The Administering of the Bodies and Sexuality of Javanese Women Migrants in Early Twentieth Century New Caledonia

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Abstract Since their arrival on the island in 1896, the Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia has been regarded as the group that has been most accommodating to the French Pacific ruler. Politically, they have never coordinated any resistance campaign. Socially, they have been able to coexist peacefully with different ethnic groups, including the Europeans, the Kanaks (Melanesians), and the Wallis (Polynesians). From the economic standpoint, they are still praised for their hard work as laborers in the plantations and mines in the past. While Europeans and other ethnic groups appreciate their presence on this island, historically the Javanese diaspora was a vulnerable community whose physical bodies and sexuality were administratively regulated by the French colonial ruler. This study intends to investigate how the female Javanese *koeli kontrak* (contract laborers) were controlled in terms of

their bodies and sexuality in past French colonial projects in New Caledonia. The novel *La Bayou: de Djakarta à Nouméa* by Liliane Saintomer and the personal and familial historical accounts of a New Caledonian Javanese descendant, Catherine Adi, served as the sources for the study's data. Adi narrates the stories of her ancestors, on both her mother's and father's sides, who arrived on this island as contract laborers. This study used content analysis as a method to identify the connections between the writers' micro narratives and the social and political circumstances that existed in New Caledonia during the time of the colonial period at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Keywords New Caledonia; body; sexuality; administration; Javanese migrants

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Introduction

When colonialism held its sway globally, not only were lands being plundered through the exploitation of natural resources, but the bodies and sexuality of the inhabitants were also being administered in accordance with the colonial rulers' objectives (Ashcroft et al. 261; Rothberg 3). When the Dutch occupied Java, the bodies and sexuality of Javanese women were colonized in many ways. An essential part of Java's colonial history involves the exploitation of women's bodies. One example was the existence of *nyai*, or women compelled to cohabit with Dutch men without a legal marriage status. For the Dutch men sent to the Dutch East Indies away from their spouses, they became a source of comfort (Hera and Wijaya 49).

In practice, the bodies and sexuality of Javanese women even entered into the solidarity politics of the European colonizers, leading the Dutch to grant France the authority to administer the bodies and sexuality of Javanese women in their labor politics. Contract laborers were not subject to any laws in France at the time. Slav-

ery was still widespread, and many nations lacked uniform standards for working conditions, particularly for former slaves in colonial nations (Shohat 104–05). However, as part of the Dutch Ethical Policy initiated by Conrad Theodore van Deventer, Indies indigenous peoples began to receive pay for their work for the Dutch colonial government (Hera and Wijaya 50).

As laborers were sent in waves to the French colony of New Caledonia, Javanese women became one of the recruitment targets. In 1880, France borrowed the Dutch regulation of Koeli Ordonantie as a recruitment instrument (Maurer 69). The ordinance was enacted to regulate *koeli kontrak*, literally contract laborers, employed by Dutch companies in the Dutch East Indies on their plantations and mines (Udasmoro and Setiadi 240). Along with men, women also worked as contract laborers. A total of 170 men and women from Java traveled to New Caledonia in 1896 as part of the first wave of labor migration to the island (Adi 10; Maurer 68).

There is a gap in the academic literature regarding the administering of the body and sexuality of Javanese women who served as contract laborers in New Caledonia. So far, sociological topics including their historic arrivals in New Caledonia, how they lived, and how they related to other ethnic groups on the island have received the greatest attention in studies regarding their presence in New Caledonia (Chappell 274; Connell, *New Caledonia or Kanaky?* 95; Connell, "The 2020 New Caledonia Referendum" 3). Numerous studies have discussed the political changes that occurred in New Caledonia relating to the referendums that gave citizens the option of choosing full independence or staying under French rule (Connell, *New Caledonia or Kanaky?* 311; Connell, "The 2020 New Caledonia Referendum" 1–2). Linguistic studies have been one of the concentrations in other fields. Among the most well-known of these is Australian researcher Pamela Allen's "Diasporic representations of the home culture: case studies from Suriname and New Caledonia," which compares the developments of the Javanese language in the two countries (Allen 1–2).

For his book *Les Javanais du Caillou*, Jean-Luc Maurer conducted the most thorough investigation on the Javanese diaspora in New Caledonia with regard to political, economic, social, and cultural elements (Maurer 67). Widyatka Ryananta authored research on the political and sociological dimensions of the Javanese in New Caledonia (Ryananta 2). There have also been linguistic studies conducted by Indonesians that examine the hybridization of the French and Javanese languages in the linguistic practices of New Caledonian Javanese (Subiyantoro 43; Subiyantoro et al. 85).

