

A PERFORMANCE FOR DINNER

Dining Culture and Colonial Identity in
the Dutch East Indies, 1880-1910.

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ABSTRACT: When photography arrived in the Dutch East Indies in the middle of the 19th century, European colonists embraced the medium to immortalise impressions of colonial life. By studying photographs produced by European colonists in the Dutch East Indies, this article examines dining culture as an arena of colonist regulation, construction and maintenance of colonist identity through visual and material performances and practices from approximately 1880 to 1920.

The article argues that colonists upheld clear cultural and social separation from the colonised through dining practices which highlighted the European material culture around the dining table and gentile sensibilities modeled after the ideals of Victorian gentility in the colonial metropole. The complete social segregation and rejection of cultural assimilation that is evident in the examined photographs, served to maintain colonists' European identity and exclusive positions of power in colonial society.

The medium of photography enabled colonists to perpetuate, reinforce, and preserve the captured messages of colonist idealized life and superiority, as the photographs were continually shared in both private and public European spheres.

Keywords: Dutch East Indies, the Netherlands, photography, dining culture, colonial identity



Introduction

After the initial spread of photography as a medium in 1839, colonial authorities brought the technology from the Western world to European colonies such as the Dutch East Indies in the early 1840s. Soon, photography became accessible to the colonial elites who quickly took to the medium as a way to immortalise everything from large events to their daily lives, industrial production and architecture to landscapes and nature photography, as well as family gatherings, social practices, and material culture. As European colonists snapped away, they produced formidable collections of photographs, many of which were circulated among family and friends, between the colony and metropole, and kept safe in family albums. Today, a considerable number of them have been published for all to see, although others are likely still held in private collections.

A number of researchers have recently engaged with expressions of colonist identity, colonial visual culture, and colonial life as represented through the medium of photography. Notably, there has been studies into photography produced in colonial Southeast Asia covering a variety of fields such as architecture (Achmadi 2014), nature and outdoor spaces (Protschky 2008), archaeology (Bijl 2009), plantation life (Minansny 2023), domestic life (Protschky 2012), soldier's amateur photographs (Protschky 2020), and Aboriginal imprisonment (Lydon, 2010). The role which photography plays in these studies is both that of a source as to what is depicted, but also as a tool which use and effect on both the colonised and the coloniser, then and today, should be examined.

This article will examine the colonial table as an arena of colonist regulation, of what it meant to be Dutch European, and how Dutch colonist identities were constructed and maintained through visual and material performances and practices thought of as essentially "European" in a timeframe focused on approximately 1880 to 1920. By examining photographic depictions of Dutch colonist life in the Dutch East Indies, the article argues that colonists constructed their identity by upholding clear cultural and social separation from the colonized. The colonial dining table was one arena

where colonist identity was clearly expressed and regulated through demonstrations of a performative dining culture highlighting European material culture and genteel sensibilities modeled after the ideals of Victorian gentility in the colonial metropol.

European Colonists in the Dutch East Indies

In the beginning of the 16th century, the first Europeans arrived an area in Southeast Asia located within the borders of what is today the Republic of Indonesia. The first Portuguese traders were searching for spice growers, and the English and Dutch were not far behind. In the year 1602, the Dutch East India Company was established, which quickly cemented the Dutch as the dominant European power for the following 200 years. When the company went bankrupt and was dissolved in 1799, the government of the Netherlands took control and established the Dutch East Indies as a nationalised colony. The colony was extraordinarily valuable to the Dutch government particularly due to the generation of large profits from trade. Through exploitative labour, the colony produced spices and cash crops and later coal and oil, which enriched the Dutch colonial elite.

