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CHARLES JEURGENS

Information on the move. Colonial archives: pillars of past global information exchange

At home in Europe
The white man can be seen as a man
As soon as he leaves home he is frightful
He analyses, spies, classifies, defines, appropriates
Conquers and dominates.[1]

Do the current focus on global issues in the historical discipline and the attention that is paid to globalisation also provide new perspectives for our view on colonial archives? These questions are at the core of this article.[2] In this contribution I discuss whether it makes sense to connect ideas and insights of globalisation to the colonial archives in order to get a better understanding of the nature and patterns of information exchange and to get a different, maybe better understanding of the substance of these archives. In the second part of this article I pay closer attention to the Dutch colonial archives created in the early 19th century.

Globalisation and networks of information

Globalisation has become a vogue word that pops up in almost every discipline. It seems to be attractive to take theories and ideas of globalisation as the starting point for new forms of analysis and explanation, but before one can do this, it is important to describe how globalisation is defined.
We are functioning in a world that is fundamentally characterised by 'objects in motion'. For Arjun Appadurai, the anthropologist and author of several books on global issues, it is the disjunctive flow of objects in motion – these objects include ideas, ideologies, people, goods, images, messages, discourses, technologies and techniques – that defines the essence of globalisation.[3] The global order is 'a complex overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models'.[4] Historians seem to agree that globalisation in any case concerns communication and connection. The first

[1] Kayoyo, *My Father's footsteps*.
[2] During past few years I gave several research seminars on this theme and I want to discuss some of the preliminary findings here. One of the students, Nico Vriend, also attended these seminars and inspired by this approach he wrote his thesis of which the results are published elsewhere in this book.
[3] Appadurai, *Globalization*, 5-6.
[4] Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference', 50.

sentence of Patrick Manning's book *Navigating World History: Historians create a global past* immediately reveals the importance of this word 'connections' in understanding globalisation: 'To put it simply', he proclaims, 'world history is the story of connections within the global human community'.[5] In addition, these connections must have a more or less structural effect. A.G. Hopkins describes it as a process 'that transforms economic, political, social and cultural relationships across countries, regions and continents by spreading them more broadly, making them more intense and increasing their velocity'.[6] In his book *Global History: Interactions between the universal and the local* William H. McNeill emphasises that communication is a fundamental prerequisite for globalisation. He concludes that '(...) if one allows for much slower and far more sporadic communication among fewer people, themselves hemmed in by formidable and seldom crossed geographical barriers, it is nonetheless true that human societies always exchanged messages with strangers and altered behaviour every so often when something new and attractive came to their attention'.[7]
From that point of view, understanding the patterns of information exchange is essential to being able to make any connection to globalisation theories.
The issue I want to discuss here is whether it is possible to read these patterns of information exchange in the (colonial) archives. Before focusing on this question it is important to give some attention to the notion of information and information networks. In addition to globalisation, information and the growing interdependency of information from all over the world is another important key feature of our modern world. In the present the concepts of globalisation and information are closely connected. News from all over the world spreads in seconds; e-mail, social media and cloud computing connects people who physically are remote. Because of these developments, historians and archivists are becoming more and more interested in the historical dimension of the concept of information.[8] According to Daniel Headrick, the information revolution in which we live now began roughly three centuries ago as the result of a cultural change. Since the Age of Reason, public officials and private citizens not only wanted to have more information at their disposal, but they also wanted to get easier access to information.[9] James Gleick puts it aptly in his book *The Information:* 'The raw material lay all around, glistening and buzzing in the landscape of the early twentieth century, letters and messages, sounds and images, news and instructions, figures and facts, signals and signs: a hodgepodge of related species. They were on the move, by post or wire or electromagnetic wave. But no one word denoted all that stuff'.[10] Today we have a single word to describe 'all that stuff': information. In the archives we still encounter a massive amount of 'that raw material', although we must acknowledge that the information stored in the archives is no longer on the move. We should realise that what we encounter in the repositories of the archival institutes is only the part that has survived. The whole, of which these remnants used to be a part, has

[5] Manning, *Navigating World History*, 3.
[6] Hopkins, 'Introduction', 16.
[7] McNeill, 'Afterword: World History and Globalization', 285.
[8] For a good overview of the most important literature on the history of information, see: Weller, 'An information History Decade'.
[9] Headrick, *When information came of age,* 217-218.
[10] Gleick, *The information, 7.*
[11] Kipling, 'Deep-Sea Cables,' [1896] in: *Rudyard Kipling's Verse, 1885–1932*, 173
[12] Thompson, 'The global communication' 246 ff.

