

A Benign Empire?

The Instrumentalisation of Abolitionism in the Moluccas, 1817-1879

PHILIP POST

This article analyses how nineteenth-century Dutch colonial officials in the Moluccas repeatedly instrumentalised abolitionist rhetoric to increase the legitimacy of the colonial State. It first demonstrates how these officials used the ban on the slave trade in 1814 to present themselves as adhering to an enlightened colonial philosophy. This allowed them to distance the newly established colonial State from the legacies of the Dutch East India Company, which had violently ruled over the Moluccas from the middle of the seventeenth century up to the end of the eighteenth century. The second part of this article shows how Dutch officials used the abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies in 1860 to both paint themselves in a favourable light and to increase their territorial claims in Papua, a region that had been subject to the authority of the Sultan of Tidore for centuries.

Dit artikel analyseert hoe Nederlandse koloniale ambtenaren in de Molukken in de negentiende eeuw abolitionistische retoriek inzetten om de legitimiteit van de koloniale staat te vergroten. Het toont eerst hoe deze ambtenaren het verbod op de handel in slaafgemaakten uit 1814 gebruikten om zichzelf te presenteren als aanhangers van een verlichte koloniale filosofie. Op deze manier konden zij afstand nemen van de erfenissen van de Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, die op gewelddadige wijze over de Molukken had geregeerd tussen de tweede helft van de zeventiende eeuw en het einde van de achttiende eeuw. Het tweede deel van dit artikel laat zien hoe Nederlandse bestuurders het verbod op slavernij in Nederlands-Indië uit 1860 gebruikten om zichzelf in een gunstig daglicht te stellen en om het Nederlandse gezag uit te breiden in Papua, een regio die eeuwenlang tot de invloedssfeer van de Sultan van Tidore had behoord.

On 28 September 1879, the Dutch Resident of Ternate, Owen Maurits de Munnick (1841-1915), gave a speech in which he proclaimed the end of slavery in Ternate and Tidore. In these semi-independent Sultanates, located in the North Moluccas, almost two decades after slavery was abolished in the Dutch East Indies in 1860, more than 4,000 individuals were still enslaved.² After all, when the practice of slavery had been put to an end in 1860, an exemption had been made for those parts of the archipelago, such as the Sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, that were not under direct Dutch control and which were governed by local rulers. These Sultanates had been subject to Dutch rule since the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, VOC) had established its spice monopoly, but had retained large parts of their internal sovereignty. The Sultans feared that their economies would collapse without slave labour and only agreed to abolish slavery if they would receive financial compensation from the Dutch government. In the following two decades, negotiations took place between the Dutch and the Sultans, which came to an end in the late 1870s and resulted in the abolition of slavery in Ternate and Tidore in 1879.

To officially announce that slavery had ended, Dutch officials in the Moluccas arranged a series of speeches and celebrations. They used these to paint the Dutch colonial government in a favourable light. In the presence of the entire Tidoran and Ternatan elites, De Munnick emphasised in these speeches that 'it is certainly not the first time that we come together in the *kedaton* [the Sultan's palace, see Figure 1] for a solemn meeting like this one, (...) but never before for such a noble purpose, as we have come to replace oppression and injustice with freedom and right, and declare all slaves of the Sultanate of Ternate free'.³ He added that the liberation of these enslaved

1 The research for this article was carried out as part of the NWO VIDI project 'Institutional memory in the making of colonial culture', led by Dr. Alicia Schrikker at Leiden University. The author would like to thank Dr. Schrikker, Prof. Dr. Jos Gommans, the other authors of this issue, the BMGN editors and the anonymous commentator for feedback on previous versions of this text. Important sources that were used for this article can be found in the National Archives of Indonesia (ANRI) in Jakarta. All the staff of the ANRI, particularly Nugrahita Rizky, have been helpful in finding relevant documents. Many of these were consulted during a research trip that was carried out with financial support from

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2 Dirk Vlasblom, *Papoea* (Mets & Schilt 2004) 64.

3 Owen Maurits de Munnick, *Mijn Ambtelijk Verleden* (J.H. de Bussy 1912) 111. Original: 'het is zeker niet de eerste maal dat in deze *kedaton* een plechtige bijeenkomst gelijk deze plaatst vindt (...) maar toch nooit met zoo'n edel doel als nu, daar wij zijn gekomen om vrijheid en recht in de plaats te doen treden van verdrukking en onrecht, alle slaven van het sultanaat Ternate vrij te verklaren'.



Figure 1. Palace of the Sultan of Ternate around 1903 © Leiden University Library Digital Collections, KITLV A95, 82725, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:935212>.

individuals was due to the work of 'our esteemed government, which again shows to not shy away from making huge financial sacrifices when this is required for the application of its noble principles'.⁴ In total, 4,449 enslaved individuals were liberated, for which the government paid a total sum of 65,600 guilders as compensation to the Sultans.⁵

In his speeches, the Dutch Resident thus used the abolition of slavery to convince the local Ternatan and Tidoran subjects of the good intentions of the colonial government. This was not the first or only time abolitionism was put to strategic use by the Dutch. As this article argues, nineteenth-century Dutch colonial officials in the Moluccas repeatedly instrumentalised abolitionism to their benefit. To make this point, the analysis focuses on both the end of the slave trade around 1814 and later the end of slavery itself after 1860. The first part of the article discusses how Godert van der Capellen (1778-1848), Governor-General between 1816 and 1826, used the ban on the slave trade in 1814 to present the Dutch as followers of an enlightened colonial philosophy. This allowed him to distance the colonial State from the legacies of the VOC, which had ruled over the Moluccas violently over the previous two centuries. The second part analyses how the Dutch officials used the abolition of slavery in the 1860s and 1870s to show themselves in a good light while simultaneously increasing their territorial claims in Papua, a region that had been subject to the authority of the Sultan of Tidore for centuries. Throughout the article, it will be demonstrated that Dutch rhetoric about the importance of abolitionism clashed with the reality of the colonial government's continued use of various forms of forced labour.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly highlighted the importance of slavery in Asia and the role of European trading companies in it.⁶ If research on the Atlantic slave trade held centre stage for a long time, more and more studies have reconstructed the central role of the Dutch in slave trade networks in the Indian Ocean. Scholars such as Ulbe Bosma, Matthias van Rossum, Alicia Schrikker and Nira Wickramasinghe, among others, have examined the numerous ways in which the VOC and the Dutch colonial State were involved in the Asian slave trade.⁷ Furthermore, intellectual historians have focused on how practices such as slavery could co-exist alongside self-perceptions of the Dutch as forming a liberal,

4 Ibid., 111. Original: 'voornamelijk te danken aan onze hooggeachte Regeering, die nu wederom toont voor geen groote geldelijke offers terug te deinsen wanneer de toepassing harer edele beginselen ze eischt'.

