Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective

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Visions of Dutch Empire

Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective[1]

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What were the major developments in thinking about Dutch empire from the early modern period to the twenty-first century? What moral, political, legal and economic arguments have been put forth to justify, criticize or reform empire? How and under what circumstances did these visions and arguments change or remain the same? This article outlines a research agenda that addresses these questions. It argues for an approach that includes a long-term perspective from the early modern period to the postcolonial situation, which sees 'Dutch' history broadly, moving beyond national borders, and instead explicitly informed by influences and actors from across the globe. This implies a transnational and transimperial approach that can highlight these global connections as well as tensions; and finally, an approach that understands intellectual history as going beyond the big names of systemic thinkers, and includes visions of empire as negotiated in (day-to-day) practice.

Visies op het Nederlandse 'empire'. Naar een globaal en langetermijnperspectief
Wat zijn de belangrijkste ontwikkelingen in het denken over het Nederlandse koloniale rijk ('empire') van de vroegmoderne tijd tot de 21e eeuw? Welke morele, politieke, juridische en economische argumenten zijn aangewend ter legitimatie, bekritisering of hervorming van *empire*? Hoe en onder welke omstandigheden zijn deze visies en argumenten veranderd of hetzelfde gebleven? Dit artikel schetst een onderzoeksagenda waarin deze vragen aan de orde worden gesteld. Het pleit voor een langetermijnperspectief van de vroegmoderne tijd tot de postkoloniale orde; voor een aanpak die 'Nederlandse' geschiedenis breed interpreteert, voorbij nationale grenzen en gevormd door invloeden en actoren in een mondiale context. Om deze mondiale connecties en spanningsvelden in kaart te brengen

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is een transnationale en transimperiale aanpak nodig. Een dergelijke vorm van intellectuele geschiedenis moet bovendien verder gaan dan de bekende namen en denkers, maar ook visies op *empire* in ogenschouw nemen die vorm krijgen in de (dagelijkse) praktijk.

Since the start of this millennium, 'empire' has become a dominant concept in historical scholarship, resulting in a variety of historiographical approaches that are often labelled New Imperial History.[2] A specific outcome of this development is the increasing attention for empire from the perspective of intellectual history, which focuses on the ways in which Europe's colonial empires were constructed and criticised ideologically through contending visions, idioms and conceptions. Like other disciplinary subfields, intellectual history has taken a global turn in recent years, inspiring an ever-growing literature on the development of such visions of empire in (early) modern global history.[3] This imperial focus is especially strong in (but not restricted to) Anglophone scholarship, exploring the early modern 'ideological origins' of empire, the 'historical roots' of imperial thought, and the varieties of imperial ideology in the nineteenth century and decolonization.[4] Other studies take a more inclusive approach by highlighting the transnational and transimperial links between European empires in the history of political thought, as well as the crucial role of empires in legal history.[5] What a number

1 This essay is based on the discussion paper for the conference *Visions of Empire in Dutch History*, organized in Leiden on 29 and 30 September 2016. We are grateful to all participants in the conference for sharing their ideas, suggestions and criticism, and to Leiden Global Interactions, the Leiden University Institute for History, the Leiden University Fund, and the Research School Political History for their financial support.

2 See, in this journal, Remco Raben, 'A New Dutch Imperial History? Perambulations in a Prospective Field', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128:1 (2013) 5-30 DOI 10.18352/bmgn-lchr.8353.

3 The intellectual global turn is discussed from various angles in Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (eds.), *Global Intellectual History* (New York 2013). See also David Armitage, 'The International Turn in Intellectual History', in: Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (eds.), *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (New York 2014) 232-252 DOI 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199769230.003.0012.

4 See e.g. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge 2000); Duncan Kelly (ed.), *Lineages of Empire. The Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought* (Oxford 2009); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World. Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton 2016).

5 Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World. Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven and London 1995); Idem, *The Burdens of Empire. 1539 to the Present* (Cambridge 2015); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire. The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton 2005); Gabriel Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire 1759-1808* (Basingstoke 2008); Sankar Muthu (ed.), *Empire and Political Thought* (Cambridge 2014); Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge 2004); Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge 2010); Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500-2000* (Cambridge 2014).

of these studies have in common is that they explicitly take a global as well as a long-term perspective, connecting East with West and early modern developments with nineteenth and twentieth-century history. However, they also share an overall disregard for one of the most significant imperial powers in (early) modern global history: the Dutch empire.

