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### Shifting lenses

*Multiperspectivity and narratives of the Dutch past in secondary history education*

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# Chapter 3

## Narratives and multiperspectivity in Dutch secondary school history textbooks<sup>12</sup>

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### INTRODUCTION

The narratives about a nation's past taught in history education are a major focus of international research (Foster & Crawford, 2006; Grever & Van der Vlies, 2017; Stradling, 2003). In many countries, textbooks are by far the most accessible sources of historical information for both students and teachers. The texts therein can be considered as historical narratives that either do or do not follow academic historiographical traditions (Foster, 2011; Sakki, 2014). History textbooks present a narrative in which specific historical actors, events, developments, and perspectives are represented. Research shows that, in several countries, textbook narratives about a nation's past tend to represent a limited, nationalistic perspective (Sakki, 2014; Van der Vlies, 2017).

In the Netherlands, secondary school students are expected to develop their historical thinking and reasoning abilities, which include identifying aspects of continuity and change, causes, and consequences. Learning about multiperspectivity is an important aim of Dutch history education; students are expected to ascertain the positionality of historical actors and the interpretative nature of periodization, of historical explanations, and of narratives about the past (College van Examens, 2015). By doing so, students learn that a historical narrative is not a "given," but a construct about the past. Therefore, a certain tension

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of consistency the endnotes in the original article have been substituted by in-text citations.

can exist between textbooks' narratives about a nation's past and the aim of presenting multiple perspectives (Van Alphen & Carretero, 2015). This raises the following question. To what extent do Dutch history textbooks address multiple perspectives while making clear that different interpretations are possible and avoiding the presentation of a "closed" narrative?

Multiperspectivity in narratives involves varying spatial and temporal scales, varying agency and plots, and varying types of historiography (Grever & Van Boxtel, 2014; Wansink et al., 2018). Multiple perspectives stem not only from a variety of narratives, but also from a variety of metaphors. Metaphors can make a perspective more persuasive, as they evoke the familiar and often highlight certain aspects while downplaying others; for example, the "High" Middle Ages, the United States as a "salad bowl," or the "collapse" of the economy (Bougher, 2015).

Against the background of the development of the Dutch history curriculum and the national and international discussion about teaching and representing the national past, it is legitimate to explore the narratives and perspectives of the Dutch past as they are represented in Dutch history textbooks used in secondary education. In the Netherlands, research on narratives in history textbooks has so far been limited (Houwen et al., 2019; Huijgen et al., 2016; Van Berkel, 2017; Van der Vlies, 2019). Parallel to our analysis of Dutch history textbooks, we also examined Flemish textbooks addressing the Dutch Revolt, in order to better understand the particularities of the presentation of this major historical episode in Dutch history textbooks. We hope that the insights generated by our analysis will be useful for textbook authors and history teachers seeking to do justice to the interpretative character of history and the multiple perspectives therein.

#### NARRATIVES OF THE NATIONAL PAST AND MULTIPERSPECTIVITY

Narratives are not only descriptive; they are also interpretative (Roth, 2016). A narrative consists of actors and instances of agency (for example, individuals or collectivities) who follow a "plot" of (chrono)logically connected events (Rigney, 2012). The configuration of time could be regarded as an element in forming the plot of the narrative (Eckel, 2010). This configuration brings together subjectively experienced time (experiences and interpretations) and the more

objective chronology of events established in time (Carter, 2003; Grever & Jansen, 2001; Grever, 2001). Moreover, the “time” we are referring to here is twofold: the time of narration—or narrative time—and narrated time, a distinction made by Lämmert (1955). In textbooks, narrative time could be seen as the amount of text used by the author to narrate the events, whereas narrated time refers to the time that elapses in the narration (Eckel, 2010; Scheffel et al., 2014).

White (1975) has emphasized the narrative character of history and the emplotment of historical narratives. There are different modes of emplotment, such as romance, comedy, tragedy, and satire, and there are narratives of “rise and fall” and “progress” as well as cyclical narratives (White, 1975; Zerubavel, 2003).

In many narratives, the use of metaphor is crucial. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) were the first to emphasize that conceptual metaphors play a central role in how we understand the world, including its history. They defined a conceptual metaphor as a metaphor that explains one concept in terms of another concept from another domain, for example “LOVE IS A JOURNEY.” (In conceptual metaphor theory, small capitals are conventionally used to designate metaphors). In Hanne’s (2015) concise formulation, “metaphor draws the audience into viewing the situation through the conceptual lens proposed by the person who utters it” (p. 24). A metaphor focuses on particular attributes of an issue or event, whereas a narrative organizes elements into a story (Bougher, 2015).

