

# Travelling the Dutch East Indies

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES  
AND LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS

Edited by  
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# Indigenous Eyes

## Javanese Colonial Travel Texts as Autoethnographic Expressions: The Case of Purwalelana and Suparta

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The year 2020 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indonesia gaining independence, yet the memory of the colonial past in ‘the East’ is still very much alive.<sup>1</sup> Rarely a week passes in which the Dutch media do not pay it some form of attention. Prompted by its multi-ethnic society, in the Netherlands today, the demand that the long-held dominant view on the Dutch East Indies be radically overhauled has never been heard so strongly as it has over recent years. In 2015, in the title of his book about slavery in the Indies, the Dutch writer Reggie Baay called for the old colonial motto ‘Daar werd wat groots verricht’ (‘There was a great achievement done’) to be replaced with the postcolonial version: ‘Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht’ (‘There was a great atrocity done’).<sup>2</sup> In 2016, a comprehensive research programme entitled *Independence, Decolonization, Violence, and War in Indonesia* was launched on behalf of the Dutch government to investigate the violence used during the Indonesian war of independence (completed in 2022). Numerous books have been published that focus on the dark side of colonialism, one such work being the (2019) book by actor Thom Hoffman, whose frequently horrifying photographs reveal how the Dutch pursued a policy of racism, repression, and destruction in the Indies.<sup>3</sup> That times have changed is further evidenced by the fact that in 2020, King Willem-Alexander offered Indonesia his apologies for the Dutch violence used during the war of decolonisation (1945-1949). This was a historic moment, in which he went a step further than his mother, Queen Beatrix.

Many Dutch museums ponder ways of ‘decolonising’ and avoiding colonial language. Recently, the Netherlands, as well as other countries, have witnessed a rekindling of the debate on the question of what to do with the statues of colonial ‘heroes’. Can the statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen – the ‘founding father’ of Batavia, who has, amongst other things, the death of thousands of Bandanese on his conscience – remain in the North-Holland town of Hoorn, or should it be removed from the public space?<sup>4</sup> Such discussions are part of what could be termed the Dutch *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.<sup>5</sup> Just as the Germans have been trying to come to terms with their National Socialist past since the end of World War II, so the Netherlands has been grappling with its colonial history.



Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Hoorn with school children in front of it. Photograph from the beginning of the twentieth century. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-F-2005-47.

Unlike Germany, the process of ‘working through’ the past got off to a relatively slow start in the Netherlands – not gathering real momentum until the last decade. Until recently, the prevailing nostalgic *tempo doeloe* (‘times of yesteryear’) perception was that the Netherlands, as a ‘humane’ coloniser, had done much that was good for the Indies/Indonesia, including the founding of schools and hospitals, and the construction of roads. The work of the Dutch writer and scholar Rob Nieuwenhuys (1908-1999) is illustrative of this nostalgic cultural memory. Whilst acknowledging its dark sides, it does, however, still offer a romanticised view of the old Indies. Nieuwenhuys accepted that the Netherlands had lost the colony at the same time he felt nostalgic about his youth there, and thus he allowed himself to be moved by stories and photographs from *tempo doeloe*.<sup>6</sup> For those who knew the Indies from personal experience, its loss often gave rise to such nostalgia. In 2018, the Dutch writer Kester Freriks, who was born in Jakarta

in 1954, published the literary pamphlet *Tempo doeloe, een omhelzing* (Tempo Doeloe, an Embrace), in which he demanded the right to be homesick and feel a longing for the Indies of his childhood, where he had felt happy.<sup>7</sup> It is, however, important to distinguish between individual experiences and a nation's collective memory, for the Dutch colonial project was – as is every form of colonialism – also inextricably bound up with racism, violence, and repression. For each person's beautiful memories, there is also the suffering of others who had no voice.

## A Historiographic Problem

Processing the colonial past is not only a societal problem; there is also a historiographic deficit. The history of Dutch colonialism in 'the East' has almost exclusively been written from a Dutch perspective, whereas the Indonesian perspective has largely been neglected. In the context of the Dutch *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, it is equally crucial to focus attention on how Indonesians experienced colonialism and to include Indonesian sources in the investigation. But reality is unruly: a credible counter-archive in Dutch does not exist.<sup>8</sup>

This is to do with the language policy that the Dutch pursued in the Indies. The right to learn Dutch was the preserve of a small elite within the colony, meaning the majority of Indonesians were excluded. Furthermore, they did not have to learn the language, as the Dutch gradually learnt to use Malay and its vernaculars. Dutch language education was largely non-existent for Indonesians until 1863 – a conscious choice that was politically motivated. On this specific point, the Dutch scholar Kees Groeneboer remarks:

Explicitly rejecting a language and education policy such as pursued by the English in British India, the Dutch decided against Western education on a large scale. An uncontrolled spread of Western knowledge by means of a European language would only endanger the existence of the colony.<sup>9</sup>

Dutch writer Rudy Kousbroek puts it another way: the coloniser regarded a surplus of Indonesians who had a good command of the Dutch language as a 'threat to the so-called "harmonious development of the indigenous population", read: a threat to Dutch supremacy'.<sup>10</sup>

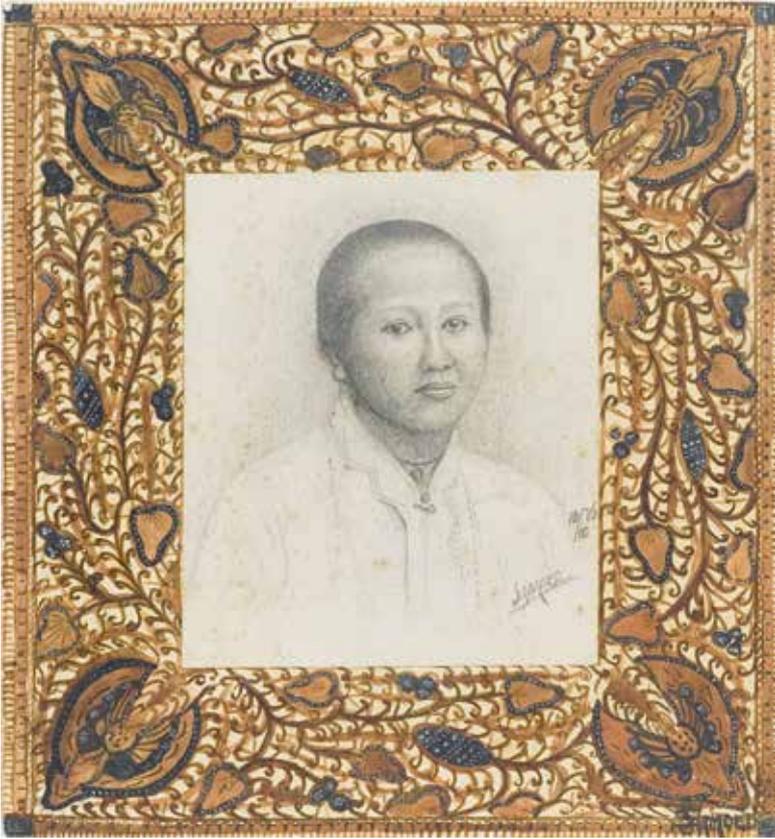
Exceptions were only made for a limited number of children of well-to-do indigenous families and a small number of Chinese families. The argument put forward in support of this policy was that educating and 'civilising' an indigenous elite would benefit mutual understanding and enhance the trust between coloniser and colonised. Only from around 1865 were Indonesians given increasingly more opportunities to learn Dutch, but the numbers of those actually taking up those opportunities remained limited. Indeed, by 1900, they totalled no more than five thousand, whilst the number

of Dutch-speaking people of Chinese origin amounted to approximately six hundred. Moving into the twentieth century, in the context of the Dutch 'ethical policy', learning Dutch on the part of Indonesians received more attention, as it became seen as a 'Gateway to the West' and as a means to eventually extend the autonomy of the indigenous population. However, whilst access to Dutch-language education in the colony was indeed eased, it did not result in the admission of large groups. Thus, although 860,000 Indonesians knew Dutch by 1942, they accounted for a mere one per cent of the total population.<sup>11</sup>

The Dutch decision to pursue a divergent language policy also had an impact on colonial literature. Whereas British, Spanish, Portuguese, or French research typically includes indigenous perspectives because the colonised wrote in the coloniser's language, this poses a problem in the context of Dutch-Indies studies, as the number of Indonesians using the oppressor's language remained scarce. Rudy Kousbroek remarked that the volume of Indonesian literature written in Dutch is very small indeed: 'A few novels (how many? five?), poems, memoirs, letters and some essays, a meagre yield, after three glorious centuries of Dutch colonisation. Enough to write a paper about, but too little for a PhD thesis.'<sup>12</sup>

