

A New Dutch Imperial History?

Perambulations in a Prospective Field¹

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This article discusses the recent developments in imperial history in Great Britain and France and analyses the state of Dutch research in the light of these new approaches. Raben concentrates on three broadly defined topics – the webbed character of colonial spaces, the impact of empire on metropolitan societies and the moral ramifications of colonial empires. The way imperial histories are written is determined by the experiences with ‘empire’ in the metropolitan countries. Despite essential differences in imperial circumstances in and of the Netherlands, Dutch historiography could be inspired by the British and French developments to explore the spatial, cultural and moral relationships between the various parts of the Dutch colonial world.

Colonial history is a contentious field. This has not always been so. Until about forty years ago historians of empire were mostly concerned with the *faits et gestes* of the colonial elites and the history of the colonised world was mainly narrated, in the famous words of Dutch historian J.C. van Leur, as seen ‘from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, the high gallery of the trading-house’.² However, since the end of colonial rule and the arrival of postcolonial migrants in the former metropolises, colonial history has lost much of its innocence and political logic.³ The initial reaction to the old imperial histories, in answer to Van Leur’s call, was to concentrate on the autonomous histories of the indigenous peoples in the colonies and on the pernicious effects of colonial rule. This ‘going native’ hardly affected perspectives on the relationships between empire and the metropolitan societies proper. It is only since the 1990s that historians in and of the West have been looking for new ways to write imperial histories. Faced with the changing character of their home societies and influenced by the emerging field of postcolonial studies, some started to question the foundations of their national histories.

In this article I will discuss the recent efforts by British and French scholars to reformulate imperial histories, and sound out the potential of these perspectives for Dutch history and historical discourse. I will start by examining how the different experiences of empire have influenced the writing of history in the metropolitan countries. After that, I will investigate various directions for Dutch imperial historiography, based on the research field charted by a new generation of imperial historians, sometimes designated as New Imperial Historians. I will concentrate here on three issues that are central to the New Imperial Histories and that have been explored in the other articles in this issue – the webbed character of colonial spaces, the impact of empire on metropolitan societies and the moral ramifications of colonial empires.⁴

New Imperial Histories

Nowhere has the effort to reformulate imperial history been so concentrated and prolific as in Britain, where since the late 1980s academic authors started to challenge the accepted views on British identity and the legacies of British imperialism.⁵ Catherine Hall wrote in this respect of ‘a profound destabilisation of white identities’.⁶ Whether these ‘white identities’ were indeed uprooted is open to debate, but it is true that assumptions of Britain’s place and historical role in the world were fiercely challenged by the arrival of migrants from the former colonies and other non-Western countries.

1 I thank the editors, the two anonymous reviewers and especially the co-organisers of the conference ‘A New Dutch Imperial History: Connecting Dutch and Overseas Pasts’, Marieke Bloembergen, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Alicia Schrikker, for their invaluable comments.

2 J.C. van Leur, review of F.W. Stapel (ed.), *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indië II and III*, in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 79 (1939) 589-595, published in English in J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society: Essays in Asian Social and Economic History* (The Hague, Bandung 1955) 261-267, especially 261.

3 Parts of the argument have previously appeared in Remco Raben, ‘De lange sporen van overzee. Nieuwe koloniale geschiedenis in Nederland en eromheen’, *De Gids* 170:12 (December 2007) 1218-1228.

4 Stephen Howe in a first large-scale attempt to demarcate the field of the New Imperial History, lists no less than eleven moot issues: ‘Introduction: New Imperial Histories’, in: Stephen Howe (ed.), *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (London, New York 2010) 1-20.

5 One of the first was Paul Gilroy, *There ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London 1987).

6 Catherine Hall, ‘Gender Politics and Imperial Politics: Rethinking the Histories of Empire’, in: Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton and Barbara Bailey (eds.), *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (London, Kingston 1995) 48-59, especially 48.

In Great Britain these new developments have been labelled New Imperial History. Despite its alluring label and the sometimes fierce reactions it engendered, we cannot speak of a clearly circumscribed field. There is little consensus and a clear manifesto is absent. Some even deny the novelty of this imperial history. Notwithstanding its elastic nature, a few characteristics in the field of imperial history can be discerned.⁷ One is its strong emphasis on cultural perspectives as opposed to the predominantly political and economic concerns of the older imperial history. Here we see a distinct influence of Edward Said and the field of cultural studies he inspired. Second, there is a mounting interest in the spatial dimensions of imperial relations, in particular the effects of moving peoples and ideas; there is a strong emphasis on the webbed character of empires and the reciprocal influences of the different parts of empire. Third, there is a recurring concern with the nature of the British nation and its imperial dimensions and connections.

In France too, a renewed interest for its overseas empire has been visible over the last ten to fifteen years. New research was triggered, in the first place, by controversies about the colonial past, such as the Algerian question and in particular the much maligned *loi colonial* of 2005, and it tends to be critical of the colonial project.⁸ French historians were less affected by Edward Said's work and were only distantly influenced by postcolonial theory. Nevertheless some of their concerns coincide with those of their British confreres: they have concentrated on the existence and manifestations of imperial culture, in particular the representations of the empire and cultures of racism in France.⁹ Some of the concerns of the British New Imperial Historians, especially about the spatial arrangements and dynamics of empire, have now started to gain a following in France.¹⁰

7 For a survey of the recent trends in studies of imperialism in the Anglo-Saxon world, see Stephen Howe, *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, who employs a very wide interpretation of the 'New Imperial History'. See also James Thompson, 'Modern Britain and the New Imperial History', *History Compass* 5:2 (2007) 455-462; Alan Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire', *History Compass* 4:1 (2006) 124-141.

8 Romain Bertrand, *Mémoires d'empire: La controverse autour du 'fait colonial'* (Bellecombe-en-Bauges 2006); see also Maurice Vaisse and Robert Tombs (eds.), *L'Histoire coloniale en débat en France et en Grande-Bretagne* (Brussels 2010).

9 See among many others Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Lemaire (eds.), *La fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial* (Paris 2005) and idem, *Culture coloniale en France de la Révolution à nos jours* (Paris 2008). For an overview, see Berny Sèbe, 'Exalting Imperial Grandeur: The French Empire and its Metropolitan Public', in: John M. MacKenzie (ed.), *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy* (Manchester, New York 2011) 19-56.

10 See e.g. Hélène Blais, Florence Deprest and Pierre Singaravélou (eds.), *Territoires impériaux: Une histoire spatiale du fait colonial* (Paris 2011).

Dutch historiography has experienced similar pressures from migrant groups. The process started in the mid-1980s when Indies-Dutch (*Indische Nederlanders*) claimed their separate place in the history of the Netherlands Indies. This resulted in a growing interest in the particular experiences of these imperial groups, but not in an effort to integrate their histories into the national history. On the whole, there is little debate on the aims and methods of ‘imperial’ history. In contrast to some trends in Anglo-Saxon academia, Dutch colonial history writing has retained a thoroughly empiricist and ‘unproblematic’ attitude and fosters a strong scepticism towards postcolonial theorisation.¹¹

The weak integration of metropolitan and imperial histories seems to be characteristic of most post-imperial societies, although the difference is gradual. As Antoinette Burton remarked almost twenty years ago, ‘empire still occupies a basically marginal place on the map of traditional British history’.¹² Similarly, scholars in France have perceived a ‘refus d’intégrer le passé colonial’.¹³ Corresponding sentiments have been heard only occasionally in the Netherlands.¹⁴ Apparently it is hardly considered to be a problem that surveys of Dutch history all but fail to mention the Dutch overseas activities and apparently do not see much influence of the colonial endeavour on Dutch society and political culture.¹⁵

Imperialisms of sorts

In important respects the New Imperial History is a quintessentially British phenomenon. What was it in British colonialism that made historians look at

11 This became evident during the conference ‘A New Dutch Imperial History: Connecting Dutch and Overseas Pasts’, The Hague, 1 October 2010. A recurrent comment was that the agenda of the New Imperial Historians offered little new to the existing Dutch practice.

