

# **‘The devils own country’**

## **The relationship between New Guinea and Dutch imperialism**



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*'Ook Nederland werd, willens of onwillens, meegesleept door dien stroom des tijds; ook wij konden geen weerstand bieden aan die dwaze en heilloze zucht tot uitbreiding. Wij bezitten een werelddeel, ons koloniaal domein kunnen wij niet eens behoorlijk beheeren; het gebied dat wij het onze noemen gaat onze krachten te boven, en nog wil men meer land veroveren. De imperialistische slokop wil alles in zijn klauwen hebben, en verhief zich, zonder een rechtsgrond te kunnen aanwijzen, tot Souverein van den geheelen Indischen archipel.'*

[H. van Kol 1901]

*'The Netherlands were, weither they wished it or not, dragged by the stream of time; neither we could resist the foolish and pointless wish for expansion. We possess a continent, we can't even administer our possessions properly; the territory which we call ours is beyond our strength, and still we wish to conquer more land. This imperialistic glutton wants everything in its claws and erected itself, without any legal ground, till Sovereign of the entire Indian Archipelago'*

[H. van Kol 1901]

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*'C'est une pays très intéressant pour un naturaliste, mais pour le reste ...rien.'*<sup>1</sup>

This pronouncement about New Guinea was made in 1877 by the Italian discoverer, Luigi Maria d'Albertis, after his return to Australia from a laborious journey along the river Fly. His view with regard to the large island on the eastern edge of the Dutch Indies was very much comparable to the one proclaimed twenty years before by the famous British physicist, Arthur Russel-Wallace. Wallace revered, in *The Malay Archipelago*, to his stay on the homeland of the famous birth of paradise as if it seemed that nature had taken precautions not to let it's treasures, which he counted among the most precious in the world, to become too commonly known and by that be underappreciated. The island was mountainous and the coastline covered by rocks. The interior consisted of dense forest which, together with a multitude of swamps and abysses, made up a nearly impenetrable barrier for those who wished to explore the unknown inland. These grave circumstances were worsened even further by the local population, which consisted of dangerous wild man living in the deepest pool of barbarity, according to Wallace.<sup>2</sup>

These circumstances contributed to the fact that New Guinea was one of the least known places on the globe by the end of the nineteenth century, and still long after. It was a true *terra incognita*. After centuries of sporadic contact between local fishermen and European discoverers and traders of different nationality the inland of the island remained a great mystery. Besides the bleak environmental conditions and hostile attitude of the local population this was also advanced by the poor climatic conditions which caused numerous deceases, many of which ended in death, among the European 'visitors'. This notorious unhealthiness gave the surgeon of the Dutch fortress on the western coast of the island occasion to proclaim, immediately on the inaugural day, that it was strictly necessary to abandon this place as soon as possible and to search for an opportunity to provide the troops with adequate fresh vegetables, meat and soup. Without this measure it was to be expected that the poor state of health among the troops would reach intolerable

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<sup>1</sup> 'Journaal eener reis naar Misool, Onin en de Geelvinksbaai van october tot december 1872 door den gouvernements-commissaris J.G. Coorengel, oud-resident van Timor' in: P.J.B.C. Robidé van der Aa, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea ondernomen op last der regeering van Nederlandsch-Indië in de jaren 1871, 1872, 1875-76 door de heeren P. van der Crab en J.E. Teysmann, J.G. Coorengel en A.J. Langeveldt van Hemert en P. Swaan* ('s-Gravenhage 1879) 190-191

<sup>2</sup> A. Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea en de Papoesche eilanden II* (Batavia en 's-Hage 1884) 158

heights.<sup>3</sup> For the soldiers who were sent to Fort Du Bus in the 1830's it was if they were sentenced to death.<sup>4</sup>

This negative judgement about the island remained intact for most of the nineteenth century and was strikingly described by the honorary member of the Dutch Geographical Society, P.J.B.C. Robidé van der Aa. With reference to the voyages of discovery, which were stimulated by the Dutch colonial government during the 1870's, Robidé concluded that New Guinea was a country where material and moral improvement weren't appreciated. The local population was disinclined to peaceful trade and couldn't be convinced of the benefits of organised labour. In such a country, where every effort for improvement recoiled on the rough manners of the inhabitants and where missionaries performed their spiritual work in vain, civilisation stood no chance. First and foremost it was necessary to change the habits of the local population if a western style of civilisation would ever have a chance of succeeding. This meant that every effort to colonise the island would be a sacrifice which nothing could refund and besides that there were many countries and peoples in Eastern Asia which were more eligible to be brought under the civilising blessing of the Dutch colonial government, according to Robidé.<sup>5</sup>

Such an attitude was dominant during the 1870's. Not only in The Netherlands but in Germany and England as well. Since the early sixties of the nineteenth century German traders swarmed across the globe. Particularly in the area surrounding New-Guinea they were very active. Repeatedly they tried to convince the German government of the necessity to acquire formal territory in Eastern Asia and the Southern Pacific. However these proposals were resolutely denied. This negative view akin to colonial projects in the Far East was backed by the influential periodical, *Pettermanns Mittheilungen*, in which there was to be read in 1882 that 'es sich für Bauern vorerst nicht eignet, da es der Colonisierung, im Sinne der Holländer, ausserordentliche Schwierigkeiten entgegenstellt, so müsste man neue Formen zur Exploitation erdenken und ein sehr gewagtes, kostspieliges Experiment machen'.<sup>6</sup> [*It is not suited for farmers, since a colonisation in Dutch style would bring tremendous difficulties. For instance there had to be explored*

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<sup>3</sup> Chirurgijn Majoor G. Ovink aan Kapitein Luitenant Steenboom van Z.M. Korvet Triton, 25 augustus 1828, Algemeen Rijksarchief Den Haag, Ministerie van Koloniën 1816-1850, Openbaar verbaalarchief (ov) 1818-1849, 27-8-1829, inv. nr. 2.10.01/698

<sup>4</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 61

<sup>5</sup> P.J.B.C. Robidé van der Aa, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea vii*

<sup>6</sup> A. Petermann, *Mittheilungen aus Justus Perthes' geographischer anstalt* (1882) 433

*new ways of exploitation and the whole project would be an extremely risky and expensive experiment]*

A comparable view was developed at the other side of the British Channel. Despite building pressure from the Australian colonies to annex the eastern part of the island Lord Carnarvon declared in 1877 that he was ‘not at all in favour of any further acquisition of territory in the South Pacific’.<sup>7</sup> This opinion was shared in 1883 by Lord Derby when he explicitly remarked ‘that we aren’t inclined to annex New-Guinea’.<sup>8</sup>

Such comments are in violent contrast with a newspaper article in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* of the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1884 (just one year after the proclamation of Lord Derby) in which there was to be read that ‘while England hasn’t answered the German invitation to join a European conference about West-Africa, it has answered to the repeated requests of the Australian colonies by annexing an important part of New Guinea’.<sup>9</sup> This in turn triggered a German countermove on the 23<sup>th</sup> of December. On that date the German government proclaimed that ‘auf der östlich von der Niederländischen Grenze gelegenen Nordküste von Neu-Guinea uns auf den Inseln im neubritannischen Archipel Angehörige des Deutschen Reichs Faktoreien begründet haben, sind die Kaufverträge mit den Eingeborenen Landerwerbungen gemacht haben, sind die betreffende Gebiete, vorbehaltlich wohlerworbener Rechte Dritter, unter den Schutz Seiner Majestät des Kaisers gestellt und ist die Deutsche Flagge zum Zeichen der Besitzgreifung daselbst gehisst worden’.<sup>10</sup> [*German citizens have established plantations and acquired land on the north coast of New Guinea, east of the Dutch border, and on the islands in the Archipelago of New Britain. These areas, excluding those which are legally owned by others, are put under the direct protection of the Emperor and a German flag has been hoisted as a sign of annexation]*

These acts made New Guinea to the next scene of the ‘rebirth of the colonial policy’<sup>11</sup>, which took place among the powerful European states by the mid-1880’s. Due

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<sup>7</sup> R.C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific. The expansionist era 1820-1920* (Melbourne 1980) 48

<sup>8</sup> ‘Nota betreffend Nieuw-Guinea, 19 oktober 1883 in: J. Woltring (red.), *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandsche politiek van Nederland 1848-1919, tweede periode 1871-1898, derde deel 1881-1885* (’s-Gravenhage 1967) nr. 364 p. 532

<sup>9</sup> ‘Een nieuwe Britsche kolonie’ in: *NRC* 13 oktober 1884

<sup>10</sup> Erlaß des Reichskanzlers an die Kaiserlichen Missionen in London, Paris, Madrid, Lissabon, Haag, Brüssel, Washington, Rom, Wien, Petersburg, Kopenhagen, Stockholm 23-12-1884., *Deutsche Interessen in der Südsee II*, ARA, Kol, Geheime resolutiën/ Kabinetverbaalarchief (kva) 1850-1900, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159 L23

<sup>11</sup> De Beaufort, *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 26 februari 1885

to its possessions in the Far East the Dutch got caught up in this process and the stakes were indeed very high for them. The Dutch government in The Hague and the colonial government in Batavia were forced to make some clear-cut decisions about their colonial possessions and policy in the Indian Ocean. This was strikingly put by the *Javabode* on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 1885:

‘Wil de Nederlandsch Indische Regeering ons koloniaal rijk behouden zoo als het thans is, dan moet Zij, met een van Haar op dit punt nauwelijks te verwachten activiteit, iets doen met en op Nieuw-Guinea. Staatsbelang gebiedt dit’.<sup>12</sup>

*‘If the Dutch colonial government wishes to retain its colonial empire in its current form, than it is obliged to act on the New Guinea question. Interest of state commands this albeit it was hardly to be expected in the light of its former policy in the Indies.’*

Eventually the government would succeed in retaining its claims to the western part of the island which resulted in an official recognition of its sovereignty by the German and British government in 1885. The question how and why the Dutch government succeeded in this arduous task is the subject of this paper. It is interesting to answer this question in terms of the discussion about the nature of the Dutch colonial policy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The ‘New Guinea question’ lends itself very well for this cause while this case makes it directly possible to compare the Dutch policy with those of outspoken imperialistic powers like Germany and England. I’d like to test the 1991 basic assumption of Maarten Kuitenbrouwer that the Dutch colonial policy in the Dutch Indies by the last quarter of the nineteenth century was pre-eminently imperial rule by a small European power.

In this paper I chose a chronological approach since this offers a clear picture of the circumstances and developments concerning New Guinea over time while it also allows room for an explanation of the different insights in the Dutch imperialism debate. The main discussion points in this debate were in 1994 distinguished by Elsbeth Locher-Scholten as being a contradiction between:

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<sup>12</sup> *Javabode*, 31 januari 1885

- economisten en politieke generalisten
- achtienseventigers en lange-termijn-denkers
- Europacentristen en periferisten<sup>13</sup>
  
- *economists and political generalisers*
- *1870'ers and long-term-thinkers*
- *European centralists and periferists*

Also due to the fact that Kuitenbrouwer remarked in his 1998 description of the Dutch imperialism debate<sup>14</sup> that the publication of Locher-Scholten's research marks an temporary end to the debate it seems logical to use these discussion points as the core of this paper. In the final pages of every chapter I will devote some attention to the developments during the considered period with regard to the imperialism debate.

I used the return of the Dutch colonial possessions in the Far East by the British in 1816 as a starting point because this forced the Dutch authorities to develop an official colonial policy for the first time since it was the VOC who conducted colonial policy up till then.

In the first chapter I'd like to pay some attention to the return of the Indian possessions and the particular problems this caused. As will be explained later on it was mainly the treaty of London of the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1824 which played a significant role in this process. This treaty became the focal point of the Dutch colonial policy during the second half of the 1820's and the first years of the 1830's. I will explain this relationship more explicitly later on.

In the Dutch colonial historiography it is generally 1830 which functions as a turning point in the colonial policy. The separation of Belgium and the financial distress which this caused necessitated the Dutch to adapt their policy to their new status as 'small power'. For the Indies this meant that financial profit and centralisation of governmental institutions on Java became the key elements of the colonial regime. The abandonment of the Dutch post on the shore of New Guinea in 1836 seems to fit quite well in this image of contraction. If this is truly so will be the central question of the second chapter.

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<sup>13</sup> E. Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat en koloniale staat. De relatie Djambi-Batavia (1830-1907) en het Nederlandse imperialisme* (Leiden 1994) 3

<sup>14</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving' in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 113 (1998) afl. 1, p. 56

This seemingly disinterested attitude to the outer parts of the Indies ended in the 1860's. This wasn't caused by a different policy but by the globally increasing interest in physical and geographical research. Since New Guinea belonged to the biggest unknown areas in the world it attracted the attention of many explorers, adventurers and luck seekers. Hereby it reached the newspapers every now and then. Which consequences this had for the international position of the island and for the Dutch policy regarding New Guinea will be a central point in this third chapter.

The increased interest in the island resulted in an increase of the number of cases in which the Dutch colonial government had to pay attention to this easternmost part of its belongings. Gradually she was forced to make clear-cut choices. These choices were strongly influenced by international competition with regard to the sovereignty over New Guinea and by the assault on its budget caused by the war in Atjeh. The solution to this dilemma formed the biggest problem which the government in The Hague and Batavia faced during the 1870's. How they found a way out of this dilemma will be the theme of this fourth part.

The tripartition of New Guinea in 1885 formed the largest territorial acquisition by the European colonisers in East Asia of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was the culmination point of a long intensifying competition in the area. In this chapter the focus will be on the role which The Netherlands played in this competition for markets and influence. Did a small power like The Netherlands have any influence on the colonial policies developed by great powers like Germany and England, and how did it succeed in withstanding this rivalry? It is particularly interesting to compare the objectives of the different participating countries with regard to their possessions in the region in order to evaluate whether The Netherlands was more comparable to an imperialistic nation or to a satisfied power?

In the last chapter I'd like to pay some attention to the period after the tripartition. Did the newly acquired territories produce the advantages they seemed to offer at the height of the competition? Quirky detail in this matter is that the first Dutch official government representative did not arrive only 13 years later on the island. What's the reason for this and how is that to be united with the ruling trend toward expansion?

In the final part I will postulate a number of opinions and remarks about the tripartition of New Guinea and the position which it resembles in the debate about Dutch imperialism.

The creation of the Batavian Republic in 1795 and the – mostly forced – French style attitude that characterized this regime meant a continuation of the split between The Netherlands and Great Britain which first appeared during the Fourth English War between 1780 and 1784. This important shift in foreign policy wasn't just a rupture with the line taken by the former Republic since the end of the Third English War in 1674, it also produced a number of potentially dangerous consequences. After all it was the recognition of the common benefits of a good relationship with regard to their vast colonial possessions in the Far East which traditionally drove the Dutch and English together. This relationship was vividly described by J.A. van Hamel as comparable to a marriage 'in which the couple run into trouble all the time and frequently have conflicting interests but in the essential difficulties of life feel attracted to each other time and again'.<sup>15</sup> By the creation of a French satellite state in the Low Countries there came an end to this basic principle of foreign policy. The breach was already predicted by Lord Dundas in a letter to Granville in which is to be read that whenever 'the French either by conquest or treaty get possession of the seat and instruments of the Dutch government, and have their senses about them, their first act will be to send a French force on board the Dutch shipping to the Cape and take possession of it'.<sup>16</sup>

Such a threat to the British empire was intolerable to London. As a consequence the British government took, during 1795 and 1811, possession of almost all the colonial belongings of the Batavian Republic. Officially it was proclaimed that this possession would be temporary but in reality a large portion was kept after the Neapolitan wars were over. At that point, in 1813, the Dutch were completely dependent on the British if they wished to regain their former status as a colonial power.<sup>17</sup> This monopoly position of the British government made it vulnerable to pressure from its own commercial sector to retain a part of the former Dutch colonies (the Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon, Demerara, Esequibo and Berbice) and add them to the already extensive British empire.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> J.A. van Hamel, *Nederland tusschen de Mogendheden. De hoofdtrekken van het buitenlandsch beleid en de diplomatieke geschiedenis van ons vaderland sinds deszelfs onafhankelijk volksbestaan onderzocht* (Amsterdam 1918) 62

<sup>16</sup> N. Tarling, *Anglo-Dutch Rivalry in the Malay World 1780-1824* (St. Lucia 1961) 51

<sup>17</sup> N.C.F. van Sas, *Onze Natuurlijkste Bondgenoot. Nederland, Engeland en Europa, 1813-1831* (Groningen 1985) 2

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* 82

The remainder of the former VOC possessions were returned to the newly formed Kingdom of Holland on the 13th of August 1814 since it was important to provide this new state with a solid basis in order to make it a successful countermeasure against renewed French expansionism. Besides that there was a large portion of the British House of Lords which saw retaining the former Dutch colonies as ‘only another burden added to those with which the nation was already so heavily loaded’.<sup>19</sup>

Although the official return was now arranged the problems weren’t over yet. In the first place there was Napoleon’s second bid for European mastery in 1815 which meant that it was only in 1816 possible for the Dutch government to take over the seat of power on Java.<sup>20</sup> In the meanwhile did the former British governor of India, Thomas Stamford Raffles, a lot to complicate the matter since he openly questioned the basis of Dutch sovereignty over much of their east Asian possessions.<sup>21</sup> Most of all it was the newly established settlement of Singapore which caused problems. These conflicts in Asia were eventually solved by a second treaty of London signed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1824.

## 2.1 The treaty of the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1824

*‘Zijne Majesteit de koning der Nederlanden en Zijne Majesteit de koning van het Verenigd Koninkrijk van Groot-Brittannië en Ierland, verlangende hunne respectieve bezittingen en den handel hunner onderdanen in Oost-Indië op eenen wederkeerig voordeligen voet te brengen, zoodat de welvaart en voorspoed der beide natiën voortaan te allen tijde bevorderd kunnen worden, zonder die oneenigheden en naijver, welke in vroeger dagen de goede verstandhouding gestoord hebben, die steeds tusschen dezelve behoort te bestaan, en willende zooveel mogelijk alle aanleiding tot misverstand tusschen hunne respectieve Agenten voorkomen, alsmede ten einde zekere punten van verschil te regelen, welke zich hebben opgedaan bij het ter uitvoer leggen van de conventie, den 13 augustus 1814 te Londen gesloten, voor zoover dezelve betrekking heeft tot de bezittingen van Zijne Majesteit de koning der Nederlanden in Oost-Indië, hebben besloten ...’<sup>22</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot* 80

<sup>20</sup> C.M. Smulders, *Geschiedenis en verklaring van het Tractaat van 17 maart 1824 te Londen gesloten tusschen Nederland en Groot-Brittannië, ter regeling van de wederzijdsche belangen en regten in Oost-Indië* (Utrecht 1856) 23-24

<sup>21</sup> Van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot* 193

<sup>22</sup> *Staatsblad van 1824*, no. 39 (blz. 537)

*'His Majesty the King of Holland and His Majesty the King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, wishing to bring their respective possessions and trade of their subordinates in a mutual beneficially order, as to increase the wealth and prosperity of both nations for now and time immemorial, without any further quarrels or disagreements, which in earlier days caused so much damage, and wishing to avoid any misunderstanding between the agents of the respective governments, and to settle a number of differences of opinion, which have arisen out of the Convention of London signed on the 13th of August 1814 with regard to the possessions of the King of Holland in East Asia, have determined ...*

In this fashion the newly signed treaty was published in the Dutch *Staatscourant*. After years of disagreement about sovereignty and trade regulations in Asia this convention finally provided clarity. The main principle of the treaty was to trade colonial possessions in order to separate the British and Dutch spheres of influence in East Asia just as the British foreign secretary George Canning had wished. His opinion was that the Dutch and English together had a common goal as 'exclusive Lords of the East' from which they shouldn't stray 'inasmuch as all other nations were jealous of both, and that it was very desirable that we should settle our matters amicably, and not give Europe the satisfaction of seeing us quarrel'.<sup>23</sup>

In a secret part of the treaty both governments agreed to a line just south of Singapore to be the divide between their respective empires. For England this was acceptable since it wished a strong Dutch kingdom in Europe as a check on the French. To make this possible it was necessary to provide this new state with a solid financial basis to which the possession of colonies could contribute significantly. And besides that did the British prefer a seemingly weak neighbour in Asia above potentially more dangerous ones like France or the United States who could be enticed to fill the gap whence the Dutch would leave the Indies.<sup>24</sup> All this left a free hand to the Dutch in the Indies and an undisturbed possession of the Indian peninsula to the British. With the official adoption of this separation in zones of influence the Dutch negotiators had achieved their goal as was proclaimed by their Minister of Colonial Affairs A.R. Falck on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1824. He stated that 'no condition, no stipulation, can bring us in a continual and necessary

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<sup>23</sup> Tarling, *Anglo-Dutch Rivalry* 147

<sup>24</sup> E. Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 45

attachment to the British government'<sup>25</sup>, by which he meant that it wouldn't be beneficial to the Dutch to stay on negotiating every little dispute with the British but rather have a clear-cut separation of sovereignty while that made the basis of the Dutch colonial empire much stronger and no longer dependent on the goodwill of the British.

