A MATRIARCH'S PAST: PIECING TOGETHER THE STORY OF MY
OMA’S JOURNEY THROUGH ORPHANHOOD AND A POST-
COLONIAL SOCIETY

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to the friendship between Oma and Tante Lott. May their unbreakable bond forever be a demonstration of the power of love, loyalty and family.

Image of Ingrid Hielckert (right) and Charlotte Fisser (left) at the orphanage circa 1949.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A Matriarch’s Past: Piecing Together the Story of My Oma’s Journey Through Orphanhood and a Post-Colonial Society

by

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Master of Arts in History

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The purpose of this research is to supplement the small but growing topic of Dutch-Indonesian history. Also known as Indo or Indische, Dutch-Indonesians are people of both Dutch and Indonesian heritage whose lineage was a result of Dutch imperialism in Indonesia. After decolonization, their mixed race background restrained their status to liminal citizens. They belonged to neither Indonesia nor the Netherlands. Their history remained relatively silent until a recent effort by second and third generation Dutch-Indonesians to recover it. This research focuses on the life of my Oma, Ingrid Hielckert, whose journey outlines adversity familiar only to those who experienced it themselves. This research follows her life from childhood to adulthood and takes inspiration from letters written by Ingrid during her youth. As a youth, Ingrid experienced orphanhood. As an adult, Ingrid struggled to find a permanent home in a post-colonial landscape. I maintain the orphanhood experienced in her youth caused similar effects of abandonment as the statelessness she experienced as an adult. While her story is unique to her, it is important to promote documentation of the lives of Dutch-Indonesian people so to preserve the history of an otherwise silent people.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Historiography</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing about the Forgotten</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through a Different Lens</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Two Worlds of Imperial Rhetoric</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Perception</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oma’s Reality: The Social Structure of the Dutch East Indies</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHE LIKED TO BE CALLED INGE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She Had a Home</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She Says Goodbye for the First Time</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Remained Quiet</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN HER WORDS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Letter I Saw</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Letter I Saw</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Third Letter I Saw</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHE PICKED UP A PEN AND WROTE DOWN HISTORY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Gave Her an Ultimatum</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They Blamed their Mother</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She Dreamt about It Every Night</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHE CALLED HERSELF INGRID</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It Drove Them from One Place to Another</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

PAGE

Figure 1. Image of the Dago Waterfall near Bandung, Indonesia circa 1932. ......................38
Figure 2. Image of Ingrid Hielckert (left) and Rudi Hielckert (right) on their wedding day in 1955..............................................................76
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the saying goes: It takes a village to raise a child. Well, it also takes a village to write a thesis. A thesis can bring different modes of success: success of time management, success of completion, the success of a degree in a certain discipline. This thesis gave me no feeling greater than the recognition of the successful bond I share with friends and family. Through moments of self-doubt, I had with me a support system whose persistence encouraged me to persevere.

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INTRODUCTION

So that was the Lighthouse, was it?
No, the other was also the Lighthouse. For nothing was simply one thing. The other Lighthouse was true too.¹

Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse

Experiencing loss is a feeling unique to each person. When mom received the call, she panicked. She grew angry, frightened and sad all in the same moment. She said only that she was leaving. She disappeared to the garage, drove an hour and a half to the airport, boarded a plane and arrived at her mother’s bedside that very day.

We called her mother affectionately, “Oma,” Dutch for grandma. Really, we grandchildren only ever her knew her as Oma. Her first name was not too clear. “Oma” stood for both her role in our lives and her name to us. She was not our oma, but simply Oma. My brother and I, still bound to school, arrived the day after Oma died.

To my surprise, all of Oma’s children, including my mom, appeared calm. Yes, their eyes bore the faint color of red and the dark circles underneath their eyes exposed their long few nights without sleep. They were calm nonetheless. Oma’s funeral, in some respect, was rather spontaneous. Indeed, I imagine most funerals are as such. Seldom does someone plan for a funeral even if all the signs are there; but, when most family gatherings had been planned, the rapidity of this large reunion was a peculiar experience. Because most of the family travelled from out of state, the funeral occurred the day my brother and I arrived. It began and ended. It was short but sweet. The family remembered her and returned to their respective homes. As we hurried through our condolences, I am not sure if any of us realized this occasion would be the last of its kind. It would be the last time we all stayed under Oma’s roof at once. Really, it would be the last time we all met together as a family. Death is

¹ Virginia Woolf, To the Lighthouse (Durham: Aziloth Books. 2010), 156.
strange in that way. One person’s passing could very well fracture a link and expose the fragility of family.

In the years that followed, however, something curious began to unfold. Oma gradually began to represent a sort of canonized saint for the family. It started small- pictures of her along the mantle could be found in the houses of each of her children. Then, several of her grandchildren decided to commemorate her with tattoos. Some would tattoo words from *The Bible* for her, while others tattooed scenes from Holland- a windmill or a tulip- as a symbol of her. Finally, as the final step into transcendence, as a village prays to their special patron saint, people in the family began to seek Oma’s memory for guidance.

It is not uncommon, really. When someone passes, especially a person of authority or celebrity, those left in bereavement must convince themselves that their loved one did not die in vain. They grieve. There was an essence of goodness to that person’s life, and it is the goodness we will commemorate. The dead become a symbol. They become less complicated in the sense that death somehow gave a conclusion and provided a singular answer to the purpose of that person’s life. That answer, in turn, would be used by those seeking the deceased’s memory for support.

Oma was a mother of seven, a grandmother of eighteen and a great-grandmother of two at the time of her death. She was this family’s matriarch. She was a leader, a person of authority. Strong, loving, accepting, motherly, strict, caring, generous, devoted- this is how we remember her. Indeed, nothing should be curious about her posthumous position, and yet, I remained perplexed.

Lydia Sylvia Ingrid Hielckert née Francis- that was her full name, but I did not hear the name from her, nor from my mom. I did not see it written in full on her tombstone. I found it written in a document.

That was it. As much as we loved Oma and mourned for her, I wondered if we really knew her. I wondered if I really knew her. I wondered if all the words we use to describe her are more beneficial as a tool to remember her, or as a way in which we help ourselves. I think to myself, if I were ever to lose my mother, would her list of traits resemble Oma’s? I spoke at Oma’s funeral; however, when I think about the stories that we shared about her, they rarely reached farther back than my own birth. Her story, however, her life that took place
before us, was mostly unknown. We grandchildren had only ever known her as Oma, her name and her role.

In 2012, my mom received a box. In it were letters addressed from a young Oma to her mother. It was then that my mom told me Oma had been an orphan in her youth. These letters were from Oma to her mother while she waited in an orphanage for her mother to take her home. Although my mom could not offer any more information about the letters, they introduced a piece of Oma I had never met. The fragile papers shined a light that granted guidance to the life of this person we so dearly admire.

Along with this newfound piece, however, one must highlight that Oma, herself, had remained mostly silent about her past throughout her adult life. By opening the door, I am disregarding her silence and publishing her personal letters without permission. I am also interpreting the letters and her life at my will. Indeed, Oma’s silence is an integral part of her story. In writing this, it is not my intention to draw a conclusion about the meaning of Oma’s life. She may have been part of what we see as a historical movement; however, her life can only really be defined by her. This is a part or parts of her life through my eyes and is not meant to infringe on our view of Oma. She can still remain Oma, her name and her role. For, nothing was simply one thing. Oma is truly our family’s lighthouse.

In 1933, Oma, who preferred to be called Inge in her youth, was born in the Dutch East Indies. Now known as the nation of Indonesia, the Dutch East Indies stood as a colony of the Kingdom of the Netherlands from 1602 to 1949. She and her family were mixed race Dutch-Indonesians. Her heritage combined both Dutch and native Indonesian ancestry; therefore, her ethnicity was a mix of both the colonizer and the colonized. In June 1940, mainland Netherlands fell to Germany. Its royal family and government fled to London. While in exile, they attempted to make decisions for their colonies. In 1941, a day after the Japanese attacked the U.S military base at Pearl Harbor, the Netherlands government in exile declared war on Japan. In January 1942, Japan declared war on the Netherlands. Two months later, Japanese forces invaded and obtained control of the Dutch East Indies capital as well as Inge’s hometown, Buitenzorg. The Japanese forces then systematically incarcerated Dutch nationals, Dutch-Indonesians who identified with the Netherlands, and those sympathetic to the Dutch cause. She, along with her family, was sent to a Prisoner of War camp in Bandung. By 1945, after a merciless occupation, Japan surrendered and its forces left the Dutch East
Indies. That same year, Indonesian Nationals began their fight for independence from the Netherlands. By 1949, the Indonesian Nationals successfully gained independence.

Meanwhile, by 1948, Inge became an orphan as both her divorced mother and father relinquished guardianship over their children. In 1951, Inge left the orphanage at age eighteen. When she reentered Indonesian society, she had to endure the stigma which followed mixed race individuals after the Indonesian revolution. Now going by the name Ingrid, she and her family left to the Netherlands in 1958 and eventually to the United States in 1960 in search of a better life. While in the United States, Ingrid had to struggle to raise her family while trying to grapple with the life she left behind. As an elderly adult, she liked to be called Oma, or grandma. In elderly age, she succeeded in keeping her past mostly secret. She embraced her role as Oma and left the world in 2006 without ever sharing her story.

In a world view, Oma’s mixed race heritage defined her life as a young girl. It took place in the Dutch East Indies during times of world war and civil unrest. In her personal sphere, Oma’s life as a young girl took place in a house shaken by individual instability and separation; a symptom of her parents’ divorce and her time as an orphan. Her subsequent years coped with a new reality in a post-world war society that marked a time of statelessness and immigration. This is her story as a person whose personal struggle with orphanhood greatly reflected the struggles of growing up a mixed race person in a world where racial and social shifts continually influenced her place, her sense of home and her identity. Her experience mirrors the experiences of thousands of postwar immigrants, and her silence about her past throughout her life is a devastatingly common reaction that has helped to keep these stories unknown.

In searching for Oma, I utilized her letters to her mother, family portrayals of her and historical context to create a more complete picture. While doing so, four major motifs emerge: family, abandonment, identity and choice. All four are important to telling this story, and none are mutually exclusive.

Family is the first entity that connected Oma to me. I am her granddaughter. I am part of her story, and she is part of mine. I, along with other family members, inherited her genes, her looks, and her mannerisms. We also inherited her past. Who she was has, in variable degrees, shaped who we are as people. Her choices have become our choices. This close knit
community we call family has internalized her history as our own; therefore, unlocking parts of her life absolutely provides that same benefit to our own lives. Yet, the notion of family is not always a given. “Family is...” is the beginning of a sentence waiting for a definition to follow it. Oma’s vulnerable connection to family as a child and a young adult created a desire to attain lasting togetherness and to obtain a stable definition of family. Indeed, family is expected to provide a constant to a person’s life. Family is always supposed to be there. Oma’s life shows that when this basic requisite is interrupted, new or changing definitions emerge so to preserve a familiarity that this comfort is supposed to provide.

Abandonment represents an interruption to family, and in my knowledge, the most severe interruption Oma faced in her lifetime. Abandonment can be caused by several factors. It can be purposeful or by accident. Oma’s first experience with abandonment could have been taken place at several instances. It could have been when her parents divorced at age six. It could have been when she and her family entered the concentration camp at age nine. It could have been when her mom left her in the care of the Red Cross at age twelve. Or still, it could have been when her dad dropped her off at an orphanage at age fifteen. In Oma’s young adulthood, she experienced abandonment in a different way. This time, family was not at its core; rather, a motherland and a fatherland abandoned her. When Oma’s home became the site of an independence movement, mixed-race individuals like herself were forced into a liminal position between the worlds. On one side, their motherland fought for freedom from its colonizer. On the other side, their fatherland fought to maintain control over the colony. When the fighting stopped, mixed-race individuals were faced with the reality that no side was fighting for them. Undesired by either side of the conflict, Oma’s experiences provide a unique correlation in which her abandonment by her family as a child exposes the extent in which the statelessness of a mixed-race person resembles orphanhood.

Her status as a mixed race individual reveals a familiar struggle with identity as well. Identity is both internally and externally defined. Sometimes, those definitions do not match. There are times when ethnic identity enhances who a person is, and there are times when ethnic identity is the only facet that matters. As a mixed-race person, identity based on ethnicity often becomes difficult to clearly define. There are certain situations, however, that force a decision. This decision can result in a great deal of safety or harm, inclusion or exclusion for the person choosing. Identity also proves to be important in an aspect of
education. Who we are as people can be greatly influenced by the environment in which we learn. Oma and my educational background greatly differ. This difference both helps and hinders the way in which I learn about Oma’s point of view.

Finally, choice—or the illusion of choice—navigates through pivotal points in Oma’s life. Choice, while often displayed in accordance with freedom, can also have underlying characteristics of coercion. When I imagine the concept of choice in Oma’s life, it is not a freethinking space wherein she can choose any path and follow it. Indeed, when I imagine paths, there are several weaving and intertwining with each other. When I imagine the concept of choice in Oma’s life, it resembles more closely to a fork in the road. There are but two paved ways, rigid and inflexible. Turning around is not an option. It appears unwise to stray far from the pavement, for on either side of the roads lay a desolate desert. It might be impossible to forge a unique path through such an unforgiving terrain. Choice is not a choice at all. Choice, in turn, becomes ultimatum.

It is also with this outlook of two-prong choice that we judge people in time of hardship. Someone can either be strong or weak, resilient or broken, a winner or a loser. However we remember people, we act as if there is a fork in the road. We usually remember them as strong, resilient and a winner. There are times in their lives, however, when they were weak, broken or a loser. There are times when they were something else entirely. While Oma faced a fork in the road more than her share of times, she was not confined to pavement. Her memory does not have to be either. There are times when Oma was strong and weak and everything in between. Her letters opened a door to an Oma barely known to her family. Her letters open the door to a part barely known about ourselves.

**HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Just four years ago, my mom received a few letters that once belonged to her mother. When my mom shared the letters with me, she informed me that her mother was an orphan in Indonesia during World War II and the Indonesian Revolution. This perplexed me. I had not heard about this until my mom gave me the letters. No one in my family, including Oma, shared her past. When I tried to further my research, I found there was a sense everyone knew about what happened and acknowledged that people suffered; however, there was a complete lack of personal accounts. Something puzzled me. The period that spurred on the
adoption of global human rights laws overlooked the plight of the Indos, or people of both European and Indonesian descent, of the Dutch East Indies. Over the last seventy years, the Indo experience has transformed into a faction of forgotten voices of World War II.

At the close of the Second World War in 1945, the idea of laws for international human rights gained global support. The atrocious realities of the Jewish Holocaust tested at the extent a man would go to harm another man. In 1949, the newly established United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which secured the rights to life for every human being. This emphasis on the human, or civilian, toll of World War II prompted a shift of focus from macro history to micro history. Historians of World War II began to concentrate on personal human experiences. While American involvement in World War II took a considerable toll in the Asian Theater, United States scholarship on the human experience during the war is predominantly concentrated on the European Theatre. Only in the last few decades have U.S. scholars of World War II focused on atrocities in Asia. These “forgotten voices” have slowly begun to emerge; however, time has covered or erased several pieces to their story.

This lengthy transition helps to pinpoint reasons for the silence connected with the lack of knowledge for the human experience during World War II. This history and historiography section aims to explain how victims of the Holocaust have been remembered and memorialized while others, namely victims of Japanese occupation of Dutch East Indies, have been forgotten in United States History. First, diarist Anne Frank demonstrates how particular circumstances help to popularize a human struggle, which becomes adopted as the main focal point of human suffering for World War II. In addition, the systematic subjugation which took place during the era of imperialism established a culture that greatly favored a European historical narrative over an Asian historical narrative. Then, the emergence of Japan’s wartime point of view in the 1950s and 1960s reveals the duality of human suffering. On one side, it gives agency to the defeated, a people are seldom written in

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2 *Indos* refer to people of Indonesian-European descent, and most commonly refers to those of Indonesian and Dutch descent. Indos who are both Dutch and Indonesian are also called Dutch-Indos, Indo-Dutch, Dutch-Indonesian or Indonesian-Dutch. Another term for Indos is *Indische*, short for *Indische Nederlander*. This term encompassed every person connected to the Dutch East Indies, including, but not limited to, Dutch Nationals, Native Indonesians, Chinese immigrants, and residents of mixed European and Asian descent.
history. On the other side, however, the promotion of Japan’s suffering further subjugates their victims. Finally, in the late twentieth century, the “forgotten voices” emerge.

On April 12, 1945, General Dwight D. Eisenhower toured the Ohrdruf Concentration Camp in Thuringia, Germany. Upon hearing of the atrocities, he insisted on seeing every square inch of the camp personally. This way, he believed, no person could claim that the Holocaust never happened. He believed the world must know and acknowledge what happened there. Furthermore, he knew that a personal view of the atrocities would render the experience more real to those who inquire about his experience. The impact of a personal view of the atrocities reached its pinnacle just two years later. In 1947, Otto Frank published *The Diary of a Young Girl*, better known as *The Diary of Anne Frank*. The study of Anne Frank’s diary captivated several different disciplines. Its popularity allowed for researchers to pursue particular focuses regarding the human experience. Mirjam Pressler’s *Treasures from the Attic: The Extraordinary Story of Anne Frank’s Family* places Frank’s life as an extension of family values and experiences. Pressler, a renowned Holocaust historian, concludes that the struggle of Frank represented the struggle of family. To authors like Theo Costar, Anne Frank’s legacy represents one crucial to children’s experience of the Holocaust and the war while Miep Gies places emphasis on Frank as a woman during war. Since its publication, the topic of Anne Frank has been heavily examined. The validity, extensive information provided by the diary, and global acknowledgement of the Holocaust allowed for an environment receptive of and interested in this wartime atrocity. The Holocaust has become a defining characteristic of World War II and Anne Frank’s life has become the face of the human toll.

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General Eisenhower’s remarks encouraged the preservation of Anne Frank’s legacy, that no one should ever forget the Holocaust. Her girlish innocence helped to push forward the message since her presumed virtue contrasted the far reaching cruelties of man and war. Her detailed description of everyday life in hiding gave substantial evidence to historians. She represents a faction that was well documented, preserved, supported and easily accessed. Her story has been adopted as a martyr for several countries, including her home country of Holland. Unfortunately, human rights violations during World War II were not limited to the Holocaust. Even more so, human rights violations which victimized Dutch citizens were not limited to the European Theater. Other atrocities, especially those which took place in the Asian Theater were not only overshadowed by the atrocious events which took place in the European Theater, but also by diversion of attention from the struggles of the victims to the struggles of the perpetrators.

Germany’s rather short, but brutal stint as an imperialist power greatly stressed the amount of human suffering which could occur during the process of colonization. Indeed, Germany did not function as a unified nation until 1871. The empire was unique in that it arose in a relatively short amount of time, and its main desire for expansion was not across the oceans in a foreign land. Rather, its desire for expansion targeted its neighboring countries. For centuries, European nations had been looking abroad to expand their empire, and now one was attempting to be built at their doorstep. Still, the institution of imperialism was centuries old, and so was the brutality that came with it. By the late fifteenth century, European explorers began their attempts to expand trade to and from Asia. In the sixteenth century, nations like Great Britain, France, the Netherlands and Portugal had begun colonization in India, China and Southeast Asia.

In 1512, the Portuguese became the first Europeans to visit the Indonesia. In 1595, the Dutch arrived in the Indonesian archipelago searching to broaden their trading posts. In

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8 Diemut Majer, “Non-Germans” under the Third Reich: The Nazi Judicial and Administrative System in Germany and Occupied Easter Europe, with Special Regard to Occupied Poland, 1939-1945 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 188.


the following years, they subsequently colonized several of the main islands and ousted Portuguese colonists. As the colonies spread, the process of forgetting the history of the Indonesian peoples commenced. Here in lies the dichotomy of the documentation of the people involved in imperialism. Imperialism created a society which cultivated a sense of normalization in conquering foreign and exotic places. When Germany attacked the familiar-when Germany attacked the homes of their fellow imperialist neighbors- history remembered the rift in an otherwise normalized action. Indeed, the forgotten history of the victimization of the Indonesian peoples far preceded the imperial actions of World War II.

