

Industriousness in an imperial economy. Delineating new research on colonial connections and household labour relations in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies

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ABSTRACT

This article delineates new research on the entangled histories of household labour, particularly women's and children's work, in the Netherlands and its colonies on Java. It offers suggestions for future empirical studies and how we may disentangle the workings of colonial connections on labour relations. A first analysis of the debates on Dutch and Javanese women's and children's work shows many ambivalences and tensions, for instance, between ideology and practice. Despite the ideal of the male breadwinner in the Netherlands, many married women and children still worked in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding Javanese women and children too, we can discern tensions between the attempts on the one hand to "Westernize" them, and introduce the ideal of domesticity. On the other hand, inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women and children were stressed. This "grammar of difference" helped justify why Dutch women and children should not perform (heavy) labour and why their Javanese counterparts could indeed perform it.

KEYWORDS

Netherlands, Netherlands Indies, Household labour relations, Dutch and Indonesian women and children

*Europe was made by its imperial projects, as much as colonial encounters were shaped by conflicts in Europe itself.*¹

“In recent years, postcolonial and post-nationalist studies have designed a research agenda allowing for dynamic and reciprocal analyses of colonial interactions. This scholarship opposes the widespread idea of nations as self-contained units of analysis. Moreover, it counters the teleological notion that developments in Western Europe and North America formed blueprints for other societies and cultures on their “road to modernity”.² Because of their interwoven histories, historical developments in “the East” and in “the West” cannot be understood without studying them relationally.³ Obviously, intensified colonial encounters in the nineteenth century constitute an important setting for analysing these entangled histories.

In their inspiring work, Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, responsible for the opening quote of this article, emphasize the many ambivalences of colonial rule, and point to the importance of recognizing how colonialism not only shaped the histories of the colonies, but just as much those of the metropolises. We cannot understand the *postcolonial* world without acknowledging these “tensions of empire”, and it is important to “examine thoughtfully the complex ways in which Europe was made from its colonies”.⁴ We need to (re)read the historical archival material from this perspective, placing colonial history not solely in the context of domination and subordination, but reconstructing a more dynamic history, characterized by tensions, anxieties and paradoxes, collaboration and resistance.⁵ Examining these tensions and

¹ STOLER, Ann, and COOPER, Frederick. “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda”. In: STOLER, Ann, and COOPER, Frederick, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 1-56. Many thanks to the guest editor and peer reviewers of *Workers of the World* and to Corinne Boter and Louella de Graaf for their useful comments on earlier versions of this article.

² For an excellent, and already classic, account, see CHAKRABARTY, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008 [2000].

³ CONRAD, Sebastian, and RANDERIA, Shalini eds. *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2002, pp.10, 12; COOPER, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question. Theory, Knowledge, History*. Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005; BAYLY, Chris. *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914. Global Connections and Comparisons*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004. While Bayly explicitly distances himself from postcolonial history, he does aim to show interconnectedness and interdependencies in world history.

⁴ COOPER, Frederick. *Colonialism in Question, op.cit.* p. 3.

⁵ STOLER, Ann L. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

contradictions will help us to understand the postcolonial remains of these complex relationships more fully.⁶

One of these legacies is the worldwide division of labour. This partly results from colonial relations, but has also been in constant development since decolonization, under the influence of shifts in global economic power relations.⁷ Throughout history, the division of work has witnessed both continuities and important changes, on the global, the regional and the household level. In this article, I will argue that the approach of “entangled history” can be a fruitful line of investigation for labour history. Whereas studies on colonial and postcolonial labour history have recently been on the rise,⁸ there have not been many attempts to approach labour history in the empire from the perspective of colonial entanglements. Most studies using the concept of entangled history (or *histoire croisée*⁹) so far have focused on political or cultural history, and not so much on labour relations in an imperial context. With regard to the division of work in the household between men, women and children both in the colonial and in the metropolitan context, this perspective has not yet been applied. Economic history, as I will argue below, is another discipline to which the integration of an approach of colonial entanglements would be a challenge.

Studying the division of work between men, women and children in the context of a colonial economy is particularly interesting because gender and age not only serve as categories of analysis, but also formed dynamic categories constructing differences of “class” and “race” in the past. By investigating this household division of work in different parts of the empire, and by establishing connections between these developments, we can truly bring “metropole and colony, colonizer and colonized [...] into one analytic field”.¹⁰

This article delineates a new research project on household labour in the Netherlands and its colonies on Java. This particular case study is not singled

⁶ COOPER and STOLER, “Between Metropole and Colony”. *op.cit.*, p. 33.

