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Summary

Being Who We Are Education and the Rise of the Dutch Individualized Society since 1945

The individualization of Dutch society seems inevitable and irreversible. From the late 1960s on, and certainly after the struggle for equal rights of sexual and cultural minorities in the 1970s, 'Being Who You Are' has become the hallmark of Dutch society, ascertained by various political principles. Every Dutch citizen has, for instance, the constitutional right to live a life unhindered by the setbacks of discrimination. The Dutch government actively engages in civil rights policy, seeking to advance the 'emancipation' of its citizens. Migrants have to learn the 'rules' of the Dutch individualized democracy in integration courses, in order to obtain Dutch citizenship. The individualization of the Netherlands, like many other Western countries, seems so self-evident, that almost nobody has raised the question whether this process is actually taking place at all.

This dissertation traces and critically examines the emergent strife for individual freedom and individual autonomy in the Netherlands after the Second World War. It seeks to analyze the 'individualization' of Dutch society by defining this process in a new, unconventional way. In current academic debates about individualization, strongly influenced by sociologists, individualization is usually described as society falling apart in autonomous, liberated individuals. The underlying assumption is that Western societies have been coherent, densely organized communities in the past. However, because of individualization, they turned into loosely organized associations consisting of free and independent individuals who prefer to make their own choices in life. This study challenges this assumption. Existing sociological research shows that although many Dutch citizens experience their daily decisions as autonomous and personal decisions, their behavior remains in many ways group-oriented and collective, sometimes even uniform. The inevitable detachment between society and individual appears to be highly controversial in practice.

Seen from this perspective, common sense individualization is a myth, and this conclusion makes the renewed study of individualization as a historical process all the more important. The emerging collective *faith* in individualization has strongly shaped Dutch postwar society. This study seeks to trace the Dutch quest for individual freedom and autonomy historically, accounting for the development and the consequences of the growing faith in 'individualization': the emerging Dutch self-image of a society, consisting of autonomous and free

individuals. One of the most remarkable conclusions of this study is that the attachment of Dutch citizens to the ideal of the free, autonomous individual actually tied them together. Because of their shared reliance on the power of individuals, Dutch Catholics, Protestants and nonbelievers, who often had vigorous disagreements in the past, forgot about their former ideological tensions. Individualization thus contributed to a new collective: the individualized society.

The emergence of the individualized Dutch society is studied from the perspective of education. The field of education can provide valuable insights in the nature of the individualized self-image of Dutch society, mainly because debates about schooling and youth in educational magazines often center around the question how children should be prepared for a future society. Seen from this perspective, youth almost literally mirrors a society. On the one hand teachers and policy makers within the educational system are often inclined to read the future in the younger generation they raise. On the other hand this younger generation is expected to adapt itself to an existing society. Because of this continuous tension attached to bringing up children, education is an excellent source of information for historians seeking to trace a national self-image, as societies are often inclined to interpret their own future by reading their younger generations. By studying Dutch teachers magazines, published by teachers labor unions and organizations for school management, this dissertation examines the development of individualization in Dutch education since 1945.

The matter of individual freedom and personal conscience became a matter of national and international concern after the Second World War, as chapter 1 (1945-1951) shows. This chapter describes how the ideal of individual freedom received increasing attention in Dutch society as a result of Allied war rhetoric, theological developments and a political appeal of Social Democrats and Dutch Reformed Protestants towards national unity. Before the war, Catholics, Protestants and nonbelievers had had their own religious and ideological organizations. Although these organizations and the resulting religious separatism in Dutch society had always been contested, these organizations became challenged in new ways after the Second World War. Especially Social Democrats and Dutch Reformed Protestants argued that Catholic and Protestant schools advocated theological dispute among Dutch citizens, instead of providing their pupils with a genuine, personal religious belief. Thus, Catholic and Protestant schools were criticized both for obstructing national unity and individual religious consciousness. By criticizing Protestant and Catholic schools Social Democrats and Dutch Reformed Protestants tried to fight for national unity and an intensified, personal belief at the same time.

The second chapter (1952-1958) shows how the conception of religion as a matter of personal conscience spread during the 1950s. Advocates of

Protestant and Catholic education became concerned about the postwar accusations of religious separatism. In addition, and perhaps even more important, was their incorporation of the concept of religion as matter of personal conscience. Advocates of Protestant and Catholic education increasingly started to argue that Christian teachers should show their dedication to God by working towards an intensified personal belief among their pupils, instead of propagating Catholic or Protestant religious culture as such. With this new conception of religion finding its way in Catholic and Protestant education, the attachment to individual freedom and autonomy intensified.

