‘Our Indies Colony’

Reading First Wave Dutch Feminism from the Periphery

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WOMEN AND IMPERIALISM

In an influential article which appeared two decades ago, Anna Davin described in some detail how an ‘ideology of motherhood’ was manipulated by what might be called ‘progressive nationalists’ in the first decades of the 20th century (Davin, 1996). She also showed how, via evolutionary theories of heredity and eugenics, the feminist movement was not only inextricably implicated in a set of propositions which linked the perceived metropolitan (national) crisis with imperialism but was active in the construction of such a connection: women would contribute their bodies and their maternal instincts, men, their torch of learning to both projects. This linkage was, she argued, the means by which women, as mothers and educators, were translated to the centre of the nationalist project. Education for motherhood was part of the process of ‘perfect[ing] the spirit, mind and body of every man and every woman of our imperial race’ in the performance of a patriotic mission to secure the national and imperial inheritance for the future and to fulfil the God-given duty ‘to carry the lamp of light and learning to the uttermost ends of the earth’ (Davin, 1996: 100).

Recognition of the appropriation of a ‘politics of maternalism’ by British imperialists and colonial reformers and the examination of the activities of colonial and metropolitan women revealing European women’s collusion in the imperialist project has placed European feminism of the period under scrutiny. As Margaret Jolly has emphasized, rather than being seen as the victims of male colonial ideologies as they

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have often been portrayed in histories of colonial women, European women participated no less in the legitimation and enactment of the overall project of colonialism through their involvement in 'feminine service' in missions of medicine and education (Jolly, 1993: 109–10). Taking the point further and building on the now extensive literature on British feminism and imperialism, Inderpal Grewal concluded in a recent study of discourses of 'home and harem' in that context, that all late 19th and early 20th century imperialist discourses and movements in which women participated and which implicated women in policies of national and colonial reform must be treated as ambiguous since 'various imperial, racist and gendered narratives were part of the lives of all women who lived in England, and . . . these varied by class and nationalism' (Grewal, 1996: 9). But it is particularly the innately ambiguous nature of maternalist discourse itself, a discourse which 'necessarily operated in relation to other discourses – about citizenship, class relations, gender differences and national identity' (Koven and Michel, 1993: 3), which insists on injecting uncertainty into readings of the role of European women.

The appropriation of maternalist discursive imagery is no more apparent than in late colonial reformist discourses. It was precisely in the more reformist colonial projects – and in their nemesis, nationalist anti-colonial projects – that this imagery posited maternalist values as 'boundary markers' of nationalist character and virtue. Frances Gouda has recently argued in relation to the Dutch East Indies that a contemporary preoccupation with gender 'dislodged [it] from the tangible realm of physiological distinctions . . . into a narrative tool' providing colonial reformers with metaphorical maternal models of native welfare and education for justifying 20th-century 'enlightened' colonialism alongside paternalistic (disciplinary) models (Gouda, 1995: 175). These metaphors, however, merely extended, with novel nuances, older 19th-century ones which had infused notions of civilizational hierarchies, such as those which compared 'savages' to children and which saw 'domestic relations' as the measure of civilization, not only aesthetically but also 'biologically and sociologically'. For Herbert Spencer, the ' ''moral nature'' of *Primitive Man* (1876) was best judged by his ''habitual behaviour to women'' which was ''frequently brutal'' and at best unsympathetic' (Stocking, 1987: 225).

Not surprisingly perhaps, a generation later, colonial reformers portrayed (European) women as the source of virtue and the salvation of western civilization in the East. But equally, other traditional imagery defined the seductive 'innocence' of the native female and her twin, the native female corrupted by colonial desire – and indeed, a feminized exotic East as a whole – as the source of European (male) moral corruption and decline.[1] As Partha Chatterjee (1993) has suggested, such forms of colonial gender stereotyping and metaphorical imagery were appropriated by patriarchal nationalist movements which in turn presented

'their' women as the keepers of Eastern spiritualism, values and culture, colonial gender relations as the source of corruption and, with some urgency, instituted traditional arts and crafts as central to a modern nationalist female education.

Nevertheless, despite incorporation of this discourse into an imperialist project, despite its class and racial dimensions, and despite the fact that much of the discourse initiated by women was subverted by a 'din of male voices – Catholic, Protestant and Jewish; liberal, socialist and conservative – demanding that women take up their sacred duties' (Koven and Michel, 1993: 2), feminism remained implicitly a radical project of social change, challenging the boundaries of existing liberal society (Wagner, 1994). Even where, as in so much of social progressive discourse directed at women, very few women appeared as subjects, in transforming motherhood 'from women's private responsibility into public policy' and in subsequently redefining social institutional structures, maternalist politics 'generat[ed] searching critiques of state and society' (Koven and Michel, 1993: 2). As such, the women's movement contributed actively and separately to the politics of national and imperial reform, however we might interpret the ideological directions such reform took. And ultimately, this radical core of this original feminist rhetoric and its objectives were appropriated by indigenous feminism in its own agenda.

LOCATING FEMINISM IN DUTCH HISTORIOGRAPHY

While British feminists were already actively engaged in the mid-19th century in extending their agenda to the concerns of empire and colonized women: in proposals for educating Indian mothers, ending child marriage, the mistreatment of widows and the practice of *sati*, and in arguing that relieving the condition of Indian women was an essential element in the civilizing of Indian life, there is little evidence of a similar interest on the part of 19th-century Dutch women. In part, this can be explained by the absence in the Netherlands of a similar imperial dimension within the discourse of national reconstruction – or rather the delay of both till the turn of the 20th century. But historiographically also, the contribution which the British discussion of feminism's involvement in the imperialist project has made to an appreciation of the significance of the interaction between nation and empire and, more specifically, between metropolitan and colonial (and nationalist) discourse, is absent in Dutch literature. Indeed, not till Kuitenbrouwer's groundbreaking publication in 1987 were the Netherlands' modern imperialist credentials adequately recognized nationally or internationally (see Kuitenbrouwer, 1991).

