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Civilizing the Devil's Own Country. The Scouting movement in Netherlands New Guinea as a tool for social, cultural and political change, 1950–1962*

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ABSTRACT

By using Scouting in Netherlands New Guinea between 1950 and 1962 as a case-study, this paper critically analyses the idea of 'Sport has the power to change the world' – a positivist notion that has caused governments and NGOs alike to present physical exercise as a tool for nation-building, education, health, community development and social inclusion. This paper argues that indeed Scouting was used in Netherlands New Guinea as a tool for social, cultural and political change. However, less idealistic motives also underlay the development of the Scouting movement. Local agency and the ways Scouting was used by Papuan Scouts to advance their own agendas will also be taken into account.

KEYWORDS

Scouting; Netherlands New Guinea; civilization; development; historical perspective

Introduction

After recognizing Indonesia's independence in December 1949, the Netherlands retained sovereignty over New Guinea based on article 73 of the Charter of the United Nations (UN), accepting

as a sacred trust the obligation to promote to the utmost ... the well-being of the inhabitants of these territories, and to this end: a. to ensure, with due respect for the peoples concerned, their political, economic, social, and educational advancement ... b. to develop self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples, and to assist them in the progressive development of their free political institutions. (Charter, 1945, p. 14)

Article 73 became the cornerstone of Dutch policies in New Guinea, until the territories were relinquished to the UN in August 1962. Subsection 73e of the Charter entrusted the Dutch to report back to the UN regularly with information about the current state of affairs.

These reports are important sources of information which offer valuable insights into the comprehensive and complicated task which this 'sacred trust' truly was. All kinds of actions and programmes were instigated in the fields of agriculture, mining, forestry, education, health care and infrastructure to further the social and economic advancement of the territories. Schooling, vocational training and a gradual 'Papuanization' of public administration had to prepare the Papuans for a self-governed future (Report on Netherlands New Guinea

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for the year ..., 1950–1962). A genuine urge for development existed amongst Dutch and Papuans alike and a recent oral history project on Papuan civil servants even suggests that Dutch administration of New Guinea was not a colonial government, but a ‘modern post-war endeavour at a development administration’ (Visser, 2012, p. 3).

Both contemporary writings and subsequent literature tend to concentrate on government projects and education as instruments for the development of the islands (Baal, 1986–1989; Kamma, 1977; Klein, 1953; Nieuw-Guinea Instituut, 1956; Schoorl, 1996; Visser, 2012). Although powerful tools, however, the UN reports indicate that Dutch government officials also deemed it necessary that the Papuans would use their leisure time usefully (Rapport inzake Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea, 1961, p. 7). In the bigger towns, sports and youth organizations came into being to support this aspiration.

The UN reports mention Scouting as the most important organization for youth work (Report on Netherlands New Guinea for the year, 1955, p. 92; 1960, p. 97). The numbers in the Scout movement increased steadily and, in 1961 around 3400 Scouts were patrolling the islands, most of them Papuans (Rapport inzake Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea, 1961; p. 135). Unfortunately, the reports do not contain detailed information on the use of Scouting as a tool for change and nor does the literature on the development of New Guinea. Scouting is only hinted at in the oral history project, in which a former civil servant, Joel Boray, enthusiastically recalls establishing a Scouting patrol group in the interior area of Wamena (see Visser, 2012). His interviewer did not seem to regard this as a serious topic for conversation, however, and failed to elaborate on it.

Research on other Southeast Asian regions nonetheless shows that Scouting was indeed used by colonial authorities and educators as an instrument to transmit Western habits and ideas (Kua, 2011; Tan & Wan, 2002; Wu, 2014). As development was the main goal of the Dutch presence in New Guinea, Scouting might even have been a tool of greater significance than in other Southeast Asian countries. This paper therefore investigates the way that Scouting was used as a tool for social, cultural and political change in Netherlands New Guinea.

The development of indigenous people was never a one-way street; research on Scouting in British Malaya points to the multi-directional nature of exchanges and to the need to take account of localized responses (Wu, 2014). The involvement of Papuan civil servants in Scouting indicates the use and agency of local intermediaries, as also established in research on development and government in Netherlands New Guinea before World War II (Derksen, 2016). Therefore, this paper also looks into local agency and the localized responses and appropriations of Dutch ideas and interests.

