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# 'Whenever a Dozen Germans Meet ...' German Organisations in the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century

Marlou Schrover

*In this article I describe German immigrants' organisations in Utrecht in the nineteenth century; the aim is to show how organisations change under the influence of developments in the sending and the receiving societies. German immigrant organisations were relatively open, easily accessible for non-Germans. There was a multitude of organisations with little coherence. The lack of unity within the German immigrant community reflected the absence of unity within German society itself. Changes in the nature of immigrant organisations are commonly assumed to result from changes in the demographic or socio-economic make-up of an immigrant community. As the examples given in this article show, the nature and continuity of immigrant organisations are also influenced by developments in the receiving and sending societies and by changes in the relationship between the two societies. How these changes affected organisations differed by case. Changes could make German immigrant organisations both more German and less German. Mostly, however, organisations became less German as a result of developments within and between the sending and receiving societies. The nearness of the Netherlands to Germany created fewer opportunities for 'Germanness' to develop, and gave German organisations less continuity than elsewhere.*

*Keywords:* Germanness; Sending Society; Receiving Society; Collective Identity; Immigrant Organisations; Utrecht

## Introduction

'How do you recognise a German? If there are two, they set up an organisation, if there is a third, there are two organisations' (Veenis 1995: 24). This is a joke nowadays told by German immigrants in Argentina, and it repeats earlier versions. In 1903 it

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was written about German immigrants in London that: 'Whenever a dozen Germans meet there is sure to be a *Verein* of some sort' (cited in Panayi 1995: 184). Numerous authors from various countries have repeated the observation. Without making comparisons it is impossible to tell whether German migrants founded more organisations than other migrants, but their activities were at least noticeable.

German immigrant communities were characterised by their willingness to organise, as well as by fragmentation into manifold organisations (McCaffery 1996: 5; Schneider 1993: 49). *Deutschtum* is the word that is used—also in English—to describe both the social infrastructure of German immigrant communities and the communities themselves. The word not only refers to being German, or to 'Germanness', but also to everything in which this Germanness found an expression: language, newspapers, churches, food and drink, theatre and music (McCaffery 1996: 155). German immigrants set up organisations, but they did not organise themselves into one German community (Henkes 1998; McCaffery 1996; Panayi 1995; Sahrer 1950).

In this article, I describe the organisations of German immigrants in the Netherlands in the nineteenth century with a focus on the Dutch town of Utrecht. For what reasons were organisations founded and which factors determined the character of organisations? These rather simple questions are related to more theoretical questions. People set up organisations to create, express and maintain a collective identity (Cohen 1985: 685, 693; Schrover and Vermeulen 2005). Organisations can be seen as an expression of a collective identity. The character, number and size of organisations indicate the extent to which immigrants want to emphasise that they are different, or the extent to which they are excluded from other organisations. It is through organisations that others can address immigrants as a collective and, as such, organisations say something about demarcations within and between immigrant groups, and between immigrants and the host society (Marquez 2001).

If organisations are regarded as an expression of common identity, it is important to see how and why organisations change. Changes in the demographic or socio-economic make-up of an immigrant population cause changes in immigrant organisations. Changes in government policy towards immigrants and their organisations also affect immigrant organisations (Penninx and Schrover 2001). Here I argue that mainly political developments in the sending and the receiving societies also influence immigrant organisations. Little attention has been paid so far to the interaction between these changes and the nature and continuity of immigrant organisations. In this article I deal with this interaction. Between 1780 and 1914 'Germany' went through considerable changes. German–Dutch relations were influenced by the Prussian invasion of the Netherlands in 1787, and by the defeat of the Prussian troops by the French army in 1805–06. The failed Revolution of 1848, the invasion of Schleswig by the Prussian army in 1864, the successes of the Prussian army against France in 1866 and 1870, followed by German unification and the *Kulturkampf*, and lastly the onset of the First World War all affected German–Dutch

relations. The events had consequences for German immigrant organisations in the Netherlands.

Parallels of the interaction between developments within Germany and the character of immigrant organisations can be found elsewhere. Polish immigrant organisations in Western Europe, for instance, were affected by the partitions of Poland in 1772, 1793 and 1795, the creation of Congress Poland in 1815, its incorporation into Russia, and the recreation of an independent Polish state after the First World War. Throughout the nineteenth century the Poles outside what once was Poland struggled for national liberation and autonomy. In the Interbellum, Catholic Polish immigrant organisations were supported by the right-wing regime in Poland, while communist organisations were opposing the Polish regime. After 1945 the roles were reversed: the left-wing organisations got support from the Polish government, whereas the pre-war Polish immigrant organisations saw their organisational infrastructure collapse because they were no longer subsidised from Poland (Goddeeris 2003).

