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Ann Laura Stoler: Along the Archival Grain

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CHAPTER ONE

Prologue in Two Parts

Ethnology is especially interested in what is *not written*. [It deals with what is] *different* from everything that men usually dream of engraving in stone or committing to paper.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, 1958

The primary function of writing . . . is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings.

—Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 1955

PART 1: WRITING AND ITS IMPERIAL MUTATIONS

THIS BOOK is about the force of writing and the feel of documents, about lettered governance and written traces colonial lives. It is about commitments to paper, and the political and personal work that such inscriptions perform. Not least, it is about colonial archives as sites of the expectant and conjured—about dreams of comforting futures and forebodings of future failures. It is a book that asks what we might learn about the nature of imperial rule and the dispositions it engendered from the writerly forms through which it was managed, how attentions were trained and selectively cast. In short, it is a book precisely about that which Lévi-Strauss says anthropology is not.

Colonial administrations were prolific producers of social categories. This book deals with these categories and their enumeration, but its focus is less on taxonomy than on the unsure and hesitant sorts of documentation and sensibilities that gathered around them. It starts from the observation that producing rules of classification was an unruly and piecemeal venture at best. Nor is there much that is hegemonic about how those taxonomies worked on the ground. Grids of intelligibility were fashioned from uncertain knowledge; disquiet and anxieties registered the uncommon sense of events and things; epistemic uncertainties repeatedly unsettled the imperial conceit that all was in order, because papers classified people, because directives were properly acknowledged, and because colonial civil servants were schooled to assure that records were prepared, circulated, securely stored, and sometimes rendered to ash.

In these chapters Dutch colonial archival documents serve less as stories for a colonial history than as active, generative substances with histories, as documents with itineraries of their own. What was written in prescribed

form and in the archive's margins, what was written oblique to official prescriptions and on the ragged edges of protocol produced the administrative apparatus as it opened to a space that extended beyond it. Contrapuntal intrusions emanated from outside the corridors of governance but they also erupted—and were centrally located—within that sequestered space. Against the sober formulaics of officialese, these archives register the febrile movements of persons off balance—of thoughts and feelings in and out of place. In tone and temper they convey the rough interior ridges of governance and disruptions to the deceptive clarity of its mandates.

If anthropology is “different” from that which is engraved in brick and mortar, as Lévi-Strauss insisted, this book embraces ethno-graphy of another kind. Fearful colonial visions and their attendant policies were engraved in consequential excess on paper and chiseled “in stone.” Their material force appeared in elaborate “coolie ordinances” repeatedly rewritten to fix the degrees of unfreedom that would keep Sumatra's plantation workers coerced and confined. Often it manifested in thousands of pages of intricate plans to establish fitting places to park colonial embarrassments—like mixed blood orphans. Material force was engraved in phantasmic scenarios of potential revolt that called for militias readied with arms.

Kilometers of administrative archives called up massive buildings to house them. Government offices, filled with directors, assistant directors, scribes, and clerks, were made necessary by the proliferation of documents that passed, step by meticulous step, through the official ranks. Accumulations of paper and edifices of stone were both monuments to the asserted know-how of rule, artifacts of bureaucratic labor duly performed, artifices of a colonial state declared to be in efficient operation.

Colonial commissions, incessant reportage in the absence of evidence, and secret missives contained political content in their archival form. Blueprints to reshape what people felt, what language elders should speak to their young, and how they should live in their homes evince visions of social design often inadequate to those tasks. Governing agents reeled uncomfortably between attention to the minutiae of domestic arrangements and generic social kinds, between probabilities and positivistic evidence, between what could be known about the past and what could be predicted for the future, between abstract principles and a keen awareness that what mattered as much to a managed colony was attentiveness to what people did in their everyday lives. In all of these concerns the middling and elite echelons of government stumbled in the face of sentiments that were as hard to assess among their own ranks as among the colonized. Affections and attachments—familial and otherwise—were often impervious to the meddling priorities of a supposedly “rational” and reasoned state. Efforts to redirect those sentiments—or cancel them out—

revealed “epistemological worries” (to use Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison’s term) about what they could know and how they could know it.¹ From efforts to mold affective states and monitor the parameters of racial ontologies, we can read their confused assessments of what kinds of knowledge they needed, what they needed to know—and what they often knew they did not.

As such, documents in these colonial archives were not dead matter once the moment of their making had passed. What was “left” was not “left behind” or obsolete. In the Netherlands Indies, these colonial archives were an arsenal of sorts that were reactivated to suit new governing strategies. Documents honed in the pursuit of prior issues could be requisitioned to write new histories, could be reclassified for new initiatives, could be renewed to fortify security measures against what were perceived as new assaults on imperial sovereignty and its moralizing claims. In this sense Lévi-Strauss’s conjunction of writing and exploitation quintessentially captures an imperial project and a colonial situation.² But as the last decade of colonial scholarship so rightly insists, pursuits of exploitation and enlightenment are not mutually exclusive but deeply entangled projects.

