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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Voor mijn lief...
# Table of Contents

**Acknowledgements**

1. **Introduction: where to begin?**
   - 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**
   - 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***
   - 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**

- Introduction to section 1: 70

4. **How Dutchness became a public problem: from national character to public question**
   - 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
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 199
- Historical consciousness 205
- Neo-patriotism: the uses of ‘our’ history and feeling at home 209
- Making a national canon without a nation 215
- The commission and its problems 222
- The native public and its canon 229
- Canon reviewed 234

9. Enacting the style of popularity 242

- Two contrasting attempts at non-exclusion 249
- When the sovereign spoke 250
- From Huizinga to Máxima 255
- This is Us 261

10. Out of Character: the national inflections of citizenship politics 266

- An ethnomethodology of inflections 266
- Not character but identity: how change was done 272
- Instruments of Dutchness 275
- Particularising comparisons: from models to inflections 280
- The problematic of post-racism 283
- The problematic of plurality 284
- The problematic of autonomy 287
- The perils of nativism 289
- Living on the liberal plateau 295

Bibliography 302
Nederlandse samenvatting 339
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