

The pamphlet that woke a nation: The search for readers

John Sterk

This study focuses on the Patriot revolt that dominated Dutch political life during the 1780s.¹ An anonymous pamphlet, *Aan het volk van Nederland*, was distributed throughout the Dutch Republic in September 1781 during the Fourth English War. Its author was Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol. A detailed study of the pamphlet, its readership and its impact, its printing history, and its author, can provide insight into the extent to which the pamphlet and the political press generally shaped the Patriot movement and the new political culture which emerged. What is unique is that the study uses Darnton's *communications circuit* as a framework to structure and to provide cohesion to the discussion. Analyses of Dutch periodicals, pamphlets, and other literature provide clues concerning the extent of the readership, gauging the impact of the pamphlet on the Dutch political scene. The conclusion is that the pamphlet, its readership, and the political press in general had a profound impact on the Patriot movement and the new political culture.

Key terms: *Aan het volk*; Patriots; stadtholder; political; Dutch; Van der Capellen; Amsterdam; Republic.

Introduction

The latter part of the 18th century has been described as the "Age of the Democratic Revolution" (Palmer 2014, 6). In the Dutch Republic, the 1781 pamphlet *Aan het volk van Nederland* ('To the people of the Netherlands') (Van

¹The first part of the title is taken from De Jong's (1922) biography of Van der Capellen in which he notes the aim of the pamphlet was to wake up the Dutch nation (389). The article presented here is based on my master's thesis (Sterk 2004), quotes from which are silently incorporated into the text. I gratefully acknowledge comments from two anonymous reviewers, whose feedback has allowed me to strengthen my article. Any remaining errors of fact or interpretation are my own.

der Capellen tot den Pol 1781, passim) (hereafter *Aan het volk*) has been credited with providing impetus and structure to the Patriot revolution of 1787. The author, who was anonymous when the pamphlet was published, addressed the influential work to the entire population of the Republic. The Patriot revolution may be placed between and compared to the better known American and French revolutions of 1776 and 1789, respectively. The message of *Aan het volk* was to wake the nation. It may be favourably compared to two more famous pamphlets that also woke nations and contributed to the growth of democratic revolutionary movements. Thomas Paine's 1776 pamphlet *Common sense* sets forth arguments in favor of American independence from Great Britain. It, too, was addressed to the "Inhabitants of America" and was one of the most influential pamphlets in American history. In 1789, the French clergyman Abbé Sieyès's pamphlet *Qu'est-ce que le tiers-état?* ('What is the third estate?') suggested the entire population of France constituted the complete nation within itself and there was no need for the first and second estates of clergy and aristocracy. Sieyès's pamphlet had an immense influence on the course of the French revolution (Palmer 2014, 212, 362). Schama notes that like the Sieyès pamphlet, *Aan het volk's* "effectiveness ... was due to its reduction of a complicated political situation to a simple description resting on a historical account: on the one hand, the nation; on the other, absolutism and privilege" (Schama 2005, 67).

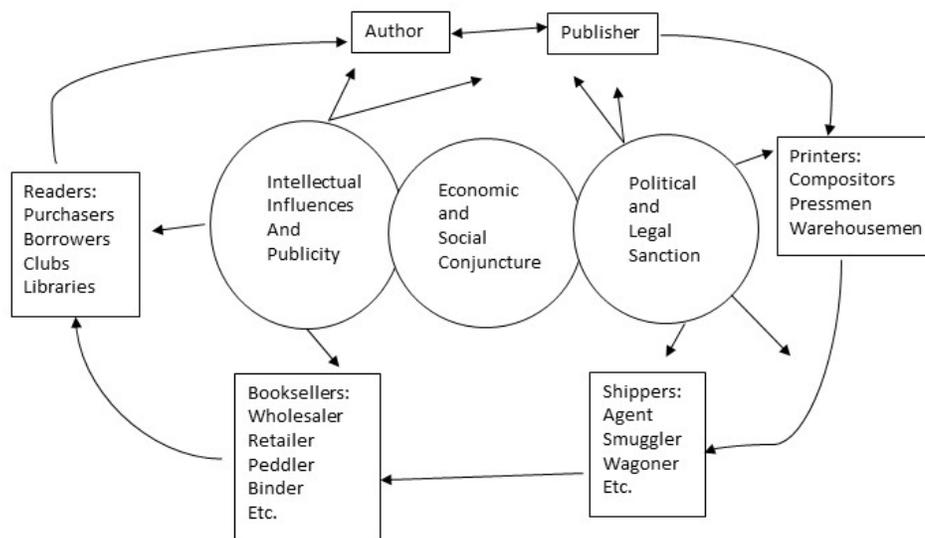
The main objectives of this study are to determine who read *Aan het volk* and the extent of its readership, as well as the context in which it was received and discussed by the reading public. The study examines *Aan het volk*, its reputed and disputed author, and its influence in the larger context of the rising political press in iterating the new political culture which emerged. Inasmuch as other scholars have covered these topics in detail, my focus is on determining who and how widespread the reading public was. An analysis of the extent to which *Aan het volk* augmented the process of determining who the reading public was follows, as well as an assessment of the degree to which *Aan het volk* and the political periodical press more generally shaped the Dutch Patriot movement during this period.

The Dutch Patriot revolution, which took place in the 1780s, has been the topic of much historical discussion over the years. During the 1980s, the debate intensified as the two-hundredth anniversary of the revolution of 1787 approached. Political discourse debated its origins, as well as its aftermath. Discussion centered on various interpretations of this critical period in the history of the Netherlands. Noteworthy is that the revolution created a political culture of its own (Van Sas 1992, 95).

The period is especially significant for the birth and rise of the political press in which journals and periodicals had gradually become the norm. It was a

key factor in spreading the new political culture throughout the country, then known as the United Provinces or the Dutch Republic (Velema 1993, 130). *Aan het volk* informs the discussion, as seen in the instances in which it was cited in various press articles and pamphlet literature in the period 1781 to 1787, otherwise known as the Patriot era of the 1780s (hereafter the Patriot era). *Aan het volk* gave further momentum and provided some structure to the Patriot movement itself. Historian Jeremy Popkin notes that *Aan het volk* “virtually shaped the main debate” between the aristocratic regents and the ordinary burgers (Popkin 1992, 282).

