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Memory wars in the Low Countries, 1566-1700

Steen, J.A. van der

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Author: Steen, Jasper Andreas van der

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INTRODUCTION

In 1690, Judocus de Grieck – a Catholic bookseller in Brussels – wrote an account of his life and travels. He recounted how he had visited the Northern part of the Low Countries and soon after crossing the border had found it remarkably foreign.¹ He was struck by the different interpretations of the communal past in the North compared to his native South. In particular, memories of the major rebellion against the overlord of the Netherlands, Philip II of Spain, diverged. De Grieck touched on this rebellion that had erupted more than a century before. The conflict, known in historiography as the Revolt of the Netherlands, the Dutch Revolt or the Eighty Years' War, tore apart the Seventeen Provinces of the Low Countries and created two polities: the Dutch Republic in the North, which corresponds roughly to the modern-day Netherlands, and the Habsburg Netherlands in the South, the predecessor of modern-day Belgium. An enthusiastic supporter of Habsburg rule, De Grieck clearly knew whom to blame for the past troubles. Compiling and summarising existing histories of the Revolt, he reached the conclusion that evil heretics had brought the country to disaster.² He wrote that as a result 'our pleasant and fertile "Nederlandt", which had previously flourished so wonderfully, was now so abused by the vitriol of heresies and domestic troubles that it seemed about to give up the ghost.'³

Not all inhabitants of the Low Countries viewed the Revolt so negatively. On the other side of the border, in the Northern Netherlands, engraver Romeyn de Hooghe looked back in 1704 on the rebellion against Philip II of Spain from a very different perspective. In his triumphant print *Allegory of the Eighty Years' War* [Allegorie rond de Tachtigjarige Oorlog], De Hooghe glorified the Revolt while blaming the conflict on the bellicosity of Spanish rulers and their soldiers (Figure 1). On the left hand, a man closely resembling the Spanish army commander Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, duke of Alba (1507-1582), is about

¹ Judocus de Grieck, *Den pelgrim van dese wereldt. Verhaelende, tot een ieders onderrichtinghe ende eerlyck vermaeck, het ghedenckweerdighste dat hy in syn Levens-pilgrimage ghesien, ghehoort, ende ghelesen heeft* (Brussels: Ian de Grieck, 1690), pp. 31-34.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-14; De Grieck cited (and annotated) works of well-known Catholic historians such as Franciscus Haraeus, Cornelius Hazart, Nicolaus Burgundus, Michael ab Isselt, and Willem Estius; about the authorship of *Den pelgrim*, see: Albertine Van Loven, 'Joan de Grieck. Onderzoek naar het vaderschap over zijn werken', *Verlagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* 1928 (1928), pp. 556-558.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1: 'Ons aen-ghenaem en vruchtbaer Nederlandt, dat eertydts soo heerlyck ghepraelt hadde: was nu door het venyn der ketteryen, en in-landsche twisten, soodanigh mishandelt, dat het scheen synen lesten snack te sullen gheven.'

to kill a personification of the Netherlandish privileges. In the 1560s and 1570s, Alba had attempted to suppress the Revolt and had not shunned violent measures. The scene also includes a cardinal, recognisable by his galero, who stands near a pedestal that symbolises the unpopular Counter-Reformation reforms promulgated by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). He is blowing evil advice into Alba's ear. In the middle, a herald allegorising the Low Countries stands below a gate adorned with the coats of arms of the Seventeen Provinces. On the right hand, a triumphal arch represents the United Provinces of the Seven Netherlands with its overseas territories. It is decorated with emblems of the former leader of the Revolt, Prince William of Orange, and his descendants, as protectors of the Republic.



Figure 1. Romeyn de Hooghe, Allegory of the Eighty Years' War (1704), Rijkmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-55.156.

De Grieck and De Hooghe both discussed the Revolt, but they did so in completely different ways. The first considered the Revolt as an undesirable interruption of the 'normal' course of Netherlandish history while the second framed the war as the successful foundation of a new state: the Dutch Republic. These were not exceptional views; De Grieck and De Hooghe exemplify the emergence of two radically different ways of remembering the Revolt in North and South. This study will examine this phenomenon, asking first how and why such conflicting interpretations of the Revolt arose; secondly,

why they remained relevant for so long; and, finally, what role memories of the Revolt played in Northern and Southern identity formation.

To understand why these questions are important it is necessary to give a brief introduction to the Revolt.⁴ The Revolt of the Netherlands broke out in 1566 in the ‘Seventeen Provinces’ of the Habsburg Low Countries, a highly urbanised region that bordered on France and the Holy Roman Empire. The composite state complex of the Low Countries consisted of seventeen independent territories that successive dynastic rulers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries had brought together in a personal union.⁵ Through a series of advantageous marriages as well as conquests and acquisitions the Habsburg dynasty came to rule several kingdoms and principalities on the Iberian and Italian peninsulas and in the Netherlands. Each province had its own laws, customs and privileges.

Historians agree that there were two central problems in the Low Countries before the rebellion against the Habsburg overlord broke out.⁶ The first was a constitutional problem. As in other composite states in Europe, local elites harboured suspicions about the policies of administrative centralisation pursued by their overlords.⁷ In the Low Countries, fifteenth-century Burgundian and sixteenth-century Habsburg princes had begun to

⁴ It is not the intention of this work to go over the history of the Revolt of the Netherlands. The present study, including the historical overview in this introduction, builds on some excellent general studies available on this topic: Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979) is still an authoritative work about the conflict; see also: Anton van der Lem, *De opstand in de Nederlanden (1555-1609)* (Utrecht: Kosmos-Z&K Uitgevers, 1995); Alastair Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990); Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Simon Groenveld et al., eds., *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog: opstand en consolidatie in de Nederlanden (ca. 1560-1650)* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2008), which is a recent re-edition of Simon Groenveld et al., *De kogel door de kerk? De opstand in de Nederlanden en de rol van de Unie van Utrecht, 1559-1609* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1979) and Simon Groenveld and H. Leeuwenberg, *De bruid in de schuit. De consolidatie van de Republiek 1609-1650* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1985); Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); the following historiographical essays are particularly helpful: J.W. Smit, ‘The Present Position of Studies Regarding the Revolt of the Netherlands’, in: J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossmann, eds., *Britain and the Netherlands. Papers Delivered to the Oxford-Netherlands Historical Conference 1959* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), pp. 11-28; Simon Groenveld, ‘Beeldvorming en realiteit. Geschiedschrijving en achtergronden van de Nederlandse Opstand tegen Filips II’, in: P.A.M. Geurts and A.E.M. Janssen, eds., *Geschiedschrijving in Nederland. Deel II: Geschiedbeoefening* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), pp. 55-84; Henk van Nierop, ‘De troon van Alva. Over de interpretatie van de Nederlandse Opstand’, *BMGN* 110:2 (1995), pp. 205-223; there is an English translation of this article: Henk van Nierop, ‘Alba’s Throne. Making sense of the Revolt of the Netherlands’, in: Graham Darby, ed., *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt* (London: Routledge, 2001); Judith Pollmann, ‘Internationalisering en de Nederlandse Opstand’, *BMGN* 124:4 (2009), pp. 515-535.

⁵ The number seventeen in the ‘Seventeen Provinces’ has been a subject of debate among historians as it does not accurately reflect the number of independent regions that made up the Low Countries, see: Robert Stein, ‘Seventeen: The Multiplicity of a Unity in the Low Countries’, in: D’Arcy Jonathan Dacre Boulton and Jan R. Veenstra, eds., *The Ideology of Burgundy: The Promotion of National Consciousness 1364-1565* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 223-285.

⁶ In these two paragraphs I am following: Van Nierop, ‘De troon’, pp. 210-214.

