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Legêne, Susan

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**THE TROPENMUSEUM AND THE COLONIAL HERITAGE**

***POSITION PAPER***

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## **Introduction**

This report takes a comprehensive look at the way the Tropenmuseum views the colonial cultural heritage and organizes activities in that field. In contemporary parlance the word colonial, like 'imperialist', carries a negative connotation, but that is not the intention here. The term is used here to refer more or less neutrally to an historical period which began in the early nineteenth century and came to an end after the Second World War. It is a period with a long prehistory which goes back to the First Seafaring Voyage to the East at the end of the sixteenth century and the foundation of Batavia on the site of the city of Jayacatra. This history is closely bound up with the history of the Netherlands itself, and there is a graphic life-size depiction of it on the walls of the staircase of the Tropenmuseum's office wing.

This painting by Paulides illustrates the fact that, by the very nature of our museum, colonialism is a constant presence in our work. The Tropenmuseum is one of the guardians of the material colonial heritage in the Netherlands. However committed we are to this legacy, the policy implementation in this field nevertheless reflects but one aspect of our work, and in most cases not a dominant one. Our mission statement declares that the aim of the Tropenmuseum is to be 'a museological meeting place between Western and non-Western cultures. Drawing on its extensive collections of material culture and photography, and through international collaboration, the museum organizes exhibitions, publications, collections, educational and other activities, all of which serve to disseminate information to a wide (international) public for the purposes of study, education and recreation.'

This report will explore how this interaction with the material and immaterial colonial heritage, both of and in the Netherlands, plays an active part in this scheme.

*March 1998*

## **The history of the Tropenmuseum and the colonial heritage**

The Colonial Museum was founded in Amsterdam in 1910 as part of the Association of the Colonial Institute. This museum on Linnaeusstraat in Amsterdam opened its doors to the public in 1926. The Association of the Colonial Institute changed its name to the Royal Tropical Institute in 1949 - following an interlude between 1945 and 1949 as 'Indies Institute' - and the museum became known as the Tropenmuseum. The Institute and Museum were - and still are today - housed in their own specially designed building.

The Amsterdam Colonial Museum on Linnaeusstraat was the direct descendent of the Colonial Museum that had been established (as the Museum of Raw Materials from the East and West Indies) in Haarlem in 1864, under the auspices of the Dutch Society for the Promotion of Industry. This Colonial Museum was opened to the public in 1871 and was housed in a wing of Paviljoen Welgelegen, a magnificent villa in Haarlem, which also housed various other museums: the Museum of Living Dutch Masters (1838-1885, subsequently moved to the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum); the Geological Museum (1853-1863, subsequently moved to the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden); the Arts and Crafts Museum (1877-1926; part of the Arts and Crafts School) and, as newcomer, the Photographic Museum (1913-c.1918; transferred to the Leiden print collection). (Bierens de Haan 1952; Kok, 1989) The old Colonial Museum's historical 'museological environment' is relevant to the subject of this position paper: interaction with the colonial heritage.

The Colonial Museum's collections were made over by the Dutch Society for the Promotion of Industry to the Association of the Colonial Institute when it was set up in 1910. Partly due to the First World War, the Association was slow to get off the ground, but in 1923 the museum in Paviljoen Welgelegen was finally closed and the collections were moved to Amsterdam, where to this day they are still known as the *Haarlem collection*. Initially the majority of the objects in the new museum came from the Haarlem collection. In addition the Colonial Institute went on to acquire a large and exceptional collection from the Ethnographical Museum of the Royal Zoological Society 'Natura Artis Magistra'. The Ethnographical Museum was founded by Artis, in collaboration with the former the Colonial Society, after the International Colonial and Export Trade exhibition of 1883, building on the collections started in 1858 by Westerman, the director of Artis. Submissions to the 1883 exhibition formed an important component of the Artis Museum that was opened in 1885. And in the years prior to the transfer to the Association of the Colonial Institute, it regularly obtained

acquisitions from the Geography Society, the Dutch Bible Society, as well as countless private donors.

