

The Sound of the Tokkeh and the Tjitjak

The Representation of the Tokay Gekko and Common House Gekko in Dutch-Indies Travel Literature

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Abstract

In the narratives of Dutch East Indies travel literature, the modest appearance of animal species such as the *tokkeh* (Tokay Gekko) and *tjitjak* (Common House Gekko) offer a fleeting glimpse of a much deeper story. For Europeans, especially the Dutch, who saw and heard the creatures for the first time during colonial times, the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* were extraordinary little reptiles. This chapter focuses on their appearance, sound, and the roles they played in Dutch East Indies travel accounts from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century such as the works of Justus van Maurik, Jan Poortenaar, C.K. Elout, Arie Trouw, and Mary Pos.

Keywords: Animals, Dutch East Indies, travel literature, sound, *tokkeh*, *tjitjak*

The first impression for those unfamiliar with the *tokkeh* (Tokay Gekko [*Gekko gecko*]) and the *tjitjak* (Common House Gekko [*Hemidactylus frenatus*]) is shocking, especially if you are alone in the middle of the night in a foreign land – only a disembodied voice is heard. Even once discovered, their physical appearances may offer little solace. For Europeans, especially the Dutch, who saw and heard the creatures for the first time during colonial times, the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* are extraordinary little reptiles – surprising due to their appearance, like miniature lizards or crocodiles.¹ These tiny exotic animals were barely visible and only known to exist by the sound they produced. However, when compared to the wild animals that most often concern the travel writings of Europeans – crocodiles, tigers, lions, elephants, rhinos, Komodo dragons, and other exotic animals in Asia or Africa – the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* appear to have warranted neither description nor recording photographically, not even for souvenirs. Indeed, encounters with these two exotic little creatures seem to instil no feeling of adventure of which to be proud or retell. Instead, they become animals whose presence, whilst surprising, is unwanted and only worthy of the briefest passing mention.

The relationship between humans and animals whilst travelling is a fascinating discussion topic, especially when concerning supposedly unwanted and surprising



Full-size color drawing of an East Indian tokoh or house lizard, by Jan Brandes, 1784.
Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

animals, such as the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak*. This chapter, therefore, aims to trace their appearance in travel accounts from the Dutch Indies from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, and to examine the roles they played in such accounts. Since the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* are often presented only in passing, this task requires that travel literature from several periods is analysed. The selection of sources for this chapter is based on period and availability. The type of data used stems from Dutch-Indies travel literature of the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. This choice of time-period is predicated on the growth of tourism activities in the Dutch Indies, namely its emergence in the late nineteenth century to its peak in the 1930s, when various travel support facilities became available, especially transportation and accommodation. To determine when tourism activities began, I use the concepts of tourism place, space, and change by Shaw and William (2004), who state that the process of commodification of tourism is started, not with the arrival of tourists and their cultures, but rather with how destinations are represented through marketing systems, such as guidebooks and travel brochures.²

As the travel literature discussed in this chapter dates from the colonial period, Edward Said's theory of *Orientalism* (1978) is of great use, providing the basis for

reading colonial literature.³ Indeed, the concept of ‘colonial discourse’ is one of Said’s contributions to postcolonial theory and, as an example of colonial discourse, the critique of travel literature is a genre that Said initiated with *Orientalism*. The other significant contribution of *Orientalism* was to show how and why the Orient was created as a binary opposition. The Orient was painted as the very antithesis, the binary opposite, and the contrasting image of the Occident. Said stated that ‘the Orient was a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscape, remarkable experiences’.⁴ For some Europeans, the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* are ‘exotic beings’ that represent the Orient. Therefore, in this chapter, I focus on the representation of the *tokkeh* and *tjitjak* in Dutch-Indies travel literature by close reading the texts from the narrators’ perspective.

In this chapter, I argue that the appearance of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* in the narratives of Dutch travel literature follows Elizabeth Leane’s (2020) typology of the representation of the ‘animal as companion’.⁵ However, being near the creatures does not make them human companions; it is the human who considers them as companions. Donna Haraway (2015) explains that companion animals comprise one kind of companion species, whilst ‘companion species is a bigger and more heterogeneous category than companion animals’.⁶ Therefore, the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* can be categorised as companion species. I would posit the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* as complementary background companions that appear when the human writers are silent and alone. They usually appear at home, at the *pasanggrahan* (guesthouse), and in hotel rooms amidst silences – both of the day and the night. Even though the role of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* remains small and seems to be relatively meaningless, their presence in the various narratives offered proof that the writers had been in the Indies, that exotic overseas colony. This is in accordance with Leane’s opinion that ‘the companion animal narrative creates space for a more positive sustained examination of interspecies interaction’.⁷ Their voices seemed a welcoming sound for newcomers in the Indies and became a crucial ingredient in memories of the tropical Indies. This concurs with the recent analyses of ‘sound in travel writing’ by Tim Youngs (2020). Youngs showed that attention to sounds in selected travel texts of the twentieth and twenty-first century reveals its use as far more than a descriptive detail. Sounds are not merely heard because they are processed and interpreted by the hearer. Rather, they are transmitted through the texts to the readers. Sounds in travel texts function in profoundly symbolic ways.⁸ As well as smell, taste, and touch, sound can evoke powerful individual memories. Therefore, the sound of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* served to arouse the memories of those that travelled to, and wrote about, the Dutch Indies.

The existence of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* in the Dutch East Indies is discussed mainly by biologists, ethnologists, and anthropologists. However, the *tjitjak* in particular has attracted attention since the time of the Dutch East India Company.

