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Universiteit Utrecht

CGEH Working Paper Series

Grammar of difference?

Labour policies and social norms on work and gender in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies, ca. 1800-1940

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July 2014

Working paper no. 58

www.cgeh.nl/working-paper-series/

Grammar of difference? Labour policies and social norms on work and gender in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies, ca. 1800-1940

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Abstract: This paper investigates developments in labour policies and social norms on gender and work from the perspective of colonial entanglements. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, work was seen a means to morally discipline the poor, both in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies. A prime example are the initiatives by Johannes van den Bosch, who first in 1818 established 'peat colonies(!)' in the Netherlands, where the urban poor were transported to become industrious agrarian workers. In 1830, the same Van den Bosch introduced the Cultivation System in the Netherlands Indies, likewise, to increase Javanese peasants' industriousness. During the nineteenth century, ideals and practices of the male breadwinner started to pervade Dutch working-class households, and child and women's labour laws were issued. Instead, legislation in the Netherlands Indies was introduced very late and under heavy pressure of the international community. Not only did Dutch politicians consider it 'natural' that Indonesian women and children worked. What is more, they presented the inherent differences between Indonesian and Dutch women as legitimation for the protection of the latter: a fine example of what Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have called a 'grammar of difference'.

Keywords: Social policy; Women's work; Child labour; Colonial history; Labour relations.

JEL Codes: I38; J21; N30.

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Introduction

Over the past two decades, postcolonial and post-nationalist studies have designed a research agenda allowing for dynamic and reciprocal analyses of colonial interactions. This scholarship criticizes the widespread idea of nations as self-contained units of analysis and furthermore counters implicit teleological notions of many historians that developments in Western Europe and North America have served as blueprints for other societies' and cultures' 'road to modernity'.¹ Instead, both postcolonial and 'new imperial' historians have argued that, because of their interwoven histories, we can only understand historical developments in 'the East' *as well as* in 'the West' by studying them in relation to each other.²

Such 'entangled histories' are probably most evident for the period of intensified colonial relations during nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imperialism. In their inspirational work, Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have emphasized the many ambivalences of colonial rule, and pointed to the importance of recognizing how colonialism not only shaped the histories of the colonies, but just as much those of the metropolises. We cannot understand the *postcolonial* world without acknowledging these 'tensions of empire', and it is important to "examine thoughtfully the complex ways in which Europe was made from its colonies".³ We need to (re)read the historical archival material from this perspective, placing colonial history not solely in the context of domination and subordination, but reconstructing a more dynamic history, characterized by tensions, anxieties and paradoxes, collaboration and resistance.⁴ Examining these tensions and *mutual* influences will not only lead to a better understanding of the metropolitan as well as the colonial past, but it can also help more fully explain the postcolonial remains of these complex relationships.⁵

In this paper, I therefore want to examine the entanglements of social intervention in relation to work and welfare in the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies from the early nineteenth century up until the Second World War. This was the period in which the Dutch increasingly attempted to gain political control over the Indonesian archipelago, leading to intensification of colonial encounters and significant socioeconomic effects on both sides of the Empire. I aim to show how state intervention – in this case by the Dutch national *and* colonial State – on the one hand was strikingly similar *in timing* in both parts of the empire, but worked out remarkably differently in terms of policies and welfare effects. These differences were reinforced by changes in ideology, entailing strong gender as well as ethnic components, impacting drastically on diverging trajectories of the working classes in both parts of the world. While early nineteenth-century initiatives have been studied in the same analytical framework,⁶ to my knowledge this is

¹ See for an already classic account: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and*

² Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002) 10, 12; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley/Los Angeles 2005); Chris Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford 2004). Although Bayly explicitly distances himself from postcolonial history, he does aim to show interconnectedness and interdependencies in world history.

³ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 3.

⁴ Ann L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton 2009).

⁵ Ann L. Stoler and Frederick Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda', in: idem (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley 1997) 1-56, 33.

⁶ Albert Schrauwers, 'The "Benevolent" Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia', *Comparative Studies of Society and History* (2001) 298-328; Ulbe Bosma, 'Dutch Imperial Anxieties about Free Labour, Penal Sanctions and the Right to Strike', in: Alessandro

much less the case for the remainder of the colonial period.⁷

This is all the more necessary because important changes took place in the nineteenth century, in which the welfare state slowly but surely emerged at least in the metropolitan parts of the Dutch empire, whereas social legislation in the Netherlands Indies lagged seriously behind. Moreover, important ideological changes occurred in this period, which I believe contributed to both the simultaneity and the divergence of social policy in the different parts of the empire. In the beginning of the century, the elites considered work by all members of the labouring classes – men, women and children – to be the key to an industrious and blossoming society and economy, both in the Netherlands and in the Netherlands Indies. Towards the end of the century, however, the wellbeing of the poor and working classes became increasingly defined as a “Social Question” in the Netherlands, in which child labour and women’s work formed an important concern. Similar concerns led to the Ethical Policy in the Netherlands Indies in 1901, although attitudes towards the work of women and children here were far more ambivalent. In the 1920s and 1930s, the ideal of the male breadwinner society had gained solid ground in the metropolis, culminating in draft legislation to prohibit any paid work by married women in 1937, whereas work by women and children in the colony was conceived as rather unproblematic and even ‘natural’ in the same period.

Work and social discipline: the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies compared (c. 1800-1870)⁸

Already in the early modern period, the authorities’ rhetoric and policies increasingly had associated poverty with idleness, both in the Dutch Republic and the Netherlands Indies. In the context of eighteenth-century economic decline, the answer to the rising problem of poverty was work: idle poor should be reformed into hard-labouring and productive citizens. This rhetoric applied to lower-class men, women, and children alike. For example, Dutch welfare institutions more and more restricted provisions for unemployed immigrants, begging was forbidden, and beneficial entitlements became increasingly dependent on people’s work efforts.⁹ Likewise on Java, Dutch colonizers condemned migration and ‘vagrancy’ by the indigenous population as being economically counterproductive.¹⁰ The number of local initiatives in the Netherlands such as workhouses and spinning contests – typically women’s and children’s work – mushroomed in the latter half of the eighteenth century. However, most of these initiatives failed. Often, the poor refused work, or soon left the workhouse because of its bad reputation or because women and children could earn more and be more flexible elsewhere in the labour market.¹¹

Stanziani, *Labour, Coercion and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th-20th Centuries* (Leiden 2013) 67-74.

