The Dutch Dream

Americanization, Pop Culture, and National Identity

On July 27, 2005, the day after Mohammed B., the convicted murderer of the controversial Dutch filmmaker and columnist Theo van Gogh, was sentenced to life imprisonment, the Boomerang company released a free postcard featuring graffiti by Van Gogh’s teenage son. Inspired by urban American hip-hop culture (often defined as African-American), the graffiti uses American iconography – the text “Theo Forever” in English, Donald Duck, and the prominently pictured American flag with the name Theo spelled out in little stars – to provide a very personal expression of both remembrance and protest. On the one hand, the graffiti can be interpreted within a post-9/11 political discourse, in which Samuel Huntington’s polarizing thesis of the “Clash of Civilizations” has been accepted by many as self-evident. By connecting him explicitly to American symbolism, Theo van Gogh is placed on the side of the USA in its War on Terror, against the Muslim extremists who took his life. On the other hand, the graffiti can also be perceived as an example of American iconography as an international lingua franca, which is no longer connected to a specific American context but free to be appropriated and interpreted on local levels. In that case, the American flag does not function as a symbol of the nation-state USA, but instead has become a sign of “America,” connoting, in this example, the freedom of expression.

The two interpretations of the Van Gogh graffiti do not contradict each other, but they do show how a distinction can be made between the nation-state USA and an imagined America. The first interpretation fits the unilateral stance of the nation-state USA, best exemplified by the now-famous words of President George W. Bush, spoken in a televised address to the American Congress nine days after 9/11: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” The second interpretation fits the notion of an imagined America as a symbol of the freedom of expression, thereby suggesting that the American
conception of such a value has come to be accepted as universal. In this chapter, I will discuss specific Dutch pop-cultural artifacts which appropriate elements of American pop culture – images, genre conventions, and audiovisual language – to comment on the Dutch political reality since 9/11, and, in particular, the assassinations of the controversial Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn on May 6, 2002, and of Theo van Gogh on November 2, 2004. As has been suggested in the Dutch media, the horrifying murders of Fortuyn and Van Gogh can be perceived as “our 9/11,” a connection which was immediately recognized by conspiracy theorists who pointed out that Van Gogh was murdered exactly 911 days after Fortuyn. More important, just as 9/11 prompted debates in the USA about redefining what it means to be American, the murders of Fortuyn and Van Gogh have been interpreted as marking a drastic change in the Dutch political climate, shifting from the celebrated principle of multicultural tolerance towards a renewed patriotism and a more restrictive view on Dutch national identity. Similar to the post-9/11 debates in the USA, there is a strong call for a return to the history of the nation-state as the foundation of a collective national identity, often envisioned, evoking Benedict Anderson’s concept, as a Dutch imagined community.

To explore how an Americanized Dutch pop culture adds to the post-9/11 political discourse about national identity in the Netherlands, I will present six case studies: an episode of the television talent show Idols presenting national identity as a theme in pop culture; the pop tributes to Pim Fortuyn remembering him as the Dutch Kennedy; hip-hop songs by Moroccan-Dutch and white Dutch rappers commenting on Dutch society; the special “Dutch Dream” issue of the glossy magazine LINDA. featuring successful “ethnic” celebrities; the movies Shouf Shouf Habibi! (2004) and Kicks (2007), both directed by Albert ter Heerdt, which use Hollywood conventions to address Dutch multiculturalism; and finally, the Dutch road movie Rabat (2011), which turned Moroccan-Dutch actor Nasrdin Dchar into an award-winning movie star. By analyzing these specific pop-cultural artifacts, I suggest that “America” can function as a shared point of reference, connecting different positions within the political debate through the common language of American pop culture, rather than falling back upon an imagined community based on Dutch national history.

**Pop Culture and National Identity**

Similar to its counterparts in other countries, the Dutch version of the television talent show Idols (RTL4, 2002-2008) consists of contestants performing cover versions of classic, most often American, pop songs, which can be seen...
as a literal form of karaoke Americanism. Each broadcast is centered around one particular theme, ranging from “The 1980s” and “Motown” to “Disco” and “Top 40 Hits.” Although themes may vary during each season, the “Dutch Hits” theme always returns, as one broadcast is dedicated to the contestants singing original Dutch pop songs, either in Dutch or English. In this manner, Dutchness is just another theme among others, which is reconfirmed by the way Idols presents the theme in its opening segment. During the second season, for example, the “Disco” episode (27 March 2004) shows the contestants dressed in platform-soled shoes, bellbottom pants, and big Afro wigs. In the “Dutch Hits” episode (3 April 2004), they are wearing traditional Dutch costumes. At first sight, the black Columbian-born contestant JK wearing a folkloristic Dutch costume looks particularly out of place, giving the impression of a drag performance, as his blackness contradicts the traditional whiteness of Dutch folklore. However, JK’s hypervisibility actually reveals that the same could be said of the white Dutch contestants, showing that they too are in “drag” by donning traditional Dutch dress. In the global pop television format of Idols, there is no real difference between disco revivalism and Dutch national folklore, as both offer just another occasion to dress up in fancy costumes.

The “Dutch Hits” episode of Idols is significant because it shows how through pop culture the presentation of national identity can be reduced to the clichéd and stereotypical images of global tourism. As host Reinout Oerlemans tells the audience, to “get into the right mood,” the contestants are placed in a “typically Dutch setting” as they are being tested on their knowledge of Dutch national heritage. In addition to the contestants wearing traditional Dutch costumes, this “typically Dutch setting” is created through the use of the color orange in combination with the red-white-and-blue of the national flag and images of Dutch tourism: tulips, windmills, wooden shoes, and cheese. The conventional orange sentiment is evoked with footage of the national soccer team and the Dutch royal family. That such a stereotypical expression of national identity should not be taken too seriously becomes clear when the contestants are quizzed about Dutch national history. None of them recognize the name of national hero Michiel de Ruyter, the famous Dutch sea admiral of the seventeenth century, jokingly suggesting instead that he must be a fishmonger or a bicycle repairman. Since the general frame of reference of both Idols and its contestants, in all the episodes, is pop culture – and American pop culture in particular – it is not surprising that the depiction of Dutch national identity conforms with the clichéd images that pop culture provides. Moreover, the performance of Dutchness fits within the overall karaoke Americanism of Idols, in which Dutchness is treated as just another theme, in spite of being performed by Dutch contestants on a Dutch television show.
By perceiving this particular performance of Dutchness on Idols as a form of karaoke Americanism, I am not suggesting that any stereotypical expression of pop culture is by definition American or should be considered as such. Also the question of whether or not Idols (based on an originally British format) is American is beside the point. The significance of this particular example is found in the notion that the Dutch edition of Idols uses its international format to present a national identity which is based on clichéd images of Dutchness taken from a global, yet American-dominated, pop culture. In this way, Idols does not present Dutchness as an explicit local or national form of self-depiction but rather as a pastiche based on how Dutchness is believed to be globally perceived. The Dutchness as presented on Idols may be an extreme example of how pop culture reduces a national identity to such a clichéd image. Nevertheless, it is telling that in a time when the redefinition of national identity has become a topic of political urgency, the depiction of Dutch nationality on Idols is taken for granted.

