

## Review of *Welvaart in zwart-wit*

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I wish I had read this book when I had begun my own research into the Dutch 1960s some ten years ago. With its broad overview of developments in the Netherlands in the first decades after the Second World War, I found reading the book, a decade later, an invaluable learning experience, contributing to the broadening of my own vistas in Dutch postwar history. There were many details I enjoyed reading about of which I knew little or nothing, such as the apparently ambivalent relationship the Dutch had to the automobile in the 1950s (especially in contrast to American views of the automobile), or the structure of Dutch emigration policy in the 1950s, or the high international standing of Dutch astronomers. Such details stimulated my reading *Welvaart in zwart-wit*.

In more structured terms, the book *Welvaart in zwart-wit* widens the scope of the historiography on the postwar Netherlands. It attempts to place social, economic, political and cultural events in an international context more than many histories of the period have hitherto done. In this respect, it more closely resembles general postwar histories of Western Europe, with their emphases on socio-economic and political reconstruction, often with a particular eye to Americanization. Thus it signals a noticeable departure from the way most 'national' histories of the postwar Netherlands have been written, with their traditional emphasis on religion and ideology, on party or (from the 1960s on) grassroots politics, and on popular and youth cultures. These traditional foci are relatively deemphasized in *Welvaart in zwart-wit*. Instead, the authors stress what we might call here 'high' politics — the politics of functionaries who made *beleid*— and of 'high' culture, whether in the sciences, letters, or especially the arts. Some historians may understandably lament the lack of attention to every day life and to the beliefs of ordinary Dutch people, but the book does serve to draw attention to important terrain long neglected by most historians. This is particularly true of 'Deel B. De reconstructie van Nederland', where the authors provide readers with a highly stimulating history of planning in the Netherlands. Finally, the authors have succeeded in inverting the way that historians have typically viewed the 1950s and 1960s. Historians, including myself, have often seen important continuities between what occurred in the 1950s and what happened in the 1960s, but the focus has usually been on the 1960s, with the 1950s serving as a kind of prelude to the Main Event. In this book, it is the 1950s that are at the forefront, with the 1960s as a kind of incremental extension of earlier developments. One might be tempted to say, as I shall suggest in a minute, that the 1960s almost seem like a postlude in this book. In any event, the authors' downplaying of the 1960s, made possible by focusing on socio-economic than on (small-'c') cultural developments, justifiably raises the question of whether historians have had an undue fixation on the magical Sixties. In

each of these respects, then, historians of the Netherlands in the twentieth century owe the authors a debt of gratitude.

All of this does not mean that I am without questions about why the authors chose to do what they did. One posture that I do wish to avoid is to judge *Welvaart* only by the standards historians would use to judge each other's work. It is not that I am without critique of the way many Dutch sociologists in particular have approached the postwar period — they have been too concerned with macro-processes, too little concerned with how mentalities constructed the frameworks of Dutch society after 1945. And it is probably true that I would have wished, out of predisposition, for *Welvaart in zwart-wit* to have been a cultural history, which, for the most part, it is not. But one must be careful not to denature the work of others, particularly others in other disciplines, by launching into criticisms that in effect insist on conformity to one's own discipline or subfield. Indeed, one of *Welvaart in zwart-wit's* genuine strengths is its interdisciplinarity, which has had the effect of widening the field of study beyond where most historians would have gone. And in the spirit of interdisciplinary discussion, I have endeavored to shape my critique of the book by asking four relatively simple questions, some compositional, some content-driven, that can be answered across disciplines.

Wouldn't the book have been more tightly conceived with the mid-1960s as ending point, rather than 1973? I generally dislike asking questions about periodization, since it is an inevitably imperfect but useful convention. This is especially true of a book of this kind, where the authors are committed to covering a range of subjects for which a single year cannot hope to serve as a definitive chronological break. (The chapter on the natural sciences, for instance, could not have been told as it was unless the end date of 1973 was extended through the 1980s.) Moreover, the answers that the authors themselves give for going to 1973 are quite reasonable. Under the 'nieuwe schikking' (a long-standing agreement between labor, business and the state) the Dutch economy grew dramatically from 1951 to 1973, with the greatest rise in welfare from 1965 to 1970. (281) Furthermore, the authors are keen to show that the low state-expenditures of the 1950s welfare state developed, in incremental and often unforeseen ways, into the high state expenditure welfare state that took off in the late 1960s and early 1970s. (90) The authors want to demonstrate that the same economic and social processes that shaped the contours of Dutch society in the 1950s also shaped the changing contours of Dutch society all the way until 1973.