5 Ibid.

6 See Reggie Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht. Slavernij in Nederlands-Indië* (Arbeiderspers 2015) for an overview.

7 Matthias van Rossum has published a great deal about slavery in Asia. An accessible introduction to his research is Matthias van Rossum, *Kleurrijke tragiek. De geschiedenis van slavernij in Azië onder de VOC* (Verloren 2015). Also see Pascal Konings, Maartje Hids, Sam J. Miske, Matthias van Rossum, Merve Tosun and Hannah de Korte, 'Exploring Slave Trade in Asia. First Steps towards an International Database', TSEG – *The Low Countries*

tolerant and just nation. In a 2017 BMGN-forum, René Koekkoek, Arthur Weststeijn and Anne-Isabelle Richards emphasised the need to study the intellectual underpinnings of the Dutch empire and discussed the multiple discourses the Dutch entertained on what their empire was about. They emphasised that different discourses were constructed throughout the empire by a variety of colonial actors, such as officials, traders, soldiers, and missionaries. As such, a variety of representations of the Dutch empire came about in different colonial settlements throughout the East and West Indies, with important contrasts between the colonies and the metropole.⁸ The reconstruction of these intellectual histories is, therefore, important to understand the different visions of the Dutch empire that circulated through the colonial realm. As the introduction of this special issue points out, while '[r]eferences to a historical tradition of obtained or regained freedom are cherished parts of Dutch culture', considerably less attention has been given to the coexistence of such freedoms with the harsh reality of forced labour and slavery.⁹

The reconstruction of the ways Dutch officials in the Moluccas instrumentalised abolitionism connects to these two research agendas. This article shows that the visions that colonial officials in the Moluccas had of themselves and the Dutch colonial system became very visible in their engagement with slavery. By making this point, this article follows up on an observation that was made by Seymour Drescher in 1995. He noted his surprise about how 'remarkably, even after the British had apparently demonstrated abolition's hegemonic potential, Dutch trans-Atlantic slave trade abolition in 1814 was not used to create any domestic ideological advantage for the restored House of Orange'.¹⁰ This article argues that officials in the Moluccas did precisely that: using the end of the slave trade and slavery to create an ideological advantage for themselves. By showing this for the Dutch case, this research connects to prior research that, in line with Drescher's remarks, revealed the ways through which the British colonial

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Other important works are Ulbe Bosma, *The Making of a Periphery: How Island Southeast Asia Became a Mass Exporter of Labour* (Columbia University Press 2015) and Alicia Schrikker and Nira Wickramasinghe (eds.), *Being a Slave. Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (Leiden University Press 2020).

8 René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, 'Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective', *BMGN – Low*

Countries Historical Review 132:2 (2017) 79-96.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10342>.

9 See the introduction to this special issue by Karwan Fatah-Black and Lauren Lauret, 'Repentance and Reappraisal: Historicising the Defenders of Slavery in the Netherlands', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12843>.

10 Seymour Drescher, 'The Long Goodbye. Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later. Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (KITLV Press 1995) 35.

government instrumentalised abolitionism to further its international agenda.¹¹

The analysis is based on a large number of archival documents. The first part, dealing with the abolition of the slave trade, is centred around a contrast between published accounts of Governor-General Van der Capellen about Dutch attempts to stop the trade in enslaved humans with the unpublished letters written by his wife, Jacqueline Baroness van der Capellen, née Jacoba Elisabeth Baroness Van Tuyll van Serooskerken, to one of her friends on Java, that show that Dutch officials continued to engage in the buying and selling of humans.¹² The second part, dedicated to the abolition of slavery, is built on archival records of the National Archives of Indonesia that illustrate how colonial officials in the North Moluccas instrumentalised abolitionism to foster the agenda of the colonial State. As such, this article is based on accounts that were written by the Dutch colonial elites; unfortunately, the voices of the enslaved people are mostly absent in the archives produced by the colonial State, nor are there first-hand accounts of how the Moluccan elites reacted to abolitionism.

The article proceeds with a sketch of the role of slavery in the Moluccas. It then delves into the Dutch officials' positioning themselves as fervently against the slave trade and shows that in practice key officials continued to buy and sell enslaved individuals. And finally, it analyses the colonial officials' utilisation of abolitionist viewpoints to extend Dutch territorial claims on Papua at the expense of the Sultan of Tidore.

The voc and slavery

Immediately after the VOC arrived in Asia in the early seventeenth century, the Company relied on slave labour for many of its core activities, and right from the start, it engaged in the buying, exploiting and trading of enslaved people.¹³ Slavery was already common in the Indian Ocean region before the arrival of European trading companies, but their presence intensified this institution and led to a huge increase in the number of people who were traded. Over time, slavery became so widespread in many Dutch settlements in Asia that Markus Vink has referred to them as 'true slave societies, in which slaves played an

11 See Suzanne Miers, 'Slavery and the slave trade as international issues 1890-1939', *Slavery & Abolition* 19:2 (1998) 17-37. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399808575237>.

12 Jacqueline's letters can be found in the National Archives of the Netherlands in The Hague (henceforth NA), Van Hogendorp Archives 2.21.008.69, 154 F-J. Her husband's account can be

found in Godert van der Capellen, 'Het Journaal van den baron Van der Capellen op zijne reis door de Molukko's', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 17:2 (1855) 281-315 and Godert van der Capellen, 'Het Journaal van den baron Van der Capellen op zijne reis door de Molukko's. Tweede gedeelte', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 17:2 (1855) 357-396.