12 Antoinette Burton, ‘Rules of Thumb: British History and “Imperial Culture” in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain’, *Women’s History Review* 3:4 (1994) 483-501, especially 486.

13 Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, ‘La fracture coloniale: Une crise française’, in: Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire, *La fracture coloniale*, 9-31, especially 12.

14 Susan Legêne, *De bagage van Blomhoff en Van Breugel. Japan, Java, Tripoli en Suriname in de negentiende-eeuwse Nederlandse cultuur van het imperialisme* (Amsterdam 1998) 13-16; more recently in *Spiegelreflex. Culturele sporen van de koloniale ervaring* (Amsterdam 2010).

15 E.g. Piet de Rooy, *Republiek van rivaliteiten. Nederland sinds 1813* (Amsterdam 2002); N.C.F. van Sas, *De metamorfose van Nederland. Van oude orde naar moderniteit 1750-1900* (Amsterdam 2004) and Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, 1800. *Blauwdrukken voor een samenleving* (The Hague 2001) completely ignore Dutch colonialism; Jan Bank and Maarten van Buuren, 1900. *Hoogtij van burgerlijke cultuur* (The Hague 2000) hardly do better.

it in a new way, and why would it be different in France and the Netherlands? For answers we have to look at the disparate colonial experiences of European countries and how they defined the way in which their history is being written.

First of all, conceptions of *being* or *having* an empire were different among the European nations. The British New Imperial History, apart from being triggered by concerns about postcolonial identities, has deeper roots in the genealogy of British identity. ‘Empire’ was much more central in the making of Britain than it ever was in the Netherlands. As Richard Price emphasised, ‘the very idea of Britain was an imperial construction’.¹⁶ The extent to which this was the case in France and the Netherlands is debatable. Indeed, the ‘very idea of France’ was determined by its imperial character too, but the word *empire* had different meanings from those in Great Britain, its most literal connotation being the First and Second Napoleonic empires (1804–1815 and 1852–1870), and indicating both the French empire in Europe as well as its overseas territories.

The words empire and imperialism, as they have been used in the English language, have determined historical horizons and invited looking for ‘empire’ in history. This is not a mere play of words: the research agendas are firmly rooted in the daily practice of operating the ‘empire’ and reflect the spatial relationships, the extension of networks, the scale of operation, the number and variety of people involved and the diversity of colonial experiences. Whereas British historians can argue that Britain and its empire were ‘mutually constituted’, in the Netherlands the role of ‘empire’ was more modest.¹⁷ Of course, the early Dutch ventures overseas since the late-sixteenth century were partly motivated by the Netherlands’ emergence as an independent state, fusing national liberation and overseas conquest, but the *raison d’être* of the Netherlands was not grounded in any imperial motivation. The Netherlands themselves were never perceived as an empire and Dutch colonialism retained a strong business-oriented and technocratic bent.

Secondly, size is a crucial element in the analysis. In comparison to the sheer expanse of the British imperial effort, the Dutch situation holds a modest position. Whereas ‘the sun never set’ on the British world, the Dutch Empire in the nineteenth century consisted of the Netherlands Indies and a few small colonies in the Caribbean and until 1873 in West Africa. This had consequences for the nature of the Dutch imperial networks, the construction of Dutch imperial identities and the impact of the colonies on Dutch society. ‘Imperialism’ would seem to be a too grandiose term for what

16 Richard Price, ‘One Big Thing: Britain, its Empire, and their Imperial Culture’, *Journal of British Studies* 45:3 (July 2006) 602–627, especially 602.

17 *Ibid.*, 603.

happened in the late colonial period. In the Netherlands only an unstable consensus exists about whether or not the country had experienced a phase of imperialism – after all, when the great European powers embarked on their last and most massive stage of conquest in the late-nineteenth century, the Netherlands tightened its overseas commitments by relinquishing its African possessions and concentrated on the colonies in Southeast Asia.¹⁸

There however, both in military aggression and administrative and cultural interference, Dutch colonialism achieved new levels of ambition and intensity that can be characterised as imperialist. Indeed, the Netherlands shared similar perceptions of civilising superiority with the bigger imperial powers. However, the word imperialism never struck root; Dutch usage employs the word colonialism, or often just ‘the Indies’. The Netherlands Indies became the dominant point of reference for administrators, entrepreneurs, engineers and adventurers. This had important implications for how the empire was experienced.

Thirdly, the nature of Dutch imperialism was different from that of Britain or France. No Dutch colony, possibly other than southern Africa in the late VOC period, developed into a settler colony. As a result, Dutch colonialism has always been dominated by business interests, whether by monopolising trading companies, absentee plantation entrepreneurs, government exploitation or conglomerates of protected private enterprises. The nexus between business and expansion has been crucial in the Dutch case. As a result, Dutch colonialism was less about ‘empire’ than about ‘opportunity’. On top of that was the late colonial concern for development, which gave Dutch colonialism a strong technocratic character.¹⁹ In contrast to Britain, imperial ceremonies were largely absent, and most of the monumental references to the Indies are found in the ornamentation of business offices.²⁰

18 Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism: Colonies and Foreign Policy, 1870-1902* (New York 1991) (originally published in Dutch in 1985); H.L. Wesseling, ‘Bestond er een Nederlands imperialisme?’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 99:2 (1986) 214-225; Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, ‘Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25:1 (1994) 91-111; see also Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, ‘Drie omwentelingen in de historiografie van het imperialisme. Engeland en Nederland’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 107:4 (1994) 559-585.

19 J.A.A. van Doorn, *De laatste eeuw van Indië. Ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project* (Amsterdam 1994); Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton, Oxford 2002).

20 Ype Koopmans, ‘Koloniale expansie en de Nederlandse monumentale sculptuur’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:3 (1992) 383-406, 393; Ewald Vanvugt, *De maagd en de soldaat. Koloniale monumenten in Amsterdam en elders* (Amsterdam 1998).

A last issue concerns the different manner and intensity with which the colonial past has been remembered and invoked. Imperial imaginations it seems have remained much more alive in Britain than in either France or the Netherlands, which accounts for the spasmodic appearances of colonial issues in the public debate.²¹ One has a strong impression that in Britain, words such as ‘silence’, ‘amnesia’ and ‘trauma’ figure much less than in France or the Netherlands.

Webs

Given the different character of imperial imaginations in the European countries, how can the New Imperial History be useful to Dutch historical practice? One of the key approaches of the New Imperial History is the application of new spatial concepts of the interrelationship of the different parts of the empire.²² Traditionally, the imperial world has been conceived in terms of a clear centre – the metropolis – and periphery – the various colonies. New Imperial Historians have argued that this is a misrepresentation. They conceptualise the British Empire as a relevant and useful analytical space in which multiple centres emerged and a multitude of networks existed. Central to the study of the webbedness of empire is the contention that the British Empire provided a structure for the development of these networks and circuits, which did not necessarily centre on the metropolitan society or capital. The background of the idea of a heavily networked imperial orbit is the concept of a ‘British world’, which, as Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich write, is ‘a phenomenon of mass migration from the British Isles’.²³ It was a world shaped by migration, primarily from Britain to the colonies, but increasingly also within this world and back to the metropolis.

