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Hybrid Identity: Family, Photography and History in Colonial Indonesia
by Sani Montclair

As members of my family lose memories and pass away, I desire to take an even tighter grip on their narrative and the recollection of their story; their distant past has become my present exploration. I travel daily to the Indies, searching through black and white photographic albums, tracing the history of my great-grandparents and grandparents. What are these photographs conveying? Whose eyes were they for and most importantly, what story are they telling?

My Grandmother, Catherine Noordraven (or Omi) was born in Chimahi, Java in 1916. Her mother (Hubertina Samson) was an Indonesian nurse and her father (Otto Noordraven), who was born in Holland, was a Dutch soldier in the military. Omi had a middle/upper class childhood upbringing and had a brother who, like his father, served in the Dutch military. The photographic albums tell the story of their travels throughout many different places in Sumatra and Indonesia, due to Otto's military post. The photographs of the women in the albums depict a life of leisure, showing bicycle riding, swimming and posed portraits in the yard. The photographs of the men usually illustrate militarization; the men are customarily in uniform or standing in front of government buildings. These photographs represent a highly gendered, racialized and performative colonial history.

My grandfather, Bob Jan vanderSpek (or Opi) was a Dutchman born in Bondowoso, Java in 1924. His father, Johannes Antonius Maria vanderSpek was an electrical engineer and mother, Cornelia Ann Maria vanLeuween was a stay at home mother. All of the photographs I have from his life are from the 1920s-30s and were sent to Holland before World War Two. The War left Opi with nothing; both his parents were killed and he was left with no belongings.

History depends on memory (as orally recounted or documented) as the only way through which actual experience can be retrieved. On the other hand, memory is constantly subject to change, influenced by later experiences (Cote 12).

The lines in this paper will move between history and memory, recalling a time in the Dutch East Indies when European identities and performances signified relations of power. The Dutch colonized the Indonesian islands and for two hundred years took Javanese and Indonesian women as their servants, sexual partners and wives. By the 1940s, there were numerous families of mixed racial backgrounds living in Java who were performing within the structures of a European identity. Uncovering the intersectional politics of hybrid identity is the primary focus of this paper. These mixed identities are revealed through a history of photographs in my family photo albums from the 1920s to the 1930s. The photographic albums in my possession document my family's story during colonial rule. They narrate pieces of history and concurrently situate their racial and gendered position in the Dutch East Indies. The albums and interviews tell stories of my grandparents' childhoods and simultaneously explore the complexities of state and homeland. Marrying a white European man was common for indigenous women, in high colonial times, and along with my great-grandmother and

grandmother, my mother also married a European white man. The ruling class globally and specifically in Indonesia was white, and the whitening of my relatives' bloodlines gave the women of color in my family higher class and racialized status. The family photo albums in my possession, along with interviews, allow me to expose these identities from the colonial model to the post-colonial. Structured through the complexities and intersectionality of performance, race, class and gender, these albums and interviews will be used as my primary source in crafting a story about citizenship and belonging.

The Dutch Colonial Project at the Turn of the Century and Family

Even the most fervent opponents of colonization must admit that in the Dutch East Indies the advancement of the natives through the building of public schools and public roads, and through the establishment of a system of irrigation for their rice fields, could not have been achieved to anything like the same degree without the direct and indirect contribution of western enterprises. If this be true—and it *is* true—it proves that the argument of pretend “draining” is utterly fallacious and that it serves merely as a demographic means to impress the masses, who are unable to comprehend its falseness (Treb 251).

This quotation, taken from *The Journal of Foreign Affairs*, in 1930, gives perspective on the ways that the Dutch imagined themselves in their colony. The colonizers envisioned themselves as being advanced and progressive, situating the so-called natives in what Anne McClintock calls *panoptical time* and *anachronistic space*. Panoptical time signifies the privileged viewing of history in the form of a spectacle—at a glance. McClintock uses the family tree to describe how race, and families were visually represented through time. Colonial scientific history has been constructed with the evolution of a racial hierarchy. “Native” peoples, along with their ways of living, were envisioned as backwards in time. This backwardness didn't actually have a place in the linear understanding of time, therefore positioning it anachronistically or out of time (McClintock 40). The centralizing trope of modernity gave notion to the historical progress of the white man and his imagined advancement was normalized in the colonies. The colonial journey of moving forward in time and bringing the “natives” into this progressive repositioning is a contradiction. Indigenous communities were essentially perceived as slowly moving forward but understood as living in the past. Colonial contact reinforced notions that “natives” were not capable of advancing themselves. These narratives of progress were seductive and used to justify colonial control. Science in the colonies was socially and politically positioned and inevitably bias. Family metaphors were used to justify gendered and racialized hierarchy, modeled after what was understood to be a natural family. The middle to upper class, white, heterosexual family was naturalized and racial mixing was seen as deviant. Creating categories of natural and unnatural bodies and territories was an obsession of the colonial project and was solidified by the law.