This remark characterizes the ambivalent relationship between both countries. On the one hand the English were 'the most natural ally' of the Dutch but on the other hand it proved to be an ally 'with whom there were also conflicting interests'.<sup>26</sup> The goal to avoid any mutual possession of territory in the Indian Archipelago would prove to be a lasting tendency in the colonial policy of the Netherlands and would often directly influence its relationship with London.

Despite the fact that governor Van der Capellen was warned, after the signing of the treaty of 1824, 'with power and emphasis', 'to keep in mind the maintenance of a spirit of harmony between the British and Dutch governments in the Indies'<sup>27</sup>, conflict broke out again only several years later. This time it was the most eastern part of the Indies which became the cause of dispute.

## 2.2 A curious intermezzo?

According to article seven of the treaty the 'Mollucas, and especially Ambon, Banda, Ternate, and there immediate subordinate territories, were dismissed [of the stipulations of the treaty] till the Dutch government judged it right to abandon its monopoly on the spice trade'.<sup>28</sup> This arrangement was to play a crucial role in the Anglo-Dutch relations in the eastern part of the Archipelago.

These relations were, ever since 1826, influenced by rumours about the establishment of a British trade post on the shores of New Guinea which, supposedly, was to function in a similar fashion as Singapore which in theory meant that its main goal would be to draw away a part of the trade from the Indies (in this case from the Moluccan spice trade). In relation to these rumours Governor Du Bus de Gisignies wrote, on the 26<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> C. Th. Elout, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis der onderhandelingen met Engeland, betreffende de overzeesche bezittingen, 1820-1824 getrokken uit de nagelaten papieren van wijlen den Minister van staat Elout* ('s-Gravenhage 1865) xxix

<sup>26</sup> Elout, *Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis der onderhandelingen* xxix

<sup>27</sup> De minister voor de marine en koloniën C.Th. Elout aan Gouverneur-Generaal Van der Capellen, 31 augustus 1824, ARA, Kol, Openbaar verbaalarchief (ovb), 31-8-1824, inv. nr. 2.10.01/406

<sup>28</sup> Smulders, *Geschiedenis en verklaring van het tractaat* 67

of September, to the Minister of navy and colonies, C. Th. Elout, in The Hague ‘that this apprehensiveness isn’t without just cause, since an establishment on an other part of the southwest shore of New Guinea would have every chance of developing as the focal point of local trade and by that would be able to develop rapidly’.<sup>29</sup> In this letter Du Bus asked for a clear set of guidelines with regard to the New Guinea situation since the governor of the Moluccas, Pieter Merkus, was pushing ‘to beat the English to it and establish a Dutch settlement instead because of the danger to the monopoly on the Moluccas which would surely radiate from the new British establishment’.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that the voyage of Lieutenant D.H. Kolff<sup>31</sup> had already proved that the rumours about the English settlement were false (probably they referred to Fort Dundas on the north coast of Australia<sup>32</sup>) the Dutch government was still seriously contemplating a settlement of its own. Thereto was ever more reason since the treaty of 1824 left New Guinea out of the Dutch sphere of influence.<sup>33</sup>

Elout left the eventual choice to King William I but informed the monarch extensively about the advantages and disadvantages of a settlement. The Minister wasn’t really positive and came to the conclusion that ‘generally speaking prove of the advantages was lacking’ and that ‘the creation of a settlement would be a heavy task’. Nevertheless it was clear that ‘it would be desirable to keep the English away from New Guinea’.<sup>34</sup> That’s why Elout advised the King to instruct the governor in the following way:

*‘1) Dat U.M. het vestigen van een etablissement op het Eiland N-Guinea vooralsnog onraadzaam acht – en daartoe geene toestemming kan geven, zonder vooraf eene meer ontwikkelde voordragt te hebben ontvangen, waarbij de zaak ook in verband zal moeten beschouwd worden, met de nieuwe inrigtingen aan de Molukkos te geven.*

*2) Dat U.M. echter voorshands wel tot eene inbezitting der Westkust van N-Guinea van den Kaap de Goede Hoop tot aan Kaap Valsch of verder zuidwaarts hoogstdezelfs*

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<sup>29</sup> Kommissaris Generaal Du Bus de Gisignies aan minister voor marine en koloniën C. Th. Elout, 26 september 1826, ARA, Kol, Geheim verbaalarchief (gv), 23-4-1827, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4195

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem

<sup>31</sup> D.H. Kolff, *Reize door den weinig bekenden zuidelijken Moluksche archipel en langs de geheel onbekende zuidwestkust van Nieuw-Guinea, gedaan in de jaren 1825 en 1826* (Amsterdam 1828)

<sup>32</sup> Minister van marine en koloniën C.Th. Elout aan koning Willem I, 13 februari 1828, ARA, Kol, gv. 13-2-1828, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4200

<sup>33</sup> Tarling, *Anglo-Dutch Rivalry* 166

<sup>34</sup> Minister van marine en koloniën C.Th. Elout aan koning Willem I, 31 maart 1827, ARA, Kol, gv. 31-3-1827, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4195

*toestemming kan geven en den K.G. reets den magtiging om daartoe, in den geest van dit voorstel, het noodige te bewerkstelligen indien hem intusschen geene redenen ter contrarie mogten zijn voorgekomen.*<sup>35</sup>

*'1) That His Majesty, up to this point, wasn't in favour of establishing a settlement on New Guinea – and couldn't approve of it, without being informed more thoroughly, in which case the whole matter would be related to the new government structure given to the Moluccas.*

*2) That His Majesty might be in favour of a annexation of the western shore of New Guinea from the Cape of Good Hope up to Cape Valsch or further south and that the governor was authorized to operate accordingly provided that no conditions to the contrary would evolve'.*

The King approved of this text but wished to leave more manoeuvring space for the governor and left the choice of a settlement up to Du Bus. On his turn Du Bus left the choice to the governor of the Moluccas. If he thought it necessary to erect a settlement on the western shore of New Guinea twenty thousand guilders would be provided to finance this project.<sup>36</sup> This chain of events left the choice about a further increase of the Dutch territory in the Indies up to the man on the spot, governor Merkus, and as mentioned above he knew how to act.

Merkus decided to 'erect a small military post to protect the claims of His Majesty the King of the Netherlands more effectively than would be the case if the territory would be annexed by a mere declaration'.<sup>37</sup> With this goal in mind a squad of 33 officers and troops left the Moluccas on board of the 'Iris' and 'Triton' on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April 1828.<sup>38</sup> Commanded by commissioner A.J. van Delden the official annexation 'of the coast of New Guinea from the 141<sup>st</sup> degree longitude on the south coast up to the Cape of Good Hope on the north coast' took place on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1828.<sup>39</sup> This proclamation was

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<sup>35</sup> Minister van marine en koloniën C. Th. Elout aan koning Willem I, 31 maart 1827, ARA, Kol, gv. 31-3-1827, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4195

<sup>36</sup> Kommissaris Generaal Du Bus de Gisignies aan de Luitenant Gouverneur-Generaal, 29 december 1827, ARA, Kol, gv. 21-9-1828, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4206

<sup>37</sup> Gouverneur der Moluksche Eilanden P.J. Merkus aan de Luitenant Gouverneur Generaal, 22 april 1828, ARA, Kol, gv. 21-10-1828, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4207

<sup>38</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 19

<sup>39</sup> Handelingen en besluiten van de Gouverneur Generaal in rade 1819-1836, 3 maart 1829, ARA, Kol, 3-3-1829, inv. nr. 2.10.01/2823

read aloud in the newly established fortress on the southwest coast of the island. This settlement, named after governor Du Bus, was the first definitive Dutch settlement on the island.

Figure 1: The position of Fort Du Bus in relationship to the Indian Archipelago.



Already during the building of the fortress it became clear that minister Elout was right by remarking that the creation of a settlement on the coast of this island would be a difficult task. In the rapport of Salomon Müller, whom joined the journey of the ‘Iris’ and the ‘Triton’, is to be read that ‘many ratings became ill pretty soon’.<sup>40</sup> The Italian count Vidua de Gonzano came to a similar conclusion. He had compassion with the soldiers who were stationed on New Guinea ‘three or four hundred miles from the Moluccas, without a chance of receiving any support, in a country, that provides nothing, whose inhabitants are on the lowest spot of the ladder of civilisation and are to be counted among the greatest traitors around’.<sup>41</sup> If one adds the notorious unhealthiness of the environment to this enumeration it is understandable that a detachment to New Guinea was treated by the troops on the Moluccas as if they received a death sentence.<sup>42</sup>

These reports obviously reached governor Merkus as well. Partly due to the fact that the British had abandoned their posts, the fortresses Dundas and Wellington) on the north coast of Australia because of the same problems Merkus advised the government to

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<sup>40</sup> S. Müller, ‘Reizen en onderzoekingen in den Indischen Archipel gedaan op last der Nederlandsche regering tusschen de jaren 1828 en 1836’ in: *Werken van het koninklijk instituut voor taal-, land en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Amsterdam 1857) 111

<sup>41</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 48

<sup>42</sup> Ibidem 61+ P.Bleeker, *Reis door de Minahassa en den Molukschen archipel gedaan in de maanden september en oktober 1855 in het gevolg van den Gouverneur-Generaal Mr. A.J. Duymaer van Twist* (Batavia 1856) 220

abandon Fort Du Bus.<sup>43</sup> This advise was adopted by the new governor, Jean Chetien Baud. He wrote to the minister of colonies Van den Bosch that it would be better ‘to end the sacrifices of people and money which the establishment on New Guinea costs because it provides no advantages to the trader or the farmer while the country is sparsely populated, poorly cultivated and extremely unhealthy’.<sup>44</sup> On the 6st of July 1835 the official approval of the King followed and the settlement was provisionally abandoned till the colonial government had located a place which would be ‘more suitable and healthy’.<sup>45</sup>

This decision meant a temporary end to the Dutch presence on the island. All that remained was nominal sovereignty over the area which followed from the proclamation of the 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1828. The retainment of this sovereignty would play a central role in the policy regarding the region during the coming decades but it would take till 1898 before another attempt at settlement would be undertaken. But how is it to be explained that there existed a settlement on the island between 1828 and 1836?

### **2.3 Early imperialism or late colonialism?**

As was already proven by the reports of governor Merkus and governor-general Du Bus from 1826 the Dutch settlement on New Guinea was firstly a reaction to British activities in the region around the important Mollucan islands. With the whole Singapore ‘affair’ fresh in mind the colonial government feared further competition in the eastern part of the Archipelago. This wasn’t wholly fictional as was demonstrated by a statement made by Captain William Barnes in 1823 with regard of the purpose of the British settlements on the north coast of Australia.<sup>46</sup>

Despite this seemingly obvious proceeding the policy akin to New Guinea deviated from the general colonial policy during the 1830’s. Generally the colonial government in Batavia adhered, during the most of the nineteenth century, to a policy of abstinence to the outer provinces and concentrated on the cultivation of Java. It is striking that exactly during a period in which the colonial government was in a dire financial situation, due to

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<sup>43</sup> P. Merkus aan Gouverneur-Generaal D.J. de Eerens, 10 augustus 1839, ARA, Kol, gv. 14-2-1840, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4258

<sup>44</sup> Gouverneur-Generaal J.C. Baud aan minister van koloniën J. van den Bosch, 29 december 1834, ARA, Kol, ov. 13-7-1835, inv. nr. 2.10.01/984

<sup>45</sup> Koning Willem I aan minister van koloniën J. van den Bosch, 6 juli 1835, ARA, Kol, ov. 13-7-1835, inv. nr. 2.10.01/984

<sup>46</sup> D.C. Gordon, *The Australian frontier in New Guinea, 1870-1885* (New York 1951) 46-47

the war on Java, that a annexation of new territory took place of which the general view was 'that it wouldn't provide extra income'.<sup>47</sup> How is this to be explained?

Therefore we must focus on the role played by King William I. In his study about the Anglo-Dutch relationship between 1813 and 1830 Van Sas remarks that William came, about halfway through the 1820's, in the position to pursue his global ambitions. 'The foreign policy, which up to that point had been forcibly negative, could now take a much more active strand'.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the best example of this is the instruction given to governor Van den Bosch in 1829 at his departure for Batavia in which he was explicitly ordered to perform research 'about the western shore of New Holland [Australia DL]; with the power to annex that coastline in name of the King if Van den Bosch thought this to be beneficial'.<sup>49</sup> This fits in well with the ambition of William to elevate the United Kingdom to large power status.<sup>50</sup> From this point of view it is possible to explain the annexation of the western part of New Guinea.

Up till the constitutional change of 1848 colonial policy was the exclusive terrain of the King which allowed for a strong personal mark. That's also why William wasn't impressed by the disadvantages of settlement on New Guinea brought up by Elout in 1827. So the conclusion must be that the man on the spot, governor Merkus, indeed directly ordered the establishment of a settlement on New Guinea but he did this in the knowledge that it would be approved by the King.

Seen from this perspective the Dutch annexation of the western part of New Guinea wasn't just a move to protect the spice monopoly of the Moluccas, like they had done in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but much more like an early example of imperialistic policy. At least when one uses the first part of Kuitenbrouwers definition of imperialism as being 'the purposeful and actual strive for formal or informal political control over another society'.<sup>51</sup> Together with the opinion of the American historian W.L. Langer that power politics among the western states lay at the heart of imperialism<sup>52</sup> it seems maintainable that the Dutch action with regard to New Guinea in 1828 is to be

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<sup>47</sup> Minister van koloniën C. Th. Elout aan de koning, 31 maart 1827, ARA, Kol, gv. 31-3-1827, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4195

<sup>48</sup> Van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot* 229

<sup>49</sup> Minister van koloniën C. Th. Elout aan Gouverneur-Generaal J. Van den Bosch, 12 november 1829, ARA, Kol, ov. 12-11-1829, inv. nr. 2.10.01/714

<sup>50</sup> Van Sas, *Onze natuurlijkste bondgenoot* 229-230

<sup>51</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme. Koloniën en buitenlandse politiek 1870-1902* (Amsterdam 1985) 8

<sup>52</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Drie omwentelingen in de historiografie van het imperialisme: Engeland en Nederland' in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 107 (1994) afl. 4, 560

characterized as an early example of imperialism in which the peripheral factor – the British trade to trade in the eastern part of the Indies – was used by the government in Europe to strengthen its international position. This is an understandable strategy when we keep in mind that William was striving to elevate the status of the United Kingdom and wished to break with the stigma of being a puppet of the English.

Besides that it is also possible to use the explanatory model created by R.F. Betts to explain the actions taken by the Dutch with regard to New Guinea. Both criteria distinguished by Betts, contiguity and pre-emption, to determine the moment at which a colonial policy can be considered imperialistic are traceable in the case of New Guinea.<sup>53</sup> Since the decision to erect a settlement on the island was taken by the governor of the Moluccas contiguity was obviously a major factor but as we have seen the decision was also prompted ‘to thwart the English’<sup>54</sup> and by that carried a strong pre-emptive element with it as well.

Furthermore Kuitenbrouwer showed that the general criteria postulated by H. Gollwitzer for ‘weltpolitisch Denken’ by the great powers were also, albeit by a lesser degree, discernable in the Netherlands. While Kuitenbrouwer immediately related this to the period after 1870 it seems to me that the choice between ‘going under as a colonial power or even as a European nation, or recovery of its historical greatness in the Indies’<sup>55</sup> already dictated the colonial policy under the regime of William I up to 1830. In that regard the Belgian revolt acted as a spoilsport. William and the Dutch government had to adept to their new status of small European power with limited financial and political means. As a small power it was no longer possible to use power politics in colonial questions. This resulted in a policy which is commonly described as being paradoxical.<sup>56</sup> For most of the remainder of the nineteenth century the Dutch concentrated on the cultivation of Java and ignored most of their outer colonies. At least this is the image they wanted to create but in reality there were so many exemptions from this line of thought that it can’t be applied indiscriminately to the whole period between 1830 and 1870. Which consequences this paradoxical policy had for the relationship with New Guinea will be explained more thoroughly in the next chapter.

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<sup>53</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 17

<sup>54</sup> Kommissaris Generaal Du Bus de Gisignies aan minister voor marine en koloniën C. Th. Elout, 26 september 1826, ARA, Kol, gv. 23-4-1827, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4195

<sup>55</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 203

<sup>56</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 94-95

### **3 The relationship between The Netherlands and New Guinea during the era of abstinence (1830-1870)**

With the departure from Fort Du Bus in February 1836 the Dutch presence on New Guinea ended. This outpost had cost, during its eight years of existence, the lives of sixteen officers and more than hundred of their subordinates as well as a large portion of the wives and children who had accompanied the troops in 1828. They had fallen victim to the terrible climatic circumstances or the hostile population.<sup>57</sup>

The eventual decision to depart the settlement wasn't strictly motivated by the poor state of health of the troops – because this wasn't much better at other remote parts of the Indies – but was more necessitated by the poor financial and military condition of the colonial government in Batavia. This wouldn't allow for the continuation of an expensive outpost like Fort Du Bus.<sup>58</sup> Besides that did one of the most compelling reasons to erect an establishment on the coast of New Guinea - the threat posed by the settlements on Australia's north coast – disappear in 1835 with the abandonment of those outposts. This even tempted Governor Baud to propose a total military departure from the area around the Moluccas including the profitable islands themselves.<sup>59</sup> Eventually this proposition wasn't to last but it is a striking example of the mentality of abstinence with regard to the outer parts of the Indian Archipelago dominant among the colonial government from the 1830's onward. For New Guinea this meant that 'the earlier interest had been substituted by indifference'.<sup>60</sup>

But, as Cees Fasseur already explained in his 1979 article about the Dutch expansion in the Indian Archipelago during the middle of the nineteenth century, the policy of abstinence wasn't always rigidly adhered to.<sup>61</sup> In the first place there were the local government representatives in the outer provinces who, due to different reasons but mostly motivated by personal ambition and a strong sense of vocation, maintained or even spread the Dutch influence. On New Guinea this wasn't the case since there wasn't any

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<sup>57</sup> 'Verslag der derde algemeene vergadering van het Aardrijkskundig Genootschap, gehouden te 's-Hage, 28 Februari 1874' in: *Tijdschrift van het Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* (1876) 32

<sup>58</sup> C. Fasseur, 'Een koloniale paradox. De Nederlandse expansie in de Indonesische archipel in het midden van de negentiende eeuw (1830-1870)' in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 92 (1979) 163

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem 165

<sup>60</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 75

<sup>61</sup> Fasseur, *Koloniale paradox* 185

government representative appointed to the island till the 1890's but the other motives extracted by Fasseur as being 'moves in a diplomatic chess game' were very much so.<sup>62</sup>

In this process it was again the relationship with the English which was responsible for a deviation from the official line of policy in the 1840's. In 1840 King William I was informed about the renewed British settlement on the northern coast of Australia and the potential threat this posed to the Indies.<sup>63</sup> This meant that the old dilemma around the eastern part of the Archipelago became actual again.

### 3.1 The Anglo-Dutch rivalry around New Guinea in the 1840's

With regard to the failed attempts at settlement on the north Australian coast during the precluded decade the energetic reaction of the Dutch government seems remarkable. In the same bundle of letters in which the King was informed about the renewed British establishment William was advised 'to send a couple of government cruisers to the islands which form the outermost and somewhat dubious boundary of the Moluccan Archipelago and let them undertake some small acts of sovereignty in order to let the area, to which the specific arrangements with regard to the Moluccas are applied, enlarge in stead of shrink'.<sup>64</sup> This was obviously in violent conflict with the predominant policy of abstinence. How is this to be explained?

