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# A Separate Language, a Separate Identity? Organisations of Frisian Migrants in Amsterdam in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Frank Suurenbroek and Marlou Schrover

*In this article we look at people who migrated from the Dutch province of Friesland to the Dutch capital, Amsterdam. We examine developments within Friesland itself at the time of migration. This case-study offers a unique opportunity to relate developments in the sending society (Friesland) to the nature of organisations in the receiving society (Amsterdam). Many similarities have been noted between internal migration and international migration; it is therefore reasonable to assume that what is observed in this case may also have relevance for international migrants. Developments within Friesland, more than any other factor, determined the nature of the Frisian organisations. An interest that was essentially local—Frisian autonomy—influenced the nature of migrant organisations outside Friesland, and helped to create a separate identity. In other words, the character of migrant organisation depended to a large extent on developments in the region of origin. Moreover, the Frisian case shows the importance of language in the construction of an identity. Lastly it is important to note that the driving force behind a movement can be very effective despite being very small, but as long as its aim is to be inclusive.*

*Keywords: Language; Construction of Identity; Friesland; Internal Migration; Sending and Receiving Societies*

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### **Introduction: Sending and Receiving Societies in the Frisian Case**

It is difficult to assess the explanatory value of the immigrants' cultural baggage, if migrants are only studied at their destination (Moya 1998). The concept of cultural baggage readily leads to circular reasoning when studied only at the receiving end of the migration process. If immigrants set up an organisation, for instance for playing football, football playing was apparently part of their cultural baggage. To avoid circular reasoning, we look in this article at both the sending and the receiving society. We focus on people who migrated from the Dutch province of Friesland to Amsterdam.

We base our work on an in-depth study of both developments within Friesland, and the Frisian organisations that existed in Amsterdam in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Suurenbroek 2000, 2001). Frisian migrants founded 13 organisations in Amsterdam during the decades before and after 1900. To analyse these organisations' goals and activities a study was made of the societies' correspondence, of reports on their meetings (internal reports and newspaper articles), of the printed programmes of the various gatherings, of letters and stories that were sent to the organisations' board members, and of announcements, invitations and ego-documents.

Discussion about cultural difference usually deals with international migration. Cultural barriers, however, exist within as well as between nations. Basques in Spain and Bretons in France are examples of minorities with cultural differences within nations (Moch 1992). Recent studies have shown that, in many aspects, internal migration and migration across national borders were not all that different (Hochstadt 1999; Jackson 1997; Pooley and Turnbull 1998). Despite such similarities having been noted, little has been said so far about organisations of internal migrants.

As we will show, the cultural difference between Friesland and Amsterdam was very much a product of the linguistic emancipation that came to the fore in Friesland at the end of the nineteenth century. Precisely at the point when the Frisian language seemed about to disappear, a movement arose that tried to retain Frisian as a separate language. The cultural difference between Friesland and the rest of the Netherlands was an invention of the last part of the nineteenth century. Emancipation of the Frisian language was the driving-force behind the numerous Frisian organisations. All these Frisian organisations centred on language. This article aims to show how a semi-political issue in the region of origin of the migrants determined the nature of their organisations in the city of destination. Cultural differences did not lie at the basis of the creation of these organisations, but rather resulted from it.

### **A Separate Identity?**

It is generally accepted that 'groups' and 'ethnicity' are social constructs. Since Frederik Barth's study of 1969, the social organisation of differences and similarities has been stressed in the definition of groups or ethnicities (Barth 1969; Verkuyten 1999). Barth saw ethnicity as a social identity that was determined to a large extent by

the context. The use of these constructs, however, does shape social relations and as such has real consequences (Breton 1964; Carter *et al.* 1996; Pozzetta 1991). Ethnicity revolves around differences that are made important (Kroes 1992; Mak 2000; Saharso 1992). It is therefore important to know who holds on to the myth of a common identity, and for what purpose (Nadel 1990: 6; Rath 1991: 37). Although there may be a consensus about the social construction of ethnicity, this does not mean that ethnicity is defined by all authors in the same way (Hutchinson and Smith 1996). A typical example of a definition is the one used by Bonacich and Modell (1980). They define ethnicity as a communalistic form of social affiliation, arising from a special bond among people of like origins, and a disdain for people of dissimilar origin. The definition leaves open *what* people share.

