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Memory wars in the Low Countries, 1566-1700

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Citation

Steen, J. A. van der. (2014, June 24). *Memory wars in the Low Countries, 1566-1700*. Brill.
Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/26493>

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Cover Page



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Issue Date: 2014-06-24

CONCLUSION

Chris Lorenz, a scholar of national historiography in modern Europe, has argued that ‘national histories in Europe can be typified with the help of eight ideal-typical characteristics [...] most outspoken in their nineteenth-century versions, but usually [persisting] well into the twentieth century’. These characteristics are: 1) National histories claim a ‘unique national identity’ for their nation – such as being a Catholic nation, a freedom-loving nation, a tolerant nation etc.; 2) this unique identity is shaped by antagonising other nations as well as minority groups within the nation; 3) therefore, war and conflict play an important role in furnishing the ‘dominant storylines’ of national history; 4) within a nation, a national history focuses on the common origins of the population and its shared past; 5) a related factor is the emphasis on continuity through time: the nation has always been there and will always be there, a notion requiring manipulation of the past; 6) nationalist historians often personify nations, a practice implying gendering and hero worship; 7) national histories tend to stress feelings of national unity despite the existence of internal differences; 8) finally, national histories suggest that justice is on the nation’s side, for instance by stressing providential support or moral superiority.¹

Interestingly, many of the characteristics that Lorenz considers to be typically modern also existed in the early modern Low Countries. This study has shown that the early modern-vs-modern dichotomy Lorenz and other modernist scholars try to prove fails to convince, especially when studying cultural memory practices in the Low Countries. The following figure shows that all of Lorenz’s characteristics of national history can be found in the Dutch Republic and even in a very multimedial form. Fewer of these characteristics seem to apply to the Habsburg Netherlands but, still, there too many elements Lorenz considers distinctive for post-1800 national history can be observed.

¹ Chris Lorenz, ‘Unstuck in Time. Or: The Sudden Presence of 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), pp. 78-80.

	Lorenz on national history	Dutch Republic		Habsburg Netherlands	
		Dutch Republic		Habsburg Netherlands	
1. Unique national identity	Republic often portrayed as a freedom-loving nation. Example: Rijksmuseum print RP-P-OB-80.751 depicts the seven United Provinces personified by seven virgins kneeling before a lance, which is crowned with a Phrygian cap.	Propagandists claimed that the Southern Netherlands were a uniquely Catholic nation.			
2. Antagonism other nations and minority groups	Historical narratives represented the Dutch Republic as the 'Free Netherlands' and the Habsburg provinces as the 'Overlorded Netherlands'.	Pro-Habsburg historians focused on the struggle between good Catholics and evil (foreign) heretics.			
3. War and conflict furnish dominant storylines	Public memories of the war against the Habsburg overlord figured prominently in narratives of national history.	People celebrate the Habsburg dynasty as triumphant protector of the true religion and of the local privileges.			
4. Focus on common origins	The Batavian Myth. Example: the States General in 1613 bought a series of twelve paintings by Otto van Veen about the Batavian rebellion in the years 69-70 AD, led by Claudius Civilis against the Roman 'oppressors'. The series was hung in the room where the States General held its assemblies.	On a national level this element seems less applicable to the Southern Netherlands compared to the Dutch Republic.			
5. Emphasis on continuity	Rebels claimed that a Netherlandish identity had always been there and that they fought only to protect it.	Southern authors stressed the continuity of Catholicism and in doing so placed the Revolt in brackets.			
6. Personification of nation	Rebel propagandists used an analogy featuring the mythical figure Andromeda who was saved by the hero Persens. In Jacob Duyym's play <i>A Nassau Persens, sijnvout of Andromeda, or the Netherlandish Trygh</i> [<i>Een Nassausche Persens, verlosser van Andromeda, ofte de Netherlandische Trygh</i>] (1606), the Netherlands are compared with Andromeda while leader of the Revolt William of Orange is compared with the hero Persens.	Portrayals of the Netherlands as an allegorical virgin abound. See for instance the cover page of this study. Loylists also used Andromeda allegories.			
7. Feelings of national unity	There were plenty of internal differences in the Dutch Republic. Narratives about the past served to bring all those different people together against a foreign foe or against internal enemies.	Feelings of national unity and devotion to the commonwealth were less lively in the Habsburg Netherlands, except devotion to the dynasty and Catholicism.			
8. Divine providence and/or justice is on nation's side	Multiple groups in North-Netherlandish society used Israelite analogies to emphasise providential support for the Republic's cause.	The Holy Virgin intervenes in numerous narratives about the South-Netherlandish past, although these interventions often take place locally.			

