

# In Search of Republican Unity: Excluding Political Opponents from the Vote During the Dutch Revolution (1780-1800)

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## Abstract

The importance of the Dutch Revolution of the late eighteenth century for political developments in the Northern Netherlands is still contested. Most historians view the period as the starting point of a number of democratic institutions, including elections. Others have pointed out, however, that the nineteenth century shows a remarkable amount of continuity in political practice with the early modern period, and have therefore questioned the impact of political change. Scholarship on the political system during the revolutionary era has paid little attention to the exclusion of a specific group from electoral politics: political opponents of the revolution. The debates on the question of whether Orangists should have access to the ballot were intense in the Northern Netherlands, where a political struggle between Patriots and Orangists had been taking place since the 1780s. Through a consideration of why the Dutch revolutionaries placed such electoral barriers against their political adversaries (mainly Orangists, but for a brief period also moderates and federalists), this essay argues that this period ought to be viewed with its particular revolutionary character in mind, rather than considering it simply as a period that relied on old practices or one that gave birth to new ones.

*Keywords:* Dutch Revolution, elections, republicanism, democracy, citizenship

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How should we interpret the political changes of the revolutionary period (1780-1813) in the Northern Netherlands? Based on an analysis of the exclusion of political opponents from the primary electoral assemblies during the Dutch Revolution, this article argues that political developments resulted to a great extent from the specific revolutionary circumstances of the late eighteenth century. This perspective offers us a fuller understanding of the choices that were made by the revolutionaries than is allowed for within the debate on whether the Dutch Revolution should be judged as the beginning of political modernity.

In Dutch historiography on parliamentary and political history, a new scholarly consensus has emerged over the past decade, which sees the revolutionary period as playing a pivotal role in the construction of a new Dutch nation-state.<sup>1</sup> Pollman and Te Velde assert this consensus squarely: although ‘there was some debate about the relevance of the new forms of politics and the long-term cultural effects, [...] hardly anyone today doubts the truly revolutionary effects of what had happened during the period’.<sup>2</sup> The period is now treated as the cradle of a number of political institutions. Even though virtually all historians stress that no linear development of democratic principles and practices can be discerned following this period, the revolutionary period is nowadays still seen as the starting point of the contemporary political system.<sup>3</sup>

Elections, long a relatively understudied aspect of the revolutionary period, are also viewed from this perspective. It has recently been argued that the experiments with elections undertaken during the French Revolution should be treated as the foundations of French electoral democracy.<sup>4</sup> Similar claims have been made in the Dutch case, with a recent overview of the development of Dutch voting rights since 1795 (the year of the Batavian Revolution), suggesting that ‘voting rights were “invented” after the establishment of the Batavian Republic’.<sup>5</sup>

1 Van Sas, *Metamorfose*, 19; Grijzenhout et al., *Bataafse experiment*, 17-18.

2 Pollmann and Te Velde, ‘New state’, 4-23.

3 For the starting point of parliamentary history, see Van den Berg and Vis, *Parlementaire Geschiedenis*; for the beginning of modern political history, see Aerts, Liagre Böhl, de Rooy, and Te Velde, *Land van kleine gebaren*.

4 Edelstein, *French Revolution*, 9. For the revival of research into French revolutionary elections, see Aberdam, *Voter*, 17-25.

5 De Beaufort et al., *Geschiedheid*, 9. See also De Jong, *Democratie*, 336.

But to what extent the revolutionary period and its political elections should be treated as the beginnings of modern politics in the Netherlands is still a matter of debate. Recent scholarship claims that the period of transformation of the Dutch nation-state between 1750 and 1850 shows more continuities in political and civic practices and institutions than the narrative of radical transition allows for. On the level of political personnel, as well as on the level of political style and practices, habits from the early modern period lasted well into the nineteenth century, this literature states.<sup>6</sup>

In this article I will analyse the position of revolutionary elections within the development of Dutch politics, by focusing on a group of citizens who were not welcome at the revolutionary ballots in the Northern Netherlands. These were political opponents of the revolution, primarily the Orangists but also, in the spring and summer of 1798 at least, moderate and federalist revolutionaries. Although virtually all canonical histories of the Dutch Revolution and especially the Batavian Republic, from Herman Colenbrander to Niek van Sas, mention the removal of Orangists in 1795 and the subsequent electoral blockades against them, these actions are never connected to the nature and development of the electoral system.<sup>7</sup> Scholarship on the Batavian elections mentions the different measures that were taken to prevent political opponents from taking part in elections, but does not consider why the Dutch revolutionaries took these steps, and what this might tell us about the character of the revolutionary representative system.<sup>8</sup>

My analysis is based on a wide selection of printed sources, such as pamphlets, periodicals, the *Dagverhaal* (the printed proceedings of parliament), and source editions on the creation of the Dutch constitution of 1798. The article begins with a section on the period of political upheaval preceding the Batavian Republic: the end of the Patriot Era (1780-1787) and the Orangist Restoration (1787-1795). The events of this period had a tremendous influence on the political ideas and arguments of the revolutionaries who devised the first electoral systems during the Batavian Republic (1795-1805). Following an analysis of the various local decrees concerning elections and the taking of oaths after the Batavian Revolution of 1795, I will discuss how disenfranchisement was debated in the emerging national constitutional debates and referenda after 1796. The last section discusses the development of political exclusion from 1798 onwards. On 22 January 1798, a coup d'état was carried out by radical Batavians. They established a constitution which contained rules for a broad franchise and democratic politics, but at the same time (temporarily) excluded Orangists, moderates, and federalists from politics. After this brief period of 'Batavian Terror' a number of coups followed that brought moderate regimes to power. These governments lifted the electoral barriers against opponents of the revolution,

6 Pollmann and Te Velde, 'New state', 16. See the also other articles in the same special issue, the (preliminary) results of the research project 'The persistence of civic identities in the Netherlands, 1747-1848', and Lauret, *Regentenwerk*.

7 Colenbrander, *Bataafsche Republiek*, 86-87; Geyl, *Nederlandse stam*, III, 345-347; De Wit, *De strijd*, 138; Schama, *Patriots*, 321; Van Sas, *Metamorfose*, 70, 110, 334-338.

