

THE *INDISCH* DUTCH IN POST-WAR AUSTRALIA *

Abstract — The *Indisch* Dutch in post-war Australia

This article considers how the Indisch Dutch related to post-war Australia. After establishing the definitional and statistical identity of Australia's Indisch Dutch, the discussion draws attention to the geographical proximity of what were once two European colonial settler communities inhabiting the southeast corner of the Asian hemisphere. Although a mere hours flying from their former pre-war locations, almost all Indisch Dutch who migrated to Australia came via the Netherlands. Despite the geographical proximity of their past and present lives, they are in fact separated by a dramatic history. This paper considers what if anything the histories of two European communities had in common and what this may have meant to both Indisch migrants and their Australian hosts in the 1950s and 1960s.

This article reviews the statistical and historical parameters of the *Indisch* community's encounter with Australia from a 'down under' perspective; that is from the perspective of Southeast Australasia.¹ Although a brief sojourn in the Netherlands forms the post-war experience and history for the majority, it is the historical events in the neighbouring countries of Indonesia and Australia that are more directly of significance here. In part the discussion draws on interviews recorded a decade ago and partially reproduced subsequently in an account of Australia's *Indisch* Dutch migrants.² These interviews were undertaken with an ageing first generation of *Indisch* Dutch migrants in Australia. By definition, typically children or young adolescents in 1942 when

* I am indebted to Frances Gouda for suggesting the direction of the following discussion; responsibility for its limitations are of course my own.

1. In emphasising Australia's and Indonesia's common location in Asia, this approach is also intended to draw attention to the colonial heritage of both the incoming *Indisch* Dutch and their post-war Australian hosts.

2. Interviews from which the generalisations made in this article are drawn were initially undertaken as part of a research project funded by Deakin University and carried out by Loes Westerbeek. Extracts from a selection of these interviews have been published in: J. Coté and L. Westerbeek (eds.), *Recalling the Indies: colonial memories and postcolonial identities* (Amsterdam 2005).

their defining war experience commenced, interviews sixty years after the post-war 'exodus' can necessarily only provide a partial, and somewhat skewed picture. It is only by situating the personal narratives of the *Indisch* Dutch in the broader historical context in which these individuals were caught up that it is possible to re-imagine their journey. The paper thus sketches a broader trajectory of the historical forces that so significantly shaped these personal experiences, drawing on conclusions of a variety of Australian and Dutch scholars.

Defining *Indisch* Dutch³

Any attempt to generalise about the experience of the approximately 30,000 *Indisch* Dutch who came to Australia prior to 1962⁴ immediately faces the question of who they were. As interpretations of this tend to vary, even in Dutch literature, the recent systematic attempt to clarify the concept undertaken by Imhoff, Beets and Huisman seems to be a useful place to begin this paper.⁵ Their research identified four distinct constitutive sub-groups ranging from Dutch nationals who happened to be in the Dutch East Indies just before the war and were thus caught up in the Japanese occupation with otherwise little identification with the colony, to Dutch Indies residents born and bred there over several generations; from 'white' Dutch to Dutch nationals of mixed European and Indonesian heritage. They include Dutch residents from the Indies who happened to be in The Netherlands before the war and even a group of Indonesians, Moluccans, who after the war were relocated to the Netherlands after a failed rebellion against the Indonesian Republic.

What is notable in their definition, apart from its breadth, is in what it highlights as common to all sub-groups: a shared relationship to a particular historical event – Japanese occupation of the Dutch east Indies – and secondly, for all but the Indonesian group, a *legal* classification as 'Dutch'. Pre-war domicile in the Netherlands, is not here seen as a primary characteristic of *Indisch* Dutch. For many individuals inclusion in Imhoff *et al.*'s definition of *Indisch* Dutch was simply an accident of history, just as for others, post-war evacuation to the Netherlands had little direct relevance to their pre-war life

3. The mixed Dutch-English term will consistently be used to represent the Dutch term *Indische Nederlanders*. Although this is not an altogether satisfactory rendition, the English equivalent term 'Indies', an abbreviation of the 'Dutch East Indies', would emphasise only a geographic reference whereas the Dutch term '*Indisch*' is typically used to indicate an ethno-cultural identity.

4. W. Willems, 'No sheltering sky: migrant identities of Dutch nationals in Australia', in: Coté and Westerbeek (eds.), *Recalling the Indies*, 251-287, 264.

5. E. van Imhoff, G. Beets and C. Huisman, 'Indische Nederlanders 1930-2001: een demografische reconstructie', *Bevolking en Gezin* 32:3 (2003) 85-124.

decisions or orientations. Indeed, sheer accidentalness appears to be characteristic of much of the post-war experience of *Indisch* Dutch including how many of them came to eventually find themselves in Australia.

Prior to 1942 Australia had probably never existed in the consciousness of the vast majority of *Indisch* Dutch. There is perhaps some irony in this community's (re-) location south.⁶ From the perspective of geographic contingency, the relocation of *Indisch* Dutch to Australia meant that they came, eventually, to settle quite close, geographically speaking, to where they had left from. Officially till 1901, and effectively until 1941, British Australians had existed alongside *Indisch* Dutch as a set of adjacent European imperial entities and had done so since the eighteenth century. Close as *Indisch* Dutch emigrants came to their pre-war homes when they migrated to Australia, this proximity only serves to highlight the historical and cultural distance that now separated them from their colonial origins. While, prior to 1945, both *Indisch* Dutch and British Australian communities struggled with an awareness of their location in the south eastern corner of the Asian hemisphere, nationalism after 1945 played out quite differently in their futures. Former colonials – or imperialists – came to settle in their new homeland, to raise their children in a post-colonial world located next door, as it were, to the Dutch colony. It was Australia's own post-war nationalist aspirations in supporting Indonesian nationalism that had been a major factor in the expulsion of Europeans from Indonesia.⁷ At the same time, continuing colonialist sentiments within Australia that had long supported British and Dutch imperialism in Asia, continued to support a vision of a 'white Australia' that initially prevented *Indisch* Dutch 'of colour' from entering the country.

Thus, a narrative of the *Indisch* Dutch in Australia after the end of the Asia-Pacific War shifts the perspective from what has largely been a Europe-centred perspective of emigration to a southern hemisphere perspective on post-colonialism. It encourages the view that the history of this community be seen as more than the personal narrative of part of the Dutch nation, or even as part of a global post war diaspora. *Indisch* Dutch migration and settlement becomes a specific instance of the impact of the demise of European imperialism, as it relates to both Indonesian and Australian history – and to the history of the imperial Netherlands. To take this broader approach is in no way to discount the uniqueness of personal memories which, for most of the previous half century, the *Indisch* Dutch in Australia have had to keep to themselves. Indeed, the intention here is to understand why these intensely personal stories have been kept within families, and rarely voiced beyond the dinner table.

