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Shifting lenses

Multiperspectivity and narratives of the Dutch past in secondary history education

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Publication date
2021

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Kropman, M. C. M. (2021). *Shifting lenses: Multiperspectivity and narratives of the Dutch past in secondary history education*.

Chapter 2

Small country, great ambitions. Students' narratives and shared knowledge of Dutch history[1]

INTRODUCTION

In the Netherlands, there are complaints and debates about the presumed lack of knowledge that students have after finishing formal education in history. It is frequently claimed that students do not know important persons, dates or historical events, especially about Dutch history. Recently, a canon of the Dutch History was defined and implemented in primary and secondary education to improve students' shared knowledge of Dutch history. Shared knowledge of Dutch history is considered important in the context of citizenship education and social cohesion (Wilschut, 2009; Van Boxtel & Grever, 2011). Although several historians acknowledged the function of shared historical knowledge, the canon was also critiqued; it could impose a master narrative of Dutch history on schools, could lead to processes of exclusion and counter the aim of teaching students to think and reason historically (e.g., Grever et al., 2006).

However, there is not a clear understanding of what students actually *do* know about history, especially about the history of the Netherlands, and about the narrative structures they use. This study aims to gain more insight into students' knowledge and narratives of the national past that they construct after completing secondary education. First, we will

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provide a description of national history in the Dutch curriculum, next we will discuss possible narratives about the Dutch past.

NATIONAL HISTORY IN THE DUTCH CURRICULUM

Acquiring chronological overview knowledge is an important goal in Dutch history education. Overview knowledge "enables students to situate phenomena and acts of people in the context of time, historical location, long-term developments, or particular events" (Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2012, p.114). In the Netherlands, a framework of overview knowledge consists of 10 clear-cut eras with associated labels, each of them carrying between three and six characteristics or key features (Van Drie et al., 2009; Wilschut, 2015), such as the spread of Christianity, the Protestant Reformation or the Great Depression. These features do not contain specific dates, events or persons. The idea behind the framework is that students can explain the key features with specific examples and situate given examples in time using their knowledge of the key features. Dutch history is part of this general frame of reference. However, out of the list of 49 characteristic features connected to the ten eras, only three explicitly refer to Dutch history: the Dutch Revolt (16th century), the Golden Age and the Dutch Republic (17th century) and Occupation during World War II (1940-1945).

In addition to this frame of reference, there is the canon of Dutch history, which has a semi-official status in primary education and the first three years of secondary education. This canon consists of fifty so called "windows" which are defined by specific events, persons or themes.[1]

The semi-official status implies that the 50 items from the canon do not have to be explicitly taught and learned, but they should be used to illustrate key features of the framework of 10 eras. For example, when teaching the key feature the "spread of Christianity" in the era of Monks and Knights (500-1000), teachers can use the canon item about "Willibrord," an English missionary who built a church in Utrecht and

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[1] See www.entoen.nu for an English version of the Dutch canon.

tried to convert the Frisians. In Dutch history textbooks events and persons from the national past are mostly embedded in European history topics. Only a few chapters are completely, or for a significant part, devoted to Dutch history. Textbooks hardly discuss long term developments across eras. For example, in one of the more popular textbooks (*Memo. Geschiedenis voor de Tweede Fase (havo)*, Second edition (2003)) three chapters are dedicated to Dutch history, which is approximately 30% of the entire textbook.

After the first two years in prevocational secondary education or three years in general secondary education, students can opt for history as a subject for two to three additional years. In upper secondary education, the 10 eras are taught. Teachers are not required to teach the canon at this level. Dutch topics, however, are included in the national history examinations, which have alternating topics every two year. Typical topics on Dutch history in the last five years were:

> - The Republic in the Era of Monarchs (Examination 2012);
> - Dynamics and stagnation in the Republic (Examinations 2009, 2010 and 2011);
> - The colonial relationship between the Netherlands and Netherlands East Indies (Examinations 2007 and 2008);
> - From child to citizen. Educating people through schooling in the Netherlands (1780 – 1901) (Examinations 2006 and 2007).

As a result of this selection of topics, in the last years of secondary education, students have been taught in depth about a particular topic in Dutch history. Starting from 2015, the examinations will no longer be devoted to annually changing topics, but to outline knowledge about the ten eras and three or four so-called "historical contexts," one of which is "The Dutch Republic 1515-1648" (see Wilschut, 2015).

To conclude, in the Netherlands, national history does not dominate the history curriculum. It is mostly embedded in a broader (European) framework and partly in typical Dutch themes. We do not know the narratives students connect to events and persons from Dutch history, nor do we know what type of knowledge they possess on topics, persons and events in Dutch history (Wilschut, 2010).

STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE AND NARRATIVES

Several scholars in different countries investigated students' knowledge and ideas about national history. These studies showed that students' knowledge is fragmentary and poor (e.g., Hess, 2009; Lee & Howson, 2009; McKeown & Beck, 1994), that students tend to reproduce so called grand narratives (e.g., Barton & Levstik, 2004; Carretero et al., 2012) and that students from different backgrounds attribute historical significance to different events and persons (e.g., Epstein, 2000; Peck, 2009). To date, these types of studies have not been conducted in the Netherlands. Grever et al. (2008) investigated English and Dutch students' ideas about which history was of interest to them, what history should be taught in schools, and their views on the purposes of school history. In this study, Dutch students appeared to be especially interested in the history of antiquity and contemporary history (post 1945). Students with an ethnic minority background considered the history of the Netherlands less important than students with al long family history in the Netherlands. However, students' knowledge was not investigated in this study.

Several researchers have noted the role of schematic narrative templates (Carretero et al., 2012; Levstik, 2000; Peck, 2010; Wertsch, 2008). Characteristic for such templates is that different narratives about the nation-state show the same basic structure that shapes the image of the past. These narratives function as cultural tools to shape representations of the past (Wertsch, 1998). The template merges episodic and configurative dimensions in collective memory and supports identity formation (Grever, 2006). Carretero et al. (2012) mention six main characteristics of schematic narrative templates in relation to the concept of a nation. First, they reflect mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Positive aspects of the past are assigned to "we," and negative aspects to "others." An example of we in the Dutch past are the *geuzen* (beggars), who fought against the foreign duke of Alva during the 16th-century Dutch Revolt. An example of others are the collaborators with Nazi Germany during the occupation of the Netherlands. Second, a template also offers identification possibilities as both cognitive and affective anchors that help to form the concept of nation, for example, the festivities during Kings Day in the Netherlands (the official celebration of the king's birthday). Third, Carretero et al. mention the presence or absence of mythical or heroic characters and motives. In Dutch history,

prince William of Orange, admiral Michiel de Ruyter, or the Jewish girl Anne Frank are candidates that spring into mind.

A fourth feature is the search for freedom or territory as a characteristic theme. The Dutch Revolt, the Napoleonic era, the Dutch colonial empire, the Second World War and the German occupation are feasible episodes that illustrate this feature in the Netherlands. Fifth, a master narrative contains moral orientations that help to justify the use of violence. Finally, a characteristic feature is the view of the nation and the nationals as pre-existing political entities. The Dutch Revolt as the origin of the Dutch nation-state is an example of this type of essentialist thinking.

There are several studies that shed light on narrative templates and narratives present in different countries. Wertsch (2012) describes the story line "expulsion-of-alien-enemies" for the Russian community. This story line starts with a peaceful situation. Then, Russia is attacked by a foreign enemy, and against all odds, Russia succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy through heroism and exceptionalism. In the United States, Barton (2012b) describes the basic template as "people seeking freedom from oppression, progressively solving a variety of social and technological problems, and always doing what is right" (p. 95). Elements of a "narrative of freedom and progress" have been found in student essays on the origins of the United States, also with upper elementary school students (Barton & Levstik, 2004; VanSledright, 2008). VanSledright remarks that although students generate the same type of story about the history of the United States, this narrative does not have much historical substance because students have difficulties with remembering facts and dates. Carretero et al. (2012) interviewed Spanish university students about the *Reconquista* and showed that most of them constructed a narrative about a nationalist notion of the concept of the Spanish nation and nearly half of them explicitly identified with the national group using the first-person plural. Peck (2010) investigated the narratives students in Canada constructed about the Canadian past. She found three types of narratives: the "founding of the Nation" narrative (of the first inhabitants of Canada and the events that built the country), the "diverse and harmonious Canada" narrative (overcoming prejudice and discrimination to establish a multicultural, multinational Canadian identity) and a "diverse but conflicted Canada" narrative (recounting the history of multiculturalism with an explicit focus on conflicts and

tensions). Finally, Lee and Howson (2009), based on interviews with students and accounts that students wrote about British history, showed that students had difficulties with producing a coherent story of British history; most responses dealt with events, not states of affairs nor long-term developments.

IS THERE A DUTCH NARRATIVE TEMPLATE?

The above scenario raises the question whether there is a Dutch narrative template, and, if so, what it looks like. The debate about the implementation of the Dutch canon in history education - which started in 2005 when the Council of Education took the initiative to formulate a Dutch canon - provides an opportunity to inform us about the question of whether there is a Dutch narrative template. Participating in this debate, several historians have discussed narratives that are embraced in Dutch society. Certainly, defining a canon is a way in which the nation state can express collective memory and historical consciousness. The renewed public interest in national history has not been unique for the Netherlands but is apparent in a variety of countries, such as the United States, England and Germany (Kennedy, 2006; Wilschut 2009). The historian Kennedy (2006), however, has expressed his amazement that the discussions about the canon in the Netherlands have been relatively quiet:

> Not by being effusive patriots, or by being uncritical defenders of Western Civilization, or by proponents of Dutch national identity, *but in their confidence that there is a more or less self-evident national history, with a more or less self-evident national heritage*. (p.101) (emphasis added, MK).

