

Tourist cycling trips in the tropics

The ideological landscape of recreational bike rides in the former Netherlands East Indies at the end of the nineteenth century

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ABSTRACT

Although previous research shows that the introduction of bicycles drove recreational travel in Western Europe, North America, and Australia, to this day, little is known about tourist cycling in other parts of the world. Nevertheless, a broader geographical context is desirable: the study of the early days of tourist cycling in former European colonies in Southeast Asia can enhance our understanding of the strong political dimensions of tourist travel in a colonial context, as it is interconnected with the project of imperialism, technological change, and modernity. This article examines the early days of tourist cycling in the former Netherlands East Indies from 1884 to 1900. The central questions are: What were the communicated experiences of cycling tourists in the Netherlands East Indies in the late nineteenth century? And what were the ideological foundations underlying their experiences? The research corpus consists of the issues of *De Kampioen* – the magazine of the Dutch bicycle association ANWB – from this period. It indicates that tourist cycling emerged in various forms in the Netherlands East Indies at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas most of the Dutch cyclists' texts that have been examined, strongly emphasize an aesthetic experience, the Australians Burston and Stokes, as the epitome of imperial self-assurance, describe their journey in their travel text more emphatically as dangerous and thereby as a form of adventure tourism. Although the ANWB had some Asian and female members before 1900, episodes of *De Kampioen* from the nineteenth century extol the physical achievements of Western men. In doing so, these androcentric accounts also underscore the European patriarchal system and the racial hierarchy that supported Dutch colonialism in Southeast Asia.

KEYWORDS

Colonialism, bicycle tourism, embodied experiences, mobility, the Netherlands East Indies, travel texts.

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INTRODUCTION

The introduction of new means of transportation made important contributions to the historical development of modern (mass) tourism.¹ Along with the rise of the train, the automobile, and the aeroplane, the bicycle also stimulated recreational travel in the so-called Western world. Until well into the nineteenth century, the group of bicycle owners consisted almost exclusively of young and well-to-do men. A sharp drop in prices of bicycles in the last decade of the same century, however, allowed office clerks and factory workers in Australia, Western Europe, and North America to buy them as well. This gave a much larger group of men and women the opportunity to travel a wider area than before (Kees van Dijk 2009: 271; Marc Rerceretnam 2018; Eric G.E. Zuelow 2016: 112). Especially at the beginning this increased freedom was certainly not applauded by everyone. In contemporary magazines and newspapers, supporters and opponents of the bicycle spoke out in no uncertain terms. Much of their commentary focused on gender issues: the social dangers and health risks allegedly associated with female cyclists were heavily debated (for example Beata Kiersnowska 2019; Michael Taylor 2010: 340-342).

The bicycle made regular trips to the countryside, parks or neighbouring towns, at self-determined times, possible. Additionally, the bike offered more room than the train or tram to choose one's own route, destination, and travel companions. You could set your own speed or stop along the way to take a contemplative look at the scenery (Gary Allen Tobin 1974: 841; Zuelow 2016: 112-114). For many the bicycle was geographically liberating (Glenn Norcliffe 2001: 24).

This boom in cycling also set in motion the development of a modern tourism industry associated with this mode of transport (Manuel Stoffers and Harry Oosterhuis 2009: 392; Tobin 1974). Almost immediately after the introduction in 1885 of the so-called "safety bicycle" (or: "safety") – a bicycle with equal-sized wheels and a chain drive – a cycling mania erupted in North America that did not end until after 1900. Similar cycling crazes took place in other regions (Norcliffe 2001: 5). To serve the needs of recreational riders, a variety of businesses specifically catering to this target group, such as hotels and cafes, appeared along popular rural routes (Tobin 1974: 838). By making it more accessible to recreationists and tourists, the bicycle dramatically changed the identity of the countryside (Norcliffe 2001: 19).

A broader academic interest in the history of cycling emerged in the late twentieth century. In their research, historians have called attention to Dutch bicycle history as well (Stoffers and Oosterhuis 2009; Sue-Yen Tjong Tjin Tai and Frank Veraart 2018). Central themes in historical research on this mode of transportation include its technical development and production (Paul Rosen

¹ This article is based on the author's doctoral research on the tourist experience of the former Netherlands East Indies between 1870 and 1945. An article on the rise of bicycle tourism in the Netherlands East Indies will also appear in 2024 in the Dutch-language scholarly journal *De Moderne Tijd*. That article, written with the cooperation of Achmad Sunjayadi, will pay some more attention to the construction of gender roles than the study published here.

2002), bicycle racing (Roger Gilles 2018), the relationship between the bicycle and modernity (Norcliffe 2001), and the significance of this mode of transportation for women's emancipation (Sarah Hallenbeck 2016; Kiersnowska 2019).

The vast majority of studies on the history of bicycle tourism deal with the United States and the United Kingdom. Studies on the history of bicycle tourism in the Netherlands itself are absent to date. Similarly, very little has been written about the role of the bike in the historical development of tourism in parts of the world other than Western Europe and North America. This includes the Netherlands East Indies. The bicycle (unlike ship, car, tram, and train) receives virtually no attention in several Dutch and English histories of the Netherlands East Indies and Indonesia (for example H.W. van den Doel 1996).² Although there are notable exceptions such as the dissertation of Achmad Sunjayadi in which he indicates the importance of the introduction of the bicycle in the development of tourism in the Netherlands East Indies (Achmad Sunjayadi 2019: 115-120), new research on this topic is desirable. In fact, the study of the early days of tourist cycling in former European colonies in Southeast Asia can enhance our understanding of the strong political dimensions of tourist travel in a colonial context, as it is interconnected with the project of imperialism, technological change, and modernity.