The Haarlem collection consisted mainly of objects that stemmed from raw materials, products and artefacts from the colonies, as well as objects related to colonial administration and colonial enterprise. By contrast the *Artis collection* was a more ethnological collection which embraced a great many objects from other cultures with which the Netherlands had no colonial links, including West Africa. Generally speaking the new Amsterdam Colonial Museum was dominated by the collection from the Indonesian archipelago, embracing New Guinea, Suriname and (to a lesser degree) the Dutch Antilles.

As a 'products museum', the Colonial Museum in Haarlem had maintained close contact with people and families who were themselves involved with the development of the colonies: in administration, economic activities in agriculture and export crops, timber and rubber extraction, education, health care, the army and the navy. *Artis* was firmly imbedded in Amsterdam's administrative, academic and cultural circles; and these links were to be further cemented after the foundation of the Association of the Colonial Institute in 1910. In its new status as an institute, the activities of the Colonial Museum came to embrace a broader framework. Whereas by that time the Dutch Society for the Promotion of Industry had become somewhat moribund - indeed it had once jokingly been referred to as the 'Dutch Society for the Promotion of Two Museums' - the Colonial Museum collection, on the other hand, was now placed in an immediate and practical context. Tropical agriculture and health (tropical hygiene) were represented alongside ethnology as permanent focal areas. Quite literally so: in the museum the exhibitions of 'products' were situated next to the offices of the departments dealing with agriculture, health and library services on Mauritskade; and the ethnology section adjoined the museum offices on Linnaeusstraat.

The Association remained in private hands; alongside individual board members, structural links were established with colonial enterprises and with the Dutch government. The plaques bearing the names of the founders in the Institute's Marble Hall bear witness not only to the close relationship which existed from the very beginning between colonial administration and economic and social development overseas, but also to academic research and museological representations of other cultures in the Netherlands.

The Institute's collection saw a steady expansion as a result of these close links with private individuals, institutions and national and municipal authorities. Since 1926 collecting and

conservation has been an on-going process, many bequests have been made by families who felt in some way connected to the Institute. There has also been a target on 'contemporary' collecting, the Museum has been the recipient of gifts resulting from diplomatic exchange, and from time to time sizeable purchases have been made. Hence the Institute possesses a museological collection of historical significance, an extensive and historically valuable library, a photographic collection dating back to the early years of photography, an equally old and original collection of films, old sound recordings of non-Western music, various private and company archives, and finally a collection of documents and maps in the Museum and library collection. In conjunction with the typically individual accents of the Colonial Institute, all these elements combine to form an invaluable source for the study of Dutch overseas relations. In this light the collection is clearly linked to those of other ethnology museums stemming from the colonial era and which - through their activities and direct backing - acquired their own particular focus in their historical collections: the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, the Ethnology Museum Nusantara in Delft, the Royal Colonial Military Hospital Bronbeek, the Rotterdam Museum of Ethnology. (Van Dijk, 1992; Joint Purchase Report OVM 1998)

The last few years have seen a growing interest in the colonial heritage in the Netherlands. This increased awareness is most immediately reflected in the public debate on that particular area of the past, and on the way in which that is carried through both individually and collectively into the area of Dutch relationships. It is also expressed in the discussions on Dutch foreign policy and the (political and aid) relations with the (former) colonies. This public discussion often takes on a rather moral tone and is beset with implicit question marks about Dutch conduct overseas. Academic studies, novels, memoirs, documentaries and films on, for instance, the end of the Dutch presence in Indonesia repeatedly engender heated social debate on the nature of Dutch colonialism; the Netherlands' precarious relations with both Indonesia and Suriname are to a certain extent a reflection of the way colonialism is retrospectively viewed in the Netherlands. In this connection in 1995 the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* led a discussion on the desirability of a museum devoted to colonialism.

