

Understanding Emotional Identities

The Dutch Phlegmatic Temperament as Historical Case-Study

163

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Throughout history emotions and emotional styles have functioned as social markers to make a distinction between groups in societies. This essay introduces the concept of 'emotional identity' to reflect upon the underlying dynamic process in which both insiders and outsiders use (the handling of) emotions, or the lack thereof, to characterise a group of persons. Taking the allegedly phlegmatic temperament of the Dutch as an example, it explains how such identities come into being and are sustained, but also contested, reappraised and altered over time. It discusses the non-exclusive and inherently paradoxical nature of emotional group identities as well as some of the key mechanisms and patterns of adjustment that account for the long life of the stereotypes involved. While the essay covers a time span of two millennia, it focuses mainly on the early modern era when classical climate zone theories merged with new modes of national thinking and even allowed for the smooth introduction of an entirely new element into the stolid character of the Dutch, that is, the national passion for profit.

De dynamiek van emotionele identiteiten. Het Nederlands flegmatisch temperament als historische case-study

Emoties en emotionele stijlen zijn in de geschiedenis regelmatig aangewend als sociaal onderscheidingsmiddel om groepen in de samenleving verschillend te waarderen. Dit artikel introduceert het begrip 'emotionele identiteit' om na te kunnen denken over het onderliggende dynamische proces waarin direct betrokkenen en buitenstaanders (het omgaan met) emoties, of het gebrek daaraan, gebruiken om een groep van personen te typeren. Met het verondersteld flegmatisch temperament van de Nederlanders als voorbeeld wordt uitgelegd hoe

zulke identiteiten tot stand komen en in stand blijven, maar ook aangevochten kunnen worden en door de tijd heen onderhevig zijn aan veranderingen en herwaarderingen. Besproken worden de niet-exclusieve en inherent paradoxale aard van emotionele groepsidentiteiten alsmede enkele van de sleutelmechanismen en aanpassingspatronen die de duurzaamheid van de stereotypen in kwestie verklaren. Terwijl het artikel een periode van twee millennia beslaat, ligt de focus op de vroegmoderne tijd toen klassieke klimaattheorieën opgingen in nieuwe wijzen van nationaal denken en er onverwacht zonder noemenswaardige problemen een verrassend nieuw element in het onverstoorbare karakter van de Nederlander geïntroduceerd werd: de nationale passie voor profijt.

From the pious tears of medieval beguines to the passionate politics of nineteenth-century statesmen, emotions have contributed to the sense of identity of themselves and of others that people in the Netherlands have cherished. In this special issue of the *BMGN - LCHR* the idea that the Dutch are generically ‘cool, calm, and collected’ has been put to test and mostly proved an illusion – at least for the Pre-Modern Period but it is hard to see anyone arriving at different conclusions for the Modern Period. Yet despite this academic exposure the notion of a ‘Dutch phlegmatic temperament’ will persist well into the next centuries. Firmly embedded in the World Wide Web today, it has become an inalienable part of the immaterial heritage of the Dutch – a legacy that is hard to ignore even when one would like to reject it.¹

Rather than taking this at face value however, it calls for an historical rethinking of stolidity as a component of Dutch identity. The allegedly phlegmatic temperament of the Dutch has a discursive history that needs to be addressed, contextualised, and X-rayed for its inner operations: how does such an emotional identity – in this case paradoxically resting on an apparent lack of emotions – come into being, work in particular contexts, and change over time?² Even when focusing on the Dutch as a people, this is a set of questions that ultimately goes beyond the discussion of national characters because not only nations have collective emotional identities but other groups as well.

1 For the World Wide Web see e.g. Wikipedia, ‘Dutch Customs and Etiquette’, in particular the sections ‘Body Language’ and ‘Miscellaneous’. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_customs_and_etiquette (19 August 2013) or Hermanus Luijendijk, ‘The Image of the Dutch’, in particular the second paragraph of the section ‘Dutch Views on Others’, *Amundyeus's Blog* (23 August 2007). <http://amundyeus.wordpress.com/2007/08/23/the-image-of-the-dutch/> (19 August 2013).

2 See the call for more systematic research into emotion patterns attributed to nations in a forum on the History of Emotions published in *German History* 28 (2010) 75 and 77.

Emotional identity: the social classifying and assimilation of emotions

The melancholy of black slaves forced to labour in America, the emotional self-restraint of the middle classes living in Victorian times, the never-ending love of mothers for their children, or the lack of social empathy of right-wing politicians – these are just a few examples to underpin the notion that social groups (whether defined by class, gender, ethnicity, age, profession, religious denomination, sexual orientation or political preference) often have a distinct emotional identity. One may not agree with the stereotyping involved, but throughout history emotions and emotional styles have functioned as markers of social identities.³ To be clear, I use the word ‘emotion’ here in the familiar broad sense of the word, that is, emotion as a catch-all term for all kinds of affective phenomena, not only emotions in the strict psychological sense of the word but also feelings, moods, passions, sentiments and temperaments.⁴ In addition, ‘emotional identity’ is introduced here as a concept to think about the way that a person or a group of persons are linked with or link themselves with particular emotions or emotions in general, with corresponding emotional behaviour, or with the lack thereof.⁵

Emotional identity is conceptually related to the idea of ‘emotional style’, but the latter presupposes an intentional process of mastering and cultivating emotions, a conscious ‘navigation of feelings’ as William M. Reddy called it.⁶ An emotional identity overlaps but is not identical to an emotional style, an emotional culture or an emotional regime – terms that,

3 Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Problems and Methods in the History of Emotions’, *Passions in Context* 1 (2010) 12-13; Susan J. Matt, ‘Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out’, *Emotion Review* 3 (2011) 120-121.

4 Nico H. Frijda, *The Emotions* (Cambridge 1986). See for the historical variation in emotion words in various languages: Dorothee Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht. Sekse en emotionele cultuur in de achttiende eeuw* (Hilversum 1998) 76-84; Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge 2003) 1-25; Ute Frevert et al., *Gefühlswissen. Eine lexikalische Spurensuche in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main 2011) 24-39.

5 The definition given is mine (D.S.). In the existing literature ‘emotional identity’ is used in a variety of meanings but generally refers to the outcome of an emotionally charged identifying process, that is, identification through emotions rather than identification with emotions as the distinguishing element as meant in my argument. Peter N. Stearns occasionally uses ‘emotional identity’ in a sense close to mine, but without providing us with a definition, see e.g. *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York 1994) 65.

6 William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge 2001) 118-129. On the concept of ‘emotional style’, see furthermore P.N. Stearns, *American Cool*, 5 and Benno Gammerl, ‘Emotional Styles – Concepts and Challenges’, *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 16:2 (2012) 161-175.

small variations aside, subsequently covered roughly the same content since the Stearns introduced the notion of ‘emotionology’ into the historical field in 1985.⁷ Emotional identity is a different phenomenon because it involves the input of outsiders as well as insiders: it includes not only how people may define themselves by their (handling of) emotions but also how others may use emotions as social markers to define a person or group. The emotional identity of an ‘emotional community’, the unit that Barbara H. Rosenwein proposes as basis for historical emotion research, therefore is more than the sum of the affective bonds, ideas about emotions and expression modes shared by its members.⁸

A group moreover, might have an emotional identity without being an emotional community in the proper sense of the word. Unlike a beguines’ convent, a Reformed conventicle or the families discussed earlier in this volume, some groups such as nations, professions or age groups are simply too large to function as an emotional community in practice.⁹ Yet they often are imputed to have distinct emotional identities. Elderly people for instance, are expected to mellow as they age, whereas adolescents are identified with their mood swings. Painters are associated with a passionate temperament, soldiers with courageous behaviour, poets with a heightened sensitivity, scientists with a lack of emotional and social intelligence. As to nations, Russians are known for their melancholic moods, English for their ‘stiff upper lip’, Spaniards for their sense of honour, Italians for their emotional gaiety and Greeks for their fiery temper.¹⁰ In sum, emotions function as markers for social identities, and that includes the social identities that nations have.

Again, one may feel uncomfortable and disagree with the labelling, but images like these (whether originally developed as ‘auto-images’ by the groups themselves or as ‘hetero-images’ by others) play an important part in the formation of collective identities such as sketched above.¹¹ Stereotypes can have self-fulfilling effects.¹² Group identities, we have to bear in mind, are shaped in a process of interaction between insiders and outsiders who

7 Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, ‘Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards’, *The American Historical Review* 90 (1985) 813-836.

