Routed Connections in Late Modern Times[1]

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Bauman (2000) argues that 'late modernity' made the solid categories of the past fluid, leaving individuals solely responsible for their actions. This freedom has also decreased the sense of connectedness among individuals, making it difficult to deal with increasingly complex issues of our time while drawing out-weighted attention to perceived risks. This growing fear and insecurity has led to the need for new kinds of secured communities to protect individuals. These new communities are most visible when the gates excluding those considered a threat to the community are observable. In addition to visible gated or bordered forms of exclusion, we also observe the growth of less visible exclusive discursive sources of othering, which serve as invisible gates within the borders of most European nation states. The fundamental ingredient in the present exclusive source of othering is the construction of otherness through culture. The culture (including religion) of migrants is constructed as absolutely different and inferior to the culture of the natives. This, what I refer to as the "culturalist discourse of othering," has become increasingly dominant in most European societies. I argue that the culturalist discourse of othering is based on a homogeneous, static, coherent, and rooted notion of culture combined with a rooted assumption of belonging (see also Stolcke 1995). In opposition to this growing culturalist discourse in Europe, we observe the increase of identity politics, emphasizing the politics of difference. In line with Iris Young (2007), I argue that any kind of identity politics which adapts the same reifying approach to culture or religion cannot offer long term unsettling opposition to the dominant discourses of inequality. What I will propose in this chapter is an *unsettling politics of connection* which is inspired by Young's approach of the politics of positional difference. With this approach I argue that one of the most durable manners to unsettle normalized structures is to facilitate connections which are "de-normalized" and inclusive of difference. Since the power of normalized discourses are partly constituted by their repetition in daily practice, it is the repetition of an individual's daily inclusive choices in interactions with others which provides the most powerful subverting force against the dominant discourses of othering.

In this paper, I argue that any rooted notion of imagining identities creates boundaries of difference which give the illusion of security while strengthening the foundations of polarization. As opposed to *rooted* positioning I will discuss *routed* positioning which reconnects individuals to the city. These routed positionings are manifestations of what I earlier called the unsettling politics of connection. Before presenting my discussion on this main point, I will discuss the building blocks of my argument, beginning with the condition of late modernity and the loss of connectivity.

Late modernity and super diversity

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[1] Parts of this chapter are based on the alternative lecture to the annual royal speech, in Dutch in 2012: http://www.nieuwwij.nl/opinie/verslag-alternatieve-troonrede-halleh-ghorashi/

Late modernity has been defined as comprising fluidity (Bauman 2000), greater reflexivity (Giddens 1991), and increased concern for perceived risks (Beck 1992). Bauman (2000) argues that in this era of late modernity, the solid categories (such as tradition, culture, religion) which once defined an individual's choices and actions have become liquid. What is left is individuality in its most extreme form: unattached and fully responsible for one's own actions. In addition to this extreme individualization we observe "diversification of diversity" which Steven Vertovec (2007) refers to as the condition of "super-diversity." The rise of numbers of migrants, the diversity of the groups of migrants, and most importantly the differences within diverse groups means the use of old categories of difference such as ethnicity or culture are inadequate for grasping the existing complexity. This inability to comprehend the increasing diversity in, especially, the big cities in Europa in addition to using old categories of difference such as culture and ethnicity contributes to a sense of uncertainty and insecurity.

Global events in the past decades, such as September 11th, shed new light on the intersection of insecurity and super-diversity, leading to an increasingly negative view of cultural diversity in Western societies. Although the presence of non-Western migrants in Europe has been considered a societal issue for decades, it was after the attacks of 11 September 2001 that those migrants, particularly with a Muslim background, became the pariahs of European nations (Feldman 2008). The visible negative presence of these migrants in the EU media and public space had never been as blatant as it became at the turn of the century. For some countries such as the Netherlands, there were specific national events (such as the political murder of Pim Fortuyn[2] by an animal activist and the murder of Theo van Gogh[3] by a young Moroccan-Dutch man) that further deepened the existing dichotomy of European self and migrant others, in particular for migrants with Islamic backgrounds.

