CHAPTER 14

The King as Father, Orangism and the Uses of a Hero: King William I of the Netherlands and the Prince of Orange, 1815–1840

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A DOUBLE PROBLEM

Part of dynastic rule is the politics of representation, and representation requires a level of control of public memory. That both memory and representation are cultural constructions is nowadays a commonplace. We analyse the composite parts of public memory, and read its forced symbolism. The politics of representation and memory can be regarded as instruments of ‘soft power’, as defined by Joseph Nye: the kind of power that attracts and co-opts as a means of persuasion or of shaping the

This chapter is based on the new biographies of the three nineteenth-century Dutch Orange kings: Jeroen Koch (2013), Koning Willem I. 1772–1843, Amsterdam; Jeroen van Zanten (2013), Koning Willem II. 1792–1849, Amsterdam; Dik van der Meulen (2013), Koning Willem III. 1817–1890, Amsterdam.
preferences of others through appeal—but without resorting to coercion or the use of money. Although Nye originally developed the concept for the analysis of foreign policy, soft power can also be found in the way governments, as systems of rule, seek to strengthen their legitimacy. The concept of soft power can fruitfully be applied to the way the House of Orange attempted to bolster their legitimacy after being installed as the Royal House in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic rule. Contemporaries, loyal politicians assisted by the court, consciously created a myth around the Orange family. They actively used the instruments of soft power to create an emotional bond between the ruler and the ruled. The United Kingdom of the Netherlands, a territory combining today’s Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, was very much a new state, with the king (who, as the ruler of Luxembourg, bore the title of grand duke) himself among its new constructions. After all, in spite of their ambitions to act as monarchs, the Orange princes had been stadtholders before the revolution, that is servants of the Dutch United Provinces, or more exactly: servants separately of each of the seven provinces.

Two problems are of interest to us here. The first concerns the difficulties of fusing the Northern and the Southern provinces into one kingdom with one national myth spun around the one royal family. The name for the ideology generated to bind dynasty and nation together is ‘Orangism’. This turned out to be a rather vague concept covering a variety of feelings and notions that originated from among certain elites, various religious groups and social classes—for example, the aristocracy, various Protestant groups and sections of the urban working classes. A further problem consisted in the poor relationship between King William I and the royal heir, Prince William of Orange, who would become King William II in 1840. My object here is to show how dynastic values and national collective identity interlinked and were put to use as a means of soft power.

**THE RETURN OF THE ORANGE FAMILY?**

‘Orange forever! Holland is free again.’ These were the first words of the famous proclamation of 17 November 1813, which announced the return, after an absence lasting almost 20 years, of William Frederick, Prince of Orange, to the Northern Netherlands. A pro-Orange political elite framed the prince coming back as a return to normality:
Trade will flourish again.
Political quarrels belong to the past,
All sorrow is forgotten
And forgiven.
[…]
The nation gets a cheerful day
Paid for by the community.
Without looting or abuse.
Everyone thanks GOD.
The old days return.
Orange forever!

On the very evening in December 1813 when William was proclaimed sovereign prince, he gave a speech. Uttering words which the Amsterdam politician Joan Melchior Kemper, a professor of law at Leyden University, had drafted for him, William declared that he was ‘given back to his People, whom he had never stopped loving, as a father returning to his family’. The prince had to be careful. After 20 years of absence he hardly knew whom he could trust. Except for a few old loyal magistrates he found himself surrounded by strangers, among them Kemper.

‘A father returning to his family’, this made some sense if one was prepared to forget the civil strife of the 1780s, when Dutch revolutionaries, who called themselves Patriots (Kemper had been one of them), had driven his supposedly tyrannical father William V, the last stadtholder of the republic, from The Hague. With references being made to his ancestors from William the Silent onwards, Orangists, former Patriots and former Dutch officials of the French government, who together improvised a transitional government in the Northern Netherlands, now presented the returned dynastic leader as the defender of freedom—the freedom of the nation, of Protestantism, of religious tolerance, or of tolerance in general. The Dutch started numbering their leaders anew. After the stadholders William I (the Silent), Maurice, Frederick Henry, William II, William III (William and Mary), William IV and William V, now, suggesting continuity and a new beginning at the same time, the sovereign prince was called William I. ‘No it is not William VI whom the people asked to return’, a paper wrote in December 1813, ‘it is William I’. This was a conscious act of framing, a politics of remembering as well as of forgetting. It was above all the years between 1785 and 1787 that were to be forgotten: the time when the Patriots, who had cherished the idea of the sovereignty of the people, were beaten by Prussian troops who had been invited by William’s mother, Wilhelmina of Prussia, to repress the
revolution. Indeed, William I was so tainted by the memory of the ‘minor civil war’ of the 1780s that some Dutch and British politicians argued in 1813 that it would be better to make his eldest son the new sovereign of the Netherlands instead of him.8

