

Forum on Decolonisation and Violence in Indonesia

Examining the ODGOI Project ('Onafhankelijkheid, Dekolonisatie, Geweld en Oorlog in Indonesië'/'Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950')

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This forum discusses the results of the large-scale research project 'Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950' (ODGOI). The research was conducted by the *Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie* (NIMH), the *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (KITLV), and the *Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies* (NIOD) from 2017-2022, resulting in thirteen monographs and edited volumes appearing thus far. This introduction situates ODGOI in the Netherlands' long and troubled process of coming to terms with the failed Dutch attempt to violently suppress Indonesian independence, looks at the present-day memory politics surrounding the research, and introduces the contributing authors and scope of this forum.

Dit forum bediscussieert de resultaten van het grootschalige onderzoeksproject 'Onafhankelijkheid, Dekolonisatie, Geweld en Oorlog in Indonesië, 1945-1950' (ODGOI). Het onderzoek werd van 2017-2022 uitgevoerd aan het Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie (NIMH), het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV) en het Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies (NIOD) en resulteerde tot nu toe in dertien monografieën en bundels. Deze introductie plaatst ODGOI in de lange en problematische zoektocht naar rekenschap voor de mislukte Nederlandse poging om het Indonesische

onafhankelijkheidsstreven met geweld te onderdrukken. Daarnaast kijkt de inleiding naar de hedendaagse herinneringspolitiek rondom het onderzoek en worden de bijdragende auteurs en de doelen van het forum geïntroduceerd.

This BMGN forum brings into conversation six established historians of colonialism and decolonisation in Indonesia and of Dutch colonialism more broadly to critically examine the project ‘Onafhankelijkheid, Dekolonisatie, Geweld en Oorlog in Indonesië, 1945-1950’ (ODGOI, ‘Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia’), which commenced in 2017 and presented its final results in 2023. The overview of official conclusions announced in 2022 and the publication of the summary volume *Beyond the Pale (Over de grens)* in the same year garnered significant public attention in the Netherlands. Since then, a stream of monographs and edited volumes have dealt with specific subthemes of this investigation. The findings of the project formed the basis for formal apologies in February 2022 by the Dutch government for the ‘extreme violence’ employed by Dutch combatants during the Indonesian War of Independence. As formulated by the ODGOI team:

During the war, the Dutch armed forces used extreme violence on a frequent and structural basis, in the form of extrajudicial executions, ill-treatment and torture, detention under inhumane conditions, the torching of houses and villages, the theft and destruction of property and food supplies, disproportionate air raids and artillery shelling, and what were often random mass arrests and mass internment. [...] The research shows that the vast majority of those who bore responsibility on the Dutch side – politicians, officers, civil servants, judges and others – had or could have had knowledge of the systematic use of extreme violence, but that there was a collective willingness to condone, justify and conceal it, and to let it go unpunished.¹

The weight of these conclusions and the overwhelming amount of underlying research make ODGOI a landmark in the long history of Dutch politics’ and society’s grappling with Indonesian decolonisation. This forum examines some of the project’s published outcomes, but also the controversies it sparked. Particular attention is given to questions ODGOI has raised about how to go about investigating sensitive histories of colonial violence and decolonisation. It also scrutinises the relations of research questions, methods and findings to the present-day memory politics in the Netherlands and Indonesia.

1 For a summary of the conclusions, see: NIOD, ‘Independence, decolonization, violence and war in Indonesia, 1945-1950’, <https://www.niod.nl/en/>

projects/independence-decolonization-violence-and-war-indonesia-1945-1950. Accessed 23 August 2024.

Given the large scale of the project's output, we have asked participants in this forum to write essays focusing on specific publications and topics in connection with the overall findings presented in the summary volume *Beyond the Pale*. In order to elicit fresh perspectives, for this forum we approached historians who are well-known for their contributions in the field, but do not belong to the 'old guard' of Dutch Indonesia studies and were not involved as the main author or editor of one of the volumes presenting ODGOI's findings.

