

オランダ領東インドから来日した戦争花嫁たち

Indo-European war brides in Japan

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東京外国語大学研究会報告 9, July 2018

In this talk, I examine the experiences of Indo-European women who entered a private relationship with a Japanese man during the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies (1942–1945), and the challenges they faced in supporting themselves and their children in the aftermath of Japan's capitulation. Surrounded by a community which had suffered harsh living conditions and personal losses in internment camps under the Japanese occupation, and accused of collaboration with the enemy, Indo-European mothers and their children were faced with much adversity in the immediate aftermath of Japan's surrender. Fearing repercussions from their families and their communities, a small group of mothers pursued the possibility of leaving for Japan together with their partner and children. The ensuing debates among Dutch and Japanese authorities about the future of these couples, from the legality of their marriages, the nationality of mothers, to their right for support provide a window on the complex relationship between women and the nation. As I will show in this talk, concerns among public officials about the rights and responsibilities over women their children underscore the symbolic importance of reasserting patronage over the nation's women and children in reconstituting a war-torn nation.

Based on Japanese documentation and Dutch archival sources from the National Archives in the Netherlands, my goal is reconstruct the debates about the rights and responsibilities over mothers' and children's welfare, as well as mothers' own considerations in safeguarding the well-being of their children and raising a family in the borderlands of two nations at war.

The Netherlands East Indies under the Japanese Occupation

During the Pacific War, Japan occupied a wide territory in East and Southeast Asia; sexual contact between troops and local women, particularly in form of the notorious Comfort Women System, was not a mere side-effect of the conflict, but is known to have been a central element of wartime strategy. The Netherlands East Indies are no exception in this respect: occupied between 1942 and 1945, the Japanese military also established Comfort Stations in the Netherlands East Indies (Ars 2000; Poelgeest 1995). Distinctive about the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies however is that the occupation also resulted in a large number of private relationships between individual members of the Japanese military of high rank, Japanese civilians enlisted in the military and Indo-European women, whose number is estimated to range between 1,000 and 3,000. The existence of these relationships is no mere coincidence or result of pure individual agency, but must be understood in the context of the racial and gendered character of Japanese occupation policies.

One of the distinctive aspects of the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies is that the Indies were a Dutch colony when Japan attacked and subsequently occupied the Indies in 1942. The occupation not only took control of the territory and removed the Colonial administration, but, in addition to

taking members of the colonial military as prisoners of war, also subjected the civilian Colonial population, including women and children, to three years of internment. The Japanese occupation effectively removed large parts of colonial society, that is, approximately 99,000 (Indo-) Europeans from public life, and placed them in internment camps, where they endured three years of harsh discipline, material deprivation and personal loss (Bosma, Raben, and Willems 2006). In so doing, the Japanese military not only occupied the Indies, but upset the existing social order, in reversing the colonial and racial hierarchy. That is, during the Japanese occupation the white Dutch colonial population was subjected to the control of Japanese forces. Indonesians, who had been subordinated to the Dutch, meanwhile, walked freely and took over many of their administrative positions. The deep sense of anger and humiliation associated with the Japanese occupation is therefore not just a matter of the material deprivations and the hard labor demanded of prisoners of war, but was also amplified by the fact that both members of the military and civilians were subjected to the rule of a race they considered as inferior.

Race also featured in the occupation in other ways. Since the Dutch colonial population included a large Creole population of Indo-Europeans of Indonesian and Dutch or European parentage, internment policies faced the question of how to define and treat this large population of mixed Indo-European origins. The Netherlands East Indies, as compared to other European colonies in Asia stood out for the fact that interracial unions were significantly more common, and their offspring accepted as members of Colonial society. Unmarried men regardless of rank often lived in concubinage due to the fact that members of the military and traders for a long time were not permitted to bring their family or marry, leading to a steady growth of a community of Indo-Europeans of mixed heritage. To give you a sense of the scale of intermarriage, in 1925, 27.5% of all Europeans in Indonesia who married chose either native or mixed-blood spouses, a ratio that remained at 20% until 1940 (Gouda 1995). Moreover, in contrast to Eurasians in the British Empire, children of mixed origin who were recognized by their fathers were granted European status in the Netherlands East Indies (Ibid.), meaning that they were able to see themselves as part of Colonial society. Towards the twentieth century, locally born men of mixed heritage also began to play an important role in the colonial administration (Bosma and Raben 2008), granting them a certain possibility of a position and status mobility within Colonial society. In approaching WWII, many Indo-Europeans also joined the Colonial military (KNIL). While marginal within Colonial society, they were, as members of the Colonial military and administration, also complicit with the Colonial state.

