

# *Merdeka!* and the dynamics of extreme violence

## The first year of the Indonesian Revolution through the eyes of three Dutch journalists

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### ABSTRACT

In the first year after World War II, there was a power vacuum in Indonesia. The Indonesians had declared their independence. The Allies had assigned the administration of the former Dutch colony to the British. The Dutch thought they could continue their colonial ambitions. It was a year of utter chaos and extreme violence. While most Dutch journalists remained in Jakarta, three went to the war zones: two of them as reporters and the other as a soldier. The analysis of three texts on the first year of the Indonesian War of Independence by Dutch eyewitnesses shows the importance of subjecting them to closer scrutiny. In the massive focus on the violence in the Indonesian freedom struggle, literary texts of this kind are too often not taken into consideration, even though they are crucial to gaining an insight into the thinking about this war at that time. Because of their hybrid nature, this type of text is pre-eminent in revealing the tension between clashing conceptions, realities, and truths.

### KEYWORDS

Indonesian Revolution, 1945-1946, violence, war, travel writing, (post)colonialism.

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## INTRODUCTION

For decades the Dutch debate on the Indonesian war of independence has covered up the extreme violence used by the Dutch army in the 1945-1949 period. In 1969, Dutch veteran and psychologist Joop Hueting was the first to speak openly of "war crimes" on national television.<sup>1</sup> In 2010 the Dutch state acknowledged that the massacre perpetrated in the West Javanese village of Rawagede on 9 December 1947, was indeed a war crime. In his 2015 PhD study, *Die brennenden Dörfer des General Spoor* (The burning kampongs of General Spoor), Rémy Limpach demonstrated that the extreme violence perpetrated by the Dutch during the Indonesian War of Independence was not just a matter of sporadic excesses; it was structural mass violence.<sup>2</sup> In 2020, during a state visit to Indonesia, the Dutch King offered his apologies for the violent derailments on the Dutch side. That same year saw the publication of David Van Reybrouck's provocative *Revolusi* (Van Reybrouck 2020). Two years later, the twelve studies comprising the Dutch state-commissioned investigation "Onafhankelijkheid, dekolonisatie, geweld en oorlog in Indonesië, 1945-1950" (ODGOI, 'Independence, decolonization, violence, and war in Indonesia, 1945-1950') and studies published in its wake provided a critical perspective on the official Dutch historiography of the Indonesian War of Independence.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of the findings of this investigation, on behalf of the government the Dutch prime minister officially apologized to the Indonesian population for the systematic and wide-spread use of extreme violence in Indonesia on 17 February 2022.

In the book *Over de grens* ('Beyond the pale', Geert Oostindie et al. 2022), which sums up the main conclusions of the ODGOI study, Esther Captain and Onno Sinke delineate the extreme violence during the first phase of the Indonesian revolution in their chapter "Haat tegen vreemde elementen en hun medeplichtigen" (Hatred of foreign elements and their accomplices). Captain and Sinke's search is for characteristics and explanations of the (extreme) violence against civilians and captured fighters of various nationalities and population groups in Indonesia, perpetrated mostly by non-regular forces between 17 August 1945, and 31 March 1946. Their special focus is on the extreme violence on the Indonesian side, which affected not only Europeans and Eurasians, Moluccan soldiers in the KNIL (the Royal Netherlands East

<sup>1</sup> See <https://historibersama.com/interview-with-dutch-veteran-joop-hueting/?lang=nl>, consulted on 9-3-2022.

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch commercial edition of the thesis was published in 2016, entitled *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*.

<sup>3</sup> In 2022, twelve publications appeared in the context of the study "Onafhankelijkheid, dekolonisatie, geweld en oorlog in Indonesië, 1945-1950", a joint research programme of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH), and the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Books, for example, *Merdeka; De strijd om de Indonesische onafhankelijkheid en de ongewisse opkomst van de Republiek 1945-1950* by Henk Schulte Nordholt and Harry Poeze, were published in 2022. Television, the Internet, and museums also devoted a great deal of attention to the Indonesian war of independence.

Indies Army), and the Chinese people but Indonesian citizens as well. Cogently, they do not fail to point out that regular Dutch combat units also turned to extreme violence in this period.<sup>4</sup> After this first wave of excessive violence had been contained by a combination of British and Japanese military actions, interventions by the government and the army of the Republic of Indonesia, and Indonesian-Dutch negotiations had begun, the violence did not end, but it did decrease in the period until 21 July 1947 (Captain and Sinke 2022a: 142-144, 151). Then, the first colonial war, termed the “first police action” (*Agresi Militer Belanda I*), depending on one’s perspective, was launched.<sup>5</sup>

By a critical analysis of texts by three Dutch eyewitnesses, this article seeks to investigate what perspectives on the war violence during the first year of the Indonesian fight for independence emerge from their accounts of their time in the war zone. These texts are not specific to one genre but mix several. Travel literature, war journalism, and eyewitness accounts are all interwoven in them. One salient characteristic of these hybrid texts is that personal experiences and observations contradict and hence undermine official political and military narratives (Peter Bishop 2016: 173-181; Ben Stubbs 2019: 162-163). The texts were written by Dutch war reporters from different backgrounds. These backgrounds shaped both their perspective on events and their perception of the extreme violence during the first year of the Indonesian Revolution. As the journeys across Indonesia by Johan Fabricius (1899-1981), Dominique (Dodo) Berretty (1925-1980), and Frans Goedhart (1904-1990) largely succeeded each other in time, a chronological approach has been adopted in this article.

#### TRAVELLING THROUGH THE INDONESIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Oddly enough, up to the present day, very little has been written about travel writing in relation to war studies. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca 1000 BC) and Homer’s *Odyssey* (ca 600 BC) are generally seen as the starting points of the genre of travel literature (Carl Thompson 2011: 35). In these texts, imperial wars are the great catalyst for the epic journeys described in them. In both the past and the present, war has been an important reason for travel – voluntarily or otherwise. This is especially true of imperial and colonial wars, which often occasioned travel to and in regions relatively unknown to the traveller (Thompson 2011: 35, 58-60). War then becomes a continuation of policy by other means, to summarise Carl von Clausewitz’s view on the phenomenon. At the same time, a policy is also the continuation of war by other means. This is certainly true of imperial or colonial wars. Ultimately, war is a confrontation with the “Other” and his ideological ideas *in extremis*. The front is a hardened contact zone, the ultimate colonial frontier. However, research on war studies, specifically on the relationship between colonial or imperial

<sup>4</sup> In the Dutch collective memory, this period is known as the Bersiap Period. This term is not usually used in Indonesia.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Elkins published *Legacy of violence* in 2022. In it, she analyses how and why violence was the most salient factor underwriting both the empire and British imperial identity. See Elkins (2022).

(war) violence, devotes only scant attention to the genre of travel writing.<sup>6</sup> A crossover between the two research areas is, therefore, an obvious choice.

Ben Stubbs points out that, in their travel writing studies, theorists like Mary Louise Pratt, Carl Thompson, and Tim Youngs pay only sporadic attention to the role of wars in their research. He, therefore, makes a case for "travel writing and its unique potential to report the mnemonics of war". Travel writing in a war zone can add nuance and depth to how the "Other" is represented. Personal observations can give a voice to individuals who will never make the history books and convey a more objective image of what is happening in the war zone. Stubbs stresses that the perspective of the travel writer travelling in a war zone offers the reader an intimate peek into matters not afforded by other literary genres. And this is exactly what can be the genesis of different ways of remembering and commemorating.<sup>7</sup>

Peter Bishop argues that orientalist ideologies are both reaffirmed and undermined in these hybrid texts because of the tension generated by the clash of the various narratives. Besides their "official" perspective, hybrid texts also harbour a counter-perspective. They do not depict colonial reality as an unequivocal, simple, and uncluttered reality, but as multifaceted and complex. A critical analysis of such hybrid texts, with their mix of travel literature, war journalism, and eyewitness accounts, could adjust, nuance, and therefore ultimately alter the dominant narrative of the war in how it is remembered and commemorated in the collective memory (Bishop 2019: 173-179).