⁷ With the notable exception of Ben White, ‘Childhood, Work and Education, 1900-2000: The Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies/Indonesia Compared’, Brood en Rozen (2001) 105-120.

⁸ This paragraph has – in a slightly modified version – partly been published in: Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, ‘Industriousness in an imperial economy. Delineating new research on colonial connections and household labour relations in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies’, *Workers of the World* 1:3 (2013) 107-112.

⁹ Marco van Leeuwen, ‘Amsterdam en de armenzorg tijdens de Republiek’, *NEHA-Jaarboek* 59 (1996) 132-161.

¹⁰ Jan Breman, *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid. Het Preanger stelsel van gedwongen koffieteelt op Java* (Amsterdam 2010) 41.

¹¹ Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *De draad in eigen handen. Vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid, 1581-1810* (Amsterdam 2007) 177-179.

The Napoleonic wars led to deepening economic crisis, and attitudes towards pauperism prevailed. Many early nineteenth-century policymakers as well as intellectuals believed that poor relief formed a disincentive for creating industrious, law-abiding citizens.¹² After the Dutch Kingdom was established in 1815, initiatives to combat poverty were taken to the national and even imperial level. Remarkably, King William I entrusted one particular person to implement his plans to counter pauperism by stimulating the industriousness of poor families, first in the Netherlands and later on Java. The man in question was Johannes van den Bosch (1780-1844), who had served as a military officer in the Netherlands-Indies since 1799. He owned a plantation on Java, where he experimented with the cultivation of cash crops between 1808 and 1810. However, Governor-General Daendels expelled Van den Bosch to the Netherlands in 1810, probably because of his criticism on the existing colonial policy. Here, Van den Bosch successfully fought against the French in 1814-1815, which did not go unnoticed by the later King.¹³

After the Vienna peace treaties of 1815, Van den Bosch spent most of his days designing plans to combat poverty in the Netherlands. He wrote an elaborate book on the problems of poverty, unemployment and the desired role of the state. Although poverty was particularly dire in Dutch towns, Van den Bosch was convinced that – unlike in Britain – *agriculture* instead of industry would be the answer to the problem in the Netherlands. Probably, his earlier experiments with cash crop cultivation on Java formed the foundation for Van den Bosch's ideas.¹⁴ He argued that the urban poor should gain the 'right to work', by having them relocated to the rural regions, where they could learn how to cultivate agricultural crops for their own subsistence, selling their surpluses the market. With private funds Van den Bosch established a Benevolent Society (*Maatschappij van Weldadigheid*) in 1818, to set up agricultural colonies in Drenthe, an under-populated province in the East of the Netherlands consisting mostly of peatland. Ten thousands of mostly urban pauper families migrated (and later were even deported) to these 'peat colonies'. The idea was that several years in the countryside would turn them into industrious agrarian workers. Eventually, they would be able to leave the colonies with some savings and an improved mentality.¹⁵

Suitable colonists nevertheless proved hard to find, and 'industriousness' soon needed to be enforced to a great extent. Part of the dwellings transformed into penal institutions for convicted paupers. Even in the 'free' peat colonies, regulations were strict and detailed. Throughout the 1820s, Van den Bosch himself regularly corresponded with the overseers, ensuring that they saw to it that "no household would be bereft of the necessary, but that it itself would earn these necessities".¹⁶ The meticulous detail of Van den Bosch's calculations for households' bare subsistence needs strikes the historian's eye when reading the archival material. While undoubtedly benevolent in intent, the experiment with the peat colonies clearly shows that to the elite, the poor were really a 'foreign country', as Frances Gouda has argued.¹⁷ The initiative was an example of social engineering, and its overseers did not eschew intensive control, or at times even force, over ordinary people's daily lives.

¹² Frances Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture. The Rhetoric of Social Welfare in the Netherlands and France, 1815-1854* (Amsterdam 1995) 20.

¹³ J. Boerma, *Johannes van den Bosch als sociaal hervormer: de maatschappij van weldadigheid* (Groningen 1927), 2-4.

¹⁴ Schrauwers, 'The "Benevolent" Colonies', 301.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 303-313.

¹⁶ National Archive (NA), Collection Van den Bosch, inv. no. 58, Benevolent Society, fol. 79v.

¹⁷ Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, 2.

A strict regime of meals, work and rest was established, including just little leisure time. Wages for field work were set at two-thirds of regular Dutch (adult male) wages, from which costs for daily subsistence were subtracted.¹⁸ Whatever a colonist family earned more, partly had to be put in a health fund, partly saved, and was partly paid out as pocket money. Enough savings had to buy the family out of the institution within a couple of years.¹⁹

Although Van den Bosch principally opposed slavery, he could hardly see the distinction between ‘forced’ and ‘free’ labour.²⁰ After all, every wage labourer was to some extent enslaved, and therefore Van den Bosch was not against coerced adoption of the poor.²¹ Indeed, voluntary colonists coming to Drenthe formed an exception: yearly, on average 22 families arrived between 1830 and 1860.²² Already in the early 1820s, the peat colonies extensively relied on state financing,²³ and in 1859, the colonies were completely taken over by the State, thus officially becoming a public institution. Most of the thousands of families and individuals in the peat colonies were from then on sent or even convicted to the “Beggars Institutions” by local urban authorities. In 1875, still 2,809 people were living here, of whom only 10 had volunteered.²⁴ Instead of reforming poor men, women and children into hard-working citizens, the colonies had turned into a full-fledged penal institution, to which undesired elements from urban society were sent off. Judging from their original intention, the peat colonies can thus be considered a failure. Nevertheless, an important effect of these social experiments was that they set an example, not only for similar initiatives in Europe.²⁵ More strikingly, the peat colonies formed a blueprint for the Cultivation System on Java, that their inventor Johannes van den Bosch designed and implemented when he was Governor-General in the Netherlands Indies (1830-1833).

