Lessons from the past? Cultural memory in Dutch integration policy

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Abstract. This article explores the contribution that cultural memory studies can make to the debate about the role of ideas and the dynamics of ideational change in policy making. Cultural memory studies engage with the cultural dimensions of remembering, and analyse how shared images of the past are mediated and transferred across distance and time. Such research shows how the past may continue to influence the present by informing the frameworks through which groups and individuals interpret and give meaning to events and phenomena. Since policy makers operate within a cultural context, shared memories are likely also to affect the way they think about the nature and roots of policy issues and the appropriateness and feasibility of policy options. In this article, policy memory (the memory shared by policy makers about earlier policies) is identified as a subcategory of cultural memory. The role of cultural memory among policy makers is studied with reference to Dutch integration policies in two periods: the mid-1990s and the early 2000s. On the basis of an in-depth analysis of policy reports and parliamentary debates, references to the past and the role they play in the policy debate are identified. Different modes of dealing with the past are found in the two periods studied, reflecting the different political contexts in which the debates took place. In the 1990s, the memory of earlier policy was invoked in the mode of continuity – that is, policy change was legitimised (conceived) as part of a positive tradition. In the 2000s, memory was invoked in the mode of discontinuity. The same policies were reinterpreted in more negative terms and policy change legitimised by the perceived need to break with the past. Arguably, this reinterpretation of the past was a precondition for the shift in policy beliefs that took place around that time.

Keywords: civic integration policy; cultural memory; ideas; policy making

Introduction

It is by now generally accepted in studies of policy making that 'ideas matter'. Ideas structure the way policy makers define policy issues, identify potential policy solutions and, more generally, perceive the world (cf. Béland & Cox 2010; Hall 1993). As a result, policies and policy making cannot be fully understood without understanding the ideas that policy makers hold, as ideas focus attention on certain problems and define the range of conceivable and legitimate policy options. This implies that policy change is also (at least partly) driven by ideational change.

However, it is less clear where ideas come from and how and why they change (or remain stable) over time. In this article, we propose one approach that has the potential to shed light on these questions: cultural memory studies. Cultural memory studies engages with the cultural dimensions of collective remembering, analysing how shared images of the past are mediated and transferred across distance and time, and how, in the process, they shape collective identities. The study of cultural memory gives insight into how shared memories are produced and passed on, modified and forgotten. It makes clear how the past

may continue to influence the present by informing the frameworks through which groups and individuals give meaning to events and phenomena in their daily lives.

Cultural memory is relevant to policy making because policy makers operate within their own cultural context. Apart from the more general societal context within which policy makers work, policy communities themselves also develop shared ideas, norms and symbols, which together constitute a specific cultural context. As in culture more generally, these 'policy cultures' are likely to be underpinned by shared interpretations of the past, whether this relates to events, ideas or policies. These interpretations may constitute taken-for-granted reference points in policy debates but may also, at times, be subject to criticism and be altered. This, in turn, may play an important role in processes of legitimating and reconsidering existing policies.

In this article, we will explore the contribution that cultural memory studies can make to policy studies by analysing the role of shared remembrance in one specific case of policy making and policy change: Dutch civic integration policies in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Using the conceptual framework of cultural memory studies, we will investigate how the past was deployed in key policy debates about the reform of civic integration policies and seek to offer an assessment of how shared memories may influence policy making.

Our analysis shows that politicians, policy makers and specialists share a specific 'policy memory'. This is a predominantly self-referential memory that is intimately connected to knowledge of previous policies and the context in which they came into being. In some periods, it functions as a sort of policy tradition, bringing continuity to policy debates. However, during times of controversy and paradigm change in a policy field, political actors refer to and reflect upon previous policies much more explicitly and critically. A change in paradigm is then accompanied by a reinterpretation of past policies (as well as their social, political and historical context).

The study of cultural memory in policy processes has the potential to contribute to three important debates in the policy studies literature. First, it may help us understand better how policy makers interpret the past in constructing repertoires for current policy making. Second, it may shed more light on the way in which interpretations of the past (events, ideas, policies) change over time, and how these shifts affect policy making in different time periods. Third, it may contribute to the debate about stability and change in policy making, which has become a key issue in historical institutionalism over the past decades.

The article proceeds as follows. We first introduce the concept of 'cultural memory' and explain how insights from the cultural memory studies literature can be used to analyse policy processes. We then turn to the methodology underlying our case study, before introducing the case of Dutch civic integration policy and the findings of our analysis of policy documents. Finally, we draw a number of conclusions and sketch an agenda for future research in this area.

Theory

The concept of 'cultural memory'

A cultural memory perspective focuses on the cultural dimensions of shared memory – that is, on the fact that collective narratives about the past are not only informed by

social and political structures, but also depend on different forms of cultural mediation and transmission (via texts, images, performance, etc.). How we perceive ourselves in the present and in relation to others depends very much on the mediated narratives about the past that we are exposed to (and to which we in turn contribute) within our own sociocultural environment.

Many scholars of cultural memory trace the field's origins back to the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who developed an understanding of memory as something that is socially produced and mediated. Halbwachs (1925, 1950) challenged the notion of individual memory as being autonomous and unique, and pointed out that even the content of unexpressed personal memory is based on socialisation and shaped by culturally specific schemata.

