

# The cachet dilemma:

## Ritual and agency in new Dutch nationalism

### ABSTRACT

In 2006, the Dutch government introduced a naturalization ceremony for foreigners wishing to become Dutch citizens. Local bureaucrats who organize the ceremony initially disapproved of the measure as symbolic of the neonationalist approach to migration. I analyze how their criticism is undermined in the process of designing the ritual, the form of which continues to express a culturalist message of citizenship, despite organizers' explicit criticism or ridicule. Using the concept of "cultural intimacy," I show how nationalism builds on a shared embarrassment among local bureaucrats, from which the new citizens are excluded by way of the ceremony. [*neonationalism, migration, naturalization, Europe, ritual, agency, bureaucracy*]

In 2006, as part of its new approach to migration and integration politics, the right-wing Dutch government introduced a naturalization ceremony for foreigners wishing to become Dutch citizens. This new policy entails what is often called the "culturalization" of citizenship, meaning that full Dutch citizenship is not merely a legal status and does not merely enable political and economic participation but also comes with a certain acceptance of "Dutch norms and values" and a certain level of integration into "Dutch culture." Whereas former integration courses were primarily meant to teach migrants the Dutch language and prepare them for the labor market, the restyled courses also include lessons on "knowledge of Dutch society" (*kennis van de Nederlandse samenleving*), which contain information on constitutional rights, the rules of democratic government, Dutch national history, dominant key values such as gender equality and sexual freedom, and perceived national customs and traditions. At the time of its introduction, the naturalization ceremony was presented as the pinnacle of a successfully realized process of integration (*bekroning van een succesvol integratieproces*). In an August 15, 2006, letter sent to the municipalities responsible for organizing the ceremonies, the then minister of integration affairs, Rita Verdonk, wrote, "Dutch citizenship is something special, more than just an adaptation in the register of population. Therefore we must mark and adorn this occasion. Moreover, it is an appropriate moment to tell people again what they may expect from our society and what is expected from them" (Directie Coördinatie Integratiebeleid Minderheden 2005).

As I write, two and a half years after its introduction, it is becoming clear that the naturalization ceremony has had an effect quite distinct from the one it was intended and expected to have. From the instructions given to the municipal bureaucracies, the ceremony was clearly meant as a kind of disciplinary initiation ritual. New citizens were to be welcomed as part of Dutch society but at the same time reminded of certain "norms and values" (*normen en waarden*), "manners" (*omgangsvormen*), and "duties" (*plichten*) that apparently were not taken to be self-evident, or were even

thought to be foreign, to them. However, the new citizens do not seem to be affected much by the welcoming gesture or the patronizing words, let alone the combination of the two. The “new tradition” (Verdonk 2006) is better understood as a state ritual that is part of a larger effort to redefine Dutch national culture in terms of autochthony and belonging (e.g., Geschiere 2009). Amidst other state-led projects, such as the creation of a Dutch historical “canon” and a new national history museum, that reformulate Dutch identity largely in high-cultural terms, the naturalization ceremony, as most commonly performed, expresses a popular, often folkloristic, version of new Dutch nationalism. One of the more interesting aspects of the ceremony is, indeed, how local civil servants have gone about presenting local forms of “Dutchness” to an audience of new citizens. Consistent with this local focus, ample evidence indicates that in various municipalities the ceremonies have become part of public-relations campaigns, tourist information efforts, and other activities meant to promote those municipalities and attract investors, residents, and tourists. Yet, since the general public hardly knows about the existence of naturalization ceremonies and certainly does not take part in them, their effect as state ritual or local self-promotion event is not very significant. That, however, does not mean that the naturalization ceremony has no impact at all. It does have a significant effect, but not on the new citizens or on the general public. The new ritual primarily has a profound impact on the local civil servants who organize and perform it.

A significant number of the local bureaucrats working in the field of migration, naturalization, and integration can be characterized as having moderate left-wing views and multicultural sympathies. Many of them, especially in smaller municipalities, like working with migrants and foreigners and empathize with them. Yet, at the same time, they are expected to implement the new right-wing nationalist integration policy. For them, the naturalization ceremony initially was symbolic of a particular way of thinking about integration and cultural differences, one that they did not agree with. But now, more than two years after its adoption, many of them have accepted the ceremony and given it their own twist. Although the naturalization ceremony is but a small event in the whole process of integration, I think that the way local bureaucrats have come to accept it is indicative of the way many of them have accepted, learned to live with, or even appropriated the new nationalist discourse. Surprisingly, then, the new ceremony reveals something about the much larger question of how new discourses on nationalism and culture become matters of social convention, or even common sense, in settings and situations in which political discourse is put into practice.

It is on this point that an ethnography of naturalization ceremonies has a contribution to make to the anthropology of new nationalism in post-1989—and especially post-September 11—Europe. Although many anthropologists

working on this complex issue are concerned with political culture and nationalist discourse, anthropology’s unique selling points are often said to lie elsewhere, in its emphasis on symbolic behavior and its attention to agency (e.g., Gingrich and Banks 2006). Indeed, some of the best work in this field—Gerd Baumann’s *Contesting Culture* (1996) and Katherine Pratt Ewing’s *Stolen Honor* (2008), to name but two—offer subtle analyses of how people negotiate, appropriate, contest, or try to transform the various identities ascribed to them. However, such a structure–agency approach is mostly employed to understand how groups and individuals with a minority status deal with dominant discourses about them. How subjects with a majority status, working in the state apparatus, deal with such issues is not really known. The naturalization ceremony may be an appropriate “microscopic” setting (Geertz 1973:21) in which to begin looking for answers to this question because it foregrounds the importance of ritual and agency. In what follows, I argue that ritual is important because it provides people with a practice that they can much more easily identify with than they can with mere discourse. That local bureaucrats are expected to organize the ritual has given them a sense of agency. By modifying the substance of the ritual, they have come to accept its form, which is not of their own making and which continues to enact a culturalized notion of citizenship. The local bureaucrats remake the ritual, but the ritual also transforms them. To the extent that the new ritual counteracts local objections to new nationalist policies, *neutralization ceremony* would be a more appropriate name for the event.

This article, then, can be read as a case study of a major discursive change that took many people by surprise: the sudden outburst of nationalism, including the definition of an “autochthonous culture” and a fear of “foreign” cultures and religions (especially Islam), in a society known—to outsiders and to itself—as tolerant and multicultural.<sup>1</sup> Although new nationalist policies on integration are designed to enhance the cultural capital of migrants, the public debate on national culture and integration, in which so many people have passionately engaged since the turn of the millennium, has had its greatest impact on how the ethnic Dutch perceive of their national culture and cultural differences. That is to say, the lack of social cohesion between various ethnic and religious groups in the Netherlands is, indeed, to a considerable extent a cultural problem. The main problem, however, is not the perceived foreignness of migrant cultures and religions but the increasingly exclusivist character of new dominant discourses of “autochthonous cultures” and “European civilization.” This framing of the issue, however, raises the question of how, and to what extent, the ideology of tolerance that formerly characterized Dutch society has been replaced by a new nationalist discourse. In this article, I seek to give an ethnographic answer to that question.

## New nationalism

In 1995, the Court of Justice in The Hague found Hans Janmaat, the leader of a small extreme right-wing party known as the Centrum Democraten, guilty of discrimination for publicly expressing his wish to abolish “multicultural society.” Shortly before his death in 2002, he took his case to the European Court of Justice, claiming that more charismatic politicians like Pim Fortuyn had escaped prosecution even though they had repeatedly made similar, or even more outspoken, remarks. Janmaat died before the case was heard, but the man who had been treated by the media as a political outcast did have a point. Several other remarks for which he was prosecuted and convicted in the 1990s sound moderate in today’s political debate in the Netherlands.