13 Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht*, 31.

important part in both luxury and productive capacities'.¹⁴ In many colonial cities, enslaved people made up half of the population, performing back-breaking labour that was crucial to the colonial infrastructure. The continuous need for forced labour meant that many thousands of people had to be brought into the Dutch colonial enclaves each year. According to recent estimates, some 660,000 to 1,135,000 people were transported to the Asian possessions of the VOC in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁵ Up to the second half of the seventeenth century, many slaves hailed from the Indian subcontinent, but from the 1660s onwards, the majority of slaves came from Southeast Asia, with many people being sold in Makassar and Bali.¹⁶ A lot of these individuals had become enslaved either through not being able to pay off incurred debts or by being captured in warfare.¹⁷

The institution of slavery was also widespread in the Moluccas, which were known as the Spice Islands because of the large amounts of high-quality spices, such as cloves, nutmeg and mace, that could be found there. First controlled by Malay, Middle Eastern and Venetian merchants, the spice trade had become increasingly dominated by Portuguese and Dutch traders.¹⁸ The dominant military position of the Dutch vis-à-vis their European and Asian competitors was reflected in the way it organised the trade in spices. To control the supply of the spice trade, the VOC had fought violent wars to establish a monopoly, which was in place from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards.¹⁹ The Company not only determined the number of spice trees that could be grown but also bought the spices that were cultivated at a fixed and low price, enabling it to make huge profits. Furthermore, the VOC decided that the cultivation of spices was to be concentrated on a few islands: mace and nutmeg on Banda, and cloves on Ambon and a few neighbouring islands. To better protect the monopoly, no spice trees were allowed in the North Moluccas, where the clove tree had originally been found. The most powerful Sultans there, in Ternate and Tidore, had agreed not to participate in the spice trade on the condition that they would receive a yearly compensation in return and that the Dutch would not interfere in their internal affairs.²⁰

14 Markus Vink, 'The World's Oldest Trade: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of World History* 14:2 (2003) 131-177, 148.

15 Pepijn Brandon, Guno Jones, Nancy Jouwe and Matthias van Rossum, 'Inleiding. Amsterdam en de slavernij in Oost en West', in: *Ibid.* (eds.), *De Slavernij in Oost en West. Het Amsterdam Onderzoek* (Spectrum 2020) 18.

16 Baay, *Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht*, 43.

17 Maarten Prak and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism. The Netherlands 1000-1800* (Princeton University Press 2022) 136.

18 David Abulafia, *The Boundless Sea. A Human History of the Oceans* (Penguin 2019) 153, 567, 688.

19 Gerrit Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en christenen* (KITLV Press 2004).

20 Chris F. van Fraassen, *Ternate, de Molukken en de Indonesische Archipel. Van soa-organisatie en vierdeling: een studie van traditionele samenleving*

The work on the spice trees depended on forced labourers and enslaved individuals. Thousands of them worked on nutmeg plantations in Banda, where the native population had been ruthlessly removed in a series of military actions led by Jan Pieterszoon Coen, after which the island had been repopulated with enslaved people from other parts of the archipelago. Similarly, on Ambon, enslaved people carried out crucial tasks, some working on the clove plantations, but even more performing forced labour that was crucial to many other sectors, such as manufacturing, shipping, the maintenance of colonial fortifications, the extraction of natural resources and agriculture. In addition, many members of the colonial elites held enslaved people as status symbols. Because of the large number of functions and occupations that were carried out by enslaved people, many historians conclude that 'slavery permeated society at every level'.²¹ Although no spice trees were allowed in Ternate and Tidore, many enslaved people could be found in the North Moluccas, where the Sultans also held thousands of enslaved people in their territories.

While Dutch rule in the Moluccas had not been fundamentally challenged throughout the eighteenth century, it received two huge blows at the turn of the nineteenth century when the British managed to remove the Dutch twice: first in 1796-1803 in Ambon and in 1801-1803 in Ternate, and again in 1810-1817 in both territories. These events took place in the context of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars when, after the French occupied the Dutch Republic in 1795, the British believed it to be crucial to obtain the Dutch-French colonies in the East Indies and thereby deal a blow to French power in Asia.²² The Treaty of Amiens, signed in 1802, established peace between Britain and France, after which the Moluccas were returned to the Batavian Commonwealth in 1803. When Dutch authority was restored in the Indies, it was no longer the VOC that exercised power, but the Dutch government, which had taken over the VOC's possessions when it was on the verge of bankruptcy. A few years later, in 1810, the British again attacked the Dutch Indies, ushering in the second British Interregnum in the Spice Islands, but this time also taking over Java in 1811. British dominance would only last a few years, however. After the disintegration of Napoleon's power and the restoration of the Dutch government, negotiations commenced about returning the Dutch colonial possessions, with important consequences for the slave trade in Asia.

en cultuur in Indonesië, deel 1 (Dissertation Leiden University 1987) 48-57.

21 Kerry Ward, 'Slavery in Southeast Asia, 1420-1804', in: David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (eds.) *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*,

Volume 3 AD 1420-AD 1804 (Cambridge University Press 2011) 163-185, 181.

22 Alexander Mikaberidze, *The Napoleonic Wars: A Global History* (Oxford University Press 2015) 62.



Figure 2. Portrait of Godart Alexander Gerard Philip baron van der Capellen, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies between 1816 and 1826. Painted by Cornelis Kruseman (1816-1857). © Rijksmuseum. SK-A-3795, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.9968>.

These negotiations led to the Convention of London of 1814, by which the Dutch colonial empire was restored, although in a restricted form. Some settlements, such as Ceylon and the Cape of Good Hope, remained in British hands, but the Indies were returned to the Dutch. The British had, however, only agreed to return these settlements on the condition that the Dutch government put a stop to the slave trade. This was quickly agreed to, because of which Gert Oostindie has argued that ‘the 1814 abolition of the slave trade was an imposition by Britain rather than the outcome of a national debate’.²³ While there had been some Patriot radicals, such as Pieter Vreede, who had argued for abolition in the 1780s and 1790s, there had been little support for the cause.²⁴

In the Moluccas, the end of the slave trade and the promise of a new governing philosophy were proclaimed during a visit by Governor-General Van der Capellen (see Figure 2) in 1824.²⁵ In a series of meetings with the local rulers of the Moluccas, he stated that the purpose of his visit was to inform his subjects of the dawn of a new era. While the corrupt policies of the VOC led to its dissolution in 1799, the newly formed colonial State was presented as based on enlightened notions of good governance and genuine care for its colonial subjects. The new generation of enlightened officials would rule completely differently than the VOC administrators had. In the words of Van der Capellen, the people of Ambon ought to ‘regard the officials who rule over you as your protectors and benefactors, and welcome the officials whom We send as peaceful envoys, who in Our name proclaim your future prosperity’.²⁶ Instead of corrupt traders, the people in the Moluccas would from now on be ruled by professional officials, whose responsibilities were outlined in detailed instructions. These would ensure that the inhabitants of the Moluccas were treated justly and fairly by their superiors, and that they were offered the ‘fatherly protection’ to which ‘all subjects of our King can make a claim’.²⁷

23 Oostindie, *50 Years Later*, 4.

24 Susan Legêne, *De bagage van Blomhoff en Van Breugel* (Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen 1998) 98. See Dirk Alkemade’s article in this special issue: Dirk Alkemade, ‘Why was Slavery not Abolished in 1798? Humanity and Human Rights in the Batavian Revolution’, *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12807>.