This idea was taken up and expanded upon in various disciplines from the 1980s onwards, resulting in a wide array of approaches and methodologies in the analysis of memory as a cultural phenomenon (for overviews, see Erll 2011; Olick et al. 2011). Despite many disciplinary differences, there is a general agreement that shared remembering is an activity strongly connected to the present interests of the group doing the remembering, the so-called 'mnemonic community' (Zerubavel 2003): collective memories are not objective reproductions of past realities, but highly selective reconstructions indicating the needs and interests of the groups and individuals in the present (Erll 2011: 8; Rigney 2005)

There is a consensus within the field that cultural memory should not be conceived of in terms of distinct packages of information that are simply there to be retrieved when the need arises; it exists only through the memory practices performed by groups and individuals within specific temporalities and social/political/cultural contexts (Rigney 2012: 18–21). Cultural memory is thus the ongoing outcome of a dynamic between past and present. While it has a large degree of stability, it is not fixed once and for all, but is continuously adapted.

The understanding of cultural memory as something that is culturally mediated and dependent on particular institutionalised practices was first developed by the cultural historians Jan and Aleida Assmann, who initiated a socio-constructivist approach to the phenomenon of collective memory in their theorisation of the concept of '*kulturelles Gedächtnis*' – that is, the manner in which knowledge and memory are preserved through processes of canonisation (Assmann 1992). Where Halbwachs focused mainly on the oral transmission of memories within a limited time span, the Assmanns were interested in more long-term, culturally externalised forms of collective memory. In their ground-breaking work (Assmann 1992, 1999), they opened up a strand of inquiry that focused on how groups and societies create a sense of collectivity and continuity through the canonisation and institutionalisation of iconic narratives, texts and images that 'are specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image' (Assmann 1995: 132); Building on the Assmanns' work on canonisation, recent understandings of cultural memory have also stressed its dynamic and malleable character (Erll & Rigney 2009) and the ongoing interplay between forgetting and remembering that underpins the retrofitting of the past to fit the present concerns (Connerton 2008; Huyssen 2000) of different mnemonic communities.

While family, class and religion have been recognised as important frameworks in the formation of mnemonic communities at varying scales (Halbwachs 1925), national frameworks have been acknowledged as the most significant in the modern era (Anderson

1991 [1983]; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Nora 1997 [1984–1992]), albeit challenged recently by transnational ones (Levy & Sznaider 2006; Assmann & Conrad 2010; De Cesari & Rigney 2014). This study will show how policy makers constitute a mnemonic community that remains connected to the larger mnemonic community of the nation while also having its own distinct traditions and terms of reference.

Cultural memory in policy studies

The concept of 'cultural memory' has been used only sparsely in the policy studies literature. Arguably, however, it plays a role in policy making processes. In the literature on the role of ideas in policy making, major changes in policies have been associated with 'paradigmatic shifts' in ideational frameworks (Hall 1993; see also, e.g., Blyth 2002; Skogstad 2011). This raises the question of what determines the content of (dominant) ideas among policy makers as well as the continuities and changes in these ideas over time. This question has proven much more difficult to answer. This is where research into processes of cultural memory formation may make a useful contribution as it bears on a key component in the process of constructing meaning in policy processes.

In taking this approach, we build on a small number of studies that have already connected cultural memory to policy making. Rothstein (2000), for instance, used the related notion of 'collective memory' to explain differences in the level of trust in collective institutions in different countries. O'Callaghan (2012), Eichengreen (2012) and Di Mascio et al. (2013) argued that responses to the 2008/2009 financial crisis were conditioned by historical experience of previous economic crises. The contributions in Neumann and Tavan (2009) looked at the role of collective memory in immigration policies in Australia and New Zealand. These various studies show a close affinity with four debates in political science: on historical analogies in international relations theory, on focusing events, on policy learning and on processes of change in historical institutionalism.

The literature on historical analogies has focused predominantly on the role of analogies in decision making with respect to military interventions (e.g., Angstrom 2011; Brandström et al. 2005; Khong 1992; Paris 2002; Record 2007). This has offered valuable insights into the role of historical events in policy-making processes. However, the cultural memory approach that we propose can make two important contributions. It can do this, first, by shifting focus to 'normal' policy making. The literature on historical analogies focuses on crises, on both ends of the 'remembering process', as it looks at the way memories of past crises are used to make sense of new crisis situations. Yet, if the understanding of issues is shaped by historical 'lessons' and by 'memories' of past events and policies, this is likely also to inform 'regular' policy making in situations that are not characterised by crisis. It is therefore also important to study the role of cultural memory outside of moments of crisis.

Second, the literature on historical analogies largely takes a psychological approach, focusing on their role in cognitive processes among policy makers. This is, of course, a crucial element in explaining the effect of historical analogies in policy making. At the same time, this focus pays less attention to the processes whereby memories of the past are constructed and shared within groups. It is these (cultural) processes of historical memory formation that are central to a cultural memory perspective.