8 Barbara H. Rosenwein, ‘Worrying about Emotions in History’, *The American Historical Review* 107 (2002) 842.

9 Here I differ partially from Rosenwein who does not view size as an issue and suggests that historians ‘may even treat a nation – an “imagined community” – as an emotional community’, see her ‘Problems and Methods’, 12.

10 See for those images and the underlying stereotyping: Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (eds.), *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters: A Critical Survey* (Amsterdam 2007).

11 *Ibid.*, 340-344.

12 Alice H. Eagly, ‘Prejudice: Toward a More Inclusive Understanding’, in: Alice H. Eagly, Reuben M. Baron, and V. Lee Hamilton (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Group Identity and Social Conflict* (Washington 2004) 54-55.

constantly – in their language, behaviour, and imagery – react and give meaning to the modes of thinking, feeling, and acting of the group in question.¹³ Emotions and emotional styles are part of this highly dynamic process as they often become socially classified, that is, labelled as typical for a particular group – either by its members or by others. Such classifications and their interpretations however, are not fixed: as components of identity they are likely to be contested, reappraised and altered in the interplay of identity formation.¹⁴

The phlegmatic temperament attributed to the Dutch is an interesting case of such an enduring emotional identity that is not fixed in its meanings and valorisations. While the Dutch themselves and some of their more gentle visitors tend to say that they are even-tempered, level-headed and sensible, others see their stolid character as boring, unimaginative and insensitive. During his period of office the Dutch Secretary of State for Finance Jan Kees de Jager (2010-2012) deliberately exploited the image of the insensitive Dutchman to justify his offensive behaviour at European top level meetings on the euro with the words ‘I am Dutch, so I can be blunt’.¹⁵ It was a telling illustration of the key mechanism of assimilation that will be analysed more in depth in this article. It explains, amongst other things, how an emotional group identity is sustained and endorsed: an emotional trait that is ascribed to a group by outsiders – in this case a lack of sensitivity in the Dutch character – is accepted as a token of their identity by members of the group involved who then give it form and substance by their own words, acts and self-images, thus lending credibility to the stereotype and making it easier for others to follow.¹⁶

The Dutch phlegmatic temperament: a genealogy

The stereotype of the stolid Dutchman (and Dutchwoman, as we shall see) goes back a long way – in effect to Antiquity when the Dutch did not even exist as a nation. Following the traces back in time, we will start by looking at

13 Willem Frijhoff, ‘Identiteit en identiteitsbesef. De historicus en de spanning tussen verbeelding, benoeming en herkenning’, *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 107 (1992) 614-634 and idem, ‘Het zelfbeeld van de Nederlander in de achttiende eeuw: een inleiding’, *Documentatieblad Achttiende Eeuw* 24 (1992) 5-28.

14 Joan W. Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry* (1991) 773-797; Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology*, 335-342.

15 Jan Tromp, ‘De Columbo van de politiek, die iedereen aftroeft’, *De Volkskrant*, 3 January 2012. <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3102775/2012/01/03/De-Columbo-van-de-politiek-die-iedereen-aftroeft.dhtml> (19 August 2013).

16 See Frijhoff, ‘Identiteit’, 624-629 and Claire Weeda who summarizes the relevant literature in *Images of Ethnicity in later Medieval Europe* (PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam 2012) 33-35.

how at the end of the Pre-Modern Period (the boundary drawn by the editors of this special issue) other nations understood ‘the Dutch character’. My brief overview starts with a citation from the travel journal of the English writer John Hill, using the pen-name Joseph Marshall, published in 1772:

Their constitutions are cold and phlegmatic to an amazing degree; [...] no passion seems to lurk in their bosoms that can be sufficient to ruffle them [...]. A Dutchman is as amphibious as a frog; half the country is water, and half their time is spent upon the water: the vapours from so much of it, and from a soil that is low, moist, and boggy, must have a strong effect on the minds of the inhabitants.¹⁷

The English of course, were famous for their rather competitive way of looking at the Dutch – a competition that was actually due to the many similarities between the two peoples, both in their culture and economic activities. To compare, let us listen to the opinion of Hill’s Italian contemporary, Carlo Antonio Pilati di Tassulo, published in French in 1780:

Il faut encore attribuer à la même humidité & épaisseur de l’air l’humeur froide & le tempérament flegmatique de cette nation. Ce flegme lui donne beaucoup de vertus, la prudence, la modération, la fermeté, la patience, le mépris des dangers, l’aversion pour la violence & l’oppression.¹⁸

Pilati di Tassulo was clearly more positive in his evaluation of the Dutch. Yet, he too stressed the influence of the watery environment on the cool Dutch disposition. Recognising its functioning as a topos now, we see the water reappear in the physiological explanation of Dutch inertia given by the German minister Andreas Riem almost two decades later:

17 Joseph Marshall, *Travels through Holland, Flanders, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Lapland, Russia, the Ukraine and Poland* (London 1772) volume 1, 43-44.

18 ‘Once again the cold humour & the phlegmatic temperament of this nation must be attributed to the same dampness and heaviness of the air. This phlegm gives them many virtues, prudence, moderation, steadiness, patience, contempt of danger, aversion to violence and oppression’. Translation of: Carlo Antonio Pilati di Tassulo, *Lettres sur la Hollande* (The Hague 1780) volume 1, 110.

Unverschuldet büsst er (der Holländer D.S.) die Fehler seines sumpfigen Erdstriches, trägt er den Spott und die Verachtung jener Völker, deren besseres Klima sie zu höherer Thätigkeit und Sittlichkeit fähig macht [...]. Seine Nahrungsmittel leiten ihn gleichfalls zum vegetabilischen Leben. Er ist dick, gross und stark, wie sein Blumenkohl, seine Kälber und Fische. Dasselbe Prinzip, das seine Naturprodukte schwammartig anfüllt und emportreibt, das Wasser, wirkt nach gleichen Naturgesetzen auch auf den Bewohner der Sümpfe.¹⁹

To be sure, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century the Germans in general held a more favourable opinion of Dutch activities, but in the second half of the eighteenth century that was starting to change.²⁰

The same water-induced inertia led other visitors to compare the Dutch character with the nation's favourite means of transportation, the barge – steady, dependable and cheap, but incredibly slow and dull.²¹ The 'trekschuit' even developed into an iconic image for the Dutch, as illustrated by a picture in a late eighteenth-century ethnographic work of British origin (see illustration 1). What interests us here is not only the barge, but even more the man at the bank of the canal whose posture and physique seem to attest to Riem's verdict of a fat and inert people. Typically, the man is wearing a fisherman's cap and holding a clay pipe in his hand – another famous symbol for Dutchness.²² Smoking was believed to drive out the wet and the cold, the unhealthy vapour of the swamps, and therefore considered vital to survive the Dutch climate. Pipes and tobacco were also standard attributes in early modern pictures of the phlegmatic temperament in general, that is, from the moment that tobacco

19 'Undeservedly he (the Dutchman D.S.) pays for the failings of his marshy part of the world, he bears the mockery and contempt of those peoples whose better climate enables higher activity and morality [...]. His food also leads to a vegetative life. He is plump, large and strong, like his cauliflower, his calves and fish. The same principle that sponge-like fills and feeds its natural products, the water, following the same laws of nature also affects the inhabitant of the marsh'. Translation of: Andreas Riem, *Reise durch Holland* (Frankfurt 1797) 376, quoted in Julia Bientjes, *Holland und der Holländer im Urteil deutscher Reisenden, 1400-1800* (Groningen 1967) 229.

20 Bientjes, *Holland*, 210-213; Rob van Ginkel, *Notities over Nederlanders* (Amsterdam, Meppel 1997) 19-20; Peter Groenewold, 'Het Duitse Hollandbeeld in de literatuur', in: Jan Vis and Gebhard Moldenhauer (eds.), *Nederland en Duitsland. Elkaar kennen en begrijpen* (Assen 2000) 247-248.

21 Jan de Vries, *Barges and Capitalism: Passenger Transportation in the Dutch Economy, 1632-1839* (Utrecht 1981) 72-73; Bientjes, *Holland*, 213.