Is there a useful manner to project the concepts and ideas from the British world on the Dutch situation? Can we speak of a Dutch imperial orbit, a Dutch world, and how ‘webbed’ was this Dutch colonial world? Superficially, one is inclined to think that the movements within the Dutch empire have been fairly well charted. Much has been made for instance, of the trading networks of early modern Dutch colonialism, in particular the Dutch United East India Company (voc).²⁴ However, Dutch historians of early modern

21 See e.g. Marie-Claude Smouts, ‘La question de la mémoire postcoloniale’, *Transcontinentales* 6:1 (2008) 91-94; Vaïsse and Tombs, *L’Histoire coloniale en débat*.

22 See above all Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London, New York 2001); idem, ‘Imperial Circuits’.

23 Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, ‘Mapping the British World’, in: idem (ed.), *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London, Portland 2003) 1-15, especially 3.

24 Els M. Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden 2010) (originally published in Dutch in 2000).

colonialism have been very good at commercial and local histories, but they have been less concerned with the connectedness of the imperial parts. The concept of a 'voc world', although implicit in many studies on early modern Dutch ventures in Asia, has received little attention and even less discussion.²⁵

Recently, some glimpses of alternative approaches have been offered. In several important ways the VOC networks operated, not only between the Netherlands and specific colonial settlements, but also between different parts of the empire. The social webs of the VOC Empire, in which locally-born women, often of mixed Asian-European descent, has already been identified by Jean Gelman Taylor's imaginative description of marriage politics in early modern Batavia.²⁶ Ulbe Bosma and I have taken this a bit further by offering an analysis of migration circuits between Asia and the Netherlands and between VOC posts.²⁷ We demonstrated that there was an intensive movement through the VOC seaborne empire not merely of Dutchmen but also Eurasians, people of Asian birth. Sons of officials went at a young age to Europe for their upbringing and returned to Asia and, with the help of new patrons from among the regents and high Company administrators in the Netherlands, managed to make a career in Asia.

The webbed character of the VOC world deserves further enquiry. This world should not be conceived as a firmly limited space of interaction or as exclusively 'Dutch'. Both the linkages between various VOC settlements as well as those to the worlds beyond should be taken into account, as the VOC created patterns of transport and safe spaces that facilitated the exchange of knowledge, goods and people. This would widen our understanding of the workings of the Dutch trade empire and its informal and even illegal corollary networks. There is some fascinating research on Portuguese and British (sub-) colonial diasporas, but historiography on the Dutch spread remains strongly Company-centred.²⁸ All kinds of persons and groups participated in or made use of the VOC world, forming their own webs. One example are knowledge networks, which have become a topic of research only fairly recently.²⁹ Another strong case are the networks of exiles as described by Kerry Ward in her aptly titled *Networks of Empire*, in which she analyses the connections between the Indonesian archipelago and the Cape of Good Hope in the eighteenth century

25 The term was used most prominently in Nigel Worden (ed.), *Contingent Lives: Social Identity and Material Culture in the VOC World* (Rondebosch 2007).

26 Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison 1983).

27 Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being 'Dutch' in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500-1920* (Singapore, Athens 2008).

28 On the Portuguese, the 'classic' text is George Winius, 'The "Shadow Empire" of Goa in the Bay of Bengal', *Itinerario* 7:2 (1983) 83-101.

29 Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin (eds.), *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden, Boston 2010).

as constituted by troops of exiles and convicts shipped off from Batavia to Southern Africa and entertaining their own networks of information and esteem.³⁰ Extensive networks existed of slaves, convicts and Asian regiments of the *voc*, which have been only partly charted and analysed.³¹

Moving to the Western hemisphere, a ‘*wic* world’ would not make a viable analytic category. The ‘Dutch Atlantic’ is of an entirely different sort than a ‘British Atlantic’ – or a ‘*voc* world’, for that matter. Pieter Emmer and Wim Klooster, two prominent historians of Dutch colonialism in the Atlantic, once argued that no ‘Dutch Atlantic’ existed.³² More recently however, historians have advocated the existence of a Dutch Atlantic network, while acknowledging that the Atlantic was never ‘Dutch’ to the extent it was ‘British’.³³ As Karwan Fatah-Black shows in this volume, networks often transcended national-imperial channels and extended over wider Atlantic areas. This was not a typical phenomenon for the Dutch colonies, but both the international origin of its colonial communities and the small size of its possessions seem to have made Dutch colonial constituencies more pluriform than others. Just as was the case in the Indian Ocean, colonialism bred various groups that moved across colonial boundaries when hardship or promise so dictated.

The Dutch colonial world transmogrified after the collapse of the *voc* and *wic* and the contraction of the Dutch empire around 1800. Between 1795 and 1826 most possessions outside the Indonesian archipelago were lost or handed over to the British. The contraction of the Dutch colonies severely curtailed the spatial reach of the networks induced or dominated by the Dutch colonial enterprise. In Asia the Netherlands Indies became the sole destination of colonial administrators, soldiers and merchants. For most of the nineteenth

30 Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge 2009).

31 Markus Vink, ‘“The World’s Oldest Trade”: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century’, *Journal of World History* 14:2 (2003) 131-177; Rik van Welie, ‘Patterns of Slave Trading and Slavery in the Dutch Colonial World, 1596-1863’, in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Dutch Colonialism, Migration and Cultural Heritage* (Leiden 2008) 155-259; Remco Raben, ‘Cities and the Slave Trade in Early-Modern Southeast Asia’, in: Peter Boomgaard, Dick Kooiman and Henk Schulte Nordholt (eds.), *Linking Destinies: Trade, Towns and Kin in Asian Histories* (Leiden 2008)

119-140. On Asian regiments: Remco Raben, ‘Het Aziatisch legioen. Huurlingen, bondgenoten en reservisten in het geweer voor de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie’, in: Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler (eds.), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie* (Leiden 2002) 181-207.

32 Pieter C. Emmer and Wim Klooster, ‘The Dutch Atlantic, 1600-1800: Expansion without Empire’, *Itinerario* 23:2 (1999) 48-69, especially 48-49.

33 A current research programme on ‘Dutch Atlantic Connections’ produces new perspectives on the flow of people and goods in the Atlantic. See Gert Oostindie and Jessica Vance Roitman, ‘Repositioning the Dutch in the Atlantic, 1680-1800’, *Itinerario* 36:2 (2012) 129-160.



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Esaias Boursse, Connecting networks: a Dutch
company and a (probable) South Asian slave woman
in Ceylon, c. 1660s.
Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

century however, the number of migrants remained at a relatively low level. Only after 1870 did more people travel to (and increasingly also from) the colonies, which changed the character of colonial societies but also enhanced the imperial awareness in the Netherlands and in the colonies. Missionaries, humanitarians, scientists and housewives added to the numbers of soldiers, administrators and entrepreneurs who traditionally formed the ranks of colonial migrants.

For the nineteenth and twentieth century we are even less well off in terms of network analyses than for the previous centuries. There is some important literature on migration movements between the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies, but little attention has been given to the nature and mechanics of specific networks.³⁴ Again, it is not only the formal colonial framework that determined the networks. One case in point is the British businesses that operated on Java since the early-nineteenth century and fostered links with British India and London.³⁵ Another hugely important migration pattern developed between parts of Asia and Dutch colonies in the form of about 74,000 indentured labourers from Java, India and China who were transported to labour-intensive plantation areas in Sumatra and Suriname.³⁶

Extremely little has been done on religious organisations, which became important stakeholders in Dutch colonialism during the nineteenth century. Knowledge networks too, offer a good case for network analysis. In their contributions to this volume, Fenneke Sysling and Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff illustrate the complexities of two types of knowledge networks – those of archaeologists and ethnologists. They show how the colonies were an important field of action for Dutch (and other Western) scholars, impacting heavily on Dutch academic traditions, and connecting in various ways to empire and nation building efforts. There was an intensive exchange of knowledge, scholars and objects between the colonies and the Netherlands, often spilling over to other countries and imperial domains.