25 Johannes Olivier, *Reizen in den Molukschen archipel naar Makassar, enz.*, vol. 1 (G.J.A. Beijerinck 1834) 1.

26 *Ibid.*, 174. Original: ‘beschouwt dan de ambtenaren, die over u gesteld zijn, als uwe

beschermers en weldoeners; ontvangt de ambtenaren die Wij tot u zenden als vredeboden, die in Onzen naam uw toekomstige welvaart komen verkondigen’.

27 Van der Capellen, ‘Het Journaal van den baron Van der Capellen op zijne reis door de Molukko’s’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 17:2 (1855) 283. Original: ‘de bevolking van dezen archipel (...) de vaderlijke bescherming te doen deelachtig worden, op welke alle de onderdanen van onzen Koning aanspraak hebben’.

In these attempts to protect the Moluccans, attention was paid to the proper treatment of enslaved individuals. Van der Capellen emphasised how fortunate it was that the slave trade was abolished. He noted that ‘on Celebes, the main trade was in slaves, which fortunately has been abolished during the years of British rule’.²⁸ He stressed the importance of abolitionism and the advantages of free labour. Because of such beliefs, he had obtained the position of ‘protector’ of the *Javaasch Weldadig Genootschap* (Javanese Benevolent Society), which aimed to combat the ills of the slave trade. His public stance against slavery was particularly expressed in his interactions with local rulers. During a visit to Makassar in July 1824, he had multiple dealings with Arong Lompo, the brother of the Queen of Boni, Salima Radjiatuddin, with whom he had to renew the alliance between the Dutch government and the Sultanate of Boni. The Queen wanted to please Van der Capellen by sending him an enslaved girl as a gift. He immediately objected to this ‘on the grounds that all slave trade by the Dutch government was prohibited’, but added that ‘any other gift, no matter how small, would please me’.²⁹ Through such expressions, he presented himself, and the Dutch colonial State by extension, as opposed to the trade in enslaved humans.

The image of a corrupt VOC and an enlightened State was later reinforced by Johannes Olivier (1789-1858), who accompanied the Governor-General on his travels throughout the Moluccas and commented on them in a widely read book. Olivier stated that the ‘sole purpose’ of their visit had been to ameliorate the situation of the local Moluccans and ensure their participation in the ‘general progress of enlightenment and civilisation’.³⁰ In his account, he repeatedly emphasised the ‘intentions of this truly enlightened statesman’.³¹ Copies of the speeches were immediately distributed throughout the Moluccas, but also printed in the *Staatsblad* (the Dutch government gazette). Van der Capellen’s journal was later published in the *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* in 1855, where it was edited by Wolter Robert van Hoëvell. In his introductory remarks, the editor described Van der Capellen as an ‘enlightened statesman, who managed to combine his love for mankind with his awareness of his higher duties’.³² This image of Van der

28 Van der Capellen, ‘Het Journaal van den baron Van der Capellen op zijne reis door de Molukko’s. Tweede gedeelte’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 17:2 (1855) 378. Original: ‘Voorheen was de voornaamste handel op Celebes die met slaven, welke gelukkig reeds door het Engelsch tusschenbestuur is afgeschaft.’

29 Ibid., 368. Original: ‘op grond dat alle slavenhandel door het Nederlandsch Gouvernement verboden was, terwijl elk ander geschenk van de koningin, hoe gering ook, mij welgevallig zou zijn’.

30 Olivier, *Reizen in den Molukschen archipel*, I, 1. Original: ‘het doel van dezen togt geen ander was dan de verbetering van het lot van eenige miljoenen natuurgelaten (...) in den algemeenen voortgang der verlichting en beschaving’.

31 Ibid., 168. Original: ‘de bedoeling van dien waarlijk verlichten Staatsman’.

32 Van der Capellen, ‘Het Journaal’, 281. Original: ‘was een verlicht staatsman, die menschenliefde met het besef van zijne hooge verplichtingen wist te vereenigen’.

Capellen as an enlightened reformer who completely did away with the past thereby reached wide audiences in the Netherlands.

Van der Capellen's rhetoric about the new colonial philosophy has also been adopted by several twentieth-century Dutch historians. Many scholars have emphasised how different the enlightened officials were from the unscrupulous VOC administrators. In 1930, F.W. Stapel wrote that 'the Moluccas publication [by Van der Capellen] will retain its value as the first official government publication in which a new spirit is evident'.³³ Similar points have been presented by Cees Fasseur, who frequently refers to the 'enlightened and humane Van der Capellen' and argued in 1990 that only in the nineteenth century did a concern for the well-being of the colonial subjects arise.³⁴ Wim van den Doel noted in his 1994 monograph on the history of the Dutch colonial bureaucracy in Java and Madura that in the course of the nineteenth century, 'all kinds of enlightened ideas would inspire the colonial rulers to strive for a more modern, bureaucratic and just administration'³⁵ and referred to Van der Capellen as a prime example of an enlightened reformer.³⁶

A different perspective? The letters of Jacqueline van der Capellen

Yet, the Governor-General's account does not tell the whole story about his attempts to stop the slave trade – far from it. Godert van der Capellen was not the only member of his family who was taking notes and putting them on paper. Accompanying him on this trip through the Moluccas was his wife, Jacqueline Baroness van der Capellen, née Jacoba Elisabeth Baroness Van Tuyll van Serooskerken (see Figure 3). During their travels, she sent scores of letters, written in French, to her friend Cécile Catherine, Countess van Hogendorp, who lived on Java. Though the letters mostly focus on conveying everyday impressions of life in the Moluccas, they also give a vivid insight into how normal the buying of people remained within the circles of the Dutch colonial elite.

In one of Jacqueline's first letters to her friend, dated 19 March 1824, the buying of enslaved children is mentioned casually, following remarks about their mutual acquaintances. After noting that 'yesterday it was [Governor] Merkus's birthday, to whom I gave some of Lord Byron's poetry, in English', she wrote that her husband had instructed the official

33 F.W. Stapel, 'Een en ander over de Molukken-publicatie van 1824', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 86:1 (1930) 178-187.

34 Cees Fasseur, 'Rulers and Ruled: Some Remarks on Dutch Colonial Ideology', *Journal of the Japan-Netherlands Institute* 2:1 (1990) 11-12.

35 Wim van den Doel, *De stille macht: Het Europese binnenlands bestuur op Java en Madoera, 1808-1942* (Bert Bakker 1994) 35.

36 *Ibid.*, 49.



