

**They Came to Stay:  
The Weak Transnational Relations of the Dutch in America**  
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Published in Henk Aay, Janny Venema, and Dennis N. Voskuil, eds., *Sharing Pasts: Dutch Americans Through Four Centuries* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2017), 3-23.

Eritrean refugees in Europe are forced by their old government to pay a two per cent tax on their earnings if they want any document from their old country. Intimidation of citizens abroad by this so-called “diaspora-tax” suspected of being used for military purposes are extreme examples of the transnational grip of countries on the emigrants who left, but are forced to keep ties to the native country. There are also many positive examples of immigrants who voluntarily keep an active interest in their country of origin, such as Philippine housekeepers in the United States who support their families at home; successful immigrant entrepreneurs who finance political campaigns in their countries of origin; or hyphenated Americans who pressure the American government to accept certain policies that support their home countries. That this can be successful is illustrated by the Polish-American demonstrations in Washington for American support for accepting Poland into NATO. This commitment was related to the large population of Polish Americans, to the end of the Cold War and to the fact that two-thirds of Polish-Americans have visited Poland.<sup>1</sup>

Dutch immigrants and their descendants are hardly involved in the current affairs of their home country, and vice versa, the interest of Dutch authorities in an active role for their immigrants in the United States for transnational purposes is minimal. Apart from the

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<sup>1</sup> Thaddeus C. Radzilowski & Dominik Stecula, *Polish Americans Today: A Survey of Modern Polonia Leadership* (Hamtramck: Piast Institute, 2010), 23-25.

standard consular care and a few import stores for Dutch staples and delicacies, such as VanderVeen's<sup>2</sup>, the ethnic bonds per se seem to generate little commercial activity.

The financial, political, and commercial activities by immigrants are elements in the growing interest in immigrants' transnational relations. A transnational approach looks at immigrants as people who create a social space in at least two nations. It doesn't define immigrants exclusively by their presence in the United States, but includes "foreign relations." One may dismiss the usefulness of this approach for investigating the Dutch-Americans because of their inconsiderable involvement in their home country. However, exactly this quality makes them a rewarding object for research, if only because of their long presence in North America. A long-term perspective that includes other parts of the Dutch colonial empire, contributes to a comparative analysis that explains the differences in transnational relations of Dutch immigrant groups.<sup>3</sup> Four centuries of transatlantic contact will reveal patterns in earlier migrations that stimulated or limited transnationalist contacts, even though this long period covers different phases of the Netherlands and the destination countries. This investigation contributes to fostering realistic expectations of keeping the descendants of Dutch immigrants and the Netherlands meaningfully connected.

Transnational immigrant relations transcend national borders because they function in a web of connections between public and private networks. These relationships don't stop when immigrants exchange one passport for another because they can simultaneously participate in political and civic circles in the countries of residence and of origin. The source for these continued relationships is the almost universal strong emotional attachment to the people and places left behind. Channels for communication and travel opportunities make

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<sup>2</sup> [www.thedutchstore.com](http://www.thedutchstore.com)

<sup>3</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations: American Immigration in Global Perspective* (Princeton University Press, 2012); See for a description of the decreasing interest of the Dutch in their home country, Michael J. Douma, *How Dutch Americans Stayed Dutch: An Historical Perspective on Ethnic Identities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 157-62.

transnational behavior possible. However, these technological means provide the conditions, but not the core feature of transnational contact. The clearest example of transnational immigrants are Mexicans who physically cross borders, legally or not, invest in their homeland economies, mobilize people for political or social change in their host country, or function as a transnational family across borders. Research on Mexican and Canadian immigrants reveals the strength of these transnational relations, but a home country much further away does not block such relations.

There is not yet a more accurate quantitative standard to rank nations in order of the intensity of their transnational contacts in the North American context, but analyses of various immigration histories revealed at least five factors that advance these dynamics. First the conditions for these contacts must be present, in the shape of open channels for communication and information exchange keeping dialogues and actions ongoing. Secondly, immigrants maintain or even intensify transnational contacts when they feel threatened or seriously marginalized by the host country. Thirdly, transnationalism is stimulated by a situation of political instability, but with prospects for improvement, in the nation of origin. This often happened in times of war or attempts at revolution and included the colonies of the home country. Fourthly, a high level of international labor mobility that includes a considerable proportion of return is another strong pillar for transnationalism. Fifthly, a cultural appreciation in the country of origin for those who return helps transnational exchange. Before we investigate these factors for Dutch Americans, we need to examine quantitative data of return migration and money transfers.<sup>4</sup>

### **Low Dutch Return Migration**

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<sup>4</sup> See references to various immigrant groups below.

