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The topic of the „Dutchness“ of Dutch culture and society, most notably the Dutch Golden Age, has been a small growth industry by itself. The classic studies of Jan and Arie Romein (1938-1939) and Johan Huizinga (1941) in particular have inspired successive generations of historians to study the alleged distinct features of Dutch civilization over time.¹

In Being „Dutch“ in the Indies, Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben transpose the issue of „Dutch“ identity to the “Indische“ world, a chain of strongly localized European communities whose members grew up within the Dutch empire in the East Indies, to explore the relationship between creolisation and colonialism from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. Creolisation is described as „a process of ongoing change and renewal of social and cultural patterns“ as distinct from „mes-tisation or hybridisation“, which presupposes a static notion of culture and identity (p. xv). The authors’ intention is to look at the „Indische“ world „from within“, from the outlook of the people who were born in the Indies through several prisms: the presence of the colonial government, European education, family background and social networks, economic opportunity, organization, and migration (pp. xvii-xix). The present volume is built on an extensive corpus of secondary literature, supplemented by research in government archives, newspapers, literary works, and genealogical studies. The authors’ stated goal is „to chart new terrain“ by „hacking away a narrow path through a jungle of assumptions and idées reçues“ (p. xi).

Chapter 1, „Separation and Fusion“, argues that the attempts at racial and ethnic engineering by the colonial authorities, classifying and segregating groups into watertight compartments, were only partly effective. Boundaries between the various groups in colonial societies remained porous in everyday practice. Moreover, colonial rulers did not invent „plural societies“, rather these were offshoots from an earlier world with its own patterns and mechanisms of separation and fusion. Chapter 2, „The Baggage of Colonialism“, roughly covers the period of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and examines the role of colonial policy and the culture of the Netherlands in shaping the „Indische” world. Though VOC governors assisted by the Dutch Reformed Church began to regulate sexual and social behavior, „the Asian community was far from being a mass of dough that could be kneaded into the requisite racial and sexual shape“ (p. 27).

Chapter 3, „Contraction“, covers the period between 1780 and 1820 defined by the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784) and the subsequent Napoleonic years. This era of drastic changes was characterized by spells of isolation, the rapid shrinking of the Company’s trading empire and a flux of largely elite emigrants leaving the former colonies for Batavia (modern Jakarta), along with a series of ideological conflicts mirroring those in the Netherlands and other parts of Europe.

Chapter 4, „Lordly Traditions and Plantation Industrialism“, discusses the emergence of a new type of landholder on the island of Java over the course of the nineteenth century: the sugar contractors of Central and Eastern Java, the leaseholders of the Principalities (Yogyakarta and Surakarta), and (after 1860) the tea planters of Priangan in Western Java. This period witnessed a fusion of two elements - an aristocratic lifestyle resembling that of the indigenous nobility and the management of a business aimed at the export market.

Chapter 5, „Mixed Worlds in the Eastern Archipelago“, describes the divergent histories of a number of „Indische“ communities and families of Makassar, Banda, Ternate, and Ambon after 1860. The years around 1860 formed a watershed in the history of the eastern archipelago, coinciding with the abolition of slavery, introduction of free trade, renewed financial credit for agricultural enterprises, in-
tensification of recruitment for the army and missions, and improvement and expansion of elementary education.

Chapter 6, „Rank and Status“, discusses the nineteenth-century attempts to base appointments within the colonial government on qualifications rather than on mechanisms of protection and favoritism. Despite all the rhetoric about professionalization, these initial reforms „floundered on the sandbanks of nepotism in the Indies“ (p. 211). Only in 1864, when the first secondary school was founded in Batavia and the certificate system abolished, did the „age of protectionism“ come to an end.

Chapter 7, „The Underclass“, switches its focus from the middling groups to the urban European proletariat. The nineteenth-century discovery of urban pauperism (a new concept reserved for the Indo-European) occurred against the background of physical separation of various population groups, increasing government intervention, and the struggle for social and political emancipation of the lower classes.

Chapter 8, „Crisis and Change in the Indische World“, assesses the (limited) impact of the agricultural crisis of 1884. Despite the depression, the economic power of old planters’ families remained unbroken. The only change was that they turned their family firms into Public Limited Companies, becoming absorbed into larger economic conglomerates. What was new was that poverty and the social shame associated with it began to function as a reference point for defining who could rightly be called Europeans in the „Indische“ community, and then to decide what rights they were entitled to.

Chapter 9, „Indische: Defined and Identified“, covers the period of the Fin de siècle and Belle Époque when two contrasting voices could be heard: the closed character of „Indo-European“ (or Indo) used to apply to Europeans of partly Asian ancestry as opposed to pure-blood white, and the open connotations of the word „Indische“ used in contrast to Netherlandish, but never to demarcate Europeans from Indonesian, Chinese, and other population groups. Everything born out of the „Indische“ movement was to be absorbed into Indonesian nationalism, while the notion of an union gained definitive form in 1919 in the Indo-Europeesch Verbond.

The „Epilogue: End of the Old World“ chronicles how the turbulent arrival of mass politics and government repression, cultural Westernization, globalization and the shift of gravity in the Dutch-Indies economy from the sugar industry of Java to oil and rubber production in the Outlying Provinces, along with social exclusivism combined with ethnic rapprochement and mixing heralded the demise of the old world of the Indies (pp. 339-343).

Bosma and Raben’s successfully accomplish their stated goal to challenge a series of „assumptions and idées reçues“ that have been pervasive in the historiography of the Dutch East Indies. These received wisdoms include Furnivall’s (J.S. Furnivall, Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy, New York 1944.)³ concept of a „plural society“ (pp. 1, 116, 342) or the alleged takeover by Dutch banks in the wake of the agricultural crisis of 1884 (pp. 258-267), and Gelman Taylor’s emphasis on the pivotal role of the „daughters of Batavia“ (pp. 62, 69), the assault on the „Indische“ culture in the nineteenth century (pp. 84, 88, 215-216), and the exclusion of the „sons of the Indies from higher posts in the civil service by Totok newcomers (pp. 184, 187, 191-192).

Written in an engaging and lively style, the arguments in Being „Dutch“ in the Indies are subtle and nuanced, expertly noting variations on themes based on locale, economic sector, group, and class. The authors also effectively employ the „life and times approach“, painting a series of small but incisive emblems to illustrate larger processes. Often these biographical sketches are enlivened with actual portraits.

Not surprisingly, a book of this ambitious scope displays certain weaknesses in coverage. The „path hacked away“ is indeed narrow at times. Though the authors make a number of important comparative observations based on the existing literature, one would like to see a greater engagement with various historiographies and seminal works on such issues as ethnogenesis and identity formation, cross-

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cultural encounters, networks and diaspora, and the Indian Ocean World to name only a few, while further research is required to substantiate conclusions. In addition, despite the book’s stated geographical and chronological scope, the history of the East Indies between 1500 and 1920, the narrative is by and large Java-centric and focuses on the nineteenth century, „the most Indische period in colonial history“ (p. 17). The period after 1780 is covered in two chapters or 40 pages (pp. 25-65), whereas the period after 1780 receives seven chapters plus an epilogue or 278 pages combined (pp. 66-343).

*Being „Dutch“ in the Indies* is an important book, whose ramifications extend well beyond the field of Dutch colonial history. It is required reading for anyone interested in the intersection between authority and culture in general and the colonial project and identity formation in particular.