

Ballare col nemico?

Reazioni all'espansione francese in Europa  
tra entusiasmo e resistenza (1792-1815)

Mit dem Feind tanzen?

Reaktionen auf die französische Expansion in Europa  
zwischen Begeisterung und Protest (1792-1815)

a cura di/hrsg. von

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Società editrice il Mulino  
Bologna

Duncker & Humblot  
Berlin

Fondazione Bruno Kessler - Studi storici italo-germanici

Atti del convegno «Far fronte alla rivoluzione. Reazioni e risposte all'espansione francese in Europa 1792-1815 / Im Angesicht der Revolution. Reaktionen auf die französische Expansion 1792-1815»

Trento, 24-25 gennaio 2008

Atti del convegno «Dancing with the Enemy? Cultural and Social Relations in Cities Occupied by French Troops (1792-1815) / Danser avec l'ennemi? Relations culturelles et sociales dans les villes occupées par des troupes françaises (1792-1815)»

Lyon, 27-30 agosto 2008

#### BALLARE

col nemico? : Reazioni all'espansione francese in Europa tra entusiasmo e resistenza : (1792-1815) = Mit dem Feind tanzen? : Reaktionen auf die französische Expansion in Europa zwischen Begeisterung und Protest : (1792-1815) / a cura di = hrsg. von Cecilia Nubola, Andreas Würigler - Bologna : Il mulino ; Berlin : Duncker & Humblot, 2010. - 306 p. ; 24 cm. - (Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento. Contributi ; 23 = Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts in Trient. Beiträge ; 23)

Atti di due convegni tenuti a Trento dal 24 al 25 gennaio 2008 e a Lyon dal 27 al 30 agosto 2008. - Nell'occh. : Fondazione Bruno Kessler.

ISBN 978-88-15-13746-3 - ISBN 978-3-428-13329-1

1. Europa - Storia - Occupazione francese - 1792-1815 - Congressi - Trento - 2008 2. Europa - Storia - Occupazione francese - 1792-1815 - Congressi - Lyon - 2008 I. Nubola, Cecilia II. Würigler, Andreas

940.271 (DDC 22.ed.)

Composizione e impaginazione: FBK - Editoria

Scheda bibliografica: FBK - Biblioteca

ISBN 978-88-15-13746-3

ISBN 978-3-428-13329-1

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# The French Occupation and the Transformation of the Dutch Public Sphere (1795-1813)

by *Thomas Poell*

*Abstract* – To begin with, this paper shows how the French Revolution and occupation facilitated, between 1795 and 1798, the development of a centralized Dutch public sphere based on universalistic principles. In reaction to the failure of the Patriot Revolt (1780-1787), the Dutch revolutionaries were quick to embrace the democratic French unitary state model. Subsequently, the much welcomed invasion of 1795 gave them the opportunity to revive the revolutionary clubs and press, and to begin the reform of the Dutch state. This reform process was driven by a series of temporary coalitions with the French authorities, which allowed the revolutionary politicians to eliminate the opposition against the centralization and democratization of the Dutch state. Subsequently, this paper demonstrates that the collapse of the public sphere after 1798 can only be partially attributed to the rise of French authoritarianism. In fact, the Dutch revolutionaries themselves played a crucial role in the breakdown of the political press and the elimination of revolutionary associations. Public political activities, as well as official democratic procedures, were increasingly considered by the revolutionaries as obstacles to political reform after the establishment of the unitary democratic constitution of 1798. In turn, the French authorities only became truly repressive after the Dutch state had been annexed by the French Empire in 1810. By this time the Dutch public sphere – at least what remained of it – had been increasingly mobilized in direct opposition to the French occupiers.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The late eighteenth century revolutionary era is generally seen as a period of spectacular growth of the public sphere in Europe. Everywhere in the revolutionary regions, political clubs, societies, and assemblies were established. New political periodicals were created, large amounts of pamphlets appeared, and the traditional practice of petitioning was turned into an instrument of contestation. In the Netherlands, political periodicals and clubs were especially created during the Patriot Revolt (1780-1787) and in the first years after the invasion of the French revolutionary armies in 1795.

Particularly striking, at the same time, is that a major part of revolutionary Europe was French occupied territory. How did the French presence

affect the development of the public sphere in these regions? It is clear, on the one hand, that the French Revolution exported the ideals of liberty and equality, as well as models for popular political involvement. Yet, on the other hand, the French state, especially after Napoleon took control, increasingly became an authoritarian force.

This paper examines the potentially contradictory French influence on the development of the public sphere in the occupied regions through an analysis of Dutch public political activity in the years between 1795 and 1813. Furthermore, to analyze how the French occupation affected public life on the local level, the examination will specifically focus on Amsterdam, which was by far the largest and richest of the early modern Dutch cities. The Dutch case is particularly interesting because the Dutch Republic had already experienced a period of intense popular revolutionary activity before the French invasion. Hence, it gives us an excellent opportunity to observe the impact of the French occupation.

This investigation is obviously linked to a long historiographical debate, in which opposing claims have been made concerning the French impact on the late eighteenth century Dutch Revolution. There are a number of historians, such as Robert Roswell Palmer and Niek van Sas, who have claimed that this revolution was primarily determined by the Dutch revolutionaries themselves, and not by the French<sup>1</sup>. On the contrary, various other historians, including Wijnand Mijnhardt and Joost Kloek, as well as Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel, have argued that, after 1795, the revolutionary changes were largely imposed by the French<sup>2</sup>. The aim of this investigation is to go beyond these black-and-white characterizations and arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the French influence. It will try to achieve this aim by specifically analyzing the manifold relationships between the Dutch and the French, and by examining how these relationships changed in the course of the occupational period.

In this effort, the following questions will be addressed. First, how did the French Revolution and occupation transform the character of publicness in the Netherlands? How did the Dutch react to the French

<sup>1</sup> R.R. PALMER, *The Age of Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols, Princeton NJ 1970, 2/2, pp. 177-199; N.C.F. VAN SAS, *Scenario's voor een onvoltooide revolutie, 1795-1798*, in «Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden», 104, 1989, pp. 622-637, here p. 626.

<sup>2</sup> J. KLOEK - W.W. MIJNHARDT, *1800: Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving*, Den Haag 2001, pp. 29-34; J.L. VAN ZANDEN - A. VAN RIEL, *Nederland 1780-1914. Staat, instituties en economische ontwikkeling*, 2000, pp. 57-58.

presence? Did they adopt or reject the French Revolutionary ideals and practices? Second, did the rise of French authoritarianism, which became especially strong after Napoleon took control of the French state, lead to the breakdown of the Dutch public sphere? And, how did the Dutch react to the repressive measures of the French regime?

## II. THE IMPACT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND INVASION

The most immediate effect of the French invasion of 1795 was obviously that it turned the tables in the Dutch political relations: the revolutionaries again occupied a dominant position. After many of them had been forced to flee the Republic in 1787, when the invasion of the Prussian armies ended the Patriot Revolt, the French invasion constituted a moment of triumph. Consequently, the Dutch revolutionaries first and foremost considered the French occupiers as liberators. Particularly telling in this sense was how the Amsterdam Revolutionary Committee announced to the urban population that it had taken over the government of the city. On 19 January 1795, it proclaimed:

«Now you are, through the generous help of the French people, and the appropriate use of your own powers, free. You consequently obtain all of your rights, which have been violently stolen from you, and on which you all, who ever you are, can make an equal claim. YOU ARE FREE! YOU ARE EQUAL!»<sup>3</sup>.

