

Some themes in *Indische* identity remaking

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Over the past 15 years, I have conducted an extended oral history project with Dutch, Dutch-Indonesians, Eurasians and Indonesians in North America who were resident in the Dutch East Indies prior to, during, and after WWII. Participants in a “political order that inscribes in the social world a new conception of space, new forms of personhood, and a new means of manufacturing the experience of the real” (Mitchell 1988, xi), they encountered the Japanese invasion and occupation from unique perspectives. More than two thirds of the interviews cover the so-called *Bersiap* period¹ and the 1945-1949 war with Republican forces, while other narrators struggled to maintain their Indonesian identity until the 1956-1957 crises. A significant number of these consultants left for the Netherlands during one of those critical confrontations; others departed directly for North America. Comparing thematic analyses of life stories collected in the Netherlands concerning this history (Steijlen 2002) with the materials in my database reveals multiple overlaps, but also significant divergences in emphasis, recall and their impact on identity formations. My North-American consultants do not engage the ongoing dialogues in the Netherlands (Houben 1997, 47-66) and Indonesia (Stoler & Strassler 2000, 4-48) that constrain or facilitate what ex-colonial subjects in those countries share. Hence, they utilize divergent schemata to frame how, what, and why they remember. In this paper I focus on two interlocked themes that emerge in my North-American *Indische*² life stories sub-database: ‘Kinship’

¹ *Bersiap* = a name given to the period at the end of the Japanese occupation when terror and violence reigned in the streets and countryside of Java and youth attacked and killed those of Dutch and Eurasian blood as well as members of the Indonesian elites who had played a role in the colonial administration. Later, Chinese and other Indonesians were also targeted.

² I use the term *Indisch(e)* to denote people from Indonesia whose ancestry includes both indigenous-Indonesian and Dutch heritage. As I note in this paper, in the Netherlands, *Indisch(e)* also refers to ‘full-blooded’ Dutch people who had lived in Indonesia for generations. I distinguish between the two by referring to those people as “Dutch-Indonesians”.

and ‘the Father’. Utilizing an extended interview with an *Indische* woman visiting Canada, I set up aspects of her narrative as a foil to examine the ways in which the *Indische* in the Netherlands and North America construct their complex identities.³

Keywords: Immigration, prescribed identities, identity markers, narrative recall, kinship, wartime fathers, Indonesia.

The data

The database that constituted the framework of my initial analysis (Beaulieu 2009) consisted of 52 extended, multi-tape interviews conducted with interviewees in North America who responded to ads soliciting life stories from Dutch, Dutch-Indonesian, *Indische* and Indonesian people who had lived in Indonesia during the final colonial period and the occupation and its aftermath. A complete breakdown of that database is given in Beaulieu (2009: 4-10). Since then, I have continued to conduct interviews, with the result that the database now holds the oral histories of 123 different narrators and has additionally expanded to include documents and photographs that have been bequeathed to me.⁴

Anonymity has been preserved at the request of interviewees. As I noted in 2009, “through the interviewee release forms, participants had the choice of releasing their names and ‘words’ for use in my doctoral dissertation” (Beaulieu 2009). Over 80% of them choose to do so; the individuals most reluctant to expose themselves to potential identification were the veterans I interviewed. Accordingly, early drafts of my thesis referred to peoples, locations, and opinions, by name, where facilitated through Intellectual Property consent. The initial dissertation draft fully revealed the identity of all interviewees who had given me permission to do so.

Once interviewees were aware that this material would be available in Holland, however, the number of people requiring anonymity increased; “It’s such a small country. Someone is sure to read it who knows someone else and before you know it, I have trouble on the doorstep. So and so will tell so and so, and they will have said it better ... no better take it out” (Oral History Interview (follow-up phone call re ethics), May 2007, Dutch-

³ Some of the data in this paper has been previously presented and discussed in Beaulieu 2009.

⁴ Ethics approval for this research was initially granted under the Human Subjects Protocol Review Committee of the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta, and then through the Human Subjects Research Committee at the University of Lethbridge, in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, thereby meeting all standards and protocols required by the Canadian Tri-Council Policy on Human Subject Research in Canada.

Canadian female). In addition, consultation with learned individuals in the Netherlands counselled complete anonymity. I have therefore taken out names, place names, references that might facilitate identification such as people in connection with certain camps, etc., particularly since interviewees spoke so freely in the certain knowledge that they were 'safe', and any threat to that safety is, in my eyes, completely unacceptable.

(Beaulieu 2009: 36)

In addition, many of my initial interviewees have since passed away, and altering their initial release forms would be a matter for their estates/heirs.

In the homeland

Eurasian people – those of mixed European and Asian descent – embody the fact that pluralism and porous ethnic relations have long marked South East Asia. The Dutch colonial administration attempted to impose order on the archipelago's composite human population by roughly sorting the people into three broad categories: Indigenous peoples, foreign Orientals and Europeans. Each of these categories was multifaceted; urban Javanese *bupati* occupied the same classificatory niche as a Sumbanese tribesman. On the ground, however, operational principles other than ethnic taxonomies were evident. Interviewees distinguish characteristics of self-social relations, as well as categorical interactions, on the basis of multiple factors, speaking directly, for example, to Colombijn's discussion of the importance of class (Colombijn 2009, 12). Concurrently, for Indonesians and Eurasians in my data, there is a critical emphasis on kin and client-patron relationships.

The problems of categorizing the archipelago's peoples into these three categories can be seen when we examine the 'European' label. Under this category, the administration included:

- a. Any people in Indonesia who stemmed from the Americas;
- b. Any people in Indonesia who stemmed from Europe;
- c. All women married to men classified as European;
- d. All in wedlock children born to men classified as European;
- e. All out-of-wedlock children formally recognized by fathers classified as European.

The domain 'European' therefore included multiple sub-domains such as 'Dutch', 'Americans' etc. Under the 'Dutch' subcategory, the administration recognized:

- a. Dutch singles, couples and children who had recently come to Indonesia from the Netherlands;

- b. Long term residents of the archipelago whose families spanned generations in Indonesia (Dutch-Indonesians);
- c. The indigenous or 'mixed-blood/Eurasian' wives of men classified as 'Dutch';
- d. The children of 'c';
- e. As a result of 'c', all generations descending from 'c' (including mixed-blood + mixed-blood who were 'Dutch' by virtue of 'd').

In fact, in *Nederlands Indië*, the majority of the European population was composed of Dutch-Indonesians and Eurasians, people born and raised in Indonesia, "whose first impressions were Indonesian, who formed their worldview in their natal milieu" (Bosma & Raben 2003, 11). Consequently:

[...] quickly after the first-generation colonialists, communities arose that although they had close contact with the colonial administration and colonial regulations, they had equally close ties with local circumstances and people; a strong local perspective. [...] This world [the *Indische* world; HB] was a [...] local community under colonial administration, an administration that left its marks on those communities, yes, but communities that had their own logic and evolved independently. The colonial administration was a sometimes dominant, but not an all pervasive, element.

(Bosma & Raben 2003, 11)

Although scholars regularly maintain that the colonial classificatory system was predicated on 'race', the people content of each category suggests that 'race' was not the only contributing principle to the colonial system of categorization. Instead, the Dutch system evidences a rigorous adherence to patrilineality. Where Dutch women married Indonesian men, their children – if that Indonesian society was patrilineal – belonged to the 'house' of their fathers, suggesting the importance of ordering through the patriline to the colonial regime. The entire colonial classificatory system appears to rest on the ordering principles that inform descent groups, including the establishment of group membership, responsibilities and rights aligned with that status, including who could and could not own land and the careful delineation of belonging in the social sphere; in short, the imposition of order on (potential) social chaos. Although it is certainly the case that a multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds regularly co-mingled in the South-East-Asian world, hybrid ethnic classifications did not represent an alternative category for the colonial administration. Unilineal taxonomies are intended to preclude hybridity; one's descent is Dutch or Javanese, for example. Yet even a cursory examination of the European category reveals its hybridity; the label 'European' glosses as monolithic but the 'contents' of the category are decidedly not. We ignore the contrast between self-perceived identities and imposed identities at

our own peril; classificatory members of the category 'European' did not necessarily self-identify as such. A tension between who I describe as being, and how I am categorized as being, existed for individuals within the system; the difficulty inherent in that etic/emic distinction critically escalated during WWII.

Expatriate life stories speak directly to the polymorphy of the Indonesian archipelago, its multiple ethnic layers and the cultural and land-body formations that lie at the core of *Indische* identity. The daily realities of Eurasian life confronted their official (legal) delineation. Governing bodies, first the Dutch, then the Japanese, and finally the Government of Indonesia, negated the indigenous matrilineal webs that bound Eurasians to their land. However, during the colonial period, the slotting of Eurasians as 'Europeans' did not have the same connotations as the identification would have during and after the Japanese occupation. Pre-World War II, many Eurasians were an integral part of the Indonesian social fabric; they were members of a society that numbered literally thousands of diverse ethnic groups across the archipelago. Subsequent to the Japanese occupation, however, 'European' denoted, as per Japanese and subsequent republican rhetoric, a dangerous alien in our midst. The Japanese, who "made mathematical ancestry decisive" (Van Schaik 1996, 56), abolished the tripartite classificatory system and stipulated blood quantum as the wellspring of ethnic, hence externally prescribed, identity: Dutch-indigenous persons with at least 50% European blood went to the camps with Europeans; those with less than 50% stayed outside the camps (Van Schaik 1996, 56).

The republicans/revolutionaries in Indonesia followed the Japanese formula. During the occupation and afterwards, the amount of 'European blood' coursing through one's veins had important consequences: blood spared you from incarceration, or it did not; blood rendered you an 'inside' member of the Indonesian social fabric, or it set you apart (outside) as a 'non-Asian' foreigner. In his discussion of the Indonesian revolution and reservoirs of violence in Indonesian society, Cribb notes the implications of these externally imposed identities during the occupation and after the surrender of the Japanese. Seeking an explanation for the significant amount of violence directed at the Eurasian population, he analyzes their importance as figureheads of the *Indische*-independence-with-association option and correlates the attacks on their persons with an Indonesian 'inferiority' complex as the nation embarked on independence (Cribb 2007, 31-48).

