



Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt: The Narrated Diaspora, 1550-1750*  
(Dissertation Leiden University 2014; Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2016, 254 pp., ISBN 9789004315914).

At a time when refugees and immigrants with different religious backgrounds are a hot topic, the publication of Müller's *Exile Memories* should certainly be noticed. During the Dutch Revolt, at least 100,000 people left their homes and went into exile: this could mean moving from the Southern 'Calvinist Republics' to the Northern Netherlands, but also finding shelter in England or in any of the German Principalities.

Müller stresses that earlier studies into diasporas have solely focussed on the first generation, while his study also includes their offspring and how they participated within their host society. How did these people construct their identity and commemorated the past: did they intimately connect – even with patriotic sentiments – to their new homeland, or were they connected to their previous home, or both. With a focus on diasporas, identity-formation and memory studies, this book relates to recent publications (like Müller, based on their dissertations) of young historians such as David van der Linden's *Experiencing Exile* (on Huguenots coming to the Republic) and Jasper van der Steen's *Memory Wars* (on the construction of a political identity in the Northern and Southern Netherlands with regard to the Revolt).

This book has been organised geographically following migrants to the Northern Netherlands/the Republic. Those that went into exile did so because they did not want to renounce their faith, for example, Lutheran's from Antwerp went to Frankfurt and connected well with other immigrants that had left for the Lutheran faith. Müller shows that most of the diasporas have a specific rhetoric: 'exile theology', a strong focus on parallels with the Bible. This was meant to make sense of the necessity of having to flee: either explained as having to suffer God's wrath or as a sign that they had been chosen. Nonetheless, most hoped to return to their hometown and commemorated their origin in publications. Müller explains that the refugees referred to the Seventeenth Netherlands, despite that this unity did no longer exist. In other words – they held on to an imaginary place in the past. This could go together with a wish to return to the old organisational structure of the Low Countries, as the changes in government were seen as the cause of the loss of hearth and home. Nonetheless, a return to their former homes was not seen as a feasible option: it was way too dangerous. The host societies were not always welcoming their new inhabitants and

xenophobic reactions towards the newcomers did occur. In the Northern textile cities of Haarlem and Leiden immigrants were welcomed and founded their own institutions in support of their fellow-refugees. Some thought that their fellow believers from the South were poor, but this was not true for many rich Protestants and Mennonites who had fled too. In historical narratives of the town, the refugees were often remembered for stimulating their new hometowns economic development.

Most families did not trust their family histories to paper at once; it only happened two or three generations later. This meant that details had been lost, became reinterpreted and changed over time: like Joost Van der Vondel's account in which an ancestor had been baptised to prevent their mother's death sentence from being carried out (129-130). Wealthy refugees who tried to get accepted by the regents or nobility, found that they had to prove their connectedness to the province and city. At the same time, the relative loose ties with their new homes made it far more easy to keep in touch with other refugee-merchants elsewhere, and move when this was more convenient – e.g. for trade purposes. Those that fled to England or the Holy Roman Empire were mostly adherents of the Reformed church and the piety movement. They blended in nicely with the movements in their host societies, though they remained a separate group for long. In England, the Puritans kept a close watch on the Dutch congregation, which – in turn – felt that they should thus behave as a model church. This then led to the fear that the Dutch would gain influence and therefore the Church of England decided to restrict the contacts between the Puritans and the Dutch. Both in England and in the German lands, the diasporas regarded themselves as God's children sent into a suffering exile, awaiting the Promised Land. Blending into their new host societies, Müller concludes that there is no formula explaining why some people with only few migrants in their ancestry became so active in remembering their past, while others with far more refugee-ancestors displayed little to no interest.

*Exile Memories* is a well-written book with many appealing examples. What makes this study so useful is its scale: Müller follows various generations and reconstructs their position within society. With over two hundred years to cover, Müller has made the choice to focus on diasporas in the cities of Haarlem, Leiden, Frankfurt and London. This could be seen as a limitation to the study, but it could (and should!) also be interpreted as an invitation to study other diasporas as well.

Reading *Exile Memories* offers a refreshing insight in the experience of having to leave one's home and having to cope with a new situation. This work on the personal experience of the major religious changes and the Dutch Revolt cannot be overlooked when identity-formation in general is studied. It is a work that should certainly receive attention in Germany and England as well. Furthermore, it is without doubt, a book that should receive the attention of cultural and church historians, but also of people interested

in (constructed-)identity and memory studies. With over two hundred years described, this book could even be of use to politicians to substantiate their debates.

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