



Restoring the Moral Order of the Community: The Symbolic Repertoire of Collective Action in the Dutch Age of Revolutions

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This chapter deals with the persistence of premodern forms of local collective action during the age of revolutions. What I am particularly interested in are those elements of non-elite collective action that have been called ritualistic, ‘charivaresque’, carnivalesque, or (pertaining to) popular culture. All of these terms can be defined in different ways, but they have in common that they describe collective action that is symbolic, in the sense that it is not accidental or random, but follows

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certain ‘rules’.¹ These forms of action symbolise a greater order and invoke shared mores and often also earlier moments of collective action; they are, in other words, appeals to tradition. Historians and anthropologists have found again and again that collective action in the premodern period had a deeper symbolic meaning, which legitimised actors’ actions. As Natalie Zemon Davis famously wrote about religious violence—but this holds true for collective action in general—‘the crowds do not act in a mindless way. They will to some degree have a sense that what they are doing is legitimate, the occasions will relate somehow to the defense of their cause and their [...] behavior will have some structure to it’.²

Manifestations of symbolic collective action with a local scope are mostly associated with the premodern era, though it is clear that they have continued to exist into modern times.³ Yet, in much of the literature, there is also a sense that something is changing in the transition to the modern period. Peter Burke has argued that by 1800, popular culture in Europe was rapidly politicising, causing ordinary people to become less concerned with strictly local issues—the stuff of popular culture—and more with ‘affairs of state’.⁴ Writing about the Low Countries, Marc Boone and Maarten Prak have identified a ‘Great’ and a ‘Little Tradition’ of urban revolt. From the twelfth to the eighteenth century, according to

¹ Compare, for example, the definition of ‘ritual’ by Barbara Stollberg-Rillinger, ‘Much Ado about Nothing. Ritual of Politics in Early Modern Europe and Today’, 24th Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute (11 November 2010) < https://www.ghidc.org/fileadmin/user_upload/GHI_Washington/Publications/Bulletin48/bu_48_009.pdf > 10–13; the definition of charivari by Marc Jacobs, ‘Charivari en volksgerichten. Sleutelfenomenen van sociale geschiedenis’, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 12: 4 (1986), 365–392; and the definitions of ‘popular culture’ and ‘the carnivalesque’ by Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

² Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘The Rites of Violence. Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France’, *Past & Present* 59 (1973), 51–91, here 91.

³ See for examples Jean-Claude Schmitt and Jacques Le Goff eds., *Le charivari: Actes de la table ronde organisée à Paris (25–27 avril 1977) par l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales et le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* (Paris: Mouton, 1981); and Gerard Rooijakkers and Tiny Romme eds., *Charivari in de Nederlanden: Rituele sancties op deviant gedrag*. *Volkskundig Bulletin* 15:3 (Amsterdam: P.J. Meertens-Instituut van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1989).

⁴ Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, 259; and Peter Burke, ‘The Repudiation of Ritual in Early Modern Europe’, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy. Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 223–238.

Boone and Prak, the cities of the Low Countries were the scene of revolts by burghers against urban elites (the ‘Little Tradition’) and revolutionary movements by urban elites against central (or centralising) state institutions (the ‘Great Tradition’). They suggest that premodern forms of collective action disappear from the Netherlands as a result of the French intervention in the Netherlands: ‘French republicanism, originating from a long tradition of monarchical centralization, overwhelmed the urban republican tradition of the Low Countries. By the time Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, the Great and the Little Traditions of urban rebellion were dead’.⁵ It is not entirely clear whether Boone and Prak are implying that this meant an end to the symbolic behaviour typical for non-elite, local collective action in early modern Europe, as they do not discuss the nature of the revolts in much detail.

Dealing with France, Charles Tilly has suggested a different periodisation. In a somewhat lesser-known publication, he provides five characteristics of what he considers a typically eighteenth-century repertoire of local collective action. In my view, four of these five characteristics can be considered symbolic behaviour:

1. ‘a tendency for aggrieved people to converge on the residences of wrongdoers and on the site of wrongdoing’;
2. ‘the extensive use of authorized public ceremonies and celebrations for the acting out of complaints and demands’;
3. ‘the recurrent use of street theatre, visual imagery, effigies, symbolic objects and other dramatic devices’;
4. ‘the frequent borrowing—in parody or in earnest—of the authorities’ normal forms of action; the borrowing often amounted to the crowd’s almost literally taking the law into its own hands’.⁶

According to Tilly, the popular action of the French revolution of the late eighteenth century still largely followed the repertoire of the rest of the

⁵ Marc Boone and Maarten Prak, ‘Rulers, Patricians and Burghers: The Great and the Little Traditions of Urban Revolt in the Low Countries’, in Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen eds., *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 127–128.

⁶ Charles Tilly, ‘Charivaris, Repertoires and Urban Politics’, in John Merriman ed., *French Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1982), 76.

century. Despite the degree of innovation and the fact that local collective action became connected to national politics, elements such as ritual punishments remained common, and collective action still often occurred during official celebrations. In Tilly's view, a real transformation in France took place only around the French Revolution of 1848, when a new repertoire of action, including electoral meetings, demonstrations, strikes, and rallies started to emerge. These new forms of action seldom happened during festivals or rituals that were authorised by the authorities.⁷

This chapter revisits the case of the Netherlands. Rudolf Dekker has demonstrated that, until the end of the eighteenth century, the Dutch case was still in line with the broader European pattern. In a study about revolts in the province of Holland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Dekker found many symbolic elements in the behaviour of Dutch early modern crowds, such as plundering, mock trials, *taxation populaire*, and other charivaresque forms of social justice.⁸ Like Boone and Prak, Dekker does not look beyond 1795, the end of the Dutch Republic and the beginning of the Batavian-French period in the Netherlands, which he considers a 'logical endpoint'.⁹ However, with Tilly's interpretation in mind, one might wonder whether the French intervention in the Netherlands in 1795 was really so crucial in bringing about a new repertoire of collective action.

