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# Institutional Memory in the Making of Dutch Colonial Culture in Asia (1700–1870)

*Alicia F. Schrikker*

On 10 June 1841, a man named Hadip Nasser approached D.F.H. Helbach, *resident* of Ternate (Maluku), in his office.<sup>1</sup> Nasser asked Helbach to mediate a conflict between his family and members of his community over the ownership of a Quran. Nasser claimed that the book had been in his family's possession since the death of his great-grandfather. Helbach decided that the family's claim of ownership was authentic and decided to return the Quran to the family; he also advised Nasser to keep the book in the mosque so that it remained accessible to both his family and the community.<sup>2</sup>

Helbach's *dagregister* (official diary) for 1841, which features a summary of this case, reveals his involvement in myriad activities in the legal, diplomatic, and religious spheres. Even in the time of the

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*Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), colonial officials like Helbach operated much like autocrats in conjunction with local powerholders. Only around 1870, with the appointment of professional independent judges in regional courts, did the process of professionalisation of officialdom really take off.<sup>3</sup> How did men like Helbach, who headed these offices and practised colonialism, make sense of what they were doing? Did these men who operated in the colonial field—administrators, church ministers, or governors—have shared ideas and norms about why they were there, and how they should operate? This chapter explores possible approaches to these questions, rather than providing definite answers regarding how Helbach and his contemporaries envisioned empire.

Until recently, the existing literature had little to offer students interested in the intellectual framework underpinning Dutch colonialism. David Armitage once described how, when he was compiling his *Theories of Empire* in the late 1990s, he had great difficulty finding suitable resources on the Dutch Empire. When he eventually contacted his Dutch colleagues, they responded saying: ‘Sorry, the Dutch had no ideas; they just counted. There is no secondary literature on the intellectual history of the Dutch empire.’<sup>4</sup> This view echoed the age-old assumptions that the Dutch were pragmatic, adaptive, and largely influenced by financial concerns only—in contrast to all other colonial powers.<sup>5</sup> Historians have advanced since Armitage was writing *Theories of Empire*, and done valuable work, in particular, on the seventeenth century. Martine van Ittersum and Peter Borschberg approached the work of the Dutch jurist Grotius through the lens of the imperial competition between the Dutch, Portuguese, and British in the seventeenth century. Arthur Weststeijn has shown that Dutch jurists and company directors reflected on classical Rome when setting up the East and West India Companies (WIC) in Asia and the Atlantic, respectively. Benjamin Schmidt and Michiel van Groesen have written about how Dutch activities in the Americas and in Asia were represented in the Netherlands in travel writing, art, and public debates. These researchers pay particular attention to how religions and peoples from around the world were represented in printed books, maps, and paintings during the heyday of early modern Dutch print culture. These images fed into Enlightenment intellectual debates about civilisational and racial hierarchies.<sup>6</sup>

Somehow, this new search for the intellectual history of the Dutch empire has limited its focus to the seventeenth century. Comparable

works on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are largely absent, and what exists does little to connect colonial cultures in the metropolis to local colonial practices and experiences.<sup>7</sup> Some see the publication of Valentijn's *Oud En Nieuw Oostindien* in 1723 as the culmination of Dutch enlightened knowledge about Asia.<sup>8</sup> However, we have no idea how this early canon of knowledge about the world beyond Western Europe was manifested in the worldview of Dutch colonial officials. We do know that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, debates and political thought on colonialism and the non-European world in the Iberian, French, and British empires were strongly informed by the Enlightenment and liberal rhetoric of progress. The absence of printed and eloquent intellectual reflections on colonialism and the empire in the Low Countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led an earlier generation of historians to conclude that there was no informed thought on colonialism. Even if at this point we know only little about the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperial self-image of the Dutch, we do know that they were actively and increasingly *doing* colonialism, and consequently, building an empire. They were after all controlling port cities, waging constant warfare, setting up tax and labour extraction regimes, claiming jurisdiction over large regions in South and Southeast Asia, and mediating local disputes, as Helbach was doing in 1841. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may have been a period of decline, in the sense that the Dutch were losing key markets to British and other traders. However, in terms of territorial claims, this was a period of expansion and intensification of Dutch intervention in local societies in Cape Town, Ceylon, Java, and Maluku. The works of Legêne, Van Goor, and Gommans indicate that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was certainly more to colonial thought than mere pragmatic counting.<sup>9</sup> They show in different ways that colonial officials—governors, judges, and church ministers—at times expressed their thoughts about the local society, their own work, and the choices they made in their work. Their research encourages a more structural approach to the evolution of Dutch colonial culture in Asia.

The *longue durée* intellectual history of Dutch colonialism was the theme of the conference on which this volume is based. The conference placed the intellectual history of the Dutch Empire on the agenda. But debates at the conference demonstrated that not everyone agreed

on what this intellectual history should look like and what the starting point should be, as we can read in the publication of the conference round-table. Should it adopt a history of political thought approach by focussing on canonical printed texts written by Dutch intellectuals, such as Grotius' *Mare Liberum* or Van Deventer's *Eereschuld*? In their position paper, Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn proposed a transnational approach, which Susan Legêne emphasised further, arguing that narrow questions about specific Dutch visions reinforce the idea of Dutch exceptionalism rather than opening up the possibility of understanding theories of empire as transnational European products. Andrew Fitzmaurice, writing from the Anglo-Saxon perspective, makes a plea for contextualising the history of political thought, but without prioritising contexts over texts or vice versa.<sup>10</sup>

We could take a different approach to the history of ideas, consider the question: 'What did they think they were doing?' as a starting point and look for commonplace expressions used by colonial officials to explain their work in their writings. Colonial culture, defined by Lauren Benton as the 'assemblage of normative practices and ideas', could be the starting point of such research, instead of Dutch print culture.<sup>11</sup> This means shifting our focus from the more traditional history of political thought to an intellectual history for which colonial culture would be the basis. This, of course, is easier said than done. To locate the production of ideas and visions of empire in this colonial culture, we must return to the world of ordinary colonialism—the world of Nasser and Helbach. After all, colonial officials kept endless records—official diaries, monthly reports, and memoranda for their successors—to account for their actions and decisions. Ideas of empire can be studied through the colonial archives, if they are perceived not merely as accounts of occurrences but as expressions of accountability, knowledge production, and norm-making. To understand the norms and ideas underpinning these actions, we must enter the workplaces of the higher and middle strata of the colonial bureaucracy between 1700 and 1870 and analyse the writing produced therein.

