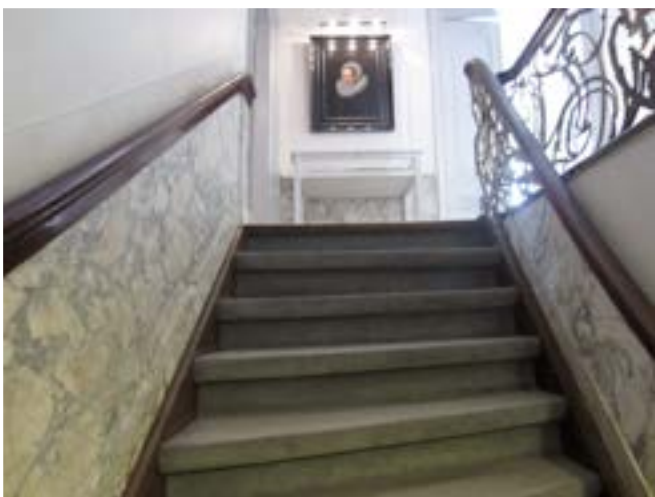


The house the family built: the heritage of the ‘Indisch factor’

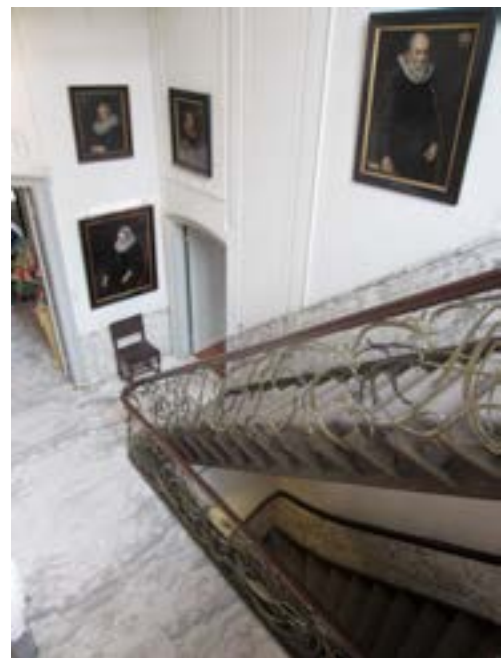
Edy Serieese

This house is a very very very fine house. “Extera fraay”, it’s called in 17th-century Dutch. Still: it’s not the the degree of being fraay that struck me when I entered it. It was the way it felt like a family home to me. Not the Dutch inside-looking-out-us-being-cosy-you’re-no-part-of-it kind of family home. Rather a joyful space in which many people could live, and all kind of things might happen. An Indisch kind of family home, actually. Like my IWI was, when we still had an place of our own for our IWI-collection and rather an atmosphere or potential than an actual situation by the way. Of course when I visited this house there was a lot going on, for the Museum just had opened up and really a crowd came running in, as curious as I was to see the house. Then again the house belongs to a family whose members, though co-founders of the VOC, never ever set foot in Indië, not in one generation, Tonko Grever, curator of the Museum, assured me. So why would it be ‘Indisch’? I blamed my strange habit to notice the ‘Indisch factor’ where ever I am (like: red tulips, playing soccer with a stone for a ball, or elder women carrying too many bags and parcels). And I forbid myself playing that game it in here. That very moment she caught my eye, “calling me”, as Indisch people would say: Anna Ruychaver.

She’s twice in the hallway: at the entrance of the Red Room, the one I barely noticed because of all the portraits everywhere around (photo 1). And the one cropped from the former at the top of the stairs coming up from the kitchen (photo 2).



2. the one at the top of the stairs is cropped from



1. the one at the entrance of the Red Room



3. illustration in Album Amicorum Van Loon



4. written by Nicolaes van Loon, Anna's son

amicorum

The vitrine she thus showed me kept this beautifully illustrated folio volume, containing as it says at the first page: the "Memorie van de overGrootvaders, overGrootmoeders, Geallieerde en Gedescendeerde Naaste Vrienden van Nicolaes van Loon en Emmerentia van Veen", being the eldest son and daughter in law of Anna Ruychaver.

