Civil Society or Democracy? A Dutch Paradox

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Since the 1990s, research has been carried out worldwide into the relationship between 'civil society' (an organised, self-aware society) and the formation of democracy. Dutch historians have to date shown little interest in this field of research, although the case of the Netherlands is an interesting one, both historically and in terms of current affairs. This article makes a case for the relevance of Dutch history to the debate on civil society in relation to three points. Firstly, where civil society is a phenomenon of the eighteenth and above all the nineteenth centuries, the society of the Republic demonstrates that a corporatist order can show characteristics of a civil society. Secondly, the factor of religion can be an important element in the promotion of social commitment. Thirdly, Dutch history flags up a paradox: it seems that a highly developed, civil society can rather limit than promote the need for political democracy and the recognition of an independent political sphere.

Civil society as a research theme

'Civil society' has proven one of the most successful concepts, both in the social sciences and in public debate, as is evident from the profusion of publications on the subject that have appeared in the past two decades. Although it harks back to republican discourse and political philosophy of the early modern age, the concept made a comeback in the 1980s in circles of East European dissident intellectuals. Faced with an overwhelming and repressive state, they entertained the ideal of a distinct social realm leaving space for free social organization and development.[1] The notion of 'civil society' has referred to the recognition and the quality of society, and to the spread of civic attitudes. The concept has posited, firstly, a social and public sphere distinct from the market, the state and the private domain of family and clan relations. Secondly, it has referred to the degree of self-organization, civic commitment and voluntary association a society demonstrates. Thirdly, and more normatively, it has assumed that citizens can cope with plurality and differences, and have a sense of common interest.

Having initially been an issue mainly within the social and political sciences, during the past decade, civil society has become an object of study among historians too. They have begun to explore civil society as a research subject: in a national context, as a transnational phenomenon and within a comparative perspective.[2] Indeed, it is 'a deeply historical concept'.[3] Historians arrived at the subject by a roundabout route. About 1980, social and cultural history had taken an interest in the study of Enlightenment 'sociability'. At the same time, in the 1980s and 1990s, an impressive research programme ran in Germany on *Bürgertum* (citizenship *and* the middle class) and *Bürgerlichkeit* (middle-class culture).[4] Apart from these issues, yet relevant to the study of civil society, is the extensive field of urban history, dealing with aspects of the city as a system, the urban community and the urban way of life.[5] Although urban history research isn't concerned with civil society as such, in recent

I would like to thank Prof. José Harris (Oxford) and Dr. Boudien de Vries (Amsterdam) for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article.

1 Jürgen Kocka, 'Civil Society in Historical Perspective', in: John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives* (New York, Oxford 2006) 37-51; Jan Kubik, 'Between the State and Networks of "Cousins": The Role of Civil Society and Noncivil Associations in the Democratization of Poland', in: Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord (eds.), *Civil Society before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Lanham, Maryland etc. 2000) 181-207; Klaus von Beyme, 'Zivilgesellschaft – Karriere und Leistung eines Modebegriffs', in: Manfred Hildermeier, Jürgen Kocka and Christoph Conrad (eds.), *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft in Ost und West. Begriff, Geschichte, Chancen* (Frankfurt am Main, New York 2000).

2 Bermeo and Nord, *Civil Society before Democracy*; Hildermeier, Kocka and Conrad, *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft*; Keane, *Civil Society*; José Harris (ed.), *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford 2003); Frank Trentmann (ed.), *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern German and British History* (New York, Oxford 2003); Ralph Jessen, Sven Reichardt and Ansgar Klein (eds.), *Zivilgesellschaft als Geschichte. Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden 2004); Graeme Morton, Boudien de Vries and R.J. Morris (eds.), *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot etc. 2006); Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Geselligkeit und Demokratie. Vereine und Zivile Gesellschaft im transnationalen Vergleich 1750-1914* (Göttingen 2003); the same work in English: Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, New York 2006).

3 Keane, *Civil Society*, vii.

4 A concise interim analysis of the research results in: Jonathan Sperber, 'Bürger, Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit, Bürgerliche Gesellschaft. Studies on the German (Upper) Middle Class and Its Sociocultural World', *Journal of Modern History* 69 (1997) 271-297; Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (3 volumes, Munich 1988); Jürgen Kocka and Allan Mitchell (eds.), *Bourgeois Society in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford 1993). Alongside Jürgen Kocka, Lothar Gall, Dieter Langewiesche, Ute Frevert, Gunilla-Friederike Budde, Hartmut Kaelble, Hans-Joachim Puhle and Manfred Hettling were the principal contributors to this research theme in the 1980s and 1990s.

5 In the United States and Europe, there are several sizeable associations, centres, networks and groups devoted to the study of urban history.

years the subject has indeed become a research topic among students of urban history.[6] Despite growing international interest, Dutch historians have shown little interest in addressing such questions, however. Contributions by Dutch historians to international projects and volumes on civil society are rare.[7] In some cases, foreign historians have dealt with aspects of civil society in Dutch history.[8] Several explanations can be put forward for this reluctance. Dutch historiography of the modern period has developed without much attention from historians outside of the Netherlands for what had become of a country of little consequence; in marked contrast to the lively interest shown in the age of the Dutch Republic and in colonial history, when the Netherlands was a true international power. Moreover, since the nineteenth century, Dutch culture has been mainly receptive and has made a prudently pragmatic use of models, ideas and movements developed abroad. As a result, modern Dutch history may well be 'interesting and unique in certain ways', but it is still 'very much part of the North-West European mainstream', as an English textbook puts it.[9]

Over the past twenty-odd years, Dutch historians have conducted a good deal of research on the culture of sociability or associational life in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and on subjects such as middle-class culture, urban history, liberalism, political culture and the formation of modern democracy in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. There has been no focus on civil society, however. A discussion on the merits of the concept has recently started, but historians have been reluctant to adopt the concept as a particularly workable tool with which to interpret and structure

6 Morton, De Vries and Morris, *Civil Society*. A concise dissertation on the issue in: John Keane, 'Cities and Civil Society', in: Keane, *Civil Society*, 1-36.

7 Ton Nijhuis, 'So nah – so fern. Das Verhältnis von Staat und Zivilgesellschaft in den Niederlanden im Vergleich zu Deutschland', in: Hildermeier, Kocka and Conrad, *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft*, 219-244; Boudien de Vries, 'Voluntary Associations in the Netherlands, 1750-1900', in: Morton, De Vries and Morris, *Civil Society*, 103-116; Jan Hein Furnée, 'In Good Company: Class, Gender and Politics in The Hague's Gentlemen's Clubs, 1750-1900', *ibidem*, 117-138. In 2008, the Dutch interdisciplinary quarterly *De Negentiende Eeuw* [DNE] 32:2 (2008) devoted a special, English-language issue to civil society as a research theme.

8 Thomas Ertman, 'Liberalization, Democratization, and the Origins of "Pillarized" Civil Society in Nineteenth-Century Belgium and the Netherlands', in: Bermeo and Nord, *Civil Society*; Jürgen Nautz, 'Sociopolitische Fragmentierung und Kompromissbereitschaft in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Österreich und die Niederlande im Vergleich', in: Jessen, Reichardt and Klein, *Zivilgesellschaft*, 262-282.

