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Objects of belonging and displacement

Artefacts and European migrants from colonial Indonesia in colonial and post-colonial times

Caroline Drieënhuizen

Abstract

As colonial Indonesia never was intended to be a "settler colony", many Dutch citizens spent only a certain period of their lives there before returning to the Netherlands. However, there were also Europeans, many with Asian-European roots, who had called the colony home for generations and were forced to leave that home after 1945.

All these different types of colonial migrants were displaced and maintained, built and reinforced their relations with the country (whether it was the colony or the "motherland") they had left. This transnationalism (or, as I argue here, imperial orientation) took shape not only legally or relationally but also experientially (D. Ip, C. Inglis, and C.T. Wu 1997).

In this article I show how, in both the colonial and post-colonial periods, objects helped European colonial migrants establish and maintain social relationships. Objects shaped identities and people's status; bolstering increase migrants' sense of "a continuous transnational self and identity", a feeling of home, but also feelings of displacement.

Keywords

Objects; transnationalism; imperial networks; identity; belonging.

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Introduction

From a Dutch perspective colonial Indonesia was never intended to be a "settler colony". Many colonial migrants took part in the extensive migration circuit which existed between the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia: they went to the colony for a certain period of time, then travelled back to the Netherlands and often returned to the colony again. This migration circuit between metropole and colony, "circle migration", was characteristic of the Dutch colony (Ulbe Bosma 2005: 8). There were, however, a large number of people who under colonial rule qualified as "European" citizens (including, but not limited to, many with Asian-European roots), whose families had lived in Indonesia for decades, sometimes even centuries. After the Second World War and the subsequent proclamation of the Independence of Indonesia in 1945, Europeans became increasingly unwelcome in the new nation state. After 1957, when the Indonesian President Soekarno expelled them from the country, most were forced to find new homes abroad.

The common factor all these various "colonial migrants" in different periods of history shared was that they were displaced persons. Therefore, they maintained, built, and reinforced their social relations with the country they left in both the colonial and post-colonial period (Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton 1992). According to Ip et al. (1997), this transnationalism "from below" occurred not only legally or relationally, by visiting the country when it became possible again, but also experientially. This is a reference to migrants' senses of identity and belonging in which an important constituent is the manner in which immigrants imagine "home", remembering homelands, and perceiving their new home. European migrants developed identities within social networks and fields which connected them to both the recipient country's society, whether this was colonial Indonesia or the Netherlands, the country of origin and the diaspora (Glick Schiller et al. 1992).

Objects can play an important role in the building, maintaining, and propagating of social relations and conveying and expressing the self to others in emotional relationships with and through their possession.[1] There is already a large body of literature which recognizes the importance of objects in social relations and the processes of identification attached to them. This is now being brought increasingly to the attention of scholars, mainly anthropologists, working on migration. Cangbai Wang has even spoken about the "material turn" in Migration Studies (Cangbai Wang 2016). The importance of objects in migration processes has already been acknowledged by scholars like anthropologists Paul Basu and Simon Coleman who stated that migration was, among other factors, grounded in objects (Basu and Coleman 2008). Parkin even went as far as to state that the "great social and cultural leveller at the point of forced displacement" was whether that person had been able to collect objects "for practical uses as well as for perpetuating a personal

[1] R. Mehta and R.W. Belk (1991: 399); M. Csikszentmihalyi and E. Rochberg-Halton 1981; David Parkin 1999; Zeynep Turan 2010; L. Colomer-Solsona (2020: 89).

and thence cultural identity" (Parkin 1999: 312). Other scholars have pointed out that objects can embody transnational relations and that "things" have a "personal magnitudes […] in the narrative of migrant lives" (Anastasia Christou and Hania Janta 2019: 556-567).

Scholars like Turan, Colomer, Colomer-Solsona, Christou, and Janta[2] have described how meaningful artefacts, taken on their travels by migrants and cherished because of their associations with a lost home and life, can foster feelings of belonging, "place-making" and "homing" in interaction with larger, transnational socio-political circumstances, personal identities. In this sense, these artefacts have functioned, as Turan, Parkin, and Colomer have argued, as transitional objects: artefacts facilitating displaced a person's migration by stimulating a sense of continuity and embodying feelings of "hominess", facilitating the transition between locations.[3] It is therefore abundantly clear that migrants exercise a certain relevant social agency in these processes.

