



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

From diaspora to “imagined minority”: memories of persecution and the cross-generational transformation of Protestant migrant networks in early modern Europe

Müller, J.M.

Citation

Müller, J. M. (2018). From diaspora to “imagined minority”: memories of persecution and the cross-generational transformation of Protestant migrant networks in early modern Europe. *Diasporas*, 31(1), 21-34. doi:10.4000/diasporas.972

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Creative Commons CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3202925>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Diasporas

Circulations, migrations, histoire

31 | 2018

Fragments d'exils

From diaspora to “imagined minority”. Memories of persecution and the cross-generational transformation of Protestant migrant networks in early modern Europe

De la diaspora à la « minorité imaginée ». Mémoires de persécution et transformation transgénérationnelle des réseaux migrants protestants en Europe à l'époque moderne

JOHANNES MÜLLER

p. 21-34

<https://doi.org/10.4000/diasporas.972>

Résumés

English Français

Most early modern religious diaspora groups in Europe cultivated narratives of persecution and martyrdom and handed them on to future generations. Yet the function of such narratives changed in each migrant generation. Focusing on printed publications of Netherlandish exile communities in Germany and the Northern Netherlands, this article argues that the reception of persecution narratives underwent drastic changes and stimulated new religious identities that allowed believers to see themselves as part of a religious minority even if they now belonged to the dominant groups in society.

La plupart des groupes diasporiques de l'époque moderne ont cultivé des récits de persécution et de martyre, et les ont transmis aux générations suivantes. Pourtant, la fonction de tels récits a changé à chaque génération de migrants. À partir des récits imprimés par les communautés d'exilés néerlandais en Allemagne et dans les Provinces-Unies, cet article soutient que la réception des récits de persécution a connu des changements considérables et a stimulé l'apparition/la formation de nouvelles identités religieuses, qui ont permis aux fidèles de se considérer comme faisant partie d'une minorité religieuse, même s'ils appartenaient désormais aux groupes dominants dans la société



Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : diasporas à l'époque moderne, chrétienté à l'époque moderne, changement générationnel, mémoire à l'époque moderne

Keywords: early modern diasporas, early modern Christianity, generational change, early modern memory, Netherlands, Germany

Texte intégral

1 Exile and displacement shaped the lives of great numbers of early modern Europeans. Between the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and the exodus of Lutherans from Salzburg in 1732, adherents of virtually all religious creeds – Lutheran and Calvinist Protestants, Mennonites, Catholics, Anti-Trinitarians, but also Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews as well as Sunni Muslims – experienced this fate. According to Nicholas Terpstra, the disruption of the medieval *corpus christianum* and the experience of increasing religious diversity led to “a drive to purge and purify” the communal and religious body from diverging elements¹. The migrant groups that emerged during the course of these persecutions cultivated narratives of exile and martyrdom and handed them on to future generations. Yet, the function of such persecution-narratives changed in each migrant generation and regulated the ways in which individuals identified with diasporic groups. Refugees of the first generation had to make sense of the experience of violence and persecution and they developed theological answers to persecution and affliction. Their writings were later re-read in a situation in which religious persecutions belonged to a distant past. Focusing on Reformed and Lutheran Netherlandish exile communities between the Republic and the western parts of the Holy Roman Empire, this article studies the intergenerational dynamics of memory transmission that helped transform the diasporic identities of migrants groups between the mid-sixteenth and the early eighteenth centuries. As I argue, the reception of persecution narratives underwent drastic changes and stimulated new and more exclusive religious identities that allowed believers to see themselves as part of a religious minority even if they now belonged to dominant groups in society. The evolution of these persecution narratives as well as their changing reception underlines the transformation of diaspora networks into religious circles that were hardly discernable from their surroundings but still imagined themselves as minorities. During this process, some of their characteristically diasporic traits lost their significance, such as the maintenance of boundaries between the migrants and their host societies and the preservation of the language and habits of the former homeland². However, the identification with a diasporic heritage was simultaneously continued and sometimes even intensified, with the paradoxical outcome that the cultivation of exile and persecution narratives connected migrants and non-migrants.

2 This article makes the claim that the notion of belonging to a minority became increasingly important for the emergence of new religious identities in Post-Reformation Europe. Using collective memories of persecution, martyrdom and forced migration, virtually all confessional groups displayed tendencies to describe themselves as minorities amidst a hostile world. To explain the identification with the heritage of older diaspora networks, I will examine the intergenerational transfer of narratives of being a minority that underlie the dynamics of post-Reformation religious differentiation. As I argue, the early modern dialectics between inclusive community and exclusive minority have to be understood in the context of the cultivated past of persecution and suffering and its transmission to future generations.