Still, the very title of the book, *Welvaart in zwart-wit*, seems to call the periodization into question, symbolizing as it does, 'de sobere welvaart en de afgebakende patronen. Daarna [that is, after 1973] ging fullcolour heersen.' (531) But the Netherlands in the course of the 1960s began to look less like the 'sobere welvaart en afgebakende patronen' that ostensibly characterize this 'IJKpunt' in Dutch history. As I know from looking back at my childhood photo albums, my Dutch uncles and aunts were using color film cameras by the mid-1960s, during my first trips to the Netherlands. More to the point, the very selection of black-and-white photographs for the book itself seems to indicate a heavy emphasis on the years before 1965. Of the 43 photographs

that appear in the book, only five clearly date from the last half of the 1960s or early 1970s. This may seem like a superficial point, but I think that the ratio of photographs from before 1965 to those after that year are broadly indicative of the amount of intellectual energy that the book itself devotes to the period before and after 1965. It is not only that the book's preponderance of material lies in the period before 1965, but that most of the book's best narrative and analyses pertain to the period before the mid-1960s.

Perhaps it is the very structure of the book that somewhat problematizes the periodization. The book tries to do two things at the same time which are very hard to do well at the same time, that is, to sketch the characteristics of an age or moment in time (or in this case, an 'IJKpunt' of 'welvaart in zwart-wit'), and simultaneously, to show change over time, that is, to show the process of economic growth — and the changes that came with it — from the late 1940s to the early 1970s. The net effect is that the account, taken as a whole, becomes more fragmented as it moves through the late 1960s and early 1970s. Put another way, we have a clearer conceptual snapshot of the beginning of the period (1950) than we do of the end of the period (1970), where social and cultural trends are only briefly summarized because they really belong to the mostly undescribed 'postmodern' age that ostensibly began only after 1973. One of the more obvious examples of how the early period gets more focus and attention than the latter is the chapter entitled 'Het geluid van Amerika', which deals chiefly with American influences in the Netherlands through the early 1950s, and then rather hastily concludes with a (very fine) one-page discussion on Abram de Swaan's analysis of America in the late 1960s.

*Welvaart in zwart-wit* might, then, have been tighter conceptually if the book had ended earlier in time. Perhaps at the beginning of the 1960s, when the diverging interests of employers and employees already made apparent, as the authors themselves argue, that the 'nieuwe schikking'... haar langste tijd had gehad.' (27) Or more specifically 1963, when Dutch economic growth was no longer driven by industrialization, but increasingly by new economic forces that would emerge in the 1970s. (44) Or perhaps a bit later, in 1967, the year the authors signal as the start of the unraveling of the broad consensus in the Netherlands. (36-37) These dates may well be no less arbitrary and no more satisfactory than 1973, but they highlight the difficulty in characterizing *Welvaart in zwart-wit* as a book as much about the Sixties as it is about the Fifties.

My second question is: why not make more — or less — of the concept of 'modernization'? *Welvaart in zwart-wit* is a work that makes fairly extensive use of the words 'modern', 'modernisering', and (less so) 'moderniteit', though not always in a clear or consistent fashion. Throughout much of the book, the authors appear to subscribe to modernization as an historical process, defined at one point as 'de historische fusie tussen individuele emancipatie en technische beheersing.' (53) Similarly, the authors refer to the Netherlands as a country that became 'modern' in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, not just in terms of material and technical advances (such as the 'modernisering van het bouwbedrijf', 198), but in 'sociaal-moreel opzicht' as well (380),

prompting widespread subscription to such 'modern' values as freedom of assembly and personal responsibility. (361) The definition of what it means to be modern becomes even more diffuse when the authors conclude that the 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s was not so much an anti-modern force as 'anders-modem.' (27) (The not-very-complimentary distinction of being anti-modern they leave to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and to Dutch judges of the 1960s, the latter group characterized as 'het verst achter in moderniteit' ; 361,364,384.) To this the authors add the 'postmodernity' of the period after 1973 as well, which for all of its differences with modernity, has been able to live in a kind of peaceful co-existence with modernity. (531) All of this is, in my judgment, a too uncritical appropriation of the words 'modernising' and 'modern'. Such words, in addition to be slippery enough to possess a host of meanings, often contain assumptions about what does and what does not belong in the contemporary world. (Is the relative lack of attention to religion, other than in the context of 'secularization', an indication of these assumptions?) And the focus on 'modernization' is one of the aspects of Dutch scholarship, particularly among sociologists, that I found most striking in my own research on the 1960s, not to mention the general Dutch proclivity to use the word 'modern' in a host of contexts. One of the chief purposes of my book *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw* was to point out that 'modernization' (or 'vernieuwing', often a close synonym) was, above all, an ideologically-laden interpretation of history that was shared, albeit in differing ways, by a wide range of opinion-makers and policy shapers in the period after the Second World War, and that the telos of modernization shaped their expectations about the future.

