

# Java on the Way Around the World

## European Travellers in the Dutch East Indies and the Transnational Politics of Imperial Knowledge Management, 1850-1870

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This article examines contemporary Dutch reactions to the travels in the Dutch East Indies of three non-Dutch Europeans and internationally popular mid-nineteenth-century travel writers: the Austrian Ida Pfeiffer, the German Friedrich Gerstäcker and the French Ludovic de Beauvoir. Their journeys were published in real time by the press both on Java and in the Netherlands, and the subsequent travel books were widely discussed in Dutch newspapers and specialised journals. This article examines this reporting and the ensuing public debates as attempts to control the flow of information from the colony, a process in which both the colonial authorities and opposition parties saw an opportunity to mobilise popular foreign authors in support of their respective political agendas. Building on recent work on imperial knowledge networks and using the example of popular travel writing, this article argues that those circuits often had a more transnational and trans-European character than commonly acknowledged.

In dit artikel worden eigentijdse Nederlandse reacties op de reizen van drie Europese auteurs in Nederlands-Indië bestudeerd. Deze schrijvers van reisverhalen – de Oostenrijkse Ida Pfeiffer, de Duitser Friedrich Gerstäcker en de Fransman Ludovic de Beauvoir – genoten in het midden van de negentiende eeuw internationale faam. Zowel de Javaanse als de Nederlandse pers plaatsten actuele berichten over hun verblijven in de Nederlandse kolonie, en hun reisverslagen werden bediscussieerd in een groot aantal Nederlandse kranten en gespecialiseerde tijdschriften. Deze verslaggeving en de daarop volgende publieke debatten worden in dit artikel benaderd als pogingen om de informatiestromen vanuit de kolonie te controleren. Zowel de koloniale autoriteiten alsook de oppositiepartijen zagen het hierbij mogelijk om populaire buitenlandse auteurs voor hun politieke agenda's te mobiliseren. Voortbouwend op recent onderzoek naar koloniale kennisnetwerken

en gebruikmakend van het voorbeeld van populaire reisverhalen, betoog ik in dit artikel dat deze netwerken vaak een meer transnationaal en Europees karakter hadden dan in het algemeen wordt erkend.

## Introduction

When the Austrian traveller Ida Pfeiffer, then on her second around-the-world journey, arrived in the Dutch settlement of Pontianak in Borneo on 6 February 1852, it marked the beginning of a notable event in the generally quiet media landscape of the Dutch East Indies of the time. Foreign visitors to the archipelago were far from a rarity by the 1850s, but ones with Pfeiffer's fame did not come along too often. The occasion was eagerly seized upon by the colonial authorities as a rare opportunity for some good publicity with the potential to reach a Europe-wide, even global, audience. In exchange for this publicity and lending her name recognition, Pfeiffer's travels in the archipelago were greatly facilitated by enthusiastic support from the officials, allowing her to reinforce her status as one of the pre-eminent travel authors of her time. In this article, I will examine Pfeiffer's journey and her later written account of it (*Meine zweite Weltreise*, 1856) alongside two other similar – if less well-known – globetrotting endeavours: the journey of the then popular German author Friedrich Gerstäcker, who stayed on Java between 1851 and 1852 and published an account in the fifth volume of his *Reisen*, (1853-1854); and the journey of the French Ludovic de Beauvoir, whose visit to Java between 1866 and 1867 is recounted in the second volume of his *Voyage autour du monde*, published in 1869.<sup>1</sup> The demand that existed in Europe and the United States for exotic, global travel literature provided authors with the chance to improve their own financial standing and social status through publications of their journeys. Less thoroughly discussed in print than, for example, the British colonies of the region, the Dutch East Indies were a particularly enticing opportunity for aspiring travel writers to raise their profile. But to fully take advantage of it, it was necessary for these authors to engage personally with the Dutch empire and its agents and offer something in return.

Imperial travel writing has been studied extensively, with much of the existing scholarship inspired by Edward Said and especially by Mary Louise Pratt's seminal *Imperial Eyes* (1992) and its discussion of the contact zone between the coloniser and the colonised. This particular kind of literature has tended to focus on the content of travel accounts, examining their use of literary devices to construct and reinforce – or occasionally to question –

1 Quotes from these works will be drawn from their contemporary English translations; other translations are mine.

racial stereotypes and imperial ideologies. For the Dutch East Indies, this line of inquiry is notably pursued in a recent volume edited by Rick Honings and Peter van Zonneveld, *Een tint van het Indische Oosten*, and such studies have also touched upon Pfeiffer.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, the purpose here is not to analyse in depth the contents of the three travel works mentioned above. Rather, through a focus on how these travels were reported in both Dutch and colonial media, and on the wider reception of the works, this article will examine the ways in which popular authors like Pfeiffer were used by different political factions in the Netherlands as an opportunity to shape the public perception of colonial matters. This particular process is here analysed as an attempt at imperial knowledge management. The article builds on the extensive literature on the intersection between knowledge and empire, inspired by Christopher Baily and Bernhard Cohn, who in the 1990s examined the ways in which the British colonial administration in India sought to produce, control and make use of knowledge and intelligence concerning the country to further their political agenda.<sup>3</sup> This line of enquiry, focusing on the imperial uses of knowledge within the colony, has more recently been followed up by, among others, James Hevia.<sup>4</sup>

Another recent strand of the literature on knowledge and empire has taken a step back and sought to cast empires as global networks where information circulated, as exemplified by recent volumes on the British empire and the Dutch trading companies.<sup>5</sup> There has, however, been a tendency to primarily consider knowledge as a scientific construct at the cost of all other forms. This article draws on both strands of this specific literature, employing a global framing and focusing on the political uses of information and its control, while shifting the focus from intelligence and scholarship to information as a popularly consumed commodity.

Two recent articles on imperial information networks, written by Charles Jeurgens and Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, and informed by the

- 2 Rick Honings and Peter van Zonneveld (eds.), *Een tint van het Indische Oosten. Reizen in Insulinde, 1800-1950* (Hilversum 2015); for a recent example on Pfeiffer, see Ulrike Brisson, 'Discovering Scheherazade: Representations of Oriental Women in the Travel Writing of Nineteenth-Century German Women', *Women in German Yearbook* 29 (2013) 97-117 <https://doi.org/10.5250/womgeryearbook.29.2013.0097>.
- 3 Christopher A. Bayly, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *Modern Asian Studies* 27 (1993) 3-43 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00016061>; Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton 1996).
- 4 James Hevia, *The Imperial Security State: British Colonial Knowledge and Empire-Building in Asia* (Cambridge 2012) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139047296>.
- 5 Examples include Brett M. Bennet and Joseph M. Hodge (eds.), *Science and Empire: Knowledge and Networks of Science across the British Empire, 1800-1970* (Basingstoke 2011); Siegfried Huigen, Jan de Jong and Elmer Kolfin (eds.), *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden 2010) <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004186590.i-448>.

