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# A NEDERLANDER WOMAN'S RECOLLECTIONS OF COLONIAL AND WARTIME SUMATRA: FROM SAWAHLUNTO TO BANGKINANG INTERNMENT CAMP

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## Introduction\*

Childhood memoirs by Indonesians about growing up in Sumatra in the late 1920s and 1930s have much to tell students of the country's history and historiography.<sup>1</sup> Such recollections of youth spent in Sumatran cities, market towns, or villages can sometimes speak volumes about a narrator's personal maturation toward adulthood in those decades of social change. Beyond this, these autobiographies can also narrate versions of Indonesia's own, larger scale "journey to nationhood," out of a "colonial childhood" (a recurrent trope in this type of memoir literature). Such personal recollections can also document the markedly different ways that the late colonial school system, its pedagogies, and the sharp status rivalries among students intent on

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\* My first thanks go to Gerdy Ungerer and her husband Daniel for talking so generously with me. Anne and John Summerfield had the initial idea for these conversations. I am also deeply grateful to Cornell anthropologist James Siegel, Holy Cross historian Karen Turner, and Holy Cross anthropologist Ann Marie Leshkovich, who read early versions of this essay and made numerous astute suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> There is a valuable literature on Indonesian autobiography. C. W. Watson's *Of Self and Nation* is especially insightful. C. W. Watson, *Of Self and Nation: Autobiography and the Representation of Modern Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2000). See also G. W. J. Drewes, "Autobiografieën van Indonesiers," *Bijdragen tot de Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde* 107 (1951): 226-264. Anthony Reid's "On the Importance of Autobiography," *Indonesia* 13 (April 1972): 1-4 sets the research agenda well.

prestigious degrees were understood in different parts of the Indies. Furthermore, printed and published childhood autobiographies and also oral histories of this type can show how Hindia Belanda itself—the Dutch East Indies as a colonial project—was emotionally apprehended by children and adolescents in contrasting areas such as Toba or Minangkabau.

Admittedly, memories of childhood days in the Indies might seem to sketch out only small stories, yet these tales can have considerable political seriousness and weight to them, along all these dimensions. Falling into the realm of supposed minor literature and popular history-telling, as opposed to more official or erudite cultural products, stories of childhood times lived in the two decades just “before Japan” (in North and West Sumatra, at least, this is a common way of dividing social time) have sometimes pointed beyond their own events and narrativity to help write Indonesia, qua nation, into the public record. These memoirs have also at times asserted particular ways of inscribing Indonesian history, for Indonesians.

In 1995 I translated into English two published Indonesian-language childhood memoirs set in Toba and Minangkabau. These were the Toba author P. Pospos’s *Aku dan Toba: Tjataan dari Masa Kanak-Kanak* (Me and Toba: Notes from childhood times) and the Minangkabau journalist and essayist Muhammad Radjab’s *Semasa Ketjil Dikampung* (Village childhood).<sup>2</sup> Each book was issued by the government publishing house Balai Pustaka in 1950, at the immediate start of Indonesian national independence. The Revolution of 1945-49 had led to the establishment of a republic under Indonesia’s first president, Sukarno. Each of these two seemingly modest but subtly ambitious autobiographical undertakings told of quotidian happenings in the two village boys’ remembered childhoods. The book about Toba in the late 1920s and 1930s, for instance, detailed Pospos’s youthful struggle to please his strict, distant father, who demanded more and more socially impressive elementary and middle school achievements. The remembered child, Djohanis, is caught up in a frenetic search for increasingly illustrious schools, which Pospos *pere* hopes will employ more and more Dutch language instruction (instead of instruction in lower status Indonesian or Toba Batak). The memoir evokes the maturing child’s increasing ability to put such demands and the language hierarchy they imply into perspective. The volume also alludes to the remembered Toba boy’s skepticism about churchgoing and village standards of propriety, as the youth grows up “toward cosmopolitanism,” toward further schooling in cities in Java—and toward Indonesia.

Pospos’s and Radjab’s audiences were broad, national publics, since each author chose to write in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, although they were also fluent in Toba Batak and Minangkabau, respectively. Evoking themes that reached beyond their small books’ overt story lines, Pospos and Radjab engaged more profound dilemmas that had to do with being young in the Indies, when the colony was institutionally and imaginatively on the move, during the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> *Aku dan Toba* and

<sup>2</sup> P. Pospos, *Aku dan Toba: Tjataan dari Masa Kanak-Kanak* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1950); and Muhammad Radjab, *Semasa Ketjil Dikampung (1913-1928): Autobiografi seorang Anak Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1950). My translations of these are offered in *Telling Lives, Telling History: Autobiography and Historical Imagination in Modern Indonesia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995). This book includes a lengthy interpretive essay on Sumatran childhood memoir writing.

<sup>3</sup> Indies colonial society “on the move” is well examined in Takashi Shiraishi’s *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990). For a useful comparison with

*Semasa Kecil di Kampung* implicitly urged Indonesian readers to contemplate the sort of modernities that the remembered boys and the larger nation itself were growing up “toward,” out of their village pasts. Both books were written in a deft, unpretentious form of Indonesian, allowing readers to be gently and enjoyably enlisted in debates about rural and religious “traditions,” about kinship worlds purportedly out of sync with their narrators’ projected adult lives, and about storytelling itself, as history can be related in prose, to popular audiences, in newly independent nations.

As is well known, Pramoedya Ananta Toer has staked out similar precincts of nationalist narrative in his historical novels. In the Buru Quartet books (*This Earth of Mankind, Child of All Nations, Footsteps, House of Glass*),<sup>4</sup> Pramoedya writes about the country’s entire, large-scale colonial history. He does this in terms of the imagined life experiences of a tight cluster of intergenerationally connected fictional characters. These include Minke, a Javanese student of promise in the late 1800s, Annelies, a mixed race girl and the object of Minke’s conflicted desire, and Annelies’s large, variegated family. All protagonists are tied directly or peripherally to the plantation economy, to the Indies’ exciting—if threatening—city life, and to schools, science, nationalist debates, and colonial bureaucracies. Levels—even “stages”—of Indonesian self-awareness about colonial state perfidy and corruption are evoked for readers through the life journeys of the Buru Quartet’s characters. The language hierarchies of the Indies, and the political possibilities of print writing and publication themselves, are also much at issue in the Buru Quartet books.

Beyond childhood autobiographies by such writers as Toba and Minangkabau popular authors, and beyond Pramoedya’s more sweeping historical novels, there are certainly other types of personal narratives about the last colonial decades worth listening to. Some of these originate from quite different political and sociological vantage points than do the more expected, pro-nationalist sorts of tales like those just mentioned. The very distinctiveness of perspective (and moral compass) that characterizes such alternative stories can help historians, anthropologists, and other scholars of Indonesia make their work more nuanced, and perhaps free them from exclusive reliance on canonized nationalist visions of some progressive growing up toward Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> These other stories put matters differently, and shake expectations.

### A Eurasian Childhood Memoir

In this paper, I present and comment upon one such off-the-beaten-path autobiographical narrative about Sumatran childhood days and youth: a tape-recorded, five-hour conversation I had in May, 2004, in Los Angeles with Gerdy

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Vietnam, see also David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> The books appeared in their original Indonesian as *Bumi Manusia* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1980), *Anak Semua Bangsa* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1980), *Jejak Langka* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1985), and *Rumah Kaca* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1988). Penguin Books, New York, has issued all four in English translations by Max Lane.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey A. Hadler’s “Places Like Home: Islam, Matriliney, and the History of Family in Minangkabau” (PhD dissertation, history, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, 2000) presents an intriguing approach to the late colonial period in West Sumatra that eschews nationalist frameworks for narrating Minangkabau experience.

Ungerer, a seventy-six-year-old Dutch citizen and long-term United States resident. She now lives in the San Diego area and spends considerable time as well in the Netherlands, where she and her husband Daniel have relatives. We spoke at the home of mutual friends<sup>6</sup> who had been trying for several years to get us together so that I could hear and record this remarkable woman's life story.

Mrs. Ungerer (she prefers to be called Gerdy) was born in 1928 in the coal mining town of Sawahlunto, West Sumatra. This was the markedly strange settlement built up into a large town by the Dutch colonial state starting in the 1890s to exploit the rich Ombilin coal fields northeast of the coastal city of Padang. To extract the coal, a government-controlled mining company was set up. It employed convict labor until 1938. Through the 1920s, in fact, prisoners in chains had constituted the core of the Ombilin mines' labor force.<sup>7</sup> Maintaining a sufficient work force was a problem, as Minangkabau were hesitant to work underground and conditions were debilitating. A combination of coolie, contract labor (until 1934), and casual day labor was used in addition to the prisoner work force. The Ombilin mines were the site of much labor violence. Flogging of the miners was common and severe, in some years affecting 60 percent of the workers (making this one of the most violent coolie labor locales in the Indies).<sup>8</sup> Group tensions among the forced laborers (they were from Java, Sunda, the Batak regions, and also Minangkabau) were also intense. The mining company did not hesitate to impose the Penal Sanction in order to keep the miners under control and at their tasks because the industry was essential: the output of the Ombilin mines was central to the colonial economy as a whole, since the coal was used to power steam ships to further link the islands of the archipelago together for the benefit of colonial trade.

The town of Sawahlunto made this whole West Sumatran mining enterprise work. It housed the mine managers, the engineers, the work gang mandors (overseers), and the Sumatrans recruited as police. It also had a military garrison and a military hospital. A thriving Nederlander or Indo-European community dominated the managerial sector of Sawahlunto life from 1900 through the end of the colonial period, a fact significant for understanding Gerdy Ungerer's oral memoir of her younger life. In contrast to the low-status, even stigmatized Eurasian pauper class found in parts of Java,<sup>9</sup> Sawahlunto's Nederlanders were a proud elite—at least among themselves.

<sup>6</sup> Textile scholars Anne and John Summerfield, editors of *Walk in Splendor: Ceremonial Dress and the Minangkabau* (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural Studies Textile Series No. 4, 1999), have known Gerdy and Daniel Ungerer since the 1970s and have traveled in West Sumatra with them.

<sup>7</sup> Information here and below on labor conditions in the Ombilin mines comes from Erwiza Erman's excellent "Generalized Violence: A Case Study of the Ombilin Coal Mines, 1892-1996," in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia*, ed. Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), pp. 105-132. See also Erwiza Erman's "Miners, Managers, and the State: A Socio-political History of the Ombilin Coal Mines, West Sumatra, 1892-1996" (PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Erman, "Generalized Violence," pp. 110-113.

<sup>9</sup> There is a large research literature on the Eurasians of the colonial Indies. An early bibliography is Paul van der Veur's *The Eurasians of Indonesia: A Political-Historical Bibliography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project Bibliography Series, 1971). See also Paul van der Veur, "Cultural Aspects of the Eurasians in Indonesian Colonial Society," *Indonesia* 6 (October 1968): 38-53; Paul van der Veur, "The Eurasian Dilemma in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 20 (1960-61): 45-60; and Paul van der Veur, "The Eurasians of Indonesia: A Problem and Challenge in Colonial History," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 9,2 (1968): 191-207. As noted below, Jean Gelman Taylor's pathbreaking *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983) is an exemplary, exhilarating social and cultural history of mestizo society in the Indies, especially under the VOC in the

Often well off, many came from mixed ancestry going back generations.<sup>10</sup> Most were Christians and, by the time of Gerdy's childhood, virtually all the Sawahlunto Nederlanders had Dutch last names. These families were often connected through marriage and social club activities to the similar Dutch-identified Eurasian communities in Padang and in other large West Sumatran cities, such as Bukittinggi. Gerdy's husband, Daniel Ungerer, came from there. As a girl with prominent mining managerial class family antecedents, Gerdy spent her early years enmeshed in Sawahlunto's superheated Eurasian high society.

Gerdy Ungerer (Gerdy Erlemann, as she was then) passed a happy and even coddled childhood in Sawahlunto until her parents sent her to an elite Catholic girls school run by the Ursuline nuns in Batavia. She was thirteen at the time and desperately homesick. But, she reconciled herself to toughing it out in this Kleinklooster school, for which her father was paying one fifth of his salary each month. The school was extremely prestigious, in the view of Gerdy's family circles back home in Sawahlunto. Most well-off Nederlander girls from the town would go to the MULO schools (the Meer Uitgebreide Lagere Onderwijs institutions, elite Dutch-language middle schools) located in many Sumatran cities, or even to the more prestigious HBS or Hoogere Burger School in Medan.<sup>11</sup> This was a secondary school normally restricted to the high colonial elite. But, studying with the nuns in Batavia marked Gerdy off as a child of more quality. She had arrived at the school in fall, 1941, and had made some West Sumatran Nederlander friends there. By early 1942, however, her family back in Sawahlunto knew that the Japanese forces were poised to invade Singapore and then the Indies. So, they sent Gerdy home to Padang, West Sumatra, on a small coastal boat (she was the only girl or woman aboard).

