

Abstracts

Plenary session: New imperial histories

Alan Lester: 'The New Imperial History: A Debate'

In this talk I will try to identify what is new about the 'new imperial history' developed with respect to Britain and its empire over the last fifteen years or so. I will pay particular attention to the ways in which it has utilised a spatial conception of networks and trajectories continually connecting Britain and its colonies and allowing for the mutual constitution of each, rejecting the older notion of a British core and various colonial peripheries. I will also pay attention to the different kinds of questions that the new imperial history asks of the colonial past and present, to the debate over the extent to which British culture itself was constituted by Britons' and others' activities in the overseas empire, and to potential ways forward for British and colonial historians.

Parallel session 1: Migration circuits

Roelof van Gelder: '40,000 Letters over Sea: A Hidden Resource in The National Archives in London'

The archives of the High Court of Admiralty (HCA) in The National Archives in London, contain letters found on ships taken by British privateers during the course of three centuries. This paper goldmine consists of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Swedish, German, Danish and Dutch letters. All together, some 200,000 to 300,000 items (at a rough guess). These letters were sent by ship from Europe to seaports all over the world, and from there back to Europe. But as they fell victim to privateers, they never reached their destinations.

As the authors of these letters were all relatives or commercial partners of persons working in the West or East Indies – or were working there themselves – their letters give a vivid impression of the lives of those who in some way were connected with overseas settlements. Sailors, soldiers, merchants, planters, ministers, bookkeepers, clerks, craftsmen and their relatives wrote about their daily lives, their fears and sorrows, as well as on commercial matters.

With the exception of some Spanish and Danish letters, only the Dutch ones have been studied. I have drawn up a general inventory of the Dutch letters – some 40,000 – in the Sailing Letters Project (www.kb.nl/sl), enabling many scholars of early modern history – historians as well as linguists – to study these.

They offer us a splendid opportunity to write on the unknown, private side of overseas history at biographical, social, micro-historical and even

economic levels. Many articles, as well as a number of books, have been published in the Netherlands based on these letters.

Henk den Heijer and Karwan Fatah Black (Leiden University): 'Eighteenth-century Surinamese-Dutch Migration Circuits'

The peopling of the Dutch Atlantic colony of Suriname in the eighteenth century was mainly the result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Europeans who migrated to the colony, however, had more choice in the matter. Looking at the history of Suriname, it is clear that the differing aspirations of the Europeans who arrived had a great impact on the colony. Europeans who left for Suriname can be divided into two main groups. There were those who were planning to settle in the new world and use the seemingly endless space to build a new life and a new society. Others saw the colony on the Wild Coast as a good opportunity to make a fortune, and then move back to Europe.

Amongst those who planned to settle in the colony, Jews in particular were especially motivated by the religious freedoms they would enjoy in Suriname. They founded their own town upstream on the Suriname River and played an important role in initial colonization. They introduced sugar cultivation and throughout the eighteenth century, their community served as a pole of attraction for European Jews.

Fortune-seekers mostly wanted to acquire fabulous riches and then move back to Europe. In the early period, some people went in search of 'the gilded city' of Eldorado. As hopes of finding this faded, they were replaced by aspirations to be successful in sugar and coffee production. An influx of migrants from Europe who had this goal in mind took place during the 1760s in particular. The increasing profits from the plantation economy inspired them to try their luck, with varying degrees of success.

This presentation will discuss different kinds of European migration to Suriname in the eighteenth century and analyze the impact the various migrant groups had on the colony.

Barbara Henkes: 'Shame and Scandal in the Family: Global Dutchness and Apartheid in South Africa'

Though the Dutch colonial venture in the Cape had come to an end by 1806, traces of Dutch colonial involvement have remained in the many different networks connecting the Netherlands and South Africa ever since. I intend to explore how traces of Dutch colonialism manifested themselves in the lifestyles of Dutch migrants who settled in South Africa under Apartheid (1949-1994) and some of the ways in which these traces were accepted, ignored and/or challenged through interaction with relatives who remained in the Netherlands.

Family ties brought Dutch filmmaker Maarten Rens and his camera to South Africa in 1981. After returning to the Netherlands with his impressions and film material, he got involved in the video-collective of the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement. His films are the product of a global network, and at the same time produce a transnational space in which divergent political cultures and attitudes towards 'race' in South Africa and the Netherlands during the 1980s confront one another. This enables us to ask how his relatives in South Africa tried to introduce the filmmaker (and his audience) into the 'normality' of their daily lives under Apartheid – and how he himself tried to show the 'abnormality' of their lives from a perspective that was significantly influenced by the public condemnation of Apartheid in the Netherlands since the 1960s.

