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A war of words : Dutch pro-Boer propaganda and the South African war (1899-1902)

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Introduction

It was already clear to contemporaries that the Dutch enthusiasm for the Boers during the South African War (1899-1902) was to be seen in the context of the history of modern imperialism. In his book *The Psychology of Jingoism*, the journalist J.A. Hobson drew a parallel between the Dutch depiction of the conflict and the situation in Great Britain, where he argued that the public had been manipulated by a small group of South African capitalists and mining magnates. Sneering at jingo propagandists he wrote that:

[they] must admit that it is likely that the Dutch nation in Holland, drawing nearly all their information from Dutch South African sources, are animated by a bias similar to, though not so strong as, ours [the British], have received a mass of evidence directly contradictory to ours, and that their intellectual judgement has been formed in a fashion similar to ours.¹

Despite Hobson's dislike of the jingoist views on the South African War, he was certainly not of the opinion that propagandists who supported the Boer republics were any better. In another book, he described Willem Leyds, the most important diplomatic representative of the Transvaal in Europe, as an 'evil genius' behind '[t]he notion of an unqualified Dutch political supremacy, with a complete dominance of Dutch language and ideas [in South Africa]'.²

Historians point out that Hobson's ideas about the capitalist conspiracy behind the prejudiced press coverage of the South African question were biased themselves, based on his own ideas about Britain's duty in the world and the role of the growing mass media. Still, his observations have shown their value for the historical study of the imperial press.³ If anything, Hobson's writings show that contemporaries considered imperialism not to be a process that only took place outside Europe, but also saw a close connection with public opinion in the metropole. His comparative remarks about the coverage of the South African War suggest that this was not only the case in Britain, but also in the Netherlands and that propaganda was seen as an important aspect of the struggle between the British Empire and the Boer republics. In later historiography about modern imperialism too, the South African War is considered to be an important topic. This thesis aims to examine contemporary notions about the concept of imperialism by taking the responses of Dutch propagandists to the South African question as a case study that is compared with secondary literature about imperial culture in Britain.

¹ Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism*, 102.

² Idem, *The War in South Africa*, 33.

³ Porter, 'Sir Alfred Milner and the Press, 1897-1899', 338; Smith, *The Origins of the South African War*, 399-400; Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the writing of Empire*, 25-29; Potter, "'The Dark Stream of Shameless Falsehood'".

Historical comparisons between the two countries on either side of the North Sea are nothing new. There is a series of conferences during which Dutch and British historians exchange views on different issues. So far, fifteen of such gatherings have been held between 1959 and 2003. The initiators of the first Anglo-Dutch historical conference emphasised that British history and Dutch history ‘are closely related’ and hoped that it would serve as a source of inspiration to scholars from both countries.⁴ In later years, the conferences focussed on specific topics, such as Protestantism, Liberalism and mass society. The history of overseas expansion has been recognised as an important field too. In 1967, the editors of a volume of papers on *Britain & the Netherlands in Europe and Asia* expressed the wish that ‘English and Dutch historians will one day be able to confer on their cultural and institutional environments, so much akin as the world goes and yet so strangely and subtly diverse’.⁵ The Anglo-Dutch historical conference in 2000 focussed on aspects of the two colonial empires between 1750 and 1850. A broad comparison yielded that overseas ambitions of both countries focussed on South-East Asia in that period, but that there were differences as well because of the fact that the Netherlands lost the dominant position that it had held in the seventeenth century, while Britain came to ‘rule the waves’ during that period.⁶ In the 1980s, another series of conferences held in Leiden, Cambridge, Delhi and Yogyakarta, brought together scholars to discuss aspects of the colonial state in India and the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many of the papers presented at these occasions explicitly aimed to draw comparisons between topics such as colonial administration, economic structures and the relationship with indigenous groups.⁷

Looking at these precedents, a comparison between the depictions of the British and Dutch empires in Asia might have been more straightforward, except that there are some differences that make such an exercise problematic. First of all, the Indian subcontinent is a single large landmass, while the Indonesian archipelago consists of a huge number of islands. Indian culture is therefore divided into much larger cultural groups than Indonesian culture, which made the colonial experience there inherently different. Another, and possibly more serious problem is the difference in chronology. British territorial expansion in India largely took place before 1860, while, except from Java, the extension of the Dutch sphere of influence in the Indonesian archipelago really took off in the 1870s.⁸ This is a significant disparity, because the Western perspective on overseas expansion shifted considerably during the nineteenth century. After 1870, the universalistic belief in progress gave way to more rigid ideas about racial hierarchies, derived from Social Darwinism.⁹ These intellectual shifts make

⁴ P. Geyl, ‘Introduction’, in: Bromley and Kossmann eds., *Papers delivered to the Oxford-Netherlands historical conference*, 9.

⁵ ‘Preface’, in: Bromley and Kossmann, *Britain & the Netherlands in Europe and Asia*, 10.

⁶ S. Conway, ‘Introduction’, in: Moore and Van Nierop, *Colonial Empires Compared*, 1.

⁷ Papers given at these conferences can be found in the following special issues: *Itinerario. Journal for Overseas History*, vol. 10, nr 1 (1986); *ibid.*, vol. 11, nr 1 (1987); *ibid.*, vol. 12, nr. 1 (1988); *ibid.*, vol. 13, nr. 1 (1989).

⁸ Johnson, ‘Problems of Comparison’, 83-93.

⁹ MacKenzie, ‘Empire and Metropolitan Cultures’, 285.

a comparison between the British and Dutch debates about colonial expansion in Asia problematic, which is not the case with the respective depictions of the South African War, because these took shape in response to the same events and at times even interacted with one another.

Of course there were significant differences between the Netherlands' and Britain's relations with South Africa. The most obvious of these is that the whole region eventually became part of the British Empire, while at the end of the nineteenth century the Netherlands was not in any position to make territorial claims on that part of the world. Also, the economic significance of South Africa to the British was far greater than to the Dutch. It can therefore be maintained that these relations cannot be called imperial.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it has been convincingly argued that the ties between the Netherlands and the Boer republics at the end of the nineteenth century were an 'informal' and 'cultural' form of imperialism, because there was a structural attempt to gain influence in the region.¹¹ The most tangible result of the Dutch sympathy for the Boers was that several thousands of Dutchmen emigrated to the republics (mainly the Transvaal) at the end of the nineteenth century, contributing to the development of modern state institutions in Southern Africa.

In secondary literature, it has been shown that British contemporaries also considered such issues to be important, because they believed their dominance in South Africa to be far from self-evident, even after the whole region had officially been incorporated into the British Empire. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, colonial administrators considered the region a weak spot in the imperial system because of the presence of a distinctive group of colonial competitors, the Dutch-speaking Afrikaners. In order to improve their grip, they set out to 'Anglicise' the white population after 1902, but these attempts failed.¹² In the light of this cultural struggle, the pro-Boer propaganda campaign in Europe can be characterised as nothing less than a war of words. The question is, however, how one should assess the historical significance of this phenomenon. The following review of historiography will explore how this complex question can be approached.