8 Van den Berg, 'Op zoek', 21-107, in his overview of electoral systems between 1795 and 1840, describes the different laws and constitutional debates that were meant to exclude Orangists. For other overviews of the Batavian electoral system, see Wels, 'Stemmen', 313-332; Veen, 'Het volk', 9-33; Overdijk, 'Regeling', 55-77. For elections on the local level, see De Bruin, *Burgers*; De Bruin, 'Gefragmenteerde volkssoevereiniteit', 79-94.

but at the same time established a political system which became less and less democratic. After 1800, therefore, disenfranchisement on political grounds ceased to exist, but so did democratic politics in general.

### *The Patriot Era (1780-1787) and Revolutionary Plans for a New Constitution*

During the 1780s a political struggle took place in the Dutch Republic, between reformist Patriots and conservative Orangists who supported the stadtholder. The Patriots had emerged during the 1780s as the heirs of the former *Staatsgezinden* (States Party) in the Dutch political landscape. They called for political reforms based on the argument that the rights and privileges they enjoyed under the old constitution had been violated and should be restored to their former position. A number of Patriots subsequently deviated from this argument, sustaining their plea for a more democratic politics not on ancient rights but on the principle of popular sovereignty.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this new approach, they pressed for increased popular control over government by way of (multi-stage) elections. Between 1786 and 1787, electoral blueprints were developed for those cities under Patriot control, which reflected the decentralised and local character of the Dutch Republic. Based on the argument that only independent, free citizens should be allowed to participate in political life, women, servants, and people relying on poor relief were not eligible to vote.

To vote, some of these blueprints added political allegiance to the list of reasons for disenfranchisement. The regulations of the city of Haarlem, for example, excluded all members of the current city council and their relatives in the first and second degree of kinship, while one of the most important pamphlets of the Patriot Era, the *Leids Ontwerp* (Leiden Draft), argued that citizens should sign an oath of allegiance to the principles of the republican constitution.<sup>10</sup> The plans for a democratization of politics were cut short, however, by the arrival of Prussian troops in September 1787, who had been sent in support of Stadtholder William V, the main opponent of the Patriots.

The arrival of the Prussian soldiers led to a quick defeat of the Patriots in the different towns and cities of the Republic, and the Orangists' revenge, which they called the 'Joyous Revolt' (*Gelukkige Omwenteling*, a reference to the Glorious Revolution of 1688), was swift and severe. Reprisals often took a material form: within a few days thousands of houses were demolished across the Dutch Republic, including 200 in the city of Gouda, and no fewer than 829 in Den Bosch.<sup>11</sup> Retaliations were also physical. Some Patriots had their hands broken by Prussian troops, incapacitating them for life. A burgomaster from Alphen was beaten, stabbed with knives and pins, and pulled behind a horse, while the retired Remonstrant minister Van den Bosch drowned in a ditch running from his abusers.<sup>12</sup> Hundreds more Patriots were imprisoned and prosecuted by the Orangist regime. The violence of the retaliations caused an exodus of Patriots across the border. Most of them

9 Klein, *Patriots republikenisme*, 216-223; Velema, *Republicans*, 125-126.

10 Klein, *Patriots republikenisme*, 267-268.

11 Schama, *Patriots*, 165.

12 Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 45.

fled to the Southern Netherlands, but a number went to France, where they would witness the French Revolution two years later.

In the meantime, the stadtholder's party sought to purge the local and provincial governments of Patriot influences. On 9 October 1787 the stadtholder's wife, Wilhelmina of Prussia, handed a list to the States of Holland containing the names of Patriot regents that she demanded be removed from their posts, as a reparation for her arrest by the Patriots earlier that year. Two days later, the States granted her wishes and removed those she had named from their positions.<sup>13</sup> The Orangists, especially those in Holland, tried to take back control of government by means of *wetsverzettingen* (the appointment of new members of town councils by the stadtholder). A commission appointed by the stadtholder removed in excess of 250 regents from the eighteen cities of Holland that had a vote in the States of Holland. Of the 444 members that were part of local councils in Holland around 20 September 1787, almost half (213) had been fired by the end of July 1788.<sup>14</sup>

Although the *wetsverzettingen* in other provinces were less extreme or even absent, they amounted to a full-scale purge of the institutions of the Dutch Republic, from high to low: even minor civil servants were dismissed from their posts. While acts of amnesty were proclaimed throughout the Dutch Republic, the States of Holland introduced an 'Oath on the Constitution', which explicitly named the hereditary stadtholdership by the House of Orange as a central element of the constitution. Those who refused to take the oath were excluded from all public offices.<sup>15</sup>

The political struggles of 1787 provide a crucial context for the electoral developments after 1795. Many of the revolutionaries of 1795 not only remembered their treatment at the hands of the Orangists during the 'Joyous Revolt' of 1787, but were intent on returning the compliment now that the roles had been reversed. This illustrates a commonly held attitude to the place of governmental positions following a period of political upheaval: the victors would immediately remove their opponents from all positions of power, only allowing their return some time later, and often under specific conditions. As the Batavian revolutionary Johan Valckenaer remarked in 1796, history showed that in cases where two parties struggled for power, the victorious party always neutralised the vanquished party: 'No revolution can take place without severe measures.'<sup>16</sup>

We thus need to ask to what extent the exclusion of Orangists after 1795 was simply a continuation of the party struggles between Orangists and *Staatsgezinden* which had dominated the early modern Dutch Republic. After all, they were seen by many Patriots as a revenge for the *wetsverzettingen* of 1787, which in itself followed the example set during earlier moments of crisis when the stadtholder had removed his political opponents from seats of power. There are, however, a number of important differences. The *wetsverzettingen* of 1787 and the general persecution of the Patriots were more extensive than the *wetsverzettingen* of 1672 and 1748-1749.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the political struggle between

13 Knoops, *Gouda 1787*, 393.

14 Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 48.

15 Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 52. For the Oath, see Van der Linden, *Groot placaat-boeck*, IX, 40.

