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Performing dialogical Dutchness: negotiating a national imaginary in parenting guidance

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ABSTRACT. In contemporary Europe, national identities are fiercely contested and governments have sought ways to strengthen national identification. Notwithstanding this European pattern, government policies are implemented differently and belonging to the nation comes to involve different images and enactments across contexts. In the Netherlands, especially, belonging to the nation is at stake in many high-profile public and political struggles. In this context, a pervasive public imaginary we call ‘dialogical Dutchness’ represents the Dutch as distinctly anti-nationalist and open to difference. This raises the question whether national boundaries actually become traversable in view of such a national imaginary. How does one become a Dutch subject if Dutchness entails not being nationalist? Through the analysis of a Dutch social policy practice – state-provided parenting courses – we show how dialogical Dutchness is negotiated and transformed in actual enactments of national difference and belonging. Although dialogical Dutchness foregrounds openness to difference and valorises discussion, it comes to perpetuate and substantiate boundaries between those who belong to the nation and those whose belonging is still in question.

KEYWORDS: Dutchness, imaginary, interpellation, parenting guidance, policy ethnography

Introduction

Across the European political landscape, renewed concerns with national identity have emerged, mainly in relation to the management of immigration and issues of access to national citizenship. Governments across Europe have confronted the complicated task of implementing policy measures aimed at strengthening national identification within populations. Although these developments take specific forms in different contexts, they are often described as a Europe-wide ‘backlash against multiculturalism’ (Alexander 2013; Joppke 2004). Indeed, the concerns with national identity often involve a

problematism of cultural difference. In these political discourses, a purported increase of cultural diversity, strongly but not exclusively associated with Islam and 'non-western cultures', is argued to necessitate a stronger, more coherent identification with and a demonstrable loyalty to the nation.

The Dutch context has been no exception to this European pattern (Slegers 2007; Van Ginkel 2006; Uitermark 2013). Although culturalist concerns over immigrant integration and national identity have a far longer genesis in Dutch politics (Duyvendak 2011; Prins 2004; Rath 1991; Schinkel 2013; Uitermark 2013; Van der Valk 2002), since 2002 in particular, succeeding governments have sought to reshape the identifications and cultural commitments of citizens and denizens alike (Van Reekum 2010). Such a politics is not merely concerned with a particular diagnosis of social problems – national cohesion strains under the pressure of cultural diversity – but must also devise ways of singling out what is, in fact, distinctive about 'the nation'. It is here that European contexts widely diverge. Specific policy measures and implementations may come to involve images and performances of nationhood that are specific to the situational settings in which policy practitioners come to interact with targeted populations (cf. Verkaaik 2010). Thus, while there may be a Europe-wide pattern in rhetoric of national reinvigoration, this general tendency may take divergent forms in actual policy practices (Van Reekum et al. 2012).

Since 2002, there have been a variety of attempts to reinvigorate Dutchness among the inhabitants of the Netherlands, from the construction of national history canons to a more pronounced deference to the grievances of 'native Dutch' in public politics (Kesic and Duyvendak 2010; Pels 2011; Suvarierol 2012; Van Houdt et al. 2011). Requirements for attaining Dutch citizenship have increasingly included a demonstration of national-cum-cultural adaptation and loyalty (Spijkerboer 2007; Verkaaik 2009; Vermeulen 2007). Parenting, and mothering in particular, has also become an area of intervention and nation-building (Van den Berg 2013). Measures to tackle social problems and problems of 'integration' (Schinkel 2010) have been developed in the field of parenting policy: local administrations are supported by the national government in implementing 'parenting guidance courses', 'early intervention programs' and mandatory 'family coaches'. This focus on mothering practices is consistent with many other forms of nation-building that have been employed at other times in history, when women – and especially mothers – have been held responsible for the reproduction of the nation, whether socially, biologically or demographically (Bonjour and De Hart 2013; Donzelot 1980 [1977]; Yuval-Davis 1997).

In this article, we focus on a particular policy case in which a specific *imaginary of Dutchness* is at stake. Already in 2001, the parenting course *Parenting with value(s)* (in Dutch: 'Waarde(n)vol opvoeden') was designed for parents, to reflect on values and norms in child upbringing.¹ The course is provided by social work agencies and other organisations in the field of social policy, and most often financed by the (local) government.

Public imaginaries of Dutchness²

By taking up the concept of *public imaginary* in relation to nationhood, we not only conceptualise nationalisms as practices of imagination (Anderson 2006 [1983]) but also seek to emphasise the importance of nationalisms for the institution of 'society' (Castoriadis 1998). Public imagination is of crucial significance because it allows for the emergence of simultaneity between otherwise indirect social relations. People can begin to imagine themselves within nationally shared pasts, presents and futures, with each member equally and immediately partaking in nationhood. As Calhoun argues, this categorical logic of nationhood distinguishes national community from other forms of sociality (Calhoun 2007). Furthermore, the imagination of national community plays a crucial role in the conception of social totalities. People make sense of their practical engagements through such imaginaries (Castoriadis 1998). How people come to imagine Dutchness directly impacts how they make sense of their engagements with others, as national differences are often hugely significant for how they see and come to act 'in society' (Schinkel 2013).