Jan Brandes (1743-1808), an illustrator and Lutheran minister in Batavia, observed the *tjitjak* in the eighteenth century and drew illustrations of a complete *tjitjak*. His image of the *tjitjak* is dated 18 February 1784. Brandes calls the *tjitjak* a *huyshagedis* (house lizard), also describing how they climbed the walls and the ceilings of the house, their body shape, their legs, their body colour, how they catch mosquitos, and their typical call (according to Brandes, the sound 'tje, tje, tje, tje, tje').⁹

The Dutch ethnologist George Alexander Wilken (1847-1891), in an article dated 1891, discusses the importance of geckos and lizards to Malayo-Polynesians. Wilken specifically explains the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh* from an anthropological perspective. Wilken explains the physical characteristics of the two animals: a pale yellow, small, and not unpleasant animal for the *tjitjak*; and yellow with brown spots for the *tokkeh*. Wilken then goes on to describe the distinctive sound they make: 'a chirping scream tone'.¹⁰ Expanding upon his description, he explains how, in the Indonesian context, the animals are considered to be oracles. The Timorese, for example, regard the two animals to be emissaries of the souls of the dead. The Gorontaloans in North Celebes (also known as North Sulawesi) believe that if a *tjitjak* or *tokkeh* falls on someone's body, it is an unfavourable omen. Similarly, if a *tjitjak* falls into food, then it is an omen of doom, whilst if it falls to the ground, something sad must be expected. According to Wilken, such beliefs are shared by the Alfur, the Minahasa, and the Javanese. Meanwhile, the *tokkeh* is said to be able to read the future based on its sound. The Balinese identify the *tokkeh* with Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and knowledge. Indeed, in Bali, if one is having a conversation and the sound of the *tokkeh* is heard, the Balinese say: 'It is true, Saraswati', or 'Be it true, mistress'. This is similar to the Bataks, who identify the *tokkeh* as *Boraspati*, the god of wisdom.¹¹

The *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* are different from the lizards that Europeans usually refer to, even though they are reptiles. *Tokkeh* have thick, cylindrical bodies with heads distinct from their necks. Their bodies are covered in spots. There are two variants of the *Gekko gecko*: the red-spotted and the black-spotted. The spots of red-spotted tokay geckos range from light yellow to red and overlay a bluish or greyish body. The male *tokkeh* ranges from 13-16 inches (35-40 centimetres) in length, whilst females measure between 8-12 inches (20-30 centimetres).¹²

The name 'gecko' was in widespread use by the mid-eighteenth century and was used by the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) in 1758 when he described the Tokay Gecko as *Lacerta gecko* (now *Gekko gecko*). The first known usage of the word in the Western world was in a book by a Dutch physician and a pioneer of tropical medicine, Jacobus Bontius (1592-1631), in which he discussed the animals and plants he had encountered in the East Indies thirty years previously.¹³ The *tokkeh* is found across Southeast and East Asia, whilst black-spotted *tokkeh* are to be found in northern Vietnam and mainland China, where they favour rocky

environments. Meanwhile, red-spotted *tokkeh* are more widespread in southeast Asia, for example, in the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Indo-Australia Archipelago. They are more likely to be encountered in lowland or submontane rainforests. In some areas, they enjoy a seemingly mutualistic relationship with people, and they may shelter in the ceilings and walls of a home, consuming undesirable insects. They communicate vocally with a sound variously described as *tok-keh* and *gekk-gekk*, which they use to locate potential mates.¹⁴

The *tjitjak* is native to Southeast Asia and is also found in Africa, Australia, and the United States. Their average size is 3-6 inches (7.5-15 centimetres), and males are larger than females. Usually, they are grey or light brown to beige with a greenish iridescence and a white underside. They can be found in various habitats, from rain forests and savannas to deserts, although they are most abundant in urban, suburban, and developed locations. They are nocturnal and almost always found on the walls of buildings near artificial lighting, as this attracts insects. The *tjitjak* has a distinctive three- or five-note call described as ‘*chuck, chuck, chuck*’. They have a louder voice and call more frequently than other gecko species and can be heard throughout the day and night.¹⁵

Corpus and embedding

The works analysed below are Justus van Maurik’s *Indrukken van een Totok, Indische typen en schetsen* (Impression of a Totok¹⁶, Indies types and sketches, 1897) and Mary Pos’ *Eens op Java en Sumatra* (Once in Java and Sumatra, 1948). Other works analysed are *Een kunstreis in de tropen* (An art trip in the Tropics, 1925) by Jan Poortenaar; *De Grote Oost* (The Great East, 1930) and *Indisch dagboek* (Indies journal, 1936) by C.K. Elout; and *Indische reisbrieven* (Indies travel letters, 1933) by A. Trouw. These writers all have different professions and backgrounds, each of them expressed through their writing.

First, Justus van Maurik (1846-1904) was a Dutch cigar manufacturer and writer. He travelled in the Indies in 1895 for business and wrote his impressions and recollections in his successful book *Indrukken van een Totok* (1897). However, according to Jeroen Dewulf (2015), this text cannot be regarded as a literal report of his Indonesian trip. Rather, it is a collection of sketches of gripping events and unique encounters.¹⁷ Nonetheless, Van Maurik’s text is an important source, because it relates to the early days of tourism in the Dutch Indies.

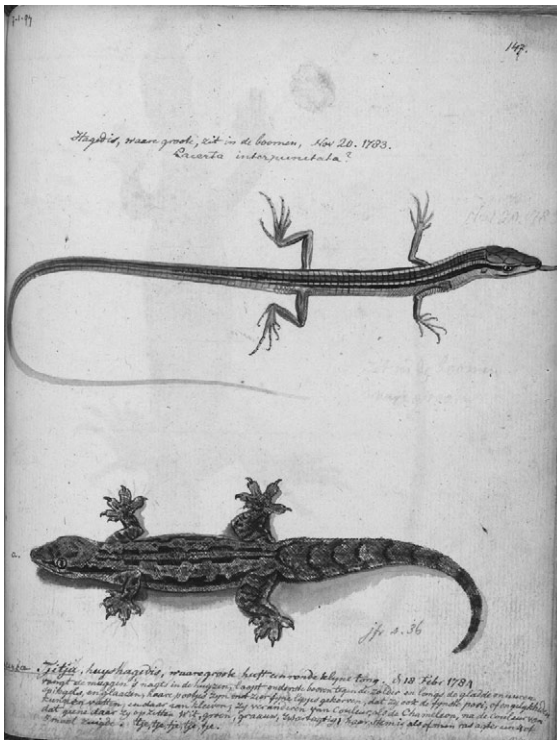
The Dutch artist, musician, and writer Jan Poortenaar (1886-1958) resided in London from 1914 to 1922. In 1922, Poortenaar embarked on a leisurely tour through the Indies, accompanied by his wife, Geertruida van Vladeracken (1880-1947), who was a singer and composer.¹⁸ The couple recorded their experience in the travel

