
Along the Archival Grain

EPISTEMIC ANXIETIES AND
COLONIAL COMMON SENSE

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Ch 1: "Prologue in Two Parts"

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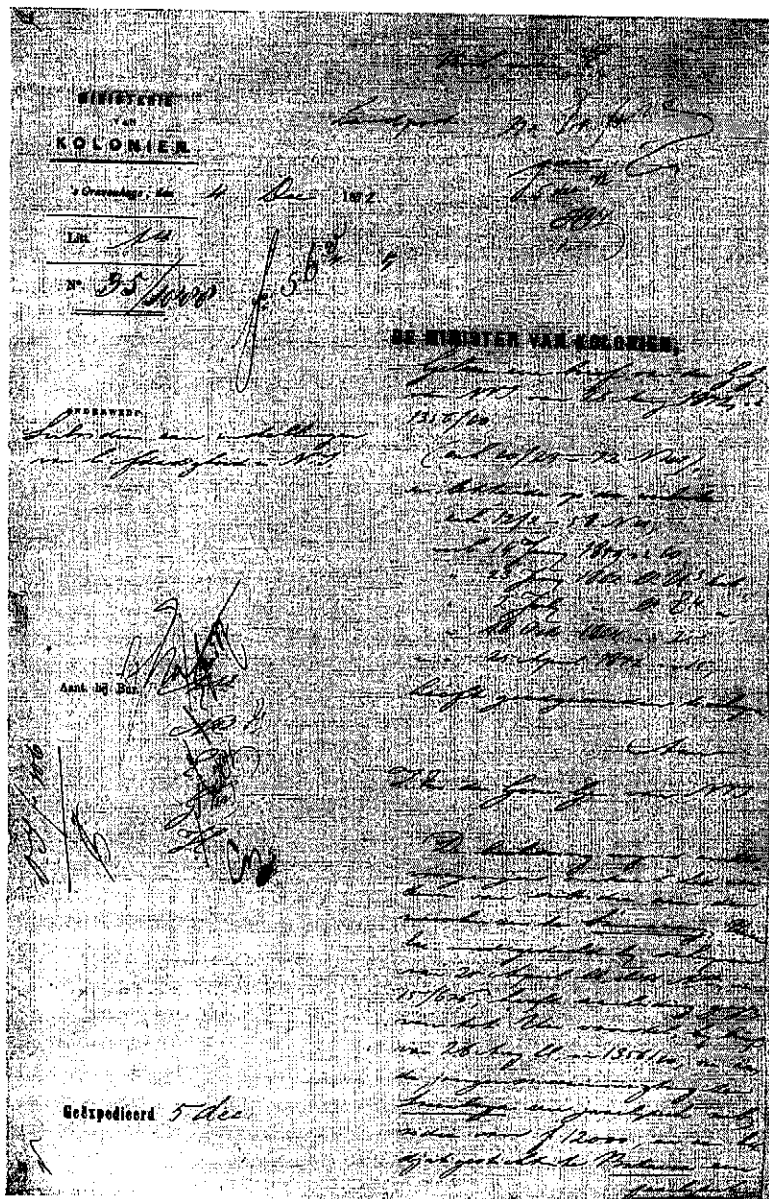


Figure 1. A typical first page of a “*verbaal*,” a document generated from the office of the Minister of Colonies (*Ministerie van Koloniën*) in the Hague that might be a decree, a demand for information, a decision, or comment on colonial issues. It notes the document to which it is a response and previous documents that have been consulted (listed on the right), some included as “*exhibitum*” and used as “evidence” for decisions and pronouncements in colonial policy.

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 of 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 mid-dling 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 a “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): 183–206. 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 a 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 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 to 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-Europese beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Haarlem: Willink, 1939), and Takahashi Shiraiishi’s discussion of the “Indo-Javanese-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. Droogelever’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,” Ph.D. Diss., Cornell University, 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 of “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 (AR) 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 (GG) 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): 11–20. 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 beethoofden: een geschiedenis van de Indisch-Nederlandse dagbladpers, 1744–1905* (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, *Eendagsvliegen: Journalistieke getuigenissen 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 their divergent assessments of danger and how poor and hazardous 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.

CHAPTER TWO

The Pulse of the Archive

But it seems you do not realize, Meneer Pangemanann, that your report is not for the general public. Only a very few people in the Indies and in the world have read and studied it. . . . You will never know, and indeed do not need to know, who else has read it. Your work of scholarship, as you like to call it, will *never receive the honor of being kept in the State archives*. Once being read, it will become dust and smoke, in the safekeeping of the devils of darkness.

—Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *House of Glass*

IT IS 1912. Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s novel, *House of Glass*, begins in the chill of the Dutch East Indies’ state archives and in the heat of colonial Java’s emergent Indonesian nationalist movement.¹ Dutch authorities call on Jacques Pangemanann, a Eurasian former police officer, newly appointed native commissioner to the elite Indies intelligence service, to defuse the movement’s spread. His mission is to read the classified state archives, and spy, report on, and then destroy Minke, the movement’s leader. But this complicity undoes Pangemanann and ravages his soul. He hears voices, develops a verbal tick and high blood pressure, becomes estranged from his family and falls into alcoholic despair. His descent from colonial officer to “bandit,” and ultimately to archive-bound “terrorist,” is rapid.² By the book’s end he will have destroyed his own hero, Minke, and himself.

When the novel opens, Pangemanann has just completed his meticulous report, assessing the strength of the nascent anticolonial movement and the commitments of its alleged instigators, the mostly Muslim-educated elite on Java. Those few architects and agents of empire with privileged

¹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *House of Glass* (New York: William Morrow, 1992). In this edition Max Lane translates “*para iblis dalam kegelapan*” as “devils of the night.” Henk Meier has encouraged me to translate it (in the epigraph) rather as “devils of darkness” to underscore the richer connotations that darkness affords. I have also altered Lane’s translation of the first part of this sentence to accord more closely with the Indonesian text. See Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Rumah Kaca* (Kuala Lumpur: Wira Karya, 1988), 24.

² Toer (1992), 31.

access eagerly read it. Leaders of the sugar industry syndicate laud his work. But his words will never enter the “nearly ten miles of closely packed papers” that make up the sanctified space of the government archive.³ He may enter the inner sanctum but leave no trace: as spy he can have no presence, as an “Indo” (a “mixed blood”) of tainted native, if elevated, origin, he can only have a muffled voice. Too lowly to be acknowledged, his “findings” are too sensitive to be preserved. As his European superior bluntly informs him, “he need not know” who has read it: “[It] will never receive the honor of being kept in the State archives.” Burned as soon as it is read, it is reduced to “dust and smoke”—an archive that is to remain in darkness.

House of Glass is the name Pangemanann gives to his report but “house of glass” references a more fundamentally disquieting space in the colonial imaginary—at once the fragile security of the Dutch police state and the false security of Europeans living nestled in it. The quest for affective knowledge—that which moves people to feel and act—was the coveted pursuit of state intelligence yet beyond its grasp. Framed by the deceptions of archival access, *House of Glass* begins with the state archive only to veer far from it, for Pangemanann hides his most precious document in the safety of his house. In Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s vision, disappeared documents and distorted reports are the archive’s paltry truths. The building that houses the state’s records is a “mausoleum” with palatial columns and thick stone walls. It does more than chill and still the air. It keeps out both the tropical heat, and the resilient motion of a resistant social world that is Java.

House of Glass reads at once as a condemnation of colonial rule and a fierce parable of the contemporary seductions of power in what was Suharto-ruled, postcolonial Indonesia. For Pramoedya, whose banned stories were transmitted orally while he was in prison for fourteen years, it is not surprising how sharply his assault is aimed—at the erudite, educated ignorance that Java’s Dutch officialdom cultivated and that the colonial archives produced and contained.⁴ Pramoedya Ananta Toer mocks those officials (and scholars) who hold tight to their paper documents, who imagine they can know the Indies without setting foot outside the archive and their carefully tended inscriptions in it.

One of his targets is clear: those who study to become “colonial expert[s] by going in and out of these buildings,” those who believe that

³ Ibid., 63.

⁴ See John David Morley, “Warped by Empire,” *New York Times Book Review* (9 June 1996), and Christopher GoGwilt, “Pramoedya’s Fiction and History: An Interview with Indonesian Novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9 (1) 1996: 147–64.

“documents are more reliable . . . than the mouths of their authors.”⁵ If the “taste of the archive” is in the heady rush of discovery, in the sensations and desires the archives stir, for Pramoedya the colonial archives are the bitter aftertaste of empire, the morsels left for us, their voracious contemporary readers.⁶ Regimes of official documentation in his account are inert remnants, iconic roadmaps to regimes of domination that warp the integrity of the best of men. Such closed-circuited regimes of impoverished testimony produce their experts who in turn produce them.

This site of safekeeping, a pyre of empire, is one plausible way to describe the deadening weight of colonial archives. But it is not the one I have in mind. Pramoedya’s caricature is a pointillist still life that captures the rigidities and distortions of a colonial optic. In his novel the archive has barely a living pulse.⁷ For Pramoedya official paper stands in relief from the vibrant political culture of a Java that high and low officials labored to grasp but could barely comprehend.

Yet colonial state archives are sites of perturbations of other kinds—less monuments to the absence or ubiquity of knowledge than its piecemeal partiality, less documents to the force of reasoned judgment than to both the spasmodic and sustained currents of anxious labor that paper trails could not contain. Nietzsche warns that “the legislation of language” establishes truth.⁸ But here that legislated lexicon produces a surfeit that spills over and smudges the archive’s policed edges. In these Dutch colonial archives, what could, should, and need not be done or said colludes and collides on the ragged ridges of racial categories, and in the constricted political space of a never-stable, Dutch-inflected “colonial situation.”

For Pramoedya the tremors of colonial rule are outside the archives. In the present volume I pursue how deeply epistemic anxieties stir affective tremors within them. The pulse of the archive and the forms of governance that it belies are in the finished reports and in the process of their

⁵ Toer (1992), 69.

⁶ See Arlette Farge, *Le Gout de l'Archive* (Paris: Seuil, 1989) for a richly tender treatment of the relationship between the sensation of the historian’s reading of archives and the material texture of such collections. See Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002) on the reader’s longings to animate these silent relics. My search for the “pulse” cannot but also share in such sensations.

⁷ What the archive does hold, for Pramoedya, are only bundled traces of colonialism’s ghostly victims, born a century earlier, who leave behind “the filth in colonial life [on the archive’s] clean white sheets.” Toer (1992), 46. On this spectral quality “of contaminating marks on the colonial archive’s pristine sheets,” see Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality: Passages of Freedom from Kant to Postcolonial Literatures of Liberation* (New York: Columbia, 2003), esp. 309–47, 310.

⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” [1874], in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities, 1979), 79–91.

making, in the fine crafts of cribbing and culling on which colonial bureaucracies so relied. In the interstices of sanctioned formulae these Netherlands Indies archives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mark the distance between recognized and disqualified knowledge, between intelligible accounts and those deemed inappropriate for exchange. Not least, here is what Michel de Certeau might include as a space of “displaced histories,” contrary and subjacent—but not necessarily subaltern—that hover in the archive’s long shadows.⁹ Sometimes these are emergent and awkward, sometimes suspended and unfulfilled narratives within the archive’s dominant mode. And sometimes there are stammers, what I would call “disabled histories,” a few brief words in Malay, seized from a “native informant,” not given the due of a narrative at all.

This book is about such a colonial order of things as seen through the record of archival productions. I ask what insights into the social imaginaries of colonial rule might be gained from attending not only to colonialism’s archival content, but to the principles and practices of governance lodged in particular archival forms. By “archival form” I allude to several things: prose style, repetitive refrain, the arts of persuasion, affective strains that shape “rational” response, categories of confidentiality and classification, and not least, genres of documentation. The book’s focus is on archiving-as-process rather than archives-as-things. Most importantly, it looks to archives as condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources. These colonial archives were both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves.

Those on which I draw here are of the official archives of the Dutch colonial state, missives and reports that passed up and down the bureaucratic ladder, or stayed secreted within its privileged echelons. But the archive’s sweep is not confined to these domains alone. Filling that archive are those people loosely tied to the Indies’ administrative apparatus but not salaried by it. These were doctors, clergymen, private school teachers and orphanage directors whose local knowledge and expertise on specific populations and practices were intermittently sought, those who took these

⁹ De Certeau uses the term “displaced history” as a history “recounting both the proximity of the past and the foreignness of your private life, or the present as a metaphor for a somewhere else.” I use “displaced history” to convey something closer to the relationship Foucault articulates between erudite and disqualified knowledge, where the latter is preserved if not emergent within the former. On “displaced history,” see Michel de Certeau, “The Theater of the Quidproquo: Alexandre Dumas,” in *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 150–55, 151; on erudite and disqualified knowledge, see Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. and trans. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 82–83.

occasions to rehearse common sense or share their views on what it meant to be Dutch, on what they thought of concubinage across racial lines, or on what they imagined were the attributes of “mixed blood” children and the nature of their moral character.

Along with the surefooted views on policies by which we have come to identify colonial enterprises are the remnants of writerly practices of a very different kind: those that chronicle failed projects, delusional imaginings, equivocal explanations of unanticipated outbursts of distrust directed toward a state apparatus on which European comforts would so precariously depend. Relegated to archival asides are lowly civil servants gone bankrupt in efforts to pay for their sons’ requisite schooling in Holland. European women go mad in throwaway sentences. In abbreviated asides impoverished widows of lowly Dutch officials send their servants to beg from their neighbors for food and funds on their behalf. These are archives peopled with Dutch administrators, as well as German and French planters scrambling to figure out whether their plantation holdings might be attacked by a few workers bent on revenge against an abusive planter—or by phantasmic “hoards” of Islamic insurgents armed to storm their guarded gates. Within the constricted ontologies of rule, understandings of outrage often escaped the reasoned state.

Because imagining what *might be* was as important as knowing what was, these archives of the visionary and expectant should river our attention upon their erratic movement back and forth in verbal tense: the conditional could powerfully reshape an immediate response as it recursively rewrote the present and refigured events that had long passed.¹⁰ The portent-laden future of revolt and betrayal is always on the imminent and dangerous horizon. When colonial social reformers conceived scrupulously planned utopias made of small-scale farmers drawn from the mixed blood orphanages, their minute descriptions of those children’s inclinations mirrored visions of what they conceived adults to be and what they feared improperly schooled children might become. Such projections, in turn, made more real the visceral fear of the resentments such subjects in the making were thought to harbor. Plans to school the young for state loyalty and humble aspirations underscored their lack of both. Resplendent in the feared, the unrealized, and the ill-conceived, such visions invite, what I call in chapter 4, a strategy of “developing historical negatives” to track a microspace of the everyday through what might become and could never be. I take these to be “blueprints of distress” that trace

¹⁰ For a related but different sense of the future orientation and possibilities written into archival production by “intentional communities,” see Arjun Appadurai, “Archive and Aspiration,” in *Information Is Alive*, ed. Joke Brouwer and Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: NAU, 2003), 14–25.

out agitations of a peculiar kind—not events but the “negative prints” of what stirred official anxiety to which colonial agents responded with infeasible policies for implausible arrangements that could neither be carried out nor sustained. If historians “tell of things that have been,” and poets “of things as might be,” as Paul Ricoeur’s parsing of the Aristotelian distinction insists, this ethnographic history of these colonial imaginaries seeps across the futuristic and the actual to capture something of both.¹¹

Here I treat these colonial archives both as a corpus of writing and as a force field that animates political energies and expertise, that pulls on some “social facts” and converts them into qualified knowledge, that attends to some ways of knowing while repelling and refusing others.¹² Such a field has centripetal and centrifugal force. In no small part it inscribes the authority of the colonial state and the analytic energies mobilized to make its assertions. But it also registers other reverberations, crosscurrent frictions, attractions, and aversions that worked within and against those assertions of imperial rights to property, persons, and profits that colonial regimes claimed as their own.

Roland Barthes might have called this a “storeyed” archival field in both senses of the term: *layered* and *crafted* from practical and unevenly sedimented deceptions and dispositions that accumulated as acceptable or discarded knowledge.¹³ The Pangemananns, whose reports were destroyed as soon as they were read, leave only a faint trace. Rather, these chapters pause at the hands and habits of those charged with the writing, recording, sorting, and proliferation of documents, in the unremarkable forms in which writerly practices appeared; in the tone and tenor of a reprimand, a dismissal, or praise, in floridly clear or illegible signatures at the bottom of a neatly copied page. Sometimes persons become visible in the entitled scrawls of an angry query across a report, or remain invisible in the faceless, careful handwriting of “copy machines” (as Eurasian clerks were disparagingly called)—subjects whose racially marked positions conferred no place for, nor right to, a signature at all.

¹¹ See Paul Ricoeur’s discussion of Aristotle’s distinction between poets and historians in *Time and Narrative*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), esp. 40–41.

¹² On Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno’s uses of the term (*Kraftfeld*), see Martin Jay, *Force fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–3. See also Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1993), 9.

¹³ See Roland Barthes’s discussion of Tzvetan Todorov’s distinction in narrative between the “unfolding of a story” and “its construction in storeys” of horizontal movement in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 87.

ARCHIVAL CONVENTIONS

When the archive . . . seems easily to give access to what one expects of it, the work is all the more demanding. One has to patiently give up one’s natural “sympathy” for it and consider it an adversary to fight, a piece of knowledge that isn’t to annex but disrupt. It is not simply a matter of undoing something whose meaning is too easy to find; to be able to know it, you have to unlearn and not think you know it from a first reading.

—Arlette Farge, *Le Gout de l’Archive*

Farge’s warning to proceed with caution, to allow oneself to falter in the face of the archive’s repetitions, formulae, and obviousness is one I take to heart. The official documents of colonial archives like those of the Netherlands Indies are so weighted with fixed formats, empty phrases, and racial clichés that one is easily blinded by their flattened prose and numbing dullness. Our readings are blunted by what often has been parsed as the seemingly panoptic glare of a vacuous, stylized official gaze. But in these archives the panoptic is a frail conceit. Administrative overviews index conventional forms of assumed mastery less than comprehensive knowledge. Such overviews—of regions, problems, or target populations—were rendered from cribbed and cluttered, spare and hurried reports of the disorder of things, written in the studied ineloquence of bureaucratese. Sometimes they were impressionistic and distant, elsewhere animated by intimate fear less than intimate knowledge of what multiple colonial civil servants thought they saw, what was reported by an unnamed underling, or what they claimed others had said.

Wedged within those folds of truth-claims emerges something else: uncensored turns of phrase, loud asides in the imperative tense, hesitant asides in sotto voce. These register confused assessments, parenthetical doubts about what might count as evidence, the records of eyewitnesses with dubious credentials, dismissed rumors laced with pertinent truths, contradictory testimonies called upon and quickly discarded. These too were assessments that implicitly weighed the stature and sensibility of their authors, and the distance that separated their words from the received scenarios of colonial common sense. In chapter 6, I refer to these as elements that make up a “hierarchy of credibility,” scales of trust that measured what forms of witness, words and deeds, could be taken as reliably relevant.

But these hierarchies too are sometimes inverted. In the brutal immediacy of a murder, in the panic of an impeding attack, in the anxious rush to fulfill a superior’s demand for information (and for proof of one’s

vigilance), in the concerted effort to ward off disaster, words could slip from their safe moorings to reappear unauthorized, inappropriate, and unrehearsed. These are not *outside* the archival field. Nor are they outside the grids of intelligibility in which those documents are lodged, but rather the subjacent coordinates of, and counterpoints within, them. Such confusions and “asides” work in and around prevailing narratives as they push on the archive’s storied edges.

Derrida’s evocative image of the archive as a site of “house arrest,” one that “gathers together signs,” suggests no entry for the wayward, no access to intruders.¹⁴ But the paper trails left by European colonial projects could never be sealed that tight; not in the Indies, where magazines, pamphlets, journals, and dailies both pilfered from the official record and were made an evidentiary part of it. Here an image of *house-breaking* might better be joined with house arrest to more vividly capture what those in command feared (as much as native insurgence)—that their houses of glass might be shattered by “inside” jobs: by civil servants improperly schooled in what not to see or say, as was Assistent Resident of Deli, Frans Carl Valck, who is center stage in chapters 6 and 7; by recalcitrant Indo-Europeans who refused to answer a state commission on their domestic and sexual affairs, as shall be seen in chapter 5; and by the unseemly action of the colony’s most respected city fathers, European high officials described in chapter 3 who, in protesting government policy, circulated documents and directives meant only for their rarified readings and well-trained ears.

This is the ethnographic space of the colonial archives, where truth-claims compete, impervious or fragile, crushed by the weight of convention or resilient in the immediate threat of the everyday; where trust is put to the test and credibility wavers. Here I linger over unspoken orders of rubric and reference that did more than define plausible evidence. Specific if not unique to the shape of these colonial archives is a racialized common sense about people and places—about Javanese coolies and Acehnese insurgents, about the sensibilities of the *Indische* population, Indies-born and -bred Dutch versus imported, transient, and *echte* Europeans. Such implicit common sense figured centrally when reporting *preceded* inquiry, when evidence was spare—or absent.

Conventions suggest consensus but it is not clear what colonial practitioners actually shared. District reports were built upon changing beliefs about what mattered to state security and what sorts of people were deemed a present or possible threat. Consensus was also shaped by how skillfully or poorly seasoned bureaucrats and fledgling practitioners could

¹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2.

apprehend the tacit changing rules of decorum and protocol, what rhetorical devices were deemed persuasive and currently active in the game.

Conventions also suggest familiarity and durability. I take them instead as moving targets and, sometimes, so did those in office themselves. Irony and humor are not lacking, mockery targets those who are too literal or not literal enough. Misinterpretations of directives were subject to ridicule when reports were sent that got things “wrong.” Stock phrases took on different political import depending on where they were placed. Contexts of relevance rapidly changed. References to the need for European nurseries might seem unremarkable in lengthy reports on education but offer striking openings to political thinking when colonial administrators obsessed over them in classified documents elsewhere: in a commission on European pauperism, in recommendations to quell creole discontent, in debates over mixed bloods “too proud” to learn manual labor. As I have argued elsewhere, this was not “information out of place.”¹⁵ In these contexts, such conjoinings of the banal and political mark implicit anxieties about subject-formation, about the psychic space of empire, about what went without saying, about the common sense that made these reasoned pairings.

THE SEDUCTIONS OF STATE SECRETS

Institutions create shadowed places in which nothing can be seen and no questions asked. They make other areas show in finely discriminated detail, which is closely scrutinized and ordered. History emerges in an unintended shape as a result of practices directed to immediate, practical ends. To watch these practices establish selective principles that highlight some kinds of events and obscure others is to inspect the social order operating on individual minds.

—Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think*

Archivists are the first to note that to understand an archive, one needs to understand the institutions that it served. “State secrets” are one of those key conventions of concealment that produce the “shadowed places” to

¹⁵ See Ann Laura Stoler, “A Sentimental Education: Children on the Colonial Divide,” in Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 112–39, and idem, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 137–64. See also Paul Starr, “Social Categories and Claims in the Liberal State,” in *How Classification Works: Nelson Goodman among the Social Sciences*, ed. Mary Douglas and David Hull (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), 154–79.

which Douglas refers: such shadows are cast by persons with cryptic titles; bureaus with nondescript names; pieces of paper that become “lost,” inaccessible, “miscatalogued,” and thus are rendered unusable and irrelevant. Shadowed places are what states create, emblematic conventions of the archival form. States do more than traffic in the production of secrets and their selective dissemination. State sovereignty resides in the power to designate arbitrary social facts of the world as matters of security and concerns of state. Once so assigned, these social facts—Indo children breastfed by native servants (who were sometimes their mothers), poor whites who went by non-Christian names, Indos “disguised” in the dress of native traders, language-use at home—are dislodged from their contexts, flung into the orbit of a political world that is often not their own. These otherwise innocuous practices become iconic indices of a colonial world perceived as being at risk, signs of alert that accrue political deliberations, that sanction the rushing in of more evidence, that confirm causal connections that warrant more secreted documentation.

Max Weber claimed that the “official secret” was a “specific invention of bureaucracy,” its “fanatically defended” prize possession.¹⁶ In the Netherlands Indies documents marked with an X as “secret,” “very secret,” or “highly confidential” were elevated to sacred status, to be guarded and then later revealed. As in the European Pauperism Commission of 1901, the stature of its recommendations derived in part from an earlier secreted commission that it exposed. And as with Pangemanann, both honored and shamed by the secrets to which he was privy, to gather information was not necessarily to know who would read it, or the narratives that it would fortify before being set afire, shredded, or stored away.

State secrets excite expectations, not least among students of empire. For we often covet that which the state conceals, regarding its secrets as accurate measures of its most nefarious intents: unmasking its magic and deceptive opacities is our calling. But we also know that codes of concealment are the fetishes of the state itself.¹⁷ Within colonial bureaucracies,

¹⁶ Max Weber, “Bureaucracy,” in *Essays in Sociology*, trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 233–34.

¹⁷ Philip Abrams held that “the state is . . . a triumph of concealment. It conceals the real history and relations of subjection behind an a-historical mask of legitimating illusion; contrives to deny the existence of connections and conflicts which would if recognized be incompatible with claimed autonomy and integration of the state. The real official secret . . . is the secret of the non-existence of the state.” Abrams, I think, gets it right and wrong. There is no “a-historical mask” but rather an elaborate apparatus geared to the task of historical reproduction. Nor was the colonial state nonexistent if we understand it rather as an *imperial* one that stretched across multiple locations—in the Indies and the Netherlands—and multiple sites and technologies of command. See Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State” [1977], *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1) (March 1988): 58–89, 77.

such secrets sometimes have strange biographies. Secrets may earmark privileged knowledge, or, as with commissions of inquiry, create the categories they purport only to describe. In the Indies colonial archives, they do some of both. Classified documents served as a signal to direct attention and cued for one’s repeated return to what knowledge should be valued and what their readers should know. They also called up and upon technologies of intelligence: secret police, fingerprinting, coded scripts, and men like Pangemanann, whose names were expunged from documents. Secret documents could have as their source native paid informants who were *vertrouwensmannen* (trustworthy men, who one took into one’s confidence); Eurasians who were charged—as was Pangemanann—to interpret native signs of discontent and distress; and, not least, purveyors of culture and psychology, anthropologists and others deemed Java experts.

Secrets do more than limit access. They promise confidences and confidence in limited circulation about something others do not and should not know. Items about clandestine police maneuvers, military preparations, and deliberations about an impending revolt are what we expect to be marked as *geheim*, with an X. But sometimes promises of access to the unknown were bizarre fictions at best. Confidential documents both secret and secrete what becomes elevated to “vital” information. Throughout the official archives of the Dutch colonial state are documents earmarked for confidentiality that were not secrets at all.

If one could argue that the presence of European beggars and homeless Dutchmen in the streets of Batavia in the 1870s were “secrets” to those in the Netherlands, they certainly were not to European post office clerks, Javanese construction workers, or Chinese storekeepers who lived on the sprawling low-lying peripheries inhabited by the impoverished of Java’s urban centers.¹⁸ Similarly, was a letter written in 1848 by a Dutch lawyer to the Resident of Batavia a “highly secret” document because he signed it—“I remain like our King, a liberal Dutchman”—when to be “*vrijzinnig*” (liberal and modern) in the colonies bordered on a subversive act?¹⁹ Or was it because it was “unseemly” for a high official to so brazenly declare his similarity to the modern King and refrain from deference? Or was it because he boldly declared his intent to participate in the colonies in a European demonstration?

Both instances suggest that what was secret in such documents was not their specific subject matters but their timing and the interpretive

¹⁸ AR, Geheim No. 1144/2284. Department of Justice to the Governor-General, Batavia, 29 April 1873.

¹⁹ AR, KV, no. 317, 1848, Zeer Geheim, Exh. E, 19 March 1848, C. Ardesche to Resident van Rees.

uncertainties about an appropriate government response that gathered around them. Similarly, classified missives on European beggars were less about what to do with the destitute than measures of disagreement and disquiet about how to racially classify those who fell into such straits. Reports on vagabond whites were “secret” in 1874 and not twenty-five years later when the public Pauper Commission appeared because officials could not agree on whether there were thirty-nine white paupers living among natives in the urban slums of Batavia, or thousands.²⁰

Documents were sometimes marked *geheim* because of the magnitude of a problem, at other times because officials could not agree on a shared sense of what the problems were. Rather than secreted truths about the state, they point to sites of unease, anticipatory warnings of emergent movement among subject populations (what Raymond Williams might even include as “structures of feeling”), of resentments that may not yet have had a name.²¹ As Frederick Barth once observed, secrets do more than sanctify—they invoke deeper secrets of their own.²²

Not least they invite disclosure. Critique emerges in the interstices of what goes without saying and what should not be said: sometimes documents referred to those who parodied commonsense conventions. As we shall see, the “dirty secrets” of Sumatra’s planters were in classified missives not because the planters’ abuses of their laboring populations were not known, but precisely because they were not to be acknowledged and aired by an “inept” civil servant like Frans Carl Valck.

COLONIAL COMMISSIONS

If it is obvious that colonial archives are products of state machines, it is only now that we are seeing them, in their own right, as technologies that reproduced those states themselves.²³ Adam Ashforth has strongly stated

²⁰ AR, KV 28 March 1874, no. 47x, no. 1144/2284. Director of Justice D. de Pauly to the Governor-General.

²¹ Statistical information in the eighteenth century was considered a source of state power and therefore *not* published. Public access to state statistics was a nineteenth-century phenomenon. See Marc Ventresca, “When States Count: Institutional and Political Dynamics in Modern Census Establishment, 1800–1993,” Ph.D. Diss., Stanford University, 1996, 50.

²² Fredrick Barth, *Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman of New Guinea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 217. I thank Maurice Bloch for this reference.

²³ On this point, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995). On the relationship between state-formation and archival production, see Michel Duchein, “The History of European Archives and the Development of the Archival Profession in Europe,” *American Archivist* 55 (Winter 1992): 14–25.

the case in his study of South Africa’s Native Affairs Commission, when he notes that “the real seat of power” in modern states is “the bureau, the locus of writing,” but it is an insight that Weber shared and that many students of colonialisms would subscribe to, as well.²⁴ Systems of written accountability called for elaborate infrastructures. Paper trails of weekly reports to superiors, summaries of reports of reports, and recommendations based on reports all called for systematic coding systems by which they could be tracked. Colonial statecraft was an administrative apparatus to gather, draw together, and connect—and disconnect—events, to make them, as needed, legible, insignificant, or unintelligible as information. Striking in this accumulation process is how much of what was collected was made irrelevant to what state officials decided, both to what they acknowledged they could do in practice and what about the Indies they claimed to know.²⁵

Nowhere was this process more evident than in the form of state-sponsored commissions of inquiry. Colonial commissions reorganized knowledge, devising new ways of knowing while setting aside others. One implicit task was to reconstruct historical narratives, decreeing what past events were pertinent to current issues and how they should be framed. Sometimes commissions were responses to catastrophic events and extended periods of crisis.²⁶ As responses they generated increased anxiety, substantiating the reality of “crisis,” the wisdom of pre-emptive response, foreshadowing that new directives were demanded, as were the often coercive measures taken to ensure their effect. By the time most commissions had run their course, political signposts were set in place: “turning points” were identified, precedents established, causalities certified, arrows directed with vectors of blame—if not action—sharply aimed.

Just as often they attested to what a commission had set out to show in the first place—that is, if the commission knew what it was after.²⁷ As

²⁴ See Adam Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 5.

²⁵ For a richly subtle analysis of the production of such commissions as a critical feature of modern governing processes, see Oz Frankel, *States of Inquiry: Social Investigation and Print Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the United States* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

²⁶ On investigatory commissions as an “emergency apparatus of government,” see Jonathan Simon, “Parrhesiastic Accountability: Investigatory Commissions and Executive Power in an Age of Terror,” *Yale Law Journal* 114 (6) (April 2005): 1419–57, 1430.

²⁷ See Fred Block and Margaret Somers, “In the Shadow of Speenhamland: Social Policy and the Old Poor Law,” *Politics and Society* 31 (2) (June 2003): 1–41, 5. Oz Frankel notes that social activists like Beatrice and Sydney Webb regarded royal commissions as political tools to “promote preconceived policies or to put thorny issues on the shelf, peddling official passivity as action” (Frankel, 139).

Dutch anthropologist Frans Husken notes of colonial commissions in Java, “when nothing else works and no decision can be reached, ‘appoint a commission’ was a favorite response of colonial authorities.”²⁸ Commissions could reactivate knowledge but also stop it in its tracks. As technologies of delay, they could effectively mobilize interest and satisfy it, as well as arrest decision. They were primed to distract. Pathos and statistics may seem a strange pairing but both were at the political heart of state inquiries. Some commission reports were searingly detailed; some were impressionistic and abstract. Vignettes about the unnamed and anecdotes of the everyday established the truth-claims of local officials, their local knowledge and ethnographic authority.

Such commissions, as we shall see in chapter 5, were also consummate producers of social kinds. The European Pauperism Commission of 1901 reassigned clusters of people for state scrutiny and in so doing revised and overwrote what was to count in ascriptions of race. Ways of living were congealed into “problems,” subject persons were condensed into ontological categories, innocuous practices were made into subjects of analysis and rendered political things. Statistics, historical narrative, and anecdote were made ready at hand, mutually corroborating evidence for commission-making projects. Proof of the difference between destitute whites and Indo-European paupers was construed by identifying distinct sorts of persons, with specific dispositions and states of mind. Details of the everyday were elevated to reliable proof of character. Neglect of children, indifference to work, succumbing to native standards were affective states not captured in numbers; condemnations of the sensory world in which poor whites lived afforded more palpable and convincing evidence of what colonial agents already thought they knew about the sorting of people and how race shaped distinct habits and inclinations.

Like statistics, commissions were common tools of statecraft forged by social reform-conscious nineteenth-century states. As instruments of moral science, statistics used deviations from the mean to identify deviations from the norm. Commissions joined those numbers with prototypic cases to measure gradations of morality and the gradations of unfreedom that went along with them.²⁹ That so many commissions were convened in the late nineteenth century was part of a technology of state practice

²⁸ Frans Husken, “Declining Welfare in Java: Government and Private Inquiries, 1903–1914,” in *The Late Colonial State in Indonesia*, ed. Robert Cribb (Leiden: KITLV, 1994), 213.

²⁹ See Arjun Appadurai on numerical representation in colonial India as a “key to normalizing the pathology of difference” in “Numbers in the Colonial Imagination,” in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 114–38.

that spanned the imperial globe.³⁰ In metropole and colony, these were high-profile promises of public accountability that in turn identified the commensurabilities on which international colonial conferences thrived. In the Indies they garnered moral authority both through the specific comparisons they sought to make between their “mixed blood problem” or their “poor white problem” and those in South Africa, Australia, and elsewhere in the imperial world.

This was a politics of comparison in which biopolitical assessments of differential racial capabilities and character were key features of social technology.³¹ Those commissions, like the European Pauperism Commission or the South African Carnegie Commission on Poor Whites thirty years later, explicitly linked domestic relationships—between parent and child, nursemaid and infant—to the security of the state. Relations between people and objects—to clothing, furnishings, room arrangements, and window-openings—were invoked, as well. Eyewitness testimonies to intimacies of the home had become data of a particular kind, critical to the state’s audit of its commitment to the public good, to racial differentiation, and to its own viability.

Not least, these commissions were quintessential “quasi-state” technologies that were in part authored and authorized by persons of stature outside it. If modern states gain force by creating and maintaining an elusive boundary to civil society, such commissions exemplified that process.³² “Outside” experts verified both the state’s right to assess the public interest and its commitment to objectivity. Commissions, in short, demonstrated the state’s right to power through its will to the production of truth.

Ethnography in the Archives

[Ethnographic work] is neither a matter of piling on theoretical antecedents nor a matter of going where no one has been before. I would put it rather that *we need to go precisely where we have*

³⁰ Royal commissions have a longer history still. See, for example, David Loades, “The Royal Commissions,” in *Power in Tudor England* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1997), 70–82. On statistics and state building, see Alain Desrosières, “Statistics and the State,” in *The Politics of Large Numbers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 178–209. For the twentieth century, see William J. Breen, “Foundations, Statistics, and State-Building,” *Business History Review* 68 (1994): 451–82.

³¹ On the use of the comparison as an instrument of statecraft, see my “Tense and Tender Ties,” in *Haunted by Empire*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), esp. 23–58.

³² Timothy Mitchell, “The Limits of the State,” *American Political Science Review* 85 (1991): 77–96.

already been, back to the immediate here and now out of which we have created our present knowledge of the world. That means constructing a mode of enquiry which will enable a return to fields of knowledge and activity in the hindsight of unpredicted outcomes, and which will thus enable recovering of material that investigators were not aware they were collecting. The ethnographic method . . . with its insistent demands of immersion, begins to look extremely promising.

—Marilyn Strathern, "The Ethnographic Effect"

A convention in the study of colonial governance is to treat state bureaucracies as information-hungry machines, ambitiously taxonomic, bent on categorical claims about those social differences that mattered and those that did not. Scholars of the colonial have become deft at identifying the distance between those normative, imposed categories of social difference that so contrast with the more mobile social and intimate relations in which people lived. If one no longer needs to argue, as Sally Falk-Moore did twenty years ago, that fieldwork should be treated as "current history," the case might still need to be made that archival productions should be treated in more registers as ethnography.³³

Students often ask what and where is ethnography in the colonial archives: is it in what, where, or how we approach these gatherings of documents? Is it in the issues addressed or their treatment? What would, and should, what Marilyn Strathern calls "immersion" look like for the ethnographer on historical-colonial ground? One could respond that the ethnographic space of the archive resides in the disjuncture between prescription and practice, between state mandates and the maneuvers people made in response to them, between normative rules and how people actually lived their lives.

But, as the last decade of historical ethnography suggests, no single answer will do. Ethnography in and of the colonial archives attends to processes of production, relations of power in which archives are created, sequestered, and rearranged.³⁴ If ethnographies could be treated as texts, students of the colonial have turned the tables to reflect on colonial documents as "rituals of possession," as relics and ruins, as sites of contested cultural knowledge. Here I treat archives not as repositories of state power but as unquiet movements in a field of force, as restless realignments and

³³ Sally Falk-Moore, "Explaining the Present: Theoretical Dilemmas in Processual Ethnography," *American Ethnologist* 14 (4): 727–36.

³⁴ Trouillot's *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* is the most explicit and noteworthy example.

readjustments of people and the beliefs to which they were tethered, as spaces in which the senses and the affective course through the seeming abstractions of political rationalities.³⁵ I take sentiments expressed and ascribed as social interpretations, as indices of relations of power and tracers of them.

The case need no longer be made that "sources" are not "springs" of colonial truths.³⁶ Distinguishing fiction from fact has given way to efforts to track the production and consumption of facticities as the contingent coordinates of particular times and temperaments, places and purposes.³⁷ As some of the best of this work now recognizes, filing systems and disciplined writing produce assemblages of control and specific methods of domination.³⁸ More than ever, new studies of archival production tackle the politics of colonial knowledge and the "arrested histories"—those histories suspended from received historiography—that are its effects.³⁹ Ethnographic sensibilities have led us to ask how oral and vernacular

³⁵ See Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and Roberto Gonzalez-Echevarria, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁶ Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-insurgency," in *Culture, Power, History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 336–71. Greg Dening, *The Death of William Gooch: A History's Anthropology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 54. See also Nicholas Dirks, "Annals of the Archive: Ethnographic Notes on the Sources of History," in *From the Margins: Historical Anthropology and Its Futures*, ed. Brian Axel (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 47–65.

³⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, "Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm," in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 96–125, and David William Cohen, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heineman, 1992); Richard Price, *The Convict and the Colonel* (Boston: Beacon, 1998). See also Axel, esp. 1–44.

³⁸ On filing systems, see Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule (1917–1967)* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008). On the nature of "documentary government," see Keith Breckenridge's insightful essays, "From Hubris to Chaos: The Making of the Bewsuyuro and the End of Documentary Government" and "Flesh Made Words: Fingerprinting and the Archival Imperative in the Union of South Africa, 1900–1930," paper presented at the History and African Studies Seminar, History Department at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, 2 October 2001.

³⁹ See Carole McGranahan, "Arrested Histories: Between Empire and Exile in 20th Century Tibet," Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2001, and idem, "Truth, Fear, and Lies: Exile Politics and Arrested Histories of the Tibetan Resistance," *Cultural Anthropology* 25 (4) (November 2005): 570–600. See also Javier Morillo-Alicea, "Aquel laberinto de oficinas": Ways of Knowing Empire in Late Nineteenth-Century Spain, in *After Spanish Rule*, ed. Mark Thurner and Andres Guerrero (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 111–40. Attention to how states shape and efface personal memories has placed emphasis on how those alternative accounts are retained as preserved possibilities for future claims and political projects. See Joanne Rappaport, *Cumbe Reborn: An Andean Ethnography of*

histories cut across the strictures of archival production and refigure what makes up the archival terrain.⁴⁰ They prime us to look for arrogant assertions of know-how couched in unacknowledged native expertise.⁴¹ Such sensibilities have opened to a broadening array of genres of documentation, to representational practices that impinge on received canons of inscription, to collages of memory that at once deface official writing as they provide new forms of historical evidence.⁴² Methodologically, they pose a challenge to conventional historical narrative, inviting students of the colonial to take critical license with “sources,” with what counts as context, and creative license with form.⁴³

If every document comes layered with the received account of earlier events and the cultural semantics of a political moment, the issue of official “bias” opens to a different challenge: to identify the conditions of possibility that shaped what warranted repetition, what competencies were rewarded in archival writing, what stories could not be told and what could not be said. Such queries have invited a turn back to docu-

History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, eds., *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Capetown: Oxford University Press, 1998); Keith Breckenridge, “Confounding the Documentary State: Cape Workers’ Letters on the Early Witwatersrand,” paper presented at the History and African Studies Seminar, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa, 30 May 2000; and Keith Breckenridge, “Verwoerd’s Bureau of Proof: Total Information in the Making of Apartheid,” *History Workshop Journal* 59 (Spring 2005): 83–108.

⁴⁰ See Shahid Amin’s fine analysis of this mix in *Event, Metaphor, Memory, 1922–1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

⁴¹ See Nicholas Dirks’s exemplary treatment of this issue in “Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive,” in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). On the critical labor performed by Africans in the study of local law and the making of colonial jurisdiction, see Benjamin Lawrance, Emily Osborn, Richard Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

⁴² For a unique ethnographic history of personal archives, local historians, and the power of their historiographies (as well as an excellent review of recent work on archives), see Penelope Papailias, *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece* (New York: Palgrave, 2005). On the relationship between amateur photography, technology, and archival practice as a site of political critique, see the subtle work of Karen Strassler, *Refracted Visions: Popular Photography in Postcolonial Java* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming). See also the excellent contributions to Antoinette Burton, ed., *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴³ Among such innovative historiographic operations I think of Richard Price’s *Convict and Colonel: A Story of Colonialism and Resistance in the Caribbean* (Boston: Beacon, 1998); Donna Merwick’s *Death of a Notary: Conquest and Change in Colonial New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Martha Hodes, “Fractions and Fictions in the United States Census of 1890,” in *Haunted by Empire*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 240–70.

mentation itself, to the “teaching” task that the word’s Latin root, *docere*, implies, to what and who was being educated in the bureaucratic shuffle of rote formulas, generic plots, and prescriptive asides.

COLONIAL COMMON SENSE AND ITS EPISTEMIC FRAMES

The archive does not have the weight of tradition; and it does not constitute the library of libraries, outside time and place—it reveals the rules of practice . . . its threshold of existence is established by the discontinuity that separate us from what we can no longer say.

—Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*

In this book, ethnographic sites emerge in the space between prescription and practice, but more pointedly elsewhere. I look for the pulse of the archive in the quiescence and quickened pace of its own production, in the steady and feverish rhythms of repeated incantations, formulae, and frames. I pursue it through the uneven densities of Dutch archival preoccupations and predicaments: where energies were expended, what conditioned the designation of an event, what visions were generated in the pursuit of prediction, which social groups garnered concern and then did not.

One of those densities, not surprisingly, thickens around social categories themselves. Here I track them through, what I call their “social etymologies.” Social etymologies trace the career of words and the political practices that new categories mark or that new membership in old categories signals. Most importantly, social etymologies attend to the social relationships of power buried and suspended in those terms.⁴⁴ Such etymologies index how social kinds were produced and what kinds of social relations were construed as plausible evidence of membership. Social etymologies, then, are not just about words. They trace practices gathered into intelligible forms. They seek those histories that have found quiet refuge in them.⁴⁵

They might also register how new social categories gained relevance as they annulled designations no longer sufficient to make the distinctions relevant to current reformist projects. In the successive waves of

⁴⁴ On “social etymology” in the analysis of imperial formations, see Ann Laura Stoler and Carole McGranahan, “Refiguring Imperial Terrains,” in *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2007), 4.

⁴⁵ I thank David Bond for developing this point with me.

commissions that addressed the problem of European pauperism, discussed in chapter 5, state visions sometimes were contested by those persons whose personal histories they rewrote and remade. Persons clustered into an administrative category that joined “pauper” and “white” rejected the stigma of the designation “pauper,” the state’s assessment of their living conditions, and the government aid designed for them.

