

## Teaching the Colony at Wageningen Agricultural College (1918-1940)

*Larissa Schulte Nordholt, Wageningen University*

This paper focuses on the classes in tropical agriculture taught at the agricultural college in Wageningen in the Netherlands and meant to prepare young men in the Netherlands for a life in the Dutch East Indies. It is part of a larger book project on the history of the agricultural college in Wageningen. The paper is centred around lecture notes by Johan Ewald van der Stok from his class on tropical plant cultivation of 1925. These lecture notes are remarkable in how they show that colonial knowledge was deemed universal and in what way students were taught to interact with local populations, among other things. As such, the classes in tropical plant cultivation offer a window into the world of early 20th century colonial life as an agricultural scientist. Secondly, in connection to that, the paper describes the broader context of colonial agricultural education during the 1920s and 1930s at Wageningen agricultural college. The paper reflects on some of the financial and institutional structures that shaped the agricultural college as a colonial institution in the Netherlands. This includes the lives of students from different backgrounds inside and outside the Netherlands. The paper therefore asks what was it like for different students to be lectured about tropical life? And how did the classes and broader environment at the college shape these students for a life in the Dutch East Indies? In what way, moreover, was knowledge from that colony translated to the university environment in the Netherlands?

---

Larissa Schulte Nordholt is a postdoctoral researcher at Wageningen University & Research. She is currently working on a book about the colonial history of that agricultural university and its predecessors in Suriname and Indonesia. The book focuses on the development and movement of environmental agricultural knowledge in the context of the Dutch empire. Her PhD dissertation, finished in 2021 at Leiden University, was concerned with the UNESCO-funded General History of Africa/*Histoire Générale de l'Afrique* (1964-1998). She is interested in questions of colonial and postcolonial knowledge production, decolonization and emancipation in the broadest sense.

---

### History of Universities Seminar

Convened by Miles Taylor (Humboldt University of Berlin, Germany), Ku-ming (Kevin) Chang (Academia Sinica, Taiwan), and Heike Jöns (Loughborough University, United Kingdom). Hosted by the Humboldt University of Berlin on Zoom: <https://www.histgeog-uni.net/history-of-universities-seminar-2023-24>.