In 1996, the Dutch literary scholar Peter van Zonneveld also problematised the fact that so few Indonesians 'wrote back' in Dutch. He claimed that of the many thousands of texts making up Indies literature, a mere 'handful' came from the colonised themselves. He characterised them as no more than 'scratches on a rock' – referring to the 1970 book of the same title by Dutch novelist Hella S. Haasse. She in turn had borrowed her title from a letter by the Dutch writer Willem Walraven from the Indies, in which he stated: 'We will be going under here, we ourselves, or our descendants, but they will change in nothing. Not even a scratch on a rock does our influence amount to...'<sup>13</sup>

From this observation Van Zonneveld went on to conclude that the concept of 'writing back' that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin introduced in their famous book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) has little or no bearing on the Dutch Indies.<sup>14</sup> According to Van Zonneveld, there were only two ways to fill this gap. First, one could study how the indigenous people are represented in Dutch sources – an approach that of course necessarily favours the Dutch rather than the Indonesian perspective. Second, one could study Dutch-language texts by Indonesians.<sup>15</sup> Examples include the letters by the Javanese aristocratic Lady Kartini, collected in *Door duisternis tot licht* (1911, *Out of Darkness to Light*); the poetry of Javanese poet Noto Soeroto; the *Indonesische overpeinzingen* (1945, *Indonesian Musings*) by Sutan Sjahrir; and the two novels written by Indonesians in Dutch, *Buiten het gareel* (1940, *Out of Harness*) by Suwarsih Djojopuspito, and *Widjajawati* (1948) by Arti Purbani, the pseudonym of Partini Djajadiningrat.<sup>16</sup> Whilst these may be enough for a PhD dissertation, as the output of a centuries-long union between the Netherlands and the Indies, it is rather little.



Portrait of Kartini, drawn from a photograph by 'Samoed', 1916. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 37C44.

Apparently, even in 1996, the time was not yet right for the suggestion, as a third option, that indigenous sources or texts (whether or not of a literary nature) could be researched.<sup>17</sup> This obviously requires learning the original languages as, without a command of these, one needs to resort to translations. Indonesians have always written, regardless of Dutch censorship. A manuscript culture existed until well into the nineteenth century. There was no Western censorship on texts, literary or otherwise, that circulated in handwritten copies. It was not until the end of that century that separate Indonesian texts appeared in print, but these were not subject to Western censorship either. It was only post-1917 that the director of the Committee for Popular Literature kept a watchful eye on the indigenous press. Previously, the Dutch Arabic and Islamic scholar Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje would monitor what was being written on behalf of the government, albeit always

'after the act'.<sup>18</sup> The impact of oral distributions of texts in the Indies is often underestimated. For example, a single 'reader' would read a text to villagers, the content subsequently being relayed to tens, perhaps hundreds more.

The study of indigenous texts poses some practical problems. Many sources are not yet available in translation. Moreover, many are printed in Javanese language and script. It takes the specialist knowledge of a scholar of Indonesian languages and cultures to translate them. There are of course Western and Asian scholars who can read these languages, nonetheless, in debate on the history of the Dutch colonial past these have been seriously neglected. In the field of Dutch Studies, these practical objections have to this day stood in the way of research into indigenous counter-narratives, insofar as they have been preserved at all. However, we are fortunate that translations of two Javanese travel texts have become available that can shed new light on Dutch colonialism in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

### **Autoethnographic Expressions**

For this article, I have drawn on the insights of literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt, who introduced these in her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (originally published in 1992).<sup>19</sup> In it, she shows that most European travellers rarely represent colonisation in their texts as a process that is consolidated through violence. Pratt points out that they used various strategies to conceal any involvement in the subjugation of the colony. They depicted their presence in the colony as a 'natural matter of course' or made it seem as if they had nothing to do with the colonisation, whilst at the same time underlining their white hegemony. Thus, a traveller could present himself as a scientist studying the colony out of genuine interest in the indigenous nature and culture – something that had nothing to do with a desire to conquer or repress. Other European travellers depicted the colony as a pristine and 'empty' paradise, uninhabited but abounding in natural resources. In yet other sources the colony is represented as dangerous – an environment in which Europeans need to be on their guard. These various European 'strategies of innocence', all of which that feature in the travel texts, are discussed by Pratt under the umbrella term 'anti-conquest'.<sup>20</sup>

In 2020, the Vidi project *Voicing the Colony: Travelers in the Dutch East Indies 1800-1945* started at Leiden University, financed by The Dutch Research Council (NWO). Focusing on travel writing, a team of two Dutch literary scholars and a scholar of Indonesian languages and cultures work to provide a new, double-voiced perspective on the colonial past in the Dutch Indies. Leiden's Asian Library, which houses one of the largest collections on Indonesia in the world, also holds a rich collection of colonial travel texts from the nineteenth and twentieth century. The texts are not only writ-

ten in Dutch, but also in Malay and Javanese, and appear in both manuscript and print form.<sup>21</sup> Due to the problems outlined above, to date, many of these sources – with few exceptions – have been barely, if at all, studied, even though they offer the potential to provide a different perspective on Dutch colonialism.<sup>22</sup>

Subsequent years will show what discoveries can be made. Until such time, as any new revelations become apparent, we depend on translations for the study of indigenous perspectives. Two sources have recently emerged: one from the nineteenth century, the other from the early-twentieth century. First of all, there is the travel journal by the Javanese nobleman Raden Mas Arya Candranegara V, who travelled through Java between 1860 and 1875 and published, under the name Purwalelana, a travel text in Javanese. A Dutch translation was published in 2013, followed by an English translation in 2020.<sup>23</sup> A second text appeared in 1916, by the Javanese prince Radèn Mas Arya Suryasuparta, who travelled to the Netherlands in 1913.<sup>24</sup> A Dutch translation appeared in 2014, followed by an Indonesian edition three years later.<sup>25</sup>

Despite their obvious differences, the above texts provide important perspectives on the Indies and Dutch colonialism through indigenous eyes. Both were written by Javanese authors who occupied leading positions in colonial society: Candranegara belonged to the ‘priyayi’ (Javanese elite), whilst Suryasuparta was counted amongst the high nobility and therefore held in even higher regard. Sadly, the voices of ‘ordinary’ people – those who were uneducated, illiterate, and who often barely managed to survive – are lost forever. They have left no written traces. Anyone wishing to study the indigenous perspective is dependent on sources from the elite.

The two travel texts by Purwalelana and Suryasuparta could be characterised as ‘autoethnographic expressions’, to use Pratt’s terminology. Pratt’s ‘autoethnography’ was an allusion to ‘instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage* with the colonizer’s terms’. Where, in her view, ‘ethnographic’ texts give expression to the views and self-representation of white Europeans, ‘autoethnographic’ works are ‘texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations’.<sup>26</sup> Autoethnographic texts, then, are not ‘authentic’ indigenous self-representations because they partly adjust to the colonial manner of representation: there is ‘appropriation’ and ‘partial collaboration with the idiom of the conqueror’.<sup>27</sup> Such expressions are a frequent phenomenon in the ‘contact zone’ that every colony, including the Indies, was: ‘the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, racial inequality, and intractable conflict.’<sup>28</sup>

Pratt uses the concept of autoethnography to demonstrate that the situation in the contact zone was never black and white; there was not always a clear distinction between coloniser and colonised. The position of the

Raden Mas Arya Candranegara V, circa 1862. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 32087.



priyayi and high nobility, to which the two Javanese travellers mentioned above belonged, is illustrative in this regard. As previously stated, both held highly privileged positions. They may have had a lower status than the Dutch, but they ranked far above 'ordinary' Indonesians – also in Javanese culture. In order to retain their positions, they worked closely together with the Dutch. Supervised by the government, they were responsible for managing the land. This gave them access to key positions, which ensured a good future for them and their children. Yet simultaneously, as I will show, their autoethnographic expressions also contain elements of counter-narrative – signs of a (albeit restrained) critical attitude towards the coloniser.