This politics of connecting the Orange forefathers with the freedom and the fatherland, as well as of framing the king as the returning father of the nation only made sense in the Northern provinces. There one could at least call it a return. In the Southern provinces, in Belgium, the former Austrian Netherlands, William I initially seemed to be little more than the next foreign ruler after the Austrians, the French revolutionaries and Napoleon. Yet, from the summer of 1815 onwards, the king also was presented as the father of the nation in the South. The word ‘returned’ was scrupulously avoided, though William I, who was keen to elaborate on the family metaphor and called all his subjects ‘his children’, immediately made a mistake by referring to the inhabitants of the Southern provinces as his ‘adopted children’. When problems arose in the South—and they came quickly as the Roman Catholic Church protested against the constitutional equality of the Protestant Church, and liberals railed against the curbing of the press and the obligation for French-speaking lawyers to use Dutch—he even called them his ‘refractory’ or ‘restive’ children. During the last years of his rule, when Belgium was already independent, and a Dutch opposition grew impatient with his authoritarian style of rule, William complained that he only had ‘naughty children’.9

Proclaiming that the nation was like a family under the guidance of the king-father was of course an exercise in very old symbolism, dating back to ancient history. Since then all kinds of new meanings had been added, though even in these early decades of the nineteenth century, the royal family came to be seen as the upholder of family values—both socially and culturally.10 The symbolism belonged to the arsenal of soft politics used by any ruling dynasty. Yet after 1813 this family symbolism around the king also had a sharper edge. Politically, the paternalistic hierarchy was meant to point to an alternative to the egalitarian vision of the nation, to the dangerous idea—propagated by American and French revolutionaries—that the nation consisted of free and equal citizens. Suggesting cohesion, concern and warmth, the metaphor of the father and his children sanctioned, above all, ‘natural’ authority: the strong and self-evident leadership by the king. Indeed, in these post-Napoleonic years the cosy family symbolism around the king, the dynasty and the nation was more politics than ever and an attempt both to gain legitimacy as well as ascendance,
and to forge a national collective identity. Ideally, this national identity had to be a Dutch-cum-Belgian identity. As an act of linguistic politics, William I’s government used the Dutch word Nederlanders (the Dutch) and the French word Belges (the Belgians) as equivalents. On the day of his inauguration in Brussels on 21 September 1815 the words ‘de Monarchie der Nederlanden’ (the Monarchy of the Netherlands) that the king used in his official address to the members of parliament was translated in French as ‘la Monarchie des Belges’.

**The Problem of Legitimacy: Some Examples of Soft Power Politics**

William I clearly needed to bolster the legitimacy of his rule, the basis of which was unclear. Was the new United Kingdom of the Netherlands just a creation of the Great Powers, of Great Britain in particular? The king’s rule was explicitly not rooted in the will of the people; this idea, the corollary of the nation as a body of free and equal citizens, had been rejected as too revolutionary. Was William’s royal position legitimized by the constitution? If the political elite might have thought so, then the king denied that this was the case. In 1814, William I told his son that the constitution was just ‘a plaything for the masses, an illusion for their liberty, which I can use according to the circumstances’. Somewhat later he concluded: ‘I also exist without the constitution, parliament only exists by grace of it.’

When talking to ministers and other state officials the king frequently liked to invoke a phrase from Article 73 of the constitution of 1815: ‘Only the King decides.’

