

## SUMMARY

### Spin Doctors of the Dutch Golden Age

#### The First Overijssel Pamphlet War (1654-1675)

This research explores the relationship between the birth of public opinion and the emergence of the nation state in the early modern period. The case in question is a political conflict in Overijssel (1654-1675) where the appointment and suspension of the nobleman Rutger van Haersolte, respectively as *drost* of Twente (1654) and *drost* of Salland (1668), twice led to a schism in the national government (the States of Overijssel). The opposing parties were the town of Deventer with the nobility of Twente (the Deventer party) on one side, and the cities of Zwolle and Kampen with the nobilities of Salland and Vollenhove (the Zwolle party) on the other. In the course of the power struggle, Kampen and the majority of the Overijssel nobility changed sides to join the Deventer party.

The conflict became so heated that on both occasions the parties decided to take it to their citizens. The result was the first public debate in Overijssel, preserved in a corpus of 124 pamphlets that have never been the subject of research. The battle for public opinion was dominated by the magistrates of the town councils: it is their names that feature most frequently as senders of the pamphlets. The sharply divided nobility only presented itself as an independent entity once.

The battle for public opinion followed the timeline of the political struggle and can be divided in two debates: 1654-1657 and 1668-1671. Both conflicts were resolved through arbitration: the first by the States of Holland, the second by the States General. On both occasions, the Deventer party emerged victorious. Although the political conflict ended in September 1671, the pamphlet propaganda war continued up to 1675. The reason for this was the invasion in 1672 by France and the German states of Munster and Cologne, which sounded the death knell for the old system of *regenten* government in Overijssel.

The pamphlet war changed from a political power struggle to a reputational quarrel between citizens. Former members of the Zwolle party used the capitulation of Deventer to take revenge for their political humiliation. They accused the magistrate of Deventer of treason, and rewrote the history of the party battles in Overijssel as (yet another) political confrontation between Republicans and Orangists.

The starting point of this inquiry is the question of how the parties used the pamphlets in their political struggle, making this doctoral thesis primarily a study in media history – primarily, but not exclusively. The pamphlets can be seen as a means of communication, but also as political and linguistic documents. They are part of the mediatisation of the early modern political culture, where the public disclosure of opinions became an adversarial act that was connected closely with the development of political thought. As a linguistic document, it can be regarded as an example of (political) rhetoric.

All three named research paradigms (media history, political history and literary history) will be examined on the basis of three parameters: the relationship between the corpus and historical reality, the situational architecture of the public discourse, and finally, the argumentation of this discourse with the reasoning and rhetorical techniques that structure it. The concept of ‘reality’ in our interpretative frame of reference denotes the shared historical actuality discussed by the speakers; ‘public discourse’ the interaction between the roles of the speakers and the political roles the parties adopt to present themselves to the public; and ‘argument’ the interaction between the reality the speakers seek to present to the public as plausible and the rhetorical devices they deploy to do this.

To analyse the corpus, we will use the theory of language in which most early modern writers and *regenten* were schooled: the classical rhetoric that identifies three roles in public discourse (speaker, counter-speaker, audience), public speaking situations (*genus deliberativum*, *iudiciale en demonstrativum*), technical means of persuasion (*logos*, *ethos*, *pathos*), argumentation (specific and common *topes*) and stylistic means (*genres*, *tropes* and *metaphors*). In this analysis, we shall not only examine the arguments themselves, but also the logics with which they are presented (*sylogism*, *enthymeme*, *paradigm*).

Since the end of the last century, research into the relationship between the emergence of nation states and the process of public opinion-forming has been dominated by Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere. Habermas saw the birth of public opinion within the context of the territorial state ruled by a dynastic monarch. According to Habermas, public opinion emerged when economically independent citizens used nationally distributed newspapers to create a public discourse in opposition to the government of the day. The oppositional dynamic of public debate in this model was based on the interaction between central authority and citizens.