In our study, we analyzed features of narratives and metaphors in textbooks about the Dutch national past in order to determine whether these narratives are open and multiperspectival or whether they are closed and singular.

#### MULTIPERSPECTIVITY

Scholars have argued that multiple perspectives are needed to transform essentialist narratives about a nation’s past into narratives that better express the interpretative character of history. For example, Stradling (2003) stressed the need to relate and to compare different perspectives in order to transmit a deeper understanding of the historical relationships between nations and between majorities and minorities both within and beyond national boundaries.

Textbook authors can express multiple perspectives by including perspectives of different historical actors (for example, perpetrators and victims); different temporal and geographical scales (via chronologies or by providing multiple local and/or international perspectives); and different types of historiography (for example, economic and cultural perspectives). Along these lines, social class, gender, age, and ethnicity may determine the perspectives of historical actors. In addition, these historiographical perspectives may also be framed by elements of political, social, economic, cultural, military, and religious history (Grever & Van Boxtel, 2014; Wansink et al., 2018).

Previous studies have asserted that academic history texts unavoidably contain the personality of an author, whereas school history textbooks supposedly do not (Paxton, 1999; Paxton, 2002). At the same time, it has also been argued that an author's voice should become more "visible" in order to substantiate the multiple perspectives in a history textbook (Crismore, 1989; Lee, 2013; Paxton, 1999; Paxton, 2002). Students are more readily prompted to engage in historical reasoning by texts that contain different narratives about the same topic. Lee (2013) analyzed the reasoning of students and compared a conventional textbook containing one perspective with a textbook in which the author mused explicitly about several different narratives that deal with the same event. She found that the second type of textbook resulted in more historical reasoning (Lee, 2013).

#### THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY: NATIONAL HISTORY IN DUTCH HISTORY EDUCATION

The Dutch government generally refrains from interfering with the content of history textbooks (Grever & Van der Vlies, 2017). Nevertheless, over the past few decades textbooks in the Netherlands have undergone a transition in response to changes in the curriculum and the debates over its content. These debates centered on (a) the establishment of the canon of the Netherlands, a national curriculum including history and culture; (b) the need for a shared chronological frame of reference; and (c) the importance of historical thinking and reasoning abilities (Van Boxtel & Grever, 2011).

The canon of the Netherlands, which aimed to reinforce students' shared knowledge of the national past during primary and secondary

education, has been criticized for producing a “master narrative” of Dutch history (Grever & Stuurman, 2007). Critics fear that such a narrative can prevent students from learning historical reasoning and lead to processes of exclusion (Grever, 2006). Consequently, the canon did not become compulsory in the upper levels of secondary education. In primary and lower secondary education, however, the canon is used to illustrate the characteristic features of the “ten-era frame of reference” for teaching European history (Stb. 2010).

In 2001, a government committee proposed a new history curriculum that included a frame of reference consisting of ten historic eras and forty-nine specific elements that encompassed characteristic developments and historical phenomena. In 2007, this frame of reference was implemented in upper secondary education and, since 2015, has featured in central examinations. Of the forty-nine elements, only three (the Dutch Revolt, the Golden Age, and the Netherlands during the Second World War) relate to prominent Dutch historical topics—a fact that explains why Dutch history is not a dominant feature of the current curriculum in secondary education (Wilschut, 2017).

Although the exam program includes a set of key concepts and indications for historical reasoning, the curriculum can be characterized as a traditional history curriculum with chronologically ordered topics and a strong focus on the appropriation of a European chronological frame of reference (Van Straaten et al., 2018). The question of how to balance a shared frame of reference with teaching historical thinking and reasoning is, however, still a subject of debate.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to understand the narratives presented in Dutch school history textbooks, we analyzed the ways in which an episode in the history of the Netherlands is represented and to what extent multiple perspectives are part of this representation. We focused on the second half of the sixteenth century, an important period in the history of the Low Countries characterized by revolt and civil strife, unity and division, which we refer to in this article as the Dutch Revolt.

Our study focused on the following research questions. First, what are the distinguishing features—in terms of agency, (chrono)logically

ordered events, spatial and social context, and metaphor—of the narrative of the Dutch Revolt in secondary school history textbooks from the Netherlands and Flanders?<sup>1</sup> Second, to what extent is multiperspectivity part of the narratives of the Dutch Revolt?

