

{ } internationaal instituut
voor sociale geschiedenis



On the Waterfront

newsletter of the friends of the IISH 2025 no. 48

Interview
Eef Vermeij

**Francisca
Fanggidaej**
archives

RAAF papers
from
Sri Lanka

Women
entrepreneurs
uncovered

Introduction

Front page:
Dr. Caroline
Bleeker behind
a lathe, circa
1930. In
1939, Bleeker
founded the
Nederlandsche
Optiek- en
Instrumenten-
fabriek
(NEDOPTIFA)
with her life
partner Gerard
Willemse.
Source:
University
Museum
Utrecht, public
domain. See
page 6.

This year marks the ninetieth anniversary of the IISH, which will be celebrated in various ways. Also, it has been twenty-five years since the Friends of the IISH was established. Reflections on the history of the Institute have featured regularly at Friends Meetings and in the columns of *On the Waterfront*. For several years we have tried to document them via interviews with staff, many of whom have worked at the Institute for most of their careers and are now retiring. The interview with Eef Vermeij is another contribution to this series. Eef already contributed to the first Friends Meetings and to *On the Waterfront* in 2000 and figures again in this issue, marking his twenty-fifth anniversary as a contributor as well. In the interview he looks back on his long and variegated career within the IISH, in which he participated in bringing about the Asia collections. The institute's history also recurs in contributions from younger staff members, about digitization of the SDAP archive by Jelle Verdijk, about satirical pamphlets from the General Jewish Labour Bund by Shanie de Graaf Kalikow, and about the personal papers of the Indonesian leftist revolutionary Francisca Fonggidaej by Rika Theo. The history of women's work, to which the Friends contributed significantly by funding the "Women's work in the Netherlands, 1500-1850" project during their first ten years (see e.g. *On the Waterfront* 7 (2003), pp. 13-15 and 24, (2012), pp. 14-15), is back in the spotlight, as highlighted in the report on the lecture by Selin Dilli on women entrepreneurs in the Netherlands, whose presence historians have tended to overlook as much as or perhaps even more than that of women workers.

Aad Blok

About the Friends

Members of the Friends of the IISH pay annual dues of 10 (for students), 25, 100 or 500 euros or join with a lifetime donation of 1,500 euros or more. In return, members are invited to semi-annual sessions featuring presentations of IISH acquisitions and guest speakers. These guest speakers deliver lectures on their field of research, which need not be related to the IISH collection. The presentation and lecture are followed by a reception. The Friends coordinator may consult the Friends about allocation of the revenues from the dues.

As a token of appreciation for their great contribution to the Friends, Jaap Kloosterman and Jan Lucassen were appointed as honorary members in 2014.

The IISH was founded by master collector N.W. Posthumus (1880-1960) in the 1930s. For the past two decades, two of the institutions established by this 'history entrepreneur' have operated from the same premises: the Netherlands Economic History Archive founded in 1914 and the International Institute of Social History, which is now more than 80 years old. Both institutes continue to collect, although the 'subsidiary' IISH has grown considerably larger than its 'parent' NEHA. Additional information about the Institute may be found in Jaap Kloosterman and Jan Lucassen, *Rebels with a Cause: Five Centuries of Social History Collected by the IISH* (Amsterdam 2010, 2016). For all information concerning the Friends, see <http://iisg.amsterdam/en/friends>

Colophon { } international institute of social history

Cruquiusweg 31
P.O. Box 2169, 1000 cd Amsterdam
Tel.: + 31 20 668 58 66
Fax: + 31 20 665 41 81
[iisg.amsterdam](mailto:info@iisg.nl)
info@iisg.nl
IBAN: NL11DEUT0555958892
BIC: DEUTNL2N
ISSN 15742156

Editor: Aad Blok
Translations: Lee Mitzman
Desk editor and coordination:
Marie-José Spreeuwenberg
Photography: Andrea Galova
Design and layout: Ivo Sikkema
Printed by: Wilco, Amersfoort
Website: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/friends>
Financial administration: Rina Sonneveld

Administrative and secretarial support:
Jacqueline Rutte
We wish to thank: Eef Vermeij, Selin Dilli,
Rika Theo, Shanie de Graaf Kalikow, Jelle
Verdijk
Friends coordinators: Aad Blok and Astrid
Verburg
Questions, including on subscriptions to *On*
the Waterfront: friends@iisg.nl
On the Waterfront is supported by Koninklijke
Brill NV

Collecting against the current

Interview with Eef Vermeij

When did you join the IISH, and how did that come about?

Before I joined the IISH on 1 March 1993, I worked at Het Fort van Sjakoo, the anarchist bookshop in Amsterdam. Even though I had no degree, I was street smart, a Jack of all trades. In 1989 at Sjakoo we had organized *Europe Against the Current*, the first festival for anti-establishment media with participants from Western and Eastern Europe featuring three days of music performances on Beursplein and a grand opening at Paradiso with a speech by Václav Havel, who had just been released from prison and became president two weeks later.

For *Europe Against the Current* we also published a large catalogue with presentations from all kinds of anti-establishment media. At the time, this was state-of-the-art publishing. The IISH contributed to it financially. That was how I learned about the ID-Archiv, which had just reached the IISH in 1989: a large archive comprising mainly journals and brochures from anti-establishment movements in Germany. Originally based in Frankfurt, it was taken over by the Institute for lack of funding, along with the two staff members. When one of them left, Axel Diederich, the remaining staff member, asked me to replace him at the ID-Archiv. That was how I ended up at the Institute.

What did your work in the ID-Archiv involve?

The ID-Archiv comprised three large collections: brochures, journals, and archives. I scrutinized all kinds of journals for new brochures. Whenever those groups sent us a copy, they would be included in our *Verzeichnis der alternativen Broschüren*. We did the same for archives and journals (over 6,000 titles). So we regularly issued three *Verzeichnisse*. We had our own niche on the IISH website and our own classification system.

In late 2002 or early 2003 the ID-Archiv was closed as a cost-reduction measure, and the ID collection was subsequently absorbed into the IISH collection. By then, I had started working at the new Asia department of the IISH.

How did you come to work at the Asia department?

That department was set up in 1996, with Willem van Schendel in charge and Emile Schwidder as permanent staff. Additional people were soon needed. I had always been open about Asia being my greatest interest. In late 1998, I was therefore asked whether I would be interested in devoting one day a week to Asia. Burmese researchers and activists had requested that the archives be preserved of the opposition that had gone into exile after the uprising in 1988 – especially in Thailand – because the Burmese authorities were doing everything possible to

erase that history. I was therefore entrusted with Burma, which was added to our core areas at the time: Pakistan and Bangladesh. My involvement increased from there. One day became two, then three.

When did you become interested in Asia?

Back in secondary school I wrote a paper about China. So I was always interested in that. While preparing for my retirement, I found a brochure that I produced together with Tjebbe van Tijen around 1980, about the Tian-an-Men Square protests in 1976 (i.e. prior to 1989). And at Het Fort van Sjakoo I imported most of the materials



from Asia and the Pacific. Even back then, I was in contact with publishers in Malaysia and India and other countries. Working at the travel agency later on, I also travelled to Asia several times, where I met my first wife. Asia has in fact been a constant factor in my life.