Clearly, this sentiment was shared by a substantial part of the population. Throughout the Republic, people celebrated the revolution, and danced around liberty trees. A few months later, in June 1795, these parties were followed by more official festivities to celebrate the alliance with the French<sup>4</sup>.

For the supporters of the Stadholder, the military and *de facto* political leader of the early modern Republic, the invasion was evidently a disaster. These supporters, who were called Orangists, had – especially between 1787 and 1795 – occupied a dominant position in Dutch society. The

<sup>3</sup> «Thans zyt gy door de edelmoedige hulp des Franschen volks, en het gepast gebruik dat gy van uwe eigene krachten gemaakt hebt, vry. Gy verkrygt daardoor alle uwe Rechten, welke u gewelddadig ontvreemd waren, en waarop gy allen, wie gy ook zyn moogt, een gelyke aanspraak hebt. GY ZYT VRY! GY ZYT GELYK!», Amsterdam City Archives (henceforth ACA), arch. NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 1, Handelingen van het Comité Revolutionair, January 19, 1795.

<sup>4</sup> F. GRIJZENHOUT, *Feesten voor het Vaderland. Patriotse en Bataafse feesten*, Zwolle 1989, pp. 135-159.

French invasion changed all this. The Stadholder immediately left the country for England, while the governing Orangist elite were quickly discharged from their positions. On top of this, especially well-known Orangists, who could also be found in the lower social circles, were constantly threatened by further punishment. For example, shortly after the invasion, the Amsterdam Revolutionary Committee urged the newly appointed local government to punish the «criminals [i.e. Orangists], who have brought disaster on the country and ruined their fellow burghers, by their detestable acts»<sup>5</sup>. A few days later, on February 9, the committee reinforced this request by claiming that each day it was asked from various sides to demand the imprisonment of the «wicked villains» and the confiscation of the «goods of this gang of robbers»<sup>6</sup>. In this hostile climate, the Orangists mostly kept quiet.

By allowing the revolutionaries to take control of Dutch politics, the French invasion indirectly facilitated the revival of the Dutch revolutionary public sphere, which had largely collapsed in 1787. An explosion of public activity followed the invasion. In March 1795, the Amsterdam Revolutionary Committee reported that new clubs, societies, and popular assemblies were being established on a daily basis<sup>7</sup>. Especially the Amsterdam Neighborhood Assemblies organized a lot of people. Following the French example, these popular assemblies had been created, in March 1795, by the society *Tot Nut van het Vaderland* [For the Purpose of the Nation]<sup>8</sup>. The official goal of the Neighborhood Assemblies was to organize the voice of the people of Amsterdam, according to the principle of popular sovereignty. The assemblies were especially successful in the first year of their existence. Their membership quickly grew to 15,000 men, and they soon covered the entire city<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> «... schurken, dewelke 's lands onheil en het verderf hunner medeburghers, door hunne verfoeielijke handelingen hebben berokkend», ACA, arch. Nieuw Stedelijk Bestur, (henceforth NSB), arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 1, Handelingen van het Comité Revolutionair, January 31, 1795.

<sup>6</sup> «... heillooze schurken ... goederen van deeze rooverbende», NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 1, Handelingen van het Comité Revolutionair, February 9, 1795.

<sup>7</sup> ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 1, Handelingen van het Comité Revolutionair, March 20, 1795.

<sup>8</sup> B. RESINK - J. VERHOEVEN, *De stem van het volk: de Amsterdamse wijkvergaderingen in de eerste jaren der Bataafse revolutie*, in «Amstelodamum», 82, 1995, 2, pp. 33-43, here, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35-37; ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 1075, Minutes of the General Assembly of the Neighborhood Assemblies in Amsterdam.

The political periodicals experienced a strong revival as well. *De Post van den Neder-Rhijn* [The Post of the Neder-Rhijn], which had been a prominent political periodical during the Patriot Revolt, made a restart as *De nieuwe post van den Neder-Rhijn* [The New Post of the Neder-Rhijn], again run by journalist Pieter 't Hoen. There were also many new political periodicals, such as *De republikein* [The Republican], edited by professor Jan Konijnenburg, and *De Democraten* [The Democrats], which was edited by lawyer Samuel Wiselius, merchant Isaac Gogel, and Reformed minister Willem Ockerse. Particularly interesting is that many of the editors of the political periodicals also fulfilled crucial governmental positions. For example, Wiselius played a key role in the revolutionary government of Holland, Konijnenburg and Ockerse functioned as prominent members of the National Assembly, while Gogel was the Dutch Minister of Finance for many years. Moreover, it is also noteworthy that many of the editors were active in political clubs, societies, and assemblies<sup>10</sup>. Thus, the periodical press could not be considered as politically independent.

Important to note is that the revolutionary Dutch public sphere could flourish because the French, as we will see, only occasionally intervened in the Dutch political process. Dutch autonomy did, however, come at a steep price, as the French made enormous financial claims. They not only demanded a «liberation fee» of 100 million guilders, which in the eighteenth century was a very large sum, but they also wanted the Dutch to pay for the maintenance of the French occupational armies. These claims brought the already heavily indebted Republic to the brink of financial bankruptcy. Consequently, in the first years after the invasion, the main frictions between the Dutch and the French were of a financial nature. These frictions became apparent at the top level in the negotiations between the Dutch revolutionary elite and the French government over the financial terms of the alliance between the two countries<sup>11</sup>. And on a lower level, they became evident in the quarrels over who exactly should pay for the maintenance of the French army. In the Amsterdam archives, various petitions can be found of merchants and craftsmen who had supplied goods to the French army, but had not yet been paid. For example, a large number of skippers and ship-owners wanted to be paid

<sup>10</sup> T. POELL, *The Democratic Paradox. Dutch Revolutionary Struggles over Democratisation and Centralisation (1780-1813)*, Ph.D. Dissertation Utrecht, 2007, p. 91; P. VAN WISSING, *Stooschrijven. Pers en Politiek tussen 1780 en 1800*, Nijmegen 2008.

<sup>11</sup> T. PFEIL, 'Tot redding van het vaderland', Amsterdam 1998, pp. 124-130; J.M.F. FRITSCHY, *De patriotten en de financiën van de Bataafse Republiek: Hollands krediet en de smalle marges voor een nieuw beleid (1795-1801)*, Den Haag 1988, pp. 211-216.

for the goods that had been confiscated by the French troops, and for the use these troops had made of their ships<sup>12</sup>.

Nevertheless, apart from these financial frictions, the French invasion, at first glance, primarily seemed to have restored and further extended the influence of the Patriot revolutionary movement. This suggests that the revolution of 1795 was simply a continuation of the revolt of the 1780's. However, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the French influence had a much deeper and transformative impact. First, as we will see, the French Revolution radically changed the ideological makeup of the Dutch revolutionaries. Second, the presence of the French armies fundamentally altered the dynamic of the Dutch political struggle. Because of both developments, the Dutch public sphere became more centralized and universalistic.

