

10 The Religious Fervour of Ethical Politics

History teaches us that any contact between the white race and the dark-skinned people has resulted in the subjugation of the latter by the former. This experience has convinced the black races that the white race is a higher form of being, and that it is the destiny of both that the one should dominate over the other.

– J.-C. Baud, quoted in Duymaer van Twist, *Algemeen overzicht van de staatkundige gesteldheid van Nederlandsch Indië over 1852* (1855: 314-315)

The rise of liberal imperialism

There has never been a dearth of dissenters fulminating against colonial policies in the homeland. Their critical voices preceded the introduction by the end of the nineteenth century of what came to be known as ‘ethical policies’. Multatuli, the pen name of Eduard Douwes Dekker, was undeniably the most vocal, deriding Dutch rule as brutally malicious (Multatuli 1860). His vehement charge, launched from within the colonial apparatus, which did not yet extend far and wide in the Indonesian archipelago, concerned the forced labour imposed on the peasantry of Java. It was already practiced in the early days of the East Indies Company, but climaxed in the cultivation system as managed by the colonial state. Between 1830 and 1870, landowners in the well-settled parts of Java were obligated to grow, process and deliver cash crops to the government warehouses for sale on the global market, as well as render other forms of *corvée* labour (Bremen 2015). Wolter Robert van Hoëvell was another strong opponent who took the colonial machinery to task in a journal which he edited and circulated. His condemnation of the slavery practiced in Java and more emphatically so in Suriname marked him as one of the moral-minded epigones who, in the slipstream of the political upheaval in 1848, found some resonance among the homeland bourgeoisie (Van Hoëvell 1848). It is a kind of critique grounded in spiritual enlightenment and therefore seems to resemble the ethical policies which surfaced half a century later. However, these early appeals to righteous rule were neither anti-colonial in their critique nor did they impinge on the received wisdom on how to operate. Moreover, they played no role in the political debate leading to the abolition of the cultivation system in 1870. Even when declared as an article of faith, virtuous morality was not

necessarily attuned to the selected concrete policy objectives. In his 1879 *Our Program*, Abraham Kuyper, the founding father of the Anti-Revolutionaire Partij (Anti-Revolutionary Party, ARP), took the ethical high ground in his deliberations on what colonialism ought to entail. He wanted to break with self-interest as its guiding principle and instead pledged to promote the wholesome advancement of the subjected population.

Steadily building up his profile as a conservative politician, Kuyper was much admired for his religious zeal by a sizable vote bank among the petty bourgeoisie leaning to fundamentalist Christianity. He became prime minister in 1901, heading a conservative cabinet of Christian parties. One of the disciples in the devoted entourage surrounding him was Alexander Willem Frederik Idenburg. After a twenty-year military career as a high-ranking officer in the colonial army, he had turned to politics. In 1901, at the recommendation of his party's supremo, Idenburg was first nominated member of parliament for the ARP and the following year appointed as minister of colonies.

This essay focuses on Idenburg's role in the take-off stage of what were labelled as ethical policies. In this endeavour, he was preceded by Kuyper as his coach-cum-tutor and, later, flanked by Hendrikus Colijn as his successor. Both of them have had in my opinion a more significant and lasting footprint on Dutch governance overseas. However, this perspective was assessed differently in a recently published intellectual biography of Idenburg (Van der Jagt 2021). Hans van der Jagt has identified him as the harbinger of the ethical policies. Although in his official postings Idenburg tried to promote a better way of life for the people of Indonesia than they had enjoyed in the past, Van der Jagt's portrayal does not conceal the dark side of his colonial rule, which was to switch from benign accommodation to stern repression whenever the call for freedom was raised. It is a make-believe kind of appraisal with which I strongly disagree.

To begin with, the need for ethical politics was initially not identified in converting the predominantly Muslim population to Christianity as foregrounded in the ARP's colonial agenda. The call for a policy of levelling up was raised around the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, when the impoverishment of the Indonesian population had become a public issue. Pieter Brooshooft was a major path breaker of this disconcerting insight. In a series of newspaper articles, he pressed for relief from existential distress and launched the term 'ethical politics', in which he elaborated on how to achieve them by lowering the heavy taxation levied in both cash and kind (through *corvée* labour). To document the growing misery, he specifically referred to the wretched life of the coolies who were contracted for employment on the large agricultural estates

opened up on the East Coast of Sumatra (Brooshooft 1901). In 1899, Conrad Theodor van Deventer contributed to the now raging debate from another perspective when he proposed to end the annual drainage of colonial profits to the homeland (Van Deventer 1899). Van Deventer said that this financial flow out of the East Indies, a huge amount of capital, should be paid back as 'a debt of honour' to be used for funding the institutional and infrastructural development of the colony. In her year-end speech from the throne in 1901, Queen Wilhelmina urged respect for the moral calling to which her Christian nation was duty bound. As minister, Idenburg was indeed the first politician to operationalize this task and, nearly a decade later, to shape it more concretely in the fabric of regular decision-making as governor-general of the East Indies. To comprehend how he framed the charge entrusted to him, it is of crucial relevance to highlight that his governance was driven by an ethos of Christian fundamentalism. There is no consensus on how to qualify his handling of this noble objective over the time span of its practice. I am inclined to rate it as coincidental with Idenburg's presence on the colonial platform both in the circuit at home and overseas. A hesitant and lukewarm start in the first few years did not augur well for its continued success. Having already been officially downgraded in the second decade of the twentieth century, it further faded away in the onset of straightforward authoritarianism to quell the steadily rising tide of nationalist fervour. This is an assessment which needs to be qualified in more detail.