Gerdy and her mother were soon forced by Japanese soldiers to leave their home in Sawahlunto. The house was looted soon afterward. The thirteen-year-old, her mother, and her maternal grandmother spent the Japanese occupation years in a pair of rough internment camps in Padang and then (for two and a half years) in Bangkinang women's prison camp, in Riau. This camp was located northeast of the Minangkabau town of Payahkumbuh, many hours distant by truck. The Bangkinang camps, one for women and children and one for men and boys over about age twelve, had been built

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1600s. And, on later eras, see especially Taylor's chapter 6, "The Inner Life of Late Colonial Society," pp. 135-158. Also insightful are the many comments on "Indo culture" in Frances Gouda's excellent *Dutch Culture Overseas: Colonial Practice in the Netherlands Indies 1900-1942* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1995), esp. chapter 5, "Gender, Race, and Sexuality: Citizenship and Colonial Culture in the Dutch East Indies," pp. 157-193. Danilyn Fox Rutherford's "Trekkling to New Guinea: Dutch Colonial Fantasies of a Virgin Land, 1900-1942," in *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*, ed. Frances Gouda and Julia Clancy-Smith (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), pp. 255-272, is also a theoretically strong source, as is the introduction to that volume, by Frances Gouda and Julia Clancy-Smith (pp. 1-20). See also the Pamela Pattynama essay in *Domesticating the Empire*, entitled "Secrets and Danger: Interracial Sexuality in Louis Couperus's *The Hidden Force* and Dutch Colonial Culture around 1900," pp. 84-107. The valuable essays by Ann Laura Stoler are noted below; these provide strong theoretical visions for studying memories of the Indies' Eurasians.

<sup>10</sup> Nederlander émigré communities today are sometimes distinguished by an avid historical self-consciousness and a scholarly bent. For a fascinating reflection of the Sawahlunto Nederlanders' interest in their history, see the website "Sawah Loento families (1880-1900) van Sumatra's Westkust," <http://home.hccnet.nl/wer.davies/fsloenth.html>). This site lists marriage and birth date information for numerous Eurasian families from the town in colonial times.

<sup>11</sup> The academic education of girls in Nederlander Sawahlunto seems to have been a prime concern for high-status families there. The Ursuline school in Jakarta was not less in status than the MULO school where Gerdy's family enrolled two younger sons, Rudy and Henri, in Yogyakarta, before the war.

quickly by forced labor in what previously had been largely unsettled forest near Pekan Baru. The women's camp where Gerdy lived housed Dutch nurses and nuns, some Australian health personnel from Singapore, and many Sumatran families especially close to the Dutch, such as the Sawahlunto Nederlanders. At its largest, there were at least 2,300 inmates of Bangkinang women's camp.

Gerdy and her mother survived, though not in good health, and after the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and the end of the war, the two were reunited with Gerdy's father and three older brothers, who had themselves been interned in different parts of the Indies. After several chaotic, violent months in Padang at the beginning of the Revolution during the *bersiap* times (*bersiap*—get ready, signifying “get ready” for revolutionary, Indonesian control of the country), the family moved briefly to Jakarta (Batavia). One older son went into a mental hospital there; he had been traumatized by forced service in the war as a field medic, Gerdy says today. From Jakarta the family shipped out to the Netherlands, where they settled. Gerdy and her husband Daniel, who had not only similar childhoods in West Sumatra but also similar wartime internment experiences in Padang and the Bangkinang camps, emigrated with their three young children to the United States in 1962. They made their home in southern California, which has a large Nederlander community. Daniel is an American citizen, while Gerdy has retained her Dutch citizenship.

Gerdy's characterization of her social identity and her pronounced pride in her specific Nederlander-of-Sawahlunto heritage help make her childhood recollections important for Indonesianists to hear. Gerdy and Daniel spent unusually privileged, pleasant, economically secure early childhoods in Sawahlunto and Bukittinggi. Gerdy's father was the director of technical operations for the Sawahlunto deep coal mine; a valued state company technician, he also taught at the mining sciences college there. Daniel's father was the top public utilities official for the city of Bukittinggi. Both their families on all sides were of mixed race heritage—persons whom scholars sometimes call Indo-Europeans, or more loosely (often too loosely), Indos, in a more familiar usage. Notably, in our 2004 talks Gerdy never used the terms “Indo” or “Indo-European,” but spoke robustly of her Nederlander standing. In fact, in her warm and often funny recollections of Nederlander community life in Sawahlunto in the 1930s, she spoke in uniformly positive terms of this sort of person and community. She was clearly operating a rhetorical world away from the constructed society more familiar to many Indonesians today in Java, where so often “Indos” are perceived as a population of “half-breeds,” collaborationists, and descendants of “loose women.” Her narrative opens questions about sexuality and perceived group membership, about sexual threats and storytelling, and about memories of racialized social hierarchies in Indies pasts. Her conversations with me in 2004 were also, implicitly, about language. Beyond all this, though, Nederlander childhood memories of this sort, situated temporally astride the end of the colonial era, the Japanese times, and the Indonesian revolution, also concern youthful worlds turned upside down, and children in pain.

### **Dutch-Overseas, in the Tropics**

Gerdy and Daniel's childhood homes, and for the most part their entire childhood worlds (except for trips to the market and communications with their Indonesian

servants), were Dutch-speaking. As children and youth, Gerdy and Daniel tell me now, they were strongly Dutch-identified (although to a casual observer today, at this distance in time from the racial classification schemes of the late colonial Indies, they certainly “look Indonesian”). Both have identified themselves, then and now, as Nederlanders.<sup>12</sup> That is, they were not Hollanders, Gerdy says, for Hollanders are those blond and blue-eyed residents of a few particular provinces in the northern Netherlands. And, they were not Indonesians, nor Minangkabau; Gerdy and her husband made it clear to me in our interviews that those persons surely came from different societies than theirs. Indonesians did not speak such good Dutch, I was informed, and they had different hopes and lower social horizons than did the Sawahlunto Nederlanders—an apparently thumping self-confident and self-aware community, as Gerdy now remembers it.

“Until Japan,” the mining town’s higher ranked Nederlanders enjoyed an abundant life. Many had sufficiently large salaries to afford their brighter children sure access to the elite European-language schools. They boasted Christian church membership (Gerdy and Daniel are Catholic). They had custom-designed, solid-walled houses, and cars with drivers, and house servants. They ate European and Indisch food. The children as well as the adults were swept up in a life of social clubs (the Soos) and sporting events; they even had fancy dress balls. And families went on regular, mining company-financed furloughs to Holland. This agreeable existence in Nederlander West Sumatra during their early childhoods made Gerdy and Daniel Ungerer’s sudden internment by the Japanese military and their experiences of harsh, frightening prison camp life all that more of a shock. Bangkinang camp turned out to be a bitter revelation about fate.

Gerdy’s family and her friends her age have found that she has only recently begun to talk about her Japanese wartime experiences. But, over the last several years, at the behest of a college student granddaughter, Gerdy has started to present public lectures about her childhood and youth to university audiences in southern California. In these talks, she has tended to focus on life in the Bangkinang women’s internment camp. This is, in part, perhaps because the 1995 commercial film “Paradise Road” (with major stars Glenn Close and Cate Blanchette)<sup>13</sup> publicized the topic of women’s internment camps in World War II-era Sumatra. That film deals with the efforts of a group of Australian and British society women and nurses from Singapore to survive their long incarceration in Belalau camp, in South Sumatra (Gerdy’s own aunt was imprisoned there). The Western women’s evacuation ship from Singapore had been torpedoed near Bangka Island, and they swam ashore there, only to be quickly captured by Japanese soldiers. On Bangka and later in Belalau camp near Palembang, they formed an *a capella* singing group and performed classical pieces from memory in an effort to maintain their esprit de corps and will to survive (only twenty-four of the thirty-two nurses captured near Bangka lived through their internment).

<sup>12</sup> The clubs in southern California for émigré Eurasians from the former Dutch East Indies may play a significant role in constructing such identities, and terminologies, today.

<sup>13</sup> “Paradise Road” was directed by Bruce Beresford and was based in part on the experiences of musician Norah Chambers and the missionary nursing sister Margaret Dryburgh (who died in Belalau camp on February 21, 1945). For background information, see Helen Colijn, *Song of Survival: Women Interned* (Ashland, OR: White Clouds Press, 1997). Relatives and admirers of the many interned Australian nurses maintain websites in these women’s memories; see, for instance, “Lest We Forget: Another ‘Brave Women’ Page,” at <http://www.angellpro.com.au/lestweforget.htm>.

Gerdy Ungerer does know this film, and admires it. In her public talks, she too emphasizes some of the headline topics associated with Japanese internment camp life in World War II-era Southeast Asia: the women's dealings with vicious camp guards; the illnesses; the leg sores; the sexual humiliation of being targets of the Japanese soldiers. But, as I listened to Gerdy's whole series of stories in the home of our mutual friends in California, her many comments about what it was like "before Japan" to live a notably high-status Nederlander childhood in Sawahlunto, specifically, also struck me as compelling and as deeply connected to the way she narrated her World War II experiences. Gerdy's positive portrayal of her own Sawahlunto childhood universe acted as an immediate check for me, correcting my own apparently rigid ways of thinking about pre-war Indies colonial society, which I had imagined to be populated by "the Dutch," "the Indonesians," and the (often low status) "Indos," arranged into a moral taxonomy dictated by heroic Indonesian nationalism. And, her affecting stories about life in the camps as a teenager also led me to rethink my heretofore vaguely negative understanding of "the Indos." This was a population not much in evidence in the southern Batak towns and villages where I have done most of my fieldwork; the muted talk about the Eurasians in the Indies that I have heard in South Tapanuli has been sparse, and derogatory.

When perceived in the most generalized terms, Indos are sometimes taken to be offspring of European fathers and native mothers. Some of Gerdy's more distant ancestors, and even her father, had indeed been foundlings abandoned by Dutch fathers. And, some conjugal relationships in past generations in Sawahlunto as a whole had been non-legal unions involving a European man and a Javanese, Sundanese, Minangkabau, or Chinese-Indonesian woman. But by the time of Gerdy's early childhood, Sawahlunto Nederlander society consisted predominantly of mestizo families with long histories, connected to each other by Nederlander-to-Nederlander marriages.<sup>14</sup> Sawahlunto high society was heavily invested in social propriety in the 1930s; this was evident in their church weddings, in their scrambles for top schools for the children, and in ongoing gossip about and with Indonesian nannies, chauffeurs, and cooks, practices that emblemized a proper European life in the tropics.

On this point, Gerdy Ungerer's autobiographical narratives amply bear out Ann L. Stoler's and Frederick Cooper's observation in "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda" that the racialized and sometimes "culturalized" social hierarchy schemes of late colonial societies were neither rigid nor fixed, for *any* of the players in places like the Dutch East Indies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>15</sup> Stoler and Cooper highlight the fluctuating nature of social personhood in moral universes like the 1920s-1930s Indies, or early twentieth-century Vietnam, or the late nineteenth-century Belgian Congo. In all these places, hierarchies of privilege tied to named, ranked groups ("the Europeans," "the natives") were inherently unstable, despite colonial states' proclamations otherwise about whiteness and moral value. In the Indies by the last colonial decades, sexual unions between high-status European

<sup>14</sup> To trace out some of these, see again the website "Sawah Loento families," at <http://home.hccnet.nl/wer.davies/fsloenth.html>. Some of the family tree information there does vary from what Gerdy Ungerer related, it should be noted. The site has considerable information on Padang's Nederlander families, as well.

<sup>15</sup> Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-56.



men and native women, between Dutch soldiers and barracks concubines, and between a whole range of European plantation employees and adventurers and native women had produced mixed-race progeny in abundance. Some of these fell into pauperism; others "married white" (typically women but not men did so); other mixed-race persons coalesced into different sorts of mestizo communities (or part-communities, connected in varying ways to the *totok* or "full blood" Dutch).<sup>16</sup> Personhood categories in all of these circumstances were porous and also the objects of much cultural anxiety in the Indies. By their very presence, mixed-race groups (perhaps especially the forthrightly prideful ones such as the Netherlanders of Sawahlunto) belied any fiction of stable categorization schemes in a "white run" colony.

Who were the Europeans in colonial societies? Apparently much was open to debate if a Sumatran company town could have a Dutch-speaking, European culture enclave like the one in which Gerdy grew up. Beyond Sawahlunto, Eurasians were numerous in the Dutch tropics: by 1900 almost three-fourths of persons legally deemed to be Europeans in the Indies were of mixed-race background. Gerdy's Dutch-toned sector of Sawahlunto was but one facet of a much larger social phenomenon in the colony.