In an era when individuals have lost their connecting ability as citizens and feel high levels of insecurity, the impact of negative images and fear for the other pushes them into a defensive position: a position in which the connection to the long-term considerations of the well-being of society are reduced to incidental, short term, individual satisfactions. Following in the footsteps of Bauman (2000: 37), I argue that extreme individualization could lead to a slow disintegration of citizenship, with the consequence that the "public" is colonized by the "private". The greatest challenge of this second modernity is then to learn collectively to tackle public issues without reducing them solely to private needs.

Longing for the roots of the past

Growing fear towards the migrant Other because of increasingly negative sentiments and the absence of new social collectives against growing insecurities are the conditions that contribute to a longing for rootedness in the past. These "imagined roots" of a common nation or community are adapted to provide the necessary safety net in these insecure times. The

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[2] Pim Fortuyn was a Dutch (anti Islam, anti-migrant, and anti-establishment) political figure. Although Fortuyn was murdered by a native Dutch animal rights activist, his murder fueled not only anti-left but also anti-migrant sentiments because of his clear stance on both.

[3] Theo van Gogh was a Dutch publicist and film maker. Together with Ayaan Hirsi Ali he made the controversial film *Submission*.

Netherlands provides a clear example of this. There have never been so many Dutch TV programs as in the recent past with Holland in their titles, "*Ik hou van Holland*" (I love Holland) being the most obvious. This is particularly interesting since the Netherlands has traditionally had an ambiguous presentation of its national identity (Ghorashi 2010). In spite of the existence of national sentiments, national identity has rarely been presented so dominantly in public. Although it is obvious that in times of increasing insecurities new social connections are necessary to provide a sense of safety, this identity based and/or rooted version is solely an illusion, consisting of contradictions that make it impossible to create a durable solution for the existing fractures in the society.

First of all, these identity based connections (through which root always resonates) are linked to the traditional categories that have lost their function in liquid modern times. The atomistic individuals who are safeguarding their space and rights, and thus their autonomy, cannot connect simultaneously to root categories such as nation, tradition, culture, religion in the old fashioned way from which they are supposed to be emancipated. This yearning for outdated categories of connection is a rather unreflective and reactive response to present insecurities. For that reason it cannot provide durable and thoughtful solutions for the complex challenges we are facing in future.

Secondly, the root connections strengthen boundaries, reify otherness, and deepen the self-other gap in societies. In the same vein, we can argue that change strategies based on identity politics which are informed by essentialist claims built on a static notion of a common past will deepen existing tensions between groups because it dichotomizes the boundaries of difference rather than providing new alternatives for connection. The cultural component of these root identities as the consequence of the present assumed cultural and religious conflicts in Europe leads to dichotomies of difference. This in turn, places (children of) migrants at the margins of European societies. Reconstructing the traditional and saturated categories contributes to a sense of non-belonging in societies that are becoming more fluid and diverse (see Eijberts 2013; Ghorashi 2014).

Thirdly, growing nationalism in European societies brings back horrific memories of the past. One of the lessons of European history is that nationalism (even in its mildest from) can become a source of assertiveness by the majority population justifying the (violent and forced) exclusion of minority groups. Recent European Parliament election of 2014, showing the rise of right wing parties such as Front National in France, UKIP in England, PVV (Partij van Vrijheid) in the Netherlands are concrete examples of this.

In sum, catering to national sentiment and/or identity based politics of any kind as a source of connection and security will have a reverse effect. It is directed towards the past instead of the future, feeding the existing polarization in societies instead of offering alternatives for shared notions of citizenship that would include diversity and consider the fluid condition of our times. In addition to this harmful reification of difference, these nationally rooted connections are not equipped to provide safety, since they have lost their function in liquid modern times. As opposed to this rooted positioning, I will discuss routed positioning in reconnecting the individual to the city[4] later in this chapter. This kind of positioning involves "created routes" shaped by engaged individuals through the interaction and interchange of past experiences to

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[4] *City* here means *society* following Bauman's choice to use this term instead of society because of its direct link to the original definition of the concept of citizen (inhabitant of a city).

construct new goals for the present and the future. The foundation of rethinking new sources of connection is to revitalize our notion of democracy, or in Gidden's (1999) words: "democratizing democracy."