Many other examples of such interactions between the characteristics of immigrant organisations and political developments can be given. Yugoslav immigrant organisations were affected when part of the immigrants from former Yugoslavia started to identify themselves as Bosnians rather than as Yugoslavs. Similarly, the position of Muslim immigrant organisations changed after the 9/11 attacks.

### **Source Material**

This article is part of a larger research project for which I made a reconstruction of the German immigrant population of Utrecht (Schrover 2002, 2003). In the nineteenth century, German immigrants formed 60 per cent of the immigrant population in the Netherlands. German immigrants had also been the largest immigrant group in the Netherlands in earlier centuries, and they continued to be the largest group until after the Second World War. In the middle of the nineteenth century, there were more than 40,000 Germans in the Netherlands. In Utrecht, as in the Netherlands as a whole, German immigrants constituted around 1 per cent of the population.

German immigrants to Utrecht came from all parts of Germany, but two regions stood out: 20 per cent came from Oldenburgs Münsterland and 35 per cent from the Westerwald in Nassau. Diversity in regional background meant that not all German immigrants spoke the same dialect. German immigrants worked in all sectors of the economy, but especially in trade and commerce. This was true for both men and women.

For this research into immigrant organisations, I used the archives of the nineteenth-century immigrant and non-immigrant organisations. Not all organisations left membership records. In the case of the organisations that have done so, it is not always clear when people joined or left. The total number of organisations (immigrant and non-immigrant) that existed in Utrecht in the second half of the

nineteenth century was large. The city almanac listed several dozens of organisations (Schrover 2002: 135–81). The overview in the almanac was, however, not inclusive. While the city almanac lists dozens of organisations, the student almanac of 1862 already recorded 46 student organisations. Seven of these were included in the city almanac, the others were not. On the whole, there must have been hundreds of organisations, although many will have been small and ephemeral. To determine the extent to which German immigrants joined existing organisations or founded their own, it is actually not necessary to have membership lists of all organisations. Data on the larger and more important organisations are enough, and luckily these do exist.

In order to do the research into the archives of organisations, I first had to create a database of Germans living in Utrecht. Just names, extracted from the membership lists of organisations, do not provide enough certainty about whether a person was German or not. The long history of German migration to the Netherlands means that by the nineteenth century there were many people living in the Netherlands whose grandparents or earlier ancestors came from German regions. It would be incorrect to consider these people as Germans only because their names indicated that one of their forefathers had come from German regions. Furthermore, names are a bad indicator because many names of German immigrants were changed into Dutch names upon their arrival and registration in the Netherlands.

On the basis of the population registers I created a database of all German immigrants living in Utrecht in the second half of the nineteenth century. The population registers were introduced in the Netherlands in 1850 and form the basis for a continuous registration of all people. The registers list name, address, date and place of birth, province of birth (Dutch-born population) or country of birth (foreign-born population), religion, marital status, occupation and date of death, as well as previous and new addresses. To give an indication of the size of this registration: the population registers for the period from 1850 to 1879 amount to 50,000 pages.

### **Prussian Invasion**

The Prussian invasion of 1787 and the events that accompanied it mainly affected the position of the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands. Lutheran churches elsewhere are commonly regarded as bulwarks of *Deutschtum* (Goldberg 1995). When first founded, the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands was an immigrant organisation. The Lutheran church became less German after the Prussian invasion.

In the turbulent period 1780–87, two Dutch political factions called the ‘Orangists’ and the ‘Patriots’ fought over political power. The Orangists supported the Stadholder William V. The Patriots, influenced by the French, favoured reforms, supported the States-General and opposed William V. The Patriots had their political headquarters in Utrecht. The Orangists were losing support until June 1787, when William V called in Prussian troops to restore his authority. Large numbers of

Prussian troops invaded the Netherlands. The pretext the Prussian king used was that he came to help his sister Wilhelmina of Prussia, wife to the Stadholder, who had been arrested by the Patriots. The large Prussian army crossed the border on 13 September 1787 and marched unhindered until they came to the fortified town of Utrecht. Faced with an overwhelming show of force the Patriots fled from their stronghold on 16 September. Houses of Patriots were plundered and inhabitants who had stayed behind molested. The Prussian soldiers took part in this plundering and molestation. The Prussian army repressed the Patriot movement within one month, and large numbers of Patriots fled to France (Rosendaal 2003: 33–50). The Orangist party won the conflict, but the result of the foreign intervention was that Patriotic and anti-Prussian sentiments remained strong within society. The Prussian immigrants and other Germans were mocked. They were depicted as paupers who set out to enrich themselves at the expense of the Dutch population (Nagtglas 1975: 62–3). They had floated into the Netherlands on a wisp of straw. The wisp of straw, symbol of their poverty, remained part of the clichéd image of German immigrants for decades. In 1962, it was written that the descendants of the German immigrants painstakingly tried to make others forget about their origins. This was understandable because of the mockery that had been made for centuries of the large numbers that came floating down the Rhine on a wisp of straw. A Frenchman may be frivolous and affected, an Englishman arrogant and stiff, but a German was poor and destitute and nothing could have been more disgraceful in the eyes of a people that had an innate respect for money (Rogier 1962: 267).

