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INTRODUCTION

Mass violence and the end of the Dutch colonial empire in Indonesia

BART LUTTIKHUIS and A. DIRK MOSES

Introduction

On 9 December 1947, Dutch troops entered the West Javanese village of Rawagedeh (now called Balongsari) to ‘cleanse’ the area of Indonesian guerrilla fighters. They rounded up the population, inquired after the whereabouts of the enemy and then executed a large part of the village’s male—unarmed—population. Reports on the numbers of victims vary between 150 (the Dutch figure) and 431 (the number still used by Indonesian authorities). Even at the time, this massacre attracted considerable attention, with the UN Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question undertaking an investigation which concluded that the action had been ‘deliberate and ruthless’. After a short investigation of their own, Dutch authorities decided it was not then expedient to prosecute their troops.¹ And there, thanks to an apologetic government report in 1969, the matter largely rested until 2008, when nine widows of victims and a survivor launched successful legal action against the Dutch state in a civil court. On 14 September 2011, The Hague Court of First Instance rejected the state’s invocation of the statute of limitations, and ordered it to pay the widows damages. The state decided against an appeal, and on 9 December 2011 the Dutch ambassador to Indonesia travelled to Balongsari and officially apologized for the massacre.

As might be expected, the Rawagedeh court case attracted intense public attention, and sparked new interest in the mass violence perpetrated during the Dutch–Indonesian conflict. After decades of relative neglect, there are signs that this heightened profile will endure for some time to come. In May 2012, the lawyer who had taken on the Rawagedeh case, Liesbeth Zegveld, announced on behalf of ten surviving relatives to also hold the Dutch state liable for the death of their husbands and fathers in the massacres in South Sulawesi, one of the most notorious violent episodes during this conflict.² In South Sulawesi, the *Depot*

Speciale Troepen (DST), under their infamous leader Raymond Westerling, killed several thousand Indonesians during a particularly ruthless counter-insurgency campaign in late 1946 and early 1947.³ In June 2012, three major research institutions in the Netherlands, the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and the Netherlands Institute of Military History, publicly called for a large-scale, government-funded investigation into ‘the controversial sides of the military conduct during the whole period of 1945–1949’.⁴ Some of the left-wing parties have signalled their support, although others are more hesitant.⁵ Finally, in mid-July 2012, two photographs of an execution of several Indonesians—the first photographic images of such events ever to become public—appeared unexpectedly in Dutch newspapers after a local archivist in Enschede found them in a rubbish container.⁶ They were part of the private photo album of a Dutch conscript soldier from the war, but otherwise nothing more is yet known about them. Their publication further enlivened the debate as well as the call for further research.

As several authors in this issue explain, this seemingly sudden eruption of public discussion about the violent Dutch colonial past is hardly novel. Scandals



Courtesy of the Enschede Municipal Archives

about the events, euphemistically termed ‘excesses’ and ‘police actions’, regularly punctuated the moral smugness of postwar Dutch society. There are grounds to suppose, however, that we are dealing with a qualitatively new stage in the hitherto only partially told story about the Dutch campaign to regain its East Indies (Indonesian) colonies after the Second World War. For one, Dutch veterans, as well as other first-generation postcolonial migrants, are far fewer in number and less able to influence the debate than in the past. Furthermore, family members of Indonesian victims are now active and visible in the Dutch sphere, as the recent court cases demonstrate. They benefit from the growing public sensibility about violations of human rights and the laws of war that developed in the wake of UN ad hoc criminal tribunals based in The Hague. In all, the question of Dutch colonial atrocities has become much less sensitive now that most of the Dutch involved have left the stage.

As a consequence, the inclination has increased to integrate the violence against the Indonesian population, both during colonial times and the decolonization process, into Dutch imperial history. Why not refer to the relevant events as ‘war crimes’ rather than the commonly used ‘excesses’? How did this violence originate? Was it an exceptional part of otherwise ‘clean’ campaigns or was it intrinsic and systemic to colonial conquest? To what extent were authorities aware and responsible for these war crimes? Why have some official files remained restricted until very recently? And, finally, can later governments—and the Dutch public—be blamed for not prosecuting and disavowing these violations even though they were aware of them?⁷

These new discussions seem to have struck a louder chord in the Netherlands than in Indonesia. Indonesian newspapers certainly reported the Rawagedeh court case and the formal Dutch apology,⁸ as well as the above-mentioned execution images, even though they were largely overshadowed by the gubernatorial elections in Jakarta at the time.⁹ Striking, however, are the reports’ concise and matter-of-fact tone, and the lack of an extensive debate. A possible explanation for this relative indifference is that Dutch atrocities—both in colonial times and during the decolonization war—are part and parcel of the Indonesian self-understanding as a nation that emerged out of a heroic struggle against ‘350 years’ of brutal Dutch colonial oppression.¹⁰ Like all national liberation narratives, the Indonesian one elides the violence perpetrated by Indonesians against one another during the anti-colonial conflict, an issue highlighted by two articles in this volume.