This contribution thus argues for a new approach to the theme of visions of empire. First, it breaks away from historiographic traditions to view the VOC and the colonial period in Asia as absolutely different. Throughout the chapter, fragments from the VOC and colonial archives—produced locally in Asia in the process of performing colonialism—illustrate the historical embeddedness and hybridity of

colonial practice and ideas. Drawing on Ann Stoler's work,<sup>12</sup> I discuss how the seemingly contradicting concepts of pragmatism and progress became core values for Dutch colonialism. This dual worldview developed over time; the practice of, and the writing about, colonialism were rooted in the practices of the VOC as it evolved over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Second, drawing on a deep understanding of the vast locally produced archives and collections in Indonesia and the Netherlands, I propose a more structural approach to the history of ideas in practice.

The article unfolds as follows: in the subsequent paragraphs, I discuss how traditional periodisation has limited our understanding of the evolution of colonial thought as a long-term process, and I subsequently explain why it is essential to incorporate VOC and colonial archives in one study. Next, I illustrate how colonial pragmatism worked through a case study from the Kuta recruitment station in Bali in the 1820s, where the liberal concept of personal freedom was stretched beyond its limits in the name of pragmatism. By entering the colonial organisation, I illustrate how colonial officials at all levels were complicit in these acts of pragmatism. In the third part, I discuss how these same officials came to terms with situations where their work forced them to act beyond what they considered just, and how they justified their actions by alluding to a shared, though vaguely defined, worldview that was anchored in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. These two parts highlight the hybridity of knowledge production and colonial justification, given that colonial officials relied heavily on local intermediaries, while they were also influenced by literature produced in Europe that reflected on Asia. In the fourth part, I discuss the historical embeddedness of doing and thinking about colonialism within the colonial establishment. I show how the VOC archives had an afterlife as containers of 'truth' in the local administration; I use examples from Ternate from the time of Nasser and Helbach to discuss the intertextuality between VOC and colonial archives. The examples in this contribution are not exhaustive, but serve as a starting point for a more systematic analysis of the archives. Drawing from the anthropology of work, I finally argue that we can view the colonial culture of administrative record-keeping as institutional memory that carried its own traditions of knowing and sense-making through generations of officials. As such, these constituted visions of empire that radiated over time into the Dutch public spheres of politics, academia, and the church.

## CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL PERIODISATION

One reason there are no studies on the long-term development of Dutch colonial culture lies in the persistent idea that the period 1795–1816 was a watershed moment in Dutch history in Asia and the Netherlands. Indeed, during this period, the Dutch colonial enterprise in Asia underwent profound constitutional and geographic changes, including the dismantling of the VOC, the Napoleonic Wars, the French occupation of the Netherlands, and the British occupation of Dutch ‘possessions’ overseas, such as Java, Maluku, Ceylon, and the Cape. Bosma and Raben aptly name this process ‘the contraction of empire’.<sup>13</sup> In these areas, the Company had developed into a state-like entity. It carried territorial claims that included the mediation and execution of tax-farming and was executed through military and diplomatic operations and through Dutch-indigenous institutions like *landraden* and other civil courts.<sup>14</sup> The early nineteenth century was characterised by political bickering over the future of the empire by colonial officials and politicians. The rhetoric of liberalism and Enlightenment played an important role in heated discussions over failures of the past and plans for the future of the Dutch colonial enterprise, as can be gathered from Koekkoek’s chapter in this volume.<sup>15</sup>

This traditional periodisation tends to mask continuities in Dutch colonial culture, making it impossible to reach a long-term understanding of how this culture evolved over time. Some colonial officials who arrived in the Indies might have distanced themselves from the VOC rhetorically, but in their actual daily work, they embodied legislative, executive, and judicial power from the start of the VOC period into the 1860s. In constitutional terms, the Dutch empire in Asia was established by 1816, with the proclamation of the *Regeringsreglement*.<sup>16</sup> However, disagreements regarding the form of government and economic exploitation that had emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century, lingered until after the end of the Java War in 1830. By then, the colonial state had taken a company-like shape, with colonial labour extraction (*cultuurstelsel*) based on VOC practices; the *Nederlandsche Handel Maatschappij* (NHM) took over much of the VOC’s role in trading colonial products with the Netherlands on behalf of the state. In practice, just as in the time of the VOC, colonial rule was layered and unevenly distributed, and legal pluralism remained the norm.<sup>17</sup>

In Maluku and other areas in the Indonesian archipelago, there is little indication that inhabitants experienced the colonial period any differently from that of the VOC period. Well into the twentieth century, they continued to refer to the colonial government as ‘kompenie’. The same held true within the workplaces of those who were performing colonialism. The archives of different administrative stations across the archipelago (residency archives), nowadays kept in the ANRI, contain material from both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This local administration directly reflects the continuities between the VOC and colonial administrations up to the 1880s. In terms of the work activities of colonial officials, it makes sense to regard this period as a whole, despite geographic and constitutional disruptions: in the eighteenth century, taxation, law, war, and peace had become core businesses for VOC officials in Asia; trade remained their business in the Netherlands. The idea that the Dutch empire was solely concerned with commercial gain was an illusion from the start.<sup>18</sup>