Studies of focusing events have analysed their impact on policy making after a crisis or disaster (Birkland 2006; Kingdon 2003). This literature has tended to look at policy change directly after the focusing event. The longer-term effects of these events are normally not studied. Although Birkland (2006: 182ff) argues that lessons from focusing events can also be forgotten, he seems to assume that the lesson itself is stable or fixed. The memory of a focusing event is thereby presented as binary: either the event is remembered, or it is forgotten. From a cultural memory perspective, it is also important to look at the way in which the content of the memory and the purported 'lessons' that are inferred from a crisis or disaster are transmitted and change over time (cf. Bovens & 't Hart 1996).

A cultural memory approach to policy making also speaks to the notion of 'policy learning' in the sense that it looks at the dynamics of changing understandings that underlie policies and policy making (cf. Dunlop & Radaelli 2013; Freeman 2006). In doing so, it introduces a specific take on these processes by conceptualising them as processes of cultural change and by zooming in on historical references in policy discourses. Moreover, whereas the notion of 'learning' carries connotations of some form of progression towards a better understanding of an issue or policy, a cultural memory approach does not assume that changing understandings necessarily lead to better understandings. Instead, the focus is on how cultural understandings of policies are formed and transformed over time.

Finally, a cultural memory approach contributes to recent debates about processes of change in the literature on historical institutionalism. Advances in this literature have taken a particular interest in the way in which institutions change over time, with a specific focus on the role of ideational drivers of change (Mahoney & Thelen 2010; Skogstad 2011). In taking this approach, historical institutionalism tends to assume a more or less unbroken chain between the past and the present, in which past events and decisions influence the present through processes of positive feedback, lock-in and transmission of norms, values and ideas through socialisation (Pierson 2004).

Insofar as historical events affect the present through norms, values and ideas, studies of cultural memory may offer a key to how understandings of the past change over time and how cultural memory is used to legitimate or, in the case of negative memories, de-legitimate current practices and policy options. After all, it is not history *per se* that affects the present, but the way in which people understand the historical roots of the present. Studies of cultural memory in policy making may help to elucidate these dynamics, thereby offering (at least partial) explanations for both continuity and change in policy making.

A cultural memory studies approach: Policy memory

In the following, we elaborate on several concepts that are particularly relevant when considering policy making from a cultural memory perspective and introduce 'policy memory' as a sub-category of 'cultural memory'. In the first place, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, the implicit reproduction of inherited knowledge (cultural memory as a storehouse of models) and, on the other hand, active recollection (cultural memory as active recall of the past). As Erll (2011) explains, cultural memory in its most generic form refers to the inherited *cultural frameworks* that structure meaning, knowledge and behaviour within communities, including policy communities: ideas, discourses and practices become institutionalised and shape how actors perceive,

interpret and act. One could qualify these frameworks as formative cultural patterns that determine how things are done, what qualifies as knowledge and what the course of action should be. These 'traditions' are most often implicit and remain relatively stable over longer periods of time.

In addition, and crucially, cultural memory refers to *active and self-reflexive recollection* – that is, to the intentional invocation of images and narratives about a shared past. For example, communities can recollect important events, shared traumatic episodes or cultural icons and artefacts in order to establish a shared identity and a sense of belonging. In our case study, we investigate examples of active recollection within a specific policy community. These acts of remembrance often concern past policy, which for various reasons becomes the subject of reflection, critique and reinterpretation. This active recall of the past can be used to create continuity with the past, but may also be performed to highlight the *difference* between then and now, to actively establish discontinuity and hence grounds for policy change. We expect the stress on continuity or discontinuity with the past to be linked to the goals and interests of actors in, respectively, defending or challenging the *status quo*.

Second, policy making takes place within a highly specialised domain involving specific actors, discourses, practices and institutional contexts. In this sense, those involved in policy making (policy specialists, politicians, experts) can be understood as partaking in a particular culture, a very specific 'mnemonic community' with its own traditions, frameworks and modes of thinking, speaking and acting (Zerubavel 2003). In other words, policy communities have access to specific knowledge about the past and produce a certain relation to this past through interaction and communication. These discourses have very particular formal characteristics; policy communities tend to cloak their debates and arguments in rational, even technocratic terms. When considered in isolation, policy discourses seem to follow their own logic and present a unique form of memory that is highly self-referential in that it refers to previous policies, their inception, implementation and sociopolitical contexts.

We therefore propose to use the term 'policy memory' when looking at how policy communities relate to past policies and the manner in which actors create a sense of continuity or discontinuity with preceding policies and policy traditions. This policy memory forms a subset of the broader set of cultural memories, which includes memories of other events and development. Policy memory is distinct from, but nevertheless connected to, these broader cultural memories; in policy debates, we may expect the latter to be linked to and inform more specific memories of past policies (i.e., policy memory).

Finally, as indicated above, cultural memory studies has shown that memories can be shared across different societal domains, emerging as 'grand narratives' that serve as background to, or frameworks for, the memory of specific communities, with the nation being chief among them. As we will show, the 'policy memory' of civic integration, though highly specialised, was also informed by more broadly shared memories of the national past as these had been culturally produced in the wider political sphere. This connection is made possible through the memory of the sociopolitical past, the interpretation of which informs reflections on the success or failure of previous policy. In other words, the manner in which a nation's social and political history is remembered in the political arena offers an additional framework for the interpretation of this past within the policy domain. We expect these

broader (national) cultural memories to be particularly important in (re)framing policy memory when debates on policies are lifted from (relatively closed and specialised) policy communities to (overarching and generalist) 'macropolitical' arenas (Jones 1994: 158), such as parliamentary debates.