Anne-Lot Hoek is the author of the critically-acclaimed book *De strijd om Bali: Imperialisme, verzet en onafhankelijkheid 1846-1950* (The Battle for Bali: Imperialism, Resistance and Independence, 2021). Hoek was originally a member of the ODGOI project, but decided in 2020 to limit her ODGOI contribution to the 'Regional Studies' subproject only. We begin this forum with Hoek's insider perspective on the project's functioning: the intellectual debates and decisions taken, as well as the power dynamics within a group composed largely of Dutch men. Her piece confirms how important it is for research projects to take seriously diversity and representation, to reflect consciously on the ethics of their practice, and to ensure that their functioning as a team coheres with critical methodologies for undertaking research on colonialism, decolonisation and violence.²

Like Hoek, Farabi Fakihi brings an 'insider-outsider' perspective to the ODGOI results. A historian at Universitas Gadjah Mada (Yogyakarta), Fakihi was one among several of his UGM colleagues invited to join the 'Regional Studies' subproject of the ODGOI research.³ An expert in postcolonial Indonesian state-formation, business, politics and economic development, Fakihi is well-equipped to reflect on continuity and change across the twentieth century, the benefits of dialogue between Dutch and Indonesian historians on colonialism and decolonisation, and the importance of attending to independent new research carried out in Indonesia. Fakihi combines a reflection on the impact of integrating Indonesian researchers into a part of the project with questions about how the Revolution fits into later histories of violence in Indonesia.⁴

This concern is shared by the third contributor, Grace Leksana, who recently joined Utrecht University, having previously worked at Universitas Negeri Malang (East Java). Building on her work on the experiences of

2 Anne-Lot Hoek, 'Power and the Production of History: Reflections on the Process and Outcomes of the ODGOI Project'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19566>.

3 Farabi Fakihi, 'The battle for the nation and pemuda subjectivity: Contradictions in a revolutionary capital', in: Bambang Purwanto et al.

(eds.), *Revolutionary Worlds: Local Perspectives and Dynamics During the Indonesian Independence War, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2023) 47-74.

4 Farabi Fakihi, 'Decolonial Dialogue and the Intricacies of Revolutionary Violence'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19568>.

Indonesian women, her longer-term perspective on histories of mass violence in twentieth-century Indonesia, and her methodological specialisation in oral history and memory, she directs her attention to the vast differences in the place of the Indonesian Revolution in national memory and culture in the Netherlands and Indonesia.⁵ Leksana is one of the filmmakers behind *Eling-Eling Peniwen* (2024), a documentary about atrocities committed by the KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, Royal Netherlands Indies Army) in Peniwen village, East Java, in 1949. The film shows the roles of women in protecting male relatives from the Dutch forces, and the price some paid – including rape – for their efforts. Yet to date, women are not commemorated among the heroes marked on the local monument and at commemorations for the victims of the massacre. Leksana is thus especially well-placed to comment on the gendered place of personal recollections of violence in the construction of historical narratives.

Katharine McGregor's contribution echoes some of Leksana's observations. McGregor is an internationally renowned expert in histories of the Indonesian military, gender and the genocide of 1965. Her work is concerned with tracing Indonesia's transnational connections with global political activists and artists, and the resulting memory practices and work toward historical justice. Her prize-winning book *Systemic Silencing: Activism, Memory and Sexual Violence in Indonesia* (2023) details transnational activism in Japan, South Korea and Indonesia addressing the neglected history of Indonesian women forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese military during the Second World War. McGregor aptly suggests further avenues for exploring silences that the ODGOI project missed – particularly in its limited focus on Indonesian women and Chinese-Indonesians – and, as a consequence, some of the reasons why it can offer only narrow insights into the longer history of colonial violence in Indonesia.⁶ The final contribution to this forum continues this line of inquiry by critically reviewing some of the key concepts employed by the ODGOI team. In this essay, the two guest editors of this forum, Susie Protschky and Pepijn Brandon, bring in their own experience as historians of colonial violence to critically discuss the theoretical framing of 'violence' in the ODGOI project.⁷

This forum is not a comprehensive summary or critique of ODGOI's findings. All authors start from a position of appreciation of the immense importance of the work done in this project, and add their critical reflections to further the process of belated reckoning currently under way. The

5 Grace Leksana, 'Reconsidering Revolutionary "Heroes" and Histories of Violence in Indonesia'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19565>.

6 Katharine McGregor, 'Silences and Memories of the Indonesian Revolution and Dutch

Colonialism'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19569>.

7 Susie Protschky and Pepijn Brandon, 'On "extreme violence" and "impunity"'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19567>.

remainder of this introduction provides a sketch of the larger landscape in which this debate among academic historians should be situated.

