



# Introduction

## The Dutch East Indies and Europe, ca. 1800-1930. An Empire of Demands and Opportunities

BERNHARD C. SCHÄR

Empires constantly depended on extra-imperial resources, labour, and expertise. This opened up and sustained opportunities for a broad range of European individuals and institutions to engage in ‘foreign empires’. Conversely, individuals and institutions within empires also benefitted from growing extra-imperial demands for colonial objects, expertise, and commodities. This introductory article to this special issue on the interactions between the Dutch East Indies and diverse European nations further elaborates these conceptual considerations. It then introduces five case studies that open up new avenues to empirically examine empires outside the analytical framework of national empires. They show how the Dutch colonial ‘state of violence’ in Southeast Asia enabled and necessitated various forms of European collaboration and integration, as well as interactions with Southeast Asian societies in the fields of science, travel, museum collections, agriculture, colonial warfare and photography.

De verschillende wereldrijken waren steeds aangewezen op grondstoffen, arbeiders en kennis van buiten. Dit gaf een groot aantal Europeanen de mogelijkheid zich voor langere tijd voor ‘vreemde mogendheden’ in te zetten. Omgekeerd profiteerden inwoners en ook instellingen van de kolonies zelf van de groeiende externe vraag naar koloniale objecten, ervaring en grondstoffen. In de inleiding van dit themanummer, dat handelt over de interacties tussen Nederlands-Indië en diverse Europese naties, wordt ingegaan op deze conceptuele overwegingen. Vervolgens worden vijf case studies geïntroduceerd waarin empirisch onderzoek naar koloniale wereldrijken wordt ondernomen waarbij het nationale kader wordt overstegen. Deze artikelen maken duidelijk hoe de Nederlandse kolonie in Zuidoost-Azië, die gegrond was op een continue staat van geweld, verschillende vormen van samenwerking en integratie van Europeanen mogelijk en noodzakelijk maakte, alsook interacties met Zuidoost-Aziatische gemeenschappen.

Deze interacties worden in dit themanummer onderzocht op het gebied van natuurwetenschap, reizen, museale collecties, landbouw, koloniale oorlogsvoering en fotografie.

## Imperialism as European history<sup>1</sup>

Two years ago, Susan Legêne argued in this journal that ‘we need to approach imperialism from a European perspective’.<sup>2</sup> Her intervention was a direct response to suggestions from three other scholars: René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard, and Arthur Weststeijn.<sup>3</sup> They had called for historicising current Dutch post-colonial culture by examining the *longue durée* histories of how the Dutch learned to view themselves as a nation in a world of empires. This debate is indicative of a larger international historiographical trend. As in the Netherlands, many historians across Europe and the wider world have embarked on a mission to ‘decolonise’ their national historical narratives in recent years. This has led to a flourishing new genre of ‘national imperial histories’, providing fresh insights into not only how countries like Great Britain, France and the Netherlands were shaped by their imperial histories, but also how countries with short-lived empires like Germany, Italy and Belgium, and even countries without colonies, such as Switzerland, Norway and Iceland, turn out to have been shaped heavily by their formal and informal imperial pasts.<sup>4</sup> Of course there is nothing inherently wrong with

- 1 This special issue was generously supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Asia Research Institute at National University of Singapore. A special thank you goes out to Marieke Bloembergen (KITLV, Leiden) and Christof Dejung (University of Bern) for their helpful comments on earlier versions of the papers presented in this volume. A big thank you is also due to Harald Fischer-Tiné, Tanja Rietmann, the BMGN editors and Carolyn Kerchof for comments on an earlier version of this introduction article. To Monique Ligtenberg I owe particular thanks for preparing the data and producing the map in this article.
- 2 Susan Legêne, ‘The European Character of the Intellectual History of Dutch Empire’, *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, 132:2 (2017) 110-120, DOI:10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10344.
- 3 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:10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10342.

- 4 Elizabeth Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford 2004); Patrick Boucheron, *Histoire mondiale de la France* (Paris 2017); Cátia Antunes and Jos Gommans (eds.), *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (London 2015); Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisierung und Nation im deutschen Kaiserreich* (München 2006); Idesbald Goddeeris, ‘Colonial Streets and Statues: Postcolonial Belgium in the Public Space’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 18:4 (2015) 397-409, DOI:10.1080/13688790.2015.1191986; Christina Lobardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (eds.), *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity* (London 2012); Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds.), *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (Basingstoke 2015); Kirsten

national histories of empire, as envisioned by Koekkoek, Richard, Weststeijn and many others. As long as the nation state continues to affect the ways we think and organise our lives to the great extent that it does, the nation will continuously be narrated.<sup>5</sup> Hence, in the foreseeable future, critical scholars of empire and colonialism will have to deal with controversies in their national arenas.