Methodology

Civic integration policy in the Netherlands has been documented and studied from the beginning of its conception and implementation, and for this reason lends itself well to reinvestigation from a cultural memory perspective. What makes civic integration policy of particular interest is that it has undergone major transitions in the past few decades and therefore offers an opportunity to look more closely at the dynamics between policy stability and change, and the role of memory therein. We pay attention both to the internal dynamics of what we have called 'policy memory' and to the way in which policy discourse is influenced by memory discourses in the political and public domain.

In what follows we look closely at two extended periods within the development of citizenship programmes: (1) the period between the presentation of the *Contourennota* in 1994 and the coming into effect of the Newcomers Integration Act (*Wet inburgering nieuwkomers*) in 1998; and (2) the period between the national elections in 2002 and the official evaluation of the Newcomers Integration Act 1998 in 2004.[1] We have chosen these two periods because they show different types of policy change. In the first period, new policies were framed as partially continuous with previous policy frameworks; in the second, a collective sense of crisis led to a more radical rejection of the previous policy regime. By studying two different phases in a particular policy domain, we aim to identify the various ways in which cultural memory contributes to policy continuity and change.

We focus with reference to the periods 1994–1998 and 2002–2004 on how policy makers, politicians and experts refer to the past in their deliberations over intended policy measures in parliamentary debates, expert meetings, policy proposals and policy evaluations. We have derived our material (parliamentary debates, committee meetings, policy documents, policy evaluations) from the digitised archives of the Dutch parliament, which we searched with the terms 'integration' [*integratie*], 'civic integration' [*inburgering*], 'naturalisation' [*naturalisatie*] and 'minorities' [*minderheden*] in the periods under investigation. Two central policy documents form the backbone of our case study: the 1994 *Contourennota* and the 2004 evaluation report of the Newcomers Integration Act 1998.

We have chosen to select our material from the parliamentary debates and documents because it is in the parliamentary arena that the public debate and more specialised policy debates meet and interact: this allows for a particular focus on the use of cultural memory in both arenas. Based on our first search, we selected documents that explicitly address civic integration policy at considerable length, leaving aside those documents that contain the search terms but do not present an extended argument. We observed that references to previous policies and policy traditions figure prominently in the debates and reports under investigation. Our interest was in how these references are used in understanding and framing current affairs and new policy measures.

The documents were studied using discourse analysis with a view to uncovering references to the past. Since our study seeks to explore a new concept in policy studies and establish its potential for contributing to our understanding of policy making, the empirical analysis had the character of a plausibility probe – that is, by critically searching for references to the past in policy debates, we sought to establish the plausibility and potential relevance of cultural memory in policy making.

Cultural memory and civic integration policy

Bringing policy 'up-to-date': From ethnic minority policy to integration policy

From the 1970s to 1994, Dutch policy with regard to immigrants focused on ethnic, cultural and/or religious group identities (i.e., 'Ethnic Minority Policy'). From the late 1980s onwards, however, there was a growing consensus that the integration of immigrants was failing, and by the early 1990s this had become a topic of heated public debate. Strong criticism was voiced in an influential report by the Scientific Council for Government Policy in 1989, which stated that little progress had been made by immigrants in the labour market and in education (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011: 145). It also concluded that the strong focus on ethnic group identities (in the form of subsidies to cultural/religious/ethnic organisations, for example) had not succeeded in strengthening the position of immigrants in Dutch society as it intended, but seemed rather to form a hindrance to the individual participation of migrants. Great stress was put on Dutch language skills as a condition for the successful integration of (especially Turkish and Moroccan) immigrants within the Netherlands. The Council proposed that more compulsory measures should be taken and that cultural rights and facilities for immigrants should be counterbalanced by obligations. Though the problems were acknowledged by the government, the advice of the Council was not translated at that point into a new policy for language courses, which remained voluntary for new immigrants. Nevertheless, the idea of mandatory language courses started to become more popular in the early 1990s and was supported by different political parties. Moreover, the government began to invest more in adult education and the improvement of educational methods for teaching Dutch to non-native speakers.

With the reformulation of integration policy in 1994 – as presented in the so-called '*Contourennota*' (Dutch Government 1994) – 'good citizenship' became for the first time a central concept within this policy domain. Attention shifted from the recognition of cultural differences, central to earlier policy, to the civic responsibilities of individuals in integration (Dutch Government 1994: 133). The framework and philosophy of the *Contourennota* differed in three ways from the first integration policies implemented from the 1980s onwards: minorities were no longer approached as target groups but framed as individuals with a disadvantaged position; much stress was laid on the importance of the socioeconomic incorporation of minorities through the labour market and educational measures; and there was a notable shift away from (multi)cultural policies and a less important role was ascribed to immigrant organizations (Dutch Government 1994: 145). Within these new parameters for minority policy, the introduction of mandatory citizenship tests was presented as a key measure (Dutch Government 1994: 4, 32).

