

Shifting the Compass

Shifting the Compass:
Pluricontinental Connections in Dutch
Colonial and Postcolonial Literature

Edited by

Jeroen Dewulf, Olf Praamstra
and Michiel van Kempen

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P U B L I S H I N G

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction	1
Jeroen Dewulf	
Chapter One.....	20
Squeezed between Rice and Potato: Personal Reflections on a Dutch (Post)Colonial Youth Adriaan van Dis	
Chapter Two	38
Beneath Literature, Beyond Empire: Imprisonment, Universal Humanism, and (Post)Colonial Mimesis in Boven Digoel, the Jodensavanne and Scheveningen Rudolf Mrázek	
Chapter Three	56
A World of Her Own: The Eurasian Way of Living and the Balance between East and West in Maria Dermoût's <i>The Ten Thousand Things</i> Olf Praamstra	
Chapter Four.....	69
Tjalie Robinson and <i>The American Tong Tong</i> : Framing a Eurasian Identity in the American Sixties Jeroen Dewulf	
Chapter Five	91
When Vondel Looked Eastwards: A Study of Representation and Information Transfer in Joost van den Vondel's <i>Zungchin</i> (1667) Manjusha Kuruppath	

Chapter Six	112
The Apparition of the Cinnamon Peelers: Dutch Colonial Presence in Eighteenth-Century Ceylon and its Reflection in Non-Literary Prose Lodewijk Wagenaar	
Chapter Seven.....	128
The Early Cape Colony: Karel Schoeman and/on Relationality Adéle Nel and Phil van Schalkwyk	
Chapter Eight.....	146
Better than the Original: Christianity in Afrikaans Literary Texts by Mixed-Race and Black Authors Luc Renders	
Chapter Nine.....	166
Slavery and its Literary Afterlife in South Africa and on Curaçao Ena Jansen	
Chapter Ten	186
Elite Slave Networks in the Dutch Atlantic Nicole Saffold Maskiell	
Chapter Eleven	206
A Press of Many Tongues: The Globalization of Dutch Jewish Literature during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries Barry L. Stiefel	
Chapter Twelve	229
Writing to Comprehend Dutch Brazil: Joannes de Laet's <i>Iaerlyck Verhael</i> Britt Dams	
Chapter Thirteen	248
"Animus Revertendi" versus "Animus Manendi": The Will to Return versus the Will to Stay in Dutch Colonial Literature Applied to Colonists in Late Eighteenth-Century Suriname Paul Hollanders	

Chapter Fourteen	261
Complexities of Non-Western Canonization	
Michiel van Kempen	
Chapter Fifteen	271
Steps in History, Paces in Personal Lives	
Giselle Ecury	
Contributors.....	282

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INTRODUCTION

JEROEN DEWULF

The Dutch Oceanus

This publication focuses on Dutch literature in a global context. Dutch literature is, in fact, much more than just literature from a tiny piece of land at the estuary of the Rhine. From the Caribbean to Southern Africa and from Southeast Asia to Western Europe, the Dutch language formed a common bond in a literature that has been deeply marked by intercontinental connections. Such a pluricentric perspective on Dutch literature remains relevant in modern times. After the colonial era ended, the Dutch language continued to produce literature that fostered intellectual bonds on a global scale. These pluricontinental contacts intensified and grew in diversity when, three centuries after the first Dutchmen ventured out into the wide world, the world came to the Netherlands. Inhabitants of the former colonies first, followed by immigrants and refugees, transformed the Dutch literary landscape to a point where an international perspective on Dutch literature has become an absolute necessity.

While language is an obvious criterion to distinguish between different literatures in the context of Europe's colonial expansion, it is not a neutral criterion. Language policy was, after all, an inherent part of the colonial system. Looking at the literature that was produced in a colonial context from the exclusive perspective of one specific European language entails the risk of perpetuating a colonial gaze. The awareness of this danger is inherent to the desired methodological turn advocated in the field of Postcolonial Studies. As the term postcolonial indicates, however, this turn did not occur in a world where the unequal power relations shaped by centuries of colonialism had been completely overcome. Significantly, when speaking back, the postcolonial Other often did so in the language of the former colonizer. In order for his/her voice to be heard, the postcolonial had to rely on a colonial legacy. This complex form of interdependency reinforced the continuous privileging of a direct relationship between the motherland and the former colony in the reception and research of colonial and postcolonial literature. This

publication has the ambition to shift the compass of analysis in a different direction. Although it does not deny the importance of the relationship between the (former) motherland and the (former) colony in the analysis of colonial and postcolonial literature, it tries to complement our understanding of this literature by focusing on pluricontinental relations beyond the European realm.

The assumption that the relationship with the motherland completely determined the literature that was produced in the colonies is, obviously, an illusion. The geographical distance to the motherland and the necessary adaptation to the local reality in constant transformation contributed to the development of a type of literature that became a specific variant of the literature produced in the motherland already during colonial times. While the inclusion of a hybrid perspective to highlight local dynamics has become increasingly common in the analysis of both colonial and postcolonial literature since Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), the dominant intercontinental connection in the analysis of this literature has remained with the (former) motherland. Thus, when studying Dutch colonial literature from Southeast Asia, scholars tend to pay attention to local Southeast Asian dynamics in combination with the connection between the Southeast Asian colony and the Netherlands. Only in exceptional cases do these analyses also include a connection to other continents, to Africa, for instance, or to the Americas. The lack of attention given to these intercontinental connections is particularly deplorable when it comes to the analysis of literature written in the language of a colonial empire that consisted of a global network of possessions.