⁷ See e.g. NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van; VAN VOSS Lex Heerma and HIEMSTRA-KUPERUS, Els. “Covering the World: Some Conclusions to the Project”. In: NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van, VAN VOSS Lex Heerma and HIEMSTRA-KUPERUS, Els eds., *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650-2000*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010, pp. 773-792.

⁸ See, among others: AUSTIN, Gareth. *Labour, Land and Capital: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005; BAHAL, Rana, and LINDEN, Marcel van der. eds. *Coolies, Capital and Colonialism: Studies in Indian Labour History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Alessandro Stanziani, ed. *Labour, Coercion, and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th-20th Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

⁹ WERNER, Michael, and ZIMMERMAN, Bénédicte. “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity”. *History and Theory*, vol. 45, 2006, pp. 30-50.

¹⁰ COOPER and STOLER, “Between Metropole and Colony”. *op.cit.*, p. 15.

out to suggest that other parts of the Dutch empire, or the world, are not important or interesting. Also, I wish to avoid “methodological imperialism” by simply replacing “nation” with “empire”. It would be a major challenge to reconstruct how “webs of empire” – connections and frictions both within and between empires – influenced the household division of labour.¹¹ However, to accomplish this in the near future, we must first do much of the labour intensive empirical historical work. Sometimes, this involves digging up new information in the archives; sometimes, it means studying well-known material from a different perspective.¹² In the need of such studies on the work of households in the period of colonialism, this article is not a result of advanced empirical research.¹³ Rather, it offers suggestions on how to carry out such an empirical study, and how we may disentangle the workings of colonial connections on labour relations.

Why connections and entanglements? The case of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies

In explaining “the rise of the West”, some economic historians have pointed to the importance of the re-allocation of household labour. One influential model is offered by Jan de Vries, who proposes that preceding industrialization, Western Europe experienced an “industrious revolution”, starting in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. Between circa 1650 and 1850, labouring households supposedly became more hard-working – not out of necessity, but because of their changing consumptive desires. Crucial to this growing industriousness was the reallocation of the available time of *all* household members: male workers shifted from leisure to more work, and women and children increasingly involved in market activities.¹⁴

¹¹ BALLANTYNE, Tony. “Rereading the Archive and Opening up the Nation-state: Colonial Knowledge in South-Asia (and Beyond)”. In: BURTON, Antoinette Burton, ed. *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003, pp. 102-121, 104.

¹² BALLANTYNE, “Rereading the Archive”. *op.cit.*, p.116; STOLER, *Along the Archival Grain, op.cit.*

¹³ The research project in fact only started on 1 January 2013, funded by the Dutch Scientific Organization (NWO) and involves two PhD-students and one senior researcher. For more information see: <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Expertise-Services/Chair-groups/Social-Sciences/Rural-and-Environmental-History-Group/Research/Industriousness-in-an-imperial-economy-1.htm>

¹⁴ VRIES, Jan de, “Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe”. In BREWER, J. and PORTER, R. eds. *Consumption and the World of Goods*. London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 85-132; VRIES, Jan de. “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution”. *Journal of Economic History*, vol.54, 1994, pp. 249-270; VRIES, Jan de. *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

De Vries' "industrious revolution" thesis offers several advantages. First, in his model both production and consumption are essential, whereas most historians before him have neglected the dynamics between the two.¹⁵ Secondly, De Vries points to the importance of households as crucial units of analysis for economic activity and labour relations. This signifies the need to investigate productive and consumptive activities of women and children, and their role in historical economic development. Interestingly – although historians have not yet explicitly linked this to the industrious revolution thesis – contemporary ideologists and policy-makers aimed to combating poverty and idleness from the eighteenth century onwards. As we will see below, both in the Netherlands and the Netherlands-Indies, attempts were made to reform the 'idle poor' into industrious workers.

However, De Vries pays little attention to institutional histories such as social policies nor to the *restrictions* and power relations within households, and especially the difficulties that women and children in these units faced. He principally presupposes equality and almost unlimited free choice, whereas many social actors and groups did not enjoy full access to all (new) consumer goods. Moreover, De Vries does not include the impact of *unequal global relations* in his analysis, since many of the new exotic consumer goods – presumably forming the incentive for working-class households to work harder – were *not* gained on entirely equal terms.