Historiography: Britain

In recent decades, historians who study British imperialism have engaged in a debate about the question as to the extent to which the imperial experience shaped the ways in which people in Britain viewed the world and viewed themselves. In the 1980s, John MacKenzie put forward that the empire had a great impact on popular culture on the British Isles, which from the 1870s onwards led to the emergence of an 'ideological cluster of monarchism, militarism and Social Darwinism' that captured all social classes.¹³ A different group of scholars,

¹⁰ Wesseling, 'Bestond er een Nederlands imperialisme?', 193-194.

¹¹ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 129; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 41. In order to avoid misunderstandings, I will use the initial of Maarten Kuitenbrouwer in references to his work.

¹² Nimcocks, *Milner's Young Men*, chapters 3 and 4; Darwin, 'A Third British Empire?', 72-77.

¹³ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 7. This book has been a starting-point for the sizable *Studies in*

including Antoinette Burton and Catherine Hall, has mainly been influenced by the work of post-colonial authors. They argue that the imperial experience inspired specific views on gender and race, forging a set of hierarchies that shaped British society to a large extent.¹⁴

There are academics who reject the claims of these so-called ‘new imperial histories’, like Bernard Porter for instance. He argues that the British Empire only attracted the attention of a small elite that benefited directly from imperial expansion and were simply interested in firm control and effective exploitation of overseas dependencies.¹⁵ It has been pointed out, however, that this narrow definition fails to grasp the full complexity of the concept of ‘Empire’, which was already a hotly debated issue amongst contemporaries.¹⁶ Therefore, a number of historians, despite their critical stance towards claims that Britain itself was deeply influenced by the process of overseas expansion, attempt to put imperial culture into firm historical context in order to investigate the meaning (or meanings) of the concept of imperialism.

One of the most fruitful exercises in this sense has been a new approach to what can be called the ‘geographies of the British Empire’.¹⁷ From the onset of the imperialism debate, concepts of space have played an important role, highlighting differences between the ‘periphery’ and the imperial ‘core’. In their classic theory of expansion, which held sway between the 1950s and 1980s, Ronald Robinson and Jack Gallagher argued that, although the government in London preferred informal means of control, the British had no other option but to expand formal rule in response to crises taking place on the fringes of their sphere of influence. As such imperialism can be seen as an ‘excentric’ process because the initiative for expansion came from the peripheries rather than from the centre. In this model, ‘men on the spot’ and local ‘collaborators’ were important intermediaries who influenced the ‘official mind’ of decision-makers in London.¹⁸ In the early 1990s, another model for British imperialism was presented by P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, who coined the concept of ‘gentlemanly capitalism’. They argue that territorial expansion was driven by a group of aristocratic financiers in London, who were in search of new opportunities for investments. In this view, the incentive for expansion was clearly ‘metropolitan’.¹⁹

A few years before Cain and Hopkins presented their theory, David Fieldhouse already argued for a more middle-of-the-road approach. He emphasised the ‘interactions’ between the core and its peripheries, whereby Britain was affected in the fields of economy, foreign policy

Imperialism of which MacKenzie is the editor-in-chief.

¹⁴ Burton, *Burdens of History*; Hall, *Civilising subjects*.

¹⁵ Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 13-17 and 313.

¹⁶ J. Darwin, ‘Bored by the Raj’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18 February 2005; D. Kennedy, Review of Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain*, H-Albion, H-Net Reviews, June 2005.

¹⁷ The following paragraphs are based on: Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks’, 124-141.

¹⁸ Robinson and Gallagher with Denny, *Africa and the Victorians*. For the notions ‘collaboration’ and ‘excentric’ cf. Robinson, ‘Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism’, 117-142.

¹⁹ Cain and Hopkins, *Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion*.

and armed forces, while the (former) colonies inherited, amongst other things, administrative systems, commodity structures and state boundaries.²⁰ This premise was further elaborated on in an important article by John Darwin, in which he presents the concept of ‘bridgeheads’ to explain ‘the dynamics of territorial expansion’. According to Darwin, earlier models tended to overlook the diversity of both British society and the regions where expansion took place as a result of the fixed focus on either the ‘periphery’ or the ‘core’. Instead, he argues that it was the ‘bridgehead [...] the hinge or “interface” between the metropole and a local periphery’ that determined ‘[w]hether British influence grew, or was transformed into formal or informal empire’.²¹ Viewed in this way, the Victorian Empire was not a monolithic entity, but a complex hotchpotch of different territories around the world, ranging from tropical dependencies to self-governing dominions in the temperate climate zones, all with their own relationship to the metropole. This ‘webbed conception of imperial space’, argues Alan Lester, narrows the gap between the ‘traditional’ empirical approach to imperialism as presented in the integrated models of expansion and the ‘new imperial histories’ that focus on the cultural aspects of empire.²² If anything, the idea of bridgeheads recognises the importance of domestic public opinion, in addition to high politics and economics, as a factor that played into the process of expansion.²³

Following similar lines of argument, an ongoing series of international conferences under the heading of the ‘British World’ investigates issues concerning the imperial diaspora, such as culture and identity. Mapping out this transnational space, the main focus has been on emigration to the so-called ‘white’ parts of the British Empire: the dominions. There, inhabitants recreated institutions of the motherland and retained a sense of belonging, which can be called ‘Britishness’.²⁴ Although it can be argued that the focus on the ‘white’ character of dominions ignores issues of exploitation and suppression of the indigenous populations²⁵, studies presented at these conferences have yielded important insights into identity-formation in different parts of the British Empire. The swift process of decolonisation after the Second World War led to the commonly held view amongst academics that imperialism and nationalism were two opposite and contradictory concepts. As a result, the histories of the British nation-state and those of the countries that grew up out of its colonies were made into separate fields of study.²⁶ Looking at the British world, however, a more complex picture emerges: despite obvious tensions, ‘colonial nationalities’ and ‘imperial Britishness’ did not rule out each other, but complemented each other and at times even overlapped.²⁷ Such feelings were supported by multiple overarching institutions and networks that survived two

²⁰ Fieldhouse, ‘Can Humpty-Dumpty be Put Together Again?’, 16.

²¹ Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians’, 629.

²² Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks’, 129.

²³ Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians’, 641-642.

²⁴ Bridge and Fedorowich, ‘Mapping the British World’, 3.

²⁵ Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks’, 130.

²⁶ Hopkins, ‘Back to the Future’, 198 and 207-208.

²⁷ Bridge and Fedorowich, ‘Mapping the British World’, 6. Cf. Potter, ‘Richard Jebb’, 107.