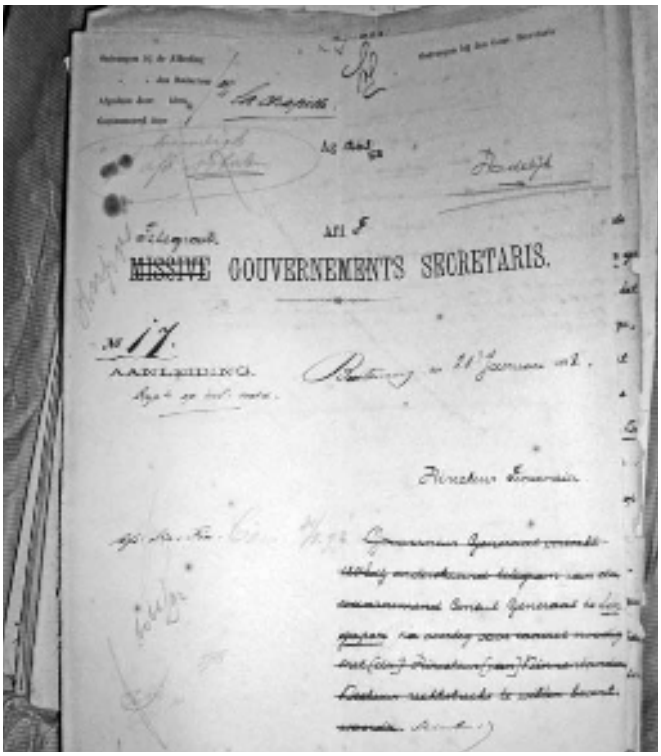
disappeared. The question that is at the forefront here is to find out whether it is possible to reconnect these current static fragments, these raw materials, to the former whole. The main characteristic of this former whole was the fluidity of the fragments, the constant move of the information along the routes of exchange.

Communication, technology and globalisation

At a cursory reading it seems most likely to make a connection between globalisation and the transfer of information after the technological inventions of the 19th century created the conditions to accelerate information exchange. In the debate about globalisation, the aspect of communication is usually linked to technical developments and the speed at which goods, people and ideas were transported. In this respect the introduction of the telegraph is often regarded as a decisive milestone in making the world smaller. Rudyard Kipling's poem *Deep Sea Cables* is illustrative for this notion: 'Here in the womb of the world - here on the tie-ribs of the earth / Words, and the words of men, flicker and flutter and beat (...). They have killed their father Time'.[11]
Indeed, the invention of the telegraph in a certain sense did kill time. Exchanging messages no longer depended on the speed at which a document could be physically transported. It was invisible signals rather, which sent information over long distances along a cable.[12] The distance between Europe and its colonies decreased substantially after the telegraph came in use. The Indo-European Telegraph linked India, via Russia overland to Britain in 1865, but it still took until 1870 before a direct, high-quality submarine telegraph connection was established between London and Bombay. These new technological connections gave birth to infinite imaginative possibilities. In reality, the new line between Europe and India faced many difficulties in the first years. Although much faster than a ship, it still took an average of five to six days to get a message of only 20 words from London to India.[13] Notwithstanding the difficulties of establishing a reliable connection between London and India, the telegraph had already developed into a powerful 'instrument of empire', due to the efforts of governor-general Dalhousie who called the establishment of the telegraph in India a 'national experiment'.[14] The first proposals to build a telegraph system in India were developed in 1838[15] and the first connections were created even before the railway lines were laid.[16] When Dalhousie left India in 1856 a 4,000 mile network of telegraph lines connected Peshawar, Agra, Bombay, Madras and Calcutta to the important European (military) settlements in the inland country.[17] According to Choudhury, the telegraph network in India was a 'linear, rational and mathematical network that linked the commercial and military nodes of the colonial state'.[18] The lines of communication did not follow the human housing pattern anymore but took the shortest way to connect the existing nodes.

[13] Hugill, *Global communications,* 39; for the history of telegraphic communication see Ahvenainen, *The Far Eastern Telegraphs*.
[14] Choudhury, 'Beyond the Reach', 350.
[15] Choudhury, 'Beyond the Reach'.
[16] Misa, *Leonardo to the Internet,* 105-106.
[17] Choudhury, 'Beyond the Reach', 338.
[18] Choudhury, 'Beyond the Reach', 351.

In the Dutch East Indies the developments were less impressive. The first telegraph line was built in 1856 between Weltevreden in Batavia and Buitenzorg.[19] In 1857 the colonial government started the construction of a telegraph cable between Buitenzorg and Surabaya and there has been a sea cable between Batavia and Singapore since 1859. In the early years of these new techniques of communication, animals, thunderstorms and earthquakes often damaged these vulnerable telegraph lines.[20]



Draft version of a telegram, Archives of the General Secretary, 1891 (*Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia*)

It indeed is tempting to connect the birth of globalisation to these technological accomplishments that accelerated the transport of goods, people and ideas. This emphasis on the technical developments, however, has the disadvantage that the accent is laid on the technical instruments instead of the underlying developments and their effects. If we only focus on the question of with what kind of technical means the flow of objects was accomplished, we will not discover the essence of globalisation. In the end, globalisation concerns mutual

[19] Mrāzek, *Engineers of happy land,* 161.
[20] Wieringa, *Kort overzicht,* 13-15.
[21] Bayly, 'Archaic' and 'Modern' Globalization', 50.
[22] Kaukiainen, 'Shrinking the World', 17-18.
[23] Kaukiainen, 'Shrinking the World', 20.

influence and the transformation of existing relationships. C.A. Bayly rightly pointed out that even before the general spread of the electrical telegraph and steam vessels between 1850 and 1880, 'the speed of the consignment and despatch of goods in international trade and government had apparently increased very substantially. The beginnings of the modern international system were driven, therefore, not so much by technological change, but by prior political and cultural change (...)'.[21] Y. Kaukiainen concluded in his research that 'quicker communications did not develop as a spin-off from new technology, but rather as a response to an active demand'.[22] He found out that the greatest acceleration in the transmission of information took place in the period before the telegraph came in operation. In 1820 it took on average 154 days to bring a message from Calcutta to London. In 1860 this had shrunk to 39 days. Ten years later, when the telegraph was available, it took only two days.[23]