Anti-Prussian sentiments influenced the Lutheran Church. In the middle of the nineteenth century, a little under half of the German immigrants in Utrecht were Catholic, about the same percentage was Protestant and 2 per cent was Jewish. About half of the German Protestants were Lutheran, the other half were Calvinist. Dutch Protestants were usually Calvinists. The Lutheran Church was a minority church and an immigrant church.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Lutheran Church members were almost all immigrants and most of them were German-born (Rommes 1998: 186–98). Repeated conflicts arose within the Lutheran Church about whether the sermon should only be in German or also in Dutch. Preaching was only in German from the beginning of this congregation in 1608, until 1638, when it was also done in Dutch. The issue at stake was not only what language would best be understood by the churchgoers, but also whether to adapt to Dutch society or not. As a result, in 1787, there were two directions within the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands: orthodox and liberal. The orthodox direction was orientated towards German regions, the liberal one less so. Both directions tried to recruit the support of the local Dutch civil governments (Rommes 1998: 195–6). In 1787, when Prussian troops invaded Utrecht and anti-German sympathies gained the upper hand, the more orthodox direction lost its support within the church. The churchgoers did not want to be identified with the German invaders. Against the wish of many churchgoers, the orthodox direction, however, did retain the support of the Orangist local civil government and hence

managed to play a role within the church. In 1795, when the French ruled the Netherlands and many of the Patriots returned from exile, support for the orthodox direction completely disappeared. The last German preacher of the Lutheran Church was replaced (Rommes 1998: 196). The Lutheran Church symbolically broke with its status as an immigrant church and became a Dutch minority church. The breach with its past was stimulated by the fact that by 1800 the number of German Lutheran immigrants had dropped considerably.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, only a very small proportion of the members of the Lutheran Church were themselves born in German regions, although they did descend from parents or grandparents who were German-born. New German Lutheran immigrants, who came to the Netherlands in the middle of the nineteenth century, mostly decided not to join the Lutheran Church since sermons and psalms in this church were no longer in German, and the church could no longer be considered a German immigrant organisation. As the church was no longer attractive to newcomers, new organisations were set up that catered to the needs of the recent German Protestant immigrants. In the second half of the nineteenth century, two new organisations emerged: *Innere Mission* [Internal Mission] and the *Gustav Adolf Vereeniging* (Gustav Adolf Society). These organisations will be discussed below.

### The Revolution of 1848

Before the German unification of 1870, German identity could only be based on cultural unity, not on political unity. Cultural unity did exist: composers, writers, philosophers and poets were the flag-bearers of a collective German culture. Not all German immigrants, however, identified with this culture or were associated with it. Some people were not convinced that this culture indeed existed. In 1868, a Dutch novelist wrote sarcastically:

The Germans speak of civilised nations and they consider themselves one of them. So be it, but I have never been able to find anything noteworthy in German civilisation that has not already been provided by the French or the English. If the Germans are genuinely a civilised nation they are so by imitation, which of course, is better than us, who do not even excel in imitation (Busken Huet 1868 [1981]: 156).

Attempts to find and create a German identity were made throughout the nineteenth century. The *Sturm und Drang* movement of the late eighteenth century favoured subjective feeling and was a tributary to the Romantic Movement. It influenced Goethe, Schiller and Herder. Herder stressed the national quality of the folksongs he studied. The brothers Grimm not only collected fairy tales, but more importantly studied and formulated the German language. After the disasters of 1805–06, when the Prussian troops were overrun by the French army and Berlin was occupied by the French, Prussia undertook far-reaching political and social reforms. It was also felt

that a sense of German unity had to be boosted. Fichte's famous *Addresses to the German Nation* of 1807–08 were a stimulus to national feeling. Part of the more general striving for unity was the initiative of 'Father' Jahn to develop gymnastics (discussed below). Not everybody, however, favoured change, or the same change. The 1830 July Revolution in Paris had repercussions in German regions, where organisations favouring a German unity along liberal lines were repressed and went underground. At the 1832 May Hambach Festival 25,000 people demanded a republic and German unity. They resolved to adopt not only peaceful methods, but also armed revolt. The resolution was answered with repressive measures: prohibition of public meetings and surveillance of suspicious characters. In March 1848 barricades went up in Berlin, following on the February Revolution in Paris. A sense of revolution spread over Europe. In the Netherlands this led to the first Alien Act, and to Alien Registration in 1849.

