



Matthijs Kuipers

A Metropolitan History of the Dutch Empire

Popular Imperialism in
The Netherlands, 1850-1940

Amsterdam
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A Metropolitan History of the Dutch Empire

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Cover illustration: Portrait of the *Indiërs Comité*. From left, first row: Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, E.F.E. Douwes Dekker, Soewardi Soerjaningrat; second row: Frans Berding, G.L. Topée, and J. Vermaesen

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Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 991 8

e-ISBN 978 90 4855 024 1 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789463729918

NUR 686

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List of Abbreviations

AS	<i>Ambonsch Studiefonds</i>
CCKP	<i>Centraal Comité van Kerkelijk en Particulier Initiatief</i> (Central Committee for Church and Private Initiatives)
EYD	<i>Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan</i> (Enhanced Spelling System)
HBS	<i>Hogere Burgerschool</i> (Higher Civic School)
IP	<i>Indische Partij</i> (Indies Party)
IV	<i>Indische Vereeniging</i> (Indies Association)
KITLV	<i>Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde</i> (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies)
KMA	<i>Koninklijke Militaire Academie</i> (Royal Military Academy)
KNIL	<i>Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger</i> (Dutch-Indisch colonial army)
KR	<i>Kolonialen Raad</i> (Colonial Council)
MULO	<i>Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs</i> (More Advanced Primary Education)
NPB	<i>Nederlandsche Padvinders Bond</i> (Dutch Scouting League)
NPO	<i>Nederlandsche Padvinders Organisatie</i> (Dutch Scouting Organization)
NPV	<i>Vereeniging De Nederlandsche Padvinders</i> (The Dutch Scouts Association)
NZG	<i>Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap</i> (Dutch Missionary Society)
NZV	<i>Nederlandse Zendingsvereniging</i> (Dutch Mission Association)
OSVIA	<i>Opleidingsschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren</i> (School for Native Civil Servants)
RR	<i>Regeeringsreglement</i> (Code of Governance)
SDAP	<i>Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij</i> (Social Democratic Workers' Party)
STOVIA	<i>School tot Opleiding van Inlandsche Artsen</i> (School for Native Doctors)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UZG	<i>Utrechtsche Zendingsvereniging</i> (Utrecht Missionary Association)
VOC	<i>Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie</i> (Dutch East India Company)
ZZG	<i>Zeister Zendelingsgenootschap</i> (Zeist Missionary Society)

On Names and Terminology

The use of names from colonial Indonesia is fraught with the implications of history. In this context language is by no means a neutral conveyer of information, although it never really can be, working within the current philosophical confines. During the colonial era there were two lingua francas in use in colonial Indonesia: Dutch and Malay. The use of the former was discouraged for non-Dutch; the latter functioned as shared tongue for the population at large, and would become Bahasa Indonesia, or Indonesian, after independence. In 1972 the old spelling was overhauled by the Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System (EYD), dropping Dutch phonetics in favour of non-colonial alternatives. Thus, *tj* became *c*, *dj* became *j*, *j* became *y*, and *oe* became *u*.

In this book I have opted not to follow rigid rules as to avoid the spelling quagmire. But any choice comes with caveats. The use of modern Indonesian spelling would acknowledge the sensibilities that come with decolonization, while the old spelling would favour historical accuracy. I tend to the latter option by not changing the spelling of names in quoted sources and, to avoid confusion, also adopt those spellings in my own writing surrounding source citations. Thus, here you will come across *Soewardi Soerjaningrat*, not *Suwardi Suryaningrat* (who, by the time of the spelling overhaul, had already adopted the name Ki Hadjar Dewantara, or Ki Hajar Dewantara in EYD). For geographical names I opt for modern spelling in most cases. You will find *Yogyakarta*, not *Jogjakarta*. There are exceptions. You will come across *Batavia*, not *Jakarta*, when the city's role as the centre of colonial administration is stressed. In a similar vein I use the name *Dutch East Indies*, either to describe the administrative unit of the colony, or when the use of *colonial Indonesia* (or variants thereof) would seem absurd, as there is no point in calling the colonial army (*Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger*, KNIL) the Dutch-Indonesian army instead.

Another major obstacle in writing in English about colonial history in Dutch society are the confusions that arise with literal translations. The adjective *Indisch* is the most prominent point in case. It pertains to *Indië*, the abbreviated name used for the Dutch East Indies. From a metropolitan point of view, it could refer to the entire colony, while in more specific contexts it could also signify the same as 'native' or 'indigenous' in English. The noun *Indië/Indies* shifts from singular to plural when translated from Dutch to English, and then shares its adjective (Indian) with other nouns (India, the West Indies). The confusion that ensues in English can be avoided in



Dutch, where *Indië* (the Indies) and *India* (India) are separate nouns with separate adjectives (*Indisch* and *Indiaas*, respectively). In order not to give in to historical accuracy – as the meaning of *Indisch* shifts subtly from context to context – I have chosen to not translate the adjective: you will find *Indisch*, in italics, throughout this work.

Introduction

The Still Waters of Empire Run Deep

Abstract

One of the main paradoxes of metropolitan imperial culture in the Netherlands is the widely held assumption that most people were indifferent to the colonies, while, simultaneously, the opposite image arises from the various engagements with empire throughout civil society. Previous studies have interpreted popular imperialism in the metropole as a phenomenon that came in waves, with heightened jingoist moods in one moment interspersed by indifference in another. Here, I argue that 'indifference' to the Dutch Empire should be studied in a new key: not as the absence of the enthusiasm for empire we can detect at some moments, but as a paradoxically active stance towards empire. To stay aloof from empire at certain moments was in line with an imperial ideology that saw the metropole as the centre that dictated the pace for colony and metropole alike.

Keywords: popular imperialism, historiography, decolonization

During the heyday of the modern Dutch Empire, colonial affairs could be vigorously debated in the Dutch press on one day, and be virtually forgotten the day after. It is this fundamental ambiguity in the position of the Dutch Empire in the life and society in the metropole that is the subject of this study. This ambiguity had much to do with the fact that the metropole was (and is) as often seen as part of the empire as it is not. Sometimes the connection between metropole and colony was all too obvious, for instance, when Dutch audiences read reports in their newspapers about the colonial wars that were waged in their name and when colonial military veterans were celebrated at home. At other times, a lack of enthusiasm 'from below' led various commentators to complain about the public's

Kuipers, Matthijs, *A Metropolitan History of the Dutch Empire. Popular Imperialism in The Netherlands, 1850-1940*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2022

DOI: 10.5117/9789463729918_INTRO



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'lukewarm indifference' to empire.¹ Yet, the ambiguity when it comes to the perceived role of empire in Dutch society is not just a story of presences and absences, but also one of contradictions within single moments. The commentators who complained about imperial indifference are a case in point: they sought attention for colonial affairs in newspapers and other periodicals, and clearly felt a natural entitlement to take up that space, while at the same time their laments about a lack of attention to colonial affairs was based on the premise that it was, to their regret, not a natural thing to devote that much attention to such matters.

