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Decolonization, Nation Building, and Migration Crises in Southeast Asia

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter explores the mechanisms and underlying socioeconomic causes of the forced migrations that attended the decolonization of Southeast Asia. It is argued that these migrations share many characteristics with those in the wake of dissolution of the empires of the European continent after the First World War. Unlike in Europe, however, most of the displacements remained under the radar of the international refugee agencies even if they entailed harrowing conditions and human suffering. Expulsion of colonial elites to Europe, China, or Japan were rubricized as repatriations rather than international migrations, even if they involved migrants having to leave for countries they had never seen before. For most of the decolonization era that extended well into the 1970s, only international refugee diasporas were identified as migration crises. They were nonetheless just the tip of the iceberg of all the displacements that attended the decades of decolonization and nation building. It is only since the 1990s that internal displacements in Southeast Asia have become defined as migration crises as part of global turn on this subject.

Keywords: decolonization, forced migrations, Southeast Asia, refugees, internal displacements

As in many other places of the world, for centuries Southeast Asian people have massively fled from violence, from slave-raiding armies to pirates preying on their coasts (Hugo and Chan 1990, 22). Whereas colonial empires had established some peace after their military conquests or annexations, decolonization was attended by innumerable forced migrations. In general one can say that what happened in the Third World in the aftermath of decolonization was prefigured in the expulsion of Iberian Jews and the French Huguenots, the contraction of the Ottoman Empire, the breakup of the Austrian- Hungarian Empire, and the Russian Revolution. Even more than these European empires,

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colonial societies in Southeast Asia were plural societies, in Furnivall's definition, in which minorities such as the Chinese were found in trade and the Europeans occupied the commanding positions in administration and plantation enterprise. The decolonization process often entailed the reorganization of these plural societies.

Our understanding of what refugee or migration crises are, meanwhile, has been shaped by the intertwined effects of the wars of the twentieth century and the emergence of the international state system. Whereas the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire caused the displacement of already 1 percent of the global population, the Second World War produced the horrendous figure of 7.6 percent, involving 90 million people for China alone (Gatrell 2013, 3). It was in this context that the "refugee regime" was born, in which the refugees were identified as people in well-founded fear of persecution. The notion of "refugee regime" implied the acceptance of the fact that the governments of the persecuting states could not be removed or changed but that other states should share the responsibility for the resettlement of the refugees. The notion that states had certain obligations toward displaced people emerged on a rather ad hoc basis after the First World War, in the wake of the Russian Revolution, and became institutionalized thanks to the work of Fridtjof Nansen, who introduced the "Nansen Passport" for displaced people. The formation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950 was of course a further major accomplishment in creating a global refugee regime. The refugee problem was defined as an international problem of people who, if not legally stateless, at least did not enjoy protection as state citizens and were castaways in the state system. This regime prescribed refugee organizations' adherence to strict impartiality and to observe the principle of noninterference as well as to uphold the notion that refugees were distinguishable from other categories of migrants (Hugo 2006). Obviously, this refugee regime, born in the aftermaths of the two World Wars, also had its Eurocentric bias. Prior to 1962, the UNHCR had only one office outside Europe, namely in Hong Kong a city that was flooded by Chinese refugees (Keeley 2001, 304, 307).

The concept of the "refugee regime" helps us to explain why population movements that are caused by social conflict are only selectively recognized as refugee or migration crises by international conventions. It also explains why Graeme Hugo observed thirty years ago that forced migrations in Southeast Asia were a neglected area among social scientists (Hugo 1987, 249). This despite the fact that the refugee flows that attended the process of decolonization in Southeast Asia had so many traits similar to the disappearance of the empires in Europe after the First World War. International conventions also fail to address how refugee migrations may have resulted in or are linked to other migrations and migration systems including human trafficking. Refugees are not just seeking safety but also a future. Extensive movements from the countryside to the cities in many regions of Southeast Asia, for example, were both caused by a push of rural unsafety and the pull of urban economic promise. Migrations are, moreover, often not confined to a single movement, but part of a chain of migrations. Today's condition of Southeast Asia as a massive emigration area is to no small extent related to earlier histories of displacement. Many of the 2.6 million Vietnamese refugees of the late 1970s

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would not stay in the country of the first arrival, and many among the almost one million who left Hong Kong in the fifteen years after the signing of the Sino-British Treaty of 1984 had been immigrants seeking safety and a future in this British Crown Colony.¹

As I will explain in the following sections, the end of colonial empires initially led to waves of rural-urban migrations. The subsequent phase of economic nationalism and reshaping of plural economies brought about expulsions of minorities, as will be detailed in the next two sections, one of which will focus on the Sino-Indonesians and Indo-Europeans in Indonesia. This will be followed by a discussion of the similarities of the diasporas originating from Southeast Asia that often included repeated migrations.

Finally, internal displacement became part of the policies of dispossession in the context of economic nationalism or just because of the greed of ruling elites.