In this article, the two travel texts are subjected to a critical analysis. The existing literature mostly adopts a cultural-historical perspective or uses the texts as information sources.<sup>29</sup> I, however, want to ask: in what manner did the noblemen write about the Indies, about the colonised and the coloniser? To what extent do their two travel texts show signs of 'appropriation' of colonial ideas? And to what extent do they (overtly or covertly) show resistance to hegemonic colonial discourse? Analysis of these texts will reveal the complexity of the autoethnographic position in the colonial system.

## Two Javanese Travellers

Before we focus on the autoethnographic position, let us first introduce the two travellers. Purwalelana was the pseudonym of the Javanese nobleman Raden Mas Arya Candranegara V.<sup>30</sup> Born in 1837, he was Regent of Kudus from 1858 to 1880 and subsequently, from 1880 until his death in 1885, Regent of Brebes, both in Central Java. His travel account, in Javanese script, was published in two volumes between 1865 and 1866 by the Dutch-Indies Landsdrukkerij (national publishing house) in Batavia. It was one of the first Indonesian texts to appear in print. A second edition in two volumes was published later: *Cariyos bab lampah-lampahipun raden mas arya Purwalelana sampun keleresaken tetembungan sarta ukaranipun saha cariyosipun kaewahan amendhet kawontenanipun sapunika dening raden mas adipati arya Candranegara (1877) and Lampah-lampahipun raden mas arya Purwalelana kaewahan kawewahan tuwin kaleresaken dening raden mas adipati arya Candranegara bupati ing Kudus (1880).*

Purwalelana was aware that his was an extraordinary work, given its contemporary description of Java: 'I decided to write this book because hitherto I have never heard or read any Javanese literature devoted to contemporary events. All the texts I am familiar with tell of kings and nobles and of invincible heroes and their skills on the battlefield.'<sup>31</sup> His choice of the pseudonym Purwalelana too, meaning something akin to 'first traveller', was far from coincidental. He writes in the first person and adopts a personal style.



Prince Mangkunegara's carriage. Painting by Alardus Haaxman, circa 1867. Mangkunegara IV was Purwalelana's father-in-law. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, SK-A-4968.

This is unique, considering the fact that, in the Javanese culture, it was considered socially rather 'blunt' to put yourself in the centre of attention. Candranegara's work received public recognition and in 1870, he was admitted to the Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences as one of its first Javanese members.

Purwalelana was the son of the Regent of Demak and received a European education. Besides Malay and Javanese, he also spoke Dutch, French, and English fluently. Presumably, the nobleman served as an example to the lower-ranking natives; he embodied the 'civilised' Javanese individual who had internalised European values and standards. He made four different journeys in the years between 1860 and 1875, visiting a total of eighteen residencies or districts on Java, from Batavia in the west to Banyuwangi in the east. He recorded the experiences he had gained on his travels into four consecutive travel texts.<sup>32</sup>

Much is revealed about Purwalelana's status by the fact that he had his own carriage, pulled by six post horses, which were regularly changed along the way. Occasionally, on steep tracks 'iron brake shoes' had to be placed on its wheels to stop them from descending too fast and the horses were then led down by the reins. Once or twice 'four teams of buffaloes' were added when differences in altitude required extra pulling power. During his fourth journey through Java, Purwalelana was terrified that his carriage would fall apart on account of the bad roads, broken bridges, and deep, water-filled gullies, causing the carriage to jolt along, with many jerks and bumps. He also preferred to travel during the day as certain areas, for example in the Yogyakarta principality, were not considered safe after dark. Due to food shortages in the region 'numerous street robbers and other bandits' operated in the area.<sup>33</sup>

Twenty-eight years after Purwalelana's death, another Javanese nobleman, Radèn Mas Arya Suryasuparta (1885-1944) or, in short, Suparta, set out on his travels, producing a second text that has survived to this day.<sup>34</sup> He was the third son of Mangkunegara V, had received a Western education, and had worked at the government's offices in Surakarta. Suparta spoke Dutch well and was familiar with modern Dutch literature. At the time, the Dutch had embarked on a new socio-economic policy in the Indies. This was the time of the so-called 'ethical policy', which not only pursued the exploitation of the Indies, but also addressed the interests of the indigenous population. As investments were made in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, the population's self-awareness increased further. This found expression, for example, in the founding of societies such as Budi Utomo (The Beautiful Endeavour) in 1908, the goal of which was the education and development of the Javanese population through exposure to Western knowledge whilst retaining their native culture, and Sarekat Islam, founded to further Indonesian material and spiritual development. Suparta was involved in both initiatives.



Raden Mas Haryo Suryo Suparta as grenadier during his stay in the Netherlands, circa 1915. Leiden University Libraries, /KITLV 34457.

Suparta did not tour Java, instead embarking on a thirty-day voyage to the ‘country of the oppressor’ on the *Wilis* – a ship operated by the Rotterdam Lloyd shipping line.<sup>35</sup> On 14 June 1913, having been granted leave by the government to study Indology, he departed from Semarang. The idea was that in the Netherlands he could gain modern insights that would help him perform his future function as a ruler. The trip was an adventure for Suparta, but also meant being parted from his wife and young daughter.<sup>36</sup> This daughter would later become the writer Arti Purbani – the pseudonym of Partini Djajadiningrat (1902-1998). Once in Leiden, Suparta attended lec-

tures by Professor Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, befriended the Javanese poet Noto Soeroto, and joined the Indische Vereeniging (Indies Association).<sup>37</sup> When World War I broke out in 1914, and the Netherlands mobilised, Suparta enlisted as a grenadier. He was given military training, but, as the Netherlands remained neutral, never saw military action. He returned home in 1915, and the following year became the ruler of the Central-Javanese principality Mangkunegaran: Mangkunegara VII. A prince, Suparta ranked higher on the social ladder than Candranegara, who was a regent. However, as Candranegara was married to one of Mangkunegara's daughters, he did have close connections with the court.

At the request of the Dutch government Suparta wrote an account of his travels, which was subsequently published in Javanese: *Serat cariyos kekesahan saking tanah Jawi dateng nagari Walandi; saking Semarang dumugi ing Marseille*. It appeared as number 168 in the Series of Publications by the Committee for Popular Literature.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, he did not write about his stay in the Netherlands. Instead, he restricted himself to a description of his journey from Semarang to Marseille in France. The underlying purpose of the publication was that the text might guide Indonesian readers in the 'right direction' regarding their development. After all, Suparta was well-educated and 'endowed with Western intellectual baggage and rooted in the tradition of his country' and thus a good 'guide towards the modern era for his "un-educated" compatriots'.<sup>39</sup>

The journey made a deep impression on Suparta. He had never before sailed on such a large ship and marvelled at the beauty of the Indies seen from the water. With an indigenous reading public in mind, Suparta includes a great many facts in his account: he describes in great detail the internal layout of the ship for his readers. He travelled via Semarang to the port of Tanjung Priok in Batavia, where he stayed for three days and had every opportunity to look around. From there, he continued his journey to Padang on West-Sumatra. Via the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, he finally arrived in Europe, at the port of Marseille.

A point of difference with Purwalelana's journey is that by 1913, the 'Petrol Age' had begun.<sup>40</sup> The first motorcycle made its appearance in the Indies in 1883, the first car arriving a year later. Even so, there were no more than fifteen cars to be found on the whole of Java around 1900.<sup>41</sup> Of course, from then on, their number gradually increased. Whilst delayed in Padang, Suparta went for a drive in an automobile and thus still managed to get a good impression of the town and its surroundings even though he only spent an afternoon there.<sup>42</sup>

Reading Purwalelana's and Suparta's texts, one is struck by the fact that they contain characteristics that also feature in Western travel texts. For instance, the unknown is often made familiar through a comparison with something from the known culture – a rhetorical figure that Carl Thompson defines as 'simile'.<sup>43</sup> According to Pratt, this is a form of colonial appro-

priation,<sup>44</sup> but it was a topos that Javanese noblemen also used, not least, as many of the areas they visited were new to them, too. When Purwalelana visits the high-altitude village of Panjalu, on West-Java, he spots a lake, surrounded by mountains in the distance. In the lake are seven small islands that look like ‘rice cones’; a description he also uses for Mount Tidar near Magelang in Central Java. Similarly, in the port of Surabaya he sees a drydock that he describes as a ‘floating structure that resembles in fact the wooden chest for storing *wayang* puppets, but without a cover’.<sup>45</sup> Suparta, in a similar vein, likens a boat he sees on his travels to a ‘watermelon that has been cut open’ and describes the stars in the sky as ‘rice grains that had been scattered in the air’.<sup>46</sup> It is of course logical that the two noblemen fall back on elements from their own world in their comparisons, but it is also characteristic of the Javanese perspective.