“One of the most crucial forms of knowledge produced by, indeed born of, colonial rule is the discipline of anthropology... anthropology is an important discursive context in this cartography and that it is an example of disciplinary knowledge that signifies the power of

naming and the contests over meaning of definitions of the self and other” (Mohanty 74). Anthropology was another colonial form of scientific knowledge production and Mohanty summarizes Trinh T. Minh-ha’s argument that science and anthropology in the colonial context were created by a conversation of two men, “white man with the white man about the primitive man” (Mohanty 75). These quotations demonstrate the underlying racialized and gendered environment that was customary throughout colonial rule. The white men of the West were able to create knowledge for white men of the West from their perspective about “native” people. Colonial anthropology was granted authority and held influence in the construction of racial and cultural hierarchies.

By the twentieth century the Dutch had been in the Islands of Indies for hundreds of years. From the beginnings of colonization, the Dutch East India Company (VOC, or *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) used Indonesian land to cultivate agriculture for the world market. Spices, and later coffee, sugar and tobacco were major exports of the island of Java and supervised by the Dutch. The Dutch, shortly after contact pushed out individual planters and gained full control of agricultural production and cultivation. Agricultural trade became the economic setting for political life in the Indies. Councils were formed in the larger towns in Java and most of the members were Dutch and not elected but nominated. The expansion of western politics were well in progress by the early twentieth century and Dutch control had soon spread to islands other than Java, though Java remained the center of colonial gravitation (Palmier 5-12).

Over eighty thousand Indonesian pupils had been educated in Dutch missionary schools by the 1920s. During this time, Indonesians were going to Europe for education and returning to positions of leadership and establishing more schools. Despite this increased access to education, few of these educated Indonesians experienced real benefits from their schoolwork. By 1928 about twenty five percent of the Indonesians who had graduated from Western schools were unemployed and many others were left with low-income jobs. Less than half of the middle rank, governmental positions were held by Indonesians, by the 1940s and only about seven percent of the high-level management jobs were held by Indonesians (Palmier 27).

The Dutch in Indonesia, had an intensely complicated relationship with their colonial past. The Dutch set the social and scientific “norm” and with the “discovery” of Indies and its people, constructed a European model through which knowledge was produced. Naming became an authoritative organization of knowledge. Indonesia was named the Dutch East Indies because the Dutch colonized it. Nature, including: plants, animals and lands, were named with scientific European terms and this ability to navigate scientifically through the Indies granted power and dominance to those with access. The expansion of Holland and colonization of Indonesia, allowed the Netherlands to imagine itself as a Great Empire and with the fall of that empire, histories were forgotten. Although there is a complex, combined history between the Dutch and Indonesians, colonialism still implemented racial domination. The Dutch had colonized the land, rhetorically infantilized the Indonesian people and romanticized the colonial interaction (Pattynama 71).

Race, Identity and Nationalism

Critical discourses have recently been trying to grant subjectivity to images of the Othered body and by doing so try to locate a truth behind the image. The bodies constructed as Other and native are also constructed as objects (Chow 27). Uncovering who looks at images,

and who produces images, is important in understanding their subject/object relationship. The Western gaze is prominent in the construction of my family photo albums. White men were usually situated behind the camera and their gaze frames each photograph. Granting subjectivity to the image is an act of speaking for the one in the image and it is not my intention to somehow speak for those bodies in the images. There is a sense of agency that is given to the looker and it is crucial in understanding how the other has been constructed, romanticized and exoticized throughout historical, colonial discourses. Photography in the colony was made for a privileged viewer and in analyzing these photographs, I understand that relationship and will not attempt to grant subjectivity to the Othered body, but deconstruct the colonial imagination.