The methodology used is partly derived from the work of Robert Darnton and his concept of the *communications circuit* to structure and provide cohesion to the discussion. Darnton’s circuit describes the life cycle of a book from its genesis in the author, through to the publisher, the printer, shipper, bookseller and finally, to the reader. His method included analyses of library contents, publishers’ business methods and readership. The following schematic model illustrates the entire communications circuit.²



Communications circuit, adapted from Darnton 1990, 112

Although Darnton’s study revolves around illegal literature extant in France before 1789 and is based on books rather than pamphlets, his circuit was used to structure the paper. An assessment of the reception and readership of *Aan het volk* illustrates, in part, the rise of the political press. The assessment relies on an examination in various archives of Dutch newspapers, journals, periodicals,

² This model appears also in Sterk (2004, 3).

pamphlets, and Patriot era lists of catalogues of libraries and booksellers. Inasmuch as there is no existing evidence surveying actual readership of the day, or published bestseller lists that make reference to *Aan het volk*, other evidence was relied upon. Archival research was done at the Press Museum housed in the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. This work was supplemented with research in the *Gemeentearchief* ('municipal archive') of the City of Amsterdam, the special collections section of the University of Amsterdam library, and the Knuttel catalogues in the Special Collections Room of the Royal Library in The Hague (see below). Archival records of literary, reading and cultural societies provided valuable insight with which to assess the extent of *Aan het volk's* readership and its reception within the Republic.

Background to the pamphlet

In the 18th century the favourable reputation of the Dutch Republic as a leading world power during its Golden Age in the 17th century deteriorated markedly and stood in sharp contrast to its earlier prominence. In the international sphere, it was no longer one of the main actors in European politics and diplomacy. Its economic structure was in decline; its armed forces were depleted; and its cultural life rested on references to its past glory. Internal turmoil manifested itself in various ways. Underlying the tensions was a mood of dejection or malaise in all levels of Dutch society. The nostalgia for what was gave rise to the establishment of numerous improvement societies and fueled enlightened initiatives that sought to address socio-economic and moral problems then facing the Republic.

Politically, the primary hostility existed between two factions. One consisted of the ruling patricians, the Patriot regents, supported by an ever widening "mass of petty traders, artisans, craftsmen, merchants and shopkeepers who identified themselves as burghers" (Schama 2005, 66) and who wished to liberate themselves and bring about change. The other faction was the House of Orange in the person of the stadtholder ('*stadhouder*'), who was the leading official, appointed by the various *Staten* ('provincial assemblies'). He in turn was backed by Orangist or stadtholderly regents. Another important conflict was the perpetual discord between Holland, the dominant province, on the one hand, and its leading city Amsterdam, and the remaining six provinces on the other (Wansink 1971, 133-155). Dissension also existed between urban and rural populations and between the various dissenting religions and the Dutch Reformed state church.

It was the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War of 1780-1784 which was the catalyst that divided the Dutch people as never before. Since the middle of the 18th century, its foreign policy was one of neutrality. During the American War of Independence in the late 1770s, the Republic traded with American colonists, supplying arms and provisions. As a pretext for war, the British produced a treaty

the City of Amsterdam concluded with the American rebels (Van Sas 1992, 97). In November 1780 the Dutch found themselves in a war for which they were ill-prepared. The war began as a series of disastrous military defeats, but soon it led to political and economic calamity. The treasury was depleted, colonies and trading posts were lost, and shipping, so vital to its economic health, was severely damaged. Political factions began to attribute blame for this state of affairs. Orangists accused the Amsterdam regents of treasonous conduct for their trading activities in the Americas. The Patriot regents and their supporters defended Amsterdam's policies and blamed the stadtholder - who was the head of the admiralty - and his advisers for the disastrous course of the war. The war crisis was exploited by the Patriots to erode the stadtholder position by capturing public opinion with their newly forged language of patriotism. Van Sas asserts that the "single most important innovation of the Patriot era was the emergence of a periodical political press" (Van Sas 1992, 98).

The widespread discontent, the changed status in how the Republic was defined and how it was viewed internally, together with the war, all contributed to the rise of the Patriot movement. The movement grew and precipitated a crisis during the summer and fall of 1787, when, at the request of the stadtholder, it was suppressed by Prussian troops to prevent the outbreak of a democratic revolution. The Prussians quickly occupied Utrecht and Amsterdam "though few shots were fired" (Palmer 2014, 254). Evidence of the heightening internal divisions was found in the increase in pamphlet literature that began to circulate at the same time as the Dutch press became highly politicized and began to lead public opinion rather than simply reporting and commenting on political events (Klein 1995, 92-93). As a result, ordinary citizens became more involved in politics, and most of the reading public was affected by the press. It was well known that the Dutch were a highly literate society and politicization of society was not the exclusive domain of the press, however. Civic militias, social organizations of various kinds and petitioning were also instrumental in this regard, as were music and theater (Van Sas 1987, 105, 122).

The rise and increasingly influential voice of the Patriots was expressed in September 1781 in *Aan het volk*. It was a frontal attack on the stadtholder and ended with an agenda for popular political action. The author, unknown at the time, turned out to be Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, a nobleman from the province of Overijssel. Among the several causal factors of the rise of the Patriot movement, the publication and distribution of *Aan het volk* was a significant one. It was widely referred to in other pamphlets and periodicals of the time and was the topic of much debate in the political press. As well, many of the ideas contained therein were reflected in the Patriot reform proposals.

Aan het volk was one of the factors that raised the level of both debate and political activity within the Republic. For the first time in the Republic's history, the Patriot movement offered the Dutch a choice for their political allegiance and the nation became an important factor in political discourse. Coupled with the generalized discontent were the weakness and complexity of the Republic's political system. There was no central power to unify the country; rather, the Republic was highly decentralized and its institutions highly particularistic. Much sovereignty resided at the local level in the towns and cities. At times, there were different stadtholders occupying the position in several provinces, and sometimes one stadtholder served in the position in several provinces. As a result of this state of affairs, decision-making was cumbersome. There were two periods when the Republic was governed by regents who were members of the governing bodies of the towns and cities. Both periods revolved around William III, who was born in 1650 and died without an heir in 1702. The first period lasted from 1650 to 1672 during William's minority. The second period began in 1702 and lasted until 1747 when the stadtholder was William Charles Henry Friso, who became William IV. He was the son of a cousin of William III (Rowen 1988, 148-162).