Based on an analysis of collective action in the 1780s and 1790s, I will argue in this chapter that in the Netherlands as well, symbolic forms of action still loomed large during this period, and that the year 1795 did not produce a major rupture in this respect. By demonstrating that premodern forms of collective action were not marginal aberrations in this period, I intend to inscribe them into the mainstream narrative of the Dutch revolution. In order to be able to do so, it is important that we first take a look at this narrative and the contentious repertoire that is commonly associated with it.

⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁸ Rudolf Dekker, *Holland in beroering: Oproeren in de 17de en 18de eeuw* (Baarn: Ambo, 1982), 12, 78–79, 93.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

THE NARRATIVE OF THE DUTCH REVOLUTION

When in 1780 war broke out between the Dutch Republic and Great Britain, this was to many Dutch citizens the last straw that added to existing discontent about economic decline and political degeneration. The prime targets of their indignation were William V, Prince of Orange-Nassau and stadtholder of the United Provinces, and his chief advisor, the Duke of Brunswick. These citizens, who started calling themselves ‘Patriots’, considered William a puppet of his cousin George III. They were also dissatisfied with the political system that had been created when his predecessor William IV had assumed office in 1747. At that time, the office of stadtholder had been made hereditary. The stadtholder had obtained a crucial say in the appointment of political office holders at the local government level. This enabled him to exert great influence on the decision-making process.¹⁰ Traditionally, the stadtholders were also military commanders of the various provincial armies. The combination of these prerogatives had transformed the stadtholderate into an almost monarchical office, and William V behaved like a monarch as well. The stadtholderian system favoured a political class, the regents (*regenten*), who strived to maintain the status quo. The ‘Patriot Movement’ attacked both the stadtholder, his courtiers and the regent class. In various cities where it got the upper hand, it introduced new local constitutions based on the principle of representative democracy.¹¹

Much of the action of the Dutch Revolution was connected to voluntary associations. In the second half of the eighteenth century, cultural societies flourished in the Dutch Republic as they did elsewhere. In the 1770s, future Patriots and the supporters of the stadtholder, the ‘Orangists’, still frequented the same literary societies, Masonic lodges, and other associations.¹² After 1780 latent tensions within these associations surfaced and escalated. As a result, many associations became

¹⁰ Jos Gabriëls, *De heren als dienaren en de dienaar als heer: Het stadhouderlijke stelsel in de tweede helft van de achttiende eeuw* (The Hague: Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1990).

¹¹ Stephan Klein, *Patriots republikenisme: Politieke cultuur in Nederland (1766–1787)* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995).

¹² Wijnandus Wilhelmus Mijnhardt, *Tot beil van't menschedom: Culturele genootschappen in Nederland, 1750–1815* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987); C.B.F. Singeling, *Gezellige schrijvers. aspecten van letterkundige genootschappelijkheid in Nederland, 1750–1800* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991); Marleen de Vries, *Beschaven! Letterkundige genootschappen in*

Patriot- or Orangist-only organisations. The topics that were discussed also became more political. Existing supra-local networks that had developed because citizens were (honorary) members of societies in multiple cities could now be put to political use. A new type of association emerged around 1783: throughout the Dutch Republic, voluntary civic militias (*vrijcorpsen* or *exercitiegenootschappen*) were founded both in cities and in the countryside. The organisation of these societies was partly modelled on the old civic guards (*schutterijen*), but the Patriots were also inspired by enlightened military ideas.¹³ They experimented with supra-local governance by organising several provincial and even a national assembly of civic militias.¹⁴

When the stadtholder, at the request of the Orangist States of Gelderland, intervened with military force in the rebellious Patriot towns of Hattem and Elburg, the Patriot States of Holland responded by suspending him as military commander of the troops on their payroll. This conflict escalated into open civil war between the troops still under the command of the stadtholder and a Patriot army mostly composed of volunteers dispatched by the local civic militias. The stadtholder won the armed conflict in the Autumn of 1787 due to the intervention of King Frederick William II of Prussia, his brother-in-law, against whose forces the Patriots did not stand a chance.¹⁵ After this suppression, most of the cultural societies continued to exist but outwardly returned to their core business. In reality they continued to be Patriot meeting places. In Amsterdam members of the cultural society *Doctrina et Amicitia* created a secret revolutionary committee that became the nerve centre of the underground Patriot movement. The committee took the initiative to

Nederland, 1750–1800 (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2002); and Joost Rosendaal, ‘Vrijmetselarij en Revolutie’, Anton van de Sande and Joost Rosendaal eds., *Een stille leerschool van deugd en goede zeden. Vrijmetselarij in Nederland in de 18e en 19e eeuw* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1995), 63–84.

¹³ Frans Grijzenhout, *Feesten voor het Vaderland. Patriotse en Bataafse feesten 1780–1806* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1989); and Olaf van Nimwegen, *De Nederlandse burgeroorlog, 1748–1815* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2017).

¹⁴ Joost Rosendaal and Stephan Klein, ‘Democratie in context: Nieuwe perspectieven op het Leids Ontwerp (1785)’, *Documentatieblad Werkgroep Achttiende Eeuw* 26: 1 (1994), 77–100.

