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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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12 Special policies for Eurasians and the Eurasian reactions

12.1 Introduction

In all three colonies, both European authorities and new indigenous authorities designed and implemented special policies and regulations for Eurasians, regarding admission to the former mother countries and related citizenship criteria. In this chapter, I describe the reactions of Eurasians to these policies and whether they made use of them or just ignored them.

12.2 India: No special British provisions and new Anglo-Indian schools

As already observed, next to the reservations for jobs in government service and educational grants, the new Indian rulers inserted special non-permanent provisions for Anglo-Indians in the first constitution of independent India. That meant that two seats in the *Lok Sabha* (Indian Parliament) were reserved as well as seats in several state legislatures for representatives of the Anglo-Indian community. They got this reservation in the context of the so-called *Poona Pact* (1932), under which Dalits (the lowest caste in India) also got reserved seats.¹ The first two Anglo-Indian representatives in the Indian parliament of 499 seats were Frank Anthony, leader of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association and A.E.T. Barrow.² Except for the job reservations and educational grants which expired over the course of the 1960s, the seats in legislatures are – remarkably – still in possession of the Anglo-Indian community today.³ Many hoped that during the Round Table Conferences, the British authorities would make special provisions for Anglo-Indians to leave for the UK in an assisted passage scheme. But they did not make these provisions, to the disappointment of the Anglo-Indian Association. Frank Anthony even pointed in a promotion and lobby publication *Will Britain tarnish her honor?* to the Dutch East Indies and the way the Dutch treated the Indo-Europeans ‘liberally and as complete equals’. By contrast, the Anglo-Indians had been ‘accorded a cold stepmotherly treatment’.⁴ Even though that was not the truth, the discursive, almost propagandistic effect was clear for British people in the mother country as well as in India.

However, some Anglo-Indians managed to migrate to the UK with the help of an assisted passage scheme. Most of these migrants only left after they had applied for British citizenship. However, as was mentioned above, that was not necessary. As a rule, British people were given preference above Anglo-Indians in this scheme. According

to British government officials, they had to be 'rescued' from the former colony in this emergency period. In the end, the scheme only helped 3,600 people to migrate to the UK in the period between 1947 and 1958.⁵ That was a rather small number in comparison to the Netherlands, where during the aftermath of decolonisation approximately 25,000 Indo-Europeans who regretted their initial decision to stay and choose Indonesian citizenship were admitted to the Netherlands via an assisted passage scheme.⁶

With regard to education, the Hartog Committee, an auxiliary committee of the Simon Commission (the statutory commission preparing the Round Table Conferences of the early 1930s in India), made recommendations to modify the system of Anglo-Indian education already in 1929. Most orphanages destined for Anglo-Indians in British India were also boarding schools. The Hartog committee advocated the retention of the general system of Anglo-Indian education, but suggested a closer connection with the general system of Indian education because the general criticism from Indian officials was that the teachers of Anglo-Indian institutions tended to 'denationalise' their pupils. One of them said: 'Your schools are excellent. They are the best in the country. But we cannot help looking on them as foreign. The Indian atmosphere is missing.'⁷ Thus, according to the Hartog Committee, the main problem was how to make the necessary connection with India, without losing the essential characteristics of an Anglo-Indian education: its Christian culture, its English language, its discipline, its social organisations and its sports and its games.⁸ In the late 1940s, a growing demand for places at Anglo-Indian schools among Indian parents became noticeable. Therefore, new regulations from the government stated that Anglo-Indian schools were required to reserve a minimum of 40 per cent of the available places for non-Anglo-Indians instead of the 25 per cent which had been in place until then. The majority of schools limited the admission of non-Anglo-Indian children to 40 per cent and reserved the remaining 60 per cent for Anglo-Indian children. Others, and especially the more expensive hill schools, did not place any limitation on the admission of non-Anglo-Indians. The consequence of this decision was that gradually a predominance of well-to-do non-Anglo-Indians and only a small percentage of 'real' Anglo-Indians attended these schools.⁹