⁷ For challenges to rulers of composite states, see: J.H. Elliott, ‘A Europe of Composite Monarchies’, *Past and Present* 137 (1992), pp. 48-71.

centralise their rule in the Netherlandish provinces to increase the efficiency of government, by streamlining tax collection to finance wars, the creation of a central bureaucracy and the professionalisation of government officials. In 1549, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who wanted to prevent future generations of rulers from partitioning the Low Countries, enacted the Pragmatic Sanction which united the Seventeen Provinces into an ‘inviolable union’ and loosened ties with the Holy Roman Empire.⁸ As a result, the Seventeen Provinces, which had in the past waged wars among each other and in some cases remained hostile, grudgingly became a kind of political unit. Another constitutional issue was the reorganisation of dioceses in 1555. This reorganisation, confirmed by the Holy See after Habsburg lobbying, altered the boundaries of the bishoprics and created a whole range of new ones. This measure enabled bishops to more effectively implement religious reform. Together with the Pragmatic Sanction, these new policies strengthened the authority of the central government in Brussels and Madrid at the expense of the privileges of clerics, nobles, provinces, and cities.⁹

The second problem facing the Low Countries was Charles V and Philip II’s aggressive and uncompromising response to the spread of Protestantism. Facilitated by a high level of urbanisation and a relatively high degree of literacy among the population, the Reformation spread rapidly through the Low Countries in the 1540s, ’50s and ’60s.¹⁰ Charles V considered heretics as challenges to his authority, and after earlier legislation proved ineffective, in 1550 he issued a law that became known as the ‘Blood Placard’: it was valid in all the Seventeen Provinces (regardless of local customs) and it required local authorities to pronounce death sentences on heretics as well as on anyone aiding or abetting them. When Philip II of Spain inherited the Low Countries, he continued Charles V’s policies of persecuting religious deviants. Besides causing unrest among the general population – poverty-stricken by a series of bad harvests and cold winters in the early 1560s – the religious prosecutors were instructed to disregard local privileges and legal

⁸ Most of the Netherlandish provinces were fiefs either of the Holy Roman Emperor or the German king: Randall C.H. Lesaffer, *Inleiding tot de Europese rechtsgeschiedenis* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008), p. 191

⁹ M. Dierickx, *De oprichting der nieuwe bisdommen in de Nederlanden onder Filips II, 1559-1570* (Antwerp: Standaard-boekhandel, 1950), pp. 23-24.

¹⁰ Alastair Duke, ‘The Face of Popular Religious Dissent in the Low Countries, 1520-30’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26 (1975), pp. 44-45; J.J. Woltjer, ‘Stadt und Reformation in den Niederlanden’, in: Franz Petri, ed., *Kirche und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in deutschen und niederländischen Städten der werdende Neuzeit* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1980), p. 157.

procedures, thereby making the religious problem also partly a challenge to local autonomy and liberties.¹¹

On 5 April 1566, hundreds of lower nobles marched on the Brussels residence of Philip II's governor in the Netherlands, Margaret of Parma. Discontented both with the religious persecutions in their territories and with the Habsburg overlord's infringement of their authority, they petitioned for moderation of the religious placards. Pending Philip II's response Margaret made some concessions to the nobles to prevent further unrest; she temporarily suspended the implementation of the placards against heresy. But before Philip had reached a decision on how to deal with the unrest, the conflict escalated. What started as a fairly moderate opposition movement among the lower nobility turned into a popular rebellion during the summer of 1566 when thousands began to attend Protestant open-air sermons outside the cities. This Calvinist movement developed a dynamic quite separate from the nobility's protests, and in August a wave of iconoclasm spread through the Low Countries from the South Flemish village Steenvoorde to Groningen in the North.¹² To restore order Dutch magnates negotiated settlements with Calvinists, but they were to pay dearly for their compromise. Philip II responded to the unrest by sending the duke of Alba, who arrived in 1567 to punish the dissidents.

In the following years Alba crushed the insurrection and prosecuted the rebels. However, the ruthless prosecutions of his tribunal, known as the 'Council of Troubles', and his unsuccessful introduction of a new permanent tax, the Tenth Penny, became the key topics of an effective anti-Spanish propaganda campaign. This campaign was led by the premier noble of the Low Countries: William of Orange, who had fled to his native Nassau as the duke approached. From Germany, the prince and his family also organised armed resistance against the duke of Alba. Initially, these efforts were unsuccessful, but in 1572 the prince of Orange and his brothers made new attempts to invade the Low Countries while exiled rebels captured some coastal towns in Holland and Zeeland. As a result of these combined efforts, a new rebellion broke out in several cities in the North.¹³

An influential historian of the Revolt, Geoffrey Parker, has convincingly argued that the Low Countries conflict can be understood only when studied in an international

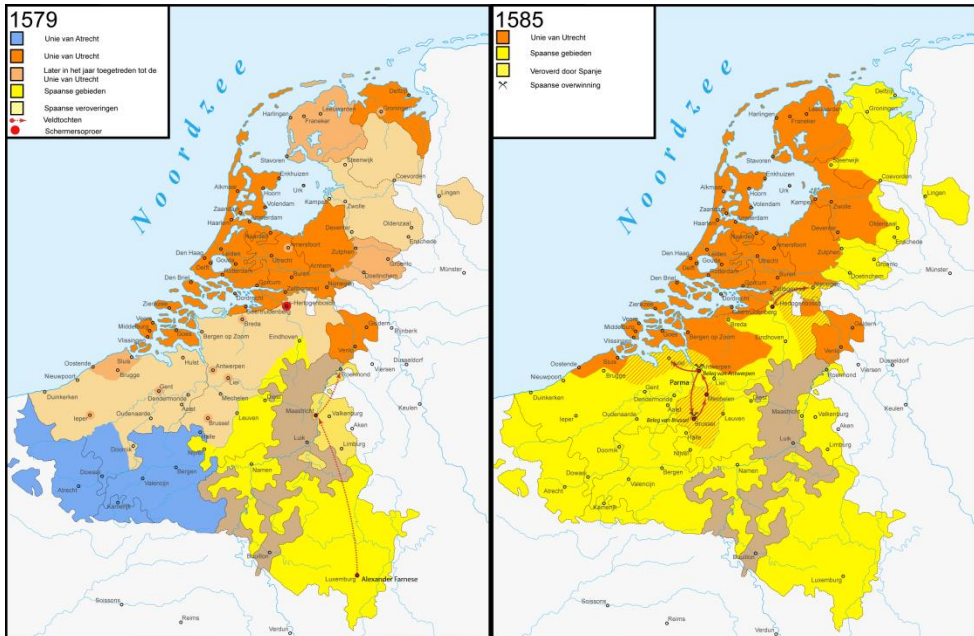
¹¹ Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, pp. 30-67; J.J. Woltjer, *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog. Over de Nederlandse Opstand 1555-1580* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1994), p. 21.

¹² Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, pp. 74-81.

¹³ Henk van Nierop, 'Confessional Cleansing. Why Amsterdam Did not Join the Revolt (1572-1578)', in: Wayne te Brake and Wim Klooster, eds., *Power and the City in the Netherlandic World* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 89-93.

context. Philip II's failures, Parker contends, should be ascribed to the difficulty and prohibitive costs of keeping together the vast Habsburg empire. Philip could never defeat his enemies on all fronts. His fight against the Ottoman infidels at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 was a window of opportunity for the rebels in the Low Countries and contributed to the success of their uprising in 1572. The second half of the 1570s saw a new wave of rebellion. Mutinies of Spanish soldiers who were underpaid due to the state bankruptcy of Philip II in 1575 and a power vacuum on the death of Louis de Requesens, governor of the Low Countries, led to a third insurrection in 1576 in which many Netherlandish provinces in North and South united against the Spanish military by signing the Pacification of Ghent (Figure 2). Soon, however, the rebel camp began to disintegrate over issues of religion. And once the Spanish king's financiers provided him with the necessary loans, the Habsburg army commander Alexander Farnese recaptured a number of Southern provinces in the early 1580s, bringing about what was to prove a lasting political separation between the Northern and Southern Netherlands (Figure 2). It took more than eighty years of war after the outbreak of the Revolt in 1566 before both sides signed the Treaty of Munster in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.¹⁴

¹⁴ Geoffrey Parker, 'Spain, her Enemies, and the Revolt of the Netherlands 1559–1648', *Past and Present* 49:1 (1970), pp. 83-94; Geoffrey Parker, 'Why Did the Dutch Revolt Last Eighty Years?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 26 (1976), pp. 56-59; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 63; Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 281-296.