We argue that an intellectual history, writ large, of Dutch empire from a long-term and global perspective is necessary to offset this imbalance in the international scholarship and to enrich the existing historiography on empire in general and the Dutch empire in particular. We argue for an approach that includes a long-term perspective from the early modern period to the postcolonial situation; which sees 'Dutch' history broadly, moving beyond national borders, and explicitly informed by influences and actors from across the globe; which implies a transnational and transimperial approach that can highlight these global connections as well as tensions; and finally, an approach that understands intellectual history as going beyond the big names of systemic thinkers, and includes visions of empire as negotiated in (day-to-day) practice.

Dutch Empire in Context

Whilst there is a venerable tradition of research on the political, socio-economic and cultural aspects of Dutch colonial history, the intellectual history of Dutch empire has thus far been largely neglected.[6] Nevertheless, the Dutch case is highly significant for at least two reasons. First, unlike their main European competitors, the Dutch were not only imperial agents themselves, but also subjects of foreign imperial rule during crucial periods in their history, subjugated by the Habsburg Empire, the Napoleonic French Empire, and the Nazi Third Reich. Crucially, these periods of foreign imperial rule coincided with decisive moments in the history of the Dutch colonial empire: the opening moves of Dutch overseas expansion at the turn of the seventeenth century, the demise of the Company-based imperial system around 1800, and the decolonization of Indonesia in the immediate aftermath of World War II. An intellectual history of Dutch empire from a comparative perspective could therefore offer specific insights into the possible ideological correlations between being subjected to empire at home and attempts to make and maintain an empire overseas. Moreover, it opens up research into the manifold actors included in 'Dutch' empire.

The Dutch case is also significant for a second characteristic that to a certain extent sets it apart from other European imperial histories: whilst

6 For a recent overview of current approaches in Dutch colonial history, see Catia Antunes and Jos Gommans (eds.), *Exploring the Dutch Empire. Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (London 2015).

empire, *imperio* or *Reich* clearly signify existing conceptions, there is no direct Dutch equivalent for the term 'empire' in historical discourse. Throughout the history of Dutch imperialism from the seventeenth century onwards, different concepts have been used to denote Dutch rule overseas, from *mogendheid* ('power') and *gezag* ('authority') to *bezittingen* ('possessions') and *coloniën* ('colonies'), and eventually, *overzeese gebiedsdelen* ('overseas territories').[7] This conceptual elusiveness raises the question which vocabularies, ideas and visions of empire were articulated throughout history, how they interrelated, developed and changed over time, and which actors and practices of domination and resistance influenced, and were influenced by, these intellectual developments.

These questions are especially pertinent since the Dutch imperial past has long remained beneath the surface of public culture, collective memory, and common discourse. Indeed, the much-derided (but nonetheless noteworthy) plea by former Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende for a revival of the 'VOC mentality' betrays to what extent it has been possible to sidestep any imperial allusion in talking about early modern Dutch colonial history.[8] This conceptual loophole is also apparent from the persistent use of the term *politionele acties* ('police actions') to denote violent episodes of the Indonesian War of Independence, suggesting that imperial wartime atrocities were merely attempts to restore civil order, and that Dutch colonial rule was different from its European counterparts. While these assumptions are being challenged by new generations of historians and other scholars, for example in the recent work of Rémy Limpach, this is filtering through to broader public culture only slowly.[9]

7 See e.g. François Valentijn, *Beschryving van Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, bevattende een naauwkeurige en uitvoerige verhandeling van Nederlands Mogentheid in die gewesten* (5 vols., Amsterdam 1724-1726); *De Koopman, of bydragen ten opbouw van Neerlands koophandel en zeevaard* II (Amsterdam 1770) 17; *Dagverhaal der handelingen van de Nationale Vergadering* V (The Hague 1797) no. 491 (27 April), 713; J.K.J. de Jonge (ed.), *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag over Java* (10 vols., The Hague 1869-1888). The conceptual elusiveness is clear from an overview work such as H.T. Colenbrander, *Koloniale geschiedenis* (3 vols., The Hague 1925-1926).

8 Arguably, this attitude is rooted in the long-dominant approach to characterize the VOC primarily as a commercial organization, in terms of 'the world's first multinational'. On the historiography of the VOC, see the still useful overview of Jur van Goor, 'De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in de historiografie. Imperialist en multinational', in: Gerrit Knaap en Ger Teitler (eds.), *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie* (Leiden 2002) 9-33.