Deeping Democracy

Within the liberal paradigm, democracy has mainly been formulated in terms of rights and equality with a prominence of what is often referred to as "the basic structure" of society. This structure, encompasses the constitutional rights, political decision-making processes, and social institutions that characterize democracy. One of the major criticism of the liberal approach of democracy with its principle of approaching all individuals as equal and the same has been that it ignores the differences at the heart of inequality. This liberal difference-blind approach identifies equality with sameness assuming that gender and culture neutral policies are the best ways to improve equality. By now it has become widely accepted that besides this basic structure, attention should be given to the qualities and attitudes of citizens operating within these structures (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 6). This "basic attitude", or democratic culture is what de Tocqueville refers to as lifestyle which is about equality of chances and possibilities for everyone, meaning space for difference (IJsseling 1999).

To include difference, proponents of "deliberative" democracy underscore the public forum, in which citizens are empowered in a free and open dialogue to translate their personal preferences into more public objectives (Janssens & Steyaert 2001: 204). Critics of this approach argue that democracy is reduced to a dialogue and that it fails to take into account power relations and their impact on access to major public platforms. As an alternative, Iris M. Young (2002) discusses deeper conditions for democracy, including two ideals of social justice; *the right of self-determination* and *self-development.* The first ideal concerns the opportunities of citizens – in spite of their differences – to gain equal access to societal resources, the second one concerns the freedom of a person to pursue life in his/her own way. Pursuing one's way of life is not absolute and has to exist within a certain legal and/or moral framework to ensure that it does not bring harm to others. When we talk about "real" freedom within a democratic system, it means that there is an absence of institutional relations of domination of certain values above others. Yet, we also know that what we ask for is impossible in its absolute sense. A perfectly just democracy is impossible, since power relations, structural inequality, and domination of certain economic processes and value systems above others, which exclude groups of people, remain in all societies. Accepting these limitations, I agree with Young when she proposes that "[p]olitical mobilization within formally democratic institutions and norms is usually the only realistic option for oppressed and disadvantaged people and their allies to improve social relations and institutions" (Young 2002: 35).

Yet, in our late modern societies, we are facing new kinds of "situatedness" when it comes to individual freedoms and rights. What is left is individuality in its most extreme form. This condition is what de Tocqueville warns us of: "Selfishness or extreme individualism would dry up the sources of public virtues" (Tocqueville in Bauman 2000: 213). What comes to the fore in this search is a connection with a thin notion of democracy which is fixated on individual rights and space. This approach to democracy is defensive and based on fear of loss and insecurity. In this situation, the connection to the long-term considerations of the well-

being of society are reduced to incidental, short term, individual gratifications. To restore the connection between the individual and the collective, a synergy needs to be created between the interests of individuals and public wellbeing. The loss of connectivity as one of the manifestations of the late modern societies means that the struggle for absolute autonomy in its old fashioned manner needs some re-conceptualization. There is a need for a more balanced and reflective connection between autonomy and social connectivity in order to restore the lost relational capacity of late modern individuals.

