

An Ethical Policy for an Islamic People

The Colonial Policy of the Kuyper Cabinet (1901–1905) and the Challenge of Human Development

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The Dutch public philosopher and social entrepreneur Abraham Kuyper ushered in a new era in Dutch colonial affairs when he became Prime Minister in 1901. Economic exploitation would be replaced by an “ethical policy” based on the moral responsibility of the Netherlands for the well-being of the indigenous people of its colonies. This article uses four types of “capital” needed for human development to frame the key components of the ethical policy *vis-à-vis* Indonesia, which are elucidated within their historical context. Despite the brevity of Kuyper’s cabinet (1901–1905), conditions on the ground improved, in part through its support for indigenous entrepreneurship and political decentralization.

Introduction

The election of the public philosopher and social entrepreneur Abraham Kuyper as Prime Minister of the Netherlands in 1901 signaled a new direction in Dutch colonial affairs. In her throne speech given at the opening of parliament that year, Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands declared,

As a Christian power, the Netherlands is obliged in the East Indian Archipelago to protect the rights of indigenous Christians, to facilitate the work of missionaries, and to imbue the whole of government policy with the understanding that the Netherlands has a moral calling to fulfil towards the people of this region.

In this connection, the low living standard of the people of Java attracts my special attention. I wish to conduct an inquiry into its causes. The legal

protections for contracted coolies will be strictly enforced. We will aim to decentralize the colonial administration. I trust that the situation in the north of Sumatra will, if the current strategy is maintained, soon lead to complete pacification.¹

For three decades before this speech from the throne, Kuyper had engaged with colonial issues and had sought to develop and defend an “anti-revolutionary” perspective on the Dutch colonies.² But with this speech, written by Kuyper as Prime Minister, that perspective became government colonial policy. It marked the official beginning of the Ethical Policy, so called because of the emphasis in colonial affairs would shift from economic exploitation to the moral responsibility that the Netherlands had for the welfare of its colonial peoples.³

Political historians often seek to address the question whether the work of a particular government administration in a particular area of policy was a success or a failure. This article will not seek to answer that question directly in the case of the Kuyper administration and its colonial policy. It is generally impossible, after all, to make absolute judgments about the political past. As the Black Lives Matter demonstrations of 2020 served to demonstrate, judgments on history—not least on its colonial aspects—can undergo significant flux as sensitivities change. It can be argued, moreover, that historians are called more to understanding past events within their historical context than they are to pronouncing judgments based on the values of a subsequent age. This applies especially to the subject matter of this article because research into the exact nature and impact of the policies pursued by the Kuyper cabinet is still in its infancy.

The focus of this article will be on the Dutch East Indies (DEI), present-day Indonesia. This is not only the largest of the colonies to have been governed by the Netherlands but also the largest archipelago in the world, made up of over seventeen thousand islands. The aim will be to introduce and elucidate some of the key components of the Kuyper cabinet’s colonial policy by placing them in their historical context. It will organize these according to some of the categories I have used elsewhere to outline the forms of “capital” that are needed for human development, based on recent social science research: financial capital, spiritual capital, institutional capital, and relational capital.⁴ Notwithstanding the major disruption caused by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an increasing amount of development thinking and advocacy attests to the importance of these elements—whatever names are given to them—to human flourishing. Kuyper was, therefore, well ahead of his time, even though the colonial framework within which he thought and acted is a thing of the past.

But before there can be any consideration of whether the colonial policy of Kuyper's cabinet has relevance for the post-colonial world of today, that policy needs some historical "flesh on the bones," so that it can be better understood and evaluated within the context in which it was developed. That is the modest historical-yet-contemporary aim of this article.

Financial Capital

Financial capital is the most obvious form of capital needed for economic development; without financial investment, economies cannot grow. For the DEI during most of the nineteenth century, however, such investment was restricted by the "Cultivation System." This was a form of tax, introduced by the Dutch government in 1830, whereby the indigenous population was obliged to allocate a fifth of its land and working hours to the colonial authorities for the cultivation of certain products. Famine, misery, and poverty ensued for the indigenous population, and corruption grew as civil servants were bribed. The sizable annual profits (known as the *batig slot*) from this regime, which had been used to enrich the motherland, dwindled toward the nineteenth century, mainly as a result of the Aceh War. This was a prolonged period of military hostilities between Dutch troops and indigenous rebel fighters in the region of Aceh in the north of the island of Sumatra—the region mentioned in the speech from the throne in the quotation at the start of this article. The associated debts were, from 1898, collected on the colony itself.⁵ Provoked by this callous arrangement, an article appeared in 1899 in the liberal magazine *The Guide (De Gids)* written by the lawyer and politician Conrad van Deventer entitled "A Debt of Honour" (*Een Ereschuld*). He argued that the transfer of vast profits from colony to mother country was unjust and should be reversed.

This magazine article was so widely discussed that historians still associate the idea of the Netherlands having a debt of honor toward its colonies with Van Deventer and the liberal tradition he represented. Jeroen Koch, for example, describes it in his major six-hundred-page biography of Kuyper as "a concept that was introduced in 1899 by the liberal lawyer and later parliamentarian C. Th. van Deventer." Yet Kuyper wrote an article about the colonies in *The Standard (De Standaard)* as early as 1873 with more or less the same title: "A Debt of Honour" (*Een schuld van eer*).⁶ For Kuyper, as for Van Deventer more than a quarter of a century later, the concept meant that the hundreds of millions of guilders of profit made by the Netherlands through the Cultivation System had to be repaid and used to improve the economic opportunity of the indigenous people.

