



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

'Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogeligheden' The Dutch Colonial Empire and the Careers of the Presidents of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij

Hof, Bram

Citation

Hof, B. (2022). *'Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogeligheden': The Dutch Colonial Empire and the Careers of the Presidents of the Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master thesis in the Leiden University Student Repository](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3295869>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

MA Thesis for the MA History Politics, Culture and National Identities, 1789 to the Present

Supervisor: Prof. dr. H. te Velde

Studentnumber: 1862405

Contact: hof.bram.13@gmail.com,

06-37345114

18245 words

‘Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden’

THE DUTCH COLONIAL EMPIRE AND THE CAREERS OF THE PRESIDENTS OF THE NEDERLANDSCHE
HANDEL-MAATSCHAPPIJ

HOF, B.S. (BRAM)

Index

Introduction.....	2
Chapter 1: Imperialism and the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century.....	8
Imperialism and the Netherlands.....	8
Justifying Empire	11
Chapter 2: Balthazar Heldring: A Change of Direction	15
Chapter 3: Jacob Theodoor Cremer: A Dutch Imperial Man.....	22
Chapter 4: Karel van Aalst: A New Entrepreneurial Spirit.....	30
Chapter 5: Daniel Crena de Iongh and Ernst Heldring: An Empire in Crisis	38
Epilogue: The Dutch Empire	44
Bibliography.....	48
Sources	48
Printed sources.....	48
Literature	49

Introduction

Cornelis Luciën Maria Bijl de Vroe, an adjutant to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies from 1914 till 1919, wrote in his journal that he was part of “the upper hundred” in the Dutch Indies.¹ His journal portrays his life among the European elite at Buitenzorg as monotonous. Politics are seldom mentioned in the conversations at Buitenzorg, even though a war is raging in Europe. The picture that Bijl de Vroe’s journal presents, suggests a colonial society indifferent to colonial, national and international politics, different in many aspects to colonial counterparts of other European nations.² Yet there is a whole other story to be told for many other Dutchmen who went to the Dutch East Indies. For them, the Dutch Indies were a launching pad for successful careers. Dutch businessman and politician J.T. Cremer called the Dutch East Indies “*Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden*”.³ Doing so, he made a reference to the United States as ‘the land of opportunities’, where everyone would have the opportunity to make something of himself.⁴ Political and Commercial heavyweights such as the president of the Dutch Bank Gerard Vissering, president of the *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*, the Dutch Trading Company, Karel van Aalst, and- perhaps the most prominent example- military man, businessman, and politician Hendrikus Colijn all thanked their personal success at least in part due to their involvement in the Dutch colonial empire.⁵ What then, did the Dutch East Indies mean for Dutchmen in the early half of the twentieth century?

In many ways, the Kingdom of the Netherlands was just another European empire. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, the Kingdom of the Netherlands consisted of the metropolitan Netherlands, the archipelago of the East Indies, and the territories collectively known as the West Indies (the South American territory of Surinam, or Dutch Guiana; and the Caribbean islands of Curaçao, Bonaire, Aruba, St. Maarten, St. Eustatius, and Saba). Especially in the East Indies, the Dutch had their own version of a civilising mission, found in all European empires at the time.⁶ However, despite apparent similarities, the Dutch historiography of the Dutch colonies and a Dutch colonial empire has for long tended to be framed as exceptional by historians. In part, this is the result of how the practitioners of empire almost exclusively -regardless of what European nation they were from-

¹ Marian Schouten, *Rond de Buitenzorgse Troon: Indisch dagboek C.L.M. Bijl de Vroe, 1914-1919, ingeleid en bewerkt door Marian Schouten, met een woord vooraf door A. Alberts* (Bussum 1980) 12.

² Ibidem, 12, 17.

³ J.T. Cremer, *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden: Reisschetsen* (Amsterdam 1914).

⁴ Halvdan Koht, *The American Spirit in Europe: A Survey of Transatlantic Influences* (Philadelphia 1949) 60.

⁵ Johannes Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland, 1919-1939: Het Hollandse Zakenleven en de Vooroorlogse Buitenlandse Politie* (Den Haag 1995) 18.

⁶ Jennifer L. Foray, ‘Comparatively Exceptional: The Paradoxes of Twentieth Century Dutch Imperialism and Decolonization’, in: Rene Koekoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire: Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London 2020) 93.

saw themselves as unique and as charting special paths. Consequently, they framed their colonial projects as different from the empires of their European neighbours. This frame proved to be persistent, as many academics since fell into a rhetoric loop, stating that Dutch historiography of empire is exceptional because Dutch imperialism was exceptional.⁷ Often, comparative studies of empire paradoxically contribute to a sense of exceptionalism. After all, comparison singles out differences first and foremost. The most prominent claim of Dutch imperial exceptionalism is that the Dutch empire was essentially a maritime trading empire, rather than an example of expansionist imperialism, a claim made as far back as 1651 on the Arms of the VOC. The suggestion is that contrary to what happened in other European empires, the Dutch 'just counted' their colonial benefits.⁸

Interestingly enough, in the historiography of empire, economic and Marxist models have long been the *lingua franca* for studying imperialism. Nonetheless, when these models were used to study possible Dutch imperialism, the conclusion would often be that the Netherlands was not yet economically developed enough, and still needed to undergo an industrial revolution, before expansion driven capital could manifest as an important impulse for imperialism. At the same time, other factors for imperialism such as nationalistic politics were not seen to be present in the Netherlands at the time. Only slowly have these claims changed since the 1970s.⁹ Dr Maarten Kuitenbrouwers book *The Netherlands and the Rise of Modern Imperialism*, first printed in Dutch in 1985, is noteworthy here.¹⁰ Kuitenbrouwer offered an international perspective to the question of whether the Netherlands were an imperialistic European power. He concluded that while there were important distinctions with other European empires, the Netherlands were not immune to the rise of modern imperialism. While the Netherlands as a small nation could not afford to endeavour in aggressive colonial expansion at the cost of other European nations, the Netherlands did assert this same aggressive imperialistic tendency within its formal colonies.¹¹

A final persistent dimension of exceptionality in the Dutch historiography of empire is the perceived gap between metropole and colony, suggesting that imperialism around 1900 was not as big a part of everyday life in the Netherlands as it was for other European nations like Britain and France. Again, this would describe the Dutch colonies as merely an area in which small groups of

⁷ Foray, 'Comparatively Exceptional', 90.

⁸ Koekoek, Richard and Weststeijn 'Introduction', 5, 6 and: Foray, "Comparatively Exceptional", 91. In: Koekoek, Richard and Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire*.

⁹ Martin Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst: Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse Cultuur Omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam 1996) 15.

¹⁰ Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme: Koloniën en Buitenlandse Politiek, 1870-1902* (Amsterdam 1985)

¹¹ Ibidem, 224, 225.

merchants, industrialists and politicians operated.¹² Martin Bossenbroek in his book *Holland op zijn Breedst*, argues that this was not the case.¹³ Expanding on Kuitenbrouwers work, Bossenbroek shows that colonies and empire, in the form of the Dutch East Indies and the Boer Wars in Africa, played a big role in shaping the Dutch national identity around the turn of the nineteenth century. According to Bossenbroek, Dutch nationalism and modern imperialism were linked together.¹⁴

Recently, there have been numerous scholars who have focused on weakening these particular dimensions of exceptionality, by focussing on connectivity, networks and shared spaces. These scholars are part of what is called a 'New Imperial History', in which the Dutch case of empire has become a point of interest.¹⁵ It constitutes an examination of intellectual history in practice, with the idea that visions of empire were constructed through day-to-day interactions with other agents of empire across the globe. Therefore, the focus is not on restating narratives of empire, but on looking for entanglement between national and imperial contexts.¹⁶ New Imperial History rejects the tendency to keep European nations in separate historiography's, as well as keeping the European nations as metropolises separate from their colonies. Instead, it focuses on parallel processes and transnational connections, as well as on migrations of practices and ideas.¹⁷ Historians of New Imperial History advocate a global and a long term perspective while engaging with recent international scholarship on the intellectual history of empire. They want to explore not what empire was, but how actors from across the globe envisioned it.¹⁸ In the end, it might be possible that the Dutch empire is different from its European counterparts. After all, notwithstanding many similarities, the differences are vast as well. However, to tell history without confirming methodological exceptionalism, the Dutch empire must first be put on the same analytical plane as other European- perhaps even non-European- empires. Therefore, compatibility, not exceptionality, must be the starting point.¹⁹

This thesis aims to contribute to this New Imperial History. For the sake of scope, it is not possible to discuss both long term dimensions as well as global dimensions. Consequently, the focus will remain on the global dimensions of empire from 1900 through 1940. This thesis will explore the depiction of imperialism in the Dutch East Indies by Dutchmen who were actively involved in the colonial dimensions of the Netherlands. I will argue that their personal lives and careers would not

¹² Foray, 'Comparatively Exceptional', 95, 96.

¹³ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst*, 9, 10.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 343, 347.

¹⁵ Foray, 'Comparatively Exceptional', 89, 95, 96.

¹⁶ Koekoek, Richard and Weststeijn "Introduction", 6.

¹⁷ Foray, 'Comparatively Exceptional', 92.

¹⁸ Rene Koekoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, 'Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective', *Low Countries Historical Review* 132:2 (2017) 83-85.

¹⁹ Foray, 'Comparatively Exceptional', 100.

have been possible without the colonies, and thus show the imperial interrelation between metropole and colony in the Dutch colonial context. Furthermore, I will argue that these Dutchmen actively shaped their visions of empire from an international- or inter-empire- perspective, and that they did not necessarily saw the Dutch empire as fundamentally different from other European empires. Again for the sake of scope, this thesis will focus on a specific set of Dutchmen, namely the most prominent figures in the Dutch Trading Company, the *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (hereafter NHM). The NHM was founded in 1824 to regain the lost trading position in the Dutch East Indies, and to help restart extensive trading for the Dutch cause.²⁰ From 1880 onwards, the NHM started focussing more on financing than on trade. Consequently, they became one of the biggest financiers of industry and agriculture in the Dutch East Indies.²¹ After 1900, many presidents and directors of the NHM had multiple commissionerships at varying Dutch companies and banks.²² This commercial and financial elite, these 'men of action', were convinced of their own ability, and saw themselves as empire builders.²³ This self-confidence was paired with a belief in progress and modernity. They disapproved of previous generations, who, according to them, had been acting weak and lethargic. Their own successful careers seemed to prove them right.²⁴ Because the NHM had very strong ties with the Dutch colonies, especially the Dutch East Indies, and because these men working at the NHM, in turn, had very strong ties with- or in fact were - the Dutch commercial and financial elite, combined, they make a strong case study for this thesis.

The 1900 till 1940 time frame is justified by other reasons as well. In 1901, the government of the Netherlands famously introduced the 'Ethical Policy' of Dutch colonialism. This was not a political shock or novelty. For some time the need to 'do something' for the Dutch Indies had been accepted. By the turn of the nineteenth century, a mission to bring civilization to the colonies had manifested in Dutch imperial thinking, as it had in other European empires. The Dutch 'Ethical Policy' was for the Netherlands what the 'white man's burden' was for the British, or what *La Mission Civilisatrice* was for the French.²⁵ Following this new political direction came an expansion in the colonies. Geographically, the territories in the Indies which previously were only formally Dutch, but were not *de facto* occupied, now were brought under direct Dutch rule, first by military force and then administratively. Overseas opportunities for employment grew rapidly. At the same time, the Dutch Indies became an important, sometimes even mobilising, component of national pride and Dutch

²⁰ Ton de Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, 1824-1964* (Amsterdam 2012) 37.

²¹ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 78, 79.

²² Ibidem, 30.

²³ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 17, 18.

²⁴ Ibidem, 17, 18.

²⁵ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst*, 191, 195.

nationalism.²⁶ Therefore, the period from 1900 till the Second World War signifies a period of imperialism and of the intellectual history of empire that is distinctive, modern in its own sense, and which demarcates empire and imperialism for the scope of this thesis.²⁷ While only the men who were president of the NHM between 1900 and 1940 are selected for this thesis, it must be noted that large parts of their careers took place before 1900. Consequently, this scope will serve primarily to select the case study. The thesis itself will also treat the decades before 1900 regarding the careers of the presidents of the NHM and the Dutch imperial developments.

The first chapter will provide a brief but necessary contextualization for the thesis, as well as the broad historical framework. The second chapter will introduce the NHM president Balthazar Heldring, who was the company's president from 1900 until his death in 1907.²⁸ Chapter three will discuss Jacob Theodoor Cremer, who succeeded B. Heldring, and who stayed on till 1913. He was in turn succeeded by Cornelis Johannes Karel van Aalst, who will be discussed in chapter four. Chapter four will also discuss Emile David van Walree, who was appointed as one of the directors of the NHM at the time when Van Aalst was president.²⁹ Van Walree never made the presidency, but did write about the Dutch colonies, and can be considered both of interest for and within the scope of this thesis. Van Aalst was forced to step down as president of the NHM in 1934. He was succeeded by Daniël Crena de longh.³⁰ Crena de longh too was forced to step down in 1939, and non-other than Balthazar Heldrings son, Ernst Heldring took on the presidency.³¹ The presidencies of Crena de longh and E. Heldring will be discussed in chapter five.

The careers of these men will serve as an example of how the Dutch East Indies were in fact seen as an important part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands within the timeframe of this thesis, making the colonial possessions of the Netherlands no different from other empires of European nations. Their own writings will be used to map out their visions of empire, along with material published by the NHM. Some considerations should be taken into account. With the exception of Crena de longh, all these men had personal experience working in the Dutch East Indies, and thus, were familiar with the colonies by first-hand experience.³² Crena de longh had no personal experience in the colonies and only visited the Dutch East Indies after he became NHM president. Ernst Heldring was president of the NHM for only one year within the time frame of this thesis. Nonetheless, his journal holds valuable information throughout the entirety of the period. Therefore,

²⁶ J.A.A. van Doorn, *Indische Lessen: Nederland en de Koloniale Ervaring* (Amsterdam 1995) 18, 19, 41, 42.