## METHOD

In order to answer these questions, we conducted a content analysis of two Dutch history textbooks used in upper levels of the higher general secondary education (*hoger algemeen voortgezet onderwijs*, havo), the intermediate track that prepares students for applied science universities: *MeMo: Geschiedenis voor de bovenbouw havo* (MeMo: History for upper levels of havo) (2011) and *Geschiedenis Werkplaats (GW)* [History workshop] (2012) (Beukers & Stephan Klein, 2011; Van der Geugten & Verkuil, 2012). In order to make the perspectives of the narrative more salient, we decided to compare these textbooks with two Flemish textbooks, *Storia 4* and *Historia 4 ASO*, used in the fourth grade of the general secondary education (*algemeen secundair onderwijs*, aso), the Flemish equivalent of havo (Goris, 2007; Van de Voorde, 2014).

### CHOICE OF TOPIC: THE DUTCH REVOLT

The Dutch Revolt, the sixteenth-century conflict in the Low Countries that resulted in the founding of a Dutch state, is a compulsory topic in the upper grades of havo (College van Examens, 2015). While the aso curriculum explicitly refrains from defining specific historical content (Einddoelen, 2018) the unity and division of the Low Countries in the sixteenth century is a major topic in both Flemish textbooks as well.

We based our choice of topic on four considerations. First, historians of nations consider wars and warfare to be powerful elements in nation-

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Dutch Revolt” represents first and foremost the perspective of the northern parts of the Low Countries and is thus itself an interpretation

building because they establish and define a common enemy, or “other,” and foster awareness of a common identity (Crawford & Foster, 2007). In the Netherlands, the Dutch Revolt is considered relevant for its role in shaping the nation and Dutch national identity. Second, in a previous study, we found that when Dutch high school graduates wrote about the history of the Netherlands, they frequently mentioned the Dutch Revolt (Kropman et al., 2015). Third, Dutch history teachers consider the Dutch Revolt a topic especially useful for teaching aspects of multiperspectivity (Wansink et al., 2017). Finally, there is a rich historiographical literature on the Dutch Revolt, with multiple perspectives and interpretations (Pollmann, 2009) —including, for example, debates on the concepts of war, revolt, and civil strife (Groenveld, 2018; Van Nierop, 2009; Woltjer, 1994); the conflict’s European ramifications (Parker, 2014); and the shift in perceptions of the *Beeldenstorm* (the wave of iconoclasm that accompanied the Revolt) from an attitude of embarrassment to one of a canonized event (Pollmann, 2016).

#### THE TEXTBOOKS

In the Netherlands and Flanders (Belgium), as in many other European countries, schools and teachers may choose freely from a variety of textbooks on an open textbook market (Sakki, 2014). Publishing houses in the Netherlands and in Flanders (at least four publishers specializing in history textbooks exist in both countries) (Van der Kaap, 2014a) do not need governmental approval to publish textbooks. Although none of these publishing houses has a monopoly, they are all aware of the requirements of the national exam programs. Dutch history teachers depend on textbooks as much as teachers anywhere (Foster, 2011; Wansink et al., 2016). A survey of Dutch upper secondary school teachers showed that only 2% of the teachers did not use a history textbook (Van der Kaap, 2009). The majority of havo and aso students (aged from sixteen to seventeen years) use one of the textbooks mentioned above. In 2014, *GW* was used by 53% of the teachers, while 17% used *MeMo* (Van der Kaap, 2014a).

Our study focused exclusively on author texts, which we defined as texts written by one or more authors and comprising chronologically presented events and developments as well as biographical vignettes and

motivational opening stories. In our analysis of *GW*, we examined the opening texts along with the section entitled “The Dutch Revolt,” which is 159 sentences long (Van der Geugten & Verkuil, 2012). In *MeMo*, the chapter “The Revolt in European Perspective” opens with a case study illustrating the main theme followed by a description of the Dutch Revolt in fifty-three sentences (Beukers & Klein, 2011). The remainder of the chapter, which discusses the Wars of Religion, was not analyzed, as it establishes no comparisons or relationships between these conflicts and the Dutch Revolt. *Historia* describes the developments in the Low Countries in a section entitled “The Low Countries from Unity to Division (1555–1648)” in thirty-five sentences; *Storia* does the same in 155 sentences under the comparable heading “Unity and Division in the Low Countries.”