Dutch discourse on migration and integration has rapidly changed since 2000, when a national discussion was opened on what was dubbed “the multicultural drama.” September 11 as well as the murders of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and Theo van Gogh in 2004 turned the debate into the most urgent national concern (Sunier and van Ginkel 2006). Only more recently have intellectuals—themselves often involved in the heated debate—taken a step back to highlight some of the continuities that remained invisible during the hectic shift in the political paradigm. The fear of Islam, for instance, is at least as old as the Salman Rushdie affair in 1989; migration and integration laws had been tightening from the mid-1990s onward; and new populist political parties contested the political establishment in local elections long before Pim Fortuyn did so in 2002. Besides, the self-image of the Dutch as a tolerant and multicultural nation was not only based on an essentialist notion of culture (e.g., Grillo 2003) but also concealed the structural neglect of migrant communities in urban neighborhoods during a time of unprecedented economic boom. It is also clear that politicians like Fortuyn exploited the notion of a discursive shift, presenting themselves as the heroes of a new era. There is, however, no denying that no one had foreseen the right-wing radicalism of politicians like Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Minister Rita Verdonk, and—more recently—Geert Wilders, all of whom were ready to supply the media with provocative one-liners. In their slipstream, many public and academic intellectuals also reinvented themselves along new nationalist lines.<sup>2</sup>

Nationalism is, of course, not new in the Netherlands, but what I call “new nationalism” differs from earlier forms in that it is primarily directed against internal migrant Others, especially Muslims (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000:161–204). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, freedom in Dutch nationalist terms meant freedom from Germany or France. Nationalism also had a colonial genealogy connected to the so-called civilizing mission of the Dutch in Indonesia and other colonies. After World War II, a sense of national

identity was paradoxically built on the notion of the Dutch as modernists and internationalists (Ginkel 1999; Swaan 1991). Today’s revival of nationalism, however, defines its key values, such as gender equality, sexual emancipation, and freedom of speech, in opposition to a perception of Islam as essentially unfriendly to women, homosexuals, and heretics. At the same time, new nationalism is attractive to many people. It thrives in middle-class suburbia as well as impoverished inner-city neighborhoods. It is embraced by progressive writers and artists fearing to lose secular liberties, by professional historians applying for research money in the field of national history, and by the youth in rural areas competing with migrant teenagers for jobs and girlfriends. On the one hand, new nationalism is discursively thin and one-dimensional, based on a simplified orientalism in which secular freedom stands in opposition to religious doctrine. On the other hand, its social elasticity makes it serve many projects and desires.

Precisely because of this flexibility, new nationalism is difficult to explain in terms of one master narrative. According to a particularly popular explanation, new nationalism in Europe is a defensive reaction against globalization. Douglas Holmes (2000), a proponent of this idea, builds on Zygmunt Bauman’s (2000) critical remarks about the “light capitalism” that breaks up communities and leaves many people out in the cold. In this view, nationalism is a response to a postmodern condition brought about by economic globalization. This may explain the formation of some of the nationalist parties that Holmes takes as his object, but many others who fear the influence of Islam cannot possibly be called the victims of globalization. In fact, the culturalization of citizenship often goes well with neoliberal economic policies (e.g., Schinkel 2007). This is, of course, not to deny that the revival of nationalism in Europe is related to the increasing flows of people, money, products, images, and ideas across national boundaries or to the growing influence of the European Union.

To avoid simplifications of any kind, I see a need for the type of work anthropologists tend to be good at: ethnographic investigation, in this case of the nitty-gritty of nationalist practice. This type of work does not limit itself to a search for social causes or structural explanations but, rather, explores nationalism as an interactional process shaped by agency and performance. Agency can be seen as a discursive intervention that is always “citational” (Derrida 1988:18) or “internally dialogized” (Bakhtin 1981:279)—that is, the intervention always builds on previous interventions that resonate with the new one. Whether the intervention is a powerful one depends on this resonance. Successful innovation, transformation, and resistance all depend on a deeply developed ear or intuition for the range of possible meanings that reverberate with the discursive intervention. As I understand it, then, *agency* is another word for intuitive cultural competence that has to be developed by repetitive

performance. Analogous to Susan Harding's (2000) understanding of conversion as the process of learning to speak a religious discourse by prolonged exposure to and interaction with it, agency in the context of nationalism entails learning to speak nationalist language and to use it creatively in what Michael Billig (1995) calls the "banality" of everyday practice. Whereas Billig is primarily interested in how the state, through recurrent ritual practices in everyday life, makes nationalism self-evident as second nature, I ask how similar practices take shape at the local level of state bureaucracy. My question is, to what extent can the naturalization ceremony be seen as an opportunity for local bureaucrats to develop the cultural competence necessary to apply the nationalist vocabulary in a creative and meaningful way?

### Local bureaucrats

Who, then, are these local public servants and what are their views on integration? I got a powerful answer to that question in October 2007 during a conference meant to bring together the two organizations responsible for immigration and naturalization matters: the national Immigration and Naturalization Department (IND) and the association of local registry office workers (NVVB). The conference is held every year, but this was the first time after Rita Verdonk had been dismissed as minister of justice. The event, held in the rather nondescript Amsterdam Rai Exhibition and Convention Center, developed into a bureaucratic catharsis. Only a year earlier, the NVVB had decided to boycott the meeting out of sheer frustration with Verdonk's policy and its implementation by the IND. For many local civil servants, the IND was not only a bureaucratic Moloch—hardly accessible, notoriously slow and arrogant, often showing contempt for its own rules and regulations—but it was also associated with a governmental change of policy informed by the wish to reduce immigration and tighten integration laws. On a local level, where bureaucrats dealt with people instead of files, the new measures and the accompanying harsh language about migrants' perceived refusal to adjust were seen as an annoyance. On top of that, municipal bureaucrats thought the new integration laws were extremely complex and impossible to work with. The boycott of the annual meeting with the IND was a strong political statement by the NVVB, but a year later, in 2007, the association took a more favorable view of the integration process. The new justice minister, Nebahat Albayrak, who belonged to the labor party, had indicated her intention to reform the IND to make it more efficient and transparent; the stigmatizing statements about migrants by members of government had come to an end; and, symbolically important, Albayrak herself had a Turkish family background.

At the 2007 conference, various speeches had already evoked an atmosphere of victory on the side of municipi-

pal civil servants when a group of stand-up comedians took the stage to present a sketch involving Dr. Phil. Within the sketch, Dr. Phil, the counselor known, of course, from the Oprah Winfrey Show, was hired to rescue the troubled marriage between the NVVB-wife and her IND-husband. A little hysterical and conveying an air of moral superiority, the wife accused the stiff, cynical husband of trying to turn their house into a barricaded castle. No longer was the house a meeting place full of guests and strangers; under the husband's new rule, the place had become dull and desolate. The husband, clearly irritated by his wife's emotional outbursts, matter-of-factly stated that they could simply no longer afford to open their doors to everyone. "It's all Aunt Rita's fault," the wife cried, "I don't want her in this house anymore." "You say that because she is my family, not yours," the husband rebuked her. At that point, Dr. Phil intervened, suggesting that, on behalf of the husband, all the IND-employers say "I am sorry" to their colleagues from the municipalities, to which the latter were to respond with a unanimous "you are welcome." Amidst general hilarity, the two groups celebrated their reunion.