The Christian gospel

In the early twentieth century the ARP occupied a major niche in the not yet democratized political landscape of the Netherlands. The colonial policy which Kuyper had outlined in *Our Program* remained the manual with which the main governmental policymakers of orthodox Christian persuasion – Idenburg at first, then joined by Colijn who soon overshadowed his predecessor – mapped its course during the late-colonial era. In his study, Van der Jagt has highlighted the paradoxical symbiosis of good and bad colonialism. In his view, this implied, on the one hand, the brutal and consolidated occupation of overseas territories and, on the other hand, efforts to induce the colonized inhabitants to follow a benevolent course leading to their advancement. According to Van de Jagt, Idenburg was the designated advocate and architect par excellence to achieve this double bind. Though phrased as a new gestalt, it was the conventional proposition

of colonialism as a civilizing mission as already stated in those terms in the party catechism which Kuyper had drafted.

The ARP's helmsman had curtly rejected exploitation of the peasantry as the organizing principle of colonial politics. Under the cultivation system, colonial management had in his view turned into a commercial enterprise:

This profit flowed from labour that remained unpaid. It was extorted from the Javanese so that we could restore order to our disordered finances, make tax rises at home superfluous and allow the state to indulge in the luxury that corrupted our political system. (Kuyper 2015: para. 252)

Replacing it by free enterprise financed by expatriate capital, however, had not discarded the use of force and the habitus of greed. Economic liberalism was no less selfish and devoted to maximizing profits and had to be replaced by true guardianship to redeem the population from backwardness. Directing how this could be achieved, Kuyper declared that colonies had to be regarded as subjected to imperial rule rather than being part of it. Homeland and faraway domains should be seen as interconnected but distinctly separate entities. Dissimilar from each other in origin and history, they were interrelated not in juxtaposition but in superposition versus subordination. His clarification was an early choice in favour of association above assimilation: 'Spatial separation of the constituent parts will prevent that in the parliament of the kingdom a Dayak will ever be seated next to a Frisian or an Acehnese next to a Dutch citizen.' Guided by tutelage, the inhabitants of the Indies would follow a path to progress while retaining their own identity. Its outcome depended on divine commandment but Kuyper remained at the ready to act as spokesman for the Messiah.

The 1901-5 cabinet chaired by 'Abraham the Great' in a coalition of Christian parties steered colonial politics in accordance with the directives originally established in *Our Program*. Its conceptualization indicated that instead of 'What can we get out of Java?', the question ought to be 'What does God want us to contribute to Java?' Whether independence would ultimately be the consequence of coming of age was again attributed to divine discretion. Kuyper took for granted that the Dutch presence overseas would have to be enduring in order to complete the mission of Christianization. He did not mince words in clarifying that conversion to Christianity was preconditional to advancement. It was a path to blissful progress which could not be paved in reverse order. His appeal expressed a determined confrontational attitude to nations considered inferior. However, colonial logistics saw to it that this crusade was nipped in the bud. Fear of offending

the Muslim majority was the main reason for political restraint. Added to this was the lax or even absent religiosity of the white community which ruled the official and civil roost in the Indies. In the private correspondence between Kuyper and Idenburg, the latter complained bitterly of the lack of hearing he found for the basic tenets of their orthodox creed among the Dutch-language press in the Indies. The ordinance which he had issued for compliance with Sunday rest was denounced as a clear example of the governor-general's holier-than-thou credentials.

Quite unexpectedly installed as minister in 1902, Idenburg's ethical bearings were immediately scrutinized. Johannes van den Brand had appealed to Christian conscience in his indictment of the prevailing system of indenture backed up with penal sanctions to which the workforce on the plantations on Sumatra's East Coast were confined (Van den Brand 1902). In *De Getuige* (The witness), a magazine addressing the front ranks of the ARP, he repeatedly informed his fellow believers and party members, with substantial documentation, about the inhuman treatment meted out to Chinese and Javanese coolies. As already discussed in Chapter 5, the colonial bureaucracy had dismissed his allegations as a fairy tale, but more factual evidence was required to put a shocked public opinion in the homeland at ease. An official from the Department of Justice was sent to Sumatra to carry out investigations in the plantation belt. Having retrieved this commissioned report, which was kept hidden in the colonial archives, I found on the first page Idenburg's handwritten note: 'A miserable history of suffering and injustice'. But when the East Indies' budget was discussed in the Netherlands parliament in the autumn of 1904, it became abundantly clear that the minister of colonies would go to any length to prevent disclosure of the contents of the submitted report. His official reason for refusing to give MPs access to the document was that those who had been accused of misdeeds or other reprehensible actions had not been given the opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. Moreover, publication would not serve any useful purpose. Rather than dwell on what happened in the past, he wanted to concentrate on improvements for the future. It was only after considerable pressure, including from members of friendly parties which formed the ruling coalition, that the minister finally though reluctantly agreed to outline the principal conclusions of the report (Bremen 1989: 7-8).