¹⁵ Van Nimwegen, *De Nederlandse burgeroorlog*.

found a network of reading societies, where citizens read and discussed Thomas Paine and other revolutionary authors.¹⁶

In early 1795, an army of French revolutionary and Dutch Patriot troops won the war against the stadtholder. The Patriots assumed power and renamed the Dutch Republic the ‘Batavian Republic’, a name inspired by the legendary Germanic tribe of the Batavians.¹⁷ The Prince of Orange-Nassau fled to England. The Patriots turned the existing infrastructure of societies and revolutionary committees into a dense network of political associations that was to characterise the new state. The political sociability of the Batavian era was a multilevel phenomenon. At the urban level, the reading societies were transformed into political clubs. The larger cities witnessed the creation of neighbourhood assemblies that built on older structures of neighbourhood autonomy.¹⁸ Delegates of local political clubs met in supra-local Central Assemblies.¹⁹ The Batavian authorities were suspicious of such initiatives, which they considered a challenge to their authority. At the same time, leading revolutionaries considered political sociability a prerequisite of a free republican state and used it to mobilise support.²⁰ In 1797, when the moderate and radical camps in the National Assembly campaigned for and against a constitutional draft in the months leading up to a national referendum about this

¹⁶ Henk Reitsma, ‘Lesegeellschaften und bürgerliche Revolution in Amsterdam’, in Otto Dann ed., *Lesegeellschaften und bürgerliche Emanzipation: Ein europäischer Vergleich* (München: C.H. Beck, 1981), 159–180.

¹⁷ Eco Haitsma Mulier, ‘De Bataafse mythe opnieuw bekeken’, *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 111: 3 (1996), 344–367.

¹⁸ Renger de Bruin, *Burgers op het kussen: Volkssoevereiniteit en bestuursamenstelling in de stad Utrecht, 1795–1813* (Zutphen: De Walburg Pers, 1986); R. van der Woude, ‘Gelijkheid op krukken: De Bataafse revolutie in de stad Groningen, 1795–1803’, *Gronings Historisch Jaarboek* (1995), 39–63; Barbara Resink and Jort Verhoeven, ‘De stem van het volk: De Amsterdamse wijkvergaderingen in de eerste jaren der Bataafse revolutie’, *Amstelodamum* 82: 2 (1995), 33–43; Annie Jourdan, ‘Amsterdam klem tussen staat en volk. Een bedreigde municipaliteit (1795–1798)’, in Ida Nijenhuis, Johanna Roelevink and Ronald Sluiter eds., *De leeuw met de zeven pijlen: Het gewest in het landelijk bestuur* (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse geschiedenis, 2010), 95–108.

¹⁹ Peter Altena, *Gerrit Paape (1752–1803). Levens en werken* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2012).

²⁰ René Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment: Contesting the Limits of Civic Equality and Participation in the Age of Revolutions* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

draft, they relied on rival networks of political clubs to disseminate their views.²¹

From the moment it emerged in the early 1780s, political sociability went hand in hand with political petitioning. In the Dutch Republic petitioning had always been a popular form of action, but during the revolutionary era it transformed in crucial ways. As long as the Patriots' demand for representative democracy had not been met, they believed that petitioning was as close as one could get to exercising popular sovereignty. The Patriots thus had a more inclusive attitude towards petitioning than the old-regime elites, who had concurred that the political instrument of petitioning should be used with moderation. Patriots employed the instrument with greater frequency and their language was less deferential. They also started collecting more signatures than had been deemed appropriate under the old regime.²² Their efforts were facilitated through the circulation of petitions in political clubs.

While local petitions remained the bread and butter of petitionary practices during the Patriot era, political petitions to provincial and national authorities were on the rise. This trend culminated in the Batavian era, when the national parliament became the most important recipient of petitions.²³ Petitions concerned with provincial or national issues were often drawn up in the ranks of radical political clubs. Quite often, the initiators of such petitions collected signatures in multiple places, causing petition drives to become truly supra-local affairs.

To sum up, the Dutch Revolution had a more 'formal' repertoire of contention that was overwhelmingly initiated and regulated by a revolutionary elite. While the members of this elite founded political clubs, drew up petitions, and canvassed for signatures, a much larger part of the population frequented clubs and signed petitions. Associations and petitions had also thrived in the early modern period, but there was a

²¹ Thomas Poell, *The Democratic Paradox: Dutch Revolutionary Struggles over Democratization and Centralisation (1780–1813)* (Ph.D. dissertation, Utrecht University, 2007); and Joris Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld: Het eerste parlement van Nederland 1796–1798* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2012).

²² Joris Oddens, 'The Greatest Right of Them All: The Debate on the Right to Petition in the Netherlands from the Dutch Republic to the Kingdom (c. 1750–1830)', *European History Quarterly* 47: 4 (2017), 634–656.

²³ Joris Oddens, 'Verzoekschriften aan het Bataafse parlement: Een terreinverkenning', *Jaarboek Parlementaire Geschiedenis* 19 (2017), 19–30.

good deal of innovation in the revolutionary era. The ways in which the existing repertoire developed can be summarised under the headings of politicisation, professionalisation, and scaling-up.

THE PATRIOT ERA

Historians of the Dutch revolution have rarely treated symbolic behaviour as an object of study in its own right.²⁴ This is not to say that they have not come across such behaviour. For this contribution, I was therefore able to look at occurrences of symbolic collective action as they have been discussed in secondary literature.²⁵ In the following two sections, I will present an ‘event catalogue’²⁶ that zooms in on a limited number of incidents, but complements this analysis with evidence from other cases.

