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**'The Eurasian Question' : the colonial position and postcolonial options of colonial mixed ancestry groups from British India, Dutch East Indies and French Indochina compared**

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# 6 Socio-economic position of Eurasians from 1900 onwards

## 6.1 Introduction

In the late colonial period, a more or less segregated society came about in all three colonies in which every population group – colonised people, colonisers and the mixed group – had its own place. In British India in particular, this development was clearly visible and a separate social life with associations and clubs for Anglo-Indians developed. In the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina separate spheres for Indo-Europeans and *Métis* people existed as well, but boundaries were easier to cross and were not as sharp as in British India. This chapter describes how authorities of the three colonial settings increasingly started to look at each other. In all three colonial settings attempts were made to rescue, raise and educate Eurasian children.

## 6.2 British India: Anglo-Indian culture in railway colonies

As has been described above, since the early eighteenth century Anglo-Indians had been excluded from a variety of colonial schools, clubs, and charitable organisations because they were not white enough and did not have legal European status.<sup>1</sup> The British admired the Dutch colonial policy regarding Indo-Europeans; according to one English-speaking journalist, the Dutch were simply ‘realists’ because they recognised the absurdity of treating Indo-Europeans as a separate ‘minority’. In his opinion, the inevitable result of the whole colonial project was hybridity. The journalist judged the ‘peculiar snobbery’ of the British colonial officials, who banned Eurasians from all European social spaces in both Malaya and India, as narrow-minded.<sup>2</sup>

Anglo-Indians enjoyed an active, but segregated and isolated, social life away from the rest of British Indian colonial society with their own clubs, especially in the railway colonies where many Anglo-Indians worked. These were the so-called railway institutes which offered dances, parties, theatre nights, cards and bingo. Indians were excluded from Anglo-Indian clubs and Anglo-Indians were in turn excluded from British clubs. The position of Anglo-Indians was marginal.<sup>3</sup> Despite these strict unwritten rules, Anglo-Indians mimicked the Europeans perhaps even more than the Indo-Europeans in the Dutch case, hoping to experience at least some upward social mobility. A considerable number of Anglo-Indian girls had affairs with British men, especially during the hot summers, according to one memoir recounted in C. Allen’s collection of colonial memories *Tales from the Raj*. However, as soon

as the cold weather started and the 'Fishing Fleet' with 'fresh' British women arrived from Britain, these relationships should be ended – according to public colonial opinion.<sup>4</sup>

The difficult position of Anglo-Indians in British India is strikingly illustrated in the following quotation from the novel *Bhowani Junction*, written by John Masters. The novel is set in the imaginary Anglo-Indian railway colony of Bhowani Junction, some years before independence. Masters, born to British parents in Calcutta in 1914, attended the Royal Military College and served in the army in India. After leaving the army, he moved to the United States and became a writer.<sup>5</sup> *Bhowani Junction* was published in 1954, shortly after independence. It was loosely connected to a series of other novels, in which members of the Savage family acted as the main characters, but only in the novel *Bhowani Junction* was the protagonist an Anglo-Indian woman.<sup>6</sup>

The following excerpt comes from a conversation between the Anglo-Indian heroine, Victoria Jones, and the Indian Ranjit, in which the latter sketches a rather gloomy future for Anglo-Indians while giving an idea of how Indians perceived Anglo-Indians:

Have you ever met an Englishman who didn't insult you? Haven't your people worked for them for a hundred years? And now how are they going to reward you? You know. They are going to leave you here to us. And what do you think we're going to do? We're going to make you realize that you are Indians, inferior Indians, possibly disloyal Indians, because you've spent a hundred years licking England's boots and kicking us with your own boot that you're so proud of wearing.<sup>7</sup>

British attitudes towards the Anglo-Indians varied, but they were usually disapproving according to Irene Edwards, who was a child during the last decade of the Raj. She claimed that the lower classes welcomed the Anglo-Indians into their clubs and messes. Indeed, these 'poor whites' even married them. But, in her opinion, the higher up the social ladder the greater was the prejudice against the Anglo-Indians.<sup>8</sup>

Despite all these prejudices, the main character of *Bhowani Junction*, Victoria, was convinced that '[t]he English despise us but need us. We despise the Indians but we need them.'<sup>9</sup> In this way, these sharply-demarcated groups existed in a precarious balance in British Indian colonial society. Lower class British soldiers fought both army regulations and prejudice when they married Eurasian women. The soldiers usually met them at the Railway Institute dances, as one of them recounted to the aforementioned author Allen:

Whenever you were dancing with an Anglo-Indian girl the first thing she did was to assail you with a great puff of garlic and cheap perfume, but you stuck to her, because she was beautiful and in any case probably the only girl available.<sup>10</sup>

This image of the Anglo-Indian girl at the railway institute dances tied in with the persistent stereotype that was widespread in Raj fiction and colonial reality that the only goal of an Anglo-Indian woman was to seduce and marry a British man. That was a ticket to the white colonisers' social circles for Anglo-Indian girls. In other words, this was an opportunity for the upward social mobility they longed for and which was quite difficult to achieve in British India.<sup>11</sup> In the colonial novel *Combat of Shadows*, written in 1962 by the Indian author Manohar Malgonkar about the life of a British

tea planter at an Indian hill station, the train of thought of the planter's Anglo-Indian mistress illustrates this perception:

Above all, she could never have laid bare to any outsider her own personal dream of becoming someday a sahib's lady, going into the reserved, all-white clubs with her head held high, escorted by an Englishman, without the slightest trace of coloured blood, of bearing blue-eyed, flaxen haired children, of going to London for a dizzy round of the town and to gaze at the King himself, and then of settling down in a cool antiseptic, wholly English suburb, and washing away the contamination of India and Tinapur.<sup>12</sup>

In *Bhowani Junction* the same stereotype was used when the father of Victoria Jones advised his daughter to marry 'up the social ladder': 'You could [...] marry a British officer and then [...] go home. You can say you are partly Spanish.'<sup>13</sup> In this quote, 'home' means the UK, since many Anglo-Indians saw that as their ultimate home. But Victoria knew quite well that:

[...] we couldn't go Home. We couldn't become English, because we were half Indian. We couldn't become Indian because we were half English. We could only stay where we were and be what we were.<sup>14</sup>

The desire of Anglo-Indians to obscure their origins was obvious from the first quotation: being of partly Spanish descent was still considered better than having a partly indigenous ancestry.

*'It isn't sunburn that makes us brown, is it?'*

Anglo-Indians expressed their mimicry clearly in their obsession with wearing a *topi*, tropical headgear which was associated with the British Indian colonial context,<sup>15</sup> but which did also appear in the two other colonial contexts. Another fragment from the novel *Bhowani Junction* tellingly illustrates this. The Anglo-Indian boyfriend of Victoria Jones, Patrick Taylor, warns her:

Where is your *topi*? You will get all sunburned.' 'I never wear one' she told me. 'But the sun!', Patrick Taylor cried. 'It is the hottest time of the day! You will get all brown!' [...] she said: 'It isn't sunburn that makes us brown, is it?'<sup>16</sup>

With that last sentence, Victoria refers to the complex negative image of the Anglo-Indians. This negative image was one of the reasons why there was a campaign against the filming of the novel. The film was set during the difficult transition period before the transfer of power by the British and dealt with the problems it brought for the small Anglo-Indian community that had remained in India.<sup>17</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, Anglo-Indians were increasingly experiencing direct competition from Indians on the job market, many of whom possessed a superior educational training. This was another reason for Anglo-Indians to resent each other.

