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Dossiê: Fascismos, 100 anos depois

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**A Dietsland Empire? The international and transnational dimensions of Dutch fascism and the NSB, 1922-42**

*Um Império da Grande Holanda? As dimensões internacional e transnacional do fascismo holandês e o NSB, 1922-42*

*¿Un Imperio de la Gran Holanda? Las dimensiones internacionales y transnacionales del fascismo holandés y el NSB, 1922-42*

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**ABSTRACT:** Dutch fascism was marked by an international outlook and character from the outset of the 1920s. Rather than a purely Netherlands affair, it had proponents in multiple countries, particularly Belgium and the East Indies (Indonesia). For many of these, the idea of a Great Netherlands territory uniting all Dutch-speaking nations – Dietsland – was central to their international vision. There were a number of Dutch fascist parties and other organisations spread across the globe which experienced limited success throughout the 1920s, notably Flemish fascists in Belgium, and the reactionary Fatherland Club in the Dutch Indies. The latter was the most important, successfully mobilising the white settler population against perceived weakness in the face of Indonesian nationalism and communism. In the early 1930s they became influenced by fascism. The dominant fascist force of the 1930s however was Anton Mussert's National Socialist Movement, which became a considerable force in the Netherlands, but proportionally even greater in the East Indies. Permitting mixed-race members in the party, it established integrated branches in the colonies where it became the largest political party. An inclusive culturalist notion of Dietsland was central to the party's international vision and plans for a future fascist Imperium. It took a broadly positive stance towards the colonial administration, pointing to it as a model of fascist rule. This international Dutch fascism was underpinned by a transnational network of members and colonial administrators and army veterans which moved around the Dutch empire. This had a real impact on the development of party ideology, as leaders had to reckon with the

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influence of the transnational fascist network. However, ultimately metropolitan chauvinism and white supremacism determined the ultimate failure of Dutch fascism in the Indies and the hollowness of the Dietsland myth.

Keywords: Fascism. Colonialism. Transnational history. Indonesia. The Netherlands.

RESUMO: O fascismo holandês foi marcado por uma visão e um caráter internacional desde o início nos anos 1920. Ao invés de um caso puramente holandês, teve proponentes em vários países, particularmente na Bélgica e nas Índias Orientais (Indonésia). Para muitos deles, a ideia de um território da Grande Holanda que unisse todas as nações de língua holandesa - Dietsland - era central para sua visão internacional. Havia uma série de partidos fascistas holandeses e outras organizações espalhadas pelo mundo que tiveram um sucesso limitado durante os anos 1920, notadamente os fascistas flamengos na Bélgica, e o reacionário Clube da Pátria nas Índias Holandesas. Este último foi o mais importante, mobilizando com sucesso a população de colonos brancos contra a percepção de fraqueza diante do nacionalismo e do comunismo indonésio. No início da década de 1930, eles se tornaram influenciados pelo fascismo. A força fascista dominante dos anos 30, no entanto, foi o Movimento Nacional Socialista de Anton Mussert, que se tornou uma força considerável na Holanda, mas proporcionalmente ainda maior nas Índias Orientais. Permitindo membros de raças mistas no partido, ele estabeleceu filiais integradas nas colônias onde se tornou o maior partido político. Uma noção culturalista inclusiva de Dietsland era central para a visão e planos internacionais do partido para um futuro Império fascista. Tomou uma posição amplamente positiva em relação à administração colonial, apontando-a como um modelo de governo fascista. Este fascismo internacional holandês era sustentado por uma rede transnacional de membros e administradores coloniais e veteranos do exército que se movimentavam em torno do império holandês. Isto teve um impacto real no desenvolvimento da ideologia partidária, pois os líderes tiveram que contar com a influência da rede fascista transnacional. No entanto, o chauvinismo metropolitano e a supremacia branca determinaram o fracasso final do fascismo holandês nas Índias e a ociosidade do mito Dietsland.

Palavras-chave: Fascismo. Colonialismo. História Transnacional. Indonésia. Países Baixos.

RESUMEN: El fascismo neerlandés estuvo marcado por una perspectiva y un carácter internacionales desde sus inicios de la década de 1920. Más que un asunto puramente neerlandés, tenía defensores en múltiples países, especialmente en Bélgica y las Indias Orientales (Indonesia). Para muchos de ellos, la idea de un territorio de la Gran Holanda que uniera a todas las naciones de habla neerlandesa -Dietslandia- era fundamental en su visión internacional. Hubo una serie de partidos fascistas holandeses y otras organizaciones repartidas por todo el mundo que tuvieron un éxito limitado a lo largo de la década de 1920, especialmente los fascistas flamencos en Bélgica y el reaccionario Club de la Patria en las Indias Holandesas. Este último fue el más importante, al movilizar con éxito a la población de colonos blancos contra la debilidad percibida frente al nacionalismo indonesio y el comunismo. A principios de la década de 1930 se vieron influenciados por el fascismo. Sin embargo, la potencia fascista dominante en la década de 1930 fue el

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Movimiento Nacional Socialista de Anton Mussert, que se convirtió en una fuerza considerable en los Países Bajos, pero proporcionalmente aún mayor en las Indias Orientales. Permitiendo la afiliación de miembros de raza mixta al partido, estableció ramas integradas en las colonias, donde se convirtió en el mayor partido político. Una noción culturalista inclusiva de Dietslandia era fundamental para la visión internacional del partido y los planes para un futuro Imperio fascista. Adoptó una postura ampliamente positiva hacia la administración colonial, señalándola como un modelo de gobierno fascista. Este fascismo neerlandés internacional se apoyaba en una red transnacional de miembros y administradores coloniales y veteranos del ejército que se movían por todo el imperio holandés. Esto tuvo un impacto real en el desarrollo de la ideología del partido, ya que los líderes tuvieron que contar con la influencia de la red fascista transnacional. Sin embargo, en última instancia, el chovinismo metropolitano y el supremacismo blanco determinaron el fracaso final del fascismo holandés en las Indias y la falsedad del mito de Dietsland.