approaches of global history, are particularly relevant for this article. Jeurgens's research on the flow of information from the Dutch East Indies to the Netherlands has outlined an explosive increase in the quantity and intensity of communications between those two spaces over the nineteenth century and has rightly pointed out the high degree of exclusivity in opportunities of access to government-controlled information circuits between the metropole and the colonies.<sup>6</sup> However, his study, though framed in terms of early globalisation, primarily focuses on a very narrowly defined – though important and well justified – subset of the total information flow: the official correspondence between the administration in the colony and the Ministry of the Colonies in The Hague. Elsewhere, Kuitenbrouwer's analysis of the Dutch press during the South African War has the merit of placing Dutch imperial information networks in a truly global and comparative perspective yet retains a focus on primarily Dutch actors and an imperial space defined by Dutch nationalism.<sup>7</sup> The image provided by these valuable contributions is significantly complicated and made more transnational by considering foreign actors like the three authors examined here. Such an exercise also addresses the wider concern, voiced by Siegfried Huigen, that much of the literature on empire and knowledge has tended to overlook the wider European entanglements of Dutch imperial networks.<sup>8</sup> This continuing oversight has perhaps been encouraged by the national logic of the colonial archive. By contrast, by looking at internationally popular travel writers and their wider context in the continental print culture, this article opens up the trans-European dimension of the Dutch empire and suggests a multi-directional flow of information instead of the simple duality of the Netherlands and the colonies. In doing so it also draws to light, along with the rest of this issue, the many opportunities opened up for – and demands placed upon – both Dutch and non-Dutch European actors by the networks of empire.

### The Dutch East Indies and international travel in the mid-nineteenth century

Around the turn of the 1850s, the primary debate in Dutch colonial politics – one that, as will be seen, also encompassed discussions on travel literature – revolved around the future of the so-called cultivation system,

6 Charles Jeurgens, 'Networks of Information: The Dutch East Indies', in: Catia Antunes and Jos Gommans (eds.), *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (London 2015) 95-130.

7 Vincent Kuitenbrouwer, "A Newspaper War"? Dutch Information Networks during the South

African War (1899-1902)', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 128:1 (2013) 127-150 <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.8358>.

8 Siegfried Huigen, 'Introduction', in: Huigen, De Jong and Kolfin (eds.), *The Dutch Trading Companies* 2-3.

an arrangement whereby export crop production on Java was boosted by forced labour extracted from the population in lieu of taxation. The system, which had originally seemed to ameliorate the colonial economy since its introduction in 1830, had contributed to a series of famines and a general sense of societal breakdown in the late 1840s. Consequently, all Dutch parties had moved towards an acknowledgement that the system needed to be changed, though there was considerable disagreement concerning the details.<sup>9</sup> In broad terms, two groups coalesced in Dutch colonial politics: the conservatives, who remained in power throughout the 1850s and sought to improve the situation by minor fixes and better supervision of the application of the law; and a newly emboldened liberal group that coalesced around the clergyman and activist Wolter Robert van Hoëvell, who advocated free labour and the abolition of the cultivation system. Of the authors considered here, both Pfeiffer and Gerstäcker included scattered critical remarks against the cultivation system, as was common for outside observers at the time, but their comments operated on a general, philosophical level and carried little urgency or weight in the context of their works. By contrast, de Beauvoir attacked the system fiercely and extensively.

A second important aspect of the conservative colonial politics of the time was the tight government control of the flow of information within the colony and to the Netherlands. The established custom was that nothing could be printed in the colony without explicit permission from the government of the Dutch East Indies, and the press was essentially dominated by the state publication *Javasche Courant*. Such censorship was enshrined in law with the new press regulation of 1856 which essentially gave the colonial authorities total powers of censorship.<sup>10</sup> Restrictions applied to both the printing of works in the colony as well as to the dissemination of works published elsewhere. Liberals sought to work around this hostile environment by founding critical papers and journals back in the Netherlands; most famously, Van Hoëvell's *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* blossomed when he was forced to leave the colonies in 1848 and continue his activism in the freer media landscape of the Netherlands. Curiously, the press regulation of 1856 actually had the opposite effect to what was intended: the idea of such draconian censorship measures being enshrined in law caused an uproar in the Netherlands and emboldened a fledgling colonial press to test its limits, provocations to which the authorities were generally unwilling to respond with force.<sup>11</sup> Even so, the spectre of punishment still hung over publications that overstepped the line and potentially encouraged self-censorship, as

9 Robert E. Elson, *Village Java under the Cultivation System, 1830-1870* (Sydney 1994) 126-127.

*Nederlandse dagbladpers, 1744-1905* (Amsterdam 2001) 66-68, 77-79.

10 Gerard Termorshuizen, *Journalisten en heethoofden. Een geschiedenis van de Indisch-*

11 *ibid.*, 76, 81.

(5555) Bij **J. C. NOORDUYN & ZOON**, te  
*Gorinchem*, is van de pers gekomen :

## **Reis Rondom de Wereld,**

DOOR

*Ida Pfeiffer.*

**Uit het Hoogduitsch.**

2 Deelen, groot 8vo., met Vignet. f 6 20

Wij verwijzen vooral naar de Oost-Indische Berigten, voorkomende in de *Staats-Courant* van 18 Augustus jl, de *Haarlemsche* en cenige andere Nieuwspapieren van 17, 18 en 19 Augustus, waardoor men beter over de verdiensten dezer even beroemde als rusteloze Vrouw en de waarde van hare Lettervruchten zal kunnen oordeelen.



A contemporary advertisement of the Dutch translation of Pfeiffer's first around-the-world account, showing how the publisher sought to take advantage of the publicity generated by her travels in the Dutch East Indies. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 19 August 1852, 4 (accessed on Delpher.nl on 21 May 2019: resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:000017107).

a contemporary commentator suggested in one review of an ex-official's memoir in 1858.<sup>12</sup>

Like the printed word, travel in the colony was also subject to restrictions and government control. On Java, one had to apply for a specific pass before being allowed to travel across the island, while the movements of foreigners – who could not even stay in Batavia (now Jakarta) without permission secured from the resident – were strictly controlled, especially if they wanted to journey beyond the administrative core centred in Batavia and Buitenzorg (now Bogor).<sup>13</sup> This was a common cause for complaint among visitors, but generally more because of the bureaucratic inconvenience involved than any actual denial of access. The process appears to have been mostly a formality, at least for individuals who had someone to vouch for them; Gerstäcker's case was apparently helped by his acquaintance with the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar, commander of the Dutch colonial army.<sup>14</sup> Pfeiffer, for her part, needed nothing but her own fame. The account of her first around-the-world journey, published in 1850, had already established her as an international celebrity, a status that made her a most welcome guest for the Dutch authorities and secured her free passage throughout the archipelago. Gerstäcker was also already an internationally published author (including in the Netherlands) at the time of his trip, known for his stories set in the United States, yet his fame was more modest and his reception therefore less generous.

Despite the restrictions, non-Dutch European visitors were not an unusual sight on Java at the time. Many of these were people employed in neighbouring colonies, especially in British India and the Straits Settlements. One such visitor was the Bengal official Charles Walter Kinloch, author of another contemporary account of Java. Kinloch's trip coincided with Pfeiffer's – they crossed paths in Bandung, and from his brief remarks one can sense the excitement the latter's presence caused in the city: 'A black tiger made his appearance in our host's garden: the evening before, there was a lion there, in the person of the well-known Madame Ida Pfeiffer.'<sup>15</sup> Other travellers came from further afield, as de Beauvoir's chance encounter with the French Duke of Alençon, an old friend, demonstrates. It should also be kept in mind that the resident European society of Java retained a strong international flavour throughout most of the nineteenth century, as shown by Ulbe Bosma, with a strong British, German and French presence in the decades following the British interregnum.<sup>16</sup> Traces of this cosmopolitanism are easy to find in the

12 'Maandelijksch overzigt der Indische letterkunde', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 20:9 (1858) 191.

