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Colonial Constructions of a Dutch Women's Movement: 1898

ABSTRACT

Anläßlich der nationalen Ausstellung der Frauenarbeit im Jahr 1898 in Den Haag wird im folgenden den imperialen Verstrickungen des niederländischen Feminismus jener Zeit nachgegangen, denn die niederländische Frauenbewegung identifizierte sich über jene Ausstellung explizit mit der nationalen und kolonialen Geschichte ihres Landes. Im Mittelpunkt der Ausstellung standen die Errungenschaften der modernen Industrie und des *Empire*. Ihren Höhepunkt bildete die Imitation eines javanischen Dorfes, dessen Anlage den BesucherInnen die Illusion einer eigenen, wenngleich miniaturhaften, imperialen Reise vermittelte. Die Organisatorinnen legten den Akzent der Bedeutung der Kolonien für die Frauenbewegung auf die Beschäftigungen, die sie europäischen Frauen als Sozialarbeiterinnen boten. Die indonesischen Frauen selbst blieben weitgehend unsichtbar. Obwohl es den Initiatorinnen mit der Ausstellung gelang, ganz unterschiedliche Frauen der niederländischen Gesellschaft zusammenzuführen, konnten sie keine Definition für ›Frauen‹ finden, die über die bestehenden kolonialen Verhältnisse hinausging.

1. Absences at the Beginnings

At the end of the 19th century Dutch feminists and women who saw themselves as part of the women's movement intensified their efforts to establish national visibility. By organising a national exhibition that celebrated women's labour in all its aspects they succeeded in this endeavour to an unprecedented extent. This exhibition, held in The Hague in the summer of 1898, provides an interesting insight into the way in which the organisers and visitors of this national exhibition identified with the available discourses about state and nation in the Netherlands.[1] A devising of new forms of public speech about women's interests and concerns intersected with the rise of a new image of Dutch colonial identity that took place in the same period. Did an exchange of ideas, metaphors and references between the language about ›women‹ and the rhetoric of empire take place? How was the speaking about ›women‹ in the Netherlands at the end of the 19th century related to speaking about ›the colonies‹? Did the ›racialised Other‹ become part of the idiom of the new Dutch women's movement? How and when were colonial women included in Dutch feminist treatises? Was – on the other hand – the language about the Dutch role in the West- and East-Indies gendered? Did Dutch feminists identify with Dutch colonial

1 All references to the exhibition are based on the results of a joint research-project. Together with Maria Grever from the Catholic University in Nijmegen I have published a book-length historical study of this exhibition: Grever, Maria; Waaldijk, Berteke: *Feministische Openbaarheid. De Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid in 1898*. Amsterdam 1998.

rule or with indigenous women living in the colonised countries? Could both forms of identification go together for a feminist in 1898?

This article tries to contribute to a genealogy of inclusion and exclusion at two levels.[2] Firstly it addresses questions about the whiteness of Western feminism. If, as is maintained with reason by many, feminist discourse about women, and in particular women's studies as an academic specialisation, is modelled on speaking about white middle class women, what implications should this have for thinking about difference and for writing a history of feminism? Is it possible to write a history of this ›whiteness‹, a history that shows how the rhetoric of ›all women‹ implied the exclusion of ›other women‹? Historical research into early forms of national feminist activism and its relation to thinking about ›race‹ may contribute to the understanding of difference as crucial for feminist projects. Instead of speaking about ›new‹ categories and the ›multiplication‹ of differences one could speak with more reason about a legacy of difference common to all feminist thinking about women. Thinking about women has in the history of feminism always taken place at the intersection of gender with other differences. That legacy can be deplored and praised – the material discussed in this paper would support both views – but it should never be denied or forgotten. Myriam Diocratez once wrote: » [A] word does not forget where it has been.«[3] ›Women‹ is a word that has traveled far, and the following is part of its travelogue.