The stand-up comedians brilliantly illustrated the rift between local bureaucrats and national politicians concerning migration and integration matters. What has been called "new realism" (Prins 2004) in Dutch political discourse combines a deep aversion to Islam (and religion in general) with antiestablishment rhetoric, a call for zero tolerance on crime, and a demand for a more decentralized and community-based form of politics. It evokes concepts like "Dutch national identity," "Dutch norms and values," and "European civilization," all perceived to be threatened by supposedly non-European cultures and religions. Many local bureaucrats working in the field of migration and integration, however, are critical of this rhetoric. Minister Rita Verdonk, in particular, was highly unpopular among them, partly for her authoritarian and intimidating way of negotiating with the municipalities and partly for her new nationalist views. There are, to be sure, exceptions to this pattern. In the city of Rotterdam, for instance, where the political heirs of Pim Fortuyn have been in a powerful position, local policies on integration are considerably more "revanchist" (Uitermark and Duyvendak 2005) than in other cities. Elsewhere, however, many local bureaucrats tend to be critical of new nationalism.

There are several reasons for this criticism. Many bureaucrats made the choice to work on migration and integration matters in the 1990s or earlier because they liked working with foreigners and wanted to help them find their way in Dutch society. Although integration courses were not voluntary, even in the 1990s, the local bureaucracy tended to see migrants as clients. Even today, many local bureaucrats build up personal relationships of sorts with their clients, unlike their colleagues in the IND, where measures are taken to avoid such relationships. Most of all, however,

local bureaucrats tend to identify with their clients out of a sense of professional ethics. It is the task of local civil servants to assist the migrant during the course of integration and to help him or her get the application for Dutch citizenship ready. It is the job of the IND to evaluate the application and decide whether to approve it. A successful application proves the competence of the local bureaucrat, whereas a rejection confirms the authority of the IND. The new integration and naturalization policy made it considerably harder for the local bureaucracy to book results.

It is against this background that the initial lack of support for the naturalization ceremony has to be understood. In the municipalities, the ceremony was not seen as a necessarily onerous part of the new integration and naturalization policy. The obligation to follow costly integration courses, concluded by a long series of exams, was much more of a burden for migrants. But the naturalization ceremony was seen as symbolic of the new regime, and for many local bureaucrats, it was redundant and patronizing. "Before they can successfully apply for Dutch citizenship," one official said, "people already have to do so many things: integration courses, several exams—by the time they get their citizenship they know more about the Netherlands than many of us." Many took the ceremony as just another obligation migrants had to perform to be accepted as full citizens. And precisely these skeptical local bureaucrats were given the task of organizing the new ritual.

### The political debate

Before exploring what the local bureaucracy made of the ceremony, however, it is useful to have a brief look at the political debate that preceded its introduction. To some extent, the introduction of the ceremony is a good example of the polysemic nature of ritual. That is to say, virtually all political parties in parliament were in favor of a ceremony but often for quite different reasons. In addition, the dominant motivation for the introduction of the ceremony changed during the process of decision making. In fact, the idea came up for the first time before the moral panic about Islam and the loss of national identity broke loose. In 2000, the then minister of urban affairs, Roger van Boxtel, first proposed the introduction of a ceremony as part of his effort to develop a more open immigration policy. Despite the continuing influx of migrants to the Netherlands from the 1960s onward, policy makers had always refused to declare the Netherlands a country of immigration. Various flows of migration, such as the labor migration starting in the 1960s and the arrival of Surinamese after the independence of Suriname in 1975, had always been treated as isolated phenomena, not as sequences in a continuing trend. Van Boxtel, member of a small liberal party established in the 1960s (Democraten 66, or D66), wanted to promote an open economy that would benefit from the influx

of skilled professionals from abroad. Like other countries of immigration, such as Canada and the United States, the Netherlands, he felt, should encourage migrants to become Dutch citizens, welcoming them by way of a formal naturalization ceremony. The parliament, however, did not support the proposal, and the idea was dropped.

Two years later, however, multiculturalism had become the main political issue of contention. In the city of Rotterdam, the party founded by Pim Fortuyn won the local elections and, having formed a right-wing coalition, started a new local integration procedure that included courses on Dutch norms, values, and manners and concluded with a so-called integration ceremony (*inburgeringsceremonie*) that marked a change of status from "nonintegrated alien" (*niet-ingeburgerde vreemdeling*) to "Rotterdammer." Clearly, this was not the welcoming ceremony for skilled migrants beneficial to the Dutch economy that Van Boxtel had had in mind, but primarily the ritual confirmation of a cultural norm (the identity of "Rotterdammer" and, more broadly, "Dutch norms and values") that the participants had supposedly learned to accept. When, in 2004, the national parliament critically discussed the integration policies of former governments, the idea of a national naturalization ceremony came up again, this time proposed by a member of the Christian-Democratic party, Mirjam Sterk, who had been the personal assistant of the alderman responsible for the new integration policy in Rotterdam.

This time, the idea was widely supported, although there was some discussion about the format and the meaning of the ceremony. Some left-wing parties continued to view the ceremony as a welcoming gesture to migrants with hyphenated identities. The vast majority, however, wanted a ceremony that expressed both the Dutch norm and the migrant's loyalty to it. There was some discussion about the form this expression of loyalty should take. Some demanded a pledge of loyalty, which met with opposition from the liberal parties.<sup>3</sup> Even Minister Verdonk said that such a pledge reminded her too much of the Second World War. Others objected that a formal oath did not necessarily reflect a true change of identity. Ironically, the liberal parties wanted an obligatory ceremony that would confirm a sense of loyalty without any sign of compulsion.<sup>4</sup>

If the parliament took some time to discuss the format of the expression of loyalty, it said very little about the formulation of the Dutch norm that the ceremony was supposed to convey. In the August 15, 2006, letter to mayors, Minister Verdonk did give some instructions about the substance of the ritual. First, she wrote, the ceremony should make clear "who we are" [*wie we zijn*]; it should provide information about "our history that has formed our identity" [*onze geschiedenis die onze identiteit gevormd heeft*] and especially about the constitution and some of the "fundamental constitutional rights" such as the antidiscrimination law, gender equality, and the freedom of speech and religion.

Second, the ceremony should convey a message of good citizenship, especially “the balance between rights and duties” [*de balans tussen rechten en plichten*]. Finally, the ceremony should promote social manners (*omgangsvormen*) and underscore that “we should treat each other with respect, and if we disagree, we should do so in a civilized manner” [*we moeten elkaar met respect behandelen, en als we van mening verschillen hier op een beschaafde manier mee omgaan*]. Apart from these instructions, the minister suggested that the ceremony should be a happy occasion, a party celebrated with “cachet” (the French *cachet* has been adopted into Dutch vernacular usage), a moment that should be both joyous and ceremonial. Other than these instructions, however, the municipalities were free to organize the ceremony as they saw fit.

### Irony and embarrassment

In a study of the making of state rituals in the Soviet Union, Christel Lane (1981:28) has argued that ritual and cultural management become important when ideology and reality are far apart. Ritual is supposed to cover up this discrepancy by structuring citizens’ perception of reality. Nevertheless, ritual “can only succeed if it responds to some degree to the emotional requirements of those who are meant to perform it”—emotions, Lane (1981:33–34) continues, that can be evoked by color, beauty, significance, and dignity. Making new state rituals, in other words, is not an easy matter, as it requires finding a balance between past and future. It cannot but relate to an existing symbolic repertoire but at the same time is intended to restructure the symbolic order. To some extent, this was precisely the predicament of local bureaucrats who were put to the task of designing a new naturalization ceremony.