13 The relevant regulations can be found in the *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 10 January 1834, though these were notably relaxed in 1861.

14 Friedrich Gerstäcker, *Narrative of a Journey around the World* (New York 1853) 540.

15 Charles Walter Kinloch, *De Zieke Reiziger, or Rambles in Java and the Straits* (London 1853) 70.

16 Ulbe Bosma, 'The Cultivation System (1830-1870) and Its Private Entrepreneurs on Colonial Java', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38:2 (2007) 280-283 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463407000045>.





A portrait of Friedrich Gerstäcker (circa 1860) by A. Linde. UBL, KITLV 16074.



books considered here. Pfeiffer, for example, was given a tour of Borobudur by her countryman Frans Carel Wilsen, an artist employed by the Dutch colonial government to make drawings of the temple complex, while Gerstäcker's arrival to Batavia was smoothed by assistance from a German interpreter by the name of Kinder, as well as by the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar. It is also notable that, while none of the authors considered spoke Dutch, they generally had no trouble getting by with a mixture of French, German and English among the higher echelons of colonial society.

The works considered here were far from the first accounts of the Dutch East Indies to be published by outsiders, and many more soon followed, but the early fifties of the nineteenth century did see the emergence of the first truly popular travel books on the archipelago. There was an opening for aspiring travel writers. As Kinloch put it in his preface: 'In the absence of any work whatever of the nature of a Hand Book relative to the Straits and Java, even the crude notes [of his diary, M.T.] would not be without their use.'<sup>17</sup> Few were better placed to make use of this opening than Pfeiffer and Gerstäcker with their pre-existing fame. It should be pointed out that, while this article focuses on a handful of travels that caught the attention of a Western audience, Europeans had by no means exclusive access to these regional and global circuits of travel. In a notable and well-publicised example, the King of Siam toured Singapore and Batavia in 1871 and later also visited Europe, while the advent of mid-century steam shipping greatly facilitated undertaking a pilgrimage to Mecca for many Muslims in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>18</sup> The movements of Chinese sojourners throughout the region over the centuries are another well-studied example.<sup>19</sup> Western globetrotters were therefore only one subset of travellers that made use of the new technologies and increasing ease of colonial travel in the period.

### First act: Friedrich Gestäcker and Ida Pfeiffer visit the Dutch East Indies, 1851-1852

While international travel to Java was common by the mid-nineteenth century, this does not yet explain the specific motives that brought Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer to the archipelago. Curiously, though both were professional travel writers, it seems to have been random chance that determined their itineraries on this occasion. Gerstäcker, at least according to his own words,

17 Kinloch, *Zieke Reiziger*, vii-viii.

18 Mustafa Serdar Palabiyik, 'The Sultan, the Shah and the King in Europe: The Practice of Ottoman, Persian and Siamese Royal Travel and Travel Writing', *Journal of Asian History* 50:2 (2016) 206-209 <https://doi.org/10.13173/jasiahist.50.2.0201>; Jeurgens, 'Networks', 115-116.

19 Wen-Chin Chang and Eric Tagliacozzo, 'The Arch of Historical Commercial Relations between China and Southeast Asia' in: Eric Tagliacozzo and Wen-Chin Chang (eds.), *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities and Networks in Southeast Asia* (Durham 2011) 1 <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822393573>.

had thought he had arranged passage from Sydney to the Philippines, from where he intended to return to Germany via the Cape of Good Hope, but only upon passing through the Torres Straits realised that the ship was headed ‘not to Manilla, as I had thought, but to Batavia’.<sup>20</sup> As for Pfeiffer, her original intention had been to head inland from Cape Town, ‘through the centre of Africa’, from which plan she was dissuaded by logistical considerations. She then sailed to Singapore with the intention of continuing from there to Australia, before once again changing course and deciding on Sarawak on Borneo and eventually the Dutch territories.<sup>21</sup>

Neither Gerstäcker nor Pfeiffer therefore had had the Dutch colonies in their sights at the start of their respective journeys, but both evidently found them well worth the visit. What was it that made the colonies worth their attention? Some of their stops on Java remain familiar hotspots of tourism today: the famous botanical garden at Buitenzorg and the crater at Tangkuban Perahu near Bandung which both of them saw, and the ruined temple complex of Borobudur, visited by Pfeiffer. For Gerstäcker, such places gave free rein to his imagination: Buitenzorg with its ‘immense quantity and variety of plants’ was the ‘most fertile spot of God’s wide creation’, while the volcano was ‘another powerful world, upon whose threshold we stood, but which we dared not enter’.<sup>22</sup> Gerstäcker deals in these passages in the kind of exotic and romantic imagery that had become habitually associated with Java over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, but works published in German remained rare. Moreover, Gerstäcker could make use of his pre-existing literary fame to amplify his voice, taking up a position as a regular travel correspondent for the Augsburg-based *Allgemeine Zeitung*. An advertisement for his *Reisen* also played up his uniqueness as a *German* travel writer: ‘Until now we in Germany have mostly had to depend on translations of foreign travel works,’ it said, before describing Gerstäcker as a ‘countryman’ whose ‘German tongue and a German heart have [...] come to know manners and situations that have so far been completely unknown’.<sup>23</sup>

Pfeiffer, on the other hand, was not satisfied by merely being first among her countrymen and -women, and her authorial persona was designed to project a more serious authority. For one, she was a keen amateur naturalist and often described her collecting activities.<sup>24</sup> Generally, she presents herself as a consummate globetrotter who had seen it all and was not easily impressed by touristic sights. ‘There is nothing very remarkable in the architecture of the temple,’ she wrote of Borobudur, comparing it unfavourably with the

20 Gerstäcker, *Narrative*, 472, 501.

21 Ida Pfeiffer, *A Lady’s Second Journey round the World* (New York 1856) 39, 43.

22 Gerstäcker, *Narrative*, 540, 573–574.

23 *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 12 February 1853, 8.

24 A thorough evaluation of Pfeiffer’s scientific work can be found in Alison E. Martin, ‘Fresh Fields of Exploration’, in Alison E. Martin, Lut Missine and Beatrix van Dam (eds.), *Travel Writing in Dutch and German, 1790–1930* (New York 2017) 75–94.

temples of British India. At Tangkuban Perahu she noted the absence of ‘the pure porous lava [...] seen on Vesuvius, Etna, and the volcanoes of Iceland’.<sup>25</sup> What she highlighted instead throughout her work were her daring escapades in the so-called outer possessions of the Dutch East Indies, on Borneo, Celebes and Sumatra, areas which European travellers rarely visited at the time and where stories of cannibals and head-hunters abounded. These places, relatively unknown in Europe, provided Pfeiffer with the opportunity to present her second journey as truly unique and ground-breaking. To gain access to those outlying areas where foreigners were not generally allowed, Pfeiffer needed the support and cooperation of the Dutch authorities, which no doubt explains at least in part the favourable terms in which she always spoke of the latter, even dedicating her book to ‘the Dutch and the Dutch governmental authorities of India’.<sup>26</sup> One can see the outlines of a negotiation here, even if it is nowhere made explicit: the traveller required Dutch support to get where she wanted, and the authorities were happy to use her celebrity for good publicity.