Rather than focussing on constitutional and geographic changes *per se*, it is more productive to think about how global revolutions, the French occupation of the Low Countries, the British interregnum in Java, and the prolonged warfare and resistance in Java influenced how Dutch colonial officials perceived the world around them and themselves. At the same time, we must question to what extent these self-images and practices were rooted in an eighteenth-century colonial culture. These questions connect to recent studies in the field of the British and French empires. In his *Corporate character*, Eddy Kent takes a cultural approach to the British East India Company archives and shows how after the 1760s, an ideal image of company officials emerged—which resonated in literature and art that reflected on the empire and persisted beyond decolonisation. For the French empire, David Todd emphasises how the eighteenth-century Bourbon Empire continued to play a role in the reformulation of French imperial ambitions after 1814 through territorial claims, actors and memories. He sees this reformulation as a sinuous process, rather than a gradual transition.<sup>19</sup>

### A VIEW FROM THE GROUND: PRAGMATIC CONCEPTIONS OF FREEDOM

How this intricate balance between continuity and change played out in practice is explained through an analysis of the immediate afterlife of the liberal ideals of individual freedom and abolition of slavery that the

British introduced in Indonesia. During the British interregnum, active measures were taken to abolish the slave trade and strengthen the individual freedom of the inhabitants of the archipelago. When the Dutch returned to power, many high administrators were impressed by these liberal standards. The Dutch took these ideas on board along with the abolition of the slave trade, but that is not where this story ends. The abolition of the slave trade forced the Dutch to think about what freedom and free choice meant in the Indonesian archipelago. As it turns out, however, there was little commitment to the idea of freedom in Dutch colonial practice, as the following anecdote illustrates:

In 1827 the Anna Paulowna had set sail from Banyuwangi to Surabaya. It carried eighty-five soldiers who had been recruited in Bali, besides the ship's crew and extra troops. Hours before they were to arrive in Surabaya, the Balinese men attempted to take over control of the ship, the ship's captain responded quickly to this act of mutiny and had his crew take up arms and shot fifty-four men dead, while ten jumped overboard.<sup>20</sup>

This tragedy was long forgotten and never made it into the annals of colonial history. As we will see, the mutiny was the soldiers' ultimate act of resistance against forced recruitment and deportation from Bali. The sad incident stands in stark contrast to the original order, issued a year earlier—to recruit 600 soldiers in Bali, The government in Batavia had expressly stipulated that conscription had to be voluntary and out of free will, to avoid any suspicion that the government was violating its own laws by trading slaves in Bali. But the Dutch already had a long history of removing people forcibly from Bali to work for them. The VOC never established a factory in Bali, but nonetheless, it engaged in trading humans on the island via Chinese and other middlemen who negotiated the slave trade with local rajas. Slaves bought in Bali were mainly those who were in debt or had been convicted as criminals—this proved to be a continuous source of labour throughout the VOC's history.<sup>21</sup> After the VOC's bankruptcy, this practice continued. So, in the early nineteenth century, when Daendels wanted slaves to work on his defence works in Java, he turned to Bali. After the British interregnum, the Dutch sent a mission to Bali to procure slaves. At this point, the Dutch were not the only traders interested in deporting men, women, and children from the island. In the early nineteenth century, French, Chinese, and Buginese traders easily found their way there as well. So in the early 1820s, when

there was a need for military recruits, turning to Bali was simply a colonial reflex founded in historical practice.<sup>22</sup>

The mission had been prepared in the preceding years by Pangeran Sayyid Hasan Al-Habashi,<sup>23</sup> who worked as an agent for the colonial state and had developed a good relationship with the raja of Badung. Pangeran Sayyid had been explicitly instructed that all recruits had to conscript out of their own free will and that the king of Badung was to be paid only a small fee per recruit in return for his cooperation. The voluntary conscription initially promised a salary to the recruits and freedom of movement. They were to be dressed as soldiers and not chained. This proved impossible: as French and Chinese traders recruiting slaves from the same pool of men were paying high prices, Pangeran Sayyid concluded that the only way to complete his mission was to pay the king of Badung similar prices per recruit. Eventually, the Dutch government allowed Pangeran Sayyid to pay the king a higher fee per recruit. Thus, the recruitment of soldiers financially resembled the slave trade, but the idea of free will remained in that the recruits were to receive a salary.<sup>24</sup> The Bali residency archives contain the letters Pangeran Sayyid wrote in Jawi, with Dutch translations. The letters express his frustration over the impossibility of the mission, which the Anna Paulowna mutiny then confirmed.<sup>25</sup>

A year later, government commissioner Pierre Dubois arrived, at what was to be a permanent recruitment station. Dubois was instructed to operate under the same impossible conditions, and like Pangeran Sayyid, he wrote extensively about the problems he encountered. If we were to visit his workplace as contemporary observers, we might find him writing or seated on his veranda discussing the progress of the recruitment with Jan Housing, the Chinese *shahbandar* (harbour master), who was well versed in Malay and Balinese and might have provided him with information on Balinese society.<sup>26</sup> Outside, we might hear the anxious voices of about 10–30 men between the ages of 17 and 25 years, and if we walked to the newly built recruitment barracks, we would find them chained, like slaves, waiting to be shipped to Java. Like his predecessor, Dubois had been given the express instruction that men had to be recruited out of free will, but nothing suggests that the men recruited during Dubois' term conscripted voluntarily. By this time, the salary advance of five guilders that was to be given to each recruit was being given to the middlemen who brought the recruits to Dubois' office. It led Dubois to exclaim in one of his letters that what he was really doing

was trading slaves and that this was certainly how the Balinese perceived his work. Dubois describes how the men tried to escape with the help of their family, and how he gave the men opium to keep them pacified when bringing them on board to be shipped to Java.<sup>27</sup> The soldier's costume (trousers, jacket, hat, and tie) was the only thing that distinguished these men from ordinary slaves. These clothes were the only indication of the formal free status they gained by being recruited. Apparently, for Dubois's superiors, this outward appearance of freedom was good enough.