The same combination of factors likely led to renewed attention given to the colonial crimes of other former imperial powers. In Great Britain, relatives of twenty-four unarmed Malayan men shot by a Scots Guards patrol in 1948 recently petitioned the Queen for an inquiry, and damning admissions by the soldiers about this ‘Batang Kali massacre’ from an aborted earlier investigation were heard in a British court in 2012.¹¹ This atrocity occurred early in the so-called ‘Malayan Emergency’, Britain’s lengthy campaign against a communist insurgency from 1948 to 1960 during which the high commissioner Gerald Templar coined the famous phrase about winning ‘the hearts and minds of the people’, henceforth

an article of faith in counter-insurgency doctrine.¹² Yet more legal action was stimulated by the revelation, in April 2012, that the British government had hidden sensitive files about these colonial wars in a secure facility far from London; many had been destroyed as well.¹³ Thereupon, former colonial subjects pointed the spotlight on slightly later colonial atrocities, namely during the Kenyan ‘Mau Mau’ uprising from 1952 to 1960. Relying on these files, three Mau Mau veterans claimed they were victims of systematic torture, and expert historians are backing them.¹⁴

Research on French atrocities in its attempted suppression of Algerian independence between 1954 and 1962—and of course during and after the conquest post 1830—has rightly spawned a cottage industry of scholarship in view of the conflict’s massive fatalities and momentous consequences.¹⁵ The unsuccessful French campaign against Vietnamese independence between 1945 and 1954 has been overshadowed by the equally unsuccessful American one, which overlapped substantially with the Portuguese struggle to retain its three African possessions—Angola, Mozambique and Portuguese Guinea—between 1961 and 1975. The major Portuguese counter-insurgency operations took place as late as 1971 and culminated in an alleged massacre at Wiriyamu in Mozambique when troops murdered hundreds of villagers thought to be insurgent sympathizers. Adrian Hastings, the radical Roman Catholic priest who wrote about the atrocity at the time, called it the ‘My Lai in Mozambique’, referencing the US massacre in Vietnam in 1968.¹⁶ As in Kenya, the number of European settlers radically increased in Angola and Mozambique, placing unrelenting pressure on indigenous farmers and land-use practices.¹⁷ Decolonization was hardly a linear process of national liberation outside western Europe; indeed, parts of the globe saw empire’s intensification and attempted revival.

The truculent attempt to retain or reassert empire after the Second World War was no Dutch particularity, then.¹⁸ According to Nicholas J. White, it was an economic necessity. In addition to roles as suppliers of raw goods and consumers of metropolitan exports, the colonies were to relieve the balance of payments problems that Britain, France, and the Netherlands faced with the United States in particular. For example, Malayan tin and rubber allowed the British to generate a much-needed surplus while Palestine and India offered no such economic benefits; they could be relinquished in a slimmed-down imperial vision. The term ‘emergency’ was selected for the Malayan counter-insurgency, because a declaration of war would have vitiated the insurance policies of British estate owners. For their part, Dutch elites regarded the winning back of Java’s and Sumatra’s rubber plantations as essential to their overall development plan; rubber exports would generate foreign exchange that could aid both the metropolitan economy as well as the East Indies, thereby winning over its population from the fledgling Republic. Not for nothing was the first ‘Police Action’ called ‘Operation Produce’.¹⁹

The new developmental rhetoric marked a further stage of empire’s justification. Traditional racism needed to be softened even before the Second World War, and empire ‘sold’ to colonial subjects as well as the metropolitan population.

Modernization would be achieved by ‘transformative invasion’, by which the imperial power would devote resources to development rather than violent (re)conquest: the ‘modernizing mission’ replaced the ‘civilizing mission’. The challenge was achieving the former while imposing European will by force of arms.²⁰ As the articles in this volume show, indigenous resistance and international pressure prevented the Dutch from realizing their development plans. And while the Dutch regarded theirs as an ‘ethical imperialism’, its utopian promise ultimately justified the application of exemplary violence to create a peace in which development could occur, ironically leading to the very violence that their ethical empire was thought to eschew.²¹

Even so, Dutch promises won over some indigenous peoples who were recruited into its armed forces, including the under-studied Plantation Guards treated here by Roel Frakking. This, too, was representative of the colonial armies at the time, most of whom came from the local societies.²² Again, this is no coincidence, as the updated imperial doctrine and counter-insurgency strategy was to win over rather than terrorize the subject population: winning their hearts and minds. The nationalists—‘terrorists’—were to be politically and physically isolated by removing villagers from their reach.²³ This point complicates a simplistic picture of decolonization wars as waged between European and non-European troops. In fact, many of the victims were civilians caught between the fronts, suspected of collaborating with the enemy and treated accordingly. The Kikuyu in Kenya split between supporters of ‘Mau Mau’ and ‘loyalists’, for instance, indicating how colonial occupations created and exacerbated fractures in indigenous society. In many ways, these wars were also civil wars.²⁴ Where the colonials comprised differing ethnic communities, those seen as traditionally loyal to the occupier were often objects of genocidal massacres, thereby eliding political and ethnic categories, as is always the case in genocide. At the same time, the nationalists and their communities could likewise become victims of the imperialist’s troops, often staffed by the local rivals.