One instance of this phenomenon of commentators using space to complain about the lack of space can be seen in the daily newspaper *Avondpost* from 12 October 1907. The headline its readers saw when they opened their newspapers read: 'Wake up, Dutch people, and engage yourself!' The words were part of an essay by W.A. van Oorschot, a frustrated former colonial army officer who published under the pseudonym *Wekker* ('Awakener' or 'Rouser'). In the essay, he proposed a different approach to the subjugation of Aceh, which was the aim of the colonial military operations carried out during the Aceh Wars that ran intermittently from 1873 to 1903. The way the Dutch attempted to subjugate Aceh was all wrong, he wrote, and these attempts were doomed to fail due to misguided ideas about colonial rule and armed conflict. Van Oorschot's claims were not uncommon for their time, although it should be added that he mixed professional insights with personal grudges. Of main interest here is not the substance of his claim, but his main underlying assumption: that the Dutch people were indifferent to their colonies. The question this book sets out to answer is: were they? Was 'indifference' indeed one of the main elements in Dutch metropolitan attitudes to the colonies in the days of modern imperialism?

Dutch Indifference

The question of public stances towards empire is pertinent because at first glance, historical examples abound that show the opposite of an indifferent metropolitan attitude to empire. The Aceh War received massive media attention in the metropole and aroused popular sentiments. If there ever was such a thing as Dutch jingoism, that pompous mix of patriotism, militarism and imperialism, it was to be found here – very much contrary

1 Martin Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst: Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1996), 229.

to the belief in popular indifference underpinning Van Oorschot's address to the readers of the *Avondpost*.² After this moment, Dutch jingoism waned. Vincent Kuitenbrouwer points out that this decline not only coincided with the completion of the conquest of Aceh and of other territories in colonial Indonesia, but also with the end of the Boer War (1899-1902), with the annexation of the Boer republics by the British, thus also ending what was arguably the episode of international politics that stirred the arousal of the Dutch public the most.³ A similar argument has been put forward before, by Martin Bossenbroek in his study of the ways in which the Dutch East Indies and South Africa – current or former Dutch colonies at that time – affected Dutch metropolitan culture around 1900. 'The hitherto forgotten and despised Afrikaners were suddenly discovered as kin-related [*stamverwanten*], when they faced the force of the almighty Albion in 1880,' he writes, 'and also the possessions in the *Indische* archipelago, not known or beloved outside a small circle, saw a steep gain in public interest.'⁴

The study by Bossenbroek – *Holland op zijn breedst* (Holland at large, 1996) – was among the first that dealt exclusively with Dutch metropolitan imperial culture, but while it contains many useful observations, the book also seems to miss some of the complexities of the Dutch indifference to empire. Bossenbroek sees public interest in the colonies appear even before 1870, in small groups or with individuals, such as military officers, scholars or missionaries, who saw the potential the colonies offered for their respective professions. With the start of the Aceh War colonial 'heroism and tragedy' were introduced into Dutch society, but still with limited resonance. Only later did civic interest at large grow. Bossenbroek marks 1883 as an important year, when not only the Krakatoa volcano erupted, but also when the International Colonial and Export Exhibition took place in Amsterdam. The combined effect of these events – and others, such as the emergence of *Indisch*-themed prose – was that colonial Indonesia transformed from an unknown site of potentialities into a known site, suited to the Dutch colonial project, in Dutch eyes. 'It turned out that heroism could be combined with charity', Bossenbroek writes, 'patriotism with indigenous culture, the motherland with exoticism, and high culture with popular culture'.⁵ But

2 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, 'Songs of an Imperial Underdog: Imperialism and Popular Culture in the Netherlands, 1870-1960', in *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester University Press, 2011), 90-123.

3 Kuitenbrouwer, 118.

4 Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 10.

5 Bossenbroek, 347.

this totality of imperial endeavours – military, scientific, missionary, trade – was overwhelming for the metropolitan public, and instead of resulting in a sustained commitment it resulted in a climax. After that point doubts returned, only exacerbated by the loss of the Boers in South Africa – ‘the end of a dream’, in Bossenbroek’s words.⁶

There are two main points in which my approach differs from *Holland op zijn breedst*. The first point concerns the ‘dream’ Bossenbroek refers to, which was surely a Dutch, colonial dream, but one rather curiously condoned by Bossenbroek, who writes that ‘without dreaming, nothing is ever achieved’.⁷ One could argue that the narrow focus on Dutch coloniality is because Dutch visions on empire are the proper subject of *Holland op zijn breedst*, but since the publication of his book several scholars have pointed out that it is impossible to reconstruct metropolitan or colonial visions in isolation from the anti-colonial forces working against them (in the case of ideas supportive of imperialism) or along them (in the case of criticism on empire).⁸ To focus on what constituted imperialism or an imperial culture based on the terms set by the very same imperialism, is to reproduce categories of empire, argues Susan Legêne, and amounts to what she calls ‘historiographical nationalism’.⁹ While this study limits itself to the Netherlands, and therefore seems susceptible to a critique of historiographical nationalism, the challenge here is to show a picture of the metropole that does not perpetuate categories of imperial thought. Who was perceived to belong in the metropole, and who was entitled to speak and be heard there, are matters where imperial thought was of great influence. Not to reproduce them means, at the very least, to make different choices on what voices to include or exclude. This study therefore includes a chapter on the Indonesian presence in the Netherlands, including dissenters like Soewardi Soerjaningrat, whose criticism of Dutch imperial politics made him an ‘unwanted participant’ in metropolitan debates.¹⁰ If we take the

6 Bossenbroek, 352.

7 Bossenbroek, 358.

8 Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso Books, 2019); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Remco Raben, ‘Epilogue. Colonial Distances: Dutch Intellectual Images of Global Trade and Conquest in the Colonial and Postcolonial Age’, in *The Dutch Empire between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000*, ed. René Koekoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard, and Arthur Weststeijn (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 205-232.

9 Susan Legêne, ‘The European Character of the Intellectual History of Dutch Empire’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 132, no. 2 (2017): 110-120.