Ethnicity has to do with group formation (Verkuyten 1999: 12), especially in connection with migration, and presents itself in collective action (Ratcliffe 1994: 6). Not all group formation is ethnic group formation, however. This is only the case when a meaning is attached to a (perceived) common history, origin, appearance, religion or language (Phinney 1990). Although it is not clear what exactly is needed to create a separate ethnicity, language features in all definitions.

Ethnicity is usually associated with migration across national borders. A different nationality, however, was not a prerequisite for creating a separate identity. A nation is an imagined political community. These communities became much more important in the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the communities people focused on were more often the province or the town, rather than the nation.

In the early nineteenth century, there were significant regional cultural differences within the Netherlands (Swierenga 1980: 129). People in one part of the country dressed differently from those in other parts. They ate different meals and did so at different hours. There was even no uniform time. Between the east and the west there was a quarter of an hour time difference. Despite the fact that the Netherlands is a small country, language differences within the Netherlands were large at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Knippenberg and De Pater 1988: 169). Civil servants travelling from the capital to the provinces in the south or the north occasionally took interpreters with them. They did not do so merely to be able to talk to the local peasants, but in order to be able to talk to their fellow-administrators at a local level.

People from one province were recognisable as 'foreigners' when they went to another province. Some travellers in the first half of the nineteenth century noticed differences in character between the inhabitants of various provinces. Frisians, from the northern province of Friesland, were regarded as rude, offensive, headstrong, ponderous, lacking courage, proud of their families, self-conceited, old-fashioned, orientated on all that was Frisian and averse to all that was not, against all change and intolerant (Knippenberg and De Pater 1988: 35). Similar but slightly different things were said about the inhabitants of other provinces. It was part of a rhetoric in which the urban population made fun of the peasants in the countryside, who were depicted

as stupid and superstitious. Obstinance, however, was reserved in the stereotypical image for the headstrong Frisians.

In the first half of the nineteenth century differences within the Netherlands started to disappear rapidly. Conscriptation played a role in this unification, but also centralisation of administration, education, and improvements in the infrastructure. School boards and inspectors saw to it that teachers spoke Dutch to their pupils. Teachers were advised not to speak dialect at school and to forbid their pupils to speak dialect on the school premises.

### **Frisian**

Friesland or Fryslan is a province in the far north of the Netherlands. Frisian is a Germanic language that is spoken in Germany and the Netherlands. There are three main varieties of Frisian: West Frisian (Frysk) which is spoken in Friesland (Netherlands), North Frisian (Friisk) which consists of nine different dialects in Schleswig-Holstein (Germany), and Sater Frisian (Seeltersk) which is spoken in Niedersachsen (Germany). Here we concentrate on the Frisian that was spoken in the Netherlands, which itself also consisted of some varieties. The Frisian Movement, discussed below, wanted to preserve that language and not the related languages in other countries. The movement did not stretch across the border into Germany. The restriction of the movement to the Dutch national context makes it clear that the aim of the movement was not so much saving the language as such, but more halting the replacement of Frisian by Dutch. More precisely, they did not reject the Dutch language, but wanted to get the Frisian language officially recognised as a real, but second, language.

Frisian, as it is spoken in the Netherlands, shows some striking similarities to English (Gorter and Jonkman 1994). Some Frisian words derive from English, others are German or Danish in origin, but the Dutch language has had the strongest influence on Frisian. Despite this, Frisian cannot be easily understood by people who speak Dutch. In 1998, Frisian was certified as an official separate language.<sup>1</sup> The population of Friesland can now officially choose between Frisian and Dutch. Names of streets are to be in two languages. Courts have to provide interpreters to translate from Frisian to Dutch and vice versa.