On the contrary, the new consumer preferences in "the West" that would have stimulated families' industrious behaviour were not purely endogenous developments. Consumption patterns in Western-Europe received a major impulse by partly enforced shifts in trade and labour relations in "the East".¹⁶ An exponent of such important influences was colonial extraction, according to some economic historians leading to the "Great Divergence".¹⁷ Therefore, my new research project 'Industriousness in an imperial economy' aims to investigate household work and consumption patterns – and changes therein – not only in the context of endogenous economic demand and supply factors, but with the inclusion of institutions (such as colonial authority and social policy), unequal power relations and imperialism.

¹⁵ SASSATELLI, Roberta. *Consumer Culture. History, Theory and Politics*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁶ For a still inspiring monograph on the changing role of sugar among the British working class see MINTZ, Sidney. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books (Viking Penguin), 1985.

¹⁷ POMERANZ, Kenneth. *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the making of the modern world economy*. Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000; ACEMOGLU, Daron; JOHNSON, Simon and ROBINSON, James. "The rise of Europe: Atlantic trade, institutional change, and economic growth". *American Economic Review* 95:3, 2005, pp. 546-579.

Already before 1800 European seafaring powers attempted to set up extractive institutions in order to gain as much as possible from the New World and Asia, often resulting in radically changing labour relations. One clear example is slavery, but also many other forms of bonded, coerced and semi-free labour coincided with the spread of colonialism and capitalism.¹⁸ On seventeenth-century Java, for instance, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) increasingly gained control of the hinterlands of Java, where lands were suitable for the cultivation of coffee and other tropical products. The Dutch tried to make the native population work for them both by collaborating with local rulers, by using armed force and by legislation.¹⁹

In the nineteenth century, imperialism intensified and was accompanied – most notably on Java – with increased political and administrative control by the metropole. There are several indications that this severely affected the division of labour and the allocation of time in households, not only in the Netherlands East Indies, but also in the Netherlands. In this article, I will further explore two examples of such effects of colonialism on labour relations, first of all in the early nineteenth-century initiatives to enhance industriousness in both parts of the empire, and secondly, by comparing debates on labour legislation for women and children in both colony and metropole.

Example 1: Imposing industriousness in metropole and colony (c. 1830-1900)

Already in the seventeenth century, poverty and idleness became increasingly linked in the rhetoric and policy of authorities both in the Dutch Republic and on Java. Dutch towns increasingly restricted poor relief for unemployed migrants, and work was connected to beneficial entitlements.²⁰ On Java too, migration and “vagrancy” were condemned as economically counterproductive.²¹ Following economic decline in the eighteenth century, work became increasingly considered to be the answer to the rising problem of poverty: the idle poor should be reformed into hard-working and productive citizens. This rhetoric applied to lower-class men, women, and children alike. Local initiatives such as workhouses and spinning contests –

¹⁸ See, e.g. PRAKASH, Gyan. “Colonialism, Capitalism and the Discourse of Freedom”. *International Review of Social History*, vol. 41: Supplement S4, 1996, pp. 9-25.

¹⁹ For Java, consult BREMAN, Jan. *Koloniaal profijt van onvrije arbeid. Het Preanger stelsel van gedwongen koffieteelt op Java*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, pp. 18-20.

²⁰ LEEUWEN, Marco H.D. van. “Amsterdam en de armenzorg tijdens de Republiek”. *NEHA-Jaarboek*, vol. 59, 1996, pp. 132-161.

²¹ BREMAN. *Koloniaal profijt. op.cit.*, p. 41.

typically women's and children's work – increased tremendously in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, practically all initiatives failed. The poor often refused work, or left the workhouse because of its bad reputation. Most women and children could earn more and be more flexible elsewhere in the labour market.²²

Following the deepened economic troubles of the Napoleonic wars, similar attitudes towards pauperism prevailed. After the erection of the Dutch Kingdom in 1815, initiatives to combat poverty were taken to the national and even imperial level. The Dutch king entrusted one person in particular to realize plans to both counter pauperism and stimulate the industriousness of poor families, in the Netherlands and on Java. This person was Johannes van den Bosch (1780-1844), who had served as a military officer in the Netherlands-Indies since 1799, but was expelled to the Netherlands in 1810, probably because of his criticism of Governor-General Daendels' policy. Back in the Netherlands, he successfully fought against the French in 1814-1815.²³