World Wars, although they were fatally weakened by the second, and have left a cultural legacy that survives even today in some parts of the world.²⁸

One way in which historians have attempted to put notions of British identity into a global context is to investigate how information travelled around the empire. Lester shows how during the first half of the nineteenth century different groups of British settlers in the Eastern Cape actively lobbied in the metropole to promote their particular views on colonial rule.²⁹ During the same period, Zoë Laidlaw argues, patronage relations between local administrators and politicians in London greatly determined how policy took shape.³⁰ In his study of the imperial press system, Simon Potter analyses how such networks developed during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Great technological and social change, such as the advent of intercontinental underwater telegraph cables and the rise of mass media, increased the exchange between the metropolitan press and newspapers throughout the empire, particularly in the white settler colonies. Fleet Street in London became the undisputed centre of journalism in the British world from which news was distributed, at the same time providing a model for colonial editors, which led to a homogenisation of the imperial press.³¹

More recently, Potter has published an interesting essay in which he warns against the pitfalls of anachronism in this ‘webbed’ notion of the British Empire as an interlinked set of networks. He takes issue with scholars who put the developments at the end of the nineteenth century on a par with the digital revolution a century later, for example by branding telegraph cables as a ‘Victorian internet’. It should not be forgotten that contemporaries ran into technological and commercial problems, which limited the flow of free information because institutions were needed to manage the infrastructure of the imperial mass media. Porter therefore distinguishes between ‘networks’ – that can be characterised as ‘informal, open, multiple, competing and dynamic’ – and ‘systems’ that were ‘dominated by a restricted number of powerful organisations, whose interest together dictate more formal, entrenched, and limited patterns of interconnection’. Throughout the history of the British Empire, informal networks continued to exist, but imperial connections must be interpreted in the light of their institutional framework, with other words as a system, in order to properly assess their historical meaning, he argues.³²

What then, was the impact of such imperial hardware on British society? Andrew Thomson has done thorough research in this field. In his study of imperial lobby groups, he shows that such organisations were able to put imperial issues on the political agenda by mobilising public opinion and as such contributed to metropolitan political culture. In line with the notion of the British world, he argues that the ‘white’ dominions, at that time known

²⁸ Darwin, ‘A Third British Empire?’; Bridge and Fedorowich, ‘Mapping the British World’, 8-11.

²⁹ Lester, *Imperial Networks*.

³⁰ Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections*.

³¹ Potter, *News and the British World*.

³² Idem, ‘Webs, Networks, and Systems’, 622.

as ‘Greater Britain’, attracted most of the public’s attention, more so than the tropical dependencies or even India.³³ In more recent work, Thompson attempts to assess the wider impact of the empire on British culture. Although it is very difficult to gather a set of quantitative data in order to come up with a foolproof answer to this question, he investigates a range of social groups in Britain, and comes to the conclusion that they all had some sort of interest in one part of the empire or another. Exactly because of this great diversity, both in the metropole and in the peripheries, the imperial experience was far from univocal: imperialism meant different things to different people.³⁴ Following a similar line of argument, Potter argues against sweeping generalisations by both the ‘new imperial histories’ and their critics, who claim that imperialism either completely formed British society or did not at all. In order to get a better understanding of the centripetal effects of imperialism, he calls for ‘detailed research into particular examples’ that are nonetheless ‘part of a broader, collective endeavour’. He concludes that ‘the work of different historians on different parts of the canvas can, when viewed at a distance, help us to see the outlines of what the painting might eventually look like’.³⁵

In order to investigate the wider meaning of imperialism, much attention has been given to the South African question, which from the end of the nineteenth century has been an important topic in the debate about the British Empire. Some argue that the South African War – which was the largest of all colonial wars Britain ever fought and, indeed, the largest conflict the world had seen since the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) – was the first sign that Britain’s international dominance was waning.³⁶ The costs to Britain were certainly high, both in human lives and in money, and several academics have argued that this was the reason that support for the empire amongst the public evaporated, if it had previously existed in the first place. In this view, the outbursts of public enthusiasm during the earlier stages of the conflict, such as the famous celebrations after the relief of Mafeking (May 1900), were only superficial bouts of mass hysteria.³⁷ In the light of the historiographical developments mentioned above, however, historians have come up with other ideas on the matter. One of the first to do so was MacKenzie, who asserts that the South African War did not break the imperial spirit. In his view, imperialism remained deeply entrenched in popular culture up until the 1950s, which demonstrates its long ‘shelf life’.³⁸ Significantly, several studies that investigate the ‘British World’ adhere to a similar chronology and argue that the influence of imperialism reached far into the twentieth century.³⁹ Although the South African War was a

³³ Thompson, *Imperial Britain*.

³⁴ Idem, *The Empire Strikes Back?*

³⁵ Potter, ‘Empire, Cultures and Identities’, 66.

³⁶ Morris, *Farwell the Trumpets*, 91; Holland, *The Pursuit of Greatness*, 10.

³⁷ Price, *An Imperial War*; Attridge, *Nationalism, Imperialism and Identity*; Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 215-216 and 234-237.

³⁸ MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*, 9 and 256.

³⁹ Darwin, ‘A Third British Empire?’, *passim*; Thompson, *Imperial Britain*, 193; Potter, *News and the British World*, 211.

serious challenge, provoking many questions about how the British Empire functioned, it was certainly not the beginning of decolonisation. ‘The old order had bent a little: it had not broken.’⁴⁰

This does not answer the question, however, as to the extent to which the South African War affected the British Empire as a whole. Although some advocates of imperial reform in Britain took the opportunity to put forward their plans, the tangible results of this campaign were rather limited. On the other hand, it can be argued that the wider effects of such lobby groups on public opinion and political culture were significant.⁴¹ Moreover, in some specific areas the conflict clearly did act as a catalyst. The coverage of events in South Africa, for example, raised fundamental issues concerning the functioning of the press, which were related to the rise of modern communication technology and mass media.⁴² In this sense, the South African War truly was a ‘media war’.⁴³ No less than two hundred correspondents working for British newspapers were present when the war started and, although the media attention did decline after June 1900, popular writers, such as Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle, continued to publish about the conflict. Jaqueline Beaumont shows that the war had an important influence on the careers of several journalists.⁴⁴ Focussing on the authorities, she points out how the large media attention was also noticed by prominent figures in the military high command and civil administration, who tried to enlarge their control over the coverage of events taking place in South Africa. The South African War was therefore an important phase in the development of modern censorship.⁴⁵ Looking at the institutional aspects, Potter identifies the conflict as a watershed for the transference of information throughout the British Empire. Faced with the shortcomings of the existing institutions, reformers sought to improve the imperial press system – with considerable success, he argues.⁴⁶

The South African question also had more diffuse effects, like its effect on the thinking about British identity. Shortly after his appointment as high commissioner of the Cape in 1897, Alfred Milner lamented that South Africa was the ‘weakest link in the imperial chain’. With this remark he did not refer to shortcomings in infrastructure, but mainly to the presence of a group of colonial rivals that threatened British dominance in the region, the Dutch-speaking Afrikaners. In order to secure the region for the British Empire, the self-confessed ‘race patriot’ and his supporters attempted to break down not only the political and military

⁴⁰ Darwin, ‘Afterword: the Imprint of the War’, 296.

⁴¹ Cf. A. Porter, ‘The South African War and Imperial Britain’; and A.S. Thompson, ‘Imperial Propaganda during the South African War’.

⁴² Because of the recent invention of the handheld Kodak camera, for example, there were far more photographs available than in previous wars that found their way to the upcoming illustrated press. Badsey ‘A Print and Media War’, 11-12; Dorward, ‘Major Tunbridge’s Boer War Album’; Searle, *A New England?*, 284.

⁴³ Badsey, ‘The Boer War as Media War’, 70-83; Potter, *News and the British World*, 38.