3 This article focuses on the production and reception of primarily printed sources. Therefore, the overall perspective presented here cannot be exhaustive. However, research in family archives of Dutch migrant descendants confirms many of these observations and reveals clear parallels between personal and unpublished texts and



printed publications³. Initially, writing about suffering served other goals than the promotion of religious exclusivism. In the first part of this article, I will address sources of the first generation of religious exiles and their struggle with the question why God did not prevent the sufferings they experienced. Then, I will examine the processes of intergenerational transfer of past experiences and the changing meanings of these persecution narratives. Finally, I will discuss the implications of imagining one’s religious group as a minority. To describe this phenomenon, I will use the term “imagined minority” to address the specific ways, in which religious and confessional groups perceived themselves as different from, and marginalized by, their surroundings, even if they were well-established in their respective societies⁴. The most striking example in this context is the Reformed Church in the Dutch Republic, whose position had a rather ambiguous character. Unlike the Church of England or the Lutheran and Catholic Church in the various German territories it was not the official State Church but it enjoyed a privileged status and the exclusive right to use public church buildings. Military chaplains and pastoral workers in the Dutch colonies were exclusively provided by the Reformed and persons running for public office had to declare their loyalty to the church, even if they were not members. In addition, the salaries of clerics were paid by the government. Simultaneously, the Reformed cultivated the image of a “suffering church⁵”. In the German and English societies in which Netherlandish migrants had settled, the situation was different but even in these contexts, they were often able to inscribe their narratives of persecution and suffering into the memory canons of their surroundings. These observations suggest that the early modern Netherlandish Protestant diaspora did not just “end”, but was incorporated into and appropriated by religious circles that valued the notion being a minority. The development from a diaspora to an “imagined minority” was thus a process that did not necessarily cut old ties but rather connected migrants and non-migrants, and transformed the cultural and religious meanings of what it meant to belong to a minority in society.

Explaining exile

- 4 The Low Countries were the stage of one of the largest migration movements in early modern Europe. Since the late fifteenth century, the Netherlandish Provinces had fallen under the rule of the House of Habsburg. After the Reformation, the Catholic Habsburg government pursued anti-heresy policies that were much stricter than in most other parts of the Holy Roman Empire. The persecution of Protestants and sympathizers of new religious movements led to a mass migration that can be subdivided into three major waves: one that started in the 1530s and reached its height in the 1540s and 1550s, one between 1566 and the early years of the Dutch Revolt in the 1570s, and one in the mid-1580s, when the so-called “Calvinist Republics” in the South were taken over by the Habsburg armies. In addition to these major migration waves, there was an almost continuous stream of Flemish and Brabant migrants from war-torn rural areas to the Dutch Republic, England and Germany, primarily during the 1590s and the 1630s.
- 5 During the early phases of this process, most migrants went to England and the German Rhineland. Most of them sympathized with either Anabaptism or Lutheran and Reformed Protestantism, even though their confessional identities were initially vague and had yet to be defined more clearly. It has therefore been assumed that the migrants’ adherence to a clear-cut confessional group was a process that only took place in the various exile towns⁶. The first Netherlandish refugee communities emerged in Wesel, London, Frankfurt and Emden, as well as other towns in the Rhineland and along the English coast⁷. The Dutch- and French-speaking stranger congregations in these cities became centers of Netherlandish refugee networks and the England and the Rhineland remained the main destination of the migrants who left during the second



migration wave. The anti-heresy policies in the Habsburg Netherlands had become increasingly unpopular during the 1550's and 60', and in 1566 a wave of iconoclastic fury shocked Catholic authorities. As a result, the Habsburg government installed the so-called Council of Troubles that sentenced thousands of Protestants and dissidents to death, even though many had already fled and were convicted in absentia⁸. Among those who left the Netherlands to escape the Council of Troubles were also nobles and members of the elite who tried to organize armed and political resistance against the Habsburg government. After earlier attempts to start a military campaign from Germany, the Northern and Western Provinces revolted against the Habsburg government in 1572 and forced the Habsburg armies to retreat. However, between 1580 and 1585, the Habsburg reconquered the Southwestern part of the Low Countries successfully. The surrender of Antwerp, the most important trading town in the Southern Netherlands, launched a large exodus of Protestants⁹. This third migration wave was different from the two earlier ones as the most important destination of these refugees shifted to the provinces of Holland and Zeeland that favored Protestantism. Protestants still migrated to Germany, and to a lesser degree England, but in the course of the consolidation of the Dutch Republic, many eventually resettled there. Migrant networks now stretched from Central Germany to the Dutch Republic and England and the various migrant churches remained closely connected across the borders of territories and states. In letters, sermons and print media, such as martyrologies or pastoral-theological booklets, they created a collective diasporic consciousness that was based on the experience of forced migration and the expectation of a future in their old home provinces¹⁰.

- 6 During the times of persecution, believers had to make sense of their troubling experiences. The main purpose of writings of first-generation migrants and individuals who witnessed religious persecutions themselves was not to create an exclusive group of believers who felt connected through a cult of martyrdom and victimhood. Rather, the crucial challenge of such theological writings was to provide an explanation of the experienced afflictions. In the emerging wave of pastoral-theological literature that resulted from the sixteenth-century religious persecutions of Protestants, authors tried to answer the question why God allowed the persecution of those who had made the right religious choices. Instead of conceiving of misery and affliction as divine punishment, the authors argued that believers should not doubt that God was still on their side. Rather, they should remember that the godly would always be persecuted and that being a Christian meant belonging to a minority. In his devotional work *Des marques des enfants de Dieu* ("The marks of the children of God"; first edition 1586) Walloon Reformed preacher Jean Taffin developed a theological model that explained human affliction by distinguishing between two causes: for the ungodly, tribulations were a sign of God's wrath while believers should conceive of affliction as a benevolent act by which God aimed to improve their spiritual well-being by cleansing them from sinfulness¹¹. Taffin had experienced expulsion himself: originally from Tournai, he fled from his residence in Antwerp to Heidelberg and then moved to the Dutch Republic where he made a career as the court preacher of the Prince of Orange. As he wrote in *Des marques des enfants de Dieu*, the experience of persecution would initially make the believers doubt God's benevolence towards them:

"What appearance is there (saith the flesh) that wee are the children of God? Our goods are violently taken from us [...]. We are driven out of our country, yea from country to country like vagabonds: we are hated of mother and father, and of our own kinsfolke and friends [...]: To be short, we see nothing but the wrath and the curse of God upon us¹²."

