

Power and the Production of History

Reflections on the Process and Outcomes of the ODGOI Project

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The Dutch government and academic institutions waited many decades before conducting a large-scale research into violence during the Indonesian War of Independence (1945-1949). When the government finally decided to fund an investigation in 2016, it soon became clear that there were differing opinions about its implementation, not only externally, but also internally among the participating researchers. Although these internal discussions are not included in the 2022 summary volume *Beyond the Pale: Dutch Extreme Violence in the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-1949*, they are part of the project's process of knowledge production. This essay reflects on some of the internal discussions and their relationship to the final outcomes of the ODGOI project.

Het duurde vele decennia voordat de Nederlandse regering en academische instituten overgingen tot het uitvoeren van een grootschalig onderzoek naar geweld tijdens de Indonesische Onafhankelijkheidsoorlog (1945-1949). Toen de regering in 2016 uiteindelijk besloot om een onderzoek te financieren, bleek al snel dat er over de uitvoering daarvan verschillend werd gedacht, niet alleen extern, maar ook door onderzoekers die bij het onderzoek waren betrokken. Deze interne discussies vormen geen onderdeel van het samenvattend overzichtswerk *Over de grens. Nederlands extreem geweld in de Indonesische onafhankelijkheidsoorlog, 1945-1949* uit 2022, terwijl ze wel deel uitmaken van de manier waarop kennisproductie binnen dit project tot stand kwam. Dit essay reflecteert op enkele van deze interne discussies en hun relatie tot de uitkomsten van het ODGOI-project.

In 2023 the event ‘The New Path of Indonesian-Dutch Historiography’ took place at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Indonesia. Several books were presented that were newly translated into Indonesian and resulted from the Dutch government-funded research project *Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950* (ODGOI, 2017-2022). One of these books, *Beyond the Pale* (*Over de grens*), was the summary volume, translated as *Melewati Batas*, in which the project’s conclusions were presented.¹

The research that resulted from ODGOI certainly provides opportunities in moving forward with Indonesian-Dutch historiography. In total, around 25 Dutch and 15 Indonesian researchers, along with many research assistants, advisors, interns and volunteers, worked on this large-scale project on the Indonesian War of Independence. At the same time, one of the main criticisms of ODGOI was that its focus and approach were too Dutch. While several discussions on these and related issues also took place within the project itself, *Beyond the Pale* hardly reflects on this internal debate, although it is part of the process of knowledge production and provides lessons for future research. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, we not only participate in history as narrators, but also as actors. There is a distinction, but also an overlap between process and narrative.²

From 2017 to 2019, I participated in the ODGOI project as a researcher on the ‘Regional Studies’ subproject, a collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch researchers. I wrote a chapter for the volume *Revolutionary Worlds: Local Perspectives and Dynamics During the Indonesian Independence War, 1945-1949* edited by Bambang Purwanto and others. Separate from that, since 2014, I had been working on my own independent PhD project, *De strijd om Bali. Imperialisme, verzet en onafhankelijkheid 1846-1950* (The Battle for Bali: Imperialism, Resistance and Independence 1846-1950), which was published in 2021.³ I did not contribute to the summary volume of *Beyond the Pale*.⁴

1 The event was centred around the launch of *Dunia Revolusi*, the Indonesian translation of Bambang Purwanto et al. (eds.), *Revolutionary Worlds: Local Perspectives and Dynamics During the Indonesian Independence War, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2023). Also presented were the translations of the books of Gert Oostindie et al. (eds.), *Beyond the Pale: Dutch Extreme Violence in the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2022) and Harry Poeze and Henk Schulte Nordholt, *Merdeka. De strijd om de Indonesische onafhankelijkheid 1945-1950* (Amsterdam University Press 2022).

2 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press 2015).

3 Anne-Lot Hoek, ‘State-making is war-making: military violence and the establishment of the state of East-Indonesia in 1946’, in: Bambang Purwanto et al. (eds.), *Revolutionary Worlds*, 179-198. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048556861-011>; Idem, *De strijd om Bali. Imperialisme, verzet en onafhankelijkheid 1846-1950* (De Bezige Bij 2021).

