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## **'Holland as a Little England'? British Anti-Slavery Missionaries and Continental Abolitionist Movements in the Mid Nineteenth Century**

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# 'HOLLAND AS A LITTLE ENGLAND'? BRITISH ANTI-SLAVERY MISSIONARIES AND CONTINENTAL ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENTS IN THE MID NINETEENTH CENTURY\*

Standard accounts of nineteenth-century anti-slavery movements have depicted a European continent largely marked by a lack of interest in, or compassion for, the plight of the slaves. On the Continent the 'sounds of silence' prevailed, in contrast to the emotional outcry against slavery heard in nineteenth-century Britain and the United States.<sup>1</sup> The continental anti-slavery movement was never really successful: the few efforts to combat slavery were undertaken by small elite societies that had little effect in destroying the institution.<sup>2</sup> Dutch abolitionism has received some attention as an interesting case study to test whether capitalism produces a strong anti-slavery movement — one of the explanations given for British abolitionism. This claim has been disproved with some fervour and the conclusion is that the Netherlands knew only 'occasional minuscule protests' against slavery.<sup>3</sup> In general there was 'little sign of abolitionism',

\* I should like to thank my colleagues in the Political Culture and National Identity research group at Leiden University, the audiences of both the Center for European Studies at Harvard University and the 'Abolitions, 1807–2007' conference in York, and especially Alison Twells and Henk te Velde for their thoughtful comments on earlier versions of this article, as well as Karwan Fatah-Black, Piet Emmer and Marian Schouten for their advice. Research for this article has been carried out with generous financial support from the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek and the Leids Universiteits Fonds.

<sup>1</sup> João Pedro Marques, *The Sounds of Silence: Nineteenth-Century Portugal and the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, trans. Richard Wall (New York, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009), ch. 10; Marques, *Sounds of Silence*; Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, 'Continental Europe', in Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *A Historical Guide to World Slavery* (New York, 1998), 15–17.

<sup>3</sup> Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone, 1980), 3–4 (editors' intro.). The best overview of this debate is Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden, 1995).

and 'Efforts . . . to produce a significant anti-slavery movement, often encouraged by British anti-slavery associations, generally failed'.<sup>4</sup>

Abolitionist movements in continental Europe have been contrasted with those in Britain and the United States as part of the historiographical controversy on the nature of the British abolition of the slave trade (1807) and of slavery (1833). If the debate Eric Williams started when he claimed that abolition served the interest of industrial capitalism is still controversial, most scholars agree with Seymour Drescher's assertion that abolition was detrimental to the British economy: Britain committed 'econocide'. This put the focus back on religious and humanitarian factors as well as on the methods anti-slavery advocates used to mobilize a mass movement.<sup>5</sup> It was in this context that abolitionist movements on the European continent were scrutinized to explain the relatively late abolition of slavery. Why had France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain failed to follow swiftly the British example by abolishing slavery in their colonies, allowing it to persist until, respectively, 1848, 1863, 1869 and 1886? In Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands it seems that little organized protest against slavery had developed, while in France a small elitist movement had proved too weak to influence politics.

Drescher has offered important comparative analyses of anti-slavery movements, distinguishing two models. In Britain and the United States citizens successfully developed new 'associational mechanisms' and 'new modes of social mobilization' to bring popular pressure to bear on hostile pro-slavery interests and hesitant state agencies, demanding immediate and total abolition. On the Continent, a model of abolitionism developed that was much narrower in political, social and geographical scope. Small elite movements aimed at gradual abolition; their leaders were reluctant to seek mass recruitment and chose to work within and through the government rather than through extra-parliamentary mobilization. Abolition on the Continent was thus

<sup>4</sup> Drescher, *Abolition*, 282; Schmidt-Nowara, 'Continental Europe', 15–16.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, 1st edn (Chapel Hill, 1944); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*, 2nd edn (Chapel Hill, 2010); Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London, 1975).

a case of 'abolition without mass abolitionism'.<sup>6</sup> This dichotomy produced information that confirmed our ideas but lacked explanatory power to tell us why a continental model developed.

To ask why continental abolitionists failed to emulate the British anti-slavery movement, however, is a *question mal posée*, informed by nineteenth-century British sentiments that to a large extent still dominate the historiography of abolitionism. Based on the Dutch case study I will argue that this perspective has clouded our understanding of the dynamics of European abolitionism. This dichotomy has, firstly, kept us from paying close attention to the sources. With some effort ample evidence of the existence of Dutch anti-slavery initiatives can be unearthed, indicating that there was much more protest than is generally assumed.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the Dutch case deepens our understanding of why most continental movements remained small and cautious. The frequent contacts between British and continental European abolitionists in the decades between 1830 and 1860 offer insight into the differing conceptions of politics, religion and emotions that informed political practices. Some examples of the transfer of methods of protest can be traced, but also many instances in which the British model was discarded as unsuitable. Thirdly and paradoxically, the interference of British abolitionists often hindered the emulation of the British model. The appeals of British abolitionists were articulated and interpreted within an imperialist framework, alienating many continental abolitionists. Coining the phrase 'inverse transfer', I will argue that the sustained attempts to export a British brand of abolitionism were often counter-productive and may have seriously hurt the progress of continental abolitionist movements. The relatively small scale and the subdued style of the movements on the Continent, therefore, were not simply failed attempts to follow the British example but, to an important and often neglected degree, a conscious decision to reject the model of British-style abolitionism.

<sup>6</sup> Seymour Drescher, *From Slavery to Freedom: Comparative Studies in the Rise and Fall of Atlantic Slavery* (New York, 1999), 221, 129; Seymour Drescher, 'British Way, French Way: Opinion Building and Revolution in the Second French Slave Emancipation', *American Historical Review*, xcvi (1991), 714.

<sup>7</sup> Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers: publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland, 1840-1880* (Amsterdam, 2007), 51-72 and ch. 2.

## I

THE BRITISH MISSION TO ABOLISH SLAVERY THROUGHOUT  
THE WORLD

Just as the slave trade had been abolished under immense public pressure in 1807, in 1833 a massive 'anti-slavery public' put pressure upon the British government to abolish slavery in its colonies, slaves becoming 'apprenticed' for a period of ten years.<sup>8</sup> The anti-slavery campaign was deeply embedded in the culture of evangelicalism, which influenced large parts of the British middle classes from the first decades of the nineteenth century on, and became dominant by mid-century. Revivalists' universal claims for the possibility and necessity of conversion and salvation produced an international outlook and inspired a range of activities for spreading the gospel and battling sins across the world by means of missionary, tract, Bible, Sunday school, temperance and anti-slavery societies.<sup>9</sup> It is no coincidence that the take-off of British abolitionism coincided almost exactly with the revival of the British missionary movement.<sup>10</sup>

The British and Foreign Bible Society had been established in 1804 by the abolitionist leader William Wilberforce and others to promote a wider circulation and use of the scriptures in Britain, the colonies and the Continent. In the following decades it provided a blueprint for other reform initiatives. In 1832 the London Temperance Society, for example, changed its name to the British and Foreign Temperance Society, 'for the purpose of extending its blessings throughout the Kingdom and throughout

<sup>8</sup> Helpful introductions to the abolitionist campaigns include J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (London, 1998); David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780–1860* (London, 1991); Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Alison Twells, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792–1850: The 'Heathens' at Home and Overseas* (Basingstoke, 2008); Hanna Hodacs, *Converging World Views: The European Expansion and Early-Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Swedish Contacts* (Uppsala, 2003); David W. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism and Cultural Diffusion', in Mark Smith (ed.), *British Evangelical Identities Past and Present* (Milton Keynes, 2008), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Two Variants of Anti-Slavery: Religious Organization and Social Mobilization in Britain and France, 1780–1870', in Bolt and Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform*, 47. See also Peter Stamatov, 'Activist Religion, Empire, and the Emergence of Modern Long-Distance Advocacy Networks', *American Sociological Review*, lxxv (2010).

the world'.<sup>11</sup> Irish abolitionists suggested the development of a worldwide anti-slavery movement as early as 1831, with reference to the success of the British and Foreign Bible Society.<sup>12</sup> Immediately after the law abolishing slavery was passed, sections of the anti-slavery public rechannelled their abolitionist zeal towards the system of apprenticeship and the eradication of slavery at a global level. In December 1833, for instance, Glasgow abolitionists organized a public meeting 'to Form a Society to Promote the Universal Extinction of Slavery, wherever it exists, particularly in the United States of America'.<sup>13</sup> The Glasgow Ladies' Emancipation Auxiliary Society was founded, which raised considerable funds for the itinerant agent George Thompson's mission to the United States. From 1834 on, Thompson inspired large groups of American men and especially women to organize local abolitionist societies.<sup>14</sup> 'The mission [to America] is essentially novel in its character, and difficult in its execution', argued the Agency Anti-Slavery Society. It had been founded in London in 1831, after which it would go on to play a crucial role in the final phase of the anti-slavery campaign. In 1834 the society deemed it necessary to co-ordinate several spontaneous local and regional initiatives against global slavery and turn them into auxiliaries of a national organization.<sup>15</sup> The same year it changed its name to the British and Foreign Society for the Universal Abolition of Negro Slavery and the Slave Trade. After protests forced the ending of slave apprenticeship in 1839, this association became active again under the name of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain, 1780–1850* (Cambridge, 2003), 22–4 (editors' intro.); *Fifth Report of the American Temperance Society* (Boston, 1832), 7.

<sup>12</sup> [C. E. H. Orpen], *The Principles, Plans and Objects, of 'The Hibernian Negro's Friend Society'* ([Dublin], 1831), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Minute Book of the Society for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the World, Formed at Glasgow, 12 December 1833, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, William Smeal Collection, Papers of the Glasgow Emancipation Society.

<sup>14</sup> *Three Years' Female Anti-Slavery Effort, in Britain and America: Being a Report of the Proceedings of the Glasgow Ladies' Auxiliary Emancipation Society, since its Formation in January, 1834* (Glasgow, 1837).