Public discourses on Dutchness thereby provide an empirical context for specifying what kinds of imaginaries are available and contextualise specific practices in which national belonging is at stake. These discourses articulate national difference by presenting particular traits, values or symbols as representative of national types. As Leerssen argues: rhetoric of national identity involves 'the conflation between the salient and the representative . . . Certain traits are singled out and foregrounded because they are typical in both senses of the term: they are held to be representative of the type, and they are unusual and remarkable' (Leerssen 2000: 283–4). By analysing a public imaginary, we thereby do not describe patterns of behaviour, norms or values (see for instance Benedict 2005 [1934]; Hofstede 1984). Rather, we describe the symbolic resources available to people in making and making sense of national boundaries within situational settings. Leerssen's analysis of national identity rhetoric demonstrates that any imaginary of nationhood can be unmasked by definition. However, this is not our aim; nor do we intend to argue that there is only one imaginary of Dutchness. Instead, we seek to show the performative effects, intended or not, of a particular imaginary of Dutchness in specific practices.

We investigate how a particular public imaginary of Dutchness translates into the design, pedagogical assumptions and practices of our policy case: practices of the 'Parenting with value(s)' course. In doing so, we link public imaginations of national distinctiveness to concrete policy practices in the urban context (cf. Verkaaik 2010). We ask how the symbolic resources of national imaginaries are linked to concrete practices of boundary-making (Zimmer 2003). The research questions that guide this article are:

1. How are the design and pedagogical assumptions of the parenting courses related to an imaginary of Dutchness?

2. Which performances of Dutchness become indicative of successful 'integration' into Dutch society in these parenting courses?
3. How are performances of Dutchness taught, learned and/or resisted?

Methodology

To address these questions, we draw from two empirical sources: (1) the course material and documentation used in guiding practices, and (2) ethnographic observations of the practices themselves. Ethnographic observations of actual practices allow us to describe which performances might become indicative of successful 'integration' and how such performances actually take place within the transactions between teachers and participants. Here, we will briefly discuss each empirical source and methods of analysis.

Content analysis of course material

We have analysed the course material and documentation used in the courses and in preparations by teachers and students. The course material for *Parenting with value(s)* was published in 2001. The course was designed by the agency Loopp, the National Association of Parental Aid and Pedagogical Prevention. It consists of two videotapes (that were not used in the ethnographic cases), a booklet with 'background information' for the professional (with articles by researchers and experts in the field), a booklet with a manual for parenting courses in general, a manual for this course in particular, some overhead sheets that can be used by professionals, plasticised cards for interactive methods and assignments, and some additional material in the form of leaflets.

We analysed the content of this material and focused on the definitions of societal problems, values, norms and the categorisations of target groups. In addition, we analysed the material on the underlying conceptions of how pedagogues should teach mothers about values and norms and, consecutively, how these should be taught by mothers to their children.

Ethnographic participation

The ethnographic material in this article was collected in 2010, in two concrete cases of the parenting course '*Parenting with value(s)*'. One of the authors of this article participated in a wide range of parenting courses for 14 months, in 2009 and 2010 in the city of Rotterdam (the second largest city in the Netherlands). The courses were organised by social work agencies, professional organisations for parenting advice and other municipal organisations (for a full account of methodology and cases, please see Van den Berg 2013). She went along with professionals in the policy field of pedagogical advice, participated in a series of parenting courses, and dropped in on organised debates

for mothers and separate meetings for discussing particular ‘themes’ (referred to as ‘themed meetings’). *Parenting with value(s)* is one of many courses for parenting education in the Netherlands. Such courses focus on a wide range of topics, including bullying, puberty and sex education (Van den Berg 2013). In the ethnographic research, special attention was given to negotiating particular meanings and interactions that took place between professionals that executed policies (in the form of parenting courses) and women that participated in the courses.

We were particularly interested in how ideas about Dutchness and particular imaginaries of Dutchness translated into concrete situations. In other words, we wanted to know how people performed Dutchness together. For our research objectives, ethnography was the most suitable methodological approach. Following the views of Willis and Trondman (2000), we understand ethnography quite broadly as a collection of research methods that involve ‘the disciplined and deliberate witness-cum-recording of human events’ (p. 5). The author who conducted the fieldwork consistently observed what was happening *between* mothers and teachers, and recorded these interactions in writing. Thus, unlike many ethnographers, we are not primarily interested in the lived experiences of the individuals participating in the practices, nor are we looking for their perspectives on the interactions or their everyday lives. Rather, we studied a range of moments, or situations, in which pedagogues encountered and confronted individual mothers who were impacted by these policies. Thus, the primary objects of this research are interactions in parenting guidance practices rather than the agents who participated in these practices. The ethnographer also interviewed 10 teachers and 7 managers of the organisations that provided parenting guidance and 12 mothers that participated in the programmes. Interviewing helped us study agents’ interpretations of what happened ‘in the room’. Nevertheless, the extensive ethnographic research forms the core of the data that is the basis of this paper.