In 2002 I arrived in Bangkok. The move started as purely opportunistic. I had left my Vietnamese wife and was in love with a Philippine woman I had met in Hong Kong. I did not want to repeat the mistake I had made with my first wife, who had come to the Netherlands because of me. Bangkok was centrally located, with many conferences and meetings, good flight connections with South and Southeast Asia, and a liberal visa policy. So we drafted a proposal to open an office in Bangkok. We discussed it with the Institute's board in perhaps two ten-minute conversations. The first time I approached Jaap, he said: "nice, come back in six months with a detailed plan and a budget." When I returned, he said: "good plan, let's do it, go ahead." After some delays, the Bangkok office opened in 2002 and remained operational until 2017.

Hitching a ride with some Red Shirt supporters from one protest site to the next. This was in front of Central World Rachaparasong (Bangkok, Thailand).



Looking at photographs with Sixto Carlos, Jr., at his family home in Pandacan, Manila (Philippines).

What was the motivation for opening that office in Bangkok?

It was intended as an outpost. There was a need from Pakistan, as well as from Bangladesh, where we had two local representatives. Achmed Salim, who died fairly recently, and Sharia Kabir. Salim was a writer, Sharia a filmmaker, specializing in documentaries, and ran a printing press to provide for his subsistence. A stronger presence of the IISH in the region, with us appearing in Pakistan and Bangladesh more often, seemed like a good idea to them. I went there on a mission to investigate whether the IISH could run operations in six countries there: Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Korea and Taiwan turned out to have enough money, knowledge, and infrastructure to set them up on their own. The Philippines and Cambodia became secondary. We decided to focus on Nepal and Sri Lanka, because we had other South Asia activities in progress.

Going through piles of papers at the Oxfam Office (Quezon City, Philippines).



Soon afterwards, the TOCO model (Toekomstige Organisatie van Collecties en Onderzoek [Future organization of collections and research]) was introduced. All the old subject specialists were retiring, and the IISH was allocated KNAW funding for the overlap to recruit new people in the meantime, with regional department heads henceforth combining scholarship with collecting. I was never in favour of that system. The material was supposed to be processed locally, under the aegis of the department heads. Researchers, however, are not necessarily good collectors. I found the plan overly ambitious, and it soon floundered, with tenuous financial cover. I then concentrated more on Southeast Asia.

How do you go about collecting in practice? How do you convince people to entrust their material to the IISH?

You need to assess which movements are of interest, and how to approach them. What matters is building trust and who introduces you. My girlfriend at the time had once been an activist as well. Anywhere she introduced me, those people knew where I stood. Sometimes that worked against me. She was from a certain part of the political spectrum, which might lead others to be suspicious of me.

We have become somewhat more circumspect over time, and nowadays the guiding principle is that archives should preferably remain in their place of origin. That was less explicit when I started. All the same, I do not think that in the current day and age I would have done anything differently with many of the archives I collected during those early days.

The new policy is to examine the needs, mainly in close consultation with local archive builders. Some actually describe this format as decolonizing archives. You are no longer the large collector bringing everything to Amsterdam in a greedy embrace. Instead, you provide a service that includes listening attentively to the needs on the part of movements and concerned individuals.

We now have several digitization projects throughout Asia, in which we are either indirectly involved as advisors, such as in India, or that we initiated, such as in Sri Lanka, or where we were asked for support, such as in Indonesia and Thailand. In Thailand, we run several projects from which we receive a digital copy, while the actual material remains there. And with some digitization projects in Indonesia, the explicit intention is for the material to remain there. Given the course of events in that country, keeping those archives there may no longer be safe at some point, because they are in danger of being destroyed, or because the people endanger themselves that way. Thanks to those digital copies, the originals disappearing is not an insurmountable problem. Still, I am somewhat traditional and like the feel of the paper. At occasions such as exhibitions, I also prefer the original.

Even when the original materials are brought to the Netherlands, we try to err on the side of caution and complete the entire digital process before items are shipped. In Hong Kong, how-

ever, where digitizing simply was not an option, we resorted to the old rescue principle.

In what measure has your procedure in Southeast Asia served as an example?

My former assistant in Thailand was directly inspired by the procedure he learned from me. He started collecting local material himself at some point. That became the Museum of Commoners, which is not a genuine museum but an online collection. He was soon embraced by the local groups, far more than I had ever been. It is now called the Museum of Popular History. We provide financial support indirectly, by purchasing items from him at a special price and also by advising him. If I ever settle in Bangkok, which is certainly conceivable, he hopes I will join him as a volunteer.

We also gave an incipient archive in Indonesia a kind of seed capital to explore options and draft a plan. But we never publicize things like that and generally operate behind the scenes in such cases.

Can you describe some things you are proud you rescued or acquired for the IISH?

Last January we organized a gathering, financed in part by the IISH, for a target group of small archives from anti-establishment groups in Southeast Asia: Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. That resulted in a network called Under the Banana Tree; one of the Indonesian archivists recalled that her father hid communist documents in a plastic bag under a banana tree, because those trees absorb a lot of water, leaving the soil underneath them relatively dry. I am involved in that project, presently as the IISH representative. Soon I will be an advisor on my own behalf. A *fanzine* on guerrilla archiving will be launched, and webinars, blogs, and a website are envisaged.



Collections in which I take pride include the Umbrella movement, the 10th regiment of the Malaysia Communist Party, the KNU (Karen National Union) in Burma, and of course also the Post-It collection, on which an article recently appeared in the IISH newsletter. Usually such acquisitions are years in the making.

The home/office in Bangkok, where an assistant is sorting papers.

How would you qualify your career as a whole?

That question is difficult to answer. The only constant element is that work has always been my first priority. I have always been fully dedicated to my work, relationships were secondary, never the other way round, and that led to quite a few problems in my personal life. In addition, there is my interest in Asia, and securing material 'against the current' has always mattered as well.

How do you feel about handing over this position?

Now that I have to hand over, I realize that a great many of my contacts have become my friends as well. And that a complete handover is impossible. Work and personal life have become entirely intertwined. My successor Hyojin Pak and I have engaged in endless conversations to review all files from the past 25 years. Next month, we will travel to Asia together to introduce her to the network.

Upon your farewell a woman from Hong-kong gave you a painting. Did it have a special significance for you?

It conveys the general story of Hong Kong and people in exile. Living between two cultures and being unable to return to a country, everything that comes with life in the diaspora. It was a moving moment, making clear once again that people are emotionally involved in these kinds of collections, and how much this work means to them.

With my assistant (who now runs his own archive, the Museum of Popular History) at Sanam Luang during a Red Shirt protest.

Forty-fourth Friends’ Day

30 January 2025

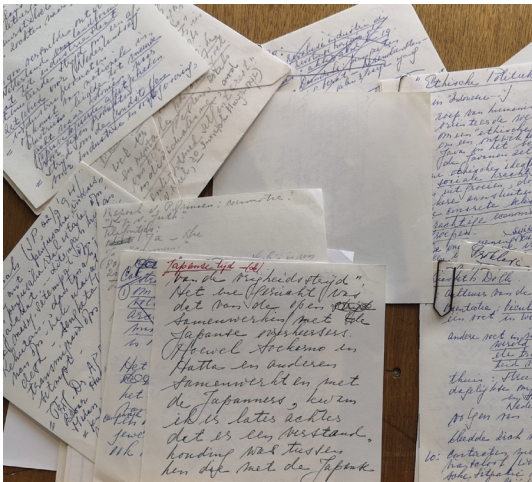
Presentation of acquisitions and special finds

Francisca Fanggidaej archives: a quest to resist forgetting

The archives of Francisca Fanggidaej, located 11,000 km from her birthplace in Indonesia, convey how a leftist revolutionary survived and persevered against various oppressive powers, from the Dutch colonial regime to the imperialist power of Japan to Suharto’s authoritarian military regime in Indonesia. Her personal papers are also intensely private, embodying the dialectic within herself. Her struggle as a woman, as a mother who had to leave seven children behind in Indonesia, as a Belanda Hitam bourgeois (black Dutch, or *zwarte Nederlander*, as she described herself), as a communist stranded with political asylum in the country she resisted, as well as her constant self-criticism, her reflections, and, in spite of all this, her unwavering hope for the future.