The End of Colonial Empires and Urban Migrations

The dissolution of colonialism in Southeast Asia forged ahead with political drama and armed violence, but the drama for millions of people was also that it marked the end of an era of relatively open borders. Over the course of the nineteenth century Southeast Asia had become a massive producer of commodities for the industrial world. In the century preceding the Second World War, an estimated 15 million Indians went to Burma, 4 million to Malaysia, and hundreds of thousands to other countries in Southeast Asia.

Further, 8 million Chinese went to the Malay Peninsula, 4 million to Indonesia, 4 million to Thailand and 2 to 3 million to Indochina (McKeown 2004, 158). The Great Depression that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929 shattered the economic foundations of this extensive mobility. Borders were closed and migrant workers who were laid off returned (Amrith 2011). Chinese labor migrants starving in the streets of Straits Settlements were sent back with government sponsored shipping, for example. Of the 440,000 Chinese returning to China in the early 1930s 75,000 had their passage funded by the government of Malaya, which also paid for the repatriation of 200,000 Tamils (Ee 1961, 43–44; Huff 2001, 290, 309, 310, 315, 319).

When the postwar governments of Southeast Asia started to figure out who belonged where and to what state, many of their questions had already been answered by the colonial administrations, who had begun the work of engineering migration, of containing migration flows, and of the construction of citizen regimes. In general, the colonial governments of Southeast Asia were not keen to have immigrant laborers as settlers—the only exception was the presence of Indonesians in British Malaya, who were considered by the British administration to pose an ethnic-Malay counterweight to growing Chinese and Tamil presence. The immigration of Chinese in Southeast Asia, to mention the largest immigrant population, was on the one hand heavily pulled by the existence of the commodity-producing frontiers but on the other ruled by restrictive immigration regimes.

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The most restrictive rules were imposed by the American administration of the Philippines that simply extended the application of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) from the United States to its colonial dependency and as a result the Chinese newcomer population in this extensive archipelago numbered a mere 100,000 at the end of colonial rule. Meanwhile, any official references that would have suggested a Philippine plural society were erased: the large Mestizo Chinese population, about 10 percent of the total population, was consciously not counted as a separate category in the American census statistics of the early twentieth century.

In other countries, however, the Chinese were considered indispensable as migrant workers and this pertained to Malaysia and the Netherlands Indies in particular. Its colonial administrations developed legal pluralism to protect the rights of the native population (Census of the Philippines 1903, vol. 2, 42; Purcell, 573–574, 581). Labor migrants were considered to be temporary residents. Millions of Chinese workers came to the Netherlands Indies in the decades around 1900, but the first generation Chinese immigrants in the Netherlands-Indies numbered a modest 433,842 among a total Chinese population of 1,190,014 by 1930. Chinese immigration was actually discouraged among other things by imposing a head-tax on every Chinese entering the Netherlands Indies (Purcell 1951, 543). Less restrictive was British Malaya, where in 1931 258,523 Chinese were born in British Malaya and 916,254 elsewhere. For Indians in British Malaya the numbers are 58,695 and 412,971 respectively. But this was as long as plantations exerted an insatiable demand for labor. By 1928 the government of Malaysia set the first restrictions on Chinese immigration, followed by a quota system for male Chinese immigrants in 1930 (Vlieland 1932, 42–43; Ee 1961, 42–43).

In mainland Southeast Asia settlement was also modest compared to the large migration flows. In Burma, which experienced 15 million immigrations from India, the total Indian population amounted to just a million among a total population of 16.9 million in 1941 (Furnivall, 1956, 186). Despite the 4 million migrants who entered Thailand the number of China-born Chinese residents stayed at 349,000 and together with the locally born 557,000 the entire ethnic Chinese population amounted to 9.8 percent of the country's population according to the reconstruction by Skinner by 1917 (Skinner 1957, 79). The government of this country issued a range of measures, including raising the cost of an entrance permit in the 1930s, to stem the additional influx of Chinese refugees from the Japanese invasion of China (Vatikiotis 1999, 221).

Many of the postcolonial discriminatory policies against Chinese minorities, particularly those against members who were engaged in retail trade, have their roots in colonial days. And these policies were in part a response to the Chinese nationality law of 1909 that was based upon the principle of *ius sanguinis*, which meant that the overseas Chinese offspring had Chinese nationality. This policy was countered in the Netherlands Indies by adopting the *ius solis* in 1910, making everyone born on the soil of the Netherlands Indies a Dutch subject and all persons recognized by a European father as their child a Dutch citizen. As a result ethnic Chinese born in the Netherlands Indies had

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a dual nationality (Purcell 1951, 515). What they shared with Europeans, moreover, was that they were not entitled to own land.