Dutch control of the colony was regularly challenged throughout the colonial period. Throughout the years, the Dutch colonial forces, the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army was continuously deployed in colonial wars to suppress various rebellions around the colony. Only in the beginning of the 20th century were the Dutch able to expand the area of the colony to cover the territory of Indonesia as it is today. Dutch control of the colony ended when the Japanese invasion and occupation during World War II resulted in the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence in August of 1945. The Dutch government contested independence leading to the Indonesian National Revolution which finally ended, as the Dutch succumbed to international pressured and recognised Indonesian independence in December 1949.

The colonial governing elite was usually comprised not only of nationals from the particular European colonial power which claimed sovereignty over the territory, but also a variation of other European nationals. This was the case in colonies across the globe as well as in the Dutch East Indies. Colonist identity was therefore not so much divided into different nationalities. Instead, all Europeans subscribed to the same identity as European colonists first, with nationality coming

second. Thus, in regard to colonists' identities, the European identity is in the majority of greater importance or synonymous with the colonists' national identity.

The identity produced through colonial photographs was based on the projection of perceived cultural and racial essences (Maxwell 2000: 9). To be considered as 'European' was not merely a question of identifying with a certain race or culture. A true European were delineated by their adherence to certain principles. According to Ann Stoler, racial membership was constructed and maintained through adherence to "middle-class morality, nationalist sentiments, bourgeois sensibilities, normalised sexuality, and a carefully circumscribed "milieu"..." (Stoler 1995: 105). Deviating could therefore result in demonization by the metropole, as was seen of impoverished and mixed-race colonials. This also allowed for the acceptance of sexual double standards in the colonies, as European identity itself was gender coded (Maxwell 2000: 7). To stray from these principles would therefore not only be considered an abandonment of polite social customs, but also mean the loss of one's European identity, social standing, and material privileges. Maintaining their European identity with all that included, was thus essential to European colonists in the Dutch East Indies.

Photography in a Colonial Setting

When Photography initially spread as a medium, it was practically exclusively accessible to an elite community of white, upper middle class men in the Western world. Europeans employed by colonial authorities immediately brought the technology to European colonies such as the Dutch East Indies in the early 1840s. Photography was a craft demanding technical skills, chemical knowledge, understanding of mechanical apparatuses, and special staging techniques. Thus, entry into the field was barred by the required specialist training and financial investment, meaning that access to photography was a privilege for those who could afford to pay the associated fees. In the Dutch East Indies, those with the means to pay were generally European planters and officials, Javanese aristocrats, and Chinese entrepreneurs (Protschky 2015: 12-13). By the end of the 19th century, however, photography had undergone a stage of democratisation whereby it had become more accessible among new social groups such as women, members of the working classes as well as some colonial elites and ethnic minorities (Maxwell 2000: 9). These engaged with the creation of

photographs at both ends of the camera lens. Consequently, photography had become a differentiated and widely distributed medium found in both high and popular cultures (Protschky 2015: 13).

Colonial photography worked to maintain and reproduce the racial stereotypes that assisted European colonialism. Colonial exhibitions were popular sites of cultural production and knowledge dissemination in the metropole. Through visual representation, they catered to both European adventure-seekers and tourists eager to gain insight into the colonial experience (Maxwell 2000: 9). Photography was regarded as accurate evidence of actions and events occurring at the imperial outskirts. Thus, the photographic representations of people and objects in the colonies served as one of the main sources to colonial life (Maxwell 2000: 7).

The photographs, which could be seen at exhibitions, tended to fall within propagandistic ideals to a greater degree than the general photographic production. Images brought back from the colonies depicting more personal scenes leaned more towards accurate reality (Dujardin 2007: 13). These could often be found in private collections. Both types of photographs spanned a wide variety of genres, from anthropological displays of colonised peoples to exhibitions of colonial architecture, images of impressive natural landscapes, and domestic colonist life.