⁴⁴ For example cf. Beaumont, ‘The Making of a War Correspondent’.

⁴⁵ Idem, ‘The British Press and Censorship’.

⁴⁶ Potter, *News and the British World*, 212.

might of the Boer republics, but also their cultural influence, so that English would prevail as the dominant language used.⁴⁷ In Britain there was a group of outspoken critics of this onslaught, who opposed the war because they thought that the Boers, as white settlers, were entitled to an independent existence. Paula Krebs points out that the fact that their views conflicted with the advocates of expansion did not mean that these Liberal authors challenged the ideological presumptions of their adversaries. Looking at the writings from both parties, she concludes that the public discourse about the South African War in Britain was greatly influenced by common notions of gender and race.⁴⁸

One noticeable feature of the use of the term ‘race’ in this context was that it did not only refer to differences between black and white people, but also to differences between English-speaking and Dutch-speaking colonists. To contemporaries, language and heritage were the two most important markers to distinguish between the two so-called ‘white races’ in South Africa.⁴⁹ This polarisation was not absolute, Thompson argues, referring to the ‘languages of loyalism’ that were prevalent amongst certain groups of Afrikaners.⁵⁰ Also on the British side, the divide was not experienced as sharply as might seem at first sight. Many British officers had genuine admiration for their adversaries, who they considered to be ideal soldiers. Others disliked the harsh methods that were used against the Boers.⁵¹ Even the Milner administration did not only use sticks to ensure British sovereignty, but also held out carrots to the Dutch-speaking population. One of the most significant compromises he made during the peace negotiation in 1902, was the suspension of the vote for black people, which was a demand of the Boers and which ensured white political supremacy in the region for decades to come. This shows that the ‘race question’ in all its facets was a central theme in the contemporary debate about South Africa and touched upon the fundamental question as to how – using the terminology of the time – one might ‘civilise’ that part of the world. Bill Nasson has therefore argued that the South African War was in essence ‘a European war fought in Africa over how best to get on with the colonial order, and what its dominant terms of reproduction should be’.⁵²

In this sense, the conflict had a distinct international component too. Several groups in other parts of the British Empire expressed their sympathy for either one of the sides. For example, the authorities in Canada and Australia sent troops to a war outside their own region for the first time in their history, which should be seen as an important precedent for their support to Britain during the two World Wars. On the other hand, dissident groups, such as French-speaking Quebecois in Canada and republicans in Ireland, admired the Boers for their plucky fight for independence. Likewise, there was much sympathy for the Boer republics

⁴⁷ Nimcocks, *Milner's Young Men*, 18-19.

⁴⁸ Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 34-36.

⁴⁹ Dubow, *Scientific Racism*, 17; Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire*, 114.

⁵⁰ Thompson, ‘The Languages of Loyalism’, 640-646.

⁵¹ Surridge, ‘“All you Soldiers are what we call Pro-Boer”’.

⁵² Nasson, *The South African War*, 283.

amongst the public on the European continent.⁵³ Although some of these sentiments were a source of concern to the British government, such as the proposal by several hotheads in Russia to invade northern India in retaliation, the public agitation in favour of the Boers did not have serious diplomatic consequences, because all the great powers remained neutral.⁵⁴ Even more than with the situation in Britain, it is therefore the question whether the pro-Boer propaganda campaign had any effect. This is especially the case amongst historians in the Netherlands, the country where sympathy for the Boers was most widespread because of feelings of racial kinship. The following section will describe how they have written about Dutch imperialism, the ties between the Netherlands and South Africa and how this work relates to British historiography.

Historiography: the Netherlands

The word ‘imperialism’ has only been introduced into the historical debate about Dutch overseas history relatively recently.⁵⁵ One of the first to do so was Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, in his thesis from 1985 about colonial policy in the Netherlands. Comparing his findings to the work of R.F. Betts, he argues that, despite its smaller size, Dutch territorial expansion (which mainly took place in the Indonesian archipelago) resembled British imperialism on several important points.⁵⁶ In his later work, he embraces the ‘metropolitan’ model of Cain and Hopkins and argues that the initiative for expansion came from wealthy financiers that belonged to the civic elites, the so-called ‘regents’.⁵⁷ Other authors writing about the Dutch East Indies also refer to British models of expansion. Both Cees Fasseur and Hendrik Wesseling adopt peripheral models, of John Galbraith and Robinson and Gallagher respectively, emphasising that Dutch officials were even more reluctant to expand the formal empire than their British counterparts.⁵⁸ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten explicitly refers to Fieldhouse’s work in her thorough case study on the annexation of a sultanate on Sumatra.⁵⁹ Drawing from these examples, it is safe to say that there is a respectable tradition in historiography about Dutch imperialism which seeks to link in with the debate about British imperial history.

It is therefore quite remarkable that there has been no serious attempt by Dutch historians to join in the debate about the cultural aspects of the British Empire. The most significant study of Dutch imperial culture, by Martin Bossenbroek, contains a few references to the

⁵³ Lowry, “‘The World’s no bigger than a Kraal’”.

⁵⁴ For the most elaborate overview of the diplomatic aspects of the South African War cf. Wilson, *The international Impact of the Boer War*.

⁵⁵ For the most complete overview of the debate cf. M. Kuitenbrouwer, ‘Het imperialisme-debat in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving’, 56-73.

⁵⁶ Idem, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 217-218.

⁵⁷ ‘regenten’. Idem, ‘Capitalism and Imperialism’; idem, ‘Drie omwentelingen in de historiografie van het imperialisme’; idem and Schijf, ‘The Dutch Colonial Business Elite’, 61-86.

⁵⁸ Fasseur, ‘De koloniale paradox’; Wesseling, ‘Bestond er een Nederlands imperialisme?’, 188-190.

⁵⁹ Locher-Scholten, *Sumatran Sultanate and Colonial State*.

work of MacKenzie in some footnotes. This while he provides conclusions that merit comparison, arguing that events taking place in Indonesia and South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century were depicted in a wide range of genres, attracted attention from virtually all social classes and had a marked influence on Dutch national identity.⁶⁰ Also studies about more detailed aspects of imperial culture in the Netherlands – such as colonial lobby groups and ethnology – contain no references to other countries.⁶¹ Others do consider the international context, such as Susan Legêne and Marieke Bloembergen, who both discuss the work of Edward Said in their books about the cultural aspects of Dutch imperialism.⁶² But they too do not provide a profound reflection on the large body of secondary literature in Britain that is available on this topic and its possible relevance to the debate in the Netherlands.

Such an exercise can have significance for the historical understanding of imperialism – on both sides of the North Sea. The historical debate about the culture of the British Empire has brought up fundamental questions about the meaning of the concept of imperialism, which puts it into firm historical context by taking into account contemporary ideas on the matter. This thesis aims to contribute to this debate with a case study of Dutch-South African relations around the South African War, which will be compared with the historiography about the ‘British World’. A further review of existing secondary literature on this topic shows that there are some interesting parallels that make such a comparison worthwhile.