Palabras clave: Fascismo. Colonialismo. Historia transnacional. Indonesia. Países Bajos.

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On the eighth anniversary of the founding of the Dutch National Socialist Movement (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging*, NSB), December 1939, the Batavia and South-Sumatra branches of the party in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) published a booklet celebrating their political struggle. More than ever, it declared, did the Indies NSB members feel 'one with our Comrades in the Netherlands', but they were particularly thinking not of those on 'National Dutch soil' [*Rijks-Nederlandschen bodem*], but those fighting against the alienation of the Dietse nature.

On this day we think of the battle which *our Flemish National comrades* wage in the growing consciousness of their Diets connection with the National Netherlands. We think of the battle of *our tribal relatives in South-Africa* with whom the Diets idea of tribal belonging and national consciousness – ever since their settlement there – has existed undefiled. But we also commemorate *the Pioneers of the Tropical Netherlands*, who through and in their battle with the Tropics have awakened Diets consciousness. These thoughts have brought us to elucidate the spirit of the front in a few articles. These articles will strengthen you in the battle of AWAKENING DIETSLAND. (N.S.B. 14 December 1931-14 Wintermaand 1939 1939, 3)

For these Dutch fascists, as for many Dutch nationalists, the true nation was Dietsland, the imagined territory that would incorporate all Dutch-speaking tribes that had been scattered across the globe since the early modern Dutch Republic's colonial ventures. Flanders would be incorporated into the territory of the Netherlands as the South-Netherlands, and in the vision of NSB leader Anton Mussert (1894-1946), all parts of the empire, including the East and West Indies (Curaçao, Suriname), South Africa, and even the Congo, would be administered as one cohesive Diets realm, ending the latter's status as colonies exploited by the metropole (Mussert, 1937/38).

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Thus the nation would be able to live up to its full potential on the world stage as a united *Imperium* of tens of millions of people. Rather than being myopic or provincial in its outlook, the NSB possessed an international vision of Dutch fascism, and had an integral international party apparatus to back this up. Whether it ultimately succeeded in living up to this vision is another matter.

### The emergence of Dutch fascism

This international vision was not entirely unique to the NSB. By the time the First World War broke out the imperatives of Dutch international politics had become firmly established tenets of the Dutch Right. Above all, retain absolute control of the East Indies, as encapsulated in the slogan *Indië Verloren – Rampspoed Geboren* (The Indies Lost – Disaster Born), reflecting the belief that economic survival was entirely dependent on the colonies (Foray 2013, 34).<sup>1</sup> As Indonesian independence in the post-war period shows this unique idea of total dependence was highly exaggerated (Wesseling 1980, 127–32), but does point to the prominence of the East Indies in the Dutch nationalist imaginary. It is therefore not surprising that concerns with this territory also found its way into Dutch fascism.

That being said, the first fascist groups to emerge in the 1920s in the Netherlands remained narrowly national affairs. The first of these emerged around the political journal *Katholieke Staatkunde* (Catholic Statecraft) in the immediate wake of the March on Rome. (Huberts 2017, 60–62). In 1924 the group became associated with the Netherlands' first fascist party, the *Verbond van Actualisten* (VvA, Union of Actualists), which was small, but loud, making headlines by disturbing left-wing meetings and strike-breaking actions (Pauw 1987). This short-lived party (1923-24) was eventually replaced by the more enduring *Vereeniging De Bezem* (Union the Broom), founded in December 1928, bankrolled by millionaire Alfred Haighton, and led by H.A. Sinclair de Rochemont (1901-42) (Zaal 2016, 44–53). While *De Bezem* managed to keep going until 1932, it was riven by factionalism; at the same time there were other new extreme-right groups cropping up which embraced fascism more or less openly to varying degrees, but rarely lasted more than a year if that (Huberts 2017, 63–99). By the end of the 1920s the various Dutch fascist groups had successfully managed to cement a reputation for diletantism.

Over the southern border fascism was also attracting considerable attention. While much of the Anglophone literature has focused on the initial success of Léon Degrelle's Rexists in

<sup>1</sup> The slogan was coined by the Afrikaner C.G.S. Sandberg (1866-1954), who would later become colonial advisor to Mussert.

Francophone Belgium (particularly in the elections of 1936), Flemish fascism was of no less importance (and of more lasting significance). Here was the origin of the idea of Dietsland (Foray 2013, 32). Disappointed with the continued dominance of francophone rule after WW1 after ‘Dutchification’ reform was blocked, the Flemish nationalist *Vlaamse Front* (Flemish Front), generally known as the *Frontpartij* (Front Party) became estranged from democracy (Wever 1994, 33). In 1925 Joris van Severen, an admirer of Mussolini and Gabriele D’Annunzio, broke with the *Frontpartij* and founded the *Katholieke Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (KVVN, Catholic Flemish National Union). The following year van Severen formulated the KVVN’s ultimate goal as being a united Netherlands and Flanders, i.e. Dietsland. Requiring the breaking up of the Belgian state, the organisation explicitly endorsed a violent revolutionary strategy (Wever 1994, 46, 50–52; 2009, 472–73). There would be many other successors to the *Frontpartij* and the KVVN. van Severen founded the overtly fascist *Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal-Solidaristen* (Verdinaso, Union of Diets National Solidarists) in 1931, which he would lead until 10 May 1940, when he was arrested by Belgian authorities, handed over to the French, and summarily executed. Most important was the VNV, founded in 1933 with Staf de Clercq as leader. de Clercq, a very competent organiser without van Severen’s doggedly radical streak, succeeded in uniting various Flemish organisations into the VNV. Only later would he transform himself into an authoritarian party Leader (Wever 1994, 95–104).

de Clercq’s support for the *Dietse* idea naturally aligned the VNV with Dutch irredentism, and especially Dutch fascist irredentism as it promoted the breakup of the Belgian state. While these two *Dietse* projects remained quite separate in the 1920s, there was some actual transnational interaction on this issue in the ‘30s. Already in the first issue of NSB weekly *Volk en Vaderland* (VoVa, People and Fatherland) in January 1933, the party affirmed the common destiny of the Netherlands and Flanders, ‘the idealistic Greater Netherlands position’, threatened by France.

