Thrilling fiction, travel guides and spaces of identity: sea Voyages between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies in novels and short stories, 1850-1940

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Travelling the Dutch East Indies

Historical Perspectives and Literary Representations

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PART II
LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

Thrilling Fiction, Travel Guides and Spaces of Identity

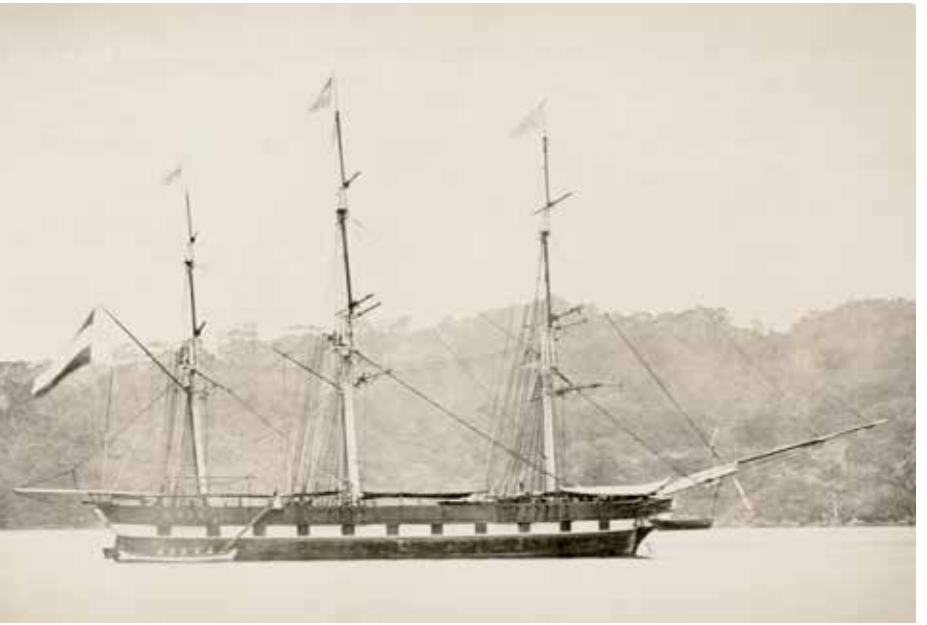
Sea Voyages between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies in Novels and Short Stories, 1850-1940

Coen van 't Veer

A remarkable image emerges from nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction about sea voyages.[1] The ships that crossed the seas between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies between 1850 and 1940 are presented as micro colonies in the novels: condensed versions of colonial society.[2] Almost all levels of colonial society are represented on board – a heterogeneous company, forced to live together for months in a confined space and in changeable weather conditions. Passengers are continuously confronted with each other's presence. They find themselves in a situation akin to being inside a pressure cooker: differences stand out more clearly at sea than on land because everything is magnified on board.[3]

Given the realistic nature of the fiction dealing with the sea voyages between Europe and the Indies, these novels can be equally regarded as travel guides. Not only do they provide the reader with interesting information about what can be seen on the journey, but they also offer guidance on how to endure and survive the voyage and can serve as an introduction to colonial life. For this reason, they can be seen as spaces of colonial identity.

In my PhD thesis *De kolonie op drift* (2020, The Colony Adrift), I analysed forty-three travel stories to see how they represented and constructed colonial identity in the contact zone of the ship.[4] These narratives yield a particularly good picture of colonial relations. In colonial society, such matters as class, status, and gender were of great significance, but the most important distinction that colonial ideology made, was that of ethnicity. This article explores what important changes can be observed in the representation and construction of ethnicity in the voyage narratives of the period 1850-1940 and how these changes might best be explained.[5]



A Dutch frigate off the coast of Java, 1860-1865. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 75356.

Travelling Through Representations

Most novels that depict the sea voyage from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies – both those navigating the Cape of Good Hope by sailing vessel, or via the Suez Canal by steamship – lack a clear plot. Without exception, the narrators are mainly concerned with painting a realistic picture of the voyage based on the passengers' experiences. Of course, the departure, the time spent at sea, the gales and storms, the heat, the wind, the ports visited, and the arrival are recurrent themes, but there are also representations of less tangible matters such as customs, morals, and habits. The explicit truth of these representations of the passage forms one of the building blocks of this genre. In many cases, the narrator emphasises that he has actually made the voyage himself and therefore claims to be a reliable source of information on the subject. To enhance these references to reality, the narrator constantly invokes well-known existing geographic locations – cities, seas, and countries.

Also, references to previous publications – explicitly or implicitly – are made to increase the impression of reliability that can be attributed to the various novels. The storytellers present themselves as experts from whom one can learn a great deal about the passage. In this light, their books can

be regarded not only as books about thrilling sea voyages, but also as travel guides.[6]

As Siegfried Huigen shows in *De weg naar Monomotapa* (*1996*, The Road to Monomotapa), the possibility of empirical testing plays an important role in travel literature:

> The representations claim to correspond with empirical reality and if successful they are seen as factual descriptions of reality. This means that the recipient of the representation believes that they are true to reality. [...] Precisely because the representations appear to describe an existing reality, they are open to criticism. Under certain conditions the 'effet de réel' can be the reason that what is represented as reality is open to investigation. Thus, it is possible that a passenger comes to the conclusion that his experiences do not correspond to the accepted representation of the actual reality in which he travels.[7]

Margaretha Zelle, better known as 'Mata Hari' (left), and her husband at the SS *Prinses Amalia* on their way to the Indies, 1897. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 4600.

According to Huigen, three variables should be taken into consideration: the power of the representation; the extent to which the representation consists of empirically refutable components; and the desire for factual knowledge on the part of the narrator. The influence of these variables can lead to the confirmation or adjustment of certain representations.[8] This also applies to contemporary fiction concerning the Dutch Indies.[9]

The Indies *belles-lettres* reflect and construct the Dutch self-image as a colonial nation and refers directly to colonial reality. Hence, literature on the Dutch Indies reveals how colonial reality was represented, seen, experienced, justified, and disputed. In turn, these texts have also influenced the shaping of colonial reality.[10] Contemporary fiction about the voyage from the Netherlands, via the Cape of Good Hope, to the Dutch East Indies and back in the period from 1863 to 1891 also serves another purpose apart from transmitting travel experiences: as mentioned above, these novels also give a representation of colonial society. Travel accounts have played a crucial role in the Western construction of the colonial world.[11] They profess to accurately portray colonial reality. These realistic pretences can imply either a controllable reproduction of experienced reality.