Much has been written about the Cultivation System, but for this paper, the relatively underexplored links with Van den Bosch’ benevolent colonies in the Netherlands are particularly interesting. Both can be seen as “development projects” with state support, focusing on agricultural production of cash crops by the (poor) population, who would not only work for their subsistence, but also received a cash bonus for surplus crops. Moreover, in both cases the objective was to reform ‘lazy’ paupers into industrious workers, and to this end, a certain degree of coercion was tolerated.²⁶ Particularly Indonesian *men* were seen as idle, as opposed to their wives whom the Dutch as well as the English portrayed as particularly industrious and entrepreneurial. For instance, Thomas Stamford Raffles, Governor-General during the British interregnum in the East Indies (1811-1816), had noted in 1817 that “[t]he labour of the women on Java is estimated almost as highly as that of the men”.²⁷

¹⁸ NA, vd Bosch, inv. no. 58, fol. 14v.

¹⁹ Berend e.a., *Arbeid ter disciplineren en bestraffing. Veenhuizen als onvrije kolonie van de Maatschappij van Weldadigheid 1823-1859* (Zutphen 1984) 60-61.

²⁰ Bosma, ‘Dutch Imperial Anxieties’, 68.

²¹ J.J. Westendorp Boerma, *Een geestdriftig Nederlander. Johannes van den Bosch* (Amsterdam 1950) 39-40.

²² C.A. Kloosterhuis, *De bevolking van de vrije koloniën der Maatschappij van Weldadigheid* (Zutphen 1981) 243.

²³ Westendorp Boerma, *Een geestdriftig Nederlander*, 38.

²⁴ ‘Bevolking der Rijksbedelaars Gestichten’, *Economist* (1875) 24:2, 732-736.

²⁵ E.g. in the Southern Netherlands, Westendorp Boerma, *Een geestdriftig Nederlander*, 37; and in France, Gouda, *Poverty and Political Culture*, 114.

²⁶ Schrauwers, ‘Benevolent Colonies’, 313-314.

²⁷ Cited in: Locher-Scholten, ‘Female labour’, 40-42. See also: H.W. Daendels, Staat der Nederlandsche Oostindische bezittingen. Bijlagen, Organique Stukken, Preparatoire Mesures 31 (’s-Gravenhage 1814) 104; Boomgaard, ‘Female labour and population growth on nineteenth-century Java’, *Review of Indonesian and*

Van den Bosch stated that Javanese peasants only needed a few hours' work per day for subsistence. In order to make them produce additionally for the market, their industriousness needed to be enhanced, for their own benefit as well as that of the imperial economy.²⁸ To achieve this, Javanese peasants should set aside a proportion of their land to produce export crops, such as coffee, sugar and indigo, for the Dutch authorities. While peasants obtained monetary recompense for their production, this predominantly served to pay land rents to indigenous elites and Dutch civil servants. The system would be in place until around 1870, and although it worked out very differently in various parts of Java,²⁹ it had a tremendous effects on both the Javanese and the Dutch economies, as I will now argue.

The effects of the Cultivation System on household labour, in particular on women's and children's work efforts, is very much unexplored territory. Angus Maddison has estimated that the introduction of the system did not mean that Indonesian workers impoverished, but that they had to work harder to meet their daily necessities.³⁰ While Maddison did not explore the economic activities of Javanese women and children, my argument here is that their work efforts indeed increased. Ben White has recently stated that the Cultivation System "required fundamental reorganization of the household's division of labour".³¹ Firstly, women's and children's labour input in subsistence agriculture increased, because men had to devote more of their time to cultivating cash crops. Secondly, although this was explicitly *not* the authorities' intention, women and children assisted or worked fully in the cultivation of cash crops as well.³² Thirdly, there is empirical evidence that women and children living in villages that were exempted from the Cultivation duties, performed free wage labour in neighbouring villages that were obliged to contribute, for instance at picking tea leaves,³³ and at coffee plantations.³⁴ Robert Elson has even suggested that in some respects this blurring of gendered work activities resulted in more equal labour relations between the sexes.³⁵

This enhanced work effort by women and children, caused by a State-supported system of resource extraction, may have originated mostly out of increasing poverty, as Boomgaard argues.³⁶ However, other historians suggest that the colonial interactions also entailed new consumptive possibilities for Indonesian households. More generally, the rise of waged labour severely affected labour relations in the Javanese economy and households, as well as their consumption patterns.³⁷ In

Malayan affairs 15 (1981) 7.

²⁸ J. van den Bosch, 'De consideratiën en het advies van den 6 Maart 1829, uitgebragt door den benoemden Gouverneur-Generaal van N. Indië J. van den Bosch, op het rapport van den heer Du Bus over de kolonisatie' [1829] in: D.C. Steyn Parvé, *Het koloniaal monopoliestelsel getoetst aan geschiedenis en staatsuithoudkunde* ('s-Gravenhage 1850) 294-328, 304.

²⁹ Robert Elson, *Village Java under the cultivation system, 1830-1870* (Sidney 1994) 43-44.

³⁰ Angus Maddison, 'Dutch income in and from Indonesia 1700-1938', *Modern Asian Studies* 23:4 (1989) 645-670.

³¹ Ben White, 'Labour in childhood's global past: Child work and colonial policies in Indonesia, 1800-1949', in: K. Lieten and E. van Nederveen Meerkerk, *Child labour's global past* (2011) 485.

³² NA, Koloniën, 1850-1900, inv. no.5830, Geheime verbalen, No. 47, 12 februari 1852. See also Peter Boomgaard, 'Female labour', 9.