Because of this increasing competition, prominent Anglo-Indians sent appeals to the British government for a continuation of the special Anglo-Indian privileges under a new Indian constitution, which had to be designed.<sup>18</sup> Not everyone agreed



Ill. 3 Screenshot from the film *Bhowani Junction* (1956): the British Colonel Savage (the British actor Stewart Granger, left), the Indian Ranjit Kasel (played by the British actor Francis Matthews), Anglo-Indian Victoria Jones (played by the American actress Ava Gardner) and Anglo-Indian Patrick Taylor (played by the British actor Bill Travers).<sup>19</sup>

on this solution to the growing poverty among Anglo-Indians and poor whites with whom they were often equated. According to John Macrae in a publication on this problem in Calcutta of 1913:

The ultimate place of the Anglo-Indian is not as one of the governing class, not as a European, but as an integral part of the social system of India, which the European is not.<sup>20</sup>

In this view, Anglo-Indians had to abandon their links with the British rulers entirely. The Pauperism Committee had already reported in 1892, that it was:

The defects of character more or less connected with this sentiment (of racial pride to be connected to the British) that seriously interfere (d) with Indo-Europeans in the struggle for work.<sup>21</sup>

In the early twentieth century, Anglo-Indians began to look for a 'homeland', a 'province', a 'state' or a newly-created town which they could call their own to escape the difficult in-between colonial situation. In such a location, they would be away from the British, who looked down on them, unless there was a need for them to answer



Ill. 4 The hill station of Simla (currently known as Shimla) in Northern India nowadays.<sup>22</sup>

a call to arms or to supervise the indigenous people. Furthermore, they would be away from the Indians who considered them not only lackeys of the British but, even worse in a 'caste' society, 'outcasts'. In 1905, a first achievement in this respect was reached when the Whitefield settlers' and Residents' Association was formed to cultivate an area called Whitefield. In those days, it was seen as the only settlement that Europeans and Eurasians could call their own.<sup>23</sup> Whitefield is nowadays a suburb of the booming city of Bangalore in southern India and a retirement home for elderly Anglo-Indians is located there.<sup>24</sup> Another example of such an agricultural colony was the settlement of ex-soldiers and Anglo-Indians on the Andaman Islands as farmers, with monthly allowances, servants, free clothing, lodgings and land. This so-called 'Andaman Scheme' was meant to relieve the pressure of the economic crisis in the late 1920s.<sup>25</sup> A last example of an agricultural project was the construction of the Anglo-Indian village in McCluskieganj (called 'Little England') in the rural east Indian state of Bihar in the early 1930s. Although this project failed and turned out to be an ill-fated utopian separatist dream, it was a scheme that attempted to finally link the Anglo-Indians to the soil of India.<sup>26</sup>

The number of youngsters who went to Britain as part of their education, was quite large in British India. British parents (and Anglo-Indians who had sufficient means) sent their children to Britain before they could learn the '*chichi*' (or sometimes spelled as '*cheechee*') language: a mix of English and Hindi which was seen as a denigrating marker of Anglo-Indians.<sup>27</sup> For Anglo-Indians who could not afford to send their children to the UK, a stay at a boarding school in the highlands in northern India was an

attractive alternative. Also for colonial authorities, the boarding schools were a solution to the growing domiciled poor white and Eurasian population. From the 1880s onwards, they set up a centralised schooling system including Eurasian boarding schools and orphanages in Kalimpong, Simla, Kurseong and Darjeeling at the foot of the Himalayas.<sup>28</sup> They provided a dual solution for the 'Eurasian Question': isolation and discipline, by means of education.<sup>29</sup> Already in 1860, Bishop Cotton of Calcutta had suggested to the government of India the establishment of hill schools far away from the Indian backstreets and bazaars. Bishop Cotton's School was established in 1859 in hill station Simla. It was argued by other British colonists that in the hills, children would grow up in an almost European climate with all but European features.<sup>30</sup> Also for Anglo-Indian orphans, the hill stations provided a good atmosphere to grow up. The hill stations were hedged with British trees and flowers. Fruits and vegetables were cultivated in orchards and vegetable gardens. The buildings looked more like half-timbered Tudor cottages, gingerbread-ornamented Swiss chalets, and other European architectural imports than the veranda-enclosed bungalows which were built in the plains.<sup>31</sup>

A well-known example of a hill institution for Anglo-Indians were the *St. Andrew's colonial homes* set up by Dr. John Anderson Graham, a missionary of the Church of Scotland. He had established this boarding school at the hill station of Kalimpong near Darjeeling in 1900 under the auspices of the Church of Scotland. Graham had travelled to Kalimpong in 1890 as a missionary with the Young Men's Guild and as part of his work he visited tea plantations in Darjeeling and Assam. His chief concern was 'the absence of a hopeful future for the children' who were living at these tea plantations.<sup>32</sup> The climate of the hill station of Kalimpong was 'cold enough to develop robustness', according to a report from Graham, whereas it was 'impossible for anyone brought up in the plains to become strong. There is a slackness in the tropics, and no robust ideal concerning work.' The children's daily routines were dominated by work, study and especially discipline. Markers of British respectability and prowess were built into the schooling, as well as activities such as competitive sport, scouting and military cadets.<sup>33</sup> The homes were modelled after William Quarrier's Orphan Homes of Scotland, opened in 1876, which Graham had visited in the 1890s.<sup>34</sup>

The institution was meant for poor and orphaned domiciled European and Anglo-Indian children who could not be admitted to a fee-paying school. However, Graham's other motive for founding his institution, which he only mentioned in private correspondence, was that he felt those fair-skinned poor and destitute Anglo-Indian children were a disgrace for the UK and Christianity.<sup>35</sup> This statement tied in with views expressed by Mr. G.O. Small, himself of Anglo-Indian ancestry, at the Calcutta Inquiry Meeting, 1918: 'If need be, they should, while young, be removed from the undesirable or insanitary surroundings in which they may happen to live.'<sup>36</sup> A similar kind of motive for removing children of mixed ancestry from their indigenous mothers was expressed in the Indochinese and Dutch East Indies cases. Its intent was elaborately explained in the prospectus of the *St. Andrew's colonial homes*:

It is a well-known fact that the domiciled community deteriorates in the environments of a tropical country and oriental standards; and the object of the Homes is to break down



the influence of heredity and of such environments, by removing the children at an early age to surroundings which are healthier, both physically and morally, than the towns in the plains.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, they were taught the 'true dignity of manual labour by precept and example.' The boys would receive training in all aspects of farming, as well as carpentry and masonry work, and the girls would be taught household skills for 'suitable' industries.<sup>38</sup> This emphasis on manual labour was meant to give them more opportunities in their later lives, so they would be 'fitly educated' and to provide:

[...] suitable openings for the Eurasian and poor European children as will fit them for emigration to the colonies or failing that, will make them more robust for work in India.<sup>39</sup>

These were rather different jobs from the lowly administrative positions Anglo-Indians traditionally occupied. By the mid-1930s, Graham had sent more than fifty former pupils to New Zealand, eleven to Australia, four to the United States and one to South Africa. In addition to this prospect of emigration, there were also other work opportunities, such as in commerce, manufacturing, the railways and telegraphs. For example, in 1906-1908 about 20 Anglo-Indian boys from the *St. Andrew's colonial homes* were sent to the British training-vessel *The Southampton*, and several of them did succeed in obtaining a career in piloting. The main work for girls was in nursing, but they also became teachers, missionaries, stenographers, typists, or worked in other administrative occupations.<sup>40</sup>

The *St. Andrew's colonial homes* consisted of cottages, each of which housed some 30 children overseen by a 'housemother' who was usually recruited from the UK or Australia. This 'house mother' had the onerous task of moulding 30 children of different origins and ages into one family. The complex was much like a self-sufficient village with 575 children and about 70 employees by 1934.<sup>41</sup> Apart from the cottages there was a school, a chapel and infirmary, as well as industrial training workshops, a gymnasium and an experimental farm.<sup>42</sup> The regime was strict and corporal punishment was used. But Anglo-Indians who were later asked about their youth at St. Andrew's generally appreciated their experience.<sup>43</sup> To cover the costs of the boarding school and orphanage, children from stable, well-to-do families were enrolled as fee-paying pupils, and they were educated alongside the 'FBs' or free boarders who were not required to pay to attend the school. No official distinctions were made between these two groups.<sup>44</sup> The *St. Andrew's colonial homes* received some money from the British colonial state as orphanages in British India were partly subsidised by the government and partly by private donations.<sup>45</sup> It was not enough to meet all costs, so Graham used skilful propaganda to attract private donations. He took a personal approach by composing monthly newsletters.<sup>46</sup>