Elementary schools and social work agencies in Rotterdam frequently work together to provide parent involvement programmes, which sometimes includes parenting courses. Typically, parenting courses are provided in what is called the ‘parent room’ of elementary schools. Many elementary schools in Rotterdam have this kind of special room for parents, which comprises part of their efforts to strengthen parent involvement. While parenting guidance practices were usually open to all parents with children attending the school, participants were almost exclusively mothers. These mothers’ children were usually aged between 4 and 12 because many of the courses were offered to parents at the elementary schools where their children attended school. Although mandatory parenting courses exist in the Netherlands, the majority of parents (and all parents contributing to the research for this article) participated in this form of social policy voluntarily. Most of these participants have a migration background. In the two cases that are analysed in this article, the teacher of the course is an HBO (higher vocational training) trained pedagogue, native Dutch and female. For this article, we refer to her as Anne.

In most cases in the ethnographic research, the teachers of parenting courses were pedagogues, hired for their expertise in child development and behaviour. The courses were provided in two elementary schools by the local social work agency that employed the teacher.

Dialogical Dutchness in public discourse

Throughout the last two centuries, Dutchness has been articulated in various ways (Leerssen 2006b; Van Ginkel 1999) for different reasons. From the late 1970s onwards, contention over immigrant integration became the context for increasingly intense debates on 'national identity' (Prins 2004; Van Reekum 2012). We argue that in these debates, a public imaginary of Dutchness became articulated that, along different lines, centred on dialogue as typical for what came to be understood as Dutch. Again, we are not suggesting that the dialogical – relationality of meanings and their interplay – actually became indicative of 'Dutch' conduct or social life. As the concept of public imaginary implies, practices and symbols that are associated with dialogue became hugely important for imagining the boundaries of Dutchness. As 'open deliberation', 'equal exchange', 'having a voice' and 'speaking out' became important in relation to a variety of contexts and issues – citizenship, gender and sex, religion, parenting, moral authority – the notion of dialogue captures the idealisation of free speech between equals and the management of dissensus and difference that became important for imagining 'Dutch society'.

It follows that *dialogical Dutchness* refers to a web of motifs evoked in public discourse – particularly from the 1970s onwards – in which the Dutch became articulated as a people that share a taste and an aptitude for open dialogue, egalitarianism, consensus seeking, pragmatic deliberation, democracy, tolerance, informal relationships, free speech, dissent and frank debate. In these articulations, problems of communal life appeared to be solvable through what in Dutch is referred to as 'bespreekbaar maken' (to open up for explicit deliberation and reflection) and 'benoemen' (to put sensitive or potentially divisive problems into words; to explicate instead of imply). The Dutch, according to this widespread discourse, find common ground and come to live with their differences through a continuous process of voice, negotiation, moderation and understanding. We will discuss some of the more salient threads in this web.

First of all, a motif about the Dutch being distinctively anti-nationalist emerged (Kloek 1993; Lechner 2007; Van Ginkel 1999; Van Reekum 2012). Nationalism, in this motif, implies that one does not speak for oneself, but allows one's ideas and commitments to be prescribed by an imposed, cultural script that is not one's own. In this way, a disdain for overly emphatic and unrestrained nationalism sets the Dutch apart (Beller and Leerssen 2007: 142–4). This narrative built upon already established notions of burgherlyness and pragmatism, prescribing a well-reasoned control over one's potentially overpowering emotions. The emphasis on self-mastery corresponds to

Leerssen's imagined topology of national affect across Europe, wherein calm composure and rational judgement of 'northerners' are contrasted with irresistible urges and the emotionality of 'southerners' (Leerssen 2006a).

Second, Dutchness became associated with an exceptional posttraditionalism, marking a moral superiority (Kennedy 1995; Mellink 2014). The Netherlands was even referred to as a 'gidsland', or a guiding country, as it was assumed to be at the forefront of global development and, thus, represented as an example for other, less advanced societies. The culture and politics of the United States provides the main point of contrast here. Compared with the United States, the Dutch acquired specific contours: as *not* dynamic, *not* aggressive and *not* nationalistic. Repressive, traditional or religious morality – particularly with regard to sexuality and pleasure – became the other of a posttraditional and liberalised image of Dutchness (see also Pels 2011). The autonomous individual at the heart of this narrative would no longer feel compelled to censor herself and stay quiet about societal taboos (Prins 2004; Verkaaik 2009). Being Dutch became associated with informal and egalitarian relationships between liberated individuals (Verkaaik 2009; cf. Kuipers 2013; Vuijsje and Wouters 1999). This was particularly applicable to relations between parents and children (cf. De Swaan 1982). Moreover, this image of Dutchness was increasingly used to judge whether others had become like the self-proclaimed moral majority (Duyvendak 2004; Mellink 2014).