Noble people keep pedigrees: family trees of the eldest son and his offspring, his eldest son with his offspring, and his eldest son etc.; by lack of sons the family is extinct. The Van Loon family for example is extinct, as I am told, though I know Philippa van Loon and her offspring are alive and kicking. Anyway, in 17th century Holland not noble families kept an Album Amicorum, like Anna and her husband Hans did. The book their son Nicolaes wrote is a kind of extended version of an Album Amicorum. A *Regenten*-version of a pedigree, framing the family in both a social circle and a background. It's composed as Nicolaes writes: "tot gedachtenisse haerder Naa Comelingen", meaning: for the children to remember. For not noble children had no pedigree to help them remember. Therefore the book is not just about the eldest sons of the Van Loon family. It is about *the extended families of both husband and wife*, including "naaste vrienden". Words by the way that already in the 17th century not necessarily meant kinship.

Now I was home. For I'm born and raised in an extended family, even though the family I was raised in did not live together in the same house or even in the same cities. And I recognized this kind of Album Amicorum, even though the once I know are not written down, but oral histories. I even recognized the habit not mentioning years or other facts that come handy, only describing the relationship between the people in it. In the oral Alba Amicori I know, there's an even more complicating factor than lacks of time indication. Family words like grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, aunt, uncle, brother, sister and child in modern Indisch families do not necessarily mean kinship, they can also mean 'close friends', like in 17th century Holland. This formula for 'family' I know from my own family and all the other Indisch families I met from my youth till today as an IWI-director. Family in that formula is rather a potential than an actual situation. It's not about blood, but about *relations built by shared history*. The history my family, the Indisch group as a whole, share is about Indië, about economic crises, World War II, 'Bersiap', migration and fitting into another country. So for me family means 'grootfamilie', that is: being a reliable organization to survive and to fit in. To me it is the most important trade the Van Loon family and their VOC peers exported. It is the house they built in Indië.

grootfamilie

The Portugese households in Asia in the 16th century were kind of 'grootfamilies': large groups of several generations, functions and positions from bosses to slaves, grandpa to grandchild, living daily life together. The VOC successfully took over power in Asia by taking over those households. The households were run by Mestizo women from wealthy Asian families in which the VOC – man married in as soon they arrived in Asia. This was a very lucky marriage. Dutch man on the one hand: merchants, tradesman, from not noble families in Europe inventing the Republiek der Zeven Verenigde Nederlanden by building fresh networks of families. And Asian women on the other hand, used to run large households, knowing how to connect families, and accustomed to Asia, inventing the environment for their European husbands in Asia to live in. Together the counterparts created the Eurasian 'grootfamilies' which ruled the VOC areas for two centuries, with the grandeur of the Asian nobility the Dutch 'Regenten. Like in Holland impossibility of sons to follow their flating the importance of sons, and em- role to link families together. And em- Gelman Taylor majestically described. daughters made the 'grootfamilie' the VOC- areas, from the Gold Coast in did not just took over the Dutch sys- to fit in into Asia, developing it in an religious, bi- or more lingual, and ever- triarchal way. VOC men ruling the col- but it's only half the history. The other their wives and daughters, women who work. Told, for that part is an oral his- the intimacy of the women's dress- rooms, in all those 10.000 daily household situations women and children share. Taylor heard them talk, studying important Dutch men in VOC Batavia, looking at both their parents and all their children. Then she reached over them to their Indisch wives to discover the true organizing power of the VOC colonies: the 'grootfamilie'.