<sup>15</sup> George Thompson to Committee of the Glasgow Emancipation Society, London, 18 Feb. 1834, Mitchell Library, Glasgow, William Smeal Collection, Papers of the Glasgow Emancipation Society.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, 2012), 9.

About 1830 the organizational forms of the British and Foreign Bible Society and similar organizations had become, as historical sociologists would put it, 'modular', that is, easily 'learned, adapted, routinized, and diffused from one group, one locale, or one moment to another'.<sup>17</sup> The same applied to forms of protest. Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow have demonstrated that this modularity was one of the key characteristics of the modern repertoire of contentious action that accompanied the rise of modern politics.<sup>18</sup> Within the United Kingdom, similar forms of protest were used in several crusades against, for instance, slavery, war, the Corn Laws and later intemperance.<sup>19</sup> Encouraged by their victories at home, British reformers became optimistic about their transfer abroad, and embarked on a mission to export their successful movement.

BFASS agents travelled across Europe on multiple occasions, and, for instance, visited the Netherlands at least eight times between 1840 and 1858.<sup>20</sup> These activities had an effect: French, Swedish and Dutch anti-slavery organizations seem to have been organized as a direct result of the BFASS's efforts.<sup>21</sup> The missionary impulse behind the spread of abolitionism was not lost on continental observers. The term 'missionary' was repeatedly used when talking about BFASS agents. In 1840 the French poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine referred in a

<sup>17</sup> Mark Traugott, 'Recurrent Patterns of Collective Action', in Mark Traugott (ed.), *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action* (Durham, NC, 1995), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Tilly, *Popular Contention in Great Britain, 1758–1834* (Boulder, 1995); Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder, 2004); Sidney Tarrow, 'Cycles of Collective Action: Between Moments of Madness and Repertoires of Contention', in Traugott (ed.), *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge, 1994); Sarah Soule, 'Diffusion Processes Within and Across Movements', in David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Malden, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730–1854* (Oxford, 1996); Norman McCord, *The Anti-Corn Law League, 1838–1846*, 2nd edn, revised (London, 1968); Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *The People's Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London, 2000); Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade against Drink in Victorian England* (Basingstoke, 1988).

<sup>20</sup> Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833–1870* ([London], 1972), 190.

<sup>21</sup> Hodacs, *Converging World Views*, 112–14. For Dutch and French instances, see sections II and III.

speech to a BFASS delegation as 'these apostles . . . these Christian missionaries' spreading the abolitionist gospel.<sup>22</sup> More often the term was used in a mocking, deprecating manner. A French journal railed against the same delegates as 'these missionaries' trying to sway the French. About the same time a report of the Dutch secret service traced Dutch anti-slavery activities to the influence of 'British and American Missionaries' luring the reluctant Dutch into the anti-slavery struggle.<sup>23</sup>

The *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter* publicized the attempts of the BFASS to inspire abolitionist movements around the world. In its first years, the main objective of the BFASS was to combat slavery in the United States, France and the Netherlands. But the field they worked was extensive: the 1844 report on 'foreign operations' noted activities in the United States, Texas, France, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Brazil, Spain, Portugal, Russia, Austria, Greece, Germany, Haiti and northern Africa (probably in order of importance).<sup>24</sup> As Hanna Hodacs has pointed out in her study of the activities of British evangelical organizations in Sweden, Britain's mission in Europe was closely tied to its perceived mission to civilize the world and convert the heathen. To the evangelical Britons, the rest of Europe seems to have been a middle ground between Britain and the heathen world, making the relationship between Britain and the European countries ambiguous. As Hodacs puts it, 'Sweden seems to have been both an object of British missionary exertions and an ally in a pan-Protestant, missionary project'.<sup>25</sup> The ambivalence of British reformers towards European countries would prove confusing and counter-productive. In Drescher's words, 'It was more difficult for British abolitionists to rouse the natives of continental Europe to sustained abolitionist fervor . . . than it was to convert the slaves beyond the line'.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 92.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 105; Riemer Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie, 1863–1963* (The Hague, 1963), 29.

<sup>24</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 29 May 1844.

<sup>25</sup> Hodacs, *Converging World Views*, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'Paradigms Tossed: Capitalism and the Political Sources of Abolition', in Barbara L. Solow and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.), *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge, 1987), 198.



The British abolitionists not only attempted to export anti-slavery information and arguments, but also tried to spread the specific methods their movement had used to battle slavery, with at its core large-scale public meetings, mass petitions and an elaborate organizational structure that mobilized people and raised ample funds. This proved very difficult. The main problem the British faced abroad was unfamiliarity with 'the English apparatus of public meetings, petitions etc.'<sup>27</sup> As the historian of French abolitionism Lawrence Jennings observes, 'British abolitionist spokesmen would continue to imagine that somehow British methods of organized mass protest against slavery could be as effective in France as they had been in the United Kingdom'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, the BFASS pushed for the organization of mass petitions and a national abolitionist organization in the Netherlands. Although no official Dutch delegation participated in the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1843 (only the Rotterdam merchant Daniel Twiss attended), the treasurer of the BFASS, George William Alexander, informed the meeting: 'I regard Holland as a little England. I have met with so much which I consider as English sentiment and American feeling on the subject of abolition, that I have great confidence with respect to the future progress of the anti-slavery cause in Holland'.<sup>29</sup> The naivety of Alexander's remark would become apparent in time.

## II

### TRANSNATIONAL ABOLITIONISM IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE

Although the political systems varied from country to country, France, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands (to name only those countries identified with late abolition) shared some similarities during the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s in that they were moving away from the politics of absolutist monarchies. France, of course, had done so through revolution and would eventually become a republic, while the Dutch revolutionary era had resulted in replacing the republic with a constitutional monarchy.

<sup>27</sup> Hodacs, *Converging World Views*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention* (London, 1843), 198.

What Christopher Schmidt-Nowara observes for Spain around mid-century holds true for many other European countries:

Twenty years of constitutional rule and institution building, even if limited, had led to a new sense of political possibilities . . . The rise of the idea of the *public*, and the growth of associations that claimed to mobilize and represent the public, created a style of politics that boded well for [colonial] reformers.<sup>30</sup>

In all four countries around the middle of the century the volume of periodicals had expanded, the number of voluntary associations and public institutions had increased, and the idea of 'the public' had become popular or at least recognized. Yet despite the optimistic assertion by the BFASS in 1841 that 'it is expected [that the progress of anti-slavery sentiments] will lead to the formation of an Anti-slavery Committee' in Portugal, no abolitionist societies were established there; while in Spain the Spanish Abolitionist Society was founded in Madrid only in 1865. Urban abolitionist networks remained small and did not become institutionalized or political.<sup>31</sup> Several French and Dutch anti-slavery societies were established, as we shall see, but they never became the mass movements that British anti-slavery missionaries hoped for.

Different experiences in politics, religion and imperialism were crucial in the development of continental divergence from British abolitionism. Firstly, the implications of the fact that abolitionism had become an integral part of imperialism need to be explored. The British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 made ending the transatlantic slave trade an imperial priority. The British put pressure upon other European governments either to abolish the slave trade immediately, as the Dutch did in 1814, or to pledge co-operation with its termination at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. In France the slave trade was abolished by Napoleonic decree in 1815 (slavery had been abolished in 1794 but was reinstated by Napoleon in 1802). Spain abolished the

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Antislavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833–1874* (Pittsburgh, 1999), 51–2. See also Guy Thomson, *The Birth of Modern Politics in Spain: Democracy, Association and Revolution, 1854–1875* (Basingstoke, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 17 Nov. 1841; Marques, *Sounds of Silence*, 130; Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Anti-Slavery*, 53; Albert García Balaña, 'Antislavery before Abolitionism: Networks and Motives in Early Liberal Barcelona, 1833–1844', in Josep M. Fradera and Christopher Schmidt-Nowara (eds.), *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire* (New York, 2013), 231–2.

trade in 1820 and Portugal in 1836, both under British pressure.<sup>32</sup> For the next half-century, the British navy patrolled the Atlantic to hunt down slave ships. Continental governments and publics alike resented the public display of British hegemony, especially the searching by British marines of foreign vessels. Right-of-search controversies arose over the legitimacy of such actions. While cherishing their glorious pasts, the inhabitants of Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and France had to recognize that Britain had become the great power of the nineteenth century. The mixed feelings of admiration, jealousy and frustration this acknowledgement produced form the background to the complex relationship that developed between British abolitionists and their continental counterparts. Following the British example in ending slavery was a bitter pill to swallow as it implied both submission to Britain and admitting backwardness in relation to Britain.<sup>33</sup>

João Marques notes that even abolitionists in Portugal saw in British pressure to abolish slavery 'an interference that was offensive to national dignity and derived from a hypocritical philanthropy'.<sup>34</sup> More dramatically, the Portuguese started to regard themselves as the victims of aggressive British tactics. Earlier images of suffering slaves had helped the public to identify with the anti-slavery cause, whereas the new image became 'poor Portugal, a weak and trampled nation . . . The Portuguese were the slaves, and the British were the masters'.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, French advocates of slavery labelled the British pleas for other nations to follow their example as egotistical calculations, as an 'infamous trap covered by perfidious philanthropy'. British abolitionists' true aim was the destruction of the French colonies, they argued, and French abolitionists were 'pliable philanthropists' and 'docile instruments' of the British empire. The French, it was suggested, lacked integrity and a sense of national honour if they acceded to abolition under British patronage. In the words

<sup>32</sup> Seymour Drescher, 'From Empires of Slavery to Empires of Antislavery', in Fradera and Schmidt-Nowara (eds.), *Slavery and Antislavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire*, esp. 297–8. See also Paul Michael Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814–48: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (Basingstoke, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*, 202, 204.

