Petra Groen, Anita van Dissel, Mark Loderichs, Rémy Limpach, and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg, ***Krijgsgeweld en kolonie. Opkomst en ondergang van Nederland als koloniale mogendheid, 1816-2010*** (Amsterdam: Boom, 2021, 648 pp., ISBN 9789024438952).

The history of Dutch colonialism was often not one of cultural subtleties but of raw military power. This is the claim that ties together a series of essays in which Petra Groen, Anita van Dissel, Mark Loderichs, Rémy Limpach, and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg narrate the rise and fall of the Dutch empire over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For these authors, colonization was possible as long as the Dutch could muster more resources, soldiers, and logistical support than their challengers. Minutely tracing tactics across a long series of campaigns, the authors show that hardly a year went by without some form of colonial military expedition. Violence, legitimized by racist discourses, is shown to be at the center of colonial state building. The volume's many images, ranging from heroic paintings of battleships to photographs of soldiers posing with mutilated bodies, strikingly bring home this message, even if they could have used some reflection about the context in which images are produced and circulated.

The first of the volume's three parts deals with the conquest of the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth century. Groen argues that until the end of that century, institutional memory within Dutch command structures was extremely limited, meaning there was little continuity in military strategies with earlier epochs of colonialism. By defining the nineteenth century as a new phase of 'High Imperialism', characterized by deep territorial control rather than coastal trade, she enters into long-standing debates about the drivers of 'modern' colonial expansion: did metropolitan politicians seek out colonies for domestic reasons, or did colonial administrators in the periphery petition reluctant metropoles to shore up their rickety rule?[1] *Krijgsgeweld en kolonie* leans towards the latter explanation, depicting a Dutch colonial empire whose broad contours were established by British fiat, and whose land-hungry peripheral administrators were checked by the frugality of metropolitan politicians. Herein, the authors explicitly engage with the work of British historian of technology Daniel Headrick, who contended that expensive new technologies such as steam ships, telegraphs, and machine guns made imperial expansion seem much more efficient to European administrators. Against this contention, the authors argue that technological dominance was no guarantee for conquest.[2] Steamships could attempt to chase down 'pirates' or blockade populations into submission, but they were of limited use for inland counterinsurgencies. There, Dutch armies

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instead developed cheaper strategies: coopting and fueling ethnic divisions, controlling food supplies, burning villages, and targeting resistance leaders and their families. The conquest of the East Indies was made possible not by a well-funded push emanating from the metropole, but by a combination of local recruitment and extreme violence.

The volume's second part shows how this system created its own gravediggers. The weak colonial state's dependence on extreme violence alienated it from its subjects and thereby made it unable to carry out the mass mobilizations necessary for twentieth-century warfare. When British naval hegemony was stripped away by the ascendant Japanese empire after World War I, the Dutch state was unable to mount an external defense. The colonial army was, after all, more suited for 'internal' policing tasks. After the Republic of Indonesia declared independence in the wake of Japanese defeat in 1945, the Dutch fell back on their earlier tactics to re-colonize the archipelago. The authors show that the extremely violent counterinsurgency methods developed over the nineteenth century were structurally applied between 1945 and 1949.

After a brief interlude concerning military administration on the Dutch Gold Coast in the mid-nineteenth century, the authors turn to the military history of the Dutch Caribbean in the book's final part. Taking to heart recent analyses of slavery as a system of organized violence, they examine how soldiers tracked down and attacked enslaved workers who tried to escape from plantations.[3] Military force continued to be employed to police colonial societies even after the abolition of slavery, a task which was reflected in the lopsided racial composition of the army. Apart from occasional tensions with France, Venezuela, and Germany there was rarely an external threat to the Netherlands' Caribbean colonies.

The authors use categories such as external versus internal defense, policing versus soldiering, and extreme versus legitimate violence to structure the book's overall argument: that the colonial state was an unstable formation lacking popular legitimacy because it privileged internal consolidation, militarized policing, and extreme violence over external defense and democratic accountability. These features are said to distinguish the colonial army's development from that of the metropole. However, the authors do

1 For a summary of this debate, see Maarten Kuitenbrouwer, 'Drie omwentelingen in de historiografie van het imperialisme: Engeland en Nederland', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 107:4 (1994) 559-585.