It typifies Purwalelana’s and Suparta’s autoethnographic positions that they move with equal ease in the Dutch-Indies and Indonesian contexts. This is illustrated in the text about Purwalelana’s first journey, when he visits Buitenzorg (presently called Bogor). Whilst there, he goes to the horse races, a typically European kind of entertainment. Numerous prominent public figures make their appearance. Even the governor-general and his wife grace the meeting with their presence. The nobleman is delighted. On his second journey he witnesses some bull races, organised by the indigenous population to mark the end of their fasting – something he also finds quite an experience.<sup>47</sup> Despite their very different settings, his descriptions of the two events are comparable and hence, it is impossible to decide where he felt more at ease.

However, it appears that the noblemen were largely ignored by colonial Dutchmen. It is clear from both texts that whilst the Javanese travellers had regular contact with the Dutch, the latter do not appear all that often in their narratives, except by way of backdrop. At no point in Purwalelana’s narrative are they given a speaking part, and his account fails to clarify whether he actually conversed with them. In colonial texts by Dutch writers, the white characters usually occupy a different world from the natives. They are, in the words of Elleke Boehmer, ‘disconnected from native life’.<sup>48</sup> Whilst Purwalelana worked with the Dutch, on his travels he was largely ‘disconnected from European life’. He visits club (‘Sociëteit’) buildings, but is not invited for meetings of ‘the Club’ (de ‘soos’); he visits horse races, but as a spectator and outsider only; he is invited by indigenous regents, but never by Dutch administrators; he sits down to a meal with some Dutch people, but does not, according to his text, take part in the conversation.

The same goes for Suparta. The Dutch pay him very little heed on his travels. The only person to talk to him is a merchant from Zaandam with a broad accent, who is kind to him. This was very different from the arrogant way in which most other Dutch persons, who suffered from a ‘feeling of superiority’, treated him. Suparta sighed: ‘How glad I would be if my wish



could be fulfilled, and I were treated as an equal by the nation that rules over Java, my homeland.' He hoped the situation would improve soon.<sup>49</sup>

Notwithstanding their elevated status, the two Javanese noblemen ranked lower than the Dutchmen on account of their native origin and skin colour. In the words of Homi Bhabha, they were 'almost the same, but not quite'.<sup>50</sup> However hard they tried to adapt to the Dutch, they would ultimately always remain lower in status.<sup>51</sup> Yet simultaneously, they were proud of this, glorifying their own Javanese culture.

### **Appropriation and Collaboration**

To what extent can the two travel texts be seen as autoethnographic expressions? Reading Purwalelana's text, one notices that he is influenced by the Dutch, who he values and admires. Nowhere does he question their presence. Indeed, he writes about colonisation as if it were a matter of course – a part of the natural order of things. When he describes the house of the governor-general or the general secretary in Batavia, he does so in an objective, encyclopaedic manner, as if it is part of an unchangeable social order.<sup>52</sup> Although Suparta is more explicit, he too shows admiration for the Netherlands, which he characterises as a country 'that may be small but is mighty too, so that it can possess a colony that is fifty times as large, with a population that is seven times bigger than its own population'.<sup>53</sup>

Purwalelana does not question the unequal treatment of ordinary Indonesians. As much becomes clear, for instance, when on his second journey he visits the bathing resort of Banyubiru – a popular outing amongst Westerners. He describes this place as a resort for Dutchmen and distinguished Javanese: 'Common people may also use it, but only when there are no Dutchmen or priyayi present.' That Purwalelana does not question the treatment of ordinary Javanese people is due to his own high position as a regent. On his travels he is frequently treated the same way as the Dutch are by ordinary folk. On his visit to the Priangan residency, for example, he comments favourably on their behaviour. As soon as they spot him (or a Dutchman), men and women begin to crouch. In contrast, at other moments during his journey, he is annoyed that ordinary Javanese folk do not act politely enough.<sup>54</sup>

The situation is different in Suparta's text. As he is not travelling in his home country, but finds himself on a ship mainly carrying Dutch people, he is – more so than Purwalelana – very much the 'Other'. Indeed, he meets very few Javanese individuals on board other than the servants. Only once does he describe a scene with some indigenous children. As the ship enters the harbour of Padang, the passengers throw coins over the ship's rail into the water, whereupon naked boys dive to retrieve them: 'The people on the quay also enjoyed watching the diving boys, especially when one danced joyfully. Judging by their smiles, the spectators found it amusing.' His playful de-

scription ('Splash, splash!') suggests that Suparta, too, found it an amusing spectacle.<sup>55</sup> Nowhere does he show any sense of the somewhat colonial inequality that this scene manifests.

When Suparta is confronted with the racist treatment of black Africans on his way to Europe, he again does not challenge the behaviour. Under way to the Suez Canal, the ship calls at the island of Perim in the Red Sea. The volcanic island was in British hands and served as a coaling station for ships sailing through the Suez Canal. He is taken across in a small boat: 'All of the rowers were Negroes; their skin was dark, and they had black or red frizzy hair, which they let grow like a wig.' Later, he notices some black children, dressed in trousers or a loin cloth only, who annoy him because they loudly advertise their wares and hassle him: 'They would only go away when addressed gruffly, and only after two or three times.' He is also taken aback when some black Africans come aboard, uninvited, to perform a 'negro dance'.<sup>56</sup> In this situation, Suparta's attitude and behaviour is comparable to that of the Dutch.

For Purwalelana, just as for the Dutch, it was normal to make use of 'coolies' and to have servants attend to him. Although Suparta does not make use of the services of 'coolies' on his travels, he does notice them on Perim, but does not question their presence. The same applies to the fact that all of the servants on board the ship are Javanese. If an electric button is pressed in the smoking room, he notes, a Javanese servant arrives to take one's order.<sup>57</sup> He invariably portrays the indigenous world of ordinary indigenous people as 'limited', compared to that of the Dutch. Himself and other priyayi excepted, all indigenous and other non-European people occupy inferior positions.

## Acculturation

Both texts show signs of appropriation and acculturation. For example, Purwalelana notes that although the priyayi hold on to their traditions, some of them resemble the white coloniser in their clothing – not least because the government has determined the attire of the priyayi. Only their headdresses and kris (a dagger worn on the left hip) differ from Dutch apparel. However, the difference is barely visible from a distance, so that most priyayi 'at first sight [...] look like Dutchmen', according to Purwalelana.<sup>58</sup> Suparta notices much the same. When delayed in Batavia he sees how Javanese men and Malay civil servants are dressed like Europeans, in white coats and trousers, 'but on top of that, a sarong folded in two so that the trouser legs are visible to above the knees', plus some headgear. Suparta also conforms to a Western style of dress on his travels, invariably wearing a white suit, black shoes, and cap.<sup>59</sup>

The Dutch influence also becomes apparent when Purwalelana visits Surakarta on his third journey, where he has an opportunity to observe the



Java's tropical nature, with the Semeru vulcano on the background. From the album Java, J.C. Greive naar A. Salm, 1865-1872. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 47D19.

lifestyle of the local priyayi. His observations illustrate how some regarded Dutch culture as the standard to live up to. They furnished their homes with Dutch furniture and even used chairs, whilst their tradition was to sit on the ground. They gave lavish, Dutch-style parties, serving Dutch meals, the ingredients for which they bought from a local Dutch chef. Just like the Dutch, they had the various dishes printed on a special menu. The Dutch influence was also perceptible in their wasteful squandering of money on presents for their wives. Children received a Dutch education, and dressed and wore their hair the Dutch way.<sup>60</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising then, that Javanese noblemen looked at their country with comparably imperial eyes as the Dutch.

