

## **CFP The Histories of (Post-)Colonial Universities in the Netherlands**

**August 29-30, 2024 at Wageningen University & Research, the Netherlands**

The creation of knowledge about subjugated lands and populations formed a crucial part of the workings of imperial states across Europe. Universities played important roles in creating, absorbing and disseminating that knowledge. The development of scientific racism or the creation of botanical gardens are just two of many examples of colonial science that supported imperial rule as new imperialism demanded knowledge of the subjugated peoples and technologies for the exploitation of human and non-human resources. Moreover, knowledge was itself part of systems of colonial hierarchies wherein European 'universal' knowledge was mostly judged to be inherently superior to local and indigenous knowledge. At the same time, however, universities played a role fostering anti-colonial thought. Universities also participated in preserving indigenous knowledge through manuscript collection, law and language documentation, as well as through the production of field notes, although mediated through the universalizing tendencies of European knowledge ideals. Yet, the historiographies of universities, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, have so far remained focused on their institutional histories within the context of the nation state.

At least some Dutch universities (Leiden, Utrecht, Delft and Wageningen to begin with) nevertheless functioned as institutions of higher learning for the colonial state in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, producing civil servants and experts who would develop colonial careers. Dutch universities also facilitated the training of indigenous elites. In the Dutch colonies itself European scientific methods and academic knowledge, moreover, was not passively adopted, but rather adapted and applied to existing traditions. Expertise that was gained during the colonial period, partly with the aid of these adaptations, generated lasting centers of global expertise in the Netherlands, thereby informing knowledge regimes for decades to come. Examples of this are the expertise on Asian history and culture in Leiden and on tropical agriculture in Wageningen, as well as companies that emerged from such knowledge hubs (Shell, Boskalis, Deltares and others).

This 2-day workshop therefore responds to that gap in our knowledge. The workshop will explore the colonial and postcolonial entanglements of higher education in the Netherlands, with room for comparative explorations focused on higher education across the global north and south, exploring parallels to and linkages with colonial centers of knowledge across empires and from the early-modern to the modern era. The aim is to bring together researchers and professionals already working on similar

projects relating to the colonial and postcolonial histories of universities in the Netherlands, while also inviting new perspectives. The purpose is to create a forum for in-depth discussion amongst researchers and professionals working on the topic who may have not otherwise encountered one another. This is based on the observation that a number of universities in the Netherlands and elsewhere have now started to explore research into their colonial pasts, but, that, so-far there has been a lack of coordinated discussion on the topic within and between these universities. For this reason, a number of the speakers will be invited.

Questions that will be addressed include: how are these legacies of empire still present in 21<sup>st</sup> century institutions? How have the colonial histories of Dutch universities influenced and contributed to lasting divides and inequalities regarding the development of higher education between global north and south? What colonial legacies of the Dutch and other empires are there to be found in universities in countries like Indonesia and Suriname? How can we engage in a sustainable decolonization of our institutions?

The workshop aims to bridge studies on the history of knowledge production, colonial histories and the histories of universities in the Netherlands. The workshop also wants to contribute to a broader discussion about the role of universities in post-colonial societies, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere, including issues connected to racial discrimination, diversity and inclusion. The second day of the workshop will therefore be aimed towards a broader audience of students and academics of different disciplines to address questions relating to the public relevance of these histories.

The workshop organizers encourage scholars from relevant fields to explore the institutional and epistemic histories of colonialism in relation to universities in the Netherlands but is open to those who explore similar themes in other knowledge spheres as well.

The keynote will be delivered jointly by Sabine Cadeau and Nicholas Bell-Romero, who both worked as research fellows at the University of Cambridge Legacies of Enslavement Inquiry.

We invite abstracts for papers covering any topic related to this theme, including, but not limited to the following:

- Colonial histories of specific faculties, disciplines and programmes of study
- Histories of universities in former Dutch colonies connected to the colonial period
- Histories focusing on the experiences and roles of foreign students at Dutch universities throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but specifically during the colonial period

- Life histories of colonial and indigenous university teachers and administrators
- Histories of anti-colonial, anti-apartheid, student nationalist organizations
- Histories of decolonisation at universities
- Histories of slavery connected to universities
- Histories of knowledge production in connection to universities and colonialism
- Histories of colonial connections between universities in the Netherlands and universities in other countries
- Histories of postcolonial or neo-colonial cooperation between universities in the Netherlands and the global south
- Financial histories of universities as connected to the colonial project
- Role of universities in resource mobilization in, for example, mining or on plantations
- Academic heritage and the role of universities in collecting material and indigenous knowledge
- Histories of exclusion and racial discrimination at universities in the Netherlands and elsewhere

Based on the presentations and discussions of the workshop, we aim to bring together our findings in an edited volume/special journal issue exploring the colonial histories of Dutch universities. We also hope to explore possibilities to contribute to broader discussions about the role of universities in post-colonial societies, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

To apply, email [office.rhi@wur.nl](mailto:office.rhi@wur.nl) with the following attachments before **January 19<sup>th</sup>**:

- Title and abstract for proposed paper (max. 300 words)
- Name and affiliation (if any)
- Brief CV (max. 2 pages)

There is a small budget available for travel and/or accommodation for those in precarious academic positions. Please reach out to the organizers for more information about eligibility.

This workshop and the keynote is made possible thanks to the generous funding of Wageningen University & Research