Despite the treaty of 1824 the Anglo-Dutch conflicts in the Far East remained plentiful. The most famous of which were the adventures undertaken by the British luck seekers James Brooke and Erskine Murray and the embarrassment they caused.<sup>65</sup> This influence of foreign explorers and adventurers within the East Indian states was intolerable to the Dutch colonial government<sup>66</sup> since, as a small power, it couldn't permit any breach of sovereignty for fear a French or American intervention which might be expected if a passive policy was strictly followed.<sup>67</sup> As a consequence Governor Baud was instructed to take measures 'to guard the territorial and political control over the Indian Archipelago

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<sup>62</sup> Fasseur, 'Koloniale paradox' 168

<sup>63</sup> Staatsraad belast ad interim met de Directie van het Departement van Koloniën aan koning Willem I, 1 februari 1840, ARA, Kol, gv. 1-2-1840, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4258

<sup>64</sup> Ibidem

<sup>65</sup> J.J.P. de Jong, *De waaier van het fortuin. Van handelscompagnie tot koloniaal imperium. De Nederlanders in Azië en de Indonesische Archipel 1595-1950* (Den Haag 1998) 236

<sup>66</sup> A. van Marle, 'De rol van de buitenlandse avonturier' in: *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 86 (1971) 33

<sup>67</sup> Fasseur, *Koloniale paradox* 168

and secure the Dutch sovereignty'.<sup>68</sup> This caused a temporary deviation from the policy of abstinence during the 1840's.

With regard to New Guinea this not only resulted in the abovementioned decision to start an active surveillance of the eastern parts of the Archipelago 'to preclude all possible questions and differences which might otherwise have arisen' but also to erect a new establishment on the island.<sup>69</sup> In the end this decision by the Governor of the Moluccas proved to be unnecessary since the new British settlement, called Port Essington, wasn't the expected 'commercial emporium of this part of the Archipelago' and lingered on till its abandonment in 1849.<sup>70</sup>

A second sensitive point in the Anglo-Dutch relationship in eastern Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century had to do with a request from London in which the English government in 1841 asked The Hague for a list of the islands and people which it regarded under Dutch sovereignty. Neither the minister for colonies nor the Governor of the Indies could give an immediate answer to this question after which a commission was set up to investigate this situation. This commission only finished its report in 1845. In it was concluded that 'everything investigated about the political and territorial position of the Dutch government in the Indies proved how much insecurity there still existed with regard to the boundaries of our sovereignty.'<sup>71</sup>

In May 1846 A.L. Weddik was sent to New Guinea to get more clarity in this matter.<sup>72</sup> The existing claims were predominantly based on the treaties which the VOC had signed with the Sultan of Tidore who traditionally was nominally the sovereign over a large part of the island. In colonial affairs of the nineteenth century this wasn't out of the ordinary and later on there would follow European interventions on much shakier ground. Still the Dutch claims weren't watertight.

In the report produced by Weddik in 1848 the rights of sovereignty ascribed to the Sultan of Tidore were largely overstated. Curiously enough this territory almost entirely corresponded with the area annexed in name of King William in 1828!<sup>73</sup> In accordance with Van der Veur it seems to me that the British threat in the area may have

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<sup>68</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 27-28

<sup>69</sup> Raad van Indië P.J. Merkus aan Gouverneur-Generaal D.J. de Eerens, 10 augustus 1839, Kol, gv. 14-2-1840, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4258

<sup>70</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 50

<sup>71</sup> Rapport staatkundige toestand Oost-Indië, 1836-1845, ARA, Kol, inv. nr. 2.10.01/2955

<sup>72</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 75

<sup>73</sup> P.W. van der Veur, *Search for New Guinea's Boundaries. From Torres Strait to the Pacific* (Canberra en Den Haag 1966) 11

played an important role in this matter. After all various rumours travelled the Netherlands during 1847 that the English had annexed a part the island. Probably these rumours were based on the journey made by Lieutenant Yule along the southern coast of New Guinea a year before. The uncertainty surrounding this journey, which was actually ordered by the British navy, was all around. In the Dutch press was to be read that ‘the Dutch nation should proclaim, solemnly and aloud, the sovereignty over the western shore of New Guinea and that the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs should prove to its British equivalent that bullying and deceiving weren’t a match against the legal rights possessed by the Dutch and that the minister should solemnly declare that a British annexation of New Guinea would be a brutal injustice’.<sup>74</sup>

Only in the cause of 1849 did it become clear that the rumours about the British annexation were false although Lieutenant Yule had actually taken possession of the islands. But this was bluntly rejected by the British government. A stance which the Dutch envoy heard through the English administrator for emigration since the opinion of the Dutch Ambassador was ‘that it wouldn’t be wise to attract attention, by directing an official or semi-official question to the Colonial Office over here, to the insights proclaimed in the Dutch press’.<sup>75</sup>

This story characterizes the position of the Netherlands as a colonial power halfway through the nineteenth century. Vigilance and prevention took a central place in the formulation of a policy with regard to the outer provinces, or in the words of C.B. Wels: ‘anxiety that other Powers would get a grip on the Indies, and the conviction that an express policy of quiescence in the Indies would be interpreted as weakness. This form of political imperialism within the archipelago had a defensive character’.<sup>76</sup> This strategy resulted in the appointment of D.J. van den Dungen Gronovius. This pensioned govern official was send to New Guinea in 1849 to place Dutch weapons of arms along the western coast of the island.<sup>77</sup> Outward this was done under the cover of a scientific expedition not to openly offend the British.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> NRC 9 oktober 1847

<sup>75</sup> Gezant te Londen aan minister van buitenlandse zaken L.A. Lightenvelt, 18 augustus 1849, Kol, gv. 24-8-1849, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4355

<sup>76</sup> C.B. Wels, *Aloofness & Neutrality. Studies on Dutch foreign relations and policy-making institutions* (Utrecht 1982) 106-107

<sup>77</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 91-92

<sup>78</sup> Fasseur, ‘Koloniale paradox’ 169

### 3.2 'Still darkness, still deep dark night!'

By this declaration of the English government that they weren't nourishing any interests to the possession of New Guinea – as was shown by the events of 1849 – and thinking of the 'costs and difficulties'<sup>79</sup> which the exploration of the area would bring the island slowly became the *prima donna* of the policy of abstinence proclaimed by the Batavian government. This was also noticed by the *Javabode* since in her edition of the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1860 we can read 'that they [the colonial government DL] had placed some posts on the beach and immediate hinterland, with the royal coat of arms and je maintiendrai on it, but whatever this promised, how much it testified of the earnestness with which the High Authorities handled the matter which proved that they did care about the faith and future of New Guinea, for now it didn't change the situation. It was still dark, still deep dark night!'.<sup>80</sup>

This isn't really surprising when one takes into account the fact that during the period between 1849 and 1859 the colonial policy was strongly influenced by Charles Ferdinand Pahud successively as Minister of colonial affairs and Governor of the Dutch Indies. In 1851 he declared that the maintenance of the policy of abstinence seemed to him as 'a utter necessity'.<sup>81</sup> Pahud was even surpassed in this opinion by his replacement on the Colonial Ministry in The Hague, James Loudon, who pronounced in 1861 that he regarded every further extension of Dutch sovereignty in the Indies as 'a step towards our downfall'.<sup>82</sup>

With regard to New Guinea this meant that the lingering plan to erect in new settlement somewhere on the western coastline, still cherished after 1836, was finally abandoned. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July Loudon told Pahud that he regarded 'the developed objections against a renewed settlement to be well-founded' and that 'further research on New Guinea wasn't necessary'.<sup>83</sup>

The abovementioned resolution caused the attention paid to the eastern boundary of the archipelago to slip to an absolute low-point. But this (forced) governmental

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<sup>79</sup> Gouverneur-Generaal J.J. Rochussen aan minister van koloniën J.C. Baud, 25 juni 1847, ARA, Kol, gv. 28-9-1847, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4336

<sup>80</sup> Javabode 10 november 1860

<sup>81</sup> Fasseur, 'Koloniale paradox' 172

<sup>82</sup> De Jong, *Waaier van het fortuin* 232

<sup>83</sup> Minister van koloniën J. Loudon aan Gouverneur-Generaal C.F. Pahud, 25 juni 1861, ARA, Kol, ov. 25-6-1861, inv. nr. 2.10.02/1073

disinterest was partly compensated during the 1860's by the enormous popularity of scientific and adventurous explorations. These adventurers, of which many were strongly influenced by the Romantic ideas about the 'good and civilized savages'<sup>84</sup>, were accompanied by missionaries sent from Utrecht to the north coast of the island since 1855.<sup>85</sup> In the next chapter I'd like to pay some more attention to the consequences of this arrival of European visitors on New Guinea and the impact they had on colonial policy but first some consideration about the place which the foregone period holds with regard to the Dutch colonial policy in the Indies seems in order.

### 3.3 Policy of abstinence?

In his 1979 article Fasseur contributed the Dutch expansion in the Indian Archipelago between 1830 and 1870 mainly to peripheral causes. This conclusion was immediately followed by the remark that the initiative was rarely taken by the government in The Hague. It only acted if the Dutch sovereignty in the archipelago seemed to be under international threat.<sup>86</sup>

Just such a threat determined the Dutch policy with regard to New Guinea between 1825 and 1850. With exemption of several short periods in the 1830's The Hague was forced to keep a keen eye on the British activities on the northern shore of Australia in order to protect its precarious claims of sovereignty to the eastern part of the Indian Archipelago. Therefore it isn't viable to speak of a policy of resignation with regard to New Guinea during this period. The measures which were taken concerning the island and its immediate surroundings are very much comparable to the ones taken with regard to Sumatra. In her study about the sultanate of Djambi Locher-Scholten supposed that Governor Baud wasn't changing the direction of colonial policy on that island but just wished to slow down the expansion process. 'His abstinence consisted merely of the physical military presence of Dutch soldiers and officials'.<sup>87</sup>

As we have seen before this military presence also disappeared on New Guinea in 1836 with the abandonment of Fort Du Bus but the sovereignty was maintained by the sending of surveillance ships and the placement of coats of arms on the beaches. As long

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<sup>84</sup> De Jong, *Waaier van het fortuin* 244

<sup>85</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 105

<sup>86</sup> Fasseur, 'Koloniaal paradox' 184-185

<sup>87</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 93

as the British government didn't show any interest in the acquisition of new territory in the Indian Archipelago and the attempts made by several individuals weren't supported in London it was a wise choice for The Hague to try to maintain its claims through bilateral agreements with the British. This caused the policy concerning New Guinea to be predominantly determined in Europe and only secondly by local circumstances.<sup>88</sup>

This attention paid to the eastern boundary of the Archipelago ended around 1850 when the threat from the Australian colonies subsided. Several attempts to erect a second Singapore on the north coast of this vast continent had failed and from the middle of the century onward the attention of the British colonies over there shifted to the exploration and development of the inland. (partly driven by the discovery of gold) Combined with the continual financial problems of the colonial government in Batavia New Guinea became the most obvious example of the Dutch policy of abstinence.

But this situation wasn't to last for long. Of the motives to adopt an imperialistic policy discerned by Locher-Scholten fear about neighbouring countries, economic gains and governmental control were no longer a point of debate in The Hague but reasons of conscience and nationalism still persisted.<sup>89</sup> Around the middle of the century nationalism wasn't such a big issue as it would be some decades later but it was to play a decisive role in the successive scientific expeditions during the 1860's. The growing international interest in this subject would slowly develop along nationalistic lines as is exemplified by the remark of Loudon that 'the Netherlands have recently undertaken several costly expeditions with the purpose of discovering the scientific (and by the general) and political possibilities which New Guinea might provide'.<sup>90</sup> Between the lines is to be read that the Dutch tried to use their (marginal) scientific expeditions in order to preserve its claims of sovereignty over the western part of the island. This supposed relationship between the growing scientific and religious interest in the island and the strengthening of the Dutch claims will be developed further in the next chapter.

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<sup>88</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 278

<sup>89</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme-debat'

<sup>90</sup> Minister van koloniën J. Loudon aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Heeckeren van Kell, 23 januari 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 23-1-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2461

*‘Ik heb nu mijn taak volbracht. Ik heb acht jaar durende omzwervingen over de grootste en weelderigste eilanden waarmee ons aardoppervlak is getooid al dan niet gedetailleerd beschreven’.*<sup>91</sup>

*‘I have completed my task. The last eight years I have travelled across the largest and luxuriant islands which cover our globe and have described them more or less in detail’.*

These words were spoken by the world-famous physicist and Darwinist Arthur Rusell Wallace in 1868 after his return to England from almost a decade of travelling in foreign and remote parts of the globe. Although Rusell Wallace is one of the most well-known explorers of his age and by that took a pre-eminent position he wasn't by far the only explorer or physicist which crossed the Indian Archipelago during the nineteenth century. Inspired by Rousseau's notion of 'benevolent and civilized savages' and pushed by a compulsion to escape from their own culture there the exploration of unknown areas of the globe became increasingly popular from the middle of the century onward.<sup>92</sup>

For the Indian government this increased attention had both positive and negative consequences. In the first place did it improve the knowledge of the area of which The Hague claimed at least nominal sovereignty but on the other hand there was always the possibility that a part of the many foreign travellers came to the Archipelago with different purposes in mind than the ones which they told the colonial government in Batavia. Such a strategy wasn't entirely strange to the Dutch since it was Minister Baud whom had followed just such a strategy in 1843 when he proposed to strengthen the Dutch sovereignty over the Archipelago by making 'geographical explorations, administrative rule, by quashing small revolts en settle minor differences'.<sup>93</sup>

This meant that the Dutch colonial government knew very well which dangers a 'scientific expedition' could bring in terms of the future sovereignty over the Archipelago. It even used this same instrument of policy every now and than like in the case of Van den Dungen Gronovius. This vigilance would prove to be very useful in preventing

<sup>91</sup> A. Russel Wallace, *Het Maleise eilandenrijk* (Amsterdam 1996) 621

<sup>92</sup> De Jong, *Waaier van het fortuin* 244-245

<sup>93</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 93, Fasseur, 'Koloniale paradox' 169

encroachments on the Dutch dominion, especially in the outer provinces, during the years to come. A good example of the importance of cautiousness was the so called scientific expedition through the eastern part of the Archipelago set up by three Italians in 1870 but which actually proved to be venture to ‘open up new markets for Italian trade, especially with Australia and the area surrounding it’.<sup>94</sup>

This tension between exploration and exploitation forced the Dutch government from the 1860’s onward to start paying more attention to New Guinea again. Practically they weren’t thinking about an active intervention, but much more of supporting Dutch explorations as a countermeasure. A strategy which was enforced by the activities of several missionary societies which settled in the eastern part of the Indies from 1855 onward and which were heavily subsidized by the Dutch government.

#### **4.1 Scientific exploration during the 1860’s**

With some difficulty Russel Wallace succeeded, in the spring of 1858, to get on board of the Hester Helena which set out for the northern shore of New Guinea to re-supply the German missionaries Ottow and Geissler who had, in assignment of the Utrecht missionary society, set up a local missionary station over there.<sup>95</sup> During his quest for the illusive bird of paradise this would prove to be one of Wallace’s toughest journeys. After his return on Ternate in 1860 he remarked that ‘in no place before had he lived through so many privations.’ Nowhere else had he encountered ‘such ongoing rainstorms, lingering deceases, lack of healthy food and fly-plagues beyond imagination’.<sup>96</sup>

Despite all these set-backs Wallace succeeded, as one of the first European explorers, to survive and write about a prolonged stay on the island. He did this in *The Malay Archipelago* which was published in 1869. But still before the appearance of this book New Guinea saw the arrival of several other expeditions of which some were subsidized by the Dutch colonial government. Almost at the same time as the publication of Rusell-Wallace’s masterpiece a Dutch expedition, commanded by H.A. van der Goes, left Amboina ‘to explore New Guinea by scientifically trained and highly qualified

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<sup>94</sup> Gezant te Florence aan minister van buitenlandse zaken Th. M. Roest van Limburg, 13 december 1870, ARA, Kol, kva. 28-12-1870, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6015

<sup>95</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 147

<sup>96</sup> A. Wichmann, *Nova Guinea. Entdeckungsgeschichte von Neu-Guinea (1828 bis 1885)* (Leiden 1910) 97-98

persons'.<sup>97</sup> In the secret part of his assignment Van der Goes was ordered to search for a suitable place to erect a new Dutch settlement. But this plan was forgotten some years further down the road when, not only this mission but several others as well, had failed to succeed in locating such a place.<sup>98</sup>

However this had no direct influence on the scientific interest in the island. The Royal Museum in Leiden pushed the Dutch government to send, in the name of science, a new expedition to New Guinea. Eventually the commissioner for emigration and colonisation agreed under the explicit condition that this expedition would also strengthen the Dutch claims of sovereignty.<sup>99</sup> But again this venture ended in disaster which caused the academic interest in the Netherlands to subside for a while.

This wasn't the case in other European countries. That this interest wasn't purely scientific was recognized only too well in The Hague. 'At the time it wasn't unknown, that both the English, mainly in Australia, Americans, Russians and Germans had laid a desirous eye on New Guinea because they thought it to be an excellent field for scientific progress or the extension of their trade relations'. Although Minister van Bosse responded by stating that he saw nothing disturbing because it couldn't be the goal of the Dutch government 'to block any scientific or individual trade enterprise on New Guinea' he also warned that 'plans of greater magnitude and significance' would bring harm to the claims of sovereignty possessed by the Dutch.<sup>100</sup>

To underline these claims once more yet another governmentally sponsored expedition was sent to the island. Commanded by P. van der Crab this voyage was officially meant to investigate the economic possibilities of the area but was also directed at checking the alleged connections between the local chieftains and the Sultan of Tidore.<sup>101</sup> Apprehensive of the well-known unhealthiness of the region Van der Crab tried hard to avoid his departure by claiming that 'there is little chance to discover anything new about the country and the people living on it, unless extensive interior voyages were undertaken'.<sup>102</sup> But this reclamation proved to be in vain while the actual goal of the

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<sup>97</sup> A. Wichmann, *Nova Guinea. Entdeckungsgeschichte von Neu-Guinea (1828 bis 1885)* (Leiden 1910) 97-98

<sup>98</sup> Oost-Indisch Besluit, 21 augustus 1861, ARA, Kol, 21-8-1861, inv. nr. 2.10.02/7313

<sup>99</sup> Staatscommissie voor Landverhuizing en Kolonisatie, 1857, ARA, Kol, inv. nr. 2.10.43/17

<sup>100</sup> Minister van Koloniën P.P. van Bosse aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Gericke van Herwijnen, 23 januari 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 23-1-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2461

<sup>101</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 208

<sup>102</sup> 'Verslag eener reis naar de Maccluers-, Geelvink- en Humboldt-baaien in Nieuw-Guinea van augustus tot november 1871 door den gouvernements-commissaris P. van der Crab, met aantekeningen uit het journaal

mission wasn't directed at discovering the inland but just at being present every now and than.<sup>103</sup>

The line of policy formulated by Van Bosse, and developed during the 1870's, with regard to New Guinea was the Dutch equivalent of the 'empire on the cheap'. On the one hand The Hague tried to suppress any threats to the Dutch sovereignty over the western half of the island by introducing a strict free trade policy but at the same time secured the continuation of this sovereignty by sending Dutch vessels to the area with a certain frequency and by attaining guarantees from its 'most natural ally'.

This strategy, with its main goal of preserving the existing status-quo, would prove to be very successful during the decades to come but before developing this argument any further I'd first like to pay some attention to the second reason for the significantly increased interest in New Guinea from 1860 onward; missionary activity.