Equivalent studies to that of British and Indian feminist historians

which explore the interaction between the Dutch feminist movement and the broader process of social and national reconstruction and between discourses of national reconstruction and Dutch imperialism as well as the place of maternalist policies within progressive Dutch colonial and Indonesian nationalist discourse, are needed.[2] The contours for such studies are emerging. From within Dutch colonial history, Taylor has made a plea for recognizing the role of 19th century Dutch women colonial writers as influential in defining a more sensitive 'ethical' colonial policy.[3] More recently, Frances Gouda (Gouda, 1995; Gouda and Clancy-Smith, 1998) has opened up a broad canvas in focusing on gender representation which confirms the powerful influence of discursive constructions of gender in late colonial discourse in the construction of 'Dutch culture overseas' and in constructions of the native other. In Australia, Blackburn's work on the history of the women's movement in colonial Indonesia has begun to open up a focus on the women's movement, Eurasian and indigenous, in Indonesia (Blackburn, 1997).

The work of anthropologist and historian Anne Stoler has until recently dominated the discussion of women and empire in the Dutch East Indies. Stoler has argued that changing gender politics were instrumental to the maintenance of colonial authority. Initially concerned to counter stereotypical representations of colonial white woman as the avenging angel of European civilization, she has argued that European women were implicated (by men) in the construction of racial boundaries seen as essential to maintain European authority and colonial moral order (Stoler, 1989: 147; 1991, 61; see also Lucas, 1986). Although most recently she has focused on colonial women's active involvement in colonial reform (Stoler, 1996), Stoler's argument has been largely to explicitly link gender to an emerging reformist (male) colonial discourse which was part of a broader project of bourgeois capitalism, rather than the result of the activities of women. Control over women was ultimately a concern for a 'control of profits [which] were secured by constantly readjusting the parameters of the colonial elite to delimit those who had access to property and privilege and those who did not' (Stoler, 1989: 154). In other words, changing colonial policy reflected (and was part of) a broader process of redefining social, cultural and economic boundaries taking place in metropolitan Netherlands in response to the 'social question'; policies which, in the colony, were inflected by specific racial overtones (Stoler and Cooper, 1997).

Within Dutch historiography the revisionist work of the political scientist Siep Stuurman was among the first to show the significance of basic normative social values implicit in the 'politics of family' as central to debates about the nature of the Dutch state and national identity in the reconstruction of Dutch nationalism at the end of the 19th century (Stuurman, 1983, 1992). Stuurman has shown how a broad

social consensus in this overwhelmingly religious and unindustrialized country formed around the family as the fundamental building block of Dutch society. Other writers have developed the notion of the *beschavingsoffensief* (civilizing offensive) or *moraliseringsoffensief*, which privileged 'the family' in the moral renewal of the Netherlands (de Regt, 1984; Righart, 1986; Damsma, 1986). Developing Stuurman's analysis of social liberalism, Dudink has recently woven the dominant strand of Dutch feminism into a broader portrayal of 19th-century Dutch social reformist discourse (Dudink, 1997), while Liesbeth Bervoets has examined these connections from within a feminist perspective (Bervoets, 1994). There has, however, been very little focus in the historiographical debate on Dutch nationalism on how this domestic moral discourse projected onto, and reverberated within, colonial politics. Since Kuitenbrouwer's discussion of Dutch imperialist policy, only Bossenbroek (1996) and to some extent Gouda (1995) have very recently attempted to elaborate a sketch of Dutch national imperialist sentiment. The little that has been published points to the importance of Stoler's insistence that these internal Dutch debates should be seen as not only having implications for an understanding of Dutch colonial discourse but, more radically, that the latter is implicated in the formation of the metropolitan discourse itself (Stoler, 1995b; Stoler and Cooper, 1997).[4] In the following section I provide a brief sketch of the development of Dutch feminism in the late 19th century to indicate how an elaboration of a maternalist politics can be located in an emerging Dutch imperialist discourse.

Dutch feminism developed in 19th-century Netherlands in a conservative, if not reactionary, climate characterized by patriarchal and religiously defined conceptions of the role of women and exemplified in large numbers of church-affiliated women's organizations. This reactionary environment was most obviously reflected in the persistent opposition to female franchise after the denial of women's electoral rights was made explicit in 1877. Between 1877 and 1919, church-based political parties conducted a specific 'moral offensive' against the four major issues of the feminist project in the Netherlands: the emancipation of women in civil society; the recognition of the social and psychological equality of women; the size and quality of the family; and the regulation of sexuality (Stuurman, 1983; Righart, 1986). The struggle to achieve electoral recognition, often the last symbolic victory of feminist movements and not achieved in the Netherlands till 1919, indicated how long it took for the radical demands of feminists to penetrate even the progressive male-dominated political arenas of their class ready to recognize the extension of suffrage to working-class men.