The author

Van der Capellen was a controversial and influential political figure on the Dutch political stage during much of the last quarter of the 18th century (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987, 7). He was born in 1741 into a patrician family that was active in politics and he spent his early years under the tutelage of both his father and grandfather, both of whom were members of the provincial *ridderschap* ('nobility'). Throughout his life Van der Capellen prided himself on being a "born regent" (Schama 2005, 65). From the beginning, he was politically outspoken.

Once Van der Capellen was admitted to the *ridderschap*, he began to play an active political role in both foreign and domestic affairs. He became a member of the Overijssel *Staten* ('provincial assembly') in 1773 and used his maiden speech to forcefully oppose the stadtholder's proposal to increase the size of the Dutch standing army at the expense of the navy, the latter being fundamental to Dutch trade and commerce (Leeb 1973, 139-140). Van der Capellen's stance was noteworthy for two reasons: first, it was enunciated in the *Staten* of the landlocked province of Overijssel, which was somewhat less developed than that of economically dominant Holland; and second, he addressed a matter of national concern and thereby drew attention to himself on the national stage (Leeb 1973, 142). Van der Capellen remained active in the assembly until 1778 when he published and distributed one of the speeches he made, contrary to the custom

of the *Staten*. Its members suspended him from his seat until 1782 (Schulte Nordholt 1982, 25).

The English War gave him an opportunity to re-enter the political arena, albeit anonymously. There were two famous pamphlets published in 1781 which solidified and galvanized the political divisions within the Republic. The first was a tract entitled *Politiek vertoog over het waar systema van de stad van Amsterdam* ('Political treatise on the true system of the City of Amsterdam') written by Rycklof Michiel van Goens, who became the editor of the Orangist newspaper *De Ouderwetse Nederlandsche Patriot* ('The Old-Fashioned Dutch Patriot') (Van Sas 1992, 105). Van Goens's pamphlet denounced Amsterdam's secretly negotiated draft treaty with the American colonies, which was the purported reason for Britain's declaration of war (*supra*). Van der Capellen felt the Van Goens pamphlet required a response and spent many months composing the document that would become the "most successful and influential pamphlet of its time" (Leeb 1973, 59).

Aan het volk was secretly published without naming the author, who concluded simply that "*Ik ben, VOLK VAN NEDERLAND! WAARDE MEDEBURGERS! ULIEDER getrouwe medeburger*" ('I am, ye people of the Netherlands, dear fellow citizens, your faithful fellow citizen'). There was an additional reference on the last page to "*Ostende, den 3 September 1781*" (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987, 92). *Aan het volk* was distributed throughout the Republic during the night and early morning of September 25 and 26, 1781. The publication and dissemination were supervised by the Mennonite preacher Francis A. van der Kemp, a Patriot and close confidante of the author.

Aan het volk was immediately banned and a hefty reward was offered for the disclosure of its author. The prohibition against the pamphlet included both selling and possession. The anonymity seemed well justified. Moreover, many pamphlets of the time were either published anonymously or their authors used pseudonyms to hide their true identity. *Aan het volk* was reprinted some fifteen times between 1781 and 1795, persuasive evidence of the breadth of its readership. Additionally, it was translated into English in 1782 as "An address to the people of the Netherlands" and published in London by J. Stockdale. The translator was unknown. In the notes following his preface, Zwitter cites a French translation as well in 1784 (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987, fn. 18, 15).

With the approach of the bi-centenary of the Patriot revolution in the 1980s, *Aan het volk* was one of the documents reprinted during the 1987 bi-centenary. Two commemorative printings of *Aan het volk* were published with introductions and comments by prominent historians (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1981; Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987).

The search for the author's identity

The identity of *Aan het volk's* author was a matter of wide speculation at the time when it was published and after, but it was not until the last quarter of the 19th century that Dutch historians began to conduct proper research. The appearance in 1879 of W. H. de Beaufort's collection of Van der Capellen's correspondence served as impetus to the Mennonite minister Adriaan Loosjes to begin a five-year study of *Aan het volk* in 1881. Several reasons have been suggested for the lack of discussion during the 19th century regarding *Aan het volk*, its author, and the Patriot era of the 1780s. Historians preferred to concentrate on the more pleasant phases of the Dutch historical past, such as the successful revolt from Spanish dominance and the Golden Age of the 17th century. Not only was the Patriot era ignored, but the entire so-called 'French period' from 1795 to 1815 was seen as a dark period of Dutch history and given short shrift. After the Vienna Settlement in 1815, publication or discussion of any anti-Orangist tracts, such as *Aan het volk*, was extremely difficult (Schama 2005, 15-16).

Loosjes's 1886 study is an inquiry into all aspects of *Aan het volk*. At times, his work reads like a detective novel and, at other times, like a scientific inquiry into printing methods. He examined other writings of Van der Capellen to note his writing style, phrasing, and spelling peculiarities, and compared these to *Aan het volk*. Loosjes concludes that Van der Capellen was the author of *Aan het volk*. Loosjes also studied the various Dutch editions and reprints, which will be covered later in the article under *Aan het volk's* printing history.

Some years after the Loosjes study, Willem P. C. Knuttel prepared a chronological list of forbidden books and pamphlets within the Republic from 1486 to 1853, wherein he listed *Aan het volk* and its author among the entries (Knuttel 1914, 125). To this point the matter of authorship appeared settled. However, De Jong, Van der Capellen's biographer, was still not convinced and sought further evidence. He found it in several letters, which Van der Capellen had written to his friends and which referred specifically to *Aan het volk*. Two of the letters in October 1783 mentioned that he contemplated writing another or second "BAHVVN." This was the Dutch acronym for "(B)rief (A)an (H)et (V)olk (V)an (N)ederland" ('Letter to the people of the Netherlands') (De Jong 1922, 392-393). Finally, De Jong was convinced of Van der Capellen's role and no one has seriously questioned his conclusion since.

Even though it took well over a century to solve the mystery of authorship of *Aan het volk*, there were some contemporary hints in the press of the day and elsewhere that Van der Capellen was the author. It appears certain that some of his friends were aware of his secret. For example, we have Van der Kemp's autobiography noted above. The editor of the Orangist newspaper *De Ouderwetse*

Nederlandsche Patriot published a letter from an anonymous writer in February 1783, which suggested that the ideas of the scandalous *Aan het volk* were attributable to Baron van der Capellen tot den Pol (*De Ouderwetse Nederlandsche Patriot*, 1781-1783, 9-11).