The trajectory of Javanese migrants to the island in the historical setting of

their arrival until their last migration in the 1950s is frequently the subject of works produced by Javanese diaspora descendants in New Caledonia (Adi 20; Muljono-Larue 5). Adi incorporates her grandparents' stories as references to reveal what life was like for the contract laborers. As a result, the text is a collection of biographies of her large family, the majority of whom worked as contract laborers. The work of Muljono-Larue, in contrast, concentrates on the overall hardships and day-to-day experiences of Javanese contract laborers in New Caledonia.

Problems of Javanese women in New Caledonia during the colonial period are at the center of a recent study by (Udasmoro et al. 74), focusing on their survival strategies in the foreign land. Given the numerous accounts found in the source materials and the fact that women of Javanese heritage tend to write more than their male counterparts, the particular study needs to be expanded. In order to fully investigate women's historical experiences in early twentieth century New Caledonia, it is crucial to elaborate on the perspective toward women.

Some women in that period had to leave Java due to poverty (Bastien 331). They were mostly farm laborers who had little money and saw the recruitment program to New Caledonia as a way out of a difficult life. From the time they departed until the time they lived in the new place, accounts of the struggles of the women, many as young as 15 to 20 years old, have been collected (Adi 60).

Generation after generation has passed down their memories, which have evolved into social narratives of the Javanese descendants in New Caledonia. Both fictional stories and historical texts written by predominantly women of Javanese heritage in New Caledonia depict experiences of how their bodies and sexuality were regulated by the colonial administration. As a novel, *La Bayou: De Djakarta à Nouméa* (Big Sister: From Jakarta to Nouméa) by Liliane Saintomer describes how the bodies and sexuality of Javanese women in New Caledonia were controlled. The novel tells the story of a poor, young Javanese rural woman who travels to New Caledonia in the early twentieth century to work as a contract *koeli*. She goes through many unpleasant incidents from the time she boards the ship, when she is sexually harassed, until she arrives in the new land, when she becomes the victim of an attempted rape by European men. The transmission of past memories to the author originates through her mother, a contract laborer in New Caledonia around the same time as the novel's setting. Meanwhile, Adi wrote historical accounts in her book *Orang Kontrak: Les Engagés Originaires de Java Venus Sous Contrat en Nouvelles-Calédonie 1896–1955* (Contracted People: Indigenous Javanese Involved in Contracts in New Caledonia 1896–1955). Adi's parents and grandparents, who worked as contract laborers, provided her with recollections.

To put into perspective the waves of diaspora to New Caledonia, particularly the diaspora of Javanese women, as well as the corresponding administration and regulation used by the French authorities as a mode of control over their sexuality and bodies, the paper employs Foucault's "docile bodies" in relation to his notion of the panopticon as its lens and framework. It emphasizes the struggle, overt repression, and subjugation of the Javanese women laborers by their French employers and, by extension, the French hierarchy.

The purpose of this research is then to investigate the administering of the bodies and sexuality of Javanese women contract laborers in New Caledonia at the beginning of the twentieth century. "Administer" in this context refers to the French colonial government's system and mechanisms in regulating Javanese migrant women to conform administratively with their rules. In order to paint a more complete image of how the Javanese migrant women had to carry out the process of not only observing the laws but also negotiating these norms as a means of survival, two separate literary genres, namely a work of fiction and a historical narrative text, have been textually combined. In this piece, the battle for the private and the public will also be examined. The paper uses historical and contextual evidence to focus on the French administrators that oversaw and regulated the bodies and sexuality of Javanese female contract laborers in early twentieth century New Caledonia.

The theoretical perspective for this research has been the concept of docile bodies. Docility occurs when a group of people are used to being watched continuously that their disciplines become internalized, and they no longer have the capacity to resist. The concept of docile bodies serves as an example of how social systems are continuously looking for reasons to observe things, particularly when it comes to the body and sexuality. This concept by Foucault (183) is especially evident in his interpretation of the panopticon, which is literally a prison tower that is used to monitor inmates. Everything that the prisoners do in their cells is constantly being watched from the tower by guards and their searchlight. However, Foucault associated the panopticon with all manner of norms and rules that are employed to keep each citizen under the ruler's thumb. As a convention, the panopticon power is also used to explain how the body is governed and controlled for a particular truth. Administrative correctness becomes one of the grounds for how such control is carried out. There are several ways to exert control over a woman's body and sexuality, including through formal and societal rules. How the Indonesian Pornography Law mostly targets women is one blatant example. Additionally, there are rules that are cultural in character and followed in different parts of the world, such as cultural norms regarding virginity.