Fortunately, the authors do, in other parts of their book, problematize the concept of modernity and modernization, sometimes indicating their skepticism of these words by placing them within quotation marks. Indeed, some of the strongest analysis in the whole book is when the authors interpret modernization as an ideological construct of policy makers, paying attention to the metaphors of modernization, such as the use of 'zuivering' and 'ordening'. (25) One of the aspects that makes section 'B' of the book, the part devoted to the history of planning, so compelling is that it offers penetrating insights into, to quote the authors, 'de van door moderniserende geobsedeerde beleidsmakers, architecten en publieke opinie.' (25) In these chapters (five through seven) we get a strong sense of the ironies, paradoxes and often unfortunate outcomes of the 'modern' planning of towns, highways and agricultural land use. Perhaps the book could have had a greater punch if 'modernization' would have been more systematically and consistently interpreted with a degree of suspicion, with more systematic attention to how 'modernization' as ideology was culturally constructed in the 1950s and 1960s.

Why not make more use of international comparisons? is the third question I pose. *Welvaart in zwart-wit* does, as I noted at the beginning of my story, highlight a number of stimulating contrasts, such as Dutch economic growth pattern in contrast with neighboring countries. (48-51) The book also mentions some of the peculiarities of the Dutch in contrast to others: the Delta Plan as expression of an heroic national identity and above all technical virtuosity (149), the striking characteristics of Dutch

postwar housing construction, including the Dutch antipathy toward high-rise apartments (200-206), and the Dutch concern with, and response to, overpopulation. (30 and Chapter 8) The chapters on the arts also sometimes highlight the more remarkable features, internationally speaking, of Dutch artistic life, such as the unique place of non-commercial film and film-makers in the Netherlands. (429-430) In particular, the chapter on the natural sciences systematically raises the question of how and when the Dutch achieved international prominence in these fields, particularly astronomy. (Chapter 13)

However, the book seems to be primarily interested in the relationship between the Netherlands and the wider world by the way in which Dutch society was influenced by globalization, or Americanization. 'Americanization' is a prominent theme in the book, particularly in regard to the development of an American-style consumer society in the Netherlands after 1955. The globalization/Americanization theme sets the pace for much of the dynamic of the book, which seems to show the most interest in wider patterns, in this case how the Netherlands was subject to, or were part of, the same developments occurring elsewhere. The conclusion of the book, with its theme of moving from unity to multiplicity, tends to confirm the book's preference for telling the narrative of how the Netherlands, a small but rather homogeneous country, increasingly became part of a much larger and in some respects a more fragmented world. And truth be told, it's an important enough story to tell. Still, the differences between the Netherlands and its neighbors might have been played up more, especially given the mandate of NWO to set Dutch culture (and not just high culture) within a wider European context. As an outsider to the Netherlands, I am particularly interested in the idiosyncrasies of the Dutch national situation, idiosyncrasies that have not necessarily faded away in a 'postmodern' world. This is one difference, I suppose, between the authors and myself on how to interpret the 1960s; they very consciously looked to set the Dutch Sixties within the context of international developments, while I focused upon the peculiarities, especially within Dutch political culture. And it is the peculiarities of the Dutch, not the similarities of their experiences with the English or the French, that have prompted many foreigners to marvel at the Dutch; in some areas, such as in its 'social experimentation', the Netherlands has drawn a great deal of attention from abroad. What were the historical roots for such policies? My recent research interest, euthanasia, may indeed have come too late on the scene to have been covered properly in *Welvaart in zwart-wit*. But one could easily go further in time to other topics. For instance, one could have described, in more than a couple of perfunctory sentences (247), how the 'trauma of decolonization' in the Netherlands compared to those of other European colonial powers. In a somewhat different vein, how were Dutch conceptions of race and ethnicity constructed in the period just before, or just at the beginning of, the larger-scale immigration of the 1970s? Or perhaps the authors could have talked more about how the acceptance of homosexuality, a discussion point throughout much of the 1960s, apparently went faster in the Netherlands than elsewhere (or did it?). Or finally, what about the Dutch penal system, which was already making an international name for itself, on account of its deeply

humanitarian approach, in the period under review? For some of these points of comparison there is at least some literature; for others, there is admittedly less. Still, I wonder if the authors could not have put the history of the Netherlands into higher relief, and sharper contrast, without committing the error of supposing the Dutch are unique in each or even most lines of comparison, or that they are 'better' where they are.