The colonial legal boundaries were shored up during the Japanese Occupation (1942–1945) of much of Southeast Asia. In the Netherlands Indies 110,000 Europeans, overwhelmingly with no Asian roots, were interned in camps, whereas the Indo-Europeans became more or less confined to rapidly narrowing urban spaces. The Japanese had tried to lure the Indo-Europeans or Métis on their side in Indonesia and Vietnam respectively. They failed to do so because in Indonesia the Indo-Europeans prided their Dutch citizenship, and in Vietnam the Métis were effectively drawn into the European camp by the Vichy administration (Pomfret 2009, 341; Thompson 1952, 49). An entirely different type of separation took place in Burma, where the Japanese Occupiers drove half a million Indians out of this country in 1942. Seventy thousand were evacuated by sea, another 4,000 or so by air, but over 400,000 had to walk back, in what became according to Hugh Tinker the forgotten “Long March” (Tinker 1975, 3–4). It was an exodus that followed upon a British defeat without any heroism; the refugees simply left on their own and Tinker himself was witness of the refugees’ desperate conditions with only a “skeleton” of a refugee organization left. At least one in eight did not survive this ordeal (Tinker 1975, 10). It became an almost forgotten migration crisis.

Throughout Southeast Asia, the countryside became a particularly unsafe place to be in these years. The impact of Japan’s “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” severely upset the rural economies. As a result severe famines in the final months of the War struck Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, and parts of the Philippines.² In Indonesia there was the additional suffering of millions who had been enlisted in forced labor projects and about 270,000 Indonesians were sent to the Southeast Asian mainland as *romusha*—to be put to work at the notorious Burma railroad—of whom only 50,000 survived. Against this backdrop of hunger, destruction, and rural unrest, Sukarno proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia on August 17 and Ho Chi Minh established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam a few weeks later on September 2. They were immediately rebuffed by the colonial powers who sent in their troops and inflicted years of colonial war on their countries. In British Malaya a variant of this scenario developed. The Malaysian Communist Party had been the leading factor in the resistance against the Japanese Occupation and it found itself in a strong position when the British returned, but not strong enough, because it hardly appealed to other Malaysians as it advocated dual citizenship for Chinese in Malaya. A ten-year communist guerrilla war against British rule started in 1947. In the Philippines, the guerrilla movement against the Japanese occupation, the Huk Balahap, channeled its resistance in the postwar years against deeply unjust agrarian relations, which culminated in an outright rebellion against the Philippine government. Rural unsafe conditions made many people flee from the countryside.

The early years after Japanese capitulation in Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia were years of extensive coerced or at least violence-induced migrations, but since this concerned predominantly movements from the countryside to the city most of these displacements were not identified as crises. The same happened with displacements

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during the wars of independence that continued during the early years of the new nations. An armed resistance movement against the Republic of Sukarno led in West Java to a massive flight from the countryside to the region's capital Bandung, which doubled in size in the 1950s to over a million residents (Hugo 2006, 73; McNicoll 1968, 44). Indeed, urbanization was another consequence of the War and the chaotic years of early independence. In Indonesia the many insurrections and constant violence—in Aceh, Tapanuli, West Java, East Java, and various parts of Sulawesi—in the first fifteen years of the Republic's existence made the countryside particularly unsafe, causing massive flows of displaced persons (Hugo 2006; McNicoll 1968, 43–48). Most of the refugee flows caused by rebellions against the government in Jakarta were either temporary as in Aceh or led to permanent settlement in the cities, leading to rapid growth for cities such as Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan and Makassar (Ujung Pandang), Pare-Pare, and Watampone in West Sulawesi (Hugo 2006, 76; McNicoll 1968, 48–50). Some refugee flows even crossed into other islands: about 10,000 residents of Sulawesi fled to Jambi (Sumatra) and another 5,000 settled along the coast of West Kalimantan.

Ethnic Chinese were disproportionately present among the refugees from the countryside. Malaysia saw a massive displacement and forced resettlement of mainly Chinese from 1949 to 1957, as part of the British response to the insurrection of the Malaysian Communist Party. About 573,000 people were resettled and the rural proportion of the Chinese population declined from 57 percent to 27 percent—for the average population it went from 74 percent to 58 percent—but one needs to recognize that the Chinese made up over a third of British Malaya's population at that time (Hirschman 1980, 118; Pryor 1979, 80, 82, 97). In Indonesia, the Sino-Indonesians were forced to move into the cities as well. Already an urbanized population in 1930, with 58.8 percent living in cities, by the late 1950s the figure stood at almost 80 percent (Coppel 1983, 7). The fact that so many Chinese had already left the countryside in Indonesia may have saved them from the worst of the 1965 killings during the suppression of the Communist party as a matter of fact (Coppel 1983, 59). Nonetheless, thousands of Chinese had to be evacuated from the Medan area in 1966. About 10,000 Chinese, who were not citizens of Indonesia, were driven out of Aceh by the order of the province's military commander (Coppel 1983, 69). The largest and gravest outburst of anti-Chinese riots took place in Kalimantan, where 5,000 Sino-Indonesians got killed and 45,000 expelled by the Dayaks in 1967. An estimated 60,000 fled to Pontianak and Sambas (Braithwaite 2010, 81; McNicoll 1968, 50). That this ethnic violence occurred between population groups that were highly intermarried can be explained by the fact that it was ignited from the outside. Sukarno in his confrontational politics towards Malaysia had sponsored Chinese guerrillas in adjacent Sarawak who had been left on their own after Indonesian appeasement of its neighbor. These fighters turned in 1966 against the Indonesian army but also attacked Dayak communities. It opened the gates of hell (Coppel 1983, 146).