Suparta's travel account likewise shows that in the eyes of the Javanese nobility, Dutch standards were considered superior. Without exception, the evening meal served on board the *Wilis* comprised seven courses of Dutch dishes, including soup, potatoes with gravy and beef, and a sweet (cake or ice-cream) for dessert. Although he was not used to this kind of food, being Javanese, he enjoyed all meals equally. Dutch table manners prevailed at mealtimes, and Suparta desperately tried to conform. However, he was not always successful. For example, on one occasion, he was overcome by seasickness during the evening meal, as a result of which he got up from the table, donned his cap and left. The next day, he learnt that a Dutchman had complained about his 'inappropriate' conduct. Whilst this may have been an extreme example, towards the end of his voyage, when he had heard this same Dutchman hold an impassioned table speech, Suparta realised that the gentleman in question was the very model of civilisation. With his 'quiet demeanour' and eloquence, he set an example for everyone to follow.<sup>61</sup>

### **Aestheticisation**

A recurrent feature of many colonial texts by Western travellers is their representation of the colony as a virgin and fertile paradise. For emphasis, travellers often painted with words, offering aestheticised descriptions of the landscape that abound with adjectives – an example of an 'imperial trope', according to Pratt.<sup>62</sup> Representing the country in this way implicitly legitimised the colonial presence: a fertile paradise just asks to be appropriated, does it not? Although Purwalelana was not a Westerner, his representation of indigenous nature seems to match the colonial manner of describing it. Incidentally, this aestheticising manner of writing was part of a long-standing tradition, according to Indonesianists Judith Bosnak and Willem van der Molen: it already occurs in *wayang* (traditional Javanese puppetry), which in turn had adopted it from Old Javanese literature.

Purwalelana too marvelled at the overwhelming beauty of the country, which often leads to aestheticised passages in his text. Gazing upon the vol-

cano of Mount Merapi in Central Java, he is awestruck. His description is evocative, aestheticised, and lyrical – a painting in language:

Along the way I can never tire of admiring how the rays of the rising sun shine on the mountains, on Lake Pening and on the barracks of Banyubiru. The water sparkles like gem-studded silver. Dazzling are the white walls of the barracks, with a touch of yellow, like a bunch of white lotus-flowers. Blue-green are the colours of Mount Prawata and black are the depths of the gorges, while the vapour rising from the Merapi looks like kapok piling up. How enchanting it is to someone who has never before witnessed such a scene.<sup>65</sup>

There are many such instances of ‘verbal painting’, although Purwalelana sometimes lacks the necessary words to describe the beauty he sees.<sup>64</sup> Speaking of the lake of Panjalu (Lengkong Lake), he says that it presents itself like a white lotus: ‘The trees stretch their branches over the water, letting them hang in strands, moving, blown by the wind. Their rustling resembles the shrieks of a beautiful virgin being carried away in the arms of a man.’ These representations seem to correspond with the overtly masculine colonial representation of the Dutch. This is also true of the emphasis he places on the land’s fertility. Many European travellers represent the country as a place where valuable spices, tea, tobacco, and rice grow, almost as if by themselves. However, Purwalelana also stresses on numerous occasions – maybe also as a part of Javanese literary tradition – how ‘good’, ‘fertile’, ‘excellent’, and ‘outstanding’ the soil is.<sup>65</sup>

Since Suparta does not travel across his own country, aestheticisation plays a less prominent role in his writings. Yet he too paints with words, emphasises the fertility of the Indies. He praises, for example, the ‘gently undulating coast of Java, my native island, which is known all over the world for its fertility and prosperity’. In the same passage, he borrows the words of the writer Multatuli from his famous novel *Max Havelaar* (1860) to describe the Indies as ‘an emerald belt that winds itself around the equator’ and as a ‘pearl in the crown’ of the Dutch kingdom.<sup>66</sup> The aestheticisation leads to a climax when he is waiting in the port of Tanjung Priok for the ship to depart, looking at the full moon:

The moonlight, broken by the movements of the water, shone on the water and sparkled over the expanse of water. The moon beams reflecting on the waves resembled, from a distance, a road of white light that leads straight to man’s deepest realm of thought. The blinking of the lighthouse on the right reminded me of a crying girl who had been left by her lover and the light of the near lighthouse resembled the eye of a glow worm, which looked on silently at the sight of her tears. [...] The two lights of the lighthouse formed a divide between the golden water expanse of the sea and the sky, like a black velvet curtain sprinkled with sparkling jewels.<sup>67</sup>

## Western Culture

Just like the Dutch, the noblemen made use of binary oppositions to distinguish between elevated Dutch culture and the supposedly lesser indigenous culture. Purwalelana, for his part, has a particular appreciation for Dutch colonial architecture. He stresses time and again the beauty of the orderly constructed and broad streets with white buildings, including *alun-alun* (a wide square in front of a palace or the residence of a regent).<sup>68</sup> On the way he praises the 'large and attractive villas, with spacious gardens adorned with ornamental plants'. He stares in wonder at the marble floors of the *societies* (Dutch town-based clubs, such as *De Harmonie* in Batavia), at the gardens full of flowers, and the handsome Dutch shops. Batavia, he thinks, is a marvellous town: 'Visitors take real pleasure in staying and sightseeing in Batavia because of its beautiful and expansive layout: the large number of fine houses, the numerous people and the excellent condition of its streets.' Another highlight is the governor-general's palace in Buitenzorg; it is so beautiful that it makes all other colonial buildings pale into insignificance. The Dutch-established botanical garden in Buitenzorg is also very much to his liking, and he is impressed by the fountain in the pond. Dutch culture, to him, is a yardstick of beauty. The furnishings in the accommodation of the regent of Kudus draw the following remark: 'The furniture of the house is also perfect because it was made in the Netherlands.'<sup>69</sup> The word 'because' in this sentence is significant. He does not mention, incidentally, that he is referring to his own house here – after all, he was the regent of Kudus! In effect, what he is doing here is making a joke.

Since Suparta mainly writes about his voyage to the Netherlands, his text is less detailed about Java, but he too waxes lyrical about Dutch architecture. Regarding Batavia's colonial buildings, he notes that they all seemed to compete in beauty: 'One showed fine roof tiles, another flaunts its beautiful structure and its walls, or its decorations. It was as if all these houses had agreed to lure everyone into taking a good look at them, so that it could be said of no house in particular that it was the most beautiful or the ugliest.'<sup>70</sup> He cannot help but conclude that no other town can surpass Batavia in size or riches.

The two noblemen are not only charmed by the architecture; they are equally beguiled by the many technological innovations that the Dutch have introduced in their fatherland. Purwalelana is enthusiastic about the steamship taking him to Batavia, full of praise for the train, and surprised that the Dutch use gas to light their houses. That households even keep a record of how much gas they use, with someone coming over every month to read their meter, baffles him. The tram that connected *Weltevreden* in the southeast with the old town of Batavia also exemplifies, for him, the progress that the Dutch have brought in the Indies.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Suparta also praises the progress achieved, noting that the Dutch have constructed paved

roads on Sumatra, in towns and villages alike. On board the ship he is impressed with a device used to measure the depth of the sea, to prevent the ship from entering too shallow waters off the coast and running aground.<sup>72</sup>

Whilst Purwalelana and Suparta applaud the beauty and technical ingenuity of Dutch culture, conversely, they portray the culture of the natives (and other foreign peoples) as underdeveloped. According to Purwalelana, the house of the regent in Semarang is 'in serious decay, because it has been badly taken care of'. The Chinese quarter is 'narrow' and, on account of the many small houses built closely together, 'chaotic'. He observes something similar in Cirebon: 'The clean and attractive main street, along which the Dutch live, is shaded by tall tamarinds. The Chinese and Arab quarters are, however, chaotic.' The *kratons* of the sultans in Cirebon are 'ugly and untidy because they are old and not very well taken care of'. The same goes for the houses in Surakarta: 'The homes and yards of many Javanese are in bad condition. The houses are in disrepair and there is a visible lack of order.'<sup>73</sup>

We find similar representations in Suparta's text. Against the beauty of the Dutch buildings in Batavia he sets the houses of the 'coolies' on the island of Perim, standing 'together in disorderly fashion'. In the Egyptian town of Port Said, he notes that the European quarter is clean whilst the Arabic district is 'dirty'. Finally, upon his arrival in Marseille, he marvels at the beauty of European architecture. With their beautiful gardens and parks, the houses are just like castles, compared to which the palaces of the wealthiest sultans in the Indies look like 'dolls' houses'. Even the house of the richest Chinese residents in the Indies is not a patch on its European counterparts.<sup>74</sup> These binary oppositions between the beautiful and technically sophisticated in relation to the Netherlands and Europe, and the neglected and undeveloped in the context of Indonesia, correlates with Dutch representations.