³³ Arsip Nasional Jakarta (ANRI), inv. no. 1621, Cultuurverslag Preanger Regentschappen 1862.

³⁴ J. van den Bosch, *Een viertal verhandelingen over den belangrijkste quaestien thans omtrent Java aan den orde van den dag* (Den Haag 1850) 42. Van den Bosch explicitly says that these female coffee pickers "can only be hired out of their own free will".

³⁵ Elson, *Village Java*, 205-206.

³⁶ Boomgaard, 'Female labour'.

³⁷ Jan Luiten van Zanden and Arthur van Riel, *Structures of Inheritance. The Dutch Economy in the Nineteenth*

this sense, the initial aims of Van den Bosch – increasing market production by the agrarian population – appear to have been more successful in the Netherlands Indies than in the Netherlands. Without a doubt, this difference in outcome related to the relative effective grip the colonial State had on the Javanese economy. Ironically, the millions of guilders profits made from the Cultivation System resulted in large capital flows to the Dutch treasury,³⁸ which allowed the economy of the Netherlands to start off what has been called a “Liberal Offensive”. This liberalization of the Dutch economy in the period 1840-1870, was thus partly supported by colonial gains. Typically, in the 1860s the Dutch liberals would turn out to be the fiercest opponents of the organization of forced labour that the Cultivation System entailed.³⁹

Another effect of the Cultivation System on the Dutch economy in this period was rapid industrialization, which in turn affected work patterns of households in the Netherlands. The semi-governmental Dutch Trading Company (*Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*), established in 1824 by the Dutch King to monopolize trade with the Netherlands East Indies, not only imported cash crops cultivated on Java into the Netherlands, but also was responsible for the shipping of cotton cloth produced in the Netherlands to the Indonesian market. To this end, new cotton factories were set up in the proto-industrial Eastern provinces of the Netherlands.⁴⁰ Because of the increased monetization of the Javanese economy, Indonesian households shifted from home production of cotton to buy textiles imported from the Netherlands. Mechanization on the one hand caused the rapid decline of hand-spinning, seriously decreasing the demand for homespun yarn both by Dutch and Indonesian women and children. On the other hand, it (temporarily) drew children and women to the factories in the Netherlands, affecting labour relations in the metropolis.⁴¹

Work, the Social Question, and Ethical Policy (1870-1901)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this intensifying industrialization in the Netherlands and the social problems it entailed increasingly gained the attention of contemporary publicists and politicians. Dutch child and women’s labour formed an important aspect of the so-called ‘Social Question’. Mainly progressive liberals started to debate the social consequences of industrialization, and they established their own societies and journals. Their discussions were in the first place directed towards paying attention to the labouring classes, in order to prevent them from falling prey to the emerging labour unrest and socialism.⁴² Nevertheless, some social-liberals were also genuinely concerned with the miserable position of the working poor, and they believed that the State was

Century (Princeton 2004) 116.

³⁸ 1831-1840: 150.6 million guilders; 1841-1850: 215.6 million guilders; 1851-1860: 289.4 million guilders. Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Structures of Inheritance*, 179-180.

³⁹ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Structures of Inheritance*, 168-187.

⁴⁰ Ton de Graaf, *Voor Handel en Maatschappij, Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, 1824-1964* (Amsterdam 2012) 59-63.

⁴¹ Gertjan de Groot, *Fabricage van verschillen: mannenwerk, vrouwenwerk in de Nederlandse industrie (1850-1940)* (Amsterdam 2001); Corinne Boter, Before she said ‘I do’. The impact of industrialization on unmarried women’s labour participation 1812-1932 (Paper presented at the European Social Science History Conference, Vienna, 25 April 2014); Cor Smit, *De Leidse Fabriekskinderen. Kinderarbeid, industrialisatie en samenleving in een Hollandse stad, 1800-1914* (Forthcoming 2014).

⁴² Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Structures of Inheritance*, 245.

responsible for alleviating some of the most outright injustices following from the process of industrialization. Although demanding social legislation was one bridge too far for these liberals, they agreed on legislation on one particular issue: child labour.⁴³ In 1874 Samuel van Houten, one of the progressive liberals active in these circles, after fierce parliamentary debate realized the Children's Law (*Kinderwetje*), which prohibited the *industrial* work for children younger than 12 years. Although the law was yet far from all-encompassing, it did constitute the very first labour Dutch labour law.

Apart from the work of children, women's work, and especially *married* women's work, was on the agenda of the bourgeois civilization attempts. One of the goals was to reform married women from the labouring classes into devoted tidy and frugal housewives, as these would lay the foundation of a stable family life, preventing disorderly behaviour such as alcoholism by their husbands or vandalism by their children. Being a proper housewife thus excluded fulltime work outdoors.⁴⁴ In the 1880s, such private initiatives also gained political weight. Both the women's movement and the emerging liberal, confessional and social democrat political parties, started to get involved in the debate on labour. The discussions not only concerned protecting women and children against exploitation, but more fundamentally on the suitability of and the right to work by (married) women, both on physical and moral grounds.⁴⁵ These concerns led to the Labour Law of 1889, containing regulations against "excessive and hazardous labour by juvenile persons and women". Among other things, this law confined the working day for women and children under 16 to a maximum of 11 hours, and prohibited Sunday and night labour for these groups.⁴⁶

In this period, a particular socio-political context had developed in the Netherlands, which historians have defined as 'pillarization'. From the 1870s onwards, interest groups emerged that organized according to ideology (Catholic, orthodox Protestant or socialist), establishing associations and organizations in many societal domains. The 'pillars' had to collaborate with each other and the less organized 'rest' (liberals and non-orthodox Protestants), because no single group would obtain political majority. This led to a transformation from a more liberal to a 'neocorporatist' direction of society, in which all of the pillars were to solve as much of their problems as possible (semi)privately within their own group, with minimal public support. In this new order, the social question had a distinctive place. The elites of especially the newly organized confessional groups, (orthodox) Protestants and Catholics, but also the socialists, adopted the strategies of civilization of the working classes already carried out by the liberal bourgeoisie.⁴⁷

Indeed, confessional politics became increasingly important in constituting some form of social security towards the end of the century. With increasing industrialization, the labourer had gained a more important role in the economy and society, and this was reflected in theological ideas about labour as well. Instead of being a curse for sin, relating to Adam and Eve's expulsion from Garden of Eden, manual labour was increasingly seen as a virtue (at least for the lower social strata).