Referring to Burgundy, to the Low Countries in the age of the sixteenth-century Habsburg emperor Charles V, an age before the Dutch revolt and the reformation, was one way in which William I and his counsellors tried to solve the problem of legitimacy. On the day William I proclaimed himself king, 16 March 1815—the step was triggered by Napoleon’s return from Elba—he said of the Southern provinces:

It is not just a piece of land that is added to the fatherland. No, a whole nation joins us, a nation that by its manners and morals, by its language and historical memories already belonged to us, as brothers and sisters. […] Uniting and amalgamating all the XVII Dutch provinces in one single State, more than once was wished for—during the reign of Charles V, in the times of Father William [William the Silent], and later in the ideas of enlightened and patriotic leaders.
On the day of his inauguration in Brussels on 21 September 1815 he again referred to Charles V and William the Silent, emphasizing the fact that his famous ancestor had been educated at the court of the Habsburg emperor, also in Brussels.

Historical examples were also used in religious politics, which were always a delicate issue in the kingdom. Freedom of religion and religious tolerance was the message, something the North claimed to have been used to since the end of the sixteenth century, but which was new to the rather traditional Roman Catholic South. To drive home the message of religious freedom under Orange rule, in 1820, at the Industrial Exhibition in Ghent, a painting by Ignatius van Bree was presented. It showed William the Silent defending Roman Catholics during the Calvinist reign of terror in Ghent in the year 1578. Historical propaganda around the beneficent rule of the House of Orange throughout the ages was fused with displaying the products of industrial politics, which as an important part of a general welfare politics was the real backbone of the rule of William I, the king who tried to bring prosperity to the nation.16

A successful economic policy did a lot for winning the trust and affection of subjects new and old, but it can hardly be called soft power. To be sure, several instruments of soft power were used. On Wednesdays King William I held his public audiences at the royal palace, and they could last for hours. All the subjects who called at the palace gate were received and after a little chat with the king, were given some money. The reason for the royal gift and the amount granted would be meticulously recorded in large cashbooks.17 Foreign visitors were impressed and amazed. One of them, the French man of letters Xavier Marmier, who in the late 1830s joined the queue before the king’s palace in The Hague, reported:

I had the opportunity to study the rare scene of subjects approaching their king in a time when revolutionaries were a real menace to the crowned heads of state, and when all over Europe kings had to be protected by armed guards. On the table there already lay three large sheets of paper, on it the names of the visitors of the day. People of different age and rank surrounded me. University professors from Leyden defending the interests of their Alma Mater to the Sovereign, a timid student presenting his thesis to the King, a poor widow begging for some money; next to the decorated field officer in a beautiful uniform with epaulettes and medals one saw a naval cadet, wearing a simple blue dress-coat, a small kepi on his head; a rich merchant, whose name was good for millions of Guilders at the Amsterdam stock exchange, sat next to an applicant asking for a humble job. In the palace on this day
all were equal, and privileges of birth and class were suspended. The workingman could precede the nobleman, the pupil his master, the soldier the officer. In an adjacent drawing-room there stood the King, leaning against a console-table, and friendly greeting everyone who came before him, listening to their requests and complaints, and sending them away with a little nod of his head. I could see the faces of humble folks, entering the room, their heads down, who suddenly were enlivened by a salutary hope, and leaving with the certainty the King had listened to them.\textsuperscript{18}

Such public audiences were part of an old monarchical tradition, reaching back to medieval times. Another old practice that was used to strengthen the bonds between king, dynasty and nation was visiting the country. This also was an instrument of soft power. The court in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands changed its location between North and South from year to year, which also meant that the royal family would move from The Hague to Brussels or vice versa. Moreover, the king visited a number of provinces every year. The itineraries were meticulously prepared. Beginning his day’s work at 5 or 6 o’clock in the morning, and seconded by one of his sons or his daughter, the king would inspect factories, harbours and canals, was welcomed by city councils, magistrates, clergymen and priests, received honours from the local regiment, and was invited to meet delegates of societies of all kind—waving to his subjects all along the way, while the local brass-band played the national anthem. Audiences would also be granted during these visits. Now the king did not just receive everyone, though, as was his practice on normal Wednesdays; these audiences were used to inform and to be informed by governors, mayors and chief constables.