<sup>34</sup> Marques, *Sounds of Silence*, 128, 53.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

of the pro-slavery advocate Thomas Jollivet, 'Let them no longer speak of the philanthropy of England; let them no longer propose it as a model for us; let us receive her examples and advice with mistrust, and as dangerous and self-seeking'.<sup>36</sup>

These anti-British sentiments could be effectively rallied against the French anti-slavery movement because it had indeed been intimately connected to British abolitionism from the start. The founding of the Société des Amis des Noirs in 1788 had been prompted by the establishment in the previous year of the London Abolitionist Society, which had dispatched its most successful agent, Thomas Clarkson, to France.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, the revival of French abolitionism, which was marked by the establishment in 1833 of the Société Française pour l'Abolition de l'Esclavage, was a direct result of the abolition of slavery on the other side of the Channel.<sup>38</sup> British anti-slavery activists who corresponded with French abolitionists (organized since 1822 in an abolitionist committee of the Société de la Morale Chrétienne) advised and aided the establishment of the French Abolition Society. Three British abolitionists, including Zachary Macaulay, board member of the former Anti-Slavery Society and editor of the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, and John Scoble, secretary of the British and Foreign Society for the Universal Abolition of Negro Slavery and the Slave Trade, attended the founding meeting of the French society, where British abolition was discussed.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1830s, French abolitionists still vigorously praised British abolition as an act of humanity and national honour, citing it as a 'noble example' that France should emulate. They were disappointed that few of their compatriots shared their enthusiasm, asking, 'Why is it that every time the example of England is cited, only its negative aspects are stressed?'<sup>40</sup> But when, during the right-of-search controversy of 1842–5, public

<sup>36</sup> Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*, 92, 104–5.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>38</sup> For nineteenth-century French abolitionism, see Lawrence C. Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802–1848* (Cambridge, 2000); Patricia Motylewski, *La Société française pour l'abolition de l'esclavage, 1834–1850* (Paris, 1998); Nelly Schmidt, *Abolitionnistes de l'esclavage et réformateurs des colonies, 1820–1851: analyse et documents* (Paris, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Drescher, 'British Way, French Way', 715; Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*, 93–4.

<sup>40</sup> Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*, 90–1, 25, 79.

indignation over British anti-slave trade measures peaked and the modest anti-slavery momentum faded, French abolitionists began to play down their British connections. In 1843 they chose not to send a high-profile delegation to the London Anti-Slavery Convention, and when French workers started organizing British-style abolitionist petitions, they distanced themselves from this initiative.<sup>41</sup> Not only did their close ties to Britain render the French abolitionists vulnerable to accusations of promoting British colonial supremacy, there seemed good reason to postpone French action until the long-term effects of British abolition became clear.<sup>42</sup>

Members of the French Abolition Society such as Tocqueville and Broglie had, as members of the parliamentary committee on slavery, proposed gradual abolition with indemnification for slave owners in 1843. However, in 1848 slavery was suddenly abolished by revolutionary decree. In older historiography this act was credited mainly to one man, the abolitionist Victor Schoelcher, who was effectively given a free hand to end slavery when he was appointed under-secretary of the navy and the colonies in the provisional government. More recent historians have called for a more positive evaluation of the role of liberal abolitionists who successfully detached abolitionism from its revolutionary connotations through their cautious and non-confrontational behaviour.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, there has been a reassessment of the role of the political outsiders who set up impressive petition campaigns in the years immediately preceding the revolution. Networks of artisans, women, Protestants and eventually even Catholic clergy sustained over the course of years several systematic petition campaigns. Their audiences seem to have been less prone to anti-British sentiment (perhaps in this anti-British climate of opinion the pro-British stance signified an anti-establishment position), as they explicitly cited the British model of extra-parliamentary mobilization and praised the 'genius' of British petitioning.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 197–200; Jennings, *French Anti-Slavery*, 174.

<sup>42</sup> Jennings, *French Reaction to British Slave Emancipation*, 15, 58–68, 104, 120; Drescher, 'Two Variants of Anti-Slavery', 59.

<sup>43</sup> Motylewski, *La Société française pour l'abolition de l'esclavage*, 32–5. For the debate on indemnification, see Frédérique Beauvois, *Indemniser les planteurs pour abolir l'esclavage? Entre économie, éthique et politique: une étude des débats parlementaires britanniques et français (1788–1848) dans une perspective comparée* (Paris, 2013).

By experimenting with public meetings and organizing local branches of the national anti-slavery society, this new French abolitionism seemed to be on its way to becoming a popular movement. Drescher goes so far as to claim that slavery would have been abolished through popular pressure even had the 1848 Revolution failed to do so.<sup>44</sup> French abolitionism epitomizes the complex nature of mid-century French politics: cautious abolitionists gave abolitionism a respectable name (while being obstructed by advocates of slavery who disdained them as tools of Britain); political outsiders embraced the British methods of agitation (while the issue of slavery never became a truly popular issue or even a true mass movement); and, in the end, parliament proved indecisive and the issue was solved through a revolutionary decree.<sup>45</sup> The Dutch story features similar ingredients but with a different outcome: there the opportunity to abolish slavery during the tumultuous year 1848 was not seized.

### III

#### RELUCTANT CONVERTS: DUTCH ABOLITIONISM IN THE 1840s

As in France, the development of organized Dutch abolitionism was intimately connected to British anti-slavery. As one of its first historians duly noted, Dutch abolitionism was the result of foreign initiative.<sup>46</sup> During the final decades of the eighteenth century, criticism and outright rejection of the slave trade and slavery had been expressed in Dutch Enlightened circles by well-known figures such as the literary celebrity Betje Wolff.<sup>47</sup> However, even though associational life flourished in the Netherlands at that time, an abolitionist organization did not emerge. In the first decades of the nineteenth century abolitionist rhetoric was all but absent from the Dutch scene. Still, the lengthy struggle against slavery in Britain and the

<sup>44</sup> Drescher, 'British Way, French Way', 733–4.

<sup>45</sup> For abolitionism as a popular issue, see *ibid.*, 721–2.

<sup>46</sup> Johanna Maria van Winter, 'De openbare mening in Nederland over de afschaffing der slavernij', *West-Indische Gids*, xxxiv (1953).

<sup>47</sup> J. W. Buisman, *Tussen vroomheid en Verlichting: een cultuurhistorisch en -sociologisch onderzoek naar enkele aspecten van de Verlichting in Nederland, 1755–1810*, 2 vols. (Zwolle, 1992); Angelie Sens, 'Menssaap, heiden, slaaf': *Nederlandse visies op de wereld rond 1800* (The Hague, 2001).

parliamentary debates of 1833 were discussed in Dutch newspapers, and a Dutch translation of the final bill to abolish slavery was published the same year the legislation was accepted. This was advertised in Dutch newspapers as 'most important for all plantation owners in the East and West Indies'.<sup>48</sup> About 1840 a sense of expanding political possibilities was triggered by the abdication of King William I, whose rule had been rather repressive. Under William II the liberal movement gained momentum. Johan Rudolf Thorbecke, the most prominent Dutch liberal, was not a clubman and never attempted to organize or mobilize people outside parliament to promote his ideas. Still, new liberal clubs were formed in Utrecht and Amsterdam, and in many other cities informal circles emerged around liberal figures, creating a breeding ground for a new form of critical citizenship.<sup>49</sup> Parallel to this, alternative circles expanded, which involved more conservative Protestants, known as orthodox Protestants, whose critical stance towards liberalism was based on anti-revolutionary political thought as expressed most eloquently by the historian and member of parliament Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer.<sup>50</sup> While Groen van Prinsterer's political ideology was in many ways diametrically opposed to that of liberals like Thorbecke, it shared the conviction that, while the public should be able to participate in a rational public debate, passions should be avoided in politics.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Bill, regelende de afschaffing der slavernij, benevens de schadevergoeding aan de eigenaars der slaven, in de gezamenlijke koloniën van het Britsche Rijk* (Amsterdam, 1833); *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 14 Oct. 1833.

<sup>49</sup> For the problematic development of opposition under William I, see Jeroen van Zanten, *Schielijk, Winzucht, Zwaarhoofd en Bedaard: politieke discussie en oppositievorming, 1813–1840* (Amsterdam, 2004). For detailed reconstructions of liberal networks in Amsterdam and Utrecht around mid-century, see J. H. von Santen, 'De Amstelsociëteit: liberale organisatie in Nederland in de jaren 1846–1851', in *Figuren en figuraties: acht opstellen aangeboden aan J. C. Boogman* (Groningen, 1979); J. H. von Santen, 'Politiek leven in de stad Utrecht rond het midden van de negentiende eeuw, 1840–1860', *Jaarboek Oud-Utrecht* (1985).

<sup>50</sup> Ewout Klei, 'Dutch Orthodox Protestant Parties and the Ghost of the French Revolution', in James Eglinton and George Harinck (eds.), *Neo-Calvinism and the French Revolution* (London, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Henk te Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap: persoon en politiek van Thorbecke tot Den Uyl* (Amsterdam, 2002), 33, 44; Henk te Velde, 'Onderwijzers in parlementaire politiek: Thorbecke, Guizot en het Europese doctrinaire liberalisme', *Low Countries Historical Review*, cxiii (1998).



The organized anti-slavery movement in the Netherlands emerged as a result of several visits by British reformers. In February 1840 a BFASS delegation visited the country.<sup>52</sup> Two board members, James Whitehorn and George William Alexander, pinned their hopes on Groen van Prinsterer, calling on him in The Hague. They invited him to become the Dutch Wilberforce, reminding him that Wilberforce was a conservative and yet had led a broad anti-slavery coalition.<sup>53</sup> A separate delegation of British Quakers made an even bigger impression. The Quaker minister and reformer Elizabeth Fry travelled to several countries on the Continent with her brother Samuel Gurney, a major financier of the BFASS, and William Allen, one of its founder members. They were on a philanthropic tour to promote prison reform, religious education and the abolition of slavery. As the earlier BFASS delegation had done, they held at least two public meetings fully devoted to the issue of slavery, explaining the views of the society and giving an outline of the British anti-slavery campaign. These meetings drew audiences of fifty to eighty men and women, a stark contrast to the British mass meetings, but in the Dutch context still considered well attended by local and British abolitionists. Fry, as well as the BFASS board members, would return to the Netherlands in later years.<sup>54</sup>

Inspired by the round of British anti-slavery missionary work in 1840, several local committees formed, such as the Utrecht society the Friends of the Slaves.<sup>55</sup> In Rotterdam ministers of the Scottish, Anglican and English Reformed churches organized a formal Anti-Slavery Committee, together with members of the English community and some Dutch liberals and orthodox Protestants. The Rotterdam Ladies' Anti-Slavery Committee, which had a similar social profile (many members were wives or daughters of the male committee), published a

<sup>52</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 8 Apr. 1840.