Because stronger than the bond, stronger than the gratitude which we owe Flanders, because it has for centuries been the dam that broke the French flood wave – stronger than the knowledge that to an important extent it has been and Flemish who made the Dutch Golden Age, while Holland deliberately, out of greed and pride, left Flanders in its sorry state – stronger than all this together, we are tied to Flanders, burdened by the common threat... (‘Vlaanderen en Holland’, *Volk en Vaderland*, 1933, 2)

The VNV and NSB recognised the mutually shared goal – Dietsland – which created the foundation for collaboration between the two parties. The parties reported appreciatively on each other in their respective party presses, underlining the international nature of the NSB fascist project (‘Vlaamsch Nationaal Verbond’, *Volk en Vaderland*, 1935, 8). But while the Dietsland ideal was uncontroversial in Flemish and Dutch far-right circles, it was also profoundly unrealistic. As

Bruno de Wever noted in the Belgian case, Dietsland served mainly as a convenient myth, one with revolutionary potential but requiring no immediate action (Wever 1997, 167–69, 179). Perhaps that is also why cooperation remained limited in practice. The VNV and NSB exchanged delegates at party conferences, Mussert and de Clercq met up in Utrecht at one point (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 124), the NSB wrote fervently admiring reports on the burning flame of Flemish youth, and so forth, but ultimately both Mussert and de Clercq were primarily interested in advancing the cause of fascism within their respective national borders.

Dutch fascism seemed to have better prospects in the East Indies, in the form of the ideologically conservative *Vaderlandse Club* (VC, Fatherland Club). Founded in 1928 in Surabaya, it was largely led by P.M.J.C. Hamer (future Nazi collaborator and police commissioner), and Henri Carel Zentgraaff (1874-1940), a former sergeant-writer during the Aceh War. Only Dutch people were permitted as members, and it was mainly active outside of institutional politics, which offered few opportunities for influence in the Indies, which was ruled by the Governor-General with very limited oversight from the elected *Volksraad* (People's Council) (Drooglever 1980, 30–33). The VC represented white Dutch settler (*totok* – a Javanese term for immigrants, but used by the colonists to denote white settlers born outside the Indies) interests, and was formed in part as a reaction against the Ethical Policy as pursued by then governor-general A.C.D. de Graeff, who to their mind had granted too many concessions to Indonesian nationalist groups, not least Sukarno and the *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (PNI, Indonesian Nationalist Party). At first the VC was strongest in the Java sugar plantations, where social conflicts between *totoks* and indigenous labourers tended to be particularly common. Indonesian nationalism was decried as not a true national movement, but rather just some intellectuals who agitated the people against legitimate authority, supported by European leftists.

A particular grievance here that led to the founding of the VC was the supposedly inadequate government response to the 1926-27 uprising of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party). This ill-advised revolt was very quickly suppressed, but continued sporadically in both Java and Sumatra. While the initial response with the KNIL was in many respects brutal, and led to 13 000 arrests and a ban on the communist and socialist parties and unions (Burgers 2010, 199–201), the de Graeff government did issue amnesties in 1926-27 (Drooglever 1980, 27, 41–46). Anti-leftist and racist sentiments grew again in the early 30s, with the government's decision to grant a trial to Sukarno and the PNI, as well as the mutiny of primarily Indonesian crew on the ship *De Zeven Provinciën* in 1931 (Drooglever 1980, 79–83). That year saw a large rightward shift in both colonial and metropolitan government under de Jong and Hendricus

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Colijn respectively, sharply increasing repression of Indonesian political movements. Sukarno was imprisoned (Woltjer 2005, 235–40; Ricklefs 1993, 188–91). The size of the VC varied strongly, with two thousand members at its lowest point in 1935, and nine thousand at its peak in 1930, accounting for 30 per cent of adult male *totoks* (Drooglever 1980, 342).

The VC could perhaps have stayed outside the history of fascism in the Dutch Indies, if its members were not so strongly interested in the new political trend sweeping the globe. Nominally fascism reached the East Indies in 1923 with T.A. Ronkes Agerbeek's minuscule *Verbond Nederland en Indië* (Netherlands and Indies Union) in Batavia. Only in December 1931 did something less stillborn emerge with the *Nederlandsch Indische Fascisten Organisatie* (NIFO, Dutch Indies Fascist Organisation), led by J.A.A. de Bree, a former member of the VC. In 1933 factionalism created various splinter groups out of NIFO: de Bree was succeeded by W.V. Rhemrev in June, a KNIL-veteran who was forcibly retired after war crimes were committed by his unit in 1927 in West-Sumatra during the suppression of the PKI uprising. Instead, de Bree founded the *Fascistische Unie*, (Fascist Union), but by August he was back at the helm of NIFO, while discontents split off and formed the *Fascistische Organisatie in Nederlandsch Indië* (FOINI, Fascist Organisation in the Dutch Indies) (Slaa and Klijn 2010, 679–82).

NIFO and its various offshoots clearly possessed no more viability than did its countless counterparts in the metropole, but its bold and violent image and rhetoric succeeded in drawing the attention of the VC, which already had a reputation as being 'more or less fascist' ('Fascisten bij Vaderlanders', *Het Volk*, 1933, 1). There was even talk of a merger in May 1933, to which the VC leadership was not entirely dismissive, adopting a wait-and-see attitude. Leading figures like Zentgraaff and Fruin showed a clear interest in fascism, declaring the VC and fascism to share the same principles in its newspaper, and wondering rhetorically whether VC did not in fact already possess all aspects of fascism. This was doubtless a political tactic against new political rivals – VC also issued statements *against* fascism as a destabilising, threatening force ('De V.C. tegen het fascisme', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1933, 11). Fascism was seen to potentially aggravate racial tensions in the Indies, and was adopted by indigenous groups as well, if primarily among social and intellectual elites. Aside from extremely short-lived groups like the 1933 *Partai Fascist Indonesia*, or the *Ario-Indiërs Rassen Unie* (Arian-Indo Race Union)<sup>2</sup> founded in 1935, fascism also influenced larger and more established parties like the *Partai Indonesia Raya* (Great Indonesia Party, Parindra). Parindra, while a so-called 'cooperative' nationalist party that participated in colonial political