After the war, Van den Bosch spent most of his time designing plans for combatting poverty in the Netherlands, which was particularly dire in towns. Van den Bosch was convinced that, unlike in Britain, not industry but *agriculture* would be the answer to the existing problems. His experiments (1808-1810) with cash crop cultivation back on Java probably formed the foundation for his ideas.²⁴ Van den Bosch argued that the Dutch urban poor should get the “right to work” by cultivating agricultural crops for the market on wastelands in rural regions. To this end, he established – with private funds – a Benevolent Society (*Maatschappij van Weldadigheid*), which would set up agricultural colonies in Drenthe, an under-populated province in the East of the Netherlands. Tens of thousands of pauper families with mostly urban backgrounds, were migrated (and later even deported) to these “peat colonies” for several years to learn how to cultivate a piece of land. The idea was that this would reform them into industrious agrarian workers, who within a few years could leave the colonies with some savings and an improved mentality.²⁵

²² NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. *De draad in eigen handen. Vrouwen en loonarbeid in de Nederlandse textielnijverheid, 1581-1810*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007, pp. 177-179.

²³ BOERMA, J., *Johannes van den Bosch als sociaal hervormer: de maatschappij van weldadigheid*. Groningen, 1927, pp. 2-4.

²⁴ SCHRAUWERS, Albert. “The ‘Benevolent’ Colonies of Johannes van den Bosch: Continuities in the Administration of Poverty in the Netherlands and Indonesia.” *Comparative Studies of Society and History*. vol.43, n.2, 2001, pp. 298-328, 301.

²⁵ SCHRAUWERS. “Benevolent Colonies”. *op.cit.* pp. 303-313.

However, suitable colonists were hard to find, and “industriousness” soon needed to be enforced to a great extent. Part of the colonial sites became penal institutions for convicted paupers. Even in the “free” colonies, regulations were strict and detailed. In the 1820s, Van den Bosch personally corresponded with the overseers of the peat colonies regularly, making sure that they saw to it that “no household would be bereft of the necessary, but that it itself would earn these necessities”.²⁶ The detail with which Van den Bosch calculated the bare necessities for households’ subsistence strikes the historian’s eye when reading the archival material. Although perhaps benevolent in intent, the peat colonies were an example of social engineering, not eschewing intensive control – and even force – over people’s daily lives. A strict daily regime of meals, work and rest was established, with only little leisure time. Wages were set at two-thirds of regular Dutch (adult male) wages, from which costs for daily subsistence were subtracted. Interestingly, Van den Bosch reckoned with equal expected earnings for men, women and children, which in practice made his calculations unrealistic.²⁷ Whenever a colonist family earned more, the earnings were partly put in a health fund, partly saved, and partly paid out as pocket money. Enough savings could buy the family out of the institution.²⁸

The number of voluntary colonists coming to Drenthe remained low: yearly, on average 22 families arrived between 1830 and 1860.²⁹ Most of the thousands of families and individuals in the colonies were instead sent or even convicted to the “Beggars Institutions” by the authorities of their home towns. In 1875, still 2,809 people were living here, of whom only 10 had volunteered.³⁰ Rather than reforming poor men, women and children into hard-working citizens, the colonies had turned into a full-fledged penal institution, removing unwanted elements from urban society. Judging from their original intention, the peat colonies should be considered a failure. Nevertheless, an important effect of these social experiments was that they set an example for the Cultivation System in the Netherlands Indies that their inventor Johannes van den Bosch designed and implemented during the time he was appointed Governor-General (1830-1833).

²⁶ National Archive (NA), Collection Van den Bosch, inv. no. 58, Benevolent Society, fol. 79v.

²⁷ NA, Vd Bosch, inv. no. 58, fol. 14v.

²⁸ BERENDS, R. Et. Al. *Arbeid ter disciplineren en bestraffing. Veenhuizen als onvrije kolonie van de Maatschappij van Weldadigheid 1823-1859*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1984, pp. 60-61.

²⁹ KLOOSTERHUIS, C.A. *De bevolking van de vrije koloniën der Maatschappij van Weldadigheid*. Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1981, p. 243.

³⁰ ‘Bevolking der Rijksbedelaars Gestichten’, *Economist*. Vol.24, n.2, 1875, pp. 732-736.