⁴³ Marco H.D. van Leeuwen, 'Armenzorg 1800-1912: erfenis van de Republiek', in: J. van Gerwen en M.H.D. van Leeuwen (ed.), *Studies over zekerheidsarrangementen. Risico's, risicobestrijding en verzekeringen in Nederland vanaf de Middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam 1998) 289.

⁴⁴ Smit, *Fabriekskinderen*, 385.

⁴⁵ E.g. Jacques Giele, *Een kwaad leven. De arbeidsenquête van 1887* (Nijmegen 1981) 87; Ulla Jansz, *Denken over sekse in de eerste feministische golf* (Amsterdam 1990) 36; Stefan Dudink, *Deugdzaam liberalisme. Sociaal liberalisme in Nederland 1870-1901* (Amsterdam 1997) 105.

⁴⁶ Selma Leydesdorff, *Verborgene arbeid - vergeten arbeid: een verkennend onderzoek naar de gevolgen van de arbeidswetgeving voor vrouwen en hun verdringing naar de huisindustrie in Nederland* (Amsterdam 1975) 33.

⁴⁷ Van Zanden and Van Riel, *Strictures of Inheritance*, 242-249.

Modern theologians depicted labour as the driving force behind the societal and economic progress that was God's will. On these grounds, ministers and confessional politicians would have to convince the labouring classes that they should not contest their position by strikes or work stoppages,⁴⁸ but their superiors ought to see to their best interests, for which the State should set some minimal conditions for monitoring labour protection. To this latter end, orthodox-Protestant politician Abraham Kuyper had already made quite revolutionary propositions in Parliament in 1874, but the time was not ripe yet.⁴⁹ Only fifteen years later, the abovementioned 1889 Labour Law with its restrictions on women's and children's work was introduced by the first Christian administration of the Netherlands, a coalition of Catholics and orthodox-Protestants.

Some historians have defined this particular socio-political culture, in which the elites of the diverse pillars aimed to look after the best interests of their less fortunate followers, as 'patronizing citizenship'.⁵⁰ As historian Elsbeth-Locher Scholten has already shown in 1981, this specific Dutch political culture may also help explain the development of a changing attitude towards the Netherlands East Indies in this period.⁵¹ Politicians and social commentators became increasingly aware that the excessive financial gains of the Cultivation System and, after its abolishment, the huge tax revenues (*Batig Slot*) derived from the Netherlands Indies had negatively affected the financial state of the Netherlands Indies. The devastating consequences for the welfare of the archipelago and its native inhabitants this entailed, increasingly raised the indignation of several contemporaries. In a renowned article, publicist and lawyer C.Th. van Deventer pleaded for the compensation of these million guilders of 'debt of honour' (*eereschuld*), and to invest this in the wellbeing of the population, for instance by providing basic education and improving infrastructure.⁵²

In the spirit of the age, the second confessional administration of the Netherlands, led by the Protestant Kuyper, was to implement the so-called 'Ethical Policy' in the Netherlands Indies at its inauguration of 1901. In her yearly speech, the young Queen Wilhelmina stated that "the Netherlands was to fulfill a moral calling towards the population of these provinces".⁵³ As Kuyper had already declared in "Our Program" in 1879, his Anti-Revolutionary Party aspired a form of "custody" over the Dutch overseas possessions, rather than exploitation or colonialism. This custody was to be achieved by the moral uplifting of indigenous populations, in the first place by Christianizing them.⁵⁴ The Ethical Policy had two main objectives: improving the welfare of the indigenous population and at the same time increasingly subjecting them to the colonial State. This policy followed from the fact that the Netherlands as a Christian nation had towards the indigenous inhabitants of the East Indies, and entailed missionary work, the protection of contract labourers, and a general investigation into

⁴⁸ Mirjam Fokeline Buitenwerf-van der Molen, *God van vooruitgang: de popularisering van het modern-theologische gedachtegoed in Nederland (1857-1880)* (Hilversum 2007) 173-177.

⁴⁹ Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper, een biografie* (Amsterdam 2006) 154. Kuyper had been a fierce critic of Van Houten's first law against child labour, because in his view this law was only intended as a regulation of labour, not serving 'the protection of the child'. Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 151.

⁵⁰ Berteke Waaldijk and Susan Legêne, 'Ethische politiek in Nederland. Cultureel burgerschap tussen overheersing, opvoeding en afscheid', in: Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben (eds.), *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief. Wegen naar het nieuwe Indië 1890-1950* (Amsterdam 2009) 187.

⁵¹ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten. Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel 1877-1942* (Utrecht 1981).

⁵² C.Th. van Deventer, 'Een Eereschuld', *De Gids* 63 (1899) 205-252.

⁵³ As cited in: S. van Randwijck, 'Enkele opmerkingen over de houding der zending tegenover de expansie van het Nederlands gezag', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 86 (1971) 55.

