

Onze Westerse Beschaving

A Conceptual History of
the Idea of the West in
The Netherlands,
1875-1994

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**“Onze Westerse Beschaving”:
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the Netherlands, 1875-1994**

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Abstract

This research project traces the history of the idea of the West in Dutch discourse from the late 19th century up until the end of the Cold War. Through the use of quantitative methods such as word embeddings and n-gram analysis, applied to historical Dutch newspapers, the project demonstrates the Orientalist, cultural supremacist origins of the concept of the West and shows how the emphasis of the concept shifted over the course of the Cold War to become a concept of ideological superiority. Not only does this project contribute to the historiography on the idea of the West, but it also re-evaluates methodological innovations in the field of conceptual history, by incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods to mutually support each other. By performing a close reading of Johan Huizinga's final work *Geschonden wereld*, we witness the discursive shift, uncovered through the quantitative methodology of the project, occurring in actual historical discourse. *Onze westersche beschaving* aids in deconstructing the concept, which plays a leading role in current geopolitical tensions, and can help us re-evaluate the legitimacy and meaning of this idea.

Foreword

This research project was carried out as my thesis for the RMA History at Utrecht University. I would like to thank my supervisor, Pim Huijnen, for his continued support and insightful feedback, provided throughout the project. I would also like to thank Joris van Eijnatten, for providing me with the data, that I used for this research project, and his helpful advice. I would also like to thank the KB, National Library of the Netherlands and Delpher, for the large-scale digitization of historical newspapers, which has enabled me to tackle this research topic using a quantitative approach. I would also like to thank my parents, Reinder Storm and Marieke van Delft for their support and encouragement. I am grateful for Rutger Postma for his friendship and feedback. I would also like to thank all the professors whose courses I have had the pleasure of attending during the RMA program, with a special mention going out to Gertjan Plets, for his inspiring and helpful course, which aided me in finding my academic voice. Lastly, I want to thank Sophie Mulder for her continued love and support, and for her knowledgeable recommendations and feedback.

Introduction

Recently, I was introduced to the trick question of which European city lies further east: Vienna or Prague. As a Western European citizen, with a less than exceptional knowledge of central European geography, I answered that it must be Prague, as Prague was firmly established in my mind as a city in eastern Europe and Vienna as a Western European city. As is probably clear to the reader by this point, in fact, Vienna lies further east than Prague. This little riddle, which uncovered some of my own cultural and metageographical prejudices, inspired me to think about how the conceptual East-West divide, so frequently used in public discourse, shapes the way we collectively conceptualize the geography of the world. Furthermore, it made me ponder the geopolitical realities which flow from these conceptions. It made me realize that terms such as the West and Western civilization are far from natural geographical terms, that are based on the spatial reality of the earth, but that they are in fact cultural and ideological concepts, that shape our spatial and geopolitical understanding of the world.

Although these realizations were personal and based on my own understandings, I was puzzled by the effects and meaning of these concepts. If the cultural concepts of Western and Eastern were internalized by me to an extent that it literally distorted my own geographical conception of Europe, what other assumptions do these concepts hold? And how did these concepts come to be shaped over time? These general, puzzling questions are what set me off on this research project in which I contribute to the conceptual history of the West-East divide. I was mainly interested in the concept of the West, as the West, in my mind, carried the most cultural and ideological meaning. When I realized that presenting a transnational history of this topic, would be beyond the scope of this specific project, I decided to zero in on the specific, personal context in which I first started thinking about this topic: that of a Dutch person's metageographical prejudices and understandings of the West and the rest.

How the Dutch relate to the conceptual history of the West is something that has hardly received academic attention so far. This fact alone makes it worthwhile to study this conceptual history in the Dutch context. However, I did not only want to contribute to the historiography of this field by researching within a new context, but also by approaching this topic with novel methods. The field of conceptual history has proven time and time again to benefit greatly from methodological innovation coming from the field of Digital Humanities.¹ Therefore, I wanted to incorporate those methods into this investigation, in order to hopefully gain new methodological insights about how the history of the West can be studied. The choice to investigate conceptual history quantitatively, comes with some caveats. Mainly in that researchers are restricted in their choice of primary source material, because of the large amount of digital text needed for certain methods. For the Dutch case, one of the largest and most complete collections of digitized historical text, consists of digitized newspapers, provided by the KB, National Library of the Netherlands.² Luckily for me, newspapers provide a public discourse, that is very much suited for the type of conceptual history I was planning to undertake. After having made these practical decisions about how to shape my research project, I set

¹ Joris van Eijnatten and Ruben Ros, "The Eurocentric Fallacy. A Digital-Historical Approach to the Concepts of 'Modernity', 'Civilization' and 'Europe' (1840–1990)," *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7, no. 1 (February 2019): pp. 686-736, <https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.580>; Michael Gavin et al., "Spaces of Meaning: Conceptual History, Vector Semantics, and Close Reading," *Debates in the Digital Humanities* 2019, 2019, pp. 243-267, <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctvg251hk.24>; Melvin Wevers and Marijn Koolen, "Digital Begriffsgeschichte: Tracing Semantic Change Using Word Embeddings," *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 53, no. 4 (2020): pp. 226-243, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01615440.2020.1760157>; Joris van Eijnatten and Pim Huijnen, "Something Happened to the Future," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 16, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 52-82, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2021.160204>.

² "Wat Is Delpher?," Delpher, accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www.delpher.nl/over-delpher/wat-is-delpher/delpher-voor-iedereen>.

out to answer the following questions: How was the metageographical category of the West conceptualized in Dutch discourse of the late 19th and 20th centuries? What ideological or cultural meaning did the concept of the West carry in this discourse, and how did this change over time? To what extent are quantitative methods useful in researching this topic?

In the following sections, I will explain the choices I have made for undertaking this research project in more detail. Hopefully, I will be able to convey why the answers to the previously formulated questions matter and why my approach is suitable to answer these questions.

A brief historiography of the East-West divide

Although the conceptual history of the West in the Netherlands does, to my knowledge, not have a precedent in the historiography, within the international community there is a thriving research tradition covering how the concepts of East and West shape our metageographical understanding of the world, and how this has happened throughout history.

A foundational work when it comes to mental maps and metageography is Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen's 1997 *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography*. This work introduces the concept of *metageography*, based on Hayden White's concept of *metahistory*.³ The authors define *metageography* as:

... the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world: the often unconscious frameworks that organize studies of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, or even natural history.⁴

This work is a milestone in presenting, defining and explaining mental geographies as being a social, cultural and ideological concept, rather than an objective feature of our world. The authors problematize the most commonly used ways of ordering the geography of our world. They point out the arbitrary nature of continents,⁵ political and ideological divisions, such as two- and threefold economic divisions,⁶ and the nation-state.⁷ Furthermore, they go on to discuss a brief overview of metageographies in the historiography of world history.⁸

I find this book to still be quite relevant. First of all, I find the concept *metageography*, as defined by the authors, to be very useful and concise and I will be utilizing it frequently throughout this thesis. Secondly, I appreciate the innovation of this book in problematizing the geographical ordering of our world, which so often gets treated as being neutral. However, I do have some gripes with this book as well, not so much with the problematization of existing metageographical categories, which I think is excellent, but more so in that they attempt to *solve* this issue, by proposing the replacement of existing concepts with new metageographical categories, *world regions* in their case.⁹ Although the authors are aware of the irony of this fact,¹⁰ and I do appreciate their ambition in trying to solve the pervasiveness of the current metageographical categories, I would argue that proposing new metageographical categories, does take away some of the legitimacy of their book. I think that simply critiquing and historicizing the metageographies that they outline, would have made the book stronger, as their propositions for replacing current metageographical concepts, build on the categories which they have spent the whole book problematizing.

Now this book is by no means the first work to acknowledge terms such as East and West as

³ Hayden V. White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

⁴ Martha Wells Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1997) ix.

⁵ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 2-3; chapter 1.

⁶ Such as the first and third world divide, but also the conceptual divides along cardinal directions: Ibid., 3-7; chapter 2 and 3.

⁷ Ibid., 8-10.

⁸ Ibid., chapter 5.

⁹ Ibid., chapter 6.

¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

social constructs, but I would argue it was quite innovative in treating geographical social constructs as a separate category of analysis. I would like to go on by discussing some of the other research that has been done specifically on the concept of the West and its history. The historiography of the West can broadly be divided along two axes: whether they explain the concept through self-identification or Othering, and whether they use the West or the non-West as their vantage point. Some publications sit somewhere in the middle, but most of the historiography on the West, can be placed along these axes.

At the root of this research tradition lies Edward Said's 1977 book *Orientalism*. The whole field of metageography and the conceptual history of metageographical categories is indebted to Said's work. In *Orientalism*, Said showed how European ideas and knowledge production about a vaguely defined, arbitrary geographical area, the *orient* in Said's case, influenced the political reality and cultural identity of the area. He also emphasizes how Orientalism not only produced identities of the Eastern Other, but also strengthened and fostered the Western identity through the process of Othering the orient.¹¹ His ideas, which he first formulated in *Orientalism*, about the mutually constitutive identity formation of the self and the Other, as a byproduct of external identity formation, have been hugely influential in the historiography of the West and are often being echoed in the work on this topic that followed it.

Another early effort at historicizing the conceptual West was made by Stuart Hall. He utilizes the binary of the West and the rest. In his chapter on the topic, he argues that the formation of the concept of the West was the result of European expansion and the resulting comparisons that took place.¹² He argues that European Othering during the ages of imperialism and expansion, were instrumental in developing the idea of the West in opposition to the Others encountered around the world. This was the foundation, on which the framework of the West would eventually be built, according to Hall.¹³

One of the first monographs on the conceptual history of the West is *The Invention of the West* by Christopher GoGwilt, published in 1995.¹⁴ In this book, GoGwilt attempts to show how writings of Joseph Conrad, such as *Heart of Darkness* (1899), *Nostramo* (1904) and *Under Western Eyes* (1911), neatly encapsulate the rise and the crystallization of the meaning of the concept of the West. GoGwilt argues that the rise of the modern concept of the West was mainly influenced by two political concepts: the changing map of the British Empire and the changing map of Europe. He argues that the British *new imperialism* of the 1890s, gave rise to an increased East-West mapping of the British Empire, whereas the changing political and social situation in Russia strengthened the East-West divide within Europe.¹⁵ He links these developments to Hobsbawn's idea of invented tradition and situates the origins of this development in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹⁶ GoGwilt's book was at the time one of the most complete and rigorous attempts to historicize the West. His emphasis on the Russian influence on the Western identity formation is still an influential idea. Around the time when GoGwilt published *The Invention of the West* in 1995, the field of *Occidentalism*, which is the study of non-Western ideas about the West, was also taking off.¹⁷ It is clear that this field had some overlap with the conceptual history of the West.

The prominence of Occidentalism in the historiography of the West can also be found in

¹¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (St. Ives: Penguin Books, 2003), 3

¹² Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Geiben (Cambridge: Polity press in association with the Open university, 1992), pp. 185-227, 187.

¹³ Hall, "The West and the Rest," 224-25.

¹⁴ Christopher Lloyd GoGwilt, *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

¹⁵ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷ See for instance:

James Carrier, ed., *Occidentalism: Images of the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995);

Xiao-mei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Alistair Bonnett's excellent monograph *The Idea of the West*. In his book, he bundles several case studies on the historical meaning of the West in relation to different identities. His main argument is that the West was not a Western invention, but that it has been deployed and shaped all around the world.¹⁸ He does cover Britain in one chapter, where the West is obviously a category of self-identification. In this chapter, he connects the rise of the idea of the West to late 19th century literature of *white crisis*, a literature which claimed to celebrate whiteness, but in fact, exposed the limits of whiteness as a form of social solidarity. When white solidarity came to be seen as a less favorable category for social identification, the West proved a useful concept to fill that void.¹⁹ In a later chapter, Bonnett discusses how the term the West has become ideologically narrow in recent times. He argues that multiple Wests have existed and coexisted during the 20th century, but that now the West has become synonymous with liberal democracy.²⁰ I find Bonnett's book to be very thought provoking and well written, and will be drawing on his analysis extensively.

The literature on the East-West divide, which in my opinion includes the study of *Orientalism* and *Occidentalism*, is expansive and I will of course not be covering all of this scholarship in my research. I would like to briefly narrow in on the historiography of the concept of the West as the result of Western self-identification, of which Bonnett is partly an example.²¹ Compared to the amount of Occidentalist scholarship,²² there is relatively little work done on the West as an internal concept of identity. The edited volume *Enduring Western Civilization* arguably uses such an approach, although that is not its main feature.²³ It features a chapter by GoGwilt, which repeats the arguments of his book.²⁴ His main purpose is to showcase the recency of the emergence of the concept of the West and to demystify its ideological and political implications. Although this book does take into account the role of the contact with Others in the construction of the West,²⁵ it tends to give more agency to the West in the creation of the idea.

Recently, Enrico Ferri has ascribed a lot of agency to the West in the creation of its own identity. Although he acknowledges the importance of the practice of Othering the East in the intellectual formation of Western civilization, he considers the creation of the West to be more so the result of a process of Western self-identification than one of the adoption of Occidentalist perspectives on the West.²⁶ In 2015, R. Bavaj and M. Steder also published a great conceptual history of how the idea of the West evolved over time in Germany. As the authors argue, Germany has a unique relationship with the West, with the concept getting used both for self-identification and for

¹⁸ Alastair Bonnett, *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11.

¹⁹ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 14-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

²¹ *Ibid.*, chapter 1 and 6.

²² Carrier, *Occidentalism: Images of the West*;

Chen, *Occidentalism: a Theory of Counter-Discourse*;

Robert English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000);

Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: A Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005);

Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006);

Péteri György, ed., *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

²³ Silvia Federici, ed., *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its "Others"*, (Westport: Praeger, 1995).

²⁴ Christopher GoGwilt, "True West: The Changing Idea of the West from the 1880s to the 1920s" in: Silvia Federici, ed. *Enduring Western Civilization*, pp 37-62.

²⁵ Federici, ed., *Enduring Western Civilization*, xii.

²⁶ Enrico Ferri, *The Myth of Western Civilization: The West as an Ideological Category and a Political Myth* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2021), 12.

Othering.²⁷ I would argue that this volume proves very well, how there is a usefulness in drawing up a history of the West within a specific national context. The authors acknowledge that the work done on the concept within a specific national context has proven useful for the development of this conceptual history.²⁸ The authors also point out that historians are still in the dark on many facets of the discursive construction of the West, and that their work will provide a valuable new contribution to this historiography.²⁹

This brings me to my own research project. I would agree with Bavaj and Steder that the conceptual history of the West is still largely underdeveloped, often favoring Anglo-Saxon or outsider contexts, when drawing up this history. Although I do acknowledge the importance of this work, I would argue that more national case studies on the development of the West as a mechanism for self-identification, would currently be valuable additions to the historiography as it stands, as these studies would be able to provide new perspectives on the development of the idea of the West within the West. In my opinion, the Netherlands is a practical and interesting case-study for such a project.

Although the Netherlands does not have a relationship to the East-West divide that is as unique as Germany's, I would argue that it does have a position regarding the East-West divide that is both relevant and interesting. While the Netherlands is culturally, politically and economically very close to the Anglo-Saxon world, which is well represented in the historiography of the East-West divide, it also has very close ties to the European continent. This fact makes it interesting to find out how the development of this metageographical division in the Netherlands relates to the existing historiography. Another aspect which sets the Netherlands apart from countries like Germany, Russia and Japan, is that both the Netherlands' geographical location, on the West coast of Europe, its racial demographics and its international relations, make it a nearly indisputable member of the West. I would argue that these circumstances make the Netherlands a national context ripe for utilizing concepts of West and non-West for identity formation. Another aspect of Dutch history, which makes it ripe for analyzing the Orientalist meaning of the concept of the West, is the Dutch colonial empire, which persisted until 1949. In that sense, the Netherlands will be a good case-study for analyzing the extent of an Orientalist meaning of the idea of the West. Furthermore, I have chosen to work on the Netherlands, as I have a unique advantage for researching Dutch society, because I am a native speaker of this relatively rare language. Given the international prominence of the Netherlands in geopolitics and the global economy, and the relative obscurity of the Dutch language, I feel that I am uniquely equipped, and in a sense obliged, to illuminate the conceptual history of the idea of the West, from the Dutch perspective.

Quantitative methods for conceptual history

Ever since the digital turn, humanities scholars have started looking for ways to adopt the new possibilities of Natural Language Processing (NLP) and distant reading techniques. Recently, there has been a trend among historians to utilize some of the novel methodologies brought about by NLP to operationalize conceptual history in the vein of Reinhart Koselleck.³⁰ In this section, I will attempt to briefly outline how digital history came to be associated with conceptual history and why, according to the historiography, digital methodologies are ideally suited for conceptual history.

The first person to explicitly argue for the usefulness of quantitative methods for conceptual

²⁷ Riccardo Bavaj and Martina Steber, ed., *Germany and 'the West': The History of a Modern Concept* (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 1.

²⁸ Bavaj and Steber, *Germany and 'the West'*, 5-6.

²⁹ Ibid., 7.

³⁰ Pim Huijnen, "Digital History and the Study of Modernity," *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7, no. 1 (February 2019): pp. 991-1007, <https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.591>;

Van Eijnatten and Ros, "The Eurocentric Fallacy";

Gavin et al., "Spaces of Meaning";

Wevers and Koolen, "Digital Begriffsgeschichte";

Van Eijnatten and Huijnen, "Something Happened to the Future".

history is Peter de Bolla in his 2013 book, *The Architecture of Concepts: The Historical Formation of Human Rights*. De Bolla had three aims in writing this book: to contribute to the understanding of concepts as an object of study within the humanities, to offer a history of the concept of human rights and thirdly, to ‘provide an exemplification of a specific methodology for tracking both the history of conceptual forms and their architectures by using data derived from digital archives.’³¹ Although De Bolla’s methodology is relatively simple, compared to the current state-of-the-art of digital humanities research, using mostly n-grams and document frequency,³² his effort to showcase the usefulness of quantitative methods for conceptual history has proven to be rather influential. De Bolla wanted to present a new theory of concepts, where he gives agency to culture at large as *having ideas*, instead of presupposing concepts only exist in historical actors. He argues that a quantitative approach towards conceptual history will allow historians to discern ‘... patterns of linguistic behavior that can be said to be supra-agential: cultural all the way down.’³³ Although De Bolla provides his own working hypothesis on the functioning of concepts, he argues that his views are most closely aligned with the ideas of Reinhart Koselleck, in that they both consider concepts to be closely intertwined with the words that denote them.³⁴

The establishment of quantitative methods as a tool for conceptual history has proven influential and has been very popular recently in digital history circles, mainly in northwestern Europe. In 2015, Melvin Wevers et al. presented a tool at the *DH2015* conference, which could account for historical changes in the semantics of concepts over time, based on word embeddings.³⁵ To my knowledge, this was fairly innovative within the field of digital history at the time. In 2016, Ortiz et al., which featured the same members as the aforementioned project, presented *ShiCo*, an apparently more sophisticated version of this tool, which was also based on word embeddings. The tool was also designed to be widely accessible to other scholars, featuring a web-based frontend. In this article, the authors very explicitly position themselves within the tradition of conceptual and intellectual history.³⁶

Another relatively early example of this is the work of Finnish scholar Jani Marjanen, who has a background in conceptual history and had already written on Koselleck before starting to adopt digital methods.³⁷ An early effort by Marjanen to operationalize a quantitative approach to conceptual history can be found in a 2018 article on -isms. Although, as with De Bolla, Marjanen’s quantitative methodology remained relatively simple to begin with, in this work he reinforced the idea of the suitability of digital methods for performing conceptual history. In this paper, Marjanen wasn’t exactly transparent about his methodology, but he claims to base his conclusions on quantitative methods. He also interacts with the ideas of Koselleck, but treats them more as a perspective in the historiography of -isms, than as a theoretical framework for his own research practice.³⁸

As quantitative methods within the humanities evolved, the link between this upcoming digital discipline and Koselleckian *Begriffsgeschichte* became more explicit. In 2019, this link arguably was ratified with the publication of a special issue of *The International Journal for History, Culture and*

³¹ Peter De Bolla, *The Architecture of Concepts: The Historical Formation of Human Rights* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 1-2.

³² De Bolla, *The Architecture of Concepts*, 7-8.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁵ Melvin Wevers, Tom Kenter and Pim Huijnen, “Concepts Through Time: Tracing Concepts in Dutch Newspaper Discourse (1890-1990) using Word Embeddings,” (paper presented at the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations Conference, Western Sydney University, Sydney, 2015), <https://dh-abstracts.library.cmu.edu/works/2206>.

³⁶ Carlos Martinez-Ortiz et al., “Design and implementation of ShiCo: Visualising shifting concepts over time,” in *Proceedings of the 3rd HistoInformatics Workshop*, ed. M. Düring, A. Jatowt, J. Preiser-Kapeller, A. van den Bosch (Krakow: 2016), <http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-1632/>.

³⁷ Jani Marjanen, “Reinhart Koselleck and Begriffsgeschichte in Scandinavia,” *Forum Interdisziplinäre Begriffsgeschichte*, 1, no. 4 (2015): pp. 27-30.

³⁸ Jussi Kurunmäki and Jani Marjanen, “Isms, Ideologies and Setting the Agenda for Public Debate,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 23, no. 3 (February 2018): pp. 256-282, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2018.1502941>.

