

**From:** Boris Gerrets gmail <[borisgerrets@gmail.com](mailto:borisgerrets@gmail.com)>  
**Date:** 2 May 2010 18:14:37 CEST  
**To:** Karin Spaink <[karin@spaink.net](mailto:karin@spaink.net)>  
**Subject:** Re: Via Miguel

Hey Karin, this is exciting.

I already love your cat. He will have to put up with his fellow cat-folks and fend for himself as I think Boris is more of a dog's name. So he better be a tough cookie . Your email caught me in London and it would have been much better to conduct our conversation about NL from there, with the benefit of distance. But as it happens I am traveling back to Amsterdam on this year's koninginndag, which I think is probably Amsterdam's worst day. But I can see your point about being from Amsterdam and I feel the same. To me it always seemed to be more of a republican refuge within the monarchy. So, celebrating the queen's birthday -which isn't actually her birthday, but just the idea of it- is a paradox of sorts. One day of controlled anarchy and uncontrolled consumption and hedonistic infantilism, but the next day there is hardly any trace of it thanks to an exceptionally efficient Dutch clean-up operation that -it has to be said- is mainly manned by our Moroccan fellow citizens. Thanks to them NL stays proverbially proper and clean. This brings me to the question of tolerance. You are right, I was wrong. General statements foment general conclusions. Some wonderful things have happened here, even though I had read somewhere that 51% of the Dutch population has a negative view of Muslims against respectively 14% in the UK and 21% in the US[1]. But statistics can be deceiving. We will have to wait for the people to speak in the upcoming elections. If my statement sounded harsh, it is because my view is informed by personal experience. I grew up hiding my identity. The German, Bulgarian background of my family was a liability of sorts in the post-war years. But I hold no grudge about it. Only it makes me have a skewed view of all things national. Seen from a personal perspective, national narratives are carefully crafted fictions carrying a high emotional charge. They exist by pitching the 'us' against 'them' and fix in time some ideal version of our collective self. But just as most of our body cells regenerate every seven years, fortunately, not much is left of the NL of the 50's.

I hate nationalisms. Can we really not do without them? I am reading John Reader's *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*. He claims that for tens of thousands of years of pre-history, Africans were coexisting peacefully without the need for nation states.

Meanwhile I arrived back into my Amsterdam Studio. It's raining cats and dogs now. The last remains of are being washed away. With the rain hammering on the glass roof I wonder what this portrait of a wet country is going to look like.

[1] In: Frans Verhagen, *Hoezo mislukt ?- De nuchtere feiten over de integratie in Nederland* (2010).