4 Although it is stated in *Beyond the Pale* that the conclusions were written by the project leadership and editors in consultation with the programme council (*programmaraad*), consisting of ‘all Dutch researchers’ (p. 443), I formally withdrew from participating in the summary volume in 2020.

In this essay, I will not discuss the research of individual colleagues, instead I will reflect on some aspects of the internal discussions on the ODGOI research process that remain unaddressed in the introduction and conclusions of *Beyond the Pale*.

Institutional and political silence

It should be considered a milestone that the Dutch government in 2016 finally funded new research into the Indonesian War of Independence, after nearly half a century of political consensus since the *Excessennota* (Report on Excesses) of 1969. This first official examination of Dutch violence during the Indonesian War of Independence had concluded that the Dutch military had used excessive violence rather incidentally, hence the interpretation of these acts as merely ‘excesses’. The public debate about the war in Indonesia was reignited in 2011 by a court case brought by Jeffry Pondaag and Liesbeth Zegveld. They represented eight Indonesian widows, whose husbands had been executed during a mass murder in Rawagede in 1947, and one surviving man. They won the case and received an apology and compensation from the Dutch State. The case dispelled the political and institutional silence that had long surrounded this issue.⁵

In 2012, three academic institutions requested funding for a historical investigation into Dutch violence during the War of Independence, a request that was reinforced by the publication in *de Volkskrant* of gruesome photographs demonstrating the execution of three Indonesians.⁶ Nevertheless, the funding request was refused by the government.

The court case had also inspired researchers outside of academia, such as myself, to start publishing on the war in Dutch media. In 2013, for instance, I revealed in *Vrij Nederland* that Dutch war crimes were committed on Bali (Figure 1). In 2015 I wrote in the *NRC* about the main conclusions of the PhD thesis of Rémy Limpach (later published as *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*) undermining the results of the 1969 *Excessennota*. Limpach demonstrated that Dutch extreme violence during the Indonesian War of Independence had not been *incidental* but *structural*. These results were already published by Limpach himself in 2014 but had not reached an audience beyond an academic one.⁷ However, the *NRC* article in 2015 that

5 NOS Nieuws, ‘Het bijna vergeten bloedbad van Rawagede’, <https://nos.nl/video/272748-het-bijna-vergeten-bloedbad-van-rawagede>. Accessed 24 March 2025.

6 Piet Kamphuis, Gert Oostindie and Marjan Schwegman, ‘Onderzoek opnieuw het militaire geweld in Indië’, *de Volkskrant*, 19 June 2012;

Lidy Nicolassen, ‘Eerste foto’s ooit van executies Nederlands leger in Indië’, *de Volkskrant*, 10 July 2012.

7 Anne-Lot Hoek, ‘Geweld in Indië was structureel’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 14 August 2015; Idem, ‘Op de vlucht neergeschoten’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 15 August 2015. These pieces were based on Limpach’s article published before his PhD defense in 2015: Rémy



Figure 1. The yearly commemoration of the 1946 Battle of the Margarana in Bali, 2016. © Anne-Lot Hoek.

featured on the frontpage led to a new call for a large-scale investigation by the political party D66.⁸

A few months after these headlines, *Soldaat in Indonesië* (Soldier in Indonesia), by Ireen Hoogenboom, Gert Oostindie and Jonathan Verwey, confirmed Limpach's conclusions based on research by a team of KITLV researchers, interns and students.⁹ Moreover, Alfred Birney's *De tolk van Java*,¹⁰ new court cases and disclosures in the media, such as the Rengat massacre, added further pressure on the government in The Hague.¹¹

In mid-2016, the Dutch government requested the academic institutions NIOD, KITLV, and NIMH to prepare a research proposal.¹² In December of the same year, the government officially approved the funding for a four-year research project to be undertaken by these institutions. According to Sjoerd Sjoerdsma (D66), who as a Member of Parliament was an important and vocal advocate of setting up a comprehensive research project, the government's approval was largely the result of the Indonesian lawsuits and new facts uncovered in research journalism, and also a result of Limpach's PhD thesis. The continuous disclosures in the media revealing the violence's regional diversity and its grave intensity had impacted The Hague. Limpach's dissertation caused, according to Sjoerdsma, the already full bucket to overflow.¹³

Limpach, 'Business as usual: Dutch mass violence in the Indonesian war of independence 1945-49', in: Bart Luttikhuis and A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *Colonial Counterinsurgency and Mass Violence: The Dutch Empire in Indonesia* (Routledge 2014) 64-90. I consulted Limpach for these NRC publications in The Hague on 28 July 2015 and by e-mail.