But the career of categories is also lodged in archival habits and how those change: in the telling titles of commissions, in the requisite subject headings of administrative reports, in what sorts of stories get relegated to the miscellaneous and “misplaced.” Attending to “words in their sites” and the conceptual weight they bear, the authority with which they are endowed, I ask how people think and why they seem obliged to think, or *suddenly find themselves having difficulty thinking*, in certain ways.⁴⁶ It is, then, not just *any* words that matter, but rather those “that revolve around different focal points of power,” that are “set in play by a particular problem” as they gather around them debate and the provisional terms of convention.⁴⁷

If Foucault’s conception of archaeology joins “the lesson of things, and the lesson of grammar,” as Deleuze claims, it is also an “audiovisual archive” that combines two forms of stratification—a “practical assemblage” of the visual and the verbal in any historical formation. On the terrain of race that “audiovisual” archive is key. It attends to “the lesson of things” to measure the “multisensory complexes” of *unseen* racial attributes, as well.⁴⁸ Throughout these archives racialized categories are shuffled, reassigned, and remade. In chapter 4, “Developing Historical Negatives,” I show that the category of “*Inlandsche kinderen*” (who were neither natives [*inlandsch*] nor children [*kinderen*] as a literal translation would suggest) could mark those of mixed background, those of illegitimate birth, or, just as easily, those Europeans whose attachments to, and familiarity with, things Javanese were considered dangerously unsuitable for a colonial situation.

Debates on the *Inlandsche kinderen* were driven by implicit notions of racial decorum, and anxious concern over the nonvisual criteria of racial membership. If easily distinguished from both well-heeled Europeans and the native and Chinese population, there was less consensus about who they were. Sometimes the term *Inlandsche kinderen* was used for those Europeans born in the Indies (as the term *los hijos del pais* was used in the

Philippines for Spaniards born in the colony);⁴⁹ elsewhere it served to designate the impoverished mixed blood population, but there is no consistency. Sometimes those of “mixed race” (*gemengd ras*) were not included, the term implicitly being reserved not for all Europeans born in the colony but for destitute whites whose circumstances and cultural affiliations marked them as not quite European.

But the term disappears almost as abruptly as it came into use. Whatever politics of identification and guardianship might have animated its currency in the late nineteenth century when unpublished commissions on white impoverishment were written, by the time of the published commission in 1902 the term was in decline, and by the 1920s, with racialized distinctions increasingly codified, largely abandoned.⁵⁰

Such discrepancies are neither misrecognitions nor cultural “mistakes” to be set aside. They provide a diacritics of the patent and latent distinctions that marked the colonial epistemology of race.⁵¹ Actively under scrutiny throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, by the 1920s the term *Inlandsche kinderen* had morphed into other designations. Newly fashioned taxonomies that more clearly identified the covert attributes of racial membership, eclipsing the earlier term. It is precisely those moments of difficulty, the “breach of the self-evident,” by which Foucault designates an “event.” It is such “uncertainty” in the order of things that enlists us to locate such sites for ethnography and problematization.⁵²

Ethnographic sensibilities guide my forays into the nature of Dutch colonial rule and its archival formations in what I take to be another basic way; namely, in attention to what the philosopher C. S. Peirce calls the “habit-taking” processes by which people align themselves with forces that are already there. Habit-taking works off colonial conventions and their common sense and is part of their making. These were the “grids of intelligibility” that made certain conventions acceptable, obvious, and

⁴⁹ See Paul Willem Johan van der Veur, “The Eurasians of Indonesia: A Problem and Challenge in Colonial History,” in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9 (2) (1968): 191–207. Van der Veur holds that in the mid-nineteenth century the term was synonymous with the “colored” (*kleurlingen*), though such a broad definition was rarely used. He also underscores that *Inlandsche kinderen* “was used to designate Eurasians and Dutchmen born in the Indies during this period” [*ibid.*; emphasis in original]. See also *idem*, “Introduction to a Socio-Political Study of the Eurasians of Indonesia,” Ph.D. Diss., Cornell University, 1955.

⁵⁰ Compare, for example, A. van Delden’s “Nota’s over de *Inlandsche kinderen*,” AR, KV, 28 March 1874, no. 47, and the published reports of the European Pauperism Commission in 1901–1902.

⁵¹ On the “patent and latent” attributes of racial assessments, see my “Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth,” *Political Power and Social Theory* 11 (1997): 183–206.

⁵² Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 41–42.

⁴⁶ Ian Hacking, “Two Kinds of ‘New Historicism’ for Philosophers,” *New Literary History* 21 (2) (Winter 1990): 343–64, 359.

⁴⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

familiar—or discordant and strange. My concern is with the *conditions of epistemic choice and chance*, of inculcation and innovation. I ask how people charged with large-scale management and local situations imagined they might identify what they knew they could not see, what common sense they used to assess racial belonging or political desires that were not available to ocular senses, how they distinguished politically motivated passions from private ones.

Anthropology has no privileged claim on the study of common sense nor the epistemologies that underwrite it. But as Michael Herzfeld argues, anthropology may have special purchase on how to go about its *comparative* study.⁵³ I am less sure we can really make that claim. For such expertise in common sense we would need to become far more proficient at studying the *changing parameters* of common sense, how common sense is rendered *uncommon*, and how people know it. Michael Polanyi refers to a “tacit dimension,” Mary Douglas to “implicit meaning,” Pierre Bourdieu to “habitus,” Charles Taylor to an “implicit understanding,”—the distilled dispositions and trained capacities that work through bodies and on them.⁵⁴ Each, with different emphasis, identifies those habits of heart, mind, and comportment that derive from unstated understandings of how things work in the world, the categories to which people belong, and the kind of knowledge one needs to hold unarticulated but well-rehearsed convictions and credulities.

But what constitutes common sense is at once historical and political; colonial contexts teach us clearly that dispositions are trained and disciplined and not without deliberation. Like habitus, they are neither uniform nor uncontested. Dispositions emerge out of a habitus that is rejected, accepted, or uneasily accommodated. Dispositions are not given, they are interpretations, discerned and made.⁵⁵ Nor were they always below the threshold of reflective surveillance.⁵⁶ To my mind, this shaping of common sense, and the reigning in of uncommon sense, together make up the substance of colonial governance and its working epistemologies. By Bourdieu’s account “habitus is that presence of the past in the

⁵³ Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology: Theoretical Practice in Culture and Society* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001), 1.

⁵⁴ See Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1967); Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); and Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 26.

⁵⁵ Clifford Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic, 1983), 73–93.

⁵⁶ William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 28.

present.”⁵⁷ What I call “epistemic habits” are steeped in history and historical practices, ways of knowing that are available and “easy to think,” called-upon, temporarily settled dispositions that can be challenged and that change. Epistemic habits share some of the properties that Hacking assigns to “rock-bottom givens”—they produce “permanent momentary items of [implicit] fact.”⁵⁸

Rather than treating epistemology as a domain of the foundational, architectural, and fixed (I think here against Richard Rorty’s claim that “time will tell but epistemology won’t”), I start from a premise shared by students of historical and social epistemology: that epistemic considerations are neither transcendent nor abstract.⁵⁹ They are of the colonial world and squarely in it. Colonial governance entailed a constant assessing and recapping of what colonial agents could know and how they could know it. Central to all the chapters in this book, then, is an engagement with this disquiet: with colonialism’s unevenly shared epistemic formations, the varying uneasiness and differential discomforts about what could be assumed to be communicable and circulated—or unrepeatable and not subject to the economy of official exchange. Epistemic formations “provide us with the possible, with the thinkable, with the constellations of concepts that are in question, what people assume to know about their worlds and how they disagree over them.”⁶⁰

Affective Strains

But even these terms of “debatability” may be up for grabs.⁶¹ Chapter 3, “Habits of a Colonial Heart,” explores the messy space between reason and sentiment, the sort of elusive knowledge on which political assessments were dependent and often had to be made. One is reminded of Weber’s contention that bureaucracies excise those domains they cannot measure, that

⁵⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Being, Time and the Sense of Existence,” in Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 210.

⁵⁸ Hacking (2002), 13.

⁵⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4. It is not really “epistemology,” as I use it here, to which Rorty’s attack is aimed but at a philosophy that imagines itself endowed as the foundational and privileged “tribunal of pure reason,” unfettered by history.

⁶⁰ Margaret Somers, “Where is Sociology after the Historic Turn?,” in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 71. Somers is not among those included in Ian Hacking’s review of a growing corpus of literature on historical epistemology. For her perceptive work that has paralleled and sometimes preceded the authors he cites, see also Somers, “The Privatization of Citizenship: How to Unthink a Knowledge Culture,” in *Beyond the Cultural Turn*, ed. Victoria E. Bonnell and Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 121–61.

⁶¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Past as a Scarce Resource,” *Man* 16: 201–19.

"bureaucracy develops . . . the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation."⁶² By Weber's criteria, the Dutch colonial bureaucracy was at best an imperfect success. "Emotional elements," personal grudges, long-harbored resentments, assessments of whether assaults should be taken as acts of personal affront or political subversion, might have escaped calculation but they were deeply part of what Douglas Holmes and George Marcus have called the "para-ethnography" of the lay world—queries and details of the everyday that had to be sensed and could not be measured by enumeration.⁶³

Managed hearts were critical to colonialism's political grammar. Imperial projects called upon specific sentiments, and assessed racial membership, in part by locating appropriate carriers and recipients of those feelings. To whom one expressed attachment as opposed to pity, contempt, indifference, or disdain provided both cultural and legal "proof" of who one was, where one ranked in the colonial order of things, and thus where one racially belonged.

Colonial statecraft required the calibration of sympathies and attachments, managing different degrees of subjugation both among its agents and those colonized. Being a taxonomic state meant more than setting out categories; it meant producing and harnessing those sentiments that would make sense of those distinctions and make them work. Reason may be the "public touchstone of truth," but it is anchored in sensibilities, as Kant insisted, and in affective states.⁶⁴

Sentiments are not opposed to political reason but are at once modalities and tracers of it. Here I treat sentiments as judgments, assessments, and interpretations of the social and political world.⁶⁵ They are also incisive markers of rank and the unstated rules of exemption. How and to whom sentiments of remorse or rage, compassion or contempt were conveyed and displayed measured degrees of social license that colonial rela-

⁶² Weber (1946), 975.

⁶³ Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, "Fast Capitalism: Paraethnography and the Rise of the Symbolic Analyst," in *Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Perspectives on the New Economy*, ed. Melissa Fisher and Greg Downey (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006), 34–57.

⁶⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 146.

⁶⁵ Similar points have been eloquently made by others. See, for example, Robert Solomon, "On Emotions as Judgments," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25 (1988): 183–91, and, more recently, Martha Nussbaum, "Emotions as Judgments of Value," in Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19–88.

tions so inequitably conferred.⁶⁶ To underscore this crucial point: expressions of sentiment depended on situated knowledge and thus relational know-how about rank—where and to whom one displayed one's range of feeling within that prescriptive world. Archival documents participate in this emotional economy in some obvious ways: in the measured tone of official texts; in the biting critique reserved for marginalia; in footnotes to official reports where moral assessments of cultural practice were often relegated and local knowledge was stored.⁶⁷ Not unlike Steven Shapin's tracking of the social history of truth in the seventeenth century, I ask who and what was granted epistemological virtue, with what cultural competencies, and by what social criteria.⁶⁸

If colonial archives were nurseries of legal knowledge and official repositories of policy, they were also repositories of good taste and bad faith. Scribes often wrote out the final, clean copy but not always. "Semi-official" correspondence, and certainly personal letters, could be directly penned by their authors. Reports to the Governor-General in Batavia and to the Minister of Colonies in The Hague were composed by men of letters whose status was enhanced by reference to Greek heroes and French *bons mots*. Such proof of competence and good judgment was demonstrated in no small part by configuring events into familiar and recognizable plots. In empire's "lettered cities" of administrative work, virtue was defined by limited and selective familiarity with the Indies.⁶⁹ Those with too much knowledge of things Javanese were penalized, as were those with not enough.⁷⁰

But administrative anxiety was also rightly riveted on those affective states of European colonials that could not be easily gauged, on those not within the state's reach to manage or assess. The public demonstration by European and creole whites in Batavia in May 1848, when family attachments threatened to crash against the demands for state loyalty, underscored

⁶⁶ On contempt, condescension, and insolence as markers of social rank, see Don Herzog, "The Politics of Emotions," in *Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 202–43. On contempt as "what the honorable have the right to show for the less honorable," see William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 206–34, 225.

⁶⁷ On footnotes as the lines that lead into moral communities and their claims to truth, see Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁶⁸ Steven Shapin, *The Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁶⁹ On the "lettered cities" of early colonial Latin America, see Angel Rama's exquisite rendition of the power of written discourse among the "letrados" in the making of Spanish rule in Rama, *The Lettered City* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996.)

⁷⁰ See Fanny Colonna, "Educating Conformity in French Colonial Algeria," in *Tensions of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 346–70.

that those in charge of the city and the colony knew how much habits of the heart could not be contained as the “private”; they could as easily spiral into a political field not in the state’s control. At issue was the contagious, transient quality of sentiment and its portability. Whether certain sentiments were politically dangerous because they were local or because they were smuggled in on the last mail boat via Paris newspapers and by word of mouth, they really did not know.

If epistemology was once the term given to *formal* theories of knowledge and their systematic study, students of social and historical epistemology have since taken it in a very different, worldly direction. Armed with a vocabulary of (epistemic) community, (epistemic) culture, (epistemic) crisis, and (epistemic) practice, more emphasis is now placed on the procedures and activities on which certain ways of knowing rely, not unlike what De Certeau called historiographic “operations.”⁷¹ While such a lexicon is more commonly reserved for the study of scientific communities of experiment and expertise, such an approach offers productive ways of thinking about governing practices that, too, depended on how much conviction, experience, and expertise were shared, and the extent to which architects and agents of rule could count on that common ground.

The epistemic practices of science and colonial governance have something else important in common: a preoccupation with “the taming of chance.”⁷² Much as classical probability theory was to measure the incertitudes of a modernizing world, colonial civil servants were charged to do the same.⁷³ Both ventures approach the conventions and categories of analysis as neither innocuous nor benign. As interpretive communities, both depend on rules of reliability and trust, on an assumed common sense about what was likely, that allow prediction and direct the political projects that those plausibilités serve.

Both are also communities of expectation. If the sciences participate in “a permanent process of . . . reshuffling . . . the boundary between what is

⁷¹ See Michel de Certeau, “The Historiographic Operation,” in de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 56–85. On epistemic cultures, see, among others, K. Knorr-Cetina, “Epistemics in Society: On the Nesting of Knowledge Structures into Social Structures,” in *Rural Reconstruction in a Market Economy*, ed. W. Hijman, H. Hetsen, and J. Frouws, *Mansholt Studies 5* (Wageningen: Mansholt, 1996), 55–73, and Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.) On epistemic crisis, see Alisdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science,” *Monist* 60 (4) (October 1977): 453–72.

⁷² Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁷³ See Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

thought to be known and what is beyond imagination,” colonial governance did much the same.⁷⁴ Sound conjecture and expectation can make governing strategies work, or as anticolonial movements have amply demonstrated, make them violently fail. And like scientific communities, new objects emerge between what one does “not quite yet know” and that for which there is not yet a name. Such epistemic objects are produced in the haze of what historian of science Hans-Jorg Rheinberger calls “a mixture of hard and soft,” or, as Michel Serres puts it, “object, still, sign, already; sign still, object already.”⁷⁵ The making of colonial categories shares this ambiguous epistemic space. New social objects were the archives’ product as much as subjects of them.

The notion that “granting epistemic warrant is a covert way of distributing power” underwrites colonial studies in some of the field’s most productive projects, which trace both veiled epistemic authority as well as blatantly assertive forms of control.⁷⁶ But just how that warrant was granted, how firmly entrenched, and how much debate accompanied that process is less often pursued. Some of the problem may be with an overcommitment to Foucault’s vocabulary. An “episteme” has come to index a scale, longevity, and hardening of thought-formations that can set us astray. A “regime of truth” suggests a durability of distinctions, a finite field of truth-claims that colonial knowledge-production would never attain.⁷⁷ As I will argue in chapter 3, understanding “what happened” in May 1848 calls on different vectors of intelligibility, alternate causalities and attributions of affect that crossed and met. I use the terms “grids of intelligibility” and “regimes of truth” cautiously, with the caveat that both mark epistemic habits and ways of knowing cut through with competing investments and altering claims. As these archives of the Indies’ colonial agents and architects evince, it was not epistemic clarity but epistemic uncertainty that generated the densest debates and the longest paper trails that wound their way through a range of seemingly unrelated subjects. Like imperial formations themselves, colonial truth-claims were provisional and subject to change.

⁷⁴ Hans-Jorg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11.

⁷⁵ Michel Serres, quoted in *ibid.*, 28–29.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Steven Fuller, *Social Epistemology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 10. See Dipesh Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), which cogently makes the case for “documenting how [European] ‘reason,’ which was not always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated,” 43. As I argue here, lack of the “self-evident” permeated the tissue of imperial governance, producing confused policies born of epistemic anxiety among European colonials themselves.

⁷⁷ Among the many places Foucault invokes “regimes of truth,” see “Truth and Power,” in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 132.

Tracing the Archival Turn

If “the transformation of archival activity is the point of departure and the condition of a new history,” as De Certeau has argued, we are clearly in a new moment.⁷⁸ The warning of E. E. Evans-Pritchard in 1951 that anthropologists tended to be “uncritical in their use of documentary sources” had little resonance then.⁷⁹ Neither did F. W. Maitland’s earlier dictum that anthropology had “the choice between being history or being nothing.”⁸⁰ Both pronouncements read as fairly quaint today.⁸¹ Among historians, literary critics and anthropologists, archives have been elevated to new analytic status with distinct billing, worthy of scrutiny on their own. One might be tempted to see this as a Derridian effect of the last decade that followed on the publication of *Archive Fever*.⁸² But the archival turn has a wider arc and a longer durée. *Archive Fever* compellingly captured that impulse by giving it theoretical stature, but Jacques Derrida’s intervention came only after the “archival turn” was already being made.

This move from archive-as-source to archive-as-subject gained currency across the richly undisciplined space of critical history and in a range of fields energized by that reformulation.⁸³ The sheer number of volumes devoted to “the archive” is staggering: in film and literary studies, in analyses of truth commissions or the human genome project,

⁷⁸ De Certeau (1988), 75.

⁷⁹ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, “Anthropology and History,” in Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (Glencoe, N.Y.: Free Press, 1962).

⁸⁰ F. W. Maitland, *Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 249. It was later famously quoted by E. E. Evans-Pritchard in “Social Anthropology: Past and Present, The Marett Lecture, 1950,” in Evans-Pritchard (1962), 152.

⁸¹ Some might argue that anthropology’s engagement with history has been less a “turn” than a return to its founding principles, an enquiry into cumulative processes of cultural production but without the typological aspirations and evolutionary assumptions once embraced. Others counter that the feverish turn to history has represented a significant departure, a new kind of rupture with anthropology’s complicity in colonial politics. Both might agree that the move signals a new way of thinking about the politics of knowledge, what a “colonial legacy” means in practice—the categories, conceptual frame, and practices of colonial authorities that have permeated anthropology’s central concerns.

⁸² Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

⁸³ Sonia Combe, *Archives Interdites: Les peur françaises face à l’Histoire contemporaine* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994). Dominick LaCapra, too, notes that the “problem of reading in the archives has increasingly become a concern of those doing archival research” in LaCapra, “History, Language, and Reading: Waiting for Crillon,” *AHR* 100 (3) (June 1995): 807. See also a special issue on “The Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11 (4) (November 1998), and *Penser l’Archive: Histoire d’Archives-Archives d’Histoire*, ed. Mauro Cerutti, Jean-Francois Fayet, and Michel Porret (Lausanne: Antipodes, 2006).

from rereadings of histories of colonialism to those of gay rights.⁸⁴ “Reading” here is an agentive act, one squarely focused on what we know and how we know it. Focus on the politics of knowledge is a methodological commitment to how history’s exclusions are secured and made.

One could argue that “the archive” for historians and “the Archive” for cultural theorists have been wholly different analytic objects: for the former, a body of documents and the institutions that house them, for the latter, a metaphoric invocation for any corpus of selective collections and the longings that the acquisitive quests for the primary, originary, and untouched entail.⁸⁵ Those differences might suggest sharply defined domains, but the blurring that is so common today is hardly a recent intervention.⁸⁶ For, indeed, something resembling the broader social life of an archive, what might be called “ethnography in an archival mode,” has been around for some time. Carlo Ginzburg’s microhistory of a sixteenth-century miller, like Natalie Davis’s use of pardon tales, drew on “hostile” documents to reveal “the gap between the image underlying the interrogations of judges and the actual testimony of the accused.”⁸⁷ Davis questioned “how people told stories, what they thought a good story was, how they accounted for motive.” In her notion of “fiction in the archives,” she worked through pardon tales to reveal both the “constraints of the law” and its popular manipulations, both the terms of argumentation and the broader set of literary forms invoked to support or undermine those claims.⁸⁸ Still, these were not ethnographies of the archive, but in it.

Archivists have been thinking about the politics and history of archives in ways that increasingly speak to a broader community of

⁸⁴ Among many others, see Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh, eds., *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), and references throughout this chapter.

⁸⁵ For this metaphoric move, see the two special issues of *History of the Human Sciences* devoted to The Archive (11 [4] [November 1998] and 12 [2] [May 1999]). Derrida’s valorization of “the archive” as imaginary and metaphor is predominant in both. On the archive as metaphor, see also Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3–64.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), esp. 81–114. On contemporary forms of documentation, see Annelise Riles, ed., *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

⁸⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (New York: Penguin, 1982), xvii, xviii.

⁸⁸ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 4.

scholars.⁸⁹ What marks the past decade are the new conversations between archivists and historians about documentary evidence, record keeping, what features of archival form and content can be retrieved, and how decisions should be made about historical significance and preservation.⁹⁰ As storage technology revamps, both question what information matters, what tacit narratives inform contemporary archival practices, and what should be retained as archives' physical forms change.⁹¹ All are asking what new accessibilities and connections are gained—and lost—when parchment and paper gave way to digital recordings.

Colonialism's Archival Grains

Genealogy is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.

—Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"

If one were to characterize what has informed a critical approach to the colonial archives, it would be a commitment to the notion of reading

⁸⁹ On the history of archives and how archivists have thought about them, see Ernst Posner, "Some Aspects of Archival Development since the French Revolution" [1940], in *A Modern Archives Reader*, ed. Maygene Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Record Service, 1984), 3–21. See also *Les Archives*, in the series *Que Sais-Je?* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959). See also Eric Ketelaar, *The Archival Image: Critical Essays* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997).

