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Voluntary associations and political participation

Voluntary associations played a role in processes of politicisation that are visible in Europe in the nineteenth century. This is not in itself a new insight, but we lack a good understanding of how and why this was the case. In my contribution I will reflect on various ways in which associational life broadened popular participation as well as broadened people's understandings of politics between 1820-1860. Middle-class reformers of all sorts and stripes played an important role in reinventing voluntary associations as tools for political pressure. Using examples from such organizations as the Irish Catholic Association and British antislavery societies in the 1820s, and from a Dutch temperance society in the 1840s and 1850s, it will become clear that mass organization in politics could be very attractive, and was sometimes successful.

Organization of people without voting rights on a political issue was highly contested. Especially on the European continent reformers organized on a smaller scale as that seemed to better fit the national political culture. Still, smaller-scale national reform organizations were crucial in the process of reimagining the role of the people in post-revolutionary politics.

In arguing for the importance of voluntary associations for political participation, scholars have often pointed at the skills people gain by participating in associational life, either as members or as organizers. A robust associational life was crucial for the formation of a stable civil society, social scientists like Robert Putnam have argued – voluntary associations would have functioned as schools for democracy.¹ Historians have studied the relation between associational life and democracy², but there are several examples in which a dense associational life does not further democratization, and even can become an obstacle to democratization.³ We need a broader understanding of the ways in which voluntary associations drove processes of politicization. The ambition of this chapter is to explore different ways in which voluntary associations could and did facilitate, or speed up, processes of politicization.

Irish Catholic Association

The Irish Catholic Association (1823-1829) was organized as part of the struggle for Catholic Emancipation.⁴ It aimed at the abolition of many of the restrictions placed on Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom, most importantly the exclusion of Catholics

from political office, in which it succeeded in 1829. Instead of using violence, this organization aimed at 'Constantly increasing constitutional agitation' through mass organization.⁵ The success of this approach was astounding. In addition to 14,000 full members of the metropolitan association, in a short while over three million associate members of the parish associations could be counted, out of a total population of seven million people. This resulted in a weekly income of over £400, known as the Catholic Rent, a substantial amount of money.⁶

The undisputed leader of the Catholic Association was lawyer Daniel O'Connell. He offered the downtrodden Catholics a new role model: self-assured, verbally aggressive, and uncompromising. He was popular in all the meanings of the word, became a national icon and an almost religious figure: 'O'Connell is of the people ... or, rather, he is Ireland himself'.⁷ The main activity of former, elitist initiatives for Catholic Emancipation had been to petition parliament in order to initiate parliamentary debates on Catholic claims. This had become a 'mockery', O'Connell claimed, – they had focused too much on the 'abstract question' of emancipation, and this had alienated those afflicted by it in their daily lives. By shifting their attention to particular grievances on the local level, their protest would have much greater impact. O'Connell understood the potential power of a shift from petitioning on behalf of people to stimulating them to petition themselves. One of the goals of the organization thus became to instruct the Irish people in their political rights, especially their right to petition parliament: 'a right of which they are ignorant of possessing'.⁸

The Catholic Association informed the people of their rights in different ways. Newspapers and tracts were important in doing so. On top of that, Thomas Wyse wrote an extensive *Political Catechism*, an apology of the Catholic Association in the form of religious instruction, for a broad popular audience. It included questions such as: 'Was the Catholic Association illegal or unconstitutional?' In the answer he explained: 'The Association was instituted to obtain redress of grievances by means of petition, –petitions could not be conducted without expense—this expense could not be met without contributions; these things are all constitutional.'⁹ The provincial meetings, a sort of annual conventions, organized in a different county every year, were also used for political education. There organizers offered a wide audience (no less than 50,000 people attended) 'a series of impressive political lectures on their grievances and their rights'.¹⁰

The 'Catholic Rent' is often described as O'Connell's 'most striking innovation in political technique'.¹¹ This can be nuanced somewhat: collecting small contributions was not entirely new in the context of Catholic Emancipation, but had never been used on this

scale and in this exact manner. O'Connell had created the Catholic Rent as a formidable political tool, by combining two effective forms from the religious world. One was the organization structure of the Catholic Church: existing parishes became by default local auxiliary societies for the Catholic Association. The other was the idea of rolling out a penny-a-week-societies on a grand scale, an idea that was pioneered by the British and Foreign Bible Society. This organization, which had many Irish auxiliary societies as well, had pioneered the dense hierarchical national organizational structure, as well as proven that a high number of members who can only pay a penny a week still account for a high weekly income.¹²