These examples illustrate that in the seventeenth-century Netherlands local identities coexisted with feelings of Netherlandish identity, and these 'national' feelings were often based on ideas about the Revolt as a communal past.

The observation that seventeenth-century Netherlanders considered the Revolt as their communal past is not quite new. Breen, Romein and Schama have already demonstrated that Dutch people in the seventeenth century attached importance to the history of the Revolt not only in their village, city, or province but also to the Revolt as a Netherlandish conflict. For the Southern Netherlands, historians have paid less attention to public memories of the Revolt, although Vermaseren and Scheelings have demonstrated that there, too, elites were keenly interested in the 'national' history of the conflict. These scholars have tended to focus on historiography. Yet, although the frequently cited works of sixteenth-century historians such as Florentius van der Haer and Emanuel van Meteren and their successors were important sources of information for many people, they were not responsible for creating the dominant readings of the past that emerged in the Habsburg Netherlands and the Dutch Republic. Although these works stimulated people's historical awareness, their coverage was too comprehensive and their interpretations too subtle for them to account for the emergence of two highly politicised narratives in the public memory of the Northern and Southern Netherlands.

The popularisation and politicisation of memories of the Revolt occurred later and require an explanation of their own. Writing before the rise of attention for nationalism and memory studies in the 1980s and '90s, Breen, Romein, Schama, Vermaseren and Scheelings did not really consider the dynamic and (with the possible exception of Schama) multimedial character of memory politics. This study has done so by posing three important questions about memory formation and memory politics that have not been asked before. Firstly, how and why did two radically different canonical narratives about the Revolt emerge in North and South? Secondly, how and why were these canonical narratives deployed for political purposes throughout the seventeenth century? Finally, how did the political usage of references to the Revolt contribute to the formation of two separate Netherlandish identities?

To understand how two radically different popular memories of the Revolt emerged in the Northern and Southern Netherlands, I have examined the political usage of the past by government authorities and interest groups. The impetus for this study was the evident existence of a very lively memory culture about the Revolt in the Dutch Republic.

The development of this culture was not as self-explanatory as scholars have assumed. Although the past traditionally served to legitimate the present, as I have shown, rebels could not easily reject the authority of their legitimate overlord with historical arguments. The privileges for which they claimed to fight were local privileges. The Joyous Entry, for instance, was strictly speaking valid only in Brabant. To circumvent this problem, the leader of the Revolt, William of Orange, attempted to communicate a reading of events in support of the rebel cause in which the Habsburg regime was targeted as a tyrannical ‘Spanish’ government. Although the prince tried to develop popular feelings of Netherlandish identity, his propaganda from the 1560s-’80s did not automatically become the blueprint of the popular national memories of the Revolt that would develop at a later stage in the Dutch Republic.

In the Southern Netherlands, the duke of Alba – as the representative of the Habsburg overlord Philip II – used violence, intimidation and destruction to manipulate popular memories of the rebellion, but this approach, too, did not become typical of the dominant historical canon that developed in the Habsburg Netherlands. Only after Alexander Farnese’s successful *reconquista* in the 1580s did a fairly coherent narrative about the Revolt appear. Formal agreements to forget the past initially obstructed the emergence of a lively memory culture about the Revolt. Government authorities in the South legislated oblivion after the recapture of formerly rebellious towns, and, generally, the remaining population had little choice but to live under the restored regime and make the best of it. Recalling that they, or their family members, or their neighbours, or their fellow citizens, had been disloyal in the past was not an opportune thing to do. When clerics, religious orders, Habsburg princes, and national, regional and local government authorities deployed memories of the Revolt, they did so for very specific purposes. They successfully used narratives about the Revolt, for instance, to convince the population that loyalty to the Habsburg dynasty was the surest way of restoring peace in the land. Such stories blamed overambitious nobles and evil heretics for the troubles. This message could be conveyed with minimal supporting historical evidence.