ODGOI and Dutch memory politics

Three Dutch institutions conducted the ODGOI research: the *Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie* (NIMH), the *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* (KITLV), and the *Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies* (NIOD).⁸ In his introduction to *Beyond the Pale*, Gert Oostindie writes that when the project was initiated, ‘bringing together these three institutes seemed the most suitable and promising way to spur the government into action.’⁹ The formulation betrays some of the dilemmas that beset many scientific projects on the history of colonialism and slavery commissioned or sponsored by national governments and other institutions with deep colonial roots. Oostindie stresses that the Dutch government did not in any way try to influence the outcomes of the research. Indeed, the conclusions are highly critical of the conduct of past Dutch governments. At the same time, the introduction also makes clear that Dutch memory politics had a substantial impact on the organisation and framing of the project, including some decisions that would later raise controversy.

Perhaps the clearest example is the prominent place granted in the research set-up to ‘extreme violence’ conducted by Indonesians against the Dutch and their allies. This reflected an explicit demand by the government to include Indonesian violence as part of ‘the difficult context in which Dutch soldiers had to operate’, as well as to acknowledge ‘the suffering of the victims of “bersiap” as well as their families.’¹⁰ Bersiap (Malay for ‘get ready!’), the warning cry associated with Indonesian fighters) is the politicised and contested Dutch term for the violent first phase of the Indonesian Revolution. The ODGOI monograph by Esther Captain and Onno Sinke on this period actually debunks the standard interpretation of bersiap as a period of ‘mindless’ and one-directional violence of nationalist Indonesian youth against white Europeans and their perceived Indo-European allies. Instead, they give serious attention to the multidirectionality of the violence, including the targeting of Indo-Chinese communities by Indonesian militias

8 The English names of the three institutes are: *Netherlands Institute for Military History*; *Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies* (not a direct translation of the Dutch, which would be ‘Royal Institute for Language, Country and Ethnographic Studies’); and *Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies*.

9 Gert Oostindie, ‘Background, guiding principles, and methodology’, in: Gert Oostindie, Ben Schoenmaker and Frank van Vree (eds.), *Beyond the Pale: Dutch Extreme Violence in the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2022) 19.

10 Oostindie, ‘Background’, 32.

for their supposed loyalty to the Dutch, as well as Dutch, British and Japanese violence against revolutionary Indonesians. Without relativising the suffering of those who fell victim to this wave of nationalist fervor, but also going beyond a racist framing of the events as an outburst of primitive and irrational cruelty, they create room for nuance in the examination of the motives of the perpetrators, including those who committed heinous acts. The authors also found evidence to revise downward the number of Indo-Europeans murdered, and set aside once and for all the contention that this episode might constitute a genocide.¹¹ Their approach has been received with consternation and outrage by some members of diaspora communities in the Netherlands (those who claim an Indonesian or Indo-European lineage and came to the Netherlands during and after the 1940s). Ironically, the very decision to devote a whole monograph to the topic and to take this as the chronological starting point of the project's investigation reveal the continuing power and resonance of the *bersiap* narrative among diaspora communities with family ties to Indonesia in the Netherlands.

Katharine McGregor has pointed out elsewhere that at the turn of the millennium, a global surge in attention to human rights, apologies for colonial violence, legal compensation cases and political reform in Indonesia converged to make asking new questions about decolonisation intellectually and politically possible.¹² In the Netherlands, a long if uneven history of whistleblowing by Dutch veterans who saw or participated in atrocities against Indonesians, together with journalistic investigations, academic examinations, legal cases and activism, had been gathering momentum in recent decades.¹³ Anne-Lot Hoek was among a spate of independent researchers who helped to tip the scales in recent years. Her monograph *De Strijd om Bali* (The Battle for Bali) appeared among a slew of Dutch-language books on the topic of the Revolution before and while the ODGOI results were trickling out. Notable other works shaping this debate, while not produced as part of the ODGOI project, include Rémy Limpach's *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor* (General Spoor's burning neighbourhoods), which laid substantial groundwork for the project, David Van Reybrouck's *Revolusi*

- 11 Esther Captain and Onno Sinke, *Het geluid van geweld. Bersiap en de dynamiek van geweld tijdens de eerste fase van de Indonesische revolutie, 1945-1946* (Amsterdam University Press 2022).
- 12 Katharine McGregor, 'From National Sacrifice to Compensation Claims: Changing Indonesian Representations of the Westerling Massacres in South Sulawesi, 1946-1947', in: Bart Luttikhuis and A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia* (Routledge 2014) 282-307.

