

Entangled histories

Unravelling the impact of colonial connections of both Javanese and Dutch women's work and household labour relations, c. 1830-1940

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Abstract

In this article I investigate changing household labour relations and women's work in the Dutch empire. I question how colonial connections affected the division of work between men, women, and children, not only in the colony – the Dutch East Indies (i.c. Java), but also in the metropolis – the Netherlands. Entanglements can be found in the influences of colonial economic policies on both colony and metropolis, as well as in the more indirect effects of colonial exploitation and taxation, and, finally in the sphere of sociopolitics and ideologies. I will analyse the entanglements between the Netherlands and Java in these domains, comparing similarities and differences, but also paying attention to the connections and transfers between both parts of the Dutch empire. Although some of the conditions and developments were highly specific to the Dutch empire, I aim to show that the method of comparing and establishing direct and indirect connections between different parts of an empire can lead to new insights that can also be applied to other parts of the world and different time periods.

Keywords: women's work, colonial history, entanglements, Dutch empire

Introduction: Entanglements in colonial history

'Colonial' and 'postcolonial' are much-debated terms. While colonies ('settlements in one territory by a political power from another territory') have been established by ancient African, Greek, Roman, and Chinese empires, most academic literature on colonialism concerns the spread of the Wes-

tern European sphere of influence across the world since the sixteenth century. Rather than being a neutral demarcation of a particular stage in history, 'colonialism' refers to unequal power relations, often underpinned by discourses on racial/ethnic differences. Consequently, the 'post' colonial does not objectively denote the period since decolonisation, as colonial power relations have often lingered on (McClintock, 1995, pp. 9-16).

In the late 1970s, criticism of the way both Europeans and Indians had been writing colonial history arose. Several scholars, united in the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG), aimed to retrieve the voices of subaltern indigenous people and their obscured role in politics and social movements (Guha, 1988, p. 40). From these initiatives, 'postcolonial studies' emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, forming a heterogeneous group of scholars critically analysing the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism by taking a multidisciplinary approach inspired by postmodernism and poststructuralism (Hasseler & Krebs, 2003, p. 91). This scholarship rejects the teleological notion that developments in Western Europe and North America form blueprints for other societies and cultures on their 'road to modernity'. Moreover, it has shown that colonial experiences varied widely, that the 'colonial project' was ridden with contradictions and conflicts, and that binary thinking in terms such as coloniser/colonised, Western/non-Western, and domination/resistance hardly furthers our understanding of the complex workings of power underpinning colonial relations (Cooper, 2003, p. 24). Apart from race and ethnicity, categories such as class, religion, and gender shaped colonial power relations.

The attention towards subaltern groups inevitably led to the study of colonised women. Pioneers in this field were anthropologists who in the late 1970s and early 1980s recorded the 'life histories' of women in the former colonies, including their experiences with imperialism (Robinson & Chaudhuri, 2003, p. 6, p. 13, note 2). Since then, many 'bottom up' case studies have appeared,¹ focusing on the histories of those standing in 'the shadows of the shadows' (Spivak, 1985, p. 265) – indigenous women – who, being 'natives' and women, rarely surface in the colonial archives. Consequently, postcolonial gender historians, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, such as Phillipa Levine, Catherine Hall, Ann Stoler, and Anne McClintock, have over the past 25 years made a case for how gender has been constitutive for the imperial project, both regarding direct colonial encounters and in terms of expected male and female roles (Wilson, 2004, p. 23).

In the late 1990s, some postcolonial historians shifted to the analysis of mutual influences of the imperial project on both colony and metropolis

(e.g. Stoler & Cooper, 1997b; Conrad & Randeria, 2002; Burton, 2003). These scholars argue that we can only understand the histories of both 'the West' and 'the Rest' by studying them interrelationally, through the approach of *histoire croisée*, or *entangled histories*. As Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have put it, 'Europe was made from its colonial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts in Europe itself' (Stoler & Cooper, 1997b, p. 1). This not only allows one to more clearly distinguish the effects of colonialism on both colony and metropolis, but it also offers an analytical tool to establish how cross-cultural encounters had *long-lasting impacts*, or in the words of Tony Ballantyne: 'the metaphor of entanglement draws attention to the durable consequences that flowed from the integrative work of expansive imperial regimes' (Ballantyne, 2014, p. 17).

Until the present, such analyses of 'entangled' or 'connected' histories have focused very much on cultural and political exchanges (e.g. Stoler & Cooper, 1997a; Hall & Rose, 2006). Even if economic relations formed a factor in the background, socioeconomic developments themselves, let alone labour relations, have been studied much less from this perspective (Ballantyne, 2010; Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2013; 2015). This is also true for the Dutch empire, in which the cross-semination of metropolitan and colonial history has only recently and quite slowly begun to emerge (Raben, 2013, p. 29). Most of this work either investigates the sociopolitical concerns of the Dutch with the welfare of the colonised population, feminism (e.g. Janse, 2013; Waaldijk & Grever, 2004), or the influences colonialism had on the formation of Dutch metropolitan identity, nationality, or material culture (e.g. Bossenbroek, 1996; Bloembergen, 2006; Legêne, 2010). Excellent studies on the influence of colonialism on Javanese women's work notwithstanding (e.g. Boomgaard, 1981; Locher-Scholten, 1986; 2000), the *entanglements* between colonialism and women's work in both parts of the Dutch empire have still hardly been investigated. This constitutes a fundamental lacuna, as labour relations, and in particular women's position in the household and in the labour market, signify not only economic, but also important social, cultural, and at times political developments.