Yet in attending to that which is “not written,” there is something of Lévi-Strauss’s vision of anthropology in what follows. By this I do not mean that it plumbs for the “hidden message” or those subliminal texts that couch “the real” below the surface and between the written lines. Rather it seeks to identify the pliable coordinates of what constituted colonial common sense in a changing imperial order in which social reform, questions of rights and representation, and liberal impulses and more explicit racisms played an increasing role. As imperial orders changed, so did common sense. Here I attempt to distinguish between what was “unwritten” because it could go without saying and “everyone knew it,” what was unwritten because it could not yet be articulated, and what was unwritten because it could not be said. Similarly, in attention to “imperial dispositions”—what it took to live a colonial life, to live in and off empire and was reflective of its practices—Lévi-Strauss’s adherence to the unwritten joins with the written to become piercingly relevant again.

But perhaps the unwritten looms largest in the making of colonial ontologies themselves. “Ontology,” as I use the term here, does not refer to

¹ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone, 2007), 35.

² The fuller quote reads: “When writing makes its debut, it seems to favor exploitation rather than the enlightenment of mankind. . . . If my hypothesis is correct, the primary function of writing, as a mode of communication, is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings” (Claude Lévi-Strauss, “On Writing,” in *Tristes Tropiques* [New York: Atheneum, 1964], 292).

the disciplined pursuits of analytic philosophy about the real ontological status of things in the world. Rather, I understand ontology as that which is about the *ascribed* being or essence of things, the categories of things that are thought to exist or can exist in any specific domain, and the specific attributes assigned to them. Ontologies, as Ian Hacking writes, refer to “what comes into existence with the historical dynamics of naming.”³ Pursuing an “historical ontology,” then, demands something that philosophical study of ontology tout court might pursue but more often does not: identification of *mutating* assignments of essence and its predicates in specific time and place.⁴ On the face of it, the notion of essence implies stability and fixity, the enduring properties of people and things. But if there is anything we can learn from the colonial ontologies of racial kinds, it is that such “essences” were protean, not fixed, subject to reformulation again and again.

The claim that there are “essences” that distinguish social kinds is very different from positing that these essences are unchanging and stable in time. In the Indies, colonial agents constantly sought new ways to secure the qualities of social kinds—most clearly when assigned attributes fell short of differentiating the gradations of exclusions and exemptions that new colonial administrations sought to make. Such reassessments called into question the epistemic habits on which they were based. As I argue throughout this book, these were not passive inhabitings but achieved, anticipatory states. Those epistemic practices were not just recorded in the colonial archive, but developed and worked through the genres of documentation that civil servants were required to make.

As such, these archives are not simply accounts of actions or records of what people thought happened. They are records of uncertainty and doubt in how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond to a changing imperial world. Not least they record anxious efforts to “catch up” with what was emergent and “becoming” in new colonial situations. Ontologies are both productive and responsive, expectant and late. Thus when questions of poor relief for impoverished whites come increasingly to the fore in the second half of the nineteenth century—in debates that anticipated many twentieth-century questions about race in metropolitan state welfare politics about the deserving and undeserving poor—designations of kinds of people that were once deemed

³ Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 26.

⁴ On attention to these ontological mutations with respect to race and the plasticity with which they get reassigned, see my “Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 183–255. With respect to scientific objects, see Lorraine Daston, who writes of “an ontology in motion” in *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 14.

adequate were no more. Ethnographic sensibilities have particular purchase in this quixotic space of premonition, probability, and speculation.

Many of the “events” on which I focus here are really not “events” at all. Sometimes, as in chapter 4, I refer to them as “non-events” since they are records of things that never happened. Similarly, often those events to which I attend are not those that figure as central in the colonial and post-colonial historiography of the Netherlands Indies. In fact, many of them would be considered to have little consequence. The European Pauperism Commissions discussed in chapters 4 and 5 have rarely been accorded an historiographic entry;⁵ the May 1848 demonstration of creole Europeans and “Indos,” the subject of chapter 3, receives only occasional and passing reference by students of Dutch colonial history.⁶ Similarly, in studies of the Dutch colonial policy, the artisanal schools and agricultural colonies for mixed blood children, described in chapter 4, leave barely a historiographic trace.

