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Beyond the 'Trauma of Decolonisation': Dutch Cultural Diplomacy during the West New Guinea Question (1950–62)

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ABSTRACT

This article opens up new perspectives on the dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia about West New Guinea between 1950 and 1962. Conventional historiography describes this episode as the 'trauma of decolonisation', with Dutch policy-makers clinging on to the last bits of their overseas empire in Southeast Asia. This article shows that some of them also attempted to formulate new principles to convince world opinion that their country was making a break from traditional forms of colonialism. Referring to Article 73 of the United Nations' Charter, the Dutch government put the well-being of the local Papuan population at the centre of their policy and several key officials embarked on an international publicity campaign to propagate this policy. The imagery of this campaign was ambivalent in the sense that it showed both continuities and discontinuities with the colonial discourse, but nonetheless it appealed to various delegates in the United Nations, including some from newly independent nations in Africa. As such the following analysis of the international aspects of the Dutch policy on West New Guinea also contributes to the general debate on decolonisation by revealing its complex dynamics.

KEYWORDS

decolonisation; cultural diplomacy; United Nations; The Netherlands; West New Guinea

At first sight the New Guinea question (1950–62) seems a marginal event in the history of decolonisation. It was a dispute between the Netherlands and its former colony of Indonesia over the western part of the island of New Guinea, once part of the Dutch East Indies but kept out of the transfer of sovereignty to the post-colonial regime in December 1949. In the decade that followed the Indonesians adamantly claimed the territory while the Dutch stubbornly clung on to it, leading the two countries to the brink of war. In August 1962 the two sides, under the supervision of the United States, signed the New York Agreement in

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which the Dutch handed West New Guinea over to a temporary mission of the United Nations after which Indonesia assumed control on 1 May 1963. In exchange for the handover, the Dutch had insisted on the so-called 'act of free choice', in which the local Papuan population would be granted an opportunity to vote whether they wanted to be part of Indonesia. In 1969 the Indonesian authorities selected a limited number of electors to partake in the plebiscite. When they voted unanimously in favour of joining the rest of the archipelago, West New Guinea was internationally recognised as a province of Indonesia.

Considering this outcome, scholars often describe the resolve of the Dutch government to hold on to West New Guinea until 1962 as an unrealistic attempt to keep the last bit of empire in Southeast Asia, a futile effort doomed to fail in the age of decolonisation. The renowned political scientist Arend Lijphart set the tone in his thesis *The Trauma of Decolonization*, arguing that the Netherlands had no economic or strategic motives to keep West New Guinea. Instead, the government's policy was 'exclusively' caused by an emotional attachment to colonialism that derived from a sense of frustrated national pride after the loss of the Dutch East Indies.¹ This view has been extremely influential in the historiography on Dutch decolonisation, not least because of its title, which seems to capture the Netherlands' inability to come to terms with its colonial past.² Over the past decade, scholars have sought to revise Lijphart's thesis, however. Danilyn Rutherford notes that Lijphart's analysis focuses only on the fear of losing out, and argues that there was also direct continuity with colonial fantasies about the possibilities of turning New Guinea into a profitable dependency.³ P. J. Drooglever, the author of the most extensive history of the New Guinea question, also criticises Lijphart's work, arguing that, although it cannot be denied that the Dutch policy to some extent was based on resentment against the Indonesians, it partly derived from a genuine belief in the principle of Papuan self-determination.⁴

This article extends this revision further by placing the Dutch policy towards New Guinea between 1950 and 1962 in the international context of decolonisation. It argues that Dutch policy-makers tried to grapple with the new world order that emerged after the end of the large colonial empires not merely by looking back, as Lijphart argued, but also by looking forward. The primary sources reveal their ambivalent attitude towards the New Guinea question: while colonial principles lingered on in their ideas, they also tried to convince world opinion that Dutch tutelage over the Papuans constituted a clean break from traditional forms of colonialism. Theo Bot, the state secretary (*staatssecretaris*) for 'Dutch New Guinea' between 1959 and 1962, was a pivotal figure. Although Bot was a junior member of the Dutch Cabinet (as state secretary he was subordinate to the minister of domestic affairs), he was present at important meetings and from the primary sources it appears that his views on the New Guinea question, which were based on his previous experience with the dossier, were influential.

In addition to the contents of Bot's policy ideas about West New Guinea, this article considers his views on diplomatic strategies. In the current historiography

about Dutch policy-making on West New Guinea, much emphasis is put on the role of the minister of foreign affairs, Joseph Luns. He strove for a bilateral solution and did not shy away from threatening Indonesia with military violence, which led to controversies that have inspired several historians to focus on his person in their narratives about the New Guinea question.⁵ In contrast to the hard diplomatic line that Luns wanted to follow, Bot wanted a multilateral solution for the problem; he can also be seen as a protagonist of Dutch soft power as he prioritised cultural diplomacy to defend the position of the Dutch in West New Guinea. In the literature on international relations the concepts 'soft power' and 'cultural diplomacy' are mainly used to analyse US foreign policy, but they are also relevant to understanding Dutch policy-making in the age of decolonisation.⁶ Officials in small states, such as the Netherlands, did not have the resources to sustain a continual campaign to boost national prestige, and they focused on the dissemination of information about specific issues to generate support for their position. Considering the New Guinea question, Bot thought it imperative that the Dutch should make a real effort to modernise the Papuans in order to show the rest of the world, by means of an international publicity campaign, that the Netherlands was shedding its colonial feathers. After an introduction of the New Guinea question and the main features of Dutch policy, the following pages focus on Bot's efforts to influence world opinion. Although the archives of his department from the period have not yet been fully released, the papers of the Department of Foreign Affairs allow for a reconstruction of a Dutch diplomatic charm offensive in 1961 and 1962.