⁹⁰ See Marlene Manoff, "Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines," *Libraries and the Academy* 4 (1) (2004): 9–25; Richard Berner, *Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: An Historical Analysis* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983); Kenneth E. Foote, "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture" *American Archivist* 53 (3) (1990): 378–93; Terry Cook, "Mind over Matter: Towards a New Theory of Archival Appraisal," in *The Archival Imagination: Essays in Honour of Hugh A. Taylor* (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Archivists, 1992), 38–69; James M. O'Toole, "On the Idea of Uniqueness," *American Archivist* 57 (4) (1994): 632–59. For some sense of the changes in how archivists themselves have framed their work over the last twenty years, see the *American Archivist*, and, most recently, *Archives, Documentation and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin Jr. and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) and "Archives, Records, and Power," a special issue (2 [1–2] [2002]) of *Archival Science*, guest-edited by Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz.

⁹¹ Terry Cook, "Electronic Records, Paper Minds: The revolution in information management and archives in the post-custodial and post-modernist era," in *Archives and Manuscripts* 22 (2) (1994): 300–329. See also Eric Ketelaar, "Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives," *Archival Science* 2001 (1): 131–41.

colonial archives "against their grain" of imperial history, empire builders, and the priorities and perceptions of those who wrote them. Schooled to think "from the bottom up," students of colonialism located "structure" with colonizers and the colonial state, and "human agency" with subalterns, in small gestures of refusal and silence among the colonized.

In reading "upper-class sources upside down," we sought to read against the languages of rule and statist perceptions. "Un-State-d" histories were to demonstrate more than the warped reality of official knowledge, to elucidate their textual properties and the violences condoned by such political distortions. In Ranajit Guha's influential formulations, colonial documents were rhetorical sleights-of-hand that erased the facts of subjugation, reclassified petty crime as political subversion, or located violence and unreason as inherent to the colonized.⁹² The analytic tactics pursued have been those of inversion and recuperation, recasting colonial subjects as agents who made and make choices and critiques of their own.

Insistence on the link between what counts as knowledge and who is in power to record their versions of it has since become a founding principle of colonial ethnography. Such analyses invite other, more challenging pursuits. In treating archival documents not as the historical ballast to ethnography, but as a charged site of it, I see the call for an emergent methodological shift: to move away from treating the archives as an *extractive* exercise to an ethnographic one. That call has been taken up differently: sometimes hotly pursued, other times merely a nod in that analytic direction. For some it represents a turn back to the powerful "poetics of detail."⁹³ To others the archival turn provides a way to cut through the distorted optics of colonial historiography and the distinctions that cordoned off fiction from authorized truths.⁹⁴

⁹² See Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), where some of Guha's early essays published between 1988–1992 are collected.

⁹³ See Greg Denning, *The Death of William Gooch: A History's Anthropology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

⁹⁴ Trouillot, 6–10. See also David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Foucault's insistence that the archive forms a system of enunciabilities rather than all the texts that a culture preserves or those institutions that store them guides Thomas Richards's treatment of the British imperial archive as "the fantastic representation of an epistemological master pattern." See Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993), 11. For Richards, Hilton's *Lost Horizon* and Kipling's *Kim* are entries in a Victorian archive that was the "prototype for a global system of domination through circulation, an apparatus for controlling territory by producing, distributing and consuming information about it." See also Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), 79–131. On the archives as an "instituting imaginary," see also Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and Its

Michel-Rolph Trouillot noted with consummate clarity that “historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power.”⁹⁵ More importantly, he offered neophytes to archival work a way to tackle what De Certeau meant by “historiographic operations” by distinguishing the archival power lodged in moments of creation from practices of assembly, retrieval, and disciplinary legitimation.⁹⁶ If Trouillot urged students to distinguish among these different operations, Nicholas Dirks’s call for “a biography of the archive” insisted on examining who was performing that labor by showing to what extent early colonial officials cum historians in British India were dependent on native informants who did the work of collection and cultural translation for them.⁹⁷ But “mining” for treasures rather than immersion is still a prevalent approach to archives and an all too expedient research mode.

Feminist historians have long sought out creative ways of demonstrating how, what Bonnie Smith aptly dubbed, “male prowess” shaped archival production, the initiation rites of historiography, and the absence of agentive histories of women excised from documents and excluded from subsequent texts.⁹⁸ On colonial terrain the challenge to locate women as subjects continues to critically stretch the scope of the archive in ways that redefine what kinds of reading and writing are historically germane.⁹⁹

Limits,” in Hamilton et al., 19–26. Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria’s subtle analysis of the grounding of Latin American literary narrative in the early Spanish colonial state’s styles of documentation also bears that stamp. See Roberto Gonzalez Echevarria, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Both Richards and Gonzalez Echevarria take the archive as a template that decodes something else, and both push us to think differently about “archival fictions,” though they reserve their analyses for literature rather than colonial archives themselves.

⁹⁵ Trouillot, 55.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁷ Nicholas Dirks, “Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive,” in van der Veer and Breckenridge, 279–313. See also Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), whose attention to the British intelligence service’s work through native channels similarly highlights the local purveyors of knowledge to which Europeans were so beholden.

⁹⁸ Bonnie G. Smith, “Gender and the Practices of Scientific History: The Seminar and Archival Research in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 100 (4–5) (1995): 1150–76.

⁹⁹ Antoinette Burton, *Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India* (New York: Oxford, 2003); and Betty Joseph, *Reading the East India Company, 1720–1840: Colonial Currencies of Gender* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also Durba Ghosh, “Decoding the nameless: gender, subjectivity and historical methodologies in reading the archives of colonial India,” in *A New Imperial History*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 297–316; Anjai Arondekar, “Without a Trace: Sexuality and the Colonial Archive,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 14 (1–2) (January–April 2005): 10–27; and Stoler (2006b).

My own first sense of what I call here “the pulse of the archive” came decades ago when I found myself confronted with reports on the horrific mutilation and murder of a European planter’s wife and children in 1876 on Sumatra’s East Coast. Multiple reports were collected on the murder, preceding attacks, and speculation on both the most immediate affronts and distant uprisings to which the murder might be linked. Even detailed accounts sometimes were unfettered by specific knowledge of the assault. In an earlier version of chapter 6, I explored how rumor ricocheted between planters and the workers they feared and the insurgents they ignored, undoing facile distinctions between reliable and conjured information, between fact and fantasy, between mad paranoia and political reality.¹⁰⁰ The contrast between neat copy and hurried hand, tidy statements and quick-paced query and response, enraged and tempered narrative, fine-grained knowledge and unabashed ignorance—all struck me as startling testimonies to the workings of empire and to what we still did not know about it.¹⁰¹ Those challenges remain at the heart of this book and with me today.

Most students of the colonial, who now work with archives in a reflective mode, treat “the archive” as something in between a set of documents, their institutions, and a repository of memory—both a place and a cultural space that encompass official documents but are not confined to them. Some of the most creative work branches out to the range of scripted and performed practices that bear the psychic and material stamp of colonial relations.

Here I do something else: several chapters stay largely within the state’s purview by attending to documents viewed by state officials but not always produced by them. As I use the term, the Dutch colonial “archives” were both a corpus of statements and a depot of documents, both sites of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed, and contradicted the investments of the state.¹⁰² Power and control, as students of archiving are quick to point out, are fundamental to the

¹⁰⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, “In Cold Blood: Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives,” *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 151–89. For an innovative treatment of the work of colonial rumors as the site of the fantastically real, see Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Those challenges prompted the 1996 Lewis Henry Morgan lectures I gave on “Ethnography in the Archives” and years of subsequent seminars bearing that title.

¹⁰² This link between state power and what counts as history was long ago made by Hegel in *The Philosophy of History*, as Hayden White points out: “It is only the state which first presents subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of History, but involves the production of such history in the very progress of its own being.” White, *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 12.

etymology of the word “archive” and should need no iteration.¹⁰³ Moralizing stories mapped the scope of state vision, the restricted limits of government responsibility, and what were defined as its beneficent missions.

Nor were they to be read in any which way. Issues were rendered important by where they appeared, how they were cross-referenced, where they were catalogued, and thus how they were framed. Official exchanges between Governors-General and their subordinates, between Governors-General and Ministers of Colonies, and between the latter and the King served as reference guides to administrative thinking; they were abbreviated “cheat sheets” of what counted as precedent and what properly fell under “concerns of state.” Some reports were meticulously scrutinized, others were carelessly read and set aside. Archival convention, however, dictated that all were abundantly cross-referenced in ways that produced paths of precedent and mapped relevance. Citation also served, not unlike footnotes, to affirm the import of one’s observations, choice of historical context, and implicitly the legitimacy of one’s selected narrative.¹⁰⁴

Some would argue that the grand narratives of colonialism have been amply and excessively told. On this argument, students of colonialisms often turn quickly and confidently to read “against the grain” of colonial conventions. One fundamental premise of this book is a commitment to a less assured and perhaps more humble stance—to explore the grain with care and read along it first. Assuming we know those scripts rests too comfortably on predictable stories with familiar plots. Such a stance leaves intact the assumption that colonial statecraft was always intent on accumulating more knowledge rather than on a selective winnowing and reduction of it. The assumption may accept too quickly the equation of knowledge to power and that colonial states sought more of both.¹⁰⁵ Not least, it leaves unaddressed how often colonial categories reappear in the analytic vocabulary of historians rather than as transient, provisional objects of historical inquiry that themselves need to be analyzed, if not explained.¹⁰⁶

Colonial archives were sites of command—but of countermand as well. “Factual storytellings”—a phrase Hayden White uses to define what

¹⁰³ From the Latin *archivium*, “residence of the magistrate,” and from the Greek *arkhe*, “to command.” See Gonzalez Echevarria, 31–34, for a detailed etymology of the term, and see Derrida (1995), 1–3, for his characteristically exquisite treatment of the conceptual entailments of “the archive” as that which commands, shelters, and conceals itself as it gathers together signs.

¹⁰⁴ On footnotes as the pathways into moral communities and their claims to truth, see Grafton.

¹⁰⁵ For a careful treatment of this culling project, see Amin.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of this issue, see my “Caveats on Comfort Zones and Comparative Frames,” in Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 205–17.

counts as history—did not always prevail.¹⁰⁷ Perturbations in the form of discrepant accounts, dissenting voices, and extraneous detail could disable action, unhinge the “facts,” and forestall response. Archival power was no more monolithic than the governing practices that it enabled and on which it was based. Subjugated knowledge erupts in contested ontologies of peoples and things. Countervailing interpretations of what compromised danger and threat could send ripples through imperious states and the polished surface of their writerly modes.

As such, I am drawn to think about archival events with and against Foucault’s compelling invitation to treat them as “reversals of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it.”¹⁰⁸ Such an approach undoes the certainty that archives are stable “things” with ready-made and neatly drawn boundaries. But the search for dramatic “reversal,” “usurpation,” and successful “appropriation” can hide “events” that are more muted in their consequences, less bellicose in their seizures, less spectacular in how and what they reframe. Here I treat archival events more as moments that disrupt (if only provisionally) a field of force, that challenge (if only slightly) what can be said and done, that question (if only quietly) “epistemic warrant,” that realign the certainties of the probable more than they mark wholesale reversals of direction.

The Watermarks of Empire

Most of these chapters treat specific government archives of the nineteenth-century Netherlands Indies and the problems their authors and collators sought to avoid or address. The final chapters are written in a different register, one which responds to lives that slip in and out of the official colonial archives and their instrumental narratives. (Indeed, some readers may want to turn directly to these last two chapters that trace the biographies of empire, and may find it more compelling to read them first.)

In chapter 7, “Imperial Dispositions of Disregard,” I question how much we who study the work of empire know about the dispositions of those it empowered. It wrestles with those habits of heart and comportment recruited to the service of colonial governance but never wholly subsumed by it. More directly, it identifies a “politics of disregard;” the psychological and political machinations it takes to look away for those who live off and in empire, as Valck did, and as many of us might find

¹⁰⁷ See White, esp. 26–57.

¹⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 76–100, 88.

ourselves inadvertently doing now. Here I take the story of Frans Carl Valck as told through government archives (chapter 6) and as it appears from a private archive (chapter 7) of a very different sort—the family papers housed in a genealogical bureau established decades after Valck's death by one of his scholarly descendants.

The story of his failed career appears here as a palimpsest, erupting at the tender and fraught center of his relationship with his only child, a daughter from whom he remained estranged for most of their lives. Sometimes the course of his Indies career as a colonial civil servant is centrally framed; sometimes it is irrelevant and only partially visible; elsewhere it is utterly absent, delicately unacknowledged, discreetly erased. Viewed from these differences of time, tone, and place, I imagine what it might take to write a history of empire “in a minor key,” through a register that conveys the confused sensibilities that cut across Valck's official record, inflecting the collision and collusion between his personal and public lives. It is thus chapter 7 that opens most directly to one way of thinking a colonial history of the present.

When historical ethnography was just coming into its own, John and Jean Comaroff urged us to “create new colonial archives of our own.”¹⁰⁹ Some students of empire have sought new kinds of sources. Others have looked to different ways of approaching familiar archives with questions not yet asked and readings not yet done. In this book, it is unexplored fault lines, ragged edges, and unremarked disruptions to the seamless and smooth surface of colonialism's archival genres over which I linger and then attempt to track. My attention is on the field of entangled documents that have been “scratched over” and crossed-out many times. But it is as much on repetitions, what Edward Said reminds us is always about “filiations” pursued or abandoned. “Repetition cannot long escape the ironies it bears within it,” or the histories upon which it calls.¹¹⁰ In these colonial archives, these repetitions join the disparate, enlist the counterintuitive, and provide the vectors of recuperations and ruptures by making familiar what colonial agents sought to know.

De Certeau defined the science of history as a redistribution in space, the act of changing something into something else. Archival labor, he warned, must do more than “simply adopt former classifications”; it must break away from the constraints of “series H in the National Archives,” to be replaced with new “codes of recognition” and “systems of expectation.”¹¹¹ But such a strategy depends on what we think we already know.

¹⁰⁹ Jean and John Comaroff, *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992).

¹¹⁰ Edward Said, “On Repetition,” in Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 111–25, 125.

¹¹¹ See De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 74–75.

For students of empire, colonial codes of recognition and systems of expectation remain at the elusive center of imperial rule, its implicit plots and its deflecting and resilient narratives.

When Robert Darnton some twenty years ago identified “history in the ethnographic grain” as what cultural history should be about, he had in mind how people make sense of the world and “thought about how they thought.”¹¹² Epistemic anxieties are precisely about that reflection. Here the ethno-graphic is about the graphic, detailed production of social kinds, the archival power that allowed its political deployment, and the grafting of affective states to those inventions. Reading along the archival grain draws our sensibilities to the archive's granular rather than seamless texture, to the rough surface that mottles its hue and shapes its form. Working along the grain is not to follow a frictionless course but to enter a field of force and will to power, to attend to both the sound and sense therein and their rival and reciprocal energies. It calls on us to understand how unintelligibilities are sustained and why empires remain so uneasily invested in them.

¹¹² Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 3.

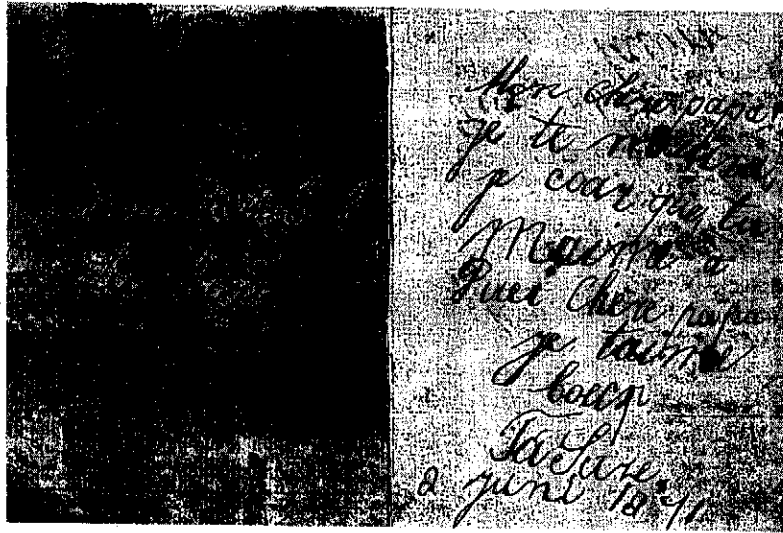


Figure 18. The first letter—or at least the first that has been preserved—that Susanna Valck probably sent to her father, Frans Carl Valck, at age seven. On the front page: *Meseu Valck La heye [La Haye, The Hague] / Mon chère (sic) papa: je [si] te m'écrit je coas [sais] que tu m'aime a xxxx. / Chère papa je t'aime boecp [beaucoup] Ta Suzette juni 1871. Source: CBG, FA.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

Imperial Dispositions of Disregard

One never wholly believes what one believes.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

One may certainly admire man, a mighty genius of construction, who succeeds in piling up an infinitely complicated dome of concepts upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water. His construction must be like one constructed of spiders' webs; delicate enough to be carried along by the waves, strong enough not to be blown apart by every wind.

—Friedrich Nietzsche,

“On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense”

THIS CHAPTER IS ABOUT THE LOGOS and pathos of empire, the durabilities of imperial dispositions steeped in matter and mind. In different guises, it wrestles with those habits of heart and comportment recruited to the service of colonial governance but not wholly subsumed by it. It seeks to broach the cast that imperial formations imposed over people's intimate social ecologies—both the intensities and the diminished qualities of their affective lives. European colonial communities built their interior frontiers on social distinctions that were schooled as well as those that could “go without saying” because they were, in C. S. Peirce's phrasing, “hidebound with habit” and had already been learned.¹ Colonial actors discerned those distinctions with care: colonial agents wrote anxiously about them. Students of colonialism, more geared to what was pressed on those persons colonized, for long did not attend to the analytic purchase such minor nuance could afford. Evidence of disdain, desire, and disaffection for thoughts and things native were basic to the colonial order of things. In recluse and repose, attachments were put to the test. In these taut and tender ties, relations of power were knotted and tightened, tangled and undone. As I have long held, these ties were not the soft undertissue of empire, but its marrow.

This chapter works closely through the life of a family whose lives moved in and out of colonial Indonesia in the late nineteenth century to ask what sorts of personhoods imperial formations called forth and upon:

¹ C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1963).

At its core is a rejection of the premise that we who study the colonial know both what imperial rule looks like and the dispositions of those it empowers. It responds to the *flat interiorities* commonly attributed to those with whom we do *not* sympathize, politically or otherwise. Its aim is directed at the smug sense that colonial sensibilities are a given and we can now quickly move on to the complexities and more subtle, troubled dispositions of the postcolonial present.

ANOTHER ARCHIVE, ANOTHER LIFE: TWO STORIES FOR FRANS CARL VALCK

The following pages are trained upon a key and familiar figure, the same Frans Carl Valck whose “discoveries” of European atrocities and whose demise as Assistant Resident during his truncated stay in Deli was the subject of the preceding chapter. It is the same Frans Carl Valck who vanishes so abruptly in 1881 (with his meager pension by then allotted) from the official archival record and from the colonial histories written on its censored edges. Luhmann, the name of the planter whose family was murdered and who remained in Deli through the 1890s, merits passing mention in East Sumatra’s historiography. Valck himself disappears, only signaled in passing by his title, caught up in a fraught and violent moment when the Resident was still stationed in Bengkalis far to the south. Valck is never again named.

I sought for some eighteen years to find what became of him since first reading his arresting letter to his friend Norman Levyssohn, along with his explicit official reports of European barbarisms on the Deli estates, which cost him his job. But enjoying neither success nor fame, Valck’s scent was faint, his imprint gone, his account of torture excised if not erased. What can be located, however, is a family connection to one of the most successful and innovative entrepreneurs in the development of Java’s mid-nineteenth-century agricultural industry—Theodore Lucassen, whose father in 1840 gained renown for first adapting French sugar beet refining techniques to large-scale sugar cane processing in the Indies.

His son, also called Theodore, was to inherit and further expand one of the most vast family-run sugar complexes in Java, an initiative that supplanted Caribbean sugar production on the world market.² It was through his affinal connection, as husband to one of Lucassen’s sisters, as uncle and

² On the rise of the Lucassen family and their sugar enterprises in Tegal, see Margaret Leidelmeijer, *Van suikermolen tot grootbedrijf: technische vernieuwing in de Java-suikerindustrie in de negentiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: NEHA, 1997), and Roger Knight, *Colonial Production in Provincial Java* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), both of whom track the “financial fortunes” of the family through a “set of interlinked state officials, sugar contractors, factory administrators, merchants involved in the commodity trade and their family and commercial associates” (Knight, 8).

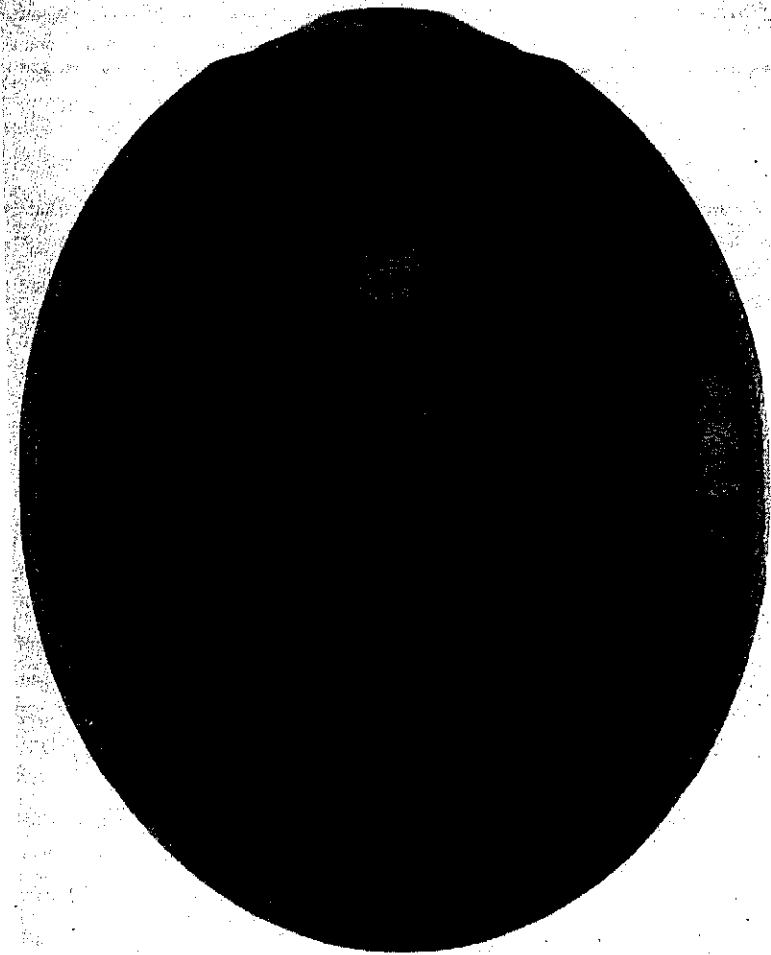


Figure 19. Frans Carl Valck’s portrait, probably made at the time of his marriage when he was twenty-seven, and before he was sent to Bali and Sumatra. Source: IB No. 96200.

then father-in-law to one of his sons, and as grandfather to one pivotal member of the Netherland’s Central Bureau of Genealogy that Frans Carl Valck was to emerge at his writing desk again.