Europeans and Chinese in Early Independent Indonesia

The migrations from the countryside to the cities and the evacuations almost seamlessly linked up to migrations out of the newly independent countries. Even though they concerned migrations that were the result of forced assimilation policies, they were not defined as crises. While for most Europeans their departure was for the obvious reason of the transfer of sovereignty, for many Eurasian or mestizo groups, who were emotionally firmly rooted in the former colonies but still visibly connected to the former rulers, the situation was far more complicated. This was particularly true for Indonesia, where the European upper crust had become very heavily creolized over the centuries. Although the Japanese occupiers had tried to lure the Indo-Europeans as “Asians” into their camp, only a few came over to their side, as the Indonesians were not only deeply attached to Indonesian soil but also thoroughly Dutch.

Immediately upon Japanese capitulation nationalist youth gangs (*pemuda*) turned violently against both white Europeans as their Indo-European offspring. Under these conditions, the elite, consisting of 70,000 Dutch, was quickly repatriated in 1945 to recover from their internment under Japanese occupation either as civilians or as prisoners of war. About 15 percent of these repatriated were academically trained and belonged to the upper crust of the colonial bureaucracy and colonial enterprise. The majority of the Indo-Europeans were not supposed to “repatriate” to the Netherlands. By late 1945, however, most of Java was under the control of the Republic of Indonesia proclaimed by Sukarno and about 65,000 Indo-Europeans were deported to protection camps, ostensibly to protect them against the *pemuda*, but actually to hold them as hostages.

In 1949, when the Europeans living in Indonesia had to choose between becoming either Dutch or Indonesian citizens, an unsurprisingly mere 10 percent opted for Indonesian citizenship. With the transfer of sovereignty many Europeans in government positions lost their jobs and about 50,000 persons left Indonesia. In private enterprise the management continued to stay in European hands, but the middle-ranking positions went to Indonesians. This Indonesianization condemned the Indo-Europeans who overwhelmingly had opted to keep their Dutch citizenship over poverty. Actually, in December 1957 all of the remaining Dutch citizens were declared *persona non grata* and all Dutch property was nationalized, which led to another exodus. In the following years, the Indo-Europeans who had opted for Indonesian citizenship desperately regretted their choice and thanks to intense mobilization of Dutch public opinion by repatriated colonial old hands the reluctant Dutch government was forced to organize their transfer to the Netherlands too. Only 5 percent of all Europeans who had lived in the Netherlands Indies stayed in Indonesia. In total, 330,000 Dutch citizens, 26,000 Moluccan colonial soldiers, and about

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23,000 Indonesians (among whom were highly educated Chinese) came to the Netherlands between 1945 and 1967 (Beets et al. 2002, 56).

Whereas Dutch citizens had to make a difficult choice regarding their citizenship as part of the transfer of sovereignty, Chinese who were born in Indonesia automatically obtained dual citizenship. This was the upshot of two opposing legal principles. Whereas the Chinese law that followed the principle of *ius sanguinis* bestowed nationality on all Chinese descendants, the Indonesian legal principle of *ius solis* granted citizenship on the basis of birth on Indonesian soil. During late colonial society the ethnic Chinese had usually aligned themselves with the colonial status quo the way the Indo-Europeans and, to a certain extent, the Indonesian aristocracy had done. For obvious reasons, the Japanese had made no effort to appeal to the Chinese and during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949), the latter usually took a neutral stand, to which they were ordered by the Kuo Ming Tang government in China (Purcell 1951, 561).

Suspicious about the very well-developed transnational bonds among ethnic Chinese, the Indonesian government pressed China to sign an agreement to end this automatic dual citizenship, which happened in the margins of the Bandung conference of 1955, and that went into force in 1960. This brought the Sino-Chinese into a situation comparable to where the Indo-Europeans of Indonesia had been since 1949. Since about a third of the Peranakan Chinese opted for Chinese citizenship and another third of the Chinese in Indonesia were born in China it resulted in the majority of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia becoming aliens. It was an uneasy situation because totok (China-born) Chinese continued to be highly influential in business and because Sino-Chinese and totok Chinese were highly intermingled through family bonds. This was the backdrop of Suharto's policy of making naturalization for totok Chinese easy and of exerting more than gentle pressure to assimilate on the entire ethnic Chinese population (Somers Heidhues 1999, 166).

