LOCALITY AND IDENTITY: HENRI MACLAINE PONT AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN THE LATE COLONIAL DUTCH EAST INDIES

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Abstract

This paper investigates issues of representation, interpretation, and difference in architecture in colonial and racialised environments, through a case study of the work of Dutch engineer, architect, and archaeologist Henri Maclaine Pont in the late colonial Dutch East Indies. Pont extensively surveyed regional Javanese building forms, and through his work he attempted to hybridise Javanese and 'Western' forms to produce a more 'appropriate' and representative form of architecture for public buildings. This paper addresses the question: is it possible for Pont's work to authentically represent any real differences, or did it mainly seek to reconcile difference and pacify the destabilising threat posed by it, serving only as a mechanism for the continued repression of the Other?

It revisits Pont's most influential but scarcely examined publication 'Javaansche Architectuur' and examines the way he practices the ideas proposed in it, in his own work. It finds that Pont demonstrates a critical awareness of the way in which the hierarchies of power affect representation in a colonial environment, but that he does not criticise the existence of these hierarchies themselves. Instead, he relies on common rationalisations and justifications, rooted in social evolutionism, paternalism, and racism. It notes that the historiography on Maclaine Pont has chosen to omit his more problematic views, in favour of a more sympathetic characterisation which presents him as a protector of the Javanese tradition.

CONTENTS

Introduction

The last quarter of the 19th century saw an increase in the number of Europeans settling in the colonial territory of the 'Dutch-Indies'. Amongst them were a remarkable number of Architects who set up offices and started practicing in, what was to them, a new context. Henri Maclaine Pont was one of these Dutch architects active in Indonesia during the 1920s and 1930s. Alongside his colleague Thomas Karsten, he is credited with the creation of the architectural movement known as 'Indies architecture'. This movement sought to hybridise 'Eastern' and 'Western' architecture and served as a counter point to the 'tropical Netherlands' vision that marginalised the indigenous culture in favour of Western norms.[1]

Pont was the first to problematise the decline of Indonesia's building tradition in his 1923 essay "Javaansche architectuur".[2] Through his work he tried to modernise the traditional building forms, most famously in his design for the Bandoeng Technische Hogeschool – now Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB). Which, through its innovative application of local materials, is still regarded as a successful example of locality in architecture.[3] While the "Indies architecture" movement was ultimately short lived, Pont's work continues to play a role in contemporary discourse on traditionality and locality in Indonesian architecture.

What is important to understand about the 'debate' around Indonesian architecture during the 1920s, is that it was primarily concerned with *'the delicate question regarding the legitimacy of future and development in a colonized society; the use of a more Western frame or to fit in the Indonesian cultural context.'*[4] This is best understood in the context of the Dutch Ethical Policy, which at the time had replaced the old system of exploitation, in favour of a kind of 'colonial benevolence', which on one hand was meant to *"uplift the Indies population"* and on the other hand to *"secure a "peaceful" space for the increasing number of Europeans (...) in the Indies".*[5]

This policy demonstrates both, an awareness a growing national conscious, and the tenuous position of the Dutch colonial government. This sentiment is most clearly expressed by Thomas Karsten in *De Taak*, when he writes about the imposition of Western architectural styles *"the coloniser confirms the existence of that split which eventually stimulates the rebellion of the colonised, with "every tukang" potentially a member of "a rebellious proletariat". In these conditions indigenous skills become "spiritual weapons"; every building asserting foreign domination can provoke a reaction and may be "a step toward an Indies architecture of their own".*[6] Karsten implies that architecture could be used to resolve this tension and prevent a violent revolution when he writes *"...a successful architecture must express a unity of the spiritual and material needs..."*[7].

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[1] Abidin Kusno, "Behind the Postcolonial: Architecture, Urban Space and Political Cultures in Indonesia", in *Colonialism and the modern world: selected studies*, (New York: Routledge, 2015), 270.

[2] Henri Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur", in *Djawa Vol.3&4, 1923/1924.*

[3] Diah Asih Purwaningrum, "INDONESIAN ARCHITECTS AND BEING INDONESIAN: Contemporary Context of Nusantaran Architecture in Architectural Design and Theory"*, 2021, 79.

[4] Purwaningrum, "INDONESIAN ARCHITECTS AND BEING INDONESIAN"*, 79.

[5] Kusno, "Behind the Postcolonial", 268.

[6] Thomas Karsten, "Bij de eerste Indiese Architectuur Tentoonstelling" (On the occasion of the first Indies architecture exhibition), *De Taak 3, no. 33* (13 March 1920): 301. as cited by Helen Jessup, "DUTCH ARCHITECTURAL VISIONS OF THE INDONESIAN TRADITION", 1985, 138.

[7] Thomas Karsten, "Bij de eerste Indiese Architectuur Tentoonstelling"*, 301 as cited by Helen Jessup.

Pont's position in this dynamic remains ambiguous, on one hand he fervently defended the Indonesian building tradition as being equal to Western architecture. On the other hand, his surveys of traditional building forms and attempts to produce an original 'Indonesian' architecture primarily appear as a reflection of his own Western architectural values. This raises the question, whether it is possible for Pont's work to authentically represent any real cultural differences, or whether it mainly sought to reconcile difference and pacify the destabilising threat posed by it, serving only as a mechanism for the continued repression of the Other.