Combining these two was a brilliant move to organize Catholics at the parish level, and to engage millions of Irish men and women in the cause of Catholic Emancipation, by asking them to pay at least a penny a month to support the organization. This created a layered organizational structure: full members (c. 14,000 by 1829) had voting rights and paid a guinea a year, while the Catholic Rent established a sort of supporting membership, in a 'subsidiary association', comparable to that of local auxiliary societies that engaged in fund-raising for a national parent society. Local priests were declared to be agents of the society, and organized the levying of the Rent.¹³ Some priests were reluctant to play a political role. However, Wyse explains that they could not resist public opinion: 'in the progress of the struggle, it was not the priest who led, but the people.... The priest after a little time, was hurried along by the torrent [of public opinion], and had only to decide whether he should ride on its surface, or be buried altogether beneath the stream'.¹⁴ In Ireland, in the 1820s, politics and religion were combined in new ways, that were institutionalized through mass organization.¹⁵

The Catholic Rent created a strong connection between the local grievances and the national efforts to redress them. The Catholic Association promised to use the funds raised to cover legal assistance of those suffering under attacks of Orangemen, to build churches and schools, and to petition Parliament. In terms of finances the Rent was a success from the beginning: By February 1829 a total amount of £51,828 was raised by millions of small gifts – many of the pounds had been made up by 240 gifts of one penny.¹⁶

But the Catholic Rent was also important in forging new connections and creating new imagined communities. The national organization and national newspapers played an important role in this. A strong desire grew on a local level to see their local grievances, and their efforts against them, mentioned in the national press. People started reading newspapers, often in Reading Rooms especially set up by Rent Committees for that

purpose. The Catholic Association spread a massive number of pamphlets, tracts, placards and addresses throughout the country, where they were eagerly read. As O’Ferrall shows in his important study of the Catholic Association, ‘Massive publicity, oratory and political meetings, the support of the priests, the gathering and articulation of grievances and the development of local political organisations all sprang from the Rent. ... One speaker told the Catholic Association that ‘the grand secret, ... the true philosopher’s stone of Catholic politics’ had been ... at last discovered’. The Catholic Rent was a catalyst in the process of politicization of the country. Much stronger than agitation on local grievances could have effected by itself, the reciprocity of the Catholic Rent connected local politics to the national level, ‘giving the Irish people a decisive parliamentary orientation’.¹⁷

The typical response of ordinary Irishmen to hardship had often been violence, but the Catholic Association now offered an alternative, when they opened up ‘the prospect of constitutional relief’ of these grievances, as a London newspaper put it.¹⁸ By insisting that all local grievances would be solved by emancipation, the Catholic Association politicized local conflicts, and connected them to national politics. The struggle for Catholic Emancipation became a movement for the total liberation of all Irish Catholics from all of their grievances.¹⁹

The leaders of the Catholic Association cast local struggles as a part of national, even international, struggle against oppression and for freedom transformed the way people understood their lives, and their relation to the world. In speeches before the Catholic Association several parallels were drawn to colonial conflicts and freedom struggles against colonial rule. Britain treated Ireland as a colony. Sheil addressed the Catholics as ‘slaves’, O’Connell complained the Quakers did ‘petition for the Negroes and ... pass their Catholic neighbours by’.²⁰ Britain ‘had degraded this country to the condition of Jamaica ... they were placed in the upper gallery of the British Empire, where they could scarcely hear the claps or hisses’.²¹ They warned of the ‘example of South America’, with all its struggles for national independence. The Catholic Association, Sheil exclaimed, was engaged in ‘the great work of liberation’ that could be seen all over the world.²² These references popularized the notion that colonial injustice was rightfully challenged, and that victory in a colonial freedom struggle was possible. What is more, they invited all Irishmen and Irishwomen to become a part of this great work of liberation, investing the struggle around local grievances with a new importance and attraction.