- 13 Bart Luttikhuis and A. Dirk Moses, 'Introduction, Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia', in: Idem, *Colonial Counterinsurgency*, 1-24; Ken M.P. Setiawan, 'Confronting Coloniality through the Courts? Reconsidering the Rawagede case', in: Katharine McGregor, Sadiah Boonstra, Ken Setiawan and Abdul Wahid (eds.), *Rethinking Histories of Indonesia: Experiencing, Resisting and Renegotiating Coloniality* (ANU Press, forthcoming 2025).

(Revolution), Maurice Swirc's *De Indische Doofpot* (The Indies Cover-Up) and Henk Schulte Nordholt and Harry Poeze's *Merdeka* (Freedom).¹⁴ Meanwhile, numerous museum and art exhibitions, feature films and documentaries addressed the issue of the Dutch as perpetrators of colonial and military violence.¹⁵

Overall, ODGOI has substantiated and greatly enhanced the results of this independent research. The project researchers delivered conclusive evidence for Dutch military forces having conducted a bloody colonial war in response to the Indonesian proclamation of independence, evidence that had been hiding in plain sight in government and military records since the Revolution itself. The ODGOI historians have documented how Dutch military archives minimised Indonesian 'collateral damage' and reduced massacres of unarmed people to body counts. They unveiled the machinations of consecutive Dutch governments, diplomats, military commanders, and journalists that distorted, controlled and buried inconvenient truths about how the war was being fought. The researchers also aired the testimonies of Dutch soldiers who grappled with and were damaged by the horrors they witnessed and participated in, and the cruelty with which they were discarded when they returned to the Netherlands, where they were silenced by a humiliated state and a society mute with disbelief at having 'lost' the 'Indies'.¹⁶

Apologies and beyond

Immediately after the official announcement of the ODGOI results on 17 February 2022, Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised to the 'people of Indonesia' for 'systematic and widespread extreme violence by the Dutch

14 Rémy Limpach, *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor* (Boom 2016) preceded the funding for and strongly guided the formulation of the ODGOI program; David Van Reybrouck, *Revolusi. Indonesië en het ontstaan van de moderne wereld* (De Bezige Bij 2021); Maurice Swirc, *De Indische doofpot. Waarom Nederlandse oorlogsmisdaden in Indonesië nooit zijn vervolgd* (De Arbeiderspers 2022); Henk Schulte Nordholt and Harry Poeze, *Merdeka. De strijd om de Indonesische onafhankelijkheid en de ongewisse opkomst van de Republiek 1945-1950* (Walburg Pers 2022).

15 This list is by no means exhaustive, but notable examples in the lead-up to the final ODGOI results of October 2023 were the Rijksmuseum

exhibition *Revolusi! Indonesia Independent* (11 February to 6 June 2022), the feature film *De Oost (The East)* (dir. Jim Taihuttu, 2020), and the NPO television documentary series *Indonesia roept! (Indonesia calls!)* (dir. Gerda Jansen Hendriks, September-October 2023).

16 All the books produced as outcomes of the research can be seen on the publisher's website, many of them in open access: Amsterdam University Press, 'Onafhankelijkheid, Dekolonisatie, Geweld en Oorlog in Indonesië 1945-1950', <https://www.aup.nl/en/series/onafhankelijkheid-dekolonisatie-geweld-en-oorlog-in-indonesië-1945-1950>.

side [in 1945-1949] (...) and the consequent looking away by former cabinets'.¹⁷ In doing so, he overturned the reigning orthodox discourse of limited and necessary violence that had dominated the Netherlands' public sphere for more than 70 years. The momentous result thus had the aura of an era ending. Indeed, the ODGOI project was self-consciously conceived as the long-awaited successor to the so-called *Excessennota* (Report on Excesses) of 1969, the previous government-sponsored investigation of the 1945-1949 war. Led by renowned Leiden historian Cees Fasseur, the *Excessennota* notoriously minimised the nature and prevalence of Dutch military violence in Indonesia. Before the *Excessennota*, there was Loe de Jong's academic study of the Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War, which included the Dutch East Indies. De Jong infamously gave in to public pressure not to use the term 'war crimes' after Dutch veterans caught wind of his intentions.¹⁸

Given the evident legacies of ODGOI in Dutch public and political culture, it is all the more important that the project be closely studied and engaged with now that it has concluded. Certainly, intense public scrutiny has followed the project since its inception. Was a research project of this scale necessary for a critical revision of past government policy, given that consensus among professional historians had already moved away decisively from the 1969 *Excessennota*? Should the Dutch government be funding such an investigation, given the question of past governments' culpability? Could the three institutions receiving the funding be trusted to conduct impartial research, given that one was founded for the purpose of gathering knowledge to aid the Dutch colonial project (KITLV), while another resides under the Ministry of Defence (NIMH)? Why were there so few international historians on the project, particularly Indonesian historians with seniority and experience? Did the project design give sufficient, or perhaps too much, voice to the concerns of veterans of the Dutch army and KNIL or to the descendants of former colonial officials?