By stepping into Dubois' workplace, we get a solemn idea of how the practice of colonial culture by the Dutch was defined by a disregard for local and corporate norms. The history of the Kuta recruitment station is unique, because we can see how these norms shifted with the consent of superior government officials, through the exchange of letters and instructions. Instructions were consciously ambiguous, for example when the government instructed Dubois in August 1828 to do his best to convince the rajas to stop the slave trade. However if that would not work, he was allowed to pay the market price of 25 Spanish reals per recruit to compete with the French and Chinese slave traders.<sup>28</sup> First, recruiters paid the market price for slaves to the raja of Badung for each recruit, the recruits' salary advances were given to the middlemen, and finally, the recruits were kept chained in the warehouse. All this was done with the consent of Dubois' superiors. There is no doubt that they were forcibly recruiting people as slaves, and government officials at all levels were complicit in this 'act of commercial pragmatism'. The history of the Kuta recruitment station in Bali in the late 1820s illustrates just how historically embedded Dutch colonial practice was.

### CULTURES OF WRITING IN COLONIALISM

Years later, Dubois wrote an ethnographic account of Balinese society, based on his years working in Kuta. His writings have attracted the attention of anthropologists and historians like Helen Creese, who made these ethnographic accounts available in a recent publication.<sup>29</sup> In the introductory chapters, she carefully analyses his writings and contextualises them. She argues that the ethnographic accounts are unique because they are the earliest comprehensive accounts of Bali, and include insights into its courtly culture, religion, and customary laws. She sees his writings as a typical product of the Enlightenment because of how he maps

Balinese society through categories such as politics, economy, law, and religion. This systematised ordering of information about Bali led him to claim that Bali was a barbaric society that stood low on the ‘ladder of civilisation’. Creese points out that this line of reasoning is typical of how Enlightenment authors of the eighteenth century wrote about societies outside Europe; she reveals a degree of intertextuality with the work of Voltaire in Dubois’ discussion of Balinese Brahmanic texts.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, she connects Dubois’ writings to a preceding tradition of writing about Indonesian society—consisting of the work of John Crawfurd, Thomas Stamford Raffles, and William Marsden—that is generally considered a product of liberal Enlightenment.<sup>31</sup> Finally, she also makes visible the intertextuality between the writings of Dubois on Bali, and writings on Bali produced in the 1810s and 1820s by Dutch official Van der Broek and by the Malay author Abdullah bin Muhammad Al-Misri, who Pangeran Sayyid employed as a writer on his missions to Bali. Dubois was critical of these texts, but he nonetheless used and referred to them. We certainly know that his unnamed Balinese concubine helped him by translating and explaining local customs and perhaps Jan Housing or others working in service of the Badung court gave him the necessary information.<sup>32</sup> Gathering information on Bali was a hybrid process, just as the practical work in Kuta had been; Dubois structured the information according to European expectations of the time. That Dubois was of French origin and wrote his ethnographic treatise in French rather than Dutch further emphasises the trans-European character of the colonial enterprise.

Ann Stoler, writing on the nineteenth-century colonial state archives, illustrates in different ways how the archives reveal categories of colonial thought. In a recent essay on Enlightenment and the empire, Stoler explains that we should not take colonial reasoning at face value. She argues that nineteenth-century colonial officials were not rational employees produced by the age of Enlightenment. Instead, society–state interactions were often intuitive and emotional, and Enlightenment political theory served to justify actions in hindsight rather than to inform them.<sup>33</sup> It is not difficult to imagine that Dubois’ depiction of Bali as a ‘barbarous society living in the past’ served him by helping to justify the slave trade in which he had been involved while in Kuta. Surely, Stoler is correct in advocating a critical approach to the knowledge production in the archives, but there must be more to the justifications we uncover in the archives than a mere disguise of colonial anxiety.

Uncovering such justifications in colonial archives could help us understand the values and norms that colonial officials shared about just rule. The inner relations among the history of ideas, archive production, and practical experience across space and time await critical assessment.

Thus, while the ethnographic information that Dubois collected is unique, it was shaped by traditions of writing about and studying other societies that had developed in Europe in the eighteenth century, while simultaneously building on existing knowledge that had been passed on in colonial offices. In an earlier study on the Dutch administrative culture in Sri Lanka, I worked on a set of regional *Memories van Overgave* written by VOC officials in Sri Lanka in the last decades of the eighteenth century. This particular genre of colonial records was written by officials to simultaneously inform successors about the practicalities of rule, and convince superiors of their own capacities. I have shown that in these instances, the authors were influenced by European Enlightenment canonical texts and ways of thinking—the *Encyclopedie des Deux Indes* by L'Abbé Raynal is one such example. More broadly, these colonial officials appear to have been guided by physiocratic ideas in their definitions of rural economic intervention in Sri Lanka, while ideas about race and civilisational development ruled how they depicted the local society and legitimised their own positions therein.<sup>34</sup>

In a way, Dubois' worldview appears to have been founded in the same eighteenth-century European Enlightenment canon as that of late eighteenth-century VOC officials in Sri Lanka. They shared ideas about civilisational development, the rule of law, and progress, which influenced how they informed their colleagues about the local society, their self-image, and how they justified their work. Writing memoirs and political-economic treatises in office to inform successors and fellow officials were a common practice throughout the VOC empire that continued into the colonial era. The archives contain a large number of these types of documents; together, they lend themselves well to a long-term analysis of colonial culture.<sup>35</sup> They encourage an approach that integrates the study of colonial culture (and thus, intellectual history in practice) in the VOC as well as in the colonial state. However, as explained earlier, there are few historians who cross this formal organisational divide. Furthermore, we need to think about the long-term effect of this knowledge and norm production in situ. Creese, for instance, shows how, via other colonial officials, various copies of Dubois' manuscript ended up in collections in the Netherlands and Indonesia. More in general

copies of the type of manuscripts discussed above found their way into archives of politicians and academics in the Netherlands and were sometimes reprinted in colonial journals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this way the reports had an afterlife in which they informed policy decisions and public and academic conceptions of colonialism and Indonesian society.