Within the framework of ‘Sports as a tool to change the world’, this paper uses a historical perspective to critically reflect on this positivist notion. It is frequently suggested that sport has been embraced by governments, NGOs and local populations to enhance nation-building, education, health care, community development and social inclusion. However, research on Netherlands New Guinea before World War II shows that education and ‘civilization’ went hand in hand with pacification and domination (Derksen, 2016). This paper thus also researches less idealistic motives underlying the development of the Scouting movement.

The research for this paper is predominantly based on archival sources, located at the National Archives of the Netherlands (NA) and the Catholic Documentation Centre of the Radboud University Nijmegen (KDC). The archives of the Dutch Scouting organization are deposited at the KDC, and contain memoranda, reports and correspondence on the Scouting movement in Netherlands New Guinea. Reports and correspondence referenced in this paper are also to be found in the archives of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs at the NA.

Scouting on Netherlands New Guinea: introduction and organization

Scouting was created in 1908 by Lord Robert Baden-Powell (1857–1941), a British general and war veteran who became a national hero during the Second Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902). During this war, the British encountered great difficulty defeating the South African Boers, which triggered deep-felt anxieties in British society about the dangers of industrialization, urbanization and modernity. Politicians, military leaders and educators worried that life in the modern city had degenerating effects on the British youth and feared that British boys were weakened and unable to defend British interest across the globe (Jeal, 1990; Macdonald, 1993). Baden-Powell proclaimed outdoor activities as a powerful remedy in the face of these fears.

According to Baden-Powell, activities such as hiking, tracking, swimming, camping, exploring and playing games outdoors could gain British youngsters strong and healthy bodies and make them self-confident and self-reliant. While being active outdoors, Scouting leaders stressed values such as loyalty, obedience, friendship and helpfulness, which were captured in the Scout Law. Scouting was organized hierarchically in patrol groups and troops, and advanced Scouts could develop leadership qualities by guiding these groups. Scouting was thus seen as an instrument for creating national health, social harmony and citizenship (Baden-Powell, 1908; Rosenthal, 1984).

Baden-Powell's ideas and methods turned out to be very appealing to teachers, educators and youth workers around the globe. The Scout movement spread rapidly and was introduced in the Netherlands only two years after its founding in Great Britain (Edinga, 1976). In the 1920s and 1930s, the movement gained ground in the Netherlands-Indies, but it was only after World War II that Scouting found its way to Netherlands New Guinea.

The UN reports indicate the complexity of Dutch endeavours in this area. According to Western standards, the native societies of New Guinea were amongst the most primitive in the world (Report on Netherlands New Guinea for the year, 1954, p. 7; 1960, p. 8). Agricultural production was low, technological development was rudimentary and material progress was limited. The indigenous peoples still widely held to mythic and animistic religious beliefs. Although practices such as cannibalism and headhunting belonged largely in the past, the 'savage' image of the Papuans was sustained through images of them wearing no, or hardly any, clothing. Hence the territories were labelled 'the Devil's Own Country'.

Scouting was introduced in these territories by Scoutmasters from the Netherlands who had arrived in New Guinea for work. The movement started in the early 1950s with only a few groups and a couple of dozen, mainly Dutch boys, but grew rapidly from the second half of the 1950s. When the Dutch departed New Guinea, the Scouting movement had around 100 groups with some 3500 members. Although the ethnicity of the Scouts was not registered, the year reports of the Scouting organization indicate that most of them were Papuans (Jaarverslagen. Met toelichtende bijlagen, 1954–1962). With an estimated population of around only 700,000, these numbers are quite significant (Rapport inzake Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea, 1951–1962). Scout troops were clustered in the coastal areas and were mainly active around Hollandia – the present-day capital Jayapura – Serui, Biak, Manokwari, Sorong, Teminabuan, Fak-Fak and Merauke.

