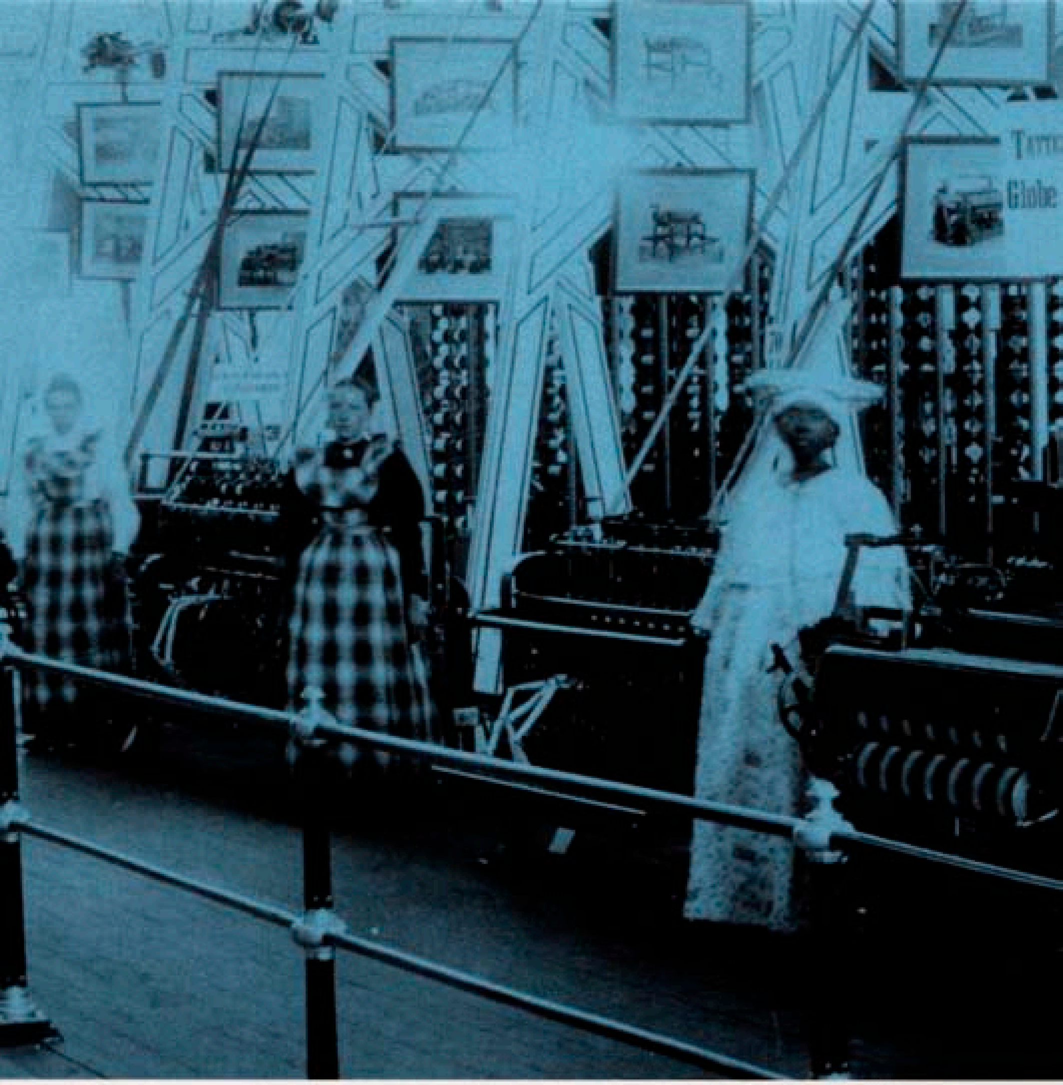


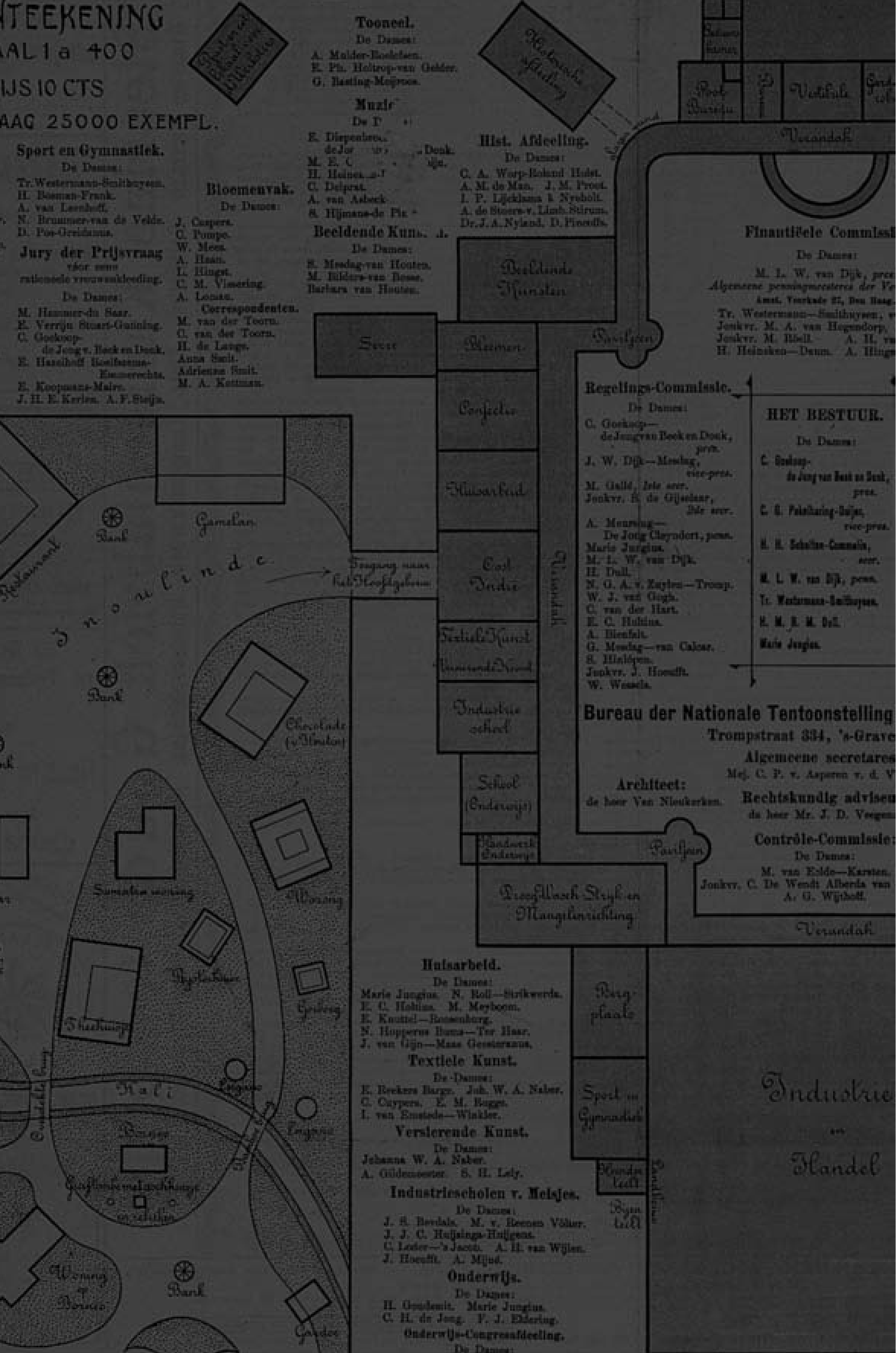
# TRANSFORMING THE PUBLIC SPHERE

## THE DUTCH NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF WOMEN'S LABOR IN 1898

MARIA GREVER AND BERTEKE WAALDIJK

*With an introduction by Antoinette Burton*

# TRANSFORMING THE PUBLIC SPHERE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# TRANSFORMING THE PUBLIC SPHERE

## THE DUTCH NATIONAL EXHIBITION OF WOMEN'S LABOR IN 1898

■ ■ ■

MARIA GREVER

AND BERTEKE WAALDIJK

*Translated by Mischa F. C. Hoyinck*

*and Robert E. Chesal*

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| ARA/NA | Algemeen Rijksarchief; recently renamed Nationaal Archief (National Archives) |
| AHR | American Historical Review |
| ANDB | Algemeene Nederlandsche Diamantbewerkers Bond General (Dutch Diamond Cutters Union) |
| HGM | Haags Gemeentemuseum (The Hague Municipal Museum) |
| ICW | International Council of Women |
| IIAV | Internationaal Informatiecentrum en Archief voor de Vrouwenbeweging (International Information Center and Archives of the Women's Movement) |
| IISG | Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (International Institute of Social History) |
| KB | Koninklijke Bibliotheek (Royal Dutch Library) |
| KHA | Koninklijk Huisarchief (Archives of the Dutch Royal House) |
| KUN | Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen (Nijmegen University) |
| NRC | Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant (New Rotterdam Newspaper) |
| NTV | Nationale Tentoonstelling van Vrouwenarbeid (Dutch National Exhibition of Women's Labor) |
| NVR | Nationale Vrouwenraad van Nederland (Dutch National Council of Women) |
| NVVZB | Nederlandsche Vrouwenbond tot Verhooging van het zedelijk Bewustzijn (Dutch Women's League for the Advancement of Moral Awareness) |
| RA | Rijksarchief (State Provincial Archives) |
| RKD | Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (State Documentation Center for Art History) |

| | |
|---|---|
| SDAP | Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij (Social Democratic Labor Party) |
| TDV | Tentoonstelling “De Vrouw 1813–1913” (Exhibition entitled “Woman 1813–1913”) |
| UB | Universiteitsbibliotheek (University Library) |
| UU | Universiteit Utrecht (Utrecht University) |