With his choice of model of the territorial state, Habermas inhabited a research tradition that linked the birth of the European nation state with the monarch’s ambition to create territorial states. This doctorate study will show that similar processes took place in different political structures, such as city republics and federal states, and often long before 1700, the year when – in Habermas’s vision – public opinion as we would recognize it today first appeared in England. The Dutch Republic was such a federal state, not ruled by a monarch but by citizens.

The Union, as the Republic was sometimes called, was a federation of seven sovereign states that only took common decisions about foreign policy. One of these states was Overijssel. The seven sovereign states were in their turn also federal in nature. For example, in Overijssel the IJssel towns of Deventer, Kampen and Zwolle functioned as independent city republics until the end of the 18th century; the Overijssel state administration had absolutely no authority over them. Their autonomy was based on a tradition of local self-government that had its roots in the Middle Ages, when Overijssel was part of the prince-bishopric of Utrecht. In the prince-bishop’s power struggle against the war-mongering nobility, support from the towns was indispensable. In exchange for this support, the cities of Overijssel were granted many different privileges that formed the foundation of their future autonomy.

In these towns, the physical space of the walled city coincided from 1200 onwards with the public space in which citizens lived their political lives. Citizen participation in town governance was extremely high. Members of the magistracy were elected annually by the electoral college that in turn represented the citizens (*gezworen gemeente*). The office of magistrate was a civic duty that the chosen candidate turned down on pain of a financial fine. Important political decisions were taken jointly by the magistrate and the electoral college. The size of city government varied from 50 voting members (Kampen) to 64 (Deventer, Zwolle) on a total population of around 6,000 to 8,000 inhabitants.

The political decision-making process was firmly rooted in a local mode of communication that consisted of verbal dialogue, hand-written documents (including petitions) and public ceremonies. Decisions were taken on a majority vote and announced by the town crier or by means of hand-written bills that were available for inspection in the town hall. Their implementation was guaranteed by a long-standing tradition of civic harmony: registered inhabitants had to swear an oath to behave at all times as loyal citizens.

This thesis shows that the party struggle in Overijssel was not a clash between Republicans and Orangists as has always been assumed, but rather a conflict between two conceptions of the state: city republic versus territorial state. The heart of the struggle was that the three city republics Deventer, Kampen en Zwolle, which had in the Middle Ages successfully defended their autonomy against the territorial lord and the nobility by sticking together, were confronted after the Dutch Revolt by a system of sovereign government (the States of Overijssel) with six voting members: three cities and three regional nobilities. These nobilities had grown into fully-fledged political entities which meant there was more potential for creating new coalitions.

This new political constellation led in the first instance to the division of Overijssel in three geopolitical spheres of influence in which Deventer and Twente formed one group, Zwolle and Salland another, and Kampen with Land van Vollenhove the third. The controversial appointment of the Salland nobleman Rutger van Haersolte as *drost* of Twente, realized in 1654 with support from Zwolle and Kampen, was seen by Deventer as an abrupt break with the long history of co-operation between the cities and therefore an encroachment on her autonomy. Later, the Zwolle city council interpreted the suspension of Van Haersolte as *drost* of Salland in exactly same way.

With their sudden participation in state government, the role of city councils changed dramatically. In their own cities these councils were the only political authority, but in national government they could belong to the party of opposition. This had huge repercussions on their public discourse. In its own town under its own jurisdiction, a city council simply announced publicly that a majority decision had been reached. As an oppositional party on the national stage, it was forced to advocate a minority standpoint. In this communication model, the decree was replaced by the reasoned explanation, the hand-written bill by the printed pamphlet. Only in this way could everyone in Overijssel be reached.

The transition from a city-based to a territorial communication model took place in Overijssel on July 23 1654, when the Deventer party declared in a letter that she would

feel forced 'in a Manifest to acquaint the world entire' with its opinion, unless the opposing party changed course. This letter may be considered as the birth certificate of Overijssel public opinion in the modern sense of the word: by appealing to the public for a rational judgement, the Deventer party gave public opinion the role of political authority.