#### ANALYSIS

The presentation of various elements of agency, temporal and geographical scale, historical dimensions, and different types of historiography helps to realize multiple perspectives in the textbooks. First, we discerned the respective building blocks of the narrative (agency, dates, events, geographical scale and dimensions, and metaphoricality) on the sentence level. And second, we analyzed to what extent these narratives were open to multiple perspectives based on our first level of analysis.

We then coded all sentences according to the following four aspects that constitute the building blocks of a narrative. First, historical agency, defined as acts of individual people, collectives, corporate bodies, and nations (Peck et al., 2011); second, the coding of dates (vague, specific, or no date at all) and historical events (situations, structures, themes, events, developments, causes, and consequences) (Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2012); third, geographical scale (setting the stage for a more general European or a more specific Dutch historical approach) (Grever & Van Boxtel, 2014); and fourth, the historiographical dimensions (military-political, socioeconomic, cultural, or religious) (Grever & Van Boxtel, 2014). The interrater reliability for these building blocks on a sample of thirty sentences corresponded to Cohen’s Kappa measures of between .71 (dimensions) and .88 (date) (see Table 2) (Landis & Koch, 1977).

In order to determine the narrative time (the relative attention paid to a certain development or event), we counted the number of sentences related to a specific date, event, theme, or development.

With respect to metaphor, we identified the metaphoricity of verbs and substantives by applying the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Steen et al., 2010). To identify potential metaphoricity, we compared the meaning of the verbs and substantives in context with their basic meaning in Dutch using the online Van Dale dictionary (Pasma, 2011). For example, the substantive *beweging* (“movement”), in the context of heretic groups in the Low Countries, has, in addition to its primarily meaning (“making it move”) an additional figurative meaning (“changing the state of affairs, opinions, and beliefs, and striving for them.” (Example derived from Beukers & Klein, 2011, p. 110)). We therefore classified this word as a metaphorical substantive. Specific to history texts is the use of substantives that begin with capital letters, such as “Cold War.” These substantives refer to historical first-order concepts as shorthand to describe a series of related events (Carretero et al., 2013). Using the MIP, we coded the possible metaphoricity of these kinds of substantives and analyzed how these possible metaphors contribute to the narrative. We also looked for direct metaphors (identified by a simile flag [“as” or “like”]) (Deignan et al., 2013). Comparisons preceded by the term “like” are more easily detected because they, so to speak, “tell” readers to expect a metaphor. Furthermore, the use of a simile may indicate the author’s openness to the underlying framework provided by such metaphors (Burgers et al., 2016). Interrater reliability (Cohen’s Kappa) on a sample of thirty sentences was .74, which is considered substantial (Landis & Koch, 1977).

In order to analyze the presence of multiple perspectives, we used our findings relating to the building blocks and the narrative’s metaphoricity. We then focused on multiperspectivity on the level of historical agency, events, scale, and dimensions. Finally, we used the building blocks and metaphors to signal references to historiographical interpretation in the author text in the context of topics such as “concepts of revolt or civil strife” (Van Nierop, 2009; Woltjer, 1994), “the Eighty Years’ War” (Groenveld, 2018), “the Dutch Revolt as part of a wider European development” (Parker, 2014), “the societal effects of Catholic and Protestant migration” (Janssen, 2014), “the Dutch contribution to the

formation of the Black Legend,” (Luna, 2016; Van der Steen, 2015) or “the shift in the perception of Beeldenstorm” (Pollmann, 2016).

**Table 2**

*Categories and Examples of the Coding Scheme used for the Content Analysis of the Textbooks on the Sentence Level*

Category	Subcategory	
Historical agency	no actor	But there was more to it.
	individual	<b>Philip</b> sent the Duke of Alba to put things in order.
	nation	<b>Spain</b> formed a huge war fleet.
	collectivity	With the drafting of the Act of Abjuration (1581), <b>the rebels</b> definitively broke ties with the Spanish sovereign.
	corporate body	This <b>military alliance</b> became the core of the new state.
Date	no date	Calvinism was the most important religion, but Catholic and other worship services were tolerated.
	vague (when ...)	Just like the other princes elsewhere in Europe, first Charles V and <b>later</b> his son Philip II pursued a centralization policy.
	specific (year, period, century)	He formed an army in Germany with which he invaded the Netherlands in <b>1568</b> .
Historical event	no event	But there was more to it.
	event, development, or period	With <b>the introduction of the “blood placards”</b> under Philip, this also became increasingly fierce.
	causes and consequences	<b>As a result</b> , the nobility was increasingly deprived of influence and privileges and felt affected in its traditional position.

