Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben. *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920.* Translated by Wendie Shaffer. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008. 439 pages.

Ulbe Bosma, Remco Raben, and Wim Willems. *De Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders.* Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006. 238 pages.

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The Dutch and Dutch-Indonesians arriving in the Netherlands from Indonesia between the late 1940s and the 1960s continued to be dismayed by the lack of understanding and appreciation they encountered in their (new) homeland. As a result, their dissatisfaction (eventually) led the Dutch government to provide a (rather meager) financial allocation to those who qualified under the guidelines set by it. There also was a grant for a sizeable research project dealing with this group. Under the auspices of the Netherlands Organization for Scholarly Research, four young historians (why they all had to be historians is unclear) were given the task of tackling the complicated project. The persons selected were Ulbe Bosma, Hans Meijer, Remco Raben, and Wim Willems.

The first volume to appear in print was Wim Willems's straightforward account of the group's exodus from the Indies (*De Uittocht uit Indië, 1945–1995* [Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2001]). Ulbe Bosma and Remco Raben followed in 2003 with *De oude Indische Wereld, 1500–1920* (The Old World of the Indies 1500–1920) (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2003). It is the text of this volume, skillfully translated by Wendie Shaffer, that appeared in English in 2008, bearing the title *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500–1920*. Somewhat unfortunately, the original Dutch title was made more dramatic and raises some questions. The existing "European" group in the Indies rarely would refer to themselves as "Hollanders" or "Nederlanders." More commonly used was the term "*Europeaan*" and, later, for those of mixed-race descent, "Indo-*Europeaan*." The 1500 date is odd since few Dutch appeared in Indonesian waters before the end of the sixteenth century. Finally, introducing the term "creolisation" opens a can of worms. The term was rarely, if ever, used in Southeast Asia since there were no "settlement colonies" in this region. Java's "European" population remained minimal. Numbers only increased after the 1860s, but the 240,000 "Europeans" living in Indonesia in 1930 shared the land with 60 million Indonesians. "Creolisation" clearly seems to be a misnomer. The authors give little background about the "European" group itself. It is relevant to mention that it included some 9,000 *Staatsblad Europeanen* (indigenous persons who had become Europeans by decree); a marriage of someone in this category with a native Indonesian legally was a "mixed" marriage. Not only were there among the Europeans (Germans, British, French, Danes, for example), but also, since 1900, Japanese (7,195 in 1930), Armenians (542), and others.

Of the four young historians named above, only Hans Meijer focused on the Europeans of mixed descent, presently most often referred to as Indos. The other team members, while employing the term "Indische Nederlanders," include in this group

not only Indos, but Europeans of white parents born in the colony (creoles) and expatriates.

In their acknowledgement and foreword, Bosma and Raben announce that their work will use a new approach. Theirs will be "a history of movement" that will hack a "narrow path through a jungle of assumptions and *idées reçues*." Such designations as "mestizo" and "mixed culture" they considered as "static" and, therefore, inappropriate, while "creolisation" was a "process of ongoing change" (p. xv). To avoid the "prescriptive and often cliché-ridden viewpoint of colonial government, travel accounts by visiting Europeans, and novels with a colonial setting," they wished to view the world of the Indies from "the inside." By doing so they would "transcend" the "schematic" interpretation that saw the Indies as a "strictly racially stratified society" (p. xvii). How were these historians and outsiders to accomplish this task? Actually, while tracing family backgrounds and social networks through several generations, they were remarkably successful in uncovering much interesting, useful, and, at times, valuable information. In presenting their findings, however, they felt compelled to criticize, downplay, or discount much of what others had written before. Even Jean Gelman Taylor's views, expressed in her standard work, *The Social World of Batavia*, do not escape the authors' displeasure (pp. 60, 84).[1] Also put under the gun as not fitting their particular approach is the concept of the "plural society" so vividly presented by J. S. Furnivall.[2] The authors refer to this "scheme" as a "misconception" because "the boundaries" between the population groups were "porous" and the colonial population statistics and legislation a fictitious compilation (p. 1). In taking this approach, however, the authors sweep aside a wealth of (mostly untapped) *factual* information. The income tax statistics for 1925, for example, reveal that of the 79,413 assessed "Europeans," 12,136 had incomes of less than 1,200 guilders a year; while of the Indonesian group, on the other hand, a mere 31,617 of the 3,178,661 assessed persons had incomes *above* that level. The 1938 data for employment in government service indicates that the number of Indonesians in the *lowest* salary categories constituted 99.1 percent of the total, while "Europeans" in the *highest* salary category formed 92.3 percent of the total. Bosma and Raben also used percentages of "European" interracial marriages for the 1920s and 1930s and saw "a peak in the pattern of ethnic rapprochement and mixing" (p. 343). But when the *original* author of these data (Hans van Marle) added *numbers* rather than percentages, matters no longer looked as bright. To have over one-fourth of the marriages of "Europeans" being racially mixed in a selected year does sound impressive, but marriages with a mere 1,334 Indonesian and 182 Chinese women in a sea of 60,000,000 Indonesians does not. The Bosma–Raben vista is, unfortunately, nothing more than a mirage.