6. A small number 'transferred' from Dutch New Guinea after 1962.

7. Margaret George, *Australia and the Indonesian revolution* (Melbourne 1980).

Partly due to the uncertainty of who originally constituted the *Indisch* Dutch, a statistical definition of this group has long been a matter of uncertainty.⁸ No official census of the European population in the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the Japanese occupation exists, most calculations going back to the last colonial census of 1930. Again Imhoff *et al.*'s research provides some reasonably firm figures: they note this census listed 283,000 persons classified as 'European' of which 87 percent were Dutch Europeans. Of these, 74 percent were born in the Netherlands Indies. Based on a range of sources and to some degree on estimations, the authors conclude the primary *Indisch* Dutch community, that is, those Dutch nationals who were in the Dutch East Indies in 1946, amounted to 288,000.⁹

Contemporary figures made no distinction between '*witte Indische Nederlanders*' (white *Indisch* Dutch), that is either *totok* (new arrivals or temporary residents) or Indies-born white Europeans, and '*Indo Nederlanders*', that is, those defined as European but of mixed European-Indonesian (or Chinese) parentage. To some extent, but definitely not with any certainty, this can however be gauged from the percentage of those who were Indies born, as it is generally understood that a majority of the latter were of mixed parentage. Rather closer approximation can be based on figures contrasting those who were incarcerated in, and those who remained outside, Japanese internment camps. On the basis of the degree of Indonesian ancestry, Japanese authorities permitted 172,000 persons legally classified under colonial law as European to avoid internment.¹⁰ An estimated 80,000 civilians (men, women and children) as well as 42,000 military POWs were interned. Of these 73,000 and 34,000 respectively survived the war and were alive in 1946.¹¹

8. The moment at which this number is calculated is also a matter of some debate, and used also to differentiate a first generation *Indisch* Dutch from subsequent generations who could be included in the broader calculation of an *Indisch* diaspora.

9. In their expanded definition Imhoff *et al.* estimate that the total 'first generation *Indisch* Dutch' by 1968 (their cut-off date) amounted to 539,000 persons. The research which elicited these figures was commissioned by the Dutch government to effect policy related to this community in the Netherlands where the majority continue to reside. Bosma *et al.* state basing themselves on a more traditional definition of who constituted *Indische Nederlanders* estimate that 'about 330,000 [people] came to the Netherlands in the almost 20 years after 1945'; U. Bosma, R. Raben and W. Willems, *De geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders* (Amsterdam 2008) 190.

10. All figures are open to question. H. Beekhuis, H. Bussemaker, P. de Haas and T. Luter, *Geïllustreerde atlas van de Bersiapkampen in Nederlandse Indië 1945-1947* (Bedum 2008) estimate a total European population of 270,000 of which 180,000 were 'buitenkampers.'

11. The number of *witte Indische* rose to 176,000 by 1946 due to normal population increases amongst free intact families. This of course does not represent a definitive differentiation between *witte Indische* and *Indo Nederlanders* since many of the latter, apart from military prisoners, although able to avoid incarceration, nevertheless presented themselves to authorities as European and were imprisoned. Motives for this are important to analyse.

These figures and categories, as inexact as they may still be, emphasise the disparate nature of the experience that *Indisch* Dutch brought with them to Australia, and according to which Australians often responded. Imhoff *et al.*'s definition of the community implies two broad areas of experience that unite the sub-groups they define: the Japanese occupation of the Indies and its immediate aftermath, and a general, direct or indirect, experience of *Indisch* culture. While the first – the war experience (and its immediate aftermath) – is the defining one since it resulted in their eviction from the East Indies/Indonesia, it is the latter that binds the community together as a diaspora.¹²

However, both sets of defining experiences are less conclusive than they may seem to be. To take, firstly, the war experience. The nature of the experience of those 'behind the wire' and those outside, the '*buitenkampers*', was more diverse than Imhoff *et al.* are prepared to account for. Although both groups experienced Japanese occupation, they experienced it differently. Even if those who remained free did not experience the same degree of deprivation between 1942 and 1945, they nonetheless suffered the general wartime conditions. More importantly the latter experienced the growing hostility of Indonesian Republican sentiment in the latter period of the Japanese occupation and, more horrifically, the direct attacks and incarceration by Indonesian *pemuda*, particularly after 17 August 1945.¹³ A recent volume estimates that of the 180,000 *buitenkampers* in Java, an estimated 42,000 were later incarcerated in Republican (Indonesian) camps – an experience which for some lasted till as late as 1947 when they were finally released under the Linggarjati Agreement.¹⁴ Beekhuis *et al.* claim this *bersiap* experience has been significantly under reported in extant Dutch literature but is crucial to an explanation of the almost total evacuation of 'settlers' from Java after the Second World War.¹⁵ Moreover, under the terms of Anglo-American arrangements

See for instance: E. Captain, 'The lady and the gentleman: constructions of Europeaness in the diaries of civilian internees in the Dutch East Indies', in: Coté and Westerbeek (eds.), *Recalling the Indies*, 205-226. An estimated 6000 people legally classified as Europeans elected to become Indonesian in 1950, but not all in fact remained after 1957.

12. Diaspora is here understood in the original sense of a community evicted from their homeland whose identity nevertheless is closely linked to their memory of where they were born. For a discussion of this concept as it applied to Australian *Indisch* Dutch see: L. Westerbeek-Veld, *Dutch-Indonesians in Australia: second generation identity in the diaspora* (Unpublished PhD thesis Deakin University 2006).

13. There are also accounts of Indonesians supporting desperate Europeans during the Japanese occupation and the '*bersiap*'.

14. Beekhuis *et al.*, *Geïllustreerde atlas* reports that there were at least 255 Republican (Indonesian) internment camps while another 180 camps existed for periods after August 1945 guarded by the Allies, some with Japanese assistance, holding Europeans for their protection and/or while awaiting evacuation. Beekhuis *et al.*, *Geïllustreerde atlas*, 22.

15. The Indonesian term meaning 'be prepared' was popularised by the Scout movement and adopted by the youthful guerrilla groups. Well represented in Dutch accounts reflect-

from which Dutch representatives were excluded, they point out, Allied military personnel and civilian *witte Indische Nederlanders* were given precedence for evacuation over *Indisch* ‘settlers’ who, having largely moved inland, were both further removed from Allied occupied areas and were considered to be less vulnerable but in fact were more likely to find themselves in Republican controlled regions, and in fact more vulnerable to *pemuda* attack and incarceration.

Esther Captain has argued that the incarceration experience tended to consolidate the sense of ‘European-ness’ amongst ‘white’ and ‘Indo’ internees.¹⁶ However one can also argue that the very distinction between internees and the ‘buitenkampers’ dramatically highlighted the distinction between ‘European’ and ‘Indo’ Dutch. Although *Indisch* Dutch were perceived as having endured a common experience of deprivation under the Japanese, in contrast to the European Dutch experience of Nazi occupation, Japanese intervention and its aftermath is more likely to have exacerbated differences within the colonial European community. Those incarcerated subsequently by Indonesian republican forces are likely to have been left with a stronger anti-Indonesian feeling than those imprisoned by Japanese. For many it is their ‘post-war’ incarceration in Republican internment camps during the Indonesian revolution, rather than their *buitenkamp* experience during Japanese occupation that constituted the defining experience and which for many irrevocably sealed their separation from Indonesia.