²⁷ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 7.

²⁸ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 158.

²⁹ Ibidem, 158.

³⁰ Ibidem, 232.

³¹ Ibidem, 284, 285.

³² In *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013); J. de Vries, 'Heldring, Ernst (1871-1954)'; C. Fasseur, 'Cremer, Jacob Theodoor (1847-1923)'; J. Kymmell, 'Aalst, Cornelis Johannes Karel van (1866-1939)'.

he too will be included. Finally, it needs to be made explicit that while these men form a good case study, their visions of empire are by no means representative of Dutch society as a whole. Many different spheres of society might have had many different views on Dutch imperialism, and they might very well have conflicted. The aim of this thesis is merely to contribute to the scholarly task of mapping out these different visions, these day-to-day negotiations of empire.

Chapter 1: Imperialism and the Netherlands in the Nineteenth Century

Imperialism is an abstract and contested concept and, consequently, not always unequivocally defined. As many as seventeen different definitions of imperialism can be found. An important distinction for this thesis is imperialism as a political concept and imperialism as a historical concept. Historically, imperialism serves as the label for the period between roughly 1870 and 1914, in which the Western powers asserted their rule over non-Western parts of the world, as well as all the motives and preconditions for this process.³³ Politically, however, imperialism is the term generally used by contemporary opponents of this process. At the time, those opponents were primarily socialists.³⁴ When used in this thesis, imperialism is understood in its historical definition. Firstly, this chapter will provide the necessary context of the Dutch imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, this chapter will briefly discuss how imperialism was generally justified, which will be of importance for the argument that the Dutch did not differ much from other European empires in this respect as well.

Imperialism and the Netherlands

British prime minister Disraeli's pronouncement of an 'imperial policy' is often seen as definitively connecting overseas territories with a sense of 'empire' from the 1870s onward.³⁵ The scramble for Africa, in which the European powers divided the African continent among themselves, signalled a more aggressive and expansionist chapter for the European empires.³⁶ When Africa was being divided at the Berlin conference of 1884, the Dutch were represented there as well. Their primary concerns were guarantees for free trade in the Congo, as well as the agreements that were made concerning colonial borders, and the mandatory effective occupation of territory to be able to rightfully claim it as imperial territory. The Dutch obtained no new territory following the conference, and apart from guarding their own interests, they kept themselves aloof.³⁷ The aggressive interest which the European powers took to colonization, is often attributed to either or a combination of three things. The first is heightened European competition, in which rivalry between the biggest European nations found its outlet in conquering Africa. The second is internal nationalistic drives, which led nations to aggressively expand outward. The third is strong economical motives, in which growing industrialisation and a

³³ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago Around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25:1 (1994) 92.

³⁴ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 193-199.

³⁵ Ibidem, 7.

³⁶ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst*, 29.

³⁷ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 22.

saturated domestic market called for colonial conquest.³⁸ Incidentally, Social Darwinism has been connected to the European continental and imperial competition. While it might have contributed to forming hostile perceptions of the endeavours of other European nations, it is a stretch to attribute all of the international relations from the late nineteenth century leading to the first world war to a pseudoscientific doctrine that was by no means universal.³⁹

There are many studies suggesting that not only did the metropole rule the colonies, the colonies also influenced the metropole. Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects* comes to mind.⁴⁰ For the Netherlands, the Aceh War and the Boer Wars were instrumental in inciting a national feeling of being Dutch, indeed linking empire and nationalism together. Bossenbroek has shown that both the Aceh War and the Boer Wars generated great national sentiments with the broader Dutch public and provided the Netherlands with a shared sense of nationality at a time when the rise of nationalism was still an ongoing process.⁴¹ With both the Aceh War and the Boer Wars, the Dutch newspapers, who otherwise were often strongly divided or 'pillarized', reported in a 'neutral' fashion, which in practice meant a nationalistic standpoint.⁴² While most people in the Netherlands did not encounter the colonies in their day to day existence, the Dutch East Indies and the perceived brothers and sisters in the South African republics did play a role in shaping Dutch nationalism.

Economical dimensions of empire are evidently present in some way. The idea that the Dutch Indies were indispensable to the Netherlands runs like a thread through Dutch narratives of empire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Especially regarding the heightened political tensions of the European continent, the loss of the Dutch Indies would diminish the Netherlands to a third rank nation.⁴³ Finally, the technological dimension must also be considered. The invention of the telegraph as well as the expansion of steamships and trains amounted to a minor communicational revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. There is no doubt that this contributed at least in some part to the rapid expansion of the European empires.⁴⁴ By the 1960s, historians began to study in what ways the colonies themselves provided the primary causes for changing imperial policies, thus starting a 'decolonized' history of empire. These studies undermined traditional assumptions of what caused the late nineteenth-century imperialistic boom. Continuity of western interests in the non-western world, as well as the plurality of motives and causes, have been emphasized.⁴⁵

³⁸ Ibidem, 12, 80.

³⁹ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (Cambridge 1997) 203-206.

⁴⁰ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 -1867* (Cambridge 2002).

⁴¹ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst*, 343, 347.

⁴² Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 140.

⁴³ Van Doorn, *Indische Lessen*, 21, 22.

⁴⁴ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst*, 199.

⁴⁵ Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago', 93.

Determining the causes and incentives of empire is clearly no easy task and it will not be attempted here. This brief summary of some of empire's underlying dimensions will have to do as a contextual background. What is more interesting for this thesis, is the way in which Dutch colonial policy and thinking developed in the late nineteenth century. At first, the Dutch did not participate in the European rivalry for colonial expansion. Instead, they focussed on holding on to the colonies they already possessed. As long as the Dutch trade was not impacted, they had not much to fear from the rivalry of the bigger European nations, primarily the rivalry between Britain and Germany. Still, most agreed that a new global order was being created and that no nation would eventually escape its implications.⁴⁶ The most prominent European player in the Asian territories was the British empire. The Dutch East Indies in the end could only continue to exist by the grace of England. For that reason, British interests in the Indies were always seen with suspicion. Border disputes on Borneo were a cause for concern, especially when the conference of Berlin seemed to imply that effective occupation was necessary, something which large parts of the Dutch East Indies lacked. The Aceh War was started in no small part because the Dutch feared English interference because of the large scale piracy that took place in the strait of Sunda, a waterway that had become of great importance after the opening of the Suez Canal. In the 1890s, the United States and Japan also had emerged as colonial powers in Asia, further increasing Dutch paranoia regarding the possible loss of the Dutch Indies.⁴⁷ Yet, pre-emptive incentives for expansion is only part of the story. As often pointed out in the Dutch case, Dutch imperialism was imperial expansion within borders that were already more or less accepted. Dutch imperialism was imperialism in-depth, not in width. Something that strikes out when the Dutch expansion in the Dutch East Indies is compared with the general expansion of the European empires, is that the Dutch were relatively late, which brings into question the European rivalry as the primary cause for Dutch expansion.⁴⁸

Whatever the causality of Dutch imperial expansion, however, thinking regarding the colonies began to shift in the Netherlands during the late nineteenth century as well. While many saw the problems of governing the Dutch East Indies, and especially the Aceh War, as a jurisdictional or a military problem, more and more, namely the religious-political groups, called for more paternalistic policies toward the colonies. Both moral and material development of the indigenous population were seen as colonial objectives. To this end, socio-economic reforms, as well as expansion in the outer territories of the Dutch Indies, were necessary. Unification of the archipelago of the Dutch East Indies was justified as the best way to achieve this goal.⁴⁹ Still, for a long time, peaceful expansion was

⁴⁶ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 80-83.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 22, 80, 99, 107-111, 158.

⁴⁸ Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago', 110.

⁴⁹ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 99-101.

preferred to militaristic expansion. Only gradually did this preference shift. Not until the Expedition to Lombok in 1894 and the 'Betrayal' of Toekoe Oemar in the Aceh war in 1896, events that both provoked a public nationalistic outcry in the Netherlands, did the Dutch switch their reticence and their model of concentration for aggressive and militaristic means of expansion. Dutch imperial policy now followed suit to those of the other European empires.⁵⁰

Although obvious differences with the Dutch imperial development regarding other empires can be seen in the late nineteenth century, there are similarities in the ways imperial expansion was legitimized. Continuity and contiguity are seen as factors of imperialism and were important factors in the Dutch context as well. Expansion took place within territories that were already seen as Dutch. Moreover, Dutch ethical motives were more redefined versions of older assumptions of a civilizing mission, than they were a new imperial motivation. These ethical motives at the same time were voiced more in the Hague than they were in the East Indies. As such, they can be seen primarily as a way to justify and legitimize colonial expansion.⁵¹ To summarize, neither European rivalry nor late-nineteenth-century models for legitimizing empires seemed to have escaped the Netherlands in their imperial experience. As mentioned above, the economical dimensions of the colonies always played a role in the public image of the Dutch East Indies. Thus, notwithstanding differences, it seems reasonable to understand the Netherlands and its colonial possessions as part of a European family of empires. Additionally, it is also important to keep in mind that, regardless of whether or not growing Dutch participation in imperialistic processes during the nineteenth and twentieth century can be proven, the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies did become more intertwined nonetheless. As the colonial government and the means to communicate between metropole and colony expanded, so did the place the Dutch East Indies held in the Dutch national mind. The colonies were not seen as unrelated -and thus essentially different than colonies of other nations- to the international position of the Netherlands regarding the major European powers. In fact, they were part of the same story. One cannot tell an international and political story of the Netherlands at the turn of the nineteenth century, without mentioning the colonies. In the next chapters, the careers of the Dutch agents of empire will illustrate this.

Justifying Empire

Overall, nineteenth-century manifestations of empire have at their core a nation that is 'free' and 'civilized', while the periphery of the empire consists of people and regions that are 'unfree' and

⁵⁰ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 134, 168, 226.

⁵¹ Locher-Scholten, 'Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago', 111.

'backward'. The most common legitimization of empire in the nineteenth century was that empire would bring civilization to all other parts of the world. Inherently, this legitimization of empire is unstable. If empire succeeds in its mission to bring civilization then it no longer needs to exist afterwards. Consequently, modern empires often claimed to be educating the indigenous population, while also claiming that to fulfil this task, prolonged colonial presence and control over the indigenous population was necessary.⁵² In the first half of the nineteenth century, a liberal model of empire was used predominantly. This model combined a civilizing mission with liberal reforms. The idea was that all people in the world were essentially the same and that any apparent difference between them was explained by a scale or ladder on which societies could be placed. The Western European civilizations were the most advanced and stood high on this societal ladder. Below them were the 'less civilized' peoples and even below them stood the 'tribal peoples'. By implementing enlightened liberal reforms, empires would eventually bring 'civilization'. Empire, thereby, was explained as a moral duty for those already civilized.⁵³

In the mid-nineteenth century, however, this liberal model of empire experienced a crisis. Large scale uprisings of the native populations in different colonies brought disillusionment regarding the enlightened promise of a universal man and about the ability of liberal reforms to bring civilization to the colonies. Thinkers like John Stuart Mill started to focus more on the apparent cultural and social differences between the civilized nations and the native societies. Different histories had led to different cultures, and different cultures led to different kinds of people. Thus, there could be no universal approach to a civilizing mission. Policies and institutions had to be modified to the specific context of the colony. For Mill, this was not a question of race. Nonetheless, he sought to explain the same differences in societies as racial theories would.⁵⁴ The crisis of liberal imperialism seemingly widened the gap between 'barbarians' and 'civilization'. The policy failures of liberal imperialism eventually called for a redefining of the legitimization of empire. Following thinkers like Mill, the process of civilization was explained not as an individual process, but more and more as collective in nature. Therefore, the way societies had grown historically were important for understanding their capability with progress and modernity.

The widening of the spectrum of ways in which civilisation might be possible, also meant that achieving civilisation was many times more complicated than previously thought. Thus, although conquest initially perhaps had not been just, maintaining empire became a necessity, to 'prevent' the colonies from falling back into anarchy. Theorists of empire in the second half of the nineteenth

⁵² Kenneth Pomeranz, 'Empire & 'Civilizing' Missions, past & present', *Deadalus* 134:2 (2005) 35, 37.

⁵³ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton 2010) 21, 29, 45, 58, 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, 31, 35-37.

century shifted their focus to a sociological analysis of nationality. If assimilation into Western civilization was perhaps not possible, at least not in the short run, then the indigenous population in the colonies had to become a 'civilized' nation in their own right, or otherwise, they would disintegrate into chaos. Empire in this context became less of a moral obligation but became the lesser evil. Empire became legitimate because if the colonies were already integrated into an empire, expelling them from it would do more harm than it would do good. Interestingly enough, at precisely the moment when European empires experienced their greatest expansion, earlier liberal ideologies of empire were no longer seen as feasible, and empire became legitimized with a more paternalistic language.⁵⁵ The Dutch were late with their imperialistic expansion in the colonies relative to other European empires.⁵⁶ Consequently, it is easily assumed that the Dutch thought different about their colonies than other European nations. Yet, as previously discussed in this chapter, the Dutch colonies played an important role in Dutch politics and in the Dutch national mind at the turn of the nineteenth century, like they did in other European manifestations of empire. Therefore, as far as legitimizing empire is concerned, this thesis will analyse whether the presidents of the NHM also justified the Dutch colonial possessions in similar ways as those described above.

