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THE CROWN AND THE BILL

On heredity, power, colonialism, privilege,

and the price of national memory

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THE CROWN AND THE BILL

On Heredity, Power, Colonialism, Privilege, and the Price of National Memory

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A Book About Power, History, and Responsibility

The Crown bears the weight of the past.

Democracy bears the weight of the present.

But the future belongs to no one.

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PROLOGUE - THE CROWN AND THE PRICE OF HEREDITY

The Question Behind the Crown

At first glance, a crown seems simple: **gold, precious stones, and a design that has been recognizable for centuries.**

Yet it has never been merely an object.

The crown embodies ideas about ancestry, authority, continuity, and the question of whether birth can entitle someone to a special place in society.

Those who look at a crown therefore see more than a head of state. They see history.

For some, the monarchy symbolizes national unity; **for others, it is a remnant of an era in which people were not allowed to decide for themselves who would govern them.**

Both groups look at the same symbol but see something different. This is because political institutions consist not only of laws, but also of memories, customs, and meanings passed down through generations.

The Netherlands is a democratic constitutional state governed by the rule of law. Citizens elect their representatives, governments can be replaced, and fundamental rights place limits on the power of the state. Yet the monarchy is not acquired through elections; **it is passed down through birth.**

This is no secret.

That is precisely why it deserves attention.

The most important question is not whether the King is a good person. The monarchy is not a test of personal character.

The fundamental question is this: **Why do we accept that one public office is hereditary?**

That is where this book begins. Not with sympathy or hostility, but with the principle itself.

A child does not choose its parents, surname, birthplace, or social environment. Nor does a child choose the wealth, connections, or history associated with its family.

… Yet all these circumstances can profoundly influence the course of a person's life.

For some, birth represents merely a beginning. For others, it also provides a head start. And for a select few, it even determines a constitutional position.

In modern democracies, public offices are generally not hereditary. Ministers are appointed, representatives are elected, and judges are appointed in accordance with legal procedures.

… Yet a head of state can still be designated by birth. This is the foundation of the monarchy, but because the principle has become so familiar, many people scarcely recognize it as a political choice.

That is why this book is not only about the monarchy, but also about inheritance: **the transfer of money, property, names, networks, education, social standing, political access, and historical reputation.**

It examines the point at which an advantage becomes so commonplace that no one recognizes it as a privilege anymore.

Privilege, after all, is often most successful when it remains invisible.

Those who have never encountered a closed door rarely ask why others find it more difficult to get in.

Those who have always had money at their disposal can easily come to believe that prosperity is primarily a matter of discipline.

Those who have benefited from good education and influential networks may forget that access to these resources is itself a form of capital.

And those who know from birth that a particular position is theirs by right may lose sight of the fact that others can never attain that position on the same terms.

None of this makes anyone guilty of their birth. A child born in a palace did not ask to be born there, just as a child raised in poverty did not choose those circumstances. Birth is not a moral achievement. Society is nevertheless entitled to examine what it does with the consequences of birth.

That is where responsibility begins.

The same applies to history. The Netherlands has a rich history of trade, science, art, maritime enterprise, law, and entrepreneurship, but also of colonial domination, slavery, theft, exploitation, war, and violence.

A nation can acknowledge both histories; **one does not cancel out the other.**

Those who wish to remember only what inspires pride see only half the picture. The same is true of those who wish to remember only what inspires guilt. A mature society must be able to examine its past in its entirety.

That is why this book places the crown alongside the colony. Not because the present King can personally be held responsible for everything that happened centuries ago, but because a monarchy cannot be separated from the history of the state with which it is connected.

A dynasty represents continuity. But continuity also means that history does not end when a generation dies. The name survives, the symbols remain recognizable, and the institutional line continues.

With that continuity, the question of responsibility also remains.

Those living today are not guilty of what they did not do, but they do live in a society shaped by the past. This distinction is essential:

Guilt is not hereditary.

History is.

Responsibility can arise from the way a society deals with that history.

