a project like the Decade. This is all the more so since the Decade is not being treated as an emancipation issue, but rather a social cohesion issue and thus calls for progressive control, namely, managing change without sharing power. Like the Minorities Policy of the 1980s, there is no structural space for state fiscal policy arrangements for Black emancipation projects. Thus, those who would benefit from the Decade funding would likely be established Dutch groups and mainstream institutions that would receive funding to organize conferences and exhibitions in the name of Black people or the Decade.

Suffice it to say that the Netherlands is not alone in its failure—and indeed in its refusal—to prioritize, or even address, the needs of its Black citizens. Other nations across Europe are equally dismissive (Keaton et al. 2014). To the extent that they pay any attention to Black people at all, it is only to those who are immigrants and refugees—sometimes to Black women who are the victims of so-called sex trafficking—and the attention is mainly to continue to exclude them from Europe. And although the UK has some race and ethnic relations policies,

as I mentioned above, they are largely being dismantled. Thus, on matters related to the boardroom, Black Europe remains invisible.

Conclusion: More to this than meets the eye!

The formation and evolution of nation-states in Europe after the end of World War II and the particular configuration of the European Union as it exists today have involved a range of economic, political, and nationalist elements that on first inspection appear to have little or nothing to do with Black people, either those in the colonies or those resident in Europe. They also appear to have had nothing to do with the long history of colonial expansion and imperial domination across Africa and the Americas. However, a closer inspection reveals that during this entire process, confronting the presence—and implications—of Black European citizens, both in the colonies and in continental Europe, became major issues. And they remain major issues today. Many of the issues that the EU is facing in terms of economic and political crises also appear to have little or nothing to do with colonialism or Black people in Europe, but again closer inspection reveals this too is an error. Today, we can find a complex interaction of national identity, nativism, and populism, and it is important to distinguish what each of these ideologies actually means in practice. And we have the permanent presence of Black European citizens, who are mainly regarded by white Europeans as permanent strangers. Black Europeans have mobilized in a number of ways to reject this non-recognition. And they continue to do so today. This is the crux of the conundrum that confronts Europe with regard to its Black citizens. And these are the challenges that Black Europeans face in terms of full citizenship rights, belonging and recognition, especially with regard to resentment, discrimination, and inequality.

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