In this article I investigate the changes in household labour relations and women's work on Java and the Netherlands. My focus will be on the entanglements between colony and metropolis in colonial economic policies, colonial exploitation and taxation, and in the sphere of sociopolitics and ideologies. I will analyse the entanglements between the Netherlands and Java in these domains, comparing similarities and differences, but also paying attention to the connections and transfers between both parts of the empire. The majority of both the Dutch and the Javanese people did

not directly interact. Only a small minority of the Dutch population migrated to the colony – and even fewer Javanese ever set foot in the Netherlands. Moreover, on Java, the Dutch followed the strategy of *indirect rule* via indigenous village heads and officials, and most indigenous Javanese were not subject to European law, but *adat* (customary law and institutions) was maintained for them. Nevertheless, the fact that both the Dutch and the Javanese lived in an empire affected their daily lives in multiple ways, even if they were usually only slightly aware of it.

Race, gender, class, and religion all formed important constitutive elements in such entanglements. I will explore how these categories intersected and how their utilisation led to very different outcomes in colony and metropolis, using a variety of sources. Firstly, I combine some of the excellent secondary literature that has in recent years appeared on women's and children's work in the Netherlands and Java, which other historians have not yet analysed in the same framework. Secondly, I combine qualitative and quantitative primary sources, both published and archival material, such as contemporary anthropological studies, censuses, household budgets, colonial reports, and labour inspection archives, collected in the Netherlands and in Indonesia.² Admittedly, these sources were predominantly written down and collected by white, middle- to upper-class men. Rereading this archival material with sensitivity to the role of people of other sexes, classes, and races nevertheless uncovers the strikingly different labour practices and policies in both parts of the empire regarding household divisions of labour, tax burdens, living standards, and social and labour legislation.

Before turning to such examples of entanglements, I will first briefly sketch the context of my case study: colonial socioeconomic relations between the Netherlands and Java. Java was the most populous island of the Dutch East Indies, with the most intensive colonial encounters with the Dutch, at first centring around the city of Batavia. About 80% of all white colonists in the Dutch East Indies settled on Java (Locher-Scholten, 2000, pp. 122-123). Because of this more intensive history of colonial encounters and the greater abundance of historical source material, this paper will mainly focus on Java. Arguably, the economic and sociopolitical links between the Netherlands and Java were strongest in terms of exploitation, trade contacts, and socioeconomic policies. This makes it an interesting and relevant case for drawing comparisons and connections. Although some of the conditions and developments were highly specific to the Dutch empire, I aim to convince readers that the *method* of comparing and establishing direct and indirect connections between different

parts of an empire can lead to new insights that can also be applied to other parts of the world and different time periods.

Case study: The Netherlands and Java in the colonial period (c. 1830-1940)

Around 1600, merchants of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) increasingly frequented the Indonesian archipelago for its richness of spices and tropical goods. The Javanese town of Jacatra (later named 'Batavia' by the Dutch, present-day Jakarta) became a provisioning post for ships. In 1618, it was brought under Dutch authority, becoming one of the most important strategic VOC outposts. Whereas only a few Dutch people settled there permanently, the majority of temporary or more long-term migrants were male soldiers, merchants, and clerks (Gelman Taylor, 1983, pp. 3-5). The VOC refrained from stimulating the emigration of Dutch women to the East Indies. This policy was continued after the VOC's abolishment in 1799, and until the late nineteenth century, European women were discouraged from migrating to the Dutch East Indies (Clancy-Smith & Gouda, 1998, p. 18). From their early settlement in Jacatra, many white male immigrants engaged in sexual relationships with Asian or part-Asian slave women or wives. The proponents of Eurasian marriages argued that mixed-race children would be much better geared to face the tropical Indian climate than immigrant white children (Gelman Taylor, 1983, pp. 15-16). Such intimate contacts highlighted the 'centrality of women in shaping the contact zones of colonial cultures that became increasingly distinguished by race' (Stoler, 2001, p. 841).

In the early nineteenth century, the Dutch strengthened their political power over the colony – first on Java, and later that century in other parts of the archipelago. Dutch rule aimed to centralise, bureaucratise, and monetise Javanese society, in order to profit as much as possible from Java's superfluous endowments. In the view of the colonisers, the 'lazy' indigenous peasant only working for his subsistence ought to be taught the virtue of industriousness, and to produce export crops for the world market. This attitude towards Javanese farmers culminated in the implementation of the Cultivation System (c. 1830-1870), explored more elaborately in the next section. It's enough to say here that the system involved the intensification of Javanese peasant households' labour input and their contributions to the colonial state, from which the Dutch treasury profited greatly.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, rising concerns were ex-

pressed in the metropolis about colonial extraction and the supposed resulting 'declining welfare' of the Javanese population. Dutch citizens became increasingly aware of the 'debt of honour' the state owed the inhabitants of Java: it should compensate for the losses they had suffered under the colonial burden (Van Deventer, 1899). As discussed below, such concerns mirrored somewhat earlier concerns about enhancing the fate of the working classes in the industrialising Netherlands. In the spirit of the age, the Dutch implemented the so-called 'Ethical Policy' in the Dutch East Indies in 1901. Gender formed an important marker in these 'social questions', both in metropolis and colony. The role of the woman in the household and, related to this, her position in the labour market, were considered crucial for the 'civilisation' of the urban and rural working classes in both parts of the empire. Nevertheless, theory and practice worked out rather differently for Dutch and Javanese women, because ethnic and cultural differences were implicitly, and sometimes quite explicitly, constructed. Whereas in the Netherlands, (married) women's labour became increasingly rare, due to the higher living standards and the rise of the male breadwinner ideology, the effects were quite dissimilar for Javanese women, who were on the one hand confronted with the same bourgeois ideals, but on the other hand, in practice as well as in (racist) theory, remained deeply involved in harsh labour.

