

# Monitoring discontent. Local unrest and the problem of national security in the Netherlands, 1830-1848

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Dr. Diederik Smit	History
Dr. Maartje Janse	History
Prof. Dr. Wim Voermans	Constitutional and Administrative Law

## Project description

This project explores the nationalization of local unrest in the Netherlands in 1830s and 1840s, by analyzing local, provincial, and national administrators' responses to (potential) unrest. The decades prior to the Constitutional Reform of 1848 were a crucial phase, both in the process of nation state building, and in the evolution of political protest. From an institutional point of the view the 1830s and 1840s can be considered as a missing link between the early modern and modern state<sup>1</sup>, while from a political-cultural perspective these decades saw the transition from traditional forms of popular protest to the birth of the mass movement.<sup>2</sup>

The period 1830-1848 was one of great societal and political upheaval, in which economic, religious, and constitutional unrest threatened the very existence of Dutch nation state. However, until now political historians have so far paid surprisingly little attention to these crises. Most studies on unrest in this period have either been carried out by theologians or socioeconomic historians.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the few political historians that did study the 1830s and 1840s have mainly been interested in politics at the national level.<sup>4</sup> Although they do point out that authorities in these years developed a deep fear of social unrest and revolution, links between local unrest and ideas on national security have never been the object of study.

Our research question is: **How was local unrest understood, described, and managed on a supralocal (esp. provincial) level?** Until the Constitutional Reform of 1848 all forms of disorderly conduct, uproar, and insurgency were intensely monitored by the Provincial Governor, who reported directly to the central authorities. As a result, his reports provide a fascinating insight in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Diederik Smit has argued that the provincial level in particular played a key role in keeping the nation together during the Restoration period. See for instance: with Brecht Deseure, 'Post-revolutionary provinces in a post-Napoleonic state. Piecing together the United Kingdom of the Netherlands', *BMGN/Low Countries Historical Review* 133-3 (2018) 98-122.

<sup>2</sup> Maartje Janse has published extensively on this topic, see for instance 'Towards a history of civil society', *De Negentiende Eeuw* 32-2 (2008) 104-121; *De afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland, 1840-1880* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek 2007); with Henk te Velde (eds.) *Organizing Democracy: Reflections on the Rise of Political Organizations in the 19th Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2017); "'What Value Should We Attach to All These Petitions?': Petition Campaigns and the Problem of Legitimacy in the Nineteenth-Century Netherlands', *Social Science History* 43-3 (2019) 509-530.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Cornelis Smits, *De Afscheiding van 1834*, (Dordrecht: Van den Tol 1971-1991 9 volumes); Jan Luiten van Zanden and Maarten Prak, *Nederland en het Poldermodel. Sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Nederland 1000-2000* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 2013); Jacques Giele, *De pen in de aanslag. Revolutionairen rond 1848* (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoeck 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Siep Stuurman, *Wacht op onze daden. Liberalisme en de vernieuwing van de Nederlandse staat* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 1992); Remieg Aerts, *Thorbecke wil het. Biografie van een staatsman* (Amsterdam: Prometheus 2018); Mathijs van de Waardt, *De man van 1848. Dirk Donker Curtius* (Nijmegen: Vantilt 2019); Jeroen van Zanten, *Schielijk, Winzucht, Zwaarhoofd en Bedaard. Politieke discussie en oppositievorming, 1813-1840* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek 2004).

administrative integration of the Netherlands: here local, provincial, and national politics collided.<sup>5</sup> Preventing revolution was key, but ironically, counterrevolutionary activities often led to administrative paranoia.<sup>6</sup>

### Research Trainee Profile

Three Research Trainees will conduct archival research on local case studies. The cities of Leiden, Rotterdam and The Hague have been selected because in all of these cities several instances of local unrest were reported in this period.

Research Trainee 1	case study: Leiden	National Archives, The Hague, City Archives Leiden
Research Trainee 2	case study: Rotterdam	National Archives, The Hague, City Archives Rotterdam
Research Trainee 3	case study: The Hague	National Archives, The Hague, City Archives The Hague

Especially the Provincial Archives are researched thoroughly in order to select more reported instances of local unrest to the list. In a shared data set information is gathered on

- Type of unrest (student row, religious upheaval, food riot etc.)
- Description of events
- Fears of local and provincial authorities ('scenarios')
- Actions taken by local and provincial authorities
- Involvement of cabinet members

This research traineeship is intended for talented and motivated students with a strong interest in the history of the Netherlands. Both BA students and (Res)Ma students who started their degree in September 2021 are eligible to apply. Applicants should preferably have proven experience with archival research. Preliminary knowledge of Dutch politics in the nineteenth century is desired but not required.