Women's organizations in the Netherlands in the mid-19th century had initially aimed at reforming the working classes, specifically by providing practical help for the 'contrite fallen' and the 'reformed

wicked': unmarried mothers, neglected children and impoverished female-headed families. After 1870 they increasingly focused on the 'protection' of girls and young women in public places, with numerous organizations founded to combat prostitution and to reform prostitutes. Parallel organizations were established in Batavia and other urban concentrations of colonial society to tend to the largely mixed-race unfortunates on the edges of a community which had grown up around a largely official and military core. By the 1880s, as the Netherlands slowly industrialized, there was a new focus on female factory work and child labour (Fritschy, 1977) and an increasingly radical articulation of demands for social change. This sequence in metropolitan Netherlands reflected responses to the social impact of changes to the Netherlands' economy: the changing nature of women's involvement in the workplace, attendant changing social conditions and the development of educational opportunities for women.[5] A similar but more diffuse response to economic changes is discernible in debates on native welfare and improvement in the condition of 'the Indo' in reformist colonial politics.

Although largely middle class and containing within it a broad range of social reformist impulses, the late 19th-century Dutch women's movement, in using gender as its organizing category, represented a radical critique of existing society and of liberal social reformism. It was concerned to free middle-class women from the strictures of patriarchal convention, legal and religious restraints and self-imprisoning conceptualizations of femininity and female self-sacrifice as well as endeavouring to ameliorate the condition of working-class women. Every corner of society, every social institution impinged on the condition of women and was thus, potentially at least, a target for feminist reform. The ideas of the women's movement were disseminated through intellectual circles, in literature and in popularized form through an expanding media. In the Netherlands one novel alone, *Hilda van Suylenberg*, is credited as establishing the feminist case for a middle-class Dutch public (Pollman, 1984; Bell, 1993: 148–51).[6] No less significant were the women professionals, who, sharing all the attributes of the new professional class, were able to argue the cause on incontrovertible scientific and practical grounds. This latter group, of which Dr Aletta Jacobs provides the most obvious example,[7] by drawing heavily on new radical socially relevant sciences, allied the more political strata of the women's movement to, for instance, the eugenicist discourse propagated by the New Malthusians. Within this discourse, the question of 'motherhood', as in Britain, was catapulted into both the scientific intellectual and political nationalist concerns of Dutch imperialism.[8]

Two distinct streams of Dutch feminism became discernible in the last decades of the 19th century, one, as it were, 'scientific' and radical, the other, 'cultural' and liberal (Everard, 1985; Mossink, 1986). Of the two it

was the latter, represented initially and most prominently by women such as Hélène Mercier and Annette Versluys-Poelman, which came to dominate the women's movement within progressive and liberal circles in metropolitan Netherlands and the colonial capital in Batavia (Everard, 1985; Wilde, 1986; Dudink, 1997).[9] This stream of feminist social critique, seen as a positive contribution to the amelioration of social inequities, most easily fitted the needs of social liberal reformers wanting to placate and pacify the emerging political voice of a working class, and linked easily with the older, church-dominated tradition of charity work of the church-affiliated women's groups.[10] This model of social work initiated by a benign well-to-do class was also most readily transportable to the social context of the Indies colony as a concern which could be supported by reformist men without a radical disruption of the politico-economic status quo. It fitted easily in the similar social structures of colonial life drawn as much by racial as by class lines while at the same time having the appearance of being 'modern' and 'progressive'.

Only at the end of the century did this fractured modern Dutch women's movement begin to turn its gaze to the condition of Dutch society in the colonies and its non-European appendage of nursemaids, servants and concubines. The 'colonial problem' called out for the more conservative of its impulses and in its rejection of 'uncivilized' colonial male behaviour, 'inhuman' native tradition, and 'ignorant' *Indisch* domestic life, the feminist voice was indistinguishable from the broader mainstream reformist discourse intent on defining racial and civilizational boundaries. This is perhaps most clearly evident in the political and radical wing of the feminist movement, which had perhaps least to offer women in the colony, European or Native. In 1912, Aletta Jacobs, the recognized leader of Dutch radical feminists, travelled to the Dutch East Indies colony as part of a world tour to lecture on and gain support for women's suffrage. While well received in the European communities where colonial European women were denied political representation of any kind, even in urban municipal elections, her appeal for support for the Dutch campaign was somewhat ironic. In the first place, the largest proportion of women classified as European was never likely to visit, let alone reside in, the Netherlands. Second, she had little to offer her 'sisters', indigenous Indonesians.

As a traveller and tourist she observed Indonesian women in passing through a distinctly feminist evolutionist perspective which froze the native woman in a variety of predetermined evolutionary stages which 'emphasized the mobile–immobile, free–unfree opposition that was part of the structure of colonial relations' (Grewal, 1996: 66). In what she described as the more primitive, pre-patriarchal matrilineal social formations of Minangkabau (West Sumatra), she found women in a developmental stage where they were still economically productive and happy.