Figures 2 and 3. The Low Countries in 1579 and in 1585: the rebellious territory in shades of orange and the Habsburg-controlled lands in yellow.

Well before 1648, the Revolt had come to occupy a central place in the public memories of the Northern and the Southern Netherlands, and it continued to do so for generations. Eighteenth-century Dutch Patriots and Belgian revolutionaries found in their sixteenth-century past an important source of inspiration.¹⁵ The rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century stimulated national pride in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century past.¹⁶ As late as the Second World War, political references to the Revolt enjoyed huge popularity in the kingdom of The Netherlands.¹⁷ More so than the period of French domination around 1800, people considered it an inspirational period during which the

¹⁵ I. Leonard Leeb, *The Ideological Origins of the Batavian Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), pp. 98-148.

¹⁶ See, for instance, the tercentenaries that came to be celebrated from 1866 onwards: Joep Leerssen, 'Novels and their readers, memories and their social frameworks', in: Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter, eds., *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 251; see also: Henk Slechte, 'Niederlande. "Durch eigene holländische Kunst angeregt, fühle ich, daß ick Holländer bin"', in: Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen. Ein europäisches Panorama* (Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 1998), pp. 223-247.

¹⁷ See for instance the cartoon comparing the Eighty Years' War to the Second World War: A. Orbaan, 'Duke of Alba: "Remember, Your Majesty, we butchered them too and never conquered"', drawing, collection NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, number 182762.

country had defeated an oppressive foreign regime.¹⁸ The diverging uses of memories of the Revolt contributed to, but also reflected, a lasting cultural divide between the Republic and the Habsburg Netherlands that still influences relations between the Netherlands and Belgium today.¹⁹ As this study will argue, this continuing divide is at least in part testimony to the success of memory-makers in the seventeenth century who moulded the past in accordance with their contemporary needs and who, in doing so, developed new and irreconcilable self-images in the Northern and Southern provinces. I will show that such memory-making often involved conflicts, which explains my use of the term ‘memory war’. Memory wars occur when political opponents use conflicting public memories of the past to conduct their political disagreements.²⁰

Historians have not really problematised the emergence of two radically different narratives about the Revolt in the Northern and Southern Netherlands. One reason might be that it has been seen as a self-explanatory phenomenon. Nineteenth-century historians, for instance, assumed that the separation of the Northern and Southern Low Countries had been the result of distinct feelings of national identity and distinct perceptions of the past. Dutch historian Robert Fruin argued in 1861 that

no transitory misunderstanding had brought about the rift but a deeply rooted difference between the Northern and Southern Netherlands, in descent, national character, history, religion, form of government, [and] social condition.²¹

¹⁸ In fact, the German occupiers soon realised that references to the Revolt against Philip II were politically charged. When Jacques Presser (who later became known as the chronicler of the murder of the Dutch Jews) wrote a history of the Eighty Years’ War, he did so under a pseudonym. And, indeed, the book was promptly forbidden by the German occupier – the analogy was too clear. See J. Romein, B.W. Schaper [J. Presser] et al., eds., *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1941); Nanda van der Zee, *Jacques Presser. Het gelijk van de twijfel* (Soesterberg: Aspekt, 2002), pp. 119-120; see also: C.J. Aarts and M.C. van Etten, eds., *Nooit heb ik wat ons werd ontnomen zo bitter, bitter liefgehad: verzetspoëzie en geuzenliederen uit de jaren 1933-1945* (Amsterdam: Ooievaar Pockethouse, 1995), pp. 149-150; and: Jeroen Dewulf, *Spirit of Resistance: Dutch Clandestine Literature During the Nazi Occupation* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 102-103, 111-114.

¹⁹ Take for example the sensitivities about the river Scheld and the fiercely debated inundation of the Hedwigeolder: ‘Ruzie rond de Schelde maakte van Mussert een politicus’, *Trouw*, 24 June 2011; ‘Inleiding van mevrouw drs. Karla Peijs, Commissaris van de Koningin in Zeeland, op de Gewestdag Schelde-Mark en Schelde-Dommel van de Orde van den Prince op 28 mei 2011 in Middelburg’, 28 May 2011, http://bestuur.zeeland.nl/cdk/toespraken/peijs/2011/cdk_110528b (accessed 22 August 2013).

²⁰ See also: Astrid Erl, *Memory in Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 10-11, 39-40; my usage of the term is more common in French historiography, see: Pascal Blanchard and Isabelle Veyrat-Masson, eds., *Les guerres de mémoires. La France et son histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010).

²¹ Robert Fruin, *Tien jaren uit den Tachtigjarigen Oorlog* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1899, first published in 1861), p. 380: ‘geen voorbijgaand misverstand de scheuring had teweeg gebracht maar een diep geworteld verschil tusschen de noordelijke en de zuidelijke Nederlanden, in afkomst, in volksaard, in geschiedenis, in godsdienst, in regeeringsvorm, in maatschappelijken toestand.’

This view was rejected by historians in the first half of the twentieth century, notably by Pieter Geyl, H.A. Enno van Gelder, and L. van der Essen, who showed that the division between North and South was the result rather than the cause of the rebellion.²² Yet, the popular national clichés persist, and even in the Netherlands today the Revolt is commonly seen as a struggle between the allegedly Protestant and rebel North, on the one hand, and the supposedly Catholic and loyalist South, on the other.²³

We have long known that in the Dutch Republic a lively memory culture about the Revolt emerged in the seventeenth century. The best studied aspect of this development is the history of early modern historiography on the rebellion.²⁴ J.C. Breen observed in 1922 that historians had for a long time neglected the rich repertory of historical texts about the rebellion and speculated that this neglect might have been due to ‘the fact that our Dutch historiography before the nineteenth century was not quite of the first rank’.²⁵ Despite these deprecating remarks about the quality of seventeenth-century historical texts, Breen demonstrated convincingly that Reformed authors played an important role in popularising negative stereotypes about the Spanish enemy.²⁶ In 1941, Jan Romein took Breen’s work a step further. To Romein we owe the insight that early modern historiography about the sixteenth-century origins of the Revolt should not be seen solely as a reconstruction of the past but foremost as a construction to be placed in its own contemporary context. That is to say: studying seventeenth-century accounts of the Revolt not only improves our understanding of the Revolt itself but also sheds light on the seventeenth-century interaction with the past in the Low Countries.²⁷ Even so, it took until the 1980s before the cultural significance of these historical texts was fully appreciated.

²² Pieter Geyl, *De groot-Nederlandsche gedachte. Historische en politieke beschouwingen* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1925), p. 99; H.A. Enno van Gelder, ‘Een historische vergelijking. De Nederlandse Opstand en de Franse godsdienstoorlogen’, *Verslag van de algemeene vergadering der leden van het Historisch Genootschap* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon, 1930), pp. 34-42; L. van der Essen, ‘L’unité Historique des Pays-Bas’, in: L. van der Essen and G.J. Hoogewerff, eds., *Le sentiment national dans les Pays-Bas* (Brussels: Éditions Universitaires, 1944), pp. 9-10.

²³ Willem Frijhoff, ‘Hoe Noord en Zuid van godsdienst verwisselden. Katholiek en protestant’, in: Jo Tollebeek and Henk te Velde, eds., *Het geheugen van de Lage Landen* (Rekkem: Ons Erfdeel, 2009), pp. 121-129.