9 Rémy Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor* (Amsterdam 2016), and for example the work of Jennifer Foray, Anne-Lot Hoek, Bart Luttikhuis, Gert Oostindie, Remco Raben, Stef Scagliola, Gloria Wekker and others. The changing tide is exemplified by the decision recently taken by the Dutch government to provide funding for a large research project on the decolonization of Indonesia, starting in September 2017.

We argue that this 'colonial aphasia', to borrow Ann Stoler's term, is related to the ways in which the Dutch empire has been defined and envisioned historically.[10] From the onset of Dutch overseas expansion around 1600 to the postcolonial era, a variety of visions and concepts have been developed by historical actors as well as historiographical tendencies that regard Dutch colonial rule as essentially non-imperial, for example by underlining its alleged commercial and non-violent characteristics. An intellectual history of Dutch empire can expose the mechanisms through which these notions of Dutch imperial exceptionalism were constructed, reiterated and criticized throughout history vis-à-vis other European empires and local populations, analysing at the same time the development of alternative concepts, ideas and visions of empire in metropolitan, as well as overseas contexts.[11] Such an approach is particularly relevant for current public debates about the postcolonial repercussions and memories of empire, especially regarding slavery and racism.[12]

We therefore propose to study the history of the thinking about Dutch empire from a global and long-term perspective, expressly engaging with the recent international scholarship on the intellectual history of empire. What is needed, first of all, is a truly global approach that bridges the persistent divide between East and West in Dutch colonial historiography.[13] An intellectual history of Dutch empire can connect European, American, African and Asian contexts precisely by studying how imperial actors from these various locations thought and wrote about the similarities and differences between East and West, as well as by linking cases of ideological resistance to empire in Dutch colonies from the Caribbean to Southeast Asia. In doing so, an intellectual history of Dutch empire can also bridge the divide between metropolitan and different colonial contexts, exploring the interconnections between ideas, visions and criticisms of imperial rule across the globe and juxtaposing the intellectual activities of Dutch colonial agents with those of anticolonial critics from Java to Paramaribo. Finally, an intellectual history

10 Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France', *Public Culture* 23:1 (2011) 121-156 DOI 10.1215/08992363-2010-018. See also Paul Bijl, 'Colonial Memory and Forgetting in The Netherlands and Indonesia', *Journal of Genocide Studies* 14:3-4 (2012) 441-461.

11 See e.g. Yvon van der Pijl and Francio Guadeloupe, 'Imagining the Nation in the Classroom: Belonging and Nationness in the Dutch Caribbean', *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Explorations* 98 (2015) 87-98 DOI 10.18352/erlacs.9982.

12 Gert Oostindie, *Postcolonial Netherlands. Sixty-five Years of Forgetting, Commemorating, Silencing* (Amsterdam 2011); Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence. Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham NC 2016).

13 Important exceptions that explicitly combine East with West are Jur van Goor, *De Nederlandse koloniën. Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse expansie 1600-1975* (The Hague 1997); and Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld. De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600-1800* (Amsterdam 2012).

of Dutch empire can bridge the divide between early modern and modern scholarly approaches, revealing and contextualising the continuities and ruptures in the development of various concepts, ideas and visions of empire from the sixteenth century to the postcolonial era. This intellectual analysis over the *longue durée* can unearth deep-rooted conceptions and self-perceptions of Dutch imperial exceptionalism and throw into relief the fault lines between various phases in the ideological construction and criticism of such exceptionalism.

To reach this global, long-term perspective, the intellectual history of Dutch empire must take a transnational and transimperial approach to compare and connect the Dutch case with the history and historiographies of other colonial empires.[14] From the conquest of Ambon to the independence of Suriname and the advent of postcolonial debates, visions of Dutch empire took shape within inter-imperial comparison, cooperation and competition; from the Dutch explorer and governor Frederick de Houtman to the anticolonial activist and writer Anton de Kom and current postcolonial activist Quinsy Gario, the experiences of empire that shaped or were shaped by such visions emerged from transimperial connections and practices across the globe.