Even if indigenous Javanese society consisted of many different ethnic groups, the Dutch colonial authorities piled them all together as one legal category of indigenous (*inlandsche*) population, forming the largest and 'lowest' group in Javanese society. Apart from the small settler 'European' and the 'Indo-European' (*mestizo*) population groups, there were also the 'foreign Orientals', consisting of minorities of Chinese and Arab background. The Governmental Regulation (*Regeringsreglement*) of 1854 stipulated that Europeans were largely subject to European law, whereas for the indigenous population *adat* applied (Fasseur, 1992, pp. 237-238). Interestingly, this legal pluralism for different population groups served to increasingly separate according to race. Whereas before the 1850s, indigenous people who converted to Christianity were accepted as Europeans, this changed when *adat* (now conveniently separated from religion) became customary law for most non-white people (James & Schrauwers, 2003, p. 63). Although exceptions were made for children born out of mixed European-Asian marriages, concerns about their 'Europeanness' also became increasingly raised towards the end of the nineteenth century (Stoler, 1992, p. 517).

Within this crude racial categorisation, social position (or class) and religion formed important markers underpinning colonial policies and

practices. In the Netherlands, a middle class had been prominently present since the seventeenth century, and it was growing from the last decades of the nineteenth century onwards. On Java, the vast majority of the population were relatively poor peasants, *tani*, whose children and wives worked from a young age in the household and in the fields. Around 1900 an investigation into the welfare of the Javanese population concluded that *tani* women worked particularly hard, 'as there are only few women who are sufficiently supported by her husband'.³ There was only a small middle class, consisting of skilled craftsmen, and lower clerks and officials for the colonial regime. Many of the urban skilled craftsmen were orthodox (*santri*) Muslims, whose wives had obtained some religious education and generally became 'obedient and frugal housewives'. Then, there was a small but rich elite, the *priyayi*, often of royal descent, who governed the villages, levied taxes and labour services, and obtained the highest offices in the colonial administration, such as regency or district head (*regent* or *wedono*). *Priyayi* women were often highly educated and rich, they usually outsourced their domestic work, and were regarded by Dutch observers as lazy and extravagant.⁴ Obviously, class differences were heavily subject to Dutch stereotyping, which affected the attitudes and policies towards them, as we will see below.

With regard to religion, most Javanese men and women adhered to the Islamic faith that had widely varying practices and devotion throughout the island, and had adopted various Buddhist and Hindu influences over the past centuries (James & Schrauwers, 2003, p. 58). Moreover, some indigenous people and many Indo-Europeans were Christians. However, as stated above, at the end of the nineteenth century Christianity no longer granted automatic acceptance as 'European', and in that sense race became a more important organising principle than religion. Interestingly, however, religion at the same time formed a discriminatory category, and the Dutch authorities had no eye for the variety of strands, excluding Muslims from judicial, economic, and social benefits, and, most importantly, they were forbidden to form political organisations. Simultaneously, the Dutch did allow religious organisation in the sphere of education, welfare, and economic associations, granting indigenous people considerable leeway in shaping civil society (James & Schrauwers, 2003, pp. 60-62). I will now show how the intersections of gender, race, class, and religion constituted similarities as well as divergence in socioeconomic policies in colony and metropolis.

Colonial economic policies and changing household labour relations in metropolis and colony

Traditionally, Southeast Asian women played a large role in subsistence food production of rice and other crops, such as millet and yams. However, most crops that were sold in the market, such as peanuts and sugar, were the domain of male agricultural labourers (Watson Andaya, 1998, p. 168). Although the role of women in subsistence agriculture is not unique, there was a specific Southeast Asian division of labour between men and women that also applied to much of Java. Rice-growing on dry (*tegal*) lands and garden agriculture were the prerogative of women, whereas both men and women performed wetland (*sawah*) rice cultivation (Stoler, 1977, p. 77).

In 1830, the colonial authorities introduced the Cultivation System (CS) on Java, demanding Javanese peasants to cultivate on average 20% of their land with export crops such as coffee, tea, and sugar for the Dutch market. In return, these households received monetary compensation (*plantloon*), which was often only sufficient to pay for land rent or other colonial taxes. The CS 'required fundamental reorganization of the household's division of labour' (White, 2011, p. 485). It put greater demands on indigenous men's labour, which increasingly caused them to move out of subsistence agriculture, leaving most of this to women and children (Elson, 1994, pp. 205-206). Indeed, around 1900, depending on the region, women performed between 50 and 80% of all rice cultivation on Java (Locher-Scholten, 2000, p. 56). Moreover, women too became involved in cash crop production, even if this was against the intentions of the colonial authorities.⁵ For instance, women and children from villages exempted from CS duties were hired for day wages as tea leaf pickers in neighbouring villages.⁶ Thus, the CS crucially altered existing Javanese labour relations, both in terms of household organisation of labour and monetisation.