Most of them found Verdonk’s letter of instruction of little use. For many, the most problematic concept in that letter was that of “cachet.” That term, they felt, asked for something out of the ordinary to express the core of the nation. One public servant said, “The minister wants cachet because she sees the outside. We are trying to see what is inside. That is not so easy.” Many others observed that Dutch nationalism lacks a key symbol that expresses the national core, is ceremonial, and has enough cachet. The constitution, for instance, is not as symbolically loaded as in the United States; neither is the flag nor the national anthem. Natural symbols like the tulip were felt to be so commercialized as to no longer have any cachet. Dutch nationalism, many local bureaucrats felt, was a matter of freedom, tolerance, and modernity, but how does one symbolize such concepts? Even the royal family and the color orange did not evoke such concepts very well. In the absence of the obvious, then, the first task was to invent key symbols for the elusive concept of “Dutchness.”

Given the initial tepid reaction, it is remarkable how much creativity was unleashed once bureaucrats started to organize ceremonies. In various places, new citizens were treated to licorice—not always a big success—or sandwiches made with peanut butter. One municipality served brussels sprouts and *boerenkool*—a peasant’s dish made of kale and potatoes. Another took three new citizens—members of a family from Afghanistan—to a dairy farm; elsewhere there was a visit to a windmill. In various municipalities, organizing committees wanted to do excursions, outings, or multicultural dinners but were confronted with tight budgets. There were speeches in various places about the feeling of solidarity fostered by the collective fear of the sea. In one place, a box of varied flowers was brought in, and all guests were invited to pick a flower to his or her liking, a gesture symbolizing the multifaceted nature of Dutch national identity. Elsewhere one could have one’s picture taken standing next to a life-size image of soccer hero Johan Cruyff. In most places, the ceremony started with coffee and ended with cheese, and almost everywhere it had a very strong local character. Various places offered local pastries, brochures from the local tourist office, information on scenic bicycle routes in the nearby countryside, and poems written by local poets. The Amsterdam ceremony was probably the most local of all, reducing Dutch history to Amsterdam’s once central position in the global economy. In sum, whereas Dutch intellectuals were busy defining Dutch culture in terms of European civilization, the naturalization ceremony linked it to nationalist history and local folklore.<sup>5</sup>

On my visits throughout the country, two different reactions among bureaucrats struck me most forcefully. One was a sense of insecurity or even embarrassment about one’s own ceremony, strengthened by the fact that the organizers looked at me, an anthropologist, as an expert on culture and ritual. My visit was a moment for them to look at their own work from a distance, like the anthropologist they imagined me to be, and to realize that their display of folklore had little to do with the realities of social life. In other cases, however, it soon turned out that the expressions of local culture were self-consciously ironic. Sometimes the irony could not be missed. In a town in the southern province of Brabant, the mayor asserted, “A Dutchman is always on time, eats his potatoes at six in the evening, and never comes unannounced. . . . A Dutchman eats cheese, puts tulips in a vase, wears wooden shoes and spends the day admiring the windmills.”<sup>6</sup> In other cases, the irony was subtler, and sometimes it was difficult to draw the line between irony and embarrassment at all.

Irony and embarrassment also ruled the workshop organized by the Dutch Association of Municipalities (VNG) in October 2007. Ceremony organizers from various municipalities, big and small, had gathered to learn from each other’s experiences. Since I think the workshop illustrates

quite accurately the local anxieties about the ceremony, I offer a lengthy excerpt from the discussion that occurred there. It starts with an introduction by an official from a town in the southern province of Limburg, which I call R, followed by comments from representatives of various municipalities, also indicated by their initials.

R: I was skeptical at first. I did not like the idea at all. But I am from Limburg, I like to celebrate.<sup>7</sup> I am also a loyal servant who does his job. And it needs to be said: the people are happy. They do not have to deal with the IND any longer. They are safe—important for refugees. But do they also belong? That remains unclear. Does the ceremony add something? I do not have an answer. I am on the other side. Do we manage to get the message of welcome across? I don't know.

We welcome everybody in the city hall. The flag has been struck. We serve coffee with *vlaai* [a local cake] in the council chamber. That is also where wedding ceremonies take place. A combo is playing music. Then the mayor makes a speech, he always does that very well. He says: "Now you are part of us. You are allowed to support the Dutch football team." He asks: "Who will you support now, the Dutch or the Turkish team?" He talks with the people. We do not sing the national anthem.

On the National Naturalization Day we went on a tour through the city.<sup>8</sup> We introduced them to the local archive which has a former dungeon. There we keep the sword with which we used to behead the prisoners. So people, we said, be careful. We also informed them that the Dutch have always been a free and civilized nation. Then the city poet recited a poem he himself had written. It was such a beautiful poem that many were deeply moved. Some even walked out of the room, which of course was not the intention.

The last time we did a ceremony was during Ramadan. So the reception was a failure. The people said to the mayor: "Please eat. Don't mind us." But the mayor answered: "I am with you." The whole day he didn't eat. Well done.

We often think about doing the ceremony differently. But it is also a matter of economy. How much can we afford? And what is it actually that we want to accomplish? Being a Limburger I am a member of the brass band. We play at carnival. But no new Dutch citizen has ever joined the brass band. It is not that they are not welcome. They must also like music, they may even be better at playing music than we are . . .

N: Maybe they play a different kind of music.

R: That is possible. But nonetheless, they don't come. So I ask myself: do people want to listen to a combo? That is the kind of question you start to ask yourself. To my mind, the ceremony is the most unattractive way to invite people to participate.

After this introduction, the chairman, an official from the ministry, opened the floor for further discussion.

H: We do it every six weeks. The reactions are mixed. Sometimes the people are really apathetic. How do you deal with that? Now we invite an expert, a former migrant from Indonesia. People from Indonesia are usually well-integrated.

M: We ask three people to tell something about their life.

D: In our city there are always a number of people who want to leave early. In other cities they put someone at the door to prevent that. We don't do that. But it poses the question: does this result in active citizenship? Frankly I don't care about cachet. I want to meet new Dutch citizens.

E: We want to organize a party, but the mayor refuses to cooperate. He says: this is forced upon me.

A: In our village the mayor visits the people at their home. People appreciate that because they see the mayor as the municipality. They feel welcomed. We always have a conversation.

Z: Not everyone appreciates the ceremony. We always take a picture of the whole group at the end of the ceremony. Some weeks ago we had someone from Germany who refused to pose with Africans and Arabs. He said: I don't belong to these people. (General hilarity.)

B: We had a discussion on whether or not to serve alcohol. On the one hand you want to be tolerant and hospitable. So we said no. (Again general laughter.) On the other hand, this is Holland. So yes, now we serve alcohol. But only beer and wine and we also serve orange juice and mineral water. (More giggling.)

V: We decided to organize the ceremony in the daytime. That means people need to take a day off so they have to explain to their boss and colleagues what they are going to do. That way you create a conversation with the autochthonous.