In order to explore the diversity of the ways in which various actors thought and wrote about specific aspects of Dutch imperialism, an intellectual history of Dutch empire should be based on a wide array of sources, expanding the traditional focus of intellectual history on famous theorists and their scholarly treatises. Such a wider source base would comprise, for example, documents related to colonial bureaucracies, institutions, and courts of law, sources on, and produced by, colonial literary and scientific societies, anonymous reports, autobiographical writing and newspaper articles – as well as images, architecture and museum designs as additional sources of visions of Dutch empire.[15] The intellectual history of Dutch empire, therefore, should go well beyond the few canonical figures such as Hugo Grotius or Multatuli, to connect the manifold voices that imagined, discussed and criticized empire in metropolitan and colonial

14 For a recent comparative perspective on European decolonization, see Elizabeth Buettner, *Europe after Empire: Decolonization, Society, and Culture* (Cambridge 2016).

15 Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad. The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670* (Cambridge 2001); Marieke Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles: the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the World Exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore 2006); Hans Groot, *Van Batavia naar Weltevreden. Het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen 1778-1867* (Leiden 2009); Kees Briët, *Het Hooggerechtshof van Nederlands-Indië 1819-1848: portret van een vergeten rechtscollege* (Amsterdam 2015); Susan Legêne, *De bagage van Blomhoff en Van Breugel: Over Nederlandse natievorming en de negentiende-eeuwse cultuur van het imperialisme* (Amsterdam 1998); Eadem, 'Powerful Ideas. Museums, Empire Utopias and Connected Worlds', in: R. Omar, et al. (eds.), *Museums and the Idea of Historical Progress* (Cape Town 2014) 15-30.

contexts, from the onset of Dutch overseas expansion around 1600 to our contemporary postcolonial world.

Exploring visions of empire in Dutch history from a long-term perspective raises the question what 'Dutch' in this context means. After all, as Catia Antunes and Jos Gommans have recently stressed, 'even in an empire that is called "Dutch", Dutch agents were a minority'.[16] How 'Dutch', if at all, were those peoples across the world that were subjected, enslaved, as well as collaborating with and profiting from the Dutch empire? In addition, until 1798 the Dutch Republic was not a centralised nation-state but a confederal union, and for most of the early modern period the 'Dutch' empire was mainly an undertaking of the seaborne provinces of Holland and Zeeland. Finally, and most contentiously, to which extent is it possible to understand empire as Dutch, or British, or French etcetera? Given that visions of empire did not develop in isolation, but in conjuncture and in reaction to developments across the globe, a transnational and transimperial approach is imperative to understand communalities as well as specificities. Without claiming to offer a definite solution to these conceptual problems, our starting point is that we intend to explore not what the Dutch empire *was*, but how actors from across the globe *envisaged* it.

Indeed, we suggest that a fruitful way of conceiving of an intellectual history of empire is through the concept of 'visions'. This concept of visions should be understood broadly, comprising not only blueprints or political designs, but also mental maps, images, and conceptions of empire, critiques of imperial practices, alternative models, or even outright rejections or denials of imperial authority. Which visions of the purpose, need, form, organization, and nature of an overseas or colonial Dutch empire have been formulated throughout history? What moral, political, legal, and economic arguments have been put forth to justify, criticize or reform empire? How and under what circumstances did these visions and arguments change or remain the same? In short, what were the major developments in the thinking about Dutch empire from the early modern period to the twenty-first century?

Republican Empire, c. 1550-1800

The chronological starting-point of an intellectual history of empire over the *longue durée* should be placed in the sixteenth-century, when ideas about Dutch imperial exceptionalism matured in the making of the Batavian myth, which presented the nascent Dutch Republic as an essentially anti-imperial

16 Jos Gommans, 'Globalizing Empire: The Dutch Case', in: Antunes and Gommans (eds.), *Exploring the Dutch Empire*, 267. See also Karwan Fatah-Black, *White Lies and Black Markets: Evading Metropolitan Authority in Colonial Suriname, 1650-1800* (Leiden 2015).

entity. The foundation of Batavia in 1619 reveals to what extent this myth was subsequently projected upon concrete colonial practice, by which the Republic became an imperial power. A variety of visions of empire emerged in the ensuing establishment of a Dutch 'republican empire' on a global scale.[17] The hybridity of that empire, which consisted of conquered territories as well as multiple trading posts and a few settler colonies throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas, was reflected by a myriad of contending conceptions of (the justification of) empire, discussed publicly in lofty humanist treatises and popular pamphlets, as well as in heated debates within the boards of the VOC and WIC. The richness of those debates still needs to be mined fully. While recent research has effectively highlighted the crucial role of Grotius, other voices and visions of empire remain largely unexplored, for example regarding the religious dimensions of thinking about empire.[18] In this context, particular attention could be paid to the manifold ways in which actors and critics of Dutch colonial expansion appropriated or challenged the idioms and intellectual strategies of their main imperial contenders, especially the Habsburg Empire and England.

