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# Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development

Whereas the Indonesian economy progressed rapidly during the last three decades of the twentieth century and Indonesia became a self-reliant and assertive world power, the Congo regressed into a state of political chaos and endemic violence which continues until the present. To what extent do the different legacies of Dutch and Belgian colonial rule in Indonesia and the Congo explain these different development trajectories? The Netherlands Indies and the Belgian Congo rank among the most “exploited” cases of modern European imperialism. The atrocities committed under the forced cultivation system in Java and Leopold’s wild rubber scheme in the Congo have become synonymous with unscrupulous European greed. Can two systems of extractive institutions produce a distinctively different long-term legacy?

This book discusses the comparative legacy of colonial rule in the Netherlands Indies and the Belgian Congo during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from a wide range of social, political, economic, and institutional perspectives. The authors reveal notable contrasts in the development of the rural subsistence sector, the plantation economy (rubber), and the industrial sector. The book also discusses differences in labour relations, land tenure policies, and varying features of colonial state formation, such as the development of the fiscal system, the education system, and the direction of post-independence economic policies pursued under Suharto and Mobutu, two of the most callous dictators of the twentieth century.

The comparative approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of colonial institutional legacies in long-run patterns of economic divergence. It adds the thought-provoking cases of Dutch and Belgian rule to the existing literature comparing the evolution of the British, French, Spanish and Portuguese empires and complements the literature that seeks to understand the notable Africa–Asia divergence in the post-independence era.

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|  |  | 10 |
|  |  | 11 |
|  |  | 12 |
| <b>1 Economic Ideas and Government Policy</b>                            | <b>7 Production Efficiency in Domesday England, 1086</b>         | 13 |
| Contributions to contemporary economic history                           | <i>John McDonald</i>   | 14 |
| <i>Sir Alec Cairncross</i>   |  | 15 |
|  | <b>8 Free Trade and its Reception 1815–1960</b>                  | 16 |
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|  | Thirteen wasted years?   | 28 |
| <b>5 France and the International Economy</b>                            | <i>Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson</i>                           | 29 |
| From Vichy to the Treaty of Rome   |  | 30 |
| <i>Frances M.B. Lynch</i>  | <b>12 Pacific Centuries</b>                                      | 31 |
|  | Pacific and Pacific Rim economic history since the 16th century  | 32 |
| <b>6 Monetary Standards and Exchange Rates</b>                           | <i>Edited by Dennis O. Flynn, Lionel Frost and A.J.H. Latham</i> | 33 |
| <i>M.C. Marcuzzo, L. Officer and A. Rosselli</i>                         |  | 34 |
|  | <b>13 The Premodern Chinese Economy</b>                          | 35 |
|  | Structural equilibrium and capitalist sterility                  | 36 |
|  | <i>Gang Deng</i>   | 37 |
|  |  | 38 |
|  |  | 39 |
|  |  | 40 |
|  |  | 41 |
|  |  | 42 |
|  |  | 43 |
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32  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
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40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45
- 14 The Role of Banks in Monitoring Firms**  
The case of the *Crédit Mobilier*  
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<b>33 Economy and Economics of Ancient Greece</b> <i>Takeshi Amemiya</i>	<b>42 An Economic History of the American Steel Industry</b> <i>Robert P. Rogers</i>	5 6 7 8
<b>34 Social Capital, Trust and the Industrial Revolution 1780–1880</b> <i>David Sunderland</i>	<b>43 Ireland and the Industrial Revolution</b> The impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish industry and society, 1801–1922 <i>Andy Bielenberg</i>	9 10 11 12 13 14
<b>35 Pricing Theory, Financing of International Organisations and Monetary History</b> <i>Lawrence H. Officer</i>	<b>44 Intra-Asian Trade and Industrialization</b> Essays in memory of Yasukichi Yasuba <i>Edited by A.J.H. Latham and Heita Kawakatsu</i>	15 16 17 18 19 20 21
<b>36 Political Competition and Economic Regulation</b> <i>Edited by Peter Bernholz and Roland Vaubel</i>	<b>45 Nation, State and the Industrial Revolution</b> The visible hand <i>Lars Magnusson</i>	22 23 24 25 26
<b>37 Industrial Development in Postwar Japan</b> <i>Hirohisa Kohama</i>	<b>46 A Cultural History of Finance</b> <i>Irene Finel-Honigman</i>	27 28 29
<b>38 Reflections on the Cliometrics Revolution</b> Conversations with economic historians <i>Edited by John S. Lyons, Louis P. Cain, and Samuel H. Williamson</i>	<b>47 Managing Crises and De-globalisation</b> Nordic foreign trade and exchange 1919–1939 <i>Edited by Sven-Olof Olsson</i>	30 31 32 33 34 35
<b>39 Agriculture and Economic Development in Europe since 1870</b> <i>Edited by Pedro Lains and Vicente Pinilla</i>	<b>48 The International Tin Cartel</b> <i>John Hillman</i>	36 37 38
<b>40 Quantitative Economic History</b> The good of counting <i>Edited by Joshua Rosenbloom</i>	<b>49 The South Sea Bubble</b> <i>Helen J. Paul</i>	39 40 41
	<b>50 Ideas and Economic Crises in Britain from Attlee to Blair (1945–2005)</b> <i>Matthias Matthijs</i>	42 43 44 45





