Out of character: debating Dutchness, narrating citizenship

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This is an inquiry into the public and political debates over Dutchness and citizenship in the Netherlands (1972-2008). It demonstrates how disagreements over nationhood and citizenship were deliberately transformed from disputes about character into debates about identity and its particular problems. As debates about Dutchness and belonging grew in intensity and political significance, national identity debates came to involve narratives and performative repertoires that were markedly different from previous modes of articulation. The study reconstructs the emergence of this discursive formation, while also showing its subsequent development into an exceptionalist imaginary of dialogical Dutchness. Across these debates, Dutchness is — again and again — performed to be liberal, expressive, plural and outspoken. Inclusion into this nation is imagined at once inevitable and liberating, while also demanding and unattainable. Along the way, citizenship politics devolves into a governmental project of retracing the public image of Dutchness with borderlines of protection. The deliberate move away from character’s essentialism ends up being a potent conversation machine. However, it fails to produce struggles to win and instead revolves discussions around a native public to be defended.
OUT OF CHARACTER:
DEBATING DUTCHNESS,
NARRATING CITIZENSHIP

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 1

1. Introduction: where to begin? 1
   A different impulse 2
   A research approach: Van Doorn on the Afrikaanderwijk 5
   A research question: De Swaan on liberal inclusion 10

2. Crafting an approach: composing nationalism and narrating of citizenship 17
   In view of culture 17
   Practice, performativity and particularity 22
   Doing Dutchness 27
   Doing Dutchness in public 30
   Studying public discourse 31
   What is national about citizenship politics? 39
   Composing nation, people and public 43

3. The culturalisation of citizenship, or how to narrate burgerschap 50
   Aspects of citizenship 52
   Abstracted, but how? 55
   Burgerschap as the public demonstration of autonomous moral conviction 57
   Looking in the mirror of burgerschap 63
   The re-culturalisation of burgerschap 66

Section 1: Making Dutchness public 69
   Introduction to section 1 70

4. How Dutchness became a public problem: from national character to public question 71
   The dwindling self-evidence of national character 72
   The style of the lecture: Huizinga’s satisfaction 75
   The crisis of identity 78
   The anxieties of a post-racist imaginary 83
   A constitutional attempt to recognise race 85
An ambivalent outsider
We are/aren’t racist
Enacting a post-racist consensus

5. Dialogical Dutchness: enacting Dutchness through debate
Dialogical Dutchness: a national mythology of public expressiveness
We are not nationalistic
Emancipation for all, paternalism for some
See me, hear me
Tolerance as dialogue
The imperative of debate
Discussing nationhood in a new era
The French inflection: historians find space to manoeuvre
Out of touch in Europe
Civilised nationalism: intellectual reflections

Section 2: Ascending to the native public
Introduction to section 2

6. Reactive politics: moments and their men
The moment of reaction
Scheffer’s essayistic alarm
Doing drama
Reactions to a call for reaction
Fortuyn’s politics of embeddedness
Dutchness after the breach

7. Enculturation: testing malleability through cultural demands
Not so new: learned citizenship
Making assimilation new
Contesting Verdonk’s mission
From tough Verdonk to brittle Vogelaar
A community of individuals
8. The right to speak of us: history, expert engagement and the native public

- The nativity of the public
- Historical consciousness
- Neo-patriotism: the uses of ‘our’ history and feeling at home
- Making a national canon without a nation
- The commission and its problems
- The native public and its canon
- Canon reviewed

9. Enacting the style of popularity

- Two contrasting attempts at non-exclusion
- When the sovereign spoke
- From Huizinga to Máxima
- This is Us

10. Out of Character: the national inflections of citizenship politics

- An ethnomethodology of inflections
- Not character but identity: how change was done
- Instruments of Dutchness
- Particularising comparisons: from models to inflections
- The problematic of post-racism
- The problematic of plurality
- The problematic of autonomy
- The perils of nativism
- Living on the liberal plateau

Bibliography

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1.

Introduction: where to begin?

This is an inquiry into the public and political debates over Dutchness and citizenship in the Netherlands in a period that lies, roughly, between 1972 and 2008. Dates and periodisations are always a dangerous affair. The dates ‘1972’ and ‘2008’ are not chosen because they neatly bracket anything. They do signal two very specific events that serve as heuristic demarcations for what this inquiry is about. As we shall see in more detail in a moment, 1972 was the year in which the Afrikaanderwijk in Rotterdam became the backdrop for a series of violent disruptions wherein native Dutch residents took to the streets and forcible destroyed the migrant labour pensions that were located in the neighbourhood. The events were quickly nominated as ‘riots’ and became the object of public concern by municipal and national government. The events in the Afrikaanderwijk were certainly not the first occurrences of violence in relation to the presence of immigrants, but it did become the occasion for a major shift in the kind of public attention and concern given to the ongoing immigration into the European parts of the Dutch Kingdom. 2008 marks the year in which what would become known as the ‘global financial crisis’ cascaded across the world. This cascade bought with it a number of concerns – increasing inequality; reform of the financial system; the euro; solidarity – that would again profoundly reshape the discursive landscape in which nationhood and citizenship could be discussed.

This inquiry is conceived from the idea that in order to understand what the politics of Dutchness and citizenship will become in the future it is imperative to understand the past. Moreover, it is imperative to understand how such understandings construct what is ‘passed’ and what may lay in the ‘future’. Different reconstructions of what happened evoke different demarcations in time. When focusing on different aspects – electoral politics; public opinion; immigration policy; etc. – we tend to see different arches of development. This study’s focus is squarely on the discursive: when people discussed questions of Dutchness and citizenship in public, how did they do so? This focus in not made because of some strong position about reality-as-text, but because the act of producing different kinds of texts is relevant for understanding what has passed. Lastly, this focus entails that I must first carefully extract my research approach
and question from the very texts that have been produced in relation to Dutchness and citizenship. I do not want to immediately grasp the problem at hand in terms that stem from outside the discursive milieu itself, even though I have inevitably already begun to do so – Dutchness; citizenship. So, I will have to discuss two questions and relate them as directly as possible to public discourses themselves: what does it mean to begin somewhere and what might it be that one begins to reconstruct by doing so?

A different impulse
If change happens, it should have a beginning. If the world has become different, it should be possible to recognise how that difference has begun to call for attention. By recognising such differences we cut time into segments. Suddenly, there is a time before and a time after the intervention of a phenomenon that commands our attention. This idea of an original moment, at which the new is seen in all its novelty and inexplicability, works a particular magic on our ambitions to reconstruct historical social change. If we could locate and analyse such an original moment, we could gain access to something extraordinary: a situation in which a novel phenomenon is already present but has not yet begun to reshape the world with which it is only just beginning to become entangled. While already present to each other, both sides – the novel phenomenon and the familiar social world – are still unblemished by the mutual effects that will very soon make their distinction impossible. The original moment thereby promises to grant a unique insight into how a new phenomenon made a difference: what was it originally that changed with the coming of something new? Of course, this notion of original difference is a fantasy. As if all could be revealed, all could be elucidated. It is a seductive idea, but it does not develop anything other than a paranoia of truth. The truth about the present comes to depend on one, original moment. When animated by such paranoia not even looking for a needle in a hay stack is enough. The predicament of the researcher is far less merciful: one is forced to look for one yet unidentified needle in a stack of needles!

It is along these lines that I would propose to understand the way in which the issues at the heart of the study before you have become subject to a particular kind of truth finding and speaking. The contention over difference and citizenship in the recent politics of the Netherlands has been analysed as if there can be somehow, somewhere an original moment at which everything changed, at which the difference was made, at which everything was irrevocably transformed. Looking back in this way, the past becomes known as a series of needle points, all of them candidates for the status of originator, of the New. And so, we build
accounts that try to show how the crucial interventions of this or that person, this or that idea, this or that event, this or that governmental decision made the difference. Such accounts may be myopic and deterministic – when all of the difference is invested in one single moment –, but also quite extended and processual – when difference is made through an entire procession of moments that only together have made the difference. These accounts can have a distinctly optimistic ring about them – when it is said that finally the difference was made – or they can be quite pessimistic – when the past appears to be forever lost. In any event, such accounts remain more or less focussed on finding the way in which the difference was made.

A myriad of empirical studies, theoretical models and heuristic summaries have been presented in order to make sense of what irrevocably changed in the Netherlands. Many of them feature in this study and many of them make a great deal of sense. Let there be no doubt: a lot has changed. Each of those studies present their own particular periodisation of the recent decades, involving different pivot points and conceptualisations of how the present was made to differ from the past. Much careful empirical work and argumentative precision has gone into the reconstruction of how and why Dutch politics of difference and citizenship has transformed, turned, broken through, and shifted. The danger in such a research program is that it caters to and acquires a paranoia of truth: accounts are set in competition to each other in order to see which can give the most comprehensive, most cunning, most total understanding of what, how, why Dutch democracy changed. Even if such studies really do not aspire to achieve anything of the sort, they begin to be treated and discussed in that way, as if they are all contenders in the same battle of needle pricking.

The impulse of this study goes against the one described above. It does not seek to present yet another version of how and why Dutch politics of citizenship and difference changed. It seeks to analyse, demonstrate and argue for continuity rather than discontinuity. The current study presumes to show that an appreciation for continuity is just as important for coming to terms with the ways in which the politics of citizenship and difference has played out and is playing out. Yet, this opposing impulse should not be understood as a critical move, nor is it all that original. It is not made because analyses of discontinuity are inherently wrong, haunted as they are with pinpointing the moments in which change really happened. Analyses of continuity, in which it is not change but endurance that figures most prominently, are not presumed to be any better on the whole. They cannot replace accounts of discontinuity in an act of falsification. However, the present study does presume that a proper regard for continuities is needed in order to better understand how the politics of citizenship and difference works.
Everybody knows this, of course. It is obvious that in order to understand politics one will need to appreciate what is made to endure and what is made to differ. Nobody contests that, nor does it need to be defended. Yet, as so much of the engagement with the recent politics of citizenship and difference – scholarly or otherwise – is prompted by a more general narrative of transformation, continuity has become under-thematised and under-theorised.

The focus on continuity is not made for the sake of balance alone. Rather, there is a substantive reason why continuity is important that has to do with how we come to grips with nationhood and nationalism in our politics. Of course, we may try to give endurance a name – ‘political culture’, ‘citizenship regime’, ‘national model’, ‘hegemonic discourse’, ‘power relations’ – but precisely by packing the problem of such endurance into one static term do we beg the question of continuity. It merely states that there is something with a certain rigidity that, thereby, is able to resist change and endures. We still haven’t understood what rigidity is made of and how a resistance to change is actually achieved along the way. Nationhood and nationalism pose precisely this problem. The issue of nationalism, or more specifically Dutchness, already invites an appreciation for continuity. It is precisely about ‘the Dutch’, ‘Dutch society’, ‘Dutch politics’, ‘the Netherlands’, ‘Dutch (political) culture’ that statements of discontinuity are often developed. Dutchness thereby already refers to endurance despite change. We may well critique the methodological nationalism that is present in such statements. That critique is certainly necessary: if accounts of discontinuity are developed, what is actually held constant in those accounts and what is the epistemic or political work that such constants are doing for those accounts? From this critique of methodological nationalism we may proceed to try and rid accounts of the remnants of such unwarranted, unquestioned and politically problematic conceptions of continuity. Yet, another impulse may be to ask how and why the apparently fictitious continuity of a thing-like nation is built into the politics of citizenship and difference. What does it mean that people are constantly busy figuring out what, where, and when to place the discontinuities in such politics? What continuity is nonetheless at play and how is it made to do its performative work? What does it mean that such politics often deal with a phenomenon – the nation – that is conceived to support the very conflicts, tensions and contradictions of politics? We may treat methodological nationalism as an intellectual vice and seek to correct our ways. However, a critical attitude does not preclude to also spend time figuring out how this apparent vice is performed in practice, what it takes to do it well and how it matters. How is the continuity of nationhood made to work? This is a worthwhile question even if one critically resists its distortions and
injustices. Such a project will inevitably come very close to pretending that there actually is a continuous nation, as it seeks to take very serious the endurance of nationhood and the way that the nation enables people to actually make continuities.

**A research approach: Van Doorn on the Afrikaanderwijk**

In order to begin such a study, I will have to upend the central discontinuity that is so prevalently articulated in both scholarly and public accounts of what changed in Dutch politics of citizenship and difference: public discourse itself. In so many ways, accounts of change have presented changing speech rules to be one of the crucial objects of analysis. Whether as cause, effect, mediator or indicator, changing ways of discussing issues of citizenship and difference have loomed large. Precisely because this study is anything but an exception to this tendency in research, it is necessary to try and defuse the time bomb of ‘discontinuous discourse’ before it blows up in my face. How will I show the importance of continuity if this study – again – focusses on the changing patterns of public discussion? I will try to defuse the bomb by introducing this study with an analysis of a short essay printed in the *NRC Handelsblad* of November 4 1972 by one of the key figures in Dutch social science and public debate, Prof. dr. J. A. A. van Doorn. *Will the Netherlands have a race issue?*, written and published long before the most referenced pivot points of what would become known as ‘the integration debate’, nonetheless articulates the problematics of immigration, difference, popular anxiety and governance in the most familiar of terms. The text thereby helps to raise the question in what way the articulation of issues concerning citizenship and difference has actually changed since.

If Van Doorn, as he wrote in his office at the *Nederlandse Economische Hogeschool*, is still our contemporary, writing in ways that are directly recognisable to current readers of the debates on citizenship and difference, how much can be made of the changing discourses in these debates? Well, still quite a lot to be sure. Within specific discursive patterns there can still be some significant variation and those variations actually matter for, to name but one area of consequence, the governance of migration and access to citizenship. It is unlikely, for instance, that anyone would use the term ‘race issue’ – ‘rassenvraagstuk’ – in their title today. Yet, the point of the present study is to not rush past the equally real and equally significant continuities in discursive practice. The goal is to figure out what continuities matter and how they matter, particularly when they pertain to discourses about Dutchness.
An analysis of Van Doorn’s essay helps to correct the untenable view that a problematisation of Dutch citizenship and difference is a recent, post-1990, or post-2001 phenomenon in public discourse. It helps to correct the idea that ‘the integration debate’ has a beginning at all, or is in need one. This idea has been hard-wired into many accounts of ‘the integration debate’ as it does some remarkable work in opening up discursive and political opportunities: a supposedly retarded attention given to issues of differences time and again comes to justify bold and exceptional measures of repression and exclusion in the present. As will become clear throughout this study, the notion of a debate-that-came-too-late is one of the basic constituents of how Dutchness comes to matter in the politics of citizenship and difference. Not only does Van Doorn’s essay dispel the idea that there was a lack of public attention for issues of immigration, difference, popular anxiety and governance – although myths can never be dispelled by empirical argument alone –, it also illustrates how the problem of publicly discussing such matters was already articulated at the heart of the problematic.

Let’s have a closer look at Van Doorn’s own words and get a sense of what he wrote in one of the most established broadsheets of the Netherlands.

Will the Netherlands have a social underclass of second-rate citizens? After the partial emancipation of manual labourers, is a societal class emerging which must lack any chance for emancipation and integration? Have we already accepted this as fact, and will it suffice to point out the economic benefits, for them and for us? Have we already accepted to pay the price of increasing irritation and tension towards these and other minorities, because there is a taboo on the term ‘race’ and Dutch tolerance can’t even be a point of discussion?

If people want it or not, that discussion has been in full swing for at least a year, and it got going because of demonstrably strong irritation. It recently led to an explosion of popular anger [volkswoede] in Rotterdam, but that explosion was royally announced by contentions in the middle of last year. People too easily forget that already in July of 1971 in the Afrikaanderwijk of Rotterdam Turkish boarding houses were besieged and fierce fighting between the tenants and Dutch neighbours broke out; that two days later in The Hague a home of Turkish guest workers was attacked because a Dutch family that was also living in the home was said to have been driven out [weggepest]. (Van Doorn, November 4 1972, NRC Handelsblad)² (#1)

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1 The words used in the Dutch original are given in brackets […] when context or the sheer specificity of their meaning merit such attention. Other comments within the quotes are also given in these brackets.

2 Throughout this text quotes will be presented in English. Almost all of them are translated out of Dutch by me. In some rare cases, an English translation was available and it was used. Of course, one’s grasp of these quotes and their discursive particularities is greatly enhanced if one can read them in the Dutch original. They are provided for the reader at rvanreekum.eu. Each quote is given a number (#x) that refers to the quote-list on the website. Full bibliographical information for the quotes is also listed there. In many instances, quotes will contain words that are beyond translatability, particularly when their usage and meanings are specific to discourses on Dutchness. To give one prevalent example, the Dutch term eigenheid is very hard to translate into the English language yet hugely important for articulations of nationhood in the Dutch context. It connotes both selfhood and distinct particularity, while also evoking essence, ownership and appropriation. I have chosen to translate eigenheid into distinctiveness as this is the most crucial meaning, yet it does not do justice to the possibilities that eigenheid affords. In instances where the Dutch term is of crucial significance I give it in brackets after the English translation. So after popular anger we see [volkswoede] as the translation...
Articulated by Van Doorn, the ‘race question’ – with explicit reference to the US and British contexts – is a matter of addressing local, neighbourhood tensions between immigrant minorities and the native majority. Its injection into public debate can be traced back to local problems of co-habitation. Such injection appears hampered, however, by certain speech rules: the taboo on the term ‘race’, which Van Doorn ostensibly breaks by publishing his essay. Moreover, the existence and value of Dutch tolerance is precluded from the public forum, according to Van Doorn. Thus, local realities cannot be represented appropriately in the national discussion because of distorting speech rules. Yet, it seems growing irritation cannot be ignored forever as ‘explosion’ after ‘explosion’ forces the public at large to consider the issue. This last point is explicitly the gist of the essay: to begin to broaden the scale of the public discussion and thereby implicate the national government.

Drawing parallels to Enoch Powell’s mobilisations across the Canal a few years prior, Van Doorn goes on to analyse the political side of the issue:

In short: while the politicians responsible felt very uncomfortable and the main broadsheets has nothing good to say about Powell, he did get approval within a segment that he was removed from furthest: labourers and the residents of lower class neighbourhoods [volksbuurten].

The Netherlands currently offers a similar image – luckily, save for a figure such as Powell. The most radical are those directly involved, residents of the old inner cities [oude stadswijken]. The local action groups and neighbourhood committees try to quell the thriving emotionality, but they demand without reserve a restriction of the amount of foreigners in their neighbourhoods. […] Surveying the whole, we have to recognise a low intensity Enoch Powellism without Powell, alienation between the locality of society and the highest levels of policy making, and a clear attempt by the political left to bridge this cleavage. (Van Doorn, November 4 1972, NRC Handelsblad) (#2)

Established politics, then, sees itself confronted with an issue that it cannot deal with appropriately. Not only does the asceticism of high-level policy discussion not express the emotionality of local life, but it seems to necessitate policies that go…

of ‘volks-’ into ‘popular’ does not sufficiently sustain the ethnological and political connotations of volk. In the end, this can be said of all the words translated as the Dutch language, whatever that includes precisely, is itself the very technology through which Dutchness is performed. I could have easily devoted the entirely of my PhD and this dissertation to semantic and conceptual inflections of key words in Dutch nationalism. That, I did not do and do not strive to do. Along the way, I do try to provide constant commentary on how terms are used and what difference that makes. I hope that the English translations will sustain the gist of what is discursively happening in the quotes. For those proficient in the obscure craft of reading Dutch, I hope the English translations will provoke a sense of disruptive and problematising distance as they are confronted with familiar arguments in unfamiliar forms. For those not yet initiated in the strange and wonderful world of Dutch this same alienating distance, now sensed from the other side, might provoke ambitions to – one day, in old age – acquire the skills to read something as funny and surprising as Ferdinand Huyck by Jacob van Lennep.
against the very basis of equality and equal treatment. This appears a problem particularly for the left as they are committed to equality and the political emancipation of the locally embedded working classes:

Whoever has made, like the political left has done, ‘political voice at the local level’ into an article of faith, cannot escape this. He finds himself in the uncomfortable company of the spokespersons of the ‘poor whites’ in the United States, who stood up for the popular mass with its unemployment, low pay, and bad housing and therefore could scapegoat the negroes – competitors that work below market price. He is also obliged to sympathise to some extent with the English that sent Powell his fifty-thousand letters, because they saw their already scarce habitations, schools, and medical facilities being occupied by an influx of mass immigration. (Van Doorn, November 4 1972, NRC Handelsblad) (#3)

The problem that these issues pose to established politics go far deeper than the particular dilemmas of the left. Basically, the problem is that local discontent and anger cannot be reduced to economic circumstances. Van Doorn explains:

Alas, we know better. There is sufficient social-scientific research – particularly concerning so-called deviant behaviour and adjacent issues of minorities – to demonstrate that ‘strangeness’ is often experienced as threatening and hostile. This is concerned not only – but still does includes – physical characteristics; behaviour and manners, lifestyle, eating habits and forms of habitation, norms and preferences also play a role. […]
Therefore, it is useless to try and retouch the tensions in the old neighbourhoods until economic injustices and political radicalism remain. If authorities can be blamed for anything, it is that they gave grossly underestimated the development of racist tendencies. Their policy – in planning, residential, social – have contributed to the fact that, today, the Netherlands is dealing with a new and serious problem. (Van Doorn, November 4 1972, NRC Handelsblad) (#4)

According to Van Doorn, a new policy direction is needed, one that is not informed by morality, ideology or idealism, but by honesty and factual knowledge. This shift towards honesty and factual knowledge will not be easy, however, because it will involve references to and national discussion of strangeness in physical appearance and particular behaviours. Van Doorn ends the essay by evoking a sense of urgency:

The Dutch people [volk] are learning a couple of tough lessons. Anyway, it has become impossible to afford itself the priggish arrogance that it so abundantly exhibits in front of countries that are struggling with a centuple of our problems.

Moreover, they will have to embark quickly on a humane and thought-out policy. Hopefully, there will not be any party-political exploitation. The entire issue is too flammable for that – this as an argument for those who are insensitive to the direct human concerns that are involved. (Van Doorn, November 4 1972, NRC Handelsblad) (#5)
So, we have in this essay the articulation of a number of key notions that have been immensely significant in the last thirty years and are still with us today. There is the concrete reality of local co-habitation, appearing as a seedbed of racist prejudices that cannot be translated in the austere and cautious language of national policy debate without losing what really matters. There is the self-evident interplay between white natives, whom always already count as the majority, and the non-white newcomers whom take the role of minorities. Van Doorn calls their problem one of ‘satisfactory/peacefully fitting in’ [bevredigend inpassen]. Van Doorn also points out that the race issue cannot be reframed in the more comfortable terms of class relations. There is the need to recognise the anxieties and tension that emerge where different people are living together, particularly the inattention to the living conditions of what are called ‘the old neighbourhoods’ [de oude wijken]. For lack of a coherent set of policies, these circumstances erupt into explosions of anger that repeatedly remind us that something will need to be done. Yet, government and the public at large remain apprehensive as a taboo on racial issues prevents them from developing it into the national issue that it needs to be and is about to become. Violent clashes in the old neighbourhoods are nonetheless forcing the Dutch people to learn some ‘though lessons’ [harde lessen].

Now, the point is neither to suggest that it is in fact Van Doorn who should be credited with opening the debate on integration long before Couwenberg, Vuijsje, Pinto, Bolkestein, Scheffer or Fortuyn were branded as candidates for that illustrious prize of public esteem. Nor do I want to claim that Van Doorn expresses the sensus communis at the time. Van Doorn was an atypical public intellectual whose ideas moved and swayed in ways that defy all-too-simplistic mappings of the intellectual field. It is certainly true that the ideas expressed in the essay were not those expressed in the official language of government. Van Doorn’s essay is interesting not because it is typical for or generalisable to a broader public opinion. The point is to appreciate what happens and what has been happening for some time – at least since the early 1970’s – when notable figures of public discussion address the issue of difference-in-the-Netherlands. When we resist for a moment the question whether Van Doorn is right or wrong, original or redundant, we may appreciate the discursive work that goes into articulating an issue at all. What does it take to meld a bundle of observations, ideas, arguments, rhetorical gestures and concepts into the figure of what we routinely call an issue? We may see what kind of work it takes to remake a whole set of social processes and struggles into a way of speaking publicly about them that makes ‘the issue’ something that can be publicised, mobilised, communicated and contested, so at to make it move through newspapers, conference halls, policy reports, bar talk, camera lenses and disputes.
between neighbours. Van Doorn quite reflexively raises that question in the essay itself: will we have the issue or not? Will it become an issue? At the same time, this already appears to be inevitable: explosions are already hurling the issue in the nation’s field of vision. Better to get a handle on it now. Van Doorn’s essay tries to do exactly that: to put forth notions and connections that together weave the fabric of a political object: immigrant integration. What can be done and cannot be done with such a fabric is still unclear. Nor do we need to think of it as a finished tapestry. New threads can be added and others may be unravelled. All of that will take work and none of that is done in isolation or with the luxury of oversight.

A research question: De Swaan on liberal inclusion
In the years following Van Doorn’s essay the Dutch government came to take up the issue that ‘explosions’ were bringing into the public eye and on the political table. Two of Van Doorn’s central concerns – national attention and a focused policy program – gradually but surely came to fruition. Not only did Dutch government come to articulate more and more decisively that a coherent, national policy approach to the indefinite presence of immigrants was in order, culminating in the drafting of the infamous minorities policy of 1980’s, the issue of ‘immigrant integration’ became a recognisable and, to a certain extent, domesticated object of discussion. It now became possible to discuss a question such as ‘how are we going to incorporate all these recently immigrated people into Dutch society and make sure that they will become full citizens of this country?’ and have other participants in such discussions recognise what it was you were addressing and what bundle of problems were entangled with that question – racism, poverty, residential segregation, religion, respect, tolerance, conviviality, extreme right voters, etc.

As I have derived an initial approach to such debate from Van Doorn’s essay – the discursive work of weaving an issue –, I want to now derive an initial question from another intervention in the ongoing discussion. I will do so by analysing yet another essay by a prominent sociologist and public commentator, Prof. dr. Abram de Swaan. The fact that I choose to introduce this study through the public writings of two prominent social scientists is no coincidence. It speaks to the fact that the articulation of social problems in Dutch politics has been and to a certain extent still is strongly inflected by the arguments, concepts and discussions of social science. The interplay between social science practice and public debate in the Netherlands will return regularly throughout this study. De Swaan did not approach questions of difference and citizenship in the same way as Van Doorn. Whereas Van Doorn articulates the problem as one of social problems, policy change and governance, De Swaan articulated the issue by attending to
globalisation, cultural hybridity and western cosmopolitanism. Here, the role of the sociologist is not to point out policy directions, but to provide orientation and critical distance in what is becoming a world society. This means that De Swaan places far more emphasis on questions of cultural difference and the social relations between people who were no longer situated in fairly homologous domains of nation, state and culture.

Throughout the early 1980’s De Swaan devoted a whole series of columns in, again, NRC Handelsblad to such matters. A recurrent theme of these columns is the now classic multicultural problematic of reconciling an openness for ethnic, religious and cultural particularity with a liberal-progressive subscription to equality, liberty and solidarity. The sociologist and public intellectual De Swaan thereby seeks to provide insight into what it could mean to be a cosmopolitan today. Indeed, a collection of his essays from this period was entitled The sorrows of the cosmopolitan (1987). Within larger debates about the postcolonial and multicultural circumstances in Europe, De Swaan’s engagement falls squarely at the side of universalism. Openness to the wider world was not to be based in a rejection of Western universalism, but instead could only emerge out of a universalism that is an intellectual product of the West, so argued De Swaan. In a three-part treatment, published on February 9, 16 and 23 1985, De Swaan discusses precisely this problem. In part one, entitled Civilisational judgement [Beschavingsoordeel], De Swaan opens the discussion:

To the achievements and corruptions of western civilisation belongs a highly curious doctrine that is widely adhered to but appears to be untenable in almost every separate case, cultural relativism: what is good or evil can only be determined from within a certain civilisation. It is impossible or senseless to make judgements upon one civilisation with the norms of another. (De Swaan, February 9 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#6)

Right away, the reader is confronted with the civilisational particularity of cultural relativism. De Swaan presents it as a product of the West. De Swaan goes on to display how this doctrine is internally contradictory and practically suspect. He concludes with somewhat of a confession:

I have fallen away from disbelief: I have renounced cultural relativism and I have taken on a conviction. About civilisations with very different technology and organisation – primitive societies – I still choose not to make judgements, they are too alien to me. But a societal form with approximately the same condition of technology and mode of domination I understand all too well and when something happens in them that goes against the norms that I apply in my own society I will denounce them with the certainty of a recent convict. Of the Papua not a word, for or against, but the workings of the Iranian regime I can more or less understand and those I denounce. In the name of
the new doctrine, in the name of cultural substantivism: Tremble, Khomeini! (De Swaan, February 9 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#7)

De Swaan played around with the terms of debate. Cultural relativism appears a zealous doctrine and a form of stubborn disbelief. Over and against religious orthodoxy, exemplified by Khomeini, is placed an equally substantive belief system: that of a progressive liberalism. The entire column is thus written in provocation of what, according to De Swaan, is a widely adhered doctrine that is nonetheless never really applied consistently in practice. The closing paragraph of the column drives home this effect: as one of the main protagonists of a worldly, cosmopolitan and progressive politics in the Dutch public sphere De Swaan professes openly to his readership that he has fallen away from the faith. The column is much more than an argument. It is a publicly enacted, theatrical gesture, at once playful, joking and earnest. The significance of De Swaan’s argument cannot be understood if one were to omit this performative, stylistic aspect of his intervention.

In the follow-up to his first piece De Swaan goes one step further. It is provocatively entitled Civilisational advantage and opens with:

There is no attack of western civilisation that does not use the arsenal of that civilisation itself. There is nothing to be said against the West that isn’t said in western terms. The western civilisation is the first and the only that has formulated and propagated its own resistance. Capitalism is western, imperialism too, but anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism are equally western. (De Swaan, February 16 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#8)

De Swaan aims to unmask all those voices that speak of eurocentrism and seek to resist assimilation to the West as, in fact, heirs to central aspects of its civilisational development. It is here that the domestication of the issue of integration reveals itself. Without any specific explanation, De Swaan moves to the question of minorities:

The crucial idea [kerngedachte] of western civilisation is the idea that there are norms that apply to all people, irrespective of the person at hand, irrespective of origin, birth mark or conviction. But minorities that claim their own law have to do so in name of their particularity. If they give this up they will dissolve as a group into the surrounding society without residue. For each member taken separately this may be either a tragedy or a liberation, but not for the minority that wants to manifest itself as a group. (De Swaan, February 16 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#9)

De Swaan goes on to discuss the contradiction in which minorities may find themselves when they seek to maintain their particularity in the face of ‘norms that apply to all people’. The core of this contradiction, according to De Swaan, is the
fact that western universalism grants minorities the right to be particular, to retain
difference. Minorities are thus drawn into a double bind: by claiming and
maintaining their particularity minorities are, in fact, affirming the universalism
that has recognised their particularity. De Swaan concludes:

For Dutch sensibilities of justice Islam is precisely not special and thus a faith which may be practised
amidst the many others.

That one, universal principle is precisely not what those believers, each within their own
sect, believe. They deem themselves excellent, graced with the one, true faith. At the same time, they
can only maintain themselves in their particular position, because they are not special for their
environment, and because they claim a principle that counts for everyone, irrespective of its validity
or faith, and they, already for that reason alone, cannot accept unreservedly.

This paradoxical relation shall turn out to instigate considerable misapprehension in the
future, because it has not yet dawned on every minority that she does not obtain her right from
something special [eigens] that others lack, but precisely from an abstract principle that ignores all
particularity and counts for everyone. (De Swaan, February 16 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#10)

This final quote, published in early 1985, gives this study its question. How? First
of all, it illustrates once more how familiar and engrained a whole series of notions
and arguments were well before the main empirical work at stake in this study. Yes,
De Swaan’s arguments are quite different from Van Doorn and many other voices
at the time. Yes, he writes in a context in which the whole problematic of
integrating minorities has become an entirely familiar topic of public discussion.
Yet, there are also significant resonances. The very idea that something like
‘integration of minorities’ was a question of, at the very least, negotiating the
distance between western, Dutch universalism that grants people the freedom to be
different and others, often recently immigrated, who found themselves at the
margins of this liberal order and whom could do little more than dissolve into it or,
in an act of self-contradiction, maintain their particularity against all odds. The
problem is always already one of cultural lag, of particularistic resistances against a
liberal order that cannot be resisted without accepting it, of fitting others in as
peacefully as possible. Again, De Swaan’s position cannot be generalised to public
or political opinion at large. That’s not the point. The point is that this discursive
elaboration of the issue, as it is articulated by De Swaan, needs little to no
explanation or justification. De Swaan can rely on a whole web of associations
available to himself and his public. The issue already has a texture to which it is
enough only to elude. Moreover, this texture resonates in important ways with that
of Van Doorn: the issue of ‘immigrant integration’ is always already the problem of
incorporating – i.e. fitting in – others into an established order, for which certain
cultural divides will have to be breached.

In his third column of the series De Swaan discusses the contradictions of
this process and the ways in which ethnic identities are created as function of the incorporation process and an ‘ethnic resentment’ operates along the way:

It is precisely those who are about to blend into the surrounding society who eagerly cultivate a resentment towards the majority; in this way they pledge their loyalty to their own group in negative terms, even though there is little else that still keeps them there.

[…]

The ethnic resentment also has a public function: it paralyses the opponent by identifying him with what he despises most: racism and fascism. And only because the opponent himself hates those follies so much can it work. Only because the opponent lives with a universalistic mentality of western civilisation does he keep listening, does he give in and notices later on that to his dismay he has promised more than he can offer. So, a second round in the spiral of indignation follows. (De Swaan, February 23 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#11)

De Swaan’s series of columns is not interesting because it may reveal how many others also thought and felt about issues of difference and citizenship at the time, but because it puts forth in well-explicated terms what can be said of it to begin with. It shows us how an issue can be dealt with, how it works, what its possibilities are. Writings by participants of public discussion, such as De Swaan’s, are interesting because they are the product of concerted effort to carefully and precisely articulate what an issue is and how it may be argued about. More specifically, writings like this one allow us to recognise that if we would suggest that there is, at a certain period in time, a culturalisation at work in the politics of citizenship and belonging in the Netherlands, we risk forgetting the extent to which the issue was not always already culturalised. This need not mean that debates over citizenship and belonging in the Netherlands have not become curiously invested in the notion of culture at certain moments and in certain periods, but it does mean that it is important to recognise that something like culturalisation was already a constitutive possibility of the issue-at-hand. Even though De Swaan may take up quite specific positions within this ongoing debate over time, he is always already arguing in the vicinity of concepts such as cultural difference, backwardness and incorporation. He needs to position his argument in relation to such concepts in order to even make an intervention.

The second reason why this final quote by De Swaan raises a question for me is because it quite succinctly presents the paradox of liberal inclusion. Liberality grants space for difference, yet to what extent can differences be recognised and is their recognition sufficient when this same liberality must refuse to understand differences on their own terms and, conversely, recognises not their particularity but merely an abstract principle that counts for all. Quite a bit has been written on such questions of recognition and accommodation since, both in
normative and sociological terms. However, what interest me about De Swaan’s quote is that he, not entirely without justification, seems to think that the proponents of minority recognition will encounter the greatest trouble in negotiating the paradox of liberal inclusion. De Swaan suggests that they may not have realised yet to what extent their inclusion into a liberal order is actually indifferent to their particularity. Minorities be warned: the recognition of particularities may have next to nothing to do with an actual appreciation of them and all the more to do with an appreciation of what sets the majority apart, its distinctive liberality. Recognition of difference in the process of integration is not a ‘love of the other’ but precisely the opposite, a ‘love of the self’. De Swaan was not incorrect in suggesting that much confusion could be expected as too what exactly motivated and justified the integration of minorities. ‘Love of the other’ and ‘love of the self’ can often be hard to distinguish. Yet, what of the majority itself? Could it not be, as De Swaan seems to overlook, that it is first and foremost the status of the majority that will become the object of much confusion? Does not the abstract norm of liberality play an equally confusing trick on the self-proclaimed majority? Could it not be that the most thorough confusion would emerge among those voices, questions and debates that revolve around what it may actually mean to be Dutch, precisely because it is so difficult to distinguish between what one is presumably doing in view of the other – taking her difference into account – and what, in fact, one does precisely in view of what one assumes is distinctive of one’s self.

Assuming that De Swaan did indeed think that it would be the minorities who were to be confused about what inclusion into a liberal order actually entails, the remainder of this study aspires, if anything, to demonstrate that De Swaan was wrong. That is, I purport to demonstrate that it is precisely the notion of what, already in the 1980’s, was called ‘the autochthon’ that would come to evoke the most dizzying confusion and, thus, public contention. The most thoroughly confused and elaborately perplexed would turn out to be those people who tried to speak about and often on behalf of the people who were understood to already be Dutch, already self-evidently citizens entitled to belong. Such speaking and debating became an increasingly impossible and self-defeating task, disfiguring the self-evident image of ‘the nation’ through the very attempts to describe it. Against De Swaan’s suggestion that the minorities may not be aware of what they were getting themselves into as they were, willy-nilly, incorporated in a liberal order, I will argue the opposite. The paradox of liberal inclusion is all the more confusing for those who imagine themselves to be already included, to speak from that position and who presume to see ‘others’ coming towards them from the margins,
for better or worse. It is precisely by imagining themselves at the heart of the nation and infusing debates about citizenship and difference with all kinds of notions of what that means that participants in public and political debates have constructed for themselves an insoluble object: Dutchness. As participants from all sides came to load that object with more and more significance and esteem, its insolubility became more and more of a problem. On the one hand, it appeared all but impossible to solve the puzzle of defining Dutchness, often because many agreed that it should not be defined. Yet, into what were ‘we’ then presuming to welcome those others who would come to learn what it meant to live in this liberal society? Thus, it also appeared all but impossible to dissolve the problem of Dutchness, often because many agreed that national belonging is, in the end, a good.

So, my question will be what kind of public confusion, otherwise known as ‘debate’, emerged over the Dutchness of Dutch citizenship since the interventions of Van Doorn and De Swaan. My approach, extracted from Van Doorn’s intervention, focuses on the discursive fabrication of a string of interrelated public issues and, more specifically, the performative aspects of such work in the public sphere. Finally, my aim will be to better understand the importance of continuity is the politics of citizenship and difference, particularly insofar as ‘the nation’ is made to endure. Let’s begin.
2.

Crafting an approach: composing nationalism and narrating of citizenship

Maar voor het kennen van het cultuurleven behoudt de waan zelf, waarin tijdgenoten leefden, de waarde van een waarheid.

But for understanding cultural life delusion itself, in which contemporaries lived, maintains the value of a truth.

— Johan Huizinga, 1919

In view of culture

This study into the recent continuities and contestedness of Dutchness is decidedly culturalist: it takes culture to be significant in and of itself. Although I do not follow Jeffrey Alexander and others in their attempts to demonstrate the causal autonomy of culture (Alexander 2004; see Woods & Debs 2013), I do appreciate and employ the idea that it is worthwhile to analyse culture in and of itself, and not – as is so often the case in social science – as some correlate of other supposedly non-cultural processes. Indeed, this study is intentionally structured in such a way: it interrelates culture among itself and takes this intermingling as the empirical problem-at-hand. In the context of this study, culturalism is not a position against something else, but a mode of doing research. That, I think, is altogether more in line with what culturalism ought to promote. It does not presume to replace structuralism or materialism – or any other contender in causal primacy –, but does distinguish certain aspects of social reality to be cultural and seeks ways to make those aspects matter in our accounts of reality. The question, of course, is what that implies.

I start out with this programmatic statement because it is important to address the issue of culture head on. I don’t want to beat around the bush: this study is an exercise in culturalism. Positioning this study in terms of culture is, of

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course, problematic and contentious. Concepts of culture and a politics of culturalism have come under fierce critique. As shall become evident in a moment, I agree with much of that critique. Moreover, I agree very much with the more basic idea of being critical about culture. Much of what has been written by way of such critique is indispensable for avoiding past mistakes and vices of research and theoretical reflection (Kuper 1999; Wallerstein 2004; Geschiere 2009). Moreover, many of such critiques have come in the form of highly sophisticated empirical accounts of our world that more often than not do a far better job of providing answers to interesting questions that those who depend on culture. ‘Cultural explanations’ and accounts in terms of ‘cultural differences’ obfuscate many important aspects of what may be relevant to us. What’s more, the concept of culture often sets us off on the wrong foot entirely. Yet, I will also argue that it is still worthwhile to take up the concept of culture and to set up research appropriate for it.

Although the literature has identified many deficiencies in the concept of culture (Baumann 1996; 1999), for the purposes of this study there are three that stand out: idealism, groupism and an overvaluation of consensus. In the first – idealism – people make the mistake of trying to explain a whole host of social phenomena by referring to ‘ideas’ as if ideas are somehow a root driver or cause of other social phenomena (Garfinkel 1967). This approach to building interesting accounts about our world is flawed for a rather simple reason: it is blatantly unclear what ideas demand of us, what they compel us to do, how their driving work can actually be demonstrated. In fact, this is precisely why ideas are interesting: they are part of disputes, conflicts, inquiries, projects, experiments in which they are at stake and through which their meanings are continuously re-invented. If ideas did not have this inventive property there would be no sense in having them nor would it be interesting to analyse them. This problem is often averted by, first, deciding out of thin air that the researcher, in a groundless wisdom clothed as learnedness, does know what ideas demand and, second, projecting back into ideas those meanings that fit the cultural explanation at hand. As long as one can hide the fact that such accounts are circular, one can claim that one has demonstrated something interesting about the world: ‘they do such and such because of their culture (which is defined as that which they do’).

Thus, one doesn’t need to resort to vulgar forms of materialism, relegating ideas to secondary or even epiphenomenal status, to argue that idealism is problematic (see also Alexander 2005). The point is that ideas are always part of interpretative repertoires extended across social relations (Mead 1934; Garfinkel 1967). This is true also for the researcher’s ideas (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).
Researchers need to think long, hard and out loud about how people, themselves included, are trying to make sense of ideas. What matters is what people are doing with ideas, without suggesting that what people ‘actually’ do does not include making sense of ideas itself. Sense making is in and of itself a practice that people actually do. It need not be perceived in a reflective or explanatory relation to other practices to be a worthy object of study. Making sense is hard enough as is.

The circularity of cultural explanations already takes us into the second problem: groupism. The notion of culture has become immensely important for our speaking of and dealing with human collectivities in terms of bounded and homogenous groups (Brubaker 2006). Particularly over last two century, the very notion of a society has become more or less synonymous with that of a culture (Heilbron, Magnusson & Wittrock 1998; Latour 2007; Calhoun 1999). ‘Society’ is the ‘cultural group’ writ large. The identification of the social and the cultural entailed in this groupist notion of society is, again, circular: sociality consists, in the end, of cultural sameness, while cultural sameness is understood to be the product of societal boundedness. This makes the identification of ‘society’ and ‘culture’ somewhat of an axiom: it need not be empirically demonstrated, merely assumed (Lemaire 1976). The object of social science is always already this compound of integrated social relations and cultural homogeneity. Historically, this approach to social reality constitutes a great break-through as it reformulates metaphysical questions about sociality into practical questions about the too-and-fro of social relations and cultural expressions that can be subjected to empirical inquiry. Yet, it has also enabled a deeply inadequate categorical thinking in both academic and extra-academic discourse as it invites the idea that one has understood a problem when one can determine which group, categorically defined, is responsible for it. Capitalism becomes the doing of capitalists, crime that of criminals, liberalism that of liberals and ethnicity that of ethnics. Collectivities are thus reduced to person-like actors, ‘groups’, that can be held responsible for certain effects because they figure as the ultimate sources of action: ‘Why did this happen?!’ ‘Because they did it.’

Groupism, as Brubaker has aptly explained (2004), is a mistake not because categorisations do not matter but precisely because they do. By irreflexively recanting the social categorisations that people employ social scientist have very effectively black boxed those practices of categorisation out of view, thereby at once and often purposefully legitimating certain categorisations at the expense of others (see also Hacking 2007). Of course, halting this nastiest of habits in social science will be very hard indeed as it is hard wired into some of the most basic assumptions about its object and purpose. While many social categorisations
have been purged over the years, others have come to replace them.

‘Culture’ has come to play a curious role in this respect. Many categorisations have been delegitimized and become suspect, making them appropriate objects of study as culture. That is, it is only when and in so far as categorisations become suspect and illegitimate, no longer our own, that social science is able to comfortably take them as culture, namely in the form of incorrect yet meaningful interpretations by lay people. Culture becomes the name of mistakes by non-experts. In a broader sense, culture is how the other understands the world differently. It is the collection of their (mistaken) interpretations over and against our neutral descriptions. This demarcation operates just as well between researcher and researched as it does between, roughly, the West and the rest. This also means that ‘culture’ becomes a name for group differences. It is culture that makes one group different from another as viewed from the supposedly culture-less standpoint of the researcher. It is in response to a culturalisation of social categorisations that notion such as ‘cultural racism’ (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991) or ‘culturism’ (Schinkel 2013) have become meaningful critiques of the supposedly neutral distinguishing of ‘cultural groups’. As Terry Eagleton (2000) has discussed, the notion of culture has travelled in the 20th century from that which everyone can potentially partake in on a global scale, naming a common humanity through the humanities, to that which separates people into discrete groups, describing their potentially deadly incommensurabilities.

Finally, the notion of culture is associated with an overvaluation of consensus (Koenis 2008; see also Rancière 2004). This overvaluation is directly related to the problems of idealism and groupism as it takes culture to be the consensus among group members about how to interpret the world and what to do in it. Culture, then, is important because it supposedly grants cohesion to collectivities by orienting their members in a similar way and coordinating their actions. It also suggests that consensus is normal while dissensus becomes pathological. Indeed, we may recognise that it is in the deep interest of people who, over the course of two centuries, have been witness to unimaginable violence and destruction that popular consensus is defined as the hallmark of society’s well-being. It is out of this violent disruption that social science and its notion of culture-as-consensus has been constructed. However, we must also recognise that this normal, peaceful society in which order is legitimate and all strife is rendered into deliberation is a fantasy called forth by its absence. The notion of culture thereby plays a trick on our senses as it tends to immediately imply consensus rather than dissensus. Culture is always already thought as consensus even when we don’t see it. Even if we hardly ever encounter societal consensus and it can
hardly be said to be the norm, we tend to perceive matters in light of it. The hope for consensus places concrete situations of coordination and contention in a horizon of agreement, as if it will eventually have to take place. There is much to be said for keeping such a horizon open in apparent contradiction to a dissensual present (Dewey 2012 [1927]; Habermas 1981; Benhabib 2002; Calhoun 2002). What does not help, however, is to assume that consensus is delayed due to a lack in cultural sameness. The idea that people are in consensus because they share in culture is begging the question at best. It also immediately rules out the possibility that people are in conflict because of similarities or, conversely, that disagreements are themselves the stuff of culture. As has been argued by Margaret Somers (1995 a, b), it is the concept of ‘political culture’ that often does a lot of questionable theoretical work in presenting both politics and culture in very particular ways. We will return to her argument shortly.

In summary, the notion of culture is rightly critiqued because it invites the construction of accounts in which bounded, homogenous groups live their lives according to, somehow, compelling ideas about whose meaning the members of such groups agree without effort. Indeed, such accounts of what our world is and how it works suit particular forms of politics and legitimate certain structures of domination. In short, it suits a politics in which authority is based on the claim that one particular group out of many knows how to live well and the aim of politics becomes the protection of that group, its ideas and its supposedly higher form of cultivation, in part through the assimilation of other groups to it (Fanon 1952; Said 1978; Balibar 2004). In this sense, the very notion of culture is racist and is properly rejected. Authority and esteem come to hinge on the extent to which one is able to enact and claim the right kind of culture. Conversely, pathology and deviance are almost inevitably culturalised, i.e. diagnosed in terms of a lack in cultural homogeneity and reverence for proper cultural endowment. Along these lines the notion of culture has enabled and still enables gross injustices, particularly because it helps to transport responsibility for those injustices onto the people that suffer from them most. Culture is used to carve up the world into worthy and unworthy segments, at best granting the cultured the privilege – ‘noblesse oblige’ – to instruct others how to mend their ways. We can already sense the faint sound of Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries* swelling beyond the hills and begin to smell the rotten stench of ‘victory’.

If the notion of culture is so strongly entangled with all of this, why hold on to it at all? And why proclaim that this study is itself culturalist? The answer is that ‘culture’ may still be worthwhile. In the context of this study it indicates a crucial aspect of politics that is appropriately called ‘cultural’. Precisely because
this study seeks to create some critical distance between itself and the ways in which ‘culture’ is politically employed, it is worthwhile to explicate its own mode of culturalism (see also Van Reekum 2011). Not only does such a contrast help to clarify what is problematic about the notion of culture, it also avoids the reiteration of unproductive dichotomies. Despite all the conceptual, methodological and normative damnation that can be justifiably flung at ‘culture’, this study will not try to work through this predicament by, instead, presenting a supposedly non-cultural, ‘materialist’, ‘structural’, ‘politico-economic’ or ‘critical’ account. These positionings already exist in view of culture and derive their meaning and impulse from arguments against ‘culture’. They have the tendency to rely on culturalism in the very repudiation of it. Much of what is done under these rubrics is far too sophisticated to remain trapped by this tendency. This already indicates that a pure non-culturalism is a simplistic abstraction. The point, here, is to argue that a straight-forwards escape out of the clutches of culture will not work. We have to repossess it.

**Practice, performativity and particularity**

One way of repossessing the concept of culture – the one I will try to follow – has been to suggest that the reason for culture’s perseverance as a sociological concept is that it addresses some very important aspects of social reality, which one would want to get a handle on even if culture is a treacherous instrument for doing so. The goal should be to explicate what those aspects are and go from there.

One of the reasons that idealistic uses of culture – approaching culture as a separate realm of somehow meaningful ideas – are so unfortunate is that this turn to culture is the very opposite of what makes it interesting. Namely, culture becomes a static firmament of self-contained truths that orient the lives of the people living under its canopy. Yet, culture should not draw our attention to the heavens, at least not predominantly. It should draw and has drawn out attention to the ground: what are people doing? Culture as a sociological instrument can help us intervene in all-too-static and deterministic accounts that account for the social world in action-less correlations and repetitions. As Garfinkel famously said, we should avoid thinking and speaking about people as if they are ‘cultural dopes’ (Garfinkel 1967). Understood along these lines, culture addresses *how* people actually achieve their lives from day to day (Goffman 1959; Schutz 1967; Mauss 1973).

For instance, let’s assume it makes some sense to say that this or that socio-economic class exists. One could, and should, then still raise the question *how* it does so. Throughout the history of social science, such exercises invariably
end up discovering that what appeared to be a compact social thing – a class – exists in a highly heterogeneous set of ways (Thompson 1963). Class is multiple. A fuller, more appropriate account of class relations would then come to include this heterogeneity of ways through which class life is executed. Culture matters. Class doesn’t just happen as if it is the product of anonymous social forces. It must be enacted and insofar as it is enacted it cannot be done monolithically. Actually doing things in practice will always entail invention, inquiry, interpretation, doubt, incompleteness, innovation and, thus, heterogeneity (James 1907). In this way, an eye for culture – how people do things – helps create far more sophisticated accounts of social reality. What has come to be known as a ‘turn to practice’ in social science was often apprehensive of the concept of culture, some of the reasons for which I discussed above, but I would argue that the turn to practice cannot do without culture, albeit in a radically new way (see also Somers 1995b; Alexander 2004; Bell 2007). Leaving culture behind in a practical turn would result in a rather flat and boring materialism that inevitably harbours culturalist prejudices, which it is unwilling to reflect upon as talk of culture has become wholly suspect. The heterogeneity we find in practice would be little more than noise, a nuisance, something to get rid of. Yet, it is not just what people do ‘materially’ – what their habits, routines and capacities are – that matters in practice, but also how they make sense ‘culturally’ of all this action by more or less reflexively trying to understand what’s happening. Even after a turn to practice, culture remains of the utmost importance because practice would regress into ‘behaviour’ if we would not include in it the on-going reflexivity with which people engage in practice (Boltanski 2011). Only then does heterogeneity become more than randomness or error, namely the constant figuring out of how to actually do things. Only then can we see that something like class exists in and through heterogeneity in practice. Culture – sense-making, performance, expression – permeates practices. Or, in other words, there are always certain styles involved in doing things to the extent that without stylistic prowess one couldn’t do them. Separating out the ‘actually doing’ from the ‘symbolic embellishment’ is counterproductive. One can’t say anything without sounding a certain way, directly impacting on what one is actually saying. One can’t act towards certain goals without acting in a certain way, directly impacting on what one is actually achieving.

A second aspect comes into view: performativity. It is not just that practices have stylistic qualities. These styles cannot be relegated to a secondary role in working through practice. To use one of the more famous examples of speech act theory (Austin 1962), it is indeed the case that one creates a business
meeting by stating ‘I hereby open this meeting’ in such a way that this statement refers to its own performative work. But included in this is the fact that one is equipped with the proper dramaturgical sensibility to express this statement in the right way. Shouting frantically ‘I hereby open this meeting!!!!’ will, in most cases, not open this meeting. It will initiate a particular kind of engagement, but not a meeting. To open a business meeting one is expected to deploy a certain tone of voice, a certain rhythm, a certain timing, thereby allowing others to also enter the performative flow. By playing around with these gestural qualities, people are able to do very minute and clever things, such as opening a meeting is such a way that the attendants get the feeling that something of great importance is going to happen about which they are expected to be very concerned and earnest (Goffman 1967; Collins 2004). The attendants can then begin to prepare their face work, their emotional work, and their alliances accordingly. The silence before the storm. All of this works just as well when people are aware of the theatrical quality of their actions. Even very attuned sociologists, who have read their Goffman, cannot and will not dispense with dramaturgy in order to get things done. Culture is not an ‘as if’ that loses its magic once people peek behind the curtains of social conventionality. Quite the opposite, it is because people are reflexive about performativity that they tend to take it very seriously. It is not just that my girlfriend is acting ‘as if’ she loves me, she’s acting that way because that is what she is trying to do (and succeeding admirably I might add). Only by playing roles with more dexterity do we break through appearances and attain some measure of veracity, durability and predictability (see for instance Butler 1993; Law & Mol 2002). Not less but more culture is needed to make things natural. Performances, then, are always attempts to get performativity going. Each gesture is a jump into an unknown and open future. It is always and necessarily an open question whether other people (and indeed other non-humans involved) will come to play along. The felicity of gestures – whether they work or not – is always in-the-making.

If, instead, something could be achieved through the application of pre-determined rules – as in a closed system –, one would no longer need to be reflexive about the stylistic qualities of one’s gestures. One would no longer be feeling out one’s way through situations, but merely taking certain chances in the context of certain probabilities. Behaviour would be enough. So when we speak of culture, we are concerned with the various ways in which people deal with and navigate through the constitutive unpredictability of their actions within situational horizons. This is also why there has always been a tension between sociological accounts that seek to understand action in terms of strategies over and against sociological accounts that seek to understand action in terms of culture. Social
scientists that work with the concept of culture are fundamentally apprehensive to the idea that action can be merely strategic. To them, strategic instrumentality is always embedded in broader cultural horizons. Once we relate culture to performativity, we can understand why. The problem is not that strategic accounts of action reduce people to cynical chance-takers, while cultural accounts reduce them to culturalised automatons. There are plenty of situations in which people are being cynical chance-takers, while there are many situations in which people are rewriting the scripts of their lives. The problem is that strategic accounts close down the horizon of action to one homogeneous telos: utility, off-spring, power, prestige, reputation, capital, violence, women, death drive, etc. For all their faults, cultural accounts persevere in social science because even if they often reduce people to script-following actors unable to step out of their assigned roles, they at least envision the horizon of action to be something at stake in the on-going performance itself. So, even if people may not be capable of performatively changing the rules of the game – one does not simply mime capitalism out of existence – cultural accounts at least provide us with accounts in which game changing is an ever present possibility. Through such accounts, we can come to know ourselves and what we do in terms that allow for them to be changed by trying to act out things differently.

Finally, this brings us to the importance of particularity. As discussed above, culture has been an important concept for thinking about particularity. One often encounters culture in plural, as in ‘different cultures’. More often than not, ‘cultures’ thereby indicate ways of doing things, close-knit social relations and group boundaries all at the same time. As said, this often involves a hierarchical ordering of ‘cultures’ that is, at once, a hierarchical ordering of peoples (Lemaire 1976). There is apparently an observer of cultures whose own culture enables him to differentiate and order other cultures. This observer culture, invariably European in descent, is thereby the supposedly neutral yard stick beneath cultural diversity. This intellectual habit, while politically productive, has posed an immense obstacle to speaking clearly about culture. Although it won’t be easy, it has to stop. Some social scientists have tried to go cold turkey and kick the habit of using culture altogether. Yet, if we follow the re-articulation of culture along the lines already put forth so far, I think we might proceed with more recognition of where we’re coming from.

Instead of identifying particularities by looking for difference between ‘cultures’, thereby reifying culture and essentialising difference, we may think of culture, in the singular, as that aspect of practices that makes differences. Culture becomes something that we all partake in, rather than something that certain people
have to a greater extent than others. So, it is not that people are different because they ‘have’, ‘are part of’, or ‘act out’ different cultures. In line with my arguments about practice and performativity, in order to actually achieve anything people necessarily need to make sense, enact, and stylise. For instance, one cannot merely be bourgeois, one has to find a particular way of doing it. One always finds oneself within an already moving field of semiotic relations in which there is no neutral position (Hall 1973). One is always already making sense, enacting and expressing in a particular way. There is no ‘working class’, ‘Turkish’, ‘male’, ‘black’, ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘radical’, ‘left-wing’, ‘professional’, or ‘environmentalist’ as that would mean that these positions exist as stable states independently of each other. All of these differences are being made, are in-the-making. That is, in order to take up any of these positions one will need to continuously re-invent what they actually involve. As the scholarship of cultural studies has so expansively demonstrated, culture is this entire landscape of particularising, of making difference, of cultivating culture. To attribute to people a specific culture – A has culture B – is entirely begging the question. It is to indicate a mere moment in a process perceived from the most particular of viewpoints, nothing more.

Take, for instance, a frequently observed attribution in the Dutch context: ‘Moroccan culture’. According to politicians, bloggers, journalists and social scientists alike, ‘Moroccan culture’ is making ‘Moroccans’ do all kinds of things that others, who do not have ‘Moroccan culture’, do not do. As already discussed, the trick is simply to define ‘Moroccan culture’ as that which one would like to attribute to ‘Moroccans’. If ‘Moroccans’ are found not to do things that were included in ‘Moroccan culture’ they have apparently become less ‘Moroccan’. This way of reasoning is what passes for serious discussion, not only in the Dutch context. Only very rarely are cultural arguments made to actually give interesting accounts of what is happening and how people come to develop their ways of living (see for instance De Jong 2007). Most of the time, the overriding concern is who one can blame, punish and discipline: how do ‘we’ make ‘Moroccans’ less ‘Moroccan’?

Does this mean that a notion such as ‘Moroccan culture’ is vacuous, a mere veil for prejudice and racism? I would think not. It is much more than that. It is the entire ensemble of ways in which people deal with the differences implied in nominations of Moroccan-ness. At the very least, it indicates that people are engaged in making differences, in particularising nationalities and ethnicities. People find themselves in already moving fields of national and ethnic differences that categorise them and through which they categorise. Thus, ‘Moroccan culture’ indicates that people are inventing and re-inventing ways to do nationhood and...
ethnicity. This, indeed, helps understand and explain why people do certain things. For instance, it helps explain why public intellectuals can make a living writing long, earnest exposés about the threat ‘Moroccans’ pose to ‘society’ as publics are interested in material that helps them navigate the moving fields of nationality and ethnicity in which they find themselves. In such exposés, they may well find socially acceptable narratives that help them explain to themselves and others how it is that they are different from ‘Moroccans’ or, instead, how their Moroccan-ness is understood by others. In a social environment in which one’s standing is closely tied up with ethnic hierarchies, it is to be expected that such writings – good or bad – will circulate widely. Just as the immigrants that came from Morocco and now live out their lives – caring, stealing, shouting, shitting, praying, fucking, voting, writing – in the Dutch Kingdom, culture-bashing intellectuals are equally partaking in ‘Moroccan culture’ as they – together with the rest of us – are inflecting the ways in which it is possible to be Moroccan today. To take on culture in one’s analysis, then, is to be attuned to the ways in which people particularise and differentiate, how people become capable of making, sustaining and re-arranging differences.

Doing Dutchness
When we take practice, performativity and particularity on board, we can say that there are ‘different cultures’ after all. That is, different practices involve a constant stylistic work – performing and interpreting – that particularises them. There are cultures of democracy, cultures of cycling, cultures of love, cultures of scholarship, cultures of dwelling, and so on. In this light, the somewhat strange habit of connecting tribal, ethnic, national, religious and racial modifiers to the word ‘culture’ – as in ‘Dutch culture’ – can also be repossessed. Of course, there is Dutch culture, meaning: there are a multitude of practices in which people, willy nilly, are performatively trying to get a handle on what it actually involves to be different in the particular way of being Dutch. People do Dutchness…and then they do it some more differently (see for instance Margry & Roodenburg 2007; Stengs 2012; Krebbekx et al. 2013; Gouda 1995; Galema et al. 1993; Schinkel 2013; Guadeloupe 2010; Mepschen 2012; Balkenhol 2014). The point is that the suggestion of homogeneity, determinism and singularity immediately seems rather ridiculous when viewed in this way: why on earth would we expect that people figure out what it involves to be Dutch in one, repeatable, rule-driven, and resembling way!? It not only seems improbable but also immensely impractical. People would have to go around living their lives and constantly thinking to themselves “wait a minute, I’m Dutch!” and then somehow adjust their actions
according to some one-size-fits-all performance model of what that would look like in this particular moment and situation.

The improbable goal of coordinating all the heterogeneous practices that involve doing something like Dutchness is linked to the ways in which tribal, ethnic, national, religious and racial modifiers are intimately associated with highly valorised and charged boundaries of in- and exclusions, of recognising and affirming human-cum-civic dignity. In all kinds of ways, our liberal democratic vocabulary of rights and sovereignty constantly refers to a ‘political community’ that is more often than not presumed to be bounded, composed of resembling members and in a state of consensus underlying more superficial disputes (Calhoun 1999). Where to find this community of resemblance and agreement? Nationalism is, among other things, the attempt to find the political community by way of national differences. Yet, this means that we ought to take culture very serious indeed (Leerssen 2006). Dutch culture, i.e. the multitude of practices in which people do Dutchness, is thereby of immense importance to projects of nationalism as it involves the presumption that there is some method to this madness. It should be possible, so nationalisms propose, to compose out of the multitude of practices a coherent overview of how they hang together, follow out of each other and exists as one integrated body of cultural life.

In Foucault’s discussion of such compositional work, he argues that the recurrent dispositif is a biopolitical one (Foucault 2003). A particular way of composing nations recurs: nations are those entities that persevere, that are able to withstand the many forces that threaten their existence, health and ability to care for themselves. Nations, then, are known by a capacity to exist on and out of themselves. They draw their capacity to endure from within. They entertain some internal distinction, the worthiness of which is demonstrated by its very resistance to force. This historical diagnosis of nations is at once a moral and political claim: ‘Society must be defended’. The fact that nations exist through force, i.e. war, at once means that we are called to war through our national affiliations. If the nation exists, it must have enemies and these enemies must be kept at bay.

From a critical standpoint, we can and should say that nationalism thereby involves the violent and unjustified differentiation between enactments of nationhood that are included in the dominant narrative and enactments that are unmasked as ‘not really coming from within’. Certain performances and interpretations become indicative of national distinction while others betray even the most skilled impostors. Culture becomes a treacherous terrain of shibboleths. As has been repeated over and over in critical treatments of nationalism, the inclusion of certain enactments is only possible through the exclusion of others.
The insiders use the outsiders to get to know themselves. The interiority of the national body exists through the very expulsion of ‘alien elements’ (see for instance Schinkel 2007). In this way, it is possible to unmask the naturalised distinctions between in- and outsiders as politically productive of contingent power relations. The discourse of nationalism, composing an internal cultural distinctiveness, is shown to be little more than a myth as it must repress and disavow parts of its historical becoming, which should therefore have been included in it. Nationalism is unmasked as it appears to refuse its own rules. It is a false game played by those who are in the position to determine the application of the rules.

While this style of critique is, I think, entirely justified, it also rushes past a lot of concerns that are not easily combined with it. Most notably, by all too quickly interpreting struggles over nationhood in terms of power relations, one almost inevitably forgets the cultural aspects of what is going on. Even if we accept – which I do – that nationalism involves the contingent imposition of boundaries, excluding certain ways of doing nationhood, as a way to legitimate inequality and justify violence, we should still be interested in how people are performatively capable of doing so. Boundaries do not get drawn around something like ‘authentic Dutchness’ because certain people have the power and interest to do so (Lamont & Molnár 2002). Even if they have the power and interest to do so, they will still need to get out there and do it. Importantly, they will have to find ways of doing so that make sense, to themselves and others, and can become part of certain repertoires. Only then can they hope to achieve what we may think power and interest afford them. Only then does the mythology of nationhood attain any kind of plausibility and does a multitude of enactments begin to resemble something approximating what the biopolitical logic of nationalism posits: an enduring, internally coherent cultural life of the nation. The fact that this project of national formation must remain provisional and is never entirely true to its own values does not give people engaged in it free range, no matter how powerful and cynical they may supposedly be. Even if people reflexively understand that the composition of a national culture is a theatrical enactment that produces the very unity it purports to reveal, those people will have to delve into the cultural complexity of said enactments and build up the capacity to perform well. No matter how often we tell ourselves that it is merely ‘as if’ a national culture exists, this realisation does very little in changing the reality of its on-going performance and particularisation. Many critiques of nationalism therefore have the effect of re-articulating it. Unmasking national narratives as partial and hegemonic often suggest that they should be performed better: more expansively, more democratically, and more inclusively. So, neither the purported ideologues of nationalism nor their critics can easily side step the
cultural practice of performance and particularisation. In order to have any impact on what people do when they do Dutchness, be it constructive or deconstructive, one will have to engage with the material.

We are finally ready to see fully why a culturalist study of public and political struggles over Dutchness is warranted next to an approach that would take nationalism to be an instrument of and struggle over power. The problem is not that nationalism isn’t such an instrument. It is. Nor are struggles over nationhood in anyway a-political, as if culture is not political. The problem is that a critical perspective, aimed at unmasking the power effects of what is going on, cannot deal with certain questions that still need to be addressed, even after one has thoroughly unmasked and antagonised power. By seeking to unmask, critical approaches cannot deal with performativity as such. In the end, performativity must be reduced to power differentials: the difference is made by who does the performing, not by how the performance is done. Culture in itself doesn’t do anything. It is merely a very circumvented, disorienting means to an end. Instead, a culturalist perspective seeks to demonstrate that while power differentials are, indeed, immensely important, power play is always complicated by the performative demands and ambiguities of unpredictable situations.

To focus on this aspect is not to suggest a competing explanation, but rather to suggest that interesting accounts of what is happening in the world tend to include multiple pieces of the puzzle that never congeal into a uniform ‘theory’ of what is actually happening behind the veil of complexity. Of course, if one feels that such reduction is precisely what sets ‘scientific’ accounts apart from others, one will not agree with my approach. Here too, I would propose to be as eclectic as possible: reducing complexity and broadening our scope of it need in no way be in competition with each other. We need both. My main aim will be the latter as I will try to interject the understandings of citizenship politics and struggles over Dutchness with considerations of the cultural, i.e. performative problems faced by its participants. I will focus on how Dutchness is done, done differently, and then done again. Finally, this means that I will also focus on the question how Dutchness is being particularised, set apart and contrasted. In short, how national difference is being recursively maintained by inventing ever different ways of enacting such difference.

Doing Dutchness in public
By now, it has become clear that in order to get a handle on the politics of citizenship and the struggles over Dutchness I will study how participants in such practices enact Dutchness. As I’ve been arguing, there is no other way to study
such enactment than in the particular. That is, in a particular situational setting, in particular kinds of practices with their particular performative possibilities and problems.

I will study such enactments in public and political debates about Dutchness and citizenship. In no way are these practices representative for, reflexive of or generalisable to some greater set of facts about ‘the Netherlands’, ‘the Dutch’, or ‘Dutch politics’. If the reader is interested in any such facts, she will be greatly disappointed. As I will argue in more detail, to think that such national nominations describe social phenomena that can be generalised to – as one generalises from a sample to a population – is to misjudge what one is dealing with. Much social science has, of course, done precisely this: generalise factual instances to a national population of facts. It is today rightly rejected as methodological nationalism, although the institutional embeddedness of sociological research seems to prevent its practitioners from effectively ridding themselves of it. In any event, my reason for looking into debates about citizenship and nationhood in the Dutch context is not that they reveal the whole in the part. Indeed, such an approach would draw my own analysis into the very controversies I seek to understand as it would seem to be a mechanism whereby the national community could be found and described. Of course, getting involved in the debate itself will be inevitable in the end, but proposing a mechanism for finding the nation is not what I will aim for. Indeed, the argument that public discourse is a superior resource for finding out about Dutchness is, as we shall see, itself a crucial and deeply problematic part of doing Dutchness today.

**Studying public discourse**

Why then study public discourses? I take public and political debate to be one practice among the multitude of practices in which Dutchness is at stake, resonating and refracting what is happening in others. As such, it merits attention. However, there are specificities to practices of public discourse that make it of particular interest.

First of all, I will focus on a number of public arenas – parliament, opinion pages of the most established newspapers, news magazines, policy documents, white papers, books, scholarly publications, manifestos, lectures, announcements and other forms of esteemed public commentary and intervention – in which participants not only voice opinions and claims, but also seek to justify those positions while critiquing others (see De Haan 2008a). This means that participants in these arenas will tend to be highly reflexive about the kinds of reasoning that is going on around them and how to intervene in ways that are understandable for
opponents and proponents alike. Many of these participants make a living out of writing, commenting, publicising, ridiculing, critiquing and defending in public. I mainly focus on one, quite particular corner of publicity: the arena of publicity that purports to achieve national generality and be the focus of mainstream attention (see Emirbayer & Sheller 1999: 161). This fragment of publicity is profoundly selective, mainly accessible for and occupied by those who can lay claim to the dominant side of a wide array of differences: male, white, heteronormative, native, rational, representative, normal, learned, famous, etc. Yet, instead of focusing mainly on this selectivity, its changing dimensions and the silences it entails, I aim to focus on the justificatory work that participants in these arenas nonetheless engage in, even if they hoard the right to speak and obfuscate their particular privileges by discourses of generality (cf. Uitermark 2012; Benson & Neveu 2005; Bourdieu 1991). What is striking about this segment of public engagement is the attempt to provide arguments that anyone could or should be able to agree with. One might unmask such discourses to be, in fact, particular and selective, but that doesn’t change the fact that the practice of participating in these arenas is done through carefully crafted enactments of generality (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006 [1991]: 35). Participants, more often than not, presume to do, even if they pretend, what Immanuel Kant proposed to be the crux of public reason and public address: ‘But by the public use of one’s own reason I mean that use which anyone may make of it as a man of learning addressing the entire reading public.’ (1970 [1784]). There is in these arenas the repeated presumption to project claims towards certain general criteria, to have them hold for everyone, whatever that may mean at any one occasion.

Insofar as participants justify and critique they set up criteria and judgements that have a wider, public significance. Subsequently, this tends to involve attempts to organise and rationalise what is, in most conversational settings, a tangled mess. By this I do not mean to say that public discourse is actually better organised and more rational than, say, your last conversation with your aunt at birthday. Indeed, your aunt may be a very organised and rational interlocutor. What I mean is that participants are engaged with discourse in a way that is peculiar to the setting of public discourse in that publicity is purposefully equated to generality. Participants explicitly worry about the definitions of terms, they try to make sense of the cleavages between opponents, they explicitly signal their alliances, they try to corroborate their claims in ways that are accessible to others, and, most of all, they are in search of consistency across a range of arguments. The arenas I focus on are marked by the perplexing and odd precept that one ought not to contradict oneself, a highly impractical notion in most
situations but highly valorised in the ones at the heart of this study. All of this means that public discourse tends to bring out explicitly the articulatory logic of what they and others are claiming as participants test out the implications of discourse to a far greater extent than is usual in other settings. What participants claim about rights, grievances, injustices, privileges, problems, diagnosis and solutions will tend to be stretched, by themselves or others, to see how well an arguments is put together and what range it may cover. Crucially, participants will evaluate each other’s performances and explicitly articulate ways of valuing the positions and persuasiveness of interlocutors. One might say that public discourse forms one of the settings where it is not so much this or that statement that is put to the test but also the logic by which such statements can be associated into more or less consistent chains of positions (see also Laclau & Mouffe 1985). Public discourse is not just a confrontation of disparate claims, but enacts an explicit contest between ideologies, criteria, standards, world views and orientations.

Much of what is said about public discourse here resonates with the characterisation given by Jürgen Habermas (1989). Habermas’ sociology of public reason has taken up the study of public discourse in precisely this direction: public discourse is interesting because it is there that people put their claims making to the test of generality. This is what sets public discourse apart from other discursive settings. While Habermas’ theory of public discourse is most certainly performative, building on speech act theory and pragmatist linguistics, I want to argue that it presents unnecessary limitations for the study of discursive enactments. Habermas’ conceptual scheme offers, in principle, only two modes of speech: instrumental and communicative reason. This means that all properly public speech is performed in view of possible agreement and intersubjective understanding. Even if participants are not aiming for agreement – an attitude that is not unknown in public fora –, their speech acts can always be unmasked as mere manipulation and not properly public reasoning. However, the question is which kinds of agreement are at stake. Of course, Habermas differentiates between a variety of systemic domains in which communication proceeds in light of different regulative horizons: truth, justice, morality, beauty, etc. What is thereby precluded, is the idea that in any one practical setting multiple ways of valuing, judging and criticising may be at stake at the same time. It seems to me that such an approach to public discourse would allow for much more stylistic plurality. Debates are never only about who or what is right, considered within one and the same horizon of agreement, but very often also about what ‘being right’ actually means or entails. At stake are multiple notions of what an actual agreement would sound like. It is this room for multiple valuations that is opened up by Boltanski & Thévenot’s
theory of justification (2006 [1991]). By differentiating many ways of judging worth and justifying claims, they effectively offer a much richer, pluralistic theory of dissensus (see also Stark 2009). They show empirically how people creatively compromise, compare and switch between a variety of worths in one and the same situational horizon.

Their initial theorisation of the economies of worth, for instance, is based on conflicts and agreements in labour relations. Out of these conflicts, they have extracted a variety of worths – spiritual, domestic, civic, that of fame, of market, and industrial. These are demonstrably available to participants across their contestations. In this way, Habermas’ communicative reason is pluralised as it is not only that actors argue in view of different modes of agreement, but also that in one and the same setting – public debate for instance – these different forms of worth are themselves to be coordinated. In fact, one and the same utterance may enact a compromise between many of them.

By showing which kinds of compromises and critiques can be performed in dealing with a variety of worths, Boltanski & Thévenot have devised a pragmatic sociology in which the practical senses of the participants are not – in the end – given by power relations that they do not reflexively grasp. Conflicts are not steered by anonymous social forces that only trained sociologists – say, Pierre Bourdieu – have the tools to bring to light and the concepts to understand. Just like trained sociologists, participants have the capacity to do (self-)critique. That is, they are able to deploy one way of evaluating against another. The question is no longer that of competing ideologies and their sociological unmasking in view of the ‘actual’ social determinations. In fact, to suggest that there are social forces that only certain experts understand is to already begin to enact a specific way of evaluating, namely a style that Boltanski & Thévenot call ‘industrial’. Boltanski & Thévenot do not seek to unmask social reality through the cunning of a sociological reduction. What matters is describing how it is that participants are capable of comprise and critique and what is made possible by doing so. For instance, it might mean that certain tests of expertise – doctoral theses – will come to play key roles in dealing with certain questions of what is and is not justified.

While the forms of worth described by Boltanski & Thévenot are certainly evocative, I will not directly apply them as one would apply a model to a case. Only some of the forms of worth will turn up in the analysis because they turn out to be useful (cf. Diken 2002). This is only to be expected as I’m working with very different material and settings from the one at stake in the initial study by Boltanski & Thévenot. The forms of worth found in their work should not, I argue, be seen as a fixed conceptual framework to be applied everywhere in the same way. They are
meso-theoretical: conceptual constructions that work better in some cases than others. It would be rather odd to think that they could be supplanted from the context of labour struggles to that of national identity debates. How Boltanski & Thévenot actually arrived at their constellation of worths is far more important than the specific worths they have orchestrated out of specific material.

What is important for me about a pragmatic sociology of worth is the more basic assumption that participants in debates are dealing with the double problem of evaluating and maintaining forms of evaluation. This assumption helps to avoid analyses of discursive contests regressing into verdicts of who is better, or better placed, to manipulate and enforce the illusions that accord with their positional interests. In such analyses of domination it is no longer possible to analyse how people come to know and judge that which interests them, as if ‘interests’ are impervious to the on-going discourses about them. Of course, public contestations are also conflicts between differentially positioned people that try to dominate each other via the manipulation of what are considered legitimate ways of judging. However, as soon as we try to understand public discourse in mere power terms – ‘which discourse favours which positions and vice versa?’ – we lose the possibility of analysing discursive enactments and their performative effects on what it is that people think they are arguing over. Over and above Habermas’ sociology of public reason, it is Boltanski & Thévenot that provide me with a mode of analysis in which discursive enactments matter in and of themselves. These enactments are not to be unmasked as so many manipulative gestures, nor are they to be unified under one communicative reason. They can be understood as creative, on-going attempts to devise, establish and revise ways of ordering worths. Public discourse is never merely an occasion for legitimating certain claims above others, but always also for articulating, maintaining and rearranging an issue and the ways in which judgments of it can be made (see also Marres 2007; Dijstelbloem 2008).

A second reason why public discourse is of particular relevance has to do with the formation of political concepts and the kinds of politics that they enable. Public discourse in the aforementioned arenas tends to proceed under the assumption that it has a focal role to play in publicly representing the political community to itself. In these arenas, the concepts ‘public’ and ‘citzenry’ are almost always used interchangeably. This homology of concepts is more often than not followed by another conflation, namely with ‘the nation’ (Kennedy & Suny 2001; Boyer & Lomnitz 2005). What is discussed in these arenas is presented and dealt with as ‘national concerns’ of ‘what is happening to the nation’. Even if participants vehemently disagree over whose voice actually speak from the nation’s point of view, public discourse is thereby already performed in search of it.
We are reminded here of the crucial connection between publicity and nationhood in the emergence of the particular mode of social relations that ‘the national’ designates. Although it has been part of theorising nationalisms for a very long time (in particular Renan 1882), it is Benedict Anderson who has developed a way to capture this connection most effectively by crafting his concept of imagined community (1983). His approach helps to describe the specificity of national community in contrast to other kinds of relations. Only via the engagement with publicly dispersed images of community, e.g. through print media, can people begin to partake in indirect social relations that involve them – their hopes, dreams, fears and desires – into a common past, present and destiny. It is in this way that people may begin to act towards themselves and others as simultaneous parts of a community while only ever encountering the vast majority of those others through imagination. Sites of public imagination, such as the arenas of public discourse I will study, are therefore immensely important in the ongoing struggle over and maintenance of imaginary practices that grant something like Dutchness plausibility in people’s lives.

These arenas can thereby be seen as specific sites in which entanglements between the political concepts of ‘public’, ‘citizenry’ and ‘nation’ are being tested and refined. What does it take to present, speak about and contest a ‘public’ issue of ‘national’ proportions and who are the ‘citizens’ that are thereby being envisioned and recognised? The effective meanings of these concepts are at play in the contestations at the heart of this study. Instead of deciding beforehand what they should mean and subsequently reconstruct the way in which their meanings are being disfigured under the stress of dominant powers and cynical manipulation, I seek to reconstruct the discursive work that they are doing and the politics they thereby enable.

In somewhat different terms, one might say that I will study the role of nationalism in democratic political culture, as long as we make sure that both nationalism and political culture are understood performatively. To do so, I follow an argument set up by Margaret Somers in her 1995 articles (Somers 1995a, b). In these seminal texts, Somers not only deconstructs the concept of political culture, demonstrating how it presumes and predicates precisely that which it purports to explain, namely modernist democratisation, but also proposes an alternate way of analysing and thinking about the historical formation of political concepts and their role in the politics of citizenship, an empirical route that was hitherto blocked by the very concept of political culture.

Somers is able to show that ‘political culture’ naturalises ‘the private’, thereby placing the patriarchal domination – ‘families’ – and capitalist exploitation
– ‘rational adults’ – of what goes on in ‘private’ beyond reproach. This is how citizenship tends to be narrated in discussions of political culture: Out of the private domain inexplicably appear property owning adults-cum-citizens with fully formed convictions able to perform political culture. Political culture never really takes place in public. It is already formed in private. ‘Political culture’ also denaturalises the state as an artificial and provisional solution to antagonisms. The state may be tolerable but should always be kept at bay. Its only real justification for acting is the private security of citizens. The concept of political culture splits democratic politics in ‘real’ and ‘less than real’ sections through a social naturalism of private society. What property owning men do with their dominion is somehow to be considered more real, more natural and more just than what people do publicly. True freedom is always without the state, without the public and without others. Insofar as politics is articulated through the concept of political culture it will delegitimise arguments for ‘state intervention’ as a normal part of what citizens organise together. ‘State intervention’ is only legitimate as a form of emergency action, securing the safety and well-being of what is private. It never appears as a form solidaristic organisation of what is public. Political culture turns out to be not merely a concept but a preformed conception of what it purports to question.

Beyond a denunciation of the market fundamentalism and contractual citizenship enabled by the concept of political culture, Somers subsequently proposes a new way to study that which was formerly black boxed by ‘political culture’. Somers suggest that we may study the actual narrations of citizenship enacted through certain public and political discourses. In this way, we no longer presume to know what democratic politics and citizenship are before we set out to study them, but rather study what people are able to make of it when engaging with each other. Public discourse is then understood to be performative of citizenship, and not a mere instantiation of an underlying politico-cultural script or model that can be copied and imposed on others. Thus, Somers constructs the logic of what she calls an Anglo-American citizenship narrative that is enacted and re-enacted through the antagonisms that occupy political agendas. For instance, while pleas for fiscal conservatism may be countered by discourses about the need for more public assistance both political gestures enact the social naturalism that divides the haves and the have-nots. Neither gesture is able to argue for or against the apparent self-evidence of property relations, let alone the very institution of private property that the American republic was built to protect. Yet, the narrative approach to citizenship does not lapse into cultural determinism. In Somers’ account, the United States are far from destined to remain the republic of ‘free men’. In fact, it
is because a hegemonic narrative can be reconstructed that it can also be changed. As I’ve argued, it is precisely a performative notion of culture that opens it up to change as performative styles can always – by definition – be performed differently. Of course, the question how it would be possible to begin to enact citizenship differently in the American context is thereby not answered. As I’ve argued elsewhere, the performative aspects of the Occupy-protests may have begun to do so as they made ‘homes’ and ‘communities’ precisely where they should not be according to the hegemonic division of private and public spheres, namely in the public square (Van Reekum 2011). In no sense does Somers’ approach imply that American democracy cannot and will not be re-invented. It can and it will.

By taking this route towards an analysis of political culture, I am sympathetic of post-Marxist discourse theory develop by Laclau & Mouffe (1985). They also demonstrate that it is principally impossible to determine what signifiers such as democracy, justice, freedom and citizenship mean. Their meanings are contingent upon the ongoing articulations of discourse and it is precisely undemocratic to suggest that they only mean what we think they mean. While hegemonic discourses may temporarily settle their meanings into predictable ways of making and recognising claims, e.g. rights, they are principally underdetermined. Or, in terms of strategy, it is up to people themselves to articulate the equivalences and differences that mark out the terrain of democratic antagonisms. It is no use waiting for ‘true’ class relations to manifest themselves or preparing for a clash of ‘essentially’ different cultures: politics will have to be invented.

Yet, where my approach differs from their particular brand of poststructuralism is that, in following Somers’ performative approach, the indeterminacy of political signifiers does not stem from an irredeemable lack of meaning, which Laclau locates in the impossible fulfilment of desire (Laclau 2006). Instead, discursive enactments always involve an expressive excess, the meaning of which is yet to be determined. There is always already more that can be done with performative repertoires, no matter how hegemonic a particular discourse may be. While I do not think too much effort should be put in such ontological questions here, I do think it is relevant to highlight this difference between a dialectical poststructuralism and a pragmatist one. While the first holds that any claim to universality must be unmasked in its particularity, the latter holds that universality must always be done differently. As the principle exponents of the latter position, Deleuze & Guattari, have said: ‘le multiple, il faut le faire’ or, the many must be made. Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, I do not think universality is out of reach at all (see Laclau 2010). Of course, we should renounce the homogenising
universalism of liberal political theory, which thinks of universals as principles that one can write down, preserve and impose. This does not mean that we can only ever have a negative, just-out-of-reach relation to universality. Universality is firmly and concretely in our grasp. It is, however, in-the-making and it is in the making that it happens.