In one of the photographs, from my family album, three men; Otto Noordraven, Otje (Otto's son and my great-uncle) and another man in uniform, are in front of a well-manicured lawn and a colonial looking building. Otje, who appears to be seven or eight, is straddling the canon with his legs dangling about two feet off of the ground. Otje whom has a slightly darker skin shade, is wearing a light collared shirt and shorts and he is not wearing shoes.



This image signifies racialized difference as well as a racialized hierarchy. Otje is pictured between two Dutch military officers, therefore granting his access to Dutch racialized and superior status. Identifying Otje's race within the context of colonial society was difficult but his father's presence by law indicated his higher racial ranking. If the militarized adults were taken out of this photograph, the boy would simply look Indonesian or "native", but with the men in it, Otje reads as the son of a Dutch officer. Otje only has access to Dutch privilege and power through his association with his father.

Race was used to categorize human beings into, biological, physical and genetic groups and it was through colonialism that race held any significance at all. Race drew the binary between the "civilized" and "primitive" (Ashcroft 180-2). The categorization of race gave scientific evidence that whiteness held superiority over so-called native people or those seen as Othered. Colonial power was founded upon the false premise that the European entity was

easily identifiable both in the political and social sphere and also in racialized “biologically” proven normalcy. Otje’s race would almost be impossible to identify if his father was not present; there was no “biological” test that would have been able to determine his racial profile. In 1930, Batavia had a population of about 450,000 of whom nearly 20,000 were racially mixed (Pattynama 50-51). Skin shade became more ambiguous and what counted as being European was continuously shifting. The members of my family had brown skin but their social, legal, religious beliefs, education and performance became markers by which their whiteness or Europeanness was determined (Stoler 42-45). The boundaries between the colonizer and colonized were not as easily distinguished as the Dutch in Europe had hoped.

As Ulbe Bosma writes in his essay, *The Indo: Class, Citizenship and Politics in Late Colonial Society*, Europeans of mixed descent were included in high status social and political circles. Otje, later in his life became a fighter pilot in the Dutch army due to his privileged positioning. Before the nineteenth century, mixed raced individuals held, more or less, the middle ranking positions in the government and also in private enterprise. “Indos (or mixed raced people) were the children of a colonial empire” (Bosma 68). Mixed raced children belonged to the Dutch in terms of legal status and under civil administration. The recognition of a European father made children, legally, European. Also, the well-educated and wealthy Indos were considered to be Dutch (Bosma 69).

Race was a principal element of political, social and cultural existence. “Centuries of intermarriage between Dutch and Javanese (or Sudanese, from the west of the island) had created a distinctively hybrid culture, one where language, costume, food and family were a blend of European and Asian traditions” (Protschky 347). The highest concentration of Europeans were living in Batavia, the capital of Java and by the 1920s almost one third of the Dutch in the Indies chose an Indonesian or Eurasian spouse (Protschky 348). My family was one of many, living in Batavia during the early twentieth century and their hybrid racial identities proved that the colonial legislation had failed in its attempts to keep “Natives” and “Europeans” separate. Nonetheless, there was a sincere anxiety, in the colonial state, around the mixing of bodies and races.

In another military photograph, twenty-three men are pictured on a rock on the beach. Most of the men are in military uniform and hats. Behind them appears to be empty land. All but two of the men read as Indonesian. They are clumped together on a rock that sits ankle deep in the water and the soldiers spill over onto the land. Some of the men are sitting on the rock with their bare feet in the water. The two Dutch-men’s heads and hats are arranged in such a way that they are located above all of the other hats; they appear as if they are taller than all of the Indonesian men.



What interests me most about this photograph is the way that The Dutch-men arranged themselves. The Dutch officers presumably outranked the Indonesian officers and the photograph visually reinforces the social, racial and military hierarchies at play. My great grandfather Otto (one of the two Dutchmen) is literally standing in front of a shorter Indonesian man who is peering over his shoulder. This photograph indicates the imperial imagination of the colonizer and his colonized subjects. This photograph is a visual metaphor for the colonization of the land and people.