### HISTORICAL EMBEDDEDNESS OF DUTCH COLONIALISM

The life and work of Dubois in the colonial office reveal the historical embeddedness of colonial thought and action within the colonial organisation. The VOC archives had an afterlife as institutional memory that informed men in the nineteenth century about how to write, think, and act while at work. In the archives we find direct traces of this cross-temporal relationship between policy, thought, and action. Through them, ideas and practices became anchored in the Dutch official mind. The nineteenth-century officials used and read these archives, and often, knowledge from VOC archives was reproduced and found its way into the colonial period in practice and writing.

Elsewhere, I have discussed how, in nineteenth-century court cases, references to VOC legislation continue to be found.<sup>36</sup> In 1824, Bien, an enslaved woman of around 20 years living in Ternate, ran away from her owners Isahak (or Baba Bjaab as his friends and relatives called him) and Njonja Tenga after they had heavily abused her. The verdict referred to Batavian statutes from 1642, which included a slave code, and quoted article no. 11 of the slave code. The court used this article in her favour to grant her freedom and punish her owners.<sup>37</sup> Recently, Sanne Ravensbergen has shown how colonial legal courts that were set up in the nineteenth century, especially the *landraden*, were built on earlier structures and ideas about the rule of law. So, while the procedures and workings of these courts surely underwent changes over time, the insecurity and patchwork nature of the courts remained constant. Practices and presumptions about the nature of society continued, changing only gradually. Ravensbergen showed that until 1870, the judges in these courts continued to be colonial officials who also performed executive power and the court's legitimacy derived from its cooperation with indigenous power holders, the *regenten*, *jaksas*, and *penghulus*, even if the distribution of power was slowly changing in favour of the Javanese regents and Dutch *residenten*.<sup>38</sup>

The VOC's legacy can thus be found in the rule of law and the institutional set up of the colonial state; and in a more mundane sense, the VOC archives were important to colonial officials on the spot. The officials preserved and consulted these archives as sources of information and truth and as guides of how to navigate the local society. In the same year when Hadip Nasser sought mediation by Helbach for his family conflict, a double disaster hit the island of Ternate. First, the Gamalama volcano erupted, and two weeks later, an earthquake followed by three weeks of heavy aftershocks rocked the island. During these three weeks, panic reigned and Ternate's sultan and residents had regular discussions about what to do. Towards the end of the three weeks, the Dutch considered abandoning the island, but the sultan insisted on staying. During these discussions, Dutch administrators went through the VOC archives to seek out previous experiences with earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, and an account from 1773 when an eruption likewise coincided with an earthquake was used for risk assessment. Elsewhere, I have analysed how this moment of historical reflection evoked opposite responses from the sultan and resident. But the point here is that VOC records were still kept in the offices of administrators. They were used as institutional memory and provided the information that formed the basis of considerations about impending action.<sup>39</sup> We also know that in the late nineteenth-century colonial officials in training consulted Francois Valentijn's work as a source on Indonesia and Dutch history there.

So while nineteenth-century administrators tended to publicly dismiss the VOC period as part of the *ancien régime* from which they felt they had progressed, they also saw the VOC archives as containers of 'truth', which included ideas about the nature of local society, and why the Dutch were there. Archival records justified historic claims and served as guidelines for obligations and responsibilities to which the Dutch had committed over time and which they had enforced on local society. In sum, the archives influenced the colonial self-image and guided administrative behaviour. Scholars of political thought might not find the internal justification for these practices very exciting, as there is little eloquent intellectual reasoning in them; however, they were written for a colonial audience and worked persuasively. When we look carefully at VOC and colonial archives, we see the production of history and ethnography—which was used to legitimise pragmatic action and, therefore, constituted colonial culture—at different levels in the organisation. As such, I argue

that between 1700 and 1870, colonial culture should be understood as a continuous, cumulative process that was largely shaped in the office, rather than in the libraries of political thinkers.

### COLONIAL CULTURE AND ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY

So far, I have used the case study of the Kuta recruitment station and fragmentary examples from the VOC and colonial archives to build a case for an archival turn in the study of the long-term history of ideas in colonialism. But how should we set about doing this, and is there any indication apart from the fragmented evidence presented here that such an approach would be fruitful? Certainly, the idea of placing the archives at the centre of an analysis of colonial culture is not new.<sup>40</sup> Kent, for example, moved beyond traditional periodisation to show how motives that we tend to situate solely in twentieth-century literary representations of the British Empire in Asia actually have a deep discursive genealogy that reaches into eighteenth-century colonial archives. Kent's work shows that it is fruitful to take a long-term approach to the history of ideas in colonialism; here, I agree that understanding the colonial self-image is an important key to that history. While Kent aims to show how that self-image came to penetrate literature and the arts at home in Britain, I would like to understand how such a colonial self-image related to the act of doing colonialism. Is it possible to grasp how daily encounters between colonial officials like Helbach and colonial subjects like Hadip Nasser influenced colonial legitimisation? In order to answer this question, we will need to dig deeper into the colonial organisation. While it is tempting to answer such a question at the individual level, it is essential to understand this development of colonial culture, or process of sense-making, not from an individual, but a collective perspective.