9 Michael Wintle, *An Economic and Social History of the Netherlands 1800-1920: Demographic, Economic and Social Transition* (Cambridge 2000) 345-347; a similar assessment in Horst Lademacher, *Geschichte der Niederlande. Politik, Verfassung, Wirtschaft* (Darmstadt 1983) 222.

the past, due to its ambiguity and its normative, political overtones. Besides, the praise of civil society smacks too much of a fundamental dislike of state power, which may be a distinctive feature of American and British history, but which does not resonate in the Dutch situation.[10]

Yet the Dutch absence in the international civil society discussion may well strike historians as odd. Since the days of the Dutch Republic, the Netherlands has had a reputation for being an outstandingly civic and bourgeois, egalitarian, liberal and tolerant society. The Dutch language developed a rich vocabulary to denote a variety of voluntary civic associations at an early stage. Whereas the English vocabulary heaps together most varieties under 'societies' and 'associations', the Dutch language distinguishes a dozen words, taken from old communal arrangements, business relationships and guild culture.[11] And today, the Netherlands is generally regarded as one of the world's most successful democracies. The *poldermodel*, or collective bargaining economy, in which the state, employers' organizations, trade unions and other interest groups seek to harmonize their interests, received wide international acclaim in the 1990s.[12] This form of consultation is part of what, in theories of democracy, goes by the name of 'consociational democracy' or 'consensus democracy'. It was mainly through the work carried out by Dutch-American political scientist Arend Lijphart since the 1960s that the Dutch political system has become the model of this type of democracy. Applied in a normative sense, consociational or consensus democracy is thought to be a preferable solution for countries covering deep ethnic, linguistic, religious or ideological rifts.[13] Besides, the Dutch are – at least as much as Americans – a nation of associators, showing the highest average number of memberships of voluntary associations in the world in the 1990s.[14] Today, together with Sweden and Denmark, the Netherlands still has the

10 Maartje Janse, 'Towards a History of Civil Society', *DNE* 32:2 (2008) 104-121; Henk te Velde, 'Civil Society and Dutch History', *ibidem*, 122-125; James Kennedy, 'A Response to Hoffmann on Civil Society', *ibidem*, 126-131.

11 M. de Vries et al., *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (29 volumes, The Hague 1882-1998); www.gtb.inl.nl.

12 Jaap Woldendorp, *The Polder Model: From Disease to Miracle?. Dutch Neo-Corporatism 1965-2000* (Amsterdam 2005); Henk te Velde, *Van regentenmentaliteit tot populisme. Politieke tradities in Nederland* (Amsterdam 2010) 205-226.

13 Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation: Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley, Cal. 1968); Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, CT 1977); Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven, CT. 1999); K.R. Luther and K. Deschouwer (eds.), *Party Elites in Divided Societies: Political Parties in Consociational Democracy* (London 1999).

14 J.E. Curtis, D.E. Baer and E.G. Grabb, 'Nations of Joiners: Explaining Voluntary Association Membership in Democratic Societies', *American Sociological Review* 66 (2001) 783-805.

highest average rate of membership, at least within Europe.[15] Dutch society is also listed among the 'high-trust countries' at the top of a global civil society index.[16]

Thus Dutch history may well be expected to be relevant to the understanding of civil society; particularly, perhaps, in relation to the development of democracy. I will address three salient issues in relation to this. The first concerns the customary limitation of the period under investigation. Most studies on civil society focus on the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries: the heyday of the voluntary association. The earlier period tends to be written off by historians of civil society as a society checked by the constraints of corporative bonds, tradition, and oppression by state and church. The twentieth century is out of the picture too, since the function of voluntary associations had then been taken over by formal and professional institutions such as political parties, trade unions and media responsive to public opinion. Dutch history suggests a different focus for our attention than on the nineteenth century alone. It calls for a new understanding of early modern corporatism *and* for a closer look at the (sometimes odd) entanglement of civil society and the constitution of democracy in the twentieth century.

Next, there is the issue of religion, often treated as a difficult element in theories of civil society. Many countries used to have, or still have, a situation of a single church holding a dominant position. Religion under these circumstances is not a matter of free choice, but a condition into which a person is born and raised. As civil society is often regarded as a condition for liberal democracy, religion has not generally been acknowledged as a force that is essential for – or even supportive of – the development of civil society. The idea of civil society has retained its eighteenth-century, Enlightenment overtones. Dutch history, however, provides arguments in favour of a much more positive assessment of religion and church in the organization of civil society.[17]

15 Paul Dekker, 'Europäische Zivilgesellschaften. Muster und gemeinsame Perspektiven', in: Christiane Frantz and Holger Kolb (eds.), *Transnationale Zivilgesellschaft in Europa. Traditionen, Muster, Hindernisse, Chancen* (Münster etc. 2009) 103-120; Rudy B. Andeweg and Galen A. Irwin, *Governance and Politics of the Netherlands* (third edition, Basingstoke 2009) 9-15.

16 L.M. Salamon and S.W. Sokolowski et al. (eds.), *Global Civil Society*, volume 2 (Bloomfield 2004); Paul Dekker, Loek Halman and Tom van der Meer, 'Ontwikkelingen in politiek vertrouwen in Europa, 1981-2004', in: Arno Korsten and Peter de Goede (eds.), *Bouwen aan vertrouwen in het openbaar bestuur. Diagnoses en remedies* (The Hague 2006) 61-78; Loek Halman, 'De politiek vertrouwen? Waarom zou je? Een empirische analyse in 33 Europese landen', in: Korsten and De Goede, *Bouwen*, 79-99.

17 Nord, 'Introduction', xxiv-xxv; Kennedy, 'Response', 129-131; James Kennedy, 'Die Kirchen und die niederländische Gesellschaft. Ein neues Verhältnis', in: Frantz and Kolb, *Transnationale Zivilgesellschaft*, 159-179.

Last but not least, the Dutch case reveals an interesting paradox in the way civil society and democracy relate to one another. It may turn out that a well-developed civil society can entail a relatively tardy, or even incomplete, development of formal democracy. Though the Netherlands is a formal democracy since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1919, there has been relatively little interest in the primacy of politics.[18] I will demonstrate how a strong development of civil society can eventually hamper the enhancement of political democracy. Since no outline of the development of civil society and democracy in the Netherlands has yet been sketched, I will deal with these three issues in the course of a historical account.

Corporatist society as civil society?

Though the Dutch Republic shared quite a number of features with the other 'old regimes' of the early modern age, it was a singular phenomenon among the more or less absolutist monarchies of the period.[19] The Republic was a highly decentralized, commercially oriented league of towns and provinces, doing without a head of state, without a ruling aristocracy, without a state bureaucracy in the making, without the order of the clergy and (except for Frisia and the eastern provinces) without a nobility of any consequence. In its social and governmental make-up, the Republic was a polity with a comparatively 'bourgeois' character. It also was a rather urbanized society; on average, even the most urbanized region anywhere in Europe at the time.[20] In

18 Andeweg and Irwin, *Governance*, 256-258 and chapter 7; Carla van Baalen, 'Mehr Demokratie – mehr Partizipation? Erfolge und Misserfolge auf dem Weg zu mehr Demokratie im niederländischen politischen System 1966-2006', *Zentrum für Niederlande-Studien. Jahrbuch 19* (2008) 11-22; James Kennedy, 'De democratie als bestuurskundig probleem. Vernieuwingsstreven in de Nederlandse politiek sinds 1918', *Jaarboek Parlementaire Geschiedenis 2004. Het democratisch ideaal* (Nijmegen, The Hague 2004) 12-23.

19 J.L. Price, *Dutch Society, 1588-1713* (Harlow, etc. 2000); J.L. Price, *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: The Politics of Particularism* (Oxford 1994); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (Oxford 1995); Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge 2005); Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (eds.), *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge 1995); Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies (eds.), *1650: Bevochten eendracht* (The Hague 1999); the same work in English translation: *1650: Hard-Won Unity* (Assen, Basingstoke 2004); Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden, etc. 1992).