34 Ulbe Bosma, *Indiëgangsters. Verhalen van Nederlanders die naar Indië trokken* (Amsterdam 2010); see also his 'Sailing through Suez from the South: The Emergence of an Indies-Dutch Migration Circuit 1815-1940', *International Migration Review* 41:2 (2007) 511-536. For soldiers, see Martin Bossenbroek, *Volk voor Indië. De werving van Europese militairen voor de Nederlandse koloniale dienst, 1814-1909* (Amsterdam 1992); Ulbe Bosma, 'European Colonial Soldiers in the

Nineteenth Century: Their Role in White Global Migration and Patterns of Colonial Settlement', *Journal of Global History* 4 (2009) 317-336.

35 See e.g. E.M.C. van Enk, *Britse kooplieden en de cultures op Java. Harvey Thomson (1790-1837) en zijn financiers* (PhD thesis; Amsterdam 1999).

36 For an overview, see Thio Termorshuizen, 'Indentured Labour in the Dutch Colonial Empire 1800-1940', in: *Oostindie, Dutch Colonialism*, 261-314.

Interesting in the Dutch case are the continuing ties between former colonies and the Netherlands – demonstrating that the early modern Dutch expansion created networks not easily forgotten or easily rekindled. The most poignant example is of course the link between southern Africa, in particular the Boer communities, and the Netherlands.³⁷ Those bonds were animated by the burgeoning nationalisms among Boers and in the Netherlands in the 1880s. Inspired by the developments in British history, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer studied the Dutch-South African circuits during and after the second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).³⁸ He shows meticulously how the contraction of empire created post-imperial networks that are characteristic of the Dutch empire and how these old linkages were integrated in the twentieth-century discourse of a Dutch racial-cultural kinship (*stamverwantschap*). In his contribution to this volume, he shows how information networks served the interests of both Boers and Dutch.

In his contribution to this volume, Klaas Stutje draws attention to a last variety of networks. He charts the international contacts of the Indonesian students in the Netherlands, in particular their activities within the framework of the League Against Imperialism. The example shows how networks extended beyond national borders and reminds us of the words of Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler that ‘colonizing and colonized elites were produced through imperial interconnections’ – and, we should add, also beyond national-imperial spaces.³⁹

When comparing the webbedness of the European empires, it becomes clear that spaces were conceived and used differently in the various empires. This was determined by the size of the empires and the location and distribution of the colonies, with the nature of business and administration in the different parts of the empire and the sorts of people involved in the imperial project. The spatial layout of the Dutch colonial world of course, was fundamentally different from that of Great Britain. Whereas in Britain the sense of a global empire was prominent, for the Dutch it was not so much ‘empire’ but ‘the Indies’ that formed the dominant representation of the colonial world. In the Dutch case, there were only few examples of people who travelled intensively the different parts of the Dutch ‘empire’. In that sense, the Netherlands remained the nodal point in its empire, as apparently there were few cross-connections between its parts.

37 G.J. Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners. Adhesie en aversie* (Franeker 1986).

38 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, *War of Words: Dutch pro-Boer Propaganda and the South African War (1899-1902)* (Amsterdam 2012).

39 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, ‘Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda’, in: idem (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley 1997) 1-56, especially 28.

The networks of the British Empire were extremely important in imperialising the nation. It was the *nabobs* – colonial returnees – who ‘brought empire home’ and blurred the clear distinctions between empire and nation.⁴⁰ In recent years much effort has gone into showing how much the British Isles have been influenced by the empire. One of the publications that catapulted this issue into British academia was Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he tried to demonstrate how much metropolitan cultures owed to the existence of empire and how they supported its ambitions.⁴¹ Said and the debate he engendered directed the attention of scholars (pro and anti Said) to the issue of the imperial ingredients of and repercussions on British society. The arrival of large numbers of (postcolonial) migrants in Europe also made the issue of colonial attitudes and legacies urgent. One benchmark study was Catherine Hall’s *Civilising Subjects* (2002), in which she argued that by the mid-nineteenth century the British developed a civilisational and racial construction of themselves in opposition to the objects of their civilising efforts.⁴²

In the Netherlands the study of imperial cultures is still in its infancy. The hesitancy to address the nexus between national culture and imperialism finds a parallel in the mistrust and general neglect with which the work of Edward Said has been received by historians there, at least until fairly recently.⁴³ Whereas Said’s work has sparked an enormous debate in the Anglo-Saxon world, this has remained largely absent in the Netherlands.⁴⁴

To this can be added that ‘Dutchness’ has not been a topic of historical study until fairly recently.⁴⁵ Moreover, the study of nationalism in the Netherlands usually ignores the imperial factor. In comparison to Great Britain, the construction of Dutchness in the nineteenth century was indeed not strongly coloured by its overseas expansion. However, the total neglect of the imperial dimension seems unjustified, if only because colonial possessions were regularly invoked as an element of national greatness. In addition, colonialism involved a relatively large percentage of the Dutch population.

40 Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge 2010).

41 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London 1993).

42 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge 2002).

43 Peter van der Veer, ‘Edward Said in the Netherlands’, *ISIM Newsletter* 13 (December 2003) 33.

44 An exception was the shortlived debate on the orientalism of C. Snouck Hurgronje sparked by Peter van der Veer, *Modern oriëntalisme. Essays over westerse beschavingsdrang* (Amsterdam 1995); see also Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Tussen oriëntalisme en wetenschap. Het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde in historisch verband 1851-2001* (Leiden 2001) 11.

45 One of the first is Joep Leerssen, *De bronnen van het vaderland. Taal, literatuur en de afbakening van Nederland, 1806-1890* (Nijmegen 2006).



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Nicolaas Verkolje, Tabo Jansz and his employer
Adriaan van Bredehoff, 1727.
Collection Westfries Museum, Hoorn.

Ulbe Bosma recently calculated that between 1812 and 1922 about 1.5 per cent of the adult Dutch population emigrated to the East Indies.⁴⁶ As the Dutch colonies did not develop into settler colonies, many returned; these remigrants exerted an as yet undefined influence on Dutch society.

The presence of the colonies in Dutch society remains elusive and ambiguous. The political discourse in the Netherlands in the era of colonialism usually did not have a vehemently ‘imperial’ pitch. Many people with interests in the colonies complained about the marginality of colonial issues in politics and the indifference of the people. Colonial affairs were represented in politics by only a few specialists in parliament, and colonial issues and budgets were rarely a point of discussion.⁴⁷ Seldom did Dutch governments use the colonies to bolster national sentiment. Dutch nationalism, Henk te Velde argues, focused on the improvement of Dutch society itself. He attaches little importance to the events in the Indonesian archipelago, and remarks that ‘the expansion in the Indies did not appeal enough to the imagination’.⁴⁸

There are many indications that colonialism was only incidentally invoked before the second half of the nineteenth century. Until then, the Netherlands Indies, let alone Suriname and the Antilles, had been largely absent in the Dutch public debate.⁴⁹ As Paul van der Velde remarks, in the mid-nineteenth century ‘[T]he Netherlands Indies fell almost completely outside the eye-range of the Dutch citizens’.⁵⁰ This changed slowly from the mid-nineteenth century. An increasing number of journals and organisations distributed news and information about the colonies. But it would be a mistake to speak of a ‘popularization of the colonial discourse’.⁵¹ The famous liberal Dutch magazine *De Gids*, starting in 1837, became an important platform for discussions on colonial policy and events in the Indies. Until

46 Bosma, *Indiëgangers*, 30.

47 J.A.A. van Doorn, ‘De sociaal-democratie en het koloniale vraagstuk’, *Socialisme & democratie* 56:11 (1999) 483-492.

48 Henk te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbef. Liberalisme en nationalisme in Nederland, 1870-1918* (The Hague 1992) 269, 272-273.