To that effect, I propose drawing inspiration from research on the anthropology of work, and more specifically, the field of 'organisational identity'. Organisational identity studies focus on how organisations define themselves and what they stand for in relation to internal and external stakeholders. Scholars involved in this discipline study how such self-definitions emerge and develop within an organisation.<sup>41</sup> To understand the intellectual framework underpinning the empire, or the more basic question raised in the introduction—'What did colonial officials think they were doing?'—a focus on self-definition is relevant and useful. One of the most interesting studies in this field was conducted recently

by Charlotte Linde on a large insurance company in the American Midwest.<sup>42</sup> She argues that organisations create narratives that give their employees a sense of purpose. This insurance company's narrative, she shows, encompasses visions of the company's past, present, and future. It gives meaning to what the organisation does and what its employees do. The narrative is embedded in the organisation's institutional memory, and it is passed on and reproduced by employees. Thus, the organisational identity is contained within this institutional memory.<sup>43</sup>

The concept of organisational identity directs our focus to questions of purpose and collective sense-making. It inspires us to question whether we can distinguish underlying narratives of past, present, and future within the colonial enterprise. How did such narratives adapt to changing circumstances? How did these narratives intersect with visions of the empire as they developed over time in the metropolis? Institutional memory and collective sense-making must be placed at the core of research on colonial culture and then examined at different levels in the organisation. We might not be able to conduct such research through interviews as Linde did, but the culture of writing within the colonial organisation—the VOC and colonial governments—provides access to this institutional memory. In the preceding paragraphs, I have shown that the archives provide us with opportunities to do so, if we focus on genres of writing and fully understand the local discursive contexts in which they were produced.

Typical VOC genres of writing, such as *Memories van Overgave*, in which knowledge was transferred from one administrator to his successor and *dagregisters*, reappeared in the nineteenth century as administrative genres. Thus, the culture of writing and reporting seems to have changed less than we might think.<sup>44</sup> I have discussed how the memoirs are full of ethnographic, political, and economic details. Furthermore, they often contained visions about the company's past, how the author's predecessor ruled, the author's accomplishments, and advice for his successor. The *Memories van Overgave* allow us to see how knowledge and experience were passed on; the *dagregisters* allow us to assess how mundane work and interactions among colonial officials changed over time. Colonial behaviour was anchored in local society and in its own colonial past, but it was also informed by contemporary global ideas, as is evident in the references to Raynal and Voltaire in the writings of colonial officials. If we look at the archives in their own right, as institutional memory, and see how they were linked to knowledge production outside

the archives, we get a much better understanding of the collective official colonial mind. Approaching it like an organisational anthropologist, we would then do this at different levels within the colonial organisation, from the centre and the office of the governor general to different local offices, and even further, to institutions at the fringes. Good examples of the latter category would be the church and missionary offices, which have produced archival heritages in their own rights.<sup>45</sup>

As I have paid little attention so far to the church as a colonial institute, the last point might require further explanation. From the beginning of the Dutch colonial enterprise, the church was an important component of Dutch rule. It functioned as a spiritual, educational, and legal body. The church councils in Maluku, Ceylon, and Batavia reported to the VOC, but also upheld separate correspondences with the *clasis* in Amsterdam to keep it informed about local affairs. Church ministers were appointed separately, but otherwise there were considerable crossovers between members of the church councils and officials of the administration. The churches functioned within and alongside the colonial realm; in the Indonesian archipelago, they continued to do so during and after the Napoleonic Wars. Church reports and council minutes form two fascinating continuous sources throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We can, therefore, ask similar questions about how church ministers regarded their position in Asia in the past, present, and future. Church councils discussed daily matters on the spiritual development of their local members, and in the eighteenth century, there was internal criticism and doubt about methods of conversion and education. In this light, discussions about language and customs frequently appear in the minutes of church councils.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, in Sri Lanka and Maluku, parishes were involved in more than mere preaching. Registration and mediating in family affairs were part of the colonial clergy's work and the related reports give insight into the daily activities of and around the churches. In the nineteenth century, missionaries found their way to the Indies in larger numbers; however, interactions between established colonial churches and new missions have been little studied, as have the new channels of information into the Netherlands that the missionaries produced to raise funds for their work.

In each case, we must work within the locality to understand how colonialism worked not just in practice, but also discursively. With pragmatism ruling supreme, we find that locally developed administrative practices and values transformed into what we recognise as 'Dutch

colonialism'. And so, in the eighteenth century, we find diverse cultures of record-keeping and local interactions that emerged over time. While certain practices faded during the nineteenth century, others continued well into the twentieth-century. But each expressed locally crystallised forms of governance that differed across regions. The history of Pierre Dubois shows that, if we want to understand visions of empire, we need to understand the discourse on local customs and practices, and the self-image of responsible rulers that was passed on to readers, as well as the actual work on the ground—here, local and Dutch norms were continuously stretched in the name of economic pragmatism and legitimised by the idea that local society was found at a stage of development different from societies in Europe that required different policies. It explains why, later in the nineteenth century, the Dutch criticised some of the effects of colonialism and pushed for ethical reform; however, they never seemed to understand the fundamental problem of their own position as colonial rulers pretending to be merchants.

## CONCLUSION

This contribution advocates a new approach to Dutch colonialism, by examining the development of narratives of colonial legitimacy within the colonial organisation. It follows Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn and it takes a *longue durée* approach that agrees with Legêne, in the sense that such ideas should not necessarily be understood as exclusively Dutch. The case of Pierre Dubois, a Frenchman, clearly illustrates this. In line with Fitzmaurice, I argue that we should place the interactions among ideas, practical experience, and the texts that were produced while doing colonialism at the centre of our analysis. The starting point would be the colonial workplace rather than the texts printed in the Low Countries or elsewhere in Europe. The VOC and colonial office archives, as products of colonial accountability and justification, offer ample possibilities of researching the *longue durée* history of ideas related to Dutch colonialism. Still, adopting this new approach is easier said than done. Therefore, this contribution is first and foremost concerned with what to look for in these immense archives and how to read the documents they contain.