### 1. *From particularism to universalism*

The French Revolution could have such a deep ideological impact on the Dutch Patriots because many of them had been in direct contact with this revolution. In 1787, after the Prussian invasion, several thousand Patriots fled to France and the Southern Netherlands to escape the Orangist reaction. This made them first-hand observers of the French revolutionary events of 1789 and the following years. On the basis of these observations, the exiled Patriots started to critically reflect on the decentralized particularistic state structure of the Republic, in which the cities and provinces were politically largely autonomous and public life was organized through local corporations and systems of privileges. Over the course of the early modern period, this particularistic state structure had provided the basis for the development of highly unequal socio-economic and political relations. It effectively protected the political influence of the regents and aristocrats, and it gave the local burghers, who constituted about one third of the population, a privileged position over the rest of society<sup>13</sup>. Despite this, the overall majority of the revolutionaries of the 1780's had not challenged the decentralized particularistic features of

<sup>12</sup> ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 97, ref. nr. 514, Report for the Amsterdam Municipality, May 5, 1797.

<sup>13</sup> E. KUIJPERS - M. PRAK, *Burger, ingezetene, vreemdeling: burgerschap in Amsterdam in de 17e en 18e eeuw*, in J. KLOEK - K. TILMANS (eds), *Burger*, Amsterdam 2002, pp. 113-132; M. PRAK, *Republikeinse veelheid, democratisch enkelvoud: Sociale verandering in het Revolutietijdvak 's-Hertogenbosch 1770-1820*, Nijmegen 1999, pp. 33-110.

Dutch society, which they considered as a safeguard against absolutism. In fact, their prime objective had been to strengthen the local privileges and achieve a limited local corporate form of democratization, which would turn the regents and aristocrats into genuine representatives of the burghers<sup>14</sup>.

This ideological program was reflected in the revolutionary public sphere of the 1780's, which had a rather fragmented and particularistic character. The revolutionaries still largely organized themselves according to the traditional corporate identities. The Patriot regents and aristocrats held their own separate meetings and created their own correspondence network. On their part, the Patriot burghers also established their own organizations<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, while cultural historians have rightly pointed out that the development of periodicals, before and during the Patriot Revolt created the foundation of a «national communication community»<sup>16</sup>, many of the articles and essays in the political periodicals concerned local struggles. Often discussed themes were the revolutionary dismissal or appointment of burgomasters and council members and the establishment of new government regulations in cities such as Utrecht, Haarlem, and Amsterdam<sup>17</sup>. The local link was even stronger in the case of the petitions, which were used as political instruments to put pressure on local governments to appoint or dismiss specific regents, or aristocrats. A largely similar claim can also be made concerning the clubs and the armed burgher forces, which cooperated on the provincial level, but did not establish any top-down organizations<sup>18</sup>.

The perspective of the Dutch revolutionaries radically changed after the French Revolution. The influence of this revolution was especially strong among the exiled Patriots. For example, in February 1793, the Amsterdam regent Balthasar Elias Abbema and the nobleman Van der Capellen van de Marsch, both located in the Southern Netherlands, launched a plan, which proposed to establish a strong executive gov-

<sup>14</sup> T. POELL, *Liberal Democracy versus Late Medieval Constitutionalism: Struggles over Representation in the Dutch Republic (1780-1800)*, in «Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History», 8, 2004, pp. 114-145, here pp. 121-127.

<sup>15</sup> T. POELL, *Democratic Paradox*, pp. 40-45.

<sup>16</sup> J. KLOEK - W.W. MIJNHARDT, 1800, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> P. VAN WISSING, *Stokebrand Janus 1787. Opkomst en ondergang van een achttiende-eeuws satirisch politiek-literair weekblad*, Nijmegen 2003, p. 74.

<sup>18</sup> T. POELL, *Democratic Paradox*, pp. 48-59.

ernment of seven Ministers, supervised by a popular assembly. In their scheme, all male adult burghers, with the exclusion of servants and people on poor relief, should be given the vote. Moreover, they emphasized that any new constitution would have to be ratified by the united sovereign Batavian people<sup>19</sup>. This plan diverged substantially from the designs, which the Patriots had proposed during the 1780s. It departed from the idea that the revolution should reinforce local autonomy and strengthen the system of privileges. Instead, Abbema and Van der Capellen looked to establish a unitary democratic state.

Meanwhile in the Republic itself, the Patriot revolutionaries were also influenced by the ideas of the French Revolution, which in contrast to the Patriot Revolt appeared to be a sweeping success. Although much more cautiously than the exiles, these revolutionaries started to formulate proposals to abolish the local systems of privileges. For example, in the Amsterdam club *Doctrina*, the political situation in the Republic was secretly discussed, the reform plans of the Patriot exiles were studied, and new ideas launched<sup>20</sup>. One of the more influential reflections on the political situation of the Republic came from lawyer Samuel Wiselius. In 1793, he argued in a speech at *Doctrina* that the particularistic conception of freedom, which had informed the creation of the Dutch Republic during the sixteenth-century Revolt against the Spanish Habsburg Empire, was very different from what «wise men» in the contemporary world considered as freedom. Wiselius maintained:

«Today freedom is the ability to make uninhibited use of the rights of nature, in so far as these have not been transferred to society. Moreover, it means to obey just laws, which originate from the people and consequently express the general will»<sup>21</sup>.

He emphasized that the traditional rights and freedoms, on the contrary, have been obtained as gifts or bought for money from «self-righteous» rulers<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> J.G.M.M. ROSENDAAL, *Bataven! Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Frankrijk, 1787-1795*, Nijmegen 2003, pp. 504-530.

<sup>20</sup> H.T. COLENBRANDER, *De Bataafsche Republiek*, Amsterdam 1908, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> «Bij ons immers heet vrijheid het vermogen, om een onbelemmerd gebruik te maken van de regten deer natuur, voor zo verre die niet aan de burghermaatschappij, te haren nutte zijn afgestaan, en te gehoorzame aan billijke wetten, die uit den boezem des volks regelmatig zijn voortgevloeid en alzoo den algemeenen wil uitdrukken», S.I. WISELIUS, *De staatkundige verlichting der Nederlanderen, in een wijsgerig-historisch tafereel geschetst*, Brussel 1828, 55.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69: «eigendunkelijke meesters».

Thus, influenced by the French Revolution, the Dutch revolutionaries not only embraced new ideas on the organization of the state, but also adopted a totally new, universalistic conception of freedom. In principle, this conception of freedom, which had been developed by the French revolutionaries, included everyone. By contrast, the early modern Dutch notion of freedom included only those people who were part of a specific privileged community. Moreover, this type of freedom was connected to local autonomy and independence from higher state institutions, while the universal type of freedom was, following the French example, linked to the unitary state. Clearly, the French revolutionary ideals potentially made it possible to centralize the fragmented Dutch public sphere, and establish it on a more universalistic basis.