The sources available make clear the importance of the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) as a forum for the Dutch. This renders the New Guinea question relevant for the wider historiography on decolonisation. At its foundation in 1945 the UN could be seen as an instrument of Western powers, some of whom still had empires. By 1960, however, the General Assembly (the legislative body of the organisation) was dominated by the many newly independent nations of Asia and Africa who opposed colonialism. The rise of the anti-colonial movement in the UN had a tangible effect on several thorny decolonisation issues, particularly the Algerian War of independence. Matthew Connelly has shown that the Algerian FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) movement was successful in mustering support for its struggle against the French among member states of the UN, which contributed to their victory.⁷ But the rise of the anti-colonial movement in the UN was not as straightforward as seems at first sight, as Mark Mazower's recent portrait of the organisation in the turbulent late 1950s and early 1960s illustrates. Although he acknowledges that decolonisation was a game changer, Mazower insists that the transformation of the General Assembly was far from a clear-cut process. Instead, he describes an atmosphere of intense disarray as old and new powers tried to come to grips with the post-colonial world order.⁸

Dutch policy towards West New Guinea epitomised this confusion with civil servants and diplomats looking for new ways to convince world opinion that the Netherlands was making a clean break with its old empire. In this respect the New Guinea question became a test case for the Netherlands in formulating a new international role for itself in a world without colonialism. While it cannot be denied that certain colonial ideas remained influential, there was far more discontinuity than Lijphart has argued. The international charm offensive of 1961–62 shows that the Dutch actively tried to strengthen the ties with newly independent countries and often did so with considerable success. Although the settlement with Indonesia over West New Guinea can be seen as a defeat for the Netherlands, the Dutch arguments about Papuan self-determination influenced several UN diplomats, particularly from African countries. As such, this case study of the New Guinea question reveals that decolonisation not only caused trauma among Dutch policy-makers, it also provided important opportunities.

The New Guinea Crisis

The New Guinea question had its roots in the decolonisation agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia in 1949. During the so-called Round Table Conference (RTC) that preceded the transfer of sovereignty, the Dutch delegation refused to hand over West New Guinea to the new regime. Historians have advanced several explanations for this move, the personal animosities between Dutch statesmen and the Indonesian leaders following the violent decolonisation conflict between 1945 and 1949 prominent among them. Moreover, by clinging on to their last bit of empire in the East, Dutch politicians hoped to keep up national prestige, echoing the old colonial fear that the Netherlands would descend to the ‘rank of Denmark’ in international politics if the Indies were ‘lost’.⁹ In the following years, the main proponent of this sentiment was Joseph Luns, the influential minister of foreign affairs, who intensely disliked President Sukarno.¹⁰ In the first half of the 1950s Luns was not alone in carrying such resentment, as is shown by the many Dutch newspaper articles that demonised the Indonesian head of state.¹¹

Another motive for the Dutch retention of West New Guinea was the idea that the territory could be turned into a prosperous settler colony. In the late 1940s negotiators were influenced by propagandists from right-wing pressure groups who had already been arguing for the colonisation of the island in the 1930s.¹² One publication portrayed West New Guinea as ‘forgotten earth’—a mysterious wilderness waiting to be explored and exploited.¹³ Pressure groups promoting Dutch settlement in New Guinea used these prospects to propagate their goals. Initially their main target was the Eurasian population in Indonesia, who feared for their future under the Indonesian regime and for whom West New Guinea was to provide a safe haven. After a few years it became clear that migration remained low, which spelled the end of the project in 1952.¹⁴

In addition to these motives, the Dutch government formulated arguments against the Indonesian claims to West New Guinea that emphasised the well-being of the Papuans. In 1950 a bilateral committee consisting of Dutch and Indonesian delegates examined the dispute to find a solution. Meetings, however, revealed such fundamentally divergent views that even the publication of a joint report proved impossible; instead, the two sides set out their own arguments in separate volumes.¹⁵ The main bone of contention was the question of whether West New Guinea belonged to the Indonesian nation-state or not. The Indonesians argued that the territory was historically part of Greater Indonesia as a tributary of the Sultanate of Ternate. Moreover, they insisted, the territory had been part of the colonial state of which the Indonesian republic was the successor—without it the postcolonial state would be incomplete.¹⁶ In contrast, the Dutch delegation argued that the Papuans of West New Guinea were fundamentally different from the other populations of the Indonesian archipelago and thus did not belong to the postcolonial nation-state. If the Indonesians took over, it was argued, Western colonialism would merely be replaced by Eastern colonialism. In the view of the Dutch, they themselves were best suited to develop this isolated part of the world and lead the Papuans to modernity and, eventually, self-determination.¹⁷

These opposing views on the nature of the postcolonial nation-state in the Indonesian archipelago led to a breakdown of relations between the Netherlands and Indonesia, in 1949 still tied by a political union. This was no sudden event, but the result of a gradual process of escalation.¹⁸ The 1950 joint committee was followed by several attempts to resolve the New Guinea question bilaterally, but these also failed. In 1956 the Indonesian government unilaterally abandoned the RTC treaty, formally ending the union that in practice had already become a dead letter. After that, tensions mounted further, with the authorities in Jakarta announcing that Dutch companies were to be nationalised and that Dutch expatriates were to return to the Netherlands in 1957. Both sides made little effort to come to a mutual agreement over West New Guinea and in 1960 the Indonesian government broke off all official ties with the Netherlands. The diplomatic freeze was accompanied by rattling sabres as the Indonesians prepared an army of invasion to take West New Guinea by force. The Dutch responded by sending troops and their only aircraft carrier to the island to display their resolve to defend the outpost.¹⁹ By early 1962 the two countries were on the brink of war, and skirmishes claimed the lives of dozens of soldiers on both sides.