The identity of "the native" was also in contention, in small places like Sawahlunto and in the Indies as a whole. Since the era of the United East Indies Company (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC), the significance of physiognomy could be subsumed to a degree for mixed-race persons who were distinguished by facility in a European language or cultural competence. Legal definitions of Europeaness shifted several times in the Dutch East Indies. Gerdy grew up in a childhood world in which the recognized offspring of European fathers were legally European, as were native women formally wed to Dutch men. For Gerdy and her siblings, the attainment of complete fluency in Dutch by age seven and the use of Dutch as a first language was an additional, key marker of European legal status (although as many as 70 percent of the approximately seventy thousand mixed-race persons legally classified as Europeans in 1900 knew little Dutch).

Indies-born, Christian, Dutch-speaking, European-aculturated, mixed-race children like Gerdy and Daniel qualified as European on all these formal scores. However, they came of age at a time when state family policy was shifting tectonically from one form of marriage to another. Older patterns of informally accepted concubinage between European men and native servant women (or other low-status Indies women) were giving way to a new, highest-status marriage model: that between a *totok* (full white) Dutch man and a *totok* Dutch woman. Large numbers of full-Dutch women were able legally to emigrate to the Indies by the early 1900s, whereas their numbers had been strictly limited before. Mixed-race communities like that of Sawahlunto were thus living near a precipice by the late 1920s, when Gerdy was born. These social worlds were perched on the outer edge of the mestizo Indies culture, one that had developed over centuries of mixed unions, before the arrival of large numbers of white women.

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<sup>16</sup> Gerdy Ungerer's family history suggests that such circa-1930s mestizo communities in towns like Sawahlunto were not only connected to similar communities in Sumatran cities like Padang and Medan, but also to the Eurasian circles of Yogyakarta and Batavia.

Stoler and Cooper note that colonial social worlds with large numbers of *metis* or mixed bloods were especially subject to constant personal and household-level worry about who belonged in the high elite, and who did not.<sup>17</sup> Such anxieties perhaps characterized the fully *totok* families and *totok* husband/Eurasian wife unions as well. But, Sawahlunto Nederlander families (in Gerdy Ungerer's retrospective portrayal) seemed to have reveled in their "mixedness" and to have gone about life with aplomb. If their mestizo world and its claims to high status were under siege, adults perhaps did not acknowledge that to children.

Gerdy Ungerer's narrative opens new windows on this sort of social world in flux, and suggests too that the vibrant kind of mestizo/mestiza Eurasian community that historian Jean Taylor has described for 1600s Batavia<sup>18</sup> may have developed in a number of variations throughout the archipelago, with each community perhaps flowering in distinct ways, depending on region and socioeconomic circumstance. Eurasian societies in the Indies may have existed in numerous forms, largely ignored by scholars, beyond the more familiar Eurasian locales which have been the objects of study: Batavia at the time of the VOC, plantation belt Deli around 1900, and plantation and court city society in Java in the late 1800s and early 1900s. We can turn first to Gerdy's recollections and then reflect on those memories in relation to some of the published scholarship on "Indo life stories" (here the term "Indo" is unstable, obviously). We can then consider Gerdy's memoir in relation to different ways of telling Sawahlunto history. My conclusion asks what the full scope of Gerdy Ungerer's childhood reminiscences (covering as they do both privileged times in Sawahlunto and life in the Japanese camps) has to tell us about the historiographic status of Sumatran childhood memoirs, seen generally. Are narrative memoirs like Gerdy Ungerer's working to de-couple imageries of guilt from colonial pasts in places like Sawahlunto by framing memories of an elite Eurasian society with reports of horrific internment camp experiences? Or are today's queries about guilt misplaced if we are dealing with tales about children?

A veritable library-full of memoirs written by Europeans and mixed-blood persons interned by the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies are available for study.<sup>19</sup> In general, however, these accounts tend to focus on the 1942-1945 internment experience itself

<sup>17</sup> On this point, see also Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Gender and Morality in the Making of Race," in Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 41-78. See also her fine essay, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: Cultural Competence and the Dangers of *Metissage*," *ibid.*, pp. 79-111. Another valuable chapter in that same anthology is "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," pp. 22-40.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia*.

<sup>19</sup> As general background to reading such memoirs, a classic source is L. de Jong's *The Collapse of a Colonial Society: The Dutch in Indonesia during the Second World War* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002); this volume is taken from Part 11b of de Jong's *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. Especially telling wartime memoirs are found in Dieuwke Wendelaar Bonga, *Eight Prison Camps: A Dutch Family in Japanese Java* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1996). For a Dutch memoir, see Margaretha Ferguson's *Mammie ik ga dood: Aantekeningen uit de Japanse tijd op Java, 1942-1945* ("Mummy I am dying: Notes from the Japanese time on Java, 1942-1945) (Den Haag: Leopold, 1976). Rob Nieuwenhuys's memoir is one of the most important: *Een beetje oorlog, Java, 8 December 1941- 15 November 1945* (A little bit of war, Java 8 December, 1941-15 November, 1945) (Amsterdam: Querido, translation, 1979). Numerous memoirs are cited in the 198-entry annotated bibliography "Japanese Camps in Southeast Asia," compiled by the antiquarian bookdealer, Antiquariaat Gemilang, of Bredevoort, The Netherlands. See their website: <http://www.antiquariaten.com/gemilang/catalogs/c00667.htm>.

(not surprisingly) and pay little or no attention to the authors' lives before World War II. In contrast, Gerdy Ungerer's story is very much balanced on three equal support beams: her comfortable, even cosseted childhood days in Sawahlunto; her time in the temporary holding camps in Padang during the early months of the war; and then her two and a half years as an adolescent in Bangkinang camp, out in the Riau jungle. Because she deals with such a broad span of time, her oral memoirs forthrightly treat issues of *metis* identities along with World War II-era Japanese prison camp experiences. Her oral memories hold all of this material together on a single narrative plane.

This is how I shall listen to Gerdy's story and offer it here, exploring the possibility that childhood memoirs by Indies Eurasians, when conjoined with reports of those same persons' World War II internment camp experiences, allow us to rethink the nature of "the Indos" in historical memory. I shall spotlight a theme that Gerdy Ungerer returned to repeatedly in all her recollections: "The women were very tough" in dealing with life both in Sawahlunto and in the Japanese camps, she said. This imagery of female strength pulses through her construction of her Nederlander identity and past, in the mining town, in the Padang gaol, and in Bangkinang camp. The fact that she was a bubbly thirteen-year-old kid when her fortunes reversed in 1942, transforming her swiftly from Sawahlunto debutante material into a prison camp internee, suggests an additional lesson: the possibility that some scholarly categories for dealing with Eurasians in the Indies and today need to be recalibrated. In popular historical depictions throughout parts of Indonesia, the so-called "Indos" are still too often associated with guilt and purportedly unsavory sexual alliances with "the Dutch." But, as Gerdy Ungerer clearly intends, such rhetoric is hard to maintain when dealing with a child's story, and with memories of children in war. Her perspective is challenging and illuminating.

### A Sawahlunto Childhood

Gerdy Ungerer's family on both the maternal and paternal sides had advanced from foundling status to become leaders of Sawahlunto's Christian high society by the time the girl was born. Her father's brilliance at his job seems to have been instrumental here: a cast-off child of a Sundanese mother and a Dutch father (a boy literally "found in the marketplace"), he was taken in by a spinster cousin and deposited in school, where he excelled. He was given the family name Erlemann. Jealousies directed at the Erlemann household from less privileged Sawahlunto Nederlander families apparently abounded. Gerdy remembers herself, as a child, having been buffeted by these emotional skirmishes at many turns. Yet Gerdy Ungerer also remembers her younger years as a time of family warmth and fun, enlivened by her capable mother.

At one point in our conversations we look at a large map of West Sumatra and discuss the different ways one can approach Sawahlunto from Padang. One route goes past Muara Kalaban. In all the following conversations, please note particularly the ways in which terms such as "the Dutch" are used. I have occasionally edited out short questions and comments of my own in these talks from the transcripts that follow. The material presented here is a small portion of our taped conversations. Gerdy, her

husband, and I were present in all the interviews. The Summerfields left us by ourselves.

**Gerdy Ungerer (GU):** "Muara Kalaban has a swimming pool there. In the vacation time, my Mom was always so much with children, you know—and she would gather the children in Sawahlunto, and she buys everyone a package of *nasi rames* [a mixed rice dish with various condiments] and they all carried a *fleis*, you know, like for water—like for the military, a water bottle like the military have. And, we all have that, and hats on, and we, we would take the trip over the mountains, to Muara Kalaban—so that's what she was doing. And we had some servants with us, carrying some things. And, she would stop there and when she sees young coconuts, you know, she would get somebody and—then we'd have coconut to drink! Oh, that was so good. And then, they say, after you drink the young coconut water, you have weak knees! [We all laugh.] And we went on ahead, and we went to Muara Kalaban and we were swimming there, but, on the way back, we took the train. And she would finance everything, my Mom—so, so it was always lots and lots of fun. It was good, yes, it was good. So I have very good child memories, before ... "

I say, "Before the war," and she agrees. The town of Sawahlunto, for the fifty or so high-status *Nederlander* families in residence there "before Japan," supported this sort of effervescent existence for children that Gerdy remembers as having been so secure. I ask, how big a settlement was Sawahlunto back then? And, what did the town look like? Daniel says, "Yes, you go past Danau [Lake] Singkarak, and then you've got Solok, and then Silungkang, and ... "

**GU:** "And then you get Sawahlunto. And it's like, like, it's built like, like a cup, I always say, with mountains around it."

We all discuss the town being in a valley.

**GU:** "And [it is] not as hot as Padang [SR: 'Oh, that's nice!'], and not as cold as Bukittingi."

**SR (Susan Rodgers):** "OK, so at that time, how big a settlement was it? Like, were there thousands of families connected to running the mine, or ... ?"

**GU:** "No, no. The Dutch families ... "

**Daniel Ungerer (DU):** "You always talk about Dutch families, or, or people called Dutch. And probably, what, fifty, not more, not more."

Gerdy and Daniel go on to say that these families were concerned with running the mine, or working for the government. Gerdy adds, "There's a hospital. We had our own doctor – " Daniel says, "A military hospital."

**GU:** "A military hospital, and it was also for the mine, because he was hired by the mine. And, we had two, three schools there. It's the Dutch school, the Catholic school, and the HIS [the *Hollandse Inlandse School*, an elementary school using Dutch]."

"Always the HIS," Daniel says. Some *Minangkabau* families lived in town, too, I find out.

**GU:** "Oh yes, working for the mine."

**DU:** "Working for the mine. And then there's one thing of course that most people don't realize, is that the people—Indonesian people—and when they had good educations, they were regarded as equivalent to the Dutch. Because the language determines how you were seen."

I learn more details about Sawahlunto life.

**GU:** "We had a co-op, like a supermarket. It was run by the mine; my Dad was in charge of it. He hired somebody as a manager there. We had the Soos ... "

**DU:** "The Societé."

**GU:** "The Soos. You know about the Soos? The club. The society, it's called S-o-o-s, Soos."

The families had dances, and a bowling alley. "And theater, we had there, and we also had a hotel in Sawahlunto," Gerdy says. I ask if the young people from this town visited back and forth with Netherlander friends in other big West Sumatran towns. Gerdy says, "Yeah, sometimes we did," and Daniel comments, "If you had a car."

**GU:** "Yeah, we had a car. And, my older brothers went to school already in Padang, in the MULO."

The three brothers later moved on to secondary schools in Batavia and Yogyakarta. How Gerdy's family attained this marked level of success had been explained earlier, when she told me some of her family history.

**GU:** "My Aunt was in that camp [Belalau camp, the one portrayed in the film "Paradise Road"]."

**SR:** "Down in Palembang!?! So, so then, your family was dispersed all over Sumatra?"

**GU:** "Uh, kind of, yes, uh-huh. I had one aunt that left Sawahlunto, and went—her husband went to work at the mines in Palembang—Bengkulu." [This uncle was sent to work in the Muara Enem mines.]

**SR:** "Uh-huh. Let me back up a little bit, because I need kind of a time framework here in terms of when you were both born, and where, and a little bit of family background, before we get into that, so—Gerdy, why don't we start with you, and then ... "

**GU:** "OK. Well, I was born in Sawahlunto, you know it's a mining town, where my father was in charge of the mines then, and that was 1928 when I was born. And I always start, you know, my talk [her lectures] like this, because we were, well, well off, you can say, you know. So we had a car, and a chauffeur. I was driving around—you know, the chauffeur was always driving me around to school, and back home, just like that. So, I was very, very spoiled: very spoiled! Because I had three brothers—my parents, my Mom, my Mom married very early, before she was seventeen years old."

**SR:** "Oh, OK, OK. And she was from—where?"

**GU:** "She was, she—her, her maiden name is Geenen. It's Geenen. And she—her mother was half-Portuguese."

I exclaim, "Like people in Malacca!" since I hadn't known that there were part-Portuguese people by this late date in this part of Sumatra.

**GU:** "Half Portuguese. And her maiden name, so you know right away, is Maitimo. M-a-i-t-i-m-o, Maitimo, it's a Portuguese name."