While racial categories were not determinate of social relations in late colonial Indonesia, they most certainly were the key factor for the subsequent life trajectories of those who lived in the colony and retained a percentage of European blood. Interviewees, who adamantly avow that they were citizens of the Indies, found that their official classification as 'European' overrode their self-

perception. From European, to camp internee, to victim of the *Bersiap* rage, the official labelling equally determined eligibility for 'repatriation'. The categorical affiliation ("European"), on the one hand the source of persecution in occupation and post WWII Indonesia, simultaneously offered escape for classificatory members through the possibility of a new life, often initially in the Netherlands.

While, as I note below, the term '*Indisch(e)*' in the Netherlands includes 'white' settlers from Indonesia, I separate out the two labels on the basis on my narrators' identity references. I use '*Indische*' as a correspondent term for 'Eurasians', and 'settlers' for the descendants of long term Dutch families in Indonesia, or Dutch who self-identified as Indonesian.

Battered souls: The *Indische* (Dutch-Indonesians) in the Netherlands

The *Indische* form a distinct group in the Netherlands where Indonesia "sits in the heart" (Pattynama 2003, 3) of national culture. Memories of the East Indies are not even peripheral to Canadian or American society, nor does either country have a deep historical bond with Indonesia outed in public discourse and national literature. Moreover, the *Indische* people in the Netherlands have formed an identifiable community with attendant political and social standing (Pattynama 2003, 4). The fluid symbol of that community is the remembered Indië.

Pattynama's analysis of *Indische* literature distinguished between first and second-generation *Indische* writers and isolated the narrative building blocks common to both:

- a. The silence imposed on their collective past;
- b. The disappointing trip back to Indonesia;
- c. The wartime father;
- d. The family stories;
- e. The ongoing problem of the 'I'.

First-generation repatriates in the Netherlands write themselves as a fated community bound by the destiny that brought them to that country. This community-through-circumstance resists identification through 'race' since in the Netherlands, '*Indische*' includes 'full blooded' whites (Pattynama 2003, 3). Unlike *Indische* interviewees in North America, who are immersed in their current societies, many *Indische* people in the Netherlands resist full textual/bodily immersion into Dutch society through the repatriate stories that define their Indonesia-to-Netherlands transition. Concurrently, the schema that binds their personal identities to Indonesian place permeates a processual 'I' formulation that situates Dutch society as 'not-me'.

The difference between North-American *Indische* absorption into the social fabric, and *Indische* resistance to a parallel trajectory in Holland, stems from the haunting questions of identity that are ever-present in the Netherlands: there is no reprieve from Indië for the *Indische* community. Adults and children live in a milieu where, seemingly, their past is ever-present in the form of national discussions and “technologies of memory” (Sturken 1997) that concretize, while re-constructing, that past. As visible signifiers of colonialism, including Dutch-indigenous sexuality, the *Indische* are not only re-inscribed with the how and why of history, but with ongoing political and social significations. Whether the East Indies are paradise lost, evil regime, or a *verzonken* (‘drowned’) Indonesia (Pattynama 2003), *Indische* identity transforms as Indies mythology in the ‘Motherland’ alters. Dutch-Indonesian narratives in the Netherlands signal their struggle with self and group identity and the search for “viable practical models to help them endure” (Cole 1998, 285).

While public discourses, made and remade, reverberate on the bodies of *Indische* individuals and community, evidence from *Indische* literature illustrates that group members are fully participant in the search for those viable models through the remaking/re-shaping of the *Indische* identity. For second-generation writers, the problem of ‘I’ making is compounded by the problem of received identity, the burden of first-generation ‘I/we’ transmission. Their eternal return to the re-working of *Indische* identity building blocks suggests incomplete mourning for an inconvertible and unspeakable loss initially suffered by parents and transmitted to children as identity legacies. Thus, first-generation writers articulate memories silenced upon their introduction into a Dutch society focused on its plight under the Nazis (Withuis 1994, 46-74), while second-generation writers exemplify Morrison’s (1989, 154) discussion of the slap and embrace relationship they maintain with parental transmissions. Symptomatic readings of both narrative sets suggest writers continue to bang on the doors of Dutch awareness in order to achieve experiential validation, reclaim voice, and construct an *Indisch*-Dutch identity.

A North-American interviewee expressed regarding a sister in Holland:

[We are speaking of being *Indisch* in the Netherlands as opposed to North America]

Interviewee: There is no recognition, none, of what they have experienced.

Self: (!) The discussion of *Indische* people is everywhere!

Interviewee: Oh exactly. They talk *about* them, not *to* them. And now there is a lot of “not that old song again” – you know? Even some of the kids have it. (Oral History Interview, June 2005, Tape 1, Dutch-Settler, female)

Second-generation writers confront Goss' claim that, "many of the Eurasians who came over as adults were indeed never able to feel at home in the Netherlands, but their children did" (Goss 2000, 18). His confident assertion is clearly not reflective of second-generation children that carry memories inspired by "living room conversation, servants, and *Indische* literature" (Pattynama 2003, 4). Instead, children write a schizophrenic sense of non-belonging while belonging in terms of their biological nation, exhibiting that the Indies-to-Netherlands origin myth profoundly affects both self and national identification (Lyotard 1993, 193).

Since Goss overgeneralizes second-generation adaptation, we can ask if his attribution to first-generation *Indisch*-Dutch citizens – that they were never able to feel 'at home' in the Netherlands – is an accurate one. Interviews with *Indische* people in the Netherlands suggest the situation is far more complex than a simple belonging/non-belonging polarity. There are first-generation immigrants, such as the narrator presented in this article, that came to feel at home in Holland, recall the past but do not construct their identities wholly on or in it, and think of Indië with love, but not with reclamatory longing. In short, they do not participate in Dermoût's assertion:

I have experienced a rather traumatic past. Therefore, I can only write about one subject – that time, those consequences, in that place at that time, and never about a subject now and here. (Van der Woude 1974, 74)

On the other hand, one of my interviewee notes:

Self: How do you define yourself today? What is your nationality?
 Interviewee: Oh, Dutch of course. I am Dutch. There is no question.
 Self: So, you are not involved politically with the *Indische* community?
 Interviewee: No. I have other *Indische* friends of course, but I have just as many friends who have never been to Indonesia. You know, there is no going back... There is no going back there. I think that to keep memories in front of you like that ... you forget to live now. I am not taking anything away from what happened. But you cannot change it, acceptance is hard, but it is important.

(Oral History Interview 2004, Tape 3, Dutch-Settler, female)

The building blocks outlined by Pattynama as fundamental elements in *Indische* narratives exhibit some overlap with my data but deviate in others. In this paper, I focus on two themes identified by Pattynama: the 'father/wartime father' and 'family stories' in the context of an overwhelming narrative/structural focus on kinship in my own North-American data. Indeed, the 'father/wartime father' arises in all Dutch and Eurasian narratives as a sub-theme of Family and kin, The occupation, and Exile/immigration in my collected narratives. I additionally touch

on two dominant landmarks in *Indische* lives that Pattynama does not identify as narrative building blocks, but that formed a focus in my collected oral histories: (1) the Japanese occupation and (2) exile in the Netherlands, experienced as the 'betwixt and between' stage Turner refers to as liminality (1969, 93-111), and the subsequent immigration. Space prohibits an in-depth analysis of any of these themes, but the two latter ones are integral to the cause-effect sequencing that frames my narrators' life stories. It is the immigration watershed that separates North-American narratives from *Indische* self-understanding in the Netherlands. Once my interviewees left the Netherlands they ceased to participate in the ongoing discussions surrounding Dutch colonialism and Eurasian identities.

The interview

Excerpts from an extensive Eurasian interview conducted while the narrator was visiting Canada signal the departure point of my discussion.⁵ Born in Batavia, the narrator remained in Indonesia until 1949, when she and her husband repatriated to the Netherlands. In grounding this discussion in her narratives, I make no claim to representative status for the excerpts of her life story. It does, however, validate the notion that "each human being occupies a legitimate position from which to experience, interpret, and constitute the world" (Stiver 1993, 409). As the life story emerges in its unique, particular presence, "social structures are as recoverable from single social beings as they are from groups of them" (Stanley 1993, 413).

The interviewee, who I will call Ali, lived in the Netherlands where she remained subsequent to her repatriation. Ali spent six months per year in Indonesia, where she built a house on a small island approximately 26 sea miles from Singapore. Via a mutual friend, I initially contacted Ali's daughter and son-in-law, let us call them Piet and Jennie, in the hopes of interviewing *them*. That email resulted in a response that Ali was on her way to Canada and an invitation to come and stay with them so that I could meet and interview her. I accepted with alacrity. The interviews took place in Piet and Jennie's home over an extended weekend. In all, I recorded four full tapes of data (90 minutes per side), although a good amount of conversation took place that I did not tape. On a number of occasions, when the conversation became intensely personal, I turned off the recorder. Throughout the interview process, Jennie remained indispensable. Fascinated, and having previously engaged some of Ali's stories, she acted as prompter: "Was that the time?", or, "Oh but Mama, where was your brother?"

I introduce excerpts from the interview and combine and contrast them with narrative bits drawn from North-American *Indische* narratives. Unlike Ali,

⁵ Both these wonderful women have since passed away.

they reside in countries where ‘*Indië*’ evokes no angst, no communal or historical memories, and no clashes between widely divergent memories on what or how it was. Ali’s *Indisch*-in-the-Netherlands remembering further confronts Pattynama’s analyses of the life story building blocks that characterize (Netherlands) *Indische* recall. Her narrative, while containing some of the building blocks identified by Pattynama, deviates significantly in others, while exhibiting overlap with my North-American Eurasian database narratives.