The success of the Catholic Association was based on mobilizing and disciplining members on a new scale, but this was only possible because its leaders employed the

power of imagination. Through the Catholic Association, Irish Catholics started reimagining the world and their place in it. Envisioning themselves as part of a nationwide, mighty movement for change empowered people in ways unimaginable before. Politics is often a story of elites, either those in power, or those leading opposition against it, and in some ways this story is too, as, for lack of sources, it does not contain direct perspectives of members at the parish level. Still, there would not be much to tell if it had not been for men and women who started to believe in the radical idea that change was possible, and even more radical: that they themselves could effect that change. Thomas Wyse, one of its leaders (and its first historian) brilliantly describes this experience of empowerment brought on by the first major successes of the Catholic Association, one that still was as much a self-fulfilling prophecy as it was a certainty:

The people believed themselves capable of every thing, — it was a great spell, — they were soon, in fact, what they believed themselves to be. ... A new tone of thinking and of acting became general and familiar throughout all Ireland. — Confidence in an instrument which had now been fully proved; an habitual and well-organised combination; strict obedience to the laws; constitutional agitation, henceforth became the code of the great confederacy of the Catholics.²³

The dramatic climax of the campaign for Catholic Emancipation were a series of election campaigns. Forty-shilling freeholders, the lowest and poorest class entitled to the franchise, had long been pressured by their protestant landlords to vote as they told them to. The Catholic Association organized a campaign that was based on an almost individual appeal to all the forty-shilling freeholders to vote for pro-Catholic candidates. Wyse, the author of the *Political Catechism*, considered independence of the freeholders ‘as the essential theoretical principle of the constitutional balance of power’. He set out on a five-week tour through the hinterland of Waterford, accompanied by a priest who would translate his speeches into Gaelic if necessary. Wyse looked upon the electors ‘as potentially reasonable beings’ and explained to them that landlords had no constitutional right to force tenants to vote for them.²⁴ To make sure the voters would comply with the plan, they were not just exposed to rational arguments, but placed under great social and moral pressure by lay agitators like Wyse, and by their priests.²⁵

The plan worked: the Catholic Association won several elections, even electing Daniel O’Connell as a Member of Parliament. This resulted in Catholic Emancipation in 1829, as King and Parliament reluctantly accepted that they had lost control to the Catholic Association, and that a bloody insurgency would be the result if O’Connell was not accepted to his seat in Westminster. The forty-shilling freeholders, many of whom

had indeed lost their homes and their livelihood, now lost their voting rights, as well. They paid a high price for acting upon their new political knowledge of their rights.

The strategists, leaders and members of the Catholic Association explored the many possibilities large-scale organization had to offer in a way that no organization had done before and that would not easily or often be paralleled in later times. One of the reasons for this is that the Irish Catholics found themselves in a unique position: their rights were suppressed within a liberal system based on the notion of rights and freedom, while they could use the structure of the Catholic Church to organize efficiently. The major shift in popular attitude that the Catholic Association sought to promote was that ordinary people started to realize that they had the right to petition, to vote against their landlord's wishes, to speak their mind, and to organize in protest against unequal treatment. The political education of ordinary men and women, who started to understand how local problems were the result of a broader system of injustices, and how they were part of an imagined community fighting these injustices, resulted in a strong popular consciousness of national politics.

British Ladies' Antislavery Societies

Antislavery is another good example of a cause that involved many non-voters in a political struggle. We know this is true for working class people, but here I want to reflect specifically on the way English women organized against slavery in the 1820s, the same years the Catholic Association flourished in Ireland. Many of these women were middle-class women, and reluctant to engage in politics. The separate sphere ideology, that had gained dominance in middle-class circles suggested that women were responsible for their families, their homes, while men were responsible for conducting business and politics. Women who were eager to participate in the antislavery movement justified this in two often combined strategies: one was to deny they were engaging in politics, and rather framing their efforts as Christian benevolence, the other was redefining the boundaries of politics and claiming that there were ways of doing politics that women should participate in, for instance through petitioning or through consumer boycotts. In the process, women's participation in the antislavery movement radicalized the movement as a whole.²⁶

While the campaigns leading up to the abolition of the slave trade (1807) had mobilized an unprecedented amount of popular support, this was mainly expressed through mass petitions signed by men. Between 1807 and 1823, abolitionism was dormant, and the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout

the British Dominions that was established in 1823 to revive the movement consisted of a London-based group of Evangelical and Quaker merchants, whose main tactic was rousing public opinion to support their leader Wilberforce's attempts to abolish slavery through Parliament. Out of frustration over the lack of co-operation of plantation owners and government officials, the London Society became more combative in tone, and started publishing a periodical, the *Antislavery Reporter*.