| VOV | Vereeniging Onderlinge Vrouwenbescherming (Women’s Mutual Protection League) |
| VVVK | Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht (Dutch Woman’s Suffrage Association) |
| VVV | Vrije Vrouwenvereeniging (Free Women’s Association) |

## INTRODUCTION

■ ■ ■

# *The Spectacular History of Dutch Feminism*

ANTOINETTE BURTON

The last half of the nineteenth century was not just "the age of exhibitions"; it was the high noon of imperial spectacle as well.[1] From London to Paris to Amsterdam to Brussels to Chicago to Adelaide to Calcutta, governments cooperated with entrepreneurs and exhibition organizers to deliver a variety of goods (agricultural, mechanical, industrial, aesthetic, and narrative) to an increasingly sophisticated consuming public, training them at once in national and global ways of seeing and belonging. Exhibitions created both real and imagined spaces in which imperial spectators and colonial "objects" came together in circuits of capitalist production and, of course, asymmetrical power. They were, in other words, one particularly spectacular manifestation of what Mary Louise Pratt has called "contact zones": terrains as material as they were symbolic, through which all manner of historical subjects might glean knowledge about the world and from which new, hybridized cultural forms often emerged. If exhibitions were predominantly metropolitan affairs, offering what Pratt calls a "promontory" perspective on Euro-American empires and their peoples, they were also decidedly multidimensional and interactive.[2] They generated new modes of knowing and a variety of unintended consequences, including performances of subaltern agency and resistance by colonial people for consumption by "native" inhabitants of the West.[3] To be sure, the triumphal ethnocentrism and orientalism that, together, undergirded the majority of these spectacles, attributed a "whiggish inevitability" to Europe's diverse—and at times competitive—civilizing missions.[4] But as feminist scholars like Annie Coombes have reminded us, the modern exhibition, like the modern museum, was a "repository for contradictory desires and identities," as well as one means by which a variety of publics were implicated in "the narratives of exclusion and belonging" produced by would-be hegemonic imperialisms, whether high or low, official or popular.[5]