It is widely acknowledged that the Transvaal War (1880-1881) aroused much enthusiasm amongst the public in the Netherlands for the white Dutch-speaking population of South Africa, particularly those living in the two Boer republics – the South African Republic (SAR) also known as the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State (OFS). This was a sharp contrast with the decades before, when there was hardly any attention for the Boers, after the British formally annexed the Cape Colony in 1814, after they had occupied it in 1806. But during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, with a climax during the South African War, the ties between the Boers and the Dutch were actually celebrated. The successful fight by the Transvaal burghers to regain their independence from the British Empire after the annexation of 1877 was for many people on a par with the revolt of the Dutch against the Spaniards in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Also in other ways, the Boers were seen as worthy descendants of their ancestors, the pioneers of the Dutch East India Company who had settled at the Cape in 1652. Memories of the so-called ‘Golden Age’ of the seventeenth century were thought to give vitality to the Dutch race and so became a source of national inspiration. Another connection with the ‘cousins in South Africa’ was that High Dutch was the official written language in the republics, although the spoken dialect differed significantly. Such feelings of racial and cultural kinship were phrased by the term

⁶⁰ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*.

⁶¹ Taselaar, *De Nederlandse koloniale lobby*; Van der Velde, *Een Indische liefde*.

⁶² Legêne, *De bagage van Blomhoff*; Bloembergen, *Colonial Spectacles*.

stamverwantschap – which, like Britishness, is virtually impossible to translate.⁶³

Although historians do not question the existence of these sentiments, there are different views as to how they should be interpreted. Like the British debate, the concepts of nationalism and imperialism are essential in this respect. In general, it is acknowledged that the pro-Boer movement had a considerable effect on Dutch nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century, serving as a mirror for the nation. The heroic conduct of the Transvaalers reminded people of the prestige of the Netherlands during the ‘Golden Age’, which in the view of many had been lost over the course of the eighteenth century. Moreover, the Boers’ victory over the mighty British Empire in 1881 showed that there were still opportunities for small nations at a time when great power politics was at its height. Niek van Sas argues that in the early days of Dutch modern politics, which led to the formation of political parties and other social structures along ideological lines – the so-called process of pillarisation – sympathies for the Boers transcended the emerging divides and, together with symbols such as the monarchy, contributed to a unified Dutch national identity.⁶⁴ Even amongst groups that initially criticised the Boers, there was a measure of sympathy for them, such as amongst Catholics (who objected to their strong Calvinism) and Socialists (some of whom thought the republics were still in a state of feudalism).⁶⁵

Despite these outward signs of unity, however, there were more problematic aspects to the relationship between the Boer movement and the process of pillarisation, because some political groups claimed exclusive rights on the notion of *stamverwantschap*. This was especially the case with orthodox Protestants, who under the charismatic leadership of Abraham Kuyper became a significant force in Dutch politics. Chris van Koppen has written the most extensive account of his involvement in the pro-Boer movement to date. Because of his bravado, he soon came into conflict with other prominent members of the movement and alienated himself from the leadership of the Boer republics. Although he continued to reflect on South Africa in his personal writings throughout his life, after 1884 he was never again a member of an official pro-Boer organisation.⁶⁶ Henk te Velde, in his study of Liberal nationalism, has noted that the feelings of sympathy for the republics amongst this group also were shrouded in ambivalence. There were great concerns amongst the Liberals about the rise of modern politics in the Netherlands, which they feared would divide the nation along party lines. The idealised image of the Boers served as a way of overcoming this fragmentation and drowning out doubts about the way in which modern society was developing. In this way, Te

⁶³ The exact meaning in Dutch is rather unclear. ‘*Stam*’ can mean several things, such as stock and stem. In some contexts it related to the descent of people, meaning that they are of Dutch stock. In other contexts it was used as a metaphor of Dutch language: a tree with branches all over the world.

⁶⁴ Van Sas, ‘Fin de siècle als nieuw begin’, 586-568. Cf. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 119; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 40-41 and 205; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 11-12; Bank and Van Buuren, *1900: Hoogtij van burgerlijke cultuur*, 100-103.

⁶⁵ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 119; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 27; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 187-190; Pretorius, ‘The Dutch Social Democrats and the South African War’.

⁶⁶ Van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*. Cf. Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 76-78.

Velde argues, the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands was detached from events in South Africa, projecting a set of constructed values on the outside world. He therefore concludes that the discourse should be seen in the light of domestic political culture only and not in terms of Dutch foreign policy.⁶⁷

Others have put forward another view on this matter. Although they do not deny the impact of the pro-Boer movement on nationalism in the Netherlands, both Gerrit Schutte and Maarten Kuitenbrouwer argue that it was a form of imperialism too: in their view, nationalism and imperialism were two sides of the same coin. In the South African context, Dutch contemporaries used the word ‘imperialism’ exclusively to refer to the British Empire, but they pursued similar goals and structurally tried to extend their influence in the region. Some opinion-makers even dreamed of a ‘New Holland’ in South Africa where the cream of the nation could go to in case of a German invasion of the Netherlands; but these territorial fantasies were exceptional. Rather, there were attempts to enlarge the cultural influence in the region by emigration to the republics and to help the Boers to develop themselves. This, it was hoped, would open up regional markets – that were growing rapidly because of the booming mining industry – to Dutch commerce. These ambitions became known under the guise of *de Groot Nederlandse gedachte* (the ideal of Greater Netherlands), which can be seen as an ‘informal’ and ‘cultural’ form of imperialism.⁶⁸

Despite these ambitions, it is an open question as to what extent they actually had an effect. One essential issue in this respect is public opinion, which is illustrated by the fact that pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands prioritised ‘propaganda’ from the very beginning. At the end of the nineteenth century this word had a more neutral meaning than it has gained since the two World Wars: propagandists wanted to inform the public in order to mobilise support for their plans and to provide an alternative to the descriptions of the situation in South Africa by British authors. As such, it should be considered in the context of the emerging mass media at the end of the nineteenth century. As was the case in other Western countries, the press in the Netherlands grew due to technological developments and the abolition of taxes. Although there is widespread consensus on this point in secondary literature, virtually no studies have been devoted to the difficult question as to the extent to which this has had an impact on the reception and formation of opinions.⁶⁹ Because of this lacuna in historiography, it is hard to assess the significance of the pro-Boer movement to Dutch history, let alone to quantify it, as there is little data available that gives insight into how public opinion in the Netherlands as a whole functioned at the turn of the twentieth century.

In historiography, however, it is suggested that there were several factors in the Netherlands that limited the influence of pro-Boers. The role of government was severely

⁶⁷ Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbeseef*, 82.

⁶⁸ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 129.