However, the interviews I conducted in 2008-2009 with the filmmaker and some of his relatives in South Africa and the Netherlands also enable us to ask other questions: How do Rens and his family try to account for their different attitudes, 15 years after the end of Apartheid? Last but not least: How can we, as historians, evaluate these different attitudes in relation to the (trans)national discourses on Apartheid that informed them? And more generally: how can we explore the moral dimensions of (post-)colonial relationships in the past and the present?

Parallel session 2: Information and cultural networks

Marten Jan Bok: 'Dutch Painters in Asia in the Seventeenth Century'

With an average of one Dutch painter arriving each year, the presence of visual artists in Asia during the seventeenth century is surprisingly strong. The Dutch East India Company apparently offered attractive employment to artists who either wanted to visit foreign lands – not unlike the traditional 'grand tour' to Italy – or who needed to escape from problems at home.

So far, research on the migration of Dutch artists to Asia has been sporadic, and our understanding of the phenomenon has not progressed substantially beyond the work of J. de Loos-Haaxman (1941). Thanks to the rapid digitization of the rich archives in the Netherlands and to the digitization of old and rare books by university libraries worldwide, I have recently been able to build up a database of artists migrating to Asia. This database contains much more detailed and reliable biographical information than was previously available. Many artists who were merely a name have now been attributed their personal data, while in many cases their itinerary in Asia could be reconstructed. In my paper, I will present the results of my prosopographical research, focusing on the question of the extent to which painters participated in the exchange of visual culture between Europe and Asia.

Vincent Kuitenbrouwer: “A Campaign of the Pen”: Dutch Journalism and the South African War (1899-1902)’

The South African War between the British Empire and the Boer republics, which started on the brink of the twentieth century, was followed with much interest by the Dutch public. Drawing on feelings of kinship (*stamverwantschap*), opinion-makers in the Netherlands called for active support for the Boers, meaning the British empire-builders could be kept at bay and the independence of the Boer republics preserved. Although the Netherlands officially remained neutral throughout the war, more informal efforts of all kinds were made to influence the course of the conflict in South Africa. The most important feature of the Dutch pro-Boer movement was propaganda, which was meant to provide a counter-narrative to the writings about the South African question by pro-expansionist authors from Britain. Many journalists actively participated in this self-proclaimed ‘campaign of the pen’.

This paper will assess the pro-Boer propaganda in the Dutch press by examining how information from the war zone was transferred to the Netherlands. Considering the state of Dutch journalism, which at the time was rather unprofessional compared to the foreign press, there were many worries about the fact that news from the British side always came in first. After the British army had occupied the territory of the two republics in September 1900, it became increasingly hard to contact correspondents who could provide information about the guerrilla war that continued to resist it. Despite these problems, however, Dutch newspapers were able to gather a significant amount of information, celebrating the heroism of the Boers and condemning the British ‘methods of barbarism’. In this way, the public in the Netherlands and a large part of continental Europe was presented with a biased view of the South African War.

Manjusha Kuruppath: ‘Casting Asian Despots in Dutch Drama: The Case of Van Steenwyk's *Thamas Koelikan*’

By 1745, the Persian ruler Nadir Shah Afshar, also known as Thamas Koelikan, had made a name for himself as a conqueror in Asia. In the very same year, the Dutch playwright Frans van Steenwyk scripted a play titled *Thamas Koelikan* in Amsterdam. This relatively unstudied play not only chose the Asian monarch as its protagonist, but also chose Nadir Shah’s conquest of Mughal India as the backdrop to his drama. A perhaps not altogether strange choice, when seen in the context of the larger European fascination for this conqueror in the mid-eighteenth century. Numerous accounts rolled off of the European presses detailing the conquests, expeditions and personality of Nadir Shah. Just as Van Steenwyk’s drama reflected the curiosity of his peers in the activities of this distant Persian sovereign, another image of Asian rulers widely circulating in Europe at the same time also found its way into

the play – the image of the Oriental Despot. Although the theme of the Oriental Despot was generically applied to Asian rulers, the relationship this label had with Nadir Shah was more intimate. From the late eighteenth century onwards, any mention of Nadir Shah was invariably a reference to Oriental Despotism, and it was not long before the ruler was inducted into the pantheon of despots alongside other ‘scourges of the East’, such as Tamerlane.