Travel Guides

Reading the novels as travel guides, they provide contemporary readers with all manner of travel information. From departure to arrival, they describe the sea voyages meticulously. *Naar den Equator* (1884, To the Equator) is a travel guide, travel log, and novel – all rolled into one. The narrator demonstrates his authority by mentioning, almost on a daily basis, the position of the vessel – its latitude and longitude – (nautical) miles travelled, and by explaining its speed in knots. Changes to the rigging are frequently mentioned too. One character in the story also regularly provides passengers with all manner of supplementary information: geographical, geological, zoological, and botanical. In the endnotes, the narrator, in order to increase his expertise and reliability still further, also indicates that he himself has experienced the various things described. In most novels, every single location that can be viewed from the ship's deck is listed. Every single harbour that is visited is described. For example, in the novel *De koloniaal en zijn overste* (1877, The Colonial Soldier and His Superior), a plethora of tourist information is offered: one can read where to go in Gibraltar, Malta, Port Said, Aden, or Point de Galle when the ship is bunkering (the taking on of food, water and fuel) in those ports.

Other practical travel information can be found in those books. The reader learns which cabins are designated to which particular social classes, how to treat seasickness, what to eat, or how to dress in a tropical environment – or indeed, how to extricate yourself from the humiliating treat-

Java's coast at Sunda Strait. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 3730.

ment first-timers have to endure at the line-crossing ceremony at crossing the equator, and how to deal with swindling locals. The novels on these sea voyages provide contemporary readers with valuable lessons in how to endure and survive the sea voyage to (or from) the colony. Katzenjammers and hurricanes, scorching heat and the bitter cold, as well as loneliness and boredom, create tensions on board and make such a sea voyage a challenging adventure indeed.

Tensions at Sea

As we have seen above, in novels about the voyage between the Netherlands and the Dutch Indies, the journey lies at the very core of a narrative that reveals a life on board that is anything but dull. The twenty stories analysed here show that the extreme circumstances under which the voyages were made generated equally extreme emotions. Especially when the ships cross the equator or leave the Suez Canal and the passengers enter a different world, they seem to throw restraint overboard, become less rational, and start to live by their impulses and instincts. That is when the travellers are

confronted with the phenomenon that can be defined as 'saltwater fever' – a phenomenon the main component of which is 'saltwater love'. Due to boredom, a lack of company, and the 'sweltering' atmosphere of 'the East', people fall in love more easily during this part of the journey. As a result, the air on the passenger ship is throbbing with erotic vibrations. The novel *Onder zeil* (1891, Set Sail) provides a clear explanation for the phenomenon of 'saltwater love':

> A passenger ship now was a very, very small and very remote village, and the circumstances increased the danger above measure. Living together for such a long, unabridged period of time, eating and passing time together, the sad feeling of homesickness, the fear of being alone and feeling cheerless in the new land, unable to make critical comparisons, and needless to say the heat, the prickling of the sea salt, who knows what else, – these all worked together to culminate in rash flirtations and engagements, knots that were tied easily in the heat of the game, but not so easily untied during more earnest times. Boredom is a wicked matchmaker; and life at sea brought fits of boredom, but also of sentimentality and over-excitement, which made seem wise and joyous what was in essence often an unconscious step of desperation.[12]

The saltwater loves alluded to in the quote above elicited the comment from Captain Tobbe in the same novel that 'more marriages are made at sea than in heaven'.[13]

A barque nearby Tanjung Priok, Batavia. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 94443.

P.A. Daum writes about saltwater love in two novels.[14] A good example is the violent love affair between Kees and Louise in *Hoe hij Raad van Indië werd* (1885, How He Became a Councillor of the Indies). In *Mrs L. van Velton-van der Linden*, published in 1886, the wealthy Van Velton sends his wife, also named Louise, and child to Europe. They travel on the 'Tjiliwong'. He waves goodbye to his wife, child (*njootje*), and father-in-law, happy they have gone (the spouses are permanently at odds with each other and are happy to be rid of one another). Louise is soon courted by a young naval officer – a man by the name of Van Hoven. Eurasian Mrs Van Stralen has his diary stolen from his cabin and this proves that Van Hoven has fallen madly in love with Louise. Mrs Van Stralen decides to inform Louise's father of the fact that Van Hoven is courting her. However, the doctor does not believe that Louise is in love with Van Hoven. Mrs Van Stralen points out the phenomenon of saltwater love to him:

> Long sea voyages are for the sake of young people who are together all day long in such a small space with no other pastime than eating, drinking and sleeping – all very real traps. Are there not plenty of examples? I do not know what it is, but it exists and has nothing in common with regular love.[15]

After a conversation with his daughter, in which she indeed admits that she is afraid she is susceptible to saltwater love, Van der Linden stays permanently at her side.

In another example, a mailboat is an erotic hotbed. In *Vrouwen lief en leed onder de tropen* (1892, Women's Joys and Sorrows in the Tropics), Nelly van Vloten expresses surprise at the behaviour of most of the female passengers on board:

> You should know, however, that most ladies on board are very flirtatious and they hang around so many different men that it was very difficult to find out which two people formed a couple. Some sit on deck for hours, laughing and talking. Some play cards and others separate themselves from the group and sit together in a corner of the deck for a cosy private moment.[16]

Even though it is tempting for the men and women travelling between continents to drive away the boredom with a love affair, such liaisons are definitely frowned upon. On board, too, love should be taken seriously. In *De koloniaal en zijn overste*, the old-timer Van Berkesteyn claims that love affairs at sea are the result of 'the emptiness and the boredom that comes with it, [...] the emptiness that, I believe, should have been mentioned first amongst all the causes of the unpleasantness. The boredom which causes the devil to find work for idle hands.'[17] The ship's doctor, Van Raven, states that sometimes sea voyages also bring people together who are destined for one another. Major van Berkesteyn states that this may happen, but certainly not very often. When the young lieutenant Kreisfeldt lets it slip that beginning a love affair is the best way to make a sea voyage pleasant, assistant-resi-

The Suez Canal, 1870. Private Collection.

dent (a civil servant of a high rank) Vuiste immediately corrects him. Love is too serious to simply be a pastime. It is striking that Mr. Vuiste considers plantation owner Samuel Bugg to be a privileged man: not only is he always cheerful and light-hearted, but he has also travelled to Europe twice already – without a wife!