Remco Raben and Peter Romijn note the frequent occurrence of an attitude called "colonial dissociation".

The war in Indonesia between 1945 and 1949 can be understood as a clash between world views with dramatic humanitarian consequences. There was a deep chasm between the views of the Indonesian and Dutch leaders about the right of Indonesians immediately and unconditionally to determine their own fate and the desire of the Dutch to continue to control the steps towards colonial disentanglement and, not least, to safeguard their own interests. At the root of the violence lay fundamentally divergent notions of right and wrong, of agency and moral authority. The conflict was about the Indonesian right to be free versus the colonial right as a ruler to determine what the political future of the country should look like; about having a say in the fate of a colonized people and the moral authority to declare oneself free of an oppressive system. In other words, the Netherlands and the Republic were talking at cross purposes as they fought. (Raben and Romijn 2002: 319).

Paul Doolan (2021: 33-34) remarks that Dutch journalists and photographers rarely visited the war zones themselves. They usually did not venture beyond Batavia/Jakarta and therefore relied on the press releases from the Dienst voor Legercontacten (DLC, Army Contact Service). Johan Fabricius and Frans

<sup>6</sup> See Philip Dwyer and Amanda Nettelbeck (2017), Walter Dierk (2017), and Piet Hagen (2018).

<sup>7</sup> Stubbs (2019: 162-163 and 170). See also Bishop (2016: 181). Stubbs refers to Mary Louise Pratt (2008), Thompson (2011), and Tim Youngs (2014).

Goedhart were prominent exceptions to this rule.<sup>8</sup> Both wanted to see for themselves what was happening outside Batavia. To this end, they not only undertook journeys to Sumatra, Sulawesi, and other islands, but also ventured into the interior of Java. Their books mix a range of genres – travel literature, war journalism, and eyewitness accounts – as do Dodo Berretty's letters. But, as a soldier, Berretty obviously had no choice but to enter the war zone.

In their chapter in *Over de grens* and again in their study *Het geluid van geweld*, Captain and Sinke (2022a: 140, 2022b: 126, 200) quote Johan Fabricius's 1947 *Hoe ik Indië terugvond/Java Revisited*. A journalist working for the BBC and *The Times*, Fabricius spent from mid-September up to December 1945 in Indonesia. In his books, he describes his travels across an Archipelago slipping headlong from the Second World War into the Indonesian War of Independence. Fabricius spent most of his time in Java but also briefly visited Sumatra, Sulawesi, and a few Moluccan islands. By the time his books were published, the situation in Indonesia had changed considerably. This might account for the fact that *Hoe ik Indië terugvond* did not attract much press attention at the time and subsequently faded into oblivion.<sup>9</sup>

In December 1945, Private Dominique (Dodo) Berretty left Europe for Southeast Asia on board the *Alcantara*. The ship arrived in the roadstead of Singapore on 23 January 1946. But Berretty had to wait until 9 March 1946, before he set foot in the country of his birth again. It was only towards the end of February 1946 that the British authorities allowed Dutch troops to return to Indonesia.<sup>10</sup> Berretty was sent to Sulawesi, Bali, and Sumatra, as well as Java. He was back in the Netherlands by 27 July 1948. It was during his time in Indonesia as a soldier that he discovered his talent for photography. Although his photos from the time have not been preserved, many of his letters to his mother have. These already hint at the keen sense of observation and eye for detail which were to make him a world-famous war photographer.<sup>11</sup>

Journalist Frans Goedhart left for Jakarta by plane on 15 June 1946, by which time the first phase of extreme violence had ended. In his *Terug uit Djokja (Back from Yogyakarta, 1946)*, written under the pseudonym Pieter 't Hoen, he describes how Indonesians looked back on this period and what the Republic of Indonesia did to curb the violence.<sup>12</sup> Sutan Sjahrir invited Goedhart to be the first Dutch journalist to visit Republican territory. In the company of two other journalists, he travelled to Yogyakarta, the then capital of the Republic

<sup>8</sup> For that matter, Alfred van Sprang published his *En Soekarno lacht...!* in 1946, about this time in Indonesia and the same year also saw the publication of Ben Grevendamme and J.A. Stevens' (1946) *Vrij*, a book of texts based on letters written by Grevendamme.

<sup>9</sup> Rob Nieuwenhuys briefly discusses this book in *Oost-Indische spiegel* (1978: 448). F.W. Korsten rediscovered the book in 2015. According to Korsten, what Fabricius describes in *Hoe ik Indië terugvond* is an "animistic history; a history which transpires to be an independent animated 'thing', which sweeps all actors along" (Korsten 2015: 260).

<sup>10</sup> Herman Bussemaker (2005: 305-306, 321-325). The most British and Japanese soldiers had withdrawn from Indonesia by 30 November 1946.

<sup>11</sup> Information on Dodo Berretty is taken from Gerard Termorshuizen and Coen van 't Veer (2021). The letters are in the possession of the Asian Library Leiden.

<sup>12</sup> Thanks to Kees Snoek who referred me to this book.



of Indonesia, in a special train. After attending the celebrations on the first anniversary of the declaration of independence there and being received in the palaces of Sukarno and the sultan, Goedhart continued his journey by train to Madiun, Malang, and Probolinggo. On 5 September 1946, he flew back to the Netherlands. He finished *Terug uit Djokja* in October the same year. The press largely ignored the book (Madelon de Keizer 2012: 168-182).

#### A COLONIAL MINDSET

Born in Bandung, Johan Fabricius had spent his youth in Java. At the beginning of the Second World War Fabricius managed to flee to England, where he found work as a newsreader and commentator with the BBC Dutch Service. In early September 1945, he left for the Netherlands East Indies and other places in his capacity as an Asia correspondent for the BBC and *The Times*. He later travelled to Indo-China, Japan, and the US. Considering himself an Indies expert on account of his background, Fabricius came to the Archipelago with pre-war, colonial notions (I. Schöffner 2013; Nieuwenhuys 1978 489-494; René Karels 2010: 343-373).

On 14 June 1945, speaking on *Radio Oranje* in London, Fabricius expressed some of his thoughts on the situation in Java. The transcript appeared as an article on the front page of the 1 September 1945, issue of the Dutch magazine *Hou en Trouw*, headlined "Backgrounds to the events in Java". The text lays bare the colonial mindset with which Fabricius would travel to Indonesia: in his view, the unrest in the Archipelago was caused by the deliberate Japanese tarnishing of the image of the Dutch authority through anti-Western propaganda during their occupation of the Archipelago and on their ability to radicalize a small section of the Indonesian population. Both the Dutch and the Indonesian people were now saddled with the legacy of that ill-fated policy. Fortunately, the Netherlands could count on the cooperation of the vast majority in Java. "We all wish to return to the Indies but only if we are shown respect and the warm welcome of old", Fabricius said.<sup>13</sup> At the time, this was a far from unusual view.<sup>14</sup> Fabricius's perspective on events in most of *Hoe ik Indië terugvond* is coloured by such pre-war colonial notions. The writer had great difficulty letting them go.

He left London by plane on 6 September 1945, headed for Java. In Singapore worrying reports about the situation in Indonesia reached him, but he found it hard to believe "that there might be deep antagonism on the part of the people against us". Fabricius was convinced that a comparison between Japanese and Dutch rule could only be favourable to the Dutch. After all, relations between "white and brown" had always been friendly before the war. Once the Indonesians understood that the Netherlands wished to rescue the country from its economic distress and wanted to cooperate towards the

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.delpher.nl/nl/kranten/view?coll=ddd&identifier=MMNIOD05:000110637:mpeg21>; consulted on: 12-22-2021.

<sup>14</sup> See also Herman Burgers (2010: 369-370), Hagen (2018: 674-676), Limpach (2016: 129, 182-183), and Gert Oostindie et al. (2022: 43-44).

future self-rule of Indonesia the old trust would surely be restored. Java had always been full of secrets for him, Fabricius states, but had never harboured any hostility. The Indonesians were just not yet ready for autonomy, he believed; they needed the Dutch to educate them in how to rule the country themselves (Fabricius 1947: 5 and 19-20).