Modernity, titled ‘Visualizing modernity: using digital techniques to trace the rise of modernity’. This issue featured contributions from leading digital humanities scholars from the Netherlands, such as Joris van Eijnatten, Pim Huijnen and Ruben Ros, as well as De Bolla. The issue opened with an introduction by Pim Huijnen, in which he specifically argues that digital techniques could prove very useful in carrying out the type of *Begriffsgeschichte* that the German conceptual history tradition and Koselleck had in mind, more systematically.³⁹ He specifically highlights how Koselleck’s theoretical views on the interdependence of language and concepts are very useful as a framework for digital history.⁴⁰

The contribution from De Bolla et al. argues again for the usefulness of digital methods in carrying out conceptual history. It does so by applying NLP techniques to historical datasets to retrace the founding of the idea of government.⁴¹ The methodology has advanced significantly since De Bolla’s 2013 book. The article argues explicitly that NLP techniques can help conceptual historical claims to gain more secure footing.⁴² The article by Dutch historians Ruben Ros and Joris van Eijnatten applies NLP tools to investigate the history of the conceptual trinity of civilization, modernity and Europe. They use Koselleck explicitly as a theoretical framework when describing their method, perhaps influenced by fellow contributor Huijnen. They adopted Koselleck’s ideas about the relationship between words and concepts: ‘that concepts are expressed in words but at the same time are more than words.’⁴³ Furthermore, they interact with Koselleck’s ideas as a perspective in the historiographical debate of conceptual history.⁴⁴ By doing so, they again reinforce the idea that quantitative, digital historical scholarship applied to conceptual history, builds on the German tradition of conceptual history, and is able to further develop this tradition.

Arguably the most explicit call for the use of digital tools in the operationalization of conceptual history on a larger scale in this volume, can be found in the contribution by Pim Huijnen. In this article, Huijnen interacts with Koselleck very explicitly, and argues that his work can serve as an excellent intellectual guide both methodologically, as well as theoretically. Huijnen presents Koselleckian concepts of the modernizing process as useful tools when studying concepts, which developed in said process. He uses the singularization of concepts as an example of a linguistic trend that can indicate conceptual change and goes on to argue that such processes can suggest that specific concepts became more politicized over time.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Huijnen argues that Koselleck’s methodological guidelines can be useful analytical tools for digital conceptual history. Huijnen highlights Koselleck’s different layers of meaning that can be differentiated when analyzing and historicizing a specific concept.⁴⁶

In recent years, the use of digital methods for conceptual history has become quite commonplace, especially in the Nordic and northwestern European circles of digital historians. A new generation of digital historians is actively building up this tradition, granting it further legitimacy. Scholars such as the aforementioned Ruben Ros are actively publishing work in this field.⁴⁷ Another influential contribution was presented in 2020 by Melvin Wevers. In this paper, Wevers highlights the usefulness of a specific digital humanities technique, namely word embeddings, for Koselleckian

³⁹ Huijnen, “Digital History and the Study of Modernity,” 1002.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1001.

⁴¹ Peter de Bolla et al., “The Conceptual Foundations of the Modern Idea of Government in the British Eighteenth Century: A Distributional Concept Analysis,” *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 7, no. 1 (2019): pp. 619-652, <https://doi.org/10.18352/hcm.575>, 620.

⁴² de Bolla et al., “The Modern Idea of Government in the British Eighteenth Century,” 640.

⁴³ Van Eijnatten and Ros, “The Eurocentric Fallacy,” 690.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 693; 724.

⁴⁵ Huijnen, “Digital History and the Study of Modernity,” 1001.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1002.

⁴⁷ Ruben Ros, “Conceptualizing an Outside World: The Case of ‘Foreign’ in Dutch Newspapers, 1815–1914,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 16, no. 2 (January 2021): pp. 27-51, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2021.160203>.

Begriffsgeschichte.⁴⁸ Given the recent attention and enthusiasm for this burgeoning tradition of digital conceptual history, it can safely be said that conceptual history using digital methods deserves to be treated seriously. With my research, I aim to contribute to this upcoming methodological field by applying this methodology to a new topic, namely the history of the West. While the analysis of spatial concepts is not entirely untrodden terrain for digital conceptual history, given the excellent article by Ruben Ros which digitally traces the concept of *foreign* in Dutch newspaper discourse,⁴⁹ I would argue that the history of the idea of the West is sufficiently different to be innovative, as the West, represents a different, more concrete type of metageographical category. Furthermore, the history of this specific concept has never been treated quantitatively.

Although, I am excited about the possibilities of quantitative conceptual history, the field is still relatively young and does bring about its own challenges. Therefore I would like to take the opportunity within the context of this research project, to critically examine the quantitative methodology for conceptual history, by supplementing this research project with a more traditional close reading analysis of the idea of the West divide in Dutch discourse, more akin to the work of scholars such as Bonnett and GoGwilt. The aim of implementing both distant reading and close reading analysis into this research project is twofold. Firstly, in doing this, I aim to paint a more detailed picture of the history of concepts related to the idea of the West in Dutch discourse, by supplementing the broadness of quantitative analysis with the depth provided by qualitative analysis. Secondly, offsetting my quantitative analysis with a qualitative analysis will allow me to view the results of both efforts in a different light, and will enable me to reflect on both methodologies critically. In the next section, I will expand on my methodology further, and will discuss the operationalization of this research project.

Sources

The data for my quantitative analysis consists of digitized newspapers provided by the KB, National Library of the Netherlands through their Delpher service. Although Delpher provides hundreds of digitized historical newspaper, I have chosen to work with only a small sample of newspapers to ensure the feasibility of this project. I narrowed the collection down to the largest and most dominant newspapers that were available in Delpher. The selection I ended up with consists of the following newspapers:

Table 1: Overview of the data used for this project

Newspaper	Available years	Total tokens after preprocessing
Algemeen Handelsblad	1875-1970	913.368.526
Nieuws v.d. Dag: Kleine Courant	1874-1914	228.632.243
De Telegraaf	1893-1994	980.794.845
Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant	1909-1929	363.699.867
De Volkskrant	1919-1994	487.180.239
Trouw	1945-1994	363.932.241
NRC Handelsblad	1970-1994	268.598.016
Total	1875-1994	3.606.205.977

In selecting these newspapers, I tried to avoid any specific religious affiliation, as well as affiliation with dissident political views, such as explicitly socialist newspapers. These papers can generally be described as either liberal (*Algemeen Handelsblad*, *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, *De Volkskrant*,

⁴⁸ Wevers and Koolen, “Digital Begriffsgeschichte”.

⁴⁹ Ros, “Conceptualizing an Outside World”.

NRC Handelsblad)⁵⁰ or popular (*Nieuws v.d. Dag*, *De Telegraaf*)⁵¹. *Trouw* is a bit of an outlier in that it originally was more of a religiously affiliated newspaper, but grew more progressive and secular as it went on, as did *De Volkskrant*.⁵² Many of these papers enjoyed some of the widest circulation of all national newspapers, and should therefore be fairly representative of the dominant Dutch newspaper discourse.⁵³ However, it should be noted that this, by no means, represents the entirety of Dutch newspaper discourse. By focusing on the dominant discourse, we sadly cannot capture the diversity of the different political and religious pillars, which characterized Dutch society for a large part of the 20th century.

Figure 1 gives us some more insight into the shape of this data. As is common with this type of research on newspaper data, there is less data for the late 19th century, as newspapers were generally shorter and less dense during this period. I could have offset this by including more newspapers for this period, but that would have skewed the data in another way, by including more, different perspectives for this period, so I opted to work with the data as is. There is also a significant gap in the data around the Second World War. This is also to be expected. Many data collections suffer from this problem, because, due to regulations of the Germans and paper restrictions, less newspapers were being published. Otherwise, the amount of data is fairly consistent. Although, I am showing the data per newspaper here, throughout my quantitative analysis, I will be working with the newspapers as a singular discourse. While this impedes me from analyzing how specific newspapers differed from one another, it does allow for making an overarching analysis for all newspapers. Throughout my analysis, I will be keeping the makeup of the data in mind.

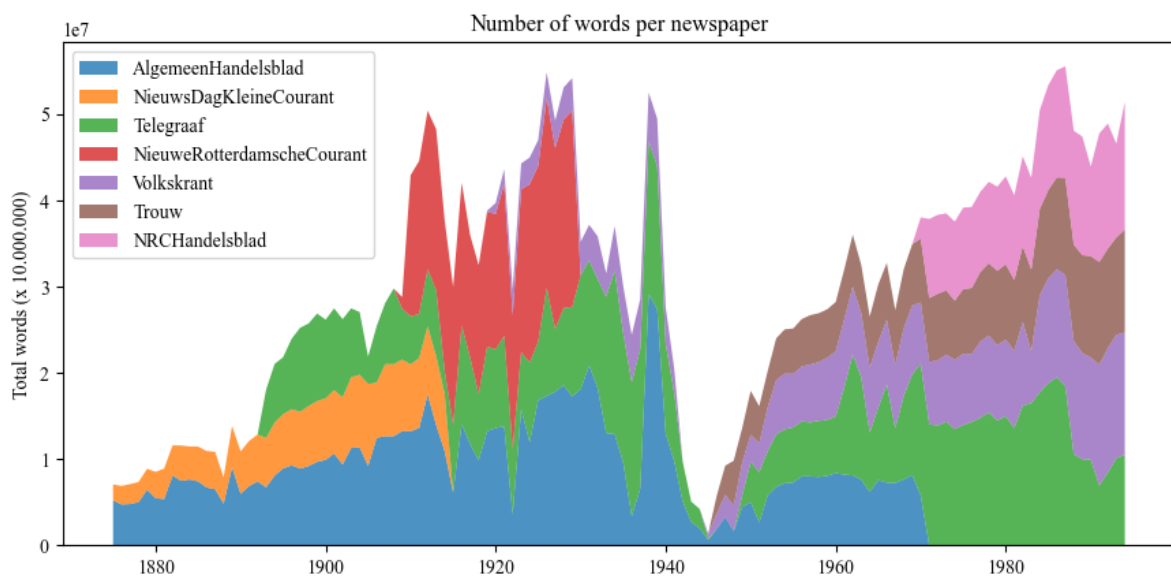


Figure 1: Distribution of data per year and newspaper

For my qualitative analysis, I wanted to find a source that was a Dutch equivalent of the type of source, which thus far, has been most prevalent in the historiography. Authors like Bonnett, GoGwilt, and Wigen and Lewis have tended to work with sources produced by a single or a select group of intellectuals for their analysis, which I thus set out to emulate. I finally settled on close

⁵⁰ Huub Wijffjes and Frank Harbers, ed., *De Krant: Een Cultuurgeschiedenis* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2019), 141.

⁵¹ Wijffjes and Harbers, ed., *De Krant*, 144.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 260-61.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 135-36.

reading the final work by Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, *Geschonden Wereld (Damaged world)*.⁵⁴ In this book, Huizinga writes about the history of Western civilization, its recent problems and how those could be solved. Throughout the book, Huizinga sheds light both explicitly and implicitly on what he regards as Western and the West, and therefore provides an excellent historical account on what the idea of the West meant for him. Besides this, the book was written at a turning point for a conceptual shift occurring with the concept of the West in the context of the end of World War II and the emerging ideological tensions between capitalism and communism. It will therefore be very interesting to investigate how Huizinga's work relates to both older and future conceptions of the idea of the West. In my chapter on Huizinga, I will go into further detail, to clarify my choice for this source and will explain how it relates to the historiography on the conceptual history of the West.

Methodology

Although my methodology basically consists of two approaches, a quantitative and a qualitative one, my quantitative methodology, is the most substantial and probably requires most explanation. I would like to briefly explain the workings of the main technological techniques that I have used for my quantitative approach, because these techniques are instrumental to how I have constructed my narrative. The exact operationalization, I will discuss in the chapter itself, but it is important that the reader understands the workings of the technologies that I have relied on. These are, in my case, n-grams and word embedding models. These techniques have been fairly well established as reliable approaches to large textual datasets in digital humanities circles, but they still require some explanation.

The first technology that I have used extensively throughout my quantitative analysis is n-grams. N-grams are '... linear sequences of linguistic units ...'⁵⁵ found within a text, or in simpler terms, a number of words occurring together in a text. The amount of words can differ, and we have different names for n-grams with different lengths. N-grams of a single word ($n=1$), we call unigrams. N-grams of two words ($n=2$), are referred to as bigrams. There are also trigrams, and longer n-grams, but I have worked mostly with uni- and bigrams. As an example of how n-grams work, consider the following text:

It was the best of times it was the worst of times

If we are to produce n-grams based on this sentence, for the word *times*, the unigrams would look as follows:

Unigrams	Frequency
times	2

If we are to produce bigrams, they would look, like this:

Bigrams	Frequency
of times	2
times it	1

While these results might not be particularly revealing, doing such operations on large datasets, has been found to be quite telling about the context of specific keywords. For my research, analyzing lists of n-grams, sorted by frequency, produced using keywords related to the idea of the West, has proven very insightful.

The other technique I used extensively for this research project is a NLP technique called word

⁵⁴ Johan Huizinga, *Geschonden Wereld: een Beschouwing over de Kansen op Herstel van onze Beschaving* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon N.V., 1945).

⁵⁵ William J. Turkel and Adam Crymble, "Keywords in Context (Using N-Grams) with Python," *Programming Historian*, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.46430/phen0010>.

embedding. This technique builds on the work of linguist Zellig Harris. In 1954, he demonstrated that semantically similar words often share contexts in a text.⁵⁶ He found that ‘the distribution of contextual words — the vocabulary surrounding a particular word — defines the meaning of a word.’⁵⁷ For example, if we have a text on electric stringed instruments, the words *bass* and *guitar* might often occur in close proximity with the words *strings*, *tuning* and *amplifier*. However, the word *chords* might more often appear closely with the word *guitar*. Still, *chords* will be more closely related to *bass* than to a totally unrelated word like *tractor*. This distributional hypothesis about language forms the conceptual basis of word embeddings.

In 2013, a team of Google engineers introduced the Word2Vec algorithm.⁵⁸ It allowed researchers to efficiently train a model on the distribution and co-occurrences of words, based on neural network technologies.⁵⁹ It can automatically learn the semantic relations of words, based on Harris’ distributional hypothesis. Since the introduction of the Word2Vec algorithm, word embedding has become very popular among digital humanities researchers and for doing digital history specifically.⁶⁰ A word embedding model contains semantic and syntactic information based on the distribution of words in a specific text. Simply put, a word embedding model can extract relationships between words, based on the frequency of co-occurrence between them in a specific dataset.⁶¹ If words frequently appear closely together, the word embedding model will judge them as being fairly closely related to each other semantically.

When a word embedding model is trained on a sufficiently large dataset, it works very well for retrieving words which are judged to be semantically related to a target word. It is possible to produce a list of *most similar* words to a target word. This will produce both words that are synonymous to the target word as well as words which are antonymous, as the algorithm has a hard time distinguishing the two categories within a word’s semantic space. Word embedding models can also be used for other tasks, such as checking the semantic relatedness between two specified terms. By exploiting this functionality of word embedding models, we can trace the degree of relatedness between two terms, for example ‘western’ and ‘democratic,’ and see how the model’s similarity score evolves over time. I will not go into a lot of detail regarding the finer workings of word embeddings here, as others have already done a better job at that, than I could in this brief methodology description.⁶² The chapter containing my quantitative analysis goes into further detail on how I have operationalized these techniques for my data and my needs.

⁵⁶ Zellig S. Harris, “Distributional Structure,” *Word* 10, no. 2-3 (1954): pp. 146-162, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1954.11659520>.

⁵⁷ Wevers and Koolen, “Digital Begriffsgeschichte,” 228.

⁵⁸ Tomas Mikolov et al., “Distributed Representations of Words and Phrases and Their Compositionality,” *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems* 26 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1301.3781>.

⁵⁹ Wevers and Koolen, “Digital Begriffsgeschichte,” 229.

⁶⁰ Tom Kenter et al., “Ad Hoc Monitoring of Vocabulary Shifts over Time,” *Proceedings of the 24th ACM International on Conference on Information and Knowledge Management*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1145/2806416.2806474>;

Johannes Bjerva and Raf Praet, “Word Embeddings: Pointing the Way for Late Antiquity,” *Proceedings of the 9th SIGHUM Workshop on Language Technology for Cultural Heritage, Social Sciences, and Humanities (LaTeCH)*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/w15-3708>;

Milan van Lange and Ralf Futselaar, “Debating Evil: Using Word Embeddings to Analyze Parliamentary Debates on War Criminals in the Netherlands,” (paper presented at Conference on Language Technologies and Digital Humanities, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, 2018);

Simon Hengchen, Ruben Ros and Jani Marjanen, “A data-driven approach to the changing vocabulary of the ‘nation’ in English, Dutch, Swedish and Finnish newspapers, 1750-1950,” (paper presented at Digital Humanities Conference, Utrecht University, Utrecht, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.34894/avbd7a>;

Melvin Wevers, “Using Word Embeddings to Examine Gender Bias in Dutch Newspapers, 1950-1990,” *Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Computational Approaches to Historical Language Change*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.18653/v1/w19-4712>.

⁶¹ Wevers and Koolen, “Digital Begriffsgeschichte,” 226.

⁶² *Ibid.*

My qualitative methodology relies on a close reading of *Geschonden Wereld*, that has been informed both by the results of my quantitative analysis, as well as by the historiography. I will compare how Huizinga's characterization of the West relates to the features of the West, which previous authors have put forth in the historiography. Furthermore, I will analyze how Huizinga's West compares to my own findings, based on the quantitative analysis of newspaper discourse. Hopefully, doing so, will enable me to supplement my research project with the analytical depth, which is difficult to obtain when working with purely quantitative methods.

Outline

This thesis is not a comprehensive history of the idea of the West in the Netherlands. I recognize that my methodology is not entirely exhaustive, and that I do not explore the full depth of each of my findings. However, I have managed to contribute to the current state of the historiography of this commonplace and influential idea, both by critically showcasing novel approaches to the topic, as well as by introducing new findings. I am aware that I have not managed to escape the use of metageographical concepts myself throughout this thesis, which, I admit, is slightly ironic. However, this also proves the inescapability of metageographical concepts. With this project, I have critically approached one, highly relevant and influential metageographical concept, namely the West. I hope others will do the same for metageographical concepts, which I leave unquestioned.

In chapter one, I discuss the historiography on the idea of the West in more detail. As well as considering some milestone works, and their interpretations of the concept's history, I examine the most important features of the idea of the West, which can commonly be found in the historiography. I have broadly divided these as features of Western identity or features of Western political economy. As will become clear, the idea of the West, though never constant, usually contains presumptions about both these aspects of society. These are not always equally important, but this division, and how the balance between these two aspects of the idea of the West has evolved, are important to this research project and my findings.

Chapter two contains my findings based on my quantitative analysis. I present the relative frequency of words relating to the idea of the West and the most common bigrams containing words related to the idea of The West. I then go on to investigate the idea of the West using the word embedding models. In this chapter, I present evidence for a conceptual shift that occurred surrounding the concept of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse during the period immediately following World War II, or around the start of the Cold War. I showcase how the balance of cultural and ideological meanings have shifted for the idea of the West, based on the results of my analysis.

Chapter three contains my findings based on Huizinga's *Geschonden Wereld*. I analyze how the features that I have found in the historiography relate to Huizinga's portrayal of the West, as well as how it relates to the findings of my quantitative analysis. Given the fact that *Geschonden Wereld* was written right when the conceptual shift, which I outline in chapter two, occurs, I pay specific attention to how Huizinga balances ideological and cultural meanings of the West in his writing. Huizinga's *Geschonden Wereld* confirms my finding of a conceptual shift, and provides this analysis with further substantiation, as well as an understanding of how the idea of the West was actually used in historical discourse.

Chapter 1: Perspectives on the invention and meanings of the idea of the West

In the current geopolitical climate, the East-West divide has very recently increased dramatically in significance. With the currently ongoing war in Ukraine, the idea of the West is vehemently perpetuated on both sides of the conflict. In Western media, the West often gets portrayed as a geopolitical body, which bears responsibility for the resolution of the conflict and which is arguably being threatened by Russian aggression. The Russian president Putin, meanwhile, is also heavily utilizing the West as an abstract Other, an antagonist and a threat to the political goals of Russia. In this conflict, we can clearly see different uses and meanings of the metageographical concept of the West. Its use in Western discourse on the resolution of the war, implies assumptions about our world order, where the West sees itself as a keeper of the peace, sustaining a world order of peaceful, ongoing Westernization. Putin and his regime, meanwhile, are attempting to portray the West in a different, more negative light, framing Western involvement in the conflict in Ukraine as an act of war, threatening the Russian state.