The format of Eurasian narratives required an adjustment to transcription since naming – both proper names and place names – is an oral composition technique utilized by these narrators to establish identity, articulate history, and contextualize bodies in space. Replacing a name with a placeholder such as ‘X’ or ‘XX’, destroyed and misrepresented the narrative sequence. Therefore, I have taken the liberty of replacing all names in the narratives with wholly fictive ones, not only to ensure that the texts do not lose their exemplary flavour, but also to protect identities that, in these narratives, are easily traceable. Indeed, that is the thematic consequence of the narrative schemata: the binding of people and events to place. In all cases, I have imposed a semi-structure on the free flow of our conversation, as I did not follow a question-answer format, nor did I direct our conversations into certain channels, favouring an ‘unravelling process’ that would allow the interviewee to follow the skeins of her thought as one story or memory evoked another. To impose textual order, I correlated diverse excerpts into focal themes. I also ‘cleaned up’ hesitations, some repetitions, and used English translations for Indonesian words. A number of paradigms however, such as *gezellig* or *feestje*, presented nuance problems in translation; I could not get it ‘just right’. I settled for approximation.

The *Indische* family: The right way to initiate a story

I am Ali Antonia van Meer, born in Batavia, Netherlands Indië, 1923. My mother was Charlotta Inge Rijker and my father, Hans Bohn. They met in Indonesia. My father was born in Putten and worked with XYZ *Maatschappij* in the Netherlands. He was sent to the Indies, yes, a young man of about 23. Well ... his company had an office in the Batavia harbour and so he arrived. Naturally then, he needed to find a place to live so he landed up with my Oma, he rented a room from her. *Ja*, she had just started to rent rooms, so he was her first ‘guest’, I would say. Well there he met my mother.⁶

⁶ From this point forward, unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are from: Oral History Interview, *Indische* female, Tapes 1-4, May, 2004.

Compare the beginning of her narrative with this sequence lifted from a male *Indisch*-American's letter to me:

My name is Johannes van der Haven, Date of birth 10-24-26 in Bandoeng, Java, Netherlands East Indies, presently called Indonesia. Youngest of 5 children. Father Hendrik Pieter van der Haven and Mother Petronella Josephina Carolina Gustavina Schwager. Father was a trader in coffee, tea and rubber. He left Holland in 1906 and was a 'full blooded' Dutchman. Mother had at least 25 to 50% Indonesian heritage. From an early age it was understood that Java was our home and Holland a faraway item ... I consider that I had a very happy youth until World War II struck ...

(Oral History Interview, Dutch-Indonesian-American male, initial correspondence prior to interview, cited with permission, June 2005)

The centrality of family to the Eurasian life/narrative is immediately apparent: Eurasian interviewees uniformly embarked on their oral histories by positioning themselves within their extended families. Names of the parents were given in full; although I have replaced the proper names for the mother in the quote found above, the writer did in fact provide me with all five of his mother's given names; names that clearly outlined her kinship with historically identifiable Eurasian families that reach deep into the colonial period. The narrative scheme further requires the narrator's position in the birth order and then explication of the father's employment position and the mother's bloodline. The latter is the focus; the father's line will disappear in his parents' generation as narrators dismiss both the patriline and the Netherlands, while they embark on an expansion of their matrilineal roots within their Indies home.

... My Oma was also *Indisch*; she was divorced, oh! a very courageous woman. That did not happen very often in that time (divorce) ... she was self-made, self-taught – she studied, she delivered babies – her own and other peoples ... and then she rented rooms and became a teacher at a Dutch-Chinese school. (chuckles) I don't know if I should say this but! Opposed to what happens now that children are never to be touched! ... well the Chinese parents they said, if they don't behave, well you let them know ...!

... My mother also went to school, well my Oma insisted, education is so important ... and she became a teacher at a Dutch-Indonesian school ...

During the 19th century Eurasian families progressively placed a greater emphasis on education for both boys and girls. As Ali notes, her Oma insisted on education for her daughters and her granddaughters. Consider, if you will, the years in which this occurred! Ali herself was born in 1923, her mother in the late 1890's, and her grandmother in the 1860's (see Figure 1 for a kinship chart showing Ali's

matriline). Her Oma was a divorced woman in a time when divorce was virtually unheard of in 'Dutch' society, and 'self-taught', becoming by turns a midwife, a teacher, and a small hotelkeeper. She ensured that Ali's mother also became a teacher. Ali herself completed her *HBS* (secondary school) before the war intervened in her further plans; she has certainly stressed education for her own very successful children. These women utilized education as a tool for self-sufficiency.

Ali: ... I knew my great-grandparents well too you know ... My great-grandfather was a de Roo. That was Oma's name after she divorced – her maiden name. My Oma had four children. My mother was the youngest daughter, and there were in all three daughters and one son; he was the youngest of all the children.

Self: Did they all go to Holland after the war?

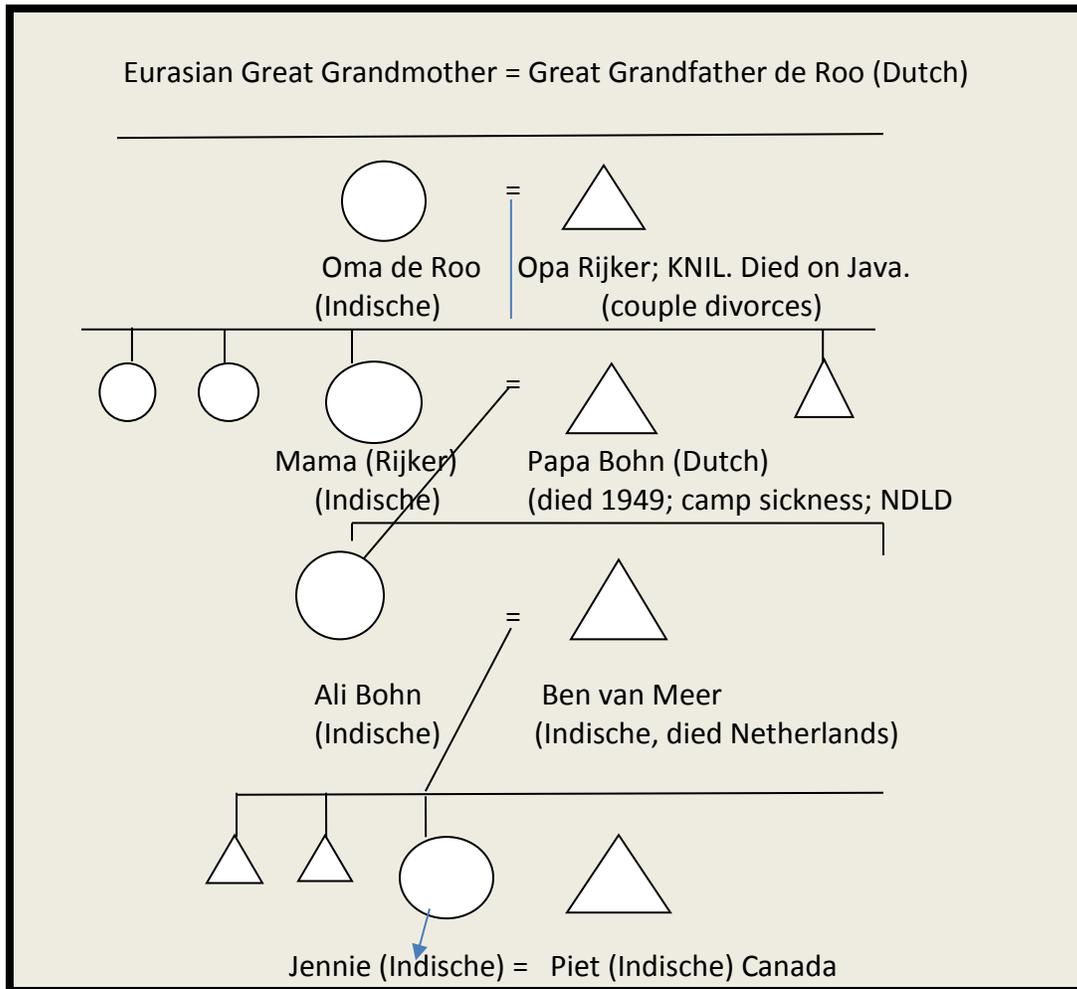
Ali: My Oma died in Indonesia. My Opa was in the army (KNIL). He died on Java. Well Mammie and Pappie went to the Netherlands, but Ben [her husband] and I, we stayed ...

In terms of the four generations of kinship data collected from Ali, in each generation of her matriline, women married Dutch or Eurasian men. The families were very close:

Ali: ... Naturally ... well you know ... I was a child before the war. [She was 19 in 1942.] I had always a lovely youth, a darling father, my mother was, well extremely, well (laughs) well really, a dear. My Oma lived two streets behind us, we went every day to her house. My sister was Papa's darling, my brother was my mother's, but I, I was Oma's darling. When ... I was 13, I remember, it was time for my first HBS ball, and I wanted a long dress and my mother she thought that utterly unnecessary ... but my Oma, she had a charming, simply charming long dress made up for me, green tucks and frills, organdy ... it was ... oh so lovely! And I believe, no I know for sure, I remember that I went with a pimply youth, on the back of his bike ... off to the ball ...

(Jennie interjecting: On the back of a bike with that dress!)

... holding a lantern. I can't remember anything of the party, but I remember that ...



went to stay with them. Later my parents took us to my grandfather⁸ at ?Sukibumi,⁹ – so nice and cool – and then later we rented a house there ... and then we built a house there because my father never wanted to go back to the Netherlands. ... yes, that was to be mammie and pappie’s house ... and we never lived in it, and then there were Indonesians that wanted to break down everything, tear it apart, and they burned it down. Yes, they burned it. After the war. Burnt. We never lived there.

Self: Who burnt things?

Ali: Youth gangs. Yes, ... so terrible. (shakes head and looks off into distance ...)

In her discussion of family, Ali introduces crucial information. As the kinship chart makes abundantly clear, Ali’s matriline reaches back into the VOC period on Java. In succeeding generations, Dutch men came to Indonesia, married an indigenous or Eurasian woman and remained in Indonesia; the pattern of Eurasians marrying Eurasians also emerges.