In Friesland, Frisian was used as a language of administration and law until the middle of the sixteenth century. Thereafter it stopped being a written language. Frisian rapidly became less important in the beginning of the nineteenth century. At that time, three languages were used in Friesland (Feitsma 1981: 163–76): the Frisian that was spoken by country people; urban-Frisian, spoken in the cities; and Dutch. Urban-Frisian was strongly influenced by Dutch. The Frisian spoken in the countryside differed by region; urban-Frisian by town. Variations depended on where people lived (region, town or country) and on class. Dutch was the language of the church and the language of education. There were no schoolbooks in Frisian and there was no Frisian bible. In church, preaching and singing were done in Dutch.

Children were forbidden to speak Frisian at school, and teachers were not to teach in Frisian. Dutch was used in courts and in administration. The written language was always Dutch; Frisian was the language of the illiterate.

Already before 1800, there were complaints about the decay of the Frisian language. Most people in Friesland spoke Dutch as well as Frisian. Observers expressed their fears that the Frisian language would soon disappear. Thereupon a Frisian language consciousness developed. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, novelists started to write in Frisian with the explicit aim of preserving the language. These authors used words that were no longer used by most speakers of Frisian. They searched for them in remote villages. The search for and re-creation of what was believed to be the original Frisian language was connected to Regional Romanticism of that time. Regional Romanticism—a European-wide movement of which the Grimm brothers in German regions were also important exponents—stressed the purity of the countryside and contrasted it with the hustle of the big city. The movement emphasised regional differences just at a time when regional differences were becoming less important. The Frisian movement was also to some extent a nationalistic movement. The Frisians did not want to set up a separate Frisian state, but they did want some form of autonomy from the Dutch centralised state. The movement mirrored itself on other groups elsewhere in Europe, such as the Flemish in Belgium and the Czechs in Austria-Hungary, who likewise hoped to find this kind of autonomy.

Not only were novels written in an attempt to preserve the Frisian language; the Frisian novelists of the nineteenth century also wrote Frisian songs. These songs were not the written-down versions of older folk music, but new songs intended to replace the old, rude, street-songs. They were meant to educate the people, and became very popular. In the second half of the nineteenth century the Frisian (amateur) theatre began to play a significant role. Frisian literature, songs and theatre were important factors in promoting the Frisian ideology: the positive value of being Frisian—loyal, sincere, diligent, simple—with an idyllic view of childhood, youth, life of people and nature, and opposing the morals of town life and what is foreign (Feitsma 1981). Before 1800, the Frisian ideology was something of the upper class. It was a remnant of the old Frisian glory and a weapon in the defence of Frisian sovereignty and autonomy, which were believed to have existed at one point in time. The emancipation of the middle class, the awakening of the peasantry, of those in the country who spoke Frisian, caused the democratisation of the Frisian ideology. The Frisian language was an important part of that ideology and a means of spreading it. Hence the Frisian language had a highly symbolic function.

The Frisian language was at the core of the so-called Frisian Movement (*Friese Beweging*). The Frisian Movement has a complicated history with a lot of internal discussion and conflict (Jensma 1998; Suurenbroek 2000; Zondergeld 1978). Here we present a simplified version of its history. In 1827 the Frisian Society (*Fries Genootschap van Geschied-, Oudheid- en Taalkunde*) was set up. This society published a yearbook in the Frisian language (*Friesch Jierboekjen*) from 1829 to

1835, and since 1837 the yearbook *De Frije Fries* (The Free Frisian) still exists today. In 1844 the *Selskip for Fryske Tael en Letterkunde* (Society for Frisian Language and Literature) was set up with the explicit aim to preserve the Frisian language. The *Selskip* felt that Frisian should be used more and should be acknowledged as a separate language. The people who set up the *Selskip* came from parts of Friesland—the village of De Bildt and the town of Leeuwarden predominantly—where an ‘untainted’ variety of Frisian had not been spoken for centuries. Teachers and (amateur) writers played a role in the founding of the *Selskip*. The *Selskip* was rather successful. In the early years the organisation had 150 members. This rose to 543 in 1884, followed by a decline, resulting in a membership of 312 in 1893 (Zondergeld 1978: 25). Around 1900, the number of members rose again to over a thousand. Both men and women were members. The population of Friesland was 340,000 at that time, of whom 0.23 per cent were members of the *Selskip*.