These different ‘war’ experiences point to a major fracture within that *Indisch* community that divided ‘white’ and ‘Indo’ *Indisch* identity and played their part in subsequent community formation in Australia as it did in the Netherlands.¹⁷ However, it is the more general common experience of colonial ‘*Indisch*’ life, that saturates the memory of the first generation of *Indisch* Dutch in Australia, and clearly acts as the bridge binding the identity of the various *Indisch* groups against that of ‘the Hollanders’, as the European Dutch are invariably referred to.¹⁸ Only amongst fellow *Indisch* Dutch can simple words generate entire memories of common experience. Sharing an understanding of these words enabled *Indisch* migrants not only to find *iets gezelligs* – a homely Dutch space in an overwhelming Anglo-environment – but

ing its greater significance to Dutch nationals, this term is rarely found in English language histories reflecting the greater Anglo-American interest in the origins of the Indonesian Republic than the fate of the ‘colonialists’.

16. Captain, ‘The lady and the gentleman’, 205-226.

17. It was a major point of tension in initial attempts to form the *Indisch* Dutch community organisation in the late 1980s in Melbourne. Interview Lia Kelners.

18. More detailed analysis would be necessary to go beyond the crude distinction between ‘white’ and ‘Indo’ to investigate the possibility of alliances within the ‘Indo’ group based on degrees of Chinese heritage, of ancestral connections to different Indonesian ethnic groups and regions.

also a niche in which to protect and celebrate their separate *Indisch* identity within an immigrant 'Dutch' context. In particular it is Javanese and Malay words incorporated into an *Indisch* lexicon that form cocoons of memory and identity for *Indisch* Dutch within a broader Dutch *lingua franca*. It is here, at this largely symbolic level, that the *Indisch* Dutch differentiate themselves from European Dutch and which unites members of this community across a multiplicity of particular experience while simultaneously celebrating their difference from the surrounding Anglosphere.

It is perhaps ironic that *Indisch* Dutch differentiation from, while sharing much of, metropolitan Dutch culture is somewhat akin to the Australian historical experience. As a former colonial society, Australians too in constructing a sense of homeland in an alien environment, developed a new, and distinct identity within a linguistic culture it continued to share with its metropolitan origins. Over time new experiences created new words and gave special meaning to existing words that expressed 'feeling Australian' within an Anglophone zone. Significantly different however, are the colonial overtones of those *Indisch* words derived from Indonesian which forever, at least to Indonesian sensitivities, bear the traces of a colonial past.¹⁹

However, important as the common link of an *Indisch* culture is in separating Dutch from *Indisch* Dutch, it is also, of necessity, an extremely fragile basis upon which the *Indisch* diaspora is based. As it depends primarily on first hand experience, its ability to energise a sense of identity is effectively eroded with the passing of the first generation. Not only is this 'bond' largely based on a childhood memory for those born within the decade or so before 1941 but it can only limp amongst second generation descendants, as Westerbeek has shown, via an assortment of disjointed, handed-down words, dishes and artefacts, or vicariously via an admittedly growing volume of published personal, fictional, and visual recollections, at least for isolated *Indisch* Dutch communities outside the Netherlands.

The 'fragility' of a separate *Indisch* identity beyond that of the actual war experience is increased, not only as a result of the ageing and gradually disappearance of what Imhoff *et al.* defined as the *Indisch* generation, but also because ultimately the community lacks 'exclusive ownership' of this experience. In the Netherlands colonial literature and history,²⁰ Indies artefacts,²¹

19. Interviewees' memories dealing with colonial childhoods necessarily use terms for unacceptable colonial categories such as 'babu', or 'djongos', use Indonesian loan words from the pre-war era which are no longer used, and recall to memory, or continue to create dishes such as 'nasi goreng' or 'bami goreng', which are quite different from their original Indonesian forms in a specific culinary sense and settings.

20. J. Bel, *Nederlandse literatuur in het fin de siècle: een receptie-historisch overzicht van het proza tussen 1885 en 1990* (Amsterdam 1993).

21. M. Bloembergen, *Colonial spectacles: the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies at the world exhibitions, 1880-1931* (Singapore 2006).

paintings,²² the ubiquitous *rijsttafel* and the inevitable ‘family member in *Indië*’ have always been part of metropolitan Dutch experience. Imperialism at a safe distance was shared by a metropolitan Dutch electorate for whom ‘The Indies was the Netherlands greatest adventure’.²³ Countless books with evocative titles presented inspiring images of life in the Indies to both attract migrants and reassure families at home.²⁴ Thus, the ‘colonial experience’, while the major emotive possession of *Indisch* Dutch, is not theirs exclusively. It is for this reason perhaps that the intangible significance ‘words’ and ‘what is buried in my heart’ are so important.

This is not the place to elaborate on the nature of reception of *Indisch* Dutch migrants in the post-war Netherlands. Suffice to say while it seemed natural *Indisch* Dutch culture would be more likely to be nursed in a Dutch linguistic and cultural environment from which it partly derived, historical accounts confirm *Indisch* Dutch migrants’ accounts of a determinedly hostile response to the cultural differences they experienced in the Netherlands. The inadequacy of the response at the time has been recognised by the Netherlands government itself. It has sought to make amends via a modest-sounding legislative package, *Het Gebaar*, ‘the gesture’, which between 2001 and 2009 delivered direct financial compensation and a broader program of financial support for the *Indisch* culture and history.²⁵ It was, as many in the community have claimed, merely a token recognition of their poor treatment in the Netherlands in the 1950s, coming too late and offering too little to compensate for past suffering, but it was nevertheless important symbolically. Summarising the situation they experienced in the fifties, Bosma *et al.* argue:

The Dutch government ... made it clear that there was no room for large groups of compatriots from the colony. The arguments were based on the consideration that the weakened Netherlands were unable to carry the burden

22. L. Hanks and G. Maris (eds.), *Lexicon of foreign artists who visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)* (Utrecht 1995).

23. J.A.A. van Doorn, *De laatste eeuw van Indië: ontwikkeling en ondergang van een koloniaal project* (Amsterdam 1994) 11.

24. These positive literary constructions of the Indies were summed up in a series of volumes published in the 1940s aimed at influencing, notably those edited by C.W. Wormser, *Zóó leven wij in Indië* (This is how we live in the Indies) (Deventer 1942); C.W. Wormser, *Wat Indië ontving en schonk* (What the Indies received [from us] and provided [to us]) (Amsterdam 1946) and W.H. van Helsdingen (ed.), *Daar werd wat groots verricht: Nederlandsch-Indië in de xxste eeuw* (Something marvellous was done over there) (Amsterdam 1941).

25. The legislation amongst other things, made available 35 million Euro to support cultural activities (including publications) to support recognition and celebration of the *Indisch* community. This has been significant in re-energising *Indisch* communities throughout the world as well as in the Netherlands.

of having to care for a massive group of migrants from the Indies. But behind this apparent pragmatic reason hid a certain fear of admitting a large group of people from an Eastern culture into the country.²⁶

Colour, the outward manifestation of difference, underpinned this ‘fear’ and ‘xenophobia’²⁷ that reverberated down through Dutch society, once more acting to separate the ‘white’ and ‘Indo’ *Indisch* Dutch. Assisting emigration became one way in which this Dutch ‘problem’ was resolved, while the less than friendly reception became one of the oft-cited reasons for leaving the Netherlands. After arriving in Australia it also contributed to a reluctance to join Dutch migrant community groups.