Fanggidaej’s story is stored in 18 crates of personal papers. The materials were brought to the IISH in batches shortly before her death in 2013. As no written letters remain from Francisca Fanggidaej herself about the transfer, her aim in leaving her papers accessible to the public at a Dutch archive institution is vague and is left for us to interpret. As an archivist of Indonesian origin and familiar with the political context of her exile, I will share my interpretation of her decision to leave her papers at the IISH in this article.

In a diary entry on a spring day in 1986, Francisca wrote: ‘I want to give my life meaning and significance. What can I share with the next generation? My life will not be long, perhaps another five or ten years. I still want to learn, but I have to leave something for those who will continue this



A collection of Francisca’s notes. IISH collection, Francisca Fanggidaej Papers, ARCHO4303.

life. Not a message, not advice or instructions. They will know better. Just facts, experiences, and some reflections on them.’ She described this desire decades before the Indonesian *melawan lupa* (meaning ‘to resist forgetting’) became a spirited catchphrase against the silence and silencing of the violent histories of Indonesia. In recent years, various civil society initiatives have used the term to demand accountability and responsibility from the post-colonial Indonesian state for its active involvement in the gross human rights violation against its people, including the 1965-1966 state purge of communism that claimed over one million lives and led hundreds of thousands to be imprisoned. The aftermath has included decades of discrimination and vilification of ‘diabolical atheist communists’, legislation banning Marxism/Leninism, and the rewriting of Indonesian historiography to distort – if not erase – the role of the Indonesian left. *Melawan lupa* seeks to unearth and reclaim these buried histories, linking them to contemporary struggles against injustice and abuse of power.

The personal papers of Francisca Fanggidaej are a record of her own path of *melawan lupa* and trace an unknown history that can inform other initiatives against forgetting. Before continuing, I will briefly introduce Francisca, who was Fransje to her family. Born on the island of West Nusa Tenggara, she grew up speaking, thinking, and behaving like a Dutch person. Her father, a nobleman from Rote Island, was employed at the public works department of the colonial government in Surabaya, until the Japanese invaded during World War II. In those difficult days, she became acquainted with a circle of young Moluccans who often gathered at her cousin’s house. Among them, Francisca found her Indonesian identity and transformed herself by joining the youth movement for a free Indonesia.

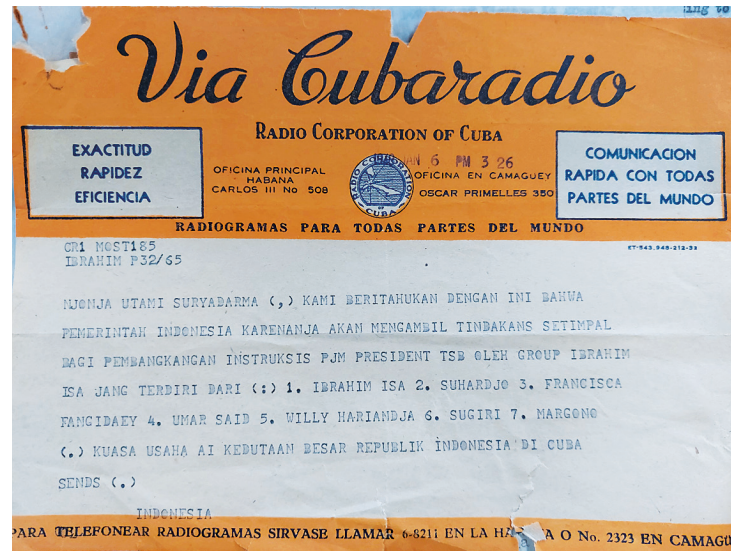
Rika presenting the Francisca Fanggidaej collection at the last Friends’ Day.



Fanggidaej's life was filled with endless struggles in the political maelstrom. As a member of the 'extremist' youth group Pesindo (Socialist Youth of Indonesia), known for causing disorder during the Indonesian War of Independence from 1945 to 1949, the Dutch colonial government considered her a rebel. Under the authoritarian Indonesian government of General Suharto, she became a fugitive communist and dissident and was in danger of having her passport revoked. In 1967, Fanggidaej went into political exile after telling the Tricontinental Conference (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) in Havana, Cuba, that left-wing Indonesian women had been subjected to extraordinary cruelty in 1965-1966 and appealing for support from women on all three continents.

To her fellow exiles she was Santi Sumitro, a pseudonym taken from the name of one of her daughters. To the students and young Indonesians who knew her in the Netherlands, she was Aunt Ciska. For those who follow her work, activism, and memoirs, she embodies many things. The papers she left behind chronicle her path as a representative of Indonesian youth at various anti-colonial world conferences in the 1940s and 1950s. She was a broadcaster, translator, stenographer and leader of the Pemuda Rakyat, a member of parliament, a transnational women's activist, and a member of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an administrator of the left-wing women's organization Gerwani, and a journalist who participated in the Asian African Journalist Association (AAJA).

After going into exile, Francisca continued to campaign against the Suharto regime and for justice for the victims of the New Order. Both during and outside her activism, she never stopped writing. She poured out her feelings in diaries and once advised her daughter to do the same. She started keeping diaries in China, during her initial year in exile. At first, she hesitated, wary of the risk of the diary falling into the wrong hands. After some consideration and advice from a friend, she decided to write not one but two kinds of diaries. 'One will contain my thoughts and experiences, which I want to pass on to my children and to Pri, my husband and friend.

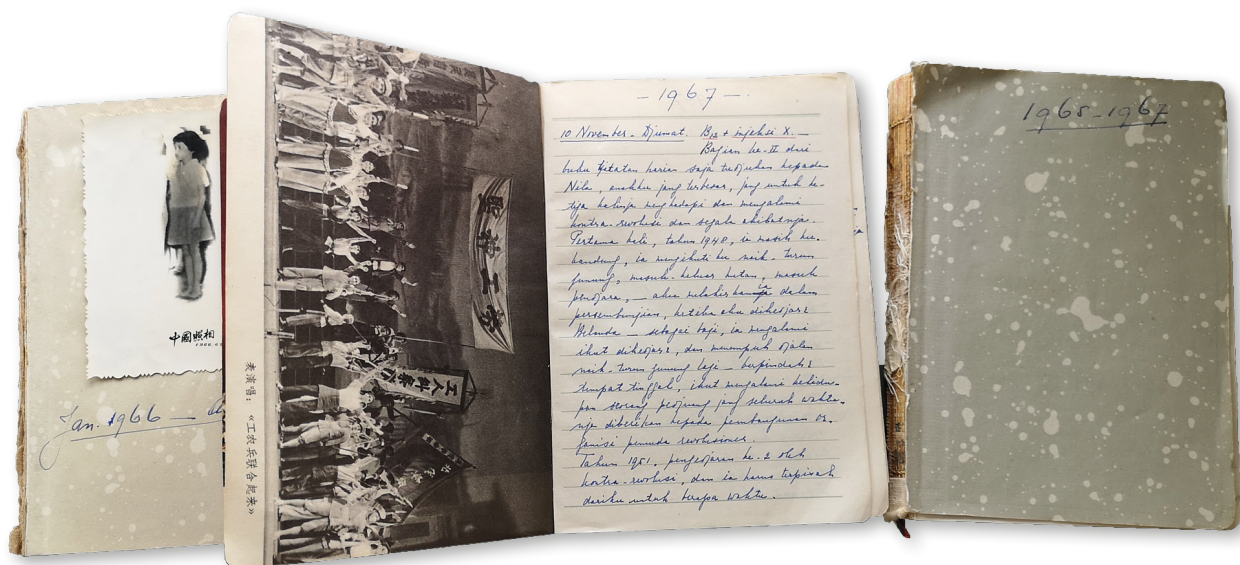


Telegram reporting that the Indonesian government will take appropriate action against the Indonesian delegation to the Intercontinental Conference in Havana. This was when her passport was revoked. IISH collection, Francisca Fanggidaej Papers, ARCH04303.