As she travelled west to east through Java, the increasingly apparent misery of women's lives she explained as evidence of evolutionary social development resulting in more complex patriarchal social formations. That what she might have been seeing was the impact of more intensive colonial penetration appeared not to have been contemplated. Thus, while Sundanese women (West Java), in the first stages of a patriarchal social system, were presented as lazy, demoralized and immodest, further east, Javanese women, in a later evolutionary social formation were

> . . . not only ugly, but also appear less civilised than any other native people we have thus far seen in our colonies. The women have their hair thick and long and not neatly combed and arranged, their sarongs and kabayas appear dark and dirty and the thick plugs of sirih hanging between their lips completes the totally uncivilised impression they present. (Jacobs, 1913: 481)

Like other colonial progressives, she was more comfortable when visiting the Royal Paku Alum household in Yogyakarta, where she met 'all the princesses . . . [who] spoke perfect Dutch as well as several foreign languages'. Here she recognized the possibilities for change and Dutch intervention. She could 'welcome the modern Javanese woman, girls from the mould of Karthini [*sic*: i.e. Kartini], who would wish nothing more than to educate themselves to make themselves serviceable to the development of their Javanese sisters' (Jacobs, 1913: 485).[11]

In terms of broader colonial politics, her visit gave her an opportunity to learn from proponents of colonial reform from whose views hers did not deviate. She ridiculed – in the midst of her campaign to gain women's suffrage for Dutch women – radical demands by the Eurasian-led Indisch Partij for self-government. But, like other colonial progressives, she urged that traditional colonialist notions be replaced by more placatory paternalistic ones to achieve the longer-term objectives of a 'new imperialism':

> The idea that we Dutch are their superior must disappear; this idea must be destroyed with the weapon of education, in the first place in relation to the Dutch people living in or coming to settle in the Indies and in the second place in as far as it is held by the natives themselves. No reason exists on the basis of which we have a right to look down upon the native. They are another people, obviously, but in no sense a people of an inferior kind. We need them to undertake the work that we are unable to do there; they need us to educate them for which they are currently coming to feel the need. (Jacobs, 1913: 472)[12]

THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S EXHIBITION OF 1898 AND DUTCH FEMINISM

The high point of the Dutch feminist movement of the turn of the century was undoubtedly the exhibition the *Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid* (National Exhibition of Women's Work) held at the Hague in 1898.[13] In its successful exhibition of women's work,[14] in the publicity and the activity surrounding its planning, establishment and conduct, and, most importantly, in the extensive period of conferencing which accompanied it, it had, in the words of Aletta Jacobs's somewhat belated and grudging compliment (she had pointedly not attended):

> . . . shaken awake the slumbering energies of the doubters, the hesitators, the unenthusiastic, the enervated, and whatever else you might want to call them, and unified them to undermine the dam wall of prejudice which, to a great extent, still obstructs the progress and development of the women's movement here. (Jacobs, 1899: 2)

The congresses accompanying the exhibition held between July and September brought together speakers representing the broad range of the women's movement.[15] It dealt with women's issues from education to prostitution and from domestic economy to factory regulation, ranging in style from harangues encouraging further action to dispassionate descriptions of projects among the working classes. It clearly revealed the underlying tensions within the women's movement at the time: between socialist and liberal reformers, those who focused on the amelioration of socioeconomic conditions and those who demanded more organic and structural changes to society as the only cure to women's oppression; and more specifically, between those who argued that social reform should improve the lot of all disadvantaged groups, the lower classes and women, and those feminists who argued that the issues related to a (male) working class should be separated from those related to the position of women.

Much of the appeal by speakers for middle-class women to become involved in 'social work' had the air of *noblesse oblige* and lacked the reformist orientation of more radical feminists. Speakers emphasized the importance of improvement of home economy, sanitation, nutrition, methods of childrearing, the need for vocational training and better work conditions to foster 'appropriate' values and habits in working-class women. Little reference was made to access to professional training or legal and economic rights, let alone the question of franchise, issues which, from the perspective of more radical feminists, might have represented evidence of a 'real' awakening within middle-class women. The range of views expressed at this representative gathering of the (largely urban) social progressive forces of end of 19th-century Netherlands

indicates reformism largely left intact the fundamental pillars of social order. Leading male progressives (who incidentally were well represented in these audiences), while advocating reform in some aspects of society, were reluctant to countenance change to traditional patriarchal social structures while middle-class feminists and liberal reformers, in delineating the moral reform of the working class, consolidated the institutions of a bourgeois moral order (de Regt, 1984: 150).[16]

From the central agenda of the women's convention, colonial reformers were able to extrapolate, should they have wished to do so, a clear message for reform in the colony. In particular, the central preoccupation with the moral and educational function of the home and, within it, the pivotal role of the mother – the specific theme of the last of the exhibition congresses – made clear that the colonial home was highly vulnerable. Dominated as it was by the untutored Eurasian or indigenous 'housewife', by an air of sexual licentiousness, and where the nurturing of children was normally left to a lesser manifestation, the *babu*, an educative moral influence could not be expected (see Stoler, 1996).

This was the theme developed at the *Tentoonstelling* seminar 'On Women's Social Work in our Indies Colony', 22–24 August. At this session it was clear that the concern of the mainstream of the Dutch women's movement went no further than a critical focus on the colonial Eurasian community, seen here as the equivalent of the metropolitan working class. Thus, Mrs van Zuylen-Tromp, afterwards founder and president of the Vereeniging Oost en West (East-West Association) dedicated to assisting colonials during their Dutch furlough and to increasing knowledge about the colony in the Netherlands (in particular by collecting native arts and crafts), declared in words pre-empting the new colonial policy – the *ethicshe politiek* (an ethical policy) announced three years later that: 'We Netherlanders, Dutch men and women, we have an earnest responsibility, in both the West and the East Indies, which our attendance here symbolises'.[17] She saw the moral reform of Dutch colonial society, that is, of the technically European but largely Eurasian European community, as dependent on 'the influence of cultured European women', of middle-class women, teachers, wives of civil servants, officers or businessmen, who she noted were already having a civilizing effect. Even 'many Indies-born and educated women' (the reference is to Eurasian women) could, given the recent rapid improvements in education, be expected to be included as 'cultured' members of the European community.[18] This view replicated the social reformist mission of the Dutch liberal feminists whose views inspired the women's exhibition.