Despite the veritable explosion of historical work on exhibitionary culture in the last decade, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of women in organizing the transnational spectacles that dominated the culturescapes of imperial modernity—or, for that matter, to the gendered meanings attached to, and entailed by, the dichotomies of production and consumption, respectability and decadence, civilization and savagery, and "home" and "away," which were among the governing categories mobilized in exhibition venues across the whole of the nineteenth century.[6] Maria Grever and Berteke Waaldijk's *Transforming the Public Sphere*, published in Dutch in 1998 and translated into English for the first time in this volume, offers an important corrective to this oversight by bringing to our attention the National Exhibition of Women's Labor, which was staged at The Hague in 1898, drew 1,400 contributors, and attracted 90,000 visitors. Arguing that the exhibition was "the first large-scale manifestation of modern feminism in the Netherlands," they situate it in the context of emergent (and convergent) Dutch feminist, nationalist, and imperialist ideologies. Through a combination of rich empirical detail and compelling social and cultural analysis, they demonstrate how and why fin de siècle Dutch feminism was embedded in contemporary debates about national/imperial achievement and status. In this respect, Grever and Waaldijk echo and complicate many of the concerns of Euro-American women's, gender, and feminist history of the past decade. In the first instance, they insist on Dutch women's complicity in framing national/imperial discourses for public consumption, thereby challenging the false binary of metropole and colony, which scholars such as Mrinalini Sinha, Catherine Hall, Ann Stoler, and others and have been trying to dismantle as part of a larger anti-imperialist historiographic project.[7] By demonstrating that Dutch women actively sought to connect consumerism and citizenship through an exhibition directed expressly, though by no means exclusively, toward women, Grever and Waaldijk illustrate linkages between a Habermasian public sphere and those so-called counterpublics created and maintained by a profoundly (if not univocally) bourgeois imperial feminism.[8] And last but certainly not least, by foregrounding the controversies over labor management, class difference, and the racialized politics of the exhibition's organization and execution, the authors of *Transforming the Public Sphere* write the history of work and of a variety of laboring bodies—from Dutch factory girls to carpet weavers—into a historiography of imperial spectacle that has largely failed to come to terms with the conditions of production behind the scenes of the modern exhibitionary impulse.[9]

The year 1898 constitutes a watershed date in American history because it marks the beginning of a new phase of American imperial-military power.[10] It proves equally significant for Dutch national-imperial history: that year saw the passage of a mixed-marriage law for the Dutch East Indies, reflecting anxieties about Dutch national purity and stability characteristic of the turn of the century more generally.[11] But if readers expect to find here a reprise of the festival-of-nations approach that characterized much exhibition organization down to the late twentieth century—one that celebrates national exceptionalism or distinctiveness by excavating a particular national narrative—they will be disappointed, and instructively so. From the beginning of their story, Grever and Waaldijk are at pains to show how saturated the project of 1898 in the Netherlands was with international influences, beginning with the walkabout that Cecile Goekoop, one of the chief forces behind the exhibition in The Hague, did at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Like Goekoop, many of the principals involved in the making of the "National" Exhibition of Women's Labor either had read about other contemporary displays or had themselves visited the international exhibitions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though they were keenly aware of the event's stakes for Dutch politics at both the national and regional levels, they were equally cognizant of the global marketplace of spectacle in which they strove to participate and on which they aspired to leave their distinctive mark. Indeed, their efforts to marshal the best of Dutch culture, as embodied both literally and figuratively in the respectable Dutch working girl (pressed into national and imperial service by well-meaning, if patronizing, bourgeois Dutch women), speak eloquently to the contradictions of "cosmopolitan domesticity" that middle- and upper-class white women across the world tried to articulate as their signature contribution to dominant regimes of global culture and modern civilization.[12] This is not to say that there was nothing distinctively Dutch about the exhibition, or that Grever and Waaldijk privilege an international frame of analysis over a national one. Like any number of feminist scholars trying to historicize the grip that imperial geopolitics had on regional and national experiences of self, nation, and empire in the modern period, they are determined to identify the "specificity of national formation" in a complex of international and global contexts.[13] No less significantly, their work on the Dutch exhibition underscores the reciprocal influence of the colonies (Indonesia, Surinam, and the Dutch Antilles) on the metropole, as well as the constitutive role that women and gender ideologies played in shaping the "civilization" process of a variety of subjects—with Dutch visitors themselves serving as the primary pedagogical objects of this nationally specific imperial spectacle.[14]

Those well acquainted with recent research produced under the rubric of "gender and imperialism" will find the story told below familiar, both in terms of the themes Grever and Waaldijk focus on and their historical methodology. Among the former are the competing and overlapping discourses of race and class which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century elite white women used, both intentionally and unintentionally, to display their allegiance as well as their indispensability to the imperial nation; their appropriation of a variety of others as spectacle to shore up their claims to legitimacy and authority as public political subjects; and their anxieties and ambivalences about those spectacles when the bodies subjected to scrutiny acted out, rebelled, and otherwise refused to fulfill the cultural roles and historical destinies assigned them in the several counterpublics achieved through a space like the exhibition hall. Equally recognizable is the combination of attention to space, geographies of culture, and the mapping of social order which have been characteristic of much imperial history, feminist and otherwise, since the late 1980s and 1990s. In *Transforming the Public Sphere*, readers will find thoughtful analyses of the intersections of national and imperial discourses with those of gender and feminism, as well as a sensitivity to the differences between agency and resistance per se, especially, though not exclusively, where white women are concerned. Such interpretive approaches have become the hallmarks of feminist studies of imperialism, as work in the last decade on subjects as diverse as British feminists, German imperial women, Australian female travelers, and Indian women reformers, to name just a few, has shown.[15]

While it is true that the highest density of historiographical work on imperial cultures so far has focused on Britain and France, with feminist critics leading the way, scholars have long been at work on the subject of women, gender, and Dutch colonialism—beginning with the 1959–60 dissertation on Indonesian women by Cora Vreede-de Stuers.[16] Far from being derivative, Grever and Waaldijk face the same methodological challenges and impasses bequeathed to us all by imperial systems of knowledge, classification, and archival logic—systems within which and against which we try to write narratives that have the capacity to counter the dominant, colonizing accounts of traditional imperial histories. Like many scholars interested in the recovery and historicization of the subaltern, for example, the authors come up against the limits of the exhibitionary archive, as well as of the complementary world of print culture on which they draw to recreate the polyphonic cultural universe surrounding the 1898 exhibition, its supporters, critics, visitors, and employees. The strike over wages, and subsequent walkout, by the Amersfoort young women workers in the middle of the exhibition—followed later by the Javanese mock-village workers—offers a case in point. Though there is much we can read from the extant sources about the contexts of these spectacular labor actions, especially in terms of the embarrassment they posed to the Dutch women organizers already divided politically about the value of exhibiting live women workers for display, we learn more about the limits of the bourgeois imperial humanitarian narrative than we do about the subjectivities of any of the strikers.[17] Their historical experiences remain beyond the realm of full recovery and, ultimately, opaque. If such opacity is unavoidable, it remains a representative feature of even the most politically nuanced and engaged feminist scholarship in the context of postcoloniality. And it behooves us to remember that although we as historians are subject to the continued distortions and depredations of the colonial archive, we are also obliged to continue to struggle to imagine new ways of bringing obscure and obscured subjects into history—even as we recognize the dream of total knowledge as one of the legacies of modern Western imperialism to the discipline of history itself.[18]