Nothing strengthens the transnational networks as much as a high level of return migration or of recurring seasonal migration. A high level of mobility between two countries has a multiplier effect. Various sources confirm the low level of return migration of the Dutch, fluctuating between 10 and 15 per cent, with a spike of 18 per cent in the years 1908-1923.<sup>5</sup> This low percentage and the low visibility of those who returned are the key to explaining the limited transnational activity of Dutch immigrants. This trend confirms the widespread expectation (and reality) of permanent settlement. Return migration equaled failure in the public and in the immigrant's mind. This might not be true for individual migrants for whom cogent decisions and needs of family members at home were often as important as homesickness, but still the home environment labeled them with some pity. *De Standaard*, a Christian weekly in the Netherlands, expressed these feelings in 1886: those who returned did so because their high hopes had been destroyed. Staying put was also a result of immigrants' strong denouncement of the old country, as Klaas Niemeijer expressed forcefully in 1905: "The only thing that binds us to Holland is our dear family; otherwise we have no regard for Holland. We thank the God of providence that He has brought us here.... In Holland you can work yourself to death, but it is impossible to save anything if you have a family. And for that reason we wish that our family was all here."<sup>6</sup>

Marjory Harper has pointed out that all migrants freeze the idea of their homeland. She suggests that there is continuity in motives to return home, especially among young singles in American urban centers who realized they had made overhasty decisions to emigrate. When they found out that the difference in wages between the U.S. and in their home country were

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon: Dutch Immigration to America, 1840-1940* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 263-65; Mark Wyman, *Round-Trip to America: The Immigrants Return to Europe, 1880-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Klaas Niemeijer to his relatives in Middelstum, Groningen, 4 June 1905. Herbert J., Brinks, ed., *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 314.

declining, they used the regular international transport connections to return home.<sup>7</sup> Russian, Central-European, Italian and immigrants from the British Isles exhibited relatively high return rates compared to Scandinavian and Irish immigrants. But even these were high compared to the Dutch. If the homeland offered opportunities to buy land or start a profitable business, there was a stronger reason to return; this added positive stories to the negative ones of loss and hardships. Moreover, the Irish had a distinct narrative framework of exile and banishment explaining their involuntary exodus from their country and their resistance to consider a return.<sup>8</sup>

Mark Wyman, a specialist on return migration, listed as the top reason for return, reaching the goal of earning enough money to buy property back home, and failure in the host country as second; homesickness and death in the family were the two remaining reasons. The dominant factor for return was important as it set the tone for the public image of migration. When emigrants returned with funds or skills their status rose, but when failed adventures dominated, returning was tainted with a negative image.<sup>9</sup>

The low level of Dutch interaction with the home country is confirmed by the low level of remittances (money sent back to the homeland). By 1887 Dutch Americans were sending more money to the Netherlands than they received, showing that they were financially solvent. In the fifty years between 1870 and 1920 they sent six million dollars back to the Netherlands, while they collected two million from the Netherlands. More remarkable than this proportion was the small annual amount of these private transfers. In

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<sup>7</sup> Dennis Conway and Robert B. Potter, "Caribbean Transnational Return Migrants as Agents of Change," *Geography Compass* 1 (2007): 25-45; Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 306-37.

<sup>8</sup> Kevin Kenny, "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study," *Journal of American History* 90 (June 2003): 134-62.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Wyman, "Emigrants Returning: The Evolution of a Tradition," Marjory Harper, ed., *Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 16-31; The database with millions of Dutch newspapers ([www.delpher.nl](http://www.delpher.nl)) listed no positive stories about a return migrant from the US. Only one person called "TT" was mentioned in het *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden*, who had stolen lawn chairs (17 April 1929). He was partly identified as a forty-seven-year old man who had just returned from the US where had lived for twenty years.

1909, for instance, the total sum of money received from home was \$100,000 whereas \$275,000 was sent home to the Netherlands.

This low figure was not a result of poverty, because most Dutch immigrants were doing well, but from a lack of personal interest in the old country. In comparison with private transfers, the value of Dutch exports to the US in 1910 was \$34 million and imports from the US were \$118 million. The sum of \$1.5 million sent back to the Netherlands between 1900 and 1909 may sound substantial, but it was only 3.5 percent of the \$419 million, all the money sent back to Europe. Only Luxembourgers and Portuguese sent less money home but these states had much lower immigration rates than the Dutch. In comparison, in the same period Belgians sent \$4.3 million home, Danes \$4 million, British sent \$82 million and Italians \$98 million.<sup>10</sup> These figures indicate that for Dutch immigration maintaining financial ties with the homeland was not important.

Also from the Dutch side, there was little organized or government encouragement to keep the contacts alive. Consuls were the connecting points in the US for Dutch immigrants needing something from the old country. Dutch diplomats were late in showing interest in the immigrant communities in the Midwest, which they believed were well served by mostly honorary consuls who were part-time appointees. They either tried to advance trade or assist immigrants in trouble, but didn't intentionally strengthen transnational ties. The first Dutch envoy to visit West Michigan and Chicago was Reneke Marees van Swinderen in the winter

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<sup>10</sup> By 1910, the census reported 120,063 Dutch, 3,071 Luxembourgers, and 59,360 Portuguese, 49,400 Belgians, 181,649 Danes, 1,221,283 British, and 1,343,125 Italians. See Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the United States: 1850-1990." <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html>; *Verslagen aan de Koning betreffende den Dienst der Posterijen, der Rijks-Postspaarbank en der Telegrafien in Nederland* (1878-1892), ... *aan de Koningin-Weduwe/Koningin betreffende den Dienst der Posterijen en der Telegrafie in Nederland* (1893-1904), and *Verslag aan de Koningin betreffende den Dienst der Posterijen, der Telegrafie en der Telefonie in Nederland* (1905-1919). *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, vol. 37, 275-76, 280. Jeroen Touwen, "American Trade with the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies," In Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. Van Minnen, and Giles Scott-Smith, eds., *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 274. In the first decade of the twentieth century 30,479 immigrants from the Netherlands arrived in the US.

of 1906.<sup>11</sup> He advised his successor John Loudon in 1911 that these visits should be limited to once a decade as they were mostly important for the locals and lacked prestige for the mother country. Curiosity won out and Van Swinderen's successor, Loudon, took the journey within a year of his arrival and was as warmly welcomed as his predecessor.<sup>12</sup> These experiences show how the lack of the Dutch government's attention for Dutch settlements at the height of their ethnic life in the United States.