Fourth, in opposition to the image of a pillarised society – comprised of clearly bounded, moral communities – a republican image emerged, envisioning a liberal moral majority and centring on the civic prerogative for expressing one's self freely, frankly and blasphemously against repressive communalism (Duyvendak 2004; Van der Veer 2002; Van Rooden 2004; Verkaaik 2009). In political debates on citizenship, the Dutch citizen was being articulated as an active, autonomous person who could make up her own mind about the moral and practical dilemmas of modern life (De Haan 1993; Zahn 1989). Political debate on citizenship was increasingly concerned with the emancipation and mobilisation of an all-too-docile electorate. The national citizenry needed to evolve from a docile population governed by responsible leaders into an active agent of self-governance engaging with public institutions (see also Bjornson 2012). Civic voice was increasingly prioritised, and the public manifestation of critique and dissent became more significant (Pels 2011).

It is no coincidence that the imaginary of dialogical Dutchness emerged alongside the political and public contention over immigration in the Netherlands. Here, dialogical Dutchness provides a scenario for assimilation (Schiffauer et al. 2004). Becoming Dutch came to be understood as the liberating passage from a substantive culture or a burdening tradition to a culture of individualism, typified by plurality, voice and freedom (Schinkel and Van Houdt 2010). In this scenario, it followed that the Dutch take pride in the absence of a substantial nationalist narrative and the accompanying liberal individualism. Furthermore, the process of becoming a native Dutch is an

intimate and self-reflexive emancipation from repressive moral authorities, granting one with the competence for autonomous self-control (Verkaaik 2009). The painful, yet liberating break with tradition and the self-assertive disdain for subservient behaviour thus becomes indicative of 'Dutch' conduct. Already, we can see how dialogical Dutchness not only provides a scenario for assimilation of newcomers, but also prescribes a specific notion of becoming a competent adult.

The course design

Strikingly, the course material is not primarily concerned with the everyday problems of parenting. 'Parenting with value(s)' instead focuses on broad societal problems in which parenting practices are embedded. The course is built around the abstract question of how to deal with freedom. Questions about how children can develop their *moral* capacities and become adults under circumstances of increasing liberty are central throughout the texts. Texts do not focus on the everyday problems that parents confront in raising their children. As is stated: 'The self-evidence with which values and norms were transmitted by former generations has disappeared. Values and norms are contested'. Furthermore, the problem of freedom is embedded in the particularity of Dutch history.

Dutch society is presented as one that has gone through and continues to go through rapid changes, and four of these transitions figure most prominently: loosening social bonds; individualisation; mediatisation; multiculturalisation. The texts stress how these changes contribute to the contestedness of values and norms. Crucially, modernisation is said to have brought on a secular, scientific culture that has unhinged the moral force of collectivist Christianity. This is held *a fortiori* for Dutch society, or so it is suggested in the background texts (which are provided to the professionals to prepare them for discussions with parents): 'Up to the 1970s 80% of the Dutch population assigned themselves to a religious community. Religion was the foundation of morality in our society'. As of the 1970s, Dutch society has changed, so it is argued: 'Morality which is derived from religion, like religion itself, has become primarily a personal matter'. Migrants, and especially Muslims, do not share this internalised, secular form of moral subjectivity, the text states: 'For Muslims this process of secularisation is not, or to far lesser extent, relevant . . .'

It is clear that embracing individual freedom and personalised morality are presented as distinctively Dutch products of social transformation. Yet, together with increasing personal freedom, the authors of the texts argue, comes the need for dialogue:

Due to these changes (and there are even more) there has emerged a wide-spread need to *reflect collectively* on and to become aware of values and norms that we subscribe to personally, but also those that we subscribe to collectively. And also: how do we deal with differences and differences of opinion? (italics added)

The differences of opinion that are deemed most relevant in the course material have to do with the differences between traditional and modern world-views, as is evident in the following excerpt:

Sometimes differences in values and norms of parents differ from the surrounding society. *Traditional* families (Dutch as well as allochthones³) who live in more or less tight-knit communities are confronted with the we-culture of the group and the I-culture of the school and society. (Italics added)

The texts thus conceptualise the problem of freedom in contemporary Dutch society as predominantly one of immigration and cultural difference. 'Traditional cultures' appear vis-à-vis 'the modernity of society' in a hierarchical dichotomy.

Maturity/modernity/rationality/science/Dutchness

According to the course texts, an advanced level of moral development in children and citizens is especially necessary in a 'multicultural society' because 'no tradition or philosophy is privileged'. The text goes on to state that this advanced level of moral development goes 'beyond' tradition, culture and community, and centres on 'universal rationality and universal validity'. These statements are based on a particular interpretation of Kohlberg's developmental model of moral reasoning in children (see Gilligan 1982 and Benhabib 1986 for critical evaluations of Kohlberg's model). In the contemporary context of the Dutch debates on multiculturalism and the 'integration of allochthonous children' into Dutch society, Kohlberg's model of six consecutive stages of moral development is adapted to a cultural hierarchy in which 'Western', and especially 'Dutch' culture is more morally developed than 'traditional', and particularly 'Islamic cultures'. In Kohlberg's model, an autonomous individual that acts in a morally conscious manner is in stage five or six of moral development. Kohlberg terms these stages 'postconventional', and in the texts accompanying the *Parenting with value(s)* course, these stage are considered especially developed in the Western world, more specifically in the Netherlands, and (even there) mostly after the 1960s.