As David Kilkullen pointed out in his famous PhD dissertation on ‘The political consequences of military operations in Indonesia, 1945–99’, this kind of warfare tends to decentralization and diffusion, with multiple axes of conflict determined more by local contingencies than high command’s imperatives. On the one hand, control over the immediate—overwhelmingly rural and dispersed—population was every party’s priority. On the other, the power vacuum of civil war created opportunities for the violent assertion of manifold political projects. While the Indonesian Republican army, for example, fought the Dutch forces, it took on a communist uprising in Central Java, Islamists in Aceh and West Java, and Dutch-sponsored Indonesian states. These kinds of struggles would continue after independence.²⁵

This messy complexity has led most colonial historians, including many in this volume, to shy away from the genocide concept they habitually associate with the so-called twentieth-century ‘canonical’ genocides, above all the Holocaust. The high modernism of that image—a fully developed European bureaucratic apparatus working hand in glove with military authorities to destroy a helpless

enumerated community with ruthless efficiency—seems far removed from the seemingly pre-modern atavism of the colonial and civil wars that raged between 1945 and 1949, and since. Leaving aside the problematic Eurocentrism of this view and the utter modernity of national liberation struggles, decolonization and their violent modalities, it ignores the messiness of the Holocaust itself. That term simplifies the multiple processes, sites and circumstances in which Jews were murdered by many different perpetrators across Europe, as well as isolating them from the parallel and related mass violence between non-Jews, such as between Poles and Ukrainians. What is more, many Jews, let alone countless other civilians, were killed in partisan warfare that closely resembled colonial warfare.²⁶ Increasingly, the Nazi empire is being regarded as an episode in imperial history more generally.²⁷

As a result, the distance between ‘canonical’ genocides and colonial warfare has been reduced for analytical purposes. All too often, the colonizer ended up waging war against the entire population because it was difficult to distinguish between civilians and combatants, especially when guerrilla-style resistance ensued. The often flat political structures of indigenous peoples meant that the colonizer could not easily identify leaders and ‘decapitate’ the local polity. At the same time, occupiers could provoke racist reactions from the colonized who resolved to expel the intruder and those indigenous people who collaborated with them, leading some scholars to refer to ‘subaltern genocide’.²⁸ Moreover, Raphael Lemkin, the lawyer who coined the genocide concept in 1943, regarded it as a radical technique of occupation, and referred to cases of colonial occupation throughout history to exemplify his point.²⁹ For these reasons, the discussion about the genocide–colonialism nexus offers scholars resources for comparative study and structural analysis. It is certainly not a matter of inappropriate labelling or mis-placed moralism:

Remaining faithful to the complexity and contingency of the past need not entail abandoning the search for patterns or logics. It means that the object of inquiry is the sum total of economic, social, and political relations between people in a colonial situation; the various bids for power and the resistances to them; the processes of escalation brought on by real, contrived, or perceived security crises; the success of the colonial state in ‘pacifying’ and either absorbing or expunging the ‘native’; the conscription of parts of indigenous society in such projects; as well, equally, as the failure of metropolises to realize their ambitions. . . Genocide is to be explained as the outcome of complex processes rather than ascribable solely to the evil intentions of wicked men. It is the job of historians to trace how highly structured relationships between geopolitics and states, states and subaltern groups, elites and their bureaucracies become incarnated in and are themselves affected by the agency of individuals in particular situations.³⁰

Our goal with the current issue is twofold. Firstly, we seek to stimulate the debate about violence in colonial and decolonizing Indonesia among a wider, non-Dutch- (or Indonesian-) speaking audience. To date, the discussions on these issues have been almost entirely Dutch and Indonesian affairs. For example, the Anglophone literature on the Dutch military campaigns in Indonesia

between 1945 is restricted to only several dozen pages altogether.³¹ The English-speaking world could and should learn from this particular case of mass violence in (de)colonization. Secondly, the learning process can and should also work in the other direction. It is our intention to interrogate the Dutch as well as the Indonesian debate with the concepts and categories developed by scholars working on the nexus between genocide and colonialism.

The Dutch academic discussion

The Dutch academic literature is characterized by a number of features. To begin with, the type of questions about mass violence and genocide in colonial situations and in wars of decolonization that we have described here have excluded Dutch colonialism in Indonesia—with the exception of a recent essay by Robert Cribb.³² At the same time, scholarship—mainly by Anglophone authors—on mass violence and on genocide in Indonesia has developed rapidly in recent years, focusing on the numerous violent events that have pervaded Indonesian society since independence and up to the present day.³³ It almost never includes the colonial period. An important exception in this respect is the anthology *Roots of violence in Indonesia* (2003), which seeks to ‘trace the historical roots of violence in Indonesia that go back further in time than the New Order and in that way enhance our understanding of why so many Indonesians suffer from so much violence today’.³⁴ Although the aims of this volume differ from ours, some of its results are highly informative to the current issue.

Of particular importance is Henk Schulte Nordholt’s analytical contribution on ‘A genealogy of violence’, based on his inaugural lecture of 2000, to which several of our authors refer. Schulte Nordholt traces ‘patterns of violence’ from the colonial period into post-independence and current-day Indonesia. He characterizes the Dutch colonial regime as based on ‘a state of violence, which is only marginally recognized in Dutch history books’. It established a ‘regime of fear’ that ‘continued to resonate in the memories of the people until the end of the colonial period’. In Schulte Nordholt’s analysis, then, actual as well as potential mass violence, marked by ‘intense racial, religious, and ethnic conflicts’, was fundamental rather than incidental to colonial rule in Indonesia (as well as other colonies).³⁵

Schulte Nordholt’s agenda-setting contribution is the first structural rather than descriptive account of Dutch colonial violence but has not convinced all scholars. Firstly, as Remco Raben explains in the epilogue here, Schulte Nordholt’s analysis may over-egg the omelette. The question remains to what extent the colonial monopoly on and use of violence differed from the metropole in view of Max Weber’s thesis about the nature of the modern state. Secondly, Schulte Nordholt’s analysis of a pervasive ‘state of violence’ based on ‘a regime of fear’ makes it difficult to differentiate and individualize instances of violence: under what exact circumstances did potential violence—the colonial ‘reputation’ of violence—become actual violence? What caused some colonial actors to perpetrate atrocities whilst others abstained or desisted?³⁶ And how do we explain that colonial

actors often combined a belief in benevolence and their own morality with advocacy of sometimes extreme violence?