However, as Wolfgang Reinhard's voluminous 'Global history of the European subjugation of the world' has irrevocably shown, colonialism was never nationally confined. It was always a pan-European endeavor that affected not only the colonies but also the very creation of 'Europe'.<sup>6</sup> This pan-European dimension is what is often overlooked by historians operating in a paradigm of 'methodological nationalism', or – in Susan Legêne's words – 'national add-on' histories of imperialism. Hence, Legêne's plea for a 'European perspective' in empire studies is part of a poignant critique of 'methodological nationalism' within Dutch colonial history writing. She articulates this critique in the context of a recurrent concern among Dutch historians. They repeatedly observe that 'their' colonial history does 'not arouse much interest' outside the Netherlands, as Elsbeth Locher-Scholten phrased it already a quarter of a century ago, particularly because 'its history and sources are not easily accessible due to an internationally little known language'.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, this Dutch preoccupation with not being properly acknowledged by peers from the former greater European imperial powers – Britain and France in particular – goes back to nineteenth-century colonial science, as Andreas Weber's contribution to this theme issue shows. The strategy developed by nineteenth-century Dutch colonial scientists has been to accommodate the more powerful language communities by 'adding' the Dutch national case to the 'international' debate, applying their

Alsaker Kjerland and Björn Enge Bertelsen (eds.), *Navigating Colonial Orders: Norwegian Entrepreneurship in Africa and Oceania* (New York 2015); Kristín Loftsdóttir, 'Colonialism at the Margins: Politics of Difference in Europe as Seen through two Icelandic Crises', *Identities*, 19:5 (2012) 597-617, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2012.732543>.

- 5 I have contributed several pieces to this genre in Switzerland, e.g. Bernhard C. Schär, 'Bauern und Hirten Reconsidered: Umriss der "erfundenen Schweiz" im imperialen Raum', in: Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk (eds.), *Postkoloniale Schweiz: Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Bielefeld 2012) 315-333, DOI: [10.14361/transcript.9783839417997.315](https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839417997.315).

- 6 Wolfgang Reinhard, *Die Unterwerfung Der Welt: Globalgeschichte Der Europäischen Expansion 1415-2015*, Historische Bibliothek Der Gerda Henkel Stiftung (München 2016), DOI: [10.17104/97834066687198](https://doi.org/10.17104/97834066687198). The pan-European dimension of imperialism has also been one of the central themes of postcolonial critique from the outset; see e.g. 'Europe is Literally the Creation of the Third World'. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York 1963) 102.
- 7 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25:1 (1994) 91-111, DOI: [10.1017/S002246340000669X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S002246340000669X).

theoretical frameworks, and publishing in English (and French, and German in the nineteenth century).

Yet this is where Susan Lêgene puts her foot down: the lack of international interest in Dutch colonial history ‘cannot be countered with more historiography inspired by the same methodological nationalism that characterizes many of the works’ dealing, among others, with British or French empires. Anglo- or Franco-centric views of empire should not be countered by ‘a Netherlands-centric focus in our view of the imperial past’.<sup>8</sup> All the more so, one might add, as scholars working from spaces within the former British empire are themselves becoming increasingly aware of some of the pitfalls that result from the ongoing ‘dominance of Anglophone historians’ in empire studies and global history.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, examining empires not only as political entities that violently competed with each other, but also continuously cooperated and exchanged information and resources, has increasingly become a preoccupation of continental European historians.<sup>10</sup> In line with these overarching historiographic developments and in view of the Dutch debate, Legêne suggests a radical three-fold revision of imperial history: a more pan-European perspective, more interdisciplinarity, and more dialogue with scholars writing from outside of Europe.

While all three suggestions are intriguing, it was the first one that speaks to me in particular. A significant reason for this is, of course, that I am a historian stemming from a country that receives even less acknowledgement from Anglo-centric scholarship than the Netherlands, namely Switzerland. As long as imperial histories are approached from national perspectives, there is simply nothing to ‘add on’ in Switzerland: no colonies, no empire.

Yet, only a stone’s throw away from my office in Zurich there is a road called Sumatrasstrasse (Sumatra Street). Zurich is also home to Switzerland’s national heritage centre, which is housed in a villa called ‘Patumbah’ – loosely named after a plantation in Sumatra, where the original Swiss owner made a fortune in the late nineteenth century. Only a short walk from the Swiss Federal Building in Bern is the Holländer Turm (Dutch Tower), where eighteenth-century Swiss military veterans returning from Dutch services in the Netherlands and their colonies would meet to enjoy a new ‘exotic’ activity: smoking tobacco. Some of their Swiss contemporaries owned plantations

8 Legêne, ‘The European Character’, 110, 114.

9 Richard Drayton and David Motadel, ‘Discussion: The Futures of Global History’, *Journal of Global History* 13:1 (2018) 1, DOI:10.1017/S1740022817000262.