One of these languages is Dutch. While the seventeenth-century Dutch were relative latecomers in the European colonial expansion, they were able to build a network that achieved global dimensions. With West India Company (WIC) operations in New Netherland on the American East Coast, the Caribbean, Northeastern Brazil and the African West Coast and East India Company (VOC) operations in South Africa, the Malabar, Coromandel and the Bengal coast in India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malacca in Malaysia, Ayutthaya in Siam (Thailand), Tainan in Formosa (Taiwan), Deshima in Japan and the islands of the Southeast Asian archipelago, the Dutch achieved dominion over global trade for more than a century (Israel 1989). From Amsterdam, the city at the heart of this commercial network that spanned the globe, the Netherlands connected the five oceans, which involved the intercontinental transfer of population groups: Portuguese-speaking slaves from India to Batavia, unruly Muslims from Batavia to the Cape Colony, slaves of Angolan origin from Dutch Brazil to New

Amsterdam, etc. (Boxer 1965). Paraphrasing Paul Gilroy's work on *The Black Atlantic* (1992), one could argue that there was not just a "Dutch Atlantic" in the seventeenth century (Nimako and Willemsen 2011) but rather a "Dutch Oceanus." Illustrative for the global mobility within the Dutch overseas network was the career of the poet Jacob Steendam (1615 - ca. 1673), who left his native Amsterdam for Elmina in West Africa, later moved to New Netherland on the North American East Coast and eventually migrated to Batavia in Southeast Asia (Murphy 1861). Despite its global scale, the intercultural dynamics in the literature that developed in this transoceanic network have traditionally been studied from a Dutch and/or a local perspective but rarely from a multi-continental one.

It should be said that postcolonial authors writing in Dutch advocated such a change in perspective decades ago. Anton de Kom (1898-1945), Cola Debrot (1902-1981), Albert Helman (1903-1996), Tjalie Robinson (1911-1974) and others not only rejected the tendency to efface problematic memories of colonial times in Dutch society but also insisted that Dutch literature from and about the former colonies should not be lumped together with literature from the Low Countries and, as Robinson claimed, be defaced with the butcher knife of Western scholarship (Mahieu 1995). Robinson was one of the first to point out that a profound understanding of Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature necessarily involved a change in perspective from the center to what was once considered the periphery of Dutch culture. In fact, while Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (2005) argued that the writing of the "not quite" and "in-between" in African and Asian nations that achieved their independence after the Second World War began in the 1980s, Robinson's transnational focus on Dutch literature from a hybrid, Eurasian perspective started already in the immediate aftermath of Indonesia's independence in 1945.

This collection of articles presents new perspectives on Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature by shifting the compass of analysis. Naturally, an important point of the compass continues to point in the direction of Amsterdam, The Hague and Leiden, be it due to the continuous use of the Dutch language, the importance of Dutch publishers, readers, media and research centers, the memory of Dutch heritage in libraries and archives or the large number of Dutch citizens with roots in the former colonial world. Other points of the compass, however, indicate different directions. They highlight the importance of pluricontinental contacts within the Dutch global colonial network and pay specific attention to groups in the Dutch colonial and postcolonial context that have operated through a network of contacts in the diaspora such as the Afro-Caribbean, the Sephardic Jewish and the Indo-European communities. Although the central focus is on

literature written in Dutch, the intercultural approach of this volume naturally includes connections with literature in languages other than Dutch that also relate to the Dutch colonial legacy, including Latin, Malay, Sranan Tongo, Papiamentu/o, Afrikaans, Petjo, English, French, Yiddish and Hebrew.

Dutch Colonial and Postcolonial Literature

This is not to place to present a detailed overview of Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature. An English-speaking readership will find a general introduction to Dutch literature in the recently published *Literary History of the Low Countries* (2009). This study, edited by Theo Hermans, does not single out colonial and postcolonial literature but includes its major authors and literary works in the broader context of Dutch literature. Although it still represents only a fraction of the original Dutch materials, a large selection of the major works in Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature has been made available in English translation in recent decades. Important pioneering work in this respect was done by E.M. Beekman, whose Library of the Indies at the University of Massachusetts Press contains several of the literary classics from the former Dutch East Indies. Beekman's study *Troubled Pleasures* (1996) as well as his translation of Rob Nieuwenhuys' classic study *Mirror of the Indies* (1982) are still considered the two major gateways for international scholars interested in Dutch literature from the former East Indies. Beekman's groundbreaking work at the University of Massachusetts was complemented by others, most prominently Paul van der Veur, whose Southeast Asia Collection at the Ohio University Library Press includes a rich selection of literary works and studies related to the Dutch East Indies. The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), the leading research institute on Colonial and Postcolonial Studies in the Netherlands, has in recent decades adopted an increasingly international perspective and has made many of its publications available in English.