Just as the legitimization of empire in the nineteenth century manifested itself in similar ways across the European nations, a common 'colonial culture' can be identified across Europe in the years between the two world wars. Matthew Stanard has shown that pro-empire propaganda was done in similar ways throughout Europe with the celebration of colonial days, the targeting of the youth, and racial expositions of empire and its subjects.⁵⁷ Additionally, he identified five common themes, in which empires were presented. The first theme is the myth of a unified empire, in which the empire was presented as a singular union. The second theme is that the colonies made the European nations bigger than they otherwise would be, thus making the colonies geographic extensions of the metropole. France presented itself as a nation with 100 million Frenchmen, counting its colonial subjects among them. The Congo became known as the 'tenth province' in Belgium, just as the area of Minahassa, only a part of the Dutch Indies, became known as '*Neerlands twaalfde provincie*' in the Netherlands.⁵⁸ The third theme is that Europe's imperial powers presented their colonies as places of profit and fortune. Even when this was not necessarily always the case, the colonies were seen as the economic saviours of the metropole. The fourth theme is that the European empires brought freedom to the colonies, precisely by conquering them. Although this seems paradoxical, the idea was that previous forms of slavery and oppression would be done away with under European rule. This theme is strongly related

⁵⁵ Methu Sankar, *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (New York 2012) 235, 237, 259, 260, 324, 325.

⁵⁶ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 134.

⁵⁷ Matthew G. Stanard, 'Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comparative Research Agenda', *Journal of Contemporary History* 44:1 (2009) 31, 37.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 37, 40.

to the fifth and last theme, the idea of a 'before and after image' of empire. Before the Europeans had arrived, the area's that would become colonies were 'poor', 'underdeveloped', 'pre-modern' and 'economically backward'. Europeans brought 'modernity', 'technology' and a 'higher order of existence'.⁵⁹ Stanard presents a picture of more or less consistent rhetoric in European colonial culture. It will be interesting for this thesis to analyse at the end whether the presidents of the NHM included similar rhetoric in their writing.

⁵⁹ Stanard, 'Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture', 40-44.

Chapter 2: Balthazar Heldring: A Change of Direction

*“De Brit beoefent het in smoking, de Hollander in toetoeep-jas, dat is het eenige onderscheid.”*⁶⁰ ~

Balthazar Heldring

The NHM was founded in 1824. Its goal was to regain Dutch prominence on the trade with the Dutch East Indies. This trade was profitable in the earlier years of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, but most of the profits from the actual trading went to American and English companies. In time, this would have implications for the Dutch control of the East Indies, or so was thought. In the memorandum and articles of association of the NHM, presented in 1825, many tasks were assigned to the company. Among them was to further Dutch trade, shipping, fishing and agriculture. The many tasks soon proved to be too many, and the improvement of the trade upon the Dutch East Indies was made a priority. Initially, the ties with the Dutch royal house were close, and the NHM operated as an unofficial governmental organisation. As such, it continued to focus its tasks on the Dutch East Indies. In 1826, the Factory in Batavia was founded, and the NHM now had a headquarters in the colony as well. Eventually, the close ties with the royal house loosened, as the political culture in the Netherlands turned more towards liberalism. Slowly but steady, the company grew. The NHM moved its headquarters in the Netherlands from the Hague to a bigger location in Amsterdam in 1831 and relocated to an even bigger location in Amsterdam in 1858. The directory of the NHM at the time of its founding consisted of a president and four directors, as well as one secretary, who held no right to vote. After 1831, the number of directors was brought back to two. All who wished to be employed as NHM agent overseas had to take a mandatory comparative exam. This exam was introduced in 1855 and was a mandatory part of the recruitment of new agents until 1920.⁶¹

Initially, the NHM had a monopoly on everything that was produced by the Cultivation System, the taxation system that assured the colonial government of twenty per cent of all the goods and produce in the Dutch East Indies that could be traded for profit. When the profits derived from this nowadays controversial system of production receded, the NHM concluded that a change of direction was needed for the company. From 1874 and onward, the NHM engaged in commerce as well as in banking. This was a process with two phases. The first phase was the changing of the statutes, which made the change in direction possible. The second phase was the appointment of Balthazar Heldring as one of the two directors in 1880, and the decision to halt all trading by the company and to focus solely on banking. By then, this was possible and even necessary because the NHM no longer held the

⁶⁰ Balthazar Heldring, *Van Calcutta to Ceylon* (Amsterdam 1925) 128.

⁶¹ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 37-39, 42-47, 63-65.

state monopoly on colonial goods. Private companies were allowed into the Dutch East Indies, and Dutch shipping companies, now utilizing steamships, were able to compete with foreign companies.⁶²

Balthazar Heldring was born on March 17th 1839, in the Dutch town of Hemmen. The family name of Heldring had ascended to the Dutch patriciate, the lower aristocracy of the Netherlands, under Balthazar's father, Ottho Gerhard Heldring. Ottho Heldring was a pastor, but also well connected to the Dutch economic sector. In their newfound role as members of the patriciate, the Heldring family would often strive to live up to the status, as they felt they still had something to prove. Balthazar Heldring was described as a critic and would often make sharp remarks, which became somewhat famously known as Heldring sarcasm. His son, Ernst Heldring, would inherit this trait, and he too would often play the role of critic himself, for example regarding the presidency of C.J.K van Aalst at the NHM. Balthazar Heldring has also been described as a hard worker. He did not back down from conflict and when he thought he was right, he would not care about what other people thought of him and would speak his mind outright.⁶³

Balthazar Heldring had six brothers and two sisters. Three of his brothers chose to follow in their father's footsteps and went on to study theology. The eldest brother died while still a theology student. The other three brothers, including Balthazar, opted for a career in the economic sector. With his father's connections, Balthazar Heldring obtained a job at the prominent Amsterdam firm Van Eeghen & Co., where he worked from 1853 till 1858. Afterwards, he sailed to the Dutch East Indies and worked for the firm Payne Stricker & Co. in Batavia and Pedang. In the Dutch East Indies, Heldring developed a bad rheumatic condition, which forced him to return to the Netherlands in 1863. Meanwhile in the Netherlands, the banking sector was developing quickly. In 1865, *de Kasvereeniging* was founded, a bank that specialised in the trade of effects. Balthazar Heldring became its first director.⁶⁴

During his years as director of the *Kasvereeniging*, Heldring would write about colonial politics. The social involvement the Heldring family was and would be known for, was inherited by Balthazar Heldring as well. H.P.G Quack, an old acquaintance of Heldring, would describe him as somebody that would look ahead. According to Quack, Heldring realised somewhere in the 1860s, as did many other young dutchmen like him, that the old ways would not be feasible in the future and that the Netherlands had to modernize, or otherwise risk falling behind in the ranks of nations.⁶⁵ In 1868, Heldring wrote two brochures about the Dutch colonial policy in the Dutch East Indies. The first was called *Nederland en Indië* and the second one, which elaborated on the first one some months later,

⁶² De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 78. 79. 86.

⁶³ Ernst Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, Editie Johan de Vries (Groningen 1970) 1, 3-5.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, 3.

⁶⁵ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 4.

Koloniaal Beheer.⁶⁶ In *Nederland en Indië*, Heldring analyses the governmental crisis in the Dutch East Indies. According to him, the native people were being unrightfully exploited, while the economic situation did not improve either, and got even worse still. Control of the colonial government was faltering. In his own words; “*Waar wij ons ook heenwenden nergens vinden wij stof tot blijdschap*.”⁶⁷ The cause of all this, according to Heldring, was the fact that the government of the Netherlands was trying to govern the colonies from the Hague. The people in the Hague were men who had no experience and no idea of what policies were needed in the colonies. The solution, therefore, was simple for Heldring. The colonies should be governed from the colonies, and not from the Netherlands.⁶⁸ The most obvious advantage of doing so was the fact that parliament no longer had to spend as much time on governing the colonies as it did. A second advantage was that, when the Netherlands would let go of their obsolete system of colonial rule, it would eventually benefit both the Netherlands as well as the colonies economically. Heldring acknowledged the importance of the economic dimensions of the colonies for the metropole. The third advantage that Heldring saw of governmental reforms regarding the colonies, is that it would neutralize possible international tensions. Heldring feared that the Dutch East Indies, because of its vast territories, might be lost in the European war, that would surely come. By more effectively governing the colonies, and by opening them up for the interests of other European nations as well, the future would be more beneficial to all and, thus, less prone to possible violent occupation.⁶⁹

While economical dimensions played a key role regarding the Dutch East Indies, Heldring looked to European international competition as a factor in colonial affairs as well. Moreover, the injustices of the old way of colonial government did not escape him, and thus warranted reform to fulfil the colonial duties of the Netherlands accordingly. These duties were not easy. According to Heldring, the normal European systems of government were of no use in the colonies. The necessary preconditions for a representative system of government did not exist in the Dutch East Indies; “*Immers de gewone gegevens voor hetgeen wij hebben leeren kennen als eene goede regeering, ontbreken*.”⁷⁰ Because the native people of the colonies were not on the same level of civilisation as the Dutch were, a modified system of government was necessary for the colonies, for the Dutch East Indies was “*een land, duizende mijlen verwijderd, met geheel andere instellingen, met eene beschaving op geheel verschillende grondslagen rustende*.”⁷¹ The similarities between the reforms

⁶⁶ Balthazar Heldring, *Nederland en Indië* (Amsterdam 1868) en: Balthazar Heldring, *Koloniaal Beheer* (Amsterdam 1868).

⁶⁷ Heldring, *Nederland en Indië*, 5-7.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, 7, 8, 21.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, 24-26 en: Heldring, *Koloniaal Beheer*, 37.

⁷⁰ Heldring, *Koloniaal Beheer*, 5, 6.

⁷¹ Heldring, *Nederland en Indië*, 7.

proposed by Heldring and the colonial systems of government as advocated by John Stuart Mill are not incidental. In both *Nederland en Indië* and *Koloniaal Beheer*, Heldring quotes Mill extensively.⁷² In fact, the reforms proposed by Heldring, are in large part based on the colonial reforms the British had implemented in India. Heldring based the argument that these reforms would be the most beneficial for governing the Dutch East Indies upon the fact that the Dutch East Indies were so similar to the British East Indies. The British encountered nearly the same problems in governing the vast territories of India from the English parliament. The governmental power England attributed to their East India Company bore much resemblance to the way the Dutch East Indies were being governed, according to Heldring.⁷³ The most profound similarity, however, was the nature of the level of civilization of the Dutch and British East Indies. For that reason, the Dutch should look to England as a prime example of colonial governance:

*“Beide worden bewoond door Oostersche volken van gedeeltelijke beschaving, wier belangen wij nevens de onze moeten be hartigen en beide moeten geregeerd worden door een handvol Europeanen, die door zedelijk overwigt moeten goedmaken, hetgeen hun aan numerieke massa ont breekt. Beide liggen in de tropische gewesten en zijn onderhevig aan dezelfde invloeden van klimaat op de zeden en gewoonten en het karakter der bevolking; beide zijn duizende mijlen van het moederland verwijderd en vereischen derhalve een bestuur op eigene grondslagen berustend. Beide werden weleer grooten deels geregeerd door Oost - Indische Compagniën, en in beide is het bestuur uit de handen dier magtige koopmans - corporatiën overgegaan aan de kroon. Vele punten van overeenkomst dus, die ons de overtuiging moeten geven dat de ondervinding in het eene land opgedaan, voor het andere land niet moet verloren gaan.”*⁷⁴

Heldring's vision for the need to 'modernize' the Netherlands, would have impact on the Dutch colonies. Fifteen years after he had become director of the *Kasvereeniging*, this 'progressive' view on the colonies, as well as his experience as a banker, made him the perfect candidate for the job vacancy in the directory of the NHM. Heldring's role would be to try and 'modernize' the NHM and, consequently, 'modernize' the Dutch nation and its colonies through the NHM.⁷⁵ Heldring would prove to be successful in his mission to reform the NHM. In 1884, he wrote a note for the commissioners of the NHM, which suggested changes that would allow the NHM to make more of its new banking role. The proposition was approved unanimously. In effect, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the NHM would become an investment bank and a private equity firm, whose

⁷² Heldring, *Nederland en Indië*, 12-14, en: Heldring, *Koloniaal Beheer*, 15.

⁷³ Heldring, *Nederland en Indië*, 8, 9, 12-19.

⁷⁴ Heldring, *Koloniaal Beheer*, 9.

⁷⁵ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 4.

activities took place primarily in the Dutch East Indies. When the then president of the NHM, Fokko Alting Mees, died in 1900, the two directors Heldring and Hartsen were the logical successors. The Board of Commissioners pressured Hartsen to step down, so they could make Heldring the next president of the NHM.⁷⁶

Throughout his life, Heldring would remain concerned with colonial politics. In his travel account *Van Calcutta tot Ceylon* he described his experience travelling the British colonial possessions.⁷⁷ After having observed British colonial governing first hand, he was very much disappointed; “*Ik vond schreeuwende armoede – een wereld van vuil en lompen.*”⁷⁸ The main issue according to Heldring was that the British had founded universities and had started to give higher education to the indigenous population too early. This was why in the British East Indies there was political unrest, and in the Dutch East Indies, there was not.⁷⁹ However, after some reflection, Heldring puts the blame for all troubles in the East Indies on the indigenous population themselves. Historical and societal differences in the native populations of Asia determined to what extent progress was as of yet possible. With the exemption of Japan, this was not much in most cases. Because of their inability with societal progress and stability, most Asiatic people needed Western guidance.⁸⁰

This was to be the main conclusion of Heldring’s travel. Colonial governance by the European nations was essential to prevent worse outcomes. Left on its own, the indigenous population would be worse off.⁸¹ Discussing the point that theoretically having colonies was wrong, Heldring contended that theoretically, this was true. However, theoretically, marriage was also not a natural occurrence, yet it was a proven and useful institution.⁸² In that same way, colonial rule was necessary for those regions; “*waar de volksgroepen zelfs nog niet tot naties gestold zijn.*”⁸³

While Heldring’s account of the historical differences that determined the success of native societies strongly resembles John Stuart Mill’s thinking on empire, Heldring’s travel account also has some noticeably racial prejudices. Throughout his account, he is negative about his encounters with the indigenous population almost exclusively. When they were poor, they were unable, when they appeared educated, they were merely trying to imitate that which they did not understand. Heldring had read Darwin, as had some of the indigenous population he spoke. He recalled seeing an Orangutang in the Calcutta zoo, on which his Indian guide remarked “You think we are descended

⁷⁶ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 88, 89, 92, 99.