This article focuses on the early days of tourist cycling in "the Indies". Who were the recreational travellers who rode their bicycles at the end of the nineteenth century? In which areas of the Indonesian Archipelago did they travel? How did their means of transport shape their tourist experiences and travel accounts? And what ideological beliefs do these colonial bicycle texts convey and perpetuate? After a historical section on cycling in the Netherlands East Indies, drawing mainly on secondary literature, the rise of recreational cycling in the colony (1884-1900) is examined in more detail using *De Kampioen*, the magazine of the Algemeene Nederlandsche Wielrijders Bond (ANWB, 'General Dutch Cycling Federation'). Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to analyse the cycling magazines that were printed in the former Dutch colony in Southeast Asia itself. Several cycling societies operating only in the East Indies published their own periodicals (see [Mr. Koning in Batavia] 1893).³ *De Semarangsche Vélo*, for example, appeared from 1898 ([Issue of *De Semarangsche Vélo*] 1898).⁴ However, no copies of these magazines have survived. Based on the travel texts about the Netherlands East Indies found in *De Kampioen*, colonial bicycle tourism and its ideological significance at the end of the nineteenth century is outlined. This is done with the help of Jonas Larsen's theoretical insights on the sensory perception of cycling tourists (Jonas Larsen 2016), which are supplemented by postcolonial critical theory (Elleke Boehmer 2005). Not only the travel texts of European bicycle riders are analysed, but also those of the Australians George Burston and Harry Stokes.

² In Van den Doel (1996) information on the history of cycling in the Netherlands East Indies is limited to one photo caption. See Van den Doel (1996: 218).

³ *De Kampioen* X/9, 3-3-1893, p. 209.

⁴ *De Kampioen* XV/35, 2-9-1898, p. 918.

HISTORY OF CYCLING IN THE NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES

The sparse historical studies that address the bicycle and cycling in the former Dutch colony in “the East” postulate that this means of transport began its rise there relatively late. Starting in 1867, when the Semarang-Tangung railroad line in Central Java was officially opened, the first trains began operating in the Indonesian Archipelago (Augustus J. Veenendaal 2022: 18). It was another twenty years or so before the first bicycle appeared on the island (Van Dijk 2009: 268). Martin Bossenbroek et al. argue that the relatively late rise of the bicycle was slowed down by the poor state of the road network at the time, as well as the conditions of the earth’s surface, which was frequently mountainous or heavily overgrown (1995: 718-719). To this can be added the imposition of import duties, which made already pricey bicycles even more expensive (W.J. Giel 1897: 717). The *becak* (passenger tricycle) began to dominate the streetscape in the Netherlands East Indies much later. These cabs were probably introduced in the 1930s (Van Dijk 2009: 268, 274).

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the first bicycles reached the Indonesian Archipelago (Van Dijk 2009: 271; David Arnold and Enrich DeWald 2011: 974). That the entry of the bicycle in the Netherlands East Indies began only after 1900, as some historians write, is incorrect (Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben 2003: 212). The American cyclist W.S. Maltby gave a show at the Batavia theatre in 1887 in which he performed neck-breaking feats on his two-wheeler and unicycle (Sunjayadi 2019: 116). In his travel book *Trick cycling in many lands; An exhibition tour of the world* from 1895, Maltby tells not only how much trouble he had in Batavia to get his bicycles through customs, but also how much of a thrill his acrobatic manoeuvres generated. According to Maltby, no residents in the capital were cycling at that time (Maltby 1895: 35; Sunjayadi 2019: 116). In Asahan (North Sumatra), the Dutchman Albert Derkinderen, the administrator of the Hessa Tobacco Company, was the first to ride around on a “safety” in 1894. That same year, other European men from that region followed his example and began sporting rides in the area (Van Dijk 2009: 271).

Most likely, the artist and writer W.O.J. Nieuwenkamp in March 1904 was the first to cycle on Bali. Six years earlier, during a first visit to the Netherlands East Indies, Nieuwenkamp had already ridden across Java on a dismantlable two-wheeler. He had brought the bicycle with him from the Netherlands. Although there were no major roads yet outside the cities on Bali, Nieuwenkamp used it to make trips from his lodging, the residence of the resident, to all kinds of locations, such as the Hindu temple Pura Segara, which he depicted in drawings, etchings, and woodcuts. By his own account, Nieuwenkamp and his bicycle caused great unrest among the Balinese people. Men, women, and children began running, making a *sembah* (reverent salute) or seeking refuge by the side of the road. At the temple at Kubutambahan, close to Singaraja, Balinese artists depicted the cycling Nieuwenkamp in stone (H.I.R. Hinzler 2013).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the use of bicycles grew significantly, and the Netherlands East Indies government began to promulgate regulations for bicycles and cyclists. The first regulation on bicycle traffic dates from 1910 (Bossenbroek et al. 1995: 719). Many different professions in the Netherlands East Indies began using this mode of transport from 1900 onwards. European planters made their inspection rounds on bicycles (Van Dijk 2009: 272). Indonesian doctors rode them to visit their patients (see W.Ph. Coolhaas 1985: 200). Police and military also used this means of transportation. In the years before the turn of the century, magazines were already busy discussing how bicycles could best be used in the Indies Army. W.J. Giel argued in the *Indisch militair tijdschrift* that the means of transport for infantry and military letter carriers, the so-called “facteurs”, would in many cases be a real godsend. About the latter he wrote:

Nothing is more mind-numbing and unpleasant than traveling the same route on the same usually miserable horse. Moreover, the mail does not always arrive neatly because of all the hassle. For the cyclist, however, it is not tedious to ride the same road, because he has enough variety in the movement of the wheel and the attention he must always pay to the road. (Giel 1897: 714)

Giel, however, was not only thinking about job satisfaction but also warfare. Had the colonial troops in Bantam been able to move more quickly by bicycle, “great calamities” could have been avoided, according to him (Giel 1897: 715).