<sup>2</sup> The name is somewhat difficult to translation, *Indiër* in this context referring to descendants of European and Indonesian ancestors: the idea was that this mixing of races had led to a new superior Aryan race.

institutions like the People's Council (*Volksraad*) (Abeyasekere 1972), also took direct inspiration from German Nazism, as became particularly evident in its militaristic youth movement that used the fascist salute (Lengkeek 2018). So there was no immediate collaboration with the more overtly fascist groups, but the VC clearly saw the need to retain its fascist-oriented membership by changing its own tune and behaviour (Drooglever 1980, 105–62). Dutch fascism was thus by the late twenties quite an international affair, going far beyond just the Netherlands.

### **Anton Mussert and the NSB**

In the 1930s the NSB took centre stage, and quickly overshadowed all other Dutch fascist groups. Founded in December 1931 – not Mussert's first attempt at founding a political party (Slaa and Klijn 2010, 108)– it was started by the civil engineer Anton Mussert, and Cornelis van Geelkerken. Mussert had been a member of the liberal conservative *Vrijheidsbond* (Freedom Union) in the 1920s, and was initially most notable as a careerist who had managed to attain the prestigious post of Head Engineer in water management for Utrecht at the age of thirty-one (Tessell Pollmann 2012, 28–50). He entered politics first in 1925, leading a protest against the so-called Belgian Treaty which would allow for Belgian access to the Moerdijk canal – an unexpected intersection of nationalist politics with Mussert's professional interests (Schuursma 1975, 279–82). Among the nationalists joining his committee was the young van Geelkerken. Their efforts proved successful as the treaty was rejected in 1927, and Mussert became increasingly interested in the more nationalist side of Dutch politics – e.g. Willem Huberts has shown he subscribed to the fascist paper *De Bezem* in this period (Huberts 2017, 90).

The first year of the NSB was spent building up the organisation and sourcing funding for the movement. The first meeting had twelve participants, with four registering as a member by the end. Mussert managed to get together some f. 10 000 to get started – indeed he generally proved quite adept at securing the party's finances from various sources, though notably not from foreign regimes – especially not in the first half of the decade (Slaa and Klijn 2010, 134–35, 170–71). In January 1933 the party went public for the first time, with a congress in Utrecht, the location of the party headquarters, gathering a few hundred members, and the publication of its weekly newspaper *Volk en Vaderland*. Well received by the conservative press (and the expected hostility from the Left) initially, the NSB then enjoyed a period of tremendous growth until 1935, with some 50 000 members – one of the largest parties in the country. It did well in that year's provincial elections with nearly eight per cent of the vote, but this proved to be its peak: it collapsed in the following years, losing half its support in 1937, and becoming increasingly marginalised and

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introverted. In this time it was also effectively hamstrung by a united democratic opposition, censure by the Churches, and laws prohibiting civil servants, military, and civil militia members from joining ‘revolutionary organisations’, including the NSB (Kunkeler 2021a, 38–41).

The first NSB programme was effectively a copy of the German National Socialist party programme, with some notable alterations such as the subtraction of antisemitism and opening the NSB to mixed-race members – a concession that would prove crucial a few years down the line. In other ways the party’s hierarchical structure was obviously closely modelled on the German model as well with some alterations: for instance it relied at first mostly on a cellular structure paying close attention to members’ social and professional background in line with corporatist ideas (Slaa and Klijn 2010, 139 - 185). This also points to Mussert’s idiosyncratic fondness for technical schemes and organisational matters. Regardless of how it began, the party changed significantly over time (Kunkeler 2021b, 355–58). It has often been noted that the NSB despite its name took even more inspiration from Mussolini’s example, as illustrated by the black shirts worn by the members or the focus on the corporatist model. In practice the NSB had contacts with both the Italian and German regimes, with connections to the latter becoming much closer from 1937 onwards (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 221–24).

While the foreign influences were obvious, arguably more significant was the cultural-political heritage of Dutch liberal-conservative nationalism, and the model of Dutch imperialism. NSB political culture was very preoccupied with the maritime: the navy was the source of Dutch power since the 1500s, the precondition for the Dutch Golden Age. The party salute, combining the straight, raised arm with a shout of *hou zee!* (lit. ‘hold sea’) echoed the encouragement to sail onwards and expand the empire in centuries past (Kunkeler 2018, 214). Mussert’s own interests were, aside from technical manuals, very much in Dutch patriotic histories, and in his speeches and writing it is the conventions of Dutch national history that provide many of his reference points. A neat illustration is provided in a 1935 issue of *Volk en Vaderland*, with a photograph of the *Tafelberg* (Table Mountain) of Kaapstad, the halfway point in South Africa on the way to the East Indies, printed underneath the header ‘Dietschland in beeld’ (Dietsland pictured). ‘The Tafelberg – how many generations of Dutch seamen have on the journey to the Indies or to the Motherland beheld its top with joy!’ (‘Dietschland in beeld’, *Volk en Vaderland*, 1935, 5). The historic Golden Age, Empire, and Dietsland were three inextricable parts of an ideological trinity, which explains why the NSB in particular had such an international vision of its fascist mission. It was imperial expansion which settled the Dietse tribes around the world, and it was their global settlement which made the Golden Age. Of all places, it was undoubtedly the East Indies which was the most crucial,

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where imperial conquest had only recently been completed, and matters of Empire and Dutch language and ethnicity remained acutely relevant.