The concept *relational autonomy*, in my view, captures the constant balancing act of individuals who take their role as democratic citizens to heart[5]. Their struggle for autonomy will not end in absolute isolation from the long term interests of the societies they are part of. For them, the struggle for autonomy is constantly mirrored in their responsibilities as citizens. This balancing act between "individual" and "citizen" requires continuously changing positions/perspectives between self and other(s). As opposed to the liberal framework of citizenship assuming a private/public binary, I choose a feminist critical approach of citizenship which blurs this boundary by presuming not only that the personal is political but that the political is personal as well. In this approach of citizenship, "the relations in which individuals and groups stand to one another within civil society, even apart from their relations to state policy, are very important both as causes of injustice and resources for remedying this injustice" (Young 2007: 107). Then citizenship means "transformation of private, self-regarding desire into public appeals to justice" (2002: 51). In this ongoing process of engagement, individual actions and societal connectedness are at play simultaneously. This approach, which is informed by critical theory, challenges the difference-blindness of liberal political theory of non-state dimensions of democratic action. In order to create *unsettling politics of connection* we need the triangle of individuals, civil society, and the state to resist the kind of democratic space which is reduced to selfish private needs of fearful individuals who colonize public space and strip it of public issues. In this process engaged and reflexive citizens play a significant role in maintaining the space for difference, e.g. a culture of democracy through their daily words and actions.

Reviving the connection to the city

One of the basic ideas behind the "deep democracy" suggested by Young (2002) is to work with situated conversations in which personal, political, and contextual aspects of interaction meet. To create routes towards the future, engaged individuals meet to shape a path through interactions and interchanges of past and present experiences. In spite of limitations (see above), the democratic frame provides certain options for shaping these yet to be formed routes to create connection among citizens. One of the important aspects of deliberative democracy is the notion of *reasonableness*.

> "Reasonable people often have crazy ideas; what makes them reasonable is their willingness to listen to others who want to explain to them why their ideas are incorrect or inappropriate. People who think they know more or are better than others are sometimes too quick to label the assertions of others as irrational, and thereby try

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[5] My definition of relational autonomy is slightly different to Young's definition which captures the structural embedding of individual agency (such as kinship, history and proximity, 2002: 231). My emphasis with this term is on the conscious balancing act of individuals between the personal and the collective by being reflective about their structural embedding

to avoid having to engage with them. […] Thus reasonable participants in democratic discussion must have an open mind" (Young 2002, p. 24).

In practice the narrow approach of reasonableness and civility is often used to exclude the "extreme" others. A broad approach of reasonableness is a process of non-violent struggle of engaged citizens from different social positions and interests with one another (Young 2002: 48-50). To resist a too rationalized notion of communication and reasonableness, it is important to be sensitive to exclusion by allowing emotions (Young 2002: 51) and "listening to silences" to develop counter-discourses that include diversity (Medina 2013: 290). Reviving connections to the city means reviving connections with the silenced others who have been blocked by the normalized dichotomies of difference.

In the following, with the help of the two concepts, epochè and alterity, I will explore the steps necessary to create new routes that challenge the existing rooted notion of individual positioning. Assuming that the politics of positional difference is shaped through routed positioning, the first step toward this is to question the taken for granted notions of connection which are informed by the normalized structures of dominance.

From comfort zones to safe spaces
To create durable spaces for security and belonging appropriate for the late modern condition, individuals need to rethink their sources of connection. This means questioning the taken for granted sources of connection or comfort zones. These zones are created by the normalized structures individuals are part of: structures that are (in a way) chosen *for* individuals rather than chosen by them. Dominant societal discourses influence individual choices, thoughts, dispositions, and actions in a subtle and invisible manner. For that reason, people often feel secure while choosing the seemingly known, spending time with people from the same background, and doing things that seem less risky. This pattern is even stronger at a time when the level of uncertainty is considered high. Yet, choosing comfort zones stimulates cloning, strengthens homogeneity, and excludes difference. In this manner, "abnormal" connections bridging sameness and difference are avoided since they are considered risky and, for that matter, less trustworthy.

To enable new connections which are routed instead of rooted it is necessary to question these taken for granted choices and create openness for the unknown, for the stranger, for the uncertain. It is only through connections with the Other and with the unknown that individuals can face the increasing uncertainty and complexity of our time through. These connections allow people to practice a sort of balancing act between sameness and difference. This means daring to choose in an "unusual" or "abnormal" manner, getting closer to the "unexpected," and creating interactions in which differences meet and create new forms of connectedness. These routed spaces are initiated as inclusive of difference and not based on the sameness that informs comfort zones.