In this article, I have argued that in order to think productively about the character and evolution of Dutch colonial thought, three persistent

historiographic barriers must be overcome. The first barrier is that of periodisation. The institutional history of Dutch colonialism in Asia has led to separate historiographies of the VOC period and that of the colonial state. Historians have seldom attempted to investigate connections between these two periods. Instead, I argue that the only way to understand the long-term development of Dutch colonial culture is by integrating the histories of the VOC and the colonial state, and consider how certain core values were transmitted from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century and beyond. The way to achieve this is by using the colonial workplace as a point of departure. Second, we need to overcome the self-image of the Dutch as pragmatic merchants that led an earlier generation of scholars to conclude that there was no such thing as a Dutch ideology of colonialism. We should try to understand this self-proclaimed pragmatism not only as acts, but also as a core value of Dutch colonialism that was used to legitimise certain actions and led men in colonial service to transgress the moral values that they claimed to sustain publicly. Next, we need to move away from the idea that political thought about colonialism can only be studied through contemporary publications of (public) intellectuals. Instead, I argue that even if colonialism was not always openly debated, the texts produced in the process of performing colonialism transmitted experiences and ideas and legitimised their actions. When we look at the colonial working field through the eyes of an organisational anthropologist, we can highlight core values and ideas that shaped colonialism, which served as foundational narratives that legitimated Dutch colonialism. Such foundational narratives ossified over time and found their way to the metropolis, through history-making, politics, and religion.

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## NOTES

1. Within the colonial administration the resident belonged to the higher government circles, he was in charge of residencies, or provinces. This function resembled that of the commandors and governors in the VOC period.
2. Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, Jakarta (ANRI), Ternate 174, dag-journaal D.F.H. Helbach 1841, journal entry 10 June.
3. See the chapter by Sanne Ravensbergen in this volume.
4. Martine van Ittersum and Jaap Jacobs, 'Are We All Global Historians Now? An Interview with David Armitage,' *Itinerario* 36, no. 2 (2012): 7–28.
5. A view that continues to be repeated in the work of Piet Emmer, *Het Zwart-Witdenken Voorbij. Een Bijdrage aan de Discussie over Kolonialisme, Slavernij en Migratie* (Amsterdam: Nieuw Amsterdam, 2018), and to a lesser extent in Wim van den Doel, *Zo Ver de Wereld Strekt. De Geschiedenis van Nederland Overzee vanaf 1800* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011). For earlier protagonists of this view see also Cees Fasseur, *Kultuurstelsel en Koloniale Baten. De Nederlandse Exploitatie van Java, 1840–1860* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1978).
6. Michiel van Groesen, *The Representations of the Overseas World in the De Bry Collection of Voyages (1590–1634)* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad: The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570–1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Martine van Ittersum, *Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595–1615* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); and Peter Borschberg, *Hugo Grotius, the Portuguese and Free Trade in the East Indies* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2011). This observation is confirmed by other contributors to this volume, such as Weststeijn, Antunes and Schmidt.
7. Dineke Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* (New Brunswick: New Jersey Transaction Press, 2014); Angelie Sens, *'Mensaap, Heiden, Slaaf': Nederlandse Visies op de Wereld rond 1800* (Den Haag: SDU, 2001).
8. Jonathan Israel, *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 545.
9. Jos Gommans, 'South Asian Cosmopolitanism and the Dutch Microcosmos in Seventeenth-Century Cochin (Kerala),' in *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600–1800*, ed. Cátia Antunes and Jos Gommans (London etc.: Bloomsbury, 2015), 3–27; Jur van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism, the Dutch in Asia* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2004); and Susan Legène, *De Bagage van Blomhoff en Van Breugel. Japan, Java, Tripoli en Suriname in de Negentiende-eeuwse Nederlandse Cultuur van het Imperialisme* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 1998).

10. 'Visions of Empire Forum,' in *BMGN Low Countries Historical Review* 132, no. 2 (2017). The forum can be consulted at: <https://www.bmg-nlchr.nl/590/volume/132/issue/2/> and consist of the following three contributions: René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard, Arthur Weststeijn, 'Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective', Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'The Dutch Empire in Intellectual History', Susan Legène, 'The European Character of the Intellectual History of Dutch Empire.' Fitzmaurice has further expanded upon this point in 'Context in the History of International Law,' *Journal of the History of International Law* 20, no. 1 (2018).
11. Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
12. Ann Stoler, 'Reasons Aside: Reflections on Enlightenment and Empire,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
13. Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben, *Being Dutch in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).
14. Over the past years a number of studies have taken a more local perspective on the history of colonial encroachment and interaction in this period. Atsushi Ota, *Changes of Regime and Social Dynamics in West Java: Society, State and the Outer World of Banten 1750–1830* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Hui Kian Kwee, *The Political Economy of Java's Northeast Coast c. 1740–1800*; Sri Margana, *Java's Last Frontier: The Struggle for Hegemony of Blambangan, c. 1763–1813* (PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2007); and Abdul Wahid, 'From Revenue Farming to State Monopoly: The Political Economy of Taxation in Colonial Indonesia, 1816–1942,' *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2014): 294–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2014.896245>.
15. Jur van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism*; A.F. Schrikker, 'Restoration in Java 1815–1830: A Review,' *BMGN—Low Countries Historical Review* 130, no. 4 (2015): 132–144; the next chapter by Koekkoek in this volume.
16. The Regeringsreglement formed the basis of the organization of the colonial state, it might translate best as 'general regulation of government'.
17. Schrikker, 'Restoration in Java 1815–1830.'
18. See Antunes in this volume.
19. Eddy Kent, *Corporate Character: Representing Imperial Power in British India, 1786–1901* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014); David Todd, 'A French Imperial Meridian, 1814–1870,' *Past and Present* 210 (2011): 155–186.
20. ANRI Bali 66, letter from the resident of Besuki, 21 May 1827.
21. Alfons van der Kraan, 'Bali: Slavery and Slave Trade,' in *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid, with the assistance