Although these authors have focused mainly on the present and very recent past, I believe that objects have also been able to provide this same function not only for modern migrants, but also for those in the past. This has been shown, for instance, in the studies of historians Maya Jasanoff and Claire Wintle. They have revealed how, mainly, men in the British-Indian migration circuit were able to present themselves as "gentleman connoisseurs" or "upper-class lords of the manor" by collecting and exhibiting objects from the colonies (Jasanoff 2004; Claire Wintle 2008). Scholars like Suzanne Daly and Tara Puri have demonstrated how Victorian bourgeois sociability which included the display of Indian objects functioned at home (Daly 2011; Puri 2017). However, this historical perspective with a focus on Indonesia and the Netherlands has been underexposed until now.

In this article, I would like to show how, from the end of the nineteenth century until the late 1980s, people legally considered to be "European" migrants and their descendants used objects to create, maintain, and strengthen social relations between friends, family, and acquaintances in the vast imperial space of colonial Indonesia and the Netherlands. This was done by fostering emotional relationships with and through objects which people were able to use to construct and express their personal transnational, or rather imperial, identities and feelings of belonging. This could help to influence people's social status, to experience existential continuity,[4] thereby securing the possibility of a future.[5]

Feeling at home in and with the colony, ca. 1900-1950

Geographical mobility among European citizens in colonial Indonesia was relatively high: soldiers and civil servants were regularly transferred within the archipelago or went on leave to the Netherlands. As said, Indonesia was

[2] Turan 2010; Laia Colomer 2013; Colomer-Solsona 2020; Christou and Janta 2019.
[3] Parkin 1999; Colomer-Solsona (2020: 92), Colomer 2013; Turan 2010.
[4] Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981.
[5] Colomer-Solsona (2020: 91).

not a Dutch settlement colony: the highest goal of European people was to send their children to Europe for their education and their ultimate dream was to retire to the Netherlands (or elsewhere in Europe). Circular migration was therefore characteristic of colonial Indonesia. The few objects people had received from family or friends or which were considered valuable or special enough to move with them, assumed great significance for migrants.

The interiors of European migrants in colonial Indonesia were characterized by an eclectic mixture of Indonesian and European influences: in old photographs one can see how scattered among objects from the archipelago such as porcelain plates, weapons, ikats, antique furniture, and brass chandeliers, European lamps with lampshades stood on side tables and paintings of Dutch landscapes hung on the walls. Pictures of Dutch windmills and winter landscapes or cuckoo clocks, like those which adorned the walls of the study of civil servant Han Damsté's (1874-1955) or those given pride of place of the walls of Elsa Silberstein's house in Bandung (see Pictures 1 and 2), were not uncommon. Wives of colonial servants were overjoyed to receive portraits of family members left behind in Holland, which were framed and hung on the wall (see Picture 3).

Picture 1. Writing desk in Elsa Silberstein's house in Bandung, 1935. (Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.nr. NG-2009-118-2).

European presents like tea sets were sent to them from the Netherlands.[6] Surrounded by objects reminding them of home and family, people in the colony felt at "home". Providing a sense of and radiating a "cosy"[7] feeling – every piece evoked all kinds of memories of the "home" which had been left behind and were tangible links with places and people from the past.

[6] University Library Leiden (KITLV-archives). Damsté Papers (correspondence of Henri Titus Damsté), DH 1084. Inv.nr. 72. Letter Bella Damsté-Muller to her mother, d.d. Sekayu, 25-12-1906.
[7] University Library Leiden (KITLV-archives). Damsté Papers (correspondence of Henri Titus Damsté), DH 1084. Inv.nr. 72. Letter Bella Damsté-Muller to her mother, d.d. Sekayu, 25-12-1906.

As "testimonial transitional objects", they were able to ease the transition to a completely new society (Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer 2006: 353; Drieënhuizen 2014).

Picture 2. Civil servant Han Damsté's study. (Collection National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands, inv.nr. RV-35557-1).

Picture 3. A room in an European house in the colony. (Collection National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands, inv.nr. 7082-nf-329-44-3).

Objects also connected family members and friends. Many Europeans living in colonial Indonesia maintained their relationships with family in the Netherlands by letters, often accompanied by little presents and photographs. Tine Tonnet (1866-1919), who was probably the first Dutch female museum curator and made a living from trading arts and crafts in colonial Indonesia and India, regularly send small gifts to her parents and the families of her siblings in the Netherlands. Her gifts served as conversation pieces between her family members and acquaintances and, as covert advertisements, stimulated them to employ Tonnet to send specific objects.