Delayed interspaces for connection
The hastiness of the late modern time leads to impatience. Impatience is not a virtue in a time that requires both patience and composure in order to grasp the surrounding complexity as fully as possible. In this vein, it is particularly important to include *delay*, a kind of timeout, enabling space for stories from the position of difference. The act of delay protects us from what Eriksen (2001) refers to as "the tyranny of the moment." "To go fast means also to

forget fast"[6] as Lyotard strikingly argues. By the hastiness of our actions we often forget details and exclude the multiplicity around us. For that reason alternative interspaces are needed which stimulate delay in interaction. These spaces must be protected and free from the power-laden structures of dominance, in the margin of the hastiness and the norms of the center.

One of the most important aspects of this space is to make it as open as possible for difference without judgment. Openness and curiosity are essential ingredients for social encounters (see also Tennekes 1994). However, for encounters outside of comfort zones, when the boundaries of self and other are sharp, we need an extra step for a sustainable encounter. Inspired by other philosophers before him, the Dutch philosopher Theo de Boer (1993) proposes the concept *epochè*: a temporary suspension of the *truth of one's own judgment*. One cannot listen to another person without temporarily putting a question mark over one's own convictions. This does not involve casting doubt on one's own ideas; rather, it involves creating a common space and taking the time (allowing delay) which would enable listening to the other with an open mind. Epochè enables necessary openness to listen through which the position of the other is not approached as a deviation from the norm but as a possible positioning within the discursive space and outside the time of the routine (or action) currently at hand. Janssens and Steyaert (2001) suggest a similar tactic, following Serres, which is to "step aside", meaning stepping into the margins of power in order to create space for one's own and other's voice from the perspective of difference, rather than conforming to the dominant norm.

This brings us to "alterity", which involves approaching the other from the position of the other (Janssens and Steyaert 2001). This is the necessary condition to enable connections between (cultural) positioning within discursive spaces without being completely subjected to the hierarchical orders of self or other imposed through the normalizing power of dominant discourses. In late modern societies invisible normalizing aspects of power are at work rather than visible forms of domination. By normalizing power I mean particularly the prominence of hegemonic norms constituting gender, racial, cultural hierarchies of difference which reproduce structures of inequality in everyday practices (Young 2007). In these normalized practices members of non-privileged groups are depicted as not only absolutely different but also "morally inferior" (Young 2007: 104). Stepping aside means choosing to distance oneself from the hierarchical orders (fixed categories of Self and Other) which are informed by normalizing power. Taking this as a starting point means that we need to engage in an ongoing balancing act with the Self and the Other in a manner in which the dynamic connection between the two does not a-priori depart from a hierarchical relation. The often used concept of *"contiguity"* in feminist literature grasps this process by implying the conscious and continuous use of a non- hierarchical view on difference: "difference side by side, without sameness as the norm or the anchor by which difference is constituted" (Oseen 1997: 55).

The assumption here is that a process of distancing from "the center," could create novel ways and space for relating to the other. By giving away one's position, one is able to question the taken for granted positioning (as members of dominant or marginal groups) and by doing that "gives way" the "rootedness" of that positioning. Constantly "giving a/way" creates a movement which prevents people from becoming "tied" into positions of power, be it a

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[6] Translated from Janssens & Steyaert 2001: 109.

dominant or subordinate position (Serres in Janssens and Steyaert, 2001: 106). Continually stepping aside is like dancing; and dance becomes the metaphor not only for giving way, but also for creating a new meeting ground devoid of the normative hierarchies of power (see also Ghorashi & Wels 2009). This dancing initiated by individuals surpasses the individual because of the ways in which it subverts structurally normalized positions through performance of difference. As Yuval-Davis puts it, in this way identity positioning is "not about individual or collective, but involves both, in an in-between perpetual state of 'becoming'…" (2011: 16).