It is true that 'our Indies colony' was well represented at the exhibition. Already a standard feature at international and national exhibitions of this kind, 'the native village' occupied a prominent display in the exhibition grounds, presumably as a reminder of the work that awaited

women, although this was not directly suggested in the associated congresses. In any event, the native village display with its 'live' Javanese actors could, at best, be conceived of as indicating the 'women's work' of the Dutch feminists' Javanese sisters. Besides displaying 'the native', more orderly displays of indigenous craft decorated the exhibition halls. While this too was perhaps intended to suggest native women's work or at least domestic crafts – and thus suggesting a broader sense of sisterhood – these exhibits were by and large the barely provenanced artefacts from private 'collections' of European 'tourists': artefacts collected from around the Indies archipelago and largely provided by (the wives of) ex-colonial administrative officials and military officers during their tour of duty. In fact this exhibitionary presentation of the native was indistinguishable from the broader process of imperialist representation of the exotic East in museums and exhibitions throughout the colonial world in its symbolism of colonial control and in its reordering of indigenous culture (Grewal, 1996).

Among the collections, however, were an important group provided by Javanese royalty and a number of items contributed by Raden Ajeng Kartini, the Dutch-educated daughter of an old and important East Javanese family. Her bold intrusion into the Dutch feminist agenda, albeit at a distance, was to have important repercussions and indirectly encouraged later Dutch feminist interest in the condition of indigenous women, as we have seen. In so doing, as Kartini's subsequent extensive correspondence to Dutch women was to reveal, she not only set out an agenda for Indonesian women (Zainu'ddin, 1980; Robinson, 1987; Tiwon, 1996), but also commenced the education of metropolitan Dutch feminists.[19] Much of the early language in which this agenda was couched was, of necessity, a Dutch vocabulary borrowed from progressive colonial and metropolitan discourses. Read as such, the edited correspondence was to be employed posthumously to support one side of a colonial debate on policy. A reading of the complete text, however, clearly reveals that the process of translation moved beyond imitation to express Kartini's deeply felt and tragically experienced conditions of colonial and feudal oppression. The authenticity of this discourse is revealed when contrasted with the well-intentioned discourses of colonial progressives and Dutch feminists who later surrounded, and ultimately stifled, her project (Coté, 1995, 1997).

A key address by R.A. van Sandick to the 'Women's Social Work in our Indies Colony' seminar provides a good insight into the way the Dutch liberal feminist discourse could be effectively appropriated by colonial reformers and transposed from a national to an imperial stage. Sandick had been recently nominated as one of the few genuine advocates of 'ethical' colonial reform by the man who coined the term 'ethical policy'. Pieter Brooshooft, the outspoken and influential critic of colonial policy

and, until 1897, editor of the progressive colonial newspaper, *De Locomotief*, had nominated Sandick together with socialist parliamentarian (and former colonial engineer) Henry van Kol and aspiring politician (and former colonial lawyer) Conrad van Deventer as representatives of a new direction in colonial politics which had the welfare of the native at heart. Sandick had recently been appointed editor of the progressive journal on colonial affairs, *De Indische Gids*, till then owned and edited by C.E. van Kesteren, a major figure in the colonial reformist movement since the 1870s. To extended applause, this advocate of colonial reform set out for his audience in unambiguous terms how colonial reformers could appropriate the feminist discourse in defining a colonial mission for the respectable bourgeois woman:

> The cultured European woman has a noble field of labour in the Indies: carrier, no, more than that, symbol of western civilisation; incarnation in faraway Asia, in the burning tropics, of Dutch national character, in all its idiosyncrasies. Noble and difficult is the task of the European woman in the Indies. (van Sandick, 1898: 11)

Despite lacking preparation for their sojourn in the colony (or because of this), the untutored woman, he continued, 'is the only means of preventing Indies Society [some 60,000 Europeans] from going native [*om niet te verinlandschen*]', from 'not becoming Asianized [*niet te aziatiseeren*]', surrounded as it was by 30 million natives, 500,000 Chinese and 20,000 Arabs. Implicitly for van Sandick, it was her naivety and innocence which constituted her angelic influence in this colonial version of the metropolitan slum. Van Sandick wished to clarify that he 'did not intend to express any contempt for Asian culture or Asian concepts of morality' noting indeed 'I like natives very much' – but he insisted, 'we must remain European'. Without European women '[T]he Indies will become a regular native mess.' Dutch women were instrumental in securing the empire because, van Sandick regretted, 'we men . . . are dragged down by the force emanating from the native population'.

This colonial version of the 'civilizing woman', the common thread of many of the presentations at *Tentoonstelling* seminars dealing with urban and rural Netherlands, confirmed Dutch bourgeois ideology as a national and even universal European norm.[20] Here also, the 'uncivilized' life of the working classes which speakers at other sessions saw as endangering bourgeois society in the Netherlands, and which middle-class women were being called upon to modify, found its gross reflection in Asian society as a whole, consisting as it did of

> . . . millions of people without aesthetic sense, lacking any sense of higher aspiration, fatalistic in their attitude, quietly accepting of life and what life brings . . . where women are regarded merely as beasts of burden and objects of pleasure, reproduction and food production. (van Sandick, 1898: 13)

While explicitly not wishing to question the Dutchman's right to associate with Asian women – which would have represented an extreme challenge to existing colonial mores in the Dutch Indies – it became the duty of Dutch women to purify European society by example in a situation where