The administering of women's bodies and sexuality is widely practiced even in developed nations. Some rules pertaining to the body and sexuality are enforced through birth control, which is closely tied to women's bodies and sexuality. For instance, during Indonesia's New Order administration (1968–1998), women were coerced into reproductive politics by being made to use birth control through a national family planning program (Udasmoro 147–48). At the time, this requirement had to be followed by married women, particularly the spouses of government personnel. The promotion of their husbands' rank and position in government offices would be hampered, for example, as punishment for those who did not comply.

In order to create docile bodies or subjects, Foucault proposes a different type of mechanism, one that is not coercive but rather constitutive of a different mode of control. For instance, the body may be regulated through a repetitive exercise or a form of ritual that eventually trains the body to exhibit a desired trait or behavior. According to Foucault, the subject must be located or positioned in time and space in order to work on the body. Different times and spaces require different mechanisms to manipulate the body.

The training of the soldier serves as the starting point for Foucault's discussion of discipline. He proposes how the ideal soldier of the seventeenth century was immediately recognizable in both appearance and behavior through the process of disciplining through training or simulations of battle—methods to use, alter, and enhance the docile body. Throughout the classical era, power was concentrated on subjugating the body. In the eighteenth century, efforts to bring about such submission constituted a new level of control in which the economy of the body was important (Foucault 150).

In addition to the army as a site of discipline and control, Foucault considers monasteries as another example of a body that is situated in time and space to encourage docility through behavioral control. To comprehend how subjects can embody the norms and transform into docile bodies, one needs to look at the mechanisms constructed by the so-called "technicians of discipline"—the means that power utilizes to "affect the body" and make it compliant.

In order to maintain order and control, Foucault underlines the necessity of using an enclosed, guarded space, such as prison, school, factory, and barracks. The systemization of the body depends on this placement and anchoring of the subject in space and time. According to Foucault, the critic can chart the ways that the operations of the body are controlled. In a monastery, for example, there are several regulated activities throughout the day, such as praying, eating, studying, washing oneself, and sleeping, all of which must be accomplished on time. This persistent

sequence shapes the aspirant's body through internalization, rendering them a docile subject. The concept of the panopticon or "surveillance tower" may even be abandoned as a result of this internalization of the discipline.

This research examined two different types of texts, namely a literary text and a historical narrative text. These two sources were examined in order to provide a comprehensive image of Javanese women in New Caledonia, both historically and fictitiously. The novel was chosen since it contains many historical elements. Additionally, a lot of literary fictional narratives are employed in historical research. However, in terms of approach, most studies that combine the two types typically simply explain how literary works with historical information should be interpreted, while studies that link two materials of different types that have the same time setting have been rare.

The content analysis method was applied in this study. The first stage involved gathering information about various topics pertinent to the administering of the bodies and sexuality of Javanese women who had been transported to New Caledonia at the close of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth century. The data was collected from Liliane Saintomer's novel *La Bayou: De Djakarta à Nouméa* (2001) and Catherine Adi's historical writing *Orang Kontrak: Les Engagés Originaires de Java Venus Sous Contrat en Nouvelles-Calédonie 1896–1955* (2014), the latter of which includes raw data from Adi's interviews with members of her family who worked as contract laborers in colonial New Caledonia. The second stage involved choosing more specific data to show patterns in how the women's bodies and sexuality were administered. In the third stage, the data were integrated with the gender perspective on positionality, which is often found in instances where women's bodies and sexuality are being administered. At this stage, the docility of the bodies serves as a lens that allows us to view the practice of controlling the bodies and sexuality of female contract laborers in early twentieth century New Caledonia.

The Javanese Diaspora in New Caledonia

As it is not on the European continent but rather across the ocean, specifically in the Southwest Pacific Sea, the French territory of New Caledonia is frequently referred to as *Outre Mer* (literally across the ocean). The Kanaks were already living on the island when British explorer James Cook arrived there on September 4, 1774 (Adi 25). During that time, France was also conducting many international expeditions. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the French had arrived on the island and established themselves as a political force. In 1864, people who were deemed prob-

lematic in France were sent to New Caledonia, where they were given jobs as farmers on the island. With mining discoveries, such as nickel, the French in New Caledonia could not afford to do the work themselves. They then tried to take advantage of a system that had been developed by the Dutch, namely the Koeli Ordonantie, issued in 1880 (Maurer 69). Using this ordinance, the Dutch sent *koeli kontrak* (contract laborers) from Dutch colonies to work on Dutch plantations. The sending of laborers from Java to Suriname is one instance of how the decree was put into practice (Allen 3).