It was with this conviction in mind that Alexander Idenburg—who regarded Kuyper as a friend, confidant, and mentor—began work in 1902 following his appointment as Minister of Colonial Affairs. It soon became apparent, however, that he wanted as little to do with this debt of honor as one of his recent predecessors, the liberal politician Jacob Cremer, who was one of its most vocal critics.⁷ Idenburg proposed, instead, the granting by the Dutch government of an interest-free advance to the DEI of thirty million guilders, spread over five or six years. When in the budget of 1902, only two million guilders was assigned for this purpose, Idenburg faced severe criticism, including from within the governing coalition of Christian political parties. In the 1905 budget, however, Idenburg finally delivered; the Netherlands would donate (not loan) forty million guilders to the DEI for irrigation, road construction, emigration, and for micro-loans to indigenous agricultural entrepreneurs.⁸

Although this was a significant achievement, with long-term positive consequences for the unfolding of indigenous enterprise, Idenburg's rejection of the "debt of honour" could be taken as evidence of a less generous approach to the financial circumstances of the DEI than liberal politicians such as Conrad Deventer and Dirk Fock.⁹ Yet for Idenburg the moral responsibility of the Netherlands as laid out in the Queen's speech of 1901 had to remain central to all colonial policy, and this involved investment in the spiritual, not just financial, well-being of the DEI.

Spiritual Capital

Not all politicians who favored an ethical approach to colonial policy were convinced that anything other than financial capital was needed for human development in the colonies. Liberal spokespeople tended to advocate an increase only in the material well-being of the indigenous population. One of them, the journalist Pieter Brooshoofd, who had considerable experience of the DEI, claimed, "The cause of all misery is lack of money."¹⁰ In contrast, Idenburg emphasized the duty of the Netherlands to pursue a broader policy of development that encompassed the "spiritual" dimensions of human existence. In his first speech in the House of Representatives, for instance, he argued that a truly ethical colonial policy included the moral obligation:

To raise and educate the peoples of the Archipelago, so that they may gradually achieve a higher position in spiritual and material terms and thus be led spiritually, economically, and politically towards greater independence.... I would like to say: especially in spiritual terms. The seed for material improve-

ment lies in the spiritual side of the elevation we seek for these peoples. Matter does not control the human spirit, but the human spirit controls matter.¹¹

Despite his misgivings about Kuyper's notion of a debt of honor, the position Idenburg stated here aligned closely with that of Kuyper; material improvement was important, but it must be the result of spiritual elevation. That spiritual elevation required serious and long-term investment in the moral and social institutions of human society. Economic development proceeded in tandem with, not in isolation from, cultural development.

Similarly to many other Western Christian leaders of his generation, Idenburg and Kuyper believed that Christian mission had an important role to play in this broader form of human development. Indeed, they believed that conversion to Christianity would help secure a brighter future for the DEI. This was not, however, a new direction in anti-revolutionary policy. Several decades earlier, the chief founder of the anti-revolutionary movement in Dutch politics, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer (1801–1876) had made an argument that is echoed in the citation from Idenburg above. Groen van Prinsterer declared, "History teaches us not that Christianity follows in the wake of civilization, but that civilization follows Christianity." For this reason, he argued, the Netherlands as a Christian nation was not at liberty in its handling of its colonies to refuse missionary activity (as advocated by the conservatives), neither was it at liberty to adopt a relationship of neutral detachment (as advocated by the liberals). As the mother country, the Netherlands was duty bound to provide an administrative infrastructure that facilitated the work of Christian mission.¹²

Reflecting Groen van Prinsterer's influence, Kuyper regarded missionary work as central to his vision of the global significance of Christianity.¹³ In his famous Stone Lectures, given at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1898, Kuyper mounted a forceful argument for Christianity as a transformative force in human culture and in the development of civilization.¹⁴ While some of the historical evidence he used in his argument is questionable, a number of contemporary writers and scholars have argued along similar lines.¹⁵ More importantly for the purposes of this article, a growing number of scholars and development professionals regard spirituality (whether or not religious) as a crucial component in economic development and human well-being.¹⁶ Neither for Kuyper nor for Idenburg did their commitment to Christianity, and to the role of spirituality in human development, mean that the Christian faith should be forced upon indigenous populations. This was frequently denied by their opponents, such as the politician Henri van Kol. He argued that the entire anti-revolutionary program would turn out to be an illusion because the Christianization of the DEI was

impossible. Idenburg protested that no person, nor government, could impart saving faith to indigenous people. Instead, he insisted, missionaries should be allowed by government, but not controlled by government, to work toward “the formation of a national spirit [*volksgeest*] so that, in the social sphere, the basic principles of Christianity are accepted as the foundations for national life [*volksleven*].”¹⁷ For Idenburg, such acceptance could be neither guaranteed nor enforced, and it could not be expected that the vast population of the DEI could be converted to Christianity by a relatively small number of missionaries, expats, and indigenous Christians.¹⁸ Idenburg’s reassurances were eventually rewarded; his opponents in Parliament came to accept freedom for missionary activity, provided adequate attention was paid to the material betterment of the indigenous population.