⁷⁷ Heldring, *Van Calcutta tot Ceylon*.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, 7.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, 141, 143.

⁸⁰ Heldring, *Van Calcutta tot Ceylon*, 137, 138.

⁸¹ Ibidem, 133, 134.

⁸² Ibidem, 139.

⁸³ Ibidem, 12.

from these animals?" "Oh yes," He replied. "I am perfectly sure about that." The reply his guide gave him thereafter, made no sense to Heldring at all, and, according to him, demonstrated that he was merely repeating things he had heard or read elsewhere, without really understanding them.⁸⁴ Throughout his travel account, he professed a very negative and denigrating look on the native population. Even though he felt sympathy for the indigenous population most of the time, he did not believe in their abilities.⁸⁵

In the end, there is no question that Balthazar Heldring defined the course which the NHM would sail for many years to come. Even though much of his career was outside the timeframe of the thesis, he was one of the most important and defining presidents of the NHM. At the same time, analysis of his writings on colonial politics show that Heldring's vision of 'modernizing' both the NHM as well as colonial politics was made in the international context and with his personal experience overseas. It is clear, indeed very explicit, that Heldring viewed the question of how to govern the colonies as interchangeable between European nations. Clearly influenced by John Stuart Mill, and citing English scholarly articles as well as English parliamentary debates in his two brochures, he shaped his colonial worldview very much in a transnational fashion. By no means was this to be a world in which the colonies would not exist. In 1868, Heldring had seen independence of the colonies as impossible; "*... als men de zaken wel beschouwt, kan men daaraan in ernst niet denken.*"⁸⁶ His travels in the British East Indies only asserted this judgement. This chapter has shown the interrelations between the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands for Heldring on a personal level and, at the same time, pointed out the international context in which Heldring saw the Netherlands and the Dutch colonies. Heldring placed the Netherlands in an international colonial context himself. Strikingly, when he compared Dutch and British colonizers, he commented;

*"[men zal] ontdekken, dat er in de Britsche steden evenveel kringetjesgedoe, neusoptrekkerijen en kibbelpartijen bestaan als op Java. Ambtenaars vinden zich te goed voor kooplieden, welke laatste zich op zich zelf alleen-zaligmakend achten. De officier trekt sabelrinkelend zijn neus op voor beide partijen, hetgeen deze beantwoorden door de houding aan te nemen, dat "das Militär immer dumm ist". Dit spel is alom achter Suez hetzelfde; men behoeft het geen bepaalde plaats te verwijten. De Brit beoefent het in smoking, de Hollander in toetoept-jas, dat is het eenige onderscheid."*⁸⁷

To conclude, Heldring personifies the start of the process in Dutch imperial history, when colonial interest grew and the colonies started to become an integral part of the Kingdom of the

⁸⁴ Heldring, *Van Calcutta tot Ceylon*, 40, 41.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, 139, 140.

⁸⁶ Heldring, *Koloniaal Beheer*, 33.

⁸⁷ Heldring, *Van Calcutta tot Ceylon*, 128.

Netherlands.⁸⁸ At the same time, he also personifies the change that the NHM underwent to coexist with the colonial developments. While Heldring repeatedly commented on the economic benefits the colonies had for the metropole, it is also clear that in the future, both metropole and colony would be intertwined. For Heldring, the colonies meant more than just economic gains. To him, the Dutch East Indies were vital for the future of the Netherlands in the fast-changing international context of the second half of the nineteenth century.

⁸⁸ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 9.

Chapter 3: Jacob Theodoor Cremer: A Dutch Imperial Man

“Op deze weinige bladzijden is getracht Cremer te schetsen als man van de daad, van de rustige bezinning, het weloverwogen initiatief, de doeltreffende uitvoering.”⁸⁹ ~ C.J.K. Van Aalst

Jacob Theodoor Cremer was born on June 30th 1847 in the Dutch town of Zwolle. His father, also named Jacob Theodoor Cremer, was an inspector for the land registry and direct taxes. He got his first education on the *School Maatschappij tot Nut van het Algemeen*. As he recalled in the memoirs of his earlier years, the most important lesson he learned over there, was the slogan ‘*eendracht maakt macht*’ and the importance of putting national interest before party interest. According to Cremer, t he would always try to live up to this slogan throughout his life.⁹⁰ After primary school, he attended the *Franse School* in Zwolle and the Vethake Institute, a boarding school, in Arnhem consecutively.⁹¹ A young man like him was generally expected to go into the military after the Vethake institute, but Cremer was not interested in a military career. Ideally, he wanted to study literature, but he did not think that such a career held many prospects and so he went into commerce. He never had regretted his decision for a moment he said in his final years.⁹² After working for a local trading company in Arnhem for a year, he went to work for a company in Rotterdam, where activities included trading in commissions from the Dutch East Indies as well wholesale on flax and linseed from Ireland. Here, Cremer came in contact with the Dutch East Indies for the first time in his professional life, and when Cremer decided that he wanted to pursue a career in trade, he said it was obvious to him that the NHM was the best way to do so.⁹³ Cremer described his years in Rotterdam as years of hard work, especially when he started to study for the comparative exam of the NHM on the side. When he was summoned to take the exam, he learned there were twenty-one other candidates, and only two positions vacant. Of all the twenty-two candidates who took the exam with him, Cremer scored the best.⁹⁴ He started working at the NHM headquarters in Amsterdam, as was customary for new employees, and after a year and a half, he shipped out to

⁸⁹ C.J.K. van Aalst, “Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer, 30 juni 1847 – 14 augustus 1823”, in: *Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde* (1924) 60.

⁹⁰ J.T. Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren: Beschreven door Hemzelf, voorzien van een Inleiding door J.F.L. de Balbian Verster* (Den Haag 1924) 13, 14.

⁹¹ Biography of J.T. Cremer, information originates from Parlement.com.

⁹² Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren*, 20.

⁹³ Ibidem, 22, 23, 25.

⁹⁴ Ibidem, 23, 25, 26.

Batavia in the Dutch East Indies on September 14th 1868. He was posted at the factory of the NHM in Batavia for another year and a half and then was posted at the NHM agency in Singapore.⁹⁵

During these years in Batavia and Singapore, Cremer learned of the new exploits in Deli, a region on the east coast of Sumatra, where tobacco and initially nutmeg as well were being cultivated, although later nutmeg proved to grow too difficult in the region for profitable cultivation. Cremer took an interest in these pioneers in Deli. When he was reposted in Batavia again, he wrote articles about Deli for a newspaper back in Arnhem, in order to make some more money. One day, an NHM agent, with who Cremer had worked in Singapore, asked Cremer to come and join him in Deli and to come working for the *Deli-Maatschappij*.⁹⁶ When the *Deli-Maatschappij* was founded in 1869, the NHM had been a big investor in the new company.⁹⁷ Thus, when Cremer asked his superiors whether he should accept the offer, they supported him and Cremer went to Deli. When he arrived in Deli he was not very impressed with what he initially saw, and the workload was heavy and difficult. Especially the lack of proper administration regarding the Chinese guest workers that were used primarily by the planters proved to be an exceptional difficulty in Deli. So, Cremer went to work and again he had to work hard.⁹⁸

When Cremer's successor as president of the NHM Karel van Aalst wrote Cremer's *in memoriam* for the yearly journal of the *Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, he called Cremer's work in Deli the best work he had done in the Indies. According to Van Aalst, Cremer had been successful in Deli because Cremer was concerned not only with the exploits of the *Deli-Maatschappij*, but with Deli as a whole. Cremer understood that what was best for Deli, was also best for the *Deli-Maatschappij*, and *vice versa*. Van Aalst saw Cremer's organizing skills as his best asset, which made him able to turn a company, or indeed a whole region, for the better. The maxim of '*eendracht maakt macht*' was one of the things that drove Cremer, according to Van Aalst. Cremer always sought to improve the collective. A stable Deli would mean a thriving tobacco culture. A thriving *Deli-Maatschappij* would mean improvement of infrastructure and living standards in the region and, consequently, be beneficial to all peoples in the Dutch East Indies, including the indigenous population.⁹⁹ Indeed, Cremer expressed such sentiments himself. When he visited the Dutch East Indies and specifically Deli again in 1907 and 1913, he wrote a travelling account on his journey back to the Netherlands the second time around. In this brochure, called *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden*, Cremer described the progress that was made in the Dutch East Indies

⁹⁵ Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren*, 29, 37.

⁹⁶ Ibidem, 40, 45, 46.

⁹⁷ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 86.

⁹⁸ Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren*, 46, 47, 49, 50.

⁹⁹ Van Aalst, 'Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer', 50-53.

compared to when he first came there. This was true also for the indigenous population, who according to Cremer had a much better standard of living than they had had previously.¹⁰⁰

The biggest problem Cremer encountered in Deli, was the scarcity of able workers. Already, the Deli planters had been bringing Chinese workers to supply the shortage, but this brought along other problems. Oftentimes, the workers would not honour their contracts and would just walk away after receiving their first payment upfront, or would go and work for another planter. To counter this, the planters, who also fulfilled the role of local government, implemented laws that made neglecting contractual obligations heavily punishable, including corporal punishments. When the Dutch government learned of some of the excesses that took place in Deli, they wanted to abolish these laws. Here, Cremer found himself involved in politics for the first time. In 1876 he wrote *Een Woord uit Deli aan de Staten-Generaal*, in which he tried to convince the Dutch parliament that abolishing these laws would have a strong negative effect on the planters and the cultivation of tobacco in Deli. Alternatively, he proposed to change rather than abolish the laws. These suggestions made by Cremer from Deli, in the end, were the basis for the *Koelie-ordonnantie* of 1880, laws regulating the treatment of migrant workers, which came into effect in all of the Dutch East Indies.¹⁰¹

When Cremer got back in the Netherlands in 1884, he continued his political career. From 1884 till 1897, he was a member of parliament and a member of the *Liberale Unie* (Liberal Union). As a member of parliament, he was concerned mostly with foreign policy and with the Dutch East Indies.¹⁰² According to Van Aalst, Cremer was not one for lengthy speeches, but he always knew precisely what to say at the right moment, especially when it concerned the colonies. His expertise on the subject was instrumental and at times critical, as in the 1884 sugar crisis. An economical disaster seemed inevitable, but Cremer took initiative and co-founded the *Nederlandsch-Indische Landbouw-Maatschappij*, which helped many companies survive the crisis.¹⁰³ In similar fashion, Cremer co-founded the *Koninklijke Fabriek van Stoom- en Andere Werktuigen* and the *Nederlandsche Fabriek van Werktuigen en Spoorwagemateriaal*. Another example is the *Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij*, which helped improve Dutch shipping greatly.¹⁰⁴ Plainly, his political career as a member of parliament by no means meant a divergence from his business enterprises. This changed when prime minister Pierson invited Cremer to join his government as minister of the colonies in 1897. Cremer accepted and in order to avoid any conflicts of interests, he sold all his shares of all the companies that had ties with the government and with the Dutch East Indies.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Cremer, *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden*, 22.

¹⁰¹ Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren*, 5.

¹⁰² Biography of J.T. Cremer, information originates from Parlement.com.

¹⁰³ Van Aalst, 'Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer', 53-55.

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, 54.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, 55.

Cremer's years as minister of the colonies coincided with the debates about the Aceh War and about the proposed change of direction, in which concentration would make place for expansion. He was a proponent of a military expedition in Aceh, and overall in favour of expansion in the archipelago. He was convinced that a short and decisive expedition would in the long run save both lives and money, as opposed to the cost of continuing the Concentration Policy, which advocated concentrating on the territories already under control, and only occasionally interfering in the outer territories. He seems to have been right. At the height of the military campaign, there were over 10000 men positioned in Aceh in 1898. In 1899, this number could already be decreased to 6000 men, which was not much more than the occupation forces during the Concentration Policy.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, when the government proposed to make a temporary settlement on New Guinea permanent, many in parliament were opposed. Cremer would defend the decision with the argument of it being a humanitarian necessity. There was no doubt in his mind that expansion of colonial rule was something desirable for both the colonizers as the native population.¹⁰⁷ Other notable endeavours of Cremer as minister of the colonies were the introduction of his mining law in 1899 and his intervention in a possible foreign takeover of an important oil company in the Dutch East Indies, *Moeara Enim*. An American company was about to buy *Moeara Enim* which would leave the *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van Petroleumbronnen in Nederlandsch-Indië* in troubles. Cremer intervened and convinced the directory to forgo the sale. On account of the growth the *Koninklijke Petroleum* went through in the years after, and what importance the company would have for the Netherlands, Van Aalst considered it proof of Cremer's importance for the Netherlands.¹⁰⁸

After his years in government, Cremer returned to his directory positions in the companies that were co-founded by him and to parliament, where he took a seat from 1901 till 1905.¹⁰⁹ Afterwards, he travelled to the Dutch East Indies, to revisited the places of his years there. When he got back to the Netherlands in 1907, he was appointed president of the NHM. In his years as the president of the NHM, from 1907 till 1913, he continued in the same direction Balthazar Heldring had set the company. Expanding the company was the goal, just as it had been with the colonies during his years in government. An entrepreneurial spirit was expected from employees, and Cremer himself would often set the example.¹¹⁰ Van Aalst described Cremer as a president who fostered good work ethics and optimism and recalled working with him as joyful.¹¹¹ After he stepped down as

¹⁰⁶ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 163, 166, 168.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, 175.

