

An Alternative Family

An Elite Christian Girls' School on Java in a Context of Social Change, c. 1907-1939

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The Koningin Wilhelmina School was a prestigious Dutch-language Protestant school for the daughters of the Javanese nobility in Yogyakarta. Opened in 1907 through the efforts of a group of elite Protestant women in the Netherlands, supporters of the Dutch Reformed mission saw the school as a tool to reform the spiritual and moral lives of young Javanese girls. At the same time, the school presented local parents with an opportunity to anchor their daughters more firmly in the Javanese colonial elite. This article investigates how the Dutch teachers at the school tried to provide their Javanese students with a surrogate Christian family to create distance from their milieu of origin. An analysis of letters by Koningin Wilhelmina School graduates shows how this particular effort to partly remove children from their own culture opened the door for highly diverse life trajectories.

De Koningin Wilhelmina School was een prestigieuze school voor de dochters van de Javaanse adel in Yogyakarta, met Nederlands als voertaal. De onderwijsinstelling, die in 1907 geopend was met hulp van een groep vrouwen uit de Nederlandse protestante elite, werd door de gereformeerde missie gezien als een instrument om het spirituele en morele karakter van Javaanse meisjes te hervormen. Tegelijkertijd gaf de school ouders uit de hogere Javaanse klasse de mogelijkheid om hun dochters deel uit te laten maken van de Nederlandstalige koloniale elite. In dit artikel wordt onderzocht hoe Nederlandse leraressen op deze school hun leerlingen van een alternatieve christelijke familie probeerden te voorzien, om zo afstand te creëren tussen de kinderen en hun oorspronkelijke milieu. Een analyse van brieven van oud-studenten van de Koningin Wilhelmina School laat zien hoe deze poging om kinderen deels van hun eigen cultuur te vervreemden uiteindelijk voor deze alumni mogelijkheden creëerde voor zeer uiteenlopende levenskeuzes.

Introduction¹

In a 1935 letter to her former teacher named H. Wellensiek, the Javanese Marjani fondly remembered her years at the Koningin Wilhelmina School (Queen Wilhelmina School, kws), a Dutch-language Protestant school for elite Javanese girls in the city of Yogyakarta. Marjani contrasted this phase ‘full of fun and good cheer’ (‘vol pret en jool’) with her current life in the small village of Subah in Central Java. She lived with her brother, who was a district head in the Javanese branch of the colonial administration. Marjani complained about the boredom she encountered: ‘I am slowly getting used to it but at the beginning, oh no! You can imagine what it was like for a girl coming from a boarding school. No Europeans, being completely surrounded by *desa* [village] people.’² At the same time, Marjani assured her teacher that she was striving to ‘follow God’s guidance’ and to resign herself to her fate, ‘as this is what you taught me in school’.³ This letter is the only trace that Marjani has left in the kws archive. Based on the source material, little can be concluded about her life, except that she successfully completed her primary education and subsequently pursued domestic education.

Marjani’s letter is an example from a collection of correspondence between students and former teachers who had returned to the Netherlands, which is held in the archive of the kws support committee. The kws was established in 1907 in the Central Javanese city of Yogyakarta by a group of engaged upper-class women in the Netherlands with connections to the Protestant mission. Marjani’s letter ties together some prominent themes connected to kws education. Alluding to the domestic values that had underpinned the school ideology, Marjani assured her former teacher that she tried to help out as much as she could in the household of her prominent brother; by writing in Dutch, identifying with Europeans and distancing herself from the common ‘*desa* people’, she located herself firmly within the Javanese elite; and finally, she invoked notions of Protestant Christianity.

This article takes a close look at the kws to demonstrate how schools like these functioned on two different levels in the late-colonial Dutch East

1 I would like to thank Tom Hoogervorst for his help with Javanese source material. I also thank the participants of the COACC expert meetings, as well as the editors of this special issue and the two anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

2 Atria Kennisinstituut voor Emancipatie en Vrouwengeschiedenis (hereafter Atria), Amsterdam, Internationaal Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging (hereafter IAV), archive

Steuncomité Christelijke Huishoudscholen voor Indonesische Meisjes (hereafter SCHIM), inventory number 41, S. Marjani to H. Wellensiek, 13 August 1935. ‘Langzamerhand wen ik er aan maar in het begin, o nee! U kunt het voorstellen voor een meisje dat van een internaat komt. Geen Europeanen en enkel en alleen *desa* mensen om je heen’.

3 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, S. Marjani to H. Wellensiek, 13 August 1935.

Indies (circa 1900-1942). On the one hand, these institutions represented an opportunity for local families to enhance their status by allowing their daughters to receive a prestigious Dutch education. Simultaneously, Dutch colonial actors used the schools for their attempts to reform Javanese family life following a particular European bourgeois – and, in the case of the kws, an explicitly Christian – model. At the kws, these attempts focused on removing girls from their Javanese cultural background by offering them an alternative familial environment at the boarding school.

Scholars writing about girls' schools in colonial contexts have often done so out of an interest in missionary work.⁴ In addition to this field, this article contributes to a wider literature that has inquired about the impact of European-style education on local women in later life, often relying on oral history interviews.⁵ Frances Gouda and, more recently, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk have worked with students' letters in the context of the privately funded Kartini and Van Deventer girls' boarding schools on Java, and analysing educated young women's ambiguous sense of belonging in colonial society as well as their ambitions.⁶ Here I draw on a similar body of sources from the period between the turn of the twentieth century and the end of de facto Dutch rule in Indonesia, while situating them in the context of a microstudy. Furthermore, by paying attention to local social dynamics, the article engages with the question of how local children 'became available' to colonial reformers.⁷ As is demonstrated in this special issue, the answer to this question varied considerably in different contexts. The contributions of Maaïke Derksen, Geertje Mak and Marleen Reichgelt, for example, show

- 4 Laura R. Prieto, 'Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves: Filipina Women and American Protestant Missions, 1900-1930', in: Hyaewool Choi and Margaret Jolly (eds.), *Divine Domesticities; Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra 2014) 367-396. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22459/dd.10.2014.14>; Rita Smith Kipp, 'Emancipating Each Other: Dutch Colonial Missionaries' Encounter with Karo Women in Sumatra, 1900-1942', in: Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda (eds.), *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism* (Charlottesville/London 1998) 211-235.
- 5 Pascale Barthélémy, *Africaines et diplômées à l'époque coloniale (1918-1957)* (Rennes 2010); Sita T. Van Bemmelen, *Christianity, Colonization, and Gender Relations in North Sumatra: A Patrilineal Society in Flux* (Leiden 2018); Karen M. Teoh, *Schooling Diaspora: Women, Education, and the Overseas Chinese in British Malaya and Singapore, 1850s-1960s* (Oxford 2018). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/os0/9780190495619.001.0001>.
- 6 Frances Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (Amsterdam 1995) 99-100; Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, *Women, Work and Colonialism in the Netherlands and Java: Comparisons, Contrasts, and Connections, 1830-1940*. Palgrave Studies in Economic History (London/New York 2019) 245-246. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-10528-0>.
- 7 Geertje Mak, Marit Monteiro and Elisabeth Wesseling, 'Child Separation: (Post)Colonial Policies and Practices in the Netherlands and Belgium', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 135:3/4 (2020) 4-28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10871>.