The impact of the French revolutionary ideals immediately became clear after the invasion of January 1795. This was especially notable in the new provincial assembly of Holland. On January 31, 1795, the provincial governors claimed:

«All people are born with equal rights, and these natural rights cannot be taken away from them. These rights consist of equality, freedom, safety, property, and resistance against oppression ... Since all people are equal, all are eligible for election in any office and administration without any other reason of preference than merit and skill ... Sovereignty resides with the entire people, and consequently no part of this people can usurp it»<sup>23</sup>.

By claiming that «all people are born with equal rights», the provincial government directly challenged the local system of privileges and the particularistic corporate state structure. Moreover, by maintaining that everyone could be elected in a political office, it pointed in the direction of a liberal democratic system. And finally, by arguing that sovereignty resided with the people as a whole and not any specific part, the provincial assembly rejected the sovereignty of individual cities and provinces, opening the door for a centralization of authority. All in all, the provincial governors proposed a more fundamental reform in terms of democratization and centralization than anyone had ever suggested during the 1780s.

A comparable move away from the early modern particularistic tradition can be observed in the organization of the revolutionary public sphere.

<sup>23</sup> «Alle menschen met gelyke rechten geboren worden, en dat deze natuurlyke rechten hun niet kunnen ontnomen worden. Dat deze rechten bestaan in gelykheid, vryheid, veiligheid, eigendom en tegenstand aan onderdrukking ... Dat, daar alle menschen gelyk zyn, allen verkiesbaar zyn tot alle ampten en bedieningen zonder eenige andere redenen van voorkeur dan die van deugden en bekwaamheden ... Dat de souvereiniteit by het geheele volk berust, en dus geen gedeelte van het volk zich dezelve kan aanmatigen», *Jaarboeken der Bataafsche Republiek*, 13 vols, Amsterdam 1795-1806, 1/13, pp. 143-145.

Unlike the Patriot societies, the revolutionary associations of 1795 were no longer explicitly organized on the basis of the corporate identities of burgher and regent. For example, the new Neighborhood Assemblies aimed to organize the voice of the entire people of Amsterdam and not just one specific part. The Amsterdam reading societies were constructed with a similar goal in mind. The Revolutionary Committee, which had been directly involved in the creation of these societies, maintained that the objective had been to «educate the people about the pure principles of true democracy»<sup>24</sup>. To this, it added that most of the members of the reading societies stemmed from that «part of the people, which most needed to be educated»<sup>25</sup>.

Of course, this is by no means to say that the particularistic organization of public life immediately disappeared after the French invasion, or that all the previously excluded parts of the population suddenly participated in the public sphere. To fundamentally transform the public sphere and Dutch society in general, the local systems of privileges would have to be abolished and replaced by general laws and the local corporations substituted by open egalitarian state institutions. As the revolutionaries realized, for such a change to take place a new Dutch constitution was needed, which would translate the French revolutionary ideals in specific institutional reforms. Consequently, the first years after the invasion of 1795 were determined by the struggle over a new constitution.

## 2. *From a fragmented to a centralized public sphere*

Particularly interesting is that these constitutional debates and struggles immediately had a centralizing effect on the Dutch public sphere: they tied the various revolutionary groups together in one overarching political debate. During the Patriot Revolt of the 1780s, much of public political activity was focused on local issues. After the French invasion, local issues were still important, but they were inevitably connected to the broader constitutional discussions. The revolutionaries agreed that debates over the organization of the guilds, the civic militias, social welfare, education, as well as local, provincial, and central government should ultimately be resolved by a new constitution.

<sup>24</sup> «... het volk tot de zuivere grondbeginzels van waare democratie opteleiden», ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 1, Handelingen van het Comité Revolutionair, March 20, 1795.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*: «dit gedeelte van 't volk, het welk de meeste inlichting nodig heeft».

This centralizing effect was further reinforced by the particular dynamics of the constitutional debates, or rather struggles, in which federalist- and unitarist-minded politicians clashed over how the Republic should exactly be reformed. Unitarist-minded politicians, such as Gogel, Wiselius, and the cloth producer Pieter Vreede saw the local particularistic Republic as an old fashioned and highly unjust state, which very much needed to be reformed on the basis of the unitary democratic state model promoted by the French Revolution<sup>26</sup>. By contrast, the federalist-minded politicians, who constituted a majority among the revolutionary elite, only adopted particular aspects of the unitary democratic model and, at the same time, continued to hold on to crucial features of the early modern decentralized Republic. Clear examples of such politicians were Patriot regents Johan Pieter Farret and Jan Bernd Bicker, as well as lawyer Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck<sup>27</sup>. The struggle between the two categories of politicians ultimately resulted in a centralization of the state and the public sphere because the unitarist-minded elite were able to construct temporary coalitions with the revolutionary clubs and the French authorities. The French were willing to cooperate as they assumed that a unified Dutch state would be better equipped to meet their extensive financial demands. These coalitions made it possible to overrule the resistance against the unitary democratic state model on the local, provincial, and central state level<sup>28</sup>.

How the temporary coalitions with revolutionary clubs and the French were constructed and subsequently employed in the revolutionary struggle, can be most clearly observed in the constitutional debate on the central state level. This debate came to a stalemate in the fall of 1797, when it became clear that more than a year of parliamentary discussions had produced a constitutional proposal, which held the middle between the federalist and unitarist ideals. Dissatisfied with this proposal, the unitarist-minded elite first started a publicity war against the proposal. Through the *Societeit voor Een- en Ondeelbaarheid* [Society for Unity and Indivisibility], which

<sup>26</sup> P. VAN LIMBURG BROUWER, *Het Leven van Mr. Samuel Iperuszoon Wiselius*, Groningen 1846; J.A. VAN SILLEM, *De politieke en staathuishoudkundige werkzaamheid van Isaac Jan Alexander Gogel*, Amsterdam 1864; S.I. WISELIUS, *Staatkundige verlichting*; P. VREEDE, *Mijn Levensloop*, Hilversum 1994.

<sup>27</sup> L. DE GOU, *Het plan van Constitutie van 1796*, Den Haag, 1975, pp. 32, 54; G. SCHIMMELPENNINCK, *Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, en eenige gebeurtenissen van zijnen tijd*, Den Haag, 1845; ACA, arch. Bicker, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 374: «My advice to the National Assembly to accept the first constitutional plan».

<sup>28</sup> T. POELL, *Democratic Paradox*, pp. 68-100.

had been established by Gogel and Wiselius, the unitarist-minded politicians organized a nationwide petition campaign in which they urged the members of parliament to reconsider the constitutional proposal. In turn, the unitarist periodical *De Democraten* argued that the proposal revived the «old provincial sovereignty», and left the municipalities too much autonomous power concerning their internal affairs<sup>29</sup>. In the mean time, the unitary-minded politicians in the National Assembly also did their part. In July 1797, twelve representatives published a pamphlet in which they advised the population to vote against the constitutional proposal. They declared that «the constitutional proposal does not correspond with the demand of a popular government by representation»<sup>30</sup>. These efforts to mobilize the public opinion were successful: the constitutional proposal was rejected by an overwhelming majority of the voters in August 1797<sup>31</sup>.

