CHAPTER 4

Pride and Prejudice: Universal Monarchy Discourse and the Peace Negotiations of 1709–1710

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In 1725, more than a decade after the Peace of Utrecht, the Frisian politician Sicco van Goslinga, now fifty-nine years old, spoke of ‘anti-French principles which after three wars had inspired all of the elder regents’.1 The wars against Louis XIV, which had commenced with the Year of Disaster in 1672 and which had lasted until the Peace of Utrecht, had marked a generation of politicians. Anti-French sentiments were deeply entrenched in the national consciousness and had not failed to leave their mark on policymakers.

This in itself is no revelation. We know that ever since the late 1660s thousands of pamphlets had flooded the Dutch public with anti-French rhetoric, about French pride, deceit, ambition, arrogance, bad religion and corruption.2 All these qualities merged into a grand narrative about what has become known as Universal Monarchy. But historians have been less receptive to the fact that such notions also touched the attitude of diplomats and policymakers, even if the Dutch historian Johanna Stork-Penning, who wrote the authoritative study on Dutch negotiations for peace during the War of the Spanish Succession, spoke of the ‘distrust of France which showed in all Dutch decisions’; she described it as a ‘substantial factor’ in the analysis.3

And yet, despite this observation, arguably the diplomatic history of this period has normally been studied through the lens of Realism, relying on intricate empirical analyses of day-to-day diplomatic manoeuvres and counter-manoeuvres—indeed the very method that Stork-Penning used and which has since then been faithfully followed by other historians studying the War of the Spanish Succession. In effect Dutch historians have all but ignored the impact of Universal Monarchy-discourse on the negotiations. Historians have been fully aware of the pervasiveness of the image of France as a Universal Monarchy, and have understandably located such discourses in such sources

1 Quoted in J.G. Stork-Penning, Het grote werk (Wolters: Groningen, 1958), 5n.
3 Stork-Penning, Het grote werk, 5.
as pamphlets, satirical poems and songs, but have more or less ignored hardcore diplomatic and political sources such as memorials and correspondence.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to attempt to bridge the methodological gap between cultural and diplomatic historians, to see whether Universal Monarchy discourse in fact pervaded all of these sources, in order to show how policymakers and diplomats did actually work within a wider cultural framework. Too often the compartments of popular culture and diplomacy are presumed to be strictly divided. I take my cue from recent developments in International Relations Theory, in particular from the Danish scholar Lene Hansen. In building up a case against Realism, she argues that foreign policy should not be explained by analysing a rational decision-making process but by understanding identity discourses, which are often steeped in popular culture. In her words, ‘Foreign policies need an account, or a story, of the problems and issue they are trying to address’. Such a story is built from a ‘basic discourse,’ a foundational story which is produced and reproduced in cultural and foreign policy texts. Thus one could argue that cultural and political sources are connected through intertextuality. Hansen operates from the notion of Julia Kristeva that all texts are part of an intertextual web, and she differentiates between explicit textual connections (such as references to other literature) or implicit textual connections (such as comparable concepts or catchphrases like ‘clash of civilizations’). It is the second category of intertextual connections I will be exploring in this chapter, focusing in particular on clusters of keywords and catchphrases. Hansen proposes an intertextual model in which discourses in various kinds of sources can be compared, in order to find out whether a specific discourse was prevalent. The purpose is to see whether a ‘basic discourse’ permeated both popular and political sources and thus to see how diplomats were in fact influenced by their cultural context. This also changes our notion on the nature of diplomatic negotiations. Whereas Realist historians assume that the language diplomats use was to describe reality, one could now argue that their language was self-referential, indeed shaped reality by means of the discourse employed. In the words of International Relations

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6 Hansen, Security as Practice, vi.
7 Hansen, Security as Practice, ch. 4.
8 Hansen, Security as Practice, 56–57.
9 Hansen, Security as Practice, 64.