⁵⁴ Abraham Kuyper, "Ons Program" (5th Edition, Hilversum 1907 [1st ed. 1879]) 331-332.

the 'lesser welfare' of the Indonesian population.⁵⁵ This attitude towards the common indigenous people had striking similarities with the attempts that had been made over the past few decades at civilizing the working classes in the metropolis. According to the Anti-Revolutionaries, the labouring classes in the Netherlands also had to be morally uplifted, and protected in ways that resembled practices of custody.⁵⁶

An important part of the Ethical Policy focused on Javanese households, and particularly the place of women therein. In some sense, the concerns for the position of married women in the Netherlands Indies and their working activities mirrored those on Dutch housewives, but apart from class, ethnicity invigorated paternalism. As stated above, the traditional image of the Javanese woman was that she was very active, both within the household and in the labour market, in contrast to her husband, "the average coolie, who does not work unduly hard".⁵⁷ Around 1900 the general image of the Javanese woman was still that "[s]he toils and drudges as long as her powers allow her to".⁵⁸ Nevertheless, European notions of the role of the Indonesian woman had become more differentiated in the course of the nineteenth century. This was partly due to the more intensive encounters between Javanese and Dutch people, the latter of whom had increasingly settled (with their families) in the colony. Partly, however, these new ideas were related to the increasing concerns in the Netherlands on the standard of living of the indigenous population. Indonesian women would play an important role in the civilization offensive this new attitude entailed.⁵⁹

Just like a century earlier, the industriousness of the Javanese population was of importance, but the newest insight on this issue was that the loose family ties on Java supposedly led to a lack of diligence and entrepreneurship, thus hampering the region's economic development. To strengthen these ties and guarantee a more stable family life, the wife needed to function as the centre of the household, and it was recommended that she would step out of the public domain.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Christian missionaries tried to impose 'western' family norms on the households they converted. Their attention was in the first place directed towards combatting polygamy, and to trying to convince Indonesian women that their most important role was being a housewife and mother, whose first and foremost obligation lay in household activities.⁶¹

However, ideal and practices were far apart. For one thing, there continued to exist large differences between various social groups. The two lowest – and largest – groups in society were the poor and 'common' *desa-vrouwen* (village women). From an early age, they helped their parents in the fields, or watched over their younger siblings. After marriage, they usually continued to work hard on the land or in their own small business, "since only few women are being sufficiently sustained by their husbands".⁶² Subsequently, there were the *santri* women, muslim women

⁵⁵ Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 462.

⁵⁶ Kuyper, "Ons Program", 369-370.

⁵⁷ E.g. ventilated by Ph. Levert in 1934, *Inheemsche arbeid in de Java-suikerindustrie* (Wageningen 1934) 247.

⁵⁸ *Onderzoek naar de mindere welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking, IXb3, Verheffing van de Inlandsche vrouw* (Batavia 1914) 1.

⁵⁹ One volume of the extensive research report (consisting of 12 volumes, but with its sub-volumes totalling 36 volumes), was entitled *The Elevation of the Indigenous Woman (Verheffing van de Inlandsche vrouw)*.

⁶⁰ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Door een gekleurde bril... Koloniale bronnen over vrouwenarbeid op Java in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw', *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 7 (1986) 41-44.

⁶¹ Sita van Bemmelen, 'Een adatrechtstudie in historisch perspectief. J.C. Vergouwen over Toba-Batakse vrouwen', *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* (1986) 71-72.

⁶² *Verheffing van de Inlandsche vrouw*, 3.

generally from the middle classes, who received some form of religious education, and usually became obedient and thrifty housewives. Finally, there were the *prijaji* (elite) women, often highly educated and rich, who usually outsourced their domestic tasks and were considered as lazy and extravagant by Dutch observers.⁶³

These are of course all stereotypes, but my point is that the rhetoric with regard to Indonesian women still revolved around their industriousness (or lack thereof). As opposed to the *communis opinio* on Dutch women, the idea that Indonesian women should not be performing work outdoors at all, was uncommon. Unlike in the metropolis, satisfactory protective labour legislation for indigenous women and children did not yet come into being in the colony, as I will now go to show.

Further legislation and the ‘male breadwinner society’ (1901-1940)

Not only in the Netherlands Indies, but also in the Netherlands, ideology and practice not always neatly coincided. The above-mentioned Child Law (1874), for instance, only covered industrial labour by children until the age of 11, and the agricultural and service sectors were long exempted from regulation. The 1889 Labour Law too made exceptions, for instance for Sunday labour for women in dairy processing. Also, after the administration Kuyper had implemented the first law for compulsory schooling for children to 12 years old, still many children stayed at home, for instance to help on the family farm, especially in seasons when their labour was dearly needed.⁶⁴ In the early 1920s, just after the minimum age for child labour had been raised to 14 years, many parents complained with the Labour Inspection that this law obliged their children to stay at home idly for two years: after all, they no longer had to go to school, but were not yet allowed to work.⁶⁵ The archives of the Labour Inspection show that, despite society’s changing norms, child labour was still very much present.⁶⁶ As late as 1928, for example, Director-General of Labour, C. Zaalberg, complained: “in industrial centres one sees the questionable phenomenon, that the housefathers cannot find work and live off the earnings of their daughter”.⁶⁷

Likewise, the labour of married women had not completely disappeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the official censuses show a clear decline in the participation of women in the Dutch labour market, particularly in the registered gainful employment by married women, part of this decline must be ascribed to under-registration of wives who worked in the family business or in domestic industry.⁶⁸ In the 1910s, a study and exhibition entailed a great deal of attention for the circumstances in the Dutch home industry, in which many women and children worked part of their time. It is hard to estimate their numbers, as the contemporary Director-General

⁶³ *Ibidem*, 3-5.

⁶⁴ There were nevertheless large regional differences, resulting from the different agricultural systems (e.g. capital vs. labour intensive). See: Willemien Schenkeveld, ‘Het werk van kinderen in de Nederlandse landbouw (1800-1913)’, *TSEG* 5:2 (2008) 28-54.

⁶⁵ NA, Arbeidsinspectie, inv. no. 1746, diverse petitions.

⁶⁶ As is also claimed by Smit, *Fabriekskinderen*, 484.

⁶⁷ NA, Arbeidsinspectie, inv. no. 267, letter from C. Zaalberg to Jac. van Ginneken, 1-8-1928.