Institutional Capital

Indigenous Enterprise

Promoting the material betterment of the people of the DEI had been central to the colonial policy of the anti-revolutionaries ever since Kuyper published *Our Program (Ons Program)*, their party’s manifesto, in 1879. At the beginning of Kuyper’s administration, the government echoed this commitment in making it clear that small indigenous social institutions in the form of private companies were central to its vision as to how this would be achieved. During the parliamentary debate of the budget for the DEI in 1901, Kuyper expressed this vision as follows:

We will prioritize the question what influence private industry has on indigenous economic development. We will also ask how indigenous business enterprise can be revived. We will attempt to help elevate the people themselves from an agricultural state to an industrial state, because only this way can they attain true development.¹⁹

Kuyper’s ideas about the social role of business, entrepreneurship, and “private industry”—whether in the Dutch colonies or elsewhere—have until recently been overlooked in academic literature.²⁰ Yet his announcement in the budget debate of 1901 cited above is not an isolated example of his vision for the positive role of business in social transformation. His support for enterprise solutions to poverty in the DEI goes back to his initial engagement with colonial policy in the early 1870s. The anti-revolutionaries had been thrust to the fore of colonial debate in 1866 through a censure motion (similar to a motion of no confidence)

issued by Levinus Keuchenius, a new anti-revolutionary member of parliament who had recently returned from the DEI with considerable firsthand experience of colonial administration, most recently as Vice President of the Indies Council. Keuchenius served his motion, which still ranks as the most famous and contentious motions in Dutch parliamentary history, against the minister of colonies Pieter Mijer for appointing himself Governor-General of the DEI whilst still retaining his office as the colonial minister.

Opprobrium was unleashed on Keuchenius from all sides, not all of it directly related to his objection to Mijer's action. Many conservatives and fellow anti-revolutionaries criticized Keuchenius for his accommodating attitude toward liberals in their support for private indigenous entrepreneurship as an alternative to the Cultivation System. These critics feared that private profit would lead to more severe oppression of the indigenous people than state exploitation.

From Kuyper's engagement with colonial affairs in the 1870s, which found its most systematic expression in his book *Our Program*, it is clear that private initiative lay at the foundation of his approach not only to how the Christian faith should be spread in the colonies but also how they should develop economically. In that book he takes aim at those who wish to exploit the indigenous people by restricting their economic institutions. Such people, he writes, "commit a sin against a nation as a whole—the sin that is called slavery when applied to individual persons."²¹ Kuyper was clearly determined that the DEI population should enjoy economic freedom, rather than being exploited in the way they had been under the Cultivation System. In making his argument, he appealed to the biblical prohibition against stealing, together with the Heidelberg Catechism's commentary on it:

Our country may no more exploit another people than I have the right to live off the field of my neighbor. That is a sin against the eighth commandment, according to the fine explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism: 'God forbids not only such theft and robbery as are punished by the government, but God views as theft also all wicked tricks and devices, whereby we seek to get our neighbor's goods.'²²

For Kuyper, commercial exploitation was a form of theft. Free enterprise, in contrast, was an integral part of the living organism that is society. For enterprise to be free, it had to be allowed to develop organically; it could not be imposed from above: "Families and kinships, towns and villages, businesses and industries, morals, manners, and legal customs are not mechanically assembled but, like groups of cells in a human body, are organically formed."²³ While ever since the foundation of the Dutch East India Company in 1602, the state had exerted a

controlling influence on commercial activity in the colony, the business sphere (whether in the colonies or in the mother country), should in Kuyper's view be permitted to evolve in a spontaneous and entirely natural way. The sphere of the state had the right and responsibility to impose regulation on business. But the state was also to defend businesses' relative autonomy as a legitimate social sphere alongside others, such as science and the arts.

Those familiar with Kuyper will recognize that this emphasis on the importance and freedom of social institutions was an expression of his doctrine of sphere sovereignty.²⁴ This doctrine also provided the basis for the idea (noted above) that the spread of Christianity could neither be imposed nor censored by government: The church was free to organize its missionary activity as it saw fit, within the rule of law. While there were differences between Kuyper and Keuchenius in the role they reserved for the Governor-General in the regulation of missionary activity, the similarity of their approach to the role of private enterprise in the economic development of the DEI is likely to have played an important role in Kuyper's decision to lend full support to Keuchenius' appointment as Minister of Colonial Affairs in 1888 in the first coalition cabinet of Catholic and Anti-Revolutionary political parties (1888–1891).

Two things, then, seem to be clear. Kuyper's pro-business vision was grounded in the importance he attached to the institutional building blocks of society, and that this vision inspired the colonial policy of the Kuyper administration. It is less clear what was the impact of this vision on the economic prosperity of the people of the DEI.²⁵ The establishment of local credit banks certainly played an important role in stimulating small-scale indigenous enterprise. Although some of these banks were controlled by Chinese immigrants who lent money at exorbitant, high interest rates, the creation of credit banks made microcredit accessible to indigenous entrepreneurs long before microfinance played a central role in the international development policy of the Netherlands and other European countries.²⁶ From the available evidence, it does appear that the economic conditions for most DEI inhabitants did improve between 1904 and 1914, despite rapid population growth.²⁷ This helped to bolster confidence in the development potential of indigenous entrepreneurship, which became a guiding principle for colonial economic policy during the first decades of the twentieth century.²⁸

Decentralization

From the perspective of sphere sovereignty, society works best when its institutions develop organically at a similar pace. This helps to deliver the institutional capital needed for human development. Rapid socioeconomic develop-

ments in the DEI therefore required rapid political reform. Ever since the introduction of the Cultivation System in 1830, the government of the DEI had been highly centralized; political authority was vested in the Governor-General.²⁹ With the introduction of a new government measure (*regeringsreglement*) in 1854, this situation was partially addressed through the establishment of an advisory council or General Secretariat (*Algemeene Secretarie*) made up of representatives of the indigenous population. The new measure operated as a rudimentary constitution, yet the Dutch administrative headquarters in Buitenzorg (the Indonesian City of Bogor today) remained the place where everything was arranged and prescribed. Several Ministers of Colonial Affairs (Willem Baron van Dedem, Jacob Cremer, and Titus van Asch van Wijck) submitted draft bills that would enable regional and local councils to assume some government roles, but they failed to become law. Idenburg fared better, however. During his time as Minister of Colonial Affairs, the Decentralization Act was passed in 1903 (which was further elaborated in the Decentralization Decree of 1904), and the Local Council Ordinance was passed in 1905. These rulings made it possible for the government to make funds available to regions and to delegate the management of these funds to local councils. Local councils, which had to include members of the indigenous population, were empowered to collect taxes; draw up local statutes; maintain local roads, squares, and waterways; administer local healthcare; and construct local facilities, such as drinking water pipes, electrical installations, and fire stations.³⁰