The crucial concept in this transnational intellectual contest was that of *imperium*, which in the early modern world essentially meant effective sovereignty.[19] Dutch claims to sovereignty overseas were based on a mixture of commerce and conquest, treaty-making, and diplomacy. The legal justification of these practices, however, remained contested throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, not least because of the ambiguous status of the main vehicles of expansion, the VOC and WIC: private joint stock trading companies invested with public marks of sovereignty. Anti-company critics and free agents challenged these institutionalised monopolies and constructed alternative visions of 'informal empires'.[20] At least as important were the multifaceted practices of collaboration, negotiation, assimilation

17 See Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*; Alexander Bick, 'Governing the Free Sea: The Dutch West India Company and Commercial Politics, 1618-1645' (PhD Princeton University, 2012); Arthur Weststeijn, 'Republican Empire. Colonialism, Commerce, and Corruption in the Dutch Golden Age', *Renaissance Studies* 26:4 (2012) 491-509 DOI 10.1111/j.1477-4658.2012.00824.x; Idem, 'The VOC as Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion', *Itinerario* 38:1 (2014) 13-34 DOI 10.1017/S0165115314000035.

18 Martine van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle. Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595-1615* (Leiden 2006); Peter Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius, the Portuguese and Free Trade in the East Indies* (Singapore 2011); Benjamin Straumann, *Roman Law in the State of Nature. The Classical Foundations of Hugo Grotius' Natural Law* (Cambridge 2015).

19 James Muldoon, *Empire and Order. The Concept of Empire, 800-1800* (Basingstoke 1999).

20 Antunes and Gommans, *Exploring the Dutch Empire* and Catia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (eds.), *Beyond Empires: Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (Leiden 2016).

and resistance by indigenous peoples and rulers in Asia, Africa and the Americas, who used various strategies (legal, political and commercial) to challenge, confront and undermine Dutch claims to colonial sovereignty.[21] As recent research has shown, comparative and transimperial perspectives can therefore be particularly helpful to contextualise Dutch visions of a Company-centred overseas empire, especially in relation to the competitors, partners and superiors of the VOC in Asia, most notably the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, the English East India Company, and local rulers and states such as Javanese sultans and the Tokugawa shogunate.[22]

Because of the dominant role of the trading companies in the early-modern Dutch empire, visions of sovereignty were intrinsically linked to commercial and economic reasoning, not least in the context of the slave trade and slavery. The significance of the slave trade for Dutch imperialism in the Atlantic as well as in Asia has recently been re-evaluated from an economic perspective, but much remains unknown about the intellectual justification and criticism of slavery. [23] Which visions of liberty and domination resulted from the tension between private traders and the monopolistic companies, and how did these visions relate to the institutionalisation of slavery and the slave trade? Which arguments were used by free agents, Company officials and slave owners of various nationalities to create or challenge relationships of dependency and domination worldwide? These are crucial questions to be tackled by an intellectual history of Dutch empire.

Transforming and Resisting Empire, c. 1750-1850

For a long-term intellectual history of Dutch empire that studies conceptual continuities and discontinuities, a particularly relevant set of issues

21 Saliha Belmessous (ed.), *Native Claims: Indigenous Law against Empire, 1500-1920* (Oxford 2011), Eadem (ed.), *Assimilation and Empire: Uniformity in French and British Colonies, 1541-1954* (Oxford 2013); and Eadem (ed.), *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900* (Oxford 2015).

22 See, for example, Romain Bertrand, *L'Histoire à parts égales. Récits d'une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)* (Paris 2011); Philip J. Stern, *The Company-State. Corporate Sovereignty & The Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India* (Oxford 2011); Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun. The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York 2014); Idem, 'The Art of Claiming: Possession and Resistance in Early Modern Asia', *The American Historical Review* 121 (2016) 17-38 DOI 10.1093/ahr/121.1.17; Arthur Weststeijn, 'Provincializing Grotius. International Law and Empire in a Seventeenth-Century Malay Mirror', in: Marti Koskenniemi, Walter Rech and Manuel Jimenez Fonseca (eds.), *International Law and Empire. Historical Explorations* (Oxford 2017) 21-38.