### The NSB in the East Indies

The Dutch first arrived at the islands of the Indian Ocean in 1596. The *Vereenigd Oost-Indisch Compagnie* (VOC, United East Indies Company) established a foothold with the city of Batavia (Jakarta), named after the Germanic tribe that inhabited the low countries in ancient times, which gave the Dutch a role as a bit player in Java (Ricklefs 1993, 27–31). While the Dutch successfully drove out the Portuguese and other potential rivals in the East Indies, and gradually increased their economic activity in the region, the VOC was hardly a profitable business. Only in the Nineteenth Century would reforms in the wake of the Napoleonic wars actually establish Dutch dominance and allow for the successful exploitation of the colonies. The Napoleonic governor Willem Daendels and the British Lieutenant-Governor Raffles had effectively reformed the colonial administration, and brought modern imperialism to the Dutch Indies. (Ricklefs 1993, 27–31) This transition ended with the Dutch victory in the Java War, which saw the death of c. half the Yogyakarta population, and made possible the successful economic exploitation of the East Indies (Ricklefs 1993, 110–19). The first half of the century also marked a change in the Dutch military presence, with the establishment of the Royal Dutch Indies Army (*Koninklijke Nederlands-Indisch Leger*, KNIL), and the adoption of terror tactics such as the burning of villages. In subsequent decades, partially in response to the wider European imperialist trend, but also on local initiative, the Dutch expanded their control over the remaining islands with extensive and brutal violence, culminating in the conquest of Aceh under General Joannes Benedictus van Heutsz (Groen 2012, 279–82; Locher-Scholten 1994, 93–96; Kreike 2021).

This was the context that resulted in the aforementioned Ethical Policy, pursued by several governors-general after Van Heutsz, which put an ethical gloss on Dutch imperialism while also effectively allowing for the emergence of the Indonesian nationalist movement, and the subsequent authoritarian reaction. In the years that Sukarno was imprisoned at Flores and Sumatra, and new monuments were built in honour of ‘the Pacifier of Aceh’ (Mark 2020a), the NSB arrived in the Indies.

The first branch was formally started in November 1933 in Surabaya, the organisation being developed properly in the following year, and expanding to the other islands. Jan Hogewind, an Indo-European former KNIL officer, initially leader of the paramilitary WA (Broek 2021, 16), was

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put in charge of the administration, energetically directing the Indies branch leaders from Utrecht.<sup>3</sup> Jan Hogewind, previously a member of the Indo-European League (*Indo-Europeesch Verbond*, IEV), a social-political organisation which promoted equality for mixed-race people in the colonial administration, used his connections effectively to extend NSB influence in the colony. For instance he encouraged functionaries to directly contact figures in the IEV, as well as the VC (including Zentgraaff), and other right-wing organisations (Hogewind to Hilgers, 1934). The willingness to recruit Indo-Europeans, and natives and other ethnic groups (Hogewind to Ledebouer, 1934), as well as the prominent leadership of several Indo-European functionaries in the party both in the colonies and the metropole, proved to be a major asset for the NSB. Drawing not just on the few tens of thousands of *totoks*, the colonial NSB soon grew to thousands of members, making it the largest political party in the Indies. Headquarters were established in Bandung (Java) and Medan (Sumatra). The Indo-European community, typically people with a Dutch father and Indonesian mother, had a special interest in the colonial order. Indo-Europeans were often recruited onto the middle rungs of the colonial administrative hierarchy, enjoyed the benefits of a Dutch education, and above average living standards. As such, they had a particularly strong interest in the maintenance of the colonial order, and felt especially threatened by Indonesian nationalism, against which fascism promised a vigorous response (Mark 2020(11); 2020b, 199).

Notably, the NSB promised this response not in contrast to the authority of the governor-general, but in harmony with it. Hence the fascist party could also be an opportunity for mixed-race members to elevate their status within the colonial hierarchy, and prove their reliability. In 1942 deputy leader van Geelkerken noted that ‘The N.S.B. never moved on political terrain in the Indies, because in a land where, against a quarter of a million European, live sixty million subjects, governmental authority must be held as highly as possible before all else’ (Geelkerken 1943, 203–4). As a consequence of this lack of revolutionary élan, the Indies NSB enjoyed fewer restrictions compared to the metropolitan party, with civil servants and military being allowed to serve while members of the party (Officieren lid van de N.S.B, *De Tribune*, 1935, 1). But as Tessel Pollmann has argued, this may well have been less a matter of deliberate strategy, than plain necessity, as Governor-General de Jonge made it very clear no political dissent from his administration would be tolerated (Tessel Pollmann 2012, 239–41; see also: Tessel Pollmann 2011). This is also evident from de Jonge’s own correspondence at this time, as reproduced in his memoirs (Jonge 1968, 314–23). At the same time the benefits to the metropolitan NSB were obvious and immediate: Indies

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<sup>3</sup> See correspondence in NIOD:123, 2.54:2056.

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members, while comprising circa 5 per cent of the membership, provided one-third of all party funds (Geelkerken 1943, 203).

While it was ostensibly Mussert's policy never to negotiate or compromise with other political parties, steering for the absolute and unadulterated takeover of power by the national socialist movement, in reality the party held a less dismissive attitude in the Indies. As noted, Hogewind encouraged contact with VC and IEV, and the Indies fascist party FOINI was even seen as a potential ally. When civil servants and military were prohibited from joining the NSB in 1934 this cast serious doubts on the Indies branches' future prospects: a very large percentage of the European and Indo-European population was employed in the civil service, so if the colonial government followed suit this would jeopardise the party's viability. While de Jonge in the end never replicated the metropolitan government's prohibition, the NSB anticipated a ban by proposing to potentially use FOINI as a fascist alternative for civil servants and military (Hogewind to Schoof, 1934). One thing that stopped such collaborations from becoming a reality was the NSB's self-confidence in these years of massive expansion, when its leaders believed it was only a matter of time before they would sweep away all rivals and opponents.