Currently there are a variety of other museum-oriented initiatives which address the colonial past. New museums such as the Moluccan Museum in Utrecht or the Suriname Museum in Amsterdam focus mainly on colonial history. Moreover there is evidence of increased government sensibility to this subject. In 1989, for instance, the General Directorate for International Collaboration decided that the restoration of African slave forts fell outside the scope of its policy

area, (*Cultural Heritage* 1989); after reassessment in the nineties, however, this view changed. In December 1997 the government presented a report to Parliament which addressed the question of Dutch forts and other material manifestations of past relations between the Netherlands and other non-Western regions. And it is striking that Indonesian museums have recently been showing an interest in joint historical and collaborative museological activities related to the colonial era.

There are a number of factors which in our opinion are responsible for this increased awareness of the colonial heritage. Government interest in historical heritage abroad was probably in part prompted by Unesco's 'Cultural heritage policy', and by archaeologists (including eminent Dutchmen in the field) who raised the issue of the plundering of cultural heritage in the Southern hemisphere to meet the demands of the Western art market. (In this connection Minister Jan Pronk even spoke of cultural genocide. Leyten 1995). The idea that preserving cultural heritage is vital to the strengthening of cultural identity in development processes has taken root, and the increased sensitivity to this subject has led to a greater sense of responsibility with regard to overseas cultural monuments which have links with the Dutch past. The changes that have taken place in Dutch society itself form another contributory factor. The end of colonial relations with Indonesia was a painful period, and fifty years on the silence that shrouded the events that took place between 1940 and 1949 in the Dutch East Indies (and what happened afterwards in Indonesia itself and the area around New Guinea/Irian Jaya) is gradually being broken down. This is reflected, among other things, in the fact that the National Institute for War Documentation (RIOD) has highlighted the Dutch East Indies and Japan as a new area of active archiving, research and debate.

Alongside the fact that those who lived through the Second World War and decolonization are getting older, the changes in Dutch society in the wake of immigration from non-European areas - particularly from Suriname and the Dutch Antilles - also play a part in this new initiative, as do the issues raised, especially by second generation Eurasians concerning their own background within Dutch society. The historical background to Dutch political relations with Indonesia, Suriname and the Dutch Antilles is particularly pertinent to these discussions. Members of the Surinamese and Antillian population, for instance, have requested that a monument be raised in the Netherlands in remembrance of the slave trade and slavery.

With the growing prominence of a multicultural society in the Netherlands, the role of the Netherlands as colonizer has come increasingly under discussion. Moreover (historical) relations with the Netherlands among other ethnic and cultural minorities are also being brought out into the open. This is reflected in 1998 in the activities surrounding the history of the Ottoman Empire, or those in

2000 in connection with 400-years Netherlands-Japan. This pervasive awareness of the various cultures within Dutch society and the outlining of historical relations is possibly linked to what is called the end of 'ethnic taboo' (Vuysje 1997). This resulted in not only a more developed policy by Dutch government authorities and other institutions with regard to the integration of ethnic minorities, but did engender reactions as well, in the form of discussions initiated by various minorities within Dutch society, on whether there is an implicit 'colonial awareness' in Dutch society, and on questions of integration, assimilation and the value of cultural identity (Blakely 1993; Van Vree 1995; Legêne 1998)

These changes that have occurred over the last fifty years, are also reflected in the developments in the Tropenmuseum. Immediately after the Second World War the Institute - prompted by a Commonwealth idea and by the conviction that relations with the Dutch East Indies were on-going - was remodelled and renamed the *Indies Institute*. As a result the Museum disposed of a large part of the collections that were not related to the colonies. At the same time new collections were acquired that were directly related to the process of independence, such as objects reflecting the vicissitudes of the Dutch and Dutch Indonesians during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, and of Dutch business life during decolonization. One of the collections acquired in this way was a series of photographic albums, individual photographs and documents which were found in the homes of Dutch people in Indonesia, and subsequently collected together by various organizations and brought to the Netherlands. Where possible these private collections were returned to their rightful owners. At the end of the seventies the remaining 300 albums, whose owners could not be traced, were deposited in the Tropenmuseum, where some of the albums were finally tracked down by the families concerned.