The aim of this paper is to answer these questions through a postcolonial critique of Pont's position, by analysing his study of and contribution to Indonesian architecture and architectural discourse in the context of the Dutch Ethical Policy and the colonial matrix of power.

literature review

While not without exceptions, the current literature on Maclaine Pont can roughly be divided into two categories. In the first category are the purely historiographical and biographical publications, mostly written in the Dutch language or by Dutch authors. This is due to the simple fact that the archival materials are in Dutch and located in the Netherlands, but it is nonetheless relevant considering the somewhat uncritical position of some of these authors. The second, consist of what could be categorised as post-colonial literature, mainly written in English, these publications provide a more nuanced critique of Pont's work, but are also constrained by the assessment of the first group due to limited access to primary sources. It deserves mentioning that some literature on the topic is written in Indonesian and is therefore unfortunately not accessible to the author of this paper.

In 1988 Helen Jessup published the first historiographical work on Pont in her PhD dissertation. Jessup presents Pont and his colleague Thomas Karsten as progressive and socially engaged architects who possessed a *"farsighted blending of idealism and practicality (and) grasp of the roots of Javanese culture"*, and laments the fact that their ideas did have a greater influence after Indonesia gained independence.[8] Ben van Leerdam covered Pont's architectural works in more detail in 1988 and again in 1995.[9] He applauds the regional character and use of local materials in Pont's work. In 2009 Gerrit de Vries and Dorothee Segaar-Howeler published their monograph on Pont, which combines findings from the previously mentioned works and adds new information from archival research.[10]

The post-colonial texts build on this foundation but take a more critical look at Pont's position in the colonial system. Steven Cairns argues that through the process of drawing the form of the *pendapa*, Pont was able to translate it as architecture, but that this inclusion into the architectural institution nullified any potential for difference: *"The pendapa is not inherently architectural; rather its architectural status is negotiated, ascribed, and, consequently fetishized as a structurally elegant, beautiful object. Its object status is projected and drawn out of the opacities it presents to the architectural light cast on to it."*[11] Abidin Kusno places Pont's work in the context of the Dutch Ethical policy and argues that his rationalist Western

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[8] Helen Jessup, "DUTCH ARCHITECTURAL VISIONS OF THE INDONESIAN TRADITION", 1985, 159.

[9] Ben F. van Leerdam, "Henri Maclaine Pont, architect tussen twee werelden", 1988. and Ben F. van Leerdam, "architect Henri Maclaine Pont, een speurtocht naar het wezenlijke van de Javaanse architectuur", 1995.

[10] Gerrit de Vries et al., *Henri Maclaine Pont 1884-1971: architect, constructeur, archeoloog* (Rotterdam: Stichting BONAS, 2009).

[11] Stephen Cairns, "Re-Surfacing: Architecture, Wayang, and the 'Javanese House'" in *Postcolonial Space(s)*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 85.

approach failed to encompass the cultural and spiritual aspects of the traditional architecture, but claims that this ultimately left a space for Indonesian nationalist to insert their own cultural identity. In that sense Kusno argues that Pont should be understood as a 'hybrid subject', *"whose professional identity was formed as neither colonizer nor colonized."*[12] Regarding the wider architectural discourse, Passchier points out that *"even if they (colonial architects) were opposite to each other or to the system, still belonged to and were members of a colonial society"*[13] and that *"the small Indonesian elite did not really join this discussion, it was all really 'about them' and it happened 'without them'."*[14]

Methodology

This paper will analyse primary sources of Pont's writings which have thus far evaded critical examination, in order to identify statements which reveal something about his personal attitudes towards the indigenous people and the colonial project. These will be compared to the historiographical characterisations to determine whether they 'fit' the narrative which has thus far been presented. It will discuss the application of his ideas in his architectural work and discuss how his use of representation serves the interests of the coloniser versus the colonised.

Figure 1 Unknown Photographer, Noor Gerlings and Henri Maclaine Pont in front of their house in Semarang, 1913, in "Henri Maclaine Pont 1884-1971" by Gerrit de Vries, 17.

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[12] Kusno, "Behind the Postcolonial", 268.
[13] Cor Passchier, "The quest for the ultimate architecture", in *Tentang Bentang*, 2008, 1.
[14] Passchier, "The quest for the ultimate architecture", 1.

Historical background

At the beginning of the 19th century the colonial territory referred to as the 'Dutch-Indies', was essentially run as *"an enormous agroeconomic project; with the Dutch as the possessors, having the advantage of the financial profits."* [15] In 1870, this system, known as the 'Cultuurstelsel' was abolished, and it became possible for the private sector to acquire land from the government, and establish businesses. This caused a shift in the colony from an exploitation model to a settlement model, which saw significant increase in the number of Europeans settling in the colony. Among them were a remarkable number of Architects who set up offices and started practicing in, what was to them, a new context. Henri Maclaine Pont was one of these Dutch architects working in Indonesia during the 1920s and 1930s.

As a consequence of the migration and rapid urbanisation, former rural villages (*desa)* were swallowed by the growing city and became urban *kampung*. Due to poor governance and planning, these areas became overcrowded, suffered from hygiene problems and saw the former social cohesion disappear.[16] In an attempt to remove what remained of the former "Cultuurstelsel", the Dutch banned the social tradition known as *sambatan*, which functioned as a kind of feudal system that was often abused by local rulers to exploit the indigenous people, mainly due to incentives given by the colonial government to increase productivity.