The Cultivation System has been extensively described, but for this paper, the relatively underexplored links with Van den Bosch' benevolent colonies in the Netherlands are particularly interesting. Both can be seen as state-led "development projects", focusing on agricultural production of cash crops by the (poor) population, who would receive a cash bonus for surplus crops they cultivated. Also, in both cases, the objective was to reform "lazy" paupers into industrious workers.³¹ Van den Bosch stated that Javanese peasants only needed a few hours' work per day for subsistence, and that their industriousness needed to be enhanced, for their own benefit as well as that of the imperial economy.³² To achieve this, Javanese peasants were required to set aside a proportion of their land to produce export crops, such as coffee, sugar and indigo, for the Dutch authorities. Although peasants obtained monetary compensation for their produce, they mostly had to use this to pay land rents to indigenous elites and Dutch civil servants. This system would be in place until around 1860, and although it worked out differently in various parts of Java, it had a tremendous impact on both the Javanese and the Dutch economies.³³

For the sake of this paper, it is most interesting to zoom in on the effects on household labour, in particular on women's and children's work efforts. Angus Maddison has assumed that the introduction of the Cultivation System did not mean that Indonesian workers were impoverished, but that they had to work harder to meet their daily necessities.³⁴ While Maddison did not explore the economic activities of Indonesian women and children, my argument here is that *their* work efforts largely increased. Indeed, Ben White has recently stated that the Cultivation System "required fundamental reorganization of the household's division of labour".³⁵ Firstly, women's and children's labour input in subsistence agriculture increased, as men got more involved in cultivating cash crops. Secondly, women and children assisted or worked fully in the cultivation of cash crops as well, and Elson even suggests that in some respects this resulted in more equal labour relations between the

³¹ SCHRAUWER. "Benevolent Colonies". *op.cit.* pp. 313-314.

³² BOSCH, J. van den. "De consideratiën en het advies van den 6 Maart 1829, uitgebragt door den benoemden Gouverneur-Generaal van N. Indië J. van den Bosch, op het rapport van den heer Du Bus over de kolonisatie". [1829] In: PARVÉ, D.C. Steyn. *Het koloniaal monopoliestelsel getoetst aan geschiedenis en staatshuishoudkunde*. Gravenhage, 1850, pp. 294-328, 304.

³³ ELSON, Robert. *Village Java under the cultivation system, 1830-1870*. Sidney: Asian Studies Association of Australia with Allen and Unwin, 1994, pp. 43-44.

³⁴ MADDISON, Angus. "Dutch income in and from Indonesia 1700-1938". *Modern Asian Studies*. vol. 23, n.4, 1989, pp. 645-670.

³⁵ WHITE, Ben. "Labour in childhood's global past: Child work and colonial policies in Indonesia, 1800-1949". In: LIETEN, Kristoffel and NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. eds. *Child labour's global past*. Amsterdam: International and Comparative Social History - vol.13, 2011, pp. 479-501, 485.

sexes.³⁶ This enhanced work effort by women and children may have originated mostly out of necessity, as Boomgaard argues,³⁷ but other historians suggest that colonial interactions also entailed new consumptive possibilities for Indonesian households. More generally, the rise of waged labour severely affected labour relations in the Javanese economy and households, as well as their consumption patterns.³⁸

Moreover, the Cultivation System indirectly affected work patterns of labouring households in the Netherlands. Take, for instance, the effects of textile exports by the Dutch Trading Company (*Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij*, *NHM*). Established in 1824 to monopolize trade with the Netherlands East Indies, the NHM soon after also started to ship cotton cloth produced in the Netherlands to the Indonesian market. To this end, new cotton factories were set up in the proto-industrial region of Twente.³⁹ This greatly stimulated the emergence of the mechanized Dutch textile industry, and boosted industrialization in the Netherlands. Mechanization caused the rapid decline of hand-spinning, seriously decreasing the demand for Dutch women and child workers.⁴⁰ Simultaneously, the imports of large quantities of factory-made cotton clothes led to the decline of domestic hand spinning and weaving of cotton by Indonesian women, who consequently began to spend their time on other forms of gainful employment.⁴¹

Eventually, the Cultivation System and other forms of colonial extraction may even have contributed to the decline of female labour force participation in the Netherlands, which occurred faster than in other West-European countries in the second half of the nineteenth century. Partly by cheap imports from the colony, and partly by monopolized exports to the Netherlands-Indies, the Dutch economy flourished after 1850 and real wages increased.⁴² This increased wealth allowed many Dutch working-class households to reallocate their time from the production of commodities towards more consumption and production of utility goods for the household – such as

³⁶ ELSON. *Village Java under the cultivation system, 1830-1870. op.cit.*, pp. 205-206.