We discuss the fame of the Portuguese in Southeast Asia concerning their skills "in sailing ships" and fighting, as Gerdy puts it. Daniel notes, "Well, you know, they always say, 'Dutch Indonesians,' but they can be sort of ... "

**SR:** "Anything!"

**DU:** "Anything! As long as you are in that country."

Daniel says that this particular relative worked in the tin mines in Bangka Island, and we go on to discuss southern Sumatran mining operations for awhile.

**GU:** "Strip mining. But, what I wanted to tell you that was so interesting to me: my grandmother always told me, her mother was a foundling from the Aceh War."

She specifies, "My grandmother Maitimo ... [SR: 'Yeah, your mother's mother.'] Yeah, my mother's mother. *Her* mother was a foundling of the Aceh War."

"Yeah, they found her as a baby in the *sawah* [the rice paddies]," Daniel reports. The child was found in a border area, Gerdy relates. Then she continues, "... So, then the nuns took care of her, and my grandmother always said, she was blond and [had] blue eyes. They never found out who she was. Uh, apparently her parents were murdered." Daniel adds, "In the battle."

**GU:** "Yeah, in the battle. Yeah, so, and that was so interesting to me, when she told me that—you know, that she never knew *her* grandparents."

Gerdy goes on, "... She was raised by the nuns, and then she, at a young age, also married the Maitimo guy." I ask about these convent orphanages, and Gerdy and Daniel both say that many large West Sumatran towns had them; these institutions were run by Dutch nuns. We go on with her maternal grandmother's story. Her great-grandmother married Mr. Maitimo.

**GU:** "And that's where my grandmother came from ... And then she [Gerdy's grandmother] married, uh, she was teaching in school, my grandmother. Her name was Helena. That's what they called her: Helena. And she was teaching at the school and then, here came this Geenen guy, and he had lost his wife, and he had two kids ... A boy and a girl. And he, he was looking for a wife! ... And so the nuns said that she would be the perfect wife for him. But she didn't want to, because she loved teaching—and, uh, but she did marry him." Helena was just eighteen or nineteen years old at the time.

**GU:** "Very young. And she said, she just *loved* teaching. And then she said, I—and she still had her old schoolbooks and song books and there were always songs in English, in German, and in Dutch of course, and in German, you know. So she was probably better schooled than my Mom ever was."

I try to ascertain Mr. Geenen's background, and Gerdy says, "You know, I don't know, what his background was." Daniel contributes, "The Geenens came, many Geenens are still in Holland."

Gerdy agrees and reports that the Geenens had four children and lived in Sawahlunto. She goes on, "Because he was, remember that he had to travel a lot? To do

with the government, the taxes? Collecting. He was a tax collector or something." This was all in about the year 1895 or so. She adds, "My Mom was born in what time, 1902." We talk about many diverse topics concerning Gerdy's own childhood, and then we meander back to family history, to her father's side. Gerdy mentions that some people in Sawahlunto resented her father's success as a community leader and technical supervisor at the mine.

GU: "Oh, that too [jealousy]. Because my Dad was very young when he came to the mines and very smart. He himself was—uh, a cousin of his or his older sister, it was something like that: she found him when he was just nine years old, just ... "

DU: "Not going to school."

GU: "Not going to school, just being in the market, or the *pasars*, you know. And she brought him, and she took him in, and he was nine years old when he went to first grade. And he finished it [all of elementary school] in three years. You know, when he was twelve."

I say, "Hmm! And his family background was, what?" Gerdy answers, "His Mom was according to what I know is Sundanese. And his father was according to him was from Dutch—Amsterdam. Because the name Erlemann is well-known in Amsterdam."

SR: "OK, so he was probably half Sundanese and half Dutch."

GU: "Yeah. But he was very dark."

I ask, "How could he ever have been left by himself in the market, then? With a father who was Dutch?" Gerdy replies, "Because his father ... " and Daniel chimes in, "Left." I say, "Kind of left. Left."

DU: "That's what the Dutch ... "

GU: "That was what the Dutch did—they'd just leave, you know, because they already have a wife."

Daniel adds, "Or they return to Holland and marry another girl ... "

GU: "And so he was left, and his mother was just going around, whatever—her other family—and so, so she didn't care about him."

I say, "Umhmm, so he was kind of left behind in the *pasar* ... " and Gerdy agrees. "And, and this, this cousin, Tante Fine, took him in. And, she was so much older than he was. And that's when he started his education." Gerdy's father went on to learn the technical aspects of coal mining by apprenticeship. When he and Gerdy's mother marry, in 1919, he is well-employed. After the birth of a first child, a daughter, in Sawahlunto, sadness develops. Gerdy relates: "But, but I wanted to tell you, is when my Mom married so young, she had a daughter—and she died when she was two years old." I ask if this baby was her first child; she was. "And according to my Mom when she talked to me later on, she said, she always thought that the baby was poisoned." The child, who had been bright and precociously talkative, died very suddenly of a seizure. Gerdy recalls, "Yes, very sudden—and she was a very healthy child. My Mom said, she was so smart, at two years of age—she would always talk to the plants, and flowers, and so—she would always talk to them. I have the same thing!

Always talk to trees and plants and hold them you know and things like that. So, she had that very much."

Who in town would have wanted to do such a thing as poison a baby to death? I ask (disingenuously, since I had heard years' worth of stories of Batak and Minangkabau poisonings in contexts of social tensions). The household had envious enemies, I learned. Later on, when rumors swirled about Gerdy's father and his eye for the ladies, others also came to resent the family's professional success in the mine. Sometimes women in the market would whisper about Gerdy's mother, when she walked into the *pasar* (the gossip concerned Gerdy's father). One time, Gerdy's mother marched into the *totok* Dutch boss's office and demanded that he transfer the family to another mining concern in far southern Sumatra, near Muara Enem; by this means, she hoped to distance her husband from temptation. The boss refused, saying that Mr. Erlemann was crucial to the Ombilin mining operations, but he did agree to transfer the implicated party and her husband, a relative and another mining technician. Off they went to Muara Enem.

Gerdy's mother also dealt forthrightly with her children's health problems. Her oldest boy, Edwin, was bitten by a rabid dog when he was about five; the only anti-rabies serum in the Indies was in an institute in Bandung at the time. Since it took days to transport the boy there (note, of course, that this was a family that could seek such a cure), his brain was affected, causing him difficulties later on when he was enrolled in the academically challenging MULO school in Padang. As a result, the family took him out of that school and arranged to send him to a trade school in Batavia. Gerdy herself, "always a straight-A student," was sent to the cloister school there, at age thirteen. That institution taught academic subjects in French, along with lessons in the social graces.

GU: "And I was only thirteen years old, you know, away from my mother. I was so homesick, for Sawahlunto, for my Mom, you know, and I met his [Daniel's] sister, his sister was there, three years ahead. So she replaced my Mom, there, you know! You know, she was older, and she was from Bukittinggi, the same area, Fort de Kock, it was called. So I related to her right away because she was somebody from there, from my area."

This elite Ursuline school prepared young women for good jobs, or for further study. Hearing about the school, I theorize that perhaps the girls could secure promising jobs since they could speak Dutch, French, and Indonesian. Both Daniel and Gerdy respond, "Not Indonesian" at this point. I ask, "Not Indonesian? So there was no Indonesian used?" Daniel replies, "No Indonesian. Even educated Indonesians were not speaking Indonesian." I ask, "Inside the schools?" and Daniel comes back, "In anywhere, anywhere."

SR: "But at that time when you were thirteen, were you fluent in Indonesian? Could you speak Indonesian?"

GU: "No, I only spoke with the servants—that's what we call *pasar Maleis* [Market Malay]."

Daniel goes on, a bit later: "All the people, the Dutch people, were speaking only Dutch. Only to the servants you had to talk a little bit in what they called *pasar Maleis*."



**GU:** "We had one servant who we took back to the Netherlands, when my Dad got the one-year leave, you know. So, and he spoke Dutch too. So that was easy for us to communicate with him."

Eventually we return to the topic of events in 1941 and 1942 in the Ursuline school. Gerdy recalls, "So when the war broke out, in December, his sister made arrangements for herself to go by herself back to Bukittinggi. My Dad called, sent a telegram, I think, to the nuns, that I had to stay put. I had to stay with them." I ask, "They—your father felt that was safer for you?"

**GU:** "Yes, and not to go with his older sister because she was only seventeen years old, and 'you're too young to go by bus ... So, you stay with, until they find a boat, that you can come by boat,' and that was in February [1942]."

**SR:** "February, OK, so just about the time that the Japanese are really going to invade Sumatra [Japanese paratroopers landed in Palembang, South Sumatra, on February 15, 1942]."

**GU:** "Yeah, and so they got word and two nuns took me over to the ship. And I, you know, if you asked me now, I don't know who paid for it, how they arranged it, but I was on the ship."

The boat was a coaster, heading to Padang. "It was a small boat, a very small boat," Gerdy comments, "And that was the funny thing: the nuns talked to the captain and they said, she should not leave her cabin. Because I was the only woman on board." Things turned out to be safe. "Yeah, I was OK. I was—no, there was only an engineer that came often, that something was wrong with the fan, but he just wanted to talk. And they served my meals, and I had a little what they called, a porthole ... And I could look out, and I saw—and, you know, we saw some mines, in the ocean. So they had to be very, very careful, you know. So it was kind of scary, but you know, when you're so young who *cares?*"

Gerdy did not even get seasick, she recalls. "So you were all right," I comment. "And you're all by yourself!"

**GU:** "Yeah, all by myself. Yeah, well, my Mom always said to me, 'You're tough'—and I think I am. Because I was not scared at all, you know, I was reading, there. And the captain comes, daily."

Back home in Sawahlunto, Gerdy's mother felt that she had "no children," since Gerdy hadn't gotten back home yet and Edwin was in trade school in Batavia and the two other boys, Rudi and Henry, were in MULO school in Yogya. So, Gerdy's safe arrival at the harbor in Padang was a happy occasion, and "My Mom picked me up with the chauffeur." Some days later Gerdy and her mother set off to Bukittinggi to deliver the luggage of Daniel's sister (bags that Gerdy had hauled home on the boat). Gerdy and Daniel had not yet met, though Gerdy knew her friend had a brother.

**GU:** "And we had lunch, you know. And, and then she opened one of the doors and she pushed me in, she said, 'There's Dantje,' and he was sitting behind a big desk. He looked up at me, he never said a word, he just looked up and down—and I turned around and I said to myself, 'What a jerk!'"

**SR:** "Teenage boys! Not worth anything ... "

"Before I could say anything, I was won already," Daniel remembers. Gerdy was wearing a long smock dress, the details of which he recalls even today. We return to our discussion of the impending Japanese incursions into Sumatra. I comment, "So, did your family at that time have any plans to want to leave Sumatra, because the Japanese were coming, or you just felt you would be OK?"

**GU:** "No, my father felt that he was needed there, and he was. But he was, in the war: they were all in the military."

Daniel says that "Not only the higher ups, all, all the Dutch—all the Dutch" were inducted into the military. Gerdy's father was taken into a special engineering section of the army, charged with the task of blowing up the West Sumatran coal mining infrastructure once the Japanese came. The invasion occurred quickly, and soon Japanese advance men were in Sawahlunto.

**GU:** "And that's what they said, for the men to work harder, the women and children were put in one whole unit of the [Sawahlunto] hospital, like an internment camp, to force them [the men in skilled jobs] to keep the production, the coal production going ... So, they met the production [goals], and after a month they let us go home."

The Sawahlunto wives and children of the mine supervisors had been interned in the local hospital, as hostages. There was enough to eat, though, and "Then, we still have kind of fun there, because we were all together there in one place, you know ... We had a guitar and a ukelele, so, in the evening you know we would sit outside, they'd allow us outside the building. But not outside the complex ... And then we were singing songs, and the Japanese guard would ask us if we could sing the Japanese song—you know, he taught us that song. And we were singing for him—that made him very happy."

No looting of the *Nederlanders'* houses had taken place by this point, Gerdy says. The Japanese had confiscated all the cameras and radios, though.

**GU:** "My grandmother at the time was with my aunt, with her younger son, Geenen, Geenen. And so when we were in the houses then all of a sudden, I think two or three months later, there was a meeting at the Soos for the men, and my Dad came home, late, around eleven o'clock at night. And he said, 'I don't think we can go to bed, we all have to pack one suitcase. Per person. And we have to leave, we get up at four o'clock in the morning, and we have to walk to the station and they will board us on the train'—and we were sent to: Padang ... So that's what we did, one suitcase."

"OK, leaving everything else behind," I add, and Gerdy says, "That's when we lost everything."

**SR:** "OK, OK, and when the house was left behind was it looted at that point?"

It was, though as Daniel says, "But you don't know." Gerdy contributes, "Well, that's what they told us later on. I had my bear collection, and I had two dolls, one was a Beatrix doll, you know, Queen Beatrix, when she was a baby, and another German doll I had. But mostly I had my own furniture ... " Doll house furniture, that is.