The fact that much of the attention by scholars working on Dutch colonial literature has traditionally been dedicated to the East Indies is no coincidence. From the very beginning, the East Indies represented the core of the Dutch colonial empire in terms of size, population and revenues. The same can be said about its literature. While some of the major classics of Dutch literature, including Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (1860) and Louis Couperus' *De stille kracht* (The Hidden Force, 1900), directly relate to the East Indies, Dutch literature from the West Indies has long been considered a field of study for specialists. In recent years, however,

Caribbean literature in Dutch has received increasing international attention. An important reason for this change is the presence of a large Surinamese and Antillean immigrant group in the Netherlands. Moreover, Suriname and the Antillean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, St. Martin, St. Eustatius and Saba are the only territories outside of Europe where authors still write in Dutch. Much of the Caribbean literature in Dutch has only recently been made available for an English readership (Van Romondt 1998). An introduction by Hilda van Neck-Yoder to Dutch-Caribbean literature in combination with a rich selection of texts by Surinamese and Antillean writers in English translation was presented by the journal *Callaloo* in 1998. It forms an excellent complement to other works, including Michiel van Kempen's *Deep-Rooted Words* (1992), an anthology of Surinamese literature, the sections on the Dutch-speaking Caribbean in James Arnold's *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* (1994), Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger's study *The Air of Liberty* (2008) and the collected volumes *Founding Fictions of the Dutch Caribbean* (2007 and 2011) by Olga Rojer and Joseph Aimone.

Despite these efforts to make the Dutch colonial legacy available for an international audience, a literary history of Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature that spans the five continents is still missing. Colonial and postcolonial literature written in Dutch has also remained conspicuously absent in major international studies in the field of Postcolonial Studies, save for studies that have a specific focus on the Caribbean or Southeast Asia. There can be no doubt, however, that the specificity of the Dutch colonial system saw a rise of literature that is not a simple repetition of the literary repertoire of other European languages.

What singles out the Dutch case is that the colonial expansion occurred in the immediate aftermath of the country's independence (Prak 2005). The Dutch overseas expansion should, in fact, be seen in the context of the rebellion against Spanish rule that erupted in the Low Countries in 1566 and eventually led to the independence of its northern provinces under the name Republic of the Seven United Netherlands or, in short form, the Dutch Republic. As representatives of a hostile nation, Dutch merchants were prevented access to Iberian ports, which triggered the desire to get direct access to colonial products (Goslinga 1979). Paradoxically, then, the foundations of the Dutch colonial empire were laid at a time when the Netherlands itself was involved in a process of nation building after gaining independence.

As independence had been achieved after a war in defense of traditional liberties, the concepts of freedom, liberty and tolerance played a key role in the construction of Dutch national identity. As Benjamin

Schmidt demonstrated in *Innocence Abroad* (2001), Dutch anti-Spanish propaganda during the uprising against Spanish King Philip II established deliberate parallels between the suffering of the Dutch people under Spanish rule and that of the indigenous population in the Spanish colonies. This rhetoric of liberation and freedom continued to be used in the context of the Dutch overseas expansion. Thus, Hugo Grotius' defiant rejection of the Iberian colonial order in *Mare liberum* (The Free Sea, 1609), acts of piracy such as the capturing of the Spanish Silver Fleet by the privateer Piet Hein in 1628 (Latimer 2009) and the territorial conquest of colonial possessions claimed by the Iberian Union (Spain and Portugal) were opportunistically justified as the legitimate continuation of the Dutch struggle for freedom at a global scale (Schmidt 2001). The Dutch Republic used a rhetoric with postcolonial features to justify its colonial expansion.

An important characteristic of Dutch colonialism and, for that matter, also of Dutch colonial literature is the gap between the attempts to justify overseas expansion as an act of freedom and the violent reality on the ground (Dewulf 2011). Moreover, there was a great concern with sinning in the deeply Christian, Calvinist Dutch society (Schama 1987). Many people in Dutch society doubted whether a righteous life was possible in pagan territory. Anyone opting for a career in the colonies put himself and his family under a cloud of opprobrium. Dutch pride of colonial expansion went, in fact, hand-in-hand with anguish of consciousness. This wavering attitude stimulated the use of double standards, as reflected in the famous saying by Caspar van Baerle (Barlaeus) in *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia* (History of Events during Eight Years in Brazil, 1660) that there is no sin south of the equator. So, from the very beginning, settlements under Dutch control in Africa, the Americas and Asia operated with different moral standards than the motherland. While concubinage and slavery were considered despicable at home, they were common practices in a colonial context (Gouda 1995)—hence the reputation of the colonies as a cesspool of impurity and vice (Stoler 2002). This reputation, however, triggered a strong curiosity, which explains the focus on topics such as eroticism, miscegenation, greed, betrayal and adultery in Dutch colonial literature.

Dutch colonial policy also excelled in the rationalization of its administration (Bosma and Raben 2008), which reflected itself in the systematic analysis of local nature, geography and indigenous customs (Huigen 2009). Although they developed in the context of a profit-oriented system of oppression, many of these scientific studies revealed a profound emotional attachment to the local environment and population (Beekman 1981).

At the time of its overseas expansion, the Dutch Republic was Europe's most prosperous and, from a religious point of view, most tolerant nation (Davids and Lucassen 1995). Few Dutch citizens felt tempted to give up a secure life at home for a career as a VOC or WIC employee in the tropics. Moreover, the small Dutch Republic counted barely two million inhabitants. This explains the high number of foreign employees working for the Dutch trading companies and the unprecedented liberties provided to religious minorities willing to settle in its overseas settlements (Kagan and Morgan 2009). Significantly, the first synagogues on the American continent were built in the context of Dutch colonial expansion. It should be stressed, however, that the Dutch openness to a (limited form) of religious tolerance and ethnic diversity in its colonies was an inherent part of the country's colonial policy and coexisted with slavery and other forms of oppression (Emmer 1998). The high number of foreigners working in the Dutch overseas settlements could also be seen in the fact that a considerable percentage of Dutch colonial literature was written by VOC and WIC employees who were not native Dutch speakers.