This discussion aptly shows the concerns of local bureaucrats as well as the tone in which they were discussed. Bureaucrats' main worry was to solve all sorts of practical problems they encountered while designing a completely new kind of ritual. They had no obvious models to follow or experts to consult, and they were very eager to learn from each other. On the level of practicalities, then, the discussion was quite serious. But there remained an undertone of skepticism in the way they discussed these everyday concerns, which revealed their discomfort with the idea of the naturalization ceremony itself. Although they did not describe their own reactions as a combination of embarrassment and irony, the less-than-serious tone and discomfited giggling can be understood as a defense mechanism that enabled the local bureaucrats to do their job without

personally subscribing to the nationalist ideology that produced the ceremony.

There were, however, also municipalities where civil servants enthusiastically put themselves to the task of designing a colorful ceremony without being bothered by either irony or embarrassment. In a regional town north of Amsterdam, for instance, the ceremony took more than an hour and was considerably more vibrant than elsewhere. Here, too, people were received in the historical city hall and welcomed by a formal speech from the mayor that was full of references to history, in particular the town's role in the Dutch Protestants' uprising against Spanish rule in the 16th century. After this introduction, a professional actor walked into the room dressed in a suit of steel armor and introduced himself as Agito, a Spanish soldier of the occupying force. He went on to say,

You may call me the original alien (*oerallochtoon*). Therefore I am asked to give you a bit of advice on this very day. I think you need some advice now that you are really going to settle here. I am not the only one in this room who has put on something special for this occasion. That is nice. But it is important to realize that clothes do matter. Suppose I would walk out into the streets in this outfit [pointing at the armor], people would treat me very differently from when I would wear ordinary jeans and a jacket. So my first advice is, do not dress differently. If you do, you show that you are different and people will treat you accordingly.<sup>9</sup>

He offered a few other suggestions ("make sure you find a job," "mix with people") before leaving the stage. Despite the theatrical format, this monologue was not meant to be ironic.

Irony was also absent in those municipalities that openly rebelled against the government's new nationalist message. In a suburban town not far from the city of Utrecht, for instance, six new citizens from Iraq, Croatia, and Venezuela were welcomed by a short, straightforward speech from the mayor:

At this moment our different lives and routes cross each other. You have come a long way to be here. Today in this country we have many opinions about foreigners. But let me tell you: migrants like you are good for our country and our economy. I welcome you. You enrich us. Do not forget where you come from and be proud of who you are. We are a free country with cultural and religious freedom so never feel ashamed. The Dutch develop too, we are also human beings, and you help us in our development. Thank you for wanting to belong to us.

In rare cases, bureaucrats flatly boycotted the ceremony. To be able to legally do so, the city government of a large town near the coast declared every day of the year to be a natu-

ralization day. This enabled the bureaucracy to invite a new citizen to come to the registry as soon as he or she received word of a positive decision, to collect his or her papers. One of the staff members in charge of naturalization matters explained, "Of course, if our new fellow-citizen insists on singing the national anthem on the occasion, the official on duty is instructed to sing along. But so far this has never happened." This comment added irony to subversion.

Today, after two and a half years of bureaucrats' creative experimenting, problem solving, and political statements, the ceremony has gradually become standardized in most places. Now that protocols have been written and budgets established, the ceremony has become part of the bureaucratic routine. In municipalities with relatively large numbers of new citizens, ceremonies tend to be based on the model of a graduation ceremony. After a formal speech highlighting the change of status, people are invited to come forward to collect their papers and a present, like graduates finishing their education. In smaller municipalities, the ritual tends to copy a wedding ceremony and includes speeches highlighting personal backgrounds, flowers, and a reception afterward. The search for key symbols naturalizing the Dutch nation has largely been abandoned. Time and routine have solved the cachet dilemma.

### Ritual power

Saying that irony and embarrassment—and in some cases enthusiasm and aversion—were the most common emotions bureaucrats displayed also means that indifference was not common. This deserves to be emphasized because most studies of modern state power foreground indifference as the main characteristic of bureaucracy, largely caused by bureaucratic formalism. Following the views of Karl Marx and Max Weber (and Franz Kafka) on the issue, authors like Michael Crozier (1964), Claude Lefort (1971), Mary Douglas (1986), Michael Herzfeld (1992), and James Scott (1998) have all, in their own ways, focused on the interrelatedness of formalism and indifference in modern bureaucracy, even if some of them quite explicitly distance themselves from the early sociology of bureaucracy. Crozier, for instance, presents his study as a critique of Weber's notion of the "bureaucratization" of society. For Crozier, bureaucracy is anything but a rationalist form of government. The bureaucracy is, rather, divided into all sorts of groups and subcultures engaged in power struggles, and its proverbial rigidity is the result of bureaucratic self-interest that fuels these conflicts. For Herzfeld, indifference is not so much an inevitable by-product of the routinization of power as a bureaucratic strategy that conceals active engagement. Although there is disagreement over the nature of bureaucratic indifference and inflexibility, these issues continue to influence both academic and popular perceptions of the bureaucracy.



It is therefore somewhat surprising that the local officials organizing the naturalization ceremony were anything but indifferent to it. Bureaucratic indifference and inefficiency are precisely what many local officials loath in the IND, with which they have to work. It is something they want to avoid at all costs in their own work. It is true that the organization of the naturalization ceremony became subject to routinization, but this did not generate indifference or lack of interest. The repetitive nature of the ceremony produced something quite different: a gradual suspension of locals' initial skepticism toward the ceremony and the nationalist ideology that is built into its form.

In the vast literature on ritual, a lot of attention has been paid to its repetitive nature. Although anthropologists have disagreed on the function of ritual—whether it, for instance, primarily reproduces power relations (e.g., Bloch 1974; Geertz 1983) or allows new worldviews to emerge (e.g., Bourdillon 1978; Handelman 1990)—there is a wide, albeit sometimes implicit, understanding that the repetitive form is crucial in bringing about a register of experience quite distinct from the ordinary that can both sanctify the status quo and open up new subject positions. Edmund Leach, for instance, wondered why, in rituals, “everything in fact happened just as predicted” (1972:334) without harming the notion that something extraordinary was going on. Ritual's routine, in other words, creates something quite dissimilar from indifference; it stimulates the experience of a reality felt to be more authentic—in either a banal or cerebral manner (Obeyesekere 1990)—than everyday life. Although James Clifford (1988) has rightly pointed out that ritual and everyday practice are much more conjunctural than much of the related literature tries to demonstrate, his critique does not undermine the observation that, in the experience of the partakers, ritual often does stand out as starkly different from the reality of daily life largely because of its repetitive form. In Roy Rappaport's (1999) view, this “liturgical order,” as he calls it, does two things. First, it prescribes the behavior of the participants. Once they enter the ritual, they become subject to its form. It is not possible to avoid the ritual's structure and language without leaving the ritual altogether. Second, through ritual structure and language, the participants enter into a world of social convention. By “social convention,” Rappaport means something very different from both belief and behavior. Belief, he insists, is personal and therefore not a subject of anthropological inquiry, whereas behavior is not necessarily directed by social convention alone. A wedding ceremony may point out the virtues of marital faithfulness, but that does not mean that adultery does not occur. Ritual's “sequestered” nature (Turner 1977:183), in other words, creates a fictional world of social convention that remains relatively untouched by everyday complexities as well as people's personal convictions. Ritual's repetitiveness gives it a feel of tradition beyond history.