The tropical products of the CS were traded and shipped by the Dutch Trading Company (*Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*; *NHM*), which obtained trading preferences for Dutch goods and the exclusive rights to handle all government trade with the colonies (Van Zanden & Van Riel, 2004, p. 112). Apart from exporting tropical commodities from Java, the *NHM* shipped a major share of the imports to the island, particularly textile goods. Foreign textile imports into Java were heavily taxed until equalisation in 1874. In combination with the secret state subsidies to Dutch factories, colonial and metropolitan economic policies coincided to stimulate Dutch textile production and develop a modern industry (Van Zanden & Van Riel, 2004, pp. 114-119; Van der Eng, 2013, p. 1026). The mechanisation of

spinning and weaving in the metropolis occurred slowly but surely: whereas in 1857 Twente only counted six mechanised spinning mills and three weaving mills, in the early 1870s there were countless factories in the region (Plemp van Duiveland, 1957, pp. 19, 26). These factories increasingly employed women and children as cheap wage labourers, to be competitive in national and international markets. While building on a tradition of female and child employment in the cottage industry, labour relations in metropolitan households nevertheless drastically changed, as the spheres of the home and the workplace were increasingly separated (Brouwer & Van Eijndhoven, 1981, pp. 83-84).



Picture 1 Industrialisation in the Netherlands increasingly drew young women working to textile factories, circa 1880

Source: Collection IISH, Amsterdam

Mechanisation not only led to changes in the physical workplace, but also in the gendered division of labour. Hand-spinning had traditionally been mainly performed by women and children, but the spinning mills mainly employed adult men, generally assisted by boys. Women and girls were amply employed in the new factories, for tasks such as burling, darning, and roving (Van Nederveen Meerkerk et al., 2010, pp. 379-380). This translated into a rising labour force participation of unmarried women in the major textile centres of the Netherlands. In Enschede, for instance, after a steep decline in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the percentage

of women stating an occupation at marriage had risen since the 1840s, up to levels of 75% towards the end of the century (Boter, 2014, p. 10). Married women, on the other hand, who had been very important in the proto-industrial textile industry, were not particularly welcome in the factories, although norms differed regionally (Janssens, 2009). Of course, many of these changes may have occurred if there had been no links with the colony, but surely with more modest scope and later.

In turn, Dutch industrialisation affected Javanese textile production. Many historians have contended that Dutch imports out-competed hand-spinning and -weaving on Java (e.g. Boomgaard, 1981, pp. 16-17; Lindblad, 1994, pp. 89-104; Van Zanden & Marks, 2012, pp. 92-93). Closer scrutiny, however, shows that this image needs to be refined. A combination of quantitative and qualitative source material shows that while hand-spinning swiftly declined over the nineteenth century, imported factory yarns were both very suitable for hand-weaving, and less time-consuming for women, who could re-allocate their labour to operating the handloom.⁷ Local demand for indigenous textile products such as sarongs and headscarves continued to stimulate hand-weaving as a side activity for women until the 1920s, both for households' own consumption and for the market. Elsewhere, I have estimated that millions of Javanese women still operated the handloom in their homes in 1930. (Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2017).

Apart from yarns, about 50% of all European imports were semi-finished bleached cloth. The factory-printed European calicoes faced severe competition from new indigenous printing techniques (*batik cap*) from the 1860s onwards. Javanese prints were of much higher quality than the European ones, and any native who could afford it preferred locally made printed cloth.⁸ Remarkably, this response to the Dutch imports, like in the case of agriculture, again involved a shift in traditional gender relations: for the first time, indigenous men became increasingly involved in the colouring of textiles, which had traditionally been an elite women's craft (*batik*) (Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2017). In turn, these handicraft products were not only consumed by the Javanese people, but also became increasingly popular among Dutch settlers in the colony, and in the Netherlands among repatriates as well as those who had never set foot in the colony. (Legêne, 2010, pp. 132-133).

Thus, colonial economic policies affected not only production and gendered labour relations, but also reinforced new consumption patterns in both parts of the empire. In the colony, monetisation, combined with imports of Dutch textiles, led to shifting patterns of both foreign *and* indigenous cloth consumption (*batik cap*). And in the metropolis, even many

of those who had never been to the Dutch East Indies themselves developed a taste for the exotic goods that were imported relatively cheaply into the Netherlands. The next section will explore to what extent the standard of living of households in the colony and the metropolis allowed for such consumptive shifts.



Picture 2 The craft of batik remained important in Java despite Dutch textile imports, circa 1910

Source: Jasper and Pirngadie, *De batikunst*, p. 59

Forced labour, taxation, male real wages, and households' living standards

Dutch colonial extraction was probably more stringent than that of other imperial powers in terms of shares of GDP and total tax income (Maddison, 1990, pp. 361, 367). For a large part, this related to the above-described Cultivation System (c. 1830-1870), which led to large profits for the government. Additionally, other taxes, such as land rent, local taxes, and community services weighed heavily on the shoulders of Javanese peasants (Thee, 2014, pp. 45-46). In the 1850s, the gains from the Dutch East Indies flowing directly to the Dutch treasury accounted for more than 50% of total tax income in the Netherlands (Van Zanden & Van Riel, 2004, p. 180).