Since 9/11 and the assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh, the political debate on Dutch national identity is predominantly focused on the danger of Muslim extremism and the issue of ethnic integration. The fear that the national identity could be undermined by the cultural imperialism of Americanization has conspicuously disappeared from the political agenda. Quite the contrary, now the USA is often mentioned as a successful multicultural society to be emulated. As Peter van der Veer has argued, the political debate says more about a changing Dutch culture than about Islam, even if most discussions are limited to the issue of Muslim fundamentalism. Particularly the assassinations challenged preexisting notions of Dutchness, as these “events did not fit the Netherlands’s global image and tourist brand as a wealthy, tolerant, and perhaps excessively liberal society.” A catchphrase in the debate is “the multicultural drama,” based on an influential essay of the same name, published on January 29, 2000 (thus before 9/11) by left-wing intellectual Paul Scheffer. In the essay, Scheffer argues that the seriousness of the situation has been underestimated. The Dutch policy of multiculturalism has resulted in ethnic segregation and the exclusion of ethnic minorities from a collective Dutch history and identity, comparable to Anderson’s notion of imagined community. The celebrated Dutch principle of tolerance through respecting ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity often turned out to be an indifference toward the immigrant population instead. As a result, first-generation immigrants have recreated their homeland cultures separately from mainstream Dutch society, leaving second-generation immigrants torn between the traditional culture of their parents and an indifferent Dutch mainstream culture. Although Paul Scheffer wrote the essay before 9/11, he believes that the multicultural drama has been
reconfirmed by 9/11 and the assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh. “Once you accept that multicultural argument against teaching them our history, you are excluding them from collective memory, from an enormous chance for renewal,” as Scheffer explained the Dutch multicultural drama to a reporter of The New Yorker in 2006, adding that “September 11th gave many of them their narrative.”

While “The Multicultural Drama” can be credited for exposing some of the actual problems facing Dutch multiculturalism, including the possibility of ethnic segregation and the social exclusion of ethnic groups from mainstream society, the essay does imply a rigid distinction between “our” and “their” culture, and thereby limits “our” culture to an identity which is predominantly formed by a collective national history. Even though national history is important, such a perspective, including the added comments after 9/11, is problematic for two reasons. First, the multicultural drama perspective presents the collective national identity as an uncontested given, suggesting that both “our” and “their” culture are fixed entities. Second, such a perspective tends to ignore that 9/11 and the assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh not only gave “many of them their narrative” but also “us” a range of narratives, including ones that polarize the debate, as well as others that instead challenge the rigid “us” versus “them” divide. This wide range of narratives can be found in the political and public debates, but also in literature, the arts, academic discussions, and in pop culture. I focus specifically on pop culture, as within this realm, the notion of national identity (including the question of who belongs to “us” and who belongs to “them”) is often expressed through the appropriation of American genre conventions and audiovisual language. Inspired by popular African-American hip-hop, national identity has been addressed in Dutch hip-hop songs by both “white” and “ethnic” rappers, including Ali B, Brainpower, Lange Frans & Baas B, Raymzter, and Postman. On television, drama series such as Najib en Julia (AVRO, 2002), directed by Theo van Gogh, and Dunya & Desie (NPS, 2002-2004) deal with romance and friendship between white Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch teenagers, whereas sitcoms like Bradaz (NPS, 2001-2002) and Shouf Shouf (VARA, 2006-2007) take the multicultural society as the setting for amusing cultural misunderstandings among characters of different ethnic backgrounds, only to return to a state of ethnic and national harmony. Popular Dutch movies like Shouf Shouf Habibi! (Albert ter Heerdt, 2004), Het Schnitzelparadijs (2005), and ’n Beetje Verliefd (2006), the last two directed by Martin Koolhoven, use the genre conventions of the Hollywood comedy to present the “funny” side of Dutch multiculturalism, showing that it is not always a multicultural drama, but often a multicultural comedy as well.

THE DUTCH DREAM
As Thomas Elsaesser has suggested, Theo van Gogh – and, to a lesser extent, Pim Fortuyn – also operated within the realm of pop culture, as he used television, film, the internet, and the popular press as “fields of symbolic action, deploying a language of signs, clichés and stereotypes as the common code of a culture that lives its differences in the realm of discourse, rather than by force.”

Although the assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh may suggest that these fields of symbolic action no longer provide space for a pop-cultural discourse, having been replaced by the political “reality” of Muslim extremism, both 9/11 and the assassinations also operate within these fields of symbolic action. The murder of Pim Fortuyn, for example, inspired Van Gogh to make the political thriller 06/05, released posthumously in 2005, in which actual news footage of Fortuyn’s political rise, his assassination, and its aftermath are combined with a fictional conspiracy narrative. Dutch film reviewers immediately made the rather obvious comparison between Van Gogh and the American filmmaker Oliver Stone by perceiving 06/05 as a Dutch version of JFK (1991), the Hollywood film about the conspiracy behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Moreover, the assassination of Theo van Gogh too can be interpreted within the fields of symbolic action as, suggested by Elsaesser, “the murder itself, with its ritualistic overtones and easily decodable symbolism, had the performative dimension of other acts of barbarity deliberately staged to produce shocking media images and atrocity events.”

Without denying the political reality of these events, one can also perceive the assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh as part of a pop-cultural discourse on Dutch national identity, functioning as symbolic references in films, television programs, websites, and pop songs.

Like the depiction of Dutchness on Idols, the pop-cultural artifacts that I will discuss below can be analyzed as performances of karaoke Americanism, in which American pop culture is being appropriated to provide commentary on Dutch national identity since 9/11. Starting with the appraisal of Pim Fortuyn as the Dutch Kennedy, I will analyze how the genre conventions and audiovisual language of American pop culture are applied to discuss notions of belonging in Dutch society, questioning the explicit or implicit “us” versus “them” divide which all these artifacts address. Operating within fields of symbolic action that are heavily inspired by the American original, these pop-cultural objects tend to refer to an imagined America, rather than the nation-state USA or a Dutch imagined community, thereby possibly opening up space for a shared sense of belonging across different cultural and ethnic identities.
In the television program *De Waarheid* (SBS6, 2002-2003), the Dutch pop singer Gerard Joling visits national celebrities to check whether or not the stories in that week’s tabloids are telling the truth. In the episode broadcast on May 4, 2002, Joling interviews politician Pim Fortuyn, the controversial independent candidate whose sudden popularity is dominating the national elections campaign at that moment. Running on a populist anti-immigration and anti-Islam platform, Fortuyn seems to attract the votes of a “silent majority” fed up with traditional politics. Yet, Joling and Fortuyn are not talking about politics. Both men are openly and quite flamboyantly gay, and they frankly discuss the lack of romance in their lives, concluding that, if neither of them finds Mister Right, they might have to grow old together. Two days later, Pim Fortuyn is assassinated at the Hilversum Media Park, the center of Dutch media, shot to death by a white Dutch animal rights activist. “Everyone is sad, the message was so bad, democracy has died, and everybody cried,” sings Gerard Joling in English on his single “At Your Service,” paying tribute to the slain politician he had interviewed so recently. “At 6.09, the sixth of May became an awful day.”