- 7 However, Taffin argues, exile was not a sign of God's wrath but rather of his love and election. Only for the ungodly, earthly afflictions were meant as a punishment¹³. For the elect, on the contrary, they served as a purifying and beneficial chastisement:

"This which thou lamentest, is thy medicine, and not thy punishment. As in a house where there are many children, the rod is necessary [...] so in the house of



God, where there are many children inclined to evil, the rod is many times more necessary than bread¹⁴.”

- 8 Believers should thus regard earthly misery as a sign of God’s involvement in their lives that “ought not to make us doubt of our adoption and salvation¹⁵”. Taffin even went so far as to postulate that exile and persecution were one of “the marks of the children of God”. While Calvin’s works contain similar passages, this idea was not exclusively Reformed: Martin Luther defined persecution one of the mark of the true church and Anabaptists and Mennonites developed their own theologies of suffering and exile¹⁶.
- 9 Not only adherents of institutionalized confessional groups sought for theological answers to the experience of exile but also individuals who rejected all forms of confessionalism, for example the Haarlem lawyer and humanist Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert, who had fled to the Rhineland due to the Habsburg persecution of heretics. In several of his plays, poems and tracts, he addressed the question of exile and referred to biblical patriarchs whom he regarded exemplary migrants. In his play *Abrahams uytgangh* (“Abraham’s Exodus”), the main protagonist serves as an example of how refugees and migrants should behave and how they should interpret their fate in the present. As Abraham explains to the reader or viewer of the play that God allowed persecution suffer “so they can learn patience¹⁷”. Coornhert’s aim was not to consolidate a new confessional identity; on the contrary, he was a harsh critic of confessional divisions and criticized the religious differentiation of his time as a trend toward sectarianism. Like his Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic contemporaries, he tried to give an explanation of the troubling present. It was only later that first-hand writings on exile and migration were read from an inverted perspective and served as foundation narratives of confessional diaspora groups.

Generational change and the diaspora

- 10 In *Des marques des enfants de Dieu*, Jean Taffin reminded his readers of past persecutions to put their own situation in perspective: as he argued, “the most excellent servants and children of God have always been most afflicted” and the presence was no exception to this rule¹⁸. Among later migrant generations, the same idea was repeated, but in a different context. Martyr books and historical narratives provided readers with accounts of exile and suffering but were read in a setting that had little in common with the period when religious persecution was an actual threat. The idea that the true believers would always be persecuted was transferred into a time when exile and expulsion belonged to the past. In 1590, Taffin’s work was translated into English by Anne Locke Prowse, a renowned author and translator of Puritan and Calvinist literature. The translation of *Des marques des enfants de Dieu* became an immediate success and the English edition appeared at least eight times between 1590 and 1634¹⁹.
- 11 Even though Prowse’s translation targeted a wider audience than only the descendants of Netherlandish migrants, all editions contained the foreword that addressed the “believers from the Low Countries.” In the Netherlandish migrant churches in England, the past still played an important role and both congregations and individual church members were involved in commemorative activities. John La Motte, a London alderman with Walloon migrant roots, was known for his exact knowledge of his ancestors’ fates and he organized annual commemorative meals at his home. At such meetings, the participants would meditate on the sufferings of their persecuted coreligionists in past and present and La Motte encouraged them “to be still *mindfull of them in bonds and miseries, as being themselves in the body*: saying, why, *their case might have been ours, or may be yet, who knows?*²⁰”. According to Ole Peter Grell, La Motte’s generation still belonged to the transnational diaspora of Reformed Protestants. Only in the following generations, the descendants Netherlandish migrants would fully become part of their English or German host societies²¹. The criteria for the



distinction between a second, still diasporic, generation and a later, assimilated generation are mainly based on marriage patterns: as Grell argues, intermarriage with locals increased after 1650 and put an end to the diaspora. While marriage patterns might be an indicator for the identification with a diaspora group, the Netherlandish migrant churches in England and the German territories included many persons without a migrant background as well. Descent was thus not the only factor that bound the old migrant networks together and the narratives of suffering and religious persecution also appealed to individuals who had no migrants among their ancestors²².

12 The discourse of the true Christians as a small and persecuted flock living as strangers between an ungodly majority became increasingly attractive once the actual persecutions retreated to the past. In the Dutch Republic and the exile towns abroad, the exile past was remembered and cultivated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1661, a century after the mass migration of Protestants and religious dissenters from the Low Countries, descendants of the migrants placed a memorial stone depicting a small ship in the midst of a wild ocean at the Reformed Church of Emden. This ship-motif was frequently used by early modern migrants, and Emden's so-called *Schepken Christi* (Christ's little ship) emblematically represented the self-image of the Reformed congregation that had housed the refugees from the Netherlands and reminded its members of the status of the true Church as a flock of strangers in this world. The ship was accompanied by the text: "God's church, persecuted and expelled, has received God's consolation here²³."