Although their fate was not one of comprehensive expulsion as the Europeans had experienced, an ethnic Chinese Indonesia exodus did come about in the 1950s. Despite the fact that they had a powerful ally in the Communist party of Indonesia (PKI), their position became increasingly insecure with the ascendancy to power of the military that had also led to the seizure of Dutch property (Somers Heidhues 1964, 17). At the orders of the military not only the schools for Dutch but also those for Sino-Indonesians were closed by late 1957 and early 1958. And while the Dutch were punished for the refusal of the Netherlands to hand New Guinea over to Indonesia, ethnic Chinese paid their price for the transnational assertiveness of both Kuo Ming Tang and PRC in Indonesia (Somers Heidhues 1964, 20–21). By the mid-1950s about 65 percent of the Chinese schools in Indonesia were PRC-minded and about 30 percent pro Kuo Ming Tang (Godley and Coppel 1990, 183–184). Although these children were firmly rooted in the country and spoke Bahasa or a local language, at school they were taught to speak and write Mandarin. Ethnic Chinese students who had completed secondary education had no university to go to in Indonesia, whereas China could boast of universities of world-class level in the 1950s (Godley and Coppel 1990, 180). The students who left for China did so

abandoning their future option of becoming Indonesian again. Fingerprints were taken at the ports of embarkation and they were declared *persona non grata*, like the Dutch. In total about 50,000 higher-educated young Chinese went to China to pursue further education, out of idealism, and also to join the Maoist experiment.

For ethnic Chinese in Indonesia the situation worsened when in 1959 measures were taken against retail traders in the Indonesian countryside who were not citizens. The options for these Chinese shopkeepers were either to move to the city or to heed Chinese propaganda that they would find a warm welcome home as “patriots” (Tan 2010, 561).

The Chinese government claimed that it could easily absorb half a million overseas Chinese and organized transport to “repatriate” 130,000 Chinese between 1959 and 1961 (Godley 1989, 335). These waves of students and economic refugees were followed by a third, and smaller, one in 1965 in the wake of the bloody repression of the Communist party, the PKI, by the Indonesian government.

The Forging of Nationhood and the Expulsion of Ethnic Chinese

What happened in Indonesia was part of a general trend in Southeast Asia, which we can define as a series of migration crises. Socialism and anticapitalism were often practically identical with creating a “pure” countryside cleansed from Chinese petty traders or, as was the case in Malaysia, from Communism. In the first fifteen years of Malaysia’s independence half a million ethnic Chinese had been resettled to empty the pond, in which the Chinese communist guerrillas operated. After the resettlement, approximately 250,000 ethnic Chinese left the country, of whom 65,000 moved to Singapore, which had become a state separated from the Malaysian Federation in 1965 (Hirschman 1975, 42). In Cambodia, where the ethnic Chinese made up 10 percent of the population, few of them stayed after the US bombardments, the horrendous regime of Pol Pot, and ten years of Vietnamese occupation. From Laos also nearly the entire ethnic Chinese population of about 64,500 fled after the coup of Pathet Lao in 1975 (Ng Shui Meng 1999, 169–171).

The military coup in Burma 1962, which declared the country a socialist state, propelled an exodus of 300,000 Indians and probably 100,000 ethnic Chinese. In 1967, violent anti-Chinese riots occurred leading to killings among ethnic Chinese (Lintner 1999, 140–143). To these figures came hundreds of thousands of internally displaced to whom I shall return later on.

In Vietnam, the ethnic Chinese, and the traders among them in particular, were one of the two important minorities who were threatened during the decolonization. The Catholic Vietnamese were the other minority consisting of 1.6 million people, or 8.5 percent of the Vietnamese population in 1945, who had immediately shown their allegiance to independence in September 1945 (Marr 2013, 428). With the implementation of the Geneva Accords between France and North Vietnam in 1954, 900,000 Vietnamese, 60

percent of whom Catholic, fled from North to South Vietnam and 140,000 Viethminh in the opposite direction. After the fall of the South Vietnamese regime in 1975, the refugee flows were relatively modest initially, but exploded in an exodus when Hanoi closed 30,000 shops in Cholon, the China town of Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) home to one million ethnic Chinese (Osborne 1980, 41). It all happened under a barrage of government propaganda against yellow capitalism and about the Chinese holding 80 percent of the economy in South Vietnam (Van der Kroef 1979, 4). At that time China invaded North Vietnam. The threatened regime reacted at home by expropriation and massive internment of entrepreneurs and former South Vietnamese government officials. The first wave was followed by a broader exodus of farmers and fishermen who feared that the economic policies of the government in Hanoi would bring disaster (Van der Kroef 1979, 5–6).

From Repatriations to Migration Crises

The decolonization trajectories were attended by the repatriations of the colonial military, civil servants, and managers of private enterprise. In some countries where the higher echelons were already “Asianized,” as was the case of the Philippines, this went rather smoothly; in other countries such as Indonesia and Korea where the colonial presence was deep and had led to the presence of large Dutch respectively Japanese populations, a painful exodus, a migration crisis, appeared to be unavoidable. Although the Netherlands and Japan were not particularly eager to “take back” their citizens who were often acculturated to the societies of their former colonies, they had little choice. Over 6 million Japanese were simply expelled from their former occupied territories and overseas possessions, including from Korea where they had been for a very long time. They were *hikiage*—literally lifted or pulled—from the colonies to Japan (Cohen 2012).