The lack of Dutch enthusiasm to populate the many trading posts around the world forced the VOC and WIC to develop a colonial system that distinguished itself in some fundamental ways from the Iberian model to which it succeeded. Unlike their Spanish and Portuguese counterparts, the Dutch were reluctant to spread Christianity and the use of the Dutch language in the overseas territories under their control. This attitude found its continuation in the policies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, created in 1815, when the remaining possessions of the VOC and WIC changed from trading posts into authentic colonies. The nineteenth-century Dutch colonial policy of indirect rule had the explicit goal of making as much profit as possible with as little interference in local customs as possible. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century did the "ethical turn" in Dutch colonial policy cause concern about education and "civilization" of the local population according to Western standards (Cribb 1993).

Nevertheless, even in the context of Dutch "ethnic policy," Malay continued to be used as the lingua franca in the East Indies and only a fraction of the local population was granted access to Dutch language education (Groeneboer 1998). The amount of Dutch literature written by authors belonging to the indigenous population of the East Indies is, therefore, fairly limited (Oostindie 2008). The independent Republic of Indonesia chose Bahasa Indonesia, a language based on Malay, as its national language. Due to the almost complete repatriation of native Dutch-speakers, Dutch did not survive as a (literary) language in Indonesia. However, the memory of the East Indies continues to the

present day to be an important topic in Dutch literature written by repatriates and their descendants. This is particularly the case with literature written by members of the Eurasian Indo community in the Netherlands (Praamstra 2009). Paradoxically then, almost all Dutch postcolonial literature dealing with Indonesia has been written by descendants of colonizers. The dependency of many of these authors on the colonial legacy is so high that one can doubt whether the term postcolonial is even applicable to much of this literature.

The Dutch reluctance to use their native language while communicating with the indigenous population and with slaves also explains why none of the Creole languages spoken in the former Dutch West Indies is based on Dutch (Oostindie and Klinkers 2003). Unlike in Indonesia, however, considerable efforts were made in the late nineteenth century to implement a Dutch educational system in the Caribbean with the intention to implement the use of the Dutch language among all population groups. As a result, Dutch is still used in the Caribbean as a literary language despite the fact that few people speak it as their mother tongue. Although they share a history of Dutch colonization, the status of the Dutch language among Surinamese is different than among Antilleans. In Suriname, Dutch has a high prestige and serves as a language of communication that binds the different ethnic population groups together. A Surinamese variant of Dutch is becoming increasingly popular among the nation's younger population. As a result, the use of local Creole languages in literature, while highly popular in the years following the nation's independence in 1975, has declined considerably. This is different on the Antillean islands that have acquired an autonomous status but remain part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Although Dutch is an official language on the islands, a different language – either Papiamentu/o (on Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) or English (on Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Martin) – is the mother tongue shared by the entire population. Moreover, due to Hispanic immigration, the proximity of Venezuela and the linguistic similarities with Papiamentu/o, Spanish plays an important role as well. Despite the fact that the emotional attachment to and fluency in Dutch has declined in the Antilles, it continues to be an important language in local literature. Both Antillean and Surinamese authors writing in Dutch generally have their work published by a publishing house in the Netherlands and they tend to write for a predominantly European audience. Another characteristic of Dutch-Caribbean literature is that much of it has been written by members of the large Surinamese and Antillean immigrant population in the Netherlands and their descendants.

Due to the growing interest in postcolonial issues, literary festivals such as *Writers Unlimited* and publishing companies such as *In de Knipscheer* have tried to bring Dutch writers with Caribbean and Indonesian roots closer together in recent decades and to stimulate young writers to seek common bonds with writers from more recent immigrant groups in Dutch society who also share a postcolonial history. Due to the increased interest in Afrikaans literature since the end of Apartheid, these efforts also include South African authors writing in the only major Dutch-based Creole language (Elphick and Giliomee 1989). This cross-fertilization points at a new phase in Dutch postcolonial literature, in which a pluricontinental, oceanic perspective is about to become increasingly common.

Guide to This Volume

The underlying topic that gives unity to this volume is the critical assessment of pluricontinental connections in Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature. This book does not aspire to be a comprehensive survey. Rather, it presents a number of scholarly articles by authors willing to tackle the issue of pluricontinental connections in Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature from their particular field of expertise. Although not all territories with historical links to the former Dutch overseas possessions are equally represented, the chapters in this volume relate to a host of areas in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, North and South America that share a Dutch colonial connection. The selection of academic articles presented in this volume is complemented with two original contributions by contemporary Dutch authors with roots in the former colonies. Their essayistic contributions open and close the book.