### **Conditions for Transnational Intensity**

A maritime and urbanized nation, the Netherlands had no lack of transport, communication and information facilities to connect with overseas migrants. Though the efficiency of the connections between England and the United States was unparalleled, the frequency of shipping from Dutch ports, the professionalization of postal arrangements, the high literacy rate, and the more than fifty ethnic periodicals circulating in the US provided all the infrastructure needed for transnational contacts.<sup>13</sup>

Reliable transport opportunities were a precondition for transnational contacts but not the cause. Written communications were more important; regular mail service and news reports about events in the homeland could stir transnational interest. But again, these were a precondition, not a cause. Political or economic causes in the homeland made the press a transnational vehicle for immigrant Americans. For Germans the failed revolution of 1848 was such a cause, and, of course, World War I.<sup>14</sup> The Great War functioned as a lightning rod for Belgian immigrants as well. They became deeply involved in supporting their homeland

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<sup>11</sup> *De Volksvriend*, 29 November 1906. *De Grondwet* reported about this visit on November 19 in its 27 November 1906 issue. Douma, *How Dutch Americans Stayed Dutch*, 87-100

<sup>12</sup> National Archives, Den Haag, inv. 2.21.205.37. Collectie John Loudon, file 3: correspondentie met de Marees van Swinderen, letter 23 February 1911 to Dr. John Loudon.

<sup>13</sup> Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 270-79.

<sup>14</sup> Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich and Ulrike Sommer, eds., *News From the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 23-25. Though it seemed that it was mostly the first generation who continued to support Germany in the Great War.

occupied by the Germans. Shortly after the German invasion, ten Belgians in Mishawaka, Indiana volunteered for the Belgian army in order to defend the fatherland, and after the armistice, many returned to find out what had happened to their relatives. This combination of war and humanitarian needs greatly enhanced investment in transnational relations. With the Dutch remaining neutral, they missed out on this incentive.<sup>15</sup>

Dutch immigrants were not systematically victimized. Though the journey across was no pleasure trip for most, they often received preferential treatment on board Holland America Line steamers in comparison to Eastern Europeans. Many Dutch emigrants could afford to travel second class or else were put in the quiet part of third class. Upon arrival in New York or other ports of entry, they might well encounter class bias, but never racial discrimination. On the contrary, they were privileged. The Dillingham Commission that published a detailed examination of immigrants between 1907 and 1910, listed the Dutch in the top of the Anglo-Saxon hierarchy: “In social customs the Dutch show greater affinity to the English than to the Germans. They have been called the Englishmen of the mainland. Like the English, the Dutch have been great colonizers.”<sup>16</sup> This positive attitude about Dutch immigrants continued until after World War II; in the words of Republican senator Alexander Wiley from Wisconsin: “They are a good breed; we can use them.”<sup>17</sup>

Of course, many Dutch immigrants suffered the insults and denigrations that all newcomers encountered, but they suffered no structural discrimination, as against, for example, the Japanese and Chinese. Historians of these nationalities have noted that the more

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<sup>15</sup> Andreas Stynen, “Twee werelden? Banden met het oude Vaderland,” in Andreas Stynen, red., *Boer vindt land. Vlaamse migranten en Noord-Amerika* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2014), 192-211.

<sup>16</sup> *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, Vol. I. *Summary* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 232. See also the positive reception of a model Dutch family (De Jong from Baarn, wealthy and healthy), as reported in *Onze Toekomst* 23 July 1920.

<sup>17</sup> Senator Alexander Wiley (Republican from Wisconsin) in *Hearings Before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, Eighty-Second Congress, First Session on United States Economic and Military Assistance to Free Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951), 249.

these groups suffered from exclusion, the more they strengthened their contacts with their relatives in China to reinforce their ethnic identity.<sup>18</sup>

### **International Labor Mobility**

Immigration becomes a serious option when the perceived difference between the economically depressed area of origin and the promise in the area of possible settlement is large. Mass movement can happen as a result of a strong tradition of emigration but the Netherlands had the opposite experience. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the western parts of the Dutch Republic were the destination of immigrants from its North Sea neighbors, thanks to higher wage levels and comparatively high urbanization with its high death rates. This area needed and could well accommodate additional migrants from outside the country. The opportunities at home were simply too good for a transatlantic exodus of Dutch citizens. As free enterprise was restricted till the 1640s, immigration could only take off in the next decade in New Netherland, the number of immigrants that were officials, traders, soldiers, was high compared to the number of artisans and farmers. This resulted in a population too small for genuine independent development. In general, Dutch migration within Europe outnumbered the movement to the Americas at a rate of three to one (160,000 vs 50,000). Amsterdam shared its position as the transit center of these transatlantic migration flows in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with London, even though the actual number of citizens of the Dutch Republic living abroad was low.<sup>19</sup>

The European citizens of the American colonies maintained close contacts with their mother countries because they were dependent on their legal, political, commercial and religious services. The development of larger populations and towards greater autonomy

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<sup>18</sup> Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations*, 114-17.