Needless to say, Schulte Nordholt is not the only scholar to have written about violence perpetrated by Dutch troops and authorities in Indonesia, but the general tendency in Dutch-language literature has been to prioritize detailed description and narrative over analysis, judgment and conceptual discussion.³⁷ Therein lay his innovation. We know that Dutch troops—or indigenous troops under Dutch command—perpetrated terrible atrocities; and we have many examples of when and where this happened, although we could know much more about them. It remains to be analysed in which circumstances these troops resorted to this kind of violence. What drove them to commit acts that they would mostly have seen as atrocities in ‘normal’ circumstances? In 1970, the sociologists Van Doorn and Hendrix, in their seminal study *Ontsporing van geweld* (Derailment of violence) on the Dutch–Indonesian war, looked for answers. They emphasized that extreme violence was part of a pattern in the decolonization process rather than restricted to isolated incidents. They particularly emphasized that the organization of violence became delegated to lower levels of the hierarchy in guerrilla warfare, leading to an increasing autonomy of individual platoons and commanders. Another important and related factor in their analysis was that the use of (extreme) violence was increasingly entrusted to special branches (special forces, the intelligence organizations), thus relieving the regular army, and ultimately the military command, of direct discretion. Everybody deliberately ‘left’ the dirty work to someone else. Hence, violence was the result of deliberate policies of destruction or at the very least of wilful blindness by the authorities, rather than of aberrant divisions or soldiers.³⁸

For all that, as Stef Scagliola points out here, Van Doorn and Hendrix stuck to the established and apologetic term ‘excesses’ rather than the more critical ‘war crimes’. Unfortunately, their first tentative answer to the ‘why’ question has not received many followers in the Dutch historical profession. As most of the previously mentioned empirical work has only been undertaken since Van Doorn and Hendrix published their volume, a new analytical look at the mechanisms that caused and shaped the violence of colonialism and the decolonization war, as well as the relevant intentions and justifications, should also lead to new insights. Especially the role of the ‘normal’ army, rather than just the special branches, deserves more attention. That this has yet not occurred is regrettable for two reasons.

Firstly, the genocide debate can benefit from an analysis of the colonial exploits of a relatively small country, the Netherlands; a colonial power, moreover, that saw itself as particularly benevolent and less dependent on violent conquest than its peers, as Gerda Jansen Hendriks shows here by reconstructing the news-reel reporting of the conflict in the Netherlands.³⁹ The Dutch public was led to believe that their troops were engaged in a humanitarian mission to bring law and order, progress and modernity to colonies not yet ready for independence. If we can trace the common imperial logics and violent tendencies in this case, much can be revealed about the inherently violent nature of colonialism.

Secondly, our perspective can also benefit the debate on Dutch colonialism. Dutch scholars and those participating in the Dutch debate have been reluctant to analyze the subject in terms of genocide. Even if one—probably rightly—remains cautious about this label, as Remco Raben argues here, it can open insightful new ways of thinking about the nature, use and role of violence in the Dutch colonial past.

Violence in colonial Indonesia

Indeed, from the outset, violence was intrinsic to Dutch colonial exploits in the Indonesian archipelago. The VOC, the Dutch East India Company, used extreme force to build up its trade empire in the seventeenth century. The almost total annihilation of the population of the Banda Islands in 1621, a clearly genocidal act committed under the direction of Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen in enforcing the Dutch spice trade monopoly, is only the most gruesome and well-known example.⁴⁰ A later infamous violent episode was the massacre of up to 10,000 ethnic Chinese in Batavia (now Jakarta) in 1740.⁴¹

The Dutch state took over the VOC's possessions in the Indonesian archipelago after it was abolished in 1796. After a short English interregnum between 1811 and 1816, the Dutch state sought to establish, fortify and expand its rule over the entire archipelago, then known as the Dutch East Indies. In the early nineteenth century, Dutch rule was restricted to small portions of the archipelago, despite nominally controlling much more. By the beginning of the next century, the Dutch had asserted their power in most parts of the East Indies, and considerably deepened the level of their control. Once again, now under state direction, violence was intrinsic to this expansion, as Petra Groen clearly illustrates here in her article on the *longue durée* of colonial warfare and military ethics. Inspired by Schulte Nordholt's thesis, she describes how the colonial military, over the course of its many campaigns in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, developed and perfected a strategy intended to minimize guerilla opposition by using ruthless exemplary violence to 'awe' the population into obedience. In the cases where the intimidation strategy failed to cow opposition, the army did not hesitate to unleash extreme violence against the population. Groen also notes that this large-scale bloodshed often failed to distinguish between enemy fighters and civilians, because presumably they were difficult to separate in colonial warfare. At the very least, large numbers of civilian casualties were frequently accepted as a matter of course, and the burning down of villages was a widespread practice.

Emmanuel Kreike further illustrates this pattern of conquest and consolidation in his detailed study on Dutch nineteenth-century colonial warfare in Aceh, Sumatra. The conflicts in Aceh were in many ways the school lessons for Dutch colonial troops, for there they perfected methods that would remain in force until the end of the colonial era; they were often referenced even during the decolonization war of the late 1940s. Much of the existing literature has focused on the final campaigns to 'pacify' Aceh in the first decade of the twentieth century, in which the deceptively named doctrine of 'surgical violence' was developed. Kreike's focus on the earlier campaigns in the 1870s and 1880s shows that the

military and civilian administration developed a form of environmental warfare to destroy the region's infrastructure of dwellings, fields, irrigation and drainage works, food stores and livestock. This destruction exposed the Acehnese population to large-scale disease, malnutrition and ultimately mortality that Kreike terms 'indirect genocide'.