Tonnet's mother, for instance, wrote to thank her daughter for "the large consignment of Chinese pottery with which you gave me such pleasure" and asked her daughter whether she wanted her to give certain cups and saucers to an acquaintance on her behalf. In the letter, she also discusses all those details of the objects which particularly appealed to her, just as if she were having an ordinary conversation with her daughter. [8]

In this way, using Mauss' classical idea of gift-giving building human relations and attaching people to people (Marcel Mauss 1922), people solidified their social relations. This mechanism was particularly apparent in a performative act when Tonnet received a photograph pendant and her family urged her to "put us all in it and greet us every day when you wake up".[9] Heartened by this encouragement, the object, the photograph set, became the centre of Tonnet's daily ritual by which to remember the family left behind in the Netherlands and her own identity.

By solidifying social relations and contributing to people's identity formation, in colonial Indonesia these objects also shaped and communicated people's status to the outside world. They displayed what people believed was "good taste".[10] Placed in a semi-public environment such as an interior or adorning people's bodies, with reference to visiting friends, family, and others, people maintained both an affective relationship with the Netherlands through objects but also communicated their "good taste", in other words: their "Europeaness". It was a form of behaviour which displayed a person's affinity with Europe and their "refinement", setting them apart from the Indonesian population, thereby affirming their social status. This was based on the idea prevalent in this period, as contemporaries indeed stated, that the interior of a building indicated the degree of civilization and artistic taste.[11] One civil servant in Fort de Kock (now Bukittinggi) in Sumatra received a painting his sister-in-law had made him for him. He gave it an honoured place in his house and wrote how every visitor was filled with amazement at something so "European" and "refined": "never has such an artistic accomplishment

[8] Personal Archive Tonnet-family, Eindhoven. Letter from "Berta" to Martine Tonnet, d.d. Leiden, 17-5-1909.

[9] Personal Archive Tonnet-family, Eindhoven. Letter from Anna Maria Tonnet-Thiel to Martine Tonnet, d.d. 5 (or 6?)-12-1893.

[10] "Ons Huis in Indië" (Exhibition catalogue *De Vrouw 1813-1913*).

[11] *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 2-10-1878.

been seen here", he wrote.[12] Unconsciously and consciously, objects like a painting made by a family member, thereby linking colony and motherland, propagated and shaped people's cultural European identity and hence their prestige in colonial Indonesia.

The tension between transnational (or rather, in this period: *imperial*, since it was about relations between the motherland and its colony) networks and socio-cultural "European" belonging it produced shows how these travelling, meaningful objects reached beyond national frameworks and feelings to construct a fluid sense of "belonging" – a phenomenon which has long been underexposed because of the historiographical fixation on writing national histories (Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller 2003; Susan Legêne 2017). In this period, people's spatial imagination was transcontinental and was formed in the vast imperial space of motherland and colony connected by networks (Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler 1997: 4). Their outlook was not global or local, transnational or national (Cooper 2005: 109). It was continental, transcontinental, regional, and imperial – depending on the socio-cultural environment in which they found themselves and the values which prevailed.

Conversely, in the Netherlands during the colonial period, objects from the colony functioned as both memories of a life in the colony but also as status symbols. In *Metamorfoze* (1897), a book by the famous Dutch author Louis Couperus (1863-1923), one of the young protagonists hangs his room full of textiles from India, his father's Indian weapons and a fabric from Siam from his mother. Having chosen this decor, the protagonist considered it a room of a "young man-of-the-world", that is, of someone who mattered (Couperus 1897: 35-37). A similar mechanism speaks from a serialized story, originally American, which was adapted to the Dutch context in 1913. Here, too, interiors are sites of affective engagements in which objects served as memories for the owner, reminded visitors of their own memories, histories, and identities and in which the collected objects also simultaneously assumed the stature of status symbols, alerting outsiders to the adventurous life of their possessor:

> There was almost no corner of the world which had not contributed to the boudoir. Armiston had never seen such a collection of Buddha statues from the Indies, turquoises from Darjeeling, veils woven with curious pearls, ivory carvings and all the wonderful and strange things made in the world. Each object in the room had its own history. He now began to look at this woman, who had so diligently collected all these wonderful things, with completely different eyes. She had really made something of her life, she had done things and seen things.[13]

The objects in Dutch interiors seem to have functioned as cultural status symbols and as references to the successful lives of their owners in the colony

[12] Personal Archive Delprat-family. Letter Th.F.A. Delprat to C.C. Delprat, d.d. Fort de Kock, 3-7-1888.