Although the stories of the vast majority of colonial peoples brought to The Hague and staged as live exhibits were not audible then or now, the colonized at work were literally everywhere to be seen at the 1898 exhibition. The purpose-built Kampong Insulinde (literally, “village of the island empire”) was the ideological heart of the spectacle, featuring batik workers, musicians, and Javanese waiters in its *rijsttafel*-serving restaurant.[19] As Grever and Waaldijk point out, there were rare instances of consensual participation by “native” women: the celebrated Indonesian feminist Raden Adjeng Kartini, for example, supported the exhibition, helping organizers gather handicrafts for display and even raising funds for the event. As European feminists elsewhere did with respect to “other” women subject to colonial rule, however, Dutch feminists would not and likely could not conceive of her as an equal, despite and, of course, because of their commitment to bringing "the woman question" into public view through the bodies of colonial females (and males) at work. This refusal relied equally on their determination to see colonized bodies as evidence of primitive time as posited against the relentless modernity of the European present, an expression of what Anne McClintock calls "anachronistic space," whereby the distance separating metropole and colony is expressed in temporal terms and, typically, through gendered bodies as well.[20] Simply by their presence, "real" colonized women like Kartini and Louisa Yda (daughter of an ex-slave woman from Paramaribo who appeared in "native dress" at the exhibition) disrupt the fiction that Dutch feminists could speak, and otherwise dictate terms, for their brown "sisters"—for us, if not for their contemporaries. If this is one of the most recognizable scripts in the story of comparative colonialisms, it is also an example of what Stoler calls the many "intersecting plots" of a modern global imperial history that exceeds national boundaries, even as it depends on them for the nuance and the cultural specificity they provide.[21]

In both the long and short run, the exhibition opened up new spaces in the public sphere for Dutch women which involved participation in debates about women's education, domestic service, the arts, vocational training, Dutch social/sexual purity, and, of course, the relationship between gender, labor, and the nation. In each case, Dutch feminists' increased (though still limited) authority on public political matters can be traced back to the forms of colonial knowledge they gathered, represented, and turned into objects of consumption. These practices, which were intended to display their capacity for citizenship, depended on the subordination of working bodies both black and white, as well as on the violences—real and symbolic—on which such subordination was predicated. In the process, Dutch women and, arguably, much of the Dutch reading public had the opportunity to see just how intimately nation and empire, class and race, gender and work were connected on the threshold of the new century. That these relationships were articulated and understood through an orientalist aesthetic both ornamentalizing and monumentalizing, tells us much about how culture was produced in the crucible of imperial modernity, not to mention how central women and gender were to its racialized manifestations. Domesticity, though an important register for normalizing imperial values, was clearly not the only one where Dutch women were concerned. At the very least, domesticity as a material reality and as a discourse was subject to refraction through a variety of lenses, women's work in a colonial context chief among them. Recognizing labor as a crucial category of analysis in histories of imperial culture proves as pressing a project as reconfiguring the field to take account of women and gender, however much it may fragment narratives of empire, whether inherited or new.[22] As significantly, the exhibition should not be understood merely as a spectacle of empire, for it was nothing less than an actor in the historical drama of Dutch colonialism and its intersection with Dutch feminism, in all their interdependent complexities. How and why the exhibition acted in the service of many contradictory desires—for nation, for empire, for emancipation, and ultimately for power in the public sphere—is one aspect of the heretofore undocumented story of 1898 that this book begins to tell.

## CHAPTER 1

■ ■ ■

# *Feminists and the Public Sphere*

In 1893, 21 million people visited the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.[1] In the White City, they strolled through palatial pavilions that celebrated the Western world's economic, political, and social progress. They also milled through the Midway Plaisance amusement park to be entertained by a range of sideshows and performances. One of the visitors was a young Dutch woman named Cecile Goekoop-de Jong van Beek en Donk, who was touring Europe and the United States along with her husband. The couple visited the exposition in Chicago during the month of October. In letters to her sister Elisabeth in Amsterdam, Cecile Goekoop enthusiastically exclaimed how impressed she was by the white marble replicas of Greek architecture, reflecting the brilliant autumn sun.[2] She could hardly have suspected that five years later, she was to head the organization of a Dutch national exhibition on women's issues. The National Exhibition of Women's Labor, held in The Hague in the summer of 1898, was modeled on the same principles as the World's Columbian Exposition, and as such it fell into the nineteenth-century tradition of national and international exhibitions. Although much smaller in scale, the exhibition in The Hague also, for instance, followed the characteristic division into national and colonial exhibits. Like the larger fairs, The Hague's exhibition also emphasized industrial progress, featured conferences, and offered sideshows and souvenirs to visiting tourists.

This book is about The National Exhibition of Women's Labor held in 1898. It tells the story of how the women's movement in a small, Western nation with a large colonial empire used an exhibition to put women's social position on the political agenda. By choosing the exhibition as their forum, Dutch women created a new public sphere. They created, to borrow Nancy Fraser's term, a counterpublic, in which the parameters of speaking about gender shifted dramatically.[3]

The exhibition in The Hague constituted a milestone in the development of Dutch feminism. Under the umbrella term *women's labor*, new coalitions were formed and new political tools deployed. A small but crucial factor in this process was the link that Dutch women had established with kindred spirits organizing women's exhibitions abroad. In this study, we interpret these developments in three contexts. First, we examine the exhibition's role as a feminist intervention in the process of constructing the public sphere and citizenship. Second, we look at the event in The Hague as an important chapter in the history of gender and visual culture. And third, we consider how women shaped and adapted the format of the colonial exhibition. This will shed light on the imperial context in which Western women's movements, and the Dutch women's movement in particular, claimed citizenship in the nation-state.