Pfeiffer appears to have received what she wanted from the deal. Her travels alone among the peoples of Borneo and Sumatra were easily the most publicised portions of her second journey. ‘Certainly this counts among the most interesting and informative parts of her latest work,’ affirmed the German newspaper *Illustrirte Zeitung* of her travels among the Dayaks. Another contemporary review underlined the novelty of the subject matter, noting that her travels ‘have the advantage of carrying you over comparatively unhacknied [sic] ground’.<sup>27</sup> One particular anecdote of her confrontation with a group of Bataks, infamous for their cannibalism – with the characteristic line: ‘You don’t mean to say you would kill and eat a woman, especially such an old one as I am!’ – was widely reprinted across Europe.<sup>28</sup> The French magazine *Revue de Paris* not only thought her adventures in the archipelago to be by far the most interesting part of the book, it also made a point of underlining that the ‘tribulations and perils’ of her second journey around the world outdid those of the first one.<sup>29</sup> Pfeiffer had therefore undeniably succeeded in finding, in the Dutch East Indies, something new and exciting for her expectant audience, and her reputation as a fearless adventurer was secured.

However adventurous their self-presentation, the authors of these works were generally dependent on the local knowledge of the guides they employed. This particular debt is rarely explicitly acknowledged: rather, it falls on the critical reader to uncover what has been called the ‘hidden

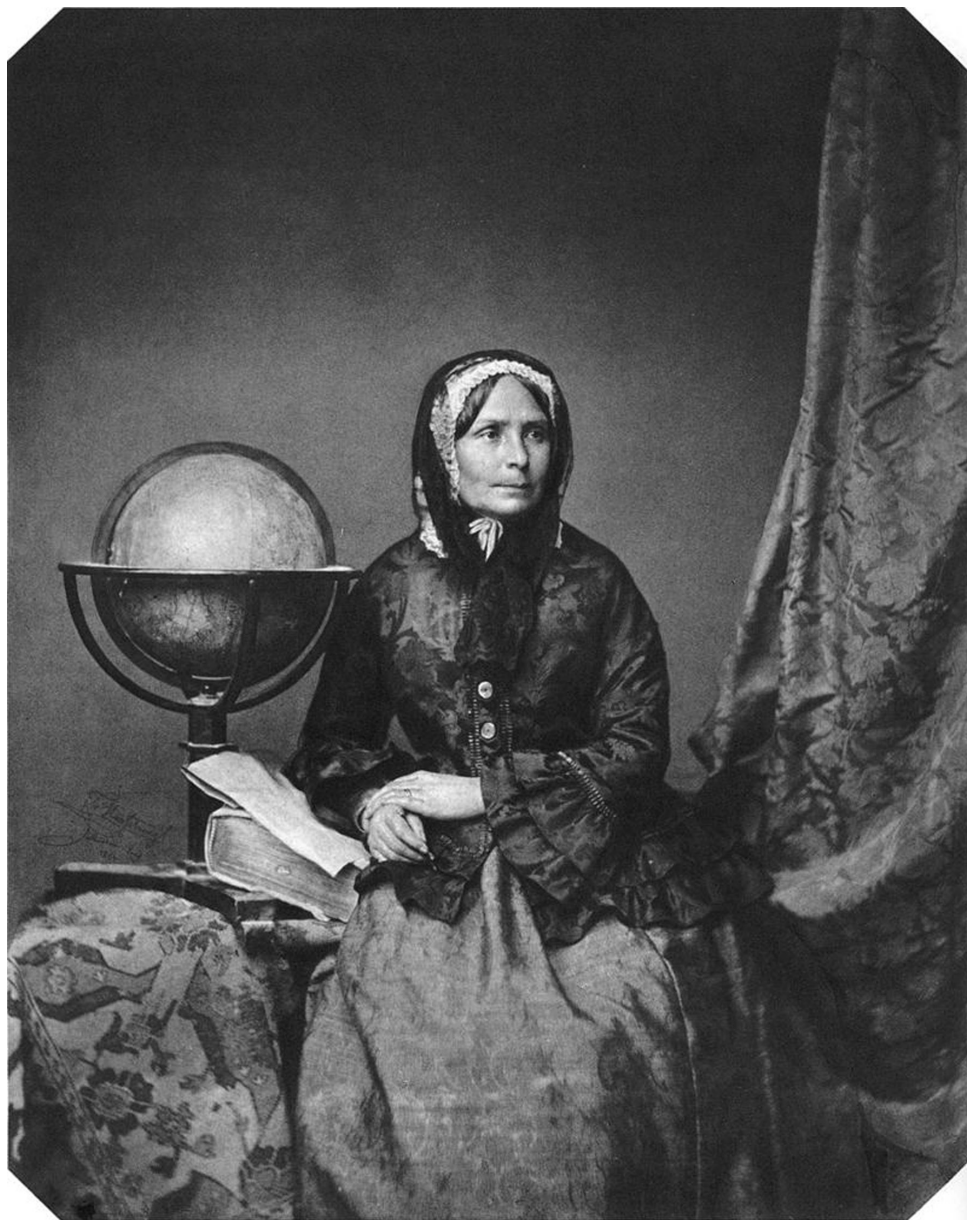
25 Pfeiffer, *Second Journey*, 130-131, 197.

26 *Ibid.*, front-matter.

27 ‘Die Weltreisende Ida Pfeiffer’, *Illustrirte Zeitung* 26 (1856) 140-142, 142; *The Albion. A Journal of News, Politics and Literature*, 3 May 1856, 213.

28 For example in *Die Gartenlaube* (1856) 55-56; *Nieuw Nederlandsch magazijn* (1856) 61-63; *L’Illustration* 30 (1857) 118.

29 ‘Mme Ida Pfeiffer, ses voyages et ses aventures’, *Revue de Paris* 33 (1856) 387.



Photograph of Ida Pfeiffer by Franz Hanfstaengl, 1856. Public domain,  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ida\\_Pfeiffer.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ida_Pfeiffer.jpg).

histories of exploration'.<sup>30</sup> In an insightful piece, Tiffany Shellam has recently drawn attention to how the work of Aboriginal guides in Australia habitually went far beyond finding the right path and involved complex processes of intermediation between explorers and local populations.<sup>31</sup> Although such questions are beyond the focus of this article, it is certainly worth considering how much careful conciliation and mediation on the part of the guides is left unmentioned in the famed anecdote of Pfeiffer's witty repartee with the cannibals of Sumatra, or how much of Pfeiffer's constant exasperation at the obduracy of her guides – she blames one for doing 'just what he pleased' – is merely an exaggerated response to their reasonable attempts to keep her safe and on the right path.<sup>32</sup> By contrast to such complaints, in the depictions of Pfeiffer's daily journeys the guides tend to disappear from view and the correct destination is reached as if by accident. In fact, she frequently boasts of crossing parts of Borneo 'entirely alone' even where the presence of a guide or other helper has been clearly established. It is important, then, not to lose sight of the local expertise without which Pfeiffer's travels could never have been completed. The same is also true of Gerstäcker and de Beauvoir, though their less adventurous travels went through comparatively familiar territory.