23 Karwan Fatah-Black and Matthias van Rossum, 'Beyond Profitability. The Dutch Transatlantic Slave Trade and Its Economic Impact', *Slavery & Abolition. A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 36 (2015) 63-83 DOI 10.1080/0144039X.2013.873591.

to explore are the ways in which the innovations in the constitutional, economic, institutional, and legal design of the Dutch empire intersected with, and were informed by, Enlightenment cultures of knowledge and ideas in the period between roughly 1750 and 1850.[24] Yet the growing body of research on various aspects of the (Dutch) Enlightenment and late eighteenth-century political culture and thought has not been sufficiently brought into dialogue with the Dutch imperial world.[25] As the colonial system of trading companies came to an end and colonial governance was transferred to the state, what moral and political principles were invoked to justify or criticize colonial rule and exploitation in this period?[26] How were policies regarding non-western peoples recast in light of Enlightenment theories of historical progress and civilization? What was the impact of eighteenth-century liberal economic thought concerning trade and labour on the political-economic design of the empire?[27] In addition, how were Enlightenment ideas and concepts applied, appropriated, enriched, tested, amended or refuted once they transferred beyond their European and Dutch origins?[28] And finally, how did colonial subjects and local populations respond and adapt to, as well as resist these innovations in imperial political thought, practises, and culture?

Politically, the turn of the century was marked by great uncertainties, high ideals, revolution, disillusionment, and the subjection to, and subsequent annexation into Napoleon's continental empire. Given these margins of policy making in the age of revolutions, what repercussions did revolutionary debates about constitutional law, the rights of man, and natural and civil equality have on visions of empire? The question of the abolition of slavery also loomed large on the horizon. Although no anti-slavery movement emerged in the Dutch Republic, the colonies and the question of slavery and

24 René Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment. Contesting the Limits of Civic Equality and Participation in the Age of Revolutions* (PhD Utrecht University, 2016); Angelie Sens, *'Mensaap, heiden, slaaf.' Nederlandse visies op de wereld rond 1800* (The Hague 2001); Gert Jan Schutte, *De Nederlandse Patriotten en de koloniën. Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden, 1770-1800* (Groningen 1974).

25 The Dutch empire is, for example, completely absent from the best overview of the eighteenth-century Dutch Enlightenment, Joost Kloek and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *1800. Blueprints for a National Community* (Basingstoke 2005).

26 Jur van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism: The Dutch in Asia* (Hilversum 2004).

27 Koen Stapelbroek, 'The Dutch Debate on Commercial Neutrality (1713-1830)', in: idem (ed.), *Trade and War: The Neutrality of Commerce in the Inter-State System* (Helsinki 2011) 114-142; Angelie Sens, 'Les Indes orientales néerlandaises vers 1763-1830. Une pépinière idéale pour une société 'en chantier'', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française* 375 (2014) 161-186 DOI 10.4000/ahrf.13135.

28 Sebastian Conrad, 'Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique', *American Historical Review* 117 (2012) 999-1027 DOI 10.1093/ahr/117.4.999.

slave trade were recurrent topics in literature, journals, pamphlets, and the Batavian National Assembly.[29] How did views on slavery affect, if at all, visions of trade, labour, and agriculture in the context of colonial empire? And what role did major Atlantic colonial revolutions such as the American Revolution and the Haitian Revolution play in Dutch debates about the purpose, justification and maintenance of their empire?

The appointment in 1808 of Hendrik Daendels as the new Dutch East Indies' governor-general heralded a new era of colonial state-building. Local Javanese ruling elites were increasingly confronted with an imperial state that sought to establish its political supremacy. How did Javanese political elites who were either harshly subjected or incorporated in the government structure respond to this new imperial order? What did anti-imperial repertoires and visions of resistance, such as Diponegoro's Javanese-Islamic mysticism, on the one hand, and Dutch arguments for subjection and political supremacy, on the other hand, look like?[30] And what legacies did such visions bequeath to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

Finally, the new imperial order was only scantily buttressed by the production of knowledge.[31] What cultures of knowledge, both in the metropole and in interaction with local colonial networks, existed outside government circles? In 1818, Dutch high military officer and future governor-general of the Dutch East-Indies, Johannes van den Bosch, published his two-volume *Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika. […] wijsgeerig, staatshuishoudkundig en geographisch beschouwd* (Dutch possessions in Asia, America, and Africa […] in philosophical, political-economical, and geographical perspective).[32] To what extent this work can be considered as one of the intellectual foundations of a highly successful new policy of colonial exploitation is yet to be determined. After his appointment as governor-general of the Dutch East Indies in 1828, Van den Bosch introduced the Cultivation System of forced labour that would benefit the Dutch treasury for decades. The fact that Van den Bosch, the major nineteenth-century architect of Dutch colonial policy, both wrote about and held posts in the East and West