10 Tanja Bühner et al. (eds.), *Cooperation and Empire: Local Realities and Global Processes* (New York 2017); Iris Schröder, *Das Wissen von der Ganzen Welt. Globale Geographien und räumliche*

*Ordnungen Afrikas und Europas 1790-1870* (Paderborn 2011) DOI:10.30965/9783657771585; Volker Barth and Roland Cvetkovski (eds.), *Imperial Co-Operation and Transfer, 1870-1930: Empires and Encounters* (London 2015); Ulrike Lindner, ‘Colonialism as a European Project in Africa before 1914? British and German Concepts of Colonial Rule in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Comparativ* 19:1 (2009) 88-106.



▲  
'Villa Patumbah' in Zurich, loosely named after the plantation the builder of the house owned in Sumatra at the end of the nineteenth century. Today 'Villa Patumbah' houses the headquarters of the Swiss Heritage Society © Zürich Tourismus.

in Surinam called ‘Zwitsergrond’ or ‘Helvetia’. And one of the authors of the modern Swiss 1848 constitution went by the name of ‘Borneo Louis’. He had started his career as military and civil commander in a Dutch fort in Banjarmasin in southeastern Borneo in the 1820s and 1830s.

Many more examples could be added. The point is: it appears that the history of modern Switzerland is deeply connected via the Netherlands with the fate of slaves in Dutch Surinam and indentured laborers in Dutch Sumatra or Java. It is also connected to the fate of countless men and women in what today is Indonesia, who resisted a Dutch Colonial Army that recruited 40 percent of its European soldiers outside the Netherlands – among them ca. 7.600 from Switzerland – in order to establish a perpetual ‘state of violence’ throughout the archipelago in the nineteenth century.<sup>11</sup> These examples illustrate a core theme of all empirical case studies presented in this special issue; namely how the webs of the Dutch empire neither started nor ended at the formal political borders of the Netherlands and its colonies. Rather, they reached deep into the European hinterland to accumulate capital, mercenaries, settlers, planters, know-how and other resources. Conversely, they also affected processes of capital accumulation, institution building, family histories, political careers, architecture and culture far beyond the empire’s borders.

However, neither the consequences of these empire-crossing histories nor the institutions, practices, networks and structures that enabled them are particularly well researched. Empire studies following the national ‘add-on approach’ simply could not uncover them, since they fitted neither the conventional Dutch, nor the Indonesian, nor the Swiss (or any other) national narratives. The authors in this theme issue therefore strongly agree with Legêne’s idea of stepping out of national frameworks in favour of more pan-European and global ones and to thereby adopt a ‘European perspective’.

This suggestion resonates particularly well with some of the core findings from a series of recent studies on Switzerland’s colonial involvements. All of these studies found that the alpine country in the European heartland was by no means the only ‘foreign’ region to become integrated in larger French, British, German, or indeed Dutch imperial spaces. The peculiar Swiss colonial involvements turn out to be just part of a larger tapestry of interwoven pan-European colonial histories.<sup>12</sup> In the early

11 Henk Schulte Nordholt, ‘A Genealogy of Violence’, in: Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (eds.), *Roots of Violence in Indonesia: Contemporary Violence in Historical Perspective*, (Leiden 2002) 33–61; Martin Bossenbroek, *Volk voor Indië. De werving van Europese militairen voor de Nederlandse koloniale dienst 1814–1909* (Amsterdam 1992).

12 For a general overview, see Patricia Purtschert, Francesca Falk and Barbara Lüthi, ‘Switzerland

and “Colonialism without Colonies”’, *Interventions* 22: (2015) 1–17; for a striking example of Swiss involvements in the French, British, and Portuguese Empires, see Patrick Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries in South-East Africa* (Oxford 2007); for the Dutch East Indies see Andreas Zangger, ‘Patriotic Bonds and the Danger of Estrangement. Swiss Networks in Colonial South-East Asia, 1850–1930’, in: Patricia

modern period, there was already a constant flow of investments, mercenaries, missionaries, merchants, settlers, and explorers from across Western, Southern, Northern and Central European regions (Switzerland among them) into the Dutch imperial space, as well as into the French, British, and other empires. This European landscape remained politically highly fragmented until well into the nineteenth century. Countries known today as Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Austria, Hungary or Italy centralised into modern nation states relatively late. Yet they were continuously entangled with and shaped by violent colonial involvements long before they became nations or (with the exception of Switzerland) empires themselves.

