Dutch and American Women Abolitionists:

The Challenging of Prescribed Gender Roles 1840 – 1863

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We are told "it is a political question; woman has no right to interfere". But this cry is only an evasion. It is only raised by those who know the power of the weapons we wield.

Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, *Annual Report* 1835

I think that what our society teaches young girls, and I think it is also something that is quite difficult for even older women and self-professed feminists to shrug off, is that idea that likability is an essential part of you, of the space you occupy in the world, that you are supposed to twist yourself into shapes to makes yourself likable that you are supposed to hold back sometimes, pull back, do not quite say, do not be too pushy because you have to be likable.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Girls Write Now Awards* 2015

Image front page: Maayke de Vries

~ Preface ~

My interest in Dutch women abolitionists began in spring 2014, while I was running my regular route along the *Lloydkade* in Rotterdam. At one point I was exhausted and decided to read the sign next to the slavery monument at the *Lloydkwartier*. The sign mentioned how 129 elite women from Rotterdam wrote an anti-slavery petition to the king in 1842, this act piqued my curiosity. I extend my thanks to my supervisor Maartje Janse for guiding my curiosity into this thesis about Dutch and American women abolitionists. Furthermore I wish to thank Irfan Ahmed for his support by editing my writing and looking at it with a critical eye for countless times. *Bohat Bohat Shukriya.*

Rotterdam, 8 December 2015.

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Women played a vital role during the anti-slavery campaigns in the United States and Great Britain in the nineteenth century. Their involvement pushed the boundaries of the prescribed gender roles of the time, as women were supposed to remain within the household sphere and abstain from any political involvement. Abolitionist women were also active in the Netherlands, such as the 129 women from Rotterdam who sent a petition to King Willem II in 1842. Although, a few decades earlier, British women had already played a significant role in the abolishment of slavery in Great Britain and the United States, this was probably the first time in the Netherlands that women collectively interfered directly with politics.[1]

American women abolitionists openly challenged the prescribed gender role by speaking in public and addressing the inequality that existed between the sexes; their outspokenness has accredited them the label of feminists by recent scholars of female abolitionism.[2] Dutch and British female abolitionists, on the other hand, are rather seen as conservative in present-day studies because no issues of a similar nature were addressed in those countries. Such a conclusion can be questioned, however, since women in all three countries had overstepped their prescribed role by interfering with a political issue like abolitionism. This thesis shall examine how Dutch women abolitionists accepted, negotiated, challenged or ignored the prescribed gender roles during 1840 – 1863. The initial part of this chapter shall give an introduction to studies that have been conducted on the involvement of women in anti-slavery campaigns. It shall also discuss the definition of feminism, and finally relate the structure and contents of this thesis.

Studies on women's involvement in the anti-slavery campaigns

Extensive research on female abolitionism has been done on American and British anti-slavery campaigns. Since the 1960s, American research has paid considerable amount of attention on the importance of women abolitionists, contrary to British studies.[3] Those focused primarily on class

[1]Elma Jonas, *Vrouwen en de afschaffing van slavernij in Engeland en Nederland 1780-1863* (Unpublished Master thesis; Erasmus University 01-08-2002) 39.

[2]Deborah Bingham Van Broekhoven, "'Let Your Names Be Enrolled" Method and Ideology in Women's Antislavery Petitioning', In: Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood. Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca and London 1994) 179-199, PP. 191.

[3] Examples of American studies: Ronald Walters, *The Anti-Slavery Appeal after 1830* (1976); Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Right and Abolition* (New York 1971); Nancy F. Cott*, The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (Yale University Press 1997); Nancy A. Hewitt, 'Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of Women's Right in America,' *Feminist Studies* 12:1 (1986) 27-49; Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery feminists in American Culture (*New Haven an London: Yale University Press 1989); Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women's rights emerges within the Anti-slavery movement 1830 -1870. A brief history with Documents* (Boston 2000).

formation, while American research focused on race and female culture.[4] Clare Midgley's study, therefore, was groundbreaking since she explored how British women were involved in the anti-slavery campaigns.[5] Initially she categorized British women abolitionists as conservative, not as feminists, due to their involvement in the anti-slavery campaign based particularly on religious motives, which were not considered innovative.[6] Midgely even stated women abolitionists counteracted the emergence of a women's rights movement in Great Britain, as they endorsed the patriarchal society in which they lived.[7]

Historians have attempted to make a distinction between radical and conservative women abolitionists. The division was applicable to studies on American women abolitionists since there is a direct link between the so-called radical women abolitionists and the emergence of the women's rights movement in America. The Seneca Falls Convention was used as a baseline to form a clear distinction between presumably conservative and radical women abolitionists.[8] During this women's right convention, the "Declaration of Rights and Sentiments" was drafted that acknowledged male dominance over women in society and which demanded their deserved rights be provided.

The dichotomy led to the neglecting of so-called conservative women abolitionists in historical studies in the United States, even though they too challenged and pushed the boundaries of prescribed gender roles.[9] Research has primarily focused on women who were seen as radicals, therefore forerunners of feminism, or feminists themselves. The reason these women abolitionists were considered radicals is because they explicitly proclaimed the right of women to comment on political issues, and to hold governmental positions in political organizations.[10] However, one can argue that the basis for women's rights came to existence even before The Seneca Falls Convention through the concerted efforts of women who contested the conventional role that had been prescribed to them by nineteenth century society.[11] Contemporary view now perceives these so-called conservative women abolitionists as founders of the American women's rights movement

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[4] David Turley, 'Complicating the Story: Religion and Gender in Historical Writing on British and American Anti-Slavery'. In: Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey Ed., *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Oxford 2011) 21 -43, PP. 21.

[5] Clare Midgley, *Women against Slavery. The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London 1992).

[6] Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power. Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam 1999) 46.

[7] Midgley, *Women against Slavery,* 203.

[8] Ruth Bogin and Jean Fagan Yellin, 'Introduction,' In: Yellin and Van Horne ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 1-19, PP.3.

[9] Nancy A. Hewitt, 'On their own terms. A historiographical Essay', In: Yellin and Van Horne ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood,* 23 – 44, 25.

[10] Amy Swerdlow, 'Abolition's conservative sisters: The Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Societies, 1834-1840', In: Yellin and Van Horne ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 31-44, PP. 31.

[11] Bogin and Yellin, 'Introduction', 3.

as well, and highlighted that they too challenged the prescribed gender roles by publicly interfering with a political matter.[12]

Not a lot of research has been conducted on women abolitionists in the Netherlands and their part in challenging existing gender roles in the nineteenth century. Maartje Janse is one of the few historians who conducted several studies on the activities of abolitionist movements in the nineteenth century in the Netherlands, as well as research on Dutch women abolitionists. Janse acknowledged the importance of the activities undertaken by women abolitionists and questioned why the abolitionist movement did not lead to the formation of the feminist movement in the Netherlands.[13]

Prior to Janse's research, Elma Jonas had delineated the activities of women abolitionists in the Netherlands, by comparing British and Dutch women abolitionists. She devoted a section of her research to the question whether Dutch women abolitionists were feminists or not. She stuck to the distinction between radical women, who openly debated the prescribed gender roles, and conservative women, who focused on the role of women within the household.[14] Jonas concluded that Dutch women abolitionists were not feminists, even though they explored the boundaries of their female role.[15]

Moreover, Suzanne Agterberg created a case study on feminism and *Réveil*-women by focusing on the Dutch woman abolitionist Anna Amalia Bergendahl.[16] Bergendahl was an outspoken female abolitionist and an associate of the *Réveil*-movement. Agterberg used a combination of the work of De Haan and Van Drenth and the American scholar Olive Banks to define feminism in her research. Agterberg argued that Bergendahl was indeed a feminist as she undertook activities outside the household thus challenged gender roles by doing so.[17]

This research would like to add a new perspective on Dutch women abolitionists by taking the American approach into account. In Dutch studies, ample focus has been placed on the possible feminist features of Dutch women abolitionists, while American studies have shown that establishing a dichotomy between so-called conservative and radical women abolitionists was

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[12] Bingham Van Broekhoven, "'Let Your Names Be Enrolled", 191.
[13] Maartje Janse, *De Afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland, 1840-1880* (Amsterdam 2007) 103.
[14] Jonas, *Vrouwen en de afschaffing van slavernij*, 17.
[15] Jonas based this conclusion on the framework laid out by Van Drenth & de Haan who elaborated on the theory originally introduced in the following article: Francisca de Haan and Romy van der Heide, 'Vrouwen-vereenigingen, Damescomité's en feministen. De zorg van vrouwen voor vrouwelijke gevangenen in de negentiende eeuw', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 23:3 (1997) 278 – 303.
[16] Réveil was the Dutch equivalent of the Anglo-Saxon Evangelical Revival.
[17] Suzanne Agterberg, *Anna Amalia Bergendahl, een voorbeeldig feministe? Casus onderzoek over een Réveilvrouw en het negentiende-eeuwse feminisme* (Unpublished BA thesis; Utrecht University 4-06-2012) 33. <http://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/251855/Anna%20Amalia%20Bergendahl,%20een%20voorbeeldig%20feministe.pdf?sequence=>6-11-2015. (Clickherefor:AnnaAaliaBergendahl)

inaccurate, as both categories of women challenged the prescribed gender roles in the nineteenth century. Therefore this research shall attempt to use American studies and their analysis of American women abolitionists as a basis to examine Dutch women abolitionists, while avoiding an analysis on feminism.

The issue of a definition

There is no clear definition of feminism, therefore applying the idea of feminism as an all-encompassing concept is problematic when defining women abolitionists, since multiple viewpoints exist regarding the extent of their feminism. The term 'feminism' emerged for the first time in France between 1880 and 1890.[18] The term did not gain popularity, however, until the 1960s, when second-wave feminism embraced it. Second-wave feminists demanded equal rights for women in all aspects of society, and took upon themselves to determine what could be labeled as feminism.[19] Hence, the defining factor of feminism became the fight for equal rights.[20]

However, one cannot impose contemporary definitions of feminism on the activities undertaken by nineteenth century women, as multiple definitions of feminism can be applied when focusing on what freedom meant for those women.[21] In her later work, Clare Midgley indicated the flaw of contemporary studies in categorizing only those women as feminist who stood up for their own rights, without taking into account their demand for the rights of enslaved women.[22] Midgley discerned three indicators which she argued proved women abolitionists were indeed feminists.[23] First of all, women abolitionists used a feminist analysis of slavery that aimed to illustrate the suppression of enslaved women on the basis of sexual and racial exploitation. Secondly, they strove for the emancipation of enslaved women. Finally, they created a rhetoric based on empathy and identification with other women.[24] Midgley summarized that all women abolitionists used a feminist analysis, who exhibited a feminist campaign agenda and were organized in a feminist way.

Barbara Winslow also addressed that the definition of feminism has evolved over time, and is, therefore, dependent on the spirit of the time.[25] Winslow divided women's movements in the nineteenth century in two categories: the first strove for women's suffrage and their right to own

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[18]Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back. The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (New York 2002) 3.
[19] Ibid, 5.
[20] Van Drenth & de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power, 46*.
[21] Clare Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', In: Kathryn Kish Sklar en James Brewer Stewart ed., *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Anti-slavery in the Era of Emancipation (*New Haven: Yale University Press 2007) 121 – 139, PP. 133.
[22] Ibid, 131.
[23] Ibid, 133.
[24] Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', 131.
[25] Barbara Winslow, 'Feminist Movements: Gender and Sexual Equality', in: Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks ed., *A Companion to Gender History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2004) 186 – 205, PP. 186.

property, while the second emphasized the unique characteristics of women without explicitly challenging the gender roles, but still expanded their individual rights.[26] Winslow pointed out that some women demonstrated in the streets, while millions of women contributed to the empowerment of women within their, often-ignored, domains in the private sphere.

Van Drenth and De Haan applied another approach, dividing the empowerment of women into three phases, placing women abolitionists in the second.[27] The first phase of the process is called women activism, the second phase being women movements, and the third one being feminism.[28] De Haan and Van der Heide defined feminism as a contestation of male dominance or privilege, and placed women abolitionists in the second phase since women had started to care about the suffering of others, and created the notion of sisterhood. They stated that not all that was new or groundbreaking should be labeled as feminism.[29]

In the Netherlands the discussion about feminism in the nineteenth century concentrated on the public role of religious women, and there is thus no explicit role for women abolitionists in this discussion. The standard work about feminism in the Netherlands *Van Moeder op Dochter* named the Orthodox-Protestant *Réveil* as the roots of Dutch feminism. *Réveil*-women undertook charitable activities among the community by working at workhouses and hospitals.[30] These women were active outside the house and had a public role, despite it being contrary to their prescribed role. Tineke de Bie and Wantje Fritschy did not, however, categorize the activities of *Réveil*-women as the origins of feminism in the nineteenth century. They disagreed with the statement made in *Van Moeder op Dochter,* as those women did not view their activities as abnormal but as a matter of course.[31] Ulrika Jansz, as well, indicated that the beginning of first-wave feminism was as late as 1860, with the writings of Anna Maria Margaretha Storm-van der Chijs.[32] Jansz argued that feminist publications about the public role of women were accidental and kept to a minimum before 1860.[33] One should be cognizant that feminism of the nineteenth century has been described from the viewpoint of second wave-feminists. Therefore, less attention has been given to women who did not explicitly challenge their prescribed gender roles.

It is debatable whether or not charitable activities outside the house were a matter of course for nineteenth century women. The cult of domesticity was prevalent in the nineteenth century,

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[26] Winslow, 'Feminist Movements,' 187.
[27] Van Drenth & de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power,* 46.
[28] Ibid, 46.
[29] Ibid, 47.
[30] Tineke de Bie en Wantje Fritschy, ' De 'wereld' van Reveilvrouwen, hun liefdadige activiteiten en het ontstaan van het feminisme in Nederland', in: *Jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis* (Nijmegen 1985) 30-58, PP. 33.
[31] Ibid, 56.
[32] Ulrika Jansz, *Denken over sekse in de eerste feministische golf* (Amsterdam 1990) 36.
[33] Ibid, 36.

according to which women were supposed to withdraw themselves from the public sphere, and to focus mainly on the household.[34] The cult separated the world into two separate spheres: the private sphere – in the house, where women were supposed to reside – and the public sphere, which was exclusively for men to indulge in. Thus women had to meet the standards of the ideal woman, who had to uphold four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.[35] The wife was considered the moral compass of the household and she had to make sure her household was not poisoned by the outside world.[36] As working women had to contribute to their household's income this ideal image essentially applied to women from the middle classes.

Present-day American research questions the victimization of women by the cult of domesticity, focusing instead on the empowering effects of this cult.[37] Importance was placed on case studies that inquired the ways women accepted, negotiated, contested, or ignored this prescribed role.[38] In the Netherlands José Eijt applied this question to religious women and their handling of the ecclesiastical and societal expectations.[39] This research attempts to use the same approach for Dutch women abolitionists and to examine how they accepted, negotiated, contested, or ignored the prescribed gender roles in the nineteenth century.

Research design

Dutch women abolitionists have not been studied before in a case study to inquire how women handled prescribed gender roles in the nineteenth century. This research wants to use the outcome of American research on women abolitionists as a source of inspiration to examine Dutch female abolitionists. At first glance Dutch women abolitionists seem to differ considerably from their American counterparts. It is important to note that American society in the nineteenth century did differ significantly from the Dutch one. American society then was based upon a revolution, and the country was held together by the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. The Netherlands, on the contrary, was a monarchy and it was only after 1848, through a constitutional change, that citizens acquired more opportunities to be involved with politics. However, their

[34] Amanda Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', *The Historical Journal* 36:2 (1993) 383-414, PP. 383.
[35] Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860', *American Quarterly* 18:2 (1966) 151 – 174, PP. 152.
[36] Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres?' 384.
[37] Mary Kelly, 'Beyond Boundaries,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 21:1 (2001) 73-78, PP. 75.
[38] Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres?' 414.
[39] José Eijt, *Religieuze vrouwen:bruid, moeder, zuster. Geschiedenis van twee Nederlandse zustercongregaties, 1820 – 1940* (Hilversum 1995)

participation was limited as popular reform movements were associated with feared revolutions.[40] Reformers did not want to be labeled as radicals since radicalism was considered inappropriate in the Netherlands.[41] Such anxiety of potential revolutions was absent in the United States, therefore radical ideas could enjoy some support and which explains why abolitionism was able to garner a greater popular response than in the Netherlands. Essentially, Dutch and American abolitionism took place in starkly different contexts.