¹⁰⁸ Van Aalst, 'Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer', 55, 56.

¹⁰⁹ Biography of J.T. Cremer, information originates from Parlement.com.

¹¹⁰ Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren*, 9.

¹¹¹ Van Aalst, 'Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer', 57.

president, he went on another one year trip to the Dutch East Indies. When he got back in the Netherlands, he was given a seat on the Board of Commissioners of the NHM.¹¹² In 1910 he was involved in the founding of the *Koloniaal Instituut*. He also was elected for senate in 1912 and thus continued his career in politics. He would remain a member until his health no longer permitted him in 1922.¹¹³ In 1918, he was appointed as a special envoy in Washington DC in the United States. Despite his high age, he accepted to further the national cause overseas. In May 1920, health complications forced him to return to the Netherlands. Initially, he would remain there only until he was well enough to go to Washington once again, but in the end, his health proved too problematic, and to his disappointment, he had to stay in the Netherlands. In 1923, the same sickness came up once more and he died of complications on August 14th 1923.¹¹⁴

Throughout his life, Cremer was involved in colonial practices. Overall, Cremer explained Dutch rule in the indies as beneficial for all. Cremer's views of such benevolent imperialism can be seen as somewhat outdated by the time he wrote *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden* in 1914. Yet, it does resemble a legitimization of empire not uncommon in his youth and his earlier years in the Dutch East Indies.¹¹⁵ Cremer believed that the expansion of private enterprises and of the government in the colonies would eventually raise the level of civilisation of the indigenous population as well. Imperialism, even imperialist expansion meant that "*onzer onderdanen daar, voortdurend hooger ontwikkeling naderbij komend, [en] tot zelfstandigheid op dit gebied allengs zullen komen.*"¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Cremer was not oblivious to the idea that the Dutch could and should not just see the Indies as a profitable enterprise. In 1891, he delivered a speech in which he criticized the Dutch government for taking too much from the Indies, and primarily the native population, and for not giving back enough. Like the British had already changed their colonial policies in the middle of the nineteenth century, so too needed the Dutch colonial policy to change, according to Cremer. He called for a decentralised government which should be accompanied by a decentralised system of finance as well. The provincial governments in the British East Indies stood as an example for Cremer. He goes as far as to say that they are in fact compatible, notwithstanding critique from opponents, who argue that the indigenous population in the British East Indies are more 'developed' than those in the Dutch East Indies. Cremer points out that the same system of colonial government is also used by the British in the colonial possessions surrounding the Strait of Malacca, whose native population 'far more resembled' that of the Dutch East Indies.¹¹⁷ In the same speech, he also called for more

¹¹² De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 159.

¹¹³ Biography of J.T. Cremer, information originates from Parlement.com.

¹¹⁴ Van Aalst, 'Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer', 58-60.

¹¹⁵ Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 21, 29, 45, 58, 59.

¹¹⁶ Cremer, *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden*, 30.

¹¹⁷ J.T. Cremer, *Koloniale Politiek: Twee Redevoeringen* (Haarlem 1891) 4, 5, 22-25.

collaboration with the indigenous population in the Dutch colonies. However, this should be in an advisory role. The indigenous population should not be included in decision making.¹¹⁸

Interestingly enough, Cremer was not impressed by the views on colonial policies from the religious political parties in his 1891 speech. However, later on, after Cremer had been minister of the colonies, he was more favourable of the 'Ethical Policy' implemented by Kuyper's religious government.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, Cremer distinguished only two positions one could have regarding the colonies; a conservative standpoint, and a liberal standpoint.¹²⁰ With this remark by Cremer himself, we can more closely identify Cremer's colonial world. He saw matters of colonial politics in a very binary way. On the one hand, there were those who wanted to keep everything just as it was, and who just wanted to profit. On the other hand, there were those who were progressive. For Cremer progressive and more benevolent ways of colonial rule were not something different from liberal economics and expansion in the private enterprise sector. In fact, for him, they were very much the same. In the stated goals of the *Koloniaal Instituut*, the importance of trade with the Dutch East Indies and, consequently, the moral obligations that came with it, became very explicit.

*"Handelsoverwegingen hebben bovendien een belangrijke rol gespeeld in de wording van ons koloniaal bezit, een bezit dat van overwegenden invloed is op de plaats door Nederland ingenomen in de rij der beschaafde natiën en dat ons eenerzijds ongetwijfeld reden geeft tot rechtmatigen trots, doch anderzijds dure plichten oplegt jegens de aan onze zorgen toevertrouwde volkeren."*¹²¹

The goal of the institute then was to support the Dutch colonial endeavours by virtue of knowledge and science.¹²² By expanding and at the same time 'modernizing' colonial policy in the Dutch East Indies, Cremer was convinced that eventually, everyone would benefit. Cremer did not discriminate between political and private economical means. Instead, he focussed on how both the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies would benefit, and sought to pursue collective interests, as he had learned to do in his childhood years. Of course, it should be said that Cremer's personal interests fared well in all his enterprises as well and that he died a very wealthy man.

There is no doubt that Cremer had to thank the Dutch East Indies for much of his fortune and his career. In *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden*, he called the Dutch East Indies a job market with infinite opportunity for young Dutch men.¹²³ His experience in Deli he named as his primary schooling for all his later endeavours in life.¹²⁴ Cremer was a hard worker, on his own account and on

¹¹⁸ Cremer, *Koloniale Politiek*, 25.

¹¹⁹ Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme*, 138.

¹²⁰ Cremer, *Koloniale Politiek*, 27.

¹²¹ J.T. Cremer, *Memorie over de Wording en het Doel der Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut* (Amsterdam 1910) 7.

¹²² Ibidem, 7.

¹²³ Cremer, *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden*, 30.

¹²⁴ Cremer, *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren*, 4.

that of others. Van Aalst recalls his never ending work ethic as president of the NHM as stunning, stating that Cremer always did *“een hoeveelheid arbeid, groter dan men ooit zou vermoeden dat één mensch volbrengen kan.”*¹²⁵ In the end, both this work ethic as well as Cremer’s focus on collective and national interests are what his contemporary friends, colleagues and peers remember him for most. At Cremer’s funeral, Colijn spoke about Cremer’s work as a special envoy in the United States. Colijn called Cremer’s efforts to persuade the United States government of the Dutch interests the most important thing Cremer had ever done for his country. *“Wat hij in Amerika verricht heeft, is slechts aan weinigen bekend, maar ik wensch te getuigen, dat hij daar misschien den grootsten dienst aan den lande heeft bewezen, dien hij bewijzen kon”*¹²⁶ Throughout Cremer’s career, both as a politician and as an entrepreneur, the Dutch East Indies were important for him and, at the same time, in his own view also important for the Netherlands. Both as a politician and as a businessman, he worked hard for the things that were in the interest of both himself, as well as the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Guided by the phrase *eendracht maakt macht*, he worked hard to achieve his goals. In the words of Van Aalst, Cremer was described *“als man van de daad, van de rustige bezinning, het weloverwogen initiatief, de doeltreffende uitvoering.”*¹²⁷ Cremer saw the Dutch East Indies as a land of countless opportunities, and during his career, he worked to strengthen ties between the Netherlands and the colony. Furthermore, Cremer continuously came into contact with foreign cases of empire, most prominently with the British East Indies and the British colonies in the strait of Sumatra. Here, Cremer spoke not of differences, but rather compared colonial policies, and sought to improve the Dutch colonial policy by learning from international or inter-empire examples.

Cremer’s career is a good example of the shift in prestige that a career in the Dutch colonies could bring. In the early half of the nineteenth century, being a planter or businessman in the Dutch East Indies was not desirable, especially not for those with standing. There had always been a gap between the civil servant and the businessman, especially when the Dutch state still held a monopoly on most goods.¹²⁸ Balthazar Heldring’s statement that the civil servant would often turn his nose on the businessman was no coincidence in that regard.¹²⁹ Nonetheless, Cremer opted for a career in the trade and travelled to the Dutch East Indies. Moreover, Cremer was very successful. As a businessman and politician, he has enjoyed considerable influence. Cremer’s career coincided with

¹²⁵ Van Aalst, ‘Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer’, 57.

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 59.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, 60.

¹²⁸ J.A.A. van Doorn, *De Laatste Eeuw van Indië: Ontwikkeling en Ondergang van een Koloniaal Project* (Zutphen 1994) 35, 36.

¹²⁹ Heldring, *Van Calcutta to Ceylon*, 128.

the period when Dutch colonial expansion was rapid, both in the colonial territories and in the public opinion at home. Especially his political career coincided with events like the Aceh War and the Boer War, which brought the colonies closer to the Dutch national mind.¹³⁰ In Cremer's mind too, the Dutch East Indies played a key role for the Netherlands but also for the colonial individual. Building on his experience, he believed the colonies to be important to the Netherlands, and at the same time, stressed the importance of Dutch rule for the colonies, thus making them interdependent. Cremer's career also shows some of the paradoxical ambiguities of Dutch colonial rule. While Cremer spoke of obligations towards the indigenous populations of the colonies and eventually defended the 'Ethical Policy', he also had been part of the crude regime in Deli, where the condition of the workers on the plantations was not much better than outright slavery.¹³¹ In the end, Cremer was there for almost all of what can be considered the Dutch equivalent of imperialism. Building on the opportunities the Dutch East Indies provided to develop his career, there is no doubt that Cremer can be seen as a new type of Dutch businessman, as one of the first Dutch imperial men.

¹³⁰ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn Breedst*, 9, 10.

¹³¹ Van Doorn, *De Laatste Eeuw van Indië*, 11.

Chapter 4: Karel van Aalst: A New Entrepreneurial Spirit

“...dat Nederland en Indië één staatkundige eenheid moeten zijn, zoodat de hulpbronnen van den een dienstbaar moeten worden gemaakt aan de belangen van den ander.”¹³² ~ C.J.K. Van Aalst

After 1900, the Dutch East Indies experienced an economic boom. Between 1900 and 1914, almost thirty per cent of all domestic emissions were coming from Dutch companies that operated in the Dutch East Indies.¹³³ While private enterprises and the civil service in the archipelago expanded, so did the NHM. More and more agencies were opened in the colonies. In 1900, the NHM had seventeen agencies in the East Indies and the rest of Asia, including the Factory in Batavia. In 1916, there were thirty-two.¹³⁴ The economic growth was halted temporarily during the first world war. Trade with the overseas territories was difficult at first because of the submarine warfare of the Germans and the trade blockade the Entente had imposed upon Germany. As the war went on and both the submarine warfare and the blockade intensified, all trade with the colonies became virtually impossible by 1917. In the same year, the telegraph connections with Batavia was cut off.¹³⁵ Even though the Dutch maintained neutrality and did not participate in the war, they had difficult years during the war economically. Central in the Dutch economic struggle of the First World War, was Cornelis Johannes Karel van Aalst.

Van Aalst was born in the Dutch town of Hoorn on May 7th 1866. His parents were Dirk Johannes van Aalst and Jacoba Maria de Ruijter de Wildt. His father was a pastor, as in turn had his father been before him. His mother's family consisted primarily of officers of the navy. After attending *Hoger Beroeps Onderwijs* in Hoorn, Van Aalst chose neither a religious nor a military career and went to study at the *Openbare Handelsschool* in Amsterdam. In 1885, he graduated and immediately he went to work at an Amsterdam trading firm that traded in tropical products. After four years, he took the candidates exam of the NHM and, after he had passed the exam, took on employment with the NHM in 1889. He was sent to the Factory in Batavia at once, which was not very common. Usually, new employees would stay in Amsterdam for one or two years first.

His career was spectacular. Already in 1891, he was promoted to division head at the Factory. In 1895 he became the second in rank at the Soerabaja office, and in 1896 he became agent, thus first in rank, at that same office. In 1898, he became second in rank at the Singapore office and, again a year later, he became an agent there too. While he was on leave in the Netherlands in 1902, Ernst

¹³² C.J.K. van Aalst, *Dagboeken*, 544, 555. Available online at <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/vanaalst/#page=0&accessor=listofletters&view=homePane>.

¹³³ Van Doorn, *Indische Lessen*, 18, 19.

¹³⁴ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 163.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, 142, 143.

Heldring, who was impressed with Van Aalst's qualities, recommended him to his father, NHM president Balthazar Heldring, for the vacant slot in the directory of the NHM and so, Van Aalst was invited to become a director at age 36.¹³⁶

After Cremer stood down as president in 1913, Van Aalst became the new president of the NHM. Characteristic of the early years of Van Aalst's presidency, was the growing collaboration of the government of the Netherlands with the bigger trading and banking firms.¹³⁷ In large part, this was due to the wartime situation in Europe. Under the slogan *handelszaak naar handelsgebruik, ook in oorlogstijd*, trading and banking firms were involved in assuring the continuation of the Dutch import and export as much as possible. Consequently, men like Van Aalst found themselves in quasi-political, but certainly influential positions.¹³⁸ Although Van Aalst had no ambition for official political roles, his new position fitted him well. A self-proclaimed *homo novus*, Van Aalst wanted to reside in the highest spheres of the Netherlands and liked to take on leadership. Van Aalst was wilful and forthcoming and interfered whenever and however he saw fit, in order to further the interests of the NHM, the Netherlands or the Dutch East Indies.¹³⁹ Right at the start of the first world war, he showed his particular character. When the war broke out, a run on the banks took place in the Dutch East Indies. The Factory of the NHM, under the leadership of Frits Marmelstein, decided not to hand out any money, not even to its most loyal customers. This was an unpopular decision with the public, the press, and the government in the colonies. Governor-General Idenburg asked the government in the Hague to talk to Van Aalst and to convince him to intervene. They talked, but to everyone's surprise, Van Aalst backed Marmelstein in his decision.¹⁴⁰ The growing ties between the NHM and the government, in particular, were also in part thanks to Van Aalst's meddling and his assertiveness. Moreover, Van Aalst held good relations with the Dutch royal family as well, adding to his considerable influence.¹⁴¹

The most well-known example where politics and the economic sector of the Netherlands overlapped in the years of World War One, was the *Nederlandsche Overzeese Trustmaatschappij* (NOT). The NOT was founded to guarantee continued trade with both Germany and the Entente in a way that would be acceptable for both war parties and that would keep the Dutch economy as steady as possible given the circumstances. Because of the total warfare nature of World War One, it was no permissible for those nations participating in the war to let the enemy acquire the much-needed resources for the war apparatus. Even if they acquired them via trade with a neutral country,

¹³⁶ Kymmell, 'Aalst, Cornelis Johannes Karel van'.