³⁷ BOOMGAARD, P. "Female labour and population growth on nineteenth-century Java". *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*. vol. 15, n. 2, 1981, pp. 1-31.

³⁸ ZANDEN, Jan Luiten van and RIEL, Arthur van. *Strictures of Inheritance. The Dutch Economy in the Nineteenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 116.

³⁹ Graaf, Ton de. *Voor Handel en Maatschappij, Geschiedenis van de Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij, 1824-1964*. Amsterdam: Utrecht University, 2012, pp. 59-63.

⁴⁰ NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. *De draad in eigen handen. op.cit.*; GROOT, Gertjan de. *Fabricage van verschillen: mannenwerk, vrouwenwerk in de Nederlandse industrie (1850-1940)*. Amsterdam: Aksant, 2001.

⁴¹ BOOMGAARD, P. "Female labour and population growth on nineteenth-century Java". *op.cit.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴² VAN ZANDEN and VAN RIEL. *Strictures. op.cit.* pp.136, 239.

hygiene and cleanliness – most notably by wives and children.⁴³ No doubt, the influx of tropical consumer goods for ever-lowering prices impacted greatly on labouring households, not only on their consumption patterns, but also on their productivity, as Mintz has suggested.⁴⁴ This entanglement will be explored in the near future, based on empirical evidence of Dutch consumption patterns.

But even if economic change facilitated these changes, why did both the supply of and the demand for industrious Dutch women and children decline? In explaining this, ideological shifts are crucial. During the nineteenth century, the ideology regarding Dutch working-class families gradually changed. Increasingly voices were heard to protect children and women, and to make sure fathers and husbands could earn sufficiently to provide for them. Towards the end of the century, changing ideologies in the metropolis also had some effects on Indonesia, most notably through the “Ethical Policy” after 1901. Nevertheless, Dutch policy-makers displayed extremely differing standards regarding labour policies within the empire, as we will now see.

Example 2: Debates on women’s and children’s work in the empire (c. 1900-1940)

Recent research has revealed that until around 1850 (married) women’s and children’s work was widespread in the Netherlands. Only from this period onwards the male breadwinner ideology fully gained ground in the Netherlands, and was also extended to all social classes by 1900. Compared to many other Western European societies, however, the participation by Dutch women and children started to decline relatively fast from the 1850s onwards.⁴⁵

However, ideology and practice did not always neatly coincide. While Dutch legislation forbade industrial child labour under 12 since 1874, agriculture and services were long exempted. When around 1900, compulsory schooling until age 12 was introduced, many young children appear to have been kept from school to work in the fields. Since the minimum working age had been raised to 14 in 1919, many parents complained to the National Labour Inspection that they had children running around idly for two years after leaving school.⁴⁶ While married women’s market work had demonstrably

⁴³ MOKYR, Joel. “Why ‘More work for mother?’ Knowledge and Household Behavior, 1870-1945”. *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 60, 2000, pp. 1-40.

⁴⁴ MINTZ. *Sweetness and Power*. *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ SCHMIDT, Ariadne, and NEDERVEEN MEERKERK, Elise van. “Reconsidering The ‘Firstmale-Breadwinner Economy’: Women’s Labor Force Participation in the Netherlands, 1600–1900”. *Feminist Economics*, vol. 18, n.4, 2012, pp. 69-96.

⁴⁶ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. no. 1746, diverse petitions.

declined, the Secretary General complained in 1928 that in industrial centers, “housefathers cannot find work and live off the earnings of their daughters”.⁴⁷ Still later, during the economic crisis of the 1930s, “protective” legislation banning all married women’s work was decreed so that their position should be in the family, and not in the labour market. Interesting discussions arose in the preparatory committees between conservatives, liberals and feminists, who not so much disagreed on the true destination of married women, but differed very much on whether the state ought to prescribe this ideal or leave it to the “free” choice of families.⁴⁸ In all of these documents, it is clear that economic necessity and unemployment among men underpinned the call for “protective” legislation for Dutch women and children.