16 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 575: 'dat geene revolutie tot stand komt dan door vigoureuze maatregelen'. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

17 Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 48.

Orangists and *Staatsgezinden* was an altogether different political conflict than the one between Orangists and Patriots. As mentioned above, the Patriots held different ideological views than supporters of the States Party earlier in the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

The Oath on the Constitution is an important example of how the institution of political oaths were an effective measure against the participation of political opponents. Certainly, the Batavians would later discuss the expediency of oaths and pledges, with some critics pointing out that an individual lacking in honour, or perhaps one with mischievous intent, would have no difficulty swearing an oath that they had no intention of adhering to. Nevertheless, the eighteenth century was a time when religious conviction and public perceptions of personal honour carried much weight, which made the swearing of an oath not something that was undertaken lightly.<sup>19</sup>

During the Orangist Restoration between 1787 and 1795, exiled Patriots drafted a number of blueprints for a new constitutional order, but these hardly mentioned exclusion based on political preference. One of the first plans to materialize was the 1789 *Plan, volgens hetwelk na de revolutie de zaaken in de Republiek zullen kunnen bestuurd worden, totdat eene algemeene landsconstitutie zal wezen ingevoerd* (Plan, according to which government will be run, until a general constitution will be enacted). The plan did not mention how future representatives would be elected. To the later bafflement of the famous historian of the period Herman Colenbrander, it failed to make clear 'how one would get rid of the hated enemies of 1787 in a satisfactory manner'.<sup>20</sup> Even the most detailed plan drawn up during the Restoration period, the *Schets tot grondslag eener nieuwe constitutie voor de Republiek der Bataven* (Sketch for the new constitution for the Republic of the Batavians), edited by Balthasar Abbema in 1793, found no role for political declarations or the exclusion of Orangists.<sup>21</sup> The rare projects for constitutional reform written in the Dutch Republic itself, such as Bernardus Bosch's *Aan het volk van Nederland over de waare constitutie* (To the people of the Netherlands on the true constitution), were also silent on the subject.<sup>22</sup>

The lack of detailed measures against political opponents of the revolution during the period 1787-1795 does not necessarily mean that the Patriots in exile were unaware of these possibilities. As mentioned above, a number of drafts from the Patriot Era had already mentioned that citizens should take an oath of allegiance. Furthermore, the French revolutionaries had employed political oaths as part of their electoral systems during different stages of the revolution.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in many early American elections after 1776, so-called test laws were enacted, involving declarations of loyalty to the new regime and thereby effectively disenfranchising Loyalists. In some states, these measures persisted

18 Klein, *Patriots republikenisme*, 284-285.

19 As was also the case in the French Revolution: Buscemi, 'Importance', 224.

20 Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, I, 17: 'hoe men op de meest afdoende wijs schoon schip zal maken onder de gehate vijanden van' 87'.

21 Colenbrander, *Gedenkstukken*, I, 106. On the constitutional designs from this period, see Oddens, *Pioniers*, 76-82; Rosendaal, *Bataven!*, 349-353.

22 Oddens, *Pioniers*, 80-81.

23 For the role of oaths in the French electoral systems, see Crook, *Elections*, 49, 93, 150, 193. For political exclusion in French revolutionary elections, see also Aberdam, *Voter*, 47-48, and (for the period of the Directory) Suratteau, *Les élections*.

until well into the 1780s.<sup>24</sup> There existed, therefore, all kinds of exclusionary practices in other Atlantic Revolutions, and although there is no evidence that the Dutch revolutionaries copied them, it makes the installing of barriers against political opponents by the Dutch revolutionaries after 1795 less surprising.

### *The Batavian Revolution of 1795: Purging the Orangists*

In the winter of 1794-1795, a French-Batavian army entered the Dutch Republic and made possible the Batavian Revolution. The stadtholder fled to England, and in many places governments were removed and replaced with provisional councils. In line with the decentralized nature of the Dutch Republic, provisional local councils drew up different regulations for the future elections of public officials.

Elections during the Batavian Republic were not held individually, but collectively in primary assemblies (*grondvergaderingen*). Citizens with voting rights convened in the assemblies to choose local representatives directly. On the provincial and national level, a system of multi-stage elections was developed during the year 1795. The roughly 3,760 *grondvergaderingen* in the Batavian Republic, each consisting of the locally enfranchised citizens, convened to vote for a *kiezer*, or elector. The electors from thirty *grondvergaderingen* gathered at district meetings in order to elect a representative.<sup>25</sup> Formally, the number of citizens who had the right to vote was relatively large, as it included all male citizens who had reached the age of twenty, had been permanent residents for at least a year, and who were not dependent on poor relief. This amounted to roughly twenty-two percent of the population. In practice, however, enrolling as a voter proved to be much harder, not least because of the measures that were taken towards supporters of the former regime.<sup>26</sup>

Plans were put forward to expel Orangists from (future) elections in different cities. In Rotterdam, for example, a proposal was put forward to exclude all former regents, all members of Orangist societies, and all those who had volunteered to fight against the French, or who had sided with the British. In Gouda a similar proposition was codified in the local election laws. In The Hague, those who had stirred up plunder and violence by signing requests in favour of the stadtholder in 1787 were excluded from the vote, while in the Frisian city of Leeuwarden former members of the now disbanded city council and officers of the former citizens' militia were explicitly excluded.<sup>27</sup> As these examples demonstrate, there was a strong link between the calls for excluding Orangists and the events of 1787.

A debate in Friesland surrounding the provincial elections of June 1795, however, shows just how contested these exclusionary policies were. The right to vote had been defined in relatively broad terms – all males over twenty years of age were eligible, and

<sup>24</sup> Dinkin, *Voting*, 43; Nash, *Unknown*, 269.

<sup>25</sup> Rutjes, *Gelijkheid*, 94-105; *Reglement*, 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> De Jong, *Democratie*, 89-93. De Jong approvingly cites Zwager, who had written that the franchise during the Batavian Republic was the most comprehensive until 1917, but he also points out a number of restrictions, especially in the *Staatsregeling* of 1798, which further reduced the electorate.

