

Shifting traditions: changes in the attitude of print laborers in The Netherlands 1820-1870

Ivo Zandhuis (ORCID: 0000-0003-0165-8341)

Abstract

This paper presents a study of the transformation of the mutual benefit societies for print laborers into the first nation wide Dutch union between 1820 and 1870. It argues that these associations are rooted in invented tradition and nationalism.[1] The civil society the print laborers started to participate in during this period of time, helped them to bond and was a basis for more sophisticated collective action, like the foundation of the union in 1866 and eventually two strikes in 1867 and 1869. The first part elaborates on the origin of this phenomenon of the so-called *typographische vereeniging* in Brussels in 1820, the spreading through the Netherlands and the evolution of their traditions. We are able to study this with the analysis of the printed sources the print laborers created. The second part treats the amounts of printing work they created and how that evolved over time.[2] For this paper over 750 lyrics of songs the *typographische vereenigingen* published on *Koppermaandag* are made machine readable which enables us to study the subject matter of the songs. This is the subject of the third part of this paper.

Paper

The typographers of the first association in the current Netherland in Breda came from various places. Two of the first board members had connections with Groningen and Brussels, both cities with a known history of a benefit organization for health hazards.[3] In Groningen a local epidemic in 1826 inspired the most important owner of a printing shop to collect money to help the victims.[4] In Brussels the journeymen had taken matters in their own hands.[5,6] In the organization they appointed among themselves, a board to govern a treasury where every ballot member deposited money for mutual benefit. Typographers in Breda combined this idea of a mutual benefit society with what they considered an important tradition: *Koppermaandag*. On *Koppermaandag* - the first Monday after Epiphany - they got drunk to celebrate the new year. The founders of the *typographische vereeniging* in Breda institutionalized the *Koppermaandagfeest* by using a part of the money in the treasury to rent a hall where the feast could take place, draw up regulations and invite the wives and masters of the workmen to the party. The innovation - combining the mutual benefit function and the yearly *Koppermaandagfeest* - was the main characteristic of the phenomenon of all the *typographische vereenigingen* that were established around the Netherlands from that moment onwards.[7]

To study shifting traditions we analyze the numbers of printing material the laborers made for the purpose of *Koppermaandag*. We distinguish *Koppermaandagprenten*, created before the existence of the *typographische vereenigingen* and booklets with lyrics of songs the *vereenigingen* used during their feast. For this paper the retained booklets, spread over ten different institutions, are studied and a table was created containing data for every song. As we did with the *Koppermaandagprenten*, we can express the activity of the print laborers in the number of songs that were created. Again we use the numbers retained booklets in cultural heritage institutions as a proxy: the fact that remarkably less booklets are preserved after 1870 must indicate that remarkably less booklets were printed. If we zoom in on the same period of time for the development of the number of *Koppermaandagprenten* and compare this with the number of

songs it is noticed that the decrease of the prints per year coincides with the growth of the number of songs. It feels like the songs replaced the Koppermaandagprenten. This can be explained with two arguments. First, remember that the Koppermaandagprenten were printed to support the collecting of tips for the drinks on the Koppermaandagfeest. Because typografische vereenigingen institutionalized the money saving for the feast, the Koppermaandagprenten lost this function. Secondly, both the Koppermaandagprenten and booklets were printed with the equipment of the masters, on paper provided by them. Masters probably did not want their workmen to spend more time and resources on creating both a Koppermaandagprent and a booklet for the feast.

Most of the songs are about drinking, the participation of women in the feast and the songs express the pride print laborers had in the role of the art of printing in the enlightened society. It is interesting to know how the choice of topic changes over time. It enables us to see, for instance, how nationalism plays a role in their attitude towards society. To study the subject matter (or 'topics') of the lyrics in more detail, the digitized, machine readable lyrics that are available in the data set are analyzed. A general, modern approach in topic analysis is named Top2Vec.[8,9] Top2Vec detects only two clusters in the set of lyrics, which means that the differentiation of the subject matter in the corpus is very small: all songs are about the only two different subjects. The most logical, but subjective judgment, is to distinguish a cluster about feast and celebration and a second cluster on pride of their work. In another approach the songs are transferred into word embeddings. Topics are composed by hand-picking a set of words that could be considered about one typical subject. The song-vector is compared to the subject-vector by calculating the cosine distance between the two. From all the distances in one year the average is taken. The change in these averages says something about the change in interests of the members of the societies. This way interesting nationalistic peaks are observed in 1856 and 1863. Another subject is the glorification of the patrons and other elite related to the association. This interestingly enough peaks at the end of the time period, just before the making of printing booklets went out of fashion. Apparently the fashion of printing these booklets remained the longest in fashion with associations that did not rebel to the bosses.

In conclusion: the printing work by the associations of printing laborers helps us to study the changes in their interests and enables us to compare this to their coercive behaviour.

[1] Craig J. Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

[2] All data and its analysis for this paper is published on <https://github.com/ivozandhuis/tv-liedjes>

[3] Albert Walter, *Gedenkboek uitgegeven ter gelegenheid van het honderdjarig bestaan, Typ. Vereniging "Door eendracht t'zaam verbonden"*, Afd. Breda van de Ned. Graf. Bond: 1837-1937 (Breda: Typografische Vereniging "Door eendracht t'zaam verbonden, 1936).

[4] G. Kromziek, *Gedenkboek typografen zieken- en pensioenfondsen voor bedienden van boekverkoopers, boek- en steendrukkers, boekbinders en aanverwante vakken, gevestigd te Groningen 1826-1936*. (Groningen: Gebr. Hoitsema, 1936).

[5] Léon Detilleux and Louis Van den Bosch, *Historique de la Société typographique de secours mutuels de Bruxelles, 1820-1910* (Bruxelles: E. Guyot, 1912);

[6] Daisy Eveline Devreese, "Ambachten, arbeidsmarkt en arbeidersbeweging: Vorming van de moderne arbeidersbeweging te Brussel, 1842-1867," in *De Kracht der Zwakken: Studies over arbeid en*

arbeidersbeweging in het verleden (Amsterdam, 1992), 109–38.

[7] Jacques Giele, “Het Ontstaan van de Typografen-Vakorganisatie in Nederland (1837-1869),” Mededelingenblad NVSG, no. 42 (1972): 2–55.

[8] Dimo Angelov, “Top2Vec: Distributed Representations of Topics” (arXiv, August 19, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2008.09470>;

[9] Joris Van Zundert et al., “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Topic?” (Computational Humanities Research Conference, Antwerpen, 2022), 398–410, https://ceur-ws.org/Vol-3290/short_paper5533.pdf.