When we look at the content of the *Contourennota* and accompanying policy reports and parliamentary debates from this period we can conclude that memories of the past played various roles in the legitimisation and framing of the new measures proposed. The *Contourennota* positions itself within the recent history of minority policy making, interpreting the successes and failures of the minority policy framework utilised in the preceding decade, referring to the content of and responses to the report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy in 1989 as well as to more recent policy reports and reviews.

Interestingly, the *Contourennota* presents itself as partly following in the spirit of the initial Ethnic Minority Policy, albeit with new emphases and particular focus points that need to be 'brought up-to-date':

> The present policy framework is partially based on the aims and concepts formulated in the minorities memorandum of 1983. Whenever future problems and challenges make this necessary, this policy framework will be updated. (Dutch Government 1994: 3)

> Continuity in policy is a guiding principle. It has been repeatedly argued that there is no alternative to the current integration policy and that it should be continued, all the more so since it has yielded fruit in different areas since it came into force. (Dutch Government 1994: 32)

The reasons presented for the new policy measures are the emerging problems identified by specialists in various reports and reviews, changes in the circumstances of incoming immigrants, and the intended redistribution of responsibilities between government, societal organizations and citizens (Dutch Government 1994: 8). The key concept of 'citizenship' is introduced as an alternative to the group-oriented philosophy informing the previous policy framework (Dutch Government 1994: 5). This transition to a stress on citizenship is also made clear in the rejection of the term 'minority policy' in favour of the notion of 'integration policy' and is presented as the outcome of a new understanding of long-term developments:

> For this reason, the term 'minorities policy' is to be replaced by the term 'integration policy' when talking about minority groups. Some people have come to believe in recent years that policies were exclusively targeting particular groups. The fact that society as a whole was the target too often went unnoticed. That is not conducive to social participation. (Dutch Government 1994: 5)

The report refers to changes in thinking about immigration and integration, reframing the immigration influx as 'permanent' rather than temporary (as it was considered in the 1980s) in light of long-term developments (Dutch Government 1994: 17). There is also an attempt to counter the apparently negative public image of immigrants and minorities by presenting the integration/immigration issue not only in negative terms, but also as something positive, with reference to the Dutch history of solidarity with those who are persecuted and 'adrift':

> The fact that immigration is a somewhat permanent feature of our society should not be seen as a threat. To do so is to fail to do justice to the facts; and it inevitably has an unintended, negative influence on people's willingness to accept the new citizens already established here … . Moreover the traditional solidarity of the Dutch people

with those who have been uprooted by persecution remains of great importance. (Dutch Government 1994: 18)

Public opinion is only referred to implicitly and is more or less dismissed as misinformed 'perception'. When we turn to other related policy documents and discussions, this pattern seems to be consistent: they deploy rhetoric of scientific objectivity and frame new policies in terms of a continuity between past and present.

The somewhat paradoxical acknowledgment that migrant policies must be brought up-to-date while at the same time framing new policies as continuous with previous measures also characterised the discussions of a committee of the House of Representatives on 1 November 1994. In this meeting, experts from different political parties discussed the new policy measures described in the *Contourennota* with the Minister of the Interior and the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport. Interestingly, all speakers – both from the left and the right – were in favour of a mandatory citizenship education programme and the development of more restrictive immigration policies. In response to questions regarding the specifics of the intended policy measures, the minister positioned the *Contourennota* as continuous with earlier minority policies which have always been unanimously supported by all political parties, thus framing it as part of a policy tradition:

> The minister pointed out that other countries have sometimes expressed jealousy of the Netherlands because there has been agreement between successive governments and parliaments on the issue of minorities. That is essential for policy. The minister also gave an unqualified 'yes' to the question whether current policy was a continuation of previous policy. (House of Representatives 1994b: 11)

The cultural memories in these examples seem to be primarily self-referential in that the object of remembrance is for the most part restricted to the preceding migrant policies. Nevertheless, the stress on recognising immigration as something permanent and in the Dutch tradition of solidarity indicates an emerging, albeit implicit, connection between the policy memory and the national memory of the Netherlands as a historical site of refuge from persecution.

This connection between specific, specialised policy memories and more broadly shared cultural memories of the Dutch past is far more explicit in the parliamentary debates concerning the *Contourennota*. In 1994, during the General Political Debates following the annual Queen's Speech and the presentation of the National Budget and the Budget Memorandum for that year, the reflection on the current 'state of the nation' was framed within the context of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Ideas about the differences between past and present and the degree to which the Netherlands had changed in the past half century were connected to issues of integration and immigration. As the representative of the far-right party Centrum Democraten (CD) put it:

> 1995 will be a year for commemoration. Above all we will be remembering the fact that, fifty years ago, we escaped from dictatorship and foreign occupation. Nevertheless, the government would be wise to keep in mind that for many Dutch people those events are now overshadowed by what is happening in society today. Some people, older people

especially, hardly recognise the society that we now have and some of them do not even feel at home here anymore. (House of Representatives 1994a, second meeting: 51)

The Prime Minister, Wim Kok of the Social Democrats (PvdA), also opened his speech by recalling the Queen's reference to the 50th anniversary of the liberation from Nazi occupation. For the Prime Minster, this was reason to think about the lessons of the past and to consider what has changed in the past five decades:

The annual Queen's Speech has focused this year on the liberation of our country 50 years ago. Attention can rightly also be paid to the similarities and differences between now and then, to the lessons that we can learn from the past and to the tasks that lie ahead, both at national and international levels. (House of Representatives 1994a, third meeting: 67)