<sup>27</sup> Van den Berg, 'Op zoek', 34.

no political strictures were in place other than a ban on deposed regents. A proposal by radical revolutionaries to imprison former members of the provincial government was rejected by the moderate provisional government, partly because the new provisional government argued that only concrete actions, and not political sympathies, were grounds for misdemeanour.<sup>28</sup>

A more common means of excluding political opponents of the system was the introduction of the abovementioned political declaration or oath. In Leiden for example, to qualify for a vote, men had to make the following statement: 'I declare as an honest man, to hold the principles of equality, liberty and brotherhood, the indivisible supreme power of the people, and the inalienable rights of man and citizen, as the only true foundations of society.' In the cities of Utrecht, Gouda, Leeuwarden, Dokkum, and Groningen, and in the region of Drenthe, voters had to make similar (verbal) declarations, sometimes in front of a municipal committee.<sup>29</sup> But just like the explicit exclusion of Orangists, this was a hotly debated topic amongst revolutionaries. On 9 March 1795, the provisional government of Holland issued a decree which compelled civil servants in the province to take an oath swearing allegiance to the rights of man and to the new government. Although this decree did not cover the matter of elections, the reactions to it show that the debate on political declarations reflected different ideological views on the nature of the revolution and its political goals.

In a fiercely worded pamphlet, the Amsterdam law professor (and Patriot) Hendrik Cras fulminated against the provincial government's decree. According to him, convictions and beliefs were of a highly personal nature, and could therefore never be enforced by a secular government. To thrust upon others one's own beliefs was an act of subjugation and therefore, ironically, in direct conflict with one of the principal rights of man, namely the right 'not to be tied to any human power in cases of belief or unbelief, or of acknowledging or not acknowledging truth'.<sup>30</sup> Besides, the matter of human rights was still heavily debated, as texts by different authors such as Pieter Paulus and Samuel von Pufendorf proved, and, given this lack of consensus, how could someone force another to take an oath on the rights of man?

Cras did not merely reject the concept of the political oath on the freedom of thought, but also encompassed the principle of popular sovereignty. Representatives of the people, he argued, especially provisional ones, were only temporary executives of popular sovereignty, and did therefore not possess the authority to demand political oaths.<sup>31</sup> The municipality of Leiden based its complaint against the decree on the possible religious overtones of an oath (they preferred a declaration), as well as the fact that the oath stipulated allegiance to the *representatives* of the people. This brought back foul memories of 1787, when the States of Holland had introduced the Oath to the Constitution, by which

<sup>28</sup> Kuiper, *Revolutie ontrafeld*, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Cited in Van den Berg, 'Op zoek', 33; De Jong, *Democratie*, 66: 'Ik verklaare als een eerlyk man, de gronden van gelykheid, vryheid en broederschap, de ondeelbare oppermacht des volks en de onvervreemdbare rechten van de mens en burger te houden voor de eenige waare gronden der Maatschappye.'

<sup>30</sup> Cras, *Bedenkingen*, 10: 'in zaaken van gelooven en niet gelooven, van erkennen voor waarheid of niet erkennen, aan geen menselyk gezag gebonden te zyn'.

<sup>31</sup> Cras, *Bedenkingen*, 92-93.



individuals had to swear their subordination to the person of the stadtholder. Had it not been the goal of the revolution to erase these divisive allegiances to specific persons or groups?<sup>32</sup> Although the arguments that were put forward against political declarations differed, what connects them is an emphasis on the right of personal belief and the conviction that political office is susceptible to corruption, which meant that citizens had to be careful with trusting the government with the contents of political declarations.

However, the principle of popular sovereignty appealed, and all the more fervently, to those in favour of political oaths. A fine example of the reasoning asserted in support of political declarations can be found in the periodical *De Democraten* (The Democrats). Issue twenty, published on 27 October 1796, contained an article ‘On the Necessity of giving a Declaration to obtain the right to vote or active civil right’.<sup>33</sup> In the eyes of the author, the new system of government was a republic, a ‘representative Democracy’, which differed from monarchies and aristocracies in the fact that it consisted of members who had entered political society on an equal basis. They were not subjects of a monarch or some kind of aristocratic government, but active members of a political community.<sup>34</sup> In this form of government, it was not enough that citizens only benefitted from their civil rights and freedoms: they had to actively participate in political life, by taking office or by defending the constitution. The voluntary nature of the social contract could only be achieved by demanding a political declaration in which citizens promised to help uphold the constitution. This type of declaration would make the subject into a free citizen. To enter a political community that was based on equality, it was necessary for its participants to endorse its founding principles:

Without such a declaration each and every member of society remains a passive citizen; and as much as he is involved in the election of his governors, and however eligible he is for those posts, he will remain a simple machine, a passive part of the great state apparatus, just as subjugated as in a monarchy or a despotic state.<sup>35</sup>

During the first year of the Batavian Republic, rules for the inclusion or exclusion of political opponents differed widely, according to local circumstances. But as the revolution proceeded, plans for a national government and constitution became more concrete. The first plans to create a national government materialized on 29 May 1795, when a commission from the *Comité te Lande* (the Committee which had replaced the *Raad van State*) submitted a *Plan tot de algemeene oproeping des geheelen Nederlandschen volks* (Plan for the general convocation of the entire Dutch people) for the election and proceedings of a future National Assembly, a body which was to replace the States-General with a proper parliament that was also tasked with designing a constitution for the Batavian Republic.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Stukken, betrekkelijk den eed*, 14-18.

<sup>33</sup> *De Democraten*, I, 153: ‘Over de Noodwendigheid van een te doene Verklaring, ter becoming van het stemrecht of active Burgerrecht’.

<sup>34</sup> *De Democraten*, I, 153.

<sup>35</sup> *De Democraten*, I, 156-157: ‘Zonder zulk eene verklaring is en blijft ieder lid der Maatschappy slechts een passief burger; en, hoe zeer hy ook werkzaam kan zyn in de verkiezing zyner Bestuurderen, en hy ook zelve daartoe verkiesbaar is, hy blijft slechts een bloot Machine, een lydelijk deel in het groote Staatswerktuig, in het wezen der zaak zoo wel onderworpen, als in eene Monarchie of onder een Despotismus.’