22 Bientjes, *Holland*, 234-235; C.C. Barfoot, "'Envy, Fear, and Wonder": English Views of Holland and the Dutch 1673-1764', in: C.C. Barfoot and Richard Todd (eds.), *The Great Emporium: The Low Countries as a Cultural Crossroads in the Renaissance and the Eighteenth Century* (Amsterdam 1992) 220-221.



Benard delin

Birk sculp

A TRECHSCHYT

Given as a Specimen of Shipping



The Barge. John Trusler, *The Habitable World Described, or the Present State of the People in All Parts of the Globe* Volume 11 (London 1791) 75.

The British Library Board, London.

had made inroads into the developing consumer market of the European continent.²³

When we follow the trail back to the sixteenth century, the pipes are still missing but the general descriptions of the stolid people living in the Low Countries river delta do not seem so different – except that sixteenth-century authors did not yet make a distinction between the Northern and Southern Netherlands. What the Dutch nowadays consider as typical ‘Dutch’ phlegm, was in effect already present in older descriptions of ‘the Flemings’ or the ‘Belgians’, which till the seventeenth century included the population of the northern part of the Low Countries. It was not until well into the Golden Age that Holland, and in its wake the rest of the Dutch Republic, would earn a distinct position in Europe’s cultural imagination, independent from both its German and southern neighbours.²⁴

For the sixteenth century we thus have to rely on sources that still approached the Netherlands as a coherent entity, such as the renowned *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Basi* (1567) of the Florentine merchant Lodovico Guicciardini. First published in Italian and attractively illustrated, the guide immediately became very popular and was soon translated into French, German, Dutch and Latin. Longish extracts were published in English and Spanish.²⁵ After 25 years of living in Antwerp, Guicciardini provided the international public with such a rich description of the Netherlandish culture that we could almost call it ‘thick’ in the Geertzian sense of the word. Since his work was frequently reprinted and immensely influential in the century to come, it merits a long citation on the supposedly phlegmatic temperament of the Netherlanders:

23 See, for example, the pipe in George Glover’s print ‘The phlegmatick’ in the series ‘The Four Complexions’, published by William Peake, London ca. 1630. The pipe was still absent in the picture of the ‘flemmatico per l’acqua’ in the first illustrated edition of *Iconologia* (Rome 1603) by Cesare Ripa, but at that time tobacco (though already introduced) was not yet widely used in Europe. For an anthology of pre-modern prints of the four temperaments (including the two mentioned in this note), see the ArtLinks journal by Marinni, ‘Четыре темперамента. Гравюры 15-19 век’. 14 January 2010; <http://art-links.livejournal.com/1698327.html> (19 August 2013).

24 P.J. van Kessel, ‘Van Fiandra naar Olanda – Veranderende visie in het vroegmoderne Italië op de Nederlandse identiteit’, *Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde KNAW. Nieuwe reeks* 56:5 (1993) 177-196; J. Huizinga, ‘Engelschen en Nederlanders in Shakespeare’s tijd’, in: idem, *Verzamelde werken II* (Haarlem 1948) 355.

25 Henk van der Heijden and Kees Oomen (eds.), *De ‘Beschrijving van de Nederlanden’ door Lodovico Guicciardini in het kader van zijn tijd* (Breda 2001) 5, 7, 25-26.

They are cold by nature and calm in all things. They wisely take fortune and the world as it comes, without too much agitation, which can be understood from their decisions and is clear from their face and colour of their hair, because commonly their hair greys only at a very great age, and even though some of them of a more withered and Saturnine (melancholic D.S.) nature allow themselves to be taken over by sadness, unable to resist grief, they are soon worn down by that and die. These people are mostly not very ambitious, that is, when they realise that they have plenty in their account and have earned enough, either in public service or commerce or another occupation, they quit the hard work and give themselves over to a well-earned rest [...]. As persons of a cold nature, they are very temperate in the domain of Venus and they strongly abhor adultery. They are not overly irascible or furious, not too haughty either, nor do they let themselves be governed by envy, so that they are civil, accommodating, open and obliging in their manners, and above all very humorous, although sometimes too rude. By contrast, they are very mean, or better said, greedy. In general they are keen on novelties and so credulous that they give their trust in everything to everybody and are therefore easily deceived [...]. But often when their distrust is aroused they become very suspicious and obstinate. They are quite arrogant and too talkative, they hardly take the interests of their fellow creatures into account, quickly forgetting benefactions, and accordingly bear little love for others, although on the other hand they also quickly forget insults and bear little hate, keeping thus far in all those affects, as Caesar writes, to the old customs as coming from that kind of air and that kind of climate. And as every nation has some virtues and some particular vices, these, as customary with the Greeks, have for the major part the fault of drinking too much, in which they take great delight.²⁶

In the mind of Guicciardini, the emotional behaviour of the Netherlanders seems to have been full of paradoxes – easily satisfied and yet greedy, not haughty and yet arrogant, trusting and yet suspicious, civil and yet rude. Such contradictory counter-images however, are part and parcel of national identities, which seldom turn out to be very consistent.²⁷ This is hardly surprising. Over time these kinds of images tend to generate their own opposites, and the more so because nations form extremely large and heterogeneous groups – the larger a group, the larger the number of different

26 Lodovico Guicciardini, *Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi* (Antwerp 1588, first edition 1567) 42-43, translation and light modernization of punctuation by D.S. This paragraph is not included in the abbreviated English edition *The Description of the Low Countreys* of 1593.

27 Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology*, 338-339, 343-344; Herman Vuijsje and Jos van der Lans, *Typisch Nederlands. Vademecum van de Nederlandse identiteit* (Amsterdam 1999) 7-8.

subgroups which may be taken to represent the group in its entirety.²⁸ ‘For there is no single national identity – rather competing national identities jostle with each other in a struggle for dominance’ as the British historian Catherine Hall explained the underlying process.²⁹ As historical circumstances change, the focus might change too. In periods when the Netherlands were at war with other countries for instance, its people were suddenly portrayed as passionate, rebellious, unreasonable, and not phlegmatic at all, with ‘the warre, heating their Flegmaticke humours’ as it were.³⁰ In a pre-modern equivalent of the modern culture wars, the Italian Paolo Giovio characterised his more liberal fellow humanist Erasmus as jealous, rash and overly emotional, a typical representative of the intemperate and freedom-loving barbarians in the north who in Giovio’s conservative eyes underappreciated the superior achievements of the refined Italian humanist culture.³¹ The intemperate character of the northerners as sketched by Giovio in his *Elogia virorum litteris illustrium* (1546) was palpably different from the temperate character of the Netherlanders as sketched by his fellow Italian Guicciardini only 21 years later. Both descriptions deployed ethnic stereotypes that had been in place since Antiquity.

Eventually Guicciardini’s words would have the greater impact. His influence can easily be traced in best selling compilation works by authors such as the Frenchman Pierre d’Avity who in 1613 described the Netherlanders as ‘paisibles, peu colères, peu ambitieux [...] plutosts addonnez aux vin qu’à l’amour’³², or the Englishman Peter Heyleyn who pictured them as

28 Marco Cinnirella, ‘Ethnic and National Stereotypes: A Social Identity Perspective’, in: C.C. Barfoot (ed.), *Beyond Pug’s Tour: National and Ethnic Stereotyping in Theory and Literary Practice* (Amsterdam 1997) 42, 49-50.

29 Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge 1992) 205.

30 Fynes Moryson, *An Itinerary [...]*, [written between 1606-1623], published as ‘Moryson’s reis door en zijn karakteristiek van de Nederlanden’, J.N. Jacobsen Jensen (ed.), *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 39 (1918) 270. Similar remarks in the anonymous pamphlet *An Exact Survey of the Affaires of the United Netherlands* (London 1665) 74-76, 89, and earlier by Spanish chroniclers, see J.C.M. Boeijen,

‘Een bijzondere vijand. Spaanse kroniekschrijvers van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog over de Nederlandse volksaard’, in: P.J.A.N. Rietbergen, F.M.A. Robben and H. de Schepper (eds.), *Tussen twee culturen. De Nederlanden en de Iberische wereld, 1150-1800* (Nijmegen 1991; first edition 1988) 2-4.

31 Karl Enenkel, ‘Het Nederlandse “nationale bewustzijn” in biografische reeksen’, in: Karl Enenkel, Sjaak Onderdelinden and Paul J. Smith (eds.), *‘Typisch Nederlands’. De Nederlandse identiteit in de letterkunde* (Voorthuizen 1999) 34-36.