One of the goals of the *Selskip* was to reach out to what some members called the common people. It was believed that this could, for instance, be done through theatre plays. To further their cause, local branch societies were set up, called *kriten* (circles). The *kriten* had to broaden the base of the movement. Around 1900, some people within the *Selskip* felt that the common people still had not been involved in the movement enough. They encouraged authors to write more simple and more realistic plays. Some even wanted to instruct the writers to only use words that actually were used in everyday language and that could be understood by everybody. In 1905, the *Boun Jong-Fryslân* (the Young Friesland League) was set up as an independent part of the *Selskip*. It was founded by Frisians who saw themselves as belonging to a younger generation. The new organisation was influenced by the socialist movement. In line with general developments in the Netherlands at the time, this initiative was followed by a separate Protestant organisation in 1908 (*Cristlik Selskip for Fryske Tael- en Skriftenkenisse* or the Christian Society for Knowledge of Spoken and Written Frisian) (Zondergeld 1978: 16–37), and shortly thereafter by a Catholic organisation (*Roomsk Frysk Selskip* or Catholic Frisian Society) (Van de Meer-Van der Klei 1967). In the meantime the *Selskip* changed once again. In 1915 some people within the *Selskip* started to oppose the idea that it was the common people who should be reached. They wanted to lift the language to a higher literary level; a language that could give shape to their thoughts and feelings. The new generation of authors also looked further afield. Translations into Frisian were made of the works of Keats and Shelley (Bork and Verkruisje 1985: 33; Jensma 1998: 183; Zondergeld 1978: 51–74).

Although all members of the various organisations thought that the Frisian language was important, this commonality did not prove to be enough to bridge religious and class differences. The result of the discord amongst the advocates of the Frisian Movement was that there were even more societies to further its cause. In mutual competition with each other, they probably did more than could have been done if antagonism had not occurred. It was precisely the competition that drove the Frisian Movement on. Whatever their differences were, all societies continued to revolve around language. The poems, songs, novels, plays and newspaper articles all

basically sang the same mantra: more or less, they praised the Frisian people, their nature, stamina and noble character, their heroic and rich history, their love of freedom and—most importantly—their difference from the rest of Dutch society (Troelstra 1933: 168–203). Authors continued to concentrate on simple language, and described everyday phenomena. Here the interlocking of language and the construction of identity come to the fore—both strengthened each other. If the language was to be preserved something had to be written in it, and the something that was written was an endless praise of all things Frisian. The praise was not sung in highbrow words. It was moulded into the cast of an innocent poem about a farm, or a view from a window. In the poem, it seemed to be more or less by accident that this was a Frisian farm and a Frisian window, although sometimes its nationalism was more than apparent. The effect, however, was that preservation of the language and construction of an identity reinforced each other. Had the core of the movement been something other than language the spiralled reaction would probably not have evolved.

The Frisian Movement branched out to the Frisians living outside Friesland. If the Frisian Movement was to be successful, it was believed, it had to be made clear that Frisian language and culture were also important to Frisians not living in Friesland. Friesland was characterised by a high rate of out-migration. Each year 70 per cent of the population growth was absorbed by migration. The out-migration rate of this province was the highest of the country. In 1881 the net migration for Friesland (counting only migration within the Netherlands) was a deficit of 4,498 in a single year (Ter Heijde 1965).