**GU:** "Yes, I had a real nice size home and all my collection of bears, and so they took everything. And I remember leaving my ring on my table, with the mirrors, and I left it there. I forgot to put it on. [It was taken.] Yeah, it was a very beautiful blue stone. I

remember it so well, and it had a water spot on it. I remember that—and I felt so bad when I left it there. And my Mom had lots of jewelry, and she gave half of it to my Dad and we kept half.”

Her father hid his portion of the jewelry in a Chesterfield cigarette tin while Gerdy and her mother snuck theirs into a sanitary napkin (“It worked!” we both agree). The women and children are loaded onto the train. I ask, “On the train to Padang, were your mother and the other adult women, did—were they very afraid, you know, did they know what might be coming?”

GU: “Well, they started—that’s when the Indonesians already started yelling at us, you know, or laughing. And the train was all boarded up, you couldn’t look outside, so it was quite hot in the train, and it was a very long ride, to Padang ...I think we stopped at Padang Panjang [Daniel says, “Always, always.”] We stopped there, and we tried to buy things from the people, there were always vendors, and they said ... ”

“They didn’t want to?” I ask. Gerdy replies, “No! They said no.”

Once they arrived in Padang, the party had to walk to trucks, and the females were transferred to the girls’ orphanage building, which was being turned into a holding camp. This was across from the Catholic cathedral. There were about three hundred women and children; the “lower-ranked people had still to work in the mines.”

GU: “There was a hedge, you know, a hedge [around the holding area]. I remember that; I could still walk around. We went to the back, there was a wall, a fence for in the back, and we climbed that, and the Drufracks were still living there [friends], and the Brothers, and we would climb there and ask them about news.”

Sometimes the girls would get extra snacks there. Gerdy goes on, “You know, strange enough, you were not thinking at that time what will happen.” Two surprising events occurred to the girls.

GU: “So before I forget: something happened when we were staying there. Like I said, there was no fencing, just a hedge, you know. Just a *slokan* ...a gully, a gully, there on one side. And I was walking outside the building, just in front of the building near the hedge, and I heard my name, he was calling my name. And I looked, and I saw a Chinese guy whose name was Hop Sing from Sawahlunto. And he said, ‘I have a package here for Non’ Andreas, you know, she’s expecting a baby—the diapers.’ It was a package, very big, and he threw it over the *slokan*, and the hedge, and I caught it. And he said give it to Non’ Andreas. And I said, OK! I knew she was pregnant. And so I gave it to her, and she was very happy because she had her diapers, you know. Because she was about to have the baby. And three days later she was called to the front, and then they got me. And we were taken outside the camp, and put in jail ... She had a cell, and I had a cell and they took us out for interrogation, you know: separate. And so, I mean: we had the same story! She received it from me, I received it from the Chinese guy, because, I said to her—I was, really, like my mother said to me, ‘You’re always so tough,’—I said, ‘Don’t you feel terrible if she has the baby and she has no diapers?! You know, she needs the diapers and they were at her house And so this Chinese guy was, was—I don’t know how she contacted him ... ’ ”

SR: “Yeah, but he was just working as a courier.”

GU: "You know, he *was* very nice, to get it for her, and he just threw it over the fence, over the hedge. But I caught it, since he happened to know me, and I gave it to her, so, what am I ... ?"

DU: "Guilty of ... "

And how were they punished? I ask.

GU: "Every, every one hour they would take us out and over and over again we had to ... "

DU: "Interrogate them."

A Japanese guard was working here in tandem with an Indonesian assistant. The Japanese "just drain you," Gerdy said. She and Non' Andreas were denied food and drink during the questioning. Finally, though, they were let off, largely unharmed. "So," Gerdy concludes, "I was thirteen years old, and already in jail!"

The orphanage site was not really a prison, though; as Daniel comments, "It was a camp. Later we come to a prison." The women and children had a central kitchen and for the most part received enough to eat.

GU: "Already at this cathedral camp they already had leaders [privileged inmates, trustees]. Because something happened that was really scary. And thank goodness, my Mom would always say, that I was too young. Because all the girls who were fifteen and up, up to thirty, I think, they wanted to, they had to come together ... "

And the Japanese asked which ones among them wanted to become, as Daniel said, "serving waitresses in the Japanese restaurant. 'What you want to do, that's your business.'"

GU: "And so about thirty of them went in the bus, but one of our leaders then, Mevrouw Haller [was a chaperone]. Treus Haller was a young woman, very, very tall, you know. Maybe she was 6'2" or 6'3". She was Dutch ... Blond, you know, blue eyes, and she went also ... as a chaperone. And, when they were driving around in Padang they knew that they were taking them to the harbor."

DU: "Not to Bukittinggi to the restaurant."

GU: "Not to the restaurant. They saw that. And there were only—there was a driver and a Japanese next to him, and the one guard. And they overpowered all three of them."

SR: "Oh my goodness! Wow!"

GU: "And they were—and Treus Hamm drove the truck, they got the rifles away from them ['It's good she could drive,' Daniel adds], and they came back in the camp and everybody was, you know, *clapping* their hands and yelling ['and screaming,' Daniel says], and screaming. I don't know what, *what* they did to the three Japanese guards, you know. We never found out. But that was—and they never tried it again."

I say, "Unbelievable! What a great story" and Gerdy notes, "The women were tough, very tough."

## In Padang Gaol

Gerdy's father paid a man to blow up the coal-loading platform at the harbor in Padang and was soon jailed. The three older boys were still in Java in school; Gerdy and her mother were in a little house off to the side of the girls' orphanage, along with others from Sawahlunto. Gerdy reports that people told the girls who had just experienced the narrow escape narrated above, "You guys are lucky that they didn't kill you. Because they had cause to kill." Later on, two of these girls did go to work for the Japanese.

Then a letter arrived for Gerdy, one her father had had smuggled out of the jail near Muara (a key Padang boat dock area).

GU: "But I just received a letter from him, that somebody smuggled, specially for me, not to my Mom, for me, and he was talking there in that letter, I remember so well, I was not in the room, I was sitting in the *speelplaats* [the playground], and I was reading it, and he was explaining to me the trials of life—'Because of the war and that kind of thing, your education stopped,' you know, things like that. And this big earthquake hit."

It was a large quake, shattering much of the house. Cooking and sanitation became difficult; the family also got word that some of the men from Sawahlunto, now in Padang, "were taken out of the jail, we heard that, and put on trains, and they were leaving." No one knew where they were being sent.

GU: "But the jail was empty, they made us pack everything up, we had to leave mattresses, everything, because we had to carry our stuff, and walk to the jail [from the part of town where the girls' orphanage was situated over to the former men's jail near Muara] ... So my Mom was taken by ambulance because she just had surgery on her foot. So I was on my own, and I teamed up with a ladyfriend with two little boys, and we got like a bamboo stick ["Like the vendors!" Daniel adds], and we bundled the, in sheets, what we had, and put it on the stick and I carried one end on my shoulder and still had something in my hand, and she had it too, and the two kids were hanging on."

Daniel comments that the Muara jail was built to accommodate at most eight hundred inmates, but now it had over two thousand.

GU: "But you know, I always said, in my notes [for her lectures], we were there two and a half months and in my notes I said I don't even want to talk about it. Or think about it."

SR: "Umhmm, the time in the jail, in Muara."

GU: "It was that bad. That's when, really, when the trials started out—I was thinking of my father's letter, you know. Ah, the open door toilet. There was one bathroom only, and there were wells, so if you wanted to refresh yourself you'd go to the well and get water ..."

Some boys from the city orphanage were sent there as well, and "that was mean," Gerdy said, since all the women were living there without any means of privacy. As inmates, the Sawahlunto women and their children slept on the concrete floors, "one blanket per person"; under those conditions, an increasing number of detainees were afflicted with dysentery and coughs. Gerdy recalled, "It was terrible. That was where

we started to be very hungry." And, " ... they never let us know," what the future would bring, in terms of where the prisoners would be interned next.

**GU:** "So that was two and a half months. And then we got word that we had to pack and move, and walk to the train station."

"The Japanese are really moving these populations around," I observe. Daniel agrees: "Because they needed room. And the houses. And so what happened was, the men were transported from the jail to a plantation. It wasn't used as a plantation anymore, but they had the buildings. And they had to build the women's camp in Bangkinang."

Bangkinang, near Pekanbaru in Riau, was "in the middle of the jungle! With the tigers!" Gerdy exclaims. After the new camp had been completed by forced labor, the women and children traveled by train as far as Payakumbuh, after which they set out into the forest in five truck convoys. As for the camp, "It was very well built," Daniel says, and Gerdy adds, "Very well built, and it was the best camp."

There were two-storey barracks, with half-meter bunks. The bottom floor of each unit was for mothers with small children, while the top floor, where Gerdy and her mother and now her grandmother stayed, was for older persons. The bathing arrangements turned out to be good since there was lots of flowing water. But, food was not plentiful, at all, although sometimes the women and girls could steal scant amounts of root crops from the small gardens they were told to cultivate. To help supplement the meager rations, a smuggling culture quickly developed between the interned teenage girls and a few of the women, some of the Indonesian guards, and local families living in small forest villages outside the walls. The top-tier Japanese prison officials and their guards tried to keep the smuggling in check, with uneven success. The guards were given nicknames: there was Bluebeard (Captain Sakai, the Japanese commandant); Little Piggy, a Japanese guard; Hot-Chili-Pepper (Cabe Rawe, another Japanese guard); John the Hitter (a third Japanese guard); and Cyclops, a sadistic Korean conscript working for the Japanese. The other guard staff members were Indonesian men, who were open to smuggling blandishments: some of the interned *Nederlander* families had, after all, managed to bring along their gold jewelry. When Gerdy describes how she and her girlfriends near her age dealt with the guards, the Japanese, and the temptations of smuggling, she repeats her judgment that "the women were very tough."

### **In Bangkinang Internment Camp**

In the film "Paradise Road," the Australian, British, and Dutch women internees in Belalau camp in south Sumatra bicker among themselves, complain about their situation (a dire one), and eventually find the inner strength to outlast the cruelty of their Japanese keepers. Some of the published memoirs about Sumatran prison camp experiences strike similar themes. Gerdy Ungerer's oral recollections of her and her mother's two and a half years in Bangkinang camp share some of these motifs, but her narrative also touches on matters specific to this one camp in the Riau hinterlands. Some of the Indonesian guards were helpful; daily life was not uniformly terrible; camp culture maintained contact with the villages outside the wooden walls of the

enclosure. But, this was a time of severe hunger for the internees, a group that included numerous Nederlander women and children from Sawahlunto. The portions of our interviews devoted to this topic run several hours long, but here I shall highlight only sections that deal with two themes: the inmates' smuggling exploits in cahoots with local Indonesian men, and the sexual danger the girls from the Japanese soldiers. In both instances, Gerdy remembers the young women and their mothers reacting with vigor and boldness.

First to Gerdy's depictions of Bangkinang camp itself. Another internee from the camp actually painted water colors of camp life, long after she got out. Gerdy and Daniel had copies of these with them in Los Angeles, and we used them for our conversations.

There were blocks of wooden shed barracks with palm-leaf roofs (Gerdy and her mother and grandmother were in Block C). Long, low washhouses were situated outside. The camp was encircled by a three-meter-high wooden fence and had a big gate at the front. Interned in Bangkinang were about 2,300 women and children, including some Dutch nuns, an Australian woman doctor (recalled in unflattering terms), a few English nurses, some Dutch, and many Nederlanders from different parts of Sumatra. Early on, the kindly Dutch nuns managed to give makeshift school lessons to the children, using sticks and the ground for chalk and blackboards, but soon that practice was disallowed. Bangkinang was, Gerdy recalls, "the best camp, but we were the most hungry." She began to smuggle food in from the outside, since her mother and grandmother were so hungry. The standard food allocation consisted of a small can of rice and a small amount of tapioca flour, which just made "blubber," Gerdy says today with disdain. Her mother had arrived in the camp separately from Gerdy, since she was still hobbled by the leg infection and had to be transported in with the sick. Soon after arrival, some of the Nederlander women decided to augment their food supply:

GU: "So then it started that my aunt, an older aunt, that always wanted to be in charge, asked if they, if we could go outside in a group and work the land. So that was at the time volunteering. But then later on they made it: you have to."

The women and girls were told to plant cassava, though for what purpose they did not know. They started to steal the cassava roots before being commanded to harvest the crop for the Japanese guards' own purposes. Daniel says that they carried out these thefts incorrectly, since they took the entire roots and the plants keeled over and died, which alerted the guards to the scam. They should have taken just half the root, he says.