In 1905 there were, in addition to the St. Andrew's colonial homes, about 60 other European schools and orphanages situated along the southern slopes of the Himalayas with around 5,400 pupils. This number seems to have increased throughout the years of the late colonial period in British India.<sup>47</sup> However, most Anglo-Indians lived in the lower parts of the Indian subcontinent, the unhealthy 'plains', throughout the year, either moving between railway colonies every few years, or living on a more permanent basis in cities such as Calcutta (Kolkata), Madras (Chennai), Bombay (Mum-

bai), Bangalore and Lucknow.<sup>48</sup> The largest Anglo-Indian and European community lived in Calcutta.<sup>49</sup>

The trend among Anglo-Indians to live in the hill stations or at least let their children grow up there was not approved by Governor General Canning, who had drawn a rigid line between the education of Europeans and Anglo-Indians in his minute on education of 1860:

Anglo-Indians would be best served by day schools on the plains, especially since the climate of the hills [...] is held to be injurious to them, if at all weakly.<sup>50</sup>

This line of reasoning was followed by many of the better hill schools, since they often did not admit Anglo-Indians. Despite this effort to restrict the sojourn in the hill stations to the Europeans, the British Indian hill stations had begun to lose their function as British enclaves by 1902. H.H. Risley, secretary to the home department of the government of India, noted: ‘There can be no doubt, that there is an increasing tendency on the part of wealthy natives to spend the hot weather in the hills.’ Those wealthy natives were often rulers of the indigenous princely states.<sup>51</sup> This trend can be seen as mimicking by the indigenous people. They imitated the British coloniser, just as the Anglo-Indians did.

Burma deserves a separate mention because in Burma, the general conditions of society were different from the situation in the rest of British India. In India, British residents frequently regarded Anglo-Indians as ‘a particularly difficult class’ while in Burma, the colonial administrators held the local Eurasian group, the Anglo-Burmese, in high esteem. With time, Anglo-Burmans dominated many parts of the colonial government in Burma, such as the railways and port authorities, the education system, the colonial police force and indigenous army units. In contrast to their Anglo-Indian counterparts, they were indeed an influential voice in Burmese colonial society.<sup>52</sup>

### 6.3 Dutch East Indies: Mimicry of the European ideal

Around 1900, stricter guidelines regarding dress and the running of a European colonial household were introduced in the Dutch East Indies, in combination with the introduction of a more negative discourse about Indo-Europeans. ‘Inside’ began to mean ‘amongst ourselves’ and only inside could people wear a *sarong*, *kabaya* or *slaapbroek* (pyjamas). Politeness dictated that whoever appeared at the front door would be invited into the house. But strangers and friends never came any further than the front gallery and only saw the family ‘properly dressed’.<sup>53</sup> These rules were not only followed in social circles of the Dutch *totoks*, also Indo-European families from the highest ranks of society adapted to this ideal. Newcomers who had just arrived were often called *totoks parvenus* by the people who had lived for some time in the Dutch East Indies. While many ‘import’ Dutch people were social outcasts in the Netherlands, they immediately attained a superior position in the Dutch East Indies because of their whiteness. This was based on the colonial hierarchy and they did not have to achieve anything before reaching that superior position.<sup>54</sup> This mechanism is tellingly described by the Dutch author Bep Vuyk:

The modest man, who embarked in Genoa, has become much more important when he disembarked in Priok. At the moment he left Europe, he became European.<sup>55</sup>

From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, better educated native people competed with Indo-Europeans for administrative jobs.<sup>56</sup> The privilege of Indo-Europeans disappeared within a couple of years. Indigenous workers were cheaper than Indo-Europeans and 'fresh' Dutch people from the mother country were better trained than them. For Indo-Europeans there no longer seemed to be a distinct place for them in society. The directors of the railway companies, which were traditionally an important source of work for Indo-Europeans, decided on equal wages for equal labour. This meant that Indo-Europeans would receive the same salary as indigenous people. It was a sensitive degradation for Indo-Europeans.<sup>57</sup> Already in the nineteenth century, the saying: 'the more dye (i.e. colour), the less pay' was common.<sup>58</sup> Because of the increased competition of indigenous people in the labour market and sharper boundaries because of the greater influx of people from the mother country, Indo-Europeans tended to hold on more firmly to their European status. They had to 'mimic' the Europeans even more, in a similar way to the British-Indian case, in order to pass themselves off as European at least to a considerable degree. However, through the act of mimicking, Indo-Europeans also denied a part of themselves by conforming to the European discourse about the inferiority and indolence of the indigenous people.<sup>59</sup>

This contradiction is well-expressed by the following quote from the colonial novel *Gerucht en geweld* (Rumour and Violence) written by Bep Vuyk in 1959. Vuyk was born in the Netherlands in 1905. Her mother was a Dutch woman and her father an Indo-European. When she was 25 years old, she left for the Dutch East Indies to work in an orphanage for Indo-European children in Soekaboemi. In 1950, she chose Indonesian citizenship. Five years later, however, her attitude towards the Indonesian Republic had dramatically changed.<sup>60</sup> She left Indonesia in 1958, after severe difficulties in gaining admission to the Netherlands, because of her former support of Sukarno.<sup>61</sup> In one of her stories, an Indo-European appears who still had a strong colonial attitude shortly after decolonisation. This Indo-European captain worked on the ship on which the protagonist and her husband travelled back to the Netherlands. The captain felt threatened by the new Indonesian rulers and did not want to conform:

At the moment, I am captain for a year and they want to get rid of me. They say I am no good for the new relations; that I cannot conform. I do not wish to conform, I do not want to pretend nothing has happened towards those black blokes, those slow, indolent Asians with their stupid black mugs.<sup>62</sup>

The protagonist asked the captain: 'What do you have against those blacks, captain, you are black yourself, aren't you?'<sup>63</sup> This question touched the core of the 'half-caste pariah' dilemma, which was still relevant after decolonisation.

He took his skin of his underarm between thumb and forefinger and screamed but not at me, with the head thrown far behind, while shrieking to the universe: 'This black skin, my own skin that I would tear off. It is the Asian within me who I hate.'<sup>64</sup>

The changes in colonial society were vividly described in one of the most famous Dutch colonial novels, *De stille kracht* (The hidden force) written by Louis Couperus

and published in 1900. The period in which the profound, above-described changes in colonial society were not yet clearly visible was later named *tempo doeloe*, which became a symbolic metaphor for ‘the good old colonial days’.

Louis Couperus was from a family with a rich history in the Dutch colony. He had lived in the Dutch East Indies for some years (1873-1878) and later often travelled there.<sup>65</sup> *De stille kracht* presented the Dutch-born colonial official Otto van Oudijck and his household, consisting of his Indies-born Dutch wife Leonie and her Indo-European stepchildren Doddy and Theo. Leonie seduced her stepson, Theo, son of her husband's previous relationship with a Javanese woman, and Addy, the Indo-European fiancé of her stepdaughter Doddy. Her husband was ignorant of her affairs while attempting to maintain European habits in his household. Van Oudijck was confronted with an indigenous revolt which in part sprang from his lack of tact with the indigenous population. At the end of the novel, he had gone ‘native’ and he was happily living with an indigenous woman in a *kampong* (an indigenous village).<sup>66</sup> The following quote described the exaggerated mimicking ‘European’ behaviour of the Indo-European inspector Van Helderer, with whom Van Oudijck cooperated. He and his wife banned all things associated with the indigenous lifestyle:

Ida van Helderer was a stereotypical white Indo-European lady. She always tried to act very European, to speak Dutch perfectly. She pretended to speak Malay badly, and she neither liked rice-table, nor roedjak [both typical Indisch dishes] [...] Her husband, the inspector, had never been to Holland. [...] And it was very odd to see, this Creole, apparently fully European, speak Dutch so correctly, that it would almost be genteel compared to the sloppy ‘slang’ of the mother country.<sup>67</sup>

In a published diary kept by Jan Krijgsman during the Indonesian war of independence, the protagonist met an Indo-European sugar chief who looked back on his life. He described the way he behaved as an Indo-European before the war, passing himself off as European in the same way as Ida van Helderer did, in the following quote:

Realise what an Indo-European is: a descendant of a colonial ancestry [...] We became descendants who lead a life, just as half-hearted as our skin-colour. By God, we are aping the Europeans, since they are the civilised race and an indigenous person remains just an indigenous person, that is how it always was. We are mimicking the Europeans, although we distrust them as thoroughly as they do us. [...] Yet, we did like the Europeans, we drank cocktails and lived in stone houses and called ourselves intellectuals and we avoided the native villages like the plague.<sup>68</sup>

Next to the frustration many Indo-Europeans must have felt, it is clear from the above that they often moved in European as well as indigenous social circles. They felt at ease and made friends in both spheres. In practice, that was sometimes a balancing act, this trying to fit in, as shown by the following quotation from the memoirs of Indo-European S.M. Jalhay, which describe the life of a male Indo-European:

Whenever he met Dutch friends, he felt he had to adapt his mood, thoughts and acts. Greeting madam and sir and shaking hands, because otherwise you would be labelled as ‘an Indo from the *kampong*’ in advance. Not just coming indoors when not called indoors.



