

World History – a Genealogy

Private Conversations with World Historians, 1996-2016

Edited by

Carolien Stolte and Alicia Schrikker



LEIDEN PUBLICATIONS

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Preface

Since its founding in 1977, the world history journal *Itinerario* has published extensive conversations with prominent world historians. In 1996, an anthology was published under the title *Pilgrims to the Past*. Edited by Leonard Blussé, Frans-Paul van der Putten and Hans Vogel and published by the CNWS (the Leiden School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies, now the Leiden Institute for Area Studies), *Pilgrims to the Past* chronicled these conversations from the journal's first 1977 issue up to the retirement of Henk Wesseling in 1995. It was a fitting moment for an anniversary anthology: Wesseling had established the Centre for the History of European Expansion at Leiden in 1974, and *Itinerario* was founded under his watch by the first generation of the Centre's staff.

Why would an academic journal publish interviews? According to journal co-founder Leonard Blussé, the journal was initially intended for an audience of both historians and aficionados, and as a way to bridge the gap between a newsletter and the 'existing, somewhat staid, academic journals.'¹ The name *Itinerario* was chosen in reference to Jan Huygen van Linschoten's famous 1596 travelogue of the same name. There were very few thoughts at the time as to how the journal should be financed or who would publish it. These and other questions have long ago been resolved. The interview with Leonard Blussé in this present volume gives a good insight into the various incarnations *Itinerario* has undergone over the years. Today the journal is very much part of the world of established history journals, and it transferred to Cambridge University Press in 2010.

Other things have remained the same. The name is still a tongue twister for some readers, and the journal's issues still open with long conversations with leading world historians, recorded in various settings and by various colleagues in the journal's network. It was a small leap, therefore, to decide that the journal's fortieth anniversary would be a good occasion on which to publish a selection of the most interesting interviews from the past twenty years. This means that this book deals with a new generation or two of historians in several ways, and the differences manifest themselves on both the personal and methodological levels. More comments on this will follow below, but it is clear that 'the

world historian', if such a generalisation can be made, is a different person in the twenty-first century from the one (s)he (formerly he!) had been in the closing decades of the twentieth.

The first volume interviewed a generation that had not only studied colonial history, but had often also been a part of it. In one review, Jurrien van Goor sighed, 'summarizing these 27 interviews is a hopeless task. . . . Some are ex-colonial administrators, but there are also people from former colonies . . . others are former missionaries and priests who developed the study of a particular diocese or pioneered the recording of oral history.'² Many of the first volume's historians had come to history as a discipline through a series of coincidences, often an unexpected intersection of the personal and the academic. Reviewing *Pilgrims to the Past*, Jeremy Black went so far as to say that 'this is a fascinating volume that is full of interest and, in some of the cases, imbued with a powerful melancholia that stems from a sense of personal loss over the ebb of empire.'³ That nostalgia is fortunately largely absent from the interviews collected here.

James Tracy, for his part, hinted that *Itinerario* as a journal had actually helped shape this generation and its historiographical lens: '[w]hat one can see from these essays is how *Itinerario* itself has promoted the evolution of the European Expansion approach, which began as a project conceived in the late colonial era . . . and has now become a means of using European documents to study the local history of different parts of the world. But *Itinerario*'s biases seem evident in the fact that senior scholars working from a Marxist perspective, like Immanuel Wallerstein and authors of the "development of underdevelopment" school, are occasionally referred to, but not included.' What was missing, according to Tracy, was an 'extended discussion of the various historical approaches to a world that is tied together by European colonialism and its historical sequels.'⁴

This second volume of interviews is skewed in a similar way: both the interviewers and the interviewed are part of the journal's extended network. Yet, in the introduction that follows we offer our own take on what these interviews can tell us about this 'second' generation, their backgrounds and their approaches. This includes an interrogation of the various historical approaches to a world bound by colonial regimes and their historical successors.

Finally, the reviews of *Pilgrims to the Past* made it clear that a bibliography of the most important works by the interviewees would have been helpful to readers and would have increased the volume's use to instructors.⁵ Thus prompted, we have added a bibliography referencing these works, but also the world historical texts that appeared in the conversations themselves.

We hope this provides further insight into the genealogy of world history, and the ways in which it has been shaped by personal connections and serendipitous encounters, as well as academic affinities. We make no grand claims to a greater validity for our findings: our sample—interviews published in *Itinerario* over the last twenty years—favours connections to Leiden and the journal itself. Nevertheless, every interviewee in this volume has contributed a body of work that has shaped the discipline of world history in several ways, and we believe an introduction to their intellectual life stories to be absolutely worthwhile.

Notes

We thank all those who have carried out interviews for *Itinerario* over the years: in order of appearance Doug Munro, Herman Roozenbeek, Jurriën de Jong, Leonard Blussé, Maurits Ebben, Jaap de Moor, Peer Vries, Peter Hoppenbrouwers, Martha Chaiklin, Jos Gommans, Carl Feddersen, Henk Niemeijer, Ghulam Nadri, Frans-Paul van der Putten, Damian Pargas, Binu John Mailaparambil, Bede Moore, Suzanne de Graaf, Lincoln Paine, Andreas Weber, Martine van Ittersum, Jaap Jacobs, Iva Pesa, Karwan Fatah Black, Jessica Roitman, Rachel Koroloff, Jan Bart Gewald, Amrit Dev Kaur Khalsa, and Sanne Ravensbergen.

- 1 L. Blussé, F. van der Putten and H. Vogel, eds., *Pilgrims to the Past: Private Conversations with Historians of European Expansion* (Leiden: CNWS, 1996), 2.
- 2 Review by Jurrien van Goor, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* [Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia] 156:4 (2000): 827–28.
- 3 Review by Jeremy Black, *Journal of World History* 9:2 (1998): 286–88.
- 4 Review by James D. Tracy, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 8:3 (1998): 464–65.
- 5 *Ibid.*