Additionally, after the CS was gradually abandoned in the 1870s, tax income from the Dutch East Indies still constituted millions of Dutch guilders per year (De Jong, 1989, p. 133). Moreover, the liberalisation of the colonial economy increased the number of private companies relying on cheap indigenous labourers, which skimmed profits to the metropolis without reinvesting much in the indigenous population's wellbeing (Booth, 2012). The consequent economic development did not trickle down to raise the living standards of most indigenous families. First of all, taxes remained high; secondly, tens of thousands of indentured Javanese labourers were put to work on the plantations in the 'Outer Islands' in

return for meagre rewards; and thirdly, the profits mainly landed in the pockets of Europeans and 'foreign Asiatic' (predominantly Chinese) entrepreneurs (Thee, 2014, pp. 51-52).

Around 1900, women only constituted 10-12% of these migrant plantation workers, but in the late colonial period they were increasingly hired as contract wage labourers.⁹ Plantation owners preferred women as a cheap, docile, and dexterous labour force. Moreover, they were brought to the islands outside Java to serve as sexual and/or marriage partners for the Javanese men working on the estates. In the early twentieth century, the permanent workforce on European plantations for a considerable part consisted of women: 25% on sugar plantations and around 45% on other European estates (Locher-Scholten, 2000, p. 51). Interestingly, indentured labouring women proved to have some agency vis-à-vis the plantation owners, as they usually did not prolong their contracts after their term was served, in sharp contrast to what their employers desired.¹⁰ Most likely they favoured working the small plot of land they had acquired with their husbands, allowing the household to provide its own food and some extra income, and to take care of possible children.

Little attention has been given to the effects of the 'colonial drain' on living standards in the metropolis, but colonialism impacted on the ways in which households in the Netherlands generated their income and altered their consumption patterns. Precisely in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the colonial contributions from the East Indies to the Dutch treasury peaked, the rise in the level of real (male) wages in the Netherlands was more spectacular than in most other Western European countries (Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2015, p. 32, table 3). Colonial gains were perhaps not the sole cause of rising real wages. However, they constituted between 25 and over 50% of the total Dutch tax revenues in the period between 1830 and 1880, and thus allowed for a substantial reorganisation of Dutch excise taxes. As a fiscal historian, De Jong has contended: 'The East Indian gains enabled the Dutch government to lower the tax pressure on the "common man" without having to impose an equal tax burden on the well-off citizen' (De Jong, 1989, p. 42).

Indeed, the prices of consumer goods declined considerably in the Netherlands during this period. Our own research on labouring households' budgets shows that in rural, but especially in urban areas, living standards rose fast between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s (Van Nederveen Meerkerk & Boter, 2015). Although this was partly related to more general price drops in the world market, the lowering of excises on basic consumables of course favoured the lower classes in society, who,

compared to richer citizens, had to spend a relatively large share of their income on foodstuffs. Moreover, coffee, tea, and sugar – increasingly consumed by the labouring classes in the nineteenth century – could be imported from the colonies for relatively low prices (Vermaas, 1995, pp. 147-149), implying a direct colonial connection with improved real wages in the Netherlands, even if its exact share is hard to establish. Lower consumption prices and the consequently higher male wages contributed to the relatively sharp fall in female labour force participation in the Netherlands, compared to many other Western European countries. Married working class women could at least formally withdraw from the labour market, as in practice, around the year 1900, many were still economically active in informal sectors such as the home industry or the family business (Boter, 2014; Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2015, pp. 37-38). Nevertheless, more and more Dutch households, also from the lower social classes, started to pursue the ideal of the ‘breadwinner-homemaker family’ faster than elsewhere in Europe (De Vries, 2008).

A comparison of early twentieth-century Dutch and Javanese peasant household budgets suggests that around 1900, living standards in the metropolis were on average already much higher than in the colony. While Dutch working class households in cities as well as in the countryside on average spent roughly half of their budgets on food, this percentage was almost 70% for Javanese peasant households in 1900. Moreover, around the turn of the century, both urban and rural labouring households in the metropolis already had a fairly diversified diet with bread, vegetables, meat, and dairy products, whereas the major ingredients of the Javanese diet consisted of grains (rice) and fruits that many peasants cultivated on their plots of land. During the early twentieth century, this gap in income and consumption patterns within the Dutch empire widened considerably. In real terms, urban households especially, but also rural families, enriched significantly in the Netherlands between 1900 and 1935, while on Java during the same period, incomes stagnated and consumption even seems to have sobered. The average Dutch household in the 1930s only spent one-third of its disposable income on foodstuffs, while this share had risen on Java to 77%. Expenditure on items and services such as education, books, and recreation now covered about a quarter of the Dutch budget, whereas such luxuries were still seldom enjoyed by the average Javanese household. Even expenses for clothing, comprising about 10% of the household budget in 1900, had now diminished to a mere 3%.¹¹