The longest royal journey through the country took place in May and June 1829.\textsuperscript{19} In response to the growing unrest in the Southern provinces the king decided to take a look for himself. The government was petitioned, as was the constitutional right of the citizens, with article 161 of the constitution of 1815 granting them the freedom to petition the authorities, including the king. There were protests against the heavy taxation of food, against the state-regulated education of Roman Catholic priests and against the curbing of the press. It drove southern Catholics and liberals into each other’s arms and contributed to a climate of rebellion that would eventually end in the Belgian revolution of 1830–1831. The aim of the king’s visit was, naturally, to appease his subjects. Yet, in the gathering political storm the limits of this kind of soft power politics rapidly became only too evident. Every word the king used was carefully
scrutinized. And when, after six weeks travelling, William concluded in Liege that he only had met satisfied, obedient and hardworking subjects, that the grievances were not real and that the protests against his rule were the work of a tiny minority, of some individuals behaving badly, the inhabitants of the Southern provinces reacted with even more protest.\(^{20}\)

**Orangism, North and South**

Of particular interest here is the sentiment called *Orangism*, a concept which groups together all kinds of loyalty, however vague, that were extended to the Orange dynasty. In Dutch historiography one frequently stumbles over the idea that monarchicalism in the Netherlands is essentially Orangism, thereby creating a contrast between this sentiment and royalism. Referring to its golden age, to the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century, it suggests that Dutch society today constitutes a ‘crowned republic’ with the Orange monarch as the head of state. Orangism is behind the national feast on the birthday of the king or the queen, it fuels the periodic hysteria around the national football team, it drives the excessive interest in anything the members of the royal family do or do not do. Since the end of the nineteenth century, much of this modern Orangist activity has stemmed from ordinary inhabitants, from committees in villages, towns and city quarters.\(^{21}\) In the republic, before 1795, it was divided into an orthodox Calvinist Orangism, an aristocratic Orangism and a popular Orangism, all of which were quite different from each other. After 1800, in the Northern Netherlands a new kind of Orangism slowly came into being as part of a spirit of reconciliation and fostered by the circumstance that the members of the dynasty were in exile; all kinds of beautiful feelings could harmlessly be projected onto them, an advantage that ended the moment they returned.\(^{22}\)

The Orangism of the period of William I’s reign, after his return in November 1813, had its own peculiarities. Cultivating feelings of loyalty towards the ruling dynasty by the subjects became a task of the state. More than ever before or after, Orangism was government policy. Etchings of the return of the Orange prince in the Netherlands, of his inauguration in Amsterdam and Brussels and of the members of the royal family were produced in large quantities and spread by the central state institutions, by the court, the government, the municipalities and by churches and universities. For the first time Dutch coins showed the portrait of the dynastic leader. Yet, the best example of the state sponsored Orangism of this period can
be found in the newly organized Netherlands Reformed Church, which by January 1816 grouped together all the different Calvinist churches in the Netherlands under the authority of the king, who himself became the head of the church organization. William I understood the church to be an instrument of state power, not unlike the enlightened monarchs of the eighteenth century or Napoleon. Uniting God, Orange and fatherland, one of the main tasks of the protestant clergy became cultivating the ‘Love for King and Country’. An attempt was thus made to generate soft power within the context of very real institutional hard power.23

New forms of Orangism from below suddenly sprang into life as a result of the Belgian revolution of 1830. Indeed, here we find an example of early nationalism in the Northern Netherlands. The inhabitants grouped together as a nation and united as one people around the Orange dynasty, Protestantism and a sense of continuity from the old republican days to the present—all invoked in opposition to the seditious Catholic and liberal Belgians, ‘Jesuits and Jacobins’. Only in reaction to this Dutch nationalist reflex did a Belgian nationalism spread across the Southern provinces which transformed an opposition that initially had only asked for their constitutional liberties to be respected. ‘Roi, consacre nos droits’ they sang in the first version of ‘La Brabaçonne’, the Belgian national anthem, the text of which radicalized as the rebellion was becoming a full-scale revolution.24