In 1783, the birthday of the stadtholder (8 March) triggered several disturbances in Rotterdam. Already in the first week of March, groups of people went from door to door, mostly at dawn, and demanded (drink) money, wood, or peat in honour of the Prince of Orange. On the stadtholder’s birthday, various other incidents were reported around the town. In the city docks, a procession of shipwrights sporting orange ribbons went from shipyard to shipyard, and at the head of the procession there was a boy dressed as a Harlequin with an orange hat and a staff. They ordered any shipwrights still at work to join them and threatened to throw the workers in the water if they refused. The rioters then went on to plunder an alehouse. Finally, they rang the bells of the shipwright, before dispersing into the city.²⁷

²⁴ Exceptions are the studies of Eric Palmen and Tiny Romme, both cited below, as well Jouke Nijman, ‘Politieke cultuur en volkscultuur in de Patriottentijd’, *Groniek* 30: 137 (1996–1997), 417–431. All of these authors present singular case studies.

²⁵ See for an overview of the literature: Joris Oddens, ‘De Nederlandse revolutie in dorp en stad. Lokale geschiedschrijving over de patriots-Bataafse tijd, 1875 tot heden’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 130: 4 (2018), 565–591, here 580. This contribution constitutes an attempt to bring into practice the method that I propose there.

²⁶ This term, as well as some other terminology used in this chapter, such as ‘contentious repertoire’, and ‘contentious regime’, is indebted to the work of Charles Tilly. See for instance Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, *Contentious politics* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).

²⁷ Eric Palmen, ‘De smalle gemeente van Rotterdam in de partijstrijd tussen de patriotten en de orangisten’, *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 10: 2 (1994), 244–249; and Eric

In the same year, another site of collective action was the town of Arnhem. For reasons of public hygiene, the local government, which was dominated by Orangists, had decided to create a new cemetery outside the city walls. The clearing of the old cemetery happened without paying due respect to the remains. This had caused unrest in the local community, which was reinforced by the rumour that a member of the city government, a staunch supporter of the stadtholder, had accepted a large sum of money from a Jewish merchant who had received permission to build on part of the municipal cemetery. In August, the situation escalated when an outbreak of dysentery caused the government to force inhabitants who received municipal poor relief and died of the disease to be buried in the new cemetery. The wife of a sergeant of the local garrison was buried there to set an example. The next evening, a crowd gathered at the site of the new cemetery. They took down the fences that demarcated the symbolic space of the cemetery. A group of women unearthed the corpse of the sergeant's wife. Her coffin was carried around in triumph through the streets of Arnhem. The procession halted in front of the *Prinzenhof*, where the garrison's commanding officer resided. It went on to one of the town's churches, where the bells were rung and the corpse was reburied. Next, the crowd returned to the site of the new cemetery, took the fences, carried them around in procession, and dumped them on the land of the merchant. Subsequently the crowd broke up, but smaller groups of people continued to go around the town, calling at the houses of the wealthy citizens and demanding drink money.²⁸

In February 1784, unrest broke out around Vierlingsbeek, in States-Brabant. Not long before, an official living in this village had tried to ban a local tradition which involved unmarried young men forcing couples to treat them to drinks before their wedding. Late at night on 1 February, men from Vierlingsbeek and surrounding villages responded by going in procession to the house of the official while making a lot of noise with various instruments. This charivari with rough music marked the beginning of a whole series of actions against the official and his family. People

Palmen, *Kaat Mossel, belleveeg van Rotterdam. Volk en Verlichting in de achttiende eeuw*. (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2009), 19–30, 43–44.

²⁸ Martien Franken, 'De uitbarsting van de Patriottenbeweging in Arnhem door de bril van Willem Anne Schimmelpenninck van der Oije (december 1782-augustus 1783)', Burchard Elias e.a. eds., *Veluwe en andere geschiedenissen: Liber amicorum drs. R.M. Kemperink* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010), 150–156.

sang offensive songs about them in public, and they were mocked in street theatre. A few days after the first incident, on Ash Wednesday, a crowd showed up at the official's house again after the day's festivities. They damaged his house and threatened to take down the walls, and they chopped down his trees and sealed his well. The locals were so persistent in their actions, that eventually the official and his family were forced to leave the village for good.²⁹

In the Spring of 1784, the windows of a house on the Oranjegracht in Leiden were smashed. The owner of the house was a member of the Leiden civic militia. The city of Leiden had an overwhelmingly Patriot population, but it also had an assertive Orangist minority, which felt threatened by this new voluntary association and by the challenges to the political status quo in general. The incident set in motion a week of further unrest directed against the local Patriots. On 8 and 9 June Orangists collectively took to the streets wearing orange cockades and other signs of their political allegiance. Passers-by were forced to do the same. On 10 June, a crowd smashed the windows of the houses and shops of two militia members, a pastry chef, and a *jenever* distiller. The rioters could barely be stopped from plundering the sites.³⁰

These four episodes of collective action constitute a rich repository of symbolic behaviour. In Rotterdam, Arnhem, and Leiden, we are clearly dealing at least at some level with a political conflict between the two rival factions that operated nationwide. In Vierlingsbeek this is less immediately obvious, although Tiny Romme, who has studied this case, suggests that the conflict between the Patriots and the Orangists may have played a role here as well.³¹ Together the four incidents show that in any event, action that was concerned with the political order of the state cannot be sharply distinguished from action concerned with the moral order of the local community, because it made use of a similar repertoire. The smashing of windows and the plundering of private residences and businesses were, in early modern Europe, the alpha and omega of rites of

²⁹ Tiny Romme, 'Charivari en patriottisme. Een nieuw perspectief', in Gerard Rooijackers, Annemiek van der Veen and Coen Free eds., *Voor 'Brabants Vrybeyd'. Patriotten in Staats-Brabant* (Den Bosch: Stichting Brabantse Regionale Geschiedbeoefening, 1988), 109–110.