▲ An administrative map of Central Java from 1905. The principality of Yogyakarta is indicated in yellow on the south coast in the middle of the map, with the city of Yogyakarta in the centre.⁸

8 P.W.M. Trap, *Midden Java*, 1905. © Collection Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, KK 031-04-08, <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:2012348>.

how Papuan children were forcibly removed from their environments and sometimes even ‘bought’ by Dutch missionaries.⁹ On the other end of the spectrum of colonial practices of child separation were elite schools such as the kws, for which local parents readily paid high school fees. While such projects may seem more benign, because they did not involve physical violence, they ultimately served similar goals. As was the case in the other child separation projects presented in this special issue, the mission that kws teachers and supporters set for themselves amounted to a project of culturally as well as physically creating distance between children and their environment of origin. In the case of the kws, however, this process was never complete, even if only because school years inevitably must come to an end, and because boarding students still visited their families regularly.

Viewed against this background, elite schools such as the kws allow for an understanding of the widely diverging ways in which child separation practices could work out on the ground. Moreover, as this article will show, the school served the interests of a particular Javanese social class at the time. This case study thus confirms that some colonial projects involving local girls fitted the agenda of local populations just as much as that of colonial actors, as other scholars have noted before.¹⁰

Over the years, the kws was able to secure a position for itself in the Yogyakarta school landscape and attracted considerable numbers of students. It existed as an independent Dutch-language girls’ school until the end of the 1930s. The first part of this article offers an explanation of the popularity of the kws in Yogyakarta elite circles in the first two decades of its existence. It then turns to the school itself, shedding light on the relationship between Christianity and ideas about family life that dominated its educational ideology at the time. Coming from a Javanese cultural background, and imbued with bourgeois and Christian values at school, kws students grew up in an environment fraught with paradoxes. Their letters allow for a glimpse into the diverse ways in which kws graduates balanced these two worlds and made use of their education. The final section of this article is devoted to an in-depth exploration of some of these documents.

9 Maaïke Derksen, “‘Removing the Youth from their Pernicious Environment’: Child Separation Practices in South Dutch New Guinea, 1902-1921” (56-79, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10874>), Geertje Mak, ‘Children on the Fault Lines: A Historical-Anthropological Reconstruction of the Background of Children purchased by Dutch Missionaries between 1863 and 1898 in Dutch New Guinea’ (29-55, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10876>), and Marleen Reichgelt, ‘Children

as Protagonists in Colonial History: Watching Missionary Photography’ (80-105, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.10869>) in *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 135:3/4 (2020).

10 Sita T. van Bemmelen, ‘Zwart-wit versus kleur: Geschiedschrijving over Indonesische vrouwen in de koloniale periode’, in: Francisca de Haan (ed.), *Het raadsel vrouwengeschiedenis: Tiende jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis* (Nijmegen 1989) 11-50.

A Protestant school for the local elite

The opening of the new building of the kws in 1913 was a festive occasion with a distinct Christian element to it. The students sang a welcome song, as well as some psalms, and in a long speech the Reverend D. Bakker, president of the kws school committee, asked for God's blessings.¹¹ Apart from members of the local European community and the Javanese nobility, the school received the Resident of Yogyakarta, J. H. Lieftrinck. Elise Idenburg-Duetz, the wife of Governor-General Alexander Idenburg and the patroness of the school, also sent a telegram to express her best wishes.¹²

In its display of Dutch language skills by Javanese girls and its collection of distinguished guests, the opening ceremony reflected the elite dimension of the school. Schools for Indonesian children that used Dutch as the language of instruction were extremely rare at the school's opening in 1907, and the few schools that existed were all aimed at specific groups of elite Christians.¹³ The kws was the first Dutch-language school for girls whose family traditions were rooted in Javanese Islam. It was followed shortly afterwards by the Franciscan Sisters' school in nearby Mendut that opened in 1908.¹⁴

The combination of upper-class sensibility and Protestant Christianity was central to the kws school project from the start. Johanna Kuyper, a daughter of the prominent Calvinist politician Abraham Kuyper, started organising a support committee for the school after having worked as a nurse at the Protestant hospital in Yogyakarta.¹⁵ Both Johanna Kuyper and her sister Henriëtte would remain central figures in fundraising efforts for the kws for years to come. Making use of their extensive network in the Netherlands, the Kuyper sisters brought together an all-female support committee for the school, made up predominantly of members of the nobility and the patriciate.¹⁶

11 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 8, 'Vierde Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de "Koningin-Wilhelmina-School", Christelijke School voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta, van 1 Juli 1911-30 November 1913'.

12 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 4, D. Bakker and G.R.G. Loggen to Support Committee, Yogyakarta, 19 October 1913; Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 8, 'Vierde verslag 1911-1913'.

13 Kees Groeneboer, *Gateway to the West: The Dutch Language in Colonial Indonesia, 1600-1950: A History of Language Policy* (Amsterdam 1998) 160-165.

14 Maaïke Derksen, "'On their Javanese sprout we need to graft the European civilization': Fashioning local intermediaries in the Dutch Catholic mission, 1900-1942', *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 19:1 (2016) 39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5117/TVGN2016.1.DERK>.

15 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 2, 'Notulen der vergaderingen van het "Comité van Bijstand"', 5 August 1905.

16 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, 'Eerste Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de "Koningin-Wilhelmina-School", Christelijke School voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta, opgemaakt in Juni 1907'.

The activities of Johanna and Henriëtte Kuyper fitted into the Protestant Christian tradition of women's charitable work. This had its roots in the *Réveil* movement of the second quarter of the nineteenth century, which had encouraged upper-class women to take up a public role in areas that were traditionally associated with women, such as the care for the sick and the poor. Dutch women had been engaged in auxiliary activities for the Protestant mission in the Dutch East Indies from the 1820s onwards.¹⁷ As noted by Geertje Mak, Marit Monteiro and Elisabeth Wesseling in the introduction to this special issue, such activities opened up opportunities for bourgeois women to claim a space for themselves in the public realm, positioning themselves as responsible members of the citizenry.¹⁸ At its first meeting in Amsterdam in 1905, the *Damescomité* (Ladies' Committee) established that the main goal of the prospective school would be to provide 'Javanese girls from the higher classes' with school education in the intellectual, moral and spiritual sense.¹⁹ In line with its upper-class outlook, the kws was exclusively open to girls from *priyayi* families, the Javanese nobility. On a practical level, the elite outlook meant that Dutch was the language of instruction. The curriculum included writing, reading, calculation, needlework, geography, singing and Biblical history. Malay and Javanese would also be taught.²⁰

It was no coincidence that the supporters of the kws directed their energies towards Yogyakarta, as the Dutch Reformed mission had a strong base there in the form of a flourishing missionary hospital.²¹ The colonial government was wary of religious tensions between different Christian denominations and did not allow other groups to do missionary work in Yogyakarta until the 1920s, which meant that the Reformed mission initially had relatively little competition in the city.²² Furthermore, the advent of the Ethical Policy around the turn of the twentieth century – of which Abraham Kuyper was one of the central ideologues – meant that the colonial government actively started to encourage the social efforts of the various Christian missions

17 Annemieke Kolle, 'In stilte te werken, niet te willen schitteren: De vrouwenhulpgenootschappen voor de zending vanaf 1822', in: Gerrit Schutte, Jasper Vree and Gerrit de Graaf (eds.), *Het zendingsbusje en de toverlantaarn: Twee eeuwen zendingsliefde en zendingsorganisatie in Protestants Nederland*. Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands Protestantisme na 1800 20 (Zoetermeer 2012) 95-99.