20 Jan de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500-1800* (Cambridge, Mass. 1984) 39; Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen, 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion', in: Davids and Lucassen, *Miracle*, 1-25 and 428-460; Marjolein 't Hart, 'The Dutch Republic: The Urban Impact upon Politics', *ibidem*, 57-98.

the province of Holland, the rate of urbanization was as high as sixty percent. Here, even the countryside was directly connected to the urban economy.[21] The Republic was part of the vertical belt of small-scale, commercial, not territorially expansive and non-centralizing city-states, stretching across Europe from the Hanseatic League down to Northern Italy, and occupying a special position in the state formation theories of Rokkan and Wallerstein.[22]

The Dutch towns, painstakingly cultivating their positions as city republics, had a high degree of social organization and a good few public venues and spaces facilitating an urban social life and association.[23] This social organization consisted in the first place of corporative or functional bodies, such as craft guilds and urban militia companies (and, mainly in the countryside, district water boards). As craft guilds were reasonably accessible, the Republic numbered thirteen hundred-odd such institutions by 1700. Guilds and town militias were not voluntary associations but public bodies, which needed the official assent of the town magistrate. Their prime function was to regulate and maintain public order. But apart from being official, regulatory bodies, the guilds and town militias also served as cultural and social institutions through their public ceremonies, festivities and prestigious lodgings. They are interesting in this respect from the perspective of civil society. Guilds and town militias were horizontal, self-governing associations of (lower) middle class citizens, which didn't normally exclude members on grounds of religious differences. They organized the interests of a broad middle class and boosted its solidarity, social confidence and sense of responsibility.

Of a more informal, yet socially basic nature were the neighbourhood associations, in which the local residents arranged their mutual rights, obligations and assistance of their own accord.[24] These were true grass-roots associations, having no need for official consent and electing their own boards. Local residents committed themselves by signing a set of bye-laws and paying a membership fee. The neighbourhood associations combined mutual aid, social surveillance and sociability, and organized the neighbourhood watches. Though this type of association gradually lost its autonomy in the second half of the seventeenth century, a strong sense of neighbourhood community appears to have survived until well into the nineteenth century.

21 A.M. van der Woude, 'Demografische ontwikkeling van de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1500-1800', in: D.P. Blok et al. (eds.), *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* (15 volumes, Haarlem 1980) volume 5, 134-139; Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge 1997).

22 Stein Rokkan, 'Dimensions of State Formation and Nation Building', in: Charles Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, NJ 1975); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (2 volumes, New York 1974-1980). See also 't Hart, 'Dutch Republic', 57-98.

23 Frijhoff and Spies, *1650*, 172-175, 204-209.

24 *Ibidem*, 210-213.

The Burgerweeshuis [Civic Orphanage] was founded in about 1520. It underwent several expansions and was the home for children of citizens with special rights, known as 'poorters'. Today, the Amsterdam Historical Museum is housed where these orphans once lived. A woman leads in two children in rags and tatters while, on the left, the matron waits with new clothes. These consisted of the red and black uniform of the orphans which made them a familiar sight in the streets of Amsterdam. Adriaen Backer, Four Governesses and a Female Warden of the Civic Orphanage, 1683. Amsterdams Historisch Museum (on loan from Sociaal Agogisch Centrum het Burgerweeshuis, Photo René Gerritsen).

Furthermore, the cities accommodated an elaborate system of civic poor relief, charitable institutions and welfare endowments, taking care of orphans and the disabled, the elderly and destitute citizens. This abundance of charitable institutions was provided for by the religious communities and their churches, and partly by the municipal authorities. Although Roman Catholics, the dissenting protestant sects and Jews were only tolerated and were officially denied a public role, they were in fact allowed to provide this kind of care for their own communities. In some larger cities, they even maintained quite distinguished buildings to this end. A position within a charitable institution or welfare endowment, be it as a regent or otherwise, conferred social prestige to its holder. To maintain a dense system of charitable institutions was a matter of civic pride and competition, between the cities themselves and between the religious communities within each city.

The fact that the urban communities displayed a considerable degree of civic association and self-confidence made the Republic by no means an early democracy. At all levels of government, power rested with a patriciate of burgher Regents. The successive Stadtholders, always members of the house of Orange, formally were officials subservient to the States of the sovereign provinces, but in stages (1674-1675, 1747-1748) they rose to an independent position of power which enabled them to outclass the Regent oligarchy and to take over its patronage in parts of the country. Nowhere was the formal right to political representation deeply embedded; probably no more than half of one percent of the adult male population was eligible for election or had the vote: a much lower figure than in England.[25] Though the urban citizenry professed the ideology of 'urban republicanism' – implying that citizens had established rights, liberties and obligations, either recorded or not – in actual practice, the business of government was left entirely to the Regents. Only in 1780-1787 was oligarchic rule fundamentally contested, earlier periods of unrest notwithstanding.[26]

Given this history, and given the standards of Habermas's ideal of a free public sphere and the nineteenth-century type of voluntary association, it is difficult to recognize a civil society or a rudimentary stage of democracy in the corporatist order of the Dutch Republic. Indeed, the guilds, militias, neighbourhood associations and church-related charitable institutions did not constitute a free domain of civic association. In part, these acted as an

25 Schilling, *Religion*, 327-329; Henk van Nierop, 'Popular Participation in Politics in the Dutch Republic', in: Peter Blickle, *Resistance, Representation, and Community* (Oxford 1997) 272-290.

26 Van Nierop, 'Popular Participation'; Maarten Prak, 'Citizen Radicalism and Democracy in the Dutch Republic: The Patriot Movement of the 1780s', *Theory and Society* 20 (1991) 73-102; Maarten Prak, *Republikeinse veelvoud, democratisch enkelvoud. Sociale verandering in het Revolutietijdvak, 's-Hertogenbosch 1770-1820* (Nijmegen 1999) chapter 8.

extension of the local authorities; the poor relief served an economic goal by maintaining a cheap labour pool. But at the same time, these institutions unmistakably constituted an early and vital demonstration of civic and social self-organization. Citizens took responsibility for their neighbourhood, their religious community and their town. This corporatist sociability was not elitist, and was often non-denominational. Being outside of local government, the guilds, urban militias and neighbourhood associations could – and did – act as unofficial representative bodies or interest groups. They regarded themselves as the core of the citizenry, hinting at a tacit popular sovereignty they represented. They voiced their interests through requests and petitions, and not without success: probably three quarters of all requests were granted.[27] The urban authorities, for their part, depended on the organized citizenry for the preservation of public order. Because of its lively public debate, the urban society of the Dutch Republic has been characterized as a 'discussion culture'.[28] Although formal participation in government was denied to the community, a pragmatic culture of bargaining between citizens and authorities gradually arose, aimed at problem-solving, channelling interests and conflicts, and socialization.