memoir *Een kunstreis in de tropen*, which was translated as *An Artist in Tropics* in 1927. The book of his journey through the Indies is illustrated with his etchings and paintings. According to Susie Protschky (2007), as an artist, Poortenaar, during his journey, criticised the attempt of the colonial government to impose European concepts of order on the tropical landscape, especially the colonial notion of a garden, which he perceived as a stilted affair.¹⁹ Poortenaar and his wife were convinced that rural life in the archipelago was impervious to colonial intervention.²⁰

The third work is from Cornelis Karel Elout (1870-1947), a leading Dutch journalist in the interwar period. Elout initially opted for a military career, first being admitted to the practical preparatory course of the Military School in Haarlem and a year later to the Artillery Course in Delft. However, when he was eighteen years old, he won a prize for the best short story, awarded by the magazine *Jong Nederland*. Although it remains unclear what made him decide to make the jump from the military to writing, in 1891 Elout joined the Amsterdam-based newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* as a reporter. After the newspaper appointed him as their correspondent in The Hague in 1901, Elout moved to the city, then to Wassenaar in 1911. Initially, he delivered local and parliamentary news and covered lectures, theatre, and music reviews. Later, however, he was permitted to limit his writing to the Lower House (of the Dutch parliament) and the stage. From 1901 to the late 1930s, he was political editor in The Hague. In 1929, Elout decided to limit his reviews mainly to the colonial budget in the Dutch East Indies. He had developed a great interest in the Dutch East Indies and, as a result, in 1925 and 1929, he travelled to and around the archipelago (Java, Bali, Sulawesi, Sumatra).²¹ In 1925, Elout made a four-month tour of the Indonesian archipelago. A year later, he published his *Indisch dagboek* (1926, Indies diary).²² He then returned to the Dutch East Indies in 1929, again resulting in a series of journalistic travel letters, *De Groote Oost* (1930, The Great East).²³

Moving now to the work of Arie Trouw (1891-1950). Trouw was a Liberal Reformed Church minister in The Hague and Scheveningen. In 1918, he was the Dutch Reformed Pastor in the municipality of Heenliet. In 1921, he joined Liberal Reformed Church as a predecessor pastor in the municipality in Haarlem, whilst twelve years later, he became pastor in The Hague and Scheveningen. In 1932, he toured for the *Groep Vereeniging Vrijzinnig Godsdiensten* (Group of the Liberal Religions Association) in the Dutch Indies and visited Java, Bali, and Sumatra, giving numerous lectures.²⁴ In 1933, he published *Indische reisbrieven* (Indies travel letters).

The only female travel writer discussed in this chapter is Mary Pos (1904-1987). She was a Dutch travel journalist known as a astute solo traveller who travelled worldwide from the late 1920s until the late 1970s. Pos was a pioneer in the Dutch field of journalism, managing to obtain sponsorship not only from ministries, but also from commercial companies such as Heineken.²⁵ In 1938-1939, Pos visited



Full-size color drawing of a lizard and a *tjitjak*, by Jan Brandes, 1784. Collection Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

several islands in the Dutch East Indies, including Sumatra, Java, and Bali. Based on this visit, she wrote two books: *Werkelijkheid op Bali* (1947, Reality on Bali) and *Eens op Java en Sumatra: Het laatste reisboek over ons Indië in zijn laatste glorieetijd* (1948, Once on Java and Sumatra: The last travel book on our Indies in its last glory time).

Place, time, and sound

Houses, hotels, guesthouses, and concert halls provide the spaces in which the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* appear. Mary Louise Pratt introduced the concept of the ‘contact zone’, referring to social spaces in which different cultures meet.²⁶ In the context of this chapter, it could be said that houses, hotels, guesthouses, and concert halls act as ‘contact zones’ for humans and animals (in this case, the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* on the one hand, and the European traveller on the other).

When Justus van Maurik was in Padang, West Sumatra, he stayed with his old friend from Amsterdam, with whom he worked on the stock exchange in

Amsterdam. He recalls being alone in the room during the daytime, encountering his first *tjitjak*:

I slept for a long time, overwhelmed by the unusual temperature and awakened by a cold, chilly, slippery something falling on my face. It was a *tjife|tjak*, a kind of small lizard, who had walked up against the ceiling from my bedstead and was probably going to get acquainted with newcomers.²⁷

Although Van Maurik was not afraid of the *tjitjak*, the creature's 'smooth, cold touch' still made him shiver. As Rick Honings notes, European travellers, perhaps unsurprisingly, tend to describe unknown things from their existing frames of reference and those of their compatriots.²⁸ For example, Van Maurik describes the *tjitjak* as 'some kind of small lizard'.²⁹