The creation of safe and delayed interspaces (be it in dyadic or group level) which are empty of judgements, provides room for reflection concerning the normalizing power of discursive positionings which produce societal relationships of similarity and difference that are based on "the categorical alternatives" of the same and the other (Ybema et al. 2009, p. 307). The experience of a safe space allows for the emergence of identity narratives in which self-definitions are central instead of reproductive or reactive positioning informed by the dominant discourse. This enables the construction and sharing of narratives in "the communal context which is vital in order to understand the ways intersectional power relations operate within the group" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 16). The emptiness of the space allows for temporarily suspending the perpetuation of dichotomous alternatives informed by the dominant discourses, making it possible to create a provisional space of commonality. This is crucial for connections through not in spite of the differences. The personal stories shared in this space provide a more comprehensive picture of one's considerations than hastily stated arguments or opinions. The openness of the space facilitates listening without judgement. When stories are told and listened to with an open-mind, opportunities to connect emerge. There are always moments in the stories (such as pain, joy, powerlessness, success) which others identify with, no matter how extreme the difference assumed at the beginning. These moments of identification are crucial for communication with and through difference, in particular when these differences are judged as unwanted. Moments of identification open doors for connection which are generally closed, because of the judgements informed by dominant discourses. When some level of sameness is experienced, even negatively perceived difference can be accepted, while "unwanted" difference without sameness is often rejected because of an assumed threat.

By sharing life stories one gets invited to start a journey with the narrator, a journey to different times and places, to a variety of experiences which are shared by all humans in spite of the particularities of those moments. These stories give individuals the chance to free themselves from their taken for granted (culturalist) positioning within the dominant discourses. This provides the possibility to break through the walls of judgements which are fed by dichotomies of self and other, creating space for the unexpected. These basic experiences of commonality create the necessary openness for engagement with difference in a more inclusive way. They also open up new ways to think about the past, allowing novel ways of imagining a future inclusive of difference (see also Medina 2013: 292). This inclusive approach is crucial for reflecting upon one's own rusted/rooted opinions towards certain societal issues. Inclusion of difference gives room for doubt: the basic ingredient for change. This enables what Yuval-Davis refers to as "the principle of 'rooting' and 'shifting', i.e. being reflexive as well as staying grounded in one's own social location…" (2011: 110).

What follows is that the self is de-centred, and otherness is on the move, contributing to a process which is open to new personal and contextual dynamics. In this balancing act of sameness and difference the choices that are made are not absolute but often overlapping. With his term "overlapping consensus", Rawls (2001) argues that in an open society diverse groups do not have to agree on everything but on the most crucial points (see also Young 2002: 44). "Too strong commitment to consensus [or shared values – HG] can incline some or all to advocate removing difficult issues for discussion for the sake of agreement and preservation of the common good" (Young 2002: 44). An open and engaged discussion based on an inclusive form of reasonableness (Young 2002) would make it possible to define the crucial points of agreement which are not informed by normalized structures, but are inclusive of difference. In this way, agreements and connections are not made departing from a-priori stated norms and values but are based on agreements resulting from continuous dialogue among various positions of difference. These positions of difference are neither fixed nor given but are shaped through constant negotiations of socially located standings. The connections which are result of these negotiations unsettle normalized hegemonic structures through continuous de-normalizing of the positions taken.

Connectedness without nationalism

Bauman (2000) refers to the work of Bernard Crick in which he promotes an idea of connectedness without patriotism or nationalism:

> "…[A kind of connectedness] which assumes that civilized society is inherently pluralistic, that living together in such a society means negotiation and conciliation of 'naturally different' interests…. [T]hat the pluralism of modern civilized society is not just a 'brute fact' which can be disliked or even detested but (alas) not wished away, but a good thing and fortunate circumstance, as it offers benefits much in excess of the discomforts and inconveniences it brings, widens horizons for humanity and multiplies the chances of life altogether more prepossessing than the conditions any of its alternatives may deliver." (Bauman 2000: 177- 178).