For nearly 500 years, colonial powers were present the islands of Indonesia. Prior to colonial rule, the peoples of Indonesia were not unfamiliar with kingdoms or international visitors. The kingdoms with which they were familiar, however, were regional. Because of Indonesia’s diverse topography and climate, most villages remained relatively isolated.\(^{11}\) Communication worked most effectively only in short distances because roads required too much upkeep from destruction by rainfall and floods. Because areas remained isolated, populations stayed rather small. Those who sought to create an empire found they had less subjects to tax. In addition, subjugation of the inhabitants also proved difficult.\(^{12}\) The small populations were agile and could very easily relocate to uncharted territory out of the reach of the jurisdiction of an unpopular ruler. Indeed, Indonesia’s topographic layout and small populations did not readily support widespread unification or nationhood. Each area, while connected by Malay culture, represented a diverse and unique community.\(^ {13}\)

When the Dutch arrived in Indonesia, their main objective was at first a monetary one rather than one of conquest and colonization. The VOC, or Dutch East Indies Company (In Dutch: Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), was established in 1602 and represented a trading conglomerate. Soon, it gained permission from the Kingdom of the Netherlands to claim land, wage campaigns against any opposition, and subjugate the peoples of Indonesia. The VOC placed most of its focus on the island of Java, naming Batavia (modern day

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 17. 
\(^{12}\) Ibid., 19. 
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 17.
Jakarta) as its capital. Even though the Netherlands successfully ousted Portuguese traders, they could not consolidate a lasting control over Indonesian villages.\textsuperscript{14} Even in Java, their control experienced limitations. For the same reasons Indonesian natives rarely embarked on imperial campaigns, the Dutch found trouble in trying to create a cohesive unit for colonization. In addition, the VOC’s main objective dealt with commerce rather than nation building. It was not until the early nineteenth century that the Dutch crown pay considerable attention to consolidating the Dutch East Indies as part of Empire.\textsuperscript{15} The Kingdom of the Netherlands transformed the VOC into a national entity and began to take primary control over the Dutch East Indies. By 1820, Dutch forces embarked on campaigns to end any resistance from Javanese subjects.\textsuperscript{16} By 1840, the Dutch began to expand toward the outer islands. This allowed the Dutch to consolidate the possessions they already had, protect their claim from encroaching European imperialists, and gave them more access to the natural resources of Indonesia. Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Dutch crushed any attempted uprisings from the indigenous peoples of Indonesia.\textsuperscript{17} In 1942, however, the Netherlands power was truly tested by Japanese imperialism.

The Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies under the pretense of liberation. They promised the Indonesian native that their presence was only warranted to expel Western influence and control from Asia. At first, the Indonesian natives welcomed the Japanese. Soon, however, they found that Japanese presence simply replaced one imperialist nation with another. It did not take long for Japan’s true intentions to emerge. They needed natural resources. When the United States placed an embargo on Japan in 1941, Japan needed to look elsewhere for natural resources like petroleum. Indonesia, rich with petroleum and other resources, proved to be a perfect target for Japanese expansion. Indeed, the brutality which derived from Japanese presence proved far worse than the subjugation by the Dutch. Wartime Dutch East Indies witnessed extraordinary hardships and war crimes at the hands of the Japanese. Indeed, along with natural resources, Japanese needed laborers. These forced

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{15} Tarling, \textit{The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia}, 13.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 97-98.
\textsuperscript{17} Ricklefs, \textit{A History of Modern Indonesia}, 178-180.
labor positions included but were not limited to: sex slavery, railroad building, and military service. Thousands of native Indonesians and European inhabitants suffered from torture, starvation, forced labor and disease.\(^{18}\)

In 1945, when Japan surrendered, the unrest did not cease. Indonesian Nationalists took advantage of the weakened Dutch power to sue for independence. Their struggle took four years and cost thousands of lives. Through the revolution the brutality continued. A period called bersiap, translated to “be prepared,” brought violence toward Dutch nationals, Eurasians and those sympathetic to the Dutch. After years of colonization, Indonesian Nationalists showed that they were now unafraid to take their freedom even if it had to be done by force. By 1949, the Dutch ceded control of the Dutch East Indies and Indonesians officially gained their independence.\(^{19}\)

After independence, the Dutch attempted to forget about their imperial past. Indonesian nationals also worked to wipe away any reminded of their colonial past. These efforts left those gravely affected by the revolution to fend for themselves. Their pain was unwelcomed in Indonesia and Holland.\(^{20}\) Among their parent nations, the brutal history of revolution and the pain it caused became a hidden secret. Internationally, the pain of World War II was also repressed. As the Cold War loomed over international relations, the United State turned to Japan, an unlikely ally in order to combat the spread of communism.

When the Japanese invaded the Dutch East Indies, its imperial prowess had already driven troops to many places in Asia. The Empire’s need and desire for political influence, raw materials, labor and food drove its decision to infiltrate other regions of Asia. Also sparrowed on by racial superiority, the Japanese Empire sought to replace Europeans as the hierarchical elite.\(^{21}\) In July of 1937, Japanese forces invaded China. From the air, Japanese planes bombed the civilian populations. On the ground Japanese soldiers committed a mass

\(^{18}\) Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 336.


\(^{21}\) Tarling, *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, 331.
slaughter of civilians.\textsuperscript{22} The extent of the horrors which the Japanese inflicted on the Chinese might never be conceptualized. Japanese soldiers tortured thousands of Chinese civilians. Women were raped, and men were hung or mutilated. Others died as pawns of contests between Japanese soldiers. The soldiers wagered who could collect the most corpses. Still others were casualties of scientific experiments at the hands of Japanese doctors and scientists.\textsuperscript{23}

During the course of the War, Japan established a brutal presence in China, Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, Burma, Malay, Siam the Dutch East Indies and French Indo-China. In 1937, Japanese soldiers committed a mass brutalization of the civilians of Chinese city of Nanking. Thousands of men were mutilated and killed and thousands of women were raped, mutilated and killed. In 1939, after losing most of its working population to military service, the Japanese recruited men from its Korean colony to work in mainland Japan and abroad. These forced laborers suffered from deplorable living conditions and often died from starvation, disease or fatal work accidents.\textsuperscript{24} In 1942, Prisoners of War from the Philippines embarked on the Bataan Death March. It claimed the lives of about 20,000 American and Filipino POWs. In 1943, forced laborers and Prisoners of War were sent on tumultuous tasks like building the Burma-Siam railroad. The task was known as the “railroad of death” because its labor caused about 200,000 deaths.\textsuperscript{25} In 1944, as Japan faced defeat, the government conscribed Korean men to forced military service. Throughout the war women from all walks of life were forced into a life of sex slavery for the Japanese military.

The extent of Japanese war crimes effected not only the Dutch East Indies, but spread through all parts of Asia. The victims from the Dutch East Indies were among many. Even though Japan’s crimes against humanity seemed to inherit no boundaries, its role in the Cold War allowed Japan to sidestep blame during the Cold War decades. The subsequent alliance

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 47.
between Japan and the United States in the fight against communism silenced those Asian victims who suffered so much under the rule of imperial Japan.

From 1945 to 1952, American troops occupied Japan. As the influence of communism from the Soviet Union began to spread, the United States saw Japan as a crucial anti-communist safeguard in Asia. The United States desired a presence in the East. During the second half of the twentieth century, the United States government sought to become allies with Japan, thus they had no desire to force Japan to admit, apologize or give reparations for the crimes against humanity committed during World War II. The United States was able to create an alliance with Japan which allowed the U.S. build military posts in the country. With a closer proximity to both communist China and communist Russia, the United States utilized Japan as a stronghold in an otherwise communist region. In order to promote Japanese benevolence globally, the United States placed a relatively small emphasis on war crimes trials. In addition, the United States refusal to recognize the People’s Republic of China as a nation (that is, until 1979 when the United States established formal diplomatic relations) left no major Asian power to bring attention to Japanese war crimes. In doing so, the atrocities committed in Asia by the Japanese during World War II remained relatively unnoticed in United States history during most of the twentieth century.

By the 1950s, victims of the atomic bomb began to speak about their experience. Indeed, Japan stands as the only nation to ever experience the devastation of the atomic bomb. This allowed the Japanese people to adopt a narrative of “unquestionable victimization.” As explained by J. Samuel Walker in “The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb: A Historiographical Update,” the late 1950s brought on debates of the decision to drop the bomb and the human toll on Hiroshima’s and Nagasaki’s inhabitants. According to Japanese imperialism historian Daqing Yang, the Japanese government worked to not only to

26 Tarling, The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, 348.
28 Tarling, The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, 598.
change its image, but strove to promote a new sense of nationalism among its people.\textsuperscript{31} Claiming victimization brought the people together under a common history. Before 1970, the Japanese curriculum widely avoided the recognition of war crimes committed during World War II. They had little opposition to this outlook. With the Cold War at its height, the U.S. government more or less supported this adopted Japanese identity so to solidify an ally. Indeed, while Japanese crimes against humanity were not absent from history, it did not find a global audience like that of Anne Frank and the Holocaust.

It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that American historians began to research a more inclusive human experience. While still placing its main focus on the Japanese experience, American historians began to focus on the wartime experience of ordinary Japanese people. Historians Haruko and Theodore Cook released \textit{Japan at War: An Oral History} depicting the human toll of Japanese living in Japan. A compilation of several different stories in several different points of view, \textit{Japan at War} offers a humanizing view of the Japanese enemy.\textsuperscript{32} Cook and Cook utilize a compilation of oral history in order to portray the role war played in the lives of men, women, soldiers and children. They present a personal history- one of family struggles, loss, and love for one’s country. Reviews praised the compilation for providing insight “into the mental process by which people” understood the war.\textsuperscript{33} Remembering the war for the Japanese meant providing a different, redeeming view of the people. Authors Cook and Cook portrayed the Japanese as they saw themselves: as victims of the War. This greatly reiterated the sentiment of Japan’s own government- that the vast majority of Japanese people remember themselves as victims rather than perpetrators.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 552.
Still, Cook and Cook’s interview process also unearthed those ordinary citizens whose extraordinary role in the War opened a window for discussion about war crimes. In addition, those citizens whose perspective was limited to their experiences at the homefront, Cook and Cook also interviewed soldiers and intellectuals whose knowledge of the international aspect of the War allowed them to reflect on their own guilt as a perpetrator. Although it stemmed from a Japanese perspective, their accounts provided glimpses of those who suffered at the hands of the Japanese during World War II. Cook and Cook’s book not only reflects the importance of the ordinary Japanese subject’s perspective during World War II, but also helped to create a platform of conversation for the forgotten victims of Japanese imperialism.

In 1997, journalist Iris Chang released *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. The book depicts the unimaginable cruelties of a Japan at war and calls for acknowledgement of the atrocious actions, especially for the crimes against humanity in Nanking, China in 1938. Chang utilizes firsthand accounts from local missionaries and survivors as well as a wide array of statistics to support the extent of human rights violations that took place. She concludes that the Japanese government has not been tasked to take responsibility for their actions like the Germans had to do for the Holocaust.\(^{35}\) Despite her claim of being the first to write about the Rape of Nanking, the subject had already attracted several historians. Chang was merely the first to really embellish it. Historians like Timothy A. Kelly and Joshua Fogel argue that Chang’s rendition of the Rape of Nanking represents a harsh generalization of Japanese during wartime. They argue that the statistics presented in the book are untrustworthy and the book itself is laced with inefficient evidence and broad claims in order to dramatize history.\(^{36}\) None-the-less, while Chang’s book harbored the brunt of criticism, it opened the door for a general popularization of the “forgotten victims” of World War II.

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While Chang may not have been the first scholar to write about the Rape of Nanking, the term “forgotten victims” spurred on more research of the human toll of World War II outside the Holocaust. Inez Hollander’s *Silenced Voices: Uncovering a Family’s Colonial History in Indonesia* brings focus to the shame and silence of the victim. While she gives credit to Chang for spurring on the movement of forgotten history, Hollander speaks to the possibility that these forgotten victims may have wanted to remain forgotten. Hollander, a Dutch Language specialist at UC Berkeley, discovered her family’s colonial roots in the Dutch East Indies with a particular focus on her paternal grandfather. In her book, she explores different scenarios her grandfather may have experienced during World War II and Japanese occupation by utilizing interviews with her family, documents penned by her grandfather, and by placing her grandfather’s life in its historical setting. She places emphasis on family history and a personal struggle to find identity and gain purpose. In this way, Hollander decisively grants a sense of agency for her family.

Hollander’s approach stays constant with this small and very new field of study. Indeed, most works have only been published within the last ten years. Hollander’s work stands apart because she appears to have the first published piece by a scholar who works within the field of history. None-the-less, most authors on the subject share similarities. The authors usually have a family relation with the person about whom they write, they are either second or third generation immigrants from Indonesia (i.e., their family no longer lives in Indonesia), and they struggled to find credible sources. Reconstructing a forgotten tragedy leaves several pieces to be determined. Hollander readily admits that lack of sufficient sources had to be replaced with educated guesses based on the historical background. As time progresses, firsthand accounts slowly disappear. The reality that these “silenced voices” could be lost forever summons a need for rapid preservation. Hollander chillingly states: “The average Dutch person will be able to tell you all about the Second World War, the German occupation, the Holocaust, Anne Frank, and the hunger winter of 1945, but when you ask him when the Dutch East Indies were liberated, what does he know?”

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38 Ibid., xviii.
Hollander, Frank and her grandfather were cut from the same cloth. They were both Dutch, yet national history only recognized one.

Because of authors like Hollander, the accounts of victims of Japanese occupation in Indonesia are growing; however, the field is still small. The small field provides a limited supply of material and even less translated work, suggesting that the study of these victims has yet to gain international prominence. With this piece, I aim to add to the growing field, while acknowledging the language barrier. I cannot read in Dutch nor Indonesian; however, my view represents that of a third generation family member whose family journey led them from Indonesia to Holland and finally to the United States. Utilizing Oma’s letters, Dutch colonial history and psychological analysis, I place primary focus on the concept of abandonment. I will explain Oma’s orphaned past through her letters and how it coincides with the effects of abandonment syndrome. Furthermore, I connect her issues of abandonment as a youth to the effects associated with dissolution of colonialism, or how her Dutch-Indo status and issues with statelessness can be viewed as a form of abandonment. I aim to explain how abandonment by both her family and her country helped to perpetuate this prolonged period of silence about her childhood and how that silence changed from a tool of suppression in her childhood to a tool of agency in her adulthood.

WRITING ABOUT THE FORGOTTEN

In 1978, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* introduced the presence of the Other in Western History. By discovering the other, he revealed the nature of Western thought as a one-sided affair. Utilizing regions from the Middle East, he reasoned that the West’s historical, cultural and political perceptions of the East derived from a comparative outlook which placed the West above the East. In a Western perspective, the West represented the civilized while the East represented the uncivilized.39

Said’s approach compares the history of the Middle East from the West’s perspective to the authentic history of the Middle East, pinpointing language of perversion and dominance as a way in which the West prolonged cultural dominance over their Eastern colonies. The West viewed the East as an asset which needed to fit within the Western

narrative. Its rendition of the East left lasting falsities of the history of the East. Said’s identification of the other showed how the identity of a people could be controlled by foreign sources. Through this control, agency is lost, and certain aspects of a history are either made from fiction or forgotten. Thus, the people being subjected become stereotyped and marginalized. He stresses the importance of resurrecting research to save a forgotten history.

The relationship between the West and the Other demonstrates the mechanisms of imperialism. The social hierarchy which colonial society relied resulted in the degradation and generalization of the natural occupants of the colony. While this cultural jargon was, at times, perpetuated to keep Westerners from engaging in sexual relations with the Other, the act became common especially among Western men and local women. These relations not only happened in the colonies of the Middle East, but in all colonies. Most relations resulted in procreation. These babies were mixed-raced: part the West and part the other. Because they fit into neither Western society nor the Other, this new population of people represented a marginalized population whose presence challenged the barriers between the West and the Other. British cultural archeologist Victor Turner called those mixed between two races a liminar, or liminal character.

Turner describes a liminal character as “the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions, outsiderhood refers to actions and relationships which do not flow from a recognized social status but originate outside it, while lowermost status refers to the lowest rung in a system of social stratification in which unequal rewards are accorded to functionality differentiated positions.” Liminal characters exist between social statuses; they belong to neither one nor the Other. Their existence challenges the fabric of their society. They represent the unlimited possibilities upon which social structures build. They provide chaos to the otherwise organized ladder of society. Because they do not fit in, they are often marginalized, existing on the threshold of society.

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40 Ibid., 119.
42 Ibid., 237.
43 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America (New York:
crossover to one side or the other. Those stuck in the purgatory that is liminality often struggle to define themselves because their identity weighs heavy on those judging them.

Liminal characters in history often refer to mixed-race people like Oma. Their liminality often left them overlooked by scholars. In the mid twentieth century, however, the emergence of local and cultural history placed greater emphasis on those forgotten by time. Of those works, *The Return of Martin Guerre* by Natalie Zemon Davis and *The Unredeemed Captive* by John Demos aim to write history about the overlooked by utilizing local and cultural history. By writing about the forgotten, Davis and Demos approach the matter with the idea that all history is subjective. Because their work relies heavily on context clues, they ponder rather than present their works as absolute fact.44 Their attention to the overlooked, liminal or underrepresented people in history, however, offers innovative ways to restore what has been forgotten.

The saga of Martin Guerre grew famous as a classic case of drama, stolen identity and deception. The retelling of the story traditionally weighs heavy on original court documents, the published works of trial participant Jean de Coras, and the writings of contemporary Guillaume Le Sueur. While both Coras and Le Sueur’s work only focus on Bertrande as the duped wife, Natalie Zemon Davis saw an opportunity to expose the limitations of recorded facts. Instead, she saw the trial of the Pseudo-Martin Guerre as a polarizing case that testifies more to everyday life in the small, Catholic, southern French community rather than indisputable fact. Davis’s *The Return of Martin Guerre* offered agency to Bertrande outside being defined by her relationships with the deserter and the imposter. While the original accounts commonly define Bertrande’s role as a fragile victim of the imposter, Davis’s rendition suggests the characteristics of the confused, unaware wife are suspicious. She proposes an account she deems more realistic: that Bertrande knew the pseudo-Martin Guerre who introduced himself as her husband was no more than a fake. Instead of becoming his unknowing victim, Davis reasons Bertrande was more believably the pseudo-Martin Guerre’s coconspirator. She was the account’s protagonist.

Davis’s focus on Bertrande de Ros complimented the growing wave of gender studies that took hold in the 1960s. Still, Davis’s admission in the introduction of *The Return of Martin Guerre* stimulated a discussion about credibility. By her own admission, Davis writes “What I offer you here is in part my invention, but held tightly in check by the voices of the past.” Davis readily submits herself to the unknown; however, her comment curtailed effort to provide a historically relevant account of the trial of Martin Guerre. Her comment is understood as a confession of fiction. In his review, historian Robert Finlay defends the traditional version of the Martin Guerre saga: “…Bertrande is not an interpretation based on the sources; it is, rather, an opinion by a modern historian who apparently believes that unsubstantiated insight can itself be taken as evidence. This is a flimsy foundation on which to build an interpretation of the Martin Guerre story that contradicts the surviving evidence.”

While he credits Davis’s version as an exceptional retelling, Davis’s perceived lack of adherence to the sources lead Finlay to believe Davis’s rendition “does not yield a portrait of Bertrande that is either plausible or persuasive.” He utilizes historical record in its unrefined form and bases his critique of Davis’s version on the central argument that the historical record never questioned Bertrande’s complicity, nor did they characterize Bertrande as anything more than a victim. The clear consensus of the record shows Bertrande’s role had “never [been] a matter for debate.” Finlay suggests that Davis’s Bertrande is more of a product of invention rather than historical reconstruction.

Finlay’s review reflects his support for traditional historiography. His strong appeal for evidentiary support as the crux of validity reflects the scientifically charged rules of structural history. Through his view, Davis’s claims lacked essential historical support and analysis. Yet, while Finlay portrayed the court and contemporary documents as a beacon of

47 Ibid., 559.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 570.
verity, Davis interpreted the sources as a preservation of culture. She approached the story of Martin Guerre with a gender and cultural methodology. Her rendition of Martin Guerre was not so she could retell the verdict; rather, she “demonstrate[d]… aspects of the law’s rule as a story-teller.”\textsuperscript{50} The law’s rule allowed Davis to “capture the richness of historical context.” Davis’s question as to how a small Catholic community’s definition of a woman’s role in their society transformed the court documents from factual account to a culturally influenced piece. To her, the court proceeding reflect a time when there was agreement that the “female sex was, after all, fragile.”\textsuperscript{51} In addition, this small town represented a male controlled society, which meant that the official participants in the trial would more readily accept Bertrande’s naivety rather than accuse her as a conspirator. Indeed, while Finlay’s verdict on Bertrande relied heavily on the word of the court documents, Davis instead perceived the word of the court document as a reflection of its time.

While Davis calls her own rendition an invention, she simultaneously questions the objectivity of the traditional story. Her interpretation deviates greatly from the accepted story; however, she subsequently challenges the validity of the traditional telling. Davis’ outlook on the original telling of Martin Guerre also reflects elements of subjectivity; therefore, with Davis’s relativist reasoning, neither her work nor the original work can be met with objectivity. Her story is just as valid as the original. Her story is just as invalid as the original. The move from structural to post-structural does not signify the line between true history and invented history; rather, it documents a shift of perception which from that point on looks at all history with subjectivism.