I will use the other as a channel to help me overcome the various mistakes in my thoughts, actions, and behaviour that I need to get rid of.' She named the journals after her two daughters. [In these diaries, the personal mingled with the political. Amid recollections of left-wing struggle and agitating quotes from Mao are many examples of efforts by Francisca to encourage herself to alleviate the pain of leaving her children behind. At one point, she wrote that her sacrifice was nothing compared to that of mothers in Vietnam, Congo, or the Dominican Republic, and that her children might face greater difficulties than she did. At that time, no Indonesian in China could possibly contact family back home. She could receive news about them only through her sister, who lived in the Netherlands. After months of waiting, she received a letter in December 1965, telling her that her children had been divided up to be looked after by three families.

In addition to her diaries, the papers of Francisca Fanggidaej include many notebooks, loose

Some of the diaries Francisca kept while living in exile. IISH collection, Francisca Fanggidaej Papers, ARCH04303.





Francisca visiting a factory that employs people with disabilities on an excursion during her exile in China. IISH collection, Francisca Fanggidaej Papers, ARCH04303.

notes, and remarks on documents, which show that she was meticulous in the notes she took. She summarized the news and the various discussions in which she took part with diligence and care. Among her various writings are also drafts, lectures she would deliver, articles in exile publications, and notes on aspects of Indonesian history that she thought had been overlooked. She used her polyglot skills to translate various publications, including stories and poems by survivors of the events in 1965. She also kept files from her activism in a number of exile organizations, such as Komitee Indonesië, Stichting Azië Studies, and several transnational left-wing organizations. There are also basic study materials ranging from the history of revolution, communism, women's movements, anti-militarism, and human rights to contemporary issues of democracy, land grabbing, peasant rights, and child labour in Indonesia. She also carefully stored the many invitations she received to speak or to attend meetings and even the funerals of exiled friends who had gone before her.

With her personal papers becoming accessible, academic studies examining the international activism of have increasingly been published, for example the articles by Taomo Zhou (2022) and Vanessa Hearman (2024), who both based their work on her personal papers at the IISH. Other articles have appeared in several mainstream media, often using her photographs available in the IISH online catalogue. Stories about her are beginning to surface in grassroots digital archives, contributing to the memory work of *melawan lupa*. Although the name and struggle of Francisca Fanggidaej are not yet part of Indonesia's official historiography, her personal papers remain to pass her experiences and thoughts on to the generations after her. In archival terms, accessibility should serve a broader purpose than users or researchers, taking into account the source community, as Francisca Fanggidaej wrote in her diary.

Rika Theo

Professor S.H. Hasbullah during a talk. Photo: Thina-karan.

Papers of the Research and Action Forum for Social Development (RAAF)

This text, edited and abridged by Eef Vermeij, was originally written by Dr Shahul H. Hasbullah as a longer introduction to the Sri Lankan records now held at the IISH. The intention of expanding the collection was unfortunately not realized during the life of Dr Hasbullah, who passed away in 2018 (see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S._H._Hasbullah). The original title of the text was 'Draft Report on Preserving Documents and Oral Histories of the Displaced Muslims of the Northern Province of Sri Lanka'. While the meanderings that brought the collection to the IISH exceed the scope of this article, prior to its arrival it was digitized in Sri Lanka with help from the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in Colombo, which holds a digital copy of the collection for use by researchers. Parts of this collection were presented at the last Friends' Day.

For generations, people from different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups have lived together in all parts of Sri Lanka. In recent decades, however, escalating ethnic tensions and war have changed the multi-ethnic, religious, and cultural composition of Sri Lankan society. In addition to the reports that exist on the large-scale displacement of different ethnic communities were other untold stories. Due to rising tensions and mistrust in the country, individuals and groups belonging to vulnerable communities (who in peacetime had coexisted amicably with the dominant population group) were also forced to seek refuge elsewhere.

Today, the plight of many of these enclave communities has been forgotten. The process of involuntary migration by economically and politically vulnerable ethnic minorities has paved the way for mono-ethnic regions within Sri Lanka. This has further exacerbated ethnic tensions and conflict in the country.

Muslims were the largest minority community, accounting for about 5 per cent of the total population of the Northern Province. They were concentrated in a few places and scattered in others. While the language used by Muslims was closely related to that of the Tamils, they maintained a distinct ethno-religious and cultural heritage in



the North. Ethnic relations between Muslims and Tamils were said to be excellent, even during the period of heightened ethnic tensions between different ethnic communities in the country.

Armed cadres of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, a.k.a. Tamil Tigers) ordered all Muslims living in northern Sri Lanka to leave, giving those living in the capital Jaffna a two-hour ultimatum and those living elsewhere in the Northern Province 48 hours. They were not allowed to bring valuables or documents with them. Tamil civilians, who did not agree with the expulsion of the Muslims, watched helplessly and in silence as a flood of Muslims left their homes. Although the expulsion occurred without bloodshed – the Muslim minority had no means to resist – it caused severe physical and mental hardship. The story of the expulsion of the Muslims from the Northern Province is well known and reported (see parliamentary speeches in early November 1990).

The expulsion of the northern Muslims took place in the third week of October 1990. To date, nearly all those affected continue to live far from their homes as displaced persons. The main concentrations are now along the north-west coast of the Puttalam district.

The displaced Muslims were unable to return to their homes in the north for a number of reasons. One was a sense of insecurity, as the LTTE continued to control (directly and indirectly) most parts of the North. Other reasons were the prevailing state of war and the destruction of their homes due to war (rendering them uninhabitable), as well as the growth of secondary forests.

With no alternative, the expelled Muslims gradually established roots in the areas of displacement. Refugee camps/welfare centres have therefore been transformed into self-settlements. While the limited welfare provided by the state remains an important source of income for these groups, they have also taken whatever employment is available in the areas of displacement. The younger generations, who were either born or grew up in the places of exile, know only the site of displacement and have no recollection of their former home.

Given this background, preservation of documents and oral traditions related to displaced northern Muslims is of great value and would contribute to the advancement of their community. Envisaging these objectives, the following section outlines the sources of information and documents on displaced Sri Lankan Muslims.

Although Muslims are known to have lived in Sri Lanka for several centuries, historians generally acknowledge the difficulties in reconstructing the Sri Lankan Muslim history due to the lack of material and written sources. The absence of sculptures and monuments in Islam may have been one of the reasons for the lack of tangible evidence of their historical presence in Sri Lanka. Additionally, as traders, the continuously itinerant existence of Muslims may have caused evidence to be lost. No attempt has been made to systematically document the available evidence of the history and culture of Sri Lankan

Muslims, nor has the oral history of the Muslim community been explored for the purpose of documentation and analysis, despite its apparent richness.