Alexei Yurchak's work on the former Soviet Union offers a subtle understanding of the effects of state ritual and its capacity to create social convention in the context of a modern society. Yurchak (2006) argues that Soviet rituals, ceremonies, and other social events enabled people to respond to Soviet state propaganda in a way that was neither supportive nor openly contesting. Evoking John Austin's notion of “performative utterances” that cannot be true or false but only felicitous or infelicitous, Yurchak highlights what he calls the “constitutive dimension” of conventional forms. People perform state rituals not because they agree with their ideological meaning but because the rituals create possibilities: to belong to a group, to do a job, and so on. Yurchak rejects the notion of an already existing self that responds positively, negatively, or pragmatically to state rituals. Rather, he sees ritual as enabling: By performing the ritual in an ideologically neutral or indifferent manner, the participants in Soviet rituals invented themselves and their social environment. In doing so, however, they internalized the Soviet Union—but not necessarily its ideology—as a cultural form, to such an extent that Soviet society appeared to them as traditional beyond history, almost eternal, as is indicated by Yurchak's wonderful title *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2006). When, in 1989, the Soviet Union collapsed, together with its rituals and ceremonies, it turned out that its ideology had already faded long before, living on only as social conventions in seemingly everlasting forms.

As I understand it, the naturalization ceremony in the Netherlands works in a comparable way. When civil servants gradually became less reflexive about its creation and began to worry less about its ideological meaning as expressed in the term *cachet*, the ceremony steadily began to impose its implicit logic on them. The naturalization ceremony, as a form, is not an ideologically neutral ritual. In its form, it carries a particular meaning derived from the dominant discourse on cultural citizenship that gave birth to it. In speeches, one may criticize the nationalist ideology, but the form of the ritual itself is more difficult to contest. That form suggests that citizenship is to some extent cultural and that a change of citizenship implies a change of cultural identity. It also entails the notion that the nation—that entity into which one is initiated—is itself already there, truly existing and even welcoming, that is, unchanged by the arrival of the new initiands. The ceremony hinges on an implicit us–them dichotomy: “We” initiate and welcome “them,” and “we” also exist without “them.” Most of all, the ceremony suggests that citizenship is an accomplishment, a conscious choice and desire, something to be proud of, rather than simply an administrative change of status. It is this implicit logic that the local bureaucracy, sometimes despite itself, gradually learned to perform.

How did this happen? First of all, local civil servants began to enjoy organizing the ceremony. The sheer pleasure

of throwing a party for the foreigners they had helped get their papers in order was the first element that undermined bureaucrats' initial critical stance. The sense of mild subversion generated when the ceremony was used as an opportunity to criticize the national government and its new integration policy only enhanced that joy. More importantly, however, the ceremony gradually became a ritual moment during which it became possible to say or do things that one would not normally say or do outside its formal limitations. However profane the entry rites of the ceremony may seem—usually a personal welcome by the civil servant on duty, followed by a cup of coffee consumed while waiting for the mayor or alderman to come in and give a speech—they do create an ambience among the organizers that feels distinct from everyday routine. As one official, who organizes ceremonies approximately once a month, said, "We have done many ceremonies by now. You enter your office in the morning thinking it is just standard procedure, but the moment the guests start to arrive you realize it is a special occasion." Although most of the organizers remain backstage, leaving the official part of the ceremony to a representative of the municipality, many of them describe the mood as more formal than the everyday mood. Some notice a difference in their bodily reactions. "It gives you a shot of adrenaline," one official said, "it feels like you have to perform. I always put on lipstick before we start." Within this ceremonial atmosphere, then, statements that would otherwise sound pretentious or imaginary sound appropriate. To give one example, I quote from a speech given by the mayor of a small rural municipality close to Rotterdam, followed by the comments of the organizer of the ceremony. The mayor noted that

the Dutch are frugal. We are also frugal when it comes to hospitality. We say that in Holland there are as many churches as there are pubs. And there are also many associations. We call that the civil society (*maatschappelijk middenveld*). In our municipality we have a strong civil society. We have associations for many things: for home watch, for care, for sports and arts. We have many choirs. We also have many churches and opinions. That makes us tolerant, especially to those who participate.

Backstage, the public servant who organized the event reflected on these comments:

When I put together the protocol for the ceremony, the speech was sent to me by the public relations department. Frankly when I read it I felt rather uncomfortable. All these clichés about the Dutch being frugal and tolerant. . . . Perhaps that was true long ago, but I know so many people who like spending money, even small children have their own mobile phones—do you know how much that costs! As to churches and pubs, yes,

the buildings are still there, but no one goes there anymore, we spend our evenings in front of the TV, and on Sunday mornings we stay in bed or go to the football field. But I must admit that when the mayor gave the speech, somehow it all sounded just right. It is because of the occasion, I suppose. You cannot be too nuanced. On a formal occasion like this, you cannot tell people that the Dutch spend their evenings in front of the television.

Others, too, noticed that irony did not work well in rituals. "Standing in front of an audience, making fun of ourselves, that makes an odd impression. A ceremony requires a certain level of sincerity." In short, despite the widespread resistance at first, the naturalization ceremony gradually became a ritually delineated moment for conveying essentialist notions about Dutch national identity to an audience of migrants, thanks to a form that does not allow irony or ridicule to continue.

This does not mean, however, that local bureaucrats also endorsed this essentialism outside the ritually defined time of the ceremony. In fact, it was striking to see that irony and embarrassment were often quick to return after the ceremony had come to an end. During evaluations immediately after the ceremony, bureaucrats often ridiculed the clichés about the Dutch that they had just ritually approved. To some extent, this mockery marked the end of the ritual for the organizers themselves. The ritual demarcation, therefore, also worked to largely keep their multicultural sympathies and aversion to right-wing nationalism intact.

One could interpret the discrepancy between the ritual message and postritual ridicule by reference to Herzfeld's notion of "cultural intimacy." For Herzfeld (1997), cultural intimacy is the shared embarrassment about the ethnic core in the imagination of the modern nation. On the one hand, nations want to be modern and civilized, but, on the other hand, they trace their origin back to uncivilized ethnicity, such that it is both at the heart and the margins of modern nations. On a more abstract level, the concept of "cultural intimacy" suggests the binding force of shared embarrassment caused by the intimate knowledge that a shared identity is deeply ambiguous, revolving around a vacuum. When applied to the case at hand, it becomes clear how, precisely, the naturalization ceremony functions as an instrument of inclusion and exclusion. The point is not so much that the ceremony conveys an essentialist notion of Dutchness into which the new citizens are initiated as novices. Superficially, at least, this is often the case. On a deeper level, however, the ceremony has a segregating effect because cultural intimacy—that shared and sacred knowledge that Dutchness is without essence—is denied to the initiands. The late Dutch historian Ernst Kossmann once compared national identity to a jellyfish on the beach. "Walk around it,"

he wrote, “explore it from all sides, but do not step into it” (Oostindie 2008). What the new nationalists try to do is make solid ground out of a notoriously slimy concept. The naturalization ceremony is part of that project, and the culturally intimate evaluations after the ritual are critical comments that restore multicultural sympathies. Migrants, however, are excluded from that part of the ritual. What is presented to them is only the ceremonially established social convention, not the travesty made of it at the end of the ritual that enables the organizers to return to a more complex social reality.