While decentralization did not aim to deliver democracy in an advanced form, the creation of local councils was intended to provide a greater degree of autonomy in the administration of the DEI. Besides incentivizing the payment of taxes, as the revenues would support local services (including health-care services), the establishment of these councils also helped promote the effectiveness of the DEI's civil service, as it now could access and utilize a broader circle of local knowledge. The councils helped, above all, to introduce the idea that the indigenous people had a stake and a voice in the governance of the colony. This attitudinal shift would later play an important role in the development of the indigenous movement toward independence. The decentralization law of 1903 can, therefore, be seen as an important first step on the long and difficult road to freedom and nationhood. It reflects the promise of decentralization in the Queen's speech of 1901, and the devolution of political authority that lay behind that promise, that was central to Kuyper's doctrine of sphere sovereignty.³¹ The impact of Kuyper's ideas on the DEI and on anti-revolutionary colonial policy was publicly recognized by Idenburg soon after his term of office as Governor-General of the DEI (1909–1916) came to an end. On Kuyper's eightieth birthday,

Idenburg wrote in *De Standaard*, “The work of Dr. Kuyper ... was groundbreaking, pioneering. He sketched out the lines along which anti-revolutionary colonial politics moves.” Idenburg expressed his gratitude to Kuyper for his “insight into the responsibilities of the Netherlands and the rights of the DEI.”³²

Relational Capital

Conflict, warfare, violence, and terrorism represent the worst forms of relational breakdown. In part because they act as a deterrent to commercial investment, they thwart economic growth and restrict human and environmental well-being. Awareness of this reality is growing, not only among researchers but also among development and business professionals, as evidenced in the fact that nongovernmental organizations and multinational businesses are increasingly including peace and reconciliation initiatives in their operations. The general principle appears to be that when people are at peace they trade; and when they trade they promote peace.³³ This principle, although it has often been forgotten, has a long history and once featured as the proud motto of Amsterdam, *commercium et pax* (commerce and peace), reflected in its harbor crowded with foreign ships at the center of the Dutch seaborne empire. Whether or not this fact had any direct influence on him, Kuyper was clear that the DEI could not prosper without peace. That is why in the Queen’s speech “pacification,” especially in the war-torn area of Aceh in northern Sumatra, was presented as an integral part of the Ethical Policy.³⁴

A tipping point in this pacification project was reached in 1904 with the appointment by Idenburg of Joannes van Heutsz as Governor-General of the DEI. Unruly regions like Aceh would from now on be governed by a policy of strict submission and control. Given the understandable abhorrence among contemporary historians toward this policy, and toward Van Heutsz for implementing it, it is a mark of how sentiments have changed that the eminent Professor of Colonial History at the University of Utrecht, Carol Gerretson (1884–1958), could write in 1927 about the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: “Nothing characterizes the greatness of this era so aptly as the fact that it can bear Van Heutsz’s name.”³⁵ Van Heutsz was also regarded as something of a hero during his time as Governor-General (1904–1909). For with the prospect of the Aceh War dragging on indefinitely, there was cross-party consensus for his attempts to restore law and order. These attempts eventually bore fruit when around 1908 the pacification of the archipelago was largely complete.³⁶

Without digressing into theories of imperialism, it is important to address the question (albeit briefly) of whether the brute force meted out as “pacifica-

tion” reduces the Ethical Policy to a guise for imperialism, fueled by economic exploitation. This is the view taken by Ernst Kossmann (1922–2003), one of the most highly regarded Dutch historians. He considered ethical politics a form of “capitalist imperialism,” created to address the failure of the Netherlands to establish its authority in Aceh. He emphasized the (Dutch) nationalist and militarist ways in which the policy was implemented, and that the new generation of colonial administrators of the DEI were all drawn from the military.³⁷ In a similar vein, Paul van ’t Veer uses the term “mission imperialism” (*zendingsimperialism*) to characterize this period in Dutch colonial politics; while Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Maarten Kuitenbrouwer refer to “ethical imperialism” (*ethisch imperialism*); and Jeroen Koch characterizes pacification as a “shocking euphemism for violent colonial submission.”³⁸ According to the “Leninist, anti-imperialist view,” Michael Wintle argues, “the Ethical Policy serves the function of providing basic health services to enable a white man’s capitalism.”³⁹ The general conclusion of historians is clear: Aside from political power, the main motive during the “ethical” period of colonial history is no different to that of earlier periods—economic exploitation for the benefit of the mother country. There is no evidence, however, of this motive at work in Idenburg or Kuyper.⁴⁰ Indeed, they both frequently critiqued such exploitation and the imperialism that often drove it.⁴¹ Nevertheless, it is certainly the case that forceful political and military coercion played a role in the governance of the DEI that is hard to justify from a twenty-first-century perspective, in which the right to nationhood and the injustice of colonialism are widely accepted.