The leadership of the Planters' Association in Deli insisted that bonded labour was indispensable to the flourishing of Sumatra's plantation industry and could not be removed from the coolie contract. Idenburg agreed that penal sanctions on the estates of Deli were a necessary evil to secure labour control. He also and readily gave in to the pressure of the capitalist estate

management to more rigorous forms of punishment for workers who dared to protest against being held captive at the site of employment and stood up to the brutalities imposed on them. But in 1913 he resisted introduction of the penal sanction also in Java which had been urged by corporate agrarian capitalism, because in his view labour was abundantly and cheaply available there.

Grandstanding on this occasion his felicitous ostentation as imbued by Christian morality, he wrote in a letter to Kuyper:

[I]t needs far more strength and courage to resist for many months the daily pressure to do what would please 'capital' and would not be found distasteful by many government officials. But in doing so I should have acted against my own conscience. (Brouwer 1958: 30-31)

The manner in which Idenburg dealt with this issue exemplifies in my opinion his duplicitous posture. On the one hand, he readily caved in to the pressure exerted by big business and, on the other, persisted in pretending that he declined to bow to injustice. It was an ambiguity which would remain a consistent trait of his official habitus.

The religious impetus Kuyper attached to colonialism had become a rare phenomenon during the high tide of Europe's territorial imperialism. Neither 'the white man's burden' clamour in Britain nor '*la mission civilisatrice*' which heralded French expansion in overseas territories – preconditioned conversion to Christianity as a requisite feature in the slow passage eventually culminating in civilized behaviour. No doubt, underlying the urge to subject other lands and their ethnicities was the claim to superiority of the colonizing nation. Instead of resorting to undiluted racism, Kuyper had highlighted this licence by laying stress on the inferior creeds of these nations. In his view:

Only the Christian nations in Europe and America have attained that purer disclosure of nobler strength that has created human society as we know it, a society to which the former – and in part still present – heathen civilizations in China and British India can in no way be compared. The Islamic way of life in disintegrating Turkey, meanwhile, and the barbaric customs of the West Asian tribes stand self-condemned. (Kuyper 2015: para. 257)

In the parliamentary debate on how to shape ethical policies in the Dutch East Indies, priority was given to combatting the growing poverty of the

autochthonous population. 'Declining welfare' was the term used in the official registration of this trend. Relief from too heavy a tax levied both in cash and labour power from the average peasant household in Java was badly required, as Brooshooft had persuasively shown. To qualify Idenburg as an energetic instigator and manager of this objective, as Van der Jagt has done, fails to take into account the reluctant and evasive manner in which he proceeded to realize this political promise.

Lack of vigour and ambition needed to reach the weakly defined target was not only indicative of the low-key approach with which the minister handled his charge. The whole colonial apparatus lacked stamina to pursue and achieve this goal. This did not apply, however, to Jacques Henry Abendanon, who had been in 1900 appointed director of education, worship and industry. Burdened with this quaint mixture of departmental tasks, the senior official, a descendant of a notable West Indian family, was highly exceptional in his radical bent to serve the interests of the Indonesian people. The talk he held in 1900 for members of the *Indisch Genootschap* (Indies Society) in The Hague criticized colonial rule for instigating exploitation, war and racism. His audience, colleagues and others close to the bureaucratic apparatus, lambasted his account as a gross distortion of the truth; they rejected his accusations as baseless and unfitting for a civil servant (Bregman 2012). To verify in more detail the trend of declining welfare, Idenburg had commissioned Abendanon to suggest how artisanal production could be upgraded to small-scale industry, which would create additional employment and income for the dispossessed classes of the peasantry. His findings and proposals were anathema to the lobby of corporate plantation business which wanted to consolidate its control over an unlimited supply of reserve labour that could be hired and fired at need. Giving in to this pressure, the colonial high command and Idenburg himself rejected the recommendations Abendanon had made in his report as too idealistic and ambitious. In similar vein, Idenburg swept aside the plea of this high-ranking official to consider education as a crucial instrument for uniting races and nations. Disillusioned at having failed to find a hearing for his policies, Abendanon left his job and the Indies in 1905 (Van Miert 1991).

Idenburg's colonial service record was impressive. He officiated three times as minister of colonies (1902-5, 1908-9 and 1918-19) and was in between governor of Suriname (1905-8) and governor-general of the Dutch East Indies (1909-16). The crucial question is whether he indeed became a committed practitioner and successful achiever of ethical policies in these front-rank positions. In my critical assessment, I endorse Elspeth Locher-Scholten's definition of this objective: 'A policy meant to bring under effective Dutch

authority the length and breadth of the Indonesian archipelago and the development directed to self-rule under Dutch leadership modelled in a Western fabric' (1981: 201).