> [T]here are numerous gazetted Europeans of both sexes, native Christians whose civic and legal position is equal to that of Europeans but who gain not one drop of Caucasian blood upon being registered; thousands and thousands of offspring of European men who have relations under the palm trees with Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Malay, Makkassarese, Niasans, Chinese and Japanese women who in turn have intermarried amongst themselves. People whose minds wobble between European and Asian attitudes. (van Sandick, 1898: 12)

Implicitly, this view struck a more conservative position regarding social reform than its original template, proposals for the reform of a metropolitan Dutch working class as outlined at another of the *Tentoonstelling* seminars, on 'The Improvement of Public Morality'.[21] Although here, too, there was a reluctance to deal with underlying social structures, the metropolitan debate was nevertheless more sophisticated, more directly embedded in concerns about social conflict, reflecting a richer vein of social theorizing but also expressing a more optimistic prognosis. The central issue of this seminar was prostitution, its causes, the means of curtailing it and the 'reform' and welfare of prostitutes, single mothers and illegitimate children. The demand for reform here was based on theoretical premises which posited the influence of environment, rather than heredity, on character.[22] This Lamarkian argument, replicated in so many metropolitan settings at the time, showed that, rather than being caused by an innately immoral nature, anti-social behaviour of sections of the working classes was the result of inadequate housing, sanitation and education.[23] The slum districts of metropolitan cities, representing 'our own heathen fields', presented an environment in which most working-class heroes and heroines were too weak to withstand the inevitable moral decay induced by the deprivating physical influences which surrounded them.[24] Even here, however, although the logic of this argument might have suggested that the solution ultimately required amelioration through state intervention, if not social reconstruction, the real solution for this speaker, as for many others, lay in the reform of the individual home and ultimately depended on the moral influence exuded by the woman.[25] The creation of a *gezellig* (homely) household, a word that reverberates with Dutch petty bourgeois morality, and the preparation of the home as refuge from the world, was to be the balm for a social morality.[26]

CONCLUSION

Whereas in 19th-century Netherlands the 'productive virtue' of the individual had reigned as the defining measure of the older liberal social philosophy (Stuurman, 1992) and in the liberal version of colonial politics 'order' had been seen as flowing from the nature of colonial administration (van den Doel, 1994), increasingly the focus of the late 19th-century social progressive critique in both metropolitan Netherlands and its Indies colony had been directed at the nature of social (colonial) relations themselves. While it took some time for the position of liberal colonial reformers to find acceptance in metropolitan Netherlands, its arguments lay very close to the concerns of metropolitan social progressives. Both saw effective social reform as necessitating an engagement with the socioeconomic condition of the working – or indigenous – classes of society. In both the metropolitan and colonial context, this emphasized the cultural characteristics of class and race respectively which in both cases were seen as susceptible to evolutionary change. In this progressive redefinition of moral and social order, the private sphere, and women's place in it, gained a central place.

The women's movement participated in this broad philosophical shift. As numerous papers at the *Tentoonstelling* seminars demonstrated, in discussions of the role of women in social reform, bourgeois values shared by the dominant strands of the women's movement were being transposed into national values. Where this debate was being projected onto an outpost of European society, it formed an extension of the 'moral offensive' then taking place in the Netherlands itself. In this colonial version, the redefinition of moral order in the colony, (of 'the boundaries of rule'; Stoler, 1989), also centred on family as the moral wellspring and thus, in the first instance, European women were implicated as the markers of civilized values. In fin de siecle Netherlands – as distinct from debates within the colony itself – recognition of the native as an element of colonial society had hardly registered at the time of the *Nationale Tentoonstelling*. The cultural ambiguity of the 'mixed-blood' population and the heterogeneity of the European colonial community represented the focal point of the colonial nightmare. Metropolitan perceptions of the need for social reform in the colony at the end of the century extended only to the colonial equivalent of the metropolitan working classes, and did not yet perceive the native as coming under its orbit. In this, the women's movement showed itself to be no more informed about colonial relations than the majority of metropolitan society. In appropriating liberal social reformist discourse, colonial reformers in the Netherlands (in contrast to more informed advocates of colonial reform in the colony itself) found a rich vein of rhetorical imagery

surrounding the metaphor of woman which stood for metropolitan bourgeois values.

While such an agenda reverberated with class, nationalist and racial sentiment, it could nevertheless operate as a vehicle for demanding broader social reform, and, thus, for women, a vehicle for political expression within a domain women could confidently claim as their own in a patriarchal culture. It was also a politics which, at home and in the colony, could be readily turned to provide arguments for social change without revolution and for redefining racial and civilizational boundaries. For Indonesian women like Kartini, recovering the feminist agenda for a maternalist politics buried in colonial progressive and feminist discourse provided a means of conceptualizing the position of traditional Javanese women in ways which empowered her. It provided a basis for a political agenda, as it had done for western feminists. In that process of translation, indigenous women found a language to define their own needs and, necessarily, to enable them to make their own accommodations with urgent nationalist agendas.