This paper studies the nature of representation of Nadir Shah in Van Steenwyk’s *Thamas Koelikan*. It enquires whether and by what means the image of the Oriental Despot features in this literary piece. It argues that the observations made in this regard should be seen in the light of the sources of information and imagery the playwright relied on in drawing up his play. This in turn is related to the larger world of the Dutch East India Company in Asia.

Plenary session: Colonial and post-colonial moralities

Romain Bertrand: ‘The Politics of Colonialism and Post-colonialism’

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Parallel session 3: Imperial values

Dienke Hondius: ‘Paternalism and other crucial concepts in the European history of *race*’

In the twentieth century, the categorization of *race* in terms of value, worth, and price, became more and more of an embarrassment, leaving it to the things that are left unspoken, unmentioned, as Frantz Fanon noted.* At the beginning of the century, a large majority of white Europeans knew black people only from images and stories about the colonies, from hearsay, not from personal interaction. In the first years of the 21st century black African and Asian communities in Europe have developed into an overall small, at places significant mostly urban presence. Many generations of white Europeans went through cycles of surprise about meeting their ‘first’ non-white neighbour, classmate, colleague, or family member.

How has ‘white Europe’ dealt with racial issues during the preceding centuries? Access to Europe of black people was restricted to very few people who gained access, often as a result of a special permission, a grant, a favour, a privilege, often also in a situation of almost complete dependence of a white

* Frantz Fanon, Racism and Culture. In: Emmanuel Eze (ed.), *African Philosophy, An Anthology*. Wiley Blackwell, Malden 1998, p. 310.

European as owner in the case of slavery, or as boss or supervisor who arranged an invitation, provided paperwork, etc. Europe never opened the doors unrestrictedly for access of non-white non-Europeans until the postcolonial period after World War II and the Shoah. Even then, access to Europe of postcolonial migrants who were usually legal citizens of the European country they chose to visit or to settle in, remained restricted: open unrestricted access regardless of age, income, education level varied according to the rules made by the European nation states, from a few years to several decades, but not more.

In this paper I address several longterm patterns in European race relations. These patterns include infantilization, paternalism, bestialization, and exceptionalism, and my main argument is an appeal to include these concepts in European history. Paternalism is a concept in political history, a theory explaining power structures. In my book I argue for a connection of the theory of paternalism, with the practical experience of real children in the history of the slave trade and slavery. Two European perceptions of Africans and Asians, as permanent children, and as people without any individual, natal or hereditary rights, have a long history. But this is not only a history of perceptions. African and Asian children were also a real presence in this history, and property relations were a reality for a long time as well.

Maartje Janse: 'Distant Victims: The Paradox of Nineteenth-century Protests Against Slavery and the Cultivation System'

It has often been stated that visibility of victims is a necessary prerequisite for the development of humanitarian protests against abuses of different kinds. For example, the relative absence of slaves in the Netherlands is often cited as one of the reasons that the antislavery movement was not very impressive. The visibility of the victims of alcohol abuse (drunkards lying in the gutter; drunken violence against the wife and children of the drunkard) on the other hand made this issue closer to the popular heart, and this explains much of its popular appeal during the 19th century.

However, in my contribution, I will argue the opposite case. Dutch protests against slavery and the cultivation system, as they developed in the 1840s-1870s, were concerned with victims the individual reformers had hardly ever witnessed themselves. This made it easier to sympathize and identify with these victims. The exploited slaves or Javanese were represented in humanitarian narratives, most famously in the novels of Harriet Beecher-Stowe and Multatuli. In these texts, the suffering colonial subjects were idealized and, in the most literal sense of the word, 'familiarised': their motherly or childlike qualities being recurring themes in the narratives, inviting the reader to engage in a 'personal' relationship with them.

In my presentation, I will contrast these imagined relations with idealised 'victims' in the colonies with the real relations with real 'victims' of alcohol abuse at home. This comparison will raise questions about the

importance of the colonies as a 'distant-enough yet close-enough' imaginary space for the mobilization of Dutch opinion, and as such crucial for the development of political participation and democratic practices in the Netherlands.

