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What we have to know – On a Modest Proposal Called Denaturalization

Column by Marie Beauchamps, 12 November 2013, de Theaterschool

Sometimes, one is taken by an impulsive urge to make some noise about an issue that one cares about. Especially when that issue is kept suspiciously silenced. A voice in my head keeps saying: “people should know, they have to know, they must know!”

But how to make noise beyond one’s own peripheries? How can one’s words, texts, and voices reach out to people one doesn’t know? How to break through the noises of others? Awaken that suspicious silence, turn it into an intelligible sequence of sounds that might break other silences?

I’ve been living with those questions for years, but even more so since last June, when one tiny little news item informed me, and those few who were quick enough to read it before it disappeared under layers of other cold hard facts, that the Dutch parliament was discussing a bill that would give the state the authority to denaturalize citizens found guilty of terrorism.

De-what? –people often ask when I start talking about it.

De-naturalization. This means that the state takes away your national identity.

Is that really possible? Isn’t there an international agreement preventing states to make people stateless?

Yes there is, but denaturalization can still apply for people with a double nationality. –I leave it up to you to think through who those people are... and what the political consequences are.

I had no idea there was such a law! People often reply.

Well, some countries already have it (such as France, Britain, America and Australia).

In France, the law exists since the first World War...it doesn’t target everybody though. Only those whose first passport was not a French one. “Nationals by acquisition” they are called. “New nationals” vs. “born nationals”. <Silence>

Wait wait wait. Hadn’t the French claimed the notion of universal citizenship with the Declaration of the Rights of Man? 1.7.8.9, there was a Revolution, wasn’t there?

–Mmmm, yes, there was, and they say they have. They might even *believe* they have. But denaturalization laws and practices say otherwise. ... Civil code. Article 25. It is all there. Right in the middle of the book containing the legal structure of what we call national identity.

Ok, so, in France, denaturalization was first used to denaturalize those whose origin was that of an enemy nation (Germany, Turkey, Hungary...). Then it was used to denaturalize Jews before deporting them during the Second World War. Then it was used to denaturalize those



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who had denaturalized the Jews –the collaborators. Nowadays, it is used to denaturalize those found guilty of terrorism –and yet... the law refuses to define terrorism. <Silence>

Oh, and there have been recent examples in Britain of people being denaturalized while being abroad, dying a first time administratively before being killed ... by drones – they were after all terrorist suspects...they could have known... Clearly, if you are a terrorist, other terrorists –even when they call themselves the warrants of democracy – will find you. <Silence>

It might be due to a certain taste for Kafkaesque plots, or an urge to come up with “a modest proposal” inspired by Jonathan Swift, that pushed some Dutch politicians to start flirting with denaturalization too. Issued by the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice –yes, you heard it right, *Security and Justice*—a bill is currently circulating through the veins of the political labyrinth, travelling between parliamentary chambers and advisory committees. It proposes to amend the law on national identity so as to “*expand the possibilities to withdraw the Dutch nationality in case of terrorist activities.*”

Now, if you ask me what we have to know, *that* is primarily what we have to know...

But there is another thing we have to know.

They say—or shall I say “we”, as Dutch society, say?—that denaturalization should apply in case of *terrorist activities*.

But who doesn't know that the word “terrorism” is nothing but a political epithet, vacuous to the point that it swallows up everyone and everything nearby, like a black hole. Loaded with the devastatingly light weight of a political will whose expression resembles a faint hart beat on the verge of exhaustion, it shouts in vain: *safety, security, safety, security, safety, sec....* Panicking to the point that it can only think of and for itself, it spirals inwards, getting tighter and tighter, awaiting asphyxia.

Indeed, denaturalization might be a modest proposal for preventing the children of the poor state of the Netherlands from being a burden on their parents or country, and for making them beneficial to the public. Denaturalizing will surely help to achieve a state in which purity, sinlessness and sacrosanctity might become a widely acclaimed model for a righteous and prosperous country.

<silence>

But while we pretend to know what terrorism is, our modest proposal rather seems to echo the final lines of Kafkas' trial, which reads, “as his sight faded, [he] saw the two men leaning cheek to cheek close to his face as they observed the final verdict. ‘Like a dog!’ he said. It seemed as if his shame would live on after him.”