### **Elements of a Counter-narrative**

Where the two travellers diverge from the dominant, colonial, and Eurocentric manner of representation is in the fact that their rather negative descriptions of indigenous and/or 'other' cultures are invariably followed by more critical comments. For example, the poor state of repair of the house of the (indigenous) regent in Semarang is partly caused, according to Purwalelana, by the government allotting too few funds for the maintenance and repair of the building. The rundown *kratons* of the sultans of Surakarta look the way they do, he states, because their allowance is too low, which prevents them from having the palaces renovated or maintained. The palace of the regent of Pekalongan is a mockery, in Purwalelana's view: 'It would be appropriate to repair it, because it is embarrassing for the government when it makes the regent live in such circumstances.' Furthermore, he states, the

fact that the houses of the 'common people' in Surakarta are in such a bad state of repair is not their fault: 'Many common people in the villages are poor and their houses are in bad shape because they are taken advantage of by the nobility, the priyayi and the Dutch who have the land at their disposal.'<sup>75</sup> Travelling from Surakarta to the residency of Madiun, Purwalelana is struck by the neglected look of the *desas* and rice paddies. The rains transform the main road into a quagmire, but the Dutch do next to nothing to address the problem:

When the government of the Principality gives orders to make repairs to the road with gravel, or to clean them, these Dutchmen ignore the instructions. They prefer to deploy their people on their own estates for planting and other labour. As a result the local government has a bad reputation. Because people are not familiar with the situation, they believe that the Javanese leadership is to blame. It may be correct that the Javanese administration does not function as well as the Dutch one, and it may be true that the local Government is not as efficient as the Dutch one, but yet the problems of the road cannot be blamed only on the Javanese leaders. The Dutch leaseholders of the domains are equally responsible.<sup>76</sup>

The opposition between rich/beautiful and poor/ugly also leads Suparta to sound a note of criticism. Having taken in all the splendour of Marseille, he states: 'I was sad that so few of my people were rich enough to own a piece of land or a house that was as beautiful as what I have seen now. I pondered the poverty of my people and was fearful.'<sup>77</sup> This is followed by a reflection on the power of the Javanese in earlier times, before their colonisation by the Dutch, when victories could still be won, and the Javanese were rich and 'renowned among other peoples'. There then follows a critical remark that we could, with some good will, call anti-colonial:

The reader must not get me wrong and think that the ideal I envisage is that of my people dominating other peoples, no, far from it. The time is over that one people dominates another, but it is my fondest hope that the fame of my people will once more be known far and wide across all of Asia, and that prosperity will be a source of enlightenment in the unknown Indies.<sup>78</sup>

These remarks bear witness to a nationalistic Indonesian ideology that three decades previously was not yet found to that extent in Purwalelana's work. In this regard, they are the harbingers of a new era.

### **Reclaiming Their Own Culture**

Yet there are still more elements in the texts that diverge from the dominant colonial discourse. For example, unlike most Dutch travellers, the Javanese noblemen do not ignore the ordinary Javanese. They may have ranked lower in the societal hierarchy, but they were certainly not regarded as absent,



Hindu-Javanese statues  
in Gaprang near Kediri.  
Leiden University Libraries,  
KITLV 87758.

as they were in many Eurocentric texts.<sup>79</sup> Purwalelana in particular studies the ‘common people’, travels to villages, and visits their homes. It is also striking that in their texts the noblemen re-claim their own culture – one marginalised by the Dutch. One of their implicit strategies in this respect is to consistently emphasise that the places that the Dutch have renamed were originally called by a different name. Where the Dutch say Buitenzorg, they use the old name Bogor. Of King’s Square in Batavia, Purwalelana remarks that the indigenous inhabitants speak of Gambir square, whilst the old town Jakarta is ‘now called Batavia’. During his stay in Batavia, he notes that, as a result of the colonisation, there are ‘almost no true descendants of the original people of Batavia’: ‘Everything has been mixed up.’<sup>80</sup> It is almost impossible to read this observation other than as a subtle reproach to the Dutch oppressor.

Another possible characteristic of the counter-perspective is the great emphasis that especially Purwalelana places on his own, Javanese culture. There are two sides to this. First, his travel text reveals his fascination for pre-Islamic culture. He visits ancestral graves and ancient ruins, studies inscriptions and reliefs, and goes to see the Borobudur and the nearby Mendut temple. On his travels he asks locals to tell him about interesting myths, sagas, and legends. And so, he is told in the Rembang residency the story of a ‘female ghost’ and a fairy tale about the egg of plenty: if it was placed in

an earthen crock in the evening, it was full of rice in the morning. Purwalelana also immerses himself in Javanese traditions. In the Kidirie residency he studies two large stone statues, to which the Javanese bring offerings of flowers and incense. The male statue, sporting an enormous phallus, serves as a fertility symbol. Childless women were supposed to sit ‘unprotected’ on ‘the tip of this sign of manhood’: ‘After this act, their wish, so it is said, will be fulfilled because they have received the blessing of Kyai Gaprang.’<sup>81</sup>

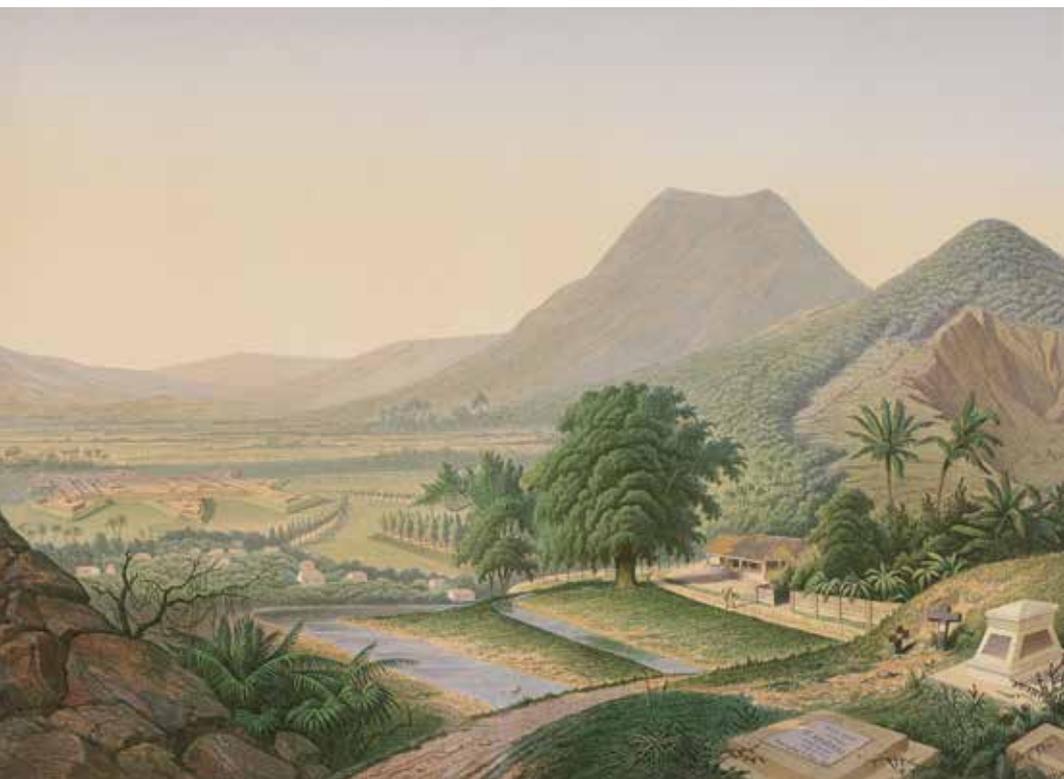
In Purwalelana’s opinion, it is a shameless statue. This can be interpreted literally, in the sense that the image has no shame, on account of the phallus not being covered. However, it could also be read in the light of his religious beliefs. Purwalelana was a broad-minded man, which is manifest, for instance, in his admiration for the Borobudur and the incredible abilities of the (Buddhist) ancestors who succeeded in building a monument of this size. At the same time, he was a strict Muslim, who was influenced by Middle Eastern Islam. On his travels he goes on a ‘pilgrimage’ to the graves of famous co-religionists to pay his respects. Also, he always visits mosques, wherever his travels take him. The Javanese people he meets who do not practise their religion properly are a source of irritation. They may be circumcised and claim to follow Islam, but they do not really know the true faith:

In their daily life, [they] still follow the customs of the old beliefs in deities. I am saying this because until the present day they still worship trees and stones by bringing flower offerings, apply yellow ointment and offer sweets from the market and so on. This behaviour is not limited to those with insufficient knowledge of their religion, but is also practised by people well versed in this belief. Islam strongly condemns it because it is considered to be on a par with worshipping idols.<sup>82</sup>

This narrative, however, barely plays a role in Suparta’s travel account as he was, first and foremost, on his way to the Netherlands. It is only once, in Batavia, that he – as does Purwalelana incidentally – visited the grave of an Arabian ‘saint’, who was worshipped by the Batavians. Suparta was also a practising Muslim and it was traditional for Javanese Muslims like Purwalelana and Suparta to pay tribute to their ancestors by visiting their graves and those of saints. At the same time, it can be argued that their explicit writing about, and representing, these traditions, stemming from a Muslim-nationalist consciousness, was an act of reclaiming their own culture.