<sup>36</sup> *Ontwerp van Constitutie van 1797*, I, IX.

The *Plan* neatly summarized the requirements to act as a voter and an elector: citizens who had lived in the Republic for over a year, and were twenty years of age, could vote. Excluded were citizens who were placed under legal restraint, those receiving poor relief, prisoners, and those who had been declared dishonourable by the court.<sup>37</sup> However, the *Plan* made no mention of any exclusion based on political conviction, on any level within the electoral system (voter, elector, or representative). The *Plan* led to a fierce struggle between the different provinces. As usual, the main bone of contention was the matter of local or national sovereignty. Should the provinces retain their relative autonomy until a new constitution was ratified, as the *Plan* proposed, or should the National Assembly exert more power over the provinces? The latter wish was most forcefully expressed by the government of Holland, which handed in a revised *Plan* in July 1795: the *Plan ter oproeping der burgers* (Plan for the convocation of citizens).<sup>38</sup> In this new *Plan*, one point was added to the list of voting requirements:

Excluded from the right to vote are those who refuse to make the following declaration: 'I declare to consider legal only those forms of government, which are founded on the inalienable rights of man and citizen, and on the sovereign power of the entire people; therefore, I consider as illegal and contrary to those principles all hereditary offices and dignities.'<sup>39</sup>

This demand for a declaration of political loyalty, which had been preceded by a number of local arrangements, was the first formal attempt on a national level to exclude political opponents from the franchise. The revised *Plan* formed the basis of a document which was ratified by a majority of the members of the States-General on 30 December 1795. This *Reglement* contained the rules and regulations on how the National Assembly was to be elected and how it would function, and would in practice act like a provisional constitution until 1798.<sup>40</sup> In the *Reglement*, the formulation from the revised *Plan* was left intact, bar the removal of the reference to the rights of man and citizen.<sup>41</sup>

On the level of national elections, therefore, a middle ground was found: although specific groups were not explicitly excluded, as had been the case in some cities just after the revolution, a declaration was demanded which would make it harder for Orangists to enter the electoral committees. They were supporters of the stadtholder, whose office had been declared hereditary throughout the Dutch Republic in 1747. Were they to make this declaration, Orangists therefore had to repudiate their core convictions, which many were not willing to do. Jacob Hendrik Schorer, for example, a regent from the province of Zeeland, answered his fellow Orangist colleague Lampsins – who reported in 1796 that a number of former supporters of the stadtholder had taken an oath of loyalty to the new

<sup>37</sup> *Plan tot de algemeene oproeping*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Oddens, *Pioniers*, 85-86.

<sup>39</sup> *Plan ter oproeping der burgers*, 12-13: 'Van het stemrecht zijn uitgesloten allen die genen, welke weigeren te doen de navolgende verklaring. "Ik verklaare voor wettig te houden alleen zoodanig eene Regeeringsvorm, welke steund op de onvervreembare Rechten van den Mensch en van den Burger; mitsgaders op de Oppermagt des geheelen Volks; en dienvolgens houde ik voor onwettig en daar mee strydende alle erfelyke Ampten en Waardigheden."

<sup>40</sup> *Ontwerp van Constitutie van 1797*, I, XIV.

<sup>41</sup> *Reglement*, 3.

regime and formally rejected the stadtholderate – that he considered it ‘unseemly and punishable’ to ‘determine someone’s convictions with an oath’. Many regents who had not already been removed after the Batavian Revolution, like Schorer, therefore laid down their offices after 1795.<sup>42</sup> In practice, then, the supporters of the stadtholder no longer had access to political institutions after the Revolution, which raised the question whether this exclusion should be formalized in a future national constitution.

### *The Constitutional Debate, 1796-1797*

The new National Assembly, which first convened on 1 March 1796, was given the task of designing a constitution which was to be presented to the people in a referendum. During the various constitutional debates, the topic of exclusion based on political allegiance was vehemently discussed on a number of occasions.<sup>43</sup> On 3 May 1796, representative Egbert Greve made a proposal in the Assembly concerning the right to vote. He stated that it was necessary, given all the different local regulations which made it unclear who qualified as a voter, to decree on a national level that in the future anyone ‘who continued to support the party of the former stadtholder, and therefore does not recognize the declared freedom and independence of the people’ was not welcome at the primary voting assemblies.<sup>44</sup> Although he rejected the notion that only those who had been Patriots before 1787 should receive the right to vote, he demanded a declaration of loyalty to the new republican principles in order to qualify as a voter. Greve’s proposal was backed by a number of representatives, including Jacob Floh, who argued that ‘the nature of a Republican government seems to me to demand that they who judge, vote, and confer on the common interests should agree on at least the general principles’.<sup>45</sup> He drew a comparison with ancient Athens, where a stranger who intruded upon the assembly would have been sentenced to death.

The Batavian revolutionaries did not want to go that far, but many representatives pointed to another reason why a declaration of loyalty was necessary. Floh, and colleagues like Valckenaer, Jan van Hooff, and Bernardus Bosch, argued that the new Batavian Republic was still in a revolutionary state and the danger of counter-revolution only too real. The ‘critical situation’ in which the young Batavian Republic found itself thus made a declaration expedient.<sup>46</sup> Valckenaer believed that the Netherlands was in an ‘intermediate in-between historical era’, which legitimated the (temporary) exclusion of Orangists.<sup>47</sup> This was even more important, since the rights of citizenship were closely connected to

42 Zwemer, *Schorer*, 89: ‘onbehoorlyk en strafbaar’, ‘door eenen Eed iemands denkwyse te bepaalen’.

43 For an overview of these debates, see Van den Berg, ‘Op zoek’, 54-62.

44 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 562: ‘die in de party des vorigen Stadhouders volhardende, aan de verklaarde Vrijheid en onafhangelijkheid des Volks geen hulde doet.’