Mary Pos (1948) had the same experience with the *tjitjak* and *tokkeh* when she was also alone in the room of a house in Batavia during the evening. First, she imagined the atmosphere in the Netherlands. It was quiet and static around the houses with shaded lamps burning everywhere; an atmosphere of intimacy and cosiness made her imagine a Dutch house. Then she saw the *tjitjaks* crawling along the walls, and she heard the thick throat sound of the *tokkeh* – 'the piercing cricket choir'.³⁰ The imagination of being in the Netherlands vanished when she saw the *tjitjak* and heard the sound of the *tokkeh*. In addition, a myriad mosquitoes had bitten her arms and legs, leaving bluish spots, again making her aware that she was in the tropics. Here, according to Pos, the appearance of the *tjitjak* and the sound of the *tokkeh* disturbed her daydreams about her homeland. As stated by Youngs (2020), the sound is processed and interpreted by the hearer. As the hearer, Pos processed and interpreted the sound of the *tokkeh*, then she transmitted through the text and showed that the sound disturbed her daydreams. When Pos visited the *Vorstenlanden* (the 'royal lands' of Yogyakarta and Solo), which according to her had the atmosphere of the Indies, different from other cities in the Indies with the bustle of European life, she described hearing the sound of a strange animal in the middle of the night. From all those strange animal noises that she could have heard, Pos stated, the sound of *tokkeh* was always predominant.³¹

Such an encounter with the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh* was also narrated by Elout (1936) from his hotel room. However, unlike the account of Pos, for Elout, watching the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh* was more a form of entertainment. Elout wrote that at least they were friendly; indeed, he describes them as 'the nicest of critters'.³² In the evening, Elout often amused himself by watching them slowly stalk flies along the roof of the front porch, or flee having lured each other with their distinctive 'tjuk-tjuk-tjuk' call. He noted that they shot away at lightning speed if approached by a human, and that the big *tokkeh* was much more timid and thus rarely seen

against the wall of the front porch. Before calling, Elout explains how the *tokkeh* first made a sound from within – a sound like a ‘Frisian hanging clock’, the weights of which have been picked up: ‘*kerrrr, kèrrrr, kèrrrr* and then it shouts, deep and dignified, with a dark voice and chanting punishment: *èk-kooo, èk-kooo, èk-koooo...* until it is over’.³³

In the above description of unknown things, once again we see the use of a more familiar frame of reference when Elout describes the sound of the *tokkeh* as a ‘Frisian hanging clock’.³⁴ Elout’s admiration for the two ‘nicest of critters’ contradicts his opinion of the other animals. Elout does not consider Indonesian fauna to be particularly strange, and suggests those who expect more – such as birds of paradise and parrots fluttering around their ears – will be sadly disappointed. He criticises those in Holland with foolish imaginations of the ‘animal horrors’ of the Indies: crocodiles, tigers, elephants, rhinos, and snakes. Based on his experience of several months in the Indies, he saw only a few crocodiles in the Palembang River, and two snakes in Java and Sulawesi – even comparing them to snakes in the Netherlands. Indeed, Elout wrote that whilst in the Dutch province of Gelderland, one could be bitten by very dangerous vipers, during his visit to the Indies, he never encountered such beasts.³⁵

As a European, Elout imagines the exotic creatures in the East, especially the wild animals he will see, such as tigers, elephants, and rhinos. However, in reality, he did not see them. He only saw crocodiles and snakes.³⁶ Elout’s obvious disappointment at not being able to see wild animals in the Indies reveals a characteristic of colonial discourse: that, although he himself criticised the Dutch for thinking that the Indies were overrun with wild animals, he also thinks that the Indies are full of exotic creatures. According to William H. Sherman, Elout’s expectation is based on eighteenth-century travel books, which were full of illustrations of exotic plants and animals, as well as places, archaeological sites, and the native costumes of the East.³⁷

Honings, based on Pratt’s idea that ‘the landscape is estheticised’, explains that a characteristic of colonial discourse in nineteenth-century Dutch travel literature is the aestheticisation of nature. In much nineteenth-century travel literature, the overwhelming nature of the Indies is described as if in a painting.³⁸ This narrative is also akin to Pratt’s concept of the ‘seeing-man’ – the label for the European (white) male subject of European landscape discourse – whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess.³⁹ Pratt shows that travel literature from the nineteenth century contains an imperialistic vision of the colonised country. This is expressed, amongst other things, in how the landscape is described as a painting. This characteristic is still discernible in Dutch travel literature of the late of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century.

The characteristics of colonial discourse outlined above are found throughout Elout’s account from 1936. Elout gave his impression of the landscape and, amongst

others, the sound of the *tjitjak* in a guesthouse in Lubuk Sikaping, West Sumatra. His description of Indonesian nature in the evening silence is accompanied by a description of the *tjitjak*'s sound. It was in the evening, and he sat on the front porch of the guesthouse in the light of a gas lamp surrounded by dancing mosquitoes. He wrote:

Outside, the pale trunks of the road shimmer (tamarinds, I believe). Behind it stands, unmoving and black, the Indonesian night, the deep, thick, motionless darkness, in which I know the heavy mountains yonder before me. And the Indonesian night itself is such a mountain range: just as heavy and just as unmoved.⁴⁰

Elout describes the vista outside the guesthouse, with the pale trunks of tamarinds by the roadside beyond which lay a still and dark Indonesian night – deep, thick, motionless darkness. He saw the black mountains before him, heavy and unmoving in the darkness. For Elout, the evening was not silent. He heard thousands of crickets, the croak of frogs, the bark of a dog, the chug of the *tjitjak*, the meow of a cat, and people talking to each other. He compares the silence of a Dutch night with the Indies: 'It is often much quieter in Holland than in the Indies where there is always noise – but it is silent, the Indies night, poignantly silent with immobility. An obsession with impassibility.'⁴¹ Elout describes the silence in the Indies as static and different from that of the Netherlands. As in the account from Pos, for Elout, the sound of the *tjitjak* in combination with other sounds, makes the difference, especially to the evening 'silence' of the Indies and Holland.