The new sociability

Alongside these forms of association, a different type of cultural sociability had emerged; one with a rather private character and that did not serve any public function. Early modern society had known fraternities, brotherhoods and chambers of rhetoric. Research is not conclusive as to the continuity of these forms of association. Some forms may have died out in the course of the seventeenth century, but there is evidence too that musical companies, chambers of rhetoric, brotherhoods, conventicles and other gatherings in a private sphere remained a common feature at this time.[29] This type of sociability arose from private initiative and could survive thanks to the space the public authorities left for people to associate without official consent. Since this space was relatively broad, the practice of free social association

27 Van Nierop, 'Popular Participation', 287.

28 Frijhoff and Spies, *1650*, 218-224.

29 Cf. Frijhoff and Spies, *1650*, 216-218; J.M. Zijlmans, *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw. Verenigingsvormen van het informele culturele leven te Rotterdam* (The Hague 1999); Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *1800: Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving* (The Hague 2001) 107. Also available in English: *1800: Blueprints for a National Community* (Assen and Basingstoke 2004).

appeared in the Dutch Republic well before 1700: at about the same period it did in some German towns, in England and in Scotland, but more than half a century earlier than in France.[30]

Sociability outside of corporative associations was initially a small-scale activity, chiefly being cultivated in circles of patricians and humanist scholars within their private homes.[31] The proliferation of sociability in a new, enlightened form, took flight after 1730 in the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht. After 1770, the other provinces followed, with the exception of the Roman Catholic provinces of Brabant and Limburg in the South. The novel spirit of association was expressed in the foundation of numerous learned societies, literary societies, reading societies, Masonic lodges and amateur scientific societies, and in the two last decades of the eighteenth century also in the formation of societies for the advancement of national reform and in political clubs. The movement was inspired by the Lockean idea, made popular through the spectatorial press, that people will improve in knowledge, reason and virtue through interchange and cooperation. If people were willing to encourage, to educate and to correct one another, sociability would advance civilization.[32] Under certain conditions, women too could partake in sociability.[33] As all these societies drew up bye-laws and ardently enforced these, membership was also an exercise in discipline and responsibility.

Enlightened sociability spread with the popularity of the Spectator-type of weekly or fortnightly periodicals that started in England in the early eighteenth century, and was soon adopted on the Continent, mainly in German cities and in the Netherlands. More than seventy Dutch titles are on record, published in the course of half a century. The most successful such 'spectators' sold a few hundred – in some cases even a few thousand – copies, but their readership was considerably larger, as they were frequently reprinted and circulated around reading societies and coffee houses. Together, these periodicals created a virtual community of readers exchanging practical, religious and moral issues, and assessments of their fellow citizens' manners

30 According to Kloek and Mijnhardt, *1800*, 106-108; also stated by Anton van de Sande, 'Inleiding', in: Anton van de Sande and Joost Rosendaal (eds.), *'Een stille leerschool van deugd en goede zeden'. Vrijmetselarij in Nederland in de 18de en 19de eeuw* (Hilversum 1995) 12-13.

31 André Hanou, 'Het letterkundig genootschap in de Nederlanden', in: Guillaume van Gemert and Frans Korsten (eds.), *Orbis doctus, 1500-1850. Perspectieven op de geleerde wereld van Europa. Plaatsen en personen* (Amsterdam, Utrecht 2005) 133-148.

32 W.W. Mijnhardt, 'Sociabiliteit en cultuurparticipatie in de achttiende en vroege negentiende eeuw', in: M.G. Westen (ed.), *Met den tooverstaf van ware kunst. Cultuurspreiding en cultuuroverdracht in historisch perspectief* (Leiden 1990) 37-69, in particular 47; Marleen de Vries, *Beschaven! Letterkundige genootschappen in Nederland 1750-1800* (Nijmegen 2001).

33 C. Baar-de Weerd, *Uw sekse en de onze. Vrouwen en genootschappen in Nederland en in de ons omringende landen (1750-ca. 1810)* (Hilversum 2009).

Paulus Constantijn la Fargue, Interior of the Hall of the Society 'Kunst wordt door Arbeid verkregen' ['Art is Achieved Through Labour'] in Leiden, 1780. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

and conduct.[34] The rapid expansion of the press, together with the new type of societies and clubs, extended the public domain people lived in.[35] Initially this new public sphere was not hostile towards the established order. It rather implied an ambitious attempt at socialization, or the realization of something that might best be called 'burgherhood', as it neither completely coincided with 'citizenship', nor with middle-class culture.

In combination with the spectatorial press, enlightened sociability introduced a new understanding of citizenship. The old legal concept of town burghership, the classic republican idea of politically active citizenship and the social status qualification 'middle sort' or 'middle class' were being transcended by a concept of social and moral citizenship. Virtues such as self-control, culture and usefulness were central to this programme, which people from all walks of life could subscribe to (at least in principle). Denied political representation, citizens turned to this programme of social and moral citizenship. According to one of the 'spectators' (*De Borger*), a good citizen was one 'who does his part to contribute to the perfection of the civil society'.[36] The concept of citizenship became increasingly complicated.[37] It had a republican tenor: regardless of their station, profession or persuasion, citizens were members of the 'borgerlyke maatschappij' (civil society), but this referred to the polity, the political community or 'gemeenebest' (commonwealth, republic). At least until the 1780s, however, citizenship implied no claim to political or democratic rights. The proper stage for the citizen in which to be active as *civis* was society. The language of the 'spectators' created something of a non-political republican citizenship: the societal republican. It is here that

34 P.J. Buijnsters, *Spectatoriale geschriften* (Utrecht 1991); Nicolaas van Sas, 'The Netherlands, 1750-1813', in: Hannah Barker and Simon Burrows (eds.), *Press, Politics and the Public Sphere in Europe and North America, 1760-1820* (Cambridge 2002) 48-68; Dorothée Sturkenboom, *Spectators van hartstocht. Sekse en emotionele cultuur in de achttiende eeuw* (Hilversum 1998); Wolfgang Martens, *Die Botschaft der Tugend. Die Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen Moralischen Wochenschriften* (Stuttgart 1968).

35 Van Sas, 'Netherlands', 48-68, in particular 52.

36 *De Borger* (Utrecht 1778-1780) no. 2, quoted in: A. Hietbrink, 'De deugden van een vrije republiek. Opvattingen over beschaafdheid in de achttiende-eeuwse Republiek', in: P. den Boer (ed.), *Beschaving. Een geschiedenis van de begrippen hoofsheid, heusheid, beschaving en cultuur* (Amsterdam 2001) 197-211, quotation 207.

37 For a discussion of the concept of 'burger(schap)' in the second half of the eighteenth century, see: Wyger Velema, 'Beschaafde republikeinen. Burgers in de achttiende eeuw', in: Remieg Aerts and Henk te Velde (eds.), *De stijl van de burger. Over Nederlandse burgerlijke cultuur vanaf de middeleeuwen* (Kampen 1998) 80-99; Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, 'De Verlichte burger', in: Joost Kloek and Karin Tilmans (eds.), *Burger. Een geschiedenis van het begrip 'burger' in de Nederlanden van de middeleeuwen tot de 21ste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2002) 155-172, in particular 158-159; Kloek and Mijnhardt, *1800*, chapters 10-11; Cf. Van Sas, 'Netherlands', 55 and N.C.F. van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland. Van oude orde naar moderniteit, 1750-1900* (Amsterdam 2004) chapter 22.

the concept of 'society' as a separate realm makes its appearance. At the same time, a new idea of a national community beyond the local and provincial level emerged from the spectatorial dissertations on the civil society. This concept gave rise to the establishment of the first voluntary association to go on to become a long-lasting national institution: the Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen [Society for the Advancement of the Common Good, 1784].[38]

During the 1780s, both the new civil sociability and the old corporative institutions underwent a rapid and heated politicization. The so-called Patriot Revolt, prompted by a widely-felt concern about the apparent decline of the Republic after the losing of an Anglo-Dutch naval battle in 1780, was basically a movement of middle-class citizens who wanted to recover the former prosperity and glory of the Republic, and blamed the Stadtholder for having bartered this away. The Patriot movement showed a mixture of old-school civic republicanism and new democratic ideals. The revived spirit of republicanism incited citizens to join the urban militias, to present claims for political reform and to demand real influence on public affairs. A novel political press emerged and many societies transformed into political clubs.