## 4.2 For God and the Fatherland

*'In het bijzonder echter moeten de toestanden op Nieuw-Guinea ongeregeld en ruw zijn geweest: voortdurende oorlogen tussen de stammen, koppensnellen, mensenroof, slavenhandel, heksenprocessen en wreedheden tegenover schipbreukelingen behoorden tot de vaste gewoonten, die de daar sinds 1855 gevestigde zendelingen tot in hun onmiddellijke omgeving konden waarnemen.'*<sup>104</sup>

*'Especially on New Guinea the circumstances must have been irregular and rough: continues warfare between the different tribes, headhunting, kidnapping, slave trading, witchcraft persecutions en cruelties against stranded sailors belonged to the local habits, which the missionaries whom had settled there in 1855 could detect in their immediate surrounding'.*

These words were used by S.C. van Randwijck in 1970 to describe the faith of the first missionaries on New Guinea. For seven long years Ottow and Geissler were the only

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van den inspecteur-honoraire der cultures J.E. Teysmann' in: P.J.B.C. Robidé van der Aa, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea* 3-4

<sup>103</sup> Minister van Koloniën P.P. van Bosse aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Gericke van Herwijnen, 23 januari 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 23-1-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2461

<sup>104</sup> S.C. van Randwijck, 'Enkele opmerkingen over de houding der zending tegenover de expansie van het Nederlands gezag' in: *BMGN* 86 (1971) 58

permanent European inhabitants of the vast island.<sup>105</sup> They had settled on the north-western shore and tried, without much success, to persuade the local population into embracing Christianity. A significant majority remained faithful to their traditional beliefs which gave S. Coolsma in 1901 cause to describe the Dutch missionary activity on the island as ‘a way of the Cross with 8 stations’.<sup>106</sup>

However this negative image is accurate in describing the miserable circumstances under which the missionaries had to work and the small accomplishments they had to show for their hard effort Coolsma description still needs to be placed in perspective. In the first place did the adventures of Ottow and Geissler attract the attention of at least a small portion of Europe and by that pulled New Guinea slowly out of obscurity.<sup>107</sup> This gradually increasing interest in the faith of the ‘outposts of Dutch civilization’ led to a slowly strengthening group of supporters in the Indies who tried to persuade the Dutch government into establishing a permanent settlement on the island.<sup>108</sup> This wasn’t what Batavia had in mind but still they consented by offering financial support to the missionaries.<sup>109</sup> This financial backing probably shouldn’t be accounted to philanthropical considerations but much more to the important contributions that the missionaries made to science which in turn could be used by the Dutch government to strengthen its claims to the possession of the western half of New Guinea. Ottow and Geissler, for instance, produced a Dutch-Mafore dictionary of which European travellers could benefit and which gave The Hague a reason to proclaim that ‘the Netherlands have organized several expensive missions to discover the potential of New Guinea with regard to scientific purposes as well as political ones’.<sup>110</sup>

The conduct of this particular case compares very well with the general line of policy, described by Fasseur in 1979, used on Borneo. Fasseur remarked that the Dutch government wasn’t averse to use the missionaries to settle a ‘pax Hollandica’ in the outer provinces. Just as on Borneo in the 1840’s this seemingly philanthropical policy with regard to the missionaries on New Guinea helped to create a positive image abroad.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> S. Coolsma, *De zendingseeuw voor Nederlandsch Oost-Indië* (Utrecht 1901) 766

<sup>106</sup> Ibidem 770

<sup>107</sup> J. van Goor, ‘Imperialisme in de marge?’ in: J. van Goor (red.), *Imperialisme in de marge. De afronding van Nederlands-Indië* (Utrecht 1986) 15

<sup>108</sup> Javabode 10 november 1860

<sup>109</sup> Haga, *Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea II* 159

<sup>110</sup> Minister van Koloniën P.P. van Bosse aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Gericke van Herwijnen, 23 januari 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 23-1-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2461

<sup>111</sup> Fasseur, ‘Koloniale paradox’ 169

Besides that did the missionaries prove to be really useful guards since they unconsciously or consciously noticed and reported about the activities of foreign visitors who might have come to the area with other thoughts in mind than purely scientific ones like in the case of the Italians Beccari and D'Albertis who attracted the attention of the missionaries in 1870 by planting an Italian flag on the western shore of the island.<sup>112</sup> After telling the Governor of Ternate about this event it eventually resulted in a large diplomatic row between Rome and The Hague which will be explained more thoroughly in the next chapter.

This system of control was extremely effective for the Dutch colonial government in Batavia. As we have seen its main goal was to preserve the status quo in the Far East but at the same time maintaining its own dominion as well. With this goal in mind no economic or financial benefits were expected from New Guinea but it functioned very effectively as a 'barrier' against 'the infiltration of a foreign power into the territory of the Dutch East Indies'.<sup>113</sup> Actually the missionaries on this eastern part of the Dutch possessions were seen as outposts of the Dutch civilization in the Archipelago without ever officially proclaiming this point of view.

### **4.3 Scientific imperialism?**

How do we have to place this period of increased international interest in New Guinea in relationship to the process which eventually ended in the recognition of the Dutch claims of sovereignty in 1885?

First of all the Dutch were again confronted with their vulnerable position as a colonial power with limited resources. Everybody was convinced that it was outside the possibilities of the Netherlands to develop several parts of the Archipelago at the same time but this didn't mean off course that they would just give up the possession over those islands which hadn't as yet been placed under effective control. This attitude was already explained in chapter 3 by referring to the actions taken by Minister Baud in 1843 but also seems to be valid with regard to New Guinea.

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<sup>112</sup> Minister van koloniën W. baron van Goltstein aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 17 november 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 17-12-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6057

<sup>113</sup> Consul-Generaal voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië Ploos van Amstel aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 21 oktober 1875, ARA, Kol, ov. 22-2-1876, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2863

To prevent any difficulties which foreign adventurers or scientists might cause by attracting unwanted attention to the benefits which New Guinea might produce and which in turn might have triggered some foreign government into annexing a part of the island or some other area in the Archipelago, as would happen during the partition of Africa<sup>114</sup>, the Dutch colonial government tried to hold on to its claims, which were mostly based on old colonial agreements with local rulers, by actively taking part in the scientific exploration of the region. It seems somewhat premature to regard this strategy as scientific imperialism, as has been described by J.J.P. de Jong for the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>115</sup> Probably the Dutch strategy was mainly preventive in order to produce some goodwill abroad and the same time strengthen or at least maintain its claims to the possession of New Guinea at minimal costs.

The main motive behind the Dutch policy seems to have been that the Netherlands 'can't tolerate or desire that its position in the Archipelago is spoiled by the greed of others. Coincidence or other circumstances produced by an entreprenuring spirit or a craving for adventures by luck seekers shouldn't be given any change'.<sup>116</sup>

Up till the end of the 1860's it was possible to ward off this potential threat with limited financial means but from the early 1870's onward this threat became much more serious since the different expeditions in the area were accurately monitored by government representatives in Europe as well as in Australia. This caused the Netherlands to forcibly drop its pacifying policy and to answer the question whether 'we try to prevent the settlement of any foreign power in general, and England specifically, on any part of New Guinea, and extend our own claims on the island as much as possible, or limit those claims and do not resist against any foreign settlement on the island, which isn't subjugated to the jurisdiction of Tidore and by that not to that of the Netherlands either?'.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> H.L. Wesseling, *Verdeel en heers. De deling van Afrika, 1880-1914* (Amsterdam 1991) oa 234-237

<sup>115</sup> De Jong, *Waaier van het fortuin* 246-247

<sup>116</sup> *Nederlandsche Staatscourant* 4 mei 1875, ARA, Kol, ov. 22-6-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/ 2795

<sup>117</sup> Minister van koloniën W. baron von Goltstein aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 23 maart 1875, ARA, Kol, kva. 23-3-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6062

## 5 The international political struggle over New Guinea 1870-1875

*‘Terwijl wij omtrent dat groote eiland, dat eenmaal zulk een belangrijke rol zal spelen in den omgang en in het verkeer tusschen de bewoners van Nieuw-Holland, Polynesië en Z.O. Azië, nog volkomen onverschillig zijn, en werkeloos toezien wat anderen daar gelieven uit te voeren, schrijft hier een Rus zijne ontmoetingen, daar zendt een Italiaan de resultaten van zijn onderzoek omtrent dat eiland in het licht, en ginds berigt kapitein Moresby, hoe hij, met zijn oorlogschip ‘Basilisk’ rondstoomde, verscheidene eilanden tot Nieuw-Guinea behorende ontdekte, op die eilanden de Britsche vlag geplant en hun namen gegeven heeft naar eenige der hoofdofficieren van zijn schip.’<sup>118</sup>*

*While we are still completely ignorant about that large island, which one day will play such an important role in the traffic between the inhabitants of New Holland, Polynesia and South-East Asia, and watch inactively what others are undertaking there, there is a Russian here whom writes down his encounters, an Italian who publishes the results of his research on the island, and Captain Moresby who describes how he, with his vessel ‘Basilisk’ steamed around the islands adjacent to New Guinea, and planted a British flag on several of them.’*

In this manner did the East-Indian press focus the attention of the colonial society on New Guinea in the early 1870’s. However not always based on the most credible information rumours swarmed Europe and the Indies during this decade that there was interest in the possession of the island by the French, Germans, Italians, Americans, Australians and even the Russians.

As a consequence pressure was applied to the government in The Hague, both by the press and by official representatives like the Governor in Melbourne and the Governor of the Indies, to formulate a clear policy with regard to the Dutch sovereignty in the Indian Archipelago. This caused New Guinea to take a central place, contrasting with the previous two decades, in the Dutch colonial policy and it contributed to the developing perception that ‘the Netherlands are still the second largest colonial power and by that has

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<sup>118</sup> Soerabaiasch Handelsblad, 18 december 1873

the right to take an honourable place among the nations, provided that it honours itself by rejecting a policy of resignation'.<sup>119</sup>

In 1870 the Dutch government was forced for the first time since the conflicts with the British in the 1840's to make a clear choice with regard to New Guinea prompted by Italian interests for the island.

## 5.1 The complicated relationship between Rome and The Hague

The unification of Italy in the 1860's were almost immediately followed by a strong urge for colonies to aggrandize the position of the newly formed state. These plans were mostly concentrated on the African shore of the Mediterranean but some larger schemes with regard to Birma, Siam, Borneo and New Guinea existed as well.<sup>120</sup>

It was with one of those grand ideas that the Dutch government came in contact in 1870 when its ambassador in Singapore reported that three Italians (G.E., C.F. Cerruti and G. de Lenna had arrived in the city of which was told that they were 'planning a journey through the Indian Archipelago, in the name of science, but of whom it was questioned whether science was their actual goal'.<sup>121</sup> Therefore the Dutch representative in Italy was immediately instructed to get more information about the true purpose of the expedition of the three Italian adventurers. Information which became even more urgent since it became clear that the Italian navy vessel 'Principessa Clotilda' had tried to acquire data about New Guinea during its stay on the Moluccas the previous summer. But eventually the Dutch representative was reassured that the abovementioned venture was just a private initiative which lacked every governmental support.<sup>122</sup>

With hindsight this seemed to be a missed opportunity for the Italians while if there had ever been a period in which the Dutch were seriously contemplating the abandonment of their possessions on New Guinea it was in these first years of the 1870's. At least this must be concluded from the letter of the Governor of the Indies, Loudon, to the Minister of colonies, Fransen van den Putte, written in 1873 in which Loudon proposed to offer New Guinea to the Italians because the control over the entire Indian Archipelago seemed

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<sup>119</sup> Brantsen van der Zijp in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal* 26 februari 1885

<sup>120</sup> D.M. Smith, *Italy. A Modern History* (Michigan 1969) 126

<sup>121</sup> Minister van koloniën E. de Waal aan minister van buitenlandse zaken Th. M. Roest van Limburg, 4 november 1870, ARA, Kol, kva. 4-11-1870, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6014

<sup>122</sup> Gezant te Florence aan minister van buitenlandse zaken Th. M. Roest van Limburg, 13 december 1870, ARA, Kol, kva. 28-12-1870, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6015

above the power of the Netherlands.<sup>123</sup> Fransen van den Putte even didn't react negative to this proposal. His opinion was pretty much the same as Loudon's as is proved by his reply that 'European neighbours shouldn't bother us anymore on New Guinea than they do in the straights of Malacca or on the north coast of Australia. If it could be arranged amicably, it would be better, to my opinion, to refer from all claims to and sovereignty over New Guinea.'<sup>124</sup> But it must be said that this remark was immediately followed by the statement that Fransen van den Putte for the moment saw no change to abandon the Sultan of Tidore because this could cause a threat to the stability in the region. This was eventually the same point of view which Governor Loudon and the Council of the Indies adopted. So the relationship with New Guinea was maintained as part of the higher goal of maintaining the status quo in the entire Archipelago. In this line it was decided that 'it isn't the calling of the Netherlands to go any further than they have done till now with regard to an area which lies without the immediate circle of its possessions and which is inhabited by ferocious tribes who produce little of value'.<sup>125</sup> With this in mind it seems acceptable to adopt the view that the Dutch government wasn't actually planning to entirely abandon New Guinea, as might be concluded from the abovementioned letters, but that they just wished to emit a clear sign of its complacency. It was satisfied with the territory it had and wasn't aiming at controlling the whole of New Guinea. This was a sensible policy since it became ever more clear that a Dutch annexation of the entire island wouldn't be acceptable to the Australian colonies which in turn could cause more serious problems with the 'arbiter mundi' England.<sup>126</sup>

In reality Loudon's proposal was soon forgotten since military action started in Atjeh just two months as a result of rumours about expected arrival of Italian and American navy vessels on northern Sumatra.<sup>127</sup> Although these rumours again proved to be false, and might well have been created in Batavia as an excuse for the intervention, the diplomatic relationship cooled in such a way that a amicable arrangement with regard to New Guinea no longer belonged to the possibilities.

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<sup>123</sup> Fasseur, 'Koloniale paradox' 179-180

<sup>124</sup> Minister van koloniën I.D. Fransen van de Putte aan Gouverneur-Generaal J. Loudon, 23 april 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 23-4-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6048

<sup>125</sup> Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlands-Indië J. Loudon aan minister van koloniën I.D. Fransen van de Putte, 13 februari 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 23-4-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6048

<sup>126</sup> oa ARA, Kol, ov. 23-10-1872, inv. 2.10.02/2536

<sup>127</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 63-64

This tense relationship reached rock bottom in 1874. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 87 Italian deputies in the Italian Parliament had signed a declaration in which was to be read ‘that Italy could, without any difficulty, take possession of a large and important part of New Guinea and its adjacent islands’.<sup>128</sup> This action could be legitimized by the contracts which the abovementioned expedition of 1870 had produced and which now could be used to realize the Italian dream of creating a penal colony in the Far East. When the Dutch Minister of Colonies W. baron van Goltstein was informed about this case he could only conclude that a conflict between the Italians and Dutch would be unavoidable if Rome was serious about its plans since the Italian expedition of 1870 had only travelled through Dutch territory so it couldn’t have signed contracts with chieftains not under the nominal Dutch sovereignty.<sup>129</sup> This potential conflict was worsened even further when news came from the missionaries on western New Guinea that the Italian discoverers Beccari and D’Albertis had planted an Italian flag on the island.

But again a prolonged diplomatic conflict was avoided by the straightforward pronouncement made by the Italian government that it wasn’t supporting any such activity. The Dutch representative, P. van der Hoeven, even reported that there couldn’t be any Italian colonisation in the Far East as long as the current Cabinet was in place since the Italian minister of Navy was ‘such a declared adversary of colonisation, that he would never support such plans, and without the support of the navy these plans couldn’t be completed’.<sup>130</sup> This caused the greatest threat to subside but still Loudon was instructed to stay alert.

Finally the Italian-Dutch relationship reached a third and temporarily last low-point in 1879. On the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of March of that year two articles were published in the London *Times* in which an Italian expedition commanded by Menotti Garibaldi was announced which was planned to leave for New Guinea in July ‘in order to attempt a large-scale settlement over there’.<sup>131</sup> Although the trustworthiness of this announcement was questioned by the Dutch representative in Rome, Westenberg, since Menotti Garibaldi was known to be very much like his father ‘in the first place a plan maker, who contrives

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<sup>128</sup> Gezant te Rome P. van der Hoeven aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 3 oktober 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 17-11-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6057

<sup>129</sup> Minister van koloniën J.K. baron van Goltstein aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 17 november 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 17-11-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6057

<sup>130</sup> Gezant te Rome P. van der Hoeven aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 20 december 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 7-1-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6060

<sup>131</sup> Minister van buitenlandse zaken W. baron van Heeckeren van Kell aan minister van Koloniën O. van Rees, 10 april 1879, ARA, Kol, ov. 16-4-1879, inv.nr. 2.10.02/3190

all sorts of grandiose schemes but, up till now, has never succeeded in realizing one'.<sup>132</sup> This was exactly what happened; nothing. The whole matter ended in a most peculiar way since the Dutch representative accused the English of complicity to the exotic plans of Garibaldi. Westenberg feared that Garibaldi's plan was actually the façade of an English plot in which the English would try to acquire a favourable position in proximity of the Dutch possessions in the Archipelago. Although this seemed already curious enough Westenberg was going even a step further by proposing to reverse the roles and form a protective naval alliance with Italy and Spain 'to preserve the necessary status and supremacy of the Dutch in the Indian Archipelago and to neutralise any future intrusions by the British'.<sup>133</sup>

Obviously this couldn't be taken seriously by Minister of Foreign Affairs van Heeckeren van Kell. In just a couple of days the whole matter was settled with the English. This even turned out to be very favourable to the Dutch since their representative in Londen, Van Bijlandt, succeeded in acquiring two reassuring statements from influential colonial authorities. Firstly there was the British Governor of the Fiji-islands, Sir Arthur Gordon, whom stated that he was convinced that any such Italian plan 'would but even be hinted at, the entire British population of Australia would move to New Guinea to prevent the Italians of succeeding' which was followed by a statement from the Minister of Colonial Affairs, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, that in such an eventuality 'the Dutch rights of sovereignty over the western part of New Guinea should be respected'.<sup>134</sup>

These reassurances ended the tense relationship between Italy and the Netherlands concerning New Guinea. All the colonial aspirations that remained were focused on North Africa while the idea of overseas penal colonies was entirely abandoned.<sup>135</sup>

## 5.2 The French, Russians and Americans

*'Dat Nieuw-Guinea ook van andere zijden belangstelling trekt, bleek uit de komst van een Russische geleerde, den heer Miklucho Maklay, die met een Russisch oorlogsschip derwaarts overgevoerd, in 1871 zich in het zuidelijk gedeelte van de Astrolabe-baai (aan*

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<sup>132</sup> Gezant te Rome Westenberg aan minister van buitenlandse zaken W. baron van Heeckeren van Kell, 28 maart 1879, ARA, Kol, ov. 16-4-1879, inv. nr. 2.10.02/3190

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem

<sup>134</sup> Gezant te Londen C. van Bylandt aan minister van buitenlandse zaken W. baron van Heeckeren van Kell, 8 april 1879, ARA, Kol, ov. 16-4-1879, inv. nr. 2.10.02/3190

<sup>135</sup> Smith, *Italy* 130-132

*de noordkust van Nieuw-Guinea) aan wal had laten zetten om dwars door het eiland naar de zuidkust te trekken, ...*<sup>136</sup>

*‘The New Guinea also draws attention from other sides, was demonstrated by the arrival of a Russian physicist, mister Miklucho Maklay, whom was dropped in the southern part of the Astrolabe-bay in 1871 by a Russian navy vessel to start a voyage to the other end of the island...’*

This simple remark caused a lot of consternation during 1871 and 1872. This unrest wasn't really directed at the presence of a foreign explorer on New Guinea, because this wasn't a abnormality as we have seen, but was based on the fact that Maklay was openly backed by the Russian navy which might have indicated an interest of the Russian state. But these tensions were soon lifted since Maklay disappeared in the inland. For months nothing was heard of him and the worse was feared. This gave Sint-Petersburg the incentive of launching a rescue mission which in turn proved to be beneficial to the Dutch since an official request for assistance was received in The Hague. From this was concluded that it concerned 'a matter, which the Russian government, without a doubt, would have been able to organize for it self, were it not for the fact that they wished to respect the Dutch rights of sovereignty over New Guinea'.<sup>137</sup>

Eventually the rescue-operation proved to be superfluous since Maklay managed to reach Australia alive and well. Over there he pronounced that 'a continual possession of any part of this island or of the entire island' would cause a great deal of problems since the Papuans would prove to be 'declared and tough adversaries'.<sup>138</sup> This also annulled the possibility of Maklay becoming an advocate of Russian annexation which reassured the Dutch even more.