### Collaboration

In an **interdisciplinary** sense, this project is a collaboration between historians of politics and an expert in the field of constitutional and administrative law. In both disciplines scholars are mostly inclined to discuss national developments, and increasingly research is done into local contexts. However, the provincial level is almost always missing from broader analyses of the development of politics and administration. By highlighting a period in which the provinces were a crucial link between the local and the national, we aim at better understanding the complexities of political and administrative development, especially with regard to the process of national integration of the Netherlands as it took place in the nineteenth century.

In a **practical** sense, this project is a collaboration with the Aspasia project of Supervisor 2. She had been planning to hire a student assistant to support her in preparing a grant proposal, but prefers to do so within the context of this wider research project. This means that she will match the budget for research trainees substantially, with a sum of 6.000 euros (or more if needed). **This means that not two, but three Research Trainees will be hired.**

<sup>5</sup> Wim Voermans has published extensively on the structure of our political system, see for instance *Het verhaal van de grondwet. Zoeken naar wij* (Amsterdam: Prometheus 2019); with Geerten Waling, *Gemeente in de genen. Tradities en toekomst van de lokale democratie in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Prometheus 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Adam Zamoyski, *Phantom Terror. Political paranoia and the creation of the modern state* (New York: Basic books 2015); and Beatrice de Graaf, *Tegen de terreur. Hoe Europa veilig werd na Napoleon* (Amsterdam: Prometheus 2018). These books deal with an earlier timeframe, similar studies have not been done for 1830-1848.

## Deliverables

- Interdisciplinary Conference (1 day), Institute for History, Leiden, with presentations by experts in history and constitutional law.
- Presentation of papers by the supervisors and trainees at the Conference.
- A special issue of Dutch peer reviewed journal *De Moderne Tijd*, with individual contributions by all trainees and an introduction by the supervisors
- An article in an international peer-reviewed journal (e.g. *Nations and Nationalism/ Journal of Modern History*), co-authored by the supervisors.
- A webinar for a broader audience, organized in collaboration with the Leiden Centrum voor Nederlandse Politiek en Bestuur, of which all three supervisors are members.
- For Supervisor 1 this project contributes in important ways to a book he is currently writing, working title: *Parts of the Sum. Piecing together the Dutch nation state* (to be published in 2023); as well as to a VIDI proposal he is working on, which focuses on the the dynamics between region and nation in the Netherlands in the long nineteenth century.
- Supervisor 2 considers this a pilot project for a large-scale investigation into the repertoires and policing of social unrest in the Netherlands, 1815-1890, on which she is currently preparing a grant proposal for the *Vrije Competitie Geesteswetenschappen*.

## Planning

### Phase 1 (February-April)

- Read and discuss relevant literature on historical context and method
- Expert meeting with supervisors, research trainees and Leiden experts on political history and constitutional law to discuss research method
- Archival research in the Provincial Archives; select and digitize source material
- Start organizing Symposium

### Phase 2 (May-June):

- Additional research into selected cases of local unrest in local archives
- Additional research into selected cases of local unrest in press reports (newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals)

### Phase 3 (June-Sept):

- prepare to present our findings in Symposium
- write individual articles to be published in a special issue of *De Moderne Tijd* (trainees)
- write introduction to special issue of *De Moderne Tijd* (supervisors)
- write first draft of article for international peer reviewed journal, such as *Nations and Nationalism* or *Journal of Modern History*

## Student Application

For further information please contact dr. Diederik Smit ([d.e.j.smit@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:d.e.j.smit@hum.leidenuniv.nl)) and/or dr. Maartje Janse ([m.j.janse@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:m.j.janse@hum.leidenuniv.nl)).

Applications should include the following documents, in one PDF file:

- Motivation letter (Dutch for BA-level, English for ResMa level)
- Academic CV
- Full list of grades