
Frank J. Lechner
Department of Sociology
Emory University
flechn@emory.edu

Draft submitted for presentation at the 2002 ASA annual meeting.
Note: 15-minute presentation will be organized around summaries in Appendix.

Frank J. Lechner
Emory University

Abstract

This paper addresses the impact of globalization on national identity by means of a case study of the Netherlands. It makes three main points. First, I propose a nuanced alternative to scenarios that posit the decline or reinvigoration of national identity, by arguing that in the global age national identities undergo embattled redefinition. Second, linking two bodies of literature on national identity and public policy, I propose a method for studying the problem at hand, by arguing that one effective way to examine national identity work is to focus on processes of policy formation as useful markers of transformations in national identity. Third, examining three policy arenas in the Netherlands, I show briefly how Dutch national identity is enacted in meeting recently intensified global challenges with local paradigms, while at the same time the content and viability of the national “project” as displayed in policy arenas are continually in question. Empirically, I conclude that in the Netherlands the nature of identity work, demonstrated in at least partial paradigm shifts, has varied by policy sector; over the last twenty years, Dutch social policy and, to a lesser extent, minority policy, retained a more distinctly national cast than Dutch media policy. Analytically, I conclude that case studies of the kind illustrated here complement more distinctly global analysis through detailed examination of the global-local/national dialectic, and thereby help to support more plausible scenarios for the future of national identity under conditions of globalization.
“The centrality of national cultures, national identities and their institutions is challenged . . . Cultural globalization is transforming the context in which and the means through which national cultures are produced and reproduced, but its particular impact on the nature and efficacy of national cultures . . . is, as yet, harder to decipher.”– Held et al., 1999

Introduction

In January 2000, a single newspaper essay triggered nationwide debate in the Netherlands. Dutch society, it argued, had failed to integrate its recently arrived ethnic and religious minorities (Scheffer 2000). Integration was a new problem not amenable to old solutions: the emancipation of Dutch workers and Catholics offered little guidance for incorporating Islamic groups. The standard public rhetoric of tolerance and inclusion could not obscure rising ethnic segregation in the country. The heart of the problem, the author stressed, was misguided multiculturalism. Intent on welcoming others, the Netherlands had lost a clear sense of its own core culture. But without a commitment to a common tradition and language, a society lacked the very basis for integration. “A society that denies itself has little to offer to newcomers.” To prevent “The Multicultural Drama” from turning into a form of apartheid therefore required renewed attention to what makes Dutch society Dutch and a renewed effort to socialize migrants into the national culture.

The article hit a nerve. Many reader sent in letters echoing Scheffer’s lament about the lack of integrating symbolism. Some intellectuals, on the other hand, took issue with his diagnosis; they argued that Dutch identity was nebulous and always in flux. The minister of integration policy weighed in by recognizing the value of a shared language in bringing about cohesion, but he considered the indictment of Dutch integration efforts far too somber. Later in the year, parliament set aside two days for an unprecedented discussion without a legislative agenda. In this debate, the leaders of all political parties engaged in collective soul-searching about the value and viability of integration.

The very fact of the commotion is noteworthy: at the turn of the twenty-first century, this debate signaled, Dutch society had come to focus once again on the nature of its national identity. What did it mean to be, or become, Dutch? What tradition could the country claim, and why should it matter? What binding elements, if any, did this society possess? Could, or should, the
country maintain any continuity with its past as it tried to incorporate newcomers? After decades in which the very mention of national identity had raised suspicions of dangerous nationalism, the issue had become central in discourse. In fact, “The Multicultural Drama” was only the latest installment in a series of exchanges among intellectuals and public officials that included two earlier rounds of debate about the subject in national newspapers.

The Dutch experience is not unique: many nation-states now face the same questions. Nor is the circumstance that precipitated the Dutch debate unique, for many countries must adapt to the presence of migrants. That trigger in turn is part of a larger shared predicament: as nation-states become enmeshed in ever-widening, ever-deepening transnational ties, their ability to fashion a distinct identity is called into question. What does it mean to be a “nation” in the global age? What does it take to constitute an “identity”? How could a “national identity” still matter? The Dutch constitute only one nation confronting a set of global questions.

In this paper I sketch three main steps in a project1 that investigates how Dutch society confronts such questions. The general purpose of the project is to address the problem raised by Held and his colleagues in their analysis of globalization, namely to decipher more precisely the impact of globalization on the nature and efficacy of national cultures. The steps in my argument are as follows:

First, drawing on two contrasting views of the impact of globalization, I argue that while national identities are certainly challenged by globalizing trends, the emerging world culture also fosters creative identity work by national groups within their particular territories. In the current global age, national identities undergo embattled redefinition.

---

1 In this paper, I omit three things relevant to the larger project: First, I skip two components of the project, namely analysis of recent Dutch identity discourse and a review of recent cultural, especially religious, change, which help to clarify the context of Dutch policy developments. Second, the project as a whole draws on an extensive review of relevant bodies of scholarly literature, primary documents (such as government reports, legislative texts, and various contributions to policy debate), and interviews with experts, but for purposes of this paper I will cite relevant sources only selectively. Third, for reasons of space I mostly bracket here the growing role of European rules and institutions in specific policy areas, which obviously has to be considered for a more complete assessment of national-level paradigm shifts in policy.
Second, linking two bodies of literature on national identity and public policy, I suggest that one effective way to examine such identity work is to focus not on the symbolic activity of intellectual elites but on processes of policy formation. Patterns in collective problem-solving are useful markers of transformations in national identity. Examined through the lens provided by studies of national identity, policy formation appears as a form of identity work. Focusing on policy formation also offers the advantage of tracing the impact of globalization by specifying its different dimensions.

