

The Christian Slaves of Depok

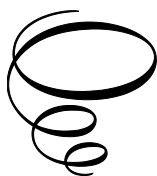
The Christian Slaves of Depok:

A Colonial Tale Unravels

By

Nonja Peters

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



The Christian Slaves of Depok: A Colonial Tale Unravels

By Nonja Peters

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Curtin University



UNIVERSITEIT
VAN AMSTERDAM

To the descendants of the Depok slaves

Your experience of this book will be existential

“All of life is filled with competing narratives, and the burden of interpretation is ultimately on the viewer and his or her subjectively-arrived-at sense of the truth.”

**(Daphne Merkin, *‘Introducing Yi Previn’*, *New York Magazine*,
17 September, 2018).**

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Fig. 3.2. The house of Pieter van Hoorn around 1665. Shown are plantations of palm trees and probably mangosteens, next to the house a dovecote on poles. It was bought after his father's death, by his son Governor General Joan van Hoorn. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/107925> Museum of World Cultures, TM-3440-5 artist unknown. Artwork in the public domain. The caption above, written by Governor-General Joan van Hoorn, reads: Our garden outside of Jaccatra, as it was during the lifetime of my father Pieter van Hoorn (1619-1682) [and his wife Sara Bessels], seen from the southside where the Japanese house now stands.

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- Fig. 3.5. *Cornelis de Bruins sketch, of indigo, coffee beans and bush-leaves on "Weltevree." Sketch No.2006, 1705. Published 1782. Bruins, de, Cornelis. 1711. Reizen over Moskovie, door Persie en Indie. Amsterdam: Willem en David Goeree.*
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- Fig.3.11. *Teisseire, Andries.1792. "Beschryving van een gedeelte de Omme en Bovenlanden dezer Hoofstad, doch inzonderheid van Zuid-Westlyke, en Westlyke Landen, benevens de bebouwing der Gronden, Leven-wys, en oefeningen der Opgezetenen; mitsgaders de Fabryken, en Handel in dezelve, Verhandeligen van het Bataviasch Genootschap de Kunsten en Wetenschappen, Zesde Deel, 51-52: "Denken niet doen"; a poem by Joan Camphuyss written for Cornelis Chastelein that hung in the entrance to Seringsing. <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/127768#page/97/mode/1up>*
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Chapter Four: Depok

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PREFACE

RESEARCH

Slavery, racism, and COVID-19 are hot topics at the time of writing in 2020. The death of African American George Floyd aroused astounding and much-needed action – anger and argument about racism – around the world. Within this context, the descendants of the Depok slaves tell a peculiar tale, one of reverence for their ancestors' liberator, who also was their enslaver.

The Christian Slaves of Depok is the third in a series of research and exhibitions on the impact on indigenous communities of the *Verenigde Oost Indies Compagnie* (VOC) or the United East Indies Company's incursion into the Indian Ocean region from 1602. The first, *Verlander: The Forgotten Children of the VOC*, was a book and an exhibition about the impact of the VOC on indigenous groups in South Africa, Namibia, the Island of Kisar in Indonesia and the Nhanda and Noongar Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia. It was on display in the Netherlands at the West Frisian Museum (WFM) in Hoorn and the Dutch Fortress Museum in Naarden and various museums in Western Australia, South Africa, and Indonesia during 2016-2019.[i] The second in the series *Depok: De Droom van Cornelis Chastelein* (*Depok: The Dream of Cornelis Chastelein*) went on display at the West Frisian Museum, Hoorn from June to October 2019. However, the captions were in Dutch only, and the book by the same name is also in Dutch. Third, *Depokkers: A Colonial Tale Unravels* went on display at the Indisch Herinneringscentrum (IHC) in The Hague for the 75th anniversary of WWII in Indonesia on September 4, 2020, for approximately ten months. Its captions are in English and Dutch). This book: *The Christian Slaves of Depok: A Colonial Tale Unravels*, is the first time the story of Depok and the Depok slaves and their descendants is told in the English language.

DutchCulture (the Centre for International Cooperation in Amsterdam) funded the initial research. However, the study could not have taken place without the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) support at the University of Amsterdam, where I was a researcher under an NWO (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek – Dutch Research Council) Visiting Professorship. Thank you also to the John Curtin Institute Public Policy, Curtin University Western Australia (WA), and the School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University WA, where I am affiliated. My colleagues at the Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (Huygens ING-KNAW) also offered advice and references. The academic advice given to me by Margaret Leidelmeijer, coordinator at the IHC Knowledge Centre and Exhibitions, facilitated a more nuanced presentation of many key concepts in the second book and exhibition – thank you. My gratitude also to Noline van der Sijs, Professor of Historical Linguistics of the Dutch language at Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen and senior researcher at the Institute for the Dutch Language in Leiden; and Marijke van Faassen, senior researcher, Huygens (KNAW) Institute Dutch History, Amsterdam, Professor Eric Ketelaar and VOC researcher Menno Leenstra for their help with the translation of Dutch texts.

My sincerest thanks to my friend Ellie Lemberg for her insightful comments on various versions of the manuscript. Sincere thanks also to Wim Millenaar for allowing me access to his remarkable private family collection of photographs, compiled by his grandfather of the same name, who was an excellent amateur photographer. As well to Wim Millenaar and Peggy Vermunt-Loen, for the many hours they spent seeking information from their family around the world. For Peggy, this included the Australian chapter of her family, headed by Mary Mullen nee Stace-Jonathans. Thank you also to Monique and James Bacas and Benno Gabrielle-Bacas for searching for the info I requested – constantly. The family film on the Jonathans family made by Barbara Zuidema and Gino Brouwer was invaluable to my knowledge base. Barbara also organised permission to use family photos which at times she also restored – thank you. Sadly, Gerard and Ab Brouwer passed away before seeing their contribution to the exhibition and book. My deepest gratitude and condolences¹

Thank you also to Tamara Samuel and her father, Theo; they added a “pure” Indonesian perspective to the Depok diaspora. They also have family in Australia, in Perth, my adopted hometown. The book would not

have reached completion without the plethora of latte coffees in Amsterdam's cafés, with my friend Emily Werlemann while we lamented our writing progress. Covid aborted this pleasant pastime.

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Thank you also to Geert Snoeijer, photographer; we conducted the interviews with the Depokkers, which we decided to film and record. I have used some frames of the visual recordings in this book. I thank the Depokkers for trusting us with their oral histories. I have dedicated the book to Depokkers around the world. Their personal experiences are expressed in the part of the book that focuses on the 20th century. Much of the research on the 19th century is original and possibly unknown to many of them.

Bill Zitman, a retired Dutch businessman, living in Perth, introduced me to Depok in 2015, when he also took me to see Tjimahi (Cimahi), where my father was born. He also led the way in the pilot study of Depok that Geert Snoeijer and I undertook in 2017 and introduced us to some prominent figures. Bill died unexpectedly in November 2020. The study could not have gone ahead in 2018 without the support of Thea Jonathans-Loppies and her family, David, Uli, and Jemima. Bill also introduced us to Jan-Karel Kwisthout, who advised on the literature he had accessed. He also connected us with prospective interviewees, and we employed the snowball methodology from there – thank you, all.²

My gratitude to Marlene de Wilde, my copy editor, for her dedication to correcting the manuscript's grammar. Marlene is a Dutch Australian like me, also living in Europe.

While my initial engagement with the topic was intentionally scientific, I always planned to transform my research results into exhibitions and