49 For Britain and France, see: Andrew Thompson, *The Empire strikes Back: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow 2005); Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire, ‘Avant propos: La constitution d’une culture coloniale en France’, in: idem (eds.), *Culture coloniale: La France conquise par son empire, 1871-1931* (Paris 2003) 5-39, especially 7-11. For

the Netherlands: Paul van der Velde, *A Lifelong Passion: P.J. Veth (1814-1895) and the Dutch East Indies* (Leiden 2006) (original Dutch version Amsterdam 2000); see also his ‘De projectie van een Groter Nederland. P.J. Veth en de popularisering van Nederlands-Indië, 1848-1895’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:3 (1992) 367-382, especially 367.

50 Van der Velde, ‘De projectie van een Groter Nederland’, 367.

51 Leonard Blussé and Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, ‘Buitenste binnen. De buiten-Europese wereld in de Europese cultuur’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:3 (1992) 341-345, especially 343.

1900 about 7 per cent of the magazine was devoted to the Indies.⁵² With the advent of liberal policies, the ban on the press in the East Indies was slowly lifted and an independent press emerged, providing the basis of new networks of information and publication. This certainly helped to create a stronger awareness of the colonies in Europe but its impact has been little studied.⁵³

The emergence of a commercial printing industry advanced knowledge of the empire. As a result, since the mid-nineteenth century, a number of missionary and humanitarian organisations, scientific societies, journals and lobby groups that discussed colonial policies and aims emerged. Some of them, such as the Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap (Royal Dutch Geographical Society), served as a vehicle for the interests of explorers and entrepreneurs.⁵⁴ Others, such as the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië (Royal Institute of Linguistics, Geography and Anthropology of the Netherlands Indies)⁵⁵ and the Indisch Genootschap [Indies' Society] served as places where old colonial hands could meet and discuss academic and policy issues. Apart from those, especially since 1900, the most important sectors of the colonial economy combined in federations in order to influence official policies.⁵⁶ This all added up to the increasing proliferation of groups, societies and publications concerning the colonies.

Martin Bossenbroek was one of the first historians who explicitly addressed the question of the importance of colonialism to Dutch society in the pivotal period around 1900.⁵⁷ In those years, he argues, the colonial factor became instrumental in the cultural and political manifestations of nationalism. Several developments converged – a burgeoning nationalism, the rise of modern institutions, and a phase of vigorous Dutch conquest in the Indonesian archipelago, which engendered an upsurge in colonial interest. A crucial moment was the punitive expedition against the Balinese rulers of the small Indonesian island of Lombok in 1894. Its initial failure and eventual success sparked an unprecedented wave of enthusiasm for conquest in the

52 Remieg Aerts, *De letterheren. Liberale cultuur in de negentiende eeuw. Het tijdschrift De Gids* (Amsterdam 1997) 223-237; Marlou Bindels, 'Indië in De Gids 1837-1900', *Indische letteren* 12:1 (1997) 34-44.

53 But see Paulus Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Utrecht 2011).

54 P.G.E.I.J. van de Velde, 'The Royal Dutch Geographical Society and the Netherlands Indies: From Colonial Lobby to Colonial Hobby', in:

Morag Bell, Robin Butlin and Michael Heffernan (eds.), *Geography and Imperialism* (Manchester, New York 1995) 80-92.

55 Today Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV).

56 Arjen Taselaar, *De Nederlandse koloniale lobby. Ondernemers en de Indische politiek, 1914-1940* (Leiden 1998).

57 Martin Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst. Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam 1996).

Netherlands. The swell of nationalist sentiment, however, was above all a matter of court circles, the nobility and the army.⁵⁸ This was different with the South African Boers, who captured the imagination of the Dutch to an unprecedented degree.

Interest in colonial matters subsided after the end of the Aceh War and the second Anglo-Boer War. Indeed, the interest in the Boers decreased after their defeat and the forced inclusion of the Boer republics in the Union of South Africa – although it never totally disappeared and even saw a modest resurgence in the 1930s.⁵⁹ By contrast, reporting on the East Indies became daily business. Increasingly, the Dutch newspaper-reading public was being drawn into the imperial world. The publishing houses followed suit. Authors and publishers found a wonderful world of exoticism, adventure and national pride in the Dutch colonies, which became a standard topic, particularly of juvenile literature.⁶⁰

Many products of the printing presses were for consumption in the colonies, where they became the building blocks of ‘colonial Dutchness’. Although the Dutch colonial empire has never been conceived as and never became a single cultural community, the concept of an imperial, transnational identity is not entirely fictitious.⁶¹ Especially with the expansion of European-style education, new networks of understanding were instituted. Colonial subjects who were educated in Dutch schools acquired tastes, adopted lifestyles and developed expectations within the framework of the colonial state, and, if only towards the very end of the colonial period, within the Dutch empire at large.⁶² One pioneering work on ‘Dutchness’ in colonial context was Frances Gouda’s *Dutch Culture Overseas*. She argued that ‘Dutch colonialism in Indië [...] resulted from an eclectic fusion [...] of a wide range of European mentalities and unique local conditions’.⁶³ This colonial ‘Dutchness’ became one of the building blocks of a ‘cultural citizenship’, which affected primarily Europeans moving in the Dutch imperial space, but also, and increasingly attracted and included indigenous individuals.⁶⁴ The idea of an ‘imperial citizenship’ or at

58 Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbeseft*, 144.

59 B.J.H. de Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap. Nederland en de Afrikaners, 1902-1930* (Amsterdam 1993) 218.

60 Dorothée Buur, *Indische jeugdliteratuur. Geannoteerde bibliografie van jeugdboeken over Nederlands-Indië en Indonesië, 1825-1991* (Leiden 1992).

61 Gert Oostindie, *De parels en de kroon. Het koningshuis en de koloniën* (Amsterdam 2006) 47.

62 Henk Schulte Nordholt, ‘Modernity and Cultural Citizenship in the Netherlands Indies: An illustrated Hypothesis’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 42:3 (2011) 435-457.

63 Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Amsterdam 1995) 9.

64 Berteke Waaldijk and Susan Legêne, ‘Ethische politiek in Nederland. Cultureel burgerschap tussen overheersing, opvoeding en afscheid’, in: Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (eds.), *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief. Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië* (Leiden 2009) 187-216.

least a form of shared culture that involved the identification of parts of the colonised society with its coloniser is worth exploring.