The forceful and abrupt evictions of the displaced northern Muslims from their homes deepened their losses, leaving them with little of their historical and cultural heritage, except for their oral tradition. Even the keepers of the oral tradition, such as storytellers, traditional dancers, poets, and others, have gradually disappeared with the passage of time.

In early February 1991, three months after the expulsion, an attempt was made to assess the living conditions of the displaced Muslims. Dr S.H. Hasbullah initiated and led the investigation. He was assisted by twenty-five students, mostly from the displaced families, two university lecturers from Peradeniya, and several volunteers from among the displaced.

Households were surveyed based on a structured questionnaire addressing mainly the cur-



rent conditions and needs of the displaced at that time. Additional questions concerned family members, the economic backgrounds of the displaced in their places of origin, and their experiences during the expulsion.

The survey was conducted mainly in Puttalam, Anuradhapura, and Kurunegala, where the majority of the displaced Muslims lived at the time. Respondents were instructed to complete the questionnaire themselves. Some uneducated respondents were assisted by others in the refugee camp (welfare centre). By early March 1991, approximately 7,000 completed questionnaires had been collected. Subsequently, about 2,000 additional completed questionnaires were received as late submissions.

The completed questionnaires captured recollections from respondents of their places of origin, details of family members, and the property and possessions they left behind, as well as their memories of the expulsion. Respondents reported the above information in their own words and added their signature or thumb print to authenticate the document. By 2008, 17 years later, more than 10,000 individual family stories of the displaced formed a rare and valuable collection

Some of the materials that eventually ended up in Amsterdam.



The RAAF office in Puttalam (2007).

of documents, not only for reconstructing the past but also for planning the future of nearly 100,000 displaced Muslims from the Northern Province.

The complete survey of households, taking up 37 bound volumes (one is missing), is systematically organized according to the names of the respondents, the streets, districts, and villages where they lived, and the region within the district to which they belonged.

Since governmental and humanitarian agencies were rarely interested in using the information on the immediate needs of the displaced persons collected through this survey, Hasbullah compiled the data on assets and property to document the economic losses of the displaced Muslims as a consequence of the expulsion. This resulted in an additional set of seven volumes ('Report on the Loss of Movable and Immovable Assets of Muslims Evicted from the Northern Province in October 1990'). Copies of the reports were given to the UNHCR, the Colombo office, the government of Sri Lanka, and various organizations representing the rights of the displaced Muslims to take necessary action. None was taken, however as the priorities of these organizations lay elsewhere.

In addition to recording oral traditions, maps of the places of origin by village and region were drawn from memory. This collection of maps is valuable, despite their state of decay.

S.H. Hasbullah/Eef Vermeij

Rewriting liberation in anarchist and bundist Haggadot

During my internship at the IISH, I was asked to examine two booklets, one from an anarchist group and the other from a socialist group. After presenting these *Haggadot* (plural of *Haggadah*) at the previous Friends' Day, I spent the subsequent weeks exploring this set of searingly satirical pamphlets, both combining the traditional *seder* format with a caustic critique of religious and capitalist establishments. Having studied these political movements independently of each other, I was surprised to discover that

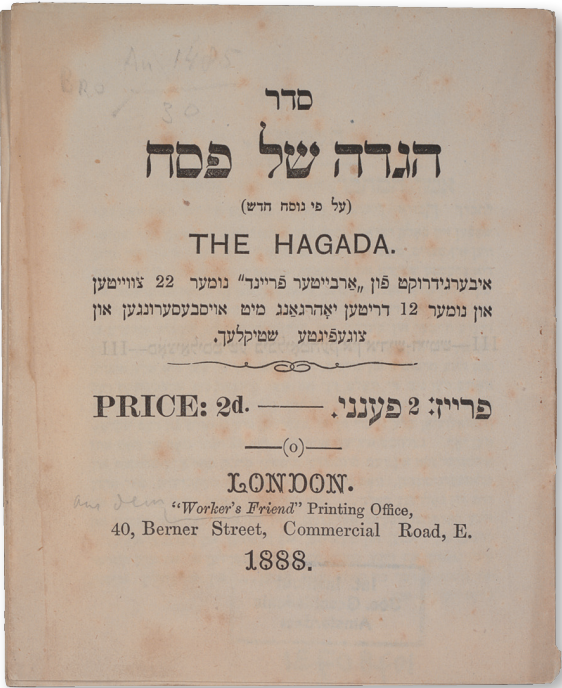
the texts in their respective *Haggadot* are largely similar.

To fully understand these pamphlets, we must first look at the Jewish ideas of domination and freedom that underlie the Jewish holiday of *Pesach* (Passover). *Pesach* commemorates the Exodus as described in the Hebrew Bible: the enslavement of pre-Jewish, Biblical 'Israelites' in Egypt, the divine interventions toward their liberation, and their formalization of their relationship with God as 'chosen' people. In the Book of Exodus, Jews also receive instructions on commemorating this enslavement and liberation. On the first night, the eve of *Pesach*, for example, they participate in a *seder* ('order'), a ritual dinner in which the story of this liberation is retold, including symbolic actions, questions, and reflections to understand its relevance. The guide to the *seder* is called a *Haggadah* ('telling').

So, why did these political radicals conduct their agitation according to the traditionally religious *Haggadah* format? Along with the late nineteenth-century flow of Jewish radicals between Eastern and Western Europe, Jewish radical materials were distributed throughout European Jewish socialist circles. These two pamphlets are part of this wave of political publications. The first was published in 1888 by the *Arbeyter Fraynd* organization (which was not yet explicitly anarchist and purchased an independent press shortly before publishing this pamphlet) in London and the second in 1900 by the Geneva-based Foreign Committee of the social-democratic *Algemeynem Yidishen Arbeyter-Bund in Rusland un Poylen* [General Jewish Labor Bund of Russia and Poland]. These organizations may appear familiar. After all, Rena Fuks-Mansfeld, who catalogued and researched the Yiddish archives at the IISH for many years, wrote about them in an issue of *On the Waterfront* in 2012. I will reference some of her suggestions here.

Much may be learned even from the covers of these booklets. Fuchs-Mansfeld suggested that

Front page of the Haggadah published by Arbeyter Fraynd in 1888. IISH collection, call number IISH BRO 3239/3





the design of the *Haggadot* served to facilitate efforts to smuggle them into the Russian Empire. They are lightweight and, if discovered, might be perceived as religious texts rather than as radical agitation. This is a likely explanation, given that expressions of radical politics were heavily censored and repressed in the Russian Empire during the late nineteenth century. In fact, the Bundist *Haggadah* was published by a Geneva-based Foreign Committee just three years after the organization was formed, because most of the party's founders had been forced into exile in 1898. While little concrete research exists on smuggling networks of radical Jewish material, the materials available in the IISH archives may provide answers. Within the extensive Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeyter Bund collection lie pages of correspondence between this Foreign Committee and Bundist groups in the Russian Empire.