In the nineteenth century numerous organisations sprang up amongst the Frisians living outside of Friesland. Those founded in Amsterdam will be described below. In 1905, an umbrella organisation was founded for the Frisian organisations outside of Friesland: the *Boun fen Fryske Selskippen bûten Fryslân* (the League for Frisian Societies outside of Friesland), also called the *Bûtenboun* (Outside League): 24 organisations joined the *Bûtenboun*. Like in Friesland itself, religious and political differences drove the members of the *Bûtenboun* apart. It led to the downfall of the organisation in 1918. In 1923, a successor to the *Bûtenboun* was established under the same name. This new organisation was destined for a longer life, probably because at this time political and religious neutrality had been incorporated into the regulations of the *Bûtenboun*. The *Bûtenboun* still exists today. The aim of the *Bûtenboun* was to form the organisational axis for all societies outside of Friesland and to facilitate co-operation between them. In this way the *Bûtenboun* hoped to help them in their efforts for the preservation and promotion of the Frisian language. To this end, annual Frisian days were organised, theatre performances, and singing and writing contests were held, new societies were established, existing societies were supported in their work, and books written in the Frisian language were sold. The *Bûtenboun* also encouraged translations.

Frisians not only migrated to Amsterdam; many also went to the United States. Frisian immigrants in the US—for instance in Paterson, New Jersey—also

established Frisian organisations. Like their counterparts in the Netherlands, they performed plays and reported back on their activities in Frisian newspapers. Internal migrants and international migrants did not differ on this point.

And within the Netherlands, Frisian migrants were not the only internal migrants to set up organisations. In Amsterdam migrants from the rural provinces of Groningen, Drente and Zeeland also set up organisations. However, for these migrants language was not a key issue. Migrants from Drente, for instance, set up a society to raise money in support of those left behind in the province, where poverty was rising after the peat market had collapsed (see Louwes 1996).

It can be argued that people from these provinces spoke a dialect but not a different language, like the Frisians. It was, however, not only in Friesland that people spoke a different language from standard Dutch. The inhabitants of the province of Limburg, in the very south of the Netherlands, spoke a language that was as different from Dutch as Frisian was. It was strongly influenced by German and French. Like Frisian, Limburgs has been officially recognised as a minority language in 1998. It has, however, been awarded a lower status, which means that, for instance, courts do not have to supply an interpreter. Today there is a movement for the preservation of Limburgs. But this movement does not have nineteenth-century forerunners like the Frisian Movement. There were no Limburgian societies in Amsterdam. A low rate of migration from this province may explain this. However, since the language consciousness did not develop in the nineteenth century, there was also no movement that could stimulate the founding of Limburgian organisations. Language difference is not enough. What was needed were people interested in cultivating the difference.

### **Frisians in Amsterdam**

In the nineteenth century, the Dutch capital attracted many migrants, both from within the Netherlands and from abroad. They migrated to Amsterdam for a whole range of reasons, one of which was construction work (Knotter 1991; Suurenbroek 2001). Construction work reached its peak in Amsterdam in the late 1880s. The result was an influx of migrants. When the demand for labour declined, some of the surplus labour force left the city. Between 1870 and 1900, more than 650,000 people moved to the city, 90 per cent of whom were born in the Netherlands. During the same period, 550,000 people moved away to other areas.<sup>2</sup> Frisians formed the third largest group of migrants. They were only outnumbered by migrants from the provinces that neighboured on Amsterdam. In 1899 it was estimated that the number of Frisians was 40,000 (*Friesche Echo*, 14 January 1899). This estimate may have been exaggerated. The number of Frisians was, however, certainly more than 20,000. Official counts are not available. When the demand for workers fell, Amsterdam continued to attract large numbers of migrants. It was a cause of worry for the local authorities.

[Unemployment is] particularly widespread among porters and the aged, and the number of porters is growing by the week, as persons from provincial towns unable

to earn money locally come to Amsterdam and here continue to compete for porting jobs; such is particularly the case with Frisians, and those from Groningen and Nieuw Diep (quoted in De Groot 1988: 171).