The most dramatic change, however, was effected by calls for more radical action that originated from the provinces, and most importantly from women. In 1825 in Birmingham a Female Society for the Relief of British Negro Slaves was established, not as an auxiliary society to the existing antislavery society, but as an independent organization, which defined as one of its chief objects the formation of more ladies' antislavery societies. Of the seventy-three ladies' associations founded between 1825 and 1833, around twenty were formed under the influence of the Female Society for Birmingham. Because of their success in mobilizing women and raising awareness and funds to battle slavery, the London society also started encouraging the formation of ladies' associations.²⁷

Many of these women, and an increasing number of men, were influenced by the new, radical perspective on abolitionism of Elizabeth Heyrick, who anonymously published a pamphlet titled *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition* in 1824. In it, she chided the antislavery society for its openness to accommodation and conciliation, and for its naïve trust in change through parliament. Slavery was a 'monstrous SIN, that should die this moment', she argued, and immediate action was imperative, as every man and woman in Britain carried guilt for the ongoing existence of slavery. Seen from the perspective of religious and moral duty, a new strategy was needed, one that was not based on political processes, but one that would apply pressure from without in new forms, and from new groups. Her calls for a 'holy war' against slavery, enlisting women as well as men, with a boycott of slave produce as one of its core activities, offered a radical alternative to existing abolitionism.²⁸

Especially her explicit denunciation of gradualism and forceful defence of immediatism in the fight against slavery had an enormous impact on abolitionism around the world. It was no coincidence that women were among the first to embrace the slogan of immediatism. Middle-class men participated in politics and had learned how to play the game of politics. Heyrick was annoyed with men telling women abolitionists that demanding immediate emancipation would not work, that it would 'be most *impolitic*, — for it would never be granted; by striving to obtain too much, you would lose all. You

must go cautiously and gradually to work.’²⁹ As political outsiders, women had lost their patience with this strategy. And it was through their voluntary associations that they felt empowered to choose their own, more radical course. Most of the women’s antislavery organizations in England and Scotland in the late 1820s explicitly followed Heyrick’s immediatism and rejected the gradualism of male abolitionists. As one female antislavery society wrote: ‘Men may propose only gradually to abolish the worst of crimes, but why should we countenance such enormities?... I trust no Ladies’ Association will ever be formed with such words attached to it.’³⁰

The exciting (or dangerous, based on the perspective) implication of radical antislavery organizations was that they created an effective vehicle for participation of political outsiders in a public debate on a highly political issue. Heyrick’s criticism of parliamentary strategies and her anti-political stance did not mean the new movement she envisioned was not political – it was instead based on a more inclusive conception of politics: one that was based on religious and moral arguments; one that included personal practices of consumption, and personal identities, and one in which those formally excluded from politics could participate.³¹

Around 1830 these radical ideas gained adherence among men too. Provincial radicals played a key role in this. Irish abolitionists, influenced by the Birmingham Ladies Society, claimed their own organization was more radical than the London Committee, as it aimed at immediate abolition, for all slaves (not just those in the British colonies), and it had developed a plan to employ itinerant agents to effectively propagate antislavery ideas. The Hibernian Negro’s Friend Society, as the Irish antislavery society was named, directly invited the London antislavery society to emulate its example.³² Middle-class merchants such as James Cropper invested money, time and effort into initiatives that challenged the more conservative London Committee. Based in Liverpool, Cropper used his marketing skills in an attempt to revive the abolitionist movement. As a ‘social movement entrepreneur’ he targeted the (potentially more radical) outsiders in his Anglo-American network.³³ In 1831, partly through pressure from female auxiliaries, the official goal of the national society became immediatism.³⁴

That same year, provincial radicals took the initiative from the national society by organizing and funding the Agency Committee, a semi-independent committee of the Anti-Slavery Society, which intensified propaganda through the use of itinerant agents, a massive amount of print work, and the framing of slavery as a ‘national sin’.³⁵ In less than a decade the British antislavery movement as a whole radicalized as the result of two factors. One was that relative outsiders now had the tools that empowered them to develop

an alternative strategy, the most important tools being their own voluntary associations and the cheap printing press. The second factor was that the democratic character of the national anti-slavery society made the established abolitionist movement relatively vulnerable to these outsiders, who had leverage through their well-organized and well-funded campaigns.