This applies not only to kings. An entrepreneur can inherit a business, a family can inherit wealth, an aristocrat can inherit a name, and a political family can inherit a network.

A country inherits institutions; **a society inherits stories. Every generation receives something from the one before it.**

The question is what it chooses to do with that inheritance.

For an inheritance that is never examined can make ownership seem natural, turn power into tradition, and eventually elevate tradition into something beyond question. At a certain point, no one asks why anymore.

That single word forms the quiet core of this book: **Why?**

Why a crown?

Why inheritance and privilege?

Why certain monuments and certain silences?

Why are some events commemorated while others are barely mentioned?

Why are certain stories given a place in the national memory while others remain out of sight?

And why do we regard some forms of power as self-evident and others as suspect?

Asking these questions does not mean being against the Netherlands. It means taking the Netherlands seriously.

A society that cannot tolerate questions is vulnerable.

A society capable of critically examining its own history and institutions demonstrates confidence in its ability to change.

This book is therefore neither a personal indictment of the current King nor an attempt to assign historical guilt to living generations. Nor is it an argument for destroying everything that is old. It examines a principle:

Can a modern democracy continue to accept hereditary power without contradicting its own fundamental principles? And if so, under what conditions?

Perhaps the monarchy will endure. Perhaps it will one day disappear. But before that question can be answered, we must reflect on what equality truly means.

Is everyone equal because everyone has one vote, or must we also consider the circumstances in which people begin their lives?

Is freedom merely the right to choose, or does it also mean having the opportunity to make choices in practice?

Does power consist solely of what is laid down in law, or also of what is decided behind doors to which not everyone has access?

And is history only what is recorded in archives, or does it also include what is passed down within families for generations?

Those who ask these questions arrive at something far greater than the monarchy: the way a society distributes power, justifies privilege, remembers its past, and determines who will be allowed to make decisions tomorrow.

The crown is merely the visible beginning. Behind the crown lie centuries of history. Behind history stand people. Behind people lie choices. And behind those choices lies the same human question:

Who gets to decide?

Who governs, who obeys, who owns, who pays, and who benefits? Who is heard, who is forgotten, and who ultimately determines what is just?

The answers change over the centuries, but the questions remain.

This book does not seek to dictate what the reader should think. It invites the reader to think again: about the crown, the Netherlands,

colonialism, privilege, democracy, memory, and responsibility. And ultimately, about themselves.

Because perhaps the most important question is not whether the crown should remain, but **what kind of society we want to be, regardless of who wears it.**

A society that dares to know its history, holds its power to account, and examines its privileges.

A society capable of acknowledging mistakes and respecting traditions without being subservient to them.

A society that tolerates differences without dividing people into superior and inferior categories.

Democracy does not mean that no one stands above us. It means that no one may stand above the law, human dignity, or the obligation to account for their actions.

The crown may remain.

The crown may disappear.

But one thing must never disappear: **the freedom to ask why.**

As long as that question exists, power cannot be taken for granted, tradition can be examined, and history can be read anew. As long as that question exists, society can change.

And as long as that question exists, the citizen is not a subject, but someone who observes, listens, thinks, questions, and ultimately helps determine the course of society.

The King wears the crown.
Others determine the course.
The citizen pays the bill.

But who truly bears the cost, who really determines the course, and who ultimately decides what happens to the crown?

That is the question with which this book begins.



Chapter 1: The crown and the bill

THE CROWN, THE PAST, AND THE PRICE OF POWER

The King wears the crown.
Others determine the course.
The citizen pays the bill.

Three sentences. Sometimes that is enough to bring a centuries-old system into uncomfortable focus.

The crown rests on the head of one person, but it represents much more: **ancestry, continuity, tradition, and hereditary succession.**

It points to a past in which power did not begin with elections, but with birth.

That is where the paradox begins.

The Netherlands is a democratic constitutional state in which political power is constrained by laws, parliamentary oversight, and elections. No one is born with the right to become prime minister, nor can anyone simply declare themselves a member of parliament. Yet the Netherlands maintains an institution whose highest position is acquired through birth.