Ragged columns of POWs would sometimes pass by the camp, and on those occasions women and girls would rush over to the wall to peek through knotholes. One time, the press of their bodies threatened to knock the entire wall down, so the guards threw up their hands in exasperation (Gerdy recalls) and told the women to just go ahead outside, line up, and look: "Those women are really really tough," she recalls the guards muttering to themselves.

It was possible to smuggle letters back and forth to the Bangkinang men's camp a few kilometers away.

GU: "I, I don't understand it [referring to the generally prickly relations between the English-speaking and Dutch-speaking inmates of the camp], for I befriended a girl, an English girl my age, and we were always walking around in the free time, you know, in the camp itself. And I was learning English. And I communicated with her in English, of course, because she didn't speak Dutch. Her brother was in the men's camp, and he befriended my Dad. So my Dad wrote me a letter, he sent us a [message], he said, why don't you write to him too? So some of the letters went, you know, back and forth, across. But then it stopped also—because there were always spies, you know. So, I had her, though, to be friends with."

Some of the Indonesian guards could be prevailed upon to help smuggle letters. A prime exchange spot was, gruesomely enough, the camp mortuary, a structure located between the men's and the women's camp. Following the death of a child, parents were permitted to come view the body in the mortuary, and letters were exchanged then. Food smuggling was even more frequent.

GU: "... and the Korean guard was the Cyclops. He was always hiding in the dark, against the fence wall, because there was smuggling going on in that camp. Because, you know, we were too hungry! So the Indonesian guards were helping us. We'd give them a jewel or something, or money, and then: he'd bring food in. Sometimes bales of sugar. And then, the fence was over three meters, and then you'd climb up, and you'd help each other, you get it down—and chilis, we asked [for] also, and sometimes rice, a small rice ... "

DU: "Already pre-made, nasi *rames*."

GU: "So, it was kind of fun to do things like that, but it was *scary* too, especially when he was on guard, you know [the Cyclops]: you have to really look out for him: he was always hiding, to catch you. He'd really hit you."

With special sharpness, Gerdy recalls one particular incident involving a young mother who joined the girls in smuggling food. This was another *Nederlander* friend.

GU: "You know, we were working in the garden, we all had a *pacul* [a hoe], you know what a *pacul* is, and we had to plant, or start moving the dirt, after we cut the trees and got rid of it—and we got like a rest. And we can walk around and go in the jungle a little bit. Or jump in the river and swim, with your clothes on, because after that you dry out after that, and you dry out very quickly, anyway. And that's what we did. And she [this particular woman] had met somebody in the village, she was in the jungle, and she said, 'Can you get me—' she gave her something, a bundle or something, 'Get me a package of *nasi rames*.'"

DU: "These people were also trying to make money. So they bring food, and try to exchange it for money, or jewelry."

GU: "And they caught her, in a lie. And she had two little kids, one boy and one girl. And they were beating her so bad—she fell down, you know, and they hit her with the butt of the rifle, while she was lying down, you know. They got away the little package of *nasi rames*. And we were standing there, and you couldn't help: because they were holding the rifle against us, too—and she was there, and she urinated. It was so bad. And after that happened, we all went in the camp, nobody wanted to smuggle from there, you know ... "



The girls did regular exercises and had been in the habit of hiding smuggled food in their shorts, under their overblouses, but after this incident, "So that stopped it."

**GU:** "And she was found out, and it was a terrible experience."

**SR:** "Did she recover from the beating and ... ?"

**GU:** "She did. But she didn't go outside anymore, and she didn't want to talk to anyone anymore."

"She was traumatized," I offer, and Gerdy recalls, "She was only talking to her kids."

She had known this woman well. Another time Gerdy's six-year-old cousin was shaken to see their grandmother beaten by John the Hitter. By this time, Gerdy relates, the elderly woman was afflicted by Alzheimer's and was always asking for food. She was "very skinny and very small and very hungry," Gerdy says. The guard lost patience and slapped her hard, an event the little boy witnessed.

Sometimes the smuggling attempts had a funny aspect, luckily, and the culprits managed to persist.

**GU:** "But, you know, some funny things would happen there too, when we were smuggling, like we would always get the stuff from the place where the bathroom was, between the two posts, and sometimes the bales of sugar were heavy, so we'd climb it [the wall], and sometimes the soldiers, the [Indonesian] guards, that were off duty, were coming to bring it! And they were sitting like on the top of the bench, you know like you sit on a horse, and bouncing themselves, and pulling it over. And then, sometimes they would come in to help us—so, two were already in with us, and then we heard footsteps on the outside. Somebody was climbing—it was Piggy, the Japanese guard! He was climbing too! He wanted to see what was going on! 'I hear something,' you know—and we were all running, we had the stuff already. And it was so funny—a little, like a little cake, and I ran to my Mom and I gave it to her and then, she said, 'Are you smuggling again!?' I said, 'Yes,' I said, 'Just be quiet.' And I ran out to help them, and we had two guards inside the camp ... We weren't supposed to. And we were hiding them, and he was in the Block."

One Indonesian guard was hiding in the bathroom, the other in the mortuary.

**GU:** " ... And apparently there was somebody dead there, so he almost fainted. You know how Indonesians are, they're scared of the dead. They don't have to be but they are—and then, he was almost crying there, you know. So, when it quieted down a little bit, we had to get him out. So we dressed him up ... "

Daniel says, "As a woman" and we all laugh and speculate about what the costume consisted of.

**GU:** "Like a shawl or something, you know. Because it can really get cold at night. And sure enough, that was Cyclops that was hiding there, so we were looking out: 'Yeah, he's there!' so we went to the other side of the block, you know, to get him out—and he got out. My gosh, that was an experience! I come back to my Mom, I said, 'Where is it [the cake]?' 'All gone.'"

Gerdy rues the fact that she almost never got to eat much of the proceeds of her thefts. She herself was beaten once, severely, in another smuggling incident. "So why did they beat you?" I ask.

GU: "I was going to one of the post parts, [near] the office, and I had a bundle in a handkerchief: jewelry, gold jewelry, that they had asked my Mom if I could sell it, because they needed some money. And you know, it was really strange that we had a little store in the camp where people would try selling necklaces or things, you know! Things they wanted to sell—and then they still had it, and then they needed some money because sometimes they'd bring in things, and you could buy a little bit extra and things like that. So, I had a bundle of gold jewelry with me, and I went to the wall to talk to one of the guards there, and when I was doing that one of the girls in my Block passed me. She was a Dutch girl, and she said to me, all she said was, 'Slanted eyes are watching you.' And she went to the bathroom. So I knew right away that the guard has seen me. So I also went to the bathroom and I squatted down, and I heard him coming. I heard his footsteps, you know, and banging doors."

SR: "And this is the Korean guard."

GU: "And he found her: he found *her*. And I heard her say, 'What do you want with me?'"

SR: "This is the Dutch girl?"

GU: "The Dutch girl. She said, 'What do you want with me?' she said to him. And he said, 'I saw you talking.' She said, 'I didn't *talk to her!* I knew she was standing there, but I didn't talk to her. I went to the bathroom.' But because I turned around right away and went to the bathroom, he knew—but he let her go. Because she had nothing to do with it. And then he was looking for me. And finally he pulled my door open and pulled me out, and he made one mistake: he looked away from me, and I flipped the bundle over the partition. And I thought, if it falls in the hole after the war I have to pay everything back. But I didn't care: I don't want him to find it on me, you know! So he pulled me to the office, and then down, and he started beating me, again, he said: 'Where's the bundle?' I said I don't have the bundle. With the first beating he gave me I landed under his desk already. And he pulled me up, he started hitting me, and all my hair [he yanked up, searching for the package]. So, he didn't find it on me. So after five blows he pulled me in the corner, and he was going to make me stand there ... "

"He was a real sadist," I say, and Gerdy responds, "Oh my God, he was really bad. He was so mad at me, he was so mad, you know, that he was just shaking. From beating me too ... But later on I heard from my Mom: Behind me sat somebody, and it fell on *her*, and she caught it, and she looked up and saw me being pulled away by him, so she went to my Mom. You know, I admire this girl, because she could have kept it, looked at it and not [have] told a soul. Because she went straight to my Mom and gave the package to my Mom. And my Mom said right away, 'And, where is my daughter?'"

And the girl reported that Gerdy had been smuggling again and was now in the office being beaten. Gerdy also relates how the "smuggler girls" risked compromising their reputations:

GU: "And you know, some of the guards were really good looking, so there was some hanky panky going on. We know that, from girls in the camp. So, when I started smuggling and my Mom was so against it because of the other girls smuggling, and there [were] some stories going around—and I said, so, they all had a bad name [that is, girl internees engaged in smuggling with Indonesian men]. So my Mom didn't want me to have a bad name, so I said, 'It's needed!' [the smuggling]. But the funny thing is, [on the] outside, the guy that was helping me was on his post, and it was a post where you'd go outside to guard the—you know [guard the camp fence]. And I said to her [her mother]: 'Look at him!' I said. As a child he had smallpox and so his face was all holes, you know. I said to her, 'Do you *think* that I could have anything to do with anybody like that? Look how ugly he is—he's nice, he's nice to me.' And, she believed me."

Gerdy also recalled that there was a chubby older woman in the camp who took to supervising the smuggler girls. One young woman "went over the fence," to a tryst with a young Indonesian man. The older woman beat her when she came back. "She was beaten up by that lady, and by the camp police."

Gerdy confronted her most sexually dangerous situation near the end of the war.

GU: "But in the meantime, I want to go and tell you about what happened in the last months, the months in '45. And I think it was three months before the end of the war. I was ordered to go to the front office. And there were three of my friends from Sawahlunto also. Girls, standing there. And I thought, 'Oh boy, what's going on?' And here was this black sedan, and they pushed us in the car and drove it out. The four of us.

Daniel adds, "You were seventeen at the time." Gerdy agrees. I ask, "The other girls were about the same age?"

GU: "Yeah, a little bit older. And we all knew each other, from Sawahlunto. And it was strange. They didn't talk, and we went to the soldiers' camp, the Japanese soldiers' camp [right near the men's camp in Bangkinang]. And they put us in a room, and they wouldn't let us talk, and it was a shock: because all those Japanese soldiers were walking in the *cawaks* ... "

DU: "Do you know what that is? Loincloths."

GU: "Loincloths, you know, and we looked at each other, and we thought: Oh wow—but nobody said anything. Nobody said a word; we just looked at each other. And I remember—I'm going to the window, and there were those blinds, and I was lifting up blinds, and I saw all the soldiers, you know, walking around there like that. And I thought: 'Oh boy, what's gonna happen?' And then Sakai came back—because Sakai was the one that put us there, in the car. Because he was there when he ordered us in the car. And then he came back with three other officers. And I was standing—like this [arms akimbo], and he hit my arms, my hands down, because I was ... [SR: "You were being too forceful?"] because I was disrespectful, he said. So, and they were laughing, and kind of giggling, you know, having fun with each other and looking us over. Like, 'Which one do you want?'"

SR: "Yeah, kind of looking at the available meat, as it were."

GU: "Yeah. And then, that was maybe fifteen minutes or so, then they left again, to discuss maybe rooms, or so on—I don't know what happened. In the meantime, my Mom was like a crazy woman ... "

SR: "Oh I bet, because she knew what was going on."

GU: "Running around, and went to the leaders there, and she said, 'I *demand*,' she said, 'from you that you talk to the Japanese guard *now*, to call the Kempetai [the Japanese military intelligence men].' So they were talking about it and she said, 'I really demand – or otherwise, you know, I'll call all the women up, to ... "

"All 2,300 of them," I say, and Daniel adds, "To revolt."

GU: "So, they did, they went to the Japanese guard. And they explained to him, that this was nothing that they could tolerate. Even Captain Sakai ordered it, you know—and he understood. So he called the Kempetai. And before something could happen to us, the Kempetai came. And talked to the officers and to Sakai and they were pretty mad, and they took us back. [DU: "Just in time."] Just in time. Because they were talking about rooms already, the four of them. 'Can we use, that [one]?' So, that was really a miracle, that that happened."

Years later, as an adult, Gerdy contacted one of the other girls in Holland. She asked her if she remembered this event. No, the other replied, "I pushed everything away from me." Shaking her head about this, Gerdy told me, "We never said one word," back when they were at the soldiers' camp. "That meant something already."

The end of the war came. A food drop from the Allied forces provided some relief and hope to the Bangkinang women and child internees. Indian troops replaced the Japanese and Indonesian guards. The camp's front gate was opened; Gerdy's father came over to visit regularly from the men's camp. Many of the Sawahlunto *Nederlanders* simply stayed put in the camps for several weeks. Gerdy says they felt much safer there than in West Sumatran towns which were then becoming increasingly violent and dangerous for persons associated with the Dutch.