Even though Heyrick's criticism of parliamentary strategies may suggest the opposite, this radicalization by the efficient organization of relative outsiders meant that more people had become part of a political campaign. Not only did they challenge existing notions of who could participate in this political issue, but they also challenged how this could and should be done. Personal consumption had become politicized when some women and men started to reject 'slave sugar'. Perhaps even more importantly, they succeeded in making a radical anti-slavery position dominant in the movement as a whole: slavery was so evil, that no political compromises or concessions could be made to it. The position that immediate abolition, without regard for the political or economic consequences, was the only acceptable policy, had far-reaching implications for political life. It can be understood as a conception of politics that invited/facilitated/democratization, because now even those without sufficient knowledge of politics could take a legitimate stand in it. Knowledge, expediency, and strategy were seen, by many, as a liability rather than a prerequisite for sound political and moral judgment. If you only needed your Bible and your conscience to know what was right and wrong in politics, almost anyone could participate, and almost anything could be politicized, in ways that were accessible to non-elites and outsiders as well.

The Dutch Temperance Movement

Another way in which voluntary associations could facilitate politicization was when existing organizations that were not considered political politicized. The Dutch Temperance movement offers a good example of this. This movement was born in the 1830s, following in the footsteps of British, American and German initiatives.³⁶ After some local temperance societies had been active for a few years, most notably in the harbour city of Rotterdam, in 1842 temperance advocates established the first national organization: the Dutch Society for the Abolition of Strong Drinks (NVASD, Nederlandsche Vereeniging tot Afschaffing van Sterken Drank). In the 1830s and 1840s this organization's strategy was best described as personal reform through elite example. In that sense they were an exponent of traditional charity, in which class hierarchy was reinforced. Nevertheless, as an organization it was remarkably inclusive. Local notables,

as well as men and women of middle and working classes were all asked to sign a pledge, stating that they would abstain from drinking liquor and would try to persuade others to do the same. There was no mandatory membership fee, all income came from voluntary gifts. Since signing the pledge was enough to be considered a member of the NVASD, the organization spanned the usually very deep divides between class and gender, in an attempt to mobilize all against the dangerous influence of King Alcohol. Granted, on a local level those who paid a yearly membership fee were treated differently from those who did not pay any subscription: the former were invited for all meetings and could vote. The focus of the pledge, and hence of the NVASD, was mainly aimed at decreasing the genever consumption of the lower classes (genever was a dutch variant of gin) – drinking wine and beer was allowed. It would take until 1881 before an organization promoting total abstinence of alcoholic consumption was organized in The Netherlands, some decades later than in the United Kingdom, where the notion of teetotalism originated.³⁷

In the early 1850s something interesting happened. In the decade after the establishment of the national organization, temperance advocates had grown disappointed with the many broken promises of its lower-class members. Many of them could not resist the social pressure of going back to drinking alcohol, especially genever, as this was engrained in all parts of life – work, socialising, celebrations -. It was difficult to place yourself outside of society. The breaking of their pledge was considered dishonorable by the middle class and elite members, who increasingly wished to distance themselves from the lower-class members, by changing the organizational structure of the NVASD.

When, in 1851, they learned of the American Maine Laws, prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, many saw this as an excellent opportunity to change the goal and character of the organization. After several heated debates, the NVASD decided to change its course and adopt a clear political aim: the prohibition of liquor. The consequence of this decision was that its 10,000 members had now become members of a political organization without ever having consciously decided to engage in politics. In other words, the politicization of the organization as a matter of fact politicized its members. Some may have given up their membership because of this, but there is no evidence that membership declined as a result of politicization.

What did members of the NVASD notice of this shift to politics? Most importantly, it initiated new communication strategies, meant to reach a wider audience that included non-elites. The leadership of the NVASD had realized by now that prohibitionist legislation should be preceded by a shift in public opinion. From 1853 it started to organize ‘meetings’, where several short speeches entertained the crowd more than the

traditional, sermon-like, long addresses had before. During those meetings, politics and prohibition were discussed at length, too.³⁸ In 1858 the organization published its first yearly almanac, aimed at a broader, non-elite audience. It contained a ten-page long report about the prolonged parliamentary debates about the question whether an official Parliamentary Inquiry should be conducted, under the title ‘The Strong Liquor Question in the Second Chamber of the Estates General’.³⁹ The article included dozens of quotes from the speeches of MPs on the problems connected to drinking. Especially the statement in the Preliminary Report on the proposal to organize an inquiry, that ‘alcohol abuse is a CANCER, gnawing away at the moral and material well-being of the nation’ would be seen as a recognition of its political relevance, and would be often repeated.⁴⁰ A Parliamentary Inquiry was voted down, but the almanac cited MP J.J. Rochussen that public opinion, not parliament, would decide whether government would have to implement policy to counter the effects of alcohol abuse.⁴¹