Emigration from the Netherlands, for the *Indisch* Dutch who had had to relocate to there, was ‘escaping’ from the patronising looks, the cold, the formality, the lack of rice and spices and what Bosma *et al.* emphasise, the question mark that European Dutch society placed over their Dutchness.²⁸ The experience of cultural difference (and indifference) of Anglo-Australians was for many preferable to the apparent cultural symmetry of the Netherlands. Amongst foreigners they could at least safeguard their memory of colonial and wartime experience – and now the humiliation of exclusion in the Netherlands – from scrutiny. Theirs indeed had been double – perhaps triple – migration experience. Different as each was, each reinforced what Hack and Blackburn have suggested was a common ‘tactic to overcome and forget war experience’: that is silence.²⁹ In both the Netherlands and Australian contexts, but for different reasons, in the decades after the war, as no one was interested in listening, *Indisch* Dutch kept their memory and experiences of the past securely stored within families and within themselves.

Emigration to Australia helped to expunge memory of the past, and to start again. Not only could the deprivation and humiliation of incarceration and the separation or loss of partners and friends now be set aside, but also the entire ‘colonial past’ which in many ways included the ‘imperial Netherlands’.³⁰ This may well have contributed to *Indisch* Dutch long remaining an ‘invisible’ sub-group within what the outside world assumed was the Dutch migrant community in Australia. Here however one cannot generalise. The

26. Bosma *et al.*, *De geschiedenis*, 190.

27. Bosma *et al.*, *De geschiedenis*, 190.

28. Bosma *et al.*, *De geschiedenis*, 190–192.

29. K. Hack and K. Blackburn, *Forgotten captives in Japan-occupied Asia* (London 2008) 267.

30. It is perhaps not coincidental that the public revelation of the *Indisch* Dutch experience as ‘comfort women’ came, finally, from a courageous Australian *Indisch* woman, Jan Ruff-O’Herne. See: J. Ruff-O’Herne, *50 years of silence* (Sydney 1994). A Dutch parliamentary report on this issue only emerged after a UN investigation prompted by submissions from the governments of Korea and the Philippines. See: International Commission of Jurists, *Report of a mission. Comfort women: an unfinished ordeal* (Geneva 1994).

motivation for emigration varied considerably and in large part, one suspects, depending on which of the groups Imhoff *et al.* defined they belonged to. In contrast to those who felt the need to escape, others more culturally *ingeburgerd* in Dutch culture – those whose connection with *Indisch* culture was most limited in time or emotionally or who were able to benefit from existing community networks – were able to exploit a common language to secure for themselves a cultural niche in a gradually liberalising Dutch society.³¹

Indisch Dutch in Australia

If the attempt to define *Indisch* Dutch confronts a series of statistical, definitional and cultural obstacles, quantifying their presence and attempting to generalise their experience in Australia is no less complex. It is only relatively recently that attempts have been made to differentiate ‘Dutch migration’, to recognise ‘the other Dutch’.³² Bureaucratic convenience, and as Willems has shown, a degree of bureaucratic connivance, coupled with political ‘spin’ and the attitude of European Dutch themselves, have ensured that the identity of *Indisch*-Dutch remained largely veiled for much of the second half of the twentieth century.³³ As far as the Australian public of the fifties and sixties were concerned, those who came from the Netherlands were *ipso facto* Dutch. For the immigration bureaucrats and official records those born in the Netherlands (regardless of their Indies experience) were Dutch, those born in the Indies were recorded as Indonesian-born Dutch citizens. Not until 1986 could those who ‘felt’ *Indisch* identify themselves as such in national censuses.

31. See: Willems ‘No sheltering sky’. See also: Wim Willems, ‘Breaking down the white walls: the Dutch from Indonesia’, in: N. Peters (ed.), *The Dutch down under, 1606-2006* (Perth 2006) 132-149.

32. This term was first used as a title of a small publication linked to an exhibition organised with the support of the Netherlands Consulate General in Melbourne in 1995: Eve ten Brummelaar, *The other Dutch: a short history of those Dutch Australians who spent their youth in the Dutch East Indies* (Melbourne 1995). While the narrative tells the story of the Dutch in the East Indies it concludes: ‘After nearly half a century we realised and felt it [that “we were not ‘forgotten’ any more”]: it was not just a bad dream, something to suppress. It [the war] really happened and there are many hundreds, even thousands of us here!’ (66). In 2000 the term was used as the title of a public exhibition at Victoria’s Immigration Museum. In 2006 a second exhibition was held, entitled ‘Dutch migration to Australia: The case of the Indisch Dutch’ in the context of 400 Years of Dutch Australia celebrations. An earlier reference to *Indisch* Dutch at the Migration museum was ‘Black Dutch’, removed after protest from the *Indisch* Dutch community (Personal communication Roy Jordaan).

33. Wim Willems, *De uittocht uit Indië. De geschiedenis van de Indische Nederlanders 1945-1995* (Amsterdam 2001) Ch. 11; Willems, ‘Breaking down the white walls’.

For the Australian public, Dutch meant ‘blond and blue-eyed’ and were typically imagined as large, rural farming families. This was not by accident since this was what government-sponsored media images represented them as being, and indeed many Dutch rural farming families more or less seemed to fit this image.³⁴ Dutch emigration officials and American, Australian and New Zealand immigration agents, Willems has argued, colluded to ensure that persons identifiable as ‘born in the Netherlands East Indies’ were unrecognisable – that is, that they would be invisible because they were white.³⁵ As Willems has documented, specific instructions were given ‘under the table’ to Australian migration officials to ensure ‘black Dutch’ were not let in behind the walls of the white fortress in Asia, while Dutch authorities attempted to negotiate special ‘deals’ with less strict agencies in order to relieve the country of the burden of its ‘coloured’ community. Until this hard-line policy was gradually relaxed in the course of the 1960s, if skin colour did not give them away, there was no advantage for *Indisch* Dutch to reveal their ‘true origins’ when Dutch migrants generally were so welcomed.³⁶

There is of course a wider irony in *Indisch* Dutch coming to Australia beyond the fact that geographically Australia was so close to where they had originally left from. Between 1945 and 1949 Australia had been instrumental in Indonesia’s diplomatic offensive to have its claim to independence recognised at the United Nations. It was one of the first countries to offer partial recognition to Indonesian claims under the multi-nation Cheribon Agreement of November 1945. Australian left wing and Communist labour unions, with the tacit support of sections of the Labor government, famously boycotted Dutch shipping leaving Australian ports while condemnation of the outrages of the Dutch ‘Police Actions’ of 1947 and 1948 was widely publicised. Nevertheless even before the change of government, the Australian Labor governments of prime

34. D. Cahill, ‘Lifting the low sky: are Dutch Australians assimilationist or accommodationists?’, in: N. Peters (ed.), *The Dutch down under*, 206-223, Table 1; J. Elich, ‘Dutch and Australian government’s perspectives on migration’, in: Peters (ed.), *The Dutch down under*, 158. The initial agreement for subsidised migration (the Netherlands Australia Migration Agreement, 1951) specified young adult labourers and farmers (Elich, ‘Dutch and Australian governments’ perspectives’, 152). Cahill shows that statistically ‘agricultural labourers’ after 1951 represented only a small minority (8 and 6 percent) of Dutch migrants. (Cahill, ‘Lifting the low sky’, Table 2) while the majority were categorised as ‘skilled vocational’. Most of these were ‘craft workers’. Cahill, ‘Lifting the low sky’, Table 2.

35. American officials in the early fifties accepted contingents of *Indisch* Dutch that they agreed could be defined as ‘deserving victims’. Willems, *De uittocht*, 264.