The King is not elected, does not apply for the position, and does not have to secure a majority of votes. He is born into it.

This is not an accusation, but the very essence of hereditary succession. Precisely because this principle seems self-evident, it deserves scrutiny. What has existed for centuries becomes tradition. And tradition can grow so old that no one asks why it exists anymore.

A Crown Is Never Just a Crown

A monarchy evokes images of state openings, official visits, palaces, and royal ceremonies. These symbolize national continuity, but behind those images lies an older reality in which ancestry determined social position.

Ancestry determined position, position determined access, and access determined influence. In this way, a structure emerged in which certain families could make decisions about the lives of others.

The modern Dutch monarchy differs fundamentally from the absolute monarchies of earlier times.

The King does not govern independently; **ministers bear political responsibility, and the parliamentary system determines the direction of the state.**

Yet the principle of hereditary succession remains.

The question, therefore, is not only how much political power the King possesses today, but also what it means for a democratic society to maintain an inherited national position.

The Past Does Not Stand Still

The Netherlands has been shaped by centuries of warfare, trade, religious conflict, economic development, and political reform.

… The country has a history of freedom, science, and state-building, but also of colonial domination, slavery, exploitation, and military violence.

These dark chapters are not isolated incidents. They formed part of the development of the Dutch state and economy.

For centuries, territories and populations outside Europe were subjected to authority over which they had little say. People were turned into property, labour was coerced, raw materials were extracted, and resistance was suppressed.

It is easy to regard such events as closed chapters.

… But history does not disappear simply because the calendar moves forward. It leaves traces in property, institutions, family histories, social relations, and collective memory.

That is why we must ask not only what happened, but also who benefited from it.

Who held power? Who gained from it?

… Who had something to lose?

… Who was allowed to speak, and who was forced to remain silent?

… Who made the rules, and who had to live under them?

These questions take us beyond individual events. They reveal the underlying structures of power.

The Colonial Past

The Netherlands has acknowledged that historical Dutch authorities permitted, promoted, and profited from slavery and the slave trade.

… This recognition is important, but it does not automatically mean that the consequences and mechanisms of that past are fully understood.

Slavery was not merely the story of people who turned into property, but also of an economic system.

Colonialism was not merely the administration of distant territories, but also a structure of interests. Military violence was not separate from political and economic objectives.

History therefore demands more than asking what happened. It also requires us to ask why it happened and who had an interest in it.

The tension between power and self-determination became particularly visible in Indonesia after 1945.

… After Indonesia declared its independence, the Netherlands attempted to restore its position in the former colony through military and political means.

Research conducted by NIOD, KITLV, and NIMH has demonstrated that Dutch armed forces used systematic and extreme violence between 1945 and 1950, including extrajudicial executions, torture, arson, destruction, and mass arrests.

This history clashed with the Dutch self-image of a nation defined by the rule of law, consultation, and reasonableness. A state can proclaim the

ideals of the rule of law within its own borders while creating a different reality elsewhere.

This is a recurring problem of power: **those who wield power often describe their intentions, while those subjected to it experience the consequences.**

The administrator speaks of order; **the population speaks of violence.**

Military command speaks of an operation; **the family that lost its home speaks of devastation.**

Both perspectives can be examined, but they do not tell the same story.

The House of Orange and History

And then the crown appears once again.

… Not as proof of the personal guilt of the present King.

… No one can be held personally responsible for actions that took place centuries before their birth.

… But a person can belong to a dynasty whose historical development is intertwined with that of the state.

That is why the relationship between the House of Orange, the Dutch state, and the colonial past deserves serious historical investigation.

The question is not whether the present King is personally responsible for the colonial past, but what role the dynasty to which he belongs played in the development of the Dutch state and its power structures.

Personal guilt is not the same as historical connection.

Those who ignore this distinction reduce history to accusation.

… Those who recognize it can investigate the past without confusing responsibility with guilt.

Historical questions do not disappear simply because the answers may be uncomfortable.

From King to Symbol

The modern Dutch monarchy occupies a different position from monarchies of earlier times. The government operates within the parliamentary system, ministers are politically accountable, and the powers of the head of state are constitutionally limited.