The deadlock in bilateral relations did not lead to a complete standstill on the diplomatic front, however. The General Assembly of the United Nations was an important forum where both countries tried to convince the international community of their views on the New Guinea question. During the decolonisation war of 1945–49, Indonesian diplomats had already lobbied actively for their cause in the UN, which on several occasions intervened to stop Dutch military actions in the archipelago.²⁰ After the formal recognition of the Indonesian

republic the country was a leading force in the anti-colonial movement, which became increasingly influential during the 1950s as many newly independent countries joined the UN's ranks. In 1955 President Sukarno hosted the First Asian-African Conference in Bandung that brought together delegates from former colonies and organisations that struggled for independence. One of the conference's priorities was the abolition of all forms of colonialism and the closing 'declaration on the promotion of world peace and co-operation' stressed the importance of self-determination, referring to the UN Charter. In addition, the delegates at the conference expressed their support for Indonesia in its dispute with the Netherlands over West New Guinea.²¹

In line with the Bandung declaration, Indonesia submitted four resolutions concerning West New Guinea to the General Assembly of the UN between 1954 and 1957, calling for direct talks to discuss the handover of the territory in order to complete the archipelago's decolonisation.²² Although active lobbying by the Dutch delegation meant that these resolutions failed to get the required two-thirds majority, the anti-colonial movement in the assembly continued to grow stronger. In 1956 the UN counted 80 members, six years later this number was 110 and the new members were mostly countries from Asia and Africa that had shaken off the colonial yoke.²³ A poignant illustration of this transformation was resolution 1514, which the Soviet Union submitted to the General Assembly in 1960, which drew heavily on the declaration of Bandung and called for the direct liquidation of all remnants of colonial empires in the world. Although Western European countries and the United States abstained from voting, resolution 1514 was adopted, a sign of the Western bloc's waning power in the General Assembly.²⁴

These developments worried Dutch policy-makers. A report by the department of Foreign Affairs described the Bandung conference as 'the "*prise de conscience*" of politicians who represent 1400 million people—more than half of the world's population'.²⁵ More urgent was the danger that that anti-Dutch sentiment over the New Guinea question would get a majority in the General Assembly if the new member states of the UN were properly co-ordinated. But these fears were already tempered in 1956 when diplomats reported that the Asian-African bloc did not constitute a solid unit, which undermined the position of Indonesia in the New Guinea question. In fact the accelerating decolonisation of Africa offered opportunities for the Dutch to keep the Papuans under their tutelage. In the context of decolonisation, the policy of the Netherlands on West New Guinea evolved as the Dutch tried to prove to the international community that they had made a clean break with the colonial age.

The Evolution of Dutch Policy on West New Guinea

In the 1950s a myriad of Dutch bureaucrats were involved in the formulation of the West New Guinea policy as it touched upon many different policy areas.

Economic Affairs and Finances took care of the development programme, while Defence was called in when the military threat of Indonesia grew and troops were stationed on the island. The international repercussions of the conflict with Indonesia brought in the Department of Foreign Affairs. Finally, the administration of West New Guinea was in the hands of the Department of Colonies and its successors. In order to mark the breach with the colonial age, a number of bureaucratic reforms took place in the course of the 1950s. Following the official handover of sovereignty to the new Indonesian regime on 27 December 1949, the Department of Colonies (*ministerie van Koloniën*) was renamed the Department of Overseas Parts of the Realm (*ministerie van Overzeese Rijksdelen*).²⁶ In 1957 the department received another name, Department of Overseas Affairs (*ministerie van Overzeese Zaken*), before, in 1959, the administration in West New Guinea was placed under the Department of Domestic Affairs (*ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken*) with a state secretary (*staatssecretaris*) responsible for its conduct.

Despite the bureaucratic fragmentations, several clear principles emerged that constituted the basis for the Dutch policy towards New Guinea. From the very start of the dispute, the Dutch government argued that its tutelage over the territory was in accordance with the UN Charter. Official documents continually referred to Article 73, which states that member states that rule 'non-self-governing territories ... recognize the interest of the local population are paramount' and promote their advancement and self-government.²⁷ Section E states that countries to which the article applies are obliged to send an annual report to a committee of the UN's General Assembly. The Netherlands took this opportunity to show the world that it was meeting these requirements and its authority over West New Guinea thus could not be considered to be a traditional form of colonial rule. This line of argument became increasingly dominant among Dutch policy-makers and diplomats when it became clear, after 1952, that the colonisation plans had failed.²⁸

Another significant development in policy-making towards West New Guinea occurred in the early 1950s. The Dutch members of the bilateral New Guinea Committee had, in 1950, invoked racial arguments to argue that the Papuans differed from other populations in the Indonesian archipelago, referring to the work of the physical anthropologists from the colonial period, who argued that the 'negroid' Papuans belonged to a different race than the 'mongoloid' Indonesians.²⁹ This line of argument became acutely problematic after 1951 when UNESCO published its first report on race in which scientists argued it to be a 'social myth' and not a biological phenomenon.³⁰ Soon after the publication of this report, Dutch policy-makers noted that it strongly influenced members of the committee supervising Article 73 and concluded that the race argument should be avoided in future publications about West New Guinea as it could be interpreted by the international community as a form of discrimination.³¹

As it happened, the Dutch report from 1950 contained another argument for keeping West New Guinea apart from Indonesia. It argued that the peripheral location of island, in between Asia and Australasia, meant that the Papuans had been completely isolated from the rest of humankind and devoid of any form of civilisation up until the advent of colonial rule. Even then, it stressed, modernity had barely penetrated the region as there had been little interest in this outpost. Only after the Second World War had the colonial authorities begun structural efforts to develop the Papuans. This was a delicate task as modern life could easily disrupt the social fabric of the tribes.³² The Dutch delegates emphasised that the development of the disputed territory would be a long-term project without any guarantee of success, but concluded that the Netherlands was the only country that could really meet the requirements of Article 73 of the UN Charter.³³

This idea became the cornerstone of the Dutch New Guinea policy set out by an interdepartmental committee in 1953. Its report stated that the Netherlands should be proactive in its efforts to convince the international community of the legitimacy of its tutelage over the Papuans as 'it is a great step from the theory of the UN to the reality of New Guinea'. People not acquainted with the country would find it hard to imagine the 'primitive' lifestyle of the Papuans, the document insisted, stressing that Dutch diplomats and officials should therefore provide the UN with 'a clear image ... of that primitiveness' so that member-states would understand that modernisation of the land would inevitably prove a long-term project.³⁴ In that sense the committee noted that the situation in West New Guinea was not comparable with that in Indonesia, which was inhabited by people with an 'old civilisation'. The island was more similar to Africa in respect to the 'backwardness and structure of the land and the people, the large distances, the limited labour reservoir, etc.'³⁵ By framing the New Guinea question within this developmental discourse, Dutch policymakers aimed to generate support for their cause in the international community as the belief that African peoples were not yet ready for complete self-government was widespread in the early 1950s, even among nationalist elites who campaigned for the end of traditional forms of colonial rule on the continent. The Senegalese intellectual Léopold Sédar Senghor, for example, thought that the colonies in French Africa were too 'poorly equipped' to handle immediate and complete independence, which was one of the reasons why he argued for a federation with France at the time.³⁶