The Dutch government had tried to draw a line between the metropolitan-born or at least metropolitan-educated Dutch citizens in Indonesia and those who did not qualify as such and were in the government’s gaze firmly rooted in Asian society. At this juncture the politicians and activists of the right, the colonial revanchists, stood firmly by the Indo- Europeans left behind in Indonesia, making the emotional plea that they should not be left at the mercy of an Indonesian president who had collaborated with the fascist Japanese occupier. Likewise, the willingness of the United States to take in Vietnamese refugees only emerged under the moral pressure of US veteran organizations pleading for their “comrades in arms.” The first wave of these refugees were the civil servants, the better educated who in no way would find a place in the new regime. They were a group of about 80,000 people who were airlifted out of the chaotic collapse of the South Vietnamese regime in 1975. They had to be taken in by the United States, even though, according to a Gallup Poll held in 1975, about 54 percent of the American people were against admitting the Vietnamese refugees into their country (Hien 1996).

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With respect to refugees who were closely affiliated with the colonial regimes the responsibilities were clear. The refugee wave from Indochina of 1979 took place in an entirely new context, however. Here we see the notion of international migration crises emerging. First of all, none of the countries in Southeast Asia that were receiving refugees from Indochina had been signatories of the 1951 Refugee Convention and hence they did not subscribe to the UNHCR definitions of refugees. Second, Hanoi clearly saw the refugee flow as a political leverage (Wain 1979, 160–161). Stories were circulating, and these seem to have been not entirely unfounded, that the government in Hanoi was involved in extorting money from the refugees and that high civil servants made in fact a business out of people fleeing their country (Van der Kroef 1979, 11). Many of the ethnic Chinese in Cholon, for example, were capable of buying their way out of the country, paying government officials (Hugo and Chan 1990, 24). For Singapore in 1980 this was an argument to become even more restrictive in allowing refugees in. The arrival of Vietnamese of Chinese descent arriving in Singapore could “upset the ethnic balance” and lead to tensions, the city state’s government feared (Lavoie and Knock 1990, 49; Yuen 1990, 82–83).

The countries in Southeast Asia succeeded in negotiating a burden sharing by western countries with regard to resettling refugees from Indochina. Nonetheless Thailand, which had sheltered one million refugees since 1975, still housed 419,000 refugees in camps at the end of the Cambodian-Vietnamese war. These refugees had fled the heavy fighting near the Thai border (Chantavanich and Rabe 1990, 66). While Thailand became more generous in providing refuge in the 1980s, the western countries turned more restrictive and began to consider boat refugees as economically motivated migrants rather than refugees according to the UNHCR definition (Chantavanich and Rabe, p. 71). With the colonial era further sinking into history, the West stepped back whereas the sense of responsibility among the ASEAN countries increased. From 1982 onwards a settlement fatigue became visible in western countries. All in all by 1988, half of the approximately 1.4 million refugees from Indochina who were resettled outside Southeast Asia lived in the United States, followed by China (284,000), Canada (121,182), Australia (117,997), and Hong Kong 68,000 (Hugo 1990, 186). For the United States it has been reported that many of the refugees were second-time migrants who had fled from North to South Vietnam in 1954 (Kelly 1986, 141; Osborne 1980, 47).

Refugee Diasporas

The reception of the refugees of decolonization varied widely, but some important similarities can be singled out. The first waves integrated relatively easily and—as often is the case with refugees—we can discern a selectivity here: it was the younger and more highly educated who tend to migrate first to escape from oppression. They often already had relatives overseas. Vietnamese students, for example, had gone to France and Canada for their studies in the early 1950s and stayed there (Chan and Dorais 1998, 294–

297). When there were no relatives around, people were more likely to resettle. That happened, for example, with the ethnic Chinese and Europeans of Indonesia, many of whom ended up in Hong Kong respectively California. It is important to underline that 60 percent of the Europeans who were repatriated were of mixed Indonesian-European descent, had few relatives in the Netherlands, and were dispersed over the country. They experienced their new country as cold both in terms of physical climate as well as mentally. About 50,000 Indo-Europeans, particularly those who were born in the colonial Indonesia, eventually did not settle in the Netherlands but migrated again—half to the United States, others to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Brazil, the Dutch Antilles, and Spain. Like the Indo-Europeans in the Netherlands, the Vietnamese refugees who were sent to the United States were dispersed over the country and had to accept low-paid jobs regardless of their training, as their certificates were simply not recognized (Hien 1996). Downward occupational mobility was the rule for the Vietnamese, particularly because a lack of language skills, but it also was the rule for Europeans who were repatriated during the Indonesian decolonization (Kelly 1986, 146).