## WOMEN'S LABOR

The year 1898 proved a special one for the Netherlands, for it was then that Wilhelmina, heiress to the Dutch throne, would turn eighteen. Wilhelmina, the only surviving child of King Willem III—who had died in 1890—was to ascend to the throne on September 6. Various local and national festivities were organized to coincide with her inauguration. Amsterdam staged a great Rembrandt exhibition, which attracted thousands of visitors. There were pageants recalling the nation's glorious past, while an exhibition of traditional dress from various regions displayed the uniqueness of Dutch cultural heritage.

Not coincidentally, many of the events alluded to the seventeenth century—the period known as the Dutch Golden Age—while they appeared to ignore the recent past. The nineteenth century had seen economic and political stagnation in the Netherlands. In economic terms, the Netherlands lagged behind its more rapidly industrializing neighbors, Belgium, England, and Germany. Toward the end of the century, the agrarian-based Dutch economy suffered from a prolonged agricultural crisis. The Netherlands lacked a strong industrial proletariat—although Dutch farm workers in the North were influenced by anarchism, the socialist movement was still in its infancy; socialists were not elected to parliament until 1897. The

Dutch bourgeoisie amassed wealth through trade, banking, and—from the 1880s onward—private exploitation of colonial resources.[4]

The Netherlands had colonies in Asia (the Indonesian archipelago), South America (Surinam), and the Caribbean islands. In terms of territory, Dutch colonial rule had not expanded in the nineteenth century. While other European powers were vying to conquer new African colonies, the Dutch concentrated on subjugating parts of the Indonesian archipelago that, until then, had been indirectly ruled through indigenous viceroys. These expansionist ambitions led to a few colonial military victories: on the island of Lombok in 1894, and in Aceh province in 1896.

The inauguration of the first Dutch queen offered various groups in society an opportunity to call attention to their national and imperial agendas. To some, the crowning of young Wilhelmina heralded a revival of Dutch glory. It was a time of reemerging nationalism, with national identity defined in explicitly imperial terms. This nationalist revival went hand in hand with a fondness for the monarchy and offered many people something to cling to in the rapidly changing society of the day.[5] The Dutch women's movement took inspiration from the crowning of a female monarch and seized the opportunity to express its hopes and desires for the future. After all, the movement reasoned, if a woman could fill the highest post in the Netherlands, then it was high time the nation realized that women could—and already did—play an important role in other areas of society. To convey this message, they chose a vehicle used only once before in the history of the international women's movement: a national exhibition. Following the example set by their Danish counterparts three years earlier, some five hundred Dutch women independently organized the National Exhibition of Women's Labor.

From July 9 to September 21, 1898, the exhibition in the dunes between The Hague and the North Sea coast attracted 90,000 visitors—most of them women, including Queen Wilhelmina and her mother Emma. In the exhibition's large, white wooden buildings with wide verandas and pavilions, objects and activities portrayed all facets of Dutch women's labor. The Hall of Industry showed live factory girls at work, while elsewhere women displayed their skills as typists, cigar makers, and pharmacists. In a mock Javanese kampong, women and men from the Dutch East Indies demonstrated batik dyeing and other skills. Exhibits devoted to social work, nursing, and education displayed the large contribution women had made to these fields. In the library, visitors could read books written by (and about) women, while in the art hall they could view paintings by Dutch women artists. Every week, conferences and lectures attracted new visitors to the grounds. With this exhibition, the Dutch women's movement had, in the words of one journalist, "erected its own temple."[6]

The Dutch women's movement had already been making its voice heard for more than three decades before it mounted the exhibition. From 1860 onward, the Dutch public had learned of the economic, social, cultural, and political restraints placed on women. Opinion-makers had spread their views in brochures, articles, pamphlets, and at public gatherings. Debates dealt with such issues as women's working conditions, the lack of educational opportunity for girls, occupational hazards for housemaids, the need for legal recourse against the fathers of illegitimate children, the legal incompetence of married women, and their subservience to their husbands. Women established associations that campaigned for the right to paid labor or fought against legalized prostitution. New magazines urged subscribers to support women's causes. A few novels pointed to women's subordinate position in society. With these forums of public debate conquered, the stage was set for women to expand their territory with an exhibition.[7]

Overtly political exhibitions remained virtually unknown to the Dutch in the late nineteenth century. National expositions usually displayed achievements in various sectors of industry, the arts, and craftsmanship, while the public gazed at the spectacle and bought the goods offered. Political movements traditionally sought publicity through serious writings and public statements. The worker's movement had recently added strikes and demonstrations to its repertoire. The women's movement, however, was no ordinary political movement. With its heterogeneous and diffuse constituency, it campaigned on a wide range of issues. Its activists came from disparate religious and ideological backgrounds. The Dutch women's movement—like its counterparts in many other countries—encompassed groups that held diametrically opposed views on such issues as the expansion of educational and professional opportunities for women and the need for labor protection and changes in marital law. From 1884, for example, a small but influential group of upper-class women campaigned against the trade in women and the legalization of prostitution in brothels. Outside influences, like England's Josephine Butler, helped to shape this nascent women's movement.[8] In 1894, the Dutch Woman's Suffrage Association (Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht; VVVK) lobbied for the recognition of women's civil rights, a political demand that the Dutch until then had only heard from a few radical socialists.[9] Although the Netherlands had long remained involved in the slave trade (it did not abolish slavery in the West Indies until 1863), the country had no strong abolitionist movement. This deprived the Dutch women's movement of the kind of important training ground that had proved so crucial to the development of the American and British women's movements. In the 1890s, a few women began calling themselves feminists, while many more who did not use this tag nonetheless felt a part of the women's movement in a wider sense. For such a multifaceted movement, the exhibition proved an excellent medium.