Here, in the Bureau of Genealogy, was Valck, in both a familiar and unexpected guise, as one not particularly feted member of a family whose thousands of letters—written to and from cousins, uncles, in-laws, children,

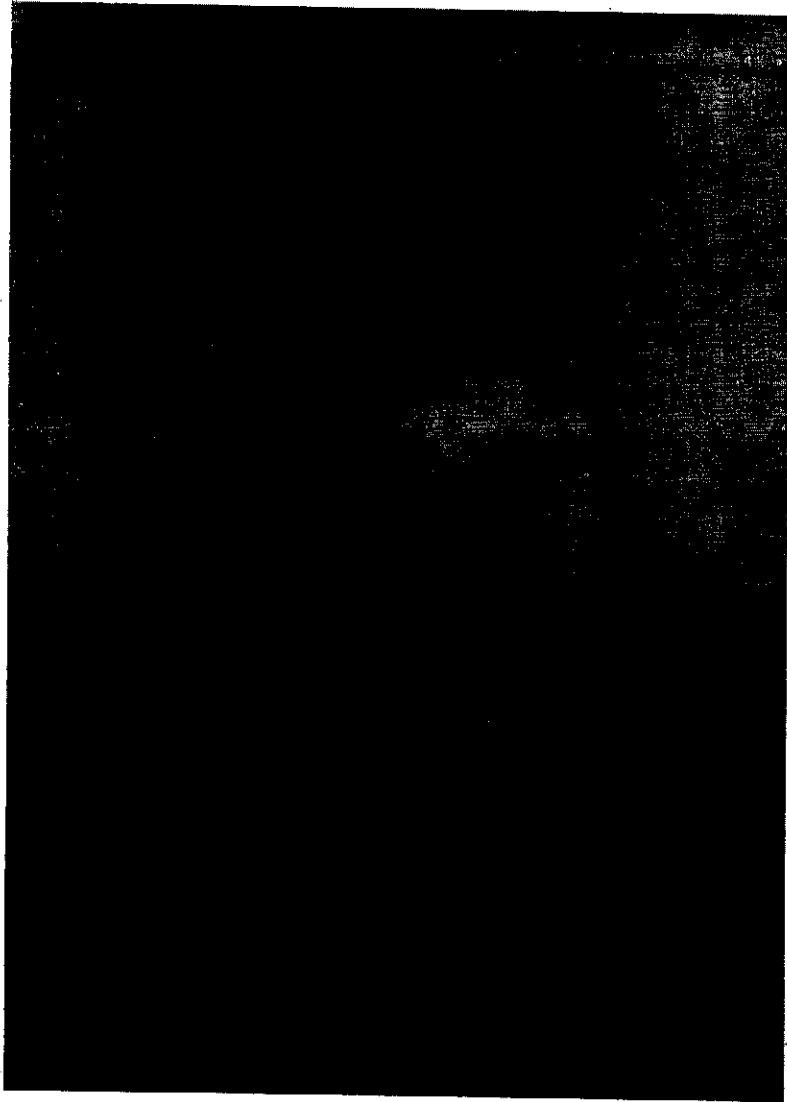


Figure 20. This portrait of Susanna Antoinette Lucassen was probably made when she was twenty-two years old, in 1862, at the time of her marriage to Frans Carl Valck. She was to die two years later, one year after the birth of her only daughter, Susanna Augusta Theodora. *Source*: IB No. 96201.

parents, lovers, and future husbands; to and from governesses, grandparents, and family friends—filled more than forty crammed boxes of a multi-generational family archive. Its location calls up the serendipities of archival holdings, their invisibilities blinding when right in one's face. For this family archive of three meters is housed one flight up the stairwell in the same grey building I had visited for nearly two decades, the same building that stores the colonial administrative archives in The Hague. The proximity and distance between these two pieces of Valck's life are the traces I follow.

The distance between the two archives is one "storey"; the distance in epistolary form and writerly genre not unexpectedly remote. In content, the filaments and phrases that join them are strong yet elusive. Sometimes phrases slip from official to personal letters like a double negative superimposed. Elsewhere the distance is exaggerated and delicately guarded to ensure no contact, not a hint that these worlds could possibly touch. There is no cross-referencing in the respective catalogues, nor mutual recognition of what is above and what below.³ One is coded for the confidentialities of a bureaucracy, one for the confidences of cousins, sons-in-law, mothers, and daughters about cold remedies, parties attended, acquaintances met, travel plans, reliable dressmakers in Paris—the innocuous minutiae that could be read aloud and shared with other family members as "an entirely social affair."⁴ More exceptional are those intended for the recipient alone. Their "appendices," too, are of a different kind. The latter are full of small objects designed to awaken longings and stir memory; tenderly preserved are pieces of ribbon, a pencil drawing, newspaper clippings, or, folded within translucent paper, a pressed flower, a child's drawing, a wisp of hair.

In this swirl of wealth, accomplishment, and family ties to military generals, Indies' governors, and the elite circles of Dutch colonial society, Valck's brief and minor career was eclipsed, barely marked as a haunting trace. His time in Deli is dim next to the luminous careers and movements

³ In 1985, when I first inquired about Frans Carl Valck at the Algemeen Rijksarchief, Ms. F. van Anrooij had informed me that after 1880 Valck's name was not mentioned again in the state archives. I was first to learn about the Valck family archive fourteen years later in spring 1999 when working on this book. I wrote to Ms. F. van Anrooij again about my sense that Valck had been well connected to other elite colonial families and asked whether there might be somewhere else to look. She suggested I write to then-Director of the Central Bureau of Genealogy, Mr. Peter A. Christiaans, who might be able to help me. Neither she nor I knew of the Bureau of Genealogy's archive of the Valck-Lucassen family, with extensive materials on Frans Carl and his father. I thank both of them for their generous aid.

⁴ Rebecca Earle, ed., *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945* (Aldershot: Algate, 1999), 7, notes that "letter-writers indicated those unusual passages which should *not* be circulated, rather than the reverse."

of his kith and the wealthy Lucassen family, into which both he and his daughter married. By name and genealogy, Valck had much to offer: his ancestors were among the patrician Dutch regent class, hereditary members of the ruling bodies of towns and provinces, whose wealth came from those offices.⁵ It was Valck's grandson, Theodore Reynirus Valck Lucassen, who eventually merged the Valck and Lucassen families into one prestigious hyphenated name and into one elaborate coat-of-arms. But the broader arch that conjoined and disjointed his life—as the father of an only child, as a husband with a succession of three wives, and as colonial official in his short-lived career—is richly preserved in measured language, as was the personhood he shaped with such deliberate care.

Here, Frans Carl Valck appears as just one affinal member (for it is the Lucassens who are fully present) of a family whose broad clan spent generations moving between Europe and the Indies, whose births, engagements, deaths, and dishonor family and friends chronicle in a steady stream of missives that made their way across the Netherlands on canal barges, across Europe by train, and most often by ship from Marseille to Singapore and then Java. These are letters carefully folded, their envelopes still intact, timed to make the next barge departing for the Dutch provinces, or sometimes hurried to make the next boat leaving from Marseille.

In this chapter I broach only a small portion of this compendium of the correspondence of kith and kin temporarily residing in, visiting, or traveling between Bali, outposts in East Sumatra, sugar factories in central Java, French country estates, Swiss spas, and stolid, brick family houses that still line the prestigious avenues overlooking the canals that run through The Hague. The generational rhythms of these lettered careers and lettered lives register the social habits and political sensibilities of those who dwelled in colonial worlds and on their political margins. Names unconnected in official archives are joined in these missives by birthday celebrations, by greetings sent to those close to the person addressed, by news of leaves, and by announcements of births, promotions, marriages, and deaths. Tracking Frans Carl's relationships through them opens a grid of power, honor, and constraint that eludes official chartings.

Those on which I focus are between Valck and his daughter, written over some thirty years in the late nineteenth century, traversing the heyday of Dutch colonial empire, the opening of the Suez Canal, colonial expositions in Europe's capitals, riots in East Java, labor violence in

Deli, and the personal aloneness of colonial posts that were sometimes embraced as relished retreats, at other times experienced as exile.⁶ These are letters that were regularly sent, sometimes impassioned, and often relentless in their efforts to connect on the part of the absent father, Frans Carl Valck, who served for some sixteen years in the Netherlands Indies, with his daughter, Susanna, with whom he maintained constant epistolary contact and was in estranged physical proximity for most of their lives.

Between 1869, seven years after Valck took up his first post in Java, when his daughter in the Netherlands could not yet read and had just turned six, and 1892, when he died in The Hague and she was by then Susanna Antoinette Valck Lucassen—married to her deceased mother's nephew, mother of three, and daughter-in-law in residence on the Kemanglen estate—he wrote to her monthly and she, as a young woman, bimonthly to him. Father and daughter moved back and forth between the Indies and Europe, in counter current on the mail boats that took him out to Singapore and Bali in 1871, and her along the same route sixteen years later, and then brought him back to Europe in 1878. She was to return to the Netherlands in 1893 upon the loss of her husband and a year after her father's death.

Their letters took a good month to arrive, hence two long months to receive a response. His were on thick, embossed stationery, adorned with the family coat-of-arms, and hers on transparent paper, often written twice over, cross-hatched at right angles, perhaps to command his attention, or, as she claimed, to save postage. Both were carefully stored with letters spanning different years. It was Valck's grandson who found them "disarranged in a wooden chest." These letters, endearingly addressed to the young "Suze," begin when Valck was on leave in France in June 1869 and before he took up his second post in coastal Bali in January 1872, as Controleur of Djembrana. Hers he kept in their original envelopes, with just two remaining in the uneven scrawl of a child's unsteady hand. The bulk of hers only began in earnest when she was twenty, upon engagement to her Lucassen cousin and then throughout the conflict with her father prior to the marriage. It was a union of which Valck adamantly disapproved, in part because she had not secured his permission properly "in writing," in part because he found their engagement unduly rushed.

⁶ Edward Said was critically right to distinguish the "discontinuous state of being" of those who suffer the indignities of exile from those whose choices of dislocation are their own. Valck and those who *choose* colonial service had no claims to the state of exile in these terms. Still, despite their privilege, they shared in what Said called a "jealous state," an "exaggerated sense of group solidarity" and the pathos of "loss of contact" that their racialized worlds so viscerally bestowed. See Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 178–79.

⁵ On the power of regents in Dutch state-formation and imperial history, see the luminous study, which appears in abbreviated form, in Julia Adams, "The Familial State: Elite Family Practices and State-Making in the Early modern Netherlands," *Theory and Society* 23 (4) (August 1994): 505–39.

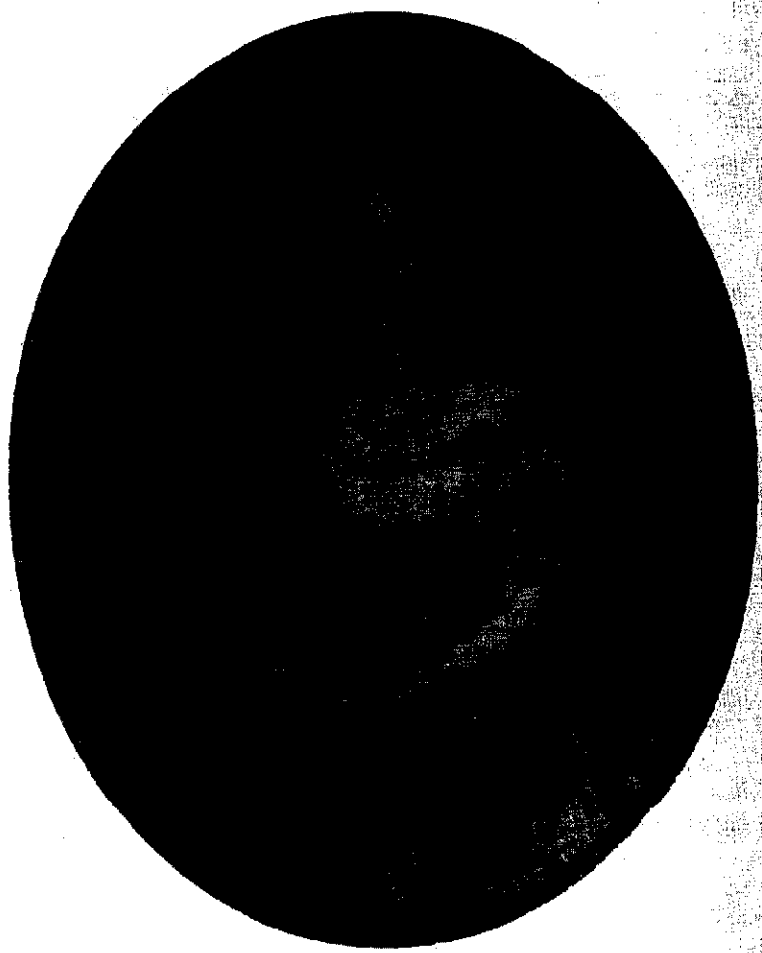


Figure 21. This portrait of Susanna Augusta Theodora Valck was probably made when she was nineteen years old, at the time of her marriage to Theodore (Theodoor) Lucassen, in 1883. Source: IB No. 96203.

The young Theodore Lucassen was still finishing his degree and had not yet completed his thesis. As Valck wrote, with palpable annoyance at Suze's precipitous decision, Theodore was still without a "calling." During this tense period of half a year, Valck refused to open a single one of her letters. When reconciled (despite her strong reproach of him and de-

fense of her choice) they were to write regularly for the last nine years of his life.

FRANCISCUS CAROLUS VALCK, EX INSULA JAVA

Valck was seen as an unexceptional man, as the most common phrase applied to him put it, "a not-incompetent" one, ensconced at the apex of a Dutch colonial elite, but only partially protected by it. The official correspondence about him, some of which he participated in, but much of which he did not—his personal letters to his wives-to-be as well as to his sweet child turned a sullen grown daughter, to friends to whom he bitterly complained about his treatment and with whom he pleaded to defend his honor—provide narratives that might seem to fall easily into ready categories: the public and official versus the private, hidden, and authentic; the professional persona versus the caring father. I see them as something else: as *the plaintive notes of a history in a "minor key,"* an entry point into the "imperfect interval" between personal and public sensibilities, a rendering of distressed and elated physical and psychic condition that constituted estrangements from the self in disjointed lives.⁷ Valck's premature fattening and balding were ostensibly "personal matters," about which he incessantly wrote to his child. But how he wrote about them are not.

In August 1873 he had been abruptly called back from Bali to deal with the eruption of what he calls a revolution in Eastern Java. He writes to her that the "*rebels gave me so little to do that I have gained weight in the most incredible manner. I absolutely look like a bulldog,*" an endearing self-portrait that conceals in its brushstrokes what has stressed his temperament and caused such strain. "*The Resident of Banjuwangi totally lost his head. . . . He just went mad. The scenes that passed during the revolt were grotesque. The Europeans showed themselves to be as cowardly and irresponsible as it is possible to be. I am still so ashamed.*"⁸

Here is a man located dead center in the colonial enterprise, living in empire and off the colonies, loyal to a state, many of whose agents he does not trust. It is still five years before he will be called to Deli, when he will accuse planters and government authorities of stabbing him in the back. He does not yet despise his posts (he is indeed proud of his recent promotion). He is not yet wholly uninterested and bored by his surroundings (he describes to young Suze the exquisite views from his Bali

⁷This chapter draws on my book in progress, *History in a Minor Key: Love Letters in Colonial Exile*.

⁸CBG, FV, 16 June 1873, Frans Carl Valck to his daughter, Susanna Valck.

coast seafront desk). But it is a life of circular exile from the Netherlands and Java. As Albert Memmi so astutely noted, for many colonials there was no going home.⁹

Valck was not alone in his unmoored, peripatetic life. Other members of the colonial bureaucracy and agricultural industries also followed kin to family enterprises or were schooled for the Indies Civil Service because this is where opportunity lay, what their families expected, and where they imagined they could earn a step “toward an easier life.”¹⁰ Benedict Anderson’s reference to the “tropical gothic” of this “bourgeois aristocracy” captures a slice of what he calls the “grimly amusing” quality of their starched sartorial trappings, the doily-filled interiors and class aspirations—the excessive comforts and arrogance that racism and the fruits of imperial profits bestowed.¹¹

But wedged between those comforts was something else: the unruly nature of people’s social imaginaries, discrepancies between the concerted and yearned for domestic “coziness” that empire induced and what emerges as its underside—estrangements from family, studied inattentiveness to the conditions around them, and to the local people whom they could not see and to whom they were beholden for their comforts and often for their survival. Valck looked away from them and away from himself. It is these spaces in between that offer a site for writing a “charmless” history—one whose rough analytic edges resist the tempered distance of a seamless narrative. It does not suffice to invoke a “social imaginary” in which “implicit and common understanding” and “normal expectations” (which Charles Taylor attributes so unproblematically to the term) were effortlessly and equally shared.¹² The “sense of how things usually go,” what constituted “foul play,” and “how things ought to go” was precisely what confronted Valck in Deli, in the belly of the beast, and on the northern Bali coast, on the outer reefs of empire. It is in the potent political and psychological registers in which he lived that his personhood was forged—and his possibilities ultimately foreclosed.¹³

⁹ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon, 1967), esp. 19–76.

¹⁰ See Cees Fasseur, *De Indologen: Ambtenaren voor de Oost 1825–1950* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1993), for the best history of learned Indies experts and their participation in the Netherlands Indies administration. On changes in the colonial civil service structure and requirements, see H. W. van den Doel, *De stille macht: Het Europese binnenlands bestuur op Java en Madoera, 1808–1942* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1994).

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983), 137.

¹² Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 24–25.

¹³ On “inner life processes” that “capture the violence and dynamism of everyday life,” see the thoughtful introduction to *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations*, ed. João Biehl, Bryon Good, and Arthur Kleinman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 5.

BEYOND IGNORANCE AND BAD FAITH:

ON RENDERING A COLONIAL LIFE

Knowledge-production and its strategic absence—contrived ignorance—are prevailing themes in the making of empire. Edward Said launched an entire field of colonial studies on the basic Foucauldian principle that distorted forms of knowledge were fundamental features of empire and its ruling technologies. In one of his last pieces, on the Iraq War, he characterized U.S. empire as one steeped in a deep “historical illiteracy,” one produced by a “cultivated ignorance” that celebrated a “sacrosanct altruism” for what have been brutally calculated imperial interventions.¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois captured that transposition much earlier in describing the historical distortions of American empire as predicated on a “deliberately educated ignorance” of the racist predicates of U.S. domestic and foreign power.¹⁵ For Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “sanctioned ignorance” is what “every critic of imperialism must chart.”¹⁶

Ignorance saturates efforts to understand the lived inequities of colonial relations in more profound and prosaic ways. While marshaled to describe a cultivated condition among those at a safer metropolitan distance, it is as decisive in accounts of the hardened inerrability of those Europeans who made the colonies their permanent or temporary homes. Writing of French North Africa in the 1950s, Albert Memmi contended that there are really only two kinds of colonizers: those who accept or those who refuse, those who turn their backs on what they know—who “self-censure” and live a feigned ignorance—versus those who could not bear the contradictions and righteously left.¹⁷ For Pierre Bourdieu, “learned ignorance” is a form of self-deception, when one is void of the principles that comprise knowledge, what people hide from themselves.¹⁸

¹⁴ Edward Said, “L’Autre Amerique,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, March 2001, and “The Clash of Ignorance,” *Nation*, 22 October 2001, 11–13.

¹⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (New York: Dover, 1999), 23.

¹⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 291. In a similar vein, Geoff Eley, in a scathing review of David Cannadine’s *Ornamentalism*, puts ignorance upfront as part of the central question Cannadine claims to address but does not—namely, how easily empire was “rather ignorantly taken for granted” by those who enjoyed its profits and pleasures at its metropolitan center and in the racial intimacies of its colonial margins. Geoff Eley, “Beneath the Skin: Or, How to Forget About the Empire Without Really Trying,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 3 (1) (Spring 2002): 11.

¹⁷ Memmi (1967), 18.

¹⁸ Bourdieu’s account of “learned ignorance” is not explicitly about colonialism but it is in a book in which the ethnographic site is Algeria under French rule. He writes, “The explanation agents may provide of their own practices . . . conceals, even from their own eyes,

In such accounts, the cultivation of “ignorance” and the vitality of empire go hand in hand. In this chapter I argue that these are accounts that elicit knowing approval but in the end they may be for us to question, if not reject. A standard critique of empire holds that imperial rule nourishes and feeds off the cultivation of ignorance, that empire is in the business of limiting, distorting, and obscuring knowledge and that with more of it, empires would be more vulnerable to critique; that critique should expose imperial pretences, that knowledge pierces what obscures the workings of power, weakens its hold, and, with sustained exposure, could be made to crash. In this frame, moral conscience and increased knowledge are redemptive and, like ignorance and empire, thought to go hand in hand.

Several premises are questionable in this argument: one, that more knowledge necessarily leads to more power; two, that knowledge necessarily leads to ethical awareness; and three, that such awareness would produce the sort of active, ethical conscience that would lead people to reject imperial hypocrisies, or, at the very least, their basest acts. Fundamental to these accounts is the assumption that these unnuanced distinctions—knowledge versus ignorance, or acceptance versus refusal—adequately describe the inhabited space of empire for those in its service and those it empowered; that is, both the cognitive conditions and political choices of empire’s European and American agents and actors.

But few of these premises are evinced in the historical particulars or borne out by the social facts. “Ignorance” versus “acceptance” fails to capture the more complex psychic space, tacit ambivalences and implicit ambiguities in which European agents and ancillaries to empire made their lives. Such categories represent not causes but effects. They are neither generative analytic sites nor starting points for analysis. “Ignorance” is an ongoing operation, a cumulative, *achieved*, and labored effect. Ignorance, then, is only symptomatic. At issue is *how* it is achieved and sustained, and what institutional, social, and psychic arrangements it responds to, produces, and requires. Both ignorance and acceptance, as labels, are too ready to fix the entangled middle ground that divides prescription from perception and both from practice. Such categories not only assume persons with far flatter, two-dimensional interior spaces than we would demand for treating our own fractious subjectivities. They

the true nature of their practical mastery, i.e., learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*), a mode of practical knowledge not comprising knowledge of its own principles. It follows that this learned ignorance can only give rise to the misleading discourse of a speaker himself misled, ignorant of both the objective truth about his practical mastery (which is that it is ignorant of its own truth) and of the true principle of the knowledge his practical mastery contains.” See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 19.

sever the imperial dilemmas of a finite “then” in the *passé composé* from a “now” of the decidedly present imperfect. Not least, they assiduously refuse recognition of comparisons, convergences, and accommodations that might compromise and implicate ourselves.