After 1949 the India Institute path was abandoned. There followed a period of uncertainty which was resolved at the beginning of the seventies when the Museum took on the challenge, instigated by the government, to shift the focus from the (former) colonies to embrace instead the whole of the tropics and subtropics, from the perspective of development collaboration.

Developments in other sections of the Institute, such as agriculture and health, followed suit.

Although it remained a private society, the former Colonial Institute - renamed Royal Tropical Institute in 1949 - nevertheless directed the greater part of its activities towards projects instigated by the Dutch government in which technical assistance was provided in areas such as agriculture and health and, after the second half of the eighties, culture. Links with the former colonial business world were loosened and were instead mainly focused on training, while at the same time the relationships of these businesses with 'the tropics' underwent drastic change. However, part of the

history of many a successful Dutch multinational is still housed in the Royal Tropical Institute. And even today the backgrounds to many of the Institute's administrators can often be traced back to businesses which pertained to the founders in 1910.

As a result of the expansion policy after decolonization, the Tropenmuseum was reopened in 1979 in an entirely new form with permanent regional exhibitions which provided a topical picture of the situation in the tropics, fleshed-out by a number of themed exhibitions, spotlighting international trade, the environment and technology, and reflecting current North-South relations. In this presentation scheme old ethnological objects were shown alongside 'contemporary' everyday artefacts, with no special emphasis on the colonial past. The method of presenting a topical picture engendered considerable public and educational interest; the Museum also attracted international attention. Journeys were undertaken to assemble and bring back newly amassed collections of objects depicting daily life in all different kinds of societies worldwide. There was a specific focus on economic and social relations, while wall texts throughout the Museum provided substantial political background information. The Museum was reorganized and - as in the time of the Indies Institute - collections were relocated to other museums: parts of the collection of the former department of tropical products were relocated to the Natural History Museum in Leiden and the Agricultural University of Wageningen. The photographic collection was also reassessed during that period. It had previously been mainly regarded as documentary material; now however the historical photographic archive was given the status of a collection, with all the administrative and conservation requirements that that entails. This new approach also brought about a reappraisal of the library collection and the music archive. The Royal Tropical Institute's archive was professionally classified and made accessible to a wider public.

From the eighties onwards each of the permanent presentations underwent small changes. But up to 1995 the character of the semi-permanent exhibitions remained in broad outline virtually unchanged. In the meantime major developments in the museological field took place in the central Light Hall of the Museum, with thought-provoking exhibitions such as *Indigo: Natural Blue; Budaya Indonesia; Mexico City; White on Black* and *Amazonia*. 1995 saw the start of a new, phased redesign programme which will reinstate the Museum as a contemporary place in Dutch society. Currently the Tropenmuseum is in the middle of that process. Three departments (Southeast Asia, Man and the Environment, West Asia & North Africa) have been redesigned, and the fourth (Latin America) is about to undergo the same process. Reflection on the colonial past - a theme of little interest in 1979 and thus almost non-existent in the 'old' presentation - forms, where relevant, an integral part of the new scheme, as does the explicit involvement of the new ethnic target group in the Museum design.

This paper goes on to address the way in which 'interaction' with the colonial era has been, or will be, integrated within this new policy. This had been subdivided into:

- collection and collection research
- exhibition and public activities
- international collaboration.

The Tropenmuseum is not intended to become a new colonial museum - on the contrary we aim to take a central position in today's world. However, colonialism as a museological historical given and as part of the Tropenmuseum's history forms (an integral) part of our policy.