18 Maartje Janse, *De afschaffers: Publieke opinie, organisatie en politiek in Nederland, 1840-1880*

(Amsterdam 2007) 28-29; Mak, Monteiro and Wesseling, 'Child Separation', 9-11.

19 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 1, 'Stellingen', 2 May 1905.

20 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, 'Eerste verslag 1907'.

21 Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (eds.), *A History of Christianity in Indonesia: Studies in Christian Mission 35* (Leiden 2008) 679-680. For an overview of Reformed missionary activities in the principality of Yogyakarta, see Kerkeraad van Amsterdam (ed.), *Vijf-en-twintig jaar zendingsarbeid te Djocja* (Amsterdam 1925).

22 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 700.

in the colony.²³ This influenced the educational landscape in the principality of Yogyakarta to a large extent, as many private educational initiatives started to receive financial support from the government.²⁴ The kws also received public financial assistance and was thus partly an exponent of the Ethical Policy.²⁵ But all these factors cannot sufficiently explain its popularity. The school was eventually able to attract considerable numbers of students precisely because the social position of certain priyayi groups was undergoing important changes at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The social ambitions of a Javanese elite group

While it is difficult to give an exact definition of the priyayi classes, in the context of Yogyakarta they can be described as nobles of the robe with connections to one of the local royal houses. In the political constellation of the Dutch East Indies, the Yogyakarta area had a special position as part of the *vorstenlanden* or principalities. As such, it was not directly ruled by the Dutch government but by the Sultan of Yogyakarta. In precolonial forms of governance, priyayi men functioned as intermediaries between courts and wider Javanese populations, meaning that their position could vary from that of a provincial chief to urban courtiers.²⁶ After the Java War (1825-1830), which brought the island of Java under effective Dutch rule, the priyayi elite acquired an important coordinating role in the system of forced agriculture known as the Cultivation System.²⁷ By the beginning of the twentieth century the priyayi class had essentially become a civil service. As such, they made up the Javanese layer within the dualistic structure of colonial governance, called the *Inlands Bestuur* (Native Administration).²⁸ Important differences, however, existed within the priyayi elite. There was a gap in wealth and status between regents, who held the highest office within the Javanese administration, and the legion of lower-ranking officials such as district chiefs and village heads.²⁹

23 Aritonang and Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, 677.

24 Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), The Hague, Archive Ministerie van Koloniën (hereafter MvK), entry no. 2.10.39, inv. no. 141, 'Memorie van Overgave van den aftredenden Gouverneur van Jogjakarta, P.R.W. v. Gesseler Verschuur, deel I', 1932.

25 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 9, 'Vijfde Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de "Koningin-Wilhelmina-School"', Christelijke School voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te

Jogjakarta, van 30 November 1913 – 30 Mei 1917'.

26 Heather Sutherland, 'The Priyayi', *Indonesia* 19 (1975) 66-69. For a more extended version of Sutherland's arguments, see Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore 1979).

27 Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and other visions (c. 1830-1930)* (Leiden 2007) 15-16.

28 Sutherland, 'The Priyayi', 65.

29 Sutherland, 'The Priyayi', 72.

Dutch colonial policy maintained and even enlarged this distance. The office of regent, for example, was made hereditary, limiting families' possibilities for social mobility within the priyayi class.³⁰

Knowledge of the Dutch language significantly increased the career chances of priyayi boys in the Native Administration. In this context, Dutch-language education became highly sought-after by lower-ranking priyayi families who wanted to secure a position in the colonial administrative elite. As early as the 1860s, some high-ranking priyayi young men studied in the Netherlands; others were tutored by Dutch teachers at home.³¹ By the beginning of the twentieth century, this interest in education had trickled down to lower-ranking priyayi families. It was not easy for them to get their children into Dutch-language schools, as access depended on Dutch officials' assessment of children's social status. In practice, then, Dutch schooling was mainly available to the sons of regents, much to the dismay of other members of the Native Administration.³² Budi Utomo, the first Indonesian political organisation, initially started out as a lobby group for lower-ranking priyayi educational access in 1908.³³

Priyayi from less prominent families sometimes went to great lengths to have their sons admitted to Dutch-language schools. In 1901, for example, an East Javanese district chief requested admission to a European school for his ten-year-old son at the office of the Governor-General in Batavia. The father explained that he envisioned a career in the Native Administration for his son and hoped eventually to send him to a secondary school for the education of Javanese civil servants.³⁴ The boy was eventually admitted to the school of his father's choice.³⁵ The Indonesian national archives hold several such letters that reflect the ambitions of lower-ranking priyayi.³⁶

The priyayi interest in Dutch education was initially almost completely limited to boys.³⁷ Education for girls was more contentious in priyayi circles. Priyayi women's roles were traditionally confined to the domestic sphere, and

30 Sutherland, 'The Priyayi', 72-73; Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, 128-129.

31 Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, 46-48.

32 Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, 47.

33 Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (Basingstoke 2001) 208-209.

34 Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (hereafter ANRI), Jakarta, Archive Algemene Secretarie Serie Grote Bundel Missive Gouvernement Secretaris (hereafter Alg. Sec. GB MGS), inv. no. 4131, Raden

Soemosoediro to Governor General, 4 August 1901.

35 ANRI Alg. Sec. GB MGS, inv. no. 4131, Besluit, 1901, date unclear.

36 ANRI Alg. Sec. GB MGS, inv. no. 4131, Raden Soemadipoera to Governor-General, 24 November 1901; ANRI Alg. Sec. GB MGS, inv. no. 4131, Mas Atmowidjojo to Governor-General, 13 October 1901.

37 Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, 157-158.

girls received domestic instruction and batik lessons at home.³⁸ While parents thus had a direct economic incentive to send their sons to school because it enhanced their career opportunities, this was not the case for their daughters. Cultural practices surrounding girlhood, moreover, meant that priyayi parents had their reservations about coeducational schooling. Priyayi girls were traditionally secluded in their residences when they reached marriageable age, around the age of twelve, and lived a secluded life until they entered into an arranged marriage.³⁹ Dutch colonial officials interpreted such practices as the reason for the relatively low attendance of Javanese girls in public coeducational schools.⁴⁰ In their responses to a government survey about girls' education that was sent out to the regents of Java and Madura in 1909, several high-ranking officials confirmed this Dutch observation and stated that local people, including themselves, objected to coeducation for girls of marriageable age. They argued for girls' schools with only female teachers to preserve girls' respectability.⁴¹ In this regard, the kws was more in tune with priyayi cultural sensibilities than public coeducational schools.