What is national about citizenship politics?

Having considered an approach to public discourse and reworked the concept of political culture, we ought to consider the role of nationalism in citizenship politics. The study of citizenship politics has, in the last decades, seen a re-appreciation of national particularities (Favell 1998a; Calhoun 2007; Duyvendak 2011). Far from a tendency to global citizenship, whereby actual citizenship regimes would become more and more alike, it seems national differences have remained pronounced. The idea that it would matter less and less where one enjoys civic status has not held up. In Europe, issues of post-colonial, labour and asylum migration, religious diversities, welfare reform and European state formation have been most significant. In light of these issues, national particularities remained important, not only in the sense of differences between actual regimes (Vink & Bauböck 2013) but also in the sense that nationhood and national belonging became a more strongly pronounced issue in citizenship politics (Yuval-Davis 2011; Geschiere 2009; Lithman 2010; Duyvendak 2011). Hopes for a mutually reinforcing relationship between citizenship and cosmopolitanism had to be reconsidered. Even if citizenship regimes are becoming post-national in a number of ways (Soysal 2012a), these developments have made national differences relevant in new ways as well. How to describe and study the differences in citizenship politics and what to make of nationhood in them?

This study seeks to improve upon some of the ways in which national particularities have been analysed and addressed in the study of citizenship politics (Brubaker 1992; Schnapper 1994; Bauböck et al. 1996; Favell 1998b; Koopmans et al. 2005; Howard 2009; Goodman 2010). The overriding problem has been that studies into citizenship politics often conflate ‘national differences’ with ‘differences between states’ (Van Reekum et al. 2012). In this way, the subsequent questions of enduring differences, convergence and/or conversion are, more often than not, answered by looking at states and the citizenship regimes and institutional politics that they can be said to contain. Quite literally, states become methodological containers as variables and indicators are aggregated within them to give outcomes that can be compared. Differences, whether understood to be national or not, are thereby always already differences between equivalent
totalities: state A has citizenship regime B with political culture C…all of which is subsumed under a national nomination X. The question of how participants in citizenship politics actually enact, reiterate and contest national particularities becomes principally unanswerable. What can be demonstrated is that a host of legal codes, procedures, concepts, discourses, measures and policies, associated via certain national nominations, develop and change in certain ways over time. Whether or not it makes sense to aggregate data in this way cannot be answered without considering how and why nations matter (Duyvendak et al. 2013). The reasons for a focus on national differences in the research field are varied. A few of those reasons deserve special consideration.

First, we should appreciate the way in which research is never indifferent towards the problematic under study (Favell 2001). In the context of citizenship it is not surprising that research has taken on the assumption of integrated nation-states. The reproduction of the nation-state project under new circumstances of mobility, diversity and political contention is often the very reason for studying citizenship politics to begin with. This engagement with the empirics-at-hand invites a basic research design: first describe (comparatively) the distinct regime of citizenship that historically characterise countries and, second, see to what extent this regime is currently reproduced. From here, one might pose questions of cross-national convergence (Joppke 2007), enduring regime differences (Koopmans et al. 2005; Jacobs & Rea 2007; Finotelli & Michalowski 2012) or postnational tendencies (Habermas 2001; Soysal 2012a, 2012b).

A second, noteworthy reason for the prominence of the national in the study of citizenship is the fact that much research has been done in service of or in cooperation with national or international state actors (Delfs et al. 1997; Scholten 2011; Bijl & Verweij 2012; see also Boersema & Schinkel forthcoming). Here, the question of national integrity is quite simply the very reason for doing (and spending public resources on) research. A number of research initiatives explicitly set out to provide state institutions with the knowledge, data and evaluative feedback to help governments manage the problem of national integration more effectively. The attempt to supply adequate knowledge for good governance is not straightforward and need not be an uncritical endeavour. It is, of course, bound by the horizon of governance in service of which it takes place (Duyvendak et al. 2011; Van Houdt 2014).

Thirdly, we might observe that in many cases citizenship politics is expressed in a universalist discourse that holds the laws, regulations and policies

4 For example, MIPEX (see: www.mipex.eu) or the yearly reports on ‘integration’ of the SCP in the Netherlands.
concerning citizenship to be expressive of universal human and civil rights, 
equality and dignity. The fact that these ideals are realised in many distinct ways in 
distinct countries therefore prompts an interest into the national particularity of 
what should, at least ideally, be universal. How can it be that the expression of 
what is understood to be universal – citizenship – is always only found in the 
particular? Why is the emancipation of Man-cum-Citizen realised differently in 
different places and times? What are the normative, political and philosophical 
lessons that we might draw from the enduring fact of civic heterogeneity?

In summary, there are a range of reasons for the tendency of research to 
focus on the extent to which the integrity of nation-states is reproduced through 
citizenship politics. Moreover, none of those reasons should be disqualified 
absolutely or callously. Yet, the overall tendency does push other questions, 
concerns and approaches to the margins. This can be seen most sharply when 
countries are attributed distinct, coherent and relatively inert models of citizenship. 
What started in research as a historical reconstruction of the contentious process in 
which state, citizenship and nationhood were more or less but never perfectly 
aligned in different cases – most poignantly the histories of French and German 
citizenship – ended up in an all-too rigid approach that seeks to place countries in 
categorisations or multidimensional spaces of possible philosophies of citizenship. 
The tautology between ‘country’, ‘nation’, ‘state’, ‘political culture’ and 
citizenship model’ that such an approach introduces is not just a superficial effect 
of heuristic terminology. As the reproduction of nation-state integrity is already 
assumed to be the problem-at-hand, these tautologies do not appear as 
methodological problems. In fact, they can be an asset as they hold the very idea of 
a ‘society’ constant. Yet, the very fact of citizenship politics demonstrates that these 
concepts are not tautological.

The consequences of tautology reappear when heuristically sorting 
differences between countries reverts to flattened descriptions of countries-as-
wholes. In its most banal form, this is when politicians, policy makers, researchers 
and public commentators begin to speak of ‘French republicanism’ or ‘Dutch 
multiculturalism’, thereby reiterating these tautologies (Bertossi 2011). The result 
is what Ian Hacking has called a ‘looping effect’ (1995). There is nothing 
inherently wrong or bad about looping. One cannot fault people for trying to loop 
together their world. Yet, the process of looping should itself be studied and should 
be part of our discussions.

One of the most problematic effects of studying, understanding and 
discussing citizenship politics in this tautological way is that claims come to be 
made and reiterated about the very continuity and discontinuity of nations. By
describing citizenship politics in terms of ‘models’, ‘philosophies’, ‘regimes’ and/or ‘political cultures’ and their differences, it becomes possible to suggest that distinct nations are characterised by distinct ways of dealing with citizenship that are – somehow – typical or befitting them. The fact that citizenship politics changes over time can then every so inaudibly come to sound like the suggestion that nations are no longer themselves, as if there ever was some static consensus about citizenship now – rudely – interrupted. Equally, it becomes possible to say that countries have entertained citizenship politics that were – somehow – unbefitting, forced upon the people by ‘elites’, ‘outsiders’ or ‘cosmopolitans’ who were out of step with national-cum-popular convictions. The fact that citizenship politics changes over time can ever so inaudibly come to sound like the suggestion that nations are becoming more themselves, as if citizenship politics should tend toward popular consensus. The academic and public ways of describing national citizenship and its political contestation is not only too limited – as it pushes to the margins considerations of how tautologies are actually created –, but also productive of certain, deeply worrisome rhetorical possibilities. It becomes possible to talk, discuss and disagree about the continuity and discontinuities of national citizenship across time. Moreover, these continuities and discontinuities become loaded with national meaning as they may come to suggest national pasts, presents and futures. That is, the academic and public debates over citizenship politics – ‘we are no longer multicultural!’ – becomes a site for imagining the passage of nations through history. They are part and parcel of the ongoing narration and naturalisation of citizenship by prescribing how citizenship was, is and is going to be. Debates like these, as they cross the boundaries between conference papers and newspapers, allow for claims about national demise, danger and redemption. Academia are thereby part of the vast infrastructure of nationally legitimated violence.

I want to address these tendencies in studying, describing and debating national citizenship with the concept of imaginary. By using this concept, I not only seek to emphasise that any concern over national differences is involved with practices of imagination, but also that such differences are often implicated in what Castoriadis has called ‘the institution of society’ (1998). That is, nationhood is not only imagined community but also socially imaginary, as it provides some very basic delineations of the totalities in which people imagine their lives to take place and their actions to make sense and take effect. By looping states, citizenship models, political cultures and publics into tautologies – they all become national –, totalities take shape and it becomes possible to say something like “In the Netherlands, we…” without anyone having the feeling that it is unclear what one is
talking about and everyone having the capacity to imagine what is being suggested and what might be done (see also Schinkel 2013). At stake in contentions over nationhood are not merely the imagined attributes of some collectivity vis-à-vis others, but also at once imaginaries in view of which social action, particularly governmental action, attain significance and have specific effects. More specifically, I will speak of a public imaginary to indicate that I analyse imaginaries of nationhood as they play out in public discourse and are constitutive of public contestations over Dutchness.

**Composing nation, people and public**

How to conceive of imaginaries of nationhood? If we accept the above argument about citizenship politics – certain ways of categorising national differences in citizenship are performative of them –, we should also reconsider how we might study and conceptualise nationalisms. Categorising nationalisms has been at the heart of research (Calhoun 1997a; Brubaker 1999). By doing so, scholars have hoped to get a handle on its conspicuously varied existence, thereby also trying to get closer to what actually defines it. They have tried to characterise and define nationalisms by reference to the determinants that have pushed them along (Van Reekum 2012a). So, there is discussion of political nationalism, cultural nationalism, state nationalism, civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism, liberal nationalism, cosmopolitan nationalism, etc. Also, we can encounter sustained discussion of the differences between patriotism and nationalism (Canovan 2000). Usually, such discussions are occupied by the idea that there is a certain limit across which justified partiality transforms into more or less blind loyalty (e.g. MacIntyre 1984; Primoratz 2002). Categorising and defining nationalisms is not merely a question of getting a grip on a social phenomenon, but often also a question of diagnosing when and where people’s associations become undesirably one-sided and begin to involve mutual distrust, animosity or worse. Indeed, in much public discourse to call someone or something ‘nationalist’ is to suggest that he or it is dangerous and irrational.

Much in the same way as ‘populism’ has become a political epitaph in many European contexts without very good methodological reasons (Canovan 1999; Laclau 2006; Oudenampsen 2010), scholars of nationalism sometimes go so far as to only speak of nationalism insofar as its effects can be deplored. The -ism should indicate that people have gone beyond ‘reality’ or ‘reasonableness’ and lapsed into ‘ideology’ and ‘blind trust’. Nationalism, then, is the deployment of nationalist rhetoric with deplorable effects as it is said to blind people to the truth. All other enactments of nationhood thereby get excommunicated out of
‘nationalism’ as if there are – somehow – coherent ways of making the difference between blinding rhetoric and enlightening commentary. Of course, we can and should have normative debates about nationalism. Moreover, any proposal for a definition of nationalism inevitably partakes in such debate. There is no way around it. Thus, we may wonder whether the scholarly ambitions to define and categorise nationalisms are not directly related to our normative attitudes towards it. Aren’t social pathology and conceptual categorisation intertwined here? In this view, to know nationalism is to trap it, thus enabling treatment and a return to social health. Or, conversely, to know nationalism is to be loyal to it, thus enabling the identification of those who are not. Yet, is it at all necessary to think of nationalisms as discrete entities that can be prescriptively defined and subdivided into categories? Is this a helpful way to develop an imaginary conception of nationhood? I don’t believe so.

Instead of searching for the essential character traits of nationalism, hiding somewhere behind its variable appearances, it is possible to consider and theorise its variability as such. We may then leave behind the rather unproductive debates about what is and what is not ‘really’ nationalism as we have come to recognise that such debates are themselves implicated in nationalisms. Instead of a taxonomic approach, I want to argue for what we might call a compositional approach to imaginaries of nationhood. What matters in this latter approach is not whether a particular practice falls within the confines of a definition, but how nationhood is composed in particular practices. Of course, this will still involve certain theoretical prescriptions about what happens through such compositions but no longer with the effect of setting apart and subdividing ‘nationalism’ as a distinct, possibly pathological or redemptive form of knowledge. It makes no sense to oppose nationalism to, say, cosmopolitanism. Or to subdivide nationalism into distinct, oppositional kinds, such as ethnic and civic nationalisms.

In taking this compositional approach I am building on work by Craig Calhoun (1997a; 2007). As a basic starting point, Calhoun conceptualises nationalisms as discursive formations (Calhoun 1997a; Foucault 1972). Nationalisms are composed out of a wide variety of discourses none of which are necessarily more characteristic than others. However, in composing nations and nationalisms such discursive formations do involve a number of recurrent problematics, allowing us to generalise about what happens in such compositions. Calhoun’s work on nationalisms can be read as an analysis of what these problematics are. Although there may be more, I will deal with three of them here and show how they are interrelated: the emergence of a people, national equality, and public mediation (see also Van Reekum 2012a).
Nationalisms are involved in constituting a people, its dignity and agency. It involves the problem of individuating a collective agent. Multitudes of people – communities, sects, families, cliques, tribes, kings, castes, gilds, classes, etc. – are to be composed into a people. In the case of Europe, Calhoun stresses the role of republican thought, the Protestant Reformation and ethnic and localist traditionalism for the entanglement of ‘nation’ and ‘people’ (Calhoun 1997b: 77-8). A host of different social and intellectual currents helped to conceive of a people as a singular agent, claiming agency politically, expressing itself culturally and persisting historically (Leerssen 2006). As already noted, individuating peoples into such a singular life entity became possible through a biopolitical governmentality that recognises and cultivates the life of a body politic (Foucault 2003). The concept and science of populations has been immensely important for addressing the problem of how a nation has such a life of its own and how it could be governed and defended.

Related to the emergence and perseverance of a people is the problem of national equality. How is it that those belonging to the nation are the same, laying claim to national membership simultaneously and in equal measure? People are precisely a people insofar as they are equal to each other and their belonging to the nation is interchangeable (Calhoun 1997a: 42). Also, how is it that people long dead and people yet to come are equally part of the nation? The nationality of one is precisely equal to the nationality of another. Nationhood concerns precisely the kind of community in which all members equally and immediately participate. Calhoun draws a distinction here between relational and categorical identities. While the former hinges on certain relational circumstances, the latter are immediate. Just as each body is part of a population equally and immediately, so national members are part of the nation in and of themselves. Here, liberalism, and the Enlightenment more broadly, cultivated the notion of common wealth, the individual and citizenship, which proved to be immensely effective ways of conceiving each other as equal, without recourse to any intermediates and on the basis of one’s proper civic dignity.

Finally, all of this would be inconceivable without public mediation. A people equally participating in nationhood does not make any sense without the imagination of community across indirect relations (Calhoun 1999; 1997a). The nation’s past, present and future can only come to life in publicly mediated imaginations. What’s more, the institutionalisation of public spheres is crucial for the creation of publics that may begin to concern themselves with national matters, with what is happening to the nation. Mobilising in public as citizens take up their political prerogatives, the nation can be seen to act. A people thereby also becomes
a public to its own concerns, interests, desires, fears, threats and historical arch. Citizenship has been of crucial importance here as the institutionalisation of civic status allows people to mobilise around shared issues and problems. Although Calhoun’s account follows closely that of Habermas, he also makes an important intervention. Habermas all too readily presupposes the identity of ‘the’ public sphere. The idea of one public sphere that is representative of society and authoritative for settling public disputes often depends on nationalist rhetoric that speaks of one people that recognises itself as one public. Yet, political communities are always composed of multiple, intersecting publics (Calhoun 1999; 2007). The question how multiple publics might be brought into a common exchange, ergo what constitutes the right to speak publicly, cannot be decided before public deliberation begins. Rather, ‘determining whose speech is more properly public is itself a site of political contestation’ (Calhoun 1997b: 85; Isin & Nielsen 2008).

In summary, the compositional approach described here does not seek to prescribe how the problematics of people, equality and publics should be dealt with in order to merit the label of nationalism. Nor does it seek to categorise nationalisms according to the basic solutions that are found. Rather, it seeks to reconstruct how in particular practices nationhood is more or less well-composed in view of a set of recurrent and interrelated problematics. None of these problematics are ever really consolidated. It is never entirely clear where the people came from or how they came together out of disparate groups. However, people do find ways of agreeing and disagreeing about these questions that produce more or less recurrent ways of articulating nationhood in particular practices.

For instance, people may start excavating archaeological sites and developing accounts of how certain tools and ornaments indicate the origins of a people (see Eickhoff et al. 2000; Henkes 2005). Invariably, they will begin to disagree about how to rank, order, interpret these findings, but by doing so they will nonetheless enact the emergence of a people to be something that is located in a past that can be encountered through certain material objects. Similar, yet different enactments can be performed through the quarrels over literatures, words, fragments of letters found in the carefully and less carefully preserved archives. Even though the past seems to demand considerable attention in matters of a people, it needn’t be decisive. People can also begin to disagree about a people with reference to distinctly contemporaneous matters. For instance, the people may be presumed to come out of a distinct pledge of alliance or certain aspirational spirit lived out in the here and now, an American dream for instance. As always, actual compositions of nationhood involve mixtures of these performative
repertoires, complex combinations of buried and dug up pasts, lived out presents and yearned for futures.

The same is true of the way in which the problematics of equality and publicity are dealt with. It is never really clear on what basis people are equal and what guarantees their immediate membership to the nation, nor is it ever entirely certain which speech and which political mobilisations are to be recognised as part of the public life of the nation. Yet, imaginaries of nationhood need not settle these questions at all to have effects. Insofar as theories of nationalism try to do just that, they miss a crucial part of how nationalisms have performative effects. Most importantly in the context of this study, nationalisms have performative effects through the very disagreements that certain problematics entail. Dissensus is quite effective enough. The idea that nationalism only has effect insofar as it can be said with certainty what the nation essentially is – an ethnic group, a language community, a culture, a race, a political alliance, a democratic revolution, a way of dancing, an aptitude, a collective trauma, a taste, a dream, a truth that can no longer be remembered, etc. – misses the way in which it is precisely how people come to deal with these questions and interrelate their possible solutions, i.e. composition, that has effects in particular practices.

As said, any theory of nationalisms partakes in normative debate as it asks us to take on a certain attitude towards it. The compositional approach argued for here is no different. Again, I’m building from work by Calhoun here. He argues, rightly, that we shouldn’t denunciate nationalisms callously. Theories and categorisations can invite us to do so and we should be cautious in this regard. What Calhoun argues about the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism has a broader relevance:

It encourages self-declared civic nationalists, liberals, and cosmopolitans to be too complacent, seeing central evils of the modern world produced at a safe distance by ethnic nationalists from whom they are surely deeply different (Calhoun 2007: 146).

By rejecting nationalisms as either wrong about the world or a mere tool of power, we not only disregard those normative aspects of nationalisms that should be taken very seriously indeed, but also act as if it is praiseworthy to disengage from the problematics at stake in nationalisms. For all its violence and injustice, the nation is about the dignity of people, their equality and the means through which they may attain some say about how they live together. Denunciations of nationalism should be ready to explain how it is that people should conceive of dignity, equality and voice if not through the composition of nations. Of course, this is not to say that
such alternative philosophies are non-existent and nationhood is our only hope. It is, however, to take very seriously what is at stake in struggles about nationhood and not presume that we can somehow judge these struggles from the outside. As Calhoun argues in detail, nations matter to people, to us, to me because through them we conceive of and try to bring into existence forms of living together that merit affirmation, the re-invention of which is still worthwhile. As I’ve already noted, many denunciations of nationalisms come down to arguments about better compositions of nationhood. They argue against them precisely because they seek to affirm dignity, equality and voice.

Particularly interesting in the context of this study, Calhoun argues for what one could call the promise of a plurality of publics: ‘. . . the crucial question remains to what extent the constitution of a citizenry and the idea of nation reflect the notion of differentiated public or that of a unitary people’ (Calhoun 1997b: 99). ‘Nationalist rhetoric has generally stressed the essential similarity of the nation’s members. It is rare to find comparable emphasis in the constitution of the national through the discourse of a public of highly differentiated members’ (Calhoun 1997b: 94). For Calhoun, a crucial issue is to what extent citizenship is reduced to a homely similarity between co-patriots, thereby disabling the expression of public difference. ‘Citizenship, by contrast to community or categorical nationality, is a specific mode of belonging directly dependent on public space’ (Calhoun 2007: 106). Calhoun’s normative considerations are consistent with what I have termed a compositional approach to nationalisms as this approach foregrounds the way in which nation, people and public are composed, entangled and looped together but are never reduced to a self-contained identity in which citizenship would come to be identical to nationality. The compositional approach not only holds that entanglement provides a more adequate account of how nationalisms take effect in particular practices, but also prescribes such entanglement to afford a better, normative assessment of what is justified in nationalisms.

In general, the compositional approach holds that nationalisms can only ever be justified insofar as they tend to entangle but do not homogenise a people, national equality and public plurality. It is therefore meaningful to question to what extent nationhood is being composed as never identical to itself and always in the process of entanglement – in the making – allowing for and, in fact, demanding a plurality of public articulations. As will become clear throughout this study, it may be quite difficult to judge when and how this demand of justification can be satisfied in practice. In fact, as I will demonstrate in a moment, the Dutch context provides somewhat of a critical case (Flyvbjerg 2006) for gaging the applicability of this normative outlook. While it may be possible to argue against the slippage
between citizenship and nationhood from a general normative-theoretical stance, it may be quite difficult to ascertain when such slippage is avoided in actual empirical practices and how people may come to do nationhood in ways that keep the entanglements of nation, people and publics open. It is to the entanglement of Dutchness and citizenship that we now turn.
3.

The culturalisation of citizenship, or how to narrate *burgerschap*

Why would the Dutch context be a critical case when it comes to the implication of public plurality in the relation of nationality and citizenship? Quite generally, public plurality plays a crucial role in attempts to figure out what may be the Dutchness of Dutch citizenship. For a long time already, notions of public plurality have figured prominently in discourses about the Dutchness of citizenship. This chapter will seek to provide a genealogy of *burgerschap* as it relates Dutchness. The aim is create more critical distance from which the developments dealt with in the subsequent chapters can be perceived. It should allow us to consider with more precision to what extent and in what way ‘the constitution of a citizenry and the idea of nation reflect the notion of differentiated public or that of a unitary people’ (Calhoun 1997b: 99).

Again, the question of continuity is crucial here. With the increasing electoral dominance and public legitimacy of anti-immigrant and ostentatiously nationalist political movements and positionings in public politics, many public and scholarly writings have provided diagnoses of transformation (Scheffer 2000; Chorus & Galan 2002; Entzinger 2003; Couwenberg 2004; Wansink 2004; Pels 2005; Sniderman & Hagedoorn 2007; Vasta 2007; see also Bovens & Hendriks 2008). A whole spectrum of transformational terms has been used to describe what has been happening in Dutch citizenship politics over the last 30 years: a sudden shift, a remarkable breakthrough, a resurgence, a return, a reaction, a revolution, a backlash, etc. All these terms seek to give a name to the idea that somehow or other a confrontation with difference has effected an irredeemable change in Dutch citizenship politics. Public plurality does some crucial work here: while the Dutch past is, for better or worse, associated with a differentialist approach to national citizenship, its present is narrated as a constriction of difference and an emphasis on assimilation and homogeneity, again for better or worse (Vink 2007; Schinkel 2008; Duyvendak et al. 2009; Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012).

If we would apply Calhoun’s concern for public plurality to these diagnoses of change, we would quite quickly come up with a verdict of Dutch case: while the Dutchness of Dutch citizenship used to be articulated with a strong
emphasis on plurality, this emphasis has markedly decreased as opposing articulations relate Dutchness and citizenship by reference to some essential similarity, often called ‘culture’. Moreover, this verdict would have as its accompaniment a counterposing verdict: the Dutchness of Dutch citizenship was always already founded on an essentialist similarity, while hidden and repressed for a while this characteristic of Dutch citizenship has been revealed in recent years as its veiling has been dropped. While opposed to each other, both verdicts do not need any consideration of how Dutchness and citizenship are made to relate. They give accounts of how they are, in fact, related and to what extent their interrelationship has changed. They do not, however, provide an account of the kind of performative work that goes into all of this. As said, this is where the crucial contribution of this study lies.

The study before you is itself the product of a scholarly diagnosis of transformation. It has been conducted in the context of a research project that entertained, at its centre, the idea that we have been dealing with a pronounced culturalisation of citizenship. The idea of a culturalisation of citizenship, as conceived in the research project mentioned above, started out from a Marshallian approach to citizenship in which different dimensions of citizenship are to be distinguished and described historically (Duyvendak et al. 2010). Marshall’s theory of citizenship thereby gave an opening to suggest that Dutch citizenship was shifting from an emphasis on political and social dimensions towards a distinct, cultural one. In no way was the notion of culturalisation primarily or specifically conceived as a shift away from ‘race’ toward ‘culture’, as is sometimes assumed. Even if the mobilisation race/culture distinctions play a major role in the culturalisation of citizenship, culturalisation neither prescribe any straightforward leaving behind of ‘race’, nor the emergence of a ‘cultural racism’. Whether culturalisation constitutes any of these directions is unspecified, itself a choice to be reflected upon.

Culturalisation does, of course, imply process and change. At the very least, it implies a heightened attention to ‘culture’ in citizenship politics. While the central argument of this study is at odds with the suggestion that Dutch citizenship had not been culturalised before the recent period of political contestation, it is also at odds with the suggestion that the prominence of ‘culture’ in citizenship politics is merely a continuation of the same in slightly different terms. Citizenship was already deeply culturalised and the more recent concerns for ‘culture’ in citizenship politics constitute a remarkable development that ought to be better understood (see also Van Houdt & Schinkel 2009). The initial research project was, from the outset, conceived to scrutinise culturalisation through a continuum between
‘constructive’ and ‘restorative’ forms of culturalisation, where ‘constructive’ indicated culture as a work-in-progress and ‘restorative’ indicated culture as a preservable essence. Not only does this dichotomy invite a certain race/culture distinctions after all – when ‘race’ is associated with unchangeable essence and ‘culture’ with adaptable practice –, it also assumes that it is possible to neatly distinguish between ‘constructive’ and ‘restorative’ modes. The main problem here, as I will argue, is that culture cannot be treated as merely another dimension of citizenship that in Marshallian fashion is developed alongside others. Or, to put it even more generally, *dimensions* of citizenship suggest that it is already clear what citizenship is apart from it acquiring dimensions in a variety of directions. With respect to culturalisation this means that we all-too-easily assume that we can oppose ‘constructive’ to ‘restorative’ as two mutually excluding modes of dealing with culture in citizenship politics. As will be explored in the subsequent chapters, ‘construction’ and ‘restoration’ continually appear together, calling forth each other, without it being possible to easily decide which of these ‘actually’ animates certain discourses, interventions and mobilisations. Instead of deciding between them and judging culturalisation accordingly, it is far more interesting to analyse their mutual dependencies and take them as part of what is at stake in the mingling of citizenship and culture. In order to develop a notion of culturalisation that allows us to do so, I will explore the relationship between culture and citizenship in more detail. Much like the concept of culture, I will argue that the notion of a culturalisation of citizenship can be productively repossessed.

Ignoring possible problems and deficiencies of Marshall’s theory, I do think that attention for the various aspects of citizenship is worthwhile (Van Houdt & Schinkel 2009; Isin & Nielsen 2008). However, the intellectual habit of enumerating aspects of citizenship is so widespread today that it is good to reflect on what all those aspects mean for citizenship. What could it mean to specify something like the *culturalisation* of citizenship? I’ll first clarify conceptually what is at stake in the culturalisation of citizenship, before going into the specifics of the Dutch context.

**Aspects of citizenship**

What sense does it make to latch words like ‘social’, ‘political’, ‘national’, ‘juridical’, ‘biological’, ‘cultural’, ‘active’, ‘moral’, etc. onto the concept of citizenship? Let’s begin with a programmatic statement by Charles Tilly:

Like relations between spouses, between co-authors, between workers and employers, citizenship has the character of a contract: variable in range, never completely specified, always depending on
unstated assumptions about context, modified by practice, constrained by collective memory, yet
inevitably involving rights and obligations sufficiently defined that either party is likely to express
indignation and take corrective action when the other fails to meet expectations built into the
relationship. (1999: 253)

The point of Tilly’s statement is not to ground citizenship in social contract theory,
but rather the opposite: to suggest that citizenship, like other instances of real world
relationships, involves the always contestable, never stable tinkering with a never
entirely coherent set of agreements and expectations. Tilly’s statement helps
understand that the dynamic of claims, expectations, indignations and re-
evaluations will have the tendency to move and proliferate. Citizenship expands,
extends, moves, and gravitates across any number of domains for which its rights
and obligations might become relevant. This is the case particularly because
citizenship involves the effort to abstract from specific circumstances and to invent
generalised rights and obligations. Once abstracted these subsequently become
associated with matters that weren’t initially relevant.

The concept of citizenship makes sense because it refers to a way of
dealing with agreements and expectations that is no longer just a case-by-case
resolution between authorities and subjects. As Tilly continues: ‘Precisely insofar
as a bundle of rights and obligations actually distinguish a whole category of the
state’s subject population defined by its relation to that state rather than by a
category’s place in the population’s general system of inequality, those
categorically defined rights and obligations belong to citizenship.’ (Tilly 1999: 253,
italics added). Historically, it began to make more and more sense to use a distinct
term – citizenship – as state agents and affected subjects began to invent rights and
obligations that abstracted from the practical circumstances of each. Thus,
citizenship is characteristically unhinged from any particular set of concerns and
may come to involve a rather long and disorderly collection of items, from
jurisdiction to education to city planning, to language, to media access and so on.
Citizenship is the institutionalisation of a social relation that may proliferate right
across a host of different concerns and domains. Citizenship is never exhausted by
a certain regime of legal codes, nor is it caught in its established institutional
practices. As an abstracted social relation it always allows for the enactment of new
aspects (Isin & Nielsen 2008) and, indeed, an erosion of its reach and depth
(Turner 2001).

Tilly’s approach to citizenship clearly emanates from a larger engagement
with the long-term history of statecraft and popular resistance, the ebb and flow of
democratisation that is at the heart of his work (Tilly 2009). Like others, most
notably Marshall (1950), his concept of citizenship invites us to look for long-term
historical arches in which aspects of citizenship are layered and patched onto each other as states and subjects enlarge and diversify their ever more intense relationship with each other. As the state diversifies, juridical rights are accompanied by political ones. Gradually, this set of rights is further complicated by a host of social rights. While citizenship is thereby formed by a disorderly set of rights and obligations, the category itself, the name of the social relation through which this set is bundled together, remain abstracted. For example, politics is no longer the occasional confrontation of sovereign and subject when parliamentary rights are granted to citizens. The political struggle, of course, still continues, but in a distinctly new way that the category of citizenship is meant to capture: the members of parliament are now exercising a capacity that they share with all those who share their particular relation to the state – citizenship – and is no longer derived from some other social status. Tilly’s definition reminds us that citizenship need not at all have the universalistic pretences that, in some cases, it has acquired (see also Calhoun 1999). The contention that citizenship should pertain to all subjects of a state is a recent ideal and a variable achievement, not some essential characteristic towards which citizenship inevitably bends. Citizenship merely means that claims are made by and rights are granted to a segment of the subjects that has distinguished itself and is distinguished on the basis of its relation to the state in general. The proliferation of citizenship means that among the many differences that exist in society a specific kind of difference becomes highly valorised and, often, dominant for deciding who may be entitled: the difference between citizens and non-citizens.

Within this approach, foregrounding the inherent instability of citizenship’s dynamics, culturalisation of citizenship would refer to the back-and-forth struggle in relation to ‘cultural’ concerns: language, customs, values, religion, knowledge, identification, art, aesthetics, meaning, understanding, heritage, commemoration, symbols, etc. From here, we can reconstruct the historical emergence and contemporary dilemmas of cultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1996; Stevenson 2003). This means that one takes culture to be a concern next to many others – welfare, politics, law, the environment and the like. Much can be said about the ways in which governments and governed have come to deal with culture through the notion of citizenship: government may for instance expect citizens to speak a certain language, while those expectation might be more or less formalised, more or less enforced (Brubaker 2013). The same may be true for religion. Yet, citizenship struggles over culture also point towards another, broader meaning of the culturalisation of citizenship. It is this meaning that I wish to explore.
Abstracted, but how?

We should be attentive to the fact that ‘culture’ poses a rather particular kind of problem to the development of citizenship. The emergence of cultural rights and obligations, namely, has the tendency to make concrete what citizenship tends to abstract from: how do people decide who will be qualified as citizens in the first place? Culture has the peculiar tendency to bring back on the table precisely those categories of ‘society’s general system of inequality’ from which the category of citizenship abstracted, to make particular that which was valued for its generality. As rights to particularity and difference take shape, the category of citizenship itself is problematised as it appears to contradict the relevance of such ‘cultural’ differences. As long as cultural rights are associated with cultural categories that are themselves assumed to delineate the civic community as a whole, this tension between citizenship and culture may still be manageable. This is where the nation-state-citizenry tautologies come to play their reiterative, looping role. For instance, compulsory education may oblige citizens to expose their children to a national history curriculum. As long as the hard work of homogenising nation, people and public is maintained – this is never entirely self-evident or successful – educational obligations are in principle no more contentious than any other kinds of civic obligations. But when cultural categories attain their significance from the differences within and across the civic community, it becomes hard to tell whether such rights and obligations actually enable an equal treatment of citizens or, in fact, disentangle and particularise the arduously abstracted category of citizenship. The culturalisation of citizenship is thereby concerned with questions about how to actually abstract citizenship. More specifically, it opens up the pressing question whether and in what sense citizenship itself is a cultural construct always bending to the particularities of non-civic differences in society.

Tilly, for one, suggest as much: ‘As observers, we actually witness transactions between governmental agents and broadly defined categories, but we abstract from those transactions a cultural bundle: a set of mutual rights and obligations.’ (1999: 253). So it is always an open question if and to what extent the abstraction of citizenship from the ‘general system of inequality’ is successful and what was needed to achieve that success. To what extent is there ever a well-enough established distinction between a category of the population in the system of inequality, on the one hand, and a category of the population defined by its relation to the state in the abstract? In principle, it should be clear enough that transactions with the state never entirely loose a connection to differences associated with culture. If citizenship is itself a cultural construct, when and how is it sufficiently abstract? When can we be sure that a discourse of citizenship –
abstract, general, concerned with the state – is not merely the cultural expression of a particular, privileged category of the population bending the state to its cultural particularity? The point of this argument is not to suggest that, behind the guise of ideology, all of citizenship is actually a form of cultural domination. We should not rush to the conclusion that citizenship is really just an ideology of bourgeois privilege, that ‘civic’ is really only code for ‘capitalist’, ‘patriarch’, and ‘white’. Indeed, it often is but it is also more than that.

I want argue that we need to be concerned with the narration and naturalisation of citizenship as put forth by Margaret Somers (2008). Citizenship is not just the product of Tilly’s to-and-fro producing a set of more or less formalised rights and obligations authorised by a state. There is always more to it. We also need to explain how this to-and-fro is enabled by and feeds back into a particularising narration and naturalisation of citizenship. Citizenship is not just or even primarily a bundle of rights and obligations, but also and crucially a historically and culturally located bundle of narratives and images that informs the specific way in which the more or less durable abstraction of citizenship is achieved and kept going, often against considerable odds. The collection of rights and obligations may be incoherent and incomplete, but it will be accompanied by narratives that assumes to make some sense out of that collection by placing its items in a more or less coherent, more or less self-evident story-line about how and why it is right and proper that citizenship is what it appears to be for the moment.

In this second meaning of the phrase, culturalisation of citizenship is about the changing narratives and associated repertoires with which people distinguish the category of citizenship from other kinds of differences between people. As Tilly argues, the to-and-fro tends to *abstract* the category of citizenship from the general system of inequality, as if devoid of any particularity and only defined by its relation to the state. But how and to what extent this effect of abstraction is actually sustained is an utterly empirical matter, dependent on the actual circumstances of narration. So we arrive at a notion of culturalisation that is markedly different from a Marshallian one, which makes it into yet another dimension, and instead foreground the narrations of citizenship through which citizenship is abstracted from other kinds of differences. The culturalisation of citizenship, then, refers to the struggle over how it is that citizenship stands apart from other kinds of differences between people, how it becomes the name of generality, granting it a privileged, abstracted status.

Although this may seem, at first, to be a rather scholastic problem, it can be found all over the place: ‘*citoyenneté*’, ‘Bürgerschaft’, ‘burgerschap’, ‘citizenship’ all have very particular genealogies and people work daily to figure
out what these notions actually mean and where they ought to apply. Studies of conceptual history show how difficult it can be for all the participants involved to figure out what the abstract notion of citizenship actually is and how their always preliminary solutions to this problem change (Koselleck & Schreiner 1994; Kloek & Tilmans 2002).

The meaning of burgerschap straddles constantly as public and political discourses change. On the one hand, burgerschap poses as the designation of a particular group amongst other groups, claiming for itself a status that is not so much concerned with the state as it is with civility, prudence and true love of country. To be a burger is to have certain dispositions and to live a certain civilised life, to display certain virtues and moral character throughout daily conduct. But it is also the name that, on the basis of burgherly dignity, is used by claimants of civic rights vis-à-vis the state. Only after a long process of contention does the vocabulary of burgers, burgerlijkheid and burgerschap lose some of its predominant attachment to a particular group and civility – the burgerij – and does it begins to designates a relationship to the state in general. This abstraction is achieved, moreover, not by simply cleansing it of particularising connotations to the cultural characteristics of a specific group, the burghers. Quite the opposite, the abstraction is achieved through a re-culturalisation of citizenship (Van Houdt & Schinkel 2009). Less and less are there allusions to the cultural gestures that set apart the burghers, but increasingly and after a while almost exclusively is burgerschap associated with the national population, its government and its particularising gestures, symbols and narratives associated with it. Quite literally, burgerschap was nationalised. Burgerschap was never a clearly political category, nor did it become more clearly abstracted by making cultural differences less relevant. What changed were the specific narrative notions and repertoires with which people made sense of the privileged position of citizens and their citizenship. Most poignantly, the narration of citizenship became encompassing rather than differentiating (Baumann & Gingrich 2004). Yet, how was this done?

The narratives of citizenship, through which people make sense of its abstraction from other categories, are reiterated many times over. At times, some or most of the story-lines are renewed. This is the sense of culturalisation to which we will now turn our attention in the Dutch case.

Burgerschap as the public demonstration of autonomous moral conviction
As was just noted, throughout the 17th and 18th centuries burgers were distinguished and distinguished themselves through a host of different narratives that centred on ideals of civility. It pertained mainly to independent, urban, mercantile families
Such narratives emphasised restraint, self-reliance, the fear of god (as opposed to fearing the Vatican), dignity, cleanliness, decency, respectability, order, utility, simplicity, pragmatism, rationality, independence, clarity, etc. These narratives operated within a much wider European world that included stories of ethnicity, aristocracy, honour, servitude, race, chivalry, religion, classism, revolution, radicalism, enlightenment, and so on (Leerssen 2006). This is to say that the narratives about civility positioned the burghers in a greater tapestry of meanings concerned with naming and differentiating groups and their affiliations.

Throughout the 19th century, the terms associated with *burgers* retained much of this differentiating tendency (Aerts 2002: 316; Aerts & Te Velde 1998). Its contentious boundaries show us what is at stake (De Haan 2002). *Burgerlijk* tends to appear in three senses. First, it designates a class of people between the nobility and the needy masses. In this sense, it also tends to refer to the nation, the civil society, the broad majority of well-ordered sociality. In this sense, it also tends to refer to the nation, the civil society, the broad majority of well-ordered sociality. Second, it designates something or someone as being unassuming or average. This may be good or bad. As such, the *burgerij* tends to include those of modest means, with modest standing, who combine moderate wealth or prestige with an intensely cultivated civility and composure, an inner worth. It places people so disposed just a step up from the uncivilised rabble, marking off its lower limit. Third, paradoxically, it designates those formidable, wealthy and prestigious families that are involved in commerce, government, diplomacy and the military. These proto-aristocratic *patriciërs* represent the very best of the *burgerij*. These burghers are elevated to such an extent that they are sometimes attributed a place just above the *burgerij* (Aerts 2002: 316-317).

All of this amounts to two things relevant for our discussion: (1) the vocabulary of *burgerschap* functions in what Tilly calls the ‘general system of inequality’. It is a language for talking about hierarchical relations of social difference; (2) Narratives of *burgerschap* represent a distinctly anti-aristocratic notion of civility that foreground cultivated dispositions and carefully appropriated norms of conduct supposedly emanating from an inner conviction and dignity (cf. Elias 1939). Being a *burger* involves the hard work of training and sculpting the self and its inclinations, of gaining control over one’s compulsions and living one’s life according to an internalised moral capacity for judgement (Dekker & De Hart 2005). Morality is first and foremost a mode of civil conduct: bringing a desiring and insatiable body under the guidance of a god-fearing conscience and prudent entrainment. *Burgerschap*, then, already involves a certain notion of government,
even as its referent is not the state in particular, namely the government of conduct through moral capacity.

During the final decades of the 18th century, the burger not only designated a class of people in the social hierarchy, but was also the battle cry in consecutive attempts to establish a new, modern, national, independent republic – the Bataafse Republiek – ruled by and for the true lovers of their country and its glorious past (Van Sas 2004: 69-86; Rutjes 2012). Although the establishment of a republic grounded on civic rule was a failure – in 1813 ‘natie’, ‘burgerschap’ and ‘patriotisme’ had all but lost their revolutionary élan – it did establish a firm connection between the state and its citizens. It established the rather modern idea that citizens and nation should designate the same collectivity and the state’s main concern should be this nation of citizens (Prak 1999: 25). Gradually, more and more politico-social movements – ‘parties’ – followed the patriotic liberals in using the language of citizenship to claim their place in the heart of the civic nation and at the helms of government (De Haan 2002). Burgerschap thereby gradually became an encompassing notion – which is not to say that many were not deliberately excluded: women, religious others, the enslaved, the poor, colonial subjects and racial others (Jones 2007; Legène 2009) – that abstracted from the social hierarchy and designated one’s relations to state government in general. This could only be achieved, however, by the fact that more and more socio-political movements followed the liberals in equating civil life to national membership. Protestants, catholics and eventually the socialists successfully tied their particular moral convictions and demonstrations of civility into the national narrative. Each claimed for themselves to be the real heart of the nation and, thus, to be equally qualified for citizenship, i.e. to have a voice in the matters of government (De Haan 2002). If the liberal, burgherly factions had hoped to, once and for all, gain decisive power over the state by claiming something that others lacked – ‘burgherly civility’ – they will have been severely disappointed. Their efforts to position themselves in the heart of the nation on the basis of their burgherly culture opened up the democratising state to other parliamentary voices claiming citizenship on the basis of their own version of the national character. Even if fierce disagreement thereby formed about what precisely was the essence of Dutch nationhood, all participants gradually began to play a similar game in which everyone came to assume that citizenship and nationhood co-constituted each other. The public display of moral dispositions thereby became conditional for access to national government.

This homology between nation and citizens functioned to the extent that the various voices found a way to depoliticise their differences, particularly when the state got involved in cultural and religious issues (Aerts et al. 1999). This
depoliticisation is often referred to as pillarisation. However, pillarisation of socio-political movements and public institutions was never a stable solution. There is no one essential form in which it existed (Van Dam 2011). Nevertheless, the paradox of many national narratives claiming citizenship of one and the same state was continuously and more or less successfully resolved.

We cannot underestimate the importance of racial difference at this juncture. Even if internal coherence was never far from failing, certain boundaries seemed unquestionable. The disagreements within the burgeoning discipline of *volkskunde* and social sciences more broadly affirmed that the Dutch – like the other highly developed peoples of Europe – had a long genealogical history (Eickhoff et al. 2000; Van Ginkel 1998). A racial imaginary drew some very basic commonalities between adversarial groups: the Netherlands was and, in many respects, still is immediately imagined to be genealogically white/European (Jones 2007). Moreover, Dutch national citizenship has always been predominately obtained through birth (Heijs 1995).

If the *burgers* have lost their pre-eminence when it came to *burgerschap*, they did so because other socio-political movements had been successful in claiming what *burgers* deemed to be their particular exceptionalism: the capacity to be morally autonomous and to live by one’s own inner moral judgements. This process accelerated in the late 19th century, particularly after 1870, when new political movements invented popular politics. It was not just a matter of following the liberals in their tendency to equate nation and citizen, but also to take on the implication of morality and government associated with it. As Van Rooden (1996) shows, the 19th century sees the passage of religion – protestantism – from the public sphere where it was self-evidently enacted as an integral part of public-cum-religious life and state rule towards the hearts and minds of its believers. Only then does it become plausible and possible to begin enacting the religious and moral claims of a particular group, such as the orthodox-protestants under the leadership of Kuyper, as particular claims on the state that deserve to be taken into account. In lieu of the liberal *burgerij*, other moral communities with their own moral convictions and cultivated dispositions begin to enact their claims to citizenship as well. They too successfully claimed to be capable of autonomously articulating inner convictions and organising a distinct way of life in civil society. Although the contents of those moral convictions might be quite different from those of the liberal *burgerij*, the enactment of citizenship is the same: the public display of moral community – through rallies, protests, events and associations – and the articulation of distinct, moral claims on the state. Moral communities that were suspected to seek more than moral autonomy – ‘jews’, ‘communists’, ‘fascists’, “
‘catholics’ – were stigmatised. In all these cases, some extra- or supra-national allegiance – world revolution; the Vatican; the diaspora – are to be brought in line with national democracy and citizenship. Demonstration of moral autonomy thereby also displays that communities are capable of placing national demands before non-national ones.

This argument could be construed to discover a hidden consensus about national citizenship beneath public strife. However, what takes shape here is not a politico-cultural consensus about citizenship, as if we have forgotten that many were excluded from this supposed consensus, but a shared means of disagreement that allowed and enabled a particular narration of citizenship. The associational politics of pillarisation need not be built upon a deep consensus in order to keep things together. What does take shape along the way is a form of disagreement that valorises some modes of political representation while rejecting others. Moral communities that could be severely hostile towards each other came to insert themselves into a liberal democratic order that granted their moral differences the status of civic voices. Deep moral, religious and political differences were subjected to an encompassing notion of equal, national citizenship. One gained the right to speak in this burgherly democracy, however, by enacting a very particular form of citizenship: through the display of civility, moral autonomy and self-control, by the capacity to abstain from power grabs, in short, through the enactment of a distinctly burghery notion of government. Even though an abstraction of burgerschap takes place, it only takes place because a variety of communities invent ways of being burghery in their relation to the state.

In summary, the culturalisation of citizenship described here is captured in two movements: (1) burgerschap moves from a differentiating discourse that highlights boundaries between hierarchical groups in society to an encompassing discourse about the nation: ‘we’ are all burghers; (2) the once particular cultural attributes of a group – burgheryness – begin to form a generalised repertoire for claiming burgerschap, a repertoire for legitimate claims to participation in state power, and thus an ideal name for designating a national character: ‘we’ are all burghery.

Throughout this shift there is constant disagreement about the national essence. Is it Calvinism? Is it entrepreneurship? Is it humanism? Is it religious pluralism? Yet, this same discord produces the circumstances in which a display of moral convictions that are self-imposed and independent from others can come to be the predominant enactment of national citizenship. Those deemed incapable of self-government and autonomous moral judgment were thereby excluded from citizenship’s encompassment. At what might be called a pivot point of this process
we see that *burgherlyness* – the remarkable fusion of inner moral conviction and outer political moderation – had attained a central place in the scholarly and public narratives of national character (Van Heerikhuizen 1982). As such, reflections over the Dutch character tend to focus on the remarkable way in which a *small* republic endured through the serendipity of European history to form a prosperous, civilised and exemplary nation-state (Krol in Beller & Leerssen 2007; see also Goudsblom 1968). Notwithstanding the importance of racial-ethnological imaginings, it is the perseverance of *political and territorial* independence and sovereignty that provides continuity in such understanding of the nation’s history.

We should not forget that there is an important counterpoint to the decidedly statist-territorial imagination of Dutchness. This counterposing narration is often designated as a form of ‘cultural’ nationalism, in opposition to political nationalism (Couwenberg 1980; 2001). This line of reasoning, from proponents like Geyl in the interbellum to Couwenberg and Fortuyn more recently, seeks to rehabilitate the centrality of language and ethnicity, involving peoples beyond the territorial borders of the monarchy. Such a notion of Dutchness does at times become prominent in citizenship politics. For instance, publics in the Kingdom associated themselves with ‘their brothers’ fighting the Boer-wars in South Africa (Van Ginkel 1999). Yet, opposing political-territorial nationalism to ethno-cultural nationalism would somehow suggest that the hegemonic narrative of Dutch *burgherlyness* and its emphasis on political and territorial continuity is not cultural, does not involve its own culturalisation of citizenship. As Leerssen has argued, all nationalism is cultural (Leerssen 2006). That is, all national narratives are developed from and sustained through cultural practices: writing, theatre, art, commemoration, symbolic representations, communication, pamphleteering, criticism, morality, etc. To call some notions of national community cultural and others less so, is to privilege certain cultural practices – speaking a language and entertaining an ethnicity – over others without much justification. In fact, ‘cultural’ nationalism is very political where ‘political’ nationalism is very cultural. For instance, what is at stake in the tensions between the *burgherly* Dutch and notions of a Dutch ethni are the appropriate political consequences of ‘national culture’: should Dutchness inform a particular political culture – moderation, equality, negotiation – or should it inform state efforts to preserve and cultivate a linguistic-cum-ethnic particularity, even beyond its territorial borders. The latter program has run into terrible, unresolvable trouble in the 20th century as discourses on pure, historical ethnicity have become tainted by the promise of genocidal violence. Even though Dutch citizenship has predominantly been obtained through birth and primordial notions of descent were crucial for imagining the historical contiguity of
the people residing in the ‘low lands’, ideas of ethno-cultural commonality have been endurably marginalised when it came to narrating *burgerschap*. When proponent of ‘cultural’ nationalism claim that their concerns have always been of secondary importance in the politics of Dutchness, they are quite right. Prominent voices have argued against them and successfully kept them in the position of a counterpoint. The mistake of ‘cultural’ nationalists lies not in their feelings of inferiority but in their conclusion that the politics of Dutchness has therefore somehow been non-cultural or, by extension, anti-nationalist.

Johan Huizinga, for instance, expressly warned for trouble in his famous lecture on the Dutch, burgherly mentality (1935). Instead of hoping for a heroic affirmation of the one true cultural core of the Dutch people, Huizinga advised his public to rekindle their national mentality – moderation – and abstain from heroism. Again, we see how disagreement sustains particular ways of composing nationhood. While there may be profound disagreement over what ought to inform our insight into the nation, both ‘political’ and ‘cultural’ nationalism find national character the main object of their concern, thereby affirming that there is such a character even if they disagree about its contents and prerogative.

From Huizinga onwards, the burgherlyness of the Dutch has become its most reiterated cliché (Aerts 2002; Eijsbouts 2002). It has never regained the status of the positive ideal it had been. More and more, it came to denote an inhibited, parochial, and rather dull way of living. The terms and the connotations that go with it have, however, not disappeared in the least. As a derogatory term *burgerlijkheid* has remained part and parcel of everyday typifications of what is distinctively dull, boring, small and inhibited about Dutch life, akin to the oft referenced *gezelligheid* [convivial cosiness]. The terminology of burgherlyness still does major work in the everyday, banal articulations of what constitutes Dutchness.

**Looking in the mirror of *burgerschap***

My argument has been that the particular narration of citizenship associated with *burgerschap* imagines Dutch society to be ruled by and for a plurality of moral communities, who are capable of autonomously articulating inner moral convictions. This narration is quite distinct from the liberal narration of citizenship that Somers reconstructs for the Anglo-American discourses on citizenship. The liberal narration of citizenship narrates society to be a collection of families and markets. Real society is, thereby, a distinctly private domain. Somers concludes that the state tends to figure as an artificial, secondary construction that needs to be kept in check if ‘real society’ – families and markets – are to thrive (Somers 2008). The self-evidence of this liberal narration of citizenship explains, for Somers, why
it was and is so painfully difficult to contest the advent of market fundamentalism and its corrosive effects on social justice in US politics.

Conversely, the narration of *burgerschap* doesn’t present the state as an artificial intruder at all, but as the executor of moral convictions and shepherd of moral communities worthy of national recognition. What the state does, it does for the moral communities from which it derives its authority. It acts in name of the citizens who have proven to be civilised and dignified and are thus able to voice worthy moral judgements. It is therefore appropriate to evaluate the actions of the state in moral terms. In this narration, the *overheid* – as the state is often named – is the public instantiation of moral authority. Public policy, laws, regulations and institutions are not temporary, artificial infringements on the private domain of citizens – as is the case in a liberal narration of citizenship –, but rather *expressions* of morality governing the lives of citizens. It is up to the leaders of moral communities to prescribe what the state should be doing. As Ernst Zahn (1989) has argued in his analysis of Dutch political culture, up until depillarisation and moves to further democratise the state the public sphere was effectively formed by institutions of moral authority – most notably the churches – and imagined to exist *above* the state, speaking down to it and telling it what to do. This conservative, paternalist narration of citizenship, in which it is only natural that leaders shepherd their followers and look out for them, is not hampered by the endemic moral dissensus that has been part of Dutch democracy since its inception. Rather, it envisions a political process in which each presents their moral vision and negotiations become attempts to accommodate each group’s moral concerns appropriately (see Lijphart 1969; Van Doorn et al. 1989).

As more and more moral convictions find their way into parliament and under the guidance of government, rights and obligations have expanded immensely (De Swaan 1989; De Haan & Duyvendak 2002; Hoogenboom 2003). The expansion of the welfare state and the social citizenship that came with it has not been the project nor the exclusive achievement of a social-democratic left (cf. Marshall 1950). It is the outcome of a process in which a variety of parties made a succession of paternalist claims, each for their own community, to be taken over by the state. When the social-democratic left actually gained the political dominance to direct this process to their own inclinations, the politico-economic possibilities for doing so quickly evaporated and so did their political dominance.

Following De Haan (1993), we can see an important re-telling of the story of *burgerschap* emerging from the 1950’s onwards. This consisted of a populist-participatory challenge to the conservative, paternalist status-quo. But as De Haan and others also showed (Van Gunsteren 1992; Koenis 1997), the participatory
challenge remained largely ineffectual. In the end, De Haan accounts for the failure to displace the conservative citizenship narrative through what he calls the funhouse mirror effect of *burgerschap* (1992). New, self-confident and defiant generations of challengers have attempted to establish more participatory conceptions of citizenship. Conservative shepherding and corporatist depoliticisation is usurped for the benefit of an emancipated and autonomous citizenry that is willing and able to find solutions to its problems. Yet, consecutive generations of challengers find themselves in the paradoxical situation of prescribing *moral imperatives* of participation, emancipation and self-creation as part of a project to, once and for all, end the moral lecturing by authorities who deem themselves elevated above the yet-to-be enlightened populace. Each generation of challengers thereby at once forms an effective target for the next wave of anti-conservative polemicists.

Narrations of *burgerschap* in the second half of the twentieth century are reconstructed by De Haan as an on-going cycle of such anti-conservative self-critiques. Our main lesson is that moral convictions are consistently conceived as the drivers behind state actions and the basis for civic voice. The right to speak is claimed on the basis of moral capacity, albeit of the emancipatory kind. Proponents of participatory citizenship contested the self-evidence of authoritative moralising. However, they did remarkably little to displace the idea that the state is there to enact what citizens are convinced is morally good, proper and worthy. Even while many contended that citizens should take their problems into their own hands and not rely so much on state provisions or be obstructed by inflexible bureaucracy, this mainly amounted to moral prescriptions of good and active citizenship yet again (Bovens 1991; Simonis et al. 1992; Engbersen & Gabriëls 1995; Penninx et al. 1995; Koenis 1997). From these points of view, government should strive to cultivate values of self-government, participation, expression, initiative and flexibility among those sections of the population that seemed to lack these capacities (Van Houdt 2014). Contentions around *burgerschap* thereby still centred on the moral equipment that is assumed to be the crux of the matter (Schinkel 2008; Ossewaarde 2010). As we can now better understand, ideals of participation do not replace a conservative concept of citizenship, but rather become one of the more authoritative versions of *burgerschap* in the morality play that was and is Dutch citizenship politics. Increasingly, moral voices demand of citizens that they cultivate the dispositions and convictions of a liberal-progressive moral majority, thus becoming part of a modern and autonomous community of engaged individualists (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp 2004; Schinkel & Van Houdt 2010).
The advent of a liberal-progressive moral majority in narrations of citizenship has not, finally, contradicted the importance of moral instruction and capacity. Attempts to introduce notions of citizenship that expressly do not depend on the cultivation of moral capacities have gained little traction (Van Gunsteren 2008; Van Reekum 2011). In a period in which more and more was expected from the idea that the limitations of the welfare state would be amended through the ‘third way’ of responsible and active citizenship, the research of the last decade clearly shows that *burgerschap* is almost exclusively associated with local, small-scale practices of direct solidarity, conviviality and cooperation (Dekker & De Hart 2005; Tonkens 2008; Van Gunsteren 2008; Hurenkamp & Tonkens 2011; Schinkel 2010; Uitermark 2014; Van Houdt 2014). *Burgerschap* does not – or almost never – refer to the practices of antagonistic democracy, self-rule, resistance or political mobilisation. *Burgerschap* is still a performance of proper, civil conduct even if political, almost never a performance of agonistic engagement.

**The re-culturalisation of *burgerschap***

In a nutshell, the significance of emerging debates on Dutchness and citizenship in the 1970’s and 80’s is that they re-introduce the possibility of a differentiating discourse of citizenship. As was discussed, the narration of citizenship had tended, in a rather long arch, towards an encompassing logic in which each visible, audible and self-supporting community – pillars, denominations, ideologies – organised around and articulated distinct moral commitments. This logic was never stable or predictable. By the 1970’s and particularly from the early 1980’s onwards, a host of categories had entered the political and public discourse indicating populations that could not and would not easily fit into an encompassing narrative: ‘*buitenlanders*’ (a term that regularly did not refer to foreigners as such, but stigmatised groups of denizens and citizens that settled in the Netherlands), ‘guest workers’, ‘Turks’, ‘Surinamese’, ‘Moluccans’, ‘Moroccans’, ‘Antillians’, ‘allochthones’, and ‘ethnic minorities’ (Tinnemans 1994; Jones 2007; Laarman 2013). What all these names have in common is that they respond, in different ways, to the indefinite immigration of people deemed to enter from outside of the European/‘white’ territories of the Dutch kingdom. What they problematise is the question if and how these populations fit among the established citizenry-cum-nation. Their very mention offered up this question without any definite solution in sight.

Encompassment was on the table for a while: some suggested that newcomers could, should or would construct ethno-cultural or religious pillars of their own and, thus, enact precisely the conservative citizenship narrative that had enabled an encompassing notion of citizenship. But the very fact that it was
explicitly discussed – and did not pass self-evidently – already indicates that the prospect of ‘ethnic pillarisation’ was a contentious one. An understanding of and justification for immigrant integration in familiar terms of pillarised emancipation did gain some measure of articulation (Schrover 2010). The actual importance of this way of conceiving the problem should however not be overestimated (Vink 2007). It mainly enabled politicians, civil servants and experts, who still dominated the discussion at the time (Scholten 2011), to depoliticise the issue by suggesting that the integration-cum-emancipation of distinct communities was nothing new in Dutch history. The trope of ethnic pillarisation downplayed the rather exceptional conjunction of immigration, economic downturn, rising unemployment and changing ideas about public morality that made immigrant integration an object of political anxiety (Lucassen & Lucassen 2011).

The genealogy of *burgerschap* allows us to better understand how *burgerschap* and Dutchness are entangled: 1) *burgerschap* is first and foremost the moral equipment that indicates sufficient civility and competence to independently partake in public life. This means, particularly, that one will refrain from imposing one’s particular moral convictions onto others; 2) *burgerschap*’s moral content is strongly associated with a polemical challenge against clerical and moral authorities as the discourses on participatory citizenship had grown stronger after the 1950’s. *Burgerschap* effectively means ‘standing on one’s own feet and not relying on others for moral guidance’. This discourse nonetheless prescribes its own moral convictions: communal participation, individualised emancipation, freedom of expression and enjoyment, individual autonomy, and moral self-government (Verkaaik 2009).

As explained at the beginning of this section, when we understand culturalisation as the arduous work of narrating and re-narrating the story of what citizenship is and effectively abstracting it from categories that express the general system of society’s inequality, it becomes clear that re-culturalisation was already well underway before the new millennium. *Burgerschap* had already become part of differentiating narrations. Such differentiation is expressed most poignantly as the difference between ‘autochthones’ and ‘allochthones’, but its expression has many guises. They are all variations on an established-outsider configuration in which, more often than not, the outsider is understood to be an outsider because she has *come from elsewhere*. Here, belonging in the European/‘white’ territory is at stake. Crossing this divide was already conceptualised as the cultivation of certain moral convictions at the heart of *burgerschap*. In such discourse, which may or may not strike an accommodative tone, *burgerschap* already captures the particularity of the established – one does not impose one’s moral convictions on
others and one is capable of standing on one’s own feet – and the deficiencies of 
the outsiders. While it is true that this differentiating narration of citizenship was 
not always or predominantly about the necessity of cultural sameness and the 
problems of cultural backwardness, we would seriously injure our analysis if we 
would therefore choose to underestimate the period before the new millennium as 
one in which citizenship was somehow not being culturalised. The discourses about 
people-out-of-place (Yanow & Van der Haar 2013) prompted re-culturalisation in a 
rather dramatic way as narratives of encompassment weren’t reiterated. Instead, 
burgerschap attained a differentiating significance as it highlighted the lacking 
moral dispositions and competencies of newcomers: ‘they’ do not know how to live 
like emancipated, autonomous, self-expressive, self-governing individuals (Rath 
1991; Van der Valk 2002; Mellink 2014). Indeed, anti-racist and multicultural 
discourses found little to no resonance in the emerging public and political debates 
concerning diversity and citizenship (Essed & Nimako 2006; Uitermark 2012; 
Duyvendak et al. 2013).
Section 1:
Making Dutchness public
**Introduction to section 1**

This first empirical section deals with two ways in which Dutchness was made public. The first chapter of this section delves into changing discourses about what nationhood is. The chapter looks at sources of the late ‘70 and throughout the 1980’s. It turns out that discussions on race and racism are of particular importance for understanding how the problem of Dutchness was articulated in ways that begin to foreground the public’s role in figuring out what Dutchness is. The second chapter deals with a major mode of imagining Dutchness to come out of this development. Its sources partly overlap with that of its preceding chapter. This emerging imaginary of Dutchness was itself not invented for the purpose of resolving discussion about race and racism. Instead, discussions over race and racism provoked new articulations of Dutchness as a public problem and provided the occasion for an already emerging imaginary of Dutchness to gain in significance and profile, while also enabling a move away from the wholly unresolved problematic of race and racism. Together, these two chapters describe how public-ness became a crucial concern in debates about Dutchness and citizenship. They thereby set up a backdrop for the second section on post-2000 developments, wherein the notion of a native public would become hugely important.
4.

How Dutchness became a public problem: from national character to public question

It was right up to the 1950’s that the concept of national character was used in public and intellectual life more or less self-evidently when articulating the kinds of differences that could make Dutchness visible and conceivable (Van Ginkel 1999; Van Heerikhuizen 1985; Aerts & Te Velde 1999). In the decades after, it slowly but surely shifted in meaning and use. It was increasingly associated with an out-dated vision of national distinction that could lead to a wholly suspect racialisation and biologicisation of differences between groups (Van Ginkel 1999). Even though the international and scientific rejection of racial taxonomies was already well under way, it took some time before racial terminology became associated with anachronistic and undesirable ways of speaking about difference publicly. As we have already seen, intellectuals like Van Doorn still routinely spoke about ‘races’ in order grasp the problems and tensions concerning difference, whereas other intellectuals, such as Abram de Swaan, were beginning to articulate difference in an altogether more ‘modern’ way. Politics was not different in this respect (Jones 2007). As is often pointed out, public commemoration of WOII had profound consequences. New generations were beginning to remember the war in new ways (De Haan 2008b). The horrors of the WOII were beginning to be remembered not as the assault on a small and innocent nation, but as the persecution of specific victimised groups – particularly from the 1970’s onward (Van Ginkel 2011) – and ‘race’ became increasingly associated with morally repugnant forms of politics and large-scale violence (Goldberg 2006; Romeyn 2014). In this view, ‘race’ is something that ought to be left behind. It is a horror, painfully remembered but also pointedly rejected.

National character forms an uncomfortable object in relation to these changing speech rules about ‘race’. The discourse of national characters is extensively tied up with natural, somatic differences presumed to be lodged in bodies of national persons (Leerssen 2000). Moreover, the logic of national characterisations prescribes national differences to be differences between entities – character types – that may have a variety of manifestations yet stem from an unchanging constitution. The problem within characterological discourse is where
and how to find traces of evidence within history of something that is itself transhistorical. Notions of racial difference have played a major role in helping people to resolve such questions. Within narratives of Dutchness that focused on a post-war rejection of racism and xenophobia and an embrace of international cooperation and diplomacy in the new Atlantic relationship, the idea that the Dutch nation was essentially delimited by a national character became distinctly anachronistic. However, the demise of a characterological discourse does not entail the demise of nationalism as such. In fact, the post-war period is marked by enthusiastic and dynamic attempt to reinvigorate and further develop the national community (Van Ginkel 2004). These were initiatives set up by religious, intellectual and political elites with the distinct aim to civilise, enlighten and emancipate the uncivilised, uneducated and subjected. Attempts to ‘break through’ stale and rigid party political boundaries was also informative for ideas about a more coherent national union. The lapse of national character into a past that was-once-but-is-no-more was thereby accompanied by new, inventive ways to articulate Dutchness.

The dwindling self-evidence of national character

What is it precisely that fades into the background when a characterological discourse becomes out-dated? The concept of national character affords a number of possibilities that need to be explicated in order to better understand what changed when its uses changed and, particularly, its significance for public articulations of Dutchness shifted.

First and foremost, national character, particularly the Dutch ‘volkskarakter’ and ‘volksaard’, calls forth an external referent: a Volk. Itself a highly complex notion (Mol & Van Lieshout 2005 [1989]: 190; Stuurman 2009), volk has the peculiar tendency to be a genealogical and a cultural object. That is, a volk is a people that is born out of each other and a people that lives its biography with each other. Volk may be best understood to be part of the biopolitical governmentality as it was institutionalised in the 18th and 19th centuries (Canguilhem 1989; Foucault 2005 [1966]; 2003). A volk lives and is able to prolong its healthy existence by caring for itself. National character thereby involves an external object – a volk that is in need of care, healing, cultivation, protection and preservation. Such care is not only or primarily deployed through the development of health care institutions and a penal system, but also through the maintenance and cultivation of hearts and minds: education, culture, memory and self-awareness. When dealing with a volk we see both the erection of national health care and the erection of national statues. Take, for instance, the
memorialisation of the Dutch independence of 1813 given definite shape in 1863 through the building of a monument showing Willem I returning to Dutch soil after the defeat of Napoleon. The crucial point here is that a *volk* is concerned with its perseverance through time and the maintenance of its vitality. The kind of entity that national character refers to is, first and foremost, an entity that has shown itself to persist through the ages (Foucault 2003). Victory in war and control over disease demonstrate precisely what a *volk* is meant to be: a people that persist against the forces that threaten to extinguish it. A *volk* proves its existence and right through the very act of persisting.

A second, important aspect of national character is tied up with the notion of character, which is both deeply personal while also shared across time and space. Like *volk*, the very idea that people, let alone *a* people, are defined by their character is part of a complex history in which a variety of notions about morality, personal worth, honour, drama, fate and, not in the least, difference amalgamate (Leerssen 2006). Most important here is the idea that people are differently disposed. They are deemed to have different sets of dispositions, endowments, habits, customs, moods, and affects. Leerssen, in particular, has shown how such characterological types were developed in Europe over a long period of time, stretching to well before the 19th century formation of nation-states. These types can only be understood if we take note of the contrasting ways in which types become to be distinguished: “they are effeminate” also means “we are not”. The emergence of a characterological discourse thus depends on the formation of a European cultural sphere in which such differences could become relevant, imagined and solidified (Leerssen 2000; see in particular Ockerse 1788). Moreover, the logic of character prescribes moral significance to national community as it ties the biography and conduct of each to the fate of the nation. When one’s personal honour is at stake, one’s national reputation is immediately involved as well.

Finally, a discourse of national characters suggests there is a particular kind of knowledge about the nation and a particular kind of authoritative voice able to communicate that knowledge. National characters can best be discerned by those who have a long view of history – as it is something that persists through history – and a broad view of the world – as it is something that differs across space. Only certain people are in the position to acquire, develop and communicate such knowledge. These people have something that other people may not possess in equal measure: historical expertise and oversight. Characterological discourse posits that within the vast cultural complexity of national difference there are persistent entities that remain essentially unchanged and unaffected by historical
contingencies. Character is something that is preserved and stored. This also means that there are specific sites in the world where evidence of character can be found: in the somatic constitution of certain exemplary persons; in the earth; in the old fisher villages; in the skull; in books; in art; in songs; in ancient ritual forms; etc. Such sites harbour evidence of what the national might be. In order to extract such evidence, one will need the expertise and ability to decipher, read, dissect and order such evidence. The capacity to analyse, understand and communicate is not given democratically but is only acquired after a long and arduous process of learning, study and training (see Eickhoff et al. 2000). The specific knowledge and skills needed to gain expertise may vary widely, but the importance of historical oversight recurs again and again: the historian, the archaeologist, the ethnologist, the linguist, the mythologist, the social scientist, the erudite intellectual knows or, at least, has some grasp of where to find traces of nationhood. Through oversight, across time and space, certain learned persons may enact their expertise in discerning and communicating what makes nations different and what has constituted their distinct ways of being. The role and rhetoric of oversight is hardly beholden to historians, but we may safely say that historiography has been keenly involved in building up the kind of oversight needed to speak with authority about national characters. Not surprisingly, it was mainly professional historians who succeeded in gaining oversight vis-à-vis their publics when national history curricula were set up. At what may have been the high point of characterological discourse in the Dutch context, historians such as Jan Romein and Johan Huizinga published extensive and careful expositions of Dutch, national history and Dutch, national character (see for instance Geyl 1925; Stibbe 1939; Romein 1942). Even Ruth Benedict explained to American G.I.’s how to understand the culture and personality of the Dutch (Van Ginkel 1992). Sociologists and ethnologists were also deeply invested in these debates (Van Heerikhuizen 1985; Van Ginkel 1999; Van Ginkel & Henkes 1999). For all their disagreements and disputes, these experts all partook in rhetoric of oversight that gives authority to those who speak with the most expansive historical and cultural breath.

So when we say that the self-evidence of national character is dwindling in the post-war period, we mean to say that a very particular way of conceiving Dutchness is falling apart only to be entangled once again in new ways. With the rise of new problems and concerns surrounding national boundaries, Dutchness becomes articulated quite differently from the way it was conceived in characterological discourse. Most striking in this development is the way in which Dutchness itself becomes the public’s problem and, thereby, a public problem and a national question. Nationalism was, of course, always already at stake in public and
political discourses about all kinds of issues, but with the demise of national character we see Dutchness itself, quite reflexively, becoming a problem in its own right. National difference and how to deal with it became a concern in need of the public’s judgment. When this happened, in the course of the 1970’s and 80’s, it did so in the context of discussions about race, racism and concerns over racist politics. Anxieties and worries over what to do with racial difference were, so to say, impetus and occasion out of which Dutchness would become articulated as a public problem and a national question: who do we think we are? In the remainder of this chapter I will consider some crucial aspects of how race and racism were implicated in the articulation of Dutchness as a public problem. The thoroughly unresolved confrontation with race was to become of crucial importance in the succeeding period. Yet, before we can delve into these discussions, it is helpful to provide some historical contrast and, at once, analyse the interplay between a concept of nationhood, the persona in the act of speaking and the prospects of one’s public. For this purpose, I will discuss in some detail the essay by Johan Huizinga On The Dutch Mentality.

The style of the lecture: Huizinga’s satisfaction

On the Dutch mentality (1982 [1935]) is, for present purposes, a particularly interesting text, because it stands at the end of a historical development. Huizinga’s lecture can be seen as the peak and, looking back, the beginning of a massive shift in characterological discourses on Dutchness. The eminent cultural scholar is highly aware of the caution with which a character sketch may be performed. In his famous diagnosis of the burgherly mentality of the Dutch, Huizinga already carefully qualifies how specific political affects – moderation, humility, satisfaction, prudence, toleration – associated with a part – Holland and the patriotic urbanites – come to stand symbolically for the whole. Huizinga does not rush to a straight-forwardly essentialist description of the Dutch person-cum-people through characterisations that are always at risk of becoming superficial clichés (cf. Leerssen 2000). He takes great effort in establishing the historico-cultural conditions leading into his present possibility to speak about the mental constituents of national culture. Huizinga’s lecture is characterology in its most reflexive mode as he precedes his exposé of national virtues with a history of a gradual and haphazard unification of a people. Only in hindsight does Dutch burgherlyness appear inevitable. With Huizinga, the Dutch character is not given a primordial point of origin, but is presented as the more or less understandable and discernible effect of a jumble of more or less associated processes. Interestingly, all of these generative processes have to do with the formation of territorial and
imperial sovereignty. The particular way in which Dutch sovereignty emerged, is presented as the context in which a particular mental character finds application and justification. It is the express intention of the essay to plea for a continuation of the mental tendencies subsumed under the category of the burgher and to combat the processes undermining its continuity: rationalisation of public life and massification of culture. One reads in Huizinga’s diagnosis the cultural pessimism of the time: an ever more rationalised state politics is driving the masses into the hands of extremist political movement that actively seek an aufhebung of the contemporary contradictions.

This means that Huizinga’s essay is explicitly articulated in critique of popularity: ‘It is one of the strangest aberrations of the current era to argue that evil becomes good if it is commonly desired by many.’ (1982 [1935]: 298) (#12). Although his lecture has the didactic intention of communicating insight into Dutch nationhood to a yet-to-be-enlightened public, Huizinga places the need for such lecturing in the context of a cultural crisis that forms the main substance of his essay: the all-too-simplistic goal of popular sovereignty – exemplified by the introduction of the popular vote – fails to produce a popular will and, instead, delivers ever smaller divisions between entrenched parliamentary factions. Thereby, indignation over democratic intransigence reaches ever higher pitch and polarisation of political differences comes to make prudent government of Dutch society an impossibility. According to Huizinga, the stalemate of a fractured corporatism provides opportunities for extremist political movements to offer up fantasies of national re-unification, freeing the people to undertake heroic national action, often in direct analogy to the ‘heroic’ breakthrough of parliamentary passivity in Germany. Huizinga’s analysis of Dutch affects is meant to counter precisely this development. Instead of heroic extremism and popular unification, he seeks to offer his public a vision of national unity that finds in burgherly moderation the dispositional core of national community. It is precisely because Huizinga speaks against the presumed sovereignty of the popular and warns for its irrational, fragmentary and violent consequences that his lecture can be employed in a comparison between different styles of national typification. His discourse is still firmly characterological.

The centre-piece of Huizinga’s essay is its attempt to re-appropriate and rekindle burgherlyness after it has been widely and repeatedly discarded as petit-bourgeois parochialism (see also Aerts 2002). This attempt is placed against the threat of nationalist extremism:
Thus remains [the political option of] the catastrophe (Cheers in the distance). The nationalist parties, with their rising influence, are prepared to bring the task to completion and chase away the state parties, tarred and feathered. Will it come to this? And if so, will they give us reason to be grateful? We don’t know. We can’t be sure if they will prove capable of erecting a better construction on the rubbles of Dutch parliamentarianism. Results elsewhere do not provide sufficient reassurance. (Huizinga 1982 [1935]: 312) (#13)

It is from this conjecture that Huizinga presents an alternative vision of national commonality, one in which unification does not imply the heroic imposition of a national will:

Many would abandon all too readily our cultural heritage [geestelijk erfdeel] of reverence for divergent opinion. [...] Most states in Europe have formed out of the principle of dominion. There are only a few that obtain their existence and being from a struggle for freedom. One of them is the Netherlands. Freedom, however narrowly interpreted, has been the yeast of our nation. (1982 [1935]: 314) (#14)

Huizinga’s characterology enacts a particular style of national typification. The object of typification is the mental disposition at the heart of national culture. This not only means that the object is to be found and followed historically as it endures through time, but also that the historian is occupied with the particular task of giving back to his public what they are at risk of forgetting. The expert gives what the public lacks. In this way, the didactic relationship between lecturer and public becomes part of the very process of cultural preservation that is the object of characterological analysis. The nation is that which endures, that which proves to have the power to resist the attrition of time. A national character becomes known in relation to a test of force:

in this context of never foreseen, as if elicited through a series of miracles and maintained state of the United Provinces has the Dutch people [volk] affirmed its form and its nature, tested its reason and its right of being. (Huizinga 1982 [1935]: 284) (#15)

The Dutch nation proves its worthiness as nation in this test of serendipity: it is maintained and affirmed against the force of obliteration. The true test of nationhood is its redemption despite all odds. Huizinga performs here what Foucault has argued to be the biopolitical logic of nationalism: the nation is that which proves capable to defend itself against the continuous onslaught of force (Foucault 2003). Huizinga’s critique of popular sovereignty finds its reason in the challenge to Dutch society’s perseverance. The lecture reminds its public of its proper mental virtues, while at the same time equipping it with the evaluative norms to identify nationalist movements as false prophets of national heroism. The
virtue of burgherly moderation, found to have withstood the tests of the past, is at once the proper style of critique to be directed at contemporary extremists. In Huizinga’s critique only the lived experience of calm satisfaction will allow the Dutch to escape the dialectics of intensifying parliamentary discord: ‘However despicable it may sound to those who feel fire and courage, as nation and state we just are, in a certain sense, satisfied, and it is our national duty to remain so.’ (293). (#16) Against the heated emotionality of nationalist extremism Huizinga’s public is reminded of its deep burgherly affect: to be satisfied.

The relationship between the concept of nationhood – a mental character of burgherlyness – and the persona who articulates it – in the role of the reassuring historian – allows for a consistency between style and content. Huizinga’s essay performs what its argument seeks to recognise in the past, thereby demonstrating that the mentality of the burgher has persisted to this day. In the historian’s narration of Dutchness history comes to teach its public affective moderation and reverence for moral differences: ‘History may sometimes teach other peoples pride and glory, for us the lesson is, if one understands is properly, only humility.’ (286). (#17)

What the exemplar of Huizinga’s essay demonstrates, is that any intervention in a discussion over nationhood and historical expertise will have to deal with the question of public authority: how is it possible that one person – an expert – has specialised, non-democratic knowledge about national history that she is able to authoritatively present to a public who is presumed to be the very nation whose historical existence is thereby disclosed? Huizinga navigates this problem by, first of all, fiercely critiquing any argument of popularity and popular imagination: Dutchness is not what the public may think it is. Secondly, the possibility of moderation and reassured satisfaction is attained by presenting Dutchness as a serendipitously enduring character of a people who have formed a political alliance in pursuit of freedom. That is, it exists even if the heirs of that history have not yet recognised it as such. Huizinga’s role as historian is merely to point out the burgherlyness that is already part of people’s affective constitution. He is there to recall it. It is precisely this style that falls apart when characterological discourses become less self-evident and other forms of discussing nationhood emerge out of this predicament.

The crisis of identity
With the demise of characterological discourse came talk of ‘national identity’ (see Leerssen 1990; Frijhoff 1992; Van Ginkel 1999). Discussion about national difference and distinction were thereby continued in slightly different terms: from
karakter to identiteit. Yet, the shift in terms is indicative of more than conversational propriety. It signals the creation of new kind of problem (Laeyendecker 1974). The interventions of S. W. Couwenberg of the early 80’s allow us to understand what changed with the increasing use of ‘national identity’ in public discourse, precisely because he seeks to hold onto some notion of characterological difference. Together with a number of other intellectuals Couwenberg tried, quite self-consciously, to salvage national characterisation (see in particular Couwenberg 1981). Therefore, his writing and positioning offers crucial insight into what ‘national identity’ adds and subtracts to the emerging contention over Dutchness.

In a special issue of Civis Mundi, a journal devoted to cultivating citizenship among the educated public with regard to national and international political issues, S. W. Couwenberg notes how Dutch nationhood had already for long time lacked a clear, cultural expression, which he relates to the fact that the Dutch were severed from their cultural fellows when Flanders seceded from the empire in 1830. In his introductory essay to De Nederlandse Natie, he quotes Seton-Watson (1981: 9):

‘The formation of the Dutch nation is a case of the division in two of a community which, with an economy and a culture as advanced as any in Europe, was growing into a single modern nation; but religious division, foreign military power and new economic opportunities in distant seas pulled and kept the two halves apart, making one into a nation and leaving the other in uncertain status.’ Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States, (1977)$^5$

All the contributors to this edited volume agree that Dutchness is not a widely and strongly cultivated identity. In the light of recent developments – a global economic crisis, a bureaucratised welfare state, depillarisation, dwindling burgherly culture, European integration, and last but not least the advent of a multiracial society – they try to assess how Dutch nationhood will or should change. Couwenberg himself presents a clear idea why such reflection is needed:

We feel obliged to draw attention to this specifically Dutch problematic, without much hope by the way. Experience teaches us that it is characteristic of the Netherlands to underestimate the significance of the national factor and related problems and to show little interest in the matter. Consequently, the Dutch have made some grave errors of judgment. Coming to mind in the post-war era are, for example, the unfortunate way in which the Dutch have reacted to Indonesian nationalism; furthermore, the errors of judgments with regard to European integration, again by a lack of regard for the reality and vitality of the national dimension in human existence. (Couwenberg 1981: 25) (#18)

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A similar risk looms over the issue of racial diversification. Here too a rather stubborn disregard for the integrity of nationhood and the strenuous process of national integration can create problems:

In recent decades, the exclusivist small-Dutch orientation is increasingly confronted with a new challenge, the consequences of which have not been sufficiently dealt with in public opinion and government policy, namely the development of the Netherlands into a multiracial society. This development has certain problematic aspects with which the large cities are particularly confronted. Only recently have people taken notice and has some discussion about the issue started. The issue is no longer taboo. However, in these discussion there has hardly been any attention given to a rather obvious question for a people [volk] that has developed, in the course of centuries, a distinct [eigen] identity, namely the question how that distinct [eigen] identity is related to the growing multiracial dimension of our society and how it can and should develop within that multiracial framework. Here, issues of legality come to the fore. Vague legal notions, such as moral decency, public order, the legal convictions existing among the Dutch people, etc., have up to now been framed and interpreted on the grounds of the Dutch political culture and tradition. As our society takes on a more multiracial character the question emerges to what extent one will take into account the other morals and attitudes when interpreting those vague legal notions. Should we on the basis of multiracial tolerance, for instance, recognise certain deviant customs of the islamic faith and way of life, like discrimination of women, polygamy [veelwijferij], and the like? (Couwenberg 1981: 11-12) (#19)

A number of elements are significant for making sense of what to do about Dutchness: racial diversification, urban problems, a ruptured taboo on debate, and the integrative significance of national identity. In search of foot hold, Couwenberg points out the burgherly core of Dutch nationhood:

When we add this all up, I am inclined to state that the Dutch people [volk] still has a hard burgherly core. Yet, this core is being undermined and corroded by all kinds of non- and anti-burgherly forces and trends which from the perspective of the traditional burgherly culture can be branded as a degradation of that culture. These trends have already made people – and this is particularly true for the intellectual top tier – embarrassed for their burgherlyness. ‘Burgherly’ has become an often used term of abuse. The embarrassment for what we, at the core, still are, is part of the identity crisis in which the Dutch nation finds itself in 1980. (Couwenberg 1981: 23) (#20)

As Couwenberg himself notes elsewhere (1987), his argument and those of others in the volume can be seen as living in two discursive universes at once. On the one hand, a number of authors present analyses of cultural patterns, often encapsulated by abstract terms – pragmatism, moralism, commercialism, Protestantism, consensus politics, burgherly culture. To a large extent, they follow the conventions of cultural sociology and historiography which not long thereafter became severely discredited, often reifying culture into an idealistic causal force which could be applied to nation-states as a whole. Their analysis, in fact, explicitly built on the characterological discourses of the preceding era (see for instance Chorus 1964). Moreover, the role of the intellectual is to oversee, locate and communicate the
integrative, moral basis on which the nation-state creates social order and continuity. These analyses serve to locate long lasting and recurring aspects of the nation’s being, often followed by the conclusion that some form of rapid social change – individualisation, globalisation, Marxism, consumerism, racial diversity, modernisation – has more recently led to the demise of such patterns, calling the integrity of the nation’s being into question. In this genre of analysis, nationhood, national identity and nation character tends to be used in overlapping ways.