From the second part of this quotation, we can conclude that Kennedy confirms the presence of a narrative template. The historian Jonker (2006) stated it more firmly, arguing that professional public historians organise Dutch history according to two main lines:

In all representations the emphasis is on the second era, that of the 16th and 17th century, the combination of the Revolt, the Golden Century and the Republic. A second best is the 19th century, a period that is believed to structure the Netherlands of today. The 19th century is like a second beginning with, as a more or less 'logical' outcome, the current welfare state. (p. 24, translated from Dutch)

For Jonker, two features stand out under the heading of the metaphor *Nederland - polderland* (The Netherlands - country of polders). First, there is what Jonker calls the "song of water and dikes" and second – closely related – "the saga of deliberation and cooperation, or middle-class mentality and pragmatism, and of democracy and tolerance." The fight against the sea, to protect against flooding, and the need to trade resulted in a consultation culture that was consecutively threatened by the Spanish sovereign, the French, and the German occupiers. Without discussing the configurational dimensions, Jonker defines episodic dimensions of the schematic narrative template as it appears in the canon debate. In the same book, Grever (2006), referring to Wertsch's 2004 publication, suggests a template with the metaphor "a small country bravely fighting for its freedoms." Several narratives fit into this template, such as narratives about the Dutch Revolt, the fight against water, resistance in the Second World War and the Netherlands as a "guiding" nation. To summarize, two narrative templates for Dutch history might be present. The first one is "a small country bravely fighting for its freedoms" and the other one, based upon the analysis of Jonker, can be formulated as "Nederland-Polderland."

AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTION

To date, there have been no studies in the Netherlands that give insight into students' knowledge of Dutch history and the narratives they use. The study that we report on in this chapter, will explore the knowledge and narratives that students have regarding Dutch history after secondary education. Of course, students' knowledge and narratives are not the outcome of history education alone. There is a strong influence of

popular historical culture, parents and leisure activities (Seixas, 1993; Wineburg et al., 2007). We asked prospective teachers, who had just finished secondary education, to write an essay on the main lines of Dutch history. We were interested in the historical actors, dates and periods, events and developments they mentioned, as well as in the narratives they constructed. The main research question that will guide this study is: Which narratives and knowledge of the national past do students construct after finishing secondary education?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

This study was conducted with 26 freshmen enrolled in history teacher training at the University of Applied Sciences of Amsterdam. Although it can be assumed that these students had a special interest in history and were more knowledgeable about it than graduates from secondary schools in general, it should also be noted that approximately half of the students starting their training as history teachers quit within the first year. The students were seventeen to twenty-six years old, seventeen males and nine females. This distribution of 65% males and 35% females is not uncommon for the student population at the start of the history teacher training. These students participated in our research right at the beginning of their teacher training, meaning just after they had finished secondary education. Most students (20) finished havo (the intermediate stream in secondary education preparing for higher professional education), four students graduated from vwo (preparing for university studies), and two graduated from secondary vocational education. Seventeen students studied the topic "Dynamic and stagnation in the Dutch Republic" or the topic "The colonial relation between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies" for their national examinations. The students' essays may reflect the knowledge they acquired as a result of studying these topics for their examinations. Four participants had not participated in national history examinations.

In a questionnaire (see Appendix A, adapted from Peck [2009]), students were asked about their social-cultural background. All participating students had Dutch nationality. Most students were born

and raised in the Netherlands. In one case only, both parents of a student were born outside the Netherlands. For five of the students, one of their parents was born outside of the Netherlands. Three of these parents came from Curaçao, a former Dutch colony in the Caribbean. A closer look at where these students were raised shows that three of them were raised in Amsterdam and finished their secondary education there, while two students were raised in one of the suburbs of Amsterdam. The vast majority of the participating students grew up in small and medium sized towns in different regions in the Netherlands.

On the question about religious affiliation, two students gave a positive answer (Mormon and Catholic). One of the students did not answer this question. Two of the students viewed themselves as atheists. We asked the students to define their own identity. Two students did not answer this question, one of the students defined his identity from his Caribbean background. In addition to sparse references (three) to belonging to a youth subculture (clothing and leisure), most of the students defined themselves as Dutch. The students that had one parent born outside the Netherlands defined themselves, with one exception (he felt American), as being a Dutch person.

At the end of the term, eleven of the participating students passed their exams. Eight of them continued their study in the second year at the University of Applied Sciences, three moved on to the university at an academic level. The fifteen other students quit the teacher training during their first year.

Data collection

During the first four weeks (2011) of their teacher training program, the students participated in a writing course. At the beginning of this course, the students were asked to complete a three-part task consisting of the following order: (a) create a mind map, (b) write an essay, and (c) answer a questionnaire. The total amount of time allotted for all three tasks was 1,5 hours. We introduced the task as an exercise in fostering their skills in writing about history. All students voluntarily agreed to participate.