These contemporary discourses utilizing the concept of the West are heavily polarized, with the ideological implications of their use arguably peaking, because of the increased importance of information warfare in the 21st century. However, the history of global conceptions of the West is, according to the historiography, heavily indebted to interactions between both discourses of external Othering and internal self-identification. The importance authors have placed on self-identification as opposed to Othering, when explaining the formation of the conceptual West from the vantage point of the West tends to vary. While some authors grant more agency to the West in the construction of its own metageographical map, others seem to favor a narrative where the concept of the West was constructed by non-Western Others as an idealized space, that was later adopted by the West itself. Although authors tend to acknowledge the legitimacy of both sides of the argument to some extent, they will usually end up leaning to one side or the other. In my opinion, this difference lies at the core of the debate in the historiography on this topic. The need to clarify this historiographical puzzle has also been pointed out by Riccardo Bavaj in his article on the formation of the conceptual West.⁶³

In this chapter, I will delve deeper into the historiography on the formation and the features of the idea of the West to outline both sides of the argument. By doing so, I will compile some of the main explanations for the development and progression of the conceptual East-West divide and its meanings, enabling myself to compare and substantiate my findings in the later chapters to the main theories in the historiography. Furthermore, I will critically reflect upon the state of the historiography and will share my own insights on the issue of where the idea of the West came from. This chapter is an essential part of this research project, as writing it will allow me to inform both myself and the reader on the current state-of-the-art on the history of the idea of the West.

Said's *Orientalism* and its legacy on the origins of the East-West divide in scholarship

As I wrote in my introduction, Edward Said's book *Orientalism* arguably lies at the foundation of the tradition of deconstructing the East-West divide as a sociocultural concept. In my opinion, the legacy of this work on the historiography of this topic cannot be underestimated. What has remained very influential about Said's work in the specific context of the historization of the East-West divide, is the interdependence Said pointed out between European or Western Othering of the East, and the creation of the identity of the Western self '... as [the East's] contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.'⁶⁴ Furthermore, Said was very innovative in pointing out that both the metageographical

⁶³ Riccardo Bavaj, "'The West': A Conceptual Exploration," *European History Online* (Institute of European History, November 21, 2011), <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/bavajr-2011-en>.

⁶⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

concepts of East and West, or Orient and Occident, were man-made, just like history itself is.⁶⁵ Said interpreted the development of the East-West divide, as a project creating a discourse of cultural hegemony of the West over the Orient:

... Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.⁶⁶

Implicitly and explicitly, Said's narrative places a lot of agency within the West in the creation of the conceptual East-West divide, and consequently, the idea of the West. He argues that Western scholars, missionaries, merchants and soldiers had the freedom to produce uncontested knowledge about the Orient, because they 'could be there' with very little resistance from the people of the Orient.⁶⁷

While Said's work is probably more important for deconstructing the colonial legacies of our recent past, in doing so, he was one of the first to examine the East-West divide as a cultural construct. What has remained very influential about Said's work, is the importance he places on the complex interdependence between Othering and self-identification in the process of creating the binary identities of East and West. In his 1995 afterword, he argues that the development and maintenance of a specific culture, requires the establishment of an Other. The existence of the Other, will allow said culture to establish and re-interpret the differences of the Other from the self, thus making the formation of these binary cultures an interdependent process.⁶⁸ What Said also pointed out, is that the externally created Oriental identities can become so pervasive that they start to become repeated and adopted by the Orientalized cultures themselves. Said finds this to be the case in Middle Eastern cultures, where Orientalist discourses are repeated as an effect of thoroughly pervasive Western hegemony.⁶⁹

Said's insights can be found repeated again and again in the historiography of the East-West divide, for instance in Stuart Hall's genealogy on the binary of the West and the rest. In this chapter, Hall looks into how the idea of the West was formed, more directly than Said. He repeats the idea that the West is a historical category rather than a geographical one.⁷⁰ And while he acknowledges that there is an element of internal agency of the West in the creation of its Western identity, which is entangled with the enlightenment, he also believes that the idea of the West was highly influenced by the comparison of Westerners with non-Western Others:

The so-called uniqueness of the West was, in part, produced by Europe's contact and self-comparison with other, non-western, societies (the Rest), very different in their histories, ecologies, patterns of development, and cultures from the European model. The difference of these other societies and cultures from the West was the standard against which the West's achievement was measured. It is within the context of these relationships that the idea of "the West" took on shape and meaning.⁷¹

Said's ideas about the interdependence of Othering and self-identification are clearly being echoed here. In the same article, Hall also explicitly talks about Said as a precursor of his own effort to historicize the West.⁷² Hall goes on to illustrate how the interactions of Europeans with their Others during European expansion, produced a notion of characteristics which were shared around the West, which led to an idea of the West as opposed to the non-West, by analyzing the discourse of early modern travel accounts.⁷³ He also showcases how the binary of the West and the rest still persists in

⁶⁵ Ibid., 5.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 332.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 322.

⁷⁰ Hall, "The West and the Rest," 186.

⁷¹ Ibid., 187.

⁷² Ibid., 205-206.

⁷³ Ibid., 208-220.

founding sociologists, such as Marx and Weber.⁷⁴ Upon further inquiry, while I find Hall's work very relevant and engaging, I would argue that there are some anachronisms in this particular chapter, especially in him using the term the West to describe centuries in which, according to later scholarship, this concept had not yet developed its modern, ideologically charged meaning. He illustrates the circumstances which led Western civilization to consider itself exceptional rather well. However, the concept of the West as designated by the term the West is, according to later scholarship, something which only arose during the 19th century.

Christopher GoGwilt's 1995 book is one of the first monographs dedicated to historicizing the concept and rhetorical construction of the West. GoGwilt is very eager to explain how his work relates to Said in his opening pages. He agrees with the main thesis of Said, but goes on to nuance his own work in relation to Said:

My concern is the transformation in the nature of cultural hegemony at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century: the shift from a European to a Western identity. The general historical claim of this study is that the political sense of the term "the West" became not only the dominant, but also a dominating term, enforcing a connection between a variety of archaic, local, and cross-cultural meanings.⁷⁵

GoGwilt argues that two major contexts caused the increased significance of the West as a cultural category: British *new imperialism* gave rise to an increased East-West mapping of history, culture and politics and the changing social and political situation in Russia gave rise to an East-West mapping of Europe. GoGwilt argues that these two contexts are very well represented in the writing of Joseph Conrad, and proceeds to analyze Conrad's work through this lens.⁷⁶ In his epilogue, GoGwilt attempts to draw up a larger narrative, attempting to explain the two contexts outside of the work of Conrad.

GoGwilt explains that in the late 19th century there was a fierce debate in Russia between *Westerners*, denoting Russians who wanted democratic reforms, and *Slavophiles*, who wanted to stay true to Slavic tradition.⁷⁷ He then goes on to showcase how these Russian debates have been echoed in Oswald Spengler *The Decline of the West* (1918), a book which gets frequently discussed in the historiography as a foundational work in deploying the modern concept of the West, although Spengler himself used the word *Abendlandes*.⁷⁸ In GoGwilt's thesis of the West as an initially, externally Othering identity developed in Russia, that was later adopted by the West, we can again see echoes of Said's understanding of the productive power of Othering. However, GoGwilt does grant agency to the West in the creation of its own metageographical identity. He argues that there was a need among British politicians for a distinction in their empire, based on race, without being explicit about it. the West proved a useful, seemingly neutral candidate for such a differentiation. He showcases how the term was used by politicians and intellectuals, including the racial implications.⁷⁹ I find GoGwilt's theses on the invention of the West interesting, but ultimately messily constructed and lacking some substantiation. His thesis is provoking, and was more thoroughly developed by others. However, as it stands, GoGwilt's first book is methodologically inadequate, focusing only on the fictional works of Joseph Conrad. Only in his epilogue, he starts showcasing his thesis in a larger context, but the evidence he presents remains quite anecdotal and not very clear or convincing.

In 2004, Alastair Bonnett published his book *The Idea of the West: Culture, Politics and History*. In my opinion, this work remains one of the most convincing, yet nuanced narratives on the idea of the West. Bonnett argues that the West is a very diffuse concept, with many meanings, that has been used, created and recreated many times both in the West and in the non-West. He views his own

⁷⁴ Ibid., 221-224.

⁷⁵ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 2.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 227.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 233.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 236-41.

work as an effort in broadening the work of Said. While he does recognize Said's work as legitimate, he finds that '... there is something unsatisfying, something partial, about accounts of Western pre-eminence.'⁸⁰ He wants to emphasize the autonomy of the non-West in creating and using ideas of the West, which are separate from the Western ideas. He argues that ideas about the West in the non-West were autonomously created and have had productive power over the conceptual East-West divide as well:

Moreover, far from being merely a response to Western images of 'self' and 'other', [the non-West] has often exhibited novel and influential ways of defining the West. Indeed, it appears that non-Western ideas about the West, in many cases, precede Western ones; that it was the non-West that invented the West.⁸¹

Although Bonnett argues that the modern idea of the West as it is known to Westerners, was a Western invention of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, be it an ever changing one,⁸² he wants to show with his book that ideas about the West in non-Western spaces are legitimate and have autonomous origins apart from the Western idea of the West.⁸³ Based on the quote above, it may seem like Bonnett takes a position on the East-West divide, which is almost the antithesis to Said's thoughts on the topic, but in my opinion, Bonnett tries to argue that there is, in fact, a counter discourse to Orientalism, which is autonomous and can also be productive.

What I find to be Bonnett's biggest accomplishment is thoroughly acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the concept of the West, depending on the historical, geographical or personal context of the subjects that use the term. Not only does Bonnett show how perspectives on the West from different places can be extremely varied, but he also demonstrates how the concept of the West has been invented in the West and how its meaning has been contested and malleable ever since. The historization of the concept of the West as a concept of self-identification is what interests me most, as it is most in line with my own research goals. Bonnett spends two chapters doing case studies on this theme. In the first, Bonnett explores the emergence of the term and in the second, he investigates how the definition of the West has become narrower over time.⁸⁴

The first chapter is a very intriguing read, which sets debates about the limits of white racism, and the following fallout of explicit white supremacy in Britain, against the rise of the idea of our modern, ideologically and politically charged, West: 'The idea of the West, developing alongside, within and in the wake of this crisis literature, provided a less racially reductive but not necessarily less socially exclusive vision of community.'⁸⁵ In this chapter, Bonnett implicitly argues that our concept of the West, although it may not be a universal one, is an invention of the West, used as a tool for self-identification. What Bonnett also does well in this chapter is to differentiate between older concepts of the West and our modern one, with its ideological and political implications. He acknowledges that ideas of the West have been around since the split of the Roman empire and that they became more meaningful during the enlightenment and European expansion, but that only during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it became a 'central' idea. He argues that this probably was also caused by events on the world stage, such as the Bolshevik revolution, increased United States hegemony and decolonization. He deems this narrative legitimate and praises the work of GoGwilt, favoring this explanation. Bonnett, however, states that new identities emerge through existing ones, and that in Britain, the identity preceding the Western one, was an identity based on whiteness.⁸⁶

Bonnett's work has been very influential in the historiography in that he facilitated historicizing the West, not as a singular concept with a singular meaning, but as a multitude of

⁸⁰ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 1.

⁸¹ Ibid., 2.

⁸² Ibid., 5.

⁸³ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁴ Ibid., chapter 1 and 6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 25.

concepts, designated by the term the West, whose meanings can shift depending on historical or spatial context. His work legitimized smaller, more localized case studies on the history of the West, because they could help explain a piece of the larger puzzle. Bonnett acknowledges that what he is doing is incomplete, but embraces his approach, to show how little is yet known about the history of the conceptual West. His heavy reliance on the accounts of individuals can be seen as a shortcoming of his methodology, but it keeps him away from making overly ambitious claims about the representativeness of his source material.⁸⁷ I would argue that Bonnett's book has allowed authors to shy away from an either-or explanation of the emergence of the metageographical East-West divide, by emphasizing the multifaceted nature of these concepts. This has opened the door for scholars to analyze the concepts of the East-West divide in a more specific historical or spatial context, without viewing the West as a monolithic actor, creating cultural meanings, as is more indicative of the work of Said.

Modern genealogies of the concept of the West still retain the question of who created this metageographical binary. For instance, in Riccardo Bavaj's 2011 article, he outlines both the construction of the West in the East and in the West, underlining the legitimacy of both perspectives. He does also acknowledge that it still requires further research how these perspectives interacted.⁸⁸ This opening up to the idea of multiple histories of the West, also gave rise to conceptual histories of the West from a national perspective, for instance in the volume by Bavaj and Steber tracing the history of the West within Germany.⁸⁹ Other works, still favor a more singular approach to the concept's origin, as we can see in Erico Ferri's 2021 *The Myth of Western Civilization*. He writes:

The West is a space defined as an antithesis to the East, but it is also and above all a self-representation that the so-called Western world has given of itself and of its contrast (real or imagined) that has opposed it over the centuries to the East.⁹⁰

So the Said-like origin story of the East-West divide still persists, albeit with more attention spent on contesting and subaltern meanings.

I am afraid that I will not be able to clear up the question of where the idea of the West came from with this specific research project. However, I do think, that I will be able to offer up a piece of the puzzle on how the concept of the West originated and morphed over time, within a specific national context. In the next half of this chapter, I will shift away from the origins of the idea of the West, and look more closely into the characteristics of the West, throughout history, as they have been pointed out in the historiography. This will give me the threads of the current narrative on the conceptual history of the West, that will allow me to perform an informed analysis of my findings in the second and third chapter.

The features of the Western identity

I argue that the cultural meaning of the West can be understood in two major ways: as an identity ascribed to Western individuals and as features of Western civilization(s) in the political economic sense. I will briefly outline some of the features which have been ascribed to the West in the historiography, starting with the features of the Western identity on an individual level. As was argued in the Bonnett chapter, which I have briefly discussed above, initially, the West rose to prominence as an implicitly racialized, exclusionary term. Other authors have pointed this out. GoGwilt also shows how early uses of the West in political speech, treated Western progress as being inextricably tied to the superiority of the white race.⁹¹ He argues that these types of ideas were drawing on the ideas of people like the sociologist Benjamin Kidd. Kidd's work, like 1894's *Social Evolution* and 1898's *The*

⁸⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁸ Bavaj, "'The West': A Conceptual Exploration".

⁸⁹ Bavaj and Steber, *Germany and 'the West'*.

⁹⁰ Ferri, *The Myth of Western Civilization*, 12.

⁹¹ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 237-38.

Control of The Tropics, which was read with enthusiasm among the British political elite,⁹² posits the Other of 'Western peoples' to be 'the coloured races'.⁹³ Wigen and Lewis also state that during the 19th century, the East-West divide was increasingly used as a form of cloaked racism and ethnocentrism. They repeat how, in their view, the racist and negative views towards the East, were essential for idealizing the West, more in line with ideas of Said.⁹⁴ Silvia Federici in a chapter on the origins of the West, also noted how in the late 19th century, the exclusionary connotations and implicit superiority of the West intensified.⁹⁵

Sophie Bessis also highlights the importance of racialized discourse in how Western civilization viewed itself in her book *Western Supremacy*.⁹⁶ Although she does not explicitly connect this feature to the concept of the West, her description further contextualizes the importance of racism in the historical context in which the ideological concept crystalized. She writes: '... it was physical factors which had given rise to all the scientific, technological, cultural and political aspects of the distinctive genius of the white race.'⁹⁷ Bessis argues that after four centuries of arguments to legitimize European efforts in subordinating and dominating non-Western peoples, Europe had, by the late 19th century, finally produced a 'fully fledged racism' with a theoretical system that seemed very hard to argue.⁹⁸ Given this historical context in the West, where the connection between race and *civilization* was institutionalized and scientifically substantiated, it is very likely that during this period, the notion of the West was an implicitly white concept. The whiteness buried in the West in the late 19th century is something which I will pay attention to during my analysis. Although, I do expect to find an explicit link between the West and whiteness, as most authors have pointed out, that this connotation was rather implicit.

Another aspect of the Western identity, which features frequently in the historiography is rationalism. While rationalism had obviously become a European virtue, during the enlightenment and scientific revolution, GoGwilt argues that the specific link between rationalism and the West was due to the influence of Russian nihilists, who practiced extreme rationalism and were in the camp of the *Westerners* in the Slavophile-Westerner debate.⁹⁹ The Russian influence on the idea of a rational West is repeated by Bonnett.¹⁰⁰ Federici argues that this connection between rationalism and the West intensified in the 1920s, thanks to a group of French conservatives, who were afraid of the "yellow peril" and "Asiatism", terms that merged the triple menace of Bolshevik Revolution, anticolonial revolt, and mystical rejection of Western economic striving.¹⁰¹ Federici argues that they came to understand the cultures of East and West as "Western" scientific rationalism against "Oriental" mysticism.¹⁰² Wigen and Lewis also find rationalism to be an important aspect of the Western identity, but they argue that it is often overexaggerated, due to the need of Western culture to differentiate itself from the East, whose lack of rationality was also exaggerated, for the same reason.¹⁰³ They do however reiterate that rationality is portrayed as an ineffable quality of the Western subject in general, though with little historization of this link.¹⁰⁴ Bonnett argues that Western rationalism was explained by Hegel as being connected with Protestantism.¹⁰⁵ This brings us to

⁹² Ibid., 239.

⁹³ Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London: Macmillan, 1894), 312.

⁹⁴ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 76-77.

⁹⁵ Silvia Federici, "The God That Never Failed: The Origins and Crises of Western Civilization," in: Silvia Federici, ed. *Enduring Western Civilization*, pp. 63-90, 67.

⁹⁶ Sophie Bessis, *Western Supremacy: Triumph of an Idea?* (London: Zed Press, 2003).

⁹⁷ Bessis, *Western Supremacy*, 30.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ GoGwilt, "True West," 44-49.

¹⁰⁰ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 45.

¹⁰¹ Federici, "The God That Never Failed," 68.

¹⁰² Ibid., 68.

¹⁰³ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 74-75.

¹⁰⁵ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 24.

another major aspect of the Western identity: Christianity.

Enrico Ferri spends a considerable part of his book on the relation between the West and Christianity. He concludes that while there is a considerable history of Christianity in what became to be known as the West, this is also a complicated relationship, as neither the West, nor Christianity have been a singular unchanging entity. He argues that if we were to uphold Christianity as an innate part of the Western identity, it would be problematic to view modern, secular Euro-American society as Western.¹⁰⁶ This is indeed an interesting tension in defining, what has come to mean the West. While the foundations of Western society arguably lie in Christianity, around the time the modern concept of the West crystalized, secularism became to be viewed as a more important feature.¹⁰⁷ It is rather unclear in the historiography how the West has related over time to Christianity and secularism since the inception of the modern ideological concept of the West In the late 19th century. I aim to make a contribution to our understanding of this relation, at least for the Dutch case, with this particular research project. As Ferri points out, Samuel Huntington, in his *Clash of Civilizations* argued that a marriage between Catholicism, Protestantism and democracy were the basis of Western culture.¹⁰⁸ While, the importance of a Christian identity for sustaining a Western identity is debatable, democracy is indeed an essential part of the West, which brings me to the features of Western political economy.

Western Political Economy

Beside the features of the Western identity on an individual level, some of the most important aspects of the West in the historiography are its features related to Western political economy. I argue, as other have before, that these features are some of the key ideological aspects of the concept of the West. The two main aspects of Western political economy are, arguably, democracy and capitalism. Silvia Federici argues that:

At each turn, the appeal to "Western Civilization" has served to dress the mundane objectives connected with the expansion of capitalist relations with a spiritual mantle, playing a role similar to that of Christianity in the political life of the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁹

Wigen and Lewis recognize capitalism and democracy as the core values that the West has ascribed to itself, although in their mind, this is somewhat contradictory, as democracy enjoyed only limited success in Europe before the Second World War. They argue that it was the economic circumstances of the countries which allowed a relatively large section of the population to achieve some economic prosperity. They also pointed out that where and when prosperity became widespread, conservative institutions made an effort to reduce popular participation in politics. They write: 'In a word, economic forces and the variable outcomes of political struggles would appear to have guided the geographical distribution of democratic forms more than any hypothesized Western spirit.'¹¹⁰ They explain the idea of the West as being democratic, more in a Said-esque manner, where they argue, albeit rather implicitly, that the East was viewed in the West as a rather backwards place, lacking *civil society* and being ruled through a mechanism of Oriental despotism.¹¹¹ This would then lead the West to emphasize or overestimate its own democratic standards.

The link that Wigen and Lewis suggest between democracy and free-market capitalism is interesting. Bonnett also points out that, in contemporary discourse, the combination of democracy and free-market economics have come to be viewed as the primary features of the West, encapsulated in so-called liberal democracy.¹¹² Bonnett, however, argues that over the course of the 20th century, the

¹⁰⁶ Ferri, *The Myth of Western Civilization*, 231.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 77; 101.

¹⁰⁸ Ferri, *The Myth of Western Civilization*, 234.

¹⁰⁹ Federici, "The God That Never Failed," 68.

¹¹⁰ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 91.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹² Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 124.

interpretation of the West's political system has shifted over time. He argues that the prominence of the concept of the West has increased significantly over the last 100 years, while at the same time, it has become ideologically narrower.¹¹³ Bonnett explains this through several factors.