For many generations and long into the nineteenth century, these European regions, rich with artisanal skills, financial and technological know-how, and with labour and capital surpluses, served as a kind of multi-imperial service and resource providers, not only for the Dutch, but also for the French, the British and others. In doing so, they built institutions such as missionary societies or museums, forged networks (e.g. of trade), acquired knowledge (e.g. on insuring risks for long distance trade) and expertise that allowed them to integrate into and benefit from the larger colonial spaces created by the imperial powers overseas.<sup>13</sup> This is the larger, yet still poorly understood story behind the curious Swiss-Dutch colonial entanglements, as illustrated above. It points to a history of European integration, and nation-state formation through collaborative imperial expansion.<sup>14</sup>

Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds.), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from Its Margins* (Basingstoke 2015) 91-109,

DOI:10.1057/9781137442741\_5; Bernhard C.

Schär, "The Swiss of All People!" Politics of Embarrassment and Dutch Imperialism around 1900', in: Harald Fischer-Tiné (ed.), *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings* (London 2016) 279-303, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-45136-7\_11.

- 13 Empirically rich examples on trading, insurance and finance know-how are Herbert Lüthy, *La Banque protestante en France de la révocation de l'Édit de Nantes à la Révolution*, École pratique des hautes études, vie section, sciences économiques et sociales. Centre de Recherches Historiques. Affaires et gens d'affaires (Paris 1970); Christof Dejung, *Commodity Trading, Globalization*

*and the Colonial World: Spinning the Web of the Global Market* (New York/London 2018)

DOI:10.4324/9781315646831. On transimperial

missionary networks: Linda Ratschiller and Karolin Wetjen (eds.), *Verflochtene Mission. Perspektiven auf eine neue Missionsgeschichte*

(Köln 2018). For transimperial science: Bernhard C. Schär, 'From Batticaloa via Basel to Berlin. Transimperial Science in Ceylon and Beyond

around 1900', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (2019) 1-33, DOI:10.1080/03086534.2019.1638620.

- 14 The map below is inspired by Jelle van Lotum's ongoing work on 'maritime careers': <https://www.maritimecareers.eu/>. I also owe him thanks for bringing Stanford's online visualisation tools to my attention.

How to research and eventually narrate such a story? One good way is to start with case studies, and to focus on one empire at a time. The contributors to this special issue take the nineteenth-century Dutch empire in Southeast Asia as a case in point and engage with three questions. Firstly, what are the structural causes and particular trajectories through which non-Dutch European actors, institutions, and networks became involved in Dutch empire building in Southeast Asia? Secondly, how did they, on the one hand, integrate into and benefit from Dutch colonial power and, on the other hand, interact with individuals and groups within the empire under the given structural asymmetries of power? Thirdly, how and why did actors, institutions, and networks from within the Dutch imperial space transgress the political borders of their empire to link up with and impact historical trajectories in non-Dutch European countries and/or their respective colonies overseas?

The suggested framework to explain and analyse such cross-imperial entanglements is that of 'Demands and Opportunities'. It is inspired, on the one hand, by recent work on the continuous presence of continental European capital, actors, settlers and networks in the British empire. David Arnold, Moritz von Brescius, Stephen Conway, Christof Dejung and others explain this presence through British colonial needs for continental European resources, which created in its turn large fields of opportunity for many Europeans. Conversely, many actors and institutions particularly from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century pre-unified and pre-imperial European regions that would eventually become modern Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Denmark, Hungary and Austria depended on Great-Britain as one of the main pathways into the larger world overseas.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, early modern historians and scholars of the Dutch empire have recently proposed similar new conceptual avenues. Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia have called for examining early modern empires not from company or government perspectives. Rather, they suggest looking at the construction of imperial spaces through the perspective of non-state agents 'operating outside the constraints imposed by the development of European empires'. Classic examples are traders acting in 'self-organized, trans-imperial and cross-cultural networks' – and, as one might add, looking

15 Moritz von Brescius, *German Science in the Age of Empire. Enterprise, Opportunity and the Schlagintweit Brothers* (Cambridge 2019) DOI:10.1017/9781108579568; Stephen Conway, *Britannia's Auxiliaries: Continental Europeans and the British Empire, 1740-1800* (Oxford 2017); David Arnold, 'Globalization and Contingent Colonialism: Towards a Transnational History of

"British" India', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 16:2 (2015) DOI:10.1353/cch.2015.0019; John R. Davis, Stefan Manz and Margrit Schulte Beerbühl (eds.), *Transnational Networks: German Migrants in the British Empire, 1670-1914* (Leiden 2012); Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *German Soldiers in Colonial India* (London 2014) and Christof Dejung, *Commodity Trading*.