That Pim Fortuyn was shot at the center of Dutch media emphasizes the notion that Fortuyn was a media phenomenon. As Ian Buruma suggests, Fortuyn not only used “showbiz as a political tool” (in the tradition of politicians such as Silvio Berlusconi, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Ronald Reagan), he also used “his instinct for pop sentimentality.” Peter van der Veer compares Fortuyn to Dutch “campy, extroverted gay entertainers,” suggesting that his gayness enabled him to “say things in a strident manner and [to combine] a feminine vulnerability with a sharp and entertaining irony.” Unlike most other Dutch politicians, Pim Fortuyn fitted easily within the realm of pop-cultural stardom, using not only the serious press but also the tabloids (including a photo session of Fortuyn relaxing in his luxurious bathroom at home) to present himself to the larger public. His death led to a massive collective mourning, reminiscent of the death of Princess Diana and befitting his charismatic star image. In both the serious and popular press, Fortuyn’s death was also immediately compared to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Although Kennedy had been shot four decades earlier (and several European political leaders had been assassinated in the intervening years), the Kennedy assassination has become part of the global audiovisual collective memory, through the Zapruder film and Hollywood movies like Oliver Stone’s *JFK* (1991). Moreover, Fortuyn also has been compared to Kennedy as the symbol of a political promise that could not be fulfilled. Dutch television repeatedly showed a fragment of an interview with Fortuyn in which he pointed at a portrait, hanging in his own living room, of
John F. Kennedy, saying that he took the American president as one of his role models. The Dutch tabloids quickly picked up this connection by recalling Pim Fortuyn’s attempt to confront conventional politics as “the guts of the Dutch Kennedy.”

The day after Fortuyn’s assassination, the Dutch commercial radio channel Yorin FM broadcast an adapted version of Tom Clay’s “What the World Needs Now Is Love.” The original version, released by Motown in 1971, is an audio collage of live radio coverage of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy played over the music of Burt Bacharach’s “What the World Needs Now Is Love” and Dion’s “Abraham, Martin, and John.” By adding Fortuyn’s voice and audio fragments of the live news coverage of his death to this melodramatic plea for peace and racial harmony, Yorin FM places Pim Fortuyn alongside these American political martyrs. However, this connection is not based on the political beliefs of those who were assassinated, but on the similarities in the way they were assassinated, in the way the media portrayed their assassinations, and what they have come to mean in cultural history. Just like Robert Kennedy, Pim Fortuyn was shot during an election campaign, and just like the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the death of Pim Fortuyn tends to be perceived as the end of innocence. In this way, Fortuyn’s death is framed within a specific American pop-cultural context, yet one which is used to articulate an equally specific Dutch collective experience. The comparison of Pim Fortuyn to President Kennedy is reinforced by the aforementioned film 06/05, the Dutch JFK directed by Theo van Gogh, suggesting that the conspiracy behind the death of Fortuyn reveals the corrupted nature of politics.

A similar sentiment is expressed by Gerard Joling on his tribute single, as he sings: “Our future went so wrong, our innocence was gone.” The song’s title refers to the English slogan “At Your Service” which Fortuyn used to express that he represents the voice of “the common people.” Singer Connie Breukhoven, better known as Vanessa, also released a tribute single. Instead of singing an original composition, Vanessa reworked “When You Say Nothing At All,” an American country song originally recorded by Keith Whitley, which had become a global hit song in the versions by the American country singer Alison Krauss and by the Irish, former Boyzone singer Ronan Keating. In Vanessa’s version, “You say it best when you say nothing at all” is changed into “You said it best, but now you say nothing at all.” One may wonder why Dutch singers decide to pay tribute to a slain Dutch politician by singing in English. When these songs were released, however, this question never arose. A possible explanation may be that the Dutch audience expects and thus accepts such songs to be sung in English, as both songs build upon the themes, rhetoric, and melodrama
expressed in songs like USA for Africa’s “We Are the World” and Elton John’s “Candle in the Wind” (both his original tribute to film star Marilyn Monroe and the adapted version in honor of Princess Diana). With these songs as original examples, singing in English may sound more convincing, sincere, and authentic. Moreover, echoing the rhetoric of these originals, Joling and Vanessa take freedom of speech and racial harmony as starting points. “They can never explain what we hear when you just say your thing” sings Vanessa, a reworking of the original line “They can never define what’s been said between your heart and mine.” Similar to “We Are the World,” Gerard Joling calls upon “the people in the street, black or white” to fight together to create a peaceful and respectful society. “As one country we’ll go on, together, together, we are strong.”

As performances of karaoke Americanism, both tribute singles imitate the American original to such an extent that, if we did not know better, one might think that they are parodies rather than genuinely meant tributes (which could explain why both singles were commercial failures). Nevertheless, they do reinforce the pop sentimentality which has come to define the Fortuyn phenomenon, fitting the depiction of Fortuyn as the Dutch Kennedy, a martyr who not only embodies the good of society, but most of all its unfulfilled promise. In this way, Fortuyn’s political agenda of anti-immigration and anti-Islam is pushed to the background, being replaced by the allegedly universal values of an imagined America such as freedom of expression, individual liberty, and racial harmony, all expressed in the hollow rhetoric of the pop-cultural cliché.

The Land of… F____ing Moroccans??!

“It may sound simple what I say, but they look at me as if I flew into the Twin Towers,” raps the Moroccan-Dutch hip-hopper Raymzter in Dutch.15 Released in October 2002, his hit single “Kutmarokkanen??!,” translated by Time magazine as “F____ing Moroccans,” addresses the negative way in which Moroccan-Dutch youth are represented in the Dutch media, particularly since the terrorist attacks of 9/11.16 The song takes its title from the infamous slip of the tongue by the white left-wing Amsterdam alderman Rob Oudkerk. When he whispered to the mayor of Amsterdam to complain about those “kutmarokkanen,” he did not realize that his words were being recorded by television. Although never intended to be broadcast, Oudkerk’s use of such a pejorative term shows that, in the then-current political climate, the overt stigmatization of Moroccan-Dutch youth was not limited to the rhetoric of right-wing politicians like Pim Fortuyn. By appropriating the pejorative term, Raymzter effectively counters this negative representation, as the term no longer merely refers to Moroccan-
Dutch youth as potential criminals or terrorists, but also to a popular hit single by a rising Moroccan-Dutch hip-hop star.

Similar to other Moroccan-Dutch hip-hop, “Kutmarokkanen??!” – both the song and the accompanying music video – combines the sounds and imagery of African-American hip-hop with local Dutch youth street culture and Arabic pop music. While the Dutch lyrics emphasize how the negative media representation has led to the stigmatization of Moroccan-Dutch youth, the music video presents an alternative scenario by showing white Dutch girls being barred from entering the disco, whereas Moroccan-Dutch girls are allowed to enter and join Raymzter in his performance of the song. The single’s cover art presents an even more explicit criticism of the negative media representation. Mocking the front page of the Dutch daily newspaper De Telegraaf, known for its alleged sensationalist and populist coverage of ethnic minorities, the cover presents the front page of De Raymzter, with a tough-looking Raymzter pictured in close-up under the headline “Kutmarokkanen??!” with the blurb “Moroccans are now also terrorizing the pop charts.”17 The fictional article reports that more and more Moroccan youth are making pop music, much to the dismay of the established radio channels, which, as the quote by an anonymous deejay reveals, may appreciate that Moroccans are making western music, but also claim that there is no room for them on the play lists. The radio channels clearly represent mainstream Dutch culture at large, which tends to tell Moroccan-Dutch youth to actively participate in society, while simultaneously excluding them from the job market. Eventually, “Kutmarokkanen??!” broke through the barrier that it criticizes, at least in the music industry, as the song was included on the play lists of the radio and music television channels, becoming the first Moroccan-Dutch hit single and setting an example for future Moroccan-Dutch pop stars to follow.