In the period leading up to the National Exhibition of Women's Labor, discussed in chapter 2, it became clear that organizing the event would require the women's movement to bridge its internal divisions in age, religion, social class, and political views. One of the movement's elder pioneers from the 1870s, Mina Kruseman, happily wrote to the central committee that "the reports of her death were greatly exaggerated" and that she would gladly contribute to the exhibition.[10] However, the various generations of women did not always cooperate so smoothly, and all too often conflicts ensued. As elsewhere, problems also arose when the women made attempts to transcend class divisions in the interest of their emancipation. Still, many countries did see the formation of new coalitions at the turn of the century. In England and the United States, women's trade union leagues bridged the gap between middle- and working-class women in their joint struggle for labor legislation and protection. In Germany and Scandinavia, women of divergent political tendencies found common ground in the demand for paid pregnancy and maternity leave.[11]

The exhibition's central theme—women's labor—reflects this ambition to overcome class divisions. The phrase encapsulated both factory labor, performed by working-class women, and professions held by middle-class women. It also mirrored a complex combination of old and new discourses. In one sense, *labor* referred to the notion of productive labor (industriousness as a virtue) upheld by nineteenth-century Dutch liberals.[12] In their view, a civilized nation was built on honest labor, rationality, and morality. Therefore, working meant making a worthwhile contribution to the nation, and productive labor by women was thought to legitimize women's claim to citizenship.[13] In another sense, however, the concept of women's labor had acquired negative connotations. By the 1890s, it had lost its neutral tone and had become widely associated with low wages, poor working conditions, immorality, unemployed men, and neglected children.[14] In this sense, the use of the term *women's labor* constituted a conscious political intervention by the organizers of the exhibition in The Hague. The exhibition, they decided, would portray civilized and decent forms of employment and would emphasize the role of productivity in social and industrial progress. This is why it displayed the work of well-to-do middle-class women who aspired to skilled vocations. At the same time, it allowed visitors to enter the world of working-class women through live demonstrations of factory, workshop, and farm work, though it paid only scant attention to the perspective of working-class women themselves. All in all, the exhibition shifted the connotations of *women's labor* in the public debate. As we will show in chapter 3, the organizers created new representations of gender and class difference in the public domain through a variety of (trade) exhibits. As a result, women's labor came to be seen less as a social problem and more as a modern challenge.

## THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND CITIZENSHIP

In our interpretation of the exhibition as a transformation of the public sphere, we use Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere, as well as later studies that have critiqued this concept from a gender perspective. The distinction between the so-called public and private spheres has played an important role in the development of women's history.[15] Like Nancy Fraser, we believe that Habermas's differentiation between three arenas of public discourse holds great importance. In his analysis of late-eighteenth-century Western European society, Habermas distinguished between the state, the market, and the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*). It is in this third arena that people can participate through rational communication about matters of common interest, about politics. This "public sphere" of newspapers, clubs, and private associations is distinct from the state (whose monopoly on coercion limits free interaction between citizens) and from the market (where the distribution of wealth and property determines human relations). The public sphere, or civil society, constitutes the space where people with no stake in the outcome of the debate discuss issues of general interest, where the economic power and legal status of the interlocutors is "bracketed."[16] Since the age of Enlightenment, this has been the arena in which new forms of citizenship are molded.

Habermas's interpretation of the public sphere proves both descriptive and prescriptive and has been the focus of much criticism from scholars in the field of gender studies. Some have pointed out that Habermas failed to recognize the masculine nature of the public sphere, never taking into account that the boundary between the public and private spheres coincided with the dividing line between the masculine and feminine domains. Some have argued that the exclusion of women from rational communication in the public sphere made civil society a masculine domain.[17] Indeed, many arenas of public debate were accessible to men only. Yet defining the public sphere as masculine problematically means that women who did take part in public debate can only be seen as exceptions operating "beyond their sex."[18] In our interpretation of the 1898 exhibition as a feminist intervention in the public sphere, we find Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas more useful. According to Fraser, Habermas was wrong to assume that the nineteenth-century bourgeois public sphere constituted the only public domain. She argues that the public sphere was not a monolithic entity, but consisted of a variety of publics and counterpublics. She believes the various public domains took shape simultaneously with, and often in opposition to, the dominant bourgeois public sphere. Counterpublics differ from the classic public sphere; they have different criteria for participation and different style and content standards of communication. The National Exhibition of Women's Labor, we believe, is an example of a counterpublic in both senses. First, new actors participated in this counterpublic. For the first time in Dutch history, women independently organized an exhibition, and working-class women such as servants spoke in public. Second, the exhibition shifted both the form and content of the debate about gender and society.

The search for pluriformity in the public sphere corresponds to recent developments in gender and citizenship studies. The idea that there was only one form of citizenship, a male-defined concept that excluded women, is giving way to a new focus tracing different forms of citizenship that have developed through history. From the end of the eighteenth century, different citizenship ideals took shape in the Western world. The ancient republican ideal, in which all citizens equally and directly participated in their community government, was revived in Rousseau's ideal of direct participatory democracy, in which the people constituted the nation. The rise of liberalism in Europe and the United States resulted in a concept of citizenship that gave the citizen a number of state-guaranteed rights and freedoms. Citizens were not obliged to govern the state directly, but they were entitled to representation in the government.[19] In this ideal of representative democracy, the rights of all go hand in hand with the state's responsibility for the welfare of all. The various concepts of citizenship were linked to several concurrent and interlaced forms of public discourse in the Western world.

In the Netherlands, enlightened citizenship took cultural and moral shape around the year 1800. Private societies and fellowships bore moral responsibility for civilizing the nation, advocating education of the masses and relief for the poor, all in the name of the common good.[20] In the first half of the nineteenth century, Dutch conservatives dominated this discourse; they relied on private, often familial, ties in politics.[21] Their position remained virtually unchallenged until the Dutch constitution was revised in 1848. The revision made room for a liberal public domain in the Netherlands, with new channels of public political debate: debating societies and electors' associations. In contrast with conservative forces, the liberals proposed that political power be subject to checks and balances and be forced to seek legitimacy through a "civilized" debate removed from private interests, desires, and preferences. It was in this context that the distinction between participatory and representative citizenship became relevant. At first, only people with sufficient "refinement"—a combination of self-restraint and intellectual development—were considered suitable participants in political dealings. In time, progressive liberals began appealing for wider criteria, arguing that everyone who performed productive labor should be permitted to join. Taken to its logical conclusion, this line of reasoning meant that the Dutch aristocracy stood to lose its self-evident role in governing the nation, while the lower middle classes and working classes would in principle gain full citizenship rights.

Like other countries in Europe, the Netherlands saw new groups with distinct denominational identities and social backgrounds enter the political arena after 1880. Two political forces broke away from the conservative and liberal conventions of public debate: The orthodox Protestant Antirevolutionary Party (Anti-Revolutionaire Partij, established 1879), mainly supported by small businessmen, and the Social Democratic Labor Party (Sociaal-Democratische Arbeiderspartij, established 1894).[22] Both parties mobilized their followers using rhetoric that appealed to emotions and group interests; they clamored for representation, discarding restrained discussions in favor of the politics of passion and turmoil.[23] This input from small tradespeople and the working classes redrew the boundaries of Dutch politics and changed their very nature.