²⁴ See for instance: Samuel de Wind, *Bibliotheek der Nederlandsche geschiedschrijvers; of oordeelkundig overzicht der inlandsche geschiedschrijvers der Nederlanden, van de vroegste tijden af tot den jare 1815*, 5 vols (Middelburg: Abrahams, 1831-1835).

²⁵ J.C. Breen, ‘Gereformeerde populaire historiographie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 37 (1922), p. 254: ‘[...] het feit, dat onze Nederlandsche geschiedschrijving vóór de negentiende eeuw niet bepaald van den eersten rang is geweest.’

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 259-273.

²⁷ Jan Romein, ‘Spiegel Historiaal van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog’, in: J. Presser, ed., *De Tachtigjarige oorlog* (Amsterdam/Brussels: Elsevier, 1978, first published in 1941), pp. 11-13.

In his thought-provoking study of Dutch culture in the seventeenth century Simon Schama pointed in 1987 to the existence of what he called ‘patriotic scripture’, a providential and historical tale of origin for the young Republic.²⁸ He argues that Dutch people considered the Revolt as a break with the past and that ‘patriotic scripture’ served to heal the breach.²⁹ Schama mentions three important elements of this Dutch tale of origin. The first is history, both recent and ancient, which includes not only the medieval history of Holland but also the recent revolt against Philip II. The second and third elements, both instances of analogical thought, are the Batavian Myth and examples from the Old Testament. The Batavians were a West Germanic tribe inhabiting parts of the Low Countries between 100 BC and 300 AD. They were known for their rebellion against the Roman Empire in 69-70 AD, as described by Tacitus in his *Histories*.³⁰ Schama picked up on the work of Ivo Schöffer and explained that the Dutch used this narrative as ‘a retrospective formulation of criteria for national legitimacy’. In his *Treatise About the Antiquity of the Batavian Now Holland Republic* [*Tractaet vande ovdtheyt vande Batavische nv Hollandsche republieque*] (1610), Hugo Grotius for instance considered the history of the Batavians as evidence that the States of Holland had always held sovereign power, which justified their rebellion against Philip II.³¹ Biblical examples notably included the people of Israel, who, like the Dutch, were God’s chosen people and who had escaped an oppressive tyrant. Schama’s contribution was to demonstrate the wide circulation and cultural relevance of these historical images. What Schama did not explain, however, is how some episodes in narratives about the Revolt became very popular while others did not. Nor have historians of the Southern Netherlands, such as Maurits Sabbe, B.A.

²⁸ Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Collins, 1987), pp. 51-125.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁰ Tacitus, *The Histories* I, translated by W. Hamilton Fyfe, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), book 4, pp. 111-119.

³¹ Ivo Schöffer, ‘The Batavian Myth During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries’, in: J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossmann, eds., *Britain and the Netherlands, V, Some Political Mythologies* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 78-101; Schama, *The Embarrassment*, p. 80; Hugo Grotius, *Tractaet vande ovdtheyt vande Batavische nv Hollandsche republieque* (The Hague: Hillebrant Jacobsz van Wouw, 1610); an example of the appropriation of the Batavian past in Holland, see: Elmer Kolfin, ‘Past Imperfect. Political Ideals in the Unfinished Batavian Series for the Town Hall of Amsterdam’, in: Marianna van der Zwaag and Renske Cohen Tervaert, eds., *Opstand als opdracht / The Batavian commissions* (Amsterdam: Stichting Koninklijk Paleis, 2011), pp. 10-19; see also: K.W. Swart, ‘The Black Legend During the Eighty Years War’, in: J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossmann, eds., *Britain and the Netherlands V: Some Political Mythologies* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975); Judith Pollmann, ‘Eine natürliche Feindschaft: Ursprung und Funktion der Schwarzen Legende über Spanien in den Niederlanden, 1560–1581’, in: Franc Bosbach, ed., *Feindbilder. Die Darstellung der politischen Publizistik des Mittelalters und der Neuzeit* (Cologne, Böhlau, 1992), pp. 78-81; Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: the Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Vermaseren and F.G. Scheelings, accounted for this phenomenon.³² They have accepted as self-evident the Revolt's apparent usefulness as frame of reference as well as how people narrated the history as a fixed sequence of episodes throughout the seventeenth century. Historians have so far not sought to explain how and why two distinct dominant memory cultures came into being in the North and South and how they developed over time.

Perhaps the lack of explanations for why the Revolt continued to play such a central role in political discussions during the seventeenth century can be attributed to the fact that only in the 1980s and '90s did we begin to thematise the emergence of memory practices. Two fields of study in particular are responsible for this. The first of these is the study of nationalism. In post-1750 societies, some historians argue, authorities and interest groups had the political motivation and an increasing number of mass media at their disposal to circulate a national outlook on the nation's past. These media included newspapers, national educational systems with history textbooks as 'weapons of mass instruction', a phrase coined by Charles Ingrao, and later also popular broadcasting media such as radio and television.³³ In a period of increasing European integration in the 1980s and '90s, scholars argued that no sense of national identity existed in the early modern period except among government officials and other elites who linked their feelings of national identity to institutions of state. As Caspar Hirschi, a scholar of nationalism, has summarised the dominant view, 'nationalism is to be seen as a uniquely modern phenomenon established by industrialisation and mass communication in the nineteenth century'.³⁴ Benedict Anderson, for instance, contended in his path-breaking study *Imagined Communities* (1983) that 'nationality' and 'nationalism' were created at the end of the eighteenth century and dismisses those who detect earlier forms of popular national feeling by calling them 'nationalist ideologues'.³⁵ Around the same time Eric Hobsbawm suggested in *The Invention of Tradition* that only the convergence of state, nation and society in the

³² Maurits Sabbe, *Brabant in 't verweer. Bijdrage tot de studie der Zuid-Nederlandsche strijdliteratuur in de eerste helft der 17e eeuw* (Antwerp: V. Resselers, 1933); B.A. Vermaseren, *De katholieke Nederlandse geschiedschrijving in de 16de en 17de eeuw over de opstand* (Leeuwarden: Gerben Dykstra, 1981); F.G. Scheelings, 'De geschiedschrijving en de beeldvorming over de Opstand in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden (16e-18e eeuw)', in: J. Craeybeckx et al., eds., *1585: op gescheiden wegen. Handelingen van het colloquium over de scheiding der Nederlanden, gehouden 22-23 november 1985 te Brussel* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988).

³³ Aleida Assmann, 'Canon and Archive', in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), p. 101.

³⁴ Caspar Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1; see also: Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates About Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 52-77.

³⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006, first published 1983), p. 4.

second half of the nineteenth century can explain the increasing attention for national history.³⁶ Although we may cast doubt on the notion that national thinking and the idea of a national past are predominantly modern phenomena, early modernists have benefitted from an important insight that these studies have offered us, namely that national thinking is not a natural or self-evident phenomenon but is constructed for political purposes.

The political purposes for which national feelings were mobilised in the seventeenth century were very different from those of nationalism in the nineteenth century. Simon Groenveld and Alastair Duke have rightly observed that in the highly urbanised provinces of the Netherlands, sixteenth-century citizens identified themselves more with their town or region than with the elusive idea of the Seventeen Provinces.³⁷ In the less urbanised parts, regional or provincial identities mattered a great deal more than feelings of national identity.³⁸ Of course, ‘identity’ is a concept fraught with ambiguity, and its usage requires some explanation.³⁹ In the present study, I use the term in a cultural sense to describe feelings of togetherness and belonging – in the case of Dutch national identity: a sense of being a Dutchman who shares a common past, a common culture and common traditions with other Dutchmen. This is a broad definition of identity that allows for identities to coexist and overlap, and which recognises that the adoption of one identity does not necessarily mean the abandonment of another.⁴⁰

Historians have shown that examples of feelings of national identity may be found in the early modern Low Countries but that only in the nineteenth century did they come to

³⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, first published 1983), pp. 1-8; Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914’, in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, first published 1983), pp. 263-265.