¹³⁷ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 158.

¹³⁸ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 27.

¹³⁹ Ibidem, 22.

¹⁴⁰ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 164, 165.

¹⁴¹ Ibidem, 158, 159.

letting the resources get to the enemy was simply not an option. Consequently, neutral countries like the Netherlands found themselves in a predicament and faced being dragged into the war. Especially for the Netherlands, which was surrounded on all sides by war parties and which was strongly dependent on trade, this was problematic. Therefore, the NOT was founded to function as a buffer between the conflicting interests of the countries at war. Although not quite an official government agency, it was the NOT who guaranteed the Entente that their products and shipments would not be traded further towards Germany.¹⁴² As both chairman of the NOT and as president of the NHM, Van Aalst held power.¹⁴³ Additionally, Van Aalst's ancillary positions were also numerous. To name a few, he was either a board member or held a commission with the *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*, the *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Stoomboot-Maatschappij*, and the *Koninklijke Hollandsche Lloyd*. He was chairman of the *Amsterdamsche Bankiersvereniging* and a founder and boardmember of both the *Koninklijke Vereniging 'Koloniaal Instituut* and the *Ondernemers-raad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*.¹⁴⁴ There is no doubt that Van Aalst's influence in the Dutch business world was considerable.

One striking case in which Van Aalst's position led him to intervene with politics was in the spring of 1918. The Germans had just successfully launched an offensive on the western front, and as a result demanded more concessions from the neutral Dutch government regarding the trade of goods like sand and gravel, which were important for Germany. According to the Germans, the concessions were necessary and just, because the Entente had seized the Dutch trading fleet. Dutch minister of foreign affairs John Loudon did not want to make these concessions. Because most were impressed with the sudden success of the German offensive in the war and feared a possible German invasion, parliament did not support Loudon in his resistance to the German demands. Minister-president Pieter Cort van der Linden now faced a minister stepping down and the possible fall of his government, which he did not want to happen so shortly before the upcoming national elections. While the council of ministers were in consultation, Van Aalst had heard from a French envoy that the Entente would not object to Dutch trade of sand and gravel with the Germans. They too feared a German invasion of the Netherlands. Van Aalst went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but could not find Loudon there. After the hearing in parliament, in which Loudon's proposal was rejected, Van Aalst tried to reach him again. This time he heard that the council of ministers were meeting and he promptly went to see them. Once he had arrived, he was denied entry at first. He then told the doorman that he had to tell minister Willem Treub - who he knew personally - something because his wife was very ill. Treub was fetched from the meeting and Van Aalst told him what he had heard.

¹⁴² Samuël Kruizinga, 'Neutrality in the Balance: The Origin of the Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij (N.O.T.)', *Leidschrift* 20:3 (2005) 57, 58, 75-82.

¹⁴³ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Kymmell, 'Aalst, Cornelis Johannes Karel van'.

Later that day, Loudon too would give in to the German demands and a crisis was prevented. Although Van Aalst's role was instrumental on this occasion, private intervention with the council of ministers was not appreciated. When Van Aalst, shortly after, tried to make England an offer to speed up the overseas trade on his own account, he was reprimanded by the ministers and was told that he had no business doing so.¹⁴⁵ After the first world war, Dutch minister of foreign affairs Karnebeek agreed with the *Raad van Bijstand van de Directie Economische Zaken*, that whatever credits Dutch banks wanted to loan to Germany, had to be reported to Vissering, president of the *Nederlandsche Bank* who in turn would report them to Karnebeek. Although Van Aalst was on the *Raad van Bijstand* and initially agreed with Karnebeek, he nonetheless held private meetings with German envoys and businessmen. Never before had he reported any of his endeavours with the NHM to Vissering, and he was not about to start doing so. Only after the first deals had already been made, and Van Aalst had told his friend, Dutch prime minister Ruys de Beerenbrouck, Van Aalst told Vissering and Karnebeek, but only after Ruys de Beerenbrouck had insisted he would do so.¹⁴⁶

As a person, Van Aalst was described as energetic and unrestrained. He was funny and most of the time, a conflict would not affect his mood. Yet, his humoristic remarks would border on rude to many of his colleagues of the Dutch business elite. For the often still pseudo-aristocratic environment he lived and worked in, he was staggeringly direct. Even in his relations with Queen Wilhelmina, he did not hesitate to speak his mind.¹⁴⁷ In his journal, Van Aalst wrote of a meeting he had had with the Queen on March 26th 1918. In this meeting, he complained about Governor-General van Limburg Stirum. According to Van Aalst, the Governor-General was too occupied with a "*Indië voor de Indiërs*" and was forgetting that the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands were and should be one political unit and that both should support each other. The Queen replied that she agreed, and she told Van Aalst that she would tell the Governor-General accordingly.¹⁴⁸

As seen in the aforementioned incidents with Van Aalst and the government, his antics would often antagonize other people. Even though he was seen as loyal and trustworthy, working with him could be difficult.¹⁴⁹ Already in his earlier career when Van Aalst worked for the German businessman Gust Briegleb in Amsterdam, he would have a difficult working relationship with his boss. Shortly after Van Aalst had left Briegleb's business, and had gone to the Dutch East Indies as an employee of the NHM, Ernst Heldring, Balthazar Heldring's son, took on a job with Briegleb. There, he heard many stories about Van Aalst's mischief in the workplace.¹⁵⁰ For Ernst Heldring, this would

¹⁴⁵ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 30-32.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, 56-58.

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem, 22.

¹⁴⁸ Van Aalst, *Dagboeken*, 544, 555.

¹⁴⁹ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 22.

¹⁵⁰ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 61.

become somewhat of a prophecy for his later encounters with Van Aalst. Initially, after the two had met in Singapore, they started out as friends. After Van Aalst was promoted to director of the NHM, on Heldring's recommendation to his father, they worked together quite extensively. Heldring was the president of the *Nederlandsche Stoomboot-Maatschappij*, in which Van Aalst as NHM director was a board member. During his lifetime, Heldring would always portray Van Aalst as an able leader of the NOT and the NHM and instrumental for the Dutch economy during World War One.¹⁵¹ Yet, while Heldring remained favourable about Van Aalst's abilities, their personal relationship began to cool over the years. According to Heldring, Van Aalst tried to remove him from any influence regarding the *West-Indische Mail*.¹⁵² At the same time, Heldring would not go along with the ego-boosting that Van Aalst according to Heldring received in the first years of World War One. In Heldring's words;

*"Hij paarde zijn vindingrijkheid, slagvaardigheid en patriotisme helaas aan een groote mate van ijdelheid, terwijl hij het met de waarheid niet al te nauw nam. Hij was meer handig dan knap, de man van het oogenblik meer dan van eenig stelsel, opportunist en belust op geld, dat hij echter met royale hand uitgaf."*¹⁵³

Another person with who Van Aalst's personality clashed, was Emile David van Walree, the eldest son of a brick factory owner. Born in Brummen in 1871, Van Walree attended the *Hogere Burger School*, and afterwards the *Openbare Handelsschool* in Amsterdam, where he met Ernst Heldring.¹⁵⁴ Heldring graduated with the highest score of his class, with Van Walree coming second. Heldring and Van Walree would remain good friends throughout their lives.¹⁵⁵ After graduating, Van Walree worked for the *Holland-Amerika Lijn* for some years and then started his training as an envoy. As an envoy, he was stationed first in Japan, and later in China. In 1901, Balthazar Heldring invited Van Walree to come to work for the NHM in order to expand the company in China.¹⁵⁶ He became an NHM inspector in 1907 and when Van Aalst became president in 1913, Van Walree took on the vacant seat of a director.¹⁵⁷ The relationship between the two was not great. In 1917, Van Walree told Ernst Heldring that he was considering stepping down as director of the NHM. He found Van Aalst too capricious and impossible to talk to. In the best interests of his health, he found it no longer desirable to continue his work for the NHM. Van Aalst of course had something to say as well and complained to Heldring that Van Walree was in a bad mood continuously. Van Aalst said that

¹⁵¹ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 201.

¹⁵² Ibidem, 201, 202.

¹⁵³ Ibidem, 202.

¹⁵⁴ F.A. Dankers, 'Walree, Emile David van (1871-1950)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).

¹⁵⁵ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 53, 54, 57.

¹⁵⁶ Dankers, 'Walree, Emile David van'.

¹⁵⁷ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 158, 168, 169.

probably one of them would have to go.¹⁵⁸ Heldring did not approve of Van Aalst's methods, but in the end, both Van Aalst and Van Walree were right. In 1918, Van Walree resigned from his position as director, because of his troublesome relationship with Van Aalst.¹⁵⁹ After his year with the NHM, Van Walree would continue with a profitable career, including for example a position as director of the *Twentsche Bank*. Additionally, he also would remain well appreciated as a consultant, primarily regarding East Asia.¹⁶⁰

Both Van Aalst and Van Walree enjoyed a career in the Dutch banking- and trading world. Consequently, the Dutch East Indies were intertwined into their lives. Interestingly enough, while the two men often could not see eye to eye, their lines of thinking about the Dutch East Indies were not so different. Van Aalst expressed his views that metropole and colony should be seen as one political unit. Consequently, the Dutch East Indies should help the Netherlands, but at the same time, the opposite was also true. Van Aalst complained about those who did not understand the relationship with the colonies in this way. Van Walree, in his 1930 publication *Azië en Wij*, also stated that while the Dutch East Indies were an official part of the Kingdom of Netherlands by virtue of the constitution of 1922, there was still not enough awareness of this connectedness between metropole and colony in the broader Dutch public. Too many still thought of the Dutch East Indies as a faraway land and not as part of the Kingdom.¹⁶¹ Van Aalst in his life showed more interest in the Dutch national and colonial economy than for the political or administrative dimensions of the colonies. Van Walree too admitted to the strong economic factors in the existence of the colonies. However, he also added, that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, this was no longer the sole reason for colonial presence. Eventually, the Dutch had understood that they had obligations as well. For the last fifty years, the Dutch had brought order and prosperity and had started to 'modernize' the indigenous population. Of course, added Van Walree, it needed to be understood that the Dutch East Indies were far from ready to govern their own. They were still very much in the early stages of development.¹⁶² Van Aalst seemed to have thought the same way about colonialism in general. Commenting on the decision of the United States to let go of the Philippines as a colony, Van Aalst stated that the colonies were "*niet in staat zichzelf te regeren*."¹⁶³ Both men thus viewed the Dutch rule in the East Indies as a necessity.

Notwithstanding Van Aalst's view that the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies should be one political unit, and should support each other, during the first world war, it is clear that Van Aalst

¹⁵⁸ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 209, 210.

¹⁵⁹ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 229.

¹⁶⁰ Dankers, 'Walree, Emile David van'.

¹⁶¹ E.D. van Walree, *Azië en Wij: Een Studie over onze Verhouding tot Nederlandsch-Indië* (Amsterdam 1930) 7.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, 9, 11, 12.

¹⁶³ Van Aalst, *Dagboeken*, 254.

places priority on the Netherlands. When he spoke in 1914 with the minister of the colonies Bastiaan Pleyte, he made it clear that in his opinion there should first come a loan from the government to support businesses in the Netherlands, before such a loan could become available for the Dutch East Indies.¹⁶⁴ In 1916, writing about his correspondence with Fritz Marmelstein, president of the NHM Factory in Batavia, Van Aalst complains in his journal that the government in the colonies is oblivious to the political and economic troubles in the Netherlands.¹⁶⁵ While Van Aalst considered the colonies integral to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, World War One added some distance between metropole and colony, and Van Aalst had no difficulty in giving priority to the former.

Nonetheless, both Van Aalst and Van Walree were clear about their views on the colonies. In 1930, Van Walree reflected on the Dutch East Indies with an international or inter-empire approach. According to him, the development of the colonies in Asia was not particularly different between the European nations involved. Moreover, all the Asian countries, with the exception of Japan, were in roughly the same stage of development, with the British East Indies only taking a slight lead over the Dutch and French East Indies.¹⁶⁶ If there is any doubt if the men of the NHM considered their colonial endeavours different from those of the British or the French, let Van Walree clear it up;

*“Indien uit de revue, welke wij Azië lieten passeeren, iets blijkt, dan is het wel dit, dat de ontwikkelingsgang in Nederlandsch-Indië in de hoofdtrekken niet verschilt van hetgeen elders voorvalt.”*¹⁶⁷

Van Aalst's career shows first and foremost that the Dutch East Indies brought opportunities not only to those who started their lives well off but also to those who came from less impressive social backgrounds. As the son of a pastor, Van Aalst would not have been a likely candidate for the presidency of both the NOT and the NHM in the early half of the nineteenth century. Yet, the developments regarding the expansion in the colonies provided opportunities for Van Aalst's career. At the same time, Van Aalst is exemplary for a change in entrepreneurial mindset in the Netherlands. The difference between Van Aalst and those from a background of more standing, like the Heldring Family, was that while those of standing tried to fit in as best as they could and tried to live up to a certain standard, Van Aalst seemed to take pride in conspicuous behaviour. The new mentality meant believing in one's abilities, working hard, and adhering to modernity.¹⁶⁸ For Van Aalst it did not matter if he clashed with others as a result. Still, his career became possible only because of the

¹⁶⁴ Van Aalst, *Dagboeken*, 20.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem, 250.

