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Overlapping and competing identities in the Nordic world: 1770 - 1919

van Gerven, T.W.J.

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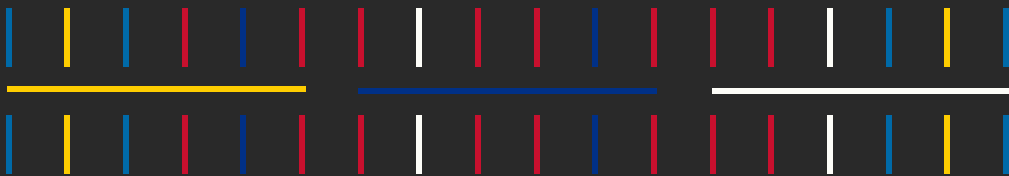
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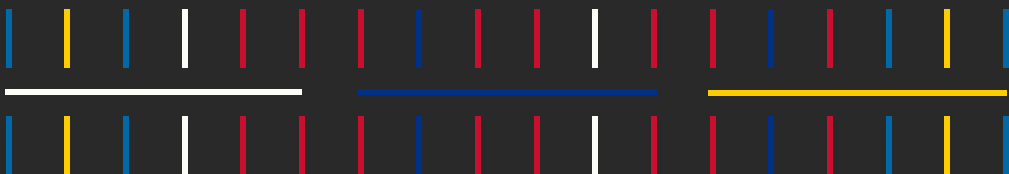
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SCANDINAVISM

OVERLAPPING AND COMPETING IDENTITIES
IN THE NORDIC WORLD

1770 – 1919



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ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,

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||| You know, if you've a friend that you trust well,
and from him want nothing but good:
share thoughts with him, and keep trading gifts,
go and visit often.

– *Hávamál*

(trans. Andy Orchard)

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The last four years I spent most of my days in the presence of dead Scandinavians. A significant chunk of the remainder of my time I had to dedicate to explaining people why in the world I would do such a thing. Why would studying the Scandinavian past be relevant for us here in the Netherlands now? And why would someone voluntarily occupy themselves with reading old and dusty books and basically write a very long MA thesis about it?

Well, here it goes. Two things. Firstly, I really enjoyed working on this thesis. I grew to love my dead Scandinavians and I consider myself privileged to have been able to earn my wages while doing something I really loved doing.

Secondly, and arguably way more importantly, the humanities are relevant, cultural history is relevant. Certainly in this day and age during which nationalism is on the rise again everywhere, playing into the hands of xenophobic demagogues and right-wing firebrands with questionable agendas, not in the least in the Netherlands, it is crucial to remind ourselves of a number of home-truths: that national identity is not genetic, not a fact of nature, that for the individual, their national identity is just one identity among many, many others, that national identity should never serve as a mechanism of exclusion, that homogeneous, monocultural nation-states have never existed and will never exist. The study of Scandinavism teaches us all this, and more. And this is why a study such as this one is, in fact, necessary: it provides today's heated debates on national identity with a dearly-needed historical context, which will hopefully contribute to stopping nationalist rhetoric from spinning out of control.

So, with all that off my chest, it is time to thank some people. A lot of people, in fact. Although writing a PhD thesis is largely a lonely affair, I am thankful that I could rely on the support and friendship of so many.

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