At the start of the 20th century, the West was, according to Bonnett, exclusively understood as Western Europe. However, over the course of the 20th century, the United States, began to be seen as a part of the West as well. By the end of the Second World War, Europe was still a part of the West, but it was more so peripheral than dominant, having been replaced by the United States as the dominant power making up the West.¹¹⁴ In a recent data-driven analysis of Dutch discourse, Melvin Wevers has shown how the United States has served as a very ubiquitous reference culture for the Dutch, from the 20th century onwards.¹¹⁵ Ruth Oldenziel has done work on this as well, and refers to the period of 1945-1972 as the era of *classic Americanization*.¹¹⁶ During this period, Bonnett argues, European politics were characterized by a disdain for American style capitalism and veered towards the welfare programs and social democratic imperatives which prevailed during the middle of the 20th century in Western European countries. In fact, Bonnett argues that this period gave European socialists the hope that the end of capitalism would be near. Western intellectuals were hoping for a new type of 'democratic socialism', to distinguish it from the style of socialism in the Soviet Union.¹¹⁷ This arguably indicates that democracy was more so an essential feature of the West, than the capitalist economic model. Bonnett finds however that in recent years, the interpretation of the political economy of the West has become much narrower. He writes:

The identification of the idea of the West with capitalism is neither surprising nor particularly new. From 1917 to 1991 the West's West was shaped in opposition to communism, more specifically the authoritarian communism of the Soviet Union. However, it remains the case that the idea of the West, both before 1917 and for many years after, was more politically plural than the West we are offered today. Over the past thirty years, the neo-liberal appropriation of the idea of the West has introduced an intellectual narrowness to the concept. It has become a very particular model, associated with specific economic practices (such as privatisation, and labour and capital market flexibility) that are globally and militarily enforced.¹¹⁸

Indeed, according to Bonnett, the strong ties between the idea of the West and capitalism are a more recent phenomenon. Ever since the end of the Cold War, this narrow version of what the West means, has been hailed as *the* best version of civilization by authors like Francis Fukuyama, which Bonnett views as a form of utopianism.¹¹⁹ Other authors, such as Silvia Federici have argued that the idea of the West has always been used to expand global capitalism.¹²⁰

I am very interested in what the historic Dutch perspectives on the ties between the West and *liberal democracy* are. the Netherlands nowadays likes to present itself as a trade nation, where historians have argued that capitalist relations originated in the late middle ages¹²¹ and where the prime minister urged Dutch citizens to recapture the spirit of the Dutch East India company in 2006.¹²²

¹¹³ Ibid., 123.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 125.

¹¹⁵ Melvin Wevers, "Consuming America: A Data-Driven Analysis of the United States as a Reference Culture in Dutch Public Discourse on Consumer Goods, 1890-1990," (dissertation, Ipskamp Printing, 2017), 414.

¹¹⁶ Ruth Oldenziel, "Is Globalization a Code Word for Americanization?: Contemplating McDonalds, Coca-Cola, and Military Bases," *The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 4, no. 3 (September 2007): pp. 84-106, <https://doi.org/10.18352/tseg.607>, 98-99.

¹¹⁷ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 126-27.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 139.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 138.

¹²⁰ Federici, ed., *Enduring Western Civilization*, xii

¹²¹ Bas van Bavel, "The Medieval Origins of Capitalism in the Netherlands," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 125, no. 2-3 (January 2010): pp. 45-79, <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.7115>, 46-7.

¹²² Gerrit Knaap, *De 'Core Business' van de VOC: Markt, Macht en Mentaliteit vanuit Overzees Perspectief* (Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht, 2014), 5.

the Netherlands as I have known it throughout my lifetime, is at the forefront of embracing neoliberal politics, hollowing out the welfare state that had been constructed in the 20th century and enforcing sweeping privatization. I am very curious how these developments relate to the Dutch idea of the West. Whether the Dutch link between being Western and upholding the advents of capitalist economics has always been so prevalent, or whether this is a more recent development. Judging from the fact that Dutch politician Pieter Jelles Troelstra tried to stage a socialist revolution in 1918,¹²³ it is fair to predict that the triumph of neoliberal capitalism in the Netherlands as a part of the West, was not always seen as a clearcut feature of the West. It will be interesting to see how the rise of free-market economics as a feature of the West will be tied to the rise of the United States as the main hegemon and actor of the West.

I am aware that this survey of the historiography is rather limited in its scope, but I have outlined some of the most important works and themes, according to my ability. Given the state of the historiography, it is fair to conclude that the formation of the idea of the West was brought about both by external Othering and by internal self-identification. Both these interpretations can yield legitimate narratives, as authors like Bonnett have successfully shown. With this research project, I will focus more on the self-identification aspect of the West, as researching how the idea of the West was a result of external Othering, requires a trans-national approach, which is outside the scope of my research. It will be interesting to see which features of the West that I have described in this chapter, will feature most prominently in the discourse, which I will be using for my analysis. And how the strength of association between these features shifted over time. Hopefully, after my analysis, I will have contributed to this historiographical debate, by illuminating the Dutch perspective on this conceptual historical development, and in turn, filling in a piece of the puzzle on the history of the concept of the West.

¹²³ J.S Wijne, *De 'Vergissing' Van Troelstra* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999).

Chapter 2: The idea of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse

*For the introduction of all the novelty, which [Peter the Great] laid as the foundation of the future Russian civilization, he made use of European powers and talents. As much as he could, he attracted men from different countries to him. By word and deed, he acknowledged the superiority of Western civilization, and borrowed from it the tools, which he required, to reach the ideal, which it had set for him and his people.*¹²⁴

Algemeen Handelsblad, 1877

*... Gorbachev views Western influence as inevitable and not necessarily harmful for the mental wellbeing of Russian youth.*¹²⁵

Telegraaf, 1985

Undoubtedly, the idea of the West in the Netherlands, has changed and morphed significantly since its inception in the late 19th century. As an example, consider how the two quotes above characterize Western influence in Russia. The first quote, derived from an article on Peter the Great, treats Western culture as an inherently superior one, which Peter The Great consciously chose to adopt and emulate for his empire. Despite the anachronism of placing the idea of the West onto earlier periods, this quote is revealing in how comfortably it treats historical Western culture as superior to historical Russian civilization. In the second quote, Western influence is considered as an inevitability, which is not necessarily harmful. While this quote seems to be more subtle about the quality of Western civilization, it lacks the agency of non-Western leaders, to adopt Western ideas. In the period between these two citations, the idea of the West seems to have morphed from an inherently great culture, which non-Western Others could choose to adopt, to a wildly pervasive idea, which Others inevitably succumbed to. What was meant by Western influence during the hundred years between these publications, might have shifted dramatically.

Although this is just one example of changing ideas of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse, which ignores the multiplicity of the idea of the West, in this chapter I will demonstrate how newspaper discourse can serve conceptual historical efforts in a quantitative way. While such an approach may not yield the same depth and nuance of a close reading analysis, it can help us distinguish broad trends over time in a much larger discourse. In doing so, I will be able to give a much more comprehensive overview of the history of the idea of the West in the Netherlands, than would have been possible with close reading. As we will see, the quantitative approach applied here, is able to uncover a better understanding of the timeline of the idea of the West, and will show some of the particularities of the Dutch case and reveal conceptual shifts over time. I will attempt to answer the question of whether the idea of the West, as presented in Dutch newspaper discourse, was a cultural one, with an emphasis on the Western identity, or an ideological one, with an emphasis on political economy. We will see how the West was initially a concept of cultural superiority, but over the course of the Cold War, came to be used as a concept of political-economic superiority.

As I explained in my introduction, I will use n-grams and word embeddings as the primary techniques for this case study. Using both these techniques, I will interrogate how the idea of the West has evolved in Dutch newspaper discourse. Thereafter, I will test theories found in the historiography and show how my findings differ from existing narratives.

¹²⁴ All quotations in this chapter are translated by myself.

Th. J., "Het Testament Van Peter Den Groote," *Algemeen Handelsblad*, April 15, 1877, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010103008:mpeg21:a0037>, accessed July 27, 2022.

¹²⁵ Jip Golsteijn, 'Rock in Rusland', *De Telegraaf*, November 2 1985, <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:011207035:mpeg21:a0912>, accessed July 27, 2022.

Methodology

Figure 2 represents a complete breakdown of the pipeline that I have constructed for this project. It shows the different steps in my research, and what I am interpreting to construct my narrative, which are mainly results of n-gram counts and similarity scores produced by the word embedding models. I

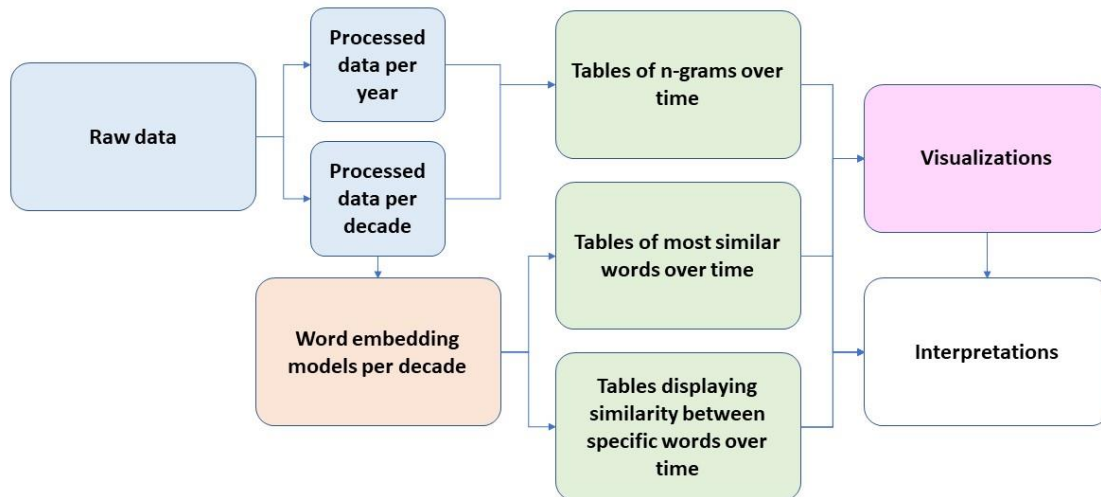


Figure 2: Visual representation of methodology pipeline

started out with preprocessing the data, which consisted of removing stop words, and separating the data chronologically, both per year and per decade. I then used this data to search for meaningful n-grams, referring to the idea of the West. I produced unigrams to trace the relative frequency of words referring to the West, and bigrams to gain a sense of what was considered Western. Besides my n-gram approach, I also used the data per decade to train word embedding models. I interrogated the word embedding models to investigate the semantic space of the idea of the West, by searching for similar words. In this chapter, I will analyze the results of all these exercises. For the more technologically inclined, I have provided an appendix to show the exact steps I have taken for this analysis, which includes the python code that I have used throughout. It shows how I have produced the results which I am discussing here. The appendix can be found on Github.¹²⁶

The nature of Dutch semantics around the idea of the West lends itself very well to our quantitative research method. In the Dutch language, there is a specific adjective for referring to something as being Western in a cultural and socio-political sense, which is not used for referring to geography. Whereas in English, the term ‘western’ can be used in both senses, for example, geographically as ‘western Spain’ or culturally as ‘Western values,’¹²⁷ the word ‘*Westers*’ in Dutch, exclusively denotes something which is related to the idea of the West.¹²⁸ Translating the above examples into Dutch, it would be ‘*West-Spanje*’ or ‘*het westen van Spanje*,’ and ‘*Westerse waarden*,’ respectively. The Dutch noun of the West, ‘*Westen*,’ does suffer from the same problem as the English noun, in that it can be used both geographically and culturally. For that reason, I will use the adjectival form of ‘*Westers*’ (Western), to separate geographical uses of the West, from the cultural and

¹²⁶ “Appendix_Thesis,” Github. accessed August 12, 2022, https://github.com/EdoStorm96/Appendix_Thesis.

¹²⁷ “Western (adjective),” Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries, accessed August 3, 2022, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/western_1?q=western.

¹²⁸ “Westers (bijvoegelijk naamwoord, bijwoord),” Van Dale, accessed August 3, 2022, <https://www.vandale.nl/gratis-woordenboek/nederlands/betekenis/westers#.YuqFShzP202>.

ideological use of the West. Although doing so will limit the possibilities of this approach, for instance, by denying us the possibility to research the singularization of the concept the West, as described by Reinhart Koselleck,¹²⁹ which did arguably occur with the idea of the West. However, having a word in Dutch, which is exclusively cultural and ideological, is a huge benefit to researching this topic for the Dutch case. For this reason, I will be working with this adjectival form.

For my analysis, I interrogated the data either on a per-year or on a per-decade basis. I work with the data on a per-year basis for counting n-grams, to research how the frequencies of terms evolve over time. However, to improve the legibility of the output of my digital analyses, I also count the most frequent n-grams per decade, starting in 1875. I opted to work with this neutral, decade-based periodization, to ensure comparability across the different periods, and to obtain a relatively unbiased periodization. I also used a decade-based periodization for my word embeddings. Training word embeddings on much smaller periods, would have produced unreliable models, as the data, on a per-year basis, would have unfortunately been too small to produce reliable models. This grants us 12 periods to work with and to analyze using word embeddings. These are the same periods that I will be using for my n-gram analysis. The amount of words per period can be seen in table 2.

Table 2: Amount of words per period

Period	Amount of words
1875-1884	77.989.948
1885-1894	109.009.907
1895-1904	231.085.214
1905-1914	320.243.898
1915-1924	336.609.891
1925-1934	398.187.727
1935-1944	247.963.606
1945-1954	118.153.576
1955-1964	261.224.229,
1965-1974	310.025.731
1975-1984	374.344.819
1984-1994	446.752.058

While this periodization does grant some considerable variance in the amount of words per decade, all periods, except the first one, grant us at least a hundred million words, which, according to Wevers and Koolen, is the minimum amount for training a reliable word embedding model.¹³⁰ Still, the asymmetry of the data size per decade, is something to keep in mind, when interpreting the results of my methodology.

Throughout this chapter, I am referring to the results of my computational pipeline, which are mostly in the form of spreadsheets. I have decided to leave these out of the text of this chapter, to improve legibility, but they can be found in the appendix, for readers eager to verify or challenge my interpretations.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 156.

¹³⁰ Wevers and Koolen, “Digital Begriffsgeschichte,” 233.

¹³¹ These can be found in the ‘spreadsheets_used_for_analysis’ folder, within the appendix: “Appendix_Thesis,” Github. accessed August 12, 2022, https://github.com/EdoStorm96/Appendix_Thesis.

N-grams featuring the Western adjective: a Cold War shift?

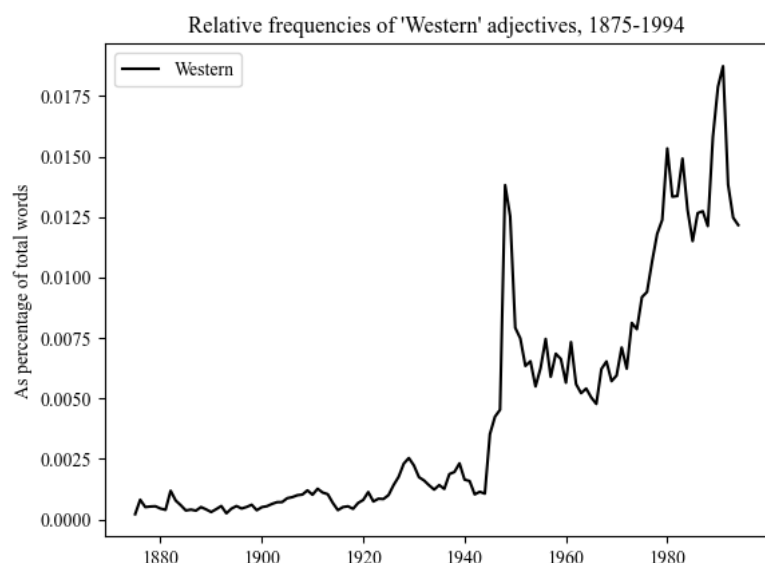


Figure 4: Relative frequencies of 'Western' adjectives, 1875-1994

World War II, saw its most significant increase in use after this war. The development of the use of the adjective 'Westers', seems to indicate that the idea of the West, became much more widespread during the Cold War, when the Soviet Union provided a much more significant and threatening Other to the wider Western community, with which the Netherlands identified. If we zoom in on the earlier period (fig. 5), before the massive post-war rise in prominence of the idea of the West, we see that the use of the adjective 'Westers', already rose to unprecedented highs after the formation of the Soviet Union,

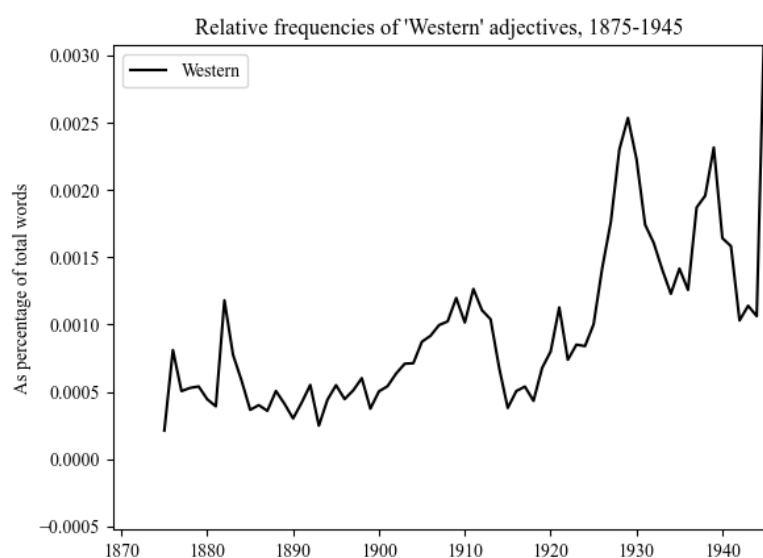


Figure 3: Relative frequencies of 'Western' adjectives, 1875-1945

to increasingly use the idea of the West, as their wider international identity.

However, in my opinion, it is not only the rise of the communist Other, which strengthened the idea of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse, but more so the fact that the nature of the concept of

First, I will analyze the relative frequency of the adjective 'Westers' as a general guide for the prominence of the idea of the West. For this, I searched for both spellings of the adjective, the historically prominent 'Westersch' and the contemporary 'Westers,' and for both conjugations of each of these ('Westers' and 'Westerse'). Figure 4 shows the occurrence of these terms, as a percentage of the total vocabulary of a specific year.

This plot indicates that the concept of the West, while present before

especially during the reign of Stalin. Although the idea of the West already rose in popularity before the formation of the USSR, it became a much more prominent term, after its formation in 1922. Perhaps, this could be explained as a shift in the wider international community in which the Netherlands placed itself. Whereas the term Europe might have been more prevalent before the October Revolution, after the communist revolution, Dutch journalists wanted to distinguish themselves from the Soviet Union, and started

the West changed significantly almost immediately after World War II, and that because of this, the idea of the West grew so significantly in popularity during this period. While it is difficult to explain how this idea changed based purely on the relative frequencies of the Western adjective, the substantial rise in use of the adjective coinciding with the start of the Cold War, is quite significant, as this conflict is frequently understood as a conflict between East and West. It seems very plausible that the meaning of the concept changed, because of this historical context. Using bigrams featuring the Western adjective, we can gain a better sense of what words were being described as Western, and thus what being Western most commonly meant. Doing so, can give further legitimacy to the hypothesis of a Cold War conceptual shift.

In the lists of bigrams featuring the Western adjective the constant relatively high frequency of the construction ‘*onze westers(ch)e*’ (*our western*)¹³² is immediately striking. This indicates that the discourse in the selected newspapers treated the Netherlands as a part of the West from the inception of the concept of the West, showing that the idea of the West, in Dutch discourse, has always been understood as a metageographical concept for self-identification. This may be unsurprising, given the location of the Netherlands on the West coast of Continental Europe, but it is still useful to quantitatively prove that the idea of the West has always been an idea used for self-identification in the Netherlands.

For understanding what was being considered as Western, I found it most fruitful to look at nouns, which followed the adjective ‘*Westers*’. Initially in the late 19th century, these are often political entities, such as nations, powers and empires. There was also already an emerging sense of a cohesive Western civilization, as the bigram ‘*Westersche beschaving*’ (Western civilization) is one of the most frequently occurring bigrams. But overall, these constructions were still very rare in this period, as can be seen by the very low frequencies of all these n-grams. ‘*Westersche beschaving*’ for instance appears only 49 times in the first decade of the data. Although the nouns which are most often described as being Western, are political entities, or to a certain extent industries, such as the railways and industry itself, when we continue looking at this list and search for features of Western-ness, we can deduce that these are more so cultural than political. Bigrams which initially feature relatively frequently are for instance, ‘*Westersche volken*’ (Western peoples), ‘*Westersche wetenschap*’ (Western science), or ‘*Westersche gebruiken*’ (Western customs). Based on these bigrams, it seems that the people and their culture in Western nations, made them Western, rather than the political economy of these nations.

The idea of the West, based mostly on cultural features, persisted up until the end of World War II and at the same time, became more widespread. Looking at the nouns following the adjective ‘*Westers*’ most frequently throughout the early 20th century, the first thing to note is how the frequency of these n-grams has expanded dramatically. The idea of the West has really cemented itself in the discourse of this period, at least to a much greater extent than during the late 19th century. Furthermore, the n-grams from the early 20th century seem to indicate, that the idea of the West was still being defined through cultural features. We again find many political entities being defined as Western, but many bigrams also point towards the emphasis on culture, when defining the idea of the West for this period. Most notable is the very high frequency of the adjective-noun combination of ‘*Westersche cultuur*’ (Western culture). However, many other notable nouns in this list, indicate that the most important features of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse, were cultural, most notably: Western ‘*onderwijs*’ (education), ‘*kerk*’ (church), ‘*ideeën*’¹³³ (ideas), ‘*kennis*’ (knowledge), ‘*kunst*’ (art), and ‘*opvattingen*’ (opinions). There also seems to be an increased sense of cohesion in the idea of the West, expressed through terms like ‘*Westersche wereld*’ (Western world), implying a cohesive society.