13 From the seventeenth century onward, exile narratives did no longer serve to make sense of disturbing experiences but rather to provide an exemplary model of Christian life. As a result, these narratives now functioned as markers of collective religious identities. In an environment in which religious commitment could be most effectively proven in terms of suffering for the sake of faith, narratives of persecution and martyrdom could serve as a religious argument²⁴. Events that were depicted in martyr books, historical accounts or theological tracts on exile were appropriated by wider circles in the societies in which the former migrants had settled and, eventually, found their way into English, German and Dutch memory canons. The Dutch martyrological tradition had initially started with authors who had experienced exile themselves or were born to migrant parents²⁵. After the period of religious persecutions, these works found a wider audience that felt connected to the heritage of suffering. As late as 1773, a Dutch journal recommended reading martyrs books with one's children to explain to them the position of Christians in this world. In one anonymous article, a father describes a conversation with his children in which they ask him about the use of hearing such gruesome stories from a distant past. As he explains, the stories of the martyrs show that

"[t]he evil are not able to bear the good. They have always persecuted them and wished that they forsake the doctrine you can find in the Bible, or otherwise torture and kill them²⁶."

14 Mentions of young readers of martyr books are frequent in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century exile circles. Parents as well as church congregations considered martyr books instructive literature for children and adolescents. Children of migrants, such as John La Motte, Samuel de Bacher or Abigael Gerbrantsdochter read martyrologies as youngsters²⁷. In the Netherlandish Lutheran congregation in Frankfurt, children were made familiar with martyr stories at a young age and Anna Maria van Schurman, the famous "learned maid of Utrecht", who was born into a Dutch Reformed migrant milieu in Cologne, mentions similar experiences as a child:

"I remember that as a child of eleven while I was reading the histories of the blood witnesses [martyrs] and contemplating the example of so many faithful followers of Christ and so many witnesses of his truth, I was deeply moved and felt such a burning desire for martyrdom that I dearly wished to end my life with such a lovely death²⁸."



15 In Van Schurman's account, her later life is intrinsically linked to these readings of martyr stories²⁹. In 1613, Van Schurman's family left Cologne to where her parents had fled earlier and settled in Utrecht. The switch from a migrant community to a place in which the Reformed were in a privileged position had important consequences for her religious identification. Christian identity was no longer self-evidently marked by being a more or less tolerated group among a hostile majority, an experience that other migrant groups in the Dutch Republic had made earlier. Van Schurman's family soon joined the circles of the so-called Further Reformation that promoted a more exclusive form of piety and doctrinal purity and she studied with the theologian Gijsbert Voetius who was a key figure in this movement. Despite the Further Reformation's stress on personal piety, Van Schurman remained unsatisfied with the religious culture she experienced in the present. As she states in her autobiography, the times "when the Spirit of the Martyrs flourished" belonged to a distant past. Christians had now forgotten about the central importance of suffering for the sake of faith³⁰. Later in her life, Van Schurman left the Reformed Church and joined the spiritual community of former Reformed minister Jean de Labadie with whom she travelled to Germany. Describing her journey through Northern Germany in terms of a biblical exodus through a desert of tribulations, Van Schurman depicts the group around De Labadie as a small and persecuted flock of believers. The martyrological and diasporic discourse she was accustomed to in her youth was now used to promote a form of religious exclusivism, in which the true Christians could be recognized by being hated and persecuted.

16 The idea that suffering was an intrinsic part of Christian life was now read in an inverted form. Members of migrant churches struggled with the question how they could live up to the theology of suffering that challenged their secure and often wealthy position in the present. Mennonite martyrologist Thieleman van Braght even depicted the state of the ancestors as more desirable than the situation in the Dutch Republic, where his coreligionists were no longer persecuted. In his *Martyrs Mirror*, he writes:

"These are sad times, in which we live; nay, truly, there is more danger now than in the time of our fathers, who suffered death for the testimony of the Lord. Few will believe this, because the great majority looks to that which is external and corporeal, and in this respect it is now better, quieter and more comfortable³¹."

17 While in the past the frontline the godly and their enemies was clearly drawn, the lines had become blurred now. Satan was still raging but in a hidden and even more dangerous form. Instead of attacking the believers openly and physically, he now tried to "destroy the soul":

"These times are certainly more dangerous; for then Satan came openly [...] as a roaring lion, so that he could be known, and it now and then was possible to hide from him; besides, his chief design then was to destroy the body: but now he comes as in the night, or in the twilight, in a strange but yet pleasing form, and, in a two-fold way, lies in wait to destroy the soul³²."

18 These passages reveal the inversion of the earlier message of the comforting theological literature that circulated in sixteenth-century migrant circles. The interpretation of persecution as a marker of the "children of God" was attractive to the first migrant generation as it made clear that believers were not to doubt God's goodness or the justification of their religious choice. In accounts of later generations, this message was understood as a warning against conformity with a lukewarm religious "mainstream". The exile past was now depicted in terms of heroic nostalgia: through exile and martyrdom, the persecuted ancestors had had the chance to prove their religious commitment, while the boundaries had now become vague and needed to be restored, be it in a spiritual sense. As a result, descendants of migrants sometimes embraced the concept of "spiritual martyrdom" that was regarded as a defining aspect of Christian life in the present³³. This concept was employed by adherents of various confessional groups as well as members of rather obscure spiritual circles like Van



Schurman who described her journey through Northern Germany as a result of God's decision "to separate our church from all those in Amsterdam who put together God and the world³⁴". The present was thus turned into a vivid reenactment of the canonized past and in Van Schurman's account, the decision to peregrinate through Germany was a continuation of her family's history of migration for the sake of faith.