⁶⁸ Ariadne Schmidt and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, ‘Reconsidering the “first male-breadwinner economy”’: Women’s labor force participation in the Netherlands, 1600–1900’, *Feminist Economics* 18:4 (2012), 80, 82.

of Labour, H.A. van Ysselsteyn, already complained of the shortcomings in the study.⁶⁹ We do know for certain, however, that many women performed paid work at home, such as rolling cigarettes, wrapping candy and canning vegetables. Interestingly, these women also produced for the colonies. They made bullions sold in the Netherlands Indies, but sometimes also fabricated military accessories, such as badges and ‘embroiding grenades’.⁷⁰

Still, the male breadwinner model had already gained solid ground in the Netherlands around the turn of the twentieth century. The officially recorded crude participation of women older than 16, for instance, had declined from 24% in 1849, to 17% in 1899, very low compared to other Western European countries at the time.⁷¹ Because under-registration was a reality in other countries as well, we can safely say that women’s participation was comparatively low the Netherlands around 1900.⁷² Moreover, the percentage of *married* women with a recorded occupation in the census was only slightly over 4%, which is low in any way you look at it.⁷³

Also, the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed further legislation trying to reduce the participation of children in the labour market and, perhaps more importantly, keeping them in school longer (see Table 1).

Table 1 – legislation concerning child labour and schooling, 1901-1921

<i>Year</i>	<i>Type of law</i>	<i>Most important coverage</i>
1901	Compulsory Schooling	6 years of compulsory primary education for children under 13
1911	Labour Law	Minimum age raised to 13; protective measures children under 17
1919	Labour Law	Minimum age raised to 14; protective measures children under 18
1921	Compulsory Schooling	7 years of compulsory primary education

Based on: Smit, *Fabriekskinderen*, 11.

Further labour legislation in the Netherlands in this period again concerned women’s work. In 1937 the conservative Catholic Secretary of State, Carl Romme, even proposed legislation to prohibit all work by married women. Eventually, this law did not make it through parliament for all working women, but only for female public servants. The documents of the preparatory committee provide interesting information on the discussions between conservative, confessional, liberal and socialist members, most of whom did not so much disagree on the ‘true calling’ of the married woman, but more specifically disagreed on the question whether the State ought to prescribe this ideal, or had to leave this up to households’ ‘free choice’.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ NA, Arbeidsinspectie, inv. no. 331, Letter by H.A. van Ysselsteyn to prof. N.W. Posthumus, 28-12-1912.

⁷⁰ NA, Arbeidsinspectie, Inv. no. 334, Documents concerning the labour circumstances in the home industry in general.

⁷¹ Schmidt and Van Nederveen Meerkerk, ‘Reconsidering’, 81.

⁷² Hettie Pott-Buter, Facts and fairy tales about female labor, family and fertility: a seven-country comparison, 1850-1990 (Amsterdam 1993) 31.

⁷³ Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (hereafter: CBS), *Uitkomsten der achtsten algemeene tienjaarlijksen Volkstelling gehouden op den 31sten december 1899* (1902) 186.

⁷⁴ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. no. 271.

In the Netherlands Indies, developments were very different. As already stated above, the work of married women was perhaps frowned upon, but it was never intended to be eradicated totally. The lobby of important businessmen, making widespread use of ‘cheap and obedient’ labourers - for instance in the tea plantations or the tobacco industry, was simply too powerful. A similarly ambivalent attitude towards the work of Indonesian children was prevalent. As we have seen, work by children, especially under the age of 12, had been a matter of growing concern and intensive debate in the Netherlands in the second half of the nineteenth century, with legislation since 1874. In contrast, a total disregard of the issue prevailed in the Netherlands Indies. This moreover becomes clear if we look at school enrolment rates. By 1900, 95% of all Dutch children younger than 12 attended school, whereas at the same time only 0.5 percent of all Indonesian children received schooling.⁷⁵ Interestingly, while the minimum age for child labour in the Netherlands had been raised to 14 in 1919 (see Table 1), it was set at 12 for Indonesian children in 1926.

Only from the 1920s onwards, the issue of female and child labour in the colony was increasingly debated in Dutch Parliament. This followed the severe criticism by the international community on the Dutch reluctance to implement legislation against female night labour and child work in the Netherlands-Indies. In 1926, the Netherlands was even summoned by the International Labour Office (ILO) to introduce labour legislation in the colonies. Indeed, the census of Java and Madura taken in 1930 lists almost 30% of all married women with a *registered* occupation, predominantly in agriculture and industry. Compared to the low official statistics we have seen for the Netherlands (still only 6% of all married women had a recorded occupation in 1930), this percentage was very high.⁷⁶ To give an impression of the type of work Indonesian women and girls performed, I have listed the five most frequently mentioned occupations in the 1930 Census both for married and unmarried women. Not surprisingly in the agrarian society that Java still was at the time, most women worked in (small-scale) agriculture. However, compared to Indonesian men, a much larger share of the women with an occupational record worked in the industry and service sectors, most notably in food and textile production and retailing. For unmarried women, domestic service was quite a common job (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Five most frequently recorded occupations for married and unmarried women in Java and Madura, 1930

Rank	Branch	No. of married women	Share of total	Rank	Branch	No. of unmarried women	Share of total
1	Small-scale farming	934,297	35.4%	1	Small-scale farming	886,538	42.0%
2	Textile production	325,549	12.3%	2	Trade in foodstuffs	139,053	6.6%
3	Trade in foodstuffs	315,859	12.0%	3	Domestic service	132,081	6.3%
4	Foodstuff production	199,349	7.6%	4	Textile production	130,326	6.2%
5	Woodwork production	159,889	6.1%	5	Foodstuff production	94,631	4.5%

Source: CBS, *Volkstelling 1930, Vol. III, 94-95.*

⁷⁵ White, ‘Childhood, Work and Education’, 105-109.