Spaces of Identity

Tensions on board are not always caused by extra-ordinary love affairs. In the confined space of 'the ship's island world',[18] there is also much quarrelling, squabbling, and gossiping about hierarchical positions within colonial society – a phenomenon born out of a specific aspect of travelling to or from the colony. During the voyage, passengers must adjust their identity to the changing environment. The novels show that a journey to 'the East' is an introduction to a colonial life in which newcomers have to assume a more colonial identity – one that eventually becomes permanent. On the voyage to the colony, Europeans become colonials, a process in which, in the confined

space afforded by the vessel, old colonial hands teach the newcomers how to live, think, and act in a colonial way.

In the novels about the sea voyage around the Cape of Good Hope, the journey is made without stops to prevent colonial soldiers from deserting. After passing the equator, 'old hands' automatically begin adapting to the tropics by wearing colonial clothes, eating rice and other Asian dishes, and adopting 'looser' manners. In novels about the journey through the Suez Canal, social changes are even more evident when the newcomers are confronted with 'the East' in Port Said after meeting the colonial 'Others' in their own 'Eastern' environment. The colonial newcomers note that they are entering a world that is quite different from their own. These observed differences between the West and 'the East' are framed in terms of binary oppositions – asymmetrical analogies and stereotypes that describe a hierarchical system of superiority and inferiority, which (in Western eyes) serves as the ideological legitimatisation of colonialism. The Suez Canal, as well as a passageway and a gateway, thus acts as a watershed between East and West.[19]

In the nineteenth century, travelling through the Suez Canal is seen as a rite of passage for Europeans. When Westerners exit the Canal, they experience something akin to a second birth: they enter the world of the Other with new, colonial identities. Hence, travelling through the Isthmus of Suez is, in itself, an act of imperialism. Importantly, this new, colonial identity is a permanent one. Indeed, when old colonials repatriate after a few years, they find that their colonial identity can no longer be shaken off and that no longer fit in '*in patria*'. In some instances, a colonial veteran has become so acculturated to an Indies lifestyle (*'verindischt'*) that he resorts to committing suicide on the voyage to Europe rather than live a life in an environment from which he has become completely alienated.

According to postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Elleke Boehmer, and Barbara Bush, novels and short stories play a deciding role within colonial discourse.[20] At the time of their publication, these novels were regarded as an important source of information about colonial life in the Indies. Indeed, the ideological representations in such works constitute a long-lasting discourse that has had a major impact on how we perceive the Dutch Indies.[21] Analysis of the novels and short stories about the sea passage from the Netherlands to the Dutch East Indies and back from the period between 1850 and 1940 shows that such narratives offer both a description of, and a format for, 'desirable' colonial behaviour and a 'proper' colonial mentality. Since these works so clearly portrayed and propagated the ideal colonial identity of the European, the reader – in the 'mother country' and in the colony alike – was easily able to glean from them the correct colonial attitudes, behaviours, and opinions to adopt.[22] Of course, and as previously stated, contemporary ideas about ethnicity played a crucial role in this whilst, at the same time, these novels reveal the ship as a 'less controlled', liminal space full of opportunities to go against conventions.

Colonial soldiers on their way to the Dutch East Indies. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 90514.

Ethnicity Up Until 1895

Before 1870, the voyage was mostly made by sailing ship around the Cape of Good Hope. However, with the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal, the traveller, at least until 1895, had a choice: he could take either the traditional slow sailing route around the Cape or opt for the more modern and faster route via steamship through the narrow canal between Port Said and Suez.[23]

As mentioned above the stories about the voyage show that up to 1895 it is necessary and desirable for Europeans to have a certain measure of acculturation in order to make it in the colony. Once the equator or the Suez Canal has been passed, changes take place in the passengers' behaviour and mentality. Above the equator and Port Said, European-continental values and standards apply, whilst below, colonial standards come into play. From that boundary onwards, on the voyage from the Netherlands to the Indies, the returning old colonials teach the novices, the newcomers, how to adapt to life in the colony.

For the 'old hands' this transformation expresses itself first in the strong desire to wear Indonesian dress and use Malay words – as is clearly articulated in the novel *Onder zeil*:

> Kitchen Malay, that vowel-rich language, studied ever more diligently by Mrs Trippius under Willikins's guidance, was given increasing precedence during the table talks. Further, European items of clothing were stowed away with great determination, Indonesian clothing was got out, sarongs and kabayas reinstated to their factual glory.[24]

The novels about the passage by steamship add to this portrayal the first serving of a so-called *rijsttafel* (literally, 'rice table', a colonial Indonesian meal containing many different dishes) during the voyage through the Suez Canal. This causes in the newcomers at least as much commotion as the change into Indonesian clothes. This first colonial meal is a feast of recognition and a great delight to the old hands, but a horror to the newcomers. The novel *De koloniaal en zijn overste* states:

> Yet just as warm, just as cordial as the Indies folks' welcome to the beloved meal, just as big is the dismay and embarrassment on the part of the novices, they look at each other, they pull a grumpy face to hide that they do not know quite well how to comport themselves, and then begin to look at their Eastern neighbours, first with astonishment, then with secret envy, as they see how these dig in and feast on the food.[25]

Passengers of the SS *Prins Alexander*, 1891 or 1892. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 15319.

When the first newcomer takes too large a chunk of *lombok* (chili pepper) and almost chokes on the hot spice, others give up on the *rijsttafel*. The omniscient narrator then remarks: 'Even so, *rijsttafel* will soon become the meal par excellence in the Indies, even for most Europeans, and will almost totally make up for the absence of the delicious Dutch food stuffs.'[26] One of the old hands articulates a generally felt opinion when he says that he who conforms first and best to Indonesian dress, colonial customs, and Asian food acts most wisely.