<sup>19</sup> Jelle van Lottum, *Across the North Sea: The Impact of the Dutch Republic on Labour Migration, c. 1550-1850* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2007), 161-80. It would be interesting to investigate the volume and character of personal connections across the Atlantic that tied the colony to the motherland.

gradually reduced the grip of the home countries. The volume in the British and Dutch transatlantic migration during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries were high in comparison to the size of their population. Other areas like Scotland and Scandinavia occasionally experienced migration waves, but these fluctuated much more and lost momentum. As long as the sending nation exerted authority over its colonies, transnational contacts were necessary, particularly for the elite. Scotland had a high proportion of citizens living outside the nation and Sweden and Norway reached similar levels around 1900.<sup>20</sup>

Labor migrants circulating between two countries kept the transnational project alive. Their migration could bring them in contact with new skills and modern ways of organization that enabled them to create international networks. Unlike the Dutch, the Poles spread out in Europe before they arrived in the US. This resulted in an impressive ten percent of the Poles working in Western Europe and the United States in the period 1870-1924. The immigrants' new experiences were empowering. Lower class Poles underwent a modernization process when they (temporarily) migrated for work and returned with ideas to change their homeland. Paradoxically, their efforts to organize and find protection in solidarity integrated Poles into the American cultural scene. It was easier for a Pole to be (culturally) accepted by America than by Germany. Historian Brian McCook concludes that while the short-term plan of migrant Poles to change their home country failed, they did succeed in introducing a more pluralistic attitude. That was not necessary in the Netherlands, as it had a very well maintained system of pluralism in its pillarized society, that granted religious and non-religious subcultures to organize in civic and political organizations which shared national power.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Brian McCook, "Becoming Transnational: Continental and Transatlantic Polish Migration and Return Migration, 1870-1924," in Annemarie Steidl, Josef Ehmer, Stan Nadel, and Hermann Zeitlhofer, eds., *European Mobility: Internal, International, and Transatlantic Moves in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Unipress, 2009), 151-74.

Greek and Italian immigrants had return rates of 40-50 per cent.<sup>22</sup> The return pattern among Scandinavian immigrants shows an initial low return rate of about 5 percent during the wave of the 1880s but Swedes responded quickly to the economic depression in the United States during the mid-1890s and 23.5 percent of the newly arrived returned. This behavior suggests that Swedes were more an integral part of international labor migration than the Dutch. The peaks in departures were followed by peaks of return. In comparison, the Dutch looked at immigration as much more permanent. This attitude corresponds with the more modest rate and relatively steady Dutch emigration pattern, one with a high level of gender balance. Gender imbalance stimulated return migration, if only to find a partner.

Many single men returned after working for a few years in American manual jobs such as mining, logging or construction. As crews often were of the same nationality, their situation offered few chances and little encouragement for integration. No wonder that 75 per cent of European return migrants were male. The Swedish return migrants often bought a business in their home country and were quite innovative. Those who returned to farm, did so in their area of origin.<sup>23</sup> The sudden and massive exodus of Scandinavian immigrants to America suggests a higher level of transnationalism, as many had decided to emigrate on the spur of the moment, something which made returning home a serious option when adverse conditions arrived. This trend caused immigrants to have a personal interest in the developments in their homeland. The slow pace of industrialization and the strong agricultural character of the Netherlands strengthened the permanency of immigrants and suggested that the best prospects for improvement of the family were in the US. A relatively high percentage of the Dutch emigrated as a families, although some moved in stages; children left behind

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<sup>22</sup> Anastasia Christou, "Greek American Return Migration: Constructions of Identity and Reconstructions of Place," *Studi Emigrazione* 145 (2002): 201-29; Dino Cinel, *The National Integration of Italian Return Migration 1870-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Hans Norman and Harald Runblom, *Transatlantic Connections: Nordic Migration to the New World after 1800* (Norwegian University Press, 1988), 107-11; Harald Runblom and Hans Norman, eds., *From Sweden to America: A History of the Migration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 201-27.

often joined their families later on. No evidence exists of Dutch immigrants returning home to buy farms or start businesses with money earned in the US. They came to stay.<sup>24</sup>

### **Political Incentives for Transnational Activities**

In sum, the labor market, economic prospects and past experiences discouraged transnational behavior. If anything, it was the political opportunities created by wars and revolutions that gave immigrants an incentive for activating transnational contacts through political mobilization in the homeland. Irish Americans, for example, intervened on behalf of their old country time and again. For instance, a part of the 125,000 Irish-American veterans of the American Civil War attempted to use their military experience to expel the British from their homeland by sending weapons and offering training. . When this proved impractical, Fenians, members of the Irish republican organization founded in the United States in 1858, planned raids on Canada to hurt the British Empire during the late 1860s; this sabre-rattling was tolerated by American authorities. Chinese immigrants joining an effort to boycott American goods as an act of transnational solidarity against American bullying of the Chinese is another example. Such transnational acts, in fact, did more harm than good because they associated immigrants with radicalism and violence.<sup>25</sup>

Compared to many other nations, the Netherlands had a stable political system that was slowly, but steadily reforming itself towards a constitutional democracy with universal suffrage (in 1917 for men, in 1922 for women). The Netherlands marked its political distress with periods of nonviolent transition. The most likely period during which the country was open to a new political order was at the end of the eighteenth century with the Dutch Republic under siege from within and without. A civil war might have erupted between Orangists and

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<sup>24</sup> There were no reports in *De Volksvriend*, *Het Oosten*, *De Grondwet*, *Onze Toekomst*, *De Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* and *the Volksstem*, about any successful returnees, and more reports about agricultural hardships in the Netherlands than about successes.