The initiators of the kws were aware of the growing interest in Western education in priyayi circles and expected that girls would soon 'follow in the footsteps' of boys.⁴² Nevertheless, the first headmistress of the kws, Wellensiek, encountered resistance from priyayi parents when she tried to find her first students in 1907. She was repeatedly turned down when she went from door to door in Yogyakarta to advertise the school. Wellensiek later recounted that the girls' parents and grandparents were of the opinion that 'learning was of no use for a girl' and that it ran counter to tradition.⁴³ In fact, the only way in which Wellensiek could persuade parents to register their girls was by allowing their brothers to be registered as well. The first children to

38 Peter Carey and Vincent Houben, 'Spirited Srikandhis and Sly Sumbradas: The social, political and economic role of women at the Central Javanese courts in the 18th and early 19th centuries', in: Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Niehof (eds.), *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and Present Notions*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 127 (Dordrecht/ Providence 1987) 29-30.

39 For a personal account of this custom, see Raden Adjeng Kartini, in: Jacques Henrij Abendanon (ed.), *Door duisternis tot licht: Gedachten over en voor het Javaansche volk van wijlen Raden Adjeng Kartini* (The Hague 1912) 47-60.

40 ANRI, Archive Algemene Secretarie Grote Bundel ter Zijde Gelegde Agenda, inv. no. 7578, Director

of Education Abendanon to Governor General, 31 October 1901. For the published version of this correspondence, see: Simon Lambertus van der Wal (ed.), *Het onderwijsbeleid in Nederlands-Indië 1900-1940: Een bronnenpublikatie* (Groningen 1963) 9-12.

41 ANRI Alg. Sec. GB MGS, inv. no. 4838, 'Overzicht van de in 1901 en 1909 door de Residenten en Regenten c.q. Patih's op Java en Madoera geuite meeningen nopens het denkbeeld der oprichting van Inlandsche meisjesscholen', undated.

42 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, 'Eerste verslag 1907'.

43 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 40, H. Wellensiek, 'Hoe de Javaansche meisjesschool met een jongen begon', undated.

enter the school were a four-year-old girl and her seven-year-old brother.⁴⁴ In this way, local elite families tried to instrumentalise the school to ensure their sons received the education they desired.

Initially, the kws was forced to maintain the practice of admitting the brothers of female students to ensure financial stability. In 1913, there were 36 girls and 22 boys at the school.⁴⁵ Ten years later, however, this image had changed completely. By 1923, 134 girls were registered at the school, 83 of whom lived in the boarding school. No boys had been admitted for several years.⁴⁶ In these ten years, Dutch-language education for girls changed from ‘a minority interest’⁴⁷ among priyayi to something that many parents were willing to pay significant sums of money for. This development was most likely connected to the higher numbers of educated priyayi men, who wanted a spouse with a similar educational background.⁴⁸

In short, being able to speak Dutch had become a prestigious skill not only for men, but for women as well: from the opening of the school onwards, kws teachers reported that Javanese parents first and foremost wanted their daughters to learn Dutch, prioritising the language over other school subjects.⁴⁹ For parents, girls’ education thus became an investment through which they could improve their daughters’ marriage chances and anchor themselves more firmly in the Javanese administrative elite. Educated girls, in this context, functioned as ‘a site to display familial status’.⁵⁰ Over the years, the vast majority of the students at the kws were the daughters of so-called *gouvernementsprijajis*, lower-ranking priyayi who worked for the colonial government.⁵¹ In their letters, graduates identified themselves as the daughters, sisters and wives of Javanese administrative officials and doctors in Dutch government service.⁵² The high student

44 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 40, H. Wellensiek, ‘Hoe de Javaansche meisjesschool met een jongen begon’, undated.

45 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 9, ‘Vijfde verslag 1913-1917’.

46 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 12, ‘Achtste Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand, de Koningin-Wilhelmina-School te Jogjakarta en de Koningin-Emma-School te Solo, 1 Juni 1923-1 September 1927’.

47 Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, 158.

48 ANRI Alg. Sec. GB MGS, inv. no. 4838, Regent of Sukapura to resident of the Priangan residencies, 25 December 1909; Patih of Sukabumi to resident of the Priangan residencies, 22 December 1909.

49 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, ‘Eerste verslag 1907’.

50 Shenila Khoja-Moolji, *Forging the Ideal Educated Girl: The Production of Desirable Subjects in Muslim South Asia* (Oakland 2018) 57. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.52>.

51 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 7, ‘Derde Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de “Koningin-Wilhelmina-School”, Christelijke School voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta, van 1 Juli 1909-30 Juni 1911’; Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 8, ‘Zesde Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand, de “Koningin-Wilhelmina-School”, te Jogjakarta en de “Koningin-Emma-School” te Solo, 30 Mei 1917-30 Mei 1919’.

52 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, ‘Brieven van oudleerlingen’.



The students of the kws posing with teaching assistant N. Bakker and headmistress H. Wellensiek. The picture was taken at the occasion of the birth of Princess Juliana in 1909 and several students are holding Dutch flags. Two years after its opening, boys were in the majority at the school, which the Dutch initiators had originally intended for girls only. This shows that priyayi parents instrumentalised the school for their own aims, namely the education of their sons.⁵³

53 Unknown photographer, 1909, published in 'Tweede Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de "Koningin-Wilhelmina-School"', Christelijke

School voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta, van 1 Juli 1907 – 30 Juni 1909'. Collection Atria IAV SCHIM, inv. no. 6.

numbers at the kws should thus be seen in the light of the social ambitions of these priyayi families.

It should be noted that the popularity of the kws lasted for only a few years. The priyayi demand for expensive girls' boarding schools started to wane from the middle of the 1920s onwards. By that time, coeducation had become increasingly accepted in Javanese circles, and the rapid expansion of the educated middle class in Javanese cities such as Yogyakarta meant that once-strict social divisions in Javanese society were increasingly blurred, making priyayi-only schools obsolete.⁵⁴ The kws also had to deal with increasing competition: by the end of the 1930s there were thirteen Dutch-language primary schools for Indonesian children in the city.⁵⁵ Finally, during the economic crisis in the 1930s, the salaries of lower-ranking priyayi suffered from budget cuts, and fewer and fewer families were willing or able to pay the school fees.⁵⁶ A combination of these factors ultimately gave the kws the final push towards conversion into a coeducational school for all social classes.⁵⁷