That's the moment I get bored about ing-status thing. I'm a woman, daughter so I am only interested in how people daily lives and on a daily basis, gaining children and cherish the 'grootfamilie'. phy on modern Indo culture in the focused on daily life. Only to discover lived colony, crises, wartimes and con- families' ran by women. Taylor claimed the Indisch society was broken at the Taylor is my hero, but she's wrong 'character' I call 'Indisch culture' and it drew, as Pamela Pattynama described historiography, "into the backyards" of



and the network system of this system was based on the fathers in important jobs, de- powering daughters in their powered they were, as Jean In 17th and 18th century this standard in the increasing Western Africa to Japan. They tem, they adjust the formula interethnic, intercultural, inter- lasting -though hidden- ma- onies is an interesting story, part, Taylor states, is told by actively made the system tory. Told and passed on in ing rooms, in the children's

Indië. I mean the power-rul- and mother, and a historian, survive. How people live their food and goods to grow the Therefore my historiogra- Netherlands automatically is how the Indies group sur- tinantal migrations in 'groot- the matrilineaire character of beginning of the 19th century. about that. What she calls did not disappear, only with- it in this first step to Indisch Indisch people.



The Indisch 'grootfamilie' Serie-se-Morjan: granny's, parents, aunts, brothers, sisters with or without kinship

oral amicornum

It withdrew, and it lasted in the intimate daily lives of Indisch people. And it passed on by mother to daughter to daughter till now. Pamela knows, I know, Liane knows. For there is no Indisch child nowadays without that knowledge. For we all asked that question: who is that grandma Hofland, this oompje Van Gaalen, our grandma Muyselaar, Bilou or auntie Minke? Are they family? Knowing the answer already: "of course they are, family, well, eh, not by blood, but we know them for such a long time, and during wartime... slash when we just arrived here... Then a story follows, an Oral Amicornum. So connecting academic knowledge with experiential knowledge we see the 'grootfamilie' in these stories. And the power of its formula, appearing in terms like 'bangsa', 'gotong royong', 'Nippon time' 'bersiap', 'here in Holland'. And in the word 'family', even more in the family words for 'friends in hard times': auntie, grandma, cousin, elder sister.

That's why I compose the historiography of the Indisch culture as a story about a 'grootfamilie' called the Indisch culture. In my project 'Aangespoeld' (Stranded), I recently started at the IWI-website thanks to the Prins Bernhard Culture Fonds, I bring all the oral amicorni I ever heard together in one timeline. Looking at individuals and 'nuclear family' groups as members of the Indisch group, placing their individual stories within colonial history rather as in a habitat than as a part of it. The hardest part is to fit in. For in the current *discours* about the colonial past there's no room for us, not even for us as an extinct group. So alive and kicking as ever and not withdrawing, rather fighting ahead, I combine things. I take historical documents from the IWI collection as a starting point, verify the dates in a proper academic way, refer to relevant sources to punctuate statements, and keep a close eye and ear on the pitfalls of my basic sources. But those basic sources are the oral amicorni, the stories we in our postwar and post colonial generation heard in the 'grootfamilie' from the days of our youth till now. I connect them with each other, with the IWI collection, and with world history, thus inventing the history of the Indisch culture. This historiography is to honor the people who told me and thus taught me how to survive and how to fit in. It's the one heritage important enough to leave our children. It also is not a current type of historiography, I admit. Rather an *oleh oleh*, our traditional gift back (mostly food of course), to our visitors, to take home to enjoy, And to remember us by.

So: from this perspective looking to this Museum, I mainly see Phillipa. The one living Van Loon while the noble dynasty has passed away. Alive and kicking, she is reaching over nobility to the inheritance ancestors like Anna Ruychaver offered her: the power of women to keep the family and to pass it's culture on. Not by just taking over the heritage, but by adjusting new skills and knowledge. Phillipa adjusted modern arts, arts history, colonial history, and herself with it. Knowing that every history is a chosen one, suspended until someone reaches out for it. Like I do now.



Philippa van Loon

That's the way Philippa gives the family house this international, dynamic, artistic atmosphere in which all kinds of everything might happen, like this conference, framing her family in modern life and in history. It's exciting what she's doing, but not surprising. For look at her eyes, the vague smile: it runs in the family.



Anna Ruychaver

Edy Serie-se
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