



# Dutch Colonial Nostalgia across Decolonisation

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**Abstract:** This article argues that nostalgia for colonialism in the Netherlands, the so called *tempo doeloe* culture, is not a specifically *postcolonial* phenomenon caused by the collapse of the Dutch empire in Asia. In fact, nostalgia for the Dutch East Indies can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when the colony was still being formed, and its current form can productively be described as a nostalgia for nostalgia. On a more general level, colonial nostalgia, which is often too easily dismissed as simple conservatism, is actually a complex phenomenon in which multiple nostalgias layer each other in an often reflexive manner. This analysis focuses specifically on the work of the Dutch writer Hein Buitenweg (1893-1983).

**Keywords:** Cultural Memory, Nostalgia, Netherlands, Indonesia, Colonial History, Postcolonial History, Tempo Doeloe, Hein Buitenweg

## Introduction

The last twenty years have seen the emergence of a sizeable body of academic literature on the ways in which people in Northern Europe remember the colonial past. In the former colonial metropolises of Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands memories of the colonial period, by turns comfortable and anxious, angry and condoning, all form part of variegated and often contradictory postcolonial memory cultures.<sup>2</sup> One particularly dominant mnemonic mode with respect to Dutch colonialism, especially as it existed in the Dutch East Indies – now the Republic of Indonesia – is the nostalgic one. Over the years the public sphere of the Netherlands has seen many stagings of what is called ‘tempo doeloe’, Malay for ‘the old days’, but in Dutch understood to mean ‘the *good* old days’ of colonial life. It was the time when, as the Dutch author Gerard Reve put it ironically in a 1966 poem, ‘gin [...] was free, as water’, ‘the natives knew their place’ and ‘there was still real cordiality and love’.<sup>3</sup> Tempo doeloe has been constructed through a wide range of media: photo books, festivals, novels, television [129] shows, magazines, music, films, and as recently as 2012 in the exhibition ‘The Indies Were Our Paradise’ in the Amsterdam public library. In both the public sphere and academic literature tempo doeloe is primarily connected with a group of 250,000-300,000 people who gradually came from (colonial) Indonesia to the Netherlands after a series of events which drove the Dutch away from their former Asian empire: the Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies in 1942, the imprisonment of many Dutch during the Japanese occupation, the Japanese capitulation and Indonesia’s declaration of independence in 1945, the chaotic and violent *bersiap* period from 1945-46, the Dutch-Indonesian wars of 1947 and 1948-9 (in the Netherlands for a long time called ‘police actions’), the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, and the expulsion of all remaining Dutch from Indonesia in 1957-58 being the main catalysts. These people had all been ‘Europeans’ within the colonial legal system (as opposed to ‘Natives’ and

'Foreign Orientals') and often had strong ties with the colonial regime.<sup>4</sup> Of the roughly 17 million inhabitants of the Netherlands today, one million have a family connection to the Indies.

It would be a mistake, however, to connect current Dutch fantasies of a colonial paradise solely to the group of 'Indies-goers' and their progeny. First of all, nostalgia is just one of the many ways in which people from the diverse group of Indische Dutch relate to this past, as the critical works of people like Rudy Kousbroek and Marion Bloem show. Secondly, *tempo doeloe* can best be seen as just one element of Dutch colonial nostalgia, which appeals to many other people in the Netherlands who do not see themselves as part of this particular group of postcolonial migrants and repatriates. *Tempo doeloe* is, in fact, part of a broader mnemonic culture in which the colonial order of things, if not the colonial system, is seen as a state of affairs to which a return is preferable. In late 2011, for instance, when the Tropical Museum in Amsterdam was about to lose its government subsidies, the politician Martin Bosma of the anti-Islam Freedom Party (PVV) supported this move, saying that his party wanted to stop subsidizing the 'Western self-hatred' the museum was promoting and to return it to its former status as Colonial Museum.

Yet colonial nostalgia is not only broader than is usually recognised, it is also older, for the underpinnings of views like the one voiced by Bosma in fact predate decolonisation and express a type of nostalgia which already existed during the colonial period. The model of this nostalgia is predicated on the notion that the various races once inhabited their own particular space-times: white people in the modern era and brown people in an older era or in no era at all, in which case they were imagined as timeless. Today in the Netherlands colonial nostalgia imagines Dutch society as an essentially white nation, sadly victimised by black and brown immigrants who have taken over the role of violators of Dutch innocence from the Germans. An everyday indication of this nostalgia is the common usage in the Netherlands of the words 'autochtoon' and 'allochtoon', respectively meaning 'native to the soil' and 'native elsewhere', which in practice are used to denote [130] white and non-white people. Yet the idea that different races naturally have their own temporal and spatial habitat and that there was a moment for which one can yearn, when the boundaries between these space-times were (still) respected, was already present when the Indies were still a colony.

Colonial nostalgia, for all its importance for Dutch colonial memory culture, has not gained much attention until the recent publication of two ground-breaking and excellent studies by Lizzy van Leeuwen and Sarah de Mul, both of whom discuss it not as an isolated phenomenon but as part of a larger discursive formation.<sup>5</sup> This article seeks to contribute to the analysis of Dutch colonial nostalgia by discussing one particular aspect that has not yet received sufficient attention, but that is nevertheless crucial for understanding this nostalgia in both the narrower and broader senses discussed above. While Van Leeuwen and De Mul emphasise decolonisation as the founding moment of colonial nostalgia, I will argue here that continuity can be demonstrated to exist across the breakdown of the Dutch East Indies in the 1940s. Across decolonisation, I will argue, Dutch colonial nostalgia has shown itself to include a mourning element for the loss of a past which, in comparison to the present, seemed more settled and ordered, particularly in racial terms.<sup>6</sup>

I will show this continuity through an analysis of the works of Dutch author Hein Buitengeweg (1893-1983), who published sixteen photo books on the Dutch East Indies between 1937 and 1983. Buitengeweg's oeuvre forms a good case study as he is an author firmly connected to *tempo doeloe* culture who already started publishing his books before decolonisation. I will

first discuss the crucial relation between modern conceptions of time and nostalgia, then outline the implications of this connection for the cultural constellation of *tempo doeloe* during the colonial era, and analyze *tempo doeloe* in the work of Buitenweg, both before and after decolonisation. Finally, Buitenweg's work leads me to a last point, namely the strongly reflective element found within colonial nostalgia, which has the effect of making this body of writing hover between fiction and non-fiction.