Alicia Schrikker: 'Dutch responses to natural disasters in nineteenth-century Indonesia: humanitarianism, governmentality and identity'

Natural disasters affecting large numbers of people, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and floods, occur on a regular basis in the Indonesian archipelago. This is as true today as it was in the past. This paper examines disasters that took place in the nineteenth century: a period in which colonial power was gradually expanding across the archipelago, while public awareness of colonialism was expanding in the Netherlands. The central questions will be how Dutch and Indonesian perceptions of the societal effects of disasters shaped colonial policy in the course of time, and how the public in the Netherlands responded to these disasters. This paper takes up the cases of the exceptional floods in central Java in 1861 and the Krakatau eruption in 1883, but will also draw on other examples, such as the eruption of Merapi in 1822/23 and the Kelud eruption of 1917.

While, in the early nineteenth century, the colonial government perceived disasters as ill-fated events, by the early twentieth century these were seen as a possible cause of social disruption that needed to be prevented. In the Netherlands, media coverage of disasters led to fundraising projects and expressions of public sympathy with the victims. Such expressions fed a Dutch self-image of a humanitarian nation providing aid to needy Javanese victims of natural disasters. A self-image that has persisted beyond the colonial era. An analysis of these responses enables us to make connections with the broader issues of nineteenth-century humanitarianism, colonial governmentality and Dutch identity.

Parallel session 4: Imperial knowledge

Marieke Bloembergen & Martijn Eickhoff: 'A National Obligation: Archaeological Research and Regime Change in Java and the Netherlands (1800-1850)'

In this paper, we focus on the connections between military expeditions, regime changes and archaeological activities in Java and the Netherlands during the first half of the nineteenth century. By discussing and comparing the archaeological activities of a group of Dutch and English civil administrators and military officers in Java (N. Engelhard, T.S. Raffles, C. Mackenzie) and those of the director of the National Museum of Antiquities in the Netherlands (C.J.C. Reuvens) and an individual Dutch

painter/traveller on Java (H.N. Sieburgh), we aim to show how, as a result of parallel regime changes, the Javanese archaeological sites and objects became part of a heritage discourse in Java and the Netherlands. They had become treasures that self-evidently had to be safeguarded by the colonial state, and that only state-supported specialists could explain. They were thereby transformed into 'a national obligation', and a means of socio-cultural critique.

Fenneke Sysling: 'Different Ethics Overseas? Anthropological Exploration Practices at Home and Overseas'

Historians of science have debated to what extent there is such a thing as colonial science. The increasing amount of research into the field seems to suggest that there is; or should we concur with what David Arnold argued for medicine: 'There is indeed a sense in which all modern medicine is engaged in a colonizing process'?

The paper considers this question, looking at local practices in two places that were of interest to physical anthropologists from the Netherlands – one in the Netherlands and one in the Netherlands East Indies. It aims to show the connectedness between research practices and ideas in both places, and will argue that most of the processes at work were part of a single, wider imperial outlook. Focusing on research practices (and the research ethics of anthropometry in particular), it compares how local circumstances were dealt with and how obstacles and (indigenous) objections were overcome. The analysis of ideas about the (bodies of) local people and ideas about the aim of the research will also add to the understanding of both explorations.

Looking both at home and overseas, this paper is able to focus on the extent to which these research networks were intertwined. To what extent were these studies carried out by the same researchers? How did practices at home and in the colonies relate to and influence each other? What kind of values and ideas were exchanged? This paper hopes to lay bare differences, similarities and change in the study of the national and colonial bodies.

Andreas Weber: 'Forging New Connections: Adriaan David Cornets de Groot Junior (1804-1829) and the Mapping of the Javanese Language in the Early Nineteenth Century'

In the first half of the nineteenth century, several attempts were made to map and describe the Javanese language. The glossaries, descriptions, dictionaries, grammars and textbooks which came off the presses in Batavia, Amsterdam and London were subsequently used in various contexts: on the one hand, they served as basis for the training of colonial civil servants and missionaries, while on the other they formed an important starting point for the 'scientific' study of Javanese language and literature as it was practiced in

the second half of the nineteenth century. By following the language disciple ('*élève voor de Inlandsche talen*') and translator Cornets de Groot to the *kraton* (court) in Surakarta and then back to the Netherlands, the following paper not only seeks to reconstruct the complex origin, but also the subsequent reception, of his *Javaansche spraakkunst* (1833) in Java and at home in the Netherlands.