Our study attempts to determine what type of citizenship the organizers of the Dutch National Exhibition of Women's Labor strove for. After all, they could choose from various models of political participation taking root at the time. They had become familiar with the conservative, liberal, socialist, and denominational views of their time, either from discussions with their male kin or through their own membership in organizations. Some feminists must have taken inspiration from the working classes' and small businessmen's demand for political representation, because as women they suffered similar exclusion. It is questionable, however, whether women seeking emancipation could invoke passion and emotion as freely as the lower middle and working classes. After all, a lack of self-control in women was traditionally associated with indecent behavior, and women's presence in the public sphere was also considered unseemly. Now that their own citizenship was at stake, some women were intent on showing that they, too, were capable of participating in the public debate in a proper, civilized manner. Therefore, they fell back on conservative and liberal concepts of moral and civilized citizenship. They were keen, for example, to avoid association with mass entertainment, for fear of appearing frivolous and improper. Some organizers even stubbornly referred to the exhibition as an "illustrated conference" and insisted that the grounds close at dusk. At the same time, however, the women organizers tried to attract a public much wider than their own upper middle class. They introduced low entrance fees to entice factory girls and servants to participate in the new public domain. As such, the exhibition became a locus where the Dutch women's movement could try out new combinations of participatory and representative citizenship.

## GENDER AND VISUAL CULTURE

Historiography about the public sphere often draws a sharp distinction between serious civil society, composed of political associations and literary salons, and the commercial mass media, which immerses the public in illusion and superficial entertainment.[24] This opposition of citizenship and consumer culture tends to be represented as gendered—while women went shopping, men discussed politics.[25] Exhibitions constituted a complex combination of, or a transition between, these two public domains. The organizers of the exhibition in The Hague were intent on staging a serious event that communicated their message: women were capable of making a worthwhile contribution to national power, civilization, and progress. However, from a commercial point of view—and in the eyes of most visitors—exhibitions mainly provided an opportunity for entertainment and amusement. Historians Robert Rydell and James Gilbert describe how exhibitions served as modern, urban spaces for public consumption.[26] Lauren Rabinovitz points out that this interpretation ignores the core issue of women and gender. Her study of fairground attractions as one of the cradles of cinema culture explains the importance of women acquiring a public space in which they could be spectators: "The Exposition constructed a socially sanctioned public space for women's participation, promising the possibility of mobile spectatorship in a safe urban environment."[27]

In chapter 4, we will discuss how one can detect various forms of gazing and being gazed at even within the limited scope of the exhibition in The Hague. The display of objects and people in an exhibition hall steers the spectator's interpretation; while strolling, he or she weaves separate elements into a story.[28] The story's meaning is therefore partly determined by the spectator (who decides how to move through the space), and partly by the layout. Several important studies have been devoted to the visual experience of exhibition visitors. According to Lieven de Cauter, technological innovations made it possible to dazzle visitors with an increasing number of sensory experiences using height, speed, and optical illusion. His examples include the Eiffel Tower, the Ferris wheel, the roller coaster, the exhibition train, and, from 1895 onward, cinema.[29]

Exhibitions combine different forms of visual experience. A panoramic view gives visitors a broad, overall impression of the whole event, and a structured layout with straight lines of vision and a predictable, hierarchical structure provides spectators with the illusion that they are able to grasp the whole world in all its complexity. The panorama has emerged as the predominant form used in national pavilions illustrating industrial progress. Anne McClintock points out that spectators derive a feeling of power from the ability to oversee time and space. She sees a link between this feeling and the popularization of Western imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century.[30]

When spectators are invited to look at a staged, private reality such as a replica of a native village, they have another type of visual experience. It can be described as a kind of voyeurism, in which the spectators gaze at the other in a domestic setting, while at the same time being drawn into the scene before them. They temporarily identify with the men and women they are gazing at, while also wondering how these others return their gaze. Their experience of the exhibition constitutes more than a mere peek into another world; for a moment, spectators become part of the world under their scrutiny.[31] They are both subject and object of the gaze.

The two types of visual experience can be linked to different notions of citizenship. The distinction between immersion and distance corresponds to the difference between participatory and representative citizenship models. Experienced as an immersion, an exhibition can be compared to a festival in which the distinction between spectators and performers is lost in total participation. Rousseau saw festivals as symbols of an ideal community of people united in one will (*volonté générale*). Whether or not visitors to the National Exhibition of Women's Labor realized it, in a sense their attendance amounted to a political statement. Spectators momentarily joined the masses who were putting women's emancipation on the political agenda. At the same time, however, the panorama of women's labor suggested the notion of representative citizenship. Safe in the certainties of their own position and worldview, some visitors saw the exhibition as a theatrical performance about social problems and political issues.[32]

## FEMINISM AND IMPERIALISM

The histories of citizenship and public domains outlined above remain conspicuously silent about the colonial and racial context in which these concepts and domains took shape. In *Race and the Education of Desire*, Ann Stoler points out the virtual absences of colonial experiences from national historiographies of the Western world. Without distinguishing between the traditions of participatory and representative citizenship, she argues that the liberal, free, and autonomous citizen who emerged in nineteenth-century England, France, and the Netherlands was not a product of metropolitan European culture. Instead, Stoler argues that the Western citizen derived his self-image from a colonial encounter in which he defined his self in relation to the racialized and gendered other from the colonies. This new bourgeois sense of self was predicated on colonial definitions of sexuality and hygiene. So far, Dutch historians have hardly touched on the issue of a possible relationship between bourgeois culture and colonialism; even recent surveys of the history of Dutch politics pay little attention to colonial history.[33] In the words of Susan Legêne, one of the few Dutch authors who has described the interaction between Dutch citizenship and colonialism, "Historiography of Dutch expansionism is a specialism."[34] In other words, it is not considered an integral part of Dutch history.