The household budgets confirm in more detail the general picture painted by the censuses on married women’s labour participation: that of

a decline of the economic contributions of women to the household in the Netherlands, whereas the contributions of wives in the Javanese household remained vital. Thus, the work of Javanese women, particularly in agriculture, small industries, and petty trade was and remained important until the end of the colonial period. This was reflected in the official percentages of female labour force participation in 1905 and 1930, which amounted to 39.3 and 31.4 respectively. For 1930, we also know that of all married Javanese women, 29.3% were registered in the census with an occupation (*Koloniaal Verslag*, 1907; *Volkstelling*, 1930, pp. 94-95). In contrast, in the Netherlands, the labour force participation was 24% around 1900, and only 10% of all *married* Dutch women were listed with an occupation (Schmidt & Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2012, pp. 77, 87). Whereas this figure for all women had stabilised in 1930, the share of married women in the Dutch labour market had even further declined, to only 6% (Pott-Buter, 1993, p. 190). These divergent patterns reflect differences in practices *and* in ideologies of female labour on Java and in the Netherlands, which resulted in different attitudes towards labour legislation and social policies, as I will now show.

Sociopolitical entanglements: Women's and children's labour and social policies

The social dilemmas following late nineteenth-century industrialisation in the Netherlands gained the attention of contemporary publicists and politicians. Children's and women's labour formed an important aspect of the so-called 'Social Question'. Debates on the social consequences of industrialisation on the one hand resulted from concern for emerging labour unrest and socialism, and on the other hand from genuine discontent with the miserable position of the working poor (Van Zanden & Van Riel, 2004, p. 245). It was increasingly felt that the State had a responsibility to alleviate the worst injustices. Although social legislation was a bridge too far for many liberals, in 1874 the first Dutch labour law was drafted, prohibiting *industrial* work for children younger than twelve years. Women's work – and especially *married* women's work – also appeared on the agenda of the bourgeois civilisation attempts. They aimed to reform working class women into tidy and frugal housewives, to become pillars of a stable family life, preventing disorderly behaviour such as alcoholism by their husbands or vandalism by their children. Being a proper housewife ideally excluded fulltime work outdoors (Smit, 2014, p. 385). In the 1880s,

such private initiatives also gained political weight. Both the women's movement and the emerging liberal, confessional, and social-democratic political parties engaged in the debate. These concerns led to the Labour Law of 1889, containing regulations against 'excessive and hazardous labour by juvenile persons and women'. The law confined the working day for women and children under sixteen to a maximum of eleven hours, and prohibited Sunday and night labour for these groups (Leydesdorff, 1977, p. 33).

The religiously pluriform Netherlands was characterised in this period by a sociopolitical context of 'pillarisation'. Interest groups organised according to ideology (Catholic, orthodox Protestant, or socialist) emerged, establishing associations and organisations in many societal domains. This development transformed the social and political landscape into a 'neocorporatist' society, in which all pillars preferably solved problems (semi)privately within their own group, with minimal public support. In this new order, the social question had a distinctive place. The elites of newly organised confessional groups, (orthodox) Protestants, and Catholics especially adopted the civilising mission instigated by the liberal bourgeoisie, framing it in a religious manner. Symbolically, the 1889 Labour Law restricting women's and children's work was introduced by the first Christian administration of the Netherlands, a coalition of Catholics and orthodox Protestants (Koch, 2006, p. 154). It was exactly the religious pillars' success in organising schooling, poor relief, and unions directed at the working classes that strengthened the confessional parties' wish to extend the electoral franchise, culminating in general suffrage for men (women followed two years later) in 1917 (James & Schrauwers, 2003, p. 57).

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, has been defined as 'patronising citizenship', and may likewise help explain the development of a changing attitude towards the Dutch East Indies in this period (Waaldijk & Legêne, 2009, p. 187). Politicians, social commentators, and civilians became increasingly aware that the excessive financial gains from the Dutch East Indies had negatively affected the financial state of the colony. The devastating consequences for the welfare of the archipelago and its native inhabitants increasingly raised the indignation of several contemporaries (Janse, 2013). In a renowned article, publicist and lawyer C.Th. van Deventer pleaded for the compensation of these millions of guilders of 'debt of honour' (*eereschuld*), and to invest this money in the wellbeing of the indigenous population, for in-

stance by providing basic education and improving infrastructure (Van Deventer, 1899).

It was the second confessional administration of the Netherlands, led by the orthodox Protestant Abraham Kuyper, that implemented the so-called 'Ethical Policy' in the Dutch East Indies. At its inauguration in 1901, the Dutch Queen stated that 'the Netherlands was to fulfil a moral calling towards the population of these provinces' (as cited in Van Randwijck, 1971, p. 55). The government aspired to a form of 'custody' over the Dutch overseas possessions, rather than exploitation or colonialism. This was to be achieved by the moral uplifting of indigenous populations, in the first place by Christianising them (Kuyper, 1907 [1879], pp. 331-332). The Netherlands as a Christian nation had a responsibility towards the indigenous inhabitants of the East Indies, which entailed missionary work, the protection of indentured labourers, and a general investigation into the wellbeing of the Javanese population (Koch, 2006, p. 462). This attitude towards the common indigenous people had striking similarities with earlier attempts at the moral uplifting and protection of the working classes in the metropolis, in ways that resembled practices of custody (Kuyper, 1907 [1879], pp. 369-370).