Third, examining three policy arenas in the Netherlands, I show briefly how Dutch national identity is enacted in meeting recently intensified global challenges with local paradigms, while at the same time the content and viability of the national “project” as displayed in policy arenas are continually in question. The analysis shows that the nature of identity work, demonstrated in at least partial paradigm shifts, varies by policy sector. Over the last twenty years, Dutch social policy and, to a lesser extent, minority policy, retained a more distinctly national cast than Dutch media policy.

I conclude by summarizing the evolution of Dutch national identity as reflected in public policy shifts since 1980 and emphasizing the ways in which “global” and “local” are intertwined in current national identity work.

Scenarios

One way to answer contemporary questions about national identity is to argue that globalization entails the demise of the nation-state. As the state loses control over economic flows, as it is exposed to intensifying competition, its effective sovereignty diminishes; therefore, at least those nations shaped by a state apparatus are likely to find their identity weakened. The sheer force of cultural globalization also tends to overwhelm any national community’s efforts to maintain its distinctness. When people, products, and ideas wash in waves across particular places, when all boundaries become porous to outside influence, any group’s commitment to “its” identity in “its” place will have to be redefined. The point of having such an identity must change as well, for globalization fosters ties not bound to place or territory. Dividing the world into distinct nations once may have had a function in a competitive capitalist system, but under modern
circumstances accumulation needs no nations. Even where some semblance of national identity
remains, it will become less central in people's experience, less important in organizing social life.
National cultures and national identities, once effective containers of much human activity, will
become empty shells. So goes one scenario.

Straightforward though this scenario seems, it has a rival. According to the alternative
view, the state is no organization bound to lose out in a struggle for influence but a globally
legitimated institution imbued with a special authority. As states necessarily retain control over
people and territory, they also must define the identity of what they manage. Far from
overwhelming nations, cultural globalization heightens their visibility and significance, for
collectivities cannot live by global flows alone, as if without boundaries. Given their relative
historic strengths, national identities are likely to become a stronger focus of loyalty in the global
age. In fact, national difference has itself become a feature of world culture; the global injunction
is and remains: thou shalt organize in particular nations. Globalization, on this view, entails
heterogeneity, notably along national lines.

Of course the rhetorical purpose of such juxtapositions is to suggest that there is a middle
way. In this case, the constructive compromise draws on both scenarios. The demise scenario is
right to suggest that under the corrosive influence of globalization national identity becomes
embattled as states lose control, global flows intensify, boundaries blur, and non-national ties rise.
In some respects, the world unifies in a manner that transcends nations. The vitality scenario
correctly points to the institutionalized features of world society that bolster national identity as
the focus of legitimate state activity, a source of collective responses to cultural globalization, a
type of identity more strongly entrenched than many others, and a form of globally sanctioned
particularism. As the world unifies, it also diversifies. The centrality and viability of national
identities are challenged, but they also can and must be redefined. The globally common
denominator, then, is continually embattled refashioning.

If this middle way is plausible as a scenario in its own right, the analytical task shifts from
arguing in global terms what the fate of national identity might be to showing in particular
instances how the dialectic of local and global, and of being-embattled and reviving-difference,
occurs. How, in short, can we best make sense of the way national cultures become enmeshed in
globalization? In this paper I argue that national-level case studies offer one effective approach. This strategy does carry risks. For example, it might seem to favor comparative ethnography over more systematic global analysis. My purpose, however, is to complement rather than to criticize the latter. Another risk has to do with the study of any single “case,” for if we have entered the “global age” (Albrow 1997) it would not make sense to portray any nation as a pristinely self-contained unit suddenly confronting outside pressure. Though I focus on the Netherlands as a unit, for the sake of simplicity, my purpose is to demonstrate the dynamics of enmeshment. On the positive side, globally-oriented case studies enable us to capture in more detail the actual global-local dialectic now under scrutiny in theoretical debate. While no single case can demonstrate a global pattern, it can serve to offer nuanced counterpoints to ambitious global scenarios familiar from the literature on globalization.

*Frameworks*

For all the scholarly disagreements over the meaning of “nation” and “national identity,” there is in fact a common thrust that runs through much of the recent literature. According to the conventional wisdom, nations are socially constructed by new methods for particular purposes in modern times. They are “imagined communities,” not primordial ones (Anderson 1991). Even if the peoples that make up particular nations have a long memory of common descent, they emerge in their contemporary from through narrative bootstrapping by elites who create the symbols around which national communities may coalesce. They are the product, rather than the source, of books and flags, schools and state bureaucracies. They represent deliberate efforts at boundary-drawing, increasingly common in a period of history when to count as an actor on the world stage required such boundaries. And they are of recent vintage, modern inventions suited for the modern age.

This conventional wisdom, I suggest, is not so much wrong in principle as incomplete in practice: though it refers to the role of institutions in the creation of modern nations, scholars usually focus on the nation as discourse, on the symbolic activity of intellectuals. In short, this literature offers a limited picture of the kind of identity work involved in fashioning nations, as mostly a matter of free-floating imagination. But for imagined communities to become actual
nations requires some kind of institutional process. Of course, an older literature on “nation-building” recognized as much. More recently, scholars have begun to examine the “politics of discourse” as well. I propose to add to such work by arguing that we can study how national identity is made and expressed by analyzing how any national community, once organized in a state, engages in distinctive patterns of collective problem-solving. In forming policies that address shared problems, national identity gets enacted. Policy formation is also identity work, the work of pursuing a distinct national project.