Where the post-1585 Habsburg authorities in the Southern Netherlands had been very effective in their fight against heretics and rebels, political propagandists in the Dutch Republic made an important innovation of their own. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, opponents of peace, including supporters of the house of Orange, were the first to use public memories of the Revolt on a national scale to argue against a (potential) peace or

ceasefire with Spain. A comparison of different popular Dutch political and historical texts has shown that time and again the same episodes were used to portray particular themes in the conflict: the nobility's petition of 1566 demonstrated that, initially, the rebels did not seek to rebel; the duke of Alba's governorship showed the malevolence of Spanish rulers and soldiers; and the capture of Brill signalled the first major rebel success. From around 1600, propagandists of the anti-peace lobby revived the propaganda spread by William of Orange, the Beggar Songs and the Hogenberg prints. More than these early publications ever could, early-seventeenth-century propagandists consolidated all the various narratives and created a dominant story-line that remained important throughout the seventeenth century and beyond.

Public memories in both countries differed from one another; considering that the Low Countries had split up into two states that divergence is not so strange. The comparative perspective, however, has enabled us to see that North and South did not produce mere mirror images of the past. Whereas South Netherlandish authors saw Protestantism as the key problem and in general preferred religious over secular readings of the rebellion, their North Netherlandish colleagues did not develop a similar attitude towards Catholicism. Many rebel authors condemned papal superstitions, but they did not consider the Catholic religion as such to have been the most important problem, nor did they primarily support their arguments using Scripture and Reformed doctrines. Although the political separation of the Low Countries caused the drifting apart of public memories, this process did not simply result in two variants of the same story. The explanation for this result lies in the national political context, which in both North and South influenced memory practices. In the Northern Netherlands, the federal and decentralised nature of the polity required propagandists to invoke a wide variety of events that could appeal to Netherlanders from different cities and regions. Furthermore, the lack of religious unity rendered religious readings of the past less useful. In the South, on the other hand, church and dynasty played a central role in the emergence of a 'national' narrative about the past rebellion. The painful fact that the most important Southern cities had rebelled against their overlord, however, meant that the chronology of narratives about the Revolt could not be very elaborate, lest too much needed to be explained away. Oblivion, then, characterised the church and state's approach to the Revolt.

In the North, quite a number of general histories appeared from 1600, in which authors had as their chief aim to narrate what had happened during the rebellion. In doing

so, even in the popularised versions, they created a rich chronology of events that they felt their audience ought to be acquainted with. In the South, fewer such histories appeared in print. For information about the Revolt, Southerners had to turn to martyrs tales, miracle books, church histories and handwritten chronicles. Traditional urban ceremonial, too, played a prominent role in communicating public memory in the South. These references to the Revolt relied less on a well-defined chronology of events. The simplified chronological narratives that did emerge in the South from the 1610s onwards were primarily reactions to texts published by Northern anti-peace propagandists. Although the political context in the South usually prevented authors from publishing secular histories about the Revolt, contacts between North and South during the Twelve Years' Truce, as well as the ideal of reunification, inspired them to do so nonetheless.