The Dutch–Indonesian war of decolonization

Colonial warfare and colonial-era thinking about the use and justification of mass violence are also an indispensable background for understanding the violence perpetrated—by either side—during the decolonization war. In many ways, this was still a colonial war; in other important ways, it was very different.

The conflict started practically immediately after the Second World War in the Pacific had ended. On 15 August 1945, the Japanese occupiers capitulated, and on 17 August Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta proclaimed the independent Republic of Indonesia. British troops arrived soon after to disarm the remaining Japanese soldiers, as Dutch forces had not yet arrived. Dutch authorities had expected—and still expected—to return to their colony and to the old ways. They were soon proven wrong. A drawn-out conflict that lasted more than four years ensued, in which the Dutch tried to 'restore peace and order' and suppress the 'extremists', whereas Indonesian forces, much weaker in military terms, resorted largely to guerilla tactics and irregular warfare to gradually wear down Dutch resolve and exhaust their resources. Several attempts were made to reach political solutions, but failed each time. Ultimately, the Dutch and Republican agendas were irreconcilable.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Indonesian side was far from unified. Republican troops, bands of *pemuda* ('youngsters'; irregular fighters), Islamic as well as communists militias, all had their own plans, were often uncoordinated, and would sometimes even fight each other to determine the future of an independent Indonesia. Matters were only settled, as far as the Dutch–Indonesian part of the conflict was concerned, when the Dutch authorities finally relented, partly succumbing to international pressures, and engaged in a final round of negotiations with the Republic. These led to the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949 and the withdrawal of Dutch troops soon after.

Only two major military campaigns were mounted by the Dutch military during this period. The Dutch leadership called them 'police actions' to signal that they regarded the Indonesian conflict as an internal matter of law and order. The first 'Police Action' in July and August 1947 succeeded in conquering large parts of Java and Sumatra. The second 'Police Action' in December 1948 and January 1949 saw the Dutch win still more territory and even capture Yogyakarta, the capital of the Republic. These victories did not mean that they had defeated the Indonesian army, however. Irrespective of their significance, an exclusive focus on these two police actions distorts the view on the overall nature of the conflict, both politically and militarily, as Roel Frakking explains in this issue. For the most part, the struggle was characterized by guerrilla efforts from the Indonesian side(s)

and countless smaller Dutch campaigns to ‘cleanse’ areas of enemy combatants, ‘restore order’ and consolidate control over the area nominally under their control. The Dutch civil and military leadership, Frakking shows, were under the fundamental misapprehension—based on an essentially colonial, pre-war mind-set—that the majority of the population was sympathetic or even loyal to their rule, such that they could ‘pacify’ certain areas by ridding them of enemy elements. Consequently, the fierce and continued insurgency took them by surprise. The drawn-out campaigns of guerrilla warfare and counter-insurgency eventually convinced them—or at least some of them—of their misjudgement, but only after several years in which violent campaigns, often of an ‘excessive’ nature, had been the order of the day.

This trope of ‘excesses’ and ‘excessive violence’ is central to understanding Dutch ways of viewing the atrocities committed during the Dutch–Indonesian war, both at the time and in later years, as Peter Romijn notes here. ‘Excesses’, he explains, is a category that regards violence as an accepted means to an end, and that splits off the excesses as incidental to legitimate military action. Not surprisingly, in Dutch public debates, ‘excesses’ have often been reduced to specific incidents, like the actions by commando units, especially the South Sulawesi campaign in 1946–47. In reality, however, atrocities and clear cases of war crimes occurred on a regular basis and may even have been systemic. At the least, Romijn shows, Dutch military and civil authorities consciously did not prioritize the prevention and prosecution of such war crimes. Soldiers entering the violent conflict, including those coming from a background of armed resistance against the German occupier in the Netherlands, could be socialized to regard ‘excessive’ violence as normal and acceptable. Elements of both the colonial heritage (Schulte Nordholt’s ‘state of violence’) and the new, unfamiliar situation of a decolonization war, with its dynamic of insurgency and counter-insurgency, as well as its chaotic cast of actors striving for predominance, can be seen to play into this socialization.

It warrants mentioning here that analysis of actual examples of Dutch atrocities/violence committed during the decolonization conflict are somewhat scarce in this volume, with the exception of the discussion by Romijn on the particular case of the West Javanese village of Pesing. Unfortunately, a planned article on violence by Dutch troops did not eventuate, meaning that the context in which such atrocities occurred remains under-explored here. If we follow Jaap de Moor’s very detailed and thoroughly documented study of the history of ‘special forces’ (commandos and paratroopers) during this conflict, we can see that much of this behaviour was part of a deliberate effort and strategy of counter-insurgency and irregular warfare.⁴² De Moor sees an ‘escalation of violence’ in the case of the South Sulawesi campaign led by Raymond Westerling’s DST, which has become the poster-child for Dutch violence in Indonesia. While they were sweeping villages, the DST would round up the population, interrogate villagers, use prepared lists of suspected insurgents, and summarily execute significant numbers. Gradually, as intelligence became less extensive and less trustworthy, the DST resorted more to intimidation, partly also through a conscious

degree of arbitrariness in their violence. For instance, exemplary executions of common criminals, dragged from prisons for the purpose, became a relatively common practice.⁴³