Four different Scouting organizations were in fact active in New Guinea: a Protestant-oriented one for boys (the *Nederlandse Padvindersvereniging* – NPV), a Catholic one for boys (the *Verkenner van de Katholieke Jeugdbeweging* – VKJB), and two similar ones for girls (the

Protestant-oriented *Nederlandse Padvindstersgilde* – NPG and the Catholic *Nederlandse Gidsenbeweging* – NGB). The Protestant-oriented NPV and the NPG were by far the largest, with the Catholics being almost exclusively active in the less-populated southern parts of the territory. With 2297 members, the New Guinea department of the NPV was in 1961 the fourth largest of the Netherlands, after those in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague.

Scout troops were mainly formed by people who were involved in education and youth work in their professional lives as well. ‘Youth workers’ including missionaries, teachers and government officials often used Scouting as an extension of their professional educational practices. The involvement of the Protestant and Catholic missions was of great significance for the development of Scouting in Netherlands New Guinea, as missionaries could use existing educational and religious structures to form new groups. The missionary boarding schools were especially important in this respect, as the Papuan youth lived outside their traditional communities and therefore these schools were deemed very suitable for teaching them new habits and ideas (Memorandum, 1960).

The colonial government was merely indirectly involved. Only in the early 1960s did the government start to provide any funding (De Leider, 1960). In 1960, the Governor of Netherlands New Guinea, P.J. Platteel, a former Scout himself, became the patron of the New Guinean Scouts.

Scouting in Netherlands New Guinea: Dutch aims and methods

The aims of Scouting in Netherlands New Guinea in the 1950s and 1960s did not differ much from Baden-Powell’s original ideas. Dutch Scouting officials presented Scouting as a tool for Papua’s youngsters to become self-reliant and independent adults, and Scouting was seen as an ideal instrument for citizenship training, community development, social integration and nation-building. For girls, Scouting was also seen as a tool for gender empowerment.

According to Dutch Scouting officials, the outdoor activities of Scouting were intended to prepare Papuan boys and girls for their adult lives. While being outdoors and engaged in activities including hiking, tracking, exploring and playing games, they would develop character traits such as courage, self-reliance and independence and foster new friendships with fellow Scouts. They would also learn to take the initiative, to be responsible and to work together, qualities which Dutch Scoutmasters thought were lacking in indigenous societies. Furthermore, Papuan Scouts could develop all kinds of practical skills, such as growing fruit and vegetables, cooking, first aid and hygienic regulations which might have been obvious to twentieth-century Western young people, but were not to Papuan Scouts. In indigenous societies food was never cooked and health care was intrinsically linked to magical pre-modern ideas (De Schakel, 1957; Nieuw-Guinea Instituut, 1956, p. 25; Rapport inzake Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea, 1961, p. 12).

Scouting was considered even more important in New Guinea, because, in contrast with the Netherlands, the Dutch youth workers did not regard the traditional family and the village schools as proper educational environments. They thought Papuan elders were unfit to guide their youngsters from their traditional tribal way of life into the modern world. Scouting could be instrumental in an ‘acculturation’ process, as it provided Papuan boys and girls with new habits (the game of Scouting), new ideas (the Scout Law) and new social ties (the global Scouting community) to replace their traditional habits and ideas (*adat*). Scouting

in Netherlands New Guinea was therefore truly 'working on civilization', at least according to the Dutch who were involved (Memorandum, 1959).

Scouting contributed to the 'sacred trust' of the Dutch by instructing the Papuans how to become good citizens – in line with the subtitle of Baden-Powell's Scouting manual – and by teaching them leadership skills. Just as Dutch government officials gradually wanted to 'Papuanize' public administration, Dutch Scouting officials wanted to Papuanize the Scouting cadre. Leading Scouting patrol groups would prepare Papuan Scouts both for leading the New Guinea Scouting organization and for fulfilling leadership positions in a future autonomous New Guinea. Thus, in 1959, Dutch Scoutmaster F.J. van der Veer made a four-month trip through New Guinea to train Papuan Scouts to become Scouting leaders. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, several Papuan Scouts were also offered the opportunity to follow leadership courses in the Netherlands and in nearby Australian New Guinea (Jaarverslag, 1960–1962; Memorandum, 1960).