The imagined minority

19 Memories of expulsion and persecution were cultivated by migrant churches throughout the seventeenth century but the identification with the persecuted ancestors reached a new dimension in the context of new cultures of piety that emerged in late-seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Protestantism. Commemorating the hardships of previous generations fitted into the religious logic of Post-Reformation piety movements that aimed for a further reform of both the church and personal Christian life. The idea that the age of religious persecutions was more beneficial to Christian life than the present was now also repeated by individuals without any links to migrant churches: both Lutheran and Reformed Pietists argued that the harsh past was less dangerous to the spiritual wellbeing of Christians than the present days of peace and security in which they forgot the struggles of the past³⁵.

20 Advocates of piety movements such as Lutheran and Reformed Pietism were therefore often attracted to the religious culture of the respective migrant churches. In Frankfurt, both the Netherlandish Lutheran congregation and the Reformed churches that were founded by migrants from the Low Countries and France, were supported by Pietists and frequented by non-migrant Frankfurters who sympathized with these new piety movements. The Netherlandish Lutherans called the Pietist minister Johann Starck the Elder their "spiritual father" and the Reformed congregation was often depicted as a hotbed for Pietist and even sectarian ideas³⁶. In the early eighteenth century, Starck held annual sermons for the descendants of the migrants from Antwerp, in which he encouraged the congregation to commemorate and preserve the exceptional piety of the persecuted ancestors³⁷. According to Johannes Lehnemann, the congregation's chronicler, the exiled ancestors should serve as role models to Christians in the present, since they had been "cleansed" by the experience of suffering and therefore valued religious steadfastness more than wealth or noble ancestry:

"Many among them descended from old and respectable families in the Netherlands, whose coats of arms are nowadays still carried in Flanders and Brabant, and they would have had reason enough to boast about their descent according to the worldly manners of the flesh and look down upon people of lower descent. However, none of all that could be found among them, because they had been cleansed in the trying fire of persecution from the cinder of vain pride and honored those as members of their community and brotherhood who were allowed by Christ to suffer in His name. Therefore they did not only grant alms to their poor and persecuted fellow countrymen, but made them full members of their congregation with the same vote in election of elders and deacons as the church members of respectable ancestry³⁸."

21 Lehnemann's account reflects more than mere nostalgia about the heroic qualities of the first migrant generation. Similar to the authors of the aforementioned martyrologies, he presents the history of his congregation in an eschatological frame, in which Christ and Antichrist are in a constant battle until the end of days. This eschatological reality needs to be kept in mind, and it is therefore necessary that the fate of the ancestors be commemorated. During the annual commemoration service, during which the new elders and deacons were elected, the congregation was reminded of the fact that the battle between Christ and the Antichrist was not yet over, and that the believers had to be cautious.



In Lehnemann's account, the migrant congregation is depicted as a model for a new and more pious urban community. The migrant ancestors represent central Christian

values and in many passages, the chronicle is modeled after the Apostle Luke's Book of Acts, which documents the first days of Christianity. Besides their great charity for other persecuted migrants the ancestors served as a blessing and an example of faith for the town of Frankfurt. Like the first Christians in the days of the Apostles, their piety and charity led to a vast growth of their congregation. As Lehnemann's chronicle asserts, non-migrants joined the Netherlanders because these migrants were "so loved by the inhabitants of this town" that they could be compared to the first Christian congregation in Jerusalem. It is indeed remarkable that some of the most notable members of the congregation did not descend from migrant families: Lehnemann had only one grandmother from the Southern Netherlands and many of the congregation's preachers had no migrant background at all.

23 The Netherlandish Lutherans in Frankfurt subscribed to the same the religious confession as most of their fellow Frankfurters congregation, and, as Lehnemann asserted, they spoke German and preserved little of their old habits and traditions. Yet, they were continuously encouraged to see themselves as a migrant community that reflected the existential status of Christians as a wandering minority among unbelievers. While many early modern church congregations commemorated their martyrs on special remembrance days, Lehnemann accounts that the Netherlandish Lutheran Church of Frankfurt also celebrated those who had left their homes for the sake of faith or were expelled forcefully³⁹. References to ancestors who had become exemplary models of Christian steadfastness during the times of persecution were eagerly appropriated by individuals who joined the migrant congregations.

24 Surprisingly, the idea that the experience of migration stimulated exemplary religious commitment and piety has survived until today and has even informed modern scholarly accounts of the nexus between early modern diaspora and Pietist culture. Church historian Willem op't Hof, who attempts to explain the fact that so many refugees from the Netherlands were active in Pietist circles, argues that their religious inclination should be understood in the context of their traumatizing migration experience. According to Op't Hof, refugees and their descendants were particularly attracted to new piety movements due to their "religious seriousness" that resulted from their "general feeling of dislocation and the many insecurities in the new situation⁴⁰". While this explanation might not be entirely incorrect with regard to the first migrant generation, this argument contains an inherent chronological problem. Both Reformed and Lutheran Pietism only bloomed at a period when the actual migrants had already become old. The interconnection between the Netherlandish diaspora and the new religious piety movements can only be detected in the case of the second and third migrant generations. These descendants of Netherlandish exiles did not share the experience of hardship and persecution themselves but often grew up in great wealth. Their Pietist inclinations can thus better be explained by the appreciation of a minority status in the context of new piety cultures. The narratives they had grown up with were now appealing to non-migrants in their environment and their diaspora communities began to serve as models for Pietist circles. The migrant roots of the congregation were embraced as a foundation for a culture of piety in which also non-migrants could participate. In this respect, the Netherlandish Lutheran congregation of Frankfurt was no exception. In the Reformed churches of Frankfurt, Bremen and the Palatinate, the same pattern can be detected and the relations between Puritans and Netherlandish migrant churches in London and other English migrant churches show similar characteristics⁴¹.