The local authorities may have feared the arrival of poor Frisian migrants, but the majority of the Frisians was in fact lower middle class. For this article we have made use of a demographic analysis of the Frisian population in Amsterdam (Suurenbroek 2001). Men mostly worked as carpenters, smiths, merchants, skippers and sailors. Twenty-five per cent of the male migrants worked as casual labourers and manual workers. Female immigrants worked as domestic servants. Domestic servants from Friesland were looked upon favourably in Amsterdam. At the top of the social ladder was a small Frisian elite. Most Frisians (80 per cent) came as single migrants. The turnover amongst the migrants was rather high. Many left Amsterdam within two years of arrival.

Frisians saw themselves as distinct from the rest of the Dutch population, feeling instead some connection with other Frisians in Amsterdam.

The grey, monotonous, shabby-looking streets with their tall buildings hardly looked inviting and it was with some misgivings that I entered through the gate. 'Glad to see you. Hand me your coat, I'll hang it by the door.' It was said to me in Frisian. I had not expected such a Frisian welcome. A friendly man in a Manchester suit stood in front of me: my new superior, Jochem Kalsbeek, originating from Tijnje (Schurer 1969: 85).

In this manner, the teacher Fedde Schurer was put at ease on his first working day in Amsterdam. Policeman H. Voordewind was similarly convinced that the Frisian identity created ties:

So I took him for a walk. The man had not said more than a few words when I realised that he was Frisian. 'You're not from Amsterdam', I remarked. 'No indeed, and nor are you.' This broke the ice and our conversation continued in the mother tongue. . . . I asked Boersma several particulars about the Amsterdam police force and he answered in great detail. The fact that he would speak his vernacular to a fellow countryman, therefore, does not seem odd to me at all (Voordewind 1949: 12).

The Frisian migrants might have felt connected to each other, but they were not instantly recognisable by others, especially not after they had lived in Amsterdam for a couple of years. All Frisians spoke Dutch and they were not discriminated against. The teacher Fedde Schurer had been working for some years in Amsterdam when rumours had it that the Frisian cavalry would be engaged in controlling the riots among the unemployed.

'What do you make of this, Sir?' upset mothers would thus accost me in the school corridors. 'They want to send over these dirty bog-trotting jades from Friesland, now!' 'No need for that', I replied, 'you see one right in front of you'. The fact that

this had not at all occurred to them, I took to be proof of my own integration and their acceptance of me as an Amsterdammer (Schurer 1969: 89).

Like many migrants all over the world, the Frisians in Amsterdam had mixed feelings about where they belonged. Policeman Voordewind remarked, after having lived in Amsterdam for forty years:

I have become an Amsterdammer to the core of my being in the course of these forty years, and with all of those Frisians who have worked and lived here for a longer period of time I proclaim that if I had not been Frisian, I would want to be an Amsterdammer (Voordewind 1949: 14).

Others were less convinced:

I am an Amsterdammer. . . . That is to say, I am an official inhabitant of Amsterdam. . . . I pay taxes to the Amsterdam authorities. My name is in the telephone and postal directories. In this, I am an Amsterdammer. . . . Yet a born-and-bred Amsterdammer is—or so I find every day—made of a different metal from me (*It Heitelan*, 11 March 1992: 204).

### **Frisian Organisations in Amsterdam**

Wybren Duim was born on 11 March 1862 in the Frisian village of Lemmer. In 1882, he settled in Amsterdam, where he would stay the rest of his life. It was not long before he became acquainted with the members of the Frisian society *De Frije Fries* (The Free Frisian), which organised gatherings at which lectures were given and yearly plays were performed. The year 1886 saw Wybren Duim's debut as an actor in Amsterdam. Later he became one of the leading performers on the Frisian stage. Reviewing Duim's very first performance, the *Amsterdamsche Courant* reported:

It was with the greatest of pleasure that we found ourselves present at the 'annual meeting' of the society '*De Frije Fries*', held in the rooms of the café Flora on the Weteringschans, last Thursday night. It was an evening of aesthetic enjoyment, such as by no means unique, but these celebratory proceedings distinguished themselves from those on similar occasions by the exclusive gathering of Frisian men and women, who have not only their lands of origin, but also their native tongue in common. . . .