10 Berteke Waaldijk and Susan Legêne, ‘Ethische politiek in Nederland. Cultureel burgerschap tussen overheersing, opvoeding en afscheid’, in *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief: Wegen naar het*

distinction between historical and analytical categories, as defined by Frederick Cooper in his *Colonialism in Question* (2004), the ‘metropole’ should be regarded as the former, and not as a category of analysis.¹¹

The second point concerns our notion of public interest in colonial affairs, which indeed came and went. The risk in Bossenbroek’s reading of the course of events, however, is that enthusiasm for and indifference to empire constitute a simple binary. He employs a metaphor that Vincent Kuitenbrouwer has called ‘rather peculiar’, namely that of the ‘triple jump’ (*hink-stap-sprong*).¹² The enthusiasm slowly gained momentum before the 1870s (the run), swayed part of the country, mostly elites in the 1870s (the hop), then blossomed in full swing until the 1890s (the step), had its climax in the enthusiastic support for the last stages of the expansion wars in Aceh and elsewhere around 1900 (the jump), only to disappear in a relatively short time (the landing). What this metaphor misses is the symbiotic relationship between enthusiasm for and indifference to empire. Colonial affairs could be vigorously debated on one day and be virtually forgotten the day after. When it comes to empire, jingoism and indifference are more closely related than one would expect. Unravelling this paradox in metropolitan attitudes regarding the colonies is the central aim of this book.

The key in unravelling ‘indifference’ is in Tara Zahra’s insight that ‘indifference is [...] fundamentally a negative and nationalist category. Indifference only existed as such in the eyes of the nationalist beholder.’¹³ While Zahra writes predominantly about indifference to the nation, the thought likewise applies to empire: imperial indifference exists primarily in the eyes of the imperial beholder. People are not so much indifferent to something, as they are simply allied to other things. And indeed, ‘indifference to empire’ was usually a charge coming from people invested in empire, and was levelled against those without such an investment. Our question then becomes: Which historical actors cared about the absence of imperial enthusiasm and why? It should be noted that Van Oorschot was not alone in his conviction that the public ought to be more interested in its empire, or that it was otherwise ‘asleep’. The ‘charge of indifference’, as we could call this regularly made accusation against shortcomings of

nieuwe Indië, 1890-1950, ed. Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2009), 187-216.

11 Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

12 Kuitenbrouwer, ‘Songs of an Imperial Underdog’, 91.

13 Tara Zahra, ‘Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis’, *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 105.

the public's attitude, echoed throughout the late nineteenth and entire twentieth century. The prime example of this is probably the influential essay 'Een Eereschuld' (1899), in which the liberal lawyer and member of parliament C.Th. van Deventer propagated an 'ethical' policy towards the Indies that had to abolish exploitative policies, and described the Dutch nation's conscience as not yet 'awakened'.¹⁴

A further paradox in this 'charge of indifference' is pointed out by Paul Bijl, in his book *Emerging Memory* (2015), where he writes that many such alarmists complained about the lack of an interest in empire, while the sheer quantity of alarmists suggested that the imperial consciousness they saw as lacking was very much alive. We should therefore not adopt their framework – which would make us ask the same irrelevant question: why were people not enthusiastic for empire? – but we should rather study the frame of reference that rendered the empire as something in constant need of propagating in the eyes of this heterogeneous group consisting of jingoist hardliners, humanitarian do-gooders and anti-colonial Indonesian nationalists, all of whom made the charge of indifference relentlessly.¹⁵

In this study I therefore suggest that we should not treat this perceived *indifference* as an anomaly to the idea of an all-permeating imperial culture. Instead, the *perception* of indifference could be seen as stemming from imperialist ideas. The most important imperial idea in this respect is the long-held notion that that metropole and colony were firmly separate entities, and that the movements of people, goods and ideas within empires are decidedly centrifugal, emanating from the centres and affecting only the peripheries. The construct of an ignorant, indifferent or otherwise not-knowing public fits this idea of the metropole as immune to outside influences.¹⁶ Not only registering indifference, as we have seen many contemporaries did, was an imperially minded thing to do, but the act of indifference to empire itself was, paradoxically, also imperially minded, as it bolstered the idea of metropole and colony as independent spheres.

Ultimately, this should bring us closer to an understanding of the ways in which Dutch imperial ideology formed the public debates and perceptions on empire. This can be seen in Van Oorschot's *Avondpost* address: his essay became a series, and that series became a book, entitled *Hoe beschaafd*

14 C.Th. van Deventer, 'Een Eereschuld', *De Gids* 63 (1899): 220.

15 Paul Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

16 Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 15.

Nederland in de Twintigste Eeuw Vrede en Orde Schept op Atjeh (How civilized Netherlands creates peace and order in Aceh in the twentieth century).¹⁷ In this conflict Dutch colonial troops had attempted (and repeatedly failed) to subjugate the westernmost part of Sumatra. It was an atrocious affair that claimed over 100,000 victims.¹⁸ While the military campaigns meant real war and bloodshed for the Acehnese, it was a ‘media war’ for the Dutch metropolitan public. Dutch and *Indisch*¹⁹ newspapers attentively covered the events and thus shaped the metropolitan perceptions of what was going on. Some of the atrocities committed by the Dutch-*Indisch* colonial army (KNIL) elicited outrage – mostly from the socialist faction in parliament – while others led to popular support and enthusiasm in response to victories of the colonial troops. Cast as part of the Dutch imperial project, the use of military force was referred to as ‘pacification actions’ in the press, rendering the brutal realities a necessity. What was at stake in Aceh, according to the metropolitan mind, was not just the outcome of a military confrontation, but the idea of the Dutch Empire itself.

Despite his criticism on Dutch colonial policy, Van Oorschot was not an anti-imperialist. He was clearly informed by the idea that there was something bigger at stake than just a military victory, but the focus of his argument was on military strategy nonetheless. He was particularly critical of the leadership of military commander Frits van Daalen, who was responsible for some of the Aceh War’s most well-known atrocities, most notably the mass murder on the villagers of Kuta Reh in southeast Aceh, in 1904, and the regular killings of prisoners of war during the Gaju expedition. Such unbridled violence, Van Oorschot asserted, would not bring about sustainable Dutch control of the region. But whereas he questioned the strategy to ‘pacify’ Aceh, the need for the subjugation was not questioned, let alone the central premises of Dutch imperialism.²⁰ In that sense Van Oorschot fits a recurring model of imperial criticism – sometimes mistakenly taken for anti-imperialism or anti-colonialism – that questions the means but not

17 The articles were subsequently published in one volume: Wekker, *Hoe beschaafd Nederland in de Twintigste Eeuw Vrede en Orde Schept op Atjeh* (’s-Gravenhage: Avondpostdrukkerij, 1907).

18 Remco Raben, ‘On Genocide and Mass Violence in Colonial Indonesia’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 3/4 (2012): 487.

19 I will use the denominator *Indisch* throughout this study in its untranslated form. For an explanation, see the section ‘On names and terminology’.