Similar to the story of Martin Guerre, John Demos’ \textit{The Unredeemed Captive} provides an account of the experiences of the Williams family in eighteenth century colonial America. The Williams family story has been famously preserved, and accounts of the family’s captivity rests heavily on the writings of just a few detailed contemporary sources. Eunice Williams, a young girl from Deerfield, Massachusetts, was kidnapped by Mohawk Native Americans in 1704. She soon adopted Mohawk culture, forgot most of her English,


\textsuperscript{51} Davis, \textit{The Return of Martin Guerre}, 81.
and had a family with a Mohawk man. All the while, her brother and father worked tirelessly to retrieve their lost family member. Her father Reverend John Williams and her brother Stephen Williams present the only firsthand accounts of her capture and subsequent life as an Indian. Reverend John Williams defined himself and the family who returned as the “redeemed captives.” Like Davis and her take on Martin Guerre, Demos strays from the standard narration of the Williams family’s struggle to return Eunice Williams to her home. Instead, Demos attempts to tell the story through the eyes of Eunice, the “unredeemed captive.” Like Davis, Demos embraces the unknown. He utilizes local and comparative history to assess the different gender roles between the Puritan Deerfield, Massachusetts community and the local Indian society. He formulates an argument that expresses a sense of choice on the part of Eunice for deciding to stay with her Indian family rather than returning to her birth family.

Throughout her near ninety years of life, however, Eunice Williams only has a few spoken words on record. Consequently, Demos’ book contains several sentences beginning with the word “perhaps,” signifying something may or may not have happened. It has long italicized paragraphs so to caution the reader that the written words are simply what he believes could have happened, and not what certainly transpired. It is this writing style that so perplexed Robert Finlay that he critiqued Davis’s work on Martin Guerre as based more on imagination than history. Still, Demos bases his rendition on deductions supported by the historical setting as he works to reconstruct the forgotten history of the unredeemed captive. And, as his introduction so greatly implies, the stories that contribute to history are infinite, even if only four or five of those stories are presented.

Said’s *Orientalism* acknowledges the power of influence; history cannot be written objectively because the society in which we belong perpetuates biases. Both Davis and Demos use cultural bias to their advantage. They aimed to expose what could have been false and what could have been true during an event by looking at the cultural construct of a

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52 Demos, *The Unredeemed Captive*, 51.
53 Ibid., 109.
54 Ibid., 3-10.
society. All the while, Davis and Demos readily admit their uncertainties. Their attempts to write about forgotten viewpoints in history creates a forum which allows for both historical accuracies and interpretation.

**THROUGH A DIFFERENT LENS**

Oma fit into the realm of historical significance because her life was bound to the era of modern imperialism. Between 1603 and 1949, the modern day nation of Indonesia lay under Dutch colonial rule. By the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of the Netherlands incorporated the colony into its government and labeled the land the Dutch East Indies. With lucrative trading ports and vast growth of cash crops such as cacao and sugar, the Dutch East Indies stood as the most important asset to Dutch imperialism. By the mid twentieth century, however, the outbreak of World War II challenged the stability of Dutch colonial rule. The Netherlands suffered tremendously from both the Western Front and the Pacific Theater. The aftermath of the world war left the Netherlands weak in several aspects, but especially militarily and economically. Indonesian nationalists gained support with an anti-colonial call and sued for independence in 1945. Four years of conflict ensued before the Dutch finally agreed to leave the archipelago. On December 27, 1949, Indonesia officially gained its independence.

Upon new leadership, Indonesian officials supported the exile of the former Dutch colonists including the mixed heritage Dutch-Indonesians.\(^55\) While Dutch society in the Netherlands welcomed the white Dutch exiles as heroes, it failed to see the mixed-heritage Dutch-Indonesian people, known as Indos, as heroes of the same struggle.\(^56\) The Indos were only reluctantly permitted into the Netherlands. The Dutch government granted Indos citizenship; however, almost immediately after their arrival to the Netherlands, the Dutch government strove to relocate the new Indo population. By the 1950s, the Indo people

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\(^{56}\) While it is important to point out that Indo was once a derogative nickname, recent events have led to the reclaiming of the title as one of honor and meaning. Indeed, in my lifetime, I have only ever known Indo as a common label for ethnicity. The term Indo, Indische, and Dutch-Indonesian will be utilized interchangeably.
embarked on a struggle to find a permanent home. The diaspora of Indos led to its high populations in Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Lydia Sylvia Ingrid Francis Hielckert, or Oma as I knew her, was just one of thousands who underwent this process. She was born in 1933 to mixed race parents. Born near the capital of the Dutch East Indies, she grew up during a time of rapid transition. She grew up during World War II. She grew up during the Revolution. She left as a Dutch citizen to Holland in 1957. She left from Holland to the United States through a government program in 1960. She, her husband and their family settled in Dublin, California that year. She died in 2006. That was her life by eras and dates; that was her life as one of thousands.

Historical significance is just one of several frames in which to place her story. Indeed, historical significance has granted Oma’s story a sense of validity. Life is often defined by other events. “She lived during World War II.” I am not innocent of this outlook. When I place Oma’s life, I utilize what I learned. World War II, Indonesian Revolution, colonialism- all of these points in time help to piece together parts of Oma’s life so to demonstrate the relatability of her story to those who endured similar plights. There are two dispositions that weigh heavily on how Oma is portrayed. The first of these dispositions is imperial rhetoric, or acknowledging that Oma and I come from different eras and have grown up with different perspectives. The second disposition stems from how we see and navigate through time, or how the concept of time in a story can sometimes operate more as a tool than contribute as an instance of fact.

**THE TWO WORLDS OF IMPERIAL RHETORIC**

Imperial rhetoric refers to the persuasive language content that was used to encapsulate and spread imperial nepotism during the height of the colonial period. It also refers to how Western society teaches history today, implying that United States public schools teach primarily from a Western-or an imperialist- point of view. For Oma and me, it helps to highlight a connection between us; that the two of us, although our youthful years stand decades apart, may have been affected by a similar agent. Imperial rhetoric is important to explore in order to both understand the world in which Oma lived and the world in which I learned.
For Oma, rhetoric created a social hierarchy based on racial distinction and division. By implementing this type of hierarchy, colonial leaders solidified their beliefs that status was scientifically determined by race and that peoples categorized in a corresponding order. For me, it helps to explore reasons why third-generation Indo-Americans have experienced a disconnect with Indonesian culture. This part explores a third generation Indo-American’s point of view toward learning about personal identity and how imperial rhetoric furthers the detachment between oneself and heritage. It also shows how common attributes of imperial rhetoric helped to create a pattern that outlines the socio-economic structure in imperial societies. It showcases how imperial control drew considerably from racial hierarchy and displays how Oma’s early childhood may have been experienced

**MY PERCEPTION**

Today, Indonesia’s population ranks fourth behind China, India and the United States. It has the largest Muslim population, with Islam being the second largest organized religion in the world. Yet, growing up in the United States, the history of Indonesia seldom (or never) made the syllabus. Indeed, the location of the archipelago is still a mystery to many Americans. Our regional awareness is mostly consumed with the neighboring Philippines. Even then, we tend to group the two countries together and mislabel Indonesia as a Pacific Islander country rather than one affiliated with the rest of Asia. Pho netically, Indonesia becomes misplaced as well. It is not uncommon to explain to someone that although they sound alike, Indonesia is not the “same thing” as India. It makes me aware of the fact that if I did not discover my family’s history stemmed from Indonesia, I would also be unaware of basic information about or the location of this major nation. I soon questioned the significance of Indonesian history in my own life and wondered if there was a reason why my Dutch heritage took precedence.

In secondary school, it appears the Ancient World only consisted of Greece, Rome and Egypt. As we moved to the Modern World, we placed the most emphasis on Western

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countries, namely Great Britain, France and Spain. We followed these focal nations into the Dark Ages. Then, we saw the resurgence of art through the beauty that was the Renaissance. When they “discovered” the New World in the fifteenth century, so did we. As the world grew larger through the eyes of Western history, the scope in which we explored these new places grew more ambiguous. The world, in a way, became simplified. It split into two parts: the conquerors and the conquered, the developed and the undeveloped, the West and everywhere else.

The histories written about people who have experienced a colonizing power follow a similar pattern: before colonization, during colonization and after independence. In this respect, we work with the process of colonization as the focal point of a people’s history. Their histories before colonization henceforth also belong to the imperialist narrative. Indeed, when an imperial power colonizes an area, the sense of place becomes redefined. Now, Indonesia is a unified nation with a central government, an official language, and six official religions. In becoming independent, it did not return to its pre-colonial make up. It did not disperse into smaller, self-governing nations as it was before colonization. Smaller territory became consolidated into a singular territory during colonization. During independence, the make-up of this territory was integrated into the new nation. While similar in culture, they differed in community; nevertheless, Indonesians became redefined as a people of one come the 1940s.

A decolonized area adopting the geographical borders made by colonizers is not abnormal. While the peoples of Indonesia differed, they grew connected through a common experience of colonization and the goal of independence. Their cultures and languages, while different, shared similar Malay backgrounds. In effect, exhibiting a unified patriotism helped create cohesiveness among several peoples, resulting in a strong sense of nationalism.

This process of nation-making, however, holds an underlying indication. In Arthur de Gobineau’s *The Inequality of Human Races*, he mentions the process in which a series of

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59 Vickers, A History of Modern Indonesia, 1.
tribes become a “real nation.” He concludes that there are two types of forces in the world: repulsion and attraction. Repulsion is the force adopted by a people who “can never raise themselves above the elementary completeness of tribal life.”60 The second force is adopted by those who are “more capable of development.”61 It is only when the latter enters and conquers the lands and tribes of the former that a “real nation” is born, and civilization can progress.62

This is the process of colonization: when otherwise stagnant tribes have been introduced to the opportunity to evolve into a civilized society by a more capable foreign race. The impact of this before colonization, during colonization and after independence corresponds to an underlying implication of before progress, during progress and after development. While de Gobineau wrote this piece in the nineteenth century, his categorization of the world into two pieces—those who act out of repulsion and those who act out of attraction—corresponds with the way we look at the world today (i.e. developed and underdeveloped, first world and third world). There are only two categories and this two category system affects the way in which we learn and identify ourselves.

Scenarios like this present a false dilemma. It aggravates our search for identity and pressures a person to identify with one category or the other. Are we part of the Western world, or do our roots hold us to our heritage as the other? Where do our histories lay: with the colonizing history of the Western world, or the more unclear history of the other world? It is with this inner struggle that I saw I too had divided the world in two. All this time I looked at Oma’s skin color, where she was born and the colonial history of that place. I assumed she did not initially belong to the Western world; that she only moved into it years later.

I first saw Oma as a single raced individual, but she, too, was mixed race. Her childhood lay exponentially closer to the epicenter of the racial theory that swept the colonial world. Growing up more closely to the theoretical likes of de Gobineau, Oma experienced

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 45.
more clearly the effects of the two worlds. She, too, looked at the two worlds—the colonizers and the colonized, the people of repulsion and the people of attraction—and had to work with a system where adaptation meant for a better life. Oma experienced a system with two ethnic groups—the Europeans and the native Indonesians. She, however, was part of the overlapped group in the middle. She was Indo. She belonged to neither and both at the same time. This aspect of her social status greatly shaped her identity.

**OMA’S REALITY: THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIES**

In Maria Elena Martinez’s landmark work, *Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza de Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico*, she places focus on how, during the long period of European colonial conquest, the purity of blood grew to take precedence in social structure. The purity of a person’s blood, or their racial affiliation, took new meaning during colonization. As the amount of communities with which Europeans came in contact began to rise exponentially, the categories of human races greatly expanded. Ethnic purity stood as an indicator that corresponded to one’s place in the social hierarchy. The closer a person ethnically associated with a European race, the higher they sat on the hierarchy. Conversely, the closer a person associated with the native ethnicity of the colonized region, the lower they sat on the hierarchy, withstanding exceptions.

Martinez’s emphasis on blood, and the cleanliness of it, shows a desire for categorization and class assurance during colonial times. The concept of clean blood brings to light the possibility blood can be contaminated. Unlike skin color or religion-traits that can fool perception—blood carried the truth behind someone’s identity. Once the blood is contaminated with other ethnicities, it cannot be uncontaminated.

While Martinez’s book focuses on Spain’s colonial past, her work transcends colonial borders. As Europeans moved farther from their cultural epicenter, the desire to maintain an

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65 Ibid., 56.
ethnically based superiority grew more important, even to the point where ethnic Europeans born in Europe became viewed as purer blooded than ethnic Europeans born in the colonies. The Spanish caste system was made up of several distinct categories, and placed extensive importance on integrating natives into their cultural and governmental system. Like the Spanish, the Dutch colonies contained a wide range of peoples including Dutch nationals, Chinese nationals, people of Arabic descent and people of mixed Eurasian descent. Unlike the Spanish, however, they placed less emphasis on creating an integral caste system. They also placed less importance on integrating the groups of people into their cultural and governmental system. The Dutch East Indies harbored a society where the Dutch colonists did not want Indonesian social structure to integrate into Dutch society. Instead, Dutch presence left Indonesian society relatively intact, allowing them to remain self-governed. The Dutch preferred to encourage cooperation with the Indonesian elite, and viewed the native Indonesians of lesser status as means to cheap labor.

Still, the large minority of Chinese immigrants took the brunt of Dutch hierarchy. The Dutch took considerable precautions to keep the Chinese and native Indonesians separate so to prevent Chinese favor and influence. The Chinese presence had long since presented a threat to European imperialists, albeit the threat was mostly fabricated. In truth, in the early years of the Dutch East Indies, the VOC relied on the Indies Chinese to increase the Dutch Empire’s revenue. The Indies Chinese were predominantly merchants, and their connections between different areas of the Indies allowed for them to become the middlemen between the native Indonesians and the Dutch nationals. Their growing presence in privileged positions, however, began to pose a point of contention for the Dutch colonial leaders.

By mid nineteenth century, Dutch nationals felt threatened by the Indies Chinese’s growing economic power. They began to restrict their movement, confining them to live in certain areas. Then, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Dutch targeted the Indies Chinese as opportunists and publicly accused them of subjugating Indonesian natives for material gain. This propaganda projected the Chinese as the main menace against the social


advancement of native Indonesians. In reality, the this propaganda allowed the Dutch to stunt Chinese hierarchical advancement. The passed discriminatory laws against the Indies Chinese. The laws raised taxes for people of Chinese descent, deemed Chinese unequal in the eyes of the law and allowed for doubt over citizenship. The Chinese were not the main threat to Indonesian advancement, but their growing unpopularity allowed Dutch nationals to control Chinese influence and power. By the 1920s, with Asian imperialism looming, the Dutch again targeted the Indies Chinese as the greatest threat toward their colony. They did not want anti-Western sentiments from Chinese Nationalists to reach their colonies.

The Dutch’s treatment of the Indies Chinese shows the lengths in which the Dutch went to maintain control of their colony. One such law was the “Ethical Policy.” Although for some, this policy represented official dedication to the betterment of native Indonesians, its underlying cause was to make sure to keep native Indonesians away from the influence and favor of the Indies Chinese.

In 1898, Queen Wilhelmina of the Kingdom of the Netherlands ascended the throne. With her kingdom suffering from economic decline, she turned her attention to the Indies in hopes of making it a more formidable asset. She attempted this feat by encouraging a greater presence of Dutch colonists in the Indies. Even so, with pleas from her people to treat the “childish” people of the Indies with care, she advocated to bring progress and prosperity to the natives. When Queen Wilhelmina adopted her “Ethical Policy,” Dutch colonists adopted a persona of a benevolent power. In their eyes, they arrived not to exploit the native Indonesians, but to protect a people whose inexperience left them incapable of working successfully in international relations and vulnerable to Chinese influence. While they distinguished themselves from other colonial rules by allowing a dual society, the importance

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68 Ibid., 92.


70 Liu, “Countering ‘Chinese Imperialism’,” 92.

71 Vickers, A History of Modern Indonesia, 17.
of race in their social hierarchy and the emphasis on blood purity continued to play a significant role.\textsuperscript{72}

Essentially, the Dutch’s explanation of the native Indonesians as a backwards people and their bestowed upon mission to bring them into the modern framework of civilization greatly reflected that of de Gobineau’s two forces. In essence, according to the Dutch and racial theory of the time, the Indonesians acted out of repulsion, and the Dutch acted out of attraction. And, while the Dutch took great pride in allowing the native Indonesians to keep their way of life, the separate societies worked as a ploy to maintain control. The Queen’s decision to advocate for a larger presence of ethnic Dutch people did not necessarily mean an exponentially larger population of Dutch residence; rather, it was meant as a call for the further separation of the two ethnic groups. By implementing raced based hierarchies, the small population of Dutch colonists consolidated power over the masses.\textsuperscript{73}

This new goal greatly changed the make-up of the Dutch East Indies. At first, when Dutch colonial power was not as prestigious, Dutch colonists known as ‘stayers’ greatly admired Indonesian culture. They bonded with native Indonesians. They integrated local Malay languages into their own. They honored relations with local women. Their diets reflected that of locals. They took pride in identifying with a new, cross-cultural outlook and had no intention of leaving their island lifestyle for Holland. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, this lifestyle came under harsh criticism.\textsuperscript{74} As the Dutch government tried to create a more powerful presence in Indonesia, they did not want it questioned by those who stood in between Dutch and Indonesian customs. Soon, a second group of Dutch people called the ‘pures’ rose in number and gained control of the colony.\textsuperscript{75} Unlike their stayer predecessors, they harbored no connection to the Indonesian community. Monetary gain, rather than social interaction, took precedence as Dutch imperial prowess grew. The importance of being European grew. While Queen Wilhelmina’s “Ethical Policy” stayed intact, it in no way advocated for equal treatment under the law.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 17

\textsuperscript{74} Bosma and Raben, Being “Dutch” in the Indies, 159

\textsuperscript{75} Vickers, A History of Modern Indonesia, 25.
The two societies of Dutch colonial rule became more apparent as the pures continued their reign. Being European became a fashion statement. Like the color purple in Ancient Rome, white became the color of Dutch colonial dominance. They wore white suits, which usually covered a robust belly. Their physical appearance put on display the well fed and manicured European lifestyle.\textsuperscript{76}

While the Dutch worked to distance themselves from native Indonesian garb and traditions, they still had an innate-like respect for what they considered royalty.\textsuperscript{77} And while some saw the “Ethical Policy” as a means in which to keep the native Indonesians sedated, others truly saw it as a way to better the position of the people of Indonesia. From 1899 until her untimely death in 1904, a young Indonesian aristocrat wrote letters to her Dutch friends. Her letters focused on her passion for a more inclusive Indonesia; one which supported education for both men and women of all statuses. Kartini, was the daughter of a regency chief.\textsuperscript{78} At a young age she learned how to speak and write Dutch. She, unlike most women of aristocratic background, continued her education through adulthood with permission from her father. She utilized her knowledge of social and political measures to correspond with Dutch intellectuals through letters. Her letters encapsulate a time of drastic change in the Dutch East Indies.

Kartini witnessed a foreign nation bring both enlightenment and horrors. Indeed, she credited Dutch schools and people with the kindness to bring education.\textsuperscript{79} Still, she regularly observed the condescending and hypocritical traits of Dutch rule. “I love the Hollanders very, very much… Many of them are among our best friends, but there are also others who dislike us, for no other reason than we are bold enough to emulate them in education and culture.”\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 26
\textsuperscript{77} In a letter to Stella Zeehandelaar written on August 18, 1899, Kartini explains that her high status does not mean she is of royalty. She says that in Holland, people seem to think if an Indonesian is not a servant, then they must be royalty. She shows confusion as to why royal titles require such acclaim in Holland. In addition, she points out that she only goes by the name Kartini because her name matters more than a family name. This stands in contrast to the importance of surnames in European culture.
\textsuperscript{78} Raden Adjeng Kartini, trans., \textit{Letters of a Javanese Princess} (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), 38.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 61.
She recognized the divide and drew attention to the Dutch mentality of us versus them. She saw that many Dutch defined society as those who govern and those who are governed.\footnote{Ibid.} When her Dutch correspondents show confusion as to why the Javanese are so poor she responded: “Why is it that the Javanese is so poor, [the Dutch] ask? And at the same time, [the Dutch] are thinking how they will be able to get more money out of him… when grass cutters who earn 10 or 12 cents a day are made to pay a trade tax… What is left for profit? Barely enough to live on.”\footnote{Ibid., 243.} Through her educated background, Kartini grew more aware of the social injustices which gripped her people.

Kartini’s scholarly background and access to Dutch schools allowed her to contribute to society. About ten years after her death, her pen pals Mevrouw and Mijnheer Abendanon publisher her letters. Inspired by her words, Kartini schools for girls opened in 1923 in her honor.\footnote{Ibid., 23.} Her exampled was an early sign which showed how the “Ethical Policy” eventually worked in the native Indonesians’ favor in the long run. Armed with knowledge, native Indonesians began to petition for political involvement as early as the 1910s. By the 1940s, the number of educated native Indonesians grew and they sued for peace. Even so, the height of the “Ethical Policy” still helped to divide the peoples of the Dutch East Indies and consolidate power for the Dutch.