Most frequent places of origin of European VOC employees between 1633 and 1794. The map was produced with Stanford University's 'Palladio' (<https://hdlab.stanford.edu/palladio/>) using spreadsheets from the VOC archives in The Hague (NA 1.04.02, <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/index/ntoo444?search-Term=>). The map depicts all European places of origin from where more than hundred men joined the VOC. This amounts to c. 60 percent of the total of c. 773.000 VOC employees.

for opportunities and satisfying demands in multiple imperial spaces simultaneously.<sup>16</sup> Siegfried Huigen proposed a similar argument with regards to knowledge networks emanating from the Dutch East India Company. Just like the trading networks, knowledge networks too were globally quenching the thirst of institutions and individuals from all continents for knowledge, news and ideas from within the VOC empire.<sup>17</sup> Jos Gommans recently elaborated on what it meant that the Dutch remained a scarce minority in most of their colonies throughout the early modern and the modern period. One major consequence was that they continuously depended not only on indigenous intermediaries, but also on staff from other European countries to conquer, defend, exploit and run their empire.<sup>18</sup> According to Jürgen G. Nagel, during the VOC period many German-speaking actors succeeded in climbing to management positions.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, for example, almost half of all European soldiers in the Dutch Colonial Army were of ‘foreign’ origin, many of them were Swiss, as Philipp Krauer discusses in his article.<sup>20</sup>

Using demand-and-opportunity structures as an analytical tool to examine trans-imperial entanglements, however, should not tempt us to paint a harmonious picture of empire as entities of peaceful exchange. Quite the contrary. Violence and hierarchies were always present. Karwan Fatah-Black, for example, recounted the fate of Swiss settlers in eighteenth century Surinam, who followed the Dutch demand for artisans, farmers and other European labourers and service providers in the slave colony. As it turned out, they did not find a better life in Surinam, but ended up as forced labourers while their settlements faltered under attacks by maroons.<sup>21</sup>

- 16 Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia, ‘Introduction’, in: Cátia Antunes and Amélia Polónia (eds.), *Beyond Empires. Global, Self-Organizing, Cross-Imperial Networks, 1500-1800* (Leiden 2016) 1, 4 DOI:10.1163/9789004304154\_002.
- 17 Siegfried Huigen, *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks, Intersections. Yearbook for Early Modern Studies* (Leiden 2010) DOI:10.1163/ej.9789004186590.i-448.8.
- 18 Jos Gommans, ‘Conclusion. Globalizing the Empire: The Dutch Case’, in: Cátia Antunes and Jos Gommans (eds.), *Exploring the Dutch Empire. Agents, Networks and Institutions* (London 2015) 267-278.
- 19 Jürgen G. Nagel, ‘Kapsiedler, Molukkenhändler, Japanreisende. Deutsche Führungspositionen der niederländischen Ostindien-Kompanie’, in: Markus A. Denzel (ed.), *Deutsche Eliten in Übersee* (St. Katharinen 2006) 291-318; for the Swiss, see Stefan Sigerist, *Schweizer im Fernen Osten. Viele Loyalitäten, eine Identität* (München 2011); Béatrice Veyrassat, *Histoire de la Suisse et des Suisses dans la marché du monde. XVIIe siècle – Première Guerre mondiale – Espaces – Circulations – Echanges* (Lausanne 2018).
- 20 Martin Bossenbroek, *Van Holland naar Indië. Het transport van koloniale troepen voor het Oost-Indische leger 1815-1909* (Amsterdam 1986) 192; Ulbe Bosma, ‘European Colonial Soldiers in the Nineteenth Century: Their Role in White Global Migration and Patterns of Colonial Settlement’, *Journal of Global History* 4:2 (2009) 317-336 DOI:10.1017/S1740022809003179.
- 21 Karwan Fatah-Black, ‘A Swiss Village in the Dutch Tropics: The Limitations of Empire-Centred Approaches to the Early Modern Atlantic World’,

*Table 6.2* European soldiers of the Dutch colonial army by origin

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1918
<i>Officers</i>							
Dutchmen	998	1,087	1,201	1,025	872	805	848
Dutchmen born in East Indies and Eurasians	126	136	157	308	446	503	483
Belgians			2		2	2	2
Germans	90	50	2		3		
Frenchmen			1	1			
Swiss		5	2		3		
Luxembourgers			2		1	1	2
Other	5	2	34	13	10	13	15
<i>Non-commissioned officers and soldiers</i>							
Dutchmen	6,825	8,227	6,656	8,449	9,143	7,418	5,892
Dutchmen born in East Indies and Eurasians	686	977	1,154	1,582	1,755	1,866	1,864
Belgians	1,134	357	3,080	1,134	1,216	383	81
Germans	1,349	1,105	1,874	1,943	1,318	947	550
Frenchmen	?	79	1,484	119	2	3	1
Swiss	2,213	1,397	702	316	179	81	25
Luxembourgers	?	14	?	195	93	35	15
Other	378	111	449	117	56	45	20

▲  
Up to fifty percent of the Europeans in the Dutch Colonial Army were of foreign origin. The main European supply regions of mercenaries for the Dutch East Indies were Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, and France. Source: Gerke Teitler, 'The Mixed Company: Fighting Power and Ethnic Relations in the Dutch Colonial Army, 1890-1920', in: Karl Hack (ed.) *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia* (London 2006) 148.