Policy formation is the subject of another large literature. Students of comparative public policy have been especially interested in the way in which nation-states have shaped distinctive economic institutions, such as industrial relations, and moderated the effects of economic inequality, for example by income transfer programs (Crouch and Streeck 1997; Hicks 1999). The underlying assumption in such work is that nation-states have a certain autonomy in choosing their purposes and selecting methods to fulfill those purposes. Even within a generally capitalist environment, states have some degrees of freedom in regulating their economies or redistributing goods. Capitalist welfare states compose variations on common themes. But the state is only relatively autonomous, for it is necessarily embedded in networks and institutions that are not part of the state apparatus itself. On the one hand, as neoinstitutionalist arguments would suggest, the state apparatus is itself shaped by a world polity, composed of institutions that incorporate global models. In that sense, no state policy is ever wholly national, yet one central, now globally legitimate object of any state is also to form a distinct nation. Domestically, on the other hand, such embeddedness can take different forms, depending on whether the state is closely tied to specific societal groups and whether the state assumes extensive responsibility for the regulation of economic life. Such embeddedness only sets the stage for policy formation, which is generally a fluid process in which many actors get involved. In the institutional process of shaping policy, such actors identify their interests, but they also make claims about the nature of the public good. Making policy is at least in part a discursive process, an intellectual exercise in which ideas acquire power. Such discourse, in turn, is shaped by the legacy of policies past, dependent on paths chosen previously. Each nation-state, according to one influential version of the argument, has its own policy paradigms (Hall 1993). Most policy-making occurs within the bounds set by
such paradigms. Only occasionally, under the pressure of perceived crises, do their strictures give way to change and learning. But even when states undergo wrenching change, they are still engaged in a national project, shaping a national community by the way state institutions resolve its problems.

This brief gloss on a large literature is only intended to make the point that the comparative study of public policy complements the conventional study of national identity. These literatures have thematic affinities—both wrestle with the problems of distinctiveness and continuity under pressure from a challenging environment, both recognize the weight of historical precedent in paradigmatically shaping identities or policy-making, both conceive of the nation as in part a discursive artefact. The heuristics developed by students of national identity provide tools for a fresh interpretation of the meaning of policy-making in nation-states. By the same token, comparative public policy gives substance and a new focus to the analysis of national identity. As nation-state actors make public policy, they demonstrate who they are and what they want the nation to be. As they apply distinctive paradigms by means of a globally legitimated apparatus, they enact an identity. Their institutional process is a form of identity work. A “cultural” reading of policy processes therefore promises to go beyond the constraints of two current literatures, as Dobbin (1994) showed in his pioneering effort to explain national variation in the forging of industrial policy.

Focusing on policy has an additional advantage, namely to decompose, as it were, both the work of the nation and the thrust of globalization. Instead of treating nation and globalization in the abstract, as artefacts of discourse, this type of analysis makes it possible to examine more precisely the intricacies of enmeshment. As a heuristic guide, it suggests that globalization’s effects may vary. Globalization poses different challenges to a nation-state’s capacity to guarantee collective welfare, to its efforts to integrate minority groups, and to its control over television broadcasting. National responses in social policy, minority policy, and media policy similarly may vary, depending on the relevant paradigm policy makers bring to bear. Analyzing varied responses to different challenges through policy formation in three arenas, as instances of embattled reconstructions of identity, enables us to move beyond the particular versions of the
demise and vitality scenarios applicable to each policy sphere and thereby bolsters the overall argument about national identity stated above.

*Dutch social policy*

One of the concrete ways in which globalization affects nation-states is through the impact of economic integration on the viability of welfare states. If countries want to attract investment and have their products compete in the world market, so goes a plausible argument, then they must create a business-friendly climate. Generous welfare policies require high taxes, raise the cost of labor and reduce the incentive to work. As international competition intensifies, such generosity becomes a liability. It is bound to hamper foreign investment and employment growth. The economic performance, and ultimately the standard of living, of costly welfare states will therefore suffer as well. An open international economy, in other words, rewards lean states. Now this argument is controversial, both because its logic underestimates the benefits economies derive from social protection and because the empirical record of welfare states is mixed. The role of nation-states remains vital, according to some scholars, in providing stable regulation and social compensation. Rather than “downward convergence,” common challenges yield different responses according to one groups of comparative scholars (Scharpf and Schmidt 2000). My purpose here is not to settle the argument, one version of the demise-versus-vitality battle, by further comparative analysis, but rather to investigate how the global challenge reverberates in a particular case. What could be viably “national” in the way nation-states handle the pressures the conventional argument describes? Can a nation-state remain committed to its own version of extensive social protection? In reconsidering their commitments and policies in this area, I propose, nation-states are performing a kind of identity work.