However, this was also a system of "mutual self-help" which facilitated the construction and maintenance of village housing. The abolition of this system therefore made the Javanese dependant on cash for labour and undermined social integrity.[17] Additionally, due to outbreaks of the plague, at the time believed to be caused by rats nesting in cut bamboo, a total ban was placed on its use as a construction material. This meant houses now had to be constructed from timber, a more costly material which was not locally available, and which the population lacked the necessary skills to use. This also made the maintenance of existing structures impossible, leading to further deterioration.[18]

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[15] J.A.A. van Doorn. *De laatste eeuw van Indië. Ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project.* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1994) 9. As cited in Passchier, "The quest for the ultimate architecture"*, 2008, 1.
[16] Passchier, "The quest for the ultimate architecture"*, 2.
[17] Jessup, "DUTCH ARCHITECTURAL VISIONS OF THE INDONESIAN TRADITION", 145.
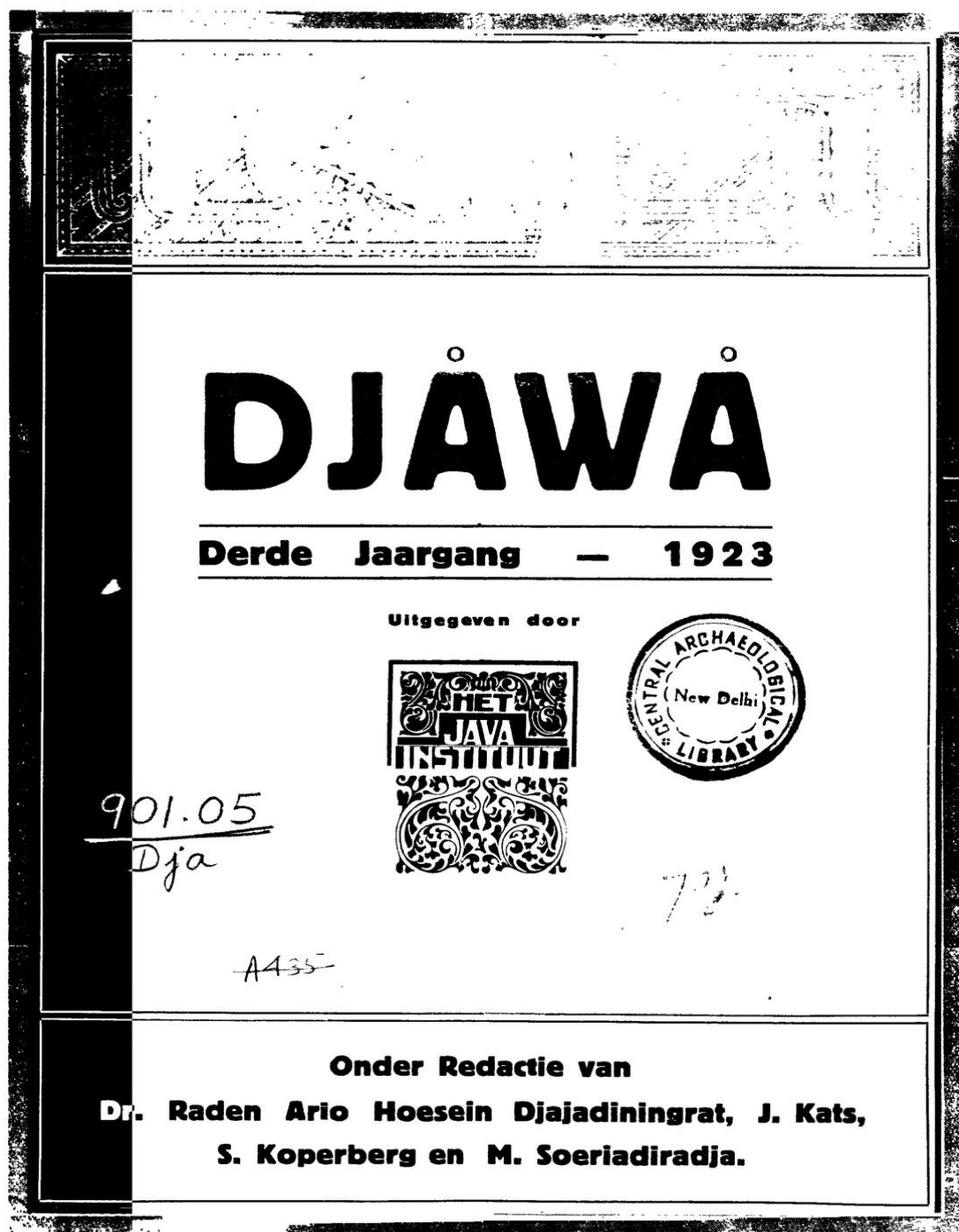[18] Jessup, "DUTCH ARCHITECTURAL VISIONS OF THE INDONESIAN TRADITION", 145.

Figure 2 Het Java-Instituut, cover page of Djawa vol 3, 1923

'Het Inlandsch bouwambacht, zijn beteekenis.. en toekomst?' - The indigenous building craft, its meaning... and future?