[13] "Feuilleton. De onfeilbare Godahl. Naar het Amerikaansch door Frederick Irving Anderson. Bewerkt voor de Expres", *De Expres*, 9-5-1913.

and in Europe just as much in reality as in fiction. For example, when people visited the stately house of Louise Loudon-de Stuers (1835-1915), widow of James Loudon (1824-1900), a former governor-general of colonial Indonesia, in The Hague around 1910, they were overwhelmed by its cultural profusion. Precious European and colonial objects stood side by side in the interior: silver boxes from the Indies graced tables, Frisian Hindelooper chairs were flanked by early-modern VOC furniture and a statue from the ninth-century Javanese temple of Borobudur stood in the garden. The stairs to the upper floor were lined with paintings by modern Hague artists such as Andreas Schelfhout (1787-1870) and Jan Hendrik Weissenbruch (1824-1903). The impressive collection of Delft porcelain assembled by James' brother, John F. (1821-1895), also a colonial migrant, stood alongside a collection of Hindu and Buddhist statues from Indonesia (Drieënhuizen 2012: 148-149).

The house of the Loudon family was certainly not the only wealthy mansion of a circle migrant full of precious European and Asian cultural heritage. Visitors to Maurits Enschedé's (1856-1934) house in The Hague also encountered just such a mixture of European and colonial influences. Enschedé had been a government prosecutor in the colony and had returned home to the Netherlands with an impressive collection of objects from the colony. Upon entering his parlour on the ground floor, one encountered two Chinese chairs with a small table. Chinese paintings hung on the walls. In the conservatory stood another small Chinese table and chairs, with what are known as VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie/United East India Company) chairs, which could be sat on when playing the game of "Indies" trictrac (or backgammon) which was set out on the table. It was also used to display some artefacts produced by the Sumatran Batak population. In the parlour on the first floor, a Chinese cloth was draped above the mirror and a copper Buddha statue adorned the mantelpiece. Above the door was a piece of Javanese teak woodcarving. In the large bookcase, if one opened a drawer, one could discover a large collection of weapons, like daggers (so called "keris"), from Indonesia. Sarongs and other textiles from the colony were housed in a Frisian cupboard, safely stored away from the damaging impact of sunlight (Drieënhuizen 2019: 231-232).[14]

With objects placed in semi-public environment as in an interior like that of Loudon or Enschedé's houses, people could consciously and unconsciously express and propagate their status to family, friends, and other visitors. Even more obviously, prestige could be expressed in a fully public setting, for example, by wearing jewellery in public. Tine Tonnet's niece wore the pearl necklace which her aunt had given her in public. It was, according to her mother, admired by "everyone". Tonnet's sister wrote to Tonnet: "And so often she reminds us that Aunt Tine is always so kind to her and has given her so many beautiful things".[15] The quotation leaves no doubt how the jewellery

[14] Archive National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands (archive Colonial Institute Amsterdam), inv.nr. 2214. Heritage Maurits Enschedé.

[15] Personal Archive Tonnet-family, Eindhoven. Letter from Constance ("Stans") Berends-Tonnet

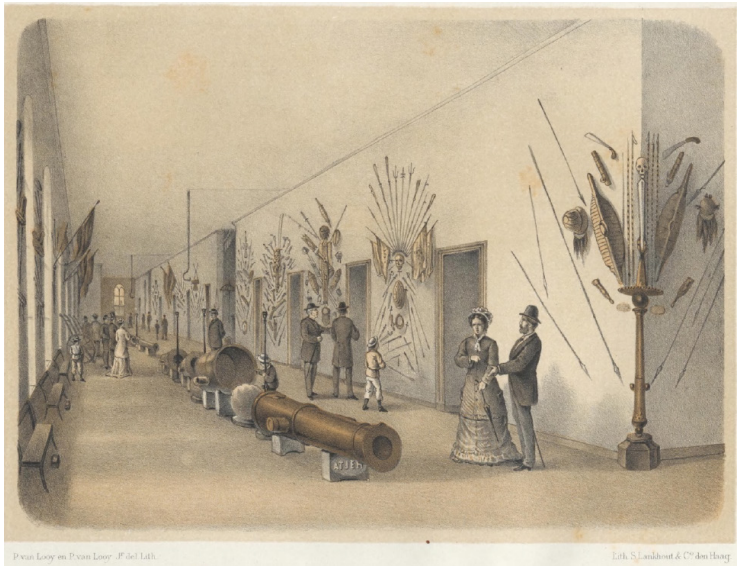
was used not only performatively, by wearing it and attracting the attention of the wearer and admirers alike while also functioning as a of status symbol, it also evoked memories of a kind aunt far away.