8 'D66 wil allesomvattend onderzoek naar Indonesië', *NRC Handelsblad*, 15 August 2015.

9 Gert Oostindie, in collaboration with Ireen Hoogenboom and Jonathan Verwey, *Soldaat in Indonesië, 1945-1950. Getuigenissen van een oorlog aan de verkeerde kant van de geschiedenis* (Prometheus/Bert Bakker 2015). Yet, less than a year before publication, in December 2014, the preliminary results of the first two years of this study had at that point not come to the same conclusion as Limpach. By then the research team had analysed nearly half of the corpus of selected ego-documents and did not take the many war crimes identified and categorised from these sources as evidence of the pervasive and systematic deployment of excessive violence. 'Dutch war crimes in the Indonesian

decolonization war? Evidence from ego-documents,' paper delivered by Gert Oostindie and Ireen Hoogenboom for the conference 'Decolonization and the Origins of "Excessive" Violence: Dutch Military Operations in Indonesia (1945-1950) in Comparative Perspective', Leiden, 10-12 December 2014, 16-17.

10 Alfred Birney, *De tolk van Java* (De Geus 2016).

11 On 7 March 2016 I was invited by D66-politician Sjoerd Sjoerdsma in The Hague to discuss my recent publications on the Rengat massacre in Sumatra (NRC and Reporter Radio NPO1, 2016) and on war crimes and corruption on Bali (Vrij Nederland 2013, NRC 2014 and 2016) and the preferability of a large-scale research.

12 Meindert van der Kaaij, *Een kwaad geweten. De worsteling met de Indonesische onafhankelijkheidsoorlog vanaf 1950* (Amsterdam University Press 2022) 302.

13 Conversation with Sjoerdsma on 4 February 2019 in The Hague. According to him, ODGOI was for 75% the result of the court cases and research journalism, and for 25% the result of Limpach's dissertation. Hoek, *De strijd om Bali*, 693.

After the project had started, some project members provided critical feedback in order to adjust the initial text on the ODGOI website in 2017 about the origins of the project, which, until then, centred on the work of Limpach and one of the project leaders, Gert Oostindie, as the main catalysts of the project. Yet, in fact, ODGOI was the result of the work by a coalition of activists, research journalists, authors, academics, lawyers and politicians.

The government funding imposed a set of conditions, including cooperation with Indonesian researchers and a study of the so-called *bersiap*, the period of intense violence against (Indo-)Dutch, Chinese and Indonesians by Indonesians that started in 1945. The project consisted of eight subprojects, such as 'Regional Studies', 'Bersiap', and studies on the political and international context of the war.¹⁴ ODGOI commenced in mid-2017 and was headed by the directors of the three institutes, Oostindie (KITLV), Frank van Vree (NIOD) and Ben Schoenmaker (NIMH), of whom the first two have by now retired.

In 2022 the conclusions were presented in *Beyond the Pale (Over de Grens)*, a work that consisted of five parts. The introduction by Oostindie focusses on the background, terms of reference, methods, the political-historical context and, together with Limpach (NIMH), the military context of the war. This introduction is followed by an interlude provided by the researchers of the oral history 'Witnesses and Contemporaries' subproject in part two, the summaries of all eight research projects in part three, and the overall conclusions in part four. The book closes off with an epilogue by historian and Director-General of Education and Culture in Indonesia, Hilmar Farid.