Besides the idea of the West being further crystalized in this period, we also witness an

¹³² All terms in this chapter have been translated by myself.

¹³³ Some OCR errors remain in the n-gram spreadsheet. I have taken those out in the text. The letter ‘ë’, which often occurs in Dutch plural nouns, tends to be changed to ‘Ã«’.

increase in n-grams which highlight Western economic activity, such as Western '*kapitaal*' (capital), '*bedrijven*' (companies) and '*ondernemingen*' (enterprises). This suggests that Western economic activity, also came to be viewed as a feature of the West (although the combination of '*Westerse economie*' (Western economy), was still only used three times, or 0.04 percent of all occurrences of the Western adjective, between 1925 and 1934). Lastly, the high frequency in the pre-war 20th century of bigrams indicating an awareness of Western hegemony is remarkable, such as: Western '*invloeden*' (influences) and '*leiding*' (leadership). This shows an awareness of the West as a hegemonial power, which in turn indicates how the West and its culture were viewed as a superior one, to be emulated by non-Western Others. This reflects how the West was viewed as a culturally defined, metageographical category, which was superior to the non-West. In fact, the construction '*Westerse superioriteit*' (Western superiority) was used three times explicitly between 1925-1934. Although this number are rather insignificant, accounting for about 0.04 percent of every time the Western adjective was used, the fact that Western superiority was mentioned explicitly at all, is already revealing.

Although the make-up of the most common bigrams featuring the Western adjective throughout the early 20th century remains fairly stable, some discursive change occurs. Closer to World War II, the bigram '*Westerse democratiën*' (Western democracies) steadily increases in relative popularity. It first appears significantly, occurring 11 times (0.5%¹³⁴) in the period 1915-1924, when voting rights and democratic institutions significantly expanded throughout Europe. However, by the period 1935-1944, it appears 203 times (4.6%). So, throughout this period, the idea of democracy became increasingly associated with being Western. Thus, by the end of the pre-war period, although the West still mainly gets defined through its cultural features, we are starting to see that being Western took on a political meaning, mainly being associated with democracy.

In the first post-war decade the most significant shift in nouns most commonly following the Western adjective occurs. Generally, these n-grams have become more politicized and place a much greater emphasis on the cohesion of the West. The most common bigram in the immediate postwar decade is '*Westerse unie*' (Western union), which featured 930 times (10%). Other bigrams implying Western unity are frequently featured as well. Clearly, the idea of Western cohesion was being more actively cultivated in the immediate post-war discourse. Nouns referring to militarism, are also very prominent in this period. It seems there is a link between an increased sense of Western cohesion and Western militarism, as they arguably had a symbiotic relationship.

Besides the increased sense of a Western community, we can also deduce from the most common bigrams, that the idea of the West has become more ideological and politicized, from the amount of words referring to political economy and international relations. Words referring to the Western mode of government, such as democracy and democracies, are becoming relatively more prominent, but also general terms like '*politiek*' (politics) followed the Western adjective 68 times (0.7%), as opposed to three times (0.07%) in the decade preceding it. Words referring to diplomacy start dominating the bigram lists in this decade. Bigrams referring to culture still occur with some significance, but based on the most common bigrams of the immediate post-war period, it becomes clear that the emphasis has shifted. Whereas the West used to be a mostly culturally defined metageographical concept, it has now, after World War II, become a politically defined one.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, the most common bigrams remain relatively stable, but another gradual shift occurs. Namely, the increased dominance of nouns, which refer to the economy, finance and capitalism. In figure 5, I have displayed the relative frequencies of several economic terms, as a percentage of all instances of the Western adjective. Clearly, these economic concepts, were increasingly being described as Western, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. These trends, along with the occurrence of many other prominent economic bigrams, such as '*Westerse industrielanden*' (Western industrialized countries), which was the third most common bigram in the period of 1975-84, and '*bedrijven*' (companies), indicate that the emphasis on economy as a feature of

¹³⁴ This percentage reflects the occurrence of a specific bigram as a percentage of all occurrences of the Western adjective.

being Western, increased significantly throughout the Cold War. Whereas, in the immediate post-World War II period, Western cohesion seems to have been a product of militarism, political alliances and shared political values, nearing the end of the 20th century, we start seeing that the Western world increasingly came to be defined through its economic mode of production, including the financialization of the economy.

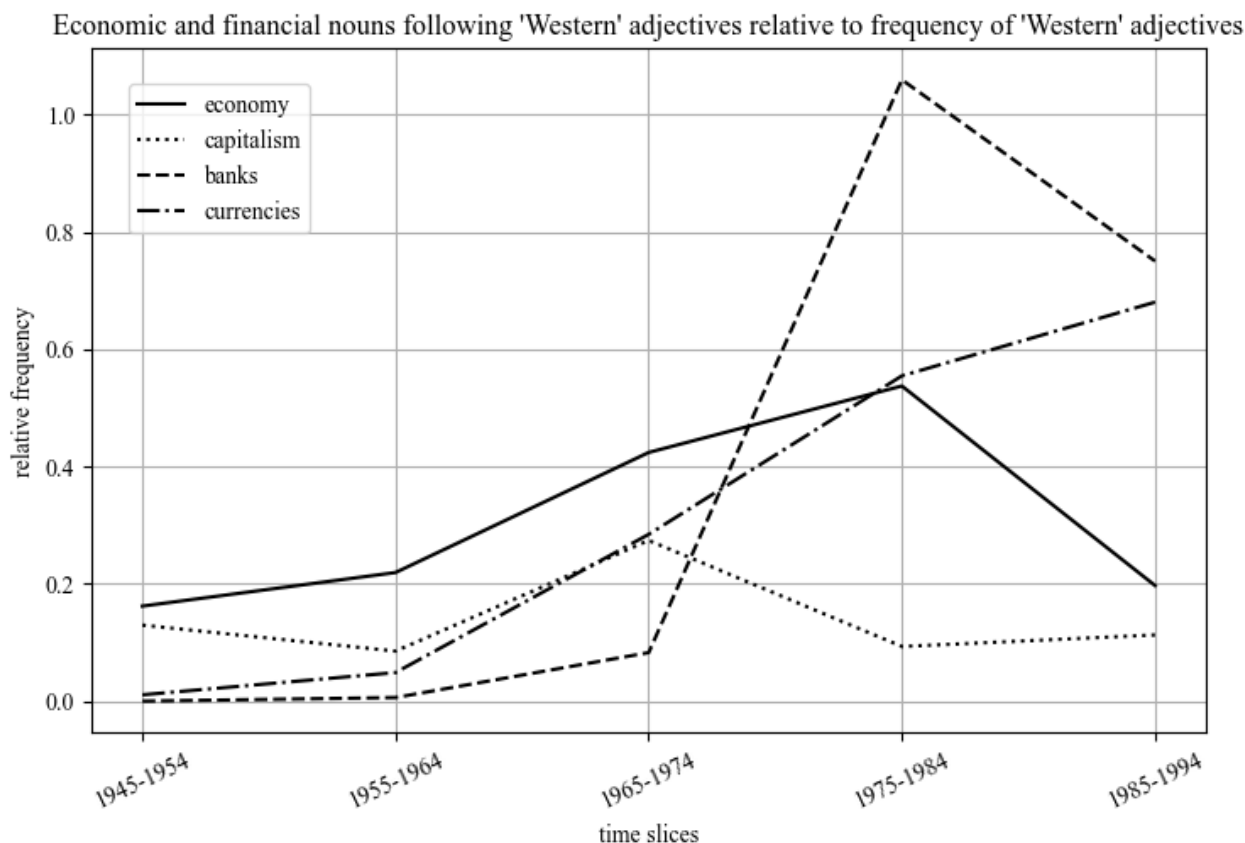


Figure 5: Relative frequencies of financial nouns following 'Western' adjectives

A final noteworthy trend, when looking at the bigrams for the post-war period, is the increase in nouns referring to Western sources of information. These include for instance, Western '*journalisten*' (journalists), '*pers*' (press), '*media*' (media), '*waarnemers*' (observers) and '*experts*' (experts). The increased occurrence of these types of n-grams showcase that, throughout this period, the distinction between Western and non-Western knowledge, became increasingly important. Given the circumstances of the Cold War, this distinction is perhaps unsurprising, but it is still noteworthy that during the second half of the 20th century, the West seems to view itself as the *de facto* producer of reliable knowledge, essentially gatekeeping knowledge production, and implicitly rejecting non-Western perspectives when it came to knowledge production.

To reiterate, analysis of bigrams featuring the Western adjective, is illuminating when trying to define how the West and being Western has been conceptualized over time. Whereas it started out as a mostly culturally defined metageographical concept, it became increasingly defined through political economy, over the course of the 20th century. This happened slowly throughout this period, but a rather rapid shift happened right after the Second World War. The emphasis shifted from a Western culture, to a Western political unity. During the Cold War the importance of economic factors, as features of the West increase steadily. In this period, there is also a shift from a Western world united through international relations and militarism to a Western world united through trade and economic interests.

Synonymns and antonymns to the Western adjective: Orientalism and ideology

Before jumping into the results of the word embedding excercises, I would like to remind the reader, that lists of the most similar words produced using word embeddings, will often feature both synonymns to the target word, as well as antonymns. It is then up to the researcher to classify which is which. This is very useful in our case, because it can give further insight into the most important features of the West, as well as provide knowledge about who was seen as the non-Western Other. But please be aware that when I say *similar*, I mean similar according to the word embedding model.

When looking at the most similar words to the Western adjective, for the first decade of our dataset, it becomes clear that the word most synonymous to Western is '*Europeesche*' (European, 0.55¹³⁵), indicating that indeed, when the idea of the West rose to prominence, it was used in this sense, to evoke Europe. Other striking words are '*koloniseerende*' (colonizing, 0.47) and '*zeevarende*' (seafaring, 0.42), which suggests that colonialism was at this moment seen as a Western quality, and '*christelijke*' (Christian, 0.42), which apparantly, was quite synonymous to Western in the late 19th century. The antonymns for this decade are also quite revealing of the deep ties between the early concept of the West and Orientalism. Some of words with the highest similarity scores, which I would classify as antonymns are '*Aziatische*' (Asian, 0.48), '*Islam*' (Islam, 0.45), '*oostersche*' (eastern, 0.43), '*Mohammedaansche*' (Mohammedan, 0.43) and '*onbedschaafde*' (uncivilized, 0.42). The high similarity scores of both civilized and uncivilized suggest that the West was defined by its high degree of civilization and the non-West by its perceived lack of civilization. This confirms our earlier findings, based on the n-grams, that the idea of the West, was initially defined through the cultural features of Western civilization, rather than the features of Western political economy. The East-West binary, which presents itself in this list of similarity scores, is clearly one of a civilized, Christian, imperialist Europe as opposed to an uncivilized, Muslim, Asian East.

The initial list of similarity scores also seems to indicate the newness of the idea of the West, through the inclusion of the words '*hedendaagsche*' (contemporary, 0.44) and '*nieuwere*' (newer, 0.41). While it is tricky to interpret what words in these similarity lists mean, the inclusion of these modern-leaning, temporal words, seems to indicate that the idea of the West was seen as something that was just emerging in this period. The West seems to be a novel idea during the late 19th century, both looking at the frequency of the Western adjective in this period, and the most similar words. This confirms the periodization of the idea of the West, which has thus far been proposed in the historiography, of it being a late 19th century invention.

When moving onwards in time throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, the lists of most similar words remain relatively stable. Some other notable words, which feature in the similarity lists of these periods are '*Javaansche*' (Javanese, 0.38), referring to the colonized Dutch indies, which was apparantly used to differentiate the West against the non-West in a true Orientalist sense. Indeed, these early lists of most similar words, seem to confirm Said's analysis about the idea of the West being highly embedded in Orientalist discourse. Throughout the pre-war period, the highest ranking antonymns to Western all refer to Asia and Islam. Synonymns and antonymns referring to political economy are quite rare in these early periods, and most words refer to cultural features of the West and the non-West, such as religion (christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) and general words describing hierarchical conceptions of culture (civilized, refined, modern, uncivilized, pagan, indigenous).

Around the time of the Russian revolution in the period of 1915-1924, unsurprisingly, we start seeing the adjectival forms of capitalist and Marxist pop up, although these are relatively far down the list, ranking considerably lower than words relating to religion and civilization. We still do not see any explicit refernces to Russia or the Soviet Union in this period, however, the introduction of Cold War ideologies in this list suggests, that political economy started being viewed as a feature of the West in this period. Still, the concept remains mostly cultural and Orientalist. However, the similarity scores

¹³⁵ This number represents the similarity score, which the algorithm has given to this word.

between capitalist and Western increase steadily leading up to the Second World War. Initially, in the period 1915-24, the similarity score is 0.43. In the following decades, it goes up to 0.51, and in the final pre-war period, it is 0.59, capitalist being one of the most similar words to the Western adjective.

We already see quite a significant emphasis on political economy in the final prewar period. Here, we see the scores for words such as '*totalitaire*' (totalitarian, 0.54), '*nationalisme*' (nationalism, 0.47), '*autoritaire*' (authoritarian, 0.47) and '*ideologie*' (ideology, 0.45) rise. Notably, this period is also the first where '*West-Europeesche*'¹³⁶ (West-European, 0.58) has a higher similarity score to Western than European, indicating that the Cold War mindset had started to sink in by this point in time. Another noteworthy feature of the list of similarity scores, is that the highest scoring word is '*Angelsaksische*' (Anglo-Saxon, 0.59). Both the prominence of Anglo-Saxon and the replacement of European with West-European, indicate that geographical meaning of the idea of the West, was starting to shift. A distinction between Western Europe started to become necessary to differentiate between Slavic and Western European cultures (or ideologies) and the term Anglo-Saxon leaves room for the United States to be included in the idea of the West as well, whereas references to the United States had not featured prominently up to this point. Additionally, there is a specific reference to the United States in this list in the form of '*Anglo-Amerikaansche*' (Anglo-American, 0.46). Again, this confirms that the United States were now becoming a part of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse.

In the final prewar period, despite the increased connection between the idea of the West and political economy, we still see Asia and references to Eastern religion in the form of '*Islam*' (Islam, 0.52) and '*Boeddhisme*' (Buddhism, 0.46) as the most prominent antonymns featured in the list of similar words to the Western adjective. As we saw with the n-grams, it is in the post-war period, that we see the largest shift in how the West/non-West binary was conceptualized. Although the definition of the West seems to stay consistent, with West-European (0.63) and Anglo-Saxon (0.62) among the highest ranking words, it is in the first post-war period that seemingly the non-West starts being defined more often as '*Oost-Europese*' (East-European, 0.55), '*Sovjet-Rusland*' (Sovietrussia, 0.53), '*Sovjet-Unie*' (Sovietunion, 0.51) and '*Russische*' (Russian, 0.51). The adjective Asian, still has the highest similarity score with the Western adjective out of all antonymical geographical areas, having a score of 0.62, indicating that the West was still commonly being defined through an Orientalist binary.

In the following decades, we see the continuation of the idea of the West being most commonly understood in a coldwar context. Throughout the 1960's and 70s, the adjectives '*kapitalistische*' (capitalist) and '*communistisch*' (communist) have the highest similarities to the Western adjective, indicating that the shift from a mostly cultural understanding of the West/non-West binary to a mostly ideological understanding has fully crystalized in these periods. By the period 1965-74, words referring to the Soviet Union have overtaken words referring to Asia as the highest scoring antonymns to the Western adjective, suggesting that by this time, political economy had become the most important feature to define a society as Western, rather than race, religion or culture. We now also see '*China*' (China, 0.57) and '*Chinese*' (Chinese, 0.56) starting to feature prominently in this list. China seems to have entered into this discourse, because of its prominent role in the Cold War, more so than because of its cultural or ethnic non-Western-ness.

While the immediate post-war period shows a quite simplistic binary surrounding the West, in line with the major powers of the Cold War, if we continue looking further in time, we can see this notion becomes more complicated. While the final decades of our data still reflect a Cold War binary of a capitalist West and a communist East, represented through Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and now, China, we do also see other world regions pop up. Of particular interest are the adjectives referring to Latin America and the the Middle East, represented in the word '*Arabische*' (Arabic). The emergence of these world regions in the later decades of the 20th century, seem to indicate that the idea of the West, was losing some of its binary nature. During this period it became one world region, among many. Still, in these periods, the term Western seemed to mostly represent a Cold War mindset,

¹³⁶ My preprocessing step removed the '-' from all the data. In this chapter, I have reinserted these when appropriate.

as words referring to the Soviet Other remain prevalent. But these periods also feature geographical terms, whose place in the Cold War binary of East and West are more ambiguous.

Another interesting addition to the later decades of discourse are the adjectives referring to Japan. I have categorized these as being synonymous to Western, as Japan, famously, often has been categorized as being a part of the West.¹³⁷ While this remains debatable, the inclusion of Japan within the semantic field of the idea of the West, represents the completion of the conceptual shift, which we see occurring with this concept. Whereas the West and being Western, when the concept emerged, meant being, most importantly, culturally Western, exemplified for instance by practicing Christianity, as it got adopted within a Cold War discourse, the concept became less about identity, and more about ideology. While Japan is culturally quite different from Western Europe, the Japanese nation adheres to the same capitalist ideology as Western Europe, and could therefore, by the late 20th century, be seen as Western. Over the course of the Cold War, political-economy became the most important marker of being Western. What is also notable about Japan being viewed as Western, is that it breaks with the tradition of the label ‘Western’ being exclusively reserved to mostly white nations. Thus, with the shift from Western being a cultural concept to an ideological one, the idea of the West officially sheds any implicit, race-based exclusionary meaning, which according to the historiography, was a feature of the idea of the West during its inception. Analyzing the most similar words to the Western adjective over time, supports the idea that a post-war shift occurred regarding the idea of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse from a culturally defined metageographical concept to an ideologically defined one.

Targeted analysis of the word embedding models

Instead of simply analyzing the lists of most similar words to the Western adjective per period to gain a general overview of the term, the word embedding models also allow for a more targeted analysis of similarities between concepts by tracing the similarity between specified concepts over time. This



Figure 6: Similarity of Western to capitalist and civilized

¹³⁷ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 5.

allows us to gain insight into more specific features of the idea of the West. First, I would like to interrogate the findings of a shift from a culturally defined idea of the West, to an ideologically defined one, further. In figure 6, I have plotted the similarity scores of the Western adjective, and the adjectival forms of both civilized and capitalist.¹³⁸ Civilized used to be one of the most similar words to the Western adjectives in the early periods of the data, although the scores remained relatively low, compared to later periods, due to the relatively infrequent use of the concept of the West. It represents a more cultural conception of the idea of the West, whereas the adjective capitalist, indicates an idea of the West that is more ideological.

Clearly, this graph suggests a shift in the conception of the West. Apparently, capitalist already became more synonymous with Western by the 1930s, but we do see the biggest difference in similarity scores in the post-war periods, when the similarity between Western and capitalist become incredibly high, with the terms seemingly becoming almost synonymous. In figure 7, I have again tried to show the shift from a cultural emphasis to an political economic emphasis, through mapping the similarities between adjectival forms of Christian and democratic to the Western adjective.¹³⁹

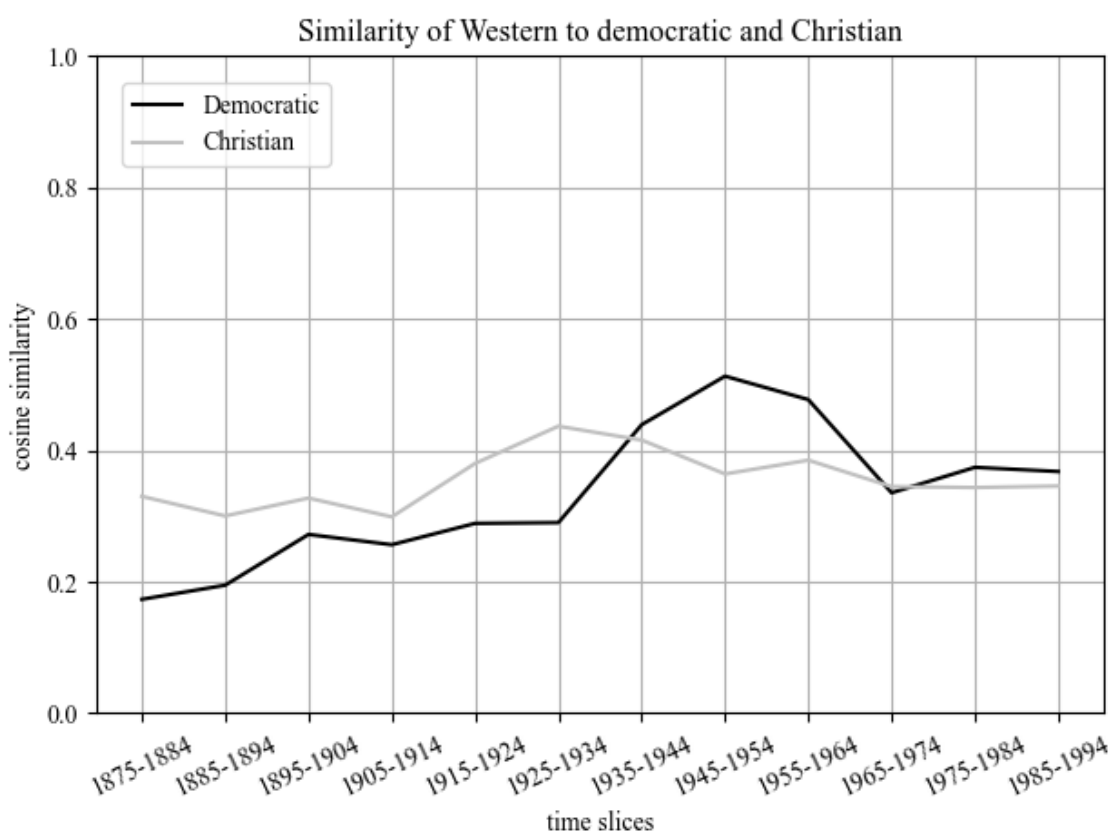


Figure 7: Similarity of Western to democratic and Christian

First, we can note that neither of these concepts have similarity scores as high as with capitalist and civilized. Secondly, while a shift can be perceived here, it is not as striking as in the previous graph. Both these features, have relatively constant similarity scores with the Western adjectives. While we can perceive a peak in the similarity between democratic and Western in the immediate post-war years, the notion of democracy seemingly was less of a political model which was

¹³⁸ Keywords:

‘Capitalist’: ‘kapitalistisch’ and ‘kapitalistische’.