Figure 1. The field police with their bicycles in West Sumatra, 1932 (Leiden University Libraries, Digital Collections KITLV 85264).

The colonial government also believed that the bicycle had great advantages for law enforcement. After all, it allowed a modest number of officers to cover a larger area than on foot (Van Dijk 2009: 272). Therefore, the mobile field police, established in 1921 to guard security in rural areas of the colony, regularly went out by bicycle while on patrol (see Figure 1) (Van den Doel 1996: 218). To prevent thieves from evading the police too easily, officers in Batavia patrolled at night without lights (Van Dijk 2009: 276).

Most bicycles that came into colonial South and Southeast Asia were European-made (Arnold and DeWald 2011: 973). Some of the bicycles imported to the Netherlands East Indies were manufactured in the Netherlands. In addition, German and English manufacturers, who could price their products more competitively, found outlets for their bicycles in the colony. In 1928, exports of Dutch bikes to the Netherlands East Indies peaked at 17,152. England and Germany exported 17,537 and 12,727 bicycles, respectively, to the East Indies that year. In the subsequent crisis years, these numbers immediately declined dramatically. The absolute low was 1932. In that year, less than two thousand bicycles were exported from the Netherlands to the East Indies (Tjong Tjin Tai and Veraart 2018: 150). Although bicycles in this region were predominantly European-made, locals were actively involved in the business (see the reported case in “Rechtszaken”).⁵ In Binjai (North Sumatra), the firm of Matseh and Akip, named after the two Malay middlemen who ran the business, was active in importing and selling Japanese bicycles during the crisis years. Because these were cheaper than European models, a larger share of the local population was then able to buy a bicycle (Coolhaas 1985: 197).

The secondary literature focuses exclusively on the history of the means of transportation in Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Borneo (Kalimantan). Colonial sources such as travel books and memoirs reveal that this means of transportation was also used on other islands of the Indonesian Archipelago in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In L.H.C. Horstings *Pawiro; Zwerftochten door Indië*, for example, we find a photograph of a cyclist near the town of Airmadidi, located in northern Celebes (Sulawesi) (Horsting 1924: 231). Coolhaas describes in *Controleur B.B; Herinneringen van een jong bestuursambtenaar in Nederlands-Indië* how, as a European government official in the Moluccas, he himself set out by bicycle to collect taxes (Coolhaas 1985: 21-22). Moreover, these personal documents show how prevailing power relations were made visible in cycling. Courtesy rules required Indonesian officials to get off in front of their European superiors when passing them on bicycles (L.G.M. Jaquet 1978: 44).

A comprehensive account of the tourist experiences of cyclists in the colony cannot be given solely on the basis of the secondary literature, the travel books or memoirs mentioned. To get an idea of the early period of tourist cycling in the Malay Archipelago, other sources need to be examined. Using the surviving issues of the ANWB magazine *De Kampioen* from the late nineteenth century,

⁵ “Rechtszaken” 1913, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 5-8-1913, n.p.

which have been systematically researched for passages about the Netherlands East Indies, the following section describes the beginnings of tourist cycling in the colony. Before outlining that history, I would like to make a brief comment on the terminology used to avoid confusion. The terms “bicycle tourism” and “tourist cycling” in the period at issue here include bicycle trips that we would not directly call “touristic” today but rather “recreational” because the absence from home is relatively short as well as the travelling distance (see Erik Cohen 1974). As this article seeks to provide an overview of travel experiences at the end of the nineteenth century, it follows the meaning that the term “bicycle tourism” had acquired at the time. Those cyclists we would now more likely call “pleasure-trippers” or “excursionists” were explicitly referred to as “tourists” back then.

TROPICAL BICYCLE TOURISM IN *DE KAMPIOEN*, 1884-1900

The first four volumes of the magazine *De Kampioen* (1884-1887) do not deal with cycling as a tourist activity in the Netherlands East Indies, and even in subsequent years most articles on the colony are not about this topic. An 1888 article states that the military administration in the East Indies was seriously considering purchasing tricycles (“Ned. Indië” 1888).⁶ It is reported that after the conquest of Lombok, the president of the bicycle union congratulated both the army chief and the Dutch Monarchy by telegram on behalf of thousands of bicycle riders ([Victory telegram] 1894).⁷ And dozens of advertisements appear in which Dutch merchants mention that they also represent an English or French bicycle brand in the colonies (for example, Gebrs. Koopman & Co. 1885: 11).

New members in Java and Sumatra also begin to be announced from 1886 onwards (for example “Lijst der Kunstlievende leden” 1886).⁸ A little later the islands of Celebes, Borneo, Madura, and Lombok are included (for example “Ledenlijst” 1890).⁹ In 1894, *De Kampioen* reports that the bicycle association on Java has fifty to sixty members ([Number of members] 1894).¹⁰ Representatives of the ANWB in the colony had already been appointed at that time and members were being actively recruited (J. Pruijboom 1889: 54-55). After paying their annual contribution, members were handed their ANWB membership certificate (see Figure 2). Initially, officially only those who belonged to the European population and persons of equivalent regulatory status could become members (“Bewijs van aangifte” 1893).¹¹ Later, it is explicitly stated that “authorized” Indonesian monarchs were also allowed to apply (“Bewijs van aangifte” 1899).¹² Only a few non-European members are mentioned by name in the nineteenth-century issues of the magazine, although

⁶ “Ned. Indië”, *De Kampioen* V/2, February 1888, p. 42.

⁷ *De Kampioen* XI/48, 30-11-1894, p. 838.

⁸ “Lijst der Kunstlievende leden”, *De Kampioen* III/2, February 1886, p. 16.

⁹ “Ledenlijst”, *De Kampioen* VII/5, 1-5-1890, p. 137.

¹⁰ *De Kampioen* XI/20, 18-5-1894, p. 339.