Turning our eye to Indonesia, Dutch observers early on painted a rather stereotypical picture of hard-working Javanese women. Contemporary observers noted that Indonesian women were generally remarkably active in the public sphere, both within the household and in the labour market. This contrasted to their view of the Javanese peasant, who was allegedly satisfied with producing the needs required for subsistence, and would spend most of his time on leisure. In the nineteenth century, European views on the role of Indonesian women apparently became more diverse. Partly, this was due to the more intensive contacts between the indigenous population and the Dutch, who increasingly started to permanently migrate and build a life in the Netherlands-Indies. Partly, these shifting attitudes were also related to changing gender norms in the European context.

Around 1900 opinions were voiced that the loose family ties in Java resulted in a lack of industriousness and entrepreneurship and thus hampered economic development. Women’s principle role ought to be in the household, instead of in the public domain, in order to secure a more coherent family life. Moreover, Christian missionaries tried to impose “western” family values on those households they converted. They opposed polygamy, and tried to convince Indonesian women that their most important task was to be a wife and mother, who was mainly occupied with household duties.⁴⁹ In 1914, elaborate research on Javanese women showed clear differences between girls and women from various social groups. The poor and “ordinary” *desa*

⁴⁷ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. no. 267, letter from C. Zaalberg to Jac. van Ginneken, 1-8-1928.

⁴⁸ NA, Labour Inspection, inv. nr. 271.

⁴⁹ LOCHER-SCHOLTEN, Elsbeth. “Door een gekleurde bril...Koloniale bronnen over vrouwenarbeid op Java in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw”, pp.41-44 e BEMMELEN, Sita van. “Een adatrechtstudie in historisch perspectief. J.C. Vergouwen over Toba-Batakse vrouwen”. pp. 52-77, 71-72. In: REIJS, Jeske; Kloek, Els; JANSZ, Ulla; WILDT, Annemarie de; NORDEN, Suzanne van; BAAR, Mirjam de. eds., *Vrouwen In De Nederlandse Kolonien, Zevende Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1986.

(village) women, helped their parents in the fields from a young age, or looked after their younger brothers and sisters. After marriage, they often worked hard on their plots of land or in their own business, as Javanese men were generally “unfit to maintain them properly”. Next, there were *santri* women, generally middle-class Muslim women who received religious education and usually became obedient and thrifty housewives. Finally, *prijaji* (elite) women were often highly educated and rich, who tended to outsource their household work and were seen by the Dutch as idle and extravagant.⁵⁰ Doubtless, these were stereotypes, but my point is that they still focused on Indonesian women’s industriousness (or lack thereof). Unlike in the Netherlands, the idea that married women should not work was not explicitly voiced for native women.

A similarly ambivalent attitude ruled in regard to the work of Indonesian children. Whereas work by children, especially under the age of 12, had been a matter of growing concern and intensive debate in the Netherlands since the 1840s, and legislation was implemented since 1874, a total disregard of the issue prevailed in the Netherlands Indies. This becomes clear furthermore if we look at school enrolment: by 1900, only 5% of all Dutch children under 12 did not attend school, whereas at the same time only one in every 200 Indonesian children received schooling.⁵¹

Some ten years later, debates arose in the context of international criticism on the Dutch reluctance to implement legislation against female night labour and child work in the Netherlands-Indies in the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1920s, the Netherlands was even summoned by the international community to implement protective labour legislation in the colonies. Interestingly, while the minimum age for child labour in the Netherlands had been raised to 14 in 1919, it was set at 12 for Indonesian children in 1926. Proponents of female and child labour stated that, following the *adat* (Islamic law and traditions), women’s labour was customary and “natural”, and that children were better off working than being idle.⁵² Of course, these opinions were voiced primarily by western entrepreneurs and liberal politicians who viewed Indonesian women and children as a source of cheap labour.

But not only businesspeople stressed the inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women. In 1925, publicist Henri van der Mandere stated:

⁵⁰ *Onderzoek naar de mindere welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking op Java en Madoera. IXb3. Verheffing van de Indische vrouw*. Batavia, 1914, pp. 3-5.

⁵¹ WHITE, Ben. “Childhood, Work and Education, 1900-2000: The Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies/Indonesia Compared”. *Brood en Rozen*. 4: Kinderarbeid, pp. 105-109.