By 1980, the Dutch welfare state had become one of the most generous in the world (Bannink 1999). After a late start in extending social provision to the ill, disabled and unemployed, the Netherlands had caught up by creating universal entitlements that provided security against market shifts and personal misfortune. Income transfers now claimed a high proportion of public resources, in fact one of the highest in the world. This generosity was the outcome of the collaborative efforts of many political and social groups. For several decades,
they had assumed that the state had a responsibility to ensure solidarity by extending minimal security to all citizens. Welfare, broadly conceived, was not a privilege, but a right. In securing welfare through transfer payments, the state could also moderate social inequality. Such shared purposes were reflected in an intricate institutional scheme, grounded in many distinct pieces of legislation. While the state controlled the purse strings, it relied on social groups in several ways. For example, in preparation for new policies, it requested the advice of the so-called social partners, representatives of unions and employers. In executing various insurance schemes, it relied on semi-public agencies run by the representatives of business, unions, or private (especially confessional) organizations. The process of making social policy, in short, had been highly corporatist, involving organized consultation with societal groups at all stages. Though conservatives had grumbled about the fairness and expense of redistribution for some years, this welfare state could count on broad support.

Then the crisis hit. The second oil shock of the late 1970s combined with a worsening international economy to produce especially severe consequences for the Netherlands, always greatly exposed to the vagaries of external change. Recession cut government income. Yet as unemployment grew, so did state expenditures. The result was a government budget out of control. At the same time, the very structure of welfare state programs seemed to reduce the state’s flexibility to introduce change or to stimulate job growth. From a welfare state sensibly compensating for economic risk without jeopardizing its economic performance, the Netherlands became a state suffering from the “Dutch disease,” its bloated budget and stifling welfare structure now aggravating its condition. Under increasing global pressure, it became clear, the Dutch welfare state might not be viable. Reform was in order.

The first priority of the new center-right government that came to office in 1982 (see Table 1 for a list of government coalitions) was not to transform social policy but to achieve wage moderation in order to improve Dutch competitiveness and thereby increase employment. Such moderation also would indirectly alleviate the burden of transfer payments, since wages were linked to benefit levels. Under pressure from the cabinet, the leaders of the main employer and union organizations agreed on moderating wage demands in exchange for greater job security. But social policy commanded attention as well. Because the system expressed widely held values
and retained strong support, the government gradually prepared the way for change. Expert reviews led to government reports led to parliamentary debate led to new legislation led to a closely contested vote in Parliament, which resulted not in structural change but in reduction of some kinds of benefits and more restricted eligibility criteria for some kinds of programs. Partial retrenchment contained the growth in costs but did not reform the system that produced those costs. It could not drastically reduce the demand for social protection and it could not make its administration more efficient. The numbers of beneficiaries kept growing (from 2.3 to 4 million between 1975 and 1990) and the ratio of inactive to working adults began to approach parity (Roebroek and Hertogh, 1998, p. 339). The main disability insurance program, the WAO, in particular kept growing inexorably. Though the Dutch economy was improving, a burdensome and opaque welfare system that favored protection over work still seemed a drag on economic performance. Cost reduction therefore gradually gave way to reconsideration of the purpose of protection and to revision of its governance structure.

While the long-perceived problem of governance created an impetus for welfare revision, that revision received a strong intellectual stimulus from a report by the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), which stressed the need that the purpose of policy should be to enable people to participate in the work force, and that therefore social protection should facilitate (re)activation. Activation minimally required eliminating perverse incentives from insurance programs. Even against the recommendations of the social partners, a coalition of bureaucrats and party officials began to form in favor of more thorough change in welfare laws. In 1992, an unprecedented parliamentary inquiry, triggered by the continuing troubles of the disability program, resulted in strong recommendations for more effective execution of welfare laws and more responsible monitoring by relevant agencies. A substantial reform effort begun by a center-right coalition was continued by a left-right coalition that assumed power in 1994. This effort centered on reforming sickness and disability insurance programs by gradually introducing incentives to prevent entry into insurance programs, increasing employer and personal liability, expanding the kinds of work beneficiaries might have to accept, differentiating premiums and benefits, and the like. New agencies were devised to carry out some of the new laws; the executive role of municipalities also increased. By the year 2000, the Dutch government had
reduced its responsibility for income maintenance, devolved executive responsibility to numerous other authorities, and imposed new responsibilities on workers, beneficiaries and employers.

What does this record, summarized in Table 2, tell us about Dutch national identity? Until 1990, not much changed: the Netherlands was still a society committed to generous welfare policies as an expression of solidarity. While the cost of programs had come under fire, consensus on the fairness of redistribution remained strong. The process of reform had not changed greatly from the period of building either: corporatist institutions were strong, consultation aimed at producing consensus was still common. Most of the old players and policies were in place. The upshot is that the impact of global pressure was processed within a framework that had a distinct national cast. The shock was accommodated by deliberate collective choices. But as external economic urgency diminished, the impetus toward internal reform intensified. Twenty years after the initial crisis hit, the shape of Dutch social policy has in fact changed quite substantially. Its discourse now routinely refers to individual responsibility, to the need for participation in work, to incentives and calculation. The justification for policies, in short, has shifted in a “neoliberal” direction. In this respect, the Netherlands clearly absorbed elements of a broader global discourse. The process of making policy also has changed: the central state has taken strong action even against entrenched vested interests, new agencies have more clearly defined responsibilities not linked to particular social groups. New players are involved in formulating and executing policy. Policy content reflects new purposes and a new organization of responsibilities: the welfare acts of the 1990s would have been impossible to pass in 1980.