12.3 Indonesia: *Spijtoptanten and the fate of the 'Steurpjes'*

After *Zwarte Sinterklaas*, on 5 December 1957, the situation for Indo-Europeans who had chosen Indonesian citizenship became increasingly problematic. When many lost their jobs, and faced discrimination, they regretted their choice and wanted to leave the country.¹⁰ They first applied for visas at the High Commissionership of Jakarta, but this application was not successful in most cases because of the reluctant attitude of the Dutch government to permit these people to enter the Netherlands. According to Dutch politicians, they would not fit into Dutch society with their slow labour pace and other 'Eastern characteristics'.¹¹ In that way, they fell between two stools, according to Dutch governmental advisors.¹² In the years between 1954 and 1957, some organisations tried to help the Indo-Europeans who were still in Indonesia. For example, *Stichting Helpt Onze Mensen in Indonesië* (SHOMI, Foundation Help

our People in Indonesia) wanted to provide local help and assistance in the repatriation procedure.¹³ From 1960 onwards, they could turn to the committee of *Nationale Actie Steunt Spijtoptanten Indonesië* (NASSI, 'National Action Supports Regretting Optants Indonesia'). The NASSI was a lobby and action group that mediated in the visa application procedure for *spijtoptanten* by giving the applicants advice and pleading for them in the permanent parliament committee of the Dutch government which discussed the repatriation of people from the former colony.¹⁴

I have analysed 110 dossiers from *spijtoptanten* ('regretting optants'), who applied for visas for the Netherlands at the office of the High Commissionership in Djakarta and when that did not succeed sent requests to the NASSI-movement. I found dossiers with the same name in both collections in the National Archives in The Hague. That gave me the possibility to follow the trajectory of families or individuals in their attempts to leave Indonesia and regain Dutch nationality. After thoroughly analysing the two archives, it became clear that the motive of 'work and career' (29 of the 110 dossiers), combined with the motive of 'gaining a livelihood/work' (25/110) were the most frequently mentioned reasons why many Indo-Europeans regretted their decision to opt for Indonesian citizenship and wanted to leave the country as soon as possible. These two motives were similar, which made the importance of work such a decisive factor for leaving. The Cold War and the threat of communism were mentioned less frequently as reasons for leaving. This was probably the case because Indonesia just like India, preferred a foreign policy of neutralism and non-alignment (the famous 'third way') in the Cold War.¹⁵ The Indonesian prime minister, Sutan Sjahrir, explained his rejection of Vietnamese requests to create a Southeast Asian regional (communist) group after the Second World War in the following way:

Ho Chi Minh is facing the French who will resist him for a very long time. Ho is also dependent on the support of the communists, who are very powerful in the independence movement which is not the case with us. If we ally ourselves with Ho Chi Minh, we will weaken ourselves and delay independence.¹⁶

Also, the offer of the Indian president Nehru was quite modest. He only gave the Vietnamese nationalist movement 'moral' support.¹⁷ From these observations, I deduce that the geopolitical factor of the Cold War was not that important in the explanation of the choice of Eurasians for staying or leaving the former colony. The famous domino theory, or fear of communism, was not as relevant for Eurasians as it was for Americans.

The reasons for the initial choice for staying and opting for Indonesian citizenship were also mentioned in these letters and requests. In particular, the information the Indo-Europeans got from the Dutch government in the person of the High Commissioner Lamping in his radio speech was mentioned as a reason for their initial stay in their letters and requests (in 29 of the 110 letters). The reasons of 'attachment to the land' and 'marriage with an Indonesian' were mentioned less (respectively in 9 and 10 of the 110 letters).¹⁸ Many tried to come to the Netherlands later as so-called *spijtoptanten* (regretting optants), since they received special treatment as ex-Dutch citizens and did not have to follow the more complicated route of 'ordinary' aliens. They acquired this name since they regretted their earlier choice of opting for Indonesian

citizenship at the end of the option period in 1951.¹⁹ Departure to the Netherlands was difficult, because they were no longer Dutch. Some Indo-European women entered a marriage of convenience with a Dutch man to obtain Dutch citizenship in order to leave and be admitted to the Netherlands. If the Indo-European woman did not want to stay in the former colony, she could decide to perform a sham divorce from her indigenous husband in order to regain her Dutch citizenship.²⁰ Authorities knew about this strategy. They received instructions to grant them admission only if they were certain that the marriages and divorces did not take place with the sole purpose of getting to the Netherlands.²¹

After many requests had been turned down, the NASSI carried out an aggressive lobbying campaign, and the government designed a special arrangement for the *spijtoptanten*. They gained the possibility to leave Indonesia through a financial advance from the government (*rijksvoorschot*).²² Legally speaking the Netherlands did not have to admit the *spijtoptanten*, but after a while the government felt morally obliged to do so due to the pressure in newspapers and from lobby groups.²³ People from within and outside the government made sure their voices were heard. These were usually people working at the remaining High Commissionership and regional commissionerships in Indonesia who expressed their criticism of the policies in correspondence. For example, in a letter of October 1953, a social advisor from the High Commissionership in Djakarta voiced his concern about the strict application of the criteria for admission to the prepaid passage scheme and the restrictions, even in cases when the applicants could obviously be admitted. Furthermore, he pointed out the difficulty that the judging institution in the Netherlands had of forming a clear, accurate picture of the situation in Indonesia for the people involved, 'while one also fears, that once in one case permission is granted, the stream of analogous or approximately analogous cases would not be stopped anymore.' At the end of his letter, the advisor proposed 'to concentrate on a better demarcation of the cases or categories in which making an exception is to be wished for.'²⁴ A number of the visa applicants were not yet adults when their fathers opted for Indonesian citizenship.²⁵ The government officials had to keep this important aspect in mind. In short, the *spijtoptanten* issue was a clear example of changing policy categories being influenced by a radical power transition period.