20 There are other interesting elements in the Wekker story, such as the role played by personal grudges held by Wekker (an Aceh veteran himself) against Van Daalen. For a thorough analysis of the contents of his writings in the context of Dutch imperialism, see: Paul Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 118-119.

the end, and thereby firmly stayed within the confines of (Dutch) imperial ideology. That is something he shared with most Dutch commentators on the colonies, and it even applies the most liberal proponents of an 'ethical policy' for the Indies, most of whom called for an end to the exploitation of the Dutch Empire's subjects, and instead appealed to the 'moral calling' of the Dutch in 'raising' the Indies. The calls for an 'ethical' colonial policy cut across all political affiliations and included liberals, socialists, and orthodox Protestants.²¹ To all the participants in metropolitan debates on the empire the same applied, namely, that the central premises of a shared imperial ideology were so hegemonic that they needed not be made explicit. From Queen Wilhelmina, who endorsed the 'ethical' agenda in her annual speech in 1900, to Van Oorschot, to most others: they were all fish swimming in imperial waters.

These 'imperial waters' are the subject of this study. The study of 'home imperialism(s)' or 'metropolitan colonial culture(s)', as this is often called, is about the often tacitly shared assumptions, mentalities and attitudes towards the colonies in European countries. Some were simultaneously nation states and imperial powers, others only the former, but in both cases such attitudes developed, making *home imperialism* a distinct and pervasive trans-European feature. While these attitudes were perhaps most visible within the ranks of political and academic elites, society at large was also caught in the same imperial web, hence the term *popular imperialism*. The central question is how this popular imperialism could function in the period from roughly 1850 to 1940. How could a culture of imperialism permeate all corners of society while contemporary commentators (and some present-day historians alike) assessed the net effect of empire on the metropole to be zero and decried a public indifferent to colonial affairs?

The Metropole in the Colonial World

A central premise of this book is that the colonial encounter was a two-way street: it affected all parties involved. While the word 'encounter' may suggest a symmetry in power relations that belies the coercion and violence that

21 The most important study into the colonial 'ethical policy' remains Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten: vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel 1877-1942* (Utrecht: HES, 1981); For a concise overview of 'ethical' thinking across the political landscape, see H.W. van der Doel, *Afscheid van Indië. De Val van Het Nederlandse Imperium in Azië* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2000), 19-56.

was central to the imperial project, the idea that colonial powers remained isolated nation states in Europe while engaging in imperial expansion is false. In the acclaimed introduction to their anthology *Tensions of Empire* (1997), Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler put it thus: 'Europe's colonies were never empty spaces to be made over in Europe's image or fashioned in its interest; nor, indeed, were European states self-contained entities that at one point projected themselves overseas.'²²

Similarly, in *Civilising Subjects* (2002), Catherine Hall writes of the idea that: 'Britain could be understood in itself, without reference to other histories: a legacy of the assumption that Britain provided the model for the modern world, the touchstone whereby all other national histories could be judged.'²³ What this suggests is that the histories of European colonial metropolises – not just that of Britain – need a makeover. They were not isolated nation states (the 'British Isles' in 'splendid isolation', or the Netherlands 'behind its dykes'), nor just the centres from which colonial policies emanated, but imperial spaces with all the complexity that entails. Yet this is exactly the picture that arises from many studies into history: colonial studies tend to ignore the metropole, and studies into the nation state tend to ignore the colonies. Both reinforce the false idea that colonialism was something that happened elsewhere. But while there is only a limited number of studies into Dutch home imperialism, this has been a vital field of research in Great Britain. While that discrepancy in itself could be a subject of study, the question I would like to ask here is: what cues we can take from British (and international) historiography?

John MacKenzie is the marquee pioneer in the study of imperial culture in the metropole with his *Propaganda and Empire* (1984). There was more to study in the metropole with regards to empire than just the 'official mind', as the arguably most influential scholars of British imperial history in the twentieth century, John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, dubbed the opinions and ways of civil servants, policymakers and politicians concerning empire. Imperial ideology was not only disseminated in official writings, but also through the imperial propaganda of many sorts to which the lower classes were increasingly exposed. In *Propaganda and Empire*, MacKenzie asserts that British domestic society was in fact steeped in imperialism, thus arguing against the idea that the effects or influences of empire were only 'centrifugal' in nature. Official propaganda was supported by 'education,

22 Stoler and Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony', 1.

23 Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Colony and Metropole in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 9.

juvenile literature, theatre and youth organizations'. The Queen, for example, was positioned as an 'imperial matriarch', and, together with this, official militarism became more respected and disseminated in public life, thereby paving the way for the concord of patriotism and imperialism.²⁴ Interestingly, MacKenzie identifies developments and differences over time – in short: from state-led jingoist propaganda before World War I, to a more broad, cultural effort to romanticize empire, for instance through advertisements, and to portray it as a site of adventure – but while the emphasis of the imperial ideology behind it changed over the years, its very presence was constant.²⁵

MacKenzie's work highlights a few challenges in studying popular imperial culture, and is thus relevant here, too, beyond his case study of Great Britain. First of all, his work and the debates revolving around it suggest that there is a fundamental problem of methodology. *Propaganda and Empire* was more about the dissemination of propaganda in society, and not directly about its reception, let alone about how imperial ideology was made 'from below'.²⁶ That is a way to circumvent the problem that the dissemination of certain points of view are easier to reconstruct than their cultural reception at large, even though, ultimately, it is the latter that he is after, as he writes that 'it is necessary to analyse the supply of materials relating to empire as well as its potential consumption'.²⁷ One could describe MacKenzie's argumentation as collecting an enormous amount of circumstantial evidence, as imperial themes popped up everywhere in popular culture, from theatre plays to the careers that ordinary people could envisage for themselves. 'It would seem unlikely', MacKenzie writes in his later work, 'that such major movements of people had no effects upon the home populations'.²⁸ This is the case MacKenzie makes: with so many references to empire in popular culture, it is simply unfathomable that the empire was not a regular part of everyday life. The circumstantial evidence is too abundant to ignore.

24 John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 2-9.

25 MacKenzie, 16, 255-257; Cf. John Darwin, 'Decolonization and the End of Empire', in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Empire, Vol. V: Historiography*, ed. Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 541-557.

26 MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 254.

27 John M. MacKenzie, ed., *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 58.

28 John M. MacKenzie, 'Passion or Indifference? Popular Imperialism in Britain: Continuities and Discontinuities over Two Centuries', in *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy*, ed. John M. MacKenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 62.