Reading the covers provides more clues to the contexts and contents of these booklets. They are both titled *Hagode shel Pesakh*, and both bear the subheading *el pi nusakh khadash*, which translates as 'a new version,' a cynical allusion that these booklets deviate from those they reference. The names of those who published them appear below, respectively *Arbeyter Fraynd* and *Algemeynem Yidishen Arbeyter-Bund in Rusland un Poylen*. Although these booklets may have fooled Russian censors, anyone who knew Yiddish or Hebrew most likely understood their political nature. The cover of the first booklet indicates that the text has been compiled from material previously featured in editions of the *Arbeyter Fraynd* journal, published by the organization of the same name. The back cover of the Bundist *Haggadah* recounts other material with more explicitly political titles published by the Geneva printer.

Going beyond the cover is necessary to consider why and how these groups shared their

politics in the *seder* format. In her explanation of the function of religion, Fuchs-Mansfeld argued that the anarchists and Bundists used this to access the Jewish masses (who in both cases were of Eastern European descent and were still traditionally religious). Beyond this, these booklets also reveal the deeply ambivalent relationship of this generation (the first organized, socialist, 'secular' Jews) to religious observance.

Simultaneously, the authors reference their belief in the dominating, oppressive injustice inherent in tradition and point to tradition as a means of understanding the current plight of the Jewish working masses, thereby revealing their vast knowledge of these practices. One such moment in these booklets is the appropriation of the 'four questions,' a series of questions that traditionally ask why the *seder* is different and are progressively answered over the course of the evening. These *Haggadot* ask not why the *seder* is different, but what makes *working, poor people* different from Jews wielding monetary and religious power: those who starve from those who feast; those who sleep on the floor from those who have mansions; those in rags from those dressed in finery; those whose only opportunity to rest is at the *from seder* from those who rest daily. A child is commanded to ask his father, who answers, after thinking, 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt', a commemoration that is the rationale for the *seder*. This is one of many moments in these *Haggadot* where the authors do not write in Yiddish but instead reference the original Hebrew of traditional *Haggadot*. The Yiddish translation then explains the ways working Jews remain 'in Egypt' (enslaved), unlike a tradi-

Front page of the *Haggadah* published by the Algemeyner idisher arbeyter-bund in rusland un poylen, 1900. IISH collection, call number IISG BRO 3252/5



Aaron Sundelevič Liberman, a primary figure in the creation of practices towards Jewish socialism. IISH collection, call number BG A8/563.

Benjamin Feigenbaum in 1892. Public domain.

tional *Haggadah*, which cites liberation as accomplished through God.

There is so much more to say about these booklets, and extensive materials at the IISH can shed light on their origins and impact. For example, based on the time of publication at the *Arbeyter Fraynd*, as well as on the tone of the writing, the original author of this pamphlet is likely to have been Benjamin Feigenbaum, one of the many religious-turned-radicals (in the lineage of Aaron Liebermann and Morris Winchevsky) who fled Eastern-European Jewish-religious-Orthodoxy and state repression and ended up in London, writing for a Jewish-anarchist journal. Further questions that merit exploration are how these booklets were used. The Galician Bund is known to have republished their edition in 1919: why was this booklet continually republished? Was it agitation? Were there anarchist and Bundist *seders*, similar to the blasphemous 'Yom Kippur Balls' held by the *Arbeyter Fraynd*? In-depth examination of the IISH collection of the paper offers clues.

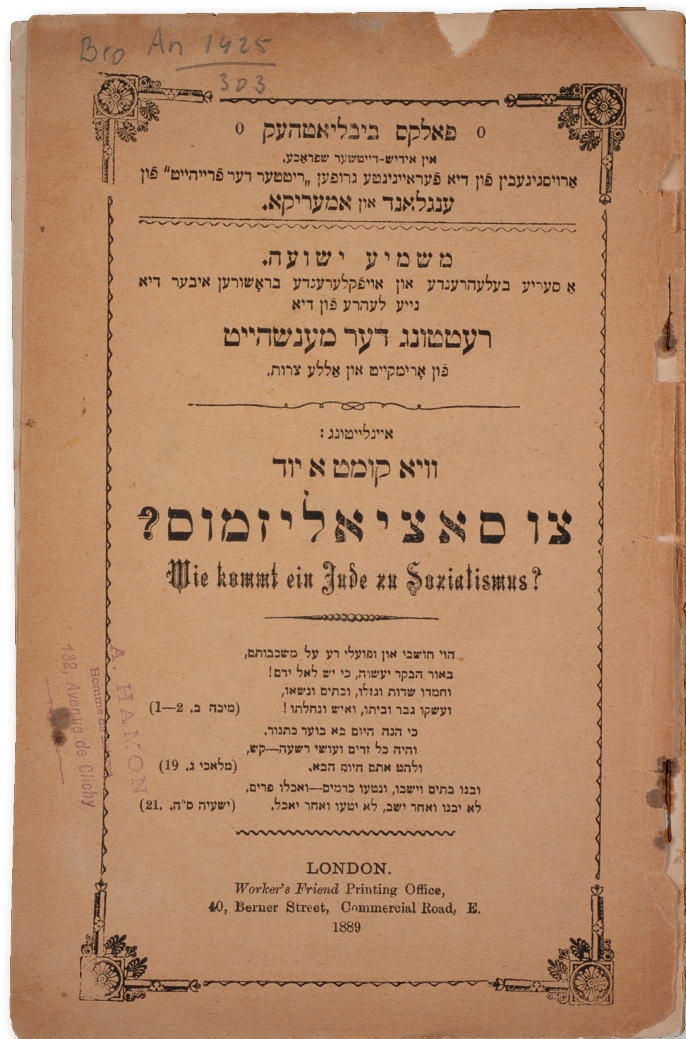
'Vi kumt a yid tsu sotsyalismus? IISH collection, call number IISG BRO 2933/5.

Although I have these questions, I am also glad that I am concluding this experience with the beginning of an answer to my original question: why were political radicals using 'religious' formats to organize? One idea is that in the early years of these organizations, the Jewish workers they were trying to radicalize still turned to



religious systems to understand the world. Thus, these anarchists and socialists found an effective strategy in the appropriation of tradition. This practice grounded their alternative analysis of the world in references and knowledge they shared with the Jewish workers they hoped to convert to political radicalism. Moreover, their satirical engagement with religious narratives such as those in these *Haggadot* established the failures of these traditional communal structures to meet the needs of these workers. God had not liberated the workers yet, but 'the revolution' might.

Shanie Kalikow



The Digitization Preparation Team

Why digitize?

Institutions with an archive function such as the IISH face major challenges in this digital era. Whereas in the past all efforts were invested in managing and collecting physical archives, online disclosure of the materials present is now an important focus as well. There are many different reasons for digitizing archives. One is social interest, as with the PIED project (to be elaborated below), and another is conservation. Ordinarily, conservation concerns material that has become fragile over time. Digitizing such material averts additional deterioration. The material in the SDAP [social-democratic workers party] archive, for example, is fragile, because it was not originally intended for long-term storage. Documents are often made of thin newspaper or carbon copy paper.

To facilitate time-consuming digitization, a team was formed within the IISH to deal specifically with readying archival documents for scanning: the Digitization Preparation Team.

Metamorfoze

This preparation team works on digitization projects with both internal and external financing. Among those financed externally, which account for the largest share, many are part of the national Metamorfoze programme, initiated by the National Library. The chief objective of this programme is to secure Dutch paper heritage and ensure ongoing access.

Metamorfoze allocates financing according to two project categories: Archives and Collections (AC) and Books, Newspapers, and Magazines (BKT). In addition, it finances research on paper conservation. The AC category is aimed at conserving and digitizing unique archive material of national interest that is decaying. The BKT category is dedicated to conserving books, newspapers, and magazines in Dutch that pertain to the collection of institutions that ensure storage.

