



Hilda Amsing en Mineke van Essen (eds.), *Over professoren. Een halve eeuw psychologie, pedagogiek en sociologie aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen* (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2014, VIII + 248 pp., ISBN 978 90 2324 994 8).

In 1963, a new faculty was introduced in the *Academisch Statuut*, which governs the structure of university education in the Netherlands, the faculty of Social Sciences. This new faculty was intended to bring together academic disciplines such as Sociology, Psychology and Political Sciences, which were until then scattered among several other (combinations of) faculties, into one organization. In subsequent years, the new faculty was formally realized in the articles of each separate university. Therefore, in recent years, several social faculties in the Netherlands commemorated or celebrated their fiftieth anniversary, sometimes accompanied by memorial books. One of these publications is the here reviewed book *Over Professoren. Een halve eeuw psychologie, pedagogiek en sociologie aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen* [About Professors: a half century of Psychology, Pedagogy and Sociology at Groningen University], a collection of nine biographical essays on nine professors from these disciplines from the past fifty years, preceded by a chapter on the origin and development of the faculty.

This first chapter mainly demonstrates that an organizational merger does not immediately lead to unification. Cooperation increased at a governmental and administrative level, but in the fields of education and research the various departments went their own way in fairly autonomous subfaculties. Indeed, as elsewhere, there was opposition to the notion that psychology, sociology and related disciplines had a common object and identity. Especially psychologists felt themselves more interconnected with the biomedical sciences than with the other social sciences. Cooperation was realized only in the departments of methodology and statistics and educational sciences. No wonder that the Groningen faculty all these years stubbornly avoided the word ‘social sciences’ and refers to itself with a title in which the constituent parts can be recognized, Faculty of Behavioral and Social Sciences.

The best part of the book consists of nine biographical sketches of professors from the faculty; eight men (P.J. Bouman, I. Gadourek, S. Lindenberg, H. Nieuwenhuis, L. van Gelder, J. Snijders, B.J. Kouwer and W.K.B. Hofstee) and one woman (W. Bladergroen). The nine persons are nicely balanced between the three subfaculties Psychology, Pedagogy / Education, Sociology, and between generations: three professors from the period just

before the joint faculty around 1960, three out of the establishment years 1965-1985 and three from beyond. Also the last three are now retired or deceased. All chapters consist of well-written and interesting stories in which both the personal life of the professor and his or her scientific career are described and interpreted. Besides, attention is being paid to the role that each person has had in the organizational development of the faculty. Why precisely these nine persons have been selected, is not explained, though the biographical sketches themselves and the blurb of the book give the impression that we are dealing with 'illustrious, inspired and controversial' figures in the field. In the absence of a full list of professors of the faculty, we must believe the editors at their word. Noticeable is also the fact that the authors of the chapters have a different relation to their main character. Some are former students or even their successors, and in some cases this makes the biographical description more a hagiographical one. Other portraits, such as those of Snijders (by Pieter van Strien), Kouwer (by Jacques Dane) and Bladergroen (by Mineke van Essen) give a nice and balanced analysis of their life and work, without avoiding the pain points.

The question left of course is that into the value of such a publication. You can discuss whether the history of a faculty or of sciences can be based on the persons who were prominent in it. The authors think so. They argue that 'the life of individual scholars can provide insight into the history of science because it reflects social developments which are an elaboration on that living in the development of the discipline' (VIII, translated from Dutch). That to me seems, with all due respect, an opportunist argument that in principle would apply to all scholars, not only the prominent ones. But that choice being made, the editors have missed the opportunity to write a final chapter in which a more comprehensive analysis is made how the lives of these nine professors have contributed to the development of the social sciences in general or the Groningen faculty in particular. The topics are for the taking. Let me give only two examples. Throughout the separate chapters you can see for example a marked change in the status of professors. Those from the first and second generation often had already made a career outside of the university before they started their academic occupation. Those of the latter generation made their career almost exclusively within academic circles. This reflects a change in the way students, PhD's and young academic professionals nowadays are being socialized in the world of science and it reflects also a change in the role of universities and university staff in society in general. Another noticeable development is that of internationalization. The older professors published almost exclusively in Dutch; even an internationally recognized celebrity in the field of personality psychology, W.K.B. Hofstee, (professor from 1969 until 2001), scarcely wrote in English in the first ten years of his professorship. He did only do so after 1985. And then to think he even studied and worked in the us!

This brings us to the question at which audience this book is directed. I suppose that it will be read differently by (former) employees and students of Groningen University than by others. The former will recognize much of what is being described as part of their own reminiscence or to understand how present situations are rooted in the past. To them, the book offers striking characterizations, nice anecdotes and a lot of facts. However, those accounts could be trivial to other readers. Mainly because a more general positioning of the main characters and the Groningen faculty in national and international arenas virtually remains absent, this book might give an introverted and sometimes complacent impression.

In 1975, the Dutch author and former reader in Geology at Groningen University, W.F. Hermans published a novel *Onder Professoren*, in which he portrayed this university and their professors as a rather provincial and narrow-minded institution. The editors do not mention it, but their title cannot be interpreted otherwise than as a nod to this bestseller. However much I value some of the biographical sketches that are really interesting and important to students of the history of science, the book as a whole cannot allay the impression Hermans gave.

Peter Selten, University of Utrecht