Ill. 5 Still from the Dutch tv-series *De stille kracht* (1974) with Theo (Willem Nijholt) and Leonie (Pleuni Touw).<sup>69</sup>

Sitting calmly indoors without touching anything, playing games like halma or ludo. Acting very enthusiastically and not showing that you were bored [...] in short everything in the Dutch mode [...] one paid attention to the language you were speaking [...] However, things were more colourful and less complicated with my Javanese friends.<sup>70</sup>

To find a solution for the downward social mobility experienced by many Indo-Europeans, colonisation projects were set up in Sumatra and New-Guinea in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of these projects failed due to a lack of cooperation among settlers. Indo-Europeans were also unwilling to do manual labour.<sup>71</sup> Indo-European girls employed the strategy of hypergamy, just like their Anglo-Indian counterparts. They tried to marry a white man (or a more fair-skinned man) and by doing so climbed up the social ladder in colonial society.<sup>72</sup>

The influential indigenous nationalist Soetan Sjahrir sketched out the position of the Indo-Europeans quite well in an essay which appeared in 1937:

The continuation of a process of transformation of our society, which was already set in for a long time, initially has given the Indos (Indo-Europeans) a privileged position, but that same process is now cancelling those privileges.<sup>73</sup>

In 1947, the journalist D.M.G. (Marcel) Koch wrote that *The Eurasian Question* in the Dutch East Indies (and most probably in the other colonies as well) could be brought back to a socio-economic problem, regarding the weakening social and economic position of Eurasians in the colony.<sup>74</sup>

The sharper boundaries, which existed from the beginning of the twentieth cen-



Ill. 6 Portrait of a group of Indo-Europeans with a car on their way from Tandjong Priok to Tjilintjing (original description: 'Foto, Portret van een groep Indo-Europeanen met een auto op weg van Tandjong Priok naar Tjilintjing'), 1932.<sup>75</sup>

tury between groups in the Dutch East Indies, were particularly visible with regard to where the different groups – the Europeans, Indo-Europeans, Chinese and indigenous people – lived. Spatial segregation emerged in the cities, resulting in separate neighbourhoods for each population group and terms like 'indigenous *kampong*', 'Chinese camp' and 'European quarter' came into use. In the European quarter, the *totoks* lived near each other and near to the Indo-Europeans.<sup>76</sup> The *kampongs* were essentially located along a belt surrounding the city. The Europeans formed a minority in the cities of the Dutch East Indies: only 25,000 Europeans lived in Batavia in 1927, 20,000 Europeans in Surabaya and 18,000 in Bandung. The total number of Europeans living in the whole archipelago was 240,417.<sup>77</sup> Eurasians with European status were included in these figures. In 1930, approximately 170,000 Eurasians lived in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>78</sup> It is impossible to give precise numbers, since the criteria for 'Europeanness' were not the same everywhere. Education in the mother country was an often-heard criterion in the guidebooks, such as *Het Indische Leven* in 1927. In this period, the European ideal became superior. Going to a secondary school in the Dutch East Indies, frequently attended by Indo-Europeans, was seen as a recipe for '*verindischen*', a process of degeneration through which people lost their European characteristics. This process was feared most in European households. An education in the motherland not only prevented the process of *verindischen*, but it also improved future work opportunities. Even though applicants were of mixed ancestry, if they had been educated in the Netherlands, they could attain the same jobs as Dutch people.<sup>79</sup>

Another instrument to structure the order of the Indo-European group was whether one had a right to furlough in the Netherlands. This right became a more important distinctive element when more indigenous people got a better education in the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> An alternative to education in the mother country

was going to a boarding school at a hill station. These schools were located in higher regions with colder climates and were isolated from indigenous influences. Europeans could bear this climate better than the hot humidity of the low lands. The Dutch East Indies was the first colony worldwide which created such a hill station, called *Buitenzorg* ('free of worries', nowadays known as Bogor), located 60 kilometres from Batavia and connected to it by railroad since 1873.<sup>81</sup> Bandung, which was located at an altitude of 700 meters in the mountainous area of the Preanger (Priangan), became equally popular. This town was surrounded by tea plantations. These isolated places were the ideal spot for schools which sought to (re-)educate Eurasians and prevent them from learning the mixed language of Dutch and Malay: 'pecoh'.<sup>82</sup>

In the military barracks of the Royal Dutch-Indies Army (KNIL), the societal changes had not started yet. In the garrisons, where the *njai* was called *moentji*, military men still lived with concubines. This practice was only forbidden in 1928.<sup>83</sup> After heated discussions among colonial rulers and rulers from The Hague, *moentjis* were still allowed in the first decades of the twentieth century among the military in order to stop prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases.<sup>84</sup>

Many Indo-Europeans were the off-spring of the so-called 'Jannen' (Dutch soldiers named after the common Dutch male first name 'Jan').<sup>85</sup> When the *moentji* fell pregnant, the Dutch father often abandoned her and her child, condemning them to a life of poverty in the *kampung*. Just as in British India, in 1902 a pauperism committee wrote an elaborate research report on the Indo-European problem. According to the committee, the best way to solve the problem was to raise the Indo-European children in a European way.<sup>86</sup> This statement was enhanced by a contemporary female writer, Adinda (pseudonym for Thérèse Hoven). She thought the best solution for these children was to take them away from their Javanese mothers. She assumed they would not have a problem with this. According to colonial authorities, Javanese mothers were like animals who only cared for their children when they were young. Similar to what happened in many other colonies (including British India and French Indochina), the Dutch colonial authorities took the radical step of removing children from their mothers in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>87</sup> Sometimes these children had been recognised by so-called professional 'recognisers'. These were often retired European soldiers who for a couple of bottles of gin were willing to legally declare any child as their offspring.<sup>88</sup> This fraudulent act did have advantages for the children, who had better chances in their lives when they had a European legal status and surname.

One of the most famous orphanages in the Dutch East Indies was the one started by missionary Johannes van der Steur. His institution was a private initiative and although he received subsidies from the government, his institution was not incorporated into general colonial policy. The first orphanages in the Dutch East Indies had already been built in the days of the Dutch East India Company. The first one was constructed in Batavia, later similar institutions followed in Semarang and other locations. The orphans were taught to be good Christians and received a basic education. The Dutch Protestant Church managed most of these early forms of poor relief and provided care for the orphans. The Parapattan orphanage for European and Indo-European boys and girls was established in Batavia as the first non-church affiliated institution in 1832 by British people belonging to the London (Lay) missionary society.

For many years, it maintained its British character.<sup>89</sup> In 1850, a report of the Dutch Education Inspector Vinne summarised a widely-held view by European observers of colonially born schoolchildren (both poor white and of mixed ancestry) in the Dutch East Indies:

The limited receptiveness, the extremely low intellectual and mental capacity, the lack of attentiveness, the complete dispirited nature of the children born here and of mixed race; weaknesses and limitations which in part [...] find their origins in nature but to which nevertheless bad upbringing, especially in the early years of childhood, contributed significantly.<sup>90</sup>

This image added to the necessity, colonisers felt, to found more orphanages in which poor and abandoned Indo-European children could be raised.