Nor were the institutionalized depots of objects, museums, just places from which distant, scholarly information was conveyed to people. They were likewise sites of affective engagements where visitors could project their own memories, identities, and identity onto the collections which communicated the usual Western perspective of the lives of the colonized people and the military and good deeds' of the Dutch colonizers. In this, they created a sense of community among specific groups of people. This clearly emerges from an article in the Dutch newspaper *Het Vaderland,* about the museum of the Royal Military Academy and its Indonesian collections just before the Second World War: "In every corner of the building anyone who has ever visited the Netherlands East Indies will find something which brings back memories, whether it be a kris or klewang, [...] of what was for most people the best time of their life".[16] The pictures show how such colonial trophy (as many of the objects came from the battlefield and were taken from defeated opponents) collections were arranged in that particular museum and in another military museum, Bronbeek, in Arnhem, which was a retirement home for veterans from the colonial army (see Pictures 4 and 5). In the case of Bronbeek in particular we can see how its collections attracted not only veterans but also women and children on a day out.

Picture 4. A weapons rack in the ethnographic museum of the Royal Military Academy in Breda around 1935. (From: S. Spoor, *Het ethnografisch museum van de Koninklijke Militaire Academie en den voormaligen hoofdcursus te Breda* ([Amsterdam] [1938]): 256).

to Martine Tonnet, d.d. Gorinchem, 10-2-1918.

[16] *Het Vaderland*, 26-11-1938.



Picture 5. A corridor in Bronbeek, retirement home for military veterans in Arnhem, around 1880. (From: J.C.J. Smits, *Gedenkboek van het Koloniaal-Militair Invalidenhuis Bronbeek* (Arnhem/Gouda 1881) Plate VII).

In short, during the colonial period objects played an important role in sustaining European social relations with distant kin which involved creating identification processes in an imperial context, encompassing both colony and metropole. Artefacts not only eased major geographical and social-cultural transitions, they also enhanced people's social status and feelings of togetherness, in both the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia.

Displaced in post-colonial the Netherlands, ca. 1950-1990

The transnational, or rather imperial, social relations of (former) colonial migrants between the Netherlands and Indonesia, shaped and perpetuated by objects, changed dramatically after Indonesian Independence and 1957 when President Soekarno expelled all Europeans from Indonesia. The defunct Dutch colony was now a relic of former times and Indonesia was made pretty much inaccessible for Dutch people: "A living reality in a time which has gone forever", a Dutch civil servant remarked in 1955.[17] The past and the country closed off with colonial social and cultural contexts rapidly disappearing, its history become more and more socially sensitive. People's "life-plans" were disrupted and many were forced to leave, without any rite of farewell, created major differences in experiences of being at home and how identities were negotiated (Colomer 2013: 18; Colomer-Solsona 2020: 93).

Now the colony no longer existed as a distinctive social-political formation and with it the country which had been a constant in people's lives was

[17] National Archives, The Hague. Archive M.B. van der Jagt 2.21.205.26. Collection 412. Inv.nr. 33. Letter from J.W. Meyer Ranneft to Max van der Jagt, 21-11-1955.

consigned to the past forever, affective entanglements of the things from that particular past began to dominate people's engagements with such objects. Nostalgia for the former colony, the trauma and absence caused by the Second World War and the subsequent war in Indonesia prevailed (Elsbeth Locher-Scholten 2001). For the people who had fled from the threat of death, the stories and the few things they could carry with them were all which remained of their personal identity to take with them into their future now the colony had been relegated to history and return was impossible (Parkin 1999: 314). As one migrant put it, the few objects she still had made her past in the colony, which had been erased by the course of history, still tangible:

> [I have] some smaller things, such as a boeloe-boeloe (feather duster), 1 Balinese gong, 1 beautiful blackwood Balinese wall plaque of a mother and child. All these objects have an enormous emotional value for me, precisely because I came from Indonesia, "penniless" with nothing but a bundle of clothes and my four children. Some things were given to me after my mother passed away, including some beautiful kebajas and sarongs, cloths and garments, which I cherish and respect with a special love. It is a part of our past which is still tangible. The inner memories remain forever engraved in the memory.[18]