The history of the Indo-European population, those of “mixed” parentage (usually European fathers and native mothers) both in the Netherlands Indies and Holland after Indonesian independence, has garnered far more attention.⁷ Still what was, in early twentieth-century colonial circles,

⁵ For an important exception, see Ulbe Bosma, *Karel Zaalberg: journalist en strijder voor de Indo* (Leiden: KITLV, 1997).

⁶ Dutch historians of Holland’s history of political dissension and social criticism treat it very differently—according it a full, if marginal, chapter.

⁷ Reference to specific works on the subject are scattered throughout these chapters but for quick reference to this extensive literature, see Paul W. van der Veur, *The Eurasians of Indonesia: a political-historical bibliography* (Ithaca: Modern Indonesia Project, 1971). Numerous novels and plays were published about “the Indo” from the late colonial period. Only some of them are cited here. Memoirs published in Dutch have had a resurgence. As Tessel Pollman and Ingrid Harms note, “Indo,” a word that could not be used even five years ago (except by Indos themselves), as of 1987 was again common, even a badge of honor. See Tessel Pollman and Ingrid Harms, *In Nederland door omstandigheden* (Den Haag: Novib, 1987), 9. Among publications by Indos who have reclaimed the name and this history for themselves, see, for example, Paul van der Put, *Het boek der Indo’s: Kroniek* (Rotterdam: Indonet, 1997), and Frank Neijndorff, *Nederlands-Indië: Een familiegeheim* (Den Haag: Nederlandse Document Reproductie, 2001). My discussion does not go beyond the early twentieth century. For an overview of the history of the Indo political movement in the Indies, see J. Th. Petrus Blumberger, *De Indo-Europeesche beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Willink, 1939), and Takahashi Shiraishi’s discussion of the “Indo-Japanese-Chinese” consortium of persons who animated early popular radicalism in *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). See also the essays in Wim Willems, *Indische Nederlanders in de ogen van de wetenschap* (Leiden: Centrum voor Onderzoek van Maatschappelijke Tegenstellingen, 1990); idem, *Bronnen van kennis over Indische Nederlanders* (Leiden: Centrum voor Onderzoek van Maatschappelijke Tegenstellingen, 1991); and idem, *Sporen van een Indisch verleden, 1600–1942* (Leiden: Centrum voor Onderzoek van Maatschappelijke Tegenstellingen, 1992). Among the most compelling histories of Indo politics are biographies of key figures, such as Bosma’s study, cited above.

referred to as “the Indo problem”—galvanizing contrary sentiments ranging from contempt and compassion to pity, fear, and disdain—is often shorn of attention to the burgeoning archive of administrative energy that, for nearly a century, was mobilized around it.

Certain moments of “the Indo problem” have been given more attention than others: that of the late 1890s and 1900s appears as a prelude of sorts to the nationalist movement; that of the 1930s, when the fascist-like *Vaderlandsche* Club took up their cause and demand for settler land rights in Dutch-controlled New Guinea;⁸ and again, following independence, in the 1950s when many Indo-Europeans were ousted from Indonesia or fled for refuge to southern California, Australia, and South Africa, and, perhaps most uncomfortably, to Holland.

But that ambiguous nineteenth-century nomenclature of the *Inlandsche kinderen*—a term that could designate mixed bloods, Indies born Dutch, and poor whites that figures so centrally in this book—is barely recalled.⁹ This is not because colonial officials did not write about them. On the contrary, kings and governor generals, regional officers, and social engineers of all sorts were obsessed with their welfare, their homes, morals, speech, rearing, and resentments—and, most importantly, their vengeful and potentially subversive inclinations. The fact that they led no revolts and produced no martyrs to their cause had little bearing on the high-pitched fears that eddied around them. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, intense debates about what was conceived as the repressed rage of *Inlandsche kinderen* point elsewhere: to what Doris Sommer in another context calls the “foundational fictions” of colonial rule.¹⁰

Consternations among those who governed were reactions to quiet and sustained assaults on the warped logic of “European” supremacy. Challenges took unexpected forms that showed imperial principles were not, and could not be, consistent with themselves. *Inlandsche kinderen* embodied and exposed hypocrisies that stretched beyond the native population—that only some Europeans had rights, that rights and race were not always aligned, and that awareness of those inconsistencies were evident to, and expressed among, empire’s practitioners themselves.

⁸ See P.J. Drooglever’s important study of this strange and failed alliance in *De Vaderlandse Club, 1929–1942* (Franeker: Wever, 1980).

⁹ Paul van der Veur’s dissertation is a notable exception. See his “Introduction to a Socio-Political Study of the Eurasians of Indonesia” (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1955). The term “*Inlandsche kinderen*” is spelled and capitalized variously throughout these documents (sometimes as “*inlandse kinderen*,” sometimes capitalized, other times not.. I follow the convention of the specific documents to which I am referring. By 1918 “*inlandsche kinderen*” refers simply to children in the native population.