These men are at the water's edge, a border between land and sea, where the Dutchmen had first sailed their colonial ships. Gloria Anzaldúa articulates the borderland as a, "vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants... Culture is made by those in power—men" (Anzaldúa 25/38). The binaries and boundaries created by colonization aren't natural and they create a unilateral understanding of what it is to be "normal". Those living outside or on the border of this normalized body were taboo, perverse and "forbidden". Being photographed on this visual border and standing on both sides of it, land and sea; the men represent both colonized and colonizing domination. The Indonesian land and people were in a continuous state of change after colonial contact. The urbanization and militarization of the indigenous population and territory instituted a change in power. Categories of "natural" and "unnatural" were formed and bodies were forced out of what comprised being natural and normal. Indigenous populations on the Indonesian islands were viewed as outsiders on their own land, unnatural inhabitants. Meanwhile, the Dutch colonizers with their power and privilege set the normalizing standards to themselves, the white. Culture after colonial contact was formed by the Dutch elite and was replicated by the Indonesians to remain inside the constraints of this Dutch defined normalcy.

Homi Bhabha takes the idea of mimicry into the colonial arena and in turn subtly explores mimicry as "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge." 107 In Bhabha's schema,

mimicry is a flawed identity imposed on colonized people who are obliged to mirror back an image of the colonials but in perfect form: “almost the same, but not white.”¹⁰⁸ Subjected to the civilizing mission, the mimic men (for Bhabha they seem to be only men) serve as the intermediaries of empire; they are the colonized teachers, soldiers, bureaucrats and cultural interpreters... (McClintock 62).

This photographic image of soldiers invokes the phenomenon of *colonial mimicry*. The Indonesian officers in the image were mimicking an identity that they could not fully take hold of. Their racialized identity read as Indonesian, not white, but they were soldiers of the Dutch army. For McClintock and Bhabha, there lies the failure of mimicry. “The mimic men are obligated to inhabit an uninhabitable zone of ambivalence that grants them neither identity nor difference; they must mimic an image that they cannot fully assume” (McClintock 63). Being Dutch soldiers, the Indonesian men were mimicking a Dutch identity, yet still unable to fully mirror back the reflection of the colonial command. Colonial identities were imposed onto these men and because they could never be understood as white, they inhabited a grey zone. These men were stuck in limbo. This grey zone left these men not fully Othered, but not within the constraints of a Dutch identity either. This points to the ways that colonialism was inherently flawed. The Dutch, as colonizers believed that they had the right and obligation to enforce their “advanced”, “normative” standards onto native peoples, bringing them into the modern present time, while simultaneously dominating and Othering them. The Dutch continuously renegotiated the boundaries and located difference within the Othered body. The Indonesian men were able to become soldiers but not ever able to become higher-ranking officers, which points to the differences that the Dutch imagined the Indonesians to have. In order to establish what the Dutch were, they first had to establish what they were not, as boundaries of whiteness shifted.

In colonial Dutch writing, terms like “factory Dutch” and “red Dutch” were found in describing the poor or working class Dutch who were more often constructed as the type to have sexual encounters with full blooded Indonesians (Stoler 195). The working class, Dutch were seen as deviant and Othered. Since racial categorization in the Indies had more to do with social standing, the performance of race signified who belonged in which neighborhood and who belonged in the *Kampong* (a low-income Indonesian neighborhood). A mixed raced family’s performance of whiteness/Europeanness gave them access to power up until World War Two. The working class and poor Dutch were perceived to be less “European” than even those mixed raced people, who were from upper or middle classes. The racial categories of Dutch and Indonesian were socially constructed and dependent largely on wealth. To ensure the racial superiority of European men, poor whites were discouraged from migrating to the colony and the Dutch colonial administration showed a definite concern over the dangers of the unemployed Dutch immigrants already living in the Indies (Stoler 363).

The Gendered Colony

Colonial elitism feminized the world for male penetration. “Explorers” named unknown terrain “virgin” therefore, using language that explicitly comes from the positioning of a woman’s body. Women served as a symbol on the borderlines of imperialism and sat at the edge of the gendered and racialized systems of the colony. Race and class were structured

through gender and normalized in the colonies. This normalization of the upper class white man had gendering effects on the colonized land and its people.