Few authors would be better suited to begin a volume focusing on pluricontinental connections in Dutch colonial and postcolonial literature than Adriaan van Dis. Born in 1946 to a family of repatriates from Indonesia, van Dis literally grew up inbetween two worlds. On the one hand, there was the Netherlands, a country that had just lost its major colony after a painful attempt to rescue Dutch grandeur with a military intervention and looked with embarrassment at repatriates like van Dis' parents as the annoying reminder of a history it wanted to forget. On the other hand, there was Indonesia, a country that survived in the memories of repatriation families, in their food, their language, their behavior, but also in their deep frustrations about the fact that it was those who had lost everything who were perceived as the embodiment of colonial guilt. The stories from van Dis' childhood marked the beginning of his career as a

writer in the early 1980s and would culminate in what is still today considered his magnum opus, *Indische Duinen*, published in 1994 and translated into English as *My Father's War*. Besides this personal Asian connection, the Dutch colonial legacy in Africa is also present in van Dis' life and work. As a student in Dutch Studies at the University of Amsterdam, van Dis came into contact with Afrikaans. It reminded him of that other creolized form of Dutch, *Petjo*, that was spoken by the Eurasian community in the former East Indies. Writing on South Africa in the 1970s naturally implied taking sides in the discussion on the country's policy of Apartheid, a choice that in the case of van Dis represented unconditional support to the country's anti-Apartheid movement, the ANC. This commitment to the struggle of South Africa's black majority was also reflected in the choice of his M.A.: van Dis decided to write on one of the most prominent critics of Apartheid within Afrikaans literature, Breyten Breytenbach. Van Dis' interest in the Dutch colonial legacy in Africa not only took him to South Africa but also to the West Coast, where he was one of the few Dutch authors to pay considerable attention to the Dutch involvement in the international slave trade, trying to find an answer to the difficult question of how the same country that in the seventeenth century seemed a beacon of tolerance came to play such a prominent role in the trafficking of human beings. Van Dis' focus on the legacy of slavery also explains his interest in the former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean. Few contemporary authors present as deep insights and provocative thoughts as van Dis on the period when Dutch history was also world history. In his essay *Squeezed Between Rice and Potato: Personal Reflections on a Dutch (Post)Colonial Youth*, van Dis presents a series of personal experiences that connect the mythological Dutch East Indies with the color-sensitive South Africa. Being himself a child of two cultures, the topic of cultural mixture is the main focus of the essay. It includes a focus on Creole languages and on the question of how race and racial discrimination influence linguistics. Van Dis' essay concludes with a reflection about the similarities between his own postcolonial youth and that of contemporary immigrant writers in Europe.

Rudolf Mrázek (University of Michigan) connects Europe, Southeast Asia and South America in *Beneath Literature, Beyond Empire: Imprisonment, Universal Humanism, and (Post)colonial Mimesis in Boven Digoel, the Jodensavanne, and Scheveningen*. He addresses the problem of mimesis in a comparative study of L.J.A. Schoonhey's book *Boven-Digoel* (1936) with I.F.M. Salim's *Vijftien jaar Boven-Digoel* (Fifteen Years in Boven-Digoel, 1976). While the former narrates the experiences of a camp doctor at the infamous internment camp in New Guinea, the

latter presents the perspective of someone who was an inmate of the camp and, during the Schoonheyts tenure, a helper in the hospital where the Dutch doctor was in charge. Mrázek shows how strongly the intensity of Salim's book was inspired by the interaction with the author of the first book. While the first two books are analyzed as one "composite" work of literature, a third one is added as a writing on the margins of the other two: Anthony van Kampen's *Een kwestie van macht* (A Matter of Power, 1977), a memoir of Dr. Schoonheyts written on the basis of extended interviews. This memoir adds a South American connection to the article: As a sympathizer to the Dutch National Socialist Movement NSB, Dr. Schoonheyts was interned throughout the war at a Dutch camp for potential Nazi collaborators in Suriname. In van Kampen's book he is described as comparing, even identifying, his fate and that of the Boven Digoel Indonesian prisoners. Mrázek shows how the drama of imprisonment, colonialism, human solidarity and forgiving underlies all three books individually and, in their interaction, together.

In *A World of Her Own: the Eurasian Way of Living and the Balance Between East and West in Maria Dermoût's Novel 'The Ten Thousand Things'* (1958), Olf Praamstra (Leiden University) interconnects Southeast Asia and South America by comparing Dermoût's descriptions of the Eurasian, "Indo" world with Mary Louise Pratt's analysis of Latin America's *mestizo* cultures. Praamstra highlights how Dermoût depicts a world in which people who behave as colonial rulers are nevertheless acculturated to the Asian way of living. This apparent acculturation is traced back to the seventeenth-century VOC era, as all knowledge about local traditions and customs, people, flora and fauna is identified by Praamstra as having been taken from the work of the naturalist Georg Everhard Rumphius (1627-1702). Praamstra interprets the role of Rumphius' work in the novel as a magic force protecting the idealized Eurasian world against the dangerous influence of both the Dutch colonizers and the indigenous population. As soon as instructions of Rumphius are neglected, the mystical powers of the East strike. By establishing a parallel to the transculturality of Latin American *mestizo* cultures, Praamstra understands Rumphius' role as exemplary for the Eurasian way of living that cannot exist without East and West being in balance, a balance that can only be maintained by means of the Dutch knowledge of the East.

In *Tjalie Robinson and 'The American Tong Tong': Framing a Eurasian Identity in the American Sixties*, Jeroen Dewulf (University of California, Berkeley) also focuses on the Indo community, the Eurasian population group with roots in the Dutch East Indies. In his analysis of the

cultural magazine *The American Tong Tong*, he highlights the transnational connections between Indonesia, the Netherlands and the United States in the postcolonial diaspora of the Indo community. He also introduces the Indo author and journalist Tjalie Robinson, founder of *The American Tong Tong*, as a forgotten pioneer of Eurasian identity in the United States. While scholars have traditionally assumed that the conscious framing of a mixed-racial identity is a recent phenomenon in the United States, when organizations such as iPride and Biracial Family Network questioned America's traditional definition of racial types in absolutist terms in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he shows how these organizations were preceded by Robinson's Eurasian Tong Tong group, founded in 1962 in California.