³⁷ Simon Groenveld, ‘Natie en nationaal gevoel in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden’, *Nederlands Archiefblad* 84 (1980), pp. 372-387; Alastair Duke, ‘In Defence of the Common Fatherland: Patriotism and Liberty in the Low Countries, 1555-1576’, in: Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann, eds., *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 222-224; Alastair Duke, ‘The Elusive Netherlands: the Question of National Identity in the Early Modern Low Countries on the Eve of the Revolt’, *BMGN* 119:1 (2004), pp. 10-37; see also: L. van der Essen, ‘De historische gebondenheid der Nederlanden’, *Nederlandsche Historiebladen* 1 (1938), pp. 168-169.

³⁸ Peter Hoppenbrouwers, ‘The Dynamics of National Identity in the later Middle Ages’, in: Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann, eds., *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 39-41.

³⁹ See: Willem Frijhoff, ‘Identiteit en identiteitsbesef. De historicus en de spanning tussen verbeelding, benoeming en herkenning’, *BMGN* 107:4 (1992), pp. 619-620; for criticism of such an ‘open’ interpretation of the concept, see: Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, ‘Beyond “Identity”’, *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), pp. 1-47.

⁴⁰ For a similar approach, see: Donald Haks, *Vaderland en vrede 1672-1713. Publiciteit over de Nederlandse Republiek in oorlog* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2013), pp. 16-17.

fruition in more popular forms of national awareness.⁴¹ The sociologist Miroslav Hroch has made an influential distinction between three phases in the development of national identity in Europe: a philological or intellectual phase, a political phase and a phase of national thought as a mass phenomenon.⁴² Niek van Sas used Hroch's three categories in his study of the development of modern Dutch identity. Van Sas places the intellectual phase in the period of the Dutch Republic and considers the Batavian Myth as the prime example of national thinking. The political phase occurred in the long nineteenth century while the phase of national identity as a popular phenomenon only really took off at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴³ I take issue with two aspects of Van Sas' usage of Hroch. Van Sas assumes, firstly, that early modern feelings of national identity were intellectual elite pursuits and, secondly, that insofar as public memory played a role in seventeenth-century Dutch self-awareness, it was the Batavian Myth. A similar argument has been made by Olaf Mörke, who in a comparative study of Dutch and Swiss 'historical images' of the past has argued that in the Republic it was mainly the historical frame of the Batavian Revolt that came to be of political importance. Van Sas and Mörke both overlook the fact that the more recent past, notably the Revolt against the Habsburg overlord, became a popular frame of reference in its own right.⁴⁴

The problem of modernist claims about 'national' identity and history is that they tend to neglect or trivialise instances of national thinking that did occur in the seventeenth century. When looking at Anderson's own definition of a 'nation' that is imagined as 'limited', as 'sovereign' and as a 'community', early modernists, including those who do not fit the 'nationalist ideologue'-label, cannot help feeling pangs of recognition.⁴⁵

⁴¹ C.A. Bayly acknowledges the existence of nations with a 'deeper lineage' than the 'lately come fabrications of populist demagogues and bigoted intellectuals', but he also emphasizes the state-driven politics of nationalism: C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 202; in his study of the Revolt in theatre plays, Hugh Dunthorne argues that the conflict had been an important topic in early modern Dutch historiography, but he claims that the Revolt lost its preeminence after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, only to be restored as an important popular episode of national history in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Hugh Dunthorne, 'Dramatizing the Dutch Revolt. Romantic History and its Sixteenth-Century Antecedents', in: Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Low Countries: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 11-15.

⁴² Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

⁴³ Niek van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland. Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750-1900* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), pp. 46-47.

⁴⁴ Olaf Mörke, 'The Content, Form and Function of Swiss and Dutch Images of History', in: André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen and Maarten Prak, eds., *The Republican Alternative: The Netherlands and Switzerland Compared* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), pp. 173-178.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 6-7.

Instances of early modern national awareness in the Dutch Republic, for instance, could also be characterised by a ‘finite, if elastic’ sense of self that distinguished the nation from other nations. National self-representations also emphasised state sovereignty, self-determination, and freedom from foreign tyranny. And although modernists claim that identification with the ‘nation’ is exclusively modern, early modern Dutch people imagined themselves to be inhabitants not only of the community of their city, region or province but also of the state complex that was the United Provinces. In many ways, the same can be said for the Habsburg Netherlands although there the Habsburg dynasty rather than the idea of ‘the state’ played an important role in identity formation.

Besides scholarly discussions about nationalism, the field of cultural memory studies has also influenced the way we look at people’s interaction with their past. The convergence of three quite separate developments can explain the increased attention for the study of memory (also known as the ‘memory boom’) in the last decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ The first of these is the already discussed insight of Hobsbawm and Anderson in the field of nationalism studies but also of Pierre Nora in his seminal *Lieux de mémoire*-project: that national identity is a construct.⁴⁷ The political project of the European Economic Community and the European Union, the Revolutions of 1989, and the Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s inspired scholars to reconsider the ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ not as unproblematic natural phenomena but as social constructs.⁴⁸ The communal past was no longer seen as a natural basis of national identity. A different picture emerged: a communal past is forged to create and reinforce an artificial sense of national identity. Secondly, attention for the repression of war memories after the Second World War in various academic disciplines contributed to the rise of memory studies. In the 1960s, people who had been born in the 1940s and ’50s accused their parents of burying in oblivion the horrors of the Second World War and of washing their hands of collaboration with the German aggressors.⁴⁹ In the case of the Netherlands, the 1960s saw an increase in Dutch discussions

⁴⁶ In this paragraph I follow Judith Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden van de Gouden Eeuw* (Leiden, 2008), p. 5. I acknowledge that cultural memory studies has a much longer lineage, including – notably – Maurice Halbwachs who coined the term *mémoire collective*: Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925).

⁴⁷ Pierre Nora, ‘Comment écrire l’histoire de France?’, *Les lieux de mémoire: III Les France 1. Conflits et partages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 11-32.

⁴⁸ Take for example John H. Elliott’s inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford: John H. Elliott, *National and Comparative History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 1-29.

⁴⁹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 27; see also: Piet de Rooy, *Republiek van rivaliteiten. Nederland sinds 1813* (Amsterdam: Mets & Mets, 2005, first published 2002), pp. 244-245.

about people's passivity and collaboration during the war. Jan Bank has shown that this critical re-evaluation of the past particularly concerned the extermination of European Jews, which became an important topic of public debate, for instance during and after the trial of Adolf Eichmann (1961-62), after Jacques Presser's publication of the history of Dutch Jews in the Holocaust *Ondergang* (1965), and in reaction to the Six Day War (1967) between Israel, on the one hand, and Egypt, Jordan and Syria, on the other.⁵⁰ Astrid Erll has also suggested that the loss of witnesses of the Holocaust, survivors of which were beginning to die out, resulted in an awareness that 'without organic, autobiographic memories, societies are solely dependent on media [...] to transmit experience'.⁵¹ Related to Erll's observation, finally, increasing attention for 'people without history' led scholars to consider oral history as a legitimate source of historical inquiry, which inspired them to conceptualise practices of oral memory transmission.⁵²

In this study, *memory* is generally understood in a metaphorical sense and, taking Astrid Erll's definition, is used not to denote the cognitive processes of individual memory but to describe and conceptualise the dynamic interaction of communities with their past.⁵³ The way groups remember bears some resemblance to individual memory processes. Just like individual memory, cultural memory is selective.⁵⁴ Aleida Assmann observes the selectivity of memory in literate societies. 'Cultures that rely on writing systems for long-term storage of information', she writes, 'develop a distinction between what I call a "canon" and an "archive"'.⁵⁵ The canon includes that which is remembered in a given society. The archive comprises those things that have been neglected over time but that are still preserved in some material form.⁵⁶ It encompasses the historical information that can be found if sought whereas the 'canon' consists of the publicly accessible information that, at least to some degree, people consider common knowledge: information which

⁵⁰ Jan Bank, *Oorlogsverleden in Nederland* (Baarn: Ambo, 1983), pp. 21-24. See for instance Dutch attention for the Eichmann trial: Abel Herzberg, *Eichmann in Jeruzalem* (The Hague: Bakker, 1962); Harry Mulisch, *De zaak 40/61. Een reportage* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 1962); the Dutch translation of Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963): Hannah Arendt, *De banaliteit van het kwaad: een reportage* (Amsterdam: Moussault, 1969);

⁵¹ Astrid Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction', in: Erll and Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), p. 9.