The political use of the Revolt by stakeholders ensured the continued circulation of memories of the conflict. Both in the Dutch Republic and the Habsburg Netherlands, princely dynasties played a central role in the development of public memories about the Revolt. While dynasties liked to portray themselves as permanent and unchanging, scions of the houses of Habsburg and Orange, and their supporters, used the discontinuity of the Revolt for their own political purposes. The Habsburgs used the Revolt to demonstrate that they were the best defenders of Catholicism and of local privileges. Throughout the seventeenth century, when time and again the Spanish got embroiled in wars with France, supporters of the dynasty used the Revolt to prove that unlike the kings of France the Habsburgs had never hesitated to prefer religion over reason of state. The house of Orange justified its privileged position as stadholderly dynasty with references to its manifold contributions to the war against Philip II and his Habsburg successors, while claiming their entitlement to public gratitude.

More often than not, the use of references to the Revolt as a Netherlandish story did not reflect natural feelings of unity but rather served to camouflage disunity and bring together people who would otherwise remain divided. Once canonical narratives had been developed in the Northern and Southern Netherlands at the beginning of the seventeenth century, their widespread popularity made them useful as frames of reference and as rhetorical weapons in domestic politics. We have seen the dynamic interplay between the Revolt as a rich frame of reference for propagandists, on the one hand, and the imperative need to position oneself against these canonical narratives, on the other. When one group began to appropriate canonical memories of the Revolt and to use them in support of a

political agenda, opposition groups seem to have felt compelled to do the same even if, initially, they were reluctant to refer to the Revolt at all. Apparently, both in North and South the 'right' interpretation of the Revolt had acquired such a sacrosanct status that 'wrong' interpretations could not be left uncontested. To illustrate this development, already in the 1610s references to the Revolt in the Republic were used not only to discuss the war but also to fight out a disagreement about the right interpretation of the doctrine of double predestination within the Dutch Reformed public church. Canonical narratives were thus continuously contested, but their canonical status increased every time they became the object of political discussion.² A similar thing happened in the Southern Netherlands in the 1630s. When a group of nobles led by Henry van den Bergh conspired against the Habsburg regime, discussions about contemporary Habsburg government in the South featured numerous references to the early, sixteenth-century, stages of the Revolt. The regime felt forced to retaliate by breaking its own policies of oblivion and by spreading its own Habsburg reading of events.

This brings us to the third question: how did the political usage of public memories of the Revolt contribute to identity formation in the Dutch Republic and the Habsburg Netherlands? Especially in the Republic but also in the South the continued political relevance and contestation of memories of the rebellion made it an important part of an overarching sense of national identity, which served as a source of inspiration in the 'present'. In the Republic we see for instance that the narrative frame could simply be reused in the struggle against France. It motivated people to do as their forefathers had done: to fight for the freedom of the Netherlands. In the Habsburg Netherlands, French threats combined with the absenteeism of the Habsburg rulers made people look back to the period before the Revolt, especially to the reign of Charles V, as a time of ideal Habsburg government. The Revolt itself also served to bolster a South Netherlandish identity. The triumphs of 1585 underlined why loyalty to Habsburg ultimately paid off. Successive Habsburg overlords had protected the true faith and guaranteed local privileges.

The long-term perspective has been very helpful in establishing the importance of the Revolt for feelings of Netherlandish identity in the Northern and Southern Netherlands.

² See also: Alexandr Osipian, 'The Usable Past in the Lemberg Armenian Community's Struggle for Equal Rights, 1578–1654', in: Kuijpers et al., eds., *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 27–43; Ulrich Niggemann, 'You will see who they are that Revile, and Lessen Your ... Glorious Deliverance'. The 'Memory War' about the 'Glorious Revolution', in: Kuijpers et al., eds., *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 63–75.