My starting point is elsewhere. Rather than assume that the worlds of empire’s agents had clarity in ways ours today do not, I am drawn to the messier, unsettling space that spans knowing and not knowing, good and bad faith, refusal and acceptance, allegiance to and belief in. Such an inquiry might attend to the wide berth of colonial actors whose names historians of the period and region would barely recognize. They would be neither particularly malicious nor sympathetic figures, rather more like those that attracted Du Bois, “not the wicked, but calm, good [women and] men.”¹⁹ Nor would this be a matter of telling a tale of an unknown colonial everyman in any sense of the term. I think more of minor figures in major histories: not Van Hoëvell, who led the 1848 demonstration in Batavia described in chapter 3, but Ardesch, who turned against him; or Nauta, who joined the public assembly only to spy on its organizers; or Cantervisscher, who handed out petitions and was later exiled from Java; or, as in the present chapter, of those expunged from the record like Valck. It might rather stay close to the sensibilities of the everyday—to what pressed on their bodies; what they chose to communicate differently to kin, colleague, and superior; what occupied their feelings; what slipped to the edges of their awareness, erupted, and then escaped their minds.

To do so, I turn to the social space of family and friendship, to the habits of heart and interest of several generations of this not remarkable colonial family of good standing and comfort, if not assured of station and wealth. These are not the Clives and Raffles of British colonial fame, not the Lyauteys, who forged new racist policy in Indochina, or the Van den Bosch, who make up the hagiographies of Dutch colonial good will, or bear the brunt of moral condemnation.

At *my* center is that rather mediocre member of the Dutch colonial administration, Frans Carl Valck. Born to the well-placed civil servant Frans Gerardus Valck (1799–1842), whose succession of prominent posts kept him in central Java, Frans Carl throughout his life rarely shared a continent, much less a home, with his mother or father. Frans Gerardus, whose own father died in Semarang when he was eight, would take leave of Frans Carl when the latter was but six. Born in the European quarter of Batavia, Frans Carl was sent to elite boarding schools in the Netherlands for most of the first two decades of his life. At twenty-six, he married Susanna Antoinette Lucassen, the twenty-one-year-old daughter of Theodore Lucassen. In 1863 she bore their only child, Susanna Augustus Theodora,

¹⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 155.

and died one year after the girl's birth. His second marriage ended abruptly and tragically when he "accidentally" shot his new wife on a hunting trip during their honeymoon. His third, more loveless marriage—to a thirty-nine-year-old woman of lesser social standing than his beloved first wife Susanna—lasted until his death.

It was in the Central Javanese sugar complex of Kemanglen that Theodore Lucassen's fortune was made, and in the Lucassens' extravagant mansion next to the factory that Frans Carl's wife, Susanna Antoinette Lucassen, was born, and in which she and her seven siblings had grown up. It was also where Valck's daughter Suze would return as wife of her cousin (Theodore Francois Lucassen) in 1887 with her first child, while pregnant with her second. She would bear two more while living at Kemanglen where one of her infant children died. This is a family whose extensive kinship ties were woven through the upper social sphere of high-government officials, merchants operating in the global market, and sugar manufacturers, who provided the economic backbone of the mid-nineteenth-century colonial economy.²⁰

Still, to read their letters is to witness bodies and minds struggling to leapfrog over most of the population in their midst: landscapes are melancholy or luxuriant yet unpeopled as Javanese, Chinese, and Balinese are bracketed, only sporadically present, in their lettered lives. Far from a panoptic gaze, theirs was a strikingly selective one. Their concerns were fixed on an immediate and distant everyday, a guarded and sequestered cosmopolitan space that spanned the globe, ears perked to events in The Hague and Paris more than to those that one might imagine would command their senses and impinge on them in Java.

Valck's succession of posts spanned the Indies, as did those of many of his school cohort, from Java to Bali to Sumatra and back to Java, before ending in The Hague. It was during his very brief and troubled post as Assistant Resident in 1877–78 in East Sumatra's plantation district that his career came to a crashing halt. Just months after his arrival, Valck, as we know, was confronted with a series of murders of European planters that he was convinced were the consequence of their own brutal labor policies and coercive tactics. Wholly unfamiliar with the local situation, he poorly judged what consequences would follow if he did not look away. Blocked by the steely silence of the planters, he attended to the rumors of tortured

²⁰ See Roger Knight, "The Sugarman's Women and the Tensions of Empire," in *Narratives of Colonialism: Sugar, Java, and the Dutch* (Huntington, N.Y.: Nova, 2000), 47–70, esp. 51–54 and his footnotes, where he traces out many of the marital and business links between these families. The Valcks' connections to the Lucassens are excluded from Knight's otherwise rich compilation, in part because the Valck father and son's careers were limited to the Civil Service, and in part because the Valck family did not really enjoy the fortune or renown of the Lucassen father and son.

and murdered estate workers and reported what he understood those acts to be—not unreasoned retaliation against physical abuse and expressions of sensible rage.

His reports were unwelcome, inappropriate, and late. Quickly transferred out of Deli, he was dismissed shortly after. Much of the rest of his life was spent composing what seem to have been unsent letters to the Governor-General, by whom he felt betrayed, in a desperate effort to rewrite his moral contract with the colonial administration, to account for his actions, and restore his honor. If we can only give an account of ourselves, as Judith Butler's parse on Nietzsche suggests, when we "are rendered accountable by a system of justice and punishment," life in Deli was that for Valck.²¹ Bear in mind, there is no evidence that these letters were ever sent. Nor do we know why he kept so many undated drafts of them. Perhaps they were all along really only meant for himself. If they were sent, Valck never indicates that any were ever answered.

THINKING TOWARD A "CHARMLESS" COLONIAL HISTORY

An arresting phrase appears in the second essay of Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* on "The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," coincidentally written in the same year that Valck arrived in Bali. Chiding the feverish turn to history in his own age, Nietzsche urges his reader not to idle in the garden of history, to not shy as historical observers from our "rough and charmless needs and requirements." We must service history, he insists, "only to the extent that history serves life." Methodological insights are packed into those simple phrases. Together, they open to the "untimeliness" he advocates and the comfort zones he so abhors.²²

Charmlessness was not a recurrent theme to which Nietzsche returned. It is never used again. Still, like so much of his phrasing, it stops the reader short, puts a break on smooth passage, prompts an uneasy recognition—or flat-out denial that the barbed accusation of dulling complacency might be aimed at us. He pierces one's most secure assumptions, most pointedly those that protectively seal stories too easy to tell. Derrida rightly called it a "spurring style" that perforates as it parries.²³

²¹ See Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 10–11, for her rendition of Nietzsche's position as outlined in a *Genealogy of Morals*.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [1874]), 59.

²³ Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 41.

Among students of the colonial, charmed accounts take many forms. Some are those with plots we know before they begin: they pit good against evil as easily as they solicit the “protection of white prestige” and a “politics of fear” to explain acts that may range from demonstrations of contemptuous disdain to hideous atrocities. Charmed accounts provide sluggish rubrics and too much slack. They coat complex commitments in generic ideologies and “shared” imaginaries as if people had to do little work with them. Charmed colonial accounts might turn the world upside down, making heroes of less vocal subalterns—or, alternately, redeem hidden heroes among empire’s henchmen. Colonial critique provincializes European epistemologies to render them parochial rather than worldly, myopic rather than panoptic, local rather than universal—not common-sensical but strange. But if to charm is to comfort and seduce with almost “magical” grace, to show not a wisp of coercion, what sensibilities would a rough and charmless colonial history track—what would such a history look like now?

It might expose jagged analytic ridges, unsmooth at its bared edges. It might stay close to the out-of-sync, those minor events, the surplus that archives produce in spite of their voiced intent. It might linger over marginalia that neither fits nor coheres. It might dispense with heroes—subaltern or otherwise. As Orwell did so often in his stories, it might turn to the unheralded and unremarked, less to the lurid than to those Europeans confused by their own inappropriate desires and disdain. Evenhandedness would not be a requisite given or goal. Good and evil would be *historical* rather than *transcendent* categories. Such an account might attend to those neither endowed with enough wit, humor, or conscience to warrant a pause or moment to mark. At the risk of irritating an audience and alienating the ready reader, it might subject empire’s actors and agents to a different sort of scrutiny that suspends judgment about who, why, and how people played out, in, and circumscribed their cultivated roles.

It is the elusive notion of “untimeliness” that provides some purchase on what Nietzsche might have considered it meant to be charmed. “Untimeliness” is at once a resolute, *critical stance* and a moving target—one no longer deemed critical once it is fixed. It is to look afresh at those analytic decorums of which our communities of interpretation are, as he put it, “rightly proud.”²⁴ No methodological program is offered. Rather, Nietzsche proffers analytic tools for maintaining a distrusting posture. What he does is alert us to attend with suspicion to that which poses as most *timely* of all.²⁵ The assault is on the sheltering retreat to

²⁴ Nietzsche, 1996, 60.

²⁵ For Walter Kaufmann, “untimeliness” is to “go against the grain of one’s age”; see Friedrich Nietzsche, translator’s introduction to *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 3–31, 21.

familiar plots.²⁶ In the case of empire, such an approach might question standard accounts and especially those to which we are most committed: that imperial pursuits can be measured by a relentless quest for knowledge in the pursuit of power—that empire produces its knowable subjects in predictable ways, that psychic space is impervious to or wholly requisitioned by the political regimes that people inhabit. Such honed “answers” that are already authorized may pre-empt harder, more impinging questions. We may instead pursue genealogies of empire in a more fulsome register that join structures of feeling to fields of force in histories of the present of a longer *durée*.

Knowledge-acquisition is only a piece of what makes empires work. It may abet allegiance or wither it. Blatantly coercive inculcation is not always the name of the imperial game. The force of rule lies in producing affiliations, loyalties, and allegiances among empire’s own agents as much as the colonized. Rule by sustained pressure as much as overt violence makes “choices” and commitments—ones that subordinate family attachments to state mandates—difficult but ennobling ones. These were precisely what hundreds of Batavia’s “city fathers” railed against when they took to the streets to protest educational policy, as we saw in chapter 3. Sometimes these sentiments depended on inchoate sensibilities, what Raymond Williams saw as beyond the semantic availability of their authors.²⁷ They shaped what people were *disposed to do*, were inclined to believe, thought they could intuit, or could choose to ignore. Imperial dispositions are composed of *trained habits of attention* channeled through principles of plausibility and rules of relevance. These are politicized cognitions and practices that distinguish sensory overloads from sensible acts.

I broach that disquieted space by asking what it took to live a colonial life, how those who lived off empire imagined themselves within it, what structured attachments heightened or dulled their sensory regimes, what interior space they inhabited, what distance might have existed between the “feel” of living off empire and what imperial states employed those in their service to do. Du Bois spells out the task mercilessly, urging “unusual points of vantage” to explore “souls undressed and from the back and side,” and the “working of [white] entrails”—“white folk” “hung, bound by their own binding.”²⁸

²⁶ As Paul de Man put it, Nietzsche’s critical historian refuses the “sheltering inwardness of history,” as he performs “an act of critical judgment directed against himself.” Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 149.

²⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 134.

²⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folk,” in *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 1999 [1920]), 17, 29.

One might rightly argue that historical ethnography is unsuited to such a task. Such work is better left to those for whom interiorities are the grist of their work; to Marguerite Duras, who grew up in the French Empire and inhabited its seedy margins; to Nadine Gordimer and John M. Coetzee, who knew from the inside the beastly quality of empire and the fears of its white settlers.²⁹ There are the Dutch colonial women novelists like Madelon Székely-Lulofs, who spent her childhood in Aceh and who later, in the 1930s, as a rubber planter's wife in East Sumatra, so viscerally captured the confinements and constraints of a colonial life in petty anxieties and agitated boredom of the everyday.³⁰ Or perhaps, it should just be left to their children, to the piercing fiction of someone like Hella Haasse, who was raised and played in the glare and shadows of empire, to those children who knew and did not know what they overheard, who unknowingly witnessed the shaky assurances that all was well, the whispered racial slurs, the empathies and disregards of their mothers and fathers.³¹

Such novels raise hard questions they do not purport to answer, ones that historical ethnography is obliged to address: How can we know when warped and despairing interiorities are empire's political effect? Are they arbitrary, tethered, or only loosely hinged to regimes of politics? Was Valck's daughter, Suze, crushed by too much awareness, or rendered stupid, as Avital Ronell might argue, by a cultural "lesson plan," in which her efforts were expended in concerted distractions that kept the Javanese world around her at bay?³² Or could she really not see it all? How much do the conditions of empire produce stupefied serene states as well as racial anxieties, or something that uneasily combines both ways of not knowing and obliquely knowing at the same time?

²⁹ See especially Marguerite Duras, *Seawall* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952); Nadine Gordimer, *Something Out There* (London: Cape, 1984); and J. M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (New York: Viking, 1980), and *Disgrace* (New York, Viking, 1999.)

³⁰ Among Székely-Lulofs's many works, *De andere wereld* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1934) provides the rawest account, one of her few novels not translated into other languages.

³¹ See Hella Haasse, *Heren van de thee* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1992), a much-acclaimed account of the real-life generations of a family enterprise, in which the protagonist appears as a man so obsessed with his colonial personal dream of success that he neglects to notice what is most dear around him—his children depart and his wife is slowly driven to despair and death. See also her *Sleuteloog* (Amsterdam: Querido, 2002), a disquieting account of a woman's colonial memories sealed in a family chest, to which she has lost the key and which, when finally opened, she finds empty. See Henk Maier, "Escape from the Green and Gloss of Java: Hella S. Haasse and Indies Literature," *Indonesia* 77 (April 2004): 79–107, for a thoughtful treatment of Haasse's disposition toward the colonial past. I thank him for sharing this latter book with me.

³² On stupidity as an achieved condition, see Avital Ronell, *Stupidity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), esp. 3–60, for a brilliant treatment of the subject.

As ethnographers and social historians, our attempts to describe that psychic and affective space often turn to caricature and invariably fall short. When David Cannadine purports to answer "how the British saw their empire," his stick figures are bereft of any interior space—their is a naturalized adherence to a class hierarchy brought with them.³³ Ronald Hyam's survey of "the British [sexual] experience" across "their empire" stays riveted on the sexual—affective dispositions are not broached further.³⁴ Johannes Fabian's subtle study of reason and unreason among European explorers of Central Africa comes closer when he argues that "bliss and despair, elation and depression often were close companions" that conditioned colonial knowledge-production as it engendered a "struggle for self-composure."³⁵ Fabian's actors are frontline explorers focused on the acquisition of scientific knowledge; it is what they were there to do. Many more of colonialism's agents were not.

ON THE POLITICS OF DISREGARD

A person can live in self-deception, which does not mean that he does not have *abrupt awakenings* to cynicism or to good faith, but which implies a constant and *particular style of life*.

—Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Imperial dispositions are at once ways of living in and responding to, ways of being and seeing oneself, ways of knowing that shape which sentiments are activated, and the affective states which circumscribe what one can know. Rather than the studied surveillance and panoptic gaze that have come to characterize the collective posture of empire's practitioners, I am drawn to something else: to "skittish seeing" and the averted gaze, to acts of ignoring rather than ignorance, to inattention, to the shock of recognition, to Sartre's "abrupt awakenings" and the quick circumspections into which they fold.³⁶ Heidegger identified one register of "disclosure" as an "evasive turning-away."³⁷

³³ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁴ Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990).

³⁵ Johannes Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 94–95.

³⁶ On "skittish seeing" and "irregular glances" that "throw the eyes into . . . confusion," see James Elkins, *The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing* (New York: Harcourt, 1996), esp. chap. 3, "Looking Away, and Seeing Too Much," 87.

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 175.

Most importantly, imperial dispositions are marked by a negative space: *that from which those with privilege and standing could excuse themselves*. I call this ability to excuse oneself from wrought engagement, this refusal to witness and the almost legal legitimacy it confers, the *well-tended conditions of disregard*. One might consider the blinding near-sightedness of circumscribed community that sets out the proper *limits of care* and why it makes ethical sense for a community *not* to concern itself more broadly.³⁸ Ethics are not absent; rather they provide *exemptions* from what one need *not* do. To what extent this requires sanctioned ignorance, self-deception, “cognitive dissonance,” or the securely unflinching constraints of habit is not a transhistorical issue.³⁹ The conditions of disregard are located in the implicit meanings people assign and reassign to their own acts and agency. They manifest in how fully the macropolitics of a moment deepen or deflect the ethics of a self, train habits of attention, and harness the affective strands and strains of a life.

Frans Carl Valck attended to some of the space in which he dwelled, but he did not always do so. His assessments of those Indies people that lived around him were subject to caricature more than insight, both attenuated attention and studied disregard. On the north Bali coast where he was posted for four years between 1872 and 1876, just prior to leaving for Sumatra, his final report as Assistant Resident of Boeileleng to his successor marks acute differences in attentiveness and analytic style. There is no temporal lag between how he sought to describe individual Balinese (on whose alliances he depended), and what he thought was reasonable to parse as a generic Balinese character. In treating the latter, he mocked their “semblances of sincerity,” their untrustworthiness, their implacable pleasure in boldfaced lies. As a subtext heading in the left margin, he underlines the phrase: “Not to be trusted, is an unabashed liar” and notes in the text that only “fear can make them control their passions and desires.”⁴⁰ Here Valck’s “insights” prepared for his successor and his superiors rehearse clunky, scripted stereotypes and narratives.

But these scripts are not all he conveys. They are followed by incisive portraits of persons who can be trusted; subtle familiarity with the hierarchy among the Balinese elite; awareness of the “transparent maneuvers” of Dutch officials who hide behind the native rulers; of native rulers who are maligned but are yet to be trusted; of individual Balinese of unsavory char-

³⁸ A good example is prescribed by Marvin Olasky, who coined the terms for George Bush’s manifesto for “compassionate conservatism.” See Marvin Olasky, *Compassionate Conservatism* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

³⁹ Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).

⁴⁰ CBG FA Valck-Lucassen, no. 415 (circa December 1875), Frans Carl Valck, “Nota voor mijnen opvolger: De Boeilelenger.”

acter. These are not just discrepant assessments; stylized social types remain resilient and unperturbed by what he otherwise seems (partially) to know.

In psychology, self-delusion and self-deception describe a temporal space of uncertainty, with the inference “that the person ‘knows’ and ‘does not know’ at the same time.”⁴¹ Self-deception, then, is an assessment about the self-knowledge of others. It is also an evaluation that may be made about one’s own past actions but not made in situ, not in the active voice, about one’s present self. Others describe it as “a suspension in the normal objective interest in reality,” what one feels and believes “at the edge of awareness.”⁴² In this frame, self-deceptive constructions are “not judgments of reality” but actions done unknowingly to convince oneself.⁴³ Sartre rejects both the Freudian frame and the divided self on which it rests. We constantly believe and disbelieve the same propositions simultaneously, he argues. Rather than acting ignorantly, “We must know the truth very exactly, in order to conceal it” more carefully from ourselves.⁴⁴

Psychology and philosophy treat self-deception as part of the human condition, as a mechanism that is activated in much the same way, regardless of time or place. Historians, on the other hand, might be expected to treat it as a way of acting in specific political situations. Historian Paul Veyne, for example, begins his *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths?* with what he identifies as a basic human dilemma: “How is it possible to half-believe, or believe in contradictory things?” “What is going on in our minds” when we do so?⁴⁵ But Veyne’s account is *in* history, not a rendering of historically and politically located half-beliefs. In the end, he

⁴¹ Theodore Sarbin, “On Self Deception,” in *The Clever Hans Phenomenon: Communication with Horses, Whales, Apes, and People*, ed. Thomas Seboek and Robert Rosenthal (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1981), 224.

⁴² David Shapiro, “On the Psychology of Self-Deception,” *Social Research* 63 (3) (Fall 1996): 792–93.

⁴³ Freudian understandings of repression often guide this analysis, posing self-deception as a state in which multiple subsystems of conscious and unconscious beliefs compete.

⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Self-Deception,” in *Existentialism: From Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian, 1975), 302. Sartre makes the point about simultaneity explicitly: “Nor is this a matter of two different moments of temporality which would permit us to reestablish the semblance of duality, but the unitary structure of one and the same project” (*Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes [New York: Citadel, 1966], 89). Akeel Bilgrami, *Self-Knowledge and Resentment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 278, makes a compelling distinction in understanding self-deception as discord between one’s disposition “that leads to behavior” and one’s sincerely avowed commitments (on the condition that one sees commitments as beliefs and desires).

⁴⁵ Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), xi, 2.

retreats: there are “only different programs of truth” (different “feelings” of truth), not bad faith (*mauvaise foi*).⁴⁶ For Veyne the demonstration of sincerity is the test that distinguishes good from bad faith.⁴⁷

But as Sartre again argues, sincerity might not be opposed to self-deception but an active feature of it.⁴⁸ Men like Frans Carl Valck were not insincere in their belief in the principles of empire and in their condemnations of some of its personnel and practices. Sometimes the contradictions were harder to bear, particularly during those life moments when he at once believed in, lived by, and despised the principles themselves. Valck might better be seen as someone caught in the bind of being as Bakhtin remarked in another context, “a person [who] never coincides with himself.”⁴⁹

Historian Thomas Haskell works differently with “self-deception” to ask why abolitionists in the mid-nineteenth-century United States felt obliged to go earlier to the aid of suffering slaves. Self-deception is not at issue, he argues, because they “did not need to hide anything from themselves.” What they shared was an “ethical shelter afforded . . . by our society’s conventions of moral responsibility,” one that “allows us to confine our humane acts to a fraction of suffering humanity without feeling that we have thereby intended [to do so].”⁵⁰ Like Veyne, Haskell slips back and forth between subjects as well as between the verbal tenses of his argument: it is “us” and “our” society as much as the abolitionists that are at issue. The moral imagination is subject to the same constraints. The relationship between macropolity and moral disposition goes unaddressed.

The ability to know and not know, to believe yet not believe in, begs for a genealogy of its own. Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida both hint at a historical trajectory of dissimulation and self-deception on which

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* Veyne’s call upon Foucault’s regimes of truth may send him astray. As an analytic, “regimes of truth” is not easily mobilized to deal with the ambiguous space of sincerity and the “arduous work,” as Lionel Trilling contended, that goes into it.

⁴⁸ As Sartre writes, “sincerity presents itself as a demand and consequently is not a state” ([1966], 313). Webb Keane casts the concept of sincerity as “interactive” and “inseparable from some kind of judgment.” If sincerity entails “arduous effort” and “judgment,” there can be no inner self to which it is true. Sincerity, like politeness and tolerance might rather be seen as that which is performed, as Keane sees it, or, as I would argue, labored on, a reining in of those sensibilities that it harnesses and subdues. See Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 6, and Webb Keane, “Sincerity, ‘Modernity,’ and the Protestants,” *Cultural Anthropology* (2002): 75.