## Time and the Other<sup>7</sup>

Essential to my understanding of nostalgia in modernity is Svetlana Boym's statement that 'nostalgic manifestations are side effects of the teleology of progress'.<sup>8</sup> Only when people could feel, as Peter Fritzsche puts it, 'stranded in the present' and cyclical conceptions of time were eclipsed by linearity, could the past be seen as a moment that had receded forever.<sup>9</sup> According to Reinhart Koselleck, European modernity was heralded by the 'temporalization [*Verzeitlichung*] of history' in the sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, he writes, the concepts of antiquity, middle ages and modernity became established, and when in the eighteenth century the philosophy of historical progress emerged, modernity was inaugurated, detached from its past, and given a new [131] future. The emergence of a new future, however, also liberated a new past, 'the increasingly alien quality [of which] rendered it a special object of historical-critical science. Progress and historicism, apparently mutually contradictory, offer the face of Janus – the face of the nineteenth century'.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, as Boym indicates:

Progress was not only a narrative of temporal progression but also of spatial expansion. Travelers since the late eighteenth century wrote about other places [...] as 'semi-civilised' or outright 'barbarous'. Instead of coevalness of different conceptions of time, each local culture therefore was evaluated with regard to the central narrative of progress.<sup>12</sup>

Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837) can serve as an example of this still prevalent idea, particularly in Europe and North-America, that certain regions of the globe, particularly the (former) colonies, are older and more backward than others. Europeans in the Dutch East Indies often considered Natives as living in what Andreas Huyssen calls the 'present past': they were seen as living in an age contemporaneous with Europe's antiquity, at best, or its middle ages, at worst.<sup>13</sup> Conservative civil servants imagined Natives as standing outside time altogether. Seeing, moreover, every present as a 'superseded former future', Europeans also projected the colonies and the Natives into a 'present future' of modernity that colonisation would ultimately realise for everybody. The Natives were thus positioned as subjects who should simultaneously be modernised (progress) and preserved (historicism). However, as the present future is an always-receding horizon, it does not offer a 'home' – the word 'nostalgia' is made up of 'nostos', which means 'the return home', and 'algia', which means 'longing' –, especially if it is perceived as a time of social upheaval. Spaces such as colonies, which were produced as an embodiment of the present past, could serve therefore as locations to cure people from the ailments of nostalgia: a move to the colonies was a move to the past and thus a move back home, or outside the flux of time altogether. This longing for a world which was imagined as 'not yet' upset was also a work of mourning for a more original state of being in which each race had its own time and space.

Today in the Netherlands one can find richly illustrated works that give a nostalgic depiction of everyday European life in the Dutch East Indies in every bookstore. What distinguishes these authors in the postcolonial period from those in the colonial period is that for the former, writing about the Indies is writing about a country that no longer exists. They live in a new reality, separated from the old one by the unbridgeable discontinuity which decolonisation has created. Because of decolonisation, the Indies as a whole moved from what Jan Assmann has called communicative memory to cultural memory, the former being proximate to the everyday, while the latter is distanced from it.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, decolonisation brought a doubling of nostalgia and produced nostalgia for nostalgia. However, [132] in important respects colonial nostalgia in the postcolonial Netherlands is a continuation of the nostalgia experienced by certain authors when the colony was still in place.

## A History of ‘Tempo Doeloe’

The words ‘tempo doeloe’ denote both a certain period of time and way of being. In Dutch, ‘tempo doeloe’ has the connotation of a slow, relaxed way of life. One racial slur aimed at Indo-European Dutch is that they are ‘tempo doeloe’, meaning they are indolent. This perception of the Indies as languid is mirrored historically in the familiar photographs made of colonial life before the development of short-exposure film, in which figures appear frozen in permanent torpor. As a period of time, ‘tempo doeloe’ denotes the good old days when life was colonially luxurious and untouched by rapid modernity. It was also the time when the Order of Creation was still in place and the various races knew where they belonged.

After decolonisation, the concept of ‘tempo doeloe’ gained momentum in the early 1960s through the photo books of Hein Buitengeweg and Rob Nieuwenhuys, the latter writing under the pseudonym E. Breton de Nijs.<sup>15</sup> In Buitengeweg’s *There Is a House in Java* from 1960, for instance, the dedication reads that the book was made ‘in remembrance of TEMPO DOELOE’.<sup>16</sup> The concept, however, had already been used during the colonial period, where it was first used in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1913 the newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant* (NRC) wrote:

Residents in the outer territories sometimes imagine themselves on the Olympus, equipped with the power to decide about all sorts of things. These days this has become less the case than in the good days of tempo doeloe when it could take months before people here [in Batavia] got to know what had happened over there.<sup>17</sup>

‘Tempo doeloe’ is presented here as a time of slowness, in two ways: slow technology (no telegraph, inferior roads, slower ships) and therefore also a slow government which had not yet penetrated with its centralising powers as far as it would later on. The colonial state was still in the making, not yet in place. This also meant more freedom for individual European civil servants, and the example given in this article is of a resident hanging a murderer without permission from the Governor-General in Batavia, the colonial capital. Modernisation, it is suggested here, brought with it bureaucratisation and centralisation of power and therefore a loss of autonomy and self-identity. Another telling use of the phrase can be found in the following comment from *Het Vaderland* from 1921: [133]

People should not forget that the Indies of ‘tempo doeloe’, the land of loneliness, plant life and what have you, no longer exist. In the last ten years the Indies have absolutely changed

with the result that life for example in Bandoeng is already very similar to life here [in the Netherlands].<sup>18</sup>

Life in ‘tempo doeloe’ is presented here as lonely but independent, especially on the plantations where individual Europeans were largely autonomous. This lifestyle first disappeared in the cities. On occasion, as illustrated by another article from *Het Vaderland* from 1930, there is a whiff of romantic adventurism: in those days one could more easily encounter ‘tigers, panthers, and other wild animals’.<sup>19</sup> That the end of tempo doeloe was indeed often connected to the arrival of European modern technology and state intervention can be seen in 1939 when, in response to the German invasion of Poland, it was proclaimed that ‘tempo doeloe [was] return[ing] to the Indies’, because the latter would be cut off from the Netherlands and ‘once again become real “tropics”’.<sup>20</sup> In these various uses of the phrase ‘tempo doeloe’ an ambiguity is perceptible, which Renato Rosaldo describes as occurring when ‘someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his intervention’.<sup>21</sup> One can sense pride of the ‘progress’ which is made, yet at the same time the lost order of former times is mourned.