The ‘force of the situation’ is a common notion used to explain the genealogy of violence in the decolonization conflict. Violence was spawned by the imperative to ‘cleanse’ an area, combined with a growing shortage of reliable intelligence. And even though summary executions and exemplary violence never became official strategy, they gradually became ingrained in normal ways of conducting campaigns beyond the DST.⁴⁴ The military and political leadership, as the Moor clearly shows, covered up this ‘excessively’ violent conduct. Of course, an explanation is not a justification, and this type of violence cannot be separated from the situation in which it is spawned. But the appeal to the ‘force of the situation’ is in itself also often cited by those responsible as an excuse, and has become deeply ingrained in ways for both politicians and historians to explain violence. What makes soldiers, commanders and politicians start seeing this argument as a justifiable or at least an appropriate way to explain transgressions of the laws of war? Peter Romijn suggests an explanation in this volume.

The emphasis on escalatory mechanisms and importance of immediate context does suggest, however, that a satisfactory explanation of decolonization violence cannot ignore the dynamic between insurgency and counter-insurgency violence. This interaction of violence was not entirely new to the war of decolonization, as the earlier Aceh wars showed, as did partisan warfare in the Second World War, but it was new in form and extent. Much of the mass violence in these years was generated from a context of mutual terror.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is important to also factor in the Indonesian violence—not because we want to claim symmetry between them, or even that they were comparable, but because violence from both sides was interrelated. Indonesian violence has been overlooked, not least in Indonesia itself, where it conflicts with the image of the Revolution as a heroic and moral struggle for freedom against a brutal oppressor.⁴⁶

William H. Frederick and Mary Somers Heidhues have taken up this challenge here. Frederick re-evaluates Robert Cribb’s use of the term ‘a brief genocide’ for the 1945–46 violence against Dutch and especially Eurasians (legally mostly also considered Dutch).⁴⁷ His fine-grained study of East Java shows the extensive and often extreme nature of the violent conflict. He searches for causes in the effects of both Dutch and Japanese rule, as well as in racial tensions inherent in Indonesian nationalism. He concludes that perpetrators, their intentions and even victims were so complex as to defy categorization. People were targeted for intimately intertwined reasons of ethnicity and presumed political/nationalist loyalties. He concludes that we should see the violence during postwar decolonizations as a uniquely complex form of violence rather than trying to affix terms like genocide or politicide.

Somers Heidhues focuses on violence perpetrated against people of Chinese ethnic origin. They were often accused of collaborating with Dutch colonialism, and as a consequence suffered from continual violence. Somers Heidhues convincingly shows that this violence continued also after the initial chaotic period of

1945 and 1946. And, like Frederick, she concludes that mostly Chinese subjects were targeted because they appeared to be pro-Dutch, given their economic role as middlemen, their tendency to rely on the Dutch for security and in some cases their use of Dutch language. The numerous murderous incidents could be attributed both to irregular forces as well as to elements of the Indonesian army. Even so, the killings could not be generalized across the entire archipelago; they occurred in highly specific circumstances. They tended to take place especially in territory that had been recently captured by the Dutch and then again evacuated, or in the context of scorched-earth tactics where Indonesian forces were retreating. Violence generally subsided once some degree of peace and order was (re)established.

Both Frederick and Somers Heidhues show that violence perpetrated by Indonesians against Dutch, Eurasians, Chinese or also other groups was extensive and deep-seated, though both eventually reject an unequivocal denotation of this violence as genocidal. They also show that the origins of violence were clearly influenced and characterized by the extremely chaotic nature of the situation during the decolonization war, with several groups vying for power. Often, the violence came less from the 'official' side of the Republic, and perhaps was used as a bargaining chip by local players. As Frederick points out, the idea of a faceless mobism—inherent in an analysis in terms of a 'power vacuum' as a causing factor—underestimates the complex relations between mobs and their leaders. Attempts to assert power and strengthen position within a situation of lack of power also play into creating mass violence. Individual as well as collective intentions hence need to be studied closely.

Remembering and forgetting mass violence

The last three articles of this volume focus on the post-independence memorialization of the violence both during the colonial era and during the Dutch–Indonesian war of decolonization. Although Paul Bijl includes a short discussion on the place of the Aceh wars in current Indonesian discourse, for the most part these articles focus on memory practices in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, we were unable to engage an author to write more extensively about the Indonesian side.

Both Paulus Bijl and Stef Scagliola show that, since Indonesian independence, the Dutch public sphere has seen frequent, periodic breakthroughs of colonial violence amidst a general tendency of forgetting and silencing. Bijl addresses cultural memory in the Netherlands and Indonesia about mass violence committed during Dutch colonialism in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the Indonesian case, with a special focus on Aceh, he shows that although the recollection of colonial violence is widely present, its meaning is highly contested. An important dividing line runs between national (Indonesian) and regional (Acehnese) interpretations. For the case of the Netherlands, he notes that colonial violence is invariably experienced as 'absent' or 'forgotten' when, in fact, traces of colonial violence are widely present in Dutch memory culture and the claim that this history has

been forgotten is in itself a form of its expression. The problem, in his terminology, is one of ‘memorability’: the degree to which a past is memorable, recallable within certain frames of remembrance. Rather than repressed or covered up, the memory of colonial violence has not fitted into a larger Dutch national narrative, with the consequence that it has had to stand on its own, framed as a counter-narrative.