Mid-September 1945, Fabricius found a chaotic situation in “Batavia” (Jakarta). The country has clearly slid from one war into another.<sup>15</sup> The Dutch had been absent from the scene for three and a half years, and power relations in Indonesia had changed drastically since the Second World War. One month before his arrival, under pressure from *pemuda*, Sukarno and Hatta had proclaimed the independent Republic of Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> Armed *pemuda*, or soldiers of the Republican youth army, Fabricius noted, guarded the front gallery of Mohammad Hatta’s house, but their presence was otherwise largely invisible. Here and there, Fabricius spotted a Republican flag flying from a house. English slogans bearing texts like “Indonesia never again the life blood of any other nation” had been painted on walls and parapets. Fabricius thought that the Indonesians had chosen English for their slogans because they had been influenced by Japanese propaganda, which was predominantly directed against the Americans and, to some extent, the English. Java, for instance, had been placed under British rule. British-Indian troops, mainly made up of Gurkhas, Punjabis, Sikhs, Rajputs, Patialans, and Mahrattas, had been stationed in the island for a week. Together with the defeated Japanese forces, the British were responsible for maintaining “law and order” in the Archipelago. Only a few KNIL units were active in Java in September and October 1945. Most Dutch troops were forbidden entry to Indonesia by the British until late February 1946.<sup>17</sup> For their own safety, many Dutch people remained in camps; some had fled back to them. “Holland no longer counts for anything”, was Fabricius’s rather disappointed comment (Fabricius 1947: 21-24). This kind of reality was not in line with his colonial notions. Colonial dissociation also affected his ideas.

<sup>15</sup> Fabricius consistently uses the colonial toponymy Batavia to refer to Jakarta.

<sup>16</sup> The youth corps had been formed by the Japanese. See Schulte Nordholt and Poeze (2022: 61-64). I thank Muhammad Yuanda Zara for providing me the following brief history of the name change of the Indonesian army. On 22 August 1945, the Committee for the Preparation of Indonesia’s Independence (Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia, PPKI), formed the People’s Security Agency (Badan Keamanan Rakjat, BKR), then on 5 October 1945, the Indonesian government formed the People’s Security Army (Tentara Keamanan Rakjat, TKR). On 7 January 1946, the Indonesian government changed the name of the People’s Security Army to the People’s Salvation Army (Tentara Keselamatan Rakjat, TKR). On 26 January 1946, the Indonesian government changed the name of the People’s Salvation Army to the Army of the Republic of Indonesia (Tentara Repoeblik Indonesia, TRI). The Indonesian National Army (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI), which was a combination of TRI and people’s militias, was officially established on 3 June 1947. The official Indonesian army attempted to control any actions by the *pemuda* militias. Incidentally, the *pemuda* did not constitute a uniform movement. Instead, there were various militias of young soldiers which often operated independently of each other. See Limpach (2016: 50).

<sup>17</sup> Captain and Sinke (2022: 146-147, 151, and 171). Captain and Sinke state that these regular Dutch units also engaged in extreme violence.

In *Hoe ik Indië terugvond*, Fabricius (Figure 1) presents himself as an authority. Knowing the country well, he feels he can make better sense of events than anyone else, simply because he had been born in Java (Fabricius 1947: 40-41 and 84). Colleagues who thought differently must, by definition, be wrong. When *The Times* urged him to be more objective, Fabricius did not take this as a signal to reconsider his stance; instead, he stopped submitting texts to *The Times* and worked only for the BBC. The divergent views of his foreign fellow correspondents also could not change his mind. The foreign media had it that the Dutch merely wanted to restore peace and order, so they could continue their colonial oppression with newly arrived forces. Fabricius complained that the fifty or so foreign correspondents were primarily set on scoops and had little or no knowledge and understanding of Indonesian-Dutch relations. Furthermore, they were more intent on witnessing the labour pangs of the Indonesian nation than on the damage caused by incompetent governance (Fabricius 1947: 40-43 and 57).<sup>18</sup>



Figure 1. Johan Fabricius. Picture taken from *Hoe ik Indië terugvond* (Fabricius 1947).

Fabricius not only deemed himself more expert than other Europeans; as a European, he also felt more knowledgeable than the Indonesians. They were incapable of instituting peace and order but did not even realize this themselves. The Indonesian leaders, for example, had no control over the *pemuda*. Plunder and murder, abduction, and tyranny were rife (Fabricius 1947: 41).

<sup>18</sup> Incidentally, in her book the author Beb Vuyk upbraided Fabricius for ignoring the backgrounds to the Indonesian uprising. See Bert Scova Righini (2005: 242).



*Were they in fact the leaders of this revolution instigated by the Japanese? Even Sukarno's words seemed to carry little weight with the fanatical gangs, who, with his name on their lips, unleashed their criminal Terror. After having incited them to violence for years, now the opportunity had come to perpetrate that violence, he vainly sought to restrain them. (Fabricius 1947: 41).*

He had grave doubts about the leadership qualities of Sukarno, whom he accused of having collaborated with Japanese fascists and was now fanatically inciting nationalism and racial hatred (Fabricius 1947: 144-147). Hatta, he thought, a shrewd debater (Fabricius 1947: 122-126). He had some sympathy for the noble Sjahrir as an intellectual democrat but also described him as a voice crying in the wilderness (Fabricius 1947: 46, 136-143). In his book, Fabricius cannot conceal his negativity about the authority the Indonesian Republican government:

*The Nationalist leaders believed that they would be able to put a stop to the bloodshed if only we were to withdraw. But what guarantees had they to offer us? What we had seen of their authority over their own people was certainly not convincing. Were we to expose a whole population of Europeans, Eurasian, and Chinese citizens to the dangers of such an experiment? (Fabricius 1947: 46).*

The answer to this question must be negative, Fabricius believed: a Dutch presence in the Archipelago was essential. As he saw it, the people of Indonesia longed for the safety, and the peace and order of the pre-war colonial era.

Despite this, Fabricius understood the ideals of the Indonesian nationalist leaders: the Indonesian nation had the right to self-rule, and the colonial era and the spirit which gave birth to it were definitely a thing of the past.

*But this revolution, whose inevitability the Dutch themselves realize and realized long before the war – must it necessarily come to pass at the cost of Java's total economic prosperity? At the cost of bloody Terror involving Indonesians, Chinese, Eurasians, and defenceless Dutch women and children [...]? Can there be any doubt that the Indonesian nation must first be educated for the enormous task of ruling this great country in such a way that the outcome might not be a disaster, the victims of which will be the millions of already half-starved people? Cannot Indonesians and Dutch come together and reach a compromise, binding both parties together in gratitude and holding out rich promises for the future? (Fabricius 1947: 53).*

Fabricius's stance here closely matches the ideas of the Dutch political representatives in the Archipelago, including the newly appointed Lieutenant-Governor-General H.J. van Mook (Schulte Nordholt and Poeze 2022: 139). Indonesia should be guided by the Netherlands on its long road to emancipation and independence. In other words, Fabricius was giving expression to opinions that are closely related to notions which were considered progressive in the 1930s.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> For the ideas of the Ethical Policy, see Elsbeth Locher-Scholten (1981: 176-208).

## EXTREME VIOLENCE

Fabricius's first expeditions took him through the various districts of Jakarta. He travelled with soldiers, with colleagues, and on his own, both during the day and after curfew. Various factions attempted to control the chaos in the capital. While Fabricius repeatedly stresses that relations between the Dutch and most Indonesians were pleasant and amicable, he also mentions unrest and disorder in the town. The defeated Japanese had mostly been tasked with ensuring safety. However, quite a few young Indonesians had taken up arms. These *pemuda* seized power in some areas, making districts unsafe for Europeans, Indonesians, and even Japanese soldiers. Fabricius did not see the *pemuda* as freedom fighters but as children, youths, with little idea of what they were doing and with no control over the violence they unleashed. However, Fabricius did distinguish between the *pemuda* and the *rampokkers*, who every night looted the offices and warehouses of Dutch, English, American, and Chinese companies for their own personal gain. The *rampokkers* were thieves who turned the chaos to their own advantage.