The Feminized representation of “virgin” and “undiscovered” land, was a false principle that the colonial system replicated. The land and people were already there when the Europeans came. Enlightenment theories of private property validated the fantasy of the world needing to be discovered by white European men (McClintock 23). Jan van der Straet and countless other discoverers created an eroticized representation of land and people. Women were found in representations of the “undiscovered” land, literally pictured, on the borderline of the new lands.

In, *Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures*, Ann Stoler Argues that colonial agency and racialized differences were primarily structured through gender. Stoler takes a closer look into the everydayness of the colony and settlements. The policing of European marriage, sexuality and reproduction was an essential component in the politics of race within the colony. Exclusion in the colonies became dependent upon who was “white” and who was “native”, who belonged and who didn’t, and finally who could develop into a proper citizen and who was seen as subject (345). Identifying “whiteness” and “nativeness” became complex with the many mixed racial families living in the colonies. For two hundred years in Indonesia, the Dutch did not allow women to migrate to the colony, leaving Dutch men to only have sexual encounters with indigenous women. Colonial legislation also prohibited European men to bring native children and wives back to Europe with them, reinforcing a highly gendered as well as racialized hierarchy (Stoler 345-4).

Concubinage or non-marital sexual arrangements were popular for European men in the Dutch East Indies and legal and sexual rights were given to white men over Indonesian women. Concubinage emphasized gendered hierarchies on which colonial models were based (Stoler 348). Corporate influence and the State, had control over the immigration of European women and during the early twentieth century, more women were allowed to immigrate. Having this sort of control, the colonial authority had the power to fix the conditions of European populations (Stoler 349). Also during this time, concubinage became highly criticized and viewed as the source of white poverty. The presence of European women in the colony required the Dutch communities to redefine their social spaces and racialized boundaries. White women in the colonies needed to uphold superior standards of living, since they now exemplified colonial morality. These higher standards of living were also implemented onto the middle and working classes and mixed raced family’s performance and conduct became imperative for social survival. There was a sincere anxiety in the colonies over the racial mixing of white women and so-called native men and this was regulated socially through forms of advertising and photography. “European women were being counseled by popular guide books, policy-makers and public opinion to assume roles that distinguished them, by race, and by class, from the indigenous women who had formerly provided the sole female contact for male Dutch colonists” (Protschky 374). Dutch women were bombarded with colonial rhetoric enforcing the prejudiced ideology that indigenous women were below them in status and racialized hierarchy. Class and racial differences were established and publicized. It was for these reasons that the mixed raced women in my family all married white men. The whitening of their bloodline ensured their, as well as their children’s racial superiority.

Women were photographed through the colonial, European lens. The leisure and mobility of Europeans in photographs from late colonial period were a primary focus. Dutch women were most commonly photographed in their gardens and yards and seen as guardians of domestic spaces. Protschky argues that commoner women were subject to the probing gaze in “pursuit of erotic images”, but I argue against this notion that only women were subject to the colonial gaze, native men and men of lower classes were also subject to this gaze, feminizing them and the land that they were native to. Colonial photography of native people was used as a mechanism of drawing comparisons and Othering.

Five Indonesian men are pictured in the back yard of the house, standing around a box of compost, in front of the chicken coup. Three of the men are holding brooms. The man furthest in the back of the photograph is in some kind of colonial uniform and boots; all of the other men appear to be bare foot. Two of the men are looking down at the ground. Directly across from the photograph of the Indonesian men, in the album, lays a photograph of my grandmother, Catherine. She is the only person pictured in the image and is sitting in a chair on a brick courtyard. She is wearing a light dress with a floral print, staring directly at the camera and smiling a little; only the edge of the courtyard and empty land rest behind her.



The men photographed in the yard were the servants of the Noordraven's. In the album these men are situated in direct contrast to Catherine. These photographs conjure the relationship that her family had with their workers and draw a distinct comparison. I know that my grandmother had a complicated relationship with class and I know that she had imagined herself as better than the men that worked in her household. I am not suggesting that my family mistreated these men, but I am proposing that the colonial imagination had led my family to believe that whiteness and wealth were superior and they hierarchically categorized their family above the Indonesian men working in their yard. The men in this photograph were subject to a colonial gaze and feminized. They are holding brooms, which are tools of the house that tie

them to the domestic role. My family, along with many other white and mixed raced people living in the colonies, defined themselves by what they were not. They were not workers in the yard; they were middle class “Dutch” and had the time to sit around and pose for photographs. The native Indonesians were given lower income jobs and the homes of the mixed raced family varied depending on wealth and class status. Most mixed raced families living in Batavia had Javanese servants; even the less well off family had house workers (Pattynama 47-65). Race, gender and class were intertwined in the mixed raced households and relations between mixed races and full-blooded Javanese varied depending on household.