Photography became an important tool in the new science of the day, the 'scientific' study of the human races. A quantity of photographs including anatomical measurements were used to record the physical characteristics and anatomies of colonised peoples so that they could be studied and categorised by European scientists. Furthermore, European anthropologists showed great interest in studying and preserving cultural artefacts and social practices, which also included photography. These studies classified indigenous populations in areas colonised by Europeans as so-called primitive doomed races. They were systematically depicted and interpreted according to reductive generalised tropes, as unable to progress, and in essence untouched by the modern colonial process despite the efforts of white colonists (Maxwell 2000: 10). In the end, the classification and study of human races granted legitimacy to further colonial expansion and contributed to the perception of the colonised as inferior and stagnant, doomed to be left behind at an earlier stage of human evolution by the civilised Europe (Dujardin 2007: 9-11). However, photography in colonial settings

were not only concerned with documenting indigenous peoples, but also the colonists themselves. It was also essential to record the daily lives of the colonists, the colonial forces, and colonists' interactions with local indigenous populations (Dujardin 2007: 9).

It is important to recognise that not all photographs represented and reproduced the same colonial theories, stereotypes, and ideologies. Indeed, a small minority of photographers produced images focused on the colonised and empowerment of indigenous peoples (Maxwell 2000: 9). Even so, most photographs produced in a colonial setting empowered Europeans by upholding the binary opposition of European civility and indigenous savagery. Thus, photography also influenced the development and maintenance of European identity in a colonial context. Through the medium of photography, the image of the faraway 'Other' could be captured, frozen, and disseminated. In this way, photography contributed to the generalised perception in Europe of non-European lands as fundamentally 'other'. This relationship with the colonised and subjugated, and thereby inherently inferior, 'other' played a part in European perception and self-regard (Dujardin 2007: 9).

Using Photography as Source

In order to understand and interpret colonial photography, it is essential to grasp that a large quantity of photographs were produced not just according to the photographer's vision but additionally to the demands of the colonial cause of expansion, economic gain, and perceived racial and cultural supremacy (Dujardin 2007: 62).

Two important aspects must be considered with regards to the context in which colonial images were produced in order to better understand and interpret them. First, all photographs have been produced by a photographer with a vision, which heavily influenced the production of the image. The photographer, or the client who commissioned the photograph, had the intention to create a certain impression in the minds of the audience, whether these were visitors experiencing a colonial exhibition, family members viewing a private album, or government agencies. It is evident that at any given time, photographic portrayals were subordinate to the needs of on one hand the commissioner and on the other hand the nation's colonial propaganda with regards to the way people and events were portrayed and therefore interpreted (Dujardin 2007: 59). As with modern

marketing, colonial photographs were carefully staged and selected to highlight some aspects of colonial life while downplaying or hiding others. Where many photographs produced in the colonial setting highlight beauty, development, and progress, one must not forget the exploitation and oppression hidden behind the romanticised and idealised depictions of colonial life (Minansny 2023).

Secondly, photographs capture and freeze a single moment forever in time, which conditions the viewer's perception of that moment. In a way, the photograph becomes a placeholder for the memory of the moment to the owner. One could argue that colonial photography preserved some part of a state's colonial ideal and contributed by itself to the creation of certain perceptions of the 'Other' held by Europeans. Thus, photographs themselves can be seen as containing fragments of a country's colonial history and its colonial situation at a specific moment (Dujardin 2007: 14).

A great number of photographs have been produced in the setting of colonial Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia, since the middle of the 19th century. Some can be found in the collection "The Dutch East Indies in photographs, 1860-1940", which belongs to the The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies under the National Library of the Netherlands. The collection consists of more than 3000 photographs from the period, depicting sceneries of nature and street life, architecture, and domestic scenes as well as portraits and group photos from the period mostly produced by professional photographers. Additionally, several images from the collection of Leiden University "Pioneer photography from the Dutch Indies" is used. This collection contains over 4500 photographs pertaining to the former Dutch Indies in the 19th and early 20th century, most of them taken by professional photographers commissioned by the Dutch government and various historical societies. It should be noted that all photographs used have been loosely dated by the archives as having been produced in the periods of either 1890-1930 or 1860-1940. This is unfortunately common in photographs from these collections, where information on both photographer and exact date have often been lost.