Even more remarkable was the fact that the Belgian revolution also gave birth to a Belgian Orangism that was opposed to the new Belgian state. In contrast to the Orangism of the North that could and did refer to the stadtholderian past and the monarchical present and was quite satisfied with the dismantling of the Dutch United Kingdom, this Southern Orangism, a product of the rule of William I and of expectations of the coming rule of his son, the Prince of Orange, propagated the prolongation and the restoration of the larger united kingdom. Although the expelled king of the Netherlands supported this Belgian Orangism with ample funds, it was a movement from below.25 It was strong both in the Dutch- and the French-speaking parts of the new Belgian state, and among its followers were industrial entrepreneurs, loyal army officers, Catholic priests, and large parts of the population in cities like Ghent and Antwerp, as well as members of the former ruling elite under William I. These Belgian Orangists were partisans of a lost cause, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands being one of the many sinking ships of history.26 After the death of the Dutch king William II in 1849, the movement dwindled rapidly.
In his attempt to keep the South under Orange rule, William I used his sons, especially the royal heir, who was more popular in the Southern provinces than the king himself. There were several reasons for why the Prince of Orange was held in such high esteem in the South. One was the splendour of his court, which contrasted markedly with the sobriety his father displayed. More important was his vast military clientele. After 1814, the Prince of Orange successfully convinced his father to rehabilitate the officers from the Southern provinces who had served in the armies of Napoleon, thereby creating strong personal bonds of loyalty. Last but not least, there were the differences between father and son in political outlook. The Prince of Orange had sympathy for the liberals and for liberalism and showed a lot of understanding for the Roman Catholics. In the North the Prince of Orange was even suspected of crypto-Catholicism. The young William disliked the Northern Netherlands with its cold and damp climate and its praise of bourgeois mediocrity. The North, above all, was the land he had to flee as a little boy.27

In contrast to his father, the prince knew how to act under pressure, and when on 24 August 1830, the king’s birthday, the rebellion started in the South, young Prince William was immediately sent to Brussels to negotiate. Unfortunately, his desperate father simultaneously gave Prince Frederick, his second son, the order to suppress the unrest with violence. Yet, after four days of fighting in the streets of Brussels during the last days of September 1830, Frederick’s army withdrew without being able to obtain a victory over the rebellious population. Belgium was lost for the Orange dynasty.

Two of the most curious moments during the Belgian revolution involved the royal heir. On 1 September 1830 Alexandre Gendebien, the leader of the moderate insurgents in the South, offered the Prince of Orange a Belgian crown: ‘The separation of the two countries is unavoidable’, he told the prince. ‘Accept the rule over Belgium as viceroy, or preferably, as king. The last option immediately will be accepted in Belgium. After the death of your father, the two parts of the country can be reunited without problems.’28 In October, three weeks after his brother’s failed military action in Brussels, the young William, in another attempt to retain the South for the Orange dynasty, placed himself at the head of the revolutionary movement, proclaiming: ‘Belgians! I have studied your situation with care. I understand your predicament and recognize your independence.
I will put myself at the head of the movement that is given power by your nationality and that will lead you to a new stability.\textsuperscript{129} This illustrated the confusion in the country and did a lot of harm to the position of the royal heir in the Northern Netherlands. His reputation was restored in August 1831, when Prince William regained his honour by leading a short punitive expedition against the new Belgian kingdom.

In the Northern Netherlands the Prince of Orange had also been very popular for a time. That, above all, was the fruit of the Battle of Waterloo, fought on 18 June 1815. In the Netherlands the hero of Waterloo was not Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington (although King William I made the British commander-in-chief ‘Prince of Waterloo’ in 1815). It was not Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher or August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, the German heroes of the battle, either. Nor was it Napoleon, whom the French still seem to regard as the real victor. In the Netherlands the hero of Waterloo, \textit{and} of Quatre-Bras two days before Waterloo, was—and is—the Prince of Orange, the former adjutant of Wellington in the Peninsular War. The legendary battle would be invoked over and over again to augment Orange rule.\textsuperscript{30}

Waterloo had been a gift from heaven for the Dutch king. It meant a lot that Napoleon was given his \textit{coup de grâce} on Dutch soil, \textit{his} territory. First, for the Great Powers, the king realised, the new kingdom had proven its worth; it indeed was \textit{le Boulevard de l'Europe}—the bulwark against renewed French aggression that the Congress of Vienna wanted it to be. Second, Waterloo, and especially the heroic role of the 22-year-old prince William, who was wounded on the battlefield, gave his father and the House of Orange the longed-for popular legitimacy, as the royal family immediately recognized. ‘The complete and glorious victory of the allies, gained in the Netherlands and deciding the fate of France and all of Europe and saving the kingdom of my son from a mortal threat; and the heroic part played by my grandson it really established the Royal House and gave it firm ground’, Wilhelmina of Prussia, the king’s old mother, wrote a few weeks after the battle.\textsuperscript{31}