⁶⁹ Van Vree, ‘Tradition and innovation in the historiography of mass media’, 89-100.

restricted due to the policy of neutrality, which was characteristic of ‘the imperialism of a small power’.⁷⁰ As a result, official responses to the South African question were reserved. At the time of the Transvaal War, the boundaries between the Dutch East Indies and the British Empire in South-East Asia were being demarcated. In government circles there were widespread fears that the British would decide to annex parts of the Indonesian archipelago in retaliation if the Netherlands were to officially become involved in South Africa. Although many prominent policy makers, and even Queen Wilhelmina herself, had strong personal sympathies for the Boers and on several occasions expressed these views, they prioritised the vested interests in Asia. Even when the emotions of the public at home ran high during the South African War, the government continued to adhere to the principle of neutrality and was careful to avoid open involvement in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign. Another limiting factor that seems to have been connected with the international position of the Netherlands was the underdeveloped state of its global lines of communication. In contrast with the British, there was no independent Dutch network of undersea telegraph cables, which made the press dependent on information from foreign agencies.⁷¹

These restrictions were apparent to contemporaries, who actively discussed them, raising questions about the relationship between pro-Boer organisations and the general public. The South African War, during which the sympathy for the Boers was widespread, can be seen as the climax of the pro-Boer movement. It is therefore remarkable that Dutch historians have paid relatively little attention to the people and organisations involved in the propaganda campaign between 1899 and 1902. Significantly, two foreign studies that address the international impact of the pro-Boer agitation, written by Ulrich Kröll and Lynette van Niekerk, emphasise the central role of Dutchmen in the international network that distributed propagandistic material in support of the embattled republics’ cause.⁷² In the assessment of the pro-Boer propaganda campaign, the nature of this network will be taken into consideration. If anything, the source material indicates that, at the dawn of the age of mass media, Boer supporters actively reflected on the importance of public opinion.

A second topic to consider in the light of the overall effect of the pro-Boer movement is Dutch-South African relations, and in particular the possible influence that Dutchmen have had on Afrikaner nationalism. Schutte shows that from the beginning of the pro-Boer movement there was a ‘love-hate-relationship’ between Dutchmen and their ‘cousins’ in South Africa. In the 1880s and 1890s, some 6,500 people from the Netherlands went to South Africa (particularly the Transvaal) to offer their services to the Boers there. Considering the total white population in the region (at the time approximately one million) this was not an overwhelming number. Moreover, these so-called *Hollanders* were not always appreciated by

⁷⁰ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 120-121 and 206-207; idem, ‘Het imperialisme van een kleine mogendheid’, 64-65.

⁷¹ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 201-202.

⁷² Kröll, *Die internationale Buren-Agitation*, 323-326; Van Niekerk, *Kruger se regterhand*, 210.

their new compatriots and there were distinct anti-Dutch sentiments amongst certain groups of Boers. Likewise, many of the emigrants who originated from modern Western society, considered the inhabitants of the republics to be rather underdeveloped, and were disillusioned by their experiences.⁷³

Despite these limitations, Schutte and others note that Dutch emigrants, many of whom were well educated, occupied important positions in the Transvaal under the patronage of Paul Kruger, who was the president of the republic from 1881 to 1900. They played a significant role in the development of state institutions, like the railways, and the education system and contributed to the modernisation of Southern Africa.⁷⁴ Moreover, the *Hollanders* promoted the formation of a national identity in the Transvaal, writing books about the history of South Africa that defended the independence of the Boer republics against propagandists who argued that they should be incorporated into the British Empire.⁷⁵ Such examples would suggest that imperial dreams of *stamverwantschap* and the emphasis on Boer independence did not necessarily cancel each other out and that pro-Boer propaganda was mainly about the colonial future of South Africa. In historiography to date, there is no overview of these sources and their contents, which shed light on the relationship between the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands and Afrikaner nationalism. This too will be a topic of discussion in the following chapters.

A final point of consideration is chronology. Historians who argue that the pro-Boer movement had a limited impact on Dutch history point out a great discontinuity after the absolute climax of public enthusiasm for the Boers during the South African War. They maintain that the Dutch public was greatly disappointed by the end of the conflict in June 1902 and the peace treaty, which formalised the annexation of the republics by the British Empire. All the dreams of a viable Dutch bridgehead in South Africa were shattered and several historians argue that the sympathy for the Boers thus disappeared as suddenly as it had emerged two decades previously.⁷⁶ In his study of Dutch-South African relations after 1902, Bart de Graaff writes that, in addition to these frustrated ambitions, there were also developments in South Africa that widened the gap between the Dutch and the Afrikaners. With the rise of modern Afrikaner nationalism and the second *Taalbeweging* (Language movement), which sought to make Afrikaans an independent language, there was a growing dislike of meddling from the Netherlands, he argues. In his view, notions of *stamverwantschap* were no more than a ‘myth’, which would suggest that the Netherlands were completely detached from the rise of modern Afrikaner nationalism, which ultimately resulted in the system of apartheid after 1948.⁷⁷

⁷³ ‘haat-liefde verhoudingen’. Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 101-142.

⁷⁴ M. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 125-128; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 103-122; De Jong, *Die Lewensomstandighede en Kulturele Bydrage*, 236.

⁷⁵ Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 198-204.

⁷⁶ Te Velde, *Gemeenschapszin en plichtsbeseft*, 180-181; Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 351-352.

⁷⁷ De Graaff, *De mythe van de stamverwantschap*, 299-308.

This is a sensitive topic in historiography, especially given the political situation in South Africa during the second half of the twentieth century, when the apartheid regime was ostracised by the international community. Dunbar Moodie argues that Kuyper's Dutch orthodox Protestant movement served as a model for radical Afrikaners, who after the South African War forged a 'civil religion' of Christian nationalism that formed the intellectual basis of the apartheid system.⁷⁸ Schutte opposes this view and states that there were fundamental differences between the nature of Calvinism in the Netherlands and that in South Africa, which made the relationship more complex.⁷⁹ He does not deny, however, that there was a lingering sympathy for the Afrikaners amongst the Dutch public, which only ended in the 1960s when the Netherlands became one of the forerunners in the protests against the apartheid regime. Schutte argues that this complete swing in public perception of the Afrikaners should not obscure the fact that there was an ongoing feeling of involvement with events taking place in South Africa, and even calls the Dutch anti-apartheid policy of the 1980s a form of cultural imperialism that showed a strong continuity with the ideal of *stamverwantschap*.⁸⁰

Literary scholars also argue that the shelf life of Dutch Africana stretched beyond 1902. These ideas were already apparent in the works of G. Besselaar and Elizabeth Conradie, two Afrikaner academics working in the Low Countries, who wrote books on this subject in the 1910s and 1930s. Although they noted differences between literary circles in the Netherlands and in South Africa, it was clear to them that there was a significant overlap too and they argued that the nascent Afrikaner *Taalbeweging*, did benefit from the ties with the cultural motherland.⁸¹ More recently, new generations of academics have also pointed out that this relationship continued after 1902. Siegfried Huigen argues that Afrikaans only became a separate language in 1925 and that the ongoing interaction had a marked influence on the development of Afrikaner nationalism.⁸² Wilfried Jonckheere shows that the view of nineteenth century writers on South Africa was reproduced in popular novels and poetry in the Netherlands up until the 1960s.⁸³

These three issues, the organisation of the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands, its relationship with the Afrikaners and the question as to whether 1902 really was such a great discontinuity, will be leading themes in this thesis. In this way, an attempt will be made to provide a more thorough description of the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands before, during and after the South African War. Comparison with related themes in the secondary literature about the British world will serve to get a better grasp of the subject. This is all the

⁷⁸ Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, 52-72; Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 185-186.