However, comparative research is an excellent way to view a topic from another perspective, to help generate new answers and views.[42] The goal of this study is to research how women abolitionists handled gender roles prescribed by the society they were living in. This research intends to outline this for Dutch women abolitionists by using the American studies as a guideline. There is an abundance of American literature on women abolitionists, and their role in the public spheres. Most of the literature argues that forming a dichotomy between so-called radical women and conservatives was baseless since both played an important part in challenging gender roles.[43] This research also intends to look past the dichotomy in the context of the Netherlands, and to approach Dutch women abolitionists in the same way American scholars have done for American women abolitionists.

By focusing on how women abolitionists challenged gender roles, the controversy on the term feminism is avoided. Too much importance has been attached to the label 'feminism' when studying women abolitionists, and the focus on feminism is too limited. Whether or not something can be labeled as feminist depends on the definition of feminism that is selected, which is considered too restrictive and disputable in this research. Hence, this study will analyze the ways women abolitionists handled the prescribed gender roles in the nineteenth century without the need to label these actions, but rather to value the actions for their significance in the 'spirit of the time'.

This thesis is divided into four chapters in order to analyze the undertakings of Dutch and American women abolitionists. The first two chapters will outline the American case as these

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[40] Maartje Janse, "Holland as a little England"? The complex relationship between British anti-slavery missionaries and continental abolitionist movements in the mid-nineteenth century', *Past and Present* 229: 1 (2015) 123 – 160, PP. 154.

[41] Maartje Janse, 'De balanceerkunst van het afschaffen. Maatschappijhervorming beschouwd vanuit de ambitie en de respectabiliteit van de negentiende-eeuwse afschaffer,' *Negentiende Eeuw* 29:1 (2005) 28-44, PP. 39.

[42] Kathryn Kish Sklar, 'Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation: American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840', *Pacific Historical Review* 59:4 (1990) 453-499, PP. 459.

[43] Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army. Ordinary women in the anti-slavery movement* (The University of North Carolina Press 1998); Kish Sklar, K., *Women's rights emerges within the Anti-slavery movement 1830 -1870. A brief history with Documents* (Boston 2000); Zaeske, S., *Signatures of citizenship. Petitioning, Anti-slavery & Women's Political Identity* (North Carolina Press 2003);Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Anti-slavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (Illinois 2005).

studies will be later used to better understand Dutch female abolitionism. Chapter one discusses American society in the nineteenth century, elaborating on its specific characteristics that made it possible for women abolitionists to raise their voices. The second chapter delves into the writings and actions of American female abolitionists for a complete overview of American women abolitionism. The third chapter focuses on the characteristics of Dutch society in the nineteenth century, describing the context in which Dutch women abolitionists were active. The fourth chapter analyzes the practices of Dutch women abolitionists by applying a close reading of writings produced by individual Dutch women abolitionists and Dutch abolitionist associations.[44] The insights derived from American studies and analyzed sources are used to interpret the writings, as well as the actions undertaken by Dutch actors. The conclusion will answer the question: how did Dutch women abolitionists accept, negotiate, challenge or ignore the prescribed gender roles during 1840-1863?

[44]Texts written by Dutch and American women abolitionists will be subjected to a close reading, which entails a detailed examination. Such a reading requires the reader to place emphasis on key words, rhetorical features and cultural references. In this thesis importance is placed on women's references to the cult of domesticity and womanhood in their anti-slavery writings, hereby scrutinizing how women abolitionists discreetly or openly accepted or negotiated the prescribed gender roles. An example of a close reading: Harvard College Writing Center, *How to do a Close Reading* (1998) <http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-do-close-reading>5-12-2015.
(ClickhereforCloseReading)

An introduction to American society and the American abolitionist movement is required in order to utilize the studies on American female abolitionists as an intellectual guideline in this thesis. This chapter will, therefore, outline the emergence of abolitionism in the United States. Furthermore, it will highlight the role of women within the abolitionist movement and their demands for equal rights.

The United States in the nineteenth century

American society was founded upon a revolution when the United States became independent from its motherland Great Britain in 1776. A significant characteristic of American society was suspicion towards the government, as well as an overall fear of the government's misuse of power, which prevailed amongst the public due to their colonial history with Great Britain. This fear was reflected in the first ten amendments to the constitution that established the necessity of individual freedom, and the need for a small government.[45]

After its independence, the United States consisted of only thirteen states, but over the course of the century the confiscation of land spread further westward across the continent. This expansion generated tension, as it challenged the delicate balance between Freedom states and Slavery states represented in Congress.[46] The antebellum reform movements emerged as a repercussion of this unsettled society between 1815 and 1860.[47] The reformers propagated an anti-government attitude, presenting themselves as a group that was completely distant from those in power. Therefore, the reformers addressed a public that had not been involved in politics before.[48]

The Second Great Awakening had significant influence on the antebellum reform movements.[49] It was the revival of Protestantism in the United States at the beginning of the nineteenth century that stressed upon the individual power of people to change and influence the world.[50] Perfectionism was the underlying thought behind this belief, aiming towards the possibility of a sin-free life on earth.[51] It also moved away from the Calvinistic notion that emotions should

[45] The Bill of Rights (online text, Independence Hall Association) <http://www.ushistory.org/us/18a.asp>27-10-2015 (Clickherefor:The Bill of Right)

[46]Elizabeth J. Clapp, 'introduction', in: Clapp and Roy Jeffrey Ed., *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery* (Oxford 2011) 1-24, PP. 7.

[47]Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860* (Toronto 1978) 12.

[48] Ibid, 11.

[49] Ibid, 15.

[50] Clapp, 'introduction', 13.

[51] Walters, *American Reformers,* 28.

be suppressed, and instead preachers used emotions to their advantage.[52] Later on, the same discourse was used by abolitionists to urge people to focus on individual responsibilities, and the possibility to avoid sin.[53]

Furthermore, economic development of the United States also contributed to the rise of reform movements in the nineteenth century. Industrialization was the advent of modern society, bringing with it technological advances that were pivotal for the spread of reform ideas.[54] Industrialization led a transportation revolution making it cheaper and more accessible for the masses, hereby allowing public speakers to travel throughout the country with ease and establishing a social network among reformers.[55] Besides, through new technologies, it became possible for reformers to launch mass mailing campaigns, as innovations made mass printing and extensive reprinting possible.[56] However, capitalist industries as a result of economic modernization flourished primarily in the Northern states, while the main economic activity of the South continued to be based on cotton plantations. The enslaved we forced into labor on cotton plantations, hence the Southerners were unwilling to abolish slavery since their economy was reliant on that exploitation. The difference in economic development formed a rift between the North and South resulting in different interests between them with regards to slavery.[57]

Abolitionism in the United States

As early as the eighteenth century there were people concerned with the situation of the enslaved – the Northern states having abolished slavery around 1800 – yet, abolitionism would not rise to prominence until after 1830.[58] Organized abolitionism began with legal disputes undertaken by white men over the freeing of the enslaved in the 1770s.[59] A new strategy would be applied by the American Colonization Society in 1816 by appealing directly to the general public instead of addressing the institutions.[60] Their charter demanded shipping freed enslaved back to Africa. A turning point was the publication of *The Liberator* by William Lloyd Garrison in 1830. He called for the immediate emancipation of the enslaved, pleading for equality and settlement within the United

[52] Walters, *American Reformers,* 35.
[53] Ibid, 37.
[54] Clapp, 'introduction', 3.
[55] Ibid, 6
[56] Alex William Black, *Print and Performance in American Abolitionism 1829 – 1865* (Cornwell University 2013) 2. < http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2048/docview/1426130840?accountid=12045>9-11-2015.
[57] Clapp, 'introduction', 6.
[58] Walters, *American Reformers,* 78.
[59] Black, *Print and Performance in American Abolitionism,* 3.
[60] Ibid, 3.

States rather than in Africa.[61] His ideas were considered quite radical and went contrary to the general opinion of the time.[62]

Garrison was the key figure in the foundation of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) in 1833: it was the first interstate organization that argued for the immediate emancipation of the enslaved.[63] Local anti-slavery associations affiliated themselves with the AASS creating a nationwide network. Garrison was inspired by mass anti-slavery campaigns established in Great Britain, as well as the enormous involvement of women in the campaigns.[64] In Great Britain women had played an important role during the anti-slavery campaigns as they appealed to other women, who had not interfered in a public matter before, hence creating a larger support base. Women and African Americans would play an important role in the AASS, however this interracial collaboration encountered resistance in both the Northern and Southern states.[65] The AASS would be confronted by violent mobs because of its controversial philosophy and method.

Eventually the AASS split because of disagreements on politics and women's rights. The first fracture arose with the founding of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS) in 1840 due to conflicting views on the role of women within the anti-slavery campaigns.[66] The AFASS was established by abolitionists who advocated women to have a passive role within the anti-slavery campaign.[67] Another demerger came with the establishment of a political party, the Liberty Party, also in 1840, which opposed the unpolitical approach espoused by Garrison and his followers.[68]

Garrison, namely, withheld himself from any political activity and instead gained influence by persuading public opinion. His emphasis on the importance of public opinion was revolutionary in a democracy.[69] He regarded public opinion as the basis of governance, which could be represented by petitions, speeches and publications of opinions.[70] This idea corresponded with other antebellum reform movements, which also questioned the working methods of the government. Garrison saw the established democracy in the United States as an example for the rest of the world. Therefore he wanted the enslaved and women to have a vote as well, as this

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[61] Clapp, 'introduction', 7.
[62] W. Caleb McDaniel, *The problem of Democracy in an age of Slavery. Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic reform* (Louisiana 2013) 4.
[63] Ibid, 64.
[64] Ibid, 65.
[65] Ibid, 71.
[66] Ibid, 90.
[67] Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Anti-slavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (Illinois 2005) 102.
[68] Walters, *American Reformers,* 90.
[69] McDaniel, *The problem of Democracy in an age of Slavery,* 109.
[70] Ibid, 8.

would otherwise set a poor example of democracy.[71] He perceived people excluded from politics as outsiders, who had to make sure a constant opposition was present to ensure important issues were being addressed, even though they did not represent the majority.[72] Therefore Garrison encouraged outsiders, such as women, to be involved with the anti-slavery campaign, and supported their demand for women's rights during the 1840s. This support was a radical standpoint, since, so far, men and women had been separated into their own spheres of life, and were therefore entitled to different rights.

Women in the anti-slavery campaigns in the United States

American women abolitionists committed themselves to the anti-slavery campaigns after encouragement from British abolitionists. The famous British abolitionist George Thompson inspired American women to establish female anti-slavery associations during his journey through the United States in 1834.[73] Local anti-slavery societies could be mixed-gender associations in the United States before 1840, contrary to the gender-segregated associations in Great Britain.[74] In the mixed-gender associations, men held leadership positions, whereas women were responsible for the management in all-female associations.[75] More than two hundred female anti-slavery associations would form in the United States between 1832 and 1855.[76] These associations aided in creating a sense of belonging for women, allowing them to come to the realization of their collective potential, as Beth Salerno stated.[77]

Women felt compelled to be involved in the anti-slavery campaign based upon their image as being the representative of moral values in society. The cult of domesticity had helped construe the image of women being emotionally superior, and therefore responsible for the moral direction of the household. Nancy F. Cott considered the cult of domesticity as the reason for the creation of womanhood, since it paradoxically contributed to the empowering idea that women were entitled to evaluate and dictate moral and religious matters in the country.[78] Since slavery was considered a sin, women were expected to see the need to abolish slavery in order to create a safe

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[71] McDaniel, *The problem of Democracy in an age of Slavery*, 10.
[72] Ibid, 10.
[73] Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 5.
[74] Kish Sklar, 'Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation', 464.
[75] Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 27.
[76] Ibid, 3.
[77] Ibid, 4.
[78] Nancy F Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (Yale University Press 1997) 201.

environment for their family.[79] However the amount of involvement that was appropriated by women was under debate and would be contested throughout the anti-slavery campaigns.

Garrison had been supporting women who took part in the campaign against slavery, however, the Grimké sisters gave a new meaning to the participation of women in the anti-slavery campaigns. Kathryn Kish Sklar indicated that the Grimké sisters ignored the conventional concept of the appropriate place for women by speaking publicly about the state of the nation before a mixed audience.[80] This act, however, lead to strong protests. In her last speech, Angelina Grimké was assaulted by a mob, which was assembled outside the hall, while she made her speech.[81] Performances would become a central element in the anti-slavery activities of both black and white women abolitionists; through the recitation of poems and delivering lectures the women created empathy for the enslaved.[82]

The Grimké sisters, furthermore, represented women not only as religious equals of men, but also as socially and morally equal.[83] In her letters, Angelina Grimké stated she considered men and women equal; the inequality having been created by a doctrine, and not of natural accord.[84] Although she considered women and men equal, she did not consider that both sexes had the same calling. She held on to the idea that women and men had different purposes in life by affirming the different tasks the two had to fulfill. The Grimké sisters are regarded as feminists in the United States since their writings promoted the dialogue on women's rights, making it an aspect of the anti-slavery movement.[85]

However, not all American women abolitionists spoke about equality between women and men, and yet, they are still considered contributors to the women's rights movement. Catharine Beecher was also a woman abolitionist who wrote against the public participation of women in the anti-slavery campaign.[86] According to her, women had to operate within their appropriate sphere, and thus Beecher promoted the profession of teaching as a suitable activity for women, but not in any way implying that women's duties were any less important than men's.[87] Hereby, according to Kathryn Kish Sklar, Beecher inadvertently promoted a new identity for women in the public sphere, and thus contributed to the empowerment of women.[88]

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[79] Bogin and Yellin, 'Introduction', 6
[80] Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Women's rights emerges within the Anti-slavery movement 1830 -1870. A brief history with Documents* (Boston 2000) 21.
[81] Kish Sklar, *Women's rights emerges,* 153.
[82] Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Anti-Slavery. Activist Women on Antebellum Stages* (Cambridge University Press 2014) 17.
[83] Ibid, 22.
[84] Kish Sklar, *Women's rights emerges,* 36.
[85] Ibid. 27.
[86] Walters, *American Reformers,* 87.
[87] Kish Sklar, *Women's rights emerges,* 107.
[88] Ibid, 27.

Harriet Beecher-Stowe, also a woman abolitionist, might have been the most important contributor to the abolitionist cause in the second half of the nineteenth century. Stowe, Catharine Beecher's sister, wrote the humanitarian novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 on the cruelty of slavery and the relief Christianity can provide. The book was the reason anti-slavery sentiments in the Netherlands arose again after its Dutch translation in 1853. Stowe, however, was an opponent of the public role of women, which is evident in the glorification of domesticity in her book.[89] Margaret H. McFadden named Stowe an "unwitting ally" since Stowe's writing "advanced a thought process of which she was unaware of, and a campaign to which she was not dedicated".[90] Her book ended up progressing international exchange, friendship, recognition and identification that was important for women worldwide. Stowe became the spokesperson of the abolitionist cause in the mid-nineteenth century, representing a new image and concept of what women were capable of.[91]

Women abolitionists labeled as conservative, like Stowe and Beecher, did not desire to achieve equal rights between men and women, however they are still considered contributors to the women's rights movement. Therefore it is necessary not to underestimate the importance of writings and actions carried out by so-called conservative women abolitionists who applied the discourse of domesticity. Because these voices were the most likely to garner support and achieve change in a society, their viewpoint suited the spirit of the time.[92]

All female abolitionists believed women possessed special talents which men lacked, notwithstanding their disunity on the appropriate place for women in the public sphere. Hereby an awareness arose of the existence of the concept of womanhood, bringing about a connectedness between them, and uniting them to empower themselves in certain facets of society.[93] The power of womanhood becomes evident mostly in the work of the thousands of anonymous women who were members of female anti-slavery associations. Julie Roy Jeffrey labeled these women as the silent army of abolitionism, indicating that the mere fact women committed themselves to the anti-slavery campaign was a radical step.[94] After all abolitionism had political implications since it intended to amend the constitution of the country. Besides, since it was a controversial topic,

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[89] Sarah Robbins, 'Gendering the History of the Anti-slavery Narrative: Juxtaposing "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and Benito Cereno", "Beloved" and "Middle Passage,' *American Quarterly* 49: 3 (1997) 531-573, PP. 543.