<sup>25</sup> Gabaccia, *Foreign Relations*, 108-11.

Patriots. Some intellectuals pointed to the American Constitution as a model, and some young Dutch regents traveled to the U.S. to observe its workings. But no immigrants returned to the newly formed Kingdom to advance an American model.<sup>26</sup>

With the exception of the German occupation in World War II, the danger of imminent destabilization of the nation, something that would encourage intervention, was low. Few immigrants felt the call to change the political system. The revolutionary years of 1848 and 1868 resulted in constitutional changes that promised a gradual extension of democratic participation.

Visionary immigrants can use their transnational social space when their home countries experience upheaval. This happened especially in the international labor movement, but the example of labor organizer Louis van Koert shows the limitations of the Dutch-American connection.<sup>27</sup> Van Koert had left The Hague to find a job in Chicago and escape both the domestic problems of a pregnant mistress and an angry wife, as well as internal conflicts in the Dutch labor movement that had marginalized him. Van Koert was a typical temporary migrant, who created a transnational family and hoped to rehabilitate himself. He faced labor leader Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, whom he challenged in Dutch newspapers. Moreover, labor protests in the Netherlands prodded him to report the victories of American labor unions, which he felt were misrepresented in the Dutch labor press and the hostile Dutch-American press. This is how Van Koert used his transnational social space.

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<sup>26</sup> Edwin van Meerkerk, "Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp: de man van 1813," in Ido de Haan, Paul den Hoed, Henk te Velde, eds., *Een nieuwe staat. Het begin van het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden* (Amsterdam: Prometheus Bert Bakker, 2013), 35-41.

<sup>27</sup> Pieter Stokvis, "Socialist Immigrants and the American Dream," in Hans Krabbendam and Larry Wagenaar, eds., *The Dutch-American Experience: Essays in Honor of Robert P. Swierenga* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000), 91-101. Stokvis focusses on the experiences in the US, while his contacts at home are at least as relevant for transnational research. Van Koert served as vice-treasurer the Central Board of the Social Democratic Association that was torn by financial quarrels.

Despite the insecurity of his existence, Louis felt empowered as an independent worker in Chicago because he could speak up freely, something impossible in the Netherlands.<sup>28</sup>

Van Koert's failure to make the best use of his transnational space was caused by the ineffective operations of the American Unions, whose members were more interested in a quick win than in structural change. On top of that, he noticed that the Socialists were as corrupt as the boss system in American politics. He was forced to strengthen his contacts with other European immigrants because the critical mass of Dutch American workers was insufficient, even in Grand Rapids. He sought affiliation with Germans, but had to conclude that ethnic divisions weakened the power of the unions.<sup>29</sup> In fact, he concluded that the workers in the US were even more enslaved by the factory owners than in Europe.<sup>30</sup> This example shows that transnational hopes were certainly present among some Dutch workers, but they missed a large enough support group for engagement with the Netherlands and an inspiring example in the U.S.

The same handicap prevented transnational exchange during the one revolutionary moment in the Netherlands, the Troelstra Revolution in 1918. This event happened at a time of reduced accessibility to the Netherlands for immigrants due to World War I, but was concluded with an acceptable compromise. Pieter Jelle Troelstra, the leader of the Social Democratic Labor Party in the Dutch Lower House, hoped that the apparent success of the Social Democrats in Berlin would spill over into the Netherlands and voiced his claim that the proletariat was ready for a nonviolent take-over of the government on Armistice Day, November 11. Division in his own ranks, rapid consent for practical reforms, military precautions, and a public demonstration for the monarchy, stopped the movement in its tracks. Troelstra had misjudged the situation. Even if the revolution had succeeded, there was no

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<sup>28</sup> Archief Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis. Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. Algemeen, Correspondentie, 127, Koert, L.W. van. 1893-1894, 3 May, 20 June, and 10 October 1893.

<sup>29</sup> 10 October 1893 and 26 September 1894.

<sup>30</sup> 17 December 1894.

labor organization among Dutch immigrants in the United States that could support the revolutionary effort. There was no organized back-up group in the U.S.<sup>31</sup>

Political developments in the Netherlands did not invite transnational involvement, but events outside the Kingdom such as the Boer wars in South Africa and conflicts in the colonies of the Dutch East Indies did. Dutch Americans identified these situations as chances to help their “tribe” with whom they could identify. The Dutch-American sympathy for the Boers drew from a historical lineage of competition with the British, a romanticized frontier tradition, similarities in religious beliefs and work ethic, even though the Boers were much less advanced than Dutch American immigrants.<sup>32</sup> Dutch Americans collected thousands of dollars for the Boers using Dutch channels and used the Boers’ struggle to confirm their own independence from a British dominated culture. However, only a few volunteered as soldiers; Dutch Americans hoped for diplomatic solutions. When news reports became less frequent and Boer defeats accumulated, attention waned. Real transnational contact proved difficult. Mentally, Dutch Americans had reinforced that their ethnic awareness was not restricted to transatlantic relations with Europe.