36. In 1975 a ‘multicultural policy’ was officially introduced. By 1987, the year leading up to the Australian bicentenary, the first popular English language Australian account of the Dutch migrant community, Edward Duyker’s *The Dutch in Australia* (Melbourne 1987), was published as part of a series celebrating Australia’s multiculturalism. This included a chapter on ‘The war and the Indies’, but remained firmly Dutch, as its cover with the recognisable iconic Dutch clogs and tulips, announced!

ministers Curtin and Chifley remained, in George's analysis, ambivalent as they tried to assess which solution – continued Dutch colonial authority or national Indonesian government – best met their longer term security interests.³⁷ In the meantime its actions on the international stage antagonised the Dutch government and nation.³⁸ By 1950, however, with new governments in all three countries, each in their own way engaged in post-war reconstruction, and with the Cold War well under way, Australia was no longer 'a source of annoyance'.³⁹ In Australia Dutch migrants were 'the next best thing' to British migrants, and certainly preferable to 'Mediterraneans'. Australia was recommended as the land of the future.⁴⁰ The only issue on the basis of which a distinction continued to be made between Dutch and *Indisch*-Dutch was that of colour. It was only gradually, as Willems has documented, and then largely unofficially, that 'people of colour', that is to say, certain categories within the settler group of the *Indisch* Dutch community, were admitted.⁴¹

Precise statistical information on *Indisch* Dutch arrivals to Australia becomes difficult to ascertain for reasons that should be apparent from what has been discussed above. The most significant problem is the nature of census statistics that only once in the post-war period – in 1986 – distinguished between 'ancestry' and country of birth. Thus, on the basis of the 1986 census it can be ascertained that prior to 1947, 277 'Indonesia-born persons of Dutch ancestry' arrived in Australia, a further 2,132 in the subsequent post-war period between 1947 and 1956, and a further 1,431 such persons between 1956 and 1966.⁴² The same census reveals that, of the 23,148 'persons reporting Dutch ancestry' in that census year, 2.3 percent 'stated their country of birth as Indonesia'.⁴³ An official publication summarising information on

37. George, *Australia and the Indonesian revolution*, 156-168. George describes government policy in these years as 'schizophrenic'.

38. L. de Jong's detailed account of the immediate post-war events makes clear Dutch irritation at Australian (and British) military actions in delaying return of Dutch authorities. See: L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog – Nederlands-Indië* ('s Gravenhage 1986) vol. III, 552-567.

39. Reported by the US Chargé d'Affaire 10 July 1974, quoted in George, *Australia and the Indonesian revolution*, 80.

40. Both Dutch and Australian governments were 'selling' the advantages of Dutch immigration via national media and specially 'commissioned' writers. See for instance: J.J. van der Laan, *Australië, land van vele mogelijkheden* (Amsterdam 1950) which carried a foreword by the then Australian Minister for Immigration. A more critical version of the same theme is A. Lodewyckx, *Australië waarheen?* (Meppel 1950).

41. Willems, 'Breaking down the white walls'.

42. J. Penny, *Indonesians in Australia, 1947-1986* (Clayton 1993) 3, table 2. Curiously, Penny's discussion of these figures ignores the Dutch ancestry group which till 1971 continued to represent the largest of the 'ancestry' groups that constituted the Indonesia born.

43. Bureau of Immigration Research, *Community profiles: Netherlands born* (Canberra 1991) 36, Fig 22. This compares to 39 percent born in the Netherlands and more than 50 percent

the community of 'Indonesian' migrants in Australia without reference to ancestry, reports global figures based on origin alone, as 918 'Indonesian' migrants in 1947, 3,631 in 1954 and 6,018 in 1961. It commented that: 'Of the several thousand Indonesia-born persons who settled here during the decade following the Second World War most were of Dutch ancestry' and that for 39 percent of those Indonesia-born over 65 the 'language spoken at home' was Dutch.⁴⁴

One question in considering why this group may have decided to come to Australia is what prior knowledge there was of Australia to influence emigrants' decision-making. This is a question which the current generation is hardly in a position to answer but in the broader picture which this paper attempts to draw, the question of any prior links or knowledge *Indisch* Dutch had of Australia is relevant. As alluded to above, a Dutch public must have been aware of the strained relations between Australian and Dutch nationals at the conclusion of the war against Japan. During the war such contact had been largely limited to military personnel, either as a result of their temporary residence in Australia 'for the duration' as part of the Indies government and military contingents stationed in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, or in the Indies itself as a result of joint military action and POW experience (primarily in Java and Ambon and, outside the Indies, in Japanese-occupied Asia).⁴⁵ After September 1945, *Indisch* Dutch briefly met Australian military forces allocated to secure the Japanese surrender or briefly, as evacuees given temporary visa permits to recuperate in Australia. The latter group, estimated to have totalled about 4,500⁴⁶ were required to leave Australia by May 1946, although this was delayed due to shipping bans and a distinct reluctance on the part of evacuees to return to the war torn Indies.⁴⁷

Representation of Australian war-time responses to contact with 'Dutch colonials' has reinforced an impression that this was largely negative. The most celebrated 'Australian' document of this attitude is the 1946 film by Dutch film maker Joris Ivens of the union-led boycott of Dutch shipping.⁴⁸ A later television series, *Changi*, a fictionalised account of Australian and Allied

claiming Dutch ancestry who by then had been born in Australia. Again this publication makes no further mention of this Indonesian born group.

44. Bureau of Immigration, *Multicultural and population research* (1995) 14, Fig. 20.

45. See Australian War Memorial Encyclopedia, 'Australian prisoners of war: Second World War prisoners of the Japanese', http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/ww2_japanese.asp (3 June 2009).

46. Beekhuis *et al.*, *Geïllustreerde atlas*, 243; Duyker, *The Dutch in Australia*, 98.

47. Duyker, *The Dutch in Australia*, 97-99. Massive devaluation of the Dutch guilder forced curtailment of the Dutch government funded program.

48. This documentary has recently been reprised by John Hughes in his documentary 'Indonesia calling: Joris Ivens in Australia'. See <http://www.archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/09/51/Indonesia-calling.html> (25 April 2010).

rows in Singapore, reflected a generic popular Australian view in its representation of a token Dutch fellow prisoner as both arrogant and a bumbling fool.⁴⁹ This drew directly on the published diaries of the Australian war hero, 'Weary' Dunlop, initially a POW in Java, which expressed criticism of fellow Dutch POWs in similar terms.⁵⁰ While these images accurately reflect (and reconstruct) widely held Australian attitudes, as a recent Dutch publication reminds us, the Dutch (national) anger at the time – beyond the question of Australia's apparent support of the Indonesian Republic – was because the boycotts (and the Australian government's unwillingness to suppress it) threatened the lives of thousands of Dutch women and children during the 'bersiap' period.⁵¹

Meanwhile the presence of Indonesians in Australia during the war, as Dutch POWs, members of the Dutch colonial military (KNIL) or as employees of the colonial government-in-exile, provided the Australian public with direct contact with 'real Indonesians' and was largely responsible for confirming a popular sympathetic understanding of Indonesian aspirations which underpinned the influential, anti-colonial opinion after August 1945.⁵² It is in response to this widespread attitude that despite taking in Dutch evacuees in the immediate post war period, Dutch Indies personnel as well as evacuees were quickly removed.⁵³ Along with them, went the group of Indonesian 'political detainees' who had 'accompanied' the DEI government in exile at the

49. 'Changri' television serial written by John Doyle first screened in 2001. See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0274245> (25 April 2010).