Analysis of the texts reveals that, in nineteenth-century colonial society, all Westerners have, to a greater or lesser extent, become acculturated to Indonesian life. At that time, there were few European women in the Dutch East Indies and hence, Western men often lived – usually without being married – with a native *njai* or 'housekeeper'. The children that were born from these relationships were Indo-Europeans. Indo-Europeans feature prominently in the stories. Remarkably, however, clear distinction is made in the novels between the eight representations of light-skinned Indo-Europeans, and the seven with a darker skin colour. The narrative that emerges here is simply that, the lighter the Indo-European's skin tone, the more he or she is represented in the stories as 'civilised'.[27]

The light-skinned Indo-Europeans know their place in colonial society: they adopt a modest and serving attitude and behave in a quiet and somewhat subservient manner. Lieutenant Leidermooi in the novel *Naar den Equator* is such an Indo-European: he has a white father and a native mother. As he describes his persona, the narrator emphasises his appearance, portraying him as a slim, black-haired young man whose skin has the tint 'of very milky coffee' and who 'with his fiery eyes and somewhat flat nose, with his sparsely planted moustache under it, unmistakably wore his certificate of origin on him'. His father, however, has given him a European education. He has passed his exams in the Netherlands with flying colours. According to the text, Leidermooi has 'retained a modesty and demureness'.[28] His European upbringing and education have pushed the 'Eastern' influences to the background. He belongs, even though most light-skinned Indo-Europeans are still dependent on white colonials when it comes to entering the higher social echelons.

Darker-skinned Indo-Europeans fair rather less favourably in the novels. Whilst they might 'masquerade' attempting to be as European as possible, over time their 'Eastern' 'primitive' instincts always come to the fore in the novels. Dolf van Weernink in *Aan wal en aan boord* (1883, On Shore and on Board by P. van Oort) offers a prime example in this regard. The increasingly degenerate Dolf is the son of former resident Van Weernink and his Indo-European wife. He is selfish, despotic, domineering, and sneaky, and he is used to getting his own way. He has inherited these traits from his 'dark' mother, the omniscient narrator points out to the reader. His dark nature is thus accounted for. He gambles, drinks, fights, charms, and blackmails during the passage, eventually committing suicide.

Suicide, albeit rarely, features in the stories as the last resort for the (Indo-)European who is regarded as an outcast because he has been affected by too many Eastern influences. Most often, this concerns white Westerners whose adjustment to Eastern customs gets out of hand. The most poignant example may be found in 'Man en Aap' (Man and Monkey), a story by C. van Nievelt that is incorporated in his novel *Onder zeil*. In this story, a Dutchman of French descent has become highly acculturated to Indonesian life as a result of living in the colony for 35 years – nineteen of which were spent at a remote, neglected outpost. He speaks Alfurian (a local language) and has forgotten his Dutch and French, he can no longer bear to wear European clothes and shoes, and eats with his hands. Even his name, Achille de la Barre, has become more Indonesian – 'Delabar'. When a government doctor meets him at his outpost, he finds Delabar critically ill and decides to send him to Europe to recover. Against his will, Delabar sets sail on a ship heading for Europe. On board he recovers quickly. He tries to establish contact with the other passengers and the ship's crew, but then it becomes painfully clear that Delabar has gone too far in the process of becoming a native. He is regarded as a white degenerate by the rest of the people on board. As a result, he is bullied and neglected.

The only figure with whom he forms an attachment is a macaque of the *Cynopithecus Nigrescens* species, which is being kept in captivity for a Dutch zoo. This very aggressive monkey is called Samiël. Samiël only calms down when Delabar talks to him. Man and monkey become friends and they form a bond that is so strong that Delabar – who is not particularly known for his bravery – immediately puts his own life at risk to save Samiël after he has escaped during a fierce storm and has fled to the ship's highest mast. The story seems to suggest that Delabar, who feels detached from European 'civilisation', is actually closer to this monkey than to the people around him. Delabar and Samiël both fall ill when the ship arrives in the northern hemisphere and the idea of having to live in cold Europe increasingly depresses Delabar. When the ship sails past the Azores, he goes on deck several times to ask if the water is hot or cold. The captain tells him that the sea has a pleasant temperature. That same night, Delabar, who has weighted himself down with lead, jumps overboard with Samiël in his arms. They disappear into the deep sea.

> The calm waves, on which the dim moonlight glimmered, had closed themselves above the two – body to body in the last battle – man and monkey – or, to give them both their full title again: *Cynophitecus nigrescens*, the black baboon from Celebes, and Achille de la Barre, a retired civil servant honorably discharged, repatriating.[29]

Delabar had become far too acculturated to Indonesian life to be able to return to Europe. The story of Delabar provides European readers with a clear message: when creating a colonial identity, Europeans must not over-adapt to 'the East'; rather, they ought to protect their 'Westernness'.

Playing cards on board, 1906. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 119287.

Like so many other stories from this time, the inference is that if Eastern influences gain the upper hand in Westerners, the outcome is always bad. It is therefore hardly surprising that natives and native culture rank lowest in the colonial hierarchy. A great number of stories try to underpin this with arguments that stem from, or cite, the theory of evolution. Natives allegedly still find themselves in a child-like or animal-like state and for this reason, they are often compared with children or animals.[30]

Downright painful, although intended to be funny, is a passage in *Onder zeil* where the eight-year-old, thoroughly acculturated child *sinjo* Alfons annoys his native nurse. The child realises that he can boss his *babu* around and abuses his power by harassing her physically and mentally. The eight-year-old receives sadistic support from one of the ship's mates:

> That the little devil kicked and pinched her now, calling her *anak babie* [child of a pig] and *loe monjet* [you monkey], all this the old creature bore with admirable patience. But when mate Klopper intervened, and, seemingly taking her side, snapped at the Sinjo: 'For shame, *djangan*, little Alfons! You can't say that, that is not true! *Baboe Julia tidah monjet! Tida, tida! Djoega monjet banjak lebeh bagoes deri baboe Julia!* (Babu Julia is no monkey! No, no! For a monkey is far more beautiful than babu Julia)'; or again, in even more cruel jest: 'No, little Alfons, no! You can barely tell from babu Julia that she is a monkey. *Tjoba lihat! Betoel, betoel, sep-*

> *erti orang!* (Look! It's truly almost human!)'– she then flew into a blind rage, and twisted and gnashed her teeth and sure enough, emitted monkey-like shrieks, whereupon Klopper held his broad hips while his wide mouth split from ear to ear with laughing.[31]

With the exception of scenes such as those highlighted above, natives remain very much background figures in nineteenth-century voyage narratives. In general, they only seem to be introduced into the stories to lend them some *couleur locale* or *couleur coloniale*, or to emphasise that they are different – and therefore supposedly inferior – to Europeans.