It is on this point exactly that MacKenzie drew criticism. His most notable criticaster was perhaps Bernard Porter, who, in his *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (2004), pointed out the following flaw in MacKenzie's logic:

The MacKenzie school tended to assume that [the propaganda] must have been overwhelming because there was so much of it; an alternative reading, however, might be that it could not have been all that persuasive, if the propagandists felt they needed to propagandize so hard.²⁹

The MacKenzie-Porter dispute essentially revolves around one more fundamental premise on which MacKenzie's argumentation rests, namely his claim that popular consent for empire was a prerequisite for 'the development, existence and promotion of imperial rule'. In contrast, Porter claims this could very well have been the case, and that MacKenzie was 'blowing up' the imperial details in 'the photograph' of domestic imperial culture.³⁰

The ensuing debate between Porter and MacKenzie resembled much of the semantic and interpretative game Porter accused his opponents of. Take for instance their exchange on the works of Charles Dickens. In Dickens's plots the empire is occasionally present, but it is seldom central to the plot. MacKenzie argues that the background presence of empire as 'the place where fortune is made' is extremely important: that emigration (and thereby the empire) can function so easily as a 'regenerative, morally improving experience' proves that empire was an 'everyday phenomenon'. In his work, MacKenzie concludes, Dickens expresses and confirms widely acknowledged imperial values.³¹ Porter sees the same imperial references as 'marginal', they should be seen as 'wings behind which the actors can appear and disappear' and are therefore a tool, nothing more.³² Porter applies the same kind of reasoning to other sources, too. When he tries to assess the 'amount of imperialism' in British middle-class schools, for instance, it comes down to counting the number of pages in schoolbooks where the empire was mentioned. The resulting low number is meant to support Porter's argument, but he also turns to a more qualitative reading of schoolbooks, which leads him to conclude that the empire was approached

29 Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 6.

30 Porter, 8-13.

31 John M. MacKenzie, "'Comfort' and Conviction: A Response to Bernard Porter', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36, no. 4 (2008): 659-668.

32 Bernard Porter, 'Popular Imperialism: Broadening the Context', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011): 833-845.

rather critically from liberal perspectives, and was seldom mentioned in connection with patriotic pride. Maps are interpreted by Porter in the same way as textbooks: the famous ‘red-bespattered’ maps – maps of the world almost entirely coloured to indicate the vast (nominal) territory of the British Empire – may have appeared as early as in the 1840s, he claims, but they were too expensive to hang on the walls of ordinary classrooms. This is the gist of most of Porter’s interpretations of empirical evidence, be they books, maps or otherwise: there were few traces of ‘empire’ in them, and if there were, they were not read extensively or disseminated widely.³³

Conquering the Metropolitan Mind

The problem with Bernard Porter’s critique on MacKenzie – and more generally, on the endeavour to study the ways in which empire affected the metropole – is that it has a limited understanding of what such influence would entail.³⁴ Porter’s approach is that of an accountant who assumes tangible traces of empire, while MacKenzie relies on a more postcolonial understanding of empire. There is of course some irony in portraying MacKenzie as a postcolonial scholar, as he offered a scathing critique on the scholar to whom much postcolonial work can be traced, namely Edward Said, that seemed to miss the point. MacKenzie, in *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (1995), argues that Said does not fully follow up to his statement that the East ‘has helped to define Europe’.³⁵ MacKenzie seems to miss oriental arts in their own right in Said’s *Orientalism*, and even though it is of course true that it can be a source of counter-Western discourse, as a critique of a book about Western conceptions it misses its target. More importantly, perhaps, is what shines through in MacKenzie’s argument, namely an ‘affection for an artistic heritage that he feels has been unfairly accused of complicity in imperialism’, in the words of Dane Kennedy, combined with an unwillingness to assess the arts as part of the wider ideological configuration they were part of.³⁶

33 Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 64-82.

34 Dane Kennedy, *The Imperial History Wars: Debating the British Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 45-46.

35 John M. MacKenzie, *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 10; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 1.

36 Dane Kennedy, ‘Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts by John M. MacKenzie’, *The International History Review* 18, no. 4 (1996): 912-914.

While MacKenzie's represents a strand of historiography that, ultimately, appears unwilling to fully draw from postcolonial approaches for our understanding of colonial history, he does offer an interesting starting point, and perhaps his views evolved over the years. In *European Empires and the People* (2011) he makes the following two references, leading up to a useful definition of 'popular imperialism'. The first reference is to the idea of 'colonization of consciousness', originally coined by Jean and John Comaroff, who used it in an African and missionary context, arguing that colonialism was more than trade at gunpoint or rule by coercion. It was predominantly a mental force, they stress, which planted the idea that imperialism amounted to the natural order of things in the minds of colonizer and colonized alike. In the work of the Comaroffs this pertains primarily to the situation in the colonies, but according to MacKenzie the same mental force was operative in metropolitan societies. There was, in other words, also a 'metropolitan mind' to conquer. The second reference MacKenzie makes is to D.A. Low and his concept of 'internalized imperialism', which Low defines as the 'ingrained assurance of the inherent right to rule others'.³⁷

These two references represent the binary of sender (propaganda) and receiver (public reception). The two definitions from the Comaroffs and from Low are subtly different and represent the two sides of this binary: the former (colonization of consciousness) invokes an image of top-down dissemination of imperial ideology, while the latter (internalized imperialism) refers to a state wherein the idea of empire is already successfully planted or internalized, suggesting a bottom-up version of imperial culture where all those who have internalized the idea of empire become agents of that empire in their own right. A related problem is that propaganda sources are more readily available to the historian, and in that way often result in neglect for the question of reception. As I will use the outlooks of the Comaroffs and Low here in combination, they make for a definition of *popular imperialism* that puts emphasis on the interaction between macro and micro levels of analysis. Imperial culture in the Dutch metropolitan society at the turn of the twentieth century, seen that way, is constituted by various, and sometimes conflicting, parts of society.

Most scholarly attention today goes to the cultural residue of empire in the present. The legacy of colonialism haunts present-day societies, as Gloria

37 MacKenzie, *European Empires and the People*, 1-18; Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); D.A. Low, *Fabrication of Empire: The British and the Uganda Kingdoms, 1890-1902* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Wekker argues in *White Innocence* (2016). An important premise of Wekker – drawing on Said – is that colonial attitudes have formed a cultural archive over 400 years of colonization. ‘I am oriented’, she writes, ‘toward the construction of the white self as superior and full of entitlement. I offer my reading of the consequences of slavery in the western part of the empire, Suriname and the Antilles, on white Dutch self-representation.’ Her portrayal and exploration of this ‘unacknowledged reservoir of [imperial] knowledge’ mostly focuses on public Dutch culture of the last two decades. The phenomena she describes are similar elsewhere in Europe, according to historian Elizabeth Buettner, who writes that the ‘decolonization of the mind’ is still far from complete across in most former imperial nations.³⁸ Historicizing the formation of the cultural archive that Wekker writes about is one of the challenges currently facing historians of (Dutch) imperialism. Indeed, domestic decolonization may be an incomplete process, but what about the domestic colonization that must have preceded it? How was this cultural archive shaped throughout centuries?³⁹

A number of authors have noted that Dutch imperial culture was remarkably different from British imperial culture. In a survey of the work on imperialism and popular culture in the Netherlands, historian Vincent Kuitenbrouwer characterizes Dutch imperial propaganda as ‘the songs of an imperial underdog’:

[N]ot much is known about how the public debate was structured during the colonial period. Certain topics, such as imperial imagery in cinema and advertisement, have received particularly little attention and research is needed to get an overview of the available sources. But there might also be a deeper issue at hand, which says something about the meaning of Dutch imperialism. Compared with the British Empire its so-called ‘cultural economy’ was rather small.⁴⁰

We know little of the way the public at large engaged with the empire, and this is not only due to a lack of research, but also due to the stealthy ways the Dutch Empire was ‘promoted’, which lacked the overly self-conscious style of British jingoism.⁴¹

38 Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 1-29; Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-20.