In a second sense this project can be seen as dealing with a historiography of inclusion and exclusion. In combining the history of the Dutch women's movement with the history of Dutch colonialism, fields are brought together that differ widely. However they share an important feature: both have seemed marginal to Dutch history in general. Colonial history of the Netherlands has been dramatically absent in Dutch political history. The colonial past has been a separate field that often only entered Dutch historical awareness as irony, as if Dutch imperialism was never as ›real‹ as the colonial projects of European neighbors were.[4] There has been research into what the Dutch ›did‹ in and ›to‹ the Indies. The reverse questions, what colonialism did to the coloniser, what role imperial rule in Indonesia, Surinam and other parts of the world played in the construction of the Netherlands as a modern state and nation are hardly ever posed.[5] The absence of ›gender‹ from the scholarship of colonialism is equally baffling, though for feminist researchers less surprising. In the following it will be argued that these two absences resemble each other.

2 Stoler, Ann Laura: *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham 1995, 209. Stoler speaks of a »genealogy of exclusions«.

3 Diaz-Diocratez, Myriam: »Het woord vergeet niet waar het geweest is: de communicatietheorie van Bakhtin als perspectief voor feministische literatuurkritiek«, in: *Lover* 16:1 (1989), 8–16.

4 Wesseling, H. L.: »Bestond er een Nederlands imperialisme?«, in: *Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren*. Amsterdam 1988, 194, for example describes Dutch imperialism as a mouse that pretended to be an elephant (published in English in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16:3 [1988], 57–70).

5 Stoler, *Desire*, 118, and Stuurman, Siep: »*Wacht op onze daden*«, *Het liberalisme en de vernieuwing van de Nederlandse staat*, Amsterdam 1992, 414, note 5.

2. 1898: An Example

In 1898, when Wilhelmina, daughter of William III, the last king of the Netherlands, who had died in 1890, reached the age of 18, she was inaugurated as the queen of the Netherlands. A group of women who had been active in promoting the emancipation of women took the initiative for a »National Exhibition of Women's Labour«. They reasoned that if a woman could be trusted to be head of state, it would be worthwhile to show how much important work was done and could be done by women in general. Women's work presented at this exhibition ranged from the labour of the poorest maid-servant to the first female doctors of medicine, from agricultural labour to the first academic dissertations written by women. The records of this massive undertaking, which involved hundreds of women organisers throughout the Netherlands, publications, eleven big conferences and which attracted more than 90,000 visitors, have been preserved almost completely and are being kept in the International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement (*Internationaal Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging* [IIAV]) in Amsterdam.[6]

Such a ›national‹ event in the history of the women's movement raises a number of fascinating questions. In the context of this paper the focus will be on the issue whether the association of Dutch feminists with a ›national event‹ such as the inauguration of the queen, implied association with the colonial aspects of the Dutch nation-state. The attempt of women to become visible as a part of the Dutch nation meant that women had to address Dutch colonialism. This involved choices about the representation of roles and positions for women at the exhibition. In 1898 the Dutch women's movement had to locate itself in the history of a nation that defined itself as a mother country. Before turning to the ways ›the colonies‹ entered the discussions among the organisers of the 1898 exhibition, it is useful to address the marginal position gender and colonialism have occupied in the historiography of the Dutch nation.

3. Excluded from Dutch History?

The history of feminism and the history of colonialism share a certain invisibility when put in the context of the development of the Dutch modern nation-state. The absence of Dutch colonial history in political histories of the Netherlands has been deplored by Ann Laura Stoler.[7] She notes that even the most innovative and intelli-

6 Amsterdam: International Information Centre and Archives for the Women's Movement, »Collection Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid in 1898« (NTV). This collection contains minutes of meetings of the board and most committees involved in preparing the exhibition as well as most printed material that was published during the exhibition. All references to the exhibition are from this collection. A virtual reconstruction of the exhibition is available at http://www.iiav.nl.