Over time, the public debate developed into an interactive process in which the actions (or words) of one party provoked actions (or words) from the other. An analysis of the corpus demonstrates that the reach of the pamphlets was initially confined to Overijssel itself, although the announced 'Manifest' had also been addressed to the public in other provinces. The first conflict was serious enough to be brought to the attention of the States General, but this did not lead citizens in the other provinces to participate in the debate. This demonstrates that in the 17th century the seven states of the Republic were still discrete public spheres.

Only after 1672, when the Republic was overrun with enemy forces, was there question of a short-lived exchange of public opinion between Overijssel and Holland: the popular opinion in Holland that Overijssel had committed treason was adopted by the Zwolle party and turned against the Deventer party on the grounds that Deventer had been the first city to surrender to the enemy. This was also the moment when civic opposition in Deventer began to use the methods of the federal pamphlet war to attack the Deventer city council, and so the printed pamphlet as political weapon also entered local politics.

But in 1654, these events were still some way off. That the Overijssel *regenten* had to grow into their new role of pamphleteer is obvious from its apologies in the first pamphlet for having gone public at all, and its use of the pejorative term *opiniatreren* or 'opionate' (to stubbornly and arrogantly stick to a position) to describe the activity of political opposition. In the beginning, the pamphlets were just publications of correspondence, but as the battle of opinions intensified, they increasingly addressed the public directly. The number of named individual speakers increases steadily, first among the nobility, but later among the city *regenten* too. This also points to the phenomenon that gradually all embarrassment was put aside.

In the pamphlets that begin to be published from 1668, the personalization of the public discourse leads to a personalization of the political conflict: the party battle is no longer represented and seen as a dispute between two coalitions, but as the personal feud between two aristocratic families: the family Van Haersolte, of which the suspended *drost* of Salland Rutger van Haersolte is a member, and the family Van Raesfelt, with Adolph Hendrik van Raesfelt, the leader of the Twente nobility and one of the most prominent figures of the Deventer party, as its figurehead.

The share of anonymous pamphlets within the corpus is significant: 40 of the 124 pamphlets were published without a named author or publisher, with most (28) coming from the Deventer party. These consisted of poems, street songs, anonymous letters (between friends), dialogue pamphlets and other literary genres. Anonymous pamphlets are generally libellous, and as such they also appear in the Overijssel corpus, notably from Zwolle. The Deventer writers use them above all as an alternative rhetorical avenue of discourse: the accusations in their anonymous pamphlets are broadly the same

as in their official pamphlets, but couched in different frames of reference and literary genres.

The predilection of the Deventer writers for the anonymous pamphlet is determined above all by the rhetorical limitations that a signed publication imposes, as our analysis of the corpus reveals. In signed pamphlets, the writers are confined to recognised administrative genres such as letters, accounts, reports, proclamations and deductive reasoning, texts in which *logos* is dominant as the means of persuasion. For a party in opposition, it is especially important to stick to strict logical argumentation when making its case to the public. If you want the public to make a rational judgment, as the authors ask their readers in their signed pamphlets, you have to convince them with rational arguments. The other means of persuasion (ethos and pathos) are subordinate to this purpose.

In their anonymous pamphlets, the Deventer writers feel free to use a different mix of persuasive techniques. In these texts, pathos comes to the fore, which does not mean that logos and ethos are lacking completely. The numerous poems, street songs, correspondence between friends, dialogue pamphlets and plays in the Deventer corpus start from very well-known events, fact and opinions from the political battle, but frame them in a popular, moralising way that makes the battle come alive as a more direct and immediate experience for the reading public.

In their logical argumentation, both parties initially appeal to historical precedents as set down in retrospective acts, mostly jurisprudence or common law. With the exception of the principle that no one with a majority of the vote can be robbed of his rights, the parties disagree on all these judicial toposes, with the result that they need other arguments to sway the public – arguments that apply to all conversational situations and are based on normative generalisations that the public can accept as plausible.