Setting the Table: European Dining Culture

By the 19th century, any act occurring around the dinner table in a European upper middleclass household, was not only about sustenance, but just as much a carefully crafted social display. The dining culture of the period often called 'Victorian', was an aspect of a lifestyle, or habitus that can be termed 'gentility', which implied respectability, refinement, good taste, and good family through their choices related to aspects such as etiquette, manners, food choices and dress. By the act of dining the household would show the achievement of private refinement and public politesse or be judged for the lack thereof. In a way, dining was the ultimate test, which would ruthlessly expose any unsuitable performance (Young 2010: 133).

The Victorian dining culture with roots in the genteel habitus, was mainly expressed through etiquette and consumption. These two aspects shaped the rituals of polite dining and worked as systems of differentiation and identification of practitioners in relation to each other. By inclusion and exclusion, the practitioner's mastery of social capital became visible to all other initiates of the system (Young 2010: 137). Correct dining and table manners was an eternal battle to establish one's position, protect it from criticism, and perhaps even advance it and move up the social ladder. In this struggle, a correct dining performance was interpreted by observers as clear evidence of gentility, or a person's character and worth. The outcome, however, was heavily dependent on the opinions of those one sought to be affiliated with (Young 2010: 136).

Polite dining was not limited to table manners. The correct consumption of goods was just as essential. The wide variety of goods available to the European middle class household in the 19th century, could prove to be just as challenging to navigate for the Victorian household. Knowledge was necessary to acquire perfectly suitable goods, in the right combination and correct order, for just the right purpose (Young 2010: 139). The display of luxury and high culture goods could be the deciding factor when it came to the family's social standing. Such goods as tableware of ceramic, porcelain, glass, or precious metals, metal cutlery, and beautifully printed textiles for tablecloths were preferred and generally belonged to every cultured European's dining table, where they presented the genteel practices as a social statement about the values of their owners. A genteel

family had to demonstrate genteel standards through their consumption of goods (Young 2010: 139).

The exemplary case to represent polite dining was the formal dinner party hosted by genteel Victorian Europeans. A dinner party as an occasion called for highly controlled performances from guests, hosts, and servants alike. Generally, invited guests would all come from similar backgrounds, be of similar social status, and thus share similar values and behaviours. In this way, no one would have to endure any discomfort from interacting with or being connected to any unsuitable acquaintances (Young 2010: 139).

A dining room was necessary to host a dining party. Thus, the existence of the dining room itself signalled the hosts' gentility to all. The designated dining space was refined in its complete separation from the kitchen, which was a place of hectic work of production and preparation of food, and appropriate only for servants and the poor. Furthermore, the designated dining room required specialised furniture to create the correct genteel dining environment. It was recommended to be furnished with pieces of display furniture such as mahogany sideboards with lamps which would contain and display tableware, side tables, a beautiful dining table with matching chairs, cabinets for wine storage, a large mirror, and elaborately framed pictures for decorating the walls (Young 2010: 141). The table setting was full of opportunities for the display of both wealth and the subtle range of practices that characterised genteel identity.

The use of cutlery was among the earliest expressions of self-controlled genteel eating. Thus, matching sets of elaborate cutlery belonged to every plate. Particularly the silver fork carried great significance as the tool of rich, refined dining. Their presence signalled the high standards and effortless ability to partake in refined dining shared by all guests (Young 2010: 141). The tableware was extensive, typically counting more than 60 pieces. It was largely made up of sets of matching plates, a number of serving dishes, bowls, and sauceboats of white ceramics, painted by hand or printed with decorations. Glassware was equally varied and plentiful. With dishes and cups for different foods and beverages, a large dining party would need considerable amounts of tableware (Young 2010: 142).