‘Civilized’: ‘beschaafd’ and ‘beschaafde’.

¹³⁹ ‘Christian’: ‘christelijke’, ‘christelijk’ and ‘christendom’.

Democratic: ‘democratisch’ and ‘democratische’.

seen as an inherent feature of the West, arguably because democracy became more widespread, reaching beyond the West as the *de facto* mode of politics, at least in principle. While the similarity between Christian and Western never reached the heights of capitalism, it stayed relatively close to the concept of the West, indicating that the link between christianity and the West, while not incredibly strong, was fairly durable in our data. It seems from these exercises that being capitalist, is one of the most inherent features of being Western, especially in the post-war period, more so than being Christian, civilized or democratic. Furthermore, these graphs illustrate visually, the Cold War shift which occurred with the conception of the West.

Besides using this targeted approach to identify the importance of different features of the idea of the West, it is also very useful in analyzing who belongs to the West. For instance, we can analyze Bonnett's hypothesis of America replacing Europe as the most dominant geographic area, making up the idea of the West.¹⁴⁰ In figure 8, I have plotted the similarities of Western to European and American.¹⁴¹ Here, we can again identify a very clear post-war shift. Whereas, as I hypothesized earlier based on the n-gram findings, early on, the concept of the West was mostly referring to Europe, by the post-war era, the United States came to be much more closely associated with the idea of the West, eventually overtaking European in similarity to Western. This also confirms Bonnets narrative about the evolution of the geographic meaning of the idea of the West, where the meaning shifted from European, to a transatlantic Western community which included the United States.

In figure 9, I have done the same exercise, but for European and West-European.¹⁴² We again witness a shift, where eventually West-European becomes more similar to the Western adjective, than European, although here the shift is less dramatic, as the prominent link between the West and Western Europe seems to already have existed in the pre-war years. Note also, that the similarity score between West-European and Western, is quite a bit higher than that of American and Western, indicating that in our data, the discourse seems to favor Western Europe as more Western than the United States. But, by the later periods, the United States are more Western than Europe as a whole. Judging by these metrics, it seems that Western Europe, was the geographical concept most closely aligned with the idea of the West, and thus, that it was mostly used for self-identification in the Netherlands.

Besides being able to offer insight into the geography of the West, as constructed in Dutch newspaper discourse, using a targeted approach, can also grant some insight into what was most commonly understood as the non-West, because of the high similarity score between antonyms. In figure 10, I have plotted the similarity scores between the Western adjective, and Asian and Russian/Soviet, as these appeared to be the most prominent antonyms of the Western adjective.¹⁴³ Both these geographical concepts' similarity to the Western adjective follow quite a similar trajectory, which probably has to do with the frequency of the Western adjective in general, but we can, again, see a notable shift. Whereas Asia initially appeared to be the undisputed non-Western Other along the East-West binary, we can see Russia/the Soviet Union, beating out Asia in the later decades. This phenomenon supports the Cold War shift, that I have found over the course of this analysis. Whereas Asia was the most prominent Other during the culturally defined era of the idea of the West, when the West, began to be understood as a most prominently ideological idea, Russia/ the Soviet Union, which is culturally closer to Western Europe than Asia, but ideologically very different, became the most prominent non-Western Other.

¹⁴⁰ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 125.

¹⁴¹ 'European': 'europeesch', 'europeesche', 'europees' and 'europese'.

'American': 'amerikaansch', 'amerikaansche', 'amerikaans' and 'amerikaanse'.

¹⁴² 'European': 'europeesch', 'europeesche', 'europees' and 'europese'.

'West-European': 'westeuropeesch', 'westeuropeesche', 'westeuropees' and 'westeuropese'.

¹⁴³ 'Asian': 'aziatisch', and 'aziatische'.

'Soviet/Russian': 'russisch', 'russische', 'sovjetunie', 'sovjetrusland', 'sovjet', 'sowjetunie', 'sowjetrusland' and 'sowjet'.

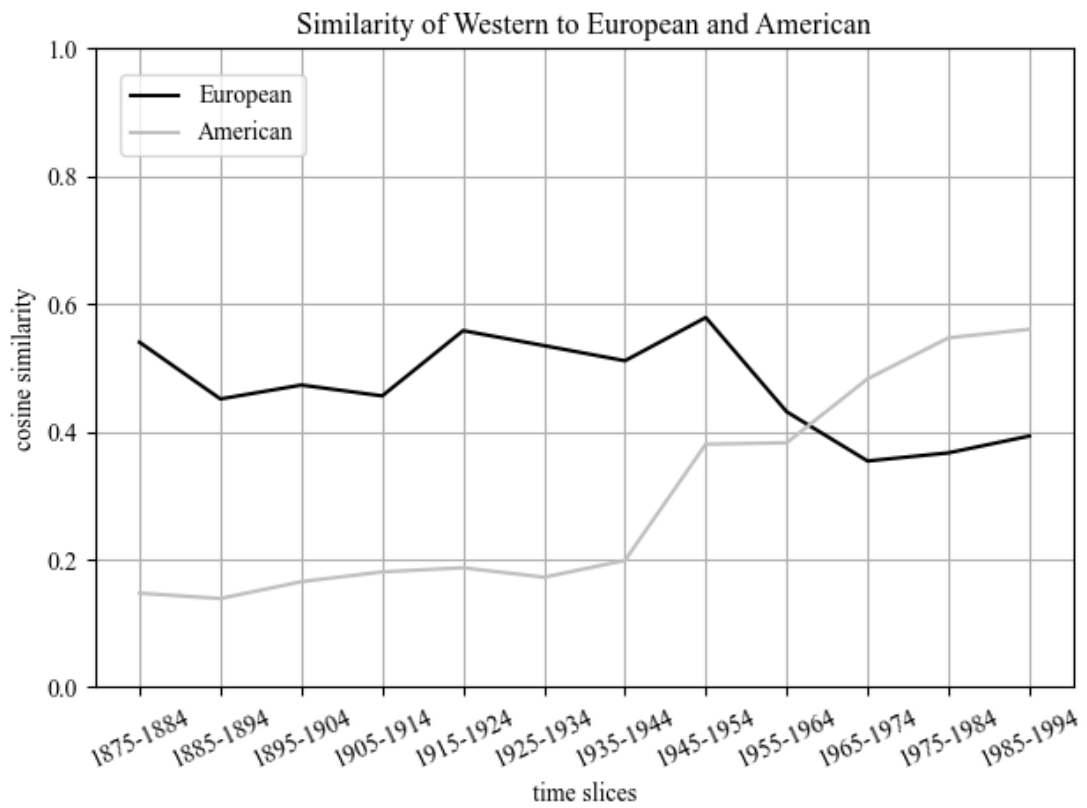


Figure 9: Similarity of Western to European and American

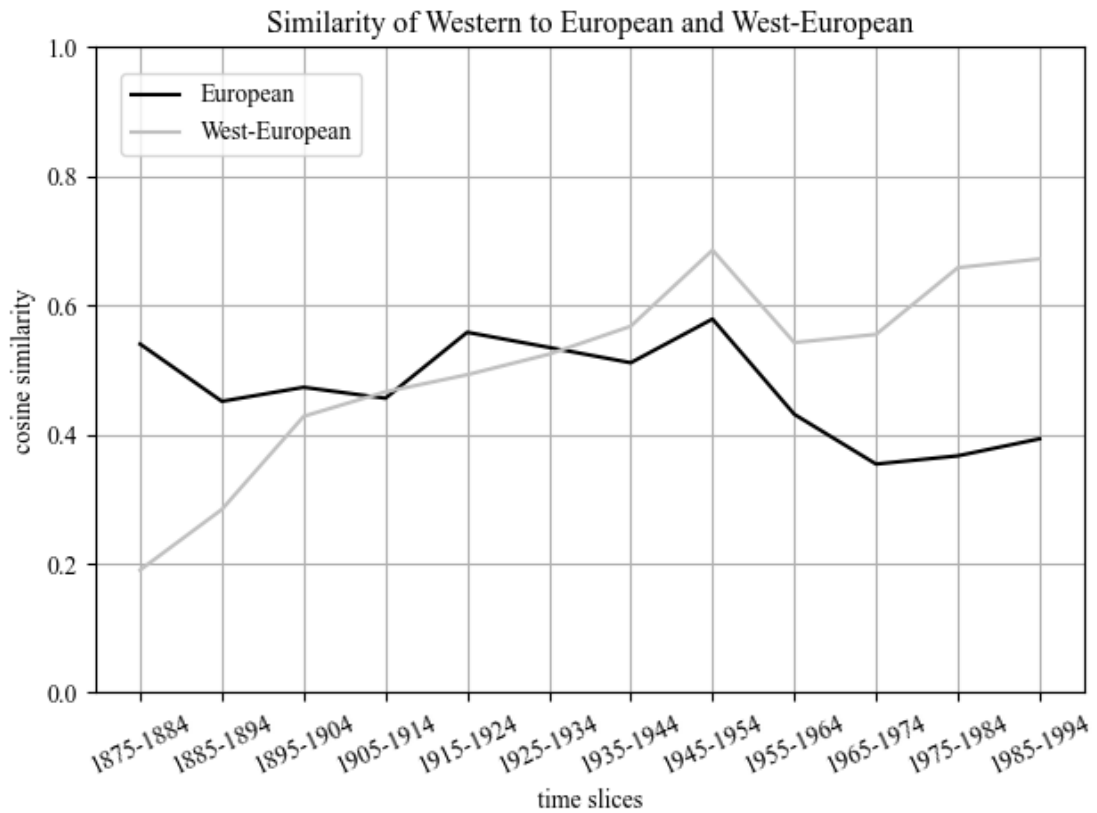


Figure 8: Similarity of Western to European and West-European



Figure 10: Similarity of Western to Asian and Russian or Soviet

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have shown the power of quantitative analysis for conceptual history. Given the availability of sufficient data, and a relevant vocabulary, I was able to confirm the findings in the historiography, validating Said's findings about the Orientalist nature of the idea of the West, and Bonnerts ideas about the rise to dominance of the United States and liberal democracy within the conceptual West, as well as validating the general proposed chronology of the idea of the West. Furthermore, I was also able to uncover new findings, most importantly: the Cold War shift, which seems to have occurred with the idea of the West. Whereas today, we tend to treat the idea of the West as one entity, holding both cultural and ideological values, my findings indicate that the balance between these has not been a stable one, and that the inclusion of political-economic values into the idea of the West, occurred later, during the Cold War.

While my approach in this chapter has not been exhaustive, the results of my quantitative approach are supportive of the idea of a Cold War conceptual shift, despite the relatively simple quantitative methodology. Further research is needed to ascertain if these findings are specific to the Dutch context or if other Western European nations, experienced a similar semantic shift in their newspaper discourse. The idea of a Cold War semantic shift, surrounding the idea of the West, instinctively makes sense, but research on this topic in various national and trans-national historical contexts would be needed to further verify this finding. I would also be very intrigued to read a history of the West in the United States. While Dutch discourse seemingly adopted the United States as part of the West, mostly after the Second World War, I would not be surprised if the discourse in the United States portrayed the United States as a part of the West much earlier.

All in all, my efforts in historicizing the concept of the West in Dutch newspaper discourse using quantitative methods have proven fruitful. I hope that this chapter inspires others to undertake similar projects. As I have shown throughout this research project, the conceptual history of the West is far from fully written, as even rather simplistic quantitative methods, uncover fairly glaring oversights in the current state of the historiography. Now, that the geopolitical prominence of the idea of the West has risen to new heights in the past year, we should consider carefully what we are

defending, when fighting for Western values. In my opinion, this chapter has been a step in that direction.

Chapter 3: Johan Huizinga's West: A Qualitative Analysis

*It is all too clear, that the term Western civilization can factually not contain any proper meaning, nor does the antithesis Eastern civilization represent any well-defined notion.*¹⁴⁴

Johan Huizinga, 1945

The quote above comes from the final work of Johan Huizinga, a famous Dutch cultural historian, who by the end of his life, spent a considerable part of his work on cultural critique.¹⁴⁵ It was written during the Second World War, when Huizinga lacked access to his personal library and public libraries.¹⁴⁶ Despite the apparent rejection of the metageographical categories of East and West, which are made explicit in this quote, Huizinga's last work is a detailed account of his views on the history, state and characteristics of the West. As will hopefully be made clear throughout this chapter, Huizinga's final work, which is entitled *Geschonden Wereld* (Damaged World), is an excellent source for applying the approaches of previous entries in the historiography of the West, to the Dutch case. It is full of explicit and implicit characterizations and assumptions about Western civilization and its people, viewed through the lens of a successful, Dutch intellectual. Furthermore, as *Geschonden Wereld* is currently still in print in the Netherlands, we can safely attest that the book's influence is still ongoing.¹⁴⁷ In this chapter, I will provide my analysis of this book through close reading. I hope to outline, how Huizinga's views on the West relate to the trends in the historiography. Furthermore, given the fact that Huizinga's account of the West in *Geschonden Wereld* was written right at the time when the conceptual shift, outlined in the previous chapter, occurred, it will allow me to contextualize this finding with further detail.

In doing so, I want to demonstrate that my enthusiasm for quantitative approaches towards conceptual history, should not be interpreted as a dismissal of traditional methodologies. I do believe that both approaches have their own strengths and weaknesses. By operationalizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in a single research project, I hope to expose what those strengths and weaknesses are and to be able to critically reflect on them. For my approach in this chapter, I have chosen to stay true to the methodologies which have thus far been applied in researching the history of the concept of the West. Most of the major works in the methodology prefer depth over breadth and tend to analyze the work of one or a few intellectuals in quite some detail. GoGwilt is the most obvious example, with his extensive reading of the works of Joseph Conrad.¹⁴⁸ However, this approach gets partially adopted by others as well. Wigen and Lewis spend a considerable part of their book analyzing the work of Arnold Toynbee, as an example of how world geography has been historicized.¹⁴⁹ Bonnett is also an avid adopter of this approach. He relies heavily on the accounts of influential intellectuals. He writes: 'I employ them to give expression both to more general processes as well as to their own particular contribution to the idea of the West.'¹⁵⁰

While the choice for which intellectual account to analyze is difficult, two names pop up again

¹⁴⁴ All quotations from the work of Huizinga in this chapter are translated by myself.

Huizinga, *Geschonden wereld*, 23.

¹⁴⁵ H. L. Wesseling, "From Cultural Historian to Cultural Critic: Johan Huizinga and the Spirit of the 1930s," *European Review* 10, no. 4 (2002): pp. 485-499, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s106279870200039x>, 491.

¹⁴⁶ Huizinga, *Geschonden wereld*, IX.

¹⁴⁷ "Geschonden Wereld," Uitgeverij Noordboek, Sterck & DeVreese, Bornmeer, accessed August 3, 2022, <https://www.bornmeer.nl/winkel/geschonden-wereld/>.

¹⁴⁸ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*.

¹⁴⁹ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, chapter 5.

¹⁵⁰ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 11.

and again in the historiography. These are Oswald Spengler¹⁵¹ and Arnold Toynbee.¹⁵² GoGwilt argues that the idea of the West first emerged fully fledged in works by these authors, namely Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* and Toynbee's surveys of world history.¹⁵³ The prevalence of these works in the historiography as sources for analyzing how ideas about the West were formed and what they meant is striking. Because of this, I wanted to find a Dutch equivalent to these works for my qualitative analysis. In my opinion, Huizinga's *Geschonden Wereld* is a good candidate for this. Its contents and message are arguably quite similar to *Untergang des Abendlandes*. In fact, Huizinga interacts directly with the work of Spengler, although he maintains a slightly different interpretation of the history of civilization.¹⁵⁴ First I will briefly discuss the works of respectively Toynbee and Spengler to get a sense of why they feature so prominently in the historiography.

Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918), translated as *The Decline of the West* in 1926, argues that civilizations have lifecycles of growth and decay. He argued that the West by the 19th century had reached its final stage of stagnancy. Furthermore, Spengler argued against the term Europe, as he thought that the West and Russia should not be viewed in the same light. Bonnett argues that this was done to discredit Russian communism, emphasizing the primitive and non-European nature of Russia.¹⁵⁵ Spengler famously wrote: "“East” and “West” are notions that contain real history, whereas “Europe” is an empty sound."¹⁵⁶ By emphasizing the importance of the West as a historical category, Spengler essentially tried to reframe how history should be interpreted. He used the metageographical concept of the West to draw up distinctions, legitimated through granting the category a distinct history. According to GoGwilt, Spengler: 'produced an idea of “the West” projected back onto history as the limit to historical thinking. For Spengler it was a positive limit, by which one might demarcate the unfolding of all history.'¹⁵⁷

Toynbee also contributed to the spatialization of civilizations through world history. He chose to divide world history into the trajectories of a few, quasi-autarkic civilizations, which each followed their own paths. He argued that these are the correct subjects for the analysis of world history and that they all followed similar trajectories of birth, growth, decline and fossilization. In his view, these civilizations were mostly organized through some new, universal religion.¹⁵⁸ Toynbee set out to overthrow the idea that Western civilization was the only civilization that required scholarly attention and to dismantle metageographical ideas, like the East-West divide. However, he created some new problems of his own in doing this, for instance, upholding rigid ideas of civilized and uncivilized societies.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, he idealized the civilization of the West and its possibilities. He found that Western culture was to be the foundation for a global, world culture. Bonnett writes about Toynbee's use of the West:

... his work exemplifies how the West could be used in ways that sustained supremacism. Rather than claims of racial superiority, Toynbee offered assertions of cultural, moral and spiritual progress. It is a final testament to Western superiority and achievement, Toynbee noted a few years after the end of the

¹⁵¹ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 233-34;

Federici, "The God That Never Failed," 71-2;

Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 31-2;

Ferri, *The Myth of Western Civilization*, 16.

¹⁵² GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 234-35;

Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 126-130;

Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 32-3.

¹⁵³ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Huizinga, *Geschonden wereld*, 15-18.

¹⁵⁵ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 32.

¹⁵⁶ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 16.

¹⁵⁷ GoGwilt, *The Invention of The West*, 234.

¹⁵⁸ Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents*, 126.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 127.

Second World War, that it alone should be capable of formulating and creating a multicultural synthesis of world cultures.¹⁶⁰

I would argue that Huizinga's *Geschieden Wereld* offers a Dutch equivalent to the works of Toynbee and Spengler. Not only does his book contain a direct reference to the work of Spengler, but in this book Huizinga also attempts to theorize the concept of civilization and interacts with ideas about civilizational progress. In the first chapter, Huizinga analyzes the term '*beschaving*' (civilization) and its counterparts in other languages on an etymological level. He prefers the term '*cultuur*' (culture) for its richer meaning.¹⁶¹ He then spends his second chapter historicizing the East-West divide. Although he is hesitant about granting the West its own history before the late medieval period, he does argue that the modern West is a result of the part of late medieval European civilization, that kept viewing Rome as the head of the church after the great schism. He writes:

In the Christian West, a culture flourished which, despite her unbreakable ties to antiquity, must be seen as a novel one, the culture in which modern civilization, which we call our own, is rooted.¹⁶²

In this sense, this work by Huizinga is in line with the works of Spengler and Toynbee, in that it, like Spengler and Toynbee, projected the idea of the West onto history. He then goes on to discuss rises and falls in Western culture. Although he rejects the idea of a rise in culture explicitly, he struggles with completely dismissing the idea that Western civilization saw progress over the past centuries.¹⁶³ In the final two chapters of his book, he goes on to describe the apparent losses that Western culture had suffered in the century leading up to the Second World War, and how those losses of culture can be redeemed.¹⁶⁴ Over the course of these chapters, a lot of Huizinga's views on Western identity and political economy get discussed, implicitly and explicitly. Therefore this work is a good candidate as a Dutch equivalent to the work of Toynbee and Spengler and I will be treating it as such.