39 Remco Raben, ‘Schuld en onschuld in postkoloniaal Nederland’, *De Nederlandse Boekengids* 1, no. 5 (2016).

40 Kuitenbrouwer, ‘Songs of an Imperial Underdog’, 94.

41 Kuitenbrouwer, 94.

But how, then, did these songs of an imperial underdog sound? The main point on which Kuitenbrouwer sees consensus among historians is in the role imperialism played in nation-building. Maarten Kuitenbrouwer for instance pointed out that the conquests of peripheral territories in the Indies was a form of 'nationalist expansion' in a double sense: it was a geographical expansion of the Dutch colonial enterprise, and at the same time it was an expansion of a truly national political space, as the empire was one of the scarce terrains where the different socio-religious groups and their political representatives had few disagreements. This expansionist nationalism was thus complementary, or even supportive, to the domestic situation, as it did not challenge the ongoing struggle between emerging societal pillars (*verzuijing*).⁴² Thus seen, imperialism was one of the binding factors or sets of values in a nation divided into groups struggling for dominance, just like the civic virtue of *burgerlijkheid* was another of those factors, as historian Henk te Velde has argued.⁴³

Another point of consensus is that the metropolitan imagination was disjointed from 'colonialism on the ground'. Such 'skewed imaginaries', writes Remco Raben, 'are an essential feature of Western imperialism over the last centuries'.⁴⁴ That the perception of the colonies in the metropole has always been coloured more by imperial ideology than by actual colonial experience is best observed in the genre of the colonial exposition. These expositions 'mainly reflected prevailing views of Dutch identity and the Netherlands' place in the world and told viewers little about colonial relations', as Marieke Bloembergen puts it in *De Koloniale Vertoning* (2002), her book on Dutch contributions to colonial expositions around the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ According to Bloembergen, the expositions served to 'present a justification of Dutch colonialism and its expansionist policies', and she identifies three possible fields that were imaginable for the makers to depict: Dutch economic interests; civilization and development; and military triumphalism. Of these three, only

42 M. Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism: Colonies and Foreign Policy, 1870-1902* (New York: Berg, 1991), 27, 348-349.

43 Henk te Velde, 'How High Did the Dutch Fly? Remarks on Stereotypes of Burger Mentality', in *Images of the Nation: Different Meanings of Dutchness 1870-1940*, ed. Annemieke Galema, Barbara Henkes, and Henk te Velde (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993), 72-73.

44 Raben, 'Epilogue. Colonial Distances', 205.

45 Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: The Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 331; for the original published version of her thesis in Dutch, see: Marieke Bloembergen, *De koloniale vertoning: Nederland en Indië op de wereldtentoonstellingen (1880-1931)* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2002).

economic interests were always present in exhibitions throughout all the years of modern imperialism. Echoing Bossenbroek's findings on this point, she notes that military justifications of colonization were present in 1880 but they withered later, while the civilizing narrative only took the full spotlight in 1910, in the heydays of 'ethical' thinking.⁴⁶ She also points to the differences in representation before national and international audiences, remarking that military triumphalism was notably absent in international contexts, probably because the Netherlands did not want to provoke rival imperial powers, while the military narrative was seen as less problematic for a strictly national audience. To explain why the Dutch contributions to international expositions did not amount simply to 'complacent imperialism' she refers to the divided state of the political elite on the issue – there was no clear line in colonial politics, and hence no clear message to convey.

Bloembergen thus also raises the problem of *reception*, similar to the one we saw in the MacKenzie-Porter controversy. If the expositions were top-down orchestrated affairs, yet lacked a clear message about what Dutch imperialism entailed, then what lasting impression did they make on the public, if any? According to Bloembergen:

The reception history of the colonial spectacles presents an ambivalent picture. Some visitors came away more convinced than ever of the greater progress and superiority of their own (Dutch) culture, some were imbued with respect for the otherness of the indigenous culture of the Dutch East Indies, and there were numerous responses in between.⁴⁷

In other words, the different kinds of reception by the public simply reflected a range of elite opinions on the colonies, from bolstering the belief in white superiority to putting that same belief in question. We can see the latter case in the public admiration for native art, as an example of which Bloembergen cites 'the woodcarvings of indigenous dwellings and the Sumatran fabrics woven with gold thread'. The widespread appreciation for batik fabrics is another example.⁴⁸ These examples show that questioning Western civilization in this context did not necessarily mean that the other civilization was appreciated fully. It still took the

46 Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles*, 321.

47 Bloembergen, 327-328.

48 Legêne, *Spiegelreflex*, 119-120. See also the sections in Chapter 1 of this study on the arts and crafts shop Boeatan.

form of what Matthew Cohen calls the ‘detached appropriation of exotica’, and which fits Stuart Hall’s more general notion of ‘the spectacle of the other’.⁴⁹ Visitors romanticized the ‘simple life’ of ‘people not yet alienated from their natural surroundings’.⁵⁰

Ordinary exposition visitors did not write about their experiences at expositions, nor, if we leave that particular genre behind, did they write lengthy essays about their appreciation of Dutch imperialism. Other authors than Bloembergen, like Bossenbroek, have tried to circumvent this problem by focusing on upper-middle-class people, to representatives of a *burgelijke* culture.⁵¹ Bloembergen meanwhile runs into the same problem that Alexander Geppert noted in his study of various colonial expositions in Europe, namely that the public is, not surprisingly, not very articulate in expressing its experiences at said expositions and was in for entertainment rather than education. Postcards sent from expositions – a popular activity, which can be considered as one of the ‘compulsory’ rites of the expositions as a tourist attraction – contained little more information than a brief description of the weather and the equally brief statement that the signatories were having a good time. The only way around it is to change the question to be answered – the postcards, for example, might not give a detailed description of the impression the exposition left on a visitor, but it does suggest that the colonial expositions were tourist attractions, and that a visit was an opportunity to ‘gaze at live inhabitants of these territories in a quasi-authentic reproduction of their normal surroundings’ for entertainment, as Bloembergen writes.⁵² Such postcolonial readings of the function of, in this case, colonial expositions are necessary to fully appreciate the place of empire in the metropole.

A similar idea is at the core of Susan Legêne’s *Spiegelreflex: culturele sporen van de koloniale ervaring* (2010), in which she set out to study ‘Dutch cultural history as a colonial history’, which has its effect on ‘expressions of art and cultural patterns, but also, in a more general sense, on dominant views’.⁵³ More broadly, works like that of Legêne, Raben, Bijl, or Lizzy van Leeuwen engage, in the words of latter, in

49 Matthew Isaac Cohen, *Performing Otherness: Java and Bali on International Stages, 1905-1952* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4; Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Culture, Media, and Identities, bk. 2 (London: Sage, 1997), 223-279.