The Dutch solidified their racial practices in law. Ethnic groups were subject to separate taxation policies and separate penalties for breaking the law, even though they lived under the same judicial agency. With the help of the “Ethical Policy,” the Dutch government moved forward with utilizing schooling as a way to achieve native progress; however, this, too, would prove to have policies of separation. Their goal to educate the native Indonesians aimed to limit Indonesians’ role in the colony and limit chances for upward growth. They simply wanted to introduce native Indonesians to a level of civilization compatible with their “childish” nature.\footnote{Vickers, \textit{A History of Modern Indonesia}, 28}
It seems the Dutch took considerable precaution to refrain from being mixed. Just as the Dutch did not want Indonesian integration into society, they were adamant about stopping integration into their blood. Preserving whiteness became paramount at the turn of the twentieth century. As Europeanization continued into the twentieth century, it grew increasingly important for Dutch men to marry Dutch women, since their wives became a component of their social status. Furthermore, the Dutch viewed interracial relationships in their colonies as an embarrassment internationally. They did not want visiting guests to witness such social interactions. Before the intense social change, however, the stayers regularly took Indonesian concubines even though the practice of interracial relations was frowned upon. Still, stayers regularly partook in the practice of legitimizing the children that came as a product of these relationships. These mixed race children and their families became known as Indische. Once the stayers lost a considerable amount of power as the pures began to arrive, their family status also faced challenges. Still, even well into the twentieth century, these mixed race relations continued to disrupt Dutch social order.

As the racial based hierarchy became stricter in the Dutch East Indies, these Euro-Indonesian families began to more feverously identify with their Dutch counterparts. They actively tried to shed the perception of “childish natives” from their own identity and instead adopt a more European lifestyle. Instead of making clear their own niche, they adopted the racial structure of Dutch colonial society and tried to work within it to prove their loyalty to Dutch leaders. While closer to local customs and people, Euro-Asians also exhibited racism toward native Indonesians, distancing themselves from the native Indonesian stereotypes.

When the Great Depression hit in 1929, Dutch colonists did not stop their lavish lifestyle. Instead, they opted to further separate themselves from the Indonesian natives through communal enclaves. The social disparity between the colonial leaders and Indonesians only worsened. Japan’s Pacific campaign developed on the platform of “Asia for Asians.” During World War II, the Japanese military began to spread throughout Asia under the pretense to dispel white colonists from Asia. Thousands of Dutch colonists were sent to internment camps where they endured imprisonment and forced labor. The mixed raced

\[85\text{Ibid.}\]
Indische had to make a choice between their two worlds: stay loyal to their Dutch ancestry and face imprisonment, or declare Indonesian ethnicity and accept marginalization in the new society.\textsuperscript{86}

There was no room for mixed races in the imperial rhetoric of the Dutch East Indies. They were an embarrassment, a constant reminder that the rules of racial conduct could be broken. No matter how many laws were passed or social standards were put into play, they could not break the relation held between several Dutch colonists and the Indies. The unnatural relationship between a more advanced individual and their uncivilized counterpart undermined the Dutch struggle for authority. As the social situation between the Dutch and the native Indonesians grew more divided and unfriendly, economic depression and impending war lay heavy on the stability in the colony. When the Japanese posted claim to the Dutch colony, the two worlds of the Dutch East Indies became abundantly clear. There were just the two choices: Dutch and Indonesian, and nothing in between. The Indische had to claim their loyalty.

I have only ever personally known her as Oma. I have not and will never meet her during her childhood. I have not and will never meet her on her wedding day, on her first day as a mother, or even on her first day as a grandmother. When I see picture of her in her youth, I cannot help but compare her youthful image to the image of her as an elder. I may make misconceptions about who she is—strong, loving, strict—because that is how I knew her. I grant the most credence to her time in the orphanage, even though the time she spent there was a mere four years of her seventy-three year existence. Oma’s life spanned far greater than one of her titles as an orphan, or a prisoner of war. I do not know the time or times in her life she felt defined her. Time cannot define, it cannot validate, it cannot characterize with certainty. Time is simply a reminder of the subjective nature of history. With a heavy heart and a touch of invention, Oma’s history can, at the very least, start a conversation.

\textsuperscript{86} Bosma and Raben, \textit{Being “Dutch” in the Indies}, 293.
CHAPTER 1

SHE LIKED TO BE CALLED INGE

I knew Oma my whole life. Her letters, however, made me realize that I had not known her for her whole life. In the letters, she was not Oma, but a young girl from the island of Java in the Dutch East Indies. She did not know she would someday marry. She did not know one day a child would call her mom. She did not know one day she would call America her home. All she knew was her reality: she was a child in an orphanage.

Her letters helped open a conversation about family. While seldom discussed, her stay in the orphanage was not a secret. The life she endured, however, has been kept private. Through personal turmoil and global conflict, these letters show a snapshot of a girl’s life and reveal her early experiences with family, abandonment and survival.

She was born on May 5, 1933 to Eduard Francis and Charlotte née Blogg. She was the second of four siblings. She had one older sister, Maja, a younger sister, Maud, and a little brother named Evert. They affectionately called the youngest child and only boy “Puk,” meaning “little” in Dutch. In true form to European tradition, she held three first names: Lydia Sylvia Ingrid, but she preferred her third name throughout her childhood and life. In her younger years, she liked to be called “Inge,” a loving nickname her siblings called her until the day of her passing.

The family lived in a large city on the island of Java. In 1940, however, Inge left her family home never to return. She and her sisters left Buitenzorg for an orphanage located just outside the Dutch East Indies capital. In 1942, she along with her mother and siblings entered a Japanese prison camp. In 1948, she and a sibling returned to the orphanage where she stayed until she came of age. Still, at one brief point in her life, although brief, Inge belonged to a traditional family structure. She was simply someone’s daughter. Before she was an orphan, she belonged to a family. Before she walked into the orphanage, she had a home.
SHE HAD A HOME

Inge was born in a city then named Buitenzorg, which meant “without a care” in Dutch. The city gained the nickname “Bogor” because the locals had trouble pronouncing the foreign phrase. To the Dutch East Indies elite, Buitenzorg acted as a vacation town, hence its title “without a care.” Located in West Java, Buitenzorg lay only thirty-six miles from the Dutch East Indies capital city of Batavia (modern day Jakarta). Buitenzorg offered a temperate climate compared to the heavily humid Batavia summers. The metropolis which surrounded her acted as West Java’s administrative center. Its allure as both governmental headquarters and as a vacation city prompted great emphasis on the city’s prosperity. By the turn of the twentieth century, Buitenzorg was one of the most developed and Westernized cities in the Dutch East Indies. It also stood as the location for Inge’s first and only family home.

Figure 1. Image of the Dago Waterfall near Bandung, Indonesia circa 1932.

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Worm’s eye view offers a unique perspective on setting. The artistic angle presents its surrounding by operating within a macro-lens. Its focus causes the main object or objects to appear larger than their actual size. It provides the observer with the sight to view the object as if she is looking from the bottom and drawing her sight upward. The intimate outlook places emphasis on a fixed sight rather than offering a peripheral vantage point. Identified as a humble perspective, worm’s eye view creates a collective awe regarding the observer’s immediate surroundings and focuses a person’s sensory on a very precise object.

Worm’s eye view naturally occurs in the eyes of a child. Young, small and new compared to the world which surrounds the child, the wonder worm’s eye view attempts to portray is effortlessly seen when a child simply looks up. Indeed, a child constantly looks up at the larger world which surrounds her, only pausing to look down to make sure one foot is steadily treading in front of the other. They investigate their senses with a newfound awareness for exploration.

She looked up at the tall buildings of the metropolis, and reached to admire the colors of the dangling leaves of the cassava plants. She smelled the effervescent scent of the orchid flowers. She tasted her mother’s pork satay. She felt the sticky humidity of the capital city’s summers. She heard the echo of street life from her bedroom window. Perhaps this was how Inge identified her hometown. Perhaps, she experienced her surroundings in a sense of awe, looking up to the world around her. Perhaps she walked unaware of the social and political affairs which shaped her town. Perhaps her only ambition was exploration in her sensory and only indulging in what was directly in front of her. Perhaps her only focus in her young life concerned her home and her family.

Yet, in a different viewpoint, the rigid barriers of her town’s structure appeared. Even though Inge’s perspective fixated on that which immediately surrounded her, a bird’s eye view of the bustling city revealed the social implications of her community greatly influenced her place; she lived within the confines of colonial rule. The mechanisms she observed daily were both beautiful specimens and tools of imperialism.


89 Worm’s eye view is a perspective seen from below.
The cassava plants for which she reached hailed from South America. Its appearance in her hometown represented the connective make-up of the mass colonization of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the plant made its way to the Philippines via the Spanish Empire and eventually traveled to the island of Java.\textsuperscript{90} There, at the turn of the twentieth century, the cassava plant acted as one of Java’s most important food staples, providing a speedy growing time, easy distribution and a high carbohydrate content. The reliance on the cassava plant as a low maintenance, highly mass producible product marked a change from the traditional reliance on rice. This switch reflected the fast growing population of the Dutch colonial holding. The amount of irrigation necessary to maintain rice production grew more and more unattractive as priorities regarding land usage quickly changed from agricultural growth to urban development.

The orchid flowers, whose scent she smelled, originated from different parts of the Indonesian archipelago and grew in a controlled space within the confines of the city’s botanical garden. In the nineteenth century, Dutch botanists started a vast collection of orchids as well as other locally and globally grown plants. Certainly, the Buitenzorg Botanical Garden provided a beautiful display of both local and foreign flora; yet the research which took place at the Botanical Garden allowed researchers to boast the extent of an empire’s global exploration. As European imperialism grew, so too, did their interest in collecting, studying and displaying fauna, flora and artifacts from the foreign lands. Its presence reflected common traits of imperialism. Botanical gardens once again showcased an appeal to the desire to categorize living mechanisms. By the 1850s, the curators of the Garden decided to reorganize the plants by taxonomic families.\textsuperscript{91} Most importantly, the Garden stood as a justification of imperialism. Modeled after English gardens, the Botanical Garden established the heavy presence of European influence and its connection to scientific

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{91} Howard W. Beers, \textit{Indonesia: Resources and Their Technological Development} (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 201.
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\end{footnotesize}
progress. For the Dutch, the Garden acted as an example of the benevolence of empire as a means to spread “civilization” through “development” and “improvement” of other lands.92

The pork satay recipe she tasted belonged to the indigenous peoples of Java, those there before Dutch occupation. Remarkably, the choice of meat used to make satay reveals information about a person’s background. Meat choices can identify region, ethnicity and even religion. Inge’s family’s choice of pork represented a fusion of cultures and the influences of colonialism. First, pork was the most popular choice among the Dutch and Indonesian-Chinese residents, both of which made up Inge’s ethnic background. Second, the use of pork reflected her family’s religious affiliations. Indeed, while there were several native religions, Islam and Hinduism were the two most popular religions of Indonesia. Inge’s Christian affiliation represented a small but growing religious sect. The height of Christian influence began when Catholic missionaries traveled to the Indonesian archipelago with Portuguese explorers. The spread of Christianity reflected both the growing population of Europeans in Indonesia and the growing amount of converts from the indigenous population. Pork satay reflected the cultural fusion of Dutch and Indonesia practices.

Batavia, the city in which she felt the mugginess of humidity, was previously named Jayakarta and once belonged to the Banten Sultanate, a kingdom native to the island of Java. The title Batavia derived from the name of a Germanic tribe called “Batavi.” The Dutch believed their ancestry originated from the Batavi tribe. The use of the root “Batavi” sent a message to both the former Banten Sultanate and the English settlers with whom they allied. On May 30, 1619, after a bitter struggle for control between the Dutch and the Banten-English alliance, Dutch forces successfully carried out a complete destruction of the city and expelled those who lived in it.93 When they renamed the city Batavia, they sent a message that the city belonged to the Dutch fold. It reflected Dutch history and greatness. The modern metropolis at which she marveled functioned as a display of Western progress and Dutch imperial control.

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Of all the factors, the neighborhood she heard from her window imposed the most immediate influence on her place. Perhaps invisible to young Inge’s eye view, a bird’s eye view of the city revealed specific boundaries; these manufactured walls created the neighborhood which surrounded her. Order, as seen in the Botanical Garden, shaped Buitenzorg. Within the city, neighborhoods were based on ethnicity. Those of Chinese descent lived in a certain neighborhood, while those of Arabic descent lived in another. Finally, the Dutch, the administrative power of the city, had their own sector. In this way, the Dutch created a plural society in which people of different ethnicities lived separately, but answered to the same ruling class.94 Where she and her family lived, where they went to school, where they shopped, who they met, and her view from her window all relied on the neighborhood to which she belonged.

Lydia Sylvia Ingrid Francis: it was a rarely heard name.95 Her hidden identity conjures thought on what a name means, but it remains to be discovered how much a name is worth. The gentrification which developed around her world appears quite conventional for the time. To a young Inge and her family, however, the structure of their identity may have hinged on this standard occurrence during modern imperialism. Her name may have been the golden ticket which provided her access to the European sector of the city.

Rumor has it Inge’s grandfather bought the Francis name. He may have changed the family surname to better position family status within a racially biased society. Just as Martinez’s *Geological Fictions* focuses on the importance of blood purity, it also uncovers ways in which people sidestepped inferior branding by bribing authorities to legitimize a more respected family name or lineage.96 Since Buitenzorg law commended segregation, it is likely inclusion into higher society influenced Inge’s grandfather to buy a new surname. Indeed, a simple name change could very well dictate employment opportunity, educational access and even living conditions. As for Inge, it may have defined the way she defined herself and the world around her.

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96 Martinez, *Genealogical Fictions*, 71.
Inge’s family identified with the Dutch of the community. Her presumed family name, Francis, boasted English and French heritage, and her father was said to be of mixed European descent. Her mother’s ancestry was a little more diverse. She was European, Chinese and Indonesian. This mix was not uncommon. Since the arrival of both Europeans and Chinese men, they regularly took Indonesian women as concubines. It was an unfortunate status for most. It was not uncommon, however, for the men to legitimize their children and desire for them to have the family name. This generation of people became known as Dutch-Indonesians, also known as Indische or Indo.97 Charlotte’s maiden name, Blogg, is also of English descent. This could very well mean that sometime in her family history, a woman was taken as a concubine or a wife to a European man. Their offspring, either legitimized through law or marriage, received the European surname and thus European racial status in the colonies.

While Dutch-Indonesians varied in skin color and physical attributes, they overwhelmingly identified with Dutch society. Inge’s household was culturally mixed, yet their adherence to a new family name showed an attempt to erase their diverse ancestry and identify solely with their European nationality.98

At the age of five, Inge belonged to a home. The social and political mechanisms which surrounded that fact may or may not have been readily apparent to her at such a young age. Inge began to mature as any other child would. The mind of a five-year-old is egocentric. She was the center of her world. Things happened because of her actions. She depended heavily on her parents as caregivers and emotional pillars. She recognized her family’s home as a strong constant foundation in her life. In the coming years, however, the foundation of her family home crumbled, and the society in which she belonged found itself on the verge of collapse. At the age of five, Inge belonged to a familiar society. She and her family worked within the mechanisms which controlled the city. At the age of five, for the only and last time in her childhood, Inge had a home.

97 Bosma, *Post-Colonial Immigrants*, 293.
98 Ibid., 17.
**She Says Goodbye for the First Time**

A number of historical events happened outside the walls of the Francis family home in 1939. In America, renowned author John Steinbeck released *The Grapes of Wrath*, a book which depicted life during the Great Depression. While Steinbeck’s novel told the story of a single American family, the effects of the Great Depression reached across international borders, causing economic turmoil, civil unrest, revolutions and war. In Spain, Francisco Franco claimed victory in the Spanish Civil War and took control of the country as a dictator. In northern Europe, Hitler commanded his military to invade Poland, which prompted Great Britain and other nations to retaliate by declaring war on Germany. In the United States, renowned physicists Albert Einstein and Leó Szilárd sent a letter to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt informing him about the possibility of creating an atomic bomb using uranium. With a global Great Depression and war imminent, the larger world around Inge seemed to be bursting at the seams. The most pivotal moments of the twentieth century took place just outside her door. These moments in history not only defined the fate of a generation, but the whole twentieth century and beyond.

In 1939, Inge turned six.

In 1939, Inge’s parents divorced.

As the rest of the world descended into domestic unrest and global hostility, the only conflict in six-year-old Inge’s world took place in her family home as the turmoil between her parents threatened to split the family in two. The mother took custody of the daughters and the father took custody of the son.\(^9\) The deconstruction of Inge’s family proceeded no differently. She and her two sisters left with her mother, Charlotte. Her young brother Puk left with her father, Eduard. Her time with her mother did not last long. In 1940, Charlotte sent her daughters to “live with the nuns.”\(^1\) She sent them to the Bdara Tjina Jesuit Orphanage just outside of Batavia. The children managed to stay together, but they waited over a year before their mother brought them back home.

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\(^9\) As opposed to common Dutch custom where the father maintains custody of all children after the divorce, customs of a divorce in the Dutch East Indies, provided the husband and wife were of similar status, presented a more equal split of possessions.

\(^1\) Maud Ouderkerk, in discussion with the author, trans. Myrna Ouderkerk, September 26, 2014.
While at the orphanage, Inge underwent one of her early experiences with abandonment. Abandonment does not discriminate; it can be purposeful or accidental. It can derive from intentional desertion, unforeseen circumstances, or even a divorce in the family.  

If the seat of an impressionable person goes vacant for any reason, feelings of abandonment occur. The effects of abandonment can arise from physical or emotional experiences. When faced with abandonment issues, children often desire attention. They are driven by a need for acceptance and a place or meaning in the world immediately surrounding them. They attempt to signify family in their life through objects, like keeping mementos. At the same time, they feel reclusive and protective of their true emotions. While they are conscious of their sadness, they repress their pain.

At seven years old, Inge had to say goodbye to her parents and her home. Her feelings of abandonment stemmed from her loss of her father through divorce and her mother through a forfeit of custody. She was relocated to a different town and experienced a loss of a familiar setting. The view from her window in the orphanage did not look similar to the view from the window of her room. The new location introduced her to exceptionally hot summers. Where she slept was no longer a home, it was simply a housing structure for several young girls who experienced a similar feeling of loss.

That feeling of awe when she looked up may not have happened as frequently within the confines of the orphanage. Sadness made her head feel heavy. Perhaps she looked down at her tattered shoes, only to glance up to see where she was walking. Perhaps, she pondered as to why her parents divorced. Perhaps she thought it may have been her fault.

The conditions in the orphanage were less than ideal. She ate bland dinners, most possibly consisting of mass produced starches like rice or cassava. She had to learn to preserve her clothes. She had to adjust to less than ideal sanitation conditions. Occasionally, she woke up in the mornings to the smell of urine. Often, mattresses were left soaked by night time accidents. The children were young, after all, and were subject to nightmares.

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101 Ibid.
and potty-training mishaps. She may have also soiled her bed. Likely, she too woke up in the middle of the night from a bad dream. Likely, in those moments, she sought her parents. The nights she could not sleep she may have wondered if she could not wake up from a nightmare. Perhaps she wondered what she did to deserve to lose her home.\textsuperscript{104}

Perhaps when she gazed at the other girls in the orphanage, she thought herself lucky to have her sisters with her. Even though Inge lacked the comfort her parents once provided, her older sister Maja and younger sister Maud remained with her. Throughout their times in the orphanage, Inge provided for her sisters an invaluable comfort. Although Inge was the middle child, her sisters often looked to her for protection.\textsuperscript{105} Her loyalty to her family defined her, and her hot temper drove her to defend those she loved. Her sisters often called on Inge for help when conflict arose. Inge’s role in her sisters’ lives meant her amount of responsibility increased when they lost their parents. Conversely, Inge’s role as a daughter, whose development greatly depended on her parents, started to decline. In 1941, however, Inge’s mom retrieved her children. Inge was again able to depend on her mom once more.

The effects of abandonment manifest as the pattern continues. Inge’s early experience was relieved when her mother reestablished custody of her daughters and son. In this instant, Inge saw her mother could come back for her. Following this moment, however, the Dutch East Indies saw the global havoc known as World War II come to its imperial doorstep. The Empire of Japan invaded and most brutally targeted the region where Inge lived. The international conflicts put another strain on Inge’s relationship with her family. During and after the war’s end, Inge once again struggled to keep her family together.

\textbf{THEY REMAINED QUIET}

She came back. Inge eased her role as the protector. Her mother could do the work now. They may not have returned to the home she knew in Buitenzorg, but the warming embrace of her mother shed away the horrors age seven carried. She was now eight and she

\textsuperscript{104} At young ages, children often place themselves in the middle of their respective worlds. They explore how they affect the world and therefore believe that everything happens because of them. When parents divorce while a child is still young, the egocentric viewpoint of the child still applies.

\textsuperscript{105} Maud Ouderkerk, in discussion with the author, trans. Myrna Ouderkerk, September 26, 2014.
could pick up where she left off: she could again be a daughter reliant on her mother. She could be a kid again.