## **The collection as evidence of contact**

It has already been argued that the Tropenmuseum collection in itself forms an important archive for the study of historical relations between the Netherlands and overseas territories up to 1940. The guiding factor is that the objects in themselves are evidence of contact. These objects can be divided into ethnographica, 'colonial objects' and 'colonial products'. As curator Goslings noted in 1924 when the Haarlem and Artis collections were amalgamated, these artefacts have been collected by scholars, missionaries, members of the forces, administrative officials, businessmen, as well as by planters. (Legêne 1998b) The contact involved, however, was not neutral, but ranged from gift, exchange, imitation and trade, to military force, pressure and extortion. This means that not only the objects themselves, but also their biography - the history of individual objects or of groups of objects from their origin in a non-Western society until their arrival in the Netherlands - must form a focus of study, if they are to function as an archival piece of colonialism. For this it is essential to correlate them with the history of their collector and with the context in which they were acquired.

The research programme that this entails would cover an extremely wide area. It not only requires considerable research into both the objects and their collectors in the context of their time, but research of this nature would break through the 'timeless' presentation of ethnographica in ethnology museums, namely the tradition of exhibiting these artefacts, irrespective of their age, without any historical reference as though they eternally referred to a contemporary society. In taking the collection as the focal point of actual, time-specific encounters between 'North and South', the research would contribute to breaking down this image - partly created by the museums themselves - of a dynamic North as opposed to a stagnating, static South.

This element of 'encounter and contact' takes on an even more immediate relevance in the section of the collection that deals with the 'colonial collections' as opposed to the ethnography section. Artefacts of colonial administration, of housekeeping and the daily life of Europeans overseas, of their business activities and product development, etcetera, form an important addition to written sources on the social context within which people lived and the perceived view of colonial society. This section of the collection provides the opportunity to study Dutch colonialism as 'project'. (Van Doorn 1994) The combination within the Tropenmuseum collections of the 'material culture of colonialism' on the one hand, and the depiction of it in paintings, photography, dioramas and other forms of visual presentations on the other, provides a fruitful area of research which will undoubtedly lead to new insights into the discussion on Dutch colonialism.

'Contact' implies a reciprocity. The collection could also offer a vital springboard for studying the influence of non-Western cultures (particularly those of the Indonesian archipelago) on Dutch culture; an influence which extends, for example, to Dutch design, Dutch culture and artistic notions of form, motifs and decorations, use of materials, etcetera. It is no coincidence that F.W. van Eeden - founder of both the Colonial Museum in Haarlem and the Museum of Applied and Decorative Arts housed in the same building - should have been extremely instrumental in systematically promulgating knowledge of non-Western formal language in the Netherlands through the channels of applied art education. In this he was a follower of William Morris. (Simon Thomas 1996; Eliëns 1990) Even that aspect offers an opportunity for researching into a reciprocity, particularly if the Museum 'props' - the plaster casts and reproductions - are included in this study of the colonial heritage. This also touches on research into lifestyle in the Netherlands and the divergence of ethnology and folklore as academic disciplines at the end of the nineteenth century.

Where the collection can be perceived as a manifestation of contact, three different factors can be distinguished:

- \* the collection as *manifestation of contact* between Dutch people in all sorts of capacities and members of non-Western societies (ethnographica);
- \* the collection as *manifestation of colonial life* overseas (colonial collection);
- \* the collection as *influence on Dutch art and culture* (both collections).

In addition a fourth element of contact is becoming increasingly important, namely the collection's inherent potential to researchers from the regions and cultures represented in the collection, *as historical material source for research into their own particular society*. This aspect is becoming increasingly important for various reasons. Firstly ethnographical collections in the West form a substantial part of the historical heritage of the tropics. Moreover academic contacts have intensified in that area over the last few years and - despite the considerable problems of translating written sources - the opportunities for collection research into collections thousands of miles away have increased enormously due to computerization. The improved (and within ten years hopefully complete) accessibility of the Tropenmuseum depots as a result of computerized registration systems, will lead to an increased number of researchers from the Southern hemisphere who are interested in specific historical collection research.