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44  
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- 51 Bengal Industries and the British Industrial Revolution (1757–1857)**  
*Indrajit Ray*
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- 64 Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development**  
The Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies compared  
*Edited by Ewout Frankema and Frans Buelens*





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# Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development

The Belgian Congo and the Netherlands  
Indies compared

Edited by Ewout Frankema and  
Frans Buelens

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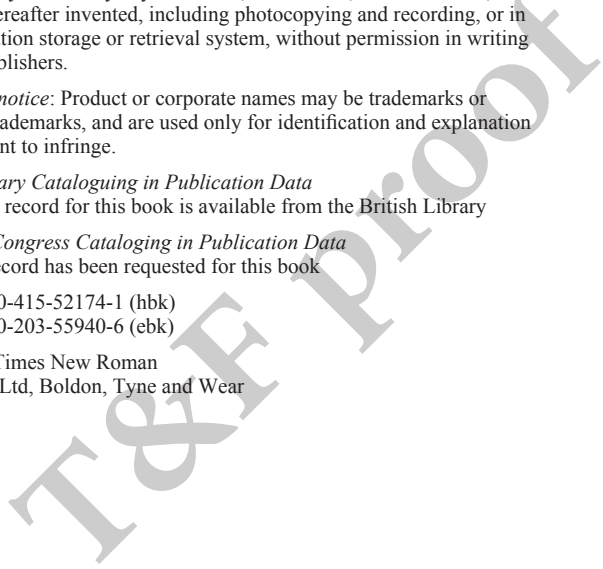
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35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
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41  
42  
43  
44  
45

# Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	xiii
<i>List of tables</i>	xv
<i>List of contributors</i>	xvii
<i>Preface</i>	xviii

<b>Introduction</b>	1
EWOUT FRANKEMA AND FRANS BUELENS	

- 1 Colonial exploitation and economic development 1*
- 2 Comparing the Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies 3*
- 3 Post-colonial economic divergence 7*
- 4 Differences in the evolution of colonial connections 8*
- 5 Organization 12*

<b>1 Extractive institutions in the Congo: checks and balances in the <i>longue durée</i></b>	18
ANDREAS EXENBERGER AND SIMON HARTMANN	

- 1 Introduction 18*
- 2 Pre-colonial history: traditional checks and balances 20*
- 3 Colonial history: unchecked power 24*
- 4 Post-colonial history: the unbalanced failing state 29*
- 5 Conclusions 33*

<b>2 Colonial extraction in the Indonesian archipelago: a long historical view</b>	41
THEE KIAN WIE	