Inge could again see her sisters smile. Most importantly, she could see her little brother, Puk. Her mother rescued them, and not just her and her sisters, but her brother, too. Indeed, nothing softened her heart more than seeing her beloved brother. Until the day she died, no presence made her happier than the presence of her little brother’s smile. His smile relieved the weight that rested on her shoulders. She could look up again.

Although they stayed in West Java, Inge and her family’s specific location remains unknown during this period. They may have returned to Buitenzorg, or they may have found a place closer Batavia. Her father’s location and whether the children saw him during this time also remains a mystery. Still, they had each other. They did not have to wake up in the orphanage for another day.

Older and more aware, the events which took place in her neighborhood and abroad may have become more noticeable. She saw the War creeping closer. Radios and newspapers brought word of defeat in the homeland. The Netherlands had fallen. Their queen had fled. At school, she must have prayed for the lives lost in the Western Front. She must have heard whispers of the possibility of an attack from Japanese forces. After all, Japan already infiltrated French Indochina. The chance the Japanese forces might arrive in the Dutch East Indies seemed more probable every day.

Her mother may have given her children direction on how to react if disaster struck. As her mom spoke, Inge imagined if it all were true, if perhaps one day she may actually have to follow her mom’s direction. She reassured herself: she would be able to stay calm. She would only take what she could carry, so she had to make the decision then of what was most important to her. She would make sure her brother was safe. She would pack his bag first. She would make sure her sisters, brother and mother are all together and flee to the safest spot. She reassured herself again: she could do it. She reassured herself once more- this situation may not even happen.

The day came. The Japanese military arrived on Java. It was a day in March. One can only ponder how Inge truly reacted.

Almost seven thousand miles away from her front door and three months before the Japanese knocked on it, Japanese forces attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.
Brought on by an American embargo which stopped Japan from receiving petroleum, the attack set in motion diplomatic decisions that ultimately affected Inge’s life.\textsuperscript{106} When the United States declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941, their Dutch allies followed suit and declared war on the Empire of Japan as well.\textsuperscript{107} The Netherlands had already surrendered its homeland to Germany a year earlier. Japanese forces took Holland’s declaration of war as an opportunity to invade its colonies.\textsuperscript{108} The Dutch East Indies’ rich supply of natural resources, made the consolidation of the land a necessity for the Japanese war effort.\textsuperscript{109} Stifled by economic turmoil, loss of government and limited military, the Dutch failed to retaliate effectively. Japanese forces started in January on Sulawesi Island, just northeast of where Inge lived. By March 9, 1942, Japanese forces entered Inge’s hometown and consolidated control over the Dutch East Indies.\textsuperscript{110}

Japan’s campaign under the creed of “Asia for Asians” initially garnered initial widespread support from native Indonesians. “Asia for Asians” greatly appealed to a sense of regional nationalism. The Japanese were present to dispel the white colonists and grant control to the Indonesian people. Indonesians rejoiced because the Dutch colonists had, in a span of over three hundred years, enslaved Indonesians, taxed Indonesians, and even initiated debilitating wars against Indonesian tribes. The Indonesians welcomed Japanese soldiers as their brother and ally.\textsuperscript{111} In 1942, Japanese forces started to construct Prisoners of War camps to systematically incarcerate people of Dutch ancestry, those sympathetic to the Dutch, and those who opposed Japanese occupation. Indonesians accepted the camps as a sign of liberation from foreign power. The Indo people, however, viewed it as a test of faith and loyalty.

\textsuperscript{106} Tarling, \textit{The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia}, 330.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 330.
\textsuperscript{108} Vickers, \textit{A History of Modern Indonesia}, 87.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{111} Tarling, \textit{The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia}, 93
In this instant, two-hundred thousand Indische people had to choose their loyalty.\footnote{Gijs Beets et al., \textit{De Demografische Geschiedenis van de Indische Nederlanders} [The Demographic History of the Dutch Indonesians] (Den Haag: Nederlands Interdisciplinair Demografisch Instituut, 2002), 84.} Most Indische chose to keep their Dutch identity and were sent to the camps. Those who chose Indonesian heritage remained out of the camps; however, they were subsequently marginalized and persecuted by the Japanese occupants and the greater Indonesian society.\footnote{Bosma, \textit{Post-Colonial Immigrants}, 30.} Her mother may have not viewed the two options as choice. She was what her name implied. There was only one option. She and her children were Dutch.

It could have taken months before Inge and her family were led off to a camp. It could have taken just days. West Java held three major Dutch East Indies cities: Batavia, Buitenzorg and Bandung. All three cities accommodated the colony’s richest and most influential people. In order to establish long lasting control, the Japanese gave high priority to this region. Within the same month of its capture, forces set up a POW camp in Bandung and banished all colonial leaders and their families from the city.\footnote{East Indies Camp Archives, "About the Camps."} Because of her ethnic background and her mother’s non-governmental job, Inge and her family may have managed to avoid the first round of incarceration. Still, it was certain. Whether their time came in March or November, Inge and her family gazed at the tall gates of the camp from the inside.

In 1942, Inge, her mother and her siblings took residence in the Bandung prisoner camp.

In 1945, they left.

That is all I know. They remain silent. Seldom have other survivors spoken, in public or private. While few accounts exist, Inge’s narrative stayed with her. When I attempted to ask Inge’s sister, Maud, through her daughter Myrna, Myrna responded hesitantly. She suggested to choose my question wisely, because I may only get one. I found out my cousin Myrna tried and failed to ask her mother about her past a few times prior to my request. In their distinguished age, the women of our family use their elderly status to evade questions about this time. As I experienced with my own eyes, the matriarchs of our families simply
and politely pretend to hear questions incorrectly. They answer whatever question they conjure up in their head and change the subject.

The only clear certainty is that the Francis family survived. In 1942, they all entered the camps; in 1945, they left the camps. That is all. Others trying to piece together their families’ colonial pasts also struggle with the lack of official records and the almost nonexistent testimony from family. Research about the experience is extensively speculative. The research relies heavily on background information and context.115 I do know that most of the 18,000 inhabitants of the Bandung camp consisted of women and children.116 I can deduce that it is entirely possible Charlotte and her four children stayed together throughout their incarceration. Puk was not yet twelve, so he could not have been sent to a boy’s camp.

As one of the most populated camps, families shared food portions. The Red Cross consistently tried to aid camps with food. The Japanese soldiers, however, rarely sent the portions to the prisoners. As the war took its monetary toll, soldiers used the Red Cross rations to feed themselves rather than the prisoners.117 The low rations meant twenty prisoners shared one box of food.

The food was the only facet of Oma’s experience she ever confirmed. Years later, when she served her own children food, she once exclaimed, “What you have on your plate was a week’s worth of food for us back in the camps.” She may have periodically seem the Red Cross insignia arrive at the camps with food rations. Young and able bodied, she and her sister Maja must have been responsible for retrieving whatever rations they could. With hunger running rampant throughout the camp, social graces may have been less prevalent as a throng of people impatiently waited for food.

I do not know how starvation affected Inge. Her life could have depended on the interpersonal relationships between herself and her family members. Her wellbeing could

115 Hollander, Silenced Voices, 128


117 Krancher, The Defining Years of the Dutch East Indies, 53.
have been intertwined with theirs.\textsuperscript{118} Her family’s health weighed heavy on her shoulders. Her brother, Puk, could not lose his smile. She finally had him back and she had to keep him safe. Perhaps at night, she remained awake from her hunger pains. She grew sick, not just because of a lack of nutrition, but because sometimes she thought how much more food she might have if she did not have to take care of her mother and brother. No matter how much she tried to stay positive, these voracious thoughts may not have been able to escape her mind. Of course she loved her family. They were worth more than any piece of food. She reassured herself. They lived another day.

Her hunger pains may have only disappeared when they tasked her with the severities of manual labor. Bandung was a manual labor camp, and no person was exempt.\textsuperscript{119} From Inge’s four-year-old brother to her mother, all the family members had to work. Prisoners regularly suffered from sicknesses and malnutrition. Working through unimaginable humidity weakened their already dehydrated bodies. The close living and working conditions created an ideal breeding ground for disease. Their lack of nutrition made them more susceptible.\textsuperscript{120} When a family member faltered, it fell upon the remaining family members to continue their unfinished work to keep their family alive and safe.

Some horrors, however, could not be remedied by family togetherness. As a woman in the camps, Inge may have had to share her most vulnerable moments with Japanese and Indonesian soldiers. As a young girl in the beginning stages of puberty, Inge may have had to take baths in a public water well. As men watched, women of the camps had to wait in long lines, naked. Some soldiers took additional pleasure in the defenselessness of the ladies. A soldier may have shouted derogatory terms towards the women, or, more heinously, he may have touched the bodies of the women with his hands or sword. Even worse, some women, for no reason at all, were pulled out of line and beaten.\textsuperscript{121}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Krancher, \textit{The Defining Years of the Dutch East Indies}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 128.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 129.
\end{itemize}
This perpetual fear gave the prisoners an awareness that they could be next. Inge could be then next person to be touched, to get sick, to be beaten, to be killed. Hope only lived through the preservation of family and the distant thought that American liberators were on their way. Just as Inge’s wartime experience started off with an attack in a foreign land, it ended with one as well. On August 9, 1945, the second atomic bomb targeted the Japanese town of Nagasaki. A few days later, the camps in the Dutch East Indies were liberated.¹²²

I can only imagine the challenges Inge’s family faced. I am not sure if I will ever know for sure. I do know one truth: young Inge and her family survived. In 1945, they left. The camps’ liberation after Japan’s surrender meant Inge could go home. They made it. All of them made it, even little Puk. They did it. She could finally look for her father. If they survived, then he could have survived as well. She had to believe it. He had to be alive somewhere out there. Just as one conflict left them, another conflict had already been brewing.

When the Empire of Japan surrendered in 1945, native Indonesians rejoiced. Japan’s creed, “Asia for Asians,” was not as it initially seemed. It only acted as a cover for Japanese imperialism and desire for resources. Their expulsion of Dutch leadership simply replaced one colonial leader with another. Still, Japanese presence promoted Indonesian nationalism. Even though this promotion of nationalism played as a tool for the Japanese to dehumanize the Dutch, Japan’s occupation took considerable steps to make Indonesian nationalism a staple in their society.

In 1942, the Japanese welcomed Indonesian as the colony’s official language.²³ Then, Dutch history books were replaced with Indonesian history books. These history books worked to dismantle a Dutch born history that the Indonesians saw as “disastrously elitist, academic and impractical.” They instead turned to an education that put forth the importance of patriotism, discipline and “a spirit of sacrificial service.”²⁴ Leaders of the nationalists

¹²² Ibid., 160.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 166.
tasked themselves with finding an Indonesian past. Muhammad Yamin, the senior Indonesian in the propaganda service in Java, turned to the fourteenth century kingdom of Majapahit. The Majapahit kingdom spanned from 1293 to 1527 and was located in Java. Yamin developed his view of the Majapahit as “the great unifier of Indonesia and of the anti-Dutch fighters as the bearers of national dignity.” In agreement, Sukarno, the leader of the Indonesian independence movement and later the first president of Indonesia, stressed the importance of a unified Indonesian history. The independence movement needed to show the people they had a glorious past, then increase the peoples’ consciousness of a dark present and finally show people that the future can be full of promise.

On August 17, 1945, just two days after the Empire of Japan announced its unconditional surrender, Sukarno declared Indonesian independence. The Netherlands vehemently denied that claim. The now stronger Indonesian nationalist movement took a turn toward violence when the Dutch refused to let go of their colonial holdings. The Dutch named this violent time Bersiap, literally translated to be prepared. Bersiap presented a peculiar civil war. Indonesian nationalists not only faced the Dutch as foes, but all Dutch supporters, which included Indies Chinese, Indo Europeans and indigenous Christians. They enlisted both guerilla warfare tactics and random acts of violence to ensure a total victory. Dutch and Dutch-Indo were driven out of city centers in Batavia and Bandung in fear of capture or death.

Questions as to why bersiap was so brutal often remain unanswered. The civilians the Indonesian revolutionaries targeted had already been targeted by Japanese soldiers during their occupation. The civilians were weak, tired and malnourished. Still, as bersiap began, they again became the target of aggression. Feite Posthumus, a Dutch resident of the Dutch East Indies said of the bersiap experience: “Ironically, all of a sudden, we were internees once again. This time we were supposed to be the enemies of the newly formed republic of Indonesia. What did we do wrong? So in October 1945, when the world at large was

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125 Ibid., 138.
126 Ibid., 132.
127 Ibid., 176.
liberated from war, we Dutch were sent to jail in Salatiga…”\textsuperscript{128} Perhaps the Netherlands government’s refusal to acknowledge Indonesian independence was enough to cause a belief that independence could then only be taken by force. Perhaps, bersiap was not the intention of Nationalist leaders. The mostly young men of the independence movement desired quick action rather than slow diplomacy and perhaps they acted without permission. Perhaps the propaganda which promoted duty and sacrifice to one’s country moved the young men to pick up arms. Perhaps such a brutal phase is simply part of the dynamic of revolution.\textsuperscript{129} Sometimes it does not matter why something happens, it just matters that it happened.

By the affair’s close at the end of 1946, three thousand Indo-European casualties were confirmed and twenty thousand remained missing.\textsuperscript{130} Food, shelter and protection were scarce commodities. Often times, families occupied abandoned houses and kept moving in order to reach Dutch controlled land or a Red Cross post for safety.\textsuperscript{131} At the time of bersiap, Charlotte, her significant other Attinger, and her children fled to Holland. They may have achieved escape through the Swiss Red Cross who, at the end of 1945, initiated evacuation of Europeans from Indonesia.\textsuperscript{132} I do not know what Inge and her family may have experience. Perhaps, they, too, fled from one abandoned house to another. Perhaps they struggled to feed six people. Perhaps they, at times, found themselves caught in the crossfire of Indonesian nationalists or the Dutch military. All I know for sure is that, in her later years, Oma harbored great respect for the Red Cross. Whenever she had a chance to donate to them, she would. This may very well mean the Red Cross offered young Inge what she and her family needed: food, shelter and protection.

When they arrived in Holland, Charlotte and the children moved from house to house. At that year’s close, Charlotte disconnected herself from her children and left them to the Dutch Red Cross.\textsuperscript{133} In a new country, in a cold and unfamiliar environment, Inge and her

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Krancher, \textit{The Defining Years of the Dutch East Indies}, 185.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Reid, \textit{To Nation by Revolution}, 176.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Vickers, \textit{A History of Modern Indonesia}, 98.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Susan Grace Navalle, in discussion with the author, March 22, 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Krancher, \textit{The Defining Years of the Dutch East Indies}, 246.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Maud Ouderkerk, in discussion with the author, trans. Myrna Ouderkerk, September 26, 2014.
\end{itemize}
siblings moved into several foster care facilities waiting to go home. In 1947, they heard news. Their father was alive and looking for his children.

Eduard contacted the Red Cross and found his children. He demanded they be taken back to the Dutch East Indies. Unaccompanied, Inge and her siblings traveled by ship back to their hometown. Without parents, they relied on themselves for food and protection. It did not matter. The pain was almost over, she thought. She was going home.

Upon her return to the Dutch East Indies, however, Inge’s search for a home continued. When she was fifteen, Inge returned, along with her sister Maud, to the nuns at the Bdara Tjina Jesuit Orphanage.

During her stay at the orphanage, Inge constantly wrote her mother. The letters painted a picture of a young girl who never lost hope her mom would return. Three letters survive. Within these letters, Inge reflects on the social unrest happening around her, her time at the orphanage, and aspects of everyday life. They narrate a story of a young girl, affected by war, who just wants to be reunited with her family. Like her first stay in the orphanage, Inge expected her mother would return for her. Charlotte, however, spent the rest of her life in Holland. She never came back.\(^{134}\)

\(^{134}\) Ibid.
CHAPTER 2

IN HER WORDS

For years, Oma’s letters to her mother sat in a box at a relative’s house in Holland. Just a few years ago, that relative found the letters and gave them to my Uncle Frans, who lived in Amsterdam. He then sent the letters to my mother in Modesto, California. Oma wrote her letters in Dutch, so mom enlisted the help of her uncle, Oom Theo, to translate. He was married to Oma’s best friend, Auntie Charlotte, known to us as Tante Lot. While Oma and Tante Lot were not sisters through blood, their bond they created in the orphanage proved to be an unbreakable one. After losing touch when they left the orphanage, both women found each other once again in the United States. Through different means, both women found their way to California, had children and began to raise their families in the new environment. Coincidentally, they had daughters who shared the name: Caroline. After a few years living in California, they found each other once again and created a makeshift extended family. Their children grew up together as cousins, bonded by a simple friendship created years prior in an orphanage in Indonesia. To this day, the children of Oma and Tante Lot look to each other for guidance on how to remember their mothers.

Both rarely talked about the orphanage. They cleverly changed the subject when others inquired about their experiences. Like their wives, Oom Theo and my grandfather, Opa Rudi, also experienced cruelties while living in Indonesia that kept them silent throughout the years. There are but a handful of favors one can ask of them in regards to their past. When my mom asked Oom Theo to translate the letters, she used one very heavy favor.

Oom Theo’s translation features both positive and negative components. On a note, Oom Theo’s personal relationship with Oma conveyed an evident sense of familiarity and

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135 In Dutch, Om means “uncle” and “Tante” means “aunt.”
understanding. Oom Theo personally knew Oma, her family, and the places she grew up. He was familiar with names, places and colloquialisms in the letters. He had the ability to translate her letters in context. Adversely, Oom Theo’s English was his third language; therefore, some words remained in Dutch even after translation. For example, he kept the term “metropool” instead of translating it to “metropolitan.” Additionally, because Oom Theo also experienced hardships in Indonesia, his insight weighed heavy on his personal bias. For example, in one of Oma’s letters, she writes, as translated by Oom Theo, “…the Jap time was your experience…” The use of the American derogatory form of the ethnicity “Japanese” denotes Oom Theo’s personal dislike of the Japanese throughout his life due to their occupation of Indonesia.

Indeed, Oom Theo’s experiences left him unattached to the very idea he was at all Indonesian. Once, I referred to our ethnicity as “Indos” in what I thought was a casual conversation about our family. He stopped me. He exclaimed that he did not spend months in an Indonesian jail at the hands of revolutionaries to be called “Indo.” He reiterated his Dutch ethnicity and his hereditary “whiteness.” Just like that, I lost my chance. I used a word which is accepted now, but in the 1940s was frowned upon, a word that suggested Oom Theo was not inherently Dutch. In this moment, I unexpectedly undermined who he was, how he defined himself and how much he struggled for what he accomplished in his life. I lost a favor, I shut down a conversation that may have helped me better understand my ancestors. I wanted to ask about the letters, but I uttered one wrong word and I will never have that chance again. Oom Theo’s reaction taught me a firm lesson about how one should and should not apply what is learned in books to real life. I am forever embarrassed and apologetic for my ignorance. Oom Theo and I shared this exchange in late 2013. He died less than a year later.

In order to balance Oom Theo’s translations, family members from my generation offered to translate the letters as well. Vivian Francis, the daughter of Oma’s youngest brother, and her partner, Jeroen, retranslated the letters. Because their skill of the English language is well versed, they offered more fitting synonyms for certain translations, cross-

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136 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter I, private collection.
checked certain explicative and translated some words left untranslated; however, their translations did little to affect the integrity of the letters’ original translation.

Laid out across the ottoman, Oma’s letters and their translations, stared back at my mother and me. With no dates to solidify the letters in a prompt timeline, mom and I could only guess the order based on context clues. Still, the thought that the three letters could have been presented in a random order or perfectly synchronized perplexes me. Since my initial meeting with her letters, I have put them in an order I believe fits. The following layout is not my order. It is simply the order in which I first read the letters, unaffected by external suggestion.

**THE FIRST LETTER I SAW**

Dear Mam,
I just mailed your letter. I have nothing to do so I am writing you. Next month I am sending you a package and if the contents are bad I am going to talk to that guy and get my money back.
My new lady of the house is nice. I think that in that instance I am lucky. But, I like to get ahead, and will ask the lady if I can do type work. Because she asked me if I would like to follow a course. First I would like a sewing course, but will come later.
Mam, did you send me the package, what you mention last time? Everything is getting more expensive here. The prices are going up like airplanes. I went to the cinema, in the new metropool, and had to pay Rp. 2,25 for one ticket, 2nd class. Expensive!! And don’t forget the cost to get to the theatres with the betjak. But the movie was very good! Little women. I go whenever I have a little money left, otherwise I don’t go.
Mams. Save your money a little bit, so you are getting out of debt. You have to be more economical. That was how we were when we had our first job. Every month yardage for a dress and every three months to buy shoes. But we are not there yet. Sometimes I cut the yardage wrong and ruin it. Well, I am not a seamstress. I don’t understand how to cut the patterns for a dress. Yes, stupid I am. Mams, when are you coming back? I would never stay there because if the war comes you’re in the cold. In Indonesia, you can make it, the Japanese time was your experience where you can eat leaves.
I am so miserable, that it gives bon kora. I will commit a murder to get skinnier, but I have to eat a lot, so stay bon kora.
If I may get something of you as a precious souvenir, then you can give me a gold necklace with a cross. I dream of it almost every night. I can buy it, if I save money, but I would like it as a memory. Don’t you think it’s much nicer if you get it? Are you already going to church? You have to do it. Well, if not now then later.
The address of written courses is: Netherlands written course board
c/o father Augustine
PO. Box 4-Culemborg
(Bon Kora price is \( f\ 2.80 \))

I did go once to Puck and he is crazy about reading. I have given him two books. But all is so expensive here, that I don’t do it again. I feel sorry for puck. He has to watch his brothers. I wish that I could help him.