50. See E.E. Dunlop, *The war diaries of weary Dunlop: Java and the Burma railway, 1942-1945* (Ringwood 1990).

51. 'Bersiap' is a term primarily used by Dutch writers to refer to the period when Dutch nationals were under threat from Indonesian republican forces (pemuda) in the confused period from August 1945 to mid 1946 – and in some cases to 1947. Beekhuis *et al.*, *Geïllustreerde atlas*, 22, enumerates the groups of Bersiap victims who died in consequence, it is asserted, of the decisions of British occupation forces and by implication, Australian boycotts.

52. This hostility is clearly documented in a number of histories. See for instance Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada: Australia & the struggle for Indonesian independence, 1945-1949* (Sydney 1975); Frank Bennett, *The return of the exiles: Australia's repatriation of the Indonesians, 1945-47* (Clayton 2003); Margaret Kartomi, *The gamelan Digul and the prison camp musician who built it: an Australian link with the Indonesian Revolution* (Rochester 2005); Joan Hardjono and Chales Warner (eds.), *In love with a nation: Molly Bonadan and Indonesia, her own story in her own words* (Picton 1995).

53. See: George, *Australia and the Indonesian revolution*; Beekhuis *et al.*, *Geïllustreerde atlas*, 244-247. Between September 1945 and March 1946, 13 ships left Australian ports with passengers to the Netherlands, and a further 11 ships between October 1945 and March 1947 left to return mainly colonial government employees to the Netherlands Indies. Amongst the last Indisch Dutch former internees on temporary recuperation visa to be 'evicted' from Australia was this writer, barely three weeks old, who with mother and brother left in September 1946.



Ill. 1 People arriving in Australia in 1945 from the Dutch East Indies. They stayed in Australia for a short period in resting camps, so they could recover from the war years which they spend in prison camps. They migrated back to the Dutch East Indies and from there on to the Netherlands. Some of them later migrated again to Australia. Source: KITLV 6735 (originally Municipal archive Schiedam).

beginning of the war and held in an internment camp in the rural town of Casino which had been closed at the end of 1946.⁵⁴

Despite the widespread negative attitudes on the part of Australians toward Dutch colonialism, as some in the interviewee group attest, prior contact was a significant factor in selecting Australia. It was probably individuals amongst these different groups, Duyker suggests, who formed the vanguard of those who later officially emigrated to Australia after having first been returned to the Netherlands.⁵⁵ For these individuals genuine Australian hospitality during their brief stay, from former comrades in arms, or former fellow inmates or just ordinary, sympathetic neighbours, concerned less about politics than about attempting to understand the experience reflected

54. George, *Australia and the Indonesian revolution*, 62.

55. Duyker, *The Dutch in Australia*, 99. This indeed was the case for the family of the present writer.

in the eyes of women and mothers like themselves, remained as a warm memory. For many more, who had never seen or taken much interest in the English speaking country to the south of their former homeland, but who saw in images (in official migration promotional literature) a country offering sun, employment and open spaces that perhaps reminded them of a certain colonial largess, was sufficient motivation. For many more, coming to Australia was merely an accidental happenchance, a fortuitous opportunity to escape the Netherlands.

Limited and brief as this war and immediate post war contact had been, it did represent the first real interaction between these European communities in imperial Asia after one hundred and fifty years. For many Australians the Asia-Pacific war was the first time they had been to 'Asia' and more specifically, the first time they had seen 'Asians'. Unlike Dutch East Indies settlers, British-Australians had been largely 'shielded' from contact with 'Asians' as a result of race-based immigration policies that specifically prohibited 'coloured immigration'. The prospect of conquest, and actual internment by 'Asians' had then become a horrific experience for white Australians. The experiences of meeting 'friendly natives' who had protected and assisted them in the defence of imperialism, specifically in their own colony of New Guinea, but also in Portuguese Timor and Ambon, as well as directly, of Indonesians in Australia was something new.⁵⁶

Beyond the conscious awareness of most, there is however a steady and quite significant trading link between Australia and the Indies. From at least the beginning of the twentieth century, when Australian trade interests were officially represented at the International Trade exhibition in Semarang,⁵⁷ a growing trade had developed. Indies ports exported mainly coffee, tea, spices and hemp, kapok and rubber, while, in a lopsided trade, the main Australian exports to the Indies were largely limited to dairy goods, flour, biscuits, coal and medicines.⁵⁸ Trade however seems to have generated little interest in the respective publics: for Australia, the growing trade with the Indies (drastically reduced during the depression years) basically replicated products that could also be sourced from the British colonies of Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong, while Australian products to the Indies, as well as

56. However, Australian involvement in the war in the Asia-Pacific region had been in defence of European imperialism – not indigenous nationalism. Australian attitudes till the mid 1950s remained solidly against admitting Asians and 'people of colour' while contemporary assimilationist policies continued to ignore the interests and needs of Indigenous Australians.

57. M.G. van Heel, *Gedenkboek van de koloniale tentoonstelling, Semarang, 20 Augustus – 22 November 1914* (Batavia 1916). Van Heel notes that Australia was officially represented at the 1914 exhibition by the governor of the Australian colony of Papua New Guinea and by trade missions from New South Wales and Western Australia.

58. *Statistical Register, New South Wales* (Sydney 1914-1930).

competing with American imports, were restricted by the size of the *Indisch* urban market.⁵⁹

More important than trade in terms of its potential in shaping an Australian public's understanding were the efforts of Australian writers who wrote travelogues of their experience 'in the east' that projected the now stereotypical images of the Indies. The most well known of these, Frank Clune, contrasted an exotic tropical 'paradise' with its 'teaming hordes' to the rather arrogant and self-indulgent white clad colonials who profited from this.⁶⁰ Adding spice to this image, was the work of 'decadent artists' including Australia's Donald Friend who, as Vickers has argued, rapidly turned the island of Bali into an image far beyond the imagination of working class suburban Australians.⁶¹ For the wealthy few who could afford the 45 Australian pounds for the fourteen-day trip from Sydney to Batavia, Byrnes Phillips, and the Rotterdam Lloyd lines connected the two pre-war communities, and, on arrival the Batavia-based colonial government Tourist Office arranged travel through Java and Bali.⁶²

How extensive awareness of Australia was on the part of the *Indisch* Dutch before 1942 is of course difficult to gauge if for no other reason than that the vast majority of interviewees were children in the pre-war period. Like Australian children, they were given little insight into the world immediately outside their borders other than their respective 'motherland' in far-off Europe. However, it is notable that both historical accounts and interviewees demonstrate a general awareness of America and American culture. The upper echelons of *Indisch* society – and the Indies economy – had been significantly Americanised before the war as late colonial fiction also attests. In that case it could well be argued that, at least for well-to-do *Indisch* Dutch, America would have been uppermost in the minds of potential immigrants, as the greater number of

59. Australian understanding of the Dutch colony may also be evident from the way statistical records initially list the Indies islands separately, rather than as part of a single political entity. Overall Australian trade statistics in this period are logged by state, making generalisations difficult while passenger totals were apparently not collated. A detailed study of Australian trading history with (imperial) Asia (i.e. prior to 1945) has, as far as this author can discover, not yet been undertaken.