On the other hand, however, various authors, Couwenberg among them, present a subjectivist assessment of Dutch nationhood. In such analysis, what matters most is not to directly present the author’s oversights into the core pattern of national life, but to assess the national consciousness taking shape in public and political attitudes, expressions and legal codifications. Far from making a definitive turn to constructivism – no one is mobilising Anderson just yet, Renan is still the preferred reference – authors are concerned with national awareness at various levels of Dutch society.

Waxing and waning between these perspectives – from the author’s insight into the nation’s core to an assessment of the public’s awareness and back – allows for interesting discursive capacities. Crucially, it allows for the capacity to both assess national awareness as weak, disregarding, relativistic, and nonchalant, while at one and the same time suggesting that a coherent, national core of patterned, traditional life still exists. Thus, it becomes possible to lament the carelessness with which the Dutch have always tended to treat their national similarity, which does and does not exist at the same time. For Couwenberg, this carelessness is directly related to the idea that Dutch people tend to focus on state boundaries, whereas cultural boundaries – which would cut across those statist ones – are neglected. A more vigorous experience of nationhood would be possible, if only the Dutch would appreciate their lasting cultural commonalities more and choose to promote those cultural practices that constitute their core.

The restorative constructivism of Couwenberg’s positioning involves three steps: a first, objectifying moment in which certain moral dispositions are deemed typically and traditionally part of a nation’s being, above all burgherlyness; a second, subjectivist moment in which the dwindling awareness of the nation’s core constitution is lamented upon; and finally, a constructivist moment in which reinvigoration of national awareness is promoted. The move towards the third step is, interestingly, hampered by an embarrassment, a collectively enforced taboo on the expression of a collective ethos. This embarrassment can even be presented as part of the nation’s core ethos as it can be deemed eminently burgherly to moderate and rationalise one’s nationalistic feelings. Yet, Couwenberg and others routinely
note that the Dutch distinguish themselves in a strongly cultivated apprehension towards nationalism, thereby both affirming that the Dutch can be singled out and lamenting that they do too little to make themselves visible.

By moving in this way from an objective, national character to a subjectively squandered awareness it becomes possible to make a constructivist appeal without any loss of historical necessity: we need to do something about our national image. Couwenberg and others are not promoting the construction of a newly invented image of Dutchness out of a particular political, intellectual or moral persuasion, but are merely pleading for the restoration of what they, in their objectivist moment, have discovered was there all along. The need to do something, however, stems not from the objectivist assertion of national character, but from the subjectivist moment of a national identity crisis. It is precisely because nationhood is not limited to a historically persisting, national character, but also involves a lively awareness of national identity that Dutchness can become the object of public concern and public policy. The problem-at-hand is not so much the demise of a national character, but rather the crisis of national identity. The problem is not that we lack erudite and exceptionally skilled people capable of communicating what the national character actually is, but the fact that there are popular impediments against the spread and cultivation of awareness among the population, namely a broadly cultivated embarrassment that is deemed typical of the Dutch. National identity, then, indicates the extent to which a population is engaged in cultivating awareness. It is the public’s problem and, indeed, a public problem. Whereas a national character may be in demise insofar as it is deemed to be badly preserved, a national identity is in crisis as the public doesn’t seem capable of imagining it persuasively. So with the rise of national identity talk, we are dealing with a new kind of problematisation: the question of coherent and persuasive imagination, the problem of cultivating awareness and overcoming impediments to wholehearted self-expression.

Race and racism are at the heart of the emerging identity crisis. This is already evident from the reactions to Couwenberg’s positionings. His public intervention came under considerable critique (Van Ginkel 1999). It was argued that Couwenberg not only justified latent and rising racism under the guise of promoting national identity, but actively spurred it on by giving authoritative voice to nationalist particularism. Yet, such interventions almost inevitably affirm the very impediments to successful imaginations that Couwenberg deemed to be at the heart of the identity crisis. It once and again highlights the carelessness with which the Dutch maintain their distinctiveness [eigenheid]. Indeed, Couwenberg resolutely distinguished himself from racism:
From all kinds of statements we can conclude that racism in this sense revives with the growing ethnic dimension of our society. In so far as this is the case, it is contrary to our liberal-democratic order and needs to be forcefully contested. The struggle against racism loses credibility, however, and becomes dubious when for political reasons all kinds of statements, which have nothing to do with it, are branded as racism. This pertains, for instance, to efforts to establish a more restrictive immigration policy with the aim to constrain population growth. (Couwenberg 1987: 150) (#21)

Racism is deemed completely out of order. If the Dutch are to become more aware of who they are, it is always already understood that this ought not to include racism. Dutchness is post-racist or it isn’t at all. Yet, according to Couwenberg this also meant that it was crucial to know what was and what was not racist. A responsible approach to the crisis of national identity would demand both the resolute rejection of racism as well as the cultivation of national awareness. So, on the one hand accusations of racism ought to be avoided as it tended to impede the cultivation of national identity, while on the other hand the rejection of racism formed an integral part of that national identity. It seems race forms a highly ambiguous object in trying to articulate a problematic of Dutchness. Even if Couwenberg seeks to retain a role for national character, his focus is on the problem of awareness and identification. Race is ambiguous here not because it lingers under the guise of character, but precisely because it impedes the successful imagination of Dutchness as it is eminently Dutch to reject racism.

The anxieties of a post-racist imaginary
As we have already encountered in the interventions by Van Doorn at the very beginning of this study, issues of difference and citizenship emerging in the 1970’s were intensively concerned with the question of race and racism. The confrontation with race and racism would eventually shape the debate over Dutchness in quite peculiar ways. In the face of racial difference Dutchness tends to appear as post-racist. Dutchness is or, at the very least, ought to be beyond racism. Racism thereby becomes a residual problem, something that may still linger but can and ought to be purged from the national community. In different ways, it is imagined to be the very constitutive outside of what it means to be Dutch. However, this also creates the context for new kinds of problems associated with Dutchness and new ways of making sense of those problems. As we’ve just seen in relation to Couwenberg, it creates the problem of anxiety over if and how Dutchness ought to be imagined. How and when do we know that such imagination does not entail a racism that ought never to be part of the endeavour to begin with?
Let’s look at an instructive example in which already much of the emerging problematic can be found. In the introduction to one of the first systemic investigations of racist discrimination in the Netherlands anthropologist Frank Bovenkerk summarises the complex nature of such a research project:

There is certainly proof that it occurs, but to what extent is it a matter of a fixed and engrained pattern? The American history professor John M. Allswang, who teaches in Leiden for some time now, said in an interview […] that the issue of ‘race’ in the Netherlands apparently raises few problems and that tolerance certainly has something to do with this. Yet, he also has the feeling that there is a ‘well intentioned conspiracy of silence’ hanging over the issue and that the unwillingness to confront matters, may mask problems. It seems like he articulates precisely how many Dutch people relate to racial discrimination at this moment. The ‘tolerant’ past is forever behind us and people have yet to find a fitting definition for the new situation. Well, the pieces of research that now follow serve to unrelentingly bring the truth about racial discrimination to the surface. (Bovenkerk 1979: 21) (#22)

In this quote we encounter the many concerns that are folded into the question of racism at the end of the 1970’s. It raises questions about the reliability of images, good intentions and questionable consequences, outsiders looking in, the past and the present, truth coming to the surface, and a willingness to confront that truth. Racism exists here as a yet to be confronted fact of discrimination taking place behind the façade of an all-too-well-intended image of tolerance. Bringing racism to light, asserting its facticity, will deface the national image, while no one seems to know as of yet how to re-arrange that image. The facts coming to the surface are part of a larger exercise in which a break with the past, or at least a certain memory of that past, is being executed and a problematic present is confronted. Establishing the occurrence of racial discrimination in the Netherlands is directly linked to the question whether the Netherlands is really what the Dutch imagine it to be: a tolerant, open and welcoming place.

The confrontation with racism turns out to be a test for the integrity of the national façade. What is Dutch and what is racist ought to exclude each other, which makes the occurrence of hidden, unacknowledged racism highly provocative: despite what everyone says, it still happens. A post-racist imaginary, in which true Dutchness is always already deemed to be without racists blemishes, presents an anxious, pressing problem: what if that image is precisely what is hiding racism from sight? Is the national image an accomplice to its own taboo? As such, racism and image stand in a specific relation to each other. The image may cloak racism, bare it from sight, keep it in silence, deny its existence and ban it from society. Racism is that which the image cannot be. Conversely, this means that the image is threatened by racism. If racism does, in fact, occur behind the façade, the image is compromised and will need to be re-constituted…but how?
The national image ought to survive the test of racism’s facticity. The point of this test is not to pull racism back into the national image and affirm its place in Dutch society. Quite the opposite, the critical attention to the persistence of racism emerging at the end of the 1970’s seeks to finally expel the residue of racism hiding behind kind words and superficial ideals. The aim is to live up to the national image of a post-racist people. The task at hand is to seek out where and how racism is hiding.

If the subsequent debates taking place throughout the 1980’s make anything clear, it is that this task is far from straight-forward. A whole host of categories, policy measures, commitments, juridical arrangements and public interventions emerged in relation to what is, at that time, still routinely called the *multi-racial society* (see for instance Couwenberg 1981; Zahn 1989). None of these efforts led to a well ordered space of possibilities in which it is evidently clear how the already established ideal of a post-racist society is to be realised. At the heart of the contention is what post-racism might actually be. Post-racism is the unequivocal benchmark of any legitimate position being taken publicly, yet there is no straightforward repertoire at hand to enact this position.

**A constitutional attempt to recognise race**

One of the most noteworthy attempts to deal with race came in the form of a new constitution, donning a new first article dealing explicitly with racial difference. It forms one attempt to enact what post-racism might be. Yet, it already shows the complexities of performing such a position and the questions that are still left unaddressed.

In 1983, after a long history of rephrasing and reconsidering by legislators (De Bruin 2010), a principled declaration of equality and non-discrimination is given the front seat in the Dutch constitution. Article 1 of the constitution states that:

> All those who reside in the Netherlands are treated equally in equal cases. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, orientation, political persuasion, race, sex or any other ground, is prohibited. (#23)

From the phrasing of the article it becomes clear that the legislator seeks to deal with human equality in a particular way. The law does not affirm human equality as such. It affirms the principle of equal treatment in equal cases. Importantly, this implies that persons can and, indeed, should be treated unequally in unequal cases. It expresses the idea that government is constantly engaged in making differences
between citizens and that such differences ought to be made. Therefore, equality before the law cannot and should not imply that government will not make any differences. Moreover, Article 1 is concerned with the problems of groups. Rather than outlawing the significance of supra-personal commitments and memberships, only affirming the status of the individual, the article calls for an appreciation of group differences in determining whether and how persons are to be treated differently. The presence and recognition of these differences itself doesn’t constitute discrimination. Lastly, the article pertains to all those who reside in the Netherlands, not just to the bearers of Dutch citizenship. We are not dealing with a right of specific rights bearers, but with a duty effective within a sovereign territory, binding for whoever might find themselves within it. Thereby, Article 1 places a moral conviction at the basis of what it means to be in the Netherlands. As the first article of the 1983 constitution it marks the rejection of discrimination as the first and foremost boundary of civil society. The article canonises the conviction that, if anything, Dutch civil society rejects discrimination of any person on any grounds.

It was particularly after the WOII and the redesign of the Dutch empire through the Statute of 1953 that diversification could no longer be ignored (Jones 2007). Beginning with the ‘repatriation’ of Indo’s, KNIL-soldiers and their families after the independence of Indonesia and ending with the migration of Dutch citizens from Suriname in the run-up to its independence (Schuster 1999), the image of a white nation was thoroughly challenged in the second half of the twentieth century (Jacobs 2000). Moreover, in the course of the 1970’s it became increasingly undeniable that the large numbers of the Mediterranean guest workers, who had settled in the Netherlands from the 1950’s onwards, were not going to return. Finally, a number of violent actions by groups fighting for Moluccan independence brightly lit these shifting boundaries of the nation (Essed & Nimako 2006).

In light of these developments, Article 1 forms the symbolic centre piece of state efforts to curtail and manage what are understood to be rising racial and ethnic tensions in the course of the 1970’s (Tinnemans 1994). It is important to note that it is hardly the result of a struggle for equality or justice by postcolonial, migrant or minority movements. Article 1 is not the product of calls to right the wrongs of any past. Rather, it expresses the determination by government to control and civilise group animosity. It is a declaration of moral conviction and idealism, not an admission of guilt or debt. Article 1 came out of post-war efforts to solidify once and for all the dignity of every human being, parallel to international
efforts in the UN and Europe and most directly in response to nazism and the Holocaust (Fennema 2000).

Article 1 of the new constitution presents us with one of the central dilemmas in the debates concerning racism in the 1980’s. As the recognition of the racial diversification Article 1 solidifies the constitutive rejection of racism for Dutch society, becoming the pinnacle of what Dutch sovereignty stands for. Now more than ever should it be clear to everyone that racial discrimination is rejected. Yet, the article does not speak about racism. It states that inhabitants of the Netherlands should be free from discrimination on the grounds of race. Does that also mean that all races residing in the Netherlands should be treated equally in equal cases? Here, race seems to be quite different from its neighbouring categories. Article 1 is intently and carefully formulated to include valued group differences within civil society, while at the same time expunging discrimination on their grounds. That strategy becomes highly unstable when confronted with race. What if race doesn’t exist? Indeed, the idea that race does not constitute a biological-somatic difference between people and has no basis in the scientific state-of-the-art was a major constituent of post-war discourse on race and racism (M’Charek 2013). How then should Article 1 be understood? Does it intend to include or exclude racial differences? What does the new constitution seek to recognise: the emergence of a multiracial nation or the moral ideal of a non-racialised one? What kind of problem is racism: the unjustified discrimination on racial grounds or the discrimination on the unjustified grounds of racism? The constitution of 1983 not only placed equality and non-discrimination at the forefront of what it could mean to be Dutch, but at once laid bare the ambiguity and instability of concerns over race. Racial discrimination was resolutely rejected, but it was not at all clear what that rejection entailed. By equating racial difference to others kinds of differences, it becomes unclear what the new constitution does and does not seek to include into civil society. What kind of difference is racial difference?

An ambivalent outsider
With the advent of the Centrumpartij (CP) it seemed that a fixed point on the horizon could be assumed: this must be racism. The anti-immigrant rhetoric, alarmism over ethnic and racial mixing, and self-proclaimed role as protectors of a native and besieged population surely qualified this newly formed political party as proof of home-grown, reactionary racism rearing its nasty head in Dutch politics. To this day, the Centrumpartij is frequently used as a clear cut example of racist
politics in many discourses and thus provides interlocutors with a more or less firm grasp of what can and cannot be tolerated as part of Dutch society. Yet, the example of the Centrumpartij also allows us to see how the avoidance of racism was to solidify race as one very specific kind of difference making distinct from others.

The presumption of racism becomes a point of contention in a heated radio-interview in November 1983, shortly after the Centrumpartij managed to obtain a seat in parliament. The occupant of that seat, party leader Hans Janmaat, had managed in the preceding years to assemble and organise a variety already existing anti-immigrant and nationalist movements and actors into a party that would be able to mobilise an often radicalised and marginal base while at the same time being able to attract new constituents responsive to a moral unmasking of the established political parties. A key to Janmaat’s success was his ability to craft a political message that was both shocking enough to draw attention and civilised enough not to repel the media and broader publics entirely (Brants & Hogendoorn 1983).

After already obtaining seats in municipal elections, national parliamentary success for the Centrumpartij was almost always presented as definite proof for emerging racism among the population, particularly among ‘common people’ in working class neighbourhoods. Wanting to address the rising tide of racism head on, Hans Janmaat was invited to an interview in the VPRO-radio program *De blanke top der duinen*, – satirically named after a strophe of a sentimental, patriotic song – that dealt with issue of xenophobia. Other party leaders were also invited, but declined to debate Janmaat, demonstrating their repulsion of his party and honouring an agreement not to engage with the Centrumpartij. The interview quickly centres on the accusation of racism when the interviewers bring up a book written by a prominent member of the CP, Wim Bruyn, containing justifications of *apartheid*:

Interviewer: That’s racism right, this kind of talk, pure racism [referring to the book]

Janmaat: what’s purely racist about it? That has nothing to do with race, sir, you should know what you’re talking about.

[…]

Interviewer: …but now answer the question, is this racism or is it not, what it says here [referring to the book], racial mixing leads to mental disorders and criminality, respond to that…

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Janmaat: We are dealing, well, we’re dealing with people from totally different upbringings. That isn’t related so much to race, although one could maybe maintain that people who are born in Africa or wherever in the world have a different physical appearance \[uiterlijke kenmerken\] from us, but it’s not about physical appearance \[uiterlijke kenmerken\], the point is that people who have totally divergent ways of living \[leefgewoonten\] come to our country, having been prompted to do so, in fact, by the big political parties in our country, because it would be so beneficial for them here in the Netherlands, and what’s the result? Both the Nederlanders whom the Centrumpartij represents in the first place, as well as various members, large amounts of those minorities, whom many others, small leftist parties in particular represent…

Interviewer: Well, it’s very irritating but you are avoiding the question again, mister Janmaat, because that mister Bruijn is the number three of your party…

Janmaat: No, I think, mister Van Wezel [one of the interviewers], that you can’t stand the fact that I’m formulating a very good response…

Interviewer: No, it’s not a good response at all, because you’re not responding to our question…

Janmaat [continuing on]: …so, those differences in culture lead to tensions…

Interviewer: But do they lead to criminality and do they lead to mental disorder?

Janmaat: well, well, that’s possible when someone from a totally different part of the world resides in the Netherlands for a long time and is unable to live out his own life rhythm \[leefritme\], someone like that is brought off balance, and you’ve seen, for instance, that naturalised man from Turkey, that he was so out of balance that he didn’t even want to fit in anymore, that he starts rejecting this society. […] That is a blunder of the Dutch government, of the big parties, making those people believe that the Netherlands is an ideal country for them. That is cowardice. And you cannot sweep away those cultural differences, the big political parties can’t do that and mister Van Wezel [one of the interviewers] can’t do that… (VPRO-radio broadcast of interview with Hans Janmaat 1983) (#24)

Quite aware of the consequences of being framed as a racist party, Hans Janmaat carefully and explicitly distances the CP from a racist position. The threat of immigration does not stem from anything having to do with somatic difference, thus it has nothing to do with race. The problem is a cultural one, having to do with divergent ways of living and ill-fitting life rhythms. It’s not just the natives who are victimised, but also the immigrant who loses his balance, getting in all kinds of trouble and burdening society. The actual culprits in Janmaat’s narrative are the ‘big political parties’. So, even though the Centrumpartij is given the role of racist outsider – providing a fixed, outsider position to move away from – the position of the CP turns out to be far more mundane. That is, Janmaat’s narrative addresses matters – cultural differences – that he carefully distinguishes from racial ones. Janmaat’s discourse hardly enacts the position of a radical outsider. In fact, it draws the same principle boundary between race – the inescapable, physical constitution of one’s being – and culture – the recurring pattern and balance of a way of life –
that organises almost all discourses on diversity emerging at that time (Tinnemans 1994).

What both Janmaat and his interviewers leave unmentioned is the proximity of Janmaat’s critique to the reasoning of government and the ‘big political parties’ at the time. Precisely like Janmaat’s CP, Dutch government assumed that a concerted effort would be needed to integrate groups of culturally divergent residents into mainstream society (Tinnemans 1994: 205-206; Duyvendak et al. 2009). Government’s management of this process seeks to compensate for a lack of integration and was explicitly justified by pointing out the dangers of sustained segregation and ethnic polarisation. With the advent of the minorities policy framework government had taken onto itself to address precisely what Janmaat is problematising: the inability of newcomers deemed culturally divergent to find their place in Dutch society without creating social and moral disorder. Janmaat is far from occupying an outsider position in this sense. Both the policy discourses that emerged in response to the ground-breaking report Ethnische Minderheden (WRR 1979) and the positions of the main political parties in this period are concerned with the cultural alterity of newcomers and the extent to which culturally divergent groups will remain segregated and subordinated if government does not act responsibly. The goal of such governmental efforts was the integration of ethnically identified target groups whose supposed cultural alterity necessitated government action.

What sets Janmaat apart, however, is not so much the priority given to the native population as it is assumed to provide a normal life rhythm to which newcomers ought to adapt – a priority which has been firmly, although at times implicitly part of the discourses of the main political parties (Rath 1992; Fermin 1997; Vink 2007; Schinkel 2007) –, but the legitimacy of the endeavour as such. The burdening presence of culturally divergent communities is deemed illegitimate in and of itself. Whether the cultural divergences can or cannot be surpassed, is – in Janmaat’s narrative – already the wrong question. Whether we could or could not live together already assumes that we should and will make the effort. What justifies the burdens and efforts of integration to begin with? Not surprisingly, the Centrumpartij and other critics of the emerging policy framework (see SP 1983) promoted remigration, undoing a burden that was illegitimately put onto the shoulders of the native population. The Centrumpartij became known for its catch phrase – ‘full is full’ – implying that too many immigrants were occupying social and moral space and thus ought to be removed.

So beyond the antagonisms between the political mainstream and emerging anti-immigrant voices, we might also take note of the way in which someone like
Janmaat purposefully enact a post-racist position. That is, he takes great care in demonstrating that his concern is not with racial-somatic difference but with cultural maladaptation. The race/culture distinction thereby becomes immensely important as it allows interlocutors to address race by demonstrating that they know how to avoid it, how to ignore it.

Curiously, with the increasing salience of the race/culture distinction and the focus on cultural difference that it entails, race becomes the more superficial term. Race becomes mere physical appearance, whereas culture becomes the very fabric and balance that defines and distinguishes ways of life. Race is superfluous, while culture determines outcomes. It is precisely because culture acquires this new significance and causal weight that public discussions over cultural others become worthwhile. Far from a simple shift from race to culture, as if culturalist discourses about maladaptation of ethnic others are merely racisms by other, politically sanitised means, race and racism continue to play crucial roles. It is precisely by demonstrating that one isn’t talking about something so insignificant as mere race that talk of culture acquires significance and a responsible division between intolerable racism and concerns about ethnocultural maladaptation can begin to take shape.

**We are/aren’t racist**
The discussions over racism in the 1980’s are haunted by a troubling question: are we equipped to recognise our racism? The ‘we’ of this question may shift from time to time, but it mostly refers to the self-consciously native, white *Nederlander* who has become convinced that only a post-racist society lives up to the ideals through which the Dutch have come to recognise their role on the global stage. Thus, concerns over racism are built from the ground up: in everyday life there is still racism, which our ideals and declared commitments cannot tolerate. If ‘we’ are to be who ‘we’ really are, the residual racism occurring in spite of our convictions should be eliminated.

Debates taking off in response to various racial issues – violent clashes between natives and immigrants in the *Afrikaanderwijk* of Rotterdam, the rise of the anti-immigrant *Centrumpartij*, new religious and ethnic organising, the killing of Kerwin Duinmeyer – are not about whether racism is wrong. On this point, there is almost complete agreement. Even the *Centrumpartij* declared that it sought to eradicate racism from Dutch society. The contention does not take place between avowed racialists and avowed anti-racist. Even with the rise of the *Centrumpartij* explicit claims for a white Netherlands in opposition to diversity remained a
marginal position (Van Donselaar 1991; Van Ginkel 1999). Time and again, concerns deal with the misrecognition of racism.

Anet Bleich devotes her opening essay in *Nederlands racisme* (1984), a collection of essays discussing the rise of racism in the Dutch public sphere, to the question how to actually define racism. She starts her essay recanting a conversation with a police officer. The difficulty of effectively recognising and naming racism is the immediate problem:

The police officer in the preceding anecdote is certainly not what one might generally envision a racist to be. He isn’t even a racist at all. He merely stands for a way of life – in the Netherlands, 1984 – in which racism is nothing extraordinary, not *a priori* shocking, not something most Dutch citizens lay awake in bed about. (Bleich 1984: 9-10) (#25)

Dutch racism in 1984 often proceeds without being recognised, unproblematically and seemingly innocently. What would be the consequence of identifying racism in the police officer’s actions?

Those who dare to question the full proof separation between police work and racist convictions will be confronted with the question if they are in favour of a professional ban. (Bleich 1984: 10-11) (#26)

The consequence would be banning the racist. Recognising and naming racism thus involves far-reaching consequences: a racist cannot be tolerated. Consequently, one will need to be quite sure about one’s claims when it comes to racism. In this light, anti-racism develops into a particular kind of critique. Anti-racism cannot only be the engaged and combative condemnation of racists and their racism. Anti-racism must, first and foremost, address the problem of misrecognition. It must give an account of how to enforce the boundary between the civil and the racist.

In her *Alledaags racisme* (1984) – the basis for her dissertation *Understanding Everyday Racism* (1991) – Philomena Essed engages this problem when she writes:

A sensible discussion of the problem of racism is therefore only possible on the basis of the recognition that society as a whole is racist in character. The Netherlands is a racist society. This means that racism is not an attribute of a particular kind of individuals, for instance those sensitive to authority, or any particular group, for instance people in working class neighbourhoods. (Essed 1984: 17) (#27)

Essed proposes to completely turn the tables on the problem of misrecognition. The problem is not to recognise where and when racism still occurs – in working class neighbourhoods – but to recognise how a post-racist norm cloaks society’s saturation with racism. Social relations are always already racially constituted and
thereby need not be recognised as such. The tension between the problem and the solution – how to ban racism from society / society is racist itself – is apparent to Essed, who continues:

The assertion that most Dutch people are racist will perhaps evoke indignation in white people. Who enjoys being called a racist! […] Racism is deeply rooted in society. The notion of superiority has been so self-evidently inscribed into the socialisation of white people, in up-bringing, education, media, politics, labour relations, in short the entire organisation and functioning of society, that many white people are not able to recognise the racism in their own feelings, attitudes and behaviour towards black people. (Essed 1984: 17) (#28)

Whereas much of the debate seeks to understand where and to what extent racism still occurs – in working class neighbourhoods, out of fear of strangers, instigated by despicable political movements, born out of ignorance and uncertainty –, Essed raises a number of questions that fly in the face of the idea that racism is a residual, localisable problem. In fact, racism is not to be localised at all. Racism is not hiding in disadvantaged pockets of big cities, but is spread out over ‘the entire organisation and functioning of society’. Racism is hiding in plain sight. That, according to Essed, explains why racism is so hard to recognise.

As in the case of the Centrumpartij, Essed’s anti-racism does not provide a stable counterpoint around which a post-racist imaginary might be envisioned. In fact, Essed’s position is directly at odds with the very ideal of post-racism. Her indictment of Dutch society, redefinition of the problem and analysis of everyday racism do not open up a definite repertoire for the enactment of a post-racist politics. Nowhere does this become more clear than in the Vermoorde Onschuld (Murdered Innocence) by sociologist and public commentator Herman Vuijsje (see also Prins 2004). In Vuijsje’s assessment, anti-racist positionings perpetuate a societal taboo on, what he calls, ethnic difference. The issue of racism cannot be dealt with in an easy-going, relaxed way because it immediately evokes guilt, punishment, apology and self-flagellation:

Essed scrutinised everyday manners of the Dutch, in conversation with black women, and ascertained that the Netherlands is infected by the racism-germ to the bone. This is the result of three hundred years of colonialism and white superiority. All white Dutch carry their part of a kind of collective, inherited guilt. Because they are Dutch.

Preachers of guilt & punishments like Essed are certainly not black by definition. Like most pressure groups on the minority scene they are a coalition of ‘black’ and ‘white’ participants. The latter see it as their duty to profess their inherited guilt, do penance, and in that way hope to be granted absolution. Just a little guilt is not enough; one has to continuously flagellate oneself over one’s depravity. (Vuijsje 1986: 29-30) (#29)
Anti-racists are not only given the role of morally dominating preachers, enforcing an orthodox boundary between good and evil, but also make it impossible to speak uninhibitedly about the fears and apprehensions that natives might have towards ethnic others. Through the attribution of guilt, anti-racists perpetuate what they pretend to fight against: the constant awareness of a moral difference between guilty Dutch and victimised other. Vuijsje’s analysis is intentionally psychological – highlighting emotions – and provocative – using precisely the kind of language that according to his analysis is taboo. The importance of emotions is related to Vuijsje use of Eliasian sociology as a counterinterpretation of native discrimination of newcomers:

**Discrimination** is the divergent treatment of persons on the basis of assumed group characteristics – can be connected to racism, but it can also have more ‘mundane’ causes. In his classic study The established and the outsiders (1965) the sociologist Norbert Elias has shown this for a British village, where industrialisation drew in newcomers who were as white and British as the established residents. The latter tried to defend their superiority, their status and their way of life against the invasion of newcomers.

The weapons used were the same as those used today in the ‘old neighbourhoods’ against darkly coloured strangers: humiliating gossip, stigmatisation of the entire group on the basis of observation of the ‘worst’ members, use of denigrating code words, and exclusion from sources of power. Most of what the established said about the newcomers was false, but nobody was in the position to correct these images. This is why intimate contact between both groups did not take place for a long time. Both groups didn’t know what was happening to them, concluded Elias, and the developments were certainly not attributable to one of either party. (Vuijsje 1986: 25) (#30)

In Vuijsje’s approach, looking for a guilty party will only reinforce the emotional dead lock that is keeping people from actually learning more about each other. The attribution of racism leads to more, not less, inhibitions about crossing the lines of difference. In order to break down such inhibitions Vuijsje not only proposes, but deliberately enacts a provocative stance. Expressing views and feelings about the other should be less restrained, more informal, less cautious, and more imperfect. Vuijsje’s book begins by stating:

In the Netherlands, the road to the ethnic is paved with formal ceremony. A powerful taboo governs our actions towards ethnic others, in public at least. The force and extent of this taboo can, according to the dominant, Dutch morality, hardly ever be large enough.

Does this ideal bring a well-functioning, multicultural society any closer? In this book I wonder whether that is the case. The inhibition that seizes us in relating to the ethnic also brings risks. It can even lead to what we are trying to avoid. (Vuijsje 1986: 7) (#31)

Anti-racism is problematic as it demands a particular way of speaking about the relations between natives and newcomers, namely one that reinforces rather than breaks down the inhibitions that keep groups apart. In this way, anti-racism
becomes a more vehement, more judgmental instance of the already established taboo on public racism permeating Dutch society. According to Vuijsje, the Dutch have lost an innocent, uninhibited attitude towards others – shamed by the large amounts of Jews that were deported during the German occupation – and anti-racism can only reinforce such collective feelings of guilt.

**Enacting a post-racist consensus**

As issues of difference and citizenship begin to take centre stage in defining and arguing about Dutchness in public, we have seen how anxious the enactment of a post-racist imaginary turned out to be. Even though the discussions over rising racism and the dangers of segregation constantly call forth a national people – namely a people who agree that racism is entirely uncivil and outside of what it means to be Dutch – it turns out this national consensus cannot easily and unproblematically be performed on the public stage. Although Dutchness has become a problem of public imagination and awareness, it seems rather complicated to establish how Dutchness ought to be imagined precisely because it is deemed clear by almost everyone involved, save those who seek to address racism as a socio-structural problem, that Dutchness is the very opposite of racism. Therefore, Dutchness does not appear to be what it ought to be and the notion of an identity crisis – who do we think we are? – is perpetuated.

It is in this context that the distinction between race and culture becomes crucial. Only by constantly mobilising this distinction can interlocutors hope to place themselves on the right side of the symbolic boundary that separates still existing racism from concerns over ethnic tensions between ‘culturally different groups’. In fact, culture becomes the more fundamental category, whereas race recedes into a background of ‘mere appearance’. As such, cultural difference poses a far greater challenge to societal order than the appearances of non-white co-patriots. What matters are the differences in ways of living and the burdens that follow from cultural mixing. Party political challenges to the governmental status quo, like those of the DS’70, CP and SP, focus on the questions of burden and effort. Who should carry the burden of cultural diversity? Who can be called upon to make an effort?

Discussions over race and racism thereby project the public problem of national identity in two related ways. First, peculiarities of native culture are understood as causes for anxiety about the post-racist ideal: the Dutch have cultivated a taboo on ethnic difference and have become embarrassed to maintain and express their national core ethos, an uninhibited and burgherly civility. In this
view, the Dutch are said to feel inhibited and constrained vis-à-vis the other (Prins 2004). Public debate and political contention thereby have become loci in which problematic aspects of Dutch culture are made visible. Second, the imagination of a post-racist Dutchness risks covering up the fact that racism still happens and is still a part of Dutch society. Here, racism becomes the unjustified discrimination on the basis of ‘mere appearance’ and ought to be rejected. The idea that Dutchness does not or ought not to include racism remains firmly intact. Between taboo and discrimination, the ideal of a post-racist Dutchness is reiterated.

Essed’s anti-racism strikes at the heart of this configuration. Yet, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, the ensuing debates over national identity would not entertain an anti-racist analysis of how and why questions of race destabilised images of Dutch exceptionalism to any significant extent. Such a questioning of what race and racism may actually be, was increasingly abandoned. In its place came a discussion that ostentatiously did not focus on ‘mere race’, but rather on the far more weighty issue of what could reasonably be considered outstanding about Dutchness and could therefore be treated as national ideals over and above difference.
In the previous chapter, we have seen how Dutchness as a public problem was constituted by a rather anxious and unresolved confrontation with questions of race and racism. While these debates firmly placed a post-racist notion of Dutchness beyond any doubt, this also meant that such debates left little to no room for considering what it might actually take to work through the legacy of, confusion about, and contemporary significance of race and racism. In short, the question whether Dutchness could, would or should be post-race could hardly be expressed, let alone extensively considered as the answer would always already be yes. So while race and racism had played crucial roles in mobilising and forging Dutchness as a public issue, the ensuing debates were to pose the question of what could safely and affirmatively be deemed Dutch in public and this question was to be worked out and posed in relation to often ostentatiously non-somatic differences. This chapter deals with the kinds of debates that emerged out of this evasive movement. It shows that such evasion is not merely negative and concealing. That is, evasion is never merely avoidance of something but also very productive of new discursive repertoires that begin to play their own role in citizenship politics. So while it is true that there is a considerable silencing of race and racism, this silence is never actually void but filled with words and arguments that never merely serve to talk over an uncomfortable silence and begin to constitute the public problem of Dutchness in new ways.

This chapter deals with the emergence of a specific kind of national imaginary. The diminishing self-evidence of a white/European nation demarcated by some kind of national character is layered with new concerns and engagements. Within a nexus of concerns about Dutch nationhood, immigrant integration, conceptions of citizenship, and European unification the issue of Dutchness acquires new possibilities. Most notably, the public dissensus over Dutchness itself becomes highly significant. The enactment of dissensus will begin to play an increasingly constitutive role for how the issue of Dutchness is sustained. Public contention over Dutchness becomes public enactment of Dutchness. This reflexive tendency, in a nutshell, is what is meant by dialogical Dutchness.
Dialogical Dutchness: a national mythology of public expressiveness

In order to see how the image of citizens speaking out and disagreeing publicly became central to public typifications of Dutchness in the early 1990’s we need to reconstruct a web of notions about speech, liberty, citizenship and modernity. Dialogical Dutchness finds its imaginative inspiration in a narrative about the Dutch that foregrounds their aptitude for debate and their commitment to dialogue. In the most general terms, I will reconstruct how images of equal and informal social relations and an openness and appreciation of difference became nationally salient. This history of salient notions will focus on the period after WOII. To some extent I will refer to social developments in that same period. However, the crux of the reconstruction is not an adequate historical or sociological account of ‘Dutch society’, but a well-rounded excursion of notions about post-war Dutchness as they came to form what I will call dialogical Dutchness.8

There is no reason to assume that a public imaginary like dialogical Dutchness has a definite core. Part of its success is probably its rather rhizomatic structure. One can begin enacting its rhetoric at one of its many extensions, thereby immediately evoking a host of other threads that are bound up with it. If one begins to speak of individualism, one can quite easily slide over into a large variety of other directions that become available. One may go on to talk about a resistance to religious orthodoxy, or rather speak about a certain rudeness in Dutch society, or go another direction altogether by mythologizing the civic freedoms of the Dutch Republic. This shows that it would be a mistake to assume logical order where there is associative resemblance, to assume definitions where there are imaginations. By describing a number of the threads that have come to make up a discourse about the Dutch disposition for dialogue one isn’t logically and exhaustively unpacking a coherent ideology of a collectivity. Rather, one starts at one end of a tapestry and traverses it along some of its knots, hoping to get an adequate sense of its associative tendencies. In principle, any point of entry will do.

We are not nationalistic

Let’s start at what may be an unlikely point of entry: nationalism. Unlikely because nationalism figures as a rather ambiguous element. In the context of dialogical Dutchness, nationalism is often the very opposite of what is deemed typically Dutch. Nationalism, here, entails that one doesn’t speak for oneself, but let’s one’s ideas and commitments be prescribed by a script that is not one’s own. It was already important in discourses on Dutchness before WOII (Van Ginkel 1999) as it

8 Of course, there is a lot more to say about Dutchness in the post-war period. The focus here is on the emergence and political salience of this particular imaginary.
informed an emotional sobriety and civilised composure that contrasted well with the overly romantic nationalism deemed typical of other European nations. A disdain for overly emphatic nationalism set the Dutch apart (Beller & Leerssen 2007; Kloek 1993; Van Ginkel 1999; Lechner 2007). It builds on already established notions of burgherlyness and pragmatism, prescribing a well-reasoned control over one’s feverous emotions. The significance of this trope has to be placed in relation to the German occupation, the unresolved role of Dutch government during that occupation and the new, Atlantic orientation in which post-war governments positioned the liberated kingdom. A nationally distinctive anti-nationalism corresponds to Leerssen’s analysis of a Europe-wide topology of national affect ascriptions. The idea that the Dutch exercise an anti-nationalist restraint is first and foremost related to the north-cold / south-hot distinction, so prevalent in the nationalist imagery of Europe (Leerssen 2006). The narrative of not-so-very nationalist Dutch puts the Dutch on the right side of history vis-à-vis Teutonic aggression, namely on the side of the noble victims. It also pointed to a new role on the world stage for the now shrunken empire, having lost its main colonial possessions in the East in 1946. The disdain for nationalist fervour qualified the ‘small country’ for an intermediary role between the great powers of the post-war order. Central concerns of anti-nationalism, then, are the avoidance of violence and pacification of destructive, irrational emotions.

The importance of anti-nationalism, particularly after WOII, should not be construed as the absence or rejection of nation building and national imagery in public or political life. Quite the opposite. As Van Ginkel (1999) shows, the period directly after the German occupation was marked by extensive mobilisation around explicit ideas of a unified, civilised and proud Volk. As had already been described in the previous chapter, a characterological discourse only lost its self-evidence in the course of the 1970’s. The political talk about one nation came especially from a series of attempts at headlong breakthroughs of the pillarised, corporatist state. Several, newly formed parties sought to round up a national majority as the parliamentary system was reconstituted (Van Ginkel 1999: 178). These movements, both of a social-democratic and more popular-conservative kind, sought to overcome the crippling, ideological divisions that they blamed for the inertia of Dutch governance. However, they did not succeed in usurping the corporatist arrangement of politics. The history of failed break-through attempts can be followed up to this day, with pragmatic-centrist (D’66, DS’70, the purple coalitions of the 1990’s) and popular-conservative (Boer Koekoek, LPF, TON, PVV) inclinations both seeking to do away with the stale demarcations of established politics.
In the context of civil society, nation building took the form of civilising offenses directed at ‘asocial working classes’ and ‘amoral youths’ (Derksen & Verplanke 1987). A healthy patriotism and sense of national belonging would provide those lacking civilised manners and disposition with the moral compass to better themselves and society as a whole (Van Ginkel 2004; De Regt 1984). The notion of anti-nationalism did not directly conflict with these movements and projects. Rather, disdain for nationalism-as-fervour became an effective enactment of the integrity and moral worthiness of the Dutch, thereby strengthening efforts of nation building. The post-war developments in the Netherlands show that anti-nationalism can provide an effective and practical narration of national difference.

The importance of anti-nationalism became even more pronounced as pillarised moral communities began to give way to a liberal moral majority (Kennedy 1995; Duyvendak 2004; Vuijsje & Wouters 1999). Resistance to traditional morality and clerical authorities gained increasing public legitimacy as large groups left the churches (Van Rooden 1996) and the economic and educational expansion created unprecedented possibilities for the post-war generations (Schuyt & Taverne 2000). The culture and politics of the United States provided a crucial point of reflection. In view of the US, the Dutch acquired specific contours: not as dynamic, not as aggressive, and not as nationalistic. The moral superiority of an emancipated people was strikingly articulated by a term such as ‘guiding country’ (gidsland), expressing the notion that the Dutch were frontrunners in a global transition into a post-traditional era (Kennedy 1995). Sociologists, both in and outside the Netherlands, were prominent narrators of this transitional story as they sought to shine their academic lights into the future (cf. Van Doorn & Lammers 1968; Zijderveld 1971). The Netherlands was deemed fit for the role as global guide, because it took on pragmatic, peaceful and reasonable positions in international relations, in contrast to the bellicose US and USSR. Moreover, succeeding governments enacted distinctly post-traditional policies concerning issues of sex, death, and drugs. To be sure, these policies were not the gains of progressivist dominance, but rather the outcome of the specific way in which the welfare state was built up, namely by pragmatically accommodating the concerns and grievances of different constituencies. Indeed, those on the left celebrated these changes as ‘progress’ but thereby obfuscated that most of these policy changes were introduced as pragmatic ways to curtail and halt precisely the ‘progress’ that self-consciously progressive publics projected to be an inevitable future (see for instance Mellink 2014).

With depillarisation, anti-nationalist postures not only gained legitimacy but became entangled with expressions of moral superiority. Resisting traditional
authority, including the small-mindedness of a once Christian nation, meant that one was more free, more emancipated, more autonomous, more competent, more contemporary, and – in a sense – more true to how the world really was (Dudink 2011; Aerts 2011). The new politics of enjoyment and self-creation that took hold in the Netherlands as it did elsewhere (Van Rooden 2004) thereby also informed a specific notion of national particularity. Repressive, religious morality – particularly with regards to bodily expression and enjoyment – became the other of a post-traditional and liberalised image of Dutchness. The autonomous individual at the heart of this narrative would no longer feel compelled to censor their expressions and stay quiet about societal taboo’s (Verkaaik 2010).

**Emancipation for all, paternalism for some**

Of crucial importance in the advent of an idealised individualism has been shifting politics of emancipation concerned with uncivilised populations and gendered divisions of labour. Since the postwar construction of the Dutch welfare state communal efforts to emancipate not-yet-civilised populations have been increasingly taken over by state institutions (De Regt 1984; De Swaan 1989; De Haan & Duyvendak 2002). Yet, the logic of such ‘civilising offences’ has persisted: organisations and their agents set out to ameliorate the moral dispositions of specific groups – perceived to be uncivil and backward – through assistance, instruction and social control. A considerable part of such offenses were directed at child rearing, cooking, household maintenance, personal hygiene and moral instruction (Van Otterloo 1990; De Regt 1984; Van Rijswijk-Clerkx 1981). Within a strong gender division of labour that reserves the home under the supervision of the mother a large part of emancipatory efforts were directed at women and their maternal responsibilities (Van den Berg & Duyvendak 2012). Such civilising practices have, for a long time already, been understood in terms of emancipation as they were aimed at the inclusion of uncivilised groups into civil society. Emancipation was conceived to be the elevation of excluded and backward groups into civil society through benevolent assistance and discipline.

A remarkable shift in the politics of emancipation did take place from the 1960’s onwards. Progressive elites were successful in gaining entry to and control over the state institutions that effected social welfare policies. Such elites devised new ideas and ideals about the methods and ends of emancipatory policies. Against notions of ‘elevation’, ‘instruction’ and ‘guidance’ from above by representatives of public and clerical authority, a process of autonomous and self-guided empowerment was proposed (Tonkens 1999). In the former perspective, group-wise entry into civil society through the demonstration of civil conduct and
communal social control provided the basic stepping stones for emancipatory efforts. From the perspective of self-proclaimed advocates of post-traditional emancipation such efforts were endemically paternalist. A broad rejection of state paternalism emerged, resisting governmental constriction of citizens’ lives in a variety of forms.

The shift towards an individualistic and autonomous conception of emancipation and effective social citizenship has been, however, highly unstable. The attempt to empower citizens through government policy has had to cope with internal contradictions that haven’t been easily resolved. First of all, social welfare policies have been justified as attempts to extend citizenship from juridical, political and socio-economic dimensions towards those of well-being, autonomy, self-creation and -expression. But such policy efforts were still enacted by state institutions that took over such responsibilities from paternalist civil society organisations. It was already in the 1970’s that critical commentators within the liberal-progressive establishment began chastising the ‘empowerment of citizens’ as just another instance of Weber’s iron cage, partly inspired by the work Foucault, Illich and the anti-psychiatry movement (see Achterhuis 1981, also see Hilhorst & Van der Lans 2013 for contemporary version of this discourse). Second, the mid-1990’s saw a reappraisal of interventionist practices in the form of ‘unsolicited intervention’, ‘outreach programs’, and ‘prevention’. This reappraisal did not contradict the still widely expounded ideals of anti-paternalism, because interventionist policies were explicitly directed at specific populations, which in different ways were deemed incapable of autonomous self-development and therefore outside the purview of the post-paternalist relations between state and citizen. These marginalised populations included denizens of different kinds: most notably groups called ‘woonwagenbewoners’ and ‘zigeuners’, the newly defined ‘ethnic minorities’, long-term unemployed, and inhabitants of disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Rath 1991; Schinkel & Van den Berg 2011; Van Houdt 2014). In many ways, the politics of government-led emancipation has thereby come full circle: (1) from the group-wise inclusion of not-yet-civilised populations into civil society through the civilising work of various ideological and denominational communities, (2) to government-led institutions aimed at emancipating citizens, (3) towards an attempt at democratisation and empowerment of citizens, headed by a vocal and self-consciously post-traditional vanguard, (4) to the targeting of not-yet-emancipated populations by a now anti-paternalist policy establishment that seeks to equip citizens for the demands of non-interventionist government. Thereby, the paradox of paternalism is both institutional and ideological: paternalism is good for those who are not yet equipped to live without it. It is a good and a bad all at once.
See me, hear me
The idealised, emancipated individual would be seen and heard. The best way to deal with contentious issues in society was to explicitly address them. The often used phrase in this respect – ‘zaken bespreekbaar maken’ – literally means to ‘make matters utter-able/negotiable’. The passage from repressed expression to visible and audible autonomy became the basic scenario through which secularisation and modernisation of society were conceived (Verkaaik 2009; Bjornson 2012; Van den Berg & Van Reekum forthcoming). This scenario builds on a particular structure of time: whenever there are enactments of explicit talk, open dialogue, and frank debate time moves towards a more fully modern future as open speech breaks the bonds of social restrictions and internalised shame (Butler 2008). As progressives and conservatives take their positions in this post-war vision of societal development, they tend to agree that people are becoming more individualistic and less restrained by groups and collectivist morality. Their quarrel is not about the direction of change, but about the worthiness of individual autonomy. Conservatives call themselves such because they, like their opponents, hold that society is becoming less traditional and more flexible. The sometimes heated debates over increasing informality in society – rudeness and fleeting sociality (Van Stokkom 2010) – thereby continuously affirm that Dutch society was, in fact, an exemplar of post-traditional development. To this day, politicians of all colours tend to agree, unbothered by evidence to the contrary (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp 2004) that Dutch society is highly individualised.

No less important were the shifting citizenship discourses for the idealisation of individual autonomy. As previously discussed in chapter 3, narrations of citizenship came to revolve around the question of active participation and sustained engagement by citizens in the workings of the state. De Haan (1992) shows that the shift towards public deliberation suffers from a recurring ambiguity: political leaders claiming to give power back to citizens can, in their turn, be unmasked as careerists and technocrats by a new wave of hopefuls who brand themselves as the true, long-awaited republicans. What is important in this context, however, is the fact that political rhetoric is increasingly concerned with civic voice, deliberation and participation. Parliamentary democracy is increasingly about what citizens demand and desire. With the rise of participatory narration of citizenship, public opinion speaks up to authorities and the point of such speech is to criticise and talk back to authorities (cf. Rosanvallon 2008). Demands, opinions, desires and grievances emanate from a public domain in which citizens are autonomous and free to make up their own minds. They shouldn’t be bothered by the moral and ideological convictions of elites or corporate bodies. Decisions by
those in government should *reflect* what can be heard among the public. Public critique becomes the mechanism through which representatives are held accountable. With this new kind of citizenship narrative came a populist notion of politics that foregrounds the popular embrace of policies and political visions, the popularity of public figures and public confrontation of ideals (De Beus 2000; Elchardus 2002). In practice, the relevant public may be limited to public commentators, civil society leaders and other judges of public contests, like writers, academics and comedians. But the shift in justification is what matters here. Judgements of worth begin to pivot towards notions of fame, and away from notions of sovereignty (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006 [1991]). Civic voice gains priority and public manifestation of critique and contention gain in significance (Corner & Pels 2003; Hajer 2009). A crucial resource for this study – opinion pages in Dutch newspapers – came into being as part of this very development.

**Tolerance as dialogue**

A final consequence of these developments is the contradictory significance of tolerance. Particularly after WOII, tolerance becomes an omnipresent adjective in typifications of Dutchness (Van Ginkel 1999; Schuyt 2009). Its role in prescribing national difference is, however, deeply unresolved. This is particularly true of its role in speaking about immigrant integration (Prins 2004; Schover 2010; Nalbantoglu 1990; Essed 1994; Essed & Nimako 2006; Ghorashi 2003). Here, tolerance means that moral-cultural difference may be bridged and accommodated through dialogue as participants gradually discover the meanings and viewpoints of the other. However, it almost invariably the case that such tolerance-as-dialogue is conceived to be something that the native Dutch does to and provides for the uninitiated newcomer (Van den Berg & Van Reekum *forthcoming*; Schiffauer et al. 2006).

Strikingly, as similar ambiguity is present in the political importance of tolerance. The tendency to endure deep moral oppositions and seek ways to work around them remains an often positively appraised aspect of Dutch political culture, yet the pillarised managerialism with which it is thereby associated is deemed ever more outdated. Here, the significance of tolerance is contradictory as it refers both to a pragmatic suspension of condemnation as well as the moral superiority of a liberalised, post-christian nation. The value of tolerance as dialogue is thereby rather ambivalent. One the one hand, the tendency to deliberate rather than condemn is understood to be a worthy part of political heritage, often canonised by the at once primordialistic and contemporaneous term *poldering* (Bos, Ebben & Te Velde 2007). On the other hand, deliberation and dialogue come
to designate the barrier to further democratisation of the liberal, post-christian nation as elites appear to negotiate among themselves and grant each other exceptions from the majoritarian rule of being liberal. With the entanglement of dialogical Dutchness, tolerance shifts from being primarily a valued aspect of a distinctly pragmatic political culture to being primarily a moral conviction of a distinctly liberal nation (Schuyt 2009). Tolerance in elite negotiations becomes suspect, while tolerance is simultaneously the designator of a national ethos.

Now that dialogical Dutchness has been charted, we can see how its particular imaginative possibilities emerged in the discussions over Dutchness in the 1980’s and early 90’s. A stream of publications emerged in this period concerned with Dutch identity. How was dialogical Dutchness implicated in these discourses?

**The imperative of debate**

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, Couwenberg’s pleas for renewed national awareness became part of struggles over race and racism. Discussions that succeeded his critiques began to shift towards other concerns. Three problems will be addressed in order to analyse what this shift amounted to: the contention over integration governance; more pronounced problematisations of Islamic faith; and further qualifications of what national awareness [*nationaal besef*] might actually be.

**A policy of failure**

Today, the failure of integration has become a pan-European issue, often framed in terms of a retrenchment of multiculturalism (Bertossi 2012; Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012), but in the case of Dutch integration politics ‘failure’ has been there all along. For at least thirty years, failing policies of immigrant integration form a well-established and recurring motif in the public and political contention over governmental efforts to integrate newcomers into the national fold. Diagnoses of failing policies imply two problems that make such critiques relevant for our purposes here: (1) failure is explained through certain, typically Dutch tendencies; (2) failure implies that the nation-state is not able to reproduce itself under conditions of intensified transnational flows, providing a reason for seeking to bolster nationhood.

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9 Parts of this paragraph were previously published in a co-authored article. See: Van Reekum, R. & J. W. Duyvendak (2012). Running from our shadows: the performative impact of policy diagnoses in Dutch debates on immigrant integration. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46, 445-466.
Government failure was, to start, the heading under which an explicit and concerted policy approach to integration was formulated between 1979 and 1983. What appeared to have failed in particular was the assimilation of Moluccans (Essed & Nimako 2006). A string of violent actions by radicalised Moluccan activists, calling for a sovereign Moluccan state, reached dramatic pitch in 1977 with the hijacking of several trains, an elementary school and, a year later, a municipal building (Smeets & Strijen 2006). These actions were resolved through military intervention, heightening both their impact on personal lives and the integrity of public order. The disturbance of that order and the threat of ethnic tensions had already been made visible when violence in Rotterdam’s Afrikaanderwijk and Schiedam were dealt with in terms of race riots (Van Donselaar 1991, Witte 2010). Concerns over public order and the future management of immigration galvanised in 1978, when social-democrat Molleman proposed to design a single, coherent policy approach to what were called ‘ethnic minorities’ (Molleman 2005; Tinnemans 1994; Scholten 2011). Failing integration and the threat of sustained segregation of ethnic groups, made visible through the disruptions of public order, was always already a central justification of government action.

The establishment of a minorities policy in 1983 made it possible to discuss further failings (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). The minorities approach focused on the emancipation of specific ethnicised target-groups. The rationale was to prevent a reinforcing dynamic of economic stagnation and ethnic division among an already tense population dealing with the fall-out of economic depression and restructuring of labour relations. The policy approach was constructed through a close-knit nexus of researchers, policy advisors, bureaucrats and politicians (Scholten 2011: 101-121; Uitermark 2012). Although, the infamous phrase ‘maintenance of identity’ [behoud van identiteit] was part of the political justification for integration programmes, the whole point of targeting specific categories of newcomers and other minorities, such as ‘woonwagenbewoners’ and ‘zigeuners’, was never to preserve, accommodate or celebrate cultural difference (Duyvendak et al. 2013). Targeting was meant to catalyse processes of socio-economic mobility and socio-cultural adaptation. The minorities policy was aimed at coordinated emancipation of marginal groups. The rationale of emancipation should thus be understood in the specificity of the Dutch context. It does not designate a contentious process of claiming rights by insurgent social movements and excluded groups (cf. McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2001; Alexander 2006), but state-led arrangements of assistance and control through which groups lacking civil competencies are to be embedded more firmly within civil society (Rath 1991).
The minorities policy is first and foremost an attempt at civilising specific target groups, equipping these groups for modern, autonomous living and managing the risks that a mix of migration and economic stagnation could pose to public order.

**Breaking down inhibitions**

Much like the interventions of Couwenberg, the failings of government policy were first of all related to concerns over race and racism. Both proponents and opponents of anti-racism criticised government policy for reinforcing, rather than relaxing the mutual inhibition between ‘white’ natives and ‘black’ newcomers. That is, integration would only be successful if natives and newcomers, white and black, would find words to express their anxieties towards each other.

In their opinionated reportage *Grote en kleine irritaties in de Amsterdamse Kinkerbuurt* (Large and small irritations in the Amsterdam Kinker quarter; February 15 1984, *De Groene Amsterdammer*), Anet Bleich and Rudi Boon reported on the interactions between natives and newcomers in Amsterdam’s Kinkerbuurt, one of the rundown neighbourhoods that were understood to be sites of resurgent racism. Bleich and Boon focus on the more or less pronounced racism of the white Dutch residents. In their narrative, the complexity of integration is attributed to both the maladjustment of the newcomers and the spiteful, often racist reactions of the white-native majority. Policy efforts to tackle the problem culminate in the spread of counter-productive and pedantic information, which front-line community workers internalise:

An unstoppable stream of factoids in print-work and photo-slides is let loose on them [the community workers] in which the foreigner is presented as either the prisoner of an apparently backward and stagnant culture, or an assistance seeker whom migration has turned into a total fool. When confronted with such a strange specimen of the human species, more than one doctor, social worker or lawyer loses confidence in his own professional competence to interact with people. (February 15 1984, *De Groene Amsterdammer*) (#32)

In this account, the attempts to deal with difference and to get beyond racism do not dampen, but instead strengthen the inhibitions of white community workers. The banalities of daily life are much too specific and complex to be dealt with through formulaic knowledge and bureaucratic policy measures. Because government policy doesn’t attend to the banal character of daily interaction, it is doomed to fail, leaving a chasm between natives and newcomers in its wake.

Although vastly different in intention and explicitly critical of Anet Bleich’s focus on native racism, Herman Vuijsje’s *Vermoorde onschuld* (1986)
follows the same motif. As was already discussed in the previous chapter, Vuijsje problematises the austerity of correct speech:

The argumentation and the style of the preachers of guilt and punishment are often reminiscent of radical feminism: the ‘oppressed’ can freely accuse the ‘oppressors’, all stereotypes and generalisations are allowed. When the opposite happens, it is discrimination and racism or sexism. (Vuijsje 1986: 33) (#33)

The victim mentality nurtured by anti-racist activists and those working in the welfare and minority policy ‘industry’ has adverse effects:

It was a relief to be at a meeting of an ethnic group where, for once, the main line was not: how pitiful are we and how bad are they, but rather: what can we do about it ourselves? (Vuijsje 1986: 34) (#34)

If the Dutch do not get over their inhibitions and stop shying away from openly talking about the everyday problems of difference, an easy-going, well-functioning multicultural society will remain out of reach. In this sense, Vuijsje’s book, published by a prominent publisher, was an explicit provocation of what Vuijsje called the ‘Dutch taboo on ethnic difference’.

The importance of provocation carries over into David Pinto’s June 1988 op-ed in the national daily *de Volkskrant* as he calls for a ‘completely new approach to the problem’. The government’s approach to minority integration has failed because it has over-accommodated and over-assisted minority communities. By helping, government has made them dependent on state paternalism.

The patronising has gone on for too long. The ethnic minorities have slowly been hugged to death. My suggestion is to just abolish the organisations that have been set up as categorical institutions and have been maintained for too long. (June 18 1988, *De Volkskrant*) (#35)

Like Bleich and Vuijsje, Pinto highlights the adverse effects of treating minorities like pitiful people, and not being able to speak uninhibitedly about the complexities of integration:

Why is it that even the slightest disapproval of a foreigner is seen as racism? Because people think that foreigners are pitiful and can’t take care of themselves! (June 18 1988, *De Volkskrant*) (#36)

Instead of the all-too-well-intentioned approach of the Dutch government, Pinto argues that immigrants should stand up for themselves and build their own futures:

This pitying of foreigners conceals the danger of a self-fulfilling prophecy. This attitude has existed for too long now. In the 90s we should no longer speak about minorities, but about immigrants.
Immigrants who can build their future themselves, who have to, want to and can stand up for themselves. (June 18 1988, De Volkskrant) (#37)

How does dialogical Dutchness play out here? First of all, government efforts to manage integration from above fail to take into account the complexities of everyday interactions. Uninhibited speech, in particular, is hampered. Open dialogue presents the passage towards integration. Yet, an overly managerial and paternalistic government restricts citizens in their daily efforts to face up to their differences. Impediments to dialogue will have to be broken down and citizens will have to be empowered. Vuijsje and Pinto not only advocate a more provocative and defiant attitude towards the paternalism of government, but in fact put that attitude into practice in their interventions (see also Prins 2004). They not only present inhibitions as the problem, but actively try to break them down through their public performances. They argue for a particular take on integration – self-reliance, outspokenness, autonomy – by enacting it in public.

A republican turn
Criticisms of the government’s minorities approach eventually lead to efforts within the policy nexus to transform it (Scholten 2011). Most importantly, it prompted the Scientific Council for Governmental Policy (WRR) to yet again publish a report on the integration of newcomers into Dutch society: *Allochtonenbeleid* (WRR 1989). In line with the notion of a failing policy, this report advocated a paradigmatic shift in dealing with *allochthones*, a term that was already frequently used but the report elevated to the status of policy category. While it responded to the kinds of criticisms presented above, the report also introduced new ideas about why integration policies had failed. With these ideas came new ideals and horizons.

The authors of *Allochtonenbeleid* – most notably Arie van der Zwan and Han Entzinger – developed a distinct notion of cultural recognition, which is central to the diagnosis of previous policies. Instead of actively accommodating the cultural identities and practices of newcomers, integration policies should side-line the specific backgrounds and communal memberships of allochthones. The term *allochthon* itself was supposed to enable the move away from ethnic group categories and towards the integration of individuals who happen to have non-native backgrounds. What is most important, according to the WRR-report, is individual success in terms of socio-economic and political participation. Cultural practice and ethnic membership is something that allochthones, and indeed all citizens, should sort out on their own. The government’s active encouragement to
form ethnically coherent communities is thus presented as the major flaw of the previous period.

Allochthones, who wish to, need to be able to maintain and develop their cultural identity: integration certainly doesn’t necessitate cultural assimilation. Even more than in realising institutional integration, this is the responsibility of the groups in question. The initiative to obtain certain facilities should come from these groups themselves. Government doesn’t have any other duties apart from breaching barriers that allochthonous groups encounter due to being allochthonous, thus enabling them to share in the cultural plurality in equal measure to the autochthones. (WRR 1989: 24) (#38)

There is a striking shift in concepts here. The WRR rejected the idea that newcomers should be supported to maintain their identities – the infamous maintenance of distinct identity [behoud van eigen identiteit] – in its own previous report on integration policy (WRR 1979; see also Vink 2007), a rejection that was carried over by government in 1983. It did so precisely because it was not up to government to dictate the contents and boundaries of ethnic identity. Government should not reify what was – in fact – fluid, plural and changing as this would only hamper integration. The 1979 report bears the imprint of an anthropological notion of group identity: it is constantly changing and cannot be prescribed in terms of a set of characteristics (Scholten 2011; Uitermark 2012). In the new report of 1989, the accommodation of supra-individual identities is also rejected, this time because citizens should be free to experience and change their identities on their own prerogative. The reasoning is not anthropological, but rather juridico-republican. The WRR thereby introduces a new logic for dealing with cultural identity and practice. As long as culture and ethnicity are treated as private matters and the government only needs to protect the negative liberty of citizens, there can be no misunderstanding about what is expected of allochthones and their equal position vis-à-vis autochthones.

There is no reason to place the ‘new’ allochthones, groups or members thereof, in a special position when dealing with their cultural and denominational identities and the creation and maintenance of the necessary, material conditions. (WRR 1989: 49) (#39)

If only government would treat everyone as citizens and leave their other identities alone, the right balance between responsibilities and rights will be maintained. What was already true for autochthones should also be true for allochthones: as far as government is concerned, only their civic, individual identities are relevant.

The failings of integration policies were no longer immediately related to concerns over race, racism and tensions between ethnically distinguished groups, but instead became associated with the remnants of pillarisation and
accommodative negotiations between differing constituencies. Failings became related to an all-too-paternalistic involvement of government in the private lives of citizens. The problem of attributing racism and the inhibitions associated with it moved to the background. Speaking out, however, remains vitally important as the antiquated arrangements of pillarisation could be struck down by speaking out against them. Enacting republican citizenship – as demonstrated already by Vuijsje and Pinto – meant not only that government should be publicly criticised, but also that government should guard the possibilities to do so.

**Staging public culture: from Rushdie and Rasoel to Bolkestein and Dales**

A crucial implication of the republican turn in integration policies, instigated from within the nexus of policy makers, researchers and political actors, was the emphasis on common, civic ground. The contradictions of the minorities approach – paternalism and inhibited speech – were to be transformed into a coherent, distinctly republican approach that would foreground the pejorative of citizens and their possibilities to speak out for themselves. What became all the more important was the common, civic space that would allow citizens, new and old, to come together on an equal footing. If a remedial approach – compensating economic and civil lags – should be abandoned, it became all the more significant to define the common starting point from which all citizens could take off on their own particular life courses. If the remnants of pillarisation were an obstacle to civic integration as they placed distinct communities under regimes of dependence and loyalty, successful integration would only be attainable if the public and the private lives of citizens could be distinguished. It is in this light that a number of public events provided the possibility of enacting public culture, of demonstrating what was or ought to be publicly shared among citizens. Far beyond the policy discourse circulating in the networks of integration governance, these events staged concrete and urgent conflicts as manifestations of a public culture in peril. At stake are not only concrete resolutions of public issues, but the broader question how a common, public culture is to be enacted and reproduced.

Of course, the global drama that acquired the name ‘Rushdie-affair’ cannot be adequately addressed here. I will merely point out a set of concerns coming out of the Dutch version of the affair as they solidified public and political attention to the problem of public speech. As Rene Gabriëls (2001) shows in his reconstruction of the Dutch affair, a couple of concerns were foregrounded.

First of all, there was the governmental management of protests and conflicts. Would government respond to claims by Muslim groups to ban the Rushdie’s novel? And would government prosecute those who had advocated the
use of violence against book sellers, publishers or called for the killing of Rushdie in public demonstrations? Banning the novel turns out to be impossible anyway. Blasphemy is only illegal in the Netherlands in relation to Allah, not Mohamed. There quickly emerged a consensus among politicians and interest groups – Mohammed Rabbâe’s NCB (Dutch Centre for Foreigners) in particular – that deliberation with those calling for Rushdie’s death in public is to be preferred over prosecution (Gabriëls 2001: 206).

The public side of the controversy, however, is rather more expressive. Beyond the relations between government, political parties, the justice department and interest groups, a much less practical discussion took place. Here, the question of religion, that is islam, and its place in Dutch society was at stake. The most striking part of this contention was the extent to which islam is presented as a foreign religious tradition. The Rushdie-dilemma – how to marry freedom with security? – was time and again described as the confrontation of foreign, religious aggression and national, tolerant secularism. Of course, there were those who sought to contextualise the fatwa in the relations between the Iranian regime and the West. These voices also tended to explain actions by Dutch muslims in the context of marginalisation and transnational ties. Experts of the muslim world were contradicted by other commentators, who argued that islamic fundamentalist posed a threat to a tolerant and modern Dutch society. Public intellectuals and writers – notably G.J.B. Hilterman, Jan Blokker, Gerrit Komrij, Abram de Swaan, Stephan Sanders, Anil Ramdas, Bart Tromp, Henk Hofland – positioned themselves against traditional, orthodox, oppressive religiosity. The Rushdie-affair effectively staged a conjunction between migrants, islamic faith, aggression and traditionalism (Haleber 1989; cf. Modood 1994). This conjunction was not an innovation of the Rushdie-affair – it was, for instance, already present in the Centrum Partij’s discourse –, but it positioned this conjunction at the heart of public culture, prompting established public figures to articulate their opinion and position. As it did in other contexts, the affair provided the opportunity and, in a sense, the necessity for public figures to enact the grounding narrative of public culture: their outspoken resistance to oppressive traditionalism in the guise of religious orthodoxy (Van der Veer 1995). As Gabriëls aptly argues (2001), Rushdie’s novel – both poetically and narratively – problematised and criticised the orientalist distinction between Western, secular freedom and Eastern, religious backwardness. It seems that the contents of the novel may have been overlooked as a resource for thinking through what was happening around it.

Right in the middle of the contention over Dutch muslims’ rejection of Rushdie’s novel and support for actions against it and its author, a remarkable
spectacle took place. A certain ‘Mohammed Rasoel’ published an op-ed in which this Iranian immigrant ridiculed the Dutch naiveté towards islam and the West’s failure to anticipate islamic aggression (Van Dijk 2003; Uitermark 2012). A year later, Rasoel’s book – *The downfall of the Netherlands: Land of naive fools* [*De Ondergang van Nederland: Land der Naïve Dwazen*] (1990) – was published. Rasoel subsequently appeared on tv and radio. The book is an extended pamphlet written in colourful language, ardently condemning the all-too-idealistic and tolerant naiveté of the Dutch as they actually believed that accommodative and welcoming behaviour on their part would lead to peaceful co-existence with their muslim neighbours.

The Dutch encounter the Muslims at cultural events, at fairs and at parties. They see the glistening, timid eyes and the earnestly radiating smile and think: how nice, how sociable, how pleasant are these people. (Rasoel 1990: 19) (#40)

The conjunction of migrants, islamic faith, aggression and traditionalism is repeated throughout the text. Rasoel’s publications draw together a number of notions: an insider of the islamic world is warning the West; the Dutch are tolerant and prone to accommodate the other; the confrontation between a secular West and fundamentalist islam is inevitably violent. These ideas resonate with the discourse of policy failure discussed above and reiterate the central contentions of the Rushdie-affair. What made the appearance of Rasoel particular and distinctive was that it soon became highly unclear who this Mohammed Rasoel actually was and if he – the person appearing on tv and radio – was in fact the author of the texts. As he appeared on tv in somewhat of a disguise – sunglasses and a Palestinian shawl –, there was apparently something to hide. Moreover, complaints of racism had been filed against the author of the book. Rasoel’s identity thereby became a rather pressing matter. It remained and remains unclear who was actually behind Rasoel. The person playing him on tv and radio is probably not the author, yet he was convicted for racist speech in lieu of his appearances (Van Dijk 2003).¹⁰ What is relevant, here, is the way in which the figure of Rasoel, who- and whatever he was, entangled the contention over Rushdie with the discourse of policy failure. The failure to integrate immigrants, Muslims in particular, the government’s attempt to pacify the conflict over Rushdie, the West’s well-intentioned tolerance, the enduring and unchanging fundamentalism of the islamic other are all lined up to form a broader narrative of the ‘downfall of Dutch society’. The mystery

¹⁰ Teun van Dijk has argued that Rasoel and his publications stem, in all probability, from a group of writers and publishers who had hired an artist, Zoka F., to play Rasoel in real life. See Van Dijk, T. A. (2003), *De Rasoel-Komrij affaire. Een geval van elite-racisme*. Critics.
surrounding Rasoel’s person enacted these concerns over the future of a liberal society as taboo. Why else would Rasoel or others instructing him hide their faces and their identities?

The Rushdie-Rasoel complex staged the failings and fate of immigrant integration as a matter of public speech. From a variety of angles, it is the possibility, necessity and significance of public voice that is at stake. First of all, Rushdie’s voice is being threatened. Second, it was questioned whether Muslims could publicly call for murder? Third, the conflict between Western secularism and Islamic orthodoxy is deemed to threaten an open, expressive Dutch culture in which sensitive issues – particularly when related to religious traditionalism – are addressed candidly. Fourth, Rasoel’s interventions and his anonymity come to problematise the future of such an open, expressive culture. Is it even possible to condemn Islam publicly?

Of course, the idea that Islam is a threat to Western civilisation and the open society runs throughout the entire controversy. One might even suggest that this was the dominant understanding of the issue to begin with. Yet, within this same controversy anxieties about the possibilities of public speech over and against religious taboo are reiterated. The controversy thereby had become the occurrence of two, rather contradictory facts about Dutchness at once. On the one hand, the opinions and interpretations going back and forth in public form the on-going enactment of dialogical Dutchness. The affairs gave concrete credibility to the notion that Dutchness comes down to unabashed, public speech. While on the other hand, the same controversy enacted a crisis of Dutchness. Resonant with the notion of integration failure, specifically Dutch tendencies of tolerance and openness were deemed problematic and self-undermining. Most poignantly in the case of Rasoel, addressing the issue of cultural demise in public is said to be inappropriate and taboo, not in the last instance by people warning for such demise. Dialogical Dutchness is performed, then, not simply by a particular carrier group with a particular take on Dutch culture or multiculturalism. Rather, it becomes reiterated and reaffirmed throughout the dynamic of public controversy. As such, the notion that Dutch culture is exceptionally post-traditional and morally superior to an immigrated culture of non-secular others only gains from an emerging controversy in which the freedom to speak is publicly at stake. The contradictory notions of Dutch exceptionalism and Dutch self-censure do not merely abide in the same discursive universe. Along the Rushdie-Rasoel affair, these notions come to reinforce each other in a performative loop: Dutch culture is superior, therefore it is self-defacing, therefore it is superior, therefore it is self-defacing, etcetera.
Dutchness acquires the superiority of a culture in a state of decadence. A final except from *The Downfall of the Netherlands* sums up this pattern:

But take note, because the Dutch believe in culture and they are prepared to bring sacrifices for it. To sacrifice a finger for another, doesn’t bother anyone. To sacrifice a hand for a finger already sounds somewhat odd. But the Dutch know no boundaries and actually say: ‘We want to die for a finger,’ forgetting that when they die the finger will die with them. Applied to daily life, this conception will lead to the realisation that the Dutch will have sacrificed their honesty, their sociability, their phlegmatic nature and precisely the tolerance with which it all started [emphasis added]. They will, in short, sacrifice their own culture to protect the islam culture. Which is all the more illogical because that culture is already excellently protected in the countries of provenance. To also protect it in the Netherlands is comparable to feeding all the endangered polar bears to the endangered tigers in India. (Rasoel 1990: 46) (#41)

It was not long after the initial controversy over Khomeini’s fatwa and Rasoel’s identity that a successive staging of public culture took shape. It too was directly related to the trope of policy failure. Frits Bolkestein, having climbed to the top of his party in the 1980’s, drew considerable attention to himself and his VVD when he published an op-ed in *De Volkskrant*, entitled *De integratie van minderheden moet met lef worden aangepakt* [The integration of minorities should be handled with courage] (09-12-1991). The op-ed was an elaboration on remarks Bolkestein had made at the Liberal International Conference in Luzern that same month. Like the WRR before him, Bolkestein’s diagnosis of failure focuses on the principle split between private-ethnic and public-civic. He also added several elements that extended the significance of this republican logic. First of all, Bolkestein presented his liberal ideals not only as political positions, but as belonging to the cultural heritage of Western civilisation. Indeed, the Luzern lecture was about the future of a post-communist Europe.11

Here we must go back to our roots. Liberalism has produced some fundamental political principles, such as the separation of church and state, the freedom of expression, tolerance and non-discrimination. We maintain that these principles hold good not only in Europe and North America but all over the world. (Bolkestein, September 6 1991)

In Bolkestein’s performance, liberal values are at once political and cultural. Liberalism moves ambiguously between being a party specific, political vision and being constitutive of democratic, public culture as such, rendering it non-negotiable.

Liberalism claims universal value and worth for these principles. That is its political vision. Here there can be no compromise and no truck. (Bolkestein, September 6 1991)

Second, Bolkestein is sceptical of the Dutch legacy of denominational ‘pillars’ for civic inclusion.

‘Emancipation through pillarisation’ has a good reputation in the Netherlands. A century of pillarisation, so it is claimed, has led to the emancipation of catholics and orthodox calvinists. On these grounds, one would also prefer emancipation through pillarisation in the case of islamic minorities. But maybe catholics and orthodox calvinists would have emancipated themselves without pillarisation. Yes, maybe they would have emancipated more quickly in the face of repression than within the rich life of their own pillars. (September 12 1991, De Volkskrant) (#42)

In Bolkestein’s account, the pillars were always already minority structures sheltering individuals from the repression of an already emancipated, liberal majority. If so, pillarisation can only be a mechanism for inclusion into that majority, not a politico-cultural ideal in itself. Not sheltering oneself from the pressures of the majority is presented as a more promising mechanism to prompt individuals to engage with, rather than retreat from, public life and to promote a more active, republican attitude.

Finally and crucially, Bolkestein calls for a ‘great debate’ on the issue of integration. This, of course, is consistent with a republican logic: if we differ, the only way to manage these differences is to speak out publicly as citizens. And like Vuijsje and Pinto before him, Bolkestein’s interventions already perform what a ‘great debate’ should be. There is no place for permissiveness or taboo in such debate, it should showcase the public culture of Dutch society and involve all political parties.

The integration of minorities is such a complex problem that it can only be solved with guts and creativity. There is no space for permissiveness or taboos. We need a great debate, in which all political parties take part, about what is allowed and what is appropriate, what is necessary and what looms if we don’t. (September 12 1991, De Volkskrant) (#43)

Bolkestein gained considerable notoriety through his interventions (Prins 2004; Rath 1992; Uitermark 2012; Fermin 1997: 82). He drew support and criticism. He thereby became yet another public figure who had the gumption to break the supposed taboo of ethnic difference (Prins 2002). His position was, philosophically speaking, hardly different from many of the positions taken by earlier critics of the minorities policies or the governmental appeasement of fundamentalism during the Rushdie controversy. These positions are predicated on a hierarchical and cultural difference between the civilised West and the yet-to-be-enlightened East.
Bolkestein is hardly original in this respect, nor is his use of rhetoric. As we have already encountered: courage, gumptions, provocation, rupture of taboo, and evocation were all established repertoires for dressing up the act of public intervention.

What makes his intervention particularly meaningful is the fact that a political leader now took on the issues and rhetorical gestures of public discussion. The problems of integration policy were already widely and openly discussed by parliamentarians, but the question what it was that Dutch citizens ought to share culturally had not yet been taken up as a major item of party political strife. Whereas parliamentary politics and public controversy over such a question had remained rather neatly separated, Bolkestein resolutely crossed the boundary between public and parliamentary discourse. Bringing the kind of reasoning that was going on publicly into the political and, most importantly, electoral struggle was provocative in and of itself. Bolkestein not only brought the public discourse to the party political field, but also drew other parties towards the public contention. He proposed ‘a great debate’ between all parties. This would be a debate in which parties would have to take positions and engage within a discourse that had hitherto not been central to party parliamentary exchanges. Bolkestein effectively drew public contention into parliament and the parliament out into the public eye. He thereby enacted a populist politics that prescribes immediacy between public opinion formation and parliamentary deliberation. That is, Bolkestein’s intervention in early September involved his fellow parliamentarians in a debate about public culture, thereby suggesting that there was profound disagreement in parliament over the idea that minorities should be integrated and that concerted effort was needed. There wasn’t. Yet, by reframing the question in terms of what citizens ought to culturally share he instigated considerable contention and response. Thereby, he implicated parliament into a public issue that was constructed and developed by non-parliamentarians: journalists, writers, public intellectuals, and commentators. Bolkestein’s intervention placed the issue of a common, public culture at the heart of parliamentary responsibility. The governmental management of minority integration had already been an object of policy, but as the diagnoses of policy failure began to centre on the lacking recognition and explication of a public culture, in which all citizens are to be grounded, the demise, protection and affirmation of such a culture could also become a central, governmental responsibility.

The performative effect of Bolkestein’s boundary crossing quickly materialised. The so-called algemene beschouwingen – a yearly rounds of debates in which all parties respond to the policy agenda of government for the following
budgetary year – were held not weeks after Bolkestein’s op-ed. The integration of minorities and the op-ed in particular were extensively discussed. On October 8 1991, Bolkestein reiterated his concerns over failing integration in parliament. Leaders of the other parties chose to respond by unanimously agreeing that a further debate was needed (TK 7, 8 October 1991). Disagreement centred not on the need for debate or the positive effect that debate could have on the efforts to integrate minorities, but on the quality of the debate and whether Bolkestein had articulated concerns in the right way. Leader of the social-democrats Wöltgens claimed, for instance, that:

Colleague Bolkestein has recently addressed the position of minorities in the Netherlands. Frankly, I have no problem with that. I do think he has created somewhat of a terminological confusion. Integration can to my mind not be equated with complete cultural adaptation. The rightly proposed, universal values – precisely because they are universal – cannot be designated as specifically western values. In some of the reactions to Bolkestein the impression has been created that there is a taboo on a discussion over the position of minorities, over rights and duties. I don’t agree with that. In any event, I don’t think there should be a taboo. My criticism is not moral but rather pragmatic [zakelijk]. I want to propose to colleague Bolkestein and the other democratic parties [ergo excluding Janmaat’s CD] to have a sober [zakelijk] discussion over the minorities policy, with the agreement that scoring political point over the backs of immigrants will be the only taboo. (TK 7, October 8 1991: 345) (#44)

To which Bolkestein replied:

The conversation will continue, but may I now make two comments? I have never said or written that integration should be equated with complete cultural adaptation. In the contrary, I have argued in an article in the Volkskrant for cultural pluralism. That is the opposite of what mister Wöltgens just said. That is my first comment. My second comment is regarding mister Wöltgens final point: I happily concur. (TK 7, October 8 1991: 345) (#45)

Bolkestein’s boundary crossing clearly evoked worries of discrimination. The next day a motion was put together by Beckers-De Bruijn, Bolkestein himself and co-sponsored by a number of representatives from other parties. The motion is strikingly general, yet served a very particular purpose. It reads:

The parliament, […] has noted that the minorities policy has as of yet not yielded sufficient results; of the opinion that this is partly due to existing prejudices and discrimination; of the opinion that this has to be combated and that this can be achieved when those who are responsible in public administration, politics, the private sector, unions, and other civil society organisations commit themselves unequivocally this goal; asks government to take initiatives that will lead to such a common declaration; and proceeds to the order of the day. (TK 22 300 nr. 28, October 10 1991) (#46)
The motion is phrased in the depoliticised language of parliamentary discourse. Policy hasn’t failed, but is as of yet insufficiently effective. The process of minority integration is hampered by discrimination and prejudice. As such, the motion could be backed by all parties in parliament with the notable, yet predictable exception of the Centrum Democraten. The actual point of the motion only comes at the end: to ask ‘government to take initiatives that will lead to such a common declaration’. This refers to Bolkestein’s plea for a great debate. As he later explained in a lecture:

The real problem of integration takes place in the neighbourhoods. There, various groups of allochthones with their own rules of conduct and cultural and religious attitudes live together with autochthones who also proclaim certain convictions. There, the groups and their customs clash. There, tensions rise. There, the other is made into the scapegoat of the misery of each. […] Neither local government nor politicians should prescribe to people how, within the law, they should live together. In the best case, they can try to create conditions for neighbourhood residents to enter into dialogue [emphasis added] about what they want ‘integration while maintaining identity’ to mean. Consensus on this issue should also be sought on the national level, as well as a national, unequivocal declaration against discrimination. In a motion, Ria Beckers, leader of Groen Links, and I have requested government to set up such a declaration. (Bolkestein 1992: 196-197) (#47)

Within such a depoliticised discourse, the common goal of integration is always dependent on the rejection of discrimination and prejudice as it places a post-racist consensus beyond the political differences of parliament. But the minister responsible for the implementation of the motion was more than aware of what was implied. Ien Dales, the serving minister for Interior Affairs and responsible for the minorities policy, took the attention paid to integration by parliament and the introduction of the motion to mean that a ‘national minorities debate’ [nationaal minderhedendebat] should be facilitated by government in order to address the problems of the current policy approach and to reflect upon what integration might actually entail. This implication of the motion – making parliament and government responsive to and responsible for the declaration of what grounds public culture – is precisely not in the motion itself. Yet, everyone involved, including the minister, was clearly capable of following up on it. Dales took on Bolkestein’s proposal for staging a great debate. She, however, channelled the debate away from a parliamentary confrontation and into the organisation of a series of conferences to be held all over the country. In these conferences, the representatives of minority organisations, local policy makers, politicians, residential associations and the like participated and discussed the muddling efforts to integrate minorities. Entzinger and Van der Zwan, architects of the new critique of minorities policies, were directly involved in the set-up of the conferences and
published a final report that, together with the reactions to their WRR-report, were instrumental to the redesigned integration policy, stipulated in the Contourennota of 1994 (Van der Zwan & Entzinger 1994).