[90] Margaret H. McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy. The Transatlantic source of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Kentucky 1999) 67.

[91] Ibid, 76.

[92] Swerdlow, 'Abolition's conservative sisters', 44.

[93] Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 201.

[94] Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army,* 25.

abolitionists represented a minority of the population. By supporting such a movement, women were clearly overstepping their prescribed roles and this faced much resistance.

Women abolitionists and the women's right movement

Women abolitionists also challenged their prescribed role by raising funds for female anti-slavery societies. Female anti-slavery societies were affiliated with the overarching AASS to which the women donated the collected money.[95] Women undertook these activities within the household sphere, as well as beyond it, and by doing so began to formulate a role for themselves in the public sphere.[96] Women abolitionists were aware of their ambiguous positions, publishing several essays clarifying their reason for participating in the anti-slavery campaign.[97]

Petitioning against slavery was the main challenge that women put up against their prescribed role in society. Petitioning was a common way for citizens to express their views to local governments in the United States. During the War of Independence against Great Britain in 1774, women, as well, sent a petition to support the patriot cause.[98] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, women often petitioned in favor for charity goals on a local level, but this was not considered a political act. That perception changed when women became engaged in petitions organized by social reform movements such as the American Temperance Society, and the anti-removal campaign in 1829.[99]

The first female anti-slavery petition came from women in Philadelphia in 1833. It was an unprecedented event, being the first time women collectively petitioned against a general issue like slavery, instead of presenting individual requests with personal motives.[100] Lucretia Mott, a Quaker preacher, initiated the first all-female petition, which was written in a humble tone.[101] The women were well aware their action was outside the boundaries of their appropriate sphere and thus put them in a precarious situation. The petition, nevertheless, gathered 2,312 signatures.[102] The women would not only place the petition in churches for women to sign but also go on a door to door campaign.[103] These campaigns required women abolitionists to persuade other women signing the petition, and in order to do so the female abolitionists needed to have knowledge about the state

[95] Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 38.
[96] Ibid, 40.
[97] Ibid, 41.
[98] Zaeske, *Signatures of citizenship*, 16.
[99] Ibid, 23.
[100] Ibid, 37.
[101] Ibid, 36.
[102] Ibid, 37.
[103] Bingham Van Broekhoven, "Let Your Names be Enrolled", 184.

of the nation, and the ability to participate in political discussions.[104] Legislators acknowledged the political dimension of the petitions and protested against the undertaking mid-1830s.[105] A general discontent existed on the active involvement of women in the anti-slavery movement, and female petitions exacerbated the situation further.[106]

After 1840, the petitions took on a more political reasoning where women began referring to themselves as female citizens, or women of the United States.[107] Their concept of citizenship was based on the importance of virtue, linking back to the special characteristics ascribed to them. Susan Zaeske showed that by referring to the term citizenship, women formed a political identity for themselves that was broader and more inclusive than simply referring to themselves as ladies from a particular village.[108] Gaining more political confidence and authority, women began to assertively demand for the abolishment of slavery.[109] Hence, the anti-slavery petitions sparked a debate about the position of women in the country, the meaning of their citizenship, and their right to petition. This debate subsequently led to the discussion initiated by several women abolitionists on women's social and political equality to men in the 1840s.[110] The petition campaign against slavery ended in a demand for equal political rights for women, which is uniquely an American occurrence. Neither women abolitionists in Great Britain, nor in the Netherlands made such demands since women did not reach the point where they began to consider themselves as citizens of their country as well.

The emerged awareness about women's rights led to the organization of the Seneca Falls Convention in the United States in 1848. The basis for the organization of the Seneca Falls Convention was laid down during the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840. Women were not accepted as official delegates during the World Anti-Slavery Convention, and this exclusion led to discontentment among the American female representatives, since they were accustomed to having an active role during meetings and gatherings. British female representatives, on the other hand, agreed with the segregation between women and men during the assembly, and even refused to meet with American women abolitionists.[111] American women abolitionists were quite perplexed upon learning of their exclusion, which in turn motivated them even more to struggle for their empowerment.

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[104] Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 67.
[105] Bingham Van Broekhoven, "Let Your Names be Enrolled", 185.
[106] Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 68.
[107] Zaeske, *Signatures of citizenship*, 158.
[108] Ibid, 159.
[109] Ibid, 160.
[110] Kish Sklar, *Women's rights emerges,* 47.
[111] Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation", 473.

It must be clarified that the political climate in Great Britain differed from that in the United States, which thus influenced the attitude of women abolitionists differently. In the United States universal suffrage already existed for white men, with the only existing discrimination based on race and gender. An important issue in the United States would become the exclusion of both African Americans and women from citizens' rights granted by the American constitution because the term "person" did not apply to them. This resulted in a debate in the 1860s on who should be granted the right to vote first: African Americans or women.[112] Therefore, the direct link between female abolitionism and the demand for women's suffrage is uniquely an American phenomenon. In Great Britain, the working class had still not earned the right to vote, and the Quakers were excluded from any political influence, and due to these reasons the British women abolitionists ended up prioritizing the empowerment of their husbands over their own.[113]

American second wave feminists have regarded the Seneca Falls Convention as the origin of feminism in the United States.[114] However, women abolitionists had already been challenging the existing gender roles long before the organization of the convention.

~ *Conclusion* ~

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, American society underwent some drastic changes, leading to the emergence of antebellum reform movements. One of those movements was abolitionism with the corresponding AASS, founded by William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison was a reformist who did not shun impetuous ideas such as the need for women's rights. The Grimké sisters were the first who challenged the prevailing cult of domesticity by speaking publicly. Contrary to its purpose, the cult of domesticity paved the way for women to feel solidarity amongst themselves, and give rise to an awareness of their collective potential to influence change. The thousands of anonymous women abolitionists who committed themselves to the abolitionist cause were quite important, especially since it was such a radical step to take. Therefore, all women abolitionists challenged the existing societal norms as they went against a society where men dominated in every aspect of life. Even women against a public role for female abolitionists paradoxically contributed to the creation of a new identity for women by interfering in politics. Hence, it can be stated that all women abolitionists in fact contributed to women's rights, particularly by gaining the right to interfere in the masculine world of politics.[115]

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[112] Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', 125.
[113] Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation", 483.
[114] Nancy A. Hewitt, 'Seeking a larger Liberty": Remapping First Wave feminism', In: Kish Sklar and Brewer Stewart ed., *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Anti-slavery,* 266 – 278, PP.276.
[115] Kelly, 'Beyond Boundaries', 77.

Annual reports published by American female abolitionists are analyzed in this chapter in order to appraise American studies on female abolitionists and their claims on the challenging of existing gender roles by female abolitionists. Writings of four female anti-slavery associations are used for a close reading. The Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham-Street Chapel and the Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Society are chosen because these associations were labeled conservative by scholars, while The Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society and the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society were named progressive. The first annual reports of the associations are analyzed, as those mention the constitution and by-laws of the associations, furthermore accessibility of annual reports was a factor in choice. The writings and actions undertaken by the female anti-slavery associations are examined jointly, as the writings were a vindication for women to undertake their actions. The purpose of the chapter is to inquire how American women abolitionists negotiated their prescribed gender roles while campaigning for the abolishment of slavery.

The Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham-Street Chapel

The Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham-Street Chapel (FASSCSC) was the predecessor of the presumed conservative Ladies' New York Anti-Slavery Society (LNYASS). The FASSCSC was the first anti-slavery association established in New York, founded by vigorous women who were already involved in other reform movements.[116] The FASSCSC declared their interference was in the name of God and called abolitionism a holy cause; the women formed the society in order to follow His will.[117] The women compared themselves to women who supported Jesus throughout his crucifixion, assuming those women must have felt the same as they felt now. The association even considered God's blessing as the very reason for their existence. Women wrote their anti-slavery texts, to a large extent, as religious speeches, since they were considered an authority on religious matters.[118] One can argue that women abolitionists exploited their moral and religious authority for legitimizing their involvement in the abolitionist cause.[119]

The FASSCSC, furthermore, called upon women to join the abolitionist strife, as slavery was also present within the household and was therefore of interest to women. Their involvement was rationalized by the statement: "Whatever else it may be, slaveholding must be eminently *a*

[116] Swerdlow, 'Abolition's conservative sisters', 34.
[117] Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham-Street Chapel, *Constitution and Address* (New York 1834) 4.
[118] Julie Roy Jeffrey, 'Women Abolitionists and the Dissenting Tradition', in: Clapp and Roy Jeffrey Ed., *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery*, 133- 154, PP. 139.
[119] Ibid, 137.

domestic evil. It works its mischiefs among the sweet charities which naturally flourish in the family circles."[120] Thus the women defended their interference by applying the rhetoric created by the cult of domesticity as slavery was considered within the household sphere, therefore entitling women to interfere.

Moreover the FASSCSC specified their need to act based upon womanhood since they possessed natural compassion for those unfortunate ones in misery:

> Must we, because we are women, look on such evil without emotion or remonstrance! We must then resist the best tendencies and impulses, both of "nature and grace". We must in this case do violence to everything within us, which in all other cases we are bound to cherish and encourage. Are we called to maintain such a struggle with ourselves – to keep down everything like natural compassion, or Christian sympathy, which might stir within us? […] – but we forbear. […] We hope female modesty does not require us to regard our country with indifferences. We have fathers, husbands, brothers, sons. *Are we not something in, and something to, our country?*" [121]

The women found a reason in their ascribed womanly features to interfere, since otherwise it would be a double standard as their caring abilities were much appreciated in other circumstances, but not in case of slavery. The legitimacy, however, of their interference in the state of the nation was linked to their bond with the other sex.

The women were quite cognizant of the resistance against their participation in the anti-slavery campaign, hence the FASSCSC posed the following rhetorical questions: "Will the story of their wrongs be less touching, when told by the lips of a women? Will their claims to compassion and assistance lose their force, when urged by female advocates?"[122] The women, in effect, were stating that they were as capable as men in campaigning for a cause, explicitly mentioning their sisters in England – who had delivered an excellent job for the abolitionist cause – to underscore their argument.[123] By expressing admiration for exemplary British women abolitionists the FASSCSC was able to unite women and form bonds between them to take action against slavery.[124]

[120] FASSCSC, *Constitution and Address,* 8 (Italics in source).
[121] Ibid, 10.
[122] Ibid, 13.
[123] Ibid, 13
[124] Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', 132.

The FASSCSC called upon American women to collectively rise up and save the nation and church from this devastating sin.[125] The women referred to their fellow white women as their sisters and convinced them to join in the struggle because their colored enslaved sisters were facing abuse and insults. The FASSCSC made emotional pleas to persuade women to join: "Women in chains – babes in iron fetters! Neglected groans – unheeded tears – unavenged blood! Miseries unutterable, yet everyday increasing! Alas, sisters, where will these things end!"[126] The woman-and-sister theme was commonly used in female anti-slavery publications since it created a bond between enslaved and free women, which however was quite unilateral. The women abolitionists wanted to create empathy by describing the horrors of the enslaved women.[127]

It was due to the situation enslaved women were subjected to that women of the Chatham-Street Chapel were compelled to take action and could no longer accept the atrocious system of slavery. In their preamble the FASSCSC mentioned that one million of "our own sex" are under the yoke of bondage.[128] The women wrote how enslaved women were disallowed to maintain sacred relations of domestic life and hopes of the blessed gospel.[129] The unilateral relation between the women abolitionists and the enslaved women was based upon womanhood because the associated duties and concerns were universal and thus applicable to all women.[130] The women explicitly addressed the sexual vulnerability of enslaved women: "unprotected by law or any sense of manly shame, from merciless stripes and cruel outrage".[131]

The women, thus, blamed men as being in charge of the system and opposed them in order to safeguard their own sex. However, the women remained well within the confines defined by the cult of domesticity by expressing their admiration towards the "stronger sex" for their courage to support the enslaved.[132] The women, nevertheless, challenged their prescribed gender roles by appealing to women to dispute legislation and take matters into their own hands.[133]

Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Society

The Ladies' New York Anti-Slavery Society (LNYASS) was founded as an extension of the FASSCSC, aiming to represent the entire city of New York. The LNYASS, however would

[125] FASSCSC, *Constitution and Address,* 16.
[126] Ibid, 15.
[127] Zaeske, *Signatures of citizenship*, 63.
[128] FASSCSC, *Constitution and Address,* 3.
[129] Ibid, 3.
[130] Zaeske, *Signatures of citizenship*, 62.
[131] FASSCSC, *Constitution and Address,* 3.
[132] Ibid, 15.
[133] Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army,* 7.

eventually become categorized as a conservative anti-slavery society due to their opposition of the election of Abby Kelley as a board member of the AASS in 1840. The basis for their objection was due to "their disapproval of public voting, the public speaking of women at meetings, and for that matter women having any official role, alongside men, on committees or in the society".[134] As many members of the LNYASS had a Revivalist background their commitment was based upon the need to support the holy cause of abolitionism, which was driven from their sense of religious responsibility.[135] The choice to become engaged with abolitionism was, nevertheless, a radical step to take since abolitionists were a small minority with strong opposition, especially from men.[136]

The LNYASS, for instance, referred to the enslaved as "his despised children", thus slavery was opposing God's will by enslaving their fellow creatures.[137] The women stated all humans were created by the same God, therefore all hearts were alike. Stressing how mother's love is a universal concept that applied to all women, they implied how an enslaved woman suffered the same as a white woman if her children were taken away from her.[138] The women referred to this as the suffering of "our sex" due to slavery.[139] An example of such wrongdoing was the disfigurement of marriage, which was considered a sacred institution that offered women protection.[140] The concerns of the New York women were especially about the situation of the enslaved women, using it to call upon other women to join the anti-slavery campaign.

However, the abolitionist cause was presented as an extension of the women's sphere, and certainly not as a political matter, thus implying their commitment to the cause was understandably natural.[141] Women were encouraged to join the movement by taking up activities that lay well within the bounds of their own sphere, thereby taking into consideration the sacredness of the feminine character.[142] The LNYASS referred to supporting the abolitionist movement as a woman's cause since it appealed to her heart full of empathy: "It is not to be supposed […] that especially in the disclosure of the heartrending details of slavery, there would be no response of woman's heart, no kindling of her sympathy, or enlistment of energies in her appropriate sphere".[143] The women, furthermore, argued their involvement did not contradict the sanctity of the female character, but on the contrary felt compelled to pursue abolishment in order to maintain its purity. The address

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134 Swerdlow, 'Abolition's conservative sisters', 32.
135 Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army,* 55.
136 Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Society, *Annual Report* (New York 1836*)* 6.
137 Ibid*, 4.*
138 Ibid, 9.
139 Ibid, 6.
140 Ibid, 9.
141 Salerno, *Sister Societies,* 22.
142 Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army,* 59.
143 LNYASS, *Annual Report 1836,* 41.

entailed an urgency for women to come to action in order to defeat the primary sinfulness that was prevalent throughout the country at that time: indifference and passiveness. The emotional reasoning employed by the women in the address gave them credence in the public sphere as it allowed them to exert influence on public opinion through this urgency.[144] The fact that women knew how to appeal to the public for a necessary change made the female abolitionists the first ones to combine their domestic life, prescribed by the cult of domesticity, with their activist life.[145]The women used these new tactics to influence public opinion and hence were in no way powerless or submissive. [146]

The LNYASS also fostered an alliance between women in the Northern and Southern states. The New York women implored their readers not to feel angry towards Southern women reasoning that they too secretly denounced the situation of the enslaved. Therefore the LNYASS stated that American women should not be categorized as oppressors or victims of oppression, but rather all women were victims in a country where slavery still existed.[147] This statement created a clear division between men and women, making it evident that women had to oppose men in order to repeal slavery.