Remarkably, Westerners travelling around the Cape of Good Hope by sailing ship generally prove to have a more conservative outlook than those who sail through the Suez Canal by steam ship, nonetheless, the stories predating 1895 yield a picture of a colonial ideology in which the population groups merge. Upbringing and education may enable light-skinned Indo-Europeans to show behaviour that gives them access to the white colonial elite, however, in contrast, a dark skin and heavily acculturated behaviour are frowned upon. Such characters resemble the natives too closely. In other words, there is a gradual blending of the colonial ethnicities at play here, a phenomenon that goes by the name of shade bar.[32]

Changes Around 1895

Post-1895, the ideal colonial identity changes drastically due to the newly introduced so-called 'civilisation mission' and the concomitant 'westernisation' and 'modernisation' of the colony. This period also saw the emergence of the so-called '*ethische politiek*' (Dutch Ethical policy). This policy was 'aimed at bringing the entire Indonesian archipelago under actual control *and* at developing the country and its people towards achieving a western-style self-government under Dutch leadership'.[33] The ethical policy was a form of development aid that was intended to enhance the welfare and prosperity of the indigenous population. The idea was that the natives would 'identify' with the Netherlands. The indigenous population was to be readied for a life lived together with the colonial oppressors whilst retaining its own culture. Yet, at the same time, Western and Eastern social environments were to be kept strictly separate.

At its deepest level, this 'civilisation mission' not only made it clear that power relations between Europeans and natives would subsequently become more asymmetrical, but also that the Europeans were superior to the natives.[34] The European colonial elite invariably based the legitimacy of the colonial presence in the Indies on the superiority of Western civilisation. It was important, therefore, to reinforce any European influences in the colony, and to exclude 'Eastern' ones. This caused the boundaries between East

and West to be drawn ever more strongly, in particular where they involved race. The new colonial policy demanded a strict separation of the races. 'Miscegenation' would allegedly lead to degeneration and was therefore regarded as negative in the colonial discourse of the time.[35] The updated colonial ideology held that the 'fatal' combination of 'Western' and 'Eastern' genes in 'miscegenation' would only serve to lay bare the worst traits of both.[36]

Partly as a result of this, concubinage with a native woman was increasingly viewed, at least after 1900, as a pernicious institution.[37] Hence, the arrival of European women was socially and culturally of great importance for the Europeanisation of the Indies. Those women who opted for a life in the colony brought their European ideas and lifestyle with them, which gave Western civilisation in the Indies a further boost and 'bourgeoisified' the European colonial upper class still further.[38] Life became even more Westernised for the Europeans in the colony. The 1920s saw an influx of higher-educated people and academics into the colony who had been recruited to develop the country's infrastructure, agriculture, mining, and medicine.[39]

Ethnicity After 1895

The above-described changes had major consequences for the representation and construction of the 'ideal' colonial identity in the voyage narratives. Around the turn of the century, the shade bar, which began to show gradual shifts between ethnicities, is replaced with a colour line, a hard, racial boundary between Europeans on the one hand, and Indo-Europeans and natives on the other.[40] From 1895, Europeans had to be as white and Western as possible. In the various narratives in the works examined only 'modern', highly educated Europeans receive positive representations. They are very Eurocentric and turn against the 'old colonial hands', who are viewed as members of the old school. Animosity between the old-guard and newcomers was however, mutual. A newcomer in the novel *Een Indisch binnenhuisje* (1924, An Indies Inner House) states, for instance, at a certain point: 'Out of a protective sort of pity every old colonial hand finds you slightly ridiculous, and makes you feel it. Whereas he does not notice that you find him just as ridiculous.'[41]

Acculturation is now represented as a danger for each and every Westerner, including, or perhaps particularly, to modern newcomers. As much is suggested, for example, by the fate of Alex Duclou in the novel *Levens-honger* (1902, Life-Hunger). Full of ethical ideals, this Dutchman leaves for the Indies to work there as a government official, but once in the colony, he soon undergoes a process of moral degeneration. His environment leaves him no choice but to abandon his high moral European principles and to adapt to the colonial mores and the customs of 'the East':

> Slowly he began to become more and more Indies, without noticing it. He began to loathe European clothes, and he only felt comfortable in sleeping trousers and cabai, in his bare feet. Through Sima, his njaï, he developed a love for native fare and delicacies, and in the morning, with his breakfast, he ate rujak with his fingers from a stone bowl. In the evening he even played native card games with a few sinjos, sucking on a light cigar. As these things gradually, unconsciously go in the Indies, with jerks and jolts, bit by bit, he sank deeper and deeper into the Indies world, like one who is slowly sucked under into quicksand.[42]

Much like Delabar before him, Duclou falls ill and a physician sends him, against his will, to Europe to recover. Whilst on the ship he is briefly revived, ultimately Duclou will not make it in Europe. He has become too much of an Indies man to be able to fit in in Dutch society, and he too finally commits suicide in the Netherlands. Duclou's history shows how even a mild form of acculturation may, within a relatively short period of time, lead to degeneration. As of 1895, any form of acculturation is taboo for 'modern' Europeans in the colony.

This aversion to Eastern influences also manifests itself in the representation of Indo-Europeans. 'Miscegenation' is completely forbidden in the works analysed.[43] There is not a single light-skinned Indo-European in any of the books under examination who is able to join the European upper class by means of a European upbringing and education. The 'Eastern' element is now dominant in all Indo-European protagonists. Whilst many Indo-Europeans still cherish a white ideal in their attempts to be as European as possible, no Indo-European protagonists are able to achieve this.[44] Indo-Europeans are constantly mocked in the narratives. Some vainly attempt to gain access to the Western colonial elite through marriage to a 'full-blooded' European woman. In the novel *Vrouw* (1900, Woman), the Indo-European controller (a civil servant of a lower rank) Maidman is married to a white woman, intertwining both race and gender. The book has a remarkable general statement with respect to this particular marriage: 'Just as extremes always try to find each other, and most Indos take pride in being able to call a full-blooded European woman theirs, so Maidman too had similarly thought to find the personification of his highest ideal in Kitty.'[45]

As this quote so clearly illustrates, most male Indo-Europeans much preferred a full-blooded European wife through whom they could 'marry up' socially, a phenomenon known as 'hypergamy'. With a 'full-blooded' European wife at his side, an Indo-European man wanted to demonstrate that he had entered into the higher echelons of the colonial order. However, in the colonial discourse of the post-1895 period, this was viewed more as the white woman's social demotion.[46] Indo-European men are scarcely featured in the novels and short stories written after 1925. These narratives only feature Indo-European women, and then only as precocious, seductive, predatory females intent on luring white men into their snares. The novel *Zoutwaterliefde* (1929, Love at Sea),[47] for example, has a precocious Indo-European

girl on board the ship. Truusje de Haan is the seventeen-year-old daughter of a government official. The story depicts her as a strange, wild, brown-skinned, black-eyed child, who is defiant, flirtatious, and coquettish. She makes advances to older gentlemen such as the headmaster Meeuwisse and Lieutenant-Colonel Prester, from whom she expects to gain favours in return for her attention, which assumes an erotic undertone.