France opted to employ this system of contract *koeli* recruitment for its projects, including its nickel mines and plantations in New Caledonia, after observing the effectiveness of the Ordonatie's implementation. As many as 170 Javanese left for New Caledonia by ship on February 15, 1896. Later, batches of additional contract laborers were sent to the island, adding to this growing population. There were roughly 87 boat voyages from Java to the island between 1896 and 1946—a period of fifty years. The contract laborers came from various regions in Java, especially Central Java, West Java, and East Java. These individuals consistently identified as Javanese. Semarang was chosen as the departure point in 1896. From 1913 through 1933, the laborers were sent out from Batavia. From 1915 through 1922, Semarang sent out more. The Port of Surabaya served as the departure point in 1919 (Adi 50). Around 5,000 Javanese were transported by several large ships from these departure points.

At the time, New Caledonia offered a variety of jobs. Seen as undemanding and pleasant in character, the Javanese were employed in a variety of sectors, primarily in nickel mines, plantations, and agricultural fields for the males. The women were mainly employed in the domestic sector, specifically as housekeepers.

From the Economy of the Body to the Efficient Machine

Even before the contract laborers from Java were transported to New Caledonia, the administering of women's bodies and sexuality had held sway under the Dutch colonial regime. The pay range on offer attracted many women from the lower classes who were desperate to join (Maurer 72–73). Even if it meant breaking the law, the labor recruiters wanted to attract as many workers as they could for strictly business reasons.

There were manipulations, primarily in the form of age falsification. Information about workers' age was adjusted to comply with labor standards. The minimum working age was 14 years old as of January 10, 1903, in accordance with New Caledonia's employment laws. However, in 1906, the labor syndicate changed the

recruitment age to be between the ages of 18 and 35 (Adi 54). However, the Dutch East Indies administration's policies, which were based on the laws that were in effect in 1909 and 1914, prohibited potential employees under the age of 16 from signing employment contracts. In her novel, Saintomer describes how her grandmother was enlisted at the age of 15. Additionally, married women who had absent husbands were also prohibited from joining. Therefore, widows and divorced women were not permitted to sign up. However, this rule was also broken in an effort to hire as many people as possible.

Adi describes in her writing the experience of one of her relatives who left because of financial troubles. The woman and her two children could get on board even though her husband objected to going. According to a rule on housing, a shelter would be allocated for a man and his family. Upon arrival, the woman and her two children was told to live together with a single man, whom she eventually married (Adi 55).

It is clear from the above account that a regime of power with economic interests controlled how women's bodies and sexuality were administered. Because of their poverty, women were used in difficult economic times. Later on, the woman's children would also work as laborers. According to some sources, they felt that they were being sold to the French by the Dutch. One source informed Adi about the issue, which is best described as the commercialization of humans.

> "Vient, vient, vient, il y a du travail là." Aussitôt, il te rentre dans un dock, tu vois. Et là, même pas la famille peut te voir. Ah, c'est comme ça, c'est, c'est, c'est vendu quoi!
> (from Catherine Adi's interview with a contract labor's daughter in March 1997, in (Adi 51))

> "Come, come, come, there's work there." Immediately, he pulled you into a dock, you see. And your family couldn't even see you there. Ah, that's what it was like, yes, yes, like being sold!

The informant explains that even though she did require employment, she could sense the strong persuasion. The Javanese villagers' attention was swiftly captured by the promise of a work, so much so that as the persuasion was being made, the gathering villagers were hustled onto the ship without having a chance to say farewell to their families. The circumstance gave the informant the impression that she was being sold. Throughout the interview, she makes frequent references to

"being sold," but admits that only when they had reached New Caledonia did she truly comprehend how much she felt like a commodity.

Men who worked in plantations and nickel mines were not the only ones who were subjected to the exploitation of the body. The treatment of women's bodies in domestic settings took many different forms, all of which were legal. In one of the accounts gathered by Catherine Adi, female laborers were required to carry water for their employers' needs each day.