To conclude this section, the policy of the Dutch government on West New Guinea evolved in an ambivalent fashion in the early 1950s. On the one hand, there was a shift from terms that could be associated with the old colonial regime, racial categories particularly were to be avoided, and the new policy was framed in terms of modernisation theory and development aid. Yet the policy also retained previous arguments for holding on to West New Guinea as government officials continued to assert that the Papuans fundamentally

differed from the other populations in the archipelago. In this respect it is noticeable that the inhabitants of New Guinea were put on a par with peoples from Africa. The official argument was that they shared the same problems considering their underdeveloped state, but this idea also echoed racial stereotypes of Africans and Papuans on account of their physical features. This imagery remained strong in Dutch policy-making circles and in the early 1960s it featured in an international publicity campaign to rally support for Dutch policy on West New Guinea.

Bot's Diplomatic Charm Offensive

Although there was consensus between the different Dutch departments over the fact that the West New Guinea policy should be aimed at development in compliance with UN Article 73, different opinions circulated as to how to present this policy to the international community. Luns became minister of foreign affairs in 1952, a post he would hold continuously until 1971 as one of the most influential Dutch statesmen of the period. He set out an aggressive line against Indonesia and on several occasions in the 1950s he stubbornly opposed the Indonesians, greatly harming the relations between the two countries.³⁷ In Luns's *Realpolitik* initially there was little consideration for the UN and he saw every form of internationalisation as a genuflection to Sukarno; instead, he devoted his energy to mobilising the Western bloc to fend off Indonesia.³⁸ Luns set his hopes on support from the United States, managing to obtain a written statement by John Foster Dulles in October 1958 in which the US secretary of state promised support to the Netherlands in case of an Indonesian invasion of New Guinea. Although it is unlikely that the Americans at the time were really prepared to intervene on a large scale, Luns used this 'scrap of paper' to convince his colleagues in the Cabinet of an assertive policy towards Indonesia as the US would back up the Dutch.³⁹ However, doubts about this line of policy grew among policy-makers as it seemed increasingly uncertain that the Americans would really intervene—particularly after the inauguration of the Kennedy administration that openly tried to win favour with the Indonesians.

In March of 1959 a new Cabinet took office and Theo Bot became state secretary for 'Dutch New Guinea', because he had intimate knowledge of the dossier. After his education at the Faculty of Indology at the University of Utrecht, Bot became a colonial administrator in Java in the 1930s. After the Second World War he repatriated to the Netherlands, worked at the Department of Overseas Affairs and its successors and was closely involved in the decolonisation of Indonesia and its aftermath. Drawing from wide experience in Dutch-Indonesian relations, he proposed an alternative line of policy to Luns's *Realpolitik*. Bot wanted to focus on internationalisation in order to find a multilateral solution of the New Guinea question and to mobilise support for the Dutch

position through the international media. As early as 1950 he had published an article arguing that the issue transcended Dutch-Indonesian bilateral relations and needed to be seen in the 'global context' of decolonisation.⁴⁰ Instead of shunning the UN, Bot proposed a proactive stance to persuade the General Assembly that the Netherlands was meeting the requirements of Article 73. In his eyes, this would nullify Indonesia's claims to West New Guinea, showing that the Dutch made a clean break with old forms of colonialism and were sincerely working to develop the Papuans and prepare them for self-determination. Crucially, Bot argued that Dutch legitimacy over the disputed territory depended on the success of the development project.⁴¹

When Bot assumed his post as state secretary he energetically set out to put these ideas into practice. On 29 March 1960 he presented a memorandum on the development of West New Guinea to the Cabinet. In order to give credibility to Dutch 'anti-colonial objectives' he proposed to implement a programme that would lead to Papuan self-determination within ten years—the first time that an official set a deadline for the Dutch civilising mission in West New Guinea.⁴² Moreover, the budget for the development programme was significantly enlarged: in 1950 the Dutch government annually spent fl. 15 million in West New Guinea, a sum that rose to more than fl. 91 million by 1961.⁴³ In this way, it tried to convince the world that it was serious about its intentions to lead the Papuans into modernity. Bot's policy was a mixture of reform and public relations and the American assistant secretary of state, Harlan Cleveland, appropriately characterised his plans as 'partly substantial, partly semantic'.⁴⁴

Bot focused on two priorities. The first was democratisation so that the Papuans could start practising to exercise their own sovereignty. Together with Governor-General P. J. Platteel, Bot organised the inauguration of the so-called New Guinea Council, a central representative body for all Papuans under Dutch rule. This body resembled the *Volksraad* (People's Council), a proto-parliament that was founded in the Dutch East Indies in 1918. In line with colonial policies, Bot's effort was quite prudent as he and other officials feared that the Papuans would not be able to handle full political responsibility and could even embarrass the Netherlands. The Council received merely advisory powers and was chaired by a Dutch administrator who set the agenda. Moreover, voting rights were limited to ensure that only able individuals would be chosen (or appointed).⁴⁵ Nonetheless the New Guinea Council was presented to the world as an important step towards democracy. The first elections were held in the early months of 1961 and on 5 April the inauguration of the New Guinea Council took place. The Dutch government invited a host of dignitaries from different countries to be present at this event, attempting to boost the international status of the proto-parliament. There was a major setback when the United States, which initially had promised to be present, withdrew at the last moment after Indonesian pressure. But that did not diminish Dutch efforts to inform world opinion about the New Guinea question—quite the contrary.