After the anti-Dutch actions and *Zwarte Sinterklaas*, it became clear that the Ministry of Justice, which formally decided on the requests, worked with another, updated list of criteria to select *spijtoptanten*. These were: first, they had to have a connection with the Netherlands, for example they or their parents had to have been born in the Netherlands, or they had to have lived there for more than 10 years. Second, they had to be in an emergency situation both physically and materially. Third, they had to have the ability to become assimilated in the Netherlands, for example because they spoke Dutch or they had friends or relatives in the Netherlands. They should also be Christians. The fourth criterion was the lack of incriminating data. The last criterion was that the Ministry used a fixed quota of *spijtoptanten*, which was only increased a couple of times.²⁶

Amongst this group of *spijtoptanten* were many Indo-European children from European-run orphanages. Representatives of a number of them, united in a board of the protestant orphanages in Indonesia, said that a large group of Indo-European chil-

dren found it difficult to adapt to the new circumstances of independent Indonesia. Already in 1950, they had made plans to receive these children under certain conditions in the Netherlands.²⁷ These conditions sounded surprisingly similar to the governmental criteria mentioned above and included the stipulations that they must be hard to raise, and they could not easily adapt to the new situation in Indonesia. Moreover, they had to have one or two European parents, they should not have other family in the former colony, because authorities hoped that no attachment to the old colony meant easier assimilation into Dutch society. Furthermore, they had to have been interned during Japanese occupation. In other words: they had to have had traumatic experiences during the Second World War. Lastly, they had to be 14 years or older.²⁸ Probably also because of exceptions to these rules, the exact number of children involved in this repatriation scheme was not clear.

A considerable number of 'Steurtjes', old pupils from the famous institution of Johannes 'Pa' (dad) van der Steur, applied for visas to the Netherlands in the late 1950s. They had a fair chance of being granted a visa since they could claim that they had experienced a Dutch upbringing and education. Proving their Dutch ancestry with formal documents turned out to be more difficult.²⁹ The leaders of the institution had applied for Indonesian citizenship for most of them, since they were minors during the option period at the beginning of the 1950s. But already at the time they took the decision, the leaders expressed their moral doubts about it.³⁰

Local correspondents of the NASSI committee, who were still living in Indonesia during that period, helped. For example, the older unmarried Miss Ter Kuile assisted many of these Indo-European children who had remained behind in European-led orphanages in Semarang and its surroundings to get out of Indonesia. The story of these 'outlawed children' was reported in the Dutch newspaper *De Telegraaf* in which it was clearly explained how inexorably strict the Dutch law was:

Who is the Dutch father? Unknown – then no permit to come to the safe Netherlands. Not recognised by the Dutch father – then no permit. The law is unrelenting. Exceptions are not made!³¹

Miss Ter Kuile was the head of the so-called *Team Pengaran Warga Negara Belanda* that was officially allowed to do its work by the Indonesian head of the military command of Semarang. It was a continuation of the old colonial 'council for social and societal matters' that had been based in Semarang.³² Amongst others, they helped the remaining ex-Dutch people and children in Semarang and its surroundings to arrange their departure for the Netherlands. Ter Kuile knew from first-hand experience how difficult the situation in Indonesia was for the ex-Dutch people. This must have given her authority in the eyes of the governmental officials in The Hague as well as in the eyes of the *Spijtoptanten* who asked for her help. Other local correspondents were missionaries or managers of homes for the elderly and orphanages. For example, Ms. G. Smid, the manager of the home for the elderly called *Tempelhof* (Temple courtyard) in Bandung wrote testimonies describing the deplorable state in which many Indo-Europeans who applied for visas lived. These testimonies accompanied the requests *spijtoptanten* wrote with the help of the NASSI-action committee to the High Commissionership. The Ministry of Justice in the Netherlands eventually made its judgment

on the basis of these requests.³³ The permanent parliamentary committee on repatriation, took the final decision. This committee consisted of five members of parliament and was the last institution that could still plead for the case of *spijtoptanten*, if all other requests had been turned down. They had the right to inspect the dossiers of the applying *spijtoptanten* which the department of immigration affairs had created.³⁴ In this committee, NASSI-member Miss J.J.Th. Ten Broecke Hoekstra had a seat, and she personally knew Ter Kuile. This personal connection probably made a huge difference for Indo-European people, who sent requests for visas. If Indo-Europeans were eventually allowed to go to the Netherlands they were first housed in contract pensions. The owners of these houses received an allowance for their maintenance.³⁵