Regarding the sound of the *tokkeh* that Van Maurik heard in his hotel room in Batavia at night, Van Maurik noted its melodic nature.⁴² He gained the same impression of the sound of the *tokkeh* during his stay in a guesthouse in Srogol, Preanger, West Java. He heard the sound of the *tokkeh* in the quiet evening after the *ronggeng* – a dance performance accompanied by *gamelan*⁴³ music. Van Maurik noted: 'It has become dead quiet, the cricket kept on singing softly, and a *tokkeh* shouted from time to time: *tokke-tokke-e*'⁴⁴ He also described the scene before him that evening with the sound of *tokkeh*:

Trees and ferns, shrubs and palms stand, still lit by the moon, ghostly outlined against the mountainous background, and dreamily the bluish-yellow glow of the moon wanders over the hospitable roof of the house, in which the guests with the *toewan besar* [the master] and his family take a rest.⁴⁵

The exotic scenery and the sound of the *tokkeh* described by Van Maurik are again characteristic of colonial discourse, and the aestheticisation of nature. Here too, Van Maurik's aesthetic description of nature is reminiscent of the impression given by Elout.

According to Pratt, female authors present their journeys in a very different manner to their male counterparts, who tend to present their journeys as voyages of discovery. The works of female authors usually lack the rhetoric of discovery, paying more attention to matters and topics that are traditionally considered to be part of the female domain.⁴⁶ At the end of her journey, Pos, travelling in a convertible car from Danau Toba (Lake Toba), North Sumatra, describes:

We drove in that open car through the goodness of the tropics evening to a picturesque kampong, the sight of which, the music, even the smells, brought us under the spell of the tropics. We drove to a still river in a vast country, which reminded me of Holland. Always that mix of the Indies and the Motherland.⁴⁷

The aestheticizing characteristics of colonial discourse are also found in Pos' description above. Once again, Pos can be seen also to use her own frame of reference regarding the silence she encounters. She compares the river's silence in a 'vast country' with the silence of Holland. After she enjoyed the landscape and its silence in the rural, she was back in the city of Medan. At night she heard the sounds of the tropics, 'the high and shrill sound of crickets, and the *tokkeh* with their heavy sound.'⁴⁸

Unlike Van Maurik and Elout, who enjoyed the sound of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak*, Jan Poortenaar gives a rather more negative impression of their calls. Poortenaar heard their sound in a concert hall. However, at that time, attendance in an Indonesian concert hall was limited to certain circles of society, thus it could be argued that it should also be seen as a 'private space'. In Indonesia, the concert hall becomes a 'contact zone' for Poortenaar, who encounters 'disparate culture'. He noted: 'It is always a surprise how people are received as a travelling artist. In large or small places, one cannot guess what people will be encountered or what their manners will be.'⁴⁹

In his chapter about concerts in the *Kunstkring* (artistic circle) of an Indonesian city in the Indies, Poortenaar compared the concert halls of Europe with those of the Indies. He interprets the situation in the Indies by using the old Dutch proverb '*'s lands wijs, 's lands eer*' (so many countries, so many customs), and describes the difference between European and colonial (Indonesian) concert halls. He comments that it is the custom in Europe that the stage is reserved for the artists. However, in the Indies, he noticed bats, mosquitos, flies, beetles, crickets, and dogs.⁵⁰ These animals and, of course, the sounds they produce, disturb concert performances. Like Elout and Pos, Poortenaar agrees that amongst the sound of the animals, the sound of *tokkeh* is the strongest. He commented: 'The menagerie of the Indies nature also provides other candidates for stage honours. *Tjitjaks*, small wall lizards, scarcely count, but the big ones, *tokkehs*, can make a respectable noise at

awkward moments.⁵¹ If, during a performance, a human makes a noise, then he or she may be asked to leave, but if it is an animal making the noise, it is not so easily remedied. Here, Poortenaar also uses his own frame of reference to describe the *tjitjak* as ‘small wall-lizards’.⁵²

Sound is essential for Poortenaar, who is a musician. Therefore, it is understandable why he finds the *tokkeh*’s voice so disturbing. There is an accepted etiquette when attending a concert: One must sit still and be calm, listening to the music being played, however, this inevitably means that any extra sound that is not part of the music will be a distraction for both players and audience alike. Similar to Pos, who is disturbed whilst enjoying her silence, for Poortenaar, the sound of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* appeared in a delicate moment, disturbing the silence of the concert hall and the music he hoped to hear.

Arie Trouw also uses a personal frame of reference to describe the *tjitjak*. In his letter from Medan, North Sumatra, after visiting a Karo-Batak village, he used the word *hagedisje* (small lizard) for the *tjitjak*. He wrote: ‘The *tjitjak* is the *hagedisje* [small lizard] that, towards evening, enters the Indonesian houses in great numbers and, in pursuit of mosquitoes, climbs up the walls and ceiling.’⁵³ The use of personal frames of reference to describe the *tjitjak* was used earlier by Brandes and Wilken.⁵⁴ Wilken called the *tjitjak* ‘a not ungraceful animal’, and he called both the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh* oracle animals par excellence.⁵⁵

In the village Trouw visited, he also found the *tjitjak* used decoratively as a motif on the house. He wrote that the creature has a reputation for good luck – something that probably plays a role in its use decorating the *kampong* houses.⁵⁶ Furthermore, many houses are surrounded by a wide, carved, wooden edging. According to Trouw, the motifs incorporated therein have magical significance, serving to attract good, and ward off evil, spirits.⁵⁷

Sound as an accompaniment of memories

The sounds of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* also accompany some of our narrators’ memories. For example, Elout, who was bothered neither by their presence nor sound, was on board the *Prins der Nederlanden* on 27 June 1925. He remembered the sound they made when he was staying at the guesthouse in Lubuk Sikaping, West Sumatra, in his journal written on 18 May 1925. Elout’s journal entry, again, exhibits the characteristics of colonial discourse – the estheticization of nature accompanied by the sound he now knows so well:

Perhaps you remember something about what I wrote about that evening in the *pasang-grahan* [guesthouse] in Lubuk Sikaping. The road with the trees. The field and the high

mountains just behind it. The fast sinking of the night flattens even far away and envelops you in darkness. It is only the lamp of the *pasanggrahan*. Crickets, *tjitjaks* and *tokkehs*. One voice begins to sing, slowly, in a minor key, resigned. And everything is motionless, staring motionless.⁵⁸

He reminisces about that evening in the guesthouse. He then describes the atmosphere of the night and the darkness around him that made it impossible to see. He feels as if everything is approaching him, but his stalkers remain invisible and inaudible. He commented that 'all that sultry darkness full of great Indies things' is stalking him, the helpless Westerner in that formidable East. Helpless in the darkness of the night, a suspicion arises that something will happen to him. He called it 'the mystery of the stillness in the Indies'.⁵⁹ Here we discover his fear and suspicion as a Westerner in the Indonesian night.