¹⁰ Doris Sommer, *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

A Colonial Incision

In the late nineteenth century the Netherlands Indies included more than forty million people classed as *Inlander* (native), hundreds of thousands “Foreign Orientals,” and tens of thousands classified as “European” (the latter exploding to over three hundred thousand by the 1930s). With such proportions, one could imagine that debates over the relatively few *Inlandsche kinderen* were no more than distractions and deferrals from more pressing concerns. But “minor” histories should not be mistaken for trivial ones. Nor are they iconic, mere microcosms of events played out elsewhere on a larger central stage. Minor history, as I use it here, marks a differential political temper and a critical space.¹¹ It attends to structures of feeling and force that in “major” history might be otherwise displaced.¹² This is not to suggest that administrative anxieties about the *Inlandsche kinderen* tell the real story of empire. Nor is it to suggest that the concerns voiced here somehow mattered more than the elaborate legal, economic, military, and political infrastructure designed to subdue, coerce, and control those designated as the native population. It is rather to identify a symptomatic space in the craft of governance, a diacritic of sorts that accents the epistemic habits in motion and the wary, conditional tense of their anticipatory and often violent register.

For here was a category that neither color nor race could readily or reliably delimit or contain. Everyone knew about the “so-called *Inlandsche kinderen*,” but few agreed on who and how many they were. Nor did naming alone, as Hacking argues, call upon and secure a common set of attributes. If knowledge is made not for understanding but “for cutting,” as

¹¹ I think here of Foucault’s description of what constitutes a statement/event as that which

emerges in its *historical irruption*; what we try to examine is *the incision* that it makes, the irreducible—and very often tiny—emergence. However banal it maybe, however unimportant its consequences may appear to be, *however quickly it may be forgotten after its appearance*, however little heard or badly deciphered we may suppose it to be, a statement is always an event that neither the language nor the meaning can quite exhaust. It is certainly a strange event . . . *it is linked to the gesture of writing*. . . . [I]t opens up to itself a residual existence . . . *in the materiality of manuscripts, books, or any other form of recording*; like every event, it is unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation, and reactivation.

(*The Archaeology of Knowledge* [New York: Pantheon, 1972], 28)

¹² My treatment of “minor history” here has some alliance with Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “minor literature,” but not in all ways. In their characterization, minor literature is always political, imbued with a “collective value” and a language “affected by a high coefficient of deterritorialization.” See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16–17.

Foucault charged, then here is knowledge that has participated in its own self-mutilation, a history that cuts long and deep.¹³ It carves incisions into the flesh of race, slices through the legal armature of white privilege, slashes through the history of public welfare, and, not least, cleaves into the conceit that more knowledge secures a more durable empire.

Lévi-Strauss once (in)famously wrote that history is a fine departure point in “any quest for intelligibility” as long as one “gets out of it.”¹⁴ But quick exit is more dangerous and more compromised than his *bon mot* suggests. In the case of empire it is really not an option. What I call “watermarks in colonial history” are indelibly inscribed in past and present. The visibility of watermarks depends on angle and light. Watermarks are embossed on the surface and in the grain. As I use the term here, they denote signatures of a history that neither can be scraped off nor removed without destroying the paper. Watermarks cannot be erased. Governments devised watermarks as protections against counterfeit currency and falsified documents that claimed state provenance. In 1848, development of the “shaded watermark” provided “tonal depth” by rendering areas “in relief.”

In this book each chapter is a watermark of sorts, shaded to provide tonal depth and temperament, to render imperial governance and its dispositions in bolder relief. Watermarking techniques were fashioned for the privileged, with tools that engraved their rights and bore their stamp. Those that emboss these pages were tools of the privileged but engraved with impressions that were sometimes used to other ends. Unlike watermarks that protect against counterfeit versions, these chapters take up another sense of counterfeit that does the opposite. From the same thirteenth-century moment in the social etymology of “counterfeit” emerges a contrary sense—one that partakes of a critical stance. It is not the false or imitative that carries the weight of meaning but that derived from “*contrafactio*”—the “setting in opposition or contrast.” It is this play on the oppositional that these watermarks embrace. The only “counterfeits” they stamp against are those that argue that there are no watermarks and there was no stamp, simply because light has been cast with darker shadows in other, more commanding directions.

PART 2: ARCHIVAL HABITS IN THE NETHERLANDS INDIES

Transparency is not what archival collections are known for and the Dutch colonial archives in which this book plunges are no exception. This is not

¹³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 88.