Besides the fears for Italian or Russian annexation the first part of the 1870's was also characterised by a apprehensive attitude with regard to the United States. It was expected that this thriving country would soon try to acquire its own colonial empire and that the outer provinces of the Dutch Indies might well be the main objective of this supposed expansion. Already during the 1850's articles started to appear in the

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<sup>136</sup> Koloniaal verslag 1873

<sup>137</sup> Minister van koloniën I.D. Fransen van de Putte aan Gouverneur-Generaal J. Loudon, 5 september 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 5-9-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2522

<sup>138</sup> 'De jongste ontdekkingsreizen in Nieuw-Guinea' in: *Tijdschrift voor het Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* (1877) 63

Netherlands in which the American desire to establish a commercial or religious outpost on New Guinea were depicted as been very serious.<sup>139</sup> Eventually all these articles were denounced in 1873.

Initially it seemed if that year was the start of a large-scale escalation of the international relationships concerning the Indian Archipelago. At least for some influential officials at the Dutch colonial office in Batavia it did. Governor Loudon became convinced that American vessels of war had left Hong Kong with the purpose of invading Atjeh on the northern tip of Sumatra. For Loudon this appeared to be the first step of a giant conspiracy through which Russia, Germany and the United States had agreed to partition the world.<sup>140</sup> However bizarre and out of reality this might seem nowadays we can't just ignore this thought since Loudon behaved as if he truly believed in this. For a better understanding of the frame of mind in which such an outrageous idea might be conceived we must take into account the actual circumstances of the time itself. After the completion of the German unification in 1871 the livelihood of the small European states was questioned more than ever.<sup>141</sup> Although this fear wasn't based on reality, as we now know with the benefit of hindsight, it can help to explain why Loudon overreacted to the departure of the American fleet from Hong Kong in the way he did. In a letter to the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs he wrote on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March: 'Have compassion with the small states and our colonies'.<sup>142</sup>

Eventually it all proved to be a storm in a glass of water. Although it came to late to have any influence on the Dutch intervention in Atjeh the Foreign Ministry in The Hague received an American dispatch in which the Foreign Secretary of the United States debunked all rumours about American actions in the Far East.<sup>143</sup> This statement also called a halt to the repeatedly reappearing stream of rumours about American involvement on and with New Guinea. After 1873 not a single article with this subject was to be found in the Indian or Dutch press.

None such articles were to be found with regard to France whatsoever. Still France played a, albeit indirect, but crucial role in the situation around New Guinea. In 1853 the French had annexed New Caledonia in order to use it as a penal colony. This caused a

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<sup>139</sup> oa NRC 16 juli 1858 en *Amsterdamsche Courant* 23 maart 1854

<sup>140</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 64 + Fasseur, 'Koloniale paradox' 179

<sup>141</sup> Wels, *Aloofness & Neutrality* 59-60

<sup>142</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 64

<sup>143</sup> *Ibidem*

huge stir in Australia.<sup>144</sup> It was seen as a threat to the Australian sphere of influence which, since the 1850's became ever more important to these British colonies and which was mainly imagined as to stretch across the Pacific adjacent to the Australian continent. The French interference caused a lot of distrust among the Australian colonies. Exemplary of this Australian variant of the American Monroe-doctrine seems to be the attitude of Professor Keith Collins whom stated in 1867 'that we do ourselves a wrong, but wilfully weaken the future power of the coming great confederacy of Australia, if we allow this prize to be snatched from us'.<sup>145</sup>

In this way did the French interference in the Pacific contribute to the idea that Australia might have to play its own part as a colonial power in the region.<sup>146</sup> This included New Guinea as well. During the 1870's the most serious threat to the Dutch possession of the island would come, just as had been the case in the 1830's and 1840's, from the other side of straight Torres.

### **5.3 'Borneo has had its Rajah Brooke, and we may rest assured that New Guinea will have hers'**

This statement was made in 1871 by one of the many Australian newspapers which were actively paying attention to the external security of the continent. This in turn sparked a renewed attempt in London, led by Archibald Campbell, to persuade the British government to annex New Guinea. This again brought up the question in The Hague 'weither the Dutch government can silently watch a British colonisation of New Guinea taking place, which, when successful, would surely turn into a British establishment?',<sup>147</sup>

For the time being the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs tried to cling to the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1871 in which the old guideline of the 1824 treaty which stated the avoidance of mutual possession of islands in the Archipelago was preserved. Minister van Bosse wrote to his colleague on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gericke van Herwijnen, that when an English settlement would be allowed 'the objection of mutual possession, after which avoidance everywhere else where Dutch and English interests met or appeared

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<sup>144</sup> Thompson, *Australian Imperialism* 17

<sup>145</sup> A. Keith Collins, *Lecture on New-Guinea* (13 april 1867) in: ARA, Kol, ov. 23-10-1867, inv. Nr. 2.10.02/2536

<sup>146</sup> D.C. Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 82

<sup>147</sup> Minister van koloniën P.P. van Bosse aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Gericke van Herwijnen, 23 januari 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 23-1-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2461

to meet, was striven with great care and effort'.<sup>148</sup>This meant that the Netherlands would retain her claims to the island and tried to move the English away from annexation.

But relatively soon this state of alarm was lifted since it appeared that the English weren't at all in favour of annexing this far-of island. It became known that 'the public opinion, in line with the government's policy, became ever more adverse against annexation'<sup>149</sup>. It was recognised that it was mainly in Australia where the emotions ran high as was for instance proven by the foundation of the New Guinea Prospecting Association in 1870 which set out to exploit the economic benefits of the island in the same way as had recently been done in the Australian interior.<sup>150</sup>This association organised an expedition 'in search of quick riches'<sup>151</sup> on and around New Guinea but stranded hopelessly on the Great Barrier Reef.

This caused a somewhat ambiguous reaction. Logically it tempered the existing enthusiasm about this possible new gold mine in the north but on the other hand did it also confirm the lack of knowledge about coast and waters surrounding New Guinea which in turn caused the discoveries of Captain Moresby along it's southern shore to take a place in the spotlight. Moresby saw his chance and annexed the eastern half of the island and, once back in Australia, started to describe it as if it was a paradise on earth.<sup>152</sup>

This constant attention gave occasion to the Dutch Governor in Melbourne, Daniël Ploos van Amstel, to write to his superior in the Netherlands in 1873 to contemplate whether it wouldn't be prudent 'that the Netherlands declares right away that New Guinea, entirely or at least partially resides under Dutch sovereignty'.<sup>153</sup>This appeal was followed the next year by another one in which Ploos stated 'that now is still time to settle all our differences. If the Australian colonies start to prosper any further, of which there is no doubt, than it might be possible that some of the governments over here might put in a

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<sup>148</sup> Minister van koloniën P.P. van Bosse aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Gericke van Herwijnen, 23 januari 1872, ARA, Kol, ov. 23-1-1872, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2461

<sup>149</sup> Gezant te Londen C. van Bylandt aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 22 december 1875, ARA, Kol, ov. 22-2-1876, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2863

<sup>150</sup> Thompson, *Australian imperialism* 39

<sup>151</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 84

<sup>152</sup> Thompson, *Australian imperialism* 39

<sup>153</sup> Consul-generaal der Nederlanden voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië D. Ploos van Amstel aan minister van buitenlandse zaken J.L.H.A. baron Gericke van Herwijnen, 24 februari 1873, ARA, Kol, ov. 25-4-1873, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2579

claim for the possession of some island or another, which might cause great difficulties'.<sup>154</sup>

But Ploos van Amstel was told that the Dutch government had decided to restrict its claims 'to the positive rights which we derive from over sovereignty over the Sultan of Tidore, whom is the supposed sovereign over the western coastal area of New Guinea'.<sup>155</sup> This decision would form the central consideration behind the Dutch colonial policy concerning the island during the remainder of the nineteenth century and seems to derive from three strains of thought. In the first place there was Governor Loudon, whom, as mentioned above, had serious doubts about the capability of the Netherlands to control the entire Indian Archipelago which in turn made a further expansion of the Dutch claims on New Guinea very unlikely indeed.<sup>156</sup>

Secondly there was a prevailing attitude that a conservative policy on New Guinea, which in reality meant a restriction to the proclamation of 1828, would be regarded as a token of good will by the Australian colonies which might deter them from interfering on the western part of the island. A supposition which was acknowledged a year later when Minister of Colonial Affairs, van Goltstein, received a message in London that the official boundary line of the Dutch possession on New Guinea since 1828, the 141th degree eastern longitude, was recognized by both the majority of the English population as well as by the Australian colonies. Since then the policy was adopted 'not to object against any foreign settlement on the eastern part of New Guinea on the ground that it belonged under Dutch sovereignty'.<sup>157</sup>

This policy was motivated in the third place by the simple fact that the Netherlands couldn't lay any legal claim on the eastern half whatsoever.<sup>158</sup> The entire episode fits in well with the characterisation used by Wesseling in 1986 to describe the Dutch colonial policy in the era of ever increasing colonial disputes between the western powers. Wesseling signalled a constant tension 'between joining in and retreating, between power

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<sup>154</sup> Consul-generaal der Nederlanden voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië D. Ploos van Amstel aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 2 september 1874, ARA, Kol, ov. 4-12-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2737

<sup>155</sup> Minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois aan consul-generaal der Nederlanden voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië D. Ploos van Amstel, 21 december 1874, ARA, Kol, ov. 22-12-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2744

<sup>156</sup> Gouverneur-Generaal J. Loudon aan minister van koloniën I.D. Fransen van de Putte, 13 februari 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 23-4-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6048

<sup>157</sup> Minister van koloniën W. baron von Goltstein aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 22 juni 1875, ARA, Kol, ov. 22-6-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2795

<sup>158</sup> Ibidem

and right'.<sup>159</sup> Together with the remark made by Fasseur that The Hague only departed from its policy of abstinence 'when that abstinence was about to create a vacuum, which might be filled by other western powers'<sup>160</sup>, the policy with regard to New Guinea suddenly seems quite logical. It even contains all the elements of 'small power imperialism' described by Kuitenbrouwer in 1991.<sup>161</sup>

The Netherlands restricted its claims to that part of the island on which it could claim at least some historical right. During the 1870's a lot of effort was directed at strengthening these fragile rights by sending several government expeditions to show to the outside world that The Hague was still interested in its possessions on the island.<sup>162</sup> As we have seen the eastern part was neglected since no historical rights could secure its annexation. Had the Netherlands done so than this could have seriously endangered its position in other parts of the Archipelago.<sup>163</sup>

But still it seems difficult to reconcile this conservative line of policy with the predominant expansionistic tendencies which the Dutch colonial policy in general began to show from the early 1870's onward. This discrepancy again seems to be a consequence of the limited resources of the 'small power'. For example, there is to be read in the *Koloniaal Verslag* of 1874 'that the intended expedition of a Dutch vessel of war to New Guinea hasn't taken place since the entire available fleet was needed elsewhere. [Atjeh D.L.] Whenever, in the future, such a mission would after all go ahead, it could never be with the goal of expanding our political influence on that massive island. On the contrary, such influence should be limited to the area which belongs to the Sultan of Tidore since our task in the Indian Archipelago is already so immense'.<sup>164</sup>

Initially this was conservative tendency was the main reason for Wesseling to proclaim that the Dutch colonial policy in the Archipelago deviated from those of outright imperialistic nations like England or Germany. Wesseling claimed that the goal of the Dutch was merely 'to maintain its existing sphere of influence in South-East Asia'. He

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<sup>159</sup> H.L. Wesseling, 'Bestond er een Nederlands imperialisme?' in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 99 (1986) 220

<sup>160</sup> Fasseur, 'Koloniale paradox' 179

<sup>161</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' in: N.C.F. van Sas (red.), *De kracht van Nederland. Internationale positie en buitenlands beleid in historisch perspectief* (Haarlem 1991) 42-72

<sup>162</sup> Robidé van der Aa, *Reizen naar Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea* XXVII

<sup>163</sup> Minister van koloniën I.D. Fransen van der Putte aan Gouverneur-Generaal J. Loudon, 23 april 1874, ARA, Kol, kva. 23-4-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6048

<sup>164</sup> Koloniaal verslag 1874

regarded the Dutch expansionism as nothing other than a reaction to international politics. 'The only motive for Dutch imperialism was the imperialism of others'.<sup>165</sup>

Although he had already abandoned his earlier point of view that the Dutch colonial policy wasn't imperialistic Wesseling kept to the deviating character of the Dutch imperialism once he accepted this term. In this view he was supported for a long time by authors like Locher-Scholten, à Campo, Fasseur and Van Goor.<sup>166</sup> This adaptation of the theory of Kuitenbrouwer also seems to work in the case of New Guinea. It is foremost Locher-Scholten who made an interesting remark about this. She concluded that the periphery was of crucial importance to the Dutch expansion in the Archipelago but that there were a number of cases, Atjeh, Lombok and New Guinea, in which The Hague played an important role'.<sup>167</sup> Albeit Locher-Scholten thought mainly of the official Dutch settlement on the island in 1898 it seems to me that it is also possible to use her conclusion with regard to the policy of the 1870's. Certainly concerning New Guinea there was no imperialistic attitude detectable in the Netherlands during this decade but the constant attention paid to the island and the formulated guideline which followed from this prolonged attention did cause a more clear picture of the boundaries of the Dutch Indies to develop in The Hague.<sup>168</sup> After 1874 New Guinea became an integral part of this. In this way did the determination of a guideline with regard to the island contribute to the development of a so called 'imagined community' which in turn caused tensions in the Archipelago to be seen from a wider point of view instead of being mere local issues. Therefore I'd like to proclaim that the Dutch Indies as an integrated entity only came into being in the 1870's and that New Guinea didn't play a decisive but still very important role in this development.

The following two decades the relationship between the Netherlands and New Guinea was determined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instead of Colonial Affairs while it is widely known that Colonial Affairs was a much more important Ministry during the nineteenth century.<sup>169</sup> This is typical of the Dutch attitude with regard to the island. Everybody was convinced that no economic advantages could be reaped from this far-off place, so that there also wasn't any necessity of erecting an official settlement. But on the

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<sup>165</sup> H.L. Wesseling, *Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren en andere opstellen over de geschiedenis van Europese expansie* (Amsterdam 1988) 189

<sup>166</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme-debat'

<sup>167</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 278

<sup>168</sup> *Ibidem* 281

<sup>169</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 32

other hand it was also recognized that the immense island formed the ideal barrier against foreign infiltration into the Archipelago. To safeguard its position on New Guinea a close association with the British was sought after 1874 since 'we are neighbours in all sorts of colonial possessions since time immemorial, and manage to get along very well in a mutual satisfactory manner'.<sup>170</sup>

With this thought in mind it is interesting to study the next decade in a separate chapter in which I will try to test Wesseling's initial theory that the Dutch expansion was just a function of international politics.<sup>171</sup> Obviously this will be done with the main focus on the developments around New Guinea. In the period between 1875 and 1885 there several constant factors to be discerned, like the interest for the island from the Australian colonies, but there were taking some surprising developments place as well, like the appearance of Germany on the colonial theatre, which caused New Guinea to remain firmly under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in stead of Colonies.

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<sup>170</sup> Gezant te Londen Van Bylandt aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 7 juni 1875, ARA, Kol, ov. 22-6-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2795

<sup>171</sup> Wesseling, *Indië verloren, ramspoed geboren* 189

*‘In een tijd als den tegenwoordige, die het zwaartepunt der politiek heeft zien verplaatsen van Parijs naar Berlijn; die een Keizerstaat in Duitschland en een Imperial Policy in Engeland heeft zien verrijzen; (...) die in Duitschland een steeds sterker en duidelijker uitgedrukt nationale begeerte, om koloniën te verkrijgen, te aanschouwen geeft; - in zulk een tijd zou het wel een mirakel wezen, wanneer de inlijving van een landstreek, die bijna de Oostenrijksch Hongaarsche monarchie in omvang evenaart, niet een algemeene, hoogst gewichtige politieke beteekenis had.’<sup>172</sup>*

*‘In a time like our own, in which the focal point of politics has shifted from Paris to Berlin; where an Empire in Germany and an Imperial Policy in England have come to the fore; (...) which has shown in Germany an ever more stronger and urgent desire to acquire colonies; in such a time it would be a miracle when the incorporation of an area which is almost as large as the Austrian-Hungarian empire, wouldn’t have general and very important political significance.’*

Such messages were to be read in almost all of the newspaper across the Indies during 1883. Especially the *Javabode* was very harsh in its judgement of the prevalent colonial policy. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of May it published an article in which was stated that ‘the muddled and sleepy colonial policy doesn’t understand the requirements of this time anymore just like an old man who behaves like a child’.<sup>173</sup> All these articles were the immediate result of the annexation of the eastern part of New Guinea by Queensland on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1883. In the Indies it was soon realized which political complications this could bring with regard to the Dutch possessions in the adjacent Indian Archipelago and a strong reaction from The Hague was asked for. This was motivated by the statement that in case such an action wouldn’t be undertaken ‘England, with New Guinea’s western half, which it would have, would penetrate our eastern possessions with a wedge’.<sup>174</sup> And besides that Batavia was also counting on the fact that ‘Bismarck or his successors would show less restriction, to

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<sup>172</sup> *Javabode* 9 mei 1883

<sup>173</sup> *Javabode* 5 mei 1883

<sup>174</sup> *Javabode* 8 mei 1883

take some tropical island or another, especially since they are strongly backed by the German people'.<sup>175</sup>

This indeed was a dilemma for which the politicians in The Hague were placed. On the one hand it didn't have the necessary means to back her claims on the western part of the island by an effective occupation but on the other hand did it still wish to hang on to these claims as was decided through the guideline of 1874.<sup>176</sup> That's why there was determined to inform both the English and German governments about the remaining Dutch interest in the sovereignty over western New Guinea. But this was obviously walking a fine line 'since we remain the neighbour of a powerful Germany on the European continent and are in constant contact with the British in the Indian Archipelago'<sup>177</sup>, as was professed by the Dutch Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Van der Does de Willebois, during the Berlin Conference.

Within this whole discussion the Australian colonies played a crucial role. The manner in which Europe reacted to the expansionism, both economic and territorial, of these British overseas possessions determined the international relations concerning New Guinea. This increasing pressure from the periphery caused the involved states to take action in 1884.