⁷⁶ Own calculations based on: CBS, *Volkstelling 1930, Vol. III (1934) 94-95.*

Proponents of Indonesian women's and children's work stated that indigenous culture and traditions made women's (hard) labour customary, and that children were better off working than being idle.⁷⁷ These opinions were first and foremost voiced by western entrepreneurs and liberal politicians who viewed Indonesian women and children as a source of cheap labour and opposed state intervention. But not only businesspeople stressed the inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women. In 1925, publicist Henri van der Mandere stated:

“It is self-evident that women in western society are excluded from hazardous and tough labour [...]. Women's position in Indonesian society is incomparable to that of the Dutch woman. Whereas manual labour is an exception in the Netherlands, it is the rule here; there are even regions where it follows from *adat*, that almost all work is done by women.”⁷⁸

This citation indicates that it was not only considered 'natural' that Indonesian women worked; the inherent differences between Indonesian and Dutch women also made it self-evident that the latter instead needed protection. This is a fine example of what Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have called 'the grammar of difference'.⁷⁹

Conclusion

In the introduction to this paper, I argued that analysing 'entangled histories' may help us better understand both the colonial and the metropolitan past. I would like to conclude this paper by pointing out how this approach adds to our knowledge on the long-run perspective of social policies in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies, especially with regard to the work of women and children.

During the nineteenth century, the Dutch State increasingly intervened in social affairs, both in metropolis and colony. With this paper, I hope to have shown that the *pace* and *timing* with which this change towards further interventionism occurred, was quite similar in both parts of the empire, but that the *scope* and *effects* of intervention differed tremendously. The explanatory framework I have used for this 'simultaneousness of the non-simultaneous' is the different ideological attitudes towards the working classes in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies, which seem to have further diverged in the course of the nineteenth century. In the early nineteenth century, combatting idleness and stimulating the poor to work, had still been on the agenda in the metropolis as well as in the colony. In fact, it may be stated that Dutch elites tended to view the working poor in the Netherlands as 'a foreign country' almost as much as they did the Javanese commoners. Thus, initiatives were taken in 1818 and 1830 respectively to reform the population's labour ethic, not coincidentally by one and the same man, Johannes van den Bosch, and supported by King William I.

Apart from their initiator, there were several other striking parallels between the peat colonies of the Society of Benevolence and the Cultivation System. Both were state-supported,

⁷⁷ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Female labour in twentieth century Java. European notions – Indonesian practice', in: E. Locher-Scholten and A. Niehof (eds.), *Indonesian women in focus: past and present notions* (Dordrecht [etc.] 1987) 77-103; White, 'Childhood, Work and Education', 110-111.

⁷⁸ H.Ch.G.J., Van der Mandere, 'Internationale wetgeving en Indië', *De Indische Gids* (1925): 1, 25. Thanks to Nynke Dorhout for providing me with this quote.

⁷⁹ Stoler and Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony', 3.

focussing on raising market production in the agricultural sector. In both projects, the objective was to educate 'lazy' paupers into thrifty workers and a high degree of social engineering and even force was at times not eschewed. Also, in both cases it was expected that women and children would contribute to the family economy, although most commonly in the family farm. A big difference between the two initiatives was their scope: although several thousands of Dutch families went to the peat colonies, it remained a peripheral phenomenon, and from the beginning many workers considered it to be a penal colony, which it would eventually entirely turn into. Conversely, the Cultivation System would have tremendous effects on Javanese society and labour relations there, and even, as I have argued here, influenced economic development and labour relations in the Netherlands.

Important effects on the Javanese economy were rapid monetization, and an increased workload by men, women and children, in subsistence agriculture but also on the plantations and in marketed economic activities. Indigenous textile production for home consumption, traditionally women's and children's work, declined due to the imports of Dutch textiles by the *NHM*, which Javanese households increasingly bought in the market. This in turn stimulated industrialization in the Netherlands, especially in traditional proto-industrial areas, where the factories in first instance looked for cheap labourers such as young children and women. Moreover, between 1840 and 1870 enormous amount of capital flowed from the trade in Javanese cash crops to the Dutch treasury. While perhaps not immediately affecting the welfare of all members of the Dutch working class, these economic gains contributed to a rise in male wages, eventually allowing for the financial backup of realization of the breadwinner-homemaker ideal for an increasing amount of households in the Netherlands.

In the same period, industrialization and the growing importance of wage labour, as well as the 'pillarization' in which class differences were partly overruled by ideological differences, led to a different take on the position of work and labourers in the metropolis. Although the 'Social Question' was in the first place born out of concern for labour unrest, a growing number of contemporaries was genuinely worried about the wellbeing of the lower classes. This apprehension was further induced by the rise of confessional parties from the 1870 onwards, who did not oppose a mild form of State regulation and even legislation. To be sure, the 1874 Child Law was drawn up by a liberal, but already at the time did not go far enough for some Protestants such as Kuyper.

While civilizing the working classes was not a confessional prerogative, but an objective shared by liberal and socialist elites, the Christian parties gave it their own twist. Gender played an increasingly important role in the debate after the work of (very) young children had been resolved by the 1874 law. The moral concerns over men and women working together in factories, and particularly the central role of the clean and thrifty housewife within the labouring household, were central issues in the discussions. Christian values also played a role in the development of the Ethical Policy in the Netherlands Indies, symbolizing the moral responsibility towards the underdeveloped population of the archipelago. However, as it turned out, the Ethical Policy was first and foremost concerned with the Christian mission and with definitively making the Javanese population subjects of the Dutch State. Although according to the ethical rhetoric, Indonesian women were crucial in modelling indigenous family life according to 'modern' western values, in practice women's and children's labour – especially for the lower classes and farmers – was not explicitly opposed, or even protected.

Contrary to the Dutch working classes, Javanese households thus remained 'a foreign country' to the elites in the Netherlands. While labour protection as well as education became increasingly available to Dutch women and children in the beginning of the twentieth century, these provisions were held off for their Indonesian counterparts. Conveniently, within the context of the decline of coerced labour on Java, women and children formed a source of cheap labour entrepreneurs in the Netherlands Indies wished to employ. Until well into the 1920s, politicians and contemporary observers utilized a rhetoric of innate culture and traditions, not only to legitimize the absence of social legislation in the colony, but also to stress that these inherent differences justified the fact that Dutch women and children indeed were protected by law. Indeed, a 'grammar of difference' moulded the State's intervention, in colony as well as metropolis.