7 Stoler, *Race*, 122–123.

gent studies of Dutch bourgeois culture do not take into consideration the social and cultural importance of the Dutch colonial empire. Colonial history is a separate field of knowledge that appears to be of only marginal value to the scholarship of Dutch political culture. A recent study by Martin Bossenbroek of the images of the ›Netherlands East Indies‹ and the ›Boeren‹ in South Africa in Dutch culture around 1900 is one of the rare exceptions.[8] The study contains a wealth of information about the impact of imperialist ideologies and practices on Dutch culture. It describes how the Dutch applauded military subjection of Atjeh during a series of bloody actions around the turn of the century. At the same time politicians formulated the ideals of an ›ethical‹ policy aimed at ›civilising‹ the Indies by way of education, infrastructure and the rule of law. Although the author at the end of his book in an ironic twist suggests that all colonial thinking may have been a dream and nothing more, his main conclusion is that imperial ideology contributed to the formation of a modern Dutch national identity that had popular support.[9]

The history of women in general and of feminists in particular in the Netherlands shares with the history of colonialism a certain historiographical exclusion and marginalisation: women's history is often seen as a separate field without implications for the history of Dutch state, culture and economy. Feminist historians have rightly claimed that women have been marginalised as outsiders, that their influence and achievements have been neglected by male historians who did not want to face the importance of gender as a useful category of historical analysis.[10] Reclaiming the importance of both histories for a better understanding of Dutch national identity in general raises the point of the connection between feminism and colonialism. In this respect histories of feminism will have to address the question how women and how the women's movement have participated in the Dutch colonial enterprise. The notion that history of feminism is about the ›good guys‹ (innocent women) left out while historiography of colonialism is about the ›bad guys‹ (aggressive imperialists) left out will not help to understand the ways in which both histories have crossed and intersected. [11]

8 Bossenbroek, Martin: *Holland op z'n breedst. Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900*. Amsterdam 1996.

9 Bossenbroek, *Holland*, 358.

10 There are too many books and articles mentioning the gender-blindness of Dutch historiography to list here. Schwegman & Withuis, Grever and Aerts address the question in a stimulating exchange about the integration of women in the Dutch Nation State. Schwegman, Marjan; Withuis, Jolande: »Moederschap: van springplank tot obstakel. Vrouwen, natie en burgerschap in twintigste-eeuws Nederland«, in: *Geschiedenis van de Vrouw. De twintigste eeuw*. Ed. by Duby, George; Perrot, Michelle. Amsterdam 1993, 557–583; Grever, Maria: »Feministen en het Vaderland. De historische legitimatie van een vrouwelijk wij-gevoel«, in: *Feminisme en verbeelding. Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 14. Ed. by Bosch, Mineke et al., Amsterdam 1994, 162–170; Aerts, Mieke: »›Om het lot van de krijgsman te delen‹. Koningin Wilhelmina en het martiale perspectief op burgerschap«, in: *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis. Sekse en Oorlog*. Ed. by Bosch, Mineke et al. Amsterdam 1995, 11–32.

11 A challenging and innovative view of the intersection between class and gender is offered in Klein, Marjan van der: »Promotie en degradatie in de kiesrecht competitie«, in: *Groniek. Gronings Historisch Tijdschrift*, 27 (1993/94), 86–106.

4. The Making of Bourgeois Power

The observation by Stoler that colonialism and imperialism are missing from histories that deal with the development of the modern Dutch bourgeois political culture is part of a broader argument. In *Race and the Education of Desire* she argues that the construction of the Western middle class and the new forms of self surveillance that fuel it can only be understood in its colonial and imperial conditions. Stoler asserts that Michel Foucault's well-known thesis about the construction of a discourse of sexuality in the West-European 19th century requires (and in some ways already includes) the indispensable supplement of the construction of a racist colonial discourse. Only this combination can fully explain the rise of power by surveillance. Colonialism was, according to Stoler, central, not marginal, to the construction of the new forms of power that rested on control of the self. The 19th century bourgeois culture of liberalism was based on a new awareness of the self that stressed ›normalcy‹, ›health‹ and ›sense‹ as denotations of personal autonomy. These middle class sensibilities were, in Stoler's words, not exported to the colonies from a strong and stable bourgeois mother country; quite on the contrary: the colonial situation itself was one of the chief locations where the European bourgeois culture was constructed. There, in the nurseries, the household manuals and marriage counsels, the European bourgeoisie developed its sense of being entitled to power by developing the image of a racialised other vis-à-vis an autonomous self.[12] Stoler makes gender an important aspect of her analysis of imperialism. She points out that »[e]mpire provided the fertile terrain on which the bourgeois notions of manliness and virility could be honed and put to patriotic test«, and that a colonial discourse of »vigilant hygiene« was centred around the white European women.[13] Although images of manliness and femininity are thus crucial in Stoler's analysis of Dutch colonialism, an active historical role of Dutch women and feminists in the construction of imperial ideologies is not taken into account.[14] On the other hand, the work by Antoinette Burton and Vron Ware, which shows the involvement of British feminists with the imperialism of their time, hardly addresses the meaning of imperialism for the construction of bourgeois power.[15]