³⁰ Erik Halbe de Jong, *Weldenkende burgers en Oranjeliefhebbers. Patriotten en prinsgezinden in Leiden 1775–1795* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014), 173–178.

³¹ Romme, 'Charivari en patriottisme', 111.

purification. They were not careless acts of outrage and vandalism, but careful actions against individuals who were deemed to have violated the moral order. The more severe the violation had been in the eyes of the community, the more destructive the plundering. When the house and land of a victim were made uninhabitable, as in the case of Vierlingsbeek, this was to be interpreted as a ritual of banishment, a punishment that was normally enforced by the authorities: the message was that the victim should leave the community.³²

The fact that the crowd in Leiden, out of all the militia members, specifically targeted a pastry chef and a distiller, should probably not be interpreted as opportunistic, but rather as a sign that the people involved were convinced of the righteousness of their actions. The demanding or taking of food and drink actually strengthened the legitimatisation that they were doing the ‘work’ that the authorities had left undone, for which they deserved to be paid.³³ We see something similar happening in Arnhem where, after having committed their acts, the perpetrators demanded drink money. In Rotterdam, the ending of a performance of collective action by plundering an alehouse and ringing the guild bells, which was usually done to signal the end of a working day, points in the same direction. In Vierlingsbeek, the prohibition of the ritual of extorting drink money to which the local men believed themselves to be entitled formed the very cause of the action.

As Eric Palmen has observed, the way in which the inhabitants of Rotterdam went from door to door to demand money or fuel around the time of public celebration became part of a common European tradition during Carnival or around the time of the feasts of Saint Martin and Saint Nicholas. It seems unlikely that the actions were without local precedents, but in 1783, they seem to have become tied up with the conflict between Patriots and Orangists.³⁴ It remains unclear whether the houses they called at were deliberately selected because their inhabitants were Patriots, or whether they just happened to be on the route. Several of the victims of the actions were involved in the corn trade, and a corn-broker believed that the actions against him had something to do

³² Ibid., 114.

³³ Peter van Rooden, ‘De plunderingen op Schouwen en te Zierikzee, 1786–1788’, *Archief van het Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen* (1983), 173–199, here 189.

³⁴ Palmen, *Kaat Mossel*, 48.

with the high grain prices. The demanding of money would in that case be a form of popular taxation, a strategy that was common within the symbolic language of the ‘moral economy’.³⁵ As for the procession of the shipwrights, it is difficult to say whether this was a unique incident where the Harlequin figure represented a topsy-turvy world in which the people took it upon themselves to (force others to) celebrate the house of Orange because the authorities would not, or whether this was just a grimmer version of festive rituals that took place every year.

THE ORANGIST RESTORATION AND THE BATAVIAN REVOLUTION

As the conflict between the Patriots and the Orangists escalated in the mid-1780s, collective action became more violent. Especially around the stadtholderian restoration of 1787, there were many instances of plundering on both sides. In May before the restoration, a Patriot crowd in Amsterdam plundered various pubs where Orangist shipwrights gathered on the island of Kattenburg.³⁶ Four months later, windows belonging to several Orangist citizens were smashed in the garrison town of Heusden in States-Brabant.³⁷ In both of these cases, these actions provoked reactions when the Orangists got the upper hand. In Amsterdam, the Orangist shipwrights responded with the large-scale plundering of houses of well-to-do Patriots.³⁸ They also organised festivities, including large processions to celebrate the stadtholderian restoration. A plunderer who had been killed by the civic guard received a stately funeral after the Prussians had entered the city.³⁹ In Brabant, the systematic plundering of

³⁵ Palmen, ‘De smalle gemeente’, 244–246; Edward P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present* 50: 1 (1971), 76–136.

³⁶ Idzard van Manen and K. Vermeulen, ‘Het lagere volk van Amsterdam in de strijd tussen patriotten en oranjegezinden 1780–1800 II’, *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 31 (1981), 3–42, here 25–27.

³⁷ Joost Rosendaal, *Tot nut van Nederland. Polarisatie en revolutie in een grensgebied, 1783–1787* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2012), 195.

³⁸ A. Haga, ‘Herinneringen van den patriot H.T. Ament’, *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 48 (1927), 1–26, here 9–11.

³⁹ Johannes Breen, ‘De feestelijke stemming na de Restauratie van 1787’, *Amstelodamum* 5 (1918), 89–91, here 90.