NOTES

1. Even so, increasingly European women were seen to be in need of, and susceptible to improvement by, education.
2. I have examined this question in my unpublished PhD dissertation (Coté, 1997).
3. I have argued elsewhere that broadly considered colonial women's writing follows similar trends evident in the writing of the higher profile male colonial writers but also tends to reflect progressive colonial rather than conservative metropolitan attitudes (Coté, 1997).
4. Stoler's argument here is made in the context of her critique of Foucault whose analysis of knowledge and power in Europe and the constitution of European bourgeois identity, she shows, ignores the influence of the colonial experience.
5. At the beginning of the period, in 1875, no girls attended general high school, the *Hoogere Burger School* (HBS); by 1880 there were 691, by 1885 1000 and by 1900 1706. In 1880 the first female student entered classical secondary school, the *Gymnasium*, and 13 years later 65 were enrolled in secondary school. In 1871 the first female student was admitted to university, by 1889 there were three graduated female doctors, by 1894 there were 55 female undergraduates and by 1898 15 pharmacists. (Brok-ten Broek, 1968: 53–6). In 1899, of a population of 5,104,137, or 3,224, 590 over the age of 15, of whom 1,701,000 were women, fewer than half a million were recorded to be in work: the vast majority of these were employed in agriculture, with the next highest category being domestic work (figures from Fritschy, 1977: 112, Table 1).
6. In one year (1898–99) the book underwent three reprintings and remained a

topic of furious public debate in the media till 1900. In it, every item on the radical feminist agenda was raised.

7. Aletta Jacobs (1854–1929) spearheaded the Dutch suffrage movement. Her career as feminist agitator commenced when her application for inclusion on the electoral roll under new electoral legislation in 1877 as a professionally educated person and woman of independent means was refused. She was in close contact with the English suffragettes, the Fabian and scientific Eugenicist movements and, although president of the Dutch suffragette movement, *Vrouwen voor Vrouwenkiesrecht*, for many years, considered her work on contraception, which liberated poor women from the burdens of childrearing and consequent poverty, as her most important achievement.
8. Radical feminist adherents of New Malthusianism such as Jacobs can be distinguished from radical socialist feminists such as Cornélië Huygens. These two were distinguished not only by class origins, but also by the fact that the latter argued strenuously against the primacy of suffrage as a feminist objective, calling first, as a socialist, for the transformation of the attitudes of middle-class women (Huygens, 1896).
9. Hélène Mercier (1839–1910) the self-educated daughter of an Amsterdam insurance underwriter wrote extensively on social reform for the working classes and for the social emancipation of women. She was closely associated with the leaders of the broader cultural liberal reformist movement critiquing contemporary bourgeois society (Wilde, 1986; Dudink, 1997). The attention given to more radical feminists like Mercier and Jacobs by a dominant socialist historiography, argues Everard, has obscured the significance of liberal feminists such as Annette Versluys-Poelman (the first president of the VVVK, *Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht* [Association for Women's Suffrage]) and other mainstream feminists who more accurately reflected the reformist interests of a *kleineburgerij* or petit bourgeoisie. In the colony itself, a short-lived colonial journal, *De Echo*, reflected such metropolitan liberal feminist views. Dutch colonial women, *totoks,* although doubtless influenced by metropolitan trends, would have had little opportunity (or interest) to influence colonial circumstances due to the transitory nature of their (husband's) colonial appointments.
10. See also Bervoets (1994: 45ff.). While her main argument is that a clear distinction can be made between 'old-fashioned' religiously inspired female charity work and the 'new' 'social work', she nevertheless also argues for the significance of the convergence of 'new' or 'social liberalism' and the moderate wing of more radical reformist movements such as socialists and feminists. Bervoets's discussion provides evidence from the Dutch context for the broader proposition argued by Koven and Michel (1993) cited earlier.
11. She further comments 'Would the writer of *Hilda van Suylenberg* ever have thought that here, in the middle of Java, she could have found such dear admirers as the princesses of the house of Paku Alam ?' There is no indication that Jacobs noted Kartini's criticism of the royal courts. Jacobs was critical of the educational endeavours of Kartini's Sundanese contemporary Dewi Sartika, who established a girls' school in Bandung where she noted traditional obeisance existing side by side with attempts to teach reading and writing, although she admired the motivation and felt herself moved to support native girls' education - 'what an expanse of uncultivated talent still lies awaiting our land to be harvested if we provided the opportunity to Javanese women as well as the men' (Jacobs, 1913: 476–7). The same colonial dream motivated colonial progressives.

12. Lack of space prevents further discussion. See Blackburn (1997) for a somewhat different perspective on Jacobs' visit.
13. The discussion here is based on an examination of the collected papers of *Tentoonstelling* congresses. Lack of space precludes discussion of how the papers on *ons Indisch colonie* relate to other congress papers. Discussion of the contemporary situation in the East Indies would also necessitate a separate paper.
14. The use of the term '*arbeid*' (labour) in relation to women in the exhibition's title itself was significant. C. Meijers draws attention to the fact that earlier women's exhibitions felt unable to do so (Meijers, 1968: 109). On the other hand, the *Tentoonstelling* was designed to be an element of the celebrations in honour of the coronation of Holland's Queen Wilhelmina and was thus consciously located in a nationalist (and emerging imperialist) context paralleling the earlier development in the women's movement in Britain (Poeze, 1986: 25).
15. The account of the *Tentoonstelling* provided by Grever and Waaldijk (1998) appeared too late to be incorporated into the discussion of this article but of course needs to be consulted for a fuller overview and assessment of the *Tentoonstelling*. A fascinating commemorative exhibition, 'De Glorie van het Ongeziene', was mounted by the Internationaal Informatie en documentatie centrum en Archief van de Vrouwenbeweging (IIAV) in Amsterdam in 1998. The names and dates of the seminars held during the 1898 exhibition are as follows:
    11–14 July Conference on Vocational Training for Women.
    19–21 July Conference on Social Work.
    25–26 July Congress on the Upbringing of Orphans.
    27 July Conference on the Means to Simplify Domestic Work.
    28–30 July Three-day conference on Advancement of Public Morality.
    6 August Conference on the Crafts: Fancy Needlework, the Artistic Aspects of Gardening and the Theatre.
    10–30 August Education Congress.
    21 August Congress on Domestic Servants.
    22–24 August Report on a three-day conference on Women's Social Work in our Indies Colony.
    26 August Seminar on the International Union of Women for Disarmament.
    26 August Seminar on the Women's Movement and the Labour Movement.
    29–30 August Conference on the Social Position of Women.
    1–2 September Conference on Home Hygiene, the Home and District Nursing.
    5 September Conference on Industrial Schools.
    14–15 September Conference on the Task of the Mother and Educator.
16. For instance Henry van Kol and M.W.F. Treub. On the former see, for instance, Tichelman (1988); on the latter, see Dudink (1997). While this liberal socialist and social liberal were fully in tune with the spirit of the sessions, there was strenuous intervention on the part of the leader of the socialist movement, P.J. Toelstra, who demanded the precedence of class over women's claims, a position in turn resisted by the leading feminist socialist, Cornélië Huygens. Other radical progressive men, such as Tak van Poortvliet and F.M. Wibaut, also criticized programmes advocated by liberal feminists as not going far enough to modify structural bases of