The significance of the Tropenmuseum collection as an archive of the contact between the

Netherlands and Dutch people and non-Western cultures, and as material repercussion of the colonial heritage in the Netherlands, is an essential element in determining the qualitative significance of the collection. This significance, however, does not necessarily have to be reflected in exhibitions; it could often be approached from other angles, tying in with current issues and public interest. Therefore for us, quality is not synonymous with 'master pieces'. Our master pieces - perceived as autonomous objects which because of their age, the value of the material used and/or the craftsmanship of the maker, are above the average quality of the collection as a whole - form a much-prized part of the collection. But it is important to stress that we attach equal importance to the collection as a cohesive entity. If the focus were exclusively on these master pieces, then the cohesion of the collection would become lost in the Tropenmuseum which, from the very outset, has collected material culture in the widest sense of the word. In the Tropenmuseum acquisition report (1997) this is made explicit with regard to the Museum's different core collections.

'Master pieces' frequently form the issue in the debate on the restitution of objects to the country of origin. This applies to objects that are perceived as an essential part of the cultural heritage of the country concerned. In the debate in the Netherlands, the colonial past (particularly nineteenth-century cultural-academic research and wars of conquest) plays an important role in reconstructing how the object arrived in the Netherlands, and in assessing the request for its return. The Tropenmuseum retains an open mind and looks into every claim of this nature submitted by third parties. More important however, given the practice and background of our collections, is that we keep an open discussion with our public on the origin of the collection and the value it represents in providing a way into non-Western cultures and an insight into the historical and present-day international position of the Netherlands.

## Concrete plans regarding the collection and the colonial heritage

Against this background the following activities are under discussion:

- *complete computerization of the collection*

The *Photography Bureau* has made a start on programming the documentation and scanning the historical collection (Dutch East Indies, Suriname, Dutch Antilles), thus making the visual material more accessible. In addition researchers will find it much easier to trace the original context in the photographic collection (work by one particular photographer; of one particular place or persons, etcetera), as well as to establish new cross-references. The organizing principles that the collection has been subject to over the years have in some cases radically dispersed the original context. Moreover the size of the collection makes the search for new cross-references an extremely time-consuming - and also not always visually overseeable - task.

The *collection* department is closely involved with the joint Dutch thesaurus project on ethnographic collections, and has also started on collection computerization. The entire project is anticipated to take about ten years. It is essential that the method of access also offers a variety of approaches for historical research into the collection, and that it indicates 'colonial' misrepresentations in the registration of objects. For example: many early nineteenth-century objects which originated from the slave culture on Suriname plantations, were ascribed as museum pieces at the end of the nineteenth century to maroons. Computerization of the collection data can reinforce this type of 'distortion' or, instead, draw the researcher's attention to the historical importance of this fact.

- *targeted collection research and debate by the Museum's own staff and with third parties*

This acknowledgement of the contextual side of the collection computerization is closely linked to the research policy regarding the collection. It is not feasible to document and research the collection from scratch again. Therefore various historical and contemporary lines of approach have been adopted which will not be extensively discussed here. The following are of relevance to the subject of this 'colonial heritage' report:

\* *A position paper on design, lifestyle and the collection* - this builds on the aforementioned interaction between non-Western and Western design; a look-back and a 're-evaluation' of the collection, but also a look-forward as a guide line to collecting.

\* Work is being carried out on a broadly based *publication project on the collection*. The line of approach which is being developed in this report on colonial heritage will also form an important part of a large number of pieces for this publication project. Alongside the Museum's own staff, researchers from partner museums in the Southern hemisphere will be approached to make specific contributions to this research. The aim is to link the collection that stems from the colonial era to a concrete past, and to lift it out of a nondescript timelessness. At the same time investigations will be carried out into ways in which European ethnology museums can contribute to the development of cultural-historical and social research in the Southern hemisphere.

\* *Collaboration with third parties in the Netherlands*

- In this connection we would like to propose that the Netherlands Collection Institute (ICN) be asked to refine and concretize the above definition of colonial heritage, based on an inventory of what should be perceived as colonial heritage in other Dutch museums as well, (maritime museums, local museums, etcetera).

- We would also like to propose that the National Institute for War Documentation (RIOD) and the Royal Tropical Institute collaborate on research into the available sources in the Institute's various collections and archives for the historiography of the Second World War in Asia.

