



Review

Lotte Jensen, *Celebrating Peace: The Emergence of Dutch Identity, 1648-1815* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2017)

Lotte Jensen, *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016)

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Lotte Jensen is currently one of the most visible scholars of historical Dutch literature. During the last year, her work was discussed by several national newspapers and journals, while *OVT*, *VPRO Boeken* and the *Universiteit van Nederland* broadcasted public lectures and interviews. This success partly depends on the topicality of her research: the creation of national identities. In two recent books – both developed in the context of her recently finished VIDI-project ‘Proud to be Dutch’ – she aims to lay bare the roots of a shared Dutch identity, and situates the origins of nationalism in the early modern period. The monograph *Celebrating Peace: The Emergence of Dutch Identity, 1648-1815* (originally written in Dutch, but recently translated into English¹) focuses on the many texts produced to celebrate peace and peace treaties, and aims to highlight their vital role in the formation of Dutch national identity. *The Roots of Nationalism: National Identity Formation in Early Modern Europe, 1600-1815* is an edited volume, resulting from a conference held at Radboud University Nijmegen in January 2015. Together, these two studies expose a wide range of cultural – especially textual – products expressing ideas of unity and patriotism long before the known flourishing of nationalism in the nineteenth century. We will, however, argue that they do not contain convincing arguments to prove the seventeenth century *emergence* of Dutch nationalism.

Celebrating Peace presents the textual discourse around peace from a diachronic perspective: from the Treaty of Munster (1648) via the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748) to the 1815 Congress of Vienna, where the United Kingdom of the Netherlands was founded. In this way, the study could be considered as a broad cultural history of moments of peace. The extensiveness and diversity of the analysed corpus is praiseworthy. Jensen reviews the canon by discovering many unknown texts from a wide range of genres (such as pamphlets, songs, poems, stage plays) and written by both male and female authors.

¹ We quote the English version. Dutch title: *Vieren van Vrede: Het ontstaan van de Nederlandse identiteit, 1648-1815* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2016).

Together, these case studies reveal a very steady discourse on peace. This is, in our opinion, the greatest merit of Jensen's diachronic cultural history: it highlights many striking continuities in the way peace was celebrated and described. From the Treaty of Munster (1648) to the Treaty of Amiens (1802), authors used the same metaphors and images. Jensen frequently addresses the reference to fat cows as metaphors for prosperity, and the allegories Pax and Mars as the representations of the dichotomy between peace and war.

Whether such discourses *emerged* in 1648 is, however, up for debate. Concordia, Discordia, Pax and Mars were allegorical characters that belonged to the standard Renaissance rhetorical tradition, and they were used in many texts and cultural contexts long before 1648. For instance, these allegories were fully present in the contributions to rhetorician contests like the 1561 Antwerp Landjuweel² (held a couple of years after the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, 1559), and were also used in rhetorician celebrations during the Twelve Year Truce (1609-1621).³ The metaphor of the cow was not introduced in 1648 either: Joost van den Vondel, for example, used the cow in a 1626 poem to honour Frederik Hendrik for one of his victories.⁴ Moreover, the connection of such topoi to (the celebration of) *peace* can be taken into discussion. Marijke Meijer Drees, for instance, demonstrates that the cow as an image for the Dutch Republic appeared in wartime as well.⁵

Our prime concern, however, is the relationship between such discourses on peace on the one hand and the shaping of national identities on the other. According to the title, celebrations of peace (main title) help us to understand the emergence of a Dutch identity (subtitle). But while *Celebrating Peace* clearly demonstrates that the inhabitants of the Dutch Republic considered their area as a coherent entity and felt themselves connected to other people around them, divergent and sometimes even opposite conceptions of their Republic as a 'nation' were expressed. Instead of 'the Dutch identity', the book rather presents a diffuse and complicated discourse on the self and the fatherland. People from different religious denominations often constructed their own ideas about their fatherland, although they frequently used the same metaphors and images to express them. In periods of peace, such differences and internal conflicts became even more visible (e.g. p. 46), as if peace celebrations sometimes hampered (instead of enhanced) the shaping of shared identities.

² Pax and Discordia are explicitly represented as opposites on the invitation card of the chamber of rhetoric that organised the contest. For a discussion, see J. Vandommele, *Als in een spiegel: Vrede kennis en gemeenschap op het Antwerpse Landjuweel van 1561* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2011), 62. For examples of this discours in textual contributions of the participating chambers of rhetoric, see: *Spelen van sinne vol scoone moralisacien wtleggingen ende bediedenissen op alle loefl ijcke consten waerinne men claerlijck ghelijck in eenen spieghel / Figuerlijck / Poetelijck ende Retorijckelijck mach aenschouwen hoe nootsakelijck ende dienstelijck die selve consten allen menschen zijn* (Antwerpen: Willem Silvius, 1562), especially fol. C2v, 9-14; fol. E1v, 18; fol. Pp1v, 19; fol. Pp1v, 25-6; fol. Rrr4r, 5-10.

³ See for example: J. Theuillier, *De schadt-kiste der filosofhen ende poeten* (Mechelen: Hendrick Iaye, 1621), especially pp. 19, 52, 62, 132, 141, 188, 213, 235.

⁴ J. van den Vondel, *Begroetenis aen den doorluchtighsten en hooghgeboren Vorst Frederick Henrick* (1626), r. 210: 'De koe belooft meer rooms uyt haer geswollen uyer'. Quoted from: J.F.M. Sterck, H.W.E. Moller, C.R. de Klerk, B.H. Molkenboer, J. Prinsen J.Lzn. en L. Simons (eds.), *De werken van Vondel: Tweede deel 1620-1627* (Amsterdam: De Maatschappij voor goede en goedkope lectuur, 1929), p. 518.