In *When Vondel Looked Eastwards: A Study of Representation and Information Transfer in Joost van den Vondel's Zungchin (1667)*, Manjusha Kuruppath (Leiden University) connects VOC operations in Southeast Asia and China with Dutch drama. With a specific focus on Joost van den Vondel's play *Zungchin* (1667), she illustrates how the role of the VOC as an agent of information transfer between Asia and the Dutch Republic also affected literature. Kuruppath broadens her perspective by linking it to the changing political situation in seventeenth-century China when the Ming dynasty fell, the emperor committed suicide and the empire opened its doors to the Manchus, the new rulers from the north. She shows how this period of unprecedented change in China was also an era of unparalleled attention in the Dutch Republic, where the Chinese political revolution was given substantial print space in a variety of texts that served as inspiration to Vondel. Kuruppath's contribution broaches three principle themes in relation to Vondel's *Zungchin*: representation, information transfer and the role of the Dutch East India Company.

In *The Apparition of the Cinnamon Peelers: Dutch Colonial Presence in Eighteenth-Century Ceylon and Its Reflection in Non-Literary Prose* Lodewijk Wagenaar (University of Amsterdam) focuses on non-literary documents that tell us about people whose lives connected several continents within the setting of the East India Company. In particular, he presents documents reporting on the annual meetings or *paresses* of the Governor of Dutch Ceylon and the cinnamon peelers. These texts are confronted with reports by commissioners investigating into complaints of cinnamon peelers. Wagenaar argues that such documents help researchers to "land" at scenes where history was made and to look behind the scenes. He believes that the documents are as vivid and theatrical as literary sources can be and concludes that "ordinary" historians and literary

historians can equally profit from using such texts in their scholarly research.

In *The Early Cape Colony: Karel Schoeman and/on Relationality*, Adèle Nel and Phil van Schalkwyk (North-West University, Potchefstroom) connect Europe, Africa and Asia in the context of VOC policies. They do so with a specific focus on one of South Africa's most accomplished contemporary novelists and historians writing in Afrikaans: Karel Schoeman. As part of their research on the representation and configuration of boundaries, liminal spaces and hybrid processes of identity formation in South African literature, Nel and van Schalkwyk undertake a preliminary survey of the complex thinking on relationality presented in Schoeman's first two volumes of a five part series *Kolonie aan die Kaap* (Colony at the Cape): *Patrisiërs & prinse* (Patricians and Princes, 2008) and *Handelsryk in die Ooste* (Trading Empire in the East, 2009). They argue that behind Schoeman's work is a "poetics of reciprocity." In relation to *Patrisiërs & prinse*, they make a case for viewing South African history as related significantly to European and Asian history, also in not immediately obvious ways, while their analysis of *Handelsryk in die Ooste* explores another component of this historical relationality: the complex dialectics in and between the micro and the macro.

In *Better than the Original: Christianity in Afrikaans Literary Texts by Colored and Black South African Authors*, Luc Renders (Hasselt University) reflects on Christianity as a transcultural phenomenon in the Dutch colonial world with a specific focus on its long lasting impact on South African identity. He analyzes a number of novels written mainly by colored and black writers in Afrikaans in the second half of the twentieth century in order to determine the position the authors took in relation to Christianity. Renders shows how the adoption of Christianity encouraged black and colored writers to start using faith as a weapon against discrimination by the white rulers: first as an attack on the hypocrisy of the Christianity preached by the whites and second as conviction that God is on the side of the oppressed and will free South Africa from Apartheid. He also indicates how the increased focus on Africanism following the assumption of power by the ANC in 1994 led to a re-appropriation of pre-Christian African beliefs. Renders shows how the way that black and colored authors have given voice to their Christian faith in their literary works underwent significant shifts that parallel the political and social developments in South African society during the second half of the twentieth century.

Ena Jansen (VU University Amsterdam and University of Amsterdam) connects two postcolonial outposts in *Slavery and its Literary Afterlife in*

South Africa and on Curaçao. In her article she argues that memories of slavery, specifically in the form of slave novels, could be an important starting point for comparative literary studies. Both in South Africa and Dutch-Caribbean authors engage with the archive of slavery to not only “keep the past alive,” but also to comment on contemporary unjust practices such as racism, corruption and political repression. She briefly frames the parameters of comparative research and traces the role which identity debates has when it comes to “claims” to the heritage and stories of slavery. The main focus is on novels which are set against the background of slave revolts at the Cape and on the island Curaçao: *Houd-den-Bek/A Chain of Voices* (1982) by South African author André P. Brink and *Katibu di Shon/Slaaf en meester* (1988 and 2002) by Curaçao author Carel de Hasteth.

In *Elite Slave Networks in the Dutch Atlantic*, Nicole Saffold Maskiell (Cornell University) connects Africa with the Caribbean and North America while exploring the ways that slavery transformed the cultural landscape of the Dutch Atlantic. She examines the social, intellectual and kinship networks that intertwined Dutch slaveholders with those they enslaved. Maskiell uncovers letters, wills and diary entries in New Netherland and colonial New York as hidden pathways of slavery connecting Caribbean planters, Harvard elites, New York magistrates and the Netherlands’ scientific society. She indicates that even as slavery disrupted the personal and family lives of enslaved Africans, it created a common slave culture that knit together merchant Dutch families and cemented Atlantic alliances which crossed contested colonial lines. She illuminates the ways in which the Dutch and English continental and Atlantic worlds were tied along lines of honor and the products resulting from trade in human beings. Maskiell also shows how insults and niceties, secret deals and veiled deceit flowed between members of the Dutch slaveholding Atlantic as moments easily missed without a framework for understanding the coded world they inhabited.