Of course there is no need to question the important contribution of technology to the tremendous acceleration in the exchange and moving of objects, but the patterns that determined how those lines of communication ran were drawn up a long time before. In this context the metaphor of the network can be used even long before the tangible cables came into operation to interconnect many different places in the world.[24] Kerry Ward shows how the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC - Dutch East India Company) consisted of various interconnected networks. Within the VOC, Ward distinguishes 'material networks (...) of bureaucracy, correspondence, trade, transportation and migration as well as discursive networks of law, administration, information, diplomacy and culture' along and within which various forms of exchange took place.[25] The networks of trade, shipping, law, diplomacy, migration and information were the main separate circuits in which, dependent on the type of network, goods, ships, people, information and the like, circulated about. These circuits all had their own dynamics and interfaced with each other at intersections or nodes (for instance *factorijen* (trading posts) and colonial centres of trade and administration). At those nodes, goods, people, ideas and information could change networks. Following Albert-László Barabási, I prefer to make a distinction between nodes and connectors. Connectors are nodes with an anomalously large number of links.[26] Like Bombay as the main connector between South Asia and the United Kingdom, Batavia was the main connector between various Asian and European networks. Thanks to the information networks which linked the subordinate offices in the VOC trading area with Batavia, the governor-general in Batavia afforded a good view of the trading opportunities in Asia. For a long time, information about almost all Asian affairs was sent to the board of the VOC, the Heeren XVII in the Dutch Republic, only via the office of the governor-general in Batavia. It was the sum of these networks that formed the trading empire and the VOC therefore had the character of an organisation with a modular structure.[27]

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[24] The use of the image of networks is not new. See for instance: Braudel, *Civilisation Matériell;* Gaastra also used the picture of networks: 'Batavia, the *rendez-vous*, occupied a unique place in the system. It was the central point where all the threads of the administrative, commercial and maritime network came together'. See Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC*, 71.

[25] Ward, *Networks of Empire*, 10.

[26] Barabási, *Linked,* 55-56.

[27] Ward, *Networks of Empire*, 302.

If we want to form a picture of the interactions from a 'global perspective', it is in particular the connectors and intersections or nodes where the different global and local networks come together that are of interest. It is at these locations that information is transferred from one network to another. Colonial administrators in Batavia determined which information from the networks linking other Asian trading posts to Batavia, or which information originating from oral indigenous sources, would then be transferred to the network that connected the East Indies to the Netherlands. Research into communication patterns using an analysis of the creation of archives can assist in exposing such networks.

Global approach: what is in it for an understanding of colonial archives?

Historians consider archives to be important sources for their research in and knowledge of the past. Every new approach to the past is checked for its tenability through research in the archives. Therefore, this also applies to approaching history from a 'global perspective'. I agree with historian and archivist Edward Higgs when he states that historians, generally speaking, are fascinated with individual series of nominal records because they want to use these records to study something else. They seldom step back from the records to investigate the general pattern to the collecting activities of the state or explore the meaning of changing information gathering activities for the nature of the relationship between state and society in general.[28] Most historians focus excessively on extracting data from the archives without realising sufficiently how this information is interlinked with other information. Archivists on the other hand were no great stimulators of an intellectual discussion on the substance of archives. It was mainly because of a growing interest of social scientists and philosophers in the nature of archives that archivists felt challenged to participate in this intellectual debate.

After having explored the features of globalisation and information it is time to say something about the archives. What are archives? Although historians sometimes still like to keep the picture that archives are 'the products of the professional activities of archivists'[29] in which they attempt to delve into the past, archivists clearly have a different approach. In the 19th century archivists defined archives as 'the whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body or one of its officials, insofar as these documents were intended to remain in the custody of that body or of that official'.[30] The late 19th and 20th century archivists emphasised the institutional basis of archives. Professional archivists mirrored this institutional approach in their archive management models and in the production of finding aids in the 20th century. Archives were treated and collected as institutional 'organic wholes' and the structuring guidelines for the description and arrangement of archives and the configuration of inventories were firmly based on the same institutional principles. Archivists produce inventories of archives

[28] Higgs, *The Information State in England,* vii.

[29] Evans, *In defence of history,* 75.

[30] Muller et al., *Manual,* 13. This definition was published in the Manual of 1898.