On the other hand, Philipp Teichfischer, Andreas Zangger and myself have shown how German and Swiss medical practitioners, scientists and planters in the nineteenth-century Dutch East Indies fully benefitted from their racial privileges as white Europeans in the colony and participated in colonial violence. Moreover, upon returning to Europe, their colonial experiences allowed them to pursue successful careers in Germany and Switzerland.<sup>22</sup>

### The Dutch empire in Europe beyond the Netherlands

The remarkable and continuous presence of European ‘foreigners’ in the Dutch empire had numerous repercussions in Europe. Cultural historians and literary scholars have highlighted how racist imaginaries and colonial worldviews were not only prevalent in imperial nations such as Great Britain, France or the Netherlands, but circulated widely through pre-imperial Germany, pre-imperial Italy, as well as non-imperial Switzerland, Poland and Scandinavia.<sup>23</sup> While the European dimension of colonial culture can therefore be taken as a well-established fact, what is still lacking are more empirical and contextualised explanations of how this European culture came about. In other words: through which networks, actors, institutions and milieus, and by which historical processes colonial imaginaries circulated remarkably freely across national and imperial boundaries in Europe and how they transformed over time.

The contributions in this theme issue offer valuable insights into this question. By focusing on the social and material means through which colonial culture travelled across space, they highlight the particular role the Dutch empire came to play for discourses of European superiority far beyond the Netherlands. Moreover, the articles suggest that we interpret empires in

BMGN – *Low Countries Historical Review*, 128:1 (2013) 31-52 DOI:10.18352/bmgn-lchr.8354.

- 22 Philipp Teichfischer, ‘Transnational Entanglements in Colonial Medicine. German Medical Practitioners as Members of the Health Service in the Dutch East Indies (1816-1884)’, *History, Medicine and Health*, 10:1 (2016) 63-79, DOI:10.4000/hms.1035; Andreas Zangger, *Koloniale Schweiz. Ein Stück Globalgeschichte zwischen Europa und Südostasien (1860-1930)* (Bielefeld 2011) DOI:10.14361/transcript.9783839417966.169; Bernhard C. Schär, *Tropenliebe. Schweizer Naturforscher und niederländischer Imperialismus in Südostasien um 1900* (Frankfurt am Main 2015).
- 23 Birthe Kundrus, *Phantasiereiche. Zur Kulturgeschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus*

(Frankfurt am Main 2003); Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk (eds.), *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Bielefeld 2012) DOI:10.14361/transcript.9783839417997; Suvi Keskinen et al. (eds.), *Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region* (Farnham 2009); Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, and Patricia Purtschert, ‘Colonialism without Colonies: Examining Blank Spaces in Colonial Studies’, *National Identities* 18:1(2016) 1-9; Christina Lobardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo (eds.), *Postcolonial Italy. Challenging National Homogeneity* (London 2012) DOI:10.1080/1460894.4.2016.1107178.

general – and relatively small imperial nations such as the Netherlands in particular – as entities that continuously demanded more European settlers, investments, colonial agents, scientists and expertise than they could recruit on their own limited territories. This opened up opportunities for a broad range of non-Dutch European actors and institutions to become involved in the Dutch imperial space. Yet, as Caroline Driënhuizen and Sophie Junge show in this volume, it also worked the other way. In the nineteenth century, non-Dutch individuals and institutions such as museums experienced an increasing demand for objects, knowledge, or goods from the Dutch empire. This in turn opened up new opportunities for actors within the Dutch empire, both on the level of colonisers and colonised, to reach across racial, linguistic, and colonial boundaries to provide such goods and services.

### **Four fields of Southeast Asian-European entanglements**

The articles in this special issue present four different fields in which people from Europe and colonial Southeast Asia interacted across the boundaries of the Dutch imperial state: science and museum collections, travelling, the military, and photography. The selection of these fields is to some degree coincidental, but it is certainly not arbitrary. On the one hand, it reflects the relative scarcity of current research on the wider European and global dimensions of the nineteenth-century Dutch empire. While preparing this issue, I reached out to colleagues in Belgium, Italy and France, inquiring about research on their countries' historical involvements in the Dutch imperial space. The answer was mostly that this is a highly relevant question, yet there is almost no research done on this topic. The articles in this issue focus largely on German, Austrian-Hungarian and Swiss entanglements with the Dutch East Indies.