In *A Press of Many Tongues: The Globalization of Dutch Jewish Literature during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Barry Stiefel (College of Charleston) focuses on Jewish literature in the Dutch colonial world. While a minority within the Dutch Republic and its overseas colonies, he shows how the Dutch Jewry, which included both Ashkenazim and Sephardim, produced a significant body of literature in Spanish, Portuguese, Yiddish and Hebrew that had a profound impact on Jews and (in Dutch, Latin, French, English and German translation) on non-Jews during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This includes Ben Israel’s first Jewish press and the world’s oldest Yiddish newspaper,

both established in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Stiefel analyzes the importance of Dutch-Jewish literature within the Netherlands and the Dutch colonial world as well as its importance vis-à-vis non-Dutch speaking lands. He compares and contrasts the spheres of influence of Dutch Sephardic literature in the Mediterranean and the Americas with the writings of Dutch Ashkenazim and their impacts on Jews in Central and Eastern Europe. His inquiry also highlights the role of Amsterdam as a node for literary communication for Jews within the Dutch Empire and the rest of the world.

In her article *Writing to Comprehend Dutch Brazil: The Role of Intertextuality in Joannes de Laet's "Laerlyck Verhael" on Dutch Brazil* Britt Dams (Ghent University) connects the Low Countries, Africa and South America in the context of the seventeenth-century Dutch colony in Pernambuco. She focuses on the geographer Johannes De Laet (1581-1649), one of the directors of the West India Company, and his thirteen volumes *Iaerlyck Verhael* (Annual Story) about the history of the WIC from 1623 to 1636, i.e. the year in which Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen took off for Brazil. Dams analyzes a number of selected passages where de Laet described the tropical reality of (what would become) Dutch Brazil, more specifically the fauna, the flora, the local people and the slaves. According to Dams, these descriptions both reveal and construct the exotic reality encountered by the Dutch colonizers in Brazil. By showing how descriptive passages became on their turn textual loci of knowledge-transfer, she demonstrates that de Laet not only displayed the exotic reality but rather constructed and fashioned it.

In *'Animus Revertendi' versus 'Animus Manendi': The Will to Return versus the Will to Stay in Dutch Colonial Literature Applied to Colonists in Late Eighteenth Century Suriname*, Paul Hollanders (University of Amsterdam) introduces the theoretical concept of *Animus Manendi* as an illuminating searchlight in the analysis of colonial literature. He juxtaposes the *Animus Revertendi* of colonists who came with the idea to return to the motherland as soon as possible with the *Animus Manendi* of those who came with the intention to stay and to build a new life in the colony. Hollanders explains how the connection between the Dutch Republic and its colonies can be studied usefully with the focus on the opposition *Revertendi* versus *Manendi*, returning versus staying. He applies his methodological concept to the specific case of Suriname's first Literary Association and its leading representative Paul François Roos (1751-1805).

In *Complexities of Non-Western Canonization*, Michiel van Kempen (University of Amsterdam) focuses on the process of canonization in

Dutch postcolonial literatures. He explains how processes of canonization of literature from former colonies follow completely different tracks as compared to Western literature. Van Kempen identifies fourteen different factors that have a decisive influence in canonization processes and exemplifies how they function in the specific case of Caribbean literature in Dutch. He claims that the impact of trans-Atlantic mechanisms on canonization in the Caribbean is an even more complicated process. As in many cases there is not a firm literary infrastructure in former colonies in the Caribbean, he questions not only how the gap is filled, but also in what way old colonial conditions still operate. His analysis includes a focus on how ideas of decolonization interfere with processes of canonization of literature and illustrates with a comparison between what happened with the work of writers from the 1930s and writers from the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The volume concludes with the voice of the Dutch-Caribbean author Giselle Ecury. Born in an ethnically mixed family on the island of Aruba, Ecury came to the Netherlands aged six. Despite living most of her life in the Netherlands, the Caribbean became a topic of central importance in her literary work. In her autobiographical narrative *Steps in History, Paces in Personal Lives: A Postcolonial Family History from Aruba*, Ecury focuses on slavery, race relations and cultural identity in a story that interconnects Africa, the Caribbean and the Netherlands. Her main focus is on the mid twentieth century, where she highlights the impact the German occupation of the Netherlands had on the nation's Caribbean possessions and shows how the Antillean island of Aruba, despite not being directly involved in the Second World War, was nevertheless dramatically affected by it.

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CHAPTER ONE

SQUEEZED BETWEEN RICE AND POTATO: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON A DUTCH (POST) COLONIAL YOUTH

ADRIAAN VAN DIS

The great Dutch writer Harry Mulisch, son of a Jewish mother and a father who collaborated with the Nazis, was wont to say: “I am the Second World War.” Well, today I echo his words: I am Postcolonialism. But at the same time, making this claim causes me qualms. Do I have the right? Did my cradle stand in the right place? Were my parents on the right side? Am I the right postcolonial color? Questions for the experts.