One of the more daring ambitions of Dutch policies in New Guinea was to create a form of solidarity and shared identity between people from different tribes. The majority of the indigenous population lived in isolation, scattered across the islands in small settlements often no bigger than a few hundred people. Most of them felt no connection to people from other tribes or villages, and large socio-political organizations were absent. Strengthening the social fabric was therefore one of the priorities if New Guinea was ever to become a governable autonomous territory (Report on Netherlands New Guinea for the year 1954, p. 7; 1960, p. 8; Visser, 2012). Dutch Scouting officials thought that Scouting could be of great assistance in this regard, as Scouting activities could foster friendships and brotherhood amongst Scouts from different tribes. They also stressed the importance of sportsmanship and fair play to making old animosities disappear. The fact that many Scout groups were formed in boarding schools was seen as a great advantage. Papuan youngsters lived outside their traditional communities there, and through interaction with boys and girls from different tribes they formed new social ties more easily. Scouting could thus contribute to community-building and social integration (Memorandum, 1959, 1960).

Dutch girl Scout leaders propagated Scouting as a pedagogical tool for girls as well. In 1961, around 400 girl Scouts were active in New Guinea, half of whom were native. Like the patrol groups for boys, they were mainly organized in the boarding schools of the Catholic and Protestant missions. Dutch Scouting officials regarded Scouting as a powerful tool in the empowerment of girls, who, in their traditional communities, often had subordinate positions. Women were not regarded as equal to men. Outdoor activities could empower the girls to use their initiative, to be responsible and to cooperate with girls from different tribes and families. To some extent, the girls could even gain leadership skills, as leadership courses were instigated for Papuan girls as well as for boys (Verslag, 1961). Scouting could thus contribute to their emancipation and to their development as self-reliant and independent citizens, which was deemed important as Dutch Scout leaders thought Papuan girls had a role to play in a future autonomous New Guinea. Furthermore, through Scouting they could develop practical skills such as cooking and first aid and increase their understanding of hygiene standards.

Although the overall aims of Scouting in New Guinea were in accordance with Dutch colonial policies, Scouting methods were slightly different. With its romanticized vision of outdoor life and outdoor activities, Baden-Powell's Scouting had a definite anti-modern flavour. The movement was established in the early 1900s to get the British youth back in

contact with nature. However, according to the Dutch, Papuan youngsters should not develop their natural skills. On the contrary, they had to abandon their traditional lifestyle and adapt to a modern way of life. Dutch Scouting officials did not seem to see this contradiction. In fact, they even propagated Scouting as a tool to keep the Papuans in contact with their natural roots. By living in an urban environment, Papuans could rapidly lose their traditional skills, and being active outdoors with Scouting would keep them in touch with their natural lifestyle (Memorandum, 1960). Therefore, a contradictory situation existed with the 'natural' activities of Scouting expected to educate the Papuan youth into a modern way of living.

Scouting on Netherlands New Guinea: secondary motives

If the reports and correspondence of Dutch Scouting officials in New Guinea are read by the letter, one could presume that Scouting truly was a miracle tool, effective in the social, economic and political advancement of the islands. However, notwithstanding the educational value of Scouting, less idealistic motives also underlay its development. Scouting was utilized by the Dutch as a tool to discipline and control the Papuan youngsters and tie them to the colonial motherland.

Civilization and disciplining went hand in hand. It was thought that the Papuans were very individualistic people with hostile attitudes towards one another. By emphasizing the importance of sportsmanship and fair play, the Dutch wanted to maintain social order and pacify disputes between Scouts from different tribes. The Scout Law stressed qualities such as loyalty, discipline and obeying orders, which, according to the Dutch, were new to the Papuans. Patrolling the islands was seen as an ideal means to teach the youth to take orders and accept authority, especially from Scouts from other tribes (Memorandum, 1957, 1959). Scouting could thus discipline and control the Papuan youth.