This fitted Bot's second priority, which was to enlarge international support for the Netherlands in the task of developing West New Guinea through a publicity campaign. Foreign researchers, journalists and film-makers were invited to New Guinea to record both the primitive lifestyle of the Papuans, who were systematically portrayed in global media as 'Stone Age people', and the Dutch efforts to develop the island. Moving images were deemed the most effective medium. In 1959 a study group chaired by the director of the ethnographical museum in Leiden, A. A. Gerbrands, reported that there was a lack of good footage of the Papuans. Gerbrands recommended inviting prominent anthropologists to shoot footage that, with proper editing, could be used in films to popularise the official Dutch view on the New Guinea question.⁴⁶ In the years that followed several well-known documentaries were shot in West New Guinea with material and logistic support from the Dutch authorities, including *La ciel et la boue* by Pierre-Dominique Gisseau (France), *From Stone Age to Atom Age* by Roger Blais (Canada) and *Dead Birds* by Robert Gardner (USA). In return for its support, the Dutch government was allowed to use parts of these films for public relation purposes.⁴⁷

In line with these efforts, Bot turned the inauguration of the New Guinea Council into a media event. In January 1961 a taskforce, composed of civil servants from the Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Domestic Affairs Departments, was founded to co-ordinate the generously funded publicity campaign.⁴⁸ Representatives of most Dutch national daily newspapers were present, as well as those from big international press agencies and several Australian and US newspapers, including the *New York Times*. The Dutch authorities paid for their travel expenses to Hollandia, at the time the capital of West New Guinea, and rented a ship as a floating hotel because there were not enough rooms ashore.⁴⁹

Television crews were an even bigger priority, with officials from the government's information service (*Rijksvoorlichtingdienst*) noting that it was important to select an international broadcasting station with a good distribution network that was willing to give a positive image of the Dutch presence in West New Guinea.⁵⁰ In February 1961 an agreement was reached with Adrian Cowell from the British company ITV. Cowell had already made a short film about West New Guinea, which presented a 'friendly' image of the Dutch regime and he was welcomed back to make a 25-minute 'roving report' on the 'task of the Dutch in New Guinea'. Broadcasted in Britain late April 1961, this documentary contained extensive footage of the installation of the New Guinea Council as a symbol of the development of the Papuans. The Dutch government fully funded the project and owned full rights of the footage, meaning that it could show it freely and diplomats received copies they could show to foreign audiences.⁵¹ Cowell took care of the commercial distribution and sold his film to about 50 broadcasting stations across the globe.⁵²

The reactions of Dutch policy-makers to the inauguration of the New Guinea Council were mixed. Reporting from the scene, Bot wrote that the event had been

'splendid'. He was particularly pleased with the performance of four Papuan council members, who had impressed the delegates with their eloquence. In their speeches they praised the Dutch administration and explicitly stated that, contrary to Indonesian accusations, it could not be seen as 'colonial' as it truly worked towards Papuan self-determination.⁵³ Following these statements, Bot allowed the members of the New Guinea Council to freely express their ideas on self-determination and the members made good use of this opportunity in the months that followed. Several scholars working on New Guinea have pointed out that this period was crucial for the development of the Papuan nationalist movement and they see the presentation of the Papuan flag, on 1 December 1961, as a galvanising moment.⁵⁴ In addition, Bot and Platteel arranged diplomatic passports for several Papuan leaders, allowing them to travel to around the world to lobby for their cause, as 'ambassadors of a nascent nation'.⁵⁵

Luns and his staff at the Department of Foreign Affairs, however, were quite sceptical about Bot's charm offensive. In January 1961 a civil servant from the department's information service criticised the grand plans for the media coverage of the Council's inauguration, noting that his superiors had 'second thoughts' about the desirability of inviting so many foreign journalists as it could not be guaranteed that all of these people would write favourably about the prospects for development.⁵⁶ The Department of Foreign Affairs expressed doubts about the plans for a New Guinea film on similar grounds.⁵⁷ Luns himself also was concerned about the Papuan diplomats, as he feared that they would be difficult to control and might harm the reputation of the Netherlands with undiplomatic statements on sensitive issues. Luns asked Bot to invite a delegation of New Guinea Council members for dinner and make them aware of the 'pressure of the international situation'.⁵⁸

Luns's department, however, lost influence during the early 1960s as Prime Minister J. E. de Quay publicly supported Bot's efforts to find a multilateral solution to the New Guinea question. On 3 September 1960 the prime minister hosted a cocktail party for the international press during which he told reporters that he was considering internationalising the New Guinea question, a remark that was instantly published by major press agencies. De Quay quickly declared that he had just 'mused' a bit and stressed that his words did not reflect official policy, but the idea had irrevocably been put on the political agenda.⁵⁹ Luns, who was in New York to attend the General Assembly of the UN at the time, was not happy with this development as it undermined his own policy line. Nonetheless, a year later he officially launched a plan at the UN to find a multilateral solution for the New Guinea question.

The Dutch UN Campaign, 1961–62

In June 1961 the Cabinet discussed a secret memorandum on West New Guinea policy written by Bot. He noted that the positive reactions to the New Guinea

Council's inauguration should not lead to complacency. On the contrary, the Dutch should use the momentum to convince the international community of their cause with a diplomatic offensive. According to Bot, the time had come to submit to the UN's General Assembly a plan for a multilateral 'development authority' that would supervise the Dutch work in West New Guinea. In exchange for this 'international "consortium" ... (which thus excludes every thought of "imperialism" or "colonialism" on part of the Netherlands)' the Dutch would demand 'some sort of a political moratorium' from the UN, which would neutralise Indonesian demands for a handover.⁶⁰ The Cabinet approved the proposal and Luns prepared an address to the 16th meeting of the General Assembly of the UN along these lines.

On 26 September Luns delivered his speech in which he stated that the Dutch were prepared to transfer their 'present powers' in West New Guinea to 'an organization or an international authority established by and operated under the United Nations, which would be vested with the executive powers and could gradually take over tasks and responsibilities' to modernise the territory. The Netherlands offered to continue to provide 30 million dollars annually to finance the development project.⁶¹ On 9 October the Dutch delegation submitted a resolution along these lines to the General Assembly. The Indonesians immediately opposed the plan, claiming that Papuan self-determination would harm the territorial integrity of their country and in early November India, a prominent member of the Asian-African bloc, proposed a counter-resolution calling for a bilateral solution between the Netherlands and Indonesia, without even mentioning the cause of the Papuans.⁶²

Initially, the Dutch delegation received positive reactions from various members of the Asian-African bloc, but it soon became clear that Indonesia was putting pressure on these countries not to support the Dutch resolution. In the General Assembly the representative from Pakistan praised Luns's plan as 'an example for the decolonisation of other areas', but stressed that the Dutch-Indonesian conflict over the matter prevented his country from supporting the proposal.⁶³ Behind the scenes the Ghanaian representative said he thought the plan was 'excellent' but that he could not vote in favour of it as the territorial integrity of Indonesia was involved.⁶⁴ Iran also expressed its sympathy for the plan, but said it could not guarantee support as a member of the Asian-African bloc.⁶⁵ As had happened previously, Dutch-Indonesian antagonism continued to have a paralysing effect on diplomacy. In the course of November it became clear that neither the Dutch nor the Indian resolution would get the required two-thirds majority, at which point a group of African nations took the initiative to break the diplomatic stalemate in an effort to forward the cause of Papuan self-determination.