The city of The Hague holds an annual literary festival, called *Winternachten* (Winter Nights)—nowadays known in the rest of the world as *Writers Unlimited*. In the early years of its existence the focus was on writers from the former Dutch colonies: Indonesia, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and South Africa. The idea was, and still is, to meet contemporary authors from countries with which the Netherlands has had a long and complicated relationship. Although not the main issue, the Dutch colonial past frequently reared its head in the debates. Descendants of African slaves took the floor, as did Indonesians whose fathers were imprisoned or killed by Dutch soldiers during the struggle for independence. The *Winter Nights* made us look again at our own history—perhaps with less complacency than before.

For example, returnees from the pre-Independence Indonesia, so-called “Indische Nederlanders,” who had settled in large numbers in the administrative heartland of The Hague, and whose descendants were keen to preserve the old East Indian atmosphere of their parents, not only had the opportunity to evoke fond memories of a lost paradise, but also got to hear the other side of the colonial saga—the indigenous side.

To everyone’s surprise, people turned out to have similar experiences. Fighting for independence and fighting to maintain the colony had more in

common than anyone expected. The festival organizers called this “synchronization”—sharing emotions in a shared period of time.

Shouldn't we have been conducting the debate elsewhere, too? In the former colonies themselves, for instance? *Winternachten* decided to go on tour. For me that meant a trip to Indonesia, to join a group of visiting writers from South Africa, Surinam and the Antilles. Talks were given before large audiences of students, with the backing of a multifarious array of local performers.

One of our team was Sello Duiker, a black South African author who wore his hair in dreadlocks and whose speech was peppered with words in Afrikaans, which bore a suspicious resemblance to the many Dutch words in the Indonesian language of Bahasa Indonesia. And then there was a Hindustani poet from Suriname, Chritra Gajadin, who caused a great stir at each venue by railing at the former colonial power. The greatest applause was reserved for the poet Changa Hickinson. This young man from the Dutch island of Sint Maarten wrote in English, and although he had a Dutch education and a sister living in the Netherlands, during the tour he flatly refused to utter a word of Dutch either to me or to the festival organizers. His opening line was, invariably: “I am the last of the slaves of the Netherlands.” This was met with thunderous applause—time and again.

As for me, I was the big white man rambling on about *tempo dulu*, the sweet colonial times. *Tempo dulu*— I used the Malay expression deliberately, because I was talking about the East Indies of my parents, a land of hearsay as far as I was concerned. Not that I didn't know the taste of exotic fruits and spices, or the stories behind the sepia photographs—my mother under the palm trees, my father posing as a proud pupil of the Dutch High School in Surabaya, the same school that Sukarno attended. To my father, Sukarno was the rabble-rouser who evicted him from his homeland. I gave an imitation of Sukarno, the way my father used to do (they spoke with the same accent): “Sukarno, full-time brothel-goer, part-time president.” I even put on dark glasses: “Meneer ik voel mij kiplekkerrr. Ayam senang.” I twanged, which translates as “Sir, I feel as happy as a chicken” but means “Sir, I feel fine.” The joke was lost on the Indonesians in the audience.

During the debates that followed I was always treated like a representative of nostalgia. Nostalgia! It was never MY colony, I would splutter in protest. My books are about ordinary folk who found themselves cast out of paradise. I grew up with them. It was their stories—and their lies—that made me the writer I am today.

And I would explain about my background, how I grew up in a hostel for repatriates—the majority of whom were born in the East Indian archipelago and knew nothing about the Netherlands, apart from what they had learnt at school. They could recite the names of all the main railway stations in the Netherlands, they could reel off all the major battles of Dutch history, but the country itself was utterly foreign to them.

My father was one such repatriate—a sergeant in the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, who left the military after the war because he had no desire to take up arms against the nationalist rebels, who were his people after all. He arrived in the Netherlands aged thirty-one, and penniless. No prospect of employment. Broken by the war. He had been captured by the Japanese, and was among the PoWs on their way to forced labor in Sumatra when their ship, the *Junyo Maru*, was torpedoed by the British. Of the seven thousand five hundred men aboard—among them a majority of Javanese laborers—at least five thousand six hundred and twenty drowned. My father found a plank of wood. Fought for a bit of timber in a blood-red ocean. Survival of the fittest. After he was fished out of the sea by the Japanese, he was put to work for two-and-a-half years as a slave on the Sumatran Death Railway of Pakan Baru. Mortality rate: close to forty percent.

Yes, my father was a man of statistics and tall tales, but the Netherlands had no call for the war stories of a Dutchman from overseas. Nor was there a ready ear for the other returnees trickling into the country until 1963 (about three hundred thousand in all, all but five thousand of them colonial-born). The Netherlands was licking its wounds after the years of German occupation. Over a hundred and forty thousand Jews had been deported—with the collusion of the Dutch police and the Dutch railways—and at least one hundred thousand of them had been murdered. Stories about Japanese camps held no interest for the Dutch public. All that bleating about a lost colony on the other side of the world, about a lost war, with nothing like the casualties suffered at home? Not enough to eat? What, in the tropics? With fruit growing on every tree? We were the ones who were starving, was the average Dutch person's reply, we had to eat tulip bulbs to survive.

Clichés, of course, but alive and kicking in my family to this day. Besides, people from overseas were spoilt. They'd had a life of servants, long furloughs, double wages and early retirement. And when they showed up in the Netherlands soon after the war they were privileged all over again—top of the list for housing, help with rations. Coupon crunchers, that's what they were!