After an elegant introductory speech . . . a welcoming song was sung and it was curtains up for the performance of 'Silent Jan', a drama in two acts, in which the audience was made party to the baser nature of a certain Grim, a solicitor, admirably played by Master W. Duim. . . . After more singing, the Frisian play 'Solke with her Pig's Trotters' was performed in the Frisian language. . . . Following this piece, there was '*doensje*' [dancing], which kept the large crowd occupied in a '*liocht en vrolik*' [light and cheerful] manner for a considerable time (quoted in *It Heitelan*, 11 March 1922: 110).

*De Frije Fries* was not the only Frisian organisation in Amsterdam (Suurenbroek 2000). As mentioned above, there were 13 Frisian organisations in the decades before and after 1900. Through the study of their archives we know more about their aims and activities. Amongst the older and more important organisations we find *Tjeerd Velstra* (1883), *Friso* (1897) and *Nocht and Wille* (first decade of the twentieth century). In 1898 the newspaper the *Friesche Echo* was published in Amsterdam. *Tjeerd Velstra* would remain a successful society until 1930. *Friso* merged with *Nocht en Wille* in 1913 and became *Fryslân*, active until the 1970s. In 1938 the *Friso-Noard* was founded, which still exists today. The aim of all these societies was preserving and encouraging the use of the Frisian language. Like in Friesland itself, there were also separate Protestant and Catholic organisations. Furthermore there was *It Frysk Toaniel* (Frisian Theatre), a dancing society and a society for playing at fives—a typically Frisian local pastime (*Kaatsen*). There were also two student organisations: *Fryslan* (1894) and the *Natio Frystica* (1898). Members of this last organisation were later involved in the founding of the *Cristlik Selskip* in Amsterdam in 1919. There was intensive contact between the board members of the various organisations. Some people who ran one organisation were also involved in another or in the Frisian newspapers. It was a small and intertwined elite who led the organisations.

The activities of the Frisian organisations proved attractive. A meeting held by the Frisian society *Velstra* in 1902 resulted in a fully packed Bellevue Theatre (600 people) and a *Friso* meeting in the same year filled the Odeon with a similar number of people. In 1913, the Bellevue was filled with an audience of 600 after the merger between *Nocht en Wille* and *Friso*. These numbers do not include those who came later. The first part of the evening was taken up by a dinner, followed by speeches, poems and plays. The unskilled classes would usually turn up for the second part of the evening, the dancing that would last until the early hours. It is possible that the unskilled classes were not at all interested in other cultural events, but maybe they simply could not afford the attendance fee for the whole evening. In any case, the attendance records indicate that many people came only for the later part of the evening.

Not all Frisians who attended may have been interested in promoting the Frisian language. Jan Jelles Hof, one of the founders of the Young Friesland League, claimed these were ‘amateur Frisians’ not seriously involved in the dispute over the language. Although Frisian was close to their hearts and they remained faithful to the language and culture throughout their lives, they were not actively engaged in the passionate discussions about the future of Frisian. In addition, they spoke mainly Dutch to their children (Zondergeld 1978: 33–8). On one occasion a lecture on ‘The Frisian Farm’ was stopped halfway through because the audience, with the exception of a few people, was not interested (*De Friesche Echo*, 14 January 1898).