Catherine sitting in her chair with the vast landscape behind her positioned her in such a way that gave her agency and a sense of belonging while simultaneously confining her to the home. The land photographed behind her was for the taking and she was linked to it through native birth and colonial principle. She had a right to that land because she was understood to be a Dutch woman. Ironically, it was colonial strategy, which kept her from exploring those lands. She was privileged but also a woman restricted to the veranda, tying her to the house, and the domestic role.

Performance and Identity

Catherine sits on the top of a fence with her friends from school. She has significantly darker skin than the rest of the young ladies. There is one other Indonesian appearing woman all the way to the left of the photograph with a young blonde child standing in front of her. The young girls are holding Dutch windmill cookies. All eight of the girls are wearing light colored dresses that are in sharp contrast to the dark scenery behind the fence they are sitting on.



The performance of Europeanness is evident in how the two mixed raced women demonstrate their class and racial standing. The clean, well fitting, light dresses and shoes of the girls convey their class and cultural identity. What it meant to be European was revealed through cultural performativity. Dressing like an Indonesian would exclude these girls from the privileged sector. Learning the performative, European ways of dressing in appropriate attire was vital to gaining recognition and privileged access to the Dutch upper classes of society. The Dutch in the colony had not developed new ways of dressing. Their clothing styles came directly from Europe and these styles differentiated the “Europeans” from the “Natives”. What

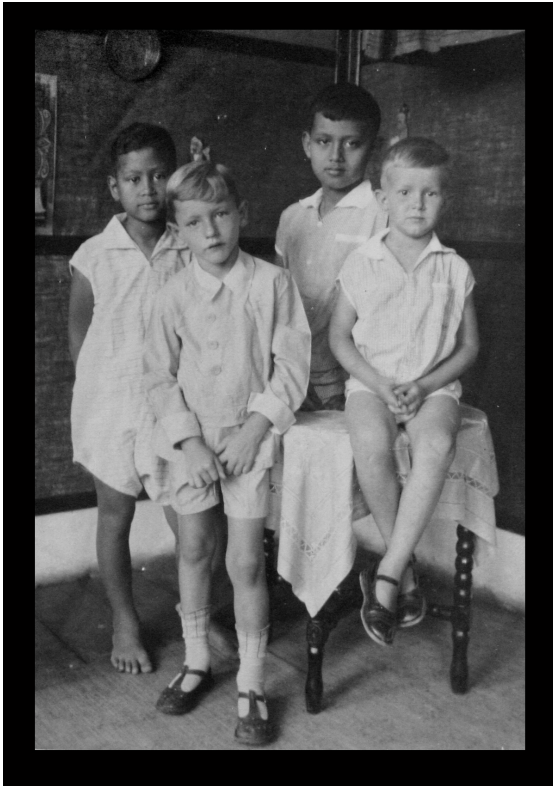
comprised “pure” or “genuine” racial Europeaness was constantly shifting and reconciled by performance and fashion. The girl’s performances of whiteness went further than their clothing; they were educated in Dutch schools, learning the fundamental aspects of the European elite. Passing as white, these hybrid identities blurred the colonizer, colonized distinction but there still maintained a difference between “white” and “nonwhite”, upper class and working class within the Indies.

“Being seen to eat the ‘wrong’ kind of food, or an improper manner was one of the behaviors that could exclude a colonist from his privileged faction” (Protschky 348). Susie Protschky argues that food and eating were linked to the exercise of power, which was embedded in perceptions of race, class and cultural identity. Protschky recommends that we pay attention to specifically how Europeans in colonies imagined themselves. What differentiated Europeans from Indigenous populations played an important role in the execution of imperialism. Defining who was European was implemented by law but was informed by social connections and cultural affiliations (349). Gender biases put women below men in categorizations of power and mixed raced women’s nationality depended on whom they married. European performance became very important here for women to appeal to white men and maintain their European status.