¹¹ “Bewijs van aangifte voor het lidmaatschap”, *De Kampioen* X/35, 1-9-1893, n.p.

¹² “Bewijs van aangifte voor het lidmaatschap”, *De Kampioen* XI/5, 3-2-1899, n.p.

we must remember that part of the European members were of Eurasian descent. Both Liem Tjoe Tjiang, lieutenant of the Chinese in Semarang, and bicycle dealer Achmad Akoewan were affiliated with the union for a time (“Ledenlijst” 1894a;¹³ [Payment reminder] 1894).¹⁴ Like Liem Tjoe Tjiang, Akoewan, who was a Muslim of Indian origin, held a distinguished position in the colony (Sumit K. Mandal 2017: 57). He was the chief of the so-called “Foreign Easterners” in Surakarta (*Regeeringsalmanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 1903: xxxiii). As a bicycle enthusiast, the Sultan of Deli maintained close contact with the ANWB, both in the Netherlands and in the East Indies ([Construction of cycle track] 1894).¹⁵ He attended the local cycling competitions in Medan in 1896 and one of his courtiers, Toengkoe Zeinoedin, even took first prize in the 500 m races (D.W.L. 1896: 670).



Figure 2. Dutch Cycling Association (ANWB) membership certificate of Albertus Petrus van de Siepkamp from Sumenep, East-Java, 1901 (Leiden University Libraries, Digital Collections KITLV D H 1324-44).

Most members in “the Indies” had already joined the union in the Netherlands. At the end of the nineteenth century, dozens of them emigrated to the tropics (for example “Militair wielrijder” 1894).¹⁶ Others stayed in the colony for several months (D. ter Haar 1890: 463-470). There, they went to work in a pharmacy or on a tobacco plant (for example, “Verandering van Adres” 1886).¹⁷

¹³ “Ledenlijst”, *De Kampioen* XI/4, 26-1-1894a, p. 52

¹⁴ *De Kampioen* XI/17, 27-4-1894, p. 282.

¹⁵ *De Kampioen* XI/50, 14-12-1894, p. 890.

¹⁶ “Militair wielrijder”, *De Kampioen* XI/16, 20-4-1894, p. 266.

¹⁷ “Verandering van Adres”, *De Kampioen* III/12, December 1886, p. 194.

They worked for a bank, the army, the navy, the domestic administration, et cetera (see "Ledenlijst" 1894b).¹⁸ Often these relatively young members held prominent positions.

From the Netherlands East Indies, association members sent their New Year's wishes to the board in the Netherlands. A few, prior to leaving, placed a short message in *De Kampioen* saying goodbye to the "sports brothers" in Holland (see Figure 3) or an advertisement in which they offered their bikes for sale (G. Jules Ketjen 1888: n.p.; P.H. Meijer Timmerman Thijssen 1889: n.p.).



Figure 3. Farewell message from Gerhard Julius (Jules) Ketjen on his departure for the Netherlands East Indies¹⁹ (Collection ANWB, The Hague).

If one goes by *De Kampioen*, ANWB members in the late nineteenth century spent more time complaining about bicycling in the tropics than bicycling itself. The Dutch cyclist Jan Hendrik Faber (1864-1921), who lived part of his life in "the Indies", was of the opinion that, first of all, there were too few inns to catch his breath and get something to eat. In addition, he found it annoying that because of the heat, he had to carry clean clothes with him at all times ([J.H. Faber about cycling] 1894).²⁰ Even more negative was the official and engineer Joh. van Wachem, who considered the Netherlands East Indies probably the most terrifying country in the whole world for cyclists (Van Wachem 1894: 719). Van Wachem supported his views with numerous arguments: the roads were not paved, the gravel was too loose, too large, and renewed too often. Touring in the coastal regions was more pleasant than in the mountainous areas inland, but it was precisely at the coast that the heat was most intense and caused problems. Then, there was the rainy season, which turned roads into ponds. Yes, anyone who cycled in a country that was so resistant to it had to be an enthusiast at heart, according to Van Wachem (Van Wachem 1894: 719-720).

A first direct indication that, in spite of the objections, besides races, bicycle rides for pleasure were being made in the Netherlands East Indies, is found in the fifth volume (1888) of the union magazine. The journal posts that George Burston and Harry Stokes of Melbourne are cycling around the world and also making a stop in "the Indies". A later issue of *De Kampioen* reports that

¹⁸ "Ledenlijst", *De Kampioen* XI/18, 5-5-1894, p. 297.

¹⁹ Ketjen 1888: n.p.

²⁰ *De Kampioen* XI/5, 2-2-1894, p. 69.

their great journey is accomplished. In the Dutch colony in Southeast Asia, the pair would have made only short rides across Java (“Australië” 1888;²¹ “Australië” 1890).²²

From 1890 onwards ANWB members began to write about their own trips in the colony. That year, in a short article, the twenty-year-old Dutchman Christiaan Jacob Woltman, who worked on a coffee plantation and recently joined the bicycle union, tells of trips he and an acquaintance made in the Minahasa (North Sulawesi) (“Ledenlijst” 1890;²³ Woltman 1890: 343). They rode a “high bi”: a type of bicycle with a large front wheel and a small rear wheel. But Woltman believed that because of the mountains, the safety bicycle would actually be more suitable. Although the roads lent themselves perfectly to the bicycle, the two were still the only cyclists on the island, according to the writer. A few weeks later, ANWB member J. Scheltema proudly reported how he cycled there and back from Batavia, where he lived, to Tangerang, at an average speed of 22 kilometres per hour (Scheltema 1890: 420). Scheltema says he completed the ride of about sixty kilometres in three hours, including a fifteen-minute break for breakfast. And he concludes his article: “This is certainly the fastest ride yet made from Batavia to Tangerang, either on horseback or by bicycle” (Scheltema 1890: 420). In the years that followed, articles regularly appeared in which the exhausting tropical tours of European male cyclists were highly praised. In 1894 there was much acclaim for the achievements of Mr. Lion O’Herne, for example, who rode from Magelang to Semarang in five hours. That he single-handedly managed to repair his tyre after it was damaged by a collision with a *grobak* (a buffalo cart) gave him even more prestige ([Bike ride Lion O’Herne] 1894).²⁴ Joh. van Wachem, who had written so critically about cycling in the tropics, also reports extensively on his bicycle tours, including his trip from Buitenzorg (Bogor) to Bantam and back (Si-Gantjang 1894a; Si-Gantjang 1894b; Si-Gantjang 1894c).