However, this ethnic awareness did not lead to transnational action, not even as the sky darkened above Europe in the 1930s. A series of interviews with Dutch Americans in North Dakota in 1939 conducted under the auspices of the Work Progress Administration illustrated this attitude. Only an occasional respondent, usually a pensioner or elderly woman, admitted to being worried about the tense situation in Europe and the threats to Holland, but

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<sup>31</sup> Hans Krabbendam, “Waarom een christelijke vakbeweging onder de Nederlandse immigranten in Amerika niet aansloeg,” *Cahier over de Geschiedenis van de Christelijk-Sociale Beweging* (2009), 132-50. The Dutch American press reported via British sources about the threat of a workers' revolution in the Netherlands and a week later it related that the attempt at revolution had failed. See also *De Grondwet*, 19 and 26 November 1918, *De Volksvriend*, 21 November 1918, *Het Oosten*, 22 and 29 November 1918.

<sup>32</sup> Michael J. Douma, “Ethnic Identities in a Transnational Context: The Dutch American Reaction to the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902,” *South African Historical Journal* 65.4 (2013): 481-503.

most of their neighbors did not support a military intervention nor expressed any ideas for reshaping the country after the war.<sup>33</sup>

The best moment for substantial change in the Dutch political system came right after World War II, but in order to have any impact on the debate one needed to have been active in the resistance to the German occupation. No immigrants qualified nor were any asked for advice. In the intellectual and political debate about constitutional reform Dutch Americans were silent. The only example of extending influence overseas was the shipping of relief goods by Dutch Americans to their kindred church organizations in the Netherlands. This went against the wishes of American and Dutch relief organizations that advocated a non-sectarian approach to relief. But this effort lasted only two years, until the Marshall Aid took over.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Dutch Empire and Transnational Relations**

Again, a situation outside the homeland triggered a Dutch American response. When Indonesia pressed for its independence between 1945 and 1948, most Dutch Americans supported the territorial integrity of the Dutch state and the Midwest became the hub of resistance towards American pressure for Indonesian independence. Dutch diplomats had courted leading immigrants to defend and explain Dutch policies to the American public in World War I. These propagandists highly appreciated this attention from the homeland as it raised their status in the Dutch immigrant community. This need for cooperation resurfaced during and after World War II, as David Snyder has shown.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> State Historical Society of North Dakota, roll 16186 WPA project. Ethnic Group Files, Dutch.

<sup>34</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, Nella Kennedy, Lisa Zylstra, eds., *Dutch-Americans and War: United States and Abroad* (Holland: VRI Press, 2014) chaps. 10 and 11. Bert Hofman, "Democracy or Dictatorship: An American Reaction to the Developments in the Netherlands between 1935 and 1945," *Pro Rege* (June 1991): 12-16; Harry A. Van Belle, "The Impact of WWII on the Reformed Dutch in The Netherlands and Canada: A Comparison," *Pro Rege* (June 1991): 27-33.

<sup>35</sup> National Archives, Den Haag, inv. 2.05.13 Gezantschap VS, 1117 dienstreis Michigan, "Losse aantekeningen over Nederlanders en oud-Nederlanders in Michigan," april 1919. *The Banner*, 29 July 1920.

Scholars of the cultural diplomatic relationship, such as David Zwart and Henk Aay, point to the tension in Dutch American communities in the Midwest between a nostalgic, old-fashioned image of the Low Countries, and the modern Netherlands. A related tension existed between the outsiders' image of the Netherlands as "vulnerable little Holland," during World War II in contrast to big and aggressive Germany, and the self-perception of the Netherlands as a mid-sized empire, a favored pronouncement of Queen Wilhelmina.<sup>36</sup> Dutch greatness as a cultural-historical asset, also in the US, clearly resided in the past. The decolonization struggle threatened to reverse this positive imagery into one of a country violently crushing Indonesia's right to self-determination. The lack of transnational contacts between Dutch Americans and Indonesia made them take a conservative stand, in the decolonization debate and their lack of direct interest in the Dutch East Indies removed them from active engagement in the political debate in the Netherlands.<sup>37</sup> Some Dutch American publications advocated the importance of restoring the colonies for the future of Dutch international trade.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the Dutch military interventions in 1947 American foreign policy and public opinion completely shifted to favor Indonesia and the issue disappeared from the Dutch American agenda.

The volume of migration within the Dutch empire to the Dutch East Indies was equal to the Dutch emigration to the United States in the period between 1900 and Apart from the language position, the intra-national migration led to a crucial difference in education while many Dutch migrants to the Indies sent their children to secondary schools in the Netherlands, Dutch Americans sent their children to schools in the US,. These choices tied the migrants to

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<sup>36</sup> David Zwart, "Constructing the Homeland: Dutch Americans and the Netherlands Information Bureau during the 1940s." *Michigan Historical Review* 33.2 (2007): 98-100; Henk Aay, "Dutch Propaganda Films in America: Documentaries from the Netherlands Information Bureau in the 1940s," In Swierenga, *Dutch Americans and War*, 221-49.

<sup>37</sup> See for instance the reprint of a *Grand Rapids Press* editorial defending the Dutch for taking time to arrange Indonesian independence in the *Missionary Monthly* (September 1947): 239.