29 See A.N. Paasman, *Reinhart: Nederlandse literatuur en slavernij ten tijde van de Verlichting* (Leiden 1984); G.J. Schutte, 'Zedelijke verplichting en gezonde staatkunde. Denken en doen rondom de slavernij in Nederland en koloniën eind 18e eeuw', *Documentatieblad werkgroep 18e eeuw* 41-42 (1979) 101-115; Sens, *'Mensaap, heiden, slaaf'*; Koekkoek, *The Citizenship Experiment*.

30 Peter Carey, *The Power of Prophecy. Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855* (2nd ed., Leiden 2008).

31 Gert Oostindie, 'Intellectual Wastelands? Scholarship in and for the Dutch West Indies up to ca. 1800', in: P. Boomgaard (ed.), *Empire and Science in the Making. Dutch Colonial Scholarship in Comparative Global Perspective, 1760-1830* (Basingstoke 2013) 253-280.

32 Johannes van den Bosch, *Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika. In derzelver toestand en aangelegenheid voor dit Rijk, wijsgeerig, staatshuishoudkundig en geographisch beschouwd* (2 vols., Amsterdam 1818).

Indies, reinforces the need for connecting the East and West in a long-term intellectual history of visions of empire.

1850-2017: from Colonial to Postcolonial Empire?

The period from the mid-nineteenth onward saw the Dutch empire expand and consolidate, influencing the daily lives of more and more people across the globe, and then collapse in the period of global decolonization. Did the idea of empire expand and collapse too? Or should we first ask whether empire was an idea that had any traction at all in Dutch debates and if not, why?

The discussion about Dutch participation in the modern imperialism, and hence exceptionalism, has been revisited in various forms over the last thirty years with recent debates over Dutch postcolonial society revitalising these questions.[33] Historically, ideas of an ethical, perhaps even non-imperial, approach to empire have gone hand in hand with decidedly imperial practices. Indignation at British imperial violence during the Boer War was for example flanked by support for the 'pacification' of Aceh. What were the processes of simultaneous remembering, forgetting and perhaps above all self-representation through which a self-image of a benevolent, ethical power

33 H.L. Wesseling, 'The Giant That Was a Dwarf, or the Strange History of Dutch Imperialism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 163 (1988) 58-70 DOI 10.1080/03086538808582768; Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme. Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870-1902* (Amsterdam and Dieren 1985); Remco Raben, 'Postkoloniaal Nederland', *Internationale Spectator* 7-8 (2000) 359-364; Buettner, *Europe after Empire*; Wekker, *White Innocence*.

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Frontispiece to volume 1 of Johannes van den Bosch, *Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika* (1818). Van den Bosch explains the image as follows: Hercules, representation of force and heroic virtue, has destroyed the supposedly eternal column of French power and crushes the attributes of its empire that lie scattered on the ground. As the justified victor, he restores the flag of the Dutch virgin. She rushes to the scene carrying the staff of Mercury, and with her other hand she points to her overseas possessions, represented by the harbour of Batavia in the background. The image combines the early modern representation of Dutch commercial empire, commonly represented as a virgin seconded by Mercury, with a typical early nineteenth-century nationalist imagery. Tellingly, the Dutch colonial empire ('overzeesche bezittingen') is vindicated as the righteous victory over French empire ('heerschappij'). Source: *Johannes van den Bosch, Nederlandsche bezittingen in Azia, Amerika en Afrika. In derzelver toestand en aangelegenheid voor dit Rijk, wijsgeerig, staatshuishoudkundig en geographisch beschouwd* (2 vols., Amsterdam and The Hague 1818).


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survived, and how was this image confirmed and contested, by the Dutch, by other (imperial) powers and above all by those subjected to the Dutch empire?[34]

As before, East and West were intimately connected, but from 1870 onward, economic and infrastructural changes led to a tying together of the empire, as well as its further integration in the world economy.[35] This connective process coincided with the rise of nationalism in the metropole and led to colonial state formation in the Indies and a sense of (creolised) *Indische* community.[36] The question whether increased contact translated into a greater colonial awareness in the metropole has produced a lively literature.[37] Connecting to a wave of paternalistic 'emancipatory' movements in various European empires, criticism of the exploitative policies in the East Indies culminated in the so-called 'Ethical Policy' of 1901, which continued well into the 1940s, reinforced by the Wilsonian moment after World War I.[38] In the colonial context, nationalist movements were gathering strength and questioning the very concept of a Dutch empire.[39] This raises questions such as how does a 'creole empire' relate to metropolitan or geopolitical visions of empire? And how did the acknowledgement of 'Eastern' cultural values relate to European civilizational and racial hierarchies and a Dutch civilising