In addition, we find in *De Kampioen* some mentions and descriptions of club rides through the main towns of the East Indies. These include the trips made by the men of the Bataviasche Wielrijders Club under the direction of their union treasurer, Mr. C.N. de Gruijter. In *De Kampioen* of 8 June 1894, we read how eight club members took a brisk ride, some fifty kilometres, in fine weather, “through Batavia’s beautiful lanes” (D.E.G. 1894: 411). Although, according to the article, they pedalled through sections of the ride at “full-speed”, the emphasis, more than the texts mentioned above, is on relaxation. Before their tour ends, they stop for entertainment at a tent of the Komedi Stambul (Malay-language folk theatre); from there the ride goes home again but not before they have consumed “quite a bit” (D.E.G. 1894: 411).

There are only a few articles that pay attention to non-European cyclists in the colony such as the aforementioned rider Toengkoe Zeinoedin who

²¹ “Australië”, *De Kampioen* V/15, 1-11-1888, p. 360.

²² “Australië”, *De Kampioen* VII/1, 1-1-1890, p. 29-30.

²³ “Ledenlijst”, *De Kampioen* VII/5, 1-5-1890, p. 137.

²⁴ *De Kampioen* XI/36, 7-9-1894, p. 636.

belonged to the company of the Sultan of Deli. That does not mean, however, that the rise of cycling in the colony was primarily a European affair. In fact, not Europeans, but the Chinese, we read in an 1899 article in *De Kampioen*, were said to be the “greatest cycling enthusiasts” in Java (“Wielrijden op Java” 1899).²⁵ However, the descriptions of colonial tours found in *De Kampioen* were all written by European men who mostly report on their own trips.

THEORY: SENSORY EXPERIENCES OF CYCLING TOURISTS

The analysis of the experiences of these cycling tourists in the colony can be further developed through employing the insights of the scholarly work of Jonas Larsen, which focuses on issues of mobility and modern tourism. Much of his research responds to and builds on that of tourism researcher John Urry. Whereas Urry in his scholarly work initially focused on the tourist gaze, Larsen also explicitly calls attention to tourism as an embodied, multisensory activity. He emphasizes that tourists not only look at the places they visit but also experience them physically (Jonas Larsen 2006).

In a relatively recent study, Larsen analyses how cycling tourists sense and experience large cities in Northern Europe and the United States (Larsen 2016). In doing so, he starts from the idea that transportation (like tourism itself) is an embodied, multisensory experience and that each means of transportation produces unique affective experiences of places. Against this background, Larsen tries to capture the unique bike gaze in words and seeks to discover what the relationship is between this tourist gaze and the other senses. To answer these questions, he goes out on his own bike, conducts interviews and observes the environment. He confines himself to four case studies: the cities of Copenhagen and Amsterdam, both of which have extensive bike lanes and are advertised as tourist cycling paradises, and the cities of London and New York, which are known to be high-risk cycling locations.

Larsen argues that cycling in large cities whose infrastructure is bicycle-unfriendly puts greater demands on physical skills than cycling in more bicycle-friendly cities. In areas considered unsafe for cyclists, cycling can be seen as a form of adventure tourism. The tourist’s pleasure arises from escaping the danger and risks present. He or she gets excited by the unpredictable sensory overload that comes from the noisy and busy traffic in the city. While pedalling forward, adrenaline flows through the body that vibrates violently due to the poor condition of the road surface. When a tourist is accompanied by his family, cycling may be considered too risky, which shows that the gaze also has a relational aspect (Larsen 2016).

According to Larsen, tourists see cycling as tantalizing to the senses in cities with highly developed cycling infrastructure. A minor disadvantage of cycling for tourists, according to Larsen, is the difficulty of reading maps while cycling. This gives the riding style a staccato character: ride, stop, plot the road. One advantage is that you can see more of the city in the same amount

²⁵ “Wielrijden op Java”, *De Kampioen* XV/9, 3-3-1899, p. 232.

of time it would take walking. The relatively leisurely pace also allows tourists to enjoy the scenery. In bicycle-ridden cities, on the other hand, it is impossible for the tourist to visually take in the scenery while cycling. This is because the full focus is on the traffic situation. There are almost no opportunities to let the eyes wander around. An exception is the bike paths along canals and parks, which Larsen calls the “safe pockets”. The affective capacities required there are relatively low, and the cyclist’s eyes need not be nervously focused on the road surface, allowing the surroundings to be enjoyed. The protective bike lanes in these islands, Larsen argues, function as tools of the tourist gaze. They make it possible (Larsen 2016).

THE REPRESENTATION OF COLONIAL TOURIST CYCLING EXPERIENCES

THE AUSTRALIAN CYCLISTS BURSTON AND STOKES

George Burston and Harry Stokes’ round-the-world tour is the first bicycle journey in the Netherlands East Indies mentioned by *De Kampioen*. Before the representation of their passage through Java is analysed from a sensory perspective using Larsen’s theory, I shall briefly outline the background of their trip.



Figure 4. George Burston and Harry Stokes posing with their high-wheeled Penny-farthing bicycles, pictured in their travel book *Round about the world on bicycles; The pleasure tour of G.W. Burston and H.R. Stokes* (1890) (Collection National Library of Australia, Canberra).