It is not the actual debates that took place in 1992 that is most relevant here. Consultation such as these debates, in which a large variety of minority stakeholders are brought together to vent, argue and re-affirm their mutual dependencies, had been held before and have been held since (for an overview of what was organised by Dales see TK 22 809, nr. 3: 2-6). The interplay between the general trope of policy failure, Bolkestein’s boundary crossing, and Dales’ depoliticisation enacted a lasting re-definition of the problem-at-hand. In terms of a staging of public culture, the dynamic is interesting because the notion of debate becomes, from this point on, a crucial notion when addressing the possibility and/or necessity of delineating a common culture. Dutchness has not only become a public problem, but an issue of a particular kind with particular possibilities. With Dales’ invention of a ‘national minorities debate’ Dutchness had become the kind of issue that is to be dealt with through debate. Of course, most issues tend to evoke debates. What I seek to highlight is that Dutchness not only evoked debate, but that the issue becomes known and conceivable as a debate prone to resolution by debate itself. The contention that the integration of minorities is in need of a national debate carries a performative significance. That is, debate itself becomes a mechanism of integration and a way to perform a common culture. As minister Dales reiterated:

In the last six months opinions are exchanged about the position of ethnic minorities with an unprecedented intensity in all sections of society. The attention is so general that people have started speaking of a "public debate on integration" [emphasis in the original]. This marks a remarkable stage in the minorities policy of central and other governments. […] The current public debate on integration does not replace the governmentally administered minorities policy [emphasis added]. It can indeed provide impulses for the continuation of an effective, results-oriented minorities policy and contribute to an acceleration of the integration process. That is why government follows developments with great interest, trusting that the broad attention will lead to great engagement and vigour among all who participate in the integration process. (TK 22 314, nr. 9: 1, March 27 1992) (#48)

Adopting the method of debate as such implies (1) the rupture of discursive inhibitions; (2) a public declaration of anti-discrimination; (3) crossing between parliamentary and public discourse; and, crucially, (4) a public enactment of dialogical Dutchness. Christian-democratic representative Huibers summarises this complex of meanings when he reflects on the significance of the up-coming minority debates:
As I have said, the goal should be to gain support for the minorities policy. This means that it is also important that the voice of those who feel threatened or victimised by the necessary extra attention given to minorities will have to be heard. In a calm atmosphere taboos should also be addressed. When you think about this, it should not be a national conference. The debate should be primarily take place in the neighbourhoods themselves. So, we will have to go to the people. As mister Dijkstal [a representative of the VVD party] already said, it will have to be a dialogue. That shall be an important element of the debate. (TK 22314 UCV 13: 5, December 9 1991) (#49)

Debate plays a double role throughout the emerging discussion over failing policies. On the one hand, it denotes the dissensus concerning minority integration. In lieu of the Rushdie-Rasoel controversy, interventions by Bolkestein and others highlight the divisive and provocative aspects of discussing integration. This tension is not specifically about any one piece of policy. Political parties did differ vocally on the issue of naturalisation and double nationality, but most of the actual policy debates around the time are quite managerial (Fermin 1997). What provided tension was the danger of introducing, opening up and inciting racist discrimination among ‘autochthonous citizens’ displeased with minority exceptions and their own prospects. This danger was apparent to parliamentarians at the time. As both Pitstra of the Greens and Bolkstein himself reflected on the national debate initiative in 1993. Pitstra stated:

The minorities policy and the great minorities debate, which should have encompassed society like a net, don’t seem to work either. Bolkestein and the VVD have unintentionally set the tone and the punctured the dikes. Through the holes now flow CD-stories [the rhetoric associated with the Centrum Democraten]. The taboos have been ruptured and with them the realisation that any racist remark, however subtle, has simply become respectable and utter-able [bespreekbaar]. To be sure, I’m not of the opinion that racist statements should be ignored, including in parliament. (EK 15: 633, February 2 1993) (#50)

Bolkestein raises similar concerns:

When I started the minorities debate in its youngest instantiation two years ago, many accused me of repeating what was said in bars and churches [a metaphor for the kind of speech that people only dare to say amongst their own and not in public, i.e. prejudice and racism]. Apparently, I was closing a gap that others wanted to preserve. This is another instance of the golden mean. A wide gap leads to a bubble around the Binnenhof [the seat of parliament and the government]. A narrow gap leads to tunnel vision. (TK 35: 2728, December 8 1993) (#51)

Debate stands in a dangerous relation to racism. This concern leads us right to the other face of debate: it not only denotes the risk of dissensus, but also the possibility to address integration explicitly and frankly without enabling racism (see also Prins 2004). In this sense, debate denotes the mechanism through which
integration becomes possible, an achievement of an exceptionally tolerant, anti-discriminatory culture. The signed declaration presented in 1992 as part of the national minorities debate initiative thereby enacts both an inclusivist rejection of discrimination and a gesture of distinction:

<<GENERAL DECLARATION AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
THE SIGNATORIES…
CALL INTO MEMORY that on the basis of the constitution, other laws and agreements discrimination on the grounds of race, skin colour, national or ethnic descent is prohibited.

AFFIRM that in a democratic society respect for every human is fundamental and that anyone living in the Netherlands should be able to participate in Dutch society on an equal footing.

NOTE that prejudice, discriminatory statements and behaviours, consciously or not, exist throughout society and are a substantial cause of existing disadvantages of minorities.

REJECT prejudice, intolerance and subordination at work, in schools, in leisure, or wherever. Discrimination is a social injustice.

COMMIT themselves to a concerted effort to prevent and combat all forms of prejudice and discrimination.

DECLARE that they will at least do the following to prevent and combat discrimination:
- To lead by example and contradict stereotypes.
- Promote the establishment of code of conduct against discrimination in each sector or branch of civil society.
- To hold people and organisations accountable for intentional or unintentional discriminatory behaviour.>> (TK 22 809 nr. 3: 10-11, September 15 1992) (#52)

The staging of public culture from Rushdie and Rasoel to Bolkestein and Dales has a peculiar performative effect. Not only does Dutchness become a public problem in the face of new diversity, it becomes a problem in need of debate. As such, Dutchness is enacted through dissensus: the debates consist of a constant dynamic between provocative challenges of self-proclaimed taboos and silences, leading to expressed anxieties over legitimising racism. Yet, public deliberation is also, in line with the imaginary of dialogical Dutchness, the enactment of public culture. Debate is a mechanism of enacting what and how a common culture is, while evading the dangers of racism and displaying Dutch exceptionalism (see also Prins & Slijper 2002). Dialogical Dutchness, then, provides a way to narrate Dutch culture as a distinctly liberal, republican and anti-nationalist one. The acts of public deliberation, provocative critique and autonomous expression come to typify Dutch nationhood. Becoming Dutch, here, involves a liberating, expressive rupture of traditional and collective repression (cf. Prins 2004; Verkaaik 2009). In light of failing integration, debate provides a mechanism for more successful acculturation.
Dutchness is not only – finally – explicitly articulated in debates, but the act of debate exemplifies what it means to be autonomous, emancipated and Dutch.

**Discussing nationhood in a new era**

In the period leading up to the stagings of public culture, as they were discussed above, intellectual discussion of Dutchness had remained – when contrasted to the period after 1991 – ostensibly parochial. Authors, sociologist and public commentators discussed Dutchness with an emphatic playfulness. In such discussion, national particularities are described as quaint, strange and, indeed, parochial. The often expressed conviction that such discussion was somewhat outdated in a thoroughly international world order gave discussion of Dutchness a distinct casualness. They present what may be understood as a light-hearted version of culture-and-personality anthropology. Sociologist Derek Philips, for instance, playfully ridicules Dutch tendencies that he, as an American, finds particularly deviant, typical and irritating. He writes:

Because the group and its laws are sovereign here, someone who appreciates his or her individuality is forced to give strongly expressed opinions, to be frank about it, and to constantly express one’s views on all matters of concern. And the more someone does this, the more probable it becomes that he or she will be deemed unfriendly, arrogant, nutty, or intolerant and will be called a trouble maker. (Phillips 1985: 24). (#53)

Rentes de Carvalho, a novelist from Portuguese extraction, described his personal dealings with the Dutch, discrediting the many myths that they tend to tell about themselves. Again, a playful ethnography of quaint particularities is the result:

Any business meeting worthy of the name is at least two hours long, and any Dutch person of some import has at least several a day, during which he consumes an identical amount of watery coffee. […] As everywhere, there are useful, necessary and indispensable meetings, but for the most part they are somnolent affairs that create the illusion of participation, and for Everyman taking the stand, when others keep quiet, the momentary enjoyment of feeling like a regent, even if only of the association “Our Garden”. […] ‘But aren’t the Dutch individualists?’ Not more or less than other mortals. But what frustrates them is that they can’t combine the benefits of association with the pleasures of individual initiative. (Rentes de Carvalho 1982: 83-84) (#54)

In his essay *Nederland, een bewoond gordijn* [The Netherlands, an inhabited curtain] Rudy Kousbroek, arguably one of the most respected Dutch intellectuals of last thirty years, does take the two previous observers to task – criticising Philips and amending Rentes de Carvalho (see Kousbroek 1987: 41-57) –, but the whole exchange never exceeds the boundaries of cultural reflection. Such exchanges contrast rather starkly with the kinds of publications that address Dutchness from
1989 onwards. It shows how the issue moves from rather light-hearted reflection on the quaint disposition of the Dutch pseudo-tribe to much more earnest discussions of the political and normative significance of national identity.

Already somewhat more politicised are the string of column published by Abram de Swaan in 1985 that were discussed in the introduction of this study. De Swaan – a leading public intellectual and one of the foremost respected sociologists in the Netherlands – wondered whether cultural recognition and fashionable critique of eurocentrism really made any practical or sociological sense. He ties the discussions over Dutchness to the quarrels over failing minorities policies, anxieties over islam, antiracist and anticolonial voices in the public debate. He agrees with voices like Philips that distinctly Dutch tendencies can be ascertained. Like Philips and Rentes de Carvalho, he mocks Dutch tolerance for newly immigrated groups and islamic practices. These should not be mistaken for appreciation and recognition, but stem from a thoroughly western, civic approach to cultural difference. Moreover, attempts to cultivate both indigenous and immigrated identities and cultures are contrasted by De Swaan to what he suggest is a much stronger process towards global culture. De Swaan’s interventions make a double point: (1) western civilisation is superior, particularly when it comes to dealing with cultural difference; (2) the significance of nationhood and distinctiveness [eigenheid] is resolutely transforming as the dominance of western civilisation is transformed into the dominance of an increasingly global culture. In line with the light-heartedness of the discussions, De Swaan famously characterised the Netherlands and its culture:

In this global circuit the Netherlands is a stopover [perron]. That is the function and the significance of the Dutch language and culture, that one can get on and off of the globe with it. The utility of the nation is to be a platform [perron] in the world. (November 16 1985, NRC Handelsblad) (#55)

Very different from ephemeral reflections on national particularities is Paul Scheffer’s discussion of Dutch national interest in A Satisfied Nation [Een tevreden natie] (1988). Scheffer, a staff member of the research organisation of the PvdA at the time, tries to spell out how social democrats could and should rethink foreign policy and diplomacy in the context of shifting Atlantic relations. His suggestions did not lead to any prolonged, public debate about Dutchness, but it does show a line of reasoning that, first, problematises Dutchness in a specific way and, second, is at heart of an argument that would, eventually, make Scheffer a leading European intellectual. Moreover, Scheffer published his book right at the time that a more politicised debate about Dutchness was beginning to take off. As this
analysis of his argument shows, Scheffer was already well-placed to take up his central role in the debates of the 1990’s.

Analogous to Couwenberg, Scheffer starts out from the idea that the Netherlands entertain a weak national identity. This is tied to the highly decentralised and deliberative formation of the Dutch state (Scheffer 1988: 32). A weak identity facilitated the conservation of an international status-quo that was in the interest of a trading nation. National interests were thereby always understood and expressed as if international co-dependence and cooperation were actually more important. Scheffer describes this intellectual tradition in foreign relations and diplomacy in order to ask whether it does not mask changing realities on the ground and is, thus, in need of change itself. Scheffer’s idea of a weak identity resonates with a long standing argument in discussion on Dutch identity. It is a particular version of the notion that the Dutch are distinctly disdainful of all-too-vehement nationalism as practiced by others. Scheffer is well aware of this and he illustrates the notion of a weak identity with a reference to Huizinga. A famous quote forms one of the mottos of his essay:

The intellectual ground, on which political illusion and rhetoric thrive most exuberantly, is that of a political sense of inferiority. (…) Oppression, subordination, loss of former greatness, imperfect national development are usually the causes. An exasperated nationalism is almost always the consequence (…). It is not our merit, but our gracious fate, that we are spared these causes and these consequences. However despicable it may sound to those who feel fire and courage, as nation and state we just are, in a certain sense, satisfied, and it is our national duty to remain so. J. Huizinga, 1935 (Scheffer 1988: 11) (#56)

Scheffer follows up by questioning the consequences of an all-too-weakly expressed national particularity:

The awareness of national distinctiveness [eigenheid] is weakly developed in the Netherlands. The eyes are more preferably directed beyond the country’s borders. This mental condition can also be found in the debate about foreign policy and the adherence to internationalism is widely propagated here. When we take our cue from public opinion, the Netherlands doesn’t exactly defend its own interest in foreign policy, but it primarily the bearer of universal principles with high moral and judiciary standing. Rarely, however, are the specific interests of the Netherlands in its relation to the ‘outside’ discussed.

The reflections that follow start out from a critique of this distorted self-image. It is, rather, worth considering whether this negation of national interest is not a means to certify the position of the Netherlands. Tactically, it is assumed that Dutch interest flourish in the same circumstances as those in which the national interests of others nations are advanced. […] Inadvertently, the silence over national interest becomes the bench mark to which the outside world is expected to aspire. It is expected that other nations will mirror themselves to the Dutch self-image.

[…]

The more we become aware of the particular interests that the Netherlands represent in Europe – even though these are cloaked in a morality of universal pretence –, the more insight can be gained into the
national traditions of surrounding nations. It may even become possible to judge expressions of national identity with some impartiality. Patronisingly, we speak of ‘English nostalgia for the lost Empire’, ‘the French longing for grandeur’ and the ‘German struggle with the divided nation’. The Netherlands finds itself surrounded by countries that take care of their national interest and identity less underhandedly. The internationalism that takes this to be nothing but the echoes of a foregone era is, in spite of its wide vision, rather narrow-minded. (Scheffer 1988: 16-17)

Scheffer’s engagement with national identity is indicative of a wider problematisation that moves Dutchness from the realm of cultural reflection into the domain of public contestation: its weakness. As shall be addressed shortly, the weakness of Dutch identity forms the crucial vehicle for its politicisation. It immediately involves the invitation of action: if Dutch identity is weak, should it be strengthened? by what means? This is quite clear from Scheffer’s own treatment in relation to foreign policy. In fact, Dutch identity provides a distorted self-image as it both overcodes national interests into universal norms and misrepresents foreign nationalism as backward. The structure of this argument – (1) Dutch identity is weakly developed, which (2) distorts certain realities and, (3) thus, necessitates a reconsideration of a nationalist imaginary – will return when Scheffer, in 1995, widens its application from foreign relations to solidarity and diversity.

Scheffer’s notion of a weak identity resonates with interventions by other intellectuals who set out to problematise national identity. We have already seen how the author of The Demise of the Netherlands conceived of the self-undermining dynamic of Dutch self-conception. Another example of this trope gained notoriety when Herman Pleij – cultural historian – addressed what he called ‘Dutch discontent’ (see also Pleij 1993).

And I keep wondering why it would be both suspect and ridiculous to reflect on the origins of a set of national characteristics, about which a growing number of foreigners expresses amazement. They do not hesitate to speak admiringly or jokingly about something like a ‘national character’ [volkskarakter], which is apparently in plain sight. But why don’t we want to hear this? Or do we deem a term like ‘national character’ so unmanageable and stained that any sensible mediation is always already out of the question?

[...]

Ordinary! There isn’t a people on earth that strives to be as ordinary as our own. We don’t want heroes, and in case they, accidentally, do emerge, they are expected to excel in ordinariness. And hero worship is completely out of the question. Acting normal is crazy enough. (Pleij 1991: 12-13)

Apart from Pleij’s reiteration of the meagre attention to nation distinctiveness and an apprehension for the notion of national character, he plays up an interesting trope about ordinariness. As Pleij himself notes, ordinariness is to be associated
with Dutch burgherlyness. According to Pleij, burgherlyness is all about restraint, smallness, frugality and utilism.

But where does that apparently uncontrollable proclivity to deny or ridicule any grandeur in the present or the past come from? And does it also relate to the visible lack of interest in the national past? Do such attitudes constitute the Dutch [Hollandse] identity? But what to do with the growing steam of foreigners, who expound the particularity of our cultural expressions and the distinction of our customs. To them, these are apparently easy to amalgamate into behavioural patterns, which can carry the seal of true Dutchness [Nederlanderschap]. Are we really that frugal, hardworking, cleanly, moderate and tolerant?

One can’t write about national constitution [volksaard] or national character [volkskarakter]. To start, those concepts are unusable. But what’s worse: these concepts have become so contaminated by sinister nationalism – from the nineteenth century culminating in contemporary racism – that any hope of rehabilitation is precluded for a long time to come. […] Isn’t it evident and inescapable that through increasing centralisation of government and cultural diffusion from the beginnings of the nation the subjects will begin to resemble each other in thinking and acting? Even though two farmers on either side of the German border (still) speak the same dialect, they think and dream remarkably different due to the suction of the centres on which they are bound to concentrate.

And therefore Dutch sobriety exists, because many believe in it and even act accordingly – not in the last instance foreigners. This is also true for the utilism, cleanliness, industriousness, pragmatism and the overarching ordinariness. Such collective characteristics [eigenschappen], principally presupposed but no less effective for it, also make it possible to speak of ‘un-Dutch’ [onhollands], which by the way – very typical – denotes a positive quality in cultural life. (Pleij 1991: 17-18) (#59)

Ordinariness evokes a string of other connotation that reiterate a long standing narrative: the Dutch are distinctly adverse to formal, hierarchical relations and excel in their appreciation of equality and openness. Of course, the anti-nationalist tendency is itself part and parcel of this narrative. It articulates a national type, but also a distinctive relationship to nationalism itself.

Over and beyond this narrative of informal relations between unheroic individualists, Pleij explicates a remarkable idea: the national identity exists in popular belief. That is, what makes a certain characteristic part of national identity – which can no longer be describes as a national character – is the extent to which it is collectively believed to be distinctly national. This in and of itself creates the circumstances in which people, attentive to the same centres of governance and cultural diffusion, begin to think and act along the lines of what they believe to be part of national identity. Pleij is well aware of the fact that his typification of Dutch identity is just that: a cliché. But he also argues that it is precisely the cliché – the Dutch are ordinary – that is believed by the many. Discussing national identity thereby involves the identification of widely shared forms of imagination. Pleij contends that, indeed, talk of national character is no longer possible or helpful, but this does not preclude a discussion of national identity as such. As he enacts in his
own treatment of the issue, one can still deal with the popular imaginations of Dutchness.

Whereas Couwenberg was and is still concerned with the relationship between an objective and a subjective moment in nationalism, Pleij transforms the discussion all together. What matters is how the many imagine their Dutchness. It is at this juncture that constructivism resolutely enters the discussion. As in the case of Scheffer, who is primarily interested in awareness, what matters most is not the learned prescription of a national culture inherent to a people. What really matters is a sensitivity to the popular imagination of a national narrative shared and communicated through political and cultural hubs. Only if one takes on board this particular version of constructivism – the national is constituted through the popular – can Scheffer and Pleij succeed in creating their particular version of the problem: national identity is weakly imagined, therefore we could and/or should begin to imagine it differently. The constructivist problematisation of national identity creates a unique responsibility, which former enactments of nationhood precluded, namely the (re)construction of national imagination itself. Disagreement need not focus on the outdated question if a national culture exist and what constitutes the Dutch character, but if the nation is imagined felicitously and what should be changed about national imagination in order to make such imagination more persuasive. It thus also creates the possibility of having a defective or regrettable form of imagination. With Scheffer the predominant awareness of Dutchness creates misguided priorities in foreign policy and diplomacy, whilst Pleij hints at the cultivation of recurrent discomfort as part of the imaginative repertoire of Dutchness.

The French inflection: historians find space to manoeuvre
Between January 16 1993 and February 26 1994, the broadsheet NRC Handelsblad published a series of articles that constituted a miniature version of Pierre Nora’s grand memory project, documenting the lieux de mémoire of the French nation (Nora 1984-1992). As Niek van Sas, the leading historian behind the project and later editor of the book collecting the newspaper essays (Van Sas 1995), explained in his opening essay in 1993:

After the WOII, research into nationalism was for some time as unpopular as nationalism itself. In the last ten years there has been a remarkable surge in a variety of disciplines: sociology, anthropology, literary studies, geography and of course history as well. […] It is a widespread misunderstanding that Dutch national awareness is weakly developed. The reverse is true: it is so self-evident that it, therefore, hardly needs any elucidation. […] The current wave of publications on the Dutch identity –
a tangled notion that I’ll not touch upon further – gives me the impression that this identity is faring quite well. (January 16 1993, NRC Handelsblad) (#60)

Interestingly, Van Sas’ assessment of the imaginative prowess of Dutchness is the reverse of that of Scheffer. Imagination is not weak or unpersuasive, it is saturated. After an academic symposium about lieu de mémoire, national identity and collective memory in France and the Netherlands, Niek van Sas and a senior editor of the NRC Handelsblad, Peter van Dijk, decided to introduce the concept of lieu de mémoire to a wider Dutch audience (Van Sas 1995: 7). Emulating the French example, Van Sas and his colleagues sought to popularise the idea of lieu de mémoire by showing how it could be applied to the various ways in which the Dutch remembered who and what they are. Van Sas emphasises the plurality of imagination that Nora’s approach gives rise to:

Dozens of lieu de mémoire have been selected, which – in the words of instigator Pierre Nora – form the codification, condensation and anchoring of French national memory and are described in an impressive publication. The contents of this imaginary museum is quite arbitrary and that underscores once more that something like a national memory can hardly be defined, let alone demarcated. (January 16 1993, NRC Handelsblad) (#61)

Van Sas is well aware of what is at stake in the matter. Indeed, he argues that academic engagement in the public discussion over Dutchness brings out normative, even moral concerns. His opening essay in NRC Handelsblad ends with a warning:

At the end of that book [Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837] Colley summarises the task of current research into nation formation and nationalism: “We need to stop confusing patriotism with simple conservatism, or smothering it with damning and dismissive references to chauvinism and jingoism. Quite as much as any other human activity, the patriotism of the past requires flexible, sensitive and above all, imaginative reconstruction”

Today, the first part of this admonition is increasingly taken to heart. The second part is no less important, but does contain a certain danger: that imagination becomes an aim in itself. What is happening now in Yugoslavia or what has happened in Auschwitz, should at least serve as a warning that modern studies of nationhood may not lapse into an ethereal relativism. The phenomenon of nationalism remains essentially bound up with tensions between good and bad. (January 16 1993, NRC Handelsblad) (#62)
The contents, further elaborations\(^\text{12}\) and public success of Van Sas’ miniature \textit{mémoire}-project will not occupy us here. What is interesting about Van Sas’ positioning of the project is the fact that it articulates a certain interpellation of historical expects like himself. The attempt to locate, describe and more deeply understand the constitutive elements of national memory is carefully placed in response to contemporary developments. Three developments are mentioned in Van Sas’ exposé: (1) a resurgence and relegitimation of research into nationalism within the academic world; (2) a wave of publications about Dutch identity; (3) past and present atrocities in the context of ethno-nationalist conflict, particularly those in the Balkans. Connecting these three concerns is Van Sas’ critique of relativism. He agrees that research into nationalism has clearly pointed out that the nation is an imaginative construct. Van Sas approvingly points to Benedict Anderson’s book as an intellectual watershed. But the recent affirmation of the constructivist approach to the nation by scholars should not lead experts to an uncritical relativism, as if they no longer have a role to play in guiding the ongoing imagination. Precisely such relativism involves the danger of unrestrained imagination, by which imagination becomes an aim in itself, leaving no empirical check on or expert judgement of what can and cannot be imagined to be national. As Van Sas argues, it is such unguided imagination that will enable patriotism to become its dark and violent other.

So, what is relevant for our purposes here is the attempt by Van Sas and his colleagues to gain or more to the point, \textit{regain} a measure of control over the imaginative practice through which the Dutch come to conceive of something like a Dutch identity. For Van Sas, Nora’s \textit{mémoire}-project serves as an example of how historians and other experts might still perform an authoritative role. Beyond the watershed of Anderson’s imagined community, experts will need to play that role accordingly, namely not just as experts \textit{of}, but also as experts \textit{in} imagination. The ambitions of professional historians, like Van Sas and others, to participate in the public discussions over Dutchness provides an interesting point of perspective onto the emerging dissensus over its significance. It shows, namely, that by that time – 1993 – Dutchness has become a recognisable, public issue with which historians come to engage in new ways as they seek to gain some measure of control.

In doing so, they introduce sophisticated concepts, for instance Anderson’s ‘imagined community’ or Nora’s ‘lieux de mémoire’. These concepts prescribe a

\(^{12}\) As in many other European contexts, the \textit{lieu de memoire} concept was to have a major impact on Dutch historiography and ethnology. It became an organising idea in discussions and publications on heritage, canonisation and identity by academic historians and ethnologists. See in particular: Den Boer & Frijhoff (1993), Tollebeek & Te Velde (2009), Wesseling (2005), Wesseling (2005-2007). See Frijhoff (2011) for a discussion of the diffusion of the \textit{lieu de memoire} concept in the Netherlands.
particular kind of engagement with the issue of Dutchness. In contrast to previous concepts – most notably national character – they no longer preclude the public’s prerogative of national imagination. Historians can only gain a right to speak about that imagination by claiming expert insight into the ways in which that public happens to be imagining it. Historians may want to correct imaginative practices or open up new directions – for instance by publishing a string of essays in a national broadsheet –, but they can only do so by persuading their publics that their collective memory need neither be static nor monolithic. The concept of *lieux de mémoire* thereby assigns both the public and the expert new possibilities. The public can learn about the many different ways in which the nation has been and may be remembered, while the historian regains an object of expertise, namely the mnemonic practices of the public. This public role of the historian is vastly different from the one still in place within a characterological situation. She is no longer the surveyor of large continuities in time and space, communicating hidden knowledge about the nation’s constitutive essences, but the well-trained interpreter and narrator of the ways in which people themselves develop and maintain sites of memory.

Although there is no single moment at which the movement becomes visible a rather massive shift has taken place. Historians still engage themselves with Dutchness and seek to communicate to publics, as did Geyl, the Romeyns, Fruin, and Huizinga. But as concerns over Dutch identity begin to take shape as a public problem and a question of imaginative forte, academic historians no longer claim centre stage. They do not speak from the pulpit. Rather, Van Sas and others play out their role as embedded in the imaginative practices taking place all around them. They enact a historical expertise that is reactive to and reflexive of the public’s prerogative to imagine, remember and forget.

**Out of touch in Europe**

It was in particular after the treaty of Maastricht was signed that the prospect of a unified Europe would be represented in contrast to the enduring importance of national identity. The Maastricht treaty not only solidified the passage to a more unified union, but also contained – for the first time – a specific paragraph on the cultural identities within it (Sassatelli 2009). Although the contentions over European unification addressed many different issues, national identity came to mean something quite specific in the on-going discussions. Whether voices in these debates supported federal unification or not, national identity came to indicate a lag or inertia in the process of unification. This concern is interesting as such, because it resonates strongly with the developing problematisation of Dutchness:
government acts in spite of a popularly entertained nationhood. If there is a problem of national identity in European unification, it has to do with the lag between administrative decision-making and popular identification. The discussions over national sovereignty, cultural and regional specificities, European citizenship and the nagging horizon of federalism thereby create a dissensus between those who do and those who don’t heed the disjunction between government and the people. Ben Knapen, political commentator and leading editor at the *NRC Handelsblad* used familiar tokens of national historiography to indicate what was happening:

There is, in short, a clash between Liberators and Patriots, between those for whom Europe is a panacea for letting fresh air in and those who see the self-evidence of national support being corroded. (June 29 1991, *NRC Handelsblad* (#63)

The possible contradiction between European unification and national distinctiveness had, of course, already become apparent to many, particularly when it came to the protection of the Dutch language (Van Ginkel 1999: 287). The construction of a common market inevitably raised questions over cultural policies of separate member states and thus came to involve national and regional identities (see D’Ancona 1989 for the Dutch context). Whereas discussions of this kind were long restricted to policy makers and advocacy groups, the discussions became intensified and increasingly involved politicians and public commentators after the 1991 signing of the Maastricht Treaty (Van Ginkel 1999: 289-290). Although the general tenant of these discussions was to what extent European unification would undermine or encompass a more local, more proximate, more strongly experienced Dutchness, they opened up the question of civilised and restrained nationalism. If the process of unification could not be continued without political and institutional regard for a popularly embraced national feeling and identification, it followed that there should be an explication of how such nationalism could be civilised and non-violent. In the imagery of these debates, national identity moves perilously between the Scylla of a technocratic, federal Europe that recognises culture only as a tradable commodity and the Charybdis of violent ethno-politics that Mitterrand would famously diagnose as the essence of nationalism. Moreover, the violence in the Balkans served as a clear and present reminder that decivilisation could easily and ferociously follow from nationalist fervour.

Van Ginkel recounts (1999: 291-292) how reappraisals of nationhood emerged within all main currents of political ideology. Christen-democratic reactions tended to emphasise the preservation of (judeo-)christian and burgherly
values and traditions. Confessional voices tend to contrast their vision of national identity to an overly individualised and overly libertarian society that lacks in inherent moral convictions what it overacts in materialist and post-materialist pragmatism. Liberals turned towards a confederate goal for Europe under the guidance of Frits Bolkestein (see also Van Schie July 15 1996). Bolkestein in particular insisted on a split between economic integration on the one hand and popular-cum-cultural sovereignty on the other. Among the social-democratic PvdA and the more activist socialists of the SP, there was a call for a stronger emphasis on the nation-state as the proper scale of solidarity. Reasons, rhetoric and success of these reappraisals within the ideological worlds of the main parties differ, yet in each instance the recognition of national distinction is articulated as a reappraisal and a deliberate project. In contradiction to an indiscriminate Europeanisation of once-national institutions, rules, and standards, the feelings and identifications of the electorate should be taken into account. Those feelings and identifications are not only more local than the scale of Europe, but also provide citizens with a sense of belonging to their own, Dutch community, laws, institutions, language, history, values, customs, and culture. Even though interlocutors differ in their focus on one of these aspects, they do not differ in their tendency to contrast native sovereignty – what is still ‘of our nation’ with what should or shouldn’t be relinquished to Brussels. The idea that European unification might itself be nation-building or productive of national reconstruction is practically non-existent.

The apparent contradiction between a weakly entertained identity and culture on the one hand and a popularly embraced sense of belonging on the other is kept going by attributing the first to an overly cosmopolitan vanguard who has already decided that a unified Europe supersedes national provincialism while projecting the other on a rooted and unsophisticated population who still feels at home in the nation and longs for the familiar. This way of understanding the distribution of values is reminiscent of earlier discourses among Dutch ethnologists, who reiterated a divide between urban, dislocated publics and those who are still-rooted-in-place (Eickhoff et al. 2000). Yet, there is a crucial difference with regards to the out-dated ethnology of the past. Political and public elites are, so warn political and public figures, out of touch with a resilient nation. Not only is Dutchness to be explicated – reinvigorated through self-consciously speaking out its contents and boundaries in public dialogue –, but in the context of European unification such articulations are attentive to a public that still understands itself as a nation, no matter how inappropriate that self-understanding may be. Thereby, Dutchness is not only found by speaking out, but also by speaking for. The central question is not whether a national identity and culture can be unearthed and what it
looks like – only a few participants still intervene within this particular horizon (Fortuyn 1992; Couwenberg 1994; Verburgh 1991; Aalders 1987; Diepenhorst, November 24 1992, *NRC Handelsblad*) and even they do so with considerable reserves. The transformed question is if, how and to what extent the people still imagine their world along the supposedly more familiar boundaries of *national imaginations*. Can, should and will Europe provide similar, competing and encompassing possibilities for self-imagination? How will we guide this enduring nationalism in civilised and proper directions?

Henk Hofland, prominent columnist and celebrated journalist, draws the different stands of the problem together – popular dissent, violent nationalism, resilient nationhood, necessary reappraisal – when he responds to the Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty:

Is that which the Danish have done through their referendum a peaceful and moderate way to express what the Croats and the like have persisted through military means? Nationalism has great flaws. In the course of this century, we have become accustomed to see them as often fatal vices. Nonetheless, nationalism as a political force has survived, also in countries with a modern political civilization and lack of blood thirst as in Denmark. All of this demands a recalibration of the importance that we must grant to national identity within an irreversible process of technological and economic integration. (June 24 1992, *NRC Handelsblad* [#64])

Hofland and his public would soon be presented with a concerted effort of recalibration: the intellectual proposition of a civilised nationalism.

**Civilised nationalism: intellectual reflections**

It was in response to a critical moment in the positioning of their party, the PvdA, that intellectuals associated with the social-democrats began drafting a reappraisal of nationalism that would have lasting effects on the way in which debates over Dutchness would proceed. More specifically, Paul Scheffer and Jos de Beus – in collaboration and in their own ways (for instance De Beus 1996a; 1996b; 1998) – would begin to make interventions that would mark much of the debates that followed, resonating to well into the new century. They would succeed in drawing attention to their ideas and prompt a wide range of responses, laying down some basic features of what would become the ‘resurgence of nationalism’ in politics after 2001. So although the notion of lagging attachment to the nation among the citizenry is embraced across the political spectrum, the debate centred on the social-democratic attempts to design a *civilised* reappraisal of national identity (Tollebeek 1996).
Although the PvdA became the largest parliamentary force in the elections of May 3 1994 and would soon form a ground-breaking coalition – the ‘purple’ government without christen-democratic participation – Paul Scheffer and Jos de Beus sketched an uncertain victory for their party in an op-ed titled ‘Parties in search of their people [volk]’:

The CDA and the PvdA [the previous coalition partners] have been punished for their failures in an area that is traditionally their strong suit: the pragmatic management of public affairs and the maintenance of livelihood in times of radical societal change. (May 5 1994, NRC Handelsblad) (#65)

In the outcome of the election, De Beus and Scheffer read a wide-spread need for a protection of welfare combined with a social philosophy that resists government paternalism and all-too-multicultural group rights. De Beus and Scheffer then draw their conclusion:

What unites all these desires is the search for a new national awareness [natie-besef]. We have to figure out, in completely new circumstances, what keeps us together. Depillarisation, immigration, and European unification are the foremost reasons why nation-formation [natievorming] is again the order of the day in the Netherlands. All that is self-evident is under pressure and what used to be a relaxed nation [Huizinga’s enduring satisfaction] threatens to become an in-ward looking, resentful community.

To prevent this from happening we don’t need a hasty jump towards Europe. The need for national responsibility and effective public administration is extensive. All too easily, the Netherlands has been spoken off as a ‘member state’ [deelstaat] or ‘province’ in Europe. The question should be: to what extent do international organisations like the European Union enable the Dutch nation-state to develop as a parliamentary democracy, welfare society, and the rule of law? If the national administration [rijksoverheid] would falter in these areas, the consequence will be a closed, tense society.

This idea of nation-formation should not be understood as a plea for closure from the outside world. To the contrary, only a nation in which citizens have proper social protections and legal securities, a nation that lives on a clear idea of cultural integration and communal solidarity, a nation in which citizens have a direct relation to the government of the country and guarantees of non-corruption are ameliorated, only in such a community will self-consciously open up to the world outside.

In short, any government that now takes power shall be national in the sense that it should be motivated by the mission to self-consciously promote nation-formation. Parties need to imagine the people they are expected to represent. (May 5 1994, NRC Handelsblad) (#66)

These arguments and rhetorical forms follow from earlier intervention made by both figures (Scheffer 1988; PvdA 1994), but what will concern us here is the way in which this particular intervention became the occasion of whole range of reactions and contention. It is, again, these positionings in their relatedness that will give us an understanding of what is happening to the problem of Dutchness in public and political discourse. This interplay between interventions and responses
is of special interest, because they – again – were explicitly described by the participants as a ‘national identity debate’. The fact of contention itself is made into a politically significant occurrence. The very fact that voices are raised over the idea and the terms – nation, nationalism, national identity, people [volk], distinctiveness [eigenheid] – is made into a central aspect of the issue. Once again, we see that the specific contents of identity are not the crucial point of struggle – only christen-democratic and decidedly conservative voices seriously present an essentialist-cultural analysis of the nation –, rather the means of enunciation are the point of focus and supply metaphors in which the possibility of a civilised imagination of Dutchness is articulated.

Immediately, there is vocal opposition to Scheffer and De Beus, in which their credentials as social-democrats are questioned:

…the plea by the two social democrats for a “relaxed nation” sounds a bit apocryphal to me. It shows that social-democratic thinking has irreversibly changed. Gone is the critical discourse on the international contradiction of capital and labour, the unmasking of the ideological effect of bourgeois law, and the attack on the illusion of the nation, the latest opium of the people. There should be a conscious effort of nation building: ‘Parties need to imagine the people they are expected to represent.’ However, it is here that these intellectuals overstep their critical boundaries. With a possible stab-in-the-back by the CD they speak of deliberate nation building and ‘back to the people [volk]’. Don’t they understand that these are outdated concepts? ‘Nation’ and ‘people [volk]’ are terms that inevitably bend towards claims of authenticity, originalism, and relatedly, to legitimacy. The voters of the CD regard themselves to be the ‘real’ Dutch, because they’ve already lived in the Netherlands for multiple generations. Therefore, they are the first to make claims to the achievements of the Dutch nation: a good home in a decent neighbourhood (without foreigners) and a generous welfare payment or a well-paying job. How will Scheffer and De Beus screen off their undoubtedly progressive project of intentional nation building from this regressive national thinking? (May 17 1994, NRC Handelsblad) (#67)

Or, in a similar vein:

Scheffer’s contention that the negative aspects of national awareness [natiebesef] have to be neutralised through democratic control doesn’t cut it. Why first let the genie out of the bottle to then try to get it back? This bottle is best left unopened. (June 30 1994, NRC Handelsblad) (#68)

Not much latter, Scheffer reiterates his position more directly in relation to European unification in an op-ed titled ‘A Europe without democracy summons populist resentment’. It concludes that:

Citizens who don’t feel represented in their own parliament won’t be tempted to see a beckoning vision in the European union. Those who deem themselves ‘strangers in their own country’, will sooner flee in ‘my own people [volk] first’ [well known caption of extreme right sentiment]. That is why Europe cannot be built on weak democracies in the member states. A European union that doesn’t assume the nation-state as the primary vessel for rule of law, social protection and
Scheffer would continue to use his platform in the *NRC Handelsblad* to argue for a reappraisal of national identity. The most sophisticated of these interventions, one that again sets off much discussion, is an essay published on January 7 1995: ‘The Netherlands as an open door’ [‘open door’ refers both to ‘cliché’ and to the ‘openness of society and borders’]. It is indicative of the debate as it focused explicitly on the discursive possibilities and constraints to speak up about national identity. Scheffer’s main point is one that resonates with his earlier arguments: it is precisely because Dutchness has been imagined so self-evidently, even somewhat arrogantly, that we now lack an appreciation for national identity and an adequately terminology for discussing it. Moreover, public figures who now take on liberal-progressive postures by ridiculing and rejecting talk of national community and culture are in fact calling forth *uncivil* nationalist reaction. As the title already announces, the crux of the argument is the mode of debate and form of imagination:

With a certain persistence, publications have been coming out in recent years that indicate a growing need to once again weigh and investigate the national awareness [*nationaal besef*]. We can think of studies like the one by Pleij (Het Nederlandse onbehagen, 1991), Righart (Het einde van Nederland?, 1992) and more recently Kossmann (Een tuchteloos probleem, de natie in de Nederlanden, 1994). Apparently, something isn’t quite right. The road to Europe seem barred, at least the road to the federal Europe in which all would compete equally as ‘member states’ [*deelstaat*]. The position of our country in Europe has become far less self-evident than would have been imagined possible ten years ago. That is why we need words that often roam around in the back of our minds, but have been left unused; words like national identity or a sense of belonging.

Such a contention is often reacted to worryingly. Particularly in left-liberal circles people proclaim: in god’s name, let’s keep this genie in its bottle. All that talk about the nation, even if well-intentioned, is at best no more than a past battle and with a little bad luck will lead to trouble. Examples of scientist, publicists and politicians that represent this view are bountiful: Koen Koch, Abram de Swaan, Anet Bleich, Marcel van Dam, Joris Voorhoeve, Jan Pronk and of course the Kapittel-group, with people like Roel in ‘t Veld and Arthur Doctors van Leeuwen, who would prefer to abolish the Netherlands altogether. That is a very diverse crowd, but in this debate their ideas are still remarkably similar. (January 7 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#70)

Scheffer goes on to recount the historical development of national imagination and claims that the main constituents of this image – tolerance, consensus and egalitarianism – are waning out of overconfident neglect. Yet, Scheffer claims, this national image and the distinct cultural history that gave rise to it, grounds much of what citizens still hold dear: an open society, cooperative and pragmatic politics and restrained economic liberalism. Scheffer repeatedly argues, however, that an anachronistic approach to nation building is out of the question:
In place of this view [the notion that national identity is no longer important] we cannot present the Netherlands of the fifties. Secularisation, immigration, European cooperation, international competition, new media and the like have changed the Netherlands. We shouldn’t make principles out of our habits. It would be worth the effort, however, to openly raise the question what *we still deem typical for the Netherlands as nation* [italics added]. To what extent are tolerance, consensus and egalitarianism still building blocks of our national awareness? How do we want to arrange our lives here? We shouldn’t cherish the distinctive [*het eigene*] for the sake of being distinctive, but rather for being able to approach the world with some self-confidence.

[...] The idea of nation-formation as an always unfinished process often seems lacking in this country. As has been said, there is nothing self-evident about the civilisation of which we are the heirs. A conscious way of dealing with the nation-state is necessary for anyone who seeks to *articulate* [*onder woorden brengen*, emphasis added] the historical community that the Netherlands is in Europe under new circumstances. (January 7 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#71)

Here we have the mode of problematisation in a nutshell: the point cannot be to dictate or affirm a uniquely authoritative reading of Dutch history and culture, but to openly and publicly *engage in debate* over what *we* still deem typical for the Netherlands as nation. Typification, according to Scheffer, follows the popular and the public: it is about what *we* – the nation in its public instance – still deem typical, not about what *is* typical for us. Scheffer’s reasoning is emblematic of the recurring importance of image over ground and public over expert as its profile is expanding even by Scheffer’s own reiteration of it.

The reappraisal of national identity thereby resonates strongly with the post-1970’s revolution in theories of nationalism that take their cue from ‘public imagination’ (Anderson 1983), ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983), or ‘ethno-symbolism’ (Armstrong 1982; Smith 1998; 2009). We may wonder whether the changing theories of nationalism and their widespread embrace in academia are themselves not part and parcel of the same displacement from historical and cultural expertise and authority towards the popular and public deployment of images.

The person to most notably disagree with Scheffer at this juncture was Koen Koch, a political scientist at Leiden University, who chose to focus his critique on the outdated nostalgia that was at the heart of Scheffer’s pleas:

Scheffer’s recipe, a call to our national identity and a plea for the return of the warm security of the sovereign nation-state, described as a ‘conscious way of dealing with the nation-state’, looks like a band-aid to me. Because this national identity is nothing but the reflection of his own ideology and because, indeed, I do not see a self-evident persistence of the Netherlands as an independent state. In all his melancholic nostalgia [*heimwee*] for a lost golden era Scheffer is quite optimistic. If only the future would so easily be bent back to such a mythic past. (January 31 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#72)
Scheffer’s optimism is also commented upon by Ton Zwaan, a historical sociologist specialising in ethnic violence:

Scheffer, who has a rather sunny outlook on the character of the Dutch nation when he typifies it with the characteristics of ‘tolerance, consensus and egalitarianism’, seems insufficiently aware of the consequences of a nationalistic perspective. Moreover, he doesn’t seem to realise that the defence of the attractive values he so adores, is based on a universalistic orientation and is undermined by a particularistic-nationalistic orientation. (February 14 1995, NRC Handelsblad) (#73)

Stephan Sanders describes the emerging debate, pointing out a change in public speech rules:

Five years ago one could. But today I dare not to joke when the national identity pops up in conversation. One used to speak about “the national identity” with mocking, derogatory quotation marks, which should convince your public that you yourself didn’t think it to be an issue, but that convention dictates that you name the non-existent problem in this way. […] But this consideration is over with; who now grins at the national, excludes himself from the discussion. Try it, the easy relativising with which you could dispense five years ago. Your interlocutors will look at you as if you’ve just lit up a doobie. You’re allowed to, nobody will stop you, but didn’t we leave that behind? War einmal. (February 4 1995, De Volkskrant) (#74)

As one of the people identified by Scheffer to be exemplary of the left-liberal apprehension towards national reappraisal, Anet Bleich presents the problem of picking sides. Where does she stand? Again, the crux of the argument centres on the question of articulation:

My own credo has always been: the world is my fatherland and I want to live where life is good. This leads to a great sympathy for Koch’s unverfroren cosmopolitanism. Indeed, who cares if tolerance has anything to do with the Netherlands? It’s valuable. Point. […] Of course, the Dutch need not pound their chests for it. But one needn’t disown this part of the cultural heritage. In my eyes, national identity isn’t beatific. But why leave its interpretation up to narrow or even xenophobic minds? The Netherlands should remain a tolerant polderland [referring to consociational politics and the protection of the land against the sea that is a widely used image of Dutchness]. I don’t feel any nationalist nattigheid in such a declaration [nattigheid meaning both ‘wetness’ and ‘trouble’, thereby again evoking the mythic struggle against water]. (February 11 1995, De Volkskrant) (#75)

The problem, again, is in the articulation: should one declare something or another to be part of the nation’s being? Is such public declaration productive or not? Does the vocabulary of nationhood offer an appropriate language for political disagreement? Bleich clearly demonstrates that such a vocabulary isn’t necessarily suspect – carefully phrasing her argument in the metaphors of national mythology –, but in contrast to Scheffer this language enacts universal values in a national milieu.
In a similar feign, Anil Ramdas further enacts the notion that the debate started by Scheffer is one of explication and positioning, one of public and audible opinion. The problem consists of public speech. Ramdas starts his contribution:

Do I also have to think of one, an opinion? Paul Scheffer has already given his, and Koen Koch and Couwenberg and Erik van Ree and Gerry van der List, everyone has given his perspective on the issue of ‘national identity’: the we-feeling. (February 18 1995, NRC Handelsblad) (#76)

Ramdas concludes that actual assimilation of newcomers is endemically complex:

They [newcomers] have fun with it. They don’t completely remain stuck in the tradition and they don’t entirely become modern, they do something much more complex. And so I don’t what to think anymore. Apparently, I can only think of an opinion about grand issues like national pride and identity when I disregard the people they involve. In that case, I’d rather not have an opinion. (February 18 1995, NRC Handelsblad) (#77)

In light of the lively discussion that had taken place on the opinion pages, the central actors in the debate decided to collect their thoughts into an edited volume, the title of which is quite significant. The volume supervised by Koen Koch and Paul Scheffer, so often identified as the main adversaries in the debate, was titled The utility of the Netherlands [Het nut van Nederland, Bert Bakker 1996]. The title reflects the central theme of the discussion leading up to the book: what do or should we imagine Dutchness for? The title itself indicates the intentional, and in some cases, strategic constructivism through which the problem-at-hand is conceived. Again, Couwenberg is alone in making a partly substantialist argument. The other contributors perform the kind of reflections about the nation already prevalent in the newspaper discussions. One essay is of special interest as it addresses one of the central concerns of this study: how people deal with the problem of nationhood.

Kossmann, prominent professor of Dutch history and author of the canonical The Low Countries. History of the Southern and Northern Netherlands (1978), had recently published Een tuchteloos probleem, De natie in de Nederlanden (1994) [An unruly problem, The nation in the Netherlands]. This extended essay dealt with the question how historically the problem of nationhood in the low countries was managed. In line with the essays’ perspective, Kossmann had already pointed out in an op-ed that:

When it comes to our so-called cultural identity, its definition […] has been so artificial for over a century now that it is apparently impossible to assert anything about it persuasively. Nor is this necessary. The incessant conversation that we in the Netherlands have, often of a reasonable quality, in a distinct [eigen], old and comfortable language, more than sufficiently demonstrates our
independence. (April 15 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*, see also Ernst Kossmann, ‘Een land leeft zolang er debat is’ [A country lives as long as there is debate], March 7 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#78)

He reiterates this line of questioning in the edited volume:

What is our situation in 1995? In what respects does the current discussion about the Dutch identity and the position of the country in the world differ from previous discussions about the subject? (Kossmann 1996: 61) (#79)

And:

Whether our culture broadly speaking will remain Dutch does not depend on her distinctiveness [*eigenheid*], and nor does it depend on the level of political and economic independence, but on our craving [*behoefte*] to primarily remain in conversation with each other. (Kossmann 1996: 65) (#80)

Kossmann present the construction of national-cum-cultural particularity as the demarcation of the speech community whose members crave ‘to primarily remain in conversation with each other.’ This partiality of conversation should be understood both linguistically – Kossmann’s writing on nationhood in the low countries places special emphasis on the shared language in the Netherlands and Flanders – *and* politically. In Kossmann’s approach, nationhood emerges out of the partiality to primarily seek conversations with *each* other rather than other others. Not Koch, but Kossmann turns out to defend the opposite view from Scheffer: the on-going disagreement *among* public figures, articulated in Dutch and in national media, is a testament of the permanence of Dutchness. Not a firm, explicit and persuasive imagination of Dutch identity will bolster the nation under conditions of migration and Europeanisation – as Scheffer contends –, but the partiality towards debate with and in Dutch. Whether debate leads to a bolstered consensus and reproduces a distinctly Dutch political culture is not important. As part of this position, Kossmann coined a phrase that would be repeated often – one that to a certain extent animates the present study – and expresses this particular brand of scepticism:

One deceives himself and one’s readers if one pretends that it [national identity] can be subjected to a systematic and encompassing investigation. It is too complex, too equivocal, too mutable. Better to walk around it, look at it from all sides but not step in it, in short: treat it like a huge jellyfish on the beach. (Kossmann 1996: 67-68) (#81)

As we have already seen, the notion of debate as the site of national imagination is far from Kossmann’s invention. The trope of speaking out, entering into dialogue and publicly debating was already part of the rhetorical fabric through which the
problem of Dutchness was conceived and through which Dutchness itself was repeatedly typified. But Kossmann, out of a particular engagement with the subject of the low countries, was the one who most forcefully put the two together: the public debate on national identity could be nothing but the on-going conversation that is the nation, albeit in a new mode. What is striking, moreover, is that this version of the problem does not breach or interrupt the discursive flow. Kossmann’s approach does not contradict the already established constructivism from which Scheffer’s debate proceeded. It merely proposes a different route of composition. Kossmann not only argues, but actively enact the idea that disagreement among each other is more than plenty of what is required to keep the nation going. His own disagreement with Scheffer is, in his logic, only further proof of a persistent national narrative, while Scheffer looks for a consensual imagination of national particularity beyond the mere fact of self-cognisant dissensus. As in many of the reviews of The utility of the Netherlands Niek van Sas – the same historian who sought to introduce new ideas about memory and nation in the public domain – picks up on this process:

Was it really necessary to make so much fuss about the Dutch identity? Was there something wrong with it? We can again reflect on this question now the debate has gotten a sequel in the form of a book. [...] With this, the criterion of E. H. Kossmann has been generously satisfied as to him ‘remaining in conversation with each other’ is most significant for the preservation of our culture. (April 6 1996, NRC Handelsblad; see also Jan Joost Linden, March 23 1996; De Volkskrant) (#82)

And so the possibilities of civilised nationalism take shape. That is, a range of responses is articulated around the notion that a civilised reappraisal of the nation is possible. This notion follows, as we have seen, directly from the idea that nationalism need not be understood as the search for a cultural, let alone racial substance. The problem for which the notion of civilised nationalism may provide solutions isn’t about natural difference. The problem is a reflexive one: do we still imagine a national identity? Should intellectuals speak for those who still do? Civilised, then, means that this mode of nationalism need not regress into the out-dated essentialism of the past. The call for debate – the centre piece of Scheffer’s performance – should ensure the progressive mode of this new nationalism. The call for debate is ostensibly inclusivist: it is an invitation to participate in the reflections over national identity. The question remains what that community should be aiming for precisely: reaching a more explicit and out-spoken consensus or entertaining an on-going multiplicity of viewpoints? In which case is civilised nationalism really taking place?
As Kossmann and others already pointed out (in particular Van Gunsteren 1996), we may wonder whether the call for debate does not expect too much when it assumes the promising horizon of a more coherent unison. And might such doubts about the feasibility of consensus not further reaffirm the state of disrepair that national identity is apparently in?

Not surprisingly, there is also a line of reasoning at this juncture that does not seek to contradict or criticise the emerging concerns over an all-too-weakly imagined nation, but rather to relativize the issue as such. This argument proceeds from the idea that national identity is not weak, nor is it deteriorating. In Kossmannian vain, the emergence of a ‘national identity debate’ in national newspapers and intellectual circles is taken to indicate the enduring salience of national imagery. Such enduring salience is cause for satisfied relaxation, as Scheffer’s Huizinga would have liked it, and critical debunking as the mythical identification of nation, culture and state becomes ever more contrived. In an op-ed aptly titled *All is well with Dutch identity*, Nico Wilterdink, yet again a historical sociologist, expresses as much when he explain to Scheffer that the problem is:

…not in the threat to national identity as a cultural or psychological category, not even primarily in the degradation of the welfare state. But in the further diminishing political autonomy of the nation state, the erosion of sovereignty. (March 4 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#83)

Far more critical are those who worry that enduring ascription to nationalism’s basic myth of one people, one culture, one state, one language, one history and one future is deeply flawed (see also Zwaan & Bezemer 1991). Joep Leerssen, professor of European studies, articulates such a critique:

The European Union has, in its short existence, shown more cultural tolerance than most nation states have in the last two centuries; small cultures and languages [implicating Dutch culture and language] can expect more from a supranational ‘Europe’ than they can in the traditional nation states. There is no reason why it would be of vital importance to map citizenship and cultural identity to each other. The cultural distance between citizens and state is only significant to a limited degree. Much more important, it seems, is to close the distance between citizens and administrative authority as much as possible. (January 7 1997, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#84)

A slew of publications, op-eds, reactions, critiques and discussions that were said to indicate a ‘national identity debate’ (see also Righart 1992; Chartier 1992; Joustra 1993; De Valk et al. 1993; Ephimenco 1994; Pröpper 1995; Wigbold 1995; Beheydt 1996; Van Staden 1996; Ephimenco 1997; De Kuyper 2000) and had, indeed, acquired the form of a debate most clearly around the interventions of Scheffer culminated, according to Leerssen, in a crucial question: is there reason to
map *citizenship* onto *cultural identity*. Indeed, it would become this question in particular that would be at stake in the period after 2001.

The particular national imaginary of dialogical Dutchness provided interlocutors with ways to form the public problem of Dutch identity. In an often ostentatious movement away from somatic-racial difference and towards the politico-cultural commonalities that ought to bind Dutch citizens together, a variety of voices came to argue for and perform *debate* as a crucial site of national imagination. This involved the further, constructivist reinvention of the problem. It is only rarely that participants of debates worry about the question whether people are still aware of what Dutchness is. Rather, what begins to guide their disagreements is a concern for the question whether and how people succeed in popularly imagining Dutchness. It is this playing field that is stretched out in the disagreements central to this chapter. The ensuing debates perform Dutchness as something that is endemically open to discussion, doubt, reappraisal, difference, expression, and opinion. In fact, such attributes come to play a major role in describing the reinvigoration of Dutch imagination as a mode of civilised nationalism. As long as it is dialogical a more vocal appreciation and articulation of Dutchness will remain non-violent and non-exclusionary. However, it is already clear that this imaginary of Dutchness entails stark boundaries and produces a constantly reiterated worry that the Dutch are – apparently – not able to say who they are. The stark boundaries become visible in the way in which debate and dialogue are taken to be politico-cultural attributes of the natives that may be employed to hasten and guide the as of yet failed integration of outsiders. The constant worries over dissensus are seen in the complicated problem of figuring out whether mere debate will be enough. Indeed, Scheffer’s ambition to create a more cohesive imagination of Dutchness is repeatedly contradicted in public. Yet, this only adds to and affirms the underlying conception of the problem that Scheffer has helped to become a major public issue: the apparent fact that Dutchness does not elicit agreement precisely where it ought to be in its element…in public. The shared means of disagreement – national identity is a matter of public imagination – thereby also creates a constant insecurity about the possible resolution of the problem. This dynamic would continue to haunt the post-2001 period. As we shall see in the following chapter, it would have profound consequences for the ways in which ever stronger political demands to try and fit culture and citizenship together would be discussed, contested and accommodated.
Section 2:
Ascending to the native public
Introduction to section 2

In the following four chapters, I will not address to any significant extent the ideological, electoral or governmental elaboration of post-2000 culturism. My aim is not to show what kinds of discourses came out of the highly dynamic networks of conservative and radical right-wing politics in this period (Oudenampsen 2013; Rooduijn 2013; De Lange 2009; Krouwel & Lucardie 2008; Kriesi & Frey 2008; Halikiopoulou et al. 2012), nor will I demonstrate to what extent these movements have been able to effect policy outputs (Vermeulen 2007; Rusinovic & Bochove 2009; Vink & Bauböck 2013; Entzinger & Scholten 2013; Uitermark 2013; Koopmans et al. 2012; Van Oers 2013; Van Houdt 2014). My focus will be elsewhere and not necessarily at the hot spots or at the most egregious events. My aim is neither to understand nor to explain how the (extreme) right has been able to gain political ground. Instead, I focus on a number of issues, events and debates that help to understand what Dutchness became in all of this and to show the extent to which specific ideas concerning the importance of Dutchness are hardly exclusive to and ought not be analysed primarily in view of a resurgent right.

The debates of the post-2000’s were built out of the discursive tools already developed, while also bringing in new notions and connections. In this second section of the study I will show how attempts to clearly, explicitly and forcefully identify images of Dutchness in the post-2000 era were put forth, justified, debated and criticised. My main conclusion will be that the conception of a native public is recurrently at work in speaking about governmental attempts to resolve problems of Dutchness and the public debates that enveloped them. The analysis will focus on three specific items of intervention and contestation. In each case, there is the basic problem of translating the diagnosis of a presumably defective identity into more concrete policy measures, projects and interventions. These three cases are: contestations over civic enculturation or inburgering (chapter 7); the mobilisation of national history through efforts of canonisation (chapter 8); and specific attempts to publicly propagate non-exclusionary conceptions of what it means to belong to the nation (chapter 9). Yet, before I can set out to analyse the specific contestations in these three directions it will be necessary to consider how the political watershed of 2000-2002 was made relevant for these interventions (chapter 6).
6. Reactive politics: moments and their men

Already for some time before 2000, discourses dealing with Dutchness articulated the idea that, in politics, there are ideals that demand too much of people, that stretch their tolerance for the other to a breaking point (Duyvendak 1997; Prins 2004; Schinkel 2007). When support for such ideals are demanded of citizens without sufficient consideration for the burdens that such ideals imply, a backlash against these ideals – even if citizens agree with them – comes to be inevitable. Such a diagnosis presents an understanding of politics in which reality and particularly the reality of people’s lived experiences of stress and exhaustion bounds the possible and the reasonable. At a certain point, there is only so much one can ask of the people. At a certain point, the demos strikes back. Political ideals may be praiseworthy and highly attractive, but they can also cloud one’s judgement of what, in reality, is happening and clutter our considerations of the costs at which ideals are realised. Seen through this lens, political realities here and now trump political horizons of idealised futures.

If it is correct that this conception of politics has been important for the ways in which positions become articulated in debates on national citizenship, then I think we should at least concede that this understanding of politics makes a lot of sense. That is, it is doing a lot of work for people in their engagement with public issues. Indeed, it is certainly not just a lay conception of democracy. It also exists as a staple of much political philosophy and science when the ‘preferences’, ‘interest’, ‘attitudes’, or ‘grievances’ of the electorate are used to explain the structure and dynamics of the electoral landscape and the tensions between representation and represented. This landscape is delimited precisely by what the voters are willing to put up with. By saying that this conception of politics makes a lot of sense, I also mean to say that it presents to us a crucial problem of democratic politics and cannot simply be regarded as ill-conceived, ‘reactionary’ thinking. There are some pertinent questions here: how does the relationship between represented and representative work? And what is and isn’t possible in this relationship? How do representatives gain support for their ideals and what will be the boundaries of legitimate decision making? Such questions suggest that the relationship between represented and representative cannot be stretched
indefinitely; that democratic legitimacy is dependent on popular support; that political parties should or, at least, need to take into account the ideas, grievances and ideals of the citizenry. The governmental and political elites should seek to mirror – at least to some extent – the concerns of the people. There are limits to the sacrifices that citizens are willing to make in order to achieve certain ideals. This conception of politics stubbornly refers to the lived frustrations of citizens, who experience in their daily lives the true costs of political manoeuvring. Especially when decisions by representatives are deemed necessary or inevitable will it entail an unmasking of political rhetoric: representatives are then said to mistakenly or deceivingly act as if there are no alternatives. What we might call reactive politics – the politics of those representatives who speak for citizens that “will not take it anymore” – defines itself through this goal: to effectively demonstrate that there are alternatives, that the burdening weight of misconceived ideals can be lifted after all.

Reactive politics, then, may also be understood as a particular brand of political populism (Canovan 1999). The malaise of democracy and the dissolution of legitimacy is then explained by the fact that representatives have neither been attentive to nor expressive of the troubles and burdens experienced by the people. In this form of populism, ‘the people’ is precisely that segment of society that feels and knows the true costs of public policy and it is they to whom representatives should (re)turn their attention. These people are not merely ‘normal’, ‘average’, ‘simple’ or ‘unpretentious’, but also specifically burdened and threatened. Their burdens are sacrifices for public goods that they are not able or willing to partake in. This enactment of politics brings forth ‘critical outsiders’ who – ahead of the politics to come – warn, criticise and scold the inattentive elites who are isolated and isolate themselves from the costs of their own idealism.

We have here at once a way to understand the relationship between representative and represented at the heart of democracy, while also creating a division of political labour. There are the ‘overburdened citizenry’, ‘the critical outsider’, the ‘self-isolating elite’ and the ‘representatives who speaks for a victimised and neglected people’. Together, this role division helps explain what is happening in politics by suggesting that representatives will have to be brought back in line and curtail their overheated idealism. Moreover, this narrative helps justify the interventions of critical outsiders who are warning the governing elite for an impending backlash. Finally, it enables the role of the populist forerunner who speaks for the people and against the elites.
The moment of reaction
The conception of politics just described is nothing new (see for instance Robin 2011), nor is it in any way specific to the kinds of discourses through which contestations over Dutchness were articulated after 2000. In fact, a model of reaction is – as we have already seen – part and parcel of problematisations of national identity right from the early 1980’s onward (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). The drama of failing integration was always already conceived to be taking place ‘in the old, urban neighbourhoods’ where conspicuously normal people are confronted with the fall-out of political decisions on a daily basis. This is also true for the worries surrounding on-going Europeanisation: normal, rooted people were said not to identify with the European project in the way cosmopolitan elites did.

What is striking, however, is the way in which the political events of 2000-2002 would come to be conceived as the rupture that would open up the possibility and the need to finally and conclusively bring political ideals back to people’s reality. That is, key events and contestations emerging between 2000 and 2002 came to figure as the backlash par excellence at which popular reaction – finally – materialised and could no longer be denied appropriate recognition. So, even though the motif of popular backlash had been crucial for articulating the problematic of national citizenship and had been enacted recurrently in the years preceding 2000-2002, the explosion of this political moment gained a higher esteem as it appeared to effect democratic legitimacy as such. The events and developments of this period were not only highly disruptive and transformative in hindsight, they were also explicitly and ostensibly articulated in terms of a watershed moment while they were taking place (see also Van Reekum 2012c). In other words, it was not with the passage of time and the possibility of historical distance that the period of 2000-2002 would become remembered as a turning point in Dutch politics. Rather, as events were unfolding they were accompanied and inflected by an articulation of rupture and displacement. The ensuing events of those years were being canonised and endowed with national significance in the moment. Public discussion on these events thereby enacted a commemoration of the national present. The on-going present now instantly became memoire. Strikingly, Pim Fortuyn, who is arguably the central figure of commemoration during these years, would be chosen as the ‘greatest Dutch person’ by the viewers of a televised election show in 2004.13

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13 De Grootste Nederlanders was aired on October 14 2004 by the KRO. The format for this program was taken from German and British examples. Brits chose Winston Churchill in the BBC-show Great Britons, while the German audiences elected Konrad Adenauer during the ZDF-show Unsere Besten.
To conceptualise this commemoration of the present is certainly not to suggest that these events are in actual fact unworthy of such nomination or that it is only their constant reiteration in media coverage that granted them the status of transformation. The evocative power of the 2000-2002 watershed cannot be reduced to an escalating media-hype manufactured through the self-referentiality of solipsistic, horse-race media coverage. However, all events are in some way mediated and all events carry in their mediation narratives about why and how such events matter (Wagner-Pacifici 2010; Stengs 2009). What I will argue here is that the period of 2000-2002 became effectively narrated as the moment in which reactive politics finally crystallised and a political culture of consensus, so crucial to what was deemed national in Dutch politics, could no longer be maintained. The already frequently imagined antagonism of ‘normal people’ over against ‘detached elites’ had become a real substance in the world – ‘Pim Fortuyn’ – that one could see, hear and even touch (Margry 2011). This commemoration of the present singled out a moment in time that came to interrupt and cut the flow of normalcy, opening up political possibilities and loading the political period after 2002 with the unbearable responsibility of reacting to its profundity, an impossible task.

It is already for this reason impossible to exhaustively address the dynamic of Dutch politics between 2000 and 2002, a period that started with ever more intense discussion on the failure of integration and Muslim otherness in particular and ended with the fall of the first Balkenende-government, nor do I aim to do so. Instead of attempting to do what so many observers have tried to do already (Chorus & De Galan 2002; Ellemers 2002; Storm & Naastepad 2003; Couwenberg 2004; Pels 2003; Wansink 2004; De Vries & Van der Lubben 2005; Bovens & Hendriks 2008), I will focus here on the two protagonists of reactive politics – Paul Scheffer and Pim Fortuyn – whose problematisations of Dutchness help to understand what the moment of reaction entailed and what significance Dutchness could come to play in resolving the rupture left in its wake. I focus on Scheffer and Fortuyn precisely because the notion of backlash became so strongly associated with their interventions and their personas. While Scheffer may often be given the role of public instigator, staying out of the electoral arena, and Fortuyn became known as the helmsman of a popular uprising, mobilising and organising a concrete political movement, both are significant in teasing out how it was that the moment of reaction had come.

**Scheffer’s essayistic alarm**

It remains unclear exactly why Scheffer’s essay *The multicultural drama* became so remarkably notorious, why upon publication it evoked such massive response
The factual substance of the essay in itself cannot explain it. As we have seen, Scheffer and others had throughout the 1990’s published extensively on the topic of national identity, migration, diversity and elite blindness for the gravity of such issues. One of Scheffer’s core claims – that Dutch national culture is weakly and confusingly articulated by elites and needs to be represented more convincingly and explicitly – had been part of his repertoire since the late 80’s. Nor was Scheffer alone in discussing the troubles of multicultural society (for example Theunis 1979; Couwenberg 1982; Van Ree 1995; Lakeman 1999; Ramdas 1997; De Beus 1998; Schnabel 1999; Duyvendak & Veldboer 2001; Fortuyn 1995, 1997; Brugman 1998 to only name a few).

What is clear, however, is the fact that in the preceding years the failure of immigrant integration and the need to better control borders had become one of the central issues in Dutch politics (Fermin 1997; Schuster 1999; Van der Valk 2002; Uitermark 2012). The most tangible outcome of these contentions would be the new, more restrictive migration and asylum legislation introduced in 2000 by then state secretary Job Cohen and the development of civic enculturation policies under minister Roger van Boxtel. Alongside the issue of asylum seekers, racialised school segregation had become indicative of a broader failure of integration. Much like the dichotomous language of autochthony, school segregation was and is discussed as the emergence of ‘white’ and ‘black’ schools. Articulated in this highly charged, racial language, the issue of school segregation had come to exemplify the extent to which a multicultural ideal remained out of reach. The fact that allochthones were not connecting with autochthones – itself a very particular understanding of what constitutes a successful multicultural society – was presented as proof that well-intended tolerance for ethnic others was not producing real world results.

In line with worries about school segregation and language proficiency there was a focus on what were deemed problems of ‘large cities’. The 1990’s saw the creation of ‘large cities policies’ that conjoined problems of urban marginality and cultural maladaptation into a single policy effort: targeting the concentration of social problems in specific areas of the largest Dutch cities (see Van der Wouden 1996; Uitermark 2013; Van Houdt 2014). The idea that ‘large cities’ needed special attention materialised in the appointment of a minister, Roger van Boxtel. Moreover, an endowed chair at the University of Amsterdam had already been set up in 1992 and was specifically concerned with ‘the problems of large cities’. Ethnic segregation and the problems caused by allochthonous youths loomed large in discussions over ‘large city problems’ (see for instance Van den Brink 2001). Finally, there was attention paid to civic enculturation policies that would remedy the contradictions of the earlier minorities approach: instruction, assistance and
enculturation of allochthones were to prevent and turn around their segregation from Dutch society and enable their emancipation (Verkaaik 2009). While this means that Scheffer’s essay entered into a wholly agreeable milieu – much of what the essay contends resonated with established public discussion –, it also means that this milieu cannot explain why Scheffer’s essay could become the object of a watershed moment.

Of course, the fact that a prominent public intellectual of the social democratic left was effectively making an argument strongly associated with the liberal conservatism of VVD-leader Frits Bolkestein and positions voiced by christen-democrats may explain why Scheffer’s gesture evoked such massive response (see Uitermark 2012: 89-90). But this line of reasoning cannot be taken too far. Scheffer’s interventions had been the occasion of debate throughout the 1990’s with Scheffer taking almost identical positions to the ones expressed in *The multicultural drama*. His essay is a breach of leftist discourse on integration to the extent that certain social-democratic protagonists, particularly prominent party figures, were seeking to depoliticise the issue through rather abstract pleas for tolerance and respect (see for instance Van Thijn 1998). But it was a breach that Scheffer and others on the left had been performing for quite some time, over and over again (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). So the question remains: why did this essay at this moment become commemorated as a watershed?

The fact that there are no clearly definable factors to explain the prominence of Scheffer’s essay may indicate that its role and prominence is the effect and cause of a whole array of factors coming together and producing the opportunity of its notoriety. Left at that, this would be a somewhat vacuous conclusion: the essay just hit the right spot at the right moment. But this way of understanding the essay does give rise to a further question: even though it is probably not possible to exhaustively isolate the external and contextual causes of its prominence – at least not in the context of this study –, we can wonder what aspects of the essay itself enable it to play precisely the role it acquired, namely an essay that *suddenly* and *autonomously* seized attention and politicised an issue. In other words, how does the essay effectively enact a breach of political discourse? What is the significance of ‘suddenness’ and ‘autonomy’? This questioning is all the more appropriate as Scheffer himself has indicated that he had been carefully honing his text for some years (Uitermark 2012: 89-90).

**Doing drama**
The answer to these questions can be addressed by looking closely at the essay’s central rhetorical trope – drama. It is this word that became the brand name of
Scheffer’s persona after 2000. The diagnosis of drama performs two vital aspects of the essay’s assumptive role. Drama thematises the kind of trouble that goes beyond the mere problematisation of an issue. Opinion pieces, news reporting and popular publications had repeated the idea that integration wasn’t succeeding and cultural differences created problems right up to the time of Scheffer’s essay. Yet, *The multicultural drama* nonetheless articulated the issue in a way that goes beyond a discussion of ‘problems’. Drama refers to the hardship that people, in reality, experience due to immigration and ethnic tensions. But there is more going on here. Not only the title, but the essay as a whole represents the issue in far more disturbing imagery.

The essay lacks any clear culprits or actions that are directly causing problems. It doesn’t attack anyone or thing in particular. Instead, the essay articulates a critical, almost nervous socio-analysis. The principles that guide Dutch society at large are at the centre of this analysis. Troubles in society are not attributed to the intended or wrong-headed actions of particular people, organisations or powers, but to a society-wide drama. That is, the essay represents the drama as the consequence of the very principles through which Dutch society is able to perceive and govern itself. The horrible circumstances into which Dutch society is all-too-quietly wandering are thereby much more shocking: the drama is not caused by clearly definable mechanisms, but is the consequence of a general and self-inflicted loss of control and an evaporated will to seriously ameliorate society. The drama is happening because society only superficially functions according to its ideals and behind its empty gestures an overall disengagement and surrender reveal themselves. ‘Drama’ indicates how societal ideals have become visions without any coherent sense and have thus precipitated a blind fall into societal disintegration. The sense of inaction that persists throughout the text heightens the need for alarm. Society isn’t so much threatened by danger as it is already falling without its leaders acknowledging it. The essay’s header introduces an entire vocabulary of passivity:

As energetically as the Netherlands attacked [te lijf ging] the ‘social question’ of yesteryear, so torpid are the reactions to the stagnation of entire generations of allochthones and the formation of an ethnic underclass today. Why do we think we can afford to see generations of immigrants fail and to leave a presumed reservoir of talent unused? And how do we gain the assurance that everything will land on its feet? The societal peace is severely threatened, according to Paul Scheffer. (January 29 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*, italics added) (#85)

Scheffer’s drama is one in which a society has lost its breath and exuberance. Instead, there is a decadent passivity that affords an indifferent fall into societal
disorder. The drama is caused not by mistakes or confusion, but by a deeply tragic passivity. Scheffer’s explicit goal, then, is to create urgency and awareness; to jolt public discussion into a sudden, energetic expression of real concern and engaged activity. The drama of a blind fall inevitably creates its opposite: a somewhat lonely, yet immensely energetic outsider who strikes the alarm.

In 1994 the government still expressed urgency regarding ethnic minorities: ‘The government concludes that the prospects are very worrisome. Reasons for concern are stagnating economic development, persistent immigration – of asylum seekers in particular – and the considerable impact of these developments on the public legitimacy of policy’ (White paper on integration policy of ethnic minorities). It seems that this urgency has evaporated in the bliss of the polder model [corporatist welfare reforms]. (January 29 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#86)

The diagnosis of drama is as much about what is happening in society as it is about the function of the essay and Scheffer’s purported role in public debate. The text speaks about itself in such a way that its publication and its author’s positioning can become moments in the very drama that the essay analyses. This performative continuity between the drama in society and the development of a debate already enacts what the essay might become in the future: a moment of alarm that breaks through the torpor and suddenly awakes society to its fall.

Scheffer’s text heightens a familiar theme in the contention over diversity and nationhood to great intensity. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, such discourses were recurrently about the possibilities for and boundaries of debate as public expressiveness became a crucial typification of Dutchness. Scheffer’s earlier interventions were instrumental in this respect. The multicultural drama, however, not only reiterates the imperative to debate, but inflates this imperative to even greater significance. Public expressiveness is not only performative of Dutchness, but acquires a redemptive quality. Only an alarm in the form of public debate will save society. No longer just the answer to a specific concern – who are ‘we’? –, the need to raise awareness and evoke urgency becomes a question of preventing a societal catastrophe. By folding the argument around the notion of drama – a blind fall instigated by decadent passivity – the essay itself gains an immense responsibility. The diagnosis of drama already means that the problem cannot be solved without a moment of rude awakening, without a sudden realisation among the interpellated public that it is falling and needs to break out of its passivity. Again, the essay is as much a diagnosis of societal problems as it is a declaration of responsibility and engagement by its author and, presumptively, its public. This rhetorical structure in itself cannot explain the essay’s notoriety, but it does explain why it was a very appropriate candidate for
such prominence. The essay’s rhetoric proposes that its publication will be the moment at which passivity will be breached. Any responses, be they positive or negative, will affirm the role it has already assumed.

Before we look at the significance of these responses, we will have to look at the way in which Scheffer’s drama may be remedied. Here, the essay’s significance for discourses on Dutchness is even more pronounced. The lack of urgency is tied to the legacy of consensus-seeking in Dutch history:

What is the value of the age-old method of peaceful coexistence in entirely new circumstances? Will it function in the same way? Is it a mark of self-confidence not to emphasise the distinctive identity [het eigene] of our society? The cultural commonality, within which difference could be lived, is now far less at hand; there aren’t many sources of solidarity. The comparison with pillarisation doesn’t match up. Segregation of schools in black and white schools is, of course, of a completely different nature than the distinction between public and denominational schools. (January 29 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#87)

Scheffer reiterates the idea that liberal values are at the core of the national ethic.

There ought not to be space in public life for movements that want to discontinue the separation of church and state or the equal rights of men and women. Religious symbols like headscarves belong to the private sphere and not to a public office such as the police. (January 29 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#88)

This liberalism is not only rooted in the cultural history of the Netherlands, but should be imagined as such through a collective, *national* identity. The drama, however, is that an overly accommodative and pacifying cosmopolitanism has prevented Dutch society from firmly and clearly imagining the values that integrate national community:

The culture of toleration, which now bumps up to its limits, goes hand in glove with an unrealistic self-image. We need to get away from the cosmopolitan illusion in which many wallow. The denunciative way in which we have dealt with national consciousness in the Netherlands isn’t welcoming. We pride ourselves in having no national pride. This boundless attitude of the Dutch doesn’t contribute to integration, because more often than not, it conceals a detached and heedless society. Today, the postmodern historical vision dominates in which every ‘we’ is immediately suspect. (January 29 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#89)

A happy-go-lucky [gemakzuchtig] multiculturalism is spreading because we are not able to explicate what keeps society together. We say too little about our borders, don’t cherish a relation to our own past and treat our language nonchalantly. (January 29 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#90)

Thorough explication of a national self-image – as opposed to a blissfully unengaged multiculturalism – will provide a national narrative, an encompassing
identity that ties together citizens. Contrary to the Dutch tendency to shy away from any form of national imagination, the debate about integration should make it clear who ‘we’ are. According to Scheffer, the notion of ‘maintaining one’s identity’ cannot provide the basis for this new national image. In reaction to his critics, Scheffer writes:

In the Netherlands a self-image is cherished in which tolerance and indifference have become strangely intertwined. […] Clearly, many take the critique of the slogan ‘integration while maintaining one’s identity’ as a sign of poor appreciation of other cultures. There is no reason to speak disrespectfully about other cultures, but this slogan is susceptible for critique because it misrecognises the experience of migration. It is an appeasing statement, while nobody should underestimate how rough a farewell from hearth and home can be. (March 25 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#91)

In what can now be called a defining gesture of Scheffer’s discourse, he entangles the words of Johan Huizinga, the Netherlands’ most renowned narrator of national history, into his analysis of the guiding self-image of Dutch society. Huizinga’s words become a beacon as they provide a prescript for the much needed explication of national identity. Strikingly, this beacon is not formed by a substantive moral or cultural commitment. Rather, Scheffer mobilises a quote that is concerned with the intensity, style and emotionality of self-imagination:

The historian Johan Huizinga wrote in his beautiful essay Nederlands Geestesmerk [Dutch Mental Character] (1935): ‘As a nation and state we are in a certain sense enduringly satisfait [content] and it is our national duty to remain so.’ He formulates a paradoxical task: all effort should be focused in order to remain at ease. This is also what is at stake today: how can we deal with new forms of inequality and segregation in such a way that the country remains uninhibited in its relations with immigrants? (March 25 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#92)

Being at ease and undisturbed is presented as being unmistakably Dutch, a crucial part of Dutch self-awareness. The troubling developments in the multicultural present must be urgently addressed to retain a relaxed society in the future. Only by going beyond the passive indifference, evasion and negligence of the past can a better, more relaxed future become reality. If the multicultural drama consists of an all-too satisfied self-awareness that has lapsed into passivity and indifference, the remedy to that drama is found not in a rejection of that national awareness but in its reinvigoration. Like Huizinga, Scheffer seeks to extend a civic burgherlyness that is, at heart, satisfied and uninhibited. In contrast to Huizinga who still speaks to the problematic of national character, such a project will crucially involve a breach of public discourse and a reinvigorated imagination of liberal values as the effort has become one of national identification.
Reactions to a call for reaction

If Scheffer’s essay is rhetorically well-endowed to assume the role of a sudden and autonomous intervention, the reactions it invoked are part and parcel of its performative flow. Public reactions further performed what the essay already prepared. The entire ensemble – intervention, reactions, public dissensus – affirms the analysis of drama in the essay: a sudden awakening is needed to breach society’s fateful passivity.

Much like Scheffer’s initial intervention, the substance of reactions to it were not unusual or strikingly different from the already established guidelines of debate over immigrants and their integration. Positions for and against were taken up. A whole series of op-eds and commentaries emerged that explicitly set out to react to Scheffer’s essay. Piece after piece responded explicitly to Scheffer, thus affirming its evocative status. Peter van der Veer, who had so strongly contradicted an orientalist reading of the Rushdie-affair years earlier, is one of the first to publish a response. It is indicative of the critical responses as they tended to agree with Scheffer’s worries albeit in less alarming terms, but contradict his suggestions for reinvigorating national identity: ‘Scheffer’s article is focused too much on a national, if not nationalistic, perspective on Dutch culture and the assimilation of other cultures to it.’ (February 5 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#93). Sociologist De Jong expresses a similar concern: ‘Scheffer repeatedly demonstrates a limited, static and monolithic perspective on cultures, in which a traditional part stands for the whole.’ (February 5 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#94). Robbert Bodegraven, editor of a magazine on multicultural society, summarises the discursive situation in his response:

With his article ‘The multicultural drama’ […] Paul Scheffer positions himself among illustrious company of those who have set off the emergency alarm over multicultural society. Paul Schnabel, J. L. Brugman, Heleen Dupuis and of course Frits Bolkestein preceded him. They all call for the protection of the [eigen] cultural heritage and warn against the cultural values that newcomers – read: muslims – want to impose on us. Scheffer now also sees this danger and suggests as a defence the re-emergence of national awareness. Scheffer relates the huge problems associated with the integration of immigrants to a ‘false self-image’. The Dutch don’t know (anymore) who they are, from whom they are descendants and how they have become what they are. This is questionable. Scheffer may be bothered by the inattention with which Dutch people discard their national pride, but proclamation of a national identity doesn’t necessarily lead to better circumstances for the integration of newcomers. (February 10 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#95)

Hans Wansink, prominent editor at De Volkskrant, also expressed scepticism:

I tend to see the failing integration of newcomers less as an issue of Dutch [Hollandse] abnegation than Scheffer. Although it is true that we are apprehensive in transmitting our own traditions and
history onto migrants, we also don’t grant the space to live out their freedom of religion and education. (February 12 2000, De Volkskrant) (#96)

Interestingly, Koen Koch – one of Scheffer’s most prominent critics – reiterates his position:

Might Scheffer be a civilised version of Haider? It’s too silly for words, but the idea demonstrates the complexity of the issue and the inability to deal with it. In this context, it is because Scheffer chooses to defend liberalism and tolerance as typically Dutch that large groups of allochthones who seek personal liberation from repressive social bonds, are alienated from him. This is regrettable and counterproductive as mechanisms of in- and exclusion are activated all the same. The opposition is not one of Dutch and non-Dutch, but of liberal over and against traditional. The shape that universal values of liberalism and tolerance take in Dutch society is constantly changing, in part because of our immigrants. This demonstrates the vitality of these values. There is no need for sweaty hands and clenched buttocks. (March 11 2000, Trouw) (#97)

Pushback also came from intellectuals and politicians who approached the issue from a decidedly pluralist perspective. In an interview with Trouw editor Marcel ten Hooven political scientists Meindert Fennema and Jean Tillie were invited to respond to Paul Scheffer’s essay and a piece by Paul Schnabel (1999) that was deemed to follow Scheffer’s line. Fennema and Tillie argued that their research showed how ethnic communal ties in fact precipitated integration:

‘What surprises me is the fact that there is hardly any empirical data in their pieces’, says Tillie. ‘They rather bluntly pronounce that everything will be in order if we work towards a Dutch monoculture. Instead, research shows that the particular cultures of minorities do not hinder integration.’ (February 28 2000, Trouw) (#98)

GroenLinks parliamentarian Mohammed Rabbbae, another regular to the debate about integration, criticised Scheffer and Schnabel quite directly:

It is remarkable that two progressives like Paul Scheffer and Paul Schnabel want to celebrate a kind of nationalistic revival over the backs of immigrants. (March 16 2000, Trouw) (#99)

Finally, social scientists Ruben Gowricharn and Jan Willem Duyvendak problematised the effects of Paul Scheffer’s intervention as they stated:

We agree with Paul Scheffer on one issue: it is crucial that the autochthonous elite is concerned about the social-economic lag of (some) migrants, in part because colour and class increasingly coincide. But, alas, this is where our agreement ends and we have to conclude that his analysis and his solutions, in so far as they are given, don’t make a lot of sense. Particularly the causal relation, suggested by Scheffer, between the social-economic position of allochthones and their culture has

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14 Wansink is referring here to the constitutionally protected right of associations of parents to create schools according to their own religious and philosophical world view and educate their children.
been rightly criticised. Developments in France show convincingly that – forced – cultural assimilation does little to amend social-economic issues. This ill-conceived relation brings Scheffer to only put ‘allochthones culture’ up for discussion, while the autochthones culture is elevated above any discussion [boven iedere discussie verheven] and should be manifested more emphatically and more ‘nationally’. 