There are implicit and explicit references in this speech to the increasing visibility and presence of different minorities, which call for a new approach. According to Kok, the globalising market, the development of the European Union and the 'open borders' of the Netherlands will make it increasingly difficult to hold on to what is considered 'typically Dutch'. In his speech, Kok stresses that society needs to preserve what it has achieved: 'We are sufficiently proud of a number of Dutch characteristics, our way of life and our lifestyle, and we are grateful that we can hold on to them where possible' (House of Representatives 1994a, third meeting: 68). These references to the end of the Second World War and the influx of migrants in the previous 50 years can be seen as part of a larger narrative in which the presence of immigrants is reinterpreted as a social development that must be dealt with (rather than as something that in time will disappear). This perspective is shared in the public and political sphere, but also forms the backdrop to the positions presented in the policy documents and debates on civic integration.

In these examples, we can identify active forms of recollection in which the policy past is used to frame new policy measures as part of an existing policy tradition. The rhetoric deployed in the *Contourennota* itself, related reports and specialist committees is relatively 'objective' and self-referential, offering a narrative in which previous policy measures are presented as viable, though in need of 'updating' due to 'changed circumstances'. The parliamentary debates, however, show a stronger relation to a broadly shared reinterpretation of the Dutch past. By associating integration policy with the commemoration of the Second World War and the societal changes that occurred in the past 50 years, these new policy measures show themselves to be informed by debates on the transformation of/threat to Dutch cultural identity. One could thus conclude that policy memory in this case is used to establish a sense of (policy) continuity in the face of social change, and thus facilitate acceptance of a more mandatory and restrictive approach to migrants.

The past as 'failure': Integration policy new style

From the late 1990s onwards, debates about integration and immigration policy became increasingly politicised. A shared sense emerged that integration policies had failed and that social cohesion in the Netherlands was in danger (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011: 133). The

articulation of this sentiment was instrumentalised by the populist right-wing party led by Pim Fortuyn (LPF) during the national election campaigns in 2002; the murder of Fortuyn in the run-up to the election, together with 9/11, reinforced the widely shared feeling that multiculturalism had had its day. After the electoral success of the LPF (which won 26 of 150 seats in parliament), many parties felt the need to reformulate their position on integration and immigration. The 'high-alert' status of these issues was amplified by widely publicised incidents involving violence committed by immigrants as well as public controversies over alleged fundamentalist Muslim mosques and radical imams. With the murder of Dutch film-maker Theo van Gogh in 2004 by a radical Islamic Dutch-Moroccan, the reassessment of former policies became one of the main themes in the public and political arena. The idea of policy failure was shared widely and a new discourse of 'toughness' developed with regard to integration policy measures (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011: 148).

This shift in discourse and policy making found expression in the Integration Policy New Style formulated by the government in 2003. Future immigrants would be required to first pass a basic examination in the country of origin and all immigrants who wished to stay in the Netherlands on a permanent basis would have to attend, and successfully complete, citizenship courses. These courses would no longer be funded by the government, but paid for by the immigrants themselves. Failing the integration examination at the end of the course would entail financial sanctions and have consequences for the granting of a permanent residence permit (Strik et al. 2010: 11; Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011: 149). Although the Integration Policy New Style closely followed the discourse and concepts deployed in the Newcomers Integration Act 1998, with its stress on 'citizenship' and 'self-responsibility', there was also a strong emphasis on the acculturation of immigrants into Dutch society. Integration and immigration became linked as the integration demands enabled the selection and restriction of immigrants coming to the Netherlands (Bruquetas-Callejo et al. 2011: 149).

In the government statement (*regeringsverklaring*) that followed elections in 2002, Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende of the Christian democratic CDA described the coalition between his party, the conservative liberal VVD and Pim Fortuyn's LPF as an unprecedented shift in the political landscape. According to Balkenende, citizens had given voice to subaltern sentiments of dissatisfaction and unease, which conveyed a loss of trust in the government's ability to acknowledge and respond adequately to problems in society, particularly those associated with the failed integration of migrants. The coalition parties stressed the failures of the previous policy system. As LPF representative Harry Wijnschenk put it:

> On the matter of scorn: that is really appropriate in the case of integration policy. This has cost an enormous amount of money in the last ten years, but has yielded very little. As a result, our country is now confronted with the problem of huge numbers of immigrants without any future prospects, who have no reason for wanting to become part of Dutch society. (House of Representatives 2002a: 35)

In 2002, a new stress on identification with Dutch cultural values and norms and on the learning of the Dutch language was also evident. Gerrit Zalm of the VVD underlined the importance of immigrants' subscribing to the central values and norms that characterise Dutch culture. Rejecting these meant going back in time:

> The Strategic Agreement speaks of the fundamental values and norms characterising Dutch society. They apply to everyone living in the Netherlands. When it comes to issues that touch on the hard-won principles of our society, such as the separation of church and state, compulsory education, or gender equality, we cannot turn back. Integration can only be successful if citizenship courses include as a matter of priority the 'values and norms of Dutch society'. (House of Representatives 2002a: 48)