2 Daniel R. Headrick, *The Tools of Empire: Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (New York 1981).

3 For one such recent analysis, see Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge 2020).

not interrogate the ways in which metropolitan and colonial states in fact co-constituted one another. In the case of the British Empire, for instance, the late British historian David Washbrook has suggested that the military might of British India reduced the metropole's reliance on domestic 'feudomilitary forces', allowing for the creation of a civilian government in Europe while spurring militarization overseas.[4] Such historiographical engagements are absent from *Krijgsgeweld en kolonie*, which instead presents Dutch military's colonial past as an isolated aberration from the lawful, normative course that was followed in the metropole. Decolonization is framed as a return to this normal course of development. As evidence of such 'normalization', Brocades Zaalberg describes the deadly suppression of striking workers in 1969 at a Shell refinery in Curaçao as a legitimate action, arguing that the Dutch marines were subordinated to the civilian government. He thereby denies that the island's colonial past might have played a role establishing the business interests that the violent intervention ultimately sought to protect.

Overall, the volume's argument could be pushed further in three directions. Firstly, colonized people's views on military strategy could be expounded in more detail. Currently the volume treats the Dutch as the primary agents of historical change, at least until the twentieth century. There are efforts to include the perspectives of subaltern soldiers and anti-colonial fighters in the volume, but these are treated rather episodically in small sub-sections on, for instance, the ethnic composition of the colonial army. They are not integrated into a longer-term narrative of how colonizers and colonized adapted their war-making strategies to one another over several centuries. During the Java War of 1825 to 1830, for example, the Dutch responded to a rival state-building project by the Javan prince Diponegoro, who blended elements from Java's eighteenth-century dynastic wars with popular modes of peasant resistance and influences from Ottoman military modernization.[5] How did these elements in turn come to shape Dutch military strategies? And did subsequent opponents of the Dutch, such as fighters in Aceh between 1873 and 1915, also draw on longer histories of colonial military confrontation? Did they draw any lessons in how (not) to conduct an insurgency from the Java War?

Secondly, one might consider broader processes of militarization to understand how violence was organized across legal, economic, sexual, and political spheres. Military force was not just an instrument but exerted its own powerful logic that blended into other aspects of life. For instance, Ulbe Bosma has argued that the system of forced sugar cultivation implemented in the immediate aftermath of the Java War was understood by colonial

4 David Washbrook, 'South Asia, the World System, and World Capitalism', *Journal of Asian Studies* 49:3 (1990) 502. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2057768.

5 Peter Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the end of an old order in Java, 1785-1855* (Leiden 2008). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/9789067183031.

administrators in military terms: they referred to the annual harvest season as the 'suikercampagne', and built on eighteenth-century experiences of subduing enslaved laborers in the West Indies.[6] Similarly, Alicia Schrikker has shown that during the Java War, military recruiters drew on the VOC's legal archives to enslave porters in Bali.[7] By shifting between legal and military registers, colonial officers reached across the supposed gap in institutional memory that had been created by the nationalization of the VOC and the British occupation of Java during the Napoleonic Wars. One could extend such insights into analyses of other overlooked geochronological continuities, possibly undermining the idea that High Imperialism was an entirely new form of colonialism: how does the *benteng* system of fortified outposts overlooking rice paddies developed during the Java War compare with eighteenth century attempts by Dutch administrators to assert control over production in Java or the Moluccas?[8]

Thirdly, one might take a more global approach in looking at concurrent processes across European empires, for instance to compare the near-simultaneous creation of mounted military police units in Java, the Netherlands, and France. This would upset the strict distinction between normative military development in the metropole and abnormal development in the colonies, while still bringing out the exceptional brutality of colonial violence as a pan-European project. As it stands, however, the volume already serves as an important reminder of the centrality of violence in colonial state formation, and thereby also provides fruitful grounds for further research.

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6 Ulbe Bosma, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia: Industrial Production, 1770–2010* (Cambridge 2013). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781139626323.

7 Alicia Schrikker, 'Institutional Memory in the Making of Dutch Colonial Culture in Asia (1700–1870)', in: René Koekkoek, Anne-Isabelle Richard, and Arthur Weststeijn (eds.), *The Dutch Empire Between Ideas and Practice, 1600-2000* (London 2019). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27516-7_6.

8 For an argument that nineteenth century territorial expansion did not constitute a hard break with eighteenth century 'mercantile' colonialism, see Jan Breman, *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market: Profits from an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java* (Amsterdam 2015). DOI: https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_597440; for a reflection on the benteng system by an Indonesian historian, see Saleh As'ad Djamhari, *Strategi menjinakkan Diponegoro: Stelsel Benteng, 1827-1830* (Jakarta 2003).