After the death of Van der Capellen in 1784, the Patriot *De Politieke Kruyer* ('The political courier') announced the event under the heading *Aan het volk van Nederland* ('To the people of the Netherlands'), followed by several pages of praise for the deceased Patriot leader (*De Politieke Kruyer*, 1784, vol. 3, 145, 2166). Mention should also be made that both a 1784 and 1795 edition of *Aan het volk* contained a portrait drawing depicting a remarkable likeness to Van der Capellen, though in neither case was his name affixed (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987, 9).

Contents and printing history of *Aan het volk*

The original Dutch version contained seventy-six pages and its language was marked by both simplicity and passion. The intended audience excluded no one; it was addressed to the entire nation. The eminent Dutch historian Pieter Geyl has noted that *Aan het volk* was the first document in Dutch history to address the Dutch people as a national unit (Geyl 1947, 53).

Prior to discussing the extensive and lengthy printing history of *Aan het volk*, a brief examination of the physical properties and its contents is in order. I have relied on the original identified by Loosjes as 'A' (infra) (Knuttel 1905, pamphlet 19864). This version contains seventy-six typed pages, including a title page. It is single spaced and contains no footnotes or references. Zwitzer notes some printing errors and provides explanatory annotations (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987, 93-104).

Van der Capellen begins by reminding readers that they have been betrayed by their political rulers for the past couple of centuries. He reaches back to ancient history, to the Batavians who occupied the lands for hundreds of years and who were free. The author traces the slow encroachment of the freedoms by subsequent rulers and describes them all as despots and autocrats. To conclude *Aan het volk*, Van der Capellen set out a reform program calling for the establishment of armed civic militias, political discussion groups, free elections, and press freedom (Sterk 2004, 59-60).

Next, questions as to how and by whom *Aan het volk* was printed, how it found its way to its readers, and what its impact was, are addressed. Dutch historians are fortunate that the printing history of *Aan het volk* since 1781 was extensively canvassed by De Beaufort, Loosjes, and De Jong. Their works provide evidence that *Aan het volk* went through many printings and editions, that it was read by "thousands upon thousands" and that it led to a state of rebellion within

the Republic (Loosjes 1886, 25). Speculation at the time suggested the original printing from the handwritten manuscript was clandestinely completed at the home of Professor F. A. van der Marck at Lingen, Germany, just across the border from Groningen (Knuttel 1914, 102). Loosjes lists seven different Dutch editions or reprints of *Aan het volk*, plus the English translation of 1782, which followed the Lingen printing. The most original *uitgave* ('edition' or 'publication') is the one Loosjes designates as 'A,' followed by six later ones, which are labelled 'B' through 'H'. Loosjes's inquiry compares the later editions with 'A' and scrutinizes the number of pages of each version, the number of lines on each page, and the number of letters in each line (this without the use of modern technology). The manner of pagination is noted, as are the spelling and punctuation differences. The quality of paper and the watermarks also are of interest to Loosjes, while the type of font and printing errors are similarly recorded.

Further, Loosjes addresses the question of how the original edition 'A' was created, mentioning that the Leiden printer, Jacobus Bronkhorst, and his associates Jan de Leeuw and Izaak de Koning participated in the printing process, as did the Leiden bookseller Cornelis Heyligert (Loosjes 1886, 37, 44). Loosjes suggests, too, that printing presses were transported to a warehouse in Leiden where *Aan het volk* was printed, assembled, and hidden in boxes. The participants in this process are named and are said to be under the overall direction of F. A. van der Kemp, a fact subsequently confirmed in the latter's autobiography (Van der Kemp 1903, 54).

Van Rijn conducted yet another study of *Aan het volk* in 1888 and uncovered some fourteen separate editions of the pamphlet, including all translations, the last one dated in 1795. He pointed out that it was not unusual for pamphlets to be left on the streets in 1781. What he found unusual was that the dissemination of *Aan het volk* was conducted in so many cities at the same time, a remarkable organizational feat. He concluded that the radical Patriot bookseller Jan Verlem, the editor of *De Politieke Kruyer*, was responsible for printing and selling the 1795 edition, observing that Verlem had previous convictions for publishing subversive materials (Van Rijn 1888, 3, 15-16).

Verlem, it should be stressed, was a vital link in a network of Patriot writers, printers, and booksellers in the Republic, and, after 1787, also abroad, to and from where a continuous flow of illegal books took place. Among his connections were Jacobus Bronkhorst, Izaak de Koning, and Jan de Leeuw, who assisted with the printing of *Aan het volk* as noted earlier. Van Rijn also mentions that the participants in the printing process were paid a premium to produce *Aan het volk* in as short a time as possible and to maintain their secrecy (Van Rijn 1888, 25, 37).

The printing history of *Aan het volk* was further of great interest to the biographer Murk de Jong. In his 1922 study, he analyzed copies of the various editions and noted that eleven libraries then extant had different copies of *Aan het volk*. De Jong also noted that demand to have a copy of *Aan het volk* was so great that several handwritten copies were made (De Jong 1922, 3, 14).

Reception and readership

Initial reactions

The reactions to *Aan het volk* were immediate, multi-faceted, and cannot be attributed solely to those of the Orangist and Patriot factions. A simplistic view suggests that the Orangists considered *Aan het volk* to be a grave danger to the Republic, while Patriot sympathizers regarded it as the first building block toward a free republic (Klein 1995, 91,115). What is clear is that it was widely read by both groups.

One of the first reactions was by the authorities. The stadtholder wrote to the various provincial *Staten* and municipalities, requesting that they take appropriate measures to forbid distribution and to punish the author, printer, and distributor of *Aan het volk* (De Jong 1922, 391). In turn, the *Staten* of Utrecht promulgated the first edict, only a few days after its first distribution, and offered a reward for information about the identity of the author, printer and distributor, threatening fines and banishment if these people could be identified and convicted. Other *Staten* and the *Staten-Generaal* ('States General, the National Assembly') issued their own similarly worded edicts. Some added that mere possession of *Aan het volk* was considered an offence and would lead to confiscation. In this manner, booksellers and libraries were added to the list of those caught within the net of offenders. Municipalities such as Haarlem, Utrecht, and The Hague also banned *Aan het volk* (Loosjes 1886, 25-30). However, it appears that the conditions of censorship and the banning of *Aan het volk* encouraged interest, attracting readers as much for the forbidden element surrounding it, as for the actual contents of that pamphlet.