Migrants are often brought up, so goes the narrative, in a 'traditional' culture 'where parenting traditions remained the same for a long time'. In the text that deals specifically with 'Islamic upbringing' (note that in the course texts, conceptual slippages occur from 'migrant' to 'allochthon' to 'Non-Western' to 'Islamic'), the author asserts that Muslims are often brought up in a 'traditional model', where 'obedience' and 'punishment' are considered of primary importance. Moreover, the author states:

This upbringing focuses on 'appearances' and 'adhering to the rules'. (. . .) a focus on the content, of why certain behaviour is favoured, is not functional and not necessary. It is about the obedience of children to the rules.

If we interpret this idea of an Islamic upbringing in Kohlberg's model of moral development, we can conclude that Muslims are presented as having lagged

Table 1. *Dichotomies of moral development*

<i>Authoritarian</i>	<i>Authoritative</i>
Pre-1960s	Post-1970s
Tradition Islamic	Modernity Western
Immigrant	Dutch natives
Preconventional	Postconventional
Toddlers	Adults

behind in the first stage: that of obedience and punishment. The moral development of Muslims is metaphorically considered to be lagging behind and in the stage of toddlers. Table 1 lists other dichotomies that are invoked in the texts accompanying the course and in the course material itself.

In the texts of the *Parenting with value(s)* course, it appears that the Dutch have experienced modernisation and have thus moved beyond the conventional stage of moral development into the postconventional adult stage. The Dutch (unlike ‘Muslims’, as is stressed repeatedly) appear as morally superior individuals that are able to make moral judgements as mature subjects and without external moral guidance.

The synchronisation of Dutchness, maturity, morality and modernity

In the course material, the upbringing of children and cultural adaptation to Dutchness become synchronised. The stages of development that Kohlberg distinguished in pedagogy become associated with the historical development of Dutch communal life, as it is articulated through the imaginary of dialogical Dutchness. Kohlberg’s model is used discursively in the materials to recount how and why the Dutch developed as a people that attained the moral competence to speak for themselves and to deliberate reflexively about moral problems. The Dutch are presented as mature and modern subjects that apply scientific knowledge – such as the Kohlberg model – to their parenting practices and – as a consequence – are morally advanced.

The meanings of Dutchness, maturity, morality and modernity become intertwined in these discursive movements. A step forward, in terms of pedagogical development, comes to equal society taking a step towards relieving itself of the heavy burden of collectivist rules and acquiring the reflexive tools offered by universal rationality. Adapting one’s pedagogical strategies and changing the upbringing of one’s children do not only make one a better parent, but *simultaneously* implies one’s integration into Dutch society. It is in this way that pedagogical theory and practice can become intertwined with the articulation of a national imaginary in the context of government policies. The course design and its basis in Kohlberg’s developmental model meshes with dialogical Dutchness to create a synchronised relationship between the

national-historical narrative of dialogical Dutchness and subjects' personal-biographical emancipation from conventional authoritarianism.

The teaching of consciousness and assertiveness offers a concrete example of the operationalisation of this synchronised relationship. What is deemed necessary for the 'modern,' moral education of today's children is a *heightened consciousness* of morality in parents, teachers and children. Careful to avoid an explicit prescription of moral values, the authors emphasise the importance of *talking about values* as the means for becoming conscious of the moral environment in which children grow up. In other words, values are, in fact, *something to talk about* as opposed to rules for obeying. In Dutch, this is called 'mondigheid'. 'Mondigheid' refers to assertiveness, independence and autonomy, but in a very specific way: '*Mondig*' (a word that translates literally to 'mouthy'; see Bjornson 2012 for an interesting analysis of the concept) refers to being able to *speak* one's mind and assert one's stake in a situation.

This assertiveness is bounded by 'respect'. In the course material, 'respect' is considered the 'core of all moral upbringing' and refers to the understanding that 'all individuals are valuable'. Yet the substantive meaning of respect remains implicit and for the reader to discover for herself. Respect curbs the imperative to speak out, but not in a clearly defined way. Again, there is a resonance between Dutch upbringing and dialogical Dutchness: a postconventional (and, thereby typically Dutch) subject is assumed to be capable of figuring out what respect means in any given situation. The limit that respect imposes on individual freedom should come from the individual herself, out of her own reflexive reasoning, and should not be derived from any authoritarian meaning of respect (e.g. 'respect your parents', 'respect the nation', 'respect the faith', 'respect your body'). Respect should be substantively empty. The community imagined in this way consists of morally developed and mature individualists who are capable of determining what respect means by their own reflexive devices. Respect is indicative of a community that is loyal to the idea that reflection and dialogue will, eventually, resolve moral dilemmas.

Performing dialogical Dutchness in situ

How does the synchronised relationship between Dutchness and parenting translate to the concrete policy practice of parenting guidance courses? How *does* one perform Dutchness if Dutchness is taken to be non-substantive and always up for discussion? How do the exercises of dialogue in the courses relate to questions of Dutchness? The remainder of this article is dedicated to answering these questions. We will analyse how teachers and students actually negotiate the imaginary of dialogical Dutchness *in situ*. More specifically, we show how mothers appropriate dialogical Dutchness: do they actually take up the scenario of assimilation implied in dialogical Dutchness, or do they find other ways of engaging in conversation?