The seventh-day Adventist Johannes van der Steur went to the Dutch East Indies as a protestant missionary in 1892. Initially he founded a Christian home for Dutch soldiers in the garrison town of Magelang, in East Java. Its purpose was to prevent soldiers from heavy drinking and visiting prostitutes. One evening he was visited by a drunken sergeant who told him that in the *kampong* a mother of four children was living in a destitute situation while the father had just passed away. Van der Steur went to the *kampong* and took the children home with him. This marked the beginning of the famous *Oranje Nassau Gesticht* ('Oranje Nassau' institution) in 1893. Van der Steur's institution wanted to rescue abandoned, neglected children born in the military barracks, and give them a decent European and Christian upbringing. After a short while, the children started to call him 'Dad'. Within two weeks he already had 14 pupils.<sup>91</sup> Not all of them were 'real' orphans. Sometimes Van der Steur went to the *kampong* to take ('rescue') neglected and abandoned children of whom at least one of the parents was still alive. He did not use force like his counterparts in Indochina and British-India. He asked permission from the mothers to 'adopt' their children, but it is questionable as to whether the mother really had a choice.<sup>92</sup> The pupils did not necessarily have to come from a military environment, all destitute, neglected and abandoned children were welcome at the orphanage. However, it is clear from the archival material that most pupils at the *Oranje Nassau Gesticht* had Dutch soldiers as fathers and indigenous women as mothers.<sup>93</sup> According to *De Indische Gids* from 1900: it was most commendable 'to remove the child as early as possible from the influence of indigenous and Malay speaking mothers.'<sup>94</sup> In the end, 'Pa' van der Steur managed to raise 7,000 abandoned, orphaned and neglected Indo-European children, who became useful and sometimes successful members of Dutch East Indies society.<sup>95</sup> To accomplish this, he received help from his sister Marie, his brothers Willem and Gijs, his wife Anna Maria Zwager and former pupils from the institution.<sup>96</sup> He used ingenious marketing techniques to raise money for instance by reporting about the circumstances at the orphanage in the magazine of the orphanage itself, *De Kleine bode van Huis* ('the small journal of the home'). He asked Christians in the Netherlands to donate his age in cents on his birthday.<sup>97</sup> In that way, the reputation of Indo-Europeans could be improved. This was needed, according to Van der Steur, since the Indo-European offspring from soldiers were usually viewed in a negative way. According to many Europeans, Indo-European children epitomised the ultimate degeneration of



the European population in the colony.<sup>98</sup> The negative image of Indo-European military personnel spread fast through the colony and soon included other Indo-Europeans, who were not connected to the military force, as well. The concubines (*njais*) who were initially considered positively as protectors of the men's well-being were now seen as bearers of ill health and other sinister, negative influences were attributed to them, which they transferred to their offspring: Indo-Europeans.<sup>99</sup>

Yet, Van der Steur did not raise these Indo-European children to become stereotypical humble orphans. He encouraged them to be assertive.<sup>100</sup> Illustration 6 shows a group of rather self-confident looking Indo-European children. Van der Steur was one of the so-called 'early ethics'. They were followers of the early civilising mission or 'ethical' movement in the Dutch East Indies, who believed in an association between East and West. According to early ethics, indigenous children in the orphanage were expected to become 'improved, perfected' Javanese people, but not 'wannabe' Europeans.<sup>101</sup>

*'A half-hearted and half-powerful in-between race'*

*De Indische Gids* portrayed Indo-Europeans as a '*halfslachtig en halfkrachtig tusschenras*' (a half-hearted and half-powerful in-between race'). It was an expression they had derived from colonial novels of Louis Couperus. The most important characteristic that was attributed to Indo-Europeans was their temper, which led to jealousy, anger, sensuality and hatred. In *De stille kracht* passion is at the forefront of the story in which it becomes clear that the colonial system cannot be maintained in the end.<sup>102</sup> The general idea was that Indo-Europeans had obtained this passion during their life in the tropical sun which would accelerate the process of ripening and maturing young Indo-Europeans.<sup>103</sup> To this image of Indo-Europeans in colonial novels other characteristics can be added: inferiority, submission and recklessness.<sup>104</sup> According to Bas Veth in his book *Het leven in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Life in the Dutch Indies) the ultimate symbol of the wicked colonial society of the Dutch East Indies was the lawless Indo-European girl, whose primary goal was to marry a man of full Dutch ancestry.<sup>105</sup> This goal was rather a challenge for her because most Dutch people thought in rather negative terms about the '*nonnaatjes*' (nickname for Indo-European women). The Dutch colonial discourse described the Indo-European woman as someone who 'in her deepest core always remained an indigenous woman.'<sup>106</sup> The danger of marrying an Indo-European woman for the future offspring of Dutch men was well-described by the following saying: 'once you have thrown the coffee through the milk, you will never get it out.'<sup>107</sup> This was an example of the 'one-drop-rule', known from the US context, where one drop of black blood from generations ago would make a person a part of the black community.<sup>108</sup> Once the alleged racial purity was affected by intermarriage, the child was unequivocally subsumed into another category (usually not the European but the indigenous one).<sup>109</sup> This negative stereotyping of the Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies appeared to be stubborn in later discussions about the admission of these people to the Netherlands after the decolonisation of Indonesia.<sup>110</sup>

## 6.4 French Indochina: Studying the Dutch East Indies and Jules Brevié

In the French context, the colonies were seen as a 'dumping ground' for the social outcasts from the mother country. The reputation of the first colonists who went to Indochina was not good. They were regarded as paupers, prostitutes and swindlers. This image began to change around 1900. The new *bonnes colons* were expected to be French men with financial means and knowledge, who could be entrepreneurs and professionals.<sup>111</sup> Because the French *colons* were inexperienced colonisers in South East Asia they wanted to learn from their neighbour colonies – the Dutch East Indies and British India – about the way a colony could be ruled efficiently. As mentioned earlier, the secretary general of the *Union Coloniale Française*, Joseph Chailley-Bert went to the Dutch East Indies in 1901-1902. He wanted to study what the French saw as a successful colonial policy towards Eurasians. Before he started this survey, he had already gone there to study what he referred to as the *vieille et intelligente colonisation* (old and intelligent colonisation) in general.<sup>112</sup> He wrote a book about his first trip: *Java et ses habitants*. In the preface to that book, he made his intentions clear: 'the newcomers in the colonisation (and it is clear that the 'newcomer' was France) have an interest to learn from their predecessors, the British and the Dutch.' He dedicated this book to the Dutch old-minister of colonies Sir I.D Fransen van de Putten, *le ministre réformateur*. Chailley-Bert even proposed to undertake a complete study, which would be named *colonisation comparée* by writing three more books during his lifetime about British India and the Dutch East Indies which would be titled: *La politique et l'administration anglaise aux Indes*, *La politique et l'administration hollandaise dans l'Insulinde* and *La politique et l'administration coloniales de l'Ancien Regime*.<sup>113</sup>

As a starting point, Chailley-Bert surveyed Batavia. He asked such questions as: 'From which age are the Eurasian children who are not recognised by their fathers looked after by government institutions?' and 'which nationality is given to these Eurasian children?' In his report, the answer to the first question was that the government did not look after children who were not recognised by their Dutch fathers. Instead, in the Dutch East Indies, there were many different charity institutions (such as orphanages run by religious organisations as well as secular associations) which could only do their work with the help of governmental subsidies. The second question was answered with reference to the nationality law of 1892, which meant that Dutch nationality was not given to these children.<sup>114</sup> Above all, the report ascertained that '*la supériorité des procédés de la colonisation hollandaise est incontesté*' (the superiority of the procedures of Dutch colonisation is undisputed).<sup>115</sup>

Another French colonial administrator, Monsieur A. July, similarly applauded 'the remarkably successful results' of the Eurasian policy implemented in the Dutch East Indies, which did not make use of the legal designation 'Indo-European' as a separate category.<sup>116</sup> However, the absence of a separate Indo-European category proved to be difficult because of the fluidity of the Indo-European group, who sometimes belonged to the Europeans, and sometimes to the indigenous people. According to French colonial officials who wrote a report on the Eurasian problem in 1938, there were good reasons for not having a separate *Métis* 'mixte' status or category in French colonial law. This would be too complicated as regards to private law. In addition, it would be

politically impossible in their view. Furthermore, legally speaking a separate caste of pariahs would be created, who would be jealous of the Europeans, and despised by both indigenous and European people.<sup>117</sup> This is a remarkable statement since my impression was that the lack of a special Eurasian category was indeed an important cause of the difficult position of Eurasians in colonial times. However, it seemed that at least in the French case, colonial authorities did not implement a separate Eurasian legal category because they believed that it would make things worse.