<sup>38</sup> Charlotte Kok, "*The Knickerbocker Weekly* and the Netherlands Information Bureau: A Public Diplomacy Cooperation During the 1941-1947 Era," (MA thesis Utrecht University, 2011), 61.

the Indies to the Netherlands whereto many of them retired . The real boost for transnational relations came about with decolonization during the late 1940s and 1950s; 300,000 Indonesians and Dutch decided to return. Until today cultural exchanges and political engagement with Indonesia remain strong and have built enduring transnational relationships.<sup>39</sup>

This comparison shows how the perspective of the future influenced the migrants' behavior. The temporary character of the migration to Indonesia kept contacts with the home land intact, especially visible in the education of the next generation. The presence of Dutch migrant communities in other parts of the world fostered the formation of a new kind of transnational contact, one that included multiple migrations, for example, from Holland via South Africa or Brazil to the Dutch settlements in the Midwest or via the Dutch East Indies to California. A systematic overview of such interconnections might enrich the knowledge of the dynamics of transnational behavior of Dutch and other Western migrants.<sup>40</sup>

High geographical mobility of the labor force created a pattern of return migration that promoted transnational contacts. A strong tradition of seasonal labor migration has made return migration acceptable, even at a great distance. But not very many Dutch laborers strayed far away from home in Europe. By comparison, Central and Eastern Europeans, as historian Adam Walaszek reminds us, were used to moving around.<sup>41</sup>

### **Cultural factors in Transnational Relations**

In the early 1800s the diplomatic relations between the young American Republic and the Netherlands were at a low, which was symbolized by the absence of diplomatic

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<sup>39</sup> Gert Oostindie en Jeannette Schoorl, "Migratie tussen Indonesië en Nederland," *Demos* 26.9 (2010): 12-14.

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne M. Sinke, "Crossing National Borders: Locating the United States in Migration History," *OAH Magazine* 19.3 (May 2005): 58-63 describes the moves in the Enserink van der Vliet family between the Netherlands, the United States, Canada, and South Africa. Other examples are in the Polder family annals.

<sup>41</sup> Adam Walaszek, "Central Eastern Europeans in the Euro-Atlantic Migration System Before the First World War," Michael Boyden, Hans Krabbendam, Liselotte Vandenbussche, eds., *Tales of Transit: Narrative Migrant Spaces in Atlantic Perspective, 1850-1950* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 29-44. ""

exchanges. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century the Dutch and American political structures moved in opposite directions: the Americans threw out their King, while the Dutch welcomed one. Despite the excitement about American independence, some Dutch observers had serious concerns about the chances for survival of the new Republic due to their doubts about a stable social and political order. But there were other ties that would bind these two peoples together: religion and especially the narrative of the mass migration.<sup>42</sup>

Shortly before American independence, the last bastion of Dutchness, the Dutch Reformed Church, had cut itself loose from its subordination to a transnational authority, the ecclesiastical rule of Classis Amsterdam. The Church began to educate its ministers on American soil, something that would eventually inspire many other educational initiatives for the new wave of immigrants beginning in the 1840s, including colleges, seminaries and Christian day schools.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile during the 1830s and 1840s the new Dutch kingdom encountered a series of constitutional, territorial, economic, religious, and financial crises that made mass emigration an attractive option for those who became victims of these troubles. The economic conditions in the United States, the availability of cheap land and demand for labor, made a transatlantic move attractive. The slow rate of industrialization in the Netherlands meant that agricultural and rural areas had the highest departure rates. Acquiring land anchored immigrants and made their settlement more permanent. Due to the absence of an international seasonal labor tradition and accusations that mass migration was an act of disloyalty to the nation, emigrant leaders had to create a plausible narrative for their departure. The religious migrant groups drew most attention due their size and publicity; they legitimized their

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<sup>42</sup> J. W. Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence* (Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 17.

<sup>43</sup> John W. Coakley, "John Henry Livingston (1746-1825): Interpreter of the Dutch Reformed Tradition in the Early American Republic," in Leon van den Broeke, Hans Krabbendam, and Dirk Mouw, eds., *Transatlantic Pieties: Dutch Clergy in Colonial America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 295-314; Wim van den Doel, "From distant Images to Closer Relations: The Netherlands and the United States during the Nineteenth Century," in Krabbendam, *Four Centuries*, 219-37.

emigration with strong moral arguments about the lack of religious freedom and unfair taxation. Both arguments discouraged later transnational investments because the emigrants envisioned a depressing future for the Dutch nation in contrast to the bright encouraging future for the US. The feelings of the Dutch immigrants about the Netherlands were anchored in the past, not on the future. A decision to settle permanently meant a loss of citizens' rights in the Netherlands but few seemed to regret that.<sup>44</sup> Their master narratives emphasized the hardships and injustices they had experienced at home. As these religious communities founded new settlements, in time, these stories of liberation from a gloomy past were commemorated with the result that this negative perspective of the homeland dominated the emigration tradition.<sup>45</sup>

Many immigrants of other nations became engaged in modernizing their own country, such as Chinese immigrants in the US who returned to assist in building schools and hospitals. Dutch emigrants, however, were hardly involved in such modernization of their home country. They preferred to take their chances in the United States.<sup>46</sup> They gained necessary expertise from their immigrant European neighbors and not from return migrants. Dutch immigrants built religious and educational institutions in the United States that helped them connect to and participate in their new environment, which were inspired by Dutch examples, but quickly became independent. Only a handful of Dutch immigrant students, mostly theologians, came to the Netherlands to get advanced degrees. After World War II, the Marshall Plan and educational exchanges such as the Fulbright program, created a web of transnational information contacts, but those then took place mostly outside Dutch American educational institutions.

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<sup>44</sup> Marlou Schrover, "Burgers, ingezetenen en vreemdelingen," in De Haan, *Een nieuwe staat*, 242-49.

<sup>45</sup> David Zwart, "For the Next Generation: Commemorating the Immigration Experience in the United States and Canada," *Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Econonmische Geschiedenis* 7 (2010): 126-50.