In her essay, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology”, Judith Butler argues, “Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity, instituted through stylized repetition of acts” (Butler 1-2). This logic shouldn’t only be applied to gender identity but also racialized identity. The performance of a racial identity is found in mannerisms and the repetition of behavior. The clothing and performance of a European upbringing gave privilege and power to those performing these identities even when they weren’t purely “white”. Whiteness, in the Indies, was a constructed identity and only those functioning within the structures of that identity were able to access privilege and power.

Performance became the embodiment or actions of appropriating the language and culture of the dominant in order to obtain a higher standing and citizenship in the Dutch East Indies. It was very important for Dutch/Indonesians to perform a European identity in order to carry a prominent social positioning. Adopting the culture, food, clothing and hairstyles of the Dutch colonizers, gave my family members access to privilege and dominance over other Indonesian people. Wearing colonial garb signified to others that they had a high social standing and that standing would attract other upper class Dutch affiliates. My family members wore certain articles of clothing such as shoes that signified class and racial eminence. Servants in and outside the home did not wear shoes, signifying their class status.

In a photograph taken from my grandfather’s album, four boys are in a room in my great-grandparent’s home. My Dutch grandfather, Opi or Bobby is standing next to another Dutch boy, who is sitting on a small table. Behind the table stands an Indonesian appearing boy and next to him is another Indonesian reading boy. The caption under this picture reads, “Bobby met Z’ Vriendendjies”, which translates to Bobby with his little friends. Both the Dutch boys are wearing shoes and the Indonesian boys are barefoot. All the boys are wearing light, tailored European outfits.



Even though the boys were all friends, there was still a racialized hierarchy that was visually represented in the photograph. The two Dutch boys were placed directly in front of the Indonesian appearing boys, which corresponded to the colonial imagination of racialized order. The Indonesian boys were indoors, wearing European clothing and performing within loose structures of European identity but, not able to fully attain privilege and whiteness. They were the friends of the Dutch boys and possibly of a mixed racial background but not the same as them. The boys standing in the back were not wearing shoes, which kept them tied to the house and the domestic role. Wearing shoes linked the upper and middle class to movement and travel. Wearing shoes allowed the Dutch accessibility to move in and out of the domestic space and across land barriers. With their access to privilege and wealth, my Dutch family also had mobility and could easily travel back to Europe from the Indies. None of the members in my family would have taken a ship back to Europe without wearing shoes.

The performance of a Dutch identity indicated a hierarchy in racial and national status. Race and class in the Indies were unavoidably intertwined, underlining was the fact that the Dutch colonizers had access to power and dominance, and their relationship with the Indonesian people became very complex, as racial distinctions became less clear. As more and more mixed race children were born, European performance became imperative. Many hybrid children had brown skin and their education, clothing and mannerisms were key to how they were perceived in society and what power and privilege they were able to attain.

WWII and Independence: Who Belongs in a Post-Colonial Indonesia?

In 1942 the colonial Dutch regime came to an end. Japanese invasion of the Dutch East Indies came abruptly and the Dutch in Java surrendered. The Japanese allied themselves with the Indonesians under the disguise of liberation from Dutch control but were soon exposed as an imperial army, plundering the lands natural resources. They enlisted Dutch laborers who were sent to Burma to construct a railroad over the river, Khwae Yai and the rest of the Dutch were sent to internment camps, meanwhile the Japanese soldiers recruited young Indonesian soldiers. Under Japanese rule, Sukarno, an Indonesian nationalist leader who was living in exile during the Dutch rule of Indonesia, was returned to Jakarta. Just two weeks after the United States bombed Hiroshima, the Japanese surrendered and Indonesia began their fight for Independence from Dutch rule. The transition of power from the Japanese to the Indonesians was no easy task; for years, the Indonesians had to keep the Dutch from seizing power and restoring their colony. In 1949, sovereignty was transferred to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia and Sukarno was accepted as the leader of the Central National Committee (Hellwig 291-309).