Having come to a head by 1787, the Patriot revolt was crushed by Prussian forces rallying to the aid of Stadtholder William V. But after a seven year period of Orangist restoration, the Patriot movement revived in the revolutionary Batavian Republic, resulting from a new take-over in 1795 backed by French revolutionary armies invading the Low Countries. For a few years, a contemporary, natural-law based democratic discourse extolling equality, liberty and fraternity (in that order) engulfed the Batavian Republic. Free elections, broad-based male suffrage and referenda were introduced. Women found recognition as 'burgeres' [female citizens].[39] A democratically elected National Assembly, representing the 'Batavian people', took over the princely quarters at The Hague. In 1798, a Jacobin Batavian constitution remoulded the old federation into a single Batavian state, and issued full citizenship to 'all members of society', regardless of their station or religion.[40]

38 W.W. Mijnhardt, *Tot heil van 't menschdom. Culturele genootschappen in Nederland, 1750-1815* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA 1987); W.W. Mijnhardt and A.J. Wichers (eds.), *Om het algemeen volksgeluk. Twee eeuwen particulier initiatief 1784-1984. Gedenkboek ter gelegenheid van het tweehonderdjarig bestaan van de Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (Edam 1984).

39 M. Everard and M. Aerts, 'De burgeres. Geschiedenis van een politiek begrip', in: Kloek and Tilmans, *Burger*, 173-229.

40 *Staatsregeling voor het Bataafsche Volk, 1798. De eerste grondwet van Nederland*, Joost Rosendaal (ed.) (Nijmegen 2005) 60; E.H. Kossmann, 'The Crisis of the Dutch State 1780-1813: Nationalism, Federalism, Unitarism', in: J.S. Bromley and E.H. Kossmann (eds.), *Britain and the Netherlands, volume IV. Metropolis, Dominion and Province: Papers delivered to the fourth Anglo-Dutch Historical Conference* (The Hague 1971) 156-175; Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in The Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York 1977). A recent synthesis of the Batavian Republic is offered by Annie Jourdan, *La Révolution batave. Entre la France et l'Amérique (1795-1806)* (Rennes 2008).

R. Vinkeles and D. Vrijdag (after J. Bulthuis), The Session of the First National Assembly, 1796.
Atlas Van Stolk, Museum Het Schielandshuis, Rotterdam.

In the wake of changing French policies since the Napoleonic takeover, however, these democratic experiments were replaced by an increasingly executive rule. French domination brought long-lasting effects such as a unitary state and intensified national feeling; but it also brought an end to a strong sense of political citizenship.

Distant politics, civil society and religion

An independent Dutch state returned under the direction of Britain and the Vienna Congress, set up as a standard Restoration monarchy under King William I of Orange, the son of the ousted Stadtholder, William V. The Kingdom of 1814-1815 had a constitution and two-Chamber representation, but any suggestion of democracy or popular sovereignty was rigorously eliminated. The Restoration order rendered the public sphere empty, reticent, and depoliticized. 'Abstinence was deemed a civic duty', as the liberal leader J.R. Thorbecke scornfully summarized the pre-1848 era.[41] With the abolition of the old corporative bodies during the French period and the dismantling of urban autonomy, a precondition for social organization and voicing interests had disappeared, although a small-town setting remained the normal habitat of social life. There was still the widespread sociability of literary societies, reading societies, clubs, Masonic lodges and the like, but these associations scrupulously steered clear of politics. Even if there was not a particularly restrictive press regime, newspapers and periodicals generally chose to avoid controversial issues. The public mind of the Restoration period praised the alleged national virtue of 'domestic life', and promoted Christian love over criticism. Society was conceived of as a family-like order comprising all walks of life, under the benevolent rule of the king. William I's policy was to place the churches and benevolent societies under indirect state supervision, and to assign them a responsibility for maintaining social harmony and disseminating morality and nationhood.[42] The monarchical state of the first half of the nineteenth century may not have been very impressive by modern standards, but it was an unusual episode in Dutch history in that the state seized the initiative in supervising public life.

41 J.R. Thorbecke, *Historische schetsen* (second edition, The Hague 1872) 174; C.A. Tamse and E. Witte, *Staats- en natievorming in Willem I's koninkrijk (1815-1830)* (Brussels, Baarn 1992); Jeroen van Zanten, *Schielijk, Winzucht, Zwaarhoofd en Bedaard. Politieke discussie en oppositievorming 1813-1840* (Amsterdam 2004); Van Sas, *Metamorfose*, chapters 23-26.

42 Nicolaj Bijleveld, *Voor God, Volk en Vaderland. De plaats van de hervormde predikant binnen de nationale eenwordingsprocessen in Nederland in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw* (Delft 2007); Emo Bos, *Soevereiniteit en Religie. Godsdienstvrijheid onder de eerste Oranjevorsten* (Hilversum 2009).

To form or join an organization was not usually problematic, but the formal right of association and assembly was not expressly guaranteed in the 1814-1815 constitutions, as this was deemed unnecessary in view of the liberal traditions of the nation. Until 1848, the Napoleonic Code Pénal articles 291-294 remained in force, prescribing that societies and associations needed government consent. In actual practice, this legal provision was only enforced if social order seemed threatened: for instance in 1834, when a radical religious group broke away from the Dutch Reformed church to set up as an independent church (the *Afscheiding*).[43] The right of association and assembly was eventually established in 1848, when a liberal reform of the constitution was conceded in order to avoid the Netherlands being dragged into the revolutionary turmoil seizing Europe. The liberal constitutional committee, presided over by Leiden professor Thorbecke, explicitly aimed to activate the *burgerij* – indicating both 'the middle classes' and 'the citizenry' – and to obtain from it a public commitment.[44] To this end, the 1848 constitution not only established direct suffrage but also whole-heartedly subscribed to the principle of voluntary association, although in the final version a provision was laid down to secure public order, with the rather obvious purport of preventing religious agitation.[45] Though the formation of trade unions was hampered until 1872 by French legislation against workers' coalitions still being in force, the authorities left associations of petty bourgeois artisans and self-help initiatives undisturbed.[46] The more or less liberal governments in power after 1848 never took recourse to legal restrictions to hinder political association. Whereas the revolutions of 1848-1849 ended in a period of repression in most countries, the peaceful constitutional reform in the Netherlands established the right of association.

Whether legally endorsed or not, the level of organization in Dutch society remained high. One author mapping in 1851 the system of church-related, private and government-sponsored charity, benevolent, educational, moral reform and poor relief institutions that were active in Amsterdam alone, needed a volume of five hundred densely printed pages to achieve

43 Bos, *Soevereiniteit*, chapter 7.

44 *Verslag der commissie, bij besluit van 17 maart j.l. benoemd tot voordragt van een volledig ontwerp van grondwetsherziening* (The Hague 1848).

45 C.J.H. Jansen, 'Klassieke grondrechten. Achtergrond en ontwikkeling, 1795-1917', in: N.C.F. van Sas and H. te Velde (eds.), *De eeuw van de grondwet. Grondwet en politiek in Nederland, 1798-1917* (Deventer 1998) 96-112, 105-106; H.IJ. IJnzonides, *Het recht van vergadering* (Zwolle 1938); E. van Raalte, *Het recht van vereeniging en vergadering in Nederland* (Alphen aan den Rijn 1939), cf. Peter Jan Margry, *Teedere quaesties: religieuze rituelen in conflict. Confrontaties tussen katholieken en protestanten rond de processiecultuur in 19de-eeuws Nederland* (Hilversum 2000).

