Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien: de Europese elite van Nederlands-Indië belicht door haar verzamelingen, 1811-1957
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Summary

In this thesis, I have given insight into the establishment and (social) development of a colonial elite in the Dutch East Indies. This elite has always been perceived as a homogeneous, white community in the colony. The colonial elite living in the Netherlands was mostly considered as an economic elite (see, for example, the publications of, Baudet & Fennema, Kuitenbrouwer, Schijf and Taselaar) set apart from the national elite. I have expanded and challenged this traditional view by placing colony and metropole in one analytic frame and by using this elite’s material collections as valuable historical sources. By examining the history of the colonial elite of the Dutch East Indies in this so called imperial space by means of objects and the practice of collecting instead, I moved away from traditional notions of this elite’s social composition, characteristics, citizenship, identity and belonging and relation with the Dutch national elite. Only with such a qualitative approach to analyze this particular social group these social phenomena can be observed.

Material collections are valuable as historical sources, because their meaning changes in the eye of the beholder. The collections, consisting of individual objects, bear a unique identity and meaning created by personal, historical and political developments. Objects make reference to the way the elite constructed their identity: the artefacts reveal relationships with local people, other Europeans and other countries, but also reveal the occurrence of wars, violent encounters, travels and other events. By tracing the objects’ ‘social lives’ we have been able to discern how collecting in the colony served several purposes: from ‘self-fashioning’, the construction of a ‘self’ to being a social mechanism of in- and exclusion in the colony. People used objects as a way to create and sustain the appropriate ‘cultural capital’ (a concept of Pierre Bourdieu). The course of life of these objects and the interaction between people and these objects reveal the colonial characteristic traits of the colonial elite.
The families presented in this thesis (Quarles van Ufford, Loudon, Delprat and Resink-Wilkens families) originated from the dominant sectors of the colony (the business and governmental sector). They all became incorporated into the interconnected colonial elite of the Dutch East Indies and were involved in various forms of collecting.

In the Quarles van Ufford-family, objects acted especially as mnemonic devices to create an imagined family past. In the Loudon-family most objects acted in a similar way, but were used as tools for obtaining prestigious social standing in the then present and future. References were made to the family’s role as empire builder and their loyalty to the nation state. As a result the family gained social prestige in the colony, in Great Britain and in the Netherlands. The objects were a reason for these families’ rooting in the imperial space of both the Dutch and colonial social orders, even though some of these families originally were not Dutch by origin. Through inhabiting the colony this elite became an integral part of the Dutch national elite. Metropole and colony were no separate spheres. Their was interaction between them and they influenced each other.

After 1870 more people than ever before sailed to the Dutch East Indies. This caused a new colonial European bourgeoisie to form that (gradually) merged into the older elites. The colonial society became even more hierarchical than it already was. Connections with Europe became more and more important when people were trying to gain a certain social standing. Efforts to preserve the traditional cultures and (applied) arts were made as part of the Ethical Policy in which Europeans tried to ‘elevate’ the native population. Collecting objects from these suddenly endangered (native) cultures and collecting and making photographs of local people was just one of a series of means to in- and exclude by the European rulers. Théodore Delprat used these particular means and also his infrastructure construction activities to emphasise his social engagement with the colony.

Most of the cultural capital was constructed and articulated by a specific amount and composition of Bourdieu’s social and economic capital at home in the colony. For the greater part women were responsible for this. It was Anna Resink-Wilkens who gained a great amount of cultural capital by her European lifestyle and efforts in preserving the (applied) arts and thereby ‘elevating’ the
local population so much that she, an Eurasian woman, rose to the social standing and prestige of members of the European elite. Because of her ‘Othering (practices)’ of local women she belonged to the group of European ladies from the elite: mechanisms of in- and exclusion became more evident. Around 1900, mechanisms of in- and exclusion were enhanced because of a more rigid and divided society. Skin colour became more important in these mechanisms, although race in the colony was conceived more as a cultural construction than a stable, biological trait. In the colony it was about gaining the aforementioned cultural capital, combined with a particular composition of social and economic capital. It was, however, a contested status that had to be defended all the time. This explains Mrs Resink-Wilkens preoccupation with the appropriate cultural capital for her children (for example, her children were not allowed to speak Petjoh or to read Karl May’s books). At the same time she brought her children into contact with high Javanese culture (for instance, the children learned to play the gamelan).

Anna Resink-Wilkens was part of the ‘Indisch’ mixed culture (‘mengcultuur’) in which the traditional Javanese culture was blended with Dutch and European influences. This mixed culture also had political consequences. This culture, created by Anna Resink-Wilkens and historians, archaeologists, fellow freemasons and the Javanese aristocracy in Yogyakarta, lied at the base of the dialogue that took place in these years between the European and young Indonesian nationalists. The Indonesian identity that emerged after the Independence in 1945 was created by this dialogue in pre-war years. It was constructed in Yogyakarta in a period of time in which almost everywhere in the archipelago the Indonesian and Dutch elites turned away from each other.

In short, collecting was a way to distinguish oneself in colonial (European) and Dutch society, because those societies were interdependent. At the end of the nineteenth century collecting became more important since social and geographical networks became more numerous and likewise created an intricate structure. Collecting was a means to achieve belonging to the colonial elite. Social climbing depended on the combination and composition of people’s cultural, economic and social capital. Especially cultural capital was very important. People were able to create this cultural
capital (by forging connections with Holland, speaking Dutch and taking on a European education) through their economic and social capital. A specific composition and amount of this capital defined the elite’s identity and cultural citizenship. This social-cultural identity marked out this elite from the other colonial people in the Netherlands. Through their transnational and transcultural character this elite has been able to join the established Dutch elite in the Netherlands. The Dutch and colonial elite were closely interwoven. In this way, this elite was able to influence Dutch society. Objects, nowadays stored in family archives and museums, reveal these origin, development and characteristics of a transnational elite in the Dutch imperial space.