A pertinent question is how – and how much – the colonial empire impacted on metropolitan society, outside the domain of politics and economy. In Britain, this has been topic of some debate among historians, triggered by Bernard Porter's *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (2004). Porter argued that the domestic impact of – and support for – the empire was less great than is often assumed, and was continuously changing.⁶⁵ This sparked fierce opposition from historians who were convinced of the existence of an 'imperial culture'.⁶⁶ The debate circles around the issue of what we mean by 'imperial culture'. In a precise and nuanced analysis of the question, Andrew Thompson concluded that empire 'was a significant factor in the lives of the British people. It was not, however, all pervasive'.⁶⁷

The Porter debate has no parallel in the Netherlands. In a recent survey Vincent Kuitenbrouwer analyses Dutch popular culture of imperialism and concludes that imperial culture in the Netherlands had been significant.⁶⁸ However, the precise impact the empire had on Dutch society and culture has not been studied in a systematic manner. The cultural activities of returnees (*Indischgasten*) and other colonial migrants during the colonial period are not well known.⁶⁹ On several occasions Susan Legêne has pointed to the various linkages between the overseas endeavours and its material residuals in the Netherlands, in particular museum collections.⁷⁰ A fascinating range of objects and manifestations of things colonial testify to a lively culture of collecting and displaying the colonies. The precise form and development of what Legêne calls a 'home-colonial culture' (*thuiskoloniale cultuur*) remain yet to be studied.

The main focus of most studies on imperial culture is on specific manifestations in the Netherlands, especially the arts, sciences, ethnographic collections, colonial exhibitions and literature, suggesting a widespread

65 Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford 2004).

66 John MacKenzie, review of Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, in *The Round Table* 94 no. 379 (2005) 280-283; Antoinette Burton, review of Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, in *Victorian Studies* 47:4 (2005) 626-628. See also Porter's reply in 'Further Thoughts on Imperial Absent-Mindedness', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31:1 (2008) 101-117.

67 Thompson, *The Empire strikes Back*, 241.

68 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'Songs of an Imperial Underdog: Imperialism and Popular Culture in the Netherlands, 1870-1960', in: MacKenzie, *European Empires and the People*, 90-123.

69 For a survey of migrants from the colonies to the Netherlands, see the meticulously researched *In het land van de overheerser* (2 volumes; Leiden 1986).

70 Legêne, *De bagage van Blomhoff en Van Breugel*.

consumption of colonial objects and images.⁷¹ However the cultural effects of colonialism are assumed by looking at the specific objects and representations; by studying them as a manifestation of imperial culture, the issue becomes self-explanatory. It remains unclear how and how deep these objects and images affected Dutch society. Some research has gone into the backgrounds and displays of rarities collections in the early modern period.⁷² For the late colonial period Caroline Drieënhuizen's recent work on the collections of several nineteenth and twentieth century elite families demonstrates how these elites moved across boundaries of nation and culture and exerted a strong influence on elite culture in the Netherlands and the Indies.⁷³ A similar manifestation in a much earlier period is the rarities collections, with their displays of curiosities from overseas worlds in the interiors of the Dutch upper-class.

As the examples of elite collections indicate, many forms of representation and imagery had a much more complicated and globalised genealogy than is sometimes assumed. This is not only true for colonial objects. A recent study of Africans in Dutch juvenile literature shows how the iconography of Africans in Dutch-language books (both original works and translations from the English) was influenced by American and British examples.⁷⁴ In that sense, it is better to speak of an internationalised discourse than of specific national cultures of empire.

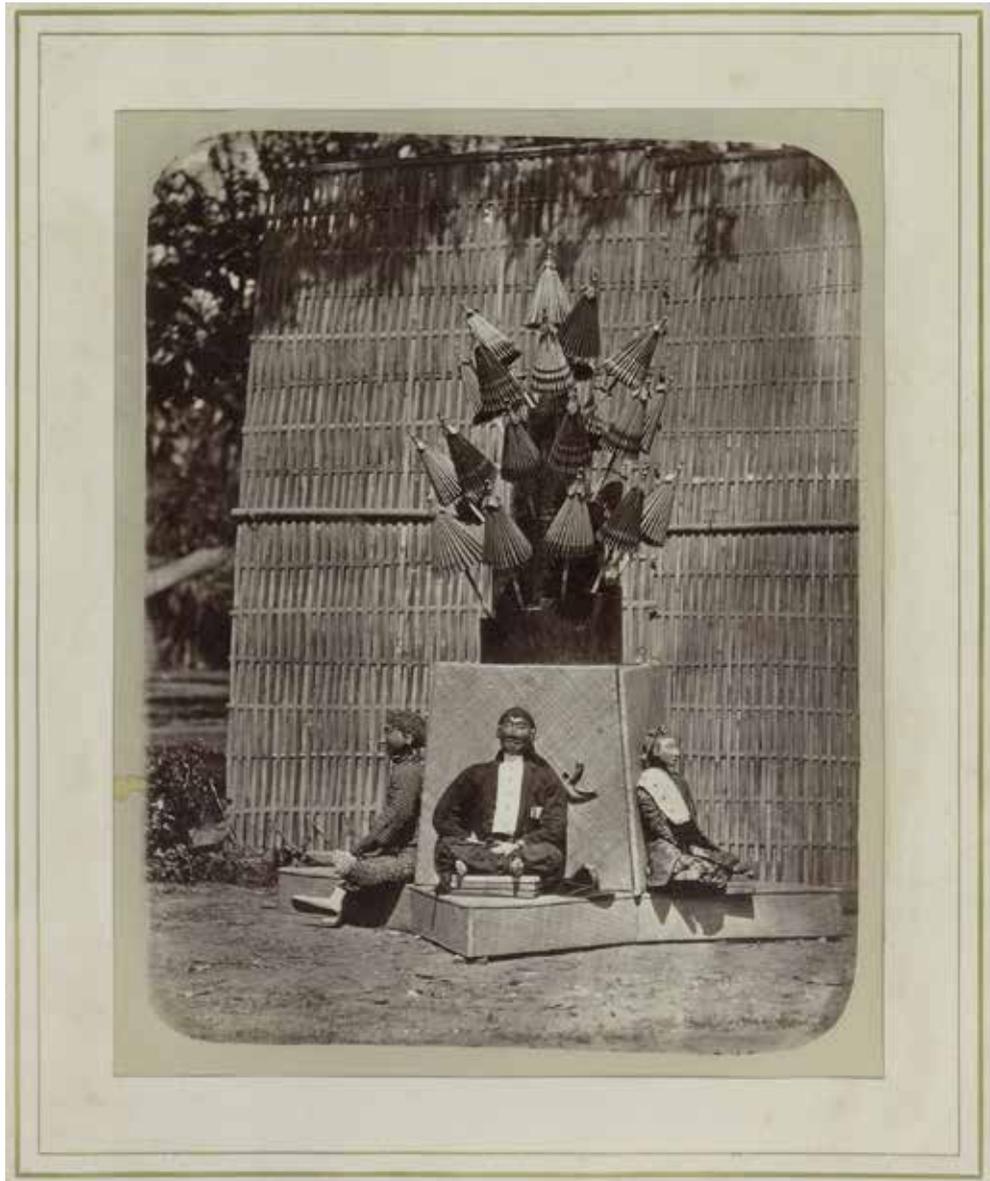
71 Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington, Indianapolis 1993) was one of the first to investigate the contribution of colonial imagery to Dutch culture. An early collection of articles on specific colonial manifestations in Dutch society is the special issue *Buitenste binnen. De buiten-Europese wereld in de Europese cultuur* of the Dutch historical journal *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:3 (1992). On colonial art, see e.g. Gerard Brom, *Java in onze kunst* (Rotterdam 1931); Marie-Odette Scalliet et al. (eds.), *Pictures from the Tropics: Paintings by Western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia* (Amsterdam 1999); Koopmans, 'Koloniale expansie', 383-406; Henk Mak van Dijk, *De oostenwind waait naar het westen. Indische componisten, Indische composities, 1898-1945* (Leiden 2007). For colonial exhibitions, see: Frances Gouda, 'Indies Pavilion in Flames:

The Representation of Dutch Colonialism at the International Colonial Exposition in Paris, 1931', in: idem, *Dutch Culture Overseas*, 194-236; Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore 2006).