Alcohol abuse should no longer be regarded an individual problem but should be understood as a social and political problem, that threatened the whole of society. It was often likened to infectious diseases to drive this point home: ‘the consumption of strong liquor is a social disease, worse than pestilence, smallpox, or cholera; and thus, more serious measures should be taken against it, than we take against these [diseases], if we do not want to perish as a people’.⁴² Social and economic progress was at stake here, as temperance advocates claimed that prohibiting alcohol would empty the prisons, mental asylums, reform institutes, and brothels, while it would fill up schools, churches and workplaces with a new generation of productive citizens. Thus, alcohol abuse and prohibition were imagined as integral to the social fabric as a whole, as a part of either a systematic decline or regeneration. Changing public opinion on alcohol abuse was mainly explaining the ‘social science’ behind the effects of alcohol abuse.

Another reason that the NVASD embraced the notion of changing public opinion was that it embraced a somewhat democratic understanding of politics. After 1848 the Netherlands was a constitutional monarchy with a liberal constitution. Petrus Hofstede de Groot, a minister of the protestant church who was very active in all sorts of reform organizations attempted put it thus in a speech for an audience of respectable middle-class members of the *Maatschappij tot Nut van 't Algemeen* (Society for the General Good), whom he hoped to recruit as members of the NVASD. After asking how alcohol abuse should be stopped, he answered:

Not by government intervention, at least: not yet. In Russia this would be efficient; but now that we elect the governments of towns, provinces, and the legislative

power of this country all through the popular vote, it should be a popular conviction [lit: ‘volksvertuiging’], that strong liquor should be prohibited, before the government can take such a measure. In North America the government prohibits the manufacturing and sale of strong liquor in many states; but – only because it had become public opinion that this should be done.⁴³

While the politicization of the organization introduced many non-voters into political issues, it also pushed people out of the organization. Women had played a considerable role in the organization when it was still regarded an organization for charity or moral reform. While there are no exact data detailing the development of membership numbers of women over time, based on the rhetoric used in its publications, the organization increasingly viewed men as preferred members of the organization. Women, it stressed in an instruction to its members, should be presented as victims of alcohol, first and foremost. Drunkards abusing their wives and children became a classic trope in temperance rhetoric. From the 1880s this tendency became even stronger, when the rhetoric of the temperance movement became infused with a new sort of masculinity. Temperance advocates were presented as valiant knights battling the dragon of alcohol, rescuing women and children.⁴⁴ However, the process of politicization also played an important role in this development: women were pushed out of the Dutch temperance organization when it politicized, as for most people, for most of the nineteenth century, politics and women were understood to exclude each other.⁴⁵ However, there are also examples where the exclusion of women resulted in a political mobilization of women. The most famous example is perhaps the antislavery movement in the United States, where debates over women’s participation in the work of abolitionist organizations sparked the women’s rights movement.⁴⁶

Concluding remarks

For those who wanted to avoid both revolt and general suffrage, voluntary associations offered an opportunity to reimagine political life and the role the people could play in it. They were perceived as modern, and powerful tools for change, by critics as well as enthusiasts.⁴⁷ The three case studies presented indicate that voluntary associations could contribute to processes of politicization in at least four ways. First of all, organizations were effective in offering its members a political education, discussing political matters in the metropole, but also informing them of their rights, and encouraging them to use those rights. Especially the right of petitioning, and in the case of Catholic Emancipation, of voting your conscience, were important here.