By 1960 most of the French colonies in Africa had become independent and joined the UN. In December 1960 and September 1961 12 of these countries met

in Brazzaville and Tananarive and formed the African and Malagasy Union, also known as the Brazzaville group. Its members fostered a special relationship with their former coloniser, France, thereby taking a different stance than the countries that had been present at the Bandung conference.⁶⁶ In fact, the members of the Brazzaville group openly criticised members of the Asian-African bloc on certain points. The declaration of Tananarive stated that all peoples in the world had the right to self-determination, 'without any regard to race, neighbourliness or history'. In this context, African diplomats explicitly referred to the cause of Papuan self-determination, implicitly dismissing the Indonesian claims to West New Guinea.⁶⁷ Several months later Senghor, who had been elected president of Senegal in September 1960, expressed his view on the matter in less diplomatic terms to the Dutch ambassador: 'we are not going to hand over Blacks to Semi-Yellows.'⁶⁸ These sentiments provided opportunities for Dutch diplomats to muster international support for their country's policy on West New Guinea.

In this respect, the address of Luns to the General Assembly on 26 September 1961 was well timed, coming barely two weeks after the declaration of Tananarive. In a reaction to Luns's speech the representative of Niger emphasised the rights of all peoples, including the Papuans, to self-determination, publicly complimenting the Dutch, whom he believed were actively working towards this goal.⁶⁹ On 2 November Luns met with representatives of the Brazzaville group who expressed their support for the Dutch resolution despite Indonesian attempts to change their minds.⁷⁰ When it became clear that a deadlock had been reached over the resolution, the Brazzaville group took the initiative to write a new text, proposing a compromise. It called for bilateral talks between Indonesia and the Netherlands to reach an agreement on the future on West New Guinea, but it did so 'without prejudice to respect for the will and self-determination of the peoples'. Moreover, it set the two parties a deadline, which favoured the Dutch position: if the two parties failed to make a deal before March 1962, the UN would install a committee that would examine whether the authority over the territory could be taken over by an international commission.⁷¹ Because the Brazzaville text implicitly referred to the principle of Papuan self-determination, the Dutch delegation withdrew its own resolution, but India's delegation did not. The Brazzaville resolution received more votes in the General Assembly than the Indian one, but its failure to attract a two-thirds majority nonetheless meant it was not adopted.

Initially, Dutch diplomats were satisfied with this outcome, even if no breakthrough had been achieved. They felt they had won a moral victory as the majority of world opinion had voted in favour of the Papuans' self-determination. But in the Netherlands the government lost support for its efforts to internationalise the New Guinea question. In parliament and in the press opinion-makers expressed increasing criticism of Dutch policy and called for the restoration of the ties with Indonesia. The United States, moreover, also

put increasing pressure on the two countries to solve the New Guinea question quickly. In January 1962 Prime Minister De Quay stated that his government was prepared to start talks with the Indonesians without preconditions, meaning that the self-determination of Papuans had become a point open for negotiation. Secret talks between Dutch and Indonesian diplomats began a few months later under American guidance in a secluded estate near Washington DC. In light of this development, historians generally consider the diplomatic campaign of the autumn of 1961 as an insignificant intermezzo, describing the plan Luns launched in the UN as 'naïve' or a 'last resort' that was doomed to fail.⁷² Sources indicate, however, that the Dutch international charm offensive in fact continued after November 1961.

In February 1962 Bot sent a confidential letter to a senior official at the Department of Foreign Affairs in which he recommended that the Brazzaville countries should be involved in the solution of the New Guinea question as much as possible. Bot wanted to persuade African countries to state that 'they consider it unacceptable that (Asiatic) Indonesia would get the sovereignty over a territory with a negroid population straight away' and that article 73 territories should 'receive independence as soon as possible in accordance with the wishes of the local population'. Such statements would strengthen the Dutch position at the negotiating table, Bot argued. In order to achieve this, he proposed inviting African UN delegates on a goodwill mission to West New Guinea.⁷³ Nine diplomats received an invitation, among whom were several from Brazzaville countries. The Indonesians instantly put pressure on the countries involved not to accept the Dutch invitation and as a result, despite positive informal reactions, most invitees declined. Still, Luns ordered that the goodwill mission should go ahead, as cancellation could be interpreted as a Dutch defeat.⁷⁴ The result was that in April 1962 two delegates arrived in West New Guinea: F. F. Guirma of Upper-Volta and M. L. Zollner of Dahomey.

On arrival, Guirma and Zollner received a dossier from the Dutch authorities outlining the schedule of their visit. In line with previous publicity, this dossier contained material showing both the primitive lifestyle of the Papuans and Dutch efforts to modernise them. Accompanying photos included one of a ritual dance, emphasising the age-old traditions of the Papuans, but also one of the presentation of the Papuans' national flag by members of the New Guinea Council as a sign of their political emancipation.⁷⁵ Scheduled events reflected the same imagery, showing the commitment of the Dutch to lead West New Guinea to self-determination. Everywhere, the African delegates were welcomed by Papuans, some of whom performed traditional dances while others demonstrated their political savvy with signs and banners stating their wish for self-determination and their dislike of the Sukarno regime.