25 In this respect, the Netherlandish stranger congregations had a highly inclusive character as they hybridized diasporic narratives with new, Pietist discourses and provided a foundation for contacts between newcomers and established citizens. Non-migrants who chose to join one of the stranger churches often did so because of their discontent with the mainstream of their home societies and the perceived lack of religious commitment of their lukewarm coreligionists⁴². The great degree of inclusivity of the diaspora churches was, ironically, the result of a religious narrative of exclusivity: To join the migrant churches and networks meant to become part of a wider



community of true believers who distinguished themselves from the lukewarm mass without any pronounced religious commitment. While the tendency to maintain boundaries between a migrant community and the local population is an essential trait of diaspora groups, in the case of the early modern Netherlandish diaspora, boundary maintenance had a primarily discursive function⁴³. By distinguishing their networks and groups from the rest of the populace, they created a boundary that revolved around religious exclusivism. Paradoxically, this narrative of belonging to an exclusive group allowed non-migrants to participate in a discourse of religious persecution and victimhood. This form of boundary maintenance was not so much based ethno-demographical group identities but rather on culturally produced narratives of religious allegiance. In the case of the early modern Netherlandish migrant networks and stranger churches, it was the very notion of an exclusive boundary or distinction that attracted non-migrants and allowed them to participate in the networks of later-generation migrants.

26 A similar, yet in some regards different, development can be detected in the case of Huguenot networks in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, especially Prussia. As Etienne Francois and Rudolf von Thadden have argued, early German discourses on national identity were often based on traits and characteristics ascribed to Huguenots⁴⁴. In these cases, however, the point of reference was not so much an exclusive ideal of belonging to a small minority but rather a “mainstream” narrative that was applicable on a wider population. This distinction might represent a fundamental distinction between the long-term development of modern diasporas as compared early modern ones that drew from a pre-nationalist repertoire of images and narratives. In the context of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-state, an “imagined minority” was a less appealing ideal than it was in early modern Europe.

27 Discourses that explained religious identities with references to narratives of persecution in the past were characteristic for religious cultures of Post-Reformation Europe once the real persecutions belonged to the past⁴⁵. Embracing an imaginary minority status served to justify and legitimize religious choices and allegiances. While such discourses were also inspired by Biblical narratives of exile, diaspora and religious persecution inspired, the transmission of collective memory between generations played a crucial in this process. The need to explain religious persecution from a theological perspective produced a literature that identified religious steadfastness with being a minority in the midst of a hostile world. Martyrologies, chronicles, songs and theological tracts that were re-read by generations who had not experienced persecution themselves and cemented the consciousness that true believers would always be a minority. Diaspora narratives became part of wider confessional cultures and helped integrate later generation-migrants into local communities. This process also underlines that early modern diasporas cannot easily be classified as self-evident demographical entities with clear-cut and ethnically determined boundaries. Rather than being solid “biological” formations, they served as horizons of religions belonging and confessional identity. In the case of the Netherlandish diaspora networks, the transition of diasporic cycles went hand in hand with a transformation of narrative modes that re-shaped religious ideals with references to the past. Embracing minority identities did not only serve as a reassurance of the Reformation heritage but also of the fundamentals of Christian life. In this context, the migrant congregations were both subject and object of a collective imagination that provided Post-Reformation societies with meaningful narratives about themselves and their past.

Notes

1 Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World. An Alternative History of the Reformation*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 2. In many respects, Terpstra’s argument bears similarities to the German literature on *Konfessionalisierung*, that stressed top-down mechanisms of early modern religious identity formation. While such approaches are often contested in recent scholarship, Terpstra’s book offers a wider and unifying



perspective on early modern religious exile that transcends the various particularized historiographies on specific persecuted groups.

2 Both boundary maintenance and homeland orientation are often considered central traits of a diaspora. See e.g. Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas. An Introduction*, London-New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 12; Dagmar Freist, Susanne Lachenicht, “Introduction”, in Dagmar Freist, Susanne Lachenicht (eds.), *Connecting Worlds and People. Early Modern Diasporas*, New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 1-7, there p. 2. In the case of the Netherlandish migrant churches, the loss of old habits, traditions as well as the Dutch language was observed and sometimes lamented by older church members. See e.g. Johannes, *Historische Nachricht von der vormahls im sechzehenden Jahrhundert berühmten evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in Antorff: und der daraus entstandenen niederländischen Gemeinde Augspurgischer Confession in Franckfurt am Mayn*, Frankfurt a.M. 1725, p. 121.

3 See e.g. Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt. The Narrated Diaspora, 1550-1750*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2016, p. 124-130; “Permeable memories. Family history and the Diaspora of Southern Netherlandish exiles in the seventeenth century”, in Erika Kuijpers, Johannes Müller et al. (ed.), *Memory before Modernity. Memory Cultures in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Brill, 2014, p. 283-296.