50 Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles*, 328.

51 Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 18-19.

52 Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles*, 113.

53 Legêne, *Spiegelreflex*, 8.

a critical and systematic effort to acknowledge the political, historical and cultural consequences of Dutch colonialism for power relations in today's society and for the international relations with Indonesia, Suriname and the Antilles, and with other former imperial powers.⁵⁴

It is with that tradition in mind that *A Metropolitan History of the Dutch Empire* is written.

The metropolitan scene of the Dutch imperial world would logically include voices, themes and tropes from the entire empire, but a number of authors has noted that the balance is usually skewed in favour of 'the East' over 'the West'. The roots of this discrepancy are most likely to be found in imperial ideology itself, which used to cherish the East ('Our Indies') while seeing Suriname and the Antilles as mere unsuccessful plantation colonies. Yet, there often is a matter-of-factness about the discrepancy between East and West that does not seem to reach the depth of it. 'The West Indies were a demographically and geopolitically insignificant part of the Dutch empire,' writes Elizabeth Buettner, 'that lacked compensating economic and geopolitical advantages.'⁵⁵ Given the fact that colonialism was as much a question of ideology, and not just a narrow matter of (successful) economic exploitation, this leaves the question at least partly unanswered. 'Usually,' notes Gloria Wekker, scholars do this 'without giving much attention to the active disappearance of the West', even though there are good reasons to combine Eastern and Western viewpoints in histories of empire, as she herself demonstrates when she traces the racialized discourse of sexuality in the 1910s and 20s. As she shows, different racial grammars (the 'erasure of race' in Indo-Dutch circles and 'stereotypes of black female sexuality' circulating in society at large) explained the willingness and unwillingness of various actors to engage with racialized tropes.⁵⁶ This book does not limit itself to the eastern half of the Dutch Empire, but as a result of the availability of source material and the uneven composition of Dutch imperial culture in this regard, it still is tilted to the East. While this is admittedly a weak spot of this book, it is also safe to say that the discrepancy between representations of East and West – in Dutch imperial culture and Dutch colonial historiography alike – is a subject deserving a book-length study in its own right.

54 Lizzy van Leeuwen, *Ons Indisch erfgoed: zestig jaar strijd om cultuur en identiteit* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008), 12.

55 Buettner, *Europe after Empire*, 100.

56 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 26, 81-107.

The Politics of History

The public debate on the colonial past in the Netherlands elicits passionate reactions. In 2012, Ulbe Bosma could still ask, ‘Why is there no postcolonial debate in the Netherlands?’, but almost ten years later, the question should be why the debate is everywhere.⁵⁷ The reasons for this shift are to be found, for a considerable part, not in scholarly activities but in activism that challenges racist practices today. Most notably this includes the protests against Zwarte Piet, the current wave of which only started in 2011 with a protest by Quinsy Gario and Jerry Afriyie. But scholarly publications also contributed to a renewed sense of urgency to questions about the afterlives of empire, like Gloria Wekker’s *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016) or the volume *Dutch Racism* (2014), edited by Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving.⁵⁸ In discussing the reception of the Dutch translation of *White Innocence*, Gloria Wekker notes the recurrent combination of ‘distance, rejection, defensiveness and aggression’ in the responses to her work.⁵⁹ In an essay discussing her work, Remco Raben remarked dryly that ‘those who hoped colonial history would be on the wane, will be disappointed’, as the public attention for histories of Dutch colonialism seems on the rise, rather than the opposite, and one main characteristic of these works is that they emphasize the political relevance today of these histories.⁶⁰ Of course this newfound political dimension of colonial history writing only feels new in the shadow of a colonial historiography marked by attempts to apoliticize these histories. Critiques of such apoliticizing tendencies are not new, but have a come a long way. The idiom of ‘trauma’ to describe the silence regarding the colonial past in the Netherlands during the aftermath of decolonization, for instance, has been explained by Elsbeth Locher-Scholten not as a sign of a psychological inability to speak, but as a way to avoid the thorny questions and self-reflection required after decolonization.⁶¹

57 Ulbe Bosma, ‘Why Is There No Post-Colonial Debate in the Netherlands?’, in *Post-Colonial Immigrants and Identity Formations in the Netherlands*, ed. Ulbe Bosma (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 193-212.

58 Wekker, *White Innocence*; Philomena Essed and Isabel Hoving, eds., *Dutch Racism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014).

59 Gloria Wekker, *Witte onschuld: Paradoxen van kolonialisme en ras* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 237.

60 Raben, ‘Schuld en onschuld’.

61 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, ‘Een bronnenpublicatie als signaal van koloniaal trauma? Ontstaan en ontvangst van de Officiële bescheiden’, in *De leeuw en de banteng: bijdragen aan het congres over de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen 1945-1950, gehouden in Den Haag van 27-29 maart 1996*, ed. P.J. Droogelever and M.J.B. Schouten (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis,

Part of the reason why many works of colonial history elicit hostile responses is that ascribing an influential role to colonialism in the past implies a greater afterlife of empire, too. That is a message with clear political stakes, and one that historians on the right do not like to hear, as we can see, for instance, in Piet Emmer's efforts to argue that 'racism, discrimination, teen pregnancies, broken families, infidelity, criminality' and much more have nothing to do with slavery in the past.⁶² The links between colonialism, racism and socio-economic status are, to the contrary, well-documented, but acknowledging them has unwelcome implications for some.⁶³ Questions about the colonial past are not neutral questions. History can serve particular agendas, as is made clear for the British case by Dane Kennedy in the following way:

There are those historians [...] who maintain that 'the idea of a powerful and constraining colonial legacy is seriously flawed', especially as an explanation for the challenges that confront many of the peoples of former colonies because it minimizes both pre- and postcolonial factors while exaggerating colonialism's lingering effects. In other words, it's time for them – and us – to get over it. There are other historians who advance the closely related argument that the British Empire was never as powerful and transformative as it is often made out to be; it was an 'improvised and provisional' empire, 'always ramshackle and quite often chaotic'. In other words, it was not that big a deal anyway.⁶⁴

The Dutch case is complicated even more by the fact that, in contrast to the British, it was a small empire – not in terms of geography, or of atrocities

1997), 250-272; See also my own essay on this subject: Matthijs Kuipers, 'De strijd om het koloniale verleden: trauma, herinnering en de "Imperial History Wars" in Nederland', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 131, no. 4 (2018): 657-676.

62 P.C. Emmer, *Het zwart-witdenken voorbij: Een bijdrage aan de discussie over kolonialisme, slavernij en migratie* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2018).