Besides mobilizing public opinion, the unitary-minded politicians also secretly asked the French regime to support a military coup. A few national representatives contacted for this purpose the Amsterdam club the *Uitkijk*. After several missions of members of the *Uitkijk* to Paris and a large financial donation to one of the French ministers, the government in Paris responded to the wishes of the unitary-minded politicians<sup>32</sup>. The French regime, which was also becoming impatient with the slow progress of the Dutch reform process, appointed Charles Delacroix as the new French representative. Delacroix was given the express instruction to stimulate the creation of a «constitution based on freedom and a stable and powerful central government»<sup>33</sup>.

Ensured of the French support, the unitary-minded politicians, led by Pieter Vreede, were ready to take the final step towards a unitary democratic

<sup>29</sup> National Archive (henceforth NA), arch. Gogel, arch. nr. 2.21.005.39, inv. 73, *De Democraten*, nr. 54, May 18, 1797: «oude provinciale oppermacht».

<sup>30</sup> NA, arch. Gogel, arch. nr. 2.21.005.39, inv. 177 «Manifest of the 12 apostles, July 1, 1797»: «het ontwerp niet overeenstemt met de vereischten van een volksregeering bij vertegenwoordiging».

<sup>31</sup> No less than 108,781 people voted against the plan, while only 27,955 were in favor. Not in one single province did the proposal obtain a majority, H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Bataafsche Republiek*, p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> L. DE GOIU, *De Staatsregeling van 1798*, 2 vols, Den Haag 1988-1990, 1/2, pp. XI-XVIII.

<sup>33</sup> «... l'établissement d'une constitution libre, d'un gouvernement digne dont la force ne soit point illusoire»; H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Gedenkstukken der algemeene geschiedenis van Nederland van 1795 tot 1840*, 22 vols, Den Haag 1906, 2/22, p. 142.

constitution. First, on January 22, 1798, the National Assembly was purged with the assistance of the French army. This led to the departure of 61 representatives<sup>34</sup>. Having eliminated the opposition, the unitary-minded politicians continued to proclaim a series of resolutions that turned the Republic – at least on paper – into a centralized state. All the provincial sovereignties were invalidated and a sovereign central executive body was created<sup>35</sup>. Subsequently, the reformed National Assembly produced a constitutional proposal based on the unitary democratic model. To guarantee that the population would approve this proposal, the new regime headed by Vreede purged the local governments and the voting assemblies. This was done with the assistance of the revolutionary clubs, which provided personnel and information on the local governors and voters<sup>36</sup>. Although these purges ultimately made the unitarist regime highly unpopular with the general population, they accomplished their goal. The constitution was approved by a majority of 153,913 against 11,597 votes<sup>37</sup>.

Hence, the analysis shows that the revolutionary public sphere not only became centralized in the course of the constitutional struggles, but also that it functioned far from democratically. Instead of facilitating an open and egalitarian debate, the political clubs and periodicals were effectively employed to overrule democratic procedures and political opponents. Not only were the Orangist-minded groups excluded from the revolutionary public sphere, various revolutionary groups were banned as well. Clearly, the French authorities were an integral part of this authoritarian reform process. Without their assistance, the unitary-minded elite would not have been able to overrule their opponents and establish a new national constitution. Moreover, neither would the revolutionary public sphere have become centralized as quickly as it did.

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed account see: L. DE GOU, *De staatsregeling van 1798*, 1/2, pp. XI-LXVI.

<sup>35</sup> T. PFEIL, 'Tot redding', pp. 187-188.

<sup>36</sup> J.C. BREEN, *De regeering van Amsterdam gedurende den Franschen tijd*, in «Jaarboek van het Genootschap Amstelodamum», 12, 1914, pp. 1-130, here pp. 72-76; see for example the address to the municipality of the Societeit voor Een- en Ondeelbaarheid, which delivered a list of 909 Orangist officials, ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. 225, Minutes of the Administrative Municipality of Amsterdam of April 5, 1798.

<sup>37</sup> H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Bataafsche Republiek*, pp. 132-134.

### III. FRENCH AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE BREAKDOWN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PUBLIC SPHERE

Paradoxically, the establishment of the unitary democratic constitution also marked the beginning of the collapse of the revolutionary public sphere. In the course of 1798 and the following years, nearly all political periodicals disappeared. Most of the revolutionary clubs were either closed down or transformed into non-political associations. In addition, the national democratization process was again largely reversed by another coup in November 1801. This coup and the subsequent reform of the constitution greatly diminished parliamentary influence and transferred political authority from the central to the provincial and local governments.

The collapse of the formal and informal revolutionary public sphere has traditionally been associated with the rise of Napoleon, who took control of the French state in 1799, and with the revival of the forces of the Dutch ancien regime<sup>38</sup>. There is certainly some truth to this interpretation, especially the part concerning the impact of French authoritarianism. The rise of Napoleon clearly undermined the position of the unitary-minded revolutionary elite, which in the previous years had depended on French support in its attempts to create a more centralized and democratic Dutch state. With Napoleon in charge, the French authorities were no longer willing to collaborate with politicians suspected of Jacobin sympathies or with revolutionary clubs for that matter<sup>39</sup>. Moreover, the Napoleonic regime also actively contributed to the reversal of the democratization process by inviting the Dutch political elite, in the spring of 1801, to start working on a revision of the constitution. In addition to this invitation, the French advised the Dutch to issue a general pardon for everyone who had been punished in 1798 for having opinions contrary to the unitary democratic ideal<sup>40</sup>.

Yet, to fully attribute the collapse of the revolutionary public sphere to French influence would not do justice to the changes in the actions and thinking of the Dutch revolutionaries themselves. Particularly the unitary-

<sup>38</sup> J. KLOEK - W.W. MIJNHARDT, *1800*, p. 32; S. SCHAMA, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813*, New York 1977, pp. 419-423; C.H.E. DE WIT, *De strijd tussen aristocratie en democratie in Nederland, 1780-1848: kritisch onderzoek van een historisch beeld en herwaardering van een periode*, Heerlen 1965, pp. 216-225.

<sup>39</sup> M. BROERS, *Europe under Napoleon, 1799-1815*, London 1996, p. 67; D.M.G. SUTHERLAND, *France 1789-1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution*, London 1985, pp. 336-351.

<sup>40</sup> L. DE GOU, *De staatsregeling van 1801*, Den Haag 1995, pp. XV-XVI.

minded politicians themselves played a central role in the breakdown of the revolutionary public sphere. This process already started after the coup of January 1798. To create a unified state and eliminate all possible opposition against the unitary democratic constitution, the Vreede regime not only purged the voting assemblies and the various governments, it also tried hard to limit the political activities of the clubs and assemblies. For this purpose, the government ordered the municipalities to close all societies and gatherings in their jurisdiction, which harbored opinions contrary to the coup of January 1798. Many clubs were closed down as a result. The clubs that remained, such as the Societeit voor Een- en Ondeelbaarheid, became instruments of the central regime. In general, organized popular political activity seemed to have largely disappeared after the summer of 1798<sup>41</sup>. This was not just the result of repression, but it was also caused by the disappointment of many revolutionaries with the unitary democratic revolution, which had not brought the kind of direct popular political influence that many people had been aiming for. Consequently, many societies turned away from politics<sup>42</sup>.

