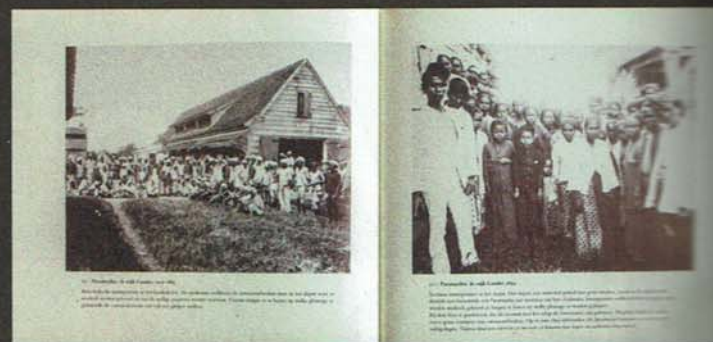


JESSICA DE ABREU'S

Consisting of various book collections, archives and artefacts, legacies of various Black writers and scientists, the more than 10,000 books in the collections are about racism and race issues, slavery and (de)colonisation, gender and feminism, social sciences and development, Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles, South America, Africa and more. As a result, the collections offer literature that is little (or not) discussed within schools and universities, and are intended as a starting collection that can grow through donations and collaborations with others. In this way Black literature, knowledge and information is made accessible.

For centuries Surinamese people had been the (forced) subjects within colonial photography, which left them unable to voice the process of dehumanisation in their lifetimes. As these communities were photographed through a western gaze, they were reduced to scientific objects and exotic creatures. The



Top to bottom: 1, 2 & 5

growing white exoticism and curiosity for Black and brown bodies led to pseudo-science and racial shows in Europe. Subsequently, we can say that the camera was also used as an instrument to falsely classify 'non-western' people as inferior beings. Colonial photography contributed to the justification of dominating and exploiting lands, cultures and bodies. Photographs presented colonialism as a successful project around the globe.

While I keep this history in mind, I questioned: what does the world look like when Surinamese people do not stand in front of the camera but are the ones able to take the photo during colonial times? Although the camera was mostly accessible to the upper layers of colonised societies, their photos do give insight on their worldview, life and creativity. The chosen books speak about the history and lives of



AUGUSTA CURIEL¹
Fotografie in Suriname: 1904-1937
LM Publishers, 2012

At the beginning of the 20th century, the sisters Curiel were one of the most important photographers in Suriname. Between 1904 and 1937 they mainly photographed daily life in Suriname, but also in the Caribbean and Europe. Unfortunately, research hasn't shown if they ever made free work as they always worked on behalf of private companies and government institutions and as purveyors to the Dutch Royal Family. Although photography was their talent, it primarily was their work and main source of income. So, their photos give us an idealised snapshot of Surinamese colonial society rather than a true reflection of the country. I am a fan of their almost perfect composition, as it's very soothing to the eyes. Curiel's photography is exceptional because of their sharpness and clarity, especially at that time.



SURINAME DOOR HET OOG VAN JULIUS MULLER²
Fotografie 1882-1902
Steven Vink
LM Publishers, 1997

In the 19th century, Julius Muller was the most productive photographer in Suriname. He was politically committed to the development of his society, and hoped his photographs would positively portray Suriname, in search of investors. Although he was a politician and entrepreneur who saw the potential of the growing gold mining of his country, nowadays he is more known for his photographic work. In 1895, Muller donated his photographs to the Haarlem Colonial Museum, and currently the *Tropenmuseum* in Amsterdam demands his work to be exhibited in the Netherlands. As a result, the photographs have been shown in various Dutch cities to demonstrate the underestimated potential of his great Suriname. It shows that we often oversee the creative talents/works of political advocates.



FOTOGRAFIE IN SURINAME³
1839-1939
Fragment Uitgeverij, 1991

In the bi-lingual catalogue *Photography in Suriname 1839-1939* we read about the history of photography that took place in Surinamese society. As it was published by Museum of Ethnology Rotterdam (currently known as *Wereldmuseum Rotterdam*) whose roots are embedded in colonialism, all of these photos should be understood within this context.

However, the book includes articles about how photography was used among Surinamese photographers as George Rustwijk and Clarissa Heilbron who both opened up their studios in the 19th century in Suriname. Although there is much colonial connotation to the catalogue, to me it was also informative to know about the (western) understanding of Surinamese history and photographic work.



TROUWPORTRETTE⁴
Surinaamse Voorouders in Beeld:
Album 1846-1950
Lucia Nankoe & Jean Jacques Vrij
In de Knipscheer, 2019

In *Wedding Portraits: Surinamese Ancestors Portrayed*, Lucia Nankoe compiled pictures from the period 1845-1950 which portray Surinamese bridal couples. The book feels like a celebration of marriage, love and family combined with optimism that within photography during colonialism was not only made by and/or for the colonisers (eyes). It was written: 'A wedding involved not only a party but also a photo, initially only in the colonial elite, but later photography also came within the reach of the middle class'. The photos are derived from private family collections, and include their stories. It is captured with at least the couple's names and important dates. Nankoe's initiative reminds us of the warmth and understanding that there was love, family, humanity in times we might not think to expect it.



WHITE INNOCENCE⁵
Gloria Wekker
Duke University Press, 2016

Unfortunately, most of the aforementioned books about Surinamese photography are rare and were barely re-published. At The Black Archives in Amsterdam, we treat them as archival pieces. Amongst Surinamese communities in the Netherlands, it is common to question why our history is constantly neglected, silenced or westernised. *White Innocence* by professor Gloria Wekker delivers a critical analysis on how systematic/institutional racism and whiteness has developed in Dutch society. She points out a paradox as 'we pretend to be a tolerant nation and deny racial discrimination and colonial violence, while at the same time aggressive racism and xenophobia are commonplace'. Her book is an essential work that ties together present-day issues with a colonial history that seems to repeat itself.

Opening image of Jessy's Room by Wouter Pocornie.

JESSICA DE ABREU is an anthropologist, curator, and activist who graduated from the departments of Social and Cultural Anthropology and Culture, Organisation and Management at VU University Amsterdam. Her passionate commitment to the field of African Diaspora has led to research on upward social mobility in New York, Amsterdam and London. Her research project on organisational anthropology focused on social entrepreneurship in Black British communities from a postcolonial perspective. She is a board member at New Urban Collective and co-founder of The Black Archives, both in Amsterdam.