But does this amount to a paradigm shift? If it does, has the image of the nation changed, at least insofar as expressed in the work of the social policy community? The results of 1990s policy reform in the Netherlands make sense as part of a new “responsibility” paradigm. But policy legacies still weigh heavily: the principle of universal solidarity remains important, corporatism has not disappeared (and may be strengthened as new agencies become entangled with the central state), and activation measures operate in a framework of still-generous transfer benefits. There has been no “big bang” (Visser and Hemerijck 1997), no change in the essential normative framework (Van der Veen and Trommel 1999). The very debate about the welfare state is still structured by corporatist notions (Cox 1993), the new links between state and society
still fit with old notions of “subsidiarity” (Roebroek and Hertogh 1998). The festering problems of the
disability insurance program, approaching one million beneficiaries out of a population of
sixteen million, demonstrate the limits of reform: faced with a choice between dramatic
streamlining and balancing of incentives and security, the Netherlands thus far has chosen the
latter. However great the practical problems they entail, such continuities are one mark of the
efficacy of Dutch identity work. But even the discontinuity contains a message, for the significant
reforms were carried out as part of a distinctly national project in which Dutch policy makers
deliberately fashioned a Dutch response to a global predicament.

**Dutch minority policy**

Like many other European countries, the Netherlands has experienced significant
immigration since the 1970s. When Surinam became independent in 1975, many of its residents
opted to move to the colonial homeland. Economic trouble in the Dutch Antilles stimulated a
steady stream of migrants as well. Guest workers from Turkey and Morocco stayed and later
brought relatives and marriage partners. When other parts of the world became less stable, many
sought asylum in the Netherlands. As a result, the country became much more diverse and
colorful.

Such streams of migrants, many have argued, put significant pressure on the capacity of
nation-states to run their own affairs, to maintain their own culture, and to define their own kind
of citizenship. Because border-crossing has intensified so much, the ability of any one state to
control the flow coming its way has diminished greatly. It is not only the sheer flow of people
that poses the challenge. Nation-states are not free to treat migrants as they see fit. Constrained
by universal norms, the way they incorporate strangers is bound to lose distinctive national
features (cf. Soysal 1994). Such incorporation also will matter less. The more people are on the
move, the less weight citizenship in any state is likely to carry. And in any national culture, the
presence of strangers makes a difference, for they alter the very self-understanding a nation-state
might have possessed. When it comes to migration, globalization therefore spells dissolution of
the national. Against this scenario of national decline, others have posited that conceptions of
citizenship, at least, are so deeply rooted in national traditions, so entrenched in legal codes, that
they will serve as permanent molds into which migration flows must be channeled (Brubaker 1992). Nation-states, this argument suggests, will try to remain vital as they make new members resemble the old, if they are to be included at all, and discourage identities that deviate from national citizenship.

If the approach to national identity spelled out above holds up, then we should find that as new policies evolve to deal with the influx of would-be members, the common scenario is neither inertia nor dissolution. Rather, minority policy should reveal that nation-states remain “resilient,” and that, at least in liberal states, citizenship can be malleable, while at the same time remaining indispensable for integrating immigrants (Joppke 1999, p. 263,142). Dutch minority policy, I suggest, initially brought traditional ideas and methods to bear on a relatively new problem, but over time also adapted to create a new model of integration. Its evolution shows some significant change, partly precipitated from the outside, and in that sense it did not simply preserve an existing identity. Yet minority policy also shows one form resilient adaptation can take.

When minorities were first widely perceived as a “problem” in the late 1970s, the apparatus brought to bear on it was not new. The Scientific Council for Government Policy issued an influential report. Government bureaucrats studied the matter, laying the groundwork for a major policy statement by the responsible cabinet officer. Even in the absence of a full-fledged corporatist structure of organizations that focused on the subject and represented relevant groups, experts and officials worked to create a consensus for a particular kind of policy. Without direct representation of affected groups in the political center, government had to take the initiative. The policy’s main goal was to assist migrants to become fully emancipated while retaining their own culture and identity. In this respect, the proposed paradigm resembled the methods by which workers and Catholics had become full members of Dutch society in earlier periods. Like workers, the policy community argued with increasing support from political parties, migrants were entitled to equality; like Catholics, they were entitled to maintain their own culture, supported by their own institutions. But this reasoning by historical analogy did not prevent the emerging public discourse, in hundreds of publications, from identifying the nation is a subtly new way: the Netherlands, many began to realize, was becoming a “country of immigration.”
The extensive discussions and analyses of minority problems in the 1980s gave rise to relatively few specific policies. To some extent, this was by design: emancipation in the social-democratic mode required the extension of ordinary entitlements to minorities above all. In part, minority policy was general welfare policy given a special twist. To promote emancipation, a new education policy gave priority to children with disadvantages. But the state did little to promote minority employment, apart from stimulating minority hiring in government. One minority-specific measure was to strengthen support for a nationwide program to educate minority children in their own language and culture. In principle, the government also recognized the right of Muslim groups to found their own schools with public funding under the 1983 constitution’s freedom of education provision, though initially few Islamic schools were founded. Subsidies began to flow to some minority organizations. Only a few measures indicated the influence of a global human rights regime. For example, permanent residence was eased in the mid-1980s, foreign residents obtained voting rights in local elections, and the constitution’s anti-discrimination provision began to cleanse laws and regulations of ethnic and religious distinctions.