In his descriptions of Indonesians, Fabricius draws on colonialist stereotypes. Othering strategies made Indonesians into creatures designed to support the view that, if they were to become independent, they required Dutch leadership. Along similar lines, *Hoe ik Indië terugvond* constantly depicts the violence in which the Indonesians were engaging. The violence perpetrated by the Dutch, in contrast, was supposedly merely in response to provocative Indonesian actions. On occasion, Fabricius does offer an explanation for the cruelties perpetrated by Indonesians, as when he wants to "convince others of the basic gentleness of the Javanese, who, nevertheless, are so easy to incite to fanaticism and in whom, as with all grown children, lies beneath the surface a slumbering beast" (Fabricius 1947: 44, 57-58, and 71).

Remarkably enough, the violence on the Dutch side was mostly perpetrated against other Asians, "children of the country" as Fabricius liked to call the Eurasians and Ambonese (Fabricius 1947: 59, 96, 151-152). His explanation was that the *pemuda* singled out those Ambonese and Eurasians who had remained loyal to the Dutch. "The more primitive Eurasian, who lived on the outskirts of the kampong, had his too easily inflamed imagination fed by thoughts of abduction, torture, and a horrible death." Eurasian and Ambonese soldiers regularly received anonymous letters written in a garbled mixture of Dutch and Malay which threatened them with *guna-guna* (black magic) and poisonous arrows. Fabricius quotes at length from such a menacing letter, signed "Kromo the Avenger". These letters unnerved many Eurasians from poorer backgrounds, but the Ambonese treated them as a joke (Fabricius 1947: 95-99). The Ambonese fought terror with terror, he claimed: being Asians themselves, they knew how to deal with other Asians. The Eurasians, Fabricius remarks, would welcome some tougher action.

They understood the Indonesian and his weaknesses; the same weaknesses were in their own blood. Our western ethic merely irritated them; they regarded it as moonshine and believed that the outcome would be only more distress and endless bloodshed. (Fabricius 1947: 152).

There were few Dutch soldiers in Jakarta. The violence perpetrated by the few Dutch soldiers already in Java was dismissed as the result of their being “trigger-happy”.<sup>20</sup> Asian violence once more served as an explanation. What with the suffering the Dutch had endured at the hands of the Japanese and their Indonesians accomplices, under “such circumstances it was not difficult to understand how easy it was for a gun to go off” (Fabricius 1947: 57-58). On top of that, the European women who had remained in Japanese internment camps for their own safety increasingly come under attack from the *pemuda* (Fabricius 1947: 34).

Blame for the violence of the last months of 1945 must therefore lie with the Indonesians, Fabricius argued. During the colonial era, Dutch violence was seen as a response to Indonesian violence (Rick Honings 2022). One strategy to justify violence was to represent the “Other” as cruel and “bestial”. In military rhetoric, it was essential to emphasize a racial hierarchy and an innate difference between Europeans and non-Europeans (Richard N. Price 2018: 29). By describing the Indonesian violence as “bestial”, while stressing that the *pemuda* were mere children in whom the “beast” slumbered under the surface, and the Indonesian populace as a primitive people easily incited to fury, Dutch violence was justified as counter-violence.<sup>21</sup>

#### NO LONGER SURE OF ONE’S RIGHTNESS

After spending some time in the Archipelago, Fabricius had occasion to alter his thinking. And this he did, just as the violence in Indonesia escalated. First, however, Fabricius was able to play a heroic role in a situation which confirmed all his ideas about the Indonesian War of Independence.

On 12 or 13 October 1945, Fabricius learned of rumours that *rampokkers* from Bantam were unleashing a bloody terror on the Christian community of Depok, which consisted of Eurasians and Indonesians.<sup>22</sup> The men were said to have been taken away by *pemuda* making common cause with the *rampokkers*.<sup>23</sup> Together with four other journalists and a Chinese driver, Fabricius travelled to Depok. Not long after leaving, a fifteen-year-old *pemuda* carrying a Japanese sword got into their car. He was headed for Buitenzorg (Bogor) and guided the travellers past the Indonesian barricades and roadblocks. In Buitenzorg, a British colonel provided the journalists with thirty Gurkhas divided over

<sup>20</sup> See also Schulte Nordholt and Poeze (2022: 149).

<sup>21</sup> See Armoud Arps (2022). See also Captain and Sinke (2022a: 171).

<sup>22</sup> This incident was also infamous among Indonesians. In Indonesia it is known as the “gedoran Depok”. It had a negative impact on the image of the Indonesian government which had failed to maintain the security of the Christian community in Depok. See Wenri Wanhar (2011) and Tri Wahyuning M. Irsyam (2017).

<sup>23</sup> For a brief history of the *Depokkers*, see J.W. de Vries (2008: 114-121).

several lorries to escort them to Depok. They drove past dwellings which had been completely ravaged, looted, and burned to the ground. The one house not damaged was that of a Republican. An ominous silence enveloped the village; not even the birds sang. It turned out that over a thousand women and children had been locked up in the buildings of the Depok police station, with almost no food or drink. They had been shut up there and robbed of their remaining belongings by the Indonesian auxiliary police, who consisted of armed teenagers. Their husbands had been carried off by train by the *pemuda*. The stories Fabricius and the other journalists were told were gruesome.

Escorted by two Gurkhas, Fabricius drove back to Buitenzorg to fetch reinforcements. The British colonel dispatched him and sixty Gurkhas and Sikhs commanded by a major back to Depok. There, the *pemuda*, yelling loudly, opened fire on them, but they were not able to make much impression on the imperturbable Gurkhas. The women and children from Depok were evacuated by the British army. By now, there were two fatalities: a twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl and a girl about four years of age, shot by Indonesian snipers. The Gurkhas looked at them in silence. "They were used to the battles man-to-man in the damp heat of the Burmese jungle – war on children was something new to them." Fabricius wondered what "strange hatred" had possessed these *pemuda* (Fabricius 1947: 100-121, quote on 119).

The reports from Depok were soon overshadowed in the media by news of fights in Semarang and the murder of Brigadier Mallaby in Surabaya. The "extremists" indulged in an "orgy of slaughter" among the British, Dutch, and Japanese in Surabaya.<sup>24</sup> Sixteen-year-old *pemuda* flung themselves at allied tanks. Fabricius expressed his surprise: he had seen nothing but "cowardly barbarity" from "Sukarno's disciples".<sup>25</sup> "For the first time – and almost with relief – we noticed indications of idealism in this insurrection" (Fabricius 1947: 127). This marks a turnabout in Fabricius's thinking about the warring Indonesians. Once he detected idealism on the part of the adversary, he had breached the dominant Dutch discourse about events in Java: not some basic instinct lay at the root of Indonesian violence but the ideal of Indonesian nationalism.

Fabricius decided to appraise the situation in Surabaya for himself. A low-flying aircraft from the British emergency aid organization RAPWI (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) was to take him. *En route*, he observed guileless *pemuda* sitting in a "cosy gathering" on the train lines and drilling in an open field. Eyewitnesses in Semarang told him about the massacres but flying on to Surabaya proved too risky, and the plane returned to Batavia. (Fabricius 1947: 126-132). There, Fabricius attended the first Dutch-Indonesian

<sup>24</sup> Fabricius has even more accounts of the violence of *pemuda* against British(-Indian) soldiers, including one recounting the murder of the crew of a Dakota which had been forced to make an emergency landing near Bekasi (on 23 November 1945) and the English retaliatory measures which ensued (Fabricius 1947: 158-166). He also describes extreme violence directed against the Japanese (Fabricius 1947: 131-132).

<sup>25</sup> Incidentally, by far not all *pemuda* were supporters of Sukarno. See also Schulte Nordholt and Poeze (2022: 84-98, 107-109, 127, 162-166, 222-224).

conference on 17 November. Sjahrir and his followers negotiated at an “eastern tempo”. “All the Westerners were driven slowly but surely demented by the dilatoriness with which the negotiations proceeded” (Fabricius 1947: 149). The talks ended in a stalemate. Meanwhile, the *pemuda* were threatening to advance on Bandung and Batavia/Jakarta. The excesses did not diminish; if anything, they increased.