Lost opportunities in the set-up

The main research topic of ODGOI was determined by Dutch concerns: the aim to analyse and explain Dutch military violence during the Indonesian War of Independence within a historical, political and international context. This main scope prevented optimal cooperation with Indonesian historians from the start, because it was already evident to them that Dutch military action was indeed very violent, as it had been during the colonial era before the Second World War.¹⁵ The significant opportunity for a truly joint scholarly

14 The subprojects focused on the following topics: *bersiap*, regional studies, the political context, international context, comparative research, asymmetrical warfare, the public aftermath and oral history.

15 This was stated by Indonesian historian Bambang Purwanto in 2016: Hoek, 'Een onderzoek naar

schuld en boete', *NRC Handelsblad*, 22 November 2016. See also: Purwanto, 'Proclamatie van de Onafhankelijkheid, Revolutie en oorlog in Indonesië 1945-1949. Een inleiding', in: Abdul Wahid and Yulianti (eds.), *Onze Revolutie. Bloemlezing uit de Indonesische Geschiedschrijving over de strijd voor de onafhankelijkheid, 1945-1949*

collaboration, with a shared research agenda and multi-vocal approach, was subsequently lost. Nevertheless, Indonesian researchers from UGM decided to participate in the ODGOI research but to focus on their own agenda with the project title: ‘Proclamation of Independence, Revolution and War in Indonesia 1945-1949.’

Although the thrust towards the ODGOI project came from Dutch politics and was driven by Dutch concerns and funding, there were still possibilities for optimising the cooperation between Dutch and Indonesian researchers. One way to do this was for the three ODGOI directors (henceforth the project leadership) to give Indonesian questions, concerns, and concepts as much space within the project structure as possible. These opportunities, however, were not fully deployed. Oostindie writes in *Beyond the Pale* that the Dutch researchers ‘respected’ the choice of the Indonesian researchers to go their own way (p. 22), but that differs from the project leadership trying to make Indonesian ideas and concerns an integral part of the project.

The underrepresentation of Indonesian perspectives was already illustrated by the project structure in which only two of the eight subprojects were designed to enable cooperation with Indonesian researchers of UGM. If Indonesia had for instance been taken as a geographical starting point for the whole project – as was the case in the subproject ‘Regional Studies’ – the entire project would probably have been better connected to the Indonesian researchers and their concerns. Such a geographical approach could have also made clear that the ODGOI project was missing some important areas of study, such as the Moluccas and West Papua (former Dutch New Guinea). The focus on military history might also have been less dominant in a different set-up, especially since political and economic factors and considerations were fundamental in starting, continuing, and ending the war (Figure 2).

Although the most fundamental decisions were taken by the project leadership beforehand, several researchers tried to discuss and adjust the project’s terms of reference within the project team and the set-up of *Beyond the Pale*. As this work was originally intended as a single-authored work by project director Oostindie, this raised concerns over the pitfalls of a single voice or perspective dominating the outcomes of a large and collaborative project.

(Amsterdam University Press 2023) 42-43.

See the contributions by Indonesian scholars

Grace T. Leksana and Farabi Fakihi, as well as

Susie Protschky and Pepijn Brandon’s analysis

of the concept ‘extreme violence’ in this

Forum: Leksana, ‘Reconsidering Revolutionary

“Heroes” and Histories of Violence in Indonesia’.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19565>;

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

Protschky

and Brandon, ‘On “extreme violence” and

“impunity”’. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19567>.



Figure 2. Portrait of Ida Pedanda Istri Ketut (1927-2021) from Ubud, Bali, who helped the revolutionary fighters in Bali as a young girl. © Anne-Lot Hoek.

Early in the project, a number of researchers from the two subprojects 'Regional Studies' and 'Bersiap' took up the initiative to discuss several issues, such as the intended single authorship of *Beyond the Pale*, with the other ODGOI researchers. The choice for a Dutch single author was portrayed as 'neutral' by the project leadership, while it arguably reflected a one-sided approach. Internal criticism of the single authorship further increased when the project leadership published the preliminary table of contents (the chapter structure) of the future summary volume on the project website, well before possible outcomes were even discussed with the researchers. It was stated on the website that this chapter structure should give direction to the researchers of the subprojects. This enlarged the concern of several participants in the 'Regional Studies' and 'Bersiap' subprojects, since this process was scientifically unjustifiable and contradicted the essence of a synthesis. Several researchers pleaded for the contribution of independent international voices to participate in the conclusions. Later on the leadership only decided to install an editorial board that consisted of the Dutch heads of the subprojects.