Heusden formed the climax of Orangist raids of the surrounding countryside. Thousands of farmers from nearby villages entered the town, singing, dancing, screaming, and shooting in the air. They demanded money and liquor and forced the citizens to toast the house of Orange. The crowd proceeded to the town hall and released two Orangist prisoners, who were paraded through the town in triumph. Subsequently over fifty houses of Patriot citizens were plundered. Patriot leaders were imprisoned and harassed. The plundering of Heusden was organised, and the plunderers seem to have maintained a strict hierarchy. One of the leaders of the operation was referred to by the crowd as ‘commander of the plunderers’.⁴⁰

The actions in the province of Zeeland on the island of Schouwen were particularly violent. In November 1786, three inhabitants of the countryside were arrested for having violated a ban on wearing Orange dress and imprisoned in the town of Zierikzee. In response, a group of farmers went from village to village in procession behind a large orange banner, smashed the windows of Patriots’ houses, and did not pay for the drinks they consumed at various village inns. The procession ended up at the Zierikzee prison, where they attempted in vain to liberate the prisoners. During the summer of the following year, after the invasion of Prussian troops, an armed clash between the Patriot free corps and an Orangist crowd resulted in the defeat of the free corps. The crowd resorted to plundering. More than a hundred houses were plundered, seventy-five of which were entirely destroyed. The countryside of the island was plundered a few months later.⁴¹

Peter van Rooden has analysed the nature of these instances of collective action. As was usual in early modern ritual plundering, the plunderers on Schouwen, with few exceptions, destroyed but did not steal because they believed that they were executing justice.⁴² As in Heusden, the plundering crowd imitated the structure of the army, with bands of plunderers headed by a captain, another sign that they believed their actions were just. As Van Rooden rightly observes, for Orangist crowds there was also an element of naive monarchism in their legitimisation. To Orangists on Schouwen, stadtholder William V was nothing short of a monarch and,

⁴⁰ Rosendaal, *Tot nut van Nederland*, 195, here 199–201.

⁴¹ Van Rooden, ‘Plunderingen’, 176–177.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 188. Cf. Dekker, *Holland in beroering*, 87.

in their eyes, going against the monarch, as the Patriots did, was a violation of the God-given social order and therefore an attack on the Dutch Reformed religion itself.⁴³

For Patriots, politics and religion were tightly linked as well. Between 1793 and 1795, the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic States-Brabant, which was ruled by the Dutch Reformed States-General in The Hague, was the stage of the war between a French revolutionary army and the troops of the stadtholder. During these years, the region witnessed a wave of religiously inspired symbolic violence by Catholic Patriots. In many villages, these Patriots plundered the local churches, which were used by a tiny Protestant minority. Bibles and psalters were torn apart, pews were used as firewood, and the plunderers defecated in the pulpits. With such desacralisation rites, Catholics demonstrated their resentment against the Calvinist ruling elite.⁴⁴

Unlike the stadtholderian restoration, the Batavian Revolution happened without mass plundering. Probably the best-known symbolic action in the early months of the Batavian Republic was directed against the symbols of the House of Orange-Nassau and other high nobility. In Leeuwarden, the graves of the Frisian stadtholders from which William V descended were destroyed. In Utrecht, the Dom church was plundered: the escutcheons of noble families were taken down and the tomb of the Countess of Solms, a relative of the stadtholder, was badly damaged.⁴⁵ In Drenthe, there is an extant painting of stadtholder William V from which the face has been scratched out.⁴⁶

Collective action directed against persons, however, did not disappear, and when it took place, its repertoire looked similar to before. The new authorities tried to prevent popular action against Orangists, but they were not always successful. When the people believed the authorities did not do a good enough job in repressing supporters of the stadtholder, they took the law into their own hands. Their behaviour has usually been interpreted as revolutionary radicalism, but the nature of the actions

⁴³ Van Rooden, 'Plunderingen', 191–192.

⁴⁴ Romme, 'Charivari en patriottisme', 116–118; Joost Rosendaal, *Bataven! Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Frankrijk 1787–1795* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2003), 551–552.

⁴⁵ Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 547.

⁴⁶ Unknown artist (unknown date) *Damaged portrait of William V* (possible copy after Guillaume de Spinny, *Portrait of William V*, 1775). Collection Drents Museum, obj. no. H1903-0027.

suggests that here, too, we are ultimately dealing with attempts to restore the local order. On Saturday 14 November 1795, during the evening, a group of Patriots plundered a house on the Heerenstraat in Rotterdam, which was apparently a gathering place for Orangists who pretended to frequent a singing club. The next evening, an armed group showed up at inns that were frequented by Orangists and the houses of innkeepers who worked at these places. They left a trail of destruction and carried Orangist symbols they found along with them as trophies.⁴⁷ In Amsterdam, many inhabitants were dissatisfied with the local government, which in their eyes was far too lenient towards civil servants with Orangist sympathies who had been allowed to keep their jobs. The resentment about this was greatest among the gunners of the voluntary city artillery (*kanonniërs*). In early May 1796, gunners started to disobey their superior officers as well as intimidate and molest civil servants. Two of the gunners were arrested, and on 9 May the city council decided to disband and disarm the city artillery. The next day, a crowd of gunners, acting on their own authority and helped by other inhabitants, stormed the city hall, entered the assembly room, and smashed the furniture. They demanded the annulment of their disbandment, the release of the arrested gunners, and the removal from office of the Orangist civil servants.⁴⁸

The Batavian period also witnessed outbursts of Orangist collective action. In Wageningen, Orangist inhabitants responded with violence when they were invited to take part in a provincial referendum. They damaged the houses of Patriot citizens, demanded drinks, and smashed windows, as one contemporary chronicler with Patriot sympathies put it, ‘the usual doings of the supporters of the House of Orange, which characterises them through the ages’.⁴⁹ Another example is presented by the events in the countryside of northeast Friesland, which had a tradition of popular unrest. In the village of Burum, for instance, the birthday of the stadtholder had given rise to riots in 1789: in the local church the Bible

⁴⁷ R.A.D. Renting, ‘Orangisten en Orangisme te Rotterdam na de Bataafse Republiek II’, *Rotterdamsch Jaarboekje* 7: 3 (1965), 195–221, here 199–200.