<sup>46</sup> See my *The Model Man: A Life of Edward W. Bok, 1863-1930* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).

Re-migration was a crucial pillar of transnational contact. All over Europe, return migrants maintained contacts with the United States, but the Dutch had a low level of return migration. The low percentage of 10-15 per cent confirmed the expectation of permanent settlement. Also the number of return trips was modest. [After 1900, return trips became more common. A survey in 1909 reported that 40 of the 578 Dutch workers in the furniture industry in Grand Rapids had been back to the Netherlands once or several times. Those who had lived in America between five and nine years, had a return rate that was twice as high as among those who had been in the United States less than five or more than ten years. Starters did not have enough money for travel and heads of families had more pressing responsibilities. Other European immigrants in the Grand Rapids area visited their home countries at twice the frequency of the Dutch.<sup>47</sup> These visitors to the old country exchanged information and urged others to emigrate, but did not seek to bring about change in the Netherlands.

A telling counter example of this phenomenon was the Association of Former-Americans that organized activities in Eeklo, seven miles south of the Dutch-Belgian border in between Ghent and Bruges. In the 1930s, this club staged reunions on July 4 and Labor Day with picnics, American patriotic songs, and opportunities to exchange stories.<sup>48</sup> This Flemish example confirms three factors that reinforced their transnational contacts. First, emigration to the US was a variation of seasonal labor in Northern Belgium and was therefore expected to be temporary. Second, the slow emancipation of the Flemish from the dominant French speaking culture led to celebrating and idealizing Flemish culture. This feeling strongly appealed to those who had left: the true fatherland was Flanders. A third distinctive element in comparison with the Netherlands was Belgium's overwhelmingly Catholic affiliation, something that made departure for the predominantly Protestant United States

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<sup>47</sup> Krabbendam, *Freedom*, 264.

<sup>48</sup> Stynen, *Boer vindt land*, 197-98.

more risky. Bishops saw emigration as temporary as well, and, not until after World War I, did they realize that their former parishioners were there to stay. These features illustrate that the transnational incentive was stronger in Belgium than in the Netherlands.

Among the examples of transnational “successes” the factor of religion is common. First of all, many ministers in two Reformed immigrant church denominations had been educated in the Netherlands, but since the communities quickly gave priority to founding their own seminaries, the need for continued exchange was much reduced. In the Christian Reformed Church, the clergy’s return rate was 14 percent, similar to the rate for all Dutch re-migrants. The number of Dutch Catholic parishes was small and the American Catholic Church leadership was more concerned with providing services for new immigrants and strengthening the ties to Rome than with building churches based on nationality.<sup>49</sup> Immigrant churches were important mediators between the culture of origin and settlement. But below the practical advantages of churches smoothening the immigrants’ transition, resided a framework of meaning that tied immigrants together. This shared vision also connected sending and receiving countries.<sup>50</sup>

The quick decline of church membership in the Netherlands since the 1960s created a widening gap with the more thriving and visible religious landscapes in the United States; this further alienated the religious Dutch American community and the secular Dutch.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusions

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<sup>49</sup> Since 1857, 73 ministers came from the Netherlands to serve in the Christian Reformed Churches in North America. Three returned upon retirement, ten took calls from churches in the Netherlands. That is about 14 per cent. Databases, Courtesy of Dick Harms, Heritage Hall, Calvin College, Grand Rapids. Krabbendam, *Freedom on the Horizon*, 138-46.

<sup>50</sup> Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America. A Portrait*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 299-342.

<sup>51</sup> Peter van Rooden, “The Strange Death of Dutch Christendom,” in Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape, eds. *Secularisation in the Christian World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 175-96.

This essay shows that transportation and communication networks prepared an excellent and expanding groundwork for transnational relations of Dutch immigrants in the United States. These preconditions could not have been the reason for the low level of transnational contacts between Dutch immigrants and their home country. A rough longitudinal and comparative pattern shows a low level of seasonal labor migration of the Dutch outside their borders, a stable society and a steady stream of mostly rural migrants who made calculated optimizing decisions. As a result, emigration from the Netherlands to North America was considered a permanent move by families. Returning was considered a defeat: the few that came back carried the burden of failure.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the few political crises in the Netherlands did not inspire immigrants to call for political change, except for several exigencies that threatened the Dutch colonial empire.

As positive transnational factors advance and multiply exchange, the reverse is also true. The lack of transnational activities make the Dutch an interesting counter example in the debate about the importance of immigrants' relations with their home country. This paper has not exhausted all aspects of Dutch immigrants' transnational behavior. We need to examine immigrant newspapers in more detail to see whether these conclusions need qualifications for different social classes, denominations, and regions. More evidence from immigrant correspondence is also needed to confirm or correct the impression of negative reports about the home country discouraging investments in the Netherlands and to document the damaged reputation of those who returned. And the time frame can be expanded to include the more recent waves of emigrants. In any event, the Dutch case shows how important the framework

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<sup>52</sup> *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad* 31 August 1882 reported that each week 60-90 German migrants arrived in Amsterdam back from New York. Occasionally a returning migrant advertised his skills in a newspaper ad for salesmen: *Nieuws van den Dag* 28 December 1905. See also *Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad*, 9 October 1907 reporting hundreds of Germans returning. *Limburgsch Dagblad* 28 September, 1932 reported on Polish remigrants who had used their American savings to buy farms in Poland.

of the nation-state, and its economic, political and religious conditions, was for the level of transnational relations. Even fast internet connections will not be able to change that.