### Pfeiffer's trip as a media event in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies

As already noted, it was Pfeiffer's journey that caused the greatest commotion at the time. Her arrival in the archipelago was announced in the state publication *Javasche Courant* in February 1852, but it was only with her arrival in Batavia, and with news of her exploits on Borneo trickling in, that the media truly took notice.<sup>33</sup> On 5 June 1852, the *Courant* devoted several paragraphs to describing her past exploits in glowing terms, outlining her travel plans in the colony and reporting on her upcoming audience with the governor-general himself in Buitenzorg.<sup>34</sup> Also included in that issue, to whet the readers' appetites further, was a fragment from Pfeiffer's writings drawn from the *Bombay Gazette*.<sup>35</sup> In this piece she discusses her views on missionary work in India, criticising especially the extravagant lifestyles of British missionaries and their detachment from the way of life of the local population. It is not unlikely that the piece had been chosen specifically for

30 Felix Driver, 'Exploration as Knowledge Transfer: Exhibiting Hidden Histories', in: Heike Jöns, Peter Meuserberger and Michael Hefferman (eds.), *Mobilities of Knowledge* (Cham 2017) 85-104 [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44654-7\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44654-7_5).

31 Tiffany Shellam, 'Mediating Encounters through Bodies and Talk', in: Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam (eds.), *Indigenous*

*Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives* (Acton 2015) 85-102 <https://doi.org/10.22459/11.09.2015.05>.

32 Pfeiffer, *Second Journey*, 87, 164.

33 *Javasche Courant*, 26 February 1852, 1.

34 *Javasche Courant*, 5 June 1852, 1-2.

35 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

reprinting because of the supposed coincidence of Pfeiffer's ideas with those of Dutch missionaries: a brief editor's note suggests that 'luckily' Pfeiffer would find the habits of the latter 'more to her liking'. With those two pieces, the tone of the narrative around her arrival had already been efficiently established: a global celebrity making a triumphal tour of a colony with a friendly and like-minded government that was delighted to receive her and support her in her exploits.

Reporting in the Netherlands was also shaped by government publications, which played a key role in the authorities' attempts to control the flow of information from the colonies. Thus, the *Courant's* piece on Pfeiffer's arrival was reprinted on 18 August 1852 in the corresponding state organ in the metropole the *Nederlandsche Staatscourant*, and also appeared in a number of local papers, either in full or abbreviated. This borrowing of news items from state gazettes and from newspapers around the world was a standard feature of global news flows at the time, but the extent of the quoted passages in this case is significant. Items of colonial miscellanea rarely took up more than a single, short paragraph in Dutch papers; by contrast, reports of Pfeiffer's movements often dominated the news of the day. For example, the announcement of her arrival in Batavia in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and the *Leydsche Courant* run to five and ten paragraphs, respectively, the latter taking up about a third of a page in a four-page paper.<sup>36</sup> Smaller papers like the two-page *Middelburgsche Courant* ran shorter versions.<sup>37</sup>

The content of these early reports is interesting, as it helps us to understand what the authorities stood to gain from all this publicity. Notable are the many references to her completed travels and future plans, which served to generate ongoing interest and create a sense of an unfolding story, while simultaneously introducing less-known areas of the colony to readers. There are also mentions of publications of her travels elsewhere, including in Dutch translation, which further helped keep readers invested by encouraging them to seek out the suggested sources while waiting for more news to come through. Most importantly, even the shortest summaries did not fail to reproduce the *Javasche Courant's* original mention of her warm reception in Batavia and an audience with the governor-general, thus foregrounding the friendly relationship with the authorities and drawing the colonial government directly into the picture, allowing it to benefit from the surge of general interest her personal popularity attracted.

These clippings can be read in the light of Charles Jeurgens's suggestion that the colonial authorities' constant concern with control of information flows had to do with a fear of being outflanked by the press and losing control of the narrative.<sup>38</sup> With this in mind, the careful framing of Pfeiffer's trip in these passages appears as a proactive move to shape

36 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 17 August 1852, 1; *Leydsche Courant*, 20 August 1852, 3.

37 *Middelburgsche Courant*, 21 August 1852, 2.

38 Jeurgens, 'Networks', 104-105.



this narrative before other outlets got a chance to take over, a manoeuvre significantly facilitated by the press censorship then in force in the colony and the state organs' privileged status. However, the story could not be captured within imperial boundaries, and it did not take long for alternative – transnational – sources to come into play. Already by 23 August 1852, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* had got their hands on an 'unpublished private letter' from Pfeiffer to 'a friend of hers in London', which they used to fill in gaps in the earlier account in the *Javasche Courant*.<sup>39</sup> In a European publishing ecosystem, a national government's control over information was always tenuous.

Other parties beyond the government and the press also sought to take advantage of the interest generated by Pfeiffer's tour. One can only imagine how pleased the Gorinchem-based publisher J.C. Noorduyn & Zoon must have been at all this coverage, seeing as they had only just brought out a Dutch translation of Pfeiffer's book recounting her first journey around the world. Instead of any synopsis or recommendation, their advert for the work, placed in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* of 19 August 1852, merely refers prospective readers to the 'messages from the East Indies, published in the *Staats-Courant* of 18 Augustus, the *Haarlemsche* and certain other newspapers [...] where one can get a better idea of the merits of this famous and restless woman, and of the worth of her literary works'.<sup>40</sup> Another advertisement, published a month later, praised Pfeiffer's unadorned honesty 'to which she likely owes the distinction, with which she has now been received also in the East Indies by the governor-general'.<sup>41</sup> Her tour of the Dutch East Indies was therefore an opportunity not only for the colonial authorities, but also provided free publicity in real time for her Dutch publisher.

Pfeiffer left the colony in July 1853, and the media buzz lasted well into that year. For example, in February 1853, the *Amsterdamsche Courant* published a lengthy piece on her exploits on Sumatra, and in May 1853, the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche* had an update on her travels in the Maluku Islands.<sup>42</sup> Also in May 1853, the *Algemeen Handelsblad* had another extract from a private letter, this time recounting her famous encounter with the cannibals. Indeed, in the public circulation of these supposedly private letters one can sense a canny campaign of self-promotion on Pfeiffer's part, and a way to circumvent the middlemen of the colonial press.<sup>43</sup> In general, these pieces regularly made sure to point out the warm welcome and full support Pfeiffer had received from the Dutch colonial authorities everywhere she went. What they rarely contained was any mention of possible negative impressions Pfeiffer might have got of either the Dutch or the colony. Overall, then, the Dutch

39 *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 23 August 1852, 10.

40 *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 19 August 1852, 4.

41 *Opregte Haarlemsche Courant*, 27 September 1852, 4.

42 As quoted in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 12 February 1853, 2; *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 30 May 1853, 1.

43 *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 9 May 1853, 3.

government could be pleased with how Pfeiffer's visit had passed. It had generated a great deal of positively tinted publicity for the colony over about a year and a half at a time when the general tenor of the public debate around the Dutch East Indies was far from positive – a good return on the relatively minor investment of waiving Pfeiffer's travel costs. The authorities themselves had come out of the affair in good light, an impression that was reinforced when Pfeiffer's account came out in 1854 bearing its dedication to Dutch colonial officials.

