Betrokken burgers: stedelijk burgerschap van republiek naar koninkrijk

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Summary

This book discusses the persistence of urban citizenship during the wider Age of Revolutions (1747-1848) and proposes that, despite state formation and political change, a local and older type of citizenship continued to shape urban life in the first half of the nineteenth century – defined as civic engagement (*betrokken burgerschap*).

Historiographical debates

This study aims to contribute to three historiographical debates. The first debate is about the impact of the Age of Revolutions (1780-1813) on the Netherlands. From the 1980s onwards, historians have reappraised Dutch eighteenth-century revolutionary movements, the so-called Patriots and Batavians, for their role in the development of national politics. The prevalent argument in the historiography is that both Patriots and Batavians profoundly contributed to political transformation, including the introduction of a public parliament, the politicisation of the press and the constitution of a national government with ministers. These fundamental changes are believed to have caused a rapid disappearance of urban autonomy and the premodern decentralised state.

The reappraisal of Patriot and Batavian revolutionaries is related to the debate about the particularity of the Dutch Restoration (1813-1840s) – a second historiography that this study addresses.

Historians agree that after a period of politicisation, a period of depoliticisation appeared. The political trauma of the Age of Revolutions convinced contemporaries that public opinion and disagreement were a threat to national politics. Consequently, politics developed new forms, styles and issues that were perceived as unifying by contemporaries. Although signs of politicisation reappeared in the 1830s, political debates only started to flourish again in the 1840s.

Thirdly, this study discusses the historiographical debate about urban citizenship in early modern times. In the 1980s the historiographical perception of urban citizenship changed. Previously, civic corporations, such as the guilds and militias, were seen as old-fashioned and ineffective. Historians effectively changed this view by showing that urban citizenship should be seen as a legal status, because it consisted of rights and duties; a political status, because the underlying civic republicanism considered urban citizens to be the urban body politic; and an economic status or contract because citizenship was a condition to become a member of craft guilds. In this view, urban citizenship was firmly attached to the corporations and it is believed that urban citizenship lost its importance during the French Revolution as the urban corporations were abolished all across Europe.

Although all three historiographical traditions acknowledged the persistence of early modern traditions in the first half of the nineteenth century, they generally did not make them the focus of their study. Consequently, little is known about how early modern traditions shaped urban life in the first half of the nineteenth century. Recent studies underscored the impact of this lack of knowledge on the broader political historical narrative of the Netherlands. For instance, early modern traditions heavily influenced the way the new national parliament was organised. In addition, early modern political practices such as petitioning and ritual protest survived the Age of Revolutions and continued to shape political participation during the Restoration. Finally, the emphasis on change does raise a fundamental question. Although profound

transformation did appear, the national and local government remained very small. However, during all these transformations the social fabric did not collapse. How is this possible? Hence, the main conclusion of this study is that civic engagement continued to shape urban life in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Method and concepts

The method and research perspective of this study were decisive to reach its conclusions. Early modernists tended to study citizenship in the Low Countries from an urban perspective and usually did not go past 1800, because urban citizenship is believed to have disappeared afterwards. Students of modern Dutch history, in turn, usually studied local communities to acquire knowledge about the constitution of national politics and citizenship. Therefore, to examine continuities in urban citizenship, a local, urban perspective was deliberately chosen as well as a wider research period (1747-1848). This study takes the local community itself and the identification with it as a starting point. For this purpose, this book draws on the municipal archives of Haarlem and Groningen to study the lives of the city dwellers of these two towns. The focus is mainly, though not exclusively, on men from the middle and upper classes.

To map civic engagement, this study (1) uses the concept of 'belonging' and (2) a practice-oriented approach. Firstly, belonging presupposes a bond between the community and the individual that could be of political, economic, cultural or moral nature. Studies show us that involvement in the community allowed members to appropriate the right to speak and protect the perceived nature of the community. Research has also shown that a local sense of belonging fuelled resistance against centralising tendencies in the nineteenth century. Subsequently, it turned out that city residents still had a surprising amount of involvement in their community and acted accordingly.

In line with literature on belonging and citizenship this study understands citizenship as practiced reality rather than mere legal status or formal representation. To really arrive at the civic practices of the average city dweller, archival sources have been read against the grain. Sources produced by more literate citizens, such as chronicles, letters and petitions, were used as well. In order to trace long-term developments, this study examines a number of instruments of the middle and upper classes to influence local politics. It especially addresses political protest, corporations (in particular civic militias, neighbourhood associations and craft guilds that were believed to be the core of early modern urban society) and civic commemorations. Lastly, to narrow down the amount of archival material, this study first and foremost examined times of crisis. Civic engagement became mobilised especially during (inter)national crises, which then left archival traces for historians nowadays. Therefore, the actions and words of residents during crises show us how they viewed their citizenship.