The explanatory factors from the theoretical frameworks of 'colonial status' and 'bureaucracy' are intermingled here. A third French *colon*, Firmin Jacques Montagne, also enthusiastically advocated the idea of following the Dutch East Indies policy on Eurasians. The Dutch, he asserted, did not only 'safeguard their prestige but also profited from a force that if badly directed, could turn against Dutch domination.' This statement pointed to the already mentioned peculiar balance colonial rulers had to maintain between on the one hand subtle incorporation of their Eurasian and indigenous subjects, while on the other hand upholding an authoritative distance to them. Montagne had heard from a friend who was an administrator at a plantation on Java that Eurasian boys could be better schooled in special military institutions for soldiers or trained for modest jobs in trade or on the plantations.<sup>118</sup>

That idea was clearly present in an article which appeared on 13 November 1925 in a contemporary French colonial newspaper, *la Dépêche Coloniale*. The author gave strong advice to the French colonial rulers to follow the Dutch in their policy regarding the Indo-Europeans, because it had brought them profit and made the people of mixed ancestry loyal supporters of the colonial enterprise.<sup>119</sup> A celebrated commentator took the French colonial enterprise even further: 'one might be surprised that my pen always returns to the words *blanc* or 'European' and never to 'Français'. The commentator adds: 'in effect colonial solidarity and the obligations that it entails, allies all the peoples of the white races.'<sup>120</sup>

The French policy regarding the *Métis* population was inclusive, as already observed. A contemporary source noted that the French colonial officials had less racial prejudice than British colonial authorities because the French were *jeunes coloniaux* (young colonials).<sup>121</sup> The French government was very concerned about the *Métis* population, and in particular the phenomenon of *reconnaissances frauduleuses* ('false recognitions' of children) was heavily debated at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, professional 'recognisers' were often recruited at the front door of the city hall or even in its offices. The indigenous mothers paid for their 'services'.<sup>122</sup> In 1918, French authorities formulated a *décret* which gave permission to colonial officials to verify the truth of such 'recognitions'. The decree also regulated that all children recognised by a French citizen would have French civil status, even when they were first recognised by their indigenous parents.<sup>123</sup> The French authorities feared that the growing *Métis* group would one day undermine French colonial superiority. The boys would become 'chefs de bande dangereux' and the girls would bring harm to the French colonial project by becoming prostitutes.<sup>124</sup>

In 1913, Charles Gravelle, an orphanage administrator in Cambodia, writing in the *Revue Indochinoise*, stated that the parents of abandoned Eurasians had prostitutes as mothers and their fathers were men who as young soldiers had become involved with

'debauchery', 'opium' and 'oriental vices'. The abandonment of the children proved the father's immorality. The children were considered abandoned, even though their Vietnamese mothers raised them.<sup>125</sup> Both French military personnel and civilians searched for abandoned and impoverished Eurasian children living with their indigenous mothers. For example, military officials who toured the Vietnamese countryside, reported to the local French colonial officials on cases of Eurasian children living in indigenous villages. The number of abandoned Eurasian children grew as increasing numbers of French soldiers returned to France and subsequently died on the battlefields of the First World War.<sup>126</sup> On 3 July 1917, the French colonial government introduced a law which recognised the illegitimate children of French fathers killed in the First World War as French citizens. It was first implemented in the mother country. A few weeks later, the French government enacted another law that established a special status for children of fallen French soldiers called *Pupille de la Nation*. Under this law the state legally adopted these children, although many had mothers who were alive and who had not abandoned them.<sup>127</sup> As already mentioned, in 1924, this law was changed so that 'unfit' Eurasian mothers could lose their maternal rights in Indochina. Their children attained a similar status as *Pupille de la Nation*. Already in June 1917, the Minister of War and the Minister of Colonies decided that Indochinese mothers would raise their recognised and non-recognised Eurasian children until the age of ten. After that the state would institutionalise the children. Some mothers were informed about this institutionalisation and disappeared in an attempt to evade colonial officials.<sup>128</sup>

*'The poor woman wishes to give her daughter to the French state'*

Kim Lefèvre, a *Métis* author who was raised in an orphanage, was also seized by professional searchers. Kim's father, a French soldier had abandoned her, but her Vietnamese mother tried to provide her with a normal childhood, despite the rejection of mother and child by Vietnamese society. One day, colonial officials forced Kim's mother to send her daughter to an orphanage run by missionaries and to officially renounce her maternal rights so that Kim could be raised as a French citizen.<sup>129</sup> She wrote in her memoirs about this important moment in her life when her mother had to sign the particular form:

The paper stated that my father was French, that he was forced to follow his regiment, abandoning my mother with a child whom she was not able to raise: that the poor woman wishes to give her daughter to the French state, which is better equipped to prepare her future, and that she renounces all her maternal rights.<sup>130</sup>

Kim felt that she had a triple handicap: she was a woman, the result of an illegitimate union, and of mixed ancestry.<sup>131</sup> Eventually, she was raised in several orphanages in Indochina:

I did not stop to erase, since my childhood, the contempt, the abuse, the hatred sometimes, from a people I considered mine. That is what I reluctantly remember, the humiliating colonisation and the arrogance of white people. I was the impure fruit of the treason of my mother, a Vietnamese woman.<sup>132</sup>

Kim continued struggling to gain an education. The story ends with the narrator's departure from Vietnam to France, where she could pursue an education.<sup>133</sup> It illustrates the deep-felt contempt and disapproval that Eurasians encountered from both colonising and colonised people, despite the inclusive nature of the French colonial rule. This disapproval was also felt by an adult *Métis* who wrote a letter to the president of the *Société d'Assistance aux enfants abandonnés franco-indochinois* in order to become eligible for French citizenship. He stressed the fate of living without a civil status, which he had experienced since childhood and which included both physical and moral sufferings:

I do not belong to any class of the Indochinese society, nobody wants to recognise me as equal, without parents, without friends, I lead a life made up of all sorts of disappointments.<sup>134</sup>

Because the French population was small in Indochina, colonial officials turned to the *Métis* to increase the number of French people living in the colony. Already from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, missionaries set up orphanages to receive abandoned and neglected *Métis* children, such as the order of *Les Soeurs de Saint Paul de Chartres*. Its reverend mother, mère Benjamin, succeeded in setting up an orphanage for *Métis* girls only in 1874.<sup>135</sup> In each of the provinces of French Indochina, religious and secular organisations for the protection of *Métis* children had been established. They were all linked to the *Jules Brévié Fondation* (about which I say more below), such as the *Société de protection des enfants Métis abandonnes du Tonkin* and the *Société de Protection des Métis d'Annam*. The latter organisation explicitly made a link to the *Jules Brévié Fondation* in its annual report.<sup>136</sup> The former had executed a name change in 1924. Instead of '*Métis*' they used the adverb '*franco-indochinois*', since the term '*Métis*' had a negative connotation in France. The members of the associated organisations were convinced that most donations for the organisation had to be collected from residents of the mother country. As a result, the name of the *Métis* child protection organisation thus became: *Société d'assistance aux enfants abandonnés Franco-Indochinois*.<sup>137</sup>

All these *Métis* child protection organisations stressed the importance of separating the *Métis* children as early as possible from their mothers before they could develop bad habits. To attain that goal, they had to be no older than two years at the moment of separation. This was especially important for their knowledge of the French language. It was also important for their physical well-being since the majority of the children were malnourished, lived in unhygienic conditions, and their moral upbringing had been neglected. Most often the indigenous mothers were indifferent about their children, according to the leaders of the organisations.<sup>138</sup> Leaders of the *Métis* children protection organisations felt that a complete separation was necessary. The parents were allowed to visit their children in the institutions, but they could not take the children away with them.<sup>139</sup> Initially, this complete separation also included departure for France, in order to grow up in an environment without suffering from racial prejudice. However, leaders of the orphanages eventually considered this unfeasible and later impossible due to the communication and transport disruptions as a result of the Second World War and Japanese occupation of Indochina.<sup>140</sup>