That a Dutch rap song about exclusion succeeds in being included within mainstream pop culture befits its hip-hop genre. “Kutmarokkanen??!” can be perceived as a cultural appropriation of African-American hip-hop, a music genre and initial subculture which finds itself in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, hip-hop can be seen as the rebellious voice of a marginalized group within American society, whereas, on the other, hip-hop has become one of the most dominant and profitable genres in American commercial pop culture.18 As such, hip-hop can be simultaneously rebellious and mainstream, representing positions of both exclusion and inclusion, eventually becoming part of the culture that it criticizes. On the global scale, hip-hop is a very powerful form of Americanization, providing the language and imagery for youth subcultures to shape their rebellion against authority, quite similar to the way rock ’n’ roll functioned five decades earlier.19 Yet, simultaneously,
hip-hop is a profitable commodity, selling American pop culture around the world.

Whereas Raymzter appropriates the rebellious rhetoric of African-American hip-hop to protest against structural discrimination in Dutch society, the white Dutch hip-hop duo Lange Frans & Baas B use rap to protest against so-called “senseless violence” in general. Released in October 2004, their number-one hit single “Zinloos” (“Senseless”) pays tribute to four different victims who all were killed for no apparent reason and as such became symbols of senseless violence. Immediately after the assassination of Theo van Gogh, with “Zinloos” still on the pop charts, Lange Frans & Baas B added a verse about Van Gogh, wishing that their “homie” Theo may rest in peace. One year later, they released another number-one hit single, “Het Land Van…” (“The Land of…”), an ambiguous ode to their homeland. Presenting the Netherlands as the land of Pim Fortuyn and Volkert van de G. (the convicted assassin of Fortuyn) and of Theo van Gogh and Mohammed B., Lange Frans & Baas B depict a nation of uncertainty: “[We] come from the land with the most cultures per square meter / yet where people are afraid to have dinner with their neighbors / and integration is a wonderful word / but shit is fucking bitter when nobody listens.” Even though they recognize the country’s confused state after the assassinations and its uncritical support of “Uncle Bush” in his War on Terror, Lange Frans & Baas B also depict the Netherlands as a country which cherishes freedom and where everyone is included within the patriotic orange sentiment when the national soccer team plays.

Through their use of hip-hop to comment on Dutch society, Lange Frans & Baas B are comparable to Raymzter, appropriating African-American hip-hop within a local context. However, by explicitly defining identity on the basis of nationality, the Netherlands as “the land of Lange Frans & Baas B” invites ambiguous interpretations. On the one hand, the nation is presented as a multicultural society, providing a home to people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Yet, on the other hand, the song also can be interpreted as implying that Lange Frans & Baas B still perceive the Netherlands as their home, in spite of its multicultural character. Here ethnicity proves to be significant. Since Lange Frans & Baas B are white, their Dutchness is uncontested, making their expression of a confused yet hopeful Dutch national identity seemingly representative of the collective Dutch state of mind. Such a perspective is reconfirmed by the music video, which shows Lange Frans & Baas B, dressed in designer suits rather than typical hip-hop attire, performing “Het Land Van…” live at the Amsterdam Uitmarkt in front of a large outdoor audience. Shots of their performance alternate with shots of the audience, showing close-ups of individual audience members listening attentively, only to erupt in approv-
ing cheers at the song’s finale. With a few exceptions, like the close-up of a young black woman, the shown audience members are white, emphasizing the whiteness of the traditional Dutch national identity. Moreover, different than “ethnic” rappers, Lange Frans & Baas B do not need to account for their ethnicity, as their Dutchness is taken for granted. One can only wonder, had “Het Land Van…” been performed by a Moroccan-Dutch rapper, whether or not such an explicit expression of a collective Dutchness would have received the same approving response, including the number-one spot on the pop charts.

“Het Land Van…” gets a provocative response with another song entitled “Het Land Van…,” rapped in Dutch by the Moroccan-Dutch hip-hop artist Salah Edin, released in 2007. The song can be seen as a counter-narrative, presenting a far more negative perspective on Dutch society. In the song, Edin denounces the Netherlands as a capitalist and materialistic country in which covert racism prevails: “The land where I was born … / the land which calls me the fucking Moroccan.” Moreover, the song samples audio fragments of, among others, Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh defending freedom of expression, suggesting, placed within the song’s context, that freedom of expression has resulted in hatred against Dutch Muslims. The song’s music video shows a conventional white Dutch family whose cozy home is being infiltrated by the media images of Muslim terrorism. Simultaneously, Salah Edin is shown slowly transforming from a mainstream young man into a Muslim extremist, eventually dressed in orange overalls as worn by the prisoners of Guantánamo Bay. The orange overalls signify both the global and the local, as the image of the Muslim terrorist is explicitly connected to the politics of the nation-state USA, whereas the color of the overalls connotes the Dutch orange sentiment.

Although explicitly commenting on Dutch society, both the song as well as the album it’s from, Nederlands grootste nachtmerrie (“Holland’s Worst Nightmare”), can be seen as appropriations of African-American pop culture. The album’s promotional material emphasizes the role of its American producer Focus, who is a protégé of the famous African-American gangsta rap producer Dr. Dre. In this way, Salah Edin obtains authenticity as being a real gangsta rapper. However, instead of the stereotypical image of the tough gangsta rapper, Edin adopts the image of the stereotypical Muslim terrorist. His picture on the album cover mimics the widely publicized mug shot of Mohammed B., the convicted assassin of Theo van Gogh. Edin has denied that the cover art is intended as a provocation, saying that instead the imitation of the mug shot is meant to emphasize the tendency in the media to portray all Moroccan-Dutch young men as potential terrorists: “This is the way the average white Dutch citizen sees me, as a young Moroccan Muslim radical. That’s why I chose to do this picture and use it for the front cover of my album. It is
in no way supporting the deeds of Mohammed B.” Yet, as a hip-hop persona, Edin’s impersonation of Mohammed B. functions quite similarly to the gangsta image of African-American rappers like 50 Cent, both as a commercial sign of street credibility and hip-hop authenticity as well as a provocative political statement.

Taken together, the rap songs by Raymzter, Lange Frans & Baas B, and Salah Edin show how the genre conventions and audiovisual language of African-American hip-hop have been translated and appropriated into a specific Dutch context, providing perspectives not only on Dutch national identity but also on the experience of structural racism and the negative depiction of Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Dutch media. However, the songs differ greatly in the messages that they convey. The two versions of “Het Land Van…” can be perceived as the two oppositional poles of the “us” versus “them” divide, in which the Dutch “us” perspective is represented by Lange Frans & Baas B and the Moroccan “them” perspective by Salah Edin. Perhaps tellingly, the first became a number-one hit single on the pop charts, whereas the second was banned from the Dutch music television channels MTV and TMF. Moreover, the divide is reinforced by Lange Frans & Baas B explicitly identifying themselves with their “homie” Theo van Gogh, and Salah Edin with Mohammed B. With his single “Kutmarokkanen??!,” on the contrary, Raymzter challenges the rigid “us” versus “them” divide, as he counters racism by not only protesting but also crossing the media’s ethnic boundaries that have kept Moroccan-Dutch rappers from commercial success. Nevertheless, although coming from different perspectives along the lines of the “us” versus “them” divide, the three songs are significantly similar in the way they appropriate the genre conventions of African-American hip-hop. They may have different stories to tell, yet Raymzter, Lange Frans & Baas B, and Salah Edin have the language of American pop culture in common.