[31] I am fully aware of the fact that this approach is too simple a reflection of reality. Collecting information for building up so-called basic registrations like the Civil Register or the Land Register do not fit in this model. Nevertheless the institutional approach is dominant.

based on the activities of an individual archives creator. From the perspective of the archives creator, the access routes (inventories) in a schematic form roughly reflect three moments of administrative reality: first the moment at which information arrives in the organisation (this results in the extensive series of incoming letters), secondly the moment at which the organisation (archives creator) takes the decision that is required based on the incoming messages (this leads to a series of decisions) and finally the information that is sent in the form of a letter (this results in extensive series of minutes or draft versions of outgoing letters). Again, from the perspective of the archives creator, this very simple model makes things surveyable because there is always a starting point and an end to administrative processes.[31] This exclusive institutional approach of archives started to display hairline cracks since archives were defined as process-bound information about two decades ago.[32] In this definition a direct relationship is laid between the archives and the processes behind the creation of documents. By taking the processes as a basis for defining and analysing archives, the scope has shifted from the institution to the information generating and structuring processes. As Luciani Duranti has explicated, every record is 'linked by a unique bond to the activity (...) producing it' and understanding that bond has to precede understanding the records.[33] Processes can be confined to a sole institution, but processes can of course also go beyond the organisational lines of a single institution. By taking the processes as the analytical tool for looking at colonial archival documents and colonial archives we come close to Appadurai's idea of 'objects on the move'. Seen from that perspective, it will become clear that archival documents themselves are the tangible traces of former fluid information exchange. When we look at the administrative process of the institutions from a somewhat greater distance, we see that what is the end of the administrative process for one archives creator is the starting point for the other. When, instead of focussing on the institutional framework, we concentrate mainly on the links in information exchange, the patterns of the information networks almost draw themselves. In doing this a different reality will be revealed and we see more clearly that the archives, which so far acted mainly as static research sources for historians, are in fact the traces of velocity that have been wrenched from their original context and transferred to an artificial archival warehouse and are in fact only seen from that (limited) perspective.

The origin of a colonial network

In the second part of this contribution I want to explore the role of information and the subsequent archives creation for the early Dutch colonial state. The year 1816 marked the beginning of a new period in the relationship between the Netherlands and the East Indies. In November 1813, the Netherlands gained its independence from France. Three years later, on 19 August 1816, the British returned possession of the territories that were known as Nederlands-

[32] Thomassen, 'Een korte introductie', 11-20.
[33] Duranti, 'Diplomatics, 15.

Indië [Dutch East Indies] to the new Kingdom of the Netherlands, following the Convention of London that was signed in 1814.[34] The influence of Dutch authority on the local societies in the archipelago showed a strong increase after 1816 when compared to the period of the VOC administration. The motives in the VOC period were of a purely commercial nature. The leaders of the VOC were not out to obtain territorial control, unless it would contribute to the profitability of the trading activities. Although the trading emporium covered parts of the Middle East, South, Southeast and East Asia, the VOC had only exercised direct control in a small number of areas.[35] This was also the most important reason why the VOC had never made much effort to train administrative officials for the East. After all, trade was the main objective, not administration.[36] However, with the dissolution of the VOC, the debts and possessions of this trading giant were transferred to the Dutch state, and the overseas possessions therefore became colonies in the sense that the mother country became responsible for their administration.[37] Herman Willem Daendels (1762-1818), who was sent to the East by the King of Holland Louis Napoleon to defend Java against the increasing British threat, understood that the responsibilities associated with managing a colony were different from the ones of managing a trading company. He started to centralise the administrative system on Java, fully in line with the developments in the Netherlands based on the French administrative system.[38] One of the many initiatives he took during his short reign (he arrived in Java in January 1808 and in May 1811 he had to transfer his power to the newly appointed and recently arrived governor-general Janssens) was the inception of the Algemene Secretarie (General Secretariat) as the administrative centre for the colonial government in the East Indies. Since then, communication between the governor-general and regional residents (Daendels named them *landdrosten*, later prefects and they were named residents since Raffles) only went via the General Secretariat. Under the British administration of the Indies (1811-1816), Lieutenant-General Raffles continued the reorganisation of the government based on the principles introduced by Daendels.

When the territories in the East were returned into Dutch hands in 1816, it was clear that the Dutch administration no longer could, nor wanted to, serve the interests of trade only; it also wanted to serve the welfare of the mother country and the colony. According to Van Welderen Rengers, the most important assignment for the Dutch Commissioners General, who in 1816 assumed power from the British, was 'to establish a system of colonial policy which would provide profits for the mother country. (...) [T]here was also prevalent the opinion that it would be impossible to obtain such results without taking into consideration the individual rights of the native population'.[39] In fact, 19 August 1816 saw the birth of the relationship between the State of the Netherlands and

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[34] Efthymiou, *De organisatie van regelgeving,* 120-122.
[35] Hui Kian Kwee, *The political economy,* 218.
[36] Fasseur, *De Indologen,* 23.
[37] Fraassen en Klapwijk, *Herinneringen,* 297. Interesting in this respect are the discussions in the *Nationale Vergadering* on the question of what colonies were. See the committee for the 'Titul over de Colonien', established on February 3, 1797.
[38] Ball, *Indonesian Legal History,* 88.
[39] Welderen Rengers, *The Failure,* 54.
[40] Welderen Rengers, *The Failure*, 52.

the colony[40], where control was in the hands of an 'enlightened' administration consisting of 'civil servants who only focused on the interests of the state and the general interest'.[41] This can be considered as an initial step towards the creation of a modern bureaucracy that, in the analysis of Max Weber, is based on and characterised by laws and regulations, clear structures of authority, skilled civil servants and written documents.[42] We should not underestimate the consequences of this regime change on the relationship between the two parts of the world. The Dutch colonial state on a large scale tried to penetrate much deeper in the indigenous society than the former VOC ever aimed to do. It is interesting to see that for many Dutch colonial civil servants who were in charge of the colonial administration the British interregnum served as an example of how to connect European administration to the lives of the local inhabitants in the villages. In the short period of British rule, the British residents were obliged to traverse their districts on a regular and systematic basis, to report about the situation in their districts and give people in the villages the opportunity to bring requests and complaints to them. In this way the British tried to connect European government to the indigenous society.[43] In 1817 the Dutch resident Servatius of Cheribon, complained about the incapability of the former VOC administration to get a picture of 'the real situation of the area' because the administrators always were dependent on the figures given by the local rulers. Servatius was impressed by the approach of the former British resident Crawfurd who 'took the right path to find out the truth' because 'this civil servant started to negotiate with the tenants to find out the state of their fields'.[44] This direct form of communication of course has it effects on the information gathering and information management activities.