The high hopes of the early 1980s did not come true. A decade of policy-making did not result in substantial equality between majority and minorities. Even if the expectations themselves had been unrealistically high, the continued minority disadvantage in education and economy and the rising ethnic segregation in major cities around 1990 gave impetus to a shift in public discourse. Initiated by the political right, treated with skepticism by the governing center-left coalition, a new theme began to pervade minority discourse: integration. The shift in emphasis did not mean that old policies were jettisoned. In fact, the commitment to emancipation remained strong. It translated into new laws to promote affirmative action by private employers and an overhaul of educational disadvantage policy. The process of policy-making also became more regular, in the sense that organized group interests became part of policy deliberations at the national level. A special ministry, instituted in 1998, came to focus on minority issues. But the very name of the ministry conveyed the change: it was devoted to “Large Cities and Integration Policy.” Hallmark of the new thrust was a law, long in the making, to require newcomers to undergo “civic integration.” While public funding to Islamic schools continued, education in ethnic cultures was scaled back to concentrate only on “living minority languages.”
integrative step was to permit foreign residents to hold dual citizenship under some circumstances, thereby encouraging naturalization. But the greater emphasis on integration did not undermine the equally growing recognition, made explicit in the platform of the coalition that took office in 1998, that the Netherlands had indeed become a country of immigration and a multicultural society. Minorities now had to be integrated into a society that had itself changed profoundly in just a few decades.

By 2000, what it meant to be Dutch differed from what it had meant in 1980. But this is not to say that migration simply caused a dissolution of national identity. Judged by the record of twenty years of policy-making, summarized in Table 3, the Dutch have been engaged in the redefinition of national identity within a distinct national framework, as a self-consciously national project. Of course, the very emphasis on integration indicates an overriding commitment to maintaining the integrity of a national community. The extensive discourse and the welter of policy actions that emerge also confirm an unquestioned interest in using minority policy as a way to shape the nation in accord with Dutch values. That the Netherlands is and must remain a viable nation is taken for granted. Important continuities in policy-making reinforce this national focus. At least some of the principles that underlie current policy are adapted versions of principles already at the center of Dutch welfare state expansion in earlier decades. The engrained method of trying to operate by consensus also has been amply applied to minority issues. If anything, that consensus has grown, as indicated by the agreement between left and right in the current government and by the consensus on the need for integration into a multicultural society expressed in the parliamentary debate referred to in the introduction. The weight of official consensus in fact has created a certain sensitivity about issues that deviate from the common view of minority problems. In some respects, it is now clear, ethnic minority problems really do differ from those of native Dutch minorities. Yet the apparatus for dealing with them looks increasingly Dutch, that is to say, intricately corporatist. If nothing else, minorities are being integrated by becoming objects of policy, by being represented officially in policy consultations. Making minority policy is itself a form of nation-building.

_Dutch media policy_
Watching television in the Netherlands in 2000 was a different experience than it had been in 1980. Program offerings had vastly increased. On three rather than two national public channels, the old publicly funded broadcasting organizations, each representing a distinct membership, together with the national broadcasting service provided a wide variety of shows. In addition, six new commercial channels now presented popular fare. Nor was programming limited to Dutch shows, for cable also made numerous foreign channels available throughout the country. German, Belgian, and British networks vied for attention with CNN, MTV, and the Discovery Channel. The media market in a country of sixteen million had become crowded indeed. How did this dramatic change come about?

One plausible reading of the Dutch TV landscape suggests that it shows the effects of all-too-familiar global encroachment. Such encroachment takes different forms: public media give way to commercial forces; local control loses out to foreign ownership; domestically produced content is increasingly replaced by foreign shows. The strong version of the encroachment argument suggests that with the advent of technologies that enable the global organization of control and the global distribution of content, multinational media companies will make inroads in any national broadcasting system. But others argue (cf. Tomlinson, 1991) that this quasi-imperialist scenario downplays several factors that counteract media juggernauts. For example, despite the skillful packaging of certain media products for global consumption, local differences in audience taste still call for different types of programming. Audiences receive new media offerings critically in any case, interpreting similar content in different ways. New technologies do not only favor multinationals; they may also enable new types of regional production. Even if the commercialization of world media affects domestic broadcasting, domestic organizations may well become effective competitors. National tastes, traditions, and structures, in this view, will remain vital in shaping the production and consumption of television programs.

---

2 These broadcasting organizations are voluntary associations, supported by membership contributions and dues paid for their respective programming guides. They are sanctioned by law to provide programming on public channels, with financial support from the state. They include the KRO (Catholic), NCRV (Protestant), VARA (socialist), EO (evangelical), AVRO (liberal-general), TROS (general), and VPRO (progressive).
The obvious recent changes in Dutch television suggest that the encroachment scenario has at least some merit: the global challenge is real, commercialization has taken hold. But although the direction of change is clear and important, the story (which I can only summarize here) is more complex than the simple scenario would have it, for in the Netherlands the change came about in a particular way. Indeed, it has been the subject of some twenty years of intense discussion and policy efforts. My focus here is on this national response to the apparent challenge. In the 1980s, Dutch media policy seemed poised to open domestic broadcasting to market competition but in fact preserved the old public system; in the 1990s, by contrast, the foundations of the old policy crumbled and its content gradually changed (Bardoel 1994; Commissie Publieke Omroep 1996; De Goede 1999). In one sense, this is a story of national failure: a previously prized public system had to make major concessions. At the same time, the attempt to give broadcast media a distinctive national character continues and the results display distinctively national features.