46 G. Harmsen, 'De arbeiders en hun vakorganisaties', in: F.L. van Holthoon (ed.), *De Nederlandse samenleving sinds 1815* (Assen, Maastricht 1985) 261-282, 263.

Johannes de Mare, A Ladies' Art Viewing in Arti et Amicitiae, Undated.
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

this.[47] Each of the more than twenty acknowledged religious communities ran their own organizations providing poor relief, charity, education and reform. There were many private, non-ecclesiastical initiatives too. Most towns could boast such a profusion of charity organizations, run by (upper) middle-class citizens. Characteristic of this long Dutch tradition of charity is the mixture of social control, civic self-affirmation, Christian inspiration and genuine social involvement it demonstrated.

The 'spirit of association' practiced in gentlemen's clubs, reading, amateur scientific, choral, musical and recitation societies was thought to be a national feature.[48] It is estimated that there were more than a thousand reading societies in the first half of the nineteenth century, and a similar number of recitation societies is on record. Choral societies too appear to have enjoyed a widespread popularity, and not only in middle-class circles. Perhaps ten to fifteen percent of the population participated in cultural sociability.[49] Dutch society of the age may have looked strangely egalitarian to foreign visitors, but actually it was a rather static order, composed of 'circles' and subtle social distinctions. It is assumed that most types of voluntary association had a predominantly (upper) middle-class membership. The programme of middle-class values and sociability was in principle inclusive, but in fact it tended to exclude women, lower-class people, Roman Catholics and especially Jews. In the first half of the nineteenth century, voluntary associations probably comprised a smaller and more elitist section of the population than Old Regime urban corporatism had.[50] Still, the practice of sociability spread after 1840, and even more after 1870, reaching lower social classes too. At the turn of the century, a medium-sized city such as Haarlem numbered about five hundred associations, some of these having a good thousand members.[51]

47 N.S. Calisch, *Liefdadigheid te Amsterdam. Overzigt van al hetgeen er in Amsterdam wordt verrigt, ter bevordering van de stoffelijke, zedelijke en godsdienstige belangen, voornamelijk der minvermogenden en behoeftigen* (Amsterdam 1851); Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, *The Logic of Charity: Amsterdam 1800-1850* (Basingstoke, New York 2000).

48 J. van Hall (1855), quoted in: W. van den Berg, 'Het literaire genootschapsleven in de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw', DNE 7:2 (1983) 146-178, quotation: 168.

49 De Vries, 'Voluntary Societies', 10-116; Dick Jansen, 'Uitgerekend op intekening. De kwantitatieve ontwikkeling van het leesgezelschap in Nederland, 1781-1850', DNE 14:2-3 (1990) 181-188; Westers, *Welsprekende burgers*, chapters 2, 8, 9, 10; Josef Vos, *Democratisering van de schoonheid. Twee eeuwen scholing in de kunsten* (Nijmegen 1999) chapters 2, 5; DNE 7:2 (1983) special issue on voluntary associations 1800-1850.

50 Cf. De Vries, 'Voluntary Associations', 107-108.

51 *Ibidem*, 114.

An interesting new phenomenon was the reform movements emerging about 1840, inspired by British and American models. These single-issue movements, advocating the abolition of slavery, prostitution or the stamp tax, or promoting temperance and morality, were meant to act on public opinion. Contrary to most cultural societies, which generally had a semi-private character, these reform organizations were directed outwards. While only intending to influence social consciousness, their actions contributed to raising political opinion at a time when there were as yet no political parties. However, even these organizations had a mainly (upper) middle-class following. Comprising a few thousand supporters, they were nothing like the English and American mass movements; neither did they aspire to be. It was not their intention to stir mass feelings. Through their modest conduct, they wanted to conform to the style of the upper middle-class political establishment.[52]

The reform movements draw attention to the fact that religion constituted a strong incentive to partake in social activity. Sociability had long been dominated by upper middle-class citizens of a liberal, Dutch Reformed persuasion. A rather middle-of-the-road Christian frame of mind was part and parcel of the nineteenth-century concept of citizenship. After 1850 however, orthodox Protestants also started to associate. From the rapidly expanding evangelical youth movement, they set up a nationwide web of organized orthodox Protestants engaging in all kinds of social activities. Although orthodox Protestants principally repudiated both the modern world and alternative religious creeds, their religious zeal was in fact conducive to taking on a more public role and intensifying their social participation.[53] Roman Catholics, too, began to organize within their community. The widespread disaffection of confessional communities with the liberal education policy prompted a mass petition movement in 1878, mobilizing 'the nation behind the voters'. As was demonstrated in 1853, when two hundred thousand Protestants petitioned against the Roman Catholic church organization being restored, religious issues were the most powerful incentive for political action.[54]

52 Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840-1880* (Amsterdam 2007).

53 Annemarie Houkes, *Christelijke vaderlanders. Godsdienst, burgerschap en de Nederlandse natie, 1850-1900* (Amsterdam 2009); Hanneke Hoekstra, *Het hart van de natie. Morele verontwaardiging en politieke verandering in Nederland 1870-1919* (Amsterdam 2005).

54 Jurjen Vis and Wim Janse (eds.), *Staf en storm. Het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland in 1853: actie en reactie* (Hilversum 2002); George Harinck, Roel Kuiper and Peter Bak (eds.), *De Antirevolutionaire Partij, 1829-1980* (Hilversum 2001).

After 1870, a process of social association according to confessional alignment started, which was to dominate Dutch politics and society until well into the 1960s. Organized sociability was expanding and opening up to new groups. At the same time, political organization and participation rose to a higher level. Politicization and the democratization of sociability were accompanied by an expanding and diversifying press. After the repeal of the stamp tax in 1869, the number of newspapers and periodicals rose impressively. Around 1850, there had been ninety-two periodicals and nine newspapers with a total circulation under a hundred thousand. At the turn of the century, some thousand periodicals and more than seventy newspapers were being published, reaching well over a million readers out of a total population of five million.[55] Newspapers and periodicals have the capacity to connect readers and to turn people with common interests or views on life into a virtual community. Above, amongst and across the multitude of voluntary associations and citizens' organizations, the press both unites and shapes communities, and therefore is of vital importance to a civil society. In the Dutch case, both the press and sociability had a small-scale, close-knit and nation-wide structure.

The subservient democracy

The expansion and heightening of social organization about 1900 and during the first part of the twentieth century took the form known as 'pillarization'.[56] Being able to organize in isolation made it possible for orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics to shepherd their confessional life principles through the moral perils of the modern age. To the socialist workers' movement, a policy of edification and enhancing discipline within their own ranks served as a means to command respect, to shame the corrupted bourgeoisie, and to give an imposing demonstration of unity and power. Being part of an emancipating community subjected people to the moral and social discipline exerted by their 'confederates of faith', reminiscent of Ernest Gellner's 'tyranny of cousins'.[57] People were free to join, but there was limited room for choice. While opening up to new social strata, the public sphere broke up into compartments in the course of the process. The confessional communities and the socialists aimed for recognition and emancipation as a group. As a result, Dutch society was imbued with discipline and social convention until

55 Figures in: Huub Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000. Beroep, cultuur en organisatie* (Amsterdam 2004) 19.