Analysis shows that these so-called common toposes are predominantly clustered around the concepts of freedom, unity and highness that were from the very beginning of the Dutch Revolt a core part of the Republic's political vocabulary. These three republican concepts are also at the root of the stereotypical political roles attributed to the *regenten*, such as tyrant, father of the fatherland, patriot, agitator, power abuser and lese-majesty offender

In this oppositional model, the tyrant is a regent elected by the majority but who flagrantly ignores the rights and freedoms of the minority and who is therefore guilty of abuse of power. On the other end of the spectrum as the non-tyrant is the shining example of the father of the fatherland who defends the unity of his city and his country, and protects the rights and freedoms of its citizens. The tyrant has his positive counterpart in the oppositional role of patriot who defends the rights and freedoms of the threatened minority and fights the tyrant's abuse of his power. The negative version of this oppositional role is the political agitator who, driven by his passions, threatens the unity of the polity and risks civil war.

The pamphlet writers use topical arguments to alternate smoothly between political actuality and the public spheres of city, country or republic. *A fortiori* arguments make it credible that a certain action or utterance from the opposing party contradicts the principles of freedom, unity and highness that the city, country and the Union should

uphold. *Ex contrario* arguments are deployed mostly to emphasize the differences between the various factions. Presenting the behaviour of the enemy as the negative opposite of one's own actions highlights the righteousness of one's own political actions.

During the first crisis, the logical arguments of the Deventer minority party are marshalled to defend the integrity of Deventer's autonomy. The city's ancient freedoms and privileges are the backdrop to the accusation that the opposition is pursuing 'a tyrannical power and permanent domination'. The many-faceted corporate and judicial principle of city freedom is blended with the simple, powerful idea behind the Dutch Revolt: the hard-fought independence of the Republic. In this argumentation, the Spanish tyrant is replaced by the tyranny of Zwolle and the sovereignty of the Republic by the autonomy of the own city republic.

In the pamphlets of the Zwolle party during the first crisis, the unity of Overijssel is paramount. Its writers build their defence from the argument that the Zwolle majority is the legal representation of the national government and that the Deventer party is guilty of lese-majesty and sedition. During the second crisis, the roles are reversed with the Zwolle minority constructing its arguments from the same lofty concept of freedom that the Deventer party had deployed during the first crisis: the autonomy of the city republic. In this debate, it is Deventer that falls back on the unity of the province for its defence.

Connected with the political paradigm discussed above is an idea of virtue that the writers project on to the *regenten* who are the actors of the political drama. These portraits of virtue are drawn from the qualities that make a good regent, and the character flaws that motivate the bad regent, forming a self-image and an enemy-image which the writers play out against others as part of their moral argument (ethos).

The virtues are less vivid; the writers fight their true combat not by praising the *regenten* on their side but by lambasting the enemy. Only the Deventer writers make a decent stab at explaining in general terms what moral demands a *regent* ought to satisfy, but even then they are also implicitly formulating a self-image. They sketch an image of the good *regent* as an official who independent of both parties is guided exclusively by his own conscience.

The profile is so idealised, the Zwolle party dismisses it as completely misleading and far-fetched. In the Deventer profile, the ideal *regent* is modelled on the example of the righteous monarch, whose actions are inspired by the cardinal virtues of justice, caution, self-control, courage and loyalty. What is not made explicit is that the *regent* also represents his city on the national stage, a role in which he has to join or oppose coalitions as part of national governance.

The significance the parties attach to character flaws does not mean the virtues are not mentioned at all. They are often signalled with adjectives such as devout, loyal, just, moderate, reasonable, kind, in which one can trace the cardinal virtues of *fides*, *fortitudo*, *justitia*, *temperantia*, *prudentia* and *caritas*. Pejorative adjectives that identify the negative counterparts of these virtues characterise the *regents* of the opposing party. Using the characteristics of the enemy as the negative opposite of the behaviour of one's own *regenten* amplifies the rectitude of one's own political actions.

The vices of the opposing party are in full display in the corpus. A central part of the enemy image is passion as opposed to reason. According to the writers, much of the political strife is caused by *regenten* who are led by their passions. In this conception of human nature, lust is the feeding ground of the base passions that threaten the *regent*. Imperiousness, greed and ambition emerge as the strongest of those passions, and are strongly linked with the exercise of office.