Stoler argues that the invisibility of colonialism in historiography of Dutch liberalism is the result of a concept of colonial rule as an activity that does not influence the mothercountry. This concept has reinforced the idea that Dutch bourgeois society and the ruling of the liberal middle class in Holland was created independ-

12 Stoler, *Race*, 99.

13 Stoler, *Race*, 128 and 188.

14 It is sometimes argued that women's history should rename itself as gender-history. This seems fruitful only when it does not mean that the history of women is *replaced* by a history of concepts of femininity and masculinity, while women and their activities are again excluded from historical narratives.

15 Ware, Vron: *Beyond the Pale. White Women, Racism and History*. London 1992; Burton, Antoinette: *Burdens of History. British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915*. Chapel Hill, NC 1994.

ently from imperial rule abroad.[16] The image of middle class sensibilities as being ›imported‹ to the colonies makes invisible the ways in which these sensibilities themselves were produced in an imperial and racialised context. Only the object of colonial rule seems to be influenced by colonialism. Its subject is untouched by what it does to others, it remains self-contained and secure in its autonomous position.

It seems useful to ask whether feminism's absence from general histories of Dutch bourgeois liberalism can be explained by referring to this same type of reasoning. Dutch women's emancipation is indeed often seen as having entered political bourgeois culture from the outside. The activities of the women's movement have often been described as those of an outside group that ›claimed‹ citizenship. The fact that Dutch women obtained rights and privileges as citizens supposedly did not influence the Dutch conception of citizenship itself.[17] The idea that citizenship could have been ›exported‹ to women while the Dutch bourgeois idea of an autonomous self did not change thus suggests that women can simply be ›added‹ to the history of the Netherlands, without ›stirring‹ that history. Although research in the field of Dutch women's history has shown that women did make a difference when they became active in fields that had been dominated by men, e.g. universities, clerical work in offices, labour- and marriage-legislation or historical scholarship, this difference has until now hardly resulted in a fundamental rewriting of the histories of these fields.[18] This deficiency is especially noticeable when one turns to the histories of modern nationalism. All of the issues addressed by the Dutch women's movement at the end of the century are considered by modern historians as crucial for the construction of modern nationalism.[19] Education, citizenship, productive labour, a popular sense of belonging, political representation, and the responsibilities for public and private morals was what new national identity was about.

16 Histories of Dutch political culture in the 19th and early 20th century hardly deal with colonial aspects of Dutch society. Cf. Stevens, Theo: »Koloniale geschiedenis in bedrijf. Commentaar bij een opgroeiende stiefkind van de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving«, in: *Theoretische Geschiedenis* 23 (1996), 361–374.

17 In a comparable line of reasoning Paula Baker has argued that the political culture of the United States was deeply influenced and changed by the rise of women as political actors. Baker, Paula: »The Domestication of American Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1870–1920«, in: *American Historical Review* 89 (1984), 620–647.

18 Braun, Marianne: *De prijs van de liefde. De eerste feministische golf, het huwelijksrecht en de vaderlandse geschiedenis*. Amsterdam 1992. Grever, Maria: *Strijd tegen de stilte. Johanna Naber (1859–1941) en de vrouwenstem in geschiedenis*. Hilversum 1994. Bosch, Mineke: *Het geslacht van de wetenschap. Vrouwen en hoger onderwijs in Nederland 1878–1948*. Amsterdam 1994. Haan, Francisca de: *Sekse op kantoor, over vrouwelijkheid, mannelijkheid en macht, Nederland 1860–1940*. Hilversum 1992. Eijl, Corrie van: *Het werkzame verschil. Vrouwen in de slag om arbeid. 1898–1940*. Hilversum 1994.