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Figure 3. Portrait of Jacoba Elisabeth van Tuyl van Serooskerken (1781-1868). Painted by Jan Willem Pieman (1800-1824) © RKD – The Dutch Institute for Art History, 1800046373, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/144761>.

Adrianus Johannes Bik to explore several islands to the east of Ambon, close to Papua.³⁷ In addition to exploring these islands, Bik was told by the Governor-General to ‘expand the relations with the neighbouring islands and inspire trust concerning the intentions of the colonial government’.³⁸ But the Governor-General was not the only Van der Capellen giving instructions to Bik; Jacqueline had done the same. In her letter, she mentioned that she had asked Bik for ‘two things: a little Papuan slave girl with frizzy hair, and a nest of young cockatoos’.³⁹ In a later letter, dated 31 March 1824, she stressed how anxious she was to see ‘what Bik will bring us from the Aru islands’.⁴⁰

Before Bik returned, Jacqueline was already offered, in late April 1824, to buy two enslaved Papua children, a nine-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl. Neither child spoke a word of Malay, so she experienced great trouble communicating with them and resorted to using signs. She named the girl Neira and the boy Chauland. In early May, she wrote that the children ‘were habituating themselves slowly but surely’ and noted that they often had breakfast together with the Governor-General, who was definitely aware of the presence of these children.⁴¹ Jacqueline contemplated what she could do with them, and considered ‘bringing them back to the Netherlands, if they succeed in applying themselves’.⁴² But in a later letter, dated 18 May 1824, she had already changed her mind. In the eyes of Jacqueline, the girl, whose name she had suddenly changed from Neira to Banda, ‘is not becoming very civilised’.⁴³ Apparently, the enslaved girl did not want to wear a sarong, which spurred Jacqueline to frequently ‘punish her with my own hand, which, I can assure you, was a terrible ordeal for me’.⁴⁴ As a result of the girl’s behaviour, Jacqueline was becoming less and less enchanted with her. She, therefore, contemplated giving her away to a woman named Aurora, who would have to become her governess and raise her. Another enslaved boy owned by Jacqueline, named Alonzo, ‘was becoming charming’, and she was planning

37 NA, 2.21.008.69, 154 F-J. Letter 3.3, dated 19 March 1824. Second page of the letter. Original: ‘Hier c’était le jour de naissance de M. Merkus. Je lui ai donné les poésies de Lord Byron, en Anglais.’ The letters have also been included in Chris F. van Fraassen’s source publication *Bronnen betreffende de Midden-Molukken 1796-1902* (Huygens Instituut 2017).

38 Van der Capellen, ‘Het Journaal’, 288.

39 NA, 2.21.008.69, 154 F-J. Letter 3.6, page 3 of the letter. Original: ‘Je lui ai demandé deux choses: une petite fille esclave, Papoua, à cheveux crépus et un nid de jeunes kakatouas.’

40 Ibid. Letter 3.6, third page of the letter. Original: ‘Je suis très curieuse de voir ce que M. Bik nous rapportera des îles d’Arao.’

41 Ibid. Letter 7.3, dated 1 May, page 2 of the letter.

Original: ‘Neira et le petit garçon s’accoutument à nous, peu à peu.’

42 Ibid. Original: ‘S’ils réussissent un peu, je les amènerai en Hollande.’

43 Ibid., Letter 9.2. On the third page of the letter.

Original: ‘Ma petite Neira, que depuis j’ai nommée Banda, ne se civilise pas beaucoup.’

44 Ibid., Letter 9.2, page 4. Original: ‘Cette cochonnerie m’était si insoutenable, que j’ai pris le parti de la châtier de ma propre main, ce qui, je vous assure, était une terrible corvée pour moi.’

to ‘dress him like a little negro’.⁴⁵ When Bik finally arrived from Aru, he brought Jacqueline a six-year-old girl. She named her Cora and contemplated that later in life she could marry Alonzo. In the following letter, written in mid-July, Jacqueline explained that ‘my small Papuans, Cora and Banda, are starting to become more human’.⁴⁶ What shines through all these remarks is the complete disregard for the children’s autonomy and how normal it was for members of the colonial elite to continue acquiring colonised people.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the notion that the children from Papua were ‘becoming more human’ shows how people from this region were still seen as having subhuman qualities, which justified their subordinate position to Europeans.

Slavery and the colonial State

Recent studies have stressed that it was not solely through such acts of private individuals that the Dutch colonial elites in the Indies continued to engage in the trade in enslaved people. Alicia Schrikker has shown how, in the early nineteenth century, the complaints of an enslaved woman named Bien about being abused by her owner led her to be removed from him, only to be auctioned off by the Dutch colonial government in Ternate to a new owner.⁴⁸ This was part of a broader pattern: immediately after taking over the Moluccas from the British in 1817, the Dutch government was regularly involved in enslaving people. For example, slave labour had been crucial to how the *voc* had cultivated nutmeg on Banda. To obtain additional workers after the slave trade was officially banned, government officials did not shy away from resorting to unorthodox methods. When, in 1818, Dutch officials stopped and searched a ship captained by a local man from Ceram (close to Ambon), they found that it carried many enslaved women and children, who had been captured on Bali. It was then decided by Commissioner-General A.A. Buijskes (1771-1838) that ‘these women and children, who stated they were enslaved on Bali, are to be shipped (...) to Banda, where they will be distributed among the landowners’.⁴⁹ This willingness to continue acquiring enslaved people

45 Ibid., Letter 9.4, page 3 of the letter. Original: ‘Mon petit Alonzo devient charmant. (...) Je l’habillerai comme un petit nègre.’

46 Ibid., Letter 10.4, page 1 of the letter. Original: ‘Mes petites Papouas, Cora et Banda, commencent à s’humaniser un peu.’

47 Also see Geertje Mak, ‘Children on the Fault Lines: A Historical-Anthropological Reconstruction of the Background of Children purchased by Dutch Missionaries between 1863 and 1898 in Dutch New Guinea’, *BMGN – LCHR*

135:3-4 (2020) 29-55. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10876>.

48 Alicia Schrikker, *De vlinders van Boven-Digoel: Verborgene verhalen over kolonialisme* (Prometheus 2021) 141.

49 NA, Buijskes, 1.01.47.05, 4. Decision by Buijskes on what to do with captured slaves, 12 February 1818. Accessible via Van Fraassen, *Bronnen betreffende de Midden-Molukken 1796-1902*. Original: ‘dier vrouwen en kinderen, als zich hebben opgegeven als slaven van Balij te zijn gebracht, met Z.M. schip

shows that, in practice, the ban on the slave trade was constantly violated and disregarded.