- 1 Introduction 41*
- 2 The Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1602–1799 41*
- 3 The transformation of colonial rule, 1799–1830 43*





x Contents

4	<i>The Cultivation System (CS), 1830–70</i>	45	1
5	<i>The liberal reforms, 1870–1900</i>	48	2
6	<i>The Ethical Policy, 1900s–20s</i>	52	3
7	<i>The Great Depression, the Japanese occupation, and Indonesia's independence, 1929–45</i>	54	4
8	<i>Conclusion</i>	56	5
			6
			7
			8
			9
<b>3</b>	<b>Varieties of exploitation in colonial settings: Dutch and Belgian policies in Indonesia and the Congo</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>10</b>
	ANNE BOOTH		11
	<i>1 Colonial exploitation: some definitions</i>	60	12
	<i>2 Explaining the divergence in GDP growth after 1970</i>	61	13
	<i>3 Indonesia, 1830–1942: a better class of exploitation?</i>	62	14
	<i>4 The evolution of the Congo Colonial State: comparisons with Indonesia</i>	68	15
	<i>5 Looking again at the post-1970s divergence</i>	80	16
			17
			18
			19
<b>4</b>	<b>The land tenure system in the Congo, 1885–1960: actors, motivations, and consequences</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>20</b>
	PIET CLEMENT		21
	<i>1 Introduction</i>	88	22
	<i>2 Staking a claim: land ownership status in the Congo Free State, 1885–1908</i>	89	23
	<i>3 From the Congo Free State to the Belgian Congo: hesitant reform</i>	90	24
	<i>4 Surveying the land: the decree of 1934 and formalized land adjudications</i>	95	25
	<i>5 Land legislation disputes and the end of colonialism</i>	99	26
	<i>6 Land policies and rural development</i>	100	27
	<i>7 Conclusion</i>	103	28
			29
			30
			31
			32
			33
			34
			35
<b>5</b>	<b>In the shadow of opium: tax farming and the political economy of colonial extraction in Java, 1807–1911</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>36</b>
	ABDUL WAHID		37
	<i>1 Introduction</i>	109	38
	<i>2 The expansion of tax farming under Dutch colonial rule</i>	111	39
	<i>3 The opium tax farm</i>	114	40
	<i>4 The small tax farms</i>	117	41
	<i>5 The end of tax farming and its long-term effects</i>	120	42
	<i>6 Conclusion</i>	124	43
			44
			45





1	<b>6 Fiscal policy in the Belgian Congo in comparative perspective</b>	130
2		
3	LEIGH GARDNER	
4		
5	1 <i>Introduction</i> 130	
6	2 <i>A difficult inheritance: the fiscal legacy of the Congo Free State</i> 132	
7		
8	3 <i>Reforming the Congo's tax system after 1908</i> 138	
9	4 <i>Public spending: a more familiar pattern</i> 143	
10	5 <i>Financial relations between the Congo and the Belgian state after 1908</i> 147	
11		
12	6 <i>Conclusion: a colonial state struggling to catch up</i> 148	
13		
14		
15	<b>7 Colonial education and post-colonial governance in the Congo and Indonesia</b>	153
16		
17	EWOUT FRANKEMA	
18		
19	1 <i>Introduction</i> 153	
20	2 <i>Different approaches to colonial educational development</i> 155	
21	3 <i>Comparing school enrollment rates, 1880–2000</i> 160	
22	4 <i>The success of the missionary effort in the Congo</i> 164	
23	5 <i>Comparing the quality of education</i> 166	
24	6 <i>Education for self-determination</i> 169	
25	7 <i>Conclusion</i> 173	
26		
27		
28	<b>8 (Un)freedom: colonial labor relations in Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies compared</b>	178
29		
30	VINCENT HOUBEN AND JULIA SEIBERT	
31		
32	1 <i>Introduction</i> 178	
33	2 <i>Colonial rural exploitation in Java</i> 179	
34	3 <i>The labor regime on the Outer Islands</i> 181	
35	4 <i>New forms of unfree labor in the Belgian Congo</i> 182	
36	5 <i>Comparative observations</i> 186	
37		
38		
39	<b>9 Rubber cultivation in Indonesia and the Congo from the 1910s to the 1950s: divergent paths</b>	193
40		
41	WILLIAM G. CLARENCE-SMITH	
42		
43	1 <i>Introduction</i> 193	
44	2 <i>Factor endowment in Indonesia and the Congo</i> 194	
45	3 <i>Large plantations in Indonesia</i> 196	
	4 <i>Large plantations in the Congo</i> 198	