Pont was one of the first to problematise the decline of Indonesia's building tradition in his 1923 essay "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht"[19]. Between 1920 and 1923 Pont spent time traveling around Java as a technical inspector for the Public Health Service[20]. During his travels he surveyed traditional building forms, but he also witnessed the state of deterioration in the local villages first hand. The essay was published in several parts in a Dutch language magazine called Djawa printed by 'het Java instituut' (fig 1.), an organisation which was founded by the Dutch with the explicit aim of 'reviving' the indigenous culture of Java, Madoera and Bali.

In his text, Pont argues against the oppressive government control over housing, instead proposing to institutionalise the *sambatan* to ensure 'proper maintenance' of the villages. While some authors have taken this text as evidence to suggest that Pont was opposed to colonialism, this chapter attempts to demonstrate that Pont did not oppose the colonial system itself. Instead, Pont blames the decline of the Javanese building tradition and dire living conditions on *"An insufficient understanding of the traditions and needs of the indigenous people"[21]* on the part of the colonial rulers, while positioning himself as an authority on what he characterises as a 'peculiar' and 'remarkably strong building tradition'.

"Do people think that the co-called bamboo and rattan ingenuity came to this people out of nowhere? A wilful illusion: the harsh reality, however, is that this craft is being disrupted in order to bring the so-called higher housing and building needs to the people, in the form of those certain constructions and models that we all know, to be implemented everywhere by regulations, and that are, compared to those old models, worse in almost every respect."[22]

With this statement Pont elevates the Javanese building tradition, while opposing the idea that the imposed Western building standards are somehow superior. At the same time, the tone of his descriptions of the Javanese building tradition is somewhat authoritative and patronising. Implying to his readers that, while it is understandable that these temporary dwellings may appear insufficient by Western standards, they are more than adequate for the needs of the indigenous people:

"It is therefore the simplest compositions, the simplest working methods, which are used there and which - grown from the peculiar, completely dependable dexterity in which these peoples in particular can acquire such great skill - are not open to improvement for this people"[23]

He then goes on to propose his 'solution', which would involve lifting the old blanket ban on bamboo construction and certain roof types and be replaced by new rules to regulate and improve existing housing stock. He proposes: *"Two new standards: one for the 'correct' maintenance of the dwellings, and a second mandating necessary periodical restoration."* Which he argues *"is entirely in line with the folk custom"[24]* Or should this not suffice, to only grant temporary building permits with a fixed expiration date, which would only be renewed if

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[19] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht, zijn beteekenis.. en toekomst?", in *Djawa,* Vol.3*, 1923.*
[20] Jessup, "DUTCH ARCHITECTURAL VISIONS OF THE INDONESIAN TRADITION", 141.
[21] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 79.
[22] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 81.
[23] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 80.
[24] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 84.

the buildings are cleaned in a 'satisfactory way'. Essentially proposing a situation in which the occupants can be forced to maintain their buildings to his standards, under treat of eviction and demolition.

Pont goes on to explain that the enforcement of his policy would require a classification of traditional building forms in order to allow standards to be adjusted to local conditions and to regulate which buildings can be built in what locations. A task for which he would of course be the ideal candidate, considering his authority as an expert on the local building traditions. Granting himself the power to classify and regulate the building tradition of a culture to which he himself does not belong.

What is most interesting about his argument is that Pont identifies a lack of understanding of the needs Javanese people on the part of the coloniser, and not the fact of colonisation itself, as the primary cause of the poor state of dwellings in the *desa* and urban *kampung*. In this way the desire to institutionalise the temporary building tradition and practice of the *sambatan*, can be viewed as an attempt to pacify the potential threat of difference and to regulate the urban space in a way that makes sense to Western planning and hygiene standards.

Pont concludes this part by stating that *"For the foreseeable future, the population is not yet capable of meeting its own needs, as evidenced by the decline of wood- and bamboo skills in the desa's."* Further asserting the necessity of colonial 'guidance' and the need for his own expertise in 'rescuing' this tradition which he is so fond of.

Pont also proposed the organisation of design competitions at annual markets to *"revive interest and trust in the crafts with the people."* And *"possibly forming or modifying the building tradition in a hygienic or economic sense"* [25] In principle the idea of a platform for promoting building skills seems noble, but the critical issue, which is left unaddressed by Pont, is the question of who organises these competitions and who selects which designs or ideas are the 'right' ones.

Further on, Pont gives some idea of what he believes is the 'right' direction for Javanese architecture to develop in: *"The carving period in the Javanese wood construction school, which started at the height of its heyday, is at the same time the most certain element that led to its decline: to the use of clumsy, needlessly uneconomical constructions around the carvings."*[26] He then presents what he believes is a more agreeable example of a Javanese building in Koedoes, about which he writes: *"the essential parts of the construction were further processed in a concise manner with motifs that speak particularly beautifully against the calm and flat wall fillings, so that a very expressive and elegant whole was obtained, a perfectly classical solution, in which the main construction is also the main element of the composition. there is nothing ostentatious and every part fulfils its own meaningful function constructively and aesthetically."*[27]

This statement is particularly interesting because it reveals a strong sentiment against the use of ornament when it does not also serve a structural purpose. This echoes the attitude of Sir Banister Fletcher about 'Eastern' architecture expressed in 'A History of Architecture', as discussed by Nalbantoglu in 'Writing Postcoloniality in Architecture'. Nalbantoglu demonstrates how in his analysis of 'non-historical' styles Fletcher affirms the western

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[25] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 85.
[26] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 85.
[27] Maclaine Pont, "Het Inlandsch bouwambacht", 85.

perspective that: *"ornament is acceptable only when it is subordinate to, or in the service of structure. Overly elaborate decoration, excessive ornamentation is to be relegated to the grotesque"*[28] She explains that, in western architectural history, ornament has been associated with *"dishonesty, impurity and excessiveness as opposed to the essential nature of structure."*[29]

From this statement it seems that what Pont was trying to do with his work, is not to understand and promote the Javanese tradition as it existed then, but to take from it what he believes aligns with his Western values of clarity, efficiency, and hygiene, and to create a new more acceptable form of 'Javanese' architecture by Western standards.