As our question with regard to the actual policy practices pertains to the ways in which mothers respond to the demands and requirements embedded in the courses, we will use Althusser's concept of *interpellation* to interpret the ethnographic data. Althusser's (2008 [1971]) example of a police officer is helpful here. The officer in the street calls 'Hey, you there!' The individual that turns his head becomes, 'by this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion' (*ibid.*: 48), a subject and begins to act out a particular set of relations between himself and the police officer. This individual recognises the hail as addressing to him and assumes a particular subject position. Non-orthodox applications of Althusser's theories have proven to be very useful in contemporary feminist analyses of the production of subjects, particularly in policy practices (Adams and Padamsee 2001; Korteweg 2003). For example, Korteweg (2003) analysed practices of welfare policies in the United States through a theoretical framework of interpellation. She was thereby able to show how frontline bureaucrats generated subjects as worker-citizens, emphasising the moral duty to work for mothers.

Applied to the case of this article, individual mothers in the two courses are interpellated and, by recognising and responding to such interpellations in the interactions between them and the teacher, may begin to perform dialogical Dutchness and take up subject positions in view of its particular imaginary of societal 'integration'. The teacher's as well as the mothers' subjectivity is thus (re)constituted.

Liberal form as interpellation

Adams and Padamsee (2001) have argued that signs and symbols can become recruiting instruments for subjects in interactions. We will argue that in the parenting guidance courses, the recruiting instrument is the liberal and repetitive *form* of structured discussion itself. In this form, teachers prefer to perform a certain level of democracy and egalitarianism. Thus, the form of the course already stages interactions as an open dialogue between equals.

Anne, a native Dutch teacher and pedagogue in her forties, positioned herself as a peer of the mothers rather than beginning the morning in her role as an expert. She repeatedly reminded participants that everyone in the course was equal and 'all opinions matter'. One approach that Anne used was an activity-based exercise that involved seven plastic cards that were designed to prompt debate-style interactions. On each card, a specific value was written: 'cooperation', 'honesty', 'politeness', 'obedience', 'patience', 'neatness (order and hygiene)' and 'respect for everything and everyone around us'.

Anne asks us to divide ourselves into smaller groups of five participants, and discuss these values in order to be able to put them into a hierarchical order. Anne explains how everyone finds certain values important, but that those are not always the same as the values that others prioritize. Some people, she says, find honesty more important than politeness. And others find them all to be equally important. 'Which, of course, is OK too' (field notes).

Anne repeatedly stressed that as the teacher, she was not willing to act as the authority in the discussions, so she would not tell the group how to order the values. Instead, she asked us to discuss them in our groups. Anne stressed that we should welcome disagreement because this would form a good basis for discussion.

This is an example where Anne initiates a performance of dialogical Dutchness: she continuously stressed the importance of a discussion between equals, prioritising the quality of individual arguments about values and embracing points of disagreement. Using the cards and the smaller groups to facilitate a discussion on values, the women were asked to engage in debate, exchange arguments, reflect on 'what is important in life' and, above all, to talk. In the *act of talking*, of taking up the invitation to discuss, of practicing dialogue, they became involved in a performance of Dutchness.

There are certainly limits to the efficacy of these interpellations. In the end, not all mothers participated in the dialogues. In some cases, mothers withdrew from the discussion by actually leaving the classroom or by refraining from commenting, and thus not engaging in the activity. In addition, there was resistance. At times, mothers employed the repertoire of equality and dialogue to position themselves vis-à-vis the teacher. Surprisingly, in some instances, interpellation succeeded precisely *because* mothers resisted and disagreed. After all, participation in debate, exchanges of arguments and dialogues between equals are what dialogical Dutchness is all about. Dissenting and speaking out can be imagined as quintessentially Dutch. The following notes provide an example of an interaction in which such outspoken dissent became apparent:

In one group of women, there is hardly any discussion about the cards. As we return to our plenary meeting after the discussions in groups, some of the women make a joke as they call out to Anne: 'We chose these cards by a majority of votes!' (in Dutch: '*meeste stemmen gelden*'). This way, they explain the absence of conflict in the groups, which is what Anne has indicated that she was after. A smaller group of women make more jokes and say how they have agreed to meet each other outside after the class to have a fist fight about it (field notes).

First, the women used a decisively democratic discourse to respond to the interpellation of the teacher. They claimed that they had used the democratic approach of voting to reach a decision and, therefore, they did not need to have a structured discussion. In a way, they referred the teacher's liberal message back to her. They chose to engage Anne in an outspoken disagreement about the assignment, thus engaging her in the debate, instead of performing the debate that Anne had sought to instigate among the group. Second, the women emphasised their response by joking about having a fistfight about their disagreement instead of having a structured discussion. In this instance, they ironically talked about a violent, physical act that went against the dialogical assignment.