Japanese internment policies initially primarily targeted full-blooded Dutch, meaning that Indo-Europeans of partial Asian heritage walked freely, and were encouraged to see themselves as part of the 'Asian brotherhood.' While this provided Indo-Europeans with personal freedom, their classification as Asians also deeply challenged their status within Dutch Colonial society, which was dependent on their loyalty and claim to their Dutch heritage, and denial of their Asian roots. Since a large number of Indo-European men had been recruited into the colonial army or worked as administrators in the colonial government, most of them were eventually interned during the occupation (Bosma, Raben, and Willems 2006).

But even with the sharpening of internment policy, a sizable part of the population, in particular Indo-European women and children, remained exempted from internment. An estimated 220,000 Indo-Europeans were not interned (Jong 2002). Life outside of the camps, however, came also with significant hardship. In the absence of fathers, husbands, and brothers, Indo-European women and their children lost their source of income, and had to live by selling their belongings, or find employment to make ends meet. Conditions were so dire that some women asked to be interned; at least they would then have food

and a roof over their head. By 1943, conditions became very dire, with an estimated 80% of the Indo-European population outside of camps being in need of support. For young people, in particular women who had often led a very sheltered life, the occupation could however also mean new freedoms and adventures. With the father interned, they had new responsibilities – boys often taking over the role of the father, and girls going out of the house to work – as well as adventure (Meijer 2004). It is under these circumstances that many Indo-European women encountered Japanese men – at their workplace or in form of a personal relationship that offered financial support and protection from arrest.

The disruption of the racial and gender order by the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies, therefore, constitutes an important backdrop to the formation of relationships between Indo-European women and Japanese men. With fathers and brothers interned, women not only shouldered the responsibility of supporting their families, but also were given considerable freedom in entering public life. As a consequence of the racial and gender distinctions of the internment policies, however, individual members of families and communities also experienced radically different circumstances during the occupation, resulting in much conflict and anger directed at women who became intimate with members of enemy forces during the internment of the Dutch community.

Encounters: Indo-European women and their Japanese partners

One key point of debate surrounding these relationships has been whether or not they can be considered as part of the Comfort-Women system, in other words, whether they are the result of a military policy and state effort to facilitate sexual services for its troops by force. While it is beyond this paper to assess individual motivations and intentions of the men and women involved, there is evidence to suggest that even though these relationships arose out of specific structural circumstances, and therefore share certain common features, they were not part of the system of Comfort Stations.

To be sure, also during the Japanese occupation of the Netherlands East Indies, the Japanese military recruited women for sexual services, according to van Poelgeest, at first in form of individual services, that were later extended into a system of brothels, to service the sexual needs of the military. According to available records, most of the women recruited were Indonesian women, but about 65 women of European descent have been considered as having been forced to serve in the system, and a total of 200–300 European women are estimated to have ‘worked as prostitutes’ during the Japanese Occupation, some of them recruited from internment camps (Poelgeest 1995). The Comfort Women System in general was not only notorious for the sexual violence it inflicted on women, but also in its assumption that the sexual needs of soldiers needed to be served as part of the war effort in form of state-run sexual services (Lie 1997).

However, precisely because sexuality became a state-controlled territory, private relationships were not permitted for members of the military. Marriages between members of the military and local women was prohibited during the war, as soldiers should commit themselves to their duty and nation (Torikai 1952). Individual relationships therefore took place in secrecy, and men could be subject to punishment if they were found out. Yet, there was also a grey area here. It has been suggested, for instance, that Japanese officers stationed in remote areas (where presumably sexual services were not available) were allowed to take an Indonesian common law wife. This means that such informal relationships were tolerated under certain conditions, presumably under the assumption that sexual health was an important element of a soldier’s well-being, and under the condition that the relationship would be monogamous (to prevent the spread of venereal disease). As a consequence, also relationships between Indo-European

women and Japanese men during the Occupation have been viewed by some as an extension of the system of prostitution established by the Japanese military during this period (Poelgeest 1995).