⁵² LOCHER-SCHOLTEN, Elsbeth. “Female labour in twentieth century Java. European notions – Indonesian practice”. In: LOCHER-SCHOLTEN, Elsbeth and NIEHOF, A. eds. *Indonesian women in focus: past and present notions*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1987, pp. 77-103; WHITE, Ben. “Childhood, Work and Education”. *op.cit.* pp. 110-111.

It is self-evident that women in western society are excluded from hazardous and tough labour [...]. Women's position in Indonesian society is incomparable to that of the Dutch woman. Whereas manual labour is an exception in the Netherlands, it is the rule here; there are even regions where it follows from *adat*, that almost all work is done by women.⁵³

Indeed, the census of 1930 lists almost 30% of all married women on Java and Madura with a *registered* occupation, predominantly in agriculture and industry. Compared to the Netherlands, this percentage was extraordinarily high.⁵⁴ The citation indicates that it was not only considered “natural” that Indonesian women worked; the inherent differences between Indonesian and Dutch women also made it self-evident that the latter instead needed protection. This is a fine example of what Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper have called “the grammar of difference”.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Research on the connections between family labour, household time allocation and colonialism is necessarily sketchy, as this is an understudied subject. The research project “Industriousness in an imperial economy” will explore these issues in the next five years, based on extensive archival research, while looking through the lens of entangled histories. More solid conclusions are expected in the near future, but so far we can already sketch some broad lines regarding attitudes towards and practices of women's and children's work in the Netherlands and Java.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, attitudes towards women's and children's work in the Netherlands and Java were strikingly similar. Fear of idleness among the working poor was a big issue until well into the nineteenth century. Authorities initiated projects to “teach” industriousness to working-class men, women and children both in the Netherlands and the Netherlands-Indies. An important example are the “peat colonies” in the Netherlands and the Cultivation System on Java, implemented by Johannes van den Bosch. Both projects show ample parallels in ideological background and implementation. In both cases, agrarian cash crops were cultivated by households, following strict rules, which enabled them to earn their own living in addition to subsistence. Both projects also

⁵³ VAN DER MANDERE, H.Ch.G.J. “‘Internationale wetgeving en Indië’”. *De Indische Gids*. 1925, pp. 1, 25. Thanks to Nynke Dorhout for providing me with this quote.

⁵⁴ Own calculations based on *Volkstelling 1930*, vol. III, 1934, pp. 94-95.

⁵⁵ STOLER, Ann, and COOPER, Frederick. “Between Metropole and Colony”. *op.cit.* pp. 1-56, 3.

displayed a deep contempt for “lazy” paupers and peasants, who needed to be reformed into industrious citizens.

Entangled as their origins may be, there were also clear differences. The Cultivation System was implemented in Javanese villages on a large scale, with wide implications for the population and the household division of work. In contrast, the Benevolent Colonies constituted a relatively isolated area in the Netherlands, where vagrants and beggars were transported out of the “ordinary” (often urban) society. In fact, the Cultivation System probably even had more effects on Dutch labour relations than the Drenthe peat colonies. Combined with the activities of the NHM, the system encouraged industrialization and mechanization of the cotton industry in parts of the Netherlands. The increased imports of colonial goods for lower prices also led to different consumer patterns in many Dutch working-class households. In general, much of the improved living standards of Dutch households may be linked to colonial extraction.

A first analysis of the debates on Dutch and Javanese women’s and children’s work shows many ambivalences and tensions; for instance, between ideology and practice. Despite the ideal of the male breadwinner, in the Netherlands many married women and children still worked in the first half of the twentieth century. Regarding Javanese women and children, on the one hand, we can discern tensions between attempts to “Westernize” them, and introduce the ideal of domesticity, On the other hand, inherent differences between Dutch and Indonesian women and children were stressed, justifying why the former should not and the latter could indeed perform (heavy) labour.

However, here again we must be aware of the differences between ideologies and practice. Much of the “protection” of Dutch wives and children was primarily aimed at protecting white male labour during economic crises. Following Stoler’s plea to research the colonial archives with a critical eye, I believe the same applies to the historical material on “Dutch” women and children. Only in this way, can we make connections between seemingly unconnected developments in labour relations across the empire. On many of the entanglements displayed above, much more research is needed to explore their complex workings and to unravel both their direct and indirect effects. This is the aim of the research project “Industriousness in an imperial economy” for the following years.