Types of projects

In recent years the Digitization Preparation Team within the IISH has worked on various archives, including those of the Centraal bureau voor sociale adviezen [Central Bureau for Social Advice], the SDAP, and the Coop consumer cooperative and its predecessors. Another digitization project of the team is conducted in the context of the Programma Indisch Erfgoed Digitaal (PIED). This project highlights the social element. PIED is focused especially on Indonesia collections. Digital access to the Indonesia collection at the IISH, in conjunction with digitized archives on Indonesia (formerly the Netherlands East Indies) from other archive institutions, will be of great value to the Indies-Moluccan community in the Netherlands. Participating in initiatives such as Metamorfoze and PIED enables the IISH to secure archives, make material broadly accessible to users, and contribute to public debate.

Procedure by the preparation team

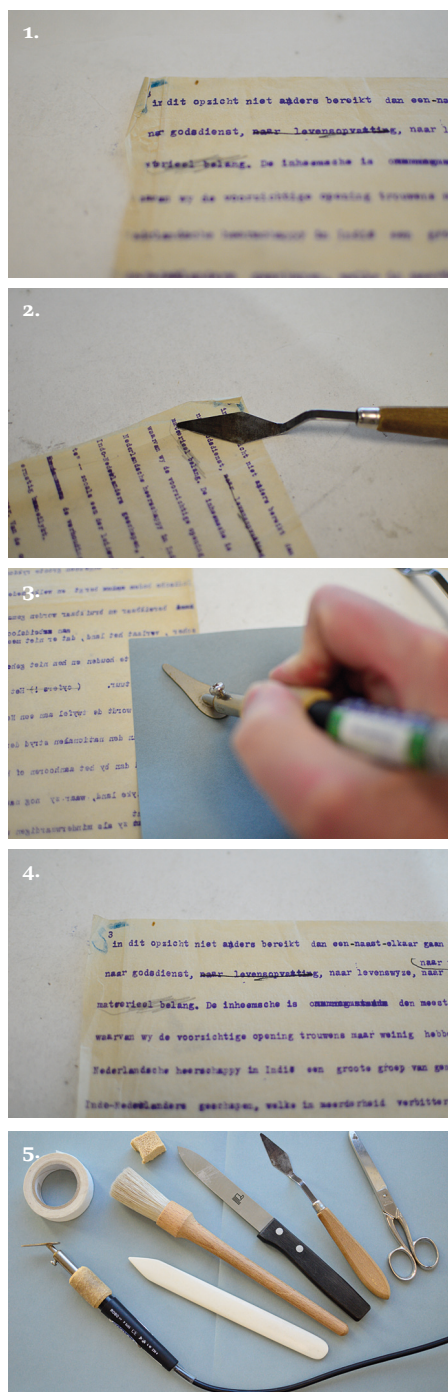
Upon deciding to digitize an archive, various IISH collection departments provide input. Based on this input, archives suitable for digitization are

selected. Dutch archives are often registered with Metamorfoze (sometimes internal financing is provided). Once the registration procedure for financing has been completed successfully, the project leader and IISH coordinator work with the scanning company to identify possible obstacles at this stage to streamline the subsequent process as much as possible. The condition of the documents is one consideration, for example whether

they are mainly individual pages, books, or newspapers, and whether deviations from the standard scan procedure are necessary, e.g. with large sheets. Alternatively, wax seals may be present. Overall, the arrangements are fixed, but each archive is unique and requires a customized approach to some extent. Following this evaluation stage, the next important task of the preparation team is to carefully review inventory lists and to register privacy-sensitive information. All findings are documented and discussed with the colleagues in charge as needed. In some cases, certain documents from the archive may not be disclosed online immediately but only after permission or digitally in the IISH reading room in connection with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) or individual ethical considerations.

The final important step in preparing the actual scanning process involves removing staples, nails, and paper clips and cleaning and repairing the documents. Here, in addition to conservation, promoting legibility of the scans to be produced is of course the main objective. Each sheet is checked and modified as needed. These are known as first-line conservation actions and are performed with 'fine instruments,' such as a tiny iron, a brush, a knife, scissors, a spatula, a bone folder, cleaning sponges, and repair tape. If

we encounter documents with mould or in such a deplorable state that they require more treatment, we contact the Conservation Department. All material on which the conservation process has been completed is then wrapped in new acid-free binders and packed in crates. Next, the archives are forwarded in batches to



1. Archive document awaiting processing. The corner of the page has been folded over, which would lead text to be omitted if the document were scanned like that.

2. Carefully unfolding the rolled-up section.

3. A tiny iron is used to flatten the paper again.

4. The document after processing.

5. The 'delicate instruments' of the preparation team.

a scanning company certified by Metamorfoze. Once material and scans are back at the IISH, they are checked at random. If the number of errors (after all, the work is done by humans) is within the margins set, the files are forwarded to the digital archivists. They arrange for the archive to be disclosed online via the IISH website.

The archive of the Centraal Bureau voor Sociale Adviezen has already undergone this entire process and is available in the IISH catalogue at ARCH00261. Preparation and digitization are still in progress for the other archives mentioned.

Jelle Verdijk

Why are women missing from the history of entrepreneurship? The Dutch case – presentation by Selin Dilli

At the last IISH Friends' Day, I presented my Veni project *The Missing Entrepreneurs? The Diversity of Female Entrepreneurship in Europe, 1900–2020*, funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO). In my talk, I explored several key questions about twentieth-century Dutch women entrepreneurs. Why do we still know so little about female entrepreneurship in the past? How has women's participation in business changed throughout the long twentieth century? What does the evolution of female entrepreneurship reveal? I

example, only 17 of 918 articles (1.85%) and 99 of 2,217 reviews (4.46%) published in the journal *Business History* even mentioned women entrepreneurs.¹ This is not because women were absent from business in the past but results from the types of research questions asked about entrepreneurs and our assumptions about women in business. The term 'entrepreneur' is typically associated with images of male owners of large companies and risk-taking men running start-ups in high-tech industries. Conversely, the roles of women in business have often been viewed as peripheral, primarily as supportive figures in family enterprises (e.g. widows stepping in incidentally and temporarily in the absence of a male heir) or are qualified as 'exceptional'. The home page of the IISH's project website *Biographies of Dutch Entrepreneurs*, for example, features only a single image of a woman. Emerging historical research, however, challenges these assumptions about businesswomen. Various examples from international historiography indicate that women were far from exceptional, and that they were active in business in a wide variety of industries, including manufacturing, retail, investments, and trade.² They also accounted for nearly one third of businesses in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Belgium around the 1900s, similar to their current share.³ One crucial lesson from the existing historiography is that we need to incorporate a gender perspective in entrepreneurship literature and broaden our definition of entrepreneurship to acknowledge the diverse daily involvement of women in business, such as owners of small shops, self-employment, and co-managers in family businesses.

In recent research,⁴ we combined quantitative data, such as historical occupational censuses, with qualitative sources from earlier studies based on oral histories to research Dutch female entrepreneurship. This study offers valuable insights into the evolving role of Dutch women in entrepreneurship throughout the twentieth century. In 1909, for example, women owned 1 in 5 businesses in the Netherlands, a ratio that rose to approximately 1 in 3 by 2020. Moreover, over the course of the twentieth century, women's participation in business changed far more dynamically than their involvement in wage work, featuring several moments of progress and reversal. In the early part of the twentieth century, entrepreneurship offered both flexibility and alternatives for married women, whose access to wage employment was restricted due to



Selin during her lecture.

sought answers to these questions by exploring the experiences of Dutch women, while drawing insights from broader international historiography as well. Additionally, I reflected on possible approaches to source material to highlight how women have contributed to business activities.