While willing to collaborate with other fascist groups, and maintain relationships with conservative groups and supporting the ruling colonial government, the NSB maintained a firm sense of its own identity, what made it different from the broader spectrum of right-wing conservative colonialists. In response to a letter in 1934, Jan Hogewind wrote:

Your letter from the 30 January arrived in my possession in good order, and I was pleased to read of your beautiful striving for fascist unity in the Indies. Nevertheless it is necessary to redirect your thinking somewhat, namely from *the Indies* to the Great Netherlands. After all, the piece by Z[entgraaff] that I am familiar with, is still based on the 'old' colonial relations between the Indies and the Netherlands, relations which the N.S.B. wants to combat with all its might. We place ourselves on the foundation of an indivisible 'Great Netherlands', embracing all parts of the current Netherlands with the colonies with *one* Great Dutch nation of the 'spirit', embracing all Great Dutch *races* of the blood. (Hogewind to den Besten, 1934)

Hogewind's letter in 1934, like the booklet cited at the beginning of this article, shows that the ideological goal of a great inclusive Dietsland, in the political framework of an indivisible *Imperium*, was the essence of NSB thinking about the colonial order. No matter how minor the distinction of a unitary *Imperium* compared to the contemporary reality of colonial relations seems – who knows what NSB reforms would have amounted to in practice – it was the cornerstone of difference between the fascists and conservatives. What has received little acknowledgement in the literature is the appeal the fascist notion of Dietsland had for colonial subjects: this was the ideological basis that permitted anyone faithful to the Great Dutch imperial project access to the future fascist community. Bearing this in mind, it is obvious why the Indies NSB newspaper, *Indië-*

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*Hou Zee*, paid particular attention to the Boer nationalists in South Africa. In 1937 it reproduced a speech by H.D. van Broekhuysen in Afrikaans, underlining the ethnic-cultural bonds that they believed connected them.

It is an honour and a privilege for me to send my greetings as Afrikaner to the Netherlands to all that belongs to the Dietse tribe. Whether we speak Dutch, Afrikaans, or Flemish, the ties that connect us are the cultural ties and these are language, history, and religion, yes all that is included by the word culture. There, wherever the men and women have gone from the little Netherlands, be it the East- or West Indies, South Africa or America, surrounded by barbarians and wild animals, imprisoned – their culture, maintain and preserve their traditions. ('De Dietsche Stam', *Indië-Hou Zee*, 1937, 3)

### **The transnational connections of the colonial and metropolitan NSB**

There was also a tangible reality to these internationalistic visions of the Dutch fascist movement, beyond the great sums it funnelled into Utrecht's coffers, which directly influenced the political and ideological metamorphoses of the NSB. There was a strong link between the Dutch Indies and the Netherlands fascist party through the disproportionate number of colonial administrators and KNIL veterans that landed high-ranking positions in the party (Foray 2012, 3; Broek 2021, 19). Aside from the all-important Jan Hogewind (Broek 2021, 16), several KNIL-veterans served in the WA in the 30s (Broek 2021, 23, 81, 129, 170–71, 175), while KNIL-veterans were also prominent on NSB electoral lists, lending a great deal of military respectability to the party in the Netherlands (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 318). Other NSB functionaries in turn visited the Indies to examine the local party branches and 'learn' about the colonial administration. Most notably Mussert himself toured the Indies during a much-publicised visit in 1935, which included a controversial reception by Governor-General de Jonge on 23 July. Metropolitan observers widely perceived the reception to legitimise the party by the colonial establishment. Prime Minister Colijn was infuriated, highlighting the very different political priorities and attitudes towards fascism in the metropole and colonies. One Social Democratic paper wrote:

But what happens in Indonesia with the visit by Mussert is serious enough, because it shows in how far fascism penetrates bourgeois circles more and more, yes how colonial great capital has already become entirely fascist. The governor-general De Jonge ... has openly given an audience to Mussert, the leader of an organisation, the membership of which is prohibited to civil servants in the Netherlands. ... The colonial rulers regard the N.S.B. as a support in the maintenance of colonial oppression. (Mussert in Indonesië – Toekomstbeeld voor Holland', *De Tribune*, 1935, 5)

The political connections underpinning Dutch fascist internationalism, facilitated primarily by the empire, resulted in complex and contradictory ideological developments. Examining the NSB's multiple ideological trajectories in the 1930s shows up the various possibilities in the meeting between the nineteenth-century legacy of a violent, imperialist, authoritarian conservatism and its confluence with new ideas from fascism in the Twentieth Century. Some of these ideological

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strands mixed very well, whereas some others, especially around race, could lead to internal conflict, perhaps particularly under Mussert's indecisive, wait-and-see leadership. Perhaps the primary role of Dutch fascist internationalism in the NSB's ideological development is that it forced the leadership to reckon with some the realities of its visions of a Dietsland empire, rather than leaving it as a distant future ideal (as VNV's de Clercq preferred), as transnational connections forced a reckoning with present colonial rule and the demands of Indies fascists.

In the short term this had a conservative effect on the NSB. Dutch colonialism and the rigidly authoritarian order of Governor-General de Jonge ensured that the NSB in the Indies sang a very different tune compared to the Netherlands, one of admiring support and compliance with the present order rather than threatening defiance and calumny. This was symbolised by Mussert's 1935 visit, which sought to equate fascist government with established colonial rule. In Mussert's own words, the governor-general 'showed himself to be the first and highest authority, which regards itself elevated above all party scheming. He showed himself a worthy representative of the Crown, and not – as we are used to in the fatherland – of the political parties' ('Interview met Mussert', *Volk en Vaderland*, 1935, 7). In the context of empire, fascism was respect for authority, and maintenance of the colonial hierarchy, and the imperial privileges that went with it – the logical and ultimate outcome of an *Indië Verloren – Rampspoed Geboren* politics that had defined right-wing thinking on the subject for decades ('Landdagrede van Mussert', *Volk en Vaderland*, 1935, 7). This conservative colonial side highlights the existence of something like what Ethan Mark termed an 'essentially native, imperial form of fascism' among the Dutch, which enjoyed widespread support, and which the NSB now exploited to reinforce its own respectability (Mark 2021, 186).

