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## Summary

### *Honour versus Honour. A Cultural History Study of Elopement in the Dutch Republic, 1580 – 1795*

In the 16th century the authorities in the Low Countries (and elsewhere on the continent) took drastic steps to end marriages without parental consent or by forcing parents to consent to a marriage of minors by running away, i.e. elopements. The problem was not a possible lack of love between the two young people, but, as many researchers point out, a matter of safeguarding the family fortune. All actions were directed to stop the diffusing of capital just because a daughter who fell in love with the wrong man.

Emperor Charles V ruled in his *Eternal Edict* of 1540 that marriage without parental consent cannot lead to passing the fortunes of the family of the girl to the young man. Even at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) discussions ran high whether the parents should have the ultimate right to consent to marriage of boys over 14 and girls over 12 years old. But the doctrine of consensus between the youngsters prevailed., though with some impediments for runaway couples, as laid down in the encyclical letter *Tam etsi*. For instance, the two must be, after leaving their parents' home, separated and the girl questioned whether she was forced or not. Clandestine marriages were forbidden. They could only take place after banns and before several witnesses.

In the *Politieke Ordonnantie* of 1580, the protestants who just had come to power in Holland stated clearly that no marriages between minors could take place without parental consent. Minority in Holland meant for a girl being over 20 and a boy over 25 years. If older their parent could protest and bring their reasons forward to the local government.

These decrees didn't have the desired effect in the early modern Dutch Republic between 1580 and 1795, as the proclamation of new laws in the provinces of Utrecht in 1650 and in Gelderland, 1660, and even a stricter one in Holland in 1751, prove. I found at least 187 cases of elopement that took place in this period. There must have been more cases, a dark number of which we know nothing. I studied cases from all over the Republic, not only Holland. I analysed the archival files, also those of cases that were already mentioned in research literature. I found only a few articles of authors who gave their view on elopements and who tried to analyse the phenomenon.

Thus, the main question of my dissertation is: Why did elopements, or *schaking* in Dutch, take place in early modern Dutch Republic? Apparently, the new harsh laws and protestant doctrine didn't have the desired effect. Something else must have played a significant role.

*Schaking* or elopement is up till now defined as carrying off a woman with or without her consent. The latter type is called *schaking met geweld*, or violent abduction, the former

*vrijwillige schaking*, voluntary elopement. This typology was introduced by the Dutch historian Donald Haks in 1982. His analysis, based mostly on a mix of legal history and economic motives, was not meant to be profound or extensive, but it nevertheless is referred to in many studies.

The 187 cases show a variety of happenings, facts, insinuations, stories, emotional outbursts, secret notes, legal finetuning and testimonies. About 70 of them contain vivid descriptions of what happened between the two, young people and her parents. The sources give us an intimate insight in early modern life, but in quite a chaotic way. To deal with this I created some order in these chaotic events. I chose the instrument of figurations, loosely based on the views of sociologist Norbert Elias (1897-1990). His interdependent power relations and power balances offered me the way to classify elopements in two divisions. One group contains elopements of a couple whose relation was known to her family, and the other of couples whose relation was unknown.

The first division is based on the fact that family of the young woman was familiar with the affair of the young couple, and agreed to it. But when asked to consent to a marriage, the family however refused. The couple couldn't accept this decision and decided to go away, hoping her family would be forced by this outrageous behaviour to give their consent yet. I call this variety simply The Refusal. Sometimes only the daughter complied with her family and accepted their refusal, but not the young man. He felt betrayed, in my view dishonoured, which forced him to take drastic action. He planned a 'violent' abduction to get his girlfriend separated from her family. In a public show of force, either he took her up on the streets and ran off with her, or went into the house, sometimes a safe haven to protect her from him, and carried her off. I name this kind of elopement The Own Direction.

The second division shows us parents or family who know nothing about the intimate relations between their daughter, niece, cousin or ward and a young man. In this division, we also see two different processes of elopement. The first is what I call The Discovery. Their love was found out by a member of the family, and suddenly, despite their hopes, the family reacted violently against the love between the daughter and her young man. In most cases, he was socially unacceptable, from a lower class. The ensuing events led to their flight. The other shows us a secret affair, mostly between a foreign military officer and a girl of local standing, that came known the moment the pair escaped. The shocked family knew nothing and started a kind of posse to bring back the girl and have the young man arrested. I style this version as The Sweeping off.

Next to these four types of elopements, or elopement figurations as I call them, I found a fifth: The Family Feud. In this one or both parents of a minor girl had died. Both the families of her father and her mother want to take the fortune that she would inherit. Both parties plot to get her married with their own favourite. Sometimes they pretend to take the girl on a trip, with consent of the other party, and consequently keep her and marry her off.

Sometimes they organise and elopement after which the girl is married with their consent, but not with that of the guardians of the other, in law family.

After analysing the sources of these 187 cases I concluded that Haks' division in voluntary and violent elopements was not as strict as it suggests. Only 10 % of the cases were violent, 90 % non-violent. In some cases, it appeared that the youngsters did not run away, but were part of an organised action by a part of their family who sought to keep the often-considerable fortune within their own ranks at the costs of another part of the family, often their in-laws. A second finding was that the girl's part in the process of an elopement was important. She was the key-figure. A third conclusion is that elopements were not only a case between a young man and a minor, unmarried, often richer young woman, but between the couple and her family. The family, in a certain way, forced the couple to elope when it refused the young man as a candidate in marriage. The family was the third party. There was also a fourth party who influenced the elopement process: the authorities, like the local, the supreme provincial and national powers, and in a lesser degree the protestant church. Another conclusion is that rape was not part of elopements or abductions. In only one case the young man explicitly, according to the victim, threatened an unwilling girl with rape. But the most important finding, until now overlooked in Dutch studies, was the considerable and often decisive role of honour in the process of an elopement.