In contrast, native identities experience a completely different evolution in post-1895 voyage narratives. The natives now are increasingly seen as human beings, albeit of a simple, 'primitive' kind. They also now feature more prominently and, it transpires, after 1925, the natives have drawn closer to the Europeans as they receive a Western education and embrace European political principles. Using the conservative rhetoric derived from ideas that were prevalent in colonial society until 1895, however, representatives of the European middle classes attempt to enhance segregation in the colony and trivialise emerging Indonesian nationalism. Considered 'old-fashioned' between 1895 and 1925, this conservative colonial thinking returns to hold sway again after this time. These narratives, therefore, may not deny natives the right and the possibility to self-development as such, however, since natives are of a 'childlike disposition', their progress must necessarily be 'gradual' and 'slow'. Native people are mostly represented as 'children' who need guidance from white Europeans. This conservative colonial view is expressed very clearly in the novel *Kentering* (1931, Conversion) in which an experienced traveller explains:

> Only, you must not forget that the simple Native – him, who we mostly deal with – is a human being of limited development and civilisation. He is best compared to a child; yes, almost all his peculiarities have something essentially childlike about them. He is cruel... out of ignorance, just like a child is unconsciously cruel; he lacks the mental restraint on what he thinks and does that we capture in notions like education, decency and tradition; he has insufficient control over himself...[48]

Incidentally, two books from the 1925-1940 period do not see Indonesian nationalism in a negative light, affording Indonesians, albeit softly, a voice. An Indonesian nationalist is allowed to speak in two chapters in *Zoutwaterliefde* and even though this is a comical novel by a Western author, it remains a small act of emancipation. *Scheepsjournaal van Arthur Ducroo* (1943, Arthur Ducroo's Ship's Journal)[49] by E. du Perron takes this a step further, the main protagonist actually expressing his understanding of Indonesian nationalism. This demonstrates a shift in native colonial identity. They have become Indonesians, with their own political ideals and a voice of their own. In these two texts, Indonesians adopt a critical attitude towards colonialism. Here, the ship, as a contact zone, functions as an observatory for the Indonesian servants. The knowledge they can gain about their European colonisers is most useful in the context of emerging nationalistic ambitions. It boosts Indonesian self-assurance and incentivises resistance to colonial domination.

Members of the Indonesian elite sailing in Europe, 1910. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 34423.

Nonetheless. although a Western intellectual such as Ducroo in *Scheepsjournaal van Arthur Ducroo* recognises and justifies Indonesian nationalism, and views Indonesians as his equals, he belongs to a minority. The ultimate 'Other' in the novels is not the less civilised European or the Indo-European, but remains the native. By means of binary oppositions, asymmetrical comparisons, and stereotyping, the gulf between coloniser and colonised is made to look as great as possible, with Westerners portrayed as superior and 'Easterners' or natives as inferior. By emphasising cultural differences, a civil inequality is 'revealed' in the texts that legitimises colonial domination.

The voyage narratives from this period perpetuate the idea that the end of colonialism is far from nigh. It is said in the novel *Tropengloed* (1927, Tropical Glow), for instance, that it is not impossible that a time may come when the 'Eastern' peoples will put an end to the domination of the white race, yet what the main characters in the book 'had seen did not give them cause to suppose that these times were already near'.[50] Although the temporary na-

Having drinks on the Indian Ocean, 1930. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 115981.

Two kids and two child caretakers or 'sea baboes' on the SS *Indrapoera* sailing towards the Netherlands, 1929. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 118371.

ture of colonial rule is acknowledged in some narratives, there are, apparently, always 'numerous reasons why its termination is as yet impossible or in any case unwise'.[51] Events, however, took a decisive turn, and the Japanese invasion on the night of 10 to 11 January 1942 would mark the end of Dutch colonial rule in the Indonesian archipelago.

Conclusion

The novels about the sea voyage between the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies provide not only thrilling stories that can be read as travel guides, but that can be seen as spaces of identity as well. Study of the works reveals that the sailing ships and mail boats constitute a miniature version of colonial society. The ship operates as a contact zone in which the various sections of stratified and segregated colonial society are thrown together in a forced gathering within an enclosed space. The Dutch East Indies as a colony was a vast and sprawling area. A ship, however, was not. Once on board, members of the various societal groups had little chance of avoiding each other. Differences would consequently soon rise to the surface. In addition, travellers had to contend with greatly varying weather conditions, including storms and heat during the passage. As this analysis reveals, due to the specific circumstances on board, the colonial microcosm on board was under constant pressure.

Moreover, the colonial society on board is in a state of transition, with the equator and the Suez Canal constituting a watershed between West and East – between the European and the colonial. During their voyage, newcomers are confronted with, and initiated into, the 'Other' world, both through their encounters with experienced travellers, and on their excursions to the various ports of call along the way. Analysis of the corpus demonstrates that to a large extent, it is during the voyage itself that the colonial identity is created.

These narratives, of a micro-colony on board ship making the voyage, yield a picture of a colony adrift. This is true in a literal sense, given that more and more people travel from one continent to the other in the period between 1850–1940. However, the compact version of colonial society also comes adrift in another, more metaphorical sense, the analyses showing how, over time, colonial ideology itself underwent considerable change.

Analysis of the various narratives has shown that representation and construction of the ideal colonial identity in the contact zone of the sailing ships and mail boats largely comes about in accordance with the findings of post-colonial scholars such as Said, Boehmer, and Bush. Educated Europeans who conduct themselves humanely, wisely, and with discipline on board and who, moreover, show adaptability represent 'true civilisation', thus symbolise the ideal coloniser. These Europeans have had a Western

upbringing and education, and set an example for the others. 'Uncivilised' behaviour on the part of Europeans (who also include the Indo-Europeans) who do not meet these standards (and show themselves to be narrow-minded, uneducated, and selfish) is heavily frowned upon.