56 See the article by James Kennedy on religion in this issue.

57 Piet de Rooy, *Openbaring en openbaarheid* (Amsterdam 2009) 40; E. Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London 1994) 7.

well into the 1960s. Having been a 'deferential society' up to the end of the nineteenth century as a consequence of socio-economic inequality and the system of charity, Dutch society entered a new period of conduct-regulation as a consequence of collective emancipation. Even the non-sectarian media shared in this culture and generally demonstrated a restrained attitude.[58] The system of pillarization may have restricted the individual, but the sense of security provided by the circle of sympathizers strongly encouraged people to join and to organize. As a result, civil association in all domains of life – be it cultural activities, sports, hobbies, or politics – rose to a very high level. By holding office on a committee, in a trade union or on a local council, newcomers acquired experience and gained confidence in assuming responsibility and running an institution.[59] Through the roundabout route of association in segregation, pillarization turned out to be an alternative route to national integration.

The formation of confessional subcultures was given an ideological foundation in 1880, when the neo-Calvinist clergyman and political leader Abraham Kuyper formulated the principle of 'sovereignty in one's own circle'. The papal encyclicals *Immortale Dei* (1885), *Rerum novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) developed a Roman-Catholic social theory on principles such as the 'societas perfecta' and 'subsidiarity'.[60] These principles referred to the idea of an organic or corporative society as it was thought to have existed in mediaeval and early modern times. According to this view, each circle of life, such as the family, educational institutions, work, science, church and the nation, had its own function and ought to be protected from state interference. Both principles were directed against liberal individualism, democratic majority rule and the liberal fiction of the impartial state. Orthodox Protestants and Roman Catholics regarded the liberal educational acts as a

58 Lex Heerma van Voss, 'De rode dreiging … en het verzuilde antwoord', in: J.C.H. Blom and J. Talsma (eds.), *Verzuiling voorbij. Godsdienst, stand en natie in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 2000) 115-132; Wijfjes, *Journalistiek in Nederland 1850-2000*, 178.

59 Dirk Jan Wolffram, 'Schikken en inschikken. Plaatselijke elites in tijden van verzuiling 1850-1920', in: Blom and Talsma, *Verzuiling voorbij*, 80-102.

60 Abraham Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring. Rede ter inwijding van de Vrije Universiteit, den 20sten october 1880* (Amsterdam 1880); Abraham Kuyper, *Het calvinisme. Zes Stone-lezingen in oktober 1898 te Princeton (N.J.) gehouden*, G. Harinck (ed.) (Soesterberg 2002); W. Goddijn and J. Sloot, 'Katholieke sociologie. Opkomst en ondergang van een sociale leer', in: F. Bovenkerk et al. (eds.), *Toen en thans. De sociale wetenschappen in der jaren dertig en nu* (Baarn 1978) 168-174; Paul Luykx, *Andere katholieken. Opstellen over Nederlandse katholieken in de twintigste eeuw* (Nijmegen 2000) 231; Hans Verhage, *Katholieken, Kerk en Wereld. Roermond en Helmond in de lange negentiende eeuw* (Hilversum 2003) 26-27.

demonstration of state oppression. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when state intervention started to expand, the confessional parties made it their principle to curtail state power, or else to divert it to their own use.

This policy would prove of quite some consequence to the development of democracy in the Netherlands. The revised Dutch constitution of 1848 had turned the monarchical order into a parliamentary system by curtailing the king's executive power, introducing full ministerial responsibility and investing parliament with new powers. Yet, under the new poll tax system, no more than about ten percent of adult males were enfranchised (about eighteen percent in municipal elections). It took time to put the new parliamentary system into practice, and politics tended to remain very much an upper-class matter. Parliament operated at a safe distance from society. The franchise was extended in 1887 and 1896, eventually giving the vote to about fifty percent of adult males. The constitutional reform of 1917 (amended in 1919) granted universal suffrage to men, and from 1919 also to women.

A comparative historical investigation into the establishment of liberal democracy reveals four patterns.[61] A first group of countries realized universal (male) suffrage at an early stage, a second group went through a bumpy course of radical progress followed by reaction, and in a third group the process stagnated, only to be resumed in the twentieth century. The Netherlands belong, together with Belgium, Great Britain, Denmark, Norway and Sweden to a fourth group of countries with a rather regular, periodical expansion of the franchise, attaining universal franchise about 1918. Important as the 1917 constitutional reform in the Netherlands was in resolving some long-standing political issues, formal democracy seems to have been achieved as if in passing. Popular sovereignty was not invoked then, nor has it been ever since. Since the short-lived constitution of 1798, the Dutch political system has always done without definitions or allocations of sovereignty, leaving such issues to practice. Besides, democracy as such was far from undisputed by 1918. Neither the upper middle-class liberals nor the orthodox Protestants, nor the Roman-Catholics (who made up about forty percent of the nation), nor the socialists championed parliamentary democracy as a principle. To the socialists, this was initially no more than a phase or a means to an end. Liberals had thrown in the towel, but found compensation in the new system of proportional representation, which safeguarded the position of minorities. The confessional parties preferred corporative or organic representation to democratic individualism and majority rule. However, since the 1870s, all parties had more or less contributed to the realization of universal suffrage, either hoping to control the process or to secure a proportional share of power.[62]

61 H. Spoormans, *'Met uitsluiting van voorregt'. Het ontstaan van liberale democratie in. Nederland* (Amsterdam 1988).

62 *Ibidem*, chapter 2; Gert van Klinken, *Actieve burgers. Nederlanders en hun politieke partijen, 1870-1918* (Amsterdam 2003).

Universal suffrage resulted in a lasting majority for the confessional parties, a stable twenty-five percent following for socialism, and a fifteen percent share for liberal parties. Parliament and government now became the arena in which the strongly organized communities bargained. The confessional parties shielded their separate domains of church, schools, aid and health care institutions from interference by the public authorities. Typical of the Dutch situation was the ascendancy of organized society over the political domain. As the confessional groups, the social democrats and the liberals attached great value to association, the organizational level of society was very high. Political representation was but a part of these societal conglomerates. Government was seen as merely a 'partner' in a complex of trade unions, employers' associations, federations of all sorts and sizes and consultative bodies, either state subsidized or not. This neo-corporatist system was democratic, in the sense that citizens and government were connected through numerous intermediary organizations. It was also steeped in vested interests and made both democracy and citizens politically inert and little disposed towards innovation. State power, expanding in the course of the twentieth century, became wrapped up in a complex of organizations representing citizens' interests. Political rhetoric played its part in upholding ideological distinctions, but in fact Dutch politics was characterized by pragmatism and a managerial approach.

In conclusion

Having reached its peak by 1960, the pillarized system then rapidly started to disintegrate. In the 1960s and 1970s, Dutch society zealously scrutinized its democracy. This whirl of reform brought about a thorough democratization of society and culture, but not of the political system. At the same time, the welfare state was taking over from the system of private social welfare institutions. A statist bureaucracy expanded in the process. In accordance with the ideology of the market that pervaded government policies since the 1980s, welfare, educational, housing and humanitarian aid organizations were supposed to operate as commercial companies. In the meantime the citizens, who formerly had been the members and supporters of a society based system of institutions, withdrew from the old associations such as trade unions and the political parties. As a consequence, citizens became customers. Nevertheless, the degree of social participation and association remains extensive, although there is a tendency towards more impersonal

◀ Albert Hahn, Poster for the Socialist Universal Suffrage Campaign, 1911. International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

and noncommittal, 'chequebook' or virtual forms of association.[63] Today's assertive 'monitory citizens' make use of other means to voice their interests and to scrutinize power, whether political or commercial. They use the media, open forums, consultative and deliberative bodies, legal action, professional lobbies, pressure and action groups and NGOs to exert influence.[64]

All in all, consensus democracy has proven to suit a densely organized, pluralistic and heterogeneous society.[65] The proportional representation system, established in 1917, has been found to be quite responsive to minorities. It has demonstrated that the emphasis in Dutch democracy is on representation, rather than on the executive power of government.[66] Consensus democracy has managed to reduce or channel social conflict, be it class struggle or religious tensions. It has also managed to transform the Netherlands into a successful, highly competitive industrial and post-industrial welfare state. On the other hand, consensus democracy tends towards the paternalistic, complacent and managerial. It has proven slow to recognize and to counter deep undercurrents of change in the general mindset or in public opinion.[67] Constituting one of the most corporatist systems among industrial democracies in the world, the Dutch polity has been typified as 'an orchestra with no conductor'. The contemporary shift 'from government to governance' in Western democracies has a long history in the Netherlands.[68] This tendency however is not conducive to enhancing people's commitment to politics.

