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In wat voor land leef ik eigenlijk? Anil Ramdas, onmogelijk kosmopoliet

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Summary

What kind of country is this? Anil Ramdas, Impossibly Cosmopolitan

by Karin Amatmoekrim

The Dutch-Surinamese essay writer Anil Ramdas (Paramaribo, February 16, 1958-Loenen aan de Vecht, February 16, 2012) was known for his unrestricted criticism of both the Dutch and the Surinamese societies. After his suicide in 2012, much has been said about the ways in which his immigration and presupposed loss of home had inspired his professional and personal life. This biographical study switches the perspective by taking into account the context in which Ramdas published his work and attempts to answer questions like: how was an intellectual of color perceived in the Netherlands? How was Ramdas' work interpreted and how were the changing realities in the multicultural society an influence on this interpretation? How, for instance, did the political reality after the 1990s (i.e. the fundamentalist attacks on Salman Rushdie, the Twin Towers, Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh) affect the reception of Ramdas' work and his ideas?

The book seeks to gain an understanding of the writer and his work, but also of the interaction between the reality outside of the writer and his inner world. It analyzes how Ramdas engaged with different environments and how these environments have engaged with him. *What kind of country is this?* uses a postcolonial view on the posture theory by integrating concepts such as double consciousness and fragmentation to come to a better understanding of Ramdas' work and personal life. It additionally pays attention to the sentiments that came into life at specific periods in his time, for example the independence of Suriname and the way the country developed after 1975, but

also the ways in which the Netherlands tried to come to terms with its multicultural society. By using a postcolonial lens, the book shows the multifaceted ways in which Anil Ramdas shaped his posture in a world that was changing rapidly. It demonstrates how Ramdas used his migration background as a way to increase his cultural authority, how he used his autonomy as an independent thinker in a social and cultural context, and how he portrayed himself in the media as a thinker who was valuable, not despite but because of the fact that he was an immigrant.

Striving for intellectual freedom, Ramdas states that one can only be wise or intellectual when one lets go of the anchors in one's own community. His stance was interpreted by the Surinamese audience as a denial of ethnic or cultural ties, when rather it was a position that stemmed from his belief that an intellectual loses his function when he refuses to speak out against unsavory matters. From that independent position, unhampered by any form of group thinking, he criticized his environment, be it Dutch or Surinamese. The book analyzes the ways his criticism on Suriname was applauded by large parts of the Dutch media and the ways the same critical engagement towards the Netherlands was interpreted by some as politically correct or arrogant. The book reflects on the role of Ramdas' addiction to alcohol in his public demise, but also shows how his loss of popularity with the larger audience went hand in hand with his opinions and ideas going out of fashion. Furthermore, the book explores how Ramdas' cosmopolitan perspectives could no longer be reconciled with the sentiments that prevailed in the last years of his life. As a cosmopolitan, he was convinced that ties to the people who are close (ethnic or cultural) should never get in the way of the moral responsibility one has for other people. This degree of looking beyond one's own identity no longer suited a country like the Netherlands, which was seeking security in a clear, uniform identity. Anil Ramdas, as a representative of complex ideas about identity, therefore no longer fit into the country he migrated to.