This was also the case with the family Van Buttingha Wichers. The few things the family chose to salvage when they were transferred to a Japanese internment camp were the art historical reference work about Chinese porcelain in the collection of Sir Percival David (R.L. Hobson 1934), a *blanc de chine* Guanyin figurine, an octagonal libation cup with the Eight Immortals and a vase. These objects epitomized the passion of the pater familias, Gerard G. van Buttingha Wichers (1879-1945), and were dragged from one Japanese internment camp to another by his family, purely because of their symbolic-emotional value as these objects were of no use whatsoever in an internment camp.

After Van Buttingha Wichers' untimely death in November 1945, these objects were brought to the Netherlands. Here the battered book with the address of the camp written in it, represented an absence which haunted the homely spaces of the family with a melancholy, reminding them of the untimely death of its owner, his passion for collecting Chinese porcelain, the loss of that collection, and the hardships endured during the Second World War, constantly generating moods and emotions (Caron Lipman 2014).

W.Ch.J. Bastiaans (1898-1975), who was born in colonial Indonesia, had a wooden Chinese household god, Xuanwu (also known by other names like Shang Di Gong, "Sian Tik Kong"), copied in Java, around 1930 (see picture 6). He wrote:

> Over the course of time many things were taken away from me, even my wife and children, but no transfer, not the Japanese occupation or the Bersiap period were able to make me lose the statue. Sian Tik Kong sits peacefully, in dignified

[18] Letter L.A. Rouwhof, *Moesson,* 15-7-1988, p. 8.

> tranquillity, on the mantelpiece in my living-room and still regularly receives his incense stick on time. This statue radiates peace and tranquillity. (Bastiaans 1961: 10).

This quotation shows that the household god represented something greater: for Bastiaans' will to survive in a war on another continent and the grief for all those he had lost during that period.

Picture 6. The figure of Shang Di Gong, especially made for Bastiaans. (From: *Tong Tong*, 15-2-1961, p. 10).

Not everyone who was interned in the Japanese internment camp was able to keep luxury items with them as the Van Buttingha Wichers' family had done. Many forced European migrants, after being interned in Japanese camps during the Second World War, returned to the Netherlands with only those objects they had made themselves in the camps: oven mitts, self-made playing-cards, toys, wallets, and the like. In the Netherlands these were cherished as acts of resistance and "courage" and resilience in times of oppression.[19] These objects were regarded not only by their personal owners in this way, they were also presented to a wider public in this light. For example, the oven mitts, playing-cards, toys, and other objects were displayed in exhibitions in the Netherlands from 1946 onwards. In such a way, these migrants' suffering, which had become part of their identity, was acknowledged by and propagated to peers and to a larger, in the Netherlands still ignorant, public. This could be an important step towards people feeling at home and belonging somewhere; having a future at that place.

[19] "Indië onder Japanse bezetting. Burgermeester Visser opent tentoonstelling bij Gerzon", *Het Vrije Volk*, 18-6-1947.

Besides the few objects which people were able to bring back from the colony, they (and often their children as well) surrounded themselves with newly purchased objects which also referred to life in the colonial era. In 1970 the Indies periodical *Tong Tong* (later: *Moesson*) stated that it would be impossible to imagine a Dutch interior inhabited by Indo-European people which did not have a Sumba *kain*, Chinese porcelain, Javanese brassware or woodcarving from Bali (L.C. Heyting 1970: 6). When asked about the background to her "Indies" interior, one lady replied:

> I think that this "Indies" atmosphere [in her home, CD] arose from a mixture of nostalgia and a kind of identity consciousness. [...] We are at home in our patria, our fatherland, but are still we are foreign: at home and not feeling at home. Therefore, we try to complete that homeland by surrounding ourselves with all kinds of objects and plants from the country in which we were born and had spent our youth. We create a home base to suit our personal feelings.[20]

People like this lady created sites of "affective engagement" at home in which objects were surrounded by a timeless, depoliticized nostalgia for a life which gone forever (and which was heavily romanticized[21] (Lizzy van Leeuwen 2008: 18; Sarah De Mul 2010)) and by traumatic emotions of the war. In these sites identities were created and emphasized so that relationships with the former colony were highlighted. In active engagement with people, objects like this acted, more than ever, as "transitional objects": helping to sustain emotional relationships with kin and fellow displaced persons and by increasing a sense of a "continuous transnational self" (Colomer-Solsona 2020: 17). This helped enormously to facilitate displaced persons' migration from former colonial Indonesia to the Netherlands.