<sup>53</sup> Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie*, 6, 24. For more on these first travels on the Continent, see G. W. Alexander, *Letters on the Slave-Trade, Slavery, and Emancipation: With a Reply to Objections Made to the Liberation of the Slaves in the Spanish Colonies. Addressed to Friends on the Continent of Europe during a Visit to Spain and Portugal* (London, 1842).

<sup>54</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 8 Apr. 1840; Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power: Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam, 1999); Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 70.

<sup>55</sup> G. W. Alexander to J. Ackersdijck, 31 Mar. 1840, University of Utrecht, Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 16 A 1.



series of pamphlets and organized the first all-women's petition in the Netherlands in 1842, following the example of British women abolitionists.<sup>56</sup>

At first glance the British visits in the early 1840s seem to have been successful. However, the imperialist connotations of the British abolitionist mission produced mixed emotions and indeed alienated potential abolitionists, as a rare autobiographical source reflects. In March 1840 the wealthy orthodox Protestant merchant Willem de Clercq confided to his diary his displeasure at the interaction between the anti-slavery Quakers led by Fry and the audience attending their public meeting. He was impressed by Fry, but had expected a discussion among equals about possible ways of abolishing slavery. Instead, he felt that the British reformers had taken on the role of missionaries and cast the Dutch in the role of the uncivilized heathen. A mission man himself (he had been a director of the Dutch Missionary Society for years) De Clercq was immediately reminded of the mission among the Maoris in New Zealand which the leading Dutch missionary periodical had recently discussed.<sup>57</sup>

I thought it strange that all the Dutch present were addressed as Christian friends yet sat there as though they were witnessing a spectacle, as though they were New Zealanders hearing such things for the first time in their lives. This made me get up and, struggling with my English, bear witness to our brotherhood and unity in the highest truths.<sup>58</sup>

De Clercq's expectations for full participation in this endeavour and for collaboration on an equal footing remained unfulfilled, and his frustration exemplifies the effects of the British approach on the continental reformers. The British aimed at maximizing the theatrical impact on their audiences. That one member of Fry's entourage noted with satisfaction that the audience members were 'astounded' by the facts the British presented seems to support De Clercq's observation that this 'spectacle' employed a missionary-heathen dynamic.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Pamphlets now only in City Archives, Rotterdam, Archief Mees, 438; petition cited in Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie*, 80–1.

<sup>57</sup> *Maandberigt van het Nederlandsch Zendeling-Genootschap* (1839), 109–12.

<sup>58</sup> C. E. te Lintum, *Willem de Clercq: de mensch en zijn strijd* (Utrecht, 1939), 210–11; compare 202–3.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Gurney, *Elizabeth Fry's Journeys on the Continent, 1840–1841*, ed. R. Brimley Johnson (London, 1931), 33.

After this demeaning experience, De Clercq never became active in the organized anti-slavery movement.

The orthodox Protestant abolitionists had a complicated relationship to abolition, not only because they remained unsure whether the Bible condemned slavery, but also because abolition touched upon conflicting elements in their ideology. The orthodox Protestant Réveil movement was part of the continental evangelical circuit that was strongest in Switzerland (where it originated), the southern German *Länder* and France. While it was close to British evangelicalism and the Quaker creed in that it similarly stressed personal piety and taking a principled stance in social and political issues, ultimately its anti-revolutionary political ideas clashed with the revolutionary political consequences that the Quakers and many evangelicals drew from their faith.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, Fry's Quaker delegation and the BFASS board members were regarded with suspicion in Réveil circles. The young lawyer H. J. Koenen reminded Groen van Prinsterer that Quakers were nothing more than 'Revolutionaries painted as Christians', writing: 'I believe that the Quakers' high-minded quest for freedom, combined with their un-Christian philanthropy, has produced in this country a negative rather than a favourable impression, both on true Christians and on sensible anti-liberals'.<sup>61</sup> While Groen van Prinsterer was flattered by the invitation to become the Dutch Wilberforce, he kept his distance from the British abolitionists.<sup>62</sup> He was no exception. Shortly after the establishment of the Rotterdam Anti-Slavery Committee in 1840, one member, the minister Ebenezer Miller, wrote to Alexander: 'I am sorry to say that we find very few here who are willing to co-operate with us in this good work. All the Dutch ministers, except two, shy off, when the subject is mentioned and these two have not yet attended a Meeting of [the] committee'.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Fred van Lieburg (ed.), *Opwekking van de natie: het protestantse Réveil in Nederland* (Hilversum, 2012).

<sup>61</sup> H. J. Koenen to G. Groen van Prinsterer, 28 Nov., 17 Dec. 1841, National Archive, The Hague, Archief Groen van Prinsterer, 77.

<sup>62</sup> Groen van Prinsterer, *Schriftelijke nalatenschap: briefwisseling, 1808–1876*, 6 vols. (1925–92), ii, 944.

<sup>63</sup> Ebenezer Miller to Alexander, 31 July 1840, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society (hereafter PASS), MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C104/62.

In late 1841 two BFASS board members, Scoble and Alexander, attempted to orchestrate the formation of a national organization through the Rotterdam Anti-Slavery Committee, but failed to keep control of the process. The BFASS agents did not fully understand the territory of their mission and underestimated the fundamental differences in political and religious ideology between the different networks of Dutch abolitionists. Their repeated insistence that Dutch abolitionists should co-operate in an ecumenical manner, as had happened in Britain, proved counter-productive and hastened the fragmentation of the emerging national movement. Alexander, understanding the importance of the founding meeting of the national organization, boarded a ship to Rotterdam, and, 'under the emergency of the case', Scoble joined him. However, owing to unfavourable winds, they arrived too late and 'found to our mortification' that the meeting had gone terribly wrong.<sup>64</sup> The liberals from Utrecht had wanted to collaborate with the orthodox Protestant abolitionists. Groen van Prinsterer, however, sabotaged the formation of a general ecumenical association out of fear of compromising his religious beliefs. He had brought a large number of kindred spirits to the meeting, who all voted in favour of his proposition to base the national anti-slavery organization on anti-revolutionary views. The appalled liberals left, and started to organize a competing general national anti-slavery society. As a consequence, two rival petitions asking the king to abolish slavery made the rounds in the winter of 1841–2. The scale of the petitions was modest: the liberal one acquired 125 signatures, the orthodox Protestant one 56. The women of Rotterdam were able to gather 128 signatures from among themselves.<sup>65</sup>

In private letters BFASS officials expressed their disappointment at the progress of the cause: 'this is a cold and dead place', Scoble wrote gloomily after the failure to establish a national anti-slavery organization.<sup>66</sup> However, government officials were very much alarmed by the recent anti-slavery

<sup>64</sup> Minutes of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and its Predecessors, 29 Oct. 1841, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 20, E2/6; *Third Annual Report of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society* (1842), 150–1; Lewis Tappan, *A Side-Light on Anglo-American Relations, 1839–1858: Furnished by the Correspondence of Lewis Tappan and Others with the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*, ed. Annie Heloise Abel and Frank J. Klingberg (Lancaster, Pa., 1927), 4.

<sup>65</sup> For more on these petitions, see Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie*; Janse, *De afschaffers*, 62–70.

<sup>66</sup> Tappan, *Side-Light on Anglo-American Relations*, 5.

initiatives and requested the leaders of both rival organizations to postpone their activities in order to allow the government to investigate the possibility of abolition. As early as 1842, the government publicly stated in its reply to the petitions that it believed abolition was inevitable, but that avoiding slave revolts and finding the funds to reimburse the slave owners were critical issues. In line with the co-operative character of Dutch civil society the abolitionists agreed to postpone launching their organizations.<sup>67</sup> But when more than a year had passed with no government action, the abolitionist circle in Utrecht around Professor Jan Ackersdijck cautiously established the abolitionist Publishing Society to publish the journal *Bijdragen aan de kennis der Nederlandsche en vreemde koloniën, bijzonder betrekkelijk de vrijlating der slaven* (Contributions to the Knowledge of the Dutch and Foreign Colonies, especially with regard to the Emancipation of Slaves). Membership was by invitation only, and the voluminous correspondence with prospective members clearly demonstrates the Dutch desire to avoid identification with the exalted enthusiasm of 'fanatical' British philanthropy.<sup>68</sup>

The British members of the Rotterdam Anti-Slavery Committee blamed this hesitancy to join the Publishing Society on an overall lack of interest in the cause. '[Abolitionists here] have to work upon stiffnecked and unbelieving people, whose hearts are for the most part in their head (I am an Englishman, and so write to you just what I think)', one wrote.<sup>69</sup> A general indifference did, in fact, prevail. The young liberal lawyer Willem Mees tried to collect signatures for the Publishing Society at a supper of the Rotterdam branch of the Dutch Society for Art and Science and reported back: 'There is not much interest in the subject; yesterday evening I had to give up all further attempts because they chose to ridicule the issue, and against that weapon we cannot fight at the moment'.<sup>70</sup> Years later Ackersdijck reminisced: 'It was then generally disapproved [of] to speak of emancipation; we met commonly with ridicule or reproach.

<sup>67</sup> Maartje Janse, 'Op de grens tussen staat en civil society: samenwerking tussen hervormers en politici, 1840–1880', *De Negentiende Eeuw*, xxxv (2011).