The immediate impact on the Patriot movement was considerable. Previously scattered and disparate groups quickened their efforts to coordinate local plans to organize civic militias and citizen committees, as advocated in *Aan het volk* (Carter 1975, 104). Other than the edicts, the Orangists were slower to react. The historian Wyger Velema (personal communication, July 2004) identifies three main reasons for their delay: the uninspired leadership of the stadtholder; the early Patriot successes in attracting a substantial portion of public opinion to their side; and, most importantly, the need to develop a proper theoretical framework to respond to the new Patriot phenomenon. Velema laments that

discussions of the anti-Patriot literature have not been prominent in subsequent historiography.³

It appears that the readership at this stage included leading Patriots and Orangists. Though it is known that there were fifteen editions or reprints of *Aan het volk*, no evidence exists of the number of copies that were made of each edition. Based upon the many editions alone, it may be reasonably concluded that readership of *Aan het volk* was significant.

The search for readers

Several ways exist for obtaining literature. Booksellers, circulating and public libraries, and reading societies, among others, are good sources. The location and size of the reading public are closely related to the public's ability to obtain reading materials and to the level of literacy in a particular region. In the 1780s no polls, statistics, or bestseller lists existed to provide direct evidence of readership. Therefore, to test the readership indirect evidence was relied upon.

Darnton lists several sources which he consulted to acquire the information he needed to complete his circuit for the illegal literature extant in France before 1789. Among these sources were judicial and bookseller guild archives. He lists further sources, such as broadsheets, pamphlets, and periodicals (Darnton 1982, 189). To this list may be added an examination of advertisements and translations of underground literature, as well as cultural phenomena, such as dramas and songs about illegal literature. Other possible sources are estate inventories, letters, diaries, autobiographies, and reader annotations (Brouwer 1988, 119). For this article, the method used is an examination of Dutch journals, periodicals, and other pamphlets that appeared in the Republic at the time to determine if *Aan het volk* was mentioned. Depending on the circulation of these media, and assuming that copies of *Aan het volk* in libraries, reading or literary societies were passed around, read, and discussed by several people per copy, one can conclude that readership was extensive. In addition, judicial records may reveal valuable information, as will minutes of societies and catalogues of booksellers and libraries.

Some of the inquiries were less successful than others. A review of judicial archives in Amsterdam for the relevant period revealed no record of charges for selling, possessing or distributing *Aan het volk* (*Rechtelijk gemeentearchief Amsterdam*, 5061) ('Judicial municipal archive Amsterdam'). This finding was surprising because Amsterdam had an extensive network of booksellers and reading rooms. The number of booksellers in Amsterdam alone in the late 1770s was over one-third of the total in the Republic (Popkin 1992, 275). The absence of

³ Conversation with Professor Velema in his office at the University of Amsterdam.

legal proceedings relating to *Aan het volk* in Amsterdam and elsewhere suggests that enforcement of the ban was difficult. One could surmise that since *Aan het volk* was banned, it was probably kept under the counter or in the backroom and was clandestinely shared by readers.

Another unsuccessful search was conducted in the records of the proceedings of various societies throughout the Republic. This is not surprising since the prohibition against *Aan het volk* included possession, selling and distribution. What is astonishing is that the pamphlet did not enter the public realm at a later date when it would not have been illegal to possess it. Nevertheless, a search was conducted among, for example, improvement societies. A mention of *Aan het volk* was not expected. It is estimated that between 1760 and 1800 some three hundred reading societies were established throughout the Republic (Brouwer 1988, 51-120). Some of these had political purposes such as the *Vaderlandsche Societeit* ('Patriot Society') in both Amsterdam and Leiden, and *Pro Patria et Libertate* ('For the country and freedom') in Utrecht. None of their records revealed that *Aan het volk* had ever been the subject of discussion in those organizations. Here again, it may be that records of any mention of the forbidden pamphlet were purged because of the ban and fear of detection by their members. Both societies were public institutions and would not wish to discredit themselves by openly displaying *Aan het volk*. Arguably, the numerous reprints and editions reveal an underground distribution system somewhat similar to that described in Darnton's *The literary underground* (Darnton 1982).

Historically, Dutch booksellers and printers operated in relative freedom, even though sporadically the authorities issued edicts to control the dissemination of critical political tracts (Harline 1987, 111). The prosecution of such edicts was inconsistent, partly because there was no coordinated central authority to enforce them. The fragmented political structure of the Republic made it almost impossible to control the press. As noted earlier, there were multiple jurisdictions which issued edicts; from each town, each of the *Staten* and the *Staten-Generaal*. Thus, it was easy to evade a municipal ban by simply walking to the next town where a forbidden work was not banned. Moreover, there was no preventive censorship in the Republic; rather, some booksellers and authors received official protection from the authorities. Hoftijzer notes that these privileges were unique to the Republic in the sense that their function was to protect, rather than to censor (Hoftijzer 1990, 180).

A further area of inquiry was the examination of catalogues of booksellers and libraries. Bookseller catalogues were selected randomly, yet they were geographically representative and covered the period between 1781 and 1787. Most of these catalogues were found in the library of the Society to Promote the

Importance of the Book Trade, which is housed within the library of the University of Amsterdam. Bookseller catalogues were selected for Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden, and Haarlem, the main cities in the (then) province of Holland, as well as Maastricht, Franeker, and Groningen as representative of some of the other provinces of the Republic. A search was performed under the title of *Aan het volk*, rather than under the author's name, whose identity at the time was, after all, unknown. Catalogues of twentieth century booksellers in various locales were also examined. In some instances, recourse to indices only occurred where they existed. None of the bookseller catalogues of the 1780s or later contained any listing for *Aan het volk*. Once more, one could conclude that the ban had much to do with the absence of entries as well as the general tendency of booksellers of the time not to include political literature in their advertising catalogues. This is borne out by the fact that only isolated references to political works were found. Meanwhile, the absence of entries in 19th century catalogues relates to the lack of interest in the Patriot era. The stadtholder's office became a kingship after the 1815 Vienna Settlement and attacks on the former stadtholder were frowned upon. This is not to say they did not stock or sell *Aan het volk*. In any event, there were several other methods to disseminate political literature. The underground clandestine distribution of forbidden literature was a widespread practice in the Republic. Patriot booksellers were well-known to the people, who knew where to find such material (Berg 1987, 10). Of particular interest in the research was the catalogue of the stadtholder, located in the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* ('Royal library') in The Hague, which contained a listing of myriad topics, but nothing on *Aan het volk*.