The revolution of 1848, together with the fear of the arrival of poor Germans, was the reason behind the introduction of the first Aliens Act. A food crisis and the high cost of living encouraged this fear. A member of the Lower House said:

I do not want a hospitality that turns the Netherlands into a safe haven for the seditiousness and the agitators who have been spat out by other countries—a shelter for the poor, the beggars and the vagrants from all corners of the world (Parliamentary Reports Session 18 July 1849, 628, Lower House member Godefroi).

The Commission of Reporters was critical of the new Law: the situation at that moment was exceptional. Political unrest outside the country's borders was combined with an increase in the number of foreign beggars, vagrants and pauperism in the Netherlands (Parliamentary Reports Session 19 July 1849, 641).

[...] who can we expect? Socialists, who can only benefit from a distribution of goods; agitators who seek to gain from the overthrow of the state (Parliamentary Reports Session 18 July 1849, 626, Lower House member Costerus).

The men in blue smocks—meaning beggars from Prussia—were equally feared as 'Proudhon'—the French revolutionaries and their followers in other countries.

[...] that the currently omnipresent revolutionary fervour and the ever-faster means of transportation, which make it possible for a crowd of malicious agitators to quickly assemble at a given location to ignite the flame of revolution and to enact their criminal plans, make it doubly important to implement such measures of containment [...] (Parliamentary Reports Session 18 July 1849, 634, Lower House member Van Heiden Reinestein).

A demonstration that took place at the Dam in Amsterdam on 24 March 1848 fed fears. The leaders of an association of German communists, consisting of only a few dozen members, had called upon craftsmen and workers to demonstrate. Approximately, 2,000 people answered their call, amongst them a number of riot-prone youth. They did not take part in the demonstration, but looted and threw stones at

windows as they went through the city (Boogman 1978: 53). The effect of the appeal by the German communists was not what they had intended. It did, however, kindle a fear of revolution and of the role that Germans might play in it.

There was, however, not only fear of a spreading revolution. There was also a new fear that parts of the Netherlands might be annexed by a unifying German state. The so-called Limburg Issue that arose in 1848 sparked these fears. In 1839, the Dutch province of Limburg, with the exception of the cities of Maastricht and Venlo, entered the German Confederation as a duchy. At the same time, Limburg remained a Dutch province. In 1848, there was a short-lived crisis when pleas were made in Limburg for detachment from the Netherlands and for entry into a German unified state. The German National Assembly consented. People were celebrating in the Limburg countryside and German flags adorned the church towers of Limburg. After a short while, however, Dutch authority was re-established and the annexation movement collapsed (Boogman 1978: 63–71). Fears died down, but were rekindled in later years.

Fears of revolution and annexation led to the introduction, in 1854, of an *Act for the regulation and limitation of the right of association and assembly*. At its introduction the proposition was made to deny foreigners and migrant-residents the right of membership to political associations, since through these associations they could strive for the enfeeblement of the Dutch State. After objections from the Lower House, the Act was modified. Only foreigners were denied the right of membership (Parliamentary Reports Session of 8 March 1854, 587–98, 589). Migrant-residents—immigrants who had already lived in a Dutch municipality for three years and had expressed their intention to stay—were allowed to become members of political associations.

In 1855, foreigners were excluded from teaching in public education. Only Dutch and naturalised citizens, it was argued, provided sufficient guarantees that they would educate the youth in a Dutch spirit (Parliamentary Reports 1855–56, appendices sheet 184, 723).

The measures that were taken after 1848 were instilled by fears of revolutionaries fleeing from German regions to the Netherlands. In reality only very few 48-ers—as the radicals were called—came to the Netherlands. Outside the Netherlands, the 48-ers played an important role in setting up *Turnvereinen* or gymnastics clubs, seen as typical for German immigrant communities (McCaffery 1996; Nadel 1990; Panayi 1995; Snell 1999).

The *Turnvereinen* were founded in Germany by ‘Father’ Jahn in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The ‘Turners’ favoured a strong and united Germany. After a few years, German governments started to regard the gymnastic clubs as subversive organisations and most of these clubs thereupon went underground. Between 1820 and 1842—the so-called *Turnsperre*—the gymnastic clubs were forbidden in Germany. The clubs, which had originally practised in the open air, moved indoors. After the failed revolution of 1848, many Turners fled to the United States. There they founded the German-American Turner Movement which prepared for

new revolutions in Germany. In American towns they built exercise halls, the so-called *Turnhalle*. These were often impressively large buildings, which not only housed the gymnastic club itself, but also theatre clubs, rifle clubs, chess clubs or a German language school (Nadel 1990: 119–20; Nagler 1995).