### **The Dutch as an Occupying Power**

The noblemen seem to use a final strategy to oppose the dominant colonial representation: they systematically emphasise the Dutch military presence. Whereas Europeans usually omit such references and primarily focus on



The fortress Willem I, second half of the nineteenth century. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 47A77.

the paradisiacal character of the Indies, the Javanese underline colonial violence. Around this time, the Dutch were involved in a bloody war in Aceh. On his way to Semarang Purwalelana notices a building that is being used as a hospital for soldiers who had been wounded in Aceh. He also encounters other military hospitals. In Surabaya he sees warships moored in port and he explores various forts in which Dutch troops are stationed, giving the number of soldiers for each. Amongst these forts is one named Ambarawa – presumably Fort Willem I – the first stone of which had been laid by the Dutch Prince Hendrik himself in 1837. It had been built in such a way that cannon could be placed atop the flat buildings, as a defence against ‘the enemy’, Purwalelana states.<sup>85</sup> Who exactly ‘the enemy’ is remains implicit, but there is little doubt they could be anyone other than the Indonesians colonised by the Dutch.

Purwalelana’s account of his stay in Batavia also contains a few references that underline the colonial violence that occurred. As he enters the

old town, his eye is caught by government buildings, in front of which cannon have been placed – ‘remnants from the past’, according to Purwalelana. In the town, he visits the houses of the lieutenant-general, the commander-in-chief of the land army, and of the officers. A few monuments also serve as reminders of the war that was waged to conquer the colony, including the statue of the ‘victor’ Jan Pieterszoon Coen (‘Mur Jangkung’) and another to commemorate the Dutchmen who had fallen during the Java War (1825-1830).<sup>84</sup> When he is delayed in Batavia, Suparta also examines a cannon and sees the statue of Coen there. Interestingly, he finds the statue small in relation to the buildings and does not bother taking a proper look because he already knows it.<sup>85</sup>

A special monument that Purwalelana visits in Batavia is that dedicated to the shame of Pieter Erberveld. On a wall stood his skull pierced with the point of a lance; it was demolished during the Japanese occupation. Erberveld was an Indo-European, who allegedly plotted a rebellion against the Dutch. However, his ‘treason’ was discovered and in 1722 he was put to a gruesome death. His heart was torn from his breast, his head and hands



Memorial stone for Pieter Erberveld in Batavia, circa 1875. Photograph Woodbury & Page. Leiden University Libraries, KITLV 3774.

were chopped off, and his body was quartered. His mortal remains were hung outside the town as a warning. Although Erbeveld was not Javanese, he was often portrayed as an indigenous freedom fighter.<sup>86</sup> As he elaborates on this matter, Purwalelana implicitly emphasises how colonialism was bound up with violence. Something similar occurs when he describes his visit to the residency office, which has a display of instruments of torture dating from the VOC era, including a spiked barrel and a rod: 'The rod was thrust into the anus and then pushed all the way through, up to the fontanelle. Thereafter the condemned was hung outdoors until death followed.'<sup>87</sup>

Purwalelana also writes about arms factories. Following a visit to the army barracks in Batavia, he heads to the government smithy, in which arms are made, including 'Kuhn-guns', which could be fired fifteen times a minute. In Surabaya he looks in at a 'blacksmith shop', which also produces arms. He sees cannon balls the size of coconuts. In addition, thirty thousand lead bullets are manufactured a day, all stamped with the initial 'W' for King William III. He does not explicitly state who these bullets were intended for, although the implication is clear. Purwalelana also sees a thousand Javanese troops in the principality of Surakarta, but these merely have a ceremonial function, lined up as they are to add lustre to the anniversary of the inauguration of Prince Mangkunegara. A striking detail here is that most of the soldiers are holding pikes bearing Dutch flags; only the prince's personal guard wear the green and yellow of the principality.<sup>88</sup> In short, Purwalelana represented the Dutch as an occupying power, maintaining their presence through the use of violence.

## Conclusion

Over seventy-five years after Indonesia gained independence, the Dutch are still grappling with their colonial past in 'the East', as the Dutch East Indies were called in the Netherlands. As well as a social issue, there is also a historiographic problem: the historiography of colonialism is based on Dutch sources. Only in the last few years has the realisation begun to dawn that, if we are to attain a balanced perception of history, it is crucial to view the experience of colonialism from another perspective. In this article, two translations of Javanese travel texts written by noblemen have been analysed. Sadly, the testimonies of ordinary Javanese people have not survived. Purwalelana and Suparta occupied high positions in colonial society. Being a regent and a prince, respectively, they ranked above a great many indigenous people. Due to their position as members of the colonised, however, they ranked lower than the Dutch. However much they tried to adapt, they would ultimately – from a Dutch colonial perspective at least – always come second.

This article has analysed Purwalelana's and Suparta's travel texts as autoethnographic expressions – a concept introduced by Pratt to indicate that

travel texts by ‘the Other’ lay bare a complex field of tensions. On the one hand, they seem to attest to appropriation and collaboration with the coloniser, his idiom, and representations. The two travel texts show, for instance, that the two noblemen do not call into question the treatment of ordinary Indonesians; after all, they themselves, as priyayi and high nobility, were also treated as superior in Javanese society. The aestheticisation of the landscape, the emphasis on the beauty and fertility of the Indies, and the opposition of the ‘civilised’ (standing for Dutch/European culture) set against the ‘uncivilised’ (standing for indigenous culture), all feature clearly in their writing.

On the other hand, however, a critical reading of their texts lays bare possible elements of a counter-narrative. The oppositions between ‘West’ and ‘East’ are invariably followed by critical remarks that are absent from Dutch travel texts. Indeed, Suparta even offers a closing anti-colonial statement, saying that the times ‘of one people ruling another are over’. Furthermore, both noblemen clearly pay heed to ordinary Javanese people and, also in the context of their Muslim background, reclaimed a culture that had been marginalised by the coloniser. A final striking feature is their representation of the Dutch as an occupying military force.

Until recently, the perception prevailed, at least in the Netherlands, that the Dutch had been a ‘humane’ coloniser. That the domination of Indonesia went hand-in-hand with racism, violence, and suppression hardly ever formed part of the collective cultural memory. Although Purwalelana and Suparta were part of the system and depended on the Dutch for their position, they nevertheless show – reading between the lines – that they experienced colonialism, still seen through indigenous eyes, differently. Of course, only two texts have been studied in this article, and therefore the results of my analysis can only be preliminary. Research into indigenous travel texts will show what conclusions can be drawn from a larger corpus. In the Asian Library at Leiden University more manuscripts are waiting to be revealed. Translating, reading, and analysing sources of this kind is hugely significant and, indeed, crucial for the Dutch *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: the process of coming to terms with the colonial past.