Scagliola, in her article, studies the Dutch process of ‘coming to terms’ with the war crimes (or ‘excesses’) committed during the 1945–49 war, focussing especially on political discussions and historiographical involvement. Unlike Bijl, Scagliola does analyse this development as one in which the memory of war crimes has been repressed and denied for a long time. She claims that both politicians (Dutch governments) and historians have ‘neutralized’ the violent past by sometimes deliberately silencing it, but more often discussing them in apologetic terms (‘excesses’), whether intentionally or unintentionally, and by prioritizing extremely detailed source study over critical reflection. Consequently, the history of war crimes did not become a common frame of reference in the Netherlands, even though new scandals punctured the consensus and made a big splash in Dutch public opinion every few decades. Despite their different approaches, Scagliola and Bijl come to a surprisingly similar conclusion, namely that Dutch colonial violence was not forgotten, but for most people it did not suit their image of themselves or at least not the Dutch national master narrative. When Dutch atrocities were remembered and periodically expressed in the press and on television, they were not narratable as part of a larger story that helped people make sense of their and the country’s (colonial) past.⁴⁸

An important part of the reason why the memory of the colonial past did not permanently feature in Dutch collective memory is to be found in the overwhelming importance of the Second World War for Dutch self-understanding. Here the Dutch self-understanding closely mirrored the Indonesian one, namely as a moral nation struggling to overthrow a brutal occupier. Consequently, colonial memory has often been portrayed as overshadowed by the Second World War memory, but as Iris van Ooijen and Ilse Raaijmakers show in their contribution to this volume, this analysis grossly simplifies the relationship. They examine the interactions between post-war and postcolonial memory, and see these as not always competitive but also ‘multi-directional’, to use Michael Rothberg’s term. They argue that there could be resonances between both types of memory that could shape and strengthen each one. As a result, postcolonial memory could break onto the national stage when and where it related to post-war memory. Van Ooijen and Raaijmakers analyse this process in two particular cases: the change in content of the annual Dutch national commemoration of the dead on 4 May, effected in 1961, and the memorialization of Camp Vught, a former concentration camp and later a ‘reception centre’ of postcolonial Moluccan immigrants. Overall, their article shows that the memorialization of the Dutch–Indonesian conflict is closely intertwined with that of the Second World War.

In some ways, as Peter Romijn also shows, the Second World War and the Dutch Indonesian war of decolonization could and should be seen as an

on-going conflict, as a single period of mass violence. At least to many actors involved, both in the Netherlands and in Indonesia, this interpretation is vouchsafed by their experiences. But the interrelation is also problematic, because the Dutch-perpetrated violence is difficult to integrate into the overall narrative; the Dutch saw themselves as victims of (German) occupation and as anti-fascists, and understood the campaign to regain their East Indies colony as a continuation of the independence struggle, namely the reacquisition of sovereignty from fascist terrorists, which is how they first regarded the Japanese occupiers, and then the Indonesian nationalists. This enduring self-image continues to be reflected in the fact that no consensus has yet emerged about what to call the conflict. As noted above, ‘police actions’ was long used in the Netherlands as a catch-all term for the entire conflict. In Indonesia, the period as a whole is generally seen as the ‘war of independence’ or the ‘revolution’, and the military campaigns referred to as the ‘Dutch military aggression’ (*agresi militer belanda*).⁴⁹ Even the articles in this volume cannot agree on a common denominator, with terms like ‘Dutch–Indonesian conflict’, ‘Dutch–Indonesian war of decolonization’, ‘Indonesian (national) revolution’ and ‘Indonesian war of independence’ in use. The history of mass violence in colonial Indonesia is still waiting to find its settled place in (Dutch) postcolonial memory.

Genocide?

The present issue is rounded off with an epilogue by Remco Raben, who draws together lines that run through this issue, and wraps up the discussion by addressing the elephant in the room: why to publish these articles on mass violence in colonial and decolonizing Indonesia in a journal devoted to genocide research? One important result that can be distilled from reading all articles in this volume together, we think, is that the decolonization war fought out in Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 features many of the ingredients that make up the genocidal recipe. Decolonization wars in particular are a context for particularly radical ‘othering’ of the enemy—sometimes to the point of dehumanization, which makes it all the easier to massacre them⁵⁰—with the complicated plethora of motivations, intentions and modes of understanding that characterize ‘modern’ wars framed in terms of ‘oppression’ versus ‘freedom’. To be sure, as Raben also notes, it is most difficult, if not impossible, to cleanly differentiate between ‘political’ and ‘ethnic’ motives behind (mass) violence during decolonization, but that is the case in all genocidal conjunctures.⁵¹ In the end, the labelling exercise may not be the most fruitful endeavour; it is precisely the overlap in and interaction between motivating factors that may have proved particularly deadly.

Conclusion

A volume like the present one can obviously never be exhaustive. There are many ways in which the questions raised and discussed in this volume could be

elaborated. They call for further research. One point that warrants much further discussion is the interaction between agents and types violence. In this issue, we have purposely tried to present discussions of violence from both sides in the Dutch–Indonesian conflict(s) together, although much more could still be said about their mutual influences. When and to what extent was violence retributive? How and to what extent did violence from one side function as a learning process to make (‘excessive’) violence an acceptable tool for the other side? Why did this mechanism function at some times but not at others?