Despite the growing interest, female entrepreneurship remains underexplored in economic and business history.¹ Research on women's work in the Netherlands and Western Europe focuses primarily on their wage labour, often overlooking the experiences of businesswomen. Searching the best-known academic journals on business and economic history for mentions of women entrepreneurs yields a limited number of published articles. Between 2000 and 2010, for

marriage bars. Further investigation into qualitative sources from Atria, including the personal records of Clara Meijers (director of the Vrouwenbank [Women's Bank]), illustrates grassroots efforts by women to build support networks. Such bottom-up initiatives enabled women to exchange knowledge through networks, share best practices, and access key resources to address the challenges of business ownership.

Our research, however, is merely a starting point and leaves many questions unanswered about Dutch female entrepreneurs. While historical occupational censuses illustrate long-term trends in female entrepreneurship, for example, they often present biased and incomplete information about women's work. These records can be inconsistent due to evolving job classifications regarding changes in working-hour requirements and varied classifications of women as co-workers, wage workers, or self-employed individuals. Furthermore, they offer limited insights into the types of businesses that women owned, their roles within those businesses, and the obstacles they faced when establishing and managing their enterprises. Addressing these gaps requires generating more comprehensive and accessible records on women in business. In doing so, we should reflect on past choices about archival sources and their implications for research. The Rotterdam Bank historical archives, for example, lack documentation relating to the Dutch Women's Bank, which used to be one of its branches. Reevaluating company archives from a gender perspective and establishing a dedicated infrastructure can help visualize the role of women in business. Business archives from the NEHA, stored in part at the IISH and located in various regional collections, may potentially deepen our understanding of Dutch women's role in

Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis

Home

Over het project

Links

Verder lezen en bekijken

Prijzen en predikaten

Reacties

Congres ondernemersbiografieën

Ondernemers

Biografieën van Nederlandse ondernemers

De website Biografieën van Nederlandse ondernemers bevat (verwijzingen naar) biografische gegevens over circa 4.000 Nederlandse ondernemers. Het is bedoeld als naslagwerk en als hulpmiddel voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek naar de persoon van de ondernemer, ondernemerschap of ondernemersgroepen. U kunt bladeren op persoonsnaam of zoeken op (economische) sector, geboorte- en sterfjaar of op trefwoord. Voor meer achtergronden en informatie over deze website zie [Over het project](#).

Bladeren op persoonsnaam

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Zoeken op woord, sector en jaar

Klik hier voor hulp bij het zoeken.

Woord(en):

Economische sector(en): - alle sectoren -

Geboortjaar:

Sterfjaar:

Zoek op: deel van woord Toon: 20 resultaten

Zoek

business and enhance our knowledge of female entrepreneurship across the Netherlands. Such research can, however, be very labour-intensive and often frustrating, as these archives may reveal little or no information about the women involved.

Regardless of these challenges, several areas are worth exploring in pursuit of a more inclusive business history. By promoting open-access sharing of information on central, regional, and local business archives, while bringing about a lasting record of these archives through a gendered lens, we can offer valuable resources for future research on this topic. We should also aim to produce new impressions and narratives about entrepreneurs reflecting a female perspec-

The Biographies of Dutch Entrepreneurs project website (dormant).

Managing director Clara Meijers and staff at the 'Vrouwenbank' in Amsterdam (1928). It had only female customers and its staff were all women.

15

20250528 IISG On the Waterfront #48 J.indd 15

10-6-2025 10:33:34

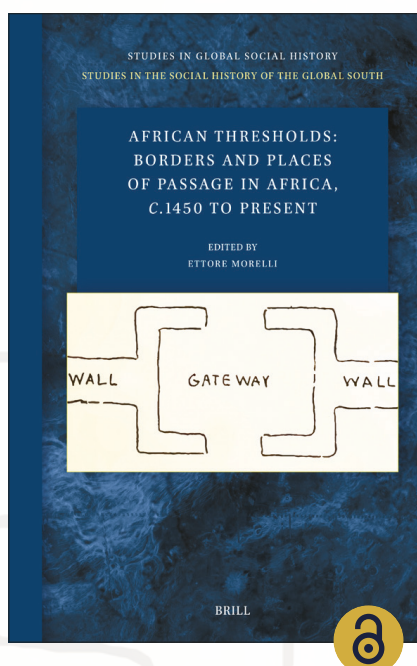
tive. In the IISH publication *Biographies of Dutch Entrepreneurs* only 13 women are featured for the entire twentieth century. The active audience engagement at the Friends' Day event already highlighted several examples of female entrepreneurs in our daily lives and close networks, demonstrating how placing women at the centre of the entrepreneurship debate and reconsidering its definition helps enhance the visibility of women. In addition, new digital tools enable analysis of extensive textual information, including newsletters, thereby demonstrating changes in the norms, public opinions, and challenges that businesswomen face.

Much work remains to be done to deepen our understanding of Dutch female entrepreneurship. Exploring this important but often overlooked aspect of history requires a continuous and sharp focus on the sources to document these women, their experiences, and their contributions. Centring our historical analysis on them will help us disclose the true extent of their contributions to business and the economy.

Looking ahead, one of the future NEHA events will therefore explore how to make women more visible in business archives. Stay tuned! Do you have other insights to share, or are you eager to continue discussing women in business history? I look forward to hearing from you.

Sources

- Mills, Albert J., and Kristin S. Williams, 'Feminist Frustrations: The Enduring Neglect of a Women's Business History and the Opportunity for Radical Change', *Business History*, 66 (2024), pp. 14–28.
- Beachy, R., B. Craig, and A. Owens, *Women, Business and Finance in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Rethinking Separate Spheres* (Oxford and New York, 2006).
- Lieshout, Carry van, Harry Smith, Piero Montebruno, and Robert J. Bennett, 'Female Entrepreneurship: Business, Marriage and Motherhood in England and Wales, 1851–1911', *Social History*, 44 (2019), pp. 440–468.
- Dilli, Selin, and Corinne Boter, 'A U-Shaped Curve of Female Entrepreneurs? The Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in the Netherlands, 1899–2020', *The Economic History Review*, online first (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.13377>.



June 2025 | Hardback | Open Access | ISBN 9789004726963 | E-ISBN 9789004726970 | Price € 112 / US\$ 122 (print only) | *Studies in the Social History of the Global South*, 55 | New subseries of *Studies in Global Social History* brill.com/shgs



BRILL

African Thresholds: Borders and Places of Passage in Africa, c.1450 to Present

Edited by: **Ettore Morelli**, Universität Basel

The Open Access publication of this book has been made possible by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

What is a border, and why does it exist? Reappraising a key idea from Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites de passage*, this book argues that a border is a threshold, a limen, made to be crossed. *African Thresholds* studies places of passage spanning from the riverine networks of Senegambia to border-making in colonial Gold Coast and Côte d'Ivoire; from the desert roads of central southern Africa to river heartlands in colonial Togo; from flows of cowrie shells across the Volta River to insurgent borderities in the Lake Chad. In a time when state borders are increasingly shut, this book aims to show us that a border is made by those who cross it as much as by those who stand by it.

Contributors are: Ettore Morelli, Fernando Mouta, Pierluigi Valsecchi, María José Pont Cháfer, Giulia Casentini, and Aimé Raoul Sumo Tayo.