These sites of affective engagement were deliberately shaped and communicated by people as an expression of their own transnational self and thus identity: "The 'Indies' objects which I have [...] are a salute to my Motherland [sic!]", someone wrote in 1988. "A tall *waringin* plant made it clear that here too, the Netherlands East Indies are far from forgotten", another migrant wrote about some other migrant's home (Liselotte Balgooy 1979: 12-13).

This kind of confirmation of a certain "Indies", cultural identity by visitors, and hence of the continuous transnational self in both the present and future, was very important to many. Someone wrote that she had never received a greater compliment than when a friend, who was captain with Garuda (the Indonesian national airline) and therefore apparently supposedly knowledgeable about all things "Indies" and Indonesian, remarked that she had an "Indies house in Holland". This confirmation of her transnational identity was very meaningful to her because she was, as she wrote, not "Indies" but a "*totok*" [that is a person born in the Netherlands who had lived in colonial Indonesia for some time, CD] and as a result she felt she did not belong anywhere: "Not with the real Dutch or with the Indo-people [that is, people of European and Asian descent,

[20] Letter Nono Poender, *Moesson,* 15-7-1988, pp. 4-5.
[21] This kind of nostalgia is called "*tempo doeloe*".

CD]".[22] To have an Indonesian *waringin* plant, something "alive which reminds one of the past", was instantly recognizable to the visitor to her home. It created a sense of kinship: "We are all like that!" (Balgooy 1979: 12-13). Journalist and rally driver Maus Gatsonides wrote in 1962 about the famous Dutch singer of European-Asian descent, Anneke Grönloh, stating that he immediately felt at home with her because of her "Indies" interior (Gatsonides 1962: 12). And, in 1988, another migrant stated that the objects in her house had more than a decorative function. "Every person entering the house can immediately see where I have come from, even if I am not at home", she wrote (see Picture 7).[23]

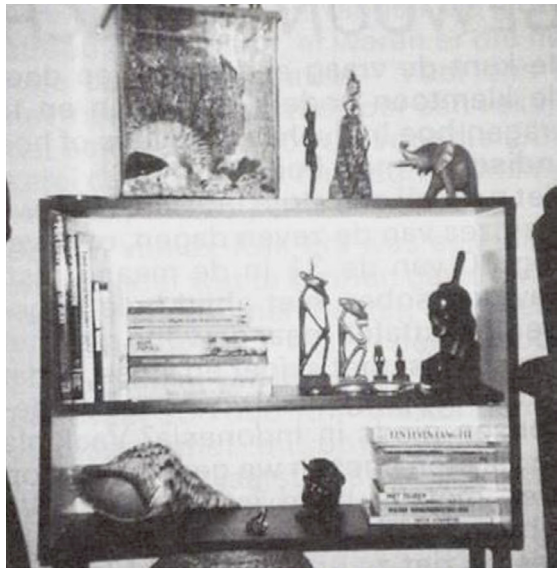
Picture 7. Louise Springer-Roggeveen's living-room in the Netherlands, 1988. (From: *Moesson*, 15-7-1988, p. 5).

By visiting a site of affective engagement like an "Indies" interior, people could experience a painful throw-back in time and be confronted with absences, like the loss of their lives and homes in the colony. They projected their own memories and histories onto the objects of others. "When I enter your house, I always have to swallow [my tears, CD] as I see a rear veranda in my mind's eye",[24] someone explained, referring to the memory of her or his own home in colonial Indonesia and the pain this could cause, even after more than thirty-five years as this was written in 1988 (see Picture 8).

This kind of evocation of painful memories by objects was not restricted to visitors, it was also felt by the owners themselves. "On the wall hangs a small horseshoe on which I stepped in front of Goebeng Station in Soerabaja on 22 August, 1945. The street dirt of Soerabaja still clings to the horseshoe".[25] The

[22] Letter A. Volleberg-Van Leent, *Moesson,* 15-7-1988, p. 5.
[23] Letter Noor Timmer, *Moesson,* 15-7-1988, p. 9.
[24] Letter Louise Springer-Roggeveen, *Moesson,* 15-7-1988, p. 5.
[25] Letter Olga Bör, *Moesson,* 15-7-1988, p. 4.

moment and the ensuing pain of losing one's life in the colony was evoked by something as tangible as the horseshoe. The reference to the mud in the objects authenticated the moment of departure in the past (Susan Pearce 1992), bringing it temporally very close to people through its tangibility - even around forty years later.