The Knuttel catalogues

More fruitful results came from an examination of those library catalogues dealing specifically with pamphlet literature. The approach to studying the Knuttel catalogues was to learn who was aware of *Aan het volk* and what could be learned about the readership. For example, were readers ordinary burgers, scholars, church-based leaders, or power holders/brokers? Was *Aan het volk* limited to the Netherlands or did its distribution reveal an international dimension of citizens working elsewhere for a more accessible system of democratic institutions? Over a period of twenty-one years, Knuttel assembled more than thirty-three thousand pamphlets that appeared in the Republic between 1486 and 1853. He assembled them by topics and dates into nine volumes, and, for entries after 1780, added summary comments at the front of each volume. These are located in the Special Collections Reading Room of the *Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in The Hague. In addition to the Knuttel catalogues, a number of libraries throughout the Netherlands contain catalogues that list pamphlets which are not in the Knuttel collection.

These catalogues, particularly those located in the special collections room of the University of Amsterdam library, were also examined.

The Knuttel catalogue reveals that pamphlet literature in the Republic greatly increased after 1778. Knuttel lists several versions of *Aan het volk*, as identified by Loosjes. These are followed by entries of the various edicts of the various *Staten*, which in turn led to discussions praising *Aan het volk*, as well as rejoinders by Orangist supporters (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 19864-19887). All of these subsequent pamphlets are anonymous and take the form of discussions among friends or letters from a friend in one city to a colleague in another city, together with the latter's responses. Pseudonyms or initials are used to hide the identity of their authors. Some of them were dated, others were not. Lengths varied from eight to forty pages.

Several of these pamphlets are of interest. One which was favourable to *Aan het volk* expresses wonder as to why the earlier pamphlet of Van Goens (*supra*) and which attacked the Amsterdam regents, was not banned. Another discusses the contents and implications of *Aan het volk*. There is a pamphlet that details an unsuccessful attempt by the same Van Goens to trick an Utrecht bookseller into selling him a copy of *Aan het volk*. One writer speculated that *Aan het volk* was actually composed by Orangist supporters to bring discredit to the fledging Patriot movement (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 19868, 19869, 19874, 19877).

Knuttel's entries for 1782 list fewer pamphlets that refer directly to *Aan het volk* than the previous year. However, these did mention several that appeared shortly after the English translation was published in London. One included a report on the Bronkhorst trial (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 20129-42, 20164-5, 20169). Knuttel's catalogue lists more than sixty entries dealing with the strife between the Patriots and their opponents (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 20129-42, 20164-5, 20169). These were followed by both attacks on, and defences of, the stadtholder and his advisers and the state of Dutch armed forces, as well as press freedom (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 20137-20199 for the stadtholder and his advisers; pamphlets 19987-20015, 20030-20058 for armed forces; pamphlets 20348-20355 for press freedom).

No direct entries mentioning *Aan het volk* for 1783 were found and only one in 1784 after Van der Capellen died. However, the pamphlets dealing with some of the ideas contained within *Aan het volk* were significant. In 1783, there were fifty-six pamphlets relating to the stadtholder and his advisers, sixty-three related to the Patriots and their press activities, and six covered military matters (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 20473-20528; 20409-20472; 20570-20575). In 1784, there were thirty-five entries attacking the stadtholder's principal adviser, the Duke of Brunswick; thirty-three dealt with Patriot activities; and thirty-eight spoke

of Van der Capellen's death and his legacy (Knuttel 1905, pamphlets 20777-20812; 20851-20883; 20813-20850). Various pamphlets which are not in the Knuttel catalogue, but that discuss *Aan het volk* are listed in the libraries of Groningen and Middelburg.

It appears that on the basis of the pamphlets noted above, interest in and discussion of *Aan het volk* and its ideas became widespread within a very short time after its first appearance, continuing for several years thereafter. It can also be said that *Aan het volk* became a model for subsequent pamphlets that attacked the stadtholder or used the notion of ancient liberties to uphold press freedom. Moreover, the periodical press began to supplant pamphlets as the preferred medium for political discourse.

Journals and periodicals

Another productive investigation focused on Dutch journals and periodicals circulating during the Patriot era. There were many to choose from and most were representative of either the Orangists or the Patriots. Some were in existence for the entire period, but many lasted only a short period of time. Most were locally oriented, but some had nation-wide attraction (Te Brake 1989, 42). In order to present a balanced review, only the most successful and representative periodicals of the period are discussed here, of which two are oriented toward the Orangists and two toward the Patriots.

The Patriot periodicals are *De Post van den Neder-Rhijn* (hereafter '*De Post*') and *De Politieke Kruyer*. The Orangist representatives are *De Ouderwetse Nederlandsche Patriot* and *De Post naar den Neder-Rhijn* ('The Post to the Neder-Rhijn', hereafter 'the Orangist Post').⁴ By far the most successful and influential periodical of the period was the Patriot-oriented *De Post*, which commenced publication in Utrecht in January 1781, just weeks after the outbreak of the English War. It remained in existence until 1787. During this period, it became known for its support of the Patriot cause and rapidly gained a large, nationwide circulation, some twenty-four hundred to three thousand copies per issue, which is a remarkable number when compared with publications in London at the start of the 19th century where the largest newspaper circulation was four-thousand (Schneider & Hemels 1979, 88). Until 1784, *De Post* appeared weekly and bi-weekly thereafter.

Over the course of its existence *De Post* contained many references to *Aan het volk*. In Theeuwen's lengthy book about the history of *De Post* and its editor, he reports that *Aan het volk* had the second most references (some twenty-one in

⁴ Emphasis in bold is mine to illustrate the seeming passing off by the Orangists on the names of the Patriot newspapers.

fourteen separate issues) of all the pamphlets that were mentioned (Theeuwen 2002, 664). Theeuwen counted some sixty-two references to Van der Capellen in his book, covering Van der Capellen's political career, his ideas and influence, his relationships with other Patriot leaders and the similarities of other pamphlets to *Aan het volk*. Typically, *De Post* reported on scandals, publishing petitions as well as excerpts from various anonymous subversive pamphlets. It ceased operations in 1787.