Why did these amateur Frisians come to the meetings? As has been said above, most Frisian migrants were young and single. A report drawn up after a *Velstra* meeting in 1902 remarked: ‘Dancing offers an excellent opportunity to find a sweetheart while listening to music.’<sup>3</sup> One programme, for a meeting of the *Fryslân*

society, printed the following suggestive message beside the list of dance partners: 'To the men: he who wishes to catch a bird should throw a net over them. To the ladies: she who wishes to be engaged in conversation should sweet-talk' (Suurenbroek 2000: 332). The meetings of the Frisian organisations were partly a marriage market for those who wanted to find a Frisian partner. There were also, of course, Frisians who felt lost in the big city. Frisian society newsletters and circulars frequently made mention of newcomers drowning in the hustle of the big unfamiliar city. Membership of one of the societies could prove the solution to this problem: 'you would be addressed in Frisian and there were people there who may have lived in Holland for years, but who were Frisians to the core [...] it was almost like being at home for a moment' (quoted in Suurenbroek 2000: 331).

The cushioning role of the Frisian organisations and their function as a marriage market made them attractive to Frisian migrants who were not very interested in maintaining the Frisian language. By organising plays and dances, the small group for whom preserving the language was the main interest could broaden the carrying capacity of their organisation. Said differently, it was through plays, dancing and singing that Frisians who were less interested in language could be involved. They were not so much interested in the ideological part of the movement and came more for the fun of it. Involving these people in the movement was not only meant to broaden the base of the movement. It also fitted the ideology, which revolved around preserving the authentic Frisian society as well as the language.

## Conclusion

The case-study presented here offers a unique opportunity to relate developments in the sending society (Friesland) to the nature of organisations in the receiving society (Amsterdam). The nature of the Frisian organisations in Amsterdam was determined to a large extent by the nature of the Frisian Movement in Friesland itself. It was developments within Friesland, more than any other factor, which determined the nature of the Frisian organisations. This interaction had three consequences:

- The common aim of the Frisian Movement and the Frisian organisations in Amsterdam was *preservation of the Frisian language*. This goal could only be reached if as many people as possible spoke this language. This meant that the Frisian Movement was very much an inclusive movement. Thus the Movement reached out to people who may have spoken Frisian but who were not interested in retaining the language (the 'amateur Frisians' as they were called by the die-hards).
- The Frisian Movement, and the Frisian organisations in Amsterdam as part of it, wanted to *reach out to the common people*. This implied broadening the activities of the Movement beyond language. People were attracted to the Movement by organising dances and by presenting the possibility of meeting other Frisians, often with marriage in mind.
- The Frisian Movement *revolved around language*. This resulted in the cultivation of Frisian poems, novels, songs, theatre plays and newspaper articles. In all these

publications something had to be said, and what was written was often praise of the Frisian landscape, nature and character. Through this *a Frisian identity was created*.

As the comparison with the other provinces showed, migration from the countryside to the town did not automatically lead to the formation of organisations (at least not at a formal level). People from other provinces had a few organisations, but by no means as many as the Frisians had. Neither does language difference in itself explain the difference; Limburgian is as different from standard Dutch as Frisian. A language awareness, however, developed much later and hence there was no movement to spur the organisations on.

The outcome of the interaction between developments within Friesland and migrants outside this province was a high degree of institutionalisation. The inclusive character of the Frisian Movement led to attempts by the Amsterdam organisations to rally as many Frisians as possible for any activity. If Frisian migrants wanted entertainment they could easily find it in one of the many organisations. The high degree of institutionalisation was strengthened by the schism in the Frisian Movement along religious and political lines. The effect of this discord was that there were several organisations working towards the same goal. Competition between these organisations furthered institutionalisation.

What is particularly interesting in the Frisian case is how an interest that was essentially local—Frisian autonomy—influenced the nature of migrant organisations outside Friesland, and helped to create a separate identity. The character of organisation of migrants depended to a large extent on developments in the region of origin. Moreover, the Frisian case shows the importance of language in the construction of an identity. Lastly it is important to appreciate that the driving-force behind a movement can be very effective, despite being very small, as long as its aim is to be inclusive.

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### **Notes**

- [1] European Charter for Regional and Minority languages, ETS no. 148, Council of Europe.
- [2] See *Statistisch Jaarboek der Gemeente Amsterdam 1897*, and subsequent issues.
- [3] See 'Dounsjen', *Sjlucht en Rjucht*, 1902: 587.

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