Nevertheless, these two acts cannot be interpreted as merely resistance. Instead, these examples can also be interpreted as effective interpellations of

dialogical Dutchness: the women *engaged in talk and discussion* with Anne about what was asked of them. The mothers negotiated Anne's plans and, through this negotiation, engaged in disagreement. Whatever the individual mothers or Anne intended, the end-products of these interactions were debate, disagreement and negotiation: all participated in a performance of dialogical Dutchness. Disagreements do not interrupt the course's pedagogical assumptions: discussion and reflection are precisely the point and were *coproduced in between* mothers and teacher.

In an interview, Anne spoke of the difficulty of engaging women in structured debate and her frustration with how some of the mothers behaved during the classes. Anne, and similar pedagogues that were interviewed for this research, understood their roles as government agents to 'empower' women and 'activate' groups of mothers that were otherwise considered 'inactive' (Cruikshank 1999; Van den Berg 2013). Anne's frustration had another source as well: she was uncomfortable with her authoritative role as a teacher. When the participants expected her to be a teacher – a figure of authority – she became uneasy. In her discomfort, Anne performed an ideal of anti-authority, of egalitarianism. Anne feels out of place when she is expected to be authoritarian, as she explained in an interview:

I feel so much like a teacher, you know, when I teach. I don't feel comfortable in that role at all. I would much rather just join the discussion, you know?

Even in a situation where she is, in fact, the teacher, Anne feels more comfortable when she considers herself to be an equal participant in the dialogue, first and foremost. She is, of course, not equal to the mothers in this situation. She is expected to teach and take up the subject-position of the teacher and to be a figure of authority. She wants to perform a paradoxical type of authority: egalitarian authority (Van den Berg 2013). Anne and other pedagogical professionals in this ethnographic research on the one hand affirmed equality to their clients, while on the other hand, and simultaneously, positioning themselves as experts. The complicated (if not impossible) task was to engage mothers in performances of Dutchness while maintaining their positions as figures of authority.

The mothers routinely recognised interpellations of dialogical Dutchness. While Anne put a lot of effort into relativising hierarchical boundaries, such boundaries were nonetheless drawn out in the interactions, and the participating mothers internalised these boundaries. Subjectivities are constituted in and take meaning from such interactions (McDowell et al. 2007). In their responses to our questions, the participating mothers indicated that they knew that the parenting courses were provided for them as 'non-Dutch' parent. They referred to problems of 'the integration in Dutch society' when the researcher inquired about why they thought they were asked to participate. Indeed, individual mothers understood themselves as 'non-Dutch' in the context of the course and in relation to the teachers (cf. McDowell et al. 2007; McDowell 2009). The parenting course was organised with an emphasis on open discus-

sion, yet there were still ways that national boundaries were performed and sustained. An imaginary of 'Dutch society' was thereby reiterated, and the mothers reflected on their positions in relation to this context.

A public imaginary of 'Dutch society' was reiterated by a woman who otherwise had trouble expressing herself in Dutch. She performed what was asked of her and, in that instant, articulated what it would mean to be part of this 'society', referring to the need for people with different backgrounds to live together in a multicultural society. Yet her expression was also an affirmation of a difference that is associated with the national boundaries that divide those who are undoubtedly 'Dutch' and those whose participation in 'society' is contested.

Conclusion: Dutchness as something to talk about

Dutchness today can be performed through the practice of dialogue and discussion. In this article, we have shown how this particular imaginary of Dutchness is not only found in public discourse, but in concrete policy practices that impact the everyday lives of urban populations. Particular performances, such as debates about values and norms and discussions about the problems of living together in a 'multicultural' society are processes through which some people can be identified as competently Dutch, while others are designated not-yet-Dutch. We have termed this particular and peculiar constellation *dialogical Dutchness*. Through the imagination and performance of the egalitarian and democratic discussion, 'the Dutch' are made visible, as are the 'non-Dutch' and the 'not-yet-Dutch'. Thereby, dialogical Dutchness provides a particular way of determining what it means to be a part of 'Dutch society'. Paradoxically, dialogical Dutchness is an imaginary of nationhood that communicates an anti-nationalist narrative. Dialogical Dutchness prescribes a rejection of substantive, national characterisations and is, rather, couched in notions of form and procedure. The focus is not directly on the 'what' of national belonging, but on 'how' belonging might be claimed.

Dialogical Dutchness ostensibly idealises difference and overt disagreement, while rejecting essentialist claims about national identity and distinction. A crucial part of this imaginary is precisely the notion that societal differences might be lived out and negotiated through dialogue and need not be homogenised. Yet such a move from rigid, exclusionary substance to a more flexible, amendable form is not easily performed. As became clear from our analysis of policy practices in which dialogical Dutchness was implicated, it may involve new ways of drawing quite explicit national boundaries that cannot be traversed effortlessly.

In the design and assumption of the parenting courses, the meaning of Dutchness, modernity, morality and maturity become intertwined. The rational-scientific methods of pedagogy are presented as particularly well performed by 'the Dutch'. In problematising the child rearing of immigrant families as 'traditional', the course materials clearly point out the historical

developments that are deemed eminently Dutch: secularism, autonomy, individualism and rationality. These markers of Dutch particularity are at once presented as historical and personal accomplishments. Dialogical Dutchness is thus not only a specific way of identifying a people, but also concerns a specific politics of time (cf. Butler 2008; Van den Berg forthcoming). Assimilation and modernisation are quite deliberately conflated. Consistently, their common denominator is the tendency to speak, use rational arguments, reflect and judge autonomously.