Controversy also surrounded the project's chronology and terminology. Fierce public debate followed the question of whether to retain

17 Original: '(...) voor het stelselmatig en
wijdverbreide extreme geweld van Nederlandse
zijde in die jaren en het consequent wegstreken
door vorige kabinetten, maak ik vandaag namens
de Nederlandse regering diepe excuses aan
de bevolking van Indonesië': Rijksoverheid, '1e
Reactie van Minister-President Mark Rutte na
de Presentatie van het Onderzoeksprogramma
"Onafhankelijkheid, Dekolonisatie, Geweld

en Oorlog in Indonesië, 1945-1950"', 17
February 2022, [https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/
documenten/toespraken/2022/02/17/eerste-
reactie-van-minister-president-mark-rutte-
onderzoeksprogramma-onafhankelijkheid-
dekolonisatie-geweld-en-oorlog-in-
indonesie-1945-1950](https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/toespraken/2022/02/17/eerste-reactie-van-minister-president-mark-rutte-onderzoeksprogramma-onafhankelijkheid-dekolonisatie-geweld-en-oorlog-in-indonesie-1945-1950). Accessed 15 April 2025.

18 Oostindie, 'Background, 13.

the term *bersiap*.¹⁹ The question whether or not to use ‘war crimes’ as the analytical framework from which to examine the violence perpetrated by the Dutch army and KNIL proved even more controversial, with one of the project leaders shortly after the publication of the results suggesting that perhaps it would have been better to use this term after all.²⁰ And finally, were the questions the project asked and the answers it produced sufficient to satisfy a broad range of observers and stakeholders in its outcomes – the Dutch government, Dutch taxpayers, local and international historians, veterans on both sides of the conflict and diaspora communities in the Netherlands?

The ODGOI project’s conclusions were not the only issue to raise questions about the operations of power and privilege. The research team’s constitution and praxis drew much public commentary, not least because of the gender imbalance in personnel and the relatively marginal role of Indonesian perspectives. The unequal gender representation in the team, pointed out by McGregor, Leksana and Hoek in this forum, links to the relative silence on Indonesian women in the research, which continued to focus on male combatants and civilians. This blind spot has only partly to do with sources. It also stems from a hostility to oral history, visual studies and postcolonial, decolonial and feminist theories, and a preference for traditional and presumably more ‘scientific’ archival sources largely generated by men that are frequently held, in a positivist sense, to narrate themselves. As the forum contributors note, the marginalisation of these alternative approaches within the confines of the ‘Witnesses and Contemporaries’ package of the ODGOI project missed an opportunity to build a more substantial bridge between stakeholders and Indonesian and Dutch historians. Leksana and Fakihi mention that Indonesian historians (themselves included) are working to produce more nuanced, plural perspectives on a Revolution whose narrative has been dominated by nationalism. In Indonesia, social revolutions and civil war remain sensitive topics, particularly in genealogies of violence and oppression against leftists, Chinese-Indonesians and separatist movements that have shaken and scarred Indonesia since 1945.

Dutch veterans’ organisations also greeted the ODGOI project’s results with dismay and have been among its most vocal critics, together with sections

19 As per the use of *bersiap* in the subtitle of Captain and Sinke’s book, *Het geluid van geweld*. However, in *Beyond the Pale*, the term is avoided in preference for a ‘military-historical’ periodisation of four phases (1) August 1945 to November 1946; 2) November 1946 to August 1947; 3) August 1947 to December 1948; 4) December 1948 to December 1949): Gert Oostindie and Rémy Limpach, ‘The war in Indonesia 1945-1949:

The military-historical context’, in: Oostindie, Schoenmaker and Van Vree (eds.), *Beyond the Pale*, 91-99.