The tone of the current debate over multicultural society has up to now been set by a few white men from the baby boom generation born shortly after WOII; Pim Fortuyn, Jan Brugman, Pieter Lakeman, Paul Schnabel en Paul Scheffer. This not only makes this gentlemen’s debate elitist, it also means that the debate refers to values and experiences that were and are important to that generation. These authors are committed to a culturally homogenous and more or less closed nation-state, which is accompanied by a blind spot for transnational cultural ties. They are also guided by a rejection of pillarisation and group ties, leading to a strong desire to culturally white wash allochthones. Was it Kossmann who said that Dutch identity was characterized by a good discussion? That is precisely what should happen now: a good discussion. With all of the many divergent voices of allochthones included. (March 23 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#100)

The point here is not to suggest that Scheffer was only criticised – he wasn’t – or that Scheffer’s critics tried to defuse his alarmism. In fact, almost all reactions concurred explicitly with his worries about societal tensions. The point is to see how a discursive turning point comes about not simply from the introduction of novel rhetorical inventions and performances, but is enacted across an entire ensemble of interventions that together make up a particular public event. Together they make real what Scheffer’s essay assumed to be the case: that his intervention would provoke much turmoil, but that this was the only way to start facing the reality of what was happening. Reflections on the debate by journalist Mark Kranenburg show how the string of publications was already being mediated as a turning point in the moment. On February 17, he writes in the NRC Handelsblad:

Just like Bolkestein before, Scheffer has not done more than to list a number of known facts and formulated some penetrating questions. And just like Bolkestein’s piece before, Scheffer’s article has evoked an avalanche of reactions. A clear case of what Americans call ‘the big mo’, the right moment. Yet it still is strange. It means that the general recognition to implement forceful policy, which emerged nine years ago when Bolkestein rocked the boat, has slowly but surely faded out. While in fact the problems that were identified have only grown in size. The influx of allochthones has continued in a higher rate and the same is true for segregation: the black schools of nine years ago have become even blacker. […] Scheffer speaks of a multicultural drama. But there is also an adjacent politico-cultural drama that leads to the fact that the necessary and continued debate on minority policy is being held not at all or on a pathetic level. (February 17 2000, NRC Handelsblad) (#101)

Although many contradicted Scheffer’s push for national awareness, they certainly did not contradict the notion that liberal values and openness towards others was at the heart of Dutch culture. Christen democratic politicians did indeed plea for tolerance of public religious expression, but they did not contradict liberalism’s centrality. The question was to what extent and how liberal values can best be
propagated and reframed. On this point, there is no substantive dissensus about what constitutes the difference between allochthonous traditionalism and Dutch culture. The image of liberal Dutchness acts as a shared means of disagreement. For Scheffer, the problem lies in the style through which Dutch liberalism could or should be presented. In line with this argument many of the reactions explicitly note how Scheffer’s intervention was affecting the debate. They again make explicit what Scheffer’s essay already assumed: that his intervention would usher in a new mode of debate, a new style of speaking that was to be more ostensive and outspoken. When, for example, Gowricharn and Duyvendak studiously analyse the discursive consequences of Scheffer’s provocations they may lay bare some, indeed, worrying aspects of public discourse, but they also affirm the notion that Scheffer’s essay had breached the boundaries and possibilities of debate. Moreover, they go on to reiterate Kossmann’s idea that Dutch identity is a matter of discussion.

Scheffer finalised and, in a sense, perfected the enactment of a turning point by publishing a reply to the many reactions, titled *The multicultural drama, a reply*. He writes:

The past two months have been an exploration journey in my own country, call it a civic enculturation course. The wave of hundreds of conversations, letters and critical commentaries in reaction to my article demonstrate that many people are affected by living together with so many cultures on such a small territory. Through the shock of immigration Dutch society is prompted to be inventive. Some are better at that than others. However, the feeling of uncertainty is not easily brushed off. In the end, the many reactions, however hard-nosed, provide hope. In the preceding years it has often been said that the multicultural multitude is not susceptible to public debate. Immediately, there would emerge dissonant tones and improper clichés. Although an emphasis on disadvantage [achterstand] can all too easily regress into stigmatisation of entire segments of the population [bevolkingsgroepen], overall this hasn’t happened. It turns out it is possible to speak in a somewhat unprejudiced [onbevangen] way about the many pitfalls in which we, of course, all too often stumble. (March 25 2000, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#102)

Many political leaders and high level administrators – Hans Dijkstal, Ivo Opstelten, Eimert van Middelkoop, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Ab Klink – responded. Roger van Boxtel, the minister responsible for ‘problems in large cities’, published an extensive reply in which he agreed with Scheffer’s analysis of the problem, but did not agree with the ‘sense of defeat that emanates from Scheffer’s piece’. In late April of 2000 a parliamentary debate was held in lieu of the public controversy. *Trouw* wrote in their editorial column that:

The parliamentary debate has, without a doubt, contributed to a more balanced approach, more clarity and, not in the least, to a normal pitch. This may prevent the issue from becoming a raw nerve of society that plays up with the lightest touch. (April 21 2000, *Trouw*) (#103)
Discussion over national identity, Muslim others, multicultural troubles and, particularly, the need for a better debate and a governmental response persisted. Once again, debate is articulated as much more than a political disagreement playing itself out in public. The idea of changing speech rules were attributed a non-political, societal significance. Debate is foremost taken to be expressive of deeply held moral commitments expressed in public. A particularly effective summation is given by public intellectual Bas Heijne, who writes in a distinctly ironic-yet-earnest style:

Of course, all these Dutch debates, with Koran-waiving imams, Nietzsche-quoting philosophers, doubting directors and crazy architects, don’t produce anything concrete, also because politicians emphatically ignore them. That’s not the point. The debates are in essence a kind of civic enculturation course, not just for allochthones, but also for the Dutch themselves. Finally, people can proclaim all kinds of things on issues about which Dutch politicians are too obtuse or afraid to do so. Finally people can speak about the Netherlands as a country to which you really feel attached. (February 17 2001, NRC Handelsblad) (#104)

If the ensemble of Scheffer’s alarm and the public reactions to it appeared to have instigated a breach of speech rules and an opening of political opportunities, the figure of Fortuyn came to actually occupy the political space thus created and further inflect the need to reinvigorate Dutchness. What became almost instantly named ‘the Fortuyn revolt’ (see in particular Ellemers 2002; Wansink 2004; Couwenberg 2004) forms the central spectacle through which a pivot point in political time was performed. While the importance of Pim Fortuyn’s entry into party political conflict in the Netherlands can hardly be underestimated, the significance of his platform for debates on Dutchness should not be. As I will argue, the problematic of Dutchness was not radically rewritten through the rise and fall of Fortuyn. After Fortuyn’s moment, articulations of Dutchness did not look much different than before. Yet, ‘national culture’ became an immensely important policy issue in lieu of Fortuyn’s ‘revolt’. How is this possible?

**Fortuyn’s politics of embeddedness**

Fortuyn’s actions would have a major effect on Dutch politics. He demonstrated that a whopping 26 parliamentary seats could be assembled around a revanchist agenda of safety and order, anti-bureaucratic reform of the welfare state, a forceful and demanding integration policy, far-reaching restriction of immigration and an optimistic plea for societal renewal (Fortuyn 2002). Moreover, he was able to do so practically overnight: entering the political field as the new leader of Leefbaar
in the summer of 2001 and being brutally yanked out of it in the spring of 2002, just before the elections.

The idea that the political events of 2000-2002 constituted a moment of reaction, in which suppressed grievance could finally manifest themselves in public, is associated most intimately with the figure of Pim Fortuyn. His shift from ex-Marxist sociology professor and public intellectual of the entrepreneurial classes to political leader of an insurgent movement of discontent and revival would turn out to deeply inflect issues of nationhood and diversity. Yet, we should take care not to rush to any conclusions about the importance of Fortuyn. What did his politics actually bring to the moment of reaction?

Fortuyn’s writing on Dutchness resonates with the counter-tradition of ‘cultural nationalism’ that can also be found in S. W. Couwenberg’s work. But nothing like a turn towards that brand of ‘cultural Dutchness’ took place in response to Fortuyn’s popularity. That is, the idea of ‘the Dutch’ as a category should be understood first in terms of a cultural ethni and only in a second instance as a territorial and political community did not find any expanding articulation. This notion of Dutchness, which implicates other culturally Dutch peoples beyond or irrespective of state territories and memberships, was and is of marginal significance for the succeeding contentions over Dutchness. Of course, such articulations of Dutchness do exist in many contexts (Margry & Roodenburg 2007; Guadeloupe & De Rooij 2007; Stengs 2012), but they are rarely the subject of political contention or policy justifications. Nor did it come to play any dominant role in the debates succeeding the ‘Fortuyn revolt’.

Fortuyn did not become notorious by proclaiming a fraternisation with the Flemish in neighbouring Belgium, the Dutch New Zealanders, emigrants in Canada, the Afrikaners of South Africa, or the preservation of ethnological heritage. His attack on the ‘leftist church’, a fantastically layered expression that galvanised Fortuyn’s disdain for the corporatist establishment and the social-democrats in particular, was concerned with the immigration of culturally other-cum-backward people who were held responsible for crime, welfare dependence, alienation among the natives and the spread of antiquated values in a modern, enlightened country (Lucardie & Voerman 2002; Pels 2003; Sunier & Van Ginkel 2006; Oudenampsen 2013). Fortuyn reiterated – to great effect – an already established distinction between enlightened Dutchness and backward islam. Apart from wonderfully evocative language and performances – not unimportant – Fortuyn did little to innovate the manner in which nationhood could be problematised. The significance of Fortuyn’s distinct ‘cultural nationalism’ lies elsewhere.
In order to demonstrate this, we need to take into account the importance of anti-statist ideas in the evolving politics of Fortuyn. Recurring throughout his writings is the idea that the contemporary world is characterised by processes – Europeanization, globalisation, migration, the ICT-revolution, rapidly raising levels of education and individual autonomy – that, first, undermine the always already contested governance of centralised state bureaucracies and, second, provide opportunities for quickly evolving, networked structures of self-government by increasingly rational and empowered citizens. The sociologist Pim Fortuyn was, in many ways, a right-conservative Manual Castells. In his book *To the people of the Netherlands: the contract-society, a political-economic drama of morals* – a reference to a canonical political pamphlet by Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol associated with the civic insurrection of the so-called patriots at the end of the 18th century – Fortuyn concurs with far-reaching cooperation in Europe, but holds that this will not create a federal Europe:

The underlying structure is far older [older than European state formation] and, time and again, proves to be of immense importance. This underlying structure is that of regionality [regionaliteit]. A region is a survey-able geographic whole, in which economy and culture found their natural course [bedding] for centuries. An important expression, if not the most important, of that culture is language. The language binds people into a people [volk], into a nation. […] Frisians and Limburger are worlds apart, not to mention the Hollanders. And how much do differences between Walloons and inhabitants of Flanders mean, or between Catalans and Basques, or between Sicilians and Northern Italians, or between the Parisian and the Breton? After WOII we were able to think for a large number of years that these differences didn’t matter anymore. The politics of many modern, centralised states was geared towards diminishing regional differences. […] However, in the last ten years there has been a shift in thinking about regions and, even more importantly, the regions are acting much more self-confidently and autonomously. An important contribution to this changing attitude comes from the policy of the European Commission. […] The dependence upon the central government led to insular regions. The only way to maintain their particularity was to concentrate on their own culture and folklore. With the diminishing position of central government the region could become much more open to the outside. […] It will become increasingly difficult for national governments to maintain their monopoly positions with regards to the region and the conglomerate urban areas. This is true not only for the monopoly on taxation – both region and urban areas are already long underway in becoming distinct spaces of taxation – but also for such varying domains as health care, education, economic development and infrastructure. […] When I think of new fascism, I don’t particularly think of Le Pen, Schonhüber, the Flemish Block or in our country Janmaat, with their escalating, primitive xenophobia. […] Consumer society implies that people constantly want something new. They’ll quickly get bored with such ladies or gentlemen. No, when I think of new fascism, I think of diligent technocrats… (Fortuyn 1992: 24-28) (#105)

Fortuyn’s notion of nationhood clearly resonates with the tradition of ‘cultural nationalism’, yet it is of a particular bend. The crucial point is not the preservation of distinct (national) cultures, nor is the national state all that important. Fortuyn routinely uses naturalising and essentialising language to speak about difference,
but the rationale for doing so comes not from an adherence to ethnic purity or primordial roots. It is not a matter of preservation, of claiming that certain cultural particularities are unchangeable and will resist amendment or mixing. Nations even appear to be highly diverse conglomerates of regions. The notion of one, homogenous national culture is untenable here. Rather, Fortuyn juxtaposes artificially constructed state institutions, particularly national ones, over and against locally lived worlds of meaningful expression and entrepreneurship that constitute the real social bonds from which national states are merely temporary extensions. Political pre-eminence therefore lies with the survey-able world of the region. Culture and economy constitute the energy, engagement, pleasure and dynamism of people’s lives and thus form the locus of value. State politics should be a tool to attend to the fears, hopes and dreams of regionally embedded citizens. National government is a means to an end: the coordinated interaction of highly diverse people embedded in their own cultural locality. Thus, the national state should never be allowed to create its own necessities, its own needs, apart from the people that have built it. In fact, Fortuyn foresees the EU taking up the task of such coordination, while regions acquire more and more means of self-government. Thereby, the national state gradually becomes marginalised, yet elites who depend on their position in national state bureaucracies resist this process with all they’ve got. For Fortuyn, new fascism comes from Weber’s bureaucratic iron cage, not Herder’s lived ethnos.

The significance of Fortuyn’s cultural nationalism was not that it breached the hegemony of a liberal or civic nationalism, much less cosmopolitan pluralism which was never hegemonic to begin with. Rather, it informed a particular assessment of and engagement with national politics. The point of Fortuyn’s nationalism is an all-out attack on the irrationalities of technocratic, bloodless government. In this regard, greater European coordination would release people’s cultural and economic vitality from the grip of centralised, national conformity. It is here that the established management of immigration and diversity creates problems according to Fortuyn. That is, the problem is not cultural diversity itself, which in Fortuyn’s cultural nationalism is a normal condition for nations, but the attempts by state administrators to bloodlessly impose a way of dealing with diversity onto its citizens. For instance: while Fortuyn’s approach to issues of difference is one that is deeply marked by cultural relativism, he – like many others – used the term as an epitaph for indifference to lived experience and historically engrained meaning as, apparently, exercised by disaffected technocrats. Fortuyn criticised the political establishment, invested in the out-dated structures of
centralised governance, for being *bloodless* cultural relativist as they disregarded the lived troubles of immigration.

Fortuyn moves without hesitation between a pre-statist Herderian notion of culture and a distinctly statist approach to Dutchness, implying state responsibilities for guarding access to citizenship on the basis of politico-cultural values. The problem with Muslims and their lacking integration was not that they don’t take to raw haring or introduce yet unknown customs, songs and products into a familiar cultural milieu. Fortuyn’s regard for the diverse cultural life of people is at the heart of his cultural relativism. The problem lies squarely in the inability of newcomers to cooperate with and participate in the practices of public interaction and political decision-making. Unlike Dutch citizens, they are not yet empowered and emancipated, equipped to claim self-governance over against an overbearing technocracy. Through this public and political inaptitude they come to rely on the technocratic state, thereby empowering the bloodless government of established state officials. According to Fortuyn, the bloodless management of diversity by established political elites disabled effective confrontations over cultural differences and discourages natives and newcomers from expressing their cultural particularities. A bloodless cultural relativism imposed by national government thereby precludes the civic maturation of the immigrant.

It is this political diagnosis that became most important in the controversies surrounding Fortuyn’s rise to prominence. Like others before him, Fortuyn often repeated that natives felt like foreigners in their own country. Yet, Fortuyn never explained that feeling by arguing that culturally different peoples could not live together; that nations could not be diverse; that a nation and a culture should coincide. The problem is conceived outside a schema of un-mixable substances. Instead, Fortuyn argued that the cultural history of Jewish, Christian and Humanist civilisation, as developed in the West, equipped the Dutch with the means to live together and deal with their cultural differences. Conversely, the backward, Islamic cultural formation disabled Muslims to live in the world of modern, emancipated citizens (Fortuyn 1997). The problem is not cultural diversity itself, but the inability of specific groups to be successful without technocratic assistance, and, even more importantly, the hesitations of the political establishment to grapple with that problem.

Arguing for the importance of a Judeo-Christian-Humanist tradition in developing a liberal democracy and an open public sphere was not exactly a gesture that many in Dutch politics were in a position to convincingly disagree with. On this issue, Fortuyn merely articulated in accusatory language what was already self-evidently Dutch, namely the liberal capacity to organise difference in
Fortuyn became most notorious for expressing precisely what his opponents also said to believe about the Dutch and their identity: they are enlightened, emancipated, modern, autonomous, liberal, civic, sexually permissive, tolerant and a bit blunt. These were the qualities of lived culture and enterprise that Fortuyn deemed best promoted by a self-assured affirmation of Dutch identity and a restriction of undesirable immigration of unequipped others. Fortuyn’s notion of cultural difference is relevant here because it helps to understand how he sought to articulate a distinction between the bloodless defence of Western liberalism by the political establishment and his own passionate expression of it. In Fortuyn’s politics, the latter is crucial to the way politics should be done. It should aspire to express energetically the lived values and experiences of culturally embedded people. This vocalisation of deeply held convictions and experiences is the proper role of the representative as he should derive his politics from embedded concerns and desires. As soon as the representative severs the link between himself and everyday life he will only be able to vocalise the artificial necessities of political engineering. This is the pathology that Fortuyn diagnosed in the stale corporatism of the purple-coalition government: a politics without life.

When critics chose to attack Fortuyn for taking anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant positions they may have been expressing genuine concern about rising animosity against immigrants, but they were also demonstrating precisely what Fortuyn deemed to be the problem: a self-inflicted discomfort with articulating one’s cultural differences to others, an ineptitude for expressing one’s embeddedness. This analysis of the problem is hardly unique to Fortuyn’s distinctive cultural nationalism. It resonates almost verbatim with problematisations as they were articulated from the end of the 1980’s onwards: the Dutch are tolerantly multicultural to the point of neglect and indifference, which makes them susceptible to incursions by cultures that are less open and pluralistic. Fortuyn was never completely trapped in the position of a cultural nationalist who expounded racist ideas about a pure, Dutch ethnos. Indeed, his positions on Dutchness were neither limited to nor primarily concerned with the preservation of said ethnos. Rather, they informed his critique of technocracy and his focus on a passionate, lively expression of political convictions.

In line with Fortuyn’s own diagnosis, his personal commitment and passion became hugely significant for the political effects of his appearance and assassination (Pels 2003; Koopmans & Muis 2009). As shall be demonstrated further in the chapters to come, it is not tenable to suggest that with Fortuyn a turn to cultural nationalism took place. However, Fortuyn’s cultural nationalism and the associated critique of technocracy did enable him to radicalise the already
established contestation over Dutch identity. Indeed, his writings and his public interventions contain many allusions to national imagery and the widely expressed notion that the Dutch should feel unrestrained in expressing their particular cultural singularity. What Fortuyn’s appearance added to the already established contention was the idea that the public struggle taking place was about him, about the persona of the public representative. Fortuyn’s persona and personal commitment to his attack on established politics in the Netherlands became highly valorised (Pels 2003; Sunier & Van Ginkel 2006; Muijs 2012). The fact that he paid for his efforts with his life was thereby all the more significant.

To be sure, this is not to suggest that Fortuyn invented or introduced personal politics into the Dutch context (cf. Pels 2003). Personalities, mediated across ever changing technologies, have long since been part and parcel of the relationship between leaders and publics in the Netherlands (Te Velde 2010; Brants & Van Praag 2006). Fortuyn’s appearance brought the importance and significance attributed to persona to a higher pitch. His persona and the effect it could have on audiences became the subject of public discourse itself. With Fortuyn it became effectively impossible to deny that ‘screen presence’ mattered in and of itself (see also Van Reekum 2012b) and the idea that personality matters was itself a crucial part of Fortuyn’s platform. Thus, the need for and power of personal connections between political leaders and electoral audiences became a matter of concern: did politicians take care of their relationship with their audiences in the right way? Why could Fortuyn do what others couldn’t? The attention-arousing and image-mediating character of modern democracy became a crucial point of discussion (Elchardus 2002; Tiemeijer 2006; Bovens & Wille 2009).

The idea that representatives should listen to the people has been an insurgent concept from the 1950’s onwards (De Haan 1993; Zahn 1989). It basically says that public opinion emanates from below and should be recanted by those in positions of leadership. Over and over, various generations of politicians and public figures had consecutively attacked each other for not really representing public opinion. What the presence of Fortuyn now added is the idea that the disembedded elites could only really be unmasked by someone who put his entire personality into his political mission. Only a person who craved an intimate relation with the public would be able to speak its mind. With Fortuyn, the narrative of participatory democracy was cast in the mould of an intimate and direct relationship between representative and represented. Critique of Fortuyn’s performative prowess – for being vulgarly populist and playing on base sentiments, particularly when it came to problems caused by allochthones – only came to
affirm the intimate connection that Fortuyn’s political movements apparently embodied.

The spectacle of Fortuyn’s rise, notoriety and assassination did little to displace the already established conception of the problem with Dutch identity, nor did it effectively introduce a counter-narrative of Dutchness into public discussion. The pushback from other parties against Fortuyn and his shocking assassination did become an immensely affective enactment of the notion that certain opinions were systematically repressed and could not be freely expressed in public (Prins 2004; Van Stokkom 2008). Thus, the troubles with Dutch identity acquired an immense weight: at stake was the very connection between ‘people’ and ‘government’. Even though Fortuyn himself added little to the on-going articulations of Dutchness, the fact that his politics were so strongly connected to his person and his leadership meant that his persona became a focal point of concern. Quite in line with reactions to Scheffer’s essay, Fortuyn rise and murder enacted a breach of public discourse and governmental policy. Yet, this breach can hardly be found in the way in which Dutch identity was approached or imagined. Both Scheffer and Fortuyn’s moments of reaction solidified and radicalised the existing image of a civic, liberal, enlightened nation.

**Dutchness after the breach**

Taken together, the interventions of Scheffer and Fortuyn constituted at the beginning of the new millennium a particular call to action. It is impossible to suggest that Scheffer and Fortuyn were the authors of the post-2000 politicisation of Dutchness. A host of other developments should always be taken into account, not in the last instance the reverberations of 9-11. However, through the way in which they helped articulate a moment of reaction in political time we can better understand what would be at stake in the attempts to translate a problematised nationhood into specific policy efforts. Two aspects seem of crucial importance.

First, Dutchness after the breach would be that which was lacking before. It is not only presented as the solution that will – finally – allow government to fix that which was broken, but it figures as the cure that had not yet been tried. ‘Dutch culture’, ‘Dutch identity’, ‘Dutch distinctiveness’ carry the promise of a last resort: now that all else has failed, we might try it. As the political turmoil of the 2000-2002 period had demonstrated, it was now time to finally do what had been postponed for so long: to turn to Dutchness in a way that the imaginary of Dutchness itself so thoroughly disabled. To *turn to it* in an emphatic, whole-hearted and authentic manner, to mobilise it without reserve. It would no longer be enough to prop it up as an abstract principle: debate, image, construction, openness,
toleration. It would need to be used, applied, implemented, effectuated, put into action. Governmental policies would have to make of Dutchness no longer just its vague goal at the horizon – ‘integration’ – but its instrument at hand. Dutchness could no longer just be the end result of policy. It should be yielded as an instrument of policy. As I have argued, the watershed of 2000-2002 cannot be reconstructed as a moment at which a cultural turn took effect. That would first of all presume that public discourse and governmental policy were not concerned with culture before. Moreover, one would assume that innovative and dissonant articulations of Dutch culture can be found in the interventions of the main protagonists of such a cultural turn. I have tried to show why it is much more appropriate to understand the significance of the watershed and the roles of Scheffer and Fortuyn along other lines.

Scheffer and Fortuyn did not invent new discourses of Dutch culture, but rather new ways to articulate the inevitable coming of backlash. Not only did they themselves figure prominently in these narratives of reactive politics, the already well-established motif of tensions between ‘multicultural idealism’ and ‘multicultural reality’ was given a far grander significance. Scheffer and Fortuyn, each in their own way, invented ways to relate this tension to the very legitimacy of democratic representation itself. The subsequent rupture of representation did open up space for a new politics of Dutchness, namely one in which Dutchness would become a governmental instrument as much as the governmental goal it was already.

Dutchness after the breach would be that which renews the connection between embedded citizens and their representatives. In their wielding of this new instrument, those in government would need to rediscover what it means to be Dutch and, thereby, restore its relationship with the citizenry. The politicisation of Dutchness is not just about finally instrumentalising it, but at once about acting on the behalf of an embedded public. Using Dutchness as a policy tool is not just a matter of using the right tool for the right job, but also a matter of listening to the people. To a certain extent we might even say that Dutchness becomes the right tool for the job because the people desire it so. What in policy science are called ‘outcomes’ become conspicuously irrelevant. What matters most are not the actual consequences of policy – better scores on indicators of integration –, but whether government is capable of instrumentalising Dutchness in policy.

Indeed, this amounts to a somewhat contradictory mission. On the one hand there is a focus on instrumental action and the hope for real solutions. Results are what matter, not the empty rhetoric of lofty ideals. On the other hand there is the audience of government. It apparently wants Dutchness to be instrumentalised
quite irrespective of the results as it demands representatives who listen to it. This tension provides the space in which the post-2000 politicisation of Dutchness would manoeuvre: Dutchness should be turned into an instrument and it should thereby be enacted convincingly in view of an embedded public. How can both be achieved? As we move now to the two foremost lines of instrumentation, it will become evident how difficult it became to enact such instruments of Dutchness convincingly.
7.

Enculturation: testing malleability through cultural demands

After 2002 civic enculturation tests would become a central focus of attention in debates about governmental effort to instrumentalise Dutchness. Of course, a whole host of other policies and regulations have been at play in the post-2002 contentions, but civic enculturation tests are the core, and in some sense, sole program geared explicitly towards the deliberate assimilation of individuals into the national fold. It thereby forms the core policy measure through which post-2002 governments sought to remedy the failure of integration and attend to the public that Fortuyn had made visible. Civic enculturation became a highly valorised object of public concern as newly elected governments would have to demonstrate their ability to get enculturation right from now on. As has become clear in the previous chapter, this implied overseeing a break from a multicultural past in the most deliberate way possible. In an essay based on a public lecture entitled ‘The rebuilding of the Netherlands’ the new leader of the christen-democrats, Jan Peter Balkenende, set out such a position:

Cultural openness, respect for opposing opinions and attitudes cannot and should not lead to tolerance and indifference. Integration and sociality can only take shape through acceptance of the principle of the Dutch rule of law and adaptation to the substantive components of Dutch culture. The values grounded in the Constitution are its core. Communalism [gemeenschapszin] presupposes common, shared values. This means that multiculturality as such is inadequate as a basis for integration. (January 25 2002, NRC Handelsblad) (#106)

As the prime minister of multiple, post-2002 governments, Jan Peter Balkenende would become the spokesperson for a politics of moral revanchism. Reiterating the moral-dispositional connotations that were already built into the notion of ‘actief burgerschap’ throughout the 1990’s (Bovens & Hemereijck 1996; Koenis 1997; Tonkens 2008; Ossenwaarde 2010; Van Houdt 2014) the idea that citizenship was first and foremost concerned with the normative and moral consensus at the basis of public life came to inform the policy agenda of civic enculturation (Driouchi 2007: 95). Access to citizenship would come to be discussed in the terms directly linked to a wider discourse on the lack of shared norms and values. If strangers were to become citizens, it was cultural assimilation to such norms and values that was in order (see also De Leeuw & Van Wichelen 2012; Boomkens 2010).
Although the motif of failed multiculturalism runs through much of the discussion over civic enculturation in the immediate months and years after Pim Fortuyn’s assassination in spring of 2002, its significance for debates over enculturation courses became particularly effective as political parties responded to the parliamentary investigation report delivered by the so-called Commission Blok. In many ways similar to commissions in other European polities – most notably the Parekh Commission in the UK (Parekh 2000) and the Stasi Commission in France (Stasi 2003; see also Akan 2009) – the Commission Blok was ordered by parliament to evaluate the integration policies of the preceding decades. With much of parliament having already taken firm positions on the failure of integration policy, the commission’s report played a curious role in the consolidation of political cleavages and electoral dynamics at the time.

The Commission operated under intensive political and public scrutiny. As we have seen, the very notion of a ‘Fortuyn revolt’ implied that the failure of integration and the political blame for that failure concerned the democratic legitimacy of the political system as such. The triangle of discontent-in-old-neighbourhoods, political-denial-of-problems and a danger-of-extreme-popular-reaction had been the discursive sine qua non of integration pessimism for a long time already. With the spectacle of his rise and tragedy of Fortuyn’s assassination, this articulations of the problem gained immense public significance.

The Commission’s work would demonstrate whether the political system – through the highly esteemed conduit of a parliamentary investigation\(^\text{15}\) – would be able to do what it had putatively failed to do for all too long: present the realities behind the political upheavals in earnest. Thus, the Commission operated in a perilous situation: it would finally bring out the facts without prejudice or bias, while what could count as those unbiased facts could, for a large majority of parliament, only point out the utter failure of past governmental action. It is also in the light of this peculiar situation that the concise, yet intricate conclusion of the commission can be best understood: ‘The Commission has determined that the integration of many allochthones has been completely or partly successful and this is a formidable achievement. Both of the allochthones in question and the receiving society.’ (Commission Blok 2004: 520) (#107). The Commission went on to point out that the ‘formidable achievement’ of successful integration could not be attributed systematically to governmental policies. In short: integration had been a

\(^{15}\) Members of parliaments have the constitutionally recognised right to call for a ‘parliamentary investigation’ that, if affirmed by a majority, is executed by a committee of parliamentary representatives who have the right to conduct interviews under oath.
success, while integration policy had little to do with that (Commission Blok 2004: 520-522).

This rather unremarkable and predictable conclusion of any policy evaluation exercise – policy cannot be shown to have systemically caused the desired policy outcomes – was nonetheless highly significant and was extensively covered in news media and discussed in parliament. For those political parties that had explicitly set out to demonstrate a veritable break with the failed past – in particular SP, PvdA, VVD, and CDA – the conclusions of the Commission indicated that more needed to be done in order to bring not-yet-integrated denizens and citizens into the national fold. Through its quite critical reception in parliament, the effect of the Commission’s work turned out to be an unexpected reversal of its conclusions: integration was still considered a failure, the Commission Blok has not been able to bring the reality of that failure into view because they followed all too studiously the parameters of integration policy explicated in a now rejected political period and, crucially, the lack of policy effects in the past should raise, not lower, expectations of new policy efforts. Much of the debate over inburgering following up on the contentious conclusions of the Commission Blok centred on what precisely this extra effort should be. If a break with the past was needed, it would be imperative to demonstrate that a resolutely different policy direction would be taken.

Not so new: learned citizenship

If the instrumentalisation of Dutchness within civic enculturation policy would constitute a radical break from the past, it should be clear what kind of past is at stake here. It is therefore important to emphasise that the very idea of civic enculturation and its institutionally concrete manifestation – class room courses supervised by instructors; textbook curricula; questionnaires and language assessments – have nothing whatsoever to do with the political upheavals at the start of the millennium.

The idea that aspirant-citizens need to demonstrate – in some form or fashion – that they are integrated in Dutch society has been part of regulating access to Dutch citizenship from its very beginning (Van Oers et al. 2010: 22). There is no period in time in which the goal of integration did not inform the reasoning over and justifications for access to Dutch citizenship (Jones 2007; Schuster 1999; Heijs 1995). The notion of a test in which such integration could be ascertained has also been part of such regulation for at least three decades (Van Oers et al. 2010). The pedagogical understanding of Dutch citizenship – that it is something to be learned – is nothing new either: burgerschap has appeared as a
learned and civilised set of dispositions in the individual for quite some time, rendering the idea that it must be learned to be obtained almost self-evident. Nor is there anything new about the idea that a failure of integration policy should be repaired by the introduction of enculturation courses geared to individualised applicants.

Civic enculturation in the forms of targeted courses emerged out of an earlier recognition of failure, as it took shape after the so-called national minorities debates of the early 1990’s. The authors of the WRR-report on the minorities policies (WRR 1989) and the evaluators of the minorities debates held across the country (Van der Zwan & Entzinger 1994) were themselves at the forefront, advocating the introduction of mandatory enculturation courses as part of the fundamental change in governmental policy. What was new here was the idea that government should become actively involved in organising and regulating the instruction prior to a test. Government should step up its efforts to integrate aspirant-citizens and claim responsibility for the effectiveness of that integration policy. As Arie van der Zwan explained in an interview with NRC Handelsblad in June of 1994 after having published a report with Han Entzinger (1994):

If one demands newcomers to adapt to Dutch society and let them achieve something by employing them, one takes away the odium of profiteers who just come in and use our institutions and provisions. So that will also affect the population, who will be more inclined to accept them and will deem this to be a just and equitable approach. In this way people can earn their own presence. (June 14 1994, NRC Handelsblad, italics added) (#108)

Van der Zwan and Entzinger formulated their argument for a mandatory enculturation program in line with discourses concerning the activation of unemployed and welfare-dependent populations (WRR 1990; Engbersen 1990). Their report is built around the notion that too much assistance and leniency towards those at the margins of society will unintentionally reinforce their dependence and passivity. Thus, their plea for a combination of labour market flexibility (allowing employers to hire newcomers at sub-minimum wage) and mandatory enculturation follows closely the more general tenants of the citizenship narrative: active citizenship appears as the disciplined ability to be autonomous, active and self-regulating (Van Gunsteren 2009; Ossenwaarde 2010).

One way of describing the shift in civic enculturation policy after 2002 would be to state that it has moved from a program that is concerned with socio-economic lags of newcomers to one that is concerned with cultural ones (see WRR 1989; Rijkschroeff et al. 2003; SCP 2003; Entzinger 2006). While this is not entirely inappropriate I want to argue that a simple dichotomy between ‘economy’
and ‘culture’ obscures much of what we need to grasp in order to understand the post-2002 contentions over Dutchness in civic enculturation programs. At the very least, it is important to recognise that the distinction between ‘economy’ and ‘culture’ is itself informed by certain ideas about what it takes to be and become Dutch. Van der Zwan and Entzinger’s argument is certainly not agnostic about Dutchness. In fact, they suggest that a mandatory program will allow newcomers to demonstrate that they have earned their right to be part of the nation. Dutchness is not absent from access to citizenship here: it appears quite forcibly as the notion that one cannot become part of the nation without effort and strain, without a test of perseverance. If burgerschap is understood to be something that can only be acquired by being learned, then the argument for mandatory enculturation cannot be understood as being ‘economic’ at the exclusion of ‘culture’.

When considering Dutchness, then, it is not all that significant whether the enculturation program proposed by Van der Zwan, Entzinger and others was mainly geared to socio-economic achievement and mobility as opposed to more explicitly ethnocultural justifications, which became more salient after 2002. The distinction between socio-economic and ethnocultural integration measures is used all too indiscriminately as a way to qualify the tendencies of integration policy (see Entzinger 2013), which is not to say that it is entirely meaningless. What may be more significant is the fact that already from the early 1990’s the idea of civic enculturation is part of a more general movement in which contractual conditions are introduced in relation to citizenship: access to full inclusion are made dependent upon achievements and activity of the individual.

This contractual logic is much more than a bleak, technocratic approach in which rights must be earned in exchange for effort and success in the labour market. With the contractual logic comes a far less ascetic, deeply emotional narrative about the effects of these policies on both the constitution of the newly residing persons as well as the feelings of justice and acceptance of the native population. As Van der Zwan and Entzinger argue in the quote above, those who are already Dutch citizens ‘will be more inclined to accept them [aspirant-citizens] and will deem this to be a just and equitable approach’. The newcomer becomes more active and emancipated, while the native becomes less anxious. The new contractualism is explicitly meant to transform the moral economy of both newcomers and native. What’s more, their relationship is at once concerned with socio-economic and ethnocultural issues. The socio-economic dependencies and dynamism of cultural others appear as particularly relevant to the potentially racist and xenophobic anxieties of the native, Dutch population.
The recognition that newcomers are being disciplined and made to do their best should arouse feelings of esteem for the new co-patriots and thereby make manageable the ethnicised tensions that had become visible during the ‘national minorities debate’. The ‘socio-economic’ effort of newcomers is thus imagined to have distinctly ‘cultural’ effects: namely creating assurance among the natives that newcomers could come to belong among ‘us’. Far from being a non-cultural program of incorporation, the very idea of a civic enculturation program is sharply inflected by notions of what it is specific about Dutch citizenship and what will enable a more peaceful and ordered process of integration: national inclusion is dependent on demonstrable effort, autonomy and economic self-reliance. In other words, what seems most significant for questions of Dutchness is the fact that civic enculturation courses and their tests were introduced from the outset as a mandatory program that would inculcate activity and self-reliance in newcomers. It is precisely by being mandatory and demanding that civic enculturation programs test what needs to be tested: the individual inclination of the aspirant-citizen to take their life into their own hands and attain access to national citizenship through concerted effort. As shall become clear, it is the mandatory character of the program that would later become the main focus of discussion and contention.

David Pinto, vocal critique of the minorities policy of the 1980’s, aptly articulates the complex way in which mandatory enculturation will include newcomers into a community of citizens for whom cultural identity becomes irrelevant and individual empowerment the only relevant horizon. In a piece that advocates a far more extensive, European program of migration control and nationally-based assimilation efforts, he writes:

Right from the start, policy makers that shaped the minorities policies in the eighties should have given attention to cultural differences. Had they done so, they would have prepared both the immigrants as well as the receiving society for the cultural and religious differences, to which immediately must be noted that it is first the migrant who should make the effort to fully participate in his new environment. This should have been done through a mandatory enculturation contract. […] The enculturation program is bound to a deadline and results. After the enculturation period one can no longer appeal to specific policies [Pinto implies group-based policies for ethnic minorities singled out by government] for foreigners. For possible assistance or welfare, foreigners from that moment on need to go to the general institutions that are there for all residents in this country without regard for differences in race or colour. (January 5 1995, *NRC Handelsblad*, italics added) (#109)

Pinto’s specific recommendations were not followed, but in his critical engagement he does explicate succinctly what is at stake in *inburgeren* more generally: through a concerted and disciplining effort focused on the cultural distance of the newcomers to Dutch society the particularity of Dutch civic life can be learned and
newcomers will attain the ability to be autonomous individuals, subsequently losing their ability to make claims on the basis of the ethnic identities that they will have shed in the process of enculturation. Policy battles and public debates continued over how such a governmental effort would be best implemented and what it would take to get newcomers to develop these dispositions of Dutch civic life. The discussions mainly focus on two interrelated axis: language proficiency and labour market mobility (Bjornson 2007; Driouichi 2007). What remains intact is the very idea that Dutch citizenship is *something to be learned* and must be learned in order for integration to be a success and popular discontent to be managed.

It is from these initial suggestions that Roger van Boxtel, the social-liberal Minister for Urban Problems in the purple coalition government, started implementing a civic enculturation program that became the centre piece of the integration project. As has been exhaustively shown (Schinkel 2007; Scholten 2011; Uitermark 2012; Duyvendak et al. 2013), the crux of these new governmental efforts was a complicated shift from an emphasis on group-based categorisations and provisions towards the integration of individuals (see also Contourennota 1994; De Zwart 2012). This shift is complex, because – as the quote from Pinto illustrates – the emphasis on individualised responsibility does not end or contradict the emphasis on the cultural distances between collectivities of newcomers and natives. In fact, the move towards individual responsibility and the ostensive departure of a minority groups approach itself comes out of a specific understanding of how and why newcomers are culturally different from natives and why integration will only take place through a process called *inburgeren* (see also Schinkel 2013).

This is indicated, most of all, from the importance that is attached to the difference between *western* and *non-western* allochthones. Far from a limited geographical meaning, these terms and their differentiation involve a host of different connotations of which territorial descent is only one and from which racialised differences are hardly lacking (Schinkel 2013; Yanow & Van der Haar 2013). The vocabulary of autochthony comes to provide an overarching language for talking about a whole host of different differences (Geschiere 2009). Whether dealing with regional, religious, national, civilisational or racial categorisations, the allochthonous difference is mainly articulated as a matter of moral-dispositional distance to Dutch life and ethnic occlusion from it (see also Rath 1991). Thus, the move towards individual responsibility does not in any way usher in a non-racial, colour-blind, group-less, strictly republican or culturally agnostic mode of citizenship politics.
The product of minister Van Boxtel’s efforts can be found in the *Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers* (1998; coming into effect on April 1 2003), stipulating that all newcomers should undergo a test – *inburgeringsonderzoek* – to determine the extent to which they are dependent on others, able to gain full employment and speak Dutch (Van Oers et al. 2010). On the basis of the outcomes, applicants would be demanded to take a course suited to their circumstances, taking into account an intricate string of possible exceptions. The consideration of such exceptions – sometimes stemming from international law and supra-national agreements – demonstrate unequivocally that the courses were always already understood to be disciplining checks on the access to citizenship and meant to evoke effort on the part of newcomers. If the courses were not deemed to be restrictive and instead conceived to be group-specific rights or accommodations for newcomers, legal exceptions would have been far less significant.

Civic enculturation is conceived in terms of responsibility and effort on the part of the newcomer from the start. The idea that *inburgering* can only take place when individual newcomers take up responsibility cannot be attributed to an assimilationist turn after 2002. The question how such responsibilisation worked out and what its contradictions might be, was also already articulated in this same period. For instance, J. H. Sampiemon, renowned journalist and public commentator, concluded in a critical op-ed on migration policy:

> But with that deterring policy the emphasis on the undesirability of the stranger became all too strong. The associated civic enculturation policy subsequently laid the responsibility for success rather strongly with the foreigner, without making clear that successful enculturation is an effort of both sides and that a reward is in order. (September 26 1997, *NRC Handelsblad* (#110)

The program developed from the early 1990’s has been explicitly justified as a break with a welfarist and all-too-caring past and an attempt to usher in a more demanding and conditional incorporation of others into Dutch civic life. It is the question of this break that inflects much of the subsequent contention over *inburgering*.

**Making assimilation new**

The coalition government of CDA, VVD and LPF and, more specifically, the Minister of Alien Affairs and Integration Rita Verdonk were keen on demonstrating that they would introduce a more demanding, more restrictive, less accommodating and less multiculturalist policy approach. *They* would be able to make a break with the past. This meant that the implementation of the *WIN* – the new program of civic enculturation – was accompanied by conspicuously monoculturalist justifications
indicating what that break might entail. The goals of *inburgering* were no longer merely being expressed in the language of labour market flexibility and individualised responsibility that were deemed central to success in Dutch society. Instead, justifications were predicated by concerns of societal cohesion, national identity and cultural assimilation (Sleegers 2007; Driouichi 2007). The already established discourse of achievement and dynamism became embellished by an explicitly cultural supplement of national commonality and unity. ‘National culture’ and the need to instrumentalise it in civic enculturation courses would come to figure as the *extra* that was needed after it was – yet again – concluded that integration has failed. This *extra* presented a need for enforced and closely scrutinised inculcation of norms, values and customs that merited the emblem of ‘national’, ‘core’, or ‘Dutch’ (Spijkerboer 2007). As Spijkerboer demonstrates (2007), parliamentary debates over the new policy plans hardly included any prolonged or significant disagreement over what actually constituted the Dutchness of Dutch citizenship. The suggestion that certain norms, values and customs marked out Dutch life passed more or less self-evidently. Their place in the enculturation program was justified in a more explicitly monoculturalist fashion and in light of a surprisingly non-individualised, non-demonstrable, supplementary goal: restoring and protecting national unity (Driouichi 2007; Vermeulen 2007; Groenendijk 2005; Spijkerboer 2007).

Minister Verdonk became the main protagonist of a more extensive, restrictive and demanding program of civic enculturation, the *Wet Inburgering*, that would come into effect as of 2007. I’ll focus here on the persona of Verdonk, because so much of the policy redirection was discussed as part of her broader political mission of radically changing the access to Dutch citizenship. Breaking with the past was not merely a matter of instrumentalising Dutchness, but also of specific personas who, in lieu of Fortuyn, would be able to break through the inertia of policy development. Whether civic enculturation could be considered to have changed was not merely a matter of the kinds of measures introduced but also invested in the persona of Verdonk. Of course, Verdonk did not author the new legislation single-handedly – that is not the reason for focusing on her role as protagonist. Rather, the significance that was attached to her persona demands that we take serious the extent to which the policy became identified with the person (Oudenampsen 2010).

A number of features of the legislation should be noted in particular. The new law sought to extend the mandatory program to so-called ‘oldcomers’ – people that have been indefinitely residing in the Netherlands but whose integration is nonetheless questioned. Moreover, the mandatory enculturation program would
now have to be concluded by taking and passing an integration exam. The obligation to not only participate but also pass an exam can be understood as an extension of the already established practice of naturalisation tests, which were formalised and far more strictly enforced with the *Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers* in 2003 (Van Oers 2008). The obligation to pass an integration exam also pertained to Dutch citizens of the Caribbean territories, which underscores the way in which the policy changes have been centred on the presence of others on the European territory. Aspirant-residents would have to pass the integration exam abroad with the introduction of the *Wet Inburgering Buitenland*, thereby preventing that immigrants, most notably aspiring spouses of Dutch residents, would already be residing in the Netherlands before having demonstrated sufficient integration. Naturalisation was to be affirmed through a naturalisation ceremony, in which loyalty to and identification with the Dutch nation should be expressed (Verkaaijk 2009).

In the main, the changes and extension first introduced under Minister Verdonk have made the enculturation program far more demanding and exclusionary (Van Oers et al. 2010). Naturalisation rates have decreased rather dramatically. The program has also begun to function more directly as a selection mechanism for immigration as both access to Dutch citizenship and legal residence have become much harder to obtain. Civic enculturation has effectively become an extension of border control and international management of populations. Strikingly, both access to citizenship and legal residence have become more similar as both become articulated in a discourse of national-cum-cultural protection. Under the stress of new assimilationism, the difference between the status of citizenship and legal residence blurs. Under the tenure of Verdonk, reasons for granting Dutch citizenship and reasons for allowing one to reside on the European territories of the Kingdom begin to resemble each other more closely: what matters for both is whether someone is deemed capable of individually and independently managing one’s existence within a national environment that is typified as a cultural apex of individual autonomy and self-regulation. Thus, the mere territorial presence of culturalised others becomes the root problem and granting such others rights before integration has taken place is deemed to exacerbate that problem.

Following this reasoning, it can be better understood how formal Dutch citizenship was presented by Verdonk and other protagonists of new assimilationism as the eventual reward for the non-integrated individual’s efforts to demonstrate her capacity to learn, her willingness to redirect her way of life, her aptitude for change under instruction, and her active participation in a ceremony of incorporation. Therein lies the gradual but crucial shift in the policy program from
the late 1980’s onwards: integration policy develops from a set of measures conceived to assist, hasten and direct the process of assimilation – whatever that is deemed to be – to a set of measures conceived to demand, test and ascertain the contractual privilege to reside on Euro-Dutch soil and partake in the dynamism of its economy and public sphere. The initial program of contractual citizenship becomes deepened by withdrawing more and more rights as they come to be presented as undue interference, assistance and aid. Real integration, then, is only achieved and demonstrated if the aspirant-native is capable of passing achievement tests in a situation devoid of rights-cum-assistance. The ‘grand prize’ at the end of this assessment is access to Dutch citizenship (Van Oers 2012; Hurenkamp et al. 2011; Van Houdt et al. 2011). The rights associated with legal residence and full citizenship should only be made available to those who have demonstrated that they could also succeed without them.

Seen in this way, it would be a mistake to understand the gradual but definite deepening of contractual citizenship in migration and citizenship policy as a reversal or revolution of political rationale (cf. Vasta 2007; Van Oers et al. 2010; Vermeulen 2007; Entzinger 2006). Of course, the neo-nationalist turn in the civic enculturation program is relevant and cannot be understood without taking into account the watershed of the Fortuyn revolt. Without it, the protagonists of post-Fortuyn governments, such as Verdonk, would not have been able to articulate how their politics differed from the past. Monocultural justification help to do just that: to articulate a deepening contractualism in terms of a policy redirection. Introducing explicit concerns over national unity, loyalty and cultural assimilation into citizenship politics does not represent a qualitatively different mode of governance. In fact, the extension and changes made under Verdonk rely directly on a contractual logic and cultural particularities that typify Dutchness in accordance with that logic: achievement, self-reliance, malleability, dynamism, individual autonomy (Van Huis & De Regt 2005; Fermin 2006; Spijkerboer 2007; Van Reekum & Van den Berg forthcoming; Suvarierol 2012). The introduction of monoculturalist concerns over national commonality has helped to justify why contractualism should be further deepened, not why the established rationale of the program should be qualitatively changed. Nonetheless, the rhetorical trope of such change is, indeed, highly significant for those who have sought to take in the position of new assimilationism. It is therefore all the more significant how the public debates in response to Verdonk’s new plans performatively affirm (1) the suggestion of such qualitative change; and qualify (2) the status of the nationalist elements associated with her political mission.
Contesting Verdonk’s mission

In response to the new plans, there emerged a variety of reasons to be pessimistic about Verdonk’s efforts. Such pessimism may be associated with support as well as criticism of the neo-nationalist turn associated with Verdonk. Such arguments for pessimism repeatedly deal with the question if it will be *practically* possible to impose, teach and test sufficient cultural integration. Reasons for pessimism extend from abstract questions of what it means to demand cultural adaptation to a whole series of bureaucratic, administrative and governmental strictures being put forth. The latter often have to do with the ways in which Verdonk’s plans extend to very different people in very different circumstances that nonetheless needed to be dealt with equitably. The actual implementation of the new policy plans quickly ran into trouble as it became almost impossible for those responsible, particularly municipalities and school administrators, to oversee all the different categories and exceptions. Also, the ambitions to oblige the so-called ‘oldcomers’ and certain Dutch citizens to partake in the program ran into legal troubles as questions of discrimination and contradictions with other laws and regulations were raised (Vermeulen 2007). Take, for instance, these concluding statements of a critical editorial commentary in the NRC Handelsblad:

Strangers can be denied entry if they do not pass the new test. And that in itself will be quite a bit of work. For legal residents [*ingezetenen*] there can only be a sanction if they receive welfare payments. Let’s keep it to this for the time being and not rummage over everything. The trouble with Verdonk is that she wants to do too much at once. Her focused effort on civic enculturation isn’t wrong at all. Her insight is all the more lacking. (December 8 2004, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#111)

It was the vague category of ‘oldcomers’ that was particularly discussed in these kinds of interventions as it turned out to be rather complicated to single out the correct target population (and not introducing discriminatory regulations). Various selection criteria were floated in the period leading up to the new legislation, but many were criticised because they would include the ‘wrong’ kind of people of whom it was unreasonable or inappropriate to demand enculturation. So, not only is the demanding and impeding character of the new policy clearly articulated – it continuously appears as an invasion into people’s lives only deemed justified if people can be presumed to lack integration –, critical interventions also help to raise the non-accommodative profile of the new assimilationism. One idea was to select ‘oldcomers’ on the basis of ‘years of schooling in the Netherlands’, an idea

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16 The Council of State repeatedly obstructed the passage of new legislation due to its discriminatory consequences.
which eventually ended up in legislation. An editor at Trouw, Esther Bijlo, wrote sarcastically:

Many Dutch people worryingly delved into their closets last week. How many years has one attended school? And can one still prove that by finding a piece of paper? If not, Rita Verdonk will be at your doorstep to make you integrate [inburgeren]. This is the absurd conclusion of the fact that Verdonk lacks the legal means to demand of certain allochthonous oldcomers that they partake in an integration exam. Let’s take everyone who has less than eight years of schooling instead. In the meantime, the Minister has declared that the autochthonous toilet attendant with only primary education [six years] will not be forced to partake in an exam. (December 9 2004, Trouw) (#112)

The enforcing character of the program is the central issue in the debates surrounding Verdonk’s tenure. The problems of implementation, bureaucracy, legal limits, discrimination and practical consequences recurrently bring up the wider problem of demanding, evoking and, in the end, instilling an individualised sense of loyalty. Some of the interventions explicitly seek to emphasise the importance of inburgering as a process of emancipation and empowerment, thereby upholding, despite all the challenges of implementation, the overriding goal: becoming autonomous. An example:

When immigrants emancipate, they become vocally assertive citizens [mondige burgers] who have come to the Netherlands from another culture and function well here as citizens. Who decide for themselves what they want to adopt from Dutch culture, what they want to maintain of their prior culture, and to what extent they want to combine those two cultures. With exactly the same legal obligations as autochthones. (June 18 2004, Trouw) (#113)

In more outspokenly defiant styles of intervention, such optimism-despite-challenges would celebrate the fact that inburgering is made to be tough, demanding and confrontational. In a piece entitled ‘Thanks for the tough integration in the Netherlands’ Nausicaa Marbe, a writer and columnist, recounted her own process of settlement and enculturation and presented the following conclusion:

My benefactors [people that were tough] were exceptions, because this country has long cherished the misconception that allochthones were endangered flowers, being crushed by the Dutch clog. The multicultural doctrine says that Dutch people from whatever background should adapt to any idiot who comes here and declares that our culture is no good. Nobody dares to require that the newcomer becomes multicultural himself and finds a balance between old and new loyalties. Or to shave the edge of his culture in order to make it fit with what exist here. Integration should be an individual, not a societal problem. A matter of courtesy, which today is indefensible. This is the culture that we gladly cherish, while we loudly shout that Dutch culture doesn’t exist. But this is what we offer to newcomers: a maze of ambiguities and contradictions, enveloped by ignorance. Disintegration, while maintaining the politically correct putty. (October 20 2003, NRC Handelsblad) (#114)
Only sporadically does the issue of Dutchness itself come up as problematic in the development of a new enculturation policy (see also Spijkerboer 2007). What it means to become Dutch is itself rarely contested. This is not to say that it is irrelevant. In fact, when Dutchness is problematised we can see that it is very relevant for understanding the more pronounced concerns with enforcement and obligation. It is, in this respect, once more important to point out that a problematisation of Dutchness is not connected to the post-Fortuyn policy efforts. Already with respect to Roger van Boxtel’s plans for enculturation courses and naturalisation ceremonies questions of Dutchness were articulated:

In my view, they [the aspirant-citizens] will be confused. Firstly, they will surely have learned in one of those enculturation courses that it is antithetic to Dutch culture to set up such ceremonies around flag and anthem. Dutch people hardly know their anthem. Secondly, Van Boxtel was inspired by a Canadian ceremony. There they have already recognised that they are an immigration country for years, in the Netherlands this had yet to be accepted. Here, access to the Dutch nationality is a very convoluted issue. And, when it has all been accomplished, Van Boxtel wants to drag out such a travesty, this seems to me ill-fitting with the painstakingly endured process nor with Dutch culture. (November 24 2000, Trouw) (#115)

A central problem of new assimilationism is that in order to instrument Dutchness it introduces forms of dealing with nationhood that appear to be strikingly atypical and at odds with established notions of Dutchness: it demands a form of national loyalty that seems to contradict what it means to be Dutch. As Pieter Dronkers, a student of theology and ethics, argues in relation to the national naturalisation day introduced under Verdonk:

The Naturalisation Day was a bit uncomfortable, in part because of the lack of symbols. But this awkwardness is typically Dutch, and rather charming.

Not everyone is at ease with the first National Naturalisation Day, held last week. The American tradition was borrowed from to add some panache; apparently, the Dutch stock didn’t include any symbols. In the polder [meaning ‘in Dutch politics’], there is a diligent search for a new symbolic language for the rite-de-passage that is, in fact, non-Dutch [on-Nederlands]. In the US, people sing about the American flag that unites the nation at occasions such as these. In the Netherlands, we hear the call to arms of a recalcitrant prince who hold his belief in justice in higher regards than his deference to worldly authority [referring to the Wilhemus, the Dutch national anthem]. This gave the first edition a certain clumsiness that was very fitting. If Dutchness [Nederlanderschap] has substance at all, than it is a kind of independent priggishness, that is averse to unnecessary nationalism. (September 1 2006, Trouw) (#116)

Interestingly, the tension between a demanding assimilationism and the idea of an anti-nationalistic Dutchness needn’t undermine the new enculturation policies. In Dronkers’ articulation, it is the clumsiness of naturalisation ceremonies that
actually save their credibility. According to Dronkers, such ceremonies work precisely because they are somewhat awkward. Oskar Verkaaik has shown in ethnographic detail how this logic plays out in naturalisation ceremonies (Verkaaik 2009). A potentially undermining critique of new assimilationism can actually come to save it from critique: if it can be shown that a demanding policy program is more flexible in practice, this need not lead to a critique of instrumentalised Dutchness. Verdonk’s neo-nationalism need not become caught in performative contradictions. In fact, it may relativize such critique as it appears that it is still very Dutch to be ‘averse to unnecessary nationalism’.

This effect comes out even more strongly in the sarcastic assessment by Jacques van Doorn in his column in Trouw. It had become known that Minister Verdonk had decided to censor sexually explicit parts of the film Naar Nederland (see also Poelmans & Tijssen 2006) as part of the curriculum presented to aspiring immigrants doing enculturation courses abroad. Possession of such material or even just viewing it could incriminate aspiring immigrant due to prevailing laws in their country of residence. Van Doorn reports:

Verdonk has therefore decided to scrap three scenes, without repercussions for the examinants, who would skip a couple of questions in their exams but would nonetheless be eligible for access to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The reader will agree that this is a shameful capitulation for the narrow-mindedness ruling the Muslim world and which we in the Netherlands want to combat. From a press release I have understood that it was particularly the PvdA-faction in parliament which was ‘astonished’. The ‘typical Dutchness’ is hereby vanished from the film, according to member of parliament Dijsselbloem. “What remains then of our intension to inform people about our culture, which is often so alien [wezensvreemd] to them?” (March 26 2005, Trouw) (#117)

Van Doorn goes on to implicate the political background of the new policy program into the contents of the film itself. Is not the politics behind the film the very hallmark of contemporary Dutchness?

The enculturation film has not yet been shown here and the contents are unknown, but what has been said in parliament makes one fear for the worst. I take it that Pim Fortuyn, the most Celebrated Dutchman of All Time, will be one of the main protagonists in the film, complete with doggies 17 and his view that islam is a backward culture. This might seem a little harsh to pious Muslims, but the politician that was able to mobilize one and half million voters and was set to become prime minister cannot possible be swept under the carpet.

The examinants, by the way, could be comforted if the film would also show Dutch attempts of protecting Muslims under threat. A fragment about Srebrenica would help. Alas, our well-intentioned intervention has not been completely successful, but the fact that Dutch military have set

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17 Pim Fortuyn’s dogs – two Cavalier King Charles Spaniêls – became a staple of his mediatized image during his political rise.
up a safe haven for Bosnian Muslims, can be seen as a precedent for the safe haven that the Netherlands currently is for tens of thousands of asylum seekers. (March 26 2005, Trouw) (#118)

Van Doorn concludes his iconoclastic treatment by relativizing:

The leader of the independence movement, Geert Wilders, cannot be left out of this film, even though a small explanation will have to be added to his proposition that Islam and democracy are incommensurable. There could be a reference to our judaeo-christian culture, which has been at odds with the Islamic world for fourteen centuries and has evoked some apprehension against the recent invasion of Muslims, perhaps a bit too strongly articulated by our well-known Venlonaar [a reference to Geert Wilder’s regional, Limburg’s descent].

Reading back now, I realize how hard it must be to make plain the subtleties of our modern civilization to simple folk from a backward culture. The question of laying out at the beach with or without a top on may still be fathomable, but what to do with the recent statements by minister De Geus that for women looking for employment an opening in prostitution is considered an employment opportunity? Can we explain that women are sometimes rejected for a job because they wear a head scarf but other women receive an obligating offer to go and sit half naked behind a window in the red light district?

Admittedly, this is an absurd story. But the absurdities from which it is built, are drawn from real life. Those strangers who have to ‘integrate’ are confronted with it. Poor strangers. (March 26 2005, Trouw) (#119)

On the one hand, the possibility of projecting an image of Dutch culture through a classroom course is ridiculed harshly. Yet on the other hand, the suggestion that those ridiculed images of Dutchness do in fact represent particularly Dutch culture is not questioned at all. Over the years, Van Doorn had become a sceptical critic of the post-Fortuyn political developments and remained so up the end of his life (see Van Doorn 2009). For Van Doorn, his self-ascribed conservatism compelled him to doubt in a principled manner all those attempts by state authorities to present a conclusive answer to the question of Dutchness. This led him to ridicule the ambitions and grand plans of the new assimilationists. He sought to put up a relativizing mirror against their overblown goal of social engineering. The critique, then, is not of Dutchness or culturalism per se, but of the way in which Dutch culture had become implicated in all-too-grandiose ambitions of state craft. What ends up being questioned – in this case from the particular sceptical engagement of Van Doorn – is whether something so complex as Dutch culture may function in an all-too-simplistic attempt to patronise newcomers. Nowhere does such a diagnosis of social complexity – the core Van Doorn’s conservatism – need to enter into a questioning of culturalism itself. Rather, the problem becomes whether the new assimilationist, like Verdonk, Dijsselbloem, Wilders, Sterk and others, aren’t becoming blind to the limits of what states can do in matters of culture and civilisation.
Such overbearing ambition is once again at the heart of the problem when the integration of Verdonk herself is mockingly questioned. For instance, in this example by historian Joost Rosendaal:

Introducing a new tradition, that’s what minister for Aliens and Integration Rita Verdonk strives for with the Naturalisation Day. Historiography calls this the invention of tradition. Particularly from the 19th century onward, those in authority use this method to cultivate a nationalistic sense of community. A tinge of historicity is attached to the new ‘tradition’. (August 29 2006, *De Volkskrant*) (#120)

Rosendaal goes on to question the historical facticity of multiple statements made by Verdonk in the context of policy proposals for naturalisation ceremonies. He concludes:

In short: when taking into account the knowledge of history and the constitution the minister has failed the exam for Dutch citizenship. However, what is really shocking and shameful, is to introduce a ‘tradition’ on the basis of incorrect statements. In this way, politicians lack credibility for our new co-patriots.

The minister had better be well-informed before he or she wants to introduce a new ceremony promoting love of country. Luckily, thanks to descent historical knowledge such made-up traditions can be relativized. When they are badly grounded, they will have little longevity. (August 29 2006, *De Volkskrant*) (#121)

Again, we see in this example how quite scathingly critical interventions directly engaging with the emergence of new assimilationism reiterate that the problem is governmental ambition, not monoculturalism. Such interventions suggest that there may be limits to what can be done with culture and tradition; that the invention of tradition is no small feat and should not be engaged in brazenly. Strikingly, even a critique that employs the presumably deconstructive notion of Hobsbawm’s ‘invention’ ends up questioning Verdonk’s historical expertise and, thereby, the inclusion of herself and her politics into Dutchness. Indeed, this critique is put forth to problematise the fact that natives employ standards to which they themselves cannot rise. The point of critique is to question governmental overreach, not the notion of Dutch culture itself.

Only rarely does criticism of new assimilationism go a step further. Bas Heijne, for instance, follows the wider scepticism about the government’s ability to govern loyalties:

This is the true turn-around that has taken place in the last couple of years: that sentimental multicultural romanticism of a few decades back could flourish through, in fact, a deeply engrained, robust feeling of certainty about the Dutch [*Hollandse*] identity; today, the uncertainty about that same identity – due to immigration, globalisation – has become so extensive that enforced affirmation
from the outside is deemed necessary. Newcomers not only need to abide by the law, but shall celebrate their Dutchness under governmental guidance. Love us. (August 26 2006, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#122)

The policy efforts of Verdonk – here referring to naturalisation ceremonies – are presented as an attempt to regain certainty. It is precisely this overly anxious push for new certainty in the face of multiculturalism’s failure that is presented as the core problem: the anxiety and imposing demand of the push – ‘love us’ – is what prevents the whole effort from succeeding. Again, the overreach of ambition is at the forefront. Nonetheless, Heijne goes somewhat further in his criticism:

The price that will inevitably be paid: as the Dutch [*Hollandse*] identity is more and more deliberately sought and described, the more Dutch history is compulsively made into nationalistic [*vaderlandse*] history, the more folkloristic and artificial Dutch culture will appear to be – like a Dutch Pasar Salam. The futile hope that the Netherlands and Dutch culture will be able to enduringly retract from the amalgamating effect of globalisation and immigration, is just as naïve as the futile hope of an effortless mixing while maintaining one’s own culture, which was cherished in the old multiculturalism. (August 26 2006, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#123)

Indeed, the very problem of the Dutchness of culture is raised here. In Heijne’s assessment the problem of overreaching ambition do in fact relate to an unrealistic notion of Dutch culture. In fact, in Heijne’s presentation the overzealous will to impose only hastens the dwindling veracity of that notion. Nonetheless, the break with a frivolous, multicultural past is part of that same critique.

One last example is given by Arnout Brouwers’ fierce critique of Verdonk’s politics and its ‘provincial extremism’:

This country can’t keep an even keel. Before Fortuyn, there ruled a doctrinal, intolerant multiculturalism. Nobody was allowed to talk about immigration problems, for fear of excommunication. Fortuyn was right to oppose it. Now, integrationism rules among politicians and opinion makers, developed to the extreme, excommunicating all dissent. And thus, nobody says anything. (January 23 2006, *De Volkskrant*) (#124)

The notion that citizenship may come to be something rather different from its current national containment is hardly ever discussed. One such alternative horizon is articulated in an intervention by Vincent de Jong:

For a long time the idea was that a strong legal position would help people integrate in society. That idea has been replaced in recent years for a viewpoint in which that legal position has to be earned, as a demonstration of integration. The excessive emphasis in politics on the problems of the multicultural society – migration as cost – is one-sided and completely overdone.
This vision entails that cultural assimilation is seen as the solution and European culture as superior. The consequence is crumbling trust between migrants and Dutch people, instead of rapprochement.

The declaration of a national day of celebration [referring to the Naturalisation Day] is a longing for the past, and not geared to the future. The Netherlands closes itself off from developments that go in another direction. A form of global or universal citizenship whereby participation in a community is central without necessarily being bounded by territory, that is the real challenge of this time. (August 29 2006, NRC Handelsblad) (#125)

It is in this way that the many problems of implementation and the ridiculed role of nationalistic elements come to affirm that the new assimilationism is a project of individualised responsibilisation, raising demands on newcomers in exchange for rights. Despite much scepticism over government’s ability to enforce adaptation to Dutch life, it is only rarely that the existence of Dutch culture is itself questioned or that an alternative notion of citizenship is presented. What new assimilationism set out to achieve was often deemed impossible, unpractical, clumsy, and at odds with what it actually meant to be Dutch. Yet, such interventions also thereby affirm the distinctive liberality of Dutch life. Again and again, enculturation appears hard to achieve because Dutch life is so remarkably liberal and varied. In the accounts of critics, the neonationalist politics of Verdonk and others may be mistaken and wrong. However, such accounts leave intact the notion that Dutch life demands particularly little loyalty on the part of individually autonomous citizens. Such accounts still enact Dutch life as one of individualised autonomy. So while the instrumentalisation of Dutchness may have been ridiculed, Dutch liberality remains. The crucial question in debates on access to citizenship becomes how to best imbue it and which political actors are best equipped to do so. It is in this respect that Verdonk’s persona became so strongly presented as ‘ambitious’, ‘impatient’ (D’Oliveira, February 1 2005), ‘stubborn’ (Koch, August 12 2005), ‘stoic’, ‘callous’, ‘tough’ (De Jong, February 10 2004), ‘fanatic’ and ‘strict’ (De Volkskrant, August 11 2005) and her obduracy was at times compared to that other Iron Lady, Margret Thatcher.

**From tough Verdonk to brittle Vogelaar**

These metaphors of toughness did not pertain only to Verdonk’s policy ambitions in the field of enculturation. They were related at least as much to her profile with regards to asylum seekers and immigration control more broadly. It was finally her political investment in the formalistic enforcement of immigration rules that would become the context of her ministerial demise. Questions concerning the legality of Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s application for asylum – she had not given her full name during interrogation by the IND – would bring Verdonk in direct confrontation with her
own record of unrepentant rigorousness. The matter eventually led to a fall of government. Having gained a prominent public profile, Verdonk tried and nearly succeeded in taking on the leadership of the conservative liberals. After having lost this battle to Mark Rutte, she formed her own political party — *Proud of the Netherlands* — in line with her already established profile of right-wing populism and nationalist revanchism. Verdonk was briefly considered to be a viable candidate to capture the electorate mobilised by Pim Fortuyn. The great expectations could not be fulfilled as it seems other political parties, particularly Wilder’s PVV, were much more effective in assembling a significant constituency. As such, Verdonk’s political presence slowly petered out.

Although the symbolism, discussions and political campaigning of Verdonk and her one-woman party merit a close analysis in their own respect (Vossen 2009; Pels 2011), the importance of Verdonk’s persona in this context is the way in which a set of policies and political ideals concerning Dutch citizenship became personified by a political figure. As we have seen, this meant that problems, contradictions and limitations of these policies and ideals were discussed in a particular way: as the (possibly overzealous) ambitions of a self-conscious and determined political actor that sought to redirect the way in which Dutchness could be governed. As we have seen, it is rather questionable if the policy changes discussed and introduced under Verdonk ever constituted a qualitative transformation of that governance. However, the personification of such redirection into the persona of Verdonk was nonetheless performative of a political watershed between a nationalistic resurgence after a supposedly non-nationalistic lapse. It branded the post-2002 governance of immigration and integration as one of resurgent nationalism and a forceful protection of national culture in the appraisals of opponents and proponents alike (see for instance Pels 2011; Heijne 2011; Van Baalen et al. 2007; Bosma 2010; Bolkestein 2012).

The fact that both the personification of forceful ambition and the watershed of new nationalism had become hugely significant in the narration of Dutch citizenship can be further demonstrated by the tenure of Verdonk’s successor Ella Vogelaar. In the newly formed cabinet of Balkenende IV (22 February 2007), Ella Vogelaar, a social-democrat, became Minister for Integration and Housing. She thanked her appointment largely to her work within the field of civic enculturation. She had headed a task-force for civic enculturation that had been intensely involved in identifying and resolving the many bureaucratic and organisational strictures of the program. The differences between Verdonk’s ambitions and those of Vogelaar were already evident from their very different ministerial responsibilities. Where Verdonk’s tenure had brought issues of enculturation in line
with those of immigration, border control and public safety, Vogelaar had received the post of Minister for Integration and Housing. In a sense, this brought the problem of integration back to where it came from: the governance of urban problems, liveability and social welfare. Moreover, it brought the program under the control of the social-democrats. Being the main defendant in the debate over failing integration, any PvdA-administrator would have been under close scrutiny when it came to integration policy.

Vogelaar’s walk in Verdonk’s shoes was quickly tripped up when it was revealed that she had hired a spin-doctor to improve the image of her policies and an interview about the news with a reporter from the blog Geenstijl.nl went badly. Once again, it seemed the PvdA tried to obscure the realities of cultural diversity by spinning the image of its policies. Vogelaar’s inability to present herself and her policies to the public became a major news story. Her media performance became a topic in and of itself. Matters became even worse for her after a statement in an interview with the broadsheet Trouw. She was quoted saying that:

Centuries ago Jews came to the Netherlands and today we say: the Netherlands have been shaped by Jewish-Christian traditions. I can imagine that we will see a similar process with regards to Islam. (June 3 2008, Trouw) (#126)

These statements were repeatedly criticised as a sign of undue tolerance and cultural relativism. One of the most significant responses came from the leader of the VVD, Mark Rutte, when he wrote that:

In Trouw she [Vogelaar] predicts that the Netherlands will become a country with a ‘judeo-christian-islamic tradition’ (Front page, 16 June). She says: ‘Centuries ago Jews came to the Netherlands and today we say: the Netherlands have been shaped by Jewish-Christian traditions.’ However, we speak of a judeo-christian tradition because of the historically inherited influence of the Jewish and Christian faith on the core values of our country. Not because a few centuries ago a modestly small Jewish community came to our country. The development of our core values is completely disconnected from the presence of certain groups [bevolkingsgroepen]. The Netherlands just doesn’t have an islamic tradition – and will not have one if the VVD can do anything about it.

The PvdA-minister doesn’t see a problem with subsidizing religious organisations. In my opinion, the state should be very hesitant in this respect, else we’ll create huge problems.

And then Vogelaar confirms a hardly noticed agreement within the coalition accord: a ‘charter for responsible citizenship’ will be created. Now that it has become clear how the minister will develop that charter, we should be very weary. It shall be ‘a process’ in which ‘a considerable amount of groups will participate’; and the result should ‘have the support of the community’. Thus, our core values are negotiable [bespreekbaar], because the result will have to have broad communal support. This can lead to a ‘process’ in which those core values are questioned and weakened. (July 17 2007, Trouw) (#127)

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18 The interview was posted on the blog ‘Geenstijl.nl’ on 17 April 2008. See for video and blog: http://www.geenstijl.tv/2008/04/rutger_en_de_mediastilte_van_e.html (accessed 06-18-2011)
A host of other concerns over Vogelaar’s leadership and policies followed, focusing in particular on the effectiveness of her more ‘pragmatic’ and ‘soft’ approach to integration as compared to her iron-clad predecessor. Eventually her own party withdrew its confidence in her as minister. At the moment of her resignation – the evening of 13 November 2008 – Vogelaar gave an impromptu speech in which she relates her own demise to the failure of her party to deal with the issue of integration:

With regard to integration I have to conclude that after the period of Fortuyn the PvdA has not been able to give a clear direction that is supported by the entire party. As a reaction to what the PvdA didn’t see in the years before, namely the negative effects of the settlement of large numbers of migrants, some of whom have caused nuisance, degradation and crime, the focus is, to my mind, too much on the tough approach only. I’m personally very much convinced that the approach should be two-sided. Setting boundaries and offering perspectives. These two need to go hand in hand. Indeed, they belong to the roots and the core values of social democracy. Enforcement when necessary, but also demonstrating that it is possible to build a future here in the Netherlands. 19

Press-conference speech by Ella Vogelaar, November 13 2008) (#128)

Vogelaar reiterates here the basic divisions that had become so strongly conjoined to the issue of enculturation: hard-soft; demanding-accommodative; assimilationist-tolerant; outspoken-politically correct. Again, we see how self-evident it had become to speak of cultural assimilation to Dutch society in a contractual logic that demands of newcomers and outsiders the willingness to change, testing and judging their malleability, effort and propensity to become autonomous citizens. Figures such as Vogelaar, seeking to soften, lower or relativize contractual demands, had to explain why this would be warranted, thereby affirming that others were – in contrast to them – prepared to be strict and uncompromising.

A community of individuals
What happened with the arrival of Rita Verdonk as the minister responsible for civic enculturation is hardly the sudden introduction of cultural concerns in the governance and debate over integration and civic enculturation. Such concerns were never not present, nor was integration into Dutch society ever not a concern surrounding access to Dutch citizenship. What was introduced under minister Verdonk was an extension of policies that has been put in place by the purple coalition governments. Aspirant-citizens needed to demonstrate language skills,

19 A brief reportage about Vogelaar’s demise and the entire speech can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9lXX1243HQ (accessed 07-02-2014).
familiarity with and affective connection to Dutch society and, above all, an aptitude for achievement and dynamism. None of this is new or qualitatively different from what had been proposed all along. Nor do we need to understand the introduction of permissive, liberal ‘norms and values’ as a sudden shift towards ‘cultural’ or ‘nationalist’ demands. Of course, their introduction and their explicit protection against newcomers matter greatly both for the people involved in the policy program and the subsequent debates, but they continue and deepen the demand of learning to be dynamic, economically mobile and morally autonomous into a more restrictive mode. Supposedly Dutch ‘norms and values’ of autonomy, expressiveness, liberalism and individualism matter in the instructional goals of the enculturation courses as they aim to teach and test the aspirant-citizens’ willingness to adapt to the demands of a community for which achievement, dynamism and self-reliance are considered prerequisite moral equipment.

What mattered is not the replacement of socioeconomic goals and justifications for cultural ones. What did matter is a tightly interwoven problematic of socioeconomic and ethnocultural concerns. Are newcomers able to change their way of life through state pedagogy? What needs to be avoided is the dependence upon others, both in terms of welfare dependence on the public at large and in terms of ethnic and/or religious dependence on community. Paradoxically, the courses and tests are introduced to effectively demonstrate whether newcomers are willing and able to share the Dutch aptitude to share as little as possible with their new co-patriots. What needs to be shared is the individual ability to not be dependent on sharing. Demands to adapt to Dutch culture work all the more effectively because Dutchness almost always appears as the pinnacle of liberality and individual autonomy. Consequently, participants in debates, whether parliamentary or public, rarely seek to spell out what Dutch culture may actually be. It is almost always indicated by what the newcomer lacks. The question at hand is whether the Dutch way of life should or should not be protected by a more demanding, less accommodating program.

The cultural turn in the civic enculturation program constitutes ‘cultural nationalism’ only in a very specific sense: the extension and further restriction of access to citizenship on the basis of overtly socioeconomic concerns is being justified by associating those concerns with particular typifications of Dutchness. Thus, a break is performed with the supposedly weak and procedural nationalism of the preceding policy regime. Dutchness matters here not because new assimilationists want newcomers to acquire a liking for what they consider to be true Dutch culture – whatever that may be –, but because certain typifications of Dutchness help them explain why specific categories of others – most generally
those that are subsumed under ‘non-western’ – have yet to learn the necessary self-discipline demanded by the civic life of a polity in which citizens should no longer rely on others for assistance, collectivist morality and guidance and have supposedly acquired the civilised disposition not to impose themselves on others. The crux is a nationalisation of liberal values (Lægaard 2007) and a project of inculcating specific dispositional characteristics, deemed modern, western, civilised and emancipated. It is here particularly that sexual permissiveness and an embrace of homosexuality in particular have come to serve as indicators for individual autonomy as such (Mepschen et al. 2010; Dudink 2011).

The ensuing debate over the new assimilationism personified by Verdonk enacts a break in time and politics. This break is the central trope through which new assimilationist voices actually take up Dutchness: they present a cultural supplement added to the already established program of enculturation and contractual citizenship. Critical responses to Verdonk’s policies more often than not reiterate this break, thereby strengthening the suggestion that (1) there was a time in which Dutch citizenship was not or only weakly protected from cultural encroachment; and (2) there still is, today, an audible, contentious dissensus over what it takes to become Dutch.

Of course, it is correct that the introduction of new, supposedly ‘cultural’ elements make the entire process of inburgering more demanding and humiliating (Van Oers 2006; 2010) – memorising often illogical and ambivalent factoids about what are supposed to be Dutch norms, values and customs will make a test harder to pass, especially when subtle language skills are needed – but the reiterated recognition that there is no consensus over Dutchness has done little to undermine the new politics of assimilation personified by minister Verdonk. Subsequent governments have not changed course. The Dutchness of the cultural demands are routinely questioned, ridiculed, contested and thrown into doubt in political and public debate. Ethnographic research has shown that doubt, irony and non-seriousness concerning those elements extends all the way through the actual policy practices (Van Huis & De Regt 2005; Bjornson 2012; Van den Berg 2013) and the naturalisation ceremonies to which they grant access (Verkaaik 2009).

What matters most within the debates is not whether these elements are really and essentially part of the cultural life of the Dutch people. It is not as if participants in these debates are working with an anachronistically ethnological conception of their object. Verdonk would not have changed her demands for cultural assimilation if she would have been convinced by an ethnological expert on Dutch society that those demands, in fact, weren’t Dutch. What matters is whether newcomers demonstrate to be able, willing and eager enough to go through an
arduous process of instruction, effort and testing in order to gain access to full inclusion, *even if and all the more effectively when the test demands acceptance and knowledge of matters that are constantly contested in public and about which the natives themselves constantly express doubt and disbelief*. The fact that the natives are willing and able to disagree further affirms the particularity of their cultural life and the possible need to protect it.

Thus, the on-going disagreements over the merits of civic enculturation courses come to performatively affirm the exceptionally autonomous individuals that compose the Dutch nation. The new, ‘cultural’ demands may appear quite ambivalent, archaic and even arbitrary in many responses to the new program, but that has done little to undermine their suitability for a more restrictive regulation of access to Dutch citizenship: will newcomers submit even if it is transparent that the test does not apply consistently to the natives themselves? By critiquing the new assimilationist policies for imposing empty and unpractical demands onto aspirant-citizens, demands that many card-carrying Dutch citizens would not be able nor willing to meet, the opponents of new assimilationism and its policies effectively affirm that the new assimilationists are – in apparent contrast to themselves – willing and able to make such demands, *even if it is transparent that no consensus over Dutch culture is in reach*.

The discursive situation in these debates shows a pattern that must be taken into account in order to better understand why the rhetoric of new assimilationists was and is quite hard to undermine: while cultural demands of assimilation can be imposed on aspirant-residents – note that the difference between residence and citizenship becomes nebulous – as a way to test their willingness to change and their aptitude for independent achievement, those same criteria of cultural integration and belonging pertinently do not apply to natives, nor does the very audible and politically salient dissensus over Dutchness detract from such deepening responsibilisation. With regard to civic enculturation, a *native public* forms the audience of policy, not an example or participant. It remains at a distance and unaddressed. That is, the demands of cultural integration have no bearing on this native public, nor does their shared, public dissensus over Dutchness effectively undermine the force of demands imposed on others. In fact, that public dissensus performs a break with an all-too-multicultural past: celebrated by some, accepted by many, criticised as ‘neonationalism’ by others. This means that the mandatory enculturation courses do not necessarily draw aspirant-citizens any closer to national inclusion as the native public is composed precisely by those for whom demands of cultural assimilation are irrelevant. Even if formal-legal citizenship is attained, the integrated allochthon remains at a distance for being so
included. When the question of belonging and national identity *is* actually posed with respect to the native public the rules of the game change radically. It is to this problematic that we now turn.
As has been discussed in chapter 4, one of the crucial aspects of Dutchness that came to be articulated in the burgeoning identity debates of the early 1990’s was the notion that Dutch identity lacked – for better or worse – strength, emphatic expression, emotionality, substance and conviction. With this trope also came the suggestion that it was precisely this lack that constituted something of a national image. As we have already seen, the crucial development here is the way in which national identity comes to be known and argued over as something that the public itself is continuously imagining. Consequently, if a multitude of Dutch people imagined their Dutchness in a conspicuously non-emotional, non-emphatic, anti-essentialist fashion, it had to be concluded that this very tendency should be credited as a part of national particularity. We have also already seen how this situation interpellated historians and other experts of national culture to redefine their right to speak. Indeed, when national identity debates became a privileged site of imagination, namely as a crucial viewpoint upon the public’s current attitudes, the scholarly and, thus, non-democratic expertise of historians and other geesteswetenschappers (cultural experts associated with the humanities) could come into conflict with the more and more often repeated argument that Dutch is what the Dutch imagine to be Dutch.

Just as a reminder of what this kind of reasoning sounds like, let’s look at a wonderfully textured example by noted public historian and commentator Geert Mak in 1992, who while not entirely unconcerned, strikes a relativizing tone by arguing that not much could be made anymore of Dutch identity:

The Netherlands isn’t proud, it is even non-proud in a proud manner. Even the most well-off Dutch [Hollanders] seem to have clenchd to the outward frugality of their 17th-century fathers with a certain stubbornness. […] An explanation for this modesty as national pride lies in the simple fact that the Netherlands as a nation has already been complete for so dreadfully long. […] What binds a modern nation like the Netherlands is not primarily a flag and a state but that which some refer to as ‘civic religion’: the largely unuttered conglomerate of attitudes, values and ideals that used to be asserted by schools and churches and that today forms the permanent undertone of opinions in

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20 This turn of phrase was lifted from the title of a book by Dutch sociologist and legalist Kees Schuyt: Schuyt, K (2009). Over het recht om wij te zeggen: groepstegenstellingen en de democratische gemeenschap. Amsterdam University Press.
broadsheets, debates in parliament, news selection by the NOS-evening news, the signs of the ANWB [national automotive organisation], the shop windows of the HEMA [conspicuously plain department store] and the thousands of other signs that are projected towards the citizens and tell him: this is the Netherlands. An ‘imagined community’, as anthropologist Benedict Anderson calls it, a schema of ideas that people need, according to him, because it provides them with a sense of continuity, the idea that people share in a common fate, without having to know one’s peers-in-fate [lotgenoten].

Now, in the Netherlands, this civic religion is still Calvinist through and through, notwithstanding the secularisation [ontkerkelijking]. And more than anything else, this is probably the deepest source of our prohibition on pride, our national compulsion for civilising, our manic egalitarianism and our almost blind duplicity. […] The problem with the Netherlands is that it is never the same, and yet also already finished for a long time. That it is without God [van God los, which also mean ‘gone wild’], and yet also trembles at His wrath. That it is itself, and yet also doesn’t know what lives in its own cellars. (December 24 1992, NRC Handelsblad) (#129)

In the following analysis, I will deal with the debates about history and national identity in the post-2000 era. More specifically, I will analyse the debates concerning the construction of a canon for the purpose of history education in schools. In analogy with the policy program of civic enculturation, the program of canonisation presents the central, if not the sole policy measure to remedy the lacking sense of national belonging. Of course, there have been many other projects and initiatives, governmental or otherwise, concerned with the reinvigoration of national identity, culture and/or cohesion after 2000-2002. Yet, these appear sectorial and partial in comparisons to the ambitions and expectations loaded into a national history canon (see Boomkens 2010). It was specifically with respect to such a canon that the problem of constructing a common ground among everyone residing in the Netherlands became thematised and debated. How would that work? What would that require? While the civic enculturation program was targeted at the allochthonous population, aspirant-residents and candidates for naturalisation, the program of canonisation is conversely targeted at the native public, ostensibly including those deemed allochthonous. Whereas civic enculturation pertinently did not refer to natives, canonisation is brought forth as a measure uniquely fitted for the native public itself. In this sense, it forms the other half of a broader policy push to inculcate national identification and feelings of belonging. Notwithstanding the symmetry, the national history canon would come to evoke a debate about the relationship between experts and publics instead of the debates about obligatory testing and demonstrated effort with respect to civic enculturation.