> «C'est pas tous les jours, mais de temps en temps, comme ça. Sam il doit se rappeler, on allait à la chasse. A la maison, je donnais la main à ma mère. Maman il portait, deux touques d'eau là ici, ah la la. Quand [...], on venait de Java, emmener les deux touques d'eau là, pour faire la cuisine tout ça, elle faisait la cuisine maman, ma mère quoi. Elle fait la cuisine pour le patron, pour tous les autres quoi, [...].» (from Catherine Adi's interview with a contract labor's daughter in March 1997, in (Adi 56))

> "Not every day, but it was like that from time to time. Sam had to remember to go hunting. At home, I lent my mother a hand. Mother had to carry two pails of water to and fro, my goodness. We came all the way from Java to bring two pails of water there, to cook everything, she did all that, she did. She cooked for the employers, for everyone else, [...]."

Young girls were also administered and told to be babysitters. The law said that kids might be requested to complete such a work as early as age 6, as that was when small children could begin performing labor. The law was eventually modified to forbid kids from starting jobs before becoming 10 years old. In one of Catherine Adi's historical narratives, Embah Ratmi's experience is described as follows.

> De son vivant, embah s'est souvenue de son travail comme bonne d'enfants dès l'âge de six ans. Embah Ratmi a gardé les enfants du gérant de la station d'élevage sur laquelle était affectée sa maman. Elle n'était ni payée, ni nourrie. Elle retrouvait sa mère pour le déjeuner. On trouve des similitudes entre son histoire et celle des enfants océaniens. L'âge minimal légal des travailleurs importés des NouvellesHébrides est fixé à 6 ans. La loi reste en vigueur durant les dix sept premières années de l'immigration océanienne. Par la suite, l'âge minimum légal est fixé à dix ans. (from Catherine Adi's interview with a contract labor's daughter in March 1997, in (Adi 60))

> During her lifetime, *embah* [granny] remembered working as a nanny from the age of six. Embah Ratmi looked after the children of the manager of the breeding station to which her mother was assigned. She was neither paid nor fed. She would only see her mother for lunch. There are similarities between her story and that of the children of the Oceanians. The legal minimum age for workers imported from the New Hebrides was 6 years. The law remained in effect for the first seventeen years of the Oceanians' immigration. Subsequently, the minimum legal age was set at ten years.

The aforementioned instances are excellent illustrations of Foucault's idea of confinement as a means of discipline. The island and the settings in which the men, women, and kids worked turned into places that were just as constricting as the prison, school, factory, and barracks. WE map out, for instance, a housekeeper's typical daily work schedule, namely waking up, preparing breakfast, morning chores, shopping, preparing lunch, additional household chores like laundry and ironing, preparing dinner, nightly chores, bedtime activities, etc. The purpose of the regulated activities was to turn the housekeeper into an "efficient machine." As a result, in this illustration, the economy of the body relied on its transformation into an efficient machine that could carry out various duties effectively, much like an all-around person. The hierarchy uses the female subject as a tool. Furthermore, the authority over the body that is fixed in space and time acts as boundaries and power structures. To put it another way, the schedule that is imposed, repeated, and possibly internalized is a power structure. The panopticon is very well in action here.

Interference of Private Affairs

Women employees were treated differently than male employees. Many laws were made specifically to prohibit women from working in certain fields, including mining. The male employees were required to complete a set 12-hour shift each day. The women who worked in the domestic sector, however, put in more hours (Adi 60). They might put in 24-hour shifts to assist the family they were hired by. Living with their employers frequently prevented them from taking time off, as Saintomer in her novel describes below. Even though it is her day off, Nadiem, the novel's main character, is required to complete the household tasks that her employer requests.

> "Nadiem, viens voir par là. Essuie-moi cela tout de suite. Tiens, vas laver aussi

ce vêtements.
-Mais Madame, c'est aujourd'hui dimanche et j'ai l'après midi de congé.
-Et bien, tu récupérera sur ta semaine.
(Saintomer 61)

"Nadiem, come and look over there. Wipe that off for me right away. Here, go wash these clothes as well."
"But, Madam, today is a Sunday, so I have the afternoon off."
"Well then you can make up for it on a weekday."

Because Nadiem's physical body in the novel is under administrative control, she is obligated to follow her master's orders. This suggests that those who disobeyed their employers would face disciplinary measures. These could be physical punishments for the women, such as being slapped or assigned tougher labor.