12.4 Vietnam: Large-scale repatriation and positive French image of Dutch policies

As part of the Geneva accords, French troops and northern civilians who wanted to move to either the southern or the northern part of Vietnam were granted 300 days to complete their travels before the partition between north and south came into effect. The most important reason for evacuation to South-Vietnam (and after that to France) was the fear of communism. However, other factors – such as the land reform campaign during the period 1953-1956 (an exact copy of the Chinese Maoist Land Reform of the years 1946-1952), the brutality of the ongoing war and the long-term consequences of the Great Famine of 1945 – also played a role in the decision to evacuate.³⁶ Earlier on, there had been periods of unrest related to the rice production as well, but this famine affected the whole country, and up to two million are thought to have died. The large-scale food crisis was caused by a socio-economic crisis, in which several devastating events came together: floods, which destroyed the harvest and transportation networks, drought, increased demographic pressures, and the war.³⁷

Between the end of the First Indochina War and 1965, the French government repatriated 30,000 to 45,000 French citizens (including Eurasians) and at least 4,500 Eurasian children to France. Initially, approximately 7,000 *Métis* remained in Vietnam. They experienced difficulties, since the Vietnamese detested them for their previous involvement in the French colonial bureaucracy. In the last months of 1954, and throughout 1955, the president of South-Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, launched a hate campaign against Eurasians, similar to the one in Indonesia in December 1957.³⁸

Thus, these tens of thousands of repatriates did not all leave at the same time. The total number of French people leaving Vietnam in the years 1955 and 1956 was 1,710, and among them were 486 Eurasians. However, the withdrawal of the whole French *Corps Expéditionnaire* after the defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 took several years. That is why there were still children of mixed ancestry born after 1954. Next to that, in South-Vietnam a number of French people (including *Métis*) stayed on after that date. But for these people, life became continually more difficult, since every foreigner who was older than 15 years had to pay an additional tax. In addition, there were not enough places at schools that had instruction in the French language. These were both reasons for Vietnamese mothers to consider repatriation at a later stage.

So, even during the Têt Offensive in 1968, an important and decisive battle of the Second Vietnam War, 585 French people were repatriated.³⁹ There were other reasons too. In 1956, it became obligatory to allocate occupations in middle management exclusively to Vietnamese people. This obligation led to the situation that after a while only French people working in executive positions would stay in Vietnam. Not only the loss of jobs, but also the economic recession and heavy inflation, related to the above-mentioned Great Famine, drove many people with some French ancestry to leave. Therefore, French officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reassured the French government that the repatriation of French people of whom the presence in Vietnam had become *inutile* (useless) had to be continued with financial help from the French state.⁴⁰

The positive image French colonial authorities had of the Dutch colonial policy regarding Eurasians in the Dutch East Indies probably influenced the generous French policy regarding *Métis*. This image appears in several letters and texts, suggesting it was an accepted view among French governmental officials. For example, the French Lieutenant Roue, who wrote a report about the Eurasian problem in 1954, took the Dutch policy on Indo-Europeans in the Dutch East Indies as an admirable example from which the French colonial authorities could learn a lot. In my opinion, Roue gave too positive a picture. He was fully convinced that Dutch colonial authorities tolerated unions between European men and indigenous women in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, he thought that Indo-Europeans had the same rights as Dutch citizens. In addition, the French lieutenant was certain that in 1945, 1.5 million Indo-Europeans lived in the Dutch East Indies. In my view, this is a highly-exaggerated number since the relevant sources talk about a maximum number of roughly 240,000 Indo-Europeans⁴¹ (see also Table 1 in chapter 1). In some sources, French colonial policy makers made references to the British policy in India towards Anglo-Indians, which was also portrayed as an ideal example to follow.⁴² The emergence of these references to both the Dutch East Indies and British India was most probably caused by the fact that Indochina was a relatively young colony in comparison to the other two.