¹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 262.

because they are not “accessible” in the sense that their many collections are still classified or closed, or that the archivists are unhelpful, or that hard-to-procure permission is required to enter. Nor is it because the reading room is cramped with long lines of too many eager dissertators (as in the French colonial holdings in Aix-en-Provence) or because the documents are in disrepair or computers and pens are forbidden, or because the collections are difficult to find or in places hard to reach. Fiches can be ordered by mail. Microfilms are made. By all of these measures, the Dutch colonial archival collections housed at the public Algemeen Rijksarchief right next to the central train station in The Hague—with its spacious, air-conditioned hall and multiple computer terminals—is among the most accessible, ultramodern depositories.

But the question of “accessibility” to the workings of the Dutch colonial administration in the nineteenth-century Indies is a real one that eludes the contemporary inventory numbers by which documents are requested and searched. Inaccessibility has more to do with the principles that organized colonial governance and the “common sense” that underwrote what were deemed political issues and how those issues traveled by paper through the bureaucratic pathways of the colonial administration. Not least, “access” rests on knowledge of the history of colonial Indonesia, on changing perceptions of danger as much as the structures of command.

Given that strikingly few scholars of colonial Indonesia actually describe their methods of archival labor or the administrative forms that shaped the circuits of reportage, accountability, and decision making that in turn produced densities of documents, their frequency, as well as procedures of cross-referencing and culling. If Dutch historians of colonial Indonesia can assume common knowledge about how the principal collection of state-generated documents about the Netherlands Indies at the Algemeen Rijksarchief are organized, foreign scholars cannot do the same.

Because the archives of the Ministry of Colonies (MK) are organized *chronologically* and not by topic, there is no easy entry by theme. Indices provide some access by subject, but only to a limited degree. It is rather specific names and dates that matter. Knowing what one is after is not always enough. More important is a reckoning with how colonial sense and reason conjoined social kinds with the political order of colonial things. But even then, as I argue throughout this book, that “common sense” was subject to revision and actively changed. Navigating the archives is to map the multiple imaginaries that made breastfeeding benign at one moment and politically charged at another; that made nurseries a tense racial question; that elevated something to the status of an “event”; that animated public concern or clandestine scrutiny, turning it into what the French call an *affaire*. In short, an interest in European paupers or abandoned mixed blood children gets you nowhere, unless you know how

they mattered to whom, when, and why they did so. This does not mean that one is wholly bound by concerns of state. The documents generated and the mandated reports produced surfeits over and again that exceeded the demands of proof and causation. Some contradicted the questions asked, others stretched for relevance. Still others pushed against the required call for useful information.

In the spirit of achieving some small modicum of clarity in an often muddled and confusing archival world—of which, after some twenty-five years, I know, and work admittedly with, only a fraction—it seems worth describing at least some of the vectors of official assemblages I encountered and the sometimes unexpected documents that were gathered around them.

The bulk of the archival documents cited in this book comes from the Algemeen Rijksarchief (now the Nationaal Archief) at Prins Willem-Alexanderhof in The Hague. This repository is the largest in the Netherlands, with ninety-three kilometers of documents in their holdings. Established in 1802 as the Rijksarchief and opened to the public in 1918, colonial matters make up only a part of a vast collection of maps, family archives; private papers of personages of national importance, archives of government bodies (like the States-General), and religious organizations. It houses the extensive collection of the Dutch East Indies Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*; VOC) that exercised sovereignty on the Dutch state's behalf from the beginning of the seventeenth century when the official monopoly on all Dutch trade in a broad region began, until the company went bankrupt in 1799.

For the period with which this book is concerned, roughly the 1830s to 1930s, the principal collection of matters dealing with the Netherlands Indies are found in the repository of the Ministry of Colonies (MK) set up by royal decree in 1814 and that continued through 1959. Communications between Java and the Netherlands before 1845 made their long journey around the Cape of Good Hope and took months to arrive. It was not until 1845 that a shorter so called “*landmail*” (sometimes called “*landpost*”) through Egypt made consultation between the ministers of colonies and the governors-general—and more direct control over the latter by the former—more feasible.¹⁵

In 1869 when the Suez Canal opened, the routing of mail between Java and the Netherlands was faster still, producing a steady stream of correspondence between their offices. By official decree of 28 May 1869, the

¹⁵ For the rich flow of “semiofficial” and private letters that passed between Minister of Colonies J.C. Baud (1840–1848) and Governor-General J.J. Rochussen, see the three volumes of *De semi-officiële en particuliere briefwisseling tussen J.C. Baud en J. J. Rochussen, 1845–1851* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1983).

Governor-General was required to report “on all important events, proceedings, proposals and other issues separately, sending where necessary transcripts of the relevant supporting documents.”¹⁶ This produced a very particular kind of administrative document, designated as a mail report (*mailrapport*; MR) and expedited to The Hague apart from the regular post.