Colonial practice

The fall of the rightist Kuyper cabinet in 1905 forced Idenburg on his dismissal as minister to accept the governorship of Suriname. He did so reluctantly, in order to earn a comfortable living, and while on the boat to the West Indies, wrote to his wife at home: '[T]he colony is languishing and its population does not seem to excel in virtuous merits and propensities' (De Bruijn and Puchinger 1985: 33). He did not change that opinion during his tenure in the West Indies and wrote a year afterwards that he was 'governor over a shambles' (De Bruijn and Puchinger 1985: 34). In Van der Jagt's more optimistic judgement, Idenburg proved himself an able manager of governance who achieved important reforms, also in Suriname. Nevertheless, the majority of its inhabitants remained trapped in poverty. This colony had lost its fame as a profit-earning part of the Dutch empire and had become a burden, at considerable cost to the homeland.

Suriname's desolate state of affairs had to be remedied, as Kuyper attested in his lament about how miserable and sad the conditions in this colony were:

Of its nearly 60,000 square miles, little more than 200 – yes, 200 – square miles are under cultivation. Its population is no larger than the single city of Utrecht. Its mortality rate exceeds its birth rate. Production has decreased to a tenth of former days. Idol worship, according to the latest Colonial Report, is on the increase. Plantation after plantation lies deserted. Every year we have to make up Suriname's deficit with several hundred thousand [guilders]. In public opinion, for anyone to go to the West Indies is such a sure sign of his general uselessness that the state of Suriname society has little to write home about. (Kuyper 2015: para. 276)

In *Our Program*, he had outlined how the quagmire could be set right again. Improvement could be attained by sending both capital and labour to 'this enticing colony'. To revitalize plantation production now that slavery had been abolished, the government should facilitate immigration from elsewhere, so that Chinese and other coolies (from British India and Java) could settle on the estates to constitute its workforce. To pre-empt the risk of mutiny, missionaries needed to be encouraged to spread the Christian

gospel among these coolies to keep them in check. Kuyper's sermon of directives was meant to result in a feudal relationship between planters and labourers which he deemed to be beneficial to both parties.

In the aftermath of the abolition of slavery in 1863, the sustained economic malaise had sparked a spirit of defiance and rebellion, of which Anton de Kom was the mouthpiece (De Kom 1934). Accused of agitation, he was arrested in 1933 and extradited a few months later by the governor of Suriname, who happened to be Idenburg's son-in-law. Idenburg himself also resorted to this method of allaying fomenting protest as part of the so-called exorbitant rights with which political dissenters were already prosecuted during his official tenure as governor-general in the Indies.

The gradual fizzling out of ethical politics was not only caused by a lack of decisive action but also by the narrow scope for its implementation. Idenburg drew the line when and where more was claimed than permitted by the rigorous maintenance of colonial authority. His biographer illustrates this lack of leniency by referring to the crackdown on resistance whenever the population or their frontmen took a stance against authority. Missing in that explanation is the notion that cause and effect may have operated in the opposite direction; that is, increased intolerance of covert or suspected dissonance led to harsher repression, which resulted in a backlash in growing support of the nationalist movement. This reverse trend could certainly be discerned during the 1920s in Java and had earlier been manifest in the wars declared on the sultanate of Aceh in North Sumatra during the final quarter of the nineteenth century. With a record of two decades of service in the colonial army, ending with a high-ranking posting in the general staff, Idenburg – together with Colijn, who followed a similar military-to-civil career – contributed as heavyweights to this theatre of extreme violence. The war crimes committed over a long period by the Koninkrijk Nederlands Indisch Leger (Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, KNIL) were dismissed by both Kuper and Idenburg in parliamentary debates as having been instigated by the zealotry of the Muslim inhabitants. The fanatical racism to which the KNIL rank and file were driven by their commanding officers led not only to sustained warfare but also triggered off a strengthening of religious belief.

The claim of benign colonialism did not last for much more than one and half decades. It was a short hiccup of good intentions, much underfunded and which did not find favour outside officialdom but met with opposition from both white expatriates and the non-Indonesian minorities. Idenburg sparingly allowed modest forms of civil congregation. Associational initiatives among the somewhat better-off sections of the Indonesian population

were not prohibited as long as such organizations had no radical motives and did not amalgamate in nationwide unions. In the wake of World War I, revolutionary stirrings in Europe also reached the Netherlands and for a short moment seemed to spiral in a leftist political revolt. Caught unawares, governor-general Johan Paul van Limburg Stirum hastily promised to change the ruling fabric in the Indies. He mandated the recently established Volksraad (People's Council) with ample jurisdiction, hoping to suppress the turmoil. From The Hague, minister Idenburg saw to it that these promises were retracted as speedily as they had been made.

In the portrait Van der Jagt has composed of Idenburg, he is shown as a well-meaning and judicious man with a wide range of laudable qualities such as honesty, sincerity, piety, modesty and righteousness, always willing to reconcile a difference of opinion, eager to avoid a dispute and reach for a compromise. Driven by orthodox religiosity, he exerted himself to support the Christian mission of Calvinism and admitted regretting not finding more space for his pietist credence for fear of kindling religious strife. His forbearance did not tempt him to seek the front rank in politics. He declined to be elected to the leadership of the ARP after Kuyper and also turned down the possibility to succeed his godfather and revered taskmaster as prime minister. With fragile health as excuse, he recommended Colijn for both postings as the better man. How can the qualities which Idenburg made manifest in his colonial career be appraised? His biographer praises him to the heavens in a portrayal arguing that the bad side to colonialism was inherent to foreign rule and that in his role as the man on the spot he did his utmost to brighten the good side. My disagreement with this verdict contradicts the flawed notion that bad and good were summoned up and doled out in equal measure, dependent on the aptitude of colonial subjects to comply or not in their subalternity. In reality, of course, the morality of fair and benevolent rule foundered, not occasionally but systematically, on the harsh bedrock of intransigent law and order. I therefore thoroughly agree with Locher-Scholten's contention that, beyond his governmental handicraft, Idenburg has not left much of a footprint on colonial statecraft (Locher-Scholten 2012). As his earmarked successor, Colijn did not wait long to express that he had no business with 'ethical nonsense' and referred to it as *maladroit* excesses from which colonial politics should be spared (Colijn 1928).