Category	Subcategory	
Geographical scale	no scale or unclear	After the reading, William of Orange spoke.
	Europe	Just like the other princes <b>elsewhere in Europe</b> , first Charles V and later his son Philip II pursued a centralization policy.
	The Netherlands	That same year, <b>Holland and other regions and cities</b> formed the Union of Utrecht under the leadership of William of Orange.
Dimension	socioeconomic (about relations between social groups; social groups; finance, taxation or wages)	To be able to pay his army, Alba introduced a <b>new tax</b> in 1569.
	military/political (about all forms of exercising power; power relations, including the use of military force)	Although one of his brothers <b>won a battle</b> near Heiligerlee, Alba remained supreme.
	religious (about religious rites or beliefs)	Protestants disapproved of the <b>worship of statues</b> .
	general	After the reading, William of Orange spoke.

## FINDINGS

### ACTORS, DATES, EVENTS, SCALE, DIMENSIONS, AND METAPHORS

The Flemish and Dutch textbooks differ considerably in their representations of agency (see the Appendix C to this article for the sentence-level results of our analysis). This being said, the same “usual suspects” appear in all textbooks. These include, on the one side, figures like Charles V, Philip II, Margaret of Parma, and the Duke of Alba, all of whom represent Catholic, “Spanish” centralist and royal interests, and, on the opposing side, the figures of William of Orange, Egmont, Horne, and Maurits, who are depicted as “Dutch” freedom-loving Protestants.

In the Dutch textbooks, individuals form the agency in the narrative. In the Flemish textbooks, while individuals also play their roles,

anonymous forces such as collectivities and corporate bodies are the dominant agents. The titles of the Dutch textbooks emphasize the Revolt as an act of the agency of the Dutch, whereas the Flemish textbooks accentuate the result of the process of division between north and south. In other words, the Dutch textbooks present history as the outcome of the decisions of individuals (especially men), while the Flemish textbooks present collectivities and corporate bodies as the main agents of history.

The historical dates provided in *MeMo* and *GW* represent a short chronology of the main events of the Dutch Revolt, including the start of the iconoclastic “storm of statues” or *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 and the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. The narratives in both textbooks correspond to the traditional periodization of the Eighty Years’ War (Groenveld, 2018). The Dutch textbooks present the Revolt primarily as a temporal sequence of events and developments, suggesting the post hoc fallacy without specifying explicit causes or consequences. *Historia* and *Storia* include more causal connections and incorporate other dates and events, such as the abdication of Charles V (1555), the death of Philip II (1598), the post-1577 wave of emigration to the northern parts of the Low Countries and the end of the Scheldetol in 1863, thereby situating the conflict in a broader historical narrative.

The authors of *MeMo* suggest that the Dutch Revolt occurred exclusively in the Low Countries, with an emphasis on the northern regions, and only briefly mention contemporary analogous developments elsewhere in Europe. While *GW* mainly emphasizes the Dutch territorial aspect of the Revolt, mentioning towns and cities in the northern parts of the Low Countries, it also provides some international context (Philip II’s war against the Ottoman Empire and the defeat of the Spanish Armada). *Historia* systematically distinguishes between northern and southern provinces (*gewesten*), and *Storia* twice weaves a presentist “our” into the text when discussing the southern provinces. In *Storia*, the conflict is grounded in a description of events and developments in the southern parts of the Low Countries, especially in and around Antwerp.

In all the textbooks, military and political dimensions dominate. In *MeMo*, military developments are described briefly: for example, the reader learns that Philip II deployed troops to stop the iconoclasts, thereby starting an eighty-year military conflict. *GW* mentions Philip II’s international military operations and prominently demonstrates the political and military dimension with a focus on political power, freedom

of religion, taxes, and government. This is also the case in *Storia*, but less so in *Historia*. While both Flemish textbooks mention economic circumstances when explaining the origin of the *Beeldenstorm*, this aspect is absent from the Dutch textbooks.

All the textbooks present the religious dimension as secondary to political considerations. *MeMo* describes heresy as a *lèse-majesté* while noting that contemporaries considered heretics to be “people who did no harm and only had divergent beliefs.” (Beukers & Klein, 2011, p. 110). The authors of *GW* mention the religious dimension only briefly when they write that “Catholics worshipped statues.” *Storia* and *MeMo* state that Calvinists “refrained from worshipping statues,” whereas the authors of *Historia* make no connection whatsoever between the worship of holy images and iconoclasm.