45 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 523: ‘De aart eener Republikeinsche Regeringsvorm, schynt my derhalven volstrekt te eischen, dat zy, die over de algemene belangen, oordeelen, stemmen, en raadplegen zullen, het onderling, ten minste in de generaale principes, eens moeten zyn.’

46 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 525, 567.

47 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 576: ‘intermediair tussen tydvak’.

membership of citizen militias and thus the right to bear arms. A number of representatives worried that extending the right to vote would automatically lead to the arming of the Orangists and therefore increase the danger of a violent counter-revolution.<sup>48</sup> This fear was not unrealistic. The alliance between France and the Batavian Republic meant that the Dutch had become a participant in the French revolutionary wars, while members of the House of Orange had not given up their claims on positions of power in the Republic.<sup>49</sup>

Other representatives objected to a declaration of loyalty on different grounds. Some were of a more pragmatic nature. A declaration of loyalty, they suggested, would have the opposite effect to that intended, since honourable Orangists would decline to make such a statement, whereas disloyal ones would simply make false statements to enter the primary assemblies.<sup>50</sup> Another pragmatic argument, mostly put forward by moderate members of parliament, was that giving Orangists the vote would hardly cause any harm to the electoral system. On a national level, voters only voted for an elector, and since electors and representatives would have to swear loyalty to the constitution, there was no danger that Orangists would push their own candidates in the primary assemblies. Moreover, deliberations in these assemblies were forbidden; citizens only convened there to cast their (secret) vote.<sup>51</sup>

It was therefore the *representative* nature of the political system which made it possible to allow political opponents to cast their vote. Another argument, used on numerous occasions, was that the exclusion of Orangists would only increase discord instead of diminishing it, and this at a time when more, rather than less, national unity was needed. It was therefore time to 'put out the fire of disastrous strife and discord', as representative Jacob Hahn put it.<sup>52</sup> Others objected on more principled grounds. Herman Teding van Berkhout, for example, argued that according to article seven of the Rights of Man and Citizen the right to vote was an inalienable right of a citizen. To prevent a large proportion of the people from the exercising of their sovereignty went against the principle that sovereignty resided in the people as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

The combination of these arguments proved slightly stronger than those in favour of a declaration. By a majority of just one vote, it was decided that Greve's proposal would be forwarded to the commission.<sup>54</sup> The constitutional commission, according to its meeting on 24 of August 1796, saw nothing in the proposal, since declarations were 'superfluous' and did not meet the right goals. Excluding declarations would furthermore allow citizens maximum freedom to make proposals for revisions to the constitution.<sup>55</sup> The only member strongly in favour of a declaration was Jacob van Manen, who argued (just as the article in *Democraten* later would) that a declaration was necessary to tie people to the social

48 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 523, 567.

49 Koch, *Willem I*, 88-108.

50 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 574.

51 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 575; Van den Berg, 'Op zoek', 57.

52 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, IV, 469: 'dat vuur van rampzalige twist en tweedragt [...] uitgedoofd worde'.

53 Van den Berg, 'Op zoek', 56.

54 *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, I, 579.

55 *Plan van constitutie*, 208.

contract, and transform them from subjects into citizens.<sup>56</sup> The first draft of the constitution, the *Plan van Constitutie*, therefore did not contain a political declaration, although it did include a declaration of loyalty to the Dutch nation.<sup>57</sup>

This was to the dismay of a number of members of the National Assembly, who put the question of voting rights for Orangists back on the political agenda during 1797. On 13 January the Assembly debated whether Orangists should be disenfranchised unconditionally, whether some kind of declaration would be sufficient to keep out political opponents, or whether no specific measures were necessary. Although the unconditional exclusion of Orangists was deemed unacceptable by a majority of seventy-six to thirty-three, the representatives agreed that a commission should propose measures that could be taken against the supporters of the former stadtholder, since many members of the Assembly continued to emphasise the ‘machinations of the Orange cabal’.<sup>58</sup> When this proposal was discussed and rejected in March, a new commission was created, which reported in April.

The report proposed that Orangists (presently ‘silent citizens’) who had taken part in the persecution of Patriots in 1787 should be denied the right to vote (indefinitely or for a number of years), but that mere followers of the Prince of Orange should keep their right to vote, provided they agreed to make a declaration of loyalty to the Batavian people and the Constitution, and promised not to vote for a known Orangist.<sup>59</sup> Representative Johan van Lokhorst proposed to remove the explicit exclusion of Orangists, and instead focus on a satisfactory formulation of the declaration. On the one hand, deliberations on the explicit exclusion of political groups would lead to needless discussion in the Assembly, while on the other the most recent elections had shown that Orangists rarely appeared and that extreme measures to preclude their participation were unnecessary. The Assembly agreed with Lokhorst’s proposal.<sup>60</sup>

The positions taken in the debates of 1797 were similar to those in 1796. On the one hand stood the revolutionaries who had viewed the Orangists as hated enemies since 1787, a danger to the republic and civil liberties, and who were afraid they would hijack the Batavian political system to restore the old regime. They generally considered a republic as a political space where civic equality was a necessary precondition, which made it mandatory for people to pledge loyalty to the shared principles of the political society if they were to become active citizens. On the other hand stood those Batavians who argued that to exclude political opponents from the franchise, or to force them to hold certain (political) beliefs, went against precisely those principles – such as the freedom of conscience and free speech – that formed the foundation of the revolution. These revolutionaries furthermore believed that a well-designed representative system that would take the sharp edge off popular influence would also diminish the risk of too much Orangist influence. They saw attempts to exclude Orangists as a cause for further discord rather than as a solution.

We can also conclude from the constitutional debates that the demand for a declaration of political loyalty was a compromise: there was not enough support to exclude groups

<sup>56</sup> *Plan van constitutie*, 207.

<sup>57</sup> Van den Berg, ‘Op zoek’, 58.

<sup>58</sup> *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, IV, 474.

<sup>59</sup> *Ontwerp van Constitutie van 1797*, II, 30–31; *Dagverhaal van de Nationaale Vergadering*, v, 678.

