

Paul M.M. Doolan, *Collective Memory and the Dutch East Indies: Unremembering Decolonization* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021, 334 pp., ISBN 9789463728744).

Paul Doolan's book is an important and timely attempt to canvas how and why various groups have sought to 'unremember', deflect or erase the 1945-1949 Indonesian Independence War from Dutch collective memory. In this war Indonesians were forced to fight when the Dutch sought to retake their former colony after the independence declaration on 17 August 1945. The war, otherwise known as the Indonesian Revolution, has gained increased attention in Dutch society in the last decade because of a series of court cases commencing with the 2011 Rawagede (Balongsari) massacre case in which widows won compensation for the murder of their husbands by Dutch soldiers. This in turn led to more successful court cases and increased Dutch scholarly engagement with this period. In this context, Doolan's book reminds us that efforts to both remember and forget this period date back to the war itself and that it remained 'a wound in Dutch public life that wouldn't go away' (12).

The central question is how the decolonization of the Dutch East Indies, especially the 1945-1949 period, has been represented in Dutch culture from 1945 to 1995. *Collective Memory and the Dutch East Indies* follows a chronological structure. The second chapter focuses on the war itself, the third chapter on the first twenty years after the war and the remaining four chapters shift focus to pay closer attention to key texts or developments in memory politics from 1969 to the 1990's. These developments include the breaking of silence about the war, a period of postmemory where the second generation played more of a role, a controversy over the work of one historian and some key texts from the 1990's. Across these chapters Doolan analyses a range of sources, such as the views of colonial officials, liberal politicians, news reports, memoirs, literature, film and key works by historians that shaped public opinion. This is one of the most comprehensive reviews of how a range of Dutch people engaged with this history in the half century after the war began and an excellent attempt to complexify our understanding of different forces that worked towards both opening and shutting down remembrance of the war.

Starting in 1945 means Doolan revisits Dutch representations of the war as it infolded in chapter two. This chapter is of critical importance because it takes us back to the debates that unfolded as the war developed. The official view on the war was that the Dutch were undertaking a 'humanitarian mission' to save Indonesians from the Indonesian Republican 'terrorists'.

The Dutch military information service presented a highly sanitized version of the war in films and in news reporting, such that no violence against Indonesians was shown and Dutch soldiers were represented as close to the people, especially to Indonesian children. Importantly, the author canvasses more critical media reporting and film representations during the war that were sympathetic to Indonesian Republicans, which characterized the war as a colonial war and acknowledged Dutch terror and war crimes against Indonesians. He pays considerable attention, for example, to the anti-colonial film *Indonesia Calling* and the interesting background of the director Joris Ivens. Doolan also suggests that the popular 1948 novel by Hella Haasse, called *Oeroeg*, which covers a friendship between a Dutch boy and an Indonesian boy and the deterioration of that friendship as they grow older through to a direct confrontation in the war, tried to cover colonialism from some complex angles. Doolan further examines the memoirs of the colonial official Hubertus J. van Mook and of the leftist parliamentarian Jacques de Kadt, who opposed the military intervention and was highly critical of Van Mook's efforts to retain Indonesia and weaken it through the forced imposition of a federal structure.

As the book progresses Doolan discusses the evolving memory landscape in the Netherlands. Chapter three highlights the increased attention to memory of the German occupation as well as the role people whose families had migrated to the Netherlands after the war played in remembrance. He argues that, in the 1949-1969 period, there was a 'traumatic rupture of memory' and hence a shift away from the more nuanced accounts of the war produced during the war itself. He attributes this rupture to a strong emphasis on the German occupation of the metropole and an associated sense of victimhood. A similar sense of victimhood was present amongst those who had participated in the war or fled the former colony. The author emphasizes that Dutch assimilation policies also impacted those who once lived in the East Indies, promoting 'the suppression of memory' about the war and more nostalgic remembrance of the colonial period that preceded it.