Sa patronne descendait en hâte les marches qui les séparaient et la gifla à plusieurs reprises. Elle osait lui repondre ! Nadiem saisit un tisson dans le feu resté allumé. Elle menaça sa patronne. Nadiem en avait assez de ses agissements, voulait bien être puni si elle méritait vraiment. Mais là, sa patronne dépassait les bornes ! (Saintomer 61).

Her employer hurried down the steps that separated them and slapped her repeatedly. She dared to answer her! Nadiem grabbed a weave from the fire that had remained lit. She threatened her employer. Nadiem was fed up with her actions, prepared to be punished if she really deserved it. But this time, her employer had crossed the line!

The administering of the women's body, however, also took place through the control of their private lives. Their employers had a lot of say in who they could meet or get married to. In Saintomer's piece, Nadiem makes the decision to wed a Javanese man without her employers' consent. She is punished after they learn the truth.

«Alors, comme ça tu t'est mariée avec un Javanais, un kakane?»
Silences. En prononçant ce mot, il avait pris un ton méprisant. Il savait que cela voulait dire grand frère. Les Javanais s'appellent respectueusement entre eux comme cela.

«Réponds»
Oui monsieur.
Oui Patron! Je te l'ai déjà dit.
Oui … Patron.
Je ne t'ai pas faire venir ici pour aller avec un Javanais. Tu es là pour travailler non pas pour batifoler.
Mais Patron tu t'es bien marié toi? Alors pourquoi moi Javanais n'ai-je pas ce droit?
Il ne fait pas partie de mon personnel!»
Elle fut sur le point de répondre, mais une gifle empêche toute tentative. (Saintomer 66).

"So, you got married to a Javanese, a *kakane* [Javanese man]?"
Silence. In pronouncing this word, he had taken a contemptuous tone. He knew it meant big brother. The Javanese respectfully call each other that way.
"Answer."
"Yes, Sir."
"'Yes, Boss!' I've told you."
"Yes, Boss."
"I didn't bring you here to wander off with a Javanese. You are here to work, not to frolic."
"But, Boss, are you not married as well? Why can't I, a Javanese, have the same right?"
"That's none of my business!"
She was about to reply, but a slap prevented the intention.

When the employers believed they had full authority to control the private life of their contract laborers, they began to administer their bodies and sexuality. In the story, Nadiem's employer emphasizes that he has the discretion to permit Nadiem to wed or not. As a result, he unilaterally dissolves Nadiem's marriage. As a member of the ruling group, the employer has the power to control and administer Nadiem's body and sexuality.

Sur ordre du patron, chacun rentra chez soi, un goût amer dans la bouche. Monsieur Loulou fit annuler le mariage de Nadiem et de Senen par le Hadji même qui l'avait prononcé. Ils divorcèrent donc sans en être avertis ! (Saintomer 67).

> On the employer's orders, everyone went home, a bitter taste in their mouths. Monsieur Loulou had the marriage of Nadiem and Senen annulled by the very *Hadji* who had pronounced it. They were therefore divorced without being informed!

Nadiem's employer then explains the social framework that was in place at the time, where the authority to regulate the bodies and sexuality of the people belonged not only to the state but also to individuals from a certain group—in this case the French. They hold the authority to control the immigrants simply because they have paid them. This suggests the condition at the time where these individual authorities believed they had the power to control both the work and personal life of the contract laborers.

Conclusion

The administering of Javanese women laborers' bodies and sexuality in New Caledonia illustrates a gender divide in the experiences of women contract laborers during the colonial era. Even the men who worked in mines and plantations encountered challenges, and their outcomes were frequently not any better. However, contrary to working in the domestic sector, labor on plantations and mines had clearer rules. On the contrary, women were subject to the rules of the families where they worked because they had to spend more than 12 hours with their employers. It appears that historically women were restricted based on their very own bodies and sexuality, not only as properties of a society but also as the properties of their employers, whether the employers be male or female.

According to Foucault, internalizing rules via repeated behavior, rather than coercion, is what causes the body to become docile. However, the process was different for the Javanese female contract laborers in early twentieth century New Caledonia. First, not only were they restricted to the domestic setting where they performed their labors, but they were also subjected to forced physical punishment on top of their monotonous daily tasks. Second, the female contract laborers' private lives were invaded as a result of the discipline's broad application. They were not only restricted in who they could marry, but their unions might also be deemed invalid and susceptible to annulment by their employers. This illustrates the social condition at the time when power targeted docile bodies for the economy of those bodies—when the authority believed that they had the right to limit and exploit the contract laborers in both the employment and personal domains.

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