De Politieke Kruyer commenced publication in Amsterdam in September 1782 and was issued weekly. It also ceased operation in 1787. Like *De Post*, its circulation extended throughout the Republic (Reitsma 1989, 255-275). Its contents consisted only of letters to and from its editor, Jan Verlem, all of which had a political slant. The paper used much stronger language than *De Post*. Correspondents used a wide variety of colorful pseudonyms to hide their identity; examples include *eenvoudig*, *Willem Slegt* and *nieuwsgierig* ('simpleton', 'William the Bad' and 'nosy'). There were many references to the ideas of Van der Capellen, including citizen militias, burger committees, popular sovereignty, and anti-stadtholder tracts.

The success of the Patriot periodicals led Orangist supporters to establish their own publications in an effort to influence public opinion in favor of the Orangists. The *Ouderwetse Nederlandsche Patriot* was the first such venture. Its name was confusing and was an attempt to regain the term patriot from their opponents whom they described as "new patriots" (Reitsma 1989, 263). It was printed in The Hague and was financed by the stadtholder and his court. It only lasted eighteen months from January 1782 to July 1783. Its contents dealt with the English War (Peterse 1988, 199). Jonathan Israel asserts that its central message was that a difference existed between the presumably better type of journalism that it itself practised and the "licentious press" of the Patriots (Israel 1998, 1111-12). Though it was well written and its tone moderate and civilized, its circulation never exceeded seven hundred. Its content was too intellectual for many of the less educated Orangist supporters. As a result, a majority of Orangist supporters were more attracted to the rhetoric of the popular articles appearing in the Patriot press. Historian Nicolaas van Sas states that the periodical played a significant role in the "political renewal [of] the Dutch Republic" by emphasizing that the values it propounded were in sharp contrast to those of the Patriot press (Van Sas 1992, 103).

At the archives of the Amsterdam Press Museum, indices were examined to all five volumes of *De Ouderwetse Nederlandsche Patriot*, as well as an addendum of the correspondence received by its editor during its existence in order to determine how often, if at all, *Aan het volk* was mentioned. The possibility existed that any references to it would be negative in tone because anyone

criticizing it could do so without fear of punishment. It was likely there would be more references in this Orangist tract than in the Patriot press for the similar time period. This was indeed the case.

Notably, within two weeks of the first distribution of *Aan het volk*, some twenty-one pages are devoted to discussing and complaining about *Aan het volk* (*De Ouderwetse Nederlandsche Patriot* 1781, volume VIII, 135-156). Again, twenty-three pages attacking *Aan het volk* by an unidentified writer fill the February 16, 1782 issue. There are further references later that year about Van der Capellen's identity. The addenda of letters which are appended to volume five contain several which mention *Aan het volk* (*Ibid*, volumes XXIV 537-560; LIX 155, 172-73; *Brieventas* ('Letter case') volume 11, 25-28, 79, 103-4, 204-51).

The search for the Orangist Post was unsuccessful because its copies were not on file at the Press Museum and any other information concerning this paper was also scarce. The only sources available noted that it appeared as a weekly for less than a year between 1782 and 1783. The editor, in this case too, was paid by the stadtholder. The periodical ceased publication in July 1783 when its editor was incarcerated for offending the regents of Gouda (Theeuwen 2002, 579). There were other Orangist periodicals, some again passing off on the names of the Patriot newspapers; *De Politieke Kruyersknecht* ('The political porter's assistant'); *De Prinselijke Courant*, *De Geldersche Historische Courant*, *De Brielsche Courant* and the *Haagsche Courant* are examples (Schneider & Hemels 1979, 97, 100-2).

The intellectual journalist and bookseller Elie Luzac, who was associated with the Orangists, attempted to counter the "assault on civilization" by writing over ten-thousand pages of political commentary, most of which was published in the 1780s and dealt with the dangers of patriotism (Velema 1992, 125). He also wrote extensively for the *Old-Fashioned Dutch Patriot* (Velema 1993, 164-5). Luzac's works represent persuasive evidence for the powerful influence *Aan het volk* and the Patriot press had on Orangists. There were also newspapers which were not identified with either Patriots or Orangists that referenced *Aan het volk* (Sassen 1987, 268).

As a result of this analysis pertaining to readership of *Aan het volk*, one can accept De Jong's claim that the pamphlet was widely read by Patriots and Orangists alike, as well as by citizens of other nations who read the translated versions. The research has demonstrated a new way to conceptualize *Aan het volk* by using Darnton's communications circuit in tracing readership and the clandestine manner in which *Aan het volk* was printed and distributed. The lasting interest in the pamphlet illustrates its importance in the later political development of the Netherlands. Finally, a discussion of the wider impact of *Aan het volk* within the Republic will conclude the article.

The impact of *Aan het volk* on political discourse

The political press, which began to develop in the Republic in the early 1780s, was a new phenomenon in Dutch culture. Prior to this time, political comment and criticism had appeared in pamphlet literature. Popkin notes that the Republic's "complex political structure generated an immense amount of publishing" (Popkin 1992, 283). He observes that it was the extensive network of publishers, booksellers, libraries and reading rooms throughout the Republic that was a precondition for this development, as were the efficient and extensive communication, distribution and transportation systems then extant (Popkin 1992, 273 ff.). These conditions and the small geographic size of the Republic enabled most citizens to obtain the print materials they desired.

Earlier periodicals had restricted themselves to reporting only on political matters. What was new was that newspapers went from merely reporting to providing commentary and background information (Klein 1995, 92). Attractive features were simplicity of language, affordable cost, and regularity of publication and distribution. Yet, pamphlet literature continued to flourish, in part because of the impact of *Aan het volk*.

Both Orangists and Patriots used the political press to influence public opinion. One of the most significant roles of the Patriot press was to unify and provide cohesion to the Patriot movement in the decentralized and fragmented political structure of the Republic (Van Sas 1992, 102).

Another consequence was the influence of the press on Dutch society generally. Politics became extremely popular. Evening study groups were organized to discuss recent political events (Van Sas 1992, 107). Participation in civic militias with their parades and uniforms developed into a popular pastime. Various creative endeavors such as theater, music, and painting were affected by politics, as was the material culture of the day, from symbols to household items which conveyed political messages. Dress also became indicative of a person's political leanings. The education system was not immune from political indoctrination (Reitsma 1989, 286). Many societies were established to foster political ends. Trade guilds and rural organizations were active participants in Patriot activity (Klein 1995, 188-190).

