



Jennifer Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, xiv + 337 pp., ISBN 978 1 107 01580 7).

In her study on visions of empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands, associate professor of Purdue University (Indiana) Jennifer Foray starts from the observation that the Dutch under German rule had a complicated experience of empire. As a long-term imperial power, the Dutch had to reformulate their relationship with the colonies after the German and Japanese empires broke the bond between the Dutch government and the Dutch Indies. Although from early 1943 onwards, most Netherlanders expected that the Axis-powers would be defeated, it was not at all clear if or how the colonial empire had to be re-established. The debates in war-time Netherlands about this issue were often heated. But as Foray concludes in her final chapter, they were of little relevance for the development from Japanese occupation towards Indonesian independence, which occurred out of sight as well as out of reach of most Netherlanders.

The spatial as well as mental distance between the Netherlands and the Dutch Indies was not only difficult to bridge for the Netherlanders under the German occupations. This gap also characterized the post-war historiography of the war. Despite L. de Jong's attention to 'Nederlands-Indië' in the expansive part 11 (altogether 5 volumes, around 3000 pages) of his *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog 1939-1945* (1969-1988), the colonial aspects of the Netherlands in World War II generally were as far removed from most historians of the war as they were from the concerns of most Netherlanders during the war. Foray follows in the footsteps of recent practitioners of colonial and world history like Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, or in the Netherlands Susan Legêne, Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben, in her attempt to integrate the history of empire in a national historical narrative, which in the case of the Dutch historiography of the war is still largely dominated by the themes of occupation and resistance.

Foray's attempt is not altogether successful. She spends much attention to description of the Netherlands under occupation, the history of the various resistance movements and illegal publications, as well as that of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB), the Nederlandse Unie (NU), and the Dutch government in exile in London, based on a careful reading of a limited selection of the secondary literature. Although this might be relevant for an international readership in order to get a grip on

the context of the debates Foray analyses, it contains little news for those familiar with Dutch historiography. Moreover, the timeframe of her analysis follows a rather worn-out habit to start the historical narrative on May 10, 1940, at the beginning of the German occupation. Despite digressions on the history of the colonial regime in Indonesia, and the pre-war debates on the future of the Dutch empire, this is a history that still very much follows the rhythm of Dutch occupation history. The sudden reversal of the declaration of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 is as big a surprise at the end of this book as it was for the contemporaries. Finally, the mental distance to the empire is clear from the fact that the debates Foray analyses consists of no more than a few snippets from the illegal press. Up to 1943, the Dutch Indies hardly ever figured in the illegal press. After the speech of Queen Wilhelmina of 7 December 1942, in which she appeared to envisage some sort of Dutch commonwealth along British lines, the future of the empire received a bit more attention. But it seems quite a stretch to argue, as Foray does in her introduction, that these debates had a 'profound' influence, or that the 'future of the Netherlands [...] was made to hinge on the projected status of the Dutch Indies' (7).

This is not to say that the debates analyzed in this book are irrelevant or uninteresting. Foray gives an intriguing insight in the debates within the NSB, which was deeply confused about its position between reverence for the Dutch colonial past and the German imperial project. She also demonstrates that the defense of Dutch values by the NU was accompanied by a glorification of colonial rule, epitomized by the publication of W.H. van Helsdingen's pamphlet *Daar werd wat groots verricht*. Most of Foray's attention is devoted to the debates in the clandestine press. The left wing, (*Waarheid, Parool, Vrij Nederland*) envisaged some kind of equal partnership along the lines that seem to have developed in the pre-war attempts to forge a new imperial relationship. While only the communists called for immediate independence, all leftist members of the resistance rejected the paternalist position of centrist and right-wing publications (*Je Maintiendrai, Trouw*), in which it was argued that the population of the Dutch Indies lacked the mental capacities for independence and still needed the guidance of a wise ruler. The conservatives of *Trouw* even rejected the idea of a commonwealth based on an equal partnership, arguing that the military re-conquest of the Dutch Indies had to be the first priority, as a necessary precondition for any step towards political reform.

Given these divergent perspectives, it is remarkable how a consensus emerged in the Spring of 1945 on the need to establish a Dutch military presence after the collapse of Japanese rule as a precondition for political reform. Yet the unity demonstrated by a joint declaration of April 1945 by resistance newspapers from all sides of the political spectrum turned out to be short-lived. When it turned out that the Indonesians had altogether different ideas about their future, the previous disagreement returned with a vengeance in the post-war debates about how to respond to the Indonesian struggle for independence.

Even if this story is familiar to historians acquainted with the literature in Dutch, Foray gives a good overview of these issues for an international audience. It is a pity that the book contains a rather large number of typos in the Dutch titles of the bibliography and footnotes, demonstrating yet in another way that it remains hard to integrate Dutch history in a more general framework.

Ido de Haan, Utrecht University