There are, however, also reasons to doubt that relationships between Indo-European women and Japanese men were an explicit part of Japanese military policy. The main common denominator was that women who entered such relationships and bore a child, resided outside of internment camps, as they were born and grown up in the Indies and came from mixed, Indo-European families. Women who were single at the time of the war, to the most part also resided with their families (and not in brothels), and their encounters with a Japanese man were observed and known by siblings and family members but kept secret from other Japanese. Some women who were already married did live on their own, but only very few resided with their Japanese partner because co-residence was apparently not permitted by the Japanese military.

It is also notable that the majority of men who are known to have entered a relationship with an Indo-European woman were not professional soldiers, but men in civilian functions. Members of the military, according to estimates by officials involved with these couples at the time, constituted no more than 30% of known cases (Torikai 1952). Those who were members of the military in most cases held a high-ranking position, and had a certain freedom of movement and did not reside in the barracks of common soldiers. Whether part of the military or serving civilian functions, most also worked in positions which brought them into contact with the general population, as technicians or administrators, or had access to scarce resources, in particular food, clothing and fuel. There were also a number of men who were members of the *kempeitai* secret police, who could freely walk the streets in plain clothes uniforms and entered relationships with Indo-European women. Also in this case, however, relationships appear to have formed as a consequence of specific circumstances and opportunities, rather than a systematic effort of the military.

Another important element of these relationships is that they were far from anonymous, and often took the form of individual, long-term commitments and personal patronage. Most stories confirm that the Japanese fathers provided for the family in economically very dire times. The intimate involvement of a young daughter – often between sixteen and eighteen years of age supported also their mothers and other family members. Some Japanese men are also known to have protected family members from arrest and internment, or having played a role in the release of a family member from imprisonment.

While the length of relationships varied, they most often took the form of long-term and often committed relationships that formed between 1943 and 1945. Although the majority of children were born between 1945 and 1946, there were also a number of women who had two children with the same father, suggesting a relationship which lasted for several years. Women also knew the name of their partner, and often other personal details; some kept photos and memento's suggesting a serious relationship that went beyond a fleeting encounter. The birth of a child also often confirmed a couple's commitment. Fathers who witnessed their children's birth before capitulation, often gave them a Japanese name. Even after capitulation, some mothers named their children after their father.

In short, although there is evidence to suggest that there were women who were forcibly recruited into prostitution and sexual slavery, these individual relationships of patronage do not appear to have taken place as part of a systematic military effort. Instead, they may rather be considered as a result of a new gender order established by the Japanese occupation. Where women relied on marriage and male family members for their welfare in peace times, the main source of their economic welfare and social pro-

tection under the occupation became associated with a relationship patronage by a Japanese man.

Needless to say, the capitulation and surrender of Japan in August 1945 was an important turning point for Indo-European women and their Japanese partners. As a consequence of Japan's surrender, Japanese fathers had to leave quickly to regroup and repatriate, or were arrested if suspected of war crimes. Women were again left to their own devices, and were faced with much unpredictability and many questions within the tumultuous Indonesian independence struggle that followed. Whereas a relationship with a Japanese man had offered protection and security during the occupation, their allegiance with 'the enemy,' materialized in the presence of a child with a Japanese father, now became a liability and source of fierce reactions from their community. Many women themselves had lost fathers and brothers during the war, either in combat or as a consequence of forced labor camps at the notorious Thai-Burma railway or in Japanese mines, generating a conflicted family situation. Rumors were spreading that women who had a relationship with a Japanese man would be interned and punished, and put on a small island.¹ Some women also reported being denied food and clothing by their communities due to their relationship with a Japanese man (Tamura 1957). Where could women and children find safety? It is here, that the reactions and measures taken by the Japanese and Dutch authorities come in.

Repatriation: Japanese perspectives

In the immediate aftermath of Japan's surrender, both Japanese and Dutch authorities were faced with the challenge of dealing with the presence of Dutch-Japanese couples in a period characterized by significant political uncertainty and unrest. In light of the traumatic experiences of Dutch POWs and civilians under the Japanese occupation, the well-being of mothers and children was a serious concern. Yet, the existence of Indisch-Japanese couples and their children in of themselves also touched on broader national issues. As has been widely argued, a nation is not just a political formation, but also, an imagined community (Anderson 1991) which relies on history, memory and symbolic representations to constitute its identity. Representations of war, moreover often deploy gendered imagery, with the nation represented by women and children, protected by male soldiers (McClintock 1996). Sexual contact across enemy lines, is thus not just a matter of individual encounters, but can also be read as the symbolic subordination of a nation, in form of its women's bodies, to the symbolic penetration by occupying forces. The attempts by Japanese and Dutch authorities to deal with the presence of Indisch-Japanese couples, therefore, were not just a matter of finding practical measures to support their well-being, but also to find ways to rectify the symbolic transgressions they represent after the end of hostilities.