It should be noted, that Huizinga is clearly viewing recent history through the lens of the time in which he was writing, with the Second World War going on at the same time. For our reading, this is a strength, as well as a weakness of this text. Huizinga places a lot of emphasis on features of Western civilization, which led to World War II, such as nationalism, militarism and race science. The historical context in which this book was written, is something to be kept in mind during the analysis, as he might overemphasize these features, given the author's historical circumstance at the time. However, given the fact that the conceptual shift, which I identified in my previous chapter, occurred right at the time of writing of this book, it is also interesting to see how Huizinga balances the importance of culture and political ideology as features of Western civilization in *Geschieden Wereld*.

The geography of Huizinga's West

Let me start out by discussing what the West means to Huizinga. In the start of his chapter on the East-West divide, he is quite clear about what he believes is meant by the term Western civilization. He writes:

In common speech, we use without much hesitation the term Western civilization, with which we tend to mean the wider milieu, in which we, inhabitants of Europe and America, live.¹⁶⁵

That is the definition, which Huizinga portrays as the common definition at the time of writing. This definition demonstrates that Huizinga already viewed America, by which I assume he means the United States, as part of the West. In that sense, this confirms our finding that around the Second World War, the United States came to be incorporated into the idea of the West. In that sense, it seems

¹⁶⁰ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, 33.

¹⁶¹ Huizinga, *Geschieden wereld*, 19.

¹⁶² Ibid., 35.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., chapter 5 and 6.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 23.

that Huizinga's West is more in line with post-war ideas of the West. However, he does not yet make the distinction between Eastern and Western Europe, which is more in line with later, Cold War discourse on the West.

If we look more closely at the text, we find a more nuanced picture of Huizinga's West. Huizinga argues that the East-West divide, while carrying some meaning earlier on, really only took its modern form from the 11th century onwards, when the Eastern Orthodox church broke from the Church of Rome, although the cultures had been drifting apart in the centuries leading up to the East-West Schism in 1054. He notes that the dividing line between these cultures was rather arbitrary, but that there was, from this point on, a meaningful cultural divide to speak of. He finds that the modern West, is the direct continuation of this medieval, Christian West.¹⁶⁶ Huizinga argues that what characterized this medieval West was both the multiplicity of nations which made up this medieval West and the uniformity in religion.¹⁶⁷ A little more insight into what, according to Huizinga, constituted this medieval West, can be found in the following paragraphs, where he discusses a few nations separately and describes their contribution to the West. He discusses France and Italy in a single section, and argues that culturally, they were most important to the formation of the West.¹⁶⁸ He then goes on to consider England, and argues that it most importantly contributed to formation of the political ideals and state order which characterizes the West.¹⁶⁹ Thereafter he states that the Germans contributed their ecclesiastical organization, architecture and the development of trade and cities to Western civilization.¹⁷⁰ Here, we clearly see that Huizinga both emphasizes cultural, as well as political features as being important to the development of the conceptual West. Furthermore, although Huizinga did not make the distinction between Eastern and Western Europe, when he defined the West explicitly, here, he does seem to make that division implicitly.

By highlighting these nations as foundational to the West, it becomes evident that Huizinga associated the West in its early stages with Western Europe. He not only highlights only these three civilizations as being the foundations of Western culture, but there are also instances of Othering in Huizinga's text. For instance, when discussing the eastern edges of the German medieval empire, he calls the civilizations beyond those borders '... Slavic and pagan.'¹⁷¹ He uses this as an opposition to the arguably Western German culture, implying that Slavic and pagan or non-Catholic cultures, were not Western. This suggests that Huizinga does not view Slavic cultures as a part of the West. Huizinga's historization of the West in this section is in line with the work of Spengler. He attempts to award historical legitimacy to the concept of the West, through granting the concept a history dating back to the middle ages, which is anachronistic according to more modern scholarship. Furthermore, Huizinga is very much influenced by his own historical circumstance, in that he describes the most powerful nations of his own time, as the most culturally significant ones of the historical West, which he creates.

The place of Slavic culture, within Huizinga's conception of Western culture, is more nuanced. In a later chapter, Huizinga discusses several culture types, which make up the West.¹⁷² The types, Huizinga is most certain about, are the Latin type, which he finds to be in decline at the time of writing, and the Anglo-Saxon type, represented most prominently by England and the US.¹⁷³ But then he mentions a Slavic type as well, although he is not sure whether this Slavic type should be included, as he finds it to be too heterogenous to be treated as a single type. He also writes that it is still largely unknown to us: 'We know much too little about what Russia and the other Slavs are, or what they

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 34-35.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 38-40.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 42.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁷² Ibid., 173.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 174.

might become.¹⁷⁴ The use of the word *we*, in this context, seems to portray the Slavic culture as a non-Western Other, however its inclusion in this list, suggests that he does view Slavic culture as a possible cultural type making up the West. It is safe to conclude from these remarks, that Huizinga viewed the membership of Slavic culture as a part of the West, with some ambiguity. He seems to currently view them as an Other, but leaves open the possibility that this position might change. In this sense, Huizinga's text has not yet completely fallen victim to the East-West binary of the Cold War, which we saw in the previous chapter. He also seems to prefer culture as a marker of Western-ness, over political economy, indicative of earlier conceptions of the West.

While the Othering of Slavic culture as non-Western is not entirely consistent, and shows Huizinga's ambiguity regarding this issue, there are some more explicit examples of Othering, mainly in Huizinga's treatment of Eastern religion. Huizinga spends a lot of time discussing the place of religion in the West, which I will get back to further on. For now, I would like to focus on Huizinga's Orientalist treatment of Eastern religion, to proclaim the superiority of Christianity. In one section, Huizinga discusses the salvation concept in Christian and Indian religion. In this section, Huizinga repeatedly emphasizes the mystic and fantastical nature of Indian religion.¹⁷⁵ He argues that because Indian salvation is not universal, i.e. salvation of the whole human race, but based on an individual's karma, and because it lacks the conception of an eternal salvation, that Christianity is better as a religion.¹⁷⁶ Huizinga operates Orientalist discourse to not only Other the East but also to reinforce the identity of the West, as being superior. In that sense, Huizinga's treatment of the East-West divide, is more akin to how the concept was used before the conceptual shift from a cultural to a political-economic conception of the West.

Western identity in *Geschieden Wereld*

I will now discuss how Huizinga portrayed the identity of Western people. The first aspect of this identity I would like to address is the issue of race. Huizinga is explicit about denouncing race science. He finds the rise of antisemitism, which according to him was facilitated by the emergence of race science, to be a prime example of cultural decay.¹⁷⁷ In a later section, he also voices his contempt for race science, writing: 'The thinking part of humanity may be sternly convinced that, in a hundred years, no one will speak of political race science or of other such brain excretions ...'¹⁷⁸ Here he implies that no intelligent person of his own time, adheres to race science and he uses a metaphor for these racist ideas, implying them to be intellectual fecal matter. However, Huizinga's work can be seen in the same light as Bonnett viewed the work of Toynbee. He emphasizes the splendor and 'enormous cultural achievements'¹⁷⁹ of Western culture (although more so attributed to the historical West), whose geography, in Huizinga's definition, just happens to correlate with geographical spaces which are inhabited by white people.

An example of how Huizinga argues that Western culture is most civilized can be found in a section where Huizinga interrogates whether Western culture has *risen* since medieval times. In a section on the printing revolution, he writes that for a civilization to be considered a 'high civilization', the people had to make use of the written word. Examples of such civilizations which he provides are Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Chinese culture. He then goes on to argue, that when writing is used as a gauge of culture, one should look at the percentage of intellectual traffic occurring in writing. Following this self-invented logic, he can then conveniently conclude that the advent of the print revolution, shows the superiority of Western culture.¹⁸⁰ There are many more examples of Huizinga proclaiming Western cultural superiority, like the one on religion I covered earlier. Looking

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 176.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 136-37.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 139-41.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 97-99.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 57-59.

at the Others used in these examples, Huizinga's East-West binary, seems to be an Orientalist one. This taken together with Huizinga's implicit definition of the West as denoting geographic areas, which were generally white, can be interpreted as him proclaiming the superiority of Western culture, which happens to be represented by white people. Nowhere does Huizinga explicitly promote white supremacy or acknowledge the white makeup of the West, but this is implicitly present.

A much more present aspect of Western identity is religion. As noted above, Huizinga viewed Christianity as a key feature for the emergence of the West, which provided a sense of commonality over the various nations of Western Europe. Huizinga argued that Christian morals as the fundamental ethical code remained uncontested in the West until the 18th century and especially the 19th century, when adherence to religion began to decrease in Western civilization.¹⁸¹ However, he argues that by the time of writing, most of his fellow Westerners had lost their sense of spirituality, which Huizinga finds to be very important as the basic system of ethics.¹⁸² Huizinga believes that Western society is desperately in need to rekindle with their metaphysical beliefs, possibly in Christian form, to reach a recovery of 'true culture'.¹⁸³ It is not quite clear what Huizinga means here by 'true culture'. It could be that he is referring to a true Western culture, as he does have a tendency to refer to Western civilization or Western culture, as simply civilization or culture. It could also be the case that Huizinga sees religion as an essential part of any 'true culture'. If the former is the case, Huizinga sees Christian belief as an integral feature of Western identity. Indeed, later on, Huizinga acknowledges that there are some who defend this idea, of the West being inherently Christian. He does not necessarily share his own view on this specifically, but he does write that a good Christian would not agree with this. He finds that most Europeans and Americans have become too vulgar and hedonist to be able to expect a revival of Christianity in the West.¹⁸⁴

In Huizinga's work, we can clearly see once again the tension between secularism and Christianity, when trying to define Western identity. Huizinga sees Christianity as instrumental in the formation of the West, and would be in favor of a 'renaissance of the Christian belief'.¹⁸⁵ In that sense, Huizinga views the West as, let us say, ideally Christian and he does arguably view Christianity as a Western feature of identity. Nevertheless, in his experience, secularism had become a much more frequently occurring feature of the Western identity, to Huizinga's annoyance. Huizinga paints a picture of the West as being historically Christian, but contemporarily, mostly secular. He does view the demise of the Christian faith as a negative process for the West, so he is actively promoting Christianity, which tells us that he still regarded Christianity as a Western virtue.

Finally, let us examine the place of reason within the Western identity as portrayed by Huizinga. He does not spend a lot of time discussing this topic, and when he does, he does not treat it necessarily as a specifically Western value. Furthermore, Huizinga appears to have a rather unique interpretation of reason. The only section, where he explicitly covers reason, is in a section where he argues that we should be satisfied with not-knowing. He writes:

[Cultural restoration] will come down to a general acceptance of not knowing, an avoidance of drilling and searching in the mental layers outside of the borders of human understanding.¹⁸⁶

It may appear that Huizinga is calling for a denunciation of the scientific method and the cult of reason in Western society, which brought it about. However, he then continues that this wish implies a return to rationalism.¹⁸⁷ This means that Huizinga views rationalism, firstly as something that used to characterize Western culture, but does not anymore, and secondly, that for Huizinga, reason and the

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 71-72.

¹⁸² Ibid., 134.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 141.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 142-43.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 141.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 187.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

scientific empiricism which it brought about, seem to be different things. Indeed, earlier in the book, Huizinga is quite critical of the progress of science and technology, and argues that those should not always be viewed as cultural gains. He argues that the highest forms of scientific progress can go hand in hand with the highest forms of barbarism.¹⁸⁸

Besides this, Huizinga thus viewed a culture of rationalism as one that has existed in some mythical past of the West, but does not anymore. He argued that, in the years preceding the war, ‘... a poorly understood irrationalism in the hands of half-civilized people impended becoming a weapon against every form of culture.’¹⁸⁹ Here, he seems to associate rationalism with civilization, as he refers to the people acting irrationally as only half civilized. He argues that this atmosphere occurred, because reason has the power to reason itself away, and thus create irrationalism. All these seemingly contradictory statements create a rather ambiguous picture of how Huizinga viewed reason and rationalism. Apparently, it was a feature of Western civilization, but not a necessarily good one, because of its internally contradictory nature. He then, confusingly, concludes his thoughts on reason in a positive light. He argues that reason is flawed, but so is human nature. For Huizinga, reason is the most trustworthy mental tool, that humans have access too, and that should be enough to practice it.¹⁹⁰ In these final sentences reflecting on reason, Huizinga treats it more so as a feature of humanity, than as a feature of Western culture, thus universalizing reason. All in all, Huizinga’s views of reason as a feature of Western identity are rather ambiguous. He does associate it with an undefined Western past, and he does associate irrationalism with being uncivilized. However, Huizinga ultimately treats reason as a positive quality, that is not purely Western, but simply human.

Based on these results, we can conclude that Huizinga still used the West in a very cultural sense, more indicative of the pre-war conception of the West, which I have outlined in the previous chapter. In general, Huizinga seems to emphasize culture or cultural identity, as a very important feature of the West. Huizinga’s emphasis on the importance of religious unity in the history of the West, and his implicit statements of Western cultural superiority over non-Western cultures, reveal that the cultural definition of the idea of the West, was still very present in his vision and in this text.

Western political economy in *Geschonden Wereld*

How did Huizinga relate aspects of Western political economy, which we found in the historiography and our quantitative analysis, to his idea of the West? First, I would like to discuss how Huizinga viewed democracy as a feature of the Western political economy. He presents a narrative, where the history of the West and of democracy are very much intertwined. He argues that around the end of World War I: ‘[democracy] could indeed be seen as the ideal of by far the largest part of the Western world.’¹⁹¹ He then draws up a brief history of democracy, which he places entirely in the historical context of precursors to Western civilization or Western civilization itself. He, obviously, discusses the roots of democracy in ancient Greece, but argues that for most of antiquity, democracy did not exist. Besides the brief flourishing of democracy in Athens, Huizinga traces some of the first examples of democracy in medieval Western European cities, such as Florence and several Flemish cities. However, he finds that democratic institutions rarely lasted in these cases. He argues that England is the exception to this trend, because the English built lasting parliamentary democracy over several centuries.¹⁹² He explains that the democratic ideal was further popularized and developed in France and America in the late 18th century, only to become one of the most important political ideals of the West by the beginning of the 20th century.¹⁹³

By placing the history of democracy only in the context of Western history, Huizinga effectively presents democracy as a political system, which arose in the West and in the West only. He

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 70.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 187-88.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 188.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 86.

¹⁹² Ibid., 91.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

makes it seem like democracy was very much intertwined with the history of the West. He leaves off his narrative at the end of World War I, when Huizinga found that: 'Every self-respecting state wanted to be ruled democratically.'¹⁹⁴ However, at the time of writing, the democratic ideal had been rejected in the West. Democracy had been crushed and replaced with fascist dictatorships, the Anglo-Saxon world being an exception to this trend. He admits the tragedy of the fact that these dictatorships had been enabled by the democratic process of voting.¹⁹⁵ Although Huizinga paints a picture where the history of the West and democracy are inextricably intertwined, he does argue that democracy has been largely lost as a universal Western value, which makes the relationship between these two concepts more ambiguous. Of course, Huizinga is overestimating the long-term effects of the rise of fascism in Europe, as he wrote this work during a time when mass-supported fascism had, for the past couple of years been a political reality in many European states and was a real threat to the democratic ideal. However, his doubt regarding democracy demonstrates how the political ideology of the West was still malleable and contested. The idea that the West is necessarily liberal and democratic, which has become so pervasive and uncontested in more recent years, as described by Bonnett,¹⁹⁶ was at least to Huizinga, not yet a conceptual reality. The exact form of the political economy of the West, was seemingly still flexible and changeable, according to Huizinga. It appears that the connection between the West and liberal democracy was present for Huizinga, but it was not set in stone, as it is now.

Although Huizinga is not a fan of the fascist leaders that replaced democratic parliaments, he is also quite critical of democracy. He argues that the shortcomings of the democratic system are widely known, and that it was ultimately doomed from the start. He found it to be too idealist and ultimately utopian.¹⁹⁷ In fact, Huizinga is quite deterministic about democracy eventually leading to tyranny. He argues that democracy only worked during the late 19th century, when representation was still largely in the hands of '... a certain elite ...'. He found that these people, be they intellectuals, rich or of aristocratic descent, brought a sense of sophistication and manners to the parliamentary system, which enabled it to work. He writes: 'In a sense, it is the admixture of an element of aristocracy, which made democracy viable, because without this, it is at risk of stranding on the uncivilized nature of the masses.'¹⁹⁸

In the book's final pages, Huizinga discusses democracy one last time. He argues that democracy, despite its flaws should be respected, because: 'It embodies the highest political ideal, conceptualized by the most civilized people, who, flawed as it may be, attempt to live according to this ideal. There is no other political form, suited to avoid despotism.'¹⁹⁹ Here, he uses the degree of *civilization* in the West to legitimize democracy, as it was invented by the most civilized peoples. In this sense, he symbiotically praises both democracy and Western culture, and does again draw up a rather strong connection between the two concepts. In this quote, he seems to use the high degree of Western civilization, or the greatness of Western culture, as a justification for democracy. It seems democracy is a product of Western culture, more so that democracy is a feature inherent to the West. All in all, Huizinga certainly does not treat parliamentary democracy as the only, or inevitable political system of the West. He does, through historicization, present it as a Western idea, but not necessarily the ubiquitous Western political system which it has become today.

Another aspect of the Western political economy in Huizinga's work is the relationship between the West and capitalism. The idea of capitalism is not treated as explicitly as democracy. He does, in certain sections, discuss changes in capitalist relations, from a more unrestricted capitalism, or liberalism, to a more social democratic system,²⁰⁰ but rarely describes the capitalist mode of

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁹⁶ Bonnett, *The Idea of the West*, chapter 6.

¹⁹⁷ Huizinga, *Geschieden wereld*, 92.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 93.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 199.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 92.

production as a system which, fundamentally, is under serious threat. In general Huizinga treats capitalism implicitly, as the *de facto* mode of Western political economy. This would indicate that the idea of Western civilization having a capitalist economy, was already more cemented during this period, at least for Huizinga. In the previous chapter, we saw capitalism starting to become intimately connected with the idea of the West a few decades before the Second World War, so in this sense the *capitalist realism* in Huizinga's conception of the West is unsurprising.

The connection between trade and the West is first drawn up in the section where he historicizes the West. Huizinga praises the prowess in trade displayed in the Christian medieval societies, which he considers the precursors of the modern West.²⁰¹ He is eager to demark these economic developments as signs of cultural progress in proto-Western civilization. In doing so, he creates an idea of Western culture, as being inherently fueled by trade and the capitalist mode of production, through historicizing this relation. Huizinga rarely critically questions the merits of capitalism, as the basis for the economy in the Western world, but he does explicitly propound capitalism as a beneficial force for Western cultural recovery. He argues that unobstructed free trade and stable currencies, along with a good degree of international trust, are necessary conditions for cultural revival.²⁰² Near the end of the book, Huizinga proudly confesses adhering to the liberal ideology himself,²⁰³ which make it rather unsurprising that he views free trade as the solution for the perceived problems of Western culture. Although for him, liberalism is, or should be, more associated with cultural freedom, more akin to a lifestyle than a political ideology. Still he does argue that the rise of 'imperialism, protectionism, nationalism and, above all, socialism' corroded the thriving of liberalism.²⁰⁴ This indicates that he is aware of the free trade ideology, residing within the liberalism, which he supports, as the -isms which he treats at the antonyms of liberalism tend to limit unrestricted capitalist trade.

Although Huizinga generally presented capitalism as the only viable economic system for the West, and legitimized the connection between these two through positive historization, he does cover the ideological threats of capitalism, mainly socialism and anarchism. He briefly reviews the rise of anarchism in late 19th century France, but treats it with such cynicism and negative conviction, that it basically gets immediately dismissed. He calls it: 'an acute disease' and a 'fashion trend'.²⁰⁵ He treats socialism in Russia as a poisonous trend which, early on, corroded the democratic ideal of the West, to replace it with a dictatorship of the proletariat.²⁰⁶ He questions the extent to which the citizens of the Soviet Union embraced socialism.²⁰⁷ In these sections, Huizinga treats non-capitalist ideologies as Western, internal ideas, but nevertheless as ones which were more so internal threats to Western civilization, than ones who were inherently emblematic of Western civilization.

In one passage, Huizinga does appear to operationalize socialism in Russia as a form of Othering. He writes that after World War I, people were anticipating a resurgence of an 'international legal order, economic recovery and a delightful rise in culture.'²⁰⁸ He writes that: 'The only real threat appeared to be the redness, which had just triumphed so bloodily in Russia.'²⁰⁹ In this section, he uses both communism as an antonym to Western ideals, and Russia as an antonym to the West, which would, in turn, make the West capitalist. So while Huizinga presents the threat to capitalism as an experienced reality, he arguably never presents these anti-capitalist ideologies as serious threats to capitalism, but more so as fringe, utopian theories, which had only succeeded in the part of the West, whose Western-ness is ambiguous in the first place, namely Russia. In this section, we see a precursor

²⁰¹ Ibid., 39; 46.

²⁰² Ibid., 146.

²⁰³ Ibid., 203.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 202.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 95-96.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 86; 158-59.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 176.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 104.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

of the post-war discourse on the East-West binary, where Russia is the most prominent non-Western Other and features of political economy are what make up the distinctions between East and West.