With lust as the universal vice, the writers associate the seven deadly sins of Christian teaching specifically with the failings of the *regent* as a person, in particular pride (*superbia*), avarice (*avaritia*), fornication (*luxuria*), envy (*invidia*) and gluttony (*gula*). This transition in the moral landscape takes place after 1668 when the political arguments have been exhausted and more powerful weapons have to be deployed. The examples are usually trivial and drawn from every-day life. Because the accusations are presented as facts without proof, the pamphlets become increasingly libellous in tone, notably on the Zwolle side.

Both lines of reasoning – the logical and ethical – are clearly influenced by the core values of classical republicanism that revived in the late Middle Ages in the Italian city states; the model of a civic urban environment whose survival was determined by the struggle between freedom and slavery, virtue and vice. In Overijssel, these took the form of the party struggles of 1654-1671, when the city republics felt their autonomy was threatened by decisions taken by the national government, and saw the virtue of their *regenten* as the only guarantor of independence.

The Deventer party exploited the power of pamphlets most effectively by operating two strands of public discourse. This enabled the writers to use a more complete rhetorical arsenal of persuasion. That this was done by design is most apparent from the *Devout Patriot* series, a narrative of dialogue pamphlets that closely follows the events of the political struggle. It is a fictitious serial which takes the form of a dramatized legal procedure against Rutger van Haersolte, featuring all the important facts and opinions of the political dispute. It is framed mainly pathetically, but logical and moral arguments are not lacking.

The main speaker is the character of the *Devout Patriot*, later named the *Overijssel Devout Patriot*. He is the stereotype of a patriotic and sensible burger who defends the freedoms and rights of his city. In the Deventer campaign, he is a spin doctor *avant la lettre*. He first appears in 1654 as a concerned burger keen to inform his fellow citizens about the party disagreements. Then he becomes the public prosecutor who starts judicial proceedings against Van Haersolte. In 1670, his final incarnation is that of a people's representative who wants to solve the deadlocked party battle.

The way in which the Deventer writers turn the *Devout Patriot* into the leading character of a literary narrative about a trial, is a subtle example of how public opinion can be shaped and influenced. The narrative casts Van Haersolte in the role of suspect before even a word has been uttered. The court setting has the additional advantage of offering the Deventer writers the opportunity to call all sorts of real or invented characters from the past as witnesses. Van Haersolte's defence witnesses are also put on the stand, creating a colourful mix of opinions about which the judge must come to an independent verdict.

As literary narrative the *Devout Patriot* series has a double function. It is not only a dramatized series of dialogue pamphlets about the Overijssel party struggle, it is also a metaphor for how public opinion is formed and manipulated. The series present public opinion as a tribunal open to all which by mouth of judge Vrederijck pronounces a verdict on Rutger van Haersolte on the basis of examination and cross-examination. It is the same ideal that is carved in the fireplace of the Deventer town hall: *Audi et alteram partem* (Also hear the other party).

The Deventer faction won the battle against the Zwolle party, but in the end succumbed to the stadtholder. Having taken power after 1672, William III revoked the status of city republic from the Overijssel towns; from then onwards, the stadtholder appointed the city councils. In the generations that followed, the preservation of city independence remained the most important issue in the political confrontation between the stadtholder and the provinces. In 1781, this battle reached its denouement when in his open letter, *To the People of the Netherlands*, the Overijssel aristocrat Joan Derk van der Capellen called on the Republic to rise up against stadtholder Willem V.

Things did not go as planned. The people did indeed rise up, but turned out to have had its fill not only of the stadtholder but also of the city councils and nobilities that had ruled the roost for so long on the basis of medieval privileges. With the foundation of the Batavian Republic in 1795, the first contours emerged of a democratic territorial state with the rule of law in which public opinion found a new outlet in national newspapers. Unlike in dynastic territorial states like England, the Batavian Republic did not have to invent the concept of public opinion because it already existed, as is demonstrated by the Overijssel corpus. In the Dutch Republic, public opinion created the modern democratic state.