In the 1930s, ‘tempo doeloe’ acquired a stronger literary resonance, for instance through its connection with the work of the novelist Maurits (pseudonym of P.A. Daum, 1849-1898) whose main subject was the life of Europeans and Eurasians in the Indies in the late nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> In 1939 Nieuwenhuys wrote an article in the magazine *Groot Nederland* about Maurits in which he calls him the ‘novelist of Tempo Doeloe’.<sup>23</sup> In the same article, Nieuwenhuys reflects on the meanings of the term. According to him, these Malayan words, more than their literal meaning, imply ‘for us a nuance [...] of kind-heartedness and appreciation... despite everything’. He writes:

But as soon as we try to theoretically define the term ‘tempo doeloe’ it turns out to be elastic and every further limitation seems arbitrary. Why would one not consider the V.O.C. time as ‘tempo doeloe’? And why would one think of the eighties and nineties, but not Multatuli’s time? Why the Regency period and not the beginning of the twentieth century?<sup>24</sup>

This suggests that in 1939 the concept of ‘tempo doeloe’ could be used to describe various moments in Dutch colonial history. After decolonisation, ‘tempo doeloe’'s meanings gradually became more extended, and as time progressed the term no longer referred to a specific period in the Indies, but to the colonial period as a whole. [134]

## Hein Buitenweg

‘Tempo doeloe’ as a name for the colonial period in its totality can also be found in Buitenweg’s work published in the 1960s, in which ‘tempo doeloe’ ends with the Japanese invasion. Buitenweg, the pseudonym of Hendrik Christianus Meijer, was a white Dutchman who had spent a large part of his childhood (from his sixth to his eighteenth year) in the Dutch East Indies, and had later pursued a career in education there. During the Second World War, he was imprisoned by the Japanese. He moved back to the Netherlands in 1948.<sup>25</sup> In the photographic books he published about the Indies between 1937 and 1983,<sup>26</sup> no room is devoted to any event that occurred after the Japanese invasion in 1942. He writes in one of his introductions:

With the capitulation of 8 March 1942 Tempo Doeloe was definitively over. What came *after*, the concentration camps, the chaos after liberation, the police actions, none is part of it. You will not find anything about it in this book.<sup>27</sup>

One explanation for the omission of the post-invasion period is that it contained too many painful memories: the situation in the Japanese camps, the fact that Buitengeweg had to give up his career, that he like so many others was forced to go to the Netherlands, and the loss of home and possibly family and friends may all have caused his reticence. Another reason, however, could be that what happened after the Japanese invasion fundamentally contradicted the image that he created in his books, namely that of a depoliticised land with a docile population that lived happily under the *pax neerlandica*.<sup>28</sup> In fact, Buitengeweg's work as a whole can be read precisely as a response to the upheaval of his beloved Indies, not only because of decolonisation, but also because of the rise of Indonesian nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century.

Buitengeweg was a highly popular author among immigrants and repatriates from the Indies, particularly among the readers of the magazine *Tong Tong* (1958-1978) which was made by and focused on *Indische* Dutch. He published frequently and is still occasionally mentioned in *Moesson*, the new name of *Tong Tong* since 1978. Even after his death in 1983 his name continued to appear regularly in the magazine and, when he died, Lilian Ducelle commemorated him by writing: 'With Hein Buitengeweg our eldest and last narrator about the Indies has passed away. And with Hein the romantic, charming Indies as we knew them have gone'.<sup>29</sup>

Currently Buitengeweg's oeuvre is slowly disappearing from sight. The last print of one of his books dates from 1985, and of a 1992 anthology of his work<sup>30</sup> the electronic database Picarta says that it is a nice collection, yet 'nevertheless primarily for old Indies-customers'.<sup>31</sup> However, in 2002 *Moesson* wrote that the maker of the photo website [www.indischalbum.nl](http://www.indischalbum.nl) was 'inspired by Rob Nieuwenhuys [135] and Hein Buitengeweg's unforgettable photograph books', which suggests that he has not been entirely forgotten.<sup>32</sup>

## Buitengeweg's Work in the Colonial Period

In Buitengeweg's work, photographs are both windows on the world and images to look at rather than through. The viewer is both invited to become absorbed and to see the Indies as standing on a theatre stage with the effect that immersion is no longer possible. Buitengeweg's first book *Djawa Dwipa: Wandering through Java with the Rolleiflex* (1937) contains one hundred pages and fifty-five photographs, all taken by Buitengeweg himself, and is just as much a photograph book as a textbook.<sup>33</sup> With more than twenty photographs each, images of the Javanese in their villages and of nature make up the largest categories, followed by images of Hindu-Buddhist and old European buildings. According to Buitengeweg, 'Djawa Dwipa' is the name that the Hindus gave to Java. With this first part of his title he places himself in a longer tradition of Europeans who saw the Indies, and especially Java, as essentially Hindu-Buddhist. This conception points to a conservative frame of time in which the Javanese were positioned outside history. However, Hindu-Buddhism in the book is also seen as a past phase in the history of the island. All in all, *Djawa Dwipa* has a double perspective on the Javanese: on the one hand as eternal, and on the other as in time but lagging behind.