Yet an institution does not need to make daily political decisions to influence how a society understands itself.

A flag does not govern a country, a national anthem does not make laws, and a monument does not make decisions. Yet they all carry meaning. The same is true of the crown.

It says: **we are connected to a past. But which past?**

To one person, a palace may symbolize tradition; **to another, privilege.**

A royal family may represent continuity, but also hereditary inequality. Colonial history can be told as a history of trade, but also as a history of subjugation.

The symbol remains the same; **its meaning changes with the perspective.**

The Problem of Taking Things for Granted

Perhaps the greatest problem with power lies not in its constant visibility, but in the moment it becomes invisible. When people see a structure exist for generations, they may eventually come to regard it as natural.

Why this family?

… Why this position and these privileges?

… Why these ceremonies and this historical reverence?

… And whoever decided that this should be the normal state of affairs?

There are historical answers to these questions, but a historical explanation is not automatically a moral justification.

The fact that something has existed for centuries proves only that it has existed for a long time. It does not prove that it is right.

The Bill

This brings us back to the third sentence: **the citizen pays the bill.**

That bill is not measured in money alone. There is also a historical, social, and human cost.

When states wage war, citizens bear the consequences.

… When colonial systems are established, subjugated populations pay a heavy price.

… When economic systems collapse, those with the fewest reserves are often hit the hardest.

… And when historical injustices are concealed, subsequent generations may be left with ignorance, distrust, and division.

This does not make every citizen responsible for every act committed in the past. It does mean that a society bears responsibility for how it deals with its history.

An examined past can be understood. A denied past continues to have consequences.

The Real Question

Ultimately, this book is not only about the King or the monarchy.

The crown is the starting point for a much broader question: **Why do people accept certain forms of power as self-evident?**

Why do we consider it normal for wealth and social position to be passed down within families?

… Why do we admire wealth without always examining how it was acquired?

… Why do we treat tradition as an argument and confuse reverence with truth?

And why do we sometimes prefer to defend a national myth rather than confront an uncomfortable historical fact?

These are not dangerous questions for a mature society. A society that fears its own questions is truly vulnerable.

Perhaps we should therefore view the crown not merely as an object on the head of a King, but as a mirror reflecting our relationship with ancestry, property, history, tradition, privilege, and authority.

The most important question is not who wears the crown, but why we consider its continued existence acceptable.

That is where this book begins: **not with a call for reverence or destruction.**

But with a simple demand addressed to every society that considers itself mature: **Look.**

Look at what existed and what still exists.

… At whom benefited and who bore the consequences.

At what was told and what was concealed. Then look at yourself as well.

After all, history is not merely the story of those who lived before us. It is also the story of what we are willing to acknowledge today.

The crown may remain in place.

… Palaces may continue to stand, and traditions may endure.

… But none of this gives us the right to portray the past as more beautiful than it was.

A crown does not prove justice.

… An ancient name does not prove merit.

… A tradition does not prove truth.

… And power does not become just simply because it has existed for a long time.

The crown carries the past.
Democracy carries the present.
But the future belongs to no one.



Chapter 2: Born to rule

INHERITANCE: THE ADVANTAGE NO ONE EARNS

Some people have to fight to establish their place in the world, while others are born into it.

Behind this difference lies one of the oldest mechanisms of human society: **inheritance**.

A child does not choose their parents, family name, wealth, or social environment. Yet the circumstances of birth can determine the course of an entire life.

Some children grow up in homes where money is never a concern. Others learn early on that every bill requires careful calculation.

Some know people who can open doors; **others must first discover that those doors even exist.**

And a few are born into families whose names have carried significance for centuries.

We call the latter a dynasty.

At its core, the principle is always the same: **what one generation builds, the next receives without having to earn it first.**

… That is not necessarily wrong.

… Parents may leave their children a house, families may continue running businesses, and family names may endure.

… But when wealth, status, or political position is passed down through birth, a fundamental question arises: **When does inheritance become privilege?**

The First Inequality

No two people begin life under exactly the same circumstances.