Findings

What did this exploration of the main characteristics of civic engagement between 1747 and 1848 ultimately yield? The first part of the book, consisting of two chapters, shows that civic engagement was about community and about active participation. In 1747, during the War of the Austrian Succession, the sudden attack by France caused uprisings in the Netherlands that put the Orange family back in their position. The insurrections broadened over the year and turned into a larger criticism of the political system. According to contemporaries, these insurrections pointed to a deeper problem: ignorance of the honour of the community. Especially Roman-Catholic town dwellers and regents were blamed for their 'uncivic' behaviour by Protestant inhabitants. Because of their supposed alliance with France and pursuit of self-interest

they were perceived as inappropriate members of the community. According to protesting inhabitants, the community could only be purified by removing these 'bad elements' that hindered proper civic behaviour and governance. These protesters developed their own standards for who belonged to the community and what characterised proper governance. In 1747 and 1748 those standards were defined by how Orange-minded, anti-French and Protestant an inhabitant was and how willing to pursue the general interest of the city and Republic they were. Protesting city dwellers maintained moral order through violent practices, which were aimed at fellow residents and the city council. In this way they claimed a place in their city. Although the precise interpretation of those characteristics of moral order differed over time, the mechanism remained the same throughout the entire research period. Conflict mobilised the engagement of citizens and made their standards explicit about who should and who should not belong to the community and how it should be governed.

The second chapter of the first part discusses a local legend that had been told for ages in Haarlem. It was said that Laurens Janszoon Coster invented the printing press in Haarlem rather than Gutenberg in Mainz. In this chapter this legend serves to explain how civic engagement worked for the urban elite, including the urban governors, and how their image of the ideal urban community influenced their engagement. The urban elite had its own ideas about what defined the city, for example famous inhabitants that furthered local fame with their inventions. Just like the rioters in 1747 and 1748, members of the Haarlem elite were concerned with the honour of the city. For them, the city's honourable past served as a vehicle to promote and defend the city. Therefore, their responsibility was to keep alive the legend about Coster. In order to gain recognition for Coster and therefore for the honour of the city, the elite created an audience that was willing to spread the legend. Book scholars, printers, other European printing towns and surrounding towns in Holland all confirmed or denied Coster's existence. Either way, they contributed to the

spread of Haarlem's claim. Over time the political changes on the national level did not affect Coster worship from the perspective of the Haarlem elite. For them, Coster remained primarily a son of Haarlem. This is an indication that early modern community thinking persisted in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The second part of this book, also consisting of two chapters, discusses civic engagement in daily life. The urban government entrusted responsibility for several elements of daily life to town dwellers, especially but not only the local infrastructure and economy. To serve this purpose, citizens were organised in both neighbourhood associations and guilds. Through their neighbourhood association, neighbours arranged the most basic parts of life, such as drinking water supply and the burial of the dead. Neighbourhood associations and the cooperation with neighbourhood councils offered the government an instrument to control the city down to street level. On the other hand, neighbourhood associations transformed neighbours into citizens. They did not simply execute certain rules, but negotiated with the government about the rules, their rights and their obligations. Their organisation thus offered them a platform to participate in developing and implementing urban policy. This book concludes that the urban government also assigned these responsibilities to citizens in the first half of the nineteenth century. During major political transitions, such as the introduction of state citizenship, daily life did not implode because neighbours kept their responsibilities and therefore remained organised and consequently continued to influence local policy making.

As for the local economy, profound changes appeared. The guilds were abolished with the first constitution in 1798, which at first glance attacked the foundation of urban local economies irreversibly. Yet, continuities emerged as well. Not only in the socio-economic functions of guilds, as historians have previously shown, but also in their political function and organisation. Due to the lack of appropriate measures by the national government, guilds remained indispensable. This offered guild members the

opportunity to adapt their corporations to new ideas about equality, for example by renewing internal election procedures. Guilds became sufficiently resilient to enter the new century. They also remained the point of contact for the city government on matters concerning their guild. This allowed them to influence local policy even after they formally transformed into a corporation or trade union in line with new legislation. When the city council, a provincial official or other fellow citizens tried to limit their political space, former guild members protested and still invoked larger ideas about the community and the place of trade associations within it. The organisation and attitude of the former guilds heavily influenced how new trade associations organised themselves after 1800.