Linda’s Dutch Dream

In February 2005, the monthly LINDA. magazine published a special issue on the success of ethnic integration in the Netherlands, using the English title “Dutch Dream” as its main theme. Introduced a year earlier, LINDA. is a lifestyle glossy magazine based on the star persona of Linda de Mol, one of the most popular television hosts of the Netherlands. Known as just Linda, she is also an actress, starring in the television drama series Gooische Vrouwen (Talpa/RTL4, 2005-2009), often described as a Dutch “remake” of the American television series Desperate Housewives (ABC, 2004-2012). Her initial image of being
Holland’s favorite daughter-in-law evolved into the far more glamorous image of a “real” star, a transformation which runs parallel to the role she plays in the Dutch film comedy Ellis in Glamourland (Pieter Kramer, 2004). By starring alongside Joan Collins, most famous for her glamorous role as Alexis in Dynasty (ABC, 1981-1989), Linda, like her character in the film, has become part of the glamour that defines movie stardom, appropriating the star myth of Hollywood. It is Linda’s star persona that forms the basis of LINDA magazine, which is clearly modeled after the American glossy O magazine, based on the star persona of the African-American talk show host Oprah Winfrey. Like Oprah, Linda is featured on the cover of each issue, and, also like Oprah, she always emphasizes her personal experience and interest in specific topics – ranging from cosmetic surgery, fashion, and dieting, to love, religion and multiculturalism – to help her predominantly female readership relate to these themes.

As Linda explains in her editorial, the idea for a special “Dutch Dream” issue came up in May 2004, as a response to the negative media representation of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. Although she mentions neither 9/11 nor the popularity and subsequent assassination of Pim Fortuyn, she clearly suggests that these events helped to shape the popular assumption that ethnic integration has failed. To counter such a negative perception, LINDA would focus on the success stories of ethnic minorities and on ethnic products, such as food and fashion, that have enriched Dutch culture. But then, writes Linda, “all went wrong.” Theo van Gogh was murdered and everything changed. “I discovered that I had thoughts I’d never had before, and of which I am definitely not proud. Suddenly it was my Netherlands and they’d better not think they can tell us to shut up or tell us how to live.” By recognizing and expressing her blunt first reaction, Linda opens up to her readers, enabling them to have their own possible feelings of intolerance acknowledged, a typical Oprah Winfrey strategy. Then, countering her own initial reaction, Linda returns to the need for a more positive perspective on ethnic integration, focusing both on the “facts” (in the form of an article based on a report by the Dutch government’s Social and Cultural Planning Office) and on the “fun” side: “the success stories, the influence on fashion, culture, and eating habits.”

By using the title “Dutch Dream” to highlight the positive side of ethnic integration, LINDA evokes the symbolic rhetoric of the American Dream, including its focus on the economic and social-cultural success of individuals, which is embodied by the featured “ethnic” Dutch celebrities. The magazine’s cover shows a festive dinner table, with Linda as the white media queen sitting in the middle, flanked by, on one side, the Moroccan-Dutch rapper Ali B and the Surinamese-Dutch stand-up comedian Jörgen Raymann, and on
the other, the Surinamese-Dutch sports anchorman Humberto Tan and the Surinamese-Dutch television host Sylvana Simons. When unfolding the fold-out cover (similar to the cover of *Vanity Fair*), the dinner table is extended to include eight more “ethnic role models,” symbolizing that ethnic integration in Dutch society can be successful: the Algerian-Dutch actor Hakim Traïdia, famous for his role on the Dutch *Sesame Street*, the Moroccan-Dutch singer and former *Idols* contestant Hind, the Surinamese-Dutch musical star Stanley Burleson, the Surinamese-Dutch member of Dutch parliament Laetitia Griffith, the Argentinean jewelry maker Rodrigo Otazu, the Surinamese-Dutch singer Ruth Jacott, the Moroccan-Dutch actor Mimoun Oaïssa of *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* fame, and the Moroccan-Dutch soccer player Mohammad Allach. With the exception of Ali B, who wears “his own clothes,” all are dressed in designer outfits, befitting the magazine’s celebratory focus on social-economic success. Although several white Dutch men are featured inside the magazine, they are conspicuously absent from its cover, or at least visually — they are present in three of the four blurbs printed on *LINDA.*’s cover. Moreover, most of the featured ethnic celebrities are either Moroccan-Dutch or Surinamese-Dutch, while the Antillean-Dutch, the Turkish-Dutch, and the Chinese-Dutch, among others, are not represented.

Inside the magazine, all featured celebrities are interviewed about their individual success. Staying within the rhetoric of the American Dream, most of them stress the importance of hard work and believing in one’s destiny. For example, Sylvana Simons argues that there is no relation between one’s ethnic background and what one can achieve in life: “You can become successful by working hard, by clearly setting your dreams and goals.” Humberto Tan suggests that young “ethnic” men can avoid a life of crime by climbing the social ladder, which requires discipline, stamina, self-criticism, and a support network of family and friends. According to Hakim Traïdia, everyone has the same opportunities to become successful, at least in acting: “Whether you are Dutch or ethnic, your success is determined by the audience.” Only the Moroccan-Macedonian-Dutch actress Touriya Haoud (not featured on the magazine’s cover) mentions that she has been treated differently because of her ethnic background, as in Dutch films she tends to be typecast as “the headscarf-wearing Moroccan girl.” She explicitly states that in that respect the Netherlands is totally different from the USA as, claims Haoud, there is far less typecasting in American films, enabling non-white actors to play a wide range of roles. In none of the interviews are the aftermath of 9/11 or the assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh mentioned. With the exception of the comment about typecasting in Dutch film, the individual success stories do not refer to broader social-political issues like discrimination. Instead, echoing the American rhet-
oric of meritocracy, the successful “Dutch Dream” as embodied by these Dutch celebrities is presented as a personal achievement which is solely based on individual talent and effort. The use of the English term “Dutch Dream” rather than a literal translation into Dutch (“de Nederlandse droom”) is significant, as it not only makes an explicit connection to the American Dream and its connotations, but also shows that the social-economic success story (“making your dreams come true”) is based on an American conception of achievement. Similar to Oprah Winfrey, as discussed in chapter two, Linda de Mol functions as an embodiment of the star myth, her Dutch appropriation of the American Dream. As such, Linda includes the ethnic Dutch celebrities within her “glamour land” – her own imagined America – by letting them join her at the festive dinner table on the cover and by interviewing them inside her magazine, and so celebrating Dutch multiculturalism.