<sup>60</sup> *Ontwerp van Constitutie van 1797*, II, 114–115.

of Orangists out of hand but neither was there enough trust in the Orangists to let them exercise their right to vote unconditionally. The revised *Plan van Constitutie* (Plan for the Constitution), known as the *Ontwerp van Constitutie* (Design of Constitution), therefore included a declaration first proposed by the National Assembly in April 1797: every citizen with the right to vote could only act on this right if he made a declaration of loyalty to the Batavian people and the Constitution, promising that he would never vote for a supporter of the stadtholderate.<sup>61</sup> The *Ontwerp van Constitutie* was presented to the electorate in a referendum on 8 August 1797, for which the rules from the *Reglement* applied, including its declaration of loyalty and rejection of hereditary offices.<sup>62</sup> But despite the attempts to exclude political opponents from the vote, it turned out that political consensus amongst the revolutionaries themselves was a chimera: the constitutional design was firmly rejected by the people.<sup>63</sup>

### *Increased Political Disenfranchisement: The Constitution of 1798*

The rejection of the *Ontwerp*, and the election of a Second National Assembly which followed it, was gradually moving Batavian politics into a deadlock. Political divisions were becoming increasingly unbridgeable, which led to the conviction amongst a number of more radical Batavians that the taking of severe measures was in order. They believed that the only way out of the political standstill was a coup d'état which would make it possible to swiftly pass a constitution for the Batavian people, and finally establish a unitary state. A group of radicals therefore conspired with the French, who controlled affairs by military means in the Batavian Republic. France had held a more positive attitude towards the Dutch radicals following the coup of 18 Fructidor (4 September 1797), which had brought a more radical and anti-monarchist government to power in Paris.<sup>64</sup> Together the French and the radical Batavians organised a palace revolution on 22 January 1798. The plotters and their allies removed dissenting members of the National Assembly, either by arrest or by forcing members to make a declaration against the regime of the stadtholder, the aristocracy, federalism, and anarchy. The resulting rump parliament proceeded to make preparations for a constitution.<sup>65</sup>

The new (and third) constitutional commission quickly produced a new constitutional design, known as the *Staatsregeling*, which was presented to the people and ratified on 23 April by an overwhelming majority of the voters (153,913 to 11,597).<sup>66</sup> The *Staatsregeling* contained two articles that were meant to sharply define the political background of the electorate. Article xIb stipulated that in order to register as a voter, a citizen had to hand in a signed declaration of hatred against the government of the stadtholder, federalism,

<sup>61</sup> *Ontwerp van Constitutie voor het Bataafsche Volk*, 11 (article 13).

<sup>62</sup> De Jong, *Democratie*, 66.

<sup>63</sup> De Jong, *Democratie*, 17: eighty percent voted against the *Ontwerp van Constitutie*.

<sup>64</sup> De Bruin, 'Soevereine volk', 33.

<sup>65</sup> For the events leading up to and on 22 January 1798, see *Staatsregeling*, I, xxxviii-lII; Oddens, *Pioniers*, 302-317.

<sup>66</sup> Van Sas, *Bataafse Terreur*, 31.

aristocracy, and anarchy, promising never to vote for a supporter of such a political system. Article xv denied access to the voting register to public supporters of Orangist and federalist forms of government, and known opponents of the principles of the revolution of 1795, for a period of ten years after the ratification of the Constitution.<sup>67</sup>

But even before the ratification the primary assemblies had been purged by the revolutionary government (by employing the voting regulations from the *Staatsregeling*), in order to muster enough support for the constitution during the referendum. The agents of the new regime tried to weed out potential political opponents from the voting rolls, and simultaneously mobilized their supporters to make a declaration and cast their vote.<sup>68</sup> Although the purges served their short-term goal, they would alienate large groups of Batavians. The large-scale purges which formed the core of the 'Batavian Terror' during the spring of 1798, and the rather random manner in which an individual was deemed a loyal supporter of the new regime or otherwise, led to a growing division among the revolutionaries themselves.<sup>69</sup>

Later that year, Pieter Vreede, one of the architects of the coup d'état and leader of the radical wing of the Batavians, defended the purges and the political oath contained in the constitution, by stating that citizens had to agree with the basic principles of the new republic to be active (that is, enfranchised) citizens.<sup>70</sup> In his defence of the coup of 22 January, Vreede echoed the more radical democratic vision which had also been expressed in the *Democraten* in 1796, a vision that supported the many calls for the exclusion of political opponents during the Batavian Republic.

The oath was still in place after 12 June, when moderate revolutionaries staged a coup d'état against the regime of 22 January. Led by general Willem Daendels, a group of Agents (heads of department) removed the members of the executive council and their supporters in parliament from their posts. They justified their action by referring to the random purge of government, its personnel, and of the primary assemblies. They also referred to the unconstitutional decision by the new National Assembly on 4 May to only elect one-third of its members, rather than the whole body as was prescribed by the new constitution.<sup>71</sup>

What is striking, however, is that none of the putschists of 12 June questioned the articles on voting rights in the Constitution in themselves, but only that they had been executed randomly and sometimes perhaps too strictly. In their justification, written to the First Chamber of the new parliament, they pointed out that it was only just to demand that a citizen act according to the truths of the revolution, and to profess his aversion to a system which had been destroyed by that same revolution. They also lamented the fact that the radical regime of 22 January had failed to oust those who had proved to be opponents of the Revolution of 1795 from the primary assemblies.<sup>72</sup> In parliament, the chairman, to general acclaim, proposed the drawing up of new voting lists, and of allowing

67 *Staatsregeling voor het Bataafsche Volk*, Acte van Staatsregeling, articles xIb and xv.

68 De Jong, *Democratie*, 194-195.

69 For the Batavian Terror, see Van Sas, *Bataafse Terreur*, 33-38; De Bruin, 'Zuivering', 100-110; Schama, *Patriots*, 321-342.

70 Vreede, *Verandwoording*, 5-13.

71 Van Sas, *Bataafse Terreur*, 38.

72 *Memorie Intermediair Uitvoerend Bewind*, 11-12.