Australians Burston and Stokes (Figure 4), two prominent members of the Melbourne Bicycle Club, began their world tour on 1 November 1888 (Rupert Guinness 2018: 15-18). The starting and ending point of the journey, which

would eventually last just over a year in total, was Melbourne. Burston chronicled their experiences, which, through the help of club member George Thorne, appeared in the newspaper *The Australasian* while they were travelling. In 1890, these travel texts were published as a book (“for private circulation only”) under the title *Round about the world on bicycles; The pleasure tour of G.W. Burston and H.R. Stokes*.

Burston and Stokes belonged to the adventurous wheel riders known as the so-called “overlanders”. This group of cyclists began making long trips in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Rosemary Sharples 2020: 519). For the Australians, the bicycle was a mode of transportation with great advantages: you didn’t have to worry about timetables and you could visit sights beyond the tourist reach of earlier travellers. Thus, the bicycle gave them the opportunity to counter the negative stereotypical image of the tourist who, in large numbers, blindly admired the sights prescribed to them.

The two covered a significant part of their trip on a so-called Penny-farthing bicycle or Ordinary. They did not actually see the advantages of the “smaller safety machines” (G.W. Burston and H.R. Stokes 1890: 236). The statement in the travelogue that their bicycles are “Australian-made”, also ties in with their goals: the venture was not only a project to achieve personal fame, but also to fuel the glory of Australia and the British Empire in general (Burston and Stokes 1890: vi, 2). Moreover, with their choice of bicycle type, they projected a desired image of themselves: the Penny-farthing was a symbol of courage and masculinity, and was ridden almost exclusively by men (Norcliffe 2001: 23). Because clothing conventions prescribed long dresses for women, this type of bicycle was not accessible to them. In fact, while cycling, part of their legs would be visible, which was considered indecent (Brian Griffin 2006: 216). The Australian-made Penny-farthing thus expresses the image of national prowess, a motif which is also reflected in the feats described, and that can be found again and again in popular English adventure stories of this era (Boehmer 2005: 14).

Burston and Stokes’ journey began with a long bike ride from Melbourne to Sydney. They then continued by train to Brisbane, where they boarded the *SS Dacca*, which left for Java on 27 November 1890. After a voyage of nearly three weeks, the passenger ship reached the port of Batavia at eight in the morning (Burston and Stokes 1890: 236).

Much to their annoyance, the world travellers could not ride their bikes immediately upon arrival. Their bicycles were allowed to enter only if they paid five pounds of tax. After complaining in vain, Burston and Stokes decided to leave their bikes at customs. However, when British Consul N. M’Neil came to their aid, they were allowed to use their high wheelers without paying import duties but only for a period of five days (Burston and Stokes 1890: 25, 28). It is by no means the only time that the Netherlands East Indies attracts criticism in the travel text. In the comparisons between the Netherlands East Indies and Australia or the British Empire that are drawn again and again, the Dutch colony often loses out, for example, in the area of transportation:

although a steam tram runs in Batavia, just like in Sydney, it is only “one-story high” (Burston and Stokes 1890: 26). Furthermore, the travel book provides unconcealed criticism of the violent rule of the Dutch colonial government: “The history of the colony appears to be a scarlet one. The Dutch rule the natives with an iron hand; they are all poor, and not a single native in a high position” (Burston and Stokes 1890: 37). The Dutch are definitely not represented as the best administrators a colonized population can imagine. From a postcolonial perspective, it can be noted that in this way, the ideology of national superiority propagated by the travel book calls into question the justification of the Dutch Empire (see Boehmer 2005: 10).

During their stay in Java, Burston and Stokes cycled successively through the suburbs of Batavia, and from that city to Buitenzorg and its environs, where they viewed the Botanical Gardens and a coffee plantation. They then rode on to the mountain towns of Sukabumi, Ciandjur, Bandung, and Cicalengka, before returning to Batavia (Burston and Stokes 1890: 28-37). From there, the journey continued by boat to Singapore, the island of Penang and the city of Rangoon, now Yangon in southern Myanmar. With British India, Southeast Asia was concluded (Burston and Stokes 1890: 28-37). Although they chose the bicycle allegedly because it allowed them to go off the beaten track, Burston and Stokes’ route through Java is largely the same as that of many other European (proto-)tourists before them (Mikko Toivanen 2019). The European neighbourhoods in Batavia, for example, receive the most attention. Nor does their choice of accommodations differ from that of most other tourists. They stayed at Hotel Bellevue and Hotel der Nederlanden, the premier hotels of Buitenzorg and Batavia during the latter half of the nineteenth century (Scott Merrillees 2006: 130; Nick Tomberge 2022).

Analysing the Australians’ text-captured cycling experiences using Jonas Larsen’s theoretical insights, we can first note that Burston and Stokes’ journey in *Round about the world on bicycles* is forcefully depicted as a form of adventure tourism. The travellers perform extreme feats (or at least make it appear that way). The appeal of adventure tourism, according to Larsen, lies in the possibility of living out your dreams: for a moment, you feel like the action hero outsmarting death or think you can control the world (Larsen 2016). From a postcolonial perspective, it can be argued that Burston and Stokes, as the embodiment of imperial self-confidence, are able to express their invincibility against that adventurous backdrop (see Boehmer 2005: 45).

Burston and Stokes’ world journey is explicitly portrayed as dangerous from the very beginning. In the areas that they visited, an emergency could occur at any time, according to their travel book. Numerous threats come along, ranging from huge reptiles, monstrous sharks and biting ants to forest fires, cannibals, and killers. En route to Java, a large shipwreck is a reminder of possible doom. For protection, the pair carried a revolver at all times. The Australians approached the local population in Java with distrust and saw them as “conscienceless” (Burston and Stokes 1890: 28). The travelogue states about the indigenous population: “They appeared to be a good-natured, happy

race; but for all that, every man carries a weapon of some kind, usually a big sheath dagger or a bent sword, stuck in their loincloth, whilst the native police are a regular picture of war" (Burston and Stokes 1890: 31).