⁵ M. Meijer Drees, "'Vechten voor het vaderland' in de literatuur 1650-1750," in: N.F.C. van Sas (ed.), *Vaderland: Een geschiedenis van de vijftiende eeuw tot 1940* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), pp. 109-14.

A related complicating factor is the conceptualization of 'Nederland'. Notions as 'Dutch', 'Netherlands' and 'national' are very complicated and diffuse, but the book lacks any careful approach to and critical reflection on these concepts. In general, 'Nederland' is understood as the 'Dutch Republic' (f.e. pp. 9, 19), implicitly defined as the Seven United Provinces. The subtitle suggests that the present-day Netherlands are an unproblematic continuation of the seventeenth century Dutch Republic, as if 'the identity' of the Seven Provinces coincides with 'Dutch identity'. This is problematic from a contemporary perspective (Jensen's perception of Dutch identity excludes over a third of the present Dutch population) as well as with an eye to the early modern period itself. What is the position of the Generality Lands, which seem to be excluded from the definition of 'Nederland', but were simultaneously discussed by Jensen in the sections on Breda (pp. 43-56, especially p. 53; see also p. 19) and Bergen op Zoom (pp. 131-3)? It remains unclear how Jensen exactly defines the Dutch Republic, and how she considers the relationship between the Generality Lands and the Seven Provinces. So while this monograph aims to understand the Dutch national identity, we do not really know *what* and *whose* identity the book tries to discuss.

As a result, it turns out to be impossible to mark the *emergence* of a Dutch identity in 1648, as the subtitle promised its readers to do. But does the book *really* aim to prove such an emergence? Whereas Jensen offers a description of the debate between the modernists and the traditionalists in her introduction, her own position remains rather vague: she is aligning herself 'more with the traditionalists than the modernists' (p. 14). How do we have to interpret 'more' in this case? Jensen does not prove herself to be a real traditionalist: while traditionalists generally focus on continuities in the shaping of nationalistic identities, she seems to represent 1648 as a starting point (and therefore hardly refers to research done by Judith Pollmann, revealing that 'we-feelings' existed *before* 1648). Simultaneously, however, Jensen aims to demonstrate a continuous process of identity formation, whereas modernists rather consider the nineteenth century as the period in which nations emerged. In both the introduction and the epilogue, Jensen presents the nineteenth century nationalistic policy as not or far from 'brand new' (pp. 25, 185). But how should we define 'far from brand new'? Which elements in the process of identity formation were developing throughout the centuries? Such questions remain unanswered.

The Roots of Nationalism, Jensen's second book published in 2016, positions itself in the same nationalism debate of traditionalists and modernists. This volume is a collection of sixteen papers on processes of identity formation within various European nations (many articles focus on the Netherlands, but others on Iceland, Russia, Spain, Wales, Belgium or Hungary) and a variety of media that serve to reflect this identity (such as printed texts, songs, puzzles, maps, travel journals). Many fascinating case studies help us to uncover early examples of nationalism and to refute the dominant connection between nationalism and modernity. Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez's paper, for example, shows the impact of Hispanophobic discourses in Europe on the shaping of a Spanish national identity. She argues that, in his stage plays, Lope de Vega placed anti-Spanish voices against honest Spanish characters to neutralize a negative perception of Spain. In another interesting paper, Jan Waszink contrasts foreign historiographers describing the Dutch Republic as a unity, to domestic writers emphasizing the power of the separate provinces.

Unfortunately, *The Roots of Nationalism* does not reflect upon the consequences of situating the nationalistic roots back to the early modern period, and it does not present a new overarching vision on identity formation. That is somewhat disappointing, especially because the volume provides a lot of follow-up questions and interesting suggestions for alternative approaches and visions, for example raised by inspiring opening papers by Azar Gat, Andrew Hadfield and David Bell. However, these theoretical views are not confronted with each other, nor are they linked to the following case studies. And although this 'diffuse character' of the volume is mentioned in its introduction ('This volume does not offer a fully developed, coherent counter-theory nor do all authors share the same views', p. 14), this approach left us with an important question: what are *the* roots this book wants to present? The title indicates an overarching idea on the emergence of nationalism, while the contributors situate the formation of nations within different periods, or even argue that it is impossible to trace any roots: 'can we imagine a time when nations did not exist?' (p. 49), Andrew Hadfield asks us in his paper.

Also due to its fragmentary structure, *The Roots of Nationalism* does not reflect upon the national differences in the shaping of nations and identities. Case studies from many European countries are analysed to prove the early roots of nationalism. As an effect, the process of nation formation seems to be presented as a European phenomenon, developed in every European nation in the same way and at the same time. However, this European perspective is simultaneously questioned in some articles. Azar Gat criticizes the 'European-centric' (p. 35) nature of nationalism studies and argues in favour of a global perspective, while David Bell confesses: 'if I were to rewrite *The Cult of the Nation* today, I would give the French colonies, and France's place within various Atlantic systems, a far more prominent place' (p. 68). Such important suggestions, expressed in the papers, regrettably have not had any effect on the composition or the purport of this volume.

These two rich cultural histories, we need to say, are unable to fulfil the promises raised by their titles: they do not reveal *the* emergence of *the* Dutch identity and *the* roots of nation formation. And maybe that's for the best. *The Roots of Nationalism* and *Celebrating Peace* rather face us with various – often diffuse and sometimes incompatible – early modern conceptualizations of 'Dutchness' and nationalism. They beg for further critical reflections on early processes of identity formation.