An argument that Pont repeats throughout his text, is that his policy would ultimately help relieve government responsibility – even though it would require additional administrative workers. With this it seems like he is appealing directly to the colonial government. This suggests that he believed that his proposal would have made it easier to maintain control of the colonial territories. In this way, Pont's study of the culture of the colonial subject is immediately turned into a tool for their continued subjugation.

During this time the colonial territories were starting to become somewhat of a financial burden for the Netherlands, so there was a need for the colony to become more self-sufficient. This points to a contradiction in the imperial logic of the Ethical Policy. On the outside the colonial interference was sold as a humanitarian project, while in reality its 'success' hinged on the ability of the colony to fund its own exploitation. What Achille Mbembe calls and 'empire-on-the-cheap', where *"the colonised had to finance their own servitude."*[30]

So far, Pont's assertions could be relegated to the realm of well-meaning paternalism. However, the second part of his essay reveals a much more problematic attitude. When arguing against the abolition of the *sambatan* Pont writes:

"Undoubtedly, what was demanded of the Javanese in the past has often been exaggerated. However, in my opinion, it cannot be denied that the Javanese, with their excess of free time, are at their best under coercion and capable of the best and most respectable work, and that they are still better "corveable" than financially taxed in their economic position. It may be considered as an unheard-of heresy if I say that, in my best judgment, not everything that was previously considered extortion has had a detrimental effect on the native society."[31]

The term "corveable" literally means being made to 'work without pay' and is used here to refer to the former feudal service which was part of the *sambatan*. This comment shows that Pont believed the former system of forced labour was in fact 'for their own benefit' and made the Javanese people a better asset to the coloniser, as evidenced by the lack of productivity and taxable income under the current system of 'free' enterprise. In the untranslated Dutch text, Pont refers to the Javanese people as 'de Javaan', the use of the definite article 'de', in combination with the singular noun 'Javaan', effectively robbing all 40 million indigenous inhabitants of their individuality and reducing them to a single known subject. 'He' does not know how to spend his time, 'he' needs us to tell him what to do. 'He' is too easily impressed

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[28] Nalbantoglu, "Writing Postcoloniality in Architecture", 1995, 4.
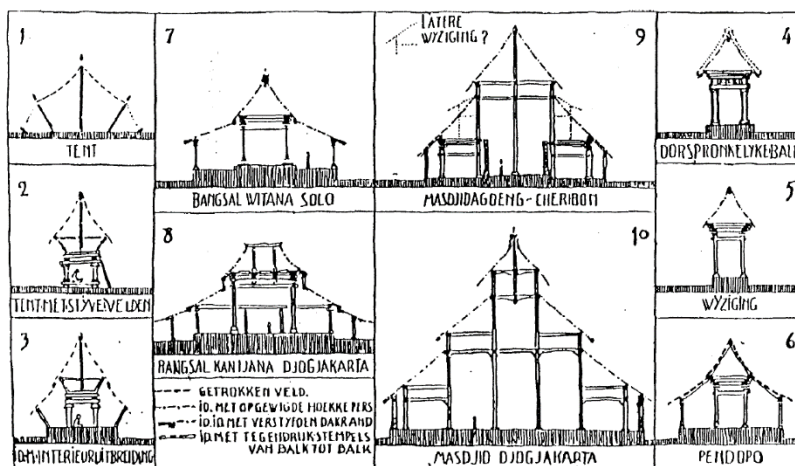[29] Nalbantoglu, "Writing Postcoloniality in Architecture", 4.
[30] Achille Mbembe, "Proximity without Reciprocity", In *Out of The Dark Night: Essays on Decolonization*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 101.
[31] Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur"*, in Djawa,* Vol.3*,* 1923, 160.

by our superior construction methods, 'he' does not see the value of his own tradition, 'he' needs us to show him. This sentiment is further reinforced by the following statement.
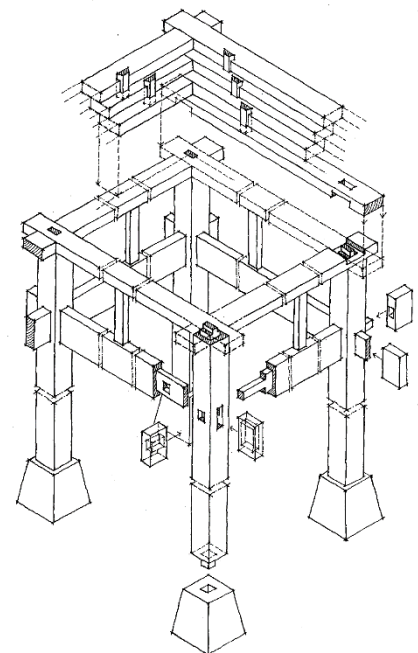
"As previously mentioned, the Indigenous society is very inefficient with its time. In urgent circumstances, its capacity is like that of an accordion. It is capable of delivering what is required within reasonable limits. If one ensures that all the good that is wrought in this way benefits the Indigenous society itself, not least its own capability, so that there is no need for exploitation for the benefit of specific persons, then what is there to object to in demanding what can reasonably be expected from it?"[32]