⁷⁹ Schutte, *Nederland en de Afrikaners*, 197-198.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, 209-212; idem, 'Stamverwantschap als imperialisme', 19. Cf. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking van de derde wereld*, 209-229.

⁸¹ Besselaar, *Zuid-Afrika in de letterkunde*; Conradie, *Hollandse skrywers II*. Conradie's second book appeared posthumously and was edited by Anna de Villiers.

⁸² Huigen, *De weg naar Monomopata*, 17-18.

⁸³ Jonckheere, *Van Mafeking tot Robbeneiland*, 209-210.

more significant because, as will appear in the following chapters, Dutch contemporaries themselves thought it important that the British coverage of events in South Africa be countered. At times, the tone of such publications was quite agitated, but there continued to be a genuine admiration for the Liberal tradition on the other side of the North Sea. Although contemporaries did signal the existence of ‘anti-British’ sentiments, these should be seen in the context of the South African question and not as feelings of outright contempt.⁸⁴

Structure of the thesis

The question about the impact of the Dutch pro-Boer movement will be approached from two angles, assessing both its institutional framework and the contents of the propaganda it produced. First of all, the organisations and institutions that were connected with the interface between the Netherlands and South Africa will be analysed. Which groups were involved in the transfer of information from South Africa to the Netherlands? What was the nature of the institutions that constituted this channel of communication? How did it develop during and after the South African War? Significantly, such questions were actively discussed by contemporaries, which says something about their importance and the need to include a description of this network in a conceptual history of imperialism. A second issue is the contents of publications that came forth from this transfer of information. How did Dutch authors depict the nineteenth century history of South Africa and the relations between the British and the Boers? In what ways did these views play a role in the coverage of the South African War? How did these publications relate to what was written by English-speaking authors? And last but not least, how did they affect views on the war after it had ended? Here too, the sources reveal that contemporaries themselves attached much importance to this sort of material in order to provide an alternative to the British coverage of events and to show the injustice that had been inflicted on the Boer republics by the British Empire.

This approach resembles the historiography on the British world and imperial culture. First of all, it feeds into notions of space. What were the relations between the metropole (in this case the Netherlands) and the peripheries (in this case South Africa, and in particular the Boer republics)? As with the British debate, nationalism and imperialism are fundamental concepts to this debate too. Were the notions of national identity in the Netherlands and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism completely detached, as authors like Te Velde and De Graaff seem to argue? Or was there some sort of interaction along the lines of communication which facilitated an exchange of certain ideas on the South African question? This would suggest that notions of *stamverwantschap* existed side by side with more narrow feelings of belonging restricted by national borders and that there was possibly even some measure of overlap. To properly assess the historical meaning of such networks, as Simon Potter reminds us, it is important to take into account the structure of the institutions along with the contents of the

⁸⁴ Van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw*, 18-21.

debate.

A second fundamental issue that is central to the rethinking of British imperialism is chronology and the idea that the South African War was not the beginning of the end for the empire. Although there was a marked discontinuity in the relations between the Netherlands and South Africa after 1902, a comparison with the British Empire opens up interesting perspectives. One of the most important features of the work of MacKenzie is his assessment that popular imperial culture had a long shelf life that lasted up until the 1950s. In the Netherlands there has been little research on this matter. In the most substantial study of this subject to date, Bossenbroek draws the line at 1902, using the rather peculiar metaphor of the ‘hop-skip-jump’: the run-up to the enthusiasm of the Dutch public started in the 1870s and 1880s, the jump took place in the 1890s and first two years of the new century, after which there was an inevitable ‘landing’.⁸⁵ But several literary scholars show that certain views on South Africa were more persistent in Dutch literature than this rudimentary chronology suggests. Another important question is whether there was an ongoing interaction between Dutch pro-Boer organisations and Afrikaner nationalists. During the 1970s and 1980s, this was a sensitive issue, because it raises the question as to whether the Netherlands was in any way associated with the rise of the ideology that led to the system of apartheid. Now that white minority rule in South Africa is assigned to history itself, this might be a good time to revisit this issue.

On the following pages these questions will be dealt with in three clusters. The first part will discuss the beginnings of the interface between the Netherlands and South Africa, what can be called the ‘principles of propaganda’. Chapter one will describe how the pro-Boer institutions came into being in the years after 1880 and the role that Dutch emigrants played in South Africa in the period up until 1899. Chapter two will describe how Dutchmen wrote about South Africa at the time and in what ways their work related to the writings of Afrikaner and English authors. The second, and largest, part will look at the propaganda campaign during the South African War. Chapters three and four will focus on the development of the institutions of the pro-Boers during the conflict. In chapter three the question will be dealt with as to how information was transferred from South Africa to the Netherlands and which groups were involved in this. The next chapter will describe how pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands related to this supply of information and how they were involved in the propaganda campaign. Chapters five and six deal with the contents of the propagandistic material: the former deals with the period between the outbreak of war (October 1899) and the occupation of Pretoria (June 1900), the latter looks at the coverage of the guerrilla phase, which lasted two years, up until June 1902. Finally, chapter seven is about the aftermath of the pro-Boer propaganda campaign and explores in what ways it fed into the debate about South African history in the Netherlands and in South Africa.

⁸⁵ Bossenbroek, *Holland op zijn breedst*, 344-352.

The research for this thesis was conducted both in the Netherlands and South Africa, which in itself is an illustration of the reciprocal nature of the ties of *stamverwantschap*. One important source has been the archive of the Dutchman Willem Leyds, state secretary of the Transvaal between 1890 and 1898, who subsequently served as minister plenipotentiary of that republic in Europe until 1902. In the latter function, he played a central role in the pro-Boer propaganda campaign during the South African War. Apart from several books on the history of South Africa, his paper legacy includes a personal archive that is kept in the Dutch national archives in The Hague and a much larger official archive that is kept in Pretoria. Leyds published four volumes of documents from the latter one, but it still holds many files that have barely been researched, including the correspondence of one of the most important pro-Boer institutions, the press office of the *Algemeen Nederlandsch Verbond* (General Dutch Alliance, hereafter ANV). Before the cultural boycott of South Africa in the 1980s, Kröll used this archive in his study of Leyds's propagandistic work and Schutte also has looked at files from his days as state secretary in the Transvaal. Moreover, the collection has been used as a source by several South African historians. The author who has most extensively studied the collection is Van Niekerk, who wrote a biography of Leyds that appeared in 1985. Since the cultural boycott ended in the early 1990s, no European researchers have visited this rich archive, which contains much information about the organisation of the propaganda campaign that has been used in chapters three and four. Moreover, the collection contains a large amount of material on the period after 1902, which has not been described by historians at all. In fact, the reason why Leyds sent his official archive to South Africa was to provide the Afrikaners with cultural ammunition for their political struggle against British domination. In this way, the archive itself was part of the ongoing war of words that is the subject of this thesis. This issue will be discussed extensively in chapter seven.