⁴⁸ Hartog Italic, ‘De oproerige bewegingen der kanonniërs te Amsterdam in 1796’, *Oud Holland* 20: 1 (1902), 16–58, here 38–39.

⁴⁹ *Nieuwe Nederlandsche Jaarboeken, of Vervolg der merkwaardigste geschiedenissen, die voorgevallen zijn in de Vereenigde Provinciën, de Generaliteits landen en de volksplantingen van den state* (1795), 5408–5409; and Laurien Hansma, *Oranje drijven: Orangisme in de Nederlandse politieke cultuur 1780–1813* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2019), 106.

on the pulpit had been torn and the pulpit had been smeared with faeces. We have seen similar actions being performed by Catholics in Brabant, but this time the perpetrators were Protestants acting against their coreligionists. In 1797, Burum was again a centre of contention in what has become known as the ‘revolt of Kollum’ (*Kollumer oproer*). An inhabitant of this village who hindered the registration of able men for conscription in a civic guard was arrested and locked up in nearby Kollum as he awaited his transfer to the capital, Leeuwarden.⁵⁰

As is often the case, the arrest of a member of the local community triggered collective action. In the neighbouring village of Zwaagwesteinde, several hundred people armed themselves with all they could find and headed to Kollum, where they succeeded in liberating the prisoners. That night, thousands of armed Frisians attacked Kollum and other villages in the region. In Kollum, the anger of the crowd was directed at specific members of the community. Their main target was a local Patriot leader. A few dozen people entered his house and physically abused him and his family. His house and most of his possessions were plundered. As it turned out, the rage of the crowd was partly inspired by the moral conduct of this local Patriot. He apparently mistreated his domestics, including a maid who was the daughter of the leader of the attackers. As well as being politically motivated, the attack also had the characteristics of a traditional charivari against immoral behaviour.⁵¹

BLURRED BOUNDARIES

What emerges from the previous sections is a local repertoire of action undertaken against violations of the moral and the political order. Plundering, which could go from smashing windows to total destruction, was in many cases the preferred form of action. Plundering crowds often appropriated food and (alcoholic) drinks or demanded money to buy these. Violence against persons was relatively rare, but it did occur. The sites of plundering varied according to the circumstances—in some cases there was only one site, in other cases there were many—but plundering never happened at random. Individual members of the local society were

⁵⁰ Jacques Kuiper, *Een revolutie ontrafeld: Politiek in Friesland 1795–1798* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2002), 263–265.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 268–269, 273.

singled out for a specific reason. Occasionally, the sites of plundering were not the houses or establishments of individuals, but other sites of wrongdoing, such as the seats of political, judicial, or religious authorities. Crowds did not always plunder, but also resorted to less violent forms of action such as charivaresque processions. Such processions could be playful, but often carried an imminent threat of violence, for instance for those refusing to join in, or escalated into plundering.

In the minds of many inhabitants of the revolutionary Netherlands, there seems to have existed no sharp distinction between moral and political order. Ultimately, they resorted to action when one or more members of a local community were believed to have committed moral offences. A moral offender, to the local population, could be a community member harming (the reputation of) other members, or an authority figure trying to break with tradition or arresting locals. In either case, the unity and harmony of the local community was believed to be under threat, and the local authorities were deemed to not be restoring order. This is why collective action virtually always contained elements that symbolically amounted to imitating or taking the place of the authorities. This could be very literal, like individuals sitting down in the seats of their leaders or the reburial of a body, or more coded, like ritual plunder symbolising an official banishment.

What the cases discussed above also exemplify, is that in the revolutionary era there seems to have been no specifically *urban* tradition of revolt. The manifestations of collective action discussed in this chapter show that the repertoires of action in cities and countryside do not differ from one another. It would be surprising if they did, as many urban dwellers had their roots in the countryside, and inhabitants of the countryside often took part in urban revolts, while their action might also be directed against village authorities. One and the same symbolic repertoire survived in the end of the age of revolutions both in rural and urban communities. This observation is relevant because it is in the cities that we tend to situate the emergence of newer manifestations of collective action, such as participating in political clubs and public petitioning.

Another distinction that is not tenable is between Patriots and Orangists. It is tempting to think of the Patriots as progressive, composed, middle-class citizens, engaged in orderly, highly controlled forms of collective action such as petitioning or parading in militias, while imagining the Orangists as an enraged rabble, desperately clinging to an old order and popular traditions. The events in Arnhem, where actions were

directed against Orangist authorities and a member of the Jewish community by people who identified as Patriots, demonstrate that this distinction is too black and white. In the behaviour of the people of Arnhem, we recognise many well-known symbolic patterns. They performed their actions at the sites of wrongdoing, in this case the old and new cemeteries, they imitated the authorities by organising a funeral procession and a reburial, and they also asked for drink money as a sign that their actions were legitimate.

An important question that remains to be addressed is whether the newer contentious repertoire that amounted to politicised forms of sociability and petitioning (which were, of course, also institutions predating the revolution) should be seen as distinct from the more traditional symbolic repertoire. Are we dealing with different groups of people involved in different types of action? Do they represent incompatible ways of thinking? In my view the answer to all of these questions is no. In fact, I would rather argue, much in line with the general thrust of this volume, that what we tend to think of as a more modern revolutionary repertoire was often understood, at the grassroots level, in symbolic terms as well.