We begin by exploring some of the context in which plans for canonisation emerged.
The nativity of the public
By the end of the 1990’s, the topic of national identity and its rhetorical forms had become a far more familiar part of public discussion. What happened next was the enactment of more pronounced attempts to actually do and make something to the effect of national reinvigoration. One such attempt came from sociologist-cum-publicist Herman Vuijsje and cultural psychologist Jos van der Lans. In two separate publications – Lage Landen, Hoge Sprongen (1998) [Low Lands, High Jumps] and Typisch Nederlands (1999) [Typically Dutch] – they sought to give some substance to the oft discussed national identity. The first presents a thematic insight into the unification of the Netherlands, much in line with the geographical perspective presented by Knippenberg & De Pater (2002). The emphasis is on processes of rapid change – modernisation – that brought the rather divers peoples who found themselves within the European borders of the Kingdom more closely together, made them more similar and, ultimately, convinced them that they were all Dutch.21 The second is an alphabetically ordered vademecum, or handbook, that goes through a myriad of topics, symbols, quaint phrases, historical sketches and contemporary particularities that together should constitute an evocative sense of Dutchness for the reader. The authors write in their introduction:

Typisch Nederlands is an attempt to open up the Dutch particularities in all their diversity and contradiction. To achieve this, we have consciously adopted a presentation in alphabetical order. This has precisely the required arbitrariness: everything is randomly ordered. This inevitably makes it into a construction kit. Some parts evoke feelings of irony, others evoke enthusiasm, pride, anger or astonishment. The Dutch identity is nothing other than what the Dutch make of it on the basis of their own experiences, insights and opinions.

We have not aimed for completeness; that would have been an impossible endeavour. Moreover, our description is inevitably coloured by our own observations and preoccupations. This is a reassuring aspect if this book: the Dutch just won’t let themselves be known fully. (Van der Lans & Vuijsje 1999: 8-9) (#130)

Thus, the typification style is explicitly not one of completeness, exhaustive description and insight into a deep and hidden core. Nor are the emotional attachments meant to be coherent. Instead, the authors propose to place themselves among the many attitudes, opinions and experiences of the people and to project an evocative sense of identity through the inevitable inflection of their own subjective engagement. It would be wrong to think that this style is one of endless subjectivism. In fact, this style – Dutch is what the Dutch make of it – entails its own problems and matters of concerns with which its interlocutor may critically engage herself. This becomes readily apparent from an essay entitled ‘Peculiarly

21 For a similar approach that emphasises institutional layering within territorial boundaries, see Kuipers 2010.
Dutch’ and published alongside *Lage Landen, Hoge Sprongen* by one of the authors, Jos van der Lans, in *Trouw*:

In the Netherlands, history is not a matter of emotion and consequently, we know remarkably little about it. […] The Dutch more emphatically create a we-feeling as they become less of a we-community through modern phenomena like individualisation and depillarisation. It is a form of paradoxical compensation. We invent neo-folklore with the demise of the old one. […] That’s why today we can openly wonder what our national identity is. What is typically Dutch? What is our national character [volksaard]? There has been a taboo on such questions for a long time. Those were the questions that formed the basis for every form of nationalism and WOII is the living proof of what excess can follow from that. That memory inflects our national consciousness to this day.

That is why it is still impossible to muse unreservedly about such questions. Indeed, we only need to look at the Balkans […], where the historical hatred between peoples [volkeren] has been sustained so strongly that in name of nationalistic feelings the most atrocious ethnic cleansings have been executed as if they happen every day. […]

But with the desire for equality [gelijkheidsdrang], the need for security and a homely, local sanctuary surely the basic ingredients of the Dutch culture are named. Even the polder model, the avoidance of conflicts by deliberating as long as possible, is the result of the joining of these three cultural chemicals.

[…] We should become much more aware of the narrative behind the reality as it surrounds us daily in the Netherlands. The narrative of modest riches, of equivalence and of local sanctuary.

We may well be a bit more chauvinistic about this. This history merits narration. It wouldn’t do any harm to recount it aloud more often. (July 4 1998, *Trouw*) (#131)

National identification need not at all be a question of imposing cultural sameness, so argues Van der Lans. Rather, it may be a matter actively engaging in storytelling. Van der Lans’ mention of ‘the Balkans’ is interesting in this respect. As happened more often throughout the 1990’s, ‘the Balkans’ or ‘Eastern Europe’ more broadly functioned as a cautioning example of what would or could happen when nationalist tendencies regained their strength: irrationality, division and violence. Yet, the prospect of ‘the Balkans’ only rarely placed the debates over Dutchness in an unfavourable light. Instead, discussions over Dutchness gained in gravity and, far from denunciation of the issue, the question became how to deal with it properly. The efforts of Vuijsje and Van der Lans can be understood in this way. Far from a relativizing tendency, the search for relativism and unreservedness entails a project of ‘louder’ narration. This louder narration may be conspicuously non-authoritarian, flexing with the imaginations of people themselves, but this nonetheless introduces its own responsibilities and its own right to speak: breaking taboos, making stories and evoking popular recognition.

Already after the publication of Scheffer’s drama-essay, S. W. Couwenberg published a distinctly ideographic overview entitled ‘What is our cultural identity’
in which he demonstrates a combination between subjectivism and objectivism by discussing Dutch identity as an ideographic phenomenon: what matters are the actual ideas that are dominantly present in the politico-cultural orientations of the Dutch public (see also Couwenberg 2001). Much in line with the reasoning of Fortuyn, Couwenberg combines an acceptance of statist nationalism, focusing on politico-cultural orientations of citizens, with the idea that national culture is, in the end, pre-political and grounded in the daily exploits of peoples. This positioning is interesting not only for its enactment of a peculiarly pluralistic traditionalism, but also because it nonetheless resonates quite strongly with the fragmentary approach as, for instance, enacted by Vuijsje and Van der Lans.

Couwenberg starts as many did throughout the nineties:

In the Netherlands, we have great difficulty acknowledging that we have a particular [eigen] cultural identity. When we do make an attempt to describe our identity, we more readily look for it in moral qualities like tolerance and a tradition of consensus than in factual data such as a particular [eigen] language, convivial customs and history. (October 14 2000, Trouw) (#132)

Then, he proceeds to discuss the ideological developments of the Dutch demos as a reflection of the lived orientations of Dutch people, concluding that:

Since the nineties, the latitudinal-liberal [vrijzinnig-liberal] orientation has gained prominence in public opinion, and this has been accompanied by a clear reaction against the left-libertarian derailments of the sixties. The Netherlands is hence in search of a new balance between the tolerance of the moderates [rekkerlijken] and the strict deference of the hardliners [preciezen]. Sticking up for maintenance and development of the own national identity is also no longer taboo. (October 14 2000, Trouw) (#133)

But how then does the diverse orientation of Dutch people relate to something like a Dutch identity, especially considering the influx of newcomers to the political community? For this Couwenberg mobilises an immensely important argument. It is presented here in some detail as Couwenberg articulates it in crystal clear language, but it is far from his invention or his exclusive position. In fact, it represents one of the more important ways to argue about the right to speak of us:

In the Netherlands, people – in leftist circles in particular – successfully fought for the recognition of [het respecteren van] the cultural identity of the ethnic minorities, especially the recognition of their language and culture in education.

In opposition to this I have defended the position that within our society a number of subcultures can be distinguished along religious, regional and ethno-cultural characteristics. But these subcultures are encompassed by a common Dutch culture, consisting of a common language and an evolving complex of norms and values that form the basis of our political culture and rule of law. That culture is a national variant of our European and western culture and this Dutch culture we may, in principle, put up as a norm for allochthones who durably settle here. (October 14 2000, Trouw) (#134)
How then does Couwenberg explain this subordinate position of allochthones in matters of cultural plurality? Why don’t they enjoy the same pre-political prerogative to live out cultural orientations, a way of dealing with culture that grounds the multiplicity of Dutch identity? Here, Couwenberg introduces a principal difference:

The cultural relativism is valid for states with autochthonous ethnic minorities, like Kurds in the Middle-East and Kosovars in Serbia, to name two current examples. There we are dealing with veritably multicultural societies. The adaptation that we may reasonably require of allochthonous minorities, e.g. migrant groups, does not apply to autochthonous minorities, who traditionally live in a certain area and through capricious processes of state formation are part of a polity that is alien to them. In this respect, recognition of certain group rights, such as administrative autonomy and the preservation of a distinct [eigen] language and culture, present a reasonable and adequate solution. (October 14 2000, Trouw) (#135)

There are two aspects of Couwenberg’s articulation that merit special attention in order to better understand the ensuing debates over history, expert engagement and Dutchness. First, in no specific sense does Couwenberg’s position contradict the one taken by Vuijsje and Van der Lans. That is, they share quite explicitly a regard for people’s own contemporary orientations. Couwenberg does emphasise the objective moment of such orientations and distinctly describes them as such, but this leads him to precisely the same conclusion as so many others voices at that moment: while the Dutch refrain from explicitly talking about their national identity due to Dutch peculiarities, they in fact do have such a thing as a national identity about which they could be more pronounced. Consequently, when this ‘we’ is articulated, it appears as an emphatically multifaceted object firmly endowed with the flexibility of a liberal, open, enlightened and diverse society. Dutchness appears always already, inherently pluralist.

Second, what matters is not the root historical cause, origin mythology or genealogy of Dutch culture at the exclusion of an outside/other, but the way in which Dutchness historically comes to encompass difference and contain its inherent plurality. What matters is what the Dutch have come to imagine, construct and conserve together as an encompassing nationhood. As we have already explored, this is one of the reasons why public debate on these issues became so thoroughly invested with meaning and gravity: debate is presumed to facilitate encompassment. It is also here that the crucial difference between natives and newcomers becomes apparent. In short, there are two kinds of differences: the native’s difference as part of an encompassing, plural, Dutch togetherness and the newcomer’s difference which resides under but does not in itself constitute the
encompassing capacity of Dutchness (see also Van Reekum 2012a). Thus, what comes to underwrite the supposedly exemplary flexibility of Dutch identity is the assumption that a Dutch people can always – in last instance – be discerned through state-territorial demarcations and their associated legal codifications as these indicate who has been here. The question of who can claim to be Dutch becomes entangled with the question who can claim to have been here, involved in the historical encompassment of Dutchness. When articulating the ‘who’ of the ‘we’ the ‘here’ helps to sort out how a principally non-exclusionary ‘we’ can still describe a ‘they-form-there’ who do not yet belong for not having participated sufficiently in a legacy of encompassment.

So while disagreements abound about what can and should be said and done about the cultural substantiation of Dutch identity, interlocutors tend to have those disagreements by reiterating the notion that the interpellated public of such debates and practices is a distinctly plural population residing and living out their lives in a territorially bounded space. The Dutch are, as the Dutch constitution puts it, ‘ingesetenen’: residents-who-are-settled-in. What matters is that they were here and by being here were part of the historical legacy of encompassment. Consequently, it is territorial otherness that can be used to speak about those that do not-yet-belong and come to entangle the many other notions of difference. It is non-western allochthony – coming from a non-western elsewhere – that is most appropriate for naming cultural maladaptation.

To be sure, territorial otherness is very far from merely geographical. As Couwenberg indicates for instance: Dutch culture is a variant of European/western civilisation. So what constitutes the cultural distance of the newcomer isn’t evident at all. What seems crucially important is the idea that one comes from a place that has enduringly participated in the central (and not peripheral) organisation of global capitalism and is attributed some version of the associated spirit: does one come from a place that has demonstrated economic prowess? The non-western allochthon thereby appears to lack a legacy of participation in what happened here… in the West. An entire debate can thus ensue about how ‘the West’ is to be recognised and what its boundaries may be, while the category itself loses little of its salience (see for instance Van den Brink 2001; Cliteur 2003; Baudet 2012).

In any event, what does become more self-evidently pronounced in this way – even throughout the on-going dissensus over the constituents of the West – is that there certainly is a way of speaking of us. Namely, by speaking for the public among the public; by actively adding to the historical legacy of identitarian encompassment. To speak of us is to compete in the public struggle over who will gain the most widely projected persuasion and evoke the most popular of
imaginations. Even the mere suggestion of territorial boundedness makes such a debate possible as it makes plausible the native public among whose attitudes, opinions, experiences and imaginations Dutchness may be found, while appearing all the more accurate – inherently plural – for never being fully trapped and identified.

It is in such a context that a central proponent of identitarian reinvigoration, Paul Scheffer, could disagree affectionately with Peter van der Veer, when the latter had argued that a concerted search for Dutch culture would be in vain as the social processes that had granted such a notion a measure of veracity had irrevocably been transformed. The expert on religious nationalism and transnational life had teasingly titled his essay ‘The Netherlands no longer exists’. In it, Van der Veer advocated a decidedly cosmopolitan outlook and proposed to counter the ills of societal disconnection by focusing on stigmatisation and discrimination, not the reinvigoration of cohesion and identity. Van der Veer wondered:

Are we dealing with a lamentable loss? Cultural nationalists, like Paul Scheffer and Frits Bolkestein, not only argue that there is something like a Dutch culture, but also that something should be dearly done to protect that threatened culture. The Dutch language, the Dutch tolerance, the Dutch history and, especially, the typically Dutch plainness (if one acts normal, one is already being crazy enough) have to be completely brought back to their former glory. This kind of conservative ideologue is generally better in describing what threatens Dutch identity [eigenheid] than what Dutch identity [eigenheid] is. In their writings, this threat doesn’t come from abstract social processes, like globalisation, but from concretely identifiable groups, the Muslims that won’t assimilate. This is an ancient pattern, that one already finds in the early modern witch hunts and is well-described by the American aphorism ‘Blame the victim’. It shows little interest in what is happening in the world or in the experiences and backgrounds of immigrants, but it does show a fear of change, something that affects established elites always and everywhere. Migrants symbolise that nothing is ever fixed, that nothing is rooted and impervious to change, that life is change. It is for this reason that debates about migrants are far less about migrants themselves and far more about what they symbolise. (September 2000, De Gids) (#136)

Scheffer responded by criticising Van der Veer’s cosmopolitanism as a boundless, indifferent attitude. But what is more interesting here is the way in which Scheffer presents the need for search for identity:

The position of Van der Veer appears to be a critical gesture, but it is far from one. Does he really not notice that his remarks belong in a Dutch tradition, in which all too often self-relativising has been a ground for self-aggrandising. The smaller, the better. […] Not a very innovative insight for a country like the Netherlands, which has described itself traditionally as the intersection of three neighbouring linguistic regions. That self-image has at once been a form of self-exaltation, but has never obstructed a feeling of responsibility. Precisely by taking up alien influences a community is able to reinvent itself continuously, without having to disavow its own existence. Not self-denial, but self-examination: that could be the art of cosmopolitanism in our time.
The Netherlands no longer exists according to the scholar of religion. Why still maintain a Rijksmuseum? Isn’t such a museum, full of Dutch [Hollandse] masters, a strange idea in a world that lives of mixture. Isn’t that a form of ‘cultural nationalism’? […] And why would we erect a monument in memory of slavery when Dutch history has become meaningless? We aren’t responsible for the misdeeds perpetrated by previous generations in the name of the Netherlands. A war in the Indie [the Dutch name of the eastern colonies], you say – never heard of. (January 27 2001, NRC Handelsblad) (#137)

In a now familiar fashion, Scheffer diagnoses the way in which the Dutch self imagines its image and what the consequences of such imaginations may be. As we have also already seen, he thereby is able to embrace wholeheartedly a defence of openness and pluralism, while still keeping the need for reinvigorated imagination going: the national self should engage in self-examination and thus discover a renewed ‘we’ within itself. The culture in cultural nationalism matters, then, first and foremost because it indicates and addresses what is native, what was and is here, what has been here during the legacy of pluralistic encompassment. While Van der Veer and Scheffer may conceptualise culture, nation and identity quite differently, their embrace of openness and cosmopolitanism does not become the main crux of the dispute. What Van der Veer already focuses on and what Scheffer responds to is the question whether nativity still count and should count for something in ‘our’ time. Both authors reiterate, almost without having to say as much, that a search for identity will never end in a steadfast description of the essential core of an identity. That’s not the point, nor does Scheffer posit an essentialist notion of cultural community. The point is whether there still is a native public for whom such a search – all the more appropriate by remaining indefinite – could be said to be necessary, practical or, even, relevant. Scheffer responds to Van der Veer’s criticism by arguing about a historical legacy and native self-understanding: while the scholar of transnationalism may say, somewhat parochially, that the Netherlands no longer exists, there is still, according to Scheffer, a native public for whom it does and for whom he chooses to raise his voice. It is only by acknowledging the existence of that public and its self-imagination that a coherent self-examination can proceed. When speaking of us, it seems the crucial question is whether there is a native public to speak to and for.

**Historical consciousness**

Analogous to civic enculturation policy, it is important to stress that the curricular redesign of history education did in no way originate from the political upheavals of 2000-2002. In fact, two consecutive commissions had been occupied with devising a new outlook and blueprint for history instruction in schools
By the end of the 1990’s connections between national identity and history education had gained some articulation in policy discussion. Take for example, one of the concrete recommendations in a RMO-report of 1999: ‘(4) Inquire to what extent a consciousness of national identity can be promoted in (history) education and emancipation policies [vormingswerk].’ (RMO 1999: 24) (#138). Despite of this, both commissions focused their reports on a somewhat different concern: historical consciousness.

While some discussion in response to both reports revolved around the question what historical consciousness might actually be, it is nonetheless possible and relevant to clarify the kind of concern that ‘historical consciousness’ referred to. As is explained in the summary of the De Rooy Commission’s report:

The most important new goal of history education is that it is truly remembered [bijblijven] by pupils. The lessons in history should yield a durable result. With reference to the ideas of historians and educationalists here and abroad, the commission presents the development of historical consciousness as the new, most important goal of history education. This goal elaborates on the recommendation of the Commission De Wit to search for a balance between factual knowledge, understanding [inzicht] and skills. But historical consciousness consists of more [méér]. It enables us to interpret reality in a sound manner, and determine our position with regard to reality.

Historical consciousness promotes:

- The understanding [inzicht] that contemporary phenomena are historically determined. Contemporary phenomena are the product of development, but also temporary and bound to a time [aan een tijd gebonden].
- A more detached, more relativizing judgement than is possible in uneducated, spontaneous and irrational reactions.

Historical consciousness should develop in pupils through an extended and coherent educational program. Examination should be concerned with the way in which candidates interpret reality and determine their position with regards to it. It is no longer sufficient to merely test the presence of purely factual historical knowledge.

The commission argues that historical consciousness is not identical to chronological consciousness. The acquisition of chronological consciousness does form a prerequisite for the development of historical consciousness. (Commission De Rooy 2001a: 2) (#139)

At the forefront of the concern for historical consciousness was the worry that neither factual knowledge nor skills were durably instilled because they did not become part of a more expansive and coherent framework for viewing reality and its temporality. As such, it was not durably instilled and remembered past the moment of instruction and testing. History education, it seemed, had itself become fleeting and contingent. The report quotes from Youth and History, a Europe-wide survey on historical consciousness and political attitudes (Angvik, Von Borries &
Keri 1994) to articulate the crucial importance of temporal continuity for an effective instilment of historical consciousness:

‘Historical consciousness is characterised by a complex relationship between the interpretation of the past on the one hand and the perception of contemporary reality and expectation of the future on the other.’ (Commission De Rooy 2001b: 1-2) (#140)

To emphasise the distinction between historical consciousness as the eventual goal of education on the one hand and chronology and factual knowledge as means to that end on the other, the report quotes Dutch historian Ed Jonker:

So Ed Jonker writes in an article on historical consciousness22: ‘With historical consciousness we are dealing with a deliberately produced cultural resource [cultuoargoed], which apart from empirical historiography also contains an element of interpretation and signification [zingeving]. Such a historical memory operates as a point of orientation, provides identity, is socially and politically effective and contributes to competence and goal-orientation of civic life [het maatschappelijke leven]. (Commission De Rooy 2001b: 2) (#141)

Within the goal of historical consciousness, then, a triplet of concerns are conjoined: (1) the durable instilment of a view onto reality and its temporality, which is associated with a more prudent, less irrational reaction to contemporary politics by youths; (2) the deliberate production of a coherent, contiguous and commonly shared framework in which historical facts and interpretive work become contextualised; (3) as such, the more coherent governance of history education by projecting the development of historical consciousness as the overarching goal in relation to which curricular decisions and didactic measures can be judged, thereby maintaining and promoting a common, cultural resource. So while, indeed, the recommendation concerning historical consciousness conspicuously refrain from any mention of canonisation and/or the reinvigoration of national identity, it is clear that historical consciousness concern a cultural resource of a commonly shared, identity-orienting and durable view onto the world.

Additionally, the ‘more’ [méér] that the De Rooy Commission provided, consisted of an epochal grid in which specific knowledge and educational activities would be placed. These 10 epochs provide all pupils with one and the same framework of history to be filled with interpretative content. The epochs are not chosen for their Dutchness, nor are they argued for as such. The epochs prescribe a historical framework that resonates broadly with a European, civilisational

historiography. They are about what made the West: early cave paintings and agricultural development, classical culture and conquest, the development of new territorial states and Christian religions, the establishment of monarchies and republics, their revolutionary transformations, the technological upheavals of society after the advent of steam and the horror of technological warfare and genocide in the 20th century. So while the ideas associated with historical consciousness did not already contain a specifically addressed concern for Dutch identity and its more coherent projection, the importance of a coherent, contiguous historical consciousness in all Dutch pupils for navigating their position within a European horizon was most certainly part of the emerging discussion over shared memory.

This emphasis on the position of Dutch society and culture within a European historical legacy also resonates with the extensive research project ‘Dutch culture in European culture’ that was finished by the beginning of the new millennium. Designed and financed in response to the national identity debates in the late eighties and early nineties – specifically those about the value of national identity in a post-Maastricht Europe – the entire project consisted of a series of separate studies. Each study is concerned with ‘the Netherlands’ in a specific year, consecutively 1650 (Frijhoff & Spies 1999), 1800 (Kloek & Mijnhardt 2001), 1900 (Bank & Van Buuren 2000), 1950 (Schuyt & Taverne 2000), with one publication overarching the entire period up to the present (Fokkema & Grijzenhout 2001). In line with the reasoning of the De Rooy Commission, the project presents Dutch culture in a European horizon, is concerned with continuity across time while relativizing the idea that history can provide a description of a definite Dutch particularity. Dutch culture remains what the various authors found culturally relevant at one moment and place in history. It is culture of a place – the burgeoning republic that is today remembered as the forbearer of a kingdom we call the Netherlands –, not the enduring cultural constitution of a people – the Dutch – that forms the heart of the project. In this respect, the projections of the De Rooy Commission already go one step further as its recommendations emphasise much stronger the importance of a shared, coherent and identity-orienting framework for what pupils should know and remember about ‘their’ history.

As noted by Karel Davids (2002: 550), it is nonetheless quite striking that many of the ‘Dutch culture’ studies of that period recursively deal with notions of deliberation, negotiation, moderation, toleration and discussion when articulating cultural tenants of public life. Typifications that, in turn, resonate with the way in which Piet de Rooy himself has dealt with the history of gradual democratisation and politicisation in the Netherlands of the 19th century and 20th centuries, namely
as a history of constant discord and deliberative consolidation of differences (De Rooy 2002).

**Neo-patriotism: the uses of ‘our’ history and feeling at home**

It was in the years after the assassination of Fortuyn that a need to specifically and concertedly do something about the national identity of the population became a key part of the political response to that moment of reaction. These positionings were taken even more urgently after the murder of Theo van Gogh in November of 2004 (Eyerman 2008; Hajer & Uitermark 2008). A host of parliamentarians and public figures took it upon themselves to articulate such positions and to argue for governmental action (Lechner 2008). Governmental action or attempts thereof would include many different avenues and initiatives, but it was the canonisation of Dutch history that would become the primary object of debate. Such new attempts at establishing Dutch particularity through history and memory stood in direct relation to earlier discussions about the relevance of history for Dutchness. In chapter 5 we have, for instance, already seen how Pierre Nora’s notion of a *lieu de mémoire* was embraced by a variety of academic historians who sought to invent a new, more publicly interactive role for themselves. The crux of this role was that historians could no longer presume to be the gatekeepers of national self-understanding, but should rather act as experts in specific projects of memorialisation. Indeed, Dutch was what the Dutch imagined to be Dutch, but this new concept of nationhood still gave historians something to do with respect to nationhood: they could begin to guide and enhance the imaginative-cum-commemorative practice of their public. Yet after 2002, the public construction of sites and fragments under the auspice of historical expertise was no longer enough for those who sought to claim that they had understood the worries of the autochthonous population. A more coherent, recognisable, persuasive and delineated image was in order and history was to provide clarity. Such imagination should not be scattered across a multitude of *lieux* – each one as valid as the next –, but should take hold in the national site par excellence: the classroom.

In an early exchange between two historians, one of the main points of contestation was immediately drawn out, namely to what use could and should history be made? A question that was reminiscent of Paul Scheffer’s well-established plea for a more deliberate and coherent construction of national identity: there is utility to Dutchness. Peter Sierksma argued:

If one seeks to return [*teruggeven*] some sense of togetherness to the population in this period of Post-Purple Confusion [referring to the demise of the purple coalitions], then history education is one of
the most natural instruments for it. A clear view on history can teach people that in the country in which they live there are, of course, not only differences in descent, culture and religion, but also similarities and common goals, such as trade and the necessity of toleration. […] Whereas De Rooy didn’t think such a list necessary, in this time of idols and icons, stories from Hadewych [canonic literature] to Hafid Bouazza [contemporary Dutch novelist] and from Marnix van Sint Aldegonde [canonic literature] to Clarence Seedorf [famous soccer player] could actually work quite effectively. And the fact that some typically Dutch [op z’n Hollands] bickering will take place about the names and the amount of names, well, that won’t hurt our awareness of national identity at all for the time being. (October 30 2003, Trouw) (#142)

David Hollanders retorted that this would amount to a political instrumentalisation of history, detrimental to the development of historical consciousness as advocated by De Rooy:

Historian Peter Sierksma wants to keep history obligatory in secondary education (Podium, October 30). An inspiring historical vision will presumably contribute to the enculturation of new co-patriots [nieuwe Nederlanders]. This also requires, according to him, a new canon […] In this view, history education is a form of social studies [maatschappijleer], with which the discipline regresses into political instrument. Previously, this lead to examination questions about German unification (when it turned out the youth taught negatively about Germans), women’s history (when feminism had to be promoted) and European unification (as promotion for the Treaty of Maastricht). All interesting topics, but motivated by mere current political and not scientific or didactical considerations. […] The value of history doesn’t reside in the making of simple analogies (‘Never again Auschwitz’), but in cultivating the awareness that such analogies are mostly untenable. In education, what matters is historical consciousness, not political urgency. (November 6 2003, Trouw) (#143)

With this confrontation, we have encountered a crucial question as to what the relationship between history education and Dutch identity is considered to be: does such a relationship involve pragmatic utility in the creation of a more self-assured society or will political instrumentalisation be the inevitable outcome? Are we dealing with a common and creative project of fabrication or are we dealing with a form of forceful imposition under a guise of national well-being? It is this questioning that helps explain why it became so important for proponents of the national history canon specifically and the use of national history more broadly to distinguish themselves from the very pertinent associations between canonisation and imposition. That is, any policy project that assumes to instil a coherent national image will need to address how and why that project is not a form of unwarranted nationalism, imposed from above. It will have to be addressed how and why such a project does indeed create a less conflicted society. Moreover, it will have to be made clear what can constitute the national in national history. This last point may be considered particularly complex as the new hopes for history education could barely take their cues from a well-established tradition of national history education. Due to distinctly plural schooling system in the Netherlands, national
history had always already been educated along quite divergent lines. In the main, these problems had been made addressable by ostensibly avoiding any claims to exclusive historiographical authority and, instead, relaying the problem in the hands of the public itself.

Let’s explore this way of dealing with the problem through an example: when KRO’s Reporter, an investigative journalism TV-show, performed a representative survey of the Dutch population on what they deemed to be at the heart of Dutch culture, journalist Esther Hageman argued that:

Queens Day, Sinterklaas, ice skating. These are the most typical symbols for the Netherlands. This can be concluded from a survey that KRO’s ‘Reporter’ will present tonight. Dutch culture is threatened, says a majority of the respondents. To protect that culture government should not avoid coercion.

[...

The particular [eigen], Dutch culture is threatened. That is, this is the feeling of autochthonous Dutch. Among them, 66% endorses the idea that the Netherlands is at risk of losing its culture. Of those people, 96% thinks this worrisome. Allochthones look upon this more calmly. Of them only 42% thinks that Dutch culture is dilapidating. But of this 42% of allochthones, the lion share, as high as 92%, also thinks this is worrisome. (March 31 2004, Trouw) (#144)

Neither this small summary of the survey, nor the actual reportage by Reporter had any long lasting significance in the debates, but they nonetheless enact a crucial style for talking about the relationship between history, culture and Dutchness. The ability and justification for speaking of us is underwritten by a logic of fame (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006 [1991]). That is, what matters is the popular recognition and embrace of certain opinions and feelings, over and above the expertise that certain participants in debates may claim. This primacy of popularity becomes even more evident when one of the central experts of history and culture (and a vocal proponent of historical canonisation) addresses the usage of history. In an intervention entitled ‘Long live history – but which one?’, Michaël Zeeman writes:

For the first time in three centuries a politician has been murdered and a popular uprising has manifested itself, the likes of which we have not witnessed for a long time. Who have we become?

[...]

Van Deursen is, apart from an extraordinary expert on the sources of the period, a great narrator: he offers a story, a story of the past that everyone longs for. He does so with authority and persuasion.

[...]

211
It forces us to recognise the crucial question: what does a national history look like in a postnational time? When consecutive governments would once again seek to instrumentalised that history, which purpose does that instrumentalisation serve and how does that work?

History is back, even if only because we look for a mainstay in it. The answer to the question where we hope to find this support is far from clear. Van Deursen provides one: in our reformatory [gereformeerd] ancestry and in the decisive role that the Dutch [Hollandse] elites traditionally have played. But that elite finds itself in great distress today and Islam reaching the numerical levels of the reformed church. However tempting it may seem to unequivocally [klip en klaar] point out a Leitkultur, as is argued by Frits Bolkestein (de Volkskrant, October 19) among others, that won’t be a panacea.

It is high time that a debate is opened up [opengetrokken] and others begin to name their key moments as well. (October 23 2004, De Volkskrant) (#145)

Zeeman doesn’t argue for Van Deursen’s historiography as such (see Van Deursen 2004). Rather, he argues that an authoritative offering, good narration and a persuasive style can open up a broader debate in which many may voice their vision of national history. So while Zeeman, who is often referred to specifically as an exemplar of a cosmopolitan intellectual23, argues that his public has entered a post-national era, this does not entail the end of national history. Rather, it entails a different mode of reasoning about and dealing with such history. It is not a matter of pointing out this or that decisive narrative, but a question of publicly proclaiming and debating ‘key moments’ as they become competitors in a struggle for the public’s attention and recognition.

The public authority of cultural and historical experts does not emanate primarily from some elevated position of learning. As enacted by Zeeman and others, the point of delving into history is not even to find a conclusive verdict. The expertise of the experts lays in their ability to bring appropriate material to the public, not to impose an exclusive vision onto others. This does not effectively change after 2000-2002 when proponents of canonisation and a reinvigoration of Dutchness argue for the unifying function of ‘our’ past. Such proponents argue that appropriate material is material in which a native public recognises itself and helps it to overcome a sense of abandonment and loss. Established ways of teaching history and enabling memory are indeed critiqued for a lack in focus, continuity, coherence and native context. But they are critiqued because they do not attend to the public’s needs, affinities and feelings, not because a national history canon ought to be coercively imposed by an exclusive group of experts who are

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23 As frequent contributor to De Volkskrant Zeeman has written extensively for that newspaper and others. Often his essays and interventions dealt with the arts, culture and the politics and policies concerning culture. Living in Rome for extended periods of time, his contributions to discussion over history, Dutchness and culture were often presented and responded to as a perspective ‘from the outside, writing as a foreign correspondent. As such, his writing on these issues partly resonates with the broader tradition of writing on Dutchness-form-outside yet coming from a figure at the heart of the Dutch cultural elite (see Van Ginkel 1997).
knowledgeable about the true historical outlines of Dutchness. So while the point of canonisation and an emphasis on ‘our’ history is clearly justified by pointing out the need to instruct and instil a stronger sense of identity and commonality, the debate over such a project is also inflected by a style that purposefully evades the suggestion of coercive imposition.

In line with the notion of ‘civilised nationalism’ that was repeatedly used in the years before 2000 – see chapter 5 – it was Jozias van Aartsen, the leader of the VVD during those years, who presented the new emphasis on history as ‘renewed patriotism’. By doing so, he was distinguishing precisely coercive and anachronistic nationalism from persuasive and contemporary patriotism. As he argued in an interview with De Volkskrant explaining why the conservative liberals should seek a stronger, more effective state governance:

How does the school become royal purveyor of good citizens? ‘One should fill society with emotion, like the French and the Americans do. There are the old themes like equality between men and women, private property, protection of your property. But more is needed, a binding element. Why are we Dutch? I concur strongly with Paul Scheffer. He is a representative of what I call the neo-patriots. That patriotism is also in me.’

‘The Netherlands has been able to incorporate immigrants for centuries. Two hundred years ago, we demanded the synagogues to use Dutch. We’ve never done that with our mosques. We have neglected that transmission of values. A generation has grown up that knows too little of our history, when the keynote [grondtoon] of the nation should be taught in school. I want the substance of history curricula to be bolstered [aangescherpt]. Freedom and tolerance should be dealt with, but also the Delta Works [engineering project strongly associated with postwar regeneration and defence-against-water typifications], Cruijff and Van Basten [famous soccer players].’

Singing the national anthem in class every day? ‘I don’t think that’s necessary. I believe very strongly in this country. In ten years, I want a society with futures perspectives, where a young generation grown up that says: it is nice to be in the Netherlands. I’m not going to go to Harvard to study, I’m not going to be a banker in London, not going to design fashion in Milan. No, I’m going to do that in the Netherlands.’ (December 30 2004, De Volkskrant) (#146)

The hallmark of neo-patriotism, then, was to avoid the imposition of a nationalist ideology. Instead, neo-patriotism prescribes an emotional and identitarian revival (see also Duyvendak 2011: Lechner 2008). The bolstering of a history curriculum is needed, not because it included items that are now deemed non-national and should thus be rejected – as if the Dutchness of history needs to be repaired –, but because it didn’t sufficiently include items that evoke recognition and response in its public. Needed are items such as public works, which are presumably recognised as national achievements among many, and famous soccer players whose names even the least interested in sports will recognise. Neo-patriotism, articulated through a logic of fame, is enacted in opposition to coercion and exclusion, because it purports to work through persuasion and public recognition.
Thus, the project of a national history canon is demarcated from inappropriate nationalism. Moreover, Van Aartsen is concerned with the question whether entrepreneurial individuals want to be in the Netherlands, not whether people understand that there is a Dutch nation to which they endemically belong. It seems a more forceful state policy aimed at the patriotism of its public is needed, in this line of reasoning, precisely because national belonging has become the public’s pejorative rather than a collective, transhistorical being.

To be sure, the plea for neo-patriotism was hardly exclusive to a conservative right-wing politics. The idea that a native population felt uprooted and homeless became a widely articulated position in Dutch politics (Duyvendak 2011: 95-98). In fact, one of the most vocal proponents of the neo-patriotic discourse was the leader of the socialist party, Jan Marijnissen, as he explained in response to the killing of Van Gogh:

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Together with Maxime Verhagen of the christen-democrats he would later introduce legislation for the construction of a national history museum, which along the lines of new canon and the classroom should have become a focal point for the reinvigoration of Dutchness. The initial motion, that would be co-signed by PvdA, VVD, CU and SGP thereby involving all but GreenLeft, D’66 and Group Wilders (the forbearer of the PVV), stated that:

Considering, that creating connectedness with each other [verbondenheid met elkaar] and the values of Dutch society is one of the great challenges which are posed before us;

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24 The subsequent debates and political manoeuvring over the construction of the museum were to evoke quite similar concerns as compared to the debates over the canon: the avoidance of state-imposed nationalism, the importance of chronology in creating coherence and the question whether such a newly constructed museum did not distract from other museums that, de facto, played the role prescribed to it. In the end, the museum never materialised as differences between its initial proponents and the actual executors undermined the process of planning and development. Meanwhile, rising costs made the museum increasingly hard to defend for coalition governments dealing with an impending financial crisis. Budgetary constraints eventually became the justification for abandoning the project. The organisation set up for its development did continue for some time by presenting exhibitions in temporary locations and developing a Nora-inspired smartphone app that enabled users to ‘collect’ entries of the virtual museum by visiting certain locations of commemorative significance. In this sense, the entirety of the Euro-Dutch territory was made into a national museum. In the end, the new leadership of the Rijks Museum succeeded in taking over the initiative and has included, after an exhaustive rebuilding project finalized in 2013, a permanent exhibition geared to Dutch history beyond its former focus on fine arts. The debates over the planned museum are not included in the analysis here. Not because they are not relevant – there are –, but because to the extent that they dealt with the right to speak of us, these debates would not add considerably different conclusion.
Of the opinion, that a national historical museum promotes the proliferation of historical consciousness and historical knowledge and can contribute to more connectedness;
Of the opinion, that the canon that is now in development is an important instrument for the spread of historical knowledge;
Appeal to the government in view of existing proposals, […], to provide proposals with regards to one national historical museum and present concrete ideas for the establishment of such a museum on prinsjesdag [the day of annual budgetary briefing in parliament] and inform parliament about incidental and structural costs thereof… (TK 30 300 VIII nr. 249, June 27 2006) (#148)

For a parliament that, near unanimously, came to discuss and disagree about matters of migration, integration and national belonging in terms of homelessness and feeling-at-home (Duyvendak 2009: 92-103), the canon became a central policy measure for the concrete effectuation of such political ambitions.

Making a national canon without a nation
The impetus for the actual construction of a national history canon came from the Education Council in early 2005. The Education Council is one of the many specially equipped advisory councils that form the beltway of Dutch policy making and is composed of carefully selected educational researchers and civil society leaders. Building on the policy discourses of the 1990’s, the Council published a string of reports on the significance and application of citizenship in schooling. These reports resonate strongly with the established citizenship narrative: citizenship appears as a civilising disposition to be cultivated in pupils (Onderwijsraad 2002; 2003; 2004). The rationale for cultivating citizenship is presented as the need to civilise society – Learning to Live Together (2002) – through targeted measures and courses in schools – Education and Citizenship (2003) – and thereby enable young people to navigate both their Dutch and their European identities – Education and Europe: European Citizenship (2004). It is in line with these ideas that the Education Council published an overall assessment of education in the Netherlands as a closing statement of its tenure in early 2005: The State of Dutch Education (2005). As part of its discussion on socio-cultural developments in the Netherlands, it lists four key processes that give rise to the Council’s advice to construct a canon: (1) demographic developments; (2) the recalibration of values due to increased ethnic diversity; (3) the emergence of a reorientation on individualism: more attention for community building; and (4) the contemporary debate on the cultural identity of the Netherlands (Onderwijsraad 2005: 17). The Council subsequently presents its advice:

Advice 2: attention for the ‘canon’ as an expression of our cultural identity
The second item which the Council points out in its advice, is the necessity to devote more attention to the task of socialisation in education, among others particularly attention for our cultural identity.
Two important components of this are contribution of education to a cultivation [invulling] of modern citizenship and a contribution to the transmission and further development of the cultural heritage.

The Council has previously published an exploratory study and two advisory reports on citizenship [mentioned above]. The Council seeks to elaborate the line indicated therein towards a more substantial direction. This is because the Council seeks to strengthen the relevance of education for society by working towards a new ‘canon’ for education. This relates to the valuable components of our culture and history with which we want to endow new generation through education.

The canon is of importance for the entire society, not just for an elitist group. Also, the canon is both conservational as well as innovative. The canon is a selection of what we think is worthy and in which we perceive our mirror image [waaraan we ons spiegelen], and also offers space for innovation. (Onderwijsraad 2005: 119-120) (#149)

Throughout the report, the Council articulates a concern for the risks of coercive nationalism. It does so mainly by developing a conversation with the analysis of cultural scholar Maarten Doorman. In Doorman’s inaugural lecture of 2004 – for the position of professor in the journalistic criticism of Arts and Culture – he had discussed the merits of a canon for education. In that discussion, Doorman takes on what he dubs the ‘four dogmas about the canon’ (2004: 8): conservatism; immutability; idolatry; and elitism. The bulk of his lecture is concerned with relativizing these dogmas. Much like other proponents of a canon at the time, Doorman was concerned with the coherence of schooling:

The question what we want to teach our children, is not a top priority. There is a drizzle of a debate about ‘norms and values’ throughout the country, yet that hardly has any consequences for education. In recent decades, education has gone through large changes, changes that have not received sufficient attention on the stage of public debate. At times, someone briefly startled by the segregation between schools, or a violent incident, and then people say classes should be smaller in size or there is some fumbling with the curriculum. Discussion on universities and the applied sciences are mainly about the level of student loans and scholarships. But this leaves little room for the question who should learn what and why. (Doorman 2004: 6) (#150)

After having relativised the criticisms lodged against a canon under the headings of the four dogmas, Doorman concludes with an affirmative suggestion:

Then what is the canon, apart from a misleadingly singular noun? In principle, this is up to the public, as consumer and as executive of a general discussion about values, taste and norms, a discussion that always rages on. It is here precisely that the importance of criticism shows itself. It is criticism that is first to select what may possibly come to belong to the canon and what won’t, and it is often times criticism that decides what we commit to the history. Criticism demonstrates what the canon is, how it constantly manifests itself in a different appearance, and how we relate to it. Criticism makes public who we are in changing world. And who we want to be. (Doorman 2004: 16, italics in the original) (#151)

Doorman’s approach here is first and foremost sociologically descriptive. That is, he concludes that public criticism, and the journalistic press in particular,
effectively produces an ever changing, always contested and contestable canon within the national-cum-public sphere. Yet, from that sociological appraisal of how and why a canon is what it is, there do follow normative considerations. While Doorman pointedly agrees with the critics of canonisation – it should not be traditionalistic, singular and concluded, idolised and instructed from above – this does not end the possibility of a canon:

The question thereby remains: should one give up the canon as a leading principle in education and thereby the identity of our shared culture, or should one engage in conversation if not a struggle over the canon, without repudiating the principle of the canon and no longer teaching our children about the monuments and highlights from our past. Not the principle of the canon, but its content should be subject to discussion. It is an asset that with the content it is also the values of the particular [de eigen] culture that are put up for discussion: it underlines that the canon offers the context for the inevitable debate about cultural identity and diversity. (Doorman 2004: 15) (#152)

It is to this final, normative statement that the Council refers when seeking to accommodate questions of coercive nationalism (Onderwijsraad 2005: 120). Much like Michaël Zeeman had argued before (April 19 2002, De Volkskrant), the point of supporting and developing a canon is not primarily because experts or others notables can claim to know what it should contain, but to enliven a public debate about its contents. The point is not to impose a canon – whatever its substance and quality – but to open up a discussion. As the Council argues:

The Council understands the canon to consist of three parts: a sum total of contents, an argumentation accompanying those contents and a method for periodic adjustments of the contents. Thus, it’s not only a matter of contents, of importance are also the argumentation and the periodic changes of the canon. The canon is not permanently given, it is rather a permanent and well-structured debate. (Onderwijsraad 2005: 120) (#153)

In lieu of the Council’s publication, Fons van Wieringen, its chairman, further elaborated this position in an interview with NRC Handelsblad. When asked how an endless debate could be avoided, he stated:

‘In a deeply pillarised society this is indeed tricky. But those days are gone. There are decision-making methods for the establishment of the canon. We imagine that it will be a combination of selections by professionals and devotees [liefhebbers]. Complete laypersons do not have an input.’ (January 17 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#154)

And when asked whether the Council now joined the neo-patriot promotion of historical consciousness, Van Wieringen emphasised:
‘Our plea is broader. It is more than historical knowledge, it is about national identity. The canon was always already there, but in the Netherlands it was never made explicit. Think of the sleigh in which the victors of the European Championship in ice skating are driven round. That image, said the reporter, gives many Dutch people a feel-good-feeling. So that is something we share.’ (January 17 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#155)

Neither the journalists posing their question, nor Van Wieringen in answering it appear to be aware that the neo-patriotic position emerged precisely as the suggestion that historical consciousness was itself not enough and should be extended and accompanied by a more explicit emphasis on Dutchness and the public recognition of it. Nonetheless, it is clear that the ambitions of the Education Council were articulated in direct connection to Dutch identity and the hopes to forge a stronger feeling of national community among its public.

As the actual project of constructing a history canon became more and more concrete, public discussion proceeded as to the sensibility of the project. Two interrelated problems recur in these discussions: coercion and selection. And two interrelated solution to these problems are suggested: debate and mutability. In the now familiar style of annoyance and scepticism, Van Doorn attacked the project in his weekly column:

And yet, the whole business concerning the canon doesn’t please me. The governmentally ordained ‘canonisation’ of selected national accomplishments and achievements, to bolster our national identity obligated in educational programs – it smells, how should I put this without being tendentious, it smells un-Dutch [niet Nederlands]. Such a cultural state paternalism is alien to us and should remain so.

By the way, the entire concept is uncouth. It boils down to an intellectual contrivance in service of a political goal, resulting in a pedagogical monstrosity, unusable for teachers and unpalatable for pupils […]

It should be dealt with differently. Of course, a wide knowledge of the history and the culture of the Netherlands can fulfil worthy functions. For a democratically oriented civic cultivation [burgerschapskunde] there is a wide panorama of inspiring themes. The Republic of United Netherlands was a marvel of political pragmatism, the Golden Age a triumph of entrepreneurialism and tolerance, the pillarisation a rare combination of group particularism and cooperative state craft, the German occupation a heartless lesson in Zivilcourage. All this and more offers abundant material for exiting stories and lively discussions. But in that case, they should not be offered up as the proud exhibits of our unique national ‘identity’ but as the more or less successful answers to the fundamental problems that everyone can empathise and come to terms with after some reflection. They not only connect the past with the present and the future, but also the life world of the ‘established’ with that of the ‘outsiders’ [Van Doorn is paraphrasing Elias & Scotsen] because they are recognisable for anyone who is trying to find their way on a modern society. (January 22 2005, Trouw) (#156)

Coercion and selection are also the problem when Annelies Huygen questions the need for a canon:
Meanwhile, the political winds have totally shifted. Today, our culture is understood as hegemonic. Whomever comes from elsewhere, need to assimilate. Education needs to instil these new values via an official, new canon, to be selected by appointed experts.

[...

According to Education Council, the goal of the canon is a cultivation [invulling] of modern citizenship and explicating the cultural identity. This is constricting. Curricula should not serve the cultural identity. Teachers shouldn’t mould their pupils into modern citizens. In fact, the reverse is the case. Pupils should be given a certain baggage of knowledge and culture in order for them to understand their surroundings. They need to gain control over their capacities. With a good foundation they will be able to determine themselves what good citizenship is and what the cultural identity entails. Government doesn’t need to do that for them. (January 25 2005, Trouw) (#157)

As many participants in these debates had expressed their concern over a canon in terms of a native public and its orientation in a European space, the problem of selection was also associated with the question of scale and geography. Such critique came most specifically from historians working in a world historical framework (see Stuurman 2006). Werner de Coninck articulated this concern by pleading for a canon of global citizenship:

Too bad that Van Wieringen can’t tell us what that cultural-historical [cultuurhistorisch] identity exactly entails. Is there something like a true Dutch [Hollands] race? Or can the Dutch identity be traced back to religious affiliation? In the year 2005, language and costume cannot provide support for the alleged Dutch identity either. In short, determining a clearly delineated Dutch identity is impractical and in light of the past undesirable.

Maybe, historical geography approaches it the most. People are conditioned by their surroundings. [...] It is, however, a fact that the European society is flowing through into Dutch society more and more. Van Wieringen’s plea for a clearly delineated canon in education provides little added value. Indeed, it remains an arbitrary selection from the national culture and history.

Pupils of today will benefit more from a canon that prepares them for global citizenship. Because despite all the conservatism of Education Council the cultural-historical [cultuurhistorische] identity of the Netherlands in the 21st century will in fact be very dynamic and constantly subject to changes. (January 25 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#158)

Interestingly, the Education Council and the neo-patriotic proponents of canonisation more generally make precisely the same argument about a Dutch canon: it ought to be open, changing, non-coercive, modern, and provide orientation in a globalised world. The idea that the canon should not be a definite prescription of Dutchness imposed by a self-selective group of experts is at the heart of the ways in which proponents of canonisation argue for the reinvigoration of Dutch historical consciousness.

This can be further illustrated by looking at an intervention arguing in favour of the Council’s ambitions by considering much the same kinds of problems. In their op-ed entitled ‘Long live the canon but not too absolutely’, staff of the Meertens
Institute for Dutch Language and Culture, the royal centre for ethnological research in the Netherlands, prof. dr. Hans Bennis, dr. Peter Jan Margry and prof. dr. Herman Roodenberg first take great care in problematising the notion of ‘identity’:

The complexity of the concept ‘identity’ makes the proposal of the Education Council an intriguing yet risky venture. In essence, the Council proposes to institutionalise a yet to be formulated ‘national’ identity. (January 26 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#159)

They then proceed to salvage the possibility of canonisation:

In order to capture such a variable identity in an educational program, we first have to come to an agreement about a general, dynamic interpretation of the concept of ‘national identity’. Identity is, according to us, an encompassing term. It is subsequently possible to name a number of cultural categories that are crucial in the concrete formation of that identity. Lastly, we have to see to it that the substantiation of these categories does not gain the status of a fixed canon, but instead of a variable selection, that can again and again match up with a constantly changing societal reality. (January 26 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#160)

It is in this same sense that Michaël Zeeman worries that the ambition to bolster historical consciousness had devolved into a deceitful instrumentalisation of history and neo-patriotic self-congratulation:

But the trouble with patriots is that they always only tell half of the story. Except for matters in which a culture like the Dutch one can take pride, there are the incidents and developments for which it should be deeply ashamed. The great asset of the European culture, with which the Dutch one is inextricably bound, is that it not only commemorates its triumphs, but also its disappointments, its disillusionments. Here, historical consciousness escapes in all too simplistic optimism and patriotism in European perspective becomes something measly. […]

The point should be to provide citizens with a more or less common frame of reference through education in history. This is – in part because of the many new participants in that society who have no direct relationship to the history of it and thus can, at best, recollect all those wonderful emotions forcedly – a far greater invitation to participate in it with respect and a certain passion. […]

This [the complexity of historical consciousness] is enlarged even more because of the revolution that society has performed from ethnos, a more or less homogenous ‘people’ [volk] in the cultural sense, to demos, a very heterogeneous company [gezelschap], that needs to find her citizenship in a democratic society. It is a question of wanting to belong to that society, its rule of law with all the rights and duties. It is not a question of wanting to be part of a people [volk] and its mythological self-images. Presumably, this is impossible without myths, but let’s have these myths as far removed from out-right lies as possible, however noble their intent. (February 5 2005, De Volkskrant) (#161)

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25 Peter Jan Margry and Herman Roodenberg are also the editors of the 2007 edited volume ‘Reframing Dutch culture: between otherness and authenticity (Progress in European ethnology)’ published by Ashgate.
Both the staff of the Meertens Institute and Zeeman find their passage between the impossibility of a canon and the ‘out-right lies’ of self-serving nationalism by arguing for the dynamism of continuous debate and the grounding of national identity and citizenship in a democratic self-conception. Not surprisingly, Paul Scheffer himself takes up this line of reasoning as well, when he explicitly sides with both Zeeman’s and Doorman’s justifications for a canon:

And that’s how it is: precisely the continuing conversation about the canon offers the possibility for self-reflection and thereby reveals, through the years, a variable self-image. What first is considered to be part of the canon can become outdated some decades later, only to be rekindled by yet another generation. (February 12 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#162)

And this is once more the line of reasoning in Olivier Hekster’s denunciation of a prescribed canon. The professor of history at Leiden University argues in close proximity to the Commission De Rooy that a more profound historical consciousness is desirable because it enables pupils to engage more thoughtfully and, indeed, critically with notion such as ‘national history’ and ‘nation’ as such:

There are great risks in such an ‘identity-cultivating’ [‘identiteitsvormende’] history. First, as has been frequently noted, the selection of the canon has a strong political slant. The canon becomes the common core of the Dutch identity; that which will not only be taught in schools, but what immigrants should learn in their civic enculturation. Such a core is limiting by definition. All histories should fall within ‘society’s history’ [‘samenlevingsgeschiedenis’]. The risk of state mythology, of a historical image that may be politically accepted but excludes groups from the new communal past, is all too evident. Equally, the risk of an all too nationalistic historiography, in which the particularity [eigenheid] of the Netherlands is overemphasised. […] From an appreciation of the past, whatever past, questions emerge. About the transience [tijdelijkheid] of things and the strangeness of past societies. Particularly in this time, when subdivision in ‘we’ and ‘the others’ are so strongly exited, these are relevant problems to think about. History shouldn’t be employed to determine an identity or to encourage patriotism. Rather, history could clarify the relativity of such concepts. (February 25 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#163)

What, then, does debate, democratic grounding and constant mutability entail for the appropriateness of canonisation? Does it mean that a canon is justifiable as it forms a crucial, commonly engaging object of democratic discord, thereby only strengthening the forces that work against an exclusionary, ethnicised conception of Dutchness; or does it mean that a canon isn’t justifiable as it limits and precludes the cultivation of autonomous judgement and engagement in pupils that is a prerequisite for modern citizenship? This ensemble of problems – coercion and selection – and solutions – debate and democratic mutability – recur through much of the discussion following the actual construction of the historical canon.
The commission and its problems
In line with the Education Council’s recommendations, Maria van der Hoeven, the christen-democratic minister for Education, Science and Culture ordered the formation of a commission that would actually construct the historical canon and develop the antecedent argumentation for it. This Commission Van Oostrom did not exclusively consist of academic historians. There were also a philosophically trained public commentator (dr. mr. drs. Maxim Februari), a social geographer specialising in youth attitudes and regional identities (prof. dr. Rob van der Vaart) and an educational administrator (Paul van Meenen). The chairman of the commission, prof. dr. Frits van Oostrom, was and is one of the pre-eminent historians of Dutch literature having received both national and international recognition for his work. Furthermore, the commission included a historian specialising in women’s history (dr. Els Kloek), who had published on the relationship between historiography and national identity debates in the past (Kloek 1993), a historian well known for his efforts in the public diffusion of history and national history in particular (dr. Herman Beliën), and a historian specialising in colonialism, the post-colonial legacy and memorialisation, migration and nation building (prof. dr. Susan Legène).

In her letter of institution, minister Van der Hoeven explained that there was a lacking level of shared knowledge of history, culture and society and that therefore administrative action was now needed on the part of the ministry:

Societal developments in recent years are the occasion to reconsider the identity of the Netherlands and the way in which it is expressed in education. The beginning of the 21st century appears to have brought an acceleration in the process of the development of this identity. There seems to be a widely dispersed need [in brede kringen behoefte] for a new ‘story of the Netherlands’. (Van der Hoeven 2005: 4) (#164)

The minister explicitly followed up on the previous efforts of the Commission De Rooy and its European contextualisation of historical consciousness:

With the construction of a canon I aim to bring about shared cultural, historical and societal knowledge about the Netherlands in an international and primarily European context. ‘Valuable components of the Dutch history’ [paraphrasing the words used by the Education Council] can refer to both positive as well as negative aspects, as both have contributed to the formation of the Dutch culture. I also deem it important to devote attention to the way in which the Dutch culture has been and is being influenced by non-Dutch cultures and vice versa.

[…] The substance in the rapport of the Commission Historical and Societal Education [the Commission De Rooy] forms an excellent point of departure for the (further) development of a canon. (Van der Hoeven 2005: 4). (#165)
Reactions to the installation of the Commission Van Oostrom were quick to materialise. They reiterate much of the problematisation and justifications articulated in the run up to the minister’s decision to appoint a now third commission. So in a plea for Nora’s concept of *lieu de memoire* and the antecedent role of historians to disclose their mnemonic potential, professor of contemporary history and chair of the history department at Leiden University Wim van den Doel, argued that:

There is a clear difference between the promotion of citizenship and the ignition of nationalism, a difference between Balkenende and Milošević.

It is also harmless to speak of a canon of National history. It is a mere testament of intellectual laziness to avoid such a discussion. But here too it is our own responsibility to choose to connect that history to the history of Europe and the rest of the world. Dutch history is simply part of world history, in which people, goods, ideas and services have always been exchanged internationally.

In other words, as long as Dutch history as framed in a canon is connected to the history of the rest of the world, there is no danger that National history will promote the emergence of a new kind of nationalism. (October 28 2005, *De Volkskrant* [#166])

As Wim van den Doel reminded his public, the Commission Van Oostrom was now the third in a series of commissions to bring coherence and evocation to history education. As is also evident from Van der Hoeven’s letter, the commission could not presume to work from scratch. It was her explicit instruction to extend and develop further the framework provided by the Commission De Rooy.

Chronological order and European contextualisation are the two most important aspects of that framework, mentioned by Van der Hoeven. Yet, the Commission was thereby also instructed to go beyond, to provide something more. In short, to work towards a canon that was not merely geared to shared historical consciousness but also to a more explicit and recognisable Dutchness of that shared canon. The effects of the canon should not just be ‘historical’ but also ‘cultural’.

It is in this way that a confrontation developed between historians promoting the epochal framework of the Commission De Rooy and the endeavours of the Commission Van Oostrom. This *historikerstreit* gradually came to involve many more participants with their own forms of engagement. The confrontation between these historians articulated the most crucial problems that the latest commission had in following the minister’s instructions: how will a canon be made under the express intention of bolstering a sense of national belonging by government and in the context of increasingly vehement political appeals and policy measures aimed at ‘not-yet-integrated’ populations to demonstrate their willingness to succeed and belong in the Netherlands? And how, for that matter,
will that canon be recognisably Dutch and thus enact in a faithful manner a civilised nationalism and an encompassing narrative? And what will be the scholarly justification for the knowledge and narrative conveyed in the canon?

The confrontation between historians has a beginning in a series of booklets, books and articles published by De Rooy *cum suis* in which they provided a view onto ‘our history’. On October 30 2004 the NRC Handelsblad published ‘What everyone has to know about the national history: a canon of the Dutch past’ (Bank & De Rooy 2004) in which they take up the 10 epochs. In the introduction to this short-hand version of the historical framework, the protagonists explain that a lack of continuity in the historical consciousness of the public is the main reason for presenting this canon:

Such continuity is usually found in a canon: an ensemble of knowledge and insights, of ordering and interpretation of the past. We are obliged to immediately add to this that such an ensemble is not immutable. To the contrary, a canon cannot and should not be canonised. It is crucial that it is constantly made the object of reflection. Who and what deserve a place in the canon and why? Michaël Zeeman once said: “The canon doesn’t teach fixed generalities, the canon tutors in reading, looking and listening, that is critical judgement.” The canon invites criticism, addition and, in any event, use. (Bank & De Rooy 2004: 3-4). (#167)

The publication of this canon in one of the most prominent and intellectually high-minded broadsheets of the Netherlands was explicitly aimed to evoke public response. Gijsbert van Es, the editor who had supervised the publication, wrote in an accompanying remark:

“The canon invites criticism, addition and, in any event, use.” write the authors in their introduction. Reactions are thereby welcomed at canon@nrc.nl. As reassurance: NRC Handelsblad will not test the readers of this canon, nor will there be quiz-questions. Nonetheless: it comes highly recommended! (Bank & De Rooy 2004: 2). (#168)

In the weeks following the publication, the newspaper provided space in its pages for responses that were sent in. Apart from support and suggestions for additions and changes, there were also negative reactions. J. C. Blom, the head of the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, deemed the canon to be the instrument with which the goal of a structured and mandatory history education for all pupils could finally be realised.26 Hotze Oldhoff listed a few items that were lacking and contested the fact that Pim Fortuyn was included in the canon.27 M. H. Cornelissen critiqued the Holland-centric perspective from which, he argued, the

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26 ‘Geschiedenis is meer dan een spelletje’, November 9 2004, NRC Handelsblad.
canon was constructed. Hans van der Caaij suggested the canon to portray some more affection, for which he pointed to the examples of Huizinga’s and Van Deursen’s writings. Agnest Verbiest questioned whether the epochs and their titles didn’t refer to one-sidedly to men and male roles. Lieuwco J. de Jong pointed out that the occupation and repression of the ‘Indische’ population and the internment of Dutch by Japanese forces were also matters that everyone had to be made aware of. A far more critical reaction came from Peter van der Veer, long-standing critic of nationalism:

The canon of the Dutch past produced by Bank and De Rooy shows the Netherlands in its most parochial appearance [toont Holland op zijn smalst]. It would not be good idea to take it as the basis of historical education in our schools, because pupils are not sufficiently shown that globalisation is not only of today, but has a long history. The Netherlands has become bound to the East and the West [referencing the way in which the colonies were referred to] in the early modern period through trade and this connection cannot be dispensed with in a couple of lines about the early period and a couple of lines about decolonisation. (November 13 2004, NRC Handelsblad) (#169)

Conversely, Sanderijn Cels argued that the authors had not been polemical and subjective enough:

A worthy canon has a certain command: namely, that you have to relate to it. It is to the credit of the authors that they are willing to enter into debate about who and what be represented in their canon. But nowhere do they indicate the boundaries of this debate. They don’t explain that a canon is not a consensual product [polderproduct]. Their invitation appears to suggest that the debate will satisfy everyone. That is just appearance. (November 13 2004, NRC Handelsblad) (#170)

Concluding, Gijsbert van Es, the editor at the paper who has supervised the publications, rounded up the responses by stating that:

Was hubris the incentive? No, certainly not. Bank and De Rooy wanted to provoke reactions. A firm debate among historians is urgently wanted.

[...] In short, this first canon of the Dutch past deserves a supplemented second version. A good timing for publication, wherever and however, seems apparent: the coming Week of Books [a yearly promotional week for book and literature] has Dutch history as its theme. (November 13 2004, NRC Handelsblad) (#171)

In this way, the responses actually effectuated the canonisation efforts of De Rooy cum suis: there had been debate and disagreement, proving that a historical canon

28 ‘Waar is de onderdrukking van het katholieke zuiden’, November 13 2004, NRC Handelsblad.

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is a worthy endeavour as it shown to be buttressed by a public willing to engage
with it.

As Van Es had predicted, in March 2005 the three men – Bank, Van Es and De Rooy – published a small booklet as a follow up to their first attempt. Interestingly, this version, which again follows the epochal lay-out, is entitled ‘The Netherlands in brief: What everyone wants to know about our history’. The phrase ‘has to know’ had changed into ‘wants to know’. In the introduction, editor Wim van der Weiden indicates why:

This booklet deals with the Dutch history in a nutshell. Previously, on October 30 2004, this overview was published in NRC Handelsblad. The title was: ‘What everyone has to know about the national history’. And underneath: ‘A canon of the Dutch past’. This ‘canon’ seeks to lay the foundation for knowledge of the Dutch history. Arouse interest, evoke discussion – that is what this short historical overview, in part, aims to do.

Thanks to reactions of NRC-readers the authors have been able to write a next version of this canon. Anno has published this one to great delight and gratitude to the authors, in hope of a new gush of reactions that are necessary to keep the Dutch history alive. (Bank et al. 2005: 5) (#172)

These remarks are of interest because they demonstrate a crucial aspect of the way in which De Rooy cum suis articulated their engagement in the debates about the canon. This engagement is twofold: first, it is indicated that national history has not been effectively presented and broadcast to pupils and the public-at-large. In the original 2004-publication, they state:

There is a strange prejudice in ‘Hilversum’ [referring to the public broadcasting associations of the Netherlands], and it is also dominant in ‘The Hague’ [referring to the central government], which says that there is little interest in serious history. The remarkably high sales counts of an author like Geert Mak in itself proves the opposite.

Of little help are those, inspired by the noblest inclinations, who suggest that historical consciousness no longer exists. It often turns out that what they mean by this is that people are no longer able to pass a school test that some of us remember from high school (at least from before the Mammoet-law [comprehensive educational reforms of the late sixties]): ‘who did what, when and why?’ With scorn, the infamous test of the Historisch Nieuwsblad [popularising magazine devoted to history] is mentioned in which members of parliament score far below passing grades. A recent re-take among ‘ordinary people’ provided an even bleaker picture. (Bank & De Rooy 2004: 3) (#173)

Secondly, this analysis of the problem gives rise to the need for a clear, concise, evocative statement about what everyone has to/wants to know about the Dutch past. The very fact that such a statement evokes critical responses does not detract from the success of the attempt. Rather, it demonstrates that there is a public interest and engagement, thereby justifying the endeavour. It is the public engagement that qualifies the experts’ proposals. As is explained with regards to the change in title from the first to the second version: ‘thanks to the NRC-readers
the authors have been able to write a next version of the canon’ (Bank et al. 2005: 5) (#174) What justifies the proposals of De Rooy cum suis is not primarily their expertise, but the fact that a public is shown to exist. What matters is that there is a public out there that ‘wants to know about the Dutch past’. One last quote from the second versions back cover:

Whoever knows may give the answer [to questions about the national history]. And those that don’t (exactly) remember, read The Netherlands in brief. (Bank et al. 2005). (#175)

Moreover, this public prerogative and the historian’s assent to it will have a civilising effect as it inculcates historical consciousness. When asked why historical consciousness is important in an interview, De Rooy responded:

American research has shown that people with more historical consciousness are less prone to believe in anxious utopias and conspiracies. As a society we are better off not having too many people that believe in those. (March 10 2005, NRC Handelsblad) (#176)

Both Gijsbert van Es and Piet de Rooy would, in collaboration with others, continue to publish overviews and narrative exploration of the Dutch past aimed at wide audiences in their attempt to enliven historical consciousness (see Mak et al. 2008; Van Es 2008).

It is clear then that this loosely coupled group of historians sought to meet a public’s desire for national remembrance in the form of concise and evocative narratives of national history. It is also clear that these attempts to enliven historical consciousness were conceived to spark and arouse debate. That is: debate would be the very conduit and expression of remembrance. Nonetheless, Piet de Rooy expressed concern when the Education Council in cooperation with ministry set out to go beyond the ambitions of the Commission De Rooy and it appeared that a new, more explicitly culturalist push for canonisation was in the making. When asked if De Rooy was pleased with the Education Council’s recommendations, De Rooy articulated concern for nationalistic coercion and unjustified selection:

‘Quite the contrary, it was very unfortunate that their proposal followed so closely after ours. It has significantly complicated things. It has caused inane confusion because their plea has a completely different intent [heeft een hele andere lading]. The Education Council suggests that such a canon will make us love the Netherlands. Chairman Van Wieringen wants to stimulate patriotism, he says. That is a return to the educational laws of 1857. They seek a broad public debate about what should be included in the canon. We know from previous discussion that something like that will go nowhere, only to a polarization of positions.’

[…] ‘I don’t understand the reasoning behind such a broad cultural canon. Apart from the practical objections – demarcation is impossible – I have moral objections. Knowledge and understanding
So while continuity and coherence of history and the assent to a public desire and subsequent debate are at the core of the justificatory logic of De Rooy cum sui, it is still differentiated from the plans of the Education Council and the ministry who, strikingly, follow a similar logic of a coherent and evocative framework of national history and its popular support. The difference is, according to De Rooy, the intent [lading]. Emphasising the Dutchness of a canon will entail a devolution into state pedagogy.

Yet another critique of both De Rooy cum sui and the new canonical ambitions was launched by Kees Ribbens and Maria Grever, whom together with Siep Stuurman had already been working on their project of the ‘paradoxes of de-canonisation’ since early 2004 in which they sought to analyse why ‘despite pertinent methodological and cultural critiques levelled at them over the past decades, the canons are still being recycled in history text books and public presentations’. Ribbens and Grever argued that the main priority in history education laid in the further professionalisation of teachers and the extension of curricular hours, not in correctly capturing a canon. Much in line with voices such as Van der Veer, they articulated a principled transnational and pluralist perspective:

Knowledge of the past can provide understanding [inzicht] about contemporary developments. This means that coming to know history as it takes place in education is best served by a wide perspective. Like the Dutch past has been embedded in international developments, so should the representation of that history be deliberately given an international context. Such education offers a more balanced image of history, an image that can lead to feelings of pride and shame, and of empathy with people in divergent times and situations. This multiple perspective onto the past demands points of connection that are often lacking in a national canon. That was also the case in the canon published last year by historians Jan Bank and Piet de Rooy. Their highlight mainly deal with political history, Holland and well-to-do, white men. Migrants, women, Limburgers, slaves merely figure as apparitions on the narrow stage of a Hollands drama. (March 1 2005, De Volkskrant). (#178)

It is indeed questionable whether De Rooy’s own argument for historical consciousness can be effectively differentiated from the new plans of the ministry. As has been shown, historical consciousness is explicitly understood to be a shared cultural good that is effective for the social and cultural identity of its receiving public. Indeed, the rather subtle difference does seem to be the articulated intent
and political context in which that intent is expressed. Yet, in this respect the
difference is also quite hard to find: Van Wieringen and the ministry may seem all
too instrumentalist in the wording of their ambitions, as if there can be a unilinear
relation between the national canon and national identification. De Rooy’s
argument for historical consciousness nowhere disputes this relationship as such,
but does emphasise its complexity, thereby perhaps preserving the need for expert
guidance to a greater extent. It appears that the difference between appropriate
engagement with a canon and state pedagogy is exceedingly narrow. De Rooy’s
principled reservations thereby helps to see the rather narrow tight-rope on which
the new Commission Van Oostrom embarked: how could canonisation be
performed without the lapsing into inappropriate nationalism?

The native public and its canon

Thus, the context in which the Commission Van Oostrom needed to find their way
was set. Indeed, their 2006-report demonstrates clearly that the commission was
fully aware and earnestly reflexive about the historiographical and public
legitimacy of their project. Moreover, they deemed it important to address in some
detail their engagement with the problem of nationalistic coercion and unjustified
selection. The report starts, from its very first pages, with a lengthy and quite full-
throated repudiation of a supposed connection between the new canon and the
politics of national identity. The commission summarises:

Indeed, as a complement to the presumed Dutch identity the canon seems a bad choice. Although it is
reasonable that people will at times recognise things in the canon that – not in the last instance
through the eyes of foreigners – appear ‘typically Dutch’ (for example: our high level of corporatism,
parochially put: the polder-model), it is not appropriate to meld canon and identity into one. It’s
already complex enough to get the canon in one’s sights without having to weigh it down with the
equally heavy and thin concept of national identity. It seems by far the best option to decouple the two
concepts. The canon may perhaps reflect the collective memory of a country, but never its identity. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 23) (#179)

So how then could the argument for a new canon be performed nonetheless? As is
clear from the previous repudiation, it is first of all done by strongly rejecting any
connection between canon and nation. Instead, an argument is set up by developing
ideas about the polyphony of the engaged public and its understanding of national
citizenship. This argument is already evident from the two quotes with which the
report opens. The first quote is drawn from an op-ed by Salman Rushdie:
When we, as individuals, pick and mix cultural elements for ourselves, we do not do so indiscriminately, but according to our natures. Societies, too, must retain the ability to discriminate, to reject as well as to accept, to value some things above others, and to insist on the acceptance of those values by all their members. [...] If we are to build a plural society on the foundation of what unites us, we must face up to what divides. But the questions of core freedoms and primary loyalties can’t be ducked. No society, no matter how tolerant, can expect to thrive if its citizens don’t prize what their citizenship means – if, when asked what they stand for as Frenchmen, as Indians, as Britons, they cannot give clear replies. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 9; quoted from ‘What this cultural debate needs is more dirt, less pure stupidity’, December 10 2005, *The Times*)

And the second directly below it is from Edward Said:

Some etymologists speculate that the word ‘canon’ (as in ‘canonical’) is related to the Arabic word qanum, or law in the binding, legalistic sense of the word. But that is only one rather restrictive meaning. The other is a musical one, canon as a contrapuntal form employing numerous voices in usually strict imitation of each other, a form, in other words, expressing motion, playfulness, discovery, and, in the rhetorical sense, invention. Viewed this way, the canonical humanities, far from being a rigid tablet of fixed rules and monuments bullying us from the past [...] will always remain open to changing combination of sense and signification. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 9; quoted from Said, E. (2004) *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Columbia University Press, p. 25)

Put together, these quotes set out an argument for the canon that, as the commission itself concludes, is in the line of Doorman, Zeeman and Scheffer (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 23). As such, it reiterates much of what had become a staple of the on-going discussions over Dutch identity: it appears distinctly multiple, civic, plural, changeable, open and non-exclusionary. Crucially, these aspects are argued for by giving the ability to articulate such an identity to a native public that, through audible debate, is able to express what it deems memorable in its citizenship. The canon presented by the commission is thereby merely one moment in an on-going explication of what becomes canonised through a mixture of voices and thereby nationally shared. Indeed, one could argue that there is a rather glaring rift between Rushdie and Said here. The first speaks of what societies-as-wholes should do and directly identifies the articulation of national distinctions to the enactment of citizenship. Furthermore, Rushdie problematises the presumed fact that people are unable to define what makes them a member of a specific nation, much in line with Paul Scheffer for instance. Rushdie speaks from the viewpoint of national governments and their responsibility for governing difference. In contrast, the quote from Said presents canonisation as an actual process going on in the humanities, a non-state entity, and conceives of the canon as a reflexive phenomenon. It is about intellectual engagement with the legacy of human thought. But it is precisely by putting these two conflicting quotes together – the one about governance of difference, the other about humanistic engagement – that the

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33 see: http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1542285/posts (accessed 07-02-2014)
commission’s argument is beginning to take shape. That is, the commission brings together the domain of governance and the domain of public engagement, thereby developing the argument that it is precisely the fact of public engagement with the canon that qualifies and justifies governmental actions towards a canon. Van Oostrom explicates this in his introductory words of the report:

In that year [September 2005 – September 2006], the commission has experienced much interest for her efforts. Apparently, many care a lot how the Netherlands deal with its culture and its history. With the publications of this report, we explicitly seek to understand this as a delighting fact, also because the canon-process, in our assessment, is at times associated one-sidedly with complaints.

The canon of the Netherlands is not a wailing wall, nor is it a chore. It is a positive factor, not directed against modernity, but in fact a valuable force behind it. This is in part why we chose for a frontispiece [see page 2 of the report for the image of the iron clock]. In the clock of cultural history the canon represents, in a certain sense, the big plate that to the eye rotates less dynamically than the brisk wheel behind the small hand, but nonetheless indicates the basic tempo [grondtempo]. Through its permanent affect it helps to move along all that is instantaneous.

We might, in election time, put it this way: The canon is what amply outlives cabinets and commissions. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 11). (#180)

What time is it? How can we keep time? These are hugely complicated questions. Not only because time itself is a phenomenon that eludes our thoughts and our attempts to capture it, but also because there is in many cases an ‘us’ involved for whom time is to be relevant and for whom it is to be kept. What is clear, however, from these words, is that the Commission Van Oostrom seeks to present their canon as a mechanism for indicating a shared time in analogy to a clock. Of course, ‘our’ time is in perpetual change and, thereby, so should ‘our’ canon. But in this respect, the canonical clock is not calibrated for distinguishing one moment from the next, it does not serve the whims and wishes of this or that cabinet, this or that commission. The canonical clock does not indicate the time of any one specific politics of national identity. It indicates time at a remove from such quotidian interruptions. It doesn’t measure election time and is thereby set apart from the electoral nationalism of the day. The canonical clock ought to indicate the broader, wider time of an ‘us’ for whom elections come and go. The canon serves to elucidate the ground tempo in which the public realises itself.

Indeed, this is all metaphor, but the metaphor is nonetheless important as it shows how the commission is able to keep the risks of an elitist, coercive, arbitrary, anachronistic, finalised and sanctified canon at bay. Through the metaphor of the clock, the commission is able to conceive of the canon as an indicator, not a prescriber, of a process that has already been going on: the ground tempo of a shared, public imagination in which moments may take their place and acquire some measure of coherence. Through the canon, government takes it upon itself to
maintain the canonical clock, making sure that everyone can know what it means to be a Dutch citizen. Yet by design, the canon cannot be exclusionary as it measures a continuous process of public polyphony, engagement and contestation. Any and all disagreement, public criticism, debate and discord is always already part of the development it describes and has the chance to become part of it, if only it endures past the transience of ‘cabinets and commissions’. It is all the more appropriate for the state to equip its citizens with such a canonical time device as it will enable them to continuously track and reflexively give back to themselves their common engagement with each other. Ergo, this cannot be state pedagogy: the state merely enables the public to instruct and memorialise itself. When referring to a now outdated canon, Curtius’s *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948), the commission writes:

Today, we would no longer present the canon in this form, but the fact remains that education still performs the crucial task of transmitting the canon – not in the least to children who do not receive it at home.

The fact that the school teaches the canon doesn’t imply state pedagogy or cultural coerciveness any more than is implied by the instruction of Dutch topography or knowledge of nature. It is nothing more than the historio-cultural translation of the mandate in which compulsory education [*onderwijs en leerplicht*] is rooted: the only legal form of indoctrination known to a civilised country. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 27) (#181)

The exact state of the canon is irrelevant. What matters is the diffusion of the national citizenry with a shared and therefore effective device for imagining the wider time in which concrete circumstances and events have been and are proceeding. At stake are not the contents, but the public effectiveness of the canon as a conduit for a national historical imagination.

The question that remains, is how the relevant public is to be differentiated from those who are not part of the continuous process of public engagement of which the canon measures the ground tempo? The argument so far already suggests that the relevant public is synonymous with the people *in* the Netherlands: its residents or ‘ingezetenen’ to recall the Dutch constitutional expression. In fact, the commission explicitly deals with this question when they address what they mean by ‘Dutch’. In a prelude to an overview of the canon – the ‘*hoofdlijnen*’ – the commission warns the readers of the report:

It is important that one deals thoughtfully with concepts like ‘the Netherlands’, ‘Dutch culture’ and ‘Dutch history’. Indeed, until the 19th century the notion of ‘the Netherlands’ is an anachronism, sand also the adjective ‘Dutch’ remain problematic for that early history. When this text deals with the history of the Dutch language and culture, the Dutch territory and the Dutch state, we actually mean
‘as relevant to this region’, without suggesting that that region has formed a cultural, governmental, linguistic or cultural [sic] unity all that time. We deal with these matters as historical phenomena. […]

The overview offers a sense of location in space and time: it shows in broad strokes what the forgone generations that have resided in this area have been through. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006b: 110) (#182)

And finally, the commission is also concerned with the question of newcomers to the Netherlands. Contrasting their position on national identity, it states:

The commission is less dismissive yet still nuanced about the association between canon and civic enculturation. Of course, one can argue on good grounds that, after knowledge of the Dutch language, the knowledge of the associated history and culture can contribute substantially to the accommodation of newcomers in this country. Yet, this isn’t the main goal of drafting a canon as intended by the commission. That is: the fragile canonical knowledge is a problem of all Dutch, certainly not of allochthones in particular. Indeed, newcomers will relate differently to certain elements of the Dutch past, at times demanding special sensitivity of teachers. But the difference appears in our eyes to be gradual rather than principal. What matters is that this is the canon of the country that we inhabit [bewonen] together. In that sense, the canon can certainly contribute to citizenship. Knowledge and understanding of how this country has developed, what it has produced of value, and where it has and has not stood for in the world is a meaningful and enriching learning objective, and provides society with a frame of reference that pay off in mutual interaction [verkeer] and in acting in the world as a Dutch person [als Nederlander opereren in de wereld]. Thus, it’s the canon of Boulahrouz [celebrated soccer player of the national squad whose familial lines can be traced to Morocco] and Beatrix [celebrated head of the Dutch Royal family whose familial lines can be traced to the society of European aristocracy]. (Commission Van Oostrom 2006a: 24, italics added) (#183)

We can now conclude how the commission argumentatively deals with its problems and justifies the drafting of a canon in contradiction to the presumptions and goals of public and political appeal for stronger national unity-cum-loyalty.

The commission meticulously decouples the presumed or suggested connection between its canonical work and the politics of national identity, clearing the way for an argument that redeems the possibility and right of governmental action on the basis of explicitly depolitical notions of time and space. That is, the commission seeks to connect its canonical work not to the political, transient constructions of national identity, but instead to a broader, public time – metaphorically presented as the ground tempo of public contestation – and a pre-political location that is deemed to exist before the statecraft of territory – indicated by the notions of ‘region’ and ‘area’ –, seemingly evoking a ground-in-itself. Thus, the native public is a matter of here-and-now: (1) its canon is the durable ensemble of what should be remembered as significant for it, rendering the shared past to be the always changing product of public polyphony in the now; (2) while referring to the circumstances and events that are said to be significant of a region or area that
is here. These coordinates appear all the more absolute by having been stripped of their politically instrumental and transient implications. Precisely by backing away from any one politics of national identity, the commission moves towards notions that enable it to argue for the canon nonetheless, despite all odds and in the last instance: ‘musical quality of polyphony’; ‘ground tempo’; ‘region’; ‘area’.

The nativity of the public, whose shared discord about the significance of the past produces the ever-changing canon, is guaranteed and underwritten by depoliticised notions of a here-and-now. This here-and-now – a guarantee in last instance – is a matter of residing. As the commission explains: ‘what matters is that this is the canon of the country that we inhabit together.’ And it is therefore that the commission argues for a circumscribed exemption of the disconnection between canon and nation with respect to those that are not from here: ‘allochthones’. Although they are most certainly included in the native public – they are indeed here – they are nonetheless exempted from the open-endedness of canonical construction as the canon’s justification – what matters is the shared ground tempo of this region – still relegates them to a ‘special’ position in view of the native public. What can be said unequivocally of those deemed of this ground – autochthones – can be said only presumably of those whose grounding is still questionable and in-the-making. So while the commission clearly indicates to be intently reflexive of the current context in which it is delivering a canon – a context of unwarranted nationalism – it nonetheless is able to argue for the canon’s relevance in civic enculturation because according to the commission’s justifications, it merely places newcomers at a gradual rather than principle distance. If understood in the right way, the commission argues, the canon cannot be instrumented in an unwarranted, exclusionary politics of national identity as it is precisely by constructing it that the eventual inclusion of newcomers is made clear. Inclusion, then, consists of the eventual right to also say that one is of this ground, to also see one’s concern become reflected in the canon of the here-and-now.

**Canon reviewed**

As the commission’s work neared completion, Piet de Rooy published an op-ed in *de Volkskrant*. In it, he discussed the perils of canonisation, emphasising that neither a historical canon nor a national history museum would promote national cohesion. His argument for that prediction was that historical overviews were always the product of selection and interpretation. Thus, attempts at gaining oversight would prompt criticisms and suggestions for modifications, not cohesive consensus. Appeals for world or global history would not remedy, but instead deepen this problem. The creation of persuasive overviews – national or otherwise
– that could evoke a faithful sense of the flow-of-time is, according to De Rooy, a
delicate craft. The products of that craft are more likely to fall flat than to actually
work effectively in the governmental search for national unity. De Rooy, therefore,
expressed scepticism as to the effort of the latest commission:

The real difficulty is to find a way to give meaning and coherence to the occurrences – in their
multitude and multiplicity –, to sketch causes and connections, and to all that in such a way that ‘the
flow of time’ becomes significant.

And lastly: we have to wait and see what the canon commission will bring, but
perhaps it is wise for us to be aware that the meaning of a canon can never be more
than a reasoned proposal to perceive a part of the past of a part of the world along
certain general lines. A proposal, nothing more nothing less. The worst that can
happen to the commission is that the results of its efforts is taken to be the Final
Verdict \textit{[Laatste Oordeel; also referring to Judgement Day]}.

This points to a third element in the notion of ‘history’: of course, facts matter as their interconnection
is a matter of concern, but in the end it will be inevitable that opinions on this will diverge – and thus
not automatically lead to ‘cohesion’ \textit{[verbondenheid]}. It has been cited over and over again, but that
doesn’t make the words of Geyl [one of the most prominent historians to have worked on Dutch
national history in the interbellum period] less truthful: history is a discussion with no end.
(September 1 2006, \textit{De Volkskrant} (#184)

Being the central proponent and author of multiple national canons and arguments
for them, it is again striking how thoroughly doubtful De Rooy expresses to be
about the possibility of canonisation.\textsuperscript{34} Moreover, De Rooy’s conclusion – canons
can only be proposals – is as close to a verbatim equivalent of the Commission Van
Oostrom’s argument as there can be. What De Rooy may not have known at the
time, was that his scepticism would be precisely the line of argument put forth by
the new commission. Of course, the crux of De Rooy’s pre-emptive objections was
his already expressed criticism of ‘national cohesion’: good historiography could
not and should not be loaded with the unbearable responsibility of creating more
unity. Much in line with Van Oostrom et al., he predicted that not unity but
discussion would be the consequence.