Yesterday night a man was murdered because he did not want to give someone his car at the Van Heutsz boulevard and they shot him. Those bastards.

Yes yes that is life nowadays. After this letter, I am not able to give anything anymore. My envelopes are gone and prices are going up again. 1 Oz ham=\( f2.25 \), 1lb of cheese \( f7.50 \), 1 Oz of chocolate \( f2.25 \) and so on. With everything, what a miserable country it is.

I am to end this letter and after a while I am writing you again. You can write me/every day I am waiting for the mailman and you are the only one I get letters from.

Many kisses of Michel, Inge, Maud and Puck
Bye, Bye Bon Kora
Clichés.
P.T.O. I just received a message. Puck is very ill. Prepare for the worst. Be strong mam.\(^{137}\)

THE SECOND LETTER I SAW

Dear Mam
How are you doing? We are doing okay. Mam, Maya did not find that book yet. Mam do I get flower seeds also? Yes Mam, it is fun here on vacation. We are getting candies. But there are not too many orphanage children. And we are sometimes having fun. We can sleep in. and we are still having fun.

Ya mam, we don’t know anything about Pucky because he is in Buitenzorg.
Reason why I don’t know anything about Pucky. Ya mam, we don’t know yet dad’s address. The whole day I have nothing to do except making soap suds, all day soap suds.
Well mam, until next time. Many greetings and kisses
Bye Mam\(^{138}\)

THE THIRD LETTER I SAW

Dear Mams and Niels,
This is the last letter you are getting from me probably. The reason is that they found out and that I did not get any money, which is the bad part (but to me the funniest) that I go to Pro Joventute.

\(^{137}\) Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter I, private collection.

\(^{138}\) Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter II, private collection.
It is all her fault. I had to walk around in my winter dress in that hot Batavia. I protested and brutalized her and therefore they hit me with the stick. I just let her hit me. He took my suitcase apart and found the letters. Now you have to write the post office in Batavia, to return the package to you. I am not afraid of him anymore. I also told him that I wouldn’t mind if he died. I would like that you can get me back. He sent me to bed without food. Try to get me back, say that you can take care for one person. I would like to go to Holland. I don’t want to stay here. Don’t write me back, but write Tante Fried so Eugene can give me the message. You can go on record and say that he is supposed to take care of us, but he is not able to. He is too stingy to spend on penny for us. Bah! I am congratulating you for your birthday. Hope many years to come and I hope, that will see you back again and I can stay with you until I get big. Mam and Niels, I am desperate and that is why I am sending this letter. Many kisses and until we see each other again and I wish real soon. Yours Ingrid

(Note) I would like to go back to you. I don’t want to stay here

Go to the guardian board

Like her time spent in the prison camps, Inge’s second stay at the orphanage was meant to remain silent. Once again, she did not keep her time at the orphanage a secret, but she never intended to talk about it. In 2010, her letters to her mother resurfaced for the first time since her mother received them. I looked at these letters as if they formed a key into Oma’s past. It is difficult to explain how these sad letters granted a piece of closure to my family and me. There were finally more clues into who Oma was as a person and who we are as a family. While the letters saddened us, it was almost as if Oma had been reintroduced to us. We experienced a sense of liberation in this sorrow. Yet, it is imperative mention Oma never willingly shared these letters with her children or grandchildren. Simply by reading them, I am infringing upon Oma’s privacy. By writing about them, I am making public without permission Oma’s personal struggles. I have no counter to the selfishness that led me to act on my desire to better understand the Indo family through the generations. I can only hope for a better understanding and the preservation of the memories of these silent people.

139 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter III, private collection.
The struggle for Indonesian Independence lasted four years. The bersiap period only covered the first two years of the struggle. When Inge returned to Java, social unrest continued. The Indonesian National Revolution, as it was later named, took place between 1945 and 1949. It was a time characterized by a massive influx of competing powers. The names of cities, street signs, and currency contradicted each other. At one point, the Dutch East Indies had three different forms of currency: the Japanese yen, the Dutch Guilder and the new Indonesian Rupiah. As nationalists began to set up their headquarters in the capital, city streets stood still bearing the names of Dutch conquerors.\(^{140}\) In this tumultuous time, the names of the capital and the territory itself became dependent on the side with which you identified. Batavia or Jakarta, the Dutch East Indies or Indonesia; the power struggle reached across military and social factions.

They Gave Her an Ultimatum

In 1947, Inge and her siblings returned to the Dutch East Indies. They moved to Batavia with their father. There, they learned their father had been sent to work on the Burma Railway. Either upon his return from the prison camps or before the war began, he met and married his new wife, Willie. Their father and Willie had already had two children of their own. The newlyweds built their house around their new family. Inge and her three siblings had to adjust to the new reality. While living with her father and stepmother, she wrote the third letter I saw.

Maud saw the letter, too. When she recounted her time at her father’s house, she focused on her stepmother’s abuse. Her description resembled the Brothers Grimm’s infamous *Cinderella* stepmother. “She really was a wicked stepmother,” she remarked. While Willie showed love and affection to her own children from Eduard, she treated Maud and her siblings with disdain. Maud recollected having to perform the “nasty tasks” of the household. The children of Charlotte and Eduard could not go outside and had to do all the household chores. When the four protested Willie’s demands, Willie turned the children over to their father for punishment. Eduard did not question his wife or ask what happened. He just punished his children.

It had to be her. It could not have been their loving father. He was the one who found them. He wanted them with him. She must have cast a spell on him. She was the wicked stepmother, and their poor father was just under her control. She was just like the one from *Cinderella*. They were Cinderella! They had to wait, hand and foot, on her children. Her children received the better clothes and better food. They did not have to work. They could have been like the children in the local fairytale, *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*. In the story, the stepmother and her daughter, Bawang Merah, treated her deceased husband’s daughter, Bawang Putih, with disdain. They constantly played tricks on her and forced her to do the household chores. In the end, though, the stepmother and her daughter realized the error of their ways and begged for Bawang Putih’s forgiveness. Or no, she was more like the stepmother from *Hansel and Gretel*. She did not want them there! Any chance, she might have tricked their dad into leaving them in the woods.

Indeed, the legend of an evil stepmother allowed Inge and her siblings to keep loving their father and accept his lack of intervention. Willie could very well have been every bit as evil as the children said; however, Eduard’s ability to escape blame was not a onetime
occurrence. They had already lost their mother. They may have been trying anything to feel they had not lost their father to his new family.

During her interview, Maud recognized fourteen-year-old Inge as their protector. “It was Inge who was a very strong [and] verbal person, the other three were scared. And one day Inge and Willie had a fight, a terrible fight.”

That was the core of the third letter I saw. It was not just a fight, it was the fight. Out of the several fights between Inge and her stepmother, the letter in front of me captured a turning point in the Francis children’s lives.

She wrote as if time was a factor to her survival. She began the letter with a sense of urgency: “This is the last letter you are getting from me.”

She was in trouble, and this time it was bad. Inge had already experienced several bouts of homelessness. She knew if she lost this house too, she may not be able to access or afford mailing material. Whatever this fight entailed, Inge was aware of the worst consequences.

Inge never specifically named her perpetrators. She never used the words dad, stepmom or Willie. Inge simply referred to them as she/her and he/him. *She* made Inge wear her winter dress during a hot Batavia summer day. Inge retaliated. Inge “protested and brutalized” her for this. *She* punished young Inge by hitting her with a stick. *He* searched her suitcase. She proclaimed to *him* that she no longer feared *him*; that she would not mind if *he* died.

Throughout the one-page letter, Inge pleaded with her mother to get them back. She had done it before. She knew what to do. She begged her mother to contact the guardian board and report *him*. Inge wanted to return to her mother.

While her siblings gave her credit as the strong one, Inge showed an awareness for her stunted childhood. She may not have shown it often, but her plea for her mother’s return revealed a desperation which triggered a survivalist instinct in Inge. Even if she could only take care of one child, Inge suggested her mom should still save her. She was angry, possibly, and tired of responsibility. Her mother relieved her of responsibility once, maybe

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144 Ibid.
145 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter III, private collection.
146 Ibid.
she could do it again. Maybe Inge could be a child again. “I hope that I will see you back
again and I can stay with you until I get big.”

Maud remembered this conflict as a defining moment between the children and their
father. Their father realized he could no longer take care of all four of his children if relations
were to continue with hostility. Inge’s relationship with both her stepmother and father
deteriorated. They gave her an ultimatum: stay in their father’s house and accept their rules,
or go back and “live with the nuns.” Maja and young Puk stayed with their father and
stepmother. Inge and Maud packed their bags and made their way back to the B'dara Tjina
Jesuit Orphanage. She had to say goodbye to Maja and her little brother. She had to give up
the chance to see her brother’s smile. She had to face the possibility that she may not always
be able to find the whereabouts of her siblings. She and her sister departed from their father’s
care one last time.

THEY BLAMED THEIR MOTHER

At this point in her life, fifteen-year-old Inge seemed to have lost her mother and
relinquished her right to her father’s house. Her subsequent orphanhood showed that in order
to belong, Inge had to fit into her parents’ separate realities. Her presence expressed her
position’s liminality. Her being represented a threshold in her respective parents’ lives. They
represented the transition from their parents’ former lives to their present lives. In their
transition from one family to another, Inge and her sisters represented chaos. They were the
loose ends from another period, the disruption in her parents’ everyday normality. She could
not assimilate; therefore, she could not escape the threshold to enter aggregation.

While Inge’s letters to her mother suggested an eventual reunion, Charlotte’s replies
have yet to be found. Whether she responded to her daughter with the same fervor is
unknown. She may have known a reunion in the near future was unlikely. Her children were
thousands of miles away from her. She was new to The Netherlands. She entered a society
whose racial bias viewed her darker complexion as a sign of intrusion and inferiority. Money
could not have come easily to her. It seemed rational. Perhaps she wanted her children but

147 Ibid.
accepted that she could not afford it. She knew her children needed something to believe, so she did not tell them it was not possible for them to come to live with her. If she wanted her children, however, an explanation for her reason to surrender custody in the first place remains difficult to comprehend.

Her daughters blamed her. As they grew older, hidden truths about their mother’s past surfaced. Attinger, Charlotte’s significant other who accompanied the family to Holland, may have been the main catalyst for the demise of Eduard and Charlotte’s marriage. They discovered Charlotte’s affair with Attinger began far before Eduard and Charlotte divorced. Shortly after they arrived in Holland, however, Charlotte fell in love with her future husband, Niels. Maud recollected, “After one year, Charlotte left [us] for her new lover, known as Niels Sigar who she married after a while. She left [us] and disappeared. [We] were left alone…”¹⁴⁹ Maud expressed a sentiment felt by all Charlotte’s children: Charlotte traded in her children for a new life with Niels.

She dropped her children off at the Dutch Red Cross. There is no telling how the conversation went, or if there was even a conversation at all. How did she justify it? Perhaps she felt if the children housed at the Dutch Red Cross, they would always have shelter and clothing. Perhaps she simply could not afford to keep her children. Or, it is possible Niels insisted.

Just as Inge’s father gave her an ultimatum, Niels may have given Charlotte an ultimatum. In Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice*, the presence of a moral dilemma arises inevitably out of conflict of truths. It is by definition “a ‘sick situation’ in that its either/or formulation leaves no room for an outcome that does not do violence.”¹⁵⁰ She was not only a mother to her children, she was also a wife to Niels. He probably encompassed her life, and she would probably have done anything for him.¹⁵¹ She may have not seen it as a reckless decision on behalf of the wellbeing of her children, but a responsible decision on behalf of loyalty to her husband and their marriage. She may have wanted her children and also her

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¹⁴⁹ Ibid.


¹⁵¹ Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 81.
marriage; yet “either choice could have been construed as selfish.”\textsuperscript{152} She was in a new place and without Attinger. A man offered to marry her, and, after a few months with the children, he may have proved that financial constraints made it impossible to keep them. Maybe she wept for her children, for the decision she made. Maybe she regretted it every day. Those emotions, however, were not the ones which her children recollected about her. She was cold, bitter and unforgiving. Because that was how they remembered her, the stories about her rarely deviate from this character. Just like the children’s evil stepmother, Charlotte transformed into a caricature.

Still, her desire to stay in touch with her daughters shined brightly through Inge’s letters. Charlotte did not terminate all communication with her daughters. She seemed to regularly inquire about all of her children in the letters. Still, it is entirely possible Inge was the only child who wrote her. She may have not just been the only one who wanted to write her, but also the only one brave enough to write her. She wrote, “He took my suitcase apart and found the letters…”\textsuperscript{153} Soon after, she warned her mom not to send her letters to Eduard’s house. Rather, she instructed her to send them to her aunt and uncle. It seemed that in Eduard and Willie’s house, writing Charlotte was a punishable offense. Still, Charlotte’s absence, whether purposeful or not, left a lasting effect on her children.

Sisters Maja and Maud never attempted to speak to their mother in their adult life. Oma continued a relationship with her mother against her sisters’ wishes. Still, shouting matches could be overheard by Oma’s children as Oma never stopped accusing her mother of abandoning her. Her mother, in turn, never stopped claiming it was only out of necessity. She reiterated, she was only trying to protect her children. From what we do not know.

As for her father, Eduard seemed to have relinquished guilt by crafting a situation in which young Inge and her siblings had to choose their fate. By doing so, Eduard relieved himself of parental decision making or fault, and inflicted on his children the fallacy of choice. Without saying it, Eduard conveyed to his children that their bond was not concrete. The bond came with conditions. These conditions made the idea of a family unit expendable.

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{153} Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter III, private collection.
During the period his children were in Holland, he created a new normal with his new wife and children. Certain aspects of his new life did not mold well with his life before the war. Eduard chose the stability of his new home over his old home. Like his ex-wife Charlotte, his new love won.

Fortunately for the Francis children, Eduard’s brother Burt regularly invited the children to his home. On several weekends, Maud and Inge visited with Maja and Puk at their uncle’s house. It was by no means a replacement for a home, but it allowed Maud and Inge to stay close to their siblings. Periods passed by, however, when Inge and Maud lost contact with their sister and brother. Their father moved without notifying the daughters in the orphanage.154

In three short years, Inge experienced abandonment on two separate occasions from two very important figures. The first was with her mother, and the second by the actions of her father. I am uncertain if Inge also wrote to her father while in the orphanage; however, it is not likely. Physical interaction with her father was not impossible, since the orphanage was only a half hour from their father and they frequently visited their father’s brother’s house. In addition, Maud expresses that neither she nor Oma regretted their decision to leave their father and stepmother’s house.155 According to Inge’s letters, she avidly wrote her mother. Inge spent three years in a prison camp with just her siblings and her mother. Her mother’s story of survival and her story of survival, whatever it may have been, were integrated. In this instance, Inge’s desire to maintain a bond with her mom held great importance, even though her mother lived seven thousand miles away. Her subsequent loss of both her mother’s home and father’s home, however, continued Inge’s rapport with abandonment. As her time in the orphanage continued, she exhibited feelings of loss and desire. She saw her youth slipping away and feared that she might spend the rest of her childhood without being in her mom’s care.

155 Ibid.
She Dreamt About It Every Night

By the end of 1948, Dutch forces regained control of all major cities held by the Indonesian Nationalists. They captured and exiled key revolutionary leaders and sought to regain control over the cities. While the Dutch successfully expelled the nationalist leaders from the cities, they could not extinguish their efforts. The Indonesian revolutionaries still found support in the countryside. Furthermore, Holland faced considerable pressure abroad to relinquish their Empire. After World War II, the United States greatly targeted imperialism as a leading reason for the outbreak of global war. Their foreign policy, as evident by the Truman Doctrine, supported a people’s right to sovereignty. After World War II, President Truman and the United States Congress enacted the Marshall Plan. This plan aided efforts to feed and rebuild war torn Europe.\(^\text{156}\) The United States Congress threatened to withdraw financial support, including funds from the Marshall Plan, to Holland under the grounds their government might use the money for imperial aims. If Dutch forces continued their campaign, they stood to lose one billion dollars in aid.\(^\text{157}\) By mid-1949, the Dutch government began the process of decolonization. On December 27, 1949, the Republic of Indonesia gained its sovereignty and declared its independence.

In 1948, Inge and Maud entered the Jesuit orphanage for the second time. While Maud’s recollection counted herself and Inge lucky they escaped the grasps of their wicked stepmother, Inge’s letters to her mother show a consuming desire for family contact. The first letter I saw was a letter Inge wrote once she left her father’s house and entered the orphanage. In her letter, she explained her daily regularities; her new normal in the orphanage.

She wrote her letter on frail, tissue-like paper. It had no lines to follow. Her writing skewed downward, and her words varied in size. Her pencil appeared dull at its tip. She wrote in proper Dutch.\(^\text{158}\) She described her life at the orphanage as repetitive, as if everything was stagnant or stuck. Day to day, nothing changed. True to the description of the


\(^{158}\) Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter I, private collection.
world around her, Inge’s own repetitive nature gleamed from the pages of her letters. Contradictory to the social unrest outside the orphanage, Inge only focused on the dreadfully monotonous moments in her day. In doing so, she tried to send secret messages to her mom about her desire to leave quickly. Perhaps each day was the same. Order and agendas helped keep all the girls busy and organized. Perhaps her time there was not repetitive; rather, she may have felt the only change worth noticing would have been the presence of her mother. She focused her letter on three points: her need for her mother to rescue her, her own financial worth, and her desire to hold a connection with her mother.

She was bored and miserable. Inge wrote to her mother that she just sent a letter, but the dullness of the orphanage encouraged her to pick up the pen again. She asked her mother to write more and even sent the address where she could send the letters in case she forgot it of course. Inge showed no humility. She was not trying to be evasive. She wanted her mother to know how much she loved and missed her. She wanted her mother to know to write. She wanted her mother to know she was waiting for her letter. In this aspect, Oma revealed her vulnerability. Perhaps when she wrote her mom, she did not feel like she could not long for something. Her letters, at times, read more like a diary. She could expose herself. She had to stay strong for her sister. Maud needed to know everything was going to be okay. When Inge penned her mom, though, she sat in a moment of solitude. She may have been surrounded by several other girls, but there were no prying eyes or eavesdropping ears between her and her pencil. Perhaps expressing her desire to be with her mom let her feel like a child again.

The pencil and paper also allowed her to talk to her mom about the feminine viewpoint of growing up. She constantly felt sick. “Bon Kora,” a phrase that may have derived from a laxative with the same name, meant “to feel ill.” At other times, it may have meant something along the lines of “happiness.” Her sisters teased her because her weight. Because of this, she decided not to eat. Lack of sustenance just made her sicker, so she ate even more. As she grew more aware of her developing body, Inge appeared to be

159 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter II, private collection.
160 Vivian Francis, in discussion with the author, September 26, 2014.
experiencing a period with which most fifteen-year olds are familiar: puberty. Inge was not fat. She just grew into her body more quickly than her sisters. Her bust size measured quite differently than her peers. She was a teenager who did not look like the rest of the girls. Her body changed. It changed more quickly than those of the girls around her.

Like a typical teenager, she felt gawky, awkward and self-conscious about her transition to maturity. In moments like this, Inge reveled in her youth. She was not the girl who had to assume responsibility of her siblings, or protect them from others. In this case, she tried to defend herself from the journey that is adolescence. She looked to her mom for guidance and understanding. In retrospect, her worry about her body brought her to life. It humanized her in the eyes of the next generations. For a brief moment, we get to see she was once young and green to the world. For a moment, she sounded just as we sounded as teens.

Still, Inge’s time to express her juvenile hardships were overshadowed by the responsibilities she did have. Mainly, her responsibility to her brother Puk constantly kept her searching for her father’s whereabouts. For whatever reason, Eduard moved often and seldom told Inge or Maud his new home’s location. Inge worked tirelessly to keep track of her moving family. Even after ten years, she felt accountable for Puck’s smile. Her brother was far from her. Inge only sporadically visited Puk when he and Maja visited their uncle’s house. There, she tried to show affection to her baby brother by buying him books, but she admitted she could not keep up the habit because she could not afford it. During one of these visits, Inge found out her little brother had to watch Eduard and Willie’s children. Inge may have believed Willie was subjecting Puk to the same chores she protested. She wanted so badly to protect her brother from her father’s rules. She felt helpless. She walked away from her one goal. She left her brother. Conceivably, she might have feared Puk might synonymize their mother’s departure with hers. Unlike her mother, however, Inge always found her way back to Puk.