Although the colonial era was over after 1954, the French wanted to maintain some cultural influence in the southern part of Vietnam. They succeeded in this endeavour and the presence of French culture continued via education, cultural exchanges, aid programmes, trade, and language courses. Its influence is still visible in the maintenance of monumental colonial buildings today.⁴³ Furthermore, the Eurasian children who remained behind in the orphanages were also seen as a continuation of French influence in Vietnam, at least when they had the right to follow education in the French language.⁴⁴ The hope was that the maternal ties of the *Métis* children to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, could re-create for France a situation in the former colony similar to that of French Canada (Quebec), where descendants of French migrants have maintained strong cultural ties to France. These cultural ties were most visible in the fact that French was still the main language in French Canada. But the members of the *FOEFI* were more concerned about the lack of attention the French government officials paid to the *Métis*. In that situation, according to them, 'the ultimate abandonment, that from France itself' would follow.⁴⁵

In the northern part of Vietnam, the development of a postcolonial culture acceler-

ated after 1954 as the DRV set up research organisations (like an Institute of History) to write their own histories that articulated a Vietnamese-centred view of the past. The Ministry of Culture and the communist worker's party encouraged the development of new cultural discourses and practices to replace old colonial ideas.⁴⁶ Meanwhile in the South, France saw a steady decline in the number of French books, journals, and newspapers imported by the people from South-Vietnam from 1954 to 1956. By 1956 these imports measured only half of the number imported in 1954. By the 1960s, however, Franco-South Vietnamese relations had undergone an enormous improvement. For example, French enterprises in South Vietnam maintained their positions and French exports to Vietnam began to increase. In 1960, 15,000 French people were still in South Vietnam, of whom 300 were teachers, and the others worked in 500 French firms.⁴⁷ This is a completely different picture from the Indonesian one where all Dutch colonial influence was banned and disappeared after 1957. Because there was still some French influence noticeable in Vietnam, it can be expected that some *Métis* people chose to stay in the former colony. Some did, but the majority of the *Métis* left for France, mainly because of the war-like situation, discrimination from the indigenous people and the fact that it was relatively easy to get French citizenship.

12.5 Comparison and conclusion: Regretting and postponing decisions

To conclude, in the immediate postcolonial years, not much changed in Indonesia, just like the situation in newly independent India. However, in the mid-1950s, the aftermath of decolonisation took a rather dramatic turn when many ex-Dutch people (*spijtoptanten*) wanted to leave for the Netherlands. They wanted to have their Dutch citizenship restored, as it turned out that Indo-Europeans who took the decision to become Indonesian citizens had collectively viewed the policy of the new Indonesian power holders rather naively, considering later developments. In the beginning, they were too credulous. However, after the Indonesians cancelled the agreements of the Round Table Conference and the anti-Dutch atmosphere intensified as a result of *Zwarte Sinterklaas* and the unrest surrounding New Guinea, many Indo-Europeans wanted to leave. They requested visas from the High Commissionership in Jakarta. Because most jobs were exclusively reserved for indigenous people, also the loss of jobs or the impossibility of getting a proper job was an important reason to leave in all three colonies. Although the Dutch government was initially unwilling to help their ex-compatriots, under pressure from many ex-colonials and other sympathisers, eventually the authorities set up an assisted passage scheme. Therefore, most *spijtoptanten* did eventually come to the Netherlands. A similar assisted passage scheme was also introduced in the British case, but it was used considerably less than in the Dutch case because the necessity to leave India was not as urgent for most Anglo-Indians in the 1950s. The new Indian power holders did stick to the constitutional safeguards of the Anglo-Indians, which is related to the explanatory factor 'bureaucratic regulations'. An anti-European atmosphere did not emerge in the same way as it occurred in Indonesia.

Anti-European hostility did develop in Vietnam, at least in the northern part. This was not only a reaction to the former French coloniser but also a struggle for commu-

nism by Vietnamese nationalists against western capitalists. But Eurasians were not affected to a large extent by this pro-communist struggle, since they had either been evacuated to the southern part of Vietnam or they had already moved to France. Most of the people who left for France, had never been there before. In a similar vein to the Anglo-Indians of British India and the Indo-Europeans of the Dutch East Indies, they were not repatriates in the literal sense of the word. The French postcolonial policy (with self-evident roots in colonial acts) regarding *Métis* can be typified as exceptionally inclusive, in comparison with the aloof attitude of both the Dutch and British politicians. Thus, bureaucratic regulations proved to be decisive in the choice to leave Vietnam for France. The French policies were particularly focused on the fate of the *Métis* children in independent Vietnam, while that was less the case in British India and the Dutch East Indies. Ideas about the way the Dutch treated their Indo-European population influenced the French in their policy making. This was presented in their documents as a generous attitude, as if all Indo-Europeans could be happily received in the Netherlands. But the French image was too positive and idealistic.⁴⁸