From these statements it becomes clear that Pont uses the perceived inferiority of the Javanese society as a justification for the continued subjugation and exploitation. This echoes the Social Darwinist belief that the domination of more 'primitive' civilisations, by more technologically advanced ones, is not only natural but also morally correct. This moral correctness is further reinforced under the pretence that colonialism was a humanitarian project which sought to modernise these 'primitive' societies.

Figure 3 Henri Maclaine Pont, Historical development of Javanese Construction Methods, 1923, Drawing on Paper, in "Architect Henri Maclaine Pont", by Ben F. van Leerdam, 1995, 370.

Figure 4 Henri Maclaine Pont, Principle Detail Stabilising structure of the bangsal, 1923, Drawing on Paper, in "Architect Henri Maclaine Pont", by Ben F. van Leerdam, 374.

'Javaansche Architectuur'

In the first part of his essay, Pont argues for the importance of protecting and revitalising the Indonesian building tradition. Here, Pont makes a clear distinction between the building tradition and what he calls 'grand architecture'. In the second part, he addresses the question whether Java possesses its own capital A architecture. He begins by laying out his view on the development of architecture alongside civilisation, following in the footsteps of Vitruvius and Laugier, Pont's 'treatise' starts with an origin myth:

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[32] Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur"*,* 160.

"In the ever sharpening struggle for existence, we see this own people, through their own invention or acquisition, becoming masters of other more penitent materials, thus acquiring new means for the confirmation and expansion of their own power and glory, — only to be fully exploited by reorganization of the people on a higher plane again, - after which there follows again an awareness of this newly acquired capacity and a new great impetus arises for the witness of one's own strength and stature in a more permanent state, the imprinting of one's own stamp on it, own forms."[33]

This argument contains several ideas that are worth unpacking: The development of civilisation as a struggle for survival between nations, the natural desire to expand their power, the linear development towards a 'higher form' of civilisation, and finally, the will to express this power in a permanent form as architecture. From his arguments, it becomes clear that Pont views the development of Architecture from a Social Evolutionist perspective, as something which happens in parallel to the development of the society itself, from a primitive state to a more complex one, where the level of development of the architecture directly reflects that of the society.

Pont introduces the idea of what he calls 'old form language', which describes how, as the civilisation develops and gains mastery of new building materials, the previous building tradition is not abandoned, but instead some 'fundamental elements' are carried over. In this way, he suggests these elements gain a cultural meaning which transcends the material and functional requirements. This idea is reminiscent of the way in which Laugier traces the fundamental elements of European classical architecture, to the model of the primitive hut.[34] However, where for Laugier, the main driver behind the development of architecture is man's struggle against nature, Pont's origin myth takes on another dimension: the struggle for power between people.

"The manner in which an Architecture is constructed, the resources and training required for it, and the organization employed therein, always leave an unmistakable mark on the Architecture, in direct connection with the organization of the Commonwealth in which the people live. After all, the architecture itself will immediately show which groups participate the most in the results, which less so; and this also shows which groups dominate, and which are subordinate, indeed, completely subjugated."[35]

With this line, Pont demonstrates a critical awareness of how hierarchies of power affect participation and representation of different groups in architecture, yet as has already been demonstrated, he does not criticise the existence of these hierarchies themselves. Instead, in his Social Evolutionist view, the domination of one people by another, is simply a natural consequence of their inferior development. While Pont accepts the colonial hierarchy of power, he does not consider it final, instead, suggesting the possibility that:

"(...) That the dominant people have new, better resources and better organizational skills, but ultimately have an open mind towards the civilization of the dominated, even showing receptiveness towards it. In this case, a catastrophic resolution of domination is not necessary, and the peoples can grow towards each other."[36]

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[33] Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur"*,* 113.
[34] Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (An Essay on Architecture), 1755.
[35] Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur", 112*.*
[36] Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur", 113.

This is an interesting statement as it hints to the possibility of a more symmetrical relationship, which could result in a hybrid culture where both are equally represented in the built forms, and where a violent struggle for independence could be avoided. Yet at the same time, Pont suggests that it is the receptiveness to the culture of the colonised, on the part of the dominant coloniser, which ultimately determines in what form it is represented in the built environment. If the 'old forms' are culture, then, it is for the European architect, with his thorough understanding of primitive building forms and superior knowledge of modern construction methods, to identify them and adapt them to new materials.