In all cases, the Javanese inhabit different times and spaces than Buitengeweg himself, showing the book's impulse to maintain a colonial and racial order that was in fact under threat of a

politicising Indonesian nationalist movement. Indeed, when *Djawa Dwipa* was published in 1937, Dutch colonial politics, in a strong conservative move, had turned away from ‘ethical policy’, the Dutch variant of the British white man’s burden which had aimed at raising the Native population and modernizing it after the Western example.<sup>34</sup> This move was largely induced by the rise of Indonesian nationalism. Only a year before the publication of the book, for instance, the regent of Bandoeng Raden Adipati Ario Wiranatakoesoema said that the number of ‘conscious’ Natives was growing quickly, while in the *Volksraad* (the People’s Council in which Natives also had seats but which had no effective political power) the so-called Soetardjo petition was submitted asking for the independence of the Indies within a period of ten years’ time.<sup>35</sup> Both events indicate that the Natives were not as timeless or backward as Buitenweg’s book and photographs suggested them to be.

Hindu-Buddhism had been strongly present on the island from at least the eighth to the sixteenth century, and many remnants from that time, including the famous temple of Borobudur, could still be found on the island and had caught the attention of Europeans since the late eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> The Hindu-Buddhist ‘layer’ of Javanese history, in one constellation, was considered to be the island’s core, a conception that was reinforced by the fact that most temples and [136] artifacts such as statues were found in Java’s soil under thick layers of forest and earth. Dutch commentators referred regularly to this period as ‘Javanese antiquity’. Important effects of this perspective were that the contemporary Muslim population was seen as a superficial layer that did not ‘belong’ to Java, and that therefore Java could be placed outside historical development and politics.<sup>37</sup> In *Djawa Dwipa*, Islam is mentioned only once and in a derogatory manner when Buitenweg calls a mosque he photographed ‘not impressive in terms of architectural beauty’ (Figure 1).<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as will be shown, the question of time and who is inside and outside it is a central issue running throughout the book.<sup>39</sup>

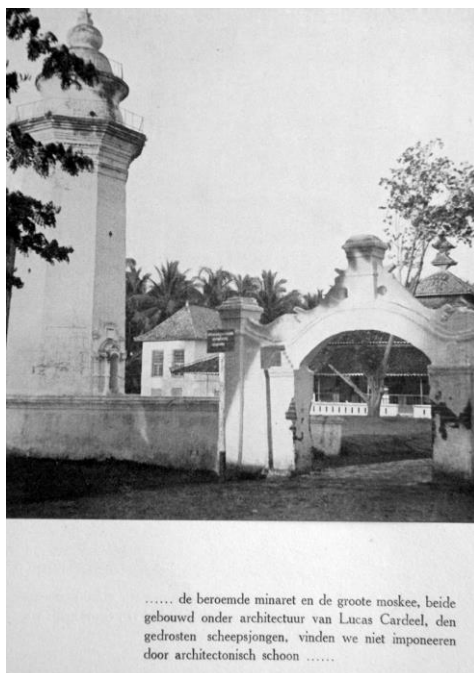


Figure 1 Hein Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 14

Six photographs in the book feature Hindu-Buddhist buildings. Halfway through the text, Buitenweg describes a trip he made to what he calls 'the heart of old Java', being Central Java where 'old' cities such as Jogjakarta and Solo lay as well as the already famous temples of Borobudur and Prambanan as well as the Dieng [137] plateau. This trip, in other words, led not only to a certain place but also to a certain time through the collapse of spatial and temporal boundaries. Paradoxically, this journey to the past is undertaken with an iconic modern machine, namely the train. On the train, Buitenweg prepares his readers for a transition from modern to ancient times when describing the passing landscape with rice fields that formed terraces up against the mountains as an amphitheatre, thereby placing Java in 1937 psychologically in line with European antiquity.

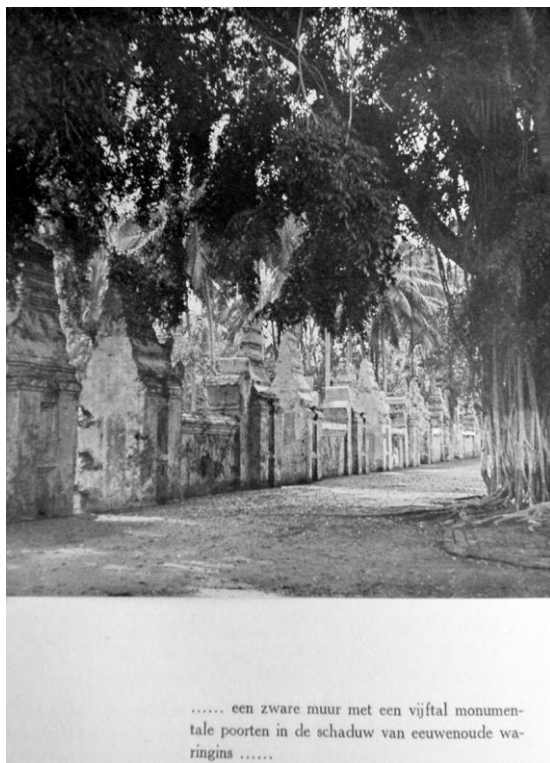


Figure 2 Hein Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 15

As the presence of the train already indicates, Java was not placed entirely outside time. This can also be seen in the second part of Buitenweg's title (*Wandering through Java with the Rolleiflex*) which introduces a temporal dimension connected to walking from one place of interest to the next, and another piece of modern technology, namely the camera. A primary effect of the oxymoron of the historical development of eternal Java is that the island is fading. Java's rulers are said to have been long deceased, their graveyards are old, while the ancient walls are tumbling down. The image created here is that of an enduring Javanese essence [138] still present in the landscape, buildings and people, but accompanied by a sense that they were at the same time more the echoes, the shadows of this core.