As well, it is evident that multiple children were born to each of the couples. Whom did the siblings marry? Eurasian interviews quickly revealed the answer: siblings married other Eurasians, indigenous people, or Dutch men/women. Tentacle-like marriage intersections crept across Indonesian society, linking geo-spatial terrains, deepening in time, mingling blood, languages, and cultural customs. Networks of kin interacted together, picnicked together, talked together about their lives, including, as one informant noted, their politics:

Interviewee: ... My brother was married to a Sundanese woman, and her brothers, who visited us all the time, were very political. So of course, we discussed politics, of course we did. My mother, who was *Indisch* as you already know, had strong opinions herself on those matters, and she was not afraid to speak out.

Self: What kind of opinions did she have, or your sister-in-law’s brothers?

Interviewee: Well I can tell you we did not have Soekarno in mind, but we did think it was time for the Indies to stand on their own and govern themselves. The Netherlands really did not know anything about our lives and we thought it would be better for the country if we could steer it ourselves. For my mother this did not mean getting rid of the Dutch. She was married to my father for heaven’s sake! But men like my sister in law’s brothers who were educated, they were getting tired of being treated as

⁸ This was the grandfather who was divorced from her Oma. Divorce did not usually cause a lapse in familial relations and in fact, this grandfather re-married later to a Eurasian woman that was kin linked.

⁹ Words marked with ? were inaudible on tape.

children. They wanted some say, they wanted to do something, something meaningful. It was really time Jetty. You could see it coming.

Self: How did your father feel about all of this?

Interviewee: Papa? Papa was Indonesian. He was never going back to the Netherlands. So, he agreed. But he always told the men (his son-in-laws thus) that it would have to go slow ...

(Oral History Interview, *Indisch*-American female, August 2005, Tape 2)

Family narrative forms the backdrop for all utterances that arise in an *Indisch* interview, whether these be political, economic, historical or personal. In turn, families are located in place/space; the landscape permeates the discursive skein and the two merge as an inseparable concept in the narrator's understanding of his/her Indies life. As Pattynama has noted, family stories are endemic to Eurasian (*Indische*) remembering in the Netherlands and we see this in Ali's narrative as well as in all interviews I conducted with *Indische* peoples in North America.

Family: The Dutch father and the *Indische* mother

Cribb states:

Indische culture was marked by distinctive uses of language, dress, cuisine, entertainment, recreation, housing, family structure and so on, all of them loosely speaking hybrid between Western and Asian cultures.

(Cribb 2003, 52)

Ali's kinship chart demonstrates that women overwhelmingly contribute the indigenous element to Euro-other marriages, and their background was vital to the socialization process and the hybridization of cultures. Mothers, as well as Asian nursemaids, transmitted diverse Indonesian or Euro-Asian customs, norms, and mores to children.¹⁰

¹⁰ I discussed the role of women in the Dutch-Indonesian household with an Indonesian academic visiting Canada. She was also the only example in my database of a marriage between a Dutch woman and an Indonesian man. Her Dutch grandmother and Javanese grandfather saw their family torn apart during the Revolution, with a number of sons supporting the Dutch, and an equal number the Republic. My interviewee is the daughter of the eldest son. Commenting on the importance of women in the socialization process, she imparted that her grandmother ensured that all of her sons spoke fluent Dutch as well as their natal Javanese. Since her grandmother transmitted the Dutch language to her father, he considered it extremely important that his daughter become familiar with both sides of her heritage. He therefore hired an instructor to teach his wife and children the language since she was home with the children; here the importance of the socialization process is explicitly articulated.

Ali: I always asked myself, about my father you know, how a young man who came to a totally strange country, did not know the language, and how he loved the country!!! How did that happen? Well ... my mother! That's how! He got to know it well. My parents married in (mammie was ...) ... let's see I was born in 1923, they must have married in 1921, then three more children, well four, the second baby died at birth so then there was five years between the next two ...

Taylor (1984) compellingly analyzed the matrilineal clan character of access to regent power in Batavia among the Dutch men who circulated through the *Raad van Indië* ('Council of the Indies'; acted as advisory to the Dutch East Indies Company Governor General), and discussed European male and Asian female alliances. The pattern evinces great historical stability. As Ali's (and other *Indische*) kinship chart demonstrates, Dutch men came to *Nederlands Indië*, took a bride of Indonesian or Eurasian descent, and then, turning their face away from their home country, they attached himself to kin, people, and the land in which their children were born. Indeed, the pattern reiterates in each generation. From the 17th century onwards, Dutch men who married into Eurasian/Indonesian families accessed Indonesian life, culture, identity, and interaction through women and their matrilineal links. *Indische* families are interconnected through women; the links that weave the web-like structures that absorbed Dutch men.

The attributions assigned by interviewees to either parent were startling in their similarities. Ali offers a typical example:

Ali: ... my father a darling ... He had always been a quiet, rather closed man, (compared to my mother) ...
 ... My mother was very religious; I have mentioned that a few times ... It was a carefree life. My mother was cheerful (*opgewekt*) and loved life, my father a darling, we all believed that God was good. Well, then came the war. And then ... it was not so easy to believe that anymore. But somehow ... it is embedded ... your faith comes back. We were raised, well that there is no difference in race, colour. We had an open, free house ... laughter, people in and out ... Ahh. The house ... (grins) we had a verandah ... and a flat roof, we always climbed up there, naturally because it was strongly forbidden ...!

This contrast between a quiet, rather reserved father, and a joyful, positive, very 'alive', and strong mother dominates these family narratives. 'A light touch' might be the best way in which to render my impressionistic response to the maternal style conveyed by informants. Life portraits were filled with the sunshine and the 'openness' Ali ascribes to her mother, and the formidable strength the mother possessed is often openly as well as subtly conveyed: "my mother was, well extremely, well (laughs) well really, a dear".

These quiet, beloved fathers had no interest in a return to the Netherlands. Family relations between his Indonesian family and his natal family were rarely close, not even subsequent to ‘repatriation’.

Ali: ... I only knew my father’s mother a little ... we had very little contact; well his parents were not happy that he married in the Indies ...

... Father did go to the Netherlands again ... well the way the holidays worked was – one time a year *binnenlands* (inside the country) holiday, one time in six years – 6 months holiday to the Netherlands, but that included the boat trip and that took two months, so yes, all in all, eight months.

Self: Did you meet you father’s family? (she has not mentioned them at all in 3 hours)

Ali: ... well yes, we saw my father’s family – there was no quaaarrel ... but my father felt he had outgrown them. One of his aunts once said ... he was different, he was always different. Yes, he was ... he studied and learnt ... I did meet my Oma on that side when I was two, and then when I was eight ... I remember, I can remember, we arrived at Den Haag ... and then ah! I remember this beautiful big house, and *Ooms* and *Tantes* and all well – not unkind ... (hesitates) no, not unkind at all. (Did you go back in the 1930s?) Yes, in 1931 – I was 8. But not in 1937. No, not again, not again. That was it. Papa was not so interested ...

“All well – not unkind ... (hesitates) no, not unkind at all.” Ali finds good in everyone; had she found anything to complain of in her father’s family I would have been extremely surprised. Nevertheless, the gaps in her text and her wavering voice reveal that the ‘not unkind’ family greeted mother, father, and children with – let us say – something less than enthusiasm. Evidently, the Dutch family had decided on good manners when greeting the Indonesian connection, but not much more.

“I only knew my father’s mother a little ... we had very little contact; well his parents were not happy that he married in the Indies.” Why? This theme emerged consistently in Eurasian narratives; when I put the question to informants, it troubled them, and they tried to avoid it. One daughter (family members were usually present at Eurasian interviews) urged: “Oh go on, tell her, Mama. What does it matter?” The narrator responded:

... We were not Dutch. My mother especially, they objected to her. Not that Mama ever let it bother her, no, even when they came to the Netherlands; she just carried on with her life. It hurt her for Papa, because there was no family. You need family. Our family was still in Indonesia, I have told you we were so close, and Oma and Opa – dead. Then there was no one in Holland and that was strange. Papa said it didn’t matter, but it did, it hurt, for them both. They said he died of camp sickness, but I think he died of a broken

heart. Broken because he loved the Indies, he loved the family, the life and there was nothing left. He gave up. Mama ... never did ...

(Oral History Interview, May 2005, Tape 2, *Indisch*-Canadian female)

An abhorrence of mingled blood is unsurprising in a Dutch society at that time characterized by ‘pillars’, where children ideally did not marry outside of a religious branch, let alone outside of a ‘Dutch’ ethnicity. However, given their immersion in the plurality of South-East Asian societies, informants were hurt and alienated by the marked differences in the ethnic interaction they encountered in the Netherlands as compared to Indonesia: “I never witnessed any discrimination although I am sure it happened ... people being what they are and what they do ...” (*Indisch*-American male, May 2005, correspondence, cited with permission).

The above Eurasian interviewee is responding to my query regarding discrimination in Indonesia against *Indische* people by the Dutch. Indeed, allegations of discrimination in the Indies are impossible to verify through my data. Eurasian consultants state that they did not notice or experience discrimination against them by the Dutch in Indonesia and avow that they did not discriminate against indigenous people; *they were part of our families*. However, they did feel familial and societal discrimination against them in the Netherlands, often subtly in the form of comments on their eating habits, manner of dress, and manners.

... She didn’t like us. She didn’t. She would say things like ... “Yes, well, it is easy to see that you are used to servants looking after you, but you don’t have that here. You better get used to it.” Or she would say, “Hmm ... yes, well *you people* don’t like potatoes” if I or my sister left a potato on our plate. All the time, pick, pick, pick. It was so hard after the camp. We longed for home ...