It was to this specific intervention that a long-standing proponent of a
canon, Michaël Zeeman, expressed annoyance with the unoriginal scepticism of
professor De Rooy:

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{34} In the same intervention, De Rooy is even out-right sceptical of the civilising effects of historical
consciousness – a core argument for his own canonical work – citing the very developed historical
consciousness in the Weimar Republic not preventing the subsequent atrocities.
\end{footnote}
Because history as an academic discipline is called, filled with the exalted self-criticism of that lame cliché, ‘a discussion with no end’, because one can think of so many ifs and buts with respect to the manner in which the past is appropriately recounted, De Rooy anxiously awaits the presentation of the ‘canon of the Netherlands’ by the canon commission on October 16.

[...] The explication of what the desired minimum of knowledge about the Dutch culture and history is by way of a canon is not going to solve that problem [the self-evidence of Dutchness and its subsequent non-articulation] at once. But it is beyond me why the argument for that desirability and the substance of that knowledge would be more catastrophic than haughtily exclusion [due to the non-articulation of Dutchness]. So let’s have that canon; we can then have a discussion about its contents, but not about the principle. (September 8 2006, De Volkskrant) (#185)

And so there emerged the somewhat odd, yet interesting circumstance that three proponents of the canon expressed disagreements about canonical ambitions along one and the same line of argument: the canon is not and cannot be a fixed, coercive statement about Dutch history, but is to be conceived as a proposal in an on-going discussion to which it may add some measure of coherence and explication. The point of the canon is thereby conceived to be the way in which it draws a native public together around it and facilitates a discussion. Zeeman was not the only one to notice that the dismissiveness of De Rooy was hard to understand. Huibert Crijns, for instance, wondered whether the previous efforts at canonisation by De Rooy cum suis were not merely practical jokes, seeing as those efforts had been instrumental in the run up to the ministry’s new plans:

Has Piet de Rooy changed his opinion in the last two years? That could be, but isn’t very likely. The thinking he articulates in his recent article is certainly not new in the world of history and was certainly known to him. Rather, it seems that the canon proposal of 2004 had been a practical joke that got out of hand. (September 12 2006, De Volkskrant) (#186)

When the canon of Van Oostrom et al. finally did see the light of day, it was received quite positively. That is, in line with the arguments of Scheffer, Zeeman, De Rooy, and the Commission Van Oostrom itself, there was considerable debate over the contents of the canon. Numerous participants in such interventions suggested additions and subtractions from the 50 windows from which the canon was built. The ‘principle’, to paraphrase Zeeman, was much less contested. See, for instance, the praise given in the NRC Handelsblad’s editorial column precisely because the commission had chosen to carefully qualify the connection between national identity and the canon:

The point is good history education and a collective memory. Other goals, such as the description of a Dutch identity, are rightly discarded; if it hadn’t the canon would succumb to the all too pressuring aims of politics and society. Indeed, national identity is a vague concept, but that does not detract
from the fact that a time line with stories and people helps in the civic enculturation of people that want to get to know their new country.

Historians and teachers will differ in their opinions about the selected historical figures, periods and events. The selection will change according to the perspective on the past. The point is to cross the river, less so the rocks which are treaded upon. (October 16 2006, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#187)

While there were also voices who wondered if those lengthy qualifications were really necessary. Was it not more or less clear that the canon has something to do with what we call ‘national identity’ yet this connection could not be precisely delineated? In an otherwise supportive response Corine Vloet, a journalist specialising in arts and culture, stated:

But one thing really does stand out. Why does the commission struggle so much with the concept ‘national identity’. The ‘presumed Dutch identity’ cannot be appropriately melded to the canon. Preferably, the commission would want to ‘decouple’ the two concepts, national identity is ‘in the international, multicultural world of today’ a ‘deceitful, yes dangerous concept’. It seems the commission has sought to counter all possible reproaches of ‘hollandocentrism’ pre-emptively. Indeed, the canon was not allowed to become a ‘vehicle for national pride’. Well yes, national pride. *Das war einmal.* National pride, as we all know, at least entails the NSB [Dutch fascist party that sided with and operated at the behest of the Nazi-rule of the Netherlands during WOII], or for example the America of George W. Bush. We’ll settle for national shame.

Yet this makes it odd that the commission is ‘less dismissive’, although ‘nuanced’ about ‘the association between canon and civic enculturation’. What would be the connection between civic enculturation and ‘national identity’? According to Frits van Oostrom, yesterday in these pages, there is no such thing ‘as the national identity of a country. It is impossible to fit everyone in the same mould.’

Yes, that’s why it’s called a national identity, not a personal or a group identity. But why would we pretend it isn’t there. We might be able to describe national identity as the sum of what everyone shared in geography, language, culture, history, etcetera. It is a kind of inheritance that one is bequeathed with, whether one wants the shoddy construction [bouwval] or not. (October 17 2006, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#188)

Thus the careful consideration of nationalistic coercion by the commission is explicitly recognised and often forms the central question of reviews: did the commission manoeuvre the canon in the right way considering the context of neo-nationalism in politics and the public sphere? Indeed, this was also the crucial point for steadfast opponents of a canon. Emblematic for such principled rejection of canonisation was the position of Maria Grever, a position that resonates to considerable extent with the view point developed in this study. After the publication of the canon, Grever did explicitly recognise the lengths to which the commission had gone to relativize the governmental instrumentality of the canon. Yet, in Grever’s argument such relativizing could never be strong enough as governmentally led canonisation still implicated state authority in what should be a resolutely public matter. One could say that Grever embraces the quote by Said
what matters in humanist engagement) at the principled rejection of the quote by Rushdie (what matters is national citizenship), whereas the commission had sought a way to combine the two insights. But even from such a position, meticulously emphasising the plurality of perspectives from which history is inherently articulated, it can be quite hard to contradict the justifications of the commission. As Grever concluded in her contribution to an edited volume on the canon and the controversies surrounding it:

A governmentally prescribed historical canon uniforms knowledge and provides clarity for all Dutch, including newcomers. It does. But this approach entails a few risks. This canon will be counterproductive for social cohesion because the plurality of perspectives onto the past taken by different groups in society is being narrowed. Indeed, it is inevitable that some groups will be excluded. The result is a one-dimensional view of historical facts that, due to their static position, risk losing their connection to the researchable historical reality. History then takes the form of a relic instead of being an expression of a dynamic and polyphonic past. Finally, history education and, more generally, historical culture become more vulnerable, because they are made dependent upon the whims of the political current [politieke actualiteit]. Pandora’s Box is then opened. (Grever 2006: 53) (#189)

Grever’s is in not merely critical, but seeks to provide a way forward:

We are wise to take the document of the commission Van Oostrom as a useful advice for teachers and educationalists. With regards to extreme interpretations of the past, one may assume that historians are ‘man’ enough to contend in an open debate equipped with arguments. Only in this way may we approach what Wilschut calls a sensible, learnable and achievable frame of reference for historical overview [orientatiekennis]. A frame that builds on traditions, remaining shared frames of interpretation and changes in Dutch society. Then we may achieve what had been noted in relation to Lorenz above: empathy and reciprocal recognition by presenting history as a debate between different, at times conflicting images. (Grever 2006: 52-53) (#190)

What redeems the possibility of canonisation in the arguments of the commission – history is offered up for debate – precludes canonisation in the argument of Grever. To the extent that government is involved in dictating history education, it should take great pains to teach that history for what it is: a public debate consisting of a plurality of voices. Yet, this is – in the argument of the commission – precisely what the commission had sought to achieve: the enumeration of a series of windows onto the past which should be re-assembled and adapted according to the public’s changing engagement with history.

This axiom of the public’s prerogative was all the more strongly enacted when the commission published a detailed report of the public debate that had ensued after its presentations in October 2006. As the ministry had requested and the commission had already announced, changes to the canon were to be made in
lieu of public criticism. In a similar way to the follow-up made by De Rooy cum suis in 2005 yet far more extensively, the 2007-report on the public reception of the canon considers in detail many of the positive, ameliorative and critical responses to the first iteration of the fifty windowed canon. As said, the commission concluded that some adjustments were in order. While the report also presented new ideas for the energetic implementation of the canon in primary and secondary education, including ideas about the website (Commission Van Oostrom 2007: 8-9). For the purposes of this analysis, the report’s further articulations of the canon’s Dutchness are of interest. The commission concludes, rightly, that its rejection of political instrumentalisation had been positively recognised. Yet, it seemed also apparent to the commission that it had perhaps overacted its denunciatory gestures:

Yet, there were also those who argued that the commission distanced itself too much from the idea that a canon may have a positive effect on national feeling [referring here among others to the intervention by Vloet]. The commission therefore wants to clarify and nuance her position on this point. As said, we have been deliberately [bewust] apprehensive in order to avoid feeding adversely effective sentiments in an inflammable climate, and with which the pride of one can easily further the demotion and even exclusion of the other. Which, of course, does not deny that in the windows of the canon of the Netherlands something of a collective identity, or at least the experience thereof, is reflected. Even without icons such as Hansje Brinker, tulips, clogs, soccer and korfbal [all symbols that are ostensibly cliché, evoking the banal] the canon contains Dutch anchors such as Rembrandt, the House of Orange, the floods of 1953 and Annie M.G. Smidt [symbols that can be said to be just as banal yet endowed with more political and cultural esteem]. A canon that supports a civilised form of Dutchness [Nederlanderschap] and self-awareness seems unobjectionable to us – as long as that feeling keeps pace with a lived awareness of the relativity of it, including knowledge of the black pages in the historical narrative of the Netherlands [mainly referring to colonialism, repression of non-protestant religions and collaboration with Nazi-rulers]. Highs and lows together form the beckons in the cultural history of the country that we inhabit together; shared knowledge of it is certainly a contribution to proper citizenship [verantwoord burgerschap]. (Commission Van Oostrom 2007: 28-29) (#191)

The commission restates its position here – the canon draws its justification from a public that is deemed native by the act of residing –, but adds to it the explicit mention of ‘civilised nationalism’ seeking to be more outspoken about the imagination of Dutchness that the windows of the canon may evoke. Yes, much of that imagination can be banal, but that does not detract from its emotional registry – ‘a national feeling’. What, again, immunises such a civilised nationalism from indulgence and decivilisation is the reflexive awareness of its constructedness and dark sides. In lieu of public responses, the appropriateness of the canon for the cultivation of good citizenship has been affirmed and enlarged:

In this respect, the commission has been pleased by the reactions of ‘new Dutch’ [nieuwe Nederlanders] who appeared to appreciate our design. The canon certainly turns out to have a
potentially binding effect, and in hindsight the commission could have emphasised that more, especially now that we have noticed in the resonance [weerklank] to what extent the canon offers a shared frame of reference to which people can easily relate [zich gemakkelijk verstaan] and about which people eagerly converse [in gesprek gaan]. That country-wide cohesion [binding] is, for us, still not the main goal of the canon, but indeed a very fortunate side-effect of it. The canon stimulates in a positive way what some call, a tad solemnly, reciprocity of fate [lotsverbondenheid] and others, more homely: keeping things together [referring to the famed words of Amsterdam mayor Cohen in describing his pragmatic approach to integration: de boel bij elkaar houden]. (Commission Van Oostrom 2007: 29; 31) (#192)

As an illustration of their claims, the commission presented the exemplar of an article by Abdelkader Benali, an award-winning author who was born in Morocco and had been a prominent voice in debates over integration and islam, in which Benali expressed support for the canon.35 It is clear then, that the commission justifies its stronger declaration of civilised nationalism on the basis of public responsiveness, particularly responses of those whose inhabitation appear incomplete as the connection between Dutchness and canon is most relevant for them.

The nativity of the public has become the shared means of disagreement. With respect to civic enculturation policies and historical canon formation, the two major attempts to utilise Dutchness in governmental policy, the concept of a native public allows participants of debates to position themselves and their discourse in view of the citizenry. The native public thereby becomes a crucial element within the performative flow of national identity debates. Or, to put it somewhat differently, to address and assent to a native public becomes a crucial method for finding where and what the national community is and what may constitute the Dutchness of citizenship. In the case of civic enculturation the native public is first and foremost conceived as an audience for the demonstration of individualised effort. That is, insofar newcomers demonstrate a willingness and effort to change can a native public’s anxieties over diversification be managed. The testing of enculturation is pointedly not relevant for this native public. Its continued dissensus over what is actually Dutch merely serves as a public demonstration of its liberality and malleability, i.e. precisely what the newcomers is yet to attain. In the case of historical canon formation, the native public is not so much an audience as it is a primary agent. Only through the responses and activities of a native public can the actions of government and experts be justified. In fact, the native pubic is here a pre-political entity that was already imagining its time and place in the world, its area and ground tempo. Governments and experts merely equip the native public with new and always mutable devices for representing itself to itself. Again,

ongoing dissensus about such a project does not directly contradict this justificatory logic as this dissensus repeatedly demonstrates that there is a native public concerned with how its time and place ought to be imagined. Debate and the disagreement it entails is first and foremost the public demonstration of a liberal, pluralistic and non-exclusionary tendency at the heart of Dutch citizenship. Dutch citizenship is always already open and changeable. Public disagreement about it merely reveals this to be the case. In the next and final empirical chapter, we’ll explore in more detail how enactments of non-exclusion work within the post-2000 context.
9.

Enacting the style of popularity

In the years after 2002, a foray of books continued to be published about the Netherlands and the troubles with Dutchness aimed at lay audiences, who were presumed to be eager for perspective (for a discussion of a multitude of them, see De Haan 2008a). Many of such publications, as has already been explored, deal with this situation reflexively. The fact that there is public and political contestation about the issue of Dutchness is presented as at least one of the reasons for publishing such books. The authors seek to provide some orientation in what has, apparently, become a very disorienting matter.

Historians and cultural scholars played a central role in these publications. Many did so with the express intention of relativizing the intensity of concerns over Dutch identity. Take, for instance, the booklet by Maarten van Rossem, who would later ridicule attempts at canonisation (Van Rossem 2005), in which he sets out to blow apart the notion of Dutch typicality by introducing his readers to a multitude of perspectives on the matter, including his own attempt to ‘clarify in a very subjective way what I appreciate about the Netherlands so much so that I would not emigrate for any price’ (Van Rossem 2004: 4). As he explains in an ironic manner:

The results of that international comparison will no doubt disappoint many who are of the opinion that the Netherlands is a very peculiar country. After reading this book, everyone may finally determine for themselves what is typically Dutch and what isn’t. (Van Rossem 2004: 4) (#193)

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242
Van Rossem suggests that the reader’s perspective may, after reading, be added to the ones provided in the booklet, thereby both attending to the reader’s desire to gain a perspective on what is typically Dutch and relativizing the attempts to capture Dutchness in any clear, conservable form.

We encounter a similar attempt at relativizing in the opening sentences of Peter Klein’s *1000 years of national history*:

> For those in the profession of history writing these are great times. From left to right – *bien étonné de se trouver ensemble* – there is a burning desire for national history. That is good. In fact, it’s too good to be true. There are, as shall become evident from this book, many national histories, none of which is the single truth. Undoubtedly, this is a let-down for all those intellectuals, half- and faux-intellectuals, scholars, pseudo-scholars, journalists, columnists, politicians, demagogues, party-ideologues, philosophical moonlighters [*tinnegieters*] and many more who reckon themselves members of the thinking part of the nation and had waited eagerly to finally have the real national history revealed to them. What they actually wanted to hear was *their* version of the national history, which as a rule they tacitly identify as the true one. (Klein 2004: 7) (#194)

Much like the Commission Van Oostrom after him, Klein writes national history and does so in assent of a captivated public, but he explicitly refuses to give any singular answers. In fact, the first chapter of Klein’s book deals with a variety of ways in which Dutch histories have been conceived throughout the past two centuries. Even more sarcastic is the historian Han van der Horst’s virtuoso mix of historiography and current affairs is entitled *The best country of the world: where do our norms and values come from?*. To be sure, the title is meant to evoke the self-congratulatory and moralistic aspects of the debates on Dutchness, which Van der Horst sets out to relativize, if not straightforwardly debunk:

> Clio, the muse of history, also appears in this book as guide. But she doesn’t take the reader by the hand to find in the past finished solutions for current problems. In that case, she would be something of a marsh fire [*dwaallicht*]. We shall see what the real meaning is of the great societal grievances and the festering Fortuyn revolt. And also how we should react to acts of terrorism such as those of Mohammed B., the murderer of Van Gogh, and his comrades. We shall track how the Dutch identity gained shape in the course of centuries. We will also encounter alternatives to the European model of the nation-state. Lastly, on this basis we will reveal processes that are the causes for the great societal changes in the Netherlands. We may then sketch the contours of a new, 21st century normality. Because it is up to the contemporary Dutch to build on history, not to return to the past. (Van der Horst 2005: 10-11) (#195)

Far less relativizing are those who see in history a seminal point of inspiration for today’s troubles. Probably the most prominent exemplar of such engagement is given by Jonathan Israel, the expert of Dutch enlightenment, who expressed nothing short of alarm about the legacy of ‘radical enlightenment’ in the Netherlands in his 2004 Pierre Bayle Lecture. Israel reviews Bayle’s writing on
toleration, which he understands to be a basic constituent of Dutch identity. His lecture opens by painting the scene:

Suddenly, the Netherlands is in uproar – culturally, politically and socially. Since the killing of Theo van Gogh, one finds deep shock and abundant signs of distress on all sides. The feeling in the Netherlands at the moment is seemingly one of a deep cultural crisis revolving around the question of toleration which, until recently, was a basic, unquestioned, taken-for-granted pillar of the Dutch sense of identity. (Israel 2004)

Israel’s history lesson is summarised in that:

Everyone must be allowed to believe whatever they want, asserts Bayle, that is part of toleration. But taken on its own, such a stance amounts merely to official indifference and, as such, is assuredly not toleration. Indeed, experience shows that complacently allowing expounders of theological doctrines to amass as much power as they can over their following can all too easily and quickly degenerate into endemic sectarian conflict and persecution. The essence of true toleration is not what has passed for toleration in Dutch society in recent years, but rather a co-ordinated policy on the part of the guardians of the state, education and opinion-forming to neutralise theological hatreds and bias; that is, prejudice, discrimination and suppression of unpopular views, wherever and whenever such bias rears its head in the form of incitement, hatred and violence. Indeed, neither democracy, nor toleration nor individual freedom can long survive unless government, teachers, media reporters and policy in whatever country join together in a co-ordinated fashion; acting promptly, consistently and without hesitation to block theological power and calls from the pulpit, wherever and whenever these seek to mobilise sections of the populace against unpopular minorities, dissenters, homosexuals, women and independent critical thinkers. (Israel 2004)

Indeed, the native public is to appreciate, once more, the crux of its political past: the marginalisation of theological authority from the public sphere and democratic governance. History, then, is a means to rediscover the true meaning of the current political ideals.

Similarly, Herman Pleij’s Erasmus and the poldermodel sets out to contradict the denunciatory stance of authors like Klein and Van der Horst by using national history, and Erasmus in particular, as a way to rethink the pragmatic politics of the so-called polder-model that, today, is blamed for the political troubles in the Netherlands. Pleij’s assessment of the significance of history is markedly different:

The hunger for history is huge. It doesn’t matter what it is, as long as it says ‘history’ on it. Explanations are evident, are indeed continuously given and repeated, yet no less true for being so. They all share one point of focus: the centuries-long available stead fasts of church and state, ideology and world view are done for, worn out and unrecognisable. Therefore, there is a growing hunger for new points of attachment and rituals that can once again provide recognition [een gemeenschapelijk gezicht kunnen geven], ascertained in formalised expressions of

interconnectedness. This will enable people to once again feel safe [geborgen] among each other and to find opportunities to share joys and fears with like-minded [gelijkgezinden]. (Pleij 2005: 104-105) (#196)

What recurs in these reflections about the uses of history is the question whether experts can, may, and should provide clear-cut narratives about ‘our history’ and what it means for its contemporary public. Indeed, the debates about canonisation are deeply engaged with concerns over how such a demarcation of shared history is justified and what the roles of experts, commissions and the state are in such efforts of demarcation. As we have seen, while disagreements abound over the appropriateness of canonisation after 2002, such disagreements more or less univocally follow the argument that coercive nationalism and arbitrary selection should be avoided at all cost. This is why expert’s involvement and pronouncement are in need of careful argumentation. To do this, national history is to be treated as a matter of public debate, not state dictum. In the end, what justifies the right to speak of ‘our history’ is the extent to which a public can be said to exist and to be responsive to it. Quite apart from the procedure through which it can be ascertained, what matters is a popular verdict. On the basis of the previous analysis, it can now be assessed how this pervasive logic of fame (Boltanski & Tévenot 2006 [1991]) inflects the on-going contention.

As was discussed in chapter 4, for the likes of Huizinga it was possible and indeed crucial, to enact what I dubbed a style of the lecture. It is in that style that Huizinga was not only able to argue for satisfaction and moderation, but also perform such affects in the articulation of the argument itself: he performs a contemplative reflection on what – for better and worse – has been the enduring profile of the parliamentary democracy that the Netherlands should strive to remain. Conversely, the debates about reinvigorated Dutchness through history education are the context for a quite different style of engagement. The point is not to convey what the public doesn’t know, to lecture from a position of learned elevation and, thereby, to create the possibility of moderating popular uncertainty from above. Instead, the point is to ascend to a public concern and to contribute to public imagination in the here-and-now with particular concern for those who come from there and have not shed the ways of then. Such activity is then to be justified with reference to evocativeness and popular response in the form of public debate.

While Huizinga is in the position to teach his public about the unacknowledged or, at least, unappreciated constitution of the Dutch nation – its enduring burgherly mental character –, contemporary experts on history and culture
involve themselves in a rather different communicative practice. Instead of providing an attentive public with knowledge of the nation’s historical existence – its developing yet persistent mental constitution, for instance –, it is a matter of providing appropriate materials and procedures for the public’s contemporary self-imagination – a canon and its debate, for instance. To be sure, neither the style of the lecture nor the style of popularity are discrete entities. Huizinga’s argument is certainly not devoid of concerns for persuasion and public recognition. Huizinga does indeed anticipate that his rhetoric of burgherlyness will evoke recognition in his public, an anticipation that was not unwarranted as the narrative of burgherlyness formed a widely used repertoire of typification in the interbellum period (Aerts 2002; Van Heerikhuizen 1985). Nor are the post-2002 debates on Dutch identity and history lacking in claims of elevated expertise. Yet, Huizinga performs his persuasion by expounding insight that his public is presumed to be lacking, while the post-2002 interventions explicitly prescribe evocation of public debate and popular responses as a means to construct, here and now, an image of Dutchness that will bring together a public and solidify its nativity. The difference between the styles of engagement and typification is certainly not between consensus and dissensus. Many could and would contradict Huizinga’s arguments (see in particular Van der Lem 1997). Even Huizinga’s own words are a testament of this as he vehemently denounces the false prophets of national unification. The fact that history is a debate is certainly not absent from Huizinga’s enactment. The lecture is clearly expressed in a context of contention. Nor are the so-called ‘canon debates’ of the new millennium a bonfire of public disagreement as there emerges a near complete agreement about the need to put history to debate. However, the notion that history is a debate becomes much more than a sociological circumstance: it becomes the very justification for its use in ameliorating societal problems. In the style of popularity, national history is not only communicated in the sociological context of public disagreement, but its very possibilities and production become that of the public forum. The encompassing effect of this discursive formation is actually quite hard to avoid as even principled opponents of canonisation will tend to prescribe, quite understandably, debate as a means to pluralise historical consciousness.

The consequential difference lays in the way that consistency may come about between style and narrative. What Alexander (2011) has conceptualised as ‘fusion’ – the situationally accomplished consistency between the ensemble of performative elements – may overstate what is actually at stake in performative success, but it does highlight an interesting stylistic problem. A certain discursive style entails certain roles and consequences for both its persona and its interpellated
public. Huizinga’s narrative of burgherly satisfaction is consistent with his style as the lecturer may bring his public back into some measure of security by providing it with an overview that it had previously lacked. Overview becomes a path to burgherly calm and moderation. In Huizinga’s style the public is reassured both with the message of his argument as well as the style of his engagement: the lecture is itself a performance of burgherly self-understanding, demonstrating its perseverance against the forces of fatal hubris. The public is challenged to ascend to this enduring, yet never fully accomplished national constitution of moderation. In the end, moderation is an assignment for the public.

Yet, how can it be possible that a public-cum-nation should still acquire insight from some elevated expert in order to remember what was actually already its mentality? This style of the lecture can only become true as long as nationhood is never truly accomplished, as long as the nation is always in need of further instruction, in need of further clashes with the forces that threaten it. For a statement about such Dutchness to be true in Huizinga’s style, it still ought to be realised more fully by its public. Whether burgherly Dutchness will persist, is for the public to ensure after having been made aware of the challenging assignment by one expert or another. So while Dutchness has persisted and exists to this day, it will still need to be completed. The struggle is not over, nor is victory necessarily justified. People will have to make the difference. Time will tell.

How different do matters become when articulated through the style of popularity. Consistency becomes possible here by acknowledging the public’s desire for imagination and providing appropriate means for doing so. It is this latter point around which much of the disagreement collects itself: what are the appropriate means? The possibility of reassurance all but disappears as claims to withhold, deny or decline the public of what it is said to need almost inevitably appear as the dead-ends of overly detached, up-rooted or academic doubt and armchair cosmopolitanism. If there is a native public, there should be a native-cum-national identity for it, full stop. The fact that the public finds itself in an imaginative crisis is the very occasion to which the experts should rise. This also means that interventions cannot be revolve around reassurance, as did Huizinga’s, but are most basically concerned with worry, alarm and anxiety as the expert should ascend to the concerns of the public and not the other way around. Insofar as Dutchness appears as the public’s prerogative, it also appears to be in crisis and is thus appropriately engaged through alarm. This is not primarily because the plurality of public opinion is said to determine what Dutchness is, as if a postmodern perspectivism has undermined a modernist sense of identity. Rather, it is part and parcel of the style of popularity to attribute a desire for explicit and
evocative imaginations of Dutchness – such as a canon or an enculturation test – to its public. Without a public in some state of crisis, there would be no sense in intervening. In contrast to the style of the lecture, the problem of nationhood in national identity discourse is not that it is *perverted* by false prophets (Huizinga’s heroic nationalists), but is the *confusion* of the public itself. Yet what expert voices subsequently tends to provide are not clear images of Dutchness, as that would contradict and exclude so many parts of the public and constitute unwarranted nationalism and state led lecturing. What they seek to provide is further material and arguments for a public debate about Dutchness, arguing that such debate will attend to the confused state of the public. Instead of providing reassurance, the experts reiterate and affirm the attributed confusion in which the public is said to wallow: Dutchness most certainly exists – as demonstrated by a native public’s concern for it – and a craving for its clear imagination appears omnipresent, yet it shall not materialise as that would contradict the very justification of its relevance.

One more point of difference: In rather stark contradiction to Huizinga’s style, the crisis of Dutchness is to be remedied through an evocative debate and, thus, the construction of a national identity. This identity, whether canonised or not, is understood to be changing with the public’s views on it. Dutchness is thereby already accomplished, always already complete: public construction-through-debate is its once-all and end-all. Consistency is not sought in the direction of instruction. There is no challenge posed or assignment given to its public apart from the imperative to participate in its on-going imagination: ‘iedereen moet meedoen’... everyone ought to participate. Refusal to join in and participate become self-inflicted forms of segregation from a practice that cannot possibly be exclusionary as it is built from dialogue and inclusion. Indeed, newcomers should be recognised – they reside here –, yet their recognition and belonging is guaranteed by a native public and a mode of encompassment that was already here – dialogical Dutchness – and to which newcomers should therefore assimilate. Indeed, this sense of what of it may means to be Dutch is emphatically all-inclusive, yet that same inclusivity is guaranteed and granted on the basis of autochthonous encompassment. Thus, the style of popularity postulates an autochthonous people that must have been always already Dutch and whose Dutchness is in no way in need of completion or amelioration. This people has no assignment to complete or ideals to still realise. To use Foucault’s terms: Its only goal is defence itself.

The line of argument should not be misconstrued: there are compelling reasons for having moved away from the style of the lecture and its transhistorical nation persisting through history. Even Huizinga, prefacing his exposition with
thoughtful reflexivity, cannot escape the prescription of a genealogical line through history that will determine what is (and is not) Dutch. His analysis may not follow the overt and often quite intentional biological raciology that is such an important part of national character discourses. He may have chosen in its stead the prescription of a politico-cultural mentality quite devoid of any somatic connections, but that does not alter the fact that Huizinga’s essay conceives of the nation as a demonstration of a people’s perseverance against the attrition of time. It is still a matter of an unchanging constitution moving through time, of defending society and thereby of discrete peoples who threaten each other’s existence. It is still a discourse of war. It is not for nothing that people have sought ways to abandon characterological discourse and speak the nation differently. The trouble is that the move away from characterology has not constituted a move away from exceptionalism. The style of popularity and its all-inclusive construction of national identity in public debate has not meant that there is no longer a prescription of hierarchy and pre-eminence: those that can claim to be native, to have already been residing and to have already been encompassed have still gained a pre-eminent right to speak of an us in which others will need to be included. The typification of Dutchness through the style of popularity still seeks out people-at-the-margins-of-encompassment upon whom the emancipatory effects of inclusion can be demonstrated and through whom the non-essence of Dutchness can be iconified. What’s more, this national identity protection entails no obligations for those whose inclusion is uncontested, apart from the unconditional imperative to participate in imagination, wherever that may lead them. If there are obligations, they fall to those whose inclusion is somehow not-yet-finished as it is they who need to become included in ‘our’ nativity.

**Two contrasting attempts at non-exclusion**

In this final segment, I will juxtapose two attempts at non-exclusion in the stylistic context that has been described above. This juxtaposition serves to show what is and what is not plausible in this context. The juxtaposition thereby highlights the way that enactments of national identity discourses are inflected by the style of popularity and the prerogative of the native public that is prescribed with it. First, one of the most prominent statements in the post-2002 debates on Dutchness will be addressed: the speech of then princess Máxima at the presentation a WRR-report on national identification. Secondly, I will analyse a specific publication of

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38 I will use the name ‘Máxima’ throughout this chapter to refer to the person that was born, Máxima Zorreguieta, and whose naming has subsequently become a matter of diplomatic protocol that I do not wish to untangle here. The name ‘Máxima’ is regularly used in public discourse and, for my purposes, refers nicely to the public phenomenon rather than the biographical person.
the Dutch Centre for Folk Culture. As shall become evident, these two attempts at non-exclusion are strongly related: the one refers to the other and they both seek to develop non-exclusionary images of what it means to be Dutch. Yet, they are at once markedly different in the ways in which they do so.

When the sovereign spoke
The remarks made by Royal princess and wife of the future monarch at the presentation of a report on ‘national identification’ by Scientific Council for Governmental Policy would become one of the most evocative moments of the post-2000 period. The remarks themselves and the subsequent responses will be analysed in some detail, but first it is necessary to consider some of the work leading up to the publication of the report. From these considerations follow the idea that the report itself and the remarks made by princess Máxima can indeed be understood in line with the kinds of interventions I’ve been dealing with so far: attempts to actually provide some substance in the form of statements and policy measures in lieu of the idea that Dutch identity is to be reinvigorated. Yet, it will also become clear that the WRR-report and Máxima’s accompanying speech were quite particular interventions when considered in this way.

First of all, the WRR’s role in policy discussions over migration and integration should be taken into account. As has been demonstrated at various point in this study and by other research, the WRR has at times played a crucial role in mediating and facilitating the dispersal of new notions, goals, critiques, priorities and policies in the field of migration and integration policy (in particular Essed & Nimako 2006; Scholten 2011; Entzinger & Scholten 2013; Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012; Van Dooremalen 2011). The main trajectory of this role can be described as one of ‘setting the pace’ to one of ‘offering alternatives’. Whereas earlier contributions of the WRR to policy debates on migration and integration were absolutely instrumental in forming and reforming the issue as such (see WRR 1979; 1989 and to a lesser extent 2001), it is particularly after 2002 that the WRR has published reports that explicitly seek to convince government to change course and seek alternatives to its current approach (see WRR 2004; 2007). Over time the reports had become more reactive. This is reflective of a broader transformation in the relations between research and policy making on migration and integration in the Netherlands (Entzinger & Scholten 2013): from a very closely knit web of interactions between academic research, research funding and policy development in the 1980’s and early 1990’s to an increasingly disjunctive field of exchange.
where a larger variety of approaches to questions of migration and integration exist, particularly as party politics has become much more important in setting policy agendas and actually taking on certain policy measures. The boundary work between research and politics has become more complex. The WRR-report of 2007, entitled *Identification with the Netherlands [Identificatie met Nederland]*, is part of this transformative process and clearly represents an attempt by the WRR to speak truth to power, albeit in a very particular way.

The fact that the WRR-report was born out of worries about the shift in governmental policy concerning migration and integration is quite apparent. It is already in 2004 that the idea of devoting a report on the issue of national identity and integration was part of discussions within the council. The project of delivering such a report was supervised by council-member Prof. dr. Pauline Meurs. A full professor in the management and organisational development of care, she had already supervised the publication of another WRR-report on immigration, *The Netherlands as an immigration society* (2001), that was at times credited with finally dispelling the idea that the Netherlands was not an immigration country.

As regularly happens within WRR-projects, the research for a new report on questions of national identity included a preliminary study executed by a number of now familiar participants in the debates on national history and canonisation: Siep Stuurman, Kees Ribbens and Maria Grever. Their publications and interventions throughout the discussions over a history canon emanated in part from this preliminary study entitled *The paradoxes of (de-)canonization*. As we have seen, their engagement with government plans to construct a new canon for history education had been quite adversarial, questioning the historiographical basis, the political rationale and the possible outcomes. The WRR was engaging with researchers that could provide alternatives to the government thinking on national identity from the outset. Kees Ribbens and Maria Grever would eventually publish a so-called exploratory report with the WRR, *National identity and multiple past* (2007), in which the development of Dutch identity and its education in the form of history instruction in schools is analysed from a pluralist perspective. Both the legacies of de-colonisations and subsequent waves of immigration to the Netherlands are extensively considered as Grever and Ribbens not only provide an analytic overview but also give policy advice.

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40 The WRR-project also lead to the publication of two other exploratory studies, namely *De casus Inburgering en Nationaliteitswetgeving: iconen van nationale identiteit. Een juridische analyse* by Fouzia Driouchi, en WRR-Webpublicatie nr. 34 *In debat over Nederland. Veranderingen in het discours over de multiculturele samenleving en nationale identiteit* by Fleur Sleegers. The latter of which informed, at least partly, the drafting of the research proposals that secured funding for this study.

A notable part of this exploratory study is the way in which interviews with youths are used to understand better the ways in which identification with the past takes shape in a postcolonial, ethnically diverse present. The use of such interviews and youths’ own views on the past plays to interrelated roles in the report: firstly, the report thereby focusses on the actual processes of identification, orientation and self-awareness relevant to both autochthonous and allochthonous youths; secondly, the prerogative is thereby given to youths themselves. This indicates two breaks from what is perceived to be the current governmental approach. Firstly, the report focuses on the actual processes of identification shaping how people – in many different ways – construct their identities instead of substantiating a monolithic notion ‘national identity’ and ascertaining youths’ identification with it. Secondly, instead of trying to figure out how national identification can be cultivated and imposed through history education, the report focuses on actually existing possibilities for such cultivation to which curricular and pedagogical reforms could be fitted. As seen through the exploratory study, government seeks to impose a rather one-dimensional and monolithic identity upon youths without considering the plurality of the past and something like ‘Dutch identity’ from the view point of youths and without attending to what they would deem relevant in constructing an identity in the Netherlands. As Ribbens and Grever explain when considering the policy implications of their research:

The current debates about national identity and historical consciousness in fact contain two political positions. On the one hand, there is an increasingly powerful neonationalist proclamation in which the transference of national values in a Western context is emphasised. Strikingly, many countries with all their emphasis on modernisation and future-orientedness are in search of historical ‘roots’. On the other hand, there is a weaker representation of a supranational approach in which pluriformity and universal – not necessarily western – values are central. In this discourse Europe and cosmopolitanism are emphasised. This message appear less self-evident, is more complex and harder to communicate in the political arena. (Grever & Ribbens 2007: 158)

These aspects of the exploratory study – prioritising people’s lived identifications, fitting policy goals to those actually existing processes of identification, contradicting the imposition of a simplistic and homogenous national-cum-western identity – are significant as they are also at the heart of the justifications for and arguments in the main WRR-report Identification with the Netherlands. As the press release that accompanied the publication of the report on September 24 2007 stated: ‘Change of perspective needed on national identity’ (#198). The Council had explicitly set out to moderate, depolarise and restrain the ever more contentious conflicts over national belonging. In the words of the Council,
...there are sturdy debates over ‘the’ Dutch national identity, over what are its essential characteristics and over the value and meaning of this identity for the cohesion of the Dutch society. […] In order to be able to approach the issue of ethnic diversity and national community productively, the WRR proposes an approach that centres on various possibilities of identification instead of a focus on the strengthening of national identity and the precise description of what it is or should be. (WRR 2007: 31). (#199)

In this way, the WRR indeed proposes a pragmatic approach to national identity formation that takes its cue from the actual dynamics through which identifications more or less collude. The report distinguishes three forms of identification – functional, normative and emotional – in relation to which government may seek to devise policy initiatives. National identity happens along each of these lines. What is, according to the report, often deemed the true hallmark of national identity in public debates – emotional attachment and loyalty to the nation – should only be taken as one among many ways in which residents of the Netherlands come to form identifications. The report thereby advocates a thorough redirections of governmental concerns. More specifically, distinctions should be maintained between (1) the socio-economic and educational disadvantages that hamper functional identification, (2) the debates about, adaptation to and enforcement of shared norms, and (3) the emotional bonds that may form in context of conviviality. The report effectively argues that recent governments have sought to deal with all of these issues as one and the same problem of a disintegrating national identity-cum-society, thereby muddling the distinctive particularities of each and counterproductively taking emotional identification to be the overarching aim. In place of the vain hope that emotional identification and its cultivation will allow government to solve a host of problems associated with migration and integration, the WRR places a disaggregated vision that resists an ill-advised reification of national identity:

The point of departure is not the whole – an image of an ideal society or an imagined community – but the nature, form and intensity of the relations between the parts. A coherent whole is thereby an imagined terminus. (WRR 2007: 31) (#200)

And:

With this report we want to contribute to the process of ‘re-imagination’ of the national community. (WRR 2007: 33) (#201)

It was at the occasion of the report’s presentation to government and the broader public that princess Máxima gave a speech. As such she performed many roles: at once wife of the king-to-be, recent immigrant to the country and successful
careerist; at once unquestionably at home in the Netherlands and an exemplar for immigrant women’s emancipation, Máxima could speak on the issue of Dutchness in ways that were unique to her position. Her speech that day – reportedly written by aides of the prime-minister – opens by acknowledging the popular anxieties over national identity: ‘The theme of identity occupies many people in our country’ (Máxima 2007) (#202). In what would turn out to be the crucial passage of the speech, Máxima recounted her own process of enculturation:

Some seven years ago I started my search for the Dutch identity. I was aided by numerous dear and wise experts. I had the privilege to meet many people. To see, hear and taste a lot of the Netherlands. It was a beautiful and rich experience for which I am enormously grateful. But ‘the’ Dutch identity? No, this I haven’t found. The Netherlands is: an attachment to privacy and intimate company [gezelligheid]. The Netherlands is: one cookie with tea. But also: enormous hospitality and warmth. The Netherlands is: sobriety and restraint. Pragmatism. But also: experiencing intense emotions together. The Netherlands is far too multiple to catch in one cliché. ‘The’ Dutch person doesn’t exist. Consolingly I can tell you, ‘the’ Argentinian doesn’t exist either. Therefore, I think it’s very interesting that the title of the report by the WRR is not ‘The Dutch Identity’. But: ‘Identification with the Netherlands’. That allows space for development. And for diversity. (Máxima 2007) (#203)

In the speech, the personal experiences of Máxima, as an allochthon finding her way in the Netherlands, resonate with the Council’s intervention of disaggregation: ‘the’ Dutch identity cannot be found. The significance of not finding ‘the’ identity is even more profound as the person not finding it is not only an allochthon but also a member of the Royal family. She is both a recent arrival to the Netherlands and an embodiment of it. In the context of the speech, Máxima enacted the persona of a stranger who is able to identify with greater ease what is distinctive about a people, recount her lived experiences of trying to settle in and being the celebrated icon of what despite everything can be called Dutch, the House of Orange. She speaks from the ambiguous position of a sovereign: both completely identified with yet also autonomous from society. It is, of course, precisely this position that would seem to make Máxima an ideal vocaliser of the report’s message. The speech does indeed argue as much as it recounts how Máxima and the WRR arrive at the same conclusion: ‘The’ Dutch person doesn’t exist. This conclusion ‘allows space for development. And for diversity.’

It is in all likelihood Geert Wilders who was first to react to the report and Máxima’s accompanying report. In a tweet sent out that afternoon, he deemed it ‘politically correct malarkey’. Indeed, many were to follow Wilders rejection of the report’s ‘change in perspective’. Both CDA and VVD came out to renounce the report and its more pragmatic approach to Dutchness. As such, the report itself and

the array of critical reactions it called forth can be understood as yet another instalment in the ongoing confrontation of neo-nationalist and cosmopolitan positions. These contentions would seem to affirm two opposing, yet related assertions: there are still those in powerful places who wish to revive the corpse of multicultural accommodation by suggesting that who ‘we’ are cannot be determined; the significance of a more pragmatic and cosmopolitan take in issues of migration and integration is beleaguered by a more readily communicable neo-nationalism. Along these lines, the entire controversy may be and, indeed, was at times reduced to a Babylonian misunderstanding between interlocutors who could no longer hear the background intentions of each other’s utterances. In short, one could suggest that Máxima/WRR had merely suggested that the Dutchman doesn’t exist, whereas quick-to-judge critics had misinterpreted – strategically or not – those words to mean that Dutch identity as such should be sacrificed for the greater goods of multicultural tolerance and cosmopolitan flexibility. Even though this interpretation of the ensuing controversy over Máxima’s statements were indeed frequently articulated, the previous analysis of a logic of fame will draw our attention not to the confrontation of two opposing philosophies of governance, but rather to the performative limits of what can be persuasively said and done in a discursive situation constituted by a logic of fame. In short, we should be attentive to the way in which both the WRR and Máxima are themselves reiterating arguments about how to deal with national identity politics that effectively disable what they purport to achieve.

**From Huizinga to Máxima**
The limits of Máxima’s performance and the WRR’s goal to ‘change perspective’ come into view when we directly contrast the presentation of the report with the stylistic components of Huizinga’s characterology. Much like Huizinga warned for the consequences of popularity, Máxima – in consonance with the WRR – warns for the dead-ends of characterology: cliché and particularism. Moreover, she does so by enumerating precisely the kinds of affective dispositions and habits that fall under the purview of characterological typifications: homeliness, sobriety, pragmatism, stinginess. It is no coincidence that these typifications resonate with Huizinga’s narration of burgherly Dutchness as it had become – not in the least through Huizinga’s efforts – a widely reiterated cliché (Aerts 2002). Seeking to distinguish her own convictions and the proposals of the WRR from exclusionary

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43 A more thorough discussion of the reports’ merits can be found in the special issue of *Migrantenstudies* devoted to it in 2008, issue 3: http://www.migrantenstudies.nl/archives/category/2008/2008-nummer3 (accessed 07-03-2014)
articulations of nationhood, Máxima embraces the shift towards identification as the proper object of concern. Yet, this is also where the configuration between concept, persona and public begins to unravel. It is here that consistency between performance, narrative and interpellation is interrupted. As a collaborator with the WRR and central icon of the royal family, Máxima speaks for and personifies both scientific expertise and territorial sovereignty. Yet, the WRR-report and her speech embrace an identitarian concept of nationhood at the explicit expense of characterology. A question arises: by what justificatory logic does Máxima speak? What allows Máxima to evaluate the practice of national identifications? How can she say that she hasn’t found the Dutch identity.

While Huizinga’s discourse instates his own persona and narrative in the historical perseverance of national character – it demonstrates what burgherlyness is and that it still works while speaking about it –, the WRR-report and Máxima’s speech lack such performative consistency. If national identity should indeed be relinquished from its characterological past and instead be understood as the process of people’s own identifications, how can Máxima’s right to speak be justified? In fact, Máxima’s performance disavows what it is meant to convey: there can be no privileged opinion on what is and isn’t Dutch, there can only be popular opinion. Only popular opinion is worthy enough to demand attention when national identity has become the actual occurrence of so many identifications. Both the scientific privileges of the WRR and the aristocratic privileges of the Crown clash with the purported embrace of identification as the object of nationhood and the ostensive critique of characterology. If the national is popular, who is Máxima to speak? How can she claim to pacify an issue that, as she herself acknowledges in the speech, ‘occupies many people in our country’?

The fact that a tension between persona and concept is much more than an obscure, scholastic inconsistency in the enactment of nationalism was soon evidenced as this inconsistency was effectively exploited by those who sought to contest the central message of the speech. More specifically, contestation of this message worked particularly well if and to the extent that such critics enacted their critique as an expression of popular dissent. One of the fiercest critiques came from Sylvian Ephimenco, who had participated in national identity debates from the advent in the late 1980’s. Ephimenco explicitly disagreed with the substantive arguments of the WRR. He had in previous years become one of the most outspoken critics of ‘Dutch multiculturalism’. In line with those critiques, he summarised the conclusions of the WRR-report:
Conclusion: because of a minority with adaptational problems the majority has to relinquish her central identity and thoroughly reconstruct it. But is it possible to forcefully impose [forceren] your national identity and steer it in a specific direction. The dynamic of the national identity is primarily an autonomous process that is rather unruly when coercion comes into play. The multiculturalism that pretended, since the 1980’s, to put that identity upside down eventually resulted in the fortuynistic revolt [referring to the notion of a ‘Fortuyn revolt’]. (September 25 2007, Trouw) (#204)

Already in his critique of the WRR and its stubbornly ‘multicultural’ approach to national identity, there is the central problem of Máxima’s performance: how can one pretend to coercively impose, to lecture, to prescribe when one has – rightly – determined that national identity should be understood as the dynamic interplay of identifications playing out in society? When Ephimenco took on Máxima’s role in a column two days later, this problem is at heart of his lamentations:

It is because of identity and tradition that Máxima never needs to get her groceries walking behind a shopping cart in the supermarket and that she goes through live as a make-believe princess [theaterprinses], surrounded by luxury, privileges and lackeys. One should be very careful before offending countless people that cling to that institution as if it concerns their self-identity. If Máxima can’t find the identity on which she is so conformably seated, she had better return to Northlands College [prestigious school that Máxima attended] for additional schooling. Offending her groupies is foolish. And not just a little. (September 27 2007, Trouw) (#205)

Ephimenco is not arguing in defence of the monarchy. He is not warning the monarchy for its associations with streams of thought that undermine its pre-eminence, i.e. multicultural pedantry. The problem is elsewhere: according to his critique Ephimenco’s public is fully aware that the monarchy is make-believe, a theatrical performance of national union and authority. The problem emerges precisely because of the fact that the monarchy exists as appearance, that it is nothing more or less than the orange coloured pageantry drawing ever so many identifications together. How could anyone whose way of life directly depends on the imaginations of a captivated public – ‘groupies’ – be so obtuse as to contradict the pre-eminence of those public imaginings? What actor would instruct his public not to look at him? Persona, concept and interpellated public do not affirm each other. An actress playing her part in a Royal pageantry speaking about the fact that the nation is a dynamic confluence of identifications cannot also expect to speak about that nation as if it is an object about which expert opinions matter. As the editorial of Trouw discussed, Máxima’s articulation of the WRR’s argument did not take into account from what position she spoke:

For many, the national identity was all too easily swept aside as non-existent. […] The optimistic plea by Máxima thereby forgoes a consideration of her privileged position. It is relatively easy for a highly educated woman with a protected status to feel like a citizen of the world. In less privileged parts of
society nationality and ethnicity are sources of tension. Yet, what has particularly evoked fierce reactions is that Máxima appears to try and dissolve [wegrelativeren] the Dutch identity. Not literally, but it is the impression that her speech gives. (September 28 2007, Trouw, italics added) (#206)

In what may have been the most poignant summation of the wave of contestation that emerged, Coos Huijsen argued in an op-ed published by the Volkskrant that the national role of the Crown has been compromised. According to Huijsen, Máxima had been allowed to express her private opinions on a contentious political issue, while she could have easily been acquainted with the fact that popular opinion ran against her convictions:

It brings to mind the American scientist Christopher Lasch who already in the seventies pointed out the frustration among the public at large over a cosmopolitan elite who cared little for the feelings of belonging and distinctiveness to which that public were attached. […] It is in this respect significant that we do have a designation for the àvant garde elite, ‘de grantengordel’ [an analogous expression to ‘rive gauche’ in France], but none for the average Dutch person, such as the French ‘pays réel’. In effect, the designated group is at least as real in the Netherlands. Whoever seeks to acquaint oneself with the ‘real Netherlands’, needs only to listen to Stand.nl [popular radio program in which regular listeners can phone in to give their opinion on the issue of the day]. (October 13 2007, De Volkskrant) (#207)

A series of cleavages emerge, setting Máxima’s appeals apart from what can properly be called ‘popular opinion’: her elitist position due to her privileged, cosmopolitan upbringing, her role in the theatre of the monarchy, and her association with the scientific expertise of the WRR. All these cleavages work to distinguish her perspective, her experiences, her ideas, her feelings, her particular way of identifying with the Netherlands from those who constantly appear to be ‘many’: the real Netherlands that is worried about national identity. Moreover, neither the intervention of the WRR nor Máxima’s articulation of that intervention in her speech work to address a rather crucial performative contradiction, namely: if national identity is the product of so many identifications, of the imaginings of the public itself, how can the voices of scientific expertise and monarchical privilege presume to lecture their public on how and what to believe about national identity? The privileged position from which Máxima speaks at once comes to explain how a central figure in the theatre of Dutchness could mistake her own significance: she is able to identify with Dutchness in this way because she, as distinguished from many others, lives life shielded from the problems of diversity. As Ephimenco already explained:

In the year 2007 Máxima has become as enlightened and multi-cosmopolitan as the correctly thinking [weldenkend] elite that had (and continues to have) her ear [souffleren]. Herman Pleij, inventor of the formula, would say that her strongly emphasised Dutch identity consist of her rejection of it. She is
As the cleavage between elite and population was drawn out so thoroughly in response to Máxima’s speech, it is interesting to note that ‘ordinary people’ were deliberately given a voice in the matter. That is: the readerships of multiple broadsheets were invited to give their view on ‘Dutch identity’ in response to the controversy (September 27 2007, NRC Handelsblad; October 11 2007, Trouw; October 13 2007, De Volkskrant). If the WRR and Máxima weren’t sure what that identity was, maybe the public itself could find answers. Indeed, broadsheets receive many of such letters everyday on any kind of topic. What matters here is the way in which letters from readers acquire a specific significance: that of the public talking back to the authority of experts. The letters, predictably, give many different kinds of answers. Some focus on characterisation, some attack the cultural relativism of the governing elite, some praise Máxima, some explain that an identity can never be defined conclusively, or only in the negative. Apparently, the controversy surrounding Máxima’s speech was deemed fit for the guidance of a lay public, the very opposites of lecturing experts.

Again, it is in the confrontation with the lay public and its willingness to give an abundance of answers to the question of Dutch identity that the intervention of the WRR and the speech by Máxima ran into their performative strictures. The stream of reactions coming from notable figures, scholars and the lay public together come to affirm that (1) relativizing the issue of national identity hasn’t worked; (2) that the debate over that identity is still in a state of confusion; (3) that the need for a more thoroughly explicated consensus that may encompass the plurality of perspectives is still in order. Moreover, the arguments of the WRR’s report did not stand over and against this conception of how identity happens. Michaël Zeeman explicated this when he criticised the report for the fact that it could not and would not deliver new ideas when it came to encompassing plurality:

It appears to me that the classical sophism in philosophical ethics – the is/ought problem, that is: the confusion that emerges when what ‘is’ is conceived as what ‘ought to be’ – has been applied with a distinct frivolity. There is confusion about what the Dutch identity is, seems to be the argument, that confusion is fed by the great many people that entertain different ideas about their national identity, so let’s cherish a myriad of identities and discourage or frustrate if necessary measures to promote cohesion within the country in terms of national identity. (September 27 2007, De Volkskrant) (#209)

In Zeeman’s view, the WRR and Máxima had misunderstood their own argument about identification with the Netherlands: the simple fact of plurality – ‘confusion’ – in no way prescribes how to deal with plurality. Yet, as soon as plurality is called
dissensus the horizon of a possible consensus, of a more explicit articulation of what binds society together, is already at play. Indeed, Zeeman ends his discussion by suggesting that more cohesion is necessary:

The Netherlands may have begun as a Republic of United Provinces, it was one republic. Many cultural identities distinguish us; the question is how one emphasises the impression of cohesion in society. How one, in short, makes citizens [staatsburgers] out of residents. (September 27 2007, De Volkskrant) (#210)

In a much more supportive discussion, J. J. A. van Doorn follows up on this line of reasoning. Van Doorn too concludes that the report and Máxima’s speech had become an occasion for further public confusion and reiteration of counterproductive conceptions of ‘our national identity’:

I have rarely read a report that offers so many new perspectives on a talked-to-death political and societal issue. […] Yet, I fear that it will have little effect. The media are already done with it without having seriously looked at it and the public-at-large simply doesn’t understand that the report offers a pliant analytical tool with which cheap talk about ‘our national identity’ can be replaced by a more precise and effective understanding of what the current integration process requires of strangers. Quite the contrary: many feel challenged to once again fantasise about ‘national identity’, whereby the report has achieved what it was intended to close down: mindless thinking in stereotypes. (October 13 2007, Trouw) (#211)

The style of popularity seems to create a very treacherous mode of discussion when it comes to arguing about ‘identification’. Far from an effective disagreement, what emerges is the almost inescapable recognition that there exists public confusion about Dutchness. In the end, prescription becomes exceedingly impossible. Neither voices arguing for the recognition of plurality nor those that call for a more articulated consensus are able to contradict the immediate pre-eminence of what the public thinks, feels and experiences.

Interestingly, what may escape this dissolution of any privileged position is precisely territoriality. Thus, even when the authority of history is enlisted for clearing up the confusion, its authority is circumscribed. As Frank Ankersmit, one of the most vocal critiques of the WRR-report, stated:

One shouldn’t look for our national identity in a certain set of general and unchanging characteristics that social scientists would distil from the behaviours of the Dutch. No, one only picks up on its trial by taking heed of the overarching line in Dutch history and what historians have said about that.

Now, historians will certainly not agree all of the time about what, for instance, the house of Orange, Calvinism or WOII have meant for our country. What our identity is, isn’t fixed forever. It is always in debate. But the fact that we put our national identity up for debate, doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. That is the error [denkfout] that princess Máxima makes.
Whoever argues like that would also have to abolish history. And all the norms and values, because we endlessly disagree about them too.

Moreover, if our identity is a product of our history than it will also change bit by bit as our country has new experiences over time. Just like we ourselves do not have the identity we had when we were younger and we will have another identity in the future. Our identity is constantly in a state of flux. (October 2 2007, *NRC Handelsblad*) (#212)

The authority of historians is not enlisted to end public disagreement nor to claim that national identity can be conclusively defined. What history does, is to bring into view the container of disagreement, the vessel within which flux happens: ‘our country’. It is in line with this argument that Ankersmit wondered whether the cover art of the WRR-report was not illustrative of errors in thinking that disabled it.44

In their response to the many criticisms of their report, specifically including those by Ankersmit, the main authors concluded:

On the cover of the report one can see a photo of a tangle of coast lines. According to Frank Ankersmit, this illustrates the confusion of the authors. In reality, these coast lines represent a historical theme: change and continuity. A perceptive reader could have discovered in them the changing contours of the Netherlands. The associated dates are mentioned at several places in the report. It illustrates that even the most physical pillar of the Dutch nationality – the land on which we live – is constantly developing. Because the Netherlands and its inhabitants will keep on changing, the debate should concern identification. In order to strengthen the connection with the Netherlands in a most practical way. (October 3 2007, *Trouw*) (#213)

**This Is Us**

We have seen what kind of trouble emerges when a style of popularity becomes a shared means of disagreement for those involved in national identity debates. I have contrasted that discursive situation to the one enacted by Huizinga. In the latter, a consistency between concept, persona and public is possible. It would seem that in contrast to Huizinga’s performance, the contemporary national identity debates are distinctly unstable, self-undermining practices as the opinions of the many come to marginalise the opinions of each, thereby nonetheless perpetuating the worry that something should be done about the incessant dissensus and the deficient identification with the Netherlands. Yet, I will end the analysis by demonstrating how the style of popularity can also be enacted in a much more felicitous manner. By which I certainly do not mean that it is in any way desirable, merely that it is performatively more robust given the stylistic demands of popularity. It turns out that a certain kind of expertise about national particularity may create for itself some stable footing. Moreover, I will show that although such

44 The cover-art can be viewed at: http://www.wrr.nl/fileadmin/nl/publicaties/PDF-Rapporten/Identificatie_met_Nederland.pdf (accessed 07-03-2014)
an enactment may be more felicitous in a performative sense, this does not make
the style of popularity any less problematic when it comes to the citizenship
politics that are involved.

In late 2010 the Dutch Centre for Folk Culture [Nederlands Centrum voor
Volkscultuur] published a colourful and richly decorated book titled This is us: The
100 most important traditions of the Netherlands [Dit zijn wij: De 100
belangrijkste tradities van Nederland] (Strouken 2010). In it, Ineke Strouken,
director of the Centre, delves into a hundred different items – Sinterklaas,
Ramadam, Nasi – and explores the ethnological history behind them. Targeting a
wide audience, the book offers readers the pleasant experience of discovering a
richer world behind the familiar, the quaint and the commemorative. The display of
cultural peculiarities offered in the book is studiously unthreatening and quotidian.
This is us is part of a much larger body of publications. Many books of this genre
exist (see in particular Enklaar 2007; Demantons 2012). The Dutch Centre for Folk
Culture alone has published several of them.45 They all present more or less the
same perspective: a national, canonical core around which a host of diverse cultural
practices are assembled. The vision of us offered in these books hinges between
deliberately parochial nostalgia and light-hearted openness for diversity and pop
culture. Particularly interesting about This is us is how it exemplifies the style of
popularity.

To understand why, we have to look at both the context and the
compilation of the book. As Strouken recounts in her introduction, the book
emerged alongside a number of social and political developments. First, she
indicates the statements made by princess Máxima. Second, Strouken mentions the
Dutch Centre preparations for the Year of Traditions [Jaar van Tradities], held in
2009, and the ratification of UNESCO’s convention on immaterial heritage
preservation. At the opening of the Year of Traditions, attended by queen Beatrix,
the 100 traditions featured in This is us played a prominent role.

In this context the book’s construction exemplifies in stark clarity how the
daunting question ‘who are we?’ can be made answerable. The Dutch Centre for
Folk Culture did not decide on a list of a hundred traditions after careful
consideration of ethnological evidence. Nor did they enlist a committee of eminent
historians. The list was not compiled, nor justified with reference to any
disciplinary expertise. Quite the opposite. The Centre decided to poll the opinions
of the Dutch population concerning their 10 most cherished traditions. The
eventual list is a top-100 of the most frequently mentioned items by respondents.

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45 see: http://www.volkscultuur.nl/winkel_6.html (accessed 07-02-2014)
This way of putting the book together isn’t hidden in small captioned end notes. It is ostensibly explained in the book’s introduction in a section titled ‘Research’. Why a poll of the Dutch population would deliver insight into Dutch nationhood is not explained. It merely states that Dutch people were asked to list 10 traditions that they deemed important.

The fact that an item is often mentioned and widely shared among the population places it higher on a ranking of traditions. The consequences of this method are striking. Although only the first hundred ‘traditions’ are included in the book, the list potentially goes on forever. There is no particular reason, other than convention and costs, to stop at a hundred. Assuming a large enough polling effort, the list would contain each and everyone’s particular preferences, even the one’s entertained by single individuals. The list featured in the book is not necessarily exhaustive at all. By following this method, the book evades any concrete delineation of what is and what is not ‘us’. There is no exclusion, only obscurity. But if nothing is, in principle, excluded from Dutch nationhood, how can we know who ‘we’ are? The method of ranking addresses this problem by suggesting that although the list is principally all-inclusive, at least the items at the top of the ranking have to be part of Dutch culture as they recur most frequently and are shared most widely. There is no substantial difference between the items on top and down below apart from the fact that certain opinions are more widely shared. By showing which traditions are most popular, the Dutch Centre for Folk Culture is able to suggest which traditions at least merit consideration for preservation. The book itself forms an instance of such preservationist effort.

Indeed, Ineke Strouken identifies some pressing problems in her introductions. First, she is worried that many traditions are subconscious and self-evident and thus do not register in a survey of opinions: ‘That is why relatively many annual commemorations are mentioned and everyday habits far less so’ (Strouken 2010: 8) (#214). There is a clash between the transparency of popularity and the opacity of habit. Second, she remarks that certain entries in the list may not really be traditions – checking email is one of them –, because traditions are typically passed on through several generations. Lastly, the entries have a fleeting status: certain ones are on their way out – prayer before dinner –, while others have just arrived – Ramadan. Moreover, the collection of traditions becomes a ‘momentopname’, a snap-shot of popular traditions at this particular moment in time. Strouken proposes to repeat the survey at regular intervals.

Unaddressed by Strouken but just as pressing is the question whose opinions actually count. The fact that the Centre polled ‘Dutch people’ passes by self-evidently in the book explanation of its research effort: Dutchness is what
Dutch people think is important. But this means that inquiry into the national can only begin after the relevant population has been delineated in some other way. The inclusion of Ramadan or Keti Koti makes ostensibly clear that the Centre’s poll depends on a territorial delineation of the Dutch public: the poll purports to chart the opinions of all persons in the Netherlands. The poll recognises all those who find themselves within the European borders of the Dutch empire. Polling works in this context only with the help of a nativist logic: People’s opinions matter because they live ‘here’ among ‘us’. In this sense, it is rather appropriate that queen Beatrix graced the top-100 of traditions with her presence at the opening of the Year of Traditions (see Nederlands Centrum voor Volkscultuur 2008). The sovereignty associated with her appearance is what guarantees the territorial boundedness of the opinionated public.

It seems, then, that the style of popularity tends to dissolve precisely what This is us strives to grasp: a clearer vision of who ‘we’ are. The Dutch Centre for Folk Culture is in search of durable, immaterial heritage in the form of ‘traditions’, but finds them through a logic that denies the relevance of durability and habit while crutching itself on a territorial delineation of the national population. As Boltanski and Tévenot note in relation to the logic of fame: ‘celebrities can be forgotten from one day to the next’ (2006 [1991]: 178). This, of course, is precisely what Strouken and her colleagues hope to prevent. Fame itself is not up to this task.

Historical durability and habitual practice return in full force in the texts that make up the many entries of the book. Here, expertise once again regains a privileged perspective above the opinion of the residents. As Strouken explains: ‘In this book, I want to tell the stories behind the selected traditions. I’ve used the archive of the Dutch Centre for Folk Culture, the articles in the magazine Tradition [a magazine published by the Centre] and my own research…’ (2010: 8) (#215). The compilation of the book may have followed the logic of fame, but the narratives it contains seek to convey precisely what the public doesn’t yet know about itself. Fame is complimented by ethnological expertise. Even more importantly, fame is complimented by territory. Some other institution – in this case, sovereign territory – must mark off those opinions that count from those opinions that aren’t relevant. This makes it all the more interesting that Strouken sees no need to justify this background assumption: the gaps between territory, population and nation can be left unmentioned as their homology is deemed sufficiently self-evident.

On the whole, This is us present a curious combinations of logics – ethnological, popular, territorial, preservationist – in which the style of popularity plays a crucial role. Fame as a measure of worth seems to enable selection without
exclusion, partiality without discrimination, national identification without nationalist xenophobia. These vices of exclusion become nothing more than justified forgetting as the public itself has cast its judgement on which traditions deserve to be in the spot light. It seems that the style of popularity offers cultural preservationists a way out of the inevitable bifurcations between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the logic of fame, it is not they who impose their hegemonic narrative of Dutchness, but the public itself that determines its own story. And yet, all of this can only work on the basis of territorial distinctions. Only insofar as it is self-evident where to find the opinions that make up Dutchness does this enactment of popularity gain some consistency.

While the sovereign might not be able to speak, sovereignty remains of the upmost importance as territorial divisions associated with sovereignty are what provide decisive order to a deliberately unordered, popular designation of what may be exceptionally Dutch. Attempts to enact non-exclusionary forms of Dutchness are thereby deeply dependent on territorial normativity. In a sense, territory saves the day. What persists in these enactments of nationhood is not a character or a mentality, but a territorial boundedness within which a native public imagines and re-imagines its identity. While without any constitution other than an imagined one, this public continuously performs and is presented through its exceptionalism and thereby retains the right to protect itself with whatever means it may image necessary. These attempts at non-exclusion may be said to be ‘merely’ nativist, as the sole criterion for inclusion is whether one is here participating in the identification with the Netherlands. Yet, even if such attempts thereby seek to escape characterological discourses positing unchanging essences that persist through history, they involve the prescription of a native public. Not only does this means that there is still a society to be defended, it also means that the narration of how the native public came to retain and regain immense significance for citizenship politics. Narration of exceptionally civic, open, liberal, pluralistic, reflexive, mutable Dutchness comes to prescribe the outer-limits and hard edges of national citizenship.
10.

Out of Character: the national inflections of citizenship politics

This study set out to develop two interrelated ideas about the role of nationalism in Dutch citizenship politics. I’ll rehearse them and draw some initial conclusions after which those conclusions will be elaborated in more detail. At the heart of my conclusions is the idea that nations matter for citizenship politics because there are national inflections of citizenship politics. I’ll end in more directly normative terms by considering how alternative inflections of nationhood could come about in citizenship politics.

An ethnomethodology of inflections
What have I tried to do and what has resulted from this study? In summation, I will argue that this study has sought to analyse citizenship politics beyond the dramaturgy of inclusion. It did not seek to analyse where, when and how inclusion happens and who plays which role in the process. Rather, the aim has been to analyse the national inflections of citizenship politics. In order to do this, I prioritised how participants in such politics themselves articulate what it is they are doing. Not because self-understandings ought to be privileged, but because it was central to this study to introduce performativity into the account of how citizenship politics is done. By following how participants articulate what it is they are doing and analysing the ongoing composition of storylines about the Dutchness of citizenship in public, I tried to show how debate about national citizenship gets recursively performed. Central to this endeavour was the question to what extent and in what way citizenship came to refer to specific kinds of people – those deemed Dutch – and how it could be ascertained what that meant.

This study is very far from comprehensive. In fact, it is performed in rejection of the myriad of attempts to grasp the entirety of ‘the debate’, precisely because such comprehensiveness is itself pregnant with national pretension. As if an analysis of the ‘entire debate’ could finally disclose what is happening with ‘the Netherlands’. Indeed, this study demonstrates that such an idealised generality – to grasp the multitude of speech acts all at once – plays an immensely important role in doing Dutchness today. By focusing on the performatative aspects of debating
Dutchness I was able to better understand how nation – in this case Dutchness – matters for citizenship politics. The resultant approach reconstructs discursive formations not as well-structured frameworks, but as intensive networks that may acquire certain, recurrently performed inflections. Such an approach seeks to take very serious the problems that face participants in citizenship politics as they bump up to similar problems over and over again. Inflections are indicated by problems that won’t go away. This approach seeks to analyse how participants actually come to partially resolve and live with the problems that plague them. This approach could be summarised under the label of an *ethnomethodology of national inflections*.

This study performed an ethnomethodology of national identity debates as long as we not forget that in order to reconstruct even the most minute gestures and situational predicaments we have to always already be linking those gestures and situations to currents and genealogies that far outrun the bounds of interaction rituals. In fact, to even begin to conceptualise what kinds of inflections might be at play in the narrations of Dutch citizenship, I have had to constantly make broader assessments of the landscape. In a very general scope, Foucault’s sensibility about such broader currents and genealogies – which is aptly summarised by the phrase ‘society must be defended’ (2003) – served as a guide in this respect. How is it that participants of citizenship politics actually conceive of and enact such defences? I will come back to Foucault on this point a number of times throughout my concluding comments.

This study did not perform an ethnomethodology of participants’ agency, but rather demonstrated how the various methods of doing citizenship politics are constantly running in between the participants themselves and sending local agitations across the discursive milieu. As methods, the inflections of citizenship politics are trans-local and trans-personal. They are nobody’s tools of power even if they privilege some and injure others. This is precisely what makes inflections dangerous. Let’s look in some more detail how I have been performing this ethnomethodology of inflections.

First of all, as the Introduction explains, this study set out to argue for the continuities in citizenship politics that are associated with nationhood. The continuity of the nation is not merely a local myth that varies with the changing opportunities of power. Rather, participants in public story-telling rely on recognisable and habituated repertoires that could only be created through considerable performative effort and ingenuity. In this sense and this sense only, this study was an exercise in culturalism. National myth making is play, but it is never free play. At the very least, interlocutors are faced with the problem of
persuading their publics that what they are articulating is in some form or another contiguous with already existing narrations about the nation, even if forgotten, repressed or marginalised. Continuity is a persistent concern for them as nationhood is, time and again, imagined to be about perseverance. Importantly, these discursive repertoires include recurring ways to disagree and contest. There are shared means of disagreement. The mere occurrence of discord and contention turns out not to be a very good reason to assume discontinuity and change.

Secondly and more specifically, this study set out to argue that a process of inclusion into a purportedly liberal and pluralistic order not only involves confusion about what it means to ‘come in’ but is equally, if not more thoroughly disruptive for ‘being already included’. The confusion, otherwise called ‘debate’, over what it means to occupy the native, already-included position has effects of its own. I’ve used Abram de Swaan’s suggestion, explored in the introduction, as a counter-point. He contended that minorities may well be mistaking liberal-cum-pluralistic self-affirmation – ‘we have the freedom to be different’ – for recognition of their difference. De Swaan contended that the newcomer need not be recognised at all, she is merely granted ‘our’ civic liberty to be different. De Swaan speaks self-assuredly from the included position. This leaves unquestioned who is actually included and able to grant such liberty. Instead of reconstructing the confusion and surprise of any one group – thereby attributing said group a prefixed role in the dramaturgy of inclusion – this study has set out to reconstruct the way in which national inclusion is argued about and discursively made into an issue. De Swaan articulates his suggestion from a firm disbelieve in civilisational relativism – critiques of the West are always already deploying the intellectual tools of the West – and thus positions himself and his public at the heart of a liberal-cum-pluralistic order: ‘do the newcomers really know what’s coming to them?’ A very different line of inquiry is opened when we, somewhat defiantly, turn the tables on De Swaan’s questioning: ‘how do the natives know what constitutes their nativity?’ In this line of inquiry prefixed roles of native and newcomer are no longer of primary significance. This study therefore sought to go beyond the dramaturgy of inclusion with its particular enrolments and expectations. It is no longer a question of how well the host includes and how well the newcomer settles in. Or, for that matter, how well the privileged exclude and how well the disadvantaged usurp.

A perspective that moves away from enrolled groups and their performance indicators obscures just as much as it opens up. In no way do I want to claim that it provides a better survey of the landscape. For one, it cannot adequately show the extent to which people are or are not included – however that is defined – as it is precisely the ways in which national inclusion is narrated that forms the focus of
the inquiry. Nor is it possible to critique and contest the enduring power differentials and their related forms of domination and exclusion. Yet, by opening up the question of nativity it *is* possible to see how the struggle over and confusion about nationhood is actually performed and how discursive repertoires that are formed and deployed in these confrontations inflect the politics of citizenship. In this respect, the study set out to show how a liberal and pluralistic narration of ‘we-the-included’ was both reiterated and continued in citizenship politics while at once becoming the occasion for the enactment of disruptive changes and, thus, the opportunity for a further deepening of conditional citizenship.

So, while it is quite hard to actually find the supposedly qualitative discontinuities in the significances of Dutchness for the governance of citizenship, rupture *is* of the utmost significance. Not because narrations of Dutch citizenship underwent some qualitative shift in the recent decades, but because rupture has become a crucial gesture in the ways in which participants of citizenship politics are able to enact their disagreements. To wit, narrations of Dutch citizenship did change in a significant way throughout the period under investigation, namely in that change has become a more and more important spectre of it. As such, coming up with recognisably novel ways of speaking about citizenship and introducing new policy measures became highly significant. Even if those ways of speaking reiterate the scene of liberal-cum-pluralistic inclusion and policy measures further deepen the conditionality of citizenship, the enactments of change ought not to be conceived as mere illusions that hide from view the more basic rigidity of a national citizenship regime that is deterministically reproduced to exclude the excluded. As will be discussed, there are no national models of citizenship that structure what national citizenship is or can become. Nations matter, but not by modelling citizenship.

As this study presumes to demonstrate, enactments of change are complex achievements that are hard, if not impossible to perform strategically or in isolation. In many instances, it was explored how entire ensembles of performative flow actually mattered most. In chapter 5, the elaboration of dialogical Dutchness was reconstructed in this way, while chapter 4 saw the exploration of a post-racist consensus. Even the moments of reaction (chapter 6), authored by Scheffer and Fortuyn, could only take place along the performative flow. Moreover, enactments of change have tended to involve quite particular projections of what ‘real’ change looks like. Most poignantly, it came to involve the spectre of more pronounced, explicit, outspoken, coherent, persuasive, evocative and instructive imaginations of Dutchness through the liberal-cum-pluralistic conduit of public debate and expression. As both chapter 4 and chapter 5 demonstrate, this reflexive move –
‘let’s stage a national debate about national identity’ – cannot be understood without the historical and contemporary context of characterology and racism.

Projections of change are therefore far from a mere smokescreen for a more basic model of citizenship. By emphasising the importance of continuity – against the diagnoses of sudden transformation – I do not want to claim that Dutch citizenship is actually pre-figured in a certain way. As if the model of Dutch citizenship is obscured by attention grabbing and ephemeral gestures of merely symbolic politics, or what in Dutch parlance is deflatingly called *symboolpolitiek*. The reason for focusing on continuity is precisely the opposite. Only when we appreciate the significance of various gestures of change for the *continuing* narration of a liberal-cum-pluralistic exceptionalism do we better understand how political and governmental avenues were opened up. As long as one merely focuses on the supposedly non-symbolic, institutionalised aspects of citizenship – laws, policies, regulations, outputs and outcomes – will it be possible to suggest that ‘Dutch citizenship’ has changed from x – ‘multiculturalism’, ‘accommodation’, ‘pragmatism’, ‘racism’, ‘paternalism’, etc. – to y – ‘monoculturalism’, ‘assimilationism’, ‘culturism’, ‘nativism’, ‘neoliberalism’, etc. The aggregate to which such qualifiers refer, will nonetheless remain out of play: it is always the self-same nation-state. Even if such an approach concludes that Dutch citizenship has been radically transformed, this conclusion pertains to an entity that itself plays no role in our understanding. It figures in our accounts as a mute prop staring back at us without moving a muscle: Dutchness.

When we include the public narrations of Dutch citizenship, and particularly the disagreements about Dutchness, into our accounts we find that diagnoses of change play roles in the continuation of certain discursive repertoires. Far from keeping the institutional structure of citizenship stable, such continuations play a crucial role in creating discursive opportunities and political cleavages in very particular directions: (1) the justification of increasingly repressive and selective border management, which all too often go far beyond the bounds of legality and dignity, by questioning the moral equipment and thus deservedness of those moving across borders (Vermeulen 2007; Dijstelbloem & Meijer 2011; Bonjour et al. 2011; Groenendijk 2011; Suvarierol 2012; Van Oers 2013; Vink & Bauböck 2013; Van Houdt 2014) (2) the differentiation and erosion of citizenship itself into imbricated hierarchies of belonging and being properly ‘at home’ by questioning the moral equipment and thus deservedness of those who reside among ‘us’ (Duyvendak 2011; Schinkel 2013; Paulle & Kalir 2013; Schinkel & Van Houdt 2010; Hurenkamp et al. 2011; Uitermark 2013). On the whole, the performative effect of change has been to enable an intensified territorial and civic *bordering*. 
The movement is one of shrinking and barricading the national citizenry from outsiders that are not or are not yet ‘like us’.

Change came to mean articulating borders and protective defences around the liberal-cum-pluralistic homeland and its natives. The emerging significance of change need not have yielded these performative effects. Change might have become the enactment of a different tendency in citizenship politics. Change might have revolved around the issues of colonialism, neoliberalism, racism or mobility. It revolved, however, around the Dutchness of citizenship. Thus, it is quite significant how enactments of change took place and what came to count as change. Moreover, this perspective provides some hope for the future as change might be enacted in ways that counteract, contradict and delegitimate the intensified bordering of national community, while projecting alternative spectres of what ought to radically change in Dutch citizenship and what will have to be done to achieve that. Such insurgent acts of citizenship (Holston 2009) will then be effective, at least in part, because they continue an already established repertoire – advocating change –, albeit in surprisingly new ways.

As it became increasingly significant to explicate publicly what constitutes the nativity of the natives and such public evocations became crucial occasions for projecting notions of what ‘real’ change might be, it was the spectre of Dutchness and more specifically Dutchness-as-a-public-problem that came to inflect citizenship politics. Its emergence was explored in chapter 4 against the backdrop of characterology. Thus, this study focuses on how participants in national identity debates were able to narrate citizenship and, crucially, what kinds of disagreement they were able to stage by doing so. This study thereby engages with public discourses on Dutchness in a very specific way. It does not seek to analyse such discourse as the container of a master code, revealing a politico-cultural script or enforcing a hegemonic logic. Of course, the empirical chapters give rise to the conclusion that there is in fact such an overriding significance of Dutchness. Yet, that ought to be understood as the effect of studying discourses on Dutchness in very particular settings and in view of very particular issues. Now, it may be true that there is, for those settings and issues, a dominant way of articulating Dutchness. I can’t say that this study presents much to contradict that overall conclusion, which may well be one of its limitations. However, the aim of the analysis lies not in demonstrating discursive hegemony – for that goal the counter-hegemonies have not been considered to any adequate extent –, but in reconstructing the enactments of discursive repertoires and thereby demonstrating the importance of performative creativity and re-iteration (see also Bell 2007: 36). It seeks to envision the field of struggle in a state of play and practice, while never
being completely agnostic about it also being in a state of domination and violence. The aim is to understand better how concerns over Dutchness might have *inflected* citizenship politics, thereby constituting one piece in a larger puzzle, not providing the overriding answer to the question what Dutch citizenship actually is or has become. In fact, this study seeks to demonstrate that answering such a question is not a responsibility of research at all.

The indulgence with which this study analyses, at times, rather minute and particular discursive exchanges and situations should be understood in this light. Cases and materials were selected and enlarged because they aid in reconstructing a string of concerns in debates about Dutchness that pull into focus the methods of particularising what is at once universal: citizenship. That is, they help explain how and why this particular context is made to be different from others in Europe and beyond. As such, the study seeks to add its piece to the puzzle of how to understand the dynamics of national citizenship politics by suggesting that participants in such politics are very often intently engaged in nationally particularising it and that this engagement has its proper performative effects. It has such effects not necessarily or even primarily because there is one, overriding meaning to national citizenship that can be imposed by powerful players, but because struggle over how nation and citizenship are to be entangled draws participants into specifically articulated issues and problems that come to mutually *inflect* their antagonisms.

Finally, this study reconstructs the national inflection of citizenship politics by considering national identity debates against the historical backdrop of characterological discourses. It is against this backdrop that I have tried to show how disagreements over Dutchness acquired new tendencies. The recurring motif in these tendencies is the way in which an imagining public is articulated to be the very agent of national determination. That is: it is *in* public and *through* publicity that Dutchness is to be found. In its most banal form, it means that Dutchness is what the Dutch imagine to be Dutch. What seems in many ways a conversation stopper turned out to be the very opposite: it is a conversation machine. In fact, this emerging public imaginary of Dutchness, what in chapter 5 I have dubbed *dialogical Dutchness*, resonates with and re-articulates well-established typifications of Dutchness, while also hugely inflating the importance of public debates about national identity as they become the pre-eminent locus of national imagination.

**Not character but identity: how change was done**
A crucial impetus for the formation of *national identity debates* is the confrontation with race and racism in the 1970’s and early ‘80 as explored in chapter 4. Publicly
expressed anxieties over race and racism dislocate Dutchness – it may not be what it seems to be – as the confrontation with native racism is said to reveal the Dutch to be out of character: ‘Is self-image merely self-deceit? It is not Dutch to be racist, yet there seems to be racism in Dutch society. How then should images of nationhood be appreciated?’ Race and racism either became articulated as a pressing cultural taboo that ought to be lifted or a backward behaviour by specific persons that ought to be banned. Within these discourses, we see the gradual yet faithful swap of ‘character’ for ‘identity’ (see also Van Ginkel 1999). I’ve argued that this swap indicates much more than window dressing. It is accompanied and made possible by the emergence of new ways in which nationhood is articulated and disagreed about. The move out of character and towards an identitarian discourse is both a rejection of essentialist and particularly racial-somatic difference for nationhood, while also the configuration of a discourse in which character, race and racism are constitutively null and void. Such essentialist differences, not in need of identitarian imagination to be real, become deliberately other to what can be said about the nation in its identitarian instance: it is what the public imagines, remembers, contends, declares or responds to. It is public-ness itself.

Race and racism have thereby been rejected in citizenship politics in a very limited sense: they have been severed from the issue (see also Uitermark 2012; Essed & Nimako 2006; Bosma 2013; Boehmer & Gouda 2012; Jones 2012; Romeyn 2014; Weiner 2014). With respect to national citizenship the discussion was foreclosed: ‘we’ are not or ought not be racist. For a while, it was particularly Hans Janmaat and his CP (later CD) that was placed in the position of extra-civil racism – not like ‘us’ – and enabled boundary drawing around a post-racist, civilised society. As the analysis of the new constitution of 1983 showed, this boundary drawing was all but stable. For one, it was and is markedly unclear whether civil society ought to recognise race and the unjust discrimination on its basis or, conversely, that it ought to reject that unjust discriminations of racism. The confrontation with race and racism was managed through a race/culture distinction that even Janmaat used to articulate his position: the problem is not idle or illusionary race locked in the body, but the dynamic and causally weighty culture, determining one’s ‘life rhythm’ – as Janmaat called it – or capacity to succeed in a modern society of morally autonomous persons. As demonstrated in chapter 5, in place of a confrontation over race and racism a public imaginary of dialogical Dutchness was configured and national identity debates were thereby taken to be both demonstrative of the liberality and pluralism of Dutchness, while at once suggesting that the Dutch are not in agreement about what they imagine
Dutchness to be. Thus, the move out of character is a potent and evocative conversation machine: the nation must be debated.

It is in these debates and with reference to these debates that participants of citizenship politics can begin to perform their diagnosis of governmental failure and subsequent enactments of change (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). What have ‘we’ done to make inclusion a failure and how do ‘we’ need to change in order to include more successfully? Public dissensus over Dutchness is thereby the premise of change – something ought to be done –, while at once figuring as exemplar for what ought to be defended – our liberality and pluralism. What ‘failure’ and ‘change’ actually entailed in a variety of policy fields and what proponents of such change were able to implement is well beyond the purview of this discursive analysis (see Duyvendak et al. 2013; Vermeulen 2007; Vink & Bauböck 2013). Policy changes have been varied, mutually incoherent and, in some cases, mainly symbolic. Yet, the fact that national inflection does not directly predict the institutional re-arrangement of citizenship does not mean that it is insignificant. National inflection does not affect citizenship politics by imposing a so-called national model onto policies and legal regulations as if there can be a point-for-point correspondence between policies and a nationally subscribed philosophy of citizenship. In fact, philosophies of citizenship and national models are discussed and conceptualised by participants in citizenship politics precisely because there is incessant disagreement over what follows out of them in terms of policies and legal regulations (Bertossi 2011; Van Reekum et al. 2012).

National context does matter, but not in terms of a model, philosophy or political culture. It matters, because participants in citizenship politics are bent on nationally particularising said politics: they engage with it by problematising how and why ‘we’ have failed to do better and which national attributes will enable success. They seek to justify their positions with reference to and by deploying discourses about nationhood. Thus, national inflection effects the creation of discursive opportunities for those seeking to stage issues and grievances. In other words: National context matters through the configuration of particularly inflected disagreements. So while much of the national identity debates involve complex exchanges over the nature of national culture, patriotism, solidarity, integration and belonging, the main policy effects ought to be sought in the fields of border control, migration, crime and welfare reform. It is there that the ongoing public dissensus over what makes the natives native have yielded openings and opportunities for the introduction of repressive and corrective measures through the assessment and cultivation of the moral equipment in citizens, denizens and migrants. It is there that the public envisioning of territorial and civic borders have
been most extensively translated into governmental practices of bordering and exclusion.