The third part of this book, consisting of chapter 5 and 6, shows that civic engagement also determined how city governments and citizens dealt with local order and security during (inter)national crises. Early modern urban citizenship included the ideal that citizens were responsible for order and security and were therefore allowed to carry a weapon. This way of thinking became institutionalised in the militia in the early modern period. Even after the militia became nationally regulated during the Batavian governments, Louis Napoleon and William I, urban paramilitary ideals lived on and emerged when a crisis threatened local order. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1813 and during the waves of revolutions in 1830 and 1848, both city authorities and residents saw the establishment of a local militia as a solution to avert unrest. Sometimes city residents offered their help, in other cases the city council called on them to do so. Two elements are important here. Firstly, city governments acted autonomously in relation to higher levels of government during these crises. Officially, the nation state did not allow for this. Yet, in times of crisis, urban governments chose to let urban interests take precedence over national ones. This resembled the urban autonomy cities enjoyed during the Dutch Republic. Secondly, it is important that citizens and city authorities, by forming a militia, fell back on an old instrument

that had proven its usefulness. For them, the premodern nature of this instrument did not matter – citizens were still responsible for security and order, and forming a militia turned out to be a good tool. Conflicts or impending crises thus strengthened local traditions, such as urban autonomy and the responsibility of citizens for order and security.

The last chapter contains a closer study of the way in which Groningen residents commemorated the year of 1672 in Groningen. In 1672 the Dutch Republic became part of several wars including an attack by the bishop of Münster in the North. Groningen was besieged by the bishop and his troops but was able to repel the attack. It was said that the bishop had to leave the city because of the defence by the brave citizens of Groningen who saved the Republic from destruction. The militia that defended the city in 1672 thus was a continuing source of inspiration for new generations, especially when local order and security were threatened. This ideal of a brave urban citizen was passed on by stakeholders through the commemoration and remembrance of 1672, both in the early modern period and in the nineteenth century. Although a break occurred in the commemorative tradition in 1795, because it was essentially anti-French in character, this did not prove to be definitive. The tradition remained vivid because actors emphasised the importance of local citizenship and were able to link the commemoration again and again to the sentiment of their time, whether anti-French or pro-French, anti-Orange or pro-Orange.

This altogether brings us to a definition of civic engagement. In short, it is a sense of responsibility for and loyalty to the local community, based on ideals about proper governance and citizenship, even beyond (formal) representation. This provoked town dwellers to claim a place in the community and exclude town dwellers who did not meet their preconditions. This, in turn, caused negotiations about belonging among citizens and the government. Instruments to actually engage included, among others, protest, organisations (neighbourhood associations, craft guilds and mi-

litias) and (group) petitions to influence local policy. Citizens felt particularly responsible for the social cohesion and infrastructure of their own neighbourhood, the local economy, and order and safety within the city.

Conclusions

These findings do have wider implications for the aforementioned debates in historiography. They underline the importance of the inclusion of town dwellers without an official burgher status in historical research on participation in local politics and urban citizenship, because this rather large group turned out to be decisive in moving local politics in certain directions. To really understand the persistence of this phenomenon, it is important to conduct research beyond formal institutions, in this case corporations. Broadening our understanding of urban citizenship asks for the adaptation of our perception of the Age of Revolutions in the Netherlands, especially regarding its practical effects and its impact on cities and towns. The Age of Revolutions became a complex process of transformation in which contemporaries knowingly used building blocks from the early modern era to cope with changing times. For corporations and traditions to survive, their capacity to adapt became crucial. The survival and adaptation of certain corporations and traditions allowed for older civic ideas to survive in the new political framework. In practice, a mixture of traditional and new practices, old and new ideals and old and new institutions determined the course of events on the urban level.

If we consider the impact of the narrower Age of Revolutions (1780-1813) on the following decennia as an active and practical process of changing by preserving, the Restoration (1813-1848) consequently becomes an even more dynamic period. Although town dwellers generally did not participate in local politics based on outspoken ideals, such as democracy, they demonstrated a

great engagement to defend their own and common interests. To participate, people could use a divergent set of political instruments that stemmed from previous eras. For instance, petitioning, visiting the burgomaster or sacking his house. The number of civic organisations, such as neighbourhood associations and trade associations, also allowed for organised participation in local policy. These organisations were generally of a local, urban nature that either built upon the early modern legacy or directly stemmed from the early modern era.

The results of this study invite scholars to reconsider the relationship between local citizenship and national citizenship during the Restoration on two levels. The study underscores that the introduction of national citizenship did not end local forms of civic engagement. Civic identities remained plural and were mobilised during different moments. Secondly, both forms of citizenship were determined by processes of in- and exclusion and consequently both forms led to inequality. This together explains why the social fabric did not collapse during the Age of Revolutions and consequently highlights the political agency of town dwellers during the first half of the nineteenth century.