Suddenly, Elout hears a *tjitjak* shout – a sound that made his ears so fiercely tense that it reverberated through his heartbeat. Then he heard the sound of the *tokkeh*, its grunts warning and taunting him, shaking his very soul. Elout writes: 'Hopelessly his cry gradually numbs. However, now the sad song singer suddenly cries a little higher, which seems to you such a despairing tone that you feel: Now it will come soon.'⁶⁰ The sound of the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh*, which according to Elout sound like sad vocalists, break the mystery of the still Indonesian night. Elout refers to this as 'the soul of the Indies'.⁶¹

In *De Groote Oost*, Elout tells how the sound of the *tokkeh* came to typify his memory of the Indies. On 5 July 1929, he wrote his journal at the largest hotel in Batavia before he departed for Belawan, North Sumatra. He noted: 'So that I, in this largest and most important Indies hotel village, where tonight I will for the last time hear the sound of my friend the *tokkeh* in my back porch and hear his name rhythming.'⁶² In the above, Elout makes the sound of the *tokkeh*, who he considers to be his friend, an important memory of his time in the Indies.

Pos, however, had a different impression of the sound of the *tokkeh* on Christmas Eve at her friend's house in Batavia. It rained and became very uncomfortable in the house. She was typing and noticed that when darkness fell, the *tjitjak* slid along the walls, suddenly becoming motionless above a painting, before slipping away behind a curtain. She also heard the monotonous call of the *tokkeh* and the endless chirping of crickets. She longs for the seclusion of a private room, with closed windows and a closed door, with the warm light of table lamps and the cheerful nurturing of a fireplace.⁶³

Pos then turns on a table lamp and sits daydreaming whilst listening to the radio. She thought of home and past family Christmas Eves. Together with her family, she sang accompanied by the organ and felt happy. However, she was the only one in the family to travel, and thus, in recent years has been amongst other



A *tjitjak*'s figure made of brass. Private collection.

people on Christmas Eve. Then she hears the *tokkeh*: 'A *tokkeh* keeps calling its name heavily and monotonously close to me, and the wind rustles in the palms.'⁶⁴ Pos' memories of Christmas Eve with her family in Holland were suddenly shattered by the sound of *tokkeh*. Moreover, the use of 'monotonous' for the sound of the *tokkeh* strengthens the impression of her dislike for the sound.

On 31 December, New Year's Eve, Pos again encounters the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh* at her friend's house in Batavia. After drinks and conversation with the host and some acquaintances, Pos sat alone. She saw from the gallery that the sky was overcast, and darkness fell early. She looks out on the motionless green, black in the twilight from the gallery, and she sees nobody. She wrote: 'A few *tjitjaks* run along the wall and an old *tokkeh*, awakened too early, calls languidly and heavily. A smell, a scent of moisture, and rotting leaves enter. I am thinking about New Year's Eve at home.'⁶⁵ New Year's Eve in the Indies accompanied with the sound of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak*, and the smell of rotting leaves, make her long for the atmosphere of New Year's Eve at home.

According to Tim Youngs, 'sounds are not merely heard; they are processed and interpreted by the auditor'.⁶⁶ In the above accounts, the sounds of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* constitute the essential element in determining the relationship between

animals and humans. Their voices became companions and evoked memories. Although Leane stated that the animal might act as a silent auditor of the narrator's opinions and reflection, in these Dutch travel texts, the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* act as far from silent auditors.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Based on this analysis of travel accounts written in the Dutch Indies by writers from various professional backgrounds, we can trace the role of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* in travel experiences. The *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* are represented as close companions in Dutch travel narratives from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. They complement their human counterparts and appear when the authors are either alone or in moments of silence.

The *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* usually appear at home, in guesthouses, hotel rooms, and concert halls – both by day and by night. Most encounters occur indoors, in the bedroom, the living room, and concert hall – places considered safe from disturbance by the traveller wanting to enjoy a quiet atmosphere. Furthermore, for some writers (Van Maurik and Elout), the presence and sound of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* are considered entertaining. Almost all of the writers use personal frames of reference to describe the physical form and sound of the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh*. Moreover, all of the writers displayed characteristic colonial discourse, especially those who described the landscape of the Indies as if a painting, accompanied by the sound of the *tjitjak* and the *tokkeh*. Their sound and presence in the various texts proved that the narrators had been in the Indies.

Even though the role of the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* is, for some writers (Pos and Poortenaar), relatively meaningless and even unwanted, their sounds welcomed the arrival of all newcomers alike and became part of their memories of their time in Indonesia. The sound of both the *tokkeh* and the *tjitjak* became the accompaniment to many thoughts – about the past, and about a homeland across the ocean.