Japanese military authorities were the first to react to the presence of Indisch-Japanese couples in the context of their own repatriation efforts. According to officials who were in charge of Indisch-Japanese couples after capitulation, the military was initially shocked by the sudden appearance of many members of the military with women and children in tow; so many men had disobeyed regulations and had had a relationship in secret (Tamura 1957). Yet, despite the fact that these private relationships infringed upon rules regarding personal conduct of members of the military, 'international marriages,' as they were called, military authorities took a number of steps to legalize their unions, and facilitate their swift repatriation to Japan.

¹ See NA 02.05.116-396

In arguing for the need to support and safeguard the well-being of these 'international marriages,' officials not only highlighted their concerns about mothers' and children's welfare, but also the connection between their treatment of Dutch women, and the international standing of a surrendered nation. More concretely, Japanese military officials took the stance that in light of the recent capitulation, the consequences of their men's wartime actions had to be approached in a 'proper' manner. Japan had to take responsibility over its actions and men were called upon to fulfill their role as husbands and fathers and marry the women if they consented, and taking them with them to Japan (Tamura 1957). They argued that women and children had to be supported on 'humanitarian' grounds – they could face threats from their own community, and were surrounded by an unstable political environment (Ibid.). In light of the fact that fathers and heads of household were considered responsible for the well-being of women and children at the time, this role fell under the responsibility of Japanese husbands and fathers. Capitulation and surrender, therefore, came with an emphasis on a notion of men's patriarchal duty to ensure the welfare of women and children, in an effort to symbolically reconstitute the dignity and propriety of the surrendered nation.

To be sure, in practice, the possibility of the repatriation of the couples to Japan also drew some doubts, precisely because men were expected to provide adequate support for mothers and children. Doing so was however no easy task. War-torn Japan did not offer many rosy prospects, with widespread food shortages affecting the general population (Dower 1999). Such conditions would hardly constitute adequate living standards for European women who had grown up in Dutch colonial society. Moreover, many soldiers came from small villages and large families, where women worked hard in the fields, without servants, cooks, or drivers, quite unlike the lifestyle women grew up in during colonial times. And there were cultural differences to be considered, not to speak of the question whether a foreign bride would be welcomed by her husband's family (Torikai 1952). Officials therefore also had important class differences in living standards to consider: even if men were eager to support their families as breadwinners, their lifestyles in war-torn Japan could hardly live up to the expected living standards of women grown up in Dutch colonial society.

However, attempts to discourage women from repatriation to Japan, according to some officials, also generated resistance. As an official in charge of negotiating with couples the benefits of staying together and repatriating to Japan reported, the attempt to dissuade women from repatriation often only strengthened their resolve to join their husbands in Japan. They argued that they could not possibly let a partner suffer such difficult circumstances, after having been helped during the three difficult years of the Japanese Occupation. Some couples even threatened to commit suicide if they were not allowed to marry and go to Japan (Torikai 1952). While the risks were high, their reaction also reflects an urge to leave the Indies, in light of the threats and rejection some felt from their families and communities.

To facilitate repatriation to Japan, the Japanese authorities took a number of steps. To offer material support and protection, Japanese authorities established a protection camp for women and children with Japanese partners in Kampong Makkassar in Batavia, which housed 30 couples before their repatriation to Japan.² Officials also set up procedures to make their unions official in form of a marriage certificate.³ After the arrival of the Allied forces, a British major with the name of Haining, acting under the

² Ibid.