63 Works that cover the entwined histories of colonialism and racism well are Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016); David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Macmillan, 2016). In his overview of the history of racism, George Fredrickson downplays the extent to which colonial societies were racist, but it should be noted this picture is mainly the result of the comparative perspective employed in the book: George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

64 Dane Kennedy, 'The Imperial History Wars', *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 1 (2015): 22.



committed, or the general impact colonial rule had on colonized and metropolitan societies, which are all things that are finally being documented in Dutch historiography, but rather in terms of culture and self-image. Instructively, it was only as late as the 1980s that historians started to think of the Dutch colonial constellation as an 'empire'.⁶⁵ This self-image as a non-empire left its traces in the Dutch language. Whereas the capitalized combination of the words 'British' and 'Empire' feels all too familiar, the same cannot be said for the Dutch equivalent. References in Dutch are usually made to 'the colonies' or 'overseas territories' and empire (*rijk*) only has its distinctive meaning with the adjective 'colonial' attached to it. The risk this non-imperial, non-jingoistic self-image poses is that it easily leads to the conclusion that 'it was not that big a deal anyway'.

The assumption that the Dutch Empire was 'not that big a deal' has been challenged by historians and other scholars. Historian Susan Legêne already argued that 'Dutch culture has developed itself as a colonial culture, which has left traces in today's society', and more recently anthropologist Gloria Wekker posited 'an unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and feelings based on 400 years of imperial rule' which play an important role in 'dominant meaning-making processes' today and in the past.⁶⁶ While authors like Legêne and Wekker acknowledge the moral dimension of their histories, others have tried to refrain from taking such positions. In 2001 historian Jos de Beus even referred to the 'rash confusion of ontological and moral calls of judgement' historians on the Dutch Empire tend to make in his eyes.⁶⁷ What was not so long ago seen as neutral and detached history writing, however, quickly loses its respectability. A claim like J.J.P. de Jong made in the mid-1990s – that 'the Netherlands didn't do that bad' in the process of Indonesian decolonization – now seems to belong to another era.

'Domestic decolonization processes remain [...] incomplete', writes Elizabeth Buettner in her comparative study of the postcolonial configurations of five former European imperial powers.⁶⁸ While what it means to write history in a 'neutral' and 'detached' manner is rapidly changing, it would be presumptuous to think that the historical discipline is exempt from this incomplete decolonization process. 'An Olympian aloofness from the

65 Kuitenbrouwer, *The Netherlands*; Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 113, no. 1 (1998): 56-73.

66 Legêne, *Spiegelreflex*, 8; Wekker, *White Innocence*, 3.

67 Jos de Beus, 'God dekoloniseert niet. Een kritiek op de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving over de neergang van Nederlands-Indië en Nederlands Suriname', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (2001): 207.

68 Buettner, *Europe after Empire*, 4.

moral and political passions that surround us', writes Dane Kennedy in this regard, 'is neither fully possible nor, I believe, entirely desirable.'⁶⁹ I mostly agree with that statement. That the Netherlands still 'has to come to terms with its colonial past', is an often-heard dictum by historians, activists and commentators, and while the reverberations of such psychological language are perhaps a matter to be discussed separately, it still stands true today. But while the point that the Netherlands has to come to terms with the past suggests that these ambiguities are something solely of the present – a trauma that came with decolonization – I contend that imperialist feelings and colonial culture in the metropole contained these ambiguities well before decolonization. To understand colonial consciousness today, we need to understand its past.

Case Studies from a Fragmented Empire

Because this study does not take the idea of 'the metropole' as a given, I have included case studies that were not thought to be part of a metropolitan imperial culture at the time. The attempts to create enthusiasm among a religious public for the overseas missionary activities (Chapter 5), for example, ostensibly have little to no apparent intersections with the metropolitan sojourns of Indonesian intellectuals, artists and students (Chapter 2). I will question the extent to which this disjuncture was in fact a coincidence, and whether most Indonesians were not destined to leave the Netherlands because they were denied a place in the imagined community of those who shared 'cultural imperial citizenship' in the first place. The Indonesian artists and intellectuals I study claimed a form of cultural citizenship, yet rejected the clear-cut categories that nation and empire presented them. The combination of the second chapter with chapters that represent more common stories of home imperial culture – like the first chapter, on *Indisch* food – is therefore essential to problematize the divide between metropole and colony.

Metropolitan imperial culture was not a monolith. It consisted of various subcultures located in diverse spaces in civil society, a number of which represent the various chapters of this study. The aforementioned first chapter examines social circles of retired colonials and the attempts to popularize the colonial cuisine in the Netherlands. The third chapter investigates teachers, school classes and attempts by museum curators of the Colonial Museum to reach them in order to promote a business-friendly take on

69 Kennedy, 'The Imperial History Wars', 22.

empire. The fourth chapter documents how the Scouting movement was introduced in the Netherlands and what imperial themes it copied and omitted from the British original. Finally, the fifth chapter shows how missionary organizations also targeted the Dutch public in what was called the ‘inner mission’. In *Holland op zijn breedst*, Bossenbroek discusses the activities of missionary organizations in colonial Indonesia, while ignoring the domestic activities of these organizations, which is one of the reasons why I have opted to include this chapter in this book, as domestic missionary activities are arguably positioned at the nexus of overseas missions and domestic imagination.⁷⁰

All the different groups and people that feature in the chapters of this book engaged in a range of different activities without engaging much (if ever) with each other. They developed their own independent initiatives and did not simply echo official colonial policy. And yet, the term *fragment* also implies a whole. The subjects of the various chapters have something in common. This smallest common denominator is the cultural grammar of the Dutch Empire. The five case studies that constitute Chapters 2 to 6 – food culture, Indonesian sojourners, schools, the Scouting movement, and the Christian mission – are all part of the grassroots experience of what can be called ‘home imperialism’. They appear to us in relative isolation – scouts did not attend mission festivals and vice versa – but indirectly they spoke to each other. Their efforts were shaped by an imperial mindset and in turn created that same mindset. The permeation of imperial cultural in society at large had that mindset in common, but its exact manifestations were highly situational.

Dutch imperial culture was stealthy, even invisible, at times. This does not mean, however, that it wasn’t there, or that it wasn’t a consistent factor in the construction of national culture. As the discussion above has shown, indifference is simply one of the registers in which contemporaries expressed their sense or understanding of empire, among others. In the next chapters we will see there were different sites of imperial construction in Dutch society, with each their own registers of expression, but also with a common thread of a Dutch imperial ideology. As Edward Said wrote in *Orientalism*, Western cultural discourse ‘is too often mistaken as merely decorative or “superstructural”’, which suggests we should not take the invisibility of Dutch metropolitan imperial culture for a lack of strength.⁷¹

70 Also see Annemarie Houkes, *Christelijke Vaderlanders: godsdienst, burgerschap en de Nederlandse natie (1850-1900)* (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2009).

71 Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, 24.