We have seen that even after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the rebellion remained important in public memory. It may be possible to develop this point a bit further. This study has concentrated on the period 1566-1700 but not because the established canonical narratives about the Revolt ceased to carry political relevance after the turn of the century. In the Southern Netherlands, historians, artists, and political propagandists continued to portray the time before the Revolt as a blissful period of peace and prosperity that had been ended abruptly by insurrections and heresy. This portrayal was by itself a political statement. The Habsburg overlord became a rallying point, as protector of the Netherlands and their privileges against the aggressive foreign policy of Louis XIV. By reminding people of the harmony between the population and their Habsburg rulers, authors could show that this state of affairs could be attained only by remaining loyal to the 'natural' overlord. In 1702, Ghent organised the Joyous Entry for the new count of Flanders, Philip V of Spain, which can illustrate how the old idea of the Habsburg dynasty as the best protector of South Netherlandish privileges could be applied to the new Bourbon overlord Philip V. The author of a commemorative booklet observed that Philip V's oath at St Peter's Abbey was identical to the one pledged by Louis I, count of Flanders in 1332.³ In it, Louis had promised 'that he and his successor counts and countesses of Flanders would maintain and safeguard the rights, privileges, preeminences and freedom of the abbey, the convent and the clerics, appendices and dependencies'.⁴ In its choice of a reference with such historical depth, the organisers wanted to show their overlord that respect for the abbey's privileges would be in line with tradition. Further on in the proceedings, Philip V's representative went to the St Bavo Church where, before the church, a triumphal arch was erected identical to the one put up on the occasion of the Joyous Entry of Philip II in 1549, a time when the country had not yet been touched by a nation-wide rebellion.⁵

I have shown that these historical emphases on the perceived glorious period before the Revolt did not mean that the Revolt had disappeared from the public memory in the South. Instead, the rebellion blended with more general narratives about the

³ Anonymous, *Beschryvinghe van de inauguratie solemniteyten ende ceremonien waer mede syn excellentie Don Ysidro de la Cueva ende Benavides Marckgrave van Bedmar &c. Commandant Generael van dese Nederlanden &c. Uyt den naem van Syne Conincklijke Majesteyt Philippus den Vyfden, Coninck van alle de Rycken van Spaignien, de Indien &c. Heeft ghedaen ende ontfanghen den ghewoonelijcken eedt vande Provintie van Vlaenderen* (Ghent: Maximiliaen Graet, 1702).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5: 'dat hy ende sijne Naervolgers Graven ende Gravinnen van Vlaenderen particuliereelijck soudon onderhouden ende bewaeren de Rechten, Privilegien, Preëminentien ende Vrydom vande voorseyde Abdy, Convent ende Religieusen, Appendentien ende Dependientien'.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

Netherlandish past. This can be illustrated by a jubilee of the 1585 reconciliation of Brussels celebrated on 17 July 1735 in Brussels.⁶ This jubilee beautifully exemplifies how the Catholic memory of the Southern Netherlands encapsulated and neutralised memories of the Revolt. The author of a commemorative booklet connected the history of the old Sacrament of Miracle explicitly to the Revolt:

The triumphant hundred and fifty year jubilee, which our princely city of Brussels celebrates with such splendour and no less joy in memory of the venerable and most holy Sacrament of Miracle in the year 1370 so disgracefully abused by evil Jews and hidden in the year 1579 due to the iconoclasts, church robbers, and Calvinist Beggars (who came from surrounding lands into these Netherlands) [...] until the year 1585, when by a magnificent procession, and to general happiness, it has been removed [from its hiding place] by the devout Catholic inhabitants and his eminence the archbishop of Mechelen and, among a great number of people, carried to its old resting place.⁷

We see here that the Revolt was absorbed into a grand narrative of Catholicism under threat, with its own chronology of events. In 1370, the miracle occurred, in 1579 Brussels became a Calvinist Republic and the sacred Hosts needed to be brought to safety, in 1585 Catholicism was restored with great joy, and in 1735 the South was still a Catholic nation ruled by the house of Habsburg.

A similar kind of dynamic operated in the North. There, too, the Revolt became part of a more comprehensive national canon that also included the French invasion of 1672. After the Peace of Utrecht of 1713 finally ended the war with France, in 1717 and on the initiative of the States of Overijssel, the States General of the Republic organised a Great Assembly. As with the Great Assembly of 1651, disagreements about the military

⁶ Anonymous, *Brusselsche eer-triomphe over het hondert-vyftigh-iaerigh jubile van 't alder-heylichste sacrament van mirakel met eene korte beschryvinge van de beldt-stormerye begaen door de Geusen in Neder-landt, en principael binnen de Stadt Brussel, Mechelen, Antwerpen, &c.* (Brussels: Iacob vande Velde, 1735).