Interestingly, most opposition parties – the social democratic PvdA, the socialist SP, the Green Party, two Protestant parties (ChristenUnie and SGP) and the social liberal D66 – did not dispute the assumption that previous policies regarding integration and immigration had failed spectacularly. Though they were critical to varying degrees of the 'tough' measures proposed by the government and questioned the transfer of responsibilities for integration policy from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice, there was a broad consensus that a return to previous policy practices was out of the question. As the representative of the SP stated in response to controversial statements about integration policy made in the media by the Minister of Immigration and Integration Hilbrand Nawijn (LPF):

> Our disappointment relates precisely to … the far-reaching integration policy being proposed, about which the minister has not yet said a word. Has the minister perhaps forgotten that he is minister for integration? Of course, integration has both a qualitative and a quantitative aspect. Two decades of failing integration policy will surely not be resolved by simply restricting the number of new immigrants. (House of Representatives 2002b: 5629)

In this same debate, there was disagreement between members of the coalition parties about the origin of the idea of 'failing migrant policy'. In other words, there was an explicit debate about the 'intellectual history' of the new paradigm. In response to the claim made by Fieroes Zeroual (LPF) that it was Pim Fortuyn who had made immigration policy the 'talk of the day', Stef Blok (VVD) retorted that it was Frits Bolkestein (eminent member of his own conservative liberal party) who had initiated the debate. Blok therefore wondered if Zeroual was trying to 'erase' Bolkestein from the history books (House of Representatives 2002b: 5630). In essence, the discussion revolved around the question whether or not problems related to the integration of immigrants had been ignored by political parties in the past – a subject that was to return in the parliamentary debates after the publication of the evaluation report of the Newcomers Integration Act 1998.

In 2004, the government commissioned the Blok Committee (named after its chairman Stef Blok) to evaluate the results of the Newcomers Integration Act 1998. According to the findings of the Committee, the integration of immigrants had been moderately successful, though it was unclear to what extent the Newcomers Integration Act 1998 had contributed to this. The evaluation report contained a highly detailed overview of the history of integration policies from the 1970s up to the present (Blok Committee 2004).

As Miriam Sterk of the CDA put it, the report gave the impression of continuously inadequate policy frameworks and measures:

> The analysis paints a picture of a government that often reacted too late to developments, and dealt carelessly with the integration of newcomers. In the first place,

by having no policy; then having a policy focused on the identity of the newcomers (who as 'guest workers' were expected to return to their country of origin); then in the 1990s, when this assumption proved false, a policy based purely on the principle of social-economic integration with no concern for other forms of connectedness with society. (House of Representatives 2004: 4094)

Interestingly, the 2004 report also incorporated shared recollections of these measures through interviews with a wide array of people who were involved with or affected by these policies: politicians, academics, policy officials, municipal officers and migrants. These interviews (at least the parts quoted in the report) give the impression that people had been critical of the policy frameworks from the 1970s onwards. In particular, the idea of 'integration with preservation of identity' was deemed highly problematic by the politicians and experts interviewed.

The responses to the 2004 Blok report show the extent to which the topic of integration had become politicised and give evidence of an overall consensus that policy had failed at every level. Interestingly, a substantial part of the debate was characterised by a critical remembering of each political party's role in sustaining a discourse of political correctness and their failure to respond adequately to emerging integration and immigration problems. The large political parties (CDA, VVD, PvdA) felt the need to present evidence showing that, even though they were responsible for much of the policies in the past, they had also achieved some successes; smaller parties (with a history of being in the opposition) made clear that in the past they had already offered alternatives to the dominant policy paradigm.

This political 'bickering' about the past demonstrates a wide-ranging consensus that integration policy since the 1970s had been misguided and ineffectual. What is perhaps the most notable element in the debate is the recurring mantra of learning lessons from the past and what they imply for future policy making. To quote Agnes Kant (SP):

Having looked at ourselves in the mirror, it is now up to the House of Representatives to pronounce on this matter. It wants a forward-looking approach. Of course, this must happen with due consideration for the lessons to be learned from the past. That too was one of the aims of the parliamentary inquiry. The conclusions drawn by the integration report give enough points of reference to draw these lessons from the past and put in place better policy for the future. (House of Representatives 2004: 4126)

In the critical reaction of the Cabinet to the report, this desire to break with the past was underlined even more forcefully: 'Precisely because the government aims to break with the past as far as integration policy is concerned, it feels called upon to react to the final report of the parliamentary inquiry' (Dutch Government 2004: 3). The government concluded that too much value had been attributed to ethnic differences to the detriment of the common good: 'Looking back at the past the government acknowledges that integration policy attached undue importance to the acceptance of differences – in lifestyle, customs, beliefs and attitudes: in short, in culture – at the cost of attention to communalities' (Dutch Government 2004: 7). It too wished to learn from the past:

The report of the Blok commission allows us to draw a lesson from the things that did not succeed or were outright failures due to misguided idealism and carelessness in the

integration of minorities. The government wants to seize this opportunity to start anew. (Dutch Government 2004: 37)

Compared to the responses to the *Contourennota* in 1994, policy debates and documents following elections in 2002 presented more elaborate instances of the active collection of previous policies (i.e., policy memory). In this case, the recollection is in a critical mode and aimed at creating an unambiguous break with the past; for this reason politicians and policy experts feel the need to dwell explicitly on the failures of the preceding policy tradition, including the Newcomers Integration Act 1998, even though this act had already implemented concrete mandatory and restrictive measures. Furthermore, the interrelation between policy memory and broader societal issues (and accompanying memories regarding the 'hard-won' values and norms of Dutch society) is much stronger in this period due to the politicisation of the subject of integration.