Right after the war, while still in the Riau camps, "We had a good time," says Gerdy. In fact, they had parties, with guitar playing. The "Sugar Brown Babies," a band made up of former inmates from the men's camp, came over to play. These festivities soon ceased, and some of the *Nederlander* families cautiously moved back to Padang, temporarily. "We are together, with the other Dutch," she says, since by this point a number of the former prisoners were living in some of the big abandoned houses near the ocean. The boys' orphanage had been used as a meeting place earlier on. Violence against some of the *Nederlanders* by groups of young Indonesian men started to occur frequently, Gerdy and Daniel both told me (his family too was in Padang by this time). The Erlemanns and the Ungerers moved to Jakarta as soon as they could, despite several severe illnesses among some of the adults. The Erlemanns, who were by now reunited with all three of their sons, elected to stay in Jakarta for several months. It turns out that Rudi had been in a POW camp near Pekanbaru (the city was located on the railroad spur built during the war with forced labor). Henri had been captured by Indonesian troops soon after the Revolution began and had spent time in Amborawa camp. Liberated by the British, he was then taken off to Sri Lanka. Edwin, the eldest, had been dispatched to the Burma theater to serve as a field medic,

an experience that exposed him to too much death and affected his mind, Gerdy says now. Gerdy's parents committed Edwin to a mental hospital in Jakarta as soon as the family arrived, and decided to wait there until he was well enough to travel, so that the whole family could depart together for the Netherlands. By 1947 they were able to do so. Gerdy and Daniel married in 1950 and lived in the Netherlands until 1962, when they came to the United States. Gerdy had persistent health problems, which she linked to her internment camp experiences. When choosing where to move, she insisted on a warm, sunny climate, and she and Daniel, and Anita, Andy, and Dave, their three children, settled in southern California. While growing up, the youngsters did not ask about their parents' *Bangkinang* camp experiences. But, "Now they do."

### Listening to Nederlander Life History Stories

This narrative stands in intriguing relationship to other memoirs by the Indies' Eurasians.

In her review of Marguerite Schenkhuizen's *Memoirs of an Indo Woman: Twentieth-Century Life in the East Indies and Abroad*, Pauline Milone<sup>20</sup> notes that this ebullient autobiography (a good companion piece to Gerdy's oral history) seems at first glance to be a text of interest primarily to the author's family and friends. Yet, Milone writes, "the reader gradually becomes aware of the author's broader purpose: she wishes that her descendants will share her and other Indos' love of their country of origin (p. 237) and know what sets Indo people apart (p. 247)." Schenkhuizen's book avers that a portion of this Indo distinctiveness consisted of a hearty forthrightness, much cheery family intimacy, and lavish dollops of *gastorijheid* (hospitality).<sup>21</sup> These are elements of Indies Eurasian culture that also shine through Gerdy's oral reminiscences, obviously. These similarities persist despite the fact that Schenkhuizen's reminiscences differ in several important ways from Gerdy's oral recollections. For one thing, there is the generational difference. Gerdy experienced the war as an adolescent, whereas Schenkhuizen was born in 1907 and was a married woman with a child when the Japanese arrived. She devotes only two of her book's thirty-four chapters to the Japanese occupation era. By 1942, Schenkhuizen had also been employed for several years at an oil company, the BPM (Bataviasche Petroleum Maatschappij). Her husband Henk was interned in a prison hospital in Madura for a part of the Japanese occupation, but Marguerite herself was able to stay outside the camps, living in a home her parents owned in Surabaya. Indeed, *Memoirs of an Indo Woman* concerns East Java. Her father was a plantation administrator there, and she recalls growing up in large homes near Blitar. She went on furlough to Switzerland and Munich, Germany, then returned to the Indies from 1929-35 (in fact, she resided in independent Indonesia until

<sup>20</sup> Marguerite Schenkhuizen, *Memoirs of an Indo Woman: Twentieth-Century Life in the East Indies and Abroad* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1993), reviewed by Pauline D. Milone, *Journal of Asian Studies* 53,3 (1994): 1020-1022.

<sup>21</sup> For a good account of the importance of some of these same household qualities, see Van der Veur, "Cultural Aspects of the Eurasian Community in Indonesian Colonial Society," pp. 38-53. Van der Veur also translated and edited a short memoir by a Eurasian woman written when she was in a relocation camp in the Netherlands after the war. See "Race and Color in Colonial Society: Biographical Sketches by a Eurasian Woman Concerning pre-World War II Indonesia," *Indonesia* 8 (October 1969): 69-79. This autobiographical essay focuses on the author's memories of her own youthful efforts to attract a Dutch husband, not an Indo one. The tone is rather cynical and bitter, quite different from Gerdy Ungerer's more generous-minded memories, which of course do not treat mixed-race status in such negative terms at all.

the early 1950s). Marguerite's mother was part Javanese and part Dutch. Her mother's mother was a baptized Javanese village woman, and her mother's father, who worked as the head forester in Blitar, Kediri residency, was from Brabant.

Schenkhuizen's portrait of her childhood in East Java takes up nineteen chapters of the autobiography and strikes some of the same chords found in Gerdy's reminiscences. Schenkhuizen recalls that the tone of what she terms Indo family life at this level of economic comfort was full of fun, gossip, and boisterousness. There was much visiting back and forth among elite Indo households. And, in Schenkhuizen's childhood, young people kept an eye out for marriageable partners among their Indo counterparts. The children went dancing, participated in little theater associations, and put on skits and musical performances for family. They learned about the classical ballet, joined the Scouts, lapped up Indisch food, and enjoyed the tropical house gardens. They shivered at tales about black magic and spells.<sup>22</sup>

Dutch-language fluency was a point of great pride, yet Indo households in Schenkhuizen's memory also spoke a kind of mestizo Dutch/Indonesian, with both lexical and grammatical borrowings. These enliven her written memoir's prose, as they did Gerdy's interviews. It is interesting also that family genealogies seem to have been a preoccupation in household conversations described both in this book and in Gerdy's recollections. Schenkhuizen's memoir is full of tales of secret ancestry and hidden liaisons suddenly revealed. In this regard, both Schenkhuizen's book and Gerdy's oral narrative resemble that large, well-known Dutch-language cluster of literary works dealing with expatriate Dutch and also Indisch Dutch in the Indies: works such as Louis Couperus's great novel *The Hidden Force*, E. du Perron's *Country of Origin*, and E. Breton de Nijs's (Rob Nieuwenhuys) *Faded Portraits*.<sup>23</sup> This range of literature expertly and affectingly (sometimes, even terrifyingly) evokes the sexual charge of Dutch/Eurasian households in the tropics. These novels also enlist readers in a near-giddy vision of shifting categories of identity.

Gerdy Ungerer's English-language reminiscences as she related them to me in 2004—in Los Angeles, no less—were historiographically multifaceted, as this print literature is too. She spoke in English, although all three of us in attendance would sometimes mix in an Indonesian or a Dutch phrase. Gerdy and Daniel's Indonesian is good (especially Daniel's), and both retain their fluency in Dutch, their native

<sup>22</sup> On this topic again, see the similar points in Paul van der Veur's "Cultural Aspects of the Eurasian Community." The large number of Dutch novels (see note 23, below) dealing with mixed-race households in the tropics also often allude to the power of magic and dangerous spells. See for instance Louis Couperus's *De stille kracht* (The hidden force) and its scary evocation of mystical powers swirling around the tension-filled household of Resident van Oudijck. Ian Buruma offers a breezy but insightful analysis of this novel in "Louis Couperus: The Eurasians of the Dutch East Indies," in Ian Buruma, *The Missionary and the Libertine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996, 2000), pp. 67-76.

<sup>23</sup> Louis Couperus, *The Hidden Force*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985, 1990); translated from Louis Couperus, *De stille Kracht* (Amsterdam: L. J. Veen, 1900). Edgar du Perron's *Het land van herkomst* (Amsterdam: G. A. van Oorschot, 1967) has been translated into English also, as *Country of Origin* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984). E. Breton de Nijs (a pseudonym for the literary scholar, Rob Nieuwenhuys) wrote what is perhaps one of the most emotionally evocative novels in this genre of memoirs of the Indies: see his *Faded Portraits* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982; Singapore: Periplus, 1999). The original was *Vergeelde portretten uit een Indisch familiealbum*, 1954. See especially the way Nieuwenhuys writes of Aunt Sophie's efforts to maintain "Dutch purity" in the family line. See also Rob Nieuwenhuys, *Mirror of the Indies: A History of Dutch Colonial Literature* (Singapore: Periplus, 1999), chapter 7, "The Indies World of Couperus," pp. 123-133, and chapter 12, "Between the Thirties and Forties," pp. 189-213 on du Perron.

language. They speak with their three grown children and all their grandchildren in English.

Gerdy's conversations with me were doubtless shaped by her recent lecture engagements before California college and university audiences. She has given enough public lectures to have established a structure for her talks, which typically include some childhood details, then narration of specific, striking incidents from the internment camps. In addition, as mentioned, Gerdy's viewing of the film "Paradise Road" has also perhaps given form to some of her stories concerning camp life. Gerdy and Daniel's attendance at several of the annual Bangkinang camp internees' reunions held in Den Haag may have influenced her narrative as well, since those gatherings might have worked to standardize elements of her prison camp stories, such as her smuggling tales. Also, Gerdy and her husband knew from Anne and John Summerfield that I have done anthropological fieldwork in North and West Sumatra, that I lived for eight months in Bukittinggi in 1995-96, and that I have written appreciatively of southern Batak and Minangkabau art, oratory, and literature. Given this knowledge, Gerdy may well have tailored her comments to accord with her perception of me as an enthusiastic admirer of Sumatra's cultures.

These are all obvious shaping elements of our May 2004 conversations. Of equal relevance to any comprehensive appreciation of Gerdy Ungerer's narrative are issues and concerns raised in Ann L. Stoler and Karen Strassler's "Memory-Work in Java: A Cautionary Tale,"<sup>24</sup> and related articles. In "Memory-Work," Stoler and Strassler read two sorts of sources contrapuntally. One is the often sentimentalized childhood memoirs of Dutch writers who sing the praises of their colonial-era Javanese nursemaids (and the fondly recalled, lush, sensual, aromatic households surrounding the European toddlers). Their second category of sources is constituted of the sparer, more workaday memories of Javanese women and men from the Yogyakarta area who had been employed in that same period as servants in well-off European and Indo-European homes in the late colonial decades. Stoler and Strassler astutely point out that colonial studies as a field needs to place memory work from various vantage locations much more at the center of inquiry, instead of assuming that the "truth" of structural oppression in a place like 1920s Java can be discovered in some simple way by merely assuring that subaltern voices are also recorded, as ripostes to official accounts springing from the colonial elite. In fact, the authors assert, "...students of the colonial often unwittingly hold to a variant of [a hydraulic storage model of memory]: memory as a repository of alternative histories and subaltern truths."<sup>25</sup>

For that same project, Stoler and Strassler and Javanese colleagues interviewed elderly Yogyakarta former servants from 1995 to 1996. They discovered a pronouncedly different world of sentiment from that pervading the Dutch memoirs. The narrative subject for both sets of speakers and writers concerned those Dutch households with small white children and native nursemaids and houseboys. Largely absent in the accounts of Yogyakarta's elderly former servants was the intensely emotionalized domestic plane evoked in so many Dutch autobiographies (*babus* remembered for their spicy sweet smells and loving caresses, and so on). Instead, their

<sup>24</sup> Ann Laura Stoler with Karen Strassler, "Memory-Work in Java: A Cautionary Tale," in Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, pp. 162-203.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

reminiscences noted the pedestrian need for servants to show up for work on time and to do what they were told in tending to the babies. And as to smells? One interviewee commented, "Dutch children weren't allowed to be held, [because] later they'd smell of [our] sweat. Holding them wasn't allowed ... [T]hey [the Dutch] were afraid [of their children] being soaked in sweat, the sweat of Javanese ..."<sup>26</sup> This same person goes on to say that " ... Dutch sweat smells worse, 'cause they eat butter, milk, cheese."<sup>27</sup>

Stoler and Strassler note that Dutch'ness and Javanese servant'ness were both in the process of being imagined by each party to these encounters, in the pre-war years and also in postcolonial times:

[In our research we] asked what these acts of remembering and retelling might signal about the duties and dispositions that went into domestic work and what it meant to be in the service of those who were often inept at being colonials: provincial brides on their first trip to the Indies, recently transferred government bureaucrats, plantation supervisors climbing the corporate ladder, young doctors on philanthropic missions, and crusty old colonial hands who might just be learning what it meant to be self-consciously European.<sup>28</sup>

None of the social personhood categories were fixed in such situations, and written and oral recollections of those lost times are also full of shifting, indistinct images.<sup>29</sup>

Stoler and Strassler also make the vital point that memories of colonial regimes are not arranged into some natural order of validity, nor is colonial studies scholarship's typical romance with resistance<sup>30</sup> uniquely insightful. Stoler and her colleagues recorded and collected conversations from former house servants about the smells, objects, tastes, and textures of domestic life in colonial households, aiming to capture part of a history of colonial sentimentality. Importantly,

These memories [that their interviewees] chose to recall present a challenge to two prevailing postcolonial stories. One is the popular romance of the beloved and nurturing servant that dominates Dutch memoirs. The other is the story of subaltern memory as the truth of the colonial past. This project adheres to neither. Instead it pushes the accounts of former servants against these Dutch renderings to explore how the dissonance in their perceptions of intimacy and affect may unsettle our certainties about what constituted the colonial and how it figures in people's memories today.<sup>31</sup>

Gerdy Ungerer's linked memories of her Sawahlunto childhood and her internment camp youth, correspondingly, unsettle certainties about West Sumatran remembered pasts of the 1930s. As an adolescent, she was transformed from a pampered girl into a camp internee and severely mistreated by her captors, a situation detailed at length in her life history, yet her family's objective connections to the power

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>29</sup> Here again, compare the fiction of du Perron, and E. Breton de Nijs.

