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**Title: Out of place**

I was born and grew up about 50 kilometres to the South of Roermond. When I was 19 years old I moved to Amsterdam, the capital of the Netherlands. During the first week of my stay there as a student, I lost my passport and had to go to the police station in order to apply for a new one. I entered the police station and told my story to the officer at the reception desk. He listened attentively and told me to go upstairs. Upstairs I entered the right office and saw in the corner of my eye the sign of what we call here in The Netherlands, the Aliens Police (Vreemdelingenpolitie). The police officer who listened to my story told me that I had to prove that I was Dutch to get a new passport, since someone like me who spoke Dutch with that kind of accent had to be German or Belgian, but certainly not Dutch!

Of course, this story is not unique at all. Millions of people all over the world can tell a similar story. I moved from the South to the Northwest. In the North, they will tell I'm from the South, in the South they will tell I'm from the North. Like many others, I am stuck linguistically between places and I am considered 'out of place'.

The question I pose is: Why is the idea of a national language so powerful that we ignore the differences between speakers every day, hour and second?

In the Netherlands, when children go to kindergarten and school for the first time, they carry along what I will call a backpack. This backpack contains all the knowledge the children have acquired at home, from their family, neighbours, community members and visitors. This backpack most often contains more than one language since children in The Netherlands may speak many languages in addition to Dutch. However, when children enter the Kindergarten building or the school building, many of them have to leave their backpacks at the entrance of the building. They are not allowed to take inside what they have learned at home. Most often a second language has to stay at the gate: dialect, Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Japanese or Spanish.

The question I like to pose is: Why do we want children to be monolingual in The Netherlands? Why do we imagine a multilingual Dutch society as problematic?

This is a picture of Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder was a German philosopher who lived between 1744 and 1803. He had a great view at that time, namely that what makes us humans human, are language diversities between societies and nations. This idea was taken up later in the latter half of the nineteenth century when the modern nations in Europe were formed; like the Netherlands and France. In order to bind the people together within new national borders, language was thought to be the most important 'glue'. The idea of binding people together was based on the idea of Herder that "language is the essence of the nation" and that "language is crucial for a national identity". A new word was founded, namely the word *the Dutch language* (as the French or German language) meaning that this language is spoken within the national borders of The Netherlands. This language is fixed; it doesn't vary and is completely identifiable and separable from another language in another nation, for example German in Germany. From that moment on, national identities were and are expressed by the idea: one nation, one people, one language, one flag and one anthem.

My two questions can be answered now. The police officer placed me outside the Netherlands because my Dutch differed too much to be part of national Dutch. Young children have to become monolingual Dutch as soon as possible in order to fit in the Dutch society: one nation, one people, and one language.

A fixed link between speaking a language – Dutch- and a national Dutch identity is an invention. In order to make this invention work from the past until today, we have to imagine that people who speak different live in different places and countries. That's why we always ask when someone speaks slightly different: "Where do you come from?" And, we always focused on the people who stayed but not on the ones who were moving. This imagination faces its limits in these rapidly changing societies. People have always been on the move and so are their ways of speaking. People move because they are forced to do so, or because they want to do so, or they have to do so. And people who circulate may produce mobile and quite unexpected ways of speaking. This makes the idea of one nation, one people, one language problematic. When an

invention is outdated, we have to disinvent it. Language is something we DO, it is an activity, and it varies.

We can call this activity of doing language: *linguaging*. The verb *Linguaging* expresses that speakers may combine words and other small linguistic elements associated with different languages; depending on whom they are talking to, in what kind of situation they are and which meanings they want to express. (Unknowingly, we've been doing it all along!). The Dutch word *kamer* stems from Latin, the Dutch word *bureau* and *reserveren* stems from French, the Dutch word *duku* from Surinamese, and the Dutch word *computer* from English. Thus, an example of linguaging is:

*Ik reserveer een kamer via de computer op mijn buro en betaal met doekoe.*

Linguaging is what we do every second of our lives! Linguaging opens our eyes that language does not belong to a nation, but to speakers in specific situations. It opens our eyes that children who use more than one language should be valued for their linguistic knowledge and it opens our eyes for linguistic differences, even between speakers born and growing up in the same place; be it a country, a village or members of the same family or even an individual in different situations. If we accept linguaging, no one is ever 'out of place' anymore.