Notes

- ¹ This experience of encountering the gecko continues into the twenty-first century. A brochure for the Dutch Travel Club, aimed at tourists wanting to join a study trip to Java and Bali in 2012, specifically mentioned the two animals on the third day in Yogyakarta: 'We are staying at the Puri Artha Hotel. A three-star hotel with excellent rooms. Here we meet the gecko and the *tjitjak* lizards. We scare him so much that he sheds his tail, which scares us so much that we flee the room...' Klos, 'Studiereis Indonesië: Java en Bali': 'We verblijven in het Puri Artha Hotel. Een 3 sterren hotel met prima kamers. Hier maken we kennis met de gekko en de *tjitjak* hagedissen. We laten hem zo schrikken dat hij zijn staart afwerpt, wat ons weer zo doet schrikken dat we de kamer uit vluchten...' Another experience of the *tjitjak* is retold by Annerie Godschalk, who owns two holiday accommodations in Bali. When asked for a nice anecdote from or about her guests, she recalls that they once had a guest (a young lady) who was visiting the tropics for the first time. The young lady started screaming very loudly when she saw the *tjitjak*. They then quickly explained that the *tjitjaks* are beneficial animals that eat mosquitoes and do not harm people. Lutjes, 'Een gesprek met Annerie Godschalk eigenaresse Buana Bali & Buana Poleng' (A conversation with Annerie Godschalk, owner of Buana Bali & Buana Poleng).
- ² Shaw & William, *Tourism and Tourism Spaces*. Early modern sources for tourism in the Dutch Indies include Maurits Buys' *Batavia, Buitenzorg en de Preanger: Gids voor Bezoekers en Toeristen* (1891). See also Sunjayadi, 'The Early Tourist Guidebooks to Dutch East Indies and Malaya in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century.'
- ³ Said, *Orientalism*.
- ⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 1.
- ⁵ Leane offered three preliminary typologies of the representation of animals in travel texts based on the functions animals perform for humans, namely as quest objects; instruments of travel; and as companions. The first category refers to any journey in which an animal encounter, be it violent or peaceful, is framed in the narrative as the primary motivation for travel, such as hunting or specimen collection. The second category is when animals are included in a journey to ensure human survival, comfort, and/or movement, or as the source of food, clothing, fuel, or protection. The third category includes animals for the companionship of humans in their journey. Leane, 'Animals', 306-315.
- ⁶ Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto*, 12-15.
- ⁷ Leane, 'Animals', 315.
- ⁸ Youngs, 'Hearing', 208.
- ⁹ Jan Brandes, *Album van Jan Brandes*, vol. 1. In his illustration, Brandes also drew a *hagedis* (lizard), and he noted in Latin *Lacerta interpunenata* with a question mark. *Lacerta* is a genus of lizards. The sound of *tjitjak* may also be described as '*tchak, tchak, tchak*.' In Indonesia, *tjitjak* have local names onomatopoeically derived from the sound they make, and are called *cicak* or *cecak*. In Singapore and Malaysia, they are called *chi chak* or *chee chak*.
- ¹⁰ Wilken, 'De Hagedis in het Volksgeloof der Malayo-Polynesiërs', 487: 'tjilpende kreet'.
- ¹¹ Wilken, 'De Hagedis in het Volksgeloof der Malayo-Polynesiërs', 487-488.
- ¹² Corl, *Gekko gekko*.
- ¹³ Bauer, *Gekkos*, 2.
- ¹⁴ Corl, *Gekko gekko*.
- ¹⁵ Wu, *Hemidactylus frenatus*.

- ¹⁶ *Totok* is a Malay term used to refer to migrants of Arab, Chinese, or European origins (primarily Dutch) in Indonesia. It also means a full-blooded person. See Bosma & Raben, *Being 'Dutch' in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500-1920*.
- ¹⁷ Dewulf, 'Meer dan banale soosverhalen', 143.
- ¹⁸ Christie's Live Auction 2240 Indonesian Pictures, Watercolours, Drawings and Works of Art, 'Jan Poortenaar (1886-1958)'.
- ¹⁹ Protschky, *Cultivated Tastes. Colonial Art, Nature and Landscape in the Netherlands Indies*, 137.
- ²⁰ Protschky, 'Environment and Visual Culture in the Tropics', 388.
- ²¹ Heldring, 'Elout, Cornelis Karel (1870-1947)'.
- ²² The first edition was published in 1926 by Mees, Santport. For this chapter I used the second edition of *Indische Dagboek*, which was published in 1936 by W.P. van Stockum & Zoon.
- ²³ Kuitenbrouwer, 'Journalistiek orientalisme', 25-44.
- ²⁴ *De Indische Courant*, 27 June 1932.
- ²⁵ Boter & Villaecusa Illán, 'Self-fashioning and Othering', 89.
- ²⁶ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 4.
- ²⁷ Van Maurik, *Indrukken van een Totok*, 5: 'k Sliep een lange poos, overweldigd door de ongewone temperatuur en ontwaakte door een koud, kil, glibberig iets dat op mijn gezicht viel. 't Was een tjet-jak, een soort hagedisje, dat tegen den hemel van mijn ledikant had geloopt en nu waarschijnlijk eens kennis met den "baar" wilde maken.'
- ²⁸ Honings, 'Een kind in de kolonie', 113.
- ²⁹ Van Maurik, *Indrukken van een Totok*, 5: 'een soort hagedisje'.
- ³⁰ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 38-39: 'het doordringende krekelkoor'.
- ³¹ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 101.
- ³² Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 188: 'alleraardigste beestjes'.
- ³³ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 188: '...kerrr, kèrrr, kèrrr en dan roept hij, diep en deftig, met een donkere stem en straf scandeerend: èk-kooo, èk-kooo, èk-koooo.. tot hij afgeloopen is'.
- ³⁴ See the work of Frans Lion Cachet, a Dutch pastor who visited Java in 1891-1892. He also used his frame of reference to describe the sound of the *tokkeh* as an 'ouderwetsche Friesche hangklok' (old-fashioned Frisian hanging clock). He wondered about the sound, whether it was a ghost or a beast that plagued him so much, and if a beast, what kind of beast was it, and where did it live? Cachet, *Een jaar op reis*, 355.
- ³⁵ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 186, 188: 'dierenverschrikkingen'.
- ³⁶ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 128, 188.
- ³⁷ Sherman, 'Stirring and Searchings (1500-1720)', 17-36.
- ³⁸ Honings, 'Een kind in de kolonie', 113; Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 204.
- ³⁹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 7.
- ⁴⁰ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 134: 'Daarbuiten schemeren de bleke stammen langs den weg (tamarinden, geloof ik). Daarachter staat, onbewegelijk en zwart, de Indische nacht, de diepe, dikke, roerloze duisternis, waarin ik ginds vóór mij de zware bergen weet. En de Indische nacht is zelf zoo'n gebergte: even zwaar en even onbewogen.'
- ⁴¹ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 134: '...het is in Holland vaak veel stiller dan in Indië waar altijd geluid is – maar hij is stil, de Indische nacht, aangrijpend stil van roerloosheid. Een obsessie van onbewogenheid'.
- ⁴² Van Maurik, *Indrukken van een Totok*, 172.
- ⁴³ *Gamelan* is traditional Indonesian instrumental ensemble including metallophones, xylophones, drums gongs, bamboo flutes, and plucked strings. *Gamelan* usually accompanies dance and *wayang* puppet performance.