Inge also had to face the events happening in the outside world. The walls of the orphanage were caving in with the weight of the violence taking place in Batavia’s streets. While she did not intentionally talk about the revolutionary war taking place, she alludes to

161 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter III, private collection.
them by telling her mother of the dangerous and troubling incidents that took place around her. She informed her mom of a shooting which occurred not too far from her place of residence. “Yes, yes, that is life nowadays…” she expressionlessly wrote, as if viewing a murder as an everyday occurrence.162

She again alluded to the instability surrounding her: “Everything is more expensive here. The prices are going up like airplanes…I went to the cinema in the new [center] and had to pay Rp. 2,25.” Later in the letter, she continues to complain about the soaring prices: “…prices are going up again. 1lbs cheese f7.50. 2 lbs. sugar f4. 1 oz. candy f 1,50. 1 oz. chocolate f2.25.”163 The rising prices of common good can very well be a result of civil unrest or war. What is more telling, however, is that Inge used two forms of currency to explain the prices of the commodities. The abbreviation Rp. refers to the Indonesian Rupiah, while the symbol f represents the Dutch guilder. The conflict between the Indonesian nationalists and the Dutch colonists directly affected Inge’s life. The civil unrest made for a less safe environment, and the price of war caused Inge to cut back on her rations.

Inge gave her mother a convincing account of her struggles as she tried to encourage her mother to rescue her. But instead of looking completely helpless, Inge seems to turn her attention to selling herself. She informed her mother that she knew how to be “economical” and that her mother should try to be the same.164 Inge also told her mother about the new Lady of the House, or the head nun. She might help Inge to learn typing work and sewing. Indeed, it almost seemed as if Inge presented her résumé, as if she wanted her mom to know that she will help support her financially. Inge actively tried to prove that she held monetary value if her mom retrieved her. At this point, Inge had not been accepted into either her mom or dad’s houses for almost a year. This attempt at selling herself as a commodity greatly reflected the role abandonment played in her life.

Along with her desire to belong, Inge also exhibited a desire to make the relationship between her and her mother by the use of tangible items. The use of mementos or keepsakes

162 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter III, private collection.
163 Ibid.
164 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter I, private collection.
helps an abandoned person portray physical and spiritual contact with family. Inge attempted to create a connection with her mother through religion. Catholicism surrounded Inge at the Jesuit orphanage. In the letter, Inge encouraged her mother to go to church, even if she could only make the services a few times a month. Inge may have felt that through the catholic religion, she and her mother could have stayed connected through life and death.

She asked her mother for an important gift. “If I may get something of you as an expensive souvenir, then you can give me a gold chain with a cross. I dream of it almost every night. I can buy it if I save money but I would like it as a memory. Don’t you think it’s much nicer if you get it?” The cross, a symbol of Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice for mankind, weighs heavy in the catholic religion. She dreamt about it every night; a gold cross which glistened when the sun shone on it. It would be new. It would be her own. When she was scared, when she felt lost, when she missed her mother, she could just clench her necklace and know God was with her. The crest would have hung closely to her heart where God manifested. God protected her. God could not leave her. Perhaps they may not have been about to reunite in the same country, but metaphysically, she and her mother would be together in God’s world. She dreamt about it every night: the present and her mother’s presence. It remains unknown if Charlotte ever gifted her daughter the cross necklace, or any gift at all. Inge’s devotion to Catholicism, however, stayed with her throughout her time in the orphanage and for the rest of her life.

Inge desperately tried to return to her mother, whether physically or spiritually. She once again reminded her mom of her slipping youth. She did not want to reach maturity without experiencing the love of her mom. Her letter called for protection, sympathy and guidance- traits expected from a mother by their adolescent daughters. She wanted so terribly to be her mother’s daughter. Still, at the close of her letter, she offered her mother some of her own strength. It may have been the case that she wrote this particularly long letter over the course of a few days. News arrived that young Puk fell ill and the outlook was not

166 Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter I, private collection.
certain. She, again, turned to her protector persona. She told her mother to stay strong. She, herself, had to stay strong as well.\textsuperscript{167}

Unfortunately for young Inge, her eighteenth birthday was fast approaching. The second letter I saw was her last known letter during her time in the orphanage. Inge wrote while on vacation with the children from the orphanage. She was aware of her age as she pointed out that everyone around her were children. She no longer pleaded with her mother to return for her. She did not attempt to ask her mother for help or to send her a gift. It was not written with panic or fear. She simply answered her mom’s questions from a previous conversation. Even when the conversation turned to Puk, who made a full recovery from his sickness, she did not reveal to her mother any tense feelings about how she could not locate him. She seemed to care a little less about giving her mother information about her children. She simply offered to her mother a quick update of all the siblings and finished her letter.\textsuperscript{168}

On May 5, 1951, Inge reached adulthood. She left the orphanage and found a job as a nanny. By this time, her father, stepmother and siblings, besides Maud, had left for Holland.\textsuperscript{169} Her father’s brother also departed to Holland. She found support through a network of friends and eventually met her future husband, Rudi Hielckert, at a friend’s party. The two quickly married and started a family of their own.

Inge entered the orphanage in 1948, when it seemed the Dutch forces were regaining control of the colony. She entered the orphanage when the territory was still formally referred to as the Dutch East Indies. She knew the capital as Batavia, the name it assumed for 350 years. In 1951, however, the Dutch East Indies officially became the Republic of Indonesia. Its capital officially reverted back to a version of its pre-colonial name: Jakarta. Power lay in the hands of the Indonesian National party with President Sukarno as its leader. Upon her departure from the orphanage, the new adult encountered the new social order. While Indische were widely criticized before Indonesian independence, the mixed heritage

\textsuperscript{167} Puk did have a terrible illness of which no one is certain of the cause. His daughter heard a story about his sickness. She only knows that at one point in Puk’s youth, a sickness put him on the brink of death. He recovered.

\textsuperscript{168} Ingrid Hielckert to Charlotte Sigar, Letter II, private collection.

\textsuperscript{169} Maud Ouderkerk, in discussion with the author, trans. Myrna Ouderkerk, September 26, 2014.
people were soon faced with deportation from their own home country. In the following years, Inge’s struggle to belong would be exasperated by a feeling of statelessness. Her mixed heritage left her dispossessed. Her effort to find a home led her from one country to another.
CHAPTER 4

SHE CALLED HERSELF INGRID

... silence is a willed omission of trauma, a defensive armor against humiliating or panic provoking memories. ‘Silent, except for social courtesies, when they met one another...they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another.’

-Doris Sommer, “Resisting the Heat”

In her article, “Resisting the Heat,” Doris Sommer suggests silence can be an action done willingly, rather than coerced by an external force. There is pain in remembering, but choosing to be silent does not signify repression. She reasons that silence may very well be an act of agency, a choice made not from forceful repression, but from a desire to persevere. Even when surrounded by those with similar experiences, a person may acknowledge it, but go no further. In some respect, this group has become aware of their liminality. They acknowledge their place within society. They are between two worlds, belonging to both and neither simultaneously. They may have decided the society in which they now belong could not truly comprehend the circumstances from which they came. While they lived in a society undetected, they never truly assimilated.

For Ingrid, silence was not only perpetuated in her childhood, but in her adulthood as well. In order to be accepted as a Dutch national, she had to abandon her Indonesian heritage. Again in adulthood, Ingrid struggled with willed abandonment. This time, however, the abandonment came from international devices rather than family dysfunction.

In 1951, there was no turning back. Her young self had grown. When she looked in the mirror, she no longer saw the little girl tripping over her own feet. She no longer saw the gawky teenager staring back at her imperfections. She had grown into a young woman who,

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by her own ability, left the orphanage. She reentered society with only her belongings and her sister. Her other family members, having lived through bersiap and revolution, had already left to Holland. From helpful aids provided by the orphanage, she found a job. She met her first friends not affiliated with her past. She had fun. She dressed up, went to parties, and moved out to a place of her own. She met a boy. When he asked her name, she replied, “Ingrid.”

![Image of Ingrid Hielckert (left) and Rudi Hielckert (right) on their wedding day in 1955.]

Older and independent, she liked to call herself Ingrid. She was in love. Her bond with Rudi gave her a heightened sense of stability. Not long after they met, Ingrid and Rudi traveled to Surabaya, a large city in East Java, and married. While her father was not there to walk her down the aisle, her sister Maud was by her side. She wore a beautiful white lace wedding dress, while her tall groom wore a dark suit. She smiled, overjoyed at beginning a new chapter in her life. A wedding, after all, is a symbol of a new beginning. She had a new

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Ingrid saw her life changing. For the first time she made her own home with her own family. She had a job as an assistant, and he worked at a sugar mill. They lived in a house and employed a housekeeper and even a cook. Just a few years after they married, she gave birth to their first child, a girl by the name of Jessica. Only a year after that, a second daughter, Monique, was born. She made her own family. Wherever they all were, they were home as long as they were together.

The benefits of living an average life at times made Ingrid feel uncomfortable. Indeed, having a house with a cook and a housekeeper was not absolutely extraordinary in her neighborhood. It was quite a regularity. When the family grew so too, did the help. Ingrid’s house was presumably no different than next door. The lifestyle, however normative, differed greatly from the way she conducted her own life till that point. She grew up with a sense of self-reliance and subsequently felt uncomfortable with the idea of people waiting on her or taking care of her children. She preferred her independence and wanted to complete tasks herself. She and Rudi fought over the hired help, as Rudi grew up accustomed to the lifestyle. Small disagreements like this presented some of the everyday struggles for Ingrid during her attempt to adapt to her new life.

It had almost been twenty years since Ingrid had a place to call home. Now she was older and everything seemed so different. The last time she experienced a home, she saw the process through the eyes of a five-year-old. Now, she had become a mother and looked through a different vantage point. For years, she dreamt of having a home. She may have fantasized about how it would look, how many children she would have, what her husband would look like, how he would treat her, and how once she had all of this she would never be unhappy. Indeed, just as she and her sisters believed in the wicked stepmother, they may very well have believed in their Prince Charming. They may have not been relying on someone to come save them. Rather, they simply may have thought there was no other way to end a story. The prince arrives, and they live happily ever after.

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By late 1957, Ingrid was the mother of two and pregnant with another. She still had not seen her mother and her father. Besides her sister, Ingrid had no family to help her and guide her through this new experience called motherhood. Baby Monique cried in the crib, while little Jessica sat on her mother’s hip. All the while, Ingrid kept balance on her swollen feet. In midst of raising two babies and coping with pregnancy fatigue, Ingrid and Rudi made a critical decision. While it is unknown whether their decision was due to force or opportunity, Rudi and a pregnant Ingrid packed up their home and moved to The Netherlands.

She had only seen the Netherlands once when she was thirteen. It was the place she last saw her mother. It was the place where her mother abandoned them for the last time. For years, she begged her mom to rescue her from the orphanage and help her come to Holland. For a considerable amount of her childhood, attaining a ticket to Holland meant achieving freedom from loneliness. Now, however, she was twenty-four. She had two children and a baby on the way. She had a house and a steady job. She had Rudi. The timing seemed inopportune and even quite risky. While most of Ingrid’s family lived in Holland, she had not had contact with them in years. With two children and one on the way, they needed to find a house and sources of income quickly. They decided to leave all they knew in exchange for the unfamiliar.

**IT DROVE THEM FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER**

Their decision to leave Indonesia could very well have been their own choice, unaffected by global and social mechanisms. However, the year 1956 held significance for Dutch-Indo people living in Indonesia. It marked the first time since World War II that the Netherlands parliament suspended its discouragement policy and opened their doors to Dutch-Indonesians who still lived in Indonesia.\(^{173}\)

When Indonesian Nationalists secured independence in 1949, Ingrid was sixteen years old. In the two years between independence and her exit from the orphanage, Nationalists initiated the dismantlement of Dutch Colonial rule. The capital of Batavia changed its name to Jakarta. Buitenzorg was henceforth officially known as Bogor. The

\(^{173}\) Bosma, *Post-Colonial Immigrants*, 37.
street she mentioned in her letters where a man was shot, van Heutsz Boulevard, was also renamed. The boulevard, located in Batavia, was named for Dutch General Joannes Benedictus van Heutsz. It preserved the memory of his victory over the Aceh province in Indonesia in 1904. After the 1949 revolution, it was renamed Teuku Umar Street in honor of the Acehnese leader who led a resistance against Dutch colonial rule. It stood as a rather fitting and symbolic replacement. Increasingly, new Indonesian rule pushed to solidify power through expulsion of colonial culture. Rightfully so, they had gained their independence from an unjust rule. When expulsion of colonial culture turned to Indonesia’s people, however, several groups fell to a marginalized status. They no longer had a place in Indonesian society and had to emigrate.

As early as 1945, just as the bersiap threatened unrest, ethnically Dutch citizens who lived in the Dutch East Indies began to leave to Holland in droves. Indonesian nationalists viewed white colonists and residents as the enemy. They aimed to erase every piece of their colonial past, including any and all Dutch settlers. They saw the Dutch as the perpetrators. In the Netherlands, however, they deemed their colonial brothers as heroes. They saw them as war heroes and recognized their contributions protecting the Netherlands, as they faced Japanese POW camps and the brutality of bersiap. Indeed, most of the Dutch who immigrated between 1945 and 1947 were part of the elite class. They were wealthy, educated and either lived in or frequently visited Holland throughout their lifetime. They were accustomed to Dutch culture and religion. They were seen as citizens of Holland rather than subjects of empire. They were white. The Dutch homeland saw no qualm with their citizenship. Their bravery during World War II was widely recognized, and they were granted reparations and credited with protecting their country. Once they moved to Holland, they quickly blended in with the greater population.

The Dutch government offered citizenship to those who wanted to remain citizens of Holland. Sometime during this period, Ingrid decided to maintain her Dutch citizenship. It is

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176 Ibid., 37.
unclear, however, if she knew what this move entailed. Indeed, Ingrid’s Dutch-Indo mixed heritage left her on the threshold of warring countries. While the Dutch government greatly accepted the immigration of ethnically Dutch citizens, those with mixed heritage were less fortunate. Dutch officials worked tirelessly to convince Dutch-Indo citizens to embrace Indonesian citizenship. On the other side, the new Indonesia nation saw little difference between the ethnically Dutch and those with mixed heritage. Their efforts to get rid of the ethnically Dutch population included Dutch-Indo people as well.

During the war and subsequent revolution, Dutch-Indo residents valiantly fought for Holland. Just as their white Dutch counterparts left to POW camps, Dutch-Indo not only were interned but publicly chose their Dutch citizenship over their Indonesian heritage. They sacrificed their lives as well. Those who were not in the prison camps were increasingly isolated, harassed and threatened. During the bersiap, Dutch-Indo people were jailed and even died alongside their white Dutch counterparts. Others left to Holland. Those left behind were even more marginalized. The Dutch-Indo became an unwelcome reminder of Indonesia’s colonial past.\(^{177}\)

After the revolution, Dutch officials redefined citizenship. They divided their people into two distinct groups: citizens and subjects. Those deemed citizens were white Dutch people who had full access to citizenship. Those deemed subjects were predominantly mixed-raced individuals who had limited access to citizenships. Instead, they were viewed as subject of the former Dutch East Indies. They adopted the idea of normative citizenship and defined the status: “It means to be a ‘good citizen.’ It concerns political views on how people should relate to, or behave in society. The participatory aspect focuses on the actual participation of people within social, socio-economic and political spheres.”\(^{178}\) Citizenship solidified white Dutch as the pinnacle example of what it meant to be part of the country.

Unlike the ethnically Dutch residents of the Dutch East Indies, the Dutch-Indo citizens were not usually part of the elite class. They were less educated and invariably made less money. They did not seem to participate in government, nor were there many outlets to

\(^{177}\) Ibid., 16

\(^{178}\) Ibid., 29.
do so. Furthermore, the idea of Social Darwinism was still quite prominent in the 1940s. Several Dutch politicians believed Dutch-Indo people could never truly be Dutch. Indeed, the term Dutch-Indo did not just allude to heritage, but also their denomination as citizens. The inclusion of a hyphenated “Indo” worked as an asterisk to their level of citizenship. It labeled them as less than a Dutch citizen. Furthermore, most politicians believed the Dutch-Indo citizens were unable to adopt Dutch culture and customs. They saw them as unfit to live in Dutch society. The Dutch-Indo who decided to keep Dutch citizenship were not expected to settle in Holland. Dutch lawmakers practiced exclusionary politics and greatly limited immigration from Indonesia. They abandoned their citizens in Indonesia.

Her motherland and her fatherland did not want her. In Indonesia, she was Dutch. To the Dutch, she was Indonesian. Her dark skin and ambiguous look set her apart. Her surname, Francis, suggested a direct connection to Europe. She spoke both Dutch and Indonesian and often times jumped between both languages at the same time. She was nationally Dutch, yet she lived in West Java throughout her young life. She pledged her citizenship to Holland and stayed loyal to Holland during bersiap, but she was not invited to the country. Just like the houses of her mother and father in her youth, Ingrid’s presence represented a form of disorder to both structures. She was both ethnicities, yet not enough of either to quietly immerse herself in either society. If either society accepted her, they risked disruption of a stable society based on supremacy through ostracizing the other.

Miraculously by 1956, the same year she had her first child, the Dutch government realized they could no longer ignore the harm being inflicted on the Dutch-Indo population in Indonesia. As Indonesian patriotism grew, the Dutch-Indo population became more and more excluded. Dutch politicians changed their minds and began to reluctantly welcome mixed race Dutch citizens from Indonesia. In 1957, after her second child was born, a pregnant Ingrid and her family moved to Bergen Op Zoom, Holland.

Ingrid and Rudi may have simply wanted to reconnect with their families. However, the rapidity in which they left their home in Indonesia suggests they felt firsthand the marginalization and persecution promoted by the Indonesian government on the Dutch-Indo population. She was a mother now, and responsible for not only her life but her family’s as well. The violence which targeted her family may very well have resulted in another dissolution of family. Fear of another possible disconnect or risk of harm coming to her new
family most likely prompted her to accept a ticket to Holland. Moreover, those Dutch-Indo who had already decided to adopt Indonesian citizenship rather than Dutch citizen had, by 1957, been nicknamed *spijtoptanten*, or “those who regretted their choice.”¹⁷⁹ She, once again, was dealt an ultimatum: stay in the land you know and risk your family, or move to a foreign land she may finally be able to call home.

**THEY WELCOMED HER WITH DISPARAGEMENT**

When the racially prejudiced Dutch laws infringed on the characterization of a Dutch-Indo population, it infringed on the character any Dutch-Indo person as well. To the racially motivated laws, Ingrid was now labeled a Dutch-Indo. According to the prejudicial law, Ingrid was not educated. She did not have the mental ability to become as educated as a true Dutch citizen. She was just an accident, a repercussion of the colonies. Ingrid was not good enough. Her mixed blood made it impossible for her to evolve. She could only ever be simple minded. Ingrid was biologically incapable of acting gracefully in a social setting. Ingrid could not make a “good” citizen. Ingrid could not be trusted to behave properly. She could not be trusted at all. She could very well turn native at any moment since she was not born with citizenship. Ingrid could not be Dutch. She could not comprehend how to be Dutch. She could blend in more successfully with the other Indonesians like her.

In black and white, Dutch law was quite racist. That was a given. When, however, a name rather than a general group replaces the recipient of racial thought, it restores humanization. These racial intolerances did not affect a faceless group, it affected each individual personally. That criticism did not bring these marginalized people together; rather, it provoked them to focus on individual assimilation. Having association with a Dutch-Indonesian brotherhood may only promote ostracism. They needed to disperse and quietly blend into the masses.

In 1958, Ingrid and Rudi moved into their new home in Holland. The same year in April, she gave birth to her first boy, Frans. 1958 marked a year of reunions. She saw her father again and met his new wife. She saw Maja for the first time in years. Most importantly to Ingrid, she found Puk, who had by then grown into a young man. The smile Ingrid saved

for her brother appeared. He was safe and well. Better than well, Puk was happy. She learned he lived a calm life in her father’s house. He had a love and respect for his father, unlike the shaky bond between Eduard and his daughters. Perhaps Puk was too young to recognize when family strife was at its worst. He may have proved more successful in adapting to his father’s rules. For this, Ingrid was happy.

A return to Holland also brought Ingrid face to face with the prospect of seeing her mother, Charlotte. She did not reunite with her. I do not know if she tried to look for her, but it seemed that if she wanted to find her, she could have. Conversely, if Charlotte wanted to contact any of her children living in Holland, she could have as well. They did not. With Charlotte’s grandchildren in tow, Ingrid ultimately decided not to find her mom.