(Oral History Interview, June 2005, Tape 1, *Indisch*-American female; emphasis mine)

Given the family/social reception many Eurasians/*Indische* received in the Netherlands, and the loss of kin ties that joined families together across the Indonesian landscape, with little in the way of new family ties to bind them in the Netherlands, it is no wonder that the Eurasian/*Indische* life narrative is rooted in family stories. The alienation they experienced in the Netherlands aligned with a deep mourning for Indonesian families/nation/homes, indeed an entire identity, lost.

Family/kin: Women and the Japanese occupation

Self: Did you talk about independence?

Ali: ... No, no we never did. We had a lovely family life, but really, not a lot of politics. My father did get the (?) *Haagse Post*, it was rose coloured, very lively, there were always great satires, drawings you know, ... Well that paper still exists today, but it is so different ... laughs! Not so lovely anymore ...!

... We learned that the Japanese were coming closer and closer. So some of the families ... decided to go to? (Dwajalaja?) on Middle Java – what were we thinking – that the Japs would not get there? So, everything we packed it all up (gives list). So, then! We had nothing – there was a house free across from Oma and we lived there. We lived across from Oma. So then – there were the Japs. They got there. And nothing that was important or could help them could fall into their hands. Anything that we could not let the Japs have, we had to burn it. My father, well with a lot of others, they burned everything ...

... Ahh ... My father's life work, his life work, with his own hands, I don't know how long he had worked on those papers; he had to burn it himself. So, we had nothing. That's how that goes. Yes, that is when I saw my father cry. The first time I ever saw him cry. I remember he walked into Oma's house, I still see him today, there was an old-fashioned fridge, there he stood, he leaned ... so broken, and *ja* ... he cried ... Somehow, we got back to our old house, some of these things are all mixed up because it was such a difficult time. But, we got back to our house. And they came and got pappie. They took him away. Well then, in 1942, pappie was in the camp.
Self: Where?

Ali: Well, in the beginning in Batavia.

Jennie: In the beginning Mama? He was moved then?

Ali: *Ja*, they moved them and moved them ... You know it is very sad, we never talked about it, ever afterwards. We never talked. I never saw him again

Self: Never again?

Ali: No, no, after they took him ... (Ali saw her father again after the war but was not to see him again during the war).

... We never went, we didn't go into the camps. Well some *Indische* people did go to camps, some of our family, my cousin, among others. But it depended on where you lived. We had to interact with Japs. *Ja* ... there were anxious moments, but I never had a terrible experience. On the contrary, we had a 'good' Japanese man who lived in our street. (She picks this up later) Now our father was gone, we had no money, and we had to live. So mammie had to think of something. Well, my mother was very religious, she went to the church often, and she had a lot of contact with the minister. Each year she made up Christmas baskets for the poor and the minister he decided something had to be done about the poor, everyone was hurting – the Japanese you know. So, he decided to re-distribute goods to those who needed them, and then he asked my mother one day – do you possibly have

a free room that we can use to distribute rice and oil? Do you think you could regulate that for me? Well yes, mammie said she could – *ja*, then it was done. We used my father's study, and then (whoosh) there came a weight scale and tables, and *tombak*, well that was the start of the shop. We were not hungry. There was the distribution post. Well we had to live. Something had to be done ... and then it changed even more ...

... I can't quite remember how it all started, this was all mammie you know. Well – one woman made *croquetten*, one made bread, the other made crafts from glass, or from straw ... embroidered purses – oh my sister-in-law made beautiful ones she sold with us – quite a family affair! Another made pastries, or – well all kinds of things. If you come and visit me in Indonesia I can show you everything! So: we earned everything on commission. We would sell it and then we got a percentage. Well it went wonderfully! Life had to go on. There were birthdays ... I remember, well I remembered later with hindsight. You know (she reflected this completely apropos) Indonesia is an extremely fruitful land, you put something in the ground and it grows ...

As soon as the Japanese established themselves in any area of the Dutch East Indies, they proceeded with the mass incarceration of all Dutch/European men, women, and children. In some areas, Eurasians formed part of the target population, while settlers (Dutch-Indonesians) in my database were all incarcerated. Whether inside or outside of the camps, the Japanese split Eurasian mothers and children from Dutch husbands. This was blanket policy under the Japanese, all women and children spent the war separated from their men, including, and dependent on blood quantum, their sons after they turned 10. Wives, girls, and young boys fashioned resources to survive. As shown in Figure 2, those *Indische* women like Ali's mother, who lived outside of the barbed wire enclosures, harnessed their knowledge of the social environment and possibilities inherent in tight family bonds and clan networks to survive. As Ali notes, "it was the women and children – they did it together." The strong reliance on female kin is evident in the way in which the women supported each other by living together and pooling resources. It emerges again in the structure of her mother's family shop; almost all of the female kin submitted goods for sale and relied on the distribution center for their extended family's economic well-being throughout the war.

Ali met her husband through that same shop:

Ali: ... 1945 – well then came my husband – well he wasn't at all my husband then, he came home to his parents and they were people who sold things through our shop. Isn't it lovely how life links together (muses for a moment). His mother's first husband died right before the war, and then

she married Opa van Steeg – a wonderful man and he loved her and the kids. Oh! how she loved him and she took *such* care of him – well because of the four kids you know – he married her and loved them all – *ja*. He was also in the camp the entire war and so my mother-in-law, she was not in the camps, she lived with *her* sister-in-law because her man was in a camp too – yes, it was the women and children, – and they did it all together...¹¹

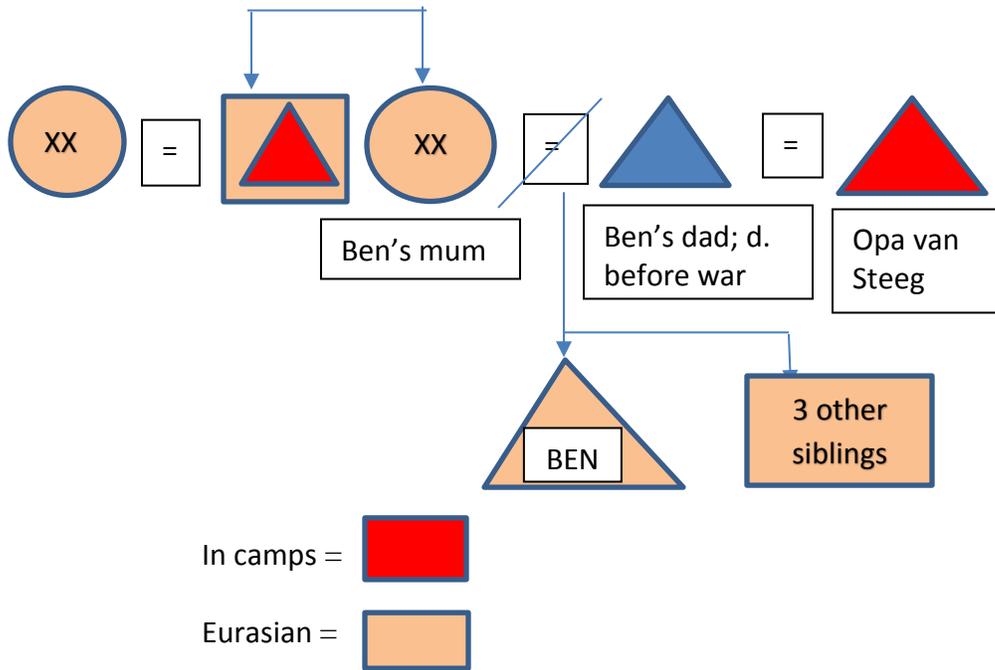


Figure 2. Ali family housing arrangements during WWII. Those in camps marked in red, Indische marked in orange and women who lived together during the war denoted by XX.

A small number of Dutch informants noted that some Eurasians escaped incarceration and I have narrative data that suggests resentment informing boundary demarcation between those who did and did not experience incarceration. Ali's statement, "well no ... not as bad as the camps, no but we did have anxious, yes very anxious moments", was offered without any provocation from Jennie or myself. We never queried for example, if 'inside' was worse than 'outside' – such

¹¹ An illustration of the manner in which re-marriage was accomplished within the linked circles. More importantly, the parents of the man she would marry were linked to her mother's sister. Finally, her statement: "... how she loved him and she took such care of him – well because of the four kids you know – he married her and loved them all" – is a wonderful introduction to a possible analysis of an 'understood pact' regarding economic and other responsibilities in marriage. I intend to probe this sequence and others like it, in a separate article, where I can focus solely on a single set of discourses.

a question would not have occurred to us. Ali's uneasy assessment suggests that she is overtly aware of resentment or criticism – of a 'we had it worse than you' syndrome. Found in Ali's text and not in the narratives of North-American Eurasian interviewees, this un-sought explanation answering unspoken criticism suggests a discourse in Netherlands – or Netherlands-*Indische* – society not found in North America.

The terror of the *Bersiap* period at the end of the Japanese occupation on Java sent a message to Eurasian men and women that the new revolutionary regime categorized them as not only non-indigenous but as aliens. They were Eurasian, contaminated by European blood. Where prior to the war they had been proud of their unique blended identities, those same identities now became a dual burden; they were recast as pollutant and dangerous within the Indonesian social fabric and their identities as 'Dutch' became a challenge in the repatriation process where many in the Netherlands equally perceived them as pollutant.

Kinship: Papa, or 'the wartime father'

Male remembering of the war period is suffused with the isolation and physical brutality of their wartime experience. Moved constantly, their accounts travel from one location of extreme deprivation and hard labour to another. Eurasian men, who overwhelmingly fought alongside the Dutch against the Japanese invaders (indeed they were a critical component of KNIL forces), formed a significant portion of POWs and were utilized throughout South East Asia as slave labour. They suffered with the prisoners taken from other Allied forces, particularly the Australians, British – including a significant contingent of Canadians who fought under British command in WWII – and Americans. Violence, terror, torture, death, and exhaustion permeate the narratives, and desperation resurfaces in the narrative tone. As one camp child recalled to a male survivor, "... we were old when we got out ..." (Oral History Interview, July 2005, Tape 2, female settler, Sulawesi). That feeling of agedness, constituted through pure exhaustion, desolation, torture, and unbearable emotional trauma, now haunts the dreams of many elderly survivors who were able to put it aside during their middle years.