However, that the inclusive range of such an imagined America proves to be limited is shown by the other articles in LINDA. magazine. While the ethnic celebrities are included within Linda's success story, thereby crossing the “us” versus “them” divide of the Dutch political discourse, the other articles reinforce the rigid distinction instead. The opposition between two cultural identities is present in almost all articles: a fashion photo spread entitled “Morocco meets Holland,” six photo portraits of gay Muslim men who “love Allah and men,” and an interview with the Surinamese-Dutch female politician Laetitia Griffith by the white Dutch male journalist Jort Kelder, whose impertinent question “Are you a Bounty?” (referring to a candy bar that is chocolate brown on the outside and white on the inside) is used as the interview’s title. In the interview, Kelder tells Griffith that she is not as sensual as he expected a Surinamese woman to be, before asking her whether or not it is true that black men are more sexually promiscuous than white men. The feature on “full color” make-up for women with darker skin is not addressed to potential non-white readers, but rather informs white female readers about the difficulties non-white women face in their search for the right make-up. In the explicit Sex and the City-style column “Angelique,” the columnist claims she cannot be xenophobic, as otherwise she never would have “enjoyed” Baba, a twenty-five-year-old Nigerian black man with a penis of twenty-five centimeters. In this way, although seemingly ethnic boundaries are being crossed, they are reinforced instead, as non-white cultures are reduced to a “colorful,” “sensual,” or “exotic” quality that enriches white Dutch culture. Moreover, in contrast to the inclusion of the ethnic celebrities, LINDA. excludes non-white readers by continuously addressing an implied (and sometimes explicit) white Dutch audience.
The Multicultural Comedy

In *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* (Albert ter Heerdt, 2004), a comedy about a group of young Moroccan-Dutch friends which became the box office hit of the year, there is one reference to 9/11. Main character Abdullah (Mimoun Oaïssa), called “Ap” by his friends, is shooting pool at his local Amsterdam bar, together with his best buddies: the Moroccan-Dutch Mustafa or “Mussi” (Mohammed Chaara), the Moroccan-Dutch Rachid (Mimoun Ouled Radi), and the white Dutch Robbie (Leo Alkemade). Suddenly Ap tells Mussi, “You look like Atta,” and then repeats to the others, “Mussi looks like Atta.”25 That Ap refers to the face of Mohammed Atta, the terrorist who piloted the first plane into the Twin Towers, is not coincidental. With the obvious exception of Osama bin Laden, Mohammed Atta has been the most extensively discussed 9/11 terrorist in the media, and specifically the oft-published picture of Atta’s face has become an emblem of 9/11.26 However, the importance of 9/11 is downplayed immediately by a comic exchange between Ap and Rachid. “Atta?” Rachid asks; “The hijacker of September 11,” Ap says; “September 11?” Rachid asks; “Those towers, man,” Ap says, to which Rachid responds, “Oh, those towers!” By observing that Mussi looks like Atta, Ap mirrors the practice of the white Dutch population of looking at Moroccan-Dutch youth, paraphrasing Raymzter, “as if they flew into the Twin Towers,” yet without resulting in the racial profiling and objectification that stigmatizes them as potential terrorists.

This comic reference to 9/11 and the objectification of Moroccan-Dutch youth is intensified by Ap’s suggestion that looking like Atta provides a great career opportunity. There are hardly any Arab actors in Hollywood, which means that once the events of 9/11 are turned into blockbuster action movies, Ap and his friends will be in great demand to star as the terrorists. Envisioning a glamorous Hollywood life with beautiful women, private swimming pools, big convertibles, and millions of dollars in his pocket, Ap tells his friends: “Not one! Not a single Arab actor left in America. It might take them a little while but once they start: one war movie after another. *Action in Afghanistan I, Action in Afghanistan II, Action in Afghanistan III.* Who will play them? Who will play Atta? I’ll tell you, those towers will go down at least thirty more times.” Another comic exchange between Ap and Rachid follows. “Saving Private Saddam,” Rachid jokes, pointing at Mussi, to which Ap responds, “They can use a crazy ape like you too. They’re not all handsome,” suggesting that Rachid, unlike Mussi and Ap himself, does not have the conventional good looks of a Hollywood leading man. Rachid shoots back, “If you say so, Brad Pitt.” The joke works, because Rachid’s comment exposes the flaw in Ap’s dream scenario. Even if they would be able to become actors in Hollywood 9/11 blockbusters,
portraying the terrorists thanks to racial profiling, they could never become the leading men, let alone Hollywood stars like Brad Pitt – a joke that, as Thomas Elsaesser rightly observes, “would fall flat indeed were it not contradicted by the film itself, which briefly did make Mimoun Oaïssa into a star.”27 Although the film takes the objectification of Dutch-Moroccan youth after 9/11 out of its local Dutch context into an imaginary Hollywood setting, eventually, as the scene suggests, there is little difference between being looked at as if you are a potential terrorist or being a potential Hollywood actor cast as a terrorist because you look like one.

The 9/11 scene is typical for the film in its entirety, as *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* literally can be considered as a form of comic relief in the debate about national identity and multiculturalism. The movie pokes fun at common stereotypes of both Moroccan immigrant culture and white Dutch mainstream society, although no explicit jokes are made about religion, neither about Islam nor about Christianity.28 In its opening sequence, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* presents a parody of the “Clash of Civilizations” at the local level. Traditional Moroccan culture is presented as naïve and backward. Ap and his brothers are shown on holiday in an isolated Moroccan country village, where their father was born. The village is presented as a romantic pre-modern cultural space, where the single television does not work properly and the villagers cannot believe that people have been on the moon. In stark contrast, the Netherlands is shown as an impersonal modern space, where it is always grey and raining. Consumerism and seductive sexuality are omnipresent, as signified by the scarcely clad female models pictured on the H&M fashion billboards which are dominating the cityscape. Ap’s voiceover reveals his love-hate relationship with both cultures, as he complains about both Moroccan traditionalism and Dutch superficiality. Yet, rather than presenting a conventional second generation’s caught-in-between-two-cultures dilemma, Ap seizes its opportunities. If he ever strikes it rich in the Netherlands, he will move to Morocco where the sun always shines.

Marketed as an “oer-Hollandse” (“typically Dutch”) comedy, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* appears to be the opposite, suggesting that this self-acclaimed label should be taken ironically. The movie closely follows the genre conventions of the Hollywood comedy to comment on multiculturalism in Dutch society. Shot in both Dutch and Arabic, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* is one of the first Dutch mainstream films which prominently features ethnic minorities as its main characters. Being an American-style multicultural comedy, the movie seems atypical rather than typical of Dutch mainstream cinema. The “oer-Hollands” label, however, can also be read as a statement, suggesting that the multicultural society which the film depicts is “typically Dutch,” challenging pre-existing
notions of national identity by using the Hollywood genre to present a Dutch identity in which the inclusion of Moroccan-Dutch youth culture is uncontested. By the exaggerated portrayal of both the traditional Moroccan immigrant culture of Ap’s parents and mainstream white Dutch society consisting of responsible adults, a multicultural space is created for Ap and his friends for whom pop culture constitutes their main frame of reference. In stark contrast to Ap’s older brother, a respectful police officer embodying the conventional image of successful integration, Ap and his friends are a group of opportunistic losers who continuously fail to achieve their goal of getting rich without too much effort. Yet, instead of repeating the dominant media image of Moroccan-Dutch youth as being potential criminals, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* depicts them as just “regular” young men rebelling against the normative responsibility of mainstream society. In this manner, the film challenges the “us” versus “them” divide, as the alliance created among Ap and his friends is formed along the lines of generation rather than nationality or ethnicity, with Hollywood as their shared point of reference.

At a conference discussing the necessity of self-censorship among Dutch filmmakers, held two weeks after the murder of Theo van Gogh, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!*’s director Albert ter Heerdt announced that the filming of its sequel *Shouf Shouf Barakka!* would be postponed, because, as he explained, “at this moment, I can’t make a comedy about these issues.” In the tense political climate that pervaded Dutch society immediately after Van Gogh’s murder, a comedy about Dutch-Moroccan ethnic relations could be misinterpreted. Moreover, the director revealed, “I don’t want a knife in my chest.”