- In collaboration with the Meertensinstituut we would like to instigate further research into the diversity of folklore and ethnology as academic disciplines in the Netherlands.

## **Exhibitions in the Tropenmuseum and a look-back on the past**

The Royal Tropical Institute is housed in a fully programmatic building, replete with architectonic and decorative elements that directly refer to the colonialism of Ethical Policy. On the one hand this tends to get 'forgotten' in the Museum's day-to-day activities, and the space is repeatedly adapted to the wishes and needs of the day. On the other there is a tendency towards greater awareness of the 'content' of the building, with the aim of better reflecting this aspect in the Museum itself.

Colonialism as such only forms one of the many themes of the Museum's exhibitions. That aspect is not intended to be reflected everywhere. However in the future a number of permanent places in the Museum as well as temporary exhibitions will be devoted to that theme.

### **The public**

The Museum must also remain alive to the way the public interrelates with the colonial past and how this is manifested in the building. Three important sections of the public who in some way relate to the colonial heritage can be distinguished. The nature of the products the Museum can offer these people on that theme do not necessarily have to be different for each target group; but the background from which these will be viewed will differ substantially, and it is pertinent to keep this in mind in the product development.

\* The first specific public group constitutes young people, who visit the Museum either individually or under the aegis of a school without much background knowledge of the Netherlands as a colonizing power. With the building as the immediate starting point, and a targeted educational programme as a guide, the Museum can contribute to expanding the historical awareness of this group of young people.

\* The second - and partly overlapping - target group concerns (mainly young) members of ethnic minorities who have come from one of the former Dutch colonies.

\* The third target group is the 65+ senior citizens who themselves have active (family) connections with this past. The Tropenmuseum offers them the opportunity of reliving a part of their past. Moreover the Museum can perhaps serve to bring difficult aspects out into the open.

This aspect of the collection will be activated by researching the collection ourselves and translating that into exhibitions, as well as by making the collection accessible to individual visitors. Here the photographic archive forms an important entry point.

\* There is also a fourth group who do not specifically visit the Museum for the exhibitions but for research purposes: the aforementioned Indonesian, Surinamese, and other experts who come to study the collection for the information it can provide on the various cultures and the contact with the colonizing power.

### ***Concrete exhibition plans***

In 1998 the Tropenmuseum mounts an exhibition in the Parkzaal showcasing a large proportion of the painting collection from the colonial era under the title *Indië omlijst* (Dutch East Indies framed). And in the Gallery the Photography Bureau brings an exhibition featuring Dutch East Indies family albums, and another on the Dutch diplomats Snouck Hurgronje and Van der Meulen in Saudi Arabia. Before that there has been an exhibition on the Surinamese photographer Julius Muller. These last two shows are collaborative ventures between the Tropenmuseum and colleagues in Saudi Arabia and Suriname.

New longer-term plans:

1 One of the ways of giving structural focus to colonialism and of making this manifest in the building is to set up a small-scale *semi-permanent exhibition on Dutch colonialism*. To this end a preliminary study under the working title 'The power of Europe' was carried out in 1994 which initially got bogged down in uncertainty about the requirements, the scope and aim of a permanent presentation of this nature. The discussion was resumed at the end of 1997, and it is anticipated that it will lead to a permanent exhibition of c. 150 m<sup>2</sup> to be realized in 2000.

2 In addition via *audiovisual programmes* we are seeking to provide a balanced range of information on colonialism in the other departments of the Museum where the theme is relevant. The Southeast Asia department already offers an audiovisual programme on the Dutch presence in the East, Indonesian independence and the events that followed in its wake. The end of 1998 will see the introduction of a similar programme in the Oceania department specializing in relations between the Netherlands and New Guinea/Irian Jaya. And in the summer of 1999 the entirely refurbished Latin America depart will offer a similar programme on the Netherlands and Suriname (and perhaps also on the Dutch Antilles). On the basis of these programmes, the Museum is also planning to develop

individual programmes, geared to the various different public groups and focusing entirely on the debate about colonialism and what came in its wake.

