

# Re-creating ‘Dutchness’: cultural colonisation in post-war Holland

---

ROB VAN GINKEL

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Amsterdam,  
Oudezijds Achterburgwal 185, 1012 DK Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

**ABSTRACT.** Following the liberation of the Netherlands from German occupation in 1945, many Dutch intellectuals were seriously concerned about the moral comportment of the Dutch in particular its youth. In their view, the war led to a sapping of norms, values and virtues they deemed ‘typically Dutch’ which could bring about complete social disintegration. Therefore, they launched campaigns to reinstate the ‘old ways’. Based on what they believed to be the nation’s authentic folk culture and character, they attempted to culturally colonise the Dutch. This article describes and analyses various forms of this institutional cultural nationalism in the second part of the 1940s.

## **Introduction**

Re-nationalisation of the masses: that, according to scores of leading intellectuals, was the most urgent task after the liberation of the Netherlands from German occupation in 1945. In their opinion, a spiritual crisis had afflicted the country’s inhabitants. After several years of ‘lying and cheating for the good cause’, public morality and decency were believed to be in a state of serious decay. ‘White lies’, ‘emergency ethics’ and ‘moral suspension’ had been necessary during the war. But according to the Protestant theologian and ethicist Hendrik van Oyen, following the liberation, these attitudes had left ‘a moral defect on the already perverted masses’ (1946: 74, 78). He even referred to a ‘distress of the spirit’.

Van Oyen, was not the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Leaders from nearly all walks of political and religious life worried about social dislocation, demoralisation, degeneration, mass society, increasing loneliness and the superficiality of entertainment. Many were particularly concerned about what they regarded to be the demoralisation of the youth, the disintegration of family life and the loosening of sexual relations. Therefore, they believed a cultural politics aimed at ‘national unity’ (*volksseenheid*) to be necessary. The ‘mass people’ should be guided by a ‘thinking vanguard’, a clerisy that would teach them how to behave in national fashion. This national unity would have

to come about through moral and disciplinary offensives. In the words of criminologist Willem Pompe: 'Morals and customs indicating how man ought to behave are indispensable for the nation to form and maintain the national character' (Pompe 1945: 56).

Many intellectuals, who are usually at the forefront of any national movement (Hutchinson 1987b: 3–9; Cormier 2003: 529), embraced this mode of thought. They could fall back on a topical tradition of 'national virtues' that had been inventoried since the late eighteenth century (cf. van Ginkel 1999). Cultural pessimists, cultural critics and cultural nationalists – often embodied in the same individuals – eagerly used them in their efforts to culturally 'colonise' the Dutch. In the post-war years, the supposed national character traits constituted the foundation for their reconsideration of what they believed to be the value and essence of 'Dutch-ness'. Not only did they describe how the Dutch – at least in their view – had been, but at the same time they transmitted the message of how they *should be* or how they should become. They felt that the national character they deemed 'typically Dutch' had to be 'awakened' or 'deepened' among the masses. Thus, description and prescription got inextricably entangled in this cultural nationalist upsurge and in the 'discursive practices' (Foster 1991: 235) of cultural nationalists.

The goal of cultural nationalists is to preserve the cultural individuality of the nation that is believed to be in jeopardy of cultural domination from without and or moral corruption from within (Hutchinson 1987b: 1; 1999: 399–400). Responding to such 'crises', cultural nationalism – which is often little more than 'a small-scale coterie of historical scholars and artists' (Hutchinson 1987a: 482) – can expand into a major ideological movement that seeks to regenerate the nation. Cultural nationalism 'seeks to celebrate, and glorify, the national culture of a community. An integral part of this national culture is, of course, the language of the community; it manifests itself in the poetry, folklore, myths, legends, epic stories, and music of a distinct linguistic and cultural group' (Cormier 2000: 107). Although taking its inspiration from the past – usually a golden age at some point in national history – cultural nationalism is also oriented towards the future. Its central tenet is that 'members of groups sharing a common history and societal culture have a fundamental, morally significant interest in adhering to their culture and in sustaining it across generations. This interest warrants the protection of states' (Gans 2003: 7). It is at this point that we see a blurring of boundaries between cultural and political nationalism, with the objective of the former being the cultural rejuvenation of the nation and that of the latter common citizenship within a sovereign state (Cormier 2003: 531).

The present article attempts to cast light on the viewpoints of Dutch cultural nationalists and their efforts to augment national unity in the period immediately following the liberation of the Netherlands, that is, from roughly 1945 to 1948. It aims to describe and analyse which functional conceptions of culture were at the root of it and how the ideologists of national unity tried to win the 'masses' for their hegemonic cultural ideal. Though they enjoyed

widespread support among the political, religious and cultural elites, their missionary efforts to 'homogenize heterogeneity' (Williams 1989: 435) were unsuccessful. Therefore, an additional question to be answered is why their civilising attempts – the project of defining morality and normality – failed. The focus will be on one cultural nationalist organisation in particular: the National Institute (*Nationaal Instituut*). Though not a state institution, its self-appointed leaders saw the Institute as little less than a Department of Propaganda.

Based on this case history, the article will also address the issue of whether cultural nationalism must be seen as a culturally homogenising and reactionary force or whether this is a misconception. Some scholars (e.g. Kohn 1946; Gellner 1983) appear to regard cultural nationalism as a regressive force, as a retreat into a 'golden age' past, while others see it as a rejuvenating force (e.g. Hutchinson 1987a, 1987b, 1999). In addition, the question will be raised as to what extent cultural nationalism is political and whether there is a clear-cut dividing line between cultural and political nationalism. For example, Cormier states that cultural nationalists shun direct political action and instead 'band together in small-scale grassroot cultural organizations and associations and struggle for the "heart and soul" of the nation and its cultural heritage' (2003: 531). However, the example of the National Institute would seem to contradict such a view. As a point of departure, I will focus on 'the production of ideologies of peoplehood, that is, ideologies of common ("national") culture' (Fox 1991: 3) and how such productions have political roots and ramifications.

### **Nation building and the Dutch youth**

During the war, collaborating or convinced National Socialist scholars – several folklorists, historians and archeologists among them – had attempted to substantiate the *Germanic* origin and nature of Dutch culture. These scholars tried to make the Dutch populace aware of this cultural substrate, to 'germanise' them and consequently to prepare them for the *Anschluss* – the incorporation into a Greater Germany (van Ginkel and Henkes 2003). Hence, Nazi Germans and their accomplices used folklore and folk culture as instruments of cultural politics. But the political and ideological misuse of national character and folklore studies during the occupation did not seem to bother many Dutch intellectuals after the liberation. Only a few of them pointed out the dangers of stereotypes. For instance, anthropologist J.J. Fahrenfort maintained that such studies would lead to myths about '*the Dutchman*', '*the Englishman*', '*the German*' and so on (1946: 16). In general, however, there were very few intellectuals who were critical regarding national character studies and their inherent essentialisms and cultural political uses. On the contrary, the soaring lamentations about the moral corruption and

spiritual degeneration of the Dutch quickly led to a cultural nationalist response.

It was a period *par excellence* of reorientation and regeneration of what were believed to be the core values of the national community. More generally, what triggers cultural nationalists

... into collective action is evidence of social demoralization and conflict which they believe results from a loss of continuity with the national heritage and a subsequent adoption of foreign values. Forming historical and cultural institutions ... , they preach a moral regeneration of the national community by returning to the spirit of its ancient past encoded in its myths, memories and culture (Hutchinson 1999: 399–400).

The production of nationalist ideologies usually anticipated the larger project of re-establishing and reforming a national culture (cf. Fox 1991: 4). The regained freedom after five years of German occupation certainly called for a moral mission in the eyes of cultural nationalists, especially with respect to the Dutch youth.

Even when the country was still occupied, intellectuals who were concerned about national unity and the moral state of affairs in the nation referred to the ‘degeneration of the youth’ (*verwildering der jeugd*). For example, the clergyman and Social Democratic leader Willem Banning wrote in 1943 that a solution was needed for ‘the problems of the non-church-going, de-christianised and demoralised youth, the position of the working class, the flood of self-indulgence and naturalism we can expect, the dislocation of nuclear families and numerous other phenomena of a social and spiritual nature’ (quoted in de Keizer 1979: 91). He suggested that a corrupt elite would lead society. Banning’s ideas met with widespread support among moralists. They regarded the ‘cultureless masses’ – and ‘mass youth’ in particular – as ‘a sick spot in our society’ and a ‘danger for Dutch health and Dutch culture’ (Algra et al. 1946: 205). The metaphors they used often refer to the medical world – to diseases caused by the masses and, albeit implicitly, to the curative role of the moralists themselves.

An example of such thinking in terms of sick and healthy can be found in Amsterdam headmaster B.J. Hinnen’s booklet entitled *Verdoolde jeugd* (Stray Youth) that was published in 1946. Hinnen depicted society or community as an organism that was exposed to the danger of ‘parasites and morbid growths’:

As long as the tissue [*het weefsel*, read: the community, RvG] is able to offer a healthy resistance, this attack on life does not give cause for concern. But this changes when the extent of the morbid growths increases abnormally. In this case, along with the interference with the resistive power the vital strength will be impaired which necessitates a powerful defence (Hinnen 1946: 16).

‘Mental health care’ was considered a crucial link in the reconstruction of Dutch society. Immediately following the liberation, the *Maandblad voor de Geestelijke Volksgezondheid*, a monthly on mental health care, called on the government, schools and churches to lead ‘the re-education of our people so

that they will become morally and socially solid individuals with a strong character' (quoted in Mol and van Lieshout 1987: 76). For those pursuing national unity it was beyond doubt that the 'nihilistic mass youth' needed to be disciplined within an institutional context. An editorial of the first post-war edition of the journal *Het Gemeenebest*, whose editors firmly believed in the ideal of national unity, stated the following:

In the cities a majority of those growing up escape the influence of private youth education. Demoralised and engaged in complete nihilism during the occupation, a 'mass youth' has come into existence that not only is a danger to itself, but also to the future of our entire nation. We believe that the state should intervene forcefully and take the lead in the upbringing of the youth (Koers 1945–46: 243).

This morality, strongly influenced by the ideas expressed in the Moral Rearmament movement, was embraced by the first post-war government. The Minister of Education, Arts and Sciences, the theologian Gerardus van der Leeuw devised his so-called 'active culture politics' (*actieve cultuurpolitiek*). According to van der Leeuw, national consciousness should be imparted to the Dutch people through national education (*volksopvoeding*). Dutch nationality, he wrote, 'is not a condition but a task, ... an ideal, and a conviction' (van der Leeuw 1945: 5). Apparently, van der Leeuw was blind to the previous ideological misuse of folk culture. He even deemed it useful in the broader political domain. In his opinion, the state had clearly to control culture through its active cultural politics, though it still needed private initiatives. To his joy and relief, several youth and other organisations took charge in this civilising mission. Youth movements of various political and religious denominations aimed at conveying a 'Dutch mentality' to the youth. This applied equally to Protestant organisations, the *Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale* (the Socialist Labour Youth Organisation) and to the *Katholieke Arbeidersbeweging* (the Roman Catholic Labour Movement).

However, supporters of the idea of national unity did not want to leave national youth education solely to organisations of a specific political or religious conviction. As the latitudinarian minister Jan Faber propounded in his book *Jeugdopvoeding een nationale zaak* (Youth Education a National Cause, 1945), a single, overarching national (and nationalist) youth organisation had to be established. Faber's ideas strongly resembled those of, for example, van der Leeuw and Banning. Faber regarded 'shaping physically and mentally healthy and principled Dutch' as the organisation's prime goal. The completion of this national pedagogic task would lead to 'a sense of national oneness, national consciousness and responsibility'. In order to achieve this goal, 'the dragon of division' should be combated, but without abandoning pluralism (Faber 1945: 15, 53). Faber, like most of his compatriots, failed to specify how to solve this contradiction.

By the time Faber's book appeared, most of his wishes regarding the formation of a national youth organisation had been fulfilled. In June 1945,

the *Nederlandse Jeugdgemeenschap* (Dutch Youth Community, abbreviated NJG) was established in which youth organisations of various religious backgrounds cooperated. As its symbol the leaders chose an orange circle – expressing its national character (the colour orange represents the Dutch royal family). This youth movement was supposed to operate as a ‘third milieu’, in addition to family (the ‘first milieu’) and school (the ‘second milieu’). Initially, Roman Catholic youth leaders refrained from joining the njg. And when in 1946 after lengthy and bothersome negotiations they decided to join, it was on condition that the organisation could only act if all participating institutions agreed on an issue. In practice, therefore, the njg turned into an impotent federation.

The anxious spiritual leaders did not just aim their civilising missions at youth. In the opinion of political, religious, intellectual and cultural elites they had to give guidance to ‘mass people’ in general. This belief was not limited to the Netherlands. It was stimulated by a widespread anxiety in Europe for the masses and the baseness of their culture. These ideas had been fuelled by publications like *La rebelión de las masas* (Ortega y Gasset 1930), a book that was translated into Dutch in 1933. Clearly, the fear of social disruption was felt more deeply after the war. According to sociologist Jaap Kruijt (1946: 81) the ‘disintegration of communities’ would lead to a ‘loss of tradition, . . . moral and spiritual dislocation of individuals, ongoing secularisation of life as a whole and declining church attendance’ and finally ‘atomisation’. Kruijt’s compatriot Piet Bouman maintained the following: ‘The balance between spirit and matter is going to be lost, the communal spirit will be undermined, tradition and common ideals will be given up and despair and confusion will gain the upper hand’ (1947: 98). In Bouman’s opinion, social tensions could be compensated for ‘by a communal élan, for example an emotional national feeling of togetherness’ and by ‘the fight against crowds of people who are exposed to spiritual and moral levelling due to socio-cultural circumstances’ (Bouman 1946: 26–7).

The community ideal was also a focal point of the Folk High School (*Volkshogeschool*), which addressed (young) adults and pursued ‘reinforcement of the national community and renewal of the folk culture’. According to Folk High School ideologist and sociologist Hans de Vries Reilingh, the youth movement had already achieved successes: ‘It has inaugurated a path-breaking innovation of folk culture in the area of folk song, folk dance and amateur play and it was later followed by institutes for folk culture and Folk High Schools’ (1946: 220). Nonetheless, the Folk High School’s ideologists perceived crises in five respects: a crisis of capitalism, of individualism, of parliamentary democracy and a cultural and spiritual crisis (cf. Roessingh et al. 1981: 20–1). Supposedly, this fivefold crisis was particularly evident in cities and should be combated by bringing about stronger social ties. Hopes were that intellectuals would be the pioneers in this pursuit of harmony and integration. However, again the Roman Catholics had their own specific demands (as in the case of the Dutch Youth Community). They intended to

establish *Roman Catholic* Folk High Schools that would indeed seek to contribute to the formation of a unified Dutch culture, but which would focus first and foremost on the Roman Catholic grassroots.

Thus, the compartmentalised loyalties of Dutch civil society seemed to constitute an insurmountable obstacle to ideas about national unity. The political polarisation that followed the rise of confessional parties in the late nineteenth century had led to a society that consisted of several 'pillars' (*zuilen*) or compartments that deeply structured the lives of the Dutch. The elites of the various politico-religious denominations sought to keep the rank and file within their own institutional spheres that included not just churches and political parties, but newspapers, unions, associations and other institutions as well. Points of contention between the confessional pillars came to a head on the issue of appropriating the nation's identity. Every political and religious organisation had its own interpretation of history, whereby the past and with it national remembrance days and monuments became issues of confrontation. Nonetheless Liberals, Social Democrats, Catholics and Protestants wanted to maintain an impression of national community so they gave the appearance of a conciliatory attitude.

The work of the Folk High School progressed unabatedly. Until the late 1950s it would continue to put its self-proclaimed nationalist task in the foreground. Another organisation attempting to achieve national unity, *Nederlands Volksherstel* (Dutch People's Recovery, abbreviated NVH), was short-lived (Neij and Hueting 1988). It only existed until March of 1948. People's Recovery was a charitable organisation that was established to aid the nation's social recuperation after the liberation. As an institution promoting concerted action it was seeking cooperation and the elimination of parochialism (*hokjesgeest* or compartmentalisation). But the Christians who participated in People's Recovery feared that their own pattern of norms and values would be affected and for this reason they rejected the idea of an organisation of national unity. After the liberation, *Volksherstel* aimed at combating social and moral disruption. It encouraged 'healthy' family life and it pursued moral and cultural enlightenment; 'Family recovery leads to people's recovery' was its slogan.

At the instigation of *Volksherstel* all political parties mentioned protection and the strengthening of the nuclear family in their party programmes. Confessional parties particularly emphasised family morals, but even the Communist Party of the Netherlands advocated protection of the nuclear family, invigoration of the Dutch people's morals and the furtherance of order and discipline. Following the liberation, intellectuals from nearly every walk of political and ideological life shared the feeling of moral upheaval and culture crisis. As noted, People's Recovery was also involved in combating the crisis. This brought the organisation into conflict with the *Nationaal Instituut* (National Institute), which claimed a monopoly on what it dubbed 'cultural defence'.

### Cultural nationalism writ large: The National Institute

During the occupation, resistance fighters developed the plan to establish an institute to bring about a national spiritual revival after the liberation, in which a sense of community and national consciousness would be the cohesive elements. It would further regard the nation as a family. This institute was the National Institute. According to social geographer J. Henrick Mulder, one of the Institute's founding fathers, national consciousness included 'a sense of self, dignity, respect, attitude, character', and a sense of national community required 'cooperation, solidarity and corporate sense' (Verheul 1990a: 34). Moral recovery and a sense of decency constituted the Institute's main concerns. HRH Prince Bernhard (the spouse of HRH Princess Juliana, heiress to the throne) became its chairman. Mulder and the classicist Pieter Verburg were its co-directors.

Shortly after the liberation, the Institute presented itself in public with a brochure explaining its background, goals and means. It noted a lack of national unity and aimed at a 'deepening of national consciousness and national community spirit' (Nationaal 1945: 3). This consciousness referred to the awareness of 'the uniqueness of the Dutch spirit' (*ibid.*: 6), an awareness which had been strengthened during the occupation: 'As a consequence of the unsought comparison of our own essential characteristics with those of the tyrant we have come to know ourselves better during the occupation years' (*ibid.*: 5). According to the Institute's ideologists, this invigorated national consciousness had to be cherished and furthered, — the more so because the Netherlands would only be able to realise its 'international calling' through a sense of dignity. They deemed a moral and disciplining offensive necessary, which would take the form of people's education, information, propaganda, meetings, mediation and planning. The Institute's financial base should come from contributions, donations, legacies and state subsidies. 'In this way', the Institute's brochure claimed,

... an Institute has been established in the classical country of free speech that will organise the deepening of patriotism in self-awareness and communal spirit, without authoritarian force yet with a steady hand and steady course, to come to a flourishing national self-expression, and a strengthening of the cultural ties with the fellow tribesmen [*stamverwanten*, that is, the descendants of Dutch emigrants in South Africa] and compatriots abroad, and the expansion of knowledge about and appreciation of our country and people and the overseas territories (Nationaal 1945: 11–12).

In its pursuit of national unity, the Institute harked back to the same aspirations concerning 'national unity' which had been fashionable in the Netherlands before the occupation.

The Institute began its task energetically. It developed and supported scores of nationalistic initiatives, among them the establishment of war memorials and a resistance museum, and the organisation of commemorations, national celebrations and folk festivals. For example, the Institute was involved in a proposal to establish the National Monument at Amsterdam's

Dam Square. Henrick Mulder, the National Institute's co-director, wanted to turn it into a 'truly national spot of Dutch territory' shortly after the liberation. In order to bring unity to the public memory of World War II, the multitude of private expressions of patriotism was canalised through (semi)-official initiatives (van Vree 1995: 29–31). The National Institute was extremely active in providing such matrices of national memory. Every plan for the erection of a war or resistance memorial had to be submitted to the Institute, which watched over its 'dignity' and thus acted as a cultural clearing-house.

According to the Institute's ideologists – which included anthropologist Eduard Meerum Terwogt and folklore scholars Piet Tiggers, Jop Pollmann and Piet Meertens – national symbols and memorials as well as ritualised celebrations could effectively serve to raise national feelings (Meerum Terwogt 1946–47: 263). In their perception, folk culture was of particular importance in augmenting national consciousness. The means to achieve this included museums visiting to get to know national, regional or local culture traits, and studying national history and traditions. National celebrations had to take local or regional readings into account, but these 'would not undermine our national cultural flourishing but on the contrary stimulate it', as the ethnologist Winand Roukens maintained during a meeting of the Institute (cf. Algra et al. 1946: 209).

In general, the Institute's tone was defensive. Initially, the dissemination of a Dutch nationalist ideology was meant to check German influences, but soon all 'foreign influences', in particular communist and Anglo-Saxon ones, were counteracted. Even though Americans had been extremely important in liberating the country, there was a widespread fear of Americanisation of Dutch culture – a fear that had already been evident in the pre-war era (cf. Wilterdink 1991; Wouters 1996; van Ginkel 1999). For instance, at a congress of the National Institute a participant asked: '... is it sufficiently known that America forestalls and destroys West-European movies and exchanges them for American movies?' Social Democrat Wim Thomassen even referred to 'anti-cultural tendencies in the American influence' that had to be countered (Algra et al. 1946: 208). This idea of creating a line of cultural defence was expressed in moral terms:

A people, who do not respect their own culture and don't know how to make sacrifices for it, will in the long term go to the dogs. The danger of a psychological invasion from the East or West is not in the least hypothetical: we must mount an intellectual, cultural defence against it (Pollmann 1947: 5).

The Institute was ambivalent towards 'strong' national cultures, a mixture of admiration on one hand and anxiety for 'cultural invasion' on the other. Sometimes these feelings were combined with feelings of moral superiority and an overestimation of the 'calling' of the Netherlands in the world, expressed through the propagation of Dutch cultural and moral attainments.

At the official opening meeting of the National Institute, Minister van der Leeuw emphasised the need to maintain national character and national

solidarity. The Institute would be extremely useful in this respect. Given its goal, it was hardly surprising that the Institute had van der Leeuw's and the government's moral and financial support. But van der Leeuw saw two dangers: the first was that the ideas would not be put into practice and the second was that the Institute would turn into a 'national busybody' [*nationale bemoeial*]. The latter fear soon came true. The National Institute recruited an extensive staff of specialists, spent too much money, attempted to do too many things at the same time, proved too centralised and too bureaucratic and had fierce competitors in confessional organisations. Initially, the general public took notice of the Institute's activities. The National Institute hardly generated revenues, spent large sums of money and excelled principally in meddling and rulemaking. It sought to knit people together, but even in its own ranks many failed to see the connection between the various activities (cf. Meerum Terwogt 1946–47: 264).

### **Folk culture as an instrument of civilisation**

The Institute aimed to plan and control Dutch cultural life according to a specific view of the nature and function of 'folk culture'. It supported folk music, folk song, folk dance and other forms and expressions of folk culture. The Institute regarded folk culture as 'one of the most powerful means against cultural superficiality and national self-denial' and an important precondition of reinforcing national feelings (Verheul 1990a: 59). An internal note sketched a grim view of culture in modern Dutch society. Music like swing, tango and *Schlager* were cultural levellers and threatened to make Dutch culture 'unnatural'. Folk culture was deemed 'ill' as a consequence of the 'cultural passivity of the masses' and the superficiality of mass culture. The National Institute periodical dubbed the mass youth who embraced popular culture 'nihilists' who 'constitute the great danger in a democratic national community' (*Binding*, 30 September 1946). Many envied and feared the cultural expansion from abroad that supposedly endangered Dutch national culture. On the other hand, the occupation was felt to have led to a 'change of mentality' and to have brought about a revival of folk dance, folk music, folk song and amateur play. As we have seen, the Institute deemed such expressions of folk culture extremely important for the intensification of national feelings. As Jop Pollmann, who was one of the Institute's ideologists, maintained: 'Whoever succeeds in curing folk culture activates an important lever: folk culture is national power. A powerful nation reinforces its folk culture. . . .' (1946: n.p.).

The National Institute was also involved in a colourful plan to inaugurate 'National Celebration Skirts', originally an initiative of the resistance fighter Mrs Mies Boissevain-van Lennep (see Withuis 1994). For the first National Memorial Day, 4 May, 1946, women were asked to design a symbolic 'national celebration skirt' in which pieces of cloth had to be used which

had a special meaning for the bearer. Many women did indeed respond to this appeal. The National Institute wanted to turn the skirts into a symbol of national togetherness because of their metaphorical associations with the post-war efforts to reconstruct Dutch society – 'we make new from old, we construct from destruction' (Withuis 1994: 301) – and their representation of unity in diversity – 'a harmonious grouping of many and various parts into a strong whole' (Verheul 1990b: 231). A woman hailing from the town of Winschoten even wrote the lyrics of a 'celebration song' about the skirt. The editors of the Institute's journal *Binding* eagerly published it in the issue of 26 July, 1946:

On May 4 we wear patchwork skirts  
Of pieces of silk, cotton, velvet.  
Bits of clothing left over  
Together make one whole.  
The symbol of this time:  
We reconstruct from scarcity  
Of what remained in our country  
After five years of war.

You cotton, symbol of our simplicity,  
Always persevering, tough and strong,  
That rebuilds our fatherland,  
Through labour most necessary,  
You have a place of honour in my skirt  
You cotton piece of work!  
You make the Netherlands great again  
And cast prosperity in its lap!

The National Institute asked women to send their homemade skirts so that they could be registered, stamped as 'real' and returned to the owner. This procedure was to prevent misuse by usurious entrepreneurs. It was one of the examples of the Institute's penchant for meddling and the press did not fail to ridicule this practice. Thereupon the gusto to make and wear the National Celebration Skirt rapidly withered away.

The cultural pessimism and anti-modernism that had influenced so many intellectuals in the pre-war period lived in the Institute's ranks. Its ideologists perceived a division between community enhancing traditions and modern, 'superficial' developments. Their viewpoints consisted of a curious mixture of pessimism and optimism: pessimism, because they feared cultural superficiality, demoralisation and the degeneration of the 'masses' devoting themselves to 'empty consumption' and 'stupid entertainment'; optimism, because they firmly believed in the possibility to solve problems through cultural planning. Departing from their own elitist and normative cultural conceptions, the Institute's leaders attempted to promote Dutch culture and to prevent the dissemination of what they regarded as 'wrong kind of culture' (that is, popular culture) among the Dutch. They believed that their ideas could not so much stop as guide and channel modernisation by preventing undesired cultural influences. More generally, cultural nationalists 'celebrate

national cultural uniqueness and reject foreign practices, in order to identify the community to itself, embed this identity in everyday life and differentiate it against other communities' (Hutchinson 1987b: 16).

Consider what anthropologist Meerum Terwogt had to say about the National Institute's activities: It wanted to awaken 'a vivid consciousness of the value of one's own cultural property' by stimulating 'good Dutch entertainment music', by, for instance organising 'chimes feasts and organ congresses', replacing '[foreign] songs' and 'swing' as much as possible by 'our richly varied folk song and folk dance heritage', promoting 'really good [Dutch] movies', enhancing 'good amateur drama' and so forth (Meerum Terwogt 1946–47: 261–2). It just did not dawn upon the National Institute's leadership that the public at large perhaps did not have any need for such cultural political initiatives, leaving aside the issue of how 'Dutch' these 'traditions' really were.

The Institute's leadership was of the opinion that state intervention in the domain of culture should be kept to a minimum. They believed that it would only lead to coercion and over-organisation. However, the National Institute itself wanted to act as a kind of Department of Information (Nationaal 1945). Cultural planning and rulemaking were central to the Institute's activities, but it lacked cohesion and a policy vision while its self-proclaimed core task of information did not come to much, partly as a consequence of the establishment in 1945 of a Government Information Service (*Regeringsvoorlichtingsdienst*). In this regard, the Institute's leaders could only boast of having given a few radio talks on national consciousness and solidarity. Yet the enormous bureaucracy, overstaffing, a lack of revenues and the drying up of state subsidies led the Institute into a destitute financial situation. The Roman Catholic Minister Jos. Gielen, van der Leeuw's successor at the Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences, stopped subsidising the National Institute. After only a year chairman HRH prince Bernhard concluded: 'Guys, let's give up. It just doesn't suit the Dutch' (quoted in Verheul 1990a: 72). Three-quarters of the staff were sent home in November 1946, and in January 1947 the Institute had to close its doors.

Thus the National Institute soon proved a failure. Its leaders bitterly attributed this demise to the 'cold indifference' of the Dutch people: they had entertained such beautiful plans and they wondered why the Dutch were not enthusiastic – not even lukewarm – about their ideas. Among themselves, the Institute's ideologists bitterly attributed this fact to '... the measure in which moral corruption became solidly rooted in the masses during the occupation. The masses were lazy and pleasure loving, and knew neither a communal spirit nor love for country and people' (Verheul 1990a: 70). What undermined the Institute was the fact that the politically and religiously compartmentalised organisations became active again in the domain of culture and people's education. This resurrection of the old 'pillars' (*zuilen*) took the wind out of the Institute's sails. It implied that the Dutch audience was exposed to multiple messages about the national project and that hegemonic claims fell

on stony ground. This rapidly undermined the ideology of national unity and efforts to achieve it. As Fox remarks: 'Struggles between nationalist ideologies – contests over ideas as well as conflicts between people – may propel one nationalist ideology into dominance and leave others by the wayside' (1991: 4). But in the Dutch case no nationalist ideology seemed able to take centre-stage due to the tenacity of the compartmentalised structure of Dutch society. However, despite their differences, the contenders at least seemed to agree that a Dutch nation existed, albeit a plural nation.

The National Institute had failed even before it could fully engage in a trial of strength with the political and religious organisations. The cause was that the Institute attempted to establish itself on firm ground where there was only quicksand: that is, between the government and private organisations. The Institute's meddling with private initiatives at local level was not appreciated. Meanwhile, the government itself had become active in cultural affairs. Thus, little room remained for the Institute to maneuver and – despite many warnings – it wanted to do too much at once. Moreover, economic reconstruction, not cultural rejuvenation, was given priority by both the state and the masses. This does not mean that cultural nationalists disappeared from the scene. Nor did they quit launching their ideas. They could continue attempting to exert some influence because several of them rose to political and societal prominence.

## Conclusion

A nation seeking to strengthen its coherence should at least underplay or even repress its internal differences. The process of nation-building therefore implies a cultural colonisation of its citizens. Encouraged by the government, organisations like the National Institute, *Nederlands Volksherstel*, the Folk High School movement and the *Nederlandse Jeugdgemeenschap* developed a variety of initiatives. They were the bearers of a form of cultural nationalism that had been in vogue prior to and during World War II. Private institutions attempted to 'awaken', 'stir up' and control national feelings. In respect of their desiderata, missionary morality and vocabulary they had much in common. In their opinion, national consciousness should be augmented through active cultural participation and dissemination which – at least according to the dominant view of these nationalists – would lead to an increased sense of community. This utilitarian or instrumental conception of culture was already present in many pre-war national unity movements, while many of their leaders continued to express their ideas in a wartime organisation called the *Nederlandse Unie* (Dutch Union). In this respect, the period of the occupation hardly constituted a break with the past. The words used before and during the war to incite a reinforcement of national consciousness were identical to those used in the first few years after the liberation. A simmering romantic nationalism that sought to encourage

authoritarian power relations and to disguise social oppositions left its imprint on this ideology.

The cultural nationalism that constituted the foundation for unitary aspirations was mainly defensive. In this respect, it lacked the expansionist tendencies inherent in the cultural nationalism of Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, it was strongly based on the idea of a clear opposition between 'us' and 'other'. In a book entitled *Geschonden wereld* (Soiled World), published in 1945, historian Johan Huizinga berated the mode of political thought that 'has led to an intentional and overly zealous fostering of national idiosyncrasy'. According to Huizinga, education, propaganda, press and censorship had led to a 'nationalisation of culture'. Consequently, the national feeling isolated itself from what was strange, yet familiar (Huizinga 1945: 203–4). Apparently, however, Huizinga's criticism did not impress the National Institute's ideologists. The cultural policy and planning they pursued was aimed at the masses. The Institute constituted itself as a centralised organisation attempting to regulate and orchestrate the establishment of monuments, commemorations, folk festivals, traditionalist meetings and public symbols. In hindsight, it is clear that the Institute and what it represented indeed 'didn't suit the Dutch'. They were too closely linked to the worldviews and anxieties of the political, religious, intellectual and cultural elites to appeal to 'the masses'.

These elites, who hailed from the entire gamut of religious and political denominations, denied 'the masses' culture since they regarded them as 'cultureless'. In their perception, popular culture was devoid of meaning. At the same time, they conceived the culture of the cosmopolitan upper classes as a boundless 'general' or 'bogus civilisation', disconnected from the imagined national community (Anderson 1983). With their ideal of community based on folk culture, cultural pessimists attempted to steer clear of the Scylla of 'cultural void' and the Charybdis of a 'sham' or 'generalised civilisation'. In their nostalgic, idealistic worldview, they attributed curative powers to a rural community life they deemed harmonious and to an ancient but still vivid 'authentic' folk culture. Both were perceived as an antidote to the disharmony and estrangement they considered inherent in modern society. According to these cultural pessimists, folk culture provided the means to enhance community spirit and social integration, whereas popular culture and cosmopolitan culture would inexorably lead to superficiality and disintegration. Nourished by the fear of unguided modernisation, the cultural nationalists disseminated their normative cultural ideals, miraculously turning their pessimism into optimism. They deeply believed in the potential for 'cultural malleability' (*culturele maakbaarheid*), and the cultural colonisation of 'the masses' and of mass youth in particular, through an instrumental use of folk culture. A wide and diverse range of political and ideological actors embraced this utilitarian culture conception.

In this respect, cultural nationalism can have a strong political dimension and, although it is often confined to small-scale organisations, it can develop

into a mass movement, particularly when receiving political support and state subsidies. In the Dutch case, many politicians who came to power after the liberation had a pre-war cultural nationalist background and were ardent supporters of organisations such as the National Institute. For instance, the first post-war Prime Minister, Willem Schermerhorn, had always been an ardent supporter of the idea of *volksseenheid*, national unity. Therefore, the attempts by nationalism scholars to distinguish rather rigorously between political and cultural nationalism (e.g. Hutchinson 1987a, 1987b, 1992 and 1999; Cormier 2003) would seem to be somewhat misplaced. Cultural homogeneity – or the lack thereof – was what concerned cultural nationalists most, and in achieving their goal of national unity, they clearly needed state financial support. Despite their use of magic formulae such as 'unity in diversity', they perceived diversity within the nation to be as much of a problem as cultural influences from without, a problem that needed to be tackled with cultural politics. If cultural nationalists had reservations about state involvement, they could not do without its financial support as the short-lived history of the National Institute shows. Whereas Hutchinson (1999: 393, 400) disputes the view that cultural nationalism is a surrogate statist movement seeking cultural homogeneity, the Dutch case shows that cultural nationalists were rather ambivalent about cultural heterogeneity and state involvement.

Although it would be tempting to call the ideologists of this type of cultural politics reactionaries this would be overly simplistic. These ideologists were well aware of the fact that the process of modernisation could not be stopped. However, they attempted to *control* the concomitant changes in order to prevent these transformations from bringing about a complete disruption of society. They thought that folk culture constituted a sovereign remedy able to recreate, maintain or augment social ties. It was precisely this retrospective utilisation of a past culture to mitigate the excesses of modernisation that made them representatives of what Klueting (1991) dubs '*rückwärtsgewandte Fortschrittlichkeit*' (backwardly oriented progressiveness). However, as mass organisations, these institutions were themselves markers of modernity *par excellence*. Cultural nationalists 'act as moral innovators and are a recurring force, regularly crystallising at times of crisis generated by the modernisation process with the aim of providing alternative models of progress' (Hutchinson 1992: 101). Their orientation towards a past folk culture was not merely a nostalgic and idealised (albeit fictitious) construction of a tightly integrated national community, but was at the same time a utopian vision of a future harmonious society (cf. Löfgren 1987: 80). Thus cultural nationalists are not traditionalists *per se* but seek to synthesise traditionalism and modernism 'in the task of constructing an integrated distinctive and autonomous community, capable of competing in the modern world' (Hutchinson 1987b: 34).

John Hutchinson rightly characterises cultural nationalists as 'reformers in conservative dress' who 'seek to use tradition to legitimate social innovation through selective borrowing from others and to rally modernists to the cause

of building on indigenous traditions rather than of obliterating them' (Hutchinson 1999: 404). Despite invocation of the past, 'the cultural nationalist seeks not to "regress" into an arcadia but rather to inspire his community to ever higher stages of development' (Hutchinson 1987b: 9). There may be conflicts over the balance that has to be struck between tradition and progress and the manner in which cultural nationalists attempt to cope with the vicissitudes of modernity and 'alternative models', but 'the underlying thrust of national revivalism is dynamic, to reform tradition and articulate options by which modernization should be pursued' (Hutchinson 1999: 402). Hence, cultural nationalism is not reactionary or archaizing and it is a force that is not at odds with modernity (or post-modernity).

This is of course not to say that it is always successful. In the post-war Dutch case, the masses could not be disciplined and instead adopted the new symbols of popular culture (i.e. music, dance, consumer goods). Moreover, the interventionism deemed necessary by cultural and intellectual elites was based on an illusion. They themselves helped create the moral panics that constituted the *raison d'être* for interventionism. They believed in a 'cultural crisis': they were simply unable to imagine that it did not exist. Due to the unstoppable dissemination of popular culture these cultural elites failed to control the culture supply in their own country. As a consequence, utilitarian conceptions concerning expressions of 'folk culture' eventually became unfashionable. Moreover, the desire for a society founded upon an idea of national unity could not be politically realised within the pluralism of a parliamentary democracy and modern society that embodied competing definitions of the nation. The politico-religious pillars and their accompanying sentiments appeared much more resilient than the protagonists of national unity movements believed. They finally resigned themselves to this fact. From the end of the 1940s there was a reversal in publications concerning the nature of Dutch society and culture. Where previously cultural nationalist connotations were often inherent in views of the nation and things national, considerations became more detached, reflective and conciliatory. This does not mean, however, that cultural nationalism in the Netherlands disappeared into oblivion although its manifestations continued to change. As elsewhere, it proved a resilient force in a modern world, resurfacing when intellectuals believed the nation's singularity to be in danger.

## References

- Algra, H., W. Banning, K. Baschwitz, A. J. M. Cornelissen, J. P. Kruyt, A. Oldendorff, J. C. H. de Pater, W. Thomassen and H. D. de Vries Reilingh. 1946. *De toekomst der Nederlandse beschaving*. s.l.: s.n.
- Anderson, B. F. 1983. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Bouman, P. J. 1946. *Sociale spanningen*. Amsterdam: Paris.
- Bouman, P. J. 1947. 'Sociologische grondslagen der actieve cultuurpolitiek', *Volksontwikkeling* 22: 98–105.

- Cormier, J. J. 2000. 'Cultural nationalism' in A. J. Motyl (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nationalism. Vol. II. Leaders, Movements, and Concepts*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 107–8.
- Cormier, J. J. 2003. 'Blocked mobility and the rise of cultural nationalism: a reassessment', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 16(4): 525–49.
- de Keizer, M. 1979. *De gijzelaars van Sint Michielsgestel*. Alphen aan den Rijn: A.W. Sijthoff.
- de Vries Reilingh, H. D. 1946. 'Het wekken van nationaal besef' in H. Algra *et al.* *De toekomst der Nederlandse beschaving*. s.l.: s.n., 212–24.
- Faber, J. 1945. *Jeugdopvoeding een nationale zaak*. Amsterdam: W. ten Have.
- Fahrenfort, J. J. 1946. *Het mythische denken in de moderne samenleving*. Groningen: J. B. Wolters.
- Foster, R. J. 1991. 'Making national cultures in the global ecumene', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20: 235–60.
- Fox, R. F. 1991. 'Introduction' in R. G. Fox (ed.), *Nationalist Ideologies and the Production of National Cultures*. Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1–14.
- Gans, C. 2003. *The Limits of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gellner, E. 1983. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hinnen, B. J. 1946. *Verdoolde jeugd*. Amsterdam: N.V. Internationale Uitgevers- en Handelsmaatschappij.
- Huizinga, J. 1945. *Geschonden wereld*. Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon.
- Hutchinson, J. 1987a. 'Cultural nationalism, elite mobility and nation-building: Communitarian politics in modern Ireland', *British Journal of Sociology* 38(4): 482–501.
- Hutchinson, J. 1987b. *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: the Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Hutchinson, J. 1992. 'Moral innovators and the politics of regeneration: the distinctive role of cultural nationalists in nation-building', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 33(1–2): 101–17.
- Hutchinson, J. 1999. 'Re-interpreting cultural nationalism', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 45(3): 392–407.
- Klueping, E. (ed.). 1991. *Antimodernismus und Reform*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Koers. 1945–46. 'De koers van Het Gemeenebest', *Gemeenebest* 6: 239–44.
- Kohn, H. 1946. *The Idea of Nationalism*. New York: Macmillan.
- Kruijt, J. P. 1946. 'Sociaal-economische veranderingen in Nederland' in H. Algra *et al.* *De toekomst der Nederlandse beschaving*. s.l.: s.n., 77–99.
- Löfgren, O. 1987. 'Deconstructing Swedishness' in A. Jackson (ed.), *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock, 74–94.
- Meerum Terwogt, E. 1946–47. 'Verantwoordelijkheidszin voor onze nationale cultuur', *Gemeenebest* 7: 261–9.
- Mol, A. and P. van Lieshout. 1987. 'Geestelijke hygiëne en de wereldvrede' in H. Galesloot and M. Schrevel (eds.), *In fatsoen hersteld*. Amsterdam: SUA, 75–88.
- Nationaal. 1945. *Het Nationaal Instituut*. Amsterdam: Het Nationaal Instituut.
- Neij, R. and E. V. Hueting. 1988. *Nederlands Volksherstel, 1944–1947*. Culemborg: Lemma.
- Ortega y Gasset, J. 1930. *La rebelion de las masas*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente.
- Pollmann, J. 1946. 'Problemen bij het herstel van de Nederlandse volksdans', *Binding*. 26 July 1946.
- Pollmann, J. 1947. 'Na één jaar', *Binding*. 17 February 1947.
- Pompe, W. P. J. 1945. *Bevrijding. Bezetting, herstel, vernieuwing*. Amsterdam: Vrij Nederland.
- Roessingh, K., G. van Enckevort, C. Stapel, R. Hajer and R. de Wal. 1981. *Een halve eeuw volkshogeschoolwerk*. Amersfoort: Vereniging voor Volkshogeschoolwerk.
- van der Leeuw, G. 1945. 'De toekomst van de Nederlandsche beschaving', *Commentaar* 1: 5–6.
- van Ginkel, R. 1999. *Op zoek naar eigenheid*. Den Haag: Sdu.
- van Ginkel, R. and B. Henkes. 2003. 'On peasants and "primitive peoples": Moments of rapprochement and distance between folklore studies and anthropology in the Netherlands', *Ethnos* 68(1): 112–34.

- van Oyen, H. 1946. 'De zedelijke uitwerking van de bevrijding op ons leven' in F. J. J. Buytendijk, E. W. Hofstee, H. van Dyen and P. J. van Winter. *De reactie van ons volk op de bevrijding*. Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 69–88.
- van Vree, F. 1995. *In de schaduw van Auschwitz*. Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij.
- Verheul, J. 1990a. *Nederlandse cultuur en particulier initiatief*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Utrecht.
- Verheul, J. 1990b. 'Om de ordening van de Nederlandse identiteit' in E. Jonker and M. van Rossem (eds.), *Geschiedenis en cultuur*. s-Gravenhage: Sdu, 225–39.
- Williams, B. F. 1989. 'A class act: Anthropology and the race to nation across ethnic terrain', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18: 401–44.
- Wilterdink, N. 1991. 'The Netherlands between the greater powers' in R. Kroes (ed.), *Within the US Orbit: Small National Cultures vis-à-vis the United States*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 3–36.
- Withuis, J. 1994. 'Patchwork politics in the Netherlands, 1946–50: Women, gender and the World War II trauma', *Women's History Review* 3(3): 293–313.
- Wouters, K. 1996. 'Fear of the "uncivilised": Dutch responses to American entertainment music, 1920–1945' in D. Bosscher *et al.* (eds.), *European Contributions to American Studies 30*. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 43–61.