The five types of elopement figurations are all determined by honour. Of course, money, love and social climbing were important, but these aspects do not explain fully why a young man and a young woman, often after a long debate between them (I didn't find any spontaneous elopements, decided in an impulsive moment or mood, without any preparations), sometimes even after discussions with her parents (the parents of the young man are seldom in view and don't play a decisive role) decided to go for it. They knew they would be disgraced, they knew also they would deliberately disgrace her parents, her family. They put their future on this one card, hopefully their trump card, to get permission to marry by going away. I found that for the couple money was not a big issue, the young man often had some means of himself. Love was in almost all cases present, though not very much expressed, because that would signify that the young woman had been made 'love mad' by an evil man who was after her virginity and the family fortune. It is my conclusion that honour made them do and act, as it made her family do and act to protect their honour.

And why honour? Many researchers emphasize the importance of honour in early modern times. I refer to the views of, among others, Julian Pitt-Rivers (1968), Frank Henderson Stewart (1994), James Bowman (2006), Alexander Welsh (2008), Keith Thomas (2009), and Robert Oprisko (2012), to Martin Dinges (1997; 2004), Gerd Schwerhoff (2004), Dagmar Burkhart (2006) and Winfried Speitkamp (2010) and to Herman Roodenburg (1992; 1996; 2004), Lotte van de Pol (1992), Luc Kooijmans (1997) and Conrad Gietman (2010). They regard honour as a normal, acceptable characteristic of daily life, for every man or

woman. Honour signified a person's worth. It measures the 'good feeling' other people have of him or her. It was a kind of currency, a social capital that one could gain or lose, and which needed protection in a constant battle in the society, in the honour group in which one lived. To lose honour often meant losing it to someone else. A good reputation helped in daily life, in getting credit, in getting help from others, in finding the right husband or wife, in achieving a respectable position in society. And so, we can understand that the highly dishonouring action of elopement had a great impact, because it was in almost all case a deliberately choice, perhaps even a forced way of action because there wasn't any other left.

To understand honour as an essential aspect of elopement, I define several important key notions. The first is what I call het *eervertoog*, or the honour discourse. In early modern times a constant discussion was going on within honour groups about how a member behaved, reacted, lived per what was considered honorable by the honour group or not. We can even detect a special discourse concerning elopements. As soon as a young man and a minor girl ran away, this action is defined within the framework of a horrible elopement. That means that the girl must have been innocent and the boy the evil genius, who deserves the death penalty. This *schakingsvertoog*, or elopement discourse, turns up in almost every case. It has nothing to do with the factual behavior, it was a way to define and signify the actions of the pair, and foremost of the young man, as criminal and wrong.

Another key notion is what I call personal honour. Every person has this, and certainly many of the young men show a high sensitivity towards honour. But the same goes for the girl. Of course, she doesn't want to be abducted or eloping with her young man, realising this would dishonour her, but she presents herself as the one who 'asked' the young man to accompany her to a safe place, away from her family, who keeps her in 'slavery'. She can't accept this any longer and must, whatever the consequences, protect her personal honour.

Her family too has a kind of personal honor or group honour, which determines who is accepted as a member of their honour group and who isn't. So, a family who is confronted with an elopement feel sits very existence threatened and takes immediate action, like hunting the pair, calling in help from relatives or the authorities to end this terrible situation.

Next to personal honour I noticed the existence of honour position. That is the place a person has in an honour group. If someone wants to keep on being a part of this group, then he or she should behave according to the group honour discourse (or code). A *schaker*, eloper, is breaking into the group by taking away a member. This shocking action is very hard to repair. The honour group of the girl, her family, will not easily after all that has happened give the young man an honour position. He is often not very much interested in this; his personal honour and his honour position in his own honour group(s) is strengthened by his marriage to this girl of an important family. In several cases, we see that a couple is indeed allowed to marry, but must live outside the honour group of her family. Another proof is that many times, especially in the figuration of The Refusal, the daughter is allowed to return to the

honour group of her family if and when she leaves her lover and promises never to see them again or send him money or leave anything in her will, she must subject herself to her family, who will find her another husband, who will strengthen the honour position of the family.

We can then see the emotional impact of a young man who, being of a lower class than his beloved, sees a possibility to augment his personal honour by marrying her, and of a young girl who feels herself forced by her family to lose her honour position in her family just to protect her honour. Thus, a contest unfolds between the honour of the family against the honour of the young pair. Their subsequent actions, from both sides, are aimed at lowering the honour of the opposite party while protecting its own honour. This *erehandel*, or honour trade, consisting of 'honour reflexes' which must be expressed on pain of dishonour, continues until one of the parties accepts the status quo and subjects to the wishes of the other. In several cases this takes many years in which a stalemate develops and only ends after the deaths of important players. The ending of an elopement is, in the cases of more prominent families, a matter of asking and receiving, together with the couple, the grace of the sovereign. In the cases of people in towns or villages the local church council mediates a truce which helps both parties to come to terms with the new situation. But there are cases in which an accomodation' is no longer possible, because the personal honour of the father or group honour of the family of the girl prevents any reparation; of the lost honour.

So therefore, I define *schaking*, or elopement, not just as an abduction or running away of a young man with a minor girl to get married, but as a change in their honour positions, which is governed by honour trade and honour reflexes, of which the most important one is their running away. Their selfchosen seclusion is aimed at forcing the family of the girl to consent to their marriage which until then was refused as it affects the family honour position.