First, the students were asked to make a mind map of the history of the Netherlands after 1500 AD (see Appendix A). Two examples of mind maps outside the domain of history were presented to them. The mind

map was intended to activate students' knowledge of Dutch history before they began to write; however, no explicit instruction was given on how to use the mind map during the writing process.

Second, students were asked to write an essay. The prompt was the following: What are the main lines of Dutch history after 1500 AD? And why? (see Appendix B). In addition, they were asked to give their essay an appropriate title. No minimum or maximum number of words was given. There was no instruction on what the requirements were for an essay on Dutch history. We chose 1500 AD as a starting date to give the students a common starting point. Two considerations for the choice of this particular year had been as follows: (a) it is a round year, five hundred years ago, without a very specific meaning in Dutch history, and it was not the starting point for a particular development, such as 1648, 1789 or 1848 could have been; and (b) the Dutch curriculum focuses on the last five hundred years, with six of the ten eras devoted to this period (Wilschut, 2015). The prompt asked students to write about the main lines, therefore, we did not expect a detailed recount of Dutch history. Although we are aware of the fact that "main lines" and the year 1500 AD may have triggered students telling a story of the Dutch nation, we used both terms as rather neutral terms. This gave the students the option to write a story with main characters and a plot, but not necessarily so.

Lastly, the students completed a questionnaire on their social background (see Appendix A).

DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the main focus will be on the analysis of the essays. The mind maps were used to corroborate the findings from our analysis of the essays. Students possibly mentioned particular events, persons or topics in their mind map but not in their essay, because they lost concentration and wanted to finish the task. One student was excluded from the sample for not writing an essay at all, which resulted in a total sample of 25 essays. The word length of the essays varied between 124 and 453, with a mean length of 291.6 words.

The analysis consisted of two steps. First, we analysed the essays in terms of the historical actors, dates and periods, events and developments that they referenced. These categories were chosen

because they form the building blocks of a narrative. For the coding of which historical actors were included in the essays, we built upon the work of Peck et al. (2011). Historical actors could be individual people (e.g., Napoleon), collectivities (e.g., women, Jews), corporate bodies (e.g., the VOC, a labor union) and nations. Next, we looked at the dates and periods students included. Based upon a first screening of the data, we defined the following periods: the 16th century, the 17th century, the 18th century, the 19th century, and the 20th century. For the 20th century, we made a distinction between the period before the Second World War, the Second World War itself (1939-1945) and the postwar period. Finally, we looked at the events and developments that were included, for example: the Dutch Revolt or industrialisation.

In the second step, we used this analysis to look for indicators of the two narrative templates suggested by Jonker and Grever and explored whether other templates might be present. The historical content that figured in the students' writing formed, in one way or another, always a necessary ingredient of a possible narrative.

The essays were coded with Atlas.ti. Coding was performed on the sentence level or on phrases when punctuation or sentence structure were lacking. This resulted in 675 quotations linked to 290 codes.

Results

First, we present the results of our analysis regarding the knowledge that can be found in the essays: (a) historical agents; (b) dates, periods and centuries; (c) events and developments. Next, with regard to our second question, we describe which periods (and particular dates) are paid attention to and the extent to which they fit the two potential narratives.

Historical knowledge

Historical Agents
Table 1 summarizes the number and types of historical agents and periods mentioned in the essays (N = 25). Collectivities as a type of historical agent were most frequently used (33%), followed by corporate bodies (26%), nations (26%) and individuals (15%). The historical agents

Table 1

Number and Types of Historical Agents per Period Mentioned in the Essays (N =25)

	Individual	Collectivity	Corporate body	Nation	Total	*Total %*
16th century	9	5	14	6	34	*16%*
17th century	8	14	36	19	77	*35%*
18th century	3	3	4	2	12	*6%*
19th century	5	24	3	11	43	*20%*
20th century Before WO II:	1	5	0	0	6	*3%*
20th century WO II:	4	9	0	14	27	*12%*
20th century After WO II:	2	12	0	5	19	*9%*
Total	32	72	57	57	218	*100%*
Total %	*15%*	*33%*	*26%*	*26%*	*100%*	

were unevenly distributed over the centuries. Two centuries stand out: the 17th and 20th century, with, respectively, 35% and 24% of the different

types of historical agents represented in the essays of the students. Corporate bodies formed the main type of historical agents (47%) in the 17th century, as was also the case in the 16th century (41%). In the 19th century, collectivities (55%) were the main historical agents. Collectivities were the historical agent in 26% of the cases in the 20th century. Not more than 32 individuals were mentioned by name in the essays. Five students (20%) used no historical personages at all in their essays. The individuals mentioned most often were: Napoleon (16), William of Orange (11), Philip II (10), Thorbecke (the Dutch politician who implemented the liberal constitution of 1848) (6), and King William I (6). Among the individuals mentioned only once or twice were Anne Frank, Calvin, Vincent van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn. Most of the persons mentioned belonged to the history of the Dutch Revolt and the Golden Age.