It is true that there was a group of revolutionaries in the Batavian era known as *Moderaten* who, much like the urban elites of the early modern Dutch Republic, dismissed symbolic forms of action as popular derailment. They had their own associations such as the Gemeenebestgezinde Burgersocieteiten (Societies of Commonwealth-Minded Citizens), elite organisations that resembled pre-revolutionary cultural societies and admitted new members by ballot. The Gemeenebestgezinde Burgersocieteit of The Hague, which counted many national politicians among its members, declared it an ‘unalterable principle’ that it could never pretend to represent the voice of the people.⁵²

Such self-imposed limitations could not be found in the regulations of the more common radical political clubs and other associations of the same period. These associations were much less elitist in terms of membership and thrived precisely because they functioned as alternative representative institutions. In petitions to local governments or the national parliament, their leaders supported the new system of representative democracy and denied that they intended to make any power

⁵² Herman de Lange, ‘De Gemeenebestgezinde burgersocieteit te Den Haag, 1797–1798’, *Jaarboek geschiedkundige vereniging Die Haghe* 1 (1970), 42–81; and Oddens, *Pioniers in schaduwbeeld*, 219.

claims. To the ordinary members, however, the new concept of popular sovereignty often seems to have been understood in terms of their established right to put themselves in the place of the authorities and restore the moral order.

The radical political club, with its internal hierarchy, can also be viewed as a less violent manifestation of the plundering band. Sometimes the boundaries between the two became blurred when members of clubs resorted to violent action. This was the case in the abovementioned incident in Rotterdam in 1795, where the attack on the illegal Orangist club was committed by members of the radical Batavian Societeit voor Volksvrienden (Society for Friends of the People).⁵³ In the revolt of the gunners (*kanonniersoproer*) that took place in Amsterdam in 1796, we see that the officers of the voluntary city artillery lost control over their subordinates because the latter pursued a moral agenda of their own, a mechanism that is also common in plundering crowds.

Similarly, petitioning can be considered a modern political right, as Dutch revolutionary ideologues did, but this did not stop people from seeing it, as they had in the early modern period, as a form of action not incompatible with, but complementary to, symbolic action. Petitioning presupposed at least a minimal degree of acceptance of the power relationship between rulers and ruled, because it implied an acknowledgement of the authority of the rulers. At the same time, it was understood both by rulers and ruled that petitioning was only one step away from violent action: if petitioners felt that they were not heard, they were more likely to take the law into their own hands. Signing petitions or presenting them to the authorities often involved the gathering of crowds. These actions can be seen as ritual steps that had to be carried out before more rigorous action was deemed justified, but they posed an imminent threat of violence. Many instances of symbolic collective action were in fact preceded by petitions; this was, for instance, the case with the Patriot revolt Arnhem in 1783 and with the Orangist riots in Leiden in 1784.⁵⁴

The events in Leiden are particularly revealing. There, the unrest over the creation of a new Patriot voluntary civic militia was greatest among the Orangist members of the old institution of the civic guard. These

⁵³ Renting, 'Orangisten en Orangisme', 199–200.

⁵⁴ Franken, 'De uitbarsting van de Patriottenbeweging', 152; and De Jong, *Weldenkende burgers en Oranjeliefhebbers*, 159.

members intended to petition the Leiden government and request that this new rival be outlawed, but they were initially kept from doing so by their board of officers (*Krijgsraad*), who promised that they would handle the situation. When this did not happen to the satisfaction of the guardsmen, they responded by drawing up a petition all the same and submitting it to the authorities directly, passing over their officers.⁵⁵ The high number of subscribers to this petition (860) was typical of the revolutionary era. The function the petition served, however, was typical of the ‘contentious regime’ of the early modern Dutch Republic. The Orangist guardsmen were well aware that there was no chance of their request being granted by the city government, which was dominated by Patriots. What they needed to show was that they had tried all options to get the government to do the right thing. When this had proven to be to no avail, they could legitimately proceed to take matters into their own hands.

CONCLUSION

Looking at the Dutch Revolution from a distance, we cannot but conclude that it had a deep impact on the political life of the Dutch Republic. This was certainly the case for non-Dutch Reformed inhabitants, and rural dwellers, among other groups, because they were accepted, for the first time since Dutch independence, as full citizens. More generally, the higher degree of political participation and the introduction of public access to government entirely changed the dynamics of citizen-ruler interactions. A large proportion of the population took part in primary assemblies to vote for referendums and elections, and engaged with the decision-making process in other ways. These novelties were not to last. After 1800, they would be viewed with suspicion for decades to come. Yet, their memory could not be banned from people’s minds.

That said, the fact that new avenues of popular political behaviour opened did not mean that older roads became dead ends. Symbolic, local collective action, that is the type of action which derived its legitimacy not from contemporary political theory but from moral custom, remained a productive repertoire throughout the revolutionary era, in cities and in the countryside, both among revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 156–159.

Episodes of symbolic action could be ‘spontaneous’ grassroots events, but this was not necessarily the case. In their attempts to achieve revolutionary *change*, political elites often capitalised on the indignation and energy generated by the desire to *restore* the moral order of the local community. In the Batavian era, populist politicians *avant la lettre* deliberately appealed to these local sentiments in their political speeches, which due to the freedom of the press reached a national audience. Rather than becoming less concerned with local issues prompted by popular culture, people discovered a new national podium where they could pursue these issues with collective petitions. In that sense, the age of revolutions did create a new political reality.

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