Velema notes that the Patriots attracted all socio-economic groupings of Dutch society. They were led by various professionals, including journalists, lawyers, and intellectuals, as well as shopkeepers and a range of dissenting religious groups (Velema 1993, 169 ff.). The Patriot program consisted of four elements: a free political press, a republic without a stadtholder, a citizen militia, and participation in government by everyone (Klein 1995, 6). The movement

continued to gain ground throughout the Republic and caused a polarization into Patriot and Orangist factions.

By the summer of 1786, the Patriots had gained control of much of the provinces of Utrecht, Holland, and Overijssel, as well as some centers in Gelderland. In August, the situation became alarming when the stadtholder sent troops to restore order. The danger of increasing civil unrest lurked and the entire country became divided into defence zones (Israel 1998, 1107-8). The unstable coalition of regents and Patriots began to fall apart. By midsummer of 1787 the Republic was deadlocked. The Patriots controlled Holland, Groningen, and Overijssel, while Zeeland and Gelderland were under Orangist control. Utrecht and Friesland were claimed by both factions.

Foreign intervention brought an end to the Patriot dream of revitalizing their nation when Prussian troops entered Dutch soil to quell the uprising at the invitation of the stadtholder, who at the time was the brother-in-law of the Prussian monarch (Israel 1998, 1113-14). The militias were disbanded. Patriots were removed from every institution and arrested, while Orangist crowds ransacked Patriot property. The result was a silenced press and a dissolution of Patriot societies (Schama 2005, 131).

Conclusion

Dutch political culture in the 1780s changed because of a number of different, but related phenomena. The pamphlet *Aan het volk* was a significant manifestation of the rise of the political press and provided impetus and structure to the emerging Patriot movement. The increasing political role of the press, in turn, had an important effect on Dutch citizens who were becoming politicized. Politics found its way into every aspect of society, from literature, religion, and education to the creative arts.

After 1787, the functions of the suppressed Patriot organizations were assumed by other seemingly non-political bodies within the Republic and also by Patriot exiles who persisted in promoting Patriot ideas from their foreign vantage points. Political ideas and debates continued to penetrate many aspects of Dutch society, permanently expanding the body politic (Van Sas 1988, 174). The Patriot movement was an exceedingly forceful challenge to an old regime, occurring in a highly decentralized republic. It was a broadly based and innovative movement.

There have been several tributes to Van der Capellen in the twentieth century. *Aan het volk* was translated into modern Dutch in two editions, one in 1966 and a bi-centenary commemorative edition in 1981 (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1981). In 1987, Zwitzer published a reprint of the original pamphlet, accompanied by an introduction and annotations (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987). Earlier, in 1984, an exhibition focusing on the life and death of Van der

Capellen, was held in Zwolle. Many items exhibited were mentioned above. Following the exhibition, several municipalities in Overijssel named streets and districts in honor of Van der Capellen (Van der Capellen tot den Pol 1987). His prominent place in Dutch history appears secure.

Whether the Patriot movement would have happened if *Aan het volk* had not been published and widely read is a question without a definitive answer. Clearly, the evidence suggests that *Aan het volk* awoke a nation. There was concern and awareness in the population and *Aan het volk* proved to be an important catalyst for a broadly-based movement for political change that was sustained throughout the 1780s and that is still relevant to the Dutch and the political culture of the Netherlands today.

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About the author

John Sterk, QC, is a Dutch-born retired lawyer and former adjunct professor of Real Estate and Business Law at the University of Alberta (Canada) and University Canada West (British Columbia, Canada). Specializing in corporate-commercial transactions and real estate law, he wrote the legal textbook *Conveyancing law and practice* (Carswell, 1981) and was president of the Canadian Bar Association in Alberta (Canada), where he served as chair of the Legal Education Society of Alberta and led various volunteer organizations. Subsequently, he earned a master's degree in history from the University of Victoria (British Columbia, Canada). His interest in the Dutch Patriot revolution of the 1780s culminated in his master's thesis, titled "The pamphlet that woke a nation."

Author's contact: johnsterk1941@gmail.com

Le pamphlet qui réveilla toute une nation: A la recherche de lecteurs

Cette étude se rapporte à la révolte des « patriotes », phénomène qui dominait la politique aux Pays-Bas durant les années 1780. Au mois de septembre 1781 un pamphlet anonyme, '*Aan het volk van Nederland*', fut diffusé dans la République des Provinces Unies, c'était durant la quatrième guerre anglo-hollandaise. L'auteur s'appelait Joan Derk van der Capellen tot

den Pol. Une analyse poussée du texte, ainsi qu'une recherche concernant son lectorat, son influence, l'histoire de sa publication et la biographie de l'auteur, peut nous aider à répondre à la question dans quelle mesure ce pamphlet, et la presse politique en général, façonnèrent le mouvement des patriotes et la culture politique qui émergeait. L'étude de Darnton est unique dans le sens qu'il s'est servi de la méthode « communication circuit » pour structurer et donner cohérence à la discussion. L'analyse de journaux néerlandais, de pamphlets et d'autres écrits donnent des clés pour mesurer l'ampleur du lectorat et l'influence du pamphlet dans le domaine politique. Il apparaît – c'est la conclusion – que le pamphlet de Van de Capellen eut largement contribué à fonder le mouvement patriote, avec plus globalement le changement de culture politique qui en résulta.

Het schotschrift dat het land wakker schudde: Het zoeken naar lezers

In deze studie gaat het over de opstand van de patriotten, fenomeen dat de Nederlandse politiek in de Jaren 1780 bepaalde. In de maand september van het jaar 1781 – dat was tijdens de vierde Engelse oorlog – werd in de Republiek een schotschrift verspreid met als titel '*Aan het volk van Nederland*'. De auteur was Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol. Door een gedetailleerd onderzoek dat zowel de tekst zelf betreft, als ook het lezerspubliek ervan, de impact, de publicatie-geschiedenis en de biografie van de auteur, kan men tot een beter inzicht komen over de vraag in hoeverre het schotschrift in kwestie, en de pers in het algemeen, de patriottenbeweging beïnvloedde. Wat nieuw is in deze studie, is de wijze waarop Darnton het gegeven 'communications circuit' aanwendt ter verheldering van de discussie. Analyses van Nederlandse tijdschriften, pamfletten, en andere geschriften geven aanwijzingen over de omvang van het lezerspubliek en over de weerslag ervan binnen het politieke kader. Ter conclusie kan worden gezegd dat deze weerslag beduidend was, het schotschrift van Van der Capellen heeft in belangrijke mate de patriottenbeweging 'gevormd'.