Dinner Parties in the Dutch East Indies

Photographic collections from the Dutch East Indies are a treasure trove when it comes to depictions of dinner parties and lavishly decorated tables laden with tableware. Several photographs taken at large dinner parties before the dinner guests arrived at the tables, allow us to experience the sight which would greet guests at such parties.

Photograph 1 depicts an unknown dining room in Jakarta. The photographed wooden tables surrounded by matching carved wooden chairs can be seen covered by white tablecloths, multiple China plates and metal cutlery for different courses, drinking glasses, wine glasses, glass decanters, and wine bottles. Artfully folded cloth napkins and elaborately arranged floral centrepieces decorated the tables. Along the walls could further decorations be found such as paintings, floral arrangements, and gilded mirrors. Above it all, lit chandeliers hung from decorated ceilings where they lit up the room and showed off the splendour to all.

Photograph 1 seemingly depicts a dinner party related to a Christmas celebration, as the room was decorated with something akin to fir garlands and a makeshift Christmas tree hanging from the ceiling with paper bells and lights attached over a dance floor. The party depicted in photograph 1 was clearly to be a large celebration with many guests attending and dining together in a colonial version of a European celebration of Christmas.



Collectie Prentenkabinet Universiteit Leiden

Photograph 1: "Versierde eetzaal met dansvloer" (Eng: "Decorated dining room with dance floor"), Dutch East Indies. Exact date unknown, 1860-1940. Source: MM.537/199 (Photo in album), Pioniersfotografie uit Nederlands-Indië, Prenten-kabinet Leiden. Permalink: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:PKL01:MM-537-199>

Another dining party is depicted in photograph 2 which show a group of men standing around a festively set table in the Dutch East Indies, under what appears to be a painting of the Dutch monarch Wilhelmina and the flag of the Netherlands, demonstrating their intact close connection to the Dutch fatherland. Compared to photograph 1, the decorations in this room were more subdued for a smaller party. However, the festively dressed European men stood around a long table fully set with white tablecloth, tableware of China and glass, and what appears to be a floral centrepiece, just as in the first photograph.



Collectie Prentenkabinet Universiteit Leiden

Photograph 2: "Mannen bij feestelijk gedekte tafel" (Eng: "Men at festively set table"), Dutch East Indies. Exact date unknown, 1860-1940. Source: MM.537/127 (Photo in album), Pioniersfotografie uit Nederlands-Indië, Prenten-kabinet Leiden. Permalink: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:PKL01:MM-537-127>

On a daily basis, few possessed the means or desire to host elaborate dinner parties. Instead, dinner could be taken less formally by individual families in reduced form. This would also be the case in households with limited financial resources, that might not have the room to spare to a dedicated dining room. In those cases, a dining table setup in the parlour became a common compromise, though it was then impossible to host formal dinner parties (Young 2010, 141).

The Dutch archives include many examples of these smaller dining rooms used for more intimate and less formal dining parties. However, as photograph 3 shows, the same standards with regards to table settings, dinner wares, and decorations, were still upheld albeit on a smaller scale. The private dining rooms seen in photograph 3 could also boast to induce the appropriate genteel dining environment, as they were furnished with the important pieces of specialised furniture such as

cabinets and sideboards of precious woods, dining tables with matching chairs for the guests, and elaborate light fixtures accompanied by framed pictures and a woven tapestry decorating the walls and ceiling. The examined dining rooms and dinner parties were clearly all rooted in the same European genteel culture and habitus, which was expressed by the colonists adhering to it through the displayed decorations and table settings.



Collectie Prentenkabinet Universiteit Leiden

Photograph 3: "Mensen heffen het glas aan gedekte tafel" (Eng: "People raise glasses at set table"), Dutch East Indies. Exact date unknown, 1860-1940. Source: F.65/058 (Photo in album), Pioniersfotografie uit Nederlands-Indië, Prentenkabinet Leiden. Permalink: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:PKL01:F-65-058>

Thus, a middleclass person should always be able to play their part in the ritualised refined dining performance, whenever attending such an event, as the dining ritual was continually practiced on a variety of scale (Young 2010: 143).