72 Ellinoor Bergvelt and Renée Kistemaker (eds.), *De wereld binnen handbereik. Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735* (Zwolle 1992).

73 Caroline Drieënhuizen, *Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien. De Europese elite van Nederlands-Indië belicht door haar verzamelingen, 1811-1957* (PhD thesis University of Amsterdam 2012).

74 Jeroen Kapelle and Dirk J. Tang, Zwart. *Sambo, Tien kleine negertjes, Pijpje Drop, Pompernikkel en anderen. Het beeld van de zwarte mens in de Nederlandse illustratiekunst 1880-1980* (Harderwijk 2008) especially 33-64.



▲
Display of *payung* and several examples of 'native sculpture' at the *Internationale, Koloniale en Uitvoerhandel Tentoonstelling 1883* in Amsterdam. National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden, A125-1-10.

Probably the empire was experienced as an indispensable daily presence only sporadically, let alone considered an essential contribution to national culture. Most importantly, we should avoid seeing cultures of empire as unchanging and all-encompassing phenomena. As Andrew Thompson argued for Britain, imperial notions and sentiments depended on class and location.⁷⁵ As most of the Dutch migrants to the Indies came from urban backgrounds, the support and awareness of colonialism was the strongest there.⁷⁶ It could well be that colonies were a luxury asset, to be mobilised when needed for national varnish, or to be evoked as a décor for adventure stories. Moreover it is likely that to most Dutch people the impact of colonialism was fairly undefined. Apart from the obvious material traces in food and architecture, the most important effect was the fairly generalised – and markedly transnational – notion of Western superiority, the righteousness of Western dominance and a space of economic opportunity.

Moral spaces

One specific part of the changing cultural and social configuration in the Dutch empire concerns the development of humanitarian concerns in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The moral spaces developing in the interaction between metropolitan and colonial societies are an up-and-coming topic that has recently been explored, again by British historians.⁷⁷

Surprisingly, little work has been done on philanthropic and missionary societies in the Netherlands, which were at the forefront of the humanitarian awakening there.⁷⁸ In many ways, they have been instrumental in informing a wider public in the Netherlands of the situation in the colonies, and instilling them with an emotional involvement with the situation overseas.

Apart from missionary societies, several civil organisations emerged for which one obvious topic of concern and activism was that of slavery. The Netherlands had its anti-slavery movement but for many reasons it started

75 Thompson, *The Empire strikes Back*.

76 Bosma, *Indiëgangers*, 31-33.

77 David Lambert and Alan Lester, 'Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy', *Progress in Human Geography* 28:3 (2004) 320-341.

78 An exception is the short overview by Th. van den End, 'Transformatie door informatie? De bijdrage van de Nederlandse zending aan de opinievorming over het koloniale bestel', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:3 (1992) 429-445, and several shorter contributions to the *Documentatieblad voor de geschiedenis van de Nederlandse zending en overzeese kerken* (1994-2004).

much later than in the British world, and was much less radical than its British counterpart.⁷⁹ In *De Afschaffers* (The Abolitionists, 2007), Maartje Janse has studied the emergence of one-issue organisations in nineteenth-century Netherlands, including abolitionists.⁸⁰ They offer a clear example of the gradually increasing presence of the colonial subjects in the consciousness of certain groups of Dutch citizens, as manifested in the activities of several anti-slavery organizations emerging in the slipstream of the success of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). Humanitarian concerns were not limited to slaves however. The *Maatschappij tot Nut van den Javaan* [Society for the Well-Being of the Javanese] was inaugurated in 1866 in reaction to news about the effects of the Cultivation System on the people of Java, and the publication of Multatuli's famous novel *Max Havelaar* on the extortion of Javanese commoners.⁸¹ The influence of missionary and secular societies in the widening of Dutch consciousness of the colonial world and its peoples is a promising topic that can yield important information on the dynamics of empire.

The growing – but far from universal – engagement with the colonial endeavour was helped by an increasingly active publishing industry. Since the late nineteenth century news from the colonies entered the Netherlands in far greater quantities than before, and vice versa. The role of intensifying communication and burgeoning media was crucial in the dissemination of colonial propaganda and the information about lobby groups and humanitarian societies.⁸² Paul Bijl has recently shown how the visual reporting of the atrocities during the last phase of the Aceh War (1873-1908) had incited diverging reactions, from national pride to humanitarian indignation.⁸³ Coming in a time of burgeoning nationalist feelings and fed by the often brutal overseas events in the East Indies and South Africa, colonial awareness became tied up with ethical debates on imperial violence and humanitarian responsibility.

79 Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'De Nederlandse afschaffing van de slavernij in vergelijkend perspectief', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 93:1 (1978) 69-101; Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (Leiden 1995); Angelie Sens, 'Mensaap, heiden, slaaf'. *Nederlandse visies op de wereld rond 1800* (The Hague 2001) 97-128.

80 Maartje Janse, *De Afschaffers. Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland 1840-1880* (Amsterdam 2007); see also Maartje Janse's contribution to this issue.

81 Janse, *De Afschaffers*, chapter 4; more extensively in idem, *De geschiedenis van de 'Maatschappij tot Nut van den Javaan' 1866-1877. 'Waarheid voor Nederland, regtvaardigheid voor Java'* (Utrecht 1999).

82 For the British Empire, the importance of the expanding press is demonstrated by S.J. Potter, 'Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire', *Journal of British Studies* 46 (2007) 621-646.

83 Bijl, *Emerging Memory*.

When the Netherlands Indies government embarked on a final round of conquest in order to subdue the remaining independent or recalcitrant polities in the Indonesian archipelago, it simultaneously initiated a new line of welfare and developmental policies usually grouped under the heading Ethical Policy. Elsbeth Locher-Scholten has demonstrated the pluriformity of this term, and the apparent tension between its expansionist and developmentalist dimensions.⁸⁴ Both expansion and interventionism are part of the intensifying engagement with the colony.⁸⁵

Strangely, little attention has been bestowed upon the linkages between the expanding social responsibilities of the government in the Netherlands proper and the emergence of the Ethical Policy in the Netherlands Indies. Usually, the birth of the Ethical Policy is dated around 1900. This view offers a neat jumping off point, but the true dynamics of the increasing state responsibility in the Indies is obscured. Social and humanitarian concerns predated the birth of the Ethical Policy. Both within government bodies and colonial societies in the Netherlands we see a growing concern with social issues within the colony.⁸⁶ Of old, missionary societies had been concerned about the fate of the poorer classes in the colonies. In the course of the nineteenth century, assisted by the expanding printed press, their concerns became increasingly shared by a wider public. This was evident by the rising, if still modest, number of people involved in the missionary societies, but also by the emergence of secular societies.