Both Dutch textbooks frame the emplotment of the narrative of the Dutch Revolt in the initial phase and first ten years of the Revolt. The authors of *MeMo* dedicate the most narrative time (43% of the sentences) to the events of New Year’s Eve 1564 and describe William of Orange’s thoughts on the policies of Philip II. The introduction to *GW*, by contrast, is dominated by the clash between the characters of Philip II and William of Orange (21% of the sentences); in the subsequent paragraph on the Dutch Revolt, the most narrative time is dedicated to the origins and first ten years of the Revolt (12.5% and 27%, respectively), with special attention paid to the *Beeldenstorm* (5%), the arrival and actions of the Duke of Alba (7.5%), and the reaction of William of Orange and his allies (6.2%). In both *MeMo* and *GW*, the emplotment of the Dutch Revolt narrative focuses on the early stages of the Revolt, suggesting the intentionality and inevitability of its eventual outcome.

In both Flemish textbooks, the use of narrative time supports the emplotment of the Flemish narratives. *Storia* gives ample space to the role of Charles V and Philip II (19% and 15%, respectively) and to the events that occurred after 1600. Likewise, the authors of the Flemish textbooks pay a comparable amount of attention to the *Beeldenstorm*, but highlight its socioeconomic context. The authors of *Historia*, the shortest textbook, limit their summary of the role of William of Orange to one sentence, but explain in detail the socioeconomic origins of the *Beeldenstorm* and the origins of the split between the southern and northern Low Countries. In terms of their geographical focus, the Flemish and Dutch textbooks appear to provide two completely separate

narratives: while the former pay more attention to events in the southern parts of the Low Countries, the latter emphasize developments in the north.

In addition to narrative elements, actors, dates, events, scale, and dimensions, we also analyzed metaphorical verbs and substantives. All texts contain sentences featuring metaphorical verbs or substantives; the number of these sentences varies from 64% of the total number of sentences in *GW* to 86% in *Historia*. Of these, between 38% (*GW*) and 66% (*Historia*) are related to events and developments in the conflict and to the exercise of power and its consequences in the Low Countries. Overall, the metaphors in use were conventional in nature. Examples include verbs such as *overnemen* (“to seize” [power]) or *vervolgen* (“to prosecute”) and substantives such as *verzet* (“resistance”) or *hof* (“court”).

In the Dutch textbooks, the authors refer to the deeds of the Duke of Alba and the actions of Spanish soldiers in negative metaphorical terms, using epithets such as “Iron Duke” and “Spanish Fury.” The authors refer to the Calvinists as “beggars” [*Geuzen*], a term which they use positively to refer to anyone who resisted the policies of Philip II. The terms “beggars” and “Spanish Fury” are also used in the Flemish textbooks—the former without the positive connotations and the latter with a negative connotation. The metaphorical term *Beeldenstorm* has a prominent place in all the textbooks.

In sum, our analysis of the building blocks and metaphors found in the narratives of the Dutch national past in Dutch secondary school history textbooks revealed several common features. First, causes and consequences play a minor role in the textbooks. Second, events and developments are mostly confined to the Low Countries. Third, the narrative is presented as the outcome of the political deeds of great men—the key figures being William of Orange and Philip II. By contrast, the Flemish authors describe the events and developments against the backdrop of European developments and Habsburg policies, and pay more attention to the southern parts of the Low Countries and to social and economic circumstances that hastened the outbreak of the iconoclastic *Beeldenstorm*.

## MULTIPERSPECTIVITY

Our second research question addressed the extent to which the textbook narratives reflect multiple perspectives. To answer this question, we examined agency, temporal and geographical scale, historical dimensions, and different types of historiography in which the presence of the authors' voices introduced multiple perspectives into textbooks.

With respect to agency, we found that the main agents in all the textbooks are either individuals (William of Orange, Philip II) or groups of individuals (beggars, noblemen), while nations and corporate bodies (such as Spain or the Catholic Church) play a subordinate role. The Dutch textbooks neglect the perspective of the Protestants in the southern parts of the Low Countries and that of the Catholics in the northern regions. By comparison, the Flemish textbooks pay more attention to the fate of religious minorities in these areas. The disparity between the authors' degree of mindfulness toward religious groups seems to obscure the perspective of the majority of the population in both the northern and southern parts of the Low Countries (Janssen, 2014; Van Nierop, 2009), which makes the narratives of the conflict less open to other perspectives and affirms their closed character.

The Dutch textbooks present the events in traditional chronological order with an emphasis on the first ten years of the Revolt (Groenveld, 2018; Pollmann, 2009; Woltjer, 1994). The Flemish textbooks incorporate the same dates in their text, but add dates that alter the periodization and situate the narrative in a broader chronology to describe the continuing Spanish and Austrian rule over the southern Low Countries.

While the geographical scale of all these narratives focuses on the Low Countries, the Dutch authors concentrate on the northern regions and the Flemish authors on the southern regions. In addition, the Dutch authors seem to consider developments in the southern regions irrelevant after the conclusion of the Union of Utrecht (*MeMo*) or the reconquering of Flanders by Alexander Farnese (*GW*).

The Dutch textbooks emphasize the political and military dimensions of the conflict over its social, economic, and religious dimensions. The Flemish textbooks, by contrast, mention economic and social circumstances with respect to the early phase of the conflict (*Storia* even discusses the consequences of the blockade of the Scheldt River).

Discussing historiographical issues is central to teaching and learning multiperspectivity. The representation of the Dutch Revolt as such is the result of a longstanding historiographical tradition, which itself, from the start of the conflict, presents a partisan representation of the conflict along religious and ideological lines (Van der Steen, 2015; Van Nierop, 2009).

Although it is by now common knowledge that politics in the Low Countries in the sixteenth century was closely intertwined with developments elsewhere in Europe (Parker, 1977; Parker, 2014; Pollmann, 2009), the Dutch textbooks approach the Revolt, in terms of geographical scale, primarily from a modern Dutch territorial perspective (although some effort is made to situate it in a broader European context). While the Dutch textbooks, and *Storia*, purportedly address the societal effects of migration with respect to the exodus of Protestants to the northern parts of the Low Countries, in fact both the Flemish and the Dutch authors concentrate on the Protestant migration, ignoring the fate of the Catholic migrants from the north. In order to enhance multiperspective history-learning, the textbook authors could highlight different historiographical issues such as the societal effects of Catholic and Protestant migration, the Dutch contribution to the formation of the Black Legend, or the shift in the perception of the *Beeldenstorm*.

Central to the framing of the narratives are notions such as “revolt,” “revolution,” “war,” and “civil strife.” Traditionally, the conflict in the Low Countries is labeled as the “Eighty Years’ War.” While both Dutch textbooks use this term (with and without capital letters), neither do so to describe the legitimate use of state violence against another state—that is, from the perspective of the victorious United Provinces. In *Storia*, the eighty-year conflict concludes not with the outcome of the war, but rather with the start of the year 1568, when William of Orange exerted his sovereign right as a prince of Orange to raise an army. The term “revolt” is another notion used in both the Dutch and Flemish textbooks. In the Flemish textbooks, the term “revolt” signifies a people’s inherent right to resist the policies of a king who has neglected his responsibility to care for the well-being of his subjects. Interestingly, none of the textbooks explicitly discuss these concepts in historiographical terms, nor do any of them use the concepts “civil strife” or “revolution” to describe the conflict.

Already during the early years of the Revolt, both contending parties

resorted to propaganda to discredit their adversaries (Van der Steen, 2015). Famous examples of mutual slander include Philip II's edict declaring William of Orange an outlaw and William's Apology. In the following years, propaganda originating from the supporters of William of Orange contributed to the development of the Black Legend, which portrayed the policies of Philip II and especially those of the Duke of Alba via depictions of their most gruesome atrocities (Luna, 2016). The authors of *GW* replicate only these elements, which they mitigate somewhat by discussing the clergymen who fell victim to the *Geuzen* in 1572. The authors of *MeMo*, by contrast, present no such elements.

Taking a different approach, *Storia* describes the policies of the Duke of Alba (including his institution of the notorious Council of Troubles, or Blood Council) as necessary to restore order, and emphasizes the developments in the southern parts of the Low Countries, especially the consequences of the Spanish Fury of 1576. The authors of *Historia* characterize the intervention of the Duke of Alba as "heavy-handed." Taken at face value, the descriptions in both *GW* and *Storia* could be interpreted as replicating elements of the Black Legend; therefore, they seem not to contribute to the teaching and learning of multiperspectivity.