Domestic Servants in Frame

Apart from the colonists themselves, people belonging to another demographic are often present in photographs produced around the colonist dining table. In these photographs, domestic servants can be seen attending to the colonists dining at the table. Photograph 4 depicts a colonist dinner party held in Bogor near Jakarta with around 25 guests seated at chairs around the table. Behind them, almost as many Indonesian servants can be counted, standing straight as they posed for the photographer. The colonists were dressed in dark suits and what seems to be dresses in varying colours and patterns, standing out from each other and the white tablecloths in their formal dress.



Collectie Prentenkabinet Universiteit Leiden

Photograph 4: “Feestelijk gedekte tafel met gasten; achter de stoelen Indonesische bedienden” (Eng: “Festively set table with guests; behind the chairs Indonesian servants”), Dutch East Indies, Java, Bogor. Exact date unknown, 1860-1940. Source: MM.537/101 (Photo in album), Pioniersfotografie uit Nederlands-Indië, Prenten-kabinet Leiden. Permalink: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=:urn:gvn:PKL01:MM-537-101>

In stark contrast, the servants were all dressed in identical white uniforms, matching the environment and décor of the dining room, as they almost blend into the background all as one, indistinguishable from each other.

The two groups, European colonists and Indonesian servants, were presented in photograph 4 as being entirely different, performing completely separate roles at the dinner table. This rigid dichotomy was emphasised not only through their position, but also through appearance and dress. While the photographs show the colonists seated at the table, ready to engage in the dining experience, the colonised Indonesian servants are standing away from the table. All guests to the dining party are of European descent, whereas all servants are local Indonesian men. This segregation along racial lines was an important part of the colonist dining performance. By upholding this stark distinction and excluding the local population from the European dining practice, colonists prevented racial and cultural intermingling in this important arena. Thus, the European dining practice was reserved as an arena for colonists to maintain their status and identity among their colonist peers, while being attended to by the colonised servants. The vastly imbalanced power relation depicted in these photographs are quite clear.

A common way to depict domestic servants in colonist photography, showed the servant posed with different arrangements of table wares. Among these, tea sets were especially popular material goods which can be discerned in several photographs from Java. Photograph 5 shows a domestic servant clad in Indonesian clothing and bare-foot posed to the left of a set table with a piece of tableware in his hands, his eyes looking directly at the photographer. The table is covered with a white tablecloth topped by a tea set complete with teapot, teacup with saucer, pitchers, as well as various other vessels of ceramic and glass, a perfect example of the colonial tea set as it could be found across Europe and the colonies.



Photograph 5: "Huisbediende op Java" (Eng: "Domestic servant in Java"), Dutch East Indies. Exact date unknown, 1860-1940. Source: 30784 (photo, albuminedruk), Nederlands-Indië in foto's, 1860-1940, Koninklijk Instituut voor taal-, land- en volkenkunde (KITLV). Permalink: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gyn:KITLV01:30784>

This setup depicted the Indonesian domestic servant in his working environment with the tea set symbolising his relation to the European colonists for whom he worked. The photograph presents the man as an attendant and caretaker of the material wares related to the European table, while simultaneously underpinning an inherent opposition between the man and the objects. As he stands barefoot, interacting with the objects, the observer is acutely aware that this is a demonstration of his type of work. These objects were not his to own or enjoy, instead, they belonged to the colonists' material culture, and his role and use of them were limited to that of a servant's. The prepared tea is not for him to drink. This is highlighted by the lack of seating available at the table.

Whereas photograph 5 includes a chair, it was pushed behind and under the table, where it did not offer the man any clear place to sit down. In effect, this meant that the servants could not sit down

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at the table to partake in the tea. This can be interpreted as symbolical of the colonised servant's exclusion from the colonist's table.