19 Gellner, Ernst: *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford 1983; Weber, Eugen: *Peasants to Frenchmen. The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Stanford 1976; Smith, Anthony D.: *National Identity*. Harmondsworth 1991; Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London 1991.

The Dutch women's movement at the end of the 19th century contributed explicitly to the discussions about these topics around which bourgeois self-awareness was established. If – as Stoler argues – ›empire‹ was a constitutive element in that process, the involvement of the women's movement in the creation of an imperial discourse deserves closer scrutiny. This calls for a revision of the image of the women's movement as an ›innocent outsider‹ to the history of nationalism as well as imperialism. The struggle for women's rights may have been one of the sites where new forms of speaking about empire and colonialism took shape. The claim to female citizenship was articulated in an era when Western nation-states participated in a worldwide imperial project. It is therefore important to trace how new definitions of female citizenship related to divisions that were defined as national, racial and social.

By reconstructing these genealogies I intend to move beyond a binary opposition of ›complicity‹ and ›resistance‹ that dominates much writing about women involved in imperial projects in Britain and the Netherlands. Narratives about ›imperial‹ women have often ambiguous story-lines. The histories of emancipation as women on the one hand and knowledge of their support for racism and oppression on the other hand seem to belong to different realms. The first is praised as independence and a break with traditional notions of womanhood, while their racism is blamed on the conventions of the time. This approach leaves the possible interdependencies between both aspects of women's lives unquestioned. White feelings of superiority were often defended by referring to the subjected position of women in ›native‹ societies. The ›emancipation‹ of European women served in some instances a legitimisation of colonial rule.

The Dutch national exhibition of women's labour in 1898 offers a challenging opportunity to trace the genealogies of imperial involvement of Dutch feminism. The exhibition was an occasion where the Dutch women's movement explicitly identified with Dutch national and colonial history. It took place at a time when Dutch colonialism was being thoroughly restructured, turning from limited settlements and extensive economic exploitation by the colonial state into full-fledged imperialist rule.[20] At the same time new ideas about social legislation and responsibility of the government for social well-being were gaining influence. When the organisers of the exhibition addressed the ›women's issue‹ as a question about the contribution of women to the Dutch state, they participated in a debate where few parameters were undisputed. The controversies between supporters and opponents of social legislation, between defenders and critics of Dutch imperialism covered a wide political spectrum.

20 Kuitenbrouwer, Maarten: *Nederland en de opkomst van het Nederlandse Imperialisme. Koloniеën en buitenlandse politiek*. Amsterdam 1985; idem, »Colonialism or Imperialism? Dutch Overseas Expansion, 1870–1914«, in: *State and Trade. Government and the Economy in Britain and the Netherlands since the Middle Ages*. Ed. by Groenveld, Simon; Wintle, Michael. Zutphen 1992, 107–124.

5. Back to 1898: Exhibiting Women and Empire

The 1898 exhibition became a landmark in the history of Dutch feminism. The organisers aimed at showing the importance of women's work in all its aspects. As mentioned before the exhibition was accompanied by a number of conferences. These were dedicated to a range of issues relating to women's labour that did not lend themselves to visual display. A conference about public morality enabled women to discuss prostitution without showing anything that could be deemed immoral. Social work was another topic that could be discussed without showing aspects of poverty and living conditions that for middle class visitors to the exhibition might have been abhorrent.

The published proceedings of these conferences reveal from what perspectives, from what locations, the women and men present looked at women's labour. Although working conditions of lower class women and, for example, prostitutes were by implication part of the conferences, the attention focussed on the role middle class women could play in ameliorating the fate of those women. Thus women's work was discussed mainly from the perspective of bourgeois women who might improve the lot of the other women. The participation of women from a working-class background was limited, though not totally absent. During the conference about ›servants‹ one or two women spoke from their experience as domestic servants, the majority however spoke from its experience as employers.