Observing the dominant societal discourse from the turn of the century in European societies, particularly in The Netherlands, we can state that the space for difference has been minimized. There is a simultaneous increase of nationalist sentiments and dichotomization of difference in which members of non-privileged groups are depicted as "morally inferior" and as not belonging to the nation yet living in it. Not only is the existence of these developments in the 21st century disturbing, but the normalization of these ideas is alarming for the future of the Europe. A defence of the culture of democracy and the ideal of pluralistic societies is lacking. In addition, the rise of nationalism in its contemporary defensive form has been internalized by many and justified by the slogans of the ruling political parties. The latest slogans of the Dutch liberal party (VVD) for local elections is a clear example of this point: "In Rotterdam spreken we Nederlands" (In Rotterdam we speak Dutch). Not only is the content of this message problematic because of its singular assumption that all those living in Rotterdam speak Dutch, but it is even more upsetting because of its tone, which implies quite clearly that all living in Rotterdam **must** speak Dutch. In spite of many negative reactions to this poster, the premier of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte, who is the head of the VVD, publicly defended the poster as beautiful.[7]

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[7] http://nos.nl/artikel/620484-rutte-mooie-poster-vvd-rotterdam.html, downloaded at 9 March 2014.

Concluding Remarks

Based on my discussion in this chapter, I argue that populist political choices are short-sighted, even dangerous. Firstly, because they are fed by essentialist and nationalist notions, as the example of Dutchness makes clear, which are singular and reactive instead of difference sensitive and future oriented. Secondly, because the aim of these political slogans is to gain short term votes which is based on a thin understanding of democracy (counting votes), while denying the long term damage it brings for a culture of democracy. These kinds of choices by political parties of any background are extremely disappointing. They do not offer any long term solutions for existing problems, but limit their actions to the public sentiments of atomistic individuals, without concern for the damage that might ensue. This example reflects the individual loss of connection to the city on a political level as well.

In line with Bauman and Crick, the alternative would be to find ways to unsettle these normalized nationalistic practices informing culturalist manifestations. Then, any kind of collective connectedness is not the outcome of an a priori given condition (Bauman 2000: 178), but of a process of negotiation through a variety of routes that are inclusive of difference. This would be the only sense of connectivity which would fit the condition of liquid modernity. The connections are not created based on the categories of the past or a normalized sense of unease fed by dominant discourses. The connections are created by the daily engagements of individuals who are constantly mirroring their private interest with the public issues and make innovative "unusual" choices to invest in the future. That would be the choice and struggle of the individual but also of politics de facto (ones who choose to be reflective instead of taking the given for granted). This is a struggle that Medina refers to as "epistemic responsivity" (2013: 53) requiring personal and relational reflective capacity to enable responsible agency and resistance towards the normalized structures of thoughtlessness or indifference. In this way imagining and enacting difference will be possible based on shared responsibilities (Young in Medina 2013: 52) of relational autonomous and engaged individuals.

In a time when power works in a subtle and invisible manner the question is how to work towards a better, more just society when the utopian or *telos* oriented thinking of the first modernity has lost ground? In this chapter I have argued the conditions for change are connected to the role of individuals and the paths they take in becoming citizens. When the power of exclusion works through repetition and is manifested in the daily normalization of actions, agency needs to provide an alternative in the same fluid manner. This means thinking about agency in terms of small changes that are taken up by individuals, groups, communities, politics, academia, etc. in their daily reflective actions. In this way, late modern agency needs to involve micro emancipation which "is less grandiose and more focused than in orthodox Marxist conceptualizations. It is rather partial, temporal movements breaking away from diverse forms of oppression [or I would say, normalization – HG], rather than moving towards [utopia or a telos - HG] (Zanoni and Janssens 2007 p. 1377)". Repetition of small reflective actions in an individual's daily encounters, with their attendant unsettling politics of connection, is a powerful way to subvert the subtle and ungraspable power of normalization.

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