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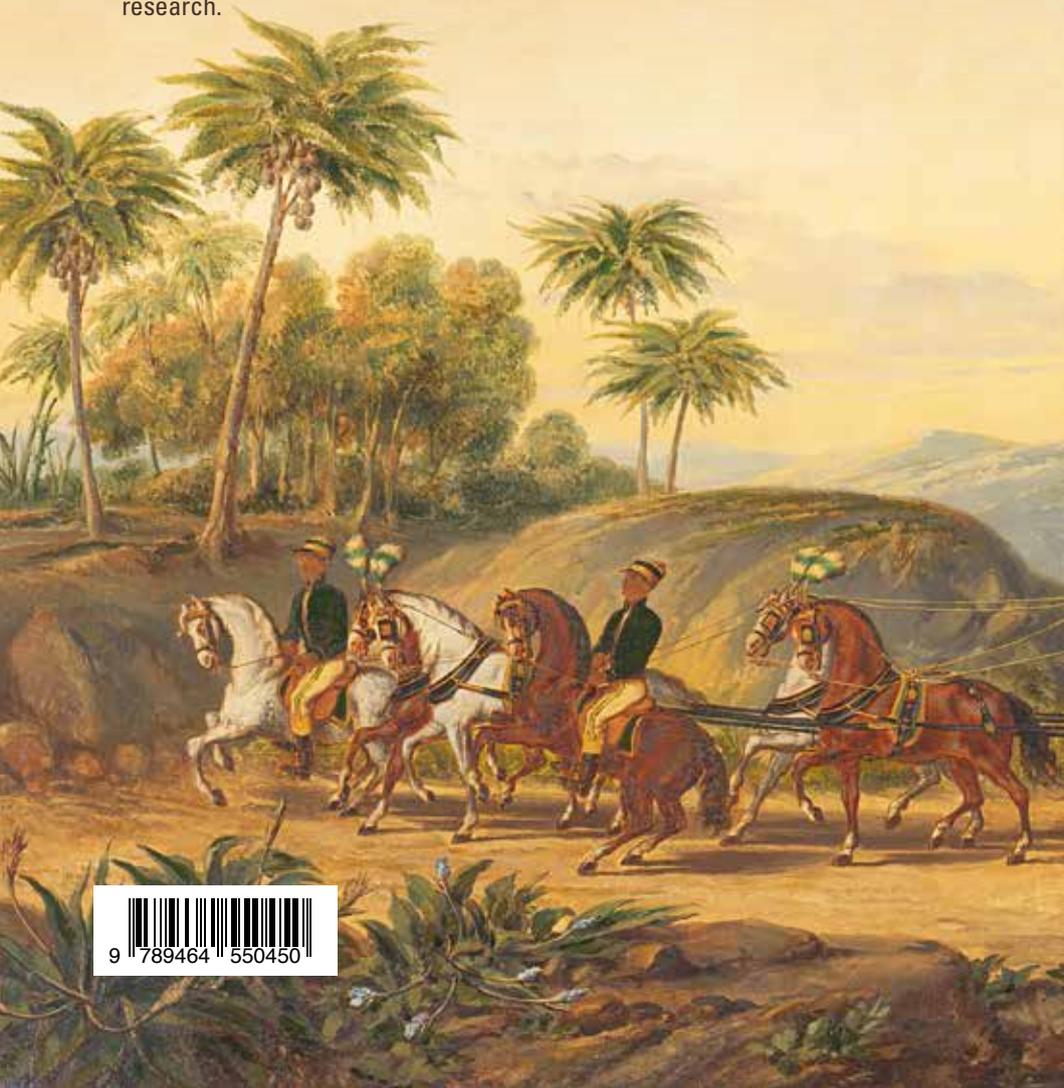
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## Notes

- 1 This chapter is written in the context of the NWO Vidi research project *Voicing the Colony: Travelers in the Dutch East Indies 1800-1945*, carried out at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS, 2020-2025). I would like to thank Judith E. Bosnak, Willem van der Molen, Olf Praamstra, Nick Tomberge, and Coen van 't Veer for their useful comments on earlier versions, and Eli ten Lohuis for the translation of this article.
- 2 Baay 2015.
- 3 Hoffman 2019.
- 4 Borst 2020.
- 5 Cf. Oostindie 2005.
- 6 Nieuwenhuys 1981, 1982, 1988.
- 7 Freriks 2018.
- 8 Raben 2016, 16.
- 9 Groeneboer 1998, 1.
- 10 Kousbroek 2013, 249.
- 11 Groeneboer 1998, 98, 297, 300.
- 12 Kousbroek 2013, 255.
- 13 Van Zonneveld 1996, 45; Haase 1970, 5.
- 14 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2002.
- 15 Van Zonneveld 1996, 45.
- 16 Suprihatin & Van 't Veer 2020.
- 17 Cf. Foulcher & Day 2002.
- 18 The image that prevailed in the Netherlands was that there was no such thing as a serious 'native' (Malay and Javanese-language) press in the colonial era. According to Termorshuizen 2011, 85, it was 'never capable of spreading its wings'. In his view, there were relatively few Indonesians who could read – something not helped by the low level of welfare. Moreover, many Indonesians from the elite were able to read Dutch-language newspapers and publications.
- 19 Pratt 2008.
- 20 Pratt 2008, 8-9.
- 21 Cf. Honings 2017.
- 22 Van de Molen 2006.
- 23 Bosnak & Koot 2013; 2020.
- 24 In this article I have deliberately chosen to use the modern Indonesian spelling of their names. Thus, I write Purwalelana and Suparta instead of the colonial spelling of Poerwelelono, Soerjosoeparto and Soeparto.
- 25 Soerjosoeparto 2014; 2017. It is important to note that the edition used here is a re-translation. Unfortunately, a scholarly, annotated edition of the text directly translated from Javanese is not

- available at this moment. In 2006, Madelon Djajadiningrat – who helped oversee the publication of the re-translation of the travel text – also published a ‘historic novel’ about Prince Suparta: *Vorst tussen twee werelden: Djajadiningrat 2006*.
- 26 Pratt 2008, 8-9.
- 27 Russo 2010, 7.
- 28 Pratt 2008, 8-9.
- 29 Cf. Van der Molen 2006; Sunjayadi 2016; Bosnak & Koot 2013, 2020.
- 30 ‘Radèn’ is a term of address for nobility, whilst ‘mas’ indicates the wearer is a man. Information about Candranegara’s life and work in this section is based on the introduction in Bosnak & Koot 2013, 2020.
- 31 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 35.
- 32 This article does not elaborate further on the route and specific places that Purwalelana visited. For these, see Bosnak & Koot 2013, 12-13. For the maps showing the routes, see Bosnak & Koot 2013, 46-47, 92-93, 166-167, 166.
- 33 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 40, 64, 215, 226.
- 34 Information about Suparta’s life and work is based on Djajadiningrat & Brinkgreve’s introduction in Soerjosoeparto 2014 and on Poeze 1986, 100-103. The Dutch translation uses the old, colonial spelling of his name: Soerjosoeparto. I have opted for the modern Indonesian version: Suryasuparta.
- 35 For an in-depth analysis of fictional representations of the voyage to and from the Indies, see Van ’t Veer 2020. That study does, however, not deal with the voyage of Suparta as his travel account was non-fiction.
- 36 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 33.
- 37 Karels 2010.
- 38 Suryasuparta 1916
- 39 Djajadiningrat & Brinkgreve in Soerjosoeparto 2014, 16.
- 40 Cf. Youngs 2013, 68.
- 41 Bossenbroek 1994-1996, 714.
- 42 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 60.
- 43 Thompson 2011, 68.
- 44 Pratt 2008, 200.
- 45 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 73, 87, 209.
- 46 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 55, 91.
- 47 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 62, 109.
- 48 Boehmer 2005, 61.
- 49 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 128.
- 50 Bhabha 2004, 123, 128.
- 51 Boehmer 2005, 111.
- 52 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 49-50.
- 53 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 40.
- 54 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 72, 92.
- 55 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 58.
- 56 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 89, 91, 94.
- 57 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 31, 75, 91.
- 58 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 44.
- 59 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 37, 47.
- 60 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 169.
- 61 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 77, 124, 127.
- 62 Pratt 2008, 200-205.
- 63 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 39.
- 64 Pratt 2008, 197.
- 65 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 74, 76, 78, 107, 108.
- 66 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 38, 40; Multatuli 1992, 237.
- 67 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 55.
- 68 Cf. Bosnak & Koot 2020, XIX, 238-240.
- 69 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 43, 57, 140, emphasis added.
- 70 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 51, 53.
- 71 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 55, 57-58.
- 72 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 83.
- 73 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 42-44, 74-75, 169.
- 74 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 91, 111, 141, 143.
- 75 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 42, 77, 169.
- 76 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 173.
- 77 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 141.
- 78 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 142.
- 79 Boehmer 2005, 62.
- 80 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 50, 53, 58.
- 81 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 178, 186, 120-122.
- 82 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 213-214.
- 83 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 195.
- 84 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 46, 50-51.
- 85 Soerjosoeparto 2014, 48, 50.
- 86 Praamstra 2021.
- 87 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 53-55.
- 88 Bosnak & Koot 2020, 56, 83, 86, 164.

In 1594, the first Dutch ships sailed to 'the East'. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, almost five thousand ships were sent to the Dutch East Indies, attracting a growing number of travellers, with trade as one of the major incentives. In addition to Dutch missionary ambitions, progress and technological innovations not only fed the growing hunger for expansion, but also stirred an appetite for adventure. The hope for a life in welfare is mirrored in the growing numbers of passengers travelling 'East' in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, Javanese travellers started to explore their homeland as well. *Travelling the Dutch East Indies* not only offers a diverse picture of travel and a critical perspective on the colonial ideology with which it is associated, but also shows how the collections of Leiden University Libraries can serve as a rich source for all kinds of historical research.



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