Apart from these idiosyncracies, errors in this major text are few. The frequent and inappropriate use of "Indisch" where it should be "Indische" (and vice versa) might bother those who know Dutch well enough, but few others. The repeated omission of the word *Koning* (King) as an integral part of the Koning Willem III secondary school is more annoying. Referring to the family name Remij as "presumably" a "corruption of the name Meijer" (p. 133) indicates that the authors apparently are unfamiliar with the

[1] Jean Gelman Taylor, *The Social World of Batavia: European and Eurasian in Dutch Asia* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).
[2] John S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policies and Practice* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

not unusual practice of reversing the family name either wholly or partly (e.g., Van Riemsdijk turning into Kijdsmeir; Vermehr becoming Rhemrev). Batavia's "Kampong Melayo" (p. 91) is obviously a misspelling, while it is unlikely that E. F. E. Douwes Dekker "spent his childhood in Semeru" (p. 317), Mt. Semeru being one of East Java's more active volcanoes. To refer to Notodirojo as a "most memorable figure" and someone who was to play "a key role in the early Indonesian nationalist movement" (p. 118) is overdoing one's admiration for this individual.[3] The quite recent convention of Dutch scholars to spell out given names is not always a success when, for example, one comes across a name such as Godert Alexander Gerard Philip Baron van der Capellen (p. 119). Fortunately, the text is not consistent in spelling out given names. Finally, the omission of Pieter Elberveld (of German-Thai descent) is to be regretted, especially in light of that "conspirator"'s major redemption in recent Indonesian history.

Being "Dutch" in the Indies ends with a theatrical outburst. With the end of the old world of the Indies near (in retrospect), we are told that the "newcomers" (presumably the expatriates) "burrowed back into their enclaves" (p. 343). Economically "more powerful and arrogant as ever," they also were "filled with a growing terror of the mighty Asian World." It usually is a losing battle to challenge historians on their own turf. In this case, however, this reviewer begs to state categorically that while he was attending the Surabaya Lycée between the fall of 1939 and December 1941, the Dutch East Indies appeared peaceful, while most of the "European" population had total faith in Britain's "impregnable" fortresses in Hong Kong and Singapore, and in America's mighty naval fleet and fighter planes. There was (unfounded) confidence and no traces of "growing terror."

Being "Dutch" in the Indies, in spite of some of its idiocyncracies, is a scholarly work; the same cannot be said about *De Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders.* This volume of just 215 pages, with 64 large photos, deals mainly with the period 1900–1970 and is built around three main topics: migration, citizenship, and colonial *breuklijnen* (lines of division). The migration chapter (by Wim Willems) is concise and to the point; in the other chapters, some of the same issues discussed in the Bosma–Raben text reappear. Racial barriers were "porous" and the notion of the "plural society" was brushed aside: "Because of its simplicity it was very attractive, but how does that help us?" (p. 164). This volume also contains several major errors. The 1946 statement by the Minister of Territories J. A. Jonkman dealing with a possible home for Indos in West New Guinea becomes an announcement that West New Guinea would be separated "from a future Republic of Indonesia" and would be "retained" for the Netherlands (pp. 110–11). The authors also struggle with the term "to opt" for Indonesian citizenship. The option period of two years (a very reasonable time in international law) is described as "making the impression of an ultimatum." The number of individuals who opted is given as 13,739 (no source is provided for this exact figure), which, including family members, would result in a total of less than "33,000 persons" (p. 135). But on page 189 the number of persons who *opted* for Indonesian citizenship has become "about 31,000 persons" (rather than the earlier given figure of 13,739). In an attempt to reduce the importance of the "European newcomers," the authors made the not uncommon error

[3] Moreover, during Notodirojo's time, there was, of course, no "nationalist movement"—there were "stirrings" and an "awakening."

in stating that Indos constituted "almost 80 per cent of the European population" (p. 147). This percentage, however, includes "creole" in the total.

Those individuals who opted for Indonesian citizenship have always been given short shrift in Dutch literature. The authors maintain this viewpoint. They claim that the size of this group is "impossible to determine." (A reasonably short stay in Indonesia, contacting several of the organizations dealing with the "*warga negaras*," or Indo-Europeans, would go a long way toward gaining a better insight into this relatively small group.) The absence of any knowledge of the size of this group is "irrelevant," however, in the authors' views, because there are no longer any differences in nationality and legal status. This is a peculiar reaction that might baffle not only "Indische Nederlanders" residing in the Netherlands, but also those in Australia and the United States of America.

One final comment seems in order. In *Being "Dutch" in the Indies*, there is the occasional use of nonquantifiable words. In *De Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders* the drops become a shower. Figures are given without any reference to source and are introduced with statements such as "According to the latest notions, ..." Some of the many "manys" even contradict each other, e.g., "Many of the interned ... could hardly be distinguished from Indonesians," but on the next page one reads "The lighter complexions of many Indische persons makes them recognizable for the outside world ..." (p. 189). In the seventeenth century (p. 148) "a goodly number of women from Europe" came to the Indies, an unlikely and unsubstantiated event, while in the eighteenth century this "stream" dried up. A bit further on we read: "More and more Indonesians and Chinese followed a study in the Netherlands" (p. 165). How many is "more and more"? (The number of university graduates in the Netherlands during the period 1924–1940 was 344 Indonesians and 360 Chinese. A lot more than was the case earlier, but how did this compare with other countries in Europe?) This is an easy-to-read book, but hardly one presenting a true picture of the "History of the Indische Netherlanders."