Finally, there's a question I really hesitate to ask, especially given the historiographical traditions of the Netherlands: Where's the moral vision? I also hesitate to ask the question because I can be irritated by two types of history books: those with an explicit moral lesson in them, and those without any. For example, I am glad, on the one hand, that the book takes some pains to avoid the old, and often stale, ideological debates over the 1960s. Sometimes this is to good effect, such as when the authors demythologize, and 'deideologize', the origins of the WAO, or offer a 'sober' account of the welfare state as not the product of a run-amok *maakbaarheidsideologie* but born out of a series of incremental steps, supported by a broad range of Dutch politicians. (305-306) At the same time, the book's tendency to deemphasize ideological conflict, as well as its inattention to personal agency in favor of larger socio-economic processes, tends to reduce the opportunities for deeper moral reflection. In this respect, I sometimes get the impression that *Welvaart in zwart-wit* is, perhaps like the epoch it ostensibly portrays, an 'ideologically chilled' book. Perhaps the relatively high-altitude orbit (high politics and high culture) of the book has something to do with this, as does the decision to interpret — and downplay — the 1960s within a larger socio-economic trajectory. As an example, the book makes few provocative judgments about the character of 'vrijheid, gelijkheid en democratie', concluding that they were renewed and reconfirmed in the 1960s, despite the 'extravagances' and 'exaggeration' of the period. (401-403) One could probably not write about the United States between 1948 and 1973 without talking a lot about freedom, equality and democracy — or the lack of it. The Netherlands, of course, has had a very different history, where these values, though contested over their precise content, seldom led to the conflict witnessed in my own country. Is it misplaced, then, to desire more moral reflection (not necessarily overt moral judgments) on the state or character of Dutch society as it existed in the 1950s and 1960s, whether in terms of its democratic qualities, or quality of life, or perhaps other criteria?

I do not think so. In the first place, moral vision is necessary, as it were, on the purely compositional grounds I mentioned above: it makes for better reading, and a sprawling study of this length especially needs moral argument, or perhaps better still, moral concerns or sensibilities, to hold it together. In fact, *Welvaart in zwart-wit* is at its best when it does show a lively moral engagement with the historical material. Again, I feel obliged to refer to the chapters on planning as an example. The authors set the tone at the beginning of the section in a couple of lyrical paragraphs on Willem van Toorn's fury at the 'empty' landscape of the Netherlands, the result of postwar planning. (135-136) That Van Toorn more or less speaks for the authors seems evident in subsequent pages. The authors note concern with the 'verval van de grote steden' (142) and

the 'systematische verwaarlozing en uitholling van binnensteden aan de hand van planmatige wederopbouw, restauratie, krotopruijing, sanering, stadsvernieuwing en vooral overloop.' (177) They decry this development, and this kind of judgment gives the whole section a sharper, more exciting edge. I also found this to be the case in the chapter (18) on the rise of modern art in the years of 1945. Perhaps the author's sympathies with Willem Sandberg and leading Dutch artists were too overtly expressed, and its story line a bit too familiar, but the theme of 'voortgaande bevrijding' gives a sense of where the chapter is going, and why the developments it describes mattered. Elsewhere, here and there, one sees evidences of similar critical engagement, and provocative historiographical interpretations, but such bright moments do not carry the book as whole. The result is that the work often lacks a binding element, or more specifically, a moral vision, that might have given this 600-page book more energy and direction.

Furthermore, a more systematic and provocative evaluation of the character of, and trends in, Dutch society in relation to other nation-states might have been a particularly stimulating way of concluding a project of this scope and ambition. What have been the real achievements of postwar Dutch society? What have been its failures? The authors need not give conclusive answers to these questions (preferably not, in fact), but suggestive reflection about such questions would have added additional flavor to the book and promoted the NWO's aim of highlighting Dutch culture within a European context. Finally, it seems prudent to remember that universally acclaimed values such as 'liberty, equality and democracy', or 'tolerance' (on which Professor Schuyt has extensively written) are always prone to changes in meaning and practice, sometimes for the good, and sometimes not, and that historical study, at the very least, can make us more alert to our own present-day shortcomings. Such a moral awareness on the part of historical researchers may seem appropriate only in more self-evidently imperfect societies like the United States, but citizens of states within the European Union are also realizing that moral and political values do not take care of themselves, and that here, too, researchers of the past must necessarily carry a measure of responsibility in cultivating, or challenging, these values. In this respect, too, the authors of *Welvaart in zwart-wit* might have exercised more of this responsibility.