The production company of *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* confirmed the postponement of the sequel, adding that Ter Heerdt and co-writer Mimoun Oaïssa, before returning to comedy, wanted to address the issues faced by Dutch multicultural society in the form of a realistic drama. As Ter Heerdt told *The New York Times*: “Before I can go on in a funny way, I first have to do another film dealing with the serious side of the problem – this time with many more [white] Dutch characters in it.”

Two years later, the team of *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* produced *Kicks* (Albert ter Heerdt, 2007), a realistic drama starring Mimoun Oaïssa as the Moroccan-Dutch kick boxer Saïd whose younger brother is shot to death by a white Dutch policeman, leading to social tensions between the different ethnic groups of the population. The film’s plot develops along various storylines in which both the white Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch main characters are connected through chance encounters, prompting many Dutch film reviewers to perceive *Kicks* as a Dutch version of *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2005), the Hollywood movie which uses a similar network-based narrative to address social problems related to race relations in Los Angeles. *Kicks* focuses on the social tensions between the white
Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch population in the aftermath of the fatal shooting, yet also emphasizes the coming together of both sides through personal interaction, suggesting that ethnic harmony is eventually possible. Although based on different Hollywood genres, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* and *Kicks* are similar in the way they appropriate the genre conventions of Hollywood to present an optimistic picture of multiculturalism in which the Moroccan-Dutch presence is an uncontested element of Dutch national identity.

The decision by the makers of *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* and *Kicks* to turn to realistic drama rather than staying with comedy reinforces the assumption that lightweight pop culture, such as “feel good” cinema, cannot deal sufficiently with the “serious” side of the debate on national identity but merely, as comic relief, provides a welcome distraction. As these two films show, however, the “fun” and “serious” character of the debate complement each other. Moreover, in spite of the postponement of its official sequel, the commercial success and popularity of *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* resulted in other multicultural comedies focused on white-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch cultural interaction, including the popular spin-off television situation comedy *Shouf Shouf* (VARA, 2006-2009) starring most of the film’s original actors. The romantic comedy *Het Schnitzelparadijs* (Martin Koolhoven, 2005) is set in the typical Dutch countryside and tells the story of the Moroccan-Dutch teenager Nordip Doenia (Mounir Valentyn) who works at a cheap roadside restaurant and falls in love with Agnes (Bracha van Doesburgh), the pretty white Dutch niece of his boss. As an updated version of the Romeo and Juliet love story, yet with the happy ending conform to the genre conventions of the Hollywood romantic comedy, *Het Schnitzelparadijs* suggests that true love and friendship have no ethnic boundaries. This message of ethnic harmony is repeated in *’n Beetje Verliefd* (Martin Koolhoven, 2006), which focuses on the Moroccan-Dutch teenager Omar, played by the popular rapper Yes-R, who arranges a blind date for his white Dutch grandfather, whereas he himself falls in love with a Turkish-Dutch girl. Staying closer to the American original, the television sitcom *Shouf Shouf* and the two films by Martin Koolhoven turn out to be even more generic and predictable than *Shouf Shouf Habibi!*. Nevertheless, together they show how the multicultural comedy has become a popular Dutch subgenre, thereby continuing to provide a counterweight to the multicultural drama perspective.

**On the (Dutch) Road**

On September 30, 2011, the Moroccan-Dutch actor Nasrdin Dchar won the Golden Calf (the Dutch equivalent of the Oscar) in the best actor category.
for his leading role in the road movie Rabat (Jim Taihuttu and Victor Ponten, 2011). In his exceptionally long and passionate acceptance speech, Dchar explains that for him the Golden Calf symbolizes love, daring to dream, and overcoming fear. “The Netherlands has fears. We are injected with fear,” Dchar states, singling out Deputy Prime Minister Maxime Verhagen and the populist politician Geert Wilders for, respectively, condoning and promoting xenophobic sentiments, and cultivating the fear of Islam in particular. Subsequently, Dchar explicitly addresses his national and cultural identity: “I’m a Dutchman, I’m very proud of my Moroccan blood, I am a Muslim, and I have a fucking Golden Calf in my hand... so be fucking afraid.” His words are almost drowned out by the ecstatic cheers and applause of the audience, enhancing the speech’s emotional and at the same time political character. While the camera zooms in on the teary-eyed faces of his father and mother (the latter wearing a golden-colored headscarf), Dchar ends his speech by telling his parents – in Arabic – that he loves them and triumphantly holds up his Golden Calf in the air. Broadcast live on Dutch public television and posted online with English subtitles for international audiences, Dchar’s speech was widely recognized in the Dutch media as a bold yet moving political statement.

That Rabat is a road movie is significant, as the road movie is often considered to be, quoting Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, “a Hollywood genre that catches peculiarly American dreams, tensions, and anxieties, even when imported by the motion picture industries of other nations.” The genre in itself connotes “America,” evoking images of Route 66, driving down a long and deserted road in a beat-up classic American convertible while passing by abandoned gas stations, with rock ‘n’ roll music playing on the car radio. Not surprisingly then, Jean Baudrillard’s America, based on the French philosopher’s actual road trip through the United States, reads like a road movie, in which the distinction between the geographical and the mediated America seems to disappear: “I looked for [America] in the speed of the screenplay, in the indifferent reflex of television, in the film of days and nights projected across an empty space, in the marvelously affectless succession of signs, images, faces, and ritual acts on the road.” When this mediated America is translated into a European – or more specifically Dutch – road movie, the geographical space changes, but the connotations remain, even when they are no longer explicitly American.

Dutch road movies typically do not stay within the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. In Jackie (Antoinette Beumer, 2012), two Dutch sisters (played by the real-life sisters Carice and Jelka van Houten) travel to the United States in search of their American surrogate mother. They find themselves on a road trip through New Mexico with a woman named Jackie, played by the
“real” Hollywood star Holly Hunter, thus reinforcing the movie’s “American” character. Most often, however, Dutch road movies take place on the European continent, starting in the Netherlands and moving southwards. For example, in Joyride (Frank Herrebout, 2005), three young Dutch women drive a red 1969 Cadillac DeVille convertible to the south of France to compete in a fashion model contest. In The Delivery (Roel Reiné, 1999), two young men (one Dutch, one British) drive their Volvo station wagon from the Netherlands to Spain to make a delivery of XTC pills. After they pick up a young French woman named Loulou, a deserted member of a terrorist group opposing the unification of Europe, the two men are chased by drug dealers, terrorists, and Interpol officers, eventually resulting in a sensational accumulation of car crashes and bomb explosions. In Hitte/Harara (Lodewijk Crijns, 2008), the white Dutch Nancy and the Moroccan-Dutch Raja drive to the south of Spain where they take the ferry boat to Morocco in search of fashionable accessories to buy for their nail and henna beauty salon in Amsterdam. The two young women face a moral dilemma when a Moroccan guy asks them to smuggle him back to the Netherlands to be reunited with his Dutch boyfriend. Unlike their American counterparts, these road movies feature protagonists moving from one country to another on traffic-jammed highways. As David Laderman has pointed out, such a difference in geographical space changes the meaning of these films: “With smaller countries sharing more national borders, the European road movie explores different national identities in intimate topographical proximity,” and, as a result, “these non-American road movies tend toward the quest more than the flight, and imbue the quest with navigations of national identity and community.”