Others such as painters, women and Nazi's were used by two thirds of the students. In the descriptions of the 17th century, eight out of 14 of the collectivities mentioned belonged to the cultural domain, such as philosophers, artists or painters. In contrast, the collectivities of the 19th century were mainly men and women and other social categories. Only two belonged to the political domain: socialists and confessionalists. Students used these collectivities in relation to the effects of industrialisation and in relation to the struggle for general suffrage. The relatively high score for the post war period is due to one female student, who used eight collectivities in this part of her essay, none of which were used by the other students. If we look at the differences between male and female students, we see that four essays of the male students (out of 17) make reference to the role of women in history, whereas six female students (out of eight) explicitly mentioned the struggle for women's voting rights or their position in society.

Most of the corporate bodies were used in the descriptions of the 16th and 17th century. For the 16th century, students used corporate bodies in their essays primarily to describe the Dutch Revolt. They referred to the Republic and the "seven provinces" as operating authorities. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the West India Company (WIC) acted as the most important agents in the 17th century and were mentioned by 36% of the students. The Republic was mentioned by 32% of the students. In the later periods, there are no common denominators for the corporate bodies used by the students.

Nations as agents in history (The Netherlands not included) were used to describe adversaries and potential threats of Dutch independence or economic growth. Only the allied forces during World War II and groups of immigrants from the former colonies were given a positive or neutral role in history. Germany figured in 32% of the essays as occupying agent during World War II.

Dates, periods and centuries
In the essays, the students used a wide range of dates, centuries, and periods to describe the main lines in Dutch history. In addition to the given year of 1500 AD, the students mentioned a specific year 46 times, divided over 25 different dates. Ten of those 46 belonged to the 17th century. Most frequently, the year 1672 appeared in the essays (6 out of 25). The year 1672 is known as in Dutch history as the Disaster Year, because the Republic was attacked simultaneously by England, France and two German states. Other dates that were frequently mentioned were: 1940 (20%) the beginning of the Occupation or World War II (sic)), 1945 (16%), 1602 (the founding of the VOC) (16%); and 1848, the first liberal constitution.

Twelve students made reference to a century (22 times total), with no specific century standing out. When looking at how students referred to different periods, the 17th century was most frequently alluded to in terms of the Golden Age, followed by World War II. The latter accentuated the term Occupation to describe this period.

Events and developments
Events mentioned belonged to the origins of the Dutch Revolt and the Dutch Republic (20% of the essays), the Disaster Year (28%), the constitution of 1848 (24%), the Occupation (20%), and Napoleon occupation the Netherlands (16%). With respect to developments, the students referred to two main developments: the struggle for independence in the 16th century (the Dutch Revolt) (24%), and the economic growth during the 17th century (28%). In a few essays,

industrialization, emancipation, pillarization[1] and democratization were mentioned, as well as decolonization and the growth of the welfare state. One of the students used all these developments to describe the main lines of Dutch history (MM25).[2]

When summarising, these results, we can conclude that in the essays the focus was upon the 17th century, followed by the turn of the 18th to 19th century and the period of World War II.

In the 16th century, the emphasis was on the second half of the period. The 18th century was, with the exception of the last decade, almost void of any event, development or historical agent mentioned by the students.

NARRATIVES

In this section we describe for every century how the narratives as indicated by Grever and Jonker are present in the essays of the students.

16th and 17th Century: Republic and Golden Age
If we apply the two templates identified before ("a small country bravely fighting for its freedoms" and "Nederland Polderland") to the 16th century, they consist of the stories of the Dutch Revolt and the struggle for religious freedom and political sovereignty and the struggle against the perils at and of the sea. For the 17th century, they refer to economic growth and political independence as effects of free trade and cooperation between the Dutch provinces and the VOC directed against outsiders such as the Portuguese and Spanish, and later on the English and French.

Students wrote in a variety of ways about the 16th and 17th centuries. Some students provided a brief description, while others gave a more detailed description of events or developments. Only a few students did

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[1] Pillarization in the Netherlands means the division of society in all its aspects (political, social, economic, cultural, even in sports and healthcare) along religious terms.
[2] Essays and mind maps were numbered per student. In the following, we refer tot mind maps as MM and to essays as E.

not pay any attention to the Dutch Revolt or the Republic.[1] A typical story about the Dutch Revolt and the Dutch Republic was told by Uulkje[2]:

> In 1577 <crossed out> the ruler was deposed with the *Acte van Verlatinge* (Act of Abandonment), this was the beginning of the Republic of Seven United Netherlands and Dutch prosperity with the VOC and the WIC went on until 1672, the year of disaster. (E6)

The Dutch Revolt was described in political-religious or/and political-military terms, whereas the story of the Republic was described primarily as an economic success story. The international context of the history of the Dutch Revolt and the Dutch Republic remained mainly out of sight, with the exception of the Disaster Year 1672. The impression is given that the economic growth of the Republic during the Golden Age was only due to the effort of the Netherlands. The use of terms such as Republic, VOC and Golden Age was common.