³ NA 2.06.116, Takenaka Kin'ichi interrogation with Pennink August 23, 1946.

authority of the Japanese Chief of Staff, formalized the weddings together with the Catholic Priest Koide, in form of Roman–Catholic weddings (Tamura 1953). Although the officials involved confirmed the limited legality of the marriage certificates, the certificates were accepted as sufficient for allowing mothers to exit the Netherlands East Indies with their husbands (based on British approval), and facilitate the boarding of a repatriation ship to Japan.⁴

Between June and August 1946, three ships left for Japan, carrying 95 women of Dutch nationality, their children, and in most cases, their partners. Arrived safely in Japan, however, couples faced new challenges. Many men had married without the knowledge or consent of their parents, which meant that returning to their parental home was in a number of cases not an option (Inoue 2000). Some men were also faced by the fact that they already had a wife and children, with whom they had to negotiate further steps.⁵ To support such cases, Japanese officials arranged for temporary housing for such families in the city of Tsuchiura in form of a collective housing unit or dormitory.⁶ Located in commuting distance from Tokyo, it became the long-term home of a number of families, which established an independent life without the support of husbands' parents after arrival.

From the perspective of Japanese authorities, then, one of the primary tasks in dealing with Indisch–Japanese couples was to bow to the responsibilities faced by a surrendered nation in taking care of its own matters 'properly,' which in this case became symbolized by a breadwinner's role in taking care of his wife and children. But even if presented as a response to international demands to take responsibility for its wartime actions, this approach also ran counter Dutch interpretations of the needs and welfare of Dutch women and their children.

Dutch perspectives: international marriage and nationality laws

Like Japanese authorities, also the Netherlands Mission in Japan was concerned with the whereabouts and well-being of Dutch women with Japanese partners, yet had a very different take on their situation in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese capitulation. The news that 95 Dutch women had arrived in Japan in August 1946 was received with great consternation by the Netherlands Mission in Japan. The main official involved in the issue, the Mission's political adviser J. Pennink, was outraged by the fact that Dutch authorities had been bypassed, and strongly objected against Dutch women's presence in Japan and their relationship with 'the enemy.'⁷ That is, where Japanese officials saw the welfare of women and children as a responsibility of their Japanese husbands, Dutch authorities saw this as an infringement on Dutch women's freedom. The ensuing debate about the legality of the marriages and women's passage to Japan provides a window not only on the complexity of legislation in wartime, but also how national interests came to intersect with the debate surrounding the future of Indisch–Japanese international marriages.

To begin with, Dutch authorities questioned the legality of women's marriages and their subsequent repatriation to Japan. Marriage certificates had been issued without the apparent knowledge or confirmation by the Dutch authorities and took the form of an awkward legal construction. The marriage certificates were issued by a British official, Major Haining (as it later turned out, under the authority of

4 NA 2.05.116-396, J. Pennink, interrogation Hideo Koide, 13 September 1946.

5 NA 2.05.116-396 Memorandum J. Pennink, 2 August 1947, see also Inoue. 2000. "Tanabeko hikiage no kaiso: Genchi no fushijo wo hirtsu shite." *Kuchikumano*:18-23.

6 Ibid.

7 NA 2.05.116-396 Memorandum voor Luit. Kol. H.L. Hoorweg, 16 January 1947.

the Japanese military) in the Netherlands East Indies and were recognized by Japanese authorities for the purpose of repatriation to Japan as the spouse of a Japanese national. In recognizing the validity of the certificates, Japanese authorities relied on a memorandum issued by the British Major Falkland Cary of April 3, 1946, which stated that “The N.E.I. Government will raise no objection to any of their subjects whether native, Eurasian or white who are legally married to Japanese law and custom, being evacuated to Japan.”⁸ Pennink however questioned the legality of the certificates, suggesting that the fact that the marriages were approved by a British major (whom he believed to work under British command), did not mean the marriages were legal according to Japanese law, and hence, that they were declared as invalid. This also meant that from a Dutch perspective, the women had not lost their Dutch citizenship with marriage, and that by questioning the legal premises of these marriages, the Dutch authorities were able to protect women’s rights as Dutch citizens.