⁴⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 327.

⁵⁰ Thomas Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility, Part I” *American Historical Review* 90 (2): 352.

modern politics increasingly depend.⁵¹ For Arendt democratic conditions produce a “modern art of self-deception” in which “deception without self-deception is well-nigh impossible.”⁵² Arendt’s attention to the modern raises a critical question. If the modern produces self-deception as one of its political requirements, and colonialism is the “underside of the modern,” then are imperial dispositions the template for modern politics?⁵³ Or, as Sartre might have put it, do imperial formations require specific “procedures” of bad faith that cultivate scrutiny and disregard?⁵⁴

Before returning to Valck, one final formulation strikes me as resonant for thinking across imperial contexts in Valck and Nietzsche’s time and our imperial present today: this is Georg Simmel’s understanding of the German expression “*Lebensluge*.”⁵⁵ In common usage, *Lebensluge* translates as “living a lie” or a “sham existence.” But the more literal translation provides more analytic traction. *Lebensluge* is also translated as a “vital lie,” enacted when a person is “in need of deceiving himself with regard to his capacities, even in regard to his feelings, and who cannot do

⁵¹ See Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1961), 227–64, and the discussion of Arendt in Jacques Derrida, “The History of the Lie: Prolegomena,” in *Without Alibi* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 28–70. See also Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers,” *New York Review of Books* 17 (8) (November 18, 1971). Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York, Penguin: 1990), esp. 94–109, provides a fuller treatment of hypocrisy: “The duplicity of the hypocrite is different from the duplicity of the liar and the cheat. The duplicity [of the hypocrite] boomerangs back upon himself, and he is no less a victim of his mendacity than those whom he set out to deceive. . . . The hypocrite is too ambitious; not only does he want to appear virtuous before others, he wants to convince himself” (99).

⁵² Arendt (1961), 256.

⁵³ Enrique Dussel, *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricoeur, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ If they do, they are not the only political formations that do so. Tzvetan Todorov argues that totalitarian states require those who live in them to adopt an Orwellian doublethink to get through the everyday. Doublethink, for Todorov, is *mauvaise foi* on a macropolitical scale: “To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneous two opinions which are canceled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing both of them, to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it . . .” For Todorov it is a conscious and intentional technique, a subterfuge that “allows you to dispense with the law of noncontradiction, to pretend there is coherence where incoherence reigns,” that which “conditions reason not to notice.” “Doublethink” lets the person off the hook. It is what insidious state projects do to people. Pretense underwrites his argument; knowing and not knowing is a conscious way of getting by, a weapon of the weak and a technology of the strong, not what “good and calm” people perform on themselves. See Todorov, “Dialogism and Schizophrenia,” in *Another Tongue*, ed. Alfred Artaega (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 205.

⁵⁵ Georg Simmel, “Knowledge, Truth, and Falsehood in Human Relations,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), 310.

without superstition about gods and men, in order to maintain his life and his potentialities."⁵⁶

Might imperial dispositions indeed have at their core such a "vital lie"? This is not the colossal lie that Arendt describes for Eichmann and the political engineers of Nazi Germany.⁵⁷ Rather it is a "lie for life," not about religious gods but secular ones, about political myths, empire's "noble" projects, as Valck called them, and the do-good deeds of those who carried them out. Like conscience, it "tells us to whom we shall and shall not do what."⁵⁸ The latter is how Claudia Koonz defines Nazi conscience, that which sets the parameters of one's community of shared moral obligation. For Koonz conscience is derived from knowledge ("con" and "science"), joined to the institutional and conceptual structures of propaganda that prepare people to accept those categories. Her analysis stops short of accounting for the twisted lived psychic spaces of an ambiguous embrace like those of a Valck.

HISTORY IN A MINOR KEY

The phrase that followed Valck through the colonial archives and his unillustrious career was that he was "neither an incompetent man nor one without means." The double negative is telling. The assessment was deliberately circumspect, a product of the protection his connections afforded and the dishonor he and those close to him left discreetly unmentioned before and after his death.

Valck's letters make us privy to the ravages of a torn heart. But estrangement and dismemberment were not his alone. Of good soul and good education, he was neither blind to the severities of Dutch rule nor squarely within its fold. In 1876 when newly posted as Assistant Resident in Deli, he proudly took his new assignment to be a "promotion," a vote of confidence from Governor-General van Lansberge, who had transferred him from the remote and, by then, less politically turbulent Bali coast.

But it was a set-up for failure from the start. Three of the most hotly contested issues in colonial governance of the time were being debated in Deli in precisely the year that Valck arrived: the creation of a "Coolie Ordinance" that would bind workers to three-year contracts and legalize indenture when slavery had just been abolished; the planters' stonewalling of a government investigation of severe maltreatment and high mortality

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1992).

⁵⁸ Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi-Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.

of workers on the estates; and the creation of long-lease, seventy-year contracts between local Malay sultans and the estate companies that gave the planters unparalleled license to take over what was deemed "vacant land."⁵⁹

Each of these issues entailed theft (of land); cover-up (of tortured workers and bribed sultans); bribery (of local rulers); and deception (of Malay farmers). Coming from an outpost in Bali, Valck could have not possibly mastered the situation or known who was paying off whom, which Malay rulers he needed to ally and whose demands he could ignore. What his job demanded was submission to the planters' "state within a state," as had his obsequious, and perhaps more savvy, predecessor, Hallewijn. After ensuring that Valck was ousted, the leading estate owners created the Deli Planters' Association the following year, a powerful lobby that was to remain for another seventy-five years the de facto arbitrator of wages, with a monopoly on the tobacco trade and jurisdiction over and financing of basic services on Sumatra's East Coast.

Valck stepped into what he later characterized as an untenable situation, what his superior described as a "not difficult" job, one that was "neither unusual nor particularly demanding."⁶⁰ Valck insisted on the opposite, that the conditions were extremely difficult, and that he was offered no help by the Resident who was formally in charge. He was sent to clean it up, he argued, precisely because there was nothing about Deli that was "normal" at all.⁶¹

In the grim confidences he conferred on his "dearest friend Levyssohn," then General Secretary to the Governor-General (and on other "high placed" persons with whom he spoke), he described the abuses of European planters, named names, and accused them of killing "in cold blood." Begging his friend's intervention, he insisted on his own self-control, that he did not write "in a moment of agitation," that he was "totally calm but utterly indignant. Everyday I see more much that needs to be cleaned up."⁶² But in the letter he was to write and rewrite to the Governor-General after his dismissal, he had much more to say. He confessed to have heard while still in Bali that the Chinese workers arriving in Deli were the "dregs of that nation." Still he saw no reason to "believe

⁵⁹ Each of these debates and resolutions has been well documented in Deli's historiography. See H. J. Bool, *De landbouwconcessies in de Residentie Oostkust van Sumatra* (Utrecht, 1903). In English, see Karl Pelzer, *Planter and Peasant: Colonial Policy and the Agrarian Struggle in East Sumatra, 1863-1947* (Leiden: KITLV, 1978); and Jan Breman, *Taming the Coolie Beast: Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1989).

⁶⁰ AN, 18 June 1877, no. 6281x, Report of the Minister of the *Binnenlands Bestuur* to Governor-General van Lansberge.

⁶¹ CBG FA, no. 420, Valck's draft of a letter to the Governor-General, n.d.

⁶² KITLV, Collectie Westerse handschriften, H, 28 October 1876, F. C. Valck to Norman Levyssohn.

nearly everything the Europeans claimed, while the coolie went with no rights at all.”⁶³ He argued that no one but he dared to apply the existing laws. He held that truthfulness had no place in Deli and that “good faith was not kept in sight.” Most insistently, he argued that he had been convicted without being heard, without recourse to defense. Appealing to his Excellency’s “sense of justice,” he insisted that upon the knowledge Valck would provide, “the verdict” against him would be retracted. It was not.

What kind of critique is possible when you are positioned in the center of a system of power on which your livelihood, future, and family depend? How to imagine his position and portray his choices without lapsing into an apologia for them? In Valck’s case the distinction at the moment was clear: between a good state and corrupt men, between a moral project and immoral people. But that too was to change. He knew he would be “thwarted, duped, and slandered from all sides.” Still, he trusted the Governor-General to back his efforts to expose “the real situation to the highest placed people in the Indies.”

But who was to be trusted? He did not want his condemnation to become public. It was only for certain ears, to protect “our name.” Selective reportage proved to be a poor option and Valck paid dearly for it. His dismissal was honorable, thanks only to the intervention of his well-placed friend Norman Levyssohn and his Uncle van Rees, both on the *Raad van Indië*. His uncle offered to help him get a post at the colonial depot in the Netherlands if he “still felt so inclined.”⁶⁴ He must not have been, for Valck was to spend the last thirteen years of a desultory life in a single labor: composing draft after draft, sometimes scribbled, sometimes excruciatingly neat, of that unsent letter accounting for his actions in the dim hope of redeeming his honor.

AN IMPERFECT INTERVAL

Let us turn back to 1872, to the letter written to his young daughter, Suze, on his way from Europe to take up his post in Bali. It conveys the promise of a different future, penned before the transfer to Sumatra that so abruptly ended his career. It was one of many he wrote regularly and without fail to his only offspring, then nine years old. He writes to her en route to the Indies, while she is to spend most of her youth in boarding schools and with her grandparents in the Dutch countryside and in The Hague. I have called him a distressed father because he writes knowing that the next time they meet, Suze will no longer be the girl-child he

⁶³ CBG FA, no. 420, Valck’s draft of a letter to the Governor-General, n.d.

⁶⁴ CBG FA, no. 379, 14 March 1879, Van Rees to F. C. Valck.

left, for his post will keep him at least seven years in the Indies, 4,000 miles away. He knows and repeatedly tells her that he will have become an old man and she will have transformed into an unrecognizable young woman who he had known but briefly as his little girl. Such separation defined their early relationship and would continue to mark most of their lives. On a ship to Bali in February 1872 he writes in French:

My dear Suze, when we crossed the Suez Canal, I was very sad because it was as if I was so much further from you and from all that I love and that a door has been closed behind me. Ah! If I could remain in Europe how happy I would have been; but this is not possible and I console myself with the thought that you very much love me and that you will be so good and sweet that when I return I will find in you a young woman who will make me forget that I will have passed so many years far from her.

But it is not really clear how much he actually missed that staid Dutch life. He loves that his thatched-roof house (that he tells her in at least three separate letters) lets in the breeze and fresh air so much better than tiles. He cannot hide his pleasure at having his servant, the “loyal Ketjik,” and the servant’s wife, Mina, there to greet him and available at his beck and call. With delight he tells her of getting caught in a storm and having to wade through rivers, his hands blistered from helping to carrying his affairs, his pants hiked up and the trek along the shore in moonlight “that was not disagreeable” as his naked feet sunk in the cool, wet sand. But “don’t think for an instant that I did not think of you, my dear; several times I asked myself what you were doing at grandma’s while I was here.”⁶⁵

In his earliest letters, he carefully leaves her world untouched by his. He creates a picture of his movements for her entertainment and pleasure, in the manner of a fairy tale, and seems to do so for both their sakes. In March, a month after settling on the Bali coast, he writes playfully “congratulating” her that she has become

princess of the country of which I am to be named king, or, as one says in this country, Radja. Now I would like to invite you as well as [Grand] Maman, Suzanne and all the household to come live in my palace and to admire its splendors; unfortunately, it is so old that it has been condemned but a new one will soon be built. Would you like to come when it is finished?

But of course Valck is no king. He is a Controleur Second Class, a lowly civil servant stationed on the north Bali coast. He is there decades after three

⁶⁵ CBG, FA, 16 June 1872, F. C. Valck to Susanna Valck.

successive Dutch efforts to wrest control of the strategic port and to displace its charismatic leader, the Raja of Boeleleng. It was in the 1846 expedition, the military assault ostensibly provoked by Balinese ransacking a wrecked cargo boat, that Dutch forces first bombed the royal palace. It was on that very Buleleng coast in 1840 where an earlier ship had been plundered—the ship that had carried the first sugar combines that Valck's father-in-law Theodore Lucassen had converted for commercial production. More than two decades in shambles, this besieged structure is what Valck refers to as his palace, not in ruins because it was "so old" but because it had been destroyed by successive Dutch mortar attacks and was now condemned.⁶⁶

Valck regales Suze with his importance, his "new friendship" with a Balinese princess who owes him a favor and who he will ask to weave a gold-threaded silk cloth for her new dress. In the first year, he appeals to what he hopes will interest a small girl, describes his house, his menagerie of chickens and rabbits, and his dear dog, Marie. He tells her to let grandma know that he is in superb health. Six months later, his fairy tale format fades with his long illness and his outlook is worn and worse:

To have the wings of a bird so I could escape my kingdom and come to embrace you just for a moment and to see all the family. Perhaps you wouldn't recognize me, since my illness I have become completely bald. But if you can wait a little until my hair grows back you won't be too shocked to see me. The only thing is I'm becoming so fat I barely could catch up to you running. Do you remember when we played hide and seek in the woods?

He has never mentioned the prison but in a letter a year later he writes that it directly faces his house. He treats the prisoners well, he tells her, with enough to eat. There are no attempts at escape. Unlike his predecessor, he forbids smoking opium, which he claims his charges are wont to do all day. And then in the next paragraph, he reminds her to be good, that it is men and boys that rule in the world, that women and girls do not command but obey (an allusion to her fits of temper), reminding them both perhaps that one can accomplish as much through gentleness as violence, as did her sweet-souled, long-dead mother.

PATHOS AND POLITICS IN COLONIAL JAVA

For students of European bourgeois culture, the sedentary and sentient comforts that brick homes, stable, circumscribed family life, and privacy

⁶⁶ See Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created* (Sydney: Penguin, 1989), 28–32, on the intensity of the Balinese defense.

allowed is captured by Peter Gay in his many volumes on the bourgeois experience. It is most notably described in his book on Arthur Schnitzler that he calls not the biography of a man but "the biography of a class."⁶⁷ For Gay, Schnitzler is not a "representative" of bourgeois respectability and prosperity, but a participant-observer and witness to it. He is reliable in part because he writes about it (in his diary); participates in a privileged, domestic coziness (and requisite conflict with his father); enjoys a childhood of privacy; and remains content with limited movements from his beloved Vienna despite easily traversing a contained cosmopolitan world of European capitals. He is disdainful of (aristocratic) duels, self-reflective about distinctions and the entrapments of class.

Not least, as Gay underscores, Schnitzler was part of a class for which the "paradigm of domesticity" was achieved with an unprecedented intensity, "idealized as never before."⁶⁸ Some of these features are resonant with the sort of upper crust of Dutch colonial elite families, like those of the Lucassens and Valcks. In Dutch colonial history, too, domesticity and stability often have been viewed as highly valued in such families. Attainment of that rootedness and a sense of belonging were what they were thought to strive for, what their attentiveness to comportment, decorum, and dress were about.⁶⁹

But a major difference sets off the Valcks and Lucassens and the thousands of families that followed similar itineraries of Gay's portrait: their participation in the life and labor of empire, what it did to the value they placed on domesticity, epistolary relations, and family connections. If "unsettledness" is a marker of modern sensibilities, as Marshall Berman tells us, then minor figures like Valck may have epitomized that sense of the world in the transient lives that imperial careers foisted upon them.⁷⁰

The geopolitical transience of empire (so removed from Gay's concerns) shaped the sentiments they harbored, the estrangements they weathered, and the ethics of their lives. Both confirming and contrasting that "paradigm of domesticity," the Valck and Lucassen family letters suggest something else: that nineteenth-century colonialisms thrived on constant movement and long-lapsed connections as they repeatedly reproduced fractured

⁶⁷ Peter Gay, *Schnitzler's Century: The Making of Middle-Class Culture, 1815–1914* (New York: Norton, 2002), xix.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁶⁹ For a slightly later period, see Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995); and my *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), esp. "Cultivating Bourgeois Bodies and Racial Selves," 95–136.

⁷⁰ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1982).

family relations, distorted sentimental structures, and estranged lives. These were not features aberrant to such bourgeois family relations, not exceptions to their otherwise firmly placed and in-place domestic arrangements, but constitutive elements. These were animated by the wider movements of capital investments, new requirements of a consolidating state apparatus, and new adaptations fitted to them.

The colonial permeates their lives. The letters course through colonial concerns, at times absentmindedly yet in vital ways. Still, *empire is the watermark of these relations*. Somehow they always return to an uncle just returned from Java, a niece marrying the son of a former colonial officer, an inadequate pension, a bolt of cloth lost in voyage, a tobacco or sugar stock that crashed, a squabble that endures continental divides. Not least, they offer a disquieting engagement and uncertain empathy. The closed-circuit social worlds of Suze and her cousins render it difficult for us to make the stretch. In fact, they instill an aversive distaste for their cosmopolitan leanings that so circumvented the people that hovered at their center and that they pushed to the margins.

Nor do these letters instill us with what Carlo Ginzburg celebrates as “the warmth of the narrator’s intimate glance.”⁷¹ For so many of their missives only brush an interior space. Intimacies are styled and scripted as well. If the goal of self-deception is, as Sartre held, *to put oneself out of reach (from oneself)*, then Frans Carl and especially his daughter were well schooled in its arts. With their tightly constrained vision and muted interior space, theirs is a highly selective regard, both with respect to themselves and to the persons and places around them.

HONOR AND SHAME

Suze’s letters make up most of what Valck chose to preserve, along with his will, some correspondence with friends, a lengthy report on Bali, his account of his part in a duel for which he was reprimanded by the government. And folded within these uneven traces of a life, taking up the other bulk of his personal archive and obsession in retirement, were the several hundred pages of double folio foolscap paper containing three carefully scripted drafts—undated, crossed-out, and annotated—of an unsent letter to the Governor-General. In format, these are belabored, careful, and, at moments, full of rage. None note the place from which he wrote them (most likely from The Hague and Arnhem where he “retired”). None have a date. Nor do we know whether it is to Governor-

⁷¹ Carlo Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things I Know about It,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1) (Autumn 1993): 10–35.

General van Lansberge to which he imagined they would be sent or to F. s’Jacobs, who assumed that position in 1881.

Frans Carl’s letters were written to Suze, but were as much for himself and, when she was still a small girl, for those relatives that would share and read them aloud to her, and later, when she was grown, that she would pass on to them. His letters are hungry for her confidences (“*tell me the names of your favorite playmates*”), testimony to his fatherly love (“*I only chide you because I love you so*”), and bear witness to his attention/surveillance (“*I note that your handwriting is less careful than usual*”). Others insist on evidence of his fatherly sacrifice (“*think of how much more I will earn for you and for us if I say just two more years*”) and thoughtful deeds (“*I sent you a bolt of raw silk and for your sweet cousin, too*”). In each of them he is watching himself as father, looking over the shoulder of those reading his letters to her, watching himself watched by his superiors and by those colonized subjects around him. In this multifocal gaze he watches his world brim with possibility and halt with failure.

If the “peculiar sensation” of an imposed “double-consciousness” is, as Du Bois held, the fate of those subject to a racialized identity, and is what Eduardo Glissant described those who endure a “schizoid self,” it was also something that middling colonizers like Valck shared, as well.⁷² Relations of power insure that this “double-consciousness” of ruler and ruled are not commensurate. But some features of doubling and dependence—as Hegel, Orwell, and Nadine Gordimer in her trenchant parody of “something out there” note—are resonant. Franz Carl’s letters were self-conscious exercises that sometimes collapsed his bracketed worlds. In them he fashioned a “plausible” self: a promising and honorable civil servant; a cultivated man of knowledge; a dedicated, protective, and disciplining father.

Erupting between these selves—punctuated with apologies for too much emoting, what he calls an “*excess of sadness*,” and too much display (“*please forgive me Suze for my last letter in which I should have contained myself better*”)—were acerbic asides, attempts at humor, the inadvertent slip of a lonely, depressed and partly delusional man. He wrote from everywhere—ships, verandas, on his lap—of his sumptuous pleasure in receiving and reading whatever she wrote, describing in close detail his posture, attire, even the slippers he wore when he read them, as well as the color, shape, and compartments of his desk.

He wrote after what he called “*excruciatingly boring*” official visits to local Balinese royalty, after ceremonies he described as mere “*farces*,” in

⁷² W. E. B. Du Bois (1982), 3; Eduardo Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), x.

which he was obliged to play a part. Self-loathing and despair are always there. Dismayed at his increasing bulk, he recounts to her his need to order new horses from Makassar because the small ones in Bali could not bear his excessive weight. At other times he would write in stillness—when he seemed barely able to move from one room to the next, from his bed to his office, having not left his thatched residence for entire days. He wrote in anticipation of a fever, fending off depression, weighted down with a too-heavy evening meal. He wrote about his dogs but rarely about the people that he met. He wrote about the prison cook's young daughter who reminded him of her and who made sure that his fifteen dogs—these, along with his firearm, were kept for protection—did not get in the way of his veranda meals. Only the couple who work for him have names. And unlike the loveless stories in Dutch colonial novels of the time (that rarely missed an opportunity to hint at the secreted concubinary arrangements of European men and native women) in these heavily screened letters to his schoolgirl daughter there were—unsurprisingly—no hints of a housemaid/mistress at all.

And spliced between these spaces was always one just for, and about, Suze, triple declarations of his love and interest in her life. He asks about her dolls (*"tell me your favorites"*); her pets; schoolwork; and friends (*"do remind me of their names"*). Other times he wrote filled with tough love, disappointed at reports of her misbehavior, with presents promised if she worked harder and took more care with her sloppy prose. And to the daughter whose penmanship and grammar in French were strained, he would devise multilanguage games for them to *"play"*: he was to respond to her in English, she to him in French, and he to her in German or Dutch. She ignored them. He wrote to her of his love for her, her deceased mother, and his most adored Holland, with pride and self-mockery at his increasingly miserly ways (*"you can't imagine what an avaré [miser] I have become"*). As his time in Bali wore less well on him (*"I don't feel very curious to travel here,"* he told her, *"[for] first of all I've voyaged enough in life but also the Indies' countryside is always the same"*).

And eventually, he wrote of his outrage at a colonial system into which he was born, for which he was groomed, from which he profited and was eventually condemned, banished to the Netherlands he had so sorely missed. From there he never left (though upon first returning he had dreamt of doing so). Instead, he quietly wrote, rewrote, and relived what had happened in those fateful months in Sumatra: of his loyalty to a colonial administration that no longer recognized his name. He in turn condemns state agents, people, but *not* the system in which his faith seems to remain.