The *Zuid-Afrika Huis* (South Africa House) in Amsterdam contains the archives of the most important pro-Boer organisations in the Netherlands and of several individuals who were involved in them. These documents have mainly been used in chapters one, three and four. In addition to these papers, the library also contains an extensive collection of publications from the period 1880-1902, ranging from books to pamphlets and photos. In order to get an overview of these publications about South Africa I resorted to secondary literature. For the period up to 1899, the books by Besselaar and Conradie have been particularly useful. These findings will be presented in chapter two. In order to get an idea of the amount of publications about the South African War, the topic of chapters five and six, I have looked at the catalogues of the *Zuid-Afrika Huis* and a collection of printed material that Leyds donated to the University of Stellenbosch in the 1930s.⁸⁶ I am also very grateful to Henriette Latsky from the University of Witwatersrand for allowing me to use her

⁸⁶ Gast ed., *Catalogus van de Bibliotheek der Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Vereeniging*; Stubbings, *Leyds-versameling van nie-boek materiaal*.

unpublished bibliography of Dutch publications about the South African War.⁸⁷ From these sources I have distilled a list that counts 358 titles that appeared between 1899 and 1902, many of which can be found in the *Zuid-Afrika Huis*.

Another interesting find in that library was the A. Welcker collection, a series of scrapbooks with the complete coverage of the South African War between October 1899 and June 1902 from the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (NRC)*, an important national newspaper in the Netherlands. Originally this collection was kept in the library of E.G.A. ten Siethoff, a medical doctor in Scheveningen. He – together with Welcker, a student at Leiden University – wanted to write a history of the war, but this plan was never executed. After the library was moved to storage in Amsterdam, the newspaper collection ended up in the *Zuid-Afrika Huis*.⁸⁸ The *NRC* was a prominent Liberal newspaper at that time and does not provide a representative section of public opinion in the Netherlands, because the press was also segmented during the process of pillarisation. Nevertheless, it is an important source because many of the articles contain letters from South Africa – either excerpts or complete texts – which shows that the pro-Boer network extended into the national press. The Welcker collection has been extensively used in chapters five and six, which focus on the coverage of the South African War in the Netherlands.

Notes on vocabulary

Some comments are due about translations. This study has been written in English, but mainly draws on primary sources in the Dutch language as it existed a century ago. To improve the readability I have translated quotations in the text, with the original excerpts in the footnotes. A few terms, such as *stamverwantschap* and *Hollander* could not be translated and have been used in their original form, as have been the names and abbreviations of Dutch organisations and periodicals.

Another difficulty was to phrase the words that were used to refer to the different groups of Dutch-speaking people. Contemporaries were certainly aware that people in South Africa spoke, and sometimes wrote, a dialect that was different from the official language in the Netherlands, but this was not formalised until 1925. Authors were therefore not consistent in the ways in which they described these differences. For the sake of clarity, I have introduced some terms that are meant to provide a better categorisation. In reference to the local Dutch dialects in South Africa, the word ‘Afrikaans’ is used; for the official language in the Netherlands, ‘*Hoog-Hollandsch*’ or ‘High Dutch’. The term ‘Dutch’ is used in two ways: either meaning from the Netherlands, or, in the South African context, to refer to people who either spoke Afrikaans or High Dutch, or both. About the words ‘Boers’ and ‘Afrikaners’: the

⁸⁷ Cf. Latsky, ‘A Bibliography of Dutch Publications on the South African War’, 443-468.

⁸⁸ It appears that the newspaper collection was stored in Amsterdam in the 1910s by the Welcker family and then was moved to the library at the *Zuid-Afrika huis* when it was opened in the 1930s. NASA, Leyds collection, LEY 211; G. Schutte, ‘De Boerenoorlog in telegrammen’, in: *Zuid-Afrika* vol. 82 (2005), 125.

former has been used to refer to white Dutch-speaking inhabitants of the Transvaal and the OFS between the 1840s and 1902, the latter to the white Dutch-speaking population in the Cape Colony and, more generally, to the white Dutch-speaking population all across South Africa.

Finally, some remarks on other aspects of semantics. As the title of this thesis suggests, the war of 1899-1902 between the British Empire and the Boer republics has always been a hotly debated issue, which is reflected in the variety of names that have been used to refer to the conflict. For a long time it was known amongst Afrikaners as *die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (the Second War for Freedom), whereas British authors used more neutral terms, such as the Second Transvaal War. Eventually the term Boer War, or Anglo-Boer War, came into sway. This name, which suggests that the war only affected the white population, has received much criticism in recent decades. Several studies, including books by Peter Warwick and Bill Nasson, have shown that black people were also involved, which led to the introduction of the more inclusive name ‘South African War’.⁸⁹ Despite the historical evidence of black involvement, one should take care not to overemphasise the multicultural nature of the war. In his later work, Nasson argues that it was essentially a conflict between groups of white settlers about which colonial model was best suited for South Africa. In this sense, black people were the great losers, because the peace between the British and Boers in 1902 effectively put an end to their political franchise for nine decades.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, I have chosen to use the name South African War in this thesis, which allows it to link in with the imperialism debate in Britain, where this term is commonly used.

This thesis deals with the ways in which the events that were unfolding in South Africa were depicted in contemporary Dutch sources and thus does not reflect my own views. The authors who wrote about these issues at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century had outspoken opinions on South Africa, largely coloured by racism, which was common in their day. I will mainly focus on their ideas about the relations between the ‘white races’ and the way this fitted into a European literary tradition. Depictions of black people are only dealt with indirectly and it goes beyond the scope of this study to unravel their voices. In citations, derogatory words such as ‘*kaffer*’ have been left in, in order to give a sense of the tone of contemporary sources. Having grown up in the Netherlands at a time when the anti-apartheid movement was at its height, it was sometimes difficult for me to grasp that such views were in vogue just a century ago. And also the contemporary sympathy for Afrikaans as a poetical language was intriguing as the only phrase I had ever learned previously was: ‘*ik nie apartheid nie*’.

At the time I write this, more than fifteen years after the birth of the ‘rainbow nation’, the relationship between the Netherlands and South Africa again has shifted significantly. In

⁸⁹ Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*; Nasson, *Adam Esau's War*.

⁹⁰ Nasson, *The South African War*, 283; idem, ‘Africans at War’.

1996, Queen Beatrix signed a new cultural treaty, replacing the old one that was unilaterally terminated by the Dutch government in 1981, after it had been suspended in response to the Soweto riots (1976) and the death of Steve Biko (1977). Since the end of the boycotts, tourism has grown enormously and many Dutch travelers are intrigued by the flowery names of Cape vineyards that sound familiar, yet exotic. This leads to new ideas about their relationship with the white Dutch-speaking population of South Africa; a topic of reflection in many weblogs. In addition, several artists, such as Stef Bos and Herman van Veen, have performed in South Africa and have written songs in Afrikaans. On television, the position of the Afrikaners is being reinvestigated; whether in the documentary by Adriaan van Dis or in the drama series *Stellenbosch*, both filmed in South Africa. These developments make it interesting to revisit the historical ties between the Netherlands and South Africa and to critically assess both the (in our perception) positive and the negative sides of this history. The aim is not to provide sweeping statements about their impact, but to fill a small corner of the canvas that depicts Dutch identity in a global context, and so to contribute to the international debate about modern imperialism.