As discussed previously, he makes little effort to distinguish between the individual and the Javanese society as a whole. This brings into focus the limits of the Self-Other dialectic in a colonial and racialised environment, as discussed by Lewis R. Gorden in 'Fanon on Decolonizing Knowledge': *"The problem is that the colonizer/master does not encounter another human being in the lower depths. Thus, for him or her, there is presumed no possibility of an equal relationship between those beings and his or her self. The relations for the colonizer/master, then, are Self-Other and nonself-and-non-others. There is no one, only "things" that stand out from the world of the colonizer s as racially inferior."* [37]

Pont seems to heavily buy into the idea that it is the paternal responsibility of the coloniser to nurture the Indonesian society until it can stand on its own. He describes how, gradually, by propping up the weakest leaders, the Dutch made themselves indispensable in the governance of the territories. And that as a result: *"We have long since protected the Native from his worst enemies and from himself. We now only know very well that this people cannot do without us for the time being."*[38]

As Achille Mbembe points out, this tendency to rewrite the history of colonialism as one of pacification, of the organisation of society, and of the establishment of infrastructure, *"rests on the old idea that colonization was a humanitarian enterprise, and that it contributed to the modernization of ancient societies—primitive societies on their deathbeds that, abandoned to themselves, would perhaps have finished in suicide.*[39] He references the words of philosopher Simone Weil to emphasise the fact that *"colonisation nearly always begins the exercise of force in its purest form, that is, by conquest"*[40]. The colonisation of Indonesia by the Dutch was no different, a fact that Pont seems more than happy to omit.

(Re)Writing Histories

The tendency to rewrite the history of colonialism as a humanitarian project, in the way Achille Mbembe describes, persists to this day. To this end, Pont's opposition to Dutch colonial policies and concern for the Javanese building tradition serve as convenient examples.

The primacy of European languages, like French and English often serves to extend the intellectual power of the former Empires. Whereas Dutch does not nearly hold the same influence. Its' limited use may provide insulation from outside criticism and give these

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[37] Lewis R. Gordon, "Fanon on Decolonizing Knowledge", in *Fanon and the decolonisation of philosophy,* 2010, 10.
[38] Maclaine Pont, "Javaansche Architectuur", 116.
[39] Achille Mbembe, "Proximity without Reciprocity", 98.
[40] Simone Weil, "New Facts About the Colonial Problem in the French Empire", in *Simone Weil on Colonialism*, ed. and trans. J. P. Little (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 66. As cited in Achille Mbembe, "Proximity without Reciprocity", 101.

revisionist tendencies room to breathe. When historiographers, like Jessup, publish in English, the process of citing and translating Dutch language primary sources acts as an additional filter, which in the absence of critical distance, has the potential to introduce bias. At the same time, they often continue to cling to the same universalist position, in which the author is presumed to exists outside of geopolitics and history. This may, in part, explain why authors like Jessup, and those who followed her, chose to celebrate Pont's defence of traditional Javanese building methods, but to omit his endorsement of forced labour, to name just one example.

In past historiography, Pont's political and ethical position has often been characterised by his fierce opposition to his colleague Wolf Schoemaker who argued:

"The Indies do not have an architecture tradition…. Old forms are often no longer suitable to satisfy the practical and spiritual needs, anyway, so far as one can say about indigenous building methods, Architecture in the sense that it has for us does not exist in Java. Javanese, with infantile impotence and naïve spiritual expressions were capable of producing only soulless, manually laboured art and senseless, dry copying and shared only their skin colour and a few of the qualities caused by tropical nature with the more highly anthropologically developed races of the East."[41]

It is easy to see how, contrasted against Schoemaker's overtly racist view, Pont appears much more sympathetic. However, as has been demonstrated, this characterisation is not entirely accurate. While Pont clearly opposes the idea that the Javanese building tradition possesses no unique qualities, their views on the Javanese people do not differ that much. Here, the debate is between an overt racism, and a more subtle form discrimination, which, none the less, refuses to acknowledge the humanity of the Javanese people, and disqualifies them from participating in the conversation about their own future all together.

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[41] Wolf Schoemaker, as cited in Helen Jessup, "Netherlands Architecture in Indonesia, 1900-42", PhD dissertation, (Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1989), 132.