⁵² Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden*, p. 5.

⁵³ Erll, 'Cultural Memory Studies', p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Aleida Assmann, 'Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past', in: Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter, eds., *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), p. 43.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

communities can understand without having to consult the ‘archive’. Events do not automatically become canonical. Studies about ‘collective memory’ in post-conflict societies and about remembering as a cultural and political act have taught us that during and after twentieth-century wars and regime changes, authorities tried to justify their politics by manipulating public memories of the past. This required huge efforts on their part, such as the construction of monuments, the organisation of commemorative festivals and the development of school curricula, often without any guarantee of success.⁵⁷ Such efforts were unimaginable before 1800. Nevertheless, ‘canons’ did come into being well before.

Historians of cultural memory, like scholars of nationalism, are prone to consider the development of Enlightened ideals such as freedom, progress and citizenship, and of modern nationalism, as requirements for societies to have a ‘national’ public memory.⁵⁸ In the Netherlands, for instance, scholars see the rise of attention for national history as a new development in the eighteenth century that was fuelled by a growing popular awareness of real or imagined economic and moral decline. According to Wijnand Mijnhardt and Margaret Jacob, this feeling of decline ‘produced a new national consciousness that drew its inspiration from the past’.⁵⁹ Joop Koopmans shows that historical commonplaces were used in the struggles between rivalling Orangist and Patriot factions in the 1780s, and he suggests that the ideological use of national history in political conflicts was a new

⁵⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 38; Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, first published 1989), pp. 1-7; Winter, *Remembering War*; Richard Ned Lebow, ‘The Memory of Politics in Postwar Europe’, in: Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner and Claudio Fogu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 6-7; see for instance the studies of memory politics after the Second World War or the fall of Communism: Andreas Langenohl, ‘Memory in Post-Authoritarian Societies’, in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, eds., *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 163-165; Stanislaw Tyska, ‘Restitution as a Means of Remembrance. Evocation of the Recent Past in the Czech Republic and Poland after 1989’, in: Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter, eds., *Performing the Past: Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press), pp. 305-306.

⁵⁸ For these views on national thinking, see: John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), pp. 45-63, 353-365; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 55-62, 88-109; Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, p. 101; Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore, ‘Apologies for the Nation-State in Western Europe since 1800’, in: Stefan Berger et al., eds., *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 3-4; see for the Dutch case Niek van Sas, ‘Vaderlandsliefde, vaderlandsche en vaderlands gevoel in Nederland, 1770-1813’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 52 (1989), pp. 471-495.

⁵⁹ Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt, ‘Introduction’, in: Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt, eds., *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century: Decline, Enlightenment, and Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 13.

development.⁶⁰ Similarly, Lotte Jensen and Lieke van Deinsen argue that where the Dutch past was initially characterised by ‘mnemonic multiplicity’ (by which they mean that memory was not yet politicised), in the 1780s Dutch Patriots and Orangists developed ‘distinct memory domains’ to fight out their political disagreements.⁶¹ Again, these scholars thus all suggest this was a new phenomenon and a prelude to the popularity of national history in the nineteenth century.

Tom Verschaffel and Marc Quaghebeur make a similar argument when they claim that national history in the Southern Netherlands was essentially a product of the mid-eighteenth century.⁶² Apart from the modernity-argument, the neglect of South Netherlandish interaction with the national past in previous centuries probably has three reasons specific to the political context of the Habsburg Netherlands. Firstly, formerly rebellious cities that reconciled to their dynastic overlord had little to gain from recalling their rebellion. Secondly, Verschaffel, René Vermeir and Luc Duerloo have shown that historians of the Habsburg Netherlands have traditionally considered the period 1600-1790 as a period of foreign oppression during which the South was merely the plaything of European powers.⁶³ According to this traditional view, no national feeling worth studying could have developed in this part of the Low Countries. In this study, I will suggest the opposite. Finally, for a long time cultural historians did not take seriously the link between national public memory and religion in the Southern Netherlands, which means that many Southern memory practices have escaped their notice. Historians of modern nationalism tend to consider the idealisation of the nation as an alternative to religion. This study argues that the one need not exclude the other, that there can be mutual interaction between religious and ‘secular’ (or political) memory practices, and that the two overlapped.

⁶⁰ Joop W. Koopmans, ‘Spanish Tyranny and Bloody Placards: Historical Commonplace in the Struggle Between Dutch Patriots and Orangists around 1780?’, in: Joop W. Koopmans and N.H. Petersen, eds., *Commonplace Culture in Western Europe in the Early Modern Period III: Legitimation of Antiquity* (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), pp. 35-36; see also: Van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland*, pp. 176-177.

⁶¹ Lotte Jensen and Lieke van Deinsen, ‘Het theater van de herinnering. Vaderlands-historisch toneel in de achttiende eeuw’, *Spiegel der Letteren* 54:2 (2012), pp. 218-219.

⁶² Tom Verschaffel, *De hoed en de hond. Geschiedschrijving in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1715-1794* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), pp. 61-98; see also: Marc Quaghebeur, ‘The Sixteenth Century: A Decisive Myth’, in: Catherine Labio, ed., *Belgian Memories*, Yale French Studies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 117; Johannes Koll emphasises the importance of nineteenth-century nationalism for the development of a national ‘Belgian’ past: Johannes Koll, ‘Belgien: Geschichtskultur und nationale Identität’, in: Monika Flacke, ed., *Mythen der Nationen. Ein europäisches Panorama* (Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 1998), pp. 53-77.

⁶³ Verschaffel, *De hoed*, p. 369; René Vermeir, ‘How Spanish Were the Spanish Netherlands?’, *Dutch Crossing* 36:1 (2012), pp. 3-5; Luc Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 6-12

Whereas memory scholars have tended to see popular interest in the national past as a modern phenomenon, this study will show that such interest was ubiquitous in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. Indeed, describing a collective experience in the past in terms of ‘memory’ is certainly not a modern invention. The ancient idea that people, as a community, were beginning to forget the past was a commonplace that seventeenth-century historians often used to motivate their writing of history.⁶⁴ In recounting the past, contemporaries in early modern and modern societies alike often spoke in terms of ‘memory’, ‘remembering’, ‘commemorating’, or ‘recalling’ but also of ‘forgetting’, and ‘oblivion’.⁶⁵ Nor is this study the first to examine practices of memory in early modern Europe. Historians of Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe have shown the major impact that religious transformations and civil conflicts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have had on the practical uses of the past. Both on the Protestant and Catholic sides, propagandists increasingly invoked the past to lend legitimacy to their confessional arguments.⁶⁶ The Revolt of the Netherlands was no exception to this development.⁶⁷

What does make the Low Countries special is the widespread emergence of ‘national’ and non-confessional readings of the past. It is true that multiple scholars have noted similar developments elsewhere, notably for late medieval and early modern France and England but also in other parts of Europe.⁶⁸ Yet they have tended to rest on the

⁶⁴ Take for example Jacob Duym, *Een Ghedenck-boeck, Het welck ons Leert aen al het quaet en den grooten moewil van de Spaingnaerden en haren aenhanck ons aen-ghedaen te ghedencken* (Leiden: Henrick Lodewijcxszoon van Haestens, 1606), f. *2r; for the example set by ancient authors such as Cicero see also Peter Burke, ‘History as Social Memory’, in: Thomas Butler, ed., *Memory: History, Culture and the Mind* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 97.