This type of photograph can be compared to similar photographs of colonists posing with tea sets. Photograph 6 depicts a European colonist woman photographed in an almost identical pose. She stands to the left of a table, on which a tea set is arranged. Looking somewhat to the side of the photographer, she is dressed in a beautiful long light dress with her hair put up in an updo, and a small tea pot in her hands.



Photograph 6: "Vrouw met theeservice in fotostudio" (Eng: "Woman with tea service in photo studio"), Dutch East Indies, Java. Exact date unknown, 1890-1930. Source: 79.24/019 (kabinetfoto), Pioniersfotografie uit Nederlands-Indië, Prentenkabinet Leiden. Permalink: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:PKL01:79-24-019>

In contrast to photograph 5, she appears to be preparing tea for herself to partake. One significant difference between the photographs is the positioning of a chair next to the table. Whereas the chair was either unavailable or completely absent to the servants, it stands open and inviting to the

colonist woman, ready for her to sit down at the table to enjoy her tea. This slight variation in the positioning of the chair hints at the underlying power structures and struggles related to the policing of the colonial table.

Colonial Dress

At a formal dinner party, guests would attend wearing their best clothes, which also played an important role in the ritualised dining practice (Young 2010: 139). In photographs 2, 3 and 4, colonist men were dressed similarly in either light or dark suits, depending on the dinner party, and dress shoes, while colonist women are seen in a variety of different colours, patterns, and cuts of dresses and hats. As a result of this, colonists were emphasised and individualised in the photographs as their appearances stood out from each other, while they were simultaneously identified as a collective following the same fashions and dress norms.

On the other side, the Indonesian servants attending to dinner parties in photograph 4 wore variations of the same uniform. All servants at a dinner party wore completely identical uniforms comprised of white shirts and pants, Indonesian traditional blangkon headdress, and bare feet. Because of this, the servants were mostly indistinguishable from each other, one identical collective, which almost became one with the background in the photographs. This effect only emphasised the difference in role and power for the European colonists and the Indonesian colonised at the dinner party as individualised master and unknown servant, as depicted in the photographs. Whereas dress and appearance at a dinner party was a chance for European colonists to dress up in formal clothing, show off to their peers, relax, and establish themselves as part of the European habitus, the dinner party was quite the opposite for the Indonesian participants. The effect of the servant uniform was that it stripped the servants of all individualism as they spent the party on their feet relegated to attend to the colonists.

The European colonists were, quite literally, the ones at the table, while the colonised Indonesian were pushed behind the chairs into the background, where they became an anonymous part of it.

Conclusion

By performing formal dinner parties according to the gentile dinner practice, Dutch colonists demonstrated their continuing belonging to the European metropole to both their colonist peers and the local colonised population. The photographic depictions of dinner parties, including the decorations, tableware, and guests, captured and perpetuated the performance of the gentile dinner practice. They highlighted European material culture and gentile sensibilities, performed by the colonists just as well as any refined European residing in the metropole would. In this way, the photographs acted as tangible evidence of the colonists' common gentile habitus and European affiliation. In these photographs, you find no indications of cultural or social assimilation with the colonised local population, but instead complete cultural and social separation, as the European colonists appeared to perform social practices, as though they had never left Europe.

When local servants were included in colonist photographs, they were posed as anonymous servants in the background of dining parties, as a stark contrast to the colonists. While the individualised colonists were centred and sat at the tables, the colonised were pushed into the background, anonymised and invisible in their uniforms. This dichotomy was part of the colonist construction of their European identity, as it required complete social segregation for colonists to maintain their exclusive positions of power in colonial society.

The messages perpetuated in the discussed photographs could be shared and persistently reinforced as they were shared with family, friends, and the wider European public, showing idealised highlights of colonist life. As the photographs captured these moments in time, they preserved the depictions and messages for long after the photographs were produced.



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