We believe Stoler's focus on ethnically (or racially) motivated inclusion and exclusion is indispensable for a proper understanding of bourgeois liberalism and the claims to citizenship formulated by nineteenth-century emancipatory movements. In the historiography of the Western women's movement, racial and colonial relationships have largely remained invisible. While many studies about bourgeois and proletarian feminism have thoroughly explored the relationship between class and gender, the connection between race and gender has been left untouched.[35] Studies on gender and imperialism have dealt with the relationship between the "whiteness" of Western cultures and Western images of female virginity, but seldom have these conclusions been extrapolated to the development of feminist thought.[36] Nevertheless, it is of great importance to move beyond the idea that women function merely as signifiers of the colonial relationship and to study how they were actively involved in the construction of colonial discourses.[37] Antoinette Burton was one of the first scholars of imperialism to explicitly raise the issues of feminism and the women's movement. In *Burdens of History*, she shows how the rhetoric and content of women's emancipation in England bore the hallmarks of an intensive interaction with colonial discourses. Virtually no studies about the Netherlands have explored the links between imperialism and feminism.[38] We hope that our book will help rectify this situation.

The colonial exhibits at the National Exhibition of Women's Labor, which we will discuss in chapter 5, contributed directly to the success of the Dutch feminist cause. With special exhibits devoted to the West Indies and East Indies "possessions," the organizers followed in the footsteps of the world's fairs.[39] Studies devoted to the latter have paid due attention to the imperialist implications of the exhibitions' physical layout.[40] In these enterprises, it is easy to detect a "grammar of gender differences."[41] Machines, cannons, ships, and buildings—all objects from the masculine domain—were prominently displayed, while "feminine" objects such as handicrafts, kitchen appliances, and interior decoration apparently stirred the imagination to a lesser degree. The masculine represented Western modernity, progress, power, and the potential imperial aggression of competing nations. Studies of gender's role in exhibitions focus mainly on how the women involved in these exhibitions fared; in time, women succeeded in securing their own exhibits, buildings, and pavilions at world's fairs.[42] With a few exceptions, the relationship between gender and imperialism in expositions remains largely uncharted territory. Hazel Carby describes how African American women were kept from participating as equals in organizing the Women's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. McClintock draws attention to the ways in which domestic commodities and imperialism became intertwined: advertisements for detergents and imperialist expositions "converted the narrative of imperial progress into mass-produced consumer spectacles."[43] Alan Trachtenberg points to the symbolic location of the 1893 Chicago Women's Building: halfway between the White City of Western "civilization" and the commercial exploitation of non-Western peoples in Midway Plaisance.[44]

The National Exhibition of Women's Labor included two halls which provided an overview of the Dutch colonies in the West and East Indies. It also featured a replica of a kampong situated next to the main buildings, where it functioned as an exotic attraction. In accommodating these exhibits, the organizers compromised their original policy decisions on two points. To begin with, the kampong was the only section in the entire exhibition which deliberately showed men and women working side by side. Together, these male and female Javanese artisans illustrated the "native lifestyle" of the Dutch East Indies. Thus the difference between "civilized" and "native" superseded gender difference. The commercial importance of the colonial exhibit inspired the second deviation from the original policy. To maximize profit from the popular kampong, the organizers decided to keep this section open to the public even at night.

Perhaps the organizers' concession to commercial entertainment was to be expected. After all, as Timothy Mitchell, Paul Greenhalgh, and Zeynep Çelik have shown, it was nearly impossible to draw a distinction between commercial spectacle and the pretense of scholarly interest in non-European peoples.[45] The combination of "scientific accuracy" and an invitation to drift into an exotic fantasy world proved irresistible to visitors and, from a business point of view, indispensable.[46] According to Annie Coombes, a visit to a colonial exposition allowed English working-class people who had never ventured outside the metropolis to identify with the imperialism propagated by the state and their employers.[47] In The Hague, the East Indies exhibit and food stands made for the greatest attractions. People who had never traveled to the overseas territories experienced the colonial exhibit as a visit to a strange and mysterious world, not least because many others visiting the exhibit were "colonials": people of Eurasian descent and Dutch people who had lived in the Indonesian archipelago for an extended period of time.

This duality, the coexistence of the panoramic view with the experience of "losing oneself in the exoticism of colonial exhibits, also has been identified in women's travel writing by Marie Louise Pratt and Sara Mills. There, these scholars have detected two distinct representations of colonial space: a panoramic view, that of the male colonial administrator who oversees his "reign" from a vantage point and devises policy, and a sexualized contact zone, where the excitement of the "dangerous" encounter with the colonial other is described.[48] The colonial exhibit at the National Exhibition of Women's Labor offered both types of experience. In so doing, it not only evoked the two ways of representing the colonies; it also suggested the representative and participatory notions of European citizenship. In this sense, the colonial exhibit reflected the different forms of citizenship claimed by Dutch women.

Exhibitions were the first mass gatherings that allowed thousands of people to see not only the medium but each other too. Seeing and being seen was the crux of going to a fair.[49] However, the rise of this new medium did not render older vehicles of feminist propaganda, such as printed matter and debating clubs, obsolete. If anything, the National Exhibition of Women's Labor perpetuated their growth. The proceedings of the exhibition conferences and debates were published in a hefty, twelve-volume series of books of lasting influence. A stream of brochures and individual books also saw publication. Furthermore, the exhibition inspired the creation of several new organizations; their significance is the subject of chapters 6 and 7. The lasting impact of the National Exhibition of Women's Labor lies in the combined use of visual and verbal means to legitimize a feminist intervention in public discourse. In this respect, the exhibition's organizers constructed a feminist public domain.

New forms of visual representation in the late nineteenth century produced what Vanessa Schwartz calls "a new kind of crowd," a gathering not unified by political demands, as in the revolutions a century earlier, but one that found mutual recognition in pleasure and entertainment.[50] Groups excluded from political citizenship, such as women, the working classes, and the indigenous populations of the colonies, did sometimes have access to this communal experience. That did not mean that gender, class, and race had ceased to function as hierarchical ordering principles; to the contrary, the distinctions between frivolous entertainment and serious labor and studies were highly gendered and racialized in expositions. This was certainly true of the National Exhibition of Women's Labor. The pioneers of the Dutch women's movement organizing the exhibition were wary of the "superficial entertainment" that women servants, factory girls, and Eurasians found in the dunes near The Hague. In this respect, their attitudes subscribed to patterns of political and cultural exclusion based on race, gender, and class. However, by opting for the format of the exposition and its paradoxical combination of seriousness and frivolousness, the organizers created a public sphere in which great numbers of Dutch women from diverse backgrounds could reflect on gender issues. Without such an intervention, participation in the classical political arena would have remained beyond women's reach.