Second, voluntary associations facilitated the entrance of new groups of people into the political domain. Those millions of Irishmen and women who were mobilized through their parish priests; the tens of thousands of middle-class Evangelical British women; the thousands of Dutch Temperance advocates — all participated in a political struggle simply through the fact that they were members of a political pressure group. It would be hard to imagine them all participating in these struggles if it was not through these organizations, as most of them did not have many other options for speaking out in politics. Even the most accessible of political rights, the right to petition, was not a right they were used to executing, for reasons such as not knowing they had that right, not knowing how to petition, or not feeling it was appropriate (for a woman for instance) to petition. Signing up for membership of an organization with a specific goal lowered the threshold for signing a petition considerably, it seems. And these types of participation in politics could create an appetite for further political participation, and a new sense of citizenship.⁴⁸

Third, voluntary associations were crucial in spreading new perspectives that allowed their members to see the world through a political lense. In the case of Catholic Emancipation local grievances were presented and understood as examples of a system of oppression, of a systematic injustice that should be fought both on a local and on a national level. In the case of the temperance movement alcohol and drunkards were increasingly understood as dangerous threats to national prosperity and the social fabric as a whole. When this threat was conceived of as so great that direct political intervention, in the form of a prohibition law, was required, the movement as a whole politicized. Everyday habits, everyday encounters, everyday grievances and frustrations, could all become politicized.

Forth, and last, membership of an organization that fought these now politicized problems, suggested in their rhetoric that their members had a role to play in solving these problems. Being part of a wide movement for liberty, justice, and national prosperity, invited members to craft a political identity for themselves. This political identity was a collective identity in the sense that it was the result of a shared struggle with like-minded members across the country, or even across the world. The sense of shared purpose and solidarity empowered people in new ways, and it could well be that it made them feel entitled to a political opinion of their own. The fact that many of these members did not have access to the ballot indicates the importance of voluntary associations for the process of politicization and democratization long before the advent of mass parties or the extension of voting rights.⁴⁹ Voluntary associations, especially after the innovation of

organizing local auxiliaries to national organizations, were perhaps more important in creating a national political community than is often thought.

In addition to that, the sense of having political agency was greatly stimulated by the mere existence of voluntary associations. One did not even have to participate in them to sense the opportunity they afforded. This also explains the impact of examples of successful mass organizations in countries that did not avidly copy the examples, but were still inspired by them. Iconic British examples such as the Anti-Slavery Society and the Anti-Corn Law League (1839-1846) influenced Continental Europe in a myriad of ways.⁵⁰ Reform organizations in the second quarter of the nineteenth century instilled in a significant portion of the people in Britain and the United States, and to a lesser degree also in continental Europe, the notion that anything could be reformed, by anyone. This optimism and sense of possibility seems to have inspired to a certain extent the revolts of 1848 as well as the rise of socialism in the decades following, when ‘association’ became the motto of a new generation of Europeans.

¹ The seminal study is Robert D. Putnam, *Making democracy work. Civic traditions in modern Italy* (Princeton, etc.: Princeton University Press 1992).

² See for instance Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord (eds), *Civil society before democracy. Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) Graeme Morton, Robert Morris and Boudien de Vries (eds), *Civil society, Associations, and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2006) (Morris’s Introduction, 1-16, gives an especially useful treatment of historical narratives of civil society); Stefan Ludwig Hoffmann, *Civil Society 1750-1914* (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

³ Remieg Aerts, ‘Civil Society or Democracy? A Dutch Paradox’, *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 125 (2010), 209–236.

⁴ James A. Reynolds, *The Catholic Emancipation Crisis in Ireland, 1823-1829* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); Fergus O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O’Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy, 1820-30* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985).

⁵ Thomas Wyse, *Historical sketch of the late Catholic Association of Ireland*, Vol. 1 (London, 1829) 261.

⁶ Ibid., II, 83; O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, Chapter 2, esp. 65; Reynolds, *Catholic Emancipation Crisis*, 30. For more on the Catholic Rent, see Michael Keyes, *Funding the Nation: Money and Nationalist Politics in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2011).

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⁹ Thomas Wyse, *The Political Catechism, Explanatory of the Constitutional Rights and Civil Disabilities of the Catholics of Ireland* (London: J. Ridgeway, 1829) 111.

¹⁰ Wyse, *Historical Sketch*, I, 227.