A similar development could be observed in the revolutionary press, which had largely disappeared by 1800. For example, *De Democraten* was immediately discontinued after the coup of January 1798, which it characterized as a «necessary shock» to end the «incessant clashes between burghers and burghers, and administrations and administrations»<sup>43</sup>. This periodical had clearly served its purpose. In the course of 1798 and 1799, other political periodicals closed down as well. The age of revolutionary agitation was evidently over. As *De nieuwe post van den Neder-Rhijn* claimed in July 1798: «now, all ideas of a revolution end»<sup>44</sup>. Strikingly, the

<sup>41</sup> R.E. DE BRUIN, *Burghers op het kussen: volkssoevereiniteit en bestuursamenstelling in de stad Utrecht, 1795-1813*, Zutphen 1986, pp. 198-199; I.J. MANEN - K. VERMEULEN, *Het lagere volk van Amsterdam in de strijd tussen patriotten en oranjegezinden, 1780-1800*, in «Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis», 7, 1981, pp. 3-42, here p. 18; H. REITSMA, *Lesegesellschaften und bürgerliche Revolution in Amsterdam*, in O. DANN (ed.), *Lesegesellschaften und bürgerliche Emanzipation. Ein europäischer Vergleich*, München 1981, pp. 159-180, here p. 175.

<sup>42</sup> P.J. BRUIJNSTERS, *Lesegesellschaften in den Niederlanden*, in O. DANN (ed.), *Lesegesellschaften*, pp. 143-158, here pp. 154-156; F.J.E. VAN LENNEP, *Late regenten*, Haarlem 1962, pp. 1-64.

<sup>43</sup> NA, arch. Gogel, arch. nr. 2.21.005.39, inv. 73, *De Democraten*, 90, January 30, 1798: «... schok noodzakelyk ... de onophoudelye botzingen tusschen burgers en burgers, besturen en besturen».

<sup>44</sup> «Thans houden alle denkbeelden van eenen revolutionairen tijd op», *De nieuw post van den Neder-Rhijn*, 200, July 24, 1798, pp. 1645-1646.

end of the revolution did not lead to a transformation of the revolutionary periodicals into a permanent political press. Even periodicals, such as *De nieuwe Post van den Neder-Rhijn*, which did try to carry on after 1798, found it very difficult to survive in the face of the growing political disinterest of the general public. In December 1799, Pieter 't Hoen, the main editor of the *Post*, came to the conclusion that his periodical could serve little further purpose and decided to call it quits as well<sup>45</sup>. Thus, the revolutionary public sphere had already largely collapsed before the Napoleonic regime had exerted any influence on the Republic.

This observation can also be made concerning the breakdown of the national democratic procedures. Not only had the general public become disappointed with the unitary democratic revolution, many of the revolutionary politicians started to reconsider the democratic ideals as well. After the constitution of 1798 had been established, it turned out to be very difficult to implement this constitution through the official democratic institutions<sup>46</sup>. In fact, these institutions obstructed the implementation process to such an extent that various politicians, who initially wanted to execute the constitution in full, eventually opted for its reform. One of them was Isaac Gogel. In fact, the man who had once defended the cause of national representative democracy was prepared to severely limit the influence of the legislative assembly and strengthen the executive power by the end of 1800. He argued that the number of representatives in the assembly should be reduced from 126 to about 30 members. Moreover, he insisted that the representative body did not have to be permanent, but that two sessions of a total of six months a year would suffice. Finally, Gogel maintained that parliament should no longer have the right to issue proposals. This right would have to be restricted to the executive council<sup>47</sup>. Similar proposals for the de-democratization of the central state were also advanced by other prominent unitary-minded politicians<sup>48</sup>. Hence, the French invitation of 1801 to start working on a revision of the constitution primarily reinforced processes of ideological reorientation, which were already ongoing.

This reorientation process in combination with the collapse of the revolutionary public sphere gave the Orangist- and federalist-minded politicians

<sup>45</sup> P. THEEUWEN, *Van patriotse idealen tot Bataafse praktijk*, in P. VAN WISSING (ed.), *Stooschrijven*, Nijmegen 2008, pp. 231-252, here pp. 249-251.

<sup>46</sup> T. POELL, *Democratic Paradox*, pp. 110-115.

<sup>47</sup> H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Gedenkstukken*, 3/22, pp. 643-644.

<sup>48</sup> L. DE GOU, *Staatsregeling 1801*, pp. 503, 558-562.

the opportunity to take control of Dutch politics. Through a French supported coup, in November 1801, a small group of federalist-minded politicians took over the central government and established a constitution, which greatly diminished the influence of the national parliament. This proved to be the end of the democratization process, which could only be revived several decades later.

#### IV. THE DUTCH PUBLIC SPHERE VERSUS THE FRENCH OPPRESSORS

The end of the revolutionary era did not, however, simply lead to a shift in the Dutch power relations, but brought about a fundamental transformation of the political landscape itself. As we have discussed, up to the establishment of the constitution of 1798 this landscape had primarily been determined by the division between Orangists and revolutionaries, and within the revolutionary camp between the federalist- and unitarist-minded groups. From the summer of 1798 onwards, these divisions became increasingly depolarized as a result of the collapse of the revolutionary public sphere and the rejection of the unitary democratic ideal by a substantial part of the revolutionary elite.

This depolarization process had major consequences for the relationship with the French. As the ideological differences between the Dutch political groups disappeared, more critical attention was devoted to the French occupiers. Hence, the post-revolutionary public sphere, to the extent to which we can speak about such a sphere, developed very much in opposition to the French. Particularly, the financial demands of the French, which from the beginning had been an object of friction, drew a lot of criticism. An early example of this development is the pamphlet *Belangrijke vragen en antwoorden ter overweging en verlichting aan het volk van Neerland* [Important questions and answers for the reflection and enlightenment of the people of the Netherlands], which appeared in Holland in 1800. This pamphlet argued that the French had robbed the Dutch of «all our strengths and possessions, which constitute the front wall of our state and have been acquired through the blood of our forefathers»<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, the pamphlet continued to lament the fact that the French had forced the Republic to maintain twenty-five thousand of

<sup>49</sup> «... alle de sterkten en bezittingen, die de voormuur van onze staat uitmaaken, bezittingen door 't bloed van onzer voorvaderen verkreegen», *Belangrijke vragen en antwoorden ter overweging en verlichting aan het volk van Neerland voorgesteld door een opregte beminnaar van zijn vaderland en voorstander van godsdienst en waare vryheid*, 1800, p. 33.

its «hungry soldiers against a double salary»<sup>50</sup>. And it closed off with an appeal to the Dutch people to become self-sufficient and to better protect themselves.

The critique of the French became especially strong from 1805 onwards, when the Napoleonic regime adopted a more interventionist approach towards the Republic. In the course of 1804, Napoleon had become irritated with the weakness of the Dutch government, which in his opinion did too little to prevent the illicit trade with England. He wanted a stronger and more energetic government with one head of state<sup>51</sup>. Initially, Napoleon saw Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck, who was the Dutch ambassador in Paris, as the most suitable candidate to lead the political reform process. However, after little more than a year, he again replaced Schimmelpenninck with his brother Louis Napoleon, who became the first Dutch King. When this arrangement did not prove satisfactory either, Napoleon decided to fully incorporate the Dutch state into the French Empire, which officially took place in July 1810.