North-American Eurasian narratives participate completely in the 'wartime father' theme identified by Pattynama. Mama was known and familiar, but narrators, in particular women, return repeatedly to the effects of the war on Papa, since many were unable to obtain closure in relation to their fathers. If Papa came back to his family, he was a changed man; Ali's father retreated within and died in 1949 from camp inflicted illnesses. Indeed, the very high death rate among male camp survivors merits further serious study. The pattern of repatriation and almost immediate death for men is consistent and noteworthy.

Ali: I saw him when he came back. He came back. *Ja.* (sighs) He had always been a quiet, rather closed man, (laughs) compared to my mother, but he was so closed then ... His life work destroyed ...

Given that both a mother and father survived, their re-union, at best made difficult through their experiences under the Japanese, often confronted the death of a child. Family members did not know of the fate of the other until the end of the war, neither husbands nor wives (and hence children) were able to ascertain the status of family members unless they were on island and able to access underground communication systems. Eurasian or indigenous citizens on the 'outside', who risked their lives as transmitters, endeavored to pass information between camps.

Men, women, and children, separated for over three years, lived completely separate lives, and experienced the unspeakable. Women and children discovered resources in themselves they had never had to tap into prior to the war. Children's identities, structured through terror, fear, death, and angst, confronted mothers, who, in the face of hate and their own despair, tried to keep love alive (as did siblings for each other). However, the children *knew* Mama. For many young children – Dutch, Dutch-Indonesian or Eurasian – in the camps or outside – Papa was only a name, a symbol of a stable time before the occupation when the family was together with Papa a strong, reassuring, and at times legitimating presence within colonial society.

Children's pre-war narratives stress close relationships with their Dutch father. The oral portraits depict a quietly firm, loving, utterly reliable, sometimes stern but wise father figure – a man you could trust and count on. Children who remembered Papa state that the hope of seeing father again kept them going throughout the war, a direct correlation between normal times and Papa's symbolic strength; to see Papa was to return to the way we were. However, Papa was not Papa when he came home. Interviewees found this transition unbearably painful; the pre-war Papa reduced to a shell of a man when he returned. Home again, but not fully present, they hurt and longed for him. "When he came home, we didn't know him anymore. Mama would hold him and rock him, and sometimes you would see tears – just quiet tears you know. He died in 1948 ..." (Oral History Interview, February 2004, Tape 2, *Indisch*-Canadian female).

Unable to recover their bonds with Papa, to re-capture Papa-as-he-was, children silently acknowledged this final symbolic alteration of their lives. There was no turning back.

Children too young to recall Papa before the war envisioned him as an icon of stability through their love for Mama and her stories. They were also, in multiple cases, unable to connect with the stranger that returned from the camps. 'Papa' became a fictional figure, the hero of stories, a person who 'had been' but

was no more. Life before the war paralleled the father myth, a wonderful place, unreachable, over, alive only in stories. Silence on the part of men regarding their experiences became the great enemy that stood in the way of family, hence life-historical, reconciliation. Unable to reach father, not ever talking through what they had mutually experienced, Papa slipped from life, and past life slipped away, leaving many unanswered questions for surviving children, as well as some of the wives.

From an interview with an *Indische* woman in her '90s:

Interviewee: The separation during the war changed us both.

Self: How did you handle that?

Interviewee: You couldn't. I mean – I couldn't – reach him. He was happy to be home, happy to see the children ... I know he had longed for us to be together. But when I say he was happy – that is the wrong word. He was glad – maybe that is better – glad – content to see us again.

Self: Did you ever reach him?

Interviewee: No. He died in 1949. From the time he came home until the time he died he was gone from us. Always kind, always courteous, but no longer involved with life ... (hesitates and then makes up her mind to go on) Jet, I had changed too. I had gone from being a spoiled woman to having nothing in the war, and I found out that I was pretty strong ... a survivor. Now ... in talking about it after all these years, I think – was I too impatient? Did I think, just get on with it, we suffered too? Did I act that way? When we went to Holland, I thought it would be over. A new beginning. Build up 'from scratch' you know? He couldn't do it, didn't want to be there. I took over. Someone had to do it. There were the children to think of still. I did it in the war, I did it after the war.

(Oral History Interview, December 2004, Tape 1, *Indisch*-Canadian female)

Exile: The Netherlands

While commonalities of experience characterize the repatriation process for Dutch, Dutch-Indonesian and Eurasian citizens upon their arrival in the Netherlands, they diverge on crucial aspects of the adjustment process. The Dutch who came to Indonesia before the war returned to a Netherlands where they had family and other attachments. Ideally, but certainly not always, the country was still familiar, and its social structure, culture and morality, remembered.

Many Eurasians, even if they had paternal familial ties in the Netherlands, found themselves without kin. Moreover, they were 'identifiable' peoples, their bodies written as colonial by virtue of their colour and their divergent customs and dialects. As 'Displaced Peoples', the Dutch government quickly identified them as a matter requiring attention; Goss exhaustively describes the initial and

follow-up reports, policy papers, and analyses requested and rendered on their circumstances (Goss 2000, 9-36).

The Netherlands receives the credit for the first formal identification of the *Indische* as a separate group requiring attention, analysis, and integration. Characteristically Dutch, the ordering of people into groups manifested in *Verzuiling* ideology and the care principle, beautifully captured by Furnivall in his address to a colonial Indies audience:

... let me recapitulate for you the main points of difference [between British and Dutch rule; HB]. Our officers are magistrates; yours are policemen and welfare officers. Our methods are repressive; yours are preventive. Our procedure is formal and legal; yours, informal and personal. Our civil service is an administrative machine; yours is an instrument of Government. Our aim is negative – to suppress disorder; yours is positive – to maintain order. Order – it is a word we both use frequently, but with a significant difference of context. We talk of “law and order” and you of “*rust* (peace/quiet) and *orde*”; but in the absence of a social conscience it is difficult to distinguish between the law and the letter of the law, and between *rust* and the placidity of a good baby in its perambulator. The caricature which depicts your system as a *baboe*, a nursemaid, and ours as a *babu*, a clerk, does emphasize a difference in vital principle. You try to keep a man from going wrong; we make it unpleasant for him if he does go wrong. You believe in protection and welfare; we believe in law – and liberty.

(Furnivall 1956, 271)

Buried deep in the Civism paradigm, care was an integral aspect of ongoing attitudes towards, and policies in, the archipelago. It surfaces again in the scrupulous attention paid to the integration of *Indische* peoples in the Netherlands. However, seen from the perspective of a person with a foot on either side of the Atlantic, it exhibits both the strength and the greatest weakness of Dutch Civism, the proclivity to decide for others. As the *baboe* metaphor implies, policy makers and experts brought to bear on a problem know best what is required to resolve a particular issue. Potential disruption is envisioned before it occurs – it may indeed never happen. Programs are in place in anticipation of possible necessities; rules and regulations cover every contingency for the good of the common weal, as well as the people or problem under consideration.

Schama analyzed the Dutch Civism paradigm through his examination of 16th/17th-century Dutch metaphors that juxtaposed society/soul/dirt/cleanliness (Schama 1991, 15-50). That fear of dirt in the body of the nation; dirt-as-pollution of nation, peoples, and individual and national soul, clearly manifests during the immediate post-war period, provoked by the chaotic conditions under and after the Nazi occupation. Integration of the *Indische* into the Netherlands population

was an absolute during the post-war rebuilding process; leaving *Indische* individuals to 'get on with it' meant, in expert opinion, that they could threaten the orderly and peaceful reconstruction of Dutch (civil) society. Yet while the Indonesian diaspora represented a potential threat to the reordering of post-WWII society, those responsible for the integration of repatriates were concomitantly and genuinely concerned that the *Indische* individual find a place in the Netherlands.

Policies however, were group prescribed for the *Indische*, structuring a clear, yet externally imposed identity that carried normative standards. *Indische* people 'are this', 'need that', 'should do', 'require', ... In turn the Nation 'prepared to receive', 'recognized', 'facilitated', 'addressed', 'ensured'... (Goss 2000, 9-36). What is missing in Goss's recapitulation is dialogue between people and experts. At what point did policy makers and analysts of the *Indische* sit down with them in those early years and ask how it was going, what they needed, what they felt? The Dutch pre-answered those questions on the basis of a Civism principle – what was best for the community as a whole – and this tendency to decide for the Eurasians/*Indische* lies at the root of their conviction that silence met their articulated experiences and their awareness that they were seen as pollutant and alien in both Indonesia and the Netherlands. Narrators articulate their perceptions that no one was interested in who they really were, how they identified, in what they had experienced, or in their perceptions of colonialism. Indeed, as they note, colonialism became a 'dirty word' shortly after the war and as resistance to it gained in intensity, so too did aversion to those who had been part of colonial society.

We could ask, since informants claim this was the reason they emigrated, if the pre-preparation and careful herding of their integration, or the lack of voice imposed on repatriates, was wise or necessary. Although the Dutch would not be Dutch without scrupulous civic planning, evacuees claim they could not 'get lost'. Once again they experienced the pain of imposed identities; they were confined to the displaced colonial category, and the attempt to refashion their lives into Dutch lives that had little resemblance to Indies normative living, was felt as an intolerable and intrusive imposition. The dominant theme, however, involves their reaction to the mother country's definition of 'who' the *Indische* person was – clouded by then current aversions to mingled blood and all of the colonial mythology that for years had enthralled the Dutch 'who never saw' Indonesia – that were brought to bear on their imposed identity.

Let me add that Eurasian-in-America interviewees warmly appreciate the Dutch efforts on their behalf. Indeed, they are far less critical of the Netherlands than my Dutch informants are and they do not echo the 'betrayal' motif that dominates Dutch discourse with respect to the Netherlands. It does arise, but it is

inconsistent, specific where it occurs, and does not dominate the refugee-to-immigration story.