In chapter four, Doolan argues that the relative silence about the war broke in 1969 due to the testimony of veteran conscript Joop Hueting, who exposed the fact that Dutch soldiers had committed war crimes against Indonesians during the war. Going further than other analyses of the significance of Hueting's disclosures, Doolan carefully analyses a range of reactions to Hueting's revelations, including responses from other veterans, the press and historians. He explains that there were very mixed reactions at the time, including outpourings of anger.

The book importantly explains the roles people with different relationships to the colonial past played in remembrance of decolonization, commenting at the same time on public responses to these works. The author highlights, for example, the Indo woman Beb Vuyk's largely autobiographical

reflections in her novels, in the 1940's and 1950's, on the extremes of nationalism and violence committed by the Japanese, the Dutch and the Indonesians, and the complex positions of Indos in the war. Yet, he comments that her work was not widely promoted or read in Dutch society. He similarly notes that the shocking 1952 memoirs of Captain Raymond Westerling, who was responsible for the 1946-1947 massacres in South Sulawesi named after him, in which he boasted about killing Indonesian 'terrorists', drew little public response. Through these observations Doolan alerts us to the fact that even though there were nuanced representations of the war, the Dutch public was not particularly receptive to certain narratives.

Doolan argues that the war has been separated out, or 'dismembered' from, national memory and largely remembered only by the participants in the war and their families. He lays the blame for the unremembering of the war squarely on Dutch historians, claiming that novelists, veterans, film makers and journalists, all addressed this issue. He takes readers through some of the most critical historiography of the 1970's and 1980's and its public reception, advancing the view that what he describes as 'the guild' of Dutch historians, acted in concert with other forces in society such as the government, political parties, the military and the *Indisch* community, to unremember the 1945-1949 period. He charts instances of self-censorship and reticence to use terms such as 'war crimes', including the example of Loe de Jong's 1984 national history volume work covering the war, which is the subject of an entire chapter.

Doolan is not the first scholar to critique the consensus-based approach taken by many Dutch historians in the past. Stef Scagliola, as Doolan notes, has also analysed this issue. But Doolan's work is the most comprehensive English language account of so many forms of Dutch remembrance of the 1945-1949 period. He positions his analysis alongside the work of many scholars who have made important contributions to understanding Dutch colonial nostalgia and loss, particularly in literature (Pamela Pattynama) on remembering, censoring and forgetting colonial violence (Susie Protschky, Paul Bijl) and broader remembrance of colonialism (Ann Stoler, Remco Raben, Frances Gouda). For scholars who do not read Dutch, his review of Dutch texts that engage with remembrance of the independence war is very useful, particularly because of the synthesis of so many diverse works. Sometimes, however, the author needed to work harder to draw these disparate sources together as the rich and well contextualized accounts of some texts occasionally read as case studies within one chapter without sufficient linking. A more thematic or group-based approach to memory work rather than the text by text account used, would have been easier for a reader to follow in terms of clearly articulating how and why memory practices changed.

A strength of the book is the careful consideration of the roles of several prominent veterans in shaping remembrance of the war through memoirs, interviews, literature and activism. In addition to Hueting, Doolan

reflects on the advocacy in the 1980's of veteran Anton P. de Graaff, who insisted veterans and their sacrifices be remembered and who successfully advocated for government support for veteran return visits or 'healing' journeys to Indonesia. He also revisits Dutch reactions to soldiers who chose to switch to the Republican side in the war, like Haji Princen. This attention to a range of veterans is important in the context of a current tendency to suggest that all veterans oppose critical discussions of this history.

*Collective Memory and the Dutch East Indies*, which is a revised version of a PhD thesis completed at Konstanz University, helps us to better understand efforts over time to remember or erase the independence war from Dutch collective memory. It also provides excellent contextualization for an analysis of how, and to what extent, the contemporary work of Dutch historians from the major research project 'Independence, Decolonization, War and Violence in Indonesia 1945-1950', released from 2022 onwards, has broken from that of the 'guild of historians'. Perhaps we are again amidst another important turn in memory right now.

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