On the other hand, the composition of the article themes is not random at all. It mirrors crucial fields through which nineteenth-century Europeans 'globalized', as Maria Paula Diogo and Dirk van Laak have recently so elegantly shown. The transition from elite travel to colonial tourism, from natural history to modern natural sciences, colonial military violence as driver of technological development and global transport infrastructure, and the resulting emergence of a colonial consumer and mass culture, were all fields that created new markets, social groups of experts, and institutions. In spite of undeniable national competition, all these fields necessarily depended on and enabled boundary-crossing collaboration, exchange and cooperation – not only among Europeans, but also between Europeans and non-Europeans.<sup>24</sup> This is a theme that has recently been examined with regard

24 Maria Paula Diogo and Dirk van Laak, *Europeans Globalizing: Mapping, Exploiting, Exchanging* (London 2016).

to anti-colonial networks of revolutionaries who used and accommodated imperial infrastructures, institutions, and discourses to travel and forge new connections far beyond the reaches of the empires they fought against.<sup>25</sup> The articles in this issue contribute to the study of trans-imperial networks by examining how Europeans and imperialists crossed borders.

### More than ideas: a multi-sided, multi-material, multi-dimensional and multi-lingual empire

Susan Legêne's ambitious plan for revising Dutch colonial history is not restricted to examining the Dutch empire as a pan-European endeavor. She also suggests more interdisciplinarity, and more dialogue with scholars, artists and thinkers from post-colonial countries outside Europe. This is a blueprint for a long-term effort. In the short term, the articles in this issue engage in a kind of interdisciplinarity within the historical disciplines. While the debate between Legêne, Koekkoek, Richard, and Weststeijn revolved around an 'intellectual history of empire', the authors in this theme issue have backgrounds in art history, the history of science and technology, new military history, and the history of collections. This allows them to broaden the scope of inquiry beyond the history of ideas by including the more material, physical, economical, and legal dimensions to their narratives.

The selection of articles presented here, therefore, looks at the Dutch empire not only through non-Dutch archives, but sees it also as an inherently multi-material, multi-sited, multi-dimensional and multi-lingual entity. In doing so, the contributions paint a surprisingly new landscape of the nineteenth-century Dutch empire. It is an empire that tapped into botanic knowledge by Balinese and Javanese noble women and connected it to natural history collections in Vienna (Andreas Weber and Caroline Drieënhuizen), that relied on impoverished men from alpine Switzerland to fight brutal wars in Sulawesi (Philipp Krauer), or that used German printing technology, Chinese *peranakan* aesthetic and Austrian storytelling skills to promote peaceful visions of an empire that was deeply violent across Europe and the wider world (Mikko Toivanen and Sophie Junge). In other words: taken together, the articles in this issue examine the Dutch empire outside the

25 Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'The Other Side of Internationalism: Switzerland as a Hub of Militant Anti-Colonialism, c. 1910-1920', in: Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds.), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (London 2015) 221-258, DOI:10.1057/9781137442741\_11; Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the*

*Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (New York 2015) DOI:10.1017/CBO9781139681001; Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Cambridge 2014) DOI:10.4159/harvard.9780674726314; Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia. Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement, 1917-1931* (Copenhagen 2019).

analytical framework of national empires. This allows them to uncover how Dutch imperial projects managed to draw in and affect people from numerous European and Asian sites by coercion or by offering them different sorts of opportunities. The effects of these encounters shaped the world far beyond the borders of the empire. Understanding how this common past has affected the spaces we inhabit today, regardless of whether they were ever formally subjected to a particular empire, opens up a new spectrum of potential collaborations in the sense that Susan Legêne suggested and that will hopefully become more frequent in the near future: a collaboration of scholars with multiple linguistic skills, using archives from within and without former particular empires, and speaking to connected audiences in many different languages within and outside of Europe.

\*\*\*

Caroline Drieënhuizen's micro-study looks at a peculiar relationship that emerged between Eurasians in colonial Java, who were juridically registered as Europeans, and museums in Austria and Germany from the 1870s onwards. These individuals' European identities, linked to colonial privileges, were increasingly questioned as a result of the influx of European migrants and settlers following the opening of the Suez Canal from the 1870s onwards. At the same time, demand for ethnographic objects in Europe also grew following the increasing competition among museums to display the entire world to large metropolitan audiences. This constellation provided 'mixed-race' collectors in the colony with new opportunities to build ties to elite European institutions and perform their cultural and social 'Europeaness' by providing museums in Europe with these highly sought-after objects. For these collectors, such objects were relatively easy to procure through their Javanese family ties and their access to colonial instruments of power. Consequently, through these networks and objects, various forms of expertise and knowledge from many different actors in the colony became an integral part of museum collections and histories across Europe, with ongoing legacies to this day.