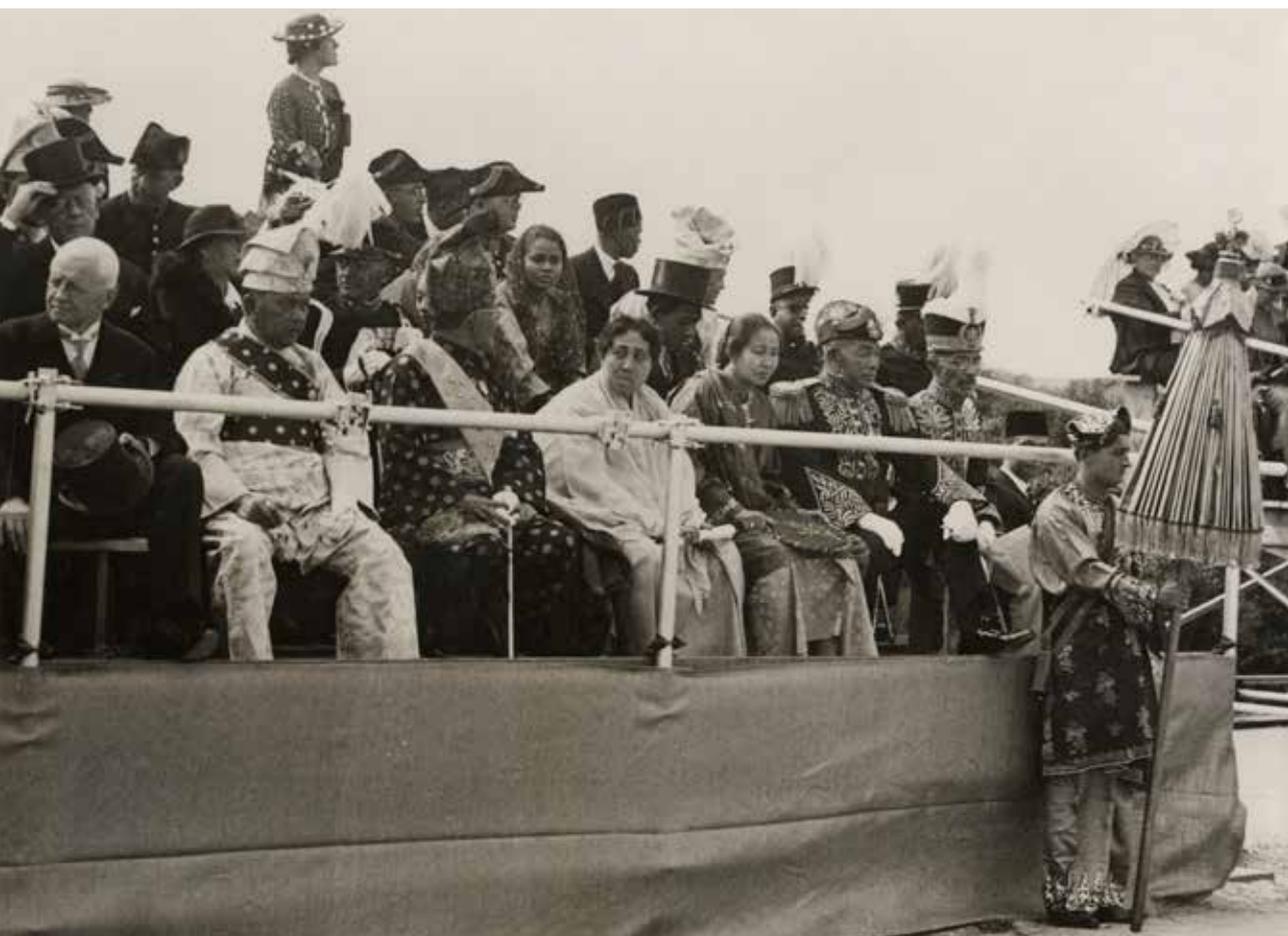
The changing moral imagination in the late nineteenth century did not concern only the urban poor in the Netherlands but had a counterpart in the colonies, which became evident in the emerging investigation of policies. On the other hand, there might have been a correlation between events in the colonies and the burgeoning of humanitarian institutions. In several instances disasters in the colonies appealed to the Dutch conscience. Disaster relief funds and committees were able to mobilise the Dutch citizenry in offering substantial amounts of money to rescue the colonised peoples plagued by floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and famines. Their contribution to the Dutch culture of humanitarianism has yet to be investigated.⁸⁷

84 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten. Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel 1877-1942* (Utrecht 1981).

85 Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben, 'Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië', in: idem (eds.), *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief. Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië* (Leiden 2009) 7-24.

86 Rutger Bregman, 'De last van een slecht geweten. Drijfveren achter een ethische koloniale politiek', *Geschiedenis Magazine* 46:7 (October 2011) 45-49.

87 Alicia Schrikker, 'Natural Disasters in the Dutch East Indies in the 19th Century' (Unpublished paper, conference 'A New Dutch Imperial History: Connecting Dutch and Overseas Pasts', The Hague, 1 October 2010).



▲ Indonesian princes watch the pageant on the occasion of Queen Wilhelmina's 40th jubilee on the Van Alkemadeaan in The Hague, 29 August 1938.
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Conclusion

In Dutch historiography the stories of colonialism and those of the metropolitan country have remained detached from each other. This can be partly explained by the format and layout of the Dutch colonial empire, the specific character of Dutch colonial culture and the Dutch historiographical traditions, but the idiosyncrasies of Dutch colonialism and colonial history do not impede new perspectives on the subject. The New Imperial History, for all its British singularity, offers new conceptual openings for the Dutch historical field.

A first objective would be to achieve a better integration of metropolitan and colonial histories. This can be done by a rigorous analysis of colonial cultures within the Netherlands. In order to do so, historians have to move away from the specific subcultures of colonialism in the Netherlands and concentrate on the effects on society at large. Elements of class and regional differences would have to be part of such analysis.

Secondly, an attempt to conceptualise the Dutch imperial spaces around the globe and to examine specific networks across (and transgressing) the Dutch imperial world would enhance our understanding of what empire was about. Many networks operated outside the official colonial domain, such as those of missionary and regular ecclesiastical organisations, which are very little studied. Likewise, a study of business and knowledge networks would provide us with a stronger idea of the non-official webs of important interest groups in the empire. Imperial spaces can also be studied through the emergence of press agencies and information networks, which became increasingly important in shaping international politics and imperial identities.

A third topic that would yield promising results, is the influence of humanitarian and other organisations dealing with colonial issues such as slavery, poverty, diseases and disasters. The almost contemporaneous emergence of ideologies of development such as the Ethical Policy in most European countries of colonising powers, point at a certain logic that is strongly connected with the development of democratic ideals and citizens' action.⁸⁸ These were not just a side effect of a rising civil society in the metropolitan country; they appear to have added strongly to the emergence of humanitarian politics in the Netherlands and in the colonies.

One last word of caution is required. The ambition to bring metropolis and colonies within one analytical framework has its limits and risks. One of the pillars of the New Imperial Historians is to allot a greater agency to

88 Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford 1997).

non-European peoples. After all, much inspiration comes from those who argue for a bigger role of the 'subaltern', as well as those who question the imperialist foundations of historical knowledge altogether.⁸⁹ In practice however, the main concerns of New Imperial Historians in Great Britain have been the character of the British nation and the linkages throughout the British Empire. It is one thing to question the predominantly national framework of much history writing, but it is another to replace it with an abstruse concept of imperial identity. There is a great risk in the New Imperial Histories of emphasising the imperial connections of a world that, obviously, had other dimensions too. 'Empire' is being made to do too much, at the risk of neglecting alternative dynamics. More specifically, the drawback of a strong focus on the networked character of empire and on imperial cultures in the metropolis is that it tends to obscure the experiences and visions of the non-European peoples in the empire. In reality of course, empire was experienced differently in the metropolis and in the colony. In that sense, the New Imperial History tends to become primarily a metropolitan or white men's history.⁹⁰ As several contributions to this volume illustrate, the Dutch colonial sphere triggered or facilitate the emergence of many networks that transgressed the boundaries of the Dutch framework. In this sense the Dutch case could offer a necessary correction to the predominantly 'national' imperial preoccupation of the New Imperial History.

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89 E.g. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton 1996) 5; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton 2000) 27.

90 For a similar criticism, see Price, 'One Big Thing', 626.