In Utrecht we do find gymnastics clubs, but they did not play a similar role to those in England or the United States. The clubs pre-dated the Revolution of 1848. The clubs did not build impressive *Turnhalle*. Most importantly they were not political. The reason for this is that the revolutionaries who left Germany did not go to the Netherlands, but rather to New York or London. There they found communities of political exiles. This explains the difference in nature between the Dutch gymnastics clubs, and similar organisations in other countries. With no revolutionaries, the gymnastic clubs were just gymnastic clubs. One German revolutionary did come to the Netherlands—Carl Euler—and he did set up a *Turnverein* in Utrecht. Euler played an active part in various insurrections in Germany, and he had set up several gymnastic clubs in German towns. He originally fled to Amsterdam, but the Amsterdam police were not pleased with the arrival of one whom they mockingly called a Hero of the Barricades. A medical professor at Utrecht University convinced him to come to Utrecht. Under the protection of this professor he was appointed gymnastics teacher at an existing student fencing club. There he was just a gymnastic teacher and his pupils were mostly non-German. This was clearly not what Euler had in mind. He moved to several other Dutch towns, and tried his luck there. In the end he moved to Brussels in Belgium, where he was equally unsuccessful in setting up a movement that was more than a gymnastic club.

### **The April Movement of 1853**

So far, mainly the effect of developments within German regions on Germans living in the Netherlands have been discussed. In 1853, it was developments outside German regions that influenced the position of Germans in the Netherlands. On 4 March 1853, the Dutch archdiocese was founded and the Pope designated Utrecht as the seat of the archbishop. This caused dismay amongst the Dutch Protestants and led to a wave of protest called the April Movement. This movement had many followers in the city of Utrecht (Albers 1903–04; von Santen 1985; Wels 1963: 70–7). At the height of the April Movement the sentiments were not only anti-Catholic, but also anti-German. At the time of the April Movement, a genuine anti-Catholic psychosis reigned in Utrecht. A pamphlet was circulating in the city that made an appeal to boycott Catholic shops. It explicitly mentioned the names of two big German shops. Buyers should not buy at these shops, and they should lay-off their Catholic domestic servants.

If everybody acted this way, these Catholics would be quickly kicked across the border, since they don't belong here in the free, Protestant Netherlands. The

ground, so it seems to me, should be burning under their feet (quoted in Albers 1903–04: 348).

The comment that the Catholics should be kicked across the border is striking and typical. The anti-Catholic attitude was not only directed toward Catholics in general, but also toward Catholic newcomers. In the anti-Catholic magazine *De Fakkel*, it was stated that the Netherlands had 1.2 million Catholics. More than half of the 12 times 100,000 were foreigners, the paper claimed (quoted in Klemann 1982). According to the magazine, the Catholic part of the nation had doubled during the previous 25 years, mainly as a result of immigration from German areas.

### **Retaining People for the Faith, Retaining People for the Nation**

The period of the April Movement stands out because German Catholics were far less often associated with Germanness than German Protestants. During the April Movement it was the Dutch who stressed the foreignness of the Catholics, rather than the German Catholics themselves. The *Innere Mission* and the *Gustav Adolf Vereeniging*, mentioned earlier, associated Germanness with Protestantism only. After the German unification and during the *Kulturkampf*—the struggle of Chancellor Bismarck with the Catholic Church from 1871 until 1883—this association became stronger. In the middle of the nineteenth century a new sense of German nationality had arisen. The connection between religion and the new united or uniting Germany, however, only applied to the Protestants.

The *Innere Mission* and the *Gustav Adolf Vereeniging* (GAV) stepped into the gap that opened up when the Lutheran Church became less German. These organisations believed that retaining people for the faith was equal to retaining them for the (German) nation.

The *Innere Mission* was based in Germany, but it was also active amongst German Protestant immigrants outside Germany. It directed its attention mainly at those Germans in the Netherlands who saw their stay as temporary, such as stucco workers and agricultural labourers. The *Innere Mission* clearly was a German organisation. About the GAV this can less easily be said. The GAV was established in the Netherlands in 1853, just after the height of the April Movement. The GAV was a sister organisation of the German *Gustav Adolf Stiftung* (GAS), set up in Germany to support Protestants living in predominantly Catholic regions. It was clearly an anti-Catholic organisation. The GAV organised itself separately from the GAS because, contrary to the German GAS, the GAV wanted to welcome Remonstrants and Mennonites, as well as Calvinists and Lutherans. The GAS opposed membership of the first two denominations.