32 ‘peaceful, slow to anger, of little ambition [...] sooner addicted to wine than to love’. Translation of: Pierre d’Avity, *Les estats, empires, royaumes, seigneuries, duchez, et principautez du monde [...]* (Paris 1635; first edition 1613) 576.

‘unmindful both of good turns and injuries’ in his *Cosmographie* of 1652.³³ Even authors who had visited the Netherlands themselves, frequently consulted Guicciardini’s work. When the Englishman Fynes Moryson wrote down his theory that due to the ‘phlegmaticke complections’ and related heavy drinking the country brought forth more women than men, he referred in the same sentence to Guicciardini – though the theory on the deviant Dutch sex ratio was entirely his.³⁴ In his influential *Observations upon the United Provinces of the Netherlands* (1673) the English ambassador to the Dutch Republic Sir William Temple was less straightforward about his borrowings, but here too part of the description of the Dutch disposition comes very close to Guicciardini’s.³⁵ The Italian’s influence on Spanish chroniclers of the Eighty Years War has already been pointed out by others.³⁶ Indeed it is hard to miss the obvious similarities between his *Descrittione* and, for instance, the *Guerras de Flandes y Francia* of the Spanish soldier Alonso Vázquez who pictured the Flemish opponents as, amongst other things, cool in nature, composed and phlegmatic, seldom irascible, furious, or haughty.³⁷ In the end, even the Netherlanders themselves were directly or indirectly influenced by Guicciardini’s description. Thus Guicciardini’s words can still be recognised in the eighteenth-century ethnographical work of Johannes le Francq van Berkhey when he approvingly cited from Strada’s *De Bello Belgico* (1632) who had actually been following Guicciardini at that point.³⁸

In his turn Guicciardini made use of Spanish sources, such as the courtly travel report of Juan Christóbal Calvete de Estrella (published in 1552), and almost two hundred other publications in Italian, Dutch, French and Latin.³⁹ As his reference to Caesar suggests, Guicciardini’s intimacy with

33 Peter Heyleyn, *Cosmographie, in Four Bookes: Containing the Chorographie and Historie of the Whole World, and All the Principall Kingdomes, Provinces, Seas and Isles Thereof* (London 1652) volume 2, 4.

34 Moryson, *An Itinerary*, 287 and also 272. Moryson visited the Netherlands in 1592 and 1595.

35 See especially 147-148. For Temple’s impact on other authors, see Barfoot, ‘Envy’, 220, 231.

36 Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, *De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in Spaanse ogen. De Nederlanden in Spaanse historische en literaire teksten (circa 1548-1673)* (Nijmegen 2003) 37, 52, 56-59, 66, 79.

37 Alfonso Vázquez, ‘Algemeene beschrijving van de Nederlanden’ [1614-1624], in: J. Brouwer (ed.), *Kronieken van Spaansche soldaten uit het begin van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog* (Zutphen 1933) 90. See for other Spanish sources furthermore Marijke Meijer Drees, *Andere landen, andere mensen. De beeldvorming van Holland versus Spanje en Engeland omstreeks 1650* (The Hague 1997) 99-106.

38 J. le Francq van Berkhey, *Natuurlyke historie van Holland* (Amsterdam 1769-1778) volume 3, 681-682.

39 Van der Heijden and Oomen, *Beschrijving*, 38-40; Claude Sorgeloos, ‘Les sources imprimées de la “Descrittione di tutti i Paesi Bassi”’, in: Pierre Jodogne (ed.), *Lodovico Guicciardini (1521-1589): Actes du Colloque International des 28, 29 et 30 mars 1990* (Leuven 1991) 38-98.

classical texts would furthermore explain his familiarity with the idea that the natural conditions of the Netherlands made its natives into stolid people. At the roots of this idea were ancient theories that articulated the existence of four basic human temperaments based on the workings of bodily fluids (the *humores* or *humours*) and different climate zones. Incidentally, Guicciardini was also acquainted with Galen, one of the leading classical authorities on the matter.⁴⁰

Continuing influence of classical humoral pathology and climate zone theories

The humoral pathology as developed by ancient physicians and philosophers (the psychologists of the time) explained medical and mental problems by the physical makeup of a person, more precisely by an imbalance between the four basic fluids in the human body – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Each of these bodily fluids corresponded to one of the four elements (air, water, earth and fire) and held the combination of qualities of that element. An excess of one of those *humours* in a body thus led to a dominance of certain qualities, which resulted into a particular disposition. The choleric, easily angered temperament, for instance, was the result of an excess of yellow bile (*cholos*) that held the combination of heat and dryness, leading to the quality of expansion that was also typical of fire (hence the furious outbursts). Air held both heat and wetness and the quality of lightness which characterised the light-hearted, sanguine temperament resulting from an excess of blood (*sanguis*) holding the same qualities. The grave, melancholic temperament by contrast, originated in an excess of black bile (*melas cholos*) and thus tended toward the qualities of coldness, dryness and heaviness, typical of the element earth. Water, finally, held the combination of cold and wetness, leading to contraction as basic quality of slime (*phlegma*) and easily recognised in the lack of movement and emotions that characterised phlegmatic people.⁴¹

Such imbalances between the four elements and bodily fluids could be reduced by human intervention, for instance by modifications in diet and daily activities upon the advice of one's physician. The natural dispositions of people however, could never be completely neutralised since the balance between the bodily humours was also affected by heredity, age, gender, season and climate

40 Sorgeloos, 'Sources', 46, 87.

41 This is a simplified summary which does not detail variations between the different theorists. Fay Bound Alberti, 'Emotions in the Early Modern Medical Tradition', in: idem (ed.), *Medicine, Emotion and Disease, 1700-1950* (Houndmills 2006)



Luna tuo in regno, nodosa hic retia pandit

Piscibus hic volucris pedicas ille equora sulcat



The Phlegmatic Temperament.

Engraving by Harmen Jansz. Muller after Maarten van Heemskerck with verses by Hadrianus Junius, 1566.

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

– factors that were not susceptible to human influence. Consequently, classical humoral medicine not only laid the foundation for the psychology of the four temperaments but also for the influential climate zone theory that would later tie the Netherlanders to a phlegmatic temperament.

Ancient climate theorists such as Hippocrates, Aristotle and Galen divided the world into different climate zones, each characterised by different qualities that determined the bodily and mental constitutions of the people living in that particular area. People in the northern parts of Europe for instance, lived in a cold and wet climate, and therefore supposedly held the traits of phlegmatic people – physically strong but slow-witted and not easily set in motion. It was following this train of thought that the Roman author Martial coined the phrase ‘auris Batava’ (Batavian ear) to ridicule the lack of intelligence and refinement found among the Batavians, the inhabitants of the wet lowlands near the northern sea.⁴² In contrast, people living in the hot and dry climate of the southern zone tended to be more agile and smart, but also quick-tempered and not always to be trusted. The Greeks and Romans maintained that they themselves were living at the centre of the world (a thought favoured by all peoples), that is, in a temperate middle zone which combined the better qualities of the other zones, but without the corresponding negative traits.⁴³

In its original version the climate zone theory was biased towards the Mediterranean world of the Greeks and later the Romans, but their ethnocentric assumptions proved to be pliable when other intellectuals started to adopt and play with the theory in later times.⁴⁴ Because this classical climate theory indeed, did survive the ages: in Europe it surfaced again in the long twelfth century when clerics started to take an interest in translations of Arabic medical treatises, it peaked when Renaissance scholars rediscovered Classical Antiquity, and got a fresh boost in the eighteenth century when scholarly interest in national differences arose.⁴⁵ Enlightenment philosophers such as Montesquieu and Hume redefined the parameters of the theory by

42 The invention was not entirely his: it was a variation on the ‘Boeotian ear’ ascribed by the Athenians to the neighbouring Thebans who, living in a comparatively flat and humid area more to the northwest, were likewise supposed to be less sensitive and civilized than the Athenians.

43 Meijer Drees, *Andere landen*, 12-15; Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology*, 298-299.

44 Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology*, 299-301; Weeda, *Images of Ethnicity*, 42.