Fabricius next travelled to Palembang, Padang, and Medan (Sumatra), where the Eurasians experienced the Indonesian Revolution as a volcano, an excessive force of nature.<sup>26</sup> He then set off for the oil-producing town of Balikpapan (in Kalimantan), which had twice been razed to the ground (Fabricius 1947: 167). His journey in Celebes took him via quiet, safe Makassar to completely demolish Manado (Fabricius 1947: 167-171). He then visited some Moluccan islands, where most of the indigenous population had remained loyal to the Dutch (Fabricius 1947: 171-198). Fabricius reiterates that the Dutch administration should be able to restore order, that the Japanese had inspired and facilitated the *pemuda* in their ruthless violence, and that Java was the centre of the Revolution (Fabricius 1947: 154). However, he no longer sounded so confident that he was in the right.

A few days before Christmas 1945, Fabricius was back in Jakarta. He took a while to readjust “to this world of bloodshed and madness” (Fabricius 1947: 199-200, quote on 199). He appeared to be questioning his earlier hesitant stance on the potential success of an independent Indonesian state. Fabricius had been cherishing high expectations of “gallant little premier” Sjahrir, whom he expected to beat his opponent Sukarno, but who would then surely be in for a hard time. Despite these doubts, an almost hopeful perspective shimmers through in his concluding observations:

Should Holland prove to have been wrong in her widespread pessimism in this respect; should the Indonesian nation, despite expectations to the contrary, prove its ability to govern itself in a modern world without any period of apprenticeship – then, historically speaking, all of today’s human suffering of to-day would fade into unimportance in the face of so great a revelation (Fabricius 1947: 204-205).

#### BRUTAL VIOLENCE ONCE MORE

Dodo Berretty’s Eurasian father, Dominique Berretty (1891-1934), was once considered the wealthiest man in the Indies. After his father’s death, Dodo Berretty had no choice but to move to the Netherlands. In September 1945, the then twenty-year-old former resistance fighter volunteered for the *Stoottroepen* (Schock Troops) Regiment hoping to be dispatched to his native country. Berretty did not concern himself much with politics. He wanted to help bring the country back under Dutch rule, but also intended to find out what had happened to his relatives and to the Villa Isola, the monumental Modernist

<sup>26</sup> Fabricius (1947: 151-156). As late as 2005, Bussemaker makes use of a similar comparison in his study discussing this period, even though he admits that this was a broad generalization (Bussemaker 2005: 18). Captain and Sinke rightly point out, however, that this is a woeful example of both racist and patronizing colonial thinking (Captain and Sinke 2022b: 223).



manor in the mountains near Bandung where he and his sister Aimée had grown up. His ultimate goal was to find a job and settle down in his homeland. Berretty departed for the Archipelago with the idea of recovering something of the Indies of yore as well as finding himself a future. In December 1945, Berretty left England for Southeast Asia as a soldier aboard the troop ship the *Alcantara*.

However, the British military South East Asia Command forbade Dutch troops entry into Indonesia to take over British positions until February 1946. The Republic of Indonesia, whose leadership had abandoned dangerous Jakarta and relocated to safer Yogyakarta in January, had just then founded the TRI (Tentara Republik Indonesia, or Indonesian National Military) in a bid to unite the numerous *pemuda* militias (Pieter 't Hoen [1946] 27, 99-105).<sup>27</sup> The Dutch troops consisted of KNIL soldiers and volunteers from the Netherlands. Dutch conscripts would also be dispatched to Indonesia from September 1946.

On 23 January 1946, the *Alcantara*, with Dodo Berretty on board, arrived in the roadstead of Singapore. He and his *Stoottroepen* battalion were first trained in jungle warfare in Malacca before sailing for Indonesia on 9 March 1946. To his and his fellow soldiers' disappointment, the battalion was not deployed in Java; instead, it was diverted to Hollandia (New Guinea/Irian Jaya/Papua) via Manado (North Celebes), before eventually being stationed in Sorong five weeks later. Here, Berretty's company spent two months in appalling conditions without a shot being fired. On 11 July, Berretty's battalion was picked up by the *Plancius*, headed for Manado, then Makassar. He writes in a letter to his mother, dated 22 July 1946:

Makassar is a pleasant spot, the true *old-fashioned* Indies. [...] There were Dutchmen with an arrogant attitude, who made you feel very clearly that they were not interested in soldiers, à la Singapore, in short. [...] we went out a lot, most of us had two months' salary which we had owing to us, in our pockets. Scenes unfolded there which are too long to describe [...], for example, lines of twenty to thirty boys queueing at certain *atap* [palm-leaf roofed] huts where some girls made themselves available.

Notable here is the emphasis Berretty places on "the *old-fashioned* Indies", in his account (he underlines the word twice). In Makassar, he believed he had rediscovered the colonial ambiance of yore, which he would have dearly liked to have seen restored. In his letter, he hints that it was Dutch rule which had ensured order, peace, and safety in the town. Like Fabricius, he showed signs of colonial dissociation.

On 22 July, Berretty's battalion was shipped to Bali. On board, Berretty received news that he had been granted the leave he had applied for earlier to go to Java. In the meantime, he had learned that his relatives had survived the war in Asia. After a few days in Jakarta, he travelled to Bandung. Arriving at the Villa Isola, he was distressed by the devastation which met his eye. In a letter to his mother, dated 2 August 1946, he writes:

<sup>27</sup> See also Schulte Nordholt and Poeze (2022: 223-224). On 3 June 1947, its name was changed to TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia).

You can see straight through the house, through some four or five large holes one metre in diameter; the damage also consists of debris shot out of it in various places and all the windows have gone. The ceilings in several rooms have collapsed and everywhere you can see the holes made by machine-gun bullets. The extremists had turned it into a fort and were subsequently shot out of it. Parts of the garden had been set fire to but, apart from that, looks extremely neglected (to put it mildly). Please tell (write to) Aimée that all that is left of the swing and the seesaw we used to play on is a pair of poles, buckled in the shooting.

Mid-August 1946 Berretty rejoined his battalion in Bali, which had been merged with other units to become the so-called Y brigade.<sup>28</sup> For about three months, the battalion was stationed in the mountains behind Singaraja.

Berretty's first war confrontations with the Indonesian "rebels" took place in Bali. In his letters dated 30 August, 6 and 21 September, 18 and 24 October 1946, he describes his experiences to his mother:

Life here continues with the regularity of a broken alarm clock. When you wake up in the morning, you don't know where you'll end up by nightfall, or through which ravine you'll be trudging. Or, you are dropped off in the early evening (pitch dark) somewhere on a road where you then must lie in ambush and stop or shoot down anything which passes. The following morning you are picked up again, chilled to the bone [...]

If you let yourself be captured by those folk [from the TRI], this spells an insanely horrible End. In Java, it has happened that lads from our side were taken; they were later found with their noses, ears, and private parts cut off, the last shoved into their mouths. I also always lug around a hand grenade, whose shards can still kill at 100 metres. You can set it off in your trouser pocket if you had no other options left. As well as this, I carry a razor-sharp American navy dagger and a small calibre pistol, and of course my rifle or Sten gun. [...]

We hardly ever take water or food with us on our marches; the kampongs have an abundant supply of both. Especially when one is a hotbed of resistance, we burn the lot down, and we take the cattle with us. [...]

In a letter dated 21 September 1946, he describes an action against a TRI headquarters, which lasted 36 hours and involved just under 1,000 Dutch soldiers.

We took around fifty prisoners and I saw six dead people, including one Jap. Japs, usually those in command, are still captured here on a regular basis. The corpses were a gruesome sight, riddled with bullets and covered in blood. The man (a Balinese) lying next to the Jap had twenty murders on his conscience. It was the biggest action carried out so far in Bali; none of us was injured or killed.