In nine essays, students paid attention to the "mother trade" to the Baltic, the Fall of Antwerp, Amsterdam as a staple market and the Disaster Year 1672. These events and phenomena figured prominently in the national examinations these students had taken. The topic of these examinations was *Dynamics and stagnation in the Republic.* None of the students who had not studied this examination topic referred to these specific events and phenomena.

The template "small country bravely fighting for its freedom" was reflected in students' essays in the sense that many of them wrote about the Dutch Revolt and some of them explicitly mentioned the fight for religious freedom. However, five students only used words that reflected the idea of a "brave small country" in relation to the economic expansion of the Netherlands.

When applying Jonker's narrative template for the 16th and 17th

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[1] E13, E15. Both students apologize for not knowing much about the history of the Netherlands. Both include the VOC in their mind map.
[2] The names of the students are pseudonyms.

century to the essays, we see that the essay narratives represented primarily the gaining of sovereignty from the Spanish and the economic and cultural growth of the Netherlands during the Golden Age. Students did not make a connection between the necessity of cooperation to fight against the sea or foreign powers, and the economic growth of the Republic. Summarising, it seems that the writings of the students were in line with the narrative template Jonker described, but without cooperation as the moving factor in Dutch history.

18th Century: Patriots, Batavian Revolution and Napoleon
Jonker and Grever were silent about the 18th century. Jonker only stated that the occupying French at the end of the 18th century had been an archenemy of the consultative culture in the Netherlands, as were the Spanish before or the Germans later on in the 20th century. In the narrative template described by Jonker, Dutch history got a 'second start' after Waterloo.

In the essays, the 18th century was the period that was paid least attention to. In three essays, there were some remarks about economic stagnation after the Golden Age. Most attention was paid to the end of the century. In two essays, more than a few words were devoted to this period. Olga wrote:

> As a result of the rise of the Enlightenment, revolutions started. The patriotic revolution was suppressed in the Republic, but the Batavian revolution succeeded. The stadtholder fled and the Republic was now called [the] Batavian Republic.
> In 1813, the Batavian Republic came under the government of Napoleon. In 1815, this French era ended and the Oranges came back. William I made himself king of the Netherlands. (E4)

All other essays were more concise about the 18th century, which was reduced to some allusions to the Batavian Revolution and the conquest of the Netherlands by Napoleon. What was at stake during this revolution was left out of consideration. Napoleon's deeds were reduced to claiming the throne of his brother Louis Napoleon, the introduction of surnames and the origin of the Kingdom of the Netherlands after the demise of the

French. Eleven of the students made remarks about this episode in Dutch history. All of these students participated in the national history examinations between 2008 and 2011. They all mentioned Napoleon, six of them also mentioned the Batavian Revolution and the Patriots.

For most of the students, this episode in Dutch history did not belong to the main lines of development. However, of the 32 individuals who figured in the essays, Napoleon was the most frequently named historical agent, even more frequent than William of Orange. A narrative of occupation, resistance, and liberation, as was embraced in the description of the period of 1940-1945, was lacking in the description of the "French Era." The actions of the French – in as much as they were present in the essays – were judged neutrally or positively, with the Netherlands floating with the international tide.

The lack of interest in the 18th century in the essays is consistent with Jonker's narrative template. According to Jonker, Dutch history got a new start in the 19th century with the origin of the nation-state of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

19th Century: Kingdom of the Netherlands

Jonker's 'second start' of Dutch history in the 19th century resulted in the modern welfare state of the 20th century. It is a narrative in which socio-economic developments went together with political-constitutional developments. The industrialization coincided with a desire for democratization. We analysed to what extent this narrative of the 19th century was present in the essays.

Sixty percent of the students spent a few words or lines on developments in the 19th century or early 20th century. Olga wrote more extensively:

> In 1848 William II felt obliged to rewrite the Dutch constitution, so that he would not been deposed. The constitution was liberalized, which implied more democracy. Constitutional statute.
> Since 1900 the industrialization got going in the Netherlands. Because there were many problems with laborers, the social issue arose. At the same time political parties were founded. This was the consequence of democratization and the expansion of the

right to vote.
These political parties disagreed on how to approach the social
issue, which resulted in an immense pillarization. (E4)

Olga is one of the four students who described both developments
present in the template. All the other students limited themselves to the
expansion of political participation, in which the constitution of 1848 and
the struggle for universal suffrage were the most important themes.