‘every Citizen, *who is not excluded from the right to vote by the Constitution*’, to take back their right to vote.<sup>73</sup> The declaration of hatred against the stadtholderate, federalism, and anarchy was therefore maintained and would return in the *Reglement* for the municipal elections which was drafted by the Representative Body in June 1800.<sup>74</sup> The exclusion of (primarily) Orangists from the vote in the period 1798-1801 could also have professional consequences, since the *Staatsregeling* demanded that a citizen was a registered voter in order to hold a government job. The Representative Body therefore issued a decree on 2 July 1799 that all civil servants who had not been registered as voters before 1 August 1798 should be removed from their posts. Despite the fact that many local governments refused to comply with this decree, political allegiance would remain an important criterion in the appointment of civil servants up until 1800.<sup>75</sup>

The provisions against political opponents would remain in place until 1801, when another coup d'état paved the way for a new constitution. The constitution of 1801 made no mention of the exclusion of Orangists from the primary assemblies, and it contained a neutral formulation of the declaration; a citizen only had to promise loyalty to the constitution.<sup>76</sup> This made it possible for Orangists to finally participate in Batavian politics, a development that was helped by the permission that the former stadtholder had given to his followers to participate in public affairs in the same year.<sup>77</sup> This ‘nationalization’ of the revolution came at the price of democratic participation, however.<sup>78</sup> From 1801 onwards, the legislative (and elected) body lost its power to the (unelected) executive branch of government, officials in different levels of government were appointed rather than elected, and gradually a tax payment was introduced as a voting requirement.<sup>79</sup> This did not mean that the disagreement between different political parties disappeared, but it ceased to be part of the political institutions, which became more authoritarian.<sup>80</sup> Partisanship was, officially, no longer a reason for political exclusion, but the broadening of the political elite went hand in hand with a depoliticization of society and was a strong brake on participatory, democratic politics. The revolutionary experiment with a broader electoral political system had come to an end.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on a specific group of citizens who were excluded from the political community by successful revolutionaries: political opponents, in the Dutch case predominantly the Orangists. During their regime, the revolutionary Batavians continuously

73 *Dagverhaal van het vertegenwoordigend lichaam*, 1, 360: ‘ieder Burger, die niet bepaaldelyk by de Staatsregeling is uitgeslooten, van het Stemrecht’ (emphasis added).

74 *Dagverhaal van het vertegenwoordigend lichaam*, VIII, 554.

75 De Bruin, ‘Zuivering’, 107, 110-111.

76 Van den Berg, ‘Op zoek’, 82.

77 Schama, *Patriots*, 421.

78 Van Sas, *Metamorfose*, 30-31.

79 Kuiper, *Revolutie ontrafeld*, 489-490; Van den Berg, ‘Op zoek’, 82-99.

80 Verheijen, *Nederland onder Napoleon*, 27.



drew up constitutional barriers against their adversaries. Although the explicit exclusion of Orangists from active and passive voting was a step too far for all but the most radical Batavians, declarations of loyalty to the new regime and a sworn denouncement of adherence to the stadtholder appeared in most voting regulations during the period when popular elections were an integral part of the political system.

Why was this the case, and what does it tell us about the political system of the Dutch Revolution? The exclusion of political opponents was based on an intricate mix of arguments, positions, and circumstances, which were in part old, in part new, but in the end formed a unique and specific late-eighteenth century revolutionary electoral system – as is evidenced by the fact that American and French revolutionary elections had similar provisions. For many revolutionaries, banning Orangists from revolutionary political institutions was simply revenge for their own treatment in 1787. This was, therefore, a specific circumstance of the revolutionary period, although it can also be viewed as a continuation of the older power dynamics of the different factions during the old Republic.

An argument that was truly specific for the revolutionary period was the not unrealistic fear that Orangists would undo the benefits of the revolution if they were allowed to take part in the political decision-making process. The constant insecurities and threats of a counter-revolution therefore made it hard to allow the participation of opponents to this new and fragile system of electoral democracy. The creation of a pluralistic electoral culture, which was already difficult enough – as is evidenced by the history of representative government, especially in the nineteenth century – was therefore a near impossibility during the tumultuous decades of the late eighteenth century. In that sense, it is remarkable that there even was a debate on the participation of Orangists. Here we can find another specifically revolutionary argument for the exclusion of political opponents, an argument which would be lost during the Restoration regime: the belief that in order to become an active citizen, a subject had to agree to the social contract and promise to defend the basic principles of the new republican constitution, the most prominent of which being popular sovereignty. A basic degree of unity within the political community was seen as a necessary condition of a functioning representative government.

This argument was mostly found at the more radical end of the Batavian political spectrum, and we thus see the somewhat paradoxical situation that the most outspoken advocates of popular sovereignty and democracy were those demanding that their political opponents be excluded from the process. This paradox can in part be explained by the fact that (radical) democrats placed great trust and importance in a representative system based on popular sovereignty, and recognized the fragility of that system, especially in revolutionary circumstances, which led them to the conclusion that opponents of revolutionary politics should be barred from its institutions.

Moderate Batavians who did not view democracy as a silver bullet could promote a less egalitarian form of government, in which the power of the people was more contained as a way of ensuring a stable Republic. In a political system where it mattered less what voters decided, it was also less of a problem to let Orangists have the vote. Moderates saw attempts to exclude Orangists from the vote as a source for discord, not as a solution. Another argument they made against excluding political opponents was that asking for a declaration of political loyalty to a certain set of political convictions ran against

precisely those basic civil rights (primarily the freedom of conviction and of speech) that the revolution was founded on. However, a combination of fear, feelings of revenge, and political pressure from radical Batavians and their specific view on popular sovereignty and elections amounted to continuous efforts by revolutionaries to place barriers against Orangists to exercise the right to vote from 1795 onwards, and these ended only after the experiment with electoral politics had finished. The debates on, and the institutionalization of, voting rights for political opponents show, therefore, that these experiments were shaped by circumstances that were partly unique to the revolutionary period around 1800 in the Northern Netherlands. To appreciate the complicated views towards elections and the efforts to create representative constitutional institutions during the Dutch revolution, it is important to take this revolutionary context as a reference point, and so it is when discussing the (dis)continuities involved in the development of Dutch democracy.

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