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The Netherlands

**For the youth : juvenile delinquency, colonial civil society and the late colonial state in the Netherlands Indies, 1872-1942**

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**Citation**

Dirks, A. (2011, June 23). *For the youth : juvenile delinquency, colonial civil society and the late colonial state in the Netherlands Indies, 1872-1942*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17773>

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**FOR THE YOUTH: JUVENILE DELINQUENCY,  
COLONIAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE LATE  
COLONIAL STATE IN THE  
NETHERLANDS INDIES, 1872-1942**



*The pupils and the re-education officers of the first state reformatory in Semarang, 1918*

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“FOR THE YOUTH: JUVENILE DELINQUENCY, COLONIAL CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE  
LATE COLONIAL STATE IN THE NETHERLANDS INDIES, 1872-1942

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van  
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden  
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. P.F. van der Heijden,  
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties  
te verdedigen op donderdag 23 juni 2011  
klokke 15.00 uur

door

Annelieke Dirks

geboren te Aduard  
in 1978

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Research in Indonesia was generously funded by the Leids Universitair Fonds (LUF)

*See the brotherhood of all mankind as the highest order of Yogis; conquer your own mind, and conquer the world*

- Japji Sahib, Pauri 28

Voor mijn geliefde en buitengewoon liefdevolle  
grootouders Hans en Kings.

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## Preface

In February 2009 I drove a light Honda motorcycle from Yogyakarta to Salatiga. I came through endless rice-fields at the foot of one of Java's active volcanic ranges and was greeted by surprised stares and enthusiastic waves and comments from the locals. White women on motorcycles were apparently not that common in the countryside. Buying gas and food was an adventure in itself, leading to invitations for homemade meals and a chance to practice my rudimentary Indonesian language skills. At the end of the trip waited a visit to one of the reformatories that played a large role in my research: the former White Cross Colony, now called Agrowisata Salib Putih. I arrived without any preparation and before I realized what happened I was brought to one of the oldest buildings on the colony. There it stood, dripping in the rain, with its small windows high-up in the walls: the former prison. It had only two small cells, where most of the juvenile delinquents living on the colony until 1942 had done some time. It was one of those moments where time falls away and you see and feel with different eyes and a different body.

My dear grandmother was born in the Netherlands Indies in 1927. Daughter of white Dutch parents who had come to the colony quite recently, she was part of the privileged classes and enjoyed a carefree childhood until her family's internment during World War II. I never consciously decided to study colonial history, but somewhere in my subconscious my grandmother's experiences, stories and love for the country of her childhood must have left their traces. When I first read about juvenile reformatories in the Indies in the summer of 2005 and saw the pictures of the children that lived there, I strongly felt that the story asked to be told and was inspired to do so. I have become the kind of historian that believes in the power of stories and in storytelling. I did my best to connect the small stories of 'delinquent' children and their parents to the larger story of colonialism and the development of the colonial state and civil society. The truth, however, is hard to find when we study the past.

This preface offers a chance to speak clearly from the only truth I really know. This is simply the voice of the heart and the soul, something that I have learned to trust more and more over the past four years. Writing my dissertation was not only an academic and intellectual adventure, but also a spiritual one. Seeking historical truth

and learning to write history as a discipline, I ended up finding my own truth and developing spiritual discipline. Writing a dissertation, as many of you have experienced, is not a walk in the park. It rather feels like a harrowing climb to the top of a very steep mountain. Doing my Ph.D. was a painful confrontation with the limitations of my own mind. Doubts, insecurities, boredom, lack of motivation and other demons were constant barriers that needed to be taken. On the other side of those walls were the rewards of beautiful archival discoveries and the flow of writing with joy and inspiration. I started looking for ways to make it easier to deal with my own mind and to stay happy during my intellectual crises and under the strain of dissertation stress. Practising and teaching Kundalini yoga and meditation gave me the techniques to steer my mind towards clarity and focus, to hear and be truthful to the voice of my heart and to find a way to live with joy and grace in every circumstance.

As a historian, as a yogi and as a human being I am deeply grateful to the Universe for the chances that were given to me in this lifetime. For the challenges and for the blessings and - most of all - for the people that have shared their knowledge, wisdom, skills and love with me. Most of my friends, colleagues, teachers and students are spread out over the three continents where I have lived: America, Europe and Asia. Some of you have even moved to Africa and Australia! In my mind I imagine a map of the world with thousands of golden lines from each of our hearts to the hearts of the people that are connected with us. I am grateful for each and every one of those golden chords that connects me to all of you. I believe that I do not have to write down your name. You know that I am grateful for what you have given me, for how you have supported this dissertation and my development. It does not matter if our connection is professional or private; it is a golden link nonetheless. Please, I ask you to just take a moment. To sit with your eyes closed, inhale deeply, and feel my gratitude. From my heart to yours. Thank you.