At the same time this international conservative-colonial-fascist confluence had a tempering effect on NSB racism. The NSB had officially rejected German-style racism from the outset, pointing to the historic religious and ethnic diversity of the Netherlands since the days of the United Provinces, but there was undeniably a large contingent in its cadres who embraced racist ideas as promulgated by Nazi Germany. The ingrained white supremacism that went along with Dutch imperialism was ubiquitous, but at the same time the realities of colonial life forced a recognition that some kind of co-existence with indigenous people was necessary. No matter how intolerant figures like de Jonge were of anything that smacked of ceding power to the native population, there was also caution for ideas that might inflame racial conflict and threaten peace and order. This was in fact a common conservative critique of the VC as it embraced fascist ideas, that it would only inflame racial tensions, which effectively barred it from collaborating with the non-fascist Right in the Netherlands (Drooglever 1980, 85). In practice, this was what allowed

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especially Indo-Europeans entry into the NSB, and gave them the leeway to participate as high-ranking functionaries (with Hogewind as the prime example).

The colonial influences did not only make for a more conservative fascism however. The transnational exchange also facilitated the transfer of colonial tactics outside of the colonial sphere. Fascism's harmony with the violent imperialism of the Dutch Indies made for an easy meeting of minds in the colony, but conversely worked to bring imperialist violence to the metropole. As we have seen there was a preponderance of KNIL-veterans active within fascist organisations generally and the NSB in particular, and in the latter case this brought military veterans with actual experience of violence into the homeland. While over-represented, they were doubtlessly still a very small proportion of the NSB membership, but they occupied influential positions in the party hierarchy, and shared their expertise from the Indies with their comrades in the Netherlands. Hogewind entertained the WA with lectures on his own experiences of patrolling hostile territory in the Indies, while singing the praises of van Heutsz's Aceh campaign (Broek 2021, 16).

Former NIFO leader and KNIL veteran, the Indo-European Willem Rhemrev joined the NSB in the mid-30s, and corresponded with Mussert and Van Geelkerken to advise them on how to handle potential electoral fallout in 1937 (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 241–42). Major Rhemrev had also fought in Aceh in 1904 ('Indisch Nieuws', *Dagblad van Zuid-Holland en 's-Gravenhage*, 1904), and had been active in organisations like Indies Defence (*Indië Weerbaar*), proving a highly quarrelsome presence in conservative pro-defence groups during the 1910s and 20s (Dijk 2007, 268, 273–85). In 1927 Rhemrev was sent to West-Sumatra to 'thoroughly cleanse Solok of undesirable [communist] elements'. This was quickly managed, but after several months it came out that his unit had committed serious 'excesses', including torture and parading the corpse of resistance leader Sa Patai around on a stick in villages. Rhemrev took responsibility for the war crimes, and was forced to retire from the KNIL, albeit 'honourably' ('De pensionneering van majoor Rhemrev', *Sumatra-bode*, 1928). In his correspondence with Mussert he warned the NSB Leader that in the likely event of an NSB electoral victory in 1937 – Rhemrev imagined thirty to fifty per cent of the vote – the communists were likely to stage a coup to prevent the fascist takeover of power. Noting he had already suppressed two revolts (Aceh and Sumatra), he offered his services to immediately come to the Netherlands on his own dime to strike down the communists there. 'PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE' he added – 'place me in the position to SOON ALSO commit a DEED for the good of the NSB and the entire Dutch Nation' (Rhemrev to Mussert and Van Geelkerken, 1936). In the event Mussert thanked Rhemrev for his unsolicited advice, but noted his perspective was perhaps a little skewed and unrealistic.

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The fascist perspective on the Netherlands seen from the Indies was one which evidently could encourage a considerably more radical, more violent approach to the problems of left-wing rebellion and disorder that the NSB claimed threatened the feeble liberal state. Mussert demanded the Indies branches remain law-abiding and decent, not participate in political campaigns, and only help fill the pockets of the Netherlands party – a metropolitan chauvinism that did little to reinforce the loyalty of members in the Indies. The impatience of the colonial fascists boiled over, with growing unrest and spontaneous actions from circles in Batavia and Malang in particular (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 238–39).

Beyond this radicalism Mussert and his deputy Van Geelkerken were regularly sent letters, sometimes including veritable essays, with advice on how to run the party in the Indies, the unsolicited help typically, and remarkably, being justified with that the Leader did not know the Indies. Veteran colonial administrators, former businessmen of Indies companies, and other self-appointed experts would tell the *Leider* all they thought he needed to know about the social, economic, political, cultural, and racial composition of the islands, though it is unclear from the archival documentation to what extent he actually took any of this into account.

### Impact on the party

All the same, the real integration of the Indies branches into the NSB ensured that it played a significant role within the party as a whole (Foray 2013, 34), with ideological developments, especially around the category of race, being particularly important. 1937 was a turning point for the party, as the general elections of May that year gave the NSB barely four per cent of the vote, a far cry from the ten to twelve per cent Mussert was hoping for, not to mention the deranged figures the likes of Rhemrev had in mind. Influences from German Nazism had been growing stronger since visiting the Nuremberg Rally in 1936 (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 221–24), which had put the *volkse* faction of the NSB in a much stronger position. Representatives of the Nazi regime has frowned on the NSB's stance on race and antisemitism for years – Himmler was particularly aggrieved by Mussert's perceived ideological laxity, something that would prove a major source of conflict during the German occupation (Kunkeler, 2018, 221-22). Broadly avowing a more racist *bloed en bodem* type of fascist ideology, prominent *volkse* functionaries such as E.J. Roskam and Hendrik Feldmeijer were less keen on the NSB's inclusive stance on race and ethnicity – indeed to some members to be *volks* was incompatible with the implicitly culturalist notion of Dietsland ('Bloed en Bodem', *Volk en Vaderland*, 1938, 4). Since 1935 they had become more prominent, partially evident from the increasingly antisemitic overtones in the party press (Kunkeler 2018,

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209–10); now with Mussert at the crossroads in May 1937 they successfully pushed him to take a more overtly racist stance. After initially presenting a more systematically catholic reading of party ideology at a meeting on party grounds in Lunteren, presenting fascism as an ideology with multiple complementary aspects to which not everyone necessarily gave equal weight, a more racist, antisemitic reading was given predominance. In hindsight this was not a final victory for the *volkse*, as debates around race, culture, nation, Dietsland, and Germania would flare up again with a vengeance during the German occupation, particularly pitting Mussert loyalists against the SS (Vermaat 2011), but for the rest of the thirties it was obvious which way the wind was blowing.