Conclusions

Our analysis of cultural memory in Dutch policy debates about integration policy shows two different modes of dealing with the past. In 1994, policy makers stressed the continuity with the past, emphasising the broad consensus among themselves and across political parties. Important changes to the policy were made, but these were presented as 'following in the spirit' of earlier policies. As a result, the existing policy regime remained unchallenged. In 2002, by contrast, a much more fundamental rethinking of integration policy took place, which was accompanied by a much more extensive reflection on, and reinterpretation of, the past. In this process, the past was partly rewritten as previous successes were now labelled failures, and a range of actors stressed that they had already opposed the old regime long before its demise. This reflection and reinterpretation seems to have been a precondition for the establishment of a new policy regime as it effectively delegitimised earlier approaches and created room for a new one.

These episodes reflect several of the key concepts that were identified in our theoretical framework. To begin with, in both episodes, we found examples of active recollection within policy making, but the type of recollection differed. In the mid-1990s, the new policy discourse was presented as following in the spirit of previous policies, yet offering a more fitting, 'updated' vocabulary matching current developments. The evaluation of previous policies in this period is presented as 'objective' and only tacitly connected to public discourse and opinions. In the early 2000s, recollections of past policies became much more elaborate and were connected to more widely shared discourses on Dutch identity and its values and norms. While equally claiming to be objective, they involved reinterpreting the past from a critical perspective that justified a new departure in the present.

This difference coincided with and was driven by the different contexts within which policy making took place. Although both episodes saw changes in integration policies, debates in the early 2000s took place in the context of the perceived failure of and crisis around the integration of ethnic minorities in Dutch society. This led to a search for new policies. In the process, the legitimisation of new approaches was underpinned by a

delegitimisation of past policies. This in turn required the (active) rewriting of history as it had been perceived until then.

The episodes also illustrate the concept of 'policy memory', which we introduced as a distinct category of cultural memory. Most of the recollections of the past in the debates we studied referred to past policies (and their alleged successes or failures). This underlines the self-referential character of these debates: debates about policies were, at least partly, fed by memories of past policies. This policy memory is a distinct category among other types of cultural memory. Research in the field of cultural memory has, by and large, focused on the formation of mnemonic communities around the recollection of disruptive events such as war or of cultural achievements during times of peace. Our concentration on policy memory thus forms an important addition to the literature on cultural memory, but also to the literature on policy making, in which the cultural construction of past policies has received little attention.

In the theoretical section we stressed the interconnections between policy memory and memories shared in wider society and politics. The case of Dutch integration policy clearly shows this connection as the debate on specific integration policies was strongly influenced, if not propelled, by wider political and social debates about immigration and the position of immigrants in Dutch society. As part of that wider debate, shared memories of past policies were also rewritten.

The strong interconnections between national and policy memory are linked to the increased salience and politicisation around integration policy in the Netherlands from 2002 onwards. Increased politicisation is arguably a precondition for both, since it moves policy debates out of closed policy communities and into broader 'macropolitical' venues for debate. Bryan Jones (1994: 185) observed that such moves usually occur 'in an environment of changing issue definitions and heightened attention by the media and broader publics', which is likely to lead to major policy change. From a cultural memory perspective, we may add that that process is accompanied by the redefinition of past policies and their legacies, which in turn legitimises, and thereby makes possible, the policy change.

These findings have several implications for our understanding of policy making and policy change. First, it shows that both continuity and change in policies is underpinned by understandings of the past, be they implicit or explicit. The exact role played by such memories and their interrelationships with other factors in the policy process require further study and specification, as do the conditions under which memories play a greater or lesser role in policy making. Our analysis hopefully serves as a first step in that endeavour by showing the potential role of cultural memory in policy making. This may help to identify the sources and character of ideational change in policy processes.

Second, if we are to understand the role of cultural memory in policy making, we need to adopt a more dynamic and nuanced perspective on the way such memories are constructed and reconstructed. Lessons from the past are not simply remembered or forgotten; they are periodically modified and reconstructed in processes of reconceiving the past. This perspective may add a new layer to existing insights into the role of historical analogies and focusing events, the memory of which is likely to be subject to changing understanding over time.

Third, reconceptualisations of the past function to legitimise policy changes *and* to drive those changes. As Brandström et al. (2005: 206) already pointed out for the use of historical analogies, the 'cognitive' and 'political' functions of these analogies cannot always be separated and are intertwined in specific cases. The reconstruction of cultural memories around Dutch integration policy in the early 2000s showed exactly that dynamic: changing conceptions of past policies served to legitimise policy change, but in doing so also facilitated the change to a new regime. This points towards the fact that cultural memories are not only rhetorical devices, but also serve as facilitators and catalysts of change in policy processes.

Acknowledgements

Note

1. All quotes have been translated from the Dutch original by the authors. The original Dutch texts with translations are available upon request from the authors.

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