My family's experience during the WWII has now become fragmented memories; only bits and pieces of their story remain. My grandmother has passed away and her brother, Otje is now ninety and his memory isn't as lucid as it once was. During the Japanese invasion, Otto was taken to an internment camp in Bandung; Hubertina, Catherine and her two children were able to stay at home. Catherine's first husband was sent to Burma to build the bridge over the river Kwai and died in the process. Otje was enlisted in the Dutch army, in flying school and was able to escape the internment camps when the war broke out. His flying squad was sent Australia and later to Jackson, Mississippi to finish pilot training; he finally returned to Indonesia after the Indonesians began their fight for Independence. When Otje went back to the islands, he decided to join the Indonesian army and flew B52 bombers for the Indonesian military. Otto, Otje's father was beside himself when Otje decided to become an Indonesian citizen and fight against the Dutch. My aunt (Beeb Cleeg) recalled Otto's sorrow with me over a phone conversation, "Om Otto was devastated, I remember him being really upset and angry when he found out and it put the family in a strange position" (Cleeg). During his military service Otje bombed the Island of Ambon, for they were trying to break away from the nation.

After the Indonesians won their independence, the Dutch and the Dutch/Indonesians were asked to leave Indonesia, in many cases their complicated place of birth. According to my grandfather, when the Indonesians won their independence the British helped escort the Dutch survivors to Australia and Europe. My grandfather, Bob Jan vanderSpek was in an internment camp in Chimahi and was advised to stay in the camp after the Japanese left because the streets were not safe, due to the uprising of the Indonesians. He and a couple of friends did not listen to the recommendation and left the camp to wander the streets. Only a couple of blocks away lay the house of my grandmother. Hubertina, my great-grandmother invited the men in and because Bob no longer had a home or family, he stayed with Hubertina, Catherine and Catherine's two children. Bob assumed the role of Catherine's old husband though it is unclear whether she actually ever loved him. The sense that I gather from my family is that Catherine's parents wanted her to be with a man since she was widowed so young. They adopted Bob and arranged for him to stay with their family. My mother, Renee was born in Indonesia in 1952 and moved with her two sisters and mother to Holland when the Dutch were asked to leave

Indonesia in 1957. Bob came shortly after.

The Japanese invasion along with the decolonization of Indonesia constituted a redefining in the classification of who belonged on the islands. When the Japanese arrived, the women in my family were able to avoid imprisonment due to their racial appearance. Even though Catherine and her children were Dutch under colonial law, their brown skinned appearance allowed for all three of the mixed raced women to evade the internment camps. Hubertina, being full-blooded Ambonese had no problems reading as Asian despite her marriage and lived experience in the Dutch Indonesian society. Their bodies, under Japanese rule assimilated into what it was or looked like to be Indonesian. While these women were characterized as Asian, Otje was still receiving training by the Dutch military and was recognized as a Dutchman. His hybrid identity allowed for him to move in between what comprised being Dutch or Asian. When my family was forced to leave the islands, Otje was seen as valuable to the formation of the Indonesian army and was able to stay and fight for Indonesian independence. His highly racialized and gendered positioning points to the many factors that played a role in who was able to stay in Indonesia and who wasn't when the Japanese left. The decolonization of Indonesia split my family in two. Their performance of the European elite was now complicated by what it meant to belong in Indonesia and my family did not fit in to the new categorization of Indonesian. The marriage of a white man now made it unsafe to live on the islands. It made more sense for Otje to perform an Indonesian identity in order to stay in his birthplace. Colonization and decolonization effected many families differently but it fundamentally shifted who was seen as a citizen from the Dutch to the Indonesians.

In conclusion, the intersectional politics of hybrid identity have demonstrated a complex relationship with history. The Dutch in the colonial East Indies, imagined themselves as further advanced both socially and politically but these notions were problematized with the racial mixing of bodies. How the Dutch distinguished themselves from the Indonesians was also culturally determined and skin shade became vague and uninformative. When the Dutch were in power, the "white", upper-class man was the normative standard, leaving all those who didn't fit into that categorization Othered, but as bodies began racially mixing, performance and education then indicated how racialized hierarchies and class status were categorized. Performance of a Dutch cultural identity gave mixed raced families access to privilege. The binary of the colonizer and colonized became permeable over the centuries that Europeans were in the Indonesian islands due to the racial mixing of bodies. The execution of imperialism was contingent upon defining who belonged and who didn't. The politics of belonging were not fixed and changed drastically pre and post World War Two; being an ideal citizen shifted from being a white European to being an Indonesian with the decolonization of the Indies.

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