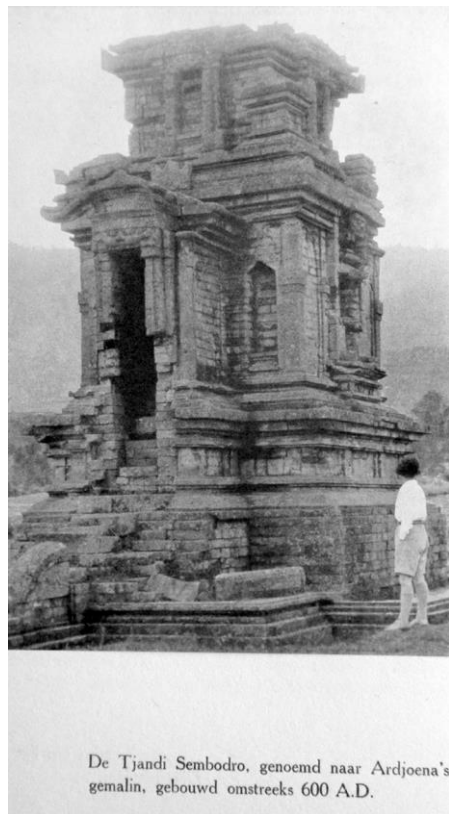


Figure 3 Hein Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 65

This tension between timelessness and being in time also returns in the photographs and the texts that surround them. The captions of the photographs of Hindu-Buddhist monuments often emphasise eternity: the walls are heavy, the gates monumental, the trees next to them centuries old,<sup>40</sup> and the graves consecrated.<sup>41</sup> Yet the photographs themselves do not show these monuments in a monumental, but rather in a colloquial manner. For instance, a photograph of ‘five monumental gates in the shadow of centuries old waringins [trees]’<sup>42</sup> does not have a frontal, but a sideways perspective, as if taken while the photographer walked past it (Figure 2). This frames these buildings as belonging to the everyday of the wandering tourist. A photograph of the temple Tjandi Sembodro, also taken sideways, has a man in Western outdoor clothes standing in front of it, a *mise en scène* which turns the temple into an object of contemporary Western tourism (Figure 3).<sup>43</sup> In these photographs, a third temporal space is produced in which two space-times (modernity and antiquity) can meet without fusing. This [139] makes it possible for the tourist to experience older times or even timelessness, while the status quo is maintained.

Throughout the book, ‘modern’ elements are kept out of sight. While cars, electric light and machine guns had been introduced to the Dutch East Indies well before 1937,<sup>44</sup> here the ships have sails, the fire is made with wood, and the lamps burn oil. In fact, the only piece of modern technical equipment in the book is the one that simultaneously made the book possible and quite effectively hides itself, namely the Rolleiflex. The Rolleiflex is a twin-lens reflex camera, with two objective lenses. One of the lenses is the photographic objective (the lens through which the picture is taken), while the other is used for the viewfinder system. The two objectives are connected, so that the focus shown on the screen will be exactly the same as on the film. The photographer does not hold the camera in front of his eye, but at waist height and can alternate

his gaze between the camera and the object or person to be photographed. Buitengeweg explicitly acknowledges the fact that he wanted to hide his camera from the person photographed: 'It takes a fair amount of cunning patience to take a photograph here and there without being noticed'.<sup>45</sup> He approaches the Javanese as shy animals whose temporal habitat would be destroyed by this moment of 'first encounter' with modernity.

In the book's introduction, there is already a productive tension between, on the one hand, Java as a liminal space between time and eternity and, on the other hand, the presence of Europeans and European time frames on the island. The first photograph of the book is vertically oriented: the upper section shows the leaves of a tree and the sky, the middle shows a river with boats and, at the bottom of the picture, a boy who is fishing (Figure 4). There is a tension between looking at the boy and, because we are looking over his shoulder, looking with the boy. This perspective allows the observer to simultaneously empathise with the boy and look down on him, be proximate to him yet distanced from him.<sup>46</sup> The photograph is a *pars pro toto* for the book as a whole in which Java is simultaneously brought close and put at a distance, leading to a paternalistic perspective. The caption is 'Rest ...', which functions at several levels at the same time. At the indexical level it suggests that the boy and the boats are not in a hurry and that, even though one of the boats is moving, it is not speeding. As an icon of Java the photograph suggests that the whole of the island is stagnant. The peacefulness of Java, Buitengeweg writes a few pages later, stands in contrast to the hurried temporal experience in contemporary Europe: 'Because this land [Java] has a dazzling beauty for those [...] who want to avoid the drag of everyday life, for those who want to break free from the pressure of malaise and war rumours and degeneration.'<sup>47</sup> Nostalgia, here, applies in the first instance to the never-to-be-reached European future (Huysen's 'present future'). Its cure is the present past of the colonies. [140]



Figure 4 Hein Buitengeweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite V

Nostalgia of the kind still encountered in the Netherlands today was already an integral part of Dutch colonialism in the late-colonial era. This is important because it shows that decolonisation was not the founding moment of Dutch colonial nostalgia, a nostalgia that should not be interpreted as primarily one for empire, but for racially and culturally homogenous space-times. What *Djawa Dwipa* also shows, moreover, is the strong ambiguity and reflectivity in Dutch colonial nostalgia, aspects that come even more to the fore in Buitenweg's postcolonial work.

## Buitenweg's Work in the Postcolonial Period

Buitenweg's postcolonial books do not seek to restore the colonial period in the Indies in a straightforward manner, nor are their photographs positioned as [141] straightforward indices of the colonial era. The titles, first of all, acknowledge the role of the rememberer in the remembrance, and have the first reflective moments: *Batavia As We Knew It* (and not *Batavia as It Was*), *What We Took Into Our Heart* (and not *What Was There*) and *Java: Dream and Remembrance* (and not *Java: Fact and History*). In a way, writing about remembrance is inherently reflective ('I remember that I remember'),<sup>48</sup> but Buitenweg's titles make this reflection more explicit. In his 1959 *Java: Dream and Remembrance*, Buitenweg writes about his photographs:

Where did I take them? To be honest I often don't know myself exactly anymore. But does it really matter? Is it really important that I took exactly *that* road where you sauntered or *that* eating-house where you so often stood watching? And that my bridge – *my* wife never crossed it without any hesitation whatsoever – is the same as the one that always scared *your* better half? After all, they *could* be...<sup>49</sup>

Buitenweg's project is not aimed at giving an impression of his own personal memories and history, but at creating a mnemonic community. The introduction of *Java* is directed at Dutch people who have lived in the Indies and who want to remember this period and tell their children and grandchildren about it. The photographs, though based on Buitenweg's personal experience, do not only act as proof for a past reality, but as places of social encounter.