Because of these interventions, the French were increasingly seen as occupiers and oppressors and no longer as liberators. Furthermore, their Dutch collaborators, which became a progressively isolated group, were portrayed as traitors<sup>52</sup>. Not surprisingly, much of this critique adopted a pro-Orangist tone. For example, in October 1806, a leaflet appeared in which Gogel and Willem Six as well as three other central state officials were condemned as traitors. To reinforce this accusation, the leaflet also contained a drawing of a gallows, and the proclamation «LONG LIFE ORANGE»<sup>53</sup>.

Not all of the anti-French writings adopted a pro-Orangist tone; some still used the revolutionary rhetoric. In fact, the most influential critique of the installation of Louis Napoleon as head of the Dutch state was voiced in the pamphlet *Oproeping van het Bataafsche Volk* [Convocation of the Batavian People], which contained a radical democratic and

<sup>50</sup> «... haare hongerige soldaaten teegens een dubbeld tractement in onze vaste soldy over te neemen, *ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Gedenkstukken*, 4/22, pp. XXV-XXVI; G. SCHIMMELPENNINCK, *Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck*, 2/2, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> T. POELL, *Democratic Paradox*, pp. 135-161.

<sup>53</sup> VIVAT ORANIE (quoted by J. JOOR, *De adelaar en het lam: onrust, opruiing en onwil-ligheid in Nederland ten tijde van het Koninkrijk Holland en de inlijving bij het Franse keizerrijk [1806-1813]*, Amsterdam 2000, p. 473).

republic message. *Oproeping*, published in the spring of 1806 by Maria Aletta Hulshoff, a clergyman's daughter, claimed that the Republic was threatened by a «foreign despot». It called upon the Batavian people to revive the popular assemblies of the revolutionary years and resist the arrival of the «foreign despot». Although *Oproeping* was primarily focused on Louis Napoleon, it was also highly critical of the government of Schimmelpenninck. It characterized this government as consisting of incompetent «public traitors», which had brought the Republic to the brink of disaster<sup>54</sup>.

The growing opposition against the French occupation was not only expressed on paper, but also took on a physical form. Especially the French attempts to enlist members of the male Dutch population for military service generated a lot of public resistance. For example in 1809, a French plan to transform the civic militias into a national conscription army set off strong protests. In Amsterdam, a small revolt broke out – when Louis Napoleon decided – in the spirit of this plan to employ two thousand men from the Amsterdam burgher forces in the lines of defense around the city<sup>55</sup>. On 26 August 1809, a large crowd gathered on the Dam Square shouting slogans against the mobilization and starting fights. The initiative for the protests had been taken by the wives of the militiamen, who were enraged that their men were being employed for military tasks outside the city borders. For the Amsterdam population the civic militias were a local defense force and ought to have remained so. The protests produced immediate results. Louis decided to send the militias back to the city<sup>56</sup>.

Another instance of public outrage was caused by the decree of Louis Napoleon, issued in July 1808, for the creation of several royal military training colleges, in which male orphans would be drilled as soldiers. In Amsterdam, the recruitment led to protests from both the orphanages and the population. First, various orphanages sent deputies to the King. When Louis Napoleon refused to see them, the orphanages in turn refused to report the names of eligible boys. Although this conflict could still be resolved through a special meeting between the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Amsterdam Municipality, and the deputies of

<sup>54</sup> M.A. HULSHOFF, *Oproeping van het Bataafsche Volk, om deszelfs denkwijze en wil openlijk aan den dag te leggen tegen de overheersching door eenen vreemdeling waarmede het vaderland bedreigd wordt*, Amsterdam 1806 (Koninklijke Bibliotheek Knuttel/23298).

<sup>55</sup> ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 716, Minutes of the Burgomaster, August 19, 1809.

<sup>56</sup> J. JOOR, *Adelaar en het Lam*, pp. 296-297.

the orphanages, it proved to be the overture for a public reaction<sup>57</sup>. A few days before the orphans were to be sent to the training college, a crowd gathered in protest in front of the Charity Orphanage<sup>58</sup>. Three days later, on July 20, 1809, the issue came to a head when the orphans were officially told that they would be transferred. Upon hearing this, several orphans rang the bell of the orphanage and started to make a lot of noise to attract the attention of the crowd that had again gathered in front of the orphanage. The mob subsequently tried to force the door to set the orphans free. Even though this action failed, as the crowd did not succeed in breaking down the door and was quickly dispersed by the police officers, this protest sent a strong message to the King<sup>59</sup>. After the first group of 190 Amsterdam orphans was sent to the royal training college, the recruitment slowed down substantially<sup>60</sup>.

After the Dutch state was annexed by the French Empire in 1810, it immediately became clear that Napoleon was not as willing to give in to public protest as his brother, who was politically sidelined after the annexation. First, despite strong protests from the Dutch central state politicians, the French regime decided to reduce the interest payments on the national debt to one third<sup>61</sup>. The reduction of the interest payments dealt a major blow to the private finances of the Dutch elite as well as of the middle class burghers, which as a result of forced loans during the previous years had also become investors in the national debt. Apart from personal financial loss, the reduction also undermined the already deteriorating economy. The purchasing power of the population decreased and the credit system of the merchants, which was for a large part based on the investments in the national debt, collapsed as well<sup>62</sup>.

On top of this financial disaster, the French also intensified the border patrols to prohibit any further trade with England. In Amsterdam alone, more than four hundred French customs officers were stationed. The

<sup>57</sup> ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 933, Minutes of Burgomaster and Aldermen, July 18-19; inv. nr. 962, Secret minutes of the Burgomaster and Aldermen, July 20, 1809».

<sup>58</sup> ACA, NSB, arch. nr. 5053, inv. nr. 962, Secret minutes of the Burgomaster and Aldermen, July 19, 1809.

<sup>59</sup> ACA, arch. Aalmoezeniers, arch. nr. 343, inv.nr. 34, Minutes of the regents, July 20, 1809.

<sup>60</sup> J. JOOR, *Adelaar en het lam*, pp. 315-316.

<sup>61</sup> H. SMITSKAMP - L.C. SUTTORP, *Historische teksten: stukken betreffende de vaderlandsche geschiedenis*, Zwolle 1949, pp. 181-183; H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Gedenkstukken*, 6/22, p. 3.

<sup>62</sup> J.L. VAN ZANDEN - A. VAN RIEL, *Nederland 1780-1914*, pp. 95-96.

total number of officers in the whole country must have been many times greater as they were stationed in virtually every town and village near the border. These French customs officers had far-reaching authority to search ships and houses, confiscate goods, and arrest people<sup>63</sup>. The strict border patrols almost completely paralyzed international trade. By 1811, the Amsterdam trade volume had dropped to about one quarter of its 1805 level, which was already low. This brought about a general crisis in all sectors of the economy<sup>64</sup>.