The GAV worked along the same lines as the GAS, and forwarded one quarter of the money it collected to the latter. There were already GAS members in the Netherlands before the GAV was founded; these were German immigrants. The GAV, however, attracted German and non-German members. Some of the German

immigrants worked towards closer ties between the GAS and the GAV. In the end they failed, mainly because the GAS headquarters in Leipzig chose to support the GAV, and not a merger. Although the leaders in Leipzig had first opposed a separate organisation, they did see advantages after a while and chose to support the GAV, since the latter organisation could more easily attract non-German members, and hence raise more money.

Relations between the GAV and the GAS changed when nationalism in Germany became stronger. The GAV did not want to be seen as a German organisation that supported a German cause and enforced a German spirit upon other nations. The GAS explicitly wanted to support Protestantism and German nationalism. The GAV was of the opinion that these were separate issues: 'Christ was not a German' (quoted in Schrover 2002: 154). The GAV wanted to strengthen Protestantism, but not a German *Volksgeist*. However, despite this stance of the GAV against German nationalism, was identified in Dutch society at large with the nationalism of the GAS. The association was not unjustified. One of the fierce advocates of the GAV in the Netherlands was the *Turnmeister*-cum-revolutionary Carl Euler. Because of this association Dutch Calvinist churches warned Dutch Protestants against GAV membership. German immigrants were of course free to join the organisation, the church ensured (Schrover 2002: 155).

The GAV did not want to be a German organisation when it was first set up, and for this reason organised itself separately from the GAS. Later, GAV members became annoyed with the nationalism of the GAS. Despite the ideas within the GAV, the organisation was associated with the GAS in wider Dutch society, especially when nationalism grew stronger in Germany. This association made the GAV more 'German' than originally intended.

## Unification

The wars of 1866 and 1870 brought dramatic changes for German–Dutch relations, and as a result affected the character of immigrant organisations in the Netherlands. Prussia had annexed various German states. From the perspective of that time, it was not unlikely that the Netherlands, or part of it, would be next. In 1876 a novelist wrote:

What would Germany want to annex from us?

– Well, there's no doubt about it, cried the Prusso-phobes: the Hermann Giant wants the whole Dutch Virgin.

– Marry? you ask. Maybe he would not be such a bad catch!

– Not a bad catch? A marriage to Blue Beard! Do you want to see the blond girl dangle in the room next to the damsels Alsace, Lorraine, and Holstein?

[...] But, I tell you, Hermann is worse than Blue Beard: he's the giant, who's always sniffing around for human flesh.[...]

– You're quite correct! The Netherlands [...] swallowed up by the German giant?

Never! The Netherlands is no Hannover, no Hessen, no Nassau (Van Ondere 1876: 1).

The threat was not completely illusionary, from the perspective of that time. The Rhine was considered as a German river, but the river's mouth lay in the Netherlands. Around the wars of 1866 and 1870 there were several crises and incidents which resulted from fears about espionage and annexation. In January 1870, before the outbreak of the German–French war, a Prussian officer was taken prisoner in the Dutch province of Limburg and accused of theft. In custody, he revealed a widespread conspiracy. More than 100 Prussians officers had in the last year volunteered to serve in the Dutch army in the Dutch East Indies. In this Dutch colony they would cause a revolt and seize power. Deprived of its most important colony, the Netherlands would be easy prey for the Prussian troops. At first, his revelations were not taken as serious. Secret investigations, however, showed that the popularity of the Dutch Army in the East Indies had indeed increased amongst former Prussian soldiers, although it was found that 40 Prussians had enlisted, not 100. When war broke out between France and Germany in July 1870, tension increased. In the end, the panic proved overdone (Bossenbroek 1992: 112–13). The effect of this and similar incidents in this period, however, was that the image of the German immigrants did change. German immigrants were seen as disciplined, but also as potential spies (Schrover 2002: 57).

The fear of annexation had been fed by the sudden, unexpected German military successes of 1866 and 1870 (Bevaart 1993: 489). The surprising German victory over France in 1870—the French were defeated within a month—led to both fear and admiration (Doedens 1973). Some Dutch held the view that Prussian education and Prussian martial law should be introduced in the Netherlands. At the same time, the Dutch national spirit should be awoken (Bevaart 1993: 470; Umbgrove 1871: 16–17). The Netherlands had felt threatened during the war, rightly so, some claimed.

Denmark has been attacked by Prussia, with the aim of protecting a German-speaking population, and as a result lost two of its provinces: Schleswig and Holstein. In France, and more particularly in Paris, when the siege was imminent, thousands of Germans were wisely expelled from the country by political decree. This measure incensed the German gentlemen, not only because it was detrimental to their espionage system, but also because they are now lacking a powerful way to incite unrest and civil war, and even to assemble a small, active army within the walls of Paris (Umbgrove 1871: 15).