In this process of growing professionalisation of government intervention, information and having information available at the right moment played an increasingly important role. The ideas from the Enlightenment not only ensured a growing interest in society from scientists, but also had an influence on the state machinery. The idea that the main objective of the state was to improve the welfare and well-being of all citizens originated from Enlightenment thinking and was fundamentally different from the preceding period when the state was mainly focused on benefiting the ruling class.[45] This fundamentally different approach can also be seen from the significance that the state placed on information. In the *ancien regime*, the function of information was primarily to serve the personal interests of the rulers. Marshal Vauban, the leading military engineer during the reign of Louis XIV, aptly expressed this when he underlined the importance of measuring population because 'the greatness of kings is measured by the number of their subjects'.[46] In the 19th century the census changed to an instrument of knowledge.[47] Knowledge of the society

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41 Fasseur, 'Nederland en Nederlands-Indië 1795-1914', 348.
42 See Gerth and Wright Mills, *From Max Weber,* 196-198.
43 Clive Day, *Nederlandsch beheer over Java,* 206-207.
44 Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Archive of the residency of Cheribon, Report by the resident, March 17, 1817.
45 Scott, *Seeing like a state,* 91.
46 Rusnock, 'Quantification, precision and accuracy: determinations of population in the ancien regime', 17.
47 Woolf, 'Statistics and the Modern State', 3.

was not an aim in itself, but a necessary condition for organising society in the desired manner.[48] A tremendous hunger for information was the result and the consequences of this are still visible in the archives.

Colonial information in a growing bureaucracy

One of the most important tools of power for governing and controlling the colonial empire was the power of writing. The pen could be 'as mighty as the sword in the making of the (...) empire'.[49] By the ever-increasing demand for information, to be collected by the colonial civil servants, the early colonial state expected to be able to exert control. So far, the paperwork bureaucracy has received relatively little attention from historians and archivists, although there are a few interesting exceptions. In his dissertation, the Dutch-South African scholar Siegfried Huigen, who specialised in linguistics and cultures, pays considerable attention to the changes following the disintegration of the Dutch VOC trading company and the transformation towards the new state structure. He suggests that the Dutch Batavian colonial administration needed new kinds of information because it wanted to consider itself an administration that wanted to promote the well-being of fellow citizens (meaning the colonists, and not the indigenous people). This could only be done effectively if the administrators knew how their citizens lived. To get an administrative grip on distant regions of the colony, it was crucial to have information concerning the local situation. This information was mainly acquired by highly placed civil servants going on investigative journeys, and by making extensive surveys and topographical maps.[50] In the 19th century, the state's administrative passion increased further to a position where everything that could be recorded, actually seemed to be registered.[51]

For a much longer time, the British had seen the significance of information for the colonial administration. For instance, C.A. Bayly describes how at the start of the 19th century the transition was made in British-governed India from a decentralised and orally based Indian information system towards a more structured and archive-based British system. He shows how native and colonial circuits were linked to each other and emphasises the move of information and the process of acquiring information through existing and created networks.[52] H.V. Bowen reconstructs the inner workings of the British East India Company in the late 18th and early 19th century. In his chapter 'Methods: an empire in writing' he sketches the intimate relationship that existed between the information gathering in and of an unknown world and meticulous records

[48] Jeurgens en Klep, *Informatieprocessen van de Bataafs-Franse overheid*.

[49] Bowen, *The business of empire,* 181.

[50] Siegfried Huigen, *Knowledge and colonialism,* 216-217.

[51] See for instance J.A.A. van Doorn, *De laatste eeuw van Indië.* Notorious were for instance the so-called *dessa* registrations, to be kept by heads of the villages. In some areas the indigenous officials should keep between 50 and 100 different registrations. Because of this unlimited counting and registering by the authorities we still know for instance about the 76,151 lashes that were given in a certain year to criminals in the area around Surabaya, or the exact amount of coffee trees that were planted each year in Java or the amount of rats that were trapped per week.