But this downward social mobility was nothing compared to what Chinese from Indonesia experienced in China. The newly arrived were shocked to see the poverty and lack of sanitation; this was particularly shocking to the middle-class Chinese who arrived in China during the years of the Great Leap (Godley and Coppel, 1990, 187–188). The immigrants from Indonesia suffered from a complete lack of recognition of their own cultural needs. The Chinese who had been repatriated in 1960–1961 were overwhelmingly settled at Hainan Island or in separate communities and continued to speak Bahasa among themselves (the Indonesian national language) as they spoke many different Chinese languages, which severely hampered their integration into Chinese society. The Indo-Chinese students by contrast stayed closer to their relatives and integrated more easily into Chinese society, although they suffered severe mistreatment during the Cultural Revolution because of their “bourgeois” background. The other Sino-Indonesians fared hardly any better though, as they were always recognized as different even if they were not of mixed Indonesian-Chinese descent. Many “returnees” from Indonesia found their way toward Hong Kong and Macau, where they usually occupied the lowest societal strata. By 1976, 300,000 overseas Chinese, mostly from Indonesia, had left China, 250,000 to Hong Kong and 25,000 to Macao. According to a recent estimate about 350,000 “repatriated” Chinese from Southeast Asia are living in Hong Kong (Godley 1989, 349). In some quarters of Hong Kong one can hear local Indonesian languages mixed with Cantonese or Mandarin. Many of these residents were pupils of the Chinese-language high schools in Indonesia in the late 1950s (Godley and Coppel 1990, 103, 105).

Internal Displacements

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The refugee diasporas are so to speak the tip of the iceberg of much larger displacements, which remained in the region and even within national boundaries. The largest single group of refugees in Southeast Asia who were registered as internally displaced were probably the 1,328,000 displaced in South Vietnam by 1968 (Gatrell 2013, 207). Internal displacement, and even mass killings, attracted little international public attention and geopolitical interests stood in the way of condemning responsible governments for causing migration crises. Four examples stand out here: first, the Indonesian occupation of East Timor; second, Papua New Guinea or Irian Jaya; third the conflict in the Muslim territories of the Philippines; and fourth the minorities in Burma and the Rohingyas in particular. In all these cases geopolitical interests severely diminished international recognition of the migration crises and even mass killings.

In the wake of the Carnation Revolution of Portugal in 1974, East Timor was on its way to become an independent nation under the leadership of the left-wing Fretilin, when Indonesia felt encouraged by anticommunist fears in the West, and the United States in particular, to invade this country. From 1975 onwards, the Indonesian occupation forces fought a cruel war; after a few years half of the population was internally displaced. From 1975 until 1999, when the United Nations became the interim ruler, a third of the population lost their lives. About 20,000 managed to escape to Australia and 10,000 to Portugal (Wise 2004, 152). Noam Chomsky censured in 1979 the immense hypocrisy of the West that denounced Vietnam for causing the boat refugee problem, while staying silent about the butchering of the people of East Timor or adding insult to injury by delegitimizing Fretilin (Chomsky 1979).

Chomsky's ire could have pertained to the situation in Irian Jaya as well. The Netherlands had been forced by the United States to hand over New Guinea—its official name at that time—to Indonesia in 1962. Resistance of the local population against this annexation had already cost 30,000 of the 900,000 Papuans their lives by the late 1970s (Van der Kroef 1978, 125). Probably tens of thousands of Papuans of Irian Jaya had fled to the eastern part of the island into Papua New Guinea. With the transmigration programme of Indonesia, bringing an influx of 250,000 Javanese and concomitant business interests in the 1980s, resistance gained new momentum and the result was a new exodus of intelligentsia and another 10,000 refugees heading Papua New Guinea.³ It was not enough to mobilize international pressure to force the Indonesian government to soften its policies, although it was enough for the World Bank and other sponsors to discontinue their support for the Indonesian transmigration programme.

A third case concerns Mindanao, the southern Philippines. By 1960, the influx of 1.2 million Christian immigrants had turned this once sparsely populated territory into the home of 19 percent of the Philippine population (Feranil 1998, 12; Wernstedt and Simkins 1965, 95; Wernstedt and Spencer 1967, 138–139). It was a migration that would only accelerate as almost three million Christians were said to have settled in Mindanao between 1966 and 1976, as smallholders but also as self-employed artisanal gold miners in the Compostela Valley (Ahmad 1982, 9).⁴ Meanwhile, plantation corporations committed extensive land grabbing, causing destruction and violence that attended the

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colonization of what once was the Islamic south of the Philippines. The Moros rebellion in the 1970s, a new depressing chapter in four hundred years of conflict, was crushed by an indiscriminate bombing of the cities of Jolo and Zamboanga, probably making half a million people homeless. It only came to be settled in 1976 after the involvement of Muammar Gadhafi—the leader of Libya and sponsor of the Moro uprising—as a mediator to negotiate autonomy of the Muslim populated areas in the southern Philippines (Algado 1992, 168). Since then the conflict has not abated at all and in 2016, the number of displaced people in Mindanao numbered almost 300,000 according to the UNHCR (UNHCR 2018).