One child receives music lessons, books, and individual guidance; **another grows up amid financial insecurity and limited opportunities.**

Some develop their talents in a secure environment, while others must focus on survival from an early age.

Effort, talent, and discipline matter, but so do circumstances.

Those who begin with an advantage may not have earned it themselves. Yet that advantage can later be regarded as proof of personal merit.

Someone who starts at the top of a hill can easily believe they are a better climber than someone standing at the bottom.

The Inheritance No One Sees

Inheritance consists of more than money or property. A surname, education, social network, language, cultural knowledge, and self-confidence can also be passed down. Even the ease with which someone approaches a director, minister, or senior official can make a difference.

Some people enter a room as though they belong there.

… Others seem to need permission before they dare to speak.

… This difference rarely appears on a bank statement, yet it can have far-reaching consequences.

Privilege is often most powerful when the person who possesses it barely recognizes it. They do not think they have an advantage; **they think the world simply works that way.**

That is precisely when privilege becomes invisible.

When Ancestry Becomes Power

A family can be wealthy, famous, or influential.

A dynasty goes further: **it turns ancestry into an institutional asset.**

The family name becomes part of the state's history, and a position can be passed down without having to be earned anew.

A politician must be elected, an administrator appointed, and a scientist must prove their worth.

… In a hereditary monarchy, however, the highest position is already waiting for the next person in line.

Not necessarily for the person with the most knowledge, the best qualifications, or the most votes, but for the person whose turn it is according to the rules of succession.

That is the essence of hereditary succession: **power can be passed down without being earned anew.**

This is why the monarchy is interesting not merely as the story of a single family, but also as an example of a much older human principle.

The Argument of Tradition

When someone asks why a hereditary system still exists, the same answer often follows**: because it is tradition.**

But tradition merely means that something has continued for long enough to become part of a culture. Age does not automatically make a custom just.

The problem arises when tradition is used to end discussion. At that point, remembrance becomes protection, and protection becomes stagnation.

A society that says, ***"That is simply how we do things,"*** has not yet answered the question of why.

Imagine a prime minister announcing, after leaving office, that their child would automatically succeed them.

The reaction would be predictable: **where is the election, and where is the democratic legitimacy?**

Within a monarchy, hereditary succession is treated differently because the monarchy is placed outside the ordinary political arena. As a result, the position does not have to be acquired in the same way as that of an elected official.

The King does not have to win. He merely has to be next in line.

That is the strength of the system, but also the source of a fundamental question: **Why do we accept a principle in the monarchy that we would not accept for other public offices?**

Power and Authority

To understand this question, we must distinguish between power and authority.

Power is the ability to get things done. Authority is the willingness of others to accept someone's position as legitimate.

A monarchy may possess little direct political power while retaining considerable symbolic authority. The crown represents continuity in a world where governments come and go.

But where does that authority come from? Democratic consent, historical continuity, upbringing, ceremony, national tradition, or a combination of these?

The answer matters. Those who do not examine authority can hardly assess why they accept it.

The Child Who Chose Nothing

Every dynasty embodies a paradox. A child is born into a position they never asked for. They do not choose the crown, their family, the public attention, or the expectations that accompany their birth.

The heir is therefore both **a beneficiary and a prisoner of their ancestry**.

This makes personal attacks on members of a dynasty overly simplistic. No one is responsible for their birth, but that does not make the hereditary system immune to scrutiny.

A person can be intelligent, likeable, and devoted while still belonging to an institution that deserves critical examination. Conversely, criticism of that institution does not mean personally rejecting everyone who belongs to it.

The individual is not the same as the system.

This distinction makes a discussion mature: **not everything should be made personal, but neither should everything be declared beyond question.**

The Myth of Equal Opportunity

Democratic societies like to speak of equal opportunity: **everyone is given opportunities, and those who work hard can get ahead. But people do not begin with the same opportunities.**

A child growing up in a secure home, with sufficient food, a good education, books, and parents who have time to spare, will generally have more room to develop their talents than a child living with poverty, uncertainty, or an unstable home environment.