4 The term “imagined minority” has sometimes been used to describe the perception of specific groups in society by state institutions or wider populations. See e.g. André Laliberté, “Beliefs and religion categorizing cultural distinctions among East Asians”, in Avigail Eisenberg, Will Kymlicka (eds.), *How Public Institutions Assess Identity*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011, p. 215-237; Rob Witte, *Racist Violence and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Britain, France and the Netherlands*, London-New York, Routledge, 1996. In this article, I will use it analogously to Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” in order to describe the cultivation of a rather imaginary minority status.

5 Judith Pollmann, “Met grootvaders bloed bezegeld. Over religie en herinneringscultuur in de zeventiende-eeuwse Nederlanden”, *De Zeventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief*, 29, 2013, n° 2, p. 154-175.

6 See e.g. Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992.

7 On this first major wave of migration, see Johan Decavele, *De dageraad van de Reformatie in Vlaanderen*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 1975, p. 577ff.

8 Approximately 1,100 people were executed after being condemned by the Council of Troubles. See: M. Dierickx, “Lijst der veroordeelden door de Raad van Beroerten”, *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire*, 40, 1962, p. 415-422.

9 Gustaaf Asaert, 1585. *De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders*, Tielt, Lannoo, 2004, p. 34f.

10 The expectation to return was often closely linked to the hope of a military victory of the Dutch Republic over the Habsburg-ruled provinces in the South. See Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt. The Narrated Diaspora, 1550-1750*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2016, p. 59-62.

11 Jean Taffin, *Des marques des enfants de Dieu et des consolations en leurs afflictions : aux fidèles du pais bas*, Leiden, 1586. I quote from the English translation by Anne Prowse: Jean Taffin, *Of the marks of the children of God and of their comforts in afflictions. To the faithfull of the Low Countrie. By Iohn Taffin. Ouerseene againe and augmented by the author, and translated out of French by Anne Prowse*, London, 1590.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

13 As an example of those for whom persecution and exile are a sure sign of God’s judgment, he mentions the Calvinist apostate Jean Haren who converted to Catholicism (*ibid.*, p. 125).

14 *Ibid.*, p. 186f.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 188; 138.

16 Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 147; Jeff Bach, “Early modern anabaptist theologies”, in Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, A. G. Roeber, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 373-386, there p. 381.

17 Dirck Volkertsz. Coornhert, “Abrahams uytgangh”, in Paul van der Meulen (ed.), *Het roerspel en de comedies van Coornhert*, Leiden, Brill, 1955, p. 266-317, there p. 302.

18 Jean Taffin, *Of the Marks of the Children of God*, 138 (*italics in the original text*).

19 During its first two decades the book was particularly popular: various editions were published in 1590, 1591, 1595, 1597, 1599, 1608 and 1609.

20 Fulk Bellers, *Abrahams Interment, or, The Good Old-Mans Buriall in a Good Old Age. Opened in a Sermon at Bartholomews Exchange, July 24, 1655, at the Funerall of the Worshipfull John Lamotte, Esq., Sometimes Alderman of the City of London*, London, 1656, fol. F4.



21 Ole Peter Grell, *Brethren in Christ. A Calvinist Network in Reformation Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 307. See also: Ole Peter Grell, "The creation of a transnational, Calvinist network and its significance for Calvinist identity and interaction in early modern Europe", *European Revue of History*, 16, 2009, n° 5, p. 619-636.

22 Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories...*, *op. cit.*, p. 204f.

23 Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt...*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

24 On the argumentative use of martyrological discourses in migrant circles, see e.g. Alexander Schunka, "Constantia im Martyrium. Zur Exilliteratur des 17. Jahrhunderts zwischen Humanismus und Barock", in Thomas Kaufmann, Anselm Schubert, Kaspar von Greyerz (eds.), *Frühneuzeitliche Konfessionskulturen*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008, p. 175-200.

25 Important Reformed martyrologies were Jean Crespin, *Le Livre des Martyrs*, Geneva, 1554, and Adriaan van Haemstede, *De historien der vromer martelaren*, Antwerp 1559. While Crespin was active in Strasbourg and Geneva, he was originally from Arras in the Southern Netherlands. The most important Mennonite martyrologies were Thieleman Janszoon van Braght, *Het Bloedig Tooneel Der Doops-gesinde, En Weereeloose Christenen*, Dordrecht, 1660 and Hans de Ries and Jacques Outerman, *Historie der martelaren, ofte waerachtighe getuygen Iesu Christi*, Haarlem, 1615. Outerman and De Ries were themselves migrants from the Southern Netherlands while Van Braght, who used their work as a source for his book, descended from a migrant family.

26 *De Denker*, Vol 565 (25 October 1773). It is unclear to which confessional group the author of this article belonged but his references to Thieleman van Braght's martyrology suggest that he was a Mennonite.

27 Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age*, London 1683, part 2, p. 102f.; UB Leiden, Arch. Thys. 118, B2, Brieven van Samuel de Bacher aan zijn zus Elisabeth Hedwich de Bacher, 18 January 1606; Gerbrandus Jansz. Schagen, *Een testament ofte bekentenis van Abigael Gerbrants Dochter*, Franeker, 1610.

