CHAPTER THREE

IMPERIALISM, ORIENTALISM AND ETHICS (1870–1914)

KITLV and Dutch Imperialism

The Imperialism Debate: Then and Now

Around the turn of the twentieth century, both the second Anglo-Boer war and the last phase of the Aceh war were taking place. In the nationalist climate that dominated the Netherlands in that period, a majority of the Dutch parliament and public opinion forcefully condemned British imperialism against the kindred Boer republics while fervently supporting the Dutch ‘pacification’ of Aceh. Only the social democrats pointed out the similarities between the two wars, which they both considered imperialist. Former engineer for the administration in the Indies, KITLV member and socialist MP H. Van Kol, for example, declared in parliament in 1899:

*Both are unjust wars, waged against a weaker nation and motivated purely by greed and a hunger for power. Both were made possible by the attitude of a larger part of the press, the government and parliament. Both wars were caused by lust for profit; and in both countries the armed forces had a special interest in the war, which enabled them to enjoy promotion and distinction. In both countries there was only a small minority who showed any resistance to the conflict.* (Kuitenbrouwer 1991: 312.)

Editor-in-chief of the socialist party publication *Het Volk*, P.J. Troelstra, put particular focus on the editor-in-chief of the liberal *Algemeen Handelsblad*, Charles Boissevain. Boissevain was a passionate nationalist who enthusiastically cheered both the Boer generals and General J.B. van Heutsz.

The colonial editor of the *Handelsblad*, E.B. Kielstra, was the person who ultimately published a retort against the unpatriotic, socialist critics in his article ‘De Atjehoorlog verdedigd’ (In defence of the Aceh War) that appeared in 1901 in the periodical *Onze Eeuw* (Kielstra 1910:179–99). Egbert Broer Kielstra (1844–1920) was recognized as an authoritative colonial expert in the Netherlands (Blok 1921–22). As officer of the engineer corps, he had served in the Indies from 1862 to 1884, participating in the first two Aceh expeditions in 1873 and 1874. He published a voluminous, three-part study on the first phase of the Aceh War in which he criticized both the
overly hasty nature of the first expedition and the premature establishment of a civil administration in 1881 (Kielstra 1883–85). When he returned to the Netherlands, he was elected twice as MP for the Liberale Unie (Liberal Union). Both inside and outside of parliament, he advocated perseverance in taking a hard line against the headstrong population of Aceh, citing J.P. Coen.

Kielstra was also a member of the supervisory boards of many colonial enterprises and the official government commissioner with both the Nederlandsch-Indische Spoorwegmaatschappij (Dutch East Indies Railway Company) and the Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM, Royal Packet Navigation Company), which played such an important part in the military pacification and economic liberation of Aceh and the Outer Territories. He received a special appointment as State Councillor

Illustration 7. E.B. Kielstra, military officer, politician and Secretary of KITLV.