In a prequel, Van der Jagt suggests that ethical politics were a colonial version of the social question raging in the homelands in the late stage of imperialism. This assessment has to be discarded as absurd. My refutation also concerns the lens which Van der Jagt chose to highlight how Idenburg's

policies and their ideological substantiation matched the code which Alexis de Tocqueville had invoked in his writings and in his manual of statecraft. The value attributed to the teachings of this political philosopher is so profound that Van der Jagt has modelled his biography in accordance with the insights which Tocqueville constructed and applied for the validation of his intellectual framework. However, their alleged like-mindedness thoroughly misapprehends Tocqueville's political leanings in theory and practice. For the sake of brevity, I refer to Chapter 2 in which I have argued that the colonial expansion of France was by no means, as Tocqueville had boasted, a civilizing mission driven by ethical politics. His roundly racist prejudice impinged on his role as recorder of the parliamentary panel which was commissioned to draft the report for the abolition of slavery in the French Caribbean in 1853. Having written the minutes, Tocqueville certified that, rather than the enslaved workforce, their employers were to be financially compensated for their loss of property. Moreover, the enslaved victims remained not only dispossessed from all means of production but were also obligated to continue labouring for their masters for another ten years. These clauses were seamlessly incorporated when, a decade later, the Dutch government ended enslavement in the West Indies.

Van der Jagt does not avoid discussing topics and issues which do not corroborate his profile of Idenburg as a dedicated practitioner of ethical politics. Neither is he shy of bringing up the diatribe against Islam voiced by prominent members of the ARP, replicating in their argumentation the anti-Islam fervour of European hegemony at large (Matthiesen 2023). But the vilification of this creed by Kuyper as 'Mohammedan idolatry' does not figure in Van der Jagt's evocative defence. As a devoted disciple of the party's founder, Idenburg nevertheless sets clear limits to his compliance, backed up by the reputation he had earned as an expert of colonial governance. Van der Jagt eloquently deals with critique which detracts from the laudable account and the pivotal role he has conferred to the subject of his biography. But the pros and cons are not summed up in proportional balance and his praising profile remains unbelievably free from blemishes. The upshot of my comments is that Idenburg was not the towering figure in the late-colonial landscape as portrayed by his biographer and does not deserve the tall pedestal erected for him.

Rather than ending my review on this note, I adopt a wider perspective. To comprehend the modest contribution Idenburg made, his lack of impact needs to be placed in the broader context of anti-revolutionary politics. Sandwiched between Kuyper as the much admired party architect and Colijn, who was much more in the limelight as a heavyweight from the

start, Idenburg played a backstage role on the party platform. Overstating his significance, as Van der Jagt does in my view, has a more ulterior motive, however. The biographer covertly wishes to redeem orthodox Christianity from the blame of racism attached to this brand of Calvinism, which resorted to colonialism as a circuit and vehicle for spreading its fundamentalist gospel. Van der Jagt's emphasis on ethical policies is meant to soft-pedal what is upfront in *Our Program*: the gross inferiority of civilizations and religious creeds other than the Western one. Idenburg proved to be a little less rigorous on this issue than either Kuyper before him or Colijn after him. But after stepping down from his official postings, he also adhered in hindsight to this article of faith which marked the ARP's course from its foundation to the end of colonial rule (Idenburg 1929).

The onset of multinational capitalism and its insistence on colonial domination

Ethical policies were not only weakly sponsored and executed but were also superseded right from the start by a contrasting course of action of which Jacob Theodoor Cremer was the pacesetter. In 1876, in his capacity as director of the Deli Company, which started operating in the early phase of the plantation industry on Sumatra's East Coast, he wrote an address to parliament in which he pleaded for the inclusion of penal sanctions in the coolie ordinance. His petition found political favour and its enactment meant that employment became regulated in legislated bondage. On his return to the Netherlands, he again turned to parliament with an appeal to stop the annual flow of financial surplus into the homeland's treasury (Cremer 1881). His appeal was not driven by a moral urge to alleviate impoverishment but aimed at infrastructural development of the archipelago to open up the resource-rich islands outside Java for capitalist business (Darini 2021). This pioneering captain of industry realized that he would have to join the political caucus in order to boost his strategic design. His petition actually concretized what Kuyper had already suggested in his party manifesto of 1879:

The archipelago does in fact constitute a single group of islands that belongs together. A common future is the best and most natural destiny for these islands. Given that the Netherlands happens to be sovereign in well over two-thirds of their populated areas, it is only natural that the unification of these scattered islands should take place under our flag. (Kuyper 2015: para. 274)