Colonial discourse is revealed as fundamentally dynamic rather than static in its nature. Indeed, analysis of aspects such as class, status, gender, and ethnicity, demonstrates that the microcosm of stratified colonial society on board the ships alters in the course of the ninety years under study. Whilst the superiority of Western civilisation invariably remains the ideological base of colonialism, ideas about its interpretation change over time. What acts as the catalyst in this process are the expressly implemented political changes in colonial ideology at the turn of the century. After 1895 – a year that could be considered a tipping point – the focus on colonialism's civilising mission becomes ever stronger as a consequence of the Ethical Colonial Policy. The European element in colonial society is to be raised to a higher level, which also causes the 'Eastern' and 'Western' worlds to become much more strictly separated. Acculturation, which had given rise to such 'Indies practices' as concubinage, is strongly renounced from that moment onwards. Education and training are crucial elements in the changes following 1895.

As the voyage narratives after 1895 portray, the increasing emphasis on the European perspective accounts for the notable difference in the colonial society's hierarchy as determined by racial theories. Prior to 1895, the narratives represent a colonial society that has a shade bar: the population groups gradually blend into one another. Post-1895, the ideal colonial identity is as white and Western as possible, a consequence of the civilising mission, and the colony's concomitant Westernisation and modernisation. A colour line now replaces the shade bar in the colonial discourse. It is exclusively 'modern' Europeans – highly educated advocates of the ethical policy – who receive positive representations. Old colonial hands, who are regarded as '*verindischt*' (acculturated), and Indo-Europeans are portrayed negatively due to their being influenced by 'the East'. It is no longer the case that light-coloured Indo-Europeans gain access to the colonial elite on the basis of a Western-style education and upbringing.

With the creation of the colour line, the fear of white degeneration creeps into colonial thinking. This fear of degeneration of whites and, concomitantly, of a tarnishing of the colonial hierarchy originates in a presumed 'racial hierarchy'. Out of a fear of white persons 'backsliding', acculturation and 'racial mixing' are emphatically renounced in post-1875 colonial discourse. Europeans who had become '*verindischt*' as well as Indo-Europeans are increasingly regarded as undesirable elements in colonial society. Post-1925 both groups are marginalised, attracting only sporadic representation, as are the remains of a colonial past that has had its day.

Native Indonesians barely play a role in the voyage narratives: either they occasionally appear in the background or are left out altogether. Both

the marginalisation of natives and their representation as primitive, animal-, or child-like, is part of a subtle process of self-representation and othering that lies at the heart of the construction of the ideal colonial identity of both groups. Fictional representations of the sea passage from the homeland to the Dutch East Indies and vice versa aim to portray the gap between Europeans and natives as being as wide as possible. This is especially noticeable when some natives develop into nationalistic Indonesians as a result of the civilising mission brought about by the ethical movement – and in this process, education and training play a crucial role as well.

The distinction between colonisers and the colonised thus threatens to become blurred, thereby undermining the necessary asymmetry of colonial power relations. Some narratives show that Europeans try to trivialise, ignore, or curb nationalistic developments using the colonial rhetoric that was in vogue before 1895. However, as they do so, they dismiss themselves as old-fashioned colonials, who in their turn are denounced by the new European elite – intellectually developed Western passengers who do not dissociate themselves from the Indonesians on board. These intellectuals not only prevent marginalisation of the Indonesians, but they also implicitly recognise that the ideal colonial identity of the colonised has changed. The natives have become nationalistic Indonesians. The ship as a contact zone acts as an observatory for the Indonesian servants. The knowledge they acquire about their European colonisers is most useful in terms of their growing nationalistic ambitions. It boosts the Indonesians' self-awareness and gives incentive to the resistance to colonial rule.

A '*djongos*', a Javanese servant, aboard of the MS *Huygens*. Willem van de Poll, National Archive, The Hague, NL-HaNA—2.24.14.02.

This study of books narrating the sea voyage between the Netherlands and the East Indies between 1850–1940 adds much to our understanding of the colonial narratives at work during this time, enhancing existing colonial discourse found in contemporary Dutch and English postcolonial analyses. Analysis of the representation and construction of the 'ideal' colonial identity in fiction pertaining to these voyages demonstrates that colonial discourse undergoes periodic shifts. In other words, colonialism needs to be periodically repackaged in order to remain current and viable.

These works beautifully illustrate the fact that civilisation is a matter of perspective and comparison. Practices that serve to express (supposed) differences in levels of civilisation between colonisers and colonised, and to represent and construct 'ideal' colonial identities prove increasingly less effective. This, in turn, throws into question any fundamental justification of colonial rule. The claim that the Western, white man allegedly represents a superior form of civilisation, with the passage of time, becomes less and less tenable.

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Notes

1 All translations from Dutch are by Eli ten Lohuis. The main criteria of selection of the novels were that they had to be about the sea voyage, they had to be fiction, and they had to be contemporary.

2 That is – *mutatis mutandis* – also true for steam ships that made the voyage through the Suez Canal from 1870. The Suez Canal was opened to ships in 1869. In the following years, this new pathway shortened the voyage considerably. Sailing ships, which still had to travel around the Cape Good Hope, soon became redundant.

3 For the British equivalent from the Indian perspective, see Boehmer 2015, 11-13, 32-60.

4 Van 't Veer 2020.

5 For this article I have restricted myself to Europeans – specifically, Europeans who have become acculturated to an Indies lifestyle, Indo-Europeans, and the colony's native population.

6 At first glance, certain novels (Wilsen 1871, Perelaer 1884-1885, Van Rees 1896, and Van Wijk 1894) appear to be non-fiction. However, closer examination of elements such as structure and the use of fictional names and dialogues makes it clear that they are unequivocally fictional in nature. Such novels should be considered simultaneously autobiographical and fictional. See Missinne 2013, 23-28, 33-56.

7 Huigen 1996, 57-58.

8 Huigen 1996, 58-59.

9 Nieuwenhuys 1978, 11-17; Beekman 1996, 5-9; Bel 1988, 136, 140.

10 Meijer 2005, 124.

11 Said 1995, 99; Pratt 2008, 3. This applies to East Indies-Dutch literature in general. See Nieuwenhuys 1978, 11-17; Beekman 1996, 5-9; Bel 1993, 305; Bel 2015, 264; Coté 2005, 133-138.