45 See for the Middle Ages Weeda, *Images of Ethnicity*, 37-42, 88-117, 329-333; for the sixteenth and seventeenth century Meijer Drees, *Andere landen*, 10-20 and Frans Grijzenhout, ‘Schilders, van zulk een lome en vochtige gesteldheid. Beeld en zelfbeeld van de Nederlandse schilderkunst in de zeventiende eeuw’, *BMGN* 107 (1992) 726-744; for the eighteenth century Dominique Désirat, ‘La théorie des climats appliquées aux beaux-arts chez l’Abbé Dubos’, in: Alain Montandon (ed.), *Le même et l’autre: Regards européens* (Clermont-Ferrand 1997) 119-130.

pointing out the influence of other factors, but they did not doubt the validity of the theory as such.⁴⁶ It was only gradually in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that the climate zone theory lost its credibility to critical scholarship.⁴⁷

Today the four temperaments still figure prominently at numerous pseudo-psychological websites, sometimes mixed with astrological-cosmological elements that betray the same age-old influences. Medieval astrology had firmly linked the temperaments to the position of planets, associating the choleric temperament with the influence of Mars, the sanguine temperament with Venus and the melancholic temperament with Saturn. Because of its element water, the phlegmatic temperament was thought to have a special relationship with Luna, the moon, known for her influence on the ebb and flow of the tides and for her ability to induce sleep. In a design for a series on the four temperaments as ‘children of the planets’ of 1566, the Haarlem painter Maarten van Heemskerck pictured duck-catchers, fishermen and sailors as phlegmatic personalities par excellence – following an already existent iconography that would turn out to be long-lasting (see illustration 2). The *phlegmatici* of Heemskerck however, were not traditionally portrayed as sleepy and slow, but as industrious and busy – both visually and verbally in the verses underneath written by the humanist scholar Adrian Junius.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, Heemskerck, Junius and the engraver engaged, Herman Jansz. Muller, were all born and living in the northern part of Holland. Natives of the boggy lands that were held in contempt by others, they were among the first to offer a fresh interpretation, different from the classical imagery of the cool and watery temperament ascribed to their countrymen and women.⁴⁹

46 David Hume, ‘Of National Characters’, in: idem, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (Aalen 1964) volume 1, 244-258; Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des Loix* (1748) Livre XIV: ‘Les lois dans le rapport qu’elles ont avec la nature du climat’, and his unpublished ‘Essai sur les causes qui peuvent affecter les esprits et les caractères’, discussed in Barbara Piqué, ‘Les caractères des nations dans l’oeuvre de Montesquieu’, in: Montandon, *Le même et l’autre*, 131-142.

47 See the critical commentary in John Andrews, *A Review of the Characters of the Principal Nations in Europe* (London 1770) volume 2, 255-262 and Azémor, *Considérations sur l’influence des moeurs dans l’état militaire des nations* (London 1788) 270-279. From the 1760s onwards, moreover, sceptical remarks can be found in Dutch Enlightenment weeklies, see Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht*, 257-258.

48 Ilja M. Veldman, *Leerrijke reeksen van Maarten van Heemskerck* (The Hague 1986) 82-87.

49 Traditions, however, die hard: around the same time Heemskerck and Muller also made an engraving with a caption (of a different author) underlining the paralysing effect of the moon on the phlegmatic temperament, see Grijzenhout, ‘Schilders’, 731-735.

The appropriation of an emotional identity

Netherlanders were not the only Europeans whose emotional identity was traditionally defined by the cold climate zone in which they lived. Inspired by the ancients, Renaissance scholars living in the southern parts of Europe continued to attribute a phlegmatic character to the entire population of north-western Europe. Thus, not only the inhabitants of the Low Countries but also those of Germany, Scandinavia and the British Isles were characterised as sturdy, stolid and slow-witted. Just like Heemskerck and Junius however, many intellectuals and artists living in those northern countries adopted the classical climate zone theory but substituted reinterpretations of their own for the Mediterranean perspective. In this early modern appropriation process we can discern a number of adjustment patterns or strategies to deal with the negative implications of the theory in its classical form.⁵⁰

One possibility was to transfer the negative traits attributed to their people to their immediate neighbours. The English and German authors cited in the first part of this article obviously took this route, passing the undesirable phlegmatic temperament on to the Dutchmen next-door. For their own nations they claimed the similarly cold but dry melancholic temperament. Since the Renaissance melancholy had lost many of its negative connotations because of (a rediscovery of) the Aristotelian idea that the greatest intellectual and artistic performances were stimulated by the qualities of black bile. That is why the Dutch painter and art theorist Samuel van Hoogstraeten described the Dutch character in 1678 as 'earthly and cold' rather than 'watery and cold', thus implying that the achievements of a melancholy genius were not beyond his countrymen's abilities.⁵¹

Netherlanders mastered the *strategy of transference* as well as other nations, even if they often used it more subtly. Without directly denying that they lived in a cold and wet area, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century physicians such as Levinus Lemnius and Johan van Beverwijck pointed to the natural variations in air and temperature within the greater area of the Low Countries, thus explaining how it was possible that intelligence and sensitivity after all did exist in the parts in which they themselves lived, that was, in the regions of Zeeland and Holland.⁵² The implicit message was that the really problematic traits of the phlegmatic temperament were to be found in neighbouring regions. In his *Parallelon rerumpublicarum* (1602) the young Grotius (Hugo de Groot) likewise had passed the northern traits of

50 Désirat, 'Théorie des climats'; Franz K. Stanzel, *Europäer. Ein imagologischer Essay* (Heidelberg 1998) 21-32; Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, 'Klimatheorie und Nationalcharakter auf der Völkertafel', in: Franz K. Stanzel (ed.), *Europäischer*

Völkerspiegel. Imagologisch-ethnographische Studien zu den Völkertafeln des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts (Heidelberg 1999) 120-122.

51 Grijzenhout, 'Schilders', 740.

52 Meijer Drees, *Andere landen*, 17-19.

brutality and coarseness from the ancient Batavians on to the Frisians, Marsaci and Canninefates, ancient tribes that had been living in the same area as his idealised Batavian ancestors.⁵³ Grotius, moreover, posited that external conditions could affect a climatologically formed temper. Facilitated by the location near the sea, large-scale trading activities had polished the character of his countrymen and women.⁵⁴

This was a different kind of argument, a historicising argument, probably derived from *Batavia* (1588), a posthumously published work of Adrian Junius. In *Batavia* Junius had not only called the Romans biased but argued further that since the clouded river delta was not their only habitat anymore, the trafficking and seafaring Hollanders no longer resembled the blunt Batavians.⁵⁵ Because of their encounters with different cultures across the seas, they had become true cosmopolitans like Ulysses, civilised and hardworking as well. Since Calvete de Estrella had made comparable remarks about the Netherlanders in his travel account of the mid-sixteenth century, it is very possible that Junius in his turn was inspired by this Spanish humanist.⁵⁶ Without rejecting the climate zone theory as such, Junius emphasised the changeability of ethnic characters due to historical developments. Two centuries later the Leiden physician and scientist Johannes le Francq van Berkhey would employ a similar *historicising strategy* when he wrote the nine volumes of his *Natuurlyke historie van Holland* (1769-1778) with the explicit intent of changing the dominant dull image clinging to the natives of the Dutch province Holland. Emphasising the range of local varieties, he both naturalised and historicised the phlegmatic characteristics of the Hollanders, underscoring on the one hand the continuity and on the other hand the diversification occurring over time through social differences and biological mixing with other nations.⁵⁷ Dutch stolidity therefore came in many kinds, often mixed with traits of other temperaments. Only the inhabitants of Waterland (a wetland area to the north-east of Amsterdam) were phlegmatic in a relatively pure form, le Francq acknowledged, but then in the good sense of the word: they were known for their perseverance, reliability, even temper and hard work. Though Waterlanders might be reserved in the public expressions

53 Grotius, *Vergelijking der gemeenebesten, derde boek: over den zeden en den inborst der Atheniensen, Romeinen en Hollanderen* [...], translation by Johan Meerman (Haarlem 1801-1803) volume 1, 97.

54 *Ibid.*, volume 1, 26-27, see also Meijer Drees, *Andere landen*, 25-28 for the context of this argument.

55 Hadrianus Junius, *Batavia. In qua praeter gentis et insulae antiquitatem* [...] (Leiden 1588) 218-220, recently translated in Dutch by Nico de Glas as *Holland is een eiland. De Batavia van Hadrianus Junius (1511-1575)* (Hilversum 2011).