The New York women affiliated themselves eagerly with Angelina Grimké, and other female anti-slavery societies. In their annual report they referred to Grimké as another heroic female figure in the anti-slavery campaign. The women stated how a woman from the countryside was the first to stand up for the slaves and this made her a great example for the rest of them.[148] Even though the New York women appraised Grimké, she however criticized them for their segregation policy towards colored women and requested, in vain, to include them in the LNYASS.[149] Another inspiration for the LNYASS was the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Boston, whom they considered as their predecessors. In one of their annual reports the LNYASS referred to an incident involving the Boston women:

> This correspondence was previous to the period which must ever be memorable in their annals, when they were called to a most unexpected test of their principles – a test which *they* stood so nobly, and which may serve to convince *us* also that *womanhood* itself, even in

[144] Carol Lasser, 'Beyond Separate Spheres: The Power of Public Opinion', *Journal of the Early Republic* 21:1 (2001) 115-123, PP. 120.
[145] Ibid, 120.
[146] Lasser, 'Beyond Separate Spheres', 118.
[147] LNYASS, *Annual Report 1836,* 7.
[148] Ibid, 4.
[149] Swerdlow, 'Abolition's conservative sisters', 42.

> the so called *free* states, is no protection to those who dare dissent from the doctrine, that slavery is – not a necessary *evil*.[150]

The women utilized womanhood as their safeguard, hereby using the concept for their own benefit as it should protect them from physical violence. Also by learning from the experiences of the Boston women it becomes evident that a sense of connectedness emerged among the women.

The LNYASS promoted petitioning by calling upon all members of the society to pressurize the American Church to proclaim slavery as a sin.[151] The women spoke in clear and precise language demanding the purge of the holy vessels of sanctuary by prohibiting slave owners to become clerics of the American church.[152] They proclaimed "slavery the worst system of oppression the world has ever seen".

The LNYASS also undertook fundraising activities for the benefit of the AASS. Their first report contained the constitution of the society making it quite evident that these societies were well organized: administrative matters were described as well as the right to vote on resolutions. Furthermore the LNYASS introduced their members by name and their function, a division was made between officers and managers. The women managed the association themselves and took on the necessary tasks. The by-laws mentioned details such as the time for regular meetings. For instance the third Monday of every month at four pm., which was followed by the agenda of every meeting and also a statement on the proper method of presenting resolutions.[153]

At the end of their annual report the LNYASS provided an overview of income and expenses of the society. It declared to have paid the National Society $325, of which the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Sewing Society, which was affiliated to the LNYASS, had collected $100.[154] The Anti-Slavery Sewing Society advertised the sale of their handcrafted goods which included card baskets, pin cushions and aprons in the *Liberator*.[155] They inquired, furthermore, about other associations, in other cities and villages that had similar practices and would show their willingness to strike up a correspondence with them.[156] Women would discuss anti-slavery activities and read anti-slavery writings during sewing activities, thus combining domestic activities with political engagements.[157] Other regular activities undertaken by the New York women was the distribution of Anti-Slavery

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[150] LNYASS, *Annual Report 1836,* 6 (Italics in source).
[151] Ibid, 16.
[152] Ibid, 10.
[153] Ibid, 19.
[154] Ibid, 15.
[155] Ladies' Anti-Slavery Sewing Society, *The Liberator* 16-05-1835, 20:5, PP. 3.
[156] Ibid, 3.
[157] Salerno, *Sister Societies,* 131.

publications; the printing costs for these publications were detailed on the balance sheet in the annual report. The auditing carried out by women was an unprecedented task since they had not become acquainted with the reporting of incomes and expenses. The New York women, also, organized parlor lectures that were given by women and although these were initially intended for a mixed audience, due to disturbance and disagreement on the setup the invited audience had to be restricted to only women.[158]

Even though the New York women were categorized as conservative, they still had the courage to join the radical abolitionist movement. These women challenged their prescribed gender roles by supporting petitioning, organizing lectures and raising money. The women, furthermore, used the concept of womanhood as an empowering element, since it gave them license to interfere with a political cause and criticize male leaders of the country and church for their tolerance towards slavery. Moreover, the Ladies New York Anti-Slavery Society can also be partially credited for making the state of New York the first state to place the question of the abolition of slavery on the ballot.[159]

The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society

The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS), on the contrary, is considered a progressive society, which is reflected in their inclusion of African American women in the association and their demand of women's rights.[160] It is especially in the 1830s that the society became notorious for their pioneering work with regard to gender equality. During subsequent years though the Philadelphia women began to restrict their working methods to remain within the boundaries prescribed by the cult of domesticity to decrease resistance, yet nevertheless still maintained their influence.[161] In their earlier years the society tried to recruit new members by actively sponsoring addresses and organizing anti-slavery lectures. The third annual report mentioned how the society had begun with twenty members but had grown to eighty strong.[162]

Their third annual report appeared under the headline "Religious and Moral" in the *National Enquirer*, which also mentioned the first all-female anti-slavery petition that had been drafted by the society. The women specified their intensive campaign consisting of circulating tracts, papers

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158 Swerdlow, 'Abolition's conservative sisters', 39.

159 Sidney J. Caddel – Liles, 'Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Society (1835 – 1840),' in: Junius P. Rodriquez, ed., *Slavery in the United States. A Social, Political and Historical Encyclopedia volume 1* (Oxford 2007) 362.

160 Jean R. Soderlund, 'Priorities and Power. The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society', In: Yellin and Van Horne ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood,* 67 – 88, PP. 67.

161 Ibid, 68

162 Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 'Third Annual Report', in: *The National Enquirer* 01-01-1837.

and pleas for signatures.[163] The response to the petition was ruthless, yet the women beheld it with a different perspective: "We knew that our petitions were not ineffectual, when the wise men from the South, sent back to us, the cry, "impertinent intermeddlers!" "Incarnate devils!" etc. We knew they were at work, when statesmen thought it necessary to make mighty efforts for their suppression."[164] In their initial years the society gathered thousands of signatures for their petitions: thirty-three hundred in 1836 and almost five thousand in 1837.[165] The Philadelphia women saw the severe backlash as an indication that men felt threatened by their petitions, and that they could, indeed, be influential on a political matter.

Nevertheless, the women felt the need to defend the decision made by one of their members to take part in a commission of the AASS. The report recognized the move was debatable, since it would be perceived as a "departure from [a] woman's proper station". The society gave the following defense:

> But we may be allowed to observe, that woman's station, and employments, have somewhat changed, when Milton prescribed her duties, and Cecil presumed to measure her intellect. We would never overstep the boundaries of propriety, we would not needlessly provoke the frown of any one.[166]

The women were simply negotiating the boundaries of their appropriate sphere and questioning the prescribed roles. The women used womanhood as a justification for overstepping the confines of their sphere clarifying that they would not do so "needlessly" but only when necessary and with regard to matters of religion and morality, of which they held a superior opinion.

The Philadelphia women perceived their interference as mandatory since more than two million of their fellow countrymen were held in bondage, which clearly contradicted the laws of God as well as the Declaration of Independence.[167] The women based the necessity of their involvement on political and religious grounds, while referring to the Declaration of Independence to legitimize the political essence of their involvement. The PFASS did not explicitly mention the suffering of enslaved women in their constitution nor in annual reports, but rather based their argument on natural rights that everyone should have.[168]

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[163] PFASS, Third Annual Report.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Soderlund, 'Priorities and Power', 78.
[166] PFASS, Third Annual Report.
[167] PFASS, *Annual Report* (Philadelphia 1838) 13.
[168] PFASS, *Annual Report* (Philadelphia 1845) 12.

Furthermore the Philadelphia women aimed to unify women for the abolitionist cause, hence the PFASS organized the second Anti-Slavery convention of American Women in 1838. The event took place in the Pennsylvania Hall, but the convention was met with such hostility that the building was burnt down by violent pro-slavery mobs during the event.[169] On the eve of the convention the women declared that: "The object of this meeting was to afford the different associations an opportunity of conferring together, respecting their modes of operation, and devising plans of united actions".[170] After the event had taken place the women named it a "novel measure of reform" since a national convention of women had only been organized once before. They stated that even though riots broke out they were all determined to continue to meet as they had committed themselves to the cause of the slaves. [171] The women had encountered rowdy, violent mobs and mass resistance while promoting abolitionism as a reaction to the language they employed and the actions they undertook. This, however, presented them the opportunities to make their own decisions and challenge the social norms.[172] Heroism was a necessary quality for certain female abolitionists in the United States since women could receive unpleasant reactions.[173] This, inevitably, only made their resolve stronger and made them more aware of their own capacities.

By the mid-1840s the PFASS applied a different method to create agitation in the country and influence the AASS, by organizing annual fairs, instead of recruiting more members.[174] Philadelphia women were influential in the AASS because the fairs raised a significant amount of money for the AASS treasury.[175] In their annual report of 1852 the Philadelphia women mentioned the success of their annual fair. At the end of their annual report the women gave an extensive summary on the organization of their fair: it took three days and was held in the Grand Saloon of the Assembly building. Generous donors were thanked because of whom it was possible for products to be sold during the fair. .[176] The report ended with a brief overview of the expenses and the generated revenue, coming to a profit of $1,401. The report, also, indicated the amount of preparation for organizing a fair:

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169 Soderlund, 'Priorities and Power', 78.
170 PFASS, *Annual Report 1838*, 5.
171 PFASS, *Annual Report* (Philadelphia 1852) 5.
172 Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation", 493.
173 Julie Roy Jeffrey, 'Permeable Boundaries: Abolitionist Women and Separate Spheres,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 21:1 (2001) 79-93, PP. 90.
174 Soderlund, 'Priorities and Power', 81.
175 Ibid, 83.
176 PFASS, *Annual Report 1852,* 18.

> The Committee of Arrangements, and their coadjutors, entered upon the work of preparation with great seal and diligence, and the gratifying results have amply recompensed them for their toils. The treasury of our Society is supplied chiefly, as our Treasurer's report will show, by the profits of the fair."[177]

Fairs, obviously, took place outside the household and entailed financial transactions that women had to become familiar with. Women abolitionists were not familiar with earning an income, thus the financial activities they undertook is of greater importance than the money itself.[178] The organization of anti-slavery fairs invoked its share of resistance though since it challenged the boundaries between the private and public sphere, greatly diminishing them.[179]

The PFASS was highly successful in organizing fairs because it focused on one specific activity and consisted of a small number of dedicated members. This was a lesson women took to heart when launching the Philadelphia Women's Right Convention in 1854, focusing as well on a small number of highly skilled and rousing speakers instead of mobilizing the crowd.[180] So women abolitionists learned many lessons with regard to organizing themselves and establishing powerful organizations, lessons that would prove valuable and applicable at a later stage as well.

Even though the Philadelphia women attempted to unify women for collective female empowerment, they also expressed their criticism of certain women. The Philadelphia women cherished the success of the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* written by Harriet Beecher Stowe but nonetheless criticized her for not supporting the abolitionist cause, who instead advocated for the American Colonization Society.[181] As the Philadelphia women stated: "The author has no sympathy with the unchristian and inhumane *animus* of that scheme, is plainly evident, and it is, therefore, more lamentable that she has given the advocates of that cruel persecutions any encouragement to number her among its apologists."[182]

Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society

The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) was founded in 1833 and included prominent contributors to the women's rights movement, such as Maria Weston Chapman and Lydia Child. Although the BFASS is considered a benefactor for the women's rights movement in the

[177] PFASS, *Annual Report 1852*, 6.
[178] Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army,* 86.
[179] Salerno, *Sister Societies,* 38.
[180] Soderlund, 'Priorities and Power', 86.

[182] PFASS, *Annual Report 1852*, 11.

nineteenth century, the society itself was highly divided on the topic of appropriate conduct of women.[183] A stark division existed between elite women, who petitioned, lectured, and published tracts, and the middle class women whose involvement was narrowed down to sewing anti-slavery needlework, and activities concentrated on the need of women and children.[184] Nevertheless the BFASS was an eminent society in the country as it sued slaveholders and co-organized a female multistate petition campaign in 1836.[185]

In their petition the Boston women appealed to female readers by referring to the multiple roles women carried out. The petition attempted to evoke sentiment and solidarity for the enslaved by implying a bond between the readers, whom they referred to as "immortal souls", and the enslaved who were "fellow-immortals" and "children of the same country".[186] They aimed to rally women by creating a sense of community by explicitly referring to their own sex and their capabilities: "As *women*, it is incumbent upon us, instantly and always, to labor to increase the knowledge and the love of God that such concentrated hatred of his character and laws may no longer be so entrenched in *men's* business and bosoms […]."[187] Furthermore, they took the concept of being *wives* and *mothers,* and *sisters* and *daughters*, which was usually used in the context of the household, and used it to their benefit to justify their involvement: "We are deeply responsible for the influence we have on the human race. We are bound to exert it; we are bound to urge men to cease to do evil, and learn to do well. […] We are bound to the constant exercise of the only right we ourselves enjoy—the right which our physical weakness renders peculiarly appropriate—the right of petition."[188] The women were convinced about their right to interfere in the matter since it was their task to instruct men to do the right thing, based on the moral superiority that had been imparted to them by the concept of womanhood. They too, like the New York women, ended up using womanhood as an empowering feature: "The best and noblest of our countrymen, thus seeing, and thus feeling these things, have spoken and acted like freemen—Oh, let us aid them to rouse the slumbering manhood of the rest! Let us rise in the moral power, power of womanhood."[189]

The campaign was met with a great reception by women; in total 31,435 signatures were gathered in the state New England, due to the painstaking efforts female abolitionists took to go

[183] Debra Gold Hansen, 'The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Limits of Gender Politics', in: Yellin and Van Horne ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood,* 45-65, PP. 46.
[184] Ibid, 63.
[185] Ibid, 51.
[186] Address of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society 1836.
[187] Ibid (Italics in source).
[188] Ibid (Italics in source).
[189] Ibid.

on door-to-door campaigns.[190] This undertaking though challenged the passive religious essence of petitioning that women abolitionists had aimed for, since most perceived the petitions as a moral request, instead of a political demand.[191] In 1836, however, the so-called "gag rule" was implemented by the House which allowed Congress to ignore anti-slavery petitions all together. [192] This move enraged the abolitionists and in fact ended up supporting their case against the government that it was becoming ever more dictatorial since it was ignoring the will of the people.[193] The Boston women abolitionists addressed this attitude of the government in their annual reports, lending a political connotation to their writings.

They responded to Senator Henry Clay who had adjured women abolitionists to stop sending petitions to Congress.[194] In their address to the senator the women used words such as *universal liberty*, *justice* and *freedom,* depicting they were unafraid of opposing him:

> Mr. Clay is shaken with apprehensions of the evil consequence of universal liberty. Sir, your *fears* are no measure of your brother's rights. […] you bid us *fear* to present to you our petitions for the extinction of such parts of it as lie within your jurisdiction, and call this terror-stricken circle of corrupt public opinion, which your judgement has marked out for us, ' our own appropriate and delightful sphere!' This style is unworthy of you and of ourselves – alike unworthy of the American Senator and American woman.[195]

The arguments the women posed were based on legal reasoning but veiled by the cloak of womanhood. The BFASS justified the interference in the abolitionist case by explicitly referring to their womanhood.[196] They explained how they were not stepping beyond their appropriate sphere as the "garment of womanhood" made them responsible to contribute to a better world. The BFASS was well aware of the potential influence women could have:

> We are told "it is a political question; woman has not right to interfere" But this cry is only an evasion. It is only raised by those who know the power of the weapons we wield. They know that if the question is discussed in the school-room, at the fire-side, by the way, at

[190] Hansen, 'The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society', 51.
[191] Zaeske, *Signatures of citizenship*, 185.
[192] Ibid, 11.
[193] Ibid, 11.
[194] Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, *Annual report* (Boston 1842) 32.
[195] Ibid, 41 (Italics in source).
[196] BFASS, *Annual Report* (Boston 1835) 22.