Loss and alienation

Of all of the different groups of people targeted during the *Bersiap* period, or persecuted later under other policies, only Dutch and Eurasian peoples ranked as 'Europeans' had clear options in that they were able to go to the Netherlands as Dutch citizens. Those who chose to leave during the first 1945/1946 repatriation were exhausted, sick, had lost their homes and all their belongings, and often had occupied employment positions that they could not take up during the revolutionary period. In 1946, as was the case with Ali's mother, a number of Eurasian women left with their formerly incarcerated husbands for the Netherlands, but in the majority of the cases in my database, while small children accompanied their parents, adult children like Ali, who self-identified as Indonesian, remained in Indonesia, hoping to make a life in their own country.

Wives discuss the very difficult adjustment process for their husbands, rather than focusing on their own emotions and feelings. It is no exaggeration to state that the condition of many of the post-camp men caused their wives great concern, and that the return to the Netherlands was a burden, rather than a solace, for many of these men. Having consciously rejected their biological nation and chosen to connect fully with their Indonesian localities and kin, no 'precarious belonging' or thoughts of optional obligations marred their dedication to the adopted land they called home (Anderson, 1999). The coerced return, as many were without other options given their health, previous employment, and state of mind, did little to psychologically assist their burden of loss and the feeling of failure they carried, since they felt alienated from the land of their birth and, often, their natal families.

Even under ordinary circumstances, many immigrants perceive a return to the country from which they emigrated as an admission of failure, that they could not 'make it' in the new country. Dutch men who married in Indonesia, and subsequently immersed themselves in land and people through kin, were, in actuality, immigrants to Indonesia, not 'visiting workers' awaiting a return to the land of their birth. They identified as Dutch-Indonesian, while those who had been born into Eurasian or settler families self-described as Indonesian. In my database, both Dutch-Indonesian and Eurasian men, who lived long lives after their camp experiences and immigrated to the 'New World' with their young families, continue to narrate a sense of failure vis-à-vis the termination of their lives in Indonesia. They admit that this is not rational:

Self: But it wasn't your fault – you cannot blame yourself that circumstances unfolded the way they did.

Interviewee: ... I know that. But this is about what I feel. Many times I thought we should have seen it coming before the war. We should have taken steps. We should have fought harder. Or the Dutch government should not have given in. Because when we first went to the Netherlands, I thought we would be going back. I truly believed that the revolution was bad for Indonesia and Indonesians and that the Dutch would hold firm, we would go home, and we would do Independence in the right way – all citizens together in a good democracy. It was a big shock when I realized that *our* country had just been handed over to Soekarno. We left ...

(Oral History Interview, July 2006, Tape 1, Eurasian-American male)

Dutch men married to Eurasian women were often not overly concerned to build a life in the Netherlands, hoping instead for employment that would feed their families, while awaiting a return to Indonesia:

... Once they sent the volunteers out, I thought, well now we will get somewhere and soon we will go home to rebuild the country. But that was not to be and we could see things change in Holland. You had people saying all kinds of things about colonialism, you had a government that wasn't sure what they stood for, or what to do, and you had lots of international pressure from the USA and others. I don't blame the Dutch. You know, they had just come out of a war too. But they did not do right by Indonesians, and we too, were Indonesians, not Dutch. That was one thing the Dutch people did not seem to understand. They really seemed to think we were pretty much Dutch and that my wife and children, born in another country for Pete's sake, were Dutch because I was the husband and father. At the same time, we heard all kinds of things about how we were colonial, how bad that was, and we thought, what do these people really know? Nothing, really, nothing. They knew nothing about Indonesia. And ... all that time the pain ... Our home, our plans ...

Self: When did you decide to immigrate?

Interviewee: We started to talk about it as early as 1947. I was feeling better, the medication had really helped, they fixed me up ... we wanted to get on with life. After the first agreement with the Republic, we were pretty sure they would sell us out. So we started to plan and my wife wanted to go somewhere where she could hear and see the sea, and where it was warm! Yes, the climate in Holland was a big surprise for her! So a few years later we left for California. We became American citizens about 10 years after that. We raised our children out here, we have our grandchildren and great-grandchildren now ... I had a great job, we had a good life. Lots of friends ...

Self: How did your children find being *Indisch* here in the States?

Interviewee: ... Well you can ask my daughter tomorrow, she will be here with the kids. But there was no '*Indisch*' (laughs) here in California, they just look tanned (laughs again). They are all just Americans. I never kept up with my family in Holland, not after the way they treated my wife. So we started from nothing here and this is where we built our lives. Our children know our story of course, and some of the grand-kids have been pretty interested to hear about Indonesia and what it was like. A couple of them have taken trips out there to see it. They really liked Bali. But for them it is just an interesting place. No memories ...

Self: What about your wife's family?

Interviewee: ... Well we helped some of them come over after we had been here a few years. So they also became Americans and we have a big family – reunions every year. We also found some of our connections in Indonesia and wrote letters, some of them have been here to visit us. We helped with that ... money-wise you know ...

(Oral History Interview, July 2006, Tape 1, Eurasian-American male)

Although this phenomenon may not be typical of the Eurasian experience in America, it is significant in my database; *Indische* narrators had little contact with Holland or with the Dutch in the American or Canadian communities in which they lived. On the other hand, we see that Eurasian accounts form a portion of camp and post-camp published recollections, and Eurasians play an important role in 'remembering' associations in North America. It bears repeating that my observations regarding the stance of Eurasians to their life in North America, Indonesia, and the Netherlands derive specifically from these database narratives and do not generalize the Eurasian experience; clearly some of them maintain ties with the Dutch-from-South-East-Asia communities, each bound to the other by common experience.

My Eurasian narrators from North America, however, tended to lose themselves within the social framework of Canadian and American locales; indeed leaving the Netherlands was the first step in setting aside an *Indische* identity. Instead, they eagerly accepted a merging of their lives into the politics and economies of their chosen countries; they became 'Canadian' or 'American', for the first time that many of them could recall, the identities the state imposed on them coincided with how they self-perceived. Although beyond the scope of the current paper, I note that the colonial Eurasian identity – one that arose in precisely the same way as the officially recognized Métis identity in Canada, is a dying identity; the Dutch-*Indische* community may be the last refuge for its maintenance.

While Dutch-Indonesian fathers articulate a 'rejected Netherlands' schema, this is not the case with Eurasian men, wives or children who had minimal time to become acquainted with Holland and little longing to get to know it better.

Their discourse focuses on loss of Indonesian place; their home and family. Revolutionaries, along with the Japanese, are the cause of that loss. While many of them state they were ‘shocked’ or ‘surprised’ when it became evident that they could not go home, they do not hold the Dutch accountable for that loss. Having uttered that generality, it should be noted that many also adhere to the narrative that:

... Life for everyone was much better under the Dutch. You will never convince me that it was a good thing that they turned the country over to Soekarno. We know what our families there have gone through, and what life has been like for them in Indonesia. The Dutch seemed to have no confidence in themselves that they were doing the right thing by fighting for the people so that Independence could be done the right way. Look at what happened to the Ambonese. I feel so sorry for them. They truly believed in the Dutch and fought hard for the Indonesian people. Really, they were betrayed. We were all betrayed. But it was so long ago now ... so long ... and there is nothing left to fight about. My kids sure wouldn't move there and well ... you know I would like to go and see it one last time. But I am getting too old. So I have the memories of when I was young and what was ...

Self: So, you don't blame the Dutch?

Interviewee: ... What's to blame? What was is what was. The rest is just talk. Like I said, I am sorry for the Indonesian people. They have suffered and suffered again. We were the lucky ones. Our lives have been so good. It was the Dutch who gave us that chance – they got us out, even though we were not Dutch. So, in a way, they made our lives possible here too. Yes, it was very wrong what happened to Indonesia. The sad thing is, no one learns from those mistakes ...

(Oral History Interview, August 2005, Tape 2, *Indisch*-Canadian female)

Immigration: An alternative identity choice

The schema mapped in Figure 3 for the Eurasian-to-America transition maps closely to the refugee narrative structure illuminated by Westerman (1998, 224-234) and the rite of passage typology first identified by Arnold van Gennep (1908; 1961). Significantly, Turner's elaboration of Van Gennep's transitional stage, the middle stage of the rite that Turner (1969, 83-111) dubbed 'liminality', focuses on disorientation and the potential for individual growth and creative self-reflection as an individual or group stands on the threshold 'betwixt and between' statuses; not the person they were in Indonesia, but not yet the person they will become. The enforced separation from their previous way of life – indeed from their society – marks the separation step of the rite for Eurasians, while the liminal stage in the Netherlands is followed by reincorporation in the 'new' country. A significant fact

that arises from these narratives is that the Eurasians I interviewed experienced closure, a marked characteristic of the advent of reincorporation, when they consciously made the decision to move to another country. Indeed, the fact of choice was critical; narrators characterized their arrival in the Netherlands as one coerced by political circumstances and triggering a sense of dislocation that required resolution based on an active search for identity frameworks. Utilizing the creative potential inherent in their liminal situations was crucial to their ongoing identity making; I map this process in Figure 3.

Persecution in Indonesia: Decision to repatriate stems from exhaustion, sickness, total loss, no future, and violence against them.
Escape to: The Netherlands.
Refugees: In the Netherlands: Alienated, lost, 'not home;' liminal phase: await return to Indonesia.
Hope lost: Indonesia gains independence; (in many cases) other family members arrive; solidifies outcast status.
Crisis: We are refugees from Indonesia that are not at home here and we cannot go back.
Options: Let's explore possibilities for a life elsewhere.
Decision: We put away any hope of a return to Indonesia and decide to leave the Netherlands.
Immigration: We put our liminal lives behind us.
Closure: We arrive in the new country: we start from scratch- we build a life.
Transformed identity: We are Canadians or Americans. While we cherish memories of Indonesia, and they are part of 'who we are' and 'where we came from', we are no longer refugees, but home.

Figure 3. Eurasian immigration schema.