Even though we found resonances between a public imaginary of Dutchness and policy practices, this relation is not one of imprinting public images onto target populations. Dutchness is not imposed on or prescribed for mothers in actual policy practices. However, courses are staged, and the teachers shape their work in ways that interpellate mothers to engage in dialogue and discussion as a means to learn how one successfully raises children in 'Dutch society'. Teaching and performing Dutchness in this way do create tensions for both the teachers and the mothers participating in the courses. The teacher is constantly caught in a contradiction. On the one hand, she performs equality, deliberation and she wants to 'join in', yet on the other hand, she seeks to instil Dutch values of autonomy and feels it is her role to guide the mothers towards them. Moreover, the courses are first and foremost about abstract societal problems such as freedom, norms, values and morality. They only address everyday parenting problems as a by-product. An unintended consequence is the contradictory situation in which the teacher finds herself: she feels compelled to simultaneously enact authoritarian and egalitarian positions.

For the mothers, learning to parent through practices of dialogue is often exclusionary precisely because dialogical Dutchness involves scenarios of assimilation that are substantively vague and procedural. Some mothers respond to the interpellation and thereby become included in the performance, yet still in the form of initiation. Others do not recognise it, do not respond, become excluded from the performance of dialogue and, consequently, from the imagined nation. They are left on the opposite side of the cultural dichotomies that dialogical Dutchness produces. Yet even if mothers seek to resist the role of initiate, such dissent can re-affirm this role, as their confrontation with dialogical Dutchness may itself become a performance of it. In this way, the difference between 'us who are already in the know' and 'they who have yet to discover' is reproduced (cf. Schiffauer et al. 2004: 331–2).

While there may be a Europe-wide pattern of new assimilationist rhetoric in public politics, this article illustrates how such efforts of assimilation play out in ways that are particular to the political and practical context. In this article, we have demonstrated that enduring exclusion need not be understood as the effect of 'ethnic' and monistic modes of nationalism. The Dutch context shows how the problem of enduring exclusion is just as pressing for pluralistic imaginaries of nationhood. This reveals how imaginaries of nationhood enable inclusion and exclusion, irrespective of such distinctions. Only by scrutinising

the actual boundary drawing in particular practices, such as parenting guidance courses, is it possible to show how imaginaries of nationhood play out and are translated in contradictory ways.

Belonging to the nation has become increasingly politicised in recent decades, particularly after 2001. When a politics of cultural assimilation and national cohesion are given concrete form in policy practices, the complexity and ultimate impossibility of becoming 'truly Dutch' become apparent. On the one hand, dialogical Dutchness rejects any imposed demands of assimilation to the nation and imagines that 'societal integration' is only possible through an equal and open dialogue. On the other hand, the notion of dialogue is caught up in clearly articulated discourses about what is distinctly Dutch and what it means to be a competent citizen and, indeed, parent in 'Dutch society'. Reproduction of national difference happens *not because* teachers impose a hegemonic imagination of Dutchness, but precisely because such hierarchy remain ambiguous. An ostensibly inclusive and constructivist understanding of national identity – one that emphasises dialogue and difference – enables boundary drawing that nonetheless reproduce naturalised differences between the nation and newcomers (cf. Lægaard 2007). Indeed, these ways of drawing boundaries are legitimated with reference to liberality, openness and difference. Yet as we have been able to show, it is precisely such references that may sustain national boundaries, as they imaginatively project criteria for people's belonging that can be almost impossible to actually satisfy in practice, while they are, at once, hard to resist and even harder to contest.

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Notes

1 'Waarde(n)vol opvoeden'. Een themapakket voor bijeenkomsten met ouders van kinderen van 0-12 jaar over waarden en normen in de opvoeding. Velp: LOOPP. 2001.

2 This paragraph is based on an analysis of public discourse in specific arenas of public discussion – parliamentary debate, op-ed writing, commentary by public intellectuals and prominent public figures – that have been central to struggles over immigrant inclusion and national identity and governmental responsibility for successful integration. For a full account of this analysis, please see Van Reekum (2014). For the purposes of this article, we compose a recurrent imaginary of what might be, according to public interlocutors, distinctly Dutch, to then investigate how this imaginary translates to actual policy practices.

3 In public and administrative discourse, purportedly non-Dutch citizens and denizens are often referred to as 'allochthones', in contrast to an unquestioned Dutchness of 'autochthones'. Although these designations are often based on specific demographic criteria (see Yanow and Van

der Haar 2013), they form the basis for highly dubious distinctions between ‘integrated’ and ‘not-yet-integrated’ populations. Moreover, already before they were administratively defined, these terms were associated with racial and ethnic hierarchies in public discourse that stigmatised those deemed ‘allochthonous’ (Geschiere 2009).

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