> the temple of the living God it cannot fail of overthrowing that wicked and cruel system of oppression.[197]

The BFASS concretized the fear many of their opponents had with regard to women's involvement in abolitionism. The fact these women opposed, in straightforward language, legislation and thus male politicians made them inadvertently challenge prescribed gender roles since women were not supposed to take on activism nor such a rebellious attitude.[198]

Apart from petitioning the BFASS also established alignments with other associations, thereby creating an extensive women's network. In their communications the BFASS reported on their activities and inquired about the activities of other societies in their letters. The Boston women reported, for instance, in a letter addressed to the Ladies' New York Anti-Slavery Society about the publication and distribution of anti-slavery pamphlets, creation of an anti-slavery handkerchief and other handicrafts. They inquired of the New York women had their own activities and for advice on ways to collect and utilize funds.[199] The BFASS was persistent in their creation of a virtual community among women across the country. In the letter to the LNYASS they wrote: "feeling at the same time, that though we are strangers in all other respects, we are yet made friends and sisters, by a common recognition of the same holy and sublime principles."[200] The American female anti-slavery associations established extensive networks; women invented various ways to unite together for a common goal. These correspondences were essential for the success of female anti-slavery societies since it gave them the privilege to learn from each other's mistakes and be efficient at the same time.[201] Women realized they belonged to a wider community that empowered them to accomplishing great things such as the abolishment of slavery. The established women's network would eventually become an important factor in the demand for women's rights during the late 1840's.[202]

Even though the BFASS is known for its contribution to the women's rights movement the majority of their members held on to the idea of a restrictive role for women in the public area. A decade after its founding, the society was dismantled since its members were unable to come to a common agreement on the role that women abolitionists had to play within the abolitionist movement.[203]

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[197] BFASS, *Annual report 1835*, 78.
[198] Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army,* 7.
[199] LNYCASS, *Annual Report 1835,* 17.
[200] Ibid, 16.
[201] Salerno, *Sister Societies,* 36.
[202] Ibid, 158.
[203] Hansen, 'The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society', 65.

~ Conclusion ~

The American female abolitionists were inspired by their British sisters and their commitment to abolitionism. The American women, as the British, distributed petitions and anti-slavery pamphlets, organized fairs and established sewing societies. In their writings American women abolitionists used their female traits to justify their interference in the matter, being convinced of their own moral and religious superiority in contrast to the ignorant masses. Women, hereby, created a network amongst each other that generated the realization of collective powers. These collective accomplishments were successful petitions and fairs that all challenged the prescribed gender roles for women. Women abolitionists interfered in a political matter by drafting petitions and collecting signatures, often in plain and strong language. Women, furthermore, gained new skills by establishing organizations that all empowered their position in society. Even though American women abolitionist are known for their radical character, most women would fit in the constructed conservative label. All women abolitionists, however, made the radical step to support abolitionism, which was a despised minority, and opposed legislation. However, American women abolitionists faced such resistance towards their participation in the movement that the women were required to maintain a confident attitude, and for some women abolitionist heroism was a necessary characteristic.

This chapter will outline the characteristics of Dutch society in the nineteenth century, as has been done for American society in chapter one. A short overview on abolitionism in the Netherlands will be presented, thereby delving into the role of women in this movement. Also, the position of women in the public sphere will be discussed in order to understand the significance of their actions.

The Netherlands in the nineteenth century

The Netherlands was a poor country at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which in turn affected its policy concerning Dutch colonies, as the colonies were an important asset of the Dutch economy.[204] The West Indies, for instance, produced commodities intended for export such as sugar and coffee, which were grown on plantations farmed by the enslaved.[205] Due to the vast distance between the Netherlands and its overseas colonies – where slavery existed – the Dutch population never directly encountered the enslaved. Slavery was, instead, often referred to as a blessed patriarchal institution.[206] And since the national debt of the Netherlands was high, the government did not have the means to compensate slave owners if the enslaved were to be set free.[207]

Until 1848, the king was solely responsible for the colonies, and hence also for the persistence of slavery. That year the Dutch constitution was amended under the guidance of a liberal politician, which drastically diminished the power of the monarchy.[208] The change ushered the era of a parliamentary democracy in the Netherlands, where there was more freedom for citizens to influence policy makers. Universal male suffrage, however, did not come into effect until 1917, and meanwhile only the elite of society were able to utilize these newfound freedoms.[209]

The constitutional change also ushered in the freedom of press and the possibility to organize meetings and establish organizations without the king's permission.[210] Even though

[204]Els Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes. Een cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlandse huisvrouw* (Amsterdam 2011) 140.
[205]Gert Oostindie, 'Introduction', in: Gert Oostindie ed., *Fifty Year Later. Anti-slavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995) 1- 21, PP. 3.
[206] Riemer Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode uit de geschiedenis van de slavenemancipatie,* 1863-1963(Den Haag 1963) 7.
[207]Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'The Dutch case of Anti-slavery. Late abolitions and Elitist Abolitionism,' in: Oostindie ed., *Fifty Year Later,* 67-88, PP. 73.
[208] István Bejczy, *Een kennismaking met de Nederlandse Geschiedenis* (Bussum 2010) 187.
[209] Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes,* 155.
[210] Henk te Velde, 'Van grondwet tot grondwet.Oefenen met parlement, partij en schaalvergroting 1848-1917', In: Remieg Aerts e.a. *Land van kleine gebaren. Een politieke geschiedenis van Nederland 1780-1990* (Nijmegen/Amsterdam 1999) 99- 262, PP. 102.

citizens had the possibility to exert influence on governmental policies, politics remained limited to parliamentary activities.[211] One reason could be that citizens still regarded politics as an activity performed by gentlemen from the upper middle class, which they felt they had no stake in.[212] Due to events in earlier periods around the continent an overall fear of revolutions and anarchy, caused by popular forces, prevailed in the Netherlands. Consequently, society favored harmony and calm instead during the nineteenth century.[213]

Nevertheless some citizens became involved in politics through single-issue organizations. Such organizations emerged around 1840, as an experimental outcome of the democratic system since citizens were becoming more determined to shape government policy. Single-issue organizations focused on challenging or abolishing a specific misconduct in society by influencing public opinion and government policy.[214] The king and the government, not knowing how to respond to these movements, regularly banned such associations.[215] Although these associations attempted to address and include the general public, the gatherings primarily constituted men from the upper middle class. This was true since, at that time in the Netherlands, the support of an influential figure or family had more significance than the number of people supporting the cause.[216] This was in stark contrast from the United States where the amount of people supporting an association was more instrumental in gaining influence. The result was that men from the upper middle class were active in both national politics as well as in single-issue associations, which thus did not leave room for agitation tactics such as what Garrison had conceived in the United States.[217]

Moreover, Dutch society was class-based where the presentation of the family to the rest of society was considered paramount. People gained status based on their social relations, professional prestige and behavioral patterns.[218] In this regard, women assumed a pivotal role as they were responsible for the representation of the household in society. They were expected to take care of the house as well as to maintain social contacts, both important facets for maintaining public status. The cult of domesticity, therefore, flourished in Dutch society in the nineteenth century where women and men were delegated separate spheres.[219] However, since women also

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[211] Te Velde, Van grondwet tot grondwet', 109.
[212] Ibid, 110
[213] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 229.
[214] Ibid, 10.
[215] Ibid, 295.
[216] Maartje Janse, '"Holland as a little England"? The complex relationship between British anti-slavery missionaries and continental abolitionist movements in the mid-nineteenth century', *Past and Present* 229:1 (2015) 123-160, PP. 135.
[217] Ibid, 26.
[218] Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes,* 143.
[219] Ibid, 141.

influenced the public status of the household, their place was not particularly restricted to the private sphere.[220]

One way for a household to be held in high esteem was through the involvement in charity work. Around the nineteenth century, due to industrialization and its entailing societal change, several organizations were established that provided relief to the weakest in society.[221] The emergence of charitable institutions grew in parallel with the tendency of citizens to empathize with others, which was cultivated through extensive publication and distribution of papers and magazines that disseminated information on the suffering of others. From these efforts arose a "community" that shared values and norms, resulting in the formation of organizations that propagated these values throughout the nation.[222]

The cult of domesticity promoted the notion that women would be most suitable for disseminating aspired values and norms. Upper middle class women, in particular, would commit themselves to charity work, for example, by founding or directing orphanages. The first social facilities were established by the state around 1870, before which the *Réveil* handled the charity work.[223] The *Réveil* were the continental European equivalent of evangelical movements in the Anglo-Saxon world, although it did not become a mass movement in the Netherlands.[224] The *Réveil* emerged after a reformation of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands in 1816.[225] They drifted away from the Calvinistic faith, pursuing a more personal concept of belief. Women received an important role in the charity works conducted by the *Réveil*, since they were perceived as the caring elements of society.[226] Women were encouraged to take action in the name of the powerless since they possessed special female traits that made them capable to care for others.[227]

Abolitionism in the Netherlands

The abolitionist movement was one of the single-issue associations that emerged in the Netherlands after 1840. Women were also involved in this association, although to a lesser extent than in Great Britain and the United States. The Dutch abolitionist movement formed almost five decades after the British one and it is often suggested that it started quite late. Research, however, has shown that the British abolitionist movement was actually a unique phenomenon, and the

[220] Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes,* 156.
[221] Hoekstra, *Het hart van de natie*, 12.
[222] Ibid, 12.
[223] Van Drenth and de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power*, 15.
[224]. Janse, "Holland as little England?" 158.
[225] Bejczy, *Een kennismaking met de Nederlandse Geschiedenis,* 197
[226] Van Drenth and de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power*, 118.
[227] Ibid, 18.

Dutch situation was similar to that of other West-European countries.[228] The emergence of abolitionism is found to be dependent on a combination of social, economic and political factors.

A small group of Dutch citizens assembled for the abolishment of slavery at the beginning of the 1840s. This came to be since people began forming single-issue associations, such as abolitionist societies, as a result of the greater extent of freedom they had gained after the constitutional change.[229] There was also a rise in awareness of the sufferings of others, making people more introspective. Humanitarian narratives, which were becoming a popular genre, aided in this self-reflection and growing empathy for the suffering of others.[230] Furthermore, evangelical movements were an important factor for the rise of abolitionism since they focused on individuals and their sins.[231]

The outset of the organized Dutch abolitionist movement came after British Quakers and board members from the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) toured through the Netherlands. The British Quakers wanted to promote their anti-slavery campaign, and their working methods through the continent. However, in the Netherlands abolitionism never gained traction as the British had hoped for it to.[232] The most important difference was the perception the abolitionists had of themselves. British abolitionists, as well as American abolitionists, considered themselves as outsiders of society, whereas the Dutch abolitionists perceived themselves less as a pressure group, and more as a part of the political establishment.[233] The Dutch abolitionists considered knowledge of politics a necessity to participate in abolitionism. According to male abolitionists a correct judgement on political questions could not be made without substantial political knowledge.[234] This is why Dutch abolitionists did not encourage women to have any influential participation as they felt women lacked such knowledge.

However, a British community residing in Rotterdam, which consisted of merchants, led the way in founding a male – as well as a female – anti-slavery association. Liberals and *Réveil*-members collaborated in these sex-segregated associations. In 1841, though, disagreements arose amongst the different groups of the male collaborations on suitable methods to accomplish the abolishment of slavery.[235] These disagreements led to a rift within the men's abolitionist movement, resulting in the formation of two separate liberal and *Réveil* abolitionist associations. In 1842 the king received multiple petitions, from the several groups, requesting the abolishment of slavery.

[228] Drescher, 'The Long Goodbye,' 51.
[229] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 14.
[230] Ibid, 27.
[231] Ibid, 28.
[232] Janse, "'Holland as a little England?" 130.
[233] Ibid, 148.
[234] Ibid, 145.
[235] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 57

This included the petition that was created by the anti-slavery committee founded by women of Rotterdam: the Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee (RLASC). From 1844 until 1848, the Publishers' Association that published the journal *Contributions to the Knowledge of the Dutch and Foreign Colonies especially with regard to the Emancipation of Slavery*, functioned as the overarching anti-slavery society in the Netherlands. However, the organization deliberately remained small to be set apart from the British strategy.[236] In 1848, the abolishment of slavery was nearly realized and even the Parliament perceived it to be inevitable. However the state was too poor to compensate slaveholders at that time and hence the matter was dropped.[237]

It was not until 1853 when the Dutch translation of the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published that Dutch abolitionism gained wider support. In the same year, the Dutch Society for the Promotion of Abolition of Slavery (NMBAS) was re-established, after the first failed attempt in 1841.[238] *Réveil*-member Groen van Prinsterer chaired the society, however, liberals joined the organization as well. Eventually, in 1863, the Dutch government decided to abolish slavery, with the clause that the enslaved would still be obligated to fulfill an apprenticeship of ten years on the plantations.

Women against slavery in the Netherlands

During the strife for abolition, anti-slavery societies were sex-segregated in the Netherlands, thus, women organized their own meetings and activities. In Rotterdam, women were inspired by the presence of the British female Quaker Elizabeth Fry, and founded an anti-slavery committee after meeting with her in 1840.[239] The RLASC consisted of women with a British connection by heritage or marriage, women from *Réveil*-families, and women with a liberal background, all of whom were from the upper middle class.[240] The committee was very active and spread brochures to other abolitionist associations.

British influence seems to have been important for the establishment of the RLASC, and its way of campaigning, since an autonomous attitude was uncommon amongst women during the *Réveil*-movement.[241] The women were able to unite themselves despite their religious and political differences, while the men were unable to resolve these differences.[242] The men first asked

[236] Janse, "'Holland as a little England?" 141.
[237] Ibid, 144.
[238] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 93.
[239] Jonas, *Vrouwen en de afschaffing van slavernij*, 37.
[240] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 57
[241] Maartje Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen en de strijd voor afschaffing van de slavernij (1840-1863)', *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* 26:59 (2003) 9-19, PP. 10.
[242] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 40.

permission from the king for the establishment of the anti-slavery organization, whereas the Rotterdam women did not make such a request, as they had, most likely, no intention to organize public gatherings.[243] Such a disparity in the employed methods indicates the women did not comply with conventional political rules as they, indeed, functioned as outsiders, similar to what the abolitionists in the United States aspired towards.

In the Netherlands, women abolitionists also sent petitions to request the abolishment of slavery. The petition from the RLASC was among the first petitions addressed to King Willem II in 1842. The petition was, at any rate, a challenge to the prescribed gender roles, even though these women placed their actions within their appropriate sphere. The RLASC collected 129 signatures, becoming the first time women made a collective political statement in the Netherlands. Another petition written by women from Amsterdam was sent to the king in 1855. The Amsterdam women collected 680 signatures, consisting of signatures from the labor class as well.[244] Elizabeth Looman-Ketelaar was the first to sign the petition. She was married to Theodorus Mattijs Looman, a well-known figure of the *Réveil*-movement. Thus, once again, the *Réveil*-movement played an important role in the anti-slavery campaign.

As a response to the petition Anna Amalia Bergendahl, amongst others, founded the Amsterdam Ladies' Committee for the Promotion of Missionary Activities and Abolition of Slavery in Surinam (ALC) in 1855.[245] The ALC raised funds for the NMBAS in order to manumit the enslaved, albeit they could not become a member of the association. Women abolitionists were not allowed to attend meetings, nor to become members of the society even though they were interested in doing so.[246] A male abolitionist requested, unsuccessfully, on behalf of an anonymous woman, to allow the presence of women during meetings. The request was made upon the argument that women had received special talents from the Lord, with regard to upbringing and missionary activities, which could be helpful for the abolitionist cause.[247] Women, thus, had no public role within the abolitionist movement or in the general *Réveil*-movement; their activities were to be restricted to the household.

Nonetheless, the ALC was allowed to raise money in order to print pamphlets and manumit the enslaved. Women would organize lotteries, prayer meetings and fairs for the benefit of the overarching anti-slavery society. According to the women, these activities took place within the

[243] Jonas, *Vrouwen en de afschaffing van slavernij,* 38.
[244] There is a disparity in the amount of signatures gathered by the women: the Journal published for the Dutch Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery mentioned 730 instead of 680 signatures. This thesis adheres to Maartje Janse's analysis in: 'Réveilvrouwen', 15.
[245] Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen,'16.
[246] Ibid, 14.
[247] Ibid, 14.

boundaries of the private sphere, although for some men this was contestable.[248] The women challenged the boundary between public and private as abolitionism was a political matter after all.