The *Jules Brévié Fondation* was founded in 1939 under the administrative command of the colonial state as the centralised *Métis* child protection organisation, to which several local *Métis* protection organisations were affiliated. It was named after one of its founders, the (former) French Governor General of Indochina, Jules Brévié, and it was financed by both governmental funds and private donations.<sup>141</sup> From the report on the founding meeting of this organisation, it became clear that the idea of this organisation for supporting the education and upbringing of abandoned and neglected *Métis* children was based on aspects of colonial rule that the French had studied in the Dutch East Indies.<sup>142</sup> The foundation of this centralised *Métis* protection organisation was also one of the proposals of the Guernut commission, launched in 1937 by Popular Front minister Leon Blum. This parliamentary commission under the leadership of the radical politician Henri Guernut investigated social and political issues occurring throughout the French empire. It created a new development programme for all French overseas territories. The commission undertook an extensive survey in each Indochinese province. One of the topics was the circumstances under which the *Métis* and their children lived.<sup>143</sup>

They also investigated changes in the number of *Métis*. Not all rulers of the provinces agreed that the number of *Métis* was on the rise as the leaders of the *Métis* protection organisation continued to claim. Some of the provincial rulers, for example those of Khan Hoa (Nha Trang), Bac Lieu (to the south of Ho Chi Minh city) and Tayninh (to the North-west side of Ho Chi Minh City) were convinced that the number of *Métis* was decreasing.<sup>144</sup> What is particularly striking while reading the assessments of the respondents on the *Métis*' condition is the number of references to the situation of the Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies. Their position was often described in extremely positive terms, which did not match the reality on the ground. The reporters obviously did so to bolster the argument about protecting the *Métis* children in Indochina. One example was the claim that the state in the Dutch East Indies adopted all *Métis* children abandoned by their fathers. That was indeed usually the case, but the reality was more nuanced. There was not enough room to house all those *Métis* children in orphanages in the Dutch East Indies. Moreover, Dutch policies were not supported by a strong centralised organisation paid for with public money, as was the case in Indochina.<sup>145</sup>

*Métis* child protection organisations were, from the start, preoccupied with the need to know the precise number of *Métis* children they had to look after. This was difficult to ascertain, since it was almost impossible to search every indigenous village in the Vietnamese countryside for abandoned white-looking *Métis* children. An annual report of the *Fondation Brévié* for 1943, indicates the number of children they had helped (1,231) and the number of children they still had to rescue (313). The report added that the last number was *certainement inférieur à la réalité* (certainly lower than the reality) because according to the report there was a constant increase in births from mixed unions.<sup>146</sup> Already earlier in 1938, it was noted in a general report entitled: *le problème Eurasien au Tonkin* that the figures given for the numbers of *Métis* – recognised or unrecognised – were unreliable. The reasons for this were the large number of indigenous women, the short duration of the liaisons, and the fast succession of the affairs that each Vietnamese woman had with different French soldiers. The unreliable character of the numbers was also apparent from the diverse numbers of *Métis*

collected in different provinces.<sup>147</sup> In that same report, a remarkable reference to the situation in the Dutch East Indies was made. The French author of the report stated that in the Dutch East Indies, the Eurasians not only had high positions, intermarried with Europeans and helped the Dutch colonial authorities to rule their colony, but also did not suffer from any racial prejudice (*aucune préjugé raciale*).<sup>148</sup> This last statement was backed up by reference to the high military commander Van Daalen in the Royal Dutch East Indies Army, who was an Indo-European. Although the example fitted well, the general statement about the absence of racial prejudice was certainly not true (as described above). However, it is interesting that such a claim was made. The Dutch East Indies was presented as the ideal example of a colonial society, which the French sought to emulate.

The capacity of the child protection institutions of the *Fondation Brévié* did not meet the demand of the increasing number of *Métis* children. A preliminary solution to help as many *Métis* as possible was to give the indigenous mother a monthly allowance to help her raise the child: 'secours à domicile' (help at home). At some point the indigenous mothers themselves learned about this financial aid and some of them, who could write in French, started to send request letters to the *Métis* child protection organisations or to the municipal office of big cities like Hanoi.<sup>149</sup> That was also the moment officials of the *Métis* child protection institutions started to question the true intentions of some of the mothers. Eventually, this kind of aid was abolished because indigenous mothers did not always use the money for their *Métis* children but for themselves.<sup>150</sup>

*'In a deplorable state of dirtiness.'*

The initiator Jules Brévié also promoted his organisation by stressing that well-educated Eurasians could not only help to create a permanent French population in Indochina, but also cultivate new territories in Indochina which contributed to a solution to the food shortages caused by the fast population growth in Indochina.<sup>151</sup> It appeared that this organisation used rather inclusive laws (such as the *décret* of November 1928) towards *Métis*. It gave each *Métis* child the opportunity to acquire French citizenship. This inclusivity was also indicated by one sentence, expressed by a director of an orphanage in Hanoi, Mr. Dupont, in an elaborate report: the Jules Brévié foundation has 'generous Eurasian politics'.<sup>152</sup>

However, people working for the *Jules Brevie fondation* also employed selection criteria. The children had to undergo a rigorous medical test and their 'Frenchness' (amongst others their physical appearance) was also assessed. Although the French were generous, dubious cases of *métis* children could be 'repaired'. 'Abnormal' children, 'the mentally handicapped and disturbed' were not selected to be educated and raised as French citizens. They were sent to indigenous schools and were destined for a life as a peasant or an artisan.<sup>153</sup> There were three basic ways by which the *Jules Brévié Foundation* could gain custody of 'abandoned' *Métis* children: In the first place, Vietnamese mothers could voluntarily bring their children to an institution or orphanage connected to the *Jules Brévié Foundation*. Second, the French father could bring a *Métis* child to an orphanage. Lastly, the *Jules Brévié Foundation* searched and seized *Métis*

children in indigenous villages.<sup>154</sup> Initially, men dominated the *Jules Brévié foundation*. It hired white women to search for supposedly 'abandoned' Eurasian children in Vietnamese villages.<sup>155</sup> They usually worked as local correspondents who reported on the worrisome circumstances in which the *Métis* children in their region lived. For example, a local correspondent in Annam reported on a family with *Métis* children, who were found 'in a deplorable state of dirtiness.'<sup>156</sup> After the reporter sent letters to the resident of the region and the *Jules Brévié Foundation*, these children were taken from their mothers. The seizure of children was not illegal because the French colonials considered it to be in the interest of the French colonial state.

The French colonial rule not only arranged for *Métis* children in Indochina to acquire French citizenship but also asked for a pro-active attitude from the Vietnamese mothers. The already mentioned *décret* of 1928 did not only regulate the possibilities to acquire French citizenship. Another part of the *décret* regulated that if a father abandoned his child, the mother had to legally recognise the child. Many indigenous mothers did not know that they were supposed to do this. If they had not done so, the local tribunal (for example in Hanoi) declared the child legally French and appointed the *Jules Brévié Foundation* as a legal guardian. This did not automatically happen for every Eurasian child. In the period 1929-1938, only 182 *Métis* children were declared French citizens. Essentially, the *Jules Brévié Foundation* was manipulating a law primarily intended to give French citizenship to children abandoned by both parents.<sup>157</sup>

The organisation cooperated with several schools, including the *École d'enfants de troupe Eurasiens de Dalat*, by sending letters to the leaders of this school in which they proposed potential candidates. Together, these two organisations tried to provide the best upbringing possible for abandoned *Métis* children in the hill station Dalat, in order to prevent them from returning to the indigenous environment.<sup>158</sup> Also other schools and orphanages were founded there, so that *Métis* boys and girls could get a proper education and moral upbringing. In all those schools, speaking French was obligatory, even during Vietnamese lessons.<sup>159</sup>