Both these quotes feature exceptionally "brutal" violence. Interestingly, it was not perpetrated unilaterally by Indonesians; the Dutch army was also said to be guilty of brutality (as well as plunder, incidentally). However, the brutalities committed by the Dutch are to some extent justified: the Balinese

<sup>28</sup> For the history of the Y brigade in Bali, see Anne-Lotte Hoek (2021: 342-376).

victim allegedly had twenty murders on his conscience. What is more, the quote states that the corpses were a gruesome sight, not that the acts of killing were, which could be taken a reprisal. The brutality is, in fact, made to refer to the victim's body rather than to the perpetrator's violence (see Arps 2022).

Indubitably, the official military discourse was being breached here as a result of the writer's personal observations. These quotes show that, in hybrid texts in which travel writing and war writing are interwoven, contain personal observations and analyses which offer a different perspective on the contemporary Dutch discourse on the decolonization war which was to dominate Dutch historiography for a long time to come.

It seems that Berretty's image of the enemy began to shift in Bali. With some other army units, on 18 October 1946, his battalion was relocated to Denpasar, the capital of Bali, to be transferred to Sumatra. This is what he writes:

The voyage to Palembang takes around three days, so we should have landed there safe and sound by the end of October, the beginning of November. There's a lot more activity there than here. There are many Englishmen, a few Americans, and oilfields and the official TRI. They are bastards, though among those who actually do have principles, something of those principles might be valid.

This, in fact, is the first instance at which he writes about Indonesian nationalism with some nuances. He talks about soldiers with "principles", referring to Indonesians fighting for their ideal of freedom. In Berretty's mind too, doubts seem to have arisen about the Netherlands' presumed justification for this war.

At the end of October 1946, Berretty was ferried to Palembang with the Y Brigade, the first Dutch army unit to be stationed in Sumatra. Berretty would join the fighting in Palembang in the "First Police Action" or *Agresi Militer Belanda I*. He had virtually stopped writing. On 31 March and 1 April, 1948, he confided some details of a soldier's life to a notebook. They reveal his disappointment in the military adventure in the Archipelago. In a letter dated 10 June 1948, shortly before his return to the Netherlands, he asks his mother to put together some civilian clothes: "I'd like to shed my uniform as quickly as possible, because I hate it." Berretty must have realized that the Dutch soldiers had been sent to the Archipelago on an impossible mission. His future was not to lie in the Indies: that country had now become Indonesia (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Dodo Berretty as a soldier in Indonesia (source: Berretty Archive).

#### ON THE OTHER HAND

Frans Goedhart looked at the Indonesian Revolution through very different eyes. A social-democrat, Goedhart had already been highly critical of Dutch rule of the Indies before the Second World War. He had been active in the resistance during that war and founded the underground newspaper, *Het Parool*. His own role in the resistance against the German occupation forces, plus the ideas of Jacques de Kadt (1897-1988) on the founding of an independent and democratic Indonesia, prompted him to make his way to the theatre of war (De Kadt 1949).

Frans Goedhart arrived in Indonesia in the second half of June, when the extreme violence of the first phase of the Indonesian Revolution had just ended, but memories of it were obviously still fresh. Yogyakarta had been declared the new capital of the Republic of Indonesia as Jakarta had become too dangerous for the Nationalists. The Republic had meanwhile managed to organize itself in many respects. The many separate militias which had unleashed the extreme violence had been placed by the TRI (Schulte Nordholt and Poeze 2022: 61-64). The Dutch image of the Republic remained unswervingly negative. Through his *Terug uit Djokja*, Goedhart (Figure 3), writing as Pieter 't Hoen, aimed to win understanding for the Indonesian perspective adopted by Sukarno, Hatta, and, especially, Sjahrir. Following a visit to Bali, he notably defended the Indonesian guerrilla warfare there in an article in *Het Parool* dated 12 August 1946 (De Keizer 2012: 175).

At the beginning of *Terug uit Djokja*, where 't Hoen announces that he will shortly travel to Yogya, some old Dutch colonials told him he must be mad:

We have been involved in a life-and-death war with the rebels for about a year, so by now we should know what to expect from these gentlemen. It is utter chaos in their so-called Republic. There is murder, plunder, and pillaging. They have destroyed and burned down all our factories. The sensible natives, who want no truck with the extremists, dare not speak out, afraid of being beaten to death. Moreover, there is famine. The simple *desa* population is daily incited against the whites. A Dutchman venturing into the territory of this negro republic will be cut into pieces. ('t Hoen [1946]: 3-4).



Figure 3. Frans Goedhart at Schiphol Airport on his return from Indonesia in 1946 (Keizer 2012: second photo section n.p.)

't Hoen reflected that the others might well be more knowledgeable about the country and its population because they had lived there for decades, but in the present instance they had fallen victim to "delusions, to unreliable propaganda, which has tried to poison not just Batavia but all of the Netherlands". His fellow diners based themselves on second-hand stories from areas on the demarcation line, where the fighting was fierce. 't Hoen, excepted the others in his company had never met Indonesian intellectuals. He had come to know them as sensible, reasonable, decent people. He understood that he could not make the others see this: they were too steeped in pre-war colonial society – the old normal. They might realize that the old situation could not possibly return unchanged, but "the changes must be limited to a minimum acceptable to the Dutch community in the Indies" ('t Hoen [1946]: 6-7).

This scene also captures what most Dutch people thought about the situation in the Archipelago. "Malignant representation, which has been spread across the Republic, shows us a distorting-mirror image of reality, and in Batavia this caricature is accepted as reality" ('t Hoen [1946]: 7). He



could only refute this propaganda which most Dutchmen held to be true by travelling to Republican territory and setting his own observations against it. He actively sought out the Indonesian perspective to attempt to remedy the colonial dissociation which plagued many Dutch people. As did Fabricius in his *Hoe ik Indië terugvond*, 't Hoen decided on a mixture of travel literature, war correspondence, and eyewitness account for *Terug uit Djokja*.

With a small party, Pieter 't Hoen travelled by special train from Batavia to Yogyakarta. During the train journey, it was already clear which two rhetorical pillars would underpin his account: personal observations and conversations with Republicans. Both unswervingly show how driven, proud, and idealistic the Republicans were. But they had also swallowed a strong dose of realism: transforming the Republic of Indonesia into a successful state would require a great deal of effort. Be that as it may, a begin had been made and, with some Dutch help, things would certainly work out. In the conversations, 't Hoen gave Indonesian opinions on issues delicate to a Dutch audience a voice. He seldom contradicted Indonesian analyses. Sometimes tacitly concurring with their side of the story; at other times he endorsed the Republican narrative's logic and obviousness.

In *Terug uit Djokja*, 't Hoen constantly stresses how well-intentioned and reasonable the Republicans were. For instance, during the train journey Darpo, the active and energetic guide from the Information Service, had already admitted that much of the anti-Dutch propaganda was exaggerated: it was propaganda from the early period of the Republic, aimed at simple folk. The Republic's leaders fortunately did not think in such black and white terms. Besides, Darpo pointed out, there were two sides to this issue. The Republic was invariably put in an unfavourable light in the Netherlands:

Do they not constantly attempt to create the impression that the Republic is utter chaos, that there is famine and terror, that its leaders are fascists, collaborators, and puppets of Japanese fascism? Does Dutch propaganda not systematically show the actions of the Republican government in a bad light? [...] Do they not make much of the cruelties, the plundering and other crimes, and do they not attempt to have the idea that these are the deeds of the Republic's regular troops accepted? ('t Hoen [1946]: 19).<sup>29</sup>

A Roman Catholic *pemuda* explained that Indonesians did not so much hate the Dutch as their colonial system. "We would much prefer to cooperate with them in friendly fashion. But if they pit soldiers against us, cooperation is impossible." ('t Hoen [1946]: 46-47). 't Hoen did not contradict these assertions.

When he arrived in Yogyakarta, he came upon a town celebrating the first anniversary of the Republic. The place was clean, and life proceeded in an orderly manner. The streets were lit and a uniformed traffic policeman directed the traffic at busy crossroads. There was plenty of food, at prices even lower than in Batavia. Indonesian and Chinese people lived amicably side by side.

<sup>29</sup> Emphasis here is on the regular. Other troops were also active at the time. Not all fighters and militias had been subsumed into the TRI/TNI.