Christian criticism on Javanese family life

As was the case with priyayi parents who were looking to enhance their daughters' marriage chances, the decision of the Ladies' Committee in Amsterdam to focus on the female segment of the elite was guided by conceptions of gender and class. The Dutch initiators of the kws believed that girls who spent their school years at a Christian school would likely become catalysts of Christian influence in their own direct environment. In their fundraising material, they presented young Javanese elite girls as the 'future wives' of priyayi men and the 'future mothers' of coming generations who would be able to spread Christian values in their own families.⁵⁸ In this way, the initiators imagined the school as an opportunity for the Protestant mission to reach the upper echelons of local society. The high social status of these new Christian families, moreover, would then assure the spreading of

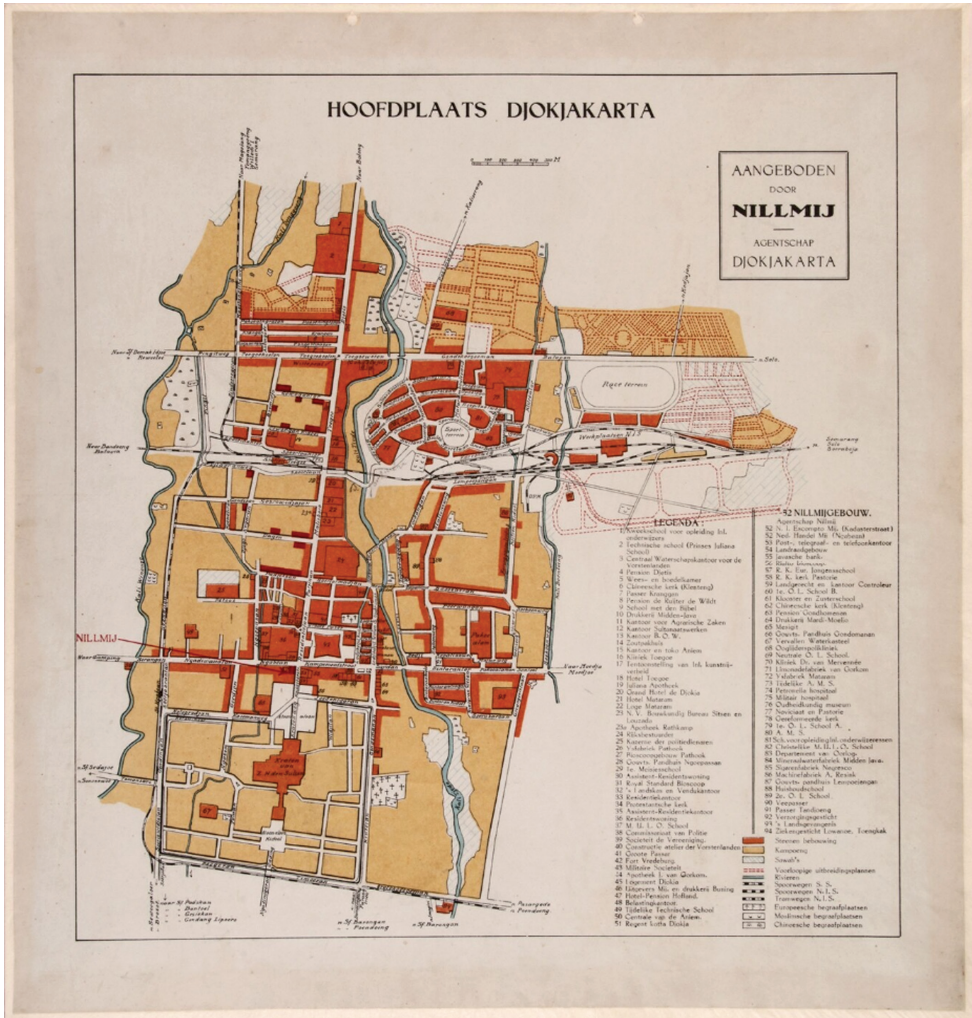
54 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 32, M.J. Van Schelven to support committee, 2 May 1934. For more about the expanding middle classes in late-colonial Indonesia, see: Tom Hoogervorst and Henk Schulte Nordholt, 'Urban Middle Classes in Colonial Java (1900-1942): Images and Language', *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde/Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 173:4 (2017) 442-474. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17304002>.

55 NA MvK, inv. no. 143, 'Memorie van Overgave van J. Bijleveld, Gouverneur van Jogjakarta 1934-1939'.

56 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 32, M.J. Van Schelven to support committee, 2 May 1934; Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, 120-121.

57 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 34, Support committee to board of Vereeniging Scholen met den Bijbel, 4 May 1939; Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 34, G.L. Bakker to Support Committee, 20 December 1939.

58 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, 'Eerste verslag 1907'.



▲ The city of Yogyakarta, circa 1925. The red shading indicates wealthier neighbourhoods, including predominantly European areas, while the orange shading represents less advantaged urban areas where local Javanese people were in the majority. The kws was located in Bintaran, a well-to-do neighbourhood to the east of the *kraton*, the residence of the Sultan. The school was close to the palace of the Paku Alam, the other royal residence in the city.⁵⁹

59 Hoofdplaats Djokjakarta, undated. © Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, TM-2423-20, <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11840/80889>.

the faith among the wider Javanese population, so the mission hoped.⁶⁰ This assumption was rooted in the highly romanticised image that many Dutch social reformers had of the priyayi classes.⁶¹ Drawing on the wider Dutch ‘Orientalist infatuation’⁶² with the refinement of priyayi culture, the support committee described the priyayi classes as ‘the designated leaders of their ignorant people’.⁶³

The Amsterdam Ladies’ Committee explicitly directed its ambitions towards the domestic realm. Javanese priyayi homes at the time looked quite different from the bourgeois Christian ideal of the nuclear family. Priyayi households were large communities where family members of different generations lived together, often linked through polygamous marriages. The number of household members was usually not fixed, as it was common for extended family members and other guests to live with relatives for an extended time.⁶⁴ As other scholars have noted before, this living situation attracted a lot of criticism from social activists – both Dutch and Indonesian – including Raden Adjeng Kartini, a regent’s daughter who rose to fame with her pleas for education for elite Javanese girls.⁶⁵

In the discourse of the kws, Javanese family homes represented a dangerous environment that was far from appropriate for the raising of young girls into responsible housemothers. Supporters of the school especially condemned polygamy and arranged marriages. Henriëtte Kuyper informed the readers of a Dutch Christian women’s magazine that priyayi girls were ‘simply sold without any right of say, to an unknown man whose property they become, and who can sell or cast [them] out at will’ when they were ‘practically still children’.⁶⁶ Needless to say, such judgements lacked nuance and did not necessarily reflect local customs. While upper-class Javanese girls indeed often were betrothed in their early teens or even earlier, their actual marriage often took place years later.⁶⁷ The same goes for Kuyper’s claim

60 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, ‘Eerste verslag 1907’.

61 Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas*, 76-78.

62 Gouda, *Dutch Culture Overseas*, 76.

63 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, ‘Eerste verslag 1907’.

64 Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, ‘Colonial Ambivalencies: European Attitudes towards the Javanese Household (1900-1942)’, in: Juliette Koning et al. (eds.), *Women and Households in Indonesia: Cultural Notions and Social Practices* (Richmond 2000) 36-37; Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, 20-21.