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 Dutch East Indies and their working activities mirrored those of Dutch housewives, but apart from class, racist stereotypes invigorated paternalism. 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. 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'.¹² In the new Dutch attention for the standard of living of the indigenous population, and the civilisation offensive this new attitude entailed, indigenous women were regarded as important actors.¹³ 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 she should step out of the public domain (Locher-Scholten, 1986, pp. 41-44). Christian missionaries tried to impose 'Western' family norms on the households they converted. Their attention was in the first place directed towards combating polygamy and trying to convince indigenous women that their most important role was being a housewife and mother, whose first and foremost obligation lay in household activities (Van Bemmelen, 1986, pp. 71-

72). The way to achieve this, however, was very much indirect, and through the conversion of higher class 'intermediaries'. Recent research on Catholic missionary schools on Java for instance shows that Dutch nuns taught 'modern' domestic tasks and values to *priyayi* (elite) girls, who in their turn were expected to instruct lower class indigenous women. With such projects, the missionaries paid little attention to the fact that elite women generally did not do household tasks, and that the distance between social groups on Java was large (Derksen, 2016).

As a result, the promotion of Western family values in the Dutch East Indies most prominently affected the role of *priyayi* and Christian women – only small minorities in a society largely consisting of Muslim subsistence farmers. Both economic interests and racial prejudices were too large to also expand the cult of 'domesticity' to the majority of women – non-Christian *desa* (village) women – whose labour in subsistence agriculture, on plantations, and in small industries and trade remained vital for colonial economic relations. Contrary to the *communis opinio* on Dutch women, the idea that Javanese 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.

Despite the rise of a male breadwinner ideology in the Netherlands, married women's and children's work had not completely disappeared in the early twentieth century. Both in cities and the countryside, poverty was still present, and many women from the lower classes did undocumented work in the family business or in domestic industry (Schmidt & Van Nederveen Meerkerk, 2012, pp. 80, 82). In the 1910s, a study and exhibition generated public attention for the circumstances in the Dutch home industry, in which many women and children worked part-time. Although it is hard to estimate their numbers, we do know for certain that many working-class housewives performed paid work at home, such as rolling cigarettes, wrapping candy, and canning vegetables.¹⁴ The fact is, however, firstly, that protective legislation restricting the abuse of Dutch women and child workers was implemented, with labour inspection to monitor such laws, and secondly, that married women – at least formally – withdrew from the labour market to conform to increasingly influential ideologies.

In the Dutch East Indies, developments were completely divergent. Until the 1930s, hardly any legislation was issued to protect indigenous workers, be they men, women, or children.¹⁵ Many sugar and coffee plantations employed not only indigenous men, but also their wives and children. A sample of 400 plantation worker households around 1940 shows

that on average, 70% of their wives also worked independently from their husbands for wages in all kinds of manual agricultural labour, contributing an average of almost 30% of the household income (Van Nederveen Meerkerk & Boter, 2015). Thus, although the advantages of the role of women as a stable factor within the household had been stressed since the introduction of the Ethical Policy, the contributions of married women were still dearly needed, in the context of the low living standards of the majority of the population. From the side of the colonisers, the work of married women outside the household and family farm, for instance as wage labourers on tobacco or rubber plantations, was perhaps frowned upon, but it was never intended to be eradicated totally. The lobby of businessmen and plantation owners, making widespread use of 'cheap and obedient' labourers, was powerful and for a long time formed a convincing argument to refrain from legislation.

Only in the 1920s the issue of restricting female and child labour in the colony became increasingly debated. This followed the severe criticism by the international community – first and foremost the International Labour Office (ILO) – on the Dutch reluctance to implement legislation against female night labour and child work in the colonies. 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 (Locher-Scholten, 2000; White, 2001, pp. 110-111). 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 (*sic*) 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* [indigenous customs and traditions – EvNM], that almost all work is done by women. (Van der Mandere, 1925, p. 25)

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.

Conclusion

This article has shown how colonial connections in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries highly influenced households' labour allocation and consumption patterns not only in a colony, *in casu* Java, but also in the metropolis, in this case the Netherlands. In the nineteenth century, active policies of the Dutch government were based on, and reinforced, highly intertwined economic developments between the metropole and its most profitable colony. This led to dramatic changes in the Javanese economy and household labour relations, because the production of export crops, monetisation, and forced labour altered indigenous households' strategies to allocate their labour power. Furthermore, it contributed to structural economic change in the Netherlands, speeding up industrialisation and shifts in labour relations in the Netherlands. From around 1860, the large gains from Java to the Dutch treasury enabled the government to lower excise taxes, implying a gradual increase in the standard of living for the working classes in the metropolis. Although many married women and children remained active in the labour market, their work became more informal, fitting the emerging male breadwinner ideology of the time. Moreover, Dutch households could expand and diversify their consumption.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, these material changes became underpinned by a dualistic ideology, highly coloured by gender, class, and race. On the one hand, the Christian notion of 'guardianship' motivated action towards the weaker inhabitants of the Dutch empire, both in the context of the metropolitan Social Question and the colonial Ethical Policy. Christian family values were central to these new policies. It was imperative that women, both in the metropolis and in the colony, stayed at home for the wellbeing of their children and husbands. On the other hand, until the late colonial period cultural and racial differences were alluded to in order to justify why, as opposed to the Dutch case a few decades earlier, social legislation was not necessary, and even undesirable, for Indonesian women and children. This distinction between 'the' Indonesian woman and 'the' Dutch woman had strong racial, class, and religious underpinnings. Whereas in much of the nineteenth century the Dutch elites had regarded the lower classes in the Netherlands as 'a foreign country', as Gouda (1995, p. 2) has argued, this started to change around 1900 as they became integrated into the pillarised organisation of society. Social, economic, and, eventually, political citizenship rights for these groups quickly expanded, in the form of labour protection, lowering con-

sumer prices, and eventually the right to vote. The attitude towards the Javanese subjects of the empire, on the other hand, strikingly differed. Attempts to 'civilise' and install 'modern' Western family values upon the indigenous population through missionary schools and the Feminist movement remained largely restricted to *priyayi* women and the minority of converted indigenous Christians.