However, a few changes concerning the institution of slavery were proposed by Van der Capellen. On 3 July 1819, the Governor-General decreed that registers of slaves were to be kept throughout the archipelago, 'because without such a register many abuses and wrongs can take place'.⁵⁰ The abuses he alluded to did not concern the treatment of slaves, but only that without such registers 'it is difficult to levy head taxes on slaves'.⁵¹ Enslaved individuals had to be registered within a year by their owners; otherwise, they would be liberated. In practice, many slave owners kept their slaves out of the registers to avoid having to pay taxes. Furthermore, in 1825, the government published a decree concerning the treatment of enslaved people, which aimed to 'ensure a soft and humane treatment by their masters and protect them against all arbitrary or disproportionate, and therefore unjust, punishments'.⁵² As a result, enslaved people were, in theory, better protected against abuses inflicted on them by their owners.

In the Moluccas, the slave registers were kept faithfully over the following decades. Extracts of these were copied in reports that colonial officials sent to their superiors in Batavia. From these, it is possible to obtain an overview of how the number of enslaved people in the Moluccas changed. In Ambon, the number of enslaved people held by the colonial government decreased from 2,843 in 1834 to 1,676 in 1840⁵³, 1,343 in 1845 and 1,089 in 1850.⁵⁴ By 1852, the number of people enslaved had been reduced to 919 and would gradually go down even further. The number of enslaved people the Dutch held in Ternate decreased from 838 in 1834 to 834 in 1843, 691 in 1849 and 607 in 1851, and would continue to diminish.⁵⁵ No detailed accounts of the number of enslaved people owned by the Sultans were kept, but these numbered in the thousands.

In these years, slavery was not considered a particularly salient issue for officials within the Moluccas and many of the travellers who

Prins Frederik naar Banda te zenden, ten einde aldaar in de perken verdeeld te worden'.

50 J. Boudewijnse and G.H. van Soest (eds.), *De Indo-Nederlandsche Wetgeving* (H.M. Van Dorp 1876) 210. Original: 'dat bij ontstentenis van een zoodanig register, velerlei misbruiken en verkeerdheden kunnen plaats vinden'.

51 Ibid. Original: 'dat daardoor groote moeielijkheid wordt ondervonden in het heffen van de belasting, bekend onder den naam van het hoofdgeld der slaven'.

52 Ibid., 449. Original: 'hebben onze zorgen steeds gestrekt om den lijfeigenen eene zachte en menschlievende behandeling van hunne meesters te verzekeren, en hen te beveiligen tegen alle willekeurige of ongeëvenaarde en daarom onrechtvaardige bestraffing'.

53 ANRI, Ambon Residency Archive, 580d, Algemeen Verslag Ambon 1840.

54 ANRI, Ambon Residency Archive, 580e, Algemeen Verslag 1840-1850.

55 ANRI, Ternate Residency Archive, 161a, Algemeen Verslag 1844.

left detailed accounts of the Spice Islands. They stressed how mild the treatment was of enslaved individuals in the Moluccas. Petrus van der Crab, who accompanied Governor-General Charles Ferdinand Pahud (1803-1873) on a visit to the Moluccas in 1860, emphasised that ‘the slaves were treated well and were considered members of the family to which they belonged’.⁵⁶ This good treatment was also commented on by another official, who stated that ‘No matter how effective an *emancipation* of the slaves in *the Indies* appears to the so-called philanthropists and opponents of slavery, in my eyes, it [the emancipation of slaves] would, concerning *Banda* and especially *Ambon*, only be a wrong and daring measure, as a three-year-experience has convinced me that the slaves there are slaves in name only, because, as members of the family, they are treated gently and modestly’.⁵⁷ As a result of this belief in the supposed good treatment of enslaved people, Dutch officials in the Moluccas could maintain the fiction that their position was not so bad.

But if slavery was not a salient issue for these officials in the Moluccas, proponents of abolitionism became increasingly vocal in the Netherlands in the 1840s.⁵⁸ Again inspired by the British, who had signed the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1833, liberals and evangelical Christians of the Réveil pressured the Dutch government into considering putting a stop to the practice of slavery throughout the colonial empire.⁵⁹ As a result of the constitutional changes that came in the wake of the 1848 revolutions, more opportunities had arisen within Parliament to scrutinise the government’s colonial policies. This enabled parliamentarians who were critical of slavery, such as former church minister in Batavia, Wolter Robert van Hoëvell, to pressure the government into implementing reforms.⁶⁰ After scores of debates between liberal and conservative politicians in the 1850s, a parliamentary majority ultimately voted in favour of abolitionism. This led to the abolition of slavery in the Dutch East Indies on 1 January 1860.

56 Petrus van der Crab, *De Moluksche eilanden* (Lange & Co. 1862) 311. Original: ‘de slaven worden goed behandeld en meer beschouwd als leden van het huisgezin, waartoe zij behooren’.

57 J.B.J. van Doren, *Herinneringen der laatste oogenblikken van mijn verblijf in de Molukko’s* (J. & H. van Langenhuysen 1852) 61. Original: ‘Hoe doeltreffend eene *emancipatie* der slaven in *Indië* aan de zogenaamde philantropen en tegenstanders van den slavenstand wenschelijk moge zijn, zou het bij mij, wat *Banda* en

vooral *Amboina* betreft, als een verkeerden en gewaagden maatregelen voorkomen, omdat eene drie-jarige ondervinding mij in allen opzichte de overtuiging heeft gegeven, dat de slaven, die het dààr toch maar bij naam zijn, omdat zij als een lid der familie met minzaamheid en eenen bescheidenen omgang behandeld worden.’

58 Baay, *Daar werd iets gruwelijks verricht*, 181.

59 Legêne, *De bagage*, 154-155.

60 Cees Fasseur, *De weg naar het paradijs en andere Indische geschiedenissen* (Bert Bakker 1995) 36.

This does not mean that slavery was abolished in all parts of the Moluccas. In those parts of the Indonesian archipelago where semi-independent rulers governed, the Dutch could not immediately abolish slavery and needed to cooperate with them to end it. This applied to the North Moluccas, where the relationship between the Dutch and the Sultans of Ternate and Tidore had been formalised in several treaties, which were based on, as one colonial official interpreted it, ‘the main principle of a complete dependence of the Sultans to the Dutch government, combined with as little interference possible in the internal affairs of the Sultans’.⁶¹ Because of these arrangements, the Sultans had grown accustomed to having a lot of autonomy in how they treated their own subjects.