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6: 'Het Triomphant Hondert-vyftigh-Iaerigh Jubilé, 't welck met soo groote pracht, ende gene mindere vreughden viert onse Princelijcke Stadt Brussel tot Gedachtenisse dat't Hoogh-weirdighste en Alderheylichste Sacrament van Mirakel in 't laer 1370 van de boose Ioden soo schandelijck is mishandelt geweest, ende in 't laer 1579 om de Beldt-stormers ende Kerck-roovers, om de Calvinische Geusen (die van andere omliggende landen in dese Neder-landen gekomen waeren) verborgen is geweest [...] tot in 't laer 1585, als wanneer 't met eene Magnifiecke Processie, ende eene algemeyne blydtschap van alle Devote Catholijcke Inwoonders door Syne Hooghweirdigheyt den Arts-Bisschop van Mechelen is uytgehaelt, en onder den toeloop van eene ontelbaere menichte van menschen gedraegen naer syne oude Rust-plaetse'.

budget and the relationship between provincial autonomy and federal decision-making figured high on the agenda. Burdened by massive debt, Friesland, Zeeland and Utrecht had decided unilaterally to cut expenditures on the troops while Gelderland, Overijssel and Holland, although also burdened by debt, continued paying the troops allocated to them.⁸ The assembly was meant to solve this problem. Although it did not succeed, the deliberations show that the national past played an important role in the proceedings. The history of the Revolt and the history of the French wars merged into a grand narrative of opposition against a foreign foe.⁹ Donald Haks has made a similar observation, and he refers to the opening speech of the assembly held by Count Adolf Hendrik van Rechteren-Almelo, delegate of Overijssel, to illustrate this point.¹⁰ Van Rechteren urged his delegates to think of the protection of the fatherland, drawing attention to the fact that ‘just as the ancestors had no scruples about risking goods and blood in order to gain dear freedom for her and her descendants, [now] the States of Overijssel too will make no scruples about sacrificing her last penny and drop of blood’.¹¹ Gelderland, too, deployed references to the past in their opposition to cuts in military expenditures. They wanted all the provinces to do what was necessary for the defence of the state ‘just as our forefathers who had helped shape the Republic with their goods and blood’.¹²

This study has shown that not only learned histories but also less intellectual media such as prints, popular historiography, and political pamphlets influenced seventeenth-century narratives about the Revolt. People could access information about the conflict in a variety of ways. This practice continued to flourish in the eighteenth century and included more playful ways of engagement with the past. A patriotic version of the game of the goose from the first half of the eighteenth century further demonstrates that Netherlanders did not need to read learned histories to gain familiarity with the historical canon of the Revolt. The game consisted of a few dozens of squares, each of which was illustrated with canonical episodes of Dutch history.¹³ The Revolt was well covered but

⁸ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, p. 986.

⁹ Haks, *Vaderland en vrede*, pp. 287-291.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 289-290.

¹¹ *Minuten van resoluties van de tweede Grote Vergadering, 1716-1717*, NA 1.01.02, inv. 4813, (28 November 1716): ‘gelijk de voorouders geen swarigheid gemaakt hebben om door haar goed en bloet [...] de dierbare vrijheid voor haer en hare nakomelingen na lichaem en na ziele te verkrijgen; dat also ook de Heeren Staten van Overijssel geen swarigheid zullen maken om haar laatste stuijver en druppel bloeds op te offeren’.

¹² *Ibid.*, (30 November 1716): ‘in gelijkheid van Onse voor-ouderen die de Republicq met goet en bloet hebben helpen formeren’.