This necessarily had tremendous fallout for the Indies branches, where some scholars have claimed as many as seventy per cent of members were of mixed race descent (Foray 2013, 35; Mark 2020). While that claim lacks evidence, and in fact can hardly be verified at all, there is no doubt that many of the top functionaries were Indo-European. As noted previously, Hogewind had actively worked to attract members of the IEV, and for a while the NSB permitted simultaneous membership as well. Some white members had been complaining to Utrecht about the prevalence of Indo-Europeans since 1933, sending letters suggesting an IEV conspiracy to infiltrate the NSB for Indo-European interests. One member believed there was a fundamental contradiction here between an Indonesian nationalist ideology and Dietsland (underscoring that there was also plenty of room for racist conceptions of the Dietsland empire), and implied that such mixed-race members could not be trusted to defend the empire from their fellow Asians, the Japanese.

While the racist chorus had been ignored by Utrecht for years, they were now finally given support. The NSB was officially a non-racist party for years, but it had handled its substantial racist membership by simply ignoring or mollifying it; sharply conflicting factions could easily co-exist through regulation by the authoritarian party apparatus. Accordingly, it could easily shift gears in the latter 30s. Hogewind was fired in 1937, despite, he complained to Mussert, a flawless track record and no apparent cause. 1938 Indo-Europeans were no longer allowed into the party, and Mussert started to put pressure on Indies functionaries to remove members with Indonesian spouses. Given Hogewind's organisational abilities, and the ethnic constitution of the Indies branches, it is not surprising that at this critical time in the wake of electoral failure this caused most of the NSB in the East Indies to collapse. One functionary had warned Mussert about the corrosive effect of racist discourse in the Indies in 1937, and the effects were now obvious.

In essence the public, that we are trying to win over in the end, feel that blood and soil is too German. Let us also stop with our Germanics, because within the cadre of the empire, I can speak with an Ambonesian national comrade [*volksgeenoot*], yes even with an indo-european, about People & Fatherland, but as soon as I start about blood and soil and 'Us Germanics' he no longer understands me. (Klijn and Slaa 2021, 347)

Members left the Indies NSB in droves, which disproportionately affected party finances precisely at the point it needed to rebuild and reinvent itself. Thus, developments in the Indies helped drive it further into isolation, and the arms of Nazi Germany which offered some indirect financial support.

At its heart the NSB, and Mussert, on the basis of the concept of Dietsland and Golden Age myths, were originally as much influenced by the model of the Indies colonial administration as they were by the fascist regimes of Italy and Germany. Dutch fascism and Dutch conservatism were not clearly distinguishable in this way, particularly given the latter's propensity for violent authoritarianism abroad. Only in the second half of the thirties did German influence come to actually predominate, giving it the upper hand for two to three years before the German invasion – even then during the occupation it became clear that other ideological currents in the NSB persisted, and would do so until the very end under Mussert's leadership as factionalism remained alive and well (Kunkeler 2018). But the *volkse* and pro-German faction could break through thanks to a mixture of inherent metropolitan chauvinism and instrumentalist attitudes, not least in Mussert personally, both underpinned by a ubiquitous and inherent white supremacism. For all the talk of a great Dietsland Imperium where empire builders of all races that identified with Dutch language and culture, there were always some questions marks around the position of non-whites in the future fascist state. As in the government of de Jonge, racial tolerance was above all instrumentalist, recognising the necessity of peaceful coexistence but fundamentally denying equality.

## Conclusions

Needless to say, fascist visions of a Dietsland Empire never materialised, but it was a powerful myth that genuinely structured much of NSB ideology, particularly insofar as it was shaped by Anton Mussert. The prospects of an administrative reorganisation of the Dutch *Imperium* tied into his organisational propensities and love of schemata, but it was also linked to a great many conservative right-wing hobby horses that Mussert brought to Dutch fascism. Genuine hopes for this Dietsland were by no means shared by everyone in the NSB, let alone Dutch fascism generally – for that it was ideologically far too heterogeneous. The fascist groups of the 1920s were broadly more concerned with counter-revolutionary activism in the streets of the Netherlands in light of the revolutionary turmoil of 1918/19, not fine reconceptualisations of empire, or ethnic brotherhood with the Flemish. The Dietsland imperial project itself was also highly unrealistic of course – completely unthinkable both in the Nazi New Order and Japan's plans for a Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere. But even before the issues raised by the global conflagration it had serious

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internal contradictions or at least frictions that came up time and again in the 1930s. The only serious practical link between different ‘Dietse’ ‘tribes’ was the East Indies, and there were deeply complex racial questions on which the Dutch fascists remained typically theoretically vague, aware of its potential to cause serious strife. Beyond that there were alternative ideological – Nazi racist – currents which did not mesh well with inclusive conceptualisations of Dietsland, and consequently weakened the NSB transnational network that was otherwise the sole tangible basis for realising the myth.

Nevertheless the idea is important. The Dietsland Empire was a myth at the intersection of old Dutch colonialist conservatism, and fascism – a notion that promised radical change and salvation of the empire while remaining essentially true to the old order. It was familiar enough to spread effectively in right-wing circles in the Indies, but different enough to offer seemingly new opportunities to those who felt marginalised or threatened by the contemporary regime. The notion of being *Diets* had a particular appeal to those in the colonies, and Dutch fascism promised to reinforce the empire with a brave new authoritarianism that would quash all those threatening it in the present. The immediate post-war period shows that indeed there were strong appetites for brutality in the colonies off which fascism could have fed, as the Dutch pursued an atrocious war against the independence movement until 1950, but hindsight shows these were the last spasms of Dutch authoritarianism in the twilight of empire, not a new beginning.

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