### Aftermath: the reception of Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer's published accounts

The travel books that contained Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer's travel accounts came out, in the original German, in 1854 and 1856, respectively. As noted by Arie Pos, the 1850s saw publishers scrambling to print accessible works on the colonies to profit off the popular demand for such literature, and Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer certainly contributed to that boom.<sup>44</sup> Both are hefty works, running at about five hundred pages (Pfeiffer's was originally published in two volumes; Gerstäcker's was part of a larger five-volume series.) As such, they were by no means throw-away booklets; rather, their audience were the educated middle classes with a keen interest on the wider world but few scholarly ambitions. They were also expressly global in scope, capitalising on the relative novelty of around-the-world accounts at the time; as such, they placed the Dutch East Indies in a wider geographical context, as one step of a larger journey. Both attracted immediate interest around Europe. Pfeiffer's *Meine zweite Weltreise* quickly came out in several translations: in English (1855), Dutch (1856) and French (1857).<sup>45</sup> Gerstäcker's *Reisen* did not have quite the same reach but was nevertheless simultaneously published in English in London. Both authors reached an international, European audience at almost the same moment and were almost certainly among the more widely read texts dealing with the Dutch East Indies at the time.

It is only natural that these works also caused a great deal of interest in the Netherlands. Even Gerstäcker, whose original visit to the East Indies had gone largely unnoticed, was drawn into ongoing debates when his experiences passed into print. An excerpt of his travels on Java was published in the 1855 volume of the *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, the official publication of the KITLV (Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-,

44 Arie Pos, "De pen eens krijgsman's" of vreemde eend in Indië. J.B.J. van Doren en zijn Herinneringen en schetsen van Nederlands-Indië, in: Honings and Zonneveld (eds.), *Een tint van het Indische Oosten*, 86.

45 Parts of her travels were also translated into Malay. See Mary Somer Heidhues, 'Woman on the Road: Ida Pfeiffer in the Indies', *Archipel* 68 (2004) 307-311 <https://doi.org/10.3406/arch.2004.3839>.

Land- en Volkenkunde) in Delft that was tasked with conducting research into the Dutch colonies as well as with educating prospective officials for the colonial service.<sup>46</sup> This piece, under the title ‘Javaansche schetsen’ (‘Javanese sketches’), was drawn not from the German or English edition of the *Reisen* but instead from the newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung*, where the sketches had appeared in 1852. The *Bijdragen* was by no means an obvious venue for such a publication, supposedly being a strictly scientific journal dedicated to increasing knowledge on the colonies, while Gerstäcker’s travel writing has a light, personal and amusing tone in line with the touristic literature of the time. This dissonance did not go unnoticed, as a contemporary reviewer noted: ‘Some may note that such an article [...] in fact does not belong in a journal where one, according to its nature, would expect to find much more scholarly pieces.’<sup>47</sup> A closer look at this piece and at the debate it caused says much about the ways in which a popular, foreign author like Gerstäcker could be drawn into colonial debates.

The *Bijdragen*, though supposedly politically neutral, was essentially a government publication, being the official organ of the KITLV. In the 1850s, in particular, its position of authority on the Dutch East Indies was being challenged by independent, liberal voices on colonial affairs, with the cultivation system and colonial censorship especially coming under sustained criticism, as outlined above. Notable proponents of the liberal faction were the reformist journal *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, published in the Netherlands since 1849; the weekly paper *De Indiër*, from 1850; and the society *Indisch Genootschap*, founded in the Hague in 1854.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to these, the KITLV, under the leadership of the conservative ex-minister of colonies Jean Chrétien Baud, toed the government line. For this position, the publication of the Gerstäcker piece provided two benefits, as aptly noted by the reviewer quoted above. Firstly, its pleasant style was likely to have an appeal ‘not only to scholars but for the general audience’ and therefore increase the reach and improve the public standing of the institute. On a related note, it is clear that the *Bijdragen* was happy to take advantage of Gerstäcker’s name recognition: the piece came prefaced by an editor’s note underlining how the author’s name ‘makes any other recommendation superfluous’.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, while Gerstäcker ‘does not politicise much’, the scattered critical remarks he made as an outsider provided, in the reviewer’s opinion, evidence of the open-mindedness of the journal’s editorship, and of their willingness to publicise differing viewpoints.<sup>50</sup>

46 Friedrich Gerstäcker, ‘Javaansche schetsen’, *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 3 (1855) 413-491 <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90001169>.

47 ‘Aankondigingen en beoordeelingen’, *Algemeene konst- en letterbode* 67 (1855) 156.

48 Cees Fasseur, *Kultuurstelsel en koloniale baten* (Leiden 1975) 80-86.

49 Gerstäcker, ‘Javaansche schetsen’, 413.

50 ‘Aankondigingen’, 156.

This second point was fiercely contested by the liberal opposition, in this case by a member of the Indisch Genootschap writing in *De Indiër*. He commented upon several perceived inaccuracies and flaws in Gerstäcker's piece, perhaps to underline its unsuitability for a supposedly scholarly publication, but the most crucial critique here had to do with the half-heartedness of Gerstäcker's criticisms, how 'all iniquities are excused with meaningless phrases', and how this served to aid the KITLV's cause:

'Upon reading p. 455 I understand again why the Institute [KITLV] has published this piece. Here he [Gerstäcker] refers to the suppression of the Javanese and to their slavish submission, but also immediately attempts to prove that this must be so, because so many natives are ruled by so few Europeans, and therefore – that the Dutch, from *their* perspective, are completely right to act as they do [...]. For him, a Republican, this is a strange opinion, but for the Institute it must have been very welcome. Is the president of the Institute not Mr J.C. Baud?'<sup>51</sup>

In this anonymous critic's opinion, the publication of the piece was little more than an act of propaganda by the conservative establishment, making use of the popularity and light style of a famous foreign writer to draw in readers, and giving a semblance of neutrality to a government paper through the publication of weightless critiques that distracted from the more serious arguments made by the colonial opposition at home. In a further editorial manoeuvre, the *Bijdragen* actually published extensive excerpts of this critique in a supplement, leaving out however the direct accusation against Baud and the critic's recommendation to read the liberal papers instead. Furthermore, these excerpts came mixed with commentary from the government-friendly publication *Tjaraka-Welanda*, whose opinion was rather that Gerstäcker tended to be too critical and idealistic in his views.<sup>52</sup> In such a form, the supplement in fact worked to reinforce the case that the institute was a neutral arbiter in the public debate, merely collating arguments from the conservatives and liberals and watching from the sidelines.

Pfeiffer's work received a somewhat similar response from Dutch liberals. The Dutch translation was reviewed fresh off the press in the *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, by the known Indies scholar, liberal and founding member of the Indisch Genootschap Pieter Johannes Veth.<sup>53</sup> Veth points out the great public interest in the work, due to the Dutch being 'greatly sensitive to the judgment of foreigners'. Yet while his review is relatively mild in tone, he does end up underlining how Pfeiffer's foreign perspective is, on the balance, a weakness: that 'her visit to most places was too brief, her knowledge of the great social and political interests too little',

51 'Ingezonden stukken', *De Indiër*, 26 May 1855.