## **6.1 The triangle Australia, England and the Netherlands, 1875-1883**

As we have seen Henry Chester took possession that part of New Guinea which didn't belong to the Dutch on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1883 in name the north Australian colony of Queensland.<sup>178</sup> This proved to be the culmination point of a current in all the Australian colonies which drew attention every now and then since 1875 and which had already prompted Ploos van Amstel to propose a Dutch settlement on the western coast of New Guinea. Ploos wrote to Van der Does that 'Australia is destined to have an important influence on the development of its adjacent islands' from which the representative

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<sup>175</sup> Javabode 9 mei 1883

<sup>176</sup> Minister van koloniën J.P. Sprenger van Eyk aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 27 oktober 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. 27-10-1884, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6157

<sup>177</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 50

<sup>178</sup> Thompson, *Australian imperialism* 51

concluded that ‘the respective governments will obviously make claims to the possession of one island or another which could lead to serious difficulties’.<sup>179</sup>

Already in 1875 such an attempt was made by the governments of Queensland, Victoria and Southern Australia but they couldn’t convince the English Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Lord Carnarvon, who wasn’t in favour of an expansionistic policy in the Pacific at this point of time.<sup>180</sup> He declined the annexation of the island because ‘not enough is known about its climate and about the fertility of the soil or about the inclination of its inhabitants for that matter’. But Carnarvon still left a sparkle of hope by stating that the annexation of the island was mainly dependent on a financial contribution from the Australian colonies because ‘these matters touch Australia more than they do England’.<sup>181</sup>

For a while such a contribution wasn’t to be expected which caused the interest in the island to subside again for some years.<sup>182</sup> This even didn’t change when Carnarvon agreed to take possession of some islands, in order to secure a safe passage for the Royal Navy through straight Torres, which lay just a stone throw away from New Guinea.<sup>183</sup>

This apparent disinterest disappeared quite rapidly in 1882 when a major row erupted in Australia over an article in the German *Allgemeine Zeitung* of November 1881 in which was proposed to annex New Guinea in order to protect the German trade interests in the Pacific. In a joint letter to the Secretary of Colonial Affairs, Lord Derby, the Agents-General of New South Wales, New Zealand, Queensland and Victoria stated that they expected ‘a more definite assurance’ from the government in London with regard to the colonial policy of the Germans because of ‘the vital character of the matter to every Colony in Australia’.<sup>184</sup>

Even before a reaction was received the prime minister of Queensland, Thomas McIllwraith, had already ordered the annexation of the eastern part of New Guinea in name of the queen ‘to prevent any foreign annexation’.<sup>185</sup> It seems as if McIllwraith wished to force a *fait accompli* on London. This seems ever more likely when one thinks of the

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<sup>179</sup> Consul-Generaal der Nederlanden voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië D. Ploos van Amstel aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 2 september 1874, ARA, Kol, ov. 4-12-1874, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2737

<sup>180</sup> C.C. Eldridge, *Victorian imperialism* (Londen 1978) 106-107

<sup>181</sup> Nederlandsche staatscourant 4 mei 1875 in: ARA, Kol, ov. 22-6-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2795

<sup>182</sup> Thompson, *Australian imperialism* 42

<sup>183</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 115-116

<sup>184</sup> *Correspondence respecting New Guinea, the New Hebrides, and other islands in the Pacific. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.* (Londen 1883) 13, ARA, Kol, kva. , inv. Nr. 2.10.02/6147

<sup>185</sup> Thompson, *Australian imperialism* 52

fact that this prime minister was president of the organisation of sugar planters in Queensland as well. The sugarcane culture was a very important source of income for this young colony and the planters relied heavily on labour provided by semi-slaves which were 'acquired' in the Pacific and on New Guinea. Foreign intervention might have ended this so the stakes were high for McIllwraith and the colony he represented.<sup>186</sup>

The Dutch representative, Ploos van Amstel, discerned, in a letter to Van der Does, a number of other reasons which seemed to have played a role in the annexation of eastern New Guinea by Queensland. Among others Ploos speaks of the efforts undertaken by British missionaries on the island, the urgent need for Great-Britain to possess strategic points along the major trade routes of the world and the fear for the establishment of a foreign penal colony just in front of the Australian north coast.<sup>187</sup>

But in the end foreign policy was the privilege of the British government in London. Therefore did the annexation only become official when it was sanctioned by the Secretary of Colonial Affairs. This wasn't to happen. Lord Derby almost started to calm the Dutch by telling the ambassador Van Bijlandt on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April that the Dutch rights and interest would be honoured. Somewhat indignantly he resumed by stating that you wouldn't be expecting from me 'ever to cooperate with such a violation'.<sup>188</sup>

Derby was backed in this interpretation by the public opinion in England. 'The precedent set by the Government of Queensland in annexing the island on its own responsibility is too dangerous to be sanctioned (...) Foreign policy is impossible if we are to be burdened with new possessions acquired without any violation of our own, or in opposition to the will of Parliament' was the opinion of the *Spectator*.<sup>189</sup> This reserve was only strengthened when both Berlin and Paris declared in May that they didn't have any plans to annex New Guinea in the near future.

On the 2<sup>th</sup> of July the English Parliament decided not to sanction the annexation made by Queensland since such decisions should remain the privilege of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, since the majority of Parliament wasn't convinced that the threat of foreign intervention was real and since it didn't qualify Queensland, with its important

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<sup>186</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 151-152

<sup>187</sup> Consul-Generaal der Nederlanden voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië D. Ploos van Amstel aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 22 september 1883, ARA, Kol, kva. 6-11-1883, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6147

<sup>188</sup> Gezant te Londen C. van Bylandt aan minister van buitenlandse zaken W.F. Rochussen, 21 april 1883, ARA, Kol, kva. 28-4-1883, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6143

<sup>189</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 159

role in the labour trade, as being the most appropriate coloniser.<sup>190</sup> But still Lord Derby gave a signal to the Australian colonies that he wouldn't be much more enticed to sanction such a project if the colonies would work more together by which 'he unofficially made the annexation of New Guinea for the British crown dependent on the creation of a confederation of the British colonies in Australia'.<sup>191</sup> This meant that there was concluded in The Hague 'that the annexation of New Guinea hasn't been abandoned but has just been postponed'.<sup>192</sup>

Despite the prevailing 'short-sighted and insipid policy regarding the large boundary-islands'<sup>193</sup>, the colonial government in Batavia for now succeeded in preserving its claims to the sovereignty over the western part of New Guinea and even managed to strengthen these claims by the declaration of Lord Derby that he would respect the Dutch sovereignty over the island.

However much The Hague was aware of its minimal influence on the formulation of a British policy akin to New Guinea<sup>194</sup> it still seemed sensible to keep the traditional orientation on London with regard to colonial questions alive. The modest attitude with which the Dutch approached the English seemed to pay off quite beneficially. One of its most important results was the slowly emerging idea in both England and Australia 'that, (...), an unaggressive commercial Nation like Holland, is the best neighbour'.<sup>195</sup> This seemingly safe position was threatened again during the 1880's thanks to the emergence of Germany as a colonial power under the wings of Bismarck.

## **6.2 Germany as neighbour, both in Europe and in the Indies**

A lot has been written about the sudden change of German foreign policy under the rule of Bismarck. Consequently there are several interesting and sometimes conflicting theories developed which are all aimed at explaining this important shift. Some of them tend to point mainly at European motives while others take a more 'global' approach. But as is

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<sup>190</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 169

<sup>191</sup> Minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois aan minister van koloniën F.G. van Bloemen Waanders, 28 juli 1883, ARA, Kol, kva. 1-8-1883, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6145

<sup>192</sup> Ibidem

<sup>193</sup> Javabode 16 mei 1883

<sup>194</sup> Gezant te Londen C. van Bylandt aan minister van buitenlandse zaken W. baron Heeckeren van Kell, 8 april 1879, ARA, Kol, ov. 16-4-1879, inv. nr. 2.10.02/3190

<sup>195</sup> Consul-Generaal der Nederlanden voor Australië, Nieuw-Zeeland en Tasmanië aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 20 september 1883, ARA, Kol, kva. 6-11-1883, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6147

most often the case a multifaceted explanation seems to be the most satisfactory. A further explanation of all these theories would take too long to concern us now but it is useful to take some elements of these theories and project them on the New Guinea question. While this may underestimate the importance of developments in other parts of the German empire this must be taken for a fact if one wishes to explain the typical German actions taken with regard to New Guinea. This detailed study of just one area of German colonial policy might, together with other detailed studies, one day shine a refreshing or comprehensive light on the whole German colonial policy between 1880 and 1914. But for now I'd just like to focus on the developments concerning New Guinea.

Traditionally Bismarck's interest for the Pacific has been explained by referring to the economic and commercial advantages that the region brought for German firms like Godeffroy & Sohn, Von Hansemann, Hensheim and the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft.<sup>196</sup> Superficially seen this explanation is correct but it isn't adequate to explain the German intervention of 1884.<sup>197</sup> In the first place the economic value of the region was very marginal indeed in comparison to the German trade interest in Europe and Africa<sup>198</sup> while an earlier request for governmental protection brought before the Reichstag in 1880 by German traders was resolutely denied. The German government declared that 'auf Okkupationen in der Südsee nicht einlassen. Wie die Sache liege, müsse es den Privatunternehmungen überlassen bleiben, auf eigene Hand vorzugehen'.<sup>199</sup> [it couldn't get involved with occupations in the Southern Seas. As the matter stands currently this should be left to private corporations and their own initiatives]

This situation altered radically in 1883 since two extra dimensions were added to the equation. Firstly the early 1880's brought an intensification of the debate about the practices of foreign traders around New Guinea and more specifically about the trade in forced labour.<sup>200</sup> This sudden attention was strikingly described by the German trader Hensheim who wrote to Bismarck that 'zu dem gewaltthätigen Auftreten der Mannschaften der englischen Arbeiterschiffe einerseits und der dadurch hervorgerufenen

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<sup>196</sup> S.G. Firth, 'German Firms in the Pacific Islands, 1857-1914' in: J.A. Moses and P.M. Kennedy (red.), *Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914* (St. Lucia 1977) 4-21

<sup>197</sup> D.K. Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire 1830-1914* (London 1973) 438-441

<sup>198</sup> W.D. Smith, *The German Colonial Empire* (Chapel Hill 1978) 108

<sup>199</sup> 'Aufzeichnung des stellvertretenden Staatssekretärs im Auswärtigen Amt, Grafen von Limburg-Stürm, über die mündliche Beantwortung der Eingabe des Geh. Kommerzienraths Von Hansemann vom 11. november 1880' in: *Deutsche Interessen in der Südsee II* 2, ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159

<sup>200</sup> M.P. Knight, 'Britain, Germany and the Pacific, 1880-1887' in: J.A. Moses and P.M. Kennedy (red.), *Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914* 66

Störungen im friedlichen Verkehr und legitimen Handel mit den Eingeborenen anderseits' [due to the violent actions undertaken by the crews of English labour ships on the one hand and the following interruption of friendly traffic and legitimate trade with the local population on the other hand] governmental support was absolutely necessary. Hensheim hoped that 'eins der in der Südsee fahrenden Schiffe der Kaiserlichen Marine für einige Zeit hier [rond de noordkust van Nieuw-Guinea D.L.] stationirt werden möge, um nach eingehender Prüfung der Sachlage geeignete Schritte zu ergreifen, die deutschen Interessen zu schützen und dem ohne Wissen und gegen die Gesetze der australischen Kolonial-Regierungen von den Unternehmen betriebenen Sklavenhandel ein Ziel zu setzen.'<sup>201</sup> [one day the ships of the Imperial Navy which cruised the Southern Seas would be stationed over here (northern shore of New Guinea) in order to take further steps, after numerous ordeals, to protect the German interests and to end the slave trade without the knowledge of the Australian colonies]

However this threat had increased significantly since 1880 this regional conflict still wasn't enough to convince the government in Berlin to take action. But this was about to change on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1883 when a resolution was adopted in Sydney, signed by all the Australian colonies and New Zealand, in which they declared 'that such steps should be immediately taken as will most conveniently and effectively secure the incorporation within the British Empire of so much of New Guinea and the small islands adjacent thereto as is not claimed by the Government of the Netherlands'.<sup>202</sup> This unanimous stand of the Australian colonies was a very serious threat to the German interests in the Pacific since Lord Derby had made approval of an annexation of a part of New Guinea dependent on the confederation of those colonies. This seemed very well feasible with the colonies uniting behind the New Guinea declaration. This in turn increased the pressure on Berlin to take a decision. The whole matter conforms with the preconditions for a European power to take colonial action formulated by D.K. Fieldhouse: 'when economic activity gave rise to some strictly non-economic problem which again demanded political action'.<sup>203</sup>

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1884 the German representative in London, count Münster, was instructed to inform the English government that Germany, following the British example of 1877, would appoint a special representative for the western Pacific to protect

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<sup>201</sup> Hensheim aan Bismarck, 29 mei 1883, ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159

<sup>202</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 192

<sup>203</sup> Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire* 464

its trade interests in the area.<sup>204</sup>This started off the process which eventually would end in the tripartition of the island within a year.

### 6.3 The Anglo-German agreement

In the meantime the pressure put on both the English and German governments to take a decision became almost unbearable. With the Australian colonies moving towards confederation in such a speedy fashion Lord Derby was forced to write to Gladstone ‘that we could not as matters stand allow any other state to seize a part of the island: the Australians would threaten secession if we did, and everybody would be against us’.<sup>205</sup> At the same time the requests from the German firms for governmental support kept on coming in.<sup>206</sup>

With this in mind count Münster was ordered on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1884 to investigate the English position with regard to the German trade interests and at the same time make clear that ‘political considerations’ were attached to this matters as far as Berlin was concerned. By this statement a seemingly insignificant controversy over trade interests in a far-off part of the world suddenly became the focal point of European power politics.<sup>207</sup>This tough position taken by the Germans was partially caused by unwillingness in London to believe the signals about German colonial aspirations. Just a couple of weeks before the announcement made by Münster the English ambassador in Berlin had declared that he saw no reason why the German Chancellor would cooperate with any plans for colonial expansion. This caused some disbelief or even disregard in London akin to the German colonial aspirations to develop, at least in the eyes of Bismarck. Both in the conflict around Angra Pequena as well in the matter of the trade interests in the Pacific the English weren’t reacting adequately to the German proposals which eventually forced Bismarck to take matters into his own hand in April.

In the first place this meant the creation of the Neu Guinea Kompagnie on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May. This cooperation between the German bankers Hansemann and Bleichröder send out dr. Otto Finsch in July to the north coast of the island in order to ‘die besten Häfen

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<sup>204</sup> Busch aan Münster, 5 januari 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/ 6159

<sup>205</sup> Gordon, *The Australian frontier* 195

<sup>206</sup> oa van Robertson&Hernsheim op 29 januari 1884 en van de Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft der Südsee-Inseln op 30 januari 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159

<sup>207</sup> Knight, ‘Britain, Germany and the Pacific’ 70

ausfindig zu machen, den freundlichen Verkehr mit den Eingeborenen herzustellen und neben der Errichtung von Handelsniederlassungen, (...), Land im weiteren Umfange und in solcher Weise zu erwerben, daß sich hieraus unter Vereinigung mit dem Landbesitz und dem weitere Landerwerb an den bestehenden Niederlassungen der Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft in der westlichen Südsee eine Kolonie bilden läßt, die zur Organisation und Entwicklung auf der gewünschten Grundlage besähigt ist'.<sup>208</sup> [find the best harbours, set up friendly contact with the local population and, besides founding new trade settlements, acquire land in the greatest possible amount, which could be used, together with the existing possessions of the Deutsche Handels- und Plantagen-Gesellschaft in the western Pacific to create a colony which is founded on the desired fundament to give it a good change for organisation and development]

With the secret approval for this project from Bismarck a diplomatic solution became of imminent importance since a German annexation of a part of New Guinea without the knowledge of the English government might force London to effectuate its guaranties made to the Australian colonies in 1883. When the annexation of New Guinea by Queensland was rejected in that year Derby had officially proclaimed that the English government saw the eastern half of the island as its exclusive sphere of interest from which followed that every foreign settlement over there would be interpreted as 'an unfriendly act'.<sup>209</sup>

To avoid this potential danger Münster was ordered 'uns mit den englischen Regierung sowohl über die den beiderseitigen Angehörigen gegenüber anzuwendenden allgemeinen Grundsätze, wie auch über eine Abgrenzung derjenigen Gebiete zu verständigen, welche wir beiderseits unter staatlichen Schutz zu stellen beabsichtigen'.<sup>210</sup> [to make arrangements with the English government about the respective views and about the boundary between the areas of the island which were to be placed under governmental control] During these talks Münster was to make clear that Granville got the message that Berlin took this matter very seriously. But still a compromise belonged to the possibilities as long as England was prepared to limit the Australian claims to the southern part of the island and no further attempts at annexing the northern part would be undertaken. To achieve this goal Von Hakfeldt used the same criteria as would be used on the Berlin Conference concerning Africa: 'Diejenigen Theile von Neu-Guinea, wo keine thatsächlich

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<sup>208</sup> Von Hansemann en Bleichröder aan Bismarck, 27 juni 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159

<sup>209</sup> Thompson, *Australian imperialism* 66

<sup>210</sup> Graf Von Hakfeldt aan Graf Münster, 2 augustus 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159

ausgeübte Souveränität einer civilisirten Macht besteht, sind daher ebenso berechtigzte Zielpunkte deutscher wie englischer Unternehmungen'.<sup>211</sup>[Those parts of New Guinea, where there isn't any actual sovereignty of a civilized power, are just as much open to German activities as they are to English]

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August Münster received a reaction from Granville. After having mentioned that he wasn't aware of the German claims to New Guinea the Minister declared that his government would be prepared to limit its claims to that part of the island which had special significance to the Australian colonies. In Berlin this was interpreted as being the southern coast so therefore the Consul-General in Sydney was instructed on the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 'zunächts im Archipel von Neu-Britannien und auf dem außerhalb der berechtigten Interessensphäre der Niederlande und Englands liegende Theile der Nordküste von Neu-Guinea überall, wo deutsche Niederlassungen bereits bestehen oder in Ausführung begriffen sind, alsbald die deutsche Flagge zu hissen'.<sup>212</sup>[to hoist the German flag in the Archipelago of New Britain besides on those parts of the northern coast of New Guinea which didn't belong to the Dutch or English spheres of interest and everywhere else where German settlements existed or were being created] With this purpose in mind Otto Finsch left Sydney on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September.

His journey would cause a last crisis concerning the Anglo-German relations with regard to New Guinea. The reason for this was that Finsch had taken possession of such a large part of the island –albeit all on the northern coast- that this caused unrest in both Australia and England. Frightened about further German expansion this caused a widening of the 'scramble' for territories across the Pacific.<sup>213</sup> During the first months of 1885 the Anglo-German relations got seriously cooled.

This tense situation ended in March when the English government definitely relinquished its claims to the northern part of New Guinea in order to win German support in the Egyptian question.<sup>214</sup> This dispute with the French over the control of Egypt was of much more importance to London than the possession of some unproductive outpost in the Pacific since the Suez canal was the 'lifeline' of the Indian empire. Ever since the military intervention in Egypt in 1882 England needed the support of at least one other strong European power to keep control over the area. Since a conflict with the French kept

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<sup>211</sup> Ibidem

<sup>212</sup> Ibidem

<sup>213</sup> Knight, 'Britain, Germany and the Pacific' 83-84

<sup>214</sup> Gordon, *Australian Frontier* 270, Thompson, *Australian Imperialism* 90

dragging on a gesture towards the Germans was necessary in this important matter as described in a letter from Gladstone to Granville 'that it is really impossible to exaggerate the importance of getting out of the way the bar to the Egyptian settlement'.<sup>215</sup>

A temporary demarcation line between the German and English possessions on New Guinea was fixed the next month which roughly divided the eastern part of the island and left the west to the Dutch. How and why the Dutch succeeded in retaining this immense area will be investigated more thoroughly below.

#### **6.4 The Netherlands and the Anglo-German rivalry about New Guinea**

Logically the developments concerning the eastern part of New Guinea were closely monitored in both the Indies as is the Netherlands. According to the *Javabode* it was 'more than obvious, that the entire old system of nominal possession and of traditional, unproven claims was unattainable; it won't be respected by Germany'.<sup>216</sup>

Still The Hague wasn't convinced of the necessity to start a policy of effective occupation of the western part of the island. This reluctant attitude was explained by Minister of Colonies, Sprenger van Eyk, from the standpoint of international law. In a letter to his colleague of Foreign Affairs Sprenger pointed out that England 'recently has taken possession, by a mere proclamation, of the southern coast of New Guinea east of the 141<sup>st</sup> degree eastern longitude which means that it can hardly object to the Dutch claims which rest on the proclamation of 1828'. Besides the Minister was of opinion that the German government couldn't question the legitimacy of the Dutch proclamation because 'a part of New Guinea's southern coast has been annexed by proclamation with their approval. By that approval they will be forced to acknowledge our sovereignty, as far as it is based on a proclamation, too'.<sup>217</sup> Sprenger's opinion was that the Netherlands should maintain its claims to the western part of the island despite the fact that 'for the immediate future (and perhaps even never) any direct advantage' was to be expected from this possession.