Related to the concern over a single Dutch author was the important issue of the Indonesian independence date of 17 August 1945. The aforementioned researchers proposed to change the word 'decolonisation' in the project title to 'independence', as a result of a workshop held at UGM in Yogyakarta. 'Decolonisation' was a problematic term in relation to 1945-1949, because in 1945 Indonesian independence had already been proclaimed.¹⁶ This was especially a concern because the Dutch State still does not fully recognise the Indonesian independence date. The project leadership included the word 'independence' as the first word of the project title as a concession. However, it would have been important to address these internal discussions and dissent amongst researchers behind the ostensibly unified, 'neutral' position taken in *Beyond the Pale*, namely that ODGOI took 17 August 1945 as a starting point for two diametrically opposed historical readings of Indonesian independence: a Dutch and Indonesian one (p. 28). This 'neutral' position indicates that the research limited itself to the question about the legitimacy of the violence. This was also reflected in the State's apology following the publication of the project results in 2022, in which apologies were made for the excessive violence, not for starting the war itself against Indonesia.¹⁷ This was remarkable, because

16 This was a result of a dialogue between Dutch researchers of the 'Regional Studies' and 'Bersiap' subprojects and Indonesian researchers on perspectives, historiography and the problems around the use of the term 'decolonisation' during a workshop organised by UGM in Yogyakarta in 2018.

17 The Dutch government reconfirmed the recognition of the Indonesian independence date of 17 August 1945 in a political sense during the 2023 debate in the House of Representatives, but stated later on that 1949 remained the official date. See also: Frank Vermeulen, 'Veel emoties

in 2005 the then Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ben Bot, had expressed on behalf of the Dutch government his profound regret about ‘the large-scale use of military resources’ against Indonesia, which had placed the Netherlands ‘on the wrong side of history’.¹⁸

Multivocality at the periphery

The ‘neutral’ stance taken by ODGOR on the Indonesian independence also does not sit well with the fact that colonial history from a long-term perspective is missing in the set-up of the research. The few rather Eurocentric pages dedicated to the history of colonialism before 1945 in *Beyond the Pale* do not explain the oppressive nature of Dutch colonialism in such a way that readers fully understand the longer histories of violence and resistance that led to the Indonesian Proclamation of Independence in 1945. More emphasis on such a perspective could also have clarified that it was not the ‘newness’ of the decolonisation process that could help explain the Dutch line of reasoning and acting at ‘the wrong side of the history’ (p. 65). That was rather due to the prevailing colonial mindset, meaning a lack of understanding that the old colonial patterns were being repeated.

The introduction to *Beyond the Pale* could have been a good place to address some of the internal discussions on multivocality, for example by starting with an Indonesian perspective on the Revolution. What independence meant for Indonesians is given very little weight in the summary volume, whilst their perspectives are not widely known in the Netherlands. The anthology *Onze Revolutie* (Our Revolution), published as part of the ODGOR outcomes, contains an article by Tahi Bonar Simatupang on the question what the importance of the 1945 Revolution might be for Indonesians. According to Simatupang, the essence of Revolution is about feeling, hope and change.¹⁹ In the edited volume *Revolutionary Worlds*, Galuh Ambar Sasi wrote about the meaning of independence for Indonesian women.²⁰ Instead, Oostindie’s introduction amounts to little more than a summary of what Loe de Jong (NIOD) had already published in the 1980s.²¹

The scope of the book’s two-page overview of important events during the War of Independence, entitled ‘Political and Military Milestones’

tijdens debat over oorlog in Indonesië’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 14 June 2023.

18 ‘De verkeerde kant van de geschiedenis’, *de Volkskrant*, 16 August 2005.

19 Tahi Bonar Simatupang, ‘Wat is de betekenis van de Indonesische revolutie voor ons?’, in: Wahid and Yulianti, *Onze Revolutie*, 67–76.