If slavery had not been a salient issue for Dutch officials when it concerned the policies of their own government, it certainly became a sensitive issue when the Sultans continued making use of slave labour. From the 1860s onwards, colonial officials in Ternate repeatedly complained about how slaves were treated by the Sultans. C.J. Bosch, Resident of Ternate between 1860 and 1861, informed his successor that he ‘should take note of the relationship between slaves and their masters. The treatment of slaves is generally bad (...). Tampering, falsifying deeds of purchase and forging these are all daily business. Complaints from slaves against their masters are also not rare.’⁶² Furthermore, Dutch officials were becoming uncomfortable with the practice of slavery as more and more enslaved individuals fled the Sultans’ territories and requested refuge on Dutch territory. According to the contracts that had been signed by Van der Capellen and the Sultans in 1824, however, there was little Dutch functionaries could do but return them to the Sultans. As Petrus van der Crab, Resident in Ternate between 1863 and 1865, explained, the treaties signed in 1824 stipulated that all runaway subjects ought to be returned to the other party, ‘and many difficulties would arise if these runaway slaves were not returned and were considered free’.⁶³

61 J.H. Tobias, ‘Memorie van overgave 1857’, in: A.B. Lopian, *Ternate, Memorie van overgave J.H. Tobias (1857) and Memorie van Overgave, C. Bosscher (1859)* (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia 1980) 4. Original: ‘Het hoofdbeginsel waarop die tractaten berusten is dat eener volstrekte afhankelijkheid der Vorsten van het Nederlandsch Gouvernement gepaard met eene zoo gering mogelijke inmenging van de zijde van den Opperheer in het inwendig bestuur.’

62 ANRI, Ternate Residency Archive, 168a, fol. 15-16. Original: ‘Een punt waarop de aandacht van mijn

opvolger wordt gevestigd, is de verhouding van de Slaven tot hunne Heeren. De behandeling der slaven is over het algemeen slecht (...). Knoeijerijen, vervalsching van koopbrieven, het namaken deszelve, zijn aan de orde van den dag. Klagten van slaven tegen hunnen meesters zijn ook niet zeldzaam.’

63 ANRI, Ternate Residency Archive, 168b, *Memorie van overgave* that was written by Van der Crab for his successor M.H.W. Nieuwenhuijs, 1867, 57-58. Original: ‘dat werde een weggelooopen slaaf niet uitgeleverd en beschouwd als vrij alleen omdat hij

According to these officials, the only way to reduce the number of enslaved individuals on the Sultans' territories was by increasing the level of Dutch control. As one of them put it, 'slavery still exists on the lands of the Sultans of Ternate [and] Tidore (...) and will only cease by limiting their autonomy'.⁶⁴ Another official claimed that 'as long as these lands are governed by their own sovereigns, we can expect no radical improvements (...). Attachment to old, rotten principles, religious fanaticism, superstition and an abhorrence to all that is new are so many obstacles which can only be overcome by a European administration.'⁶⁵ In their opinion, only by placing European officials in the Sultans' territories could greater 'enlightenment and civilisation' be obtained.⁶⁶ As such, the Dutch used tropes about European superiority that were also employed by officials and scientists in the British and French colonial empires in the course of the nineteenth century. They used similar arguments about their superior civilisations to justify a more direct rule by European administrators, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards.⁶⁷

A direct way in which Dutch officials increased the power of the colonial State concerned the use of abolitionist policies to justify colonial expansion on Papua. At the time, large parts of what is now known as West Papua fell under the sphere of influence of the Sultan of Tidore. The effective authority of the Sultan on these islands was limited and was based on collecting tribute every year, which consisted of tortoise shells, sea cucumber, birds of paradise and, most importantly, enslaved people. Although the Sultan's power was indirect, his claims on the lands of Papua were supported by the VOC in a contract they had signed in 1667. The Company supported his claims because it wanted to have a buffer zone

naar gouvernements grondgebied geweken is, er daardoor vele moeilijkheden zouden ontstaan'.

64 ANRI, Ternate Residency Archive, 168b, *Memorie van overgave* that was written by Nieuwenhuijs for his successor Boes Lutjens in 1869, 22. Original: 'Slavernij bestaat nog in de landen onder het bestuur der vorsten van Ternate, Tidore en Batjan en zonder meerdere beperking van het thans aan die Vorsten toegelaten zelfbestuur zal zij niet ophouden.'

65 J.H. Tobias, 'Memorie van overgave 1857', 6-7. Original: 'doch zoo Lang deze landen onder het beheer van hunner eigene Vorsten staan, zullen geene radicale verbeteringen in straks bedoelden geest kunnen verkregen worden (...)

Gehechtheid aan oude vermolmde beginselen, Godsdienstige dweepzucht en bijgelovigheid, en den afkeer van al wat nieuw is, zijn zoo vele beletselen die alleen door een op Europeeschen leest geschoeid bestuur kunnen overwonnen worden.'

66 *Ibid.*, 6. Original: 'verlichting en beschaving'.

67 See, for example, Amalia Ribí Forclaz, *Humanitarian Imperialism. The Politics of Anti-Slavery Activism, 1880-1940* (Oxford University Press 2015); and Suzanne Miers, 'Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues, 1890-1939', in: Damien Alan Pargas and Felicia Roşu (eds.), *Critical Readings on Global Slavery* (Brill 2018).

east of the Moluccas, where it held its spice monopoly, and delegated the responsibility over this area to the Sultan of Tidore.⁶⁸ As a result, it could better protect its spice monopoly without incurring the costs of controlling this vast area itself. Furthermore, as the Sultans of Ternate and Tidore were not allowed to participate in the spice trade on their own, the trade with Papua enabled the Sultan of Tidore to have some income independently of the VOC.

The reason for the colonial government's wish to establish itself more directly in Papua was that other European empires were taking an interest in this huge territory east of the Moluccas. Ever since the late eighteenth century, the British had made multiple attempts to establish relations with communities in West Papua, but most of the time these had led to few lasting relations. When the Dutch and British had signed the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 to settle border disputes in Southeast Asia, no agreements had been included about Papua, leaving Dutch officials in the Moluccas with many concerns about British attempts to claim parts of this vast area. A British request in 1841 to the Dutch government asking for a detailed list of all the islands that were claimed by the Dutch in the Indies again caused tensions. Similarly, the visit of the French naval officer Jules Dumont d'Urville (1790-1842) to the shores of West Papua in 1839 made the Dutch worry about French interest in Papua. The interest of other European empires in this region encouraged the Dutch to reflect on how their claims to Papua could be justified. Very quickly, this justification was found in the way the Sultans were held responsible for enslaving people in Papua – a situation which the Dutch now claimed they wanted to stop.