There is also more understanding today than in earlier periods about the radical ideology that plays a role in driving a minority of Muslims to violence—an ideology often referred to nowadays as Islamic fundamentalism, Islamic extremism, Jihadism, Islamicism, or pan-Islamism. During Kuyper’s times, in contrast, it was considered a discovery when the orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who was a leading scholar of Islam, proved in 1893 that the Islamic doctrine of holy war (*jihad*) was an important motive driving fanatical guerilla warriors, who considered martyrdom in the struggle against the Dutch “infidel” to be meritorious.⁴² For him and for those who became convinced of the ideological motives to the indigenous violence in Aceh, the armed action against that violence by the colonial authorities was seen as the only way to bring social stability. In Snouck Hurgronje’s words: “War and peace! Hard-fought war even, but afterwards complete peace!”⁴³ Kuyper echoed this sentiment when he wrote that, with such pacification attempts, “weak surgeons make stinking wounds.”⁴⁴ Idenburg was also convinced that the development agenda of the Ethical Policy could only be effectively implemented in areas subject to radi-

cal Islamic violence if the Dutch authorities gained full control.⁴⁵ That attempt to win control faced its greatest challenge in the apparent intractability of the Aceh War, which, in the words of John Furnivall, “was exhausting the country like a cancer.”⁴⁶

In contemporary historiography, Dutch military action in Aceh tends to be linked not with violent Islamic extremism but with the fact that Aceh, although part of the DEI, was an independent sultanate with a strong sense of self-identity it felt the need to defend. This may reflect a concern that the establishment of a link with violent Islamicism could serve to absolve the Dutch authorities from the ferocity of their attempts to restore peace and security. Whatever the case, the ending of the Aceh War appears to have ushered in the kind of robust economic development that is associated with relational capital.⁴⁷ In their roles as successive Governor-Generals from 1904 to 1916, Van Heutsz and Idenburg implemented an ambitious program of administrative improvement, socio-economic development, and the broadening of missionary activities.⁴⁸ The colonialism in which they were involved still stands guilty at the bar of history. But the fierceness of the military action taken by the Dutch forces deployed in Aceh has to be understood, in part, as an attempt to overcome fanatical jihadi terrorism for the sake of the humanitarian agenda of the Ethical Policy.

Conclusion

Hopefully it has become clear from the foregoing discussion that the question of success or failure regarding the colonial policy of Kuyper’s administration cannot deliver a clear-cut answer. The most recent biography of Kuyper, written by the American historian James Bratt, indicates that this question is still current among academic historians. In this biography, Bratt writes,

The Kuyper cabinet promoted good government for the colonies as a value in its own right. Idenburg insisted on strict and transparent accounting in colonial affairs.... All in all, Kuyper could count colonial policy as a solid success. It followed his old principles while gaining support from other parties. It focused and accelerated existing momentum into an enduring policy formula.⁴⁹

Putting judgements of success or failure to one side, Bratt is right to highlight the consistency with which the Kuyper cabinet pursued the principles of colonial policy that he had formulated more than two decades earlier, most notably in his political manifesto *Our Program* of 1879. It is also clear from the historical evidence, including the voluminous correspondence between Kuyper and Iden-

burg, that these two politicians were convinced of the soundness and integrity of their principles. They considered them to be grounded in a moral calling to raise the standard of living of people at the bottom of the social scale, in part by helping them to help themselves by dint of their own entrepreneurial effort. Despite the morally flawed colonial framework in which this took place, that is a moral calling (however it is phrased) to which countries seem increasingly committed in the twenty-first century. This is reflected, for instance, in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which remain in place despite the challenges imposed on them by the COVID-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020. They include a commitment to reduce poverty and to stimulate business innovation, decent work, economic growth, peace, justice, and strong institutions.⁵⁰ All of these echo key tenets of the colonial policy of the Kuyper cabinet.

Moral responsibility is, of course, easier to pronounce in throne speeches and global declarations than it is to carry out in practice. Nevertheless, it does appear that the promises in the Queen's speech were not forgotten. The studies into the prosperity of the DEI's lower classes, for instance, were carried out and led to the introduction of concrete social reforms.⁵¹ Although the effectiveness of these reforms is virtually impossible to assess with accuracy due to lack of available data, indicators such as levels of healthcare and education do show significant improvement. Primary education in particular underwent positive development, although not enough to keep up with the demand from a rapidly increasing population caused in part by the healthcare improvements. Despite this population boom, the available evidence does appear to confirm that the economic conditions for most DEI inhabitants improved during the early years of the twentieth century.⁵²

It would be wrong to assume that such improvement was to the economic detriment of the Netherlands. As already noted, profit from the Cultivation System had dwindled toward the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the costly Aceh War. But the economic consequences for the Netherlands of abolishing the Cultivation System altogether in favor of indigenous entrepreneurship; adopting the Ethical Policy with its commitments to decentralization and pacification; and reversing the flow of funding between the DEI and the mother country, did not amount to the catastrophe many expected. In part because of the restoration of peace, Ernst Kossmann is right to have suggested that the Ethical Policy was economically beneficial for the Netherlands.⁵³

Benefits procured by the Kuyper administration on behalf of colony and mother country are all the more remarkable given the constraints of geography and term of office. Around seven thousand miles and a journey time of several weeks separated the Netherlands and the DEI. Yet the government of a small

country in Europe found itself in charge of a vast archipelago on the other side of the globe. Moreover, as home to the world's largest Islamic population, the DEI had a radically different culture and predominant religion to the Netherlands, where in-depth knowledge of Islam was restricted to a handful of scholars and civil servants. Regarding term of office, the four years of the Kuyper cabinet were hardly long enough for the reforms and developments discussed in this article to take full effect on the ground. Idenburg himself was aware of this challenge. One of the difficulties, he declared, was that "in a relatively short period of time our Indies need to undergo a process of development that took centuries for Western populations."⁵⁴

By focusing on the financial, spiritual, institutional, and relational needs of the colony, Idenburg's time in office was used to maximum effect. As a result, policy makers today can take the colonial policy of the Kuyper administration as a "case study" providing evidence and insight that human development can most effectively be achieved if all mechanistic and one-dimensional understandings of the human person and human society are rejected in favor of organic and multidimensional understandings. Human beings and the societies they form cannot be measured in material terms alone. For they have innate spiritual, institutional, and relational dimensions. Tackling human poverty therefore requires a focus on what creates human wealth—wealth in the broad sense of weal or well-being. That is what the Ethical Policy, however imperfect and historically conditioned, sought to do in the status and freedom it sought to give to missionary work, private enterprise, political representation, and military action in the cause of peace.