Once back in the metropole, Cremer became a member of the Liberal Union and was allotted a seat in parliament in 1885 to campaign for the subjection of Aceh in the national interest. His appointment as minister of colonies in a liberal-conservative coalition enabled him from 1897 until 1901 to seek a range of allies to jointly implement his imperialist master plan. Nicknamed 'coolie Cremer' by social-democratic parliamentarians – for his role in the brutal exploitation of the huge workforce contracted for Deli's plantation belt – he saw to it that the lion's share of the budget set aside for ethical policies was spent on major public works inside and outside Java. The main priorities of his blueprint were railway and road building, irrigation and port construction to promote maritime traffic. Regular shipping would connect the outlying regions and involve them in regional and international trade. All these ventures were meant to be first and foremost at the service of private enterprise, the plantation and mining industry in particular. The Indies Mining Law of 1897, drafted by Cremer two years after his installation as minister of colonies, brought minerals under the sole custody of the colonial state. By splitting up natural deposits from property of land, he made sure that the Indonesian population could not claim ownership to these treasures of the soil waiting to be processed as industrial commodities (Van Maanen 2021:28-30).

Cremer found a close associate in Aart van der Wijck who, on his resignation as a high-ranking colonial official, joined the board of the Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (Royal Packet Navigation Company, KPM). To find adequate scope for the company's interests, he rejoined government service to act as governor-general in the East Indies in 1893. During his stint in high command and in proper imperialist fashion, he did not sever his ties with private business. At Van der Wijck's initiative, an expedition force invaded the island of Lombok and he arranged these troops to be transported by KPM vessels. It was during this operation that Colijn, still a mere lieutenant in the colonial army, committed war crimes which he himself acknowledged and for which he received, approved of and mediated by minister Idenburg, the highest military medal awarded for meritorious and exceptional bravery. In a letter to his wife, Colijn, wrote:

We could not grant pardon. I ordered nine women and three children, begging for their lives and huddled near me in a heap, to be shot. It was a nasty job but it had to be done. The soldiers bayonnetted their bodies with glee. (Langeveld 1998: 59)

In 1899, having completed his stint as governor-general, Van der Wijck resumed his lucrative business career as an oil and shipping magnate.

As resident of Surabaya he happened in 1888 to witness the beginning of oil exploration in East Java (Van Maanen 2021). He saw it as a bonanza which made him change his trade from colonial official to become a leading captain of colonial industry. Van Der Wijck was not shy in using the political acumen he had acquired to become chairman of the newly established Council for Mining in 1902 and member of the Senate in 1904. But he netted the largest part of his high income as CEO of the Royal Dutch Petroleum Company, which was given permission to explore oil wells in Sumatra. In competition with Standard Oil, the Dutch company had successfully lobbied for the concession, which depended on the granting authority of Idenburg. In 1906, this enterprise merged with the Shell Transport and Trading Company sourcing oil in Kalimantan. The fusion of these like-minded industries amalgamated a year later to Royal Shell, which eventually turned to worldwide expansion from its Dutch headquarters.

Next in line for admission to the imperialist clique of politicians and policymakers was Jo van Heutsz. As a senior officer in the colonial army, he had published a pamphlet, *De onderwerping van Atjeh* (The subjugation of Aceh), in 1893 in which he explained why the war declared on this sultanate in North Sumatra a quarter of a century earlier had resulted in heavy losses but not in the conclusive defeat of this ferocious and tenacious enemy. His unsolicited counsel on how to pacify the rebellious province impressed both military and politicians in the colonial high command, A year later, Van Heutsz was appointed civil and military governor of Aceh and mandated to go ahead with his strategy. He arranged for Colijn to join him as his adjutant. It was a role which, many years before, had similarly marked Idenburg's rise in the military hierarchy. Not much later, Van Heutsz was appointed governor-general, a posting to which he also brought Colijn. The ongoing war and its political fallout remained their first priority, and even more so when lower ranking officers opened the book on war crimes that had been committed. Both Idenburg and Kuyper vehemently denied the charges in parliament. Colijn, however, did not hesitate to admit to the reported cruelties:

In his wording, women are also used to fighting along with men and try to escape together with them. Not every now and then but again and again. It may sound indifferent but it is standing practice in our skirmishes in the Indies. The first blow is half the battle. And when our forces target a village occupied by the enemy, women and children cannot be spared. (Cited in Van de Loo 2017; see also Hagen 2018)

In 1907, on his resignation from the army, Colijn joined the colonial state as advisor on the governance of the provinces outside Java. To substantiate this designation, he journeyed around the length and breadth of the archipelago to take stock of the islands not yet incorporated into the East Indies (Colijn 1907). On his return to the homeland as an already well-known and vocal member of the ARP, he joined its parliamentary fraction, later becoming minister of war in the same rightist coalition of religious and conservative parties in which Idenburg came back for a second term as minister of colonies in 1908. After completing his ministerial tenure, Colijn preferred to turn to civil life and private colonial business. As CEO of Bataafse Petroleum Maatschappij (Batavian Oil Company, BPM, later Royal Dutch Shell), he had landed a very lucrative position which offered him ample opportunity to become a man of fortune. A capitalist-driven political economy had emerged in the Indonesian archipelago, which testified to a close alliance between colonial policies and private business.