### The excluded

A brief final word, then, about the people who are excluded from the moment of cultural intimacy after the ceremony and who are denied the bureaucratic knowledge that being Dutch is much more complicated and diffuse than is presented during the ceremony. How do they experience the ritual? The first thing that catches the attention is that, without bothering to talk to the people involved, politicians, policy makers, and journalists take it for granted that the *naturalisandi* consider their new citizenship a cultural transformation and a change of cultural identity. The ideological consensus on the culturalization of citizenship is such that few people can imagine naturalization to be a purely pragmatic change that does not affect a person's sense of being. A few well-known public intellectuals from foreign backgrounds have fostered this notion by describing their decision to naturalize as “the most important decision of my life.”<sup>10</sup> Their statements have led to the general conclusion that all new citizens will appreciate the ceremony as an occasion on which to share similar strong feelings with others during a public celebration. However, people conveniently forget that only a small percentage of the invitees show up to attend those ceremonies that are not obligatory.<sup>11</sup> The ceremonies held prior to 2006 were not compulsory, and they attracted, at best, 20 percent of the target group. Local bureaucrats often have difficulties preventing people from leaving ceremonies early. In some cases, the ritual is disrupted by the defiant behavior of—mostly young—new citizens.

Let me first look at the roughly 20 percent of migrants who do appreciate the ceremony. For them, naturalization is, indeed, an emotional moment. Most of them are former refugees who have gone through a very long process of proving their bona fide status as refugees, following integration courses, and applying for Dutch citizenship. It is not unusual for such a process to last ten years or more, a period mostly experienced as a time of utter uncertainty. For some, naturalization means no longer being stateless. Paradoxically, obtaining a Dutch passport enables them to visit their home countries again, as is, for instance, the case for Iraqi Kurds. People 40 years or older are primarily happy

for what their new citizenship will mean for their children, who, they hope, will feel less out of place than they themselves do. For them, the ceremony means the end of a long time of waiting, a symbolic break with their place of birth, and a moment of recognition in the new country.

The vast majority, however, consider the Dutch passport a useful piece of paper, like a driver's license or a diploma. It will advance their position in the labor and education markets, save them from tiresome visits to the immigration office, and in general make their life in the Netherlands easier. They look at Dutch peculiarities, like celebrating Santa Claus, an obsession with sexuality, and the habit of having long and formal meetings, with mild tolerance but without feeling the urge to adopt such tendencies themselves. They patiently sit through the naturalization ceremony, which they consider—rightly in my view—symbolic of the Dutch people's preoccupation with their own culture: not unpleasant but not very enticing either. One civil servant said, “Most of them don't mind the ceremony. They simply want their passport.”

At the other end of the spectrum one finds the so-called *optanten*. The naturalization process for this category, consisting of adults born in the Netherlands who have lived there all their lives, is considerably easier than for those born outside the country. Most of them are children of first-generation migrants from Morocco and Turkey who opt for Dutch citizenship at the age of 18. They grew up in the Netherlands, enrolled in Dutch schools, and speak the Dutch language fluently but are also used to being seen and treated and talked about as *allochthones*. They have quickly built up a reputation for disrupting ceremonies with insubordinate behavior, which irritates the organizing bureaucrats enormously because it spoils the good, friendly, multicultural atmosphere most of them want to create. On their part, however, the young *optanten* consider the naturalization ceremony another occasion that sets them apart from their ethnic Dutch peers.

These three different positions also inform the various ways in which people respond to their exclusion from the cultural intimacy of being Dutch. The first group largely appreciates the increasingly ceremonial character of the ritual because it channels their emotions in a certain way. They do not necessarily wish to be included in the cultural intimacy of the organizers because that could belittle the significance of their emotions. In fact, this group is usually somewhat confused if the master of ceremonies openly criticizes or ridicules the concept of Dutch culture. The second group is not necessarily interested in the cultural intimacy of the bureaucracy either. What one could call their “secular opinion” of culture and religion as primarily private affairs enables them to accept the public dominance of Dutch culture as expressed in the ceremonies. Their mild tolerance toward the dominant culture functions as a defense against cultural interference by the state, just as secularism,

in its original meaning, saved religion from the state. It is primarily members of the third group, the optanten, who experience the ceremony as offensive. For them, born and bred in the Netherlands, the clichés about Dutchness ring as fictitious as they do to local bureaucrats, but their exclusion from the bureaucracy's cultural intimacy puts them in a position in which they are supposed to accept the clichés as true. Their defiance can be seen as a contestation of this position as well as an attempt to create a sense of cultural intimacy among themselves. Their disregard ridicules the Dutch clichés as much as the local bureaucrats' comments backstage, but this skepticism about Dutchness takes place in a different setting, creating different—and even opposing—positions.

This is perhaps the most damaging effect of the naturalization ceremony. Whereas many local bureaucrats would normally empathize with the young optanten, the different moments of cultural intimacy created by the ceremony drive them apart. This may explain why some of the local bureaucrats have developed rather negative views of the optanten over the last few years. They appear to be frustrated by their inability to successfully establish a sense of solidarity with this group. One may wonder to what extent the optanten can be blamed for this sense of frustration, which is, in an important way, inherent in the form of the naturalization ceremony and therefore beyond the responsibility of both groups.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have focused on the positions and practices of local bureaucrats in relation to a new nationalist discourse that has increasingly gained influence in Dutch politics since the beginning of the 21st century. I have done so not just because local bureaucrats are the ones who have to translate the new nationalist discourse into local policies regarding immigration and citizenship but also because their gradually growing involvement in the naturalization ceremonies says something about how new political discourses become ingrained in practice-based social conventions. I have argued that the naturalization ceremony has helped them to accept and express new nationalism as a social convention that may not be sustained by the experience of everyday reality but that is expressed in a ritually demarcated moment and nuanced in the cultural intimacy following the ritual. The distinction between ritual and nonritual moments makes Dutchness at once more real than and irrelevant to bureaucratic practice. This split neutralizes bureaucrats' initial opposition to the naturalization ceremony and the culturalist ideology that created it. This process results in a form of agency different from that of the reflexive self found, for instance, in the work of James Scott (1985), but also from that of the self that finds agency in willfully accepted compliance (Mahmood 2005). The bureaucratic self

is an acting self, that is, a self that, in the daily practice of meaningful work, develops cultural competence by learning and internalizing its conventional forms to the point of mastering them.

What this ethnographic account of new Dutch nationalist practice suggests, then, is that the effect of nationalism increases when it ceases to be mere discourse and becomes embedded in the ritualized behavior of everyday life. In fact, the naturalization ceremony is an example of how citizenship in today's Europe is being ritualized. The ceremony is, in a way, an appropriate part of the restyled process of integration that is obligatory for non-Western migrants, in the sense that the courses, exams, and ritual passages can be seen as a sequence of practices meant to teach migrants one crucial, yet implicit, key value of new nationalism, namely, that culture, in its essentialist form, matters. Like the integration trajectory as a whole, the naturalization ceremony emphasizes and fixes cultural differences. What I have argued here is that the nationalist discourse on culture can be contested, ridiculed, and undermined but that new nationalism, as institutionalized in ritual form, is much more difficult to resist. The form is subtler and more seductive precisely because it allows for discursive ambiguity. Far from neutral, however, it carries the dominant nationalist logic with it in an implicit, self-perpetuating manner.

## Notes

*Acknowledgments.* Parts of the empirical research for this article were done by students of the University of Amsterdam. I especially want to thank Corrie van Beitel, Janke de Boer, Sandra van Duuren, Gijs Haanschoten, Lode Kulik, Dewi Lepelaar, Lisanne Oonk, Lotte van Oudheusden, Arjanne Schaaf, Anna Tiggelaar, Esme Tromp, and Jasper Velzeboer. I have also benefited enormously from comments by Marieke Brand, Jan Willem Duyvendak, Thomas Blom Hansen, Lotte Hoek, Peter Geschiere, Rob van Ginkel, Francio Guadeloupe, Annelies Moors, Mattijs van de Port, Baukje Prins, Vincent de Rooij, Willem Schinkel, Irene Stengs, Alex Strating, Thijl Sunier, and Jojada Verrips. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers for *American Ethnologist* for their useful comments as well as Linda Forman for editing the text very carefully.