creation on the one hand and the aim to facilitate control of the overseas servants on the other hand. The result of this was the creation of a paper empire that acted as a surrogate for the territorial empire and gave the illusion of control.[53] Thomas Richards proposes that, seen from the perspective of our own information society, Victorian England was one of the first information societies in history, but in his analysis he puts emphasis on the collected information itself that could be used to exercise control and gives less attention to the processes of creation. In his approach, the archive forms as it were an imagined kind of utopian state. '[T]he apparatus of the Victorian archive appears as a prototype for a global system of domination through circulation, an apparatus for controlling territory by producing, distributing, and consuming information about it'.[54] I want to stress the words 'global system of domination' here, because of its disjunctive character, which is essential for a proper understanding. Scientific institutions, institutes managing collections and even scientific expeditions were essentially focused on 'gathering local knowledge, codifying it, and translating it into the language of the state'.[55] The language of the state had to an increasing degree a utilitarian nature, focused on creating order by defining categories and creating registrations. The European information systems were based on a written and systematic manner of recording information. Dutch historian H. Brugmans typifies the period following 1798 as a time in which 'bureaucracy taken to nonsensical extremes' led to an unprecedented number of documents being produced.[56] The spirit of the French administration would not disappear from the country after the departure of Napoleon. In 1824, Daniel François van Alphen, a member of the Dutch parliament, expressed in a memorandum to King Willem I his dissatisfaction and concern regarding 'the spirit of distrust brought upon us by the French administration that hampers the work due to all of the formalities and checks' and he was furious about the 'many documents that must be written and the numerous signatures that must be obtained and registers kept'.[57] In 1819, the lawyer and later Member of Dutch Parliament Donker Curtius van Tienhoven was already arguing for a simplification of the records in all areas. 'The Government, or rather the Bureaucracy' should no longer want to control everything. The desire for detail had gone far too far.[58] These observations completely fit in the pattern that James Scott sketches in his influential book *Seeing like a State* when he typifies the 'paper records' created in this way as the relevant facts based on which the officials worked. '[T]here are virtually no other facts for the state than those that are contained in documents standardised for that purpose. An error in such a document can have far more power – and for far longer – than can an unreported truth.'[59]

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[52] Bayly, *Empire & Information,* 102.
[53] Bowen, *The business of empire,* 178-180.
[54] Thomas Richards, 'Archive and Utopia', 108-109
[55] *Ibidem*, 108.
[56] Brugmans, *Van Republiek tot Koninkrijk, 76-77.*
[57] Jeroen van Zanten, *Schielijk, winzucht, zwaarhoofd en bedaard,* 177.
[58] *Ibidem*.
[59] Scott, *Seeing like a State,* 83

Developing colonial information networks and archives

What was the significance of information, information gathering, information-management, exchange of information and as an administrative result of these activities, the creation of archives in the first years after 1816 in the relationship between the Netherlands and its East Indies colony? I will not be able to answer all these questions in the scope of this first tentative exploration of the subject. But as I already mentioned, territorial control and control over the people that lived in this area became an important objective for the new colonial state. To achieve this, a set of instruments had to be developed that could contribute to achieving this objective. The effectiveness of this set of instruments was largely dependent on the quality and reliability of the information that was exchanged between Batavia and The Hague.
And at the same time this was also the problem. The communication between the Dutch state apparatus on the one side of the world and the colonial servants on the other was a major source of concern for the Ministers of Colonies during the entire 19th century. As regards their exchange of dispatches, the Dutch government and the administrative apparatus in Batavia were many months of travelling apart late into the 19th century. This physical distance and the complete dependency of information was the major source of the chronic concern of the Dutch government. There was an ever-present anxiety in the King and the Minister of Colonies about the accuracy and timeliness of the information they got from the Governors-General about what was taking place at the other side of the world. They never felt certain of being in control because of the risk of an information-gap. Experienced colonial civil servants in the East Indies knew how to play the communication game with their superiors in the Netherlands. The friendly advice that the former governor-general and minister of Colonies Johannes van den Bosch gave in 1835 to De Eerens, who at that moment was on his way to the East Indies to receive training on the job under the leadership of the interim governor-general Baud in order to take over the governor-generalship, is revealing:

> 'Write (...) frequently, my dear General, either privately or officially regarding public affairs; provide information confidentially in your private letters about the state of affairs and the prospects that present themselves. Do not allow any fear of disappointment to restrain you; here we do not assume infallibility with respect to future affairs. Describe in particular anything pleasant and favourable that occurs. Do not withhold the unpleasant, but always present it with visible regret, so that people will be convinced that it has occurred in spite of your efforts, and that diligent attempts will be made to prevent or mitigate any undesired outcomes. Please allow me, to frankly inform you, your Excellency, of the general interests and the King's favour, for as far as it is to the benefit and honour of your administration'.[60]