34 Heinz Gollwitzer, *Geschichte des welpolitischen Denkens II. Zeitalter des Imperialismus und der Weltkriege* (Göttingen 1982); Jennifer Foray, *Visions of Empire in the Nazi-Occupied Netherlands* (Cambridge 2014); Paul Bijl, *Emerging Memory. Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam 2015).

35 Thomas Lindblad, 'Colonial Rule and Economic Development. A Review of the Recent Historiography on Indonesia', *Jahrbuch fur Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 36:1 (1995) 9-22, 18.

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

37 See, for example, M. Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst. Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam 1996); J.Th.M. Bank (et al.), 'Buitenste binnen: De buiten-Europese wereld in de Europese cultuur', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 105:3 (1992) 341-546; R. Girardet, *L'idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962* (Paris, 1979); Ch.-R. Ageron, *France coloniale ou parti colonial?* (Paris 1978) 297-298; A.S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow 2005); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge 2002); Frederick Cooper, Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (London 1997).

38 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford 2007).

39 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten. Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel, 1877-1942* (Utrecht 1981) 183.

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Surinamese people celebrating independence, November 1975.
Collection Nationaal Archief, The Hague. Photo: Bert Verhoeff/Anefo.

mission?[40] The Great Depression put these questions into sharper relief and leads to the question what economic insecurity meant for the concept of empire.[41]

World War II saw alternative forms of empire, imagined in the Indies for some time, and being discussed in the metropole as well.[42] Nonetheless, the war of decolonization was fought to retain as much of the old empire as possible and while economically empire continued after its political demise, real alternatives came too late. Meanwhile, the Netherlands joined NATO and a nascent European community. Was Jacques Marseille right that these new empires, by invitation, smoothened the Dutch transition from colonial empire to a bipolar world?[43]

In the era of Dependency theory and progressive politics, a 'benevolent' Dutch empire, focused on development aid, gave Surinam its, reluctantly accepted, independence, but also saw large numbers immigrating to the metropole, leaving the Antilles as the last vestiges of Dutch imperialism. How do we account for an empire that would prefer to dissolve itself; how does development aid and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy relate to empire in the context of earlier paternalistic and economic realist tropes?[44] A long-term analysis that studies the continuities and discontinuities in visions of Dutch empire from its inception to the present is necessary to answer these questions.

Conclusion

In the postcolonial Netherlands, arguments about the myth of white innocence face passionate pleas for Black Pete. While the Dutch empire in its various incarnations was often creolised and dependent upon other European powers, entrepreneurs, and labour from across the globe, Dutch colonial memory today appears more 'Dutch' than its empire ever was. We therefore

40 Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles*; Anne-Isabelle Richard, *Colonialism and the European movements in France and the Netherlands, 1925-1936* (PhD University of Cambridge, 2010).

41 Ibidem; Thomas Lindblad, 'Colonial Rule and Economic Development. A Review of the Recent Historiography on Indonesia', *Jahrbuch fur Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 36:1 (1995) 9-22, 18.

42 Foray, *Visions of Empire.*

43 Jacques Marseille, *Empire colonial et capitalisme français. Histoire d'un divorce* (Paris 1984); Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From "Empire" by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford 2003).

44 Proposition 1 in Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking van de Derde Wereld. Beeldvorming en beleid in Nederland, 1950-1990* (The Hague 1994); Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten.*

contend that it is time to investigate visions of 'Dutch empire' in the long term from a transnational, transimperial and global perspective: exploring the interplay (or lack thereof) between a multitude of conceptualisations and arguments, including entrepreneurial and governmental visions, as well as visions of resistance and opposition; asking how science and culture buttressed and battered ideas of empire; interrogating Dutch 'exceptionalism' and examining the claims to great, middle or moral power status of this small country with its large empire. This implies examining the 'Dutchness' of a multicultural (post)empire, fundamentally dependent on others, be they the great powers, non-Dutch entrepreneurs or local populations who all shaped visions of empire in Dutch and world history. This essay and the forum in which it appears are the first steps in pursuing this research agenda further.

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