Dalat was the clearest example of a hill station in French Indochina. The French doctor Alexandre Yersin discovered the Lang Bian plateau upon which Dalat was built in 1893. Yersin was a famous doctor who discovered the pestilence bacilli and its cure.<sup>160</sup> The plateau on which Dalat was built had an altitude of 1500 meters and this provided for a moderate climate, with temperatures ranging from 5 to 25 degrees Celsius, with an annual average of 20 degrees.<sup>161</sup> Yersin modelled Dalat upon British colonial hill stations like Simla, Kalimpong and Darjeeling.<sup>162</sup> This newly created town grew fast. In 1923, 1500 people lived in Dalat but by 1937, this had risen to 10,000 people. At that time, it had become a provincial centre of political administration and trade for agricultural products from the neighbourhood.<sup>163</sup> The town's rapid development fit with larger plans to develop Dalat into the colony's summer capital. Under this plan, which had already commenced in 1904, Dalat would serve as a 'European Centre' and 'a counterweight to Vietnamese (indigenous) power.'<sup>164</sup>

French authorities established various schools for *Métis* children in Dalat such as the *Couvent des Oiseaux*, which Kim Lefèvre attended, the *Domaine de Marie de Dalat*, an orphanage led by the sisters of charity of Saint Vincent de Paul and the *École d'enfants de troupe Eurasiens*. The *Jules Brévié Foundation* proposed to build another





Ill. 7 The old railway station of Dalat (not used as such anymore, picture taken by author in June 2016).

new *Métis* institution in Dalat so that the hill station would function as a *centre du groupement Métis* for the whole of Indochina.<sup>165</sup>

Dalat's geographic isolation prevented indigenous mothers from reclaiming their *Métis* children. Later on, they found protection there from the Japanese during the Second World War. In addition, the hill station offered abandoned *Métis* children 'a good climate, indispensable to their physical formation', and 'a French milieu that is no less necessary to their moral formation'.<sup>166</sup> Administrators hoped that *Métis* children growing up in Dalat would become fit and strong by playing various kinds of sports, by learning to manage plantations, and by attending French schools. These sorts of activities were also useful with regard to potential future occupations in agriculture. When the unemployment rate among Eurasians began to rise fast in the 1930s and 1940s, plans were made for a 'centre de petite colonisation'. This centre was specifically meant for young Eurasians and would be located in the region of Xuan Loc in the province of Bien Hoa (currently an area to the north west of Ho Chi Minh City).<sup>167</sup> There were also plans for such a centre in the high lands of Tonkin (in the Northern part of Vietnam) and in Traninh (now located in Laos) but those centres were never built.<sup>168</sup>

The *Jules Brévié Fondation* also sent children to summer camps (*colonies de vacance*) in resort areas, such as Cap Saint Jacques, Kampot, and areas surrounding Dalat. The *Jules Brévié Fondation* made the town its headquarters for *Métis* orphanages, contributing to Dalat's reputation as the 'town of the youth'.<sup>169</sup> What contributed to this was the presence of the *Petit et Grand Lycée Yersin* in Dalat. These schools followed the French curriculum and were meant to be exclusively for European children. However, they attracted *Métis* children who could pass themselves off as European.<sup>170</sup> Above all, for the Indochinese European social elite, the pursuit of education in metropolitan France still remained the most highly desirable goal.<sup>171</sup>



Ill. 8 Couvent des Oiseaux today (picture taken by author in June 2016).

The kind of racial politics applied to abandoned *Métis* children in order to rescue them from the native environment was not limited to French Indochina, it was a widespread phenomenon across French colonies in Africa and Asia.<sup>172</sup> Also in British, Dutch and Belgian colonies in Asia and Africa, the removal of Eurasian children from the indigenous sphere was a common practice and part of the colonial civilising project.<sup>173</sup> In the Netherlands, in France, and in the UK and commonwealth countries similar ‘save the children’ movements emerged. This happened in the framework of a general civilising project to raise or re-educate poor street children and their parents, who were seen as members of the ‘dangerous classes.’<sup>174</sup> How could the Europeans claim to civilise the indigenous people in the colonies if they were not able to civilise poor children in Western European towns?<sup>175</sup> The belief that orphans and poor children could be ‘remoulded’ through education, labour and a change of environment in the colonies was consistent with orphan-related policies in the mother countries.<sup>176</sup>

### 6.5 Comparison and conclusion: Protecting and raising Eurasian children

To conclude, during the late colonial period, the process of Europeanisation had developed in all three colonies, and alongside that development, a separate Eurasian social life came into being. The gradual disappearance of this Eurasian social infrastructure after decolonisation represented an additional explanatory factor for why Eurasians left the former colony. To acquire European citizenship became the ideal because it offered the most opportunities for social mobility in the colonies. Governmental officials and representatives of the child protection organisations pressed European fathers to recognise their Eurasian children. False recognitions did occur in the Dutch East Indies and French Indochina. As a consequence, European fathers of

Eurasians were to be found in both higher and lower strata of the colonial civil service, and in enterprises, but their Eurasian children would never obtain the same status as their fathers.<sup>177</sup> These false recognitions did not happen in British India because, as said earlier, the possibility to recognise Anglo-Indian children as European citizens did not exist there.

In all three colonies, an education in the mother country helped one to become 'European'. For Eurasians, the European style-education at boarding schools at the hill stations was a reasonable alternative in all three colonies. An additional advantage for the colonial authorities was that in these isolated places Eurasian children would not be influenced by negative native influences, including revolutionary, anti-colonial activities. These were locations isolated from the rest of colonial society. Children could easily be prevented from learning languages like 'pecoh' (Dutch East Indies) '*chichi*' (British India) or *Tây Bõ*, the 'pidgin French' of Indochina.<sup>178</sup> Authorities were convinced that the perceived danger of mixedness and degeneration could be best prevented by giving Eurasian children a decent upbringing and education. They deemed education the key means to safeguard and advance European values and whiteness.<sup>179</sup> This development was even more present in British India, which was a less liberal and more closed colonial society than the Dutch East Indies. But also in French Indochina in the 1930s, almost every colonial city had an organisation for the protection of abandoned *Métis* children.<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, also in French Indochina, hill stations were constructed in the highlands to the north of Saigon, of which Dalat became the most famous. In Dalat, various orphanages, boarding schools and a military school for children of mixed ancestry were established. Although racial boundaries between colonial groups were drawn sharpest in British India, class and education still played a role next to colour, certainly when decolonisation was eminent. Lower-class British colonists with less education did not want to be lumped with Anglo-Indians. But these two groups were often together categorised as the domiciled (poor white) community. This social sphere was distinguished from the rest of colonial society, but in French Indochina and the Dutch East Indies the boundaries were more blurred.

In this period, more transnational links developed between the colonies. The French played an important role in this process. As a 'young' coloniser they wanted to learn from the neighbouring colonies about developing a solid colonial rule in general and a specific policy regarding the *Métis* population and their children. The French colonial government copied legislation the Dutch had implemented for the Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies. For example, they designed a similar model of private welfare societies and orphanages which aimed to educate and care for *Métis* children in order to raise them as 'good' French citizens. They set up agricultural colonies, which the colonial authorities saw as a solution to the common Eurasian problem that they faced. Eventually, the French colonial authorities went a few steps further in their endeavour to avoid the mistakes of the Dutch colonial officials that had created a large white (Indo-European, pauper) underclass.<sup>181</sup> They made adaptations to the Eurasians' colonial status. The particular place of Eurasians in the colonial hierarchy became a decisive factor in the choice between leaving or staying. French colonial officials were concerned about *Métis* children in the colony and feared a decline in the number of French people living on the French mainland. That is why they for-

cibly removed 'abandoned' (by their French fathers) Eurasian children from their native mothers. These acts also happened in the other two colonies, but in the French context it was clearly a centralised governmental affair. The leaders of the French orphanages evacuated the children of mixed ancestry to metropolitan France and augmented the French population in this way. This secret seizing of indigenous children also happened in the other colonial contexts, but the French codified it. It resulted in less freedom of choice for the (almost) adult children after decolonisation, although some of them were quite content with their situation, and it prepared the way for generous French citizenship criteria for Eurasians.