All of my questions have been chiefly suggestions for refinement, rather than radical departures of approach. They have been ways in which I would have made a fine book more provocative and even more revealing, in a more tightly constructed way. In saying all of this, I am aware that I am very much in the position, as we say in America, of 'armchair quarterback', of a non-player making easy criticisms about how the football game should have been played. I salute the authors for a truly landmark work, in which they made me think and rethink what I've held about contemporary Dutch history.

## Keuzes en accenten

DOEKO BOSSCHER

Was er meer ruimte, dan zou de lof hier minstens zo royaal klinken als het wat kritischer commentaar. Schuyt en Taverne zijn tot een grote prestatie gekomen en hebben een belangrijke bijdrage geleverd aan een beter begrip van die moeilijke periode rond het ijkjaar 1950. Een moeilijke periode binnen een moeilijk concept. Het liefst zou ik wat dieper dan nu mogelijk is zijn ingegaan op het conceptuele kader, op het idee om met ijkjaren te werken; op de voor- en nadelen daarvan, en op hoe de auteurs op dat punt hun taak hebben opgevat. Nu blijft dat een marginaal onderwerp in deze bijdrage. Naast een opgelegd gebrek aan aandacht voor de interpretatie van hun ingewikkelde opdracht door de schrijvers van *Welvaart in zwart-wit* en voor de vele verdiensten van hun aanpak, treedt in deze wel zeer korte beschouwing een derde vertekening op, doordat ik ook nog eens indirect aandacht moet besteden aan de bijdrage van James Kennedy — zo vat ik tenminste mijn taak op.

Het verhaal rond het ijkpunt 1950 beoogt een historische dwarsdoorsnede te zijn van de Nederlandse cultuur in het ijkjaar. Is dat gelukt? In grote trekken wel. Het probleem met dit soort dwarsdoorsneden is, dat het te analyseren object anders dan in het geval van bijvoorbeeld een kaas die men klieft, vooral gekend wordt aan de hand van ontwikkelingen in de jaren voor en na de kloof. De doorsnede van een kaas is goed te beschrijven met behulp van wat men ziet als men de twee helften goed bekijkt op het punt waar zij van elkaar gescheiden zijn. Bij een dwarsdoorsnede van Nederland in 1950 komt het erop aan een goede keus te maken inzake een ordenend principe. De keus gaat tussen wat men vindt dat niet mag ontbreken als thema, en wat men wel meent te mogen laten voor wat het is. Dat Schuyt en Taverne daarin een heel grote vrijheid hadden, is duidelijk. Die vrijheid is zeker niet verkeerd gebruikt, maar willekeurigheid, die trouwens tot op zekere hoogte onvermijdelijk ieder boek kenmerkt, is ook in dit geval duidelijk te bespeuren.

Een eventueel bezwaar tegen gebrek aan originaliteit snijdt alleen hout als er meteen bijgezegd wordt hoe het origineler had gekund. Het bewijs dat er aanleiding was voor een nieuwe visie, vernieuwend ten opzichte van gevestigde ideeën, laat zich eigenlijk slechts leveren in de vorm van het presenteren van een min of meer uitgewerkte alternatieve visie. Wie het laat bij 'het had wel wat origineler gekund' slaat een slag in de lucht. Ik stel daarom slechts vast, dat door de samenwerking van een socioloog en een architectuurhistoricus, waarvan sommigen verwachtten dat zij een heel andere kijk op het naoorlogse Nederland beloofde, geen opzienbarende conclusies zijn gewrocht. Er is weinig noemenswaardige 'chemie' geweest, geen versmelting van disciplines tot één nieuwe. Als ik mij niet vergis, verschilt het boek dat er nu ligt daardoor in wat het ten principale beweert niet meer dan gradueel van het corpus van eerder verschenen studies over de periode. Ik haast me te zeggen dat Schuyt en Taverne wel degelijk hun eigen stempel op dit werk hebben gedrukt. Dat is onder andere goed