<sup>68</sup> A. H. Büchler to De Redactie der *Bijdragen*, July 1844, Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 16 A 8.

<sup>69</sup> Alex Jay, Secretary of the Rotterdam Committee, to John Scoble, 19 Dec. 1843, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C18/86.

<sup>70</sup> W. C. Mees to A. S. Rueb, 3 Jan. 1844, Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 16 A 8.

Slavery was considered necessary for our colonies, and it was thought dangerous to represent it as inhumane and unlawful'. This sentiment had radically changed by 1853, he asserted.<sup>71</sup> But in the early phase of Dutch anti-slavery more than mere indifference hindered the movement's growth. Even those Dutch liberals most inclined to follow the British example kept their distance from the BFASS and refused to mobilize more people. A. S. Rueb, the secretary of the Publishing Society, explained to Alexander why they would not follow the BFASS's advice to organize large-scale petitions. Such actions would harm the cause as they would tarnish the reputation of abolitionism as well as that of the individual petitioners: any association with mass politics must be avoided to give the cause a respectable image. Dutch abolitionists too were hindered by rumours spread by slave owners that England was trying to bring ruin to the colonies of other nations now that abolition had proved a failure. 'Consequently the friends of abolition are often considered the tools of England'.<sup>72</sup>

Keeping their distance was a conscious decision, and rejecting the British example of mass mobilization was the result of both a direct strategy to avoid the ridicule of pro-slavery advocates and a sincere belief that these methods would not work in the Dutch political context. Annoyed with the meddlesome 'British and Foreign Society' (meaning the BFASS), some observers even raised doubts that anti-slavery societies could ever have been as influential in the British political system as their adherents claimed. The liberal *Algemeen Handelsblad* boldly declared that it was not 'some British society or other for the abolition of slavery' that had had 'any effect in procuring the emancipation in the British colonies, but that this result was solely owing to the £20,000,000 sterling paid to the planters by the government, to which the whole nation was obliged to contribute'.<sup>73</sup> Equally annoyed, a BFASS board member retorted in the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*: 'It was just exactly such societies as that alluded to which fixed the attention of the British people [on the horrors of the slave trade and the sin of slavery]'. After public opinion and the press

<sup>71</sup> Ackersdijck [to Alexander?], 13 Apr. 1853, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C155/3.

<sup>72</sup> Rueb to Alexander, 8 May 1844 [draft], Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 16 A.

<sup>73</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 29 Dec. 1841; *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 12 Jan. 1842.

had been won over, government could easily obtain the funds necessary from parliament: 'The government only complied with the wishes of the people in emancipating the slaves'. Another misinterpretation by the Dutch, claimed the *Reporter*, was that in discussing the abolition of slavery in Britain, they confounded the British Anti-Slavery Society with the British government. It tried to explain that pressure groups did not participate in technical political debates on compensation for slave owners but simply claimed that slavery was contrary to the principles of justice and humanity. In 1833 the Anti-Slavery Society had not, as the Dutch writer supposed, opposed the wishes of the British people, but rather represented them.<sup>74</sup> When the BFASS board members continued to insist that Dutch abolitionists should petition and submit a bill to parliament, Dutch abolitionists reiterated in the letters they wrote in response that they had to win the trust of their countrymen before they could claim to represent them. 'The whole influence we hope to be able to exert depends entirely on our discretion and on the esteem in which we are held by the enlightened part of our country men . . . [This] seems to require the utmost prudence in our first steps'. Rather than petitioning government, 'Our aim must be to work on public opinion by well studied tracts'.<sup>75</sup>

Upon publishing a direct appeal from the BFASS to the Dutch public to end slavery, the editors of the *Bijdragen* explained in an almost apologetic manner to their readers that 'In England they speak of the Dutch as friends, whose co-operation is to be expected'.<sup>76</sup> The BFASS's hopes and expectations that the Netherlands would act as a 'little England' would be mostly disappointed. One exception was a relatively large-scale petition initiated by the Publishing Society in 1847, for which 179 signatures were gathered. This petition was not so much a matter of new-found enthusiasm for British methods, but rather the effect of clever manipulation by the Rotterdam Anti-Slavery Committee, which was prepared to come up

<sup>74</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 12 Jan. 1842.

<sup>75</sup> For instances of pressure, see Minute Books of the Society for the Publication of the *Bijdragen*, 25 Nov., 9 Dec. 1844, 4 Feb. 1845, Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 154a; reply in Rueb to Alexander, 8 May 1844 [draft], Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 16 A 8.

<sup>76</sup> 'Oproeping uit Engeland', *Bijdragen*, i, 4 (1844), 210.

with much-needed funding for the journal in exchange for a national anti-slavery petition.<sup>77</sup>

#### IV

##### A POPULAR MOVEMENT? DUTCH ABOLITIONISM IN THE 1850s

The Dutch came close to abolishing slavery in 1848. No revolution broke out, but in reaction to revolutionary activities in several European cities, William II asked Thorbecke to draft a liberal constitution and form a liberal government. It looked as if France would abolish slavery without granting the slave owners monetary reparations, and some influential advisers suggested that the Netherlands should do the same. However, both conservatives and liberals shied away from this drastic measure. With the state coffers empty and the country on the verge of bankruptcy, liberal abolitionists did not know how to proceed: they wanted to put pressure on government to abolish slavery but felt apprehensive about appearing too radical. The Publishing Society vanished, and it would take another five years for Dutch abolitionism to revive.<sup>78</sup>

The translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that appeared in the year following its first publication in 1852 transformed the face of Dutch abolitionism. The book became an instant bestseller, the talk of society, and considerably enlarged public support for abolition. The national anti-slavery society that Groen van Prinsterer had tried to establish in 1842 but that had never become active was revived as the *Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter Bevordering van de Afschaffing der Slavernij* (Dutch Society for the Promotion of Abolition of Slavery, NMBAS). Women were excluded from membership, and it remained relatively small, with at its high point some 670 members. Some NMBAS members, such as the orthodox Protestant house painter Julien Wolbers, were disappointed that it had not become a 'true popular movement', and in an attempt to persuade his fellow abolitionists to adopt a larger-scale, more confrontational style

<sup>77</sup> Minute Books of the Society for the Publication of the *Bijdragen*, 18 and 25 Oct. 1844, Ackersdijck Collection, HS 1152, 154a; J. Ackersdijck *et al.*, *Adres aan de edelm: H.H. president en leden van de Tweede Kamer der St. Generaal over de afschaffing der slavernij* ([Utrecht], 1848).

<sup>78</sup> J. P. Siwipersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij, 1833–1863* (Groningen, 1979), 162–3; Janse, *De afschaffers*, 89–90.



of protest, he started a correspondence with BFASS board members and missionaries in the colonies to ask for their support and advice.<sup>79</sup> Wolbers, however, was the exception, and a relative outsider at that. The consensus was that this type of protest would harm the cause, and the NMBAS actively opposed such actions.

When the secretary of the BFASS, Louis Alexis Chamerovzow, proposed to go on a lecture tour of the Netherlands in 1854, the NMBAS did not want to receive him. Its secretary, J. W. Gefken, replied that the earlier visits from the BFASS had been useful, but now that a Dutch abolitionist movement had become active, he thought it 'wise that it should have a completely national colour'. A year later Gefken suggested that a visit would harm the cause, explaining:

The advocates of slavery will not miss the opportunity to denounce this initiative (well-intended as it, in itself, may be) as a foreign intervention, and will confidently report us to the government as the tools and the playthings of a foreign power. We want the anti-abolitionist movement, which is not absent here either, to be resisted by national influences.<sup>80</sup>

He added that a few Dutch abolitionists did not share this perspective. 'Some young people from Amsterdam, no doubt with the best intentions, but with very little knowledge on which to base their judgement of political questions, have come to a different view'.<sup>81</sup>

This remark goes to the heart of the matter. The NMBAS abolitionists operated within a conception of politics in which political knowledge was a prerequisite for participating in the political process. In most of his letters Gefken mentioned that the NMBAS were working upon 'the serious part of the Nation'.<sup>82</sup> Women, young men and disfranchised citizens were not thought fit to participate in the anti-slavery movement and

<sup>79</sup> Julien Wolbers, 'De afschaffing der slavernij eene volkszaak', *Tijdschrift Uitgegeven van wege de Nederlandsche Maatschappij ter Bevordering van de Afschaffing der Slavernij*, vii, 3 (Sept. 1861), 45–52; vii, 4 (Nov. 1861), 61–8. For more on Wolbers, see Maartje Janse, 'Representing Distant Victims: The Emergence of an Ethical Movement in Dutch Colonial Politics, 1840–1880', *Low Countries Historical Review*, cxxviii (2013).

<sup>80</sup> J. W. Gefken to L. A. Chamerovzow, 13 Feb. 1854, 23 June 1855, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C31/77 and 81. All of Gefken's letters are written in French, my translation.

<sup>81</sup> Gefken to Chamerovzow, 23 June 1855.