The king and his advisors acted accordingly. Over and over again William I would use his son’s fame for his state propaganda, by ordering etchings of the battle scene to be given away as presents, by leading high visitors around the very battlefield he himself had avoided in June 1815, and by encouraging battlefield tourism. He also bought a huge canvas: Jan Willem Pieneman’s \textit{Battle of Waterloo}, today the largest picture in the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum. When it was finished in 1824 it was
first shown in London and Brussels. In 1826, a Dutch lion, cast in iron, was placed upon an artificial hill on the battlefield. This also was a tribute to the Prince of Orange; although irreparably damaging the battlefield—much to the chagrin of Wellington—hill and lion mark the place where the prince was wounded. And every year Waterloo would be remembered: from 1816 until the Second World War, 18 June was a national holiday in the Netherlands. The remembering of the last battle against Napoleon had immediately become part of William I’s royal soft power tools. Already, in August 1815, the king told the members of parliament: ‘There comes a time when the Battles of Quatre-Bras and Waterloo will be regarded as two shining pillars of the new Dutch State. Fortunate the father whose sons had the honour to help to raise those pillars and sprinkle them with their blood.’

The public celebrated the prince-hero in its own way. On 2 July 1815, two weeks after the Battle of Waterloo, the young William had recovered sufficiently to visit a church where to his and God’s glory a Te Deum was sung. Shortly thereafter, during a theatre visit, the cast surprised the prince with a special song and through a hidden mechanism behind his chair a laurel-crown was placed upon his head. After the performance, the audience gave the prince a standing ovation, a practice that would often be repeated during the following years. Visiting Brussels and Waterloo in August 1815, Walter Scott was surprised by the spontaneous veneration of the prince. At every corner in Brussels a storyteller or street singer celebrated his heroic deeds. Parliament decided to give the prince three palaces: Soestdijk in the North, Tervuren in the South, and a new palace to be built in Brussels, the beautiful classicist building by the architects Charles Vander Straeten and Tieleman Franciscus Suys. It was finished in 1828, so William and Anna resided only two years in the building, which today houses the Belgian Academy Palace. The veneration of the prince continued. In 1831, after the punitive action against Belgium, the Dutch poet Willem Hendrik Warnsinck compared the Prince of Orange with his martial stadholderian ancestors:

Is it Maurice or Frederick Henry,
Or is it the third William,
Rising from the dust?
No! It is the Hero of Waterloo,
The Crown Prince, the hope of the Dutch,
He avenges us; he saves our honour,
And gives us peace at heart.
Dynastic Claustrophobia

After 1815, the king consistently sought to cash-in on his eldest son’s fame as hero of Waterloo. For the royal heir, being used by his father was nothing new, on the contrary. From 1807 onwards, young William had been the only hope left for the Orange dynasty. By that year, there was nothing left to inherit, except for a few small estates in Poland. For reasons too complicated to summarize here the Orange family had lost everything: their position as hereditary stadtholders of the Dutch Republic, their position in Nassau, where they had been princes in the Holy Roman Empire, and their positions in Fulda, Dortmund, Corvey and Weingarten, which together were the reparations the family had been given after the Peace of Amiens of 1802. The only means for the Orange dynasty to regain a position somewhere in Europe was to let the young William marry someone poised to inherit a throne. Of the three possibilities of ‘dynastic politics’—that is to reign, to fight and to marry—by 1807 only the last option remained.

The Orange dynasty’s marriage politics now aimed at Charlotte, Princess of Wales. She was to become the spouse of the young prince William; it was a conscious effort to repeat the most successful alliance by marriage the stadtholderian family had ever contracted: that of William III and Mary II. In December 1813 William and Charlotte were engaged, but the plans for their marriage collapsed under an avalanche of difficulties, public and private: two heirs to two thrones, the power play between parliament and the prince regent, a clash between Whigs and Tories, the impossible combination of characters of the prince and princess, and the quarrels between Charlotte and her divorced parents, Princess Caroline and the prince regent.36

By 1815 the Prince of Orange knew very well what it was to be an instrument of his father’s politics. He would never get used to it. Prince William developed a veritable case of ‘dynastic claustrophobia’. One symptom of this condition was blaming his father for all that went wrong, something made easier by the fact father and son always clashed. William I was a stern and authoritarian king, enlightened in a more coercive sense. And he was jealous: ‘Yes, I also fought against the French at Quatre-Bras. But we were beaten and no one wrote about it’, he gibed at his frightened daughter-in-law Anna Paulowna, the sister of Tsar Alexander; his eldest son had married in 1816.37