20 Galuh Ambar Sasi, ‘The meaning of independence for women in Yogyakarta, 1945–1946’, in: Purwanto, *Revolutionary Worlds*, 35–46.

21 Loe de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, volume 11a – c (Staatsuitgeverij 1984–1986).

(p. 58-59), underlines the lack of innovation because the milestones are merely seen from a Dutch perspective. Although ODGOI focuses on Dutch military violence, this timeline could have been enriched with experiences that were significant for Indonesia. Indonesia is full of monuments and memorials referring to specific moments during the War of Independence that could have been part of this overview to revise or reorient the Dutch historiographical debate.

At the same time, the massacre of Rawagede and the extrajudicial killings on South Sulawesi, both listed in the overview of 'Political and Military Milestones', certainly look out of place underneath that title. Their meaning would come more into its own in a summary of mass murders or crimes, such as the heavy shelling of civilians on the market in Bandar Buat,²² the rape and murder in Peniwen,²³ and the large-scale attack on Rengat in Sumatra during Operation Crow. The Rengat massacre, in which large numbers of predominantly civilians were killed, does not even appear once as a separate event in the entire book.²⁴ This is remarkable, as David Van Reybrouck calls it potentially the 'largest individual war crime' of the entire war and Liesbeth Zegveld deems the Rengat massacre of the same order of magnitude as the massacres of Rawagede and South Sulawesi (Figure 3).²⁵

These kinds of omissions also appear in the historiographical discussion in the introduction, which is merely focused on the work of the involved institutions and their networks, with little emphasis on international literature and contributions from outside Dutch academia. However, the introduction of *Beyond the Pale* states that multivocality is one of the 'indispensable tools' of the ODGOI project, also to be found in the

22 See Max van der Werff, 'De massamoord van Bandar Buat', 6 January 2013, <https://maxfromthewharf.com/nl/bandarbuat-2/>; Hajravif Angga, 'Sejarah Tragedy Pasar Bandar Buat dan Runtuhnya Jembatan Marapalam', 30 January 2022, <https://padang.harianhaluan.com/indepth-feature/pr-1062570811/sejarah-tragedy-pasar-bandar-buat-dan-runtuhnya-jembatan-marapalam>. Accessed 28 May 2025; see in this forum, Leksana, 'Reconsidering Revolutionary "Heroes"'. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19565>.

23 Stef Scagliola and Natalya Vince, in collaboration with Khedidja Adel and Galuh Ambar, 'The Places, Traces, and Politics of Rape in the Indonesian and the Algerian Wars of Independence', in: Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Bart Luttikhuis (eds.), *Empire's Violent End: Comparing Dutch, British, and*

French Wars of Decolonization, 1945-1962 (Cornell University Press 2022) 115.

24 RTL Nieuws, 'Nederlands leger richtte veel groter bloedbad aan in Sumatra', 13 February 2016, <https://www.rtl.nl/nieuws/nederland/artikel/720056/nederlands-leger-richtte-veel-groter-bloedbad-aan-sumatra>; Anne-Lot Hoek, 'Ook op Sumatra richtte Nederland een bloedbad aan', *NRC Handelsblad*, 13 February 2016; Idem, 'Rengat 1', *Inside Indonesia*, 12 September 2016, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/archive/articles/anne-lot-hoek>; Limpach, *De brandende kampongs*, 663-669.

25 David Van Reybrouck, *Revolusi. Indonesië en het ontstaan van de moderne wereld* (De Bezige Bij 2020) 468; NOS Nieuws, 'Meer doden bij Nederlandse acties op Sumatra in 1949', <https://nos.nl/artikel/2086612-meer-doden-bij-nederlandse-acties-op-sumatra-in-1949>.



Figure 3. The commemoration of the 1949 Rengat massacre in Rengat, Sumatra, 2016. © Anne-Lot Hoek.

‘Witnesses and Contemporaries’ subproject. That subproject originated upon the request of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, and was set up with the goal of collecting personal testimonies, but did not become an integral part of the academic research. This is rather remarkable, as in international scholarship the use of oral history is seen as an important counterbalance to the study of colonial archives. One of the causes for the lack of multivocality in the project structure could be that Limpