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Preferred Citation: Thurman, Michael D. *The Nature of Nations. The Dutch Challenge to Modernization Accounts of National Identity.* In: Extraordinary Times, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences, Vol. 11: Vienna 2001



The Nature of Nations: The Dutch Challenge to Modernization Accounts of National Identity

Michael D. Thurman

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to show that modernization accounts of national identity, although common, cannot in fact explain where such identity comes from. While nationalism¹ is a uniquely modern phenomenon, I argue that there is nothing inherent within the process of becoming modern, that is state-building and the development of capitalism and industrialization, which necessitates the emergence of national identity. I make my point by testing the modernization paradigm both theoretically and empirically. Then I present an important and largely neglected case of modernization which sharply contradicts the modernization paradigm's assumptions: the United Provinces of the Netherlands, also referred to as the Dutch

¹ Throughout this essay *nationalism* refers to the idea of national identity, not to the political ideology of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Republic (1581-1795).² I also suggest an alternative explanation of where national identity comes from based upon the Dutch experience.

The following discussion will be divided into three parts. Part one will lay out the modernization account of national identity by reviewing the pertinent literature. Special emphasis will be placed on the levels of urbanization, literacy, and transportation infrastructure modernization theory says leads to national identity. Part two will test the modernization paradigm against the case of the United Provinces and show that it cannot account for Dutch national identity. Part three will explain how Dutch national identity in fact came into being which suggests an alternative hypothesis as to the origins of national identity. I will conclude by showing how this new hypothesis better explains where national identity comes from today.

Part One: Modernization Theory and National Identity

Definition of Nationalism

I define nationalism as being a particular worldview, a style of thought that locates the source of individual identity within a people, embodied in a nation, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity. As such, the people, or community of believers to continue the analogy, are fundamentally homogenous and only superficially divided by the lines of status, class, locality, and in some cases even ethnicity. Nationalism is an ontological form, a way of conceiving of reality – past, present, and future.³

The Modernization Paradigm

Modernization accounts of national identity are in fact forms of communications theory. Whether it is state building (Tilly, Mann, Hall, Rokkan);⁴ a growing econ-

² I use the two terms interchangeably which is common practice both now and then.

³ For an expansion of this definition, see Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Harvard. U. Press, 1992).

⁴ Charles Tilly, ed. *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975); Michael Mann, "The Emergence of Modern European Nationalism," in *Transition to Modernity*, edited by John Hall and I. C. Jarvie (Cambridge U. Press, 1992); John A. Hall and G. John Ikenberry. *The State* (U. of Minnesota Press, 1989); Rokkan, Stein. "Dimensions of

omy or capitalism (Rostow, Nairn, Wallerstein, Stalin),⁵ industrialization (Gellner),⁶ print capitalism (Anderson),⁷ Westernization (Kedourie),⁸ and technology (Deutsch)⁹ – the actual mechanism of causation is the same. Waging war, the drive for profits, etc. led to greater levels of social intercommunication through the construction of transportation infrastructure, increases in literacy, and changes in communication technology. The effect is to change the density and frequency of social interaction which I refer to as social intercommunication. The change in social intercommunication, so goes the theory, somehow magically leads to national identity. It is never expressly explained how this occurs. Testing modernization theory against the United Provinces will expose this critical flaw in the paradigm.

There are in essence two schools of thought with regard to the independent variable said to cause the changes in social intercommunication. One focuses on state-building and the other focuses on economic growth. The statist variant of modernization holds that the expanding state integrates a loose amalgam of people into one society through the bureaucratic mechanisms established to extract the resources for financing and waging war. The state erects or encourages a growth-oriented economy to form so it can reap ever-increasing revenues in order to meet its increasingly expensive military obligations. The increased transportation, administrative, and financial infrastructures thus created are the mechanisms which modernization theory argues lead to national identity

The economic variant of modernization theory claims that the unified state and national identity result from the needs of a growing economy. The argument is that sustained economic growth requires a centralized state to provide the collective goods necessary for its efficient operation. Capitalism and industrialization result from the state's increased demands for revenue. Again, national identity emerges

State Formation and Nation-Building," *Formation of National States in Western Europe*, edited by Charles Tilly (Princeton U. Press, 1975).

⁵ Rostow, W. W. *Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge, 1960); Thomas Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977); I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York, 1974); Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*. Orig. 1912.

⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (U. of Cornell Press, 1983).

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

⁸ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

⁹ Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: Wiley, 1953).

through the higher levels of social intercommunication brought about by a denser transportation and communication infrastructure.

Though statist and economic variants of modernization theory appear to present alternative accounts of national identity, upon closer examination they are both in fact forms of communications theory. A brief review of the arguments of three of the most prominent proponents of the modernization accounts of national identity will allow me to test the paradigm against the experience of the United Provinces in part two.

Ernest Gellner is representative of the economic variant and uses industrialization to account for national identity by suggesting that the “needs” of an industrial economy led to increases in both levels of urbanization and literacy. This he claims led to national identity. He asserts that “the age of transition to industrialism [sic] was bound to be the age of nationalism.”¹⁰ As the worker moved from the village to the city in order to work in the factories, the person came to identify with others like him and this led to national identity.¹¹ Gellner further argues that a modern, industrialized economy requires generically trained workers who are mobile and able to perform a wide variety of functions required by the industrialized economy. This is accomplished by the institutions of mass education which communicate common myths and stories to the future workers of the industrial economy, and this made nations.

Benedict Anderson, who includes a bit of both of the statist and economic variants of modernization theory, explains the emergence of national identity by arguing that “print-capitalism” increased levels of literacy and the standardization of language, that is, it freed language from the parochial context in which traditional language was based. The standardization of language meant that the same idea could be transmitted throughout an entire language group with greater ease and

¹⁰ Gellner (1983):40.

¹¹ It is indicative of the overwhelming dominance of economic accounts of national identity that Gellner’s rather bold assertions were initially received with great skepticism but are now routinely cited, without further comment, as evidence of the link between industrialization and national identity. Gellner’s theory has somehow become empirical fact, evidence to the contrary. This is especially apparent within Dutch scholarship. Among others see Wantje Fritschy and Joop Toebe, eds., *Het ontstaan van het moderne Nederland [The Origins of the Modern Netherlands]* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1996); Hans Knippenberg and Ben de Pater, *De eenwording van Nederland: schaalvergroting en integratie sinds 1800 [The Unification of the Netherlands: Expansion and Integration since 1800]* (Nijmegen: Sun, 1988).

accuracy. This was caused by the demands of the European book publishing industry and the state's monopolization of vernacular language groups.

Anderson argues that by the 16th century, book publishing, having exhausted growth in profits from its limited Latin-language audience, began to print books in the vernacular. This had the effect of standardizing vernacular languages, and because they were the languages people spoke in their everyday lives, the political authorities of various societies were able to monopolize ownership of the newly standardized vernacular languages, something they could not do with universalized Latin. The standardization of the vernacular and its political control led to nationalism.¹²

The last of the three authors, Anthony Smith, is by far the most prolific writer on nationalism and represents a statist position by arguing that national identity grows out of some proto-national, ethnic identity he calls by the French word, *ethnie*.¹³ Smith claims that a nation forms through “vernacular mobilization” or “bureaucratic penetration” of a pre-existing *ethnie*. The former is caused by historians, lexiconographers, and grammarians interested in standardizing the language. The latter is caused by the state's desires to raise revenues and armies to defend itself. This led to “a unified transport and communications system” among other things. He gives 17th century France and England as examples and concludes that “alongside these processes of state-making there developed a strong national consciousness.”¹⁴ If he is correct, national identity should certainly have been present in the United Provinces which qualified as an *ethnie* with a standardized language and a unified transport and communications system – even before his examples of France and England.

Although Gellner, Anderson, and Smith approach the question differently, they ultimately point to changed levels and forms of communication as their explanatory mechanism. But before testing their conclusions, I want to explain why I have chosen the case of the United Provinces.

¹² Anderson (1991).

¹³ *Ethnies* are “named units of population with common ancestry myths and historical memories, elements of shared culture, some link with a historic territory and some measure of solidarity, at least among their elites.” See Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1995): 57.

¹⁴ Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

The Value of the Dutch Case

The Netherlands is an excellent test case for modernization theory: first, the Dutch Republic was highly integrated, urban, and literate but national identity did not emerge. As the 18th century turned into the 19th, the Dutch Republic had much higher levels of urbanization (40%)¹⁵ than either France (20%)¹⁶ or Great Britain (23%)¹⁷. It was not until the mid-19th century that England reached Dutch levels of urbanization, and it took France until the second decade of the 20th to reach the same. Indeed the noted Dutch scholar Marolijn 't Hart referred to the Dutch Republic as “a state of fifty-eight cities.”¹⁸ If Gellner was correct in claiming that higher urbanization levels leads to national identity, it should certainly have been present in the United Provinces with the highest urbanization rates in Europe.

Anderson and Smith stress the importance of standardizing the vernacular in accounting for the emergence of national identity and they provide 17th century France and England as examples and they discuss literacy as a sufficient condition for this. But the United Provinces had far higher levels of literacy than France or England yet did not develop national identity. Per capita income in the Republic was greater than that of Great Britain up until 1800,¹⁹ and Dutch literacy surpassed that of its neighbors until they caught up at the end of the 19th century. In fact, not only were the Dutch more literate, they consumed and produced more reading material per capita than anyone else at the time.²⁰ If national identity is truly caused by levels of literacy, as Anderson and Smith suggest, it should have appeared in the United Provinces *before* England and France.

Not only did the United Provinces meet the minimum standards of literacy said by modernization theory to have caused national identity in the paradigmatic cases

¹⁵ Marolijn 't Hart, “Cities and Statemaking in the Dutch Republic,” *Theory and Society* 18 (1989); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995): 328.

¹⁶ William B. Cohen, “The Development of an Urban Society,” in *The Transformation of Modern France* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993): Introduction.

¹⁷ See table 13.1, “Growth of the Levels of Urbanization of European Countries, 1700-1800” in Paul Bairoch, *Cities and Economic Development* (U. of Chicago Press, 1988): 215.

¹⁸ 't Hart (1989): 666.

¹⁹ Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy* (Cambridge U. Press, 1997):707

²⁰ For a discussion of Dutch literacy levels and book consumption in comparison with other European states, most notably France and England, see Craig C. Harline, *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic* (Dordrecht: Martinus Mijhoff Publishers, 1987).

of England and France, it surpassed them. If the modernization paradigm is to be believed, the United Provinces should have become the world's first nation because, if nothing else, its public education was qualitatively and quantitatively superior to that of its neighbors. Four features of Dutch education makes this clear.

First, not only was literacy high in the urban areas of the Republic, as was often the case elsewhere, it was equally high, or higher, in rural districts. Second, women were significantly more educated than their counterparts in other countries. Third, the Dutch had a commitment to the education of the poor not seen elsewhere. Officials of the Amsterdam poorhouse were concerned that "[t]he poorest orphans' limited exposure to formal education would prove to be very damaging...for 'once they became skilled in their craft [learned in the poorhouse] they still do not possess the capacity to keep records of that which they make, buy, or sell.'"²¹ The fourth unique feature illustrated by this passage was that education for the wide section of society meant more than signing one's name, it meant accounting and arithmetic *as a matter of course*.

All of this points to the fact that more people were more educated in the United Provinces than in neighboring countries and this was the result of conscious public policy. If Gellner and others claim that education is the key for explaining the emergence of national identity, it should have appeared in the United Provinces. It appears the Republic was not only a good candidate for developing national identity according to modernization theory, it was a better candidate than widely cited examples of England and France.

Additionally, the relatively small size of the United Provinces, situated on the Rhine delta, allowed for the development of a dense network of canals, rivers, and roads which in turn allowed for a very high level of public transportation. At a time when travel in most of Europe was inconvenient, often dangerous, and always expensive, the Dutch system was far less so, which meant the common person traveled far more often than his French or English counterpart.²² Again Smith points to communications networks as a cause of national identity, and again, national identity was not present in the United Provinces.

A second reason the United Provinces presents a good test for modernization theory is that the Dutch Republic developed a very high level of social intercom-

²¹ "In dien se tot perfectie van haer ambacht comen hebbende geen capaciteyt van't geen datse maken, coopen off vercoopen, notitie te houden." (Gemeente Archief Amsterdam, Part. Arch. 343, no.8) as quoted in de Vries and van der Woude (1997): 694.

²² Jan de Vries, *Barges and Capitalism* (Utrecht: HES Publishing, 1981).

munication *before* Britain set the pattern or form of development other countries would come to emulate. Countries that developed subsequent to Britain often imported its ideas in an attempt to meet, compete with, or surpass British economic and military success. This is important because the British example provides the empirical foundation for modernization theory, therefore testing modernization theory in those countries which developed high levels of social intercommunication after Britain, may not be a true test of the model's explanatory power because what might be viewed as evidence of an "objective" development thus affirming the model – say communication levels and national identity – may in fact not be objective at all. They may be instead examples of the successful importation of what are in fact *subjective* British views of the world wrapped up in local garb. In other words, the United Provinces provides a purer case of modernization than cases developing after Britain.

The Dutch Republic provides a unique opportunity to test modernization theory because it possessed all of the indices of social intercommunication thought by the model sufficient to constitute national identity, and importantly, it was free from possible contamination by the model's constituent case. The Republic therefore can "run" the experiment of modernization without fear of teleological reasoning. If changes in the tenor and tone of social intercommunication are truly the objective source of national identity, it must certainly happen in the Dutch Republic if modernization theory is at all to be believed.

Part Two: Testing Modernization Theory in the Dutch Case

A test of the communications thesis at the heart of modernization theory is best achieved if the thesis is broken down into its three causal relationships. First, modernization theory holds that state-building and/or a growth-oriented economy caused increased levels of social intercommunication through the erection of various forms of transportation and communication structures. Second, increased levels of social intercommunication is said to have led to increased social integration. And third, social integration is presumed to have been national in form. Let me examine each of these in turn in light of the Dutch experience.

The first step in the argument is that state-building and/or a growth-oriented economy causes increased levels of social intercommunication. It can be demonstrated without much trouble that the introduction of new communication technologies, and the increased rationalization or bureaucratization of social administration as a result of waging war and running a growing economy, did have the effect

of increasing levels of Dutch social communication.²³ The experience of the Netherlands confirms this first step of the communications thesis.

The United Provinces also confirms the second step, that increased social intercommunication did in fact lead to greater social integration. This can be shown by looking at the topics of interest and distribution patterns of printed material. At the beginning of the Republic most news journals were local and addressed themselves to local issues, or if not local per se, how wider concerns impacted local interests. As time progressed, the titles of pamphlets, broadsheets, and the like, as well as an increase in the number of general works on *vaderlandsche geschiedenis* [patriotic history] became apparent. What sold, increasingly, were issues of “national” concern, rather than those of a more parochial nature. Additionally, certain newspapers and magazines which had been exclusively local, developed a readership far beyond the boundaries of their traditional interests.²⁴

However this step in the argument is more theoretically problematic than the first. While increases in social intercommunication may have in fact happened, it does not follow theoretically that increases in social integration can also be necessarily assumed.²⁵ Integration means a change in the way people view the world in which they live, and because we are talking about national identity, increases in integration must mean increases in the *degree* to which people come to identify with others in some social space. The *meaning* of that identification cannot be inferred from the simple fact of an increase in integration.²⁶ Modernization theory does not

²³ For an often cited work on the effects of war on the financial institutions of the Republic see Marolijn 't Hart, *The Making of a Bourgeois State: War, Politics and Finance during the Dutch Revolt* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1993).

²⁴ Harline (1987).

²⁵ Deutsch uses the term, “assimilation” instead of integration. See Deutsch (1953).

²⁶ What modernization theory completely ignores is that increases in social intercommunication have no intrinsic value for people, on how they view their world. Social integration is a form of social meaning for the actors involved and can never be explained in terms of “objective” factors of frequencies of barge traffic, literacy rates, or degrees of urbanization. Meaning comes from the values actors impute to the so-called “objective” social phenomena. Increases in communication theoretically could have no effect on levels of social integration, it might increase integration, as modernization theory asserts, or it might do quite the opposite. As Walker Connor noted in a well-known essay published in 1972, the notion that increased modernization necessarily leads to an increase in social integration can be challenged on purely empirical grounds. He provides a list of cases where changes in communication led to the strengthening of division, not integration. See Connor, “Nation-building or Nation-destroying,” *World Politics* 24:3 (1972): 319-355.

really explain what happened because among other things it neglects the important observation that, Marshall McLuhan notwithstanding, the medium is not the message.

The answer to the problem is found in the third step of the argument – that increased social integration is presumed by modernization theorists to be evidence of nationalism. It is here that the United Provinces exposes modernization theory's greatest weakness. Social integration is not synonymous with national identity and so the presence of the former cannot be taken as evidence of the latter. Highly integrated societies can take on a whole host of forms, as history amply shows. The United Provinces were highly integrated, but unlike in England and France, integration was not national in form.

Part Three: The Origins of the Dutch Nation

Dutch national identity appeared not due to some magical causal link with social integration as modernization accounts argue. It was the result of three stages or conditions common to all major social change: prior conditions, precipitating conditions, and subsequent conditions. Prior conditions look at the situation before the catalytic event. The purpose is to understand why the old system was no longer able to meet the needs of its actors, and thus why it suffered a crisis of legitimacy. Precipitating conditions considers the catalyst, or accelerator as Chalmers Johnson calls it, which made the failings of the old system an active topic of conversation and public debate, and very likely, that which brought people into the streets.²⁷ Subsequent conditions deals with the resolution to the crisis, which in this case means a “national” solution. I will follow this tripartite approach in explaining the emergence of Dutch nationalism.

Prior Conditions

The point here is to highlight those conditions which led to the loss of faith in the old system. This explains why contemporary actors were willing to entertain new solutions to old problems. Three major sources of de-legitimacy are evident. First, the internecine battles between the Regents' party and the Orangists flared up again. Each side accused the other of treason and villainy of various kinds. This gave rhetorical ammunition to the opponents of each side with the cumulative ef-

²⁷ Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Stanford U. Press, 1982).

fect of de-legitimizing the whole system. These squabbles had happened several times in the two hundred years of the United Provinces, but this time was different. In the past, the extra-systemic participation by the people through riots and pamphleteering helped the hand of either Orangists or the Regents to win. In the past one side was seen by elites and the rabble as a viable palliative for the sins committed by the other side. This time, for the first time, the disenfranchised elites and the commoners that followed them, rejected *both* parties as illegitimate for the reasons that follow.

The central ideological and institutional reality of the United Provinces was decentralization. To paraphrase, the United Provinces were neither united nor provinces. They were instead seven quasi-autonomous mini-states. There were two key relationships at the heart of the decentralized system which national identity would eventually supplant: the relationship between cities within provinces which jealously guarded municipal rights and autonomy from each other, and the relationship between the provinces and the stadhouder, or viceroy, at the center of the “federal” government.

Out of these two relationships two political factions emerged. The Regents party or faction represented the traditions of provincial and municipal autonomy, and as such represented the republican impulse of the Union. Their rivals, the Orangists or Orange party, were firmly behind the stadhouder, vested in the princely house of Orange. They had aristocratic pretensions and sought to strengthen the central government in the Hague at the expense of the always squabbling provinces and their constituent cities and rural areas.

What is important for this discussion, however, is that prior to the *Patriottentijd* or Patriot Period (1781-1787) when the Dutch nation came into being, the Regents and Orange parties represented the two poles around which the Dutch worldview revolved. For the two-hundred or so years prior, the Regents and Orangists gained ascendancy over the other periodically, usually in response to massive public disturbances and cries against whichever party was in power. The *Patriottentijd* was different. Both the Orangists’ monarchical view and the Regent party’s “republican” or provincial view of the state and society became discredited.

The second source of de-legitimacy came not from temporal concerns, but from a long-term practice which had been slowly placing pressure on the political system’s legitimacy for decades. Over the years, the ruling merchant families had devised a collusive arrangement whereby financially lucrative and socially prestigious public offices, at all levels of government, would rotate between themselves, or their

descendents, even though the offices were technically open to all qualified, Protestant applicants.²⁸

Known as *Contracten van Correspondentie* (Letters of Correspondence), these secret agreements prevented the upstart sons of the nouveau riche and the small clutch of noble families from obtaining the offices they felt they were due.²⁹ This had the effect of exacerbating the not always latent friction between the merchant elite and the relatively small number of hereditary nobles. More importantly, it laid bare the widening discrepancy between the promises and the reality of Dutch society. The Republic promised equal access for all, but reality suggested things were different. This frustration with the system would lead this small band of nobles to entertain new ideas of respect and power as members of the new Dutch Nation. Incidentally, and for many of the same reasons, the nobility of France and Russia were also the bearers of their respective nations.³⁰

A third source of de-legitimization came from the continued decline of the Dutch economy.³¹ Commercial competition from France and England and the lowering of German demand for the Republic's highly profitable agricultural products meant significant changes in the structure of the Dutch economy.³² But the Republic had mortgaged its future and could not respond to the new competition from abroad. The Republic had the highest wages, highest taxes, and among the lowest interest rates in Europe, in addition to very high levels of government debt.³³ The effect was mesmerizing. Having pioneered the effective use of long-term gov-

²⁸ Although technically an office holder had to be a member of the Reformed Church, in practice, and in response to the famed Dutch toleration, Protestants of all stripes, Jews, and Catholics often occupied important positions. See Heinz Schilling *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992): 363.

²⁹ Jan A. F. de Jongste, "The Restoration of the Orangist Regime in 1747: the Modernity of a 'Glorious Revolution,'" in *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt (Cornell U. Press, 1992): 36.

³⁰ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Harvard U. Press, 1992).

³¹ J.L. van Zanden, "Dutch Economic History of the Period 1500-1940: a Review of the Present State of Affairs," *Economic and Social History in the Netherlands* 1 (1989): 9-29.

³² The dominant source of domestic investment was in agricultural land in the east of the Republic. But as the demand for Dutch agricultural goods dropped, rural unemployment resulted. Most migrated to the cities in search of work. See de Vries and van de Woude (1997)..

³³ Marolijn t'Hart, "The Making of the Dutch State," in Tilly and Blockmans, *Cities and the Rise of States*: 208.

ernment debt, the Netherlands found itself incapable of escaping from it. Like the Gordian knot, the harder the Dutch tried to untangle their financial constraints, the tighter they became.

These events were perceived as crises by the participants in terms of culture. As such, political and economic decline was seen as evidence of moral decay. Somehow the moral virtue of the past which most Netherlanders believed was the cause of the Republic's Golden Age had been lost.³⁴ The villain was the "Frenchification" of the stadhouder and the aristocratic pretensions of the Regents.³⁵ The rant from the pulpits warning of the moral dangers of material success was not new. From the earliest days of the Republic the moral authorities had railed against what they saw as worldly decadence. But while times were good, the dangers of this world threatened only the souls of the individuals so affected. When times grew bad, however, the collective soul was imperiled. Economic decline was seen to be evidence of God's displeasure

Precipitating Conditions

The accelerator or catalyst for the events to follow was the threat and then outbreak of the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784). It became immediately apparent that the Republic was ill prepared to wage war, and elites and commoners began to wonder aloud who was to blame. The Dutch did not fault the British for bringing ruin upon their Republic, as one might suspect they would have, they blamed the Organists, and then slowly, them blamed the Regents too. This happened in the following way.

It became clear to contemporary observers early on in the war that the Orangists, led by the Stadhouder William V, were reluctant participants because of their long-standing dynastic ties with the British crown and because of the periodic support the Orangists received from Britain in their struggles against the "republican" Regents, who monarchical England saw as a potential threat to their own legitimacy. The ghost of Cromwell was never far behind. Slowly people came to suspect that

³⁴ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (U. of California Press, 1988).

³⁵ Haitsma Mulier, "'Hoofsche papegaaien' of 'redelyke schepsels': Geschiedschrijvers en politiek in de Republiek in de eerst helft van de achttiende eeuw," [Haughty Parrots or Reasonable Creatures: Historians and Politics in the Republic in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century], *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 102 (1987): 450-475.

war losses were the result of treasonous liaisons between the House of Orange and British Crown, although there is no evidence to support this.

In times past, the Regents party would have been swept into power through popular acclamation, the Stadhouder sent into exile, or stripped of his influence. But this time, provincial autonomy, represented by the Regents party, prevented the reforms certain influential elites felt were necessary to wage the war effectively and bring the decentralized Dutch state into a more efficient, centralized form. The cities' stubborn adherence to medieval charters which guaranteed outmoded municipal rights at the expense of the collective good, outraged the reformers and their followers. The effect was to bring the whole system into question.

But again, I must stress, there was nothing in the state of affairs in which the Republic found itself, no matter how serious, which necessitated the emergence of the Dutch nation. The crisis of legitimacy and the accelerator or catalyst brought things to a head, that is all. National identity became the solution to the crisis of legitimacy and identity this occasioned because, first, it was available through the rhetoric of the American Revolution; second, there was an influential bearer or carrier of the idea who was well positioned to inject it into the public debate; and third, its solution worked.

Subsequent Conditions

The last stage looks at why nationalism was imported as a solution to the crisis of legitimacy activated by the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War. My purpose is to show that national identity is an idea, a view of the world which is imported in response to the temporal needs of a given society, at least at this early date. I also wish to show that the mechanism for doing this lies in the hearts and minds of usually a select group of men. This will dispel any notion that nations are structurally determined. I also include a discussion of where the Dutch got the idea of the nation and who imported the idea as an example of the pattern other cases might have followed: a disgruntled intellectual looking beyond his own shores to an idea which simultaneously justifies his anger with the present system while elevating him to a status above his oppressors. I begin by looking at how national identity was imported into the United Provinces. I then consider who imported the idea and where it came from.

The Dutch nation was born on 25 September 1781, when a pamphlet entitled, *Aan het Volk van Nederland* [To the People of the Netherlands] appeared on stoops around the Republic. The author withheld his name, signing it only as a "fellow citizen", but it soon became clear that it had been penned by the disgruntled no-

bleman Baron Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol from the eastern town of Zwolle. This one pamphlet is the first evidence of Dutch national identity and was the first one to address the entire people of the country, not just the inhabitants of a particular province or class.³⁶

The pamphlet claimed that *both* the Orangists and the Regents had betrayed the interests of the People, the Nation, and this betrayal was the source of the Republic's problems. For the first time, it was argued that the *Volk* possessed ultimate sovereignty, whose source was ancient and derived from the "rational choice" of free men. Van der Capellen also made the stunning claim through his attack on the regent oligarchy that provincial autonomy was also in violation of the national interest. By denying the traditional meanings of the Republic their validity and by elevating the People to the position of sovereign, van der Capellen set in motion the battle that would rage between the old institutions originally erected to maintain, defend, and promote the old views of reality, and the new, national view which saw such institutions and practices as wholly anachronistic, indeed, un-Dutch.

By asserting the sovereignty of the Nation, van der Capellen single-handedly undercut two-hundred years of monarchical and feudal claims to sovereignty made the Orangists and the Regents, which meant he challenged the very ideas which legitimated the Republic's existence and gave the Dutch the poles around which their collective identity revolved. In fact, his disgust of the Orangists was so intense that he claimed that William the Silent, the founder of the independent Dutch state, its first stadhouder, the Father of the Fatherland, was a *foreigner* thereby removing the legitimacy of the stadhouder's office. As a "foreign" institution, the stadhouder must be resisted and those who support him must be traitors to the Nation.