This passive policy was dictated in the first place by the unavoidable situation 'that we are the weak neighbour of the powerful Germany on the continent and that we remain

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<sup>215</sup> Gordon, *Australian Frontier* 270

<sup>216</sup> *Javabode* 3 februari 1885

<sup>217</sup> Minister van koloniën J.P. Sprenger van Eyk aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 27 oktober 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. 27-10-1884, inv. 2.10.02/6157

in constant contact with Great-Britain in the Indian Archipelago'.<sup>218</sup> This meant that a pro-German policy would jeopardise the Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 on which a large portion of the Dutch claims in the Archipelago was based but on the other hand a pro-English policy could have economic and political consequences in Europe itself.<sup>219</sup> Still this didn't mean that the position of a small power among large neighbours was per definition a negative one. With regard to this situation the Dutch representative in London, van Bijlandt, remarked that the Anglo-German rivalry concerning New Guinea 'will probably strengthen our position more than it will weaken it, since it seems likely to me, that both of these strong powers will safeguard us against the hunger of the other, while when England would have been the only authority on New Guinea we would, over time, surely get into serious trouble with them'.<sup>220</sup>

That the Dutch position in the Indian Archipelago was appreciated by the Germans as well is proven from a letter written by its representative for the Pacific region, Stuebel, to Bismarck in which is to be read that 'es würde sich an holländisch-Indien anlehnen, dadurch der Gefahr der Erdrückung durch rundherumliegenden englischen Besitz entzogen sein soll.'<sup>221</sup> [the Dutch possession of the Indies should be praised, since it diminishes the danger of getting encircled by English territories] This was very much the vision of Bismarck himself too. Therefore Minister Van der Does could remark in the Dutch Parliament on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1885 that 'Germany and England recognise the line [141<sup>th</sup> degree eastern longitude DL] as being the boundary of our possession. The German government has informed me about its annexation of the north-eastern part of the island and has guaranteed that they would respect the line. The same recognition of our right has been acquired from the English a long time ago, and besides that, it became known to me, that when the large movement for the Australian annexation of New Guinea was founded even there the boundary of our territory was respected'.<sup>222</sup>

This secured the Dutch possession of the western half of the island for a while but the question of the effective occupation remained. Which influence this had on the Dutch colonial policy during the next two decades will be examined in the following

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<sup>218</sup> M. Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 50

<sup>219</sup> H. von der Dunk, *Die Niederlande im Kräftenspiel zwischen Kaiserreich und Entente* (Wiesbaden 1980) 19

<sup>220</sup> Woltring, *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek* nr. 560 p. 779

<sup>221</sup> ARA, Kol, kva. Inv. nr. 2.10.02/6159 44-45

<sup>222</sup> Minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois 26 februari 1885 in *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Steten-Generaal 1884-1885* 348

chapter but first of all I'd like to pay some attention to the role that the tripartition of New Guinea played within the debate about whether the Netherlands should be regarded as an imperialistic power.

## 6.5 Our weakness is our strength?

It still remains a remarkable situation that the Netherlands succeeded in maintaining the sovereignty over an area which was thirteen times larger than its own territory in Europe and they did so without using political pressure or military means and despite the competition from strong states like Germany and Great-Britain. Is this success to be regarded as the result from an imperialistic policy in The Hague or should it be contributed to the fact that it followed from its beneficial geographical position in both Europe and Asia?

Obviously a straightforward answer isn't acceptable and several factors should be taken into account. On the one hand The Hague was very active at the diplomatic level to maintain its claims to the possession of the western part of the island and to protect them, like in 1884 when the German deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Busch, inquired how the Dutch government would react in case a foreign power would erect a settlement on the western part of the island. The Dutch representative in Berlin, Van der Hoeven, immediately replied 'that our government can't be pleased about this since it poses a serious threat to the sovereignty over the important Moluccas'.<sup>223</sup> This was also the point of view which prevailed with regard to the German and English annexations on New Guinea. The influential member of the Dutch Parliament, De Beaufort, pointed out that the global trend towards colonial expansion could have serious consequences for a large colonial power like the Netherlands. This remark was surpassed by the one made by Brantsen van der Zijp whom advised the government that 'our diplomacy should keep a very vigilant eye on the developments and should actively safeguard the position of the Netherlands as a colonial power. Mainly it should avoid any future difficulties which might arise from current conflicts'.<sup>224</sup>

This was exactly what happened. On the basis of her prominent position as a colonial power the Dutch tried to acquire the status of 'first power of the second order'. To

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<sup>223</sup> Gezant te Berlijn Van der Hoeven aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 15 oktober 1884, ARA, Kol, kva. 27-10-1884, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6157

<sup>224</sup> Brantsen van der Zijp, 26 februari 1885 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal* 345

realise this The Hague tried to get as much of its territory in the Indies internationally recognized. But in reality the European relationships between the great powers accounted for its possibilities and left little room for an independent policy.<sup>225</sup>

Just at this point did the Anglo-German rivalry help the Dutch position. During the diplomatic conflict over the possession of eastern New Guinea it became clear that both powers were very anxious of the other improving its position on the island by acquiring territory on the western half. This was quite a comfort to the Dutch since it now could count on the fact that both Germany and England would respect their sovereignty over the western part of the islands since a breach of this sovereignty would cause serious trouble with the opponent of which it wasn't possible to tell where it would end.

This just leaves the question whether the Dutch policy can be described as being imperialistic? At first glance Wesseling seems to have a very powerful argument by stating that the Dutch expansion wasn't directed at new areas but remained inside its old sphere of influence and was only directed at maintaining this influence across the Archipelago. Whenever new activity was undertaken this was the immediate consequence of an alteration in the international situation. In short, the Dutch imperialism was nothing else but a reaction to the imperialism of others.<sup>226</sup>

Up till this point there isn't much to be brought against the analyses of Wesseling. Even Kuitenbrouwer came to a similar conclusion in 1985 by stating that the international factor was a very important motive for the Dutch imperialism in the Indian Archipelago.<sup>227</sup> But their theories diverge on the point of the objective of the expansionistic policy. Wesseling concluded that the Netherlands sometimes pacified an area and incidentally brought a local tribe under governmental control but was mainly satisfied with written subjugation to Dutch sovereignty.<sup>228</sup> This remark is again superficially correct but doesn't contribute to the development of an imperialistic mentality caused by internal factors.

There is an obvious and unmistakable contrast between the remark of Governor Loudon from 1861 in which he considered 'every expansion of our sovereignty as to be a step closer to our downfall'<sup>229</sup> and the statement made by Brantsen van der Zijp from 1885 that 'the Netherlands is still the second largest colonial power in the world and by that has

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<sup>225</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 65

<sup>226</sup> Wesseling, *Bestond er een Nederlands imperialisme?* 189

<sup>227</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 209-210

<sup>228</sup> Ibidem 192

<sup>229</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 46

the right to play an honourable role among the congress of nations, at least when it honours itself and doesn't tolerate a policy of resignation'.<sup>230</sup> Seemingly a development in the thought about the role which the Netherlands had to fulfil in the Indies had taken place between 1860 and 1885. The development of this imperialistic mentality formed the basis of Kuitenbrouwer 1991 analyses and he stated that it had important consequences for the Dutch foreign policy.<sup>231</sup> In his 1985 dissertation Kuitenbrouwer had already presumed that choices of policy in the Netherlands were made according to the concerning circumstances but were dictated by several constant factors. In the first place it mattered a lot which possessions were in dispute, which foreign power was involved and what the reaction of Parliament and public opinion was.<sup>232</sup>

This interpretation pays more attention to the internal factors which contributed to the development of the abovementioned imperialistic mentality in the Netherlands. With regard to New Guinea these circumstances played an important role as well. This easternmost island of the Archipelago was on the bottommost spot of the hierarchy ladder of Indian possessions which was obviously dominated by Java and Sumatra. This is for instance proven by an article in the *NRC* of the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1884 in which the question was asked what should be done with 'our claims or rights on the western coast. If we don't use them and we need our power elsewhere than it would be best to auction our part of New Guinea. It is very likely that England is willing to pay a decent price for this area in order to prevent it from being taken by the Germans or any other unpleasant competitor'.<sup>233</sup> This was also the opinion of the well-known Dutch socialist H. van Kol whom remarked in 1901 that the island 'isn't worth the sacrifice of money and human lives which it will surely keep on taking'.<sup>234</sup>

Still The Hague decided to keep to its possession of the western half of the island. As has been said before the actions of foreign competitors were beneficial to the recognition of the Dutch claims which now could be maintained by a defensive policy without any effective instruments of power. In this matter a neutral position between the rivalling great powers in combination with a policy of free trade and an continual reference to its historically based rights seemed to be the best way to avoid any intrusions

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<sup>230</sup> Brantsen van der Zijp, 26 februari 1885 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1884-1885* 345

<sup>231</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 64

<sup>232</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 206

<sup>233</sup> *NRC* 13 oktober 1884

<sup>234</sup> H.H. van Kol, *Het imperialisme van Nederland* (Rotterdam 1901) 21

in what widely became accepted as the exclusive Dutch sphere of influence in the Indies.  
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Finally the public opinion seems to have played an, indirect, role in the development of a policy concerning New Guinea. In a letter, meant as a clarification of the guideline which was adopted in 1874, Van der Does wrote to Governor van Lansberge that any public interest in the matter up till now had been absent, but that it was strongly to be questioned whether this would remain the same for the nearby future. Therefore the 1840's had given quite a good example. The settlement of James Brooke on Serawak had caused a truly frantic reaction back in the Netherlands and the government was heavily criticized about its passive policy while this same policy was applauded just a couple of months before.<sup>236</sup> With this in mind the decision to keep on to the claims to New Guinea was reinforced. Generally speaking it was accepted 'that one doesn't take the difficulties concerning a more active policy on New Guinea for granted but that it can't be concluded from the lack of interest at the moment that a passive attitude towards the island wouldn't cause oppositions from the chauvinists'.<sup>237</sup>

Concluding one could state that the maintenance of the Dutch claims to the western part of New Guinea, which were based on the guideline which was formulated in 1874, can best be placed among the strategy which was advised by Minister Fransen van der Putte and which placed great emphasis on informal, maritime imperialism accompanied by economic expansion and indirect control.<sup>238</sup> The fact that this Minister was at the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs just in the years when the guideline was adopted seems to strengthen this supposition.

Despite the international recognition of the Dutch sovereignty the process of governmental control which eventually is the most striking feature of expansionism wasn't completed without the effective occupation of the island. How the small country of the Netherlands fulfilled this task will be examined further in the next chapter.

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<sup>235</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 209 + Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 291

<sup>236</sup> Minister van Koloniën W. baron van Goltstein aan minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois, 23 maart 1875, ARA, Kol, kva. 23-3-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/6062

<sup>237</sup> Minister van buitenlandse zaken P.J.A.M. van der Does de Willebois aan Gouverneur-Generaal J.W. van Lansberge, 26 april 1875, ARA, Kol, ov. 26-4-1875, inv. nr. 2.10.02/2780

<sup>238</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 212

*‘Overtuigd dat ons volksbestaan onafscheidelijk verbonden is aan ons koloniaal bezit, en alles behoort te worden gedaan om het rustig bezit en de geleidelijke ontwikkeling daarvan te verzekeren, heb ik het voorstel van de Regeering om over te gaan tot vestiging van ons bestuur in Nederlandsch Nieuw-Guinea met genoegen gezien.’<sup>239</sup>*

*‘Convinced that our existence as a people is inseparably linked to our colonial possession, everything should be done to retain the peaceful control over and steady development of these possessions. With this thought in mind I found great pleasure in the initiative of our government to start the effective occupation of New Guinea’*

About this proposal a fierce debate developed during 1897 between the Minister of Colonial Affairs, Cremers, and the socialist member of Parliament, Van Kol. The socialists hated ‘the ridiculous large power policy of the Netherlands’<sup>240</sup> in the Archipelago. Van Kol’s opinion was that the development of New Guinea was too much to ask from the small country and therefore he wished the Dutch to concentrate on the further development of Java and Sumatra. His opinion was that the only reason for the Dutch to retain their claims on New Guinea was ‘the pursuit of gain of the large capitalists’<sup>241</sup> and he discounted any arguments about political, ethical or protective motives as being mere inventions.

With the benefit of hindsight this fear about the exploitation of the island by the capitalists, driven by an sincere feeling of humanity, seems to have been somewhat overstated. History has learned that Cremers was speaking the truth when he proclaimed to the Dutch Parliament ‘that we’re going to do some simple civilizing work over here’ and that no one was thinking ‘that we’re going to incur a settlement which could bring us any financial gain, to put it simply. No, only some Ternatian hunters gather the feathers of the birds of paradise on the island and even that brings them in constant conflict with the local population; but any benefits for Europeans or their governments aren’t to be expected

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<sup>239</sup> Pyttersen 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 171

<sup>240</sup> Van Kol 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 171

<sup>241</sup> Van Kol, *Het Nederlands imperialisme* 23

either now or in the future'.<sup>242</sup> If this was the official opinion of the Minister for Colonial Affairs one is tempted to question why they even bothered to bring the area under control?

In this matter I can't completely agree with Locher-Scholten when she states that ethical motives were far more important than fear for foreign competitors.<sup>243</sup> Albeit she evidently builds on the theory of Kuitenbrouwer that the fear for foreign intervention subsided after 1894<sup>244</sup> this argument was still used in the discussion about the settlement of government representatives on New Guinea in 1897 and 1898. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1897 Minister Cremer declared in Parliament that 'the eye of several nations, in Asia as well, has fallen on this part of New Guinea. Therefore it is impossible to maintain this policy of non-intervention, however much we might like to. When we don't make the decision to settle our representatives over there right now than it is possible that we will be forced to do that quite soon or will have to abandon the area all together'.<sup>245</sup>

Where in 1885 the reclamations made by the missionaries to bring the western part of the island on governmental control weren't adequate to tempt Parliament to take such a decision since the sovereignty over the area had been recently guaranteed through a series of international treaties a combination of factors caused the expansion of governmental control to be approved of in 1898. Besides the already mentioned motives of ethical and strategic-political origin nationalistic and management arguments played an important part in this decision as well. A good example of this is the remark made by the MP Pyttersen that 'the great importance and value of the Netherlands as a colonial power'<sup>246</sup> wasn't taken into account in the discussion about New Guinea. This view is instrumental of the active and expansionistic attitude which developed in colonial matters in the Netherlands after 1896. The development of this policy was partly motivated by managerial arguments. In reality this was a combination of two related factors. On the one hand there was the argument of internal control which was represented by the view that we can no longer tolerate 'the mock control professed by us over there' because it couldn't be expected that any respect would follow from a policy which was limited to 'the distribution of flags and

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<sup>242</sup> Minister van Koloniën J.T. Cremer 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 175

<sup>243</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 282

<sup>244</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 208

<sup>245</sup> Minister van koloniën J.T. Cremer, 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 175

<sup>246</sup> Pyttersen, 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 177

the erection of weapons of armour'.<sup>247</sup> Besides that there was also an argument of international importance. Cremer concluded that 'according to the new rules of sovereignty a European nation is thought of to be the rightful sovereign over an area from the moment that it occupies the respective area'. Therefore his opinion was 'that the question whether we would abandon such an area was very serious indeed. It isn't a question whether this part of New Guinea has any value to us'<sup>248</sup> but if we wish to retain our claims to the possession of the Indian Archipelago as a whole.

The economic motive emphasised by Van Kol seems to have been the only argument which wasn't of any importance concerning the decision to take effective control over the island. Still Van Kol was right by characterizing the Dutch colonial policy as being imperialistic.<sup>249</sup> But it still remained the imperialism of a small power which was very much dependent on the larger powers to make an continuation of this policy possible. This support from its larger neighbours was gained by a strict policy of free trade, by putting emphasis on the moral superiority (expressed in the so called ethical policy) of the Dutch and to avoid any internal disorder in the Archipelago. Thanks to her historical heritage and her strategic position between the rivalling great powers the Netherlands could get away with a passive policy and shift its limited resources to the most endangered part of the Archipelago without being in serious danger of losing the other parts through foreign intervention. This was recognised all too well in The Hague and therefore the Dutch colonial policy was for a long time dictated by avoiding any possible reason for foreign intervention in the Indies. In a constant re-evaluation of the international situation a different policy was adopted 'from case to case' in which a combination of ethical, economic, nationalistic, managerial and power political arguments could trigger governmental action.

In the case of New Guinea such a combination of arguments was reached in 1898. However being ethically legitimized<sup>250</sup> fear of foreign intervention and the emerging idea that the Netherlands had a special role to fulfil in the Indies played an important part in the eventual decision to start an effective occupation of the island. It is New Guinea which is most suitable of explaining the difference between an imperialistic great power and a state

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<sup>247</sup> Ibidem 171

<sup>248</sup> Minister van Koloniën J.T. Cremer, 19 november 1897, *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 179

<sup>249</sup> Van Kol, *Het Nederlands imperialisme* 1

<sup>250</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 290

which was forced to follow an imperialistic policy to safeguard its colonial possessions like the Dutch. Therefore it can be useful to make a general comparison between the Dutch and German territories on the island.

## 7.1 Kaiser-Wilhelmsland as an example?

It was clear to the East Indian press that Germany was much better equipped to successfully develop New Guinea than the Netherlands was. In the *Javabode* of the 3th of February 1885 is to be read that there isn't any reason 'why Germany, with its shrewd, but working along a steady plan, Government and its energetic wish for colonial possessions, won't take advantage from an island which we've only used for surveys and a couple of scientific expeditions or the erection of coats of arms'.<sup>251</sup> The *Soerabajaansch Handelsblad* was also of the opinion that German controlled New Guinea 'seems to have a better future ahead of it than any other German colony'.<sup>252</sup> This was reason enough to put constant pressure on The Hague to start the effective control of the Dutch part of the island since 'we doubt whether Bismarck, either for the completion or any other reason would be bothered by such meagrely based rights of sovereignty over the western part of New Guinea (which is currently seen as being Dutch)'.<sup>253</sup>

These expectations were proven in reality to be wide of the mark. Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, as German New Guinea was called in 1885, was controlled by the Neu-Guinea Kompagnie which, as a monopolistic trade company was also responsible for the economic exploitation of the area as well as for the build-up of the governmental apparatus.<sup>254</sup> From its base at Fischhafen (see map) the Kompagnie worked on making Kaiser-Wilhelmsland a popular place for settlements of German farmers but it became clear pretty soon that this was an illusion and the number of Europeans living in the colony never exceeded the 300.<sup>255</sup>

During the following years it came to the fore that New Guinea wasn't suitable as a trade colony either since the Kompagnie wasn't able to win the hearts and minds of the local population. Although its sovereignty over the area was no longer questionable small

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<sup>251</sup> *Javabode* 3 februari 1885

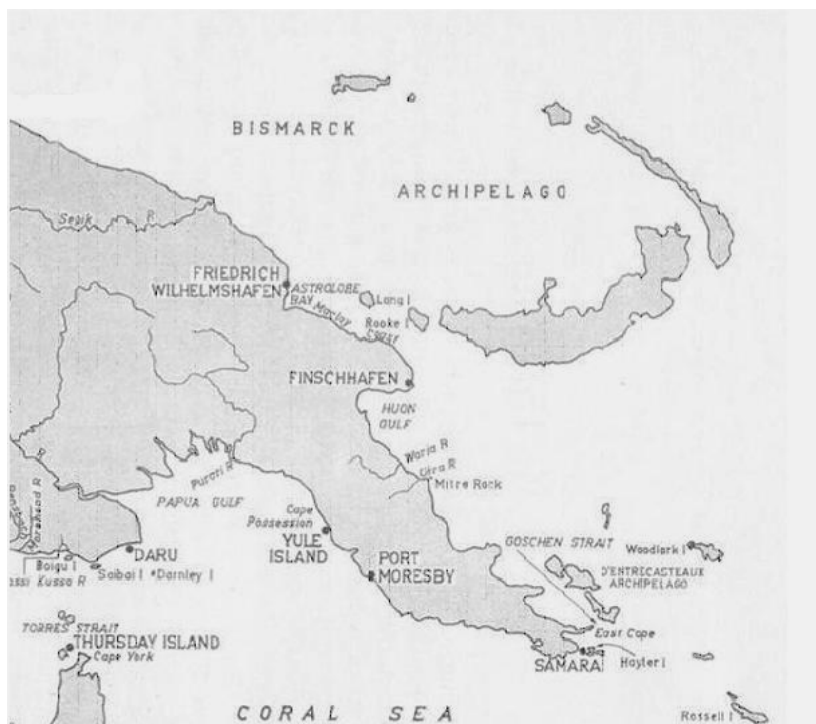
<sup>252</sup> *Soerabajaansch Handelsblad* 2 februari 1889

<sup>253</sup> *Javabode* 3 februari 1885

<sup>254</sup> I. Moses, 'The Extension of Colonial Rule in Kaiser Wilhelmsland' in: J.A. Moses en P.M. Kennedy (red.), *Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914* (St. Lucia 1977) 294

<sup>255</sup> *Ibidem* 290

scale attacks on plantations and settlements went on which caused great damage to the reputation of the colony in Germany itself which in turn acted as a further brake on the emigration to the island. A reputation which already was unfavourable due to the unhealthy climate. The company wasn't able to overcome this opposition from both the local population and the potential German settlers since it lacked the necessary colonial expertise and authority which might have acted as a counterweight.<sup>256</sup> Finally the Kompagnie was relieved of its duties in 1898 when the German government itself took over the control over Kaiser-Wilhelmsland from the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1899 onward.



