

realistische verwachting dat veel lezers *Diaconie* niet van A tot Z zullen of willen lezen maar zich tot hen interesserende stukken zullen beperken.

Dat de auteur bij zo een omvangrijk archief en een niet eerder zo uitvoerig beschreven geschiedenis keuzes heeft moeten maken waarbij de voorkeur is uitgegaan naar een meer verhalende geschiedschrijving is echter begrijpelijk. De vragen die *Diaconie* oproept kunnen allicht beschouwd worden als aanleiding en uitnodiging voor verder onderzoek in de Haagse diaconale archieven.

Vis' boek beschrijft vakkundig de boeiende geschiedenis van een voortdurend tussen zich wijzigende omstandigheden laverende organisatie die steeds opnieuw werd geconfronteerd met de vraag hoe het beste invulling te geven aan de bedragen die men door inzamelingen en giften verkreeg ten behoeve van de minderbedeelden in de samenleving. Dat is nu niet minder relevant dan in de zestiende eeuw, want ondanks alle veranderende opvattingen en verbeteringen in de levensstandaard blijven nood en gebrek ook in eenentwintigste-eeuws Den Haag geen onbekende grootheden, en dat zal in andere Nederlandse plaatsen niet anders zijn. Met *Diaconie* heeft Vis in elk geval een standaardwerk afgeleverd voor de Haagse geschiedenis, een voorbeeld voor diaconieën en hun historici elders en een belangrijke bijdrage aan de geschiedschrijving van de sociale zorg in Nederland.

Henk Looijesteijn, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis

Michiel van Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic. Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). 265 p. ISBN 9780812248661.

DOI: 10.18352/tseg.1010

From 1624 to 1654 the Dutch Republic had a large colonial empire in Brazil. In *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, Van Groesen shows how the rise and fall of this colony were affected by the peculiar media landscape of Amsterdam. The strategic use of printed media at first generated national joy over the victories won in Brazil by the West India Company (WIC). But gradually the authorities lost their control over the circulation of news, and a different, grim picture of the colony emerged. Dutch Brazil became 'Amsterdammified'; the media war over the colony eventually caused its doom.

Van Groesen treats Dutch Brazil as a case study for historical research on print culture. He uses 'the rise and fall of Dutch Brazil to demonstrate the interplay between Atlantic news, information management and public opinion' (p. 189). By stating that Amsterdam, because of its high degree of press freedom, was Europe's main Atlantic news center in the seventeenth century, Van Groesen broadens the

book's relevance. Abroad, too, eyes were set on Dutch Brazil, for it was the first Protestant colony in the world. Also, its geopolitical dimension was significant, because of the war between the Dutch Republic and the Habsburg Empire. Van Groesen sees the Dutch reporting of Atlantic news as a key moment in the development of public opinion in Europe. In the discussion on Dutch Brazil, several groups that were previously absent from public debate now also raised their voices.

Exploring a wide variety of sources, Van Groesen reconstructs the media representation of Dutch Brazil. He draws on newsprints, papers, and pamphlets, but also shows how the official news channels were undermined by letters and personal stories of soldiers. The author begins by tracing the knowledge in the Dutch Republic about Brazil before WIC rule. He then dedicates two chapters to the most successful period of Dutch Brazil. This started with a spectacular media hype after the conquest of San Salvador de Bahia in 1624. The Dutch were so interested in this news because it was the first major defeat of the Habsburg monarchy since the continuation of the Habsburg-Dutch war in 1621. The inconvenient fact that the Spaniards took control again of the colony only a year later was not covered. Also, there was significantly less public attention for the Dutch victories in the years after 1640.

Despite these victories, the positive media image that had predominated in the first decades now disappeared. Apart from the official reports issued by the WIC and the States General, other accounts of Brazilian experiences began to take over the public sphere. More and more reports of miserable living conditions in the colony and disappointing financial results appeared in print. Criticism of the WIC for its leadership, the slave trade, which was deemed immoral, and the outrageous tolerance of Catholicism in the colony became prominent. The most hotly debated issue, however, was the monopoly position of the WIC. This issue pitted the different WIC chambers against each other; while the Amsterdam regents and merchants preferred free trade, the province of Zeeland wanted to maintain the monopoly.

The revolt in 1645 of the *moradores*, the Portuguese (and Catholic) plantation owners in the colony, heralded the beginning of the end for Dutch Brazil. As the public turned more and more against the WIC leadership, the latter lost its control of the news flow altogether. Soldiers were not paid in time, shares dropped, and the WIC troops suffered significant losses. In Amsterdam, not only the public but also the authorities lost their belief in the WIC. Only the province of Zeeland continued to plea for supporting the colony. In the strife between the two provinces, powerful Amsterdam eventually got the upper hand, and the colony was renounced. In January 1654, the governor of Dutch Brazil symbolically handed over the keys of Recife to the Portuguese commander. Dutch Brazil, it was said, was lost because of 'pure negligence'. The defeat resulted in painful media silence, which after a few years transformed into a mythological and exotic recollection of Dutch Brazil.