The right to speak about social problems in general was claimed by women who tended to define social problems as problems of ›other‹ women. The problems of young middle class women who were educated and who suffered from boredom being stifled by the limits posed upon them were discussed by one of the few women with a medical degree. This doctor, Catharina van Tussenbroek, was herself an example that such limits could be overcome. In this perspective it is revealing that the exhibition of the working conditions of poor labouring women (seamstresses, cigar-makers, farm-hands) was seen as the responsibility of the committee on social work.[21] This part of the exhibition was called the ›table of horrours‹. Here, products of long and underpaid hours of women's labour were exhibited and budgets of working class families were added as further illustration. Clearly, these conditions belonged to the realm of social work, they formed the proper object of women wanting to improve the situation of other women. The committee on industry exhibited the glorious results of modern industry and the good working conditions that were created by some modern industrialists, their wives and by the female welfare workers they employed.[22]

Apart from the glories of modern industry, the glory of the empire figured prominently at the exhibition. One of the conferences was dedicated to the role of women in the colonies and was announced as a debate about social work in »*our*

21 Amsterdam, IIAV, »Collection NTV«, f. 148, minutes of meeting May 1, 1897.

22 See for example a booklet published to accompany the exhibition's ›Hall of Industry‹: Spar-naay, Marie: *Industriezaal*. N.p. 1898. This text was to a large extent devoted to the need to create new supervision-jobs for middle class women.

Indian properties« (my emphasis – B.W.).[23] Here the colonies were discussed as places of opportunity for women from the Netherlands. The discussion of colonial conditions emphasised the possible role Western women could and should play in the colonies. Attention focussed on issues of »morality« and health-care in the colonies. While colonial ›responsibilities‹, the ›white woman's burden‹ so to speak, were discussed at the conference, the empire itself was celebrated. The exhibition added ›taste‹, ›sound‹ and ›image‹ to the words at the conference. In several pavilions Indonesian and Surinamese food was for sale, handicrafts from the colonies were exhibited and Gamelan music could be listened to. Whereas the exhibition in general was strictly limited to showing the results of women's work, here the organisers departed from that principle: both male and female crafts were shown. Presumably the organisers were more interested in the new opportunities for European women that colonial rule offered than in the condition of women's labour in the colonies.

This point of view was underscored by the architectural design of the exhibition. The exhibition grounds, in the dunes just outside the Hague, were divided into two parts. In a symmetrical building large and small rooms were dedicated to several types of women's work. The entrance at the front brought the visitors into a big ›Hall of Industry‹. Here the achievement of modern industry was displayed.[24] The central room at the end of the building was the conference hall where all exhibition conferences were held. Apart from two small rooms dedicated to the Dutch East Indies and Suriname, where examples of handicraft from these parts of the world were shown, the main part of the colonial exhibition was situated in the gardens. Winding footpaths brought the visitors to different small pavilions. ›Exotic‹ music, ›exotic‹ architecture and ›exotic‹ food were offered to the women and men who visited the exhibition. The gardens offered relaxation after visiting the exhibition or one of the conferences. Here the classification was less strict and the sensation of wandering into another world provided visitors with the illusion of imperial travel in miniature.[25] They could see Javanese women doing batik-work. They could also listen to a Javanese Gamelan-orchestra made up of men. The Javanese men and women belonged to a troupe who had been travelling through Europe to perform at several exhibitions. There is no evidence that much discussion took place about the fact that male musicians participated in the exhibition. While the concerts and recitals of the exhibition in general were limited to work by female composers, all-

23 »Samenkomst ter bespreking van den arbeid der Vrouw op verschillend Maatschappelijk gebied in onze Indische bezittingen«, Amsterdam, IIAV, *Collection NTV*, f 305.

24 The exhibition of women's labour stands in a long tradition of manufactural exhibitions that glorified national success in industry. Rydell, Robert W.; Gwinn, Nancy E.: *Fair Representations. World's Fairs and the Modern World*. Amsterdam 1994.