Both children may be intelligent, curious, and ambitious. Yet they do not have the same resources with which to develop those qualities.

One child can make mistakes without immediately putting their future at risk. For another, a single poor decision or unexpected setback can create a lasting disadvantage.

It is therefore misleading to compare people's later achievements in isolation and conclude that the person who has progressed furthest must also have worked the hardest.

This does not mean that success requires no effort or that people from difficult backgrounds cannot achieve extraordinary things. It means that individual achievements are always influenced, in part, by the circumstances in which a person grows up.

Success can be a personal achievement without being exclusively a personal achievement.

Talent, discipline, and perseverance all play a role, but upbringing, health, financial security, education, social connections, and chance also determine which doors open.

Those who look only at the outcome see the winner. Those who also examine the circumstances understand how many different paths led to that outcome—and how many paths remained closed to others.

The Right Not to Have to Prove Yourself

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of inherited privilege is not what someone receives, but what they do not have to do.

They do not have to fight constantly for access.

… They do not have to keep proving that they belong.

… They do not have to start from zero.

… They do not have to fear that a single failure will destroy everything.

The outside world sees the achievements, but not always the circumstances that preceded them.

That is why someone can have worked hard and still be privileged. The two are not mutually exclusive. Privilege does not necessarily mean that someone is lazy; it means they operate from a more favourable starting position.

This distinction is essential if we are to take both personal effort and social inequality seriously.

The Inheritance of the Crown

In the monarchy, inherited privilege becomes particularly visible: **the crown is not earned but inherited.**

For that very reason, it serves as a mirror for the rest of society. Inherited advantages also exist beyond palace walls: **wealth, businesses, land, networks, reputations, and social positions.**

The monarchy is simply the most recognizable form. Many people wear no crown yet still receive advantages they did not build themselves.

This raises an uncomfortable question: **What does a person truly possess through their own merit?**

Knowledge is shaped, in part, by education.

… Talent is influenced by both natural aptitude and environment.

… Health cannot be entirely controlled, and opportunities are not self-selected. Even the willingness to work hard does not develop independently of upbringing, experience, and circumstances.

This does not make personal responsibility unimportant. It does mean that no one has made themselves entirely on their own.

Everyone stands on something that already existed: **one person on a foundation of poverty, another on a foundation of wealth**; **one on exclusion, another on access.**

Some also stand on centuries of accumulated family history.

The Question That Remains

Inheritance is a fact of human existence. Parents pass down property, knowledge, names, and traditions. That need not disappear.

The fundamental question is how much inherited advantage a society can tolerate before equality becomes little more than an attractive phrase.

For many people, inheriting a house is unremarkable. Taking over a family business is understandable. Inheriting a family name is inevitable.

But inheriting a public office raises a different issue: **the legitimacy of power.**

When ancestry grants access to a position that matters to an entire country, private inheritance and public responsibility intersect. This is precisely where the tension between monarchy and democracy emerges.

The crown is therefore more than an old symbol. It challenges the idea that birth and democratic equality can coexist without difficulty.

… And as long as that question remains, the answer deserves more than an appeal to tradition. It deserves a convincing argument.

Being born to a crown is not a wrongdoing. But a society that continues to pass crowns down through generations must be able to explain why.



Chapter 3: The invention of legitimacy

LEGITIMACY: WHY DO WE OBEY?

Power alone is not enough. Being able to break down a door does not give you the right to enter the room. Possessing an army does not automatically make you right. Being wealthy does not make you wise. And being born in a palace does not entitle you to reverence.

Yet throughout the centuries, people have found ways to make power appear acceptable. We call this **legitimacy**.

Brute force can compel people to obey. Legitimacy goes further: **it leads people to recognize a system voluntarily and submit it to its authority.**

A soldier can order someone to stand up. A king is obeyed because people believe he has the right to give orders. The difference lies between coercion and conviction.

Those who can convince people that their power is legitimate need to use less violence to preserve it.