65 Locher-Scholten, ‘Colonial Ambivalencies’, 37. There is a copious literature on Kartini’s life. A good starting point is Jean Gelman Taylor, ‘Kartini

(1879-1904)’, in: *Digitaal Vrouwenlexicon van Nederland* (2014), <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/vrouwenlexicon/lemmata/data/Kartini>. The essential English edition of Kartini’s work is Joost Coté (ed.), *Kartini: The Complete Writings 1898-1904* (Clayton 2014).

66 H.S.S.K. [Henriëtte Sophia Suzanna Kuyper], ‘De Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo’, *Christelijk Vrouwenleven* 10 (1926) 172.

67 Susan Blackburn and Sharon Bessell, ‘Marriageable Age: Political Debates on Early Marriage in Twentieth-Century Indonesia’, *Indonesia* 63 (1997) 112. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3351513>.

that it was common for Javanese men to have over twenty wives.⁶⁸ In fact, Islamic law did not allow men to have more than four wives at the time, even though divorce and remarriage were common.⁶⁹ As in British India, where ‘child marriage’ was vehemently discussed by British social reformers⁷⁰, such remarks were an expression of the colonial maternalism that is discussed in the introduction to this special issue.

In the eyes of the Dutch kws supporters, the Javanese religion lay at the root of the moral corruption they identified in Javanese family life. In their fundraising material, they described this belief system as a *mengelgodsdienst*, a curious mixture of animism, Buddhism and Hinduism with a thin veneer of Islam.⁷¹ Again, such simplistic portrayals did not convey local realities, as Javanese religion was a synthesis between the observance of the five pillars of Islam, the belief in local spiritual forces and Sufi practices.⁷²

Unsurprising for Christian social reformers, the supporters of the kws saw Christianity as the basis of Western civilisation and social progress.⁷³ They painted a binary image of Christianity as being founded on love and charity, arguing that the Javanese people lived in fear of God and other spiritual powers instead. In the argumentation of the support committee, this supposed lack of familiarity with God’s perfect love accounted for the flawed family lives of the *priyayi*.⁷⁴ Indeed, kws supporters’ criticism of Javanese home life concentrated on what they perceived as a lack of affective bonds within family units. Because of a lack of trust and intimacy in Javanese marriages, they argued, Javanese women were unable to be their husbands’ ‘life companion’ (*levensgezellin*).⁷⁵ They contrasted this image of flawed Javanese marriages with the ideal of Christian companionate marriage. This idea of married life as a mutual effort of two people, connected by an intimate bond, was central to Christian

68 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, H.S.S. Kuyper, ‘Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo’, undated.

69 Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, 20.

70 See, for example: Subhasri Ghosh, ‘Coming of Age in Colonial India: The Discourse and Debate over the Age of Consummation in the Nineteenth Century’, in: Kristine Moruzi and Michelle J. Smith (eds.), *Colonial Girlhood in Literature, Culture and History, 1840-1950* (Basingstoke/New York 2014) 79-92. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137356352_6.

71 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, H.S.S. Kuyper, ‘Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo’, undated.

72 Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, 30.

73 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 8, ‘Vierde Verslag 1911-1913’.

74 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, H.S.S. Kuyper, ‘Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo’, undated.

75 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, H.S.S. Kuyper, ‘Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo’, undated.

ideals of domesticity and family life at the time.⁷⁶ But this criticism was not limited to husbands and wives alone: all Javanese family relationships were supposedly founded on fear and hierarchy.⁷⁷ The boarding school at the kws was supposed to function as an antidote to this environment by introducing Javanese girls to ‘the free and happy life, as it blossoms in our Christian families’.⁷⁸

Learning how to ‘do family right’

Two years after the opening of the school, the parents of one student decided to register her as a boarding girl because they considered their daughter too old to be seen in public on her way to school every day.⁷⁹ The idea of sending out a daughter was not foreign to priyayi culture, as priyayi girls often spent some time at the residence of a regent to acquire domestic and social skills.⁸⁰ The first boarding student was soon followed by another girl and two sisters from Demak. In the yearly report of the school, the entrance of the first boarding students was celebrated as a triumph, and the Ladies’ Committee proudly printed a studio portrait of the four girls. The photograph, which showed the girls wearing their richly decorated batik sarongs, was clearly meant to impress the school’s supporters with its aristocratic atmosphere.⁸¹ By the end of the 1910-1911 school year, eleven of the eighteen girls at the school were boarding students. There were also thirteen boys registered at the school, but they were not allowed to live in the dormitory.⁸²

There is no doubt that the teachers at the kws and its supporters saw the boarding section of the school as the most important means for evangelisation, as this institution represented an opportunity to bring elite Javanese girls permanently into a ‘Christian environment’.⁸³ The word ‘environment’ is of vital importance here. For the school’s initiators and supporters its Christian character lay not only in Bible readings and church visits. They interpreted Christianity not simply as a matter of personal beliefs:

76 Tine Van Osselaer, ‘Religion, Family and Domesticity in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: An Introduction’, in: Tine Van Osselaer and Patrick Pasture (eds.), *Christian Homes. Religion, Family and Domesticity in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leuven 2014) 17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1jks28>.

77 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 10, Zesde verslag 1917-1919.

78 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 10, Zesde verslag 1917-1919. ‘Het vrije en gelukkige leven, zooals het bloeit in onze Christelijke gezinnen (...)’.

79 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 40, H. Wellensiek, ‘Hoe de Javaansche meisjesschool met een jongen begon’, undated.

80 Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite*, 21.

81 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 7, ‘Derde verslag 1909-1911’.

82 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 7, ‘Derde verslag 1909-1911’.

83 Atria SCHIM IAV inv. no. 7, ‘Derde verslag 1909-1911’.



The first boarding school students of the kws, 1910. Little is known about their family background beyond their connection to the priyayi nobility. One of the girls was the daughter of a *djaksa*, a prosecutor in the Javanese legal system. Two of the first boarding students were sisters. By presenting this picture in its yearly report, the kws support committee aimed to provide proof of the success of the school in attracting boarding students to supporters and potential donors. The aristocratic and solemn atmosphere of the portrait eludes to the Dutch colonial fascination with the priyayi classes.⁸⁴

84 Unknown photographer, 1910. Published in 'Derde Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de "Koningin-Wilhelmina-School", Christelijke School

voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta, van 1 Juli 1909-30 Juni 1911'. Collection Atria IAV SCHIM, inv. no. 7.

instead, using a biblical metaphor, committee members likened the religion to 'sourdough' ('een zuurdesem') that permeated life in its entirety.⁸⁵ The school could, therefore, only be successful if the girls not only acquired knowledge of the Gospel but also gained first-hand experience of a Christian way of life that could counter the effects of their Javanese cultural background.⁸⁶ In other words, to build on a phrase used by gender historians Mary Huber and Nancy Lutkehaus, the boarding school was meant as a space where elite Javanese girls could learn how to 'do family right'.⁸⁷ This implied separation from their own cultural sphere. As one teacher phrased it, 'When our students go home at one in the afternoon, we have lost them'.⁸⁸