Similar to other colonial domains, revolutionary and nationalistic ideas spread around in New Guinea in the 1950s and 1960s. Halfway through the 1950s an indigenous Scouting leader made contact with an Indonesian nationalist organization and some Indonesians even attempted an ill-prepared invasion of New Guinea. By organizing the leisure time of the Papuan boys, the Dutch wanted to prevent this kind of revolutionary outburst as much as possible. Committing them to Dutch organizations was intended to prevent the youth from grouping themselves and developing more politically motivated youth movements (Memorandum, 1957, 1959).

This was of even greater importance since Scouting was mainly targeting the future Papuan elite at boarding schools. Scouting was a means to tie these youngsters to the Dutch administration and to retain influence over the territory, as a 1957 memorandum made explicitly clear (Memorandum, 1957). Papuan Scouts swore an oath to serve God, Queen and Country and this country first and foremost referred to the colonial motherland and not to an autonomous New Guinea. During their activities, Scouts sung the Dutch national anthem, performed dances around the Dutch flag and celebrated Dutch national holidays. In 1954, brief discussions amongst Dutch Scouts on whether it was desirable to join the Scouting organization of nearby Australian New Guinea instead of remaining with the far-away motherland were rapidly cut short. It was agreed that Scouting had to contribute to maintaining the Dutch presence in New Guinea in line with the motto of the Dutch royal family – 'Je maintiendrai', or 'I will maintain' (Correspondentie, 1954).

While in theory Scouting was a brotherhood of equals, in practice the Dutch perpetuated social divisions. Scouts were divided into different groups, based on gender, ethnicity and religion. Dutch, Papuan, Chinese and Ambonese groups separately patrolled the islands. Until halfway through the 1950s, indigenous Scouting leaders were mainly recruited from Ambonese groups. Before World War II, the Dutch had deployed these 'foreigners' as government and missionary officials; it was a colonial system that has been labelled in the literature as 'dual colonialism' (Derksen, 2016, p. 112; Pouwer, 1999, pp. 162–163). The Moluccans were very unpopular with the Papuans, but Dutch Scouting officials appointed them as patrol leaders nevertheless. It was only in the late 1950s and early 1960s that Papuan Scouts rose in the ranks. Even then, their quest for leadership positions created tensions between different candidates and their groups. Several reports exist of indigenous patrol leaders denouncing fellow Scouts to the Dutch Scouting board (*Stukken betreffende de padvinderij*). The hierarchical system of Scouting could thus create social conflicts and lead to social stratification.

Scouting on Netherlands New Guinea: Papuan agency and motives

The shared ambition of indigenous Scouts serves as evidence that Papuan involvement in Scouting could have unforeseen consequences for the Dutch. Papuan motives for engaging in Scouting were not always the same as the Dutch envisaged. (A very important disclaimer has to be made here, as my research is based on Dutch sources, and therefore the Papuan perspective is studied through a Dutch lens.) But it can be said that for the Papuans, Scouting was a means to gather social, economic and political capital.

As the quest for leadership positions shows, the hierarchical system of Scouting was very appealing to Papuan Scouts. They valued social status and prestige – 'pangkat' – and Scouting could provide them with status. Being a Scout leader meant having social prestige in life outside Scouting as well (Memorandum, 1959). Furthermore, Papuan Scouts used their uniforms to engage in economic activities, with Scout troops deploying themselves as working units in indigenous settlements (*kampongs*), as newsboys, gardeners or for the unloading of ships. Involvement in Scouting could thus help them make money (Memorandum, 1959). The leadership qualities indigenous Scout leaders developed in Scouting could also benefit them greatly later in life. From the end of the 1950s onwards in particular, this factor became more important and leadership positions in the Scout movement were increasingly filled by Papuans.

The global scale of the Scout movement created possibilities for Papuan boys to broaden their horizons and come into contact with fellow Scouts from across the globe. In 1959 a world Scouting Jamboree was organized in the Philippines which was visited by a Dutch Scout leader and three Papuan Scouts. The indigenous Scouts met and talked with Scouts from Europe, India and other Southeast Asian countries and learned about international and political developments in other parts of the world (Nieuw Guinea Koerier, 1 August 1959).