Mikko Toivanen in his article examines the relationship between Dutch colonial authorities and politicians, and three popular travel writers from Austria, Germany, and France around 1850. The travel writers benefitted from generous Dutch colonial support during their trips. Newspapers reported on their journeys in real time both in the colonies and in Europe. Moreover, all three travelers published widely popular accounts of their travels, which were translated into several languages and hence read across Europe. As Toivanen shows, these travelers successfully used the Dutch imperial infrastructure as an opportunity to further their fame and financial gain outside the Netherlands. Conversely, Dutch colonial authorities and political factions in the Netherlands eagerly used the flow of information revolving around these travelers to portray images of the empire in the Netherlands and the wider world that would advance their own competing agendas.

Andreas Weber looks at how the natural history commission established in 1820 by King Willem I paradoxically connected Dutch colonial science to and disconnected it from the rest of Europe. It was tasked with exploring the newly emerging empire in Southeast Asia. To this end, it employed a number of non-Dutch European naturalists and experts. Upon arriving in the Dutch East Indies, these naturalists entered an inherently transnational imperial space, violently forged by a multinational colonial army on the one hand and managed by European planters with different linguistic backgrounds on the other hand. Apart from this trans-imperial infrastructure, the scholarly work of collecting scientific specimens and facts in the field also benefitted from indigenous labour and a variety of local forms of knowledge. Remarkably, however, the scholarly fruits of this research hardly entered the European learned discourses of the time. The reason was that, on King Willem I's insistence, they were published in Dutch, a language only few Europeans could read. Hybrid knowledge produced through cross-cultural interactions by a multi-lingual group of European explorers was, in other words, impeded from circulating because of Dutch linguistic nationalism.

Sophie Junge examines simultaneously global, national, and local dimensions of early twentieth-century postcards depicting Surabaya. These had mostly stereotypical views of the city on the front and a space to write on the back. As Junge shows, the material production of these postcards was an intensely trans-imperial phenomenon. It relied on networks of paper suppliers and printers in Germany, and photographers, publishers and postcard correspondents in Surabaya whose family ties connected them to Armenia, Great Britain, and China. Turning to the representational, ideological side of the postcards, Junge argues that they played a relevant role in the Dutch colonial imagination. Containing Dutch inscriptions and decorated with Dutch motives, they represented Surabaya as part of 'their' national empire. However, the postcards were not used by Dutch Europeans alone. They circulated widely, ending up, among other places, in postcard collections in Switzerland. As Junge emphasises, these inexpensive postcards also enabled growing sections of the middle classes across Europe to participate in an emerging colonial commodity culture.

Philipp Krauer examines an illicit recruiting network supplying the Dutch colonial army with Swiss mercenaries between 1858 and 1890. At the centre of this network was a former Swiss mercenary who ran the 'Hotel Helvetia' in the small Dutch town of Harderwijk, where the Colonial Army Depot was located. As Krauer shows, the Swiss recruiter benefitted from the desire of young Swiss men to escape poverty by seeking opportunities abroad on the one hand and growing Dutch demands for soldiers to violently expand the Dutch sphere of influence in the second half of the nineteenth century on the other hand. As promoting foreign military services was prohibited under Swiss law, the network had to operate in secret. Its business model was to

employ recruiters who could lure young Swiss men into Dutch services and organise their transport to Harderwijk. Moreover, since not all of these young men had proof of an impeccable reputation, as required by the recruitment depot for entry into the Colonial Army, the network forged a great number of documents. Interestingly, some Swiss authorities turned a blind eye on this illegal business. For Swiss municipal governments, Dutch demands for mercenaries were a welcome opportunity to dispose of ‘unwanted’ individuals.

**Bernhard C. Schär** (1975) is a lecturer and senior researcher at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology’s (ETH Zürich) chair for Modern Global History. He is currently leading a research team on European Mercenaries in the Dutch Colonial Army (KNIL) between 1816 and 1914. Together with artists from Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Switzerland he is also collaborating on a theatre play with an accompanying exhibition based on his book *Tropenliebe* (Campus 2015) to be shown in 2020 in Theater Basel. Recent publications include: ‘From Batticaloa via Basel to Berlin. Transimperial Science in Ceylon and Beyond around 1900’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (2019) 1-33; ‘“The Swiss of All People!” Politics of Embarrassment and Dutch Imperialism around 1900’, in: Harald Fischer-Tiné (ed.), *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings* (London 2016) 279-303. Email: [bernhard.schaer@gmw.gess.ethz.ch](mailto:bernhard.schaer@gmw.gess.ethz.ch).