This also means that we ought to include in our analysis of boundary work not only the complex interactions between symbolic and social boundaries (Lamont & Molnár 2002; Pachucki et al. 2007), but precisely those modes of boundary work that seek and make divisions outside of the interplay between the symbolic and the social. That is, the struggle over symbolic boundaries, so prominent in this study, may very well create opportunities and avenues for boundary making that are neither symbolic nor social. Bordering, conceived in this sense, indicates precisely those (governmental) practices that seek to police and resolve the confusing interplay between symbolic and social boundaries by re-enforcing demographic and spatial divides in the hope that such division may be less ambiguous, by seeking certain deterministic fixes for the contentiousness of citizenship. Such hope is vested in the bureaucratic administration of civic status, thereby creating demographic facts about the state of Dutch society and its integration (Yanow & Van der Haar 2013; Schinkel 2013; Boersema & Schinkel forthcoming). Also, hope is vested in the ever more vigilant surveillance and control over spatial borders in order to see plainly who can and cannot enter the native ground. Boundary work, here, is neither symbolic nor social, but rather concerns the development of monitoring and control, of seeing and grasping divisions ‘out there’ in the world. They are attempts at ‘materialising’ social and symbolic boundaries into natural divisions that can be monitored and observed by neutral experts and officials. While we may be well aware that such materialisations of boundaries yield anything but unambiguous divisions (Bowker & Star 1999; Hacking 2007), we ought not to reduce these attempts at materialisation to the power of social groups to instate their preferred distinctions. Technologies of administration and border control are not the play things of the establishment. Rather, such bordering practices constitute a third pole, both effected by and effective for symbolic and social boundary making. In any event, the persistent notion that national identity lacked in symbolic clarity – whatever its proper appearance was deemed to be – has thereby created openings to step up and intensify the bordering of national boundaries as such bordering evokes the promise of less ambiguity.

**Instruments of Dutchness**

Inflected by debates about Dutchness – and not, for instance, racism or mobility – projections of change tend to involve the assertion that Dutchness lacks in consensual imagination, in part by referring to the contentiousness of the issue, and relating this lack to the failure of integration and migration policies, a failure that is
eventually branded as the now infamous, pan-European ‘failure of multiculturalism’ (cf. Alexander 2013; Lentin & Titley 2011). Measures are then proposed that ought to enable the natives, and consequently the newcomers, to more coherently and explicitly imagine what it means to be Dutch and identify with the nation. Those proposals, however, have almost invariably as their motif the principle that natives ought to be able to figure out for themselves what that means and that this moral capacity is precisely what exemplifies nativity. ‘We’ are free to be different and such liberal difference constitutes ‘our’ exceptionalism. Newcomers are still to acquire this individualistic moral autonomy and self-assertive disdain for imposed morality. In other words, what tends to be proposed in place of an all-too-liberal-cum-pluralist conception of Dutchness, which is deemed to have prevented the development of effective integration and migration policies, is a liberal-cum-pluralist projection of Dutchness, as the exceptional hallmark of native moral capacity. It is this dynamic that we saw in the case of civic enculturation (chapter 7) and the historical canon (chapter 8).

This means, first of all, that any imposition of Dutchness falls necessarily to the side of the not-yet-Dutch as the capacity to live morally without the imposed guidance of others is precisely what qualifies nativity. If natives claim that they no longer feel at home because of diversity and migration, they thereby do not qualify for a mandatory civic enculturation course to assess their identification with and loyalty to a liberal-cum-pluralistic nation. Their dis-identification never removes them from themselves. In terms of enculturation, native have nothing to do. Natives are already free to be what they choose to be and their difference from other natives is never the same kind of difference as that of the not-yet-Dutch. Enactments of change tend to reiterate a liberal-cum-pluralistic exceptionalism for the native public. One wonders what citizenship politics would look like if it was actually about what citizens are hoping to do instead of the static imagination of an always-already exceptional person.

Secondly, the very fact that projections of change evoke concerns that such changes are antithetic to ‘our’ liberal-cum-pluralistic identity demonstrate publicly – where it matters most – that the Dutch are still not in accord over the Dutchness of citizenship. What’s more, critical reactions to the enactments of change, often associating them with political persona such as Bolkestein, Scheffer, Fortuyn, Balkenende or Verdonk, tend to reiterate rather than contradict the nativity of liberality and pluralism as they concur that the ‘neonationalism’, ‘xenophobia’, ‘populism’ and ‘intolerance’ constitute a sea change for Dutch citizenship politics. Oppositional voices can be remarkably nostalgic: ‘we are no longer who we once
were…liberal and pluralistic.’ And so, progressivist nostalgia becomes implicated in the performance of enduring identity crisis.

The crucial means of disagreement in this conversation machine is, again and again, the notion that Dutchness is what the Dutch deem to be Dutch, that the prerogative is with the native public itself. Consequently, becoming Dutch entails the active participation in this individualised and variegated imagination of Dutchness. As we’ve seen, this means that Dutchness is effectively sought and found within the public debates about it. It also means that the notion of a native public is of the upmost importance. It implies that insofar as there is a public that actively imagines its nativity as evidenced by the public prominence of national identity debates and the electoral support for new assimilationist politics, there ought to be governmental efforts to protect and cultivate that nativity. What ought to be protected and cultivated is precisely public-ness, namely those capacities that enable natives to publicly – freely and diversely – entertain identifications with Dutchness. Herein also lay the performative limits of Dutchness: the native public cannot be contradicted.

We’ve seen the notion of native public at stake in both debates over civic enculturation policies and the historical canon. In the former (chapter 7), the native public is an audience as the assessments and judgements of enculturation policy do not pertain to it but are performed for it. In no way does the ensuing ridicule of and dissensus over civic enculturation detract from the claims made by ‘new assimilationists’ such as Verdonk. The capacity to ridicule and disagree with impositions of Dutchness, i.e. mandatory enculturation courses, are precisely what constitute the nativity of the public to whom the test of enculturation, already for that reason, does not apply. The malleability of the natives is re-iterated and this malleability is at the forefront of what the civic enculturation tests are set up to assess: the capacity of the aspirant resident-cum-citizen to actively reform their commitments before one is granted rights and recognitions. Civic enculturation tests do not so much assess whether one is the right kind of person, but whether one has the capacity to become the right kind of person while rights or social assistance are still withheld from you (see also Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 115).

As has been remarked upon extensively, Dutch citizenship – burgerschap – is almost always called forth and discussed as a moral capacity (Van Houdt 2014; Van Gunsteren 2008; Hurenkamp & Tonkens 2011; Dekker & De Hart 2005; Schinkel 2010; Kloek & Tilman 2002; Aerts & Te Velde 1998; De Haan 1993). The politics of and debates over civic enculturation aren’t significantly different, nor is the moral conception of citizenship in any way an innovation of post-2000 claims for cultural adaptation. The push for cultural adaptation is itself not
insignificant. It is yet another enactment of change that performatively enabled the deepening contractualisation of citizenship that was part of the program from its inception in the early 1990’s. The idea that mandatory tests would attend to the anxieties of a native audience was not a post-2000 invention but already articulated by previous proponents of the program. The fact that after 2002 ostensibly ‘cultural’ elements were added to the test only implies ‘a turn to culture’ in a very specific sense: it is argued that the native public has called for cultural adaptation through a ‘civic revolt’ and because it has called for it, it ought to be done. ‘Cultural adaptation’ is here still a pedant of the native public, not a project of cultural ennoblement onto the national population as a whole. Couwenberg is still waiting for his revival of cultural Dutchness. The post-2002 civic enculturation program is a practice of bordering through ostensibly cultural demands, not the border outpost of a national education in culture. To stress once more: in no sense do the courses and tests pertain to the ways in which natives imagine and articulate their Dutchness.

This latter point can be given even more force when we compare the contestations over civic enculturation to those over the historical canon (chapter 8). When it comes to the education of the native public itself, the rules of the game are remarkably different. First of all, at no point is it relevant to withhold rights, recognitions or assistance. Rather, what the canon – already in its pre-2002 iterations – should do, is to amend, broaden and solidify the imaginative capacities of the native public. It is there, in stark contrast to enculturation courses, to help the native public in its imaginative exploits. Again, this program is a pendant of the native public: it is taken up by government because there is a native public that seeks and merits aid in the imagination of nationhood. The project of the historical canon is also ‘changed’ after 2002. Where civic enculturation was renewed by a self-proclaimed ‘new assimilationism’ the historical canon is promoted through a ‘neo-patriotism’ as a follow-up to the ‘civil nationalism’ of the 1990’s. Across the public contention over the canon there is a re-iteration of the notion that debate, a to-and-fro of public responses, ought to be the conduit of canon formation.

Debate justifies the project by demonstrating a native public in need of imaginative aid. Debate forms it by openly and freely bringing in a myriad of elements. Debate evaluates it by critically responding and suggesting amendments. Debate fulfils it as the canon becomes the centre of a debate, which doesn’t need to be resolved, and has thus made the imaginations of the native public more audible. The canon is said to track a ‘ground tempo’ for those who are ‘here’ and ‘now’. Along this process, the native public appears exceptionally free and differentiated and yet these attributes never undermine the idea of a historical canon for ‘us’. At
best, they help justify the project as they appear to distinguish it from what is resolutely and routinely rejected: imposed nationalism. History, then, is all important: national citizenship and the right to speak on it is articulated as the privilege of those who have been ‘here’ and were part of a history of encompassment. Yet, history derives this significance from the native public, ‘here-and-now’, imagining and remembering itself thus. As the canon commission declares: it is not the anachronistic idea that ‘the Netherlands’ has persisted through history as an essentially self-same entity that matters, but the way in which ‘we’ today imagine and debate over the history of the ‘region’ that is now called the Netherlands. If a ground tempo indicates native temporality, region indicates native territoriality. This territorial ground is crucial as it provides a guarantee that the native public does indeed have boundaries outside of its imagination, namely in relation to allochthonous newcomers who have not been here in this region. So although it need not be clear where territorial boundaries are to be drawn at any one point, it is certainly the case that such boundaries are to be drawn, that a native public can claim the right to speak about the history of a region. So although Dutch citizenship has been predominantly institutionalised through jus sanguinis and complimented with jus soli elements (Heijs 1995; Vermeulen 2007), territoriality plays crucial roles in its own right as the Dutchness of citizenship is narrated and re-narrated through distinctly territorial story-lines: ‘we’ imagine to have been ‘here’ and thus claim the right to speak from the position of the natives and treat those associated with non-native descent as newcomers not-yet-included in this encompassing public-ness.

This narrative of what it means to be included works through a logic of fame. Nativity is not given by empathy (spiritual worth), sovereign decree (domestic worth) or mechanistic expertise (industrial worth). Instead, the many, the public, the majority have worth. It is the congruence of many that ensures the nativity of some. Contradicting fame, and more specifically contradicting the public’s concern for nativity, is quite hard to do as long as one also seeks to speak for everyone. This is the performative trouble that was analysed in relation to Maxima’s speech. Whether on the basis of scientific expertise, national solidarity or sovereignty, Maxima contradicted the native public. Not because she seemed to be remobilising a defunct relativism about Dutchness, but because she apparently presumed to be able to know better than the native public. Within the logic of fame knowing better is all but impossible. Of course, one can take up a particular position and compete for attention, but only by relinquishing the presumption to speak for everyone. It is only particularistic positions – ‘we fight against the leftists church’ – that can gain the momentary gloss of universality. The presumption of
civic universality – ‘couldn’t we all agree that...’ – is precisely what demonstrates hypocrisy and deception. The right-conservative voices in citizenship politics have been far more successful in making their particularistic positions count as universal precisely by speaking of and for a particular constituency: the ‘normal, hardworking Dutch citizen’ concerned for her nativity (see also Oudenampsen 2010; Pels 2011).

Finally, it is possible to know better within a logic of fame, namely through the technique of polling. Polls give the native public to itself and thus set up hierarchies of fame that prioritise, ostensibly without exclusion. Polls merely construct obscurity. Yet, as in the cases of civic enculturation and the historical canon, the polling of fame works only in relation to territorial borders that mark where native freedom-cum-difference ends and the other’s difference begins. The polling of fame is a matter of bordering nonetheless. The native public, which knows itself through fame, is thereby deeply dependent on territorial borders. Its propensity for relativism – Dutch is what is deemed Dutch – is used time and again as a justification for an ever more vigilant protection of its borders. The style of popularity, moreover, is hardly suitable for articulating what the nation is still to achieve, to become, to hope and long for. It is rhetorically disabled for the assignment of public challenges in the future and overly endowed with organs of alarmist exclamation.

Particularising comparisons: from models to inflections
The politics of citizenship, migration and diversity has been intensively studied in the last twenty years. Particularly in Europe, the emerging literature has been concerned with distinct national pathways along which a variety of states have sought to cope with cross-border mobility, deepening diversity and intensifying political contention over citizenship in the face of difference (e.g. Schnapper 1994; Bauböck et al. 1996; Favell 1998b; Koopmans et al. 2005; Goodman 2010). Many of these studies, even if comparative, suffered from methodological nationalism as they were set up to compare tautological compacts of nation, state and citizenry. What such studies don’t do and indeed cannot do, is to study the very politics of entangling these notions. In its most problematic form, this meant that ‘countries’ were associated with ‘models’ wholesale and different outcomes of politics and policy were attributed to the ‘model’ that a ‘country’ was deemed to be following. Together with Duyvendak and Bertossi, I have tried to explain why we think this research strategy is wrong-headed (Van Reekum et al. 2012). The crux of that argument was that ‘models’ are constantly contested and critiqued within citizenship politics (see also Duyvendak et al. 2011). Ergo, there is never only a
struggle going on between ‘models’ but also always a struggle over ‘models’ (Bader 2007). Here, imaginaries of nationhood play a major role as they are used in arguments over what ‘our’ model of integration and citizenship actually entails and demands. This study has demonstrated it quite clearly: it is not so much a struggle between different images of the nation that matters but disagreements about what the liberal-cum-pluralistic imagination of the nation may demand of ‘us’.

Much research seeks to analyse change over time and differences between national contexts in terms of the movement of ‘countries’ along stable dimensions between different models: from multiculturalism to monoculturalism, from civic nationalism to ethnic nationalism, etc. This approach leaves out the very real and very consequential struggles over the sense and non-sense of these very dimensions. What does our civic nationalism demand of ‘us’? This dimensional approach is chosen, of course, in order to perform an objectivist reconstruction of what is happening to citizenship. Yet, as long as such research does not take into account how citizenship politics is contextually inflected, it cannot help but objectify citizenship to the point of reification and takes for granted precisely what it ought to study: the contestedness of citizenship (cf. Koopmans et al. 2005). Beyond legal frameworks, policies and their practical implementations, we ought to study the enactment of citizenship (Isin & Neilson 2008). Looking at public discourse and its enactments is one way, among many, of doing that.

If categorising will always tend to slip into more or less sophisticated forms of methodological nationalism, we might conclude that the dangers of tautology are a necessary evil. There will always be a pragmatic need for labels or typologies which sort out nations-as-wholes, and thus tend to reproduce the myth of integrity. However, we might also invoke Charles Tilly’s approach to comparative research. Tilly distinguishes four modes of comparison – variation-finding, universalising, encompassing and individualising – that all have their uses in the study of social relations (Tilly 1984: 81). Much academic controversy stems from a lacking appreciation of each. From the perspective of variation-finding – often with the aim of variation-explaining – the arguments and objections that come out of individualising analysis inevitably seem wrong-headed or worse: unsystematic. From this standpoint those arguments and objections seem to boil down to one, banal yet unproductive edict: everything is unique, nothing can be compared. But the fact that individualising comparisons seek to identity what is individual only seems like the end of all comparison from the standpoint of generalisation. In reality, individualising analysis forms an equal-but-different mode of comparison. Moreover, individualising comparisons can help to correct,
counterbalance and qualify the generalisations of variation-finding. There are tasks for which individualising comparisons are rather well-suited.

In a nutshell, individualising comparisons seeks to identify what is particular, what is immanent to a context in juxtaposition with other cases. Yet, in the context of national citizenship this approach does not to describe an individual. Here, the term individual is rather unfortunate as it is precisely the idea of nation-as-individual – comparable along generalised dimensions of difference – that we want to avoid. What we are looking for is not individuality as compared to other cases, but particularity as juxtaposed to other contexts. This also means that we are not looking for those characteristics that make particular cases different from all others. Although individualising comparisons often lead to conclusions that are irreducible to generalised categorisation, this is not the main goal. The point is not to suggest that each case, when looked at long and hard enough, becomes an irreducible moment in history and cannot be compared. Rather, one seeks to understand how the particularity of a case is sustained. Which kinds of inflections enable participants to particularise their narrations of citizenship? What kind of work goes into the on-going particularisation of a national context? What is it that goes into making national citizenship national? This may very well include processes that are also present in other cases and, thus, not lead to the banal conclusion that each case is a unique, incomparable individual. Particularising comparison seems a better term for this kind of research.

So what would it mean to compare particularities, as developed above? It should be quite clear that such national inflections cannot serve to attribute certain characteristics to different cases. In fact, they describe ways of doing just that. Nor do particular inflections render particular cases unique and incomparable. In fact, many of the inflections describes above can also been reconstructed in other contexts. Comparison is, here, not a way to unpack variation into a set of constituent ingredients. Rather, comparison can be used to juxtapose ways in which participants succeed, more or less, to particularise and what tendencies can be associated with these particularities. It is therefore imperative to reconstruct inflections not in terms of ‘ideas’ or ‘assumptions’ but through problematics, as it is precisely because certain disagreements persist in certain ways that citizenship politics is inflected. Tendencies do not derive from certain deeply embedded truths so much as they get worked up through perpetual confusion over certain problems.

This study has developed at least three problematics through which the particularity of the Dutch context is sustained, through which national inflections performatively affect citizenship politics.
The problematic of post-racism

To be sure, identifying a problematic of post-racism in relation to national particularity does not suggest that race, racial differentiation and racism are of little significance for understanding Dutch citizenship politics. It is precisely the opposite: because the idea of post-racism – an image of a polity which has left or is on its way in leaving the horrors of racial domination behind – looms so large in narrations of Dutchness, an understanding of racial signification is indispensable (Lentin 2011). What will not work, however, is to evoke the mirror image of a post-racist imaginary by suggesting that much of the apprehension towards addressing race and racism in public debate is basically a slight-of-hand in which ‘race’ is more or less cleverly masked by ‘culture’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘religion’ or ‘the other’. As if beneath layers of conversational propriety lays racism nonetheless and slips of the tong can be heard everywhere if one knows how to listen. Such propriety and slips of the tong exist, to be sure, but the problematic of post-racism, with which participants of debates have been continuously confronted, is far more bewildering that the question how to speak correctly about race and racism. If ‘we’ are or should be post-racist, the accusation of racism is – far worse than public criticism – effectively a form of symbolic expulsion. When and how is such a punishment justified? How can ‘we’ stipulate the appropriate consequences? The well-argued reasons to apply the notion of racism beyond those somatic and colour-coded differences that have come to dominate understandings of ‘races’ to include cultural, aesthetic and geopolitical differences have not made the problem of post-racism any easier to cope with. They increase the amount of potential perpetrators, sometimes indefinitely. If ‘we’ are post-racist, anyone can fall out of the national community through the act of perpetrating racism, even or especially those who imagined themselves to stand firmly at its centre.

The historically weak organisation of white nationalist movements (Donselaar 1991), the complex yet undeniable inclusion of colonial subjects in the national community during the episodes of decolonisation (Schuster 1999; Jones 2007; Jacobs 2000), the specific memorialisation of WOII (De Haan 2008b; Van Ginkel 2011), the eventually widely espoused rejection and denial of racism by public representatives and the very marginal role of antiracist mobilisation in the Dutch public sphere (Van Dijk 1992; Essed & Nimako 2006; Uitermark 2012; Weiner 2014) seem to have reinforced each other, relegating race and racism to a marginal role in citizenship politics. In lieu of this historical legacy, the imaginary of post-racism has meant that public debate over citizenship has inflected away from a veritable struggle over race and racism and towards a supposedly non-racial language of ‘minorities’, ‘identities’, ‘cultures’, ‘ethnicities’, ‘allochthones’ and
‘religions’ (Guiraudon et al. 2005; De Zwart 2005, 2012). Alas, much of what is deeply problematic in racial imaginaries – most poignantly, the self-evidence with which group boundaries are assumed to be given and given a name – persists. In fact, the givenness of groups was hard-wired into the policy idiom and data registration systems with which the networks of researchers, policy makers and public administrators approached the increasingly problematised issue of integration (Geschiere 2009; Yanow & Van der Haar 2013; Paulle & Kalir 2013). The problematic of immutable and given group differences has thereby not gone away, while ‘racism’ became a deeply problematic attribution (see Fennema 2000; Vuijsje 1997).

Precisely because of the shift towards an ostentatiously non-racial discourse and set of issues – religion being the most important one (Van der Veer 1995) – it has been far more complicated to delegitimise anti-immigrant and neonationalist politics in the Dutch public sphere. The post-racist imagination of Dutchness has thereby contributed to the emergence of anti-antiracism: the notion that the more acute problem is not racism – conceived as withering backwardness – but, in fact, antiracism itself as it muffles public speech about groups and ‘their’ problems (Prins 2004). A frank and open debate would purportedly serve newcomers much better.

We may say that the national particularity of post-racism lies in its regulation of public speech: while statements deemed racist have become strongly rejected, issues of diversity became more and more articulated in an ostensibly non-racial language in which it became progressively harder to address the problems of assuming immutable and given group differences. The straightforward sociological truth that group differences are never given and immutable became for all practical purposes almost unutterable in public debates. For instance, stating that there is no such thing as ‘the Muslims’ came under critique as relativistic denial of concerns over religious difference. One of the consequences of this national inflection is that cultural assimilation – the idea that people can only be part of society by taking over specific norms and values – could more easily be presented as the self-evident horizon of citizenship policies having nothing whatsoever to do with racism.

**The problematic of plurality**

If ever there was a narrative cliché about the particularity of Dutch citizenship, it is given by the enduring spectre of pillarisation. The segmentation, paternalist representation and political coordination of a pillarised polity is, even to this day, an important interpretative frame for speaking about and understanding the
particular way in which Dutch citizenship is related to moral, religious and cultural plurality (Van Dam 2011). That being said, the legacy of pillarisation has been contested almost as soon as it had been articulated (Kruijt & Goddijn 1961; Thurlings 1971). What matters, then, is pillarisation’s contestedness.

Although it is true that participants in public debate played around with the notion of new pillarisation in lieu of new diversity (Schover 2010), such prospections were and are rarely meant as celebrations of pillarised plurality (Rath 1991; Vink 2007; Maussen 2013). Rather, if and when pillar-wise emancipation of ‘minorities’ has been advocated, there is the suggestion that pillarised organisation will empower certain, proverbially ‘non-western’ or ‘disadvantaged’ religious or ethnic communities to get up to speed with the currents of Dutch modernity.

Frisians, Limburgers, Americans and Japanese were rarely thought in need of ‘multiculturalism’. Instead of interpreting the enduring significance of the pillarisation myth as proof of its enduring effect on policy making – i.e. as a deeper politico-cultural consensus structuring the policy process on a national level – we may more appropriately see its invocation in debates about Dutch citizenship as proof of the way in which plurality had become one of the central problems that won’t go away. What’s more, we might instead argue that internal ambiguities in the narrative of pillarisation became rather unsustainable in the face of the new diversities of the post-70’s era, which prompted an increasingly impatient politics with regards to the communities-to-be-emancipated. Emancipation was needed now rather than later.

The story of pillarisation has always appeared a conflicted one. Its internal ambiguity provides it with flexibility and drama that partly explains its appeal. Pillarisation-stories share an ambiguity that – in the context of public debate – became more and more unsustainable from the 1970’s onwards. This ambiguity revolves around the question what pillarisation is actually meant to be: (1) is it in essence a form of pacified civil war between wholly incommensurable moral communities that have nonetheless found the means to square their differences parliamentary under the auspice of a monarch supplying the much needed cohesion; or (2) is it in essence a form of protracted assimilation of outsiders – jews, socialists, catholics for instance – into the ‘modern’ world of a rational, entrepreneurial, (post)protestant, ‘Hollands’ establishment. This ambiguity came to matter less and less in the postwar era: if pillarisation was civilised war or protracted assimilation was inconsequential as a moral majority came to be identified and was said to speak for itself in terms of a flight away from pillarised constrictions and into a post-traditional world of individualised plurality (Duyvendak 2004). Instead of being spoken for by the patrons of pillars, Dutch
citizenship became conceived as being able to speak for one’s self. Again, this should not be understood as the emergence of a straightforward consensus. The valuation of individualised plurality creates a whole host of problems and disagreements. Pillarisation’s ambiguous logic for dealing with plurality was not so much consolidated as it was declared irrelevant.

In the face of new diversity, then, pillarisation could only really provide a pathway to its eventual demise: if a pillarised policy approach was to be followed at all – many argued to the contrary – such segmented emancipation should eventually lead to its own irrelevance in order to qualify as an approach that provided entry into Dutchness. The valuation of plurality became a central problem of the new citizenship politics, but not as a path-dependent continuation of a pillarisation logic, whatever that logic is supposed to be exactly. Quite the opposite: some, pragmatically framed segmentation was decided upon in view of the eventual irrelevance of such vaguely pillar-esk institutions, policies and allowances. Certain communities could be allowed to organise along certain pillar-esk lines, because that would hasten their ability to become what the established Dutch citizenry had already: post-pillarised, post-traditional frontrunners in the race towards modernity’s completion. Of course, specific forms of cultural reification were an effect of this approach (Schover 2010; Koopmans 2002) – it necessitated the identification of coherent ethno-cultural blocs and called forth enactments of such reified identities – but cultural reification can hardly be attributed to an excess of multiculturalism. Reifications were part of attempt to get minorities above and beyond the very need for pillarised life.

Strikingly, the importance of segmented emancipation discourses came to centre on the question of speed: which route will allow ‘us’ to take ‘them’ to modernity most precipitously? When policy questions become problematised in this way, conflicts will focus on lags, hurdles and obstructions. An entire policy battle may erupt over the question if and why ‘accommodation’ and ‘recognition’ is on the whole good or bad for ‘integration’. Yet, such battles are indeed nationally inflected by the complicated legacy of group recognition in Dutch context: accommodation of plurality comes to be judged as bad when it locks outsiders into their segmented institutions and identities. The many advocates for accommodation, recognition and ‘tolerance’ of plurality have hardly been willing or able to disrupt this emancipatory narrative. There are huge and consequential disagreements between what we may call ‘pragmatists’ and ‘culturists’ in this respect (Uitermark 2012), but neither carrier group has been able to break effectively with the idea that recognition of plurality is a path towards citizens’ individualised ability to be different. Rather, the problem of plurality becomes how
to belong to nobody in particular, to incorporate and live out all the many
differences that are available in our world but to never get stuck in any of them.
Dutch citizenship politics has seen huge disagreements about what government
should and shouldn’t recognise as legitimate differences, but the performative
effect of these policy controversies has been to affirm over and over again that
newcomers need to adapt – either through emphatic assistance or through forceful
imposition – to the dynamic, individualised pluralism that the Dutch citizenry is
deemed to live out so exceptionally.

Again, the supposed backlash against ‘multiculturalism’ in the Netherlands
is a rhetorical figure in public debate rather than an adequate understanding of such
public struggles (Duyvendak et al. 2013). What’s more, the problem of pluralism
has inflected citizenship politics, because it has introduced the spectre of a ‘failed
model’ to get away from. There is little to no narrative innovation in this respect:
autochthonous plurality – being different without being fixed – remains the
terminus of emancipatory efforts. Even the most relativizing of stances in these
debates – often voiced by the social liberals of D’66 – suggest that newcomers will
learn to live in a world of plurality eventually.

The curious role of pluralism particularises Dutch citizenship politics as it
time and again appears as both the problem to be solved – the other’s difference –
and the solution to be sought – autochthones difference. This double role of
pluralism – problem and solution – has created many opportunities for those who
argue that newcomers never seem to be emancipating fast enough and government
policies never seem to escape the legacy of pillarised accommodationism once and
for all. The shadow of self-effacing relativism seems to re-appear as soon as
participants of debates propose to focus more on ‘our identity’ (Van Reekum &
Duyvendak 2012).

The problematic of autonomy
Freedom is one of the most important political concepts of the last three centuries,
giving meaning to much of what people the world round express when they speak
about citizenship. So how could it be of significance for any one national context in
particular? Here, we should again remember that particularity is not given by that
which is special or unique, but by the practice of particularising through which one
context is enduringly demarcated from another. So when we suggest that the
problem of autonomy is of particular significance for Dutch citizenship politics, we
mean to say that public articulations of what autonomy might be are crucial for
understanding how Dutchness and citizenship are enduringly entangled.
As we have already seen, freedom is important because it figures as the end-point of emancipatory efforts (see also Hurenkamp et al. 2012: 122). To live out one’s deeply personal desires, convictions and hopes is narrated as exceptionally Dutch (Verkaaik 2009). In this view, articulations of Dutchness seem to have shifted rather massively from stories about a frugal, burgherly, christian and somewhat boring nation (Galema et al. 1993) to one’s about secularised promiscuity, expressivity and permissiveness (Van der veer 1995; Kennedy 1995; Mepschen et al. 2010; Hoving 2004; Ghorashi 2010). But much like the problems of post-racism and plurality it is the particular narration of freedom that counts.

When we deepen our historical view somewhat, it becomes clear that the current emphasis on individual freedom, enjoyment and expressiveness – symbolised so evocatively by the ‘gay man’ (Dudink 2011) – is more like a variation on an already established theme than a clear break with preceding narratives of national particularity. What matters in not so much freedom – the absence of tyranny – but autonomy – the cultivated ability to life properly without an imposed morality (cf. Krol 2007). We might say that the substance of the good life in narratives of Dutchness has rather dramatically changed during the postwar period, but what endures is the idea that the good life is formed from inner moral capacity (Kruithof 1980; De Regt 1984; Derksen & Verplanke 1987; Rath 1991; Schinkel 2008).

Exceptionally Dutch liberalism is represented most convincingly by those acts and practices that are understood to emanate from deep within the personal intimacy of the individual and express its self-orientation: religiosity, sexuality, loyalty, identification, attachment, conviction, speech, reflexivity, enjoyment. In pessimistic discourses about the influx of not-yet-emancipated newcomers, the mere acceptance of the rule of law is not nearly enough: actual integration is only achieved when the aspirant-citizen demonstrates an authentic desire for the substance of the law. Saying that you detest homosexuals but you denounce any extra-legal action against them demonstrates a lacking integration in Dutch society and the failure on the part of policy.

In the context of citizenship politics the problem of autonomy presents a rather daunting paradox: how will entry into the nation be made possible if external moral imposition is antithetic to the very moral autonomy that sets the Dutch apart? Again, the problem of autonomy does not predetermine any one policy approach: one might conclude that an indefinite patience – ‘tolerance’ – with the moral incompetence of newcomers is in order, just as one might conclude that the capacity for moral self-guidance should be closely and punitively monitored. Moreover, the very act of publicly debating Dutch citizenship tends to
performatively affirm public expressiveness as a core element of what it means to be Dutch. Contradicting the imaginary of dialogical Dutchness is almost impossible when the means of contradiction – free, open and self-confident disagreement in public – are themselves part of that narrative: the orthodox imam calling for jihad with the infidels appears always already to be operating within the horizons of distinctly Dutch freedoms, albeit that he appear confused about what those freedom afford him. His speech is thereby rendered out of place precisely by being afforded space.

As soon as one contradicts alarmist discourses about the demise of national identity and the problems with newcomers, one has already begun to enact one of the core performances of Dutchness. This, again, helps explain why opponents of anti-immigrant and neonationalist movements have hardly been willing or able to dislodge the idea that access to citizenship should involve an adaptation to exceptionally Dutch freedoms. Declaring that there is no such thing as Dutch freedoms to which we may demand assimilation evokes a performative contradiction as such declarations are a focal performance of autonomy.

**The perils of nativism**

Through juxtaposition with other ways of particularising national citizenship, we might sharpen our view of what may be particularly problematic about Dutch citizenship politics. Here, I think ‘France’ and the ‘United States’ offer helpful contrasts for sharpening our understanding of a Dutch inflection.

We may say that the Dutch particularity of post-racism lies in the peculiar way in which racism tends to be related to Dutchness. In short: True Dutchness appears already post-racist. True Dutchness is time and again projected at the horizon of post-racism, whatever that is deemed to entail. On the one hand, there appears a contrast with the way in which group differences tend to be related to French typicality (see Amiraux & Simon 2006): groups are most certainly to be named and identified by state institutions, while the natives are at once a group among others (‘autochthones’) and the projected goal of integration by which groups dissolve into a post-racist community. The recurring problem is not so much how to communally project a universalism before difference – ‘citoyenneté’ –, but rather the engineering of a post-racist society of different groups – ‘bevolkingsgroepen’. On the other hand, there appears a contrast with American typicality as group identifications and the policies associated with them do not appear in the horizon of a national legacy of racism, national unification and civil struggle for equality. Dutch emancipation is not primarily a redress of injustice born out of a rupture in the life of the nation but a paternalistic incorporation into
an already just society. There appears a narrative disjunction between Dutch legacies of racism, conceived to be in the past or passing (Bosma 2013, Boehmer & Gouda 2012; Jones 2012; Weiner 2014), and the contemporary efforts to incorporate newcomers associated with labour migration, EU-integration and asylum seeking.

The problematic of pluralism has inflected citizenship politics, because it has introduced the spectre of a ‘failed model’ to get away from. Here, we see a contrast to French and American contexts most clearly: the national model – whatever it is deemed to be – is still something to aspire to, not to get away from. Failure appears as the inability to implement the model in the right way, not the failure of the model itself (Bertossi 2012; Foner 2012). As discussed elsewhere, the idea that citizenship politics should get away from a ‘failed model of accommodation and recognition’ (pillarisation, anti-racism, multiculturalism, pragmatism, etc.) has been articulated from the early 1980’s to this day (see also Ministry of SZW 2011, 2013). The peculiarity of pluralism in such debates, however, is that each proposed evasion of the failed model of recognition will tend to highlight, once again, a valuation of pluralism as a defining element of Dutch citizenship (Van Reekum & Duyvendak 2012). Escalation has been the main result.

With respect to freedom, the contrast with Anglo-American narrations of citizenship is rather pronounced. Such narrations revolve around the question of freedom from artificial, political institutions (Somers 1995b). Freedom indicates the prerogative to impose morality in the privacy of the family, community and the private corporation. The ability to impose onto others – children, women, believers, employees, etc. – is precisely the point of having freedom (see also Robin 2011). In contrast, the centrality of individualised autonomy seems to resonate closely with struggles over exceptionally French citizenship. In both contexts, the assertion that certain newcomers are not equipped for autonomous life has become quite important in citizenship politics (Akan 2009; Bowen 2009). Yet, there is a crucial difference here. Whilst autonomy appears as a matter of cultivated ability in the Dutch context – something to be learnt and thus potentially imposed –, the idea of potentially imposing such an ability seems to sit uneasily in narration of Frenchness. The mere contact with French culture should elicit the autonomous individual from within the immigrant (Bonjour & Letting 2012). The idea that a newcomer will have learned how to be French seems to defeat the purpose as it present Frenchness not as the underlying universal humanity of each individual but as a particular cultural competence of a particular group of people in history. This more decidedly essentialist notion of autonomy (as an ability that lays dormant in each human being) resonates more strongly with Frenchness when it is presumed to
emerge without guided cultivation. Civic integration courses in the Netherlands are meant to instruct how to be free, while in France they are deemed to reveal the always already free individual. Consequently, the idea to make such courses mandatory and conditional for citizenship is far less problematic in relation to Dutchness.

Instead of conceiving of post-racism, plurality and freedom as characteristics of Dutch citizenship politics, it is imperative to reconstruct them as problematics. They are not underlying self-evidences or building blocks of a hegemonic consensus. Rather, they constitute problems that will not go away, that persist, that keep on involving participants of citizenship politics as they try to figure out what is national about national citizenship. Instead of creating a consensus, these problematics have been at the heart of extensive disagreements. Moreover, it is precisely by evoking disagreements that they have inflected citizenship politics towards an increasingly protectionist mode that justifies an intense bordering of the national community. Dissensus is itself the occasion for protection. What recurs across these disagreements and enables participants to grapple with the problematics, is a specific mode of nativism. How do I conceive of this nativism and why is it dangerous?

I’ve distinguished the post-2002’s debates on civic enculturation and the historical canon by suggesting that they constitute an instrumentalisation of Dutchness. That is, these policy measures were discussed not merely as being about Dutchness or as gearing towards an eventual inclusion into Dutch society, but as ways of turning Dutchness itself into a policy tool, as using Dutchness to make people Dutch. I’ve provided a perspective onto these debates that deliberately undermines the idea that something like a ‘turn to culture’ has thereby taken place. Instead, what has taken place from the 1970’s onwards is the emergence, deepening and escalation of an identitarian logic that, through an anxious flight from characterology, seeks national identity in public, in public imaginations, in what the public appears to think, feel, remember, identify, discuss and debate. Curiously, publicness thereby became the very exceptionalism that marks out nationhood, on the basis of which protectionist measures of bordering have been justified and undertaken. Once more Foucault: the public must be defended.

In this mode of citizenship politics the imagination of the native public ought to be enabled and cultivated, not contradicted or corrected. The legal residence and access to citizenship of certain categories of persons deemed morally incapable of succeeding without rights or assistance are to be prevented, discouraged and minimised. Indeed, racist, orientalist and culturist discourses are used to make sense of which categories and differences are relevant and why. Yet,
the importance of *malleability* – the ascribed proclivity to take individualised responsibility for one’s fate instead of depending on others or referring to systemic injustice outside of one’s self – ought not to be reduced to any of these. The norm of malleability at play in civic enculturation questions not whether one *is or is not* one of ‘us’, but whether one *is able to become* the right kind of person (Mezzadra & Neilson 2013: 115). It is this capacity that is attributed to the natives: persons that are equipped with an individualised, moral capacity to be different. The norm of malleability envisions natives to be independent of collectivity and capable of succeeding through individual effort without collective guidance or social assistance. Most basically, citizenship becomes narrated as the privilege of those who have demonstrated to be able to do without it. Moreover, it is granted in reward of such effort.

Insofar as malleability is used to make sense of and regulate the borders between natives and newcomers, we are dealing with a grammar of alterity (Baumann & Gingrich 2004; Ehrhardt 2012) that is qualitatively different from, although often entangled with racist, orientalist or culturist discourses. As malleability is given to the natives, we may call this grammar nativist. What such nativist discourses suggest, against the essentialist impossibility of ever actually crossing boundaries, is that everyone can become native *if only* they made the individual effort and where not hampered by well-meant yet distracting forms of assistance and recognition. Everyone is potentially included on the basis of the idea that everyone potentially has the capacity to adapt to new circumstances, new surroundings. Nativism works, then, not by mirroring the positives and negatives of self and other, what Baumann calls *orientalising* (Baumann 2004). Rather, it articulates an universal norm of malleability to measure the extent to which people have made an effort to adapt, while giving the propensity of malleability to the natives. At the heart of this nativity lies not some essential characteristic that contrasts with others but precisely the tendency to mould characteristics to whatever life in liberal society demands. The fact that this nativist measuring of individualised effort is in many cases entangled with quite starkly drawn mirror lines that set up Dutch liberality as an essential characteristic of ‘us’ over and against ‘their’ essential illiberality and backwardness should not bring us to reduce nativism, in all its moments, to nothing more than racism-without-race.

Let me be clear, nativist discourses can be and often are racist – with or without race – employing descent and territorial belonging as ways to hierarchise and exclude (see in particular Yuval-Davis 2011) while conceiving of nativity through a purported modernness/whiteness/European-ness/judeo-christianity. Yet, when malleability is in play nativism can also be *more than* racisms as becoming
like ‘us’ is not only deemed possible but teleologically already the case. It is precisely by ascribing malleability to the other – she can change – that it becomes possible to explain non-inclusion out of the lacking effort of the newcomer – she did not change yet. Holding out potential inclusion for the future is thereby a way of responsibilising non-inclusion in the present. Nativism, conceived in this way, narrates national society as a distinctly open, liberal and pluralistic place wherein inclusion is merely a matter of time and effort of its aspirant inhabitants. In time, ‘they’ will learn. So while substantial and consequential discord can emerge over whether newcomers have or have not gone through ‘time and effort’, such contestation tends to affirm that inclusion is to be measured in this way.

This is also why it is important to distinguish nativism from other grammars of alterity. Nativism performs an encompassing logic by suggesting that the universal possibility of inclusion is protected and guaranteed by those who have already been included: the natives. It is thereby qualitatively different from other grammars of alterity such as orientalising and segmenting. We may argue that a discourse of ‘eventual integration’ through pragmatic and instrumental recognition of difference has increasingly and quite successfully been challenged by succeeding discourses of ‘impatient integration’ through demanding and prioritising participation in and alliance to national identity. These critiques of the pragmatic status-quo could only emerge through shifting power balances in integration politics (Uitermark 2012). Self-proclaimed monoculturalists did actually interrupt the politics of citizenship and were able to redirect the governance of citizenship in substantial ways. It took very real ingenuity and politicisation to do. What they have challenged, however, is not and never was an all-too-multicultural hegemony that was enamoured with the difference of the other and blinded for the ‘problems of immigration’. As this study demonstrates at several places in this process, what was challenged was a nativist, encompassing narrative that articulates this society to be exceptionally liberal and pluralistic and therefore inclusionary par excellence. What was contradicted, was the idea that inclusion was over time inevitable and could already be forecast. In short: that inclusion and difference need not be politicised as the future was secure.

Challenges to nativist exceptionalism – ‘inclusion is inevitable’ – tend to foreground the need to explicate, shore up, codify and protect the nativity of natives. They tend to propose more demanding and responsabilised policies of integration and migration, to track, evaluate and enforce the ‘time and effort’ put in by newcomers. As such, they also tend to articulate not merely the assumption of native exceptionalism but its active and persuasive imagination in public. Critiques of the nativist narrative thereby reiterated it, albeit often by advocating bordering
measures that depend on racist, orientalist and culturist distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

In Somers’ Anglo-American citizenship narrative, the naturalistic distinction between private and public society tends to be re-iterated and favour those that seek to curtail the always already artificial interventions of the state. In the liberal-cum-pluralistic narrative reconstructed in this study, liberality and plurality are moral capacities of citizenship that can potentially be learned by everyone and need only be imposed on those who are not there yet. This narrative is re-iterated and favours those that seek to display their emancipation from moral imposition, thus qualifying themselves for imposing on the not-yet-included. As has happened, again and again, the defendants of a pragmatic integrationism are attacked for their collectively imposed apprehensions to display what they too agree is great and good about being Dutch: the freedom to be different. Little more could be mobilised against such attacks than the suggestion that, indeed, liberality and plurality ought to be protected, but not through such ‘harsh’ measures and with such ‘ruff’ words as that only hampers the learning process and could arouse violence and racism. Frankly, who wouldn’t want enemies like that?

As I have developed it here, nativism in its basic form states that everyone can potentially become native, that it is a matter of ‘time and effort’ on the part of the yet-to-be-included, that nativity is constituted by this encompassing propensity. The peril of such a citizenship narrative is that it is rhetorically disabled to deal with voices that claim to protect and defend nativity. Such a narrative merely offers the objection that making citizenship more demanding and exclusive is impractical, counterproductive or may legitimate native racism. It does not offer an antagonistic counter-challenge that contradicts protectionism. As long as the native public can be shown to seek protection such claims have merit and the native public is no less open-minded for making them. One can try to contradict protectionism through calls for a nativist encompassment of differences, but one will thereby have little to no space to develop effective antagonisms with one’s opponents.

My conception of nativism is therefore not so very important when it comes to understanding the discourses of the self-proclaimed defenders of the nation. In these instances we encounter many nativist claims, but they do little more than render boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ un-crossable. Here, the vocabulary of racism, orientalism and culturism suffices, even if we should take care in reconstructing how the native ground comes to matter for people (Geschiere 2009; Duyvendak & Erhardt forthcoming). However, by contrasting solid, essentialising, and substantive boundaries to fluid, transitory, and imagined ones, we risk attributing perils only to the side of essentialist and substantive difference.
Peril does not merely lie in the grounded substantivity of the autochthon. The perils of nativism lie precisely in the ways in which fluidity, transition and imagination can come to particularise national citizenship and inflect citizenship politics. So, when it comes to understanding the rhetorical disability of those seeking to contradict essentialising discourses, it becomes imperative to notice that these attempts at disagreement tend to work through nativist exceptionalism. They seek to shore up post-racism, plurality and liberty as exceptionally inclusive capacities of Dutch citizenship that will enable ‘us’ to encompass difference eventually. This entails a depoliticisation of difference, a fleeing of the field before the battle has begun. In more overtly normative terms: either one explicitly proposes an alternative program of national reformation (or deconstruction) that usurps the narrations of one’s opponents, or one accepts that one can only ever articulate a moderate version of what one’s opponents choose to fight for (cf. Laclau & Mouffe 1985). For all the disagreements that have enveloped citizenship politics in the last three decades, disagreement is still to come (cf. Rancière 2004).

**Living on the liberal plateau**

Through a nativist logic, Dutchness is narrated as *life on a liberal plateau* (see also Wekker & Lutz 2001; Van Reekum 2009). On top, everything is flat, non-hierarchical, open, equal, diverse, provocative, ironic, and able to flow smoothly. Who wouldn’t abide there, who couldn’t be included in such a society? The slopes, by contrast, run up steeply. There is time and effort needed to reach the plateau and become native. While those on the slopes are still to achieve their inclusion, those on the plateau need not achieve anything but their well-being. For the included, there is no higher. On the slopes, one needs determination and discipline, to keenly know which way is up. As soon as one reaches the plateau and enters into nativity all of those skills become irrelevant. These capacities are what brought you up, but once included they may be discarded at will. At least, they can no longer be demanded of you. On top, it is precisely one’s playful unawareness of hierarchy and one’s aptitude to engage with others on an equal footing that displays one’s acculturation to the native ground. The story-line of a liberal plateau allows participants in citizenship politics to make sense of why it is that imposition is precisely what the natives do not do, while to become native on must be imposed upon. It explains how freedom and difference mark native life, while newcomers are not free from impositions and ought to give up their difference and become more like ‘us’.

So let’s return to Calhoun’s statement that was presented at the beginning of this study: ‘Nationalist rhetoric has generally stressed the essential similarity of
the nation’s members. It is rare to find comparable emphasis in the constitution of the national through the discourse of a public of highly differentiated members’ (Calhoun 1997b: 94). This study has demonstrated how an emphasis on a public of highly differentiated members need not entail and, in fact, may disable the construction of nationhood away from a politics of homely similarity. More specifically, such a national inflection of citizenship politics can create successive and escalating opportunities for protectionist claims that speak of liberty and plurality as the exceptional capacities that brought ‘us’ ahead of ‘them’. It can thereby normalise a politics that holds claims to be justified because they are voiced by the natives: if the public says so, it is right. Nativity becomes right in itself...by all means necessary. This yields a politics that grounds itself by claiming to listen to citizens, disabled as it is to articulate political visions otherwise. This could be called populism, but only if we forget that populism finds priority in the people not because what the people say is right but because the people ought to be the agent of democracy. Whether the people are right or not ought to be irrelevant. The people ought to be enabled nonetheless, enabled to begin to make its own mistakes. Strikingly, what counts for populism in Dutch politics is a politics that says the people are right. Its critics warn us that the people may have very bad policy proposals, that they may be right about their grievances but wrong about solutions for them (see also Schinkel 2013). What is all too often left unremarked is that this so-called populism is thereby yet another contender in the conflict over ‘good governance’ and ‘effective policy’. It is a prolongation of depolitical managerialism, albeit through an anti-establishment rhetoric and celebrations of the strong leader. The people are given the right to be right, but only in so far as it concerns the management of the state’s affairs.

For all of the rightful indignation that is ascribed to it, this people cannot go beyond its role in state management. This people is always synonymous with the population residing within the state’s borders. It is always a ‘bevolking’ – a residing population – consisting of ‘bevolkingsgroepen’ – culturally distinct segments of the population. The people are the ‘ingesetenen’. They are settled in. At no point does this nativist politics – even when it is devoutly inclusivist and holds that anyone can become settled in – actually begin to enact a people that claims space for itself apart from the state’s affairs and its territorial sovereignty (cf. De Haan 1993). It can only populate the state’s domain, it has no space for itself. For all the contention that has emerged over Dutchness the national people has not acquired any other prerogatives than to reside in and imagine their nativity. At no point does this people have devices of its own to make and remake what it is or wants to become. It is in so far as it is native to a territory. The nation is not a
public project of the people-to-come, but a governmental object for policing the
borders between the established and the outsiders. Therefore, the entanglement
between people and nation can only ever appear as a responsibility of the state, as
something for which better governance is needed. This is what we have seen quite
clearly and consistently in the Dutch context: the constant referral of the problem
of nationhood to the responsibility of the state, eventually to the point that
Dutchness became an instrument of policy itself. Government would – ‘finally’ –
use Dutchness in order to police the Dutchness of citizenship. Through all of this,
the national people retain a rather striking passivity. It may play a crucial role in the
state’s affairs – namely as the subject of grievances and the object of governance –
but is very far from an agent of democracy, very far from populist. Self-rule is out
of the question. In so far as it is a public agent engaged in articulating public
reasons, it appears as a native public. Its role is to publicly express its imaginations
about Dutchness and thereby orient, justify and evaluate the bordering practices of
government. Thus, Dutch culture is mangled, repressed and reduced to the
governmental bordering between those for whom it is assumed and irrelevant and
those for whom it measures their difference and upon whom it can be imposed.

To be sure, whichever way one engages with Dutchness, it makes
differences. To imagine otherwise tends to reiterate a deeply problematic
exceptionalism that is, nonetheless, used to make differences. Considerable
progress will have been made when Dutchness is no longer understood through the
failures and successes of government – ‘how has our exceptionally Dutch self-
imagination prevented/equipped us in governing citizenship’ – but as narrative
resource and battleground for a politicisation of citizenship. To some extent, this is
precisely what the right-conservative and monoculturalist voices have already done
so effectively these last few decades. They have drawn on widely recognised and
often celebrated images of exceptional Dutchness to politicise citizenship. They
have staged a native rights movement. However, it has merely succeeded in the
state-led bordering of citizenship, not in any re-invention of Dutch democracy and
the prerogative of the citizenry. It has succeeded in escalating unjustifiable
bordering and differential treatment. Its main products are grief and anger.

Are alternative politicisations possible? Can contention over Dutch culture
be more than an occasion for state-led bordering, whether stringently exclusionary
or pragmatically inclusivist? Can the story-line of the liberal plateau be uprooted?
It would mean that the problem of Dutchness is no longer conceived as a lacking
coherence of public imagination, but precisely as its reduction to governmental
bordering. Despite the incessant focus on coherence, the national identity debates
of the recent decades have at least valorised the idea of dissensus. Of acting out of
character. What would it mean to perform debate over Dutchness differently? What kind of entanglements between nation and citizenship would such discourses begin to articulate? In thinking about these question we ought to appreciate the recurring tendency of the national identity debates of the recent decades: disagreement abounds, yet it is captured and annulled by becoming the demonstration of Dutch exceptionalism. Likewise, change became highly valorised, yet it came to imply the more coherent imagination of nationhood by a native public. Instead of heeding Ernst Kossmann warnings – that disagreement itself was consensus enough –, a more thoroughly coherent identity came to dominate the horizon of national identity debates. Thereby, it became all but impossible to deny that identity was not in crisis. ‘Out of character’ and ‘into crisis’ became the all-too-narrow dimensions of narrative possibility.

This way of debating Dutchness thereby also has its performative limitations. As the governmental attempts to police difference appear to continually fall short, so do the public’s attempts to imagine Dutchness coherently. This is what drives the conversation machine and keeps the suggestion of an embattled Dutchness afloat. However, it also leaves space to interrupt the performative flow of national identity debates and turn them into the occasion of a different politics. Instead of exceptionalism the failure of imaginative consensus may also come to imply something very different. Firstly, it may demonstrate what should be obvious: that Dutch culture is a thoroughly fissured terrain and its significance for citizenship is not to outline the Dutch citizen so that government might retrace the public’s imagination with borderlines. Secondly, however, dissensus over Dutch culture may not come to enact a search for identity in public debate at all, however post-characteristic, but rather the possibility that Dutch culture cannot be occupied by any one public, that a native public itself diminishes rather than guarantees Dutchness. We would then begin to approach Calhoun’s promise of public plurality.

As I have argued, this is a tall order in the Dutch context as it would presumes that citizenship is not grounded in the territory of the state, is not envisioned to be an eventual autochthony. It would involve the politicisation of Dutch culture not for the sake of identitarian clarity but precisely because Dutch culture is recognised to make differences. It would also involve a new way of remembering and assessing the recent past: not as a (failed) search for identity by a native public but as the gradual emergence of veritable disagreement, however narrowly inflected and normatively problematic, about how Dutchness matters. Indeed, this study presumes to go some way in the direction of such a memory of the recent past by analysing the notion of a native public, the specificity of
nativism that goes with it and the performative effects of public disagreement. Yet, can disagreement do more than enact an identity crisis? Only if disagreements are not taken up as an indication of crisis but, conversely, as an involvement in Dutchness. Only when disagreements begin to indicate that participants in those antagonisms are making Dutchness differently, instead of drawing different borders around it. Then the enrolment of native and newcomer could be usurped and a horizon of possible agreement and eventual inclusion become more and more irrelevant. Inclusion would not be something that eventually might happen through a contentious process of debate, but something that is being realised right here and right now.

Despite the fact that succeeding governments have stayed the course and, in fact, constructed even more borders around Dutch citizenship, there is also reason to believe that public discourse is beginning to entertain the kind of disagreements described above. Strikingly, race and racism have been at the very centre. A succession of public debates about the figure of Zwarte Piet, particularly in 2013, seemed not to be performed through the repertoires of the preceding national identity debates as they have been reconstructed in this study. The contentions over Zwarte Piet could not be entirely assimilated to those repertoires.

I will not pretend to even begin to unpack what took place in these final remarks. Zwarte Piet is a highly complex cultural figure. Central to the debates was the critical assertion made by antiracist writers, activists and artists that Zwarte Piet is a form of Dutch racism associated with the yet-to-be-confronted legacy of colonialism and white supremacy. They thereby presented, in a number of different ways, a perspective on Dutch society that discovered at the heart of Dutchness the out-right celebration and public promotion of a racist fantasy and a regressive attachment to colonial imaginations. Moreover, the fact that many said to cherish the figure, deemed the figure to be harmless or could not see how it was racist was effectively antagonised as precisely part of the problem, namely a blatant incapacity to recognise, to imagine, to recollect the racism from which Dutchness was and is constructed.

In quite general lines, I want to suggest that what took place could not be entirely contained within the established bounds of disagreement-as-identity-crisis. The problematic that seemed to be articulated did not present Dutchness as the public’s problem, nor did debate become a mere search for identity. Instead, antagonists confronted the ways in which the pageantry and performance of a cultural figure, Zwarte Piet that is inextricably tied up with Dutchness, could have vastly different memories, affects, meanings and consequences for different publics. Participants in these debates may have tried to mobilise the well-
established repertoires of nativism – ‘they’ don’t understand yet that ‘our’ Zwarte Piet is not racist –, thereby often enabling and normalising ironic and not so ironic racism. What could not be denied, however, was that the critics of Zwarte Piet and the publics they successfully mobilised were engaging intensively with Dutch culture and making it relevant for citizenship. The power effects of calling certain publics native while excluding others was effectively put up for discussion. The very idea of a native public became problematic even if only because it was explicitly defended. Thus, a disjunction of publics was deemed to be engaging with Dutch culture and coming up with antagonistic positions and accounts. This was something new. Along this perspective, which was probably not the dominant one, Dutchness no longer appears in crisis. Quite the opposite, it appears to matter greatly to a whole variety of participants, yet these same participants thereby confront deeply antagonistic ways of grasping, valuing and living it. This was not crisis but involvement. Dissensus could not entirely be reduced to the exceptionalism of a native public. Dutchness did not merely appear embattled. Rather, while certain publics appeared to seek protection for their particular fantasies, other publics appeared to desperately express their memories and meanings.

For me, the debates surrounding Zwarte Piet indicate that, along with the incessant reduction of disagreement into exceptionalism, concerns over Dutchness can also appear to be the particular involvements of particular publics. That is, disagreement over Dutchness can proceed in ways that disable any one public from claiming a native priority or even pretend that such a public ought to be assembled to begin with. It does take considerable performative agility to innovate upon the routinised ways in which Dutchness is politicised. I think it is no coincidence that such innovation is now taking place with respect to race and racism. As I have argued, the flight away from characterology was accompanied by a nullification of race and racism. The notion, well established in a variety academic discourses, that racism is a societal phenomenon, configured along the very relations of sociality, has not begun to do the work it could and shall. In any event, it seems to be one of the directions into which the mythology of living on a liberal plateau can be displaced and around which a more thorough politicisation of Dutchness can begin. To contradict the narrative of the liberal plateau, including wholly illiberal claims about ‘our’ essential characteristics, could become one way to be a citizen. At least, there would be something to reach for. Citizenship politics would no longer be the protectionism it tends to be today. It wouldn’t be a matter of bordering something that is always already there, but the struggle for what is still to be achieved and yet to be realised. This is also what remains irreducible and valuable in rhetorics of
nationhood: the description of a dignity that is as immediate and unconditional as it is shared and primordial. Citizenship politics ought to become struggles over what is almost completely uncertain and implausible: common dignity. One last time Foucault: society should not be defended, dignity must be won.
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Nederlandse samenvatting

Deze studie behandelt het publieke en politieke debat over Nederlanderschap. Het richt zich in het bijzonder op de periode tussen 1972 en 2008. Zoals alle jaartallen vormen ook deze tamelijk arbitraire afbakeningen in de tijd. Toch omvatten zij een opeenvolging van publieke debatten en controversen die, zo poogt deze studie te laten zien, in een verband met elkaar staan. Ze vormen een stelsel aan tegenstellingen, kritieken, ruzies, aanvallen, verdedigingen, opposities en aanklachten die samengenomen bepaalde, terugkerende mogelijkeheden vertonen. Cruciaal is hierbij de opkomst van zoiets als 'nationale identiteit', waar debatten zich steeds meer omheen gaan organiseren. In een groter historisch perspectief stelt deze studie dat de opkomst van 'nationale identiteit' niet enkel gezien kan worden als veranderend taalgebruik, maar een verandering indiceert in de manier waarop strijd over burgerschap en nationale gemeenschap opgevoerd kan worden. Dat 'nationale identiteit' steeds vaker in plaats van het achterhaald geachte 'nationaal karakter' of 'nationale aard' wordt gebruikt, kan niet enkel begrepen worden als een manier om de somatische, racistische en gewelddadige grondslagen van nationale gemeenschap te verbloemen met ogen- schijnlijk minder uitsluitende en beladen termen. Er is meer aan de hand dan een verfraaiing van publieke taal aan de discursive buitenkant.

Deze studie is een verkenning en analyse van de veranderende manier waarop strijd over Nederlanderschap kan gaan plaatsvinden wanneer eerdere strijdvormen hun overtuigingskracht en waarachtigheid verliezen. Door daarbij de voornaamste discontinuïteit te zoeken en te beschrijven in het verlaten van 'karakter' en het zoeken naar 'identiteit' nodigt deze studie haar publiek uit om een groot aantal andere discontinuïteiten, zoals die juist nadrukkelijk een rol zijn gaan spelen in de debatten over 'nationale identiteit', op een nieuwe manier te begrijpen. De veel besproken beschrijvingen van omslagen, revoltes, reacties en heroriëntaties in de politiek van Nederlands burgerschap – vooral rondom een contrast tussen een al-te-multiculturalistisch verleden en een cultuur-assimilationistisch heden – spelen zelf een cruciale rol in de strijd over wat Nederlanderschap zou kunnen en moeten inhouden. Het opvoeren van discontinuïteit met het verleden is met de vorming van nationale identiteitsdebatten een cruciaal onderdeel geworden van burgerschapspolitiek.

De studie steunt hierin primair op een idee van Michel Foucault – discursive formatie – dat onder anderen door Craig Calhoun is uitgewerkt in de theorievorming over nationalisme. Zo geeft deze studie een bijdrage aan het bredere onderzoek naar de politiek van burgerschap, in het bijzonder het onderzoek dat betrekking heeft op de Nederlandse context. De analyse van publiek debat staat eerst en vooral in het teken van de politisering van burgerschap, dat wil zeggen de manier waarop strijd over burgerschap mogelijk is en wordt gemaakt. Wat betekent het voor die politisering dat er gedurende een bepaalde periode een cascade aan debatten en controversen plaatsvindt die draaien om de kwestie wat en hoe het
is om een Nederlander te zijn? Wat gebeurt er wanneer Nederlanderschap een nadrukkelijk publieke kwestie wordt? Het gaat daarbij dus niet perse en niet specifiek om beleidsontwikkelingen en veranderingen van wet- en regelgeving. Het is aantoonbaar het geval dat noties rondom nationale particulariteit nadrukkelijker een rol zijn gaan spelen in het rechtvaardigen en inrichten van beleid. Deze studie wil nu juist laten zien hoe langs een reeks aan oneenheden over publieke en bestuurlijke problemen ook altijd verhalen over de nationale gemeenschap worden gearticuleerd. Deze verhalen maken zelf een verschil in de politisering van burgerschap.

De strijd over burgerschap kan niet gereduceerd worden tot een strijd over een stelsel van wetten en regels zoals die door een staat worden afgedwongen. Hier bouwt de studie voort op ideeën van Margaret Somers. Om een dergelijke strijd – die over macht gaat – überhaupt te kunnen voeren, wordt er voortdurend gebruik gemaakt van allerlei voorstellingen die een beeld projecteren van wat en hoe 'Nederlands burgerschap' is of zou moeten zijn. Wij weten (en vinden het van enorm belang om anderen te laten zien dat we weten) dat dergelijke voorstellingen dikwijls op strategische wijze worden ingezet: het komt bepaalde mensen in bepaalde posities goed uit bepaalde voorstellingen te geven. Het zou van sociologische en politieke naïviteit getuigen om te geloven in deze voorstellingen zelf, om ze voor waarheid aan te nemen. Na de ontsporingen van 19de eeuwse ideologieën in 20ste eeuws geweld, is naïviteit – een gewillig geloof in voorstellingen – de grootste intellectuele zonde geworden. Het is zaak door de voorstellingen heen te zien en ze te ontmaskeren.

Tegen deze ontnuchterende voorstelling van zaken in, poogt deze studie te laten zien dat ontmaskering wel degelijk op zijn plaats is, maar toch niet het enige en beslissende perspectief kan zijn. Zelfs wanneer voorstellingen enkel cynisch en strategisch zouden worden ingezet – op zichzelf al een absurde gedachte –, zou het dan toch nog steeds nodig zijn om te begrijpen welke mogelijkheden voorstellingen bieden in het aanbinden van strijd over burgerschap. Juist omdat deelnemers aan publieke strijd over burgerschap een zekere gevoeligheid ontwikkelen voor het narratieve, voorstellende aspect van hun interventies, kunnen we die strijd – hoe strategisch ook – niet begrijpen zonder daarin mee te nemen wat al deze politieke retoriek en spelbeheersing nu precies zouden kunnen voorstellen. Juist omdat deelnemers reflexief zijn over en rekening houden met het voorstellende, performative effect van hun optreden, is het van belang te analyseren hoe deze voorstellingen zich ontwikkelen. Daarbij helpt het om de strekking van allerhande publieke verhalen over Nederlanderschap, zoals die in debatten en controversen gearticuleerd raken, niet te zoeken in een interne coherентie – alsof er achter die verhalen een eigenlijke betekenis schuilt – maar juist in de verdere doorwerking van die verhalen op de praktijk van het publieke optreden. Wat publieke verhalen zouden kunnen betekenen, moet nu juist in de verdere praktijk van publiek-verhalen-vertellen verkend worden. Dat betekent alsnog dat deze studie erop gericht is een beschrijving te geven van deze praktijk, haar te vangen in enkele
treffende benamingen en beelden. Ook hier is het niet de vraag of zo'n beschrijving het denken over burgerschap en natie weergeeft zoals die eigenlijk is, alsof enkel een ontmaskering van voorstellingen kan leiden tot adequate kennis. Het gaat erom een beschrijving te geven die zelf nieuwe vragen, nieuwe problemen en nieuwe voorstellingen mogelijk maakt.

Deze studie verdedigt in deze zin de cultuursociologische positie dat het nooit voldoende is om voorstellingen tegen het licht te houden, alsof de socioloog alleen zou staan in het ontwikkelen van een 'kritische' blik. Deelnemers aan politiek bedienen zich nu juist dikwijls van diezelfde, kritische stijl. Juist wanneer we ons dieper en enigszins verliezen in voorstellingen, hoe waanzinnig die ook mogen zijn, kunnen we nagaan wat voorstellingen te weeg brengen in de manier waarop we politiek maken en hoe we tot andere, alternatieve voorstellingen zouden kunnen komen die verwijzen naar een andere, toekomstige politiek.

Wie zich verder diep in de historische ontwikkeling van publieke verhalen over Nederlandschap constateert al vrij snel, zoals velen voor haar hebben gedaan, dat burgerschap en Nederlandse particulariteit al geruime tijd in een zeer nadrukkelijke relatie tot elkaar staan. Hoofdstuk 3 behandelt dat ook de manier waarop burgerschap en Nederlandse particulariteit met elkaar verstrengeld zijn geraakt en nauwelijks zonder elkaar gearticuleerd konden worden. Burgerlijk zijn en Nederlands zijn verwijzen in die geschiedenis voortdurend naar elkaar. De notie van Nederlands burgerschap berust daarmee op een culturalisering van burgerschap en recentere episodes van dergelijke culturalisering kunnen alleen in het verschiet van die geschiedenis worden begrepen. De genealogie van culturalisering wordt in dit hoofdstuk gevolgd, in het bijzonder in zoverre die relevant is voor de verdere analyses van het meer recente verleden.

Inhoudelijk blijkt burgerschap een door en door morele categorie: het duidt niet alleen burgerlijke beschaving aan, maar daarmee ook de capaciteit om moreel zelfstandig te leven en het zonder morele bevoeging te stellen. Wat de staat herkent wanneer het burgerschap erkent, is precies deze morele beschaving, autonomie en zelfbeschikking. In de politiek van burgerschap blijkt het dan ook van belang om tot publieke uitbeeldingen van dergelijke morele vorming te komen ten einde een claim te kunnen leggen op zoiets als 'Nederlandsburgerschap'. Verhalen over Nederlands burgerchap ontwikkelen zo een overkoepelelende strekking: ze beschrijven hoe een veelheid aan moreel autonome leden – gemeenschappen of individuen – elkaar vinden in een wederzijdse bevestiging van diezelfde autonomie. Dit geeft ook precies het contrast weer met de culturalisering van burgerschap zoals die vanaf de jaren '70 gaat plaatsvinden. Verhalen over burgerschap krijgen dan weer sterker een differentiërende strekking. Dat Nederlands burgerschap niet een overkoepelelend maar juist een onderscheidend begrip zou zijn, komt tot uitdrukking in de manier waarop kwesties van immigratie en vestiging worden geproblematiseerd. De overkoepelelende betekenis van burgerschap blijkt niet vanzelfsprekend van toepassing op mensen die zeer
nadrukkelijk worden aangeduid als buitenstaanders en nieuwkomers. Deze groepen, voor wie de veronderstelling van morele autonomie niet zomaar opgaat, hebben met elkaar gemeen dat ze gepositioneerd worden buiten het 'witte'/Europese territorium van het Nederlands koninkrijk. Hun aanwezigheid roept dan wel de suggestie op van 'etnische verzuring', zodat nieuwe groepen toch weer in een overkoepelend narratief kunnen worden ingepast, maar het feit alleen al dat er in deze termen over gesproken werd, geeft aan dat er aan een voortzetting van dat narratief getwijfeld werd. Eind jaren '80 kwam het debat over integratiebeleid dan ook steeds nadrukkelijker in het teken te staan van een kritiek op en vermijding van 'etnische' afzondering.

Hoofdstukken 4 en 5 vormen te samen een analyse van nationale identiteitsdebatten. Enerzijds betekent de vorming van dergelijke debatten, van eind jaren '70 tot begin jaren '90, een verschuiving van thema's, concepten, problemen en noties van nationale gemeenschap. De meest belangrijke is de manier waarop nationale identiteitsdebatten een verwijdering opvoeren van achterhaald geachte denkbeelden en argumenten over 'nationale karakters', hun historische duurzaamheid en verschillen. Het blijkt echter ook dat deze verwijdering beter begrepen kan worden wanneer ze in verband wordt gebracht met opkomende spanningen en vragen rondom ras en racisme. De noodzaak om kwesties van natie en nationale gemeenschap anders te gaan beschouwen en bespreken, blijken door deelnemers aan debatten voortdurend in verband te worden gebracht met de idee dat het nu juist Nederlands zou zijn of zou moeten zijn om voorbij het racisme van het verleden te zijn of te komen. Verhalen over Nederlanderschap geven vorm aan een post-racistische verbeelding, waarin Nederlands zijn in elk geval betekent niet-racistisch zijn. In deze verbeelding verschijnen kwesties van ras en racisme ofwel als discriminatie, ofwel als taboeisering van etnische verschillen. In beide gevallen verschijnen ras en racisme als kwesties waaraan de nationale gemeenschap voorbij moet zien te komen. Meer structurele kritieken van racisme, waar de aandacht gericht wordt op de manier waarop ras en racisme maatschappelijke verhoudingen als zodanig vormgeven, hebben in deze gesprekssituatie een marginale positie.

Anderzijds betekent de vorming van nationale identiteitsdebatten een toenemend belang van het idee dat Nederlands is wat Nederlanders menen dat Nederlands is. Het is niet enkel het geval dat Nederlanderschapp in toenemende mate een publieke kwestie wordt, het wordt door deelnemers aan debatten ook nadrukkelijk als zodanig besproken. Wat er in de publieke sfeer zoal gesteld wordt over Nederlands zijn, wordt daarmee nadrukkelijk aangeduid als een belangrijke, zelfs cruciale bron van inzicht in wat nog met enige zekerheid als Nederlands kan worden bestempeld. Dat het nationale gevormd wordt door wat mensen zichzelf, in onderling debat, voorstellen bij een natie, is niet enkel een gedachte die in de academische literatuur over nationalisme ingang vindt, maar wordt in de Nederlandse casus ook van het grootste belang voor de manier waarop er gestreden wordt over 'nationale iden-
titeit'. Niet alleen betekent dit, dat het nationale anders begrepen wordt – niet meer een karakter, maar een publieke opinie –, het betekent ook dat de publieke onenigheid over Nederlanderschap aantoont dat de nationale identiteit in crisis is en er een noodzaak zou kunnen zijn tot correctieve maatregelen. Langs deze weg ontstaat dan ook de stelling dat de nationale identiteit vooral anders – meer coherент, explicieter, overtuigender, duidelijker, eenduidiger – zó moeten worden verbeeld en dat niet alleen deelnemers aan het debat maar ook de overheid hierin een verantwoordelijk hebben of zouden moeten krijgen. Deze laatste gedachte stoelt bovendien sterk op de idee dat Nederlandschap in het verleden te vaag, te onnadrukkelijk, te weinig overtuigd, te lankmoedig of te relativistisch werd verbeeld.

In navolging van reeds bestaande verhalen over Nederlanders, waarin morele autonomie, vrijzinnigheid en uitgesprokenheid centraal staan, ontstaat er in deze situatie een nadrukkelijk aanwezig beeld: dialogisch Nederlanderschap. Hiermee wordt niet alleen bedoeld dat, met name na 1989, ideeën over Nederlanderschap zeer nadrukkelijk gaan over de capaciteit zich uit te spreken, maar ook dat dit publiekelijk uitspreken begrepen wordt als een uitbeelding van wat Nederlanderschap inhoudt. Het publieke debat is niet enkel een vindplaats van het nationale, die een identiteitscrisis laat zien, maar juist ook een plek waar Nederlanderschap nog het meest op zijn plek is. Het is in het publieke dat het nationale thuis is. Publieke debatten over Nederlanderschap bevestigen en herbevestigen zo de idee dat Nederlanders zijn wat velen, publiekelijk, menen dat ze zijn: vrij, autonoom, uitgesproken, vrijzinnig, tolerant, tot overleg bereidt, democratisch, brutaal, voorbij beknelende schaamte, expliciet, open... De nationale identiteitsdebatten geven op deze manier waarachtigheid aan de liberale en vrijzinnige verbeelding van Nederlanderschap en wel precies in die maatschappelijke sfeer waar een inzicht in het nationale nog mogelijk wordt geacht: de publieke discussie. Zo ontstaat dan ook een scherp contrast met diegenen, met name 'moslims', die op afstand van deze dialogische levenshouding en gemeenschap worden bezien en krijgt die afstand een betekenis voor nationaal lidmaatschap.

Hoofdstukken 6, 7, 8 en 9 vormen gezamenlijk een analyse van de periode na 2001. Hoewel het afscheid en afstand nemen van een achterhaald verleden reeds een cruciale geste was geworden in de vorming van nationale identiteitsdebatten, krijgt een dergelijke optreden een nog veel zwaarder gewicht in deze periode. Hoofdstuk 6 behandelt op welke manier zowel interventies van Paul Scheffer als die van Pim Fortuyn rond 2001 de aanleiding vormen voor het idee dat een gedurige breuk met het verleden noodzakelijk zal zijn. Dit krijgt vervolgens vooral vorm door de idee dat de overheid specifieke beleidsmaatregelen zou moeten inzetten om de integriteit van de nationale gemeenschap te beschermen en bestendigen. Deze beleidsmaatregelen behoren niet alleen gericht te zijn op de nationale gemeenschap, maar ook ingegeven te worden door nationale gemeenschap. Eerder beleid
wordt als ontoereikend gezien, omdat daarmee niet enkelvoudig Nederlanderschap tot doel *en* middel werden gemaakt. Wat steeds vaker met termen als 'nationale cultuur' of 'Nederlandse cultuur' wordt aangeduid, moet aangeven dat er wel degelijk normen, waarden, identificaties en levenshoudingen zijn die enerzijds beschermd en bestendigd kunnen worden en, anderzijds, aan anderen kunnen worden opgelegd. Deze voorstelling van overheidsverantwoordelijkheid – ontwikkel en ontplooi beleid dat 'cultuur' gebruikt om de nationale gemeenschap te verbinden en verstevigen – is daarmee gelijk de belangrijkste geste van omwenteling die een rol gaat spelen in burgerschapspolitic. Hoofdstuk 6 laat echter ook zien dat noch Scheffer, noch Fortuyn nadrukkelijk afwijkende ideeën of inzichten hadden over de politiek van nationale identiteit, wanneer we die vergelijken met de eerdere periode. Zij vonden wel nieuwe manieren om dergelijke ideeën te articuleren en politiseren. Echter, de gedachte dat kwesties van nationale identiteit en burgerschap rond 2001-2002 radicaal van inhoud en inzet veranderen is niet vol te houden en moet juist zelf als cruciaal onderdeel van zich ontwikkelende strijdstijlen gezien worden.

In hoofdstukken 7 en 8 worden de twee belangrijkste beleidsinstrumenten die expliciet gericht zijn op het beschermen en bestendigen van de nationale gemeenschap behandeld: het inburgeringsbeleid en de ontwikkeling van een nationaal geschiedeniscanon. Geen van beide beleidsprojecten komen voort uit de politiek van 2001-2002, maar ze krijgen wel een andere, meer gewichtige lading na dat moment. In beide hoofdstukken wordt de conceptie van een 'gevestigd publiek' uitgewerkt. De debatten rondom inburgering en canon laten zien hoe steeds, op verschillende manieren, een beroep gedaan wordt op het bestaan, de zorgen en belangen van een 'gevestigd publiek'. Hiermee wordt dan bedoeld dat er een grote groep burgers is die zich niet alleen sterk identificeert met Nederland en, terecht of niet, een gedeeld idee van Nederland verbeeld, maar ook een publiek vormen van overheidsbeleid en als zodanig in hun verbeelding van de natie beïnvloed worden door het overheidsoptr Fen. De conceptie van 'gevestigd publiek' rechtvaardigt niet alleen bepaalde claims – op grond van het feit dat bepaalde burgers zich nu eenmaal een bepaalde verbeelding maken – maar informeert ook waarom en hoe de overheid zou moeten handelen – namelijk op een manier die effectief tegemoet komt aan de zorgen en belangen van een zichzelf verbeeldend publiek.

Aan de hand van dit begrip en de manier waarop het terugkomt in publieke debatten over inburgering en de canon, wordt in hoofdstuk 7 laten zien dat inburgering geen enkele aanspraak inhoudt of betrekking heeft op het gevestigde publiek. Het gevestigde publiek is met betrekking tot het inburgeringsbeleid enkel toeschouwer. Juist in deze zienswijze, wordt het mogelijk om de eisen van culturele assimilatie en morele bevoogding die onderdeel uitmaken van het inburgeringsbeleid te rijmen met de idee van een liberaal en vijzinnig Nederlanderschap dat middels dat beleid wordt beschermd en afgebakend. De discussie over het inburgeringsbeleid bevestigt voortdurend dat reeds gevestigde en inge-
burgerde Nederlanders niet zouden kunnen en ook niet hoeven voldoen aan de eisen die gesteld worden aan buitenstaanders. Van belang blijkt dan ook niet te zijn of het inburgeringsbeleid daadwerkelijk mensen assimileert tot een Nederlandse cultuur, maar of immigranten als individu gedwongen worden zich in te zetten en te heroriënteren ten einde een toets succesvol te volbrengen. Niet de mate waarop iemand Nederlands is geworden staat in discussies centraal – nagenoeg iedereen bevestigt dat daarover nauwelijks overeenstemming mogelijk is –, maar de mate waarin iemand heeft moeten veranderen door individuele inzet en zo heeft laten zien tot verandering in staat te zijn. Juist die capaciteit wordt herhaaldelijk voorgesteld als hetgeen gevraagd wordt. In de discussies rondom het inburgeringsbeleid verschijnt Nederlandschap eerst en vooral als de individuele capaciteit om – zonder hulp van anderen – de eigen levenshouding te veranderen en aan te passen zodat iemand geschikt kan worden geacht voor het leven in een geliberaliseerde maatschappij, waarin mensen zo weinig mogelijk afhankelijk zijn van elkaar.

De conceptie van 'gevestigd publiek' speelt een geheel andere rol in de discussies rondom de canon. Hier is zij verre van een toeschouwer. Ze is juist de grond voor en het object van beleid. Waar immigranten nu juist zo weinig mogelijk geassisteerd moeten worden ten einde hun inburgering aan te kunnen tonen, moet het gevestigde publiek middels de canon nu juist in staat worden gesteld zich een beter, eenduidiger en overtuigender beeld van zichzelf te vormen. Hoofdstuk 8 behandelt het proces waarlangs er uiteindelijk een geschiedeniscanon tot stand komt en laat daarbij vooral zien welke rechtvaardigingen er voor het ontwikkelen van de canon worden ingebracht. Hier speelt de notie van verspreiding een cruciale rol. Het is juist omdat er 'vele' burgers zouden zijn die geïnteresseerd zijn in en reageren op de verspreiding van kennis over nationale geschiedenis dat er grond is voor het ontwikkelen van een canon. Ook hier blijkt dat het voeren van publieke debatten zelf aanleiding is om te claimen dat er – kennelijk – een vraag is naar en aandacht voor nationale geschiedenis. Vervolgens wordt de complexe manier waarop de canoncommissie haar canon positioneer in de bredere discussies over nationale geschiedenis en nationale identiteit geanalyseerd. Hieruit blijkt dat de argumentaties van de commissie uiteindelijk ondersteund worden door een territoriale afbakening van de nationale verbeelding. De commissie schrijft zelf een verbeeldende conceptie van nationale gemeenschap voor, maar houdt daarbij wel vast aan het idee dat er een 'regio' is waar die verbeelding betrekking op heeft en waarbinnen het publiek van die verbeelding gevonden kan worden.

Tenslotte wordt in hoofdstuk 9 op basis van de eerdere, empirische hoofdstukken een argument opgebouwd over hoe en waarom nationale identiteitsdebatten anders werken dan voorgaande conflictstijlen over de natie. Aan de hand van twee cases – een lezing van prinses Maxima en een boek van Ineke Strouken – wordt laten zien welke tendensen zich voordoen in dergelijke debatten. Hoofdstuk 9 laat daarmee in exemplarische vorm zien wat in de eerdere hoofdstukken langzaam ontwikkeld werd. De twee cases laten zien hoe natio-
nale identiteitsdebatten steeds om kwesties van populariteit en beroemdheid draaien. Hierbij wordt het concept van beroemdheid ingezet zoals dat is ontwikkeld door Boltanski en Tévenot. Aanzienlijk zijn die claims, die ideeën, die posities die schijnen te worden ingenomen door 'vele' anderen en daarmee bekendheid genieten. De waarde van een idee over nationale identiteit blijkt eerst en vooral af te hangen van de mate waarin het schijnt te worden gezien en herkend door een wijdverspreide meerderheid. Hieruit blijkt ook dat dergelijke meerderheden niet of nauwelijks kunnen worden tegengesproken en maar zeer ten dele verantwoordelijkheid kunnen dragen voor het verwerken van conflicten rondom nationale identiteit. De meerderheden zoals die verschijnen in nationale identiteitsdebatten krijgen daarbinnen geen nieuwe taken, geen politieke vooruitzichten en articuleren ook geen nieuwe doeleinden. Er vindt enkel de articulatie plaats van een recht en grond tot bescherming.

In hoofdstuk 10 wordt een concluderende reflectie gegeven op het voorgaande. Gesteld wordt dat publieke discussies over Nederlandschap bepaalde, steeds terugkerende tendensen laten zien, die te maken hebben met nationale inflecties van strijd over burgerschap. Daarbij wordt een idee van particulariserende vergelijking uitgewerkt. Hiermee wordt een vorm van vergelijkend onderzoek aangeduid dat gericht is op het beschrijven en conceptualiseren van een particuliere context. Door – zoals in deze studie wordt gedaan – te kijken naar de manier waarom deelnemers aan burgerschapspolitiek voortdurend een (nationale) context particulariseren, wordt het mogelijk te beschrijven op welke manier context doorwerkt in strijd over burgerschap. Vervolgens wordt een overzicht gegeven van deze context door drie problematieken te beschrijven die steeds terugkeren in de Nederlandse context, zoals die door deelnemers wordt geparticulariseerd. Het gaat om een problematiek van post-racisme, van pluraliteit en van autonomie. Vervolgens wordt geconcludeerd dat er in de Nederlandse context sprake is van een specifieke vorm van nativisme, welke niet volledig met andere vormen van differentiëren – racisme, culturisme, orientalisme – samenvalt. Juist langs de vele onenigheden en tegenstellingen in nationale identiteitsdebatten wordt steeds de idee uitgebeeld en bevestigd dat Nederlanderschappelijk gegeven wordt door een ver- vormbaarheid van het individu, door een flexibele omgang met vele perspectieven, door het kunnen veranderen. Deze gesteldheid en capaciteit wordt vervolgens verbonden met reside- ren, met gedurige aanwezigheid in het territorium van de natie-staat. Nativisme houdt hier niet perse in dat de ander zich moet aanpassen aan de gevestigden, maar eerder dat inpas- sing per definitie mogelijk is en ieder uitblijven daarvan uiteindelijk begrepen moet worden als een gebrek van de buitenstaander. Juist door inclusie van te voren reeds te veronderstel- len en met de grond van de natie te identificeren, worden zij die nog ingepast moeten wor- den altijd al begrepen in relatie tot een exceptioneel beeld van de Nederlander: open, vorm- baar, flexibel, vrij, onafhankelijk, individueel, uitgesproken, verschillend. Dat er verschil is,
is altijd al te danken aan dit exceptioneel Nederlandse leven. Daarmee depolitiseert het Nederlandse nativisme haar burgerschapspolitiek: gevestigden kunnen immers niet meer om aanpassing gevraagd worden, zij hebben reeds aangetoond in staat te zijn vrij en verschillend te leven. Het leven in Nederland verschijnt in deze nativistische verbeelding als leven op een liberaal plateau: er op te geraken is een kwestie van inzet en gestaag opklimmen naar een hoger niveau door middel van morele civilisering en emancipatie, maar eenmaal op het plateau belandt is voor gevestigden niets meer te bereiken en vervalt politiek in een doelloos protectionisme.