The *mailrapporten* were generated by the Governor-General in Batavia. Each was made up of a folded double sheet of foolscap paper on which was provided a summary statement of the issue at hand. Bundled within it were supporting documents. The summary report, then, was from the Governor-General, but what the *mailrapporten* contained could be documents from many sources: those within and outside the government apparatus—information solicited from middling “social engineers” in health, education, and industry with comments on a regional or local matter. By administrative design, these gathered documents constituted the evidentiary packages for decisions to be made. Such accumulations of conflicting assessments, extraneous detail, anecdote, and local know-how are flash points of something else: of epistemic habits called into question, of certain knowledge in the face of uncertain conditions, of bold and equivocal interpretations of the everyday.

Mailrapporten were classified as “*geheim*” (secret, usually marked with an X) or remained unmarked. Since the Minister of Colonies archives were only open to the public in 1918, at the tail end of the period discussed in these chapters, the question of “secret” was never about public access. *Geheim* marked rather the care taken to limit circulation of such documents *within* the colonial administration itself and, as I note in chapter 2, many matters were not “secret” at all. The designation “secret” was an administrative label. Appended documents might be marked “*vertrouwelijk*” (confidential) by a lower-level official as a warning and assessment, less often as an official category.

The more important rubric in the Dutch colonial archives is the “*verbaal*” (Vb). A *verbaal* was generated from the office of the Minister of Colonies, a message that might be a decree, a demand for information, a decision or comment on a *mailrapport* of the Governor-General or of someone else. Because the *verbaal* contained the Minister’s message, also on double foolscap paper, and the materials he consulted or deemed relevant to write the message or make a decision, mail reports and their appended documentation often were included in *verbalen*. *Verbalen* were organized chronologically by the date they were sent. But the reports and letters therein could span an extended period of time. The first page is

¹⁶ The full text is available online at <http://www.moranmicropublications.nl/Mailrapporten.html>.

key: the Minister's text opens with reference to the Governor-General's previous communication to which the *verbaal* was a response. Secondly, it provides a listing of earlier documents seen as relevant or called upon. This system of flagging not only creates paper trails; it provides a trace through time, an administrative genealogy of precedence, an implicit regime of relevance that might be ignored or pursued. For example, a *verbaal* of 4 December 1872 (listed as V 4 December 72, no.35/1888) notes that the Minister has read the Governor-General's letter of 26 August 1872 and has "taken notice of" other documents, some which might be included as items of relevance "*exhibitum*." This particular *verbaal* references six other documents dating from 1858 to 1872.

Verbalen from the 1870s had printed on the title page "subject." Thus the 4 December 1872 *verbaal* is titled "subsidies to charitable institutions in the Indies." But this only partially reflects what the *verbaal* was about; not charities in any general sense, but exclusively those orphanages in the urban centers of Semarang, Batavia, and Surabaya where most of the European population lived and where most of their destitute descendants and abandoned mixed blood offspring ended up. An appended letter of the Resident of Batavia writes of the increasing number of impoverished Europeans with no means of support; another from the Director of Education provides detailed lists of the cost and materials—number of towels and pillows, cotton undershirts and pants—allocated for each interned child. This is not among the most interesting of *verbalen* for the subjects I treat here, but it does indicate the range of particulars of the everyday that could make their way into documents passed between the highest echelons of the colonial administration.

In the case of the unpublished commission on needy Europeans in the Indies, treated in chapter 5, the report of the commission was sent to the Governor-General in piecemeal fashion as parts were completed. The Minister of Colonies in turn might gather all or some of those documents together in his response. Between 1872 when the commission on needy Europeans was inaugurated and 1874 when the final report was sent (and a decision was made not to make it public) a thick set of *verbalen* (especially those of V 25 April 1872, No.15/626, and 28 March 1874, no.47/506) were produced. Under the subject heading "Government care for the upbringing and education on behalf of the European population of the Netherlands Indies." ("*Staatszorg van opvoeding en onderwijs ten behoeve van den Europeesche bevolking van N.I.*") the *verbaal* of 28 March 1874 referenced twenty-four other documents, providing at once a genealogy of prior discussions and decisions and a selective citational map.

Subject headings of such *verbalen* could both conceal and reveal what they contained and what constituted the political rationalities that produced them. For example, reference to "upbringing" (*opvoeding*) as well

as “education”(*onderwijs*) in the subject title for the unpublished commission signaled a new urgency (though not a new phenomenon) in addressing child-rearing practices as a potential threat to the state. Political dangers resided in the domestic milieus in which “mixed blood” children lived and the misguided affections those environments provided. In this context “upbringing” turned attention less to the provision of artisan schools for adolescents (as had been the case in preceding decades) than to the need for earlier intervention with the very young, with their bodily “physical development” and their habits “of heart.” The reference to the “European population” raises an issue at the center of this book, for most of those children discussed in these reports were not legally acknowledged as European, could not speak Dutch, and were living outside the European quarters.