1. To a considerable extent, this article is a result of this stunning change of discourse in Dutch politics and society. As a native of the Netherlands, I have never felt an urge to do anthropology "at home." Being an anthropologist primarily enabled me to leave the Netherlands and spend considerable time in Pakistan, where I have worked for more than a decade. The neonationalist turn in the Netherlands since the year 2000, however, caught my interest, and I wondered how to explain this dramatic political change. As was the case for other Dutch anthropologists, such as Peter Geschiere (2009) and Oscar Salemink (2006), these events made me redirect my professional attention to developments in my home country.

2. Dutch anthropologists have played a minor role in this debate. Until the early 1980s, some anthropologists were involved in research that helped shape public policies related to the labor migration that began in the 1960s. Since then, this role has largely been taken over by sociologists. In this respect, the Netherlands

differs significantly from, for instance, Norway, where anthropologists have dominated the public debate on migration and integration. Best known is Unni Wikan (2001), who has called for an assimilationist approach to immigration.

3. I use the term *liberal* here in the European sense of the word, meaning “right of center.”

4. The pledge of loyalty was initially not a part of the ceremony. In 2008, however, a “declaration of solidarity” (*verklaring van verbondenheid*) became obligatory. It reads, “I declare to respect the Constitutional order of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, its freedoms and rights, and promise to faithfully fulfill the duties of citizenship” [*Ik verklaar dat ik de Grondwettelijke orde van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden, haar vrijheden en rechten respecteer en beloof de plichten die het staatsburgerschap met zich meebrengt getrouw te vervullen*].

5. This turn from civilization to autochthonous culture and folklore in the debate about Islam and national identity also takes place elsewhere in Europe, for instance, in Germany in the discussion about *Leitkultur* (Ewing 2008:214).

6. This example comes from Sandra van Duuren’s research on naturalization ceremonies in the province of Noord-Brabant.

7. The inhabitants of the province of Limburg are predominantly Catholic and are known in the Netherlands as relatively flamboyant and fun loving.

8. There are, in fact, two kinds of naturalization ceremonies. From 2006 to 2008, National Naturalization Day was celebrated on August 24; since 2008, it has been observed on December 15. All municipalities are required to organize a ceremony on that day. Throughout the year, however, smaller ceremonies are held. Large cities have a ceremony almost every week; small municipalities have one at least every three months.

9. This quote comes from fieldwork conducted by Esme Tromp and Jasper Velzeboer.

10. This is a quote from Afshin Ellian, a public intellectual of Iranian origin. See Scheffer 2006.

11. One is required to attend the ceremony at which one receives the royal grant of naturalization. However, attendance at the bigger ceremony organized on National Naturalization Day is not obligatory.

## References cited

- Bakhtin, Mikhail  
1981 *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Michael Holquist, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt  
2000 *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Baumann, Gerd  
1996 *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Billig, Michael  
1995 *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Bloch, Maurice  
1974 Symbols, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 15:55–81.
- Bourdillon, M. F. C.  
1978 Knowing the World or Hiding It: A Response to Maurice Bloch. *Man* 13:591–599.
- Clifford, James  
1988 *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Crozier, Michel  
1964 *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, Jacques  
1988 *Limited Inc*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Directie Coördinatie Integratiebeleid Minderheden  
2006 Brief aan burgemeesters, 15 August 2006. <http://www.justitie.nl>, accessed September 10, 2008.
- Douglas, Mary  
1986 *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Ewing, Katherine Pratt  
2008 *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Geertz, Clifford  
1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books.  
1983 Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power. In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*. Pp. 121–146. New York: Basic Books.
- Geschiere, Peter  
2009 *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gingrich, Andre, and Marcus Banks, eds.  
2006 *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn.
- Ginkel, Rob van  
1999 *Op zoek naar eigenheid: Denkbeelden en discussies over cultuur en identiteit in Nederland*. The Hague: Sdu.
- Grillo, R. D.  
2003 Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety. *Anthropological Theory* 3:157–173.
- Handelman, Don  
1990 *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harding, Susan  
2000 *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri  
2000 *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Herzfeld, Michael  
1992 *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*. New York: Berg.  
1997 *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. New York: Routledge.
- Holmes, Douglas  
2000 *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neo-Fascism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lane, Christel  
1981 *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society—the Soviet Case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Leach, Edmund  
1972 Ritualization in Man in Relation to Conceptual and Social Development. In *Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach*. William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, eds. Pp. 333–337. New York: Harper and Row.
- Lefort, Claude  
1971 *Éléments d’une critique de la bureaucratie*. Geneva: Droz.
- Mahmood, Saba  
2005 *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Obeyesekere, Gananath  
1990 *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Oostindie, Gerd  
2008 Kossmanns kwal: Identiteit, migratie en koloniale geschiedenis zijn onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden. *De Academische Boekengids* 68:15–20.
- Prins, Baukje  
2004 *Voorbij de onschuld: Het debat over integratie in Nederland*. Amsterdam: Van Gennep.
- Rappaport, Roy  
1999 *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Salemink, Oscar  
2006 *New Rituals and the Nation: The Netherlands in the Mirror of Vietnam*. Amsterdam: Free University Press.
- Scheffer, Paul  
2006 Fijn, kan heel het land mee naturaliseren. *NRC Handelsblad*, August 23. <http://www.bkb.nl/llowgenda/home/parent-page/lorem-page/fijn-kan-heel-het-land-mee-naturaliseren-door-paul-scheffer-nrc-next-van-24-08-2006/>, accessed August 12, 2008.
- Schinkel, Willem  
2007 *Denken in een tijd van sociale hypochondrie: Aanzet tot een theorie voorbij de maatschappij*. Kampen, the Netherlands: Klement.
- Scott, James C.  
1985 *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.  
1998 *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sunier, Thijl, and Rob van Ginkel  
2006 "At Your Service": Reflections on the Rise of Neo-Nationalism in the Netherlands. *In Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*. Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks, eds. Pp. 107–124. New York: Berghahn.
- Swaan, Bram de  
1991 *Perron Nederland*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff.
- Turner, Victor  
1977 *Symbols in African Ritual*. *In Symbolic Anthropology: A Reader in the Study of Symbols and Meanings*. Janet L. Dolgin, David S. Kemnitzer, and David M. Schneider, eds. Pp. 183–194. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Uitermark, Justus, and Jan Willem Duyvendak  
2005 *Civilizing the City: Revanchist Urbanism in Rotterdam (the Netherlands)*. ASSR Working Paper, 05/05. Amsterdam: Amsterdam School for Social Science Research.
- Verdonk, Rita  
2006 Naturalisatieceremonie. <http://www.justitie.nl/actueel/toespraken/archief2006/>, accessed April 4, 2008.
- Wikan, Unni  
2001 *Generous Betrayal: Politics of Culture in the New Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Yurchak, Alexei  
2006 *Everything Was Forever until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

*accepted June 16, 2009*

*final version submitted June 22, 2009*

Oskar Verkaaik  
University of Amsterdam  
Department of Anthropology  
OZ Achterburgwal 185  
Amsterdam 1012 DK  
Netherlands

[o.g.a.verkaaik@uva.nl](mailto:o.g.a.verkaaik@uva.nl)