From Physical Strength to Authority

Originally, power probably depended primarily on physical strength. Whoever commanded most warriors could control a territory. Whoever protected food supplies or possessed weapons could subjugate others. But no ruler can be everywhere at once or keep everyone under constant surveillance.

Something far more effective therefore emerged: **the belief that obedience is the right thing to do.**

When people believe that a person, family, or institution has the right to govern, power no longer needs to be constantly visible. The law takes over part of the work, as do tradition, upbringing, and symbols. Eventually, society itself helps maintain the system.

The person in power no longer has to keep saying, *Obey me.*

People say it to one another.

The Sacred King

One of the oldest ways of legitimizing power was to connect it with the supernatural.

The king ruled because the gods were supposedly willing it. His ancestry was sacred, his bloodline exceptional, and his position part of a higher order.

Anyone who opposed him was therefore not merely challenging a ruler but defying the order of the world or opposing God. Political criticism could thus be portrayed as treason, and resistance to a dynasty as an act of impiety.

The crown acquired an aura of its own.

The question ***Why does this person rule?*** was replaced by an answer that seemed self-evident: ***Because he was destined to rule.***

Once such an answer is accepted, evidence appears unnecessary.

The Miracle of Birth

Birth consequently acquired political significance.

A child who had achieved nothing could nevertheless be considered more important than thousands of others.

Not because of character, knowledge, or merit, but because of the family into which that child had been born.

Imagine a newborn child. It cannot yet speak, formulate policies, lead an army, or understand an economy. Yet society may already know that this child will one day occupy an exceptional position.

Not because anyone knows what the child will become, but because everyone knows **who gave birth to the child**.

That is the political significance of a dynasty: **ancestry becomes a promise of future power.**

When Ancestry Becomes Evidence

A dynasty reinforces itself across generations. Portraits remain on the walls, palaces retain their place, titles are passed down, and ceremonies are repeated. Names and family coats of arms connect the present with those who came before.

The new monarch therefore never stands entirely alone. The monarch carries the memory of everyone who preceded them.

This is both the strength and the vulnerability of a dynasty. Those who control the past can also influence the story used to justify their position in the present.

History is therefore not merely a collection of facts. It is also a struggle over meaning.

History as a Source of Legitimacy

Every state tells itself a story. There are heroes, wars, liberation, disasters, and moments of national pride. But there are also events that people would rather discuss as little as possible.

This is not exclusively a Dutch phenomenon. Families, businesses, churches, political parties, and states all try to make their existence understandable and defensible. In doing so, they tend to emphasize their successes while allowing their mistakes to fade into the background.

The question is therefore not merely: **What is written in the history books?**

Another question deserves attention: **Who decided what was important enough to be included?**

History and memory are not the same thing.

History seeks to investigate events; **memory seeks to preserve meaning.**

The same war can represent heroism to one family and loss to another. A state may celebrate a victory while the people of the defeated country remember the same event as a catastrophe.

National history can therefore be true and still incomplete. Not necessarily because the facts are incorrect, but because certain perspectives are missing.

Those who possess power often also possess the means to write. Those who are subjected to that power sometimes have only memories to rely on—memories that are fragile and easily lost.

The Language of Power

Power determines not only what happens, but also how events are described.

An invasion may be called a ***military operation***. Oppression becomes ***the maintenance of order***. Economic exploitation is described as ***trade***, and conquest is referred to as ***expansion***.

Words do not change reality, but they do change how people judge it. Those who control the language influence the judgement.

Political language is therefore never entirely innocent. When a society repeatedly describes events using the same words, it can forget that other words are possible. Sometimes, choosing a different word is precisely what is needed to examine an old narrative anew.

The Law as the New Crown

With the development of the modern state, the basis of legitimacy changed.

The king could no longer rely solely on the argument: ***I rule because my ancestors ruled.***

Another source of authority came to the fore: **the legal order**.

Constitutional rules, parliamentary representation, elections, and the principles of the rule of law began to play an increasingly important role. Power had to be accountable to citizens and was constrained by laws and institutions.

Yet a remarkable combination remained.