In sharp contrast to the Netherlands, the Javanese population did *not* gain political citizenship, and Muslim political organisations were forbidden. Ironically, schooling and social welfare by Muslim organisations were allowed, which would ultimately form the hotbeds of indigenous resistance against the Dutch colonial state (James & Schrauwers, 2003, p. 61). Moreover, most Javanese, and even many Indo-European inhabitants, did not fall under European jurisdiction as did white Dutch settlers in the Dutch East Indies. *Adat* (traditions and customs) was uniformly employed to exclude indigenous populations from political, economic, and social citizenship rights. Even in the 1920s, *adat* was used as an argument against labour protection for Javanese women, who were rhetorically put against 'the' Dutch woman, who instead was not used to hard labour and required protection. Historical memory had obviously quickly waned, as only a few decades before, most Dutch working class women performed heavy labour, in factories or in the fields, without much social protection.

Of course not all changes in household labour allocation and living standards can be directly attributed to colonial connections. For sure, the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century had embarked on a path towards industrialised, self-sustained economic growth which also related to changes in the national and global economy. Nevertheless, contemporaries as well as historians have realised that many of these beneficial developments were rooted in the extraction of colonial labour and goods. These colonial connections not only impacted on and changed households' daily experiences in the colony, but also directly or indirectly affected the lives of the working classes in the metropolis, even if they never set foot outside their region.

Colonial entanglements thus work on different levels, in terms of chronology and space, as well as spheres of influence. In much of the nineteenth century, effects could be quite direct and related to specific government policies, such as the Cultivation System or the lowering of excise taxes. Around the turn of the century, however, it was rather social concerns and (gendered) ideologies that on the one hand became highly interwoven, and on the other hand worked out very differently in both parts of the empire. Abstracting from the Dutch Empire, it is crucial to analyse the different trajectories of metropolitan and colonial histories and to stress

‘the mutual implication of both these histories in the “uneven and combined development” of the global political economy’ (Sinha, 1995, p. 182). Scrutinising household labour relations and the role of women’s work in these is highly relevant, as this is an example *par excellence* where ideologies and practices intersected with presumed differences based on gender, race, class, and religion.

Notes

1. See for a recent overview: Wiesner-Hanks 2011, p. 369, note 47.
2. This research is the result from a Vidi-research project financed by the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO), entitled ‘Industriousness in an imperial economy. Interactions of households’ work patterns, time allocation and consumption in the Netherlands and the Netherlands-Indies, 1815-1940’. I am indebted to Daniëlle Teeuwen and Corinne Boter, who collected and analysed some of the source material used in this paper.
3. Verheffing van de Inlandsche vrouw, 3.
4. Ibidem, 3-5.
5. NA, Koloniën 1850-1900, 5830.
6. ANRI, Kulturen, 1621.
7. ANRI, Residential Archives Priangan, 3/12, Algemeen Verslag 1849, and 30/4, Statistiek 1852; ANRI, Archives Director Cultures, 1621, Cultuurverslagen Preanger Regentschappen, Verslag 1862.
8. NA, Koloniën 1850-1900, 2362, 26 November 1870.
9. Kantoor van Arbeid, Verslag van den Dienst der Arbeidsinspectie (1937-1938).
10. E.g. NA, 2.20.41, inv. 54; NA, 2.20.07, inv. no. 529; Centraal Kantoor voor de Statistiek in Nederlandsch-Indië, Statistisch Jaaroverzicht van Nederlandsch-Indië (1926) 174; *ibid.* (1931) 223. Thanks to Daniëlle Teeuwen for her archival work.
11. For a more detailed analysis of these household budgets see: Van Nederveen Meerkerk and Boter (2015). The Dutch household budgets accounted for representative groups of rural and urban households around 1900 and in the 1930s. For the Javanese case, it was more problematic to get a representative sample. For 1900, budgets of groups of peasants in the residency of Semarang were taken, which the contemporary observers took to be representative of the average villager. For the 1930s, the Koeliebudgetonderzoek was taken. As Locher-Scholten (2000, pp. 88-89) has pointed out, this only captured a small number of estates and only families were selected consisting of married couples with their dependants (children and/or other living-in relatives). Nevertheless, this was the most common living form, and moreover, a control group of a few hundred peasant households was included in the survey, which seems more representative than the coolie families, and which has thus been used for the comparison in this paper.
12. Onderzoek 1914, 1.
13. One volume of the extensive research report consisting of twelve volumes, but with its sub-volumes totalling 36 volumes, was entitled The elevation of the indigenous woman Verheffing van de Inlandsche vrouw.
14. NA, Arbeidsinspectie, 334.
15. NA, Koloniën Dossierarchief, 1023.

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