The inhabitants were proud of the Republic and of what it had achieved in Yogya within a short period of time ('t Hoen [1946]: 23-31). At first, 't Hoen was accompanied by two armed bodyguards, but later criss-crossed the town on his own, with no danger to himself. Once, when he returned his wallet to his back pocket a little too carelessly after he had bought something, an old saleslady approached him to point this out: "Some insolent pickpocket or other villain might compromise the reputation of the Republic!" ('t Hoen [1946]: 25).

Exhibitions of advances in aviation, industry, and painting were being staged in the town. 't Hoen's Indonesian guide pointed out that some 150 pilots had been trained for the occasion. This would not have happened under Dutch rule. The guide at the industry exhibition was visibly proud that no European had had any cause for concern about the quality of the fine products made here. The exhibition of paintings was especially outstanding, 't Hoen felt. Works by artists who had not received any European training interested him the most. He was especially intrigued by the works of the talented painter, Affandi. He transformed the exhibition into a metaphor:

To me, this exhibition seems to typify the spiritual climate of Republican life. It is exuberant, passionate, enthusiastic, and dynamic. At the same time, it exposes the weaknesses of Republican life: a clear lack of technique and discipline. ('t Hoen [1946]: 32).

It seems this is the first time in *Terug uit Djokja* at which 't Hoen levels criticism at the young Republican nation. However, later in the text, it transpires that he had merely suggested a point for improvement, which provided no more or less than an opportunity for the Dutch to work together with the Indonesians, and help the Republic Indonesia develop itself ('t Hoen [1946]: 74-75, 118 and 127-128).

On 17 August, when the proclamation of the previous year was celebrated, 't Hoen attended Sukarno's speech in honour of the occasion. Standing next to the president were Hatta, Sjarifuddin, and Sjahrir, "indispensable to the leadership of the Republic, but Sukarno is the symbol of national unity, which cannot be tarnished without jeopardising the Republic itself" ('t Hoen [1946]: 33). Cheered by the crowds, Sukarno spoke about democracy, popular sovereignty, the fight against anarchy, and the desire to live in peace with other nations; a dawn concert and a parade followed. 't Hoen realized that he is in "the heart of the Republic of extremists and terrorists, unarmed and unattended!" ('t Hoen [1946]: 34).

In the afternoon, 't Hoen was received in the *kraton* by the brother of the sultan. He was given a tour of the palace. The sultan's brother assured him:

We would definitely never participate in a social revolution which turned everything upside down and was accompanied by large-scale massacres. But this is not what is happening here. The government aims to transform Indonesia into a modern state, it wants to root out illiteracy, build factories, and raise the level of welfare. My brother [an army general and office holder, CV] completely agrees! After all, we are modern people too, are we not?! My brother and I

studied in Leiden and are acquainted with Europe. Long ago we had reached the conclusion that our country needed to be completely modernized. In this respect, there is not the slightest difference of opinion between the sultan and the Republic. How could we ever create a modern state, if we could not achieve national independence? ('t Hoen 1946: 37).

In the evening, 't Hoen and six hundred other guests attended the reception in the presidential palace. Towards the end of the event, a *pemuda*, freshly arrived from the front, addressed the elite of the Republic. He said that, while there was every reason to hold a party, the front-line troops fighting and giving their lives for the Republic must not be forgotten. They could only persevere if the whole country was behind them.

After the party, 't Hoen's European travelling companions returned to Jakarta, but he wanted to see more of the Republic ('t Hoen [1946]: 41). In the sequel to *Terug uit Djokja*, 't Hoen repeatedly portrays the Republic of Indonesia as a modern state in which Indonesians, Eurasians, Arabs, and Chinese people lived together in peace. The Republic was supported by the whole population ('t Hoen [1946]: 23-24, 72, 82, 124-126).

This sentiment was also palpable at another meeting in Malang. In his hotel there, 't Hoen had a visit from an elderly retired Indonesian teacher who had studied in Leiden. He loved the Netherlands and asked a torrent of questions about the country and the occupation. In the meantime, aware of the Republic's need for brain power, he had become head of a HBS (Senior Secondary School). Despite his initial scepticism about the Republic, he now felt that the precarious experiment set in motion on 17 August had essentially been successful. The leaders had shown leadership, determination, and a sense of responsibility. He admitted that his expectations had been more than met militarily, politically, and organizationally ('t Hoen [1946]: 69-72).

't Hoen then describes his interlocutor's *ethos*:

His words are obvious proof that he was a moderate man but that, nevertheless, he had unreservedly joined the fight for national freedom. His opinions were apparently representative of a large part of the Republican intelligentsia and the younger generation, on whom he must surely exert great influence through his function. ('t Hoen [1946]: 73).

The elderly Indonesian man was equally uncompromising about the Dutch. The Netherlands and the Republic must strike up a properly formulated, long-term alliance. The Indonesians badly needed the Dutch: their help would surely help them realize the Republic's ambitions.

In fact, we shall soon need many more Dutchmen here than there have ever been before. Obviously, their position will be different from what it used to be. Earlier, the Dutchman in fact exercised unlimited power. Those days are gone forever. However, we would still like to have him here as an assistant, as an advisor, and as a friend. In Holland, they do not seem to understand, and I even had the impression from a few Dutch newspapers that I recently happened to lay my hands on that, in

Holland, it is believed that we hate the whites and that we are particularly hostile towards the Dutch. But none of that is true! ('t Hoen [1946]: 74-75).

In *Terug uit Djokja*, the author emphasizes time and time again that the ties between the Netherlands and Indonesia were still intact; what had changed, however, was the nature of the countries' relationship.

#### VIOLENCE AS A MEANS

The extreme, unchecked violence of the period from August 1945 to March 1946 was a matter of great concern to 't Hoen. The first time he reported on the violence with any subtlety in *Terug uit Djokja* is when he came upon some members of the militant group KRIS (Kebaktian Rakyat Indonesia Sulawesi, 'Indonesian People's Devotion Sulawesi') in a coffeehouse. He describes one of them, a long-haired young man about twenty with a big pistol in his holster, as a self-confident, happy person, whose victorious gaze defied everyone around him. The young man called to mind characters in a Tom Mix cowboy film, a stage performance of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and members of the BS (*Binnenlandse Strijdkrachten*, 'Internal Armed Forces') just after the Dutch liberation. The behaviour of these hidalgos occasionally verged on the strange, even quixotic, but their fighting skills were excellent, in Darpo's opinion. At times they might be somewhat exuberant, but only three months earlier their behaviour had been much worse, another Indonesian civil servant explained:

Then they held shooting exercises in the street and, when they came to see you at the ministry, they would draw their revolvers and fire into the air to announce themselves! Lately we have managed to teach them much better manners. They should be fairly normal in six months or so! ('t Hoen [1946]: 27).

Apparently, the *pemuda* were just as trigger-happy as the Dutchmen in Fabricius's *Hoe ik Indië terugvond*. The message implied is that Indonesian violence was born of the youthful bravura of the *permuda*, but the Republic would normalize their behaviour.

The walls of the coffeehouse were hung with posters from the early period of the Republic. "These are bloody images, glorifying revolutionary youths sacrificing their lives in the Nationalist cause. Some pictures betray the population's hatred of the Japanese." ('t Hoen [1946]: 27). The younger generation's self-sacrifice in a good cause is presented as the motor driving the violence. Nevertheless, in the next sentence, it is said that it was the Japanese whom the Indonesians truly hated.

't Hoen does not stop at a brief mention of the Indonesian violence during the early period of the War of Independence. In Malang he returned to this subject when the old Indonesian teacher told him how much the Indonesian people had suffered under the Japanese occupation. The man argued that, even if the Indonesians were better off under the Dutch, they were now fed up with all oppressors, the good as well as the bad ('t Hoen [1946]: 76). They had every right to take control of their own country. This argument made perfect

sense to 't Hoen. After all, the Netherlands had fought for its independence from the Spanish oppression, which closely resembled colonization. That Indonesians had now seized their moment was completely understandable to the former fighter against the German occupation, 't Hoen. He did, however, regret that it came attended by so many atrocities:

I was thinking of the women and children murdered in cold blood in Surabaya and Ambarawa and of the corpses nailed to planks, which had floated through the Priok Canal in Batavia every day barely a year ago. But had the iconoclastic furies and the many other ravages and cruelties attending the birth of our own nation not been of the same kind? When national passions burst forth and cannot immediately be channelled into a normal and quiet course, cruelties and crimes seem the inevitable companions of great political events. ('t Hoen [1946]: 76).