Another important point that could and should be raised is that of multi-sided and internal conflicts. As we know, but in the literature often only acknowledged in passing, the Dutch–Indonesian war of decolonization was not structured as a simple two-sided binary, despite of romantic narratives of national liberation. As already noted, especially on the Indonesian side, there were various parties that also fought each other for predominance, Indonesians fought for the Dutch, and even the Dutch forces were not a hegemonic block.

Finally, an issue that has so far remained largely unexplored is the extent to which thinking in terms of human rights and of crimes against humanity influenced the political and military thought and behaviour at the time. We know that the Dutch–Indonesian war was one of the first to be scrutinized and monitored by the United Nations. Furthermore, this was the same period in which the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as well as the Genocide Convention were drafted and signed. Little is known on whether or how these deliberations influenced thinking on the ‘Indonesian question’. It is regularly stressed that the Netherlands was not deeply involved in the drafting of these documents because it was pre-occupied with garnering international support for its stance on the ‘Indonesian question’,⁵² but did their potential applicability to its own practices not worry them? Some evidence might suggest that they could not conceive of the UN documents as applicable to their colonial campaign⁵³—a stance that would have put them staunchly in one camp with their British counterparts⁵⁴—but the archival work remains to be done.

Before we open the floor to our authors, two short remarks are in order. Firstly, we regret that our attempts to win Indonesian contributors to this special issue did not meet with success. Although this lacuna may partly reflect the lack of interest in the questions covered in this volume, it is more likely an indication of the poor connections and interactions between Indonesian historiography and the English-speaking academic world. This is an issue we plan to address in the near future.

Secondly, like every author working on Indonesia’s colonial history, we have had to contend with spelling issues, especially of names and place names. In colonial times, a transliteration adapted from Dutch was used, which has since been reformed several times (i.e. –u– for colonial-era –oe–, –c– for colonial-era –tj– etc). Current Indonesian writing often changes old names into the new orthography; most Dutch authors do not. We have chosen to leave the decision to the authors.

Notes and References

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- 2 'Familie eist schadevergoeding bloedbad Zuid-Sulawesi', *Volkskrant*, 7 May 2012.
- 3 See especially Willem IJzereef, *De Zuid-Celebes affaire* (Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1984); Jaap de Moor, *Westerling's oorlog, Indonesië 1945–1950: de geschiedenis van de commando's en parachutisten in Nederlands-Indië 1945–1950* (Amsterdam: Balans, 1999), pp. 128–159. The number of victims of this campaign is not conclusively known, but most likely lies in the order of several thousands. The Indonesian textbook number, 40,000, is a clear—but no less powerful—exaggeration.
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- 7 See several articles in *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 July 2012; *Volkskrant*, 22 February 2012; 19 June 2012. Also see Harm Ede Botje and Anne-Lot Hoek, 'Onze vuile oorlog', *Vrij Nederland*, 10 July 2012; Boom, 'Archiefmap 1304'.
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- 14 Ian Cobain, 'Mau Mau veterans launch second round of legal action', *Guardian*, 16 July 2012.
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- 18 Ronald H. Spector, *In the ruins of empire: the Japanese surrender and the battle for postwar Asia* (London: Random House, 2007).
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- 39 Also see Frances Gouda, *Dutch culture overseas: colonial practice in the Netherlands Indies 1900–1942* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1995), pp. 41–43; cf. Susan L. Carruthers, ‘Two faces of 1950s terrorism: the film presentation of Mau Mau and the Malayan Emergency’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1995, pp. 17–43.
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- 43 De Moor, *Westerling’s oorlog*, pp. 128–159. On the South Sulawesi campaign, also see IJzereef, *De Zuid-Celebes affaire*.
- 44 De Moor, *Westerling’s oorlog*, pp. 158–159.
- 45 On the importance of fear for the colonial surroundings as a cause of colonial violence, see Schulte Nordholt, ‘A genealogy of violence’, pp. 40–41.
- 46 See William H. Frederick’s contribution to this volume. In English-language literature there is more interest in these episodes of violence, for example, other work by Frederick and by Robert Cribb: William H. Frederick, ‘Shadows of an unseen hand: some patterns of violence in the Indonesian Revolution, 1945–1949’, in Colombijn and Lindblad, *Roots of violence*, pp. 143–172; Cribb, ‘The brief genocide of Eurasians in Indonesia, 1945/46’; Cribb, *Gangsters and revolutionaries: The Jakarta people’s militia and the Indonesian revolution, 1945–1949* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).
- 47 Cribb, ‘The brief genocide of Eurasians in Indonesia, 1945/46’.
- 48 Judging from the recent developments described at the beginning of this introduction, we might be witnessing this Dutch frame of reference starting to change to include the history of colonial violence, but it remains to be seen how resilient it will be this time.
- 49 See, for example, the authoritative national history, with several editions over the last decades: Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro and Nugroho Notokusanto (eds.), *Sejarah nasional Indonesia*, 6 Vols., rev. ed. R. P. Soejono and R. Z. Leirissa (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2008).
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- 53 Castermans-Holleman, *Het Nederlands mensenrechtenbeleid*, pp. 99–103. As Castermans-Holleman cites, for example, only a few years later (1953) Foreign Minister Jan-Willem Beijen, in a memorandum on the European Convention on Human Rights, stated that it merely contained ‘conditions... that for a country like the Netherlands, which has not and will not become guilty of such violations, should be seen as superfluous’. Emphasis added.
- 54 A. W. Brian Simpson, ‘Britain and the Genocide Convention’, *British Yearbook of International Law*, Vol. 73, No., 2003, pp. 5–64.

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