In his study discussing the history of KPM, À Campo also emphasized the significant role this shipping line played in colonial state formation (À Campo 1992). The decision to make the enterprise responsible for all maritime transport throughout the archipelago reflected the increased significance of Dutch imperialism, while at the same time granting this monopoly to a Dutch company contributed to achievement of this goal. Just like Cremer, his sparring partners Van der Wijck, Van Heutsz and Colijn were the major figureheads in this geopolitical web. Imperialism was the breeding ground for the exuberant multinationalism its instigators extolled and played a major, much underrated role in the historiography on metropolitan state formation. It was a credo that claimed an imperial identity that transcended the homeland, enfolding territories and their ethnicities acquired in overseas expansion. The governmental fabrication of this empire had a capitalist stamp to which a patriotic flavour was added. Kuyper had commented on this fervour in *Our Program*:

To possess colonies is an honour. It enhances our prestige, affords us a different place in Europe than we would otherwise have, and causes the splendour of a glorious past to shine over the weaknesses of our current life as a nation. Having colonies is a privilege that others envy. To defend the colonies should be worth something to us. (Kuyper 2015: para. 252)

The front-rank politicians of the ARP had wholeheartedly consented to spread colonial governance to the whole peninsula, but without losing sight of their own ideological objectives. Those considerations regularly cropped

up in the official and private correspondence with which Idenburg and Kuyper kept in regular touch with each other. Dutch power and authority had for a long time been mainly concentrated on Java, Madura, Bali, various parts of Sumatra and Maluku. Many of the large and small islands parcelled out over the peninsula had only become effectively included in the realm of the East Indies from the end of the nineteenth century onwards. Many of these tracts were inhabited by tribes still adhering to paganism. Giving missionaries of Christianity permission to settle in these quarters might result in building up a counterweight against the Muslim majority of the autochthonous population in Java and Sumatra. In confrontational parlance Kuyper had given vent to his intention to raise the Christian cross against the Islamic crescent moon. The rank and file of the military force recruited for the colonial army were mainly recruited in the Maluku islands of Indonesia and were already converted to Christianity at the time of the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company, VOC). In the round of negotiations in the late 1940s which preceded Indonesia's independence, the Dutch delegation proposed to split the country and nation up into a decentralized framework which would build-up to a combined union headed by the Queen of the Netherlands. This plan foresaw 'a nation of Mohammedans and Christians in which white and brown would be assembled'. This formula had been concocted by Huib van Mook, the last minister of colonies (1949: 222). His wishful thinking of unity in diversity was of a very different fabric than the similar appeal which Sukarno had flagged for the future of Indonesia.

The outgoing tide of colonialism

Admitting that the colonized people were unwilling to cooperate, Idenburg warned that patience was required to complete the colonial task, because to hand over authority to a revolutionary avant-garde was out of the question. The road to liberty had to be paved prudently and a beginning would be made at the bottom of society. It was an implication intended to disparage popular clamour for freedom and self-rule. Van der Jagt suggests that Idenburg was fully aware of the emerging political restiveness and competently forestalled niches of dissent from building up into orchestrated resistance. It is not only with the wisdom of hindsight that his misapprehension of the changing tide should be exposed. The historian Jan Romein wrote an essay in which he deliberated on the awakening of Asia which had started in the early twentieth century, also in Indonesia 'where the paddy grows

inaudibly' (Romein 1929). Published in the Netherlands but banned from circulation in the Indies, his essay was avidly read and passed on in the underground nationalist circuit. Colonial authorities held on to the illusion that the initiators of the nationalist movement had been unable to mobilize a mass following. This *idée fixe*, incurred by a climate of fierce repression, found application in resorting to the so-called exorbitant rights which allowed the authorities to deal ruthlessly with protest. Those among the front ranks who openly dared to raise the call for freedom, as, for instance, Tan Malaka and Ernest Douwes Dekker did, were extradited; others, such as Mohammed Hatta, Sutan Sjahrir and Sukarno were detained for many years. The main leaders of the abortive communist revolt which broke out in 1926-27 were either sentenced to death or locked up in a gruesome penal camp especially erected for them in faraway New Guinea (Irian Jaya). The impeachment from beginning to end of the nationalist leadership was a major reason why, after independence, democracy failed to become embedded in the political set up and why public authority soon acquired an authoritarian twist. From the Dutch side, the question of how to frame the postcoloniality of the Indies was not considered in any other way than as a political imbroglio. Taking stock of Indonesian perceptions continued to remain an uncharted avenue. The title of Idenburg's biography refers to Pramoedya Ananta Toer's ironical comment on the intrusion of aliens into the Indonesian archipelago as angels from Europe. But in none of the many pages of the book does the author deem it relevant to take account of the narratives in which Indonesia's most famous novelist discusses the nature, impact and downfall of Dutch colonial rule.