This assertion can be subjected to various interpretations. It is debatable whether these kinds of atrocities are comparable. Moreover, such a comparison would not mean the perpetrators are exempt from responsibility for the violence used. The remark that great political events are apparently inevitably attended by cruelties and crimes is complacent. After all, the militias had been subsumed into the TRI to prevent these excesses of extreme violence ('t Hoen [1946]: 27, 99-105).<sup>30</sup>

An Indonesian colonel still refuted in front of 't Hoen that the Indonesian population welcomed the Dutch army as bringers of peace and order:

For the non-combatants, who live in the combat zone, the war is a horrific nightmare. In fact, you must have seen the same in Europe. The civilian population is naturally relieved and delighted when the mayhem stops. They can come out of their hiding places and are offered food and aid to relieve their most urgent needs. Especially when the advancing troops are decent lads and do not unleash the savage Ambonese and the Dutch Military Police upon the civilian population, the village people will be at their happiest, which they exuberantly express. ('t Hoen [1946]: 106-107).

The TRI colonel, who had been trained at the KMA (Royal Military Academy) in Breda, was implying that it would be incorrect to conclude that the population wanted nothing better than a return to pre-war Dutch rule. The many instances of arson in occupied territory, in Bandung in this case, were proof to the contrary. The colonel predicted a guerrilla war which would be mere child's play compared to what happened in Aceh if the Netherlands tried to occupy Java again. A scorched earth policy would be adopted. As they said their farewells, 't Hoen and the colonel shook hands, knowing "that a massacre could and must be prevented and that there is ample room for friendship between our peoples" ('t Hoen [1946]: 27, 99-105).

Towards the end of his book, 't Hoen is 50 kilometres away from the front in Surabaya, "where, instead of drinking each other's health, the Dutch and Indonesians are shooting at each other". He states that he has not detected any

<sup>30</sup> See also Schulte Nordholt and Poeze (2022: 223-224).



hatred of the Netherlands or the Dutch. The Indonesians were hospitable, frank, and full of high spirits. He therefore wondered why "our lads" will have to carry on fighting "these youngsters", how much longer will people be killed, and why our peoples cannot live together in peace and friendship.

It is a long and ancient history, that of the Netherlands and Indonesia, and one which contains several dark episodes. On both sides, we must resolve to forget these. A new beginning must be made between white and brown in Indonesia. To this end, let us first rid ourselves of our prejudices. These people are not inferior to us. They are different to us in some respects. That is not a problem, and it is certainly no cause for contempt. ('t Hoen [1946]: 111-112).

The Indonesian Revolution was a national, social, and cultural revolution which should be embraced by the Dutch, 't Hoen argued. Indonesia must and should become an independent country.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Johan Fabricius, Dodo Berretty, and Frans Goedhart each came to Indonesia from a different background and viewed events in the Archipelago through different eyes. What connects them is that they did not remain on the side-lines but move into the war zone and made contact with Indonesian nationalists. This raised their doubts about the official Dutch view of the war and the concomitant violence. Independently of each other, they recognized that Indonesia had a legitimate right to be independent and that the extreme violence is not perpetrated solely by Indonesians.

Johan Fabricius's *Hoe ik Indië terugvond* and Dodo Berretty's letters home reveal a shift in colonial thinking. Towards the end of his book, the journalist Fabricius seems to query his view that Dutch influence was indispensable to the new Indonesia, given that the Indonesian leaders still lacked the capacity to govern the country properly and instal law and order. The Indonesian people were presumed to be a primitive people who were longing for a return to the orderliness of the colonial era. Fabricius thought the Indonesians needed the Dutch to evolve and develop towards self-rule and self-determination, which was the country's good right. Fabricius' reasoning was undoubtedly coloured by pre-war colonial stereotypes, which stemmed from 1930s progressive ideas about education and greater Indonesian independence.

The military man, Dodo Berretty, would have been more ready to entertain the idea of restored colonial rule, his letters suggest. During his years as a soldier, however, he learned that Indonesian independence fighters too cherished principles and ideals and that these might well be justified. By the end of his stint in Indonesia, he was disgusted with military life. He had also realized that the colonial times would never return. The Indies no longer existed; Indonesia had taken their place.

<sup>31</sup> Frans Goedhart was also a Dutch politician. His goal was to initiate a dialogue between the Dutch and the Indonesians. As a result, he was welcomed by Indonesian nationalists but reviled by Dutch colonialists. See De Keizer (2012: 168-182).

Both Fabricius, who witnessed three months of the first phase of chaos and excesses in Indonesia, and Berretty, who experienced the next period at close quarters, initially framed the Dutch violence as a response to Indonesian violence; they never queried its legitimacy. At the outset of their stint in Indonesia, the two writers still seemed to adhere to the official military narrative. Dutch subjects and Dutch interests must be protected and defended against the brutal actions of the Indonesian youth fighters and their powerless leaders. All the Indonesian (primitive) people wanted was safety, peace, and order; they required assistance and coaching by the Dutch on their long road to emancipation.

Gradually, however, cracks appeared in these rock-solid convictions as both writers observed matters which militated against the official Dutch discourse about the war in Indonesia. Independently of each other, they reached the conclusion that there were indeed principles and ideals beneath the Indonesian violence. Therefore, they needed to alter their views of the Indonesians and, concomitantly, of themselves. They began to question whether the Dutch were in the "right". The same can be applied to the violence used. Aspirations for independence were initially seen as an excuse for Indonesians to let off steam through an extreme form of violence. During their travels, Fabricius and Berretty perceived that excessive violence and plunder were not the exclusive preserve of the Indonesians; Dutch soldiers were equally guilty of these excesses. With the dawning of this perception, almost all colonial dissociation dissipated.

The text by Pieter 't Hoen throws a different angle on the violence dynamics of the Indonesian War of Independence. 't Hoen sought to raise his compatriots' awareness of their colonial dissociation and to alter the dominant Dutch perspective on events in the first year after the Proclamation of the Indonesian Republic. For this purpose, he personally observed how the Republican government was functioning. At the same time, as a former resistance fighter, he was fascinated by the Indonesians' revolutionary drive. Rightness, 't Hoen felt, was mostly on the side of the Indonesian Republic and its leaders. Goedhart was opposed to the old colonial thinking; he stressed the positive sides of the Indonesian fight for independence and the proper functioning of the Republic and endorsed the new (post-) colonial ideology of Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir. Furthermore, his own radical social-democratic convictions even seemed to push him to idealize the elan of the Indonesian revolution.

The nationalist leaders of the Republic of Indonesia were in control, he felt. Calm and order reigned in the Republican territory. The Dutch and Indonesians must begin working together as equals on the future of this new state. The "Other" did not exist for 't Hoen. Racial prejudices were pre-war delusional beliefs, which must not be used to legitimize colonial violence. 't Hoen even looked indulgently on Indonesian violence as he argued that extreme violence could occasionally attend the birth of a nation.

An analysis of three hybrid texts about the Indonesian War of Independence by Dutch eyewitnesses shows the importance of studying these more closely. In the mass attention focused on the violence used during the Indonesian liberation struggle, this type of literary text is all too often disregarded, even though these texts are crucial to gaining insight into how the war was perceived at the time. Their hybrid nature especially brings out the tension between clashing notions, realities, and truths. Both the dominant Dutch perspective and the Indonesian counter-perspective feature in these hybrid texts. Critical analyses of this specific mixture of travel literature, war journalism, and eyewitness accounts could be of great importance for how the Indonesian War of Independence is remembered and commemorated in the Netherlands as well as in Indonesia: then and only then can the long-standing images of the Indonesian War of Independence be adjusted and nuanced.

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