To his despair, the king was unable to control his vainglorious son, who was almost a one-man revolution. Prince William was one of those young veterans who were dissatisfied with a post-Napoleonic order, which was explicitly presented as a restoration. Was this the world for which they...
had risked their lives? Ex-officers, in particular, longed for new adventure. The frustration of these armed bohemians took several forms: craving for new glory, political radicalism or outright conspiracy against the restored monarchs.38 Prince William tried it all. He was very popular in Brussels, not least amongst circles of officers, freemasons and French revolutionaries who had flocked there after Napoleon’s downfall. Among them was Lazare Carnot, one of the régicides (king murderers) who had voted for the execution of Louis XVI, but also a member of Robespierre’s Committee of Public Safety, and erstwhile Minister of War for Napoleon. In 1816 and 1817, Carnot, with others, contacted the prince with a plan to topple the unpopular restored King Louis XVIII of France. The Orange prince should become the new French king. The young prince was flattered, and even asked his new brother-in-law Tsar Alexander for military assistance. A year later, William’s name came up during the investigation of an attempted murder of Wellington. This time he had nothing to do with it.39 So reckless in his dealings with revolutionaries (and in his amorous contacts with women and men) was the Prince of Orange, that he constantly endangered the reputation of the Dutch royal family, especially as family values amalgamated with bourgeois morality, and stood for more than just a legitimization of patriarchal authority. Paying off blackmailers became a recurring and expensive nuisance for his father. Eventually the king would only make use of his eldest son in times of crisis—foremost, as we have seen above, during the Belgian revolution of 1830.40

Prince William inherited the throne in 1840, after the abdication of his disillusioned father. Belgium was lost, as the king in 1839 finally admitted; the state was almost bankrupt, and liberals were pressing for constitutional reform. A widower since 1837, the king wanted to marry one of the ladies-in-waiting of the late queen. This time his eldest son, who had loved his mother, avenged himself by using the idea of family values to stage a public scandal against his father. By remarrying, the royal heir thought, the king had betrayed the memory of the deceased queen. And besides that: the old king’s new wife not only was a Roman Catholic, she was not of equal birth and, coming from the Southern Netherlands, a Belgian woman.41

**Conclusion**

In royal families the sense of sharing a common fate is always stronger than the feeling of solidarity. The family members are condemned to one another, and this is especially true for the dynastic leader and the
dynastic heir. In times of revolution this mutual dependence is all the more pressing.

After 1813/1815 a new myth had to be woven around the Orange family in the new kingdom of the Netherlands, fusing dynastic values, family values and collective national identity. The politics of memory provided one strategy, although it was different in the North, where the Republic was invoked, and the South, where looking back on Burgundy and Charles V became commonplace. In both cases the memory was highly selective. A very special case was the memory of the battle of Waterloo. Here, military honour, the beginnings of the new state, the legitimacy of royal rule and the strained relationship between king and heir came into play.

This politics of memory provides one example of the use of soft power in the new United Kingdom of the Netherlands. The different forms of Orangism in early nineteenth-century Netherlands were also important. At first this was part of the politics of the state, an effort from above to create emotional bonds of trust and affection between the ruler and the ruled by using a rather vague ideology. It was not very effective. Far more successful, in this period of revolution and war, were the forms of Orangism that came from below as a result of the very real political struggles during and after the Belgian revolution. The longed-for sentiments almost sprang up spontaneously. In the Northern Netherlands the majority seemed glad to be rid of the Southern Provinces: the king, the Orange dynasty, the state—now it all belonged to them, to the small Dutch Protestant nation. In the South, in Belgium, Orangism became part of the opposition against the new state. This time it was an emotional bond between the Dutch king, his heir the Prince of Orange and some of their former subjects. Of course, one could call this soft power politics. But then the problem is that court and government could make use of these sentiments, but were hardly able to control them—not even if the relationship between the king and the royal heir had been better.

NOTES

1. For example: Natalie Scholz (2006), Die imaginierte Restauration. Repräsentationen der Monarchie im Frankreich Ludwigs XVIII., Darmstadt.
5. Proclamation by Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp, 17 November 1813.


29. Proclamation by Prince William, 16 October 1830.
35. Willem Hendrik Warnsinck, ‘De Tiendaagsche Veldtogt’ (1831).