3 In collaboration with the Society of Cultural Anthropologists/Non-Western Sociologists an exhibition is being prepared on *100 Years of Anthropology in the Netherlands* (December 1998 to December 1999). This show will explore the relationship between colonialism, academic practice and image formation of other cultures for a wide public, as well as reflecting the transition from colonialism to development aid.

4 The new permanent *Latin America department* (finished July 1999) will have a corner tower of 100m<sup>2</sup> entirely devoted to the Dutch Antilles and Suriname. Proceeding from a concept of cultural layers, this is placed in a framework which will specifically focus on the arrival of Europeans on the Latin American continent, thus placing Dutch colonialism in a wider context.

5 Plans are well advanced for an exhibition in the Tropenmuseum on Armenian culture in the Netherlands (guest curator Anny-Rose Nahapetian). It is expected that this exhibition will be showcased in the Parkzaal around the turn of the century.

6 It has been agreed in principle that in 2001 the Trade Union Museum will present an exhibition on *plantation work* in Deli based on the Tropenmuseum collection. Research for this has not yet begun.

7 The first contacts have been established with an English/French/German/Dutch initiative committee in Indonesia, supported by the Indonesian government, to set up a large exhibition on the Javanese painter Raden Saleh. Within this framework the theme for the Netherlands could be: Raden Saleh and the colonial rulers.

## **International collaboration**

The Tropenmuseum's international projects make it clear that addressing the colonial heritage is not simply a matter of historical interest, nor of opening up the collection and presenting it to an (ex)colonial public. What we call colonial heritage also forms part of the historical heritage of non-Western cultures that were deliberately brought into colonial relationship with the Netherlands (Europe). The societies concerned were just as much altered by this as the Netherlands. (For an elaboration on this complex interaction see, for example, Pemberton, 1994)

The international projects in which the Tropenmuseum is active are frequently geared to national museums in the Southern Hemisphere. The collaboration concerns three areas:

1 As already stated we are actively involved in strengthening research relationships. In this respect the Tropenmuseum publication serves as a springboard.

2 In addition the Tropenmuseum has a role to play in the conservation and administration of collections: training in active and passive conservation, registration of objects, etcetera.

3 First and foremost the Museum offers expertise, as in the case of the National Museum of Sana'a in Yemen, or the Historical Museum in Hanoi, Vietnam, in helping to (re)design semi-permanent exhibitions and presentation schemes for the public.

All the above however is not necessarily (or rather, not usually) in a 'colonial context' and it is definitely not our intention to turn it into one. However the colonial past does play an explicit role in two projects on which the Tropenmuseum is currently working.

### *1 Collaboration with museums in Jakarta*

A start was made in 1997 on formulating a joint research/training/exhibition project between the Jakarta Historical Museum and the Tropenmuseum. This project focuses on the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century collection of furniture, (church)silver and other arts and crafts products which will reflect the interchange between local and newly established Western craftsmen brought in by the Dutch. In the meantime efforts are being made to widen the scope of the training side of this project (passive and active conservation) to include material from other museums in Jakarta. This project is currently in the identification and formulation phase.

### *2 Mauritius commemorative exhibition*

Under the banner 'first contacts' the Tropenmuseum has been invited to organize an exhibition on the earliest Dutch contacts with the island of Mauritius, to which the island owes its name. The request came through a national committee on Mauritius that plans to celebrate this first contact of 400 years ago in grand style in September 1998; this is being given the full support of the Dutch government.

### 3 *Dispersed past*

Furthermore the Tropenmuseum endorses the priorities set out in the report 'Dutch cultural heritage abroad' (1997). In the short term a proposal is being developed relating to architecture abroad. The Photography Bureau contains wonderful collections of photographs of colonial buildings (Indonesia, Dutch Antilles, Suriname). In addition a project is under way in collaboration with the Curaçao Museum which will result in an exhibition and publication on the Soubllette Collection.

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