28 Anna Maria van Schurman, *Eukleria seu melioris partis electio*, Amsterdam, 1684, p. 14.

29 See also Pieta van Beek, "'Ardens martyrii desiderium': on the martyrdom of Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678)", in Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. de Jong, Marc van Vaeck, *The Low Countries as a Crossroad of Religious Beliefs*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 247-265.

30 Anna Maria van Schurman, *Eukleria...*, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

31 Thieleman Jansz. Van Braght, *Martelaarsspiegel*, p. 7

32 *Ibid.*

33 On "spiritual martyrdom", see Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1999, p. 279. This concept was even transferred to North America, where religious groups described their new situation in terms of "spiritual martyrdom", even if they were no longer persecuted. See e.g. Brother Lamech, *Chronicon Ephratense. A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata*, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, S.H. Zahm, 1889, p. 214.

34 Anna Maria van Schurman, *Eucleria of uitkiezing van beste deel*, Leeuwarden, De Tille, 1978 [1684], p. 303.

35 Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories...*, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

36 Andreas Deppermann, *Johann Jakob Schütz und die Anfänge des Pietismus*, Tübingen, Mohr&Siebeck, 2002, p. 29f; Johannes Lehnemann, *Historische Nachricht*, "Zuschrift" (unpaginated foreword).

37 *Ibid.*, "Zuschrift" (unpaginated foreword).

38 *Ibid.*, p. 122.

39 Both Lehnemann and Van Schurman as well other authors categorize migrants as "confessors", or as people who served as witnesses of true Christianity through their extraordinary sacrifices for their faith. See Johannes Lehnemann, *Historische Nachricht*, "Zuschrift" (unpaginated foreword); Pieta van Beek, "'Ardens Martyrii Desiderium. On the Martyrdom of Anna Maria van Schurman (1607-1678)", in Arie-Jan Gelderblom, Jan L. de Jong and Marc Van Vaeck, *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs*, Leiden, Brill, 2004, p. 247-265, there p. 257.

40 Willem op't Hof, "Piety in the wake of trade. The North Sea as an intermediary of reformed piety up to 1700", in Juliette Roding and Lex Heerma van Voss (eds.), *The North Sea and Culture (1550-1800). Proceedings of the International Conference held at Leiden 21-22 April 1995*, Hilversum, Verloren, 1996, p. 248-265, there p. 250.

41 Johannes Müller, *Exile Memories...*, *op. cit.*, p. 186-189; Jan van de Kamp, "Ein frühes reformiert-pietistisches Netzwerk in der Kurpfalz in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 103, Oktober 2012, n° 1, p. 182-208.

42 A similar tendency can also be observed in sixteenth-century England where Puritans were attracted to the Dutch stranger congregations. See e.g. Patrick Collinson, "The Elizabethan



Puritans and the Foreign Reformed Churches in London", in Patrick Collinson, *Godly people. Essays in English Puritanism and Protestantism*, London, The Hambledon Press, 1983, p. 528-555, p. 249ff.

43 On boundary maintenance of diaspora networks, see e.g. Cohen, *Global Diasporas*, 12; John A. Armstrong, "Proletarian and Mobilized Diasporas", *American Political Science Review*, 70, 1976, n° 2, p. 394.

44 Rudolf von Thadden, "Vom Glaubensflüchtling zum preußischen Patrioten", in Rudolf von Thadden, Michelle Magdelaine (ed.), *Die Hugenotten 1685-1985*, München, C.H. Beck, 1985, p. 186-197; Etienne Francois, "Vom preußischen Patrioten zum besten Deutschen", in Rudolf Von Thadden, Michelle Magdelaine, *Die Hugenotten*, p. 198-212.

45 It is noteworthy that groups who suffered exclusion and aggression for a longer period of time, such as Jews or Mennonites, were less inclined to present themselves as minorities and rather tried to appeal to "mainstream" ideals of community. See e.g. Mirjam van Veen, "Dutch Anabaptist and Reformed Historiographers on Servetus' Death: Or How the Radical Reformation Turned Mainstream and How the Mainstream Reformation Turned Radical", in Bridget Heal, Anorthe Kremers (ed.), *Radicalism and Dissent in the World of Protestant Reform*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017, p. 162-172.

Pour citer cet article

Référence papier

Johannes Müller, « From diaspora to "imagined minority". Memories of persecution and the cross-generational transformation of Protestant migrant networks in early modern Europe », *Diasporas*, 31 | 2018, 21-34.

Référence électronique

Johannes Müller, « From diaspora to "imagined minority". Memories of persecution and the cross-generational transformation of Protestant migrant networks in early modern Europe », *Diasporas* [En ligne], 31 | 2018, mis en ligne le 21 août 2018, consulté le 21 septembre 2022. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/972> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/diasporas.972>

Auteur

Johannes Müller

Johannes MÜLLER is an assistant professor of German at Leiden University. He has published on migration, cultural memory and transnational religious networks in early modern Europe. He is the author of *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt. The Narrated Diaspora, 1550-1750* (Leiden: Brill 2016) and co-editor of *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill 2013).

Johannes MÜLLER est *assistant professor* d'allemand à l'université de Leyde. Ses publications concernent la migration, la culture mémorielle et les réseaux religieux transnationaux dans l'Europe moderne. Il est l'auteur de *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt. The Narrated Diaspora, 1550-1750* (Leyde, Brill, 2016) et coéditeur de *Memory before Modernity. Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leyde, Brill, 2013).

Droits d'auteur



Creative Commons - Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International - CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