All the textbooks describe the *Beeldenstorm* as playing a crucial role in the development of the Revolt. All of the descriptions mention the destruction of Catholic church interiors by the Calvinists, a phenomenon that rapidly spread throughout the Low Countries. The Flemish textbooks add economic motives to this description. None of the textbooks address the chaotic and socially disruptive events triggered by the outbreak of the *Beeldenstorm* (the only such events mentioned are Philip II's attempts to retaliate and restore order). Likewise, none of the textbooks present or discuss the author's voice as part of the interpretative character of history.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Our research focused on the features of the narrative of the Dutch Revolt in secondary school history textbooks from the Netherlands and Flanders and on the extent to which multiperspectivity is part of these narratives.

Both Dutch textbooks present a narrative of the Dutch Revolt in which the events and developments of the first ten years of the Revolt

form the emplotment of the narrative, which is strictly confined to the Low Countries. Individuals are presented as the main historical agents. Superficially, the most obvious difference between the two Dutch textbooks is the amount of narrative time they devote to the history of the Dutch Revolt, but there is no difference in their general interpretation: the plots of both textbooks follow the same configuration and present the conflict in terms of the successful “rise to independence” of the Netherlands, a configuration framed by an implicit, overarching metaphor of “rise, bloom, and decay” (Mijnhardt, 1998). By contrast, the plots of the Flemish textbooks can be labeled as stories of “loss and failure” as part of a broader narrative of the process of political independence.

Generally speaking, the authors tend to recount the dominant version of the events during the Dutch Revolt, paying little or no attention to multiple perspectives, causality, or the interpretation of the role of individuals and events and their significance.

The Dutch textbooks are characterized by a low level of multiperspectivity; they present historical agency as the acts and motives of a small number of individuals or groups and limit their geographical scale to the territory of the modern Dutch nation-state. In terms of plot, they concentrate on the political dimensions of the first ten years of the Revolt, a period that is presented as eventually leading to an independent Dutch Republic. Neither textbook discusses historiographical issues, which are referred to indirectly, if at all. The Flemish textbooks, by contrast, contain elements that contribute to a more multiperspective approach.

This study was subject to certain limitations. We limited our analysis to one topic as presented in two Dutch history textbooks, and only analyzed textbooks used in one educational track (havo) for one particular age category (sixteen to seventeen years old). The question of whether the same lack of multiperspectivity also characterizes discussions of other topics (such as the Golden Age, Dutch colonialism, or the Netherlands during WW II) as well as other educational tracks and age categories, merits further research, as does the question of how the Dutch Revolt and other topics fit the broader historical narrative of the Dutch nation-state and whether these topics comply with the characteristics of a master narrative and accompanying metaphors.

Although history textbooks are still the most common source of

information used by teachers and students, the extent to which multiperspectivity is part of the classroom practice of teachers and their students merits further research. Our analysis focused on the main author texts, but did not consider workbook materials or accompanying tasks and questions. An analysis of these materials could help determine whether they add perspectives to those presented in the textbooks. For example, students could be asked to identify perspectives that are presented (or missing) or to compare different perspectives (Houwen et al., 2019).

Future research could also focus on classroom practice: how do teachers and students engage in multiperspectivity when they use these materials? Furthermore, it would be interesting to write a history textbook and worksheets wherein multiple perspectives are explicitly presented (a challenging task, given that textbook authors have little room to operate). Integrating multiple perspectives into a single narrative might detract from the comprehensibility of the text. The focus might also be placed on developing students' ability to critically analyze (deconstruct) narratives about the past and their understanding of history as interpretation.

The narrative of the Dutch Revolt in the examined textbooks is shaped by the authors' choice of language and rhetoric. We recommend that authors of history textbooks adopt multiperspectivity as the main lens through which they impart their historical teachings. Three points are worth stressing in this regard. First, authors should acknowledge that they are historians operating within the field of history and writing a form of history that includes the narrative structure of history and its implications for the field of history education. This means that authors should avoid bias by integrating new directions in historiography into their work. Second, authors should be aware of and pay attention to the use of qualifying language—not only metaphorical language, but also hyperbole and adverbs that “color” a text and present a single perspective (even at the risk of excluding others). By focusing on metaphorical elements (such as the *Beeldenstorm* or the Spanish Fury) as problematic issues, authors could help students to develop their own conceptual frameworks while keeping in mind that their use of language may be interpreted in a manner that may or may not reflect multiple perspectives. Finally, Flemish and Dutch textbook authors should consider making historiographical issues an explicit part of their texts in

order to encourage thinking about multiperspectivity as part of historical learning and reasoning.