social inequality, by which they indicated a primary concern for male/class claims over those of women.

17. A key event in colonial historiography is the royal speech at the opening of parliament after the 1901 elections, which brought to power the first conservative, anti-liberal government based on support of clerical parties, which advocated support for principles of Christian education and social reform both nationally and in terms of colonial policy.
18. The *Vereeniging Oost en West*, established at the beginning of 1899 to maintain the momentum of interest generated at the *Tentoonstelling*, came to include almost the entire corps of colonial progressives as well as, initially, Dutch-educated Javanese. Its Eurocentric focus was in 1903 to 'strengthen the bonds between the Netherlands and her possessions and colonies and to promote their common interests as well as the interest of East and West Indies in particular'. In 1900 it established a periodical, *Het Kolonial Weekblad*, for which two Indonesian members, Abdul Rivai and Kartono Tjondronegoro, wrote articles. In 1900 it had a membership of 600 which increased rapidly to 2800 in 1903, in which year it was involved in efforts to raise funds to bring Kartini to the Netherlands (Jacquet, n.d.).
19. See Jacquet (1987) for the first full text of Kartini's correspondence to Rosa Abendanon-Mandri between 1900 and 1904. See Coté (1992, 1995) for an English translation. An extensive bibliography on Kartini exists (see in particular Taylor, 1976, 1989, 1993). The result of Kartini's 'education' of Dutch feminists is apparent in the subsequent women's exhibition of 1913, based on the theme the house, which also marked an important nationalist anniversary, namely, the anniversary of Dutch independence.
20. Two other papers dealt in general terms with the moral role of women in the colony. I.F. Scheltema, in his paper 'De Vrouw en de Volksopvoeding in Oost Indie' (The Woman and the Education of the People in the East Indies) discussed the necessity of educating girls in the colony as instruments for the re-education of society – 'De Indische vrouw [zal] het volk in het algemeen opvoeden' (The Indies Woman Will Educate [raise up] the Community in General) (*Verslag, Arbeid van de vrouw . . . in Onze Indische bezittingen*, p. 207). This required not academic bookish education but moral education so that the *Indisch* woman could promote the development of *Indisch* society with tact and by example. The second paper advocated schools for mothers, *moederscholen*, as the basis of social reform. Both papers failed to specify but clearly assumed a focus on Indo-European, *Indische*, and thus European, women rather than *Inlandsche*, or native women.
21. 'Driedaagsche Samenkomst tot Bevodering der Openbare Zedelijkheid, (Three Day Meeting to Promote the Interests of Public Morality) 28–30 July 1898. It brought together liberal and socialist feminists, aristocrats and socialists, medical practitioners and ministers of religion.
22. See M. Huizinga (1898: 151–63).
23. Such views also were a response to fears of class conflict. Social progressives held that decent workers were not engaged in a class struggle but were simply no longer able to tolerate the social conditions they experienced, and that these conditions were rectifiable by government intervention. The colonial 'ethical policy' of the 20th century can be conceived of in these terms, that is, as attempting to address the dangers of a racial (more accurately a nationalist) conflict, but the argument here was that unlike the implication of social reform in seminars dealing with the metropolitan

condition, references to the colonial condition reflected the more conservative end of the social reformist continuum.

24. This almost incidental reference to 'internal' missionary work indicates an important substratum of thinking which linked the prior focus on missionary activities among 'the heathen' of the empire to the dangerous 'other' within the urban metropolis (Jones, 1980: Ch. 5). Lamarkianism posited that 'changes in heredity occurred through the effort of the organism to adapt to changed conditions in its environment' (Jones, 1980: 80). It implied a prospect of evolutionary progress over generations through the manipulation of the environment.
25. This 'liberal reformism' supported the women's movement in as far as it was a cooperative movement for social reform. 'The woman of every social class, through simplicity of dress and through improvement of the home, can contribute directly and indirectly to the improvement of morality' (Huizinga, 1898: 160). This required the liberation and education of women as well as the 'self-control' of men.
26. Speakers at the seminar on women's crafts contributed to this theme of advocating the development of working-class women's aesthetic sensibility without considering the feminist goal of emancipation (see, for example, Meyboom, 1914).

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