The wave of decolonization in the aftermath of World War II led to the disappearance of the former rulers from the overseas statecraft which had been fabricated from the homelands. In the metropolitan historiography dwelling on the colonial past, the fight for freedom is dealt with as a *fait accompli*. Adamant unwillingness to waive the sustained extraction of raw resources and cheap labour power, which was the pinnacle of the tenacious efforts of the colonizing powers not to abandon the territories they had occupied, has remained covered up in the conventional historical documentation. The Netherlands is not the only nation which did its utmost not to surrender the overseas parts of its empire and to retain the fabric of a multinational state. Martin Thomas has brought together in two volumes essays documenting how France tried to keep its colonial presence in Africa and Southeast Asia intact by resorting to extreme violence (Thomas 2011-12).

As will be highlighted in more detail in the next chapter, this Dutch endeavour became embodied in a well-oiled lobby with Willem Treub as its

founder and pilot. One of the channels to exercise pressure, addressing both the political forum and public opinion, was a periodical published from 1929 to 1940 *De Rijkseenheid, staatkundig-economisch weekblad ter versterking van de banden tussen Nederland en de Indiën* (Imperial unity, a political-economic weekly to reinforce the ties between the Netherlands and the Indies). The editors and contributors, listed in each issue, were well-known members of the high-ranking bourgeoisie (Taselaar 1999). The periodical's circulation aimed to arouse pro-colonial feelings and demonstrated that, besides the ARP, now headed by Colijn, liberal-to-conservative politicians and big business shared and sponsored the propagated belief in a multinational state whose tropical possessions were meant to remain firmly embedded.

Interestingly, this objective was already phrased in a memorandum on how to promote business in Asia drafted by one of the first CEOs of the VOC in the early seventeenth century. After committing genocide on one of the Spice Islands, massacring the population and enslaving survivors who did not manage to escape the ordeal, Jan Pieterszoon Coen stated that the VOC had come to the archipelago with the intention never to leave again. In 1937, Colijn, the ARP boss who was prime minister of the Netherlands five times between 1925 and 1939, commemorated Coen's 350th birthday. He conceded that this trailblazer of Dutch expansion overseas had on occasion been relentless, but he hailed the man as a veritable and righteous son of Calvinism (Colijn 1937).

Conclusion

Situating Idenburg in between Kuyper and Colijn and glorifying him as a committed proponent of ethical colonialism leads to an improper balance of what these three politicians had in common: a fundamentalist religiosity which aimed at virtuous Christianity as the driving force in the attainment of civilization. My rejection of this gospel and its implicit jingoistic racism is threefold. In the first place, the complete denial of the desire for freedom of the colonized population. The obstinate refusal to acknowledge and accommodate the ambition to construct and self-manage the nation's fabric is the cornerstone of colonialism. In the second place, an ethos of anti-revolutionary tyranny which was aggravated by a Eurocentric lens, defined advancement not in an emic but in an etic perspective. The religious bias went hand in hand with both the inability and unwillingness to operationalize and implement ethical policies in the secular spirit in which they were announced. Soft pedalled and underfunded right from the start,

they never reached the take-off stage. Lastly, the missing notion that behind mere lip service to ethical policies a vigorously practiced capitalism unfolded, either passively (Kuyper and Idenburg) or actively (Colijn) endorsed by these stalwarts of anti-revolutionary politics. Colijn was a captain of industry whose greed to grow rich as his first priority concerned both Idenburg and Kuyper, but it was a disapproval they never expressed in public.

Idenburg privately deplored the strong support given to colonial capitalism in parliament by Colijn, the former lieutenant of Van Heutsz and rising star in the ARP. 'We should not forget', Idenburg commented to Kuyper in 1911, 'that the true Anti-Revolutionary is against the exploitation by the mother country, no less by private enterprise than by the state.' All the same, Idenburg did agree with Kuyper that Colijn should be the next ARP leader when Kuyper retired (Kuitenbrouwer and Schijf 1998: 81).

In response to social-democratic criticism against corporate capitalism in what came to be seen as 'our Indies', Kuyper retracted from the blame he had cast upon private enterprise in *Our Program*. He now suggested that investment of capital from the homeland was preconditional for economic growth to take off (Brouwer 1958: 16). Stymied in a total disregard for the exploitation of the colonial workforce, his argumentation implied that the social question, as was being posed and solved by allowing for collective action in the homeland, could be prevented from taking shape in the Indies. My inference from this contrast is that the lobby articulating the drive of capitalism in the Indies which emerged in the late-colonial era succeeding in slowing down the process of concerted assertion by which labour in the homelands was able to engage in emancipatory action to gain both economic and political rights.

Idenburg's biography has been favourably reviewed in the mainstream Dutch media. That positive judgement diverges from the anti-colonial discourse which has come to dominate the contemporary assessment on the rise and decline of Europe's expansion overseas. As can be inferred from the ambit of my essay, this countervailing opinion is a verdict on Europe's colonial past with which I fully concur. In a recent monograph, Caroline Elkins (2022) has strongly denounced the idea that liberal imperialism, of which ethical politics was the Dutch synonym, endeavoured to develop the occupied territories and their population despite the plunder and repression inherent to it. The violence practiced and the impunity to continue the brutal subjection of these countries and nations, which she has documented in elaborate detail for the British empire and as Martin Thomas has put on record for the same French colonial mindset, are entirely applicable to the brutal Dutch and Belgian regimentation of their statecraft overseas.

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