⁶⁵ See James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. x; Charles H. Parker, ‘To the Attentive, Nonpartisan Reader: The Appeal to History and National Identity in the Religious Disputes of the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997), pp. 57-78.

⁶⁶ Bruce Gordon, ed., *Protestant Identity and History in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 1996); David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1989); Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378-1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Howard Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 117.

⁶⁷ For the Dutch Republic: Breen, ‘Gereformeerde populaire historiographie’, pp. 254-273, 372-382; for the Southern Netherlands, see: Vermaseren, *De katholieke Nederlandse geschiedschrijving*; Scheelings, ‘De geschiedschrijving’.

⁶⁸ A seminal work on French national consciousness in the sixteenth century is: Myriam Yardeni, *La conscience nationale en France pendant les guerres de religion (1559-1598)* (Leuven: Nauwelaerts, 1971); Other notable works include: Colette Beaune, *Naissance de la nation France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), pp. 15-74; Alain Tallon, *Conscience nationale et sentiment religieux en France au XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001), pp. 27-53; for an overview of scholarship on early modern French identities, see: David Bell, ‘Recent Works on Early Modern French National Identity’, *The Journal of Modern History* 68:1 (1996), pp. 84-113; for England as an exceptional example of an early emergence of national memory: Fentress and Wickham, *Social Memory*, pp. 129-130; see also: Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 10; Balázs Trencsényi and Márton Zászkaliczky, eds., *Whose Love of Which Country? Composite States, National Histories and Patriotic Discourses in Early Modern East Central Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

assumption that the forging and political exploitation of public memories were top-down phenomena. David Cressy has shown, for instance, that the state in Tudor and Stuart England performed a central role in the management of memory by establishing its own Protestant calendar, cutting down on the number of holy days and introducing new secular commemorations. Where before the Reformation, English history had no part in the liturgical calendar, this situation changed under the reign of Elizabeth I. Cressy demonstrates that government authorities developed ‘a mythic and patriotic sense of national identity’, focusing less than before on traditional Catholic frames of reference such as religious doctrine and more than ever on the recent past.⁶⁹ The intention was to create a ‘rhythm of the year’ that supported the political aspirations of the government.

Building on studies about early modern memory formation, I argue that the modernist suggestion that popular awareness of a national past emerged only after 1750 neglects the political, rhetorical and cultural importance that earlier generations attached to ideas of a collective history that inspired and brought together people across local and regional boundaries.⁷⁰ In short, although modern memory scholars claim that a national collective memory can exist only in conjunction with modern nationalism, this claim is not historical.⁷¹ Moreover, by focusing exclusively on the early modern period, instead of using it merely as a ‘decor’ against developments of the modern age, the present study can more accurately analyse the use of public memory in the early modern Low Countries.⁷²

This book offers a comparative study of memory politics in the early modern Low Countries. Modern scholarship demonstrates that a comparative perspective can yield valuable new insights into the way societies remember. Studies of memory politics after twentieth-century partitions, including East and West Germany and the two Koreas have shown that authorities massaged and manipulated the communal past to their own political

⁶⁹ Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, p. ix; see also: David Cressy, ‘National Memory in Early Modern England’, in: John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 61-73.

⁷⁰ For a more elaborate discussion of the importance that scholars attach to ‘modernity’ in the field of cultural memory studies, see: Judith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers, ‘On the Early Modernity of Modern Memory’, in: Erika Kuijpers et al., eds., *Memory Before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 3-7.

⁷¹ A similar point regarding the modernity of nationalism is made by Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism*, pp. 7-9; see also: Erika Kuijpers, et al., eds., *Memory Before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁷² Jeroen Duindam makes this point in his call for more comparative research: Jeroen Duindam, *Vergelijking als maatstaf: heerschappij in de vroegmoderne wereld* (Leiden: s.n., 2011), p. 3.

advantage and in response to what was happening on the other side of the border.⁷³ A comparative approach is all the more useful because of the difficulty historians have in breaking free from existing canonical narratives about the past.⁷⁴ Thomas Welskopp has noted that ‘the comparative lens is perfectly suited to elaborating and explaining both the peculiarities of national “master-narratives” and the basic patterns, at times uncannily similar, that they have in common.’⁷⁵ Considering the evident advantages of a comparative approach, it is striking that no historian has ever engaged in a constructive comparison of the memory cultures in the Northern and Southern Netherlands.⁷⁶

The first theme that the comparison will address is the emergence of two different memory cultures in North and South. In a national context historians of the Dutch Republic have shown that the Revolt was celebrated in the seventeenth century as a successful struggle for freedom and as a ‘foundation narrative’ for the new state. By comparing Northern ways of dealing with the Revolt to images of the past in the Habsburg Netherlands, we can test just how self-evident the memory culture in the Republic was as well as find out if, despite the inexpediency of remembering the Revolt in the reconquered South, similar memory practices developed there. One of the central contentions of this study, in line with Aleida Assmann’s distinction between the canon and the archive, is that processes of memory formation did not happen organically but were the result of conscious efforts of individuals, interest groups and authorities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to have their interpretation of the past recognised as authoritative.⁷⁷

This brings me to the second theme of the comparison, namely the influence of dynasty, state, and church on public memory practices. In the Southern Netherlands Habsburg authority was restored while in the Dutch Republic there was no sovereign prince. In the South the Counter-Reformation achieved great success while the Reformed

⁷³ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 1-12; Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 142-178; Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 4-15; Jeffrey Herf, ‘Politics and Memory in West and East Germany since 1961 and in Unified Germany since 1990’, *Journal of Israel History* 23:1 (2004), pp. 40-64; Seunghei Clara Hong, ‘Re-Collecting Fragments: Towards a Politics of Memory in Partition Literature’, unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Michigan, 2009), <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/63639> (accessed 12 February 2013).

⁷⁴ Marc Bloch, ‘A Contribution Towards a Comparative History of European Societies’, in: Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967, article first published 1925), pp. 70-71.

⁷⁵ Thomas Welskopp, ‘Comparative History’, *European History Online* (2010), <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/theories-and-methods/comparative-history> (accessed 16 January 2013), p. 11.

⁷⁶ A notable exception is Gerrit Verhoeven, *Anders Reizen? Evoluties in vroegmoderne reiservaringen van Hollandse en Brabantse elites (1600-1750)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009).

⁷⁷ Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden*, pp. 9-14.

church in the North, despite being the privileged church, had to coexist with other confessions and did not enjoy the status of state church. How did religious unity in the South and religious plurality in the North influence practices of memory, and what role did the state and the dynasty play in memory formation? The comparison offers an excellent opportunity to analyse the mutual influence of memory and identity formation in two different religious and political systems, one of which had Catholicism and the other Calvinism as the dominant religion. Thirdly, the comparison between North and South in this study will demonstrate that both parts of the Low Countries interacted with and influenced one another's memory practices. This comparison has yielded not only similarities but also striking dissimilarities. I selected a few themes to elaborate on in the following chapters, and within those themes I had to deal with some qualitative and quantitative incommensurables. Reflecting on such differences, however, can be quite useful. For example, the memory culture of the Revolt was less lively in the Southern Netherlands than in the Dutch Republic. Rather than discarding some ways of interaction with the past in the South as attempts to 'forget' the Revolt, I will argue that policies of oblivion in the Habsburg Netherlands were not only intended to forget or ignore in the literal sense but that they were also meant to neutralise the harmful effects of remembering the past in a rebel-turned-loyal society.