From the outset, the forms of imagery used in the travel book further fuel the suggestion of a risky enterprise. The moon turns "blood red", black-tiled houses with corrugated iron roofs give a "dark, funereal appearance," elephants behave like "unwieldy monsters," and Java is a "country infested with tigers and leopards". The same goes for the inserted historical episodes that are hardly reassuring. They recall major natural disasters from past centuries, such as the destructive eruption of Krakatoa in 1883 (Burston and Stokes 1890: 11, 13, 26, 36, 38, 63). To evoke their encounter with a world that was difficult to describe and dominate, stereotypical images of threat and calamity were heavily relied upon (see Boehmer 2005: 22).

Judging from the text, the physical effort required by Burston and Stokes was great, as was the sensory load. Only thanks to their "excellent physical condition" they didn't have to throw in the towel. The motif of scorching heat is blown up to extreme proportions in the travel book. The raging forest fires made the heat more intense. The wind blew burning leaves and extreme heat into the faces of Australians. And with that came the rainstorms and high humidity on Java: "The country was simply lovely, but the atmosphere resembled a Turkish bath" (Burston and Stokes 1890: 25). Although dense foliage hung over the roads where sunbeams were almost impossible to penetrate, the two cyclists were "melting hot, and kept up a continual drip" (Burston and Stokes 1890: 30). But they adapted and pedalled on: "When in Java [...] we do as the Javanese do, pulling off our shirts and riding in silk coats, which was a considerable improvement" (Burston and Stokes 1890: 30). As in several cities in British India, including Bombay (Mumbai), there was, according to Burston and Stokes, a permanent smell in Batavia that almost knocked the visitors out of the saddle. Because the senses were already severely tested, there was no room for a tourist's view of the surroundings, where this was occasionally possible in Australia itself (for example Burston and Stokes 1890: 9-10).

In the last quoted passage from *Round about the world on bicycles*, the representation of sensory experiences is accompanied by an assertion that is intended to bring out the identity (and associated status) of Burston and Stokes as "real travellers," namely, "When in Java [...] we do as the Javanese do." The desire to travel off the so-called "beaten track" and behave like a "local" are two stereotypical elements of this role. They are still evident in current tourist discourses where they are paired with a rejection of the term "tourist" to characterize one's own traveller role (for example Tom Sintobin 2022: 226). For Burston and Stokes the term "tourist" did not have such a negative connotation that it had to be rejected.

It is the bicycle that helped make the desired self-image possible for Burston and Stokes. This means of transportation allowed them to visit places that would otherwise be much more difficult to reach, making it clear that they

were not just ordinary tourists travelling the beaten track. However, as noted above, Burston and Stokes mainly went to places that other tourists at the time also visited. Exceptions include their stops at “native shanties” where they ate with their fingers “à la Javanese” (Burston and Stokes 1890: 31, 35). Moreover, it is also the bicycle that Burston and Stokes used to position themselves against the Javanese people. The paradox is that, on the one hand, the bicycle is employed to move toward the Javanese population (in order to adopt an adventurous traveller’s role) and, on the other hand, it is used to contrast itself with them (in order to present themselves as “Western” with all the “superior” connotations that the term in contemporary colonial discourse had).

THE EUROPEAN MEMBERS OF THE ANWB

Unlike the Australians Burston and Stokes (who wrote a book), Dutch ANWB members published their travel descriptions in *De Kampioen* itself. The experiences written down by them, most briefly discussed above, differ partly from those of Burston and Stokes. On the one hand, there are travel experiences of cyclists that are very close to those of Burston and Stokes. Joh. van Wachem, who uses the pseudonym “Si-Gantjang” (‘the Swift One’), also places strong emphasis on physical exertion in his descriptions which he wrote for his sports comrades in the Netherlands. While travelling alone through mountainous terrain from Buitenzorg through Jasinga to Rangkasbitung in 1894, he panted “like a carriage horse” and bathed in sweat. The driving rain turned the roads into mud puddles, making cycling much of the time impossible, but eventually he managed to achieve his goal. The potential danger posed by wild animals is also a similarity between Burston and Stokes and Si-Gantjang’s tourist texts. Although he mocks his own achievements, Si-Gantjang creates in this travelogue an image of himself in which masculinity, heroism, and physical strength predominate, like Burston and Stokes (Si-Gantjang 1894a; Si-Gantjang 1894b; Si-Gantjang 1894c). Moreover, the bicycle, as a technological innovation and symbol of modernity, is considered in both texts the exclusive domain of “the West.”

A difference is that Si-Gantjang’s route truly goes off the beaten track; much of his itinerary is on back roads. Secondly, more than Burston and Stokes, Si-Gantjang makes an appeal to the hospitality of the Indonesian people, including local heads and a police officer. At the latter’s house, he not only eats rice with his fingers but also spends the night. His knowledge of Malay and Sundanese also fosters contact with the Indonesian population. Unlike Burston and Stokes, there is no perceived threat from the Indonesians in Si-Gantjang’s text, nor does he carry a gun. The representation of the Dutch colony in his text is much more peaceful than the representation given by the Australians. The use of violence in attempting to assert dominance over the indigenous populations of the occupied territories is left out of the picture. Dutch colonial rule is not criticized, but justified by stating that the Indonesian people are “law-abiding” and by presenting them as “in need of civilization” (Si-Gantjang 1894b: 872; Boehmer 2005: 49).