xii	<i>Contents</i>		
	5 <i>Smallholdings in Indonesia</i>	200	1
	6 <i>Smallholdings in the Congo</i>	203	2
	7 <i>Conclusion</i>	206	3
			4
<b>10</b>	<b>Manufacturing and foreign investment in colonial Indonesia</b>	211	5
	J. THOMAS LINDBLAD		6
	1 <i>Introduction</i>	211	7
	2 <i>Modernity in a traditional context</i>	212	8
	3 <i>The different faces of capitalism</i>	217	9
	4 <i>Unilever Indonesia</i>	221	10
	5 <i>Conclusion</i>	224	11
			12
			13
			14
<b>11</b>	<b>The industrialization of the Belgian Congo</b>	229	15
	FRANS BUELENS AND DANNY CASSIMON		16
	1 <i>Introduction</i>	229	17
	2 <i>“Raubwirtschaft” (1885–1908)</i>	231	18
	3 <i>The first wave of industrialization (1920–40)</i>	232	19
	4 <i>The second wave of industrialization (1940–58)</i>	237	20
	5 <i>Planning for the development of heavy industries (1958–60)</i>	241	21
	6 <i>The collapse of the Congolese industrial complex</i>	242	22
	7 <i>Summary and conclusions</i>	245	23
			24
			25
			26
<b>12</b>	<b>Mobutu, Suharto, and the challenges of nation-building and economic development, 1965–97</b>	251	27
	JAN-FREDERIK ABBELOOS		28
	1 <i>Introduction</i>	251	29
	2 <i>Similar challenges, different circumstances</i>	257	30
	3 <i>Political versus economic capacity building</i>	259	31
	4 <i>Urban versus rural interests</i>	262	32
	5 <i>The reversal of fortune</i>	263	33
	6 <i>Conclusion</i>	268	34
			35
			36
			37
	<b>Conclusion</b>	274	38
	EWOUT FRANKEMA AND FRANS BUELENS		39
			40
			41
	<i>Index</i>	281	42
			43
			44
			45





1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
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32  
33  
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35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45

# Figures

0.1	The equatorial location of the Congo (DRC) and Indonesia	4
0.2	Map of the Belgian Congo, c.1920	5
0.3	Map of the Netherlands Indies, c.1920	6
0.4	GDP per capita of Indonesia and the Congo (DRC), 1950–2010	8
1.1	Map of Central Africa	20
1.2	Regional slave trade networks in the Congo Region, 1600s–1800s	22
1.3	Economic deterioration in the Congo, 1950–2010	31
2.1	The Great Post Road ( <i>De Grote Postweg</i> ) from Anyer to Panarukan built by Governor Herman Willem Daendels in 1808	43
4.1	Railroads and navigable waterways in the Belgian Congo, c.1932	93
5.1	Public revenue in the Netherlands Indies, 1821–45	114
6.1	Map of the Congo Basin region	133
6.2	Per capita revenue in the Belgian Congo and selected British colonies, 1911	138
6.3	Per capita hut tax payments by province, 1929	141
6.4	Revenue by source, 1930 and 1955	143
6.5	Allocation of public spending in the Belgian Congo	145
6.6	Public spending in 1955	146
7.1	The education system in the Belgian Congo after 1925/9	157
7.2	The education system in the Netherlands Indies in the 1920s	159
7.3	Gross primary school enrollment rates (age 6–11) in the Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies, 1940–2000	161
7.4	Gross secondary and tertiary enrollment rates in the Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies, 1890–1940	163
7.5	Per capita government expenditure on education in the Netherlands Indies and the Belgian Congo, 1880–1940 (in current US\$)	167
10.1	Sectoral composition of Indonesian GDP, 1900–40	213
10.2	Number of factories in the Netherlands Indies, 1908–40	214
10.3	Dutch capital investment and exports from the Netherlands Indies, 1910–39	219
12.1	The Congo's merchandise export composition (1892–2010)	253
12.2	Indonesia's merchandise export composition (1874–2010)	254





xiv *Figures*

12.3	Evolution of the average annual crude oil and copper prices (1960–2008)	264	1 2
12.4	Indonesia's and the Congo's net barter terms of trade (1967–2009)	265	3
C.1	Argumentation scheme	275	4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45