German immigrant communities were seen as posing a threat to the safety and sovereignty of the countries where they lived, and this threat also existed in the Netherlands, some believed. Traders would become traitors, if a war broke out (Umbgrove 1871: 16). Citizens should not buy from German shops, shopkeepers should not hire German help, and trading companies should not employ German clerks.

In 1871, the pro-German Professor of Philosophy C.W. Opzoomer, from Utrecht, expressed the view that the expulsion of German immigrants from Paris might be a precedent. On 17 July 1870, the *Frankfurter Zeitung* reported that all German workers had been chased out of Strasbourg. A day later, a Belgian newspaper reported that all Prussian citizens had been banned from Paris. Such bans and expulsions had not happened in recent history. French newspapers encouraged the policy. Opzoomer quoted the French newspaper *Le Pays*, which reported that there were hundreds of thousands of Germans in Paris; many of them were spies who sent intelligence to Berlin on a daily basis. The French government had to act; the Dutch should bid the population of Paris to immediately expel the Germans (Opzoomer 1871: 101).

Germans in the Netherlands were not being expelled, in spite of Umbgrove's warnings (Doedens 1973: 144). German immigrants living in the Netherlands were quoted as saying:

We gratefully recognise the sympathy of the sensible part of the Dutch nation. In Switzerland, in England and in Rumania, the Germans have been insulted and assaulted. Here in Holland we have lived in peace and friendship and our Dutch fellow citizens have participated in our peace celebrations. We are happy and content here and hope this will never change (Opzoomer 1871: 23–4).

The Dutch newspapers, however, continued to write unfavourably about the German immigrants, so much so that the Dutch envoy to Berlin complained about the hostile attitude of the Dutch press towards the Germans (Woltring 1962: 426–8).

### Singing Together

It was mainly the singing societies or *Liedertafeln* that were affected by the above-mentioned changes in Germany. The first *Liedertafel* in Germany was set up in Berlin in 1809 (Von der Dunk 1966: 317–30). Like the gymnastic clubs, the *Liedertafeln* were political organisations that played a role in the movement for a united Germany. In the 1840s, they were an alternative to forbidden political organisations. The dilemma that the *Liedertafeln* outside Germany faced was what unity they supported: the unity between German immigrants, as was the case in the United States and England (Bohlman 1995: 288), or support for a united Germany and a Great German Empire, which could include parts of Denmark, Flanders or the Netherlands. Some of the *Liedertafeln* in Flanders and Denmark favoured the last option (Snell 1999: 198, 202).

In 1827, the first *Liedertafeln* in the Netherlands were set up. They were led by Germans, used German study material and sang German songs only. The *Liedertafeln* were, however, not exclusively immigrant organisations; there were more non-German than German singers (20 per cent were German). Belgian and Polish migrants also joined the singing societies. Analysis of their membership lists shows that the singing societies were accessible to German immigrant men from various religious and regional backgrounds. There were Lutheran, Catholic, Calvinist and

Jewish members from almost all sectors of society; but lower-class German Catholics were absent. The religious heterogeneity of the singing societies made them different from the organisations that have been discussed so far. Unlike the other organisations, no connection was made between saving people for the faith and saving them for the nation. Several German members were at the same time members of other, smaller, German organisations in Utrecht, which are not described here. The Utrecht president of the GAV was also a member of the singing society. The membership of Jewish singers is somewhat surprising since Jews were commonly banned from gentile social clubs in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Fear of annexation, or more precisely fear of being suspected to support annexation, made the *Liedertafeln* in the Netherlands less German after the middle of the nineteenth century. Between 1845 and 1852 there were yearly singing contests in which German singing societies from the western part of Germany, and Dutch societies took part. The contests were held alternatively in the German town of Cleves and the Dutch town of Arnhem. After 1853 the Dutch-based singing societies set up their own contests. The organisers wanted the singing societies to play a role in enforcing a Dutch national identity, like the German societies did for the German identity. If the Dutch-based singing societies were to play this role they could no longer sing in German. The organisers therefore ordained that the societies that wanted to take part in the contest sang in Dutch. Composers were invited to write a Dutch repertoire.

### A German Organisation?

The organisations named previously were to some extent German: German songs, German methods and German inspiration. Nevertheless, it can be questioned whether these organisations can really be considered German, not the least because the members were not exclusively German. The organisations that German immigrants set up were relatively open organisations in which Dutch-born people and immigrants from other countries were welcome. German immigrants were also welcome in Dutch organisations. I found German immigrants in the membership lists of many important organisations in Utrecht. German immigrants were not as a rule excluded from membership.

