

Summary:

Stories of and about so called ‘moffenmeiden’, women who, during the German occupation of The Netherlands, started a relationship with a German soldier, together form a hidden and veiled part of history, while these stories have had (and still have) great influence upon the lives of involved and surviving dependants. In this thesis a description will be given of these ‘moffenmeiden’ and their situation in the Dutch city of Bergen op Zoom. The most important ‘aim’ however, was to find an explanation for the manner of dealing with these women on both formal (the ‘Bijzondere Rechtspleging’, translated: the ‘Special Jurisdiction’) and informal (family, friends, neighbours) grounds, in the period between the 27th of October 1944 and the 1st of June 1948. It turned out to be a necessary research method to interview a variety of involved people, including the concerning women. This possibility is, taken into account the strong taboo that is still very vivid today, limited and it gets smaller while time passes on. This given contributes to the relevance of this analysis. The results are also based upon literature and archive material, especially upon the records of the Central Archive for the Special Jurisdiction.

The starting point of the analysis was based upon the belief that an explanation for the (in)formal manner of dealing with ‘moffenmeiden’ from Bergen op Zoom could be found in the historical context. This historical context was defined and covered through an extensive discourse analysis. The interviews with several involved people, the concerning women, and surviving dependants were of great importance here. It is being assumed that four dominant discourses (gender and sexuality, sociality, religion and patriotism) formed an ‘instruction manual’ for the justified and correct behaviour of a in a community like Bergen op Zoom living woman (in the period of research).

In the opinion of the average inhabitant of Bergen op Zoom, the ‘moffenmeiden’ did not confirm themselves to this ‘manual’. Especially in this small and ‘familiar’ community, every deviation of the ‘normal pattern’ was simply undesirable. This led to the social exclusion of the ‘moffenmeiden’. The social environment of the concerning women assumed these women had neglected to confirm themselves to the dominant ‘sexual ethics’. This deviation in sexual behaviour formed the essence of their drifting. The ‘moffenmeiden’ had betrayed their country through their sexuality and they were detested because of this. On the other hand, their (assumed) sexual misbehaviour also caused jealousy. The negative feelings of disgust, anger and jealousy were strengthened by several factors (hereby I for instance highlight the theory of the ‘Other’ and the ‘scape-goat’). These feelings could not be expressed during the occupation. This is why the liberation caused a great ‘unloading’ of feelings of negativity, frustration and revenge. The post-war informal manner of dealing with the ‘moffenmeiden’ was very specific and aimed. Their public punishment was aimed against their femininity and sexuality. The period of occupation can be seen as a ‘breeding ground’ for this social reaction.

In imitation of the public opinion and to prevent a 'bijltesdag' (a too severe reaction against the so called 'betrayers', this for instance occurred after the liberation of France), the Special Jurisdiction was raised. 'Betrayers' (the 'moffenmeiden' were seen as part of this group) stand accused of their 'un-patriotic behaviour' in tribunals and special courts. The 'moffenmeiden' were in most of the cases punished by imprisonment. A tribunal and an internment camp were raised in Bergen op Zoom as well. The Special Jurisdiction also highlighted the assumed sexual misbehaviour of the 'moffenmeiden'. Reprisals against their assumed 'perverted' behaviour were not institutionalised though.

When, after several years, the public opinion round 'betrayers' grew more gentle and mild, the authorities again imitated the public opinion; the tone of voice of the Special Jurisdiction also grew milder ('betrayers' were for instance more often discharged of internment and they were treated 'better'). The Dutch authorities at the time (in the appearance of the Special Jurisdiction) thus frequently took in account the mental state/ mood among the Dutch inhabitants. This is why the formal manner of dealing with 'moffenmeiden' can be seen as an articulation of the informal way of dealing with these women.

In the termination of the thesis, I thus draw the conclusion that the explanation for the direct post-war formal way of dealing with the 'moffenmeiden' can be traced back to the deviant behaviour of these women during the occupation of The Netherlands as well. The (assumed) sexual misbehaviour of these women forms the essence here. The indignation about this sexual misbehaviour is not justified though; in practice, the 'moffenmeiden' did not strikingly differ from their female contemporaries when it comes to sexuality. This is why we can suppose that the main reason for the post-war (in)formal way of dealing with 'moffenmeiden' was based upon an unjust and intended maintained 'stigma' whereby the 'moffenmeiden' are being portrayed as prostitutes.