CHAPTER FIVE

DECOLONIZATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION (1940–1975)

THE DECOLONIZATION PROCESS

The Second World War was also a difficult time for KITLV. The Institute had difficulty remaining active under German occupation. From both inside and outside, for example, the Institute was seriously pressured to drop its ‘Royal’ title. During the last winter of the war, the library was only open one and a half days per week due to fuel shortages. In Indonesia, nearly all Dutch KITLV members were incarcerated in camps by the Japanese. Any books and source materials in their possession were usually lost. Only a select few were permitted to continue to work outside of the camps; one such individual was the manager of the Bataviaasch Genootschap’s Museum, A.N.J. Thomassen à Thuessink van der Hoop (Bernet Kempers 1969: 420).

Dutch historiography during the German occupation was long ‘under the spell of good or evil’, as meaningfully expressed by Blom (1989: 102–21). Only small minorities, however, actually participated in the resistance or actively collaborated with the German authorities. The attitude of most Dutch was fittingly characterized by Kossmann (1986: 154) as ‘accommodating’. In historical circles today, it is sometimes said that accommodation is merely a euphemism for collaboration. That is incorrect. The extent to which accommodation on the outside during war was accompanied by disgust on the inside is highly evident, including the letter that KITLV board member Damsté wrote to Secretary Stapel on 20 May 1944 (KITLV 227).

In this letter, Damsté argued that former civil servant and former professor of administrative law D.G. Stibbe, some of whose ancestors were Jewish but who was not required to wear a yellow star, indicating he was a Jew, should be allowed to visit the library. ‘I suspect’, Damsté wrote, ‘that the board will unanimously agree to honour this request if possible without significantly damaging the Institute’s interests. The Institute has its enemies, including among its members, and so caution is warranted.’ Collaborators did not consider the German authorities and members of the pro-German Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB) to be ‘enemies’;
accommodators often did. But a spirit of courageous resistance is nevertheless absent in Damsté’s letter.

Who were these enemies among the members of KITLV as referred to by Damsté? Only five individuals were expelled as KITLV members ‘for political reasons’ in 1945 (BKI 1946: xxx). One of these, however, was the NSB Secretary General of the Department of Justice during the war, J.J. Schrieke. Having been at one time professor of colonial and administrative law in Leiden and KITLV board member, Schrieke was dubbed ‘a high-level collaborator’ (Van Anrooij 1989). His brother was B.J.O. Schrieke, Van Eerde’s successor as director of the Koloniaal Instituut’s anthropology department and extraordinary professor of anthropology in Amsterdam, who would have nothing at all to do with national socialism. Already in his Leiden oration, J.J. Schrieke (1935) had advocated following the Japanese strategy for combating a crisis, characterized by nationalization of the economy, sober education for the people and a strict labour discipline. At the end of his oration, Schrieke warmly honoured the memory of his mentor and predecessor Van Vollenhoven in both academic and personal terms.

The direction that Schrieke gave to Van Vollenhoven’s study of adat law at the beginning of the war, however, would have made his mentor turn in his grave. Schrieke, who joined the NSB in 1940, made a prominent contribution to the special edition marking the one-hundredth volume of Bijdragen in 1941 that shined a new light on the differences between adat law and civil law titled ‘Adatrecht tegenover juristenrecht; Een oude tegenstelling in nieuw licht’. Referring to Van Vollenhoven and as analogy to the Indies, in this contribution Schrieke advocated replacing the applicable law of the Netherlands, which was strongly influenced by Roman law and the French civil and penal codes, by ‘the sound and primal German Volksrecht’: the original law of the Netherlands that, thankfully, was still alive in the legal consciousness of many Dutch (BKI 1941: 425–37). Schrieke’s colleague in both law and NSB, H.A. Idema, wrote a contribution based on Van Vollenhoven discussing a trio of nineteenth-century men of law in the Indies, subtitled no less as ‘Iets uit den strijd om de legaliteit’ (An anecdote about the legality struggle) (BKI 1941: 173–233). The KITLV board was likely to have been highly relieved to receive Schrieke’s letter of resignation of 21 September 1941, in which he resigned from the board because of his appointment as Secretary General of Justice (KITLV 224). After the war, for his collaboration Schrieke was initially sentenced to death, but this sentence was commuted to twenty years of imprisonment in 1946.