- of Jennifer Brewster (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983), 315–340. For more generalized studies of the role of slavery, slave trade and slave labour in the VOC see Reggie Baaij, *Daar werd wat Gruwelijks Verricht* (Amsterdam: Atheneaeum—Polak & van Genneep, 2015); and Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke Tragiek. De Geschiedenis van Slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2015). For a contemporary reflection on the VOC's history on Bali, see ANRI Bali/Lombok 3.
22. For the French slave trade in Bali and the transport to the Mascarenes, see Richard Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens, OH: University of Ohio Press, 2015).
  23. Pangeran Sayyid Hasan Al-Habashi originally came from Surat in South Asia. He was employed as agent for the colonial government on several occasion and was Arabic tutor at the court of Yogyakarta. He was close to the high colonial administrators. Helen M. Creese, *Bali in the Early Nineteenth Century: The Ethnographic Accounts of Pierre Dubois*, *Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 305 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 39, note 35.
  24. ANRI Bali 66; see also Bali/Lombok 81 with instructions for the raja of Bali Badung about the recruitment, dates 18 October 1826.
  25. ANRI Bali 66 and Bali 3 for the Jawi letters containing Pangeran Sayyid's seal.
  26. Creese, *Bali in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 79, note 37.
  27. ANRI Bali/Lombok 82, letter 88, Dubois to the resident of Besuki and Banyuwangi, 30 September 1828. He describes the situation of the slave trade quite vividly and explains that once the transaction has been made, the slave traders have full power over these people, and the king no longer cares about them even if the traders beat the slaves to death, the king will not act. He continues to say that in fact the government's power over their recruits remains the same: 'wij hebben dezelfde regten, en hoezeer de commissie moeite heeft gedaan om dat idee van slavernij in onze handen te doen verdwijnen, heeft het volk zulks nog in begriip...?'
  28. ANRI Bali/Lombok 81, letter 88, Dubois to the resident of Besuki and Banyuwangi, 30 September 1828.
  29. Creese, *Bali in the Early Nineteenth Century*.
  30. Creese, *Bali in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 150–151 for Voltaire, and 160–163 for her general observations on the Enlightenment roots and moral reflections such as barbarity in his work.
  31. William Marsden, *The History of Sumatra: Containing an Account of the Government, Laws, Customs and Manners of the Native Inhabitants, with a Description of the Natural Productions, and a Relation of the Ancient Political State of That Island* (London, 1784); Thomas Stamford Raffles,

- The History of Java* (London, 1817); and John Crawfurd, *History of the Indian Archipelago: Containing an Account of the Manners, Art, Languages, Religions, Institutions, and Commerce of Its Inhabitants* (Edinburgh, 1820).
32. Creese, *Bali in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 152–153 on the writings of Van den Broek and Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Misr; 167–168 on his concubine and other possible informants.
  33. Stoler, ‘Reasons Aside: Reflections on Enlightenment and Empire.’
  34. A.F. Schrikker, *Dutch and British Colonial Intervention in Sri Lanka, 1780–1815* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), Chapters 4 and 5.
  35. Ibid.
  36. Schrikker, ‘Restoration in Java.’
  37. ANRI Ternate 170, 1824–26, ‘Proces papieren tusschen den fiskaal J.H. Otto A.O. Eisscher, contra de Makassar Isaak en zijne huisvrouw Njonja Tenga over mishandeling van een slavin genaamd Bien.’ For the Bataviase Statuten and the slave code see J.A. van der Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch plakaatboek, 1602–1811*, vol. 2.
  38. Sanne Ravensbergen, *Courtrooms of Conflict: Criminal Law, Local Elites and Legal Pluralities in Colonial Java* (PhD thesis, Leiden University, 2018).
  39. The sultan of Ternate in his diary-entry of the earthquake, mentions that the Dutch officials show him the old books from their archive. F.S.A. de Clerq, *Bijdragen tot de kennis der residentie Ternate* (Leiden: Brill, 1890), 202–223. For a Dutch account of that meeting, see ANRI Ternate 173, dagjournaal Helbach 1840; A.F. Schrikker, ‘Disaster Management and Colonialism in the Indonesian Archipelago, 1840–1920,’ in *Natural Hazards and Peoples in the Indian Ocean World: Bordering on Danger*, nr. 8, ed. G. Bankoff, and J. Christensen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 225–254.
  40. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). More recently: Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).
  41. Michael G. Pratt, Majken Schultz, Blake E. Ashforth, and Davide Ravasi, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
  42. Charlotte Linde, *Working the Past: Narrative and Institutional Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
  43. Ibid.

44. In contrast with the organization of the archives in the Netherlands. Charles Jeurgens, 'Networks of Information: The Dutch East Indies,' in *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600–2000*, ed. C. Antunes and J. Gommans (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 95–130.
45. This research is currently conducted by two PhD students within the framework of the Institutional Memory project: Philip Post 'Reproducing past, present and future: colonial visions and experience in Asia in the residencies' and Alexander van der Meer, 'Spirited Narratives of Purpose and Progress: Church-Society Engagement Alongside the (Company-) State'. For more information see: <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/humanities/institutional-memory-in-the-making-of-colonial-culture>.
46. Hendrik E. Niemeijer en Th. van den End, *Bronnen betreffende Kerk en School in de Gouvernementsen Ambon, Ternate en Banda ten tijde van de VOC, 1605–1791* (Den Haag: Huygens ING, 2015).