¹⁶⁶ Van Walree, *Azië en Wij*, 46-49.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 52.

¹⁶⁸ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 17, 18, 20.

changes in the Dutch colonies and because of the opportunities the Dutch East Indies provided him with.

Chapter 5: Daniel Crena de longh and Ernst Heldring: An Empire in Crisis

*"Het zal wel de eerste keer zijn, dat een president der Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij Indië bezocht."*¹⁶⁹ ~ Ernst Heldring

Despite all the difficulties of World War One, the Dutch banking sector flourished in the second decade of the twentieth century. On the NHM headquarters in Amsterdam, there were four times more employees in 1920, 540 employees, than there had been in 1914, which had been 'only' 141 employees. Not only was it necessary for the NHM to build a bigger headquarters- which would not be finished until 1926- the directory was also enlarged from two to four directors. In the first years of the nineteen twenties, a heavy depression damped activity in both Europe and the Dutch East Indies, but economic activity returned gradually.¹⁷⁰ However, within the directory of the NHM the difficulties did not fade away. Van Aalst did not tolerate any competition and reigned absolute. Furthermore, between 1902 and 1934, Van Aalst held a total of seventy positions as a board member, chairman or president with many different companies, clubs, and institutions. At times, this was more than even Van Aalst could handle. During World War One, he used up two whole days alone to do his work as president of the NOT. In 1919, Van Aalst was burned out. A year later, his son died of the Spanish Flu. Two years later, his wife died. Consequently, he thought about resigning his position as president of the NHM.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, Ernst Heldring and Van Aalst had reconciled and were again on speaking terms. Van Aalst even tried to convince Heldring to take on a position as commissioner. Yet, Heldring declined, stating the state of the directory as his main concern. According to Heldring, none of the directors was very able. While Van Aalst concurred, he did not state the true reason for the weak directory according to Heldring. Heldring thought they were there because Van Aalst would not permit any strong leaders beside him.¹⁷² Heldring and Van Aalst also discussed the possibility of Van Aalst resigning from the presidency, which almost seemed a certainty at the time, and the vacancy of a seat as director. Van Aalst named Daniël Crena de longh as his favourite candidate. Heldring thought him a sympathetic young man but also thought him too gentle for the role of a leader. In his journal, Heldring also wrote that Van Walree had expressed that Heldring himself would be a favourable candidate for the presidency after Van Aalst. Heldring quickly dismissed the notion.¹⁷³ In

¹⁶⁹ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1141.

¹⁷⁰ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 200, 202, 224, 228.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem, 230.

¹⁷² Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 556.

¹⁷³ Ibidem, 557.

1925, it seemed inevitable that Van Aalst would resign. Heldring writes that he was away more and more and that the gap between Van Aalst and the directory continued to grow. Van Aalst himself told Heldring that he would resign in 1926 and that Crena de longh and not secretary Abbing would be promoted to the still vacant position of director. Overall, Heldring judged the internal situation of the NHM in the nineteen twenties as very difficult.¹⁷⁴

Daniël Crena de longh was born in 1888 in Dordrecht, the Netherlands. Crena de longh was a well-known name in Dordrecht, where his ancestors had accumulated their wealth in the wheat trade. Daniël's father was a lawyer and like him, Daniël went to study law at the University of Leiden. He graduated in 1914 and found work at the NHM agency in Rotterdam. The NHM saw a future in the young man and in 1916 he was sent to an internship in New York. Already in 1920, he became the NHM agent in Rotterdam, the highest rank in the Rotterdam office. As Van Aalst had wanted, Crena de longh was promoted to director of the NHM in 1925.¹⁷⁵ However, Van Aalst did not resign in 1926. He would stay on for almost another decade. It would take a worldwide recession to bring him down eventually. After the Wallstreet crash in 1929, the NHM initially still made some profits, but from 1931 and onwards, they no longer did and the company was not able to turn out any dividend. The biggest problem was the inertia of the directory. Van Aalst still reigned supreme but was not as sharp as he once had been. Additionally, the other directors had not much to bring to the table, for Van Aalst would not permit them to. With the Board of Commissioners, the situation was largely the same. Consequently, the directory did not innovate enough and invested mostly in sectors that were already less profitable than they had once been, even before the crash of 1929, like sugar production.¹⁷⁶ In March 1934, Van Aalst told Heldring during a private dinner that he would resign as president of the NHM, and that Crena de longh was the next candidate. In June, Heldring got confirmation from Van Aalst. Heldring stated again, as he had done in 1925, that he thought that Crena de longh would be able and decent, but was lacking in vigour.¹⁷⁷

Immediately upon his promotion to president, Crena de longh faced the task of reforming the NHM. Additionally, next to reforming the NHM in the Netherlands, the presidency also brought with it a certain obligation to the economy of the Dutch East Indies. As an example of such an obligation, the president of the NHM also took on a position on the *Ondernemersraad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* and the *Bond van Eigenaren van Nederlandsch-Indische Suikerondernemingen*. Crena de longh was a president of the NHM who had no previous experience in the colonies. Thus, when the dust of the restructuring of the NHM had settled, he went on an educational journey to the

¹⁷⁴ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 594, 623.

¹⁷⁵ J.P.B. Jonker, 'Crena de longh, Daniël (1888-1970)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).

¹⁷⁶ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 261.

¹⁷⁷ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1068, 1073.

Dutch East Indies.¹⁷⁸ Upon his return, he was interviewed by the Dutch press. When he was asked what his general impression was, he answered positively;

*“Mijn indruk van Indië? Door mijn werk stond ik niet vreemd tegenover het land, daar ik mij met zoveel van zijn economische problemen heb moeten bezighouden. Maar thans zijn mijn voorstellingen levend geworden. [...] Mijn algemeene indruk is trouwens, dat er in Indië hard wordt aangepakt, men zit er niet bij de pakken neer. Men – en dat geldt ook voor de regering – pakt de zaken met voortvarendheid aan. De menschen zijn er jonger, er zijn minder weerstanden te overwinnen.”*¹⁷⁹

In a second interview later that month, he repeated this optimism. Moreover, he drew a comparison with the colonies of the British and the French. The Netherlands were in no position to give economic guidance to the world, and therefore, the Netherlands had best adapt to the new situation.¹⁸⁰ Crena de longh was hopeful that they would do so effectively, because of what he had seen on his journey to the Dutch East Indies;

*“Voor de wijze waarop Indië dit heeft gedaan heb ik de grootste bewondering. Men heeft zich met moed, resoluutheid en snelheid in het onvermijdelijke geschikt. Het resultaat is dat voor Indië naar mijn overtuiging de aanpassing thans reeds zeer ver gevorderd is.”*¹⁸¹

Crena de longh showed a heavy focus on economics when discussing the colonies. Stating that because of the very close connection between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, any economic improvement over there should naturally have a beneficial effect on the economy at home as well. Yet, he did find it necessary to say something about the benefits for the Dutch East Indies too, adding that economic improvements would of course also benefit both the European population and the native population in the colonies.¹⁸² When Crena de longh went to see Heldring after his journey, they spoke very little about the colonies, which Heldring found remarkable. With typical Heldring sarcasm, he wrote in his journal *“Het zal wel de eerste keer zijn, dat een president der Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij Indië bezocht.”*¹⁸³

An interesting episode during Crena de longh’s precedency was the announcement of the engagement between Princess Juliana of the Netherlands and Prince Bernhard van Lippe-Biesterfeld. To get the prince familiar with both the Netherlands as well as the Dutch East Indies, it was decided

¹⁷⁸ Jonker, ‘Crena de longh, Daniël’.

¹⁷⁹ *De Telegraaf*, 11 oktober 1935, 3. Available online on Delpher.nl.

¹⁸⁰ *De Telegraaf*, 23 oktober 1935, 1. Available online on Delpher.nl.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem, 1.

¹⁸² Ibidem, 1.

¹⁸³ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1141.

that he would take on temporary employment with the NHM. This decision demonstrates exactly how important the NHM still was in the 1930s regarding both the economy of the Netherlands as well as the Dutch colonial possessions. Heldring recalls how he, Crena de longh and Leonardus Trip, president of the *Nederlandsche Bank* met at the NHM headquarters, where they awaited the arrival of the prince. Heldring described the prince as intelligent and sensible, and as concerned and interested with the NHM. The prince was interested primarily in the direct economic involvement of the NHM.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, the synopsis that was presented to the prince in book form about the history and the activities of the NHM, focussed heavily on firstly the economics of the Netherlands and the NHM, and only in a later section on that of the Dutch East Indies. Interestingly, when talking about the economic benefits of the Dutch East Indies, the benefits of Dutch rule in the colonies for the native population were stressed as well. When discussing the ecological geography, the fact that the indigenous population were no longer an exclusively agricultural society, but now also engaged in wage labour was stressed. When pointing out the position of the Dutch East Indies in the global economy, the many foreign investors and the foreign sales markets were explained as 'beneficial for the Dutch East Indies'. This so-called 'open door policy' of the Dutch government regarding the colonies, was continued always with the goal of 'developing' and 'civilizing' the indigenous population. Moreover, the unity of the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands was stressed in length.¹⁸⁵ Concluding the introduction to the Dutch East Indies, it was also fair to admit the benefits of the colony for the Dutch metropole; "*Het spreekt overigens vanzelf, dat de nauwe band van het Moederland met de overzeesche gewesten ook voor land en volk van Nederland van niet te onderschatten beteekenis is.*"¹⁸⁶ The information that was provided for the Prince shows the place of the Dutch East Indies in the activities of the NHM in the 1930s. While the colonies were of importance, the general economic development of the Netherlands came first, and the colonies were only explained secondly.

In 1939, Crena de longh clashed with the Board of Commissioners. From the 1920s onwards, the NHM had done business with the German firm Mendelssohn & Co., in particular with its Amsterdam agent Fritz Mannheimer. Van Aalst had held a good relationship with him, and Crena de longh inherited and continued their working together. Like Van Aalst, Mannheimer was a man with a particular character and, consequently, someone who was either loved or hated. During the 1930s, Mendelssohn & Co. came into a downwards spiral. The ascendancy of the Nazi Party in Germany was troublesome for the firm, as many of its directors and employees were Jewish. Under Nazi rule, the

¹⁸⁴ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1200, 1201, 1218.

¹⁸⁵ *De Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*, information collected with the goal of educating Prins Bernhard van Lippe-Biesterfeld on the economic aspects of the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies by *de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (Amsterdam 1936) 74-76.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 76.

firm encountered an increasingly hostile environment in their home country. Mannheimer himself would request naturalization with the government of the Netherlands in 1936 for that reason. Additionally, misconduct played a role. For example, Mannheimer had acquired an art collection with money from the firm. When an undertaking of the German firm in which the NHM participated failed in 1939, commissioner of the NHM A. van Hoboken phoned the directory to warn them about Mannheimer. The directory did not listen. In fact, the NHM supplied Mannheimer with an additional loan of twelve million *gulden* that same month. Shortly after, Mannheimer died. The bankruptcy of Mendelssohn & Co. now was deemed inevitable. As one of the biggest participants in the firm's activities, the NHM was hit hard. The Board of Commissioners blamed Crena de longh, who had ignored Hoboken's warning and they wanted his resignation.¹⁸⁷ Crena de longh did not agree, he admitted his mistake, but also did not think he would have to resign for it. After all, of all the commissioners and the directory, only one person had warned about Mannheimer. Nonetheless, the Board of Commissioners agreed that faith in the NHM would not return unless Crena de longh would resign, and someone trustworthy would take his place.¹⁸⁸

That someone they found in Ernst Heldring. Heldring, after he had graduated from the *Openbare Handelsschool* in Amsterdam in 1889, had worked for the prominent Amsterdam firm Van Eeghen & Co. and had travelled to Londen and the West-Indies for the firm. He then found employment with the coffee trading firm W. Heybroek Jr. & Co. and travelled to the United States and again to the West Indies, as well as to the Dutch East Indies. In 1899, he was made director of the *Koninklijke Nederlandsche Stoomboot-Maatschappij*. He was co-founder of the *Java-China-Japan Lijn* in 1902 and took initiative to prevent the takeover of the *Zuid-Amerika Lijn*, later the *Koninklijke Hollandsche Loyd* by German firms. Heldring, known for his integrity and responsibility, was the trustworthy man to replace Crena de longh the NHM needed in 1939 according to the Board of Commissioners.¹⁸⁹ Initially, Heldring himself thought either Van Walree or M.J.A. Deknatel, president of the *Nederlandsche Clearing Instituut* would be the next candidates. Although Heldring thought Van Walree would be an able candidate, his temper would not give the stability the NHM needed to retrieve the faith of the public. Heldring said he did not know Deknatel well and made no comment on his abilities. Some weeks later, it came to Heldring's attention that the Board of Commissioners wanted him to be the next president of the NHM. While he pointed out his age of 68 years old and his limited expertise in banking, he did not, as in 1925, immediately dismiss the idea. Instead, in his memoirs, he gradually seems to accept it. Finally, after he had considered it sometime and had

¹⁸⁷ De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 283, 284.

¹⁸⁸ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1399, 1402.