52 These commentaries were quoted in a supplement to *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 3 (1855).

53 Pieter Johannes Veth, 'Maandelijksch overzicht der Indische letterkunde', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 18:6 (1856) 444-447.

and what is more, that she cannot escape the framing of her ever-helpful hosts: ‘We hope that Dutch readers, upon reading this work, as well as those [...] written by other foreigners about our Indies, will not lose sight of how the merely reasonable efforts to receive them well and give them a good impression of ourselves have worked to bring them to a favourable judgment and made them see everything through rose-tinted glasses.’<sup>54</sup>

Veth’s overall judgment of the work is far from harsh, but when one takes into account his political position and the forum of his review, it becomes clear that he saw the popularity of foreign travel writers utterly dependent on the colonial authorities as a significant problem in a situation where the flow of information from the Dutch East Indies to Europe was already tightly controlled by the government. This stance parallels the concerns, discussed by Kuitenbrouwer, of Dutch journalists who found themselves dependent on foreign news agencies after the introduction of global telegraph communications in the late nineteenth century, and shows that those debates over the benefits and disadvantages of transnational information flows had precedents in the 1850s.<sup>55</sup>

That outside visitors could struggle to recognise the violence inherent in the colonial situation is shown by the case of Hilarius Augustes Wijnandes Brumsteede, whose tea plantation Tjioemboeloeit near Bandung was a regular stop on the itineraries of visitors, including Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer. The latter does not have much to say about the place, apart from a rather mechanical description of the work done there, but Gerstäcker’s account is all the more enthusiastic. He commends the host’s ‘most kind and friendly manner’ and, upon observing the labourers of the plantation notes with amazement ‘how well these dark sons of a hot clime have entered into the spirit of the thing’.<sup>56</sup> Both these statements are thrown into unpleasant relief by the fact that soon after Brumsteede was indicted for arbitrarily torturing his workers, a scandal that Gerstäcker was oblivious to and that only came to light through an anonymous letter from an informant based in Buitenzorg, published in *De Indiër*.<sup>57</sup> When Brumsteede was sentenced in 1856, the journal chalked it down as a victory for their cause but also as a cautionary example of the kinds of abuses that frequently went unpunished and could only be fought by a free colonial press.<sup>58</sup> And while the piece does not explicitly mention Gerstäcker or Pfeiffer, the contrast is clear: outsiders like them were in no position to provide accurate information on what was actually happening behind the scenes. As such, their philosophising about free and coerced labour remained necessarily superficial, posing no danger to the colonial government. This

54 Ibid., 446-447.

55 Kuitenbrouwer, ‘Newspaper War’, 137.

56 Gerstäcker, *Narrative*, 565-567.

57 ‘Strafoefeningen te Tjioemboeloeit in de afdeeling Bandung, Preanger-Regentschappen’, *De Indiër*, 28 July 1855, 2.

58 ‘Particuliere correspondentie van “de Indiër”’, *De Indiër*, 5 July 1856, 2.



A view of Mount Malabar from the veranda of the tea plantation Tjioemboeloit (ca. 1859-1860) by J. Groneman. The plantation was a popular destination for travellers in the 1850s, including Pfeiffer and Gerstäcker. UBL, KITLV 37C303.



helps to explain the overt helpfulness of the authorities toward Pfeiffer and the decision to publicise Gerstäcker's 'sketches' in a government journal.

### Second act: the visit of Ludovic de Beauvoir in 1866-1867

When the French nobleman Ludovic de Beauvoir arrived on Java in November 1866, many things had changed, if not in the colony itself then certainly in the tenor of the debate around Dutch colonial politics. De Beauvoir, at only nineteen years of age, travelled with his childhood friend Pierre Philippe Jean Marie d'Orléans, the Duke of Penthièvre, and like Pfeiffer, they received a reception fit for a celebrity. Penthièvre, as the grandson of the former king Louis Philippe, was exiled from France for political reasons between 1848 and 1870, and the aura of his nobility was enough to attract attention everywhere they travelled. Upon arrival on Java, they received a letter from the governor-general himself assuring that 'political considerations not permitting him to offer to a prince in exile the honours due to a French prince, he yet begs to be allowed to treat him as the grandson of a king'.<sup>59</sup> Such recognition eased the trip of the Frenchmen considerably, especially as it came with a pass to travel across all of Java with the help of local officials and free use of post horses, a perk that immediately freed them from the kinds of financial considerations that Gerstäcker had had to deal with.

Penthièvre's name also allowed the travellers to quickly make important connections with the local establishment. Mere days after their arrival the resident of Batavia, Hendrik Jeronimus Christiaan Hoogeveen, threw them a lavish party with all the beau monde of the city, and similar receptions awaited them all along their travels.<sup>60</sup> Conveniently, Hoogeveen was also the man officially responsible for the permits required by foreigners to stay and travel on Java. And in fact, the networking started even before their arrival on the island. On the ship from Australia, they made the acquaintance of Ambrosius Johannes Wilbrordus van Delden, the president of the Batavia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who then seems to have acted as something of a local host and guide in Batavia. From the diary that Van Delden kept on his visit to Australia it can be seen that the presence of the noblemen on the ship caught his immediate attention upon boarding and they quickly became friendly, the former complimenting the intelligence and manner of the young men and the latter 'overjoyed' (*overgelukkig*) at the chance to receive some advance information on Java.<sup>61</sup>

59 Ludovic de Beauvoir, *A Voyage round the World*, Vol II (London 1870) 15.

60 Beauvoir, *Voyage*, 17.

61 Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (hereafter NA), Archief van A.J.W. van Delden (1819-1887), access number 2.21.350, Dagboek van A.J.W. van Delden, inventory number 1.

De Beauvoir's tour of Java, which lasted about a month, can therefore be said to have passed smoothly and even luxuriously. Officials and Javanese nobility everywhere were happy to receive such illustrious company, and the around-the-world journey the young noblemen had embarked upon commanded significant media attention, even if not quite as much as Pfeiffer's had done a decade and a half earlier. Their arrival and departure were reported in papers both in the colony and in the Netherlands, and pieces in local papers on Java gave updates on their itineraries and the receptions arranged for them.<sup>62</sup> It is, however, the Dutch response to de Beauvoir's published account of that trip, first published in France in 1869, that shows most clearly how the colonial context that he travelled in had changed since the journeys of Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer.

De Beauvoir's *Voyage autour du monde. Java, Siam, Canton* was not translated into Dutch, but that was not a significant hurdle for the work's popularity in the Netherlands, considering the widespread fluency in French among the country's educated classes. Indeed, one contemporary review describes the work as well-known (*overbekend*) among the Dutch reading populace.<sup>63</sup> It was an international hit, going through several editions in France and appearing in English almost immediately, apparently rivalling Pfeiffer's earlier work in popularity. The difference, however, was that while both Pfeiffer and Gerstäcker had received direct or indirect support from the Dutch authorities and were consequently considered tainted by that association in the eyes of the liberal opposition, by the time of de Beauvoir's journey the dominance of the conservative party in Dutch politics had come to an end and the general political mood had shifted in favour of colonial reform.<sup>64</sup> In particular, open criticism of the colonial system had become much more prevalent after the publication of former colonial official Eduard Douwes Dekker's influential *Max Havelaar* in 1860.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps reflecting this general shift, de Beauvoir's work is much sharper and thorough in its criticisms of the colony and especially the cultivation system.