In 1897, the first organisation was set up in Utrecht that presented itself as a German *Verein*: *Deutsche Verein zu Utrecht*. Contrary to the situation in other countries, where the word *Verein* was used much earlier, this was the first organisation that used this word. In other countries the word *Verein* was already used by German organisations much before 1897. The choice of the name is not irrelevant. Koopmans and Statham (1999: 678) have pointed out that, through a name, claims are made on a collective identity and, through the claims, the collective identity is shaped. The *Deutsche Verein zu Utrecht* used both *Deutsche* and *Verein* in its name. The aim of this organisation was explicitly to stimulate Germanness, sociability (*Geselligheid*) and love for Germany. The *Verein* was set up in Utrecht by

recent German immigrants. They were all Protestant and all middle-class men. Later, German organisations of the same nature followed elsewhere in the Netherlands.

Unlike elsewhere, the First World War was not a watershed in German–Dutch relations, due to Dutch neutrality. During the war Germans in the Netherlands set up organisations for the support of German-Dutch families who had lost their breadwinner during the war. This was followed by the creation of a memorial for the German prisoners of war who had died while in the Netherlands.

The GAV and the *Innere Mission*, mentioned above, continued their activities in the twentieth century. In the Interbellum, however, the German Catholic Church also started to reach out to German Catholics living elsewhere. Earlier attempts to do so had met with opposition from the Catholic Church in the Netherlands and with a lack of interest amongst German Catholics in the Netherlands. After the First World War attempts were successful.

In 1950, the German scientist Wilhelm Sahner published a study on German organisations in the Netherlands before the Second World War. He spoke about *Insel-oder Streudeutschum* (island or ‘strew’ *Deutschum*). There was a multitude of organisations all working seemingly independently of each other. According to Sahner, the number and the nature of German organisations in the Netherlands could be explained by the cultural and linguistic similarities between Germany and the Netherlands. Furthermore, there were close ties between both countries. Sahner, whose book was published just after the Second World War, may have been keen to bridge differences and stress similarities between the Dutch and the Germans. The Dutch treated the Germans in an open and friendly way, according to Sahner, and there were few restrictions on the activities of German immigrants. Germans living in the Netherlands could easily keep in touch with Germany. Sahner saw that there originally was little need for German immigrants to set up their own organisations. The need to set up organisations was, however, felt more after the First World War. In the 1920s, the first attempts were made to set up an umbrella organisation. Towards the end of the 1930s, the influence of the Nazi regime became apparent. The Nazi regime tried to force all German immigrants living in the Netherlands and their descendants into one organisation. In this they partly succeeded, especially since the Germanness of some immigrants, mainly Jews, was denied (Henkes 1998).

## **Conclusion**

The organisations that were set up by German immigrants in the Netherlands were relatively open organisations. They were easily accessible for non-Germans. There was a multitude of organisations with little coherence. The lack of unity within the German immigrant community reflected the absence of unity within German society itself. Organisations can be an expression of a common identity, but in the German case the diversity within organisational structure was an expression of a missing common identity.

Changes in the nature of immigrant organisations are commonly explained by pointing at changes in the demographic or socio-economic make-up of an immigrant community. As the examples given in this article show, the nature and continuity of immigrant organisations are also influenced by developments in the sending society, in the receiving society, and by changes in the relationship between the sending and the receiving society. Changes could make organisations more German or less German. The Prussian invasion of 1787 caused the Lutheran Church to break with its German origin and become a Dutch minority church. After the revolution of 1848 it was feared that not only poor Germans, but also revolutionaries would come to the Netherlands. Measures were taken to discourage their arrival. The fact that the Netherlands borders on German regions discouraged the German revolutionaries from choosing this country as their destination. All this made the gymnastic clubs in the Netherlands much less German than they were in the United States and England. In 1853, during the April Movement, the anti-Catholic ideology also carried anti-German sentiments. In this case it was members of the receiving society that stressed the Germanness of German Catholic migrants. This was something German Catholics themselves would not easily do because Germanness was commonly associated with Protestantism, rather than with Catholicism. The singing societies in the Netherlands, which worked with German instructors, and sang only a German repertoire, became less German when German nationality developed more strongly. The singing societies did not want to be associated with German nationality and annexations. The Dutch GAV was on purpose set up separately from the German GAS in order to stress its own identity. Despite this intention, the GAV was strongly identified with German nationalism by Dutch society, and as a result became more German. Dutch churches encouraged the German nature of the GAV by advising its members against joining it.

How an organisation developed—becoming more German or less German—depended on occurrences in Dutch and German society, and on the relationships between both countries. In the period described here, organisations mostly became less German, rather than more German. The nearness of the Netherlands to Germany, and the (perceived) threat of annexation caused the balance to tip to this side. In countries further away, such as the United States, Germanness could develop more strongly and could gain more continuity.

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