12 Van Nievelt 1891, 242-243.

13 Van Nievelt 1891, 242.

14 For Daum's life and works, see Termorshuizen 1988.

15 Daum 1997, vol. 2, 256.

16 Adinda 1988, 35.

17 Foore 1879, vol. 2, 17.

18 Boehmer 2015, 33.

19 Boehmer 2015, 48-51.

20 Said 1995, 92-93; Boehmer 2005, 5; Bush 2006, 123.

21 Mathijsen 2013, 288-289; Pattynama 2014, 53; Van Boven 2015, 16-21, 27.

22 MacKenzie 1984.

23 The Suez Canal was too narrow for sailing vessels to navigate.

24 Van Nievelt 1891, 241.

25 Foore 1879, vol. 2, 69.

26 Foore 1879, vol. 2, 65, 71.

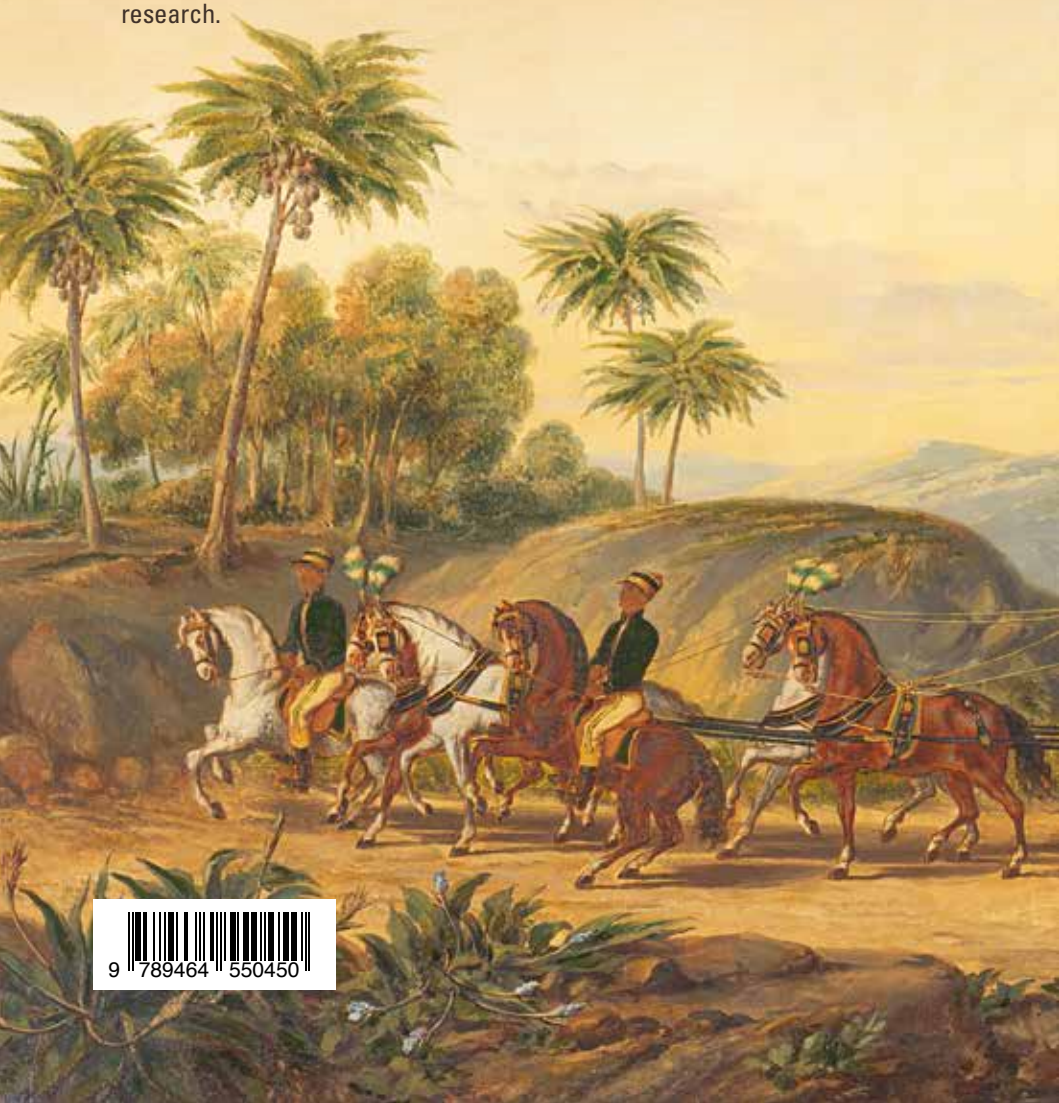
27 This applies even more to Indo-European women. Women are usually represented differently from men and are governed by even stricter standards. Mathijsen 2002, 24, 31-32; Stoler 1991, 427.

28 Perelaer 1884, vol. 1, 119.

29 Van Nievelt 1891, 226.

30 Boehmer 2005, 75-81.
31 Van Nievelt 1891, 93.
32 Meijer 2004, 27; Boudewijn 2016, 18-20.
33 Locher-Scholten 1981, 201.
34 Praamstra 2001, 11.
35 Stoler 1991, 430-436.
36 Kemperink 2001, 28-29, 97.
37 Stoler 1991, 425-428.
38 Stoler 1991, 421, 425-428, 436-439.
39 Bosma 2010, 180-181; Van den Doel 1996, 190-191; Van Doorn 1995, 11-12.
40 Meijer 2004, 27; Boudewijn 2016, 18-20.
41 Van Wermeskerken 1924, 50.
42 Borel 1902, 10.
43 Pattynama 2014, 56, 65.
44 Boudewijn 2016, 146.
45 Mâs Rânoe 1900, 22.
46 Meijer 2004, 74; Rosen Jacobson 2018, 96.
47 This novel was translated in 1931 as *Love at Sea*: Stoke 1931.
48 Burgersdijk-Kolkmeijer 1931, 13.
49 This novel was ready to be published in 1940, but publication of it was delayed by the outbreak of the Second World War.
50 Coops 1927, 174-175.
51 Van Doorn 1995, 83-84.

In 1594, the first Dutch ships sailed to 'the East'. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, almost five thousand ships were sent to the Dutch East Indies, attracting a growing number of travellers, with trade as one of the major incentives. In addition to Dutch missionary ambitions, progress and technological innovations not only fed the growing hunger for expansion, but also stirred an appetite for adventure. The hope for a life in welfare is mirrored in the growing numbers of passengers travelling 'East' in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, Javanese travellers started to explore their homeland as well. *Travelling the Dutch East Indies* not only offers a diverse picture of travel and a critical perspective on the colonial ideology with which it is associated, but also shows how the collections of Leiden University Libraries can serve as a rich source for all kinds of historical research.



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