Despite all the challenges the DEI posed to their administration, the names of Idenburg and Kuyper go down in history as the architects, pioneers, and implementers of a new direction in Dutch colonial politics. While their cabinet was too briefly in office for many of the proposed improvements to be fully realized, it was long enough for it to sow and germinate in the DEI the seeds of positive change that would eventually flower into nationhood and would achieve in full measure the greater degree of independence it envisaged.

Notes

1. Queen Wilhelmina, “Troonrede van 17 September 1901,” in *Troonredes, openingsredes, inhuldigingsredes 1814–1963*, ed. Ersnt van Raalte (’s-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1964). The Queen’s speech is also available at <http://www.troonredes.nl/troonrede-van-17-september-1901/>.
2. Before 1901, Kuyper had set forth his colonial policy most notably in his *Ons Program* of 1879. The 1880 abridgement is translated as *Our Program: A Christian Political Manifesto*, trans. and ed. Harry Van Dyke (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015). Kuyper devotes chapter 19 to colonial policy.
3. The historical background to the colonial policy of the Kuyper-cabinet is discussed in Peter S. Heslam, “Guardianship Policy Toward an Islamic People: The Colonial Policy of Abraham Kuyper (1871–1879),” forthcoming.
4. Peter S. Heslam, “Happiness Through Thrift: The Contribution of Business to Human Wellbeing,” in *The Practices of Happiness: Political Economy, Religion and Wellbeing*, ed. John Atherton, Elaine Graham, and Ian Steedman (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 54–65.
5. J. T. Minderaa, “De politieke ontwikkeling in Nederland 1887–1914,” in *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 13 (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1978), 474.
6. Jeroen Koch, *Abraham Kuyper: Een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2006), 462; C. Th. van Deventer, “Een eereschuld,” *De Gids* (1899), 215–28, 249–52. Reprinted in *Een eereschuld: Essays uit De Gids over ons koloniaal verleden*, ed. R. Aerts and T. Duquesnoy (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1993), 197–245; A. Kuyper, “Een schuld van eer,” *De Standaard*, February 12, 1873, no. 268. The word *schuld* in Dutch can be rendered “debt” or “guilt” in English. Both meanings operate in the Dutch terms *een schuld van eer* and *een eereschuld* used respectively by Kuyper and Van Deventer.
7. Although Kuyper and Idenburg were close friends, Idenburg expressed his frustrations about Kuyper in letters to his wife. He wrote to her on October 24, 1915: “The great difficulty with Kuyper is that his sensitivity is so unharmoniously developed. It is very finely developed (hypersensitive, I would say) if it applies to himself; undeveloped, when it applies to others. Because of this, he has been able to do great things but it has also served to alienate many people.” Two weeks later he wrote to her that, partly because Kuyper always wanted to be in the right, working with him was difficult (November 7, 1915). See *Briefwisseling Kuyper-Idenburg*, ed. J. de Bruijn and G. Puchinger (Franeker: Wever, 1985), 568.
8. W. H. Vermeulen, “Oost-Indië 1891–1918,” in W. J. van Welderen baron Rengers, *Schets eener parlementaire geschiedenis van Nederland*, vol. 4 (’s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1955), 286–87.

9. Dirk Fock (1858–1941) served as Governor of Suriname (1908–1911), another Dutch colony, before becoming Governor-General of the DEI (1921–1926).
10. Pieter Brooshoft, *De ethische koers in de koloniale politiek* (Indonesia: De Busy, 1901), 120; B. J. Brouwer, *De houding van Idenburg en Colijn tegenover de Indonesische beweging* (Kampen: Kok, 1958), 18.
11. *Handelingen van de Eerste en Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, 1901–1902, Tweede Kamer, 10de vergadering, November 21, 1901, 106 (available at www.statengeneraal.digitaal.nl). Idenburg’s reference to the DEI gaining “greater independence” uses the same two words Kuyper used in laying out his party’s colonial policy in *Ons Program*, 328 (ET: Kuyper, *Our Program*, 301).
12. *Handelingen der Tweede Kamer*, 1851–1852, 457.
13. Kuyper’s ideas on the work of missionaries are outlined in Heslam, “Guardianship.”
14. See P. S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998).
15. See, for example, Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (London: Little, Brown, 2020); Robert Calderisi, *Earthly Mission: The Catholic Church and World Development* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World: How the Bible Created the Soul of Western Civilization* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011); Melvyn Bragg, *The Book of Books: The Radical Impact of the King James Bible 1611–2011* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011); Nick Spencer, *Freedom and Order: History, Politics and the English Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011); Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004); Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
16. Examples include Robin Grier, “The Effect of Religion on Economic Development: A Cross National Study of 63 Former Colonies,” *Kyklos* 50, no. 1 (1997): 47–61; Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary, “Religion and Economic Growth across Countries,” *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 5 (2003): 760–81; *The Hidden Form of Capital: Spiritual Influences in Societal Progress*, ed. Peter Berger and Gordon Redding (London: Anthem Press, 2011); Peter S. Heslam, “Christianity and the Prospects for Development in the Global South,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, ed. Paul Oslington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 359–83; Katherine Marshall, “Faith, Religion, and International Development,” in Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook*, 384–400; Peter S. Heslam and Eric A. S. Wood, “Faith and Business Practice amongst Christian Entrepreneurs in Developing and Emerging Markets,” in *Koers—Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 79, no. 2 (2014): Art. 2131, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/koers.v79i2.2131>; Andrew Henley, “Is Religion Associated with Entrepreneurial Activity?” IZA Discussion