Although 60% of the students paid some attention to this "second
start" in Dutch history, their story was mainly a story of more political
participation. Most students did make connections between social-
economic developments and political-constitutional developments. None
of the students made a connection between this 'second start' of Dutch
history and the coming of the modern welfare state, although the social
issue was phrased in terms of the development of the welfare state at the
beginning of the 20th century, which will become clearer as we discuss
the writings about the 20th century.

20th Century: German occupation
Jonker (2006) saw the years of German occupation in the same light as
the Dutch Revolt or the French period. It was a rather short period of
foreign invasion that formed a threat to the consultative culture in the
Netherlands and in the narrative of the "second start" it formed a break
in the development toward a modern welfare state.

In the essays, World War II and the years of occupation were
frequently mentioned by the students. More than two thirds of the
students paid attention to this episode in Dutch history. Shirley wrote
one of the longer passages:

However, during WW II Germany occupied the Netherlands. The
Jews were persecuted by the Nazis and murdered. People went
underground and became members of the resistance. At the end
of WW II, the Netherlands were liberated by the allied forces.
(E24)

In most essays, the students were rather neutral in their description of these years. Dolf, however, was more explicit about the meaning of the Occupation:

> The Second World War came over us, but we did not give up and the Netherlands are so characteristic in their resistance during this same war. Could it be a coincidence that the oh so well known diary, a symbol of Dutch identity, comes from the Netherlands? I don't think so. (E26)

This interpretation is more in line with the template suggested by Grever. This student used "we," whereas hardly any student used the first-person plural. One other student used the first-person plural in relation to the Occupation. A minority of 32% of the students refrained from describing World War II or the Occupation. There was, however, no discrepancy in the length of their essays compared with the essays of the other students. In these students' essays, the accent was on the Dutch Revolt or the Golden Age.

Applying Jonker's narrative to this period in the students' essays, it is apparent that this episode is described more in neutral terms of "a foreign invader" than as "a threat to Nederland – Polderland." Students did not connect World War II to the growth of the welfare state. It seems that there was no continuity in the Dutch history in the essays, as implied in Jonker's story about the 'second start'.

20th Century: the Netherlands after World War II

Only Agnes wrote extensively about the last 65 years:

> The country has to recover from the damage. Depillarization took place. Youngsters revolted against their parents and took a stand against the older generation. Sex, drugs and rock & roll are important. People strive for world peace and don't want war anymore. The modern time of computer and television emerges. People are going to drive cars. A technological revolution takes place. Meanwhile, the Netherlands have become a multicultural

country. People of different races, origins, skin colours and religions live there. This starts a problem. The welfare state is being rolled back and citizens are gaining more responsibility. Islamization is at the origin of clashing population groups and political discussions amongst others by the worldwide threat of terrorism. Economical crisis is the cause of cuts in government spending. (E25)

Most of the 48% of the students who made remarks about this post war period only jotted in a brief remark or slogan about developments after the war. Some referred to the decolonisation of Indonesia, while others made (very) brief remarks about the Cold War or the Netherlands in a unified Europe. The effects of the end of the Cold War escaped attention in the essays. With the exception cited above, the 1960's were not present. For the last decade, the political murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh were passed by.

To summarise, students did not pay much attention to the post war period. The essays did not include the element of continuous development of the modern welfare state as logical outcome of the "second start" of the history of the Netherlands, as Jonker had stated.

Small country, great ambitions
We asked the students to think about a title for their essay. We will discuss the titles that students came up with and relate these to the templates that Jonker and Grever described.

Fifty-two percent of the students repeated or paraphrased the given task in the title. The remaining titles were more revealing. We categorized these titles into three groups. The first group consisted of the essays (of three students) with a title expressing the notion that in the essay a selection was made out of a wide range of possibilities: "Topics everybody knows" (E1), "A small piece of total history" (E20), and "Dutch history in a nutshell" (E25).

The second group consisted of the essays (of five students) with titles in which somehow the smallness and greatness of the Netherlands were combined: "Netherlands: small and forceful" (E3), "Small country, great ambitions" (E8), "Ups-and-downs of a small country with a great history" (E12), and "Netherlands, small but magnificent" (E22). These four titles

came close to Grever's template, although the greatness that was referred to was mostly not about the fight for particular freedoms, but about economic prosperity.

The third group of titles (of four students) referred to different aspects of Dutch history: "Dutch history from Golden Age to knowledge economy (E16), 'The Dutch: thinkers and doers" (E23), "National pride: allegiance to the colors of the Prince" (E24), and "The Netherlands after 1500: trial and error" (E5). Only in this last title could one perceive the narrative template described by Jonker, although without a defined 'second start'.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We have addressed the question which narratives of the national past Dutch students construct after finishing secondary education. We have looked at the events, persons and developments in Dutch history that students included in their narratives and at the types of narratives and schematic narrative templates in which these were embedded.