Chapter 3 (1959-1966) examines the results of the postwar attempts to intensify personal religious belief. Believers were increasingly portrayed as autonomous individuals, free to choose but ultimately responsible for their personal relation to God. Some forms of group pressure that had long been self-evident, suddenly became contested: the importance of church attendance, Christian politics and the urge to establish Christian organizations as such. Raising children as Christians collectively, by sending them to Christian schools, suddenly became a matter of debate. At the same time, both pupils and teachers experienced new forms of group pressure: the responsibility for their own relationship with God, the collective pressure to 'prove' themselves as Christians by acting like a Christian in their personal lives. The ideal of Christian solidarity became a moral standard for individual behavior, as did the growing attention for global brotherhood and development countries. The importance of personal conscience and individual autonomy was also stressed in pedagogy in the early 1960s. From now on, teachers should raise their pupils as independent, liberated individuals able to choose their own paths in life.

Chapter 4 (1967-1972) highlights how Dutch teachers and policy makers dealt with the results of this pedagogical development. How do you teach independence, autonomy and self-reliance, as these goals imply that children should make their own decisions? During the 1960s, many teachers and education specialists came to see this dilemma as a vital problem within Dutch education. In doing so, they voluntarily undermined their own authority, no longer believing that children should be brought up in 'old-fashioned', 'authoritarian' ways. Nevertheless, authority was reconsidered, not abolished. From the late 1960s on, authority was only acceptable when it presented itself as a contribution to individual freedom and self-conscience among pupils. By adapting to these new forms of authority, teachers and education specialists committed themselves to an individualized society, and tried to prepare their pupils as well as they could for this promising future.

After the reassessment of authority in the 1960s, the construction of the individualized society commenced. As chapter 5 (1973-1981) shows, building the individualized society resulted in confusion about its aims, frustration about

the apparently slow progress that was being made and astonishment about the strong political tensions that suddenly emerged. As the individualized society was taking shape in the 1970s, its advocates found out that, although they strived for the same aim of liberating individuals, their conceptions of the road towards individualization differed strongly. Political disagreements arose, and the Dutch middle school, proposed in the early 1970s as a new form of secondary schooling that should prepare a younger generation for an individualized society, became victim of this dissension. As the 1970s wore on, Dutch citizens started to realize that the strife for individual freedom and autonomy did not guarantee political consensus at all. The ‘emancipation’ of the child, the political attempt to raise it as a liberated individual, able to make its own choices in life, failed as a collective process. Hence, ‘emancipation’ became a personal responsibility. Implicitly Dutch citizens started to assume that their society was already individualized, and that individual freedom and autonomy were available to all individuals willing to obtain it.

The consequences of this assumption are described in chapter 6 (1982-1990). Although the utopian individualized society of the late 1960s was never truly established, the continuous strife for individual freedom and self-reliance had created a community of self-proclaimed individuals. Dutch citizens had started to think of themselves as independent, liberated individuals, able to make their own decisions in an egalitarian society. With the arrival of non-western immigrants in the Netherlands, and Muslims in particular, Dutch citizens came to believe that these assumed ‘pre-modern’ newcomers should be taught to behave like individuals, and should thus wear off ‘old-fashioned’ (religious) behavior. Dutch teachers and education specialists committed themselves to ‘intercultural education’, meant to ‘emancipate’ migrants and turn them into the ‘modern’ and liberated individuals that Dutch citizens thought to be themselves.

However, Dutch citizens instead of migrants designed the aims of this emancipation process, meant to fit newcomers into existing Dutch culture. At the same time, Dutch citizens barely recognized that their own individualized self-image was the result of a collectively propagated ideal of individual freedom, rather than an actual, measurable increase of individual self-reliance. As a result, the political strife for the emancipation of newcomers forced them to adapt to Dutch individualist culture, instead of turning migrant groups into autonomous and liberated individuals. After all, ‘Becoming Who You Are’ turned out to be ‘Becoming Who We Are’.

Thus, the foundations for the Dutch integration debate were laid at about 1990, including contemporary commonplaces such as the division between ‘black schools’ and ‘white schools’, ‘autochthones’ and ‘allochthones’, the aim to ‘integrate’ migrants in Dutch society by learning them to adapt to ‘Western values’. In conclusion, this dissertation critically examines the

contemporary status of the Dutch integration debate. The definition of individualization as the emergence of an individualized self-portrait of society puts current Dutch debates about multiculturalism in a new perspective. It sheds light on the many problematic assumptions underlying the rigid divide between modern, individualized and pre-modern, non-individualized citizens and shows that the collective belief in individualization itself strongly contributed to group formation in Dutch society after the Second World War. The emergence of a cohesive group of self-portrayed 'individuals' defines contemporary Dutch attitudes towards newcomers and contributes to political and cultural tensions in debates about multiculturalism in the Netherlands. However rethinking individualism and the ideological foundations of the Dutch individualized society may help to fight these tensions with renewed energy.