- Paper, no. 8111 (April 2014), <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8111.pdf>; A. Somu and V.S. Sujatha, “Spirituality and Its Impact on Economic Empowerment of Self-Help Group Members,” *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM)* 17, no. 4 (2015), 11–18; Peter S. Heslam, “The Rise of Religion and the Future of Capitalism,” *De Ethica* 2, no. 3 (2015): 53–72, <https://de-ethica.com/article/view/1757>; Mitchell J. Neubert et al., “The Role of Spiritual Capital in Innovation and Performance: Evidence from Developing Economies,” *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 41, no. 4 (2017): 621–40.
17. Cited in Brouwer, *De houding van Idenburg en Colijn*, 18.
 18. Idenburg’s perspective was shared by Kuyper, who wrote about the DEI soon after leaving office as Prime Minister that the relatively small number of Europeans, and the arrogance with which many of them operated, served to ensure that “The Javanese ... will not rise to any higher religion or morality than that of their native spirituality.” Abraham Kuyper, *Om de oude wereldzee*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Van Holkema & Warendorf, 1907–1908), 1:41. The translation cited in this footnote is from an abridged translation of this work, published as Abraham Kuyper, *On Islam*, ed. James D. Bratt with Douglas A. Howard (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2017), 40. On the global stage, Kuyper had no expectation that Christianity would vanquish Islam. In fact, he worried about the possibility of the reverse and was sobered by the effectiveness with which Islam had conquered regions of the world that were previously predominantly Christian. See Kuyper, *Om de oude wereldzee*, 2:43–51 (or idem, *On Islam*, 210–15). Although alert to the dangers of fanatical Islam, he reserved great admiration for the religious dedication and devotion of most Muslims, and for their belief that the sovereignty of God applied to every area of life, not just religion. This regard permeates *Om de oude wereldzee*, and he expresses it again in the opening section of his three-volume book *Pro Rege of het Koningschap van Christus*, 3 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1911–1912), 1:1–11. The English translation of this work is Abraham Kuyper, *Pro Rege: Living under Christ’s Kingship*, 3 vols. (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 3–13.
 19. *Handelingen van de Eerste en Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1901–1902*, Bijlage B, Begroting voor Nederlandsch-Indië voor 1901.
 20. They are discussed in two articles by Peter Heslam. See Peter S. Heslam “The Spirit of Enterprise: Abraham Kuyper and Common Grace in Business,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 7–20; Peter S. Heslam, “Calvinism in Business—an Enlightened Enterprise? Abraham Kuyper, Common Grace, and the Potential of Business,” in Abraham Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*, ed. Peter S. Heslam (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2020), xix–xl.
 21. Kuyper, *Our Program*, §250, 301.

22. Kuyper, *Our Program*, §250, 300–301. For several other examples of how Kuyper uses the Ten Commandments, and the reflections on them of the Heidelberg Catechism, see Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*.
23. Kuyper, *Our Program*, §39, 44.
24. For a summary and discussion of Kuyper’s idea of sphere sovereignty, see Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, 154–60.
25. Thomas Lindblad has pointed out that appropriate criteria to measure improvements are difficult to find. See J. Th. Lindblad, “The Late Colonial State and Economic Expansion, 1900–1930s,” in *The Emergence of a National Economy: An Economic History of Indonesia, 1800–2000*, ed. Howard Dick et al. (Crow’s Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 111–52, esp. 147.
26. See Heslam, “Spirit of Enterprise”; Heslam, “Calvinism in Business”; and Heslam, “Christianity and the Prospects for Development,” 359–83; Jan Evers and Stefanie Lahn, “Promoting Microfinance: Policy Measures Needed,” *Finance et bien commun* 25, no. 2 (2006): 47–53, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-finance-et-bien-commun-2006-2-page-47.htm>.
27. E. H. Kossmann, *The Low Countries 1780–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 412.
28. H. A. Idema, *Parlementaire geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië 1891–1918* (’s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1924), 139–40; S. L. van der Wal, “De Nederlandse expansie in Indonesië in de tijd van het modern imperialisme: de houding van de Nederlandse regering en de politieke partijen,” in *Bijdragen en Mededelingen over het Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 86 (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1971), 53; Heslam, “The Spirit of Enterprise”; Heslam, “Christianity and the Prospects for Development.”
29. See John S. Furnivall, *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 261.
30. See F. W. Stapel, *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Amsterdam, 1943), 321–22.
31. See Brouwer, *Houding van Idenburg*, 20; P. S. Heslam, “Prophet of a Third Way: The Shape of Kuyper’s Socio-Political Vision,” *Journal of Markets & Morality* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 11–33.
32. A. W. F. Idenburg, “Dr Kuyper en Indië: artikel ter gelegenheid van Kuypers tachtigste verjaardag” in *De Standaard*, October 29, 1917.
33. This new awareness reflects in part the impact of the work of, for example, Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Timothy Fort,

Business, Integrity, and Peace: Beyond Geopolitical and Disciplinary Boundaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