20 NOS, ‘Indonesië-onderzoeksleider: “We hadden moeten spreken van oorlogsmisdaden”’, 20 February 2022, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2418199-indonesie-onderzoeksleider-we-hadden-moeten-spreken-van-oorlogsmisdaden>. Accessed 15 April 2025.

of the substantial and diverse diaspora communities in the Netherlands with roots in colonial-era Indonesia. Some *Indisch*, Moluccan and Indo-Dutch activist groups objected that the results tarred all KNIL-combatants with the same brush as perpetrators of atrocities. Historian Miko Flohr's recent overview of these protests is representative, as it frames the issue through a lens of family history that dominates debates in the Netherlands and often leads to avoidance of the topic of implication.²¹ Flohr's grandfather was an Indo-European soldier of KNIL whose internment in a Japanese POW camp was immediately followed by conscription to fight Indonesians when the Revolution broke out. Flohr resents the implication that his forebear should now be deemed a perpetrator, rather than a victim first of Japanese fascism and then of the pitiless directives of his own government.²² His resentment is echoed by many survivors (and their descendants) of Japanese and Republican camps, of the violent first phase of the Indonesian Revolution, and of refugees from 'the Indies' during and after the fall of the colonial government, who were met with racially assimilationist policies in the post-war Netherlands. These grievances form the basis of further demands for apologies and financial restitution still unmet by the Dutch government.²³

Quite apart from the limits of Prime Minister Rutte's apology, the symbolic and political significance of this gesture can be measured as much by the outrage it garnered among various Dutch veterans' and diaspora community activists and lobby groups, as by the enormous step it represented in processes of truth-telling about the violent mode in which 350 years of Dutch colonial rule came to an end in Indonesia.²⁴ ODGOR's results appear in a country where powerful political voices are strongly opposed to reckoning with the colonial past. Among conservative and far-right politicians and public figures, anger at the suggestion that white Dutch people should reflect negatively on the Netherlands' colonial past has only strengthened over time. In February 2022, the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV) leader and parliamentarian Geert Wilders heralded his election promise of

21 See Protschky and Brandon's essay for this Forum, 'On "extreme violence" and "impunity"'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19567>.

22 Miko Flohr, "'En wij dan?'. Het dekolonisatieonderzoek en de postkoloniale ontheemden', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 136:3 (2023) 264, 269-270. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5117/tVg2023.3.007.FLoh>.

23 See, for example, the agendas of Stichting Het Indisch Platform 2.0, <https://deindischekwestie.nl/>, Federatie Indische Nederlanders (FIN), <https://www.federatie-indo.nl/>, Maluku4Maluku <https://maluku4maluku.com/>. All accessed 2 September 2024.

24 Open letter by Jeffry Pondaag and Francisca Pattipilohy addressed to the Dutch government, 'Questions about the Dutch research project "Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950"', 27 November 2017, <https://historibersama.com/questions-about-the-dutch-research-project/>; Open letter by Hans Moll, President of the Federatie Indische Nederlanders, to Prof. Frank van Vree, 'Objections to research design', 14 June 2019.

retracting all state apologies for ‘police actions’ and slavery. He questioned Rutte’s apology, demanding one from the Republic of Indonesia instead for its ‘violence and for bersiap’, and insisting that Dutch veterans should be recognised as heroes.²⁵ Just over a year later, in 2023, during the second House of Representatives debate on the ODGOR results, right-wing parliamentarians did not discuss the project’s summary book, *Beyond the Pale*, but cited instead from a reactionary ‘answer’ to the study edited by former NOS director and ardent revisionist Bauke Geersing, *Het pijnlijke afscheid van de Indische Archipel. Trauma, discussie, eerherstel* (The Painful Farewell to the Indies Archipelago: Trauma, Discussion, Rehabilitation).²⁶ The subsequent advent of a coalition government with Wilders’ PVV as its largest component further underlines the precarious state of knowledge production on the colonial past. However, the debate on ODGOR’s findings should not become a hostage to those adverse political tendencies. The forum that follows is intended as a contribution to this debate.

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25 Geert Wilders (@geertwilderspvv), ‘Waar zijn de excuses’ [‘Where are the apologies’], Twitter, 18 February 2022, discussed in Setiawan, ‘Confronting Coloniality’; PVV election program 2023, 29–30, <https://www.pvv.nl/verkiezingsprogramma.html>. Accessed 2 September 2024.

26 Bauke Geersing (ed.), *Het pijnlijke afscheid van de Indische Archipel. Trauma, discussie, eerherstel* (Aspekt 2023).