Unlike Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer, whose mild critiques of colonisation come in brief asides and are outweighed by personal impressions and the praise directed at helpful Dutch officials, de Beauvoir dedicates a whole chapter, under the rubric of 'The Colonial System' ('Le système colonial'), to a detailed discussion of the workings of the colony, the oppression of the population, the need to institute free labour and a description of what he terms 'the duties of a mother-country in the nineteenth century'.<sup>66</sup>

62 For example, *De Locomotief: Samarangsch handels- en advertentie-blad*, 10 December 1866, 2.

63 'Zou het onverschillig zijn, hoe andere natiën over ons beleid in Indië denken?', *Mededeelingen van wege het Nederlandsche Zendelingennootschap* 90 (1875) 412.

64 Fasseur, *Kultuurstelsel*, 205.

65 Termorshuizen, 'Schreeuwen', 37-38.

66 De Beauvoir, *Voyage*, 142-170.

None of this criticism is diluted by the kind of relativism that one finds in Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer, and de Beauvoir's tone is fiercely forward-looking (in this one chapter; it is notable that his general style is exuberant and humorous). De Beauvoir is not known to history as an eager political commentator, but evidently he sensed that he was witnessing a moment of change on Java. He even went as far as to send a copy of the second volume of his *Voyage* to the liberal Minister of Colonies, Engelbertus de Waal who was in power since 1868, with an accompanying letter stating his pleasure at the recently passed Agrarian Law of 1870 which essentially abolished the cultivation system.<sup>67</sup> This letter makes it clear that de Beauvoir kept on following Dutch colonial politics after his journey – for example, he made reference to a specific issue of a newspaper where the matter was discussed, and to the date of the parliamentary session where De Waal defended the law – and that he saw himself as having contributed to that cause in some small way. He expressed a wish that the minister might, 'like a general after a victory', recognise in his work 'one of his humble but courageous soldiers'. Where Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer largely avoided politics, de Beauvoir threw himself into the thick of it.

Unfortunately, de Beauvoir does not elaborate on the sources he employed nor the aims he had in writing the chapter. One contemporary commentator speculated on a link between the contemporary French efforts to establish a presence in Indo-China and de Beauvoir's desire to position himself as a voice on colonial matters, suggesting that 'les princes écrivent pour la France'.<sup>68</sup> *Max Havelaar* may also have been an inspiration, either in its English translation or through the excerpts that had come out in French in the *Revue moderne* in 1867–1868. Moreover, it is of interest to note that the two Dutch officials closest to the Frenchmen during their visit to Java, Van Delden and Hoogeveen, both appear to have been at least moderately reformist in their positions. The former is primarily remembered for his 1875 publication *Blik op het Indisch staatsbestuur*, which outlines a broadly reformist programme; of Hoogeveen, it is known that he was at some point a member of Douwes Dekker's inner circle during the latter's time in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>69</sup> As such, it is not unthinkable that when Van Delden was called upon to provide information on Java aboard the ship from Australia, or when Hoogeveen treated his guests in Batavia, they could have been sources of critical insights for their guests.

Regardless of de Beauvoir's personal motives, the reformist party was only too happy to take advantage of such an internationally famous supporter. The *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* welcomed de Beauvoir's volume eagerly. A brief note in the second issue of 1870 announced the arrival of an important new work and praised de Beauvoir for not being 'like so many other foreigners

67 NA, Collectie 211 E. de Waal, access number 2.21.173, Correspondentie 1847-1870, inventory number 2.

68 *Nieuwe Bataviaasch Handelsblad*, 12 February 1870.

69 Eduard du Perron, *De bewijzen uit het pak van Sjaalman* (Rijswijk 1940) 61.

who, after a brief visit to Java, dazed by the smoke blown into their eyes, become admirers and eulogists of our administration’ – a reference no doubt to the likes of Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer.<sup>70</sup> A full review followed in the next number, equally full of praise and enlisting de Beauvoir’s words to help in the political struggle towards an end to forced labour and the cultivation system.<sup>71</sup> In the newspapers, the liberal *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* reviewed de Beauvoir’s work favourably with the title ‘The colonial monopoly system judged by a foreigner’. The publication was also noted in the colonial press on Java, which had since the 1850s grown to become much more varied and free. The liberal *Nieuwe Bataviaasch Handelsblad*, wishing to ‘make their readers aware of this book’, published lengthy extracts of the critical chapter translated into Dutch.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, the conservative-leaning *Java-bode* sought to discredit de Beauvoir by describing him as ‘almost a child’ during his visit, and by assuring, evidently disingenuously, that in the Indies ‘no one ascribes any value to his chapter concerning our colonial system’.<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to gauge the true effect de Beauvoir’s work had on the colonial debate at the time but it is undeniable that it was widely seen by the liberal party as a useful vehicle to spread their cause to a mainstream audience.

## Conclusion

While authors like Pfeiffer, Gerstäcker and de Beauvoir only accounted for a minor portion of the total information flow between the colonies and Europe, the fact that their works reached an audience across Europe and the United States gave them a cultural heft far beyond what simple word counts might suggest. Moreover, compared to the officials and scientists more often studied by historians of empire and knowledge, they also provided a different kind of challenge to the colonial authorities precisely because their writings circulated internationally beyond Dutch national networks and colonial controls, along circuits that were both trans-European and multi-directional. To the Dutch authorities, such European authors represented both a risk and an opportunity that required careful negotiation. The information in their writings needed to be actively managed rather than just kept out of sight in the colonial archive, but its public appeal was also tempting. It could be used to satisfy domestic curiosity toward colonial matters without exposing the administration to the critiques of the liberal opposition, taking advantage of the foreign authors’ dependence on government support and lack of expertise in the region to shape their travels and narratives, using state-controlled newspapers and journals to amplify that message.

70 *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 4:2 (1870) 154.

71 ‘Java in 1866’, *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië* 4:3 (1870) 155-166.

72 *Nieuwe Bataviaasch Handelsblad*, 12 February 1870 and 14 February 1870.

73 *Java-bode*, 23 February 1870, 3.

Aware of the risk, the opposition mobilised their organs to denounce such works as propaganda, attacking Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer on the pages of *De Indiër* and the *Tijdschrift*. For them, such touristic works, even if well-intentioned, were a poor substitute for a vital, critical colonial press that could attack the violence and abuses of the cultivation system locally and in detail rather than in philosophical asides, a difference underlined by the Brumsteede affair discussed above. Yet the liberals were also able to take advantage of multipolar and cross-imperial networks, and to enlist European voices in their support, as can be seen in their championing of de Beauvoir's work which, although in many ways similar to those of Gerstäcker and Pfeiffer, was emboldened by the zeitgeist to take a strong political stance and call for concrete colonial reforms. Like the earlier works, it was supported by one side of Dutch colonial politics and denounced by another, but by the time of its publication it was the liberal De Waal that held the position of the Minister of Colonies, while the conservatives had lost their dominance.

For the authors involved, far removed from daily Dutch affairs, these entanglements with imperial politics represented an opportunity for literary fame and financial gain, as the demand for exotic travel literature hit a peak in Europe and the United States. And there were also other considerations: Pfeiffer sought to gain credence as a naturalist by assembling collections during her travels; for de Beauvoir, the demise of the cultivation system in 1870 brought topicality and credibility as a political commentator. In all these various ways, actors from around Europe could tap into, add to and become part of the global information network connecting the colonies and Europe in a complex negotiation of opportunities and demands. The process of colonial travel and the authoring of those travels in the shape of – even seemingly light-hearted – literary texts was therefore a complex negotiation of the interests of the various parties involved, with potential gains and risks for everyone concerned.

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