However, other tourist cycling accounts of the colony in *De Kampioen* are even further removed from Burston and Stokes' travel book. In Christiaan Jacob Woltman's short article about his journey by bicycle through the Minahasa (northern Sulawesi), for example, the sensory load is much less pronounced than in the texts analysed above. Only the locals who walked out to see it made cycling through difficult at times. Woltman writes: "When I enter a village there is almost no way through; everyone runs out of their homes to see that wondrous object" (Woltman 1890: 343). He calls the roads in the Minahasa "wonderful even better than at Padang, Batavia, or Surabaya", and he managed to avoid the heat by cycling out early in the morning or after six in the evening. Of possible danger, he makes no mention. Woltman presents cycling as aesthetically pleasurable rather than a form of adventure tourism. He does attribute some heroism to himself, like the others, by portraying himself as a pioneer. He writes that an acquaintance and himself "are the only ones who practice cycling here" (Woltman 1890: 343).

J. Scheltema's more extensive cycling report shows great similarities to Woltman's short article. Although Scheltema wanted to set a fast time during his ride from Batavia to Tangerang and back, he does not present the act as a war of attrition. The road was "good": "the condition of the soil was quite similar" and because it rained a little during the night, the "excess dust has been swept away and the road has become beautifully solid" (Scheltema 1890: 420). Scheltema's steering skills were not really put to the test, leaving room for a tourist's gaze despite his fast pace. The *benting* ('fort') was "picturesquely situated", and even the sounds seemed to add to the beauty of his cycling experience: "Soon the hubbub hushed and I heard only the splashing and thundering of the rapids in the river" (Scheltema 1890: 420). Scheltema does not speak of any dangers in his report, although he too does portray himself as heroic. It is precisely by describing the trip as easy that he tried to win praise for his achievement: "the fastest ride yet made from Batavia to Tangerang" (Scheltema 1890: 420).

The already mentioned tour of the Bataviasche Wielrijders Club joins the two texts by Woltman and Scheltema discussed above (D.E.G. 1894: 411), as well as the travelogue that Si-Gantjang published in *De Kampioen* in 1898 about a trip with three male friends to Java's south coast (Si-Gantjang 1898), with the difference that Si-Gantjang strongly ridicules the physical condition of his friends. The weather was "beautiful", we read in the report of the Bataviasche Wielrijders Club, as was most of the road, and even the wind was with them. The description of the tour emphasizes the fun the young men had among themselves. It also shows how bicycle clubs in "the Indies" in the late nineteenth century met the desire for camaraderie among European men by organizing outings:

While riding, we were surprised by a union member who was walking with a girl in the moonlight, he next to his bicycle and she next to him. Suddenly he left her alone saying: "I will come back later, otherwise they will have earned a *riks* [2½ guilders, NT] from me!" Amid roaring laughter and cheers, we went on. (D.E.G. 1894: 411).

Although the eight men cycled fifty kilometres, each came home “without fatigue” (D.E.G. 1894: 411). The headline, “Een ritje langs Batavia’s schoone dreven” (A ride along Batavia’s beautiful lanes), steers strongly toward a picturesque, peaceful view of the colonial capital. Here we see how Dutch colonizers deal with the otherness of the tropics by adopting leisurely practices from the so-called “motherland”, as well as rhetorical structures: for example the use of the word “dreven” which has a strong association with the Dutch countryside (see Boehmer 2005: 90).

CONCLUSION

Although the characterization “cycling boom” is a bit strong to characterize the situation in the Netherlands East Indies at the end of the nineteenth century, tourist cycling was already prevalent in many forms: more or less strenuous, alone or in groups (with members of the cycling club), on a high bi or safety bicycle. Part of the bicycle’s appeal lay in the opportunity this mode of transportation gave to go off the beaten track and to meet a desire for camaraderie among European men in the colony. Although the Dutch Cycling Association ANWB had some Asian and female members in the late nineteenth century, issues of their magazine *De Kampioen* from this time extol especially the (physical) achievements of European men. In doing so, these androcentric accounts show cycling as an exclusive pastime and also underscore the gender inequalities and the racial hierarchy of Dutch colonialism in Southeast Asia back then.

The analysed texts on colonial bicycle tours show variation. Whereas the Australians Burston and Stokes emphatically describe their bicycle ride across Java as a dangerous and physically demanding undertaking, that danger is absent or less strongly present in the analysed travel texts by Dutch ANWB members. Moreover, in several accounts by Dutch cyclists, the physical efforts are represented as less demanding. Based on the diverse experiences in these texts, nineteenth-century bicycle tourism in the colony can be divided into an adventurous (Burston and Stokes in 1890, Si-Gantjang in 1894) and an aesthetic (Woltman and Scheltema both in 1890, the Bataviasche Wielrijders Club in 1894, and Si-Gantjang in 1898) type. It should be remembered, however, that the adventure and beauty are created by the travel texts. We do not have direct access to the experiences of nineteenth-century cyclists, but can only examine the representations of their experiences.

The depictions of the two different types of colonial bicycle tourism each have their own political meaning which seems partly determined by contemporary nationally coloured colonial discourses about the Netherlands East Indies. The Australians Burston and Stokes present cycling as an adventure in their travel book by portraying “the Indies” and the Indonesian people as dangerous. They create a background against which to display their own invincibility and the superiority of the British Empire which they embody (see Boehmer 2005: 45). As mentioned, that danger is much less prominent in the texts of the ANWB members who wrote about their bicycle rides – even those

who can be considered adventure tourists. The travel texts of the ANWB members express a greater familiarity: they depict the colony frequently as a “home in the tropics”, and the representation of the cycling experiences is often part of a “cult of home”: a broader enterprise of living Dutch in a non-European environment (Boehmer 2005: 51). As a result, the travel texts of bicycle tourists, who were affiliated with the Dutch bicycle association ANWB, as well as the establishment of cycling clubs and making club trips itself, symbolically connected the colony to the metropole.

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