25 Coombes, Annie E.: »Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities«, in: *The Oxford Art Journal* 11:2 (1988), 57–68, offers an insightful analysis of the consequences of the »lack of rigorously imposed control over the viewing space« at British colonial exhibitions around 1900. »Learning through pleasure« offered the visitors a chance to feel like participants of the British empire.

female choirs and woman-conductors, the colonial context apparently made the gender of the musicians less important.[26]

6. Comparing Two Worlds

Because the exhibition contained both the representation of women's labour in the Netherlands and of women's labour in the colonies, it is possible to compare the perspectives involved in both instances. It was not often that colonial and domestic conditions were exhibited in the same place. In this context the analogies between slums and colonies drawn during the conference and exhibition deserve particular attention. Michelle Perrot has pointed out that for women at the end of the 19th century ›slums‹ could mean the same as ›jungle‹ meant for men: an opportunity to discover new territories, a chance to live dangerously and outside the limited conventions of their lives.[27]

A social democratic leader was reported to have criticised the fact that bourgeois women paid so much attention to conditions in the colonies that needed improvement. According to him, closer to their well-to-do homes, in the urban slums, the same appalling conditions could be found. It is crucial to look closely at the implications of this analogy as there is more at stake than a metaphor for the enterprise of looking beyond the limits of one's own class. The analogy between the empire and the poor or working classes points to the way the Dutch women's movement constructed women's claim to citizenship. The argument that women were entitled to full membership of society was based on the idea that their labour was valuable for *others*.

The value of women's work was defined as contributing to a social and ›civilised‹ Dutch nation and empire that took care of those in need. The construction of ›others‹, whether ›paupers‹ or indigenous men and women in the colonies, whether ›drunken husbands‹ or ›fallen women‹, was crucial for the construction of the Dutch women's movement. By making ›social work‹ for the benefit of these groups the centre of their definition of women's claim to citizenship, the feminists took part in and contributed to a new definition of state and nation in the Netherlands. By claiming public attention for what were now called ›social problems‹ and

[26] Two journal articles testify to the group of Javanese: v. S.: »Insulinde op Insulinde« *Insulinde* 19–7–1898, and v. S.: »De quaestie der Javanen van kampong Insulinde« *Insulinde* 27–9–1898, reprinted in: Poeze, Harry A.: *In het land van de overheerser. Indonesiërs in Nederland 1600–1950*. Dordrecht 1986, 28. In a little booklet that was sold to visitors the organisers of the exhibiton of Insulinde (the name for the Indonesian part of the exhibition) expressed their gratefulness to the general organising committee that they were allowed to show Javanese men as well as women. They argued that where ›woman's labour‹ could in theory be considered separately from ›men's labour‹, the exhibition/performance of ›native life‹ was incomplete without the male element.

[27] Perrot, Michelle: »Outside the Circle«, in: *The History of Women in the West*. Ed. by Duby, George; Perrot, Michelle (series-eds.). Vol. IV: *Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*. Ed. by Fraisse, Genevieve; Perrot, Michelle (vol. eds.). Cambridge 1993, 373–404.

the specific ameliorating power of women, these feminists strengthened a new definition of social responsibility of the state. Their contribution was significant in the creation of a discourse that defined empire and nation as social entities.[28] The Dutch women's movement of the 1890s helped to put ›morality‹, social policies, and an ethical approach to colonial politics on the national agenda.

The exhibition of 1898 combined calls for the prohibition of prostitution, for social legislation and for a ›civilising‹ colonial policy. It enabled women from the Dutch middle class to see themselves as part of the ruling classes of the Netherlands. By claiming that women could make the nation ›social‹, ›decent‹ and ›civilised‹, they constructed room for middle class white women in national public life. This approach facilitated the emergence of new forms of authority. These were no longer based on wealth or economic independence, but on a gendered and racialised sense of ›decency‹ and ›normalcy‹.

7. Who Were ›Women‹?

For the women who participated and organised the exhibition of 1898 this new basis of entitlement was exhilarating. It opened visions of a world where they no longer would be excluded from positions of authority on account of their sex. On the contrary: their sex provided them with special claim to authority. The debates surrounding the preparations for the exhibition reflect this thrill. At the same time, they show an uneasiness when speaking about ›women‹. In the language of the organisers the word ›women‹ shifted from subject to object. At one moment ›we women‹ would improve the world, a moment later ›women‹ were the ones whose position would be improved by efforts such as the exhibition. Sometimes quite literally ›women‹ moved in one argument from being subjects to being objects and back again. Whether they discussed women as objects of improvement or women as the agents who would bring about this betterment, speakers and writers had to deal with differences: when describing women's agency, they stressed the different political and religious convictions that were combined in the exhibition. When explaining in what sense the position of women should be improved, social and economic differences were mentioned: both the middle class woman who was not allowed to work and the woman who needed charity would profit from the women's movement. While class was important in these distinctions, the colonial context offered another set of differences to bridge. It was not easy to find a language that included both Dutch women (in the mother country and in the colonies) and indigenous women in the colonies. When the Indies and Suriname were described as ›*our* possession‹, the word ›our‹ included all Dutch women in the imperial project while Surinamese and Indonesian