In *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, Van Groesen demonstrates the importance of the interplay between the authorities, the public and the media. He connects a wide range of opinions and their influence on the decision-making process, while still considering their particularity. This is one of the strongest points of this book; it shows that the opportunities the Amsterdam media offered were the reason why the debate on Dutch Brazil got out of control. For some marginalized groups, such as the Sephardic Jews, this was actually the first time they took part in public debate. Interest groups had their respective motivations and opinions. For example, the Amsterdam regent who regarded the colony as a waste of money suddenly found himself on the same side as the strict Calvinist who despised the toleration of Catholics and the presupposed lack of moral standards in the colony.

Even though the thrust and execution of the study is convincing, there are also some minor weaknesses to point out. To some extent, Van Groesen seems to overstate the importance of news on Dutch Brazil for readers in the Republic (p. 10). Sometimes it seems as though the Amsterdam media covered mostly or only Atlantic news. Nonetheless, Van Groesen succeeds in showing that the Atlantic was important for Amsterdam. His claim that the Dutch Republic was just as significant for the Atlantic is less convincing. Van Groesen wants to turn away from 'the discourse of empire that has traditionally favored Spain and Britain' (p. 9), and show that the Dutch presence in the Atlantic was substantial as well. However, the book is not really about the Dutch in Brazil, but rather about Brazil in the Dutch Republic. The reader does not learn much about the activities in the colony itself, only those aspects that were presented in the contemporary media that constitute Van Groesen's sources. In order to gauge the influence of the Dutch presence in the Atlantic compared to other European powers, different empirical work would have been necessary.

Lastly, the distinction between Brazil and the rest of the colonial empire in the Dutch Atlantic seems rather vague. Why exactly is the book only about Brazil? Sometimes the other Atlantic territories are touched upon indirectly, or they are considered as complementary to Dutch Brazil, but nowhere is the difference stated explicitly. Van Groesen argues that 'other Dutch ventures in the Atlantic ... did not have the same political substance or public appeal' (p. 10). Unfortunately, he does not explain why. To me, this observation seems to raise more questions than answers. After all, in West Africa the Habsburgs had important colonies as well, so that conquering these was just as essential for the success of the Dutch Empire. This notwithstanding, Dutch victories in Africa never generated as much media attention as Brazil. It might be an interesting point of departure for further research to compare Dutch Brazil with other colonies.

These criticisms, however, mostly show that Van Groesen rightly puts this neglected part of Dutch history back on the front page. The book offers a major

contribution to Dutch historiography, for it studies the Dutch Atlantic from a different angle than the usual frame of imperialism and the WIC. With his emphasis on media, and an impressive use of diverse sources, Van Groesen not only casts new light on the history of Dutch Brazil, but also makes clear how the print media strongly influenced the interaction between the public and the authorities.

Isabel Casteels, University of Amsterdam

Walter Scheidel, *The Great Leveler. Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century*. (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017). 503 p. ISBN 9780691165028.

DOI: 10.18352/tseg.1012

Ongelijkheid in al zijn vormen en de oorzaken ervan staat momenteel in grote belangstelling, zowel in media en politiek als, al langer overigens, in de historische wetenschap. Die ongelijkheid is een constante in de geschiedenis van de moderne mensheid. Veel wetenschappers uit een veelvoud van disciplines houden zich bezig met de vraag waarom sommige landen en mensen (puissant) rijk zijn en waarom (veel) anderen straatarm. Voor de oorzaken is gewezen op natuurlijke omstandigheden, meest expliciet door Jared Diamond in *Guns, Germs and Steel*. Weer andere stellen dat ongelijkheid wordt veroorzaakt door een verschil in cultuur en religie. Dat debat zal voorlopig nog wel even worden voortgezet, zeker met de steeds dominantere rol van China op het wereld(handels)toneel.

Minstens zo interessant is echter de vraag of er iets aan die ongelijkheid gedaan kan worden. In de menselijke geschiedenis vallen immers periodes aan te wijzen waarin het verschil tussen arm en rijk significant verminderde, sommigen zouden het een 'feest van nivellering' noemen. Zover zal de historicus Walter Scheidel ongetwijfeld niet willen gaan. In zijn prachtige en diepgravende *The Great Leveler. Violence and the History of Inequality from the Stone Age to the Twenty-First Century* wijst hij vier factoren aan – in zijn terminologie 'the Four Horsemen of leveling' – die ertoe leidden dat economische ongelijkheid sterk afnam, vooral omdat deze vooral schadelijk waren voor de positie van de top van de samenleving.

Het stemt de lezer wellicht droevig dat dit volgens Scheidel allemaal gewelddadige, met grote aantallen doden gepaard gaande, factoren zijn, namelijk: massale mobilisatie voor oorlog, systeem veranderende revoluties, het ineensstorten van staten en catastrofale epidemieën. Hoewel data soms slechts zeer beperkt beschikbaar zijn en Scheidel daarom soms noodgedwongen zijn toevlucht moet nemen tot speculaties of zeer algemene observaties, is zijn argumentatie zeer