<sup>30</sup> For sharp discussions of this point, see Michael Brown, "On Resisting Resistance," *American Anthropologist* 98,4 (1996): 729-749; and Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17 (1990): 41-55.

<sup>31</sup> Stoler and Strassler, "Memory-Work in Java," p. 164.



elite in the mining town receive little mention. Her Bangkinang camp tales are subaltern narratives by and about women and children abused by the Japanese, while her girlhood stories about Sawahlunto spring from sociologically privileged locales. Given all this, Gerdy's narrative flickers, much as the fictional characters of Couperus and du Perron are vague and shadowy.

In addition, Gerdy's recollections also show how complex Eurasian identities were in times and places like 1930s-1940s Sumatra, and how subtle the identities of Nederlanders who subsequently emigrated remain today (at a time when émigrés to places like southern California are opening up and describing the broad range of their youthful experiences to younger American kin). As Stoler notes, scholars should avoid getting swept up into the reified racial classifications schemes of defunct colonial states. As Gerdy and Daniel's use of the word "Dutch" shows, no imagined hierarchy of "Europeans," "mixed bloods," and then "natives" is ever rigid in actual, daily circumstances; over generational time; or in spoken memory today.<sup>32</sup> The Nederlanders interned in Bangkinang camp are radically unstable as a social group in Gerdy's tales: these "Indos" could even have become Indonesians if some of the girls who went "over the fence" had stayed with boyfriends in forest villages. Or, these Bangkinang Nederlanders could have become Dutch, if only the Sawahlunto Eurasians' fond hopes for a trajectory of increasingly European cultural identity had been attainable. But, war intervened, the Japanese came, and social categories fractured.

Stoler, finally, also points out that the intimate domestic sphere of household interactions, emotional bonds, small jealousies and resentments, and sexual intrigues in homes like those of Dutch plantation managers in Deli<sup>33</sup> offer scholars extraordinarily intense cultural sites for studying colonial politics in larger senses—in fact, as Stoler puts it, for studying tensions of empire. Spoken life histories about the domestic sphere in mixed Nederlander communities like Sawahlunto work in similar ways, I would suggest. In fact, imageries of sexual threat and tales of various illicit liaisons—prominent in the full range of Gerdy's recollections—point researchers toward new ways of thinking about "Indonesians" as a social category in remembered Sumatran pasts.

### Sawahlunto and Historical Memory

Gerdy's recollections of the town of Sawahlunto are intriguingly selective. It is also notable that her portraits of the town are uniformly cast so that it appears in the form of a childhood place, a pleasant sphere inhabited before "a fall."

Sawahlunto's political and economic profile as the town whose city fathers supervised the extraction of Ombilin coal for three and a half decades does emerge from Gerdy's oral narrative. Her father was such a prominent mine technician that

<sup>32</sup> The essays in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds., *Domesticating the Empire*, provide good examples of the sort of flexibility in conceptualization of race as a constructed category that I would advocate when considering Gerdy Ungerer's narrative. See, for instance, Frances Gouda, "Good Mothers, Medeas, or Jezebels: Feminine Imagery in Colonial and Anticolonial Rhetoric in the Dutch East Indies, 1900-1942," in Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, *Domesticating the Empire*, pp. 236-254.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Ann Laura Stoler, "A Sentimental Education: Children on the Imperial Divide," in Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, pp. 112-139.

Gerdy and her brothers could not help but hear a good deal about coal mining. What is not so evident in her stories, though, is the Ombilin mines' bleak history of labor exploitation and violence to and among the miners. In May 2004, she told me none of this. The high rates of corporal punishment used against conscripted laborers in the mines, and the larger patterns of poverty elsewhere in the Indies plantation economy that propelled so many male contract and convict laborers toward the Ombilin deep mines, were either hidden from the eyes of this Nederlander child or have been veiled in her reminiscences. Perhaps her location of her story as a childhood tale allows this silencing. Gerdy's upbeat narrative about small, well-cared-for Nederlander children and their intimate household world has the effect of pushing any acknowledgment of the rougher adult universe characterized by convict labor off to the side. A question for further study of Nederlander life histories arises: would this pattern of memory be repeated in other Nederlander oral memoirs collectible today?

It is important to note here what got omitted from Gerdy's story. Erwiza Erman provides an acutely observed labor history of the Sawahlunto region in "Generalized Violence: A Case Study of the Ombilin Coal Mines, 1892-1996."<sup>34</sup> Erman details how the Sawahlunto/Ombilin mines complex became "a violent labor regime."<sup>35</sup> After the discovery of the two-hundred-million-ton coal vein by the Dutch engineer De Greve in 1868, the government in the Netherlands debated how best to secure this impressive energy source. The coal was to be both produced and consumed in the Indies, for use in the ship trade. Eventually it was decided that a government-run mining concern would be organized, but "the colonial state's high demand for coal was not backed up by sufficient capital, and it was therefore essential to procure cheap labor."<sup>36</sup> Minangkabau living nearby the coal fields were not well-qualified to be conscripted as miners because they often feared work underground due to spirit beliefs,<sup>37</sup> and "at best, local people worked as casual labourers, for example as carpenters."<sup>38</sup> The company thus moved to recruit two additional categories of workers, mostly from outside West Sumatra: convicts and contract workers, on the coolie labor model. Free labor was also used. Contract and free labor came mostly from Java; the coolie miners signed up for three-year contracts and were subject to beating under the Penal Sanction.<sup>39</sup> Convict laborers consisted of both common criminals (many were bandits from Batavia) and political prisoners, whose sentences ranged from five to twenty years.<sup>40</sup>

It is this last group of miners whose presence entered forcefully into Sumatran folk history. I discovered this in conversations with my elderly Angkola Batak language teacher, G. W. Siregar, in 1974 to 1976. Bapak G. W. had been a student at the Kweekschool in Bukittinggi (the teacher-training institute) from 1914 to 1917, and he often told me stories about West Sumatra. One of his prime tales concerned the mistreatment of the political prisoners in the Ombilin mines. Bapak G. W. informed me with shock that the men were kept chained together and were beaten with sticks. He had heard these stories from others, as he had not visited the mines himself as a young

<sup>34</sup> Erman, "Generalized Violence," pp. 105-131.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109-110.

man. I have heard similar stories from other southern Batak about West Sumatra's past. Gerdy's reports, which omit any mention of convict labor, thus contrast with the recollections of Sumatrans who were positioned differently. To speculate: perhaps any acknowledgment today of the viciousness of the Nederlander managerial class's treatment of the indigenous mine workers would have threatened the logical consistency of Gerdy's entire narrative of her childhood days as a sunny time filled with family closeness, fun, and energy. Social class tensions were never acknowledged in her talks with me, although I had briefly mentioned some of Bapak G. W.'s stories to her before we formally started our interview.

In "Generalized Violence," Erman goes on to report that after the state discovered that the Penal Sanction floggings failed to subdue the miners, "semi-military control was introduced, to make labourers too afraid to escape from the mines."<sup>41</sup> A garrison was set up in Sawahlunto; a local militia of about thirty men was also recruited to augment the troop of guards.<sup>42</sup> By 1902 there were also some forty-eight formally trained policemen at work. And, "[i]n 1910 there were 82 police officers in Sawahlunto, and two years later (1912) two brigades of police agents were purposely moved from Padang Panjang to Sawahlunto and assigned the major task of curbing the increasing desertion."<sup>43</sup> Some 1,500 convict laborers were working in the mines by 1896. As these numbers increased, so did the numbers of agents of control.

Flogging became routine, but as Erwan summarizes, "Careful consideration of the evidence demonstrates all too clearly that the institutionalized violence of the mine management and the state did not succeed in generating obedience among the miners."<sup>44</sup> The Sawahlunto complex had swiftly become a powder keg. Very early on in the mine's existence, in fact, tensions and conflicts spilled over into the town:

At the end of the nineteenth century, W. J. Rahder, controleur of Sawahlunto (West Sumatra) claimed that the town had already degenerated into a "criminal colony." This statement may have been meant as a protest by a lower-ranking Dutch official against the use of criminals in the Ombilin coal mines, or it may be an indication of his inability to maintain law and order among the townspeople. The presence of criminals, he reported, had made the local people fearful and insecure in their hometown, so that most of their dry-fields had been neglected. Visitors to the Sawahlunto market felt threatened, and no longer enjoyed their visits. They returned home as soon as possible, apprehensive about criminal acts that might be committed by convict labourers.<sup>45</sup>

Convict labor remained at the core of the work force until about 1920 and was phased out by 1934.<sup>46</sup> Contract, free, and casual labor continued to be used until the end of Dutch control, when, as we saw in Gerdy's stories, the Japanese occupation authorities attempted to keep the Nederlander technical staff in place to run the mine.

The period of Sawahlunto's history ranging from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s emerges in notably heroic terms in some of the official publications of the current

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

sub-provincial government there. There is, for instance, an official website for the promotion of tourism and industrial investment (<http://www.sawahlunto.go.id>, "The Official Sawahlunto Website: Sawahlunto, Kota Wisata Tambang yg Berbudaya," Sawahlunto, a touristic, culture-filled old mining town.") The historical section of this site emphasizes the town's most unusual heritage: the website notes that Sawahlunto is not a regular Minangkabau settlement, occupied by families whose ancestors resided in that place for generations, but a small city created by the Dutch with convict labor. The website goes on to mention the extension of the railroad lines all the way into Sawahlunto by 1894. After noting the extremely low pay of all Ombilin miners in colonial times, the authors explain (my translation), "And thus it can be imagined that by the beginning of the twentieth century Sawahlunto truly represented an internment camp for these forced laborers." The present-day town and sub-provincial government have their task cut out for them in trying to encourage tourism in this spot: historical tourism in West Sumatra in general is eclipsed by cultural tourism and mountain-scenery tourism centered around Bukittinggi. Advertisements promoting that more popular region highlight "ancient Minangkabau traditions." To make matters worse, Sawahlunto has also seen considerable recent youth gang violence between rival villages and rival village factions.<sup>47</sup>

In sum, there have been multiple ways of narrating Sawahlunto history, each incomplete in some aspect.

## Conclusion

"The women were very tough" is a leitmotif in both Gerdy Ungerer's stories about her Sawahlunto childhood and her narratives about the years she was incarcerated in Padang and Bangkinang. She recalls the Nederlander communities of the Indies through this heroic grid. According to her report, a Nederlander's childhood in Sawahlunto was illuminated by goodness and care; adulthood meant newfound violent dealings with Japanese, and wily liaisons with "the Indonesians," who lived in villages just beyond the camp gates (and who later lurked in Padang, ready to attack Nederlander refugee families). "Normal" adult sexuality for the girls would have meant marriage with elite Nederlanders, but the war changed everything, and in some cases subjected the girls of Gerdy's remembered adolescence to rape by the Japanese. The violent period from 1942-45 disrupted and challenged Gerdy's memories of a happy childhood spent in what outsiders know to have been a violent place. Her childhood recollections fragmented, and she recovers them today through a screen of internment memories.

In the most general sense, Gerdy Ungerer's vivid talks suggest that women's war narratives of this sort are usefully augmented by childhood autobiographical materials. In the case of oral memoirs by Eurasians who grew up in the last decade of the colonial Indies, taking the full sweep of years from the late 1920s through World War II and into the Indonesian Revolution allows outside observers to hear more of the youthful experiences of Nederlanders like Gerdy Ungerer than would be the case if their

<sup>47</sup> See for instance media coverage in *Tempo* Interaktif, of November 28, 2003: "Tawuran Antar Kampung, Sembilan Rumah Terbakar," datelined Padang, <http://www.tempo.co.id/hg/nusa/sumatera/2003/11/28/brk,20031128-02,id.html>.

personal histories were seen in a more disjointed manner. There is another, more significant benefit to joining the colonial-era childhood recollections of Eurasian women like Gerdy Ungerer to their stories of their suddenly reversed fortunes in the war: these longer, more expansive narratives allow affecting access to exceptionally sophisticated evocations of Indonesia's (and the Indies'—and southern California's) protean cultures of shifting identities.



Gerdy Ungerer, 2005