[28] The argument that women invented the social, and that the social was gendered as female has been made eloquently and convincingly by Denise Riley. However, she does not address questions of colonialism. Riley, Denise: *»Am I That Name?« Feminism and the Category of ›Women‹ in History*. Basingsstoke 1988. For Dutch history, see: Dudink, Stefan: *Deugdzaam liberalisme. Sociaal-liberalisme in Nederland 1870–1901*. Amsterdam 1997.

women were excluded. For the organisers it does not seem to have been obvious that a National Exhibition of Women's Labour in the Netherlands necessarily included a colonial dimension. In fact, they hesitated to define how speaking about ›women‹ should be related to speaking about the colonies.

The last minutes of the first preparatory meetings demonstrate this. One woman asked whether attention for the Indies (»east« and »west«) was fitting for an event that aimed to improve the situation of Dutch women.[29] The question gave rise to an extensive discussion in which several ways of including the colonial in a Dutch women's project were articulated. One of the speakers asserted that a growing number of Dutch women went to the East Indies and that it was in their interest to know more about the colony. Another speaker argued that information about the Indies might help to raise interest in the colonies, where conditions were often »deeply horrible«. She implied that Dutch women might improve these circumstances. The first speaker doubted whether »Indian women« (*Indische vrouwen*) would profit from the Exhibition. If the Exhibition could not contribute directly to the advance of women in the colonies, a colonial section would be unnecessary. The last woman to speak on the issue referred to the young queen and women's experience of exclusion. First she argued that women who had suffered removal from authority at the hands of men should themselves beware of excluding another group of women. She then continued by arguing that if the Exhibition was to ask the royal support of the queen, the organisers should take into account that the queen would never support an undertaking that excluded a number of her subjects. This statement was received with applause by those present. Thus the female monarch provided an image that included all women. The language of national and imperial unity provided the speaker with a language that seemed to make all women equal. However, this form of inclusion had its price. It was based on the uncritical acceptance and celebration of Dutch imperialism.

8. A Legacy of Differences

The question how Dutch feminism in the 1890s related to Dutch colonialism is crucial for the effort to write women into Dutch history. If we want to take seriously the claim that women, gender and feminism have been important actors and factors in this history, then the implication of the women's movement in the Dutch colonial enterprise will have to be addressed. Stoler argues convincingly that new forms of power developed in the 19th century depended on the construction of a new bourgeois sense of the autonomous self. This self was constructed by differentiation from sexualised and racialised ›others‹. The women who organised the Exhibition of 1898 infused the public debate with arguments about women's responsibility in the areas of sexuality, social conditions and colonial rule. Dutch feminism contributed to the innovation of the meaning of citizenship. This citizenship had at its heart the

[29] Amsterdam, IIAV, »Collection NTV«, f. 2, minutes of meeting in Utrecht, March 17, 1897.

right to ›educate‹ the working classes, to ›save‹ ›fallen women‹ and to ›civilise‹ colonial subjects. Crossing the lines between the different women that ›educated‹, ›saved‹ and ›civilised‹ was central to the construction of Dutch feminism: a new subject was created. Implied in this new subjectivity however was the construction of the ›objects‹ of women's work for the nation: the women who had to be saved, uplifted and civilised.

Embedded in Dutch colonial discourse, the language used to describe these ›others‹ was often patronising and condescending. Although Dutch feminists succeeded in bringing together different women from all parts of Dutch society at the Exhibition of 1898, they did not succeed in defining ›women‹ as a category that went beyond colonial relations. At certain moments, e.g. when they discussed the role of Dutch women in the Dutch colonies, the women's movement of the late 19th century contributed to the emergence of the language of empire. Feminist historians who are interested in the history of differences among women must take this aspect of the legacy of difference seriously.

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