60. Frank Clune, *To the Isles of Spice with Frank Clune: a vagabond voyage by air from Botany Bay to Darwin, Bathurst Island, Timor, Java, Borneo, Celebes and French Indo-China* (Sydney 1940). In one incident, to highlight the character of the Dutch colonialists, he writes: 'The Doctor and I ordered *rijsttafel* and didn't have long to wait before the team of platter bearers arrived in Indian file ...Horror seized the Hollander when he discovered that *Rijsttafel* Waiter No. 6 was out of place and standing behind waiter No. 7 instead of before him. Sacrilege to a *rijsttafel* gastronome!' (165).

61. A. Vickers, *Bali, a paradise created* (Ringwood 1989).

62. D.A. Rinkes, N. van Zakinge, and J.W. de Roever (eds.), *Het Indische boek der zee* (Weltevreden 1925); Vereeniging Toeristenverkeer, *Illustrated Guide to Buitenzorg, the Preanger and Central Java* (Batavia 1913).

Indisch Dutch immigrants to North America indeed confirms.⁶³ In addition, it was America which had ‘saved’ them, while limited Australian involvement in their rescue (mostly in far off Sulawesi) and widespread criticism first of British policy, and then of Australian diplomatic initiatives, compared poorly.

Few within the pre-war *Indisch* community would have been aware of the degree of racism in Australia although the ‘white Australia policy’ was an openly declared principle of all governments.⁶⁴ Interviewees’ memories of a colonial childhood typically fail to recognise in descriptions of the warm intimacy with ‘native’ servants within the European household the broader racial character of colonial relations this reflected. Somewhat older interviewees however do indicate awareness of racist attitude played out within the European community itself directed at ‘Indos’.⁶⁵ But in general, in the decades before the war, the European community had drawn together in the face of an increasingly articulate Indonesian nationalist movement. A veneer of cultural respectability was maintained, although the Indo-Dutch political organisation, the *Indo-Europees Verbond*, continued to campaign actively for the improvement of conditions for the ‘coloured Europeans’, in particular with regard to career aspirations.⁶⁶ Within the European community in general however, ‘colour’ was no longer the issue it had been earlier in the twentieth century.⁶⁷ An improved economy after the First World War – although significantly declining again in the Depression – and increased migration from Europe, had successfully ‘Europeanised’ the urban Indies. It was, as indicated above, Japanese policy that re-emphasised racial difference within the European community. For many, arrival in the Netherlands where differentiation based on colour (and speech patterns) became a daily experience, this represented a return to attitudes of earlier days, and kept open the wounds delivered by Japanese policy. But, it was only when faced by an Australian migration officer that the question of colour became flagrantly apparent, and how very ‘colonial’ Australia was in relation to it.

63. Rijkschroeff estimates that between 1953 and 1963 ‘58,000 Dutch emigrated to the United States 40 % of whom had come from the former Dutch East Indies’. B. Rijkschroeff, ‘The Dutch-Indonesians in the United States: a case of double emigration’, in: R. Kroes and H-O. Neuschäfer (eds.), *The Dutch in North-America: their community and cultural continuity* (Amsterdam 1991) 422-440, 422.

64. Internationally it was famously articulated by the Australian prime minister Hughes at the Versailles Conference in 1919 and recalled by scholarly Dutch contributors, to the *Indische Gids* in the early 1920s when discussing Dutch response to the ‘Japanese threat’, J.T. Furstner, ‘Vlootbezuiniging’, *De Indische Gids* 42:1 (1920) 218.

65. See U. Bosma and R. Raben, *Being ‘Dutch’ in the Indies: a history of creolisation and empire, 1500-1920* (Singapore and Ohio 2008).

66. H. Meijer, *In Indië geworteld: de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam 2004) 154-190.

67. See U. Bosma, *Karl Zaalberg: journalist en strijder voor de Indo* (Leiden 1997); J. Coté, ‘Romancing the Indies: the literary construction of Tempo Doeloe, 1880-1930’, in: Coté and Westerbeek, *Recalling the Indies*, 133-172.

Racial awareness then becomes one of the themes that emerges in the interaction with the emigration-immigration process to mark the boundaries between the different groups constituting the emigrating *Indisch* Dutch. Several interviewees when asked to think back to their early days in Australia thirty or forty years early, recall being compared to, or being made to feel as, Italians, Lebanese or in one case, as an Aboriginal. Whether or not actually so named, the comparison aptly characterises the typical Anglo-Australian perceptions of the day. In the fifties and sixties the sudden and significant wave of 'Mediterranean' migrants concerned white Australians, particularly as they 'packed together' in close-knit cheaper inner urban precincts. In a later period, when multicultural attitudes had become fashionable, their culture was retrospectively celebrated for introducing a coffee, wine and pasta culture to what was then still a parochial, Anglo-centred, Protestant-dominated Australia. As an immigrant community – recognisable primarily because of their swarthy appearance – they were welcomed for filling the undesirable and menial manual jobs that white Anglo-Australians no longer wanted.⁶⁸

In the environment of the migrant receiving culture of post-war Australia, European Dutch, and within that cohort, *witte Indische Nederlanders* undoubtedly stood out as being amongst the better qualified migrants.⁶⁹ Some interviewees suggest that *Indisch* Dutch were distinguished, like their Mediterranean counterparts, by their willingness to *work* in this still pioneering society, and, on an individual basis, like them, were appreciated for their 'make-do' and 'can-do' nature. They found they could readily integrate in the many spaces in post-war Australian communities desperate for people with both initiative and skills. One might suggest that for these individuals, if not for the *Indisch* Dutch as a whole, they aligned well with the pioneering character of these Anglo colonials; there was a certain similarity to an Australian ethos, which assisted their settlement. Thus, both groups of *Indisch* Dutch, *Indo* and *witte Indische Nederlanders* experienced in different ways the frank assessment of their monolingual, mono-cultural, and relatively parochial, hosts.⁷⁰

The reputation of having rapidly assimilated stood European Dutch migrants in good stead in the first decades of the post-war era. From the beginning, blond, blue-eyed Dutch migrant families became the 'pin-up' migrants on which governments based their campaign to encourage Anglo-Australians to accept the influx of non-British migrants. *Indisch* Dutch, initially unrec-

68. Greek, Italian and Maltese migrants were respectively the least qualified amongst the 'first generation' migrant groups (Cahill, 'Lifting the low sky', 211: Table 2).

69. The Dutch migrant cohort as a whole, represented the most highly qualified migrant group after German migrants. See Cahill 'Lifting the low sky' above.