56 Rodríguez Pérez, *Tachtigjarige Oorlog*, 37-42.

57 Eveline Koolhaas-Grosfeld, *De ontdekking van de Nederlander in boeken en prenten rond 1800* (Zutphen 2010) 91-93, 139-140, 146-147.

of their affections, they would express them freely in private and could thus hardly be accused of lacking feelings.⁵⁸

Le Francq combined the historicising strategy with an explicit reappraisal of the phlegmatic temperament, emphasising the positive sides of the humour attributed to the Hollanders. Such a *revalorisation strategy* in fact had already been used by Erasmus when he gave a positive twist to the allegedly native bluntness, praising it as honesty, in his early sixteenth-century commentary on the ‘auris Batava’ epigram of Martial.⁵⁹ A further step in the upgrading of the stolid character of the northern peoples was taken by Montesquieu, who stated that the lack of sensitivity of their nerves caused by their strong muscles not only made them less emotional but also less susceptible to criminal behaviour and tyrannical governments.⁶⁰ Thus, when Pilati di Tassilo praised the Dutch for their ‘aversion pour la violence & l’oppression’, he could very well have been inspired by Montesquieu. The French philosopher’s revaluation of the northern climate was soon embraced by Dutch authors too.⁶¹ Dutch Enlightenment magazines started to underline how moistness and coldness stimulated important virtues such as caution, composure, diligence, earnestness and stability.⁶² The Dutch Reformed theologian and moral critic IJsbrand van Hamelsveld asserted that being a predominantly phlegmatic people⁶³, the Dutch could theoretically still excel in patriotism, patience and diligence but, as he also complained in *De zedelijke toestand der Nederlandsche natie* (1791), in his time less fortunate phlegmatic traits had regrettably got the better of his country since luxury, effeminacy and inertia had replaced the former industry and resilience.⁶⁴

With the diminished international power of the Dutch Republic in the late eighteenth century, this obviously was a prolific era for national self-criticism. Around the same time that Van Hamelsveld chastised his

58 Le Francq, *Natuurlyke historie*, volume 3, 473-474, 682, 721, 761.

59 M.E.H.N. Mout, “‘Het Bataafse oor’”. De lotgevallen van Erasmus’ adagium “Auris Batava” in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving’, *Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde KNAW. Nieuwe reeks* 56:2 (1993) 77-102.

60 Piqué, ‘Caractères’, 136-138.

61 Eveline Koolhaas and Sandra de Vries, ‘Terug naar een roemrijk verleden. De zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst als voorbeeld voor de negentiende eeuw’, in: Frans Grijzenhout and Henk van Veen (eds.), *De Gouden Eeuw in perspectief. Het beeld van de Nederlandse zeventiende-eeuwse schilderkunst in later tijd* (Nijmegen 1992) 108-110.

62 Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht*, 257.

63 Predominantly phlegmatic, since Van Hamelsveld also believed that temperaments had mixed and partly changed in the course of the centuries.

64 IJsbrand van Hamelsveld, *De zedelijke toestand der Nederlandsche natie, op het einde der achttiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 1791) 126-143, 341-366, 382-383. Cf. the Swiss historian Johann Heinrich Füssli who stated in 1771 that their money had made the Dutch ‘feiger and träger’, quoted in Daniel Tröhler, ‘Switzerland and the Netherlands in the 18th Century: The Republican Discourse of Public Virtues’, *De Achttiende Eeuw* 37 (2005) 93.

compatriots, his fellow minister Willem Anthony Ockerse too did not deny the lesser sides of Dutch stolidity. Nevertheless, in his three-volume *Ontwerp tot eene algemeene characterkunde* (1788-1797), which was one of the first attempts at a modern scientific psychology from a socio-biological perspective⁶⁵, he reviewed the Dutch temperament in a quite positive tone, describing it as:

[...] a middle thing between the frivolous vivacity of the sanguine French and the proud melancholy of the thick-blooded, bilious English, he (the Dutchman D.S.) tempers both by a mix of German coolness in addition to which, however, the Spanish dignity, since the last count's rule, seems also to have shed a few drops.⁶⁶

This was a fine example of the *middling strategy*, claiming the preferred in-between position and therefore the best balanced character for your own nation. In the high Middle Ages French and English intellectuals had already relocated the favoured middle climate zone – previously monopolised by the Mediterranean – and matched it to the geographical coordinates of their own region, asserting that they were the people living in the most temperate and ideal circumstances.⁶⁷ Other countries had followed suit with similar claims.⁶⁸ Now and then a sympathetic foreigner would step in: Moryson praised the people of Flanders and Brabant (note *not* Holland) as being ‘free from the French levity and from the German gravity or morosity, being of a middle and good temper betweene them’.⁶⁹ Ockerse’s middling claim clearly stood in a tradition.

In sum, the perception that the Low Countries were populated by people without strong passions, emotions, or feelings existed not only among foreigners. Netherlanders themselves have actively contributed to the fabric of that identity, if not by their actual behaviour (which forms an important part of an emotional identity but is difficult to gauge for the past) then certainly by the images and words with which they reinterpreted that originally negative stereotype of insensitivity. Adding nuances and gradations, historicising and

65 For an extensive analysis, see Frijhoff, ‘Zelfbeeld’, 23-28.

66 Willem Anthony Ockerse, *Ontwerp tot eene algemeene characterkunde* (Utrecht 1788-1790; Utrecht 1797) volume 3, 44.

67 Weeda, *Images of Ethnicity*, 100-117, 255-256, 329, 333.

68 Stanzel, *Europäer*, 30; an example would be the sixteenth-century Vicente Álvarez who wrote that the Spanish climate and the Spanish temperament were the most moderate, lacking the extremities of the Italian, German or Flemish people. See Rodríguez Pérez, *Tachtigjarige Oorlog*, 45-46.

69 Moryson, *Itinerary*, 286. For his contemporaries’ ideas about those cultural contrasts within the greater Low Countries area, see Meijer Drees, *Andere landen*, 19.

upgrading the phlegmatic temperament, Dutch authors and artists multiplied its meanings and thus made it possible to assimilate the trait of stolidity into their national identity. Like shot fabric, the phlegmatic identity of the Dutch changed its colours when looked at from a new angle.

Incorporation of new elements: desire for profit as national passion

This historical reflection on the Dutch and their emotions would not be complete if it were to ignore another important element of Dutch emotional identity, already mentioned by Guicciardini – Dutch greed.

For the past two centuries acquisitiveness has not been viewed as an emotional phenomenon and only recently have people rediscovered the basically emotional drive behind many economic transactions.⁷⁰ In Pre-Modern Times however, people still fully realised the emotional nature of the desire for money and goods.⁷¹ They called it a passion, as did John Andrews when he wrote about the Dutch in 1770:

[...] and whatever truth there is in the imputation of their heavy, phlegmatic temper in other matters, their activity and warmth in the pursuit of money are not inferior to those of the most mercurial nations. When animated by this, their ruling passion, they become absolutely other men and exhibit an alertness and vivacity, to which they are utter strangers on other occasions. This thirst [...] is the real, genuine character of the Dutch.⁷²

Economic scientists would later reframe the drives of economic actors as rational interests rather than irrational passions, but the transition between those two frames took some time.⁷³ In the mind of eighteenth-century André Thouin for instance, interest was still a passion when he remarked about the Dutch: 'l'Intérêt seul est leur grand mobile, l'unique source de leurs vertus, en étouffant l'essor de leurs autres passions'.⁷⁴ That the desire for money was actually the only impetus that could set the inert mass of a Dutchman in motion, was also suggested by Andreas Riem whom we met in the first part of this article.⁷⁵ In her *Tagebuch* the renowned German author Sophie von La

70 Matt, 'Current Emotions Research', 121.

71 Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht*, 200-213.

72 John Andrews, *A Review of the Characters of the Principal Nations in Europe* (London 1770) volume 2, 171.

73 Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton 1977).

74 'Interest alone is their great driving force, the unique source of their virtues, smothering the rise of their other passions'. Translation of: André Thouin, *Voyage dans la Belgique, La Hollande, et l'Italie* (Paris 1841, journey in 1795), cited in R. Murrin, *La Hollande et les Hollandais au XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles vues par les Français* (Paris 1925) 62.