<sup>82</sup> For example, Gefken to Chamerovzow, 13 Apr. 1854, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C31/78.



hence were not actively mobilized. The 'young people' referred to were the members of the Young Men's Society for the Abolition of Slavery 'Servitus Generis Humani Flagitium' ('Slavery is the Shame of Mankind'), founded by a handful of young men in Amsterdam in 1853 after they had read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Its ambitious president, 17-year-old Frédéric Jules Pierre Moquette, initiated a correspondence with BFASS board members. Between 1855 and 1858 he wrote at least fourteen long letters containing information on the progress of Dutch abolition, and made repeated requests for support. One of his aims was to bring anti-slavery luminaries such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Craft, the fugitive slave from Georgia, to the Netherlands to lecture.<sup>83</sup> While Stowe did not visit the Netherlands when she made her European tour and Craft attempted to come but was denied a passport, lesser-known speakers such as Benjamin Millard, a former missionary to Jamaica, and the BFASS secretary Chamerovzow lectured several times at Moquette's invitation.<sup>84</sup> In his lectures, Chamerovzow repeatedly rejected insinuations of foreign interference and 'propagandism', stressing that he recognized he was a 'stranger; in a foreign land' and promising to avoid political issues and view abolition from a religious perspective only.<sup>85</sup>

Towards the end of the 1850s, the BFASS almost completely gave up on trying to influence the elite NMBAS, as they came to realize the abolition debate in parliament and the press was informed by 'difficulties which we Englishmen can scarcely understand'. In order to establish a British-style movement they understood they needed to target political outsiders such as women and young men.<sup>86</sup> When he first visited in 1855, Chamerovzow publicly appealed to women to become active in the cause, and on private visits he initiated the formation of the Young Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, affiliated with Moquette's organization, with the aim of funding schools in Suriname. The sisters Anna and Charlotte Bergendahl from Amsterdam split off from this relatively invisible society to establish a more outspoken

<sup>83</sup> Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 191; F. J. P. Moquette to Chamerovzow, 4 Sept. 1856, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C34/75.

<sup>84</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 Mar. 1855, 70–1; 1 Sept. 1855, 203.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 Sept. 1855, 195, 197, 203.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 Mar. 1855, 71; Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 191.

Dames-Comité te Amsterdam ter bevordering van de Evangelieverkondiging en de Afschaffing der Slavernij in Suriname (Amsterdam Ladies' Committee for the Promotion of Mission and Abolition of Slavery in Suriname).<sup>87</sup> Through effective fundraising activities such as bazaars of 'ladies' fancy goods', a stream of publications and prayer meetings, they became highly visible and active members of the abolitionist movement.<sup>88</sup>

Like Moquette, the Bergendahl sisters corresponded frequently with the BFASS, overcoming the undeniable language barrier: 'I hope you will be able to read my bad Englisch excuse the many faults', Charlotte Bergendahl wrote to Chamerovzow.<sup>89</sup> Wolbers concluded the first of many letters to the BFASS with a similar apology: 'I can good read the English but not good express me in that language'.<sup>90</sup> Moquette and Gefken preferred to correspond in French. Chamerovzow's public lectures in English were translated simultaneously 'phrase by phrase' by one of the board members of the Young Men's Society for the Abolition of Slavery, who also spent many evenings translating Dutch anti-slavery publications, to make them available for the BFASS board members.<sup>91</sup>

In 1855, at the height of anti-slavery activism in the Netherlands, a second women's petition was presented to the king, bearing some 750 signatures, including those of domestic servants, pub owners and wives of unskilled workers.<sup>92</sup> Combined with other initiatives that seem to have left few traces, including a student anti-slavery society, a second young men's anti-slavery society in Utrecht, and the involvement of children in Amsterdam in fundraising to free slave children, it appeared that

<sup>87</sup> Moquette to Chamerovzow, 19 Apr. 1856, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C34/71; Charlotte Bergendahl to Chamerovzow, 20 Apr. 1856, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C28/6.

<sup>88</sup> Janse, *De afschaffers*, 103–13.

<sup>89</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 Sept. 1855, 202; Temperley, *British Antislavery*, 191; Anna Bergendahl to the BFASS, 20 June 1859, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C28/3; Charlotte Bergendahl to Chamerovzow, 20 Apr. 1856, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C28/6.

<sup>90</sup> Wolbers to Chamerovzow, 8 Mar. 1855, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 22, G104.

<sup>91</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 Sept. 1855, 195, 197; Moquette to Chamerovzow, 19 Apr. 1856, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C34/71.

<sup>92</sup> Maartje Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen en de strijd voor afschaffing van de slavernij, 1840–1863', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800*, xxvi (2003).

the Dutch movement was starting to resemble its British counterpart more closely.

In both France and the Netherlands the BFASS eventually established contacts with abolitionists who favoured the immediate rather than gradual abolition of slavery. These were usually members of marginal groups who had been excluded from the main anti-slavery organizations, and now, with British support, they started to form their own associations. Because they did not have to worry so much about political expediency and social respectability, they could embrace British methods. The new generation of organizations gained a modest amount of popular support, but not that of opinion leaders, who shunned identification with such groups. The NMBAS even placed advertisements in newspapers to distance itself from the initiatives of the Young Men's Society for the Abolition of Slavery.<sup>93</sup> Moquette blamed his organization's inability to recruit more members on the fact that Dutch public opinion insisted that politics was 'not child's play' and that 'the country's notables should discuss these issues in parliament'.<sup>94</sup> Still, the initiatives of Moquette and others challenged this notion and demonstrated that Dutch anti-slavery was by no means limited to some 'occasional minuscule protests'.

## V

### FIFTY YEARS LATER?

In 1863 slavery was finally abolished in the Dutch colonies after many debates about the method and the issue of compensation to slave owners. In the end, a ten-year apprenticeship was decided upon, and a total of 13.5 million guilders was paid to slave owners in compensation. As we have seen, the British example worked in contradictory ways in continental Europe, and the precedent of generous financial compensation proved particularly problematic. In the previous decades the Dutch state had simply lacked funds for a generous buy-out. The secretary of the BFASS, Chamerovzow, admitted that in retrospect British abolitionists regretted having agreed to financial compensation,

<sup>93</sup> *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 Dec. 1856.

<sup>94</sup> *Verslag van het eerste jaarfeest gehouden zondag 12 november 1854* (n.p., [1854]), National Archive, The Hague, Archief Groen van Prinsterer, 77, 12.

which they now believed to be 'the great, the fatal error' and the 'stumbling-block in the way of Emancipation in other countries ever since'.<sup>95</sup>

The 1848 Revolution offered a window of opportunity to abolish slavery without compensation. However, the Dutch liberals refused to do so, because they wanted the new liberal government to be considered a reliable partner and to avoid any identification of liberalism with revolutionary practices that Groen van Prinsterer's anti-revolutionary party would have pounced upon. Both anti-revolutionary and liberal abolitionists, supported by 'enlightened public opinion', preferred a late abolition to an unlawful one, and were deeply concerned about the political, economic and social consequences of abolition. They remained gradualists, and only the unexpectedly high revenues flowing from the forced labour in the East Indies from the 1850s onwards provided the financial opportunity to free the slaves in the West Indies.<sup>96</sup>

But why was there no large-scale popular movement putting pressure on these cautious politicians? To start with, Dutch abolitionists did not have to battle the well-organized pro-slavery interests that their British and American counterparts faced, an opposition that mobilized and radicalized abolitionists there. Because many plantations in Suriname were struggling as it was, and because British (and later French) emancipation made the Dutch situation *anormaal*<sup>97</sup> and vulnerable to potential slave revolts, Dutch slave owners seem, from 1842 on, to have placed their hopes on generous financial compensation in the case of abolition, rather than on fighting abolition per se. French colonial interests offered relatively stronger opposition than the Dutch, thus sparking more radical anti-slavery.<sup>98</sup> Lecture tours by African American abolitionists from the United States had an enormous impact on the British public but did not extend to the Continent, probably owing to the language barrier as well as to

<sup>95</sup> *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 1 Sept. 1855, 200.

<sup>96</sup> Figures in Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel, *Nederland, 1780–1914: staat, instituties en economische ontwikkeling* (Amsterdam, 2000), 222–5.

<sup>97</sup> Siwpersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij*, 128.

<sup>98</sup> Siwpersad, *De Nederlandse regering en de afschaffing van de Surinaamse slavernij*, 108, 115, 187. On the impact of slave revolts, see Seymour Drescher and Pieter C. Emmer (eds.), *Who Abolished Slavery? Slave Revolts and Abolitionism: A Debate with João Pedro Marques* (New York, 2010).

passport problems as in the case of Craft.<sup>99</sup> Still, a more fundamental explanation lies in the character and development of Dutch political culture.

A well-known collection of articles on Dutch anti-slavery is named *Fifty Years Later*, referring to an aphorism ascribed to Heinrich Heine: 'If the world were to come to an end, I would go to Holland, where everything happens fifty years later'.<sup>100</sup> Looking at mass protests this seems to be a correct assessment. In the Netherlands mass protests would develop fully only from the last two decades of the nineteenth century with the rise of socialism and the competing response from Catholic and Protestant political groupings. Only then would political debate acquire the more emotional, confrontational, theatrical and even religious style and tone that had characterized British and American politics from the 1830s.<sup>101</sup> However, upon closer inspection, it might be more accurate to say that Britain was fifty years early. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, in his transnational survey of the development of civil society, calls Britain the 'lone exception' in that 'developments in voluntary associations typical for the 1860s and 1870s had begun a half-century earlier'. Associational techniques and the protest repertoire of the social movement pioneered in Britain would eventually spread across the world, but around mid-century the different phases (or, less ahistorically, 'styles') continued to exist side by side.<sup>102</sup>

The exchanges between British and continental abolitionists offer an opportunity to gain insight into the possibilities for, and limits to, the transfer of forms of protest from one political culture to the other. The process of cross-cultural transfer involves the transfer not only of ideas and practices but also of less tangible elements such as inspiration, legitimization and

<sup>99</sup> R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1983).

<sup>100</sup> Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later*; aphorism first used in Pieter C. Emmer, 'Anti-Slavery and the Dutch: Abolition without Reform', in Bolt and Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform*, 80.

<sup>101</sup> Ido de Haan and Henk te Velde, 'Vormen van politiek: veranderingen van de openbaarheid in Nederland, 1848–1900', *Low Countries Historical Review*, cxi (1996).