Such “official” circuits of communication between the Minister of Colonies and the Governor-General were crisscrossed with voices that were never contained by official pronouncements alone. In the case of the May 1848 demonstration, the subject of chapter 3, the number of detailed reports is staggering: they named names; recounted multiple and fractured versions of what transpired; and contested one another’s understanding of who was involved, how subversive they were, evincing phantasmic speculations on why they were so. Here, in 1848, the included documents reached low and deep onto the streets of Batavia and far to the outskirts of the city where soldiers were ready with arms. There are those between the *Assistent Resident* of Batavia and its Resident, the Resident and the Governor-General, the Governor-General and the Minister of Colonies, and the Minister of Colonies and the Netherlands’ King. But many other forms of communication swept across Batavia over that month: petitions, letters, and announcements that placed the threat of European treason, communist influence, Indo-European revolt, revolution in Europe, and state concerns over the political potential of outraged “parental feelings” at the heart of administrative fears and on virtually every page.

Published correspondence between Governor-General Rochussen and Minister of Colonies Baud, collected in their “semiofficial” and private letters, provides another window onto their joint contempt and unfettered disdain for the *Inlandsche kinderen*—idioms of a “common sense” that would continue to permeate a politics of “sympathy” more overtly expressed in later years.

One of the most critical documents about the May 1848 demonstration and the kind of event it was has rarely been called upon by the few scholars who have sought to write about the gathering. This is no surprise because the document only shows up in the *verbaal* of the Minister of Colonies a full nine years later. Referenced in a brief essay on Van Hoëvell written twenty years ago, neither the author nor others have

drawn on this investigative inquisition by the Resident of Batavia. Transcribed interviews in both Dutch and Malay evince scores of people who participated in the demonstration, were hailed to join, or heard about its planning on the preceding days.¹⁷ Thus even when we do know the dates and actors, documents slip from time and place. Sometimes it is only when they are called upon to legitimate or situate new predicaments in the lineage of older ones that we have “access” to them.

“The” colonial archives occupy a space that transcends officially designated archival collections. *Mailrapporten* and *verbalen* occupy only part of the force field in which documents were produced. Over the last twenty-five years I have drawn on pamphlets, books, newspapers, statutes, letters at the KITLV (Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, and Volkenkunde), the KIT (Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen), the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Leiden University library, missionary collections in Oegstgeest, the Ministry of Defense (MD), Central Bureau of Genealogy (CBG), and, less frequently, those at the National Archives in Jakarta (NA), most of which were requested and sent to me via the Nationaal Archief in The Hague. Describing this archival space is not an attempt to define its outer limits, all that it includes and excludes and all that I have left out. My interest is not in the finite boundaries of the official state archives but in their surplus production, what defines their interior ridges and porous seams, what closures are transgressed by unanticipated exposition and writerly forms.

Political summaries, published colonial statistics, and contemporary articles in newspapers and journals in the Indies and in the Netherlands responded to the official record, as chapter 4 on colonial commissions attests. Journalists and literati were active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and they boldly critiqued the autocratic nature of the colonial administration, as well. Excellent studies have been done of many of them.¹⁸ I draw more fully on articles in the press and elsewhere where they butted up against the common sense of the colonial administration to show just how uncommon that sense was. But sometimes

¹⁷ See Herman Stapelkamp, “De Rol van Van Hoëvell in de Bataviase mei-beweging van 1848,” *Jambatan* 4 (3): 11–20n38. Stapelkamp references the document as MK 571, resolution openbaar archief 8 Jan 1857, dossier no. 14. I thank Benjamin White for procuring this document for me and Ms. F. van Anrooij of the Algemeen Rijksarchief for making it available.

¹⁸ See, for example, Gerard Termorshuizen, *Journalisten en heethoofden: een geschiedenis van de Indisch-Nederlandse dagbladpers, 11744–1905* (Leiden: KITLV, 2001); Ulbe Bosma, *Karel Zaalberg: journalist en strijder voor de Indo* (Leiden: KITLV, 1997); Paul van der Velde, *Een Indische liefde: P. J. Veth, 1814–1895* (Leiden: Balans, 2000); Ahmat B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855–1913)* (Ithaca: SEAP, 1995); and, for a later period, W. Walraven, *Eendagsluigen: Journalistieke gebeurtenissen uit kranten en tijdschriften* (Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot, 1971).