Affective bonds among the girls played an important role in the project of emotional and spiritual reform that ultimately came down to the creation of an 'alternative family' at boarding school. Teachers illustrated the familial atmosphere in the dormitories with anecdotes about the older girls fulfilling a motherly role for their younger schoolmates, tucking them into bed and saying evening prayers with them. The students and teachers shared their meals together, which was also presented as an aspect of Christian family life unknown to the Javanese.⁸⁹ When there were around fifty boarders, a second dormitory was built on the terrain of the school, so that the small-scale environment could be preserved. 'Two dormitories mean: two *families*. And in all respects, this is preferable to one big *institution*', the support committee stated.⁹⁰

To ensure that Protestants in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies would continue to make donations to the school, it was crucial that the support committee showed proof of the effectiveness of its strategies. Teachers presented Javanese girls as receptive to their message of Christian bourgeois domesticity. Publications mentioned, for example, that girls were 'not left untouched' by their stay in a Christian home⁹¹, or that God was 'working in their hearts'.⁹² It should, however, be emphasised that the large majority of the students at the KWS never converted. Throughout all yearly reports, there is mention of about twenty baptisms and confirmations, while there

85 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, H.S.S. Kuyper, 'Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo', undated; Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 8, 'Vierde verslag 1911-1913'.

86 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, H.S.S. Kuyper, 'Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo', undated.

87 Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy Christine Lutkehaus, *Gendered Missions: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice* (Ann Arbor 1999) 3.

88 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 44, H.M. Hemmes, 'De geestelijke kant van het onderwijs op onze Christelijke Huishoudscholen', 1936.

89 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 13, 'Negende Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo, 1 September 1927-31 December 1929'.

90 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 9, 'Vijfde verslag 1913-1917'. Italics appear in the source.

91 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 7, 'Derde verslag 1909-1911'.

92 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 8, 'Vierde verslag 1911-1913'.

were around 400 alumni by the mid-1930s.⁹³ For a young priyayi woman, conversion to Christianity meant a radical break with family tradition and a formal abandonment of Islam. Clearly, most students and their families were not interested in taking this step. The low number of conversions aligns with Merle Ricklef's observation that very few priyayi were attracted to Christianity.⁹⁴ It is unclear to what extent parents were aware of the prominent place of religion at the school, as the school board obscured the religious aspects of daily school life in its advertisements aimed at priyayi families.⁹⁵ But even if parents did know about the Christian outlook of the kws, it is quite possible that they considered it a small price to pay for the social advantages it could offer them.

Notwithstanding this lack of enthusiasm for conversion, the Dutch support committee extensively celebrated the few conversions that did occur from the 1920s onwards in the yearly reports and in fundraising material.⁹⁶ Through baptism, these Javanese girls entered into the universal 'family' of Christianity. Like conversions, examples of girls entering into companionate marriages were heralded as important indicators of the 'success' of a kws education. One alumna married a teacher from Madura, whom she helped with his correction work. She also started a needlework club for the wives and daughters of Madurese colonial officials and, according to the yearly reports of the kws, told them stories from the Bible.⁹⁷ In another instance, a former student who had been baptised married a Christian Javanese man and moved to East Java, where the couple engaged in 'evangelising work: he as the leader of a Christian choir, she in a women's association'.⁹⁸ Such anecdotes were displayed as proof that living in the boarding school was indeed effective, because graduates recreated the Christian-bourgeois family model propagated in the school in their own lives.

To ensure the continuity of Christian influence in the life of alumnae, the kws teachers did their best to keep in touch with them. Twenty years after its opening, the school had built up an elaborate network of former students who received Christian books and magazines. These reading materials were sent out from Yogyakarta along with a newsletter that contained Bible quotes, messages for individual readers, tidbits of news about marriages and births – under the heading of 'News from the kws Family' – and ideas for recipes and

93 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 16, 'Twaalfde verslag 1936-1937'.

94 Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, 257.

95 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 5, 'Eerste verslag 1907, Circulaire aan de prijaji's en inlandsche ambtenaren'; Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 48, 'Christelijke Huishoudschool met internaat te Djokjakarta (Klitren lor 13)/Pawijatan "Ngrengga

sarta ngreksa Grija" Kristen (nganggé pondokan) ing Ngajogjakarta (Klitren Lor 13)', 1927.

96 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 13, 'Negende verslag 1927-1929'.

97 H.S.S.K. [Henriëtte Sophia Suzanna Kuyper], 'De Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo', *Christelijk Vrouwenleven* 10 (1926) 201.

98 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 13, 'Negende verslag 1927-1929'.

needlework.⁹⁹ Former students were regularly invited to return to the school to celebrate Christmas and teachers' birthdays and stay there for a couple of days.¹⁰⁰ All these efforts were meant to keep the alternative family at school intact beyond the school years.

Mixed responses: life as a kws graduate in changing times

'Your naughty little student is a young lady now', Marjani jokingly finished her 1935 letter to her former teacher Wellensiek.¹⁰¹ This section turns to the question of how kws alumni looked back on their education in later years, and what effect it had on their individual lives. How did they deal with the experience of having received a prestigious education, while also having lived for some years in an environment that was designed to remove them from their own cultural background? Undeniably, the body of around 60 letters that has survived in the archives inevitably gives a skewed image of former students' lives. Not only were they often written years after graduation, only a small percentage of alumni kept in touch with their former teachers in the Netherlands. The letters in the archive are written by around 35 different girls and young women.

Some alumnae seem to have experienced tension between their lives with their family and their school experiences. Soemanti, for example, contrasted her quiet family environment in the village of Mundinan, East Java, with the liveliness of the boarding school and said that she felt restricted in her freedom, as her parents were 'a little bit old-fashioned' ('een beetje van het oude geslacht').¹⁰² In other cases, the choices of alumni caused rifts within families. This is particularly visible in letters by young women who wrestled with their religious feelings. Three letter writers experienced severe conflict with their families after they decided to become Christians. Teacher training student Moetinah, for example, told Wellensiek that her parents had explicitly forbidden her to convert, telling her that she was too young to be thinking about religious matters. Despite their objections, she was baptised in the presence of her sister, who apparently supported her.¹⁰³ Similarly,

99 Utrechts Archief (hereafter UA), Utrecht, Archive Generaal Deputaatschap voor de Zending, Zendingbureau, Zendingcentrum en aanverwante instellingen van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (hereafter GDZ), entry no. 1133, inv. no. 3115, 'Rondzendbrieven 1932-1939'.

100 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 16, 'Twaalfde Verslag van het Comité van Bijstand voor de Christelijke Scholen voor Meisjes uit den Javaanschen

Adelstand te Jogjakarta en Solo, 1 januari 1936 – 31 december 1937'.

101 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, S. Marjani to H. Wellensiek, 13 August 1935. 'Uw kleine, ondeugende leerling van vroeger is nu een jonge dame'.