<sup>102</sup> Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society, 1750–1914* (Basingstoke, 2006), 45. See also Jonathan Sperber, 'Reforms, Movements for Reform, and Possibilities of Reform: Comparing Britain and Continental Europe', in Burns and Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform*.

moral authority.<sup>103</sup> However, even a seemingly straightforward transfer of forms of protest often turned out to be a complex process of deliberation and negotiation, in which likenesses and differences were gauged, played down or exaggerated. And even when they were adopted, they were often subject to adaptation.<sup>104</sup> To understand the transfer of forms of protest it is crucial to appreciate that transfer does not necessarily mean that a form of protest is implemented immediately, or implemented at all for that matter. Learning of a new mode of protest simply adds a new option to the repertoire of contentious action. But extending the repertoire of protest can also scare people and thus, paradoxically, lead them to adopt more cautious options than previously used. If a newly learned option is available, yet rejected as inappropriate (at least for the time being), we can refer to this as a process of 'inverse transfer'.

This inverse transfer explains why, despite the lack of resemblance between the principal abolitionist organizations of Britain on the one hand and of France and the Netherlands on the other, the British anti-slavery movement played a key role in shaping the continental movements. While abolitionists around the world felt inspired by the British example, invoked it to legitimize their actions, adopted elements of British abolitionist discourse, turned to British abolitionists for practical and moral support, and sometimes experimented with British forms of protest, inverse transfer seems to have been even more important in the process of cross-cultural exchange. The deliberate attempts of the British to engender direct transfer, and their somewhat arrogant assumptions about the superiority of British methods, raised suspicion and irritation, and often triggered an explicitly negative response, reaffirming the 'otherness' of continental politics and culture. The refusal to

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Henk te Velde, 'Political Transfer: An Introduction', Mieke Aerts, 'Feminism from Amsterdam to Brussels in 1891: Political Transfer as Transformation', and Annemarie Houkes and Maartje Janse, 'Foreign Examples as Eye Openers and Justification: The Transfer of the Anti-Corn Law League and the Anti-Prostitution Movement to the Netherlands', all in *Political Transfer*, special issue of *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire*, xii (2005).

<sup>104</sup> See, for example, Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn (eds.), *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest* (New Brunswick, 1997); Sean Chabot, *Transnational Roots of the Civil Rights Movement: African American Explorations of the Gandhian Repertoire* (Lanham, 2012).

adopt British methods of protest, therefore, cannot simply be equated with a failure to follow the British example.

To understand fully why Dutch abolitionists considered the British model as different and inappropriate, we need a closer examination of the political and religious context. In many ways Britain and the Netherlands were similar. Civil society in both countries was well developed, and a rich associational life provided plentiful experience of organizing. Political organizations were legal (or at least condoned most of the time), and parliament allowed individual members of parliament to introduce private bills, which offered popular movements the opportunity to get their proposals into parliament by securing the interest of a small number of members. The difference lay elsewhere, in the underlying conceptions of politics that informed and shaped political practices. These conceptions had grown out of political traditions and experiences and would inform the selection of appropriate protest methods.

In Britain parliament had been an important focus of political life for a long time, and not just for politicians. The widespread notion of popular rights, and the extensive practice of petitioning, meant that parliament was the place to which individuals and groups turned to vent their grievances, and often achieved remedy through it. By contrast, the Dutch parliament did not (yet) play this role in political life. After the liberal constitution of 1848 it was first and foremost the place where politicians discussed constitutional law. Rather than a practical institution inviting popular participation in politics, it was a legalistic bulwark with a very limited conception of politics (relating mainly to state finances, war and public order), which kept society at a distance. As a result, around mid-century, politics played little role in the world-view of most citizens, and citizenship was remarkably apolitical, at least in the decades between 1815 and 1848.<sup>105</sup> In a way that marked its distinctiveness from other countries, Dutch civil society developed by discouraging political zeal and hampered rather than stimulated the development of democratic politics.<sup>106</sup> On the one hand, civil institutions facilitated reform and sometimes polite political

<sup>105</sup> Janse, *De afschaffers*.

<sup>106</sup> Remieg Aerts, 'Civil Society or Democracy? A Dutch Paradox', *Low Countries Historical Review*, cxxv (2010).



protest; on the other, cultural citizenship functioned as an alternative to political citizenship. From this perspective, an organized anti-slavery movement represented a new form of political citizenship, which prefigured similar single-issue movements in the following decades, such as the ones against alcohol abuse, the exploitation of the inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies, taxes on newspapers and the liberal Education Law.<sup>107</sup> But only towards the end of the nineteenth century would politics become important to large groups of citizens.

This apolitical notion of citizenship had developed as a reaction against the revolutionary period, which was generally seen as an aberration to be avoided at all costs in the future.<sup>108</sup> It could be said that the legalistic approach to politics and parliament was an attempt to create a political practice devoid of the contestation, passion and politicization of everyday life that had characterized the revolutionary years. In Britain, where the threat of revolution had also been important, revolution did not have the same impact on political life as it had had on the Continent. Rather, it legitimized a long tradition of popular rights and freedom from absolutist rule that served to promote the political participation of citizens. In continental Europe in the wake of the era of revolution, a doctrinaire liberalism propelled the move away from absolutism towards new forms of politics. This aimed at finding a golden mean between the *ancien régime* and the disorder of revolution. Doctrinaire liberals were wary of Anglo-American political practice in which the politics of contestation and public agitation were central to political life and in which political parties and ever-changing factions vied for popular support. In countries with a rich history of revolutions, the instability of this system rendered it unattractive.<sup>109</sup> Though the influence of doctrinaire liberalism on parliamentary politics is fairly clear, further research is

<sup>107</sup> Janse, *De afschaffers*.

<sup>108</sup> Van Zanten, *Schielijk, Winzucht, Zwaarhoofd en Bedaard*.

<sup>109</sup> Luis Díez del Corral, *El liberalismo doctrinario* (Madrid, 1945); Luis Díez del Corral, *Doktrinäer Liberalismus: Guizot und sein Kreis* (Neuwied am Rhein, 1964); Aurelian Craiutu, *Liberalism under Siege: The Political Thought of the French Doctrinaires* (Lanham, 2003); te Velde, 'Onderwijzers in parlementaire politiek'; Henk te Velde, 'The Organization of Liberty: Dutch Liberalism as a Case of the History of European Constitutional Liberalism', *European Journal of Political Theory*, vii (2008). See also Alan S. Kahan, *Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: The Political Culture of Limited Suffrage* (Basingstoke, 2003).



needed to identify how it facilitated or limited extra-parliamentary mobilization. We know that, even in European countries where there was a good deal of radical activity, citizens were hardly ever mobilized and organized in any way comparable to the British and American reform campaigns. Owing to the oppressive politics of most continental regimes, networks of small-scale secret societies or crypto-political associations were more typical than national mass organizations, and violent action more typical than mass petitioning.<sup>110</sup> The Dutch regime was less oppressive, but, despite that (or perhaps because of that), Dutch radicalism around the middle of the nineteenth century was weak and politically insignificant.<sup>111</sup>

In terms of political culture and civil society the Netherlands occupied an intermediate position between Anglo-American political culture and that of Germany, France, Spain and Portugal.<sup>112</sup> I have argued elsewhere that the Dutch conception of politics as an activity confined to parliament and to a small elite group of well-informed independent citizens offered some limited room for manifestations of public opinion. However, when Dutch citizens disagreed with government policies, they mostly challenged them in a deferential, non-confrontational manner, since they valued harmony as much as their political leaders. Those who behaved according to the norm could easily find the ear of a sympathetic politician, not least because they were likely to be members of the same social group.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, those who were considered to be unfit to participate in politics — women, young men, radicals — were ignored. For a long time it was nearly impossible for members of these groups to get access to members of parliament, a reason why they petitioned the king instead. The handful of radicals, democrats and early socialists who held alternative conceptions of politics never fundamentally influenced political life before the 1870s because

<sup>110</sup> Sperber, 'Reforms, Movements for Reform, and Possibilities of Reform', 323. Guy Thomson's study of political life in the Spanish countryside, however, suggests that political culture in Spain in the third quarter of the nineteenth century was more diverse and vibrant than previously thought: Thomson, *Birth of Modern Politics in Spain*.

<sup>111</sup> M. J. F. Robijns, *Radicalen in Nederland, 1840–1851* (Leiden, 1967).

<sup>112</sup> Maartje Janse, 'Towards a History of Civil Society', *De Negentiende Eeuw*, xxxii (2008).

<sup>113</sup> Janse, 'Op de grens tussen staat en civil society'.

there were too few of them to command attention.<sup>114</sup> Doctrinaire liberalism can be understood as an attempt to perfect the 'art of separation': separating parliament from society, separating public from private identities, and separating arguments from emotions. Of course, this ideology of the public sphere to which doctrinaire liberalism is intimately connected was essentially fictitious and never fully a reality. Still, it was a powerful fiction, shaping attitudes and reality in important ways.<sup>115</sup> Conservative evangelicals like Groen van Prinsterer challenged the notion that politics and religion could be separated, seeking to integrate religion into the liberal conception of politics, but his fear of revolution meant that he never pushed the challenge too far.<sup>116</sup>

## VI

### FROM CAUTIOUS TO PASSIONATE ABOLITIONISM

The suggestion that Dutch abolitionists were never truly passionate about their cause is true in the sense that most of them believed passions should be separated from politics as dangerous forces that would lead to revolution and disorder.<sup>117</sup> But we should recall that a cautious elitism also dominated the leading British and American anti-slavery organizations until the late 1820s. The early history of American and British abolitionism is replete with small, cautious and elitist organizations that have often been overlooked or treated briefly as the prehistory of 'true' abolitionism. In these years radical women and black abolitionists were ignored and not accepted as full members of the mainstream abolitionist organizations. However, around 1830 abolitionist organizations were transformed within a few years from relatively elitist, male-dominated and gradualist organizations to being radical and inclusive organizations demanding change without delay.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Robijns, *Radicalen in Nederland*, 326–33.

<sup>115</sup> Michael Walzer, 'Liberalism and the Art of Separation', *Political Theory*, xii (1984); Harold Mah, 'Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians', *Journal of Modern History*, lxxii (2000).

<sup>116</sup> Te Velde, *Stijlen van leiderschap*, 33, 44; te Velde, 'Onderwijzers in parlementaire politiek'.