~ *Conclusion* ~

The Netherlands was a poor country in the nineteenth century, hence the state was unable to compensate slaveholders and thus felt required to maintain slavery. Abolitionism, consequently, emerged in the Netherlands as a single-issue association in the middle of the nineteenth century, however the movement differed from their British and American counterparts. In the Netherlands abolitionism never gained traction to become a mass movement as it had done in the United States. In the Netherlands were no evangelical mass movements that provided reform movements with a possible target audience or mobilization tactics. The religious message was promoted by the *Réveil*-movement in the Netherlands, but their ideas were unable to gain significant momentum in society. Furthermore, the Dutch society was not a favorable environment for such popular reform movements, as an overall fear for revolutions prevailed. Dutch abolitionists held an aristocratic character and avoided radical maneuvers. In the American society, on the contrary, radical reformers such as Garrison could even enjoy some support. Women, nevertheless, became a part of the anti-slavery campaign in the Netherlands, even though the cult of domesticity flourished. Dutch women abolitionists would, although to a lesser extent than their American counterparts, blur the boundaries between private and public sphere by collectively interfering with a political matter.

[248] Maartje Janse, 'Towards a History of Civil Society', *De Negentiende Eeuw* 32:2 (2008) 104 – 121, PP. 109.

This chapter focuses on the writings produced by three female abolitionist agencies and three individual women abolitionists in the Netherlands. The first abolitionist agency is the Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee, the second is a group of women from Amsterdam who sent a petition in 1855, and the third is the Amsterdam Ladies' Committee for the Promotion of Mission and Abolition of Slavery in Surinam founded by, amongst others, Anna Amalia Bergendahl. Furthermore, Betje Wolff and Elisabeth Maria Post, eighteenth century women abolitionists, are also included to indicate the difference between eighteenth and nineteenth century female abolitionists. The goal is to scrutinize the work of Dutch women abolitionists as was done for American women abolitionists, in order to outline the way women handled prescribed gender roles while campaigning for the abolition of slavery between 1840 and 1863. The utilization of the all-encompassing approach, advocated by scholars of American female abolitionists, could potentially shed new light on the significance of the actions of Dutch women abolitionists, since American female abolitionists are already acknowledged for having challenged their prescribed gender roles.

Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee

The Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee (RLASC) sent a petition to King Willem II in 1842 which consisted of 129 signatures, of which 58 had only one last name, indicating these women were unmarried or chose to use their own name.[249] The Civil Code at the time regarded married women the same as minors and mentally impaired people, in essence obliging them to silence.[250] This remarkably did not deter the women as they, by all means, acted on their own behalf, having made a conscious decision to sign the petition, and what makes this more intriguing is that it was an unprecedented event. King Willem II was quite astonished to receive an all-female petition as it was the first time women were collectively and directly interfering with a political issue.[251] Politics was a forbidden topic for women in the nineteenth century; women were seen as incapable of analyzing the world outside the household, hence their writings was restricted to settings within the private sphere.[252]

The RLASC began their petition by making it evident that it was written from a female perspective. The women started off by proclaiming that as 'female residents' of the Netherlands

[249] Jonas, *Vrouwen en de afschaffing van slavernij*, 39.
[250] Toos Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen? Opvattingen over vrouwen en schrijverschap in Nederland, 1815 – 1860* (Amsterdam 1997) 7.
[251] Letter from Mr. Boagers to Mr. Ackersdijk 23 -05-1842, UBU, Collection Ackersdijk HS 1152, 16 A 1.
[252] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 31.

they were compelled to request the alleviation of the deplorable situation of the slaves in Surinam.[253] Because the women enjoyed freedom themselves they could no longer withstand the unfree situation of the slaves. The RLASC acknowledged their own privilege – their freedom – which indicates their intent was not to explicitly challenge the prevalent norm of the separate spheres or gender roles. However, the notion of freedom for women in the first half of the nineteenth century was different than the contemporary definition. The fact that women abolitionists stood up to realize their notion of freedom for enslaved women should not be underestimated, as Clare Midgely stated.[254]

Although there was no explicit disapproval of the prevalent norm, implicitly the women did challenge the dominant structure of society. In their petition the women called for the entire system of slavery to be abolished. They stated: "the system of slavery (even in its mildest form) is hostile to the spread of Christianity."[255] The use of the words "system" and "slavery" in conjunction corresponded to the language that had also been applied in American anti-slavery publications. At the time in the Netherlands, however, slavery was presented to the public as a blessed patriarchal system.[256] David Brion Davis stated that for centuries slavery had already existed in the form of the patriarchic society, since the system of slavery was built around the family metaphor where the father was the head of the family.[257] Women were the archetypical slave as they were considered the inferior sex.[258] Slavery was solely a man's world; they were the managers on the plantation and regulated the practices around the slave trade. The women questioned the ability of men to direct the colonies and the nation, in the right moral and religious direction, by drafting a petition that requested legislative amending. For Dutch women to take this bold step was even more remarkable since patriarchy had been reaffirmed by the codification of the civil code in 1838, which constitutionally gave the man absolute control over his family.[259] The women were indeed fighting male dominance, although in discreet language, and replacing patriarchy with maternalism based upon the moral superiority provided by the cult of domesticity.

The influence of the cult of domesticity was noticeable in the petition, as the RLASC referred to womanhood as their legitimation to petition. The women stated: "We are doing this [request the king to abolish slavery] supported by those accounts that justify the act based upon

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[253] Petition of the Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee 02-1842, Municipal Archive Rotterdam, Family Archive Van Oordt 675, inventory number 563
[254] Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', 131.
[255] Petition RLASC 02-1842.
[256] Reinsma, *Een merkwaardige episode,* 7.
[257] David Brion Davis, 'Declaring Equality: Sisterhood and Slavery', in: Sklar and Brewer Stewart ed., *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Anti-slavery,* 4.
[258] Ibid, 3.
[259] Kloek, *Vrouw des Huizes,* 140.

Christian teaching, and those that should resonate in a sensitive heart. What is a human being when deprived of its liberty?"[260] The Rotterdam women, thus, utilized womanhood as their vindication for petitioning, because Christian teaching instructed them to do so and their moral expertise could no longer approve the existence of such cruelty. The RLASC justified their interference on the basis of Christian ideas, hereby implicitly arousing the notion that women stood closer to these ideas and thus would have better judgement.

Furthermore the RLASC focused on the suffering of enslaved women, since it corresponded with their specific domestic role in society. The petition paid explicit attention to the motherly role of the female enslaved, and her inability to fulfill that role properly:

> May our plea not go to waste – may it please Your Majesty to take this affair into consideration. We trust that our petition will not be fruitless and that soon will come the moment when every mother in Suriname can embrace her children and scream out loud in motherly ecstasy: "These children are mine!"[261]

The goal of the female abolitionists was clear: the freeing of enslaved women since they suffered much worse than men. The Rotterdam women made their purpose quite clear in their petition:

> We, from our womanly essence, plead especially for the interest of the enslaved women to Your Majesty, because the existence of slavery is a double burden to her. We will not dwell on her sufferings to Your Majesty, yet we would like to state that it is in all its forms unbearable and quite often resulting in the loss of a life.[262]

It is quite remarkable how the committee referred to slavery as a double burden for enslaved women, thus creating a clear division between male and female enslaved. They insinuated that being a women was already a burden therefore slavery doubled their sufferings in comparison to enslaved men. The RLASC, thus, contradicted their earlier statement about their own privileged freedom, and instead the Rotterdam women created awareness about the burdens women had in life, possibly referring to the natural calling of motherhood.

Women abolitionists consciously used language differing from the language men had been applying.[263] The male abolitionists were aware of the fact that their discourse differed from the

[260]Petition RLASC 02-1842
[261] Ibid
[262] Ibid
[263]Jonas, *Vrouwen en de afschaffing van de slavernij*, 38.

women. Abolitionist Mr. Bogaers wrote in a letter to Mr. Ackersdijk that a significant number of women had the intention to draft a petition in Rotterdam. He added that the emancipation of slaves would be advocated in this petition with "feminine eloquence".[264] The men applied a cautious tone, in their attempt to avoid offending the king and desiring to operate within the law.[265] The women, however, applied a less cautious tone, writing in a direct manner instead of applying the "velvet glove" approach used by the men. Since women operated from outside the political sphere they had the luxury to be more direct in their method and not be restrained by the expected conventional standards.[266] Because the women did not want to interfere with politics, as they explicitly stated, their appeal was based on emotional and religious arguments, rather than political ones.

Besides the petition the RLASC published pamphlets in which the women emphasized female characteristics. The committee published at least three pamphlets, of which two are preserved. In their second pamphlet the women addressed the need for guidance for enslaved women in order to construct a pious life, which was essential as the most beautiful asset of the female character was virtue.[267] It was this virtue that made women able to improve hearts and bring hidden noble characteristics to the fore, according to the committee. Women's possession of specific characteristics made them able to lead towards righteous moral behavior as had been suggested by the cult of domesticity. And, to that effect, women did in fact hold influence in the household, illustrated by a letter from liberal abolitionist, W. Mees to another abolitionist, A.S. Rueb, about a young man working in a printer office. Mr. Mees wrote: "He [owner of the printer office] was pleased with Antoine. He is a good zealous young men, who married an English woman and became a fiery abolitionist because of this."[268] The cult of domesticity, in fact, empowered the position of women in the household, since it gave them superiority over men with regard to religious and moral issues. The glorification of the cult of domesticity continued far into the mid-nineteenth century.[269] Therefore, as gender roles were being defined and constructed, women abolitionists found themselves in the middle of this due to their writings for the cause since their writings contained notions of womanhood, and assigned tasks.

The petitions published by the RLASC specifically focused on women, attempting to compel them to support the anti-slavery campaign by reading about the suffering of enslaved

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[264] Letter from Mr. Bogaers to Mr. Ackersdijk 18-01-1842, UBU, Collection Ackersdijk, HS 1152, 16 A 1.
[265] Reinsma, *Merkwaardige episode,* 74-79.
[266] Marjan Schwegman, 'Hysterische mannen en koele vrouwen. Politiek, sekse en emoties in de lange negentiende eeuw', *BMGN - The Low Countries Historical Review*, 121:2 (2006) 278-284, PP. 281.
[267] Second anti-slavery pamphlet of the Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee, Municipal Archive Rotterdam, Family Archive Mees 39 inventory number 438, n02.
[268] Letter from Mr. Mees to Mr. Rueb, 02-07-1844, UBU, Collection Ackersdijk HS 1152, 16 A 8; 2.
[269] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 41.

women, with whom they could identify with due to their representation as mothers, wives and daughters. In order to arouse compassion among the population, and garner their support for the anti-slavery cause, women abolitionists pointed out the horrors slave families had to survive and endure. In their second pamphlet the Rotterdam women considered motherly tenderness a burden for enslaved women as they knew their child would also grow up a slave.[270] The women abolitionists wanted to create an imaginary bond between women in the Netherlands and the enslaved women in the colonies, although this constructed bond was merely one-sided.[271] Since there was no direct contact between women abolitionists and enslaved women, the enslaved women were unaware of the campaign that was launched on their behalf. As such the RLASC stated their reason to take action was in order to help "thousands of helpless women" overseas.[272] However, a clear racial distinction prevailed between the women abolitionists and the enslaved women, since the female abolitionists were compelled to speak on behalf of the 'incompetent' enslaved women, thereby replacing patriarchy with maternalism and eradicating all agency from the enslaved women.

Furthermore by dwelling on the sufferings of the enslaved women the RLASC aimed to effectuate action among women, compelling them to feel the urgency to change the situation.[273] The RLASC, in their third pamphlet, asked the question of how the life of a slave differed from the life of someone not enslaved. The seventh answer provided the following reply: "May one remember that enslaved women, to the shame of humanity, in every way are treated as men […] and women are not spared during their most sensitive and crucial conditions."[274] They referred to pregnancy and giving birth that made the enslaved women vulnerable. The Rotterdam women fostered solidarity amongst each other by considering equal treatment between women and men as inhumane. They stated that since women were different beings they therefore required an appropriate treatment which was specific to the female condition and which could only be understood by other women.

A pioneering element in the writings of the women abolitionists was the call for women to unify themselves. This was breaking new ground as women realized they could collectively influence the course of events. The RLASC made an appeal to women to stand up for abolitionism together with their husbands, brothers and other relatives, by influencing them. They explicitly called upon women to take matters into their own hands: "Let us, fellow-countrywomen, let us,

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[270] Second anti-slavery pamphlet RLASC.

[271] Maartje Janse, 'Representing Distant Victims. The Emergence of an Ethical Movement in Dutch Colonial Politics, 1840-1880', *BMGN- Low Countries Historical Review* 128:1 (2013) 53-80, PP. 57.

[272] Second anti-slavery pamphlet RLASC.

[273] Janse, 'Representing Distant Victims', 60.

[274]Third anti-slavery pamphlet from Rotterdam Ladies Anti-Slavery Committee, Municipal Archive Rotterdam, Family Archive Mees 39 inventory number 438, n03.

women, hope for better things, let us unite in this great cause with hand and heart. We have exerted our influence before, now let us do it again. Let us exert our influence on our husbands, on our brothers and other relatives."[275] The women felt the need to exert their influence on their male relatives considering themselves in the position to direct them in the right moral direction. The Rotterdam women, contrary to social conventions, appealed to the public by using strong language urging for action, which was uncommon for women at the time since they were designated a role away from civic life.[276] Women were expected not to use aggressive language but rather to speak gently and with moral values.[277]

The RLASC, furthermore, raised funds for the Publishers' Association in Utrecht and maintained a correspondence with them in order to donate money. The Rotterdam women were also quite scrupulous about the managing funds, as the letter to Mr. Ackersdijck, by Mrs. Jay's husband indicates:

> They have unanimously agreed to devote 75 guilders of the collected money to this project [anti-slavery periodical]. They wish 50 guilders of their sum to be considered as a contribution towards the expenses which will be assumed by the publication and 25 guilders for the appraised that they may have the first number and some to send to their friends.[278]

The excerpt reveals the committee made democratic decisions based upon the opinions of their members. Women were being encouraged to speak out in female anti-slavery associations and to formulate their own opinion. Mr. Jay requested Mr. Ackersdijck to inform the treasurer Mrs. Twiss to whom money would be transferred. This illustrated the notable activeness of the committee, since there was a need to appoint a treasurer and the necessity to liaise with other abolitionist movements for the distribution of money. The RLASC existed until at least 1844 when abolitionist A.S. Rueb wrote a thank you note to them for their contributions and sent the women copies of the anti-slavery journal.[279]

[275] Second anti-slavery pamphlet RLASC.
[276] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 31.
[277] Ibid, 31.
[278] Letter from Mr. Jay to Mr. Ackerdijk 16-12-1843, UBU, Collection Ackersdijk HS 1152 16 A 3 155.
[279] 'Thank You Note' written by A.S. Rueb 01-02-1844, UBU, HS 1152, 16 A 8, note 155.