Pennink’s objections and the ensuing debate among diplomatic officials about the status of these marriages however were not merely motivated by procedural concerns, but also a belief that women should better return to their homeland in the Netherlands East Indies. In a memorandum from January 1947, Pennink explained his reasons why women who had come to Japan should repatriate as soon as possible. He observed that women reported differences in climate, diet, and language, as well as rejection by their Japanese families and the patriarchal attitude of men towards women in Japan as central concerns and reason for seeking out the help of Dutch authorities. Pennink’s report also did not hide his objections against the relationships, and deep suspicions of Japanese motivations. Based on interrogations with Japanese officials, who had been in charge of marriages who had accompanied one of the groups of women to Japan, he concluded that the marriages were forced, and the repatriation of Dutch women to Japan constituted a ‘trafficking in women’ (*vrouwenhandel*). He suspected officials of forcing women to marry, asserted that some of the marriages were ‘paper marriages’ (*schijnhuwelijken*) against women’s will, and accused Japanese men of maltreating Dutch women, in demanding their submission to their husbands and family.⁹ To support women’s plight, Pennink facilitated winter clothing and food parcels, and the opportunity to repatriate to the Netherlands East Indies.¹⁰ Until then, the Mission ensured that women could keep their citizenship and support for their return to their homeland. Similar to Japanese authorities, they thus offered protection from a presumably hostile environment.

Yet although Pennink showed himself as sympathetic, his attitude vis-à-vis women shifted when it became clear that some women decided to stay in Japan and legalize their marriages despite his warnings. Pennink chastised those resistant to repatriation for their unpatriotic actions (*onvaderlandslievende daad* in Dutch), calling on them to accept their wrong doing. That is, while he recognized that women had left the Netherlands East Indies because of a strong feeling of social rejection, and ostracism from their communities, he felt that women should face up to the ‘unpopularity of their actions,’ return to the Netherlands East Indies and prove themselves to be a ‘better person’ there.¹¹ That is, while he was willing to see them as victims of human trafficking, women who considered their relationships and marriages as consensual,

8 Ibid.

9 NA 2.05.116-396 Rapport: Repatriatie van Nederlandsche onderdanen uit Japan, 18 September 1946, J. Pennink.

10 NA 2.05.116-405; The last possible opportunity to repatriate to the Netherlands East Indies without cost was August 12, 1947. See NA 2.05 115 396 Repatriation of Netherlands subjects now in Japan, Central Liaison Office Tokyo, 4 September 1946.

11 NA 2.05.116-396 Memorandum voor Luit. Kol. H.L. Hoorweg, 16 January 1947.

and were critical of their reception within the Netherlands East Indies were considered disloyal and undeserving of Dutch assistance.

This stance became more concrete after the last opportunity to return to the Netherlands East Indies with government support had passed in August 1947. Couples applying for a visa to enter Japan as a married couple were subjected to considerable scrutiny, and were required to provide extensive documentation, including a marriage certificate, proof of approval of their marriage from their parents, proof of sufficient financial means, and above all, a declaration by Dutch women that they understood that marriage would mean the loss of citizenship, and that they would not be entitled to Dutch support after that, even in the event of divorce. Marriage with a Japanese national, viewed in these terms, constituted a choice between Dutch citizenship and rights, and a life with a Japanese national, with an uncertain future in Japan.

What can we conclude about the Dutch and Japanese approach to the couples based on these developments? Even if the Dutch authorities appeared as much more critical of these relationships on the surface, in both cases, the authorities' view on women's future was closely intertwined with their own national interests. Japanese authorities called upon men's responsibilities as husbands and fathers and thereby attempted to reconstitute the dignity and respect of the surrendered Japanese nation, symbolized by a husband and father who takes care of his wife and children. Dutch authorities in turn, considered women's repatriation to Japan as an invasive act, that only extended the indignities suffered by the Dutch population during the Japanese occupation. If women's relationships and the birth of children symbolized Japan's invasion of the sovereignty of the Dutch colony, repatriation to Japan added insult to injury in taking further control, rather than relinquishing their authority over Dutch women and children. Also for Dutch authorities, therefore, a reassertion of the gender order disrupted by the Japanese occupation, in form of Dutch patronage of women and children, was an important element of the symbolic recuperation of the formerly occupied nation.

Women's voices

Having mapped Dutch and Japanese perspectives on international marriages, I would now like to turn to the story of women themselves. What were women's own considerations about their children's welfare in the aftermath of Japanese surrender?

Available documentation on couples who repatriated to Japan with their children highlights their children's well-being, and their responsibility as parents over their welfare as a central concern. Some couples who had not planned to stay together in the long term, for instance, decided to stay together for the sake of the children. Ms. L.'s story illustrates this view. She had stayed with a Japanese man during the occupation, but when he was moved to another city due to his work duties, they went their separate ways. Upon finding that she was pregnant after Japanese surrender, however, she visited him to discuss their options. She reports: "He told me that he wanted to marry me as soon as there was an opportunity to do so, and that I had to try to come to Japan. He gave me the address of his parents, and this is where we were supposed to meet. The main issue for both of us was that the child should stay with its father." The prospective birth of a child, in other words, sealed their relationship and called on their responsibilities as parents.