The story of Joel Boray, already mentioned in the introduction, exemplifies the difference that Scouting could make for an indigenous boy. Boray was born in around 1942 on the island of Serui, the son of a local village leader. Aged 15 he moved to Hollandia, to be educated at the School for Indigenous Administrators (OSIBA), the training school for Papuan civil servants. He resided at the boarding school of the OSIBA and there he joined the Scout movement.

In these formative years, Boray was submerged in the world of the Dutch and adopted their ideas. After four years of schooling and Scouting, he had internalized the lessons of his Dutch educators. On leaving OSIBA, he regarded it as his mission to develop the tribal societies. 'Papuan in the interior were really very underdeveloped ... we wanted to bring them progress', he recalled 40 years later (cited in Visser, 2012, pp. 162–163). Dutch educators extensively stressed the importance of being responsible and using one's initiative and thus Boray remembered: 'I not only waited for orders, but also thought about and sought out initiatives. All of this was because I had been educated in such a way as to be personally responsible in the field' (cited in Visser, 2012, p. 165). His fieldwork included spreading sports and physical activities in the indigenous societies. 'Mens sana in corpora sano' was one of the lessons learned at the OSIBA. Boray therefore initiated Scouting in the interior of New Guinea, as a part of his 'social task' as a civil servant (Visser, 2012, p. 165, 185).

The Papuans at the OSIBA were loyal to the Dutch administration. 'The Dutch ... knew how to manage a region ... we honoured the Dutch flag during the Dutch period', remembered Boray (cited in Visser, 2012, p. 176). When Dutch Scouting officials looked for indigenous Scouts to represent New Guinea at the World Jamboree in 1959, they found them at the civil-servant training school. Boray was educated and spoke some English and could thus be presented to the rest of the world thereby demonstrating that the Dutch took their 'sacred trust' seriously.

For Boray, the trip to the Philippines was a means to gather social and political capital. Walking around Manila he experienced the enticements of the modern world, as, unlike village-like Hollandia, Manila truly was a modern city. In the Philippines, the Papuan Scouts got access to the highest diplomatic levels. They were received by the Dutch ambassador and by the international Scouting board. During conversations with fellow Scouts from all parts of the world, they presented themselves as loyal subjects to the Dutch administration. When being asked 'Are you from Irian Barat?', they answered by saying 'Excuse me, we are from Netherlands New Guinea', meaning that New Guinea belonged to the Netherlands and not to Indonesia. However, at these encounters, they were also asked questions along the lines of: 'How come you are not independent yet?' (Nieuw Guinea Koerier, 1 August 1959). Conversations with Scouts from nations which had recently become independent might well have triggered thoughts about self-government and independence. In the end, the Dutch could control the Scouting organization, but they could not control the hearts and minds of the Papuan Scouts.

Scouting at the OSIBA strengthened Boray's education as a civil servant and gave him qualities which benefited his professional career. During the Dutch era, he was loyal to his educators, but he also developed ideas about self-government and independence. 'We were educated by the Dutch, we were educated by the Indonesians, but we are still Papuans This nation wants independence', Boray said in 2012 (cited in Visser, 2012, p. 168, 180).

Concluding remarks

This paper is mainly about ideas and intentions, as it is very difficult, if not impossible, to measure the extent to which Scouting truly contributed to developing character traits or instructing good citizenship. What can be said is that present-day notions about the power of sports as a tool to change the world were already prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. Scouting was presented by Dutch Scouting officials as an instrument for community-building,

community development, national health, social harmony, gender empowerment and nation-building. However, this paper also makes clear that less idealistic motives lay behind the introduction of Scouting. Scouting was used not only as a tool for development, but also as an instrument for the disciplining, pacification and domination of indigenous Scouts and the preservation of Dutch control over Netherlands New Guinea. Moreover, local agency has to be taken into account. Papuan motives for engaging in Scouting were not always in accordance with the ideas that the Dutch had envisaged. For Papuans, Scouting was a means to gather social, economic and political capital, as well as to come into contact with fellow Scouts across the globe. These contacts might have awakened and accelerated ideas about independence and self-government, which were ultimately in opposition to Dutch interests.

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