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42  
43  
44  
45

# Tables

0.1	Estimated and guesstimated population densities in the Congo, Indonesia and Java, 1890, 1920, and 1950	11
1.1	Inequality between Europeans and Africans in the Belgian Congo, 1958	29
2.1	Production and exports of Java and Madura during the Cultivation System (1833–69)	46
2.2	Contributions from the Netherlands Indies to the Dutch treasury, 1851–61	47
2.3	Number of Chinese, Javanese, and Indian workers in East Sumatra, 1883–1930	50
3.1	Budgetary revenues and expenditures per capita, <i>c.</i> 1938, African Colonies and Indonesia	71
3.2	Budgetary and trade indicators compared: Netherlands Indies and the Belgian Congo, 1937	71
3.3	Road and rail densities: Indonesia and the Congo, 1938–9 and 1958–9	72
3.4	Population densities and road and rail densities: Zaïre and the Outer Islands of Indonesia, <i>c.</i> 1960	74
3.5	Budgetary revenues and expenditures per capita, Belgian Congo/Zaïre: 1939–70	75
3.6	Area under main cash crops, 1958	76
3.7	Hectares of food crops per thousand people, 1958	77
3.8	Production of food crops, 1958	77
3.9	Area cultivated by peasant households per agricultural worker, 1934 and 1958	78
5.1	Income from tax farming in the Netherlands Indies, 1816–1925	112
5.2	The composition of tax farming revenue in Java, 1851–1900	117
7.1	Absolute numbers and indices of missionary presence and students enrolled in the Belgian Congo, 1908–57	164
7.2	The “population support ratio” in the British, Dutch, and Belgian colonial empires, <i>c.</i> 1938	165
11.1	GDP (1958) (value added by industry)	230





xvi *Tables*

11.2	Comparing industrial production for Belgium and the Belgian Congo in 1957	231	1
11.3	Balance of payments of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi (1920–39)	233	2
11.4	Capital account of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi (1948–58)	239	3
11.5	Evolution of the volume index of industrial production (1939–57)	240	4
12.1	Divergence in growth, structures of production, and export between the Congo and Indonesia (1960–2010)	252	5
			6
			7
			8
			9
			10
			11
			12
			13
			14
			15
			16
			17
			18
			19
			20
			21
			22
			23
			24
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# Preface

1  
2  
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The conception of this book can be traced back to the late afternoon of Monday August 3, 2009. In a session on African business history at the World Economic History Congress 2009 in Utrecht, Frans Buelens presented a paper on the equity development of Union Minière, Belgium’s largest mining company active in the Belgian Congo from 1906. Ewout Frankema was in the audience. In the aftermath of that session we engaged in a lively discussion about why the Dutch and the Belgians know so little about each other’s colonial history. Apparently, states and nations, like people, have their own ways of digesting the past and are typically not keen to share the most shameful aspects with outsiders. In fact, until today even a frank national debate about the colonial legacy has been continuously frustrated by politicians and lobby groups in the Netherlands and Belgium. However, when nations cannot come to terms with the black pages of their history, they will find it impossible to take genuine responsibility for the consequences of their deeds.

That afternoon we decided to try to organize a meeting where some leading Belgian and Dutch scholars could exchange their views on colonial exploitation and also explicitly address the question of how this legacy may have affected the long-term development of the subject peoples in the Congo and Indonesia. The project grew bigger than we originally envisaged when we obtained a grant from the Vlaams–Nederlandse Comité voor Nederlandse Taal en Cultuur, enabling us to organize two workshops, one in Utrecht (December 2010) and one in Antwerp (October 2011), and to invite a number of international scholars to join the exchange. The proceedings of these workshops have eventually resulted in this book.

We are grateful for the generous support of the Dutch and Flemish Science foundations. We also thank the N.W. Posthumus Institute (the research school for economic and social history in the Netherlands and Flanders) for financial support. We thank Utrecht University and the University of Antwerp for hosting our workshops. We are grateful to Simon Holt and Emily Kindleysides of Routledge for guiding us smoothly through the logistical details of the publication process. A final word of thanks goes to our former colleague Daan Marks, who was a co-initiator of this project until he took up his current job at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.





*Preface* xix

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Things are changing. In the spring of 2010 David van Reybrouck's *Congo. Een geschiedenis* (De Bezige Bij) started to conquer the Belgian and Dutch market. This book about Belgium's colonial past won two major literary prizes in the Netherlands, the AKO-Literatuurprijs and the Libris Geschiedenis Prijs, testifying to a huge hidden interest in the topic. It is our hope that our book can further contribute to the struggle against the great amnesia.

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