¹⁸⁹ De Vries, 'Heldring, Ernst'.

squared things with Crena de Jongh as well, he accepted the position, stating; *“Het is een geweldige taak die mij toegedacht wordt.”*¹⁹⁰

Heldring's promotion to president coincided with the escalation of the tensions in Europe and the start of the Second World War. The majority of Heldring's journal entries in late 1939 and early 1940 discuss the developments regarding the war. Time and time again he feared, like many others, that the Germans would invade the Netherlands. Unfortunately, he turned out to be right, and the war would leave a gap of five years in his otherwise so extensive journal. When the Germans invaded the Netherlands on May 10th 1940, these were the last words Heldring would write for five years;

*“10 Mei 1940. Het is zoover. De Duitse vliegtuigen zijn boven ons land. Er wordt sedert vannacht 2.45 uur geschoten. 's Morgens 5.15 geschreven.”*¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1392, 1399, 1401, 1403.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 1453.

Epilogue: The Dutch Empire

Ernst Heldring resumed his work as president of the NHM after World War Two and would remain president until his resignation in 1948, after which he kindly refused to take a seat as the chairman of the Board of Commissioners because of his high age of 77.¹⁹² Directly after the second world war, Heldring found himself being president at a time when the Indonesian nationalists had proclaimed Indonesian independence. While the situation in the archipelago seemed dire, Heldring still wanted the Netherlands to continue its colonial projects. When on November 30th 1945 he met with the *Ondernemersraad*, many thought that the Netherlands would have to secede their political control and bargain for a treaty in which they could at least continue their economic activities. Heldring finds these sentiments understandable, but disagrees;

*"...ik acht de verwezenlijking van [die] inzichten gevaarlijk voor ons aanzien in de wereld. Met een rijkseenheid hebben wij althans nog een 'empire' en een standing in den wereldraad, al zie ik nog geen inwendig sterke structuur ervan. Nederland zou in een verdragsverhouding tot Indië tot den rang van Denemarken afdalen"*¹⁹³

His use of the word 'empire' is interesting here. The Dutch colonial idiom never has had an equivalent for the British term 'empire'.¹⁹⁴ Yet, when the threat of losing control of the colonies seemed real, Heldring made the comparison and it shows exactly how intertwined metropole and colony were in his mind. Two years later, Heldring had become more and more pessimistic.

*"Nederlandsch-Indië was nog Nederlandsch, Indonesië wordt meer en meer een vreemd land."*¹⁹⁵ Still, he held the hope of regaining control of the colonies. When Heldring learned of the plans for military action a week before the second Dutch military campaign in the Indonesian independence war, even then, he concurred.¹⁹⁶

Like the presidents before him, both Heldring's professional and personal lives were intertwined with the Netherlands as a colonial power. With the notable exception of Crena de longh, they all started their career with firms and companies that did business with the Dutch East Indies and, consequently, travelled there themselves. Balthazar Heldring, Cremer, and Van Aalst all did so as

¹⁹² De Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij*, 301.

¹⁹³ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1473.

¹⁹⁴ Remco Raben, 'Epilogue: Colonial Distances: Dutch Intellectual Images of Global Trade and Conquest in the Colonial and Postcolonial Age' in: Rene Koekoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire: Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London 2020) 206.

¹⁹⁵ Heldring, *Herinneringen en Dagboek*, 1486.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 1495.

an employee of the NHM. Ernst Heldring did not, yet it is still true that his career would have been unthinkable without the Dutch East Indies.

Balthazar Heldring's career took off at a turning point in Dutch imperial history when instead of a conservative stance towards the colonies, 'progress' became the key. With his progressiveness, he was instrumental in reforming the NHM to a large scale banking firm, thus setting the path for the presidents after him. Cremer's successful career shows that while a post in the colonies previously had been socially undesirable, this was no longer the case. His success as both a businessman and politician show the possibilities the Dutch East Indies now held for young Dutchmen trying to start their career. During his career, Cremer witnessed the Dutch colonial expansion in the Indies. Consequently, he can perhaps be seen as the archetype of the Dutch imperial man. As Van Aalst had described Cremer, Van Aalst himself was often described by others as one of the *mannen van de daad*.¹⁹⁷ Coming from a relatively humble background, his career shows that, while men like Crena de longh, Van Walree and Ernst Heldring already had considerable standing at the start of their careers, such benefits were no longer a prerequisite for success. The colonies made possible a different kind of career, in which hard work and vigour were seen as the necessary qualities, thus truly making the Dutch East Indies a '*land van onbegrensde mogelijkheden*' for Dutchmen. Van Aalst's career shows how much the Dutch colonies and the Dutch development towards 'modernity' were intertwined after the colonial expansion in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, his career shows that in the early twentieth century of the Netherlands, one story cannot be told without the other. After the abolition of the Cultivation System, the Dutch East Indies provided new opportunities for businessmen. With Balthazar Heldring's help, the NHM took on a central role in the Dutch colonial economy. The careers of men like Cremer, Van Aalst, Van Walree and Ernst Heldring indeed show the '*onbegrensde mogelijkheden*' the Dutch East Indies provided and, thus, show how closely interconnected the Dutch colonies are with the history of the 'modern' Dutch business world. It is impossible to imagine a 'modern' Dutch business world in the first half of the twentieth century without the colonies, these men, or the NHM.

The statement that the presidents of the NHM thought and theorized much about the Dutch East Indies perhaps seems somewhat obvious. After all, it was their job to do so. At first glance, the presidents seem to have had very liberal justifications of empire, which could perhaps be seen as somewhat old-fashioned when compared to justifications of empire in other European empires at the time.¹⁹⁸ The economic dimensions of the colonies run like a thread through their discussions of the Dutch East Indies. Especially in times of economic peril like the First World War or the Great

¹⁹⁷ Houwink ten Cate, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland*, 17, 18.

¹⁹⁸ Sankar, *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, 324, 325.

Depression in the 1930s, economical aspects seem to be heightened and discussed primarily in regards to the needs of the metropole. Yet, at all times, even in the First World War and the 1930s, they also spoke of the obligations the Dutch had towards the colonies and towards the native populations. Here, the paternalism associated with 'modern' imperialism is clearly visible.¹⁹⁹ For the presidents, colonial obligations were not another goal altogether. The common narrative the presidents held, was that economic development would benefit both the metropole and the colony, that it would bring development and civilization in the colonies and that it would improve the international position of the Netherlands as well. Economic and ethical goals were not different but the one and the same, as were the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies. Metropole and colony were one political unit. It is true that not every Dutchman and woman lived so proverbially close to the Dutch East Indies. The presidents themselves would often complain about the indifference of their fellow countrymen and women regarding the colonies and find themselves stressing the unity between metropole and colony again and again. Still, to discard the Dutch colonies as mere trading colonies, would be to misrepresent their importance to the lives of these *mannen van de daad*.

When we look again at Stanard's five theme's in which empire was commonly justified throughout Europe in the first half of the twentieth century, we can easily identify all of them in the writings of the presidents of the NHM.²⁰⁰ Firstly, metropole and colony needed to be seen as a single unified entity. Secondly, the Dutch East Indies made the Netherlands bigger than they otherwise would have been and thus were paramount to the place of the Dutch in the world order of nations. Thirdly, the colonies were repeatedly portrayed as the economic backbone of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Fourthly, colonialism brought freedom to the indigenous populations. Take for instance Cremer's policy of expansion in order to safeguard the peace in the colonies while he was a minister in the Dutch government. Lastly, the before- and after image of colonialism was used as a narrative. Again, Cremer most exemplarily compared the Dutch East Indies from his Deli years to when he revisited them in 1914 and was favourable about the 'progress' he had seen.

All the presidents described and discussed colonial policies in constant comparison with the colonies of other European nations, most often with the British East Indies. Compatibility here was often assumed, and even though the word 'empire' never entered the Dutch colonial vocabulary at large, they did not think of the Dutch colonies as inherently different from those of other European nations. What this thesis has shown is, first and foremost, that by studying the careers of the presidents of the NHM in a Dutch colonial context, we can see that the Dutch East Indies became increasingly tied together with the Netherlands in a way that mirrors the colonial expansion and the

¹⁹⁹ Sankar, *Empire and Modern Political Thought* 324, 325.

²⁰⁰ Stanard, 'Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture', 37-44.

colonial experience of other European nations during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth century. Additionally, this thesis has shown that the presidents of the NHM themselves made no distinction in essence between the Dutch colonial experience and that of other European nations. Thus, the presidents of the NHM- and by extension, the Dutch colonial experience for many- existed and operated within an international framework of empire, and the Netherlands and the Dutch empire should be understood and studied accordingly.

Bibliography

Sources

Aalst, C.J.K. van, *Dagboeken*, 544, 555. Available online at

<http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/vanaalst/#page=0&accessor=listofletters&view=homePane>. (As seen on 06-21-2021.)

Biography of J.T. Cremer, information originates from Parlement.com. Available online at

<https://www.parlement.com/id/vg09lkzjh4zl>. (As seen on 06-21-2021.)

De Telegraaf, 11 oktober 1935. Available online on [Delpher.nl](http://delpher.nl). (As seen on 06-21-2021.)

De Telegraaf, evening edition 23 oktober 1935. Available online on [Delpher.nl](http://delpher.nl). (As seen on 06-21-2021.)

Printed sources

Aalst, C.J.K. van, "Levensbericht van Jacob Theodoor Cremer, 30 juni 1847 – 14 augustus 1823", in:

Jaarboek van de Maatschappij der Nederlandsche Letterkunde (1924).

Cremer, J.T., *Jeugd en Jongelingsjaren: Beschreven door Hemzelf, voorzien van een Inleiding door*

J.F.L. de Balbian Verster (Den Haag 1924).

Cremer, J.T., *Koloniale Politiek: Twee Redevoeringen* (Haarlem 1891).

Cremer, J.T., *Memorie over de Wordings en het Doel der Vereeniging Koloniaal Instituut* (Amsterdam 1910).

Cremer, J.T., *Ons Land van Onbeperkte Mogelijkheden: Reisschetsen* (Amsterdam 1914).

De Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, Information collected with the goal of educating Prins

Bernhard van Lippe-Biesterfeld on the economic aspects of the Netherlands and the Dutch

East Indies by *De Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (Amsterdam 1936).

Heldring, Balthazar, *Koloniaal Beheer* (Amsterdam 1868).

Heldring, Balthazar, *Nederland en Indië* (Amsterdam 1868).

Heldring, Balthazar, *Van Calcutta to Ceylon* (Amsterdam 1925).

Heldring, Ernst, *Herinneringen en Dagboek, Editie Johan de Vries* (Groningen 1970).

Schouten, Marian, *Rond de Buitenzorgse Troon: Indisch dagboek C.L.M. Bijl de Vroe, 1914-1919, ingeleid en bewerkt door Marian Schouten, met een woord vooraf door A. Alberts* (Bussum 1980).

Walree, E.D. van, *Azië en Wij: Een Studie over onze Verhouding tot Nederlandsch-Indië* (Amsterdam 1930).

Literature

Bossenbroek, Martin, *Holland op zijn Breedst: Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse Cultuur Omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam 1996).

Dankers, F.A. 'Walree, Emile David van (1871-1950)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).

Doorn, J.A.A. van, *De Laatste Eeuw van Indië: Ontwikkeling en Ondergang van een Koloniaal Project* (Zutphen 1994).

Doorn, J.A.A. van, *Indische Lessen: Nederland en de Koloniale Ervaring* (Amsterdam 1995).

Fasseur, C., 'Cremer, Jacob Theodoor (1847-1923)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).

Foray, Jennifer L., "Comparatively Exceptional: The Paradoxes of Twentieth Century Dutch Imperialism and Decolonization", in: Rene Koekoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire: Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London 2020).

Graaf, Ton de, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, 1824-1964* (Amsterdam 2012).

Hall, Catherine *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 -1867* (Cambridge 2002).

Hawkins, Mike, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (Cambridge 1997).

Houwink ten Caat, Johannes, *Mannen van de Daad en Duitsland, 1919-1939: Het Hollandse Zakenleven en de Vooroorlogse Buitenlandse Politie* (Den Haag 1995).

Jonker, J.P.B., 'Crena de longh, Daniël (1888-1970)', in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).

Koekoek, Rene, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn "Introduction", in: Ibidem, *The Dutch Empire: Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London 2020).

Koekoek, Rene, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, "Visions of Dutch Empire: Towards a Long-Term Global Perspective", *Low Countries Historical Review* 132:2 (2017).

- Koht, Halvdan, *The American Spirit in Europe: A Survey of Transatlantic Influences* (Philadelphia 1949).
- Kruizinga, Samuël, "Neutrality in the Balance: The Origin of the Nederlandsche Overzee Trustmaatschappij (N.O.T.)", *Leidschrift* 20:3 (2005).
- Kuitenbrouwer, Maarten, *Nederland en de Opkomst van het Moderne Imperialisme: Koloniën en Buitenlandse Politiek, 1870-1902* (Amsterdam 1985).
- Kymmell, J., 'Aalst, Cornelis Johannes Karel van (1866-1939)' in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).
- Locher-Scholten, Elsbeth, "Dutch Expansion in the Indonesian Archipelago Around 1900 and the Imperialism Debate", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25:1 (1994).
- Mantena, Karuna, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton 2010).
- Pomeranz, Kenneth. "Empire & 'Civilizing' Missions, past & present", *Deadalus* 134:2 (2005).
- Raben, Remco, "Epilogue: Colonial Distances: Dutch Intellectual Images of Global Trade and Conquest in the Colonial and Postcolonial Age" in: Rene Koekoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard and Arthur Weststeijn, *The Dutch Empire: Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London 2020).
- Sankar, Methu, *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (New York 2012).
- Stanard, Matthew G., "Interwar Pro-Empire Propaganda and European Colonial Culture: Toward a Comperative Research Agenda", *Journal of Contemporary History* 44:1 (2009).
- Vries, J. de, 'Heldring, Ernst (1871-1954)' in: *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* (2013).