Amsterdam women's petition 1855

The second all-female petition delivered to King Willem III was by women from Amsterdam who gathered 680 signatures, making the effect of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book noticeable. In their petition the women referred to all that had become known about the situation of the slaves in the colonies, most likely inspired by the events related by the book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[280] Stowe ended up becoming an unwitting ally and a source of inspiration for the women in Amsterdam in their creation of the petition. She created a new image of women, one that portrayed women as capable beings and able to act independently from men.[281] The women felt compelled to step outside their prescribed role as the book was written by a female author, an important character of the book was a women and the book addressed the special female features that were necessary in order to end the suffering of the enslaved. The effect of the humanitarian narrative *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was manifested by the urgency of the Amsterdam women to reform the system, based on the emotions the novel evoked.[282]

The Amsterdam women invoked their special female characteristics as an excuse to interfere with the matter. The petition started off by acknowledging the existence of different spheres:

> "The undersigned take liberty to turn to the throne of Your Majesty with a most urgent plea. It may not astound you that this is done by the sex which does not engage in public affairs during ordinary instances. However, when the interests of her fellow creator is at stake she would violate her conscience if she would not raise her voice."[283]

The women understood their action did not conform to societal conventions, nonetheless the very same conventions enabled them to interfere with the matter. Just as was seen with the RLASC, the moral and religious superiority that had been ascribed to women through the cult of domesticity allowed the Amsterdam women to claim the need for them to ensure their country was on the right moral path. They formed a clear distinction between a political petition and a humanistic petition, such as theirs, in order to remain in accordance with the cult of domesticity. In the petition they stated: "The undersigned do not act in the field of political economy, they only crave to raise a cry of compassion for the unfortunate slaves and female slaves at your throne."[284] After 1848 an overall

[280] Monthly Journal published for the Dutch Society for the Promotion of the Abolishment of Slavery [Hereafter: NMBAS] ('s Gravenhage 1856) 54.
[281] McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy,* 67.
[282]Janse, 'Representing Distant Victims', 59.
[283] Journal NMBAS 1856, 55.
[284]Ibid, 55.

fear for revolutions was prevalent in the Netherlands, and a reevaluation of domestic values was considered necessary to counteract such revolutionary spirits.[285] One of the effects was that it reaffirmed the position of women in the household, lending a greater importance to her role.[286]

The Amsterdam women used this recognition of female essence in their petition as they outlined how slavery was damaging the concept of family. The women stressed upon the importance of family life – as was stated in the Bible – being their primary motivation to abolish slavery, which was in conflict with the Christian idea of the family. Furthermore, women mentioned how slavery played involuntary a role in their families as well: "And in which Christian family is the fate of these unfortunates not discussed?"[287] Hereby the women declared how slavery was also affecting Christian families in the Netherlands as women had to instruct their families to condemn the practice on the basis of religious arguments. The women's foremost wish was to safeguard their family from outside evils but the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* meant the book was much more accessible, hence slavery could no longer be ignored. The Amsterdam women also explicitly mentioned they wrote the petition in their role as wives, mothers and marriageable girls and not simply as women or citizens. Hence their significance in society was not based upon their individual being, but related to their role as moral safeguards for others.

The Amsterdam women focused on the suffering of their own sex due to slavery and their inability to perform their expected female role. They referred to enslaved women in their womanly roles such as mothers, wives or unmarried girls: "Those women whose marriages are not accepted, who are charged for showing affection to their men, these virgins whose sense of honor is ridiculed; those mothers who pay heavily for the love of their children." The Amsterdam women felt compelled to speak to the king on behalf of the enslaved women since "although they [female enslaved] are your subjects as well Your Majesty, they would never be able to express their concerns therefore the undersigned deemed it mandatory to express these in their name based upon God and our conscience ".[288] The women abolitionists, thus, like their American counterparts linked womanhood and activism together, since women felt compelled to take matters into their own hands on behalf of their fellow women by addressing the king. The Amsterdam women concluded their plea with the statement that they trusted the king would consider their request and would "make an impartial judgement based not just upon short-term interests".[289] Even though the women stated they had no intention to interfere in politics, they, nevertheless, gave the king advice on the matter.

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[285] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 40
[286] Ibid, 41
[287] Journal NMBAS 1856, 55.
[288] Ibid, 55.
[289] Ibid, 55.

The Amsterdam Ladies' Committee for the Promotion of Mission and Abolition of Slavery in Surinam

In 1855, the establishment of the Amsterdam Ladies' Committee for the Promotion of Mission and Abolition of Slavery in Surinam (ALC) occurred as a result of the petition drafted by the Amsterdam women and the encouragement by male members of the NMBAS to join the anti-slavery campaign. In the first edition of the associated journal the men made an appeal to women to become involved in the anti-slavery campaign.

> Do you know how many young slave children are dying because they do not receive any maternal care? […] Do you know slaves do not recognize marriage? […] You who are not created to speak for the promotion of important concerns of humanity at the pulpit or in the boardroom, but who do exert important influence on the entire society albeit in the quiet domestic sphere and through relations in social life. However, the writing talents of some [women] are exceptional, therefore we pray that you will follow the example of your American sisters, who used their outstanding talents to liberate many from the yoke of slavery.[290]

The appeal focused on female characteristics that had been defined by the cult of domesticity. Women were being encouraged to exert influence within their appropriate sphere just as the American women abolitionists had. This is despite the fact that authorship was considered an undesirable profession for women in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, as men in generally assumed women lacked the ability to analyze or generalize.[291] It is also apparent the tactics used by American women abolitionists were being served as an example for Dutch female abolitionists to compel them to direct the nation towards the right moral path. This empowered the situation of women since even men acknowledged female talents were quite essential and could not be restricted to just within the household. From then on the annual reports and announcements of the ALC would be published in the journal from the general anti-slavery society NMBAS.

The ALC intended to serve as an example for other women to establish ladies' committees in their cities as well:

[290] Journal NMBAS 1856, 4.
[291] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen? 7*.

> If this short statement arouse some ladies at the same time to establish similar committees in other cities, we are most willingly to give all the associated and requested information, and in the event that committees would like to affiliate themselves with the committee based in Amsterdam, it seems certainly not unimportant for the matter of abolition when a General Dutch Ladies' Committee for the Promotion of Abolition of Slavery [Algemeene Nederlandsche Dames-Vereeniging ter bevordering van de Afschaffing van der Slavernij] would be established. [292]

Their aim was to create a network of assistance and inspiration among women across the country, thus committees would work together to support the abolitionism campaign. The appeal to form female anti-slavery societies, however, received no documented response as only the ALC is known to have existed at the time. Although the response may be dismal, the intention of these women must be taken into consideration as they were challenging the expected norms of society and were quite evidently considering themselves a collective force that could shape the course of current affairs.

The ALC however was able to appeal to individual women, and men, in the country, as donations poured in from various parts of the country. The financial reports of the committee provided an overview of these received donations; large amounts were quite often donated by aristocratic women.[293] Furthermore, in 1861, the ALC advertised a fair they were organizing and requested for donations from all over the country to be sold at the fair. The women reckoned visitors would be interested to know where the products came from.[294] Through this outreach the committee attempted to engage women from all over the country in the anti-slavery campaign. And even though their appeal did not result in more committees, through such concerted efforts women from all over the country did become engaged in the anti-slavery campaign. This engagement, though, was to a much lesser extent than in the United States.

To understand why participation was less active we must try to understand the context of the time with regards to women. Slavery was a disputable topic, since it was controversial, and much different than other charitable activities that had thus far been undertaken by women. As American research indicated for American women abolitionists, every woman was taking a radical step by affiliating herself with anti-slavery as they were expressing their opinion on a controversial topic in a society and time where it was uncommon, and unacceptable even, for women to do so. These conclusions can similarly be applied to Dutch women abolitionists as well since the cult of

[292] Journal NMBAS ('s Gravenhage 1857) 134.
[293] Ibid, 74 and Journal NMBAS (s Gravenhage 1860) 55.
[294] Journal NMBAS ('s Gravenhage 1861) 144.

domesticity was reevaluated after 1848 resulting in women being banned from holding a political opinion. The public sphere would be divided in two domains during the 1850s: the political sphere and social matters.[295] Women gained more authority in the public sphere by acquiring responsibilities for social matters in the society, as the duty to take care of the unfortunate ones in the country.[296] However, the political arena was exclusively for men since women were considered intellectually inferior.[297]

Despite the unfavorable atmosphere for female political participation the ALC organized meetings whereby women gathered in order to support a common goal: the abolishment of slavery. The ALC described their operations as follows: "In particular it would be very pleasant if more Ladies' Committee be formed, which would, just like us, manufacture needlework during the fortnightly afternoon meetings, be informed about the details of abolition, and unite with us for the general objective."[298] During domestic work, such as sewing, women met to discuss their views on slavery, which was a new experience for them. In these meetings they were challenged to think about the future of the nation, giving them new input to think about topics that were generally considered inappropriate. Even though the sewing activity took place within the household sphere, one can argue women abolitionists were operating in the semi-public sphere.[299] That is because the needlework was intended to be sold at the anti-slavery fairs, and besides the women also discussed those political matters during their gathering.

Another type of activity the ALC organized were joint prayers for the abolition of slavery.[300] These public prayer meetings aligned with women's religious superiority albeit it took place in a public place as the church, therefore these activities can also be labeled as semi-public. For the ALC their aim to abolish slavery was because it hindered slaves from embracing Christianity, therefore they supported missionary activities in Surinam.[301] Hence the rationale behind the ALC's involvement was deeply religious, as could be expected of women from that time. In the annual report of 1857 the ALC mentioned their prayer meeting raised 130 guilders for the manumission of twelve slaves.[302] Even though religion fitted the role women were assigned to, the ALC challenged it by organizing public events in order to address and aid abolitionism.

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[295] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 44
[296] Ibid, 46.
[297] Ibid, 53.
[298] Journal NMBAS 1857, 57.
[299] Janse, 'Towards a History of Civil Society', 109.
[300] Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen', 17.
[301] Journal NMBAS 1860, 81
[302] Journal NMBAS 1857, 160.

In 1862 the ALC, once again, wanted to organize a fair, during which products that had been donated were sold. Raffles had taken place in previous years, during which women gave away donated gifts in exchange for a purchased lot.[303] This time around though the ALC announced the fair would also include the sale of ladies needlework. It was uncommon for women to gain their own income at the time, therefore it was a new experience for them to be involved on their own account in financial issues. The meaning of making their own income was more important than the money itself since women were not accustomed to self-acquired income. A justification for such an event was necessary as it would draw women out from their place in the household and actually required them to make a profit. The ALC issued the following statement: "The Committee believes the gifts would generate much more their rightful value if they would be *sold*, likewise it would be more satisfying for the honorable workwoman."[304] It is clear the ALC felt obligated to justify their plans since it required more involvement from women. Women, at least, were interested in the event as the committee received a box with needlework from Surinam, intended to be sold at the bazar.[305]

The ALC, thus, undertook economic activities and carved out a public role for themselves. The committee managed to come up with new activities time and again and remain a beneficial organization. They were also creative in collecting revenues by founding, for instance, the Penny Union in 1860. The Union was launched to engage people with lower incomes in the anti-slavery campaign as well. By joining the Penny Union people could commit themselves to donate five pennies every week.[306] This indicates the resourcefulness of the ALC and their desire to engage the entire population in a campaign and not just the upper middle class or men. The committee thanked those involved in each edition of the magazine and advertised new activities they were organizing, essentially functioning as an efficient non-governmental organization.

On the eve of the abolition of slavery the president of the committee, Anna Amalia Bergendahl drew up the balance for the committee, which had been in existence for seven years. In the course of that time they had "distributed about a thousand circulars and exhortations, organized three prayer meetings and public assemblies, arranged three lotteries to sell women handicrafts, and published the yearbook 'Christian Mercies' for four years."[307] The NMBAS thanked the ALC sincerely for their support in the following years.[308] In total the women raised

[303] Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen', 17.
[304] Journal 1861, 110 (Italics in source).
[305] Ibid, 42.
[306] Ibid, 52.
[307] Anna Bergendahl, *Album* (Amsterdam 1863) 89.
[308] Journal NMBAS ('s Gravenhage 1862) 52.

12,000 guilders which was a significant amount in those days.[309] Hence it can be concluded that the activities of the ALC were crucial for the existence of the NMBAS.

Anna Amalia Bergendahl

Anna Amalia Bergendahl was president of the ALC, and also wrote several booklets on her own initiative despite the fact that female authorship became more and more contested after 1848.[310] Bergendahl was born in a philanthropic family, her parents founded an association concerned about the poor in Amsterdam.[311] When she was 14, Bergendahl met the British women abolitionist Elizabeth Fry, which proved a lasting effect on her as she became the inspiration for Bergendahl to become an abolitionist as well.[312] Bergendahl began with the printing of the yearbook "Christian Mercies" in which poetry and prose of various authors were published for the benefit of the charitable activities such as the abolitionist cause. She would also publish her own work in these booklets alongside those from other women such as Elise van Calcar, the first Dutch feminist.[313] Women were seen as incapable of writing about the world in an objective manner, a task that men – and even many women – considered could be undertaken by men alone.[314] Therefore it was courageous of Bergendahl to publish her opinion, since female authors would be targeted with defamation and criticism.[315]

In her writings and actions Bergendahl focused on solidarity among women and the establishment of the notion of sisterhood. In the booklet of 1862 she wrote about her contact with a Japanese Ladies' society. Bergendahl mentioned the distribution of yearbooks to the Japanese society, she sent a wish together with these booklets "that the content, after the translation, encouraged Japanese women to support mentally and materially the unprivileged ones".[316] This indicated the solidarity women felt amongst each other, since contact was established with women in other continents. Bergendahl also highlighted the bond among women by creating a special relation with the queen of the Netherlands. Bergendahl corresponded with the queen by dedicating the booklets to the queen in the preface, and sending them to her.[317]

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309 Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen', 17.
310 Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 55.
311 Janse, ' De balanceerkunst van het afschaffen', 33.
312 Janse, 'Réveilvrouwen', 16.
313 P. Ellerman, *Vaderlanders letteroefeningen* (Amsterdam 1859) 713.
314 Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 55.
315 Ibid, 59.
316 Bergendahl, *Allbum,* 95.
317 Ibid and Anna Amalia Bergendahl, *Berigt van eenige Liefdadige Werkzaamheden te Amsterdam, te Suriname, in Syrië enz.* (Amsterdam 1865)

Conforming to the cult of domesticity Bergendahl glorified family life as it was in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, and renounced slavery as it hindered the enslaved women from fulfilling the same ideal.[318] In her poem *Surinam* she stated that no one on earth should be inhibited from faithfulness until death, hereby implying everyone was entitled to marriage as prescribed by the social convention of the time.[319] Furthermore, she wrote disapprovingly of the way enslaved women were being treated, referring to the separation of children from their mother. Bergendahl described the act as heartbreaking and appealed to Dutch Christians, who would be guided by God, to put an end to such depravity since "the Lord saw all people free to serve him as they wished, to act as a nation and choose their own government".[320] According to her interpretation the Lord perceived all people free to choose their own government but she did not explicitly mention whether that would also apply to women.

Anna Bergendahl's cousin, Jens Christiaan Bergendahl, was a benefactor in appealing women for charity. J.C. Bergendahl wrote the essay "Women's Work" in which he summoned several women who played an important role in history. He also referred to the British women abolitionist Elizabeth Fry, who used her talents and powers for the benefit of others.[321] Furthermore, he cited Mrs. Beecher-Stowe as a woman who managed to combine the upbringing of her children with commitment to abolitionism. J.C. Bergendahl wanted to encourage women to combine their duties at home with necessary charitable tasks in society, and with the overview of exemplary women he intended to inspire them.[322] The examples intended to show that managing a household and being involved with charity was certainly possible.[323] Even though the article was written by Anna Bergendahl's cousin, its message was coherent to the ideas that she wanted to spread, i.e. women should obtain an appropriate role for themselves also outside the household. The essay demonstrated the power of women, the likes of Fry and Beecher-Stowe, whose exemplary character and accomplishments would hopefully make other women realize their own abilities in and outside the household.

Anna Bergendahl was an exceptional figure for she had a public role since she published anti-slavery tracts under her own name.[324] She wrote a letter of her own volition to the BFASS on 20 June 1859, while correspondence between the RLASC and the Publishers' Association was being

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[318] Bergendahl, *Allbum,* 62.
[319] Ibid, 61.
[320] Ibid, 59.
[321] J.C. Bergendahl, 'Vrouwen-werk', in: A.A. Bergendahl ed., *Souvenir uitgegeven ter voordeele der vereeniging te Amsterdam: tot ondersteuning van Hulpbehyoevenden en hare Beaarscholen onder bescherming van Hare Majestijt de Koningin* (Amsterdam 1855) 187-193, PP. 188.
[322] Ibid, 190.
[323] Ibid, 192.
[324] Janse, *De Afschaffers,* 111.

conducted by men on behalf of the women in the 1840s. In the letter Bergendahl stated: "Emancipation is generally thought more against than in favor of popular interest".[325] She comprehended that Dutch people perceived her involvement in the abolitionist cause as disreputable yet she was undeterred from continuing her strife, which reveals her self-awareness and strong resolve.