75 Riem, *Reise*, 325, cited in Bientjes, *Holland*, 234.

Roche put it in a reversed perspective, theorising it was the ‘ökonomischen Nationalgeist [...] der nirgends etwas, nicht einmal eine Bewegung des Leibes verschwendet, die nur einiger Maßen überflüssig seyn könnte’.⁷⁶ That would account for the calm behaviour and great achievements of the Dutch, but also for their indifference to so many things. Because ‘the desire of gain almost constantly absorbs the other passions, and destroys their force and energy’ as their English contemporary William Falconer explained the workings of the human mind in 1781.⁷⁷

Here foreigners had found a new angle to make sense of the stolid Dutch character they encountered – either in person or in the books in their library. Their explanation rested on an understanding of how emotions worked, an understanding of what we might nowadays call the ‘performativity’ of emotions, that is, of what emotions actually *do*: for instance, in this case the emotion is believed to be so powerful that it suppresses and overrules every other emotion, every other motivation to act differently.

The passions that were overruled and found sadly lacking in Dutch behaviour by other nations, were often ‘manly’ passions such as the longing for honour, valour, and the love of one’s country.⁷⁸ This implicit gendering of the Dutch temperament fitted well with the common idea that women had a colder and wetter nature than men.⁷⁹ Netherlanders also missed out on the passionate love between man and wife, as we have already read in Guicciardini’s description and can still read in its modern-day American equivalent, *The UnDutchables*, wherein the authors merrily paraphrase an unidentified source saying that ‘the Dutch approach the subject of sex with the warmth and passion of an ice cube’.⁸⁰ For early modern foreigners, the cool behaviour between the sexes was the ultimate proof of the phlegmatic complexions raised in that cold and wet environment. One marvelled at the

76 ‘economical spirit of the nation [...] that does not waste anything anywhere, not even a movement of the body which could be just a little superfluous’. Translation of: Sophie von La Roche, *Tagebuch einer Reise durch Holland und England, von der Verfasserin von Rosaliens Briefen* (Offenbach am Main 1788) 159.

77 William Falconer, *Remarks on the Influence of Climate, Situation, Nature of Country, Population, Nature of Food and Way of Life on the Disposition and Temper [...] of Mankind* (London 1781) 409. See also Diderot on the operations of ‘la soif de l’or’ in Abbé Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (Geneve 1781) volume 7, 437.

78 This is discussed in the second chapter of Dorothee Sturkenboom, *Mannelijkheid in meervoud. De vergeten dimensie van de Nederlandse handelsidentiteit* (forthcoming). On the altered perception of honour as an emotion, see Ute Frevert, *Emotions in History – Lost and Found* (Budapest 2011) 37-85.

79 The humoural theorists, however, were not completely coherent on this part, so at times different temperaments were ascribed to the female sex. See Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht*, 258-259.

80 Colin White and Laurie Boucke, *The UnDutchables: An Observation of the Netherlands: Its Culture and its Inhabitants* (Lafayette, CO 2001) 198.

chastity, the lack of jealousy, the liberties and open friendships that were possible between unmarried members of the opposite sexes.⁸¹ Foreigners had a hard time understanding why the passions never ran higher or why the women did not take more delight in flirting, unless they took the cold environment or the Dutch love for money into account.⁸² Male visitors almost felt compassion for the Dutch men who had to live with such women – until they realised that warm-blooded men too, were rare among the Dutch, or till they remembered the shortcomings of the fair sex in other countries.⁸³ Never one to grow tired of speculations and niceties, Sir William Temple spelled it out like this:

I have known some among them that personated Lovers well enough but none that I ever thought were at heart in love, nor any of the Women [...]. Whether it be that they are such lovers of their Liberty [...] or that the dullness of their Air renders them less susceptible of more refined Passions, or that they are diverted from it by the general intention every man has upon his business [...]. The same causes may have had the same Effects among their married Women.⁸⁴

Whereas the dull air and love of liberty were themes that we already know from Roman authors, the interest in business was a relatively new explanation. In classical times the inhabitants of the Low Countries were still known for their disinterest in trade, thus earning a favourable remark about their incorruptible character from Caesar in *De Bello Gallico*.⁸⁵ Clearly this had changed when the centre of economic activities shifted from the Mediterranean to the north-west of Europe and Netherlanders became engaged in the long-distance networks of the late Middle Ages. Well before the successes of the Golden Age would mark nearly all inhabitants of the Low Countries as commercial animals, their love of money had become a component of their emotional identity as described by others. An early sample is given by the Castilian Fernando de la Torre who in his *Laus Hispaniae* (1455) characterised the citizens of Flanders as greedy when compared to his countrymen who lived on so much richer soil and therefore could afford to be more generous (and lazy).⁸⁶ In this mix of cultural criticism and geopsychology it was perfectly logical to explain traits like avarice and generosity by the natural environment.

81 Moryson, *Itinerary*, 261, 296, 299, 302.

82 Vázquez, 'Algemeene beschrijving', 106.

83 Rodríguez Pérez, *Tachtigjarige Oorlog*, 45, 102; Owen Feltham, *A Brief Character of the Low Countries under the States* (1652) [first written in 1624-1625], ed. Graeme Watson, *Dutch Crossings* 27 (2003) 117, 121, 131; Charles Pierre

Coste d'Arnobat, *Voyage au pays de Bambouc* [...] (Brussels 1789) 212-216; Pilati di Tassulo, *Lettres*, 184-187.

84 Temple, *Observations*, 148-149.

85 Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*, l. 1.

86 Rodríguez Pérez, *Tachtigjarige Oorlog*, 31.

To summarise the prevalent view among early modern foreigners, Netherlanders were not only too cold but also too commercially minded for the passions of love, honour, valour or patriotism. The climate *and* the professional focus of merchants and traders on economic transactions made the Dutch collectively into a nation missing out on the nobler feelings of humankind. How did the Dutch cope with this imagery? What was their take on the desire for gain as a crucial component of their collective identity?

To start, seventeenth-century Dutchmen and women agreed with the view held by their contemporaries that the drive for profit was emotional in nature, sometimes warning each other of the ‘excessive commotions in business and trades’.⁸⁷ That commerce was part of their culture was nevertheless accepted and made into a point of pride. Le Francq even hypothesised that the talent to calculate the risks involved in trade dated back to Antiquity when the Batavians had demonstrated a similar keen sense of calculating their chances in the dicing and gambling matches for which they were famous.⁸⁸

Making a connection between the Batavians and trade however, was a long shot. Junius and Grotius wrote that the population of the Low Countries had only become involved in trade much later. The point those two authors made about trade causing people to become friendlier, more diligent and civilized, recurred as an argument in the international debate on the societal effects of commerce developing in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.⁸⁹ Following Jacques Savary’s *Le parfait négociant* (1675), Montesquieu famously spoke about ‘le doux commerce’ that softened barbarian manners and made people gentler, more peaceful, more polished. At the same time Montesquieu did not overlook the sordid sides of commerce, such as worshipping of money above other values. Taking a middle position in the early modern debate on commerce, Montesquieu’s *De l’esprit des lois* (1748) had an enormous impact on the international Republic of Letters, Dutch intellectuals included. Van Hamelsveld for instance, almost literally echoed the Frenchman’s words when he acknowledged greed as a national flaw in his *Zedelijke toestand der Nederlandsche natie*.⁹⁰

Generally speaking, Dutch authors had no difficulties acknowledging that their countrymen loved making money. It seemed as if the phlegmatic Dutchman had a natural gift for it:

87 An anonymous Waterlander in 1647, cited in Bert Koene, *De Caeskopers. Een Zaanse koopmansfamilie in de Gouden Eeuw* (Hilversum 2011) 99.

88 Le Francq, *Natuurlyke historie*, III, 1457-1458.

89 Hirschman, *Passions and Interests*, 59-63.

90 Dorothee Sturkenboom, ‘Abraham Blankaart: een literair icoon als antwoord op het vaderlands tekort’, in: Joris van Eijnatten, Fred van Lieburg, and Hans de Waardt (eds.), *Heiligen of helden. Opstellen voor Willem Frijhoff* (Amsterdam 2007) 253-254.