The refugee experience in the Netherlands therefore represents the liminal phase in these narratives/lives. Separated from their homes following the persecution phase in Indonesia based on the signification attached to their ethnicity by Japanese, *pemuda* and revolutionaries, they awaited a return to their natal nation. Although many of them attempted to convey the realities of life in Indonesia to Dutch citizens, they were 'cried down' by self-determination rhetoric, colonial shame felt by those who had never participated in Indies life, and politicians and experts who advised them to forget their lives and start anew in the Netherlands; their identities were once again externally prescribed. Continuing to cherish a hope that they might someday return, they held aloof, indeed chose to remain liminal, from the well-intentioned efforts to integrate them into the Dutch social fabric, and awaited the outcome of Dutch-Indonesian negotiations. Interviewees

state that they would never have ‘fit’ into society in the Netherlands, nor did they have a desire to do so. Resisting the path to ‘Dutch’ identification laid out for them, and dismissing an interest in an ongoing dialogue with the ‘mother’ country with respect to the colonial-*Indische* identity, they additionally articulated their genuine dismay of the climate, the size of the country, the lack of linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity, and what they interpreted as a very ‘stiff’ way of life with a suffocating morality and tendency to ‘check to see what the other person is doing’. There was no hope of ‘forgetting’ in a country engaged in relentless discussion of self and the colonial period. ‘Reincorporating’ into the Dutch social fabric was therefore not a viable option.

Once it became clear that Indonesia would pass to the Republic, and many older children, initially left behind, repatriated from Indonesia in 1949/1950, potential immigrants came to grips with the fact they could not return to their homeland. The awareness of non-return instigates ‘crisis’ and initiates the ‘closure’ sequence that will end in Canada or the United States; a reincorporation denoted by a new status. In making that decision, they articulate their awareness that they were simultaneously setting aside the Dutch-*Indische* connection that historically fed, and in the Netherlands continued to feed, their identities. They made the choice to start anew.

Families consulted together as to their options. Many of them methodically sent out letters to any contacts they had made with people from Canada and the US. Others initiated their immigrant explorations through their churches; these were interviewees whose faith, although severely strained during the occupation, did not cause them to withdraw from that belief altogether. The key theme that emerges from these oral histories is that the Netherlands was not an option for any of these immigrants. In making the decision to leave, they simultaneously altered the trajectories of their future identity perceptions and closed the door on the Netherlands-Indies chapter, the dialogue in the Netherlands on the Dutch colonial period, and their *Indische* identity. Each one of these interviewees describes themselves as ‘American’ or ‘Canadian’ and understands their natal land in the same way that other immigrants to North America do – Indonesia is the land where I was born and while it forms part of who I became, it is no longer my identity.

Lifestyle, climate, contacts, and employment opportunities in a potential immigration destination gravely influenced the decision of final ‘place’ for these narrators. Once location was determined, however, immigrants agree that excitement set in, and planning for their new home began to change their being in the world. Following the long trip overseas and their settlement in the new place of residence, they initiated their lives in the new country. No longer liminal, they embraced their new identity/status, reincorporating as Canadian or Ameri-

can immigrants, casting their lot with those who had come from all over the world to start anew, exchanging many stories:

In those early years what really struck me is that everyone had a story to tell. There were refugees from all parts of the world and many of them had it even worse than us in the countries they left – far worse. We learned very quickly to value what we had. We were educated, we could get good work and the language we had started to learn it in Indonesia and before we left Holland.

Self: In Indonesia?

Interviewee: Well sure. There were lots of Americans in Indonesia before the war, and we would have a drink with them and so ... Not so strange. So, the language was not a problem and the kids picked it up so fast. In the 50s too, America was booming. Well like I said, jobs were there for the taking, we were educated and soon we were doing really well. Our family thrived.

(Oral History Interview, August 2005, Tape 1, *Indisch*-American male)

The impossibility of ‘forgetting’ (a.k.a. getting lost) and lack of closure in the Netherlands, where the loss of the Indies was continually re-visited, represents the divergence between *Indische*-in-the-Netherlands and North-American identities; *Indische* in the Netherlands identify as *Indisch*, those in the Americas do not. Discourses on the colonial period, the multiple opinions that defined the role of the Dutch in Indonesia for those who had been there, programs and prescribed options put in place for *Indische* integration; these factors facilitated a feeling of ‘non-escape’, while immigration and life in a new land evoked the possibility of re-writing the self in historical and psychological freedom. No, narrators have not forgotten the Indies. What they have been able to do is ‘place’ their experiences within the context of their wider lives and tie their lives to other immigrants who also dealt with persecution. More importantly, the identity ‘Eurasian’ is moot for these narrators. They fully belong in Canada and the USA; they no longer experience the turmoil that stems from the conflict between self- and etic identification. While honoring their natal origins, they are Canadian or American.

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About the author

Over the past 17 years, Hendrika Beaulieu-Boon has been engaged in oral history/life story research, initially with North American interviewees who were citizens of the Dutch East Indies during the last years of the colonial period and World War II, and who experienced the subsequent diaspora to the Netherlands. In 2009, she obtained her Ph.D. from Leiden University based on that study. Thereafter, she has been primarily engaged with life story/documentary research among the Blackfoot of Canada and the United States and with various immigrant communities. A historical anthropologist who commonly approaches analyses through the lens of multiple socio-linguistic methodologies, her focus is on extending and challenging official – and hegemonic – documented History through accounts derived from people ‘on-the-ground’. As an immigrant herself, she believes that there is a lacuna of detailed work around the immigrant experience, and advocates for extended social science research among immigrant communities, with a particular focus on cross-cultural experiences.

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Des thèmes du renouvellement de l’identité *Indische*

Depuis 15 ans, je mène un projet d’histoire orale approfondi avec des Néerlandais, des Indonésiano-néerlandais, des Eurasiens et des Indonésiens en Amérique du Nord qui ont vécu dans les Indes néerlandaises avant, pendant et après la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Des participants d’un « ordre politique qui inscrit dans le monde social une nouvelle conception de l’espace, des nouvelles formes d’identité individuelle et un nouveau moyen de fabrication de l’expérience sur le réel » (Mitchell 1988, xi), ils ont vécu l’invasion et l’occupation japonaise avec des perspectives uniques. Dans plus de deux tiers de ces interviews, il s’agit de la période du soi-disant *Bersiap* et de la Guerre de 1945 à 1949 contre les forces républicaines, tandis que d’autres narrateurs luttèrent pour maintenir leur identité indonésienne jusqu’aux crises des années 1956 et 1957. Un nombre significatif de ces consultants étaient partis pour les Pays-Bas pendant un de ces affrontements cruciaux ; alors que d’autres étaient partis directement pour l’Amérique du Nord. La comparaison entre les matériaux de ma base de données et des analyses thématiques des histoires de vie qui ont été rassemblées aux Pays-Bas et qui portent sur cette histoire (Steijlen 2002) révèle plusieurs concordances, mais aussi des écarts significatifs concernant l’emphase, le récit et les formations d’identité. Mes consultants nord-américains ne s’engagent pas dans les discussions en cours aux Pays-Bas (Houben 1997, 47-66) et en Indonésie (Stoler & Strassler 2000, 4-48) qui

limitent ou facilitent ce que les anciens sujets coloniaux racontent dans ces pays. Par conséquent, ils emploient des schémas divergents pour encadrer les comment, de quoi, pourquoi ils se souviennent. Dans cet article, je me concentre sur les deux thèmes interconnectés qui apparaissent dans ma sous-base de données d'histoires de vie nord-américaines *Indische* : 'la Parenté' et 'le Père'. En employant une longue interview avec une femme *Indische* qui visitait le Canada, je mets en place des aspects de son récit comme un faire-valoir pour examiner les façons dont les *Indische* au Pays-Bas et en Amérique du Nord construisent leurs identités complexes.

Thema's in de recreatie van de "Indische" identiteit

Gedurende de afgelopen 15 jaar heb ik een uitgebreid "oral history project" uitgevoerd met (Indische) Nederlanders, Nederlands-Indiërs, Indo-Europeanen en Indonesiërs in Noord-Amerika die zich in Nederlands-Indië bevonden in de periode voor, tijdens, en vlak na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Als deelnemers in een "political order that inscribes in the social world a new conception of space, new forms of personhood, and a new means of manufacturing the experience of the real" (Mitchell 1988, xi) beleefden zij de Japanse invasie en bezetting vanuit een uniek perspectief. Meer dan twee derde van de interviews betreffen de zogenaamde *Bersiap*-periode en de oorlog met de Republikeinse troepen in 1945-1949. Sommige geïnterviewden probeerden aan hun Indonesische identiteit vast te houden totdat de crises van 1956-1957. Een belangrijk deel van deze informanten vertrok naar Nederland gedurende een van deze cruciale confrontaties; anderen emigreerden direct naar Noord-Amerika. Een vergelijking van thematische analyses van levensverhalen over deze geschiedenis opgetekend in Nederland (Steijlen 2002) met het material in mijn database levert zowel overlappingsen als afwijkingen op in termen van wat wordt benadrukt en wat wordt herinnerd, en de gevolgen daarvan op de formatie van een nieuwe identiteit. Mijn Noord-Amerikaanse informanten zijn niet betrokken bij de voortdurende discussies in Nederland (Houben 1997, 47-66) en Indonesië (Stoler & Strassler 2000, 4-48), die in zeker mate beperken of bepalen wat ex-koloniale burgers in die landen met elkaar en anderen delen. Als gevolg daarvan gebruiken zij andere schemata om vorm te geven aan hoe, wat en waarom zij zich bepaalde dingen al dan niet herinneren. In dit artikel vestig ik de aandacht op twee gerelateerde thema's die naar voren komen in mijn sub-database van Noord-Amerikaanse Indische levensverhalen: 'Familie' and 'de Vader'. Aan de hand van een uitgebreid interview met een Indische vrouw op bezoek in Canada gebruik ik aspecten van haar verhaal als een handvat voor een beschrijving van de manier waarop Indiërs in Nederland en Noord-Amerika hun complexe identiteiten construeren.