Design for the Technische Hoogeschool Bandung

Pont's vision of a modern Indonesian architecture is most clearly expressed in his seminal work: the design for the Technische Hoogeschool Bandung, now now Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB). Which through its innovative application of local materials, is still regarded as a successful example of locality in architecture.[42] What is interesting about the design, is Pont did not base it on any specific Indonesian building form, instead opting for a design which would be broadly representative. He claims that this was done to ensure that students coming from different regions of the territories would feel 'at home'.[43] This detail is crucial, as it suggests an attempt at representing an 'Indonesian' national identity, rather than a purely local one. It seems that for Pont the hope was that the Europeans living on Java would have a place within this National identity, either as part of the Dutch empire, or as a (semi)independent state.
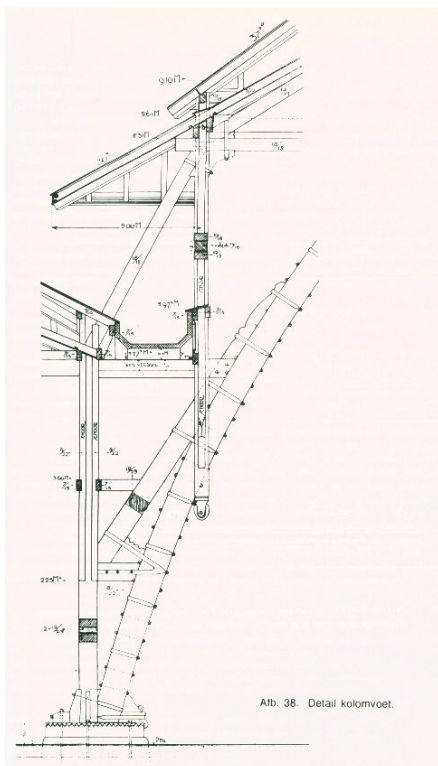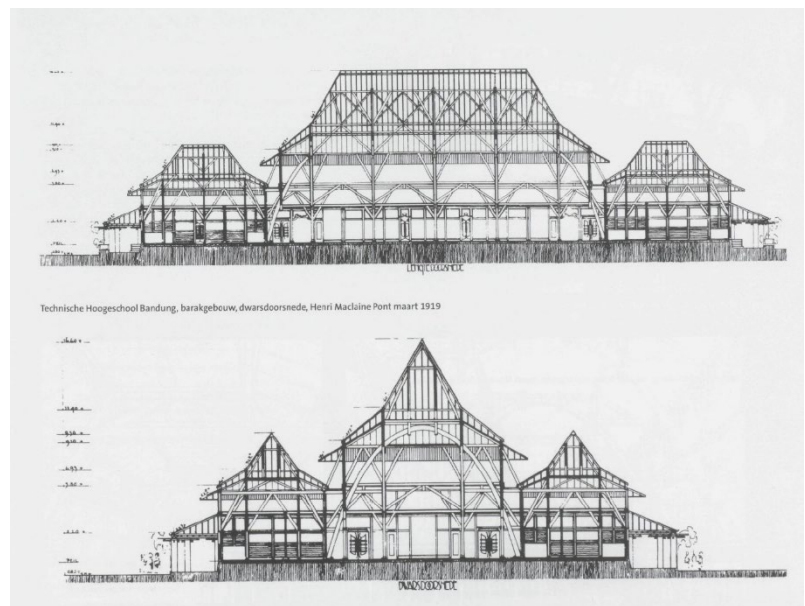

Figure 3 Henri Maclaine Pont, Detail of a Column Foot, 1919, in "Henri Maclaine Pont 1884-1971" by Gerrit de Vries, 31.

Figure 4 Henri Macaline Pont, Section drawing of the design for the ITB, March 1919, in "Henri Maclaine Pont 1884-1971" by Gerrit de Vries, 25.

Another notable fact is that, despite Pont's extensive study of Javanese structural systems, the wide span structure employed in the ITB is not based on any Javanese idea. Instead, Leerdam suggests, there is be some evidence that the arched widespan structure was based on an earlier design by Pont for a sugar warehouse in the port of Cilacap.[44] This was done out of concern over the high cost associated with the use of large solid timber members, which the university was unwilling to fund.

This resulted in a building, which, on the surface appears as a sympathetic attempt at representing the Indonesian identity and was dedicated to uplifting the Indonesian people, by

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[42] Diah Asih Purwaningrum, "INDONESIAN ARCHITECTS AND BEING INDONESIAN", 79.
[43] Gerrit de Vries, "Henri Maclaine Pont 1884-1971", 29.
[44] Leerdam, "Henri Maclaine Pont", 41.

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providing them with knowledge needed to build up their own Nation. However, in reality it is nothing but a shell, an empty disguise, held up by a perilous scaffold, derived form the same architecture of exploitation which it is desperately trying to conceal. This same contradiction underpins the institution itself, whose curriculum was largely designed to support the interests of the colonial government, rather than those of the indigenous people.[45]

Conclusion

This paper expands on the post-colonial critique of Pont's work in Indonesia by Abidin Kusno and Stephen Cairns. Its' main contribution comes from the way in which it analyses Dutch language primary sources of Pont's writing. These texts have previously only been discussed through secondary sources and translated citations of historiographers, but they had not been analysed so directly through a postcolonial lens.

This work finds that Pont demonstrates a critical awareness of the way in which the hierarchies of power affect representation in a colonial environment, but that he does not criticise the existence of these hierarchies themselves. Instead, he relies on common rationalisations and justifications, rooted in social evolutionism, paternalism, and racism. By positioning himself as a defender of the Javanese building tradition, he affords himself an alibi of sincerity, which allows him to continue to enjoy his position in the colonial hierarchy of power. A position which grants him the privilege to dissect and (re)invent the history, culture, and architecture of the Javanese people.

It notes that past historiography on Maclaine Pont has chosen to omit his most problematic views, in favour of a more sympathetic characterisation which presents him as a protector of the Javanese tradition. This is most visible in the work of Helen Jessup but has continued in later historiographical and biographical works. This has had a notable effect on the way in which Pont's work has been received. Based on analysis of secondary sources, Kusno concludes that Pont should be understood as a 'hybrid subject', "*whose professional identity was formed as neither colonizer nor colonized.*" [46] . This paper disagrees with this characterisation, instead concluding that Pont's professional identity and work are clearly formed by his identity as a coloniser. It concludes that his works, such as the design for the ITB, are, in fact, a form of appropriation. However, this does not deny that they can, and have been, successfully re-appropriated by the Indonesians who inherited them. The buildings for the ITB are still in use today, and continue to serve as an inspiration for contemporary Indonesian architects.

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[45] Kusno, "Behind the Postcolonial", 278.
[46] Kusno, "Behind the Postcolonial", 268.

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