34. The historian George Puchinger writes that the issue of pacification “largely determined the Dutch approach to its colonies at this time.” See George Puchinger, *Colijn: Momenten uit zijn leven* (Kampen: Kok, 1960), 32.
35. C. Gerretson, *Verzamelde werken*, vol. 2, 1904–1931 (Baarn: Bosch & Keuning, 1927), 239.
36. Minderaa, “Politieke ontwikkeling,” 477.
37. Kossmann, *The Low Countries*, 406–12. It is true that the Governor-Generals Idenburg, W. Rooseboom, Van Heutsz, and H. Colijn were all former military commanders, though those that followed Colijn were more cautious in their use of force and operated with greater diplomacy.
38. Paul van ’t Veer, “De machthebbers van Indië,” in *Bijdragen en mededelingen*, vol. 86 (1971), 40–46 (45); Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten: Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische Archipel 1877–1942* (Utrecht: HES, 1981), 194; Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst van het moderne imperialisme. Koloniën en de buitenlandse politiek 1870–1902* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche Leeuw, 1985), 196; Koch, *Abraham Kuyper*, 461. See also the review of Koch’s biography by Peter S. Heslam, “Recensie van J. Koch, *Abraham Kuyper: Een biografie* (Amsterdam 2006),” *Documentatieblad voor de Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis na 1800* 29, no. 65 (November 2006): 69–71.
39. Michael Wintle, *An Economic and Social History of the Netherlands 1800–1920: Demographic, Economic, and Social Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 217. For anti-imperialist accounts, Wintle points to Ailsa Zainuddin, *A Short History of Indonesia* (Victoria: Cassell, 1975); Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
40. This holds true for the intensive and extensive correspondence Idenburg and Kuyper conducted over many years, the publication of which fills the six-hundred odd pages of De Bruijn and Puchinger, *Briefwisseling*.
41. Kuyper’s critiques of economic exploitation permeate the anthology of his writings published as Kuyper, *On Business and Economics*. Some of his many critiques of imperialism in his *Om de oude wereldzee* are based on his assessment that European imperialism had stoked the rise of pan-Islamism (see especially vol. 2, 41–51, or *Kuyper on Islam*, 206–16). In his exposition of colonial policy in *Our Program*, he argues forcefully that the relationship the Netherlands should have with the DEI is

neither one of exploitation, nor colonization, but guardianship (*voogdij*). See *Our Program*, §250, 300–301; and Heslam “Guardianship.”

42. C. Snouck Hurgronje, *De Atjèhers* (Batavia/Leiden: Landsdrukkerij/Brill, 1893–1894).
43. Snouck Hurgronje, *Atjèhers*; Puchinger, *Colijn*, 32. Snouck Hurgronje’s influence can be detected in Kuiper’s decision, after his cabinet was voted out of office in 1905, to make a ten-month-long trip around the Mediterranean Sea. One of his objectives in making this trip was to gain a better understanding of Islam. Echoing Snouck’s findings, he wrote in his one-thousand-page published travelogue *Om de oude wereldzee* about his concern for the rise of pan-Islamism in many countries, including the DEI. See *Om de oude wereldzee*, 2.36, 41–48 (or Kuiper, *On Islam*, 201, 206–11). Kuiper notes the worldwide regard in which Snouck Hurgronje is held in *Om de oude wereldzee*, 2.41 (Kuiper, *On Islam*, 206).
44. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 197.
45. In a review of Kuitenbrouwer’s *Nederland en de opkomst*, C. Fasseur argues that an exchange of ideas Idenburg conducted with DEI officials in 1902–1903 demonstrates that Idenburg was more nuanced in his belief in military solutions to the unrest in Aceh than is acknowledged by Kuitenbrouwer. Fasseur’s review is published in *Bijdrage en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 102 (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1987), 672–75. Nevertheless, the Professor of Law at the Free University and anti-revolutionary politician Pieter Diepenhorst (1879–1953) is typical in the support anti-revolutionary spokespeople gave for the military action against Aceh’s violent Islamicists. As a result of that action, he wrote, “legal certainty and security were promoted; hitherto unimagined opportunities for economic development were opened up; and stability and order were greatly advanced.” P. A. Diepenhorst, *Ons isolement: Practische toelichting van het program van beginselen der antirevolutionaire partij* (Kampen: Kok, 1935), 418.
46. Furnivall, *Netherlands India*, 235.
47. C. Fasseur, “Nederland en Nederlands-Indië 1795–1914,” in *Algemene geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 11 (Bussum: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1978), 348–72; Kossmann, *Low Countries*, 412.
48. Kuitenbrouwer, *Nederland en de opkomst*, 199. Idenburg was Minister of Colonial Affairs from 1908 to 1909, and Governor-General of the DEI from 1909 to 1916.
49. James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuiper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2013), 308–9.
50. See <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

51. This investigation, carried out by Idenburg, produced results so shocking to him that he blocked their full disclosure. See Janny de Jong, "Ethiek, voorgedij en militaire acties," in *Het Kabinet-Kuyper (1901–1905)*, ed. D. Th. Kuiper and G. J. Schutte (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001), 157–83, esp. 169–71.
52. W. P. Coolhaas "The Netherlands East Indies After 1795," *A Critical Survey of Studies on Dutch Colonial History* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1960), 78–121; De Jong, "Ethiek," 172–78; Locher-Scholten, 176–208; Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 16–20; Dick, 95–97; Jeroen Touwen, "The Economic History of Indonesia," in *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples (March 16, 2008), <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-indonesia/>; Jan Luiten van Zanden and Daan Marks, *An Economic History of Indonesia: 1800–2010* (London: Routledge, 2012), 85–102.
53. Kossmann, *Low Countries*, 412. See also Janny de Jong, *Van batig slot naar ertschuld: De discussie over financiële verhouding tussen Nederland en Indië en de hervorming van de Nederlandse koloniale politiek, 1860–1900* ('s-Gravenhage: SDU, 1989).
54. Alexander Idenburg to Dirk Fock, 1902. Cited in Brouwer, *De houding*, 20.