- ⁴⁴ Van Maurik, *Indrukken van een Totok*, 229.
- ⁴⁵ Van Maurik, *Indrukken van een Totok*, 229: 't Is doodstil geworden, slechts de krekel blijft zachtjes doorzingen en een enkele gèkko roept van tijd tot tijd zijn: tokkè-tokkè-è! Boomen en varens, heesters en palmen staan, stil beschenen door de maan, spookachtig zich afteekenend tegen den bergachtigen achtergrond en zachtkens dwaalt de blauwiggele schijn der maan over 't gastvrij dak van het huis, waarin de gasten met den toewan besaar en zijn gezin zijn ter ruste gegaan.'
- ⁴⁶ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201-227.
- ⁴⁷ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 250: 'We reden in dat open auto'tje door de goedheid van de tropena-vond naar een schilderachtige kampong, waarvan de aanblik, de muziek, zelfs de geuren je onder de ban der tropen brachten, we reden naar een stille rivier in een wijd land, dat je aan Holland deed denken. Altijd weer die mengeling van Indie en het Moederland.'
- ⁴⁸ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 250: 'De krekels hoog en schel, de tokkeh's met hun zwaar geluid.'
- ⁴⁹ Poortenaar, *Een kunstreis in de tropen*, 127: 'Het is toch altijd een verrassing, hoe men als reizend artist ontvangen wordt. In groote noch kleine plaatsen is er peil op te trekken.'
- ⁵⁰ Poortenaar, *Een kunstreis in de tropen*, 129.
- ⁵¹ Poortenaar, *Een kunstreis in de tropen*, 129: 'De menagerie der Indische natuur brengt nog vele andere gedierten ten toonele. Tjitjaks, kleine muur-hagedisen, tellen niet mede, maar tokkeh's, de groote, kunnen een flinke stem opzetten op ongewenschte momenten.'
- ⁵² Poortenaar, *Een kunstreis in de tropen*, 129: 'kleine muur-hagedisen'.
- ⁵³ Trouw, *Indische reisbrieven*, 43: 'De tjitjak is het hagedisje, dat tegen den avond in groote getalen de Indische huizen binnenkomt en op jacht naar muskieten, tegen de wanden en zoldering opklimt.'
- ⁵⁴ Jan Brandes, *Album van Jan Brandes*, vol. 1; Wilken, 'De Hagedis in het Volksgeloof der Malayo-Polynesiërs'.
- ⁵⁵ Wilken, 'De Hagedis in het Volksgeloof der Malayo-Polynesiërs', 487: 'niet onbevallig dier'.
- ⁵⁶ Trouw, *Indische reisbrieven*, 43.
- ⁵⁷ Trouw, *Indische reisbrieven*, 43.
- ⁵⁸ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 195: 'Misschien is u iets bijgebleven van wat ik schreef over dien avond in den pasanggrahan te Loebboek Sikaping. De weg met de boomen er langs. Het veld en de hooge bergen daar vlak achter. Het snelle zinken van den nacht die al't verre wegvlaakt en in duisternis u doet omsluiten. Alleen het lampje van den pasanggrahan. Krekels, tjitjaks en tokkeh's. Eén stem begint te zingen, langzaam, in mineur, berustend. En alles onbeweeglijk, starend onbeweeglijk.'
- ⁵⁹ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 195: 'heel die zoele duisternis vol grote Indische dingen'; 'het geheimenis der roerloosheid'.
- ⁶⁰ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 197: 'hopeloos zijn roep allengs verdoovend. En nu huilt de zanger van het droeve lied ineens wat hooger en dat schijnt u zulk een wanhoopstoon dat ge voelt: Nu komt het dadelijk.'
- ⁶¹ Elout, *Indisch dagboek*, 198: 'de ziel van Indië'.
- ⁶² Elout, *De Grote Oost*, 187: 'Zoodat ik, in dit grootste en voornaamste Indische hoteldorp, waar ik dezen nacht voor 't laatst mijn vriend de tokkeh in mijn achtergalerij zijn keel zal hooren schrapen en zijn naam zal hooren uithrythmen, mijn ervaringen van reizen en verblijven in Indië wel vast kan gaan neerschrijven.'
- ⁶³ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 198.
- ⁶⁴ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 199.
- ⁶⁵ Pos, *Eens op Java en Sumatra*, 206: 'Een paar tjitjaks rennen langs de muur en een oude tokkeh, te vroeg ontwaakt, roept loom en zwaar. Een geur van vocht en rottende bladeren komt naar binnen. Ik denk aan ouderjaarsavond thuis...'
- ⁶⁶ Youngs, 'Hearing', 218.
- ⁶⁷ Leane, 'Animals', 307.

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