This article set out to argue, firstly, that early-modern urban corporatist society as it operated in the Dutch Republic may rank as a form of civil society; secondly, that religion, both moderate and zealous, can and did enhance the formation of civil society and democracy; and thirdly, that a strong civil society can eventually impede further development of formal, political democracy. In general, Dutch history appears to constitute a perfect example of the way civil society is conducive to the rise of democracy. It meets four requirements mentioned by Philip Nord in this respect.[69] Nord points to early tolerance on the part of the authorities with regard to social association. A second precondition would be stable integration of the countryside into

63 Dekker, 'Europäische Zivilgesellschaften', 103-120; Andeweg and Irwin, *Governance*, 13.

64 The advent of a novel type of 'monitory democracy' is substantiated by John Keane, *The Life and Death of Democracy* (London 2009); also see Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Live* (New York 1998).

65 Andeweg and Irwin, *Governance*, chapter 11.

66 Ank Michels, 'Theories and Core Principles of Dutch Democracy' (2007), *European Governance Papers (EUROGOV)*, C-07-01, www.connex-network.org/eurogov/pdf/egp-connex-C-07-01.pdf.

67 Cf. James Kennedy, *Bezielende verbanden. Gedachten over religie, politiek en maatschappij in het moderne Nederland* (Amsterdam 2009).

68 Andeweg and Irwin, *Governance*, 169, 191.

69 Nord, 'Introduction', xxiii-xxviii.

the civil life of the nation. The third involves a positive role for religious inspiration, particularly of dissenting and evangelical fervour, in nineteenth-century urban culture. The fourth requirement concerns the extent to which the parliamentary system was established at the emergence of mass politics. All four preconditions fully apply to the Dutch case. Even the attitude and position of Dutch Roman Catholicism favoured the formation of civil society.[70]

Looking for continuity in the Dutch *political* system over the last two centuries is problematic. But there is an unmistakable legacy when it comes to society and practices. Since the seventeenth century at least, Dutch society has demonstrated a high degree of organization, mainly within an urban or small-town setting: first through corporative bodies and church-related charity institutions, later also through a plethora of voluntary associations, with either a more private or a more public character. There were always strong social ties connecting citizens horizontally and vertically. This social environment trained citizens in social skills, fostered their sense of commitment, opened up ways for them to voice their interests and taught them to bargain. This 'social capital' however didn't automatically create a need for democratization.

Indeed, the wealth of Dutch 'social capital' appears to have been accumulated at the expense of political zeal. Apart from a few short periods, Dutch society did not usually take a great interest in politics as such. There has always been a dislike of political dissent and a tendency toward political indifference. This attitude arose from a concept of citizenship which highlights not political but social activity. When, at the end of the nineteenth century, politics democratized, it was in fact being colonized by a segmenting

70 Cf. Kennedy, 'Kirchen' and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago 1994). On Dutch Roman Catholicism: J.P. de Valk, *Roomser dan de paus? Studies over de betrekkingen tussen de Heilige Stoel en het Nederlands katholicisme, 1815-1940* (Nijmegen 1998); Paul Luykx, *Andere katholieken*; Peter Raedts, 'Tussen Rome en Den Haag. De integratie van de Nederlandse katholieken in kerk en staat', in: Henk te Velde and Hans Verhage (eds.), *De eenheid en de delen. Zuilvorming, onderwijs en natievorming in Nederland 1850-1900* (Amsterdam 1996) 29-44; Henk van den Berg, *In vrijheid gebonden. Negentiende-eeuwse katholieke publicisten in Nederland over geloof, politiek en moderniteit* (Nijmegen 2005); Cf. Hermann-Josef Grosse Kracht, 'Religiöse Fremdlinge in der modernen Welt? Ultramontane Katholiken im 19. Jahrhundert und die Frage nach den Entstehungskontexten einer zivilgesellschaftlichen Demokratie', in: Jessen, Reichardt and Klein, *Zivilgesellschaft*, 89-113.

civil society. Politics and democracy have since been treated as mere agents in the service of societal interests. As a result, they have taken on managerial features.

Today, Dutch citizens indicate that they highly value their democracy, but dislike politics.[71] They claim a further democratization of the system, yet do not consider this a prime issue.[72] Successful initiatives to enhance democracy chiefly focus on 'interactive policymaking' and forms of deliberation. They do not entail reforms of the political system. This pattern reveals that citizens only partly associate democracy with politics. In their view, democratic achievements such as equality, freedom of expression, self-fulfilment and prosperity are embedded in society and culture. The principles of social democracy and mass culture have become internalized. The strong development of society in the Netherlands appears to have produced the illusion that politics, even democratic politics, is fairly irrelevant.[73] Thus Dutch democracy demonstrates the strengths, as well as the limitations, of being rooted in civil society. ◀

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71 Herman van Gunsteren and Rudy Andeweg, *Het grote ongenoegen. Over de kloof tussen burgers en politiek* (Haarlem 1994); Herman van Gunsteren, 'Voor democratie maar tegen politiek', in: Joop van Holsteyn and Cas Mudde (eds.), *Democratie in verval* (Amsterdam 2002) 17-32. Still, the level of political trust is comparatively high in the Netherlands: Dekker, 'Europäische Zivilgesellschaften'.

72 Van Baalen, 'Mehr Demokratie?'; Kennedy, 'Democratie'.

73 Henk te Velde, 'Politieke cultuur, verenigingen en sociabiliteit', DNE 28:3 (2004) 193-205, in particular 198.

Religion in the Modern Netherlands and the Problems of Pluralism

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The religious history of the Netherlands during the last two centuries exhibits some of the same dynamics and tensions as those evidenced in neighbouring countries. This article selects from religious history three historiographical issues salient to transnational patterns. The first pertains to Dutch church-state relations in the nineteenth century, most notably a relatively early disestablishment. The second theme concerns the so-called 'pillarization' (*verzuiling*) of Dutch society, and to what extent pillarization – to the extent it is a useful concept at all – can be regarded as a quintessentially 'Dutch' way to manage religious pluralism. The last theme focuses on secularization, a concept which historians have used to analyse the decline of organized religion in the Netherlands, particularly the sharp decline in religious participation and adherence after 1960. Religion, however, has remained an important focus of debate in recent decades, as the Dutch sought again to renegotiate the politics of pluralism.

In religious terms, the modern Netherlands has been a country of paradoxes. For the last century, the numbers of those disclaiming any religious affiliation have been among the highest in Europe, a phenomenon strengthened by the absence of a state church. At the same time, the country's public life in the last two centuries has been characterized by uncommonly powerful religious movements that shaped – and to some degree still shape – the fields of politics, education and media. A Protestant country (nearly two-thirds of its population were so identified in the nineteenth century) with a historically Protestant-dominant state, the Netherlands became, by the mid-twentieth century, a country where the fulcrum of power lay in the hands of the Catholic political party (*Katholieke Volkspartij*), who represented a large and rather well-disciplined religious minority.[1] An Islamic power – insofar