According to the Dutch diplomat who accompanied Guirma and Zollner, these occasions had a marked effect on the two African delegates. On arrival

they professed scepticism about Dutch rule in West New Guinea, but during various meetings with Papuans Guirma and Zollner became convinced that there was a clear 'national consciousness' among them that was stimulated by the Dutch. In addition, they saw great similarities between New Guinea and Africa, with respect to the landscape and the peoples.⁷⁶ After returning to UN headquarters in New York, Guirma expressed these views during a 90-minute press conference attended by 100 journalists. He stated that 'it is a fact that the Papuans are negroid' and dismissed Indonesian claims to West New Guinea as 'artificial'. He told the audience that he wanted self-determination for the Papuans, but that it was not a realistic short-term goal considering that 'the population is still living in the stone age'. Echoing the plan that Luns had proposed the previous September he thought that the disputed territory should be handed over to a UN mission that could oversee Papuan development. In response to a question from a representative of the 'negro press in America' about why he 'defended a colonial power', Guirma denied the suggestion that he had 'and stressed the point that he believes in total de-colonization but he also believes in a bit of good-will to settle a dispute'.⁷⁷

Conclusion

These remarkable statements, which in fact supported the Dutch policy towards West New Guinea, failed to have much political effect. In June 1962, a Dutch diplomat reported that he did not expect that the sympathy of African statesmen for the Papuan cause would influence the negotiations between the Dutch and the Indonesians.⁷⁸ His assessment was soon confirmed when a deal was reached on the future of West New Guinea, which saw the principle of Papuan self-determination sacrificed, with no guarantees that the people of West New Guinea would be able to vote on this matter freely. Looked at from this perspective, as many historians writing about the New Guinea question have done, the Dutch internationalisation plans and the cultural diplomacy that accompanied them seem rather insignificant. Looked at through the prism of Lijphart's 'trauma of decolonisation' paradigm, the Indonesians outwitted the Dutch with a solid display of *Realpolitik* as they had the international tide on their side with the rise of the anti-colonial movement. Instead of looking at the outcome, however, this article has put the Dutch West New Guinea policy in a broader international context of decolonisation, which has yielded new perspectives on this topic.

The pages above argue that not all Dutch policy-makers simply looked back during the New Guinea crisis with the aim of clinging on to the Netherlands' status as a colonial power. On the contrary, Bot explicitly wanted to break with the colonial period and sought new sources of legitimacy for Dutch overseas involvement. To be sure, his new ideas about West New Guinea showed continuities with the old in their insistence that the inhabitants of the island

differed from other populations in the Indonesian archipelago. But, as Drooglever has aptly pointed out, Bot and several other Dutch policy-makers also supported the principle of Papuan self-determination. In order to promote this cause, they embarked on an international publicity campaign and, although the charm offensive did not have much effect on the negotiations between the Netherlands and Indonesia in 1962, it had an impact on relations with newly independent countries in Africa, several of which openly supported the Dutch position in the New Guinea question. Dutch policy-makers and diplomats realised that decolonisation was not merely a threat to the international position of the Netherlands but that it also offered opportunities. Many of the arguments raised during the New Guinea question became central to the new policy area of development aid, which flourished during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, many people who had been involved in the New Guinea question joined the Department of Development Aid that was founded in 1965. Bot became its first minister.⁷⁹

Considering the New Guinea question in the international context of decolonisation also yields an insight that is relevant for the wider historiography on this topic. Bot's cultural diplomacy focused mainly on the UN's General Assembly, which he saw as an important forum to convince world opinion that the Netherlands was shedding its colonial feathers and that the Dutch were working towards Papuan self-determination. Dutch publicity on West New Guinea, invoking both racial stereotypes of Papuans and symbols of their political emancipation, was positively received and even reiterated in public by an African diplomat. This suggests that the rise of the anti-colonial movement in the UN was a far more complex process than many accounts have argued. Although Indonesia exerted much pressure on Asian-African countries not to vote in favour of the Dutch, it was not able to mobilise enough support for its own position either. The stance of the Brazzaville countries showed that newly independent nations did not operate as a solid bloc, something that Dutch diplomats sought to exploit. Such findings support Mazower's view on the UN around 1960, when member states, new and old, were looking for ways to deal with each other after the collapse of colonialism. Far from being a peripheral issue in world history, the New Guinea question touched upon the heart of the decolonisation process, which elicited a confusing search for principles that could shape an emerging new world order after the age of empire.

Notes

1. Lijphart, *The Trauma of Decolonization*, 9. The historian Hans Meijer is an outspoken supporter of Lijphart's view: Meijer, "Geschiedenis".
2. For a good discussion, see Locher-Scholten, 'Verwerking en koloniaal trauma', 3–9.
3. Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan*, 69–71.
4. Drooglever, *Een daad*, 147, 174.

5. Gase, *Misleiding of zelfbedrog*; Brouwer, 'De Nieuw-Guineakwestie'.
6. Nye, *Soft Power*; Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 'What Are', 3; cf. Chong, 'Small State'.
7. Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution*, 279–80.
8. Mazower, *Governing the World*, 258–72.
9. Baudet, 'Nederland en de rang'.
10. Kersten, *Luns*, 299.
11. Meijer, 'Images of Indonesia', 64–66.
12. Meek, 'Nieuw-Guinea als utopie'.
13. Eechoud, *Vergeten aarde*.
14. Meijer, 'Het uitverkoren land'.
15. For an overview of the proceedings, see *Rapport van de commissie Nieuw-Guinea*, vol. 1.
16. Saltford, *The Anatomy of Betrayal*, 8.
17. Lijphart, *The Trauma of Decolonization*, ch. 3.
18. This paragraph is based on Meijer, *Den Haag-Djakarta*.
19. Hellema, *De Karel*.
20. Doel, *Afscheid van Indië*, 379.
21. 'Final Communiqué', 8–9.
22. Webster, *Fire and Full Moon*, 105.
23. Drooglever, *Een daad*, 315.
24. Mazower, *Governing the World*, 263.
25. '[D]e "prise de conscience" van politici, die 1400 miljoen mensen—meer dan de helft van de wereldbevolking—vertegenwoordigen.' Quoted in Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking*, 41.
26. Up until 1953 the department also co-ordinated the union with Indonesia and was called Department of Union Affairs and Overseas Parts of the Realm (Ministerie van Uniezaken en Overzeese Rijksdelen). See 2.04.53.20, inv.nr. 52, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken: Sectie Statistische Archieven Overzeese Rijksdelen (SAOR), Nationaal Archief, Den Haag (hereafter NL-HaNA).
27. UN Charter, Article 73.
28. Drooglever, 'Een paar bedenkingen', 99.
29. *Rapport van de commissie Nieuw-Guinea*, vol. 2, 17–18. For the views of physical anthropologists on New Guinea during the interwar years, see Sysling, *The Archipelago of Difference*, 216–18, ch. 7.
30. Montagu, *Statement on Race*, 15.
31. *De toekomstige ontwikkeling*, 211–12.
32. *Rapport van de commissie Nieuw-Guinea*, vol. 2, 29–30.
33. *Ibid.*, 70.
34. 'Van de theorie van de Verenigde Naties naar de praktijk van Nieuw-Guinea is ... een grote stap'; 'duidelijk beeld ... van die primitiviteit'. *De Toekomstige ontwikkeling*, 18.
35. '[O]ude beschaving'; 'de achterlijkheid en de structuur van land en volk, door de grote afstanden, door het beperkte arbeidsreservoir'. *Ibid.*, 19.
36. Cooper, *Citizenship*, 189.
37. Drooglever, *Een daad*, 235–36.
38. Stol, 'De enige', 18–33.
39. In historiography there is controversy about Luns's intentions in this matter. Some argue that Luns knew that Dulles's promise was not solid and manipulated policy-making by lying about it. Others argue that Luns sincerely, although misguidedly, believed that the Americans would chose the side of the Netherlands in the conflict with Indonesia. Kersten, *Het vodje van Dulles*.