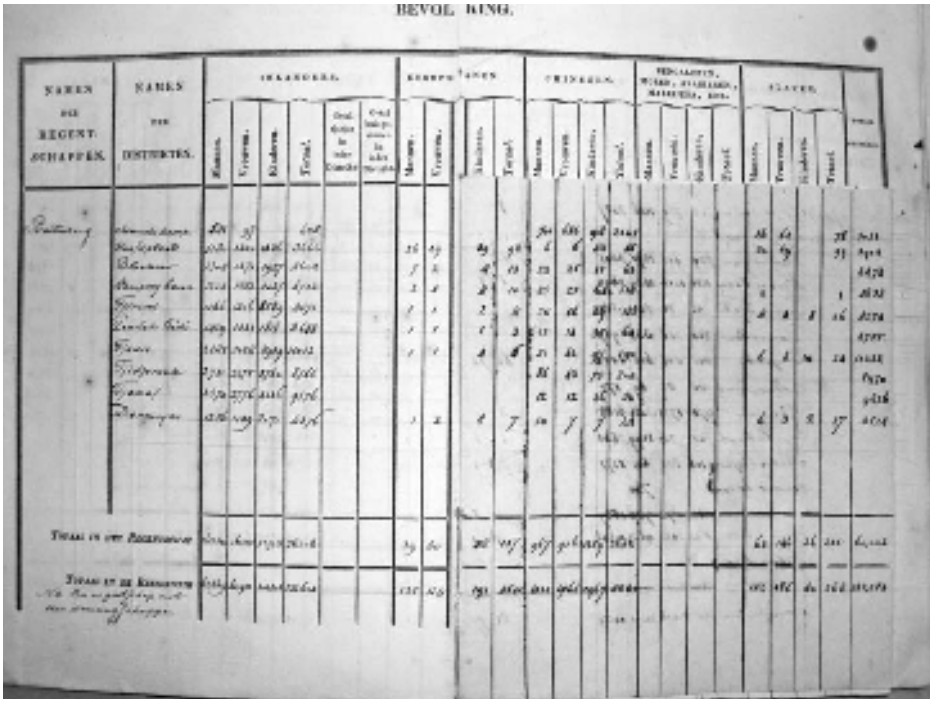
[60] Gerretson and Coolhaas, *Briefwisseling*.
[61] Nationaal Archief, 2.10.01, Ministry of Colonies, inv.no. 3151, Instruction to the governor-general [part of the decree of 3 January 1815, no. 48]. See also Charles Jeurgens, 'Op zoek naar betrouwbare informatie. De Commissarissen-Generaal en de stichting van de koloniale staat, 1816-1819' in: J. Thomas Lindblad en Alicia Schrikker (red) *Het verre gezicht. Politieke en culturele relaties tussen Nederland en Azie, Afrika en Amerika. Opstellen aangeboden aan prof.dr. Leonard Blussé* (Franeker 2011) 266-285.

The manner in which the governor-general had to communicate with the Minister of Colonies was specified in many instructions. The Commissioners-General, who took over the administration from the British in 1816, were told that proper minutes had to be made of all meetings and that these minutes, including associated appendices, had to be periodically sent to The Hague. The governor-general was supposed to maintain uninterrupted correspondence with the Minister regarding all affairs that could be of interest.[61] This correspondence was conducted in two different ways: the so-called official correspondence (which could be regular or confidential) with the ministry and the semi-private (or sometimes named as semi-official) correspondence between the governor-general and the Minister. This correspondence could be conducted without the involvement of civil servants of the Ministry. Furthermore a copy of all decisions taken by the governor-general also had to be sent to The Hague every three months. Later, new and different forms of communication were invented to improve the information, like the colonial report after 1848 and the mail-reports since 1869.
One could say that the information network linking Batavia and The Hague was focused on making the East Indies society legible for the Dutch government. This 'making legible' was not just unlimited and aimless gathering of information, but rather a sophisticated process which determined in advance what information was required for what kind of purpose or government intervention. In this respect the many instructions are revealing.

Although the network between the governor-general in Batavia and the Minister of Colonies formed the backbone of the colonial system, the value and the power of this backbone depended completely on the quality of its branches and the degree of penetration into the indigenous society. Repeatedly, the governor-general was urged not only to provide faster, but also more precise information to the Minister of Colonies and the King.[62] Because the government in The Hague became more and more demanding, one of the main concerns of the early colonial administration in Batavia was to set up a stable and reliable information network between Batavia and the rest of the archipelago to be able to fulfil the information requirements of the Dutch government. Carel Siradus Willem van Hogendorp (1788-1856), resident of Buitenzorg and later resident of Batavia wrote about the effects of this insatiable hunger for information of the colonial government in the East Indies. The governors, residents, assistant residents and other employed officials 'conducted a large correspondence which resulted in a flood of lists and reports; because bureaucracy and the trend to blot paper with ink has gained ground like elsewhere'.[63] His observation of a fast growing bureaucracy is also confirmed by the figures. The number of incoming letters that were registered in the agenda of the Algemene Secretarie increased from 512 in the month of December 1816 to 814 in the month of March 1819.

[62] For instance: Nationaal Archief, 2.01.01 Ministry of Colonies, inv.no. 4188, verbaal dd 01 February 1826, no. 8K confidential; Nationaal Archief, 2.10.01 Ministry of Colonies, inv.no. 4571, 10 Feb. 1826 La H. Nr 14K

[63] Hogendorp, *Beschouwingen der Nederlandsche bezittingen in Oost-Indie,* 110-111.



Registration of the population in the districts in the Regency of Buitenzorg, 1837 (*Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia*)

The colonial government in the East Indies attempted to control the information exchange between the villages and Batavia by giving the heads of the districts, the so-called residents, detailed instructions on how to inform the governor-general. For instance, in 1820 the residents on Java were given an instruction to collect annual statistical data and in 1823 a detailed instruction was received by all residents in the archipelago to produce annual reports on the categories of administration (subdivided into more than 30 different subjects like the extent of stability or instability of the situation in the *regentschappen* (regencies), population, economics etc.), finance (subdivided in 12 different subjects) and the civil servants (European and local) complete with detailed orders on how to model the answers in the papers.[64]

For their part, the residents attempted to set up an information network to be able to get all the local information they needed. The resident of Cheribon, for instance, immediately increased the quality and number of his staff in 1817 to be able to keep the records in an appropriate way,[65] including raising the number of writers from one to three. The assistant-residents produced reports on a regular

[64] ANRI, Archive of the Algemene Secretarie, Decision of the governor-general of 14 November 1823.