While this was a common trope that led at least some couples to stay together and go to Japan, the uncertain outlook on the actual trip, and what life in Japan would look like also raised some doubts.

Another couple, Ms. V. and Mr. K., for instance, similarly decided to stay together after learning of Ms. V.'s pregnancy. Yet Ms. V. was skeptical about taking the two children, who were infants at the time, on a long boat trip to a place she had no familiarity with. As a consequence, she initially planned to go on her own, to check out the situation, before risking a trip with two small children. Eventually, however, the couple decided to repatriate as a family, and ultimately stayed in Japan permanently.

The concerns about life in Japan were not unfounded; illness and malnutrition were real issues facing small children at the time. Repatriation came with a boat trip of minimally two weeks, which in some cases took as long as five weeks in real terms. Although nurses were on board, they were trained to serve the needs of soldiers at the front, and not pregnant women and children. As a consequence, the delivery of a child on board of one of the repatriation ships was supported by the captain, who appeared to have more experience with childbirth than the nurses on board (Inoue 2000). Also after arrival in Japan, illness could take its toll. The son of Ms. L., according to her report, did not tolerate the climate and was taken to an American hospital shortly after her arrival. Unable to afford the medical bills, the mother had to find work, which in turn, did not sit well with the in-laws. Eventually, Ms. L. returned to the Netherlands East Indies, in consideration of her son's health.

Life for Dutch women in Japan also came with other challenges. Besides the language barrier, differences in diet and customs, everyday life differed sharply from the Netherlands East Indies. There were no servants, and women often had to get up early to cook rice on a wooden fire. Winters were cold, and new arrivals had few if any winter clothes (Torikai 1952). Relationships with the family were also often difficult. Some women felt rejected by their partners' families and found their partners withdrawn and intimidated after arrival in Japan.¹² Since they had married without the approval of the head of the family, also their partners found themselves in a difficult position.

Some women therefore looked for other options. While some divorced and returned to the Netherlands East Indies immediately, others stayed with their partner through thick and thin (Torikai 1952). Since repatriation to the Netherlands East Indies no longer received Dutch government support after 1947, women separating from their husbands after 1947 had very limited options. Some found themselves jobs in foreign companies in Japan, to save up for their return ticket. This however also meant that children were then often left in orphanages, separating mothers and children. Others, according to the observations of the embassy, engaged with American GIs, which were considered as being in the position to provide support and help along procedures regarding repatriation and other matters.¹³

Conclusion

As the stories of women who repatriated to Japan show, a personal relationship with a Japanese man during the Japanese Occupation of the Netherlands East Indies was far from a private matter but deeply intertwined with political circumstances of the post-surrender period. A relationship with a Japanese man during the occupation of the Netherlands East Indies could provide valuable access to scarce resources, as well as protection in a period characterized by serious material deprivation for the Dutch population. The change in the political and social context after capitulation however also altered the meaning of such relationship. Women could face criticism and backlash from their families and communities for having had

¹² NA 2.05.116-396

¹³ Ibid., NA 2.05.116-396

a relationship with a Japanese man, and a relationship often became a liability rather than a resource. With the involvement of Japanese and Dutch authorities, a relationship took on yet other dimensions: it could facilitate an escape from the Netherlands East Indies and safe passage to Japan. Yet at the same time, this could also result in the questioning of their loyalty to the Netherlands, and for those who decided to stay in Japan, lead to a loss of citizenship and government assistance.

Women's supposedly private relationships in such way, provide a window on the symbolic significance of women's actions on a national level. As debates surrounding their welfare show, national prerogatives closely impacted the way in which women's and children's future was dealt with, and the extent to which help and assistance was provided. Yet, while women presumably put themselves at risk by entering a controversial relationship with the 'enemy,' their stories also make clear that making it on your own, particularly with small children to take care of, was difficult and risky. It highlights women's heavy dependence on marriage as a means for material protection of their well-being in a period characterized by social and political upheaval. Above all, it underscores women's marginal position within their nation, as debates on their marriages concerned themselves with patriarchal rights and responsibilities over their welfare, but paid little attention to their actual well-being and independence.

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