These letters between a father and daughter are shaped by the exigencies of empire and estrangements of the everyday, by the common dislocations of careers that were the norm in tens of thousands of European

colonial lives. They are love letters of a special sort. He declares his love more insistently as their distance increases (as he passes through the newly opened Suez Canal), affirms his hold on her as their ties become weaker (*"I know how boisterous you have been, Grandma Smits has told me"*), and as he knows less (and cares to know less?) about whom she talks, what she reads, what makes up her days. These are love letters designed to instill attachment, to capture the taste of her childhood in which he takes no part, to create rather than affirm a closeness for the little girl who will grow into a young woman while he is away. What he tells her his most fears is that she will recognize neither his aged, stout physique nor his voice when they meet years later on the dock in Marseille.

Valck's letters are touching if pitiful; hers irritable and uninspired. His are as rich as hers are flat and mundane. If hers can assume his interest (even in the face of her cross-hatched prose), when she is little he works hard to create it. To get her attention he squeezes the affective from the immediacy of familiar objects and movements (*"I'm wearing slippers, my desk is black, the dogs scurry under my feet when I eat at midday"*). He implores her to believe that distance makes the heart grow fonder, but unsure himself, he tells stories to excite, elicit pity, or in some way touch: of seeing little Balinese girls "like" her, of his fat cow and geese, selective, censored images of his everyday. He tells her of his marvelous or ill health, of how much better he would be if he only had more time to move about and had fewer people coming "to complain of injustices done them"—demands that keep him *"as if glued to [his] desk."*

These are the letters that replace a shared space—laments for a childhood he can only imagine. (When she is little he begs her to send the family names of her favorite schoolmates so that he might perhaps hear her name uttered by someone in his circle who might happen to be the parent of one of her friends.) He implores her, in each letter, to send yet another portrait, knowing it will never be recent enough to catch up with what he has missed and how she has changed. He asks her to measure her height so he can *"see her grow"* and tells her he will mark it on his office wall. He sends her his portrait (one not kept among her letters) that worries him before it arrives because he appears so old. He asks her to quickly *"touch up"* the blurred white spots so that he will look less gross and grey.

He presses for more and more evidence of their closeness as it seems to slip away—as his closings shift imperceptibly from *"Papa"* to *"Papa Valck"* and sometimes simply to *"Valck,"* signed in the florid hand he usually reserved for official letters. These closings become more removed, not so much with her growing up, but with his inadvertent forgetting of who she was and now is and how far he had drawn away from her. Unknowingly, the studied difference he so carefully had maintained between his writing to her and the official business that cluttered his office desk

seems to collapse. But then a letter signed “Valck” might be followed by one of infantile intimacy, signed “ton Pati-Pati” (“your Papa”), as if grasping to reinvoke their closeness with the diminutive pet name she had given him as a small girl. Her letters, too, perhaps absentmindedly repeat that apartness a decade later when she is a young mother in Java and signs a letter to him with “S. Lucassen” rather than “Suze.” Intimacy over time and space was a labored state to maintain.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

It was with the pet name “ton Pati-Pati” that he signed the most poignant and painful letter he would send to her, on 16 July 1878, written as he readied to leave his last post in Ambarawa for Batavia and the mail boat that would bring him back to Marseille. He writes on the joint occasion of her fifteenth birthday and on notification of his final dismissal from the Civil Service. He has just recently learned of a damning, “highly unflattering” report about his performance in Ambarawa written to the Governor-General by the Resident of Semarang. Valck is found wanting on multiple counts: in his treatment of tax arrears (he protests that one of his accountants was ill); detention of prisoners (he claims to have accounted for everyone); his handling of the outbreak of violence in a nearby village (that he claims to have handled judiciously and with the utmost care); and in his contradictory report on a local murder (he claims to have investigated further to find out the truth and two days later corrected his first erroneous report). His report to the Resident of Ambarawa protesting the slander and affirming his own virtue, honesty, and unflinching diligence falls on deaf ears. The Resident accuses him of continuing to treat important matters “en bagatelle” (“lightheartedly”)—as he is said to have done in Deli.⁷³

His letter to Suze, the week before, begins softly in French, telling her how pleased he is by her improved handwriting, still warning her not to press so hard with her pen because “a scrawl is a fault not easily undone.” He congratulates her for her academic successes, and only then, on the point of seeing her for the first time after seven years (in each letter he has counted their years of separation in months and days), he tells her that she now has reached an age in which he can treat her as more than a daughter (“there is no one that loves you more”). She is now ready to become his most cherished confidant, to carry the burden of the financial and political knowledge of their situation—he calls her, heartbreakingly, “his

⁷³ CBG, FA, no. 420, *Beantwoording der nota voor den Assistent-Resident van Ambarawa*, F.C.Valck, 23 July 1878, sent from Semarang.

dearest friend”—wrenching from her the prospect of the daughter-father relationship for which he so yearned at the very moment that it and their physical proximity become possible.

In this longest letter he would ever write to her, he recounts for the first time the fierce backstabbing to which he has been subject and to which his career has succumbed. He explains why he was dismissed, how he was betrayed by those who knew the horrific situation in Deli and set him up (he even mentions the accusations against him in his final post in Ambarawa). After wishing her a happy birthday, he writes bitterly, in language that is only partly for her, repeating almost verbatim the argument he had made, and would make again, in his official reports, the very words he used to his friend Levyssohn two years earlier. He entreats her, as he did Levyssohn, not to imagine that he exaggerates, and pens the same phrases he would repeat in his unsent letter to the Governor-General written years later from The Hague:

You must then know, my friend, that I have always served the government with a devotion to which I have sacrificed more than many. I have usually served with pleasure until I was sent to Deli, a region for which I had little desire to go but where I had to fulfill a noble mission which was to protect those unfortunates who were treated in the most barbarous way. These were the Chinese, the Javanese, the Hindu coolies on whom the European planters, those one called the “civilizers,” inflicted the whip and brutalized to the point of death. Don’t think that I exaggerate, that I speak more than the truth. When I arrived in Deli, according to all reports it was a hell. Within eight months and by the time I left there was not a single European who would any longer dare to perform such atrocious acts as those that before had taken place everyday. You can imagine what enemies I made, enemies who were influential enough in the capital to ruin my reputation. But never was there a word that I was dishonest, this you must never forget. . . . The Governor-General chose me among more than 110 of my colleagues for Deli because he knew, as he told me, that I would act with complete impartiality, which is what I did. He told me that it was a distinction for me to be sent to Deli and promised to rescue and protect me. None of this was done. He abandoned me and left me to be reviled and insulted. No promise was kept, not even the chance to defend myself against the attacks made in a report of one of my superiors, a report with not an ounce of truth. And there is nothing more sacred than the right of one accused to self defense.

His tone then switches from colonial politics to her everyday. He reminds her to keep the train receipts for her trip to meet him in Paris, to be sure not to spend the money carelessly because they can no longer afford

to do so. Distinctions crumble as he calls on her, his “dearest friend,” to share his hardship and not to imagine him as someone who would ever lose courage. He scrambles to connect: warns her that money will be scarce, that his signature was just like hers at the same age, that he will always love his beloved daughter.

Should we have any doubt as to whether Suze was prepared for this new role, her schoolgirl letter responding to his a few months later from boarding school evinces that she was not, as she implores him to permit her to go with her classmates to the colonial exposition in Paris:

Dear dear Papa,

You will have certainly received [Grand] Maman's letter where she asked you to allow me to go to Paris, but I thought it kinder of me if I asked you myself. You know how much I would love to go, oh I would so! It would be one such cruel deception for me [not to be allowed]! I have so hoped to go one time to Paris to the [colonial] exposition. Mademoiselle Jeanne has herself proposed it and you know that she will keep us well under guard so we won't get lost! There are a few girls who already have permission and it would be so hard for me to see them leave without me. I promise you and you can believe me, if you let me to do it, I will take far greater pains with my lessons and especially I won't feel the consequences of my escapades! And what's more I will see you! Oh, I want to so, so much! It would be the time when I would be going on vacation anyway. I implore you to not refuse me. Please allow me this pleasure! Don't refuse it, I implore you! If you permit me, please telegraph me immediately so I will not longer be in doubt. I'm sure now that I have asked you in such a way you can't refuse me. Just think, there are not expositions like that of the exposition of 1878 every year. Adieu dear Pati-Pati. I thank you already,

Your happy Suze . . . RSVP!!!

Whatever his expectation, it was neither confidant nor friend that Suze became. There are no letters from the months following his arrival in The Hague and she is still at school, none stored until after boarding school. Five years later, in spring 1882, she was to write in a steady, angry stream, long letters, still in French, over their heated conflict about her marriage plans to her cousin, Theodore. “Trust” is the word that each repeats again and again. She accuses him of distrusting Theodore and his father. He denies it and claims that he only wants Theodore to have a proper position before they marry. She tells him she loves him but it is to the man she intends to marry to whom she must be most loyal. Valck concedes after refusing to open her letters for several months. The marriage is a gilded affair and then they write again, she from France, in Abbeville, at

the sugar beet factory where Theodore was learning his trade, and then on her way to the Kemanglen estate, the Lucassen family complex on Java.

She has bought a sumptuous red leather diary with a thin gold border especially, and hopefully, for her stay. The first entry, several days after her arrival, comes from her Uncle van Rees's (now Governor-General) official residence, where he is opulently installed in the palace in Buitenzorg, in the hills outside of Batavia. Her first entry hardly fills more than a page. In French she writes:

Buitenzorg, 29 April 1887

Arrived here at Uncle van Rees's charming Governor-General's reception. Slept very well in an enormous bed, breakfast this morning at seven thirty. After that the arrival of Uncle Daan and Aunt Suzette and Pieteke . . . to see Uncle Rees. With this delight of being in a palace like Buitenzorg, to be able to walk in a splendid park.

And the next day:

Buitenzorg, 30 April 1887

Had a very nice day. Did a tour in the pony carriage of Poppi, pulled by adorable little black horses. Saw Auguste Miesegars [?] who came to spend Sunday here. Did another tour in the carriage with Adrienne, Poppi, and Auguste. Life here still pleases me so much. The climate is ideal.

The next day's three-line entry is sullen, terse, and in Dutch:

Birthday of Mamie; little to note. Theo has been somewhat indisposed, cranky.

These are the first and last entries, a single page. My own marginalia escapes my efforts to temper judgment and remain observant, to not let my impatience get in the way:

My reaction is awful. Of course she couldn't keep to her diary, I think. She was too lazy and too dull to see, too bored (and too stupid/stupefied, Ronell might insist) to have anything worth writing or anything to say. But had she devotedly written, I would have derided her just the same, convinced that it was “proof” that she had nothing to care for but herself and her petty complaints and pleasures. How could she get by on knowing so little and emoting so much? How could she arrive in Java where she had not been since a year old when her mother died, and have nothing to say? How dare I assume I know her already? I think she is peevish and refuses to grow up. My reaction is worse when she is older. I know from her later letters she will spend them complaining, performing her duty as a

fussy mother. But why no empathy? Wasn't her little girl to die at Kemanglen as an infant? Who is this Suze I so disdain?

From Tegal her letters spiraled distractedly into a blinding immediacy—about her children's colds and molars. Peevishly, she wrote about her distaste for Java and everything else. In sporadic outpourings when “*ready to burst*,” she wrote of resenting her life in a wing of the Lucassen great house, the surveillance of the Lucassen women, of no way of creating any “*coziness*,” of nothing to call her own. She pines for a city, complains of her boredom living so far from one, and of her absent husband, who did nothing with her and nothing but work at the factory until late in the day.

It is not the story that Suze's husband, Theodore, chose to convey to his father-in-law several months after their arrival in Tegal. Born at the Kemanglen family complex, he has not been back in ten years, since the age of nineteen. His memory, he says, is weak on the weather, he remembers it as having been much more unbearably hot ten years ago, when every night he would “*wring out*” his sweat-soaked pillow “*like a sponge*.” What stays vivid is how depressing he thought the countryside around Tegal then; he finds it “*less melancholic now*.” “*It really is a good country*,” he affirms, where he and Suze are living “*happily and contented*” and in good health. Still it is a “*monotonous landscape*,” nature so “*disappointing*” and so “*very untidy*.” Nostalgia for Europe is all that animates his prose as his letter drifts to the “*translucent lakes*” of Switzerland, and a walk along any Dutch canal, of “*ten times more aesthetic pleasure than the longest ride through an Indies landscape*.”⁷⁴ But nostalgias and yearnings sometimes pulled in other directions. The sheer exuberance of Frans Carl Valck's first letters to Suze when he arrives back in Bali in 1872 have nothing bored about them at all. On the contrary, nature was his favorite companion; it was from the Balinese he looked away.

For colonial civil servants and the women who accompanied them, such letters were lifelines of sorts—to civilities, sociality, and compassion—self-portraits for display. But they were awkward as well, as time lapsed and the comforts of the colony sometimes pulled them unknowingly further from European ways. Such purloined letters seem transparent, the sensibilities accessible and easy to convey. But are they? For they offer both predictable and contrary stories about how empire intruded on and escaped the everyday. If hagiographies are stuffed with personal letters, critical colonial histories are usually not—perhaps because of the sympathies they invoke, the shock of recognition, the disquiets they inspire. Or perhaps it is the “*flitting glance*” of embarrassed familiarity that turns us away.

⁷⁴ CBG, FA no. 374, 8 August 1877, Théodore Lucassen to F. C. Valck (occasionally the letters are signed and addressed to Theodore [French], while at other times to Theodoor [Dutch]).

THE ETHICS OF COLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHY: ON WALK-ON ROLES

As a window on what Valck felt, what deceptions he lived and how he was disposed, his narratives are wanting, full of holes. We know so many details and yet so little about him: not what books he read, how much he drank, what dreams he dreamt, whether he had a lover or frequented prostitutes during those seven years in the Indies—which injustices he chose to disregard. His discrepant messages combine high morals and bold indifference, callousness and compassion, utter effectualness and power, depression and racialized distaste. They remind us that Valck's humanist indignations and disregard were both nourished by colonial politics, were lived through those politics and on its edges. His first promotion occurred on Bali's north coast, when he took a small part in blowing the whistle on the collusion of a Dutch official and a local regent. His demise followed his indictment of Deli's European planters and high-ranking colonial officials in Batavia who turned their backs on what they knew. But even within this do-good bent, the colonized appear with only walk-on roles. It is a sobering reminder of Salman Rushdie's warning that if colonial history has been written with the colonized as bit players, that gives no license for contemporary historians to do the same.⁷⁵

By Rushdie's account, Valck's story—and Suze's still more so—are not ones we should legitimately choose to tell. His life is predicated on the privileges of empire: for long periods embracing its pleasures, and at later moments involuntarily distanced from it. Hers transpires elsewhere, escapes into the ether of an obsessively tended, hothouse world. One is struck by what he refuses to write, what remains tacitly excised. Injustices sometimes matter. Others he notices but does not see. Still others he chooses not to convey. Injuries to his sense of self cut across both genres. If in Suze's personhood, Java only intrudes as bothersome, boring, or insufficiently picturesque, in his the colonized appear as blurred shadows in a sarong, at a prison door, as a generic Chinese coolie pinned down for a lashing—not persons with histories, and rarely those with reflective selves.

⁷⁵ Salman Rushdie, “Outside the Whale,” in *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Penguin, 1992), 90. On Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* he writes:

Indians get walk-ons, but remain, for the part, bit-players in their own history. Once this form is set, it scarcely matters that individual fictional Brits get unsympathetic treatment from their author. The form insists that *they are the ones whose stories matter*, and this is so much less than the whole truth that it must be called a falsehood. It will not do to argue that Scott was attempting to portray the British in India, and that such was the nature of imperialist society that the Indians *would* only have had bit-parts. It is no defense to say that work adopts, in its structure, the very ethic which, in its content and tone, it pretends to dislike. It is, in fact, the case for the prosecution.

Nor are these letters “windows onto the soul,” the truly private and intimate spaces of a personal self.⁷⁶ Sometimes they were proof of what empire conferred (service, spacious housing, and stature), sometimes evidence of tastes that, despite distance and discomfort, one retained. Frans Carl liked to joke about becoming *décivilisé*, of needing to visit friends and write in French so he would not lose touch. Suze rarely joked at all but prided herself on her children’s “thank yous” in French rather than Malay. And in hushed whispers (“*please, Papa, don’t dare tell anyone what I say, you know what rumors can do*”), she’d write of her unkempt kin, the Lucassen women who went barefoot, ate appalling (local) food, and disapprovingly, she wrote, policed what she would do or say. She in turn had contempt for their *Indische* ways. They were no longer oriented to Europe, kept inadequate distance from colonial customs, tastes, and dress, wore their sarongs out like bedclothes throughout the day.

Two years after her arrival at Kemanglen, she writes her father with expectant excitement. The arrival of more frequent French mailboats will allow them to finally “coordinate” their letters. Here is her response to his previous letter of a month earlier, arriving three days after hers had left.

*I am busy sewing my household linen. Also kabaai must be made as I am planning to start wearing sarong and kabaai. Of course, only in the mornings, when I have to do the household chores. In the evening I will always keep dressing: I don’t want to adopt that bad habit.*⁷⁷

“Of course” marks off the world from which she distinguishes herself; of those “*who stay on*” (the *blijvers*) like the Lucassen women and what she vows she will never become. The daily accoutrements of Europe continue to hold her fast and she insists she must have them. In each letter she requests something more: an egg-rack from Sack’s, “*a big jar of Dr. Aufeland’s children’s powder*,” “*pastilles from Gerandel*.”⁷⁸ It is in February 1889 that her own small house in the Kemanglen complex is finally being built and with exhausted excitement, awaiting the birth of her fourth child, she tells him of her longing to move in, of her relief at no longer having to live in a wing of the great house. She chides him for not understand-

⁷⁶ Most epistolary history dismissed that conceit long ago. As William Decker puts it, “Perhaps the most fundamental fiction of letter writing” is one that “assumes the existence of a certain confidentiality as its enabling condition,” one belied by the social conventions of the letter-writing form. William Decker, *Epistolary Practices: Letter Writing in America before Telecommunications* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 5. On the “myth” of the “letter’s status as a privileged marker of privacy,” see Earle, 7.

⁷⁷ CBG, FA, 24 January 1889, Susanna Lucassen to F. C. Valck.

⁷⁸ CBG, FA, 6 February 1889, Susanna Lucassen to F.C. Valck.

ing how much she has suffered in waiting for it, how awful it was for two years to live “*with people so antipathetic to us, or especially to me*.”⁷⁹

*I can see in your letters that you cannot imagine our position here and how unbearable it is. You can’t imagine, dear Papa, how much the stay here has harmed me. Firstly I have gotten nervous; one could not tell by looking at me but I feel it all the more. When I feel so nervous, even my nails hurt. Also I have become ten years older indeed. I have become very resentful and finding fault, mon caractère c’est absolument aigri [my temperament is completely sour].*⁸⁰

Why have the Lucassen women become so hostile to her? Are they as disdainful of her clinging to European pretensions as she is of their *Indische* ways? When she returns to The Hague upon her husband’s sudden death at Kemanglen (the day before she turns thirty years old) and upon her father’s death the preceding year, her letters end. Her oldest son becomes the genealogist who deposits her and her father’s letters in the genealogical bureau in The Hague. Her second son becomes an entomologist. Her only daughter marries the French Marquis de Seilhac. No further generations are born in Java. No one returns to the Indies. Investments are transferred to African plantations. Before Indonesia’s independence, the Kemanglen estates are already sold. The watermark of empire is scratched over and etched out of their lives. Descendants live in small apartments in the suburbs of The Hague with portraits of wealthier earlier generations on their walls. In 2002 the name of “Susanna Lucassen” appears on the program for an outdoor summer performance in the French Luberon for promising young ballet stars. I ask if her family ever lived in Java. “Oui,” she smiles, “someone was in the Indies once,” and she glides away. There is not an imperial trace. Or is there?

French historian Roger Chartier gives immense value to epistolarity *sans qualité*, not for the information conveyed but in the sense that Robert Musil uses the term in *The Man Without Qualities*, for entry into the affective and political expectations produced and the reciprocities they demanded and required.⁸¹ Ordinary epistolarity provides what Chartier calls an act of “housebreaking” into private lives.⁸² Mary Favret takes that violent trespass in another direction to suggest that such letters are less “windows into the intimate self” than a genre that introduces us into a

⁷⁹ CBG, FA, 6 March 1889, Susanna Lucassen to F.C. Valck.

⁸⁰ CBG, FA, 6 February, 1889, Susanna Lucassen to F.C. Valck.

⁸¹ See Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

⁸² See Roger Chartier’s introduction to *Ces bonnes lettres: une correspondance familiale au XIXe siècle*, ed. C. Dauphin, P. Lebrun-Pézerat, D. Pouban (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 17–25, 23.

world that “intrudes upon our own.”⁸³ The letters between Valck and his daughter do something of both. We are privy to lives in which the politics of empire bleeds into the texture of the personal and then, as if too present, is carefully washed out.

“Information” is there—in abundance. It depends on what kinds of things we imagine such an archive could allow us to know. In this letter-writing trove of Frans Carl Valck, his daughter Susanna, and their acquaintances and family, no documents could offer thicker evidence of the veins of commitment, disregard, obligation, and investment that pulsed through their concerns and bound the life-force of personhoods and politics together. But clarity about what Valck “really felt” about living in empire and off its rewards is elusive at best. Family letters provide a personalized and ethnographic inflection in a minor key, not the crescendo of major chords, but the plaintive notes in which things may not be felt as they seem to be.

In tracking the molten relationship between bureaucratic missives and familial ones, sometimes these forms abruptly pull apart, elsewhere they merge registers of tone and mood, in which imperial dispositions were inhabited and remade. Rather than underscoring distinctions between the intimacies of empire and its public face, such letters address alternative senses of timing and distance, of expectation and exigency, of divided commitments that empire produced in its subjects and the elite hired help paid to manage them. Not least, our use of such letters demands hermeneutic humility, forcing longer reflection on what made up their common sense and how much imperial dispositions are sustained by the generative power of a “vital lie.”

The noun “ignorance” and the verb “to ignore” share a social and legal etymology, where definition of the former, “want of knowledge,” is predicated on the definition of the latter active, verbal form, “to refuse to take notice of.” How these two are joined, what political measures and psychic processes produce subjectivities that instantiate both, is a condition of imperial histories we would do well not “to ignore.” Both continue to haunt the logos and pathos of empire. Both inform what Mary Douglas called “those shadowed places” that states and more expansive procedures of governance protect. The epistemic incertitudes and ontological categories in which honor and white prestige, racial humiliations and critical refusals were inscribed may look different now. But they continue to bear on the residual effects of empire and, more importantly, on what people are “left with.” The politics of disregard may cast longer shadows still, across the accounts we give of ourselves in the face of emergent predicaments of imperial formations in a contemporary world that is so visibly different and subadjacently resonant today.

⁸³ Mary A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1993), 10.