102 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Soemanti to H. Wellensiek, 22 January 1928.

103 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Moetinah to H. Wellensiek, 10 February 1929.



▲
'Een kijkje in de huiskamer' ('A look inside the living room'). The ideal of Christian domesticity came to the fore in the material aspects of the KWS school interior as well. The older girls on the right are portrayed while they are doing needlework, an important aspect of bourgeois girls' education at the time. The toys of the small children on the left include a miniature Noah's ark and two dolls dressed in costumes from Marken, a village in the Netherlands. These toys were gifts from individual women in the Netherlands who financially supported the school, as well as from women's auxiliary committees for the Protestant mission.¹⁰⁴

104 Unknown photographer, undated. Atria IAV SCHIM,
inv. no. 40.

Miranti decided to get baptised without telling her mother because it would only cause 'trouble' ('gezeur').¹⁰⁵ Tensions only grew worse when Miranti decided to take up a job teaching domestic science. Her mother accused her of forgetting all about her family now that she was a Christian.¹⁰⁶ In this instance, a Javanese mother indeed felt that her daughter's education had removed her from her familial roots. Miranti, however, felt happy in her busy new job.¹⁰⁷ Eight years later, in 1937, she was still working at the secondary school connected to the kws.¹⁰⁸

Some graduates made choices that did not directly align with their priyayi background nor with the ideals of the kws. The letters of graduates who chose to pursue a professional career are especially fascinating because both priyayi culture and kws educators considered motherhood to be a woman's primary calling. kws teachers generally approved when unmarried graduates such as Miranti took up employment. This was, in the end, the life these Dutch women had chosen for themselves as well. Most graduates who wrote about their careers likewise chose occupations that fitted the Christian ideal of women devoting themselves to caring for others. They became teachers or worked in the medical field, such as Ida, who became a midwife.¹⁰⁹ In other cases, graduates did not express professional aspirations themselves, but were able to give their own children access to higher education. Kloempoek, for example, told Wellensiek in the mid-1930s that two of her children went to the prestigious lyceum of the Carpentier Alting Foundation in Batavia, while one of her daughters was in medical school.¹¹⁰

Notwithstanding their approval of some careers, teachers also warned graduates in the school newsletter not to idealise professional life too much. They stressed that having a job was not the only way to lead a fulfilling life, trying to encourage housewifely ambitions in their graduates instead.¹¹¹ Married women who pursued a career were reproached in no uncertain manner. Oeminari, a teacher and mother of nine, was sharply reminded by a kws teacher in one of the newsletters that she had to quit her job immediately if she started to neglect housework. The teacher pointed out that her God-given primary duties were in the household.¹¹²

Perhaps surprisingly, there were also instances when Javanese women turned their kws education to use for the Indonesian independence

105 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Miranti to H. Wellensiek, 10 February 1929.

106 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Miranti to H. Wellensiek, 4 June 1929.

107 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Miranti to H. Wellensiek, 29 July 1929.

108 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 16, 'Twaalfde verslag 1936-1937'.

109 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Ida to H. Wellensiek, 25 August 1935.

110 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Kloempoek to H. Wellensiek, 21 August 1935.

111 UA GDZ 1133, inv. no. 3115, 'Rondzendbrief', 27 September 1932.

112 UA GDZ 1133, inv. no. 3115, 'Rondzendbrief', October 1938.

movement. One of the school newsletters mentioned no less than three graduates who were Taman Siswa teachers.¹¹³ Taman Siswa was an anticolonial school organisation that aimed to offer an alternative to Western-oriented education, which it regarded as imperialist.¹¹⁴ However, working at a Taman Siswa school did not necessarily imply an ideological adherence to anticolonialism, as Agus Suwignyo has noted. Because of severe government budget cuts to public education, independent schools such as the Taman Siswa institutions remained one of the few options open for Javanese teachers in the 1930s.¹¹⁵ That said, some kws students did become outspoken nationalists and even combined this with Christian sensibilities, such as the teacher Miati. While Miati recounted that she and her family had celebrated Christmas, she also expressed her hope for ‘a happy and unified Indonesia’ (‘een gelukkig en groot Indonesië’) at the death of her brother, who was active in the nationalist movement.¹¹⁶ Miati might have been part of the large group of Dutch-educated Indonesians who experienced a shift in their political ideas in the crisis years of the 1930s.¹¹⁷ Such ideas were far removed from the ideal of the compliant Christian housemother and the loyal colonial subject that the kws had tried to instil in its students.

Conclusion

The kws in Yogyakarta served divergent goals for its different stakeholders. To priyayi parents, the prestigious and expensive education at the Dutch school represented an opportunity to anchor themselves more firmly in the Javanese administrative elite and increase their daughters’ marriage chances. Elite Protestant women from the Netherlands, however, saw the school as a place where priyayi girls could be re-educated through the experience of a particular form of Christian family life. The letters of alumni show

113 UA GDZ 1133, inv. no. 3115, ‘Rondzendbrief’, April 1938.

114 Ki Hadjar Dewantara, ‘Een en ander over “nationaal onderwijs” en het instituut “Taman Siswo” te Jogjakarta’, in: Maria Anna Emma Van Lith-Van Schreven and Jacoba Hendrika Hooykaas-Van Leeuwen Boomkamp (eds.), *Indisch Vrouwenjaarboek 1936* (Yogyakarta 1936) 206–219; Kenji Tsuchiya, *Democracy and Leadership: The Rise of the Taman Siswa Movement in Indonesia* (Honolulu 1987).

115 Agus Suwignyo, ‘The Great Depression and the changing trajectory of public education policy in Indonesia, 1930–42’, *Journal of Southeast Asian*

Studies 44:3 (2013) 466–467. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463413000337>.

116 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Miati to H. Wellensiek, 1 January 1938.

117 Agus Suwignyo, ‘The Making of Politically Conscious Indonesian Teachers in Public Schools, 1930–42’, *Southeast Asian Studies* 3:1 (2014) 121. For a discussion of political consciousness amongst Indonesians who studied in the Netherlands, see Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia: Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement, 1917–1931*, NIAS Monographs 45 (Copenhagen 2019).

that these young women used their education to pursue widely divergent trajectories that did not necessarily align with the interests of their families, nor with those of their former teachers. Their education, coupled with their background, gave them access to a range of social groups in colonial society. While some kws graduates chose to convert and became integrated into Christian communities, which fitted the objectives of the kws, the large majority did not. Those who combined a professional career with marriage and motherhood effectively went against the cultural codes they had absorbed in both their Javanese families of origin and their Christian boarding school 'family'. All in all, educated women found ways to instrumentalise their education to attain their own goals. That is not to say that the affective ties established at the kws did not run deep. Sometimes these connections made it through tumultuous times: in 1947, in the middle of the Indonesian War of Independence, twenty former kws students still found the occasion to celebrate Christmas together.¹¹⁸

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118 Atria IAV SCHIM inv. no. 41, Seger to H. Wellensiek, 23 May 1948.