A second objective of this comparative study is to see how canonical narratives about the Revolt changed over time and came to play a key role in public debates about war and peace, public policy and religion. Due to the authority of the past in pre-modern societies, in changing political contexts it was subject to constant reinvention.⁷⁸ As the medievalist Gabrielle Spiegel has noted, historical narratives are 'able to address the historical issues so crucially at stake and to lend to ideology the authority and prestige of the past, all the while dissimulating its status as ideology under the guise of a mere recounting of "what was."⁷⁹ As people started challenging Charles V and his successor Philip II's centralist policies, contemporaries began to look into the history of local privileges.⁸⁰ And during the rebellion, supporters of resistance against Philip II found a source of inspiration in the already circulating European memories of the Spanish cruelty to

⁷⁸ Pollmann and Kuijpers, 'On the Early Modernity of Modern Memory', pp. 7-10.

⁷⁹ Gabrielle M. Spiegel, 'Medieval Canon Formation and the Rise of Royal Historiography in Old French Prose', *Modern Language Notes* 108 (1993), p. 653.

⁸⁰ J.J. Woltjer, 'Dutch Privileges, Real and Imaginary', in: J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossman, eds., *Britain and the Netherlands. Volume V: Some Political Mythologies* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 19-35.

the American Indians.⁸¹ Political changes not only influenced memories of the Revolt, but influence also operated in the reverse direction. Dominant narratives about the conflict influenced how political disagreements could be voiced.⁸² Looking at this interplay of memory and politics over the long term until 1700, we will see that canonical narratives about the Revolt in North and South initially served to antagonise the foreign enemy but quickly became a frequently used political weapon to disarm domestic political opponents. An exploration of how this happened, and why, sheds light on the way some historical discourses about the Revolt remained politically potent for centuries to come.

So, how do we study early modern memory practices? It is tempting to build primarily on the work of respectable early modern historians which, after all, are useful to study contemporary people's understanding of their past. Given the source problems, this is exactly what most historians have done. However, such an intellectual and elite approach neglects more popular ways of dealing with the past, including the use of historical arguments in political propaganda or religious disputes. I contend that these kinds of interaction with the past, in conjunction with learned historiography, have been very influential in establishing a dominant memory culture. Apart from historiography, the source material of this study therefore includes political pamphlets, government treatises, religious tracts, propagandistic prints, diaries, songs, poems, and folklore stories. By broadening the range of references to the Revolt, this study will be able to show that ideas about a national past also existed outside of government elites.

Using concepts from memory studies and on the basis of a corpus of wide-ranging source material, I will thus compare political memory practices in the Dutch Republic and the Habsburg Netherlands in the seventeenth century. This ambitious geographic coverage and time-span, however, also means that I have had to make choices that need some explanation. My broad approach to the topic of public memories of the Revolt in the early modern Low Countries has its limitations. An important limitation of this study is its representativeness. It is impossible for me to assess accurately how representative the sources I use were in their contemporary context, nor have I entertained aspirations of completeness. I am aware of these considerations but have nonetheless decided that the added value of gaining a wide-ranging understanding of public memory formation over the

⁸¹ See for instance the Dutch interest in Spanish cruelties in the Americas: Swart, 'The Black Legend'; Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*, p. 73.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

long term from a comparative perspective outweighs the problem of not being able to tell with certainty whether a particular memory practice in Utrecht, to name a random example, can also be found in Groningen or other parts of the Low Countries.

Another limitation is that I have excluded some important aspects of memory formation after the outbreak of the Revolt of the Netherlands. Firstly, by studying both the emergence and political usage of two different public memories on a national level, I have largely ignored local practices of memory. This is not to trivialise them; I acknowledge that they remained very important throughout the early modern period. My choice can be justified as a necessary practical restriction for purposes of feasibility. A more positive justification is that my colleague Marianne Eekhout, who is also a member of the NWO VICI-research project *Tales of the Revolt: Memory, Oblivion and Identity, 1566-1700*, has studied the public use of memories of the Revolt on a local level. We have agreed that I should study memory politics on a national and she on an urban level. We both include provincial memory politics in our dissertations.⁸³ A second aspect that I disregarded is the Spanish side of the story. This may seem strange because for most of the studied period the overlord of the Habsburg Netherlands was also the Spanish king, and therefore, as other historians have shown, Spanish politics were of crucial importance for Habsburg governance in the Southern Netherlands.⁸⁴ I have nonetheless made this choice because I want to contribute to discussions about identity formation in the Low Countries. With this objective in mind, Spanish perspectives on the Netherlands mattered less to me than Dutch and South Netherlandish perspectives on Spain.

This book is divided into seven chapters. In chapter 1, I will show that the Habsburg government authorities accused the rebels of introducing evil novelties and argued that history was on their side. Rebels, on the other hand, created a communication problem for themselves when they rebelled against their legitimate overlord. They could not convincingly use the past in their justificatory writings because they obviously proposed a radical break from the past. What we see, then, is that rebel propagandists in the 1570s, '80s and '90s turned to other ways of arguing their case.

Chapter 2 will examine the principles of selection that ultimately led to the emergence of two popular dominant narratives in the Northern and Southern provinces of

⁸³ Marianne Eekhout, 'Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt: The Urban Memory Landscape in the Low Countries, 1566-1700', unpublished PhD dissertation.

⁸⁴ Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in Spaanse ogen: de Nederlanden in Spaanse historische en literaire teksten (circa 1548-1673)* (Nijmegen: Van Tilt, 2003), p. 17.

the Low Countries. Judith Pollmann has suggested that interest groups played an important role in developing a national canonical version of the history of the Revolt. In the run-up to the Twelve Years' Truce, opponents of peace, South Netherlandish exiles, Maurice of Nassau, and other groups who opposed the Truce, supported their political viewpoints and opposition to the policies of the States General with appeals to the memory of the Revolt.⁸⁵ Although we will see that this is an acceptable hypothesis for the rise of dominant images of the past in the Northern Netherlands, it does not explain how the Revolt came to be remembered in the South. There much of what had happened during the Revolt seems to have fallen into oblivion. We will see if this is really what happened.

Chapters 3 and 4 will examine the appropriation of the past and the use of contested memories for political purposes. They will show, for example, how in the North the house of Orange came to derive much of its prestige from Prince William of Orange's role as leader of the Revolt. While in the North memories of the Revolt were often used to support the Orange dynasty's political aspirations, conversely, anti-Orangist factions during the First Stadholderless Period (1650-1672) challenged the house of Orange by playing down its war record. In the South the Habsburg dynasty preferred to forget what had happened during the Revolt, but their supporters could not resist using the past to their advantage. Despite their pursuit of oblivion, central authorities in the South could not always prevent memories of the Revolt from being used for internal political purposes – for example during the conspiracy of nobles against the Habsburg regime in 1632 or the combined Franco-Dutch invasion in 1635. Urban government authorities also instigated public remembrance of the Revolt, such as during the Joyous Entries of new Habsburg sovereigns, thereby creating an interplay between top-down dynastic memory-making and bottom-up local memory practices.

Historians of the Revolt have rightly pointed out that the conflict changed character after the expiration of the Twelve Years' Truce in 1621. It became increasingly a conflict between two states rather than a civil war. Nevertheless, references to the sixteenth-century origins of the war continued to be politically potent in the period 1621-1648. Chapter 5 will explain why in a new political context these references remained so relevant.

⁸⁵ Judith Pollmann, 'No Man's Land: Reinventing Netherlandish Identities, 1585-1621', in: Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann, eds., *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 251-258.

As we will see in chapters 6 and 7, even after the Republic and the Habsburgs buried the hatchet in 1648, the war was still a popular rhetorical battleground on which opposing political factions settled their disputes. Once the generations who had witnessed the troubles began to die out, however, public memories of the war changed. Organic forms of memory transmission within families and communities were increasingly complemented by cultural and less personal ways of engaging with the past, and this interaction meant a further homogenisation of the narratives about the Revolt. The long-term perspective allows me to see what role the Revolt came to play in Dutch and South Netherlandish culture. A better insight into the role that political and religious factions played in this process will help explain what was necessary for memories of the Revolt to remain relevant even when the war had come to an end and those who had experienced the conflict no longer lived to tell the tale.