40. Bot, 'Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea', 7.
41. Ibid., 9.
42. '[A]nti-koloniale doelstellingen.' Bot, *Nota inzake doelstellingen*.
43. Schoorl, 'De controleur', 11.
44. Memorandum of a conversation between Theo Bot and Harlan Cleveland, 13 June 1961. Record Group 84, 3011, box 59, National Archives and Record Administration, Washington DC.
45. Drooglever, *Een daad*, 504–11, 725.
46. Report A.A. Gerbrands, 31 Dec. 1959. Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 14098, NL-HaNA,
47. For documents concerning these films, see Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 14089 and 14098, NL-HaNA.
48. A sum of fl. 286.000 was allocated to fund the publicity campaign. Memorandum, 27 Jan. 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 28004, NL-HaNA.
49. Memorandum, 15 March 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 15117, NL-HaNA.
50. Memorandum, 17 Jan. 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv. nr. 14097, NL-HaNA.
51. '[V]riendelijk'; 'de taak van de Nederlanders in Nieuw Guinea'. Memorandum about the negotiations between the Dutch officials and Cowell, Feb. 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 14097, NL-HaNA.
52. Report on distribution footage, Cowell, n.d., Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 14097, NL-HaNA.
53. '[V]oortreffelijk'. Codetelegram Th. Bot, 6 Apr. 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 15117, NL-HaNA.
54. Chauvel, *Constructing Papuan Nationalism*, 22–28; Rutherford, *Laughing at Leviathan*, 29, 92.
55. '[A]mbassadeurs van een land in wording.' Galen, *Ons laatste oorlogie*, 119–20, 182.
56. Memorandum, 3 Jan. 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv.nr. 15117, NL-HaNA.
57. Memorandum, 25 Jan. 1961, Buitenlandse Zaken/Code-Archief 55-64, 2.05.118, inv. nr. 14097, NL-HaNA.
58. '[D]e druk van de internationale situatie.' Quoted in Galen, *Ons laatste oorlogie*, 201.
59. Drooglever, *Een daad*, 384–85; Brouwer, 'De Nieuw-Guineakwestie', 173–74.
60. '[I]nternationaal "consortium" ... (hetgeen dus elke gedachte aan "imperialisme" of "kolonialisme" van Nederland uitsluit); 'een soort politiek moratorium'. Bot, 'Memorandum', 8.
61. *Uitgave Ministerie*, 73.
62. Ibid., 261.
63. Ibid., 10.
64. Memorandum by C. B. Barkman, 9 Nov. 1961, Permanent Vertegenwoordiger Verenigde Naties (hereafter PV VN), 2.05.273, inv.nr. 917, NL-HaNA.
65. Memorandum, De Voogd, 30 Oct. 1961, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 917, NL-HaNA.
66. Cooper, *Citizenship*.
67. '[S]ans aucune consideration de race, de voisinage n[i] d'histoire'. Excerpt, statement, UN ambassador, Niger, 10 Oct. 1961, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 955, NL-HaNA.
68. 'Nous n'allons pas livrer des Noirs à des Demi-Jaunes.' Letter, Dutch Ambassador in Dakar (A. De Roo van Alderwerelt) to Department of Foreign Affairs, 19 May 1962, Ambassade Senegal, 2.05.245, inv.nr. 177, NL-HaNA.

69. Excerpt, statement, UN ambassador, Niger, 10 Oct. 1961, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 955, NL-HaNA.
70. Memorandums of C. B. Barkman, 2 and 8 Nov. 1961, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 922, NL-HaNA.
71. *Uitgave Ministerie*, vol. 73, 262.
72. For 'naïve', see Drooglever, *Een daad*, 408; for 'last resort', see Meijer, *Den Haag-Djakarta*, 609.
73. '[Z]ij het onaanvaardbaar achten dat (het Aziatische) Indonesië zonder meer de soevereiniteit over een gebied met een negroïde bevolking zou verkrijgen ... zo spoedig mogelijk onafhankelijkheid verkrijgen in overeenstemming met de wensen van de lokale bevolking.' Memorandum, Th. Bot, 23 Feb. 1962, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 922, NL-HaNA.
74. Codetelegram, J. Luns to Dutch UN embassy, 21 March 1962, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 977, NL-HaNA.
75. The photographs can be found in PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 977, NL-HaNA.
76. Report, L. J. Goedhart, 16 Apr. 1962, PV VN, 2.05.273, inv.nr. 977, NL-HaNA.
77. Report of the press conference of Guirma, 7 May 1962, Ambassade Liberia, 2.05.205, NL-HaNA.
78. Report, K. R. Jonker, June 1962, 44, Ambassade Senegal, 2.05.245, inv.nr. 177, NL-HaNA.
79. M. Kuitenbrouwer, *De ontdekking*, 141–43.

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