Van der Capellen and his comrades were heavily influenced by the events in the North America. Van der Capellen was involved in several ways: by direct participation in the Revolution: by publishing his translation and commentary on the Declaration of Independence and the constitution of Massachusetts, and by participating in spirited correspondence with the fathers of the American Revolution – Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin. He also helped along the lobbying campaign John Adams undertook in the Republic to drum up support and funds for the Revolution. Apparently van der Capellen's contributions to the American

³⁶ This is according to Peter Geyl, *De Patriotten beweging 1780-1787* [The Patriot Movement 1780-1787] (Amsterdam, 1947).

cause were significant enough to warrant the following remark by no less a figure than George Washington:

*“Your nation, Sir, and your Character in particular, have indeed merited the confidence and regard of the Confederate States of America – and they will long, I trust, be considered with grateful veneration.”*³⁷

The American cause was also quite popular among the Dutch and so van der Capellen could use that idiom for decrying injustice at home because it made sense for his audience, as he did in *Aan het Volk*. The effect was to present nationalism as an alternative identity for those who had lost faith in the old order.

The rest of the 18th century and all of the 19th was a case of dispersing the national ideal to the rest of the population, as happened in other parts of Europe. The particular nature of Dutch nationalism was a result of the nationalization of its pre-national or prior conditions. Dutch nationalism was as much a product of its past as it was the result of a new way of looking at the world.

Conclusion: From History to Histories

Modernization accounts of national identity are flawed. State-building and the emergence of capitalism and/or industrialization, though often coterminous with the appearance of nationalism, cannot be shown upon closer inspection to have caused national identity. The problem is that modernization accounts are actually forms of communications theory which ultimately point to social integration as evidence of national identity. And while national identity is certainly a form of social integration, it is not synonymous with it. For this reason, socially integrated societies may or may not be national in form.

The Dutch case suggest an alternative explanation of where nations come from. Nationalism is actually an idea which is imported by particular social elites in response to the deficiencies of the old system which they see as illegitimate. Looking at prior, precipitating, and subsequent conditions as a means of understanding how and why particular nations appear helps make this clear.

The work here begs an important question however, and one it is not constructed to answer: where did the Americans get their national identity from? This essay only shows that national identity did not originate in the Netherlands, though modernization theory predicts it should have. Liah Greenfeld suggests an answer,

³⁷ Ibid, p. 5.

although I have done no independent research to test her conclusions. I include her argument here because it is commensurate with my findings, and as a means for future discussion. She argues that national identity was invented in England during the course of the 16th century. The development was wholly English and thus wholly contingent. Again, no structural causes are possible. Once invented, nationalism spread to places like the Dutch Republic, the United States, France, etc. Europe then introduced nationalism to its imperial possessions so that it has become the defining characteristic of modern identity.

Once introduced, nationalism reinterpreted existing conditions and made them its own. It took the history of royal dynasties, which had little or nothing to do with the common person when the actual events occurred, and made them national, and therefore relevant for the average person in the street, that is, “possessable” by all members of the nation regardless of their station. Royal triumph or defeat became triumph or defeat for every member of the nation. Joan of Arc of the 15th century has identitive relevance for 21st century French skinheads. Through this slight of hand the Orangists *and* the Regents came to sit side-by-side in the same Pantheon of the Dutch Nation, their significant differences washed away by the brilliant light of national glory. Nations make histories out of history.

This last comment brings up a final point: where do nations come from today? Why have scholars of nationalism failed to predict the resuscitation of national feeling after the Cold War and during the supposed increase in global interdependence? The modernization paradigm which is still so dominant cannot explain why industrialized nations split apart, and subsistence-level agricultural communities claim the status of nations. There are some alternative explanations, such as suggesting that nationalism is a reaction to globalization, Europeanization, etc. These processes no doubt have an effect on people’s perceptions of their world, but it cannot explain why nationalism is the response and not something else. Pointing to such developments only explains why people are discontented with the status quo.

The answer to this problem lies in the reality that nations can emerge anywhere, anytime given the right conditions. To understand where nationalism comes from today, one must see national identity for what it is – a tool for the execution of political and cultural power. Nationalism is a way to legitimize power aspirations, mobilize supporters, and identify enemies. It can be xenophobic or inclusive, reactionary or progressive. The form a particular nation takes is infinitely mutable. So to understand the origins of contemporary nations is to understand power and the tools for its management. Exploring this, I believe, is the future of the field.