<sup>117</sup> Alex van Stipriaan, 'Stilte! Niet storen! De slavernij is afgeschaft', *De Negentiende Eeuw*, xxix (2005).

<sup>118</sup> See Howard Temperley, 'Anti-Slavery', in Patricia Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from Without in Early Victorian England* (London, 1974); Richard S. Newman, *The* (cont. on p. 156)

One of the most important explanations for this successful mass mobilization is the religious framing of slavery and abolition. For Quakers and evangelicals, as well as members of other denominations, slavery came to be seen as a national sin. Fighting it meant averting God's wrath; for Britons it meant proving the country to be worthy of its empire. Removing slavery, many believed, would speed the second coming of Christ.<sup>119</sup> The implications of the notion that slavery was a 'monstrous sin, that should die this moment' were laid out by Elizabeth Heyrick, a Quaker from Leicester, in her *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition*. She criticized the 'spirit of accommodation and conciliation' in the abolitionist movement as a 'spirit of delusion' and called for active opposition and a 'holy war' against slavery. The movement became radicalized — a process in which political outsiders such as women and free blacks played a crucial role — and the main abolitionist organizations embraced immediatism instead of gradualism.<sup>120</sup> The emergence of immediatism in American and British anti-slavery is related to a fundamental shift in religious temperament and emotional culture that made large groups of people 'passionate' about fighting slavery.<sup>121</sup> This radical opposition to slavery was charged with emotion, especially a loathing of sin. The world-view and rhetoric produced by evangelical conversion were based on the sharp dichotomy between good and evil, sin and virtue, and this did not allow for a moderate position, but rather produced an 'ultraist'

(n. 118 cont.)

*Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2002).

<sup>119</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford, 2002); Ronald G. Walters, *Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore, 1984); Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York, 1994).

<sup>120</sup> [Orpen], *Principles, Plans and Objects, of 'The Hibernian Negro's Friend Society'*, 2, 3, 6; [Elizabeth Heyrick], *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition, or, An Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest, and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery*, 1st edn (London, 1824), 16–17, 18; Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, esp. chs. 4–6.

<sup>121</sup> Michael Young, 'A Revolution of the Soul: Transformative Experiences and Immediate Abolition', in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta (eds.), *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago, 2001); for a more general analysis of the importance of emotions in social movements, see the introduction.

mentality.<sup>122</sup> This radical position did more than transform the discourse of reformers: it opened up paths to political participation for those formerly excluded. One did not have to be well informed about proposals for legislation or the financial issues involved in monetary compensation for slave owners; one simply had to be for or against slavery.

Anti-slavery was connected to religion in another way too, as the development of methods of mass protest was intimately linked to the politicization of religious issues. Religious constituencies were the first to experiment with the methods that would characterize modern social movements, often derived from revival techniques.<sup>123</sup> As the historical sociologist Peter Stamatov argues, the strength and radicalization of national anti-slavery networks were directly related to the strength of movements for religious renewal and reform. In Britain and the United States political activism by Quakers, Methodists and evangelicals functioned as a catalyst for the radicalization of abolitionism and the renewal of methods of protest.<sup>124</sup> In continental European countries, where these forms of religious political activism did not gain a strong hold, relatively exclusive and cautious social movements remained the dominant mode for citizens' participation in politics.

The fact that the strand of abolitionism that developed within the Dutch Réveil movement resembled British abolitionism is no coincidence. Most of the British-style Dutch initiatives, such as the petition of the women of Amsterdam, the young men's and women's organizations and children's fundraising activities, were related to the Vereeniging ter Verbreiding der Waarheid (Society for the Propagation of Truth), an inner city mission in the poor Amsterdam neighbourhood of Jordaan, aimed at 'spreading the Réveil to the 3rd and 4th classes of society'.<sup>125</sup> Within these circles, it seems, a similar but relatively weak shift in emotional

<sup>122</sup> Ronald Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860*, revised edn (New York, 1997), 28; Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*.

<sup>123</sup> Peter Stamatov, 'The Religious Field and the Path-Dependent Transformation of Popular Politics in the Anglo-American World, 1770–1840', *Theory and Society*, xl (2011); Sperber, 'Reforms, Movements for Reform, and Possibilities of Reform'.

<sup>124</sup> Stamatov, 'Activist Religion, Empire, and the Emergence of Modern Long-Distance Advocacy Networks', esp. 616–18.

<sup>125</sup> Annemarie Houkes, 'Réveil van het volk: de Vereeniging ter Verbreiding der Waarheid, 1847–1870', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis na 1800*, xxviii, 63 (2005).

culture took place. The smaller-scale, elitist (even aristocratic) character of the Réveil, however, prevented the development of a national mass movement rooted in this new emotional culture.

Even though *Uncle Tom's Cabin* triggered a remarkable emotional response and revived the anti-slavery movement, the issue of slavery never moved the Dutch public at large.<sup>126</sup> Religious issues were far better at mobilizing the masses and rousing passions, as the notable exception of the anti-Catholic *Aprilbeweging* of 1853 demonstrates. A national protest against the liberal law granting Dutch Catholics the right to restore their hierarchy resulted in a mass petition of two hundred thousand signatures as well as some anti-Catholic violence. The protest proved politically ineffective (the law was passed); participants immediately afterwards denounced their own actions as 'ridiculous', and hardly ever mentioned it again in subsequent decades, as they seem to have been somewhat ashamed of their emotional outcry.<sup>127</sup> Both the *Aprilbeweging* and British-style abolitionism were deemed inappropriate in the Dutch context because they clashed with a dominant understanding common to doctrinaire liberalism and elitist anti-revolutionary Réveil: if revolution was to be kept at bay, strong emotions should not be displayed in public and should certainly not be mixed with politics.<sup>128</sup>

★ ★ ★

Rather than attempting and failing to emulate British-style abolitionism, continental abolitionists consciously rejected large parts of the model as inappropriate in their national context. The tone and content of the British missionaries' appeal only widened this divide, as continental recipients understood that appeal as embedded in British imperialism. The British ambivalence

<sup>126</sup> Ulla Jansz, 'Hartstocht en opgewondenheid: kamerdebatten over mensenrechten in de koloniën rond 1850', *Jaarboek parlementaire geschiedenis* (2003); Janse, *De afschaffers*, 114–19.

<sup>127</sup> Piet de Rooy, *Ons stipje op de waereldkaart: de politieke cultuur van modern Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2014), 125; Wim Janse and Jurjen Vis (eds.), *Staf en storm: het herstel van de bisschoppelijke hiërarchie in Nederland in 1853. Actie en reactie* (Hilversum, 2002).

<sup>128</sup> Annemarie Houkes, *Christelijke vaderlanders: godsdienst, burgerschap en de Nederlandse natie, 1850–1900* (Amsterdam, 2009), esp. ch. 6; Maartje Janse, '“Vereeniging en verlangen vereenigd te werken”: Réveil en civil society', in van Lieburg (ed.), *Opwekking van de natie*, esp. 174–5.

towards collaboration with continental abolitionists, construed as a partnership but implicitly based on a notion of conversion and instruction, often proved counter-productive. Despite this rejection, continental abolitionism was influenced by the British example. A broad and significant process of transfer of British forms of protest can be distinguished. It is best conceived as a process of inverse transfer, in that it involved considering but discarding options as unsuitable to the national context. At the same time even the most cautious continental abolitionists adopted elements of the British repertoire. After some hesitation, they organized public 'meetings' (using the English word) to rally support for abolitionism. The three anti-slavery petitions of 1842 delivered a total of no more than a few hundred signatures, yet undeniably reinforced the idea that the number of supporters, in addition to the more familiar 'quality' argument, was a significant political factor. Some groups of political outsiders embraced the British repertoire of protest with more enthusiasm. Both the elitist and the popular abolitionist initiatives remained small-scale compared to their British and American counterparts, but within the Dutch political context they were considerable in size. Experimenting with new forms of politics, Dutch abolitionists — most cautious, some passionate — pioneered the development of extra-parliamentary political movements that would evolve over the following half-century into a practice more closely resembling Anglo-American reform movements.

Britain's early abolition had been the result of the coincidence of a unique yet short-lived coalition of anti-slavery forces demanding immediate abolition of slavery with government's unique yet short-lived susceptibility to this type of pressure. Operating in a newly expanded climate of opinion, using the language of evangelicalism, a cross-class alliance emerged, which was especially strong in the urban and mining areas that were heavily influenced by (Methodist) evangelicalism.<sup>129</sup> Following the metaphor of a famous map that served as illustration in one of the first histories of British abolitionism in 1839, they came together like swelling torrents in a great

<sup>129</sup> David Turley, 'British Anti-Slavery Reassessed', in Burns and Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform*.

anti-slavery river, yet after 1833 split again, 'from one river into numerous estuaries, streams, and puddles'.<sup>130</sup> By then they had grasped the opportunity that had opened up around 1830. The fear of revolution and unrest, revived by the revolutions in France, Belgium and Poland in 1830, made government more susceptible to the claims and the style of organization developed by reformers.<sup>131</sup> As Linda Colley states in her analysis of the successful reforms of Catholic Emancipation (1829), parliamentary reform (1832) and the abolition of slavery (1833) in Britain, 'the years between Waterloo and the accession of Queen Victoria — and especially the late 1820s and early 1830s — were arguably the only period in modern British history in which peoplepower . . . played a prominent and pervasive role in effecting significant political change'.<sup>132</sup> We should thus neither exaggerate the exceptionalism of countries that abolished slavery relatively late, nor underrate how exceptional British abolition was. Most of all, we should conceive of the differences in national styles of abolition and abolitionism not as a simple dichotomy but rather as a complex system in which each helped to define the possibilities of the others.

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<sup>130</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, new edn (London, 1839), map facing p. 164; Huzzey, *Freedom Burning*, 7–8.

<sup>131</sup> Burns and Innes (eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform*, 14–16 (editors' intro.).

<sup>132</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 362–3.