Rabat fits Laderman’s description, as the road movie most prominently deals with questions of identity. The movie can be perceived as a coming-of-age story of Nadir, its main character played by Nasrdin Dchar. Nadir has been sent to Morocco by his father to deliver an old Mercedes taxi as dowry, which, as his father hopes in vain, will help to find Nadir a traditional Moroccan bride. Nadir is joined by his best friends, the Moroccan-Dutch Abdel (Achmed Akkabi) and the Tunisian-Dutch Zakaria (Marwan Kenzari). On the road, they pick up a hitchhiker, a young French woman named Julie (Stéphane Caillard), who takes them along to a birthday party of her gay friends in Barcelona. In spite of the Americanness of its genre, nothing in Rabat is explicitly American. Instead of a classic American convertible, Nadir drives his father’s old Mercedes taxi, which not only functions as dowry, but also symbolizes the history of Nadir’s father as a guest worker who made his living in the Netherlands as a taxi driver. The movie’s soundtrack consists of local chansons played on the AM car radio, and with each crossing of a national border the language changes. The movie’s
dialogue switches easily from one language to another: Dutch, Arabic, English, French, and Spanish. In *Rabat*, borders are crossed both literally and metaphorically, continuously raising questions about belonging. Rather than repeating the simplistic dichotomy of Dutch versus Moroccan culture, typical of stories about the culture clash of second-generation immigrants, *Rabat* shows a multiplicity of identities, be it national, cultural, religious, or generational. In the end, all three protagonists choose their own destiny: Abdel goes back to Amsterdam to finally open his own restaurant, Zakaria visits his relatives in Tunisia for the first time, and Nadir goes to Barcelona to be with Julie, his new French girlfriend.

Whereas *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* uses the genre convention of the Hollywood comedy to poke fun at both traditional Moroccan immigrant culture and mainstream white Dutch society, *Rabat* uses the road movie genre to move – quite literally – beyond the “us” versus “them” divide in the Dutch multiculturalism debate, not by denying cultural differences but instead by showing the wide range of possible identities and senses of belonging. The same multiplicity is expressed in Nasrdin Dchar’s acceptance speech, in particular when he explicitly announces that he is a Dutchman who is proud of his Moroccan descent and his religious beliefs, thereby articulating that these identities are not mutually exclusive. His statement is specifically powerful because he is a talented and eloquent actor who has just won a Golden Calf, a “real” movie star. Moreover, as Dchar tells the viewers, making *Rabat* was like a dream come true, urging them – “and especially the younger generation” – to never stop dreaming.

**Conclusion: The Promise of Pop Culture**

Although a strict distinction is often made between the entertainment of pop culture on the one hand and the seriousness of political discourse on the other, both American and Dutch pop culture show that in specific cases the two realms can become intertwined. In this chapter, I aimed to explore how Dutch pop culture appropriates elements of its American example to comment on a political reality. The focus on national identity is then the most obvious choice as, particularly after 9/11 and the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, the discussion about national identity – specifically in relation to the issues of Islam and multiculturalism – has come to dominate Dutch political discourse. Specifically the idea that a common sense of belonging is to be found in a collective national history, forming an imagined community that provides a clear expression of Dutchness, appears to be widely accepted. More-
over, a traditional fear of Americanization as a form of cultural imperialism which could threaten national culture and identity seemingly has disappeared, partially replaced by a fear for the growing influence of Islam, which may imply that the omnipresence of American pop culture is now perceived as a buffer rather than a threat.

Yet, as my discussion of the Dutch pop-cultural artifacts suggests, other senses of belonging can be found in the shared experience of American pop culture. All the examples – the *Idols* “Dutch Hits” episode, the Pim Fortuyn tribute singles by Gerard Joling and Vanessa, the hip-hop songs by Raymzter, Lange Frans & Baas B, and Salah Edin, the special “Dutch Dream” issue of *LINDA.* magazine, and the films *Shouf Shouf Habibi!, Kicks,* and *Rabat* – translate an American original into a specific local and national context. Although American pop culture is viewed as a model to emulate, none of these Dutch pop-cultural artifacts makes connections to the nation-state USA or to a historical Dutch imagined community, but instead should be perceived as part of an imagined America which transcends geographical boundaries. In other words, here American pop culture provides a common language to discuss political issues as national identity, ethnic integration, and multiculturalism, with the potential of creating alliances among different cultural identities within the Netherlands.

As performances of karaoke Americanism, each of these case studies shows that Dutch pop culture is not merely an imitation of American pop culture, but instead is made up of active cultural appropriations in which mimicking and mocking often go together, presenting different perspectives on the notion of national identity in the Netherlands. The depiction of Dutchness on the “Dutch Hits” episode of *Idols,* based on the worn-out clichés of global tourism, does not only express national identity, but also undermines its authenticity, because it is such a cliché that one cannot take it too seriously. The tributes to Pim Fortuyn use American pop culture to glorify the assassinated politician as the Dutch Kennedy, thereby mystifying his political agenda and implying that collective mourning equals national unity. The Moroccan-Dutch rappers Raymzter and Salah Edin successfully make the stereotypical image of the African-American gangsta rapper their own, using the rebelliousness of hip-hop to critically assess Dutch society. Lange Frans & Baas B, in their turn, use the same language of hip-hop to present an ambiguous yet affirmative ode to the Dutch nation. *LINDA.* magazine borrows the rhetoric of the American Dream to present “ethnic” success stories as examples of the Dutch Dream, intending to prove that ethnic integration can be successful. In this way, the American conception of achievement is introduced to celebrate Dutch multiculturalism. Finally, *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* and its successors apply the genre
conventions of Hollywood to present a promising and inclusive perspective on national identity. Yet, although American pop culture functions as a common language, its connotations differ from one pop-cultural artifact to another, thereby questioning its alleged universalism.

As the case studies show, the potential to create alliances among different cultural identities is not always fulfilled. The intention to challenge the “us” versus “them” divide by appropriating the rhetoric of the American Dream and so celebrating Dutch ethnic success stories, as done by LINDA magazine, is undermined by the magazine’s continuously reinforcement of the otherness of “their” ethnic culture in opposition to “our” white Dutch culture. Also the two different versions of “Het Land Van…” by Lange Frans & Baas B and Salah Edin suggest that the distinction between white Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch cultural identity is reinforced rather than challenged. Gerard Joling’s call for “the people in the street, black or white” to come together is a generic cliché, reducing the message of racial harmony to hollow rhetoric. In the end, the ethnically mixed group of young losers in Shouf Shouf Habibi! seems to be the most promising in creating an alliance among “our” and “their” culture. Exposing the ambivalence of the American Dream – and, by extension, the Dutch Dream – by being anti-heroes who, within the film’s fictional setting, fail to succeed, they simultaneously have become success stories in their own right by being actors in a commercially successful and critically acclaimed movie.

Sometimes, the promise of multicultural alliance can be found where one expects it the least. In the final scene of 06/05, Theo van Gogh’s political thriller about the conspiracy behind Pim Fortuyn’s assassination, the white Dutch main character Jim de Booy (Thijs Römer) is playing soccer on the beach with his teenage daughter and her Moroccan-Dutch boyfriend, who she endearingly describes as “my very own kutmarokkaan.” With the bittersweet pop song “Broad Daylight” as soundtrack, the camera presents a pan shot of the beach, moving from the soccer-playing trio to the broad horizon, a typical Hollywood convention that symbolizes an uncertain yet optimistic future. In 06/05, a multiethnic Dutch national identity is presented as an uncontested given, embodied by two young teenagers in love playing soccer together.