70. An oft-repeated complaint however was the lack of homeliness and sociability of working class Australians whose homes were not '*gezellig*' (homely) and who lacked the ability *om eventjes te komen babbelen* (to just drop in for a chat).

ognisable were not separately identified, either officially or ‘on the street’. Nor, it seems, did they seek separate recognition in terms of organisations. Eventually, however, following the official acceptance of ‘multiculturalism’ in the 1970s and the gradual opening up to migration from Asia there after, the exoticism of ‘different cultures’ – cultures expressed by migrant groups that had remained intact and with attributes that generated visible and public performance⁷¹ – came to be publicly celebrated. By then, the well-assimilated European Dutch community had retained little tangible evidence on which to differentiate itself and on which to base its (second generation) identity. As at least two contributors to a landmark Dutch community conference in 1993 noted, the Dutch had become ‘invisible’ because of their success in meeting the demands of Anglo-Australian society.⁷²

Significantly, this conference was also the last at which a gathering of the Dutch community failed to recognise its *Indisch* Dutch cousins as constituting part of the Australian Dutch community.⁷³ The publication a decade later of a book celebrating the 400 years of contact between the Dutch and Australia was then a welcome and timely initiative. Unintentionally, this book also sets the relationship between the *Indisch* Dutch and Australia at the forefront of the account. Where the 1993 publication assumed a definition of the *Indisch* Dutch based on events surrounding the Second World War, the claim of ‘400 years of Dutch-Australian contact’ assumes the centrality of the Dutch settlement in Asia in this relationship. While the publication itself defines employees of the Dutch East Indies Company in purely European Dutch terms, from the perspective of the history of the *Indisch* Dutch it can be argued that these early contacts were undertaken by the forerunners of the *Indisch* Dutch community. As Bosma and Raben argue,⁷⁴ the 400 year history of the *Indisch* Dutch was founded in these earliest days of the *Vereenigde Oost Indische Compagnie* (voc) in Asia, when Batavia – not the Netherlands – was the effective capital of this Asian enterprise. If not the Chinese, as has been argued,⁷⁵ then certainly it was the *Indisch* Dutch – people of Dutch origins whose lives or interests were connected to the East Indies – who ‘discovered’ Australia.

71. Ghassan Hage, *White nation: fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society* (Annandale 1998).

72. Articles by W. Walker-Birckhead, ‘The invisible Dutch in Australia: cultural meanings of migration’, in: B. Grüter and J. Stracke (eds.), *Dutch Australians taking stock: proceedings of the first national Dutch Australian Community Conference, Melbourne, November, 1993* (Melbourne 1995) 59-69; Gary Bouma ‘The Dutch in Australia: a case of successful assimilation?’, in: Grüter and Stracke (eds.), *Dutch Australians taking stock*, 75-85.

73. In retrospect, this exclusion becomes more marked by the degree to which contributors sought to define Dutchness in papers with titles such as ‘The Dutch psyche: a cultural exploration’, ‘Dutch immigration’ and ‘The Dutch in Australia’.

74. Bosma and Raben, *Being ‘Dutch’ in the Indies*.

75. G. Menzies, *1421: the year Chinese discovered the world* (London 2002).

Be that as it may, in this celebratory publication no less than four of its twenty-three chapters specifically direct attention to the Australia-related history of the *Indisch* Dutch. As Westerbeek shows in one of these chapters (summarising a more detailed PhD study on the second generation) much of the markings upon which, half a century earlier, important differences were based, have now faded.⁷⁶

Conclusion

It can be said that *Indisch* Dutch now constitute a distinct and separate community in multicultural Australia. This Australian community is part of a global community much of whose history has also been obscured behind a veil of bureaucratic convenience, racism, political correctness and personal efforts to deal with traumatic experience. As part of a global phenomenon, their story of exodus and resettlement forms part of a broader narrative of post-colonial and post-imperial nation-making, of global migration and resettlement and, not least, of global ideological re-orientation. This article has aimed to understand part of the geo-political context in which this has taken place and which contributed to constructing the processes that shaped the experiences of one particular community within whose experience much of this global process can be seen to be reflected.

Today, the significance of the racial, cultural and national anxieties which featured so prominently a little more than half a century ago, and which this discussion has sought once more to uncover, appears to have diminished. The world is increasingly globalised and mobile: difference is less noticed, relocation more common. Nevertheless when one inspects inside communities, one becomes all too aware that the identity boundaries laid down in earlier times continue to linger in the lives of individuals albeit by taking on new meanings. If a globalised culture is making cosmopolitans of us all, 'modern' individuals and groups are now granted the space to celebrate the cultural markers that can differentiate them from the 'globalised' mass. In Australia political policies of cultural tolerance have contributed to minority groups such as the *Indisch* Dutch being recognised within the wider community as having a distinct identity and history. Rehearsing the history of the *Indisch* Dutch abroad, recognises the richness of this cultural heritage but also provides a window into the broader historical processes that we have all been subject to and should be cognisant of. They were but one group thrust into a postcolonial world as a result of the end of European imperialism; their heritage the outcome of a process of globalisation that commenced four

76. L. Westerbeek, 'Indische identity in Australia', in: N. Peters (ed.), *The Dutch down under* (Perth 2006) 254-276.

hundred years earlier and that gave rise to the intense interaction between European and Asian cultures.

At the same time, the identity of this community in Australia is fragile and perhaps should not be exaggerated. If, like most other post-war migrant groups, the *Indisch* Dutch is a fractured community, the above account has indicated that this group is more disconnected than most. This is, in the first place because of the tenuous and ambiguous basis that the definition provides for constructing a common link. Moreover, given that its physical reference point – that is *Indië*, the colonial Dutch Indies – has disappeared in the post-colonial world, the cultural reference point of *Indisch* identity has increasingly had to rely on a vicariously rehearsed literary recreation in the Netherlands. Today, for the Australian – as well as for the other fragments – of the global *Indisch* community the Netherlands stands in as ‘loco-homeland’ for an *Indisch* heritage where it is best embedded in a linguistic and cultural sediment. Indonesia, which is not the Indies, vouchsafes little of either memory or heritage of an Indies past.

The *Indisch* Dutch, whose cultural genealogy stretches back four centuries, have had a chequered post-colonial history in both the Netherlands and Australia. But in both cultural contexts their ‘difference’ has contributed to the education of both host societies. Both fractions of the community have forced their presence on the dominant ‘white’ national discourse to different degrees, and in turn, the gradual relaxation of a national racial self-image has contributed to the ability of *Indisch* Dutch to gradually express their identity. Significant differences, however, in the social positioning of *Indisch* Dutch in both contexts remain evident. Amongst the more obvious reasons for this is the more rapid decline of cultural and linguistic markers in a foreign, Anglophone context, resulting in an inability to adequately support identity amongst a second and third generation. The geo-political factor which has been emphasised in the above discussion also remains relevant. Despite the proximity of Indonesia, in Australia’s continued ambivalence regarding its place in Asia there continues to be little encouragement for the expression of Asian inheritance of the *Indisch* Dutch. Attempts at institutional expression in the form of *tempo doeloe* organisations have, generally speaking, failed to encompass post-emigration generations. Increasingly second generation *Indisch* Dutch in Australia of whatever (physical or ideological) complexion, find they need to draw from the deeper and better resourced but increasingly more homogenised well of the on-going *Indisch* Dutch community in the Netherlands.

About the author

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within the broad category of *Indisch* Dutch himself – born in 1946 to parents who survived Japanese internment in Sulawesi and briefly evacuated to Australia – he has co-edited a book on *Indisch* Dutch migrants in Australia, *Recalling the Indies: Colonial Memories and Postcolonial identities* (Amsterdam 2005). He researches colonial cultures and modernity in early twentieth century Netherlands East Indies/Indonesia. As well as articles on Dutch colonial policy and practice, he has translated and edited three volumes of letters by R.A. Kartini, the latest being *Realising the Dream of RA Kartini. Her sisters' letters from colonial Java* (Ohio/KITLV, 2008).