Picture 8. Noor Timmer's bookshelves in her house in the Netherlands, 1988. (From: *Moesson*, 15-7-1988, p. 9).

Certainly, in the first decades after Indonesia's Independence, Dutch museums like the former colonial museum in Amsterdam, which was renamed "Tropenmuseum", were still sites of affective engagement for people projecting their own colonial memories, histories, and identities onto the collections (see Picture 9). In 1962, the museum was still attracting visitors who said they had come there to relive the atmosphere of the "old East Indies".[26] In the same period, in 1967, the staff of the ethnographical museum in Leiden observed that visitors came mainly to "reminisce" and that certain museum displays seemed to encourage an almost nostalgic look back at an idealized colonial past.[27]

Throughout the late twentieth century and even in the twenty-first century,[28] cultural objects, whether in museums or in people's homes, have continued to shape and maintain relations between uprooted migrants or

[26] Corlien Varkevisser and Els van der Zee (1963: 49, 66, 69).
[27] *Annual Report Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde Leiden 1967* (The Hague 1969: 275).
[28] See, for instance, the Astrid Alling-Korstjens' project "Memory of a Motherland" in which she photographed people with romantic Indonesian paintings in their living room. She describes how these paintings function as a sort of youth memory, something people recognize from the past and whose stories are rapidly disappearing. Astrid Alling – Herinnering aan een Moederland (consulted 29-6-2022).

their (grand-)children and a life and country which belonged to the past forever. They forged an "Indies" identity and stimulated a sense of collective belonging among those who also identified with it, making a life and future in the Netherlands possible.

Picture 9. A room in the "Indisch Museum"/Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam between 1945-1950, displaying cultures from Sulawesi and Kalimantan. (Collection National Museum of World Cultures, the Netherlands, inv. nr. TM-60056272).

Conclusion

Objects played an important role in colonial migrants' experiential transnationalism, both in colonial and post-colonial times. People and objects entered into social relations which created meaningful, dynamic relationships across borders. In these transnational (or rather: *imperial*) social networks of travelling objects, migrants built and continue to build social-cultural fields which have linked their country of origin and their country of settlement together.

In these fields, people have developed specific identities and feelings of belonging, and hence well-being and feeling at home in culturally different places (that is, the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia), which simultaneous affected their social status. These identities and social status were not formulated with two nation states in mind, but came into being in social-cultural fields which had linked the (former) colony to the Netherlands. In this broad imperial space of the Netherlands and colonial Indonesia, a specific social-cultural colonial "European" identity was forged which connected people to the two different societies.

Although after decolonization and the birth of the nation-state Indonesia the Dutch colonial empire in Asia had become a political impossibility, its social-cultural geographical outlook still determined colonial migrants' way

of thinking. Even up to the 1980s, migrants with the European legal status from the former colony and their descendants continued to construct their identity and feeling of "home" in sites of affective engagement with the former colonial state and their colonial family history as a reference point and visitors projected their own, similar memories, identities, and histories onto these object-filled places. The objects formed these migrants' "bases of future re-settlement" (Parkan 1999) and offered the possibility of maintaining their continuous transnational self. These identities still connected people to Dutch and the former colonial society – a society forever consigned to history. I believe, therefore, that these objects and identities and feelings of belonging created by and with these objects are imperial rather than transnational. As a result, we should keep an open mind about the historical inter-sectionalities of different forms of mobilities which have shaped the past and also the present.

These identities, which, as we have seen were not static but evolved over time, are still differ from other, mainly post-colonial, Indonesian migrants, like the groups of Chinese-Indonesians and Moluccans who came to the Netherlands after 1957. In general, in the colony the European migrant identities discussed here were based on their degree of "Europeanness" and kinship, through family, with Europe/the Netherlands and, after decolonization, were based mainly on a very depoliticized, timeless nostalgia for the colony and the trauma of the Japanese internment camps (Locher-Scholten 2002). And, as we have seen, objects have been the agents of place and belonging in those specific experiential *imperial* identities, even after the colony had gained its independence.

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