The historical agents, events, developments and dates that many students included in their essays were related to the Dutch Revolt (e.g., William of Orange, Philip II), the Golden Age (e.g., economic growth, 1602 founding of VOC, Disaster Year 1672), the first part of the 19th century (e.g., Thorbecke, King William I, 1848 first liberal constitution) and World War II (e.g., 1940, 1945, German Occupation). These elements coincided with the characteristic features of eras in the Dutch framework of ten eras. Although, the textbooks mention several other persons and events from Dutch history to illustrate European developments (such as the Reformation, industrialisation, decolonisation), these persons and events were rarely included in the essays. We do not know whether students did not remember them or did not consider them part of the essentials of Dutch history. Several components of the students' essays seemed to be "residue knowledge" of the Dutch topics they studied for their national examinations, such as the frequent mentioning of Napoleon and 1672 (the Disaster Year). In 2015, the system of alternating themes for the national history examinations will be abolished, and students will be assessed on their overview knowledge of the ten eras, combined with three or four "historical contexts." This raises the

question of whether this change in the curriculum will change the story about Dutch history that students construct after leaving secondary school. Most likely it will not change much because students already emphasise episodes from Dutch history that are mentioned among the characteristic features of eras in the 10-era framework. It is remarkable that, although the framework of the 10 eras with characteristic features forms the core of the history curriculum, students do not use it as a tool to organise their account of Dutch history, in spite of the fact that in history textbooks, events, persons and developments in Dutch history are often connected to the developments and states of affairs that are part of the framework. Lee and Howson (2009) suggested that a framework should function as a scaffold within which or around which narratives can be built. The participants in our study, however, did not use the framework of the ten eras in that way.

When we look at the narratives students constructed, two features stand out. First, students seemed to construct the same main lines in Dutch history as historians have done according to Jonker (2006), but the consultation culture as the main characteristic feature of the schematic template Jonker outlines was missing. Jonker (2006) stated that historical representations of Dutch history emphasized the Dutch Revolt in the 16th century, the economic growth and prosperity in the 17th century and the origins of the Dutch welfare state and parliamentary democracy in the 19th century. These are exactly the periods and events that were mentioned most by the students. However, the students did not emphasise the consultation culture as a characteristic feature of Dutch history and did not make causal connections between this culture and the fight against the water, trade and religious plurality as suggested by Jonker. It must be said that most students did not include many causal links at all, which was in line with students' accounts on British history that were discussed by Lee and Howson (2009). This might be a result of the difficulties most students experience in writing in the explaining or arguing genre (Coffin, 2006). It may, however, also be a result of a curriculum in which every now and then themes from Dutch history pop up without much attention given to long term developments and causal links.

A second common feature of the students' narratives was that most students did not tell a nationalistic story. A nationalistic tone was absent in most essays. Students hardly used the first-person plural ("we") and

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heroic characters or motives, mentioned by Carretero (2012) as a feature of schematic templates connected to national history, hardly figured in the students' essays. William of Orange, for example, who on the website of the Dutch canon (www.entoen.nu) is presented as "father of the country" and founder of the Dutch state, was only mentioned briefly and in rather neutral terms. The students, however, emphasized positive episodes in Dutch history, such as economic growth and cultural prosperity in the Golden Age, events related to the origins of Dutch parliamentary democracy and resistance against German Occupation. We might say that the template that Grever suggests ("a small country, bravely fighting for its freedoms") was present in the students' accounts. They did not put much emphasis on fighting for freedom, but the "greatness" of the Netherlands came to the fore in the positive episodes just mentioned.

The title that one of the students used to label his narrative – "Small country, great ambitions" – may better reflect a template that seemed to underlie students' accounts. Not much attention was paid to more negative experiences, for example, the Dutch role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism or the collaboration that took place during the German occupation. These topics are part of the curriculum and textbooks, but apparently the students did not consider them significant enough to include them in their essays.

The participants in our study formed a rather selective group, most of them being male and white. Research in other countries has shown that students from different ethnic backgrounds attribute significance to events and persons in national history differently (Epstein, 1998; Peck, 2010). We do not know whether Dutch students of, for example, Surinamese or Indonesian backgrounds would mention different elements of Dutch history. More research with a more heterogeneous group of students is needed to gain insight in possible differences in the narratives those Dutch students might construct.

There is still a great deal of work to do if we want students to produce a survey of history which differs from the usual narrative templates. We can catch a glimpse in the essays of a few options to break up the schematic narrative template (such as the absence of the "we"-perspective in most of the essays); the inclusion in some of the essays of minority groups, slavery, migration, and a more or less neutral stance towards the moral implications of World War II and the years of

occupation and deportation.

The outcome of an educational program that gives room to discussing and exploring the edges, cracks and fissures in the schematic narrative template, without losing its powerful societal and cultural cohesive elements (VanSledright, 2011) could be a more negotiated narrative where there is room for different perspectives (Grever, 2012). Then, there would be a possibility to fit in other story lines, characters and plots. To do so would help students understand that this template does not necessarily lead to a canonical version of the past, but rather it would mold past events into more than one possible outcome.