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- ¹² Irene Whelan, *The Bible war in Ireland: the ‘Second Reformation’ and the polarization of Protestant-Catholic relations, 1800-1840* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005); Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth-Century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002); Stephen K. Batalden, Kathleen Cann and John Dean (eds), *Sowing the Word: The Cultural Impact of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 1804-2004* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press 2004).
- ¹³ Wyse, *Historical Sketch*, II, 83; O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, 57-58.
- ¹⁴ Wyse, *Historical Sketch*, I, 284.
- ¹⁵ For more on this see Maartje Janse, ‘A Dangerous Type of Politics? Politics and Religion in Early Mass Organisations: The Anglo-American World, c. 1830,’ in: Joost Augusteijn, Patrick Dassen, and Maartje Janse (eds), *Political Religion beyond Totalitarianism: The Sacralization of Politics in the Age of Democracy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2013) 55–76.
- ¹⁶ O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, 317 (Appendix 1: Total Catholic Rent Subscribed in Ireland).
- ¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 71-78.
- ¹⁸ *The Morning Chronicle* (London), 14 January 1828.
- ¹⁹ O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, 38, 73.
- ²⁰ Daniel O’Connell and Richard Lalor Sheil, *A Collection of Speeches spoken by Daniel O’Connell, Esq. and Richard Sheil, Esq. on Subjects Connected with the Catholic Question* (Dublin: John Cumming 1828) 370, 203.
- ²¹ *The Morning Chronicle* (London), 4 January 1828.
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- ²⁴ Auchmuty, *Sir Thomas Wyse*, 83-84.
- ²⁵ O’Ferrall, *Catholic Association*, 135.
- ²⁶ Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992).
- ²⁷ *Ibidem*.
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- ²⁹ Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, not gradual abolition, or, An inquiry into the shortest, safest, and most effectual means of getting rid of West Indian slavery* (London, 1824) 14.
- ³⁰ *Letters on the Necessity of a Prompt Extinction of British Colonial Slavery: Chiefly Addressed to the More Influential Classes... to which are Added, Thoughts on Compensation* (Leicester: Hatchard and Son, 1826) 164.
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- ³² Charles Orpen, *The Principles, Plans and Objects of the ‘Hibernian Negro’s Friend Society’, contrasted with those of the previously existing ‘Anti-Slavery Societies’* [1831].

³³ Joshua Civin, 'The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels', Unpublished paper Conference Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Antislavery and Women's Rights, Gilder Lehrman Center, 2001.

³⁴ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 106.

³⁵ Howard Temperly, 'Anti-Slavery', in: Patricia Hollis (ed.), *Pressure from without in early Victorian England* (London 1974) 27-51.

³⁶ This case study is based on Maartje Janse, *De Afschaffers: Publieke opinie, politiek en organisatie in Nederland, 1840-1880* (Amsterdam 2007). Seminal histories of these temperance movements elsewhere include Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press 1971); Elizabeth Malcolm, 'Ireland sober, Ireland free': drink and temperance in nineteenth-century Ireland (Gill and Macmillan 1986); Ian Tyrrell, *Sobering up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press 1979); J.S. Roberts, *Drink, Temperance and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Boston 1984). Historical sociologists have added interesting perspectives as well: Michael P. Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Social Movement* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2006); Ann-Marie Szymanski, *Pathways to Prohibition: Radicals, Moderates, and Social Movement Outcomes* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press 2003).

³⁷ Jaap van der Stel, *Drinken, drank en dronkenschap: Vijf eeuwen drankbestrijding en alcoholhulpverlening in Nederland: een historisch-sociologische studie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1995) 151-153.

³⁸ Janse, *De afschaffers*, 149.

³⁹ *Almanak van de Nederlandsche Vereeniging tot Afschaffing van Sterken Drank*, Vol. 1 (1858) 52-61; also see *Het regt van enquête en de sterke-drank-quaestie in de Tweede Kamer* ('s Gravenhage: H.C. Susan, 1857).

⁴⁰ *Almanak NVASD*, 53.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴² Petrus Hofstede de Groot, *De voorname bron van maatschappelijke ellende in onzen tijd. Redevoering* (Groningen: M. Smit 1854) i.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 31.

⁴⁴ Gemma Blok, 'Gentle Knights: Masculinity, Teetotalism and Aid for Alcohol Abuse c. 1900', *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 127 (2012) 1, 101-126; Janse, *De afschaffers*, 158-160;

⁴⁵ Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840-1880* (Hilversum: Verloren 2007).

⁴⁶ Kathryn Kish Sklar, '“Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation”: American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840', *Pacific Historical Review* 59 (4

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⁴⁸ Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*.

⁴⁹ Anne Heyer, 'The Making of the Democratic Party. The Emergence of the Party Organizations of the German Social Democratic Workers' Party, the British National Liberal Federation and the Dutch Anti-Revolutionary Party, 1860s-1880s', dissertation, Leiden University (2019).

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