After *Java*'s introduction, Buitenweg starts the book as follows:

Christmas 1958

It so happens that now that I am starting this book it is Christmas day and while I was typing the date I was thinking of how in the old Indies, especially on days like these and more than usual, we used to think of Holland and how images which have since become realities for us were crowding our mind.<sup>50</sup>

He then describes a Dutch scene of Christmas bells, singing through cities and villages, and snow covering Dutch roofs, fields and roads. Back in the Netherlands, Buitenweg admits to having a more sober response than the longing he had back then in the Indies. Now, however, he is looking towards the Indies: 'Like Then in the glowing East to the radiating winter cold, Now our longing goes out to the country of eternal sunshine'.<sup>51</sup> He discusses a painting in his house which he had only to glance at briefly 'to be there again' and gives a short description in the present tense of an Indonesian landscape. He continues: 'And again I have wandered

through the country of my youth and my adulthood when in the weeks before Christmas I made a selection for this book from the hundreds of photographs that I am lucky to still possess'.<sup>52</sup>

[142]

*Java*, a book with memories of the Indies, thus starts with the description of a Dutch winter landscape, and by remarking how in the Indies one thinks of the Netherlands and vice versa. Being either in one place or the other necessarily entails a missed experience, and once one has arrived in the longed for place, the images one had turn out to be richly embellished. Moreover, just as it was images which made it possible to experience the Netherlands in the Indies, so too do the painting and the hundreds of photographs lead back to the Indies. The description of the Indonesian landscape in the present tense is ambiguous as it could be a description of that landscape, of Buitenweg's recollection of it, of the painting, or of his recollection of the painting. By emphasizing missed experience, the difference between observation and memory, and mediation, Buitenweg's book reflects on itself and creates distance. It 'delays the homecoming', in Boym's terms, even though this homecoming is exactly what it seeks to facilitate.

An important element in this co-existence of proximity and distance is fictionalization. Even in *Djawa Dwipa* fiction is strongly present, for instance when Buitenweg describes a dream he had. In *Java*, after the opening pages, the rest of the first chapter is framed as fiction, with Buitenweg suggesting a 'melantjong' (Indonesian for a stroll) to his readers:

But let us finally melantjong now that the day is still young and the world fresher than ever. Because right there is a side path that simply lures you away from the dusty road. [...] And over the bamboo bridge [...] I follow the man who strolls across it under his broad-brimmed sun hat.<sup>53</sup>

Readers are invited to enter the possible world of 'Java' through the semiotic channel offered by *Java*. With the help of deictic elements such as 'right there' they can transport themselves in their imagination to the world created by Buitenweg, which emerges through a photograph of a man with a sun hat crossing a bridge. The rest of the chapter is structured around the promised stroll, with each of its twenty-two photographs positioned as an important step in it. It becomes clear that it describes a fictional world when Buitenweg tells a story from his youth to a water buffalo he meets on the way, which starts laughing at it. A few pages later, his Rolleiflex starts talking to him. Reading Buitenweg and viewing his photographs is moving between immersion in the possible world that is the Indies, and reflecting on them as a possible world.

In their depiction of a nostalgic place and time where all races still knew their place, Buitenweg's colonial and postcolonial photograph books are in several ways ambiguous, and knowingly so. The uncertain times in which he wrote, in which the loss of the Indies was both a threat and a source of homesickness, invited a double perspective on the Native world: one where it was looked down upon as lagging behind in time, and one where it was desired and mourned as its stability was imagined to have the capacity to steady a drifting modern society. It [143] is this combination of a longing for order (with possibly dire real-world consequences, for nostalgia is far from innocent) and a subtle irony which postpones the homecoming and shows awareness of its fictitious quality which is so often encountered in Dutch colonial nostalgia.

## Conclusion: Nostalgia across Decolonisation

The Dutch hardly yearn back to their empire. Certainly, imperial nostalgia – that is, as opposed to colonial nostalgia, a nostalgia to a time when the nation ruled the waves and had large overseas territories – does exist, for instance in a remark made by former Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende that the Dutch should recapture their ‘VOC-mentality’, a reference to the Dutch East India Company. Yet what Paul Gilroy has shown to be the case for Britain, namely that a melancholia for empire is still strongly present in national culture, is much less true in the Netherlands, where Dutch colonisation has long been distinguished from British and French colonialism in particular because of the Dutch lack of power play and surplus of modesty and carefulness. These Dutch self-conceptions can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when small scale and even mediocrity were installed as essential national virtues.<sup>54</sup>

Decolonisation, therefore, did produce nostalgia for those Dutch who lost the country they grew up in and inhabited, but it cannot account for Dutch colonial nostalgia in society as a whole. This nostalgia has more to do with the transition experienced as a result of globalization processes, European integration, and migration, which are seen as threats to an imaginary Dutch national identity. Just as is the case in Buitenweg’s work, it is precisely the threat of instability, loss and a sea change in society which prompts nostalgia to a more ordered imaginary past. Current fantasies of an integrated, homogenous and white society should therefore be traced back to the colonial period when everybody supposedly knew their place: the Natives in the present past of the Indies, the Europeans in the present future of the Netherlands.