For many decades, as one participant once put it, media policy has been a national parlor game in the Netherlands. When radio emerged as a new medium, the strongly organized “pillars” of Dutch society (Catholics and Protestants especially, socialists more hesitantly) established radio broadcast organizations to reflect their respective interests and worldviews. They used their political clout to gain state support for their right to broadcast time and resources. The path of a pillarized, public-private broadcasting system, once established, strongly shaped all subsequent policy into the television age. The parlor game consisted of finding ways to adapt to new circumstances while respecting the vested organizational interests. Participants in the game included, besides state officials, experts within political parties that were strongly tied to particular broadcasters, whose representatives also claimed a strong voice in all media matters. When the threat of commercialization had become more real by the early 1980s, in part due to the spread of cable systems, the responsible cabinet officer appeared to want to change the rules of the game. In fact, the new legislation he prepared, and for which he mobilized support in the political and media community, favored the rights of the old broadcasters and prohibited commercial TV channels or networks. The chief justification was that commerce would threaten the diversity of
cultural expression, which would harm the public good. The Media Act of 1988, the outcome of years of debate, thus showed a national policy community in a holding pattern (cf. Table 4).

But in 1989 the work of the previous decade came undone. Taking advantage of a European rule on fair competition in cable television, a commercial broadcasting company based in Luxembourg established a foothold in a Dutch cable system. When it became clear that the government could not prohibit its broadcasts, the era of commercialization had officially arrived. The policy fall-out was significant. Faced with a new kind of competition, the publicly supported broadcasters became even more embattled, at a time when their historic political support declined due to broader depillarization. Their traditional voice in policy-making weakened. After a 1991 law formally allowed commercial broadcasting, their market share declined to less than fifty percent of the TV audience. As a result, advertising income for the public channels declined producing budget shortfalls. To deal with those troubled finances, the government then took the initiative to impose a reorganization on the public broadcasters, reallocating programming slots and giving a new to national television programming service. The traditional organizations received new support, in the form of licensing and financing, but had to accept several restrictive rules. Behind the 1990s amendments to the 1988 law was a new kind of justification for the state role in managing media: diversity of expression was still important, to be sure, but so was enabling fair competition. Although in the process the central government used a heavy hand, the ostensible purpose was to reduce political involvement in running Dutch television, to reduce state entanglements.

Because Dutch media policy changed in justification, process, and substance, it is fair to describe its record as a paradigm shift (De Goede 1999). The dam put up in the 1980s broke. Media policy in the 1990s could not put it together again. In the face of new constraints, the very significance of the parlor game itself diminished, as the state challenged the vested interests. If the hallmark of the old media policy was to create and preserve a distinctly national system for the expression of the diversity within a distinctly national culture, then certainly the record of media policy shows that the “centrality” of the national has declined. But even in this arena, where outside pressure clearly had a transforming effect, two important caveats are in order. First, in the paradigm shift some features of the old system were preserved. The traditional broadcasters
still receive public support for a public task; they still provide varied, at least partly noncommercial programming. Residues of the old pillarized system survive. Second, actual changes in Dutch media policy were not simply the result of outside pressure. For example, the support for the traditional broadcasters was declining for reasons of Dutch domestic change. They could no longer count on large groups of people or political parties who believed in their mission. Even the paradigm shift, then, resulted from a subtle interaction between global and domestic forces.

Conclusions

In this paper I interpreted shifts in Dutch policy formation as markers of ongoing national identity work in order to decipher the impact of globalization on the centrality of one national culture. The analysis of three policy domains in the Netherlands since 1980 first unpacked the diffuse notion of globalization into a set of distinct “challenges,” each newly significant to Dutch society in recent decades. It showed, over all, how Dutch identity gets enacted in meeting global challenges with local paradigms. Across the three arenas, in the period under discussion, policy-making remained a deliberate and viable national project. But just as the challenges varied, so did the particular paradigm-shaped responses. In the case of social policy, partial reform in the 1980s gave way to significant restructuring in the 1990s, at least partly under the influence of a global neoliberal discourse, but the new “responsibility paradigm” incorporated many features of earlier episodes of policy-making. In minority policy, the relatively modest attempts of the 1980s to respond to waves of migration with multicultural emancipation were succeeded by a new set of policies partly intended to bring about integration. In media policy, the old nationally distinctive approach to a diverse, public-private broadcasting system could not contain the pressures of transnational commercialization and was drastically transformed in the 1990s. The Netherlands thus “processed,” as it were, the globalizing economic, migration, and media challenges in variable ways. In two sectors, continuity in content and form balanced a shift in policy purpose and instruments; in a third field, full-fledged paradigm change became more evident. Insofar as the collective formation of public policy helps to shape a nation’s identity, the answer to the
question of what it meant to be Dutch in 2000 therefore would have depended on where you looked or whom you asked.

The challenge-and-response framework adopted above for analytical purposes could easily convey the wrong image, as if globalization is a universalizing stream to be stopped by the particularistic dams of national identity. Instead, this case study provides empirical support for the argument that the global and the national are thoroughly intertwined. In carrying out its identity work through public policy, a nation-state already draws on an apparatus that has global legitimacy. The very task of defining the nation is itself a global charge to any nation-state, and therefore any definition of national identity is always more-than-national. The actual process of globalization, insofar as it undermines a nation’s settled ways or self-understanding, heightens the significance of that task. Even where the actual capacity of a nation to respond, or to hold on to any one tradition, is in question, the salience of national identity as a project may well increase. Nations can show resilience precisely in becoming embattled. Of course, the degree to which a nation’s identity becomes embattled and the particular way in which it shows resilience are shaped by its own historical trajectory of the interplay between globalizing forces and national sediments. The global-national dialectic is itself path-dependent. Therefore, no single case, such as the Dutch one presented here, can fully illuminate the dynamics of what is now a global experience.