Calm and cool of mind, shaped for a diligent and industrious life, needing larger profits than other peoples to exist in this land, having a fine intellect of *combination* and *calculation*, sharp in promoting his advantage, and fired by an overpowering passion for profit, paired with patience and perseverance to see through his plans, he seems to be made for trade by Nature itself. It is at the same time his talent and his need.⁹¹

For most Dutch authors this was not to say that the Dutchman was greedy. Almost two centuries apart both Grotius and Le Francq for instance, claimed that the Hollanders generally kept their desire for profits in check and balanced it with generosity.⁹² Although Grotius qualified avarice and ambition as problematic passions for humankind, he prided himself that his incorruptible countrymen were ‘not interested in outrageous or base profits’.⁹³ Likewise, and unlike the Athenians and Romans, his people were hardly susceptible to ‘that vain tickling of the thirst for glory’ which had created so many problems in history.⁹⁴ Lacking the passion for honour should be something of which to be proud. Grotius’s expression of national pride – which we might call an ‘emotive’ following Reddy⁹⁵ – illustrates the almost universal human need to feel good about the group with which one identifies oneself.⁹⁶ This is what modern-day psychologists call ‘in-group favouritism’.⁹⁷

Of course, not all Dutchmen or women necessarily identified with the commercial character of their country, but if we take professional playwrights as in any sense representing national feelings, we can observe how in the Dutch Republic the public appreciation of merchants’ behaviour improved over time.⁹⁸ Towards the end of the eighteenth century the patriotic women writers Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken immortalised the Dutch merchant as an icon of the ‘true’ Dutch character with the literary figure of Abraham Blankaart who featured prominently in two of their epistolary novels written in the 1780’s. Portrayed as sturdy, hard-working, prosperous, and pragmatic, perhaps sporadically too direct or even blunt, yet also great-hearted, generous and not

91 Italics in original tekst: Ockerse, *Ontwerp*, volume 3, 135. Johann Christian Sinapius likewise considered the phlegmatic character the best suited for the commercial profession in his *Lesebuch für Kaufleute* (Hamburg, Leipzig 1783) 79-80.

92 Grotius, *Vergelijking*, volume 1, 88 and volume 2, 13-14, 18-22; Le Francq, *Natuurlyke historie*, volume 3, 649-658, 761, 922, 973, 1032.

93 Grotius, *Vergelijking*, volume 2, 1-2, 8-16, citation on 13.

94 *Ibid.*, 1-8, citation on 4.

95 Reddy, *Navigation*, 104-107, 128.

96 Cinnirella, ‘Ethnic and National Stereotypes’, 43-44.

97 Tim Vanhooissen and Frank van Overwalle, ‘Me or Not Me as Source of Ingroup Favoritism and Outgroup Derogation: A Connectionist Perspective’, *Social Cognition* 28 (2010) 84-109.

98 Dorothee Sturkenboom, ‘Staging the Merchant: Commercial Vices and the Politics of Stereotyping in Early Modern Dutch Theatre’, *Dutch Crossing* 30 (2006) 211-228.



▲
The Dutchman.

Cartoon by Rusty Haller after Huug Schipper, published in Colin White and Laurie Boucke, *The UnDutchables. An Observation of the Netherlands, its Culture and its Inhabitants* (Lafayette, CO 2001). White-Boucke Publishing.

devoid of sensitivity or ideals, Abraham Blankaart was the personification of the phlegmatic and commercially successful Dutchman as Dutch authors at the end of the Pre-Modern Period preferred to see him.⁹⁹

Conclusion: the dynamics of emotional group identities

As stated in the introduction, the ideas and images analysed in this essay are not only widespread but also extremely enduring. Arriving at the end of my argument, one final illustration may serve to highlight not only their persistence into the twenty-first century, but also the dynamics and discrepancies involved. In a cartoon recently published in *The UnDutchables*, a popular guidebook for English-speaking foreigners living in the Netherlands, several iconic elements from the first two illustrations make their reappearance (see illustration 3). The modern Dutchman is pictured in a similar watery setting as his iconographic forerunners and equipped with the same fishing devices as Heemskerck's sixteenth-century *phlegmatici* (illustration 2). His pipe and fishing cap are those of the eighteenth-century Dutchman reclining at the bank of the canal (illustration 1). Like him, the present-day Dutchman seems to prefer spending his time without much excitement and without much movement, typical of his phlegmatic temperament. At the same time he is also slightly different from his pictorial ancestors, incorporating a younger element in Dutch emotional identity, his commercial nature, in the number of fishing rods and floats he is using. Maximising their number on the one fishing permit that he supposedly is willing to pay for, he reveals his greed and economy, allegedly the only true passions of the Dutch.¹⁰⁰

Whether one appreciates its humour or not, it is remarkable how the American cartoonist managed to catch the paradoxical emotional identity of the Dutch, their stolidity and passions, in one – admittedly not very flattering – image. Perhaps the reader is tempted to dismiss this picture as a distorted foreigner's view of the Dutch character. That however, would be a mistake. The original drawing inspiring the American illustrator to create this cartoon was of Dutch origin. Thus, what we are looking at here is how an initially outsider's opinion of the Dutch character – recall the words of Guicciardini, Andrews and others on the previous pages – dating from the Early Modern Period was adopted and reworked by a present-day Dutchman and then reproduced again by a foreign artist from overseas. The economically fishing Dutchman in *The UnDutchables* represents in a nutshell not only the persistent and often contradictory nature of national stereotypes but also the dynamics inherent in the process of emotional identity formation addressed in this paper.

99 Sturkenboom, 'Abraham Blankaart'.

100 White and Boucke, *The UnDutchables*, 65-66.

Emotional group identities, such as the Dutch phlegmatic identity discussed in this essay, are always the result of an interplay between insiders and outsiders – a dynamic process in which, I have argued, the parties involved classify, attribute, appropriate, (re)assess and transfer particular emotions or emotions in general, with corresponding emotional behaviour, or the lack thereof, to a particular group. Emotional group identities, I argued further, are not necessarily exclusive. A phlegmatic temper was and is not a typically Dutch trademark. Originally ascribed to the Thebans by the Athenians and then to the entire population of northern Europe by the Romans, it is still considered a trait of, for instance, the Finnish and English people who nowadays cultivate their ‘sisu’ respectively ‘phlegm’ as much as the Dutch cultivate their ‘nuchterheid’.¹⁰¹ Though far from exceptional, their alleged psychological makeup (including, in the case of these nations, related shared traits as perseverance, diligence, and introversion) is nevertheless presented as unique for those peoples, as markers of their social identity, both by insiders and outsiders.¹⁰² Group identities however, are less exclusive than people like to think in their quest for an orderly categorised world. As history testifies, elements of social identities migrate very easily from one region to another.¹⁰³

Finally, emotional group identities might gradually change over time as new elements are assimilated into the package. While the stereotype of the stolid northerner had its roots in ancient climate zone theories, the passion for money was assimilated in Dutch emotional identity after the Netherlanders had reinvented themselves as a commercially-minded people. The new element blended successfully into the existing imagery and theories thanks to the creative interplay of natives and foreigners picturing what they believed or claimed to be the Dutch character. If this created an inherently contradictory identity, it only speaks of that key quality of group identities that more often than not are inconsistent in nature. Together with the described strategies of adjustment, this quality might be crucial to understand both the apparently unproblematic incorporation of new elements *and* the extremely long life of emotional group identities. In this essay the paradoxical and enduring image of the Dutch as a phlegmatic and yet impassioned people (‘meet the chilly, passionate Dutch’¹⁰⁴) served as the historical example, but the mechanisms and patterns explained in this paper can also be detected in other emotional group identities that we find in history and history writing every day. ◀

101 Beller and Leerssen, *Imagology*, respectively 152, 146, 143.

102 See for the level-headed and reserved (self-) image of the Dutch in present days: Jan Blokker Jr., *Als de wereld vergaat, ga ik naar Nederland. De vaderlandse geschiedenis in 40 uitspraken en meer* (Amsterdam 2007) 135-138, 151.

103 Ingomar Weiler, ‘Ethnographische Typisierungen im antiken und mittelalterlichen Vorfeld der “Völkertafel”’, in: Stanzel, *Europäische Völkerspiegel*, 97, 101-102, 112.

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- 104 Han van der Horst, 'Meet the Chilly, Passionate Dutch', in: *The Netherlands: A Practical Guide for the Foreigner and a Mirror for the Dutch* (Amsterdam 2001) 29-33.