Finally, the French repression also deeply affected the press, which was more systematically censored than ever before. In July 1810, the French authorities decreed that Dutch printers and booksellers were compelled to send them one copy of each periodical they published. In April 1811, even further-reaching measures were adopted. In each province, or department as they were now called, only a few printers and booksellers were allowed to operate. These printers and booksellers had to be registered and they had to obtain a license, which could be revoked, if they published material that did not conform to the strict regulations dictated by the French. To make sure that the printers and booksellers respected these regulations, they had to present the proofing of each work they wanted to publish to the authorities. Ultimately, the bureau of l'Imprimerie et la Librerie [Printers and Booksellers] decided whether a particular work could be published<sup>65</sup>. Hence, the traditional system of regressive censorship was replaced by one of preventive censorship.

These measures proved to be effective: the production of political pamphlets came to an abrupt halt in the period between 1810 and 1813. If we go by the rather comprehensive pamphlet collection of the National Library of the Netherlands, only thirty-five pamphlets were published during these years. Of these thirty-five, only two had a political character. Neither one of these two strongly criticized the French occupation<sup>66</sup>. Thus, after the disappearance of the political periodicals and the clubs the Dutch public sphere lost another vital instrument of public expression and resistance.

This is not to say that the Dutch population did not criticize the annexation or resisted the French occupation. It just did so through

<sup>63</sup> J. JOOR, *Adelaar en het lam*, pp. 425-427.

<sup>64</sup> J.L. VAN ZANDEN - A. VAN RIEL, *Nederland 1780-1914*, pp. 89-95.

<sup>65</sup> J. JOOR, *Adelaar en het lam*, pp. 530-531.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 530.

less institutionalized means. In the highly repressive environment after 1810, the written critique on the occupation primarily took the form of libels and placards. Most of these writings attacked Napoleon, who was characterized among others as a «tyrant», «monster», and as a «French executioner». Some of them also contained a call to actively resist the occupation. For example, on September 4, 1812, placards were found throughout Amsterdam in which the «sunken Netherlands» was called upon to gather its forces and throw off the «heavy despotic yoke»<sup>67</sup>. Even more explicit was the text of a libel, which was spread on December 28, 1812, in Dordrecht: «Revenge, revenge! Fellow citizens, the tyrant is finished, so riot and revenge!»<sup>68</sup>.

The Dutch population indeed rioted against the French. Most riots occurred in 1813, when it was common knowledge that the French Empire was falling apart. Before this time, there was primarily resistance against specific French measures. In Amsterdam, one of the most contentious issues was the increased border patrols, which greatly damaged Amsterdam trade, but also finally ended the status of Amsterdam as an independent trading city. Consequently, the border patrols inevitably led to confrontations. For example in September 1810, an angry mob clashed with the French customs officers after they had searched a house on the Keizersgracht. The situation got completely out of hand when the mob began to throw stones and customs officers started to fire into the crowd. Various people got injured and one died. The confrontation only stopped when the burgher force, a detachment of soldiers, and a deputation of the municipality intervened. This clash was one of several confrontations between the Amsterdam population and the French authorities in the years between 1810 and 1813. In total, there were six minor revolts<sup>69</sup>.

One other major cause of the local revolts was the conscription, which had already been an issue during the governments of Schimmelpenninck and Louis Napoleon. The conscription effectively ended the tradition of local corporate burgher forces, which had always been perceived as a cornerstone of the early modern Republic. The departure from Amsterdam of the first cohort of conscripts on April 11, 1811, immediately led to clashes. These clashes were ignited when a girl in the Jodenbreestraat

<sup>67</sup> «... gezonken Nederland ... knellend dwingelands juk», H.T. COLENBRANDER, *Gedenkstukken*, 6/22, p. 584.

<sup>68</sup> «Wraak, wraak! Medeburgers, het is met den tiran gedaan, dus oproer en wraak!», *ibidem*, pp. 371-372.

<sup>69</sup> J. JOOR, *Adelaar en het lam*, pp. 440-441, 799-807.

was prevented by French soldiers from saying goodbye to her brother, who had been drafted. This greatly angered bystanders. Riots broke out and demonstrations were held in the Jewish neighborhood and in the Jordaan, a lower middle and working class district. The French authorities immediately issued a prohibition on public gatherings, and established a Military Committee with the authority to execute people. In relation to the April riots, twenty-three Amsterdam inhabitants were condemned, of which three were given the death penalty. They were executed by a firing squad<sup>70</sup>.

In November 1813, when the French troops finally left Amsterdam to fight an invading army of Cossacks, it became clear that the tension between the Amsterdam population and the French had significantly increased in the last years of the occupation. Angry crowds set fire to the French customs offices, while customs officers were physically assaulted. Moreover, the homes of the French authorities were attacked. Confronted with this mass uprising, the remaining French officials fled the city, which meant the end of more than eighteen years of French occupation. The Dutch members of government stayed behind, most of them even stayed in office when the General Dutch Government was proclaimed on November 21, 1813. Only Gogel refused to break his oath to Napoleon and left for Paris at the end of November<sup>71</sup>.

## V. CONCLUSION

This investigation has demonstrated that the remarkable rise and subsequent breakdown of the late eighteenth century Dutch public sphere can neither be qualified as an indigenous development, nor as one that was externally driven by the French Revolution and occupation. Such black and white characterizations do not do justice to the cooperative relationship between the Dutch and the French during much of the period of occupation. Neither do such qualifications capture the fundamental changes in the relationship between the Dutch and the French over the years between 1795 and 1813.

First, the Dutch revolutionaries were clearly influenced by the unitary democratic ideal of the French Revolution. Yet, they did not simply copy

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 347, 664.

<sup>71</sup> T. POELL, *Het einde van een tijdperk: de Bataafs-Franse tijd 1795-1813*, W. FRIJHOF - M. PRAK (eds), *Zelfbewuste stadstaat, 1650-1813*, Amsterdam 2005, pp. 429-499, here pp. 495-499.

it, but adopted specific aspects of this ideal that suited their particular interests. Second, at least in the years between 1795 and 1805, the French authorities primarily functioned as partners in changing coalitions with different groups of Dutch politicians. Third, only from 1805 onwards did the French regime try to determine the Dutch political relations in a top down fashion. Consequently, the political basis of the alliances with the French became ever narrower.

Taken together, the French influence fundamentally transformed the Dutch public sphere. A revolutionary public sphere, carried by political periodicals, clubs, pamphlets, and petitions, had already developed during the Patriot Revolt of the 1780s, but this sphere was rather fragmented by the strong focus of the Patriot revolutionaries on local political change. After 1795, the debates and struggles over a new national constitution, inspired by the French unitary democratic ideal, led to the centralization of the public sphere. This centralization process was further facilitated by temporary coalitions between unitary-minded politicians, revolutionary clubs, and the French authorities, which made it possible to overrule the resistance against the transfer of authority from the local and provincial governments to the central state. Moreover, although the revolutionary public sphere largely collapsed in the years after 1798, the centralization of publicness proved to be permanent. Especially in the years after 1805, a post-revolutionary public sphere developed in opposition to the increasingly repressive policies of the French occupiers. Consequently, by 1813 the Netherlands was characterized by a centralized public sphere, mobilized in opposition to an authoritarian state. In this sense, the Dutch public sphere had – perhaps not surprisingly – strongly come to resemble its French counterpart.