The Sultan of Tidore collected his tribute during yearly raiding expeditions, which were called *hong*i expeditions. For a couple of months each year, hundreds of Tidoran men would visit Papua on huge war canoes to violently capture hundreds of individuals and enslave them. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Dutch colonial State allowed these expeditions. With slavery becoming increasingly problematic in the late 1850s, Dutch officials considered whether they could allow the Sultan of Tidore to continue these raids. Some officials believed that without the *hong*i expeditions the Sultan of Tidore would lose both an economic motive to remain interested in Papua and would find it more difficult to enforce his authority. As a Resident of Ternate put it, 'if we obstruct [the Sultan in] this (...) because there are unusual flaws in the means he employs for it [the violent *hong*i], then we ought to supply him with other ways to do so.

68 Fré Huizinga, 'Relations between Tidore and the North Coast of New Guinea in the Nineteenth Century', in: Jelle Miedema, Cecilia Odé and Rien

A.C. Dam (eds.), *Perspectives on the Bird's Head of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. Proceedings of the Conference Leiden, 13-17 October 1997* (Rodopi 1998) 387.

Obstructing him on the one hand and not supplying him with other ways to do so entails that we effectively rob him of his power over and incomes from these lands.’⁶⁹

This is exactly what happened in the 1860s. Dutch Residents, supported by the government in Batavia, increasingly put a stop to the *hongi* expeditions to prevent the Sultan from enslaving more and more people. As a result, the Sultan of Tidore lost both his effective power over Papua and the economic value he took from these islands. When the Dutch, therefore, made their intention known of taking over Papua, there was little resistance from the Sultan, as the lands had become less valuable to him due to the Dutch policies. Officially, the Dutch officials presented this as a way to stop slavery in Papua. As one official, Hendrik Quarles van Ufford, put it, ‘the inhabitants of Papua are still mostly characterised as slaves by the court of Tidore, and although it is believed that the repeated methods of persuasion and amiable expostulations towards the Sultan have brought about some change for the better, only a [Dutch] settlement in Papua can certainly put a stop to this situation for good’.⁷⁰ In a new contract that the Sultan of Tidore signed with the Dutch in 1872, he agreed to give up his claims on Papua and allowed the establishment of Dutch rule there.⁷¹

In addition to being able to expand Dutch territorial claims, the speeches De Munnick gave in 1879, cited in the introduction to this article, show that the abolition of slavery in the Sultanates in 1879 also gave the Dutch an opportunity to present themselves as harbingers of justice and humanity. Though Resident De Munnick publicly celebrated the end of slavery in his speeches, he was privately more cautious about whether it would officially come to a stop. As he stated in a note for his successor, ‘it will take many years before all traces of slavery will have disappeared from here, especially in those parts where the government still has little or no

69 C.J. Bosch, ‘Politiek Verslag 1859-1860’, in: Paul Haenen and Fré Huizinga (eds.), *The General and Political Reports of the Ternate Residency* (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia 2001) 33. Original: ‘Beletten wij dit (...) omdat er eigenaardige gebreken kleven aan de middelen die hij daartoe bezigd, dan behooren wij hem andere middelen aan de hand te geven, doch het eene belettende en het andere nalatende, berooven wij hem feitelijk van het gezag over en zijne inkomsten van den landen.’

70 Quarles van Ufford, *Aantekeningen betreffende eene reis door de Molukken van Zijne Excellentie*

den Gouverneur-Generaal Mr. A.J. Duymaer van Twist in de maanden september en oktober 1855 (Martinus Nijhoff 1856) 70. Original: ‘De inwoners der Papoea’s worden door het hof van Tidore nog meestal als slaven aangemerkt, en al meent men door de herhaalde overredingen en minnelijke vertoogen bij den sultan hierin eenige verandering ten goede te hebben te weeg gebracht, zeker is het, dat slechts eene vestiging in de Papoea’s voor goed een einde aan dien toestand zou kunnen maken.’

71 J.W.H. Leslie-Miller, *Het economisch aspect van het Nieuw-Guinea probleem* (Excelsior 1952) 13.

supervision'.⁷² Though De Munnick again pointed to the benign influence of the Dutch government, he omitted to discuss how many forms of coerced labour, bordering on slavery, continued to remain present throughout the Dutch East Indies and would only end with the termination of the Dutch empire in the East Indies.

Conclusion

In this article, it has been argued that Dutch officials in the Moluccas repeatedly instrumentalised abolitionism during the nineteenth century. They did so in 1824, when Governor-General Van der Capellen paid a visit to the Moluccas to announce a new governing philosophy. He explicitly distanced the colonial State from the violence that had been inflicted on the people of the Moluccas by the VOC. Despite his lofty rhetoric about the State's noble intentions, letters from his wife, Jacqueline van der Capellen, show that she – and many other members of the colonial elite – continued to buy and sell human beings. Furthermore, when Van der Capellen introduced slave registers to be kept throughout the archipelago, they were meant to improve the levying of head taxes on enslaved people rather than their treatment. The article then reconstructed how Dutch officials used the abolition of slavery in the Moluccas both to reduce the power of the Sultan of Tidore in Papua and to present themselves as a force of good.

The discrepancies between the lofty rhetoric about the noble intentions of the Dutch empire and the harsh nature of everyday colonial practice did not disappear with the end of slavery. In 1901, Dutch Queen Wilhelmina (1880–1962) proclaimed the Ethical Policy, indicating that a new colonial philosophy would reign supreme in which genuine care for the colonial subjects held a central place. Simultaneously, however, Dutch territorial expansion would intensify around 1900, bringing more and more parts of the Indonesian archipelago under direct Dutch control. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people would be forced to work in circumstances that were so dire that they bordered on those of slavery. Still, up to the turn of the twentieth century, the belief persisted that the Dutch had done empire differently because of this Ethical Policy. But if the alleged success of the Ethical Policy would quickly become part of a broader Dutch narrative of the importance of freedom, justice, and equality, it is only within recent decades that the centrality of slavery and colonialism within the Dutch colonial empire has received the attention it deserves.

72 Jeroen Overweel, *Topics relating to Netherlands New Guinea in Ternate Residency Memoranda of Transfer and other assorted documents* (DSALCUL/IRIS 1995) 69. Original: 'Het zal echter nog vele

jaren duren voordat alle sporen van slavernij hier verdwenen zijn, vooral in die streken waar het bestuur nog weinig of geen toezigt kan uitoefenen.'

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