By the end of December that year, she became pregnant with her fourth child. Her home was steadfastly growing, perhaps more quickly than she expected. While the laws for citizenship changed in Holland, sentiment toward Dutch-Indos remained hostile. She and Rudi found little opportunity or hospitality in Holland. They learned quite quickly that the Dutch government did not necessarily expect all migrating Dutch-Indos to stay in the Netherlands. Several sponsorship programs arose to support families, and immigration to places like Australia, New Zealand and the United States. In September of 1959, Ingrid gave birth to her fourth child, a girl she named Susan Grace. With four children, and by 1960 another one on the way, she and Rudi had to make another life changing decision. After just two years in Holland, Ingrid and Rudi accepted a sponsorship. They were told their new home was named Auburn. They were told their new home was located in the state of California, a state on the west coast of the United States. They might not have known much more about California than its weather and location. Still, they packed their bags and moved once more.

**THEY FINALLY ARRIVED HOME**

When asked why Ingrid and Rudi chose to move to the United States, her sister Maud simply responded, “It was the weather.” Indeed, the weather in the Netherlands left many

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180 Susan Grace is my mother.
Dutch-Indos longing for a warmer climate, but a five-thousand mile move is seldom merited by weather. Still, a desire for something that more closely resembled her place of birth reveals a deeper intention: she was still in search of a home.

In a way, Ingrid’s decision to move to America resembled Inge’s ultimate decision to move away from her father’s house and into the orphanage. If she had a genuine choice, young Inge may have chosen to grow up in a house with her mother and father. If she had a genuine choice, Ingrid may have never left Bogor. When all other options were exhausted, Inge made a decision riddled with pressure to enter the orphanage. When all other options were exhausted, Ingrid made a decision riddled with pressure to move to the United States.

In America, she harnessed some freedoms available to her in neither Indonesia nor Holland. In America, she was considered an immigrant from Holland, a luxury she took very seriously. In October of 1960, she had her fifth child, a girl named Caroline. She thereafter had two boys, David and John, although not in sequential years. On the birth certificates for her American-born children, Ingrid claimed “white” as her race. Here, no one challenged her claim. No one told her to place a cultural asterisk near her ethnicity. No matter what she looked like, she had the luxury to classify herself and her children. All along the walls of her house, she hung Dutch memorabilia. She displayed a large poster of the prince and princess. Wooden shoes decorated her window sill. Paintings of tulips covered the walls. No one wondered why her skin or hair color did not match that of the princess’s. No one asked why she and her family partook in the consumption of culturally Indonesian dishes like satay, oxtail soup, gado-gado, lemper or semur. She was Dutch because she said she was Dutch.

Still, Ingrid did not forget her role as the Other in Dutch society. Susan worked as a restaurant server for her first job. During one shift, she overheard a table speaking Dutch. Ecstatic, Susan approached the table and began to speak Dutch to them. She explained she was actually born in Holland and had visited the country once since immigrating to the United States. She soon felt awkward. She understood what the people were saying, but could not understand the context in which they spoke. Later that night, she called her mother. She told her how ecstatic she was to find Dutch speakers, but she also expressed her

182 Placer County, California, Certificate of Live Birth no. 1151 (1960), State of California Department of Public Health.
confusion with the conversation. As Susan began to repeat the conversation to her mother, Ingrid stopped her. She recommended to my mom to refrain from starting conversations in Dutch. She had to tell her daughter the Dutch speakers spoke condescendingly toward her. Ingrid told her daughter not to be embarrassed, but also warned her that certain Dutch people may judge her differently than she judged herself. Before this, Susan never thought to consider the color of her Dutch guests. She had an olive complexion. They were white.

Ingrid recognized her status as a liminal person. She was mindful of social graces and her place in the eyes of certain Dutch factions. When Susan shared her experience, she did not express disbelief. Without divulging specifics of her life, Ingrid simply instructed her daughter to keep silent. Perhaps then they could not hurt her. She recognized the color of her skin. She knew the difference between brown and white. Perhaps she chose “white” as her children’s race not because she wished to be white ethnically; in fact, she was at least part white ethnically. Rather, she may have simply perceived white as a way to explain her nationality. She grew up in a culturally Dutch community. Since she was born, she was Dutch. Being white was not just a way she classified herself. Being Dutch was not a choice. It was who she was, even if societal norms cast her to the far edge of their nationality.

The birth certificates of Ingrid and Rudi’s children could, on their own, demonstrate the tumultuous journey made by Dutch-Indo people in the 1950s and 1960s. They had two children in Indonesia, two children in Holland and three more children in the United States. Within a span of three years, Ingrid and her family lived in three countries located on three different continents. Though challenging, Ingrid was aware she was one of many who embarked on a worldwide journey to find a home. Just as she was surrounded by girl in the orphanage, she recognized that while they may have differentiating backstories, their journeys all culminated a similar result. They lived not in the place of their birth and they lived not in their place of nationality; still, they found a home. Just as Doris Sommer observed, while each person recognized another’s journey “they neither described nor asked about the sorrow that drove them from one place to another.”183 They remained silent.

SHE DID NOT ASK FOR SYMPATHY

Sommer’s quotation suggests that perhaps some people do not make choices under the influence of repression. Instead, they make conscious choices based on their own power. For a while, I felt sympathy for Oma. I felt like she had to hide who she really was, and like she had to repress her Indonesian heritage. I thought she had to claim one or the other. When she chose Dutch citizenship, I thought she had to let go of any part of her Indonesian heritage. She had to let go of her childhood. She took to a country in which she only lived for two years. I now think that perhaps, Oma did not repress or forget. She chose to move forward in her own direction. She still acknowledged a difference between her color and the color of ethnically Dutch people. She claimed white race because she wanted to do so, not because she thought it covered her brown skin.

She lived fully aware. She did not walk through her life in a daze. She did not desire to be something other than what she was. Her adoption of a white identity may simply be a misinterpreted sign of solidarity. Indeed, when caught within the mess of decolonization, mixed race people become pegged as victims. This victimization places these mixed race people on the side of the colonized. Ingrid was brown, but she was just as white, too. She did not want to be a victim. Unlike the abandonment of her childhood, she was able to find closure with her national status. She had to move several times, but she gained the authority to define herself.

IN HER DAUGHTER’S EYES

To say Ingrid persevered through diversity is both a misleading summary of her life and a diluted sentiment to describe her efforts. Again, in memorializing her, we tend to gravitate toward attributes which convey strength and direction. We remember her decisions as being made with the utmost conviction. In reality, throughout her adult life, Ingrid struggled. She struggled with her children, her marriage, finances and bouts of depression. On several occasions, she met these challenges without strength. She failed. She failed often. She lacked the storybook sympathy of a mother. She was unforgiving and short tempered.

184 Bosma, *Post-Colonial Immigrants*, 32.
She grew farther apart from Rudi, and he grew farther apart from her. Her children, at times, feared her. Their attempts to make sense of her actions often came to no avail. For better or worse, she remained silent about her past. Her daughter, Susan, reminisces about her:

When we were younger, we used to think mom did things just to be mean. She wanted us to eat everything off our plates. Thank God we had a dog. Eating time was at five o’clock sharp and if you weren’t there at five you got what was left. You would get the neck of the chicken or part of a wing. It never occurred to us how she felt about food. She may have mentioned once or twice about her POW experience, but we thought she was just being mean. We weren’t in poverty. We never had to be on welfare. Mom and dad were always proud because they always worked and always provided for us. We were never without food. We were never without clothes. They might have been hand-me-downs but we were still clothed.

My mom, if you think about it, had seven kids on the road with a two-year gap between Caroline and David. Nowadays, they have formulas to keep kids calm. They have something called postpartum depression. Maybe my mom had that but they didn’t say those things back in the day. It is quite possible that she had that. Maybe she was an insecure person after what happened. ‘Who could love me?’ They didn’t have counseling back then. What if they did?

I didn’t get close to mom until after I had Joey. My mom wasn’t really somebody you could talk to. I remember when I was young I was in the hospital for like a week. Every day was chore day at the house and each of us would be assigned something to do. I remember the day I came home I thought how am I going to do my chores? I was scared because I didn’t know how I was going to do them. I don’t think they gave me painkillers back then. She’s going to make me do my chores, I thought. Then I heard her say, ‘Not you, Grace! You sit right there!’ I was shocked. I felt bad for my brothers and sisters but I thought, wow, she cares about me. She was strict. It was black and white with her. We just started learning these trick in the book to survive with her. I know she wasn’t stupid but at some point she probably thought, I give up.

When I got pregnant with Joseph, the one thing I was more afraid of was my mom. She was the louder one. She was a strict mom and she would tell you exactly how she felt, then she hit you. I didn’t know what she was going to do to be honest. I really don’t think I thought she was going to hit me. I just didn’t know how she was going to react. My oldest sister had already gotten pregnant a few years earlier and mom was so mad. One day one of my sisters got mad at my mom and screamed, ‘You don’t even know anything about your daughters! You don’t even know that one of them is pregnant.’ I was in the same room. I stayed quiet and so did my mom. That was all that was said. The next day, I went to grab the car keys and she met me there. ‘Are you pregnant? Tell me, are you pregnant?’ I didn’t answer. I just left to school. I didn’t even go to school! I think

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185 Susan was afraid to tell her mother about her pregnancy because she was a teenager at the time.
I just cried. The next day I told her and she just took me to the doctors. She never said anything bad. She would always just tell me, ‘You’re having a boy!’ and I would just say, ‘No, I’m having a girl!’ She was never rude to Gordon. She just accepted him.

When my water broke, she drove me to the hospital but she couldn’t stand seeing me in pain. I remember her saying, ‘I’m going to BINGO. I’ll be back!’ She showed her way of caring but it wasn’t hugs. I don’t think she trusted love. I don’t think she got that she could care for people and not be hurt. I think it was easier to be angry.

When the baby arrived, mom was right. It was a boy. I asked her to name him. She chose Joseph Adrian. She wanted me to get him baptized Catholic, so I did. She was much nicer in her later years. She was a more like a mom and more like a friend. I wish I would have had her like that when we were young.

Her daughters were only capable of speaking from their perspective. When asked about their mom and if they were aware of her past, they usually replied, “She never talked about it.” Only looking back did Jessica, Monique, Susan Grace and Caroline associate their mother’s behavior with her silence. They did not know their mother had a story to tell until later in life. By then, Ingrid had masterfully eluded her past. By the time her daughters started to ask her question, Ingrid skillfully changed the subject. She kept focus on her children’s lives rather than her own.

Since their mother’s passing, they quietly reflect on certain moments in their lives. Several times throughout her interview, without being provoked, Susan followed a story with suggestions as to why her mom did what she did. Sometimes, like with their mom’s feeling on food, Ingrid’s daughters have begun to understand why she reacted the way she did. Other times, however, they continue to search for answers. When Susan gave birth to Joey, her mom left. When she reminisced, she found it comical her mother chose to play Bingo. Still, immediately after she said it, Susan digressed and started to comment on the mechanisms which controlled Ingrid. Perhaps it was not just the pain of seeing her daughter in labor, perhaps Ingrid did not know how to be there for her daughter emotionally. Even when she exempted Susan from her daily chores, she did so with a sharp voice, “Not you,

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186 Gordon was the father of the child. Susan and Gordon later married.

Perhaps, as Susan said, it was easier to be angry. Maybe it was just easier to sound angry as well. Indeed, her exemption from chores is a cherished memory which signified her mother’s love.

It seemed easier for Susan to accept her mom’s anger. When her mom greeted her with kindness and understanding, Susan had a hard time explaining her mom’s sympathy. It was much easier to conceptualize her mother’s anger. At one point, Susan wondered if the normalization of depression might have helped her mom seek help. This speculation is not abnormal among those in Ingrid’s position. Today, several second generation children of World War II survivors question the same situation. They wonder if their parents’ lives would have been different if their parents could have sought help, or if diagnoses like Post Traumatic Stress Disorders existed. Instead of help, there was a common consensus: dwelling on the past only jeopardized the future.

Ingrid’s own life greatly influenced that of her children. Ingrid’s children fall into the mold of the second generation. The second generation, or those who grew up in the United States, represented the generation with the most pressure to assimilate. They were most likely raised by patriotic parents who showed their love for America. They inherited their parents’ silence. They were explicitly taught not to question their elders out of respect and obedience. Thus, they had a limited knowledge of their cultural background. Like Ingrid’s children, the second generation commonly endured feelings of detachment with their parents, unable to understand their parents’ motives. Affection was seldom received by the second generation. With their children, displays of love would derive from a willed effort. The second generation then gave way to the third generation. Due to the effort of the first and second generation, third generation Dutch-Indos developed a sense of self-confidence. Because their society had grown to acknowledge different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, young people of mixed heritage inquired about their history. They represented a generational shift: a generation encouraged to feel pride, a generation encouraged to ask questions.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
CONCLUSION: WE KNEW HER AS OMA

My mom grew wary when I insisted I would go with her. She told me I would not like what I saw. I told her not to worry. Before we arrived, we took a detour to a nearby McDonald’s to pick up a Happy Meal for her. When we arrived, mom gave me one last chance to change my mind and stay in the car. It was an overcast day in February. The clouds blocked out the sun, and everything below the sky adopted a variation of the color gray. I put on my coat and smiled. I told her I had not changed my mind and wanted to get out of the car. She reluctantly accepted my final answer. I was actually very excited to visit her. I secretly hoped she wanted to share some of her fries with me. It was a long day and I was a little hungry. I smiled as mom and I entered the elevator. I kept talking to her, telling her to relax. When we arrived on the right floor, I stopped talking out of courtesy for others. A secretary pointed us to the room where she was waiting. Distracted by the prospect of fries, I gleefully began to walk toward the room.

When mom opened the door, my plastered-on smile drooped to a somber grimace. I looked at a long, narrow room. It could not have been any wider than an average hallway. Propped up against the wall sat worn, secondhand recliners. Those occupying the seats kept a very consistent blank, stare toward the grimy floor. The gray from the outside seeped through the windows and cast shadows over the patients. I saw any sign of color drown in a blanket of gloom. Their view, from which the gray snuck in, was the parking lot. Wet by a morning rain, the concrete parking lot offered little signs of excitement. There was a purgatory between life and death, and it was located in that room.

In that instant, I feared my mother noticed the look on my face. I knew I could not have hidden it successfully. We continued to quietly walk down the aisle. At that moment, I became startled. I began to hear faint sounds of life. It had a familiar voice, one I could recognize anywhere. The closer I drew, the more vibrant the voice resonated. I heard her, “God bless you! God loves you. Did you know that? Do not worry. You will be taken care
of.” We finally arrived at the worn recliner we were looking for. She did not realize we were there watching her because her full attention was on the somber man beside her. “He loves you.” She repeated, “You will make it.” Only the smell of her fries hinted our close proximity. She turned to us and smiled. In a room full of darkness, she was the light. “Hi, Oma,” I said as mom and I sat down next to her.

The long, thin, plastic IVs penetrated her emaciated arms. Her hair grew thinner each day. Her round cheeks started to sink into her face. She appeared just as sick as those around her. Still, she smiled.

I suppose it is because she had been through worse. I suppose it was because she was not alone in her struggle. Just as she was not the only one in the orphanage, just as she was not the only Dutch-Indo who traveled from place to place to find a home, she was not the only person in that room. If this room really was the threshold between life and death, she had already visited that place several times before this moment. She had already been through purgatory. She had already experienced the threshold. At least this time she knew there would be a moment of exodus. She knew where she was going.

Several of us wonder if Oma was ever truly happy. When I think back to that moment, I see the cross around her neck. She wore it every day. She no longer had to close her eyes to see it. She saw crosses like hers on her daughters’ necks and their daughters’ necks. That little girl in the orphanage dreamt of her family every night. She dreamt of the cross glistening as it dangled from her neck every night. That little girl dreamt of it, and Oma achieved it.

When I think back to that day, I know Oma was happy. I know Oma was happy because that was the day I realized she knew she had nothing to fear. On the day of her funeral, I shared the story with my family. After I finished, my mom approached me and said, “I saw it, and I was hoping you saw it, too. I did not want to say anything. I did not want to force you to see something.” In that moment, mom and I were staring at the same lighthouse. We both saw Oma in the same light. Oma knew her fate and did not cringe. She did not feel sorrow for herself. Instead, she took on the form of a brightly shining light. Her courage showed us the way. She looked at the face of death and smiled.

Today, multi-racial societies in the United States have become the norm. In May, several Dutch-Indos and their families travel to Long Beach, California to attend the Holland
Festival which celebrates the shared culture of the Netherlands and Indonesia. In the Netherlands, a type of reverse-influence took effect. While initially believed they were incapable of assimilation, Dutch culture has, in many ways blended with Dutch-Indo culture. Literature, arts, and, most prominently, food has taken a considerable role in showing the fusion of the two societies. An astoundingly high rate of intermarriages also blended the two groups, making the differences separating them insignificant.

While multi-racial societies have become widespread and inclusive, societal practices still place emphasis on the ethnicity of a person in order to determine who they are and to which group they belong. Even as we define ourselves, we look at our past, ethnicity and nationality for a type of auto-patriotism, for a way to construct our story.

Oma’s act of agency spurred on the power to self-define. Maria Root’s poem, *Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage*, tells this new generation of mixed heritage people they have the right to define themselves and they have the right to change that definition as life continues.\(^\text{189}\) Her first stanza is as follows:

\begin{quote}
I have the right not to justify my existence in this world  
I have the right not to keep the races separate within me  
I have the right not to justify my ethnic legitimacy  
I have the right not to be responsible for people’s discomfort with my physical or ethnic ambiguity.\(^\text{190}\)
\end{quote}

The stanza particularly relates to the liminal characters of history. Indeed, as liminal is a title given to and not chosen by the person of mixed heritage, Root maintains ethnic ambiguity does not cause chaos, only a person’s perception does.

Her next stanza as follows:

\begin{quote}
I have the right to identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify  
I have the right to identify myself differently than how my parents identify me  
I have the right to identify myself differently than my brothers and sisters  
I have the right to identify myself differently in different situations\(^\text{191}\)
\end{quote}

\(^\text{189}\) Maria Root, *Bill of Rights for People of Mixed Heritage* (Seattle: Marvin Foundation, 1996).

\(^\text{190}\) Ibid., 1.

\(^\text{191}\) Ibid.
She reclaims agency. A person of mixed-race heritage can choose how to portray herself. The input of those around her have no bars on her agency. She is not confined to restriction. There is no such thing as contradiction.

Her final stanza:

I have the right to create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial or multiethnic
I have the right to change my identity over my lifetime--and more than once
I have the right to have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people
I have the right to freely choose whom I befriend and love.192

She defines identity not as a rigid decree but as a continuously changing variable. A person cannot receive an accusation of not devoting herself to a single ethnicity. A person cannot face criticism of not being “enough” of something. There is no such thing as a cultural scale.

They, no matter how quiet, started the movement for the following generations. They defied victimization and chose their ethnicity. It is a paradigm shift that the power of this new generation may lay in the idea that we can choose not to choose. Perhaps those of my Oma’s generation chose not to speak because, to them, their struggles were behind them. They happened, and that was it. Oma was an orphan, but so was every other child at the orphanage. Oma was a Dutch Indo immigrant, but so was everyone else around her. Oma and others like her quietly acknowledged those like her, but did not inquire about the sorrow that each other felt. Perhaps they kept silent because they did not want their history of abandonment to become our history as well.

Oma represents one of the several stories from Dutch-Indos that went untold. Her story may help a comparative study. The United States is one of five countries with high Dutch-Indo populations. Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Holland have legacies of their own. The different struggles and cultures in which the Dutch-Indos immersed themselves set up a formula for a fascinating comparative study with an emphasis in cultural history.

Just like Oma was not the only Dutch-Indo who faced hardships during their lifetime, Dutch-Indo is not the only mixed race people whose history has been hanging in the

192 Ibid.
threshold. Her history is the history of the English-Indian, the French-Shawnee, the Mexican, the Japanese-Korean, and the African American. Their mere existence perpetuated disorder and confusion, unacceptance and hate. Their hidden stories misconstrued a willed silence for a coerced weakness. They come from muddled histories, misrepresentation and biased typecasts. They represent peoples who recently have risen to define and embrace an identity. Of the transformation, English scholar Michele Elam says, “The national images of racially mixed people have dramatically changed just within the last few years, from ‘mulattoes’ as psychically divided, racially impure outcasts to being hip new millennials who attractively embody the resolution of America’s race problem.” An outlook on mixed-race individuals is gradually changing from social outcasts to a vision of the future. Emphasis on stories like Oma’s may help shape or reveal where the phenomenon is heading.

While it may be easy to misinterpret their silence with defeat, victimization or repression; Oma’s silence was the first step toward our banishing our liminality, expressing our agency, and choosing our identity. Oma raised her children in an ambiguous fashion. She did not concern herself with explaining her past to her children. She never placed emphasis on it, allowing further generations to make for themselves its significance. She helped the next generation to have the right to accept a multi-cultural heritage.

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