Charlotte Bergendahl, Anna Bergendahl's sister, was also engaged in the abolitionist cause and as secretary of the ALC wrote a letter to Mr. Chamerovzow in London in 1856. Mr. Chamerovzow was secretary of the BFASS and maintained correspondence with the NMBAS and the Young Men's Society for the Abolition of Slavery in the Netherlands as well.[326] Charlotte and her sister left the Young Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society (YLASS) that was established the previous year, describing the manner in which the separation came about in the letter.[327] Charlotte mentioned the difficulty of turning the "circle" into a "formal society" including necessity to establish rules, and furthermore the indecision of the other ladies eventually resulted in the split. Together with five other ladies Charlotte and Anna decided to form an independent committee that would give the sisters the liberty to "act as they found best".[328] Charlotte mentioned the following: "yesterday evening we met for the second time since our separation, and had the pleasure of meeting with 12 ladies (mostly of our personal friends) […] we counted 44 contributing members. […] I forgot to mention that my sister A.A.B. was chosen as president, myself as secretary and another lady as treasurer".[329]

The letter indicated that the Bergendahl sisters were determined to make a relevant contribution to the abolitionist cause and considered the approach of the YLASS not vigorous enough. The letter illustrates quite well that the drafting of a constitution required effort from women abolitionists, and the formalization of the society was perceived as a controversial step. Hence Anna Bergendahl's role as president and spokeswoman of the ALC was disputable as such activities were not common for women, reflected by the hesitation of the YLASS to move towards a formal society. The assertiveness of Anna Bergendahl tested the nerves of the NMBAS and led to several reprimands by men, demanding that she remain in the background.[330] However, Bergendahl, and the like, did not petition against slavery, but maintained their interference as apolitical as possible.

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[325] Anna Bergendahl to BFASS, 20-06-1859, Bodleian Library of Commonwealth and African Studies at Rhodes House, Oxford, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society [hereafter: PASS] MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C28/3 Underlining as in original

[326] Janse, "Holland as a little England?" 147.

[327] Charlotte Bergendahl to Chamerovzow, 20-04-1856, PASS, MS Brit. Emp. s. 18, C28/6.

[328] Ibid.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Janse, 'De balanceerkunst van het afschaffen', 35.

Elisabeth Maria Post & Betje Wolff

In the eighteenth century anti-slavery sentiments emerged as a result of the Enlightenment, due to which freedom was seen as a necessity for human intellect to thrive. As far back as 1791 Elisabeth Maria Post wrote about an imaginary plantation in Latin America, appealing to her audience by depicting the horrific situations on those plantations. The book was published when Enlightenment ideas were flourishing and the idea of equality was rampant.[331] She focused on creating an image of the ideal woman, ascribing enslaved women the same emotions as white women, thus attempting to bridge the ignorance that had thus far existed about slavery. She consciously depicted enslaved women as mothers, a tactic female abolitionists would later also use. Furthermore, Post describes a scene in which an enslaved woman breast feeds her child in such a loving way that it would be similar to Europeans norms.[332] Subsequently Post reminded her readers the child would grow up in slavery to the sorrow of its parents, once again trying to appeal to the emotions of her readers. The humanitarian narratives that would be used by abolitionists in the nineteenth century originated from the "sentimentalism" literature movement of the eighteenth century.[333]

However focusing explicitly on the suffering of enslaved women was a new concept that was invented in the nineteenth century, a tactic that Elisabeth Maria Post did not use in her book. She did not concentrate on the suffering of enslaved women when in the book the protagonist Reinhart admitted to his friend that he sometimes had impure thoughts when seeing a female slave.[334] Her book was written from the perspective of its male protagonist, Reinhart and did not focus on the sexual exploitation of the enslaved women. She focused on the weakness of men when giving in to these feelings instead of concentrating on the suffering of the women, while later women abolitionists wanted to create solidarity among women by incorporating the perspective of the enslaved women in their writings regarding such matters.

In 1802, Betje Wolff promoted the abolition of slavery during the time when the Netherlands was the Batavian Republic, which was under the governance of the Patriots who

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[331] Ulla Jansz, 'Onze natuurgenoten overzee. De afschaffing van de slavernij in de Nederlandse koloniën als mensenrechtenvraagstuk', *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 118:4 (2005) 497 – 512, PP. 501.

[332] Elisabeth Maria Post, *Reinhart, of natuur en godsdient* (Online text, DBNL) 590. <http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/post003rein01_01/>02-12-2015. (Clickherefore:Reinhart)

[333] Maria Schwegman, 'Strijd om de openbaarheid: sekse, cultuur en politiek in Nederland' in: Douwe Fokkema & Frans Grijzenhout Ed., *Rekenschap 1650 – 2000* (Den Haag 2001) 145-177, PP. 148.

[334] Post, *Reinhart, of natuur en godsdient,* 440.

garnered support of the French army. The French had brought with them Enlightenment ideas to the republic, among them being the ideas about equality. Betje Wolff's book mentioned a poem titled "People Buyers" written by a poetess "whose eyes turned wet by seeing the abuse to slaves in America".[335] The protagonist responded: "That is ghastly! Who, with a sensible heart, can ignore the words of the poetess?" [336] Subsequently she announced to boycott products produced by slaves, which was precisely how the involvement of women in the anti-slavery campaign began.[337] Betje Wolff combined the Enlightenment ideals with an appeal to women to empathize with those who were suffering as woman were more sensitive for the sufferings of others. Women were demanded to utilize their sensitivity in their household, because a woman without feelings was a monster.[338]. Again there was, however, no explicit identification with enslaved women, which became a common theme in the writings of later women abolitionists.

~ *Conclusion* ~

The writings of Dutch women abolitionists reveals that women in the Netherlands spoke out against slavery by focusing on the sufferings of enslaved women and describing the horrors they had to go through. Their aim was to free enslaved women; this ideal of freedom fitted well in the narrative created by the domesticity cult. Nevertheless their campaign focused on their own sex, creating solidarity among women by inviting them to join their struggle and to contribute to the cause by undertaking particular activities. This inadvertently led to their empowerment as the division between the private and public began to blur. Furthermore Dutch women abolitionists acquired new skills through the activities they undertook as part of the anti-slavery campaign. Even though the Dutch women abolitionists framed their action within the household sphere, their actions challenged the prescribed roles for women.[339] Petitioning politicized the involvement of women as it aimed at amending legislation. It also aided in creating a public identity for women, which made them capable of acting as independent human beings while being able to shift public opinion. The petitions, however, did not refer to women as solely citizens of the country, whereas the American women abolitionists did refer to themselves in that manner, which allowed for a consciousness to emerge for the demand for women's suffrage. Furthermore fundraising made women acquainted with financial matters such as accounting, marketing and negotiating. Since they

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[335] Betje Wolff and Aagje Deken, *Geschrift eener bejaarde vrouw* (Online text, DBNL) 236. <http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/wolf016gesc01_01/>27-11-2015. (Clickherefor:Geschrifteenerbejaardevrouw)

[336] Ibid, 239.

[337] Ibid, 239.

[338] Ibid, 244.

[339] Streng, *Geschapen om te scheppen?* 76.

did not earn money independently these encounters were meaningful. Finally, the gatherings made it possible for women to be outside the house and meet likeminded people. The gatherings were a place of encouragement for women to think on their own and acquire knowledge about the state of the nation. They allowed the women to gather knowledge about establishing a society and acquire the necessary skills to manage such an endeavor. In all aspects these undertakings ended up empowering women even though the women reaffirmed their restricted role repeatedly by stating to comply within the confines delegated by the domesticity cult.

During the nineteenth century the cult of domesticity prevailed in the Netherlands as well as in the United States, which entailed the separation of spheres between women and men. For quite a while women have been presented as victims of the cult of domesticity, however this representation has come to question over the last few decades. Empowering elements of the cult have been highlighted, such as the creation of womanhood that enabled women to claim moral and religious superiority. This thesis focuses on women abolitionists as a case study to scrutinize how Dutch women handled the prescribed gender roles. The studies on American women abolitionists were applied as an intellectual guideline, to provide context and understanding in the case of the Netherlands since American studies on female abolitionism have focused significantly on the silent majority. The American studies on anonymous women abolitionists indicated the radical aspect of abolitionism for every woman and the instructiveness of the all-female abolitionist associations. These derived insights are a pivotal aspect in understanding how women abolitionist handled their prescribed gender roles in the United States as well as the Netherlands.

In previous studies much emphasis was placed on the possible feminist characteristics of women abolitionists in the Netherlands, although this depends on which definition is applied. American women abolitionists were labelled feminists due to their outspokenness on women's rights, therefore a direct causal link existed between them and the women's rights movement. The Dutch female abolitionists, however, were not considered as such since the women's rights movement did not arise until much later in the Netherlands. This research showed that even though Dutch women abolitionists applied desired and conventionally acceptable language in their writings, and positioned themselves within the norms of the prevailing cult of domesticity, they nonetheless challenged their prescribed role.

First of all, the choice to support abolitionism was not an obvious one: abolitionists were a minority in the Netherlands where a conservative society was prevalent in the nineteenth century. During such times it was definitely not preferred to be considered a radical, as there prevailed a fear of revolutions in the Netherlands. For women abolitionists it was an even bigger risk since women were not supposed to interfere in the political sphere, which they most definitely were due to their demands to amend legislation. To justify their involvement as acceptable, female abolitionists suggested, by using domestic and religious language, that it was merely an extension of the private sphere. Nonetheless it is evident that women abolitionists were involved in a political cause and their attempt to collectively influence public opinion was truly groundbreaking. As such Dutch women abolitionists created petitions against slavery and sent them to the king. This political

act required women to draft a petition and persuade other women to sign their request, hereby providing them the opportunity to gain new skills in the art of campaigning.

Women also gained new skills in organizing events such as fairs and meetings, which also challenged their prescribed role since the events took place outside the household. During the meetings women gained knowledge about politics by discussing abolitionism, and furthermore the meetings gave women the opportunity to meet likeminded women outside the household and feel part of a broader community. Moreover women had to show determination by establishing structure in their all-female associations, which entailed a constitution, election of officers, and decisions on working method. Even though women abolitionists declared to stay within their appropriate sphere, their actions depicted otherwise. If one were to focus solely on the activities Dutch women abolitionists undertook outside the household they would certainly fall short of the daring audacity their American counterparts depicted. However it is important to commend the Dutch women for even daring to negotiate their gender roles by undertaking activities in a sphere, that was perceived as public or semi-public, and which society did not actually grant them the liberty to partake in.

Dutch women abolitionists might have been more progressive than have credited for by Dutch scholars. Dutch women abolitionists may have challenged and negotiated their prescribed role in a subtle and inoffensive manner but it should not mean they were 'conservative' or 'not empowering' in nature. One must be careful in understanding the context of those times and avoid applying contemporary values and norms to nineteenth century women, and to their efforts in changing the world around them. The tendency is to categorize Dutch female abolitionists as conservative as they did not after all campaigned for women's right and emphasized the stereotypical role of women that would be used to disallow women political influence at the end of the nineteenth century. The argument used to refuse women suffrage was, namely, women's inability to put their emotions aside and their structural instability that made them unsuitable for politics.[340] However, the examination of American women abolitionists indicated that the majority of them justified their interference on the basis of religious and moral arguments. The consequence of the outspokenness on womanhood by women abolitionists was mostly unwitting in the United States, as they inadvertently formed a virtual community through which they realized their collective influence and their entitlement to enforce it based on their specific womanly talents. These empowering elements were unintentional as most American female abolitionists intended to limit their involvement in abolitionism within the prescribed gender roles.

[340] Schwegman, 'Hysterische mannen en koele vrouwen', 281.

Dutch women abolitionists also formulated their alliance with abolitionism within the boundaries of the private sphere by focusing on womanhood and special womanly features. Thence the campaign to effectuate abolition of slavery was aimed at the freeing of enslaved women, since those women were unable to properly act out their womanly tasks in life. Thus the purpose of the anti-slavery campaign had a female aim. In their writings Dutch women abolitionists focused on sufferings enslaved women were subjected to by men, since slavery was rooted in patriarchy. Women abolitionists stood up for the interests of their fellow women, even though the bond they created with the enslaved women was one-sided. The agony of the enslaved women was exemplified by referring to specific female conditions, as the impotence to protect oneself against sexual exploitation, the vulnerability when pregnant or giving birth. The identification of Dutch women with the suffering of specifically enslaved women was a novelty in the 1840s. One can argue collective "gender consciousness" emerged, whence women began to organize as women on behalf of women.[341] Solidarity formed among women that transformed their campaign into an empowering one, since the interests of their fellow women were important enough to take a disputable step as becoming an abolitionist. By creating associations and raising money for the anti-slavery campaigns, women abolitionists became aware of what they collectively were capable of, thus the notion of womanhood became imbued with female empowerment.

Dutch women abolitionists also formed solidarity with Dutch women in society, in order to abolish slavery, by sending petitions, distributing anti-slavery publications and organizing meetings. In previous studies The Dutch Women's League for Promotion of Moral Consciousness, founded in 1884, was labeled the first women's organization with political characteristics.[342] The organization was a sort of philanthropic political movement since it made demands to the government through politically mobilizing the public.[343] According to De Vries the involvement of women, certainly Christian women, was not a matter of course in legislation in 1884, since a political collective of women did not exist.[344] One can argue that the involvement of Dutch women in the anti-slavery campaign can be viewed as the first collective involvement of women in politics, since female abolitionists made demands to abolish slavery to the government.

Even though this thesis did not aspire to apply the definition of feminism on Dutch women abolitionists, it does want to highlight that the working method of Dutch women abolitionists were in correspondence with Midgley's theoretical framework. [345] Because Dutch women abolitionists

[341] Van Drenth and de Haan, *The Rise of Caring Power,* 130.
[342] Petra de Vries, *Kuisheid voor mannen, vrijheid voor vrouwen. De regelmentering en bestrijding van prostitutie in Nederland, 1850 - 1911* (Hilversum 1997) 93.
[343] Ibid, 94.
[344] Ibid, 94.
[345] Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', 131.

focused on freeing enslaved women by creating an analysis on sexual and racial exploitation of enslaved women, and directing the writings to their own sex while simultaneously encouraging women to stand up against this harmful practices. Furthermore, the veneration of the cult of domesticity and subsequently the emergence of womanhood influenced the first wave of feminism in the Netherlands at the end of the nineteenth century. Their arguments for political rights were based on women's moral and religious superiority and the necessity to incorporate those in the government as well. [346]. Elise van Calcar, the first Dutch feminist, was clearly influenced by the concept of womanhood as well, since she prescribed women different tasks in life than men. Van Calcar, just like female abolitionists, emphasized the natural destination of women as a subordinate of men: women had different features and thus a different place in society.[347] A question that can be raised is, would Van Calcar been influenced by female abolitionists? Bergendahl did publish an essay written by Van Calcar in one of her booklets. This suggests, once again, that women abolitionists possibly had more influence on women's empowerment than they are credited for in present-day studies. The fact is the actions of women abolitionists were unprecedented and groundbreaking for their time and one should assess them according to nineteenth century standards instead of being influenced by concepts promoted by second wave feminists, or by hindsight on the devaluation of emotions in the political sphere.

In order to give an appropriate response to Clare Midgley's call for an inclusive form of writing about female abolitionism, further research is necessary on the role of enslaved Dutch women in the anti-slavery campaign.[348] In American research much attention has been paid to the role of African American women in the abolitionist movement, but unfortunately this has not been the case in Dutch research. This research indicated the courage and radicalism of white women to join the abolitionist movement, but much more bravery was necessary for enslaved women to challenge the system. In order to not only write white women back in history, but also black women, it is crucial that research also be conducted on the role of enslaved women in the Dutch abolitionist movement.

[346] Hoekstra, *Het hart van de natie*, 12.
[347] Ans van Dalen, *De vrouwenkwestie bij Elise van Calcar en Betsy Perk* (Doctoraalscriptie Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 1988) 22.
[348] Midgley, 'British Abolition and Feminism in Transatlantic Perspective', 136.

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