The fourth case is Myanmar, ruled by a regime that knows that the country is strategically located and that China, the United States, and ASEAN are keen to prevent one of the two others from gaining too much influence over the country. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) there were 642,000 internally displaced people in this country as a consequence of violence by August 2017. Among them are the Christian Karen and the peoples, such as the Shahn, living in the border states with China, which is a true frontier infested with war lords, narcotics, and Chinese plantation and mining enterprises (IDMC 2017). Since then massive expulsions of Rohingya have taken place and 688,000 new refugees arrived in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh between August 2017 and January 2018 (UNOCHA)⁵ The current ordeal for the Rohingyas is the culmination of a history of oppression and displacement that harks back to the first days of the independence of Burma in 1948. Its new government denied citizenship to this large Muslim minority, who lived in the coastal stretch, which borders south of Bangladesh and where once the kingdom of Arakan was located. The exclusion was aggravated after the military coup of 1962, when the generals were looking for scapegoats for their failed socialist economic policies. A denial of citizenship for the Rohingyas was reiterated in the 1980s by the leader of the Burmese junta Ne Win, on the grounds that it concerned refugees from Bangladesh, a falsehood created to withhold their citizen's rights. Actually, Rohingyas have been shifted back and forth along the Bengal-Burmese border. A heightened level of communal violence against the Rohingyas has led to the displacement of 150,000 people between 2012 and 2014. Many of them tried to find a safer place abroad either over sea or over land, which has led to an extensive human trafficking network. In some of these networks that have made a business out of helping members of oppressed minorities out of the country Burmese and Thai generals have been collaborating, which came to light when mass graves were found of starved refugees who had been held for ransom before smuggling them into Malaysia (Human Rights Watch 2015; *Al Jazeera* 2017). However tragic this is, for the Myanmar government it is attractive to see international attention directed to human trafficking, as it deflects the public gaze from the underlying political drama and migration crisis (Ibrahim 2016, 93–95).

All four of the above cases underline to the point that it was only by the end of the Cold War that the issue of the internal displacements became more prominent in international organizations. In 1992, the UN appointed its first Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (Cohen 1998, 4). It was the sight of the Kurdish

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refugees relentlessly persecuted by Saddam Hussein seeking shelter at the border with Turkey that gave convincing proof to the fact that huge internal displacements were threats to international stability as well. In 1998, Roberta Cohen published *Masses in Flight*, with a preface by Secretary General of UN Kofi Annan, stating that the internally displaced, at that time an estimated 25 million people, were in worse conditions than international refugees, deprived as they were of medical facilities, proper food and housing.

The number of internally displaced in Southeast Asia during decolonization widely exceeds the number of international refugees, a barely noticed fact. This can first of all be explained by the fact that the internal displacement predominantly has been one from the countryside to the city. This is a well-recorded fact for Indonesia, but to a certain extent true for Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam as well. It can also be explained by the fact that many internally displaced return to their homes after a while and last but not least by the sad fact that many internally displaced may not survive the violence attending their displacement.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the colonial regimes and economies in Southeast Asia brought about massive migration crises, which share a number of important characteristics with those of Europe at the time of the victory of the nation state model in the early twentieth century. But unlike in Europe the plural societies in Southeast Asia were part of economic globalization, a trend that was reversed by the 1930s. The decomposition of colonial empires and the economic nationalism of postcolonial governments, including their aggressive frontier policies, brought the large-scale displacements, most of which were not identified as migration crises. It was however a long chain of coerced migrations of ethnic minorities who did fit the nation building projects of the newly independent states. The parallel with Europe after the First World War has been obscured because of the long time span of this decolonization, covering more than thirty years since the Second World War, and the geopolitical interests that muted international indignation. Moreover, most of these displacements were internal. In the 1990s the international organizations began to take a different view of internal displacement partly because of the wider repercussions and because of the intermingling of oppression, refugee problems, and human trafficking. In that respect we are living in a world fundamentally different from the one a century ago, when the “refugee regime” came into existence.

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Notes:

(1) For Vietnamese figures see Chan and Dorais 1998, 286.

(2) The food shortages in Vietnam and Indonesia are well-known. For the food shortages in British Malaya see Kratoska 1988.

(3) By the late 1970s, there were already 10,000 refugees in Papua New Guinea; in addition to this number a new flow of refugees came in the mid-1980s. For the 1970s see Nyamekye and Premdas 1979, 933; Bell, Feith and Hatley 1986, 541.

(4) In the mining sector, artisanal gold mining grew massive in Mindanao, involving an estimated 125,000 to 500,000 workers. See Verbrugge 2015.

(5) UNOCHA. <http://www.businessinsider.com/rohingya-refugee-camps-myanmar-images-2017-12?international=true&r=US&IR=T>

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