¹³ P.J. Buijnsters and Leontine Buijnsters-Smet, eds., *Papertoys: Speelprenten en papieren speelgoed in Nederland (1640-1920)* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2005), p. 146.

placed in the wider national history of the Republic. Episodes such as the Inquisition, the duke of Alba's governorship, the Sea Beggars at Brill, the relief of Leiden and the Pacification of Ghent were all part of the game. Not only did it include a selection of noteworthy events; it also provided an interpretation of these episodes. If, for example, a player arrived on the square depicting the Inquisition he would lose three tokens. But if he stood on the rebel capture of Breda in 1590, he would win a token. The instructions for the game, published in 1751, explain that it was made by a 'learned lady, having very close connections to an illustrious family in our Republic'. Originally to be used in the creator's family circle only, according to these instructions, the game proved to be such a success that it was published and made available to a wider audience.¹⁴ The game enabled children and their parents to learn the historical canon in a playful atmosphere.¹⁵

The canonical narrative about the Revolt was relevant not only for elite groups in society. It should come as no surprise that the duke of Alba continued to occupy a central role in the public memory of many inhabitants throughout the Republic. Writer Justus van Effen in 1731 penned and published in the *Holland Spectator* [*Hollandsche Spectator*] a memorable reference to Alba after a visit to an Amsterdam workman. During his visit, Van Effen – forty-five years old at the time – wondered at the total lack of good manners shown by the workman's four-year-old daughter, and he pointed out to the father his parental duties. The workman replied that Van Effen was right but that he could not do anything. To Van Effen's question regarding what held him back the man answered: 'In this house live three to four other families, people like me who have to earn their living with their hands. When I feel it is necessary to punish the girl, at once I hear a group of women who call me a tyrant, a brute, a Ducdalf.'¹⁶

The distinguished nobleman Adolf Hendrik van Rechteren-Almelo, the learned lady who created the game of the goose, and the group of women described by Justus van Effen, all referred to the Revolt and considered its prominent place in the national history of the Republic as a matter of fact. We cannot know exactly what Van Rechteren's audience thought about his references to the past, how players perceived the historical character of

¹⁴ *Verklaringe van het spel, verbeeldende door gedenk-penningen de geheele historie der Vereenigde Neederlanden, en in het korte al het geen aanmerkelijk in dezelve is voorgevallen, sedert ... 1555 ... tot op ... 1713* (The Hague: Mattheus Gaillard, 1751), pp. iii-vi.

¹⁵ Buijnsters and Buijnsters-Smet, eds., *Papertoys*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁶ Justus van Effen, *Hollandsche Spectator* 11 (29 October 1731), edited by P.J. Buijnsters (Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1984), p. 81: 'In dit huis woonen drie à vier andere families, meest luiden die, gelyk ik, de kost met hunne handen moeten winnen. Wanneer ik nodig acht het meisje te straffen, hoor ik aanstonds een party wyven, die my voor een tyran, voor een beul, voor een Ducdalf uitschelden'.

the game of the goose, or what the women in Amsterdam were thinking, and what message they tried to convey, when they shouted ‘Ducdalf’. Nevertheless, the wide currency of the references, their stubborn consistency, and the sheer wealth of material presented in this study demonstrate that this conflict continued to occupy a central role in the public memory which, as I have shown, should not be attributed primarily to the work of historians but foremost to less scholarly ways of engaging with the past. One of those is the political use of the past and the resulting emergence of national identity formation.

To end with a more general conclusion, political realities in the present are very important for keeping alive public memories of the past. I think this holds true for the early modern as well as the modern period. In the seventeenth century, the Revolt played a central role in political debates much in the same way that the Second World War still serves as an important frame of reference for modern-day politicians and opinion-makers in many European countries. Modern people may disapprove of the opportunistic political motivations underlying popular seventeenth-century manipulations of the past, but up to this very day those constructed images of the past still inform inhabitants of the modern successor states of the old Low Countries in the way they look at their neighbours and in their interpretations of what it means to be Belgian or Dutch. Whereas this process of identity formation has previously been attributed largely to the efforts of nineteenth-century nationalist historians, I would argue that many of the historical images that they eagerly adopted came into being and circulated widely throughout the seventeenth century.