However, as this paper shows by example, close contextual analysis of single cases can support a plausible global scenario for the evolution of national identity, demonstrate the strength of an analytical approach drawing on different bodies of scholarship, and explain how, through distinctive collective efforts to address shared problems, the enmeshment of national cultures in globalization generates heterogeneity.
References


APPENDIX

Figure 1: Outline of Argument


Background:

• Revived debate about national identity in the Netherlands – addresses underlying global issue

Problem:

• Globalization challenges centrality of national identities but impact remains to be deciphered – whither national identity in the “global age”?

Argument:

• Go beyond/draw on demise and vitality scenarios to analyze embattled reconstruction

Proposal:

• Link established literatures on national identity and comparative policy to study policy formation as identity work

Case:

• Policy developments in the Netherlands since 1980: social policy, minority policy, media policy

Conclusions:

• Empirical: Dutch case displays variable paradigm shifts in response to global challenges
• Analytical: case study demonstrates dynamics of enmeshment, supports alternative scenario
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Prime Minister</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973-1977</td>
<td>Den Uyl (PvdA)</td>
<td>PvdA, KVP, ARP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977-1981</td>
<td>Van Agt (CDA)</td>
<td>CDA, VVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1982</td>
<td>Van Agt (CDA)</td>
<td>CDA, PvdA, D’66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Van Agt (CDA)</td>
<td>CDA, D’66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982-1986</td>
<td>Lubbers (CDA)</td>
<td>CDA, VVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1989</td>
<td>Lubbers (CDA)</td>
<td>CDA, VVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1994</td>
<td>Lubbers (CDA)</td>
<td>CDA, PvdA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994-1998</td>
<td>Kok (PvdA)</td>
<td>PvdA, VVD, D’66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-2002</td>
<td>Kok (PvdA)</td>
<td>PvdA, VVD, D’66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CDA = Christian Democrats  
PvdA = Social Democrats  
VVD = Liberals  
D’66 = Left-Liberals  
KVP = Catholics (now CDA)  
ARP = Protestants (now CDA)
### Table 2—Dutch Social Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Solidarity paradigm</th>
<th>Responsibility paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>solidarity, distributive justice, universalism</td>
<td>solidarity, participation, individual responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>corporatist consultation and consensus-building</td>
<td>government initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>more important; reformed, disentangled administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>cabinet officers, bureaucrats, party representatives, organized private, agencies, experts</td>
<td>organized private party role reduced; expanded role of new agencies, municipalities, some companies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Bannink, 1999; Roebroek and Hertogh 1998; Van der Veen and Trommel 1999; Visser and Hemerijck 1997

Note: table 2 summarizes shifts in policy formation under the heading of two distinct “paradigms” for the sake of convenience; as the text indicates, Dutch social policy in the 1990s displays considerable continuity with that of the 1980s, and the extent to which a truly new paradigm takes hold varies from one policy domain to another.
### Table 3--Dutch Minority Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td><em>Emancipation paradigm</em></td>
<td><em>Integration paradigm</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>emancipation, equality,</td>
<td>equality, respect for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>respect for cultural</td>
<td>difference, integration,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>difference</td>
<td>participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>government-initiated</td>
<td>more corporatist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>consensus-building,</td>
<td>consultation, broader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>policy-making</td>
<td>consensus, more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>decentralized execution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
<td>politicians, bureaucrats,</td>
<td>politicians, agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>experts in tight network</td>
<td>officials at many levels,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>experts, minority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policies</strong></td>
<td>Education in Own language</td>
<td>Promotion of Proportional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and Culture (1974-);</td>
<td>Minority Employment Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education Priority Policy</td>
<td>(1994-); Municipal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1985-); Ethnic Minorities</td>
<td>Educational Disadvantage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in Government (1986-);</td>
<td>Policy; more Islamic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Islamic Broadcasting</td>
<td>schools funded; dual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organization (1985-);</td>
<td>citizenship allowed under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>general welfare benefits,</td>
<td>some conditions; National</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>housing subsidies</td>
<td>Consultation Minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>formalized (1998-); Civic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration of Newcomers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Act (1998)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Jaaroverzicht 1998; Lucassen and Penninx, 1994; Tesser et al. 1999
### Table 4—Dutch Media Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>1980s: Pluralism paradigm</th>
<th>1990s: Competition paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>expression of religious and political diversity, use of broadcasting for public good, primacy of state interest</td>
<td>expression of diversity, fair competition, audience choice, limited state responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>lengthy consultation and bargaining within tight policy network, political support for broadcasting organizations</td>
<td>consultation and competition in public system, general state directions and monitoring, loosened ties of broadcasters and officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>cabinet officers, civil servants, pillarized party experts and broadcasting organization representatives</td>
<td>cabinet officers, civil servants, appointed officials, reduced role for party experts and organization representatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>Media Act 1987-8: institutes advisory council and monitoring body; preserves diverse publicly funded broadcasting organizations (imposes content and support requirements); makes t.v. production facilities autonomous; prohibits most commercial broadcasting</td>
<td>22 amendments to Media Act: allowing commercial t.v. (1991), reallocating programming across three national channels and granting concession periods to broadcasters (1994-5), requiring cooperation, instituting new national television organization (1997)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Bardoel 1994; Commissie Publieke Omroep 1996; De Goede 1999