[65] When the Dutch took over Cheribon, the general administration of the resident consisted of the 'Resident, one assistant to the resident, one native revenue assistant, a second native revenue assistant, a writer in the town, a writer (European) for the records, two Javanese writers, ten mounted oppasses' (sic). ANRI, Archive of Residentschap Cheribon 2/1, Report of the resident, March 17, 1817.

[66] ANRI, Residentschap Cheribon, box 18, 1817-1841, 2/5 Report of the regent of Galor, 5. March 1826.

[67] See for instance the letters written by the *demang* of the village of Parong. ANRI, Archive of Tangerang, 1819

basis, based on information gathered by the local regents or *bupati*. One example were the reports signed by the *bupati* of Galor in which he sent figures about the number of children that had fallen ill and died of *'tjatjar batuk'* (a kind of smallpox).[66] In the information collected by the *assistent-residenten* and district heads of the police, we find reports and letters from village heads *(demang)*, written in the local language, in which they inform the Dutch authorities on all kinds of more or less important events that happened in the villages.[67] These reports and letters of course never reached the governor-general in that form, let alone the Minister of Colonies in The Hague, but they were the needed and expected information to provide the vital fuel to the backbone of the network between Batavia and The Hague. It was however not only the information itself, but also the transport of the information that immediately received attention after the takeover in 1816. The resident of Cheribon for instance improved the carriage of dispatches within his district and to the nodes of Semarang and Batavia. Instead of three times a week, he organised daily transportation of letters by the 127 horses and three mail carriages he had available within his *residentschap*.[68]
The information sent from Batavia to The Hague depended fully on the quality of the chain that connected Batavia to the inner areas in the archipelago. The colonial state continuously tried not only to control and extend the information structures, but also the quality and amount of information that was exchanged.

Tentative conclusions

The main question asked at the beginning of this chapter was whether the theories on globalisation and networks can also be useful for our understanding of the colonial archives. I gave special attention to the role of information and information exchange in the period of the early colonial state. I want to refer to Bayly, when he stated that the beginnings of the modern international system were driven not so much by technological change as by prior political and cultural change. Compared to the concerns of the former VOC, the role, focus and interests of the ruling authority after 1816 seem to have changed in the direction of full state interests and this also had its effect on the information needs. The concerns of the colonial state and its consequent hunger for the kind of information it believed was needed to exert control over the colony and inhabitants defined the structure of the information network. The connection of the villages to the apparatus of the colonial state resulted in a ramified information network.

We must however stress the fact that this information exchange and communication was not based on equality. Although the villages on Java and elsewhere in the East Indies became more and more connected to the large global

[68] ANRI, Archive of Residentschap Cheribon 2/1, Report of the Resident, March 17, 1817. In a letter of December 30 1816 the newly appointed governor-general and Commissioner-General Van der Capelle wrote to Falck: 'De afstand van Batavia (37 Eng mijlen) [from Buitenzorg CJ] is wat groot. Wij leggen dezelve echter in 3 uuren af, zoo goed zijn de wegen. Wij doen die tour met postpaarden en wisselen 6 maal. Deze afstand veroorzakt echter dat ik eene dubbele huishouding en stallen moet hebben, zoodat ik hier en te Rijswijk steeds alles gereed en in goede orde moet vinden, hetgeen aangenaam, ja noodzakelijk, maar ten uiterste kostbaar is, daar beide huishoudingen altijd doorlopen. Het getal mijne paarden te Rijswijk en hier beloopt thans 80 en ik kan er niet veel van afschaffen'. See Nationaal Archief, 2.21.006.48, Collectie Falck, Inv. Nr. 82, Letter from Van der Capellen to Falck, December 30, 1816.

information network, the flow of information was disjunctive. The colonial state enforced the delivery of information. In analysing the archives created by the colonial apparatus and by reconstructing the velocity of the information, we will be able to detect the multi-stage and multi-layered information systems and the ramified networks of colonial information. Information was not static, but changed every time it was used, aggregated and forwarded. By researching the structures of the networks we can perhaps find out how the 'man on the spot' was connected to the administrative colonial hubs in the East Indies and, via the network, also to the Netherlands. By studying the content of the information that was sent via the different lines of the network, we might be able to learn more about the real substance of the archives. Colonial servants gathered local knowledge, then codified and translated it into the language of the state. The deeper the state wanted to intervene, the more information was required. By doing this, these colonial administrators produced files, censuses, statistics, maps and memoranda, which formed the raw material for the making of colonial policy. Extensive research in the archives and knowledge of the archives creation at the nodes and connectors of the information networks may shed more light on the question what kind of information was transferred and how the meaning of the archival documents changed in the fluid processes of information exchange.

Abbreviations

NA Nationaal Archief (National Archive) The Hague
ANRI Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia Jakarta (National Archive of Indonesia)

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Archives

National Archive The Hague

Ministry of Colonies, Period 1816-1849
(entry number 2.10.01)

Ministry of Colonies, Period 1850-1899
(entry number 2.10.02)

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