Map 2: The eastern half of New Guinea

The failure of the Neu Guinea Kompagnie wasn't as clear at the time as it is nowadays. For a long time the company acted, in the Australian newspapers, as the role model of effective rule. 'The difference is to be explained by the fact that the German territory is governed by a company based in Berlin. English New Guinea on the other hand is governed by the supreme government which follows political and humanitarian motives, which as a basis of policy are false', was the opinion of the *Straits-Times*.<sup>257</sup>

<sup>256</sup> I. Moses, 'The Extension of Colonial Rule in Kaiser Wilhelmsland' in: J.A. Moses en P.M. Kennedy (red.), *Germany in the Pacific and Far East, 1870-1914* (St. Lucia 1977) 298

<sup>257</sup> Bataviaansch Handelsblad 23 februari 1887

By this statement the author neglected the fact that the three colonial powers on New Guinea had different objectives. These were vividly described by E.B. Kielstra in 1914.

*‘De Nederlanders hebben West-Nieuw-Guinea binnen hunne invloedssfeer getrokken omdat zij het destijds bestaande specerij-monopolie der Molukken meenden te moeten beschermen en liefst geen vreemde natie in de buurt hadden. De Engelschen, hier eigenlijk Australië, wenschten heerschappij op Nieuw-Guinea om te voorkomen dat een mogelijke vijand zich aan de overzijde van de Torresstraat zoude kunnen nestelen; de Duitschers eindelijk eischten, na 1882 ongeveer, als opkomende koloniale mogendheid, ter bescherming van hun niet onbelangrijken handel in de naburige eilandengroepen, ook ginds “een plaats onder de zon”’.*<sup>258</sup>

*‘The Dutch have pulled western New Guinea into their sphere of influence in order to protect the valuable trade monopoly on the Moluccas wherefore they didn’t like any foreign nation in the vicinity. The English, actually the Australians, wish to control New Guinea in order to prevent the settlement of a potential enemy on the other side of Torres-strait; the Germans finally demanded, after about 1882, as a rising colonial power, in order to protect their significant trade in the neighbouring islands, their own place under the sun’*

For both the Netherlands and England the most important function of the island was defensive while Germany, as a colonial newcomer in the region, wished to expand their influence in the area. When it slowly became clear that such a strategy was to be extremely costly and brought little result the possibility that the continuation of the Dutch claims on the western half would be strengthened by the development of more intensive economic activity became ever less likely.<sup>259</sup> As has been shown in the foregone chapter the absence of such economic motives contributed strongly to the seemingly disinterested attitude of The Hague and Batavia with regard to effective occupation of its share of the island. To speak with the words of Fieldhouse ‘there was no over-riding need to impose formal political control’ because ‘economic factors’ weren’t politicized.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> E.B. Kielstra, *Nieuw-Guinea* (z.p. 1914)

<sup>259</sup> Een dergelijke samenhang werd door Lindblad beschreven. J.Th. Lindblad, ‘Economische aspecten van de Nederlandse expansie in de Indonesische Archipel, 1870-1914’ in: J. van Goor (red.), *Imperialisme in de marge. De afronding van Nederlands-Indië* (Utrecht 1986) 229

<sup>260</sup> Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire* 466

From this point of view New Guinea was an example indeed. In 1885 great expectation existed about the German colonial rule but fifteen years later it was evident to everyone that the German policy had failed miserably. Both the Netherlands and England weren't prepared to bring the same financial and human sacrifices as Germany had done for a region which merely served as a buffer zone. This caused New Guinea to linger on as being one of the great enigma's of the world. In this matter I'd like to quote Kielstra once more since his statement that 'the European powers on New Guinea acted, partly forced, partly due to rivalry, but not because the possession of the island in itself was advantageous' describes the essence of the whole tripartition in just one sentence.

## **7.2 1898 as a turning point?**

In his 1991 article Kuitenbrouwer stated that the policy of resignation was definitely left for a more expansionistic colonial policy in 1898.<sup>261</sup> 'Even for New Guinea, (...), the 1890's formed a caesura due to the installation of governmental control'.<sup>262</sup> By this remark the author questioned Wesseling's theory that the Dutch colonial policy was determined by incidents which were mainly caused by conflicts with foreign competitors. It was obvious to Kuitenbrouwer that the Dutch policy during this decade wasn't incidental but followed a systematic pattern of pacification. Through an impressive enumeration of examples Kuitenbrouwer succeeded quite well in supporting his theory but with regard to New Guinea some hesitation is to be signalled. For instance there is to be read that the settlement of government officials in the outer provinces during the 1890's 'functioned on several places, like New Guinea, as living coats of arms. On most islands, especially the larger, economic important, ones they executed effective colonial governance'.<sup>263</sup> This leaves room for the question if the theory about a caesura in Dutch colonial policy in 1898 is indeed true with regard to New Guinea? Albeit when government officials are just replacing the traditional coats of arms but in practice have the same purpose is that to be regarded as systematic pacification?

Locher-Scholten struggled with this question as well in her 1994 study about the Sumatran province of Djambi. On the one hand the author states that 'the new colonial mentality of strengthened self-confidence' was pushed by the successes on Lombok in

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<sup>261</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 52

<sup>262</sup> Ibidem 62

<sup>263</sup> Ibidem 56

1894 and on Atjeh two years later. The striking feature of this new colonial ideology was, according to Locher-Scholten, the imagined community of a powerful colonial state encompassing the entire Indian Archipelago.<sup>264</sup> But earlier on she remarked that ‘a vague idea of imagined community already existed during the 1840’s and 1850’s’.<sup>265</sup> This supposition was supported by a statement from the Dutch Minister for Colonial Affairs, Rochussen, made in 1859, that ‘the extension of our rule takes place as a consequence of the awareness of what can be done in the Archipelago under our authority’.<sup>266</sup> As was already noted on page 49 New Guinea was an structural part of this imagined community.

When this is the case a different light begins to shine on Kuitenbrouwer’s theory that the Dutch policy with regard to New Guinea during the 1880’s and 1890’s was mainly motivated by pre-emption.<sup>267</sup> Obviously pre-emption was an important pillar of Dutch colonial policy, as we have seen above, but it wasn’t a deciding factor in 1898. The fear of foreign intervention was just one cause for the deployment of government officials in that year. It is even doubtful whether such a decision would have been made if ethical and managerial motives (pages 71 and 72) had been absent. The settlement of powerful states like Germany and England in the direct vicinity of the Dutch possessions on the island was no reason to send these officials in 1884 or 1885 either.<sup>268</sup> If one wishes to see a clear example of preventive occupation on the island one should look at the settlement of Fort Du Bus in 1828. This decision was unmistakably made ‘to thwart the English’.<sup>269</sup>

With this in mind I’d like to share Locher-Scholten’s conclusion that pre-emption wasn’t such a relevant factor in Dutch imperialism around the turn of the century<sup>270</sup>, but it would go too far to state that it wasn’t a factor at all. New Guinea provided an exceptional case since the driving force behind imperialism, at least according to Wesseling, being pre-emption already played an important part in the formulation of a policy toward the island at an early stage (around 1828). Therefore 1828 forms a much clearer turning point than 1898.

Still it is evident that 1898 was an important year for the relationship between the Netherlands and New Guinea. But I think that this importance should, in the first place, be

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<sup>264</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 289

<sup>265</sup> *Ibidem* 281

<sup>266</sup> Fasseur, ‘Een koloniale paradox’ 179

<sup>267</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, ‘Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid’ 60

<sup>268</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 282

<sup>269</sup> Kommissaris Generaal Du Bus de Gisignies aan minister voor marine en koloniën C. Th. Elout, 26 september 1826, ARA, Kol, gv. 23-4-1827, inv. nr. 2.10.01/4195

<sup>270</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 282-283

accounted to the other component of modern imperialism which Kuitenbrouwer, following Betts, discerns. I think that contiguity was of much greater significance.

Both Kuitenbrouwer, Locher-Scholten and Wesseling<sup>271</sup> share the opinion that Dutch imperialism didn't follow a pre-determined plan. Its policy was made up according to the circumstances with which it had to deal. The policy during the 1890's is different in so far that the answers which were found for all sorts of colonial questions tended to become ever more synchronized. Contrary to the statement made by Wesseling that the last decade of the nineteenth century didn't show the emergence of an imperialistic mentality in the Netherlands this seems to be exactly what did happen. This is illustrated by optimistic remarks like:

*'Overtuigd dat ons volksbestaan onafscheidelijk verbonden is aan ons koloniaal bezit, ...' en 'toch bestaat er geen grond om te twijfelen aan de mogelijkheid om ook Nieuw-Guinea op te voeren tot eene hoogte, waardoor het, als een ander Java, een parel zal worden aan Neerlands kroon'.<sup>272</sup>*

*'Convinced that our existence as a people is inseparably linked to our colonial possessions' or 'and still there is no reason to doubt the possibility that we can lift New Guinea to such a height that it will one day be, just like Java, a pearl on the Dutch crown'*

Such a mentality was expressed in several ways. A very important component was the nationalistic fever which connected itself with the colonial policy.<sup>273</sup> This developing enthusiasm about an active colonial policy in the Archipelago caused the strategy of Fransen van der Putte, which emphasized informal and maritime imperialism, to be replaced by an offensive strategy of formal and territorial imperialism.<sup>274</sup> This increasing willingness to act was brought about by developments in the Archipelago itself. For instance New Guinea was definitely brought into the imagined community in 1891 by the foundation of a three-monthly steamer service along the shore of the island by the

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<sup>271</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 206, Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 289, Wesseling, *Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren* 189

<sup>272</sup> Pyttersen 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 171

<sup>273</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, 'Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid' 64-65

<sup>274</sup> Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst* 212

Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij.<sup>275</sup> This caused the government to become much better informed and by that concerned about the troubles and problems which existed on and around the island. It was no longer possible or desirable to play ignorance which forced the Netherlands to join in on 'the fate of a colonial power'<sup>276</sup> which around the turn of the century meant formal territorial expansion. Thanks to this synthesis between the imagined community and the emergence of an imperialistic mentality the criteria of contiguity were seen in an ever wider perspective.

For New Guinea this meant that effective governmental control began in 1898. The dislocation of the social structure on the island brought about by the intensifying contacts between the indigenous population and European adventurers, in combination with British protests about the disorder on the Dutch part of the island<sup>277</sup>, now formed enough reason to make this decision while in the decades before the traditional answer would have been to send a small-scale mission together with the intensification of diplomatic contacts between The Hague and London. In 1898 governmental control became a goal on its own which was legitimized by a combination of ethical, managerial and political arguments. In the words of the Director for Internal Affairs a situation had come into being in which 'the prestige of our nation doesn't allow for a continuation of the miserable and deprived conditions on New Guinea'.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> J.N.F.M. à Campo, *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij. Stoomvaart en staatsvorming in de Indonesische Archipel 1888-1914* (Hilversum 1992) 191

<sup>276</sup> Bastert 19 november 1897 in: *Handelingen van de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal 1897-1898* 147

<sup>277</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 280

<sup>278</sup> *Ibidem* 287

*Een continue configuratie tussen perifere en Europese factoren.*

*A continual configuration between peripheral and European factors.*

With this short sentence I'd like to describe the Dutch policy with regard to New Guinea during the nineteenth century. Just like Locher-Scholten remarked about Djambi I think that a multifaceted vision on modern imperialism, represented by D.K. Fieldhouse's theory, is most suitable to describe the relationship between the Netherlands and New Guinea.

In the first place this British historian opted for continuity. Fieldhouse sees the European expansion at the end of the nineteenth century not as a new phenomenon but more as the culmination point of a historical tradition. 'It was the end of an old story not the start of a new one'.<sup>279</sup> For almost all European colonial powers he's able to show that they already had older economic, political or religious connections with the areas where they acted in a imperialistic manner later in the century. This is true for the Netherlands and New Guinea as well. Her claims on the islands rested during the entire century on the proclamation of 1828. For decades The Hague appealed on its historical legacy from the era when the country was still a (potential) great power. Despite all rhetoric about abstinence and contraction the possession of the island was continued at all times because it was just there that the Dutch claims to the sovereignty over the entire Indian Archipelago were threatened. This threat was mainly local during the first half of the century and focussed on the economic importance of the trade monopoly of the Moluccas and on the preservation of the Netherlands as a colonial superpower but slowly began to broaden when the idea of an imaged community in the Indies began to take form just in an area in which the Netherlands definitely dropped to a second rank status among the European states.

But it is of importance not to overstate the influence of the idea of a imagined community. The limited resources of the small state that the Netherlands was, and is, didn't allow for a imperialistic strategy to develop even if this would have been desirable.

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<sup>279</sup> Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire* 460

The colonial policy was ad-hoc formulated and it was only due to a constant set of crisis in the periphery, in this case the emergence of the Australian colonies, which kept the attention of the European officials on the island. This is what sets New Guinea apart from other areas in the Archipelago. Fasseur remarked, in line with Fieldhouse, in his study about the Dutch expansion halfway through the nineteenth century that the periphery was decisive in the development of the colonial policy. Only when the Dutch position in the Archipelago was directly threatened was the colonial policy influenced by the government in The Hague. And, as we have seen, such a threat existed on New Guinea.

With regard to the development of a colonial policy concerning the island Europe played an essential role. The decisions taken was strongly dictated by arguments of international politics. The preservation of the island wasn't a goal in itself but an (essential) part of foreign policy which was directed in the first place at maintaining the Dutch sovereignty over the Indian Archipelago. For the Netherlands it was even more true than for the larger imperialistic powers that 'colonialism was not a preference but a last resort'.<sup>280</sup> Decisions taken in this matter were strongly influenced by developments on the outer edges of the Dutch territory. Peripheral factors like the Australian expansion and the German trade interests were all causes for European tension which again provided a reason for clear choices of policy. This caused a paradoxical situation by which The Hague had the greatest influence on and paid relatively much attention to an area which was clearly at the bottom of the ladder of economic possibilities. In that policy several strategy can be discerned between 1828 and 1898.

Initially the Kingdom under the guidance of William I could use an offensive, militarily backed, strategy to counter any foreign threats to its sovereignty in the Archipelago. Several features of modern imperialism, like expansion towards new areas and the extension of the national sphere of influence seem to have been the result of a mentality in which territorial expansion was part of the political struggle in Europe. Seen from this point of view the strategy developed by William I can be placed within the framework of European politics where the King strived to regain the position of great power for the united Netherlands. William wasn't to be stopped by negative expectations about the future or practical problems. The Dutch actions taken on New Guinea in 1828 are motivated by 'an extension into the periphery of the political struggle in Europe' on the one hand but on the other it was also caused by 'economic activity (the spice

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<sup>280</sup> Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire* 462

monopoly of the Moluccas) which gave rise to some strictly non-economic problem (English competition based in Australia) which in turn demanded political action'.<sup>281</sup> As a consequence there already existed in 1828 a situation in which 'European rule was (...) imposed by metropolitan governments in places where basic national interests were economic not because economic activity itself required formal empire but because (...) some non-economic problem existed which could not be solved by informal means'.<sup>282</sup>

This strategy of force was ended quite abruptly in 1830 when the Netherlands was forced to adapt their policy to the new reality of a separated Belgium. For New Guinea this meant that any further military occupation on the island was out of the question but at least the extensive colonial possessions which the Dutch had in the Indies were nominally retained. During the next two decades a strategy akin to New Guinea was adopted which is very similar to the one imposed by Fransen van der Putte in the 1870's. By small acts of sovereignty combined with diplomatic talks in Europe, both in the periphery and in the motherland itself, an effective strategy of containment was developed which was mainly aimed retaining the outer provinces as buffer zones around the crown which was formed by Java.

Only after the temporary subsidence of the threat from the Australian colonies during the middle of the century a policy which came close to abstinence was adopted. Besides the fear for foreign intervention the economic charm of the region declined as well due to the slow depreciation of the spice monopoly on the Moluccas which in turn meant that the stakes were lowered. It was only due to the emerging scientific and religious interest in the island that a connection between The Hague and New Guinea remained.

This loose connection ended definitely in 1874 when a renewed threat from Australia forced The Hague to make some clear-cut decisions again. These decisions were strongly influenced by the limited means the Dutch had. The positive result of the adopted conservative guideline was that it helped enormously in creating a general notion about the size of the Dutch Indies. Thanks to a combination of historical rights, her crucial position in European politics, and a policy of strict free trade the Netherlands succeeded in maintaining this imagined community.

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<sup>281</sup> Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire* 460-464

<sup>282</sup> *Ibidem* 470

With regard to New Guinea this was expressed by using the rights which the Sultan of Tidore possessed over a part of the island since the seventeenth century. There wasn't any potential foreign competitor who could match this. This historical legacy was strengthened by the fact that the small nation that the Netherlands was by the last quarter of the nineteenth century posed no threat to its colonial adversaries but at the same time it was protected against the greed of these competitors by her strategic middle position in both Europe and Asia. None of the colonial rivals 'feared the consequences of political action' taken by the Netherlands because it limited its actions within its own vast sphere of influence. This sphere of influence was pretty stable since the treaty of 1874 because any breach would inevitably lead to an alteration of the balance of power between the colonial superpowers. Therefore the remark made by the Dutch representative in London, Van Bijlandt, is ever so true for both New Guinea as for the Indies as a whole since the Anglo-German rivalry 'will do more to strengthen us than to threaten us'.<sup>283</sup> The disproportionately large colonial possession of the Dutch during the nineteenth and early twentieth century can be traced back to the relative security of this situation. This security in turn implicitly contributed to the development of a imperialistic mentality which was mainly directed at pacification of uncontrolled areas within its own, internationally recognized, sphere of influence.

It is in this light that the tripartition of New Guinea in 1885 becomes important. It resulted in the declaration from both Germany and England that they would respect the Dutch sovereignty over the western part of the island. This caused the third phase of imperialism, as described by Kuitenbrouwer in 1985, to come into existence. Only the pacification of the interior remained. Due to abovementioned recognition the necessity for such a pacification subsided. It was only after the emergence of a combination of factors in 1898 that effective occupation of the island became important enough to direct some of the sparse Dutch resources toward the island. That this choice was made at that point in time fits in perfectly with the transformation from informal, maritime imperialism towards formal, territorial imperialism represented by the 'Korte Verklaring' of 1898.

In summary the Dutch sovereignty over the western part of New Guinea is to be appointed to an early imperialistic wish for expansion which was caused by both European and peripheral factors and which was followed by a defensive attitude with regard to claims

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<sup>283</sup> Woltring, *Bescheiden betreffende de buitenlandse politiek* nr. 560 p. 779

acquired through the proclamation of 1828. A combination of its strategic position in Europe together with an effective colonial policy aimed at containment was successful in retaining these rights. The importance of the tripartition of New Guinea in 1885 lies in the fact that it provided an international basis for the Dutch sovereignty which was the main aim of the Dutch colonial policy during the nineteenth century.<sup>284</sup> Eventually 1898 was the culmination point of different factors which already played a role in 1828 but only by their simultaneous emergence in abovementioned year in conjunction with a tendency toward a more active colonial policy provided enough reason for intervention.

To finally return to the discussion points formulated by Locher-Scholten in the introduction it can be concluded that the Dutch policy with regard to New Guinea was a long term issue which is highly characterized by continuity. Concerning the contradiction between economists and political generalists and the one between Euro-centralists and peripherists a synthesis seems to be necessary. In 1828 both peripheral economic factors on the Mollucas as well as power political arguments in Europe brought the annexation about. Such a synthesis remained in place during the remainder of the nineteenth century albeit that the arguments behind them changed several times. Thanks to the technological and managerial development it became possible to approach the entire Archipelago as one entity which caused economic interest in the central areas to have immediate consequences for other parts of the Archipelago as well. In 1898 New Guinea still acted as a buffer against unwanted economic competition from the eastern periphery just like it had done in 1828. The only difference was that scale in which this was seen had enlarged significantly. It was no longer directed at the protection of the spice monopoly on the Moluccas but on the protection of the key islands Java and Sumatra. The maintenance and international recognition of this outpost remained firmly in the portfolio of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which tried hard to safeguard the Dutch position in the Indies through diplomatic means. This is why we can speak of an continual configuration between peripheral and European factors.

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<sup>284</sup> Locher-Scholten, *Sumatraans sultanaat* 289-290