



# Outside In? Reflections on *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*

## Introduction

Over the last decades, the *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* has invested in a trajectory to increase the visibility of the journal beyond the Low Countries and to expand engagement with the international community working on the history of the Low Countries. An important step in this trajectory was the transition in 2012 toward ‘Gold Open Access’, with all articles being immediately and freely available. To increase international visibility, the use of English was actively encouraged. This has resulted in the majority of articles being published in English (80 percent in 2016), while the share of English book reviews has equally increased, up to about 40 percent. Alongside these initiatives, English manuscripts have been sent out as much as possible to experts working in institutions outside the Netherlands and Belgium. For the Forum and Discussion sections – those for which the editors themselves can invite authors – international experts have been invited, with success. The establishment of an International Advisory Board served the same aim: to create a transnational network of Low Countries scholars who not only advise the editorial board and participate in the journal, but who can – through their own networks – contribute to enlarging both the authorship and the audience of the journal.

The meeting of the International Advisory Board (IAB) and the presentation of the first Low Countries History Award in November 2016 provided an excellent occasion to evaluate these efforts and to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the journal from an external perspective. We invited Ben Schmidt (University of Washington), a member of both the IAB and the jury of the Award, to reflect on the current state of the journal and to present this to the yearly conference of the Royal Netherlands Historical Society, which is responsible for publishing *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*. The text that follows is an edited version of this talk. We subsequently

asked Martha Howell (Columbia University) and James Kennedy (University College Utrecht / Utrecht University) to respond to Schmidt's contribution.

As editors, we are delighted to find such great appreciation for the overall quality of the journal. We also share with the contributors to this forum several concerns that they have expressed. Despite the efforts we have made, currently only 10 percent of the regular articles are authored by scholars working outside the Low Countries, and no more than 10 percent of the visitors to the journal's website are based outside the Netherlands and Belgium. As the forum authors indicate, the inherently hybrid character of the journal – being the Royal Netherlands History Society's home journal, while at the same time aspiring to cover the history of a highly diverse region that corresponds today to the North of France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands – makes for an unusual position within the field of academic historical journals. It also accounts for imbalances within the journal between the 'North' and the 'South', both in terms of authorship and subject matter. At the same time, we believe that the diversity at the core of the journal constitutes a strength, as it stimulates us to move beyond nation-centered histories and to fully participate in international historiographical conversations. This conviction also resonates in the contributions that follow. We hope they may form the starting point for further reflection among our readership.