That being said, Huizinga, contradictorily, is quite critical of the excesses which global capitalism had brought about. In several parts in the book, Huizinga condemns the culture of greed and excess, which he saw in his own time. He argues that many living in modern Western countries are purely interested in ‘acquisition and pleasure’, which Huizinga considers to be vulgar and common.²¹⁰ In another part of the book he displays his disgust for corporate greed:

Greed, power hunger and violence have not been renounced anywhere; the world is entering its next phase as an acquisitive society, as a society of winning and pleasure. The prospect is dark.²¹¹

Indeed, Huizinga denounces the excessive exploitation and greed, which capitalist societies brought about. What is interesting here, is that while Huizinga denounces these features of Western capitalism, he does still portray them very much as features of Western civilization, arguably strengthening the ties between the West and a capitalist mode of production. Huizinga is also very critical of the commodification of culture, commercialism and mass media. In this case, he argues that these are direct results of ‘the modern economic system’.²¹² He argues that these modern economic features were first brought about in America, but that European civilization followed suit.²¹³ He is mournful of the fact that these developments have occurred in Western culture, but nevertheless, by emphasizing the pervasiveness of these practices in the West, strengthens the perceived ties between the West and capitalism.

While Huizinga is thus critical of some features of modern capitalism, almost in line with Adorno’s later views of the culture industry in some passages, nowhere does he argue that the West has been, could be or should be anything other than a capitalist civilization. While he treats democracy more so as a temporary political system, albeit very popular and widespread, capitalism seems for him to be a feature of the West, which has much deeper roots and is a much more fundamental element of the idea of the West. It appears to be an unchallenged system, which, despite some shortcomings, is ultimately the only viable system of political economy for the West. Even though socialism and anarchism are present in Huizinga’s text as political ideologies which exist in the West, they are never treated as serious contenders for organizing Western civilization. The fact that these dissenting ideologies were mentioned at all, does show that the political economy of the West was, to a certain extent, still contested. However, the strong connection between capitalism and the West is present here and foreshadowing how the idea of the West would be changing, over the course of the coming decades, to an idea mainly defined through political economy, and especially capitalism.

Finally, Huizinga stresses some features as being very influential over his own time, which were not present in the works I discussed in chapter 1. These are, what Huizinga calls hypernationalism and militarism. Huizinga views these developments as being intimately connected, and, despite being widespread, both severely detrimental to Western culture.²¹⁴ Huizinga spends a considerable part of his book to discussing how these phenomena developed and proclaiming his distaste for them. Furthermore, he emphasizes how prevalent these two features of the West had become since World War I. While I initially thought these features of the West were dismissible, and quite subjective, given that these words also feature prominently in the list of most similar words to the Western adjective for the 1940s and 50s, it is safe to conclude that these were in fact seen very much as features of the West around the period of the Second World War. Although the links between

²¹⁰ Ibid., 143.

²¹¹ Ibid., 144.

²¹² Ibid., 165.

²¹³ Ibid., 166.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 84-85.

nationalism, militarism and the West were not as durable as the link between capitalism and the West, these were, for a short period of time, viewed as features, very much inherent to being Western.

Conclusion

In his *Geschonden Wereld* Huizinga touched on nearly all features of the West, which were described in the historiography. This book is very much in line with the positive historization of the West and the anachronistic creation of a history of the West, which can be found in the works of Spengler and Toynbee. Huizinga's book carries with it some of the same ideas about the West, in that it also projects the concept onto history. Although Huizinga rejects the idea of the West explicitly, the discourse in *Geschonden Wereld* implicitly helps to create and develop the idea of the West and proclaims the superiority of Western culture. This could be interpreted in the same light as Bonnett interpreted the writings of Toynbee. By explicitly defining the West as geographical regions inhabited by white people, through defining it as Europe and the United States, and then, through several means, proclaiming the superiority of Western culture, it is clear that Huizinga created an implicit narrative of white supremacy. His text can be viewed as an example of how the West can be used to differentiate between white people and the rest, while avoiding explicit racism.

Furthermore, Huizinga's text offered nuanced and interesting examples of many characteristics of the West, such as the place of Slavic culture within the West, the tension between secularism and Christianity and the political economy of the West. While many of these characteristics create some ambiguity about their place in the West, this type of nuance, gained from a close reading exercise, is exactly the strength of this type of methodology. It shows how certain ideas remained ill-defined, even for the people who live through the historical context, which we are trying to analyze, and that contradictory viewpoint may exist even within a single text by a single author. This mainly refers to the contradictory place of Russia within the West in Huizinga's book, but this can also be seen in Huizinga's treatment of democracy as the political system of the West. He is both enthusiastic and critical of this system, and he treats it both as an universal phenomenon, as well as a temporal one.

The West that Huizinga presents in *Geschonden Wereld*, also provides an example of the idea of the West undergoing the conceptual shift, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Cultural and ideological conceptions of the West coexist, and sometimes contradict each other in Huizinga's text. He seems to represent both the old idea of the West, in his cultural supremacy, as well as the new idea, in his heavy emphasis on political economy as features of the West. Huizinga treats capitalism as the uncontested economic system of the West, confirming our findings of the previous chapter. Huizinga's text seems to foreshadow the ideological narrowing of the concept of the West, in that it basically refuses to think of the West as anything other than a liberal democracy, despite acknowledging the shortcomings of this system. Perhaps this has something to do with the importance of free trade for Dutch history and the Dutch economy. All in all, Huizinga's text underscores the results of the quantitative research and shows how the ideas of the West, which we found, actually functioned in Dutch discourse of this period. It broadens our perspective, gives us much more insight into the period of conceptual shift and helps to understand how the idea of the West was actually used for creating cultural and ideological narratives.

Epilogue

To reiterate, these changes are fundamental, groundbreaking and rigorous. It would be a mistake to assume that at a time of turbulent change, one can simply sit it out or wait it out until everything gets back on track and becomes what it was before. It will not.

*However, the ruling elite of some Western states seem to be harbouring this kind of illusions [sic]. They refuse to notice obvious things, stubbornly clinging to the shadows of the past. For example, they seem to believe that the dominance of the West in global politics and the economy is an unchanging, eternal value. Nothing lasts forever.*²¹⁵

Vladimir Putin, June 17 2022

*However we see it, much of the rest of the world sees it quite differently. So we may see it as the war of recolonization in Ukraine, democracy versus autocracy. But not just China, [but also] India, Brazil, South-Africa, probably the majority of the world population, the global south, see it very differently. And I think we in the West, really need to wake up to that.*²¹⁶

Timothy Garton Ash, July 10 2022

As I have illustrated throughout this research project, the idea of the West, ever since its inception in the late 19th century, has been subject to changes in definition, to accommodate the worldviews of time and context. When used for self-identification, it was initially a tool to proclaim the cultural prowess and superiority of Europe over the non-West and more specifically Asia, in the process legitimizing colonial subordination and exploitation of the non-West, which in most cases, happened to conveniently run along racial lines. Over the course of the 20th century, Western global hegemony and in turn, global capitalism, of which the West was and is the main profiteer, came under serious threat from communism. Colonialism proved unsustainable and the power within the West shifted from Europe to the United States. These factors caused the West to be defined and legitimized less through its perceived cultural superiority, and more through its self-proclaimed ideological superiority. As we have seen, throughout the Cold War, capitalism became the most important feature of Western ideology, and currently, we are living in a world where this feature of the West, has successfully been adopted, or in some cases, been externally enforced through foreign intervention, all around the world.²¹⁷

Although the meaning of the West and what it stands for, are less clearly defined today than during the Cold War, arguably because the West was enjoying a few decades of uncontested global hegemony, we are witnessing a resurgence of a Cold War mentality, embodied in Putin's aggression towards Ukraine and provocations of the West in speeches, as well as through increased Western unity, as Western leaders and elites are feeling their position of global power become unstable, because of Russian aggression and the economic rise of China and other major economies of the *global south*. Indeed, the term Second Cold War is currently being thrown around to explain our contemporary geopolitical situation.²¹⁸ Although these tensions are not brought about by the same ideological tensions as the Cold War of the 20th century, we in the West tend to regard them as

²¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, "St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary Session," President of Russia, June 17, 2022, accessed July 27, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/68669>.

²¹⁶ "Welke Langetermijngevolgen Heeft De Oorlog?," NOS.nl - Nieuws, Sport en Evenementen (Nieuwsuur, July 4, 2022), accessed July 27, 2022, <https://nos.nl/1/2435330>.

²¹⁷ Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "The Strategic Logic of Covert Regime Change: US-Backed Regime Change Campaigns during the Cold War," *Security Studies* 29, no. 1 (2019): pp. 92-127, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1693620>, 112-13.

²¹⁸ Jacob Sweet, "Are We Entering a Second Cold War?," Harvard Magazine, March 14, 2022, accessed July 27, 2022, <https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2022/03/are-we-entering-a-second-cold-war>.

tensions brought about by the ideological difference of democracy vs. autocracy, as indicated by the Garton Ash quote, cited above, which comes from a Dutch public broadcasting program. The outcome of the Cold War has, rather successfully, eliminated realistic opposition to global capitalism, but we prefer to view the current geopolitical tensions as revolving around political ideals. While this does make sense, as the major powers of the non-West, mainly China and Russia, do have rather poor democracies, when compared to many Western countries, I would argue that viewing the current geopolitical tensions in this light, is indicative of a lack of self-reflection on the part of the West.

While I do not think it is justified of the non-West to attack Western values, like freedom of speech or free love, I do believe the non-West is justified in resisting Western hegemony, militarism and the global capitalist system, of which the West currently is the main beneficiary. The ties between the idea of the West and capitalism are, as I have shown in my research, very strong. In my mind, these ideas are currently being used for a kind of symbiotic justification: the West is praised for its achievement of supplying its citizens with unprecedented wealth and capitalism, is praised for the wealth it has brought to the West. However, I believe that the wealth of the West is not sustained through the greatness of the West or capitalism, but by the poverty and exploitation of the non-West through neocolonial mechanisms. The whole idea of the West, with all of its exclusionary and geographically hierarchical implications, then becomes a necessary tool for upholding and legitimizing the global material inequality, which the West needs in order to sustain its own material wealth. The idea of the West itself, with its strong ties to capitalism and ideas of cultural and sometimes racial supremacy, upholds and legitimizes the uneven geographical development of our world.²¹⁹ In that sense, I can see why people in the non-West could desire seeing Western civilization, as it stands, fall from its position of global hegemony.

In Dutch public broadcast media, the distinction between Western cultural values and Western ideological values is rarely made, and the idea of the West tends to get treated as something inherently good and worth defending. To me, it seems like we should become more critical of the geopolitical implications of using the idea of the West in this uncontested sense. We should realize that our own unprecedented privilege, can only exist because of the poverty of others, which our recent ancestors created and legitimized through cultural, racial and ideological supremacist narratives, and colonial and neocolonial exploitation. While I do not believe the West should abandon its cultural values of free opinion, speech, religion and love, I think we should become much more critical of how the capitalist system and geopolitical power structures, which the West successfully fought so hard to defend and construct throughout the 20th century, benefit the West and help it maintain its global cultural and economic hegemony. If we are really democratic at heart, let us make the world more democratic and equal, through the redistribution of opportunity, power and wealth. For the West, this might mean making some concessions to our standard of living, and abandonment of the largely unregulated capitalist system, as it exists today.

In Dutch public discourse, disruption of the world order under Western soft power often gets treated as undesirable. Of course, Putin's aggressive Othering of the West would intuitively make any self-identifying Western person defensive. Furthermore, the war crimes and political oppression, that are currently being carried out under his regime are inexcusable and undesirable, no matter how you look at it. But I do understand his desire for an end to Western dominance in geopolitics and the global economy. While a global redistribution of power may mean a material setback for people living in the West, it would be a giant leap forward for the majority of the world population in the non-West. It reminds me of a quote, which I have seen floating around the internet: 'When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.'²²⁰ While we should not stop defending our cultural values, I think it is time to start questioning our place in the world order and economy, and see how this can be

²¹⁹ David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2019), 59-62.

²²⁰ It's exact origins are unclear:

"When You're Accustomed to Privilege, Equality Feels like Oppression," Quote Investigator, November 13, 2021, accessed July 27, 2022, <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2016/10/24/privilege/>.

justified, if we are really committed to democratic ideals. If we truly accept that the whole world is culturally and ideologically equal, we can stop making the distinction between the West and the non-West. The only metageographical distinction, that should really be necessary in our globalized world, facing global challenges which affect us all, is that of the world and the non-world. Maybe, if the West were to become committed to making the whole world feel equally included in the fate of our planet, the non-West would be less committed to desiring or actively working towards the fall of the West.

Conclusion

With this research project, I have traced how the concept of the West was conceptualized in Dutch discourse from its inception in the late 19th century, up until its triumphant victory of the Cold War in the 1990s. Although this research project has focused exclusively on Dutch discourse, this discourse and conceptual progression is probably not unique, and might to a certain degree be illustrative for more Western European nations, and the type of discursive landscape, I describe, might even have reached beyond Europe. Although this would have to be validated with more research, my findings support the historiographical narratives, which were constructed for larger geographical contexts. I have quantitatively proven the embeddedness of the idea of the West in Orientalist conceptions of world cultures, as described most prominently by Edward Said. Furthermore, I have found evidence for the increased role of the United States in the metageographical concept of the West, as well as its ideological narrowing towards liberal democracy, as described by Bonnett. But my research not only confirmed scholarship by other historians. The quantitative analysis has pinpointed a discursive shift surrounding the concept of the West, occurring at the start of the Cold War, when culture ceased to be the most important characteristic of Western-ness and a political economy of liberal democracy started being the most important feature of Western civilization. I am confident that my findings support this narrative, which thus far, had not been presented so concretely in previous work. Noticing this trend has been made possible by my use of a quantitative approach. All in all, this research project has once again proven the utility of quantitative methods for conceptual history.

Although my distant reading approach was most fruitful in producing these findings, I have been able to back up this narrative through my close reading of Huizinga's *Geschonden Wereld*, which illustrates the occurrence of the conceptual shift that I describe, in much more detail, and verifies the findings of my quantitative analysis, mainly deepening our understanding of the concept of the West as it stood around the period of the Second World War. Combining these two techniques for this research project grants more legitimacy to the findings of my quantitative analysis. While I am certainly not the first to call for integration of both distant and close reading methods,²²¹ I have successfully demonstrated how powerful this combination can be, for the field of conceptual history, although combining such approaches would have wider applications within the humanities and social sciences. With this research project, I have contributed to the historiography on the idea of the West, by uncovering and concretizing the discursive shift which occurred with the concept, thus illuminating and historicizing how the concept balanced cultural and ideological meaning throughout time. But I have also contributed to the wider field of digital humanities. Not necessarily by using these techniques for the first time, or trying out new ones, but by showing how quantitative approaches can lead to meaningful narratives, and how quantitative research can benefit from being accompanied by close reading. Although, again, I may not be the first to do so, I would argue this research project is a good example of how this can be done and how effective it can be.

Besides the academic relevance of this research project, this work also carries much societal relevance. With the contemporary geopolitical situation at the time of writing in the summer of 2022, I have noticed that the idea of the West has become very present once again in public discourse. It still gets treated as a natural, uncontested category in much of the Dutch public broadcast media which I consume, as well as in many other areas of the public sphere. Besides the increased relevance of the concept of the West in the Netherlands, the West is also being aggressively Othered by the Russian president Putin and his regime. As we have seen in the historiography, this Othering goes hand in hand with increased self-identification. Therefore, it is really important to critically examine this concept historically, and expose it for what it really is: an idea. Not only is the West an idea, but one with a

²²¹ Katherine Bode, "The Equivalence of 'Close' and 'Distant' Reading; or, toward a New Object for Data-Rich Literary History," *Modern Language Quarterly* 78, no. 1 (January 2017): pp. 77-106, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-3699787>.

history of hierarchical organization of culture (and arguably race) and a history of vehemently defending capitalism and democracy. Although I do not disapprove of everything the West stands for, deconstructing this concept and analyzing where it came from, is particularly relevant in the current era of increased East-West geopolitical tensions.

Despite my conviction of this research project's academic and societal value, I am aware that I had to limit myself due to time and technological constraints. Limiting myself to Dutch discourse greatly added to the feasibility of the project, but restricts the wider relevance of my findings. Although I believe the Netherlands to be a good case study of a Western country, as much of my findings were in line with narratives found in the historiography, which were based on other national or transnational contexts, how my findings compare to other contexts ultimately will have to be validated with further research. I also regret that I could not incorporate more newspapers in my quantitative analysis. This was mostly due to technological constraints, as I had to do all the computing for this project on my personal laptop. I wish I would have had access to more powerful computers, as that would have allowed for the incorporation of more source material. This is an issue for many scholars working within digital humanities, as most academic computing infrastructure is geared towards scholars working within the natural sciences. I am happy with what I was able to do, but I wish I would have had access to so-called super computers for conducting my research.

I also believe that my methodology has only scratched the surface of what could have been possible. The results I produced support my analysis, but had I taken more time to work with different terms, I possibly could have backed up my narrative more convincingly, by looking into more words than just the Western adjective, like the noun of the West, or the concept of civilization itself. I was also not able to thoroughly interrogate the cloaked racial connotations of the idea of the West, that others have pointed out, quantitatively. I could not find words which were specific enough for my needs to examine these hypotheses sufficiently, as terms like *wit* (white) and *blank* (blank²²²) had too many other meanings, besides race. Perhaps other researches can think of ways to research the connection between the West and whiteness quantitatively, using more modern NLP algorithms, like BERT.²²³ This is also difficult, because, as gets pointed out in the historiography, this connection is more so implicit, than explicit. For now, studying this connection has to remain reserved for traditional approaches.

If I would have had more time, I might have been able to incorporate such angles, but this touches on another challenge which scholars working within digital humanities encounter, namely, the challenge of implementing the methodology. I am largely self-taught in Python and I really enjoy constructing my pipeline from scratch in Python. However, given the fact that I have not received any formal training in this area throughout my BA and MA history programs, it is a rather slow and time consuming process. I am personally in favor of humanities scholars implementing digital methodologies themselves, as only they can fully articulate and understand their own research needs, but balancing programming and historical analysis remains tricky. In my experience, this pushes researchers to carry out their actual historical analysis rather quickly. Fortunately, the incorporation of programming skills in humanities curricula is being worked on at many universities. I am sure this will open up quantitative methods to more scholars, who did not have the opportunity to learn programming on their own.

I would also like to address that my finding of a conceptual shift occurring with the idea of the West is arguably stating the obvious. Of course this period, characterized by intense geopolitical ideological tensions often understood in terms of East and West, carried with it changes in how the West was conceptualized. However, it seems to me that this conceptual shift had thus far not been concretely pointed out in the historiography. Bonnet's chapter on the ideological narrowing of the

²²² The word *blank* used to be the most common way to describe white people in Dutch, although it has fallen out of fashion in recent years, because of its all but neutral implication.

²²³ Wietse de Vries et al., "BERTje: A Dutch BERT Model," *ArXiv Preprint*, December 2019, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.1912.09582>.

concept came closest, but does not connect this event to a shift from cultural conceptions of the West to a more so ideological one. Although this finding seems obvious in retrospect, it is only through quantitatively examining the idea of the West, that I was able to see this happen. Therefore, concretizing this finding has been a major contribution to the historiography, despite the obviousness of something like this taking place.

My findings open up many possibilities for further research. As I have mentioned earlier, I would really like to see more quantitative historical scholarship on the idea of the West in other national or transnational contexts. Working with multilingual data would be challenging, so that would have to be reserved for rather extensive research projects. I predict that transplanting this type of research to other Western European context would yield similar results, but I expect that the conceptual progression would be quite different for the United States. I am very interested in how the concept of the West has functioned historically in the United States, whether it became ideological earlier on and to what extent it was used for self-identification throughout the concept's history. As we have seen, in the Netherlands, up until the early 20th century, the term the West was mostly reserved for denoting Europe. I would be very interested to see how this would compare in the United States. Furthermore, I would also be very interested to see quantitative analyses of the idea of the West in the non-West. Of course, researchers would have to accommodate their method for the language they are working with, and this could prove tricky, but there are many possibilities for further quantitative research on the idea of the West, that could yield further insight into the concept's history.

I would also be very interested in examining other metageographical concepts in the way that I have done here. Initially, I set out to conduct research on the meaning of all the cardinal directions, both east and west, as well as north and south, given the increased currency of ideas like the *global north* and *south*. This proved to be too large a topic for this specific research project, but historicizing these terms quantitatively, would be interesting as well. It would be a challenge to select for the relevant vocabulary, but with some experimentation, it would be quite possible to carry out research on these and other metageographical concepts as well. Furthermore, it would be extremely useful to deconstruct the metageographical terms, by which we organize our mental map of the world. It would help in uncovering the prejudices which we hold against different parts of the globe, and in turn, help us re-evaluate how we want to view them.

For now, I am very happy with what I have been able to accomplish with this research project. I am proud of my approach, as well as my findings. I hope that I have inspired other researchers to critically examine the illustrious idea of the West, or to start adopting quantitative methods as part of their research practice. I have, again, successfully showed the power of quantitative approaches for carrying out conceptual history, through validating previous findings and being able to contribute new insights to existing narratives. When starting out on the journey of this research project, I had a hunch that there were many assumptions about culture, hierarchy and ideology buried within the concept of the West, but I did not know what I was going to find. I can now say with confidence that my hunch was correct, and I believe we should carry on critically deconstructing the history of dense and powerful concepts, which dominate our understanding of the world. The concept of the West is not a neutral description, so let us be careful in how we use it.

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