I draw on newspapers simply to show how widely state “secrets” were shared.

Sometimes the borders that define the “official” and the “non-official” are hard to trace. Government civil servants wrote newspaper articles based on material culled from official records to which the public was not supposed to have access. Leaks soaked through and across confidential missives, private letters, and the sequestered archival page. Stylistically there is overlap, as well. When Frans Carl Valck, years after dismissal from his post, wrote a letter to his son-in-law to inform him of the Minister of Foreign Affairs’s wish to speak with him, he writes “*geheim*” in bold letters at the top of the page, as though reliving his involvement in colonial affairs from which he has been so long banished. But this leakage between the protocols of office and the private world of Valck had more poignant and painful manifestations still, which will be explored in chapter 6, as for instance when this father and civil servant would inadvertently slip, signing letters to his ten-year-old daughter not “Papa” but “Valck.”

The breadth of the archive that spans Frans Carl Valck’s life and work, discussed in chapters 5 and 6, thus takes us elsewhere, through the tiers of colonial governance in other ways. It was the *Binnenlandsch Bestuur* (BB), a distinct and powerful governing structure that ran the administrative corps of the Indies and consolidated its formal and rigid hierarchy of civil service jobs in the mid-nineteenth century, that was to seal Valck’s fate. When Valck was upbraided for his performance, it was the influential director of the *Binnenlandsch Bestuur* who scathingly made the case.

Many of the documents I work with here are those the *Binnenlandsch Bestuur* generated and sent on to the Governor-General, who in turn conveyed them to the Minister of Colonies. The *Raad van Indië*, the elite advisory board to the Governor-General, often emerges with a premier role in making decisions that the Governor-General on his own could or would not. Events in Deli also take us into the relationships between the Dutch military corps and the civil service through correspondence that underscores how divergent were their assessments of danger and how poor and haphazard their communications were.

The story of Frans Carl Valck’s failed career produces another extended colonial archive of its own. Relations of family and friends among the richest sugar barons and highest-placed administrators show through in moments of crisis, in requests for exceptional treatment, on vacations, and in the deadening calm of forced retirement. In short, the reach is beyond the Algemeen Rijksarchief’s secure walls to linger in its opacities, to muddy its reflection, to refract away from its shadow, and sometimes to shatter what has been so fittingly referred to as colonialism’s “house of glass.”

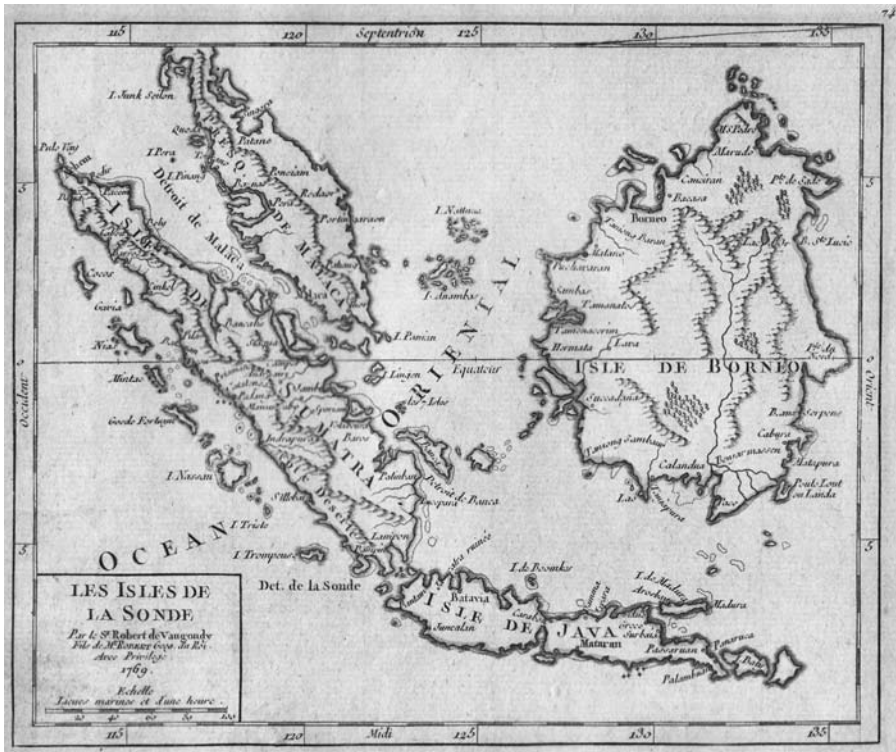


Figure 2. Map of Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and Malacca “Isles de la Sonde.” Robert de Vaugondy, 1769, before Deli was “opened” for the European plantation industry in the 1860s. *Source*: private collection of A. Stoler.