Moreover, as in Buitenweg’s case, attempts to restore colonial times and simultaneous reflections on the fictional element of these attempts can often be encountered in contemporary Dutch colonial nostalgia. During the parliamentary session in which Martin Bosma suggested the return of the Colonial Museum, politician Boris van der Ham from the liberal party D66 mockingly urged Bosma to use his last thirty seconds of allotted speaking time to utter ‘One more term of abuse!’ (‘Nog één scheldwoord!’). This is indicative of some of the responses to the PVV, namely a tendency not to take their contributions too seriously, but to point out their fantastic quality. Dutch colonial nostalgia is full of overtly fantastic elements like these. A few years ago, Moesson advertised its new calendar with colonial photographs with the slogan ‘Now even more nostalgic!’ A nostalgia that identifies itself as such is inherently self-reflective and acknowledges its fictionality. [144] In the Dutch amusement park *De Efteling*, visitors can go on a VOC-roller coaster ride (The Flying Dutchman), summoning nostalgia for a more adventurous colonial past when Dutchmen set out to sail the seas, between walking through a fairy tale forest and entering the haunted castle: all three are imaginary worlds. These are all indications that a return to the colonial period is not seen as a viable step, and responses that do not take into account this acknowledged fantastic element miss the point. On the other hand, colonial nostalgia in the Netherlands has many real effects, such as the desire for homogeneity expressed in the continued use of the words ‘allochtoon’ and ‘autochtoon’ and the ‘burqa ban’, for example. Critical analyses of this nostalgia will have to take both its fictionality and its troubling, material effects into account.

## Notes

1. I want to thank the peer reviewers for their valuable comments on an earlier version of this article. I also want to thank Carmen Ramos Villar, Jenny Watson and an earlier, anonymous commentator of this article for helping me with my English and at various points with the argument. Having said this, all mistakes and errors in this article are mine. Despite my efforts, I have unfortunately not succeeded in reaching the copyright holder(s) of the photographs of Hein Buitenweg.
2. Key publications for each of these countries include Vicent Viaene, David van Reybrouck and Bambi Ceuppens (eds), *Congo in België: Koloniale cultuur in de metropool* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2009); Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1998); Helma Lutz and Kathrin Gawarecki (eds), *Kolonialismus und Erinnerungskultur: die Kolonialvergangenheit im kollektiven Gedächtnis der deutschen und niederländischen Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (Münster: Waxmann, 2005); Gert Oostindie, *Postkoloniaal Nederland: vijftenzestig jaar vergeten, herdenken, verdringen* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010). See also Paul Bijl, 'Colonial Memory and Forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia', in *Journal of Genocide Research* 14.3-4 (2012), 441-61; Paul Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming).
3. Gerard Reve, *Nader tot U* (Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot, 1966), p. 135: 'jenever [...] als water, gratis en voor niets', 'Inlanders wisten hun plaats', 'Er was nog echte hartelijkheid en liefde'. Unless otherwise mentioned, translations are my own.
4. In Dutch these three legal categories were 'Europeanen', 'Inlanders', and 'Vreemde Oosterlingen'.
5. Lizzy van Leeuwen, *Ons Indisch erfgoed: zestig jaar strijd om cultuur en identiteit* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008); Sarah de Mul, *Colonial Memory: Contemporary Women's Travel Writing in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011). On tempo doeloe culture, see also Pamela Pattynama, '(Un)happy Endings: Nostalgia in Postimperial and Postmemory Dutch Films', in *The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism, Multiculturalism*, ed. by Elleke Boehmer and Sarah de Mul (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), pp. 97-122. [145]
6. On nostalgia as a work of mourning, see Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist Nostalgia', in *Representations* 26 (1989), pp. 107-22.
7. This paragraph's title is derived from Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
8. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 10.
9. Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).
10. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 11.
11. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 60.
12. Boym, *Future of Nostalgia*, p. 10.
13. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

14. Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', in *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 123-33.
15. E. Breton de Nijs, *Tempo doeloe: fotografische documenten uit het oude Indië 1870-1914* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1961); Hein Buitenweg, *De laatste tempo doeloe* (Den Haag: Servire, 1964).
16. Hein Buitenweg, *Op Java staat een huis* (Den Haag: Servire, 1960): 'als herinnering aan TEMPO DOELOE'.
17. *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, 10 June 1913: 'Residenten op de buitenbezittingen wanen zich wel eens op de Olympus, toegerust met de macht om over alles en nog wat te beschikken. Tegenwoordig is dat wat minder geworden dan in de goede dagen van tempo doeloe, toen het maanden kon duren eer men hier kennis kreeg van hetgeen er ginds gebeurd was.'
18. *Het Vaderland*, 30 July 1921: 'Men vergete niet, dat het niet meer is het Indië van "tempo doeloe", het land van eenzaamheid, plantenleven en wat nog meer. Indië is in de laatste tien jaren absoluut veranderd, zoodat het leven bijv. te Bandoeng al heel weinig verschilt met dat van het leven hier.'
19. *Het Vaderland*, 11 October 1930: 'tjigers, panters en andere wilde dieren'.
20. *Het Vaderland*, 12 September 1939: 'In Indië keert tempo doeloe terug', 'weer echte "tropen" worden'.
21. Rosaldo, 'Imperialist Nostalgia', p. 108.
22. See for instance an article by Henri Borel in *Het Vaderland* of 14 December 1930.
23. Rob Nieuwenhuys, 'Maurits: Romancier van Tempo Doeloe', in *Groot Nederland* 37.2 (1939), pp. 201-37.
24. Nieuwenhuys, 'Maurits', p. 207: 'voor ons een nuance [...] van gemoedelijkheid en waardering ... ondanks alles', 'Maar zodra we trachten het begrip "tempo doeloe" theoretisch te bepalen, dan blijkt het elastisch te zijn en elke nadere begrenzing schijnt willekeurig. Waarom zou men de tijd van de V.O.C. niet onder "tempo doeloe" rekenen? en waarom bijvoorbeeld wel de tachtiger en negentiger jaren en niet de tijd van Multatuli? waarom wel de pruikentijd en niet het begin van de twintigste eeuw?'
25. See René Wassing and Rita Wassing-Visser (eds), *Ahoeh, Indië! Het beste van Hein Buitenweg* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Atrium, 1992). In an article in *Moesson* from 1983 it is stated that Buitenweg was initially in the Indies from his seventh to his sixteenth year, that he [146] worked for the Batavian Oil Company and began a career in education in the 1930s. See *Moesson* 27.19 (1983), p. 3.
26. Two books were published when the colony was still (officially) in place, in 1937 and 1947 respectively, and fourteen between 1956 and 1983.
27. Buitenweg, *Laatste tempo doeloe*, p. 7: 'Met de capitulatie op 8 maart 1942 kwam in wezen het definitieve einde van Tempo Doeloe. Wat daarna kwam, de concentratiekampen, de chaos na de bevrijding, de politieke acties, dat alles maakt er geen deel meer van uit. U zult er in dit boek niets over vinden.'
28. Frank van Vree, "'Onze gemartelde bruid": De Japanse bezetting van Indonesië in Nederlandse films en documentaires', in *Beelden van de Japanse bezetting van Indonesië: persoonlijke getuigenissen en publieke beeldvorming in Indonesië, Japan en Nederland*, ed. by Remco Raben (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999).
29. *Moesson* 27.19 (1983), p. 3: 'Met Hein Buitenweg is onze oudste en laatste verteller over Indië heengegaan. En met Hein het romantische, lieflijke Indië zoals wij het gekend hebben.'

30. Wassing and Wassing-Visser, Ahoeh Indië.
31. <[www.picarta.nl](http://www.picarta.nl)>, retrieved on 1 February 2012.
32. Moesson 47.6 (2002), p. 7: '[g]ïnspireerd door de onvergetelijke fotoboeken van Hein Buitenweg en Rob Nieuwenhuys'.
33. Hein Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa: zwerftochten door Java met de Rolleiflex* (Bandoeng: Nix, 1937). It was reprinted in 1947 and 1966 as *Zwerftochten door Java*.
34. On ethical policy and photography, see Susie Protschky (ed.), *Camera Ethica: Lenses on the Ethical Policy in Late Colonial Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming), Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, *Ethiek in fragmenten: Vijf studies over koloniaal denken en doen van Nederlanders in de Indonesische archipel, 1877-1942* (Utrecht: HES, 1981).
35. H.W. van den Doel, *Het rijk van Insulinde: opkomst en ondergang van een Nederlandse kolonie* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1996), p. 247, p. 250 and p. 253.
36. Pauline Lunsing Scheurleer, 'Collecting Javanese Antiquities: The Appropriation of a Newly Discovered Hindu-Buddhist Civilization', in *Colonial Collections Revisited*, ed. by Pieter ter Keurs (Leiden: CNWS, 2007).
37. For more on the politics of time in the Indies see Paul Bijl, 'Old, Eternal, and Future Light in the Dutch East Indies: Colonial Photography and the History of the Globe', in *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, ed. by Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 49-65.
38. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 14: 'vinden we niet imponeeren door architectonisch schoon'.
39. On this temporal positioning, see also Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. 178-85; Nancy Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscripting the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 22-30.
40. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 15.
41. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 57.
42. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 15: 'een vijftal monumentale poorten in de schaduw van eeuwenoude waringins'.
43. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. opposite 65. [147]
44. See Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
45. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, p. 14: 'Er behoort een groote mate van listig geduld toe om hier en daar ongemerkt een foto te nemen.'
46. On the paradox of empathy and distance in Dutch 'ethical policy', see Susan Legêne, 'Enlightenment, Empathy, Retreat: the Cultural Heritage of the Ethische Politiek', in *Colonial Collections Revisited*, ed. by Pieter ter Keurs (Leiden: CNWS, 2007), pp. 220-45.
47. Buitenweg, *Djawa Dwipa*, pp. VII-VIII: 'Want dit land is van een verbijsterende schoonheid voor wie [...] niet onder willen gaan in de sleur van het alledagsleven, voor wie zich willen ontworstelen aan dien druk van malaise en oorlogsgerucht en verwildering.'



48. See Luisa Passerini, 'Memories between Silence and Oblivion', in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, eds. by Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 238-54.
49. Hein Buitenweg, *Java: Droom en herinnering* (Den Haag: Servire, 1959), p. 11: 'Waar ik ze maakte? Eerlijk gezegd weet ik dat zelf dikwijls niet precies meer. Maar doet het er eigenlijk wat toe? Komt het er véél op aan of ik nu werkelijk dát weggetje nam waarlangs U zo graag melantjongde, of dát waronkje waar U zo dikwijls voor hebt staan kijken? En of mijn brugje – ook mijn vrouw ging er nooit helemaal zonder schroom overheen – hetzelfde is waar Uw betere helft wat bang voor was? Overigens zouden ze het ook best kúnnen zijn...'
50. Buitenweg, *Java*, p. 13: 'Kerstmis 1958 / Het toeval wil dat het eerste kerstdag is nu ik aan dit boek begin, en terwijl ik deze tijdsaanduiding hierboven tik, denk ik eraan hoe wij vroeger in het oude Indië juist op dagen als deze méér dan anders met onze gedachten in Holland waren en beelden die nú werkelijkheid voor ons zijn geworden, zich toen in onze geest verdrongen.'
51. Buitenweg, *Java*, p. 15: 'Zoals Toen in het gloeiende Oosten naar de stralende winterkou gaat Nu ons verlangen uit naar het land van de eeuwige zonnebrand.'
52. Buitenweg, *Java*, p. 17: 'En ik heb weer door het land van mijn jeugd en van mijn volwassenheid gezworven toen ik de weken vóór Kerstmis uit de honderden foto's die ik zo gelukkig ben nog te bezitten een keus deed voor dit boek.'
53. Buitenweg, *Java*, p. 19: 'Maar laten we nu toch eindelijk heus eens gaan melantjongen, nu de dag nog jong is en de wereld frisser dan ooit. Want daar heb je weer een zijpaadje dat je gewoonweg van de stoffige weg af lokt. [...] En over het bamboebrugje [...] volg ik de man die daar onder zijn breedgerande hoed overheen slentert.'
54. See: Gert-Jan Johannes, *Lof der aalbessen: over (Noord-)Nederlandse literatuurtheorie, literatuur en consequenties van kleinschaligheid 1770-1830* (Den Haag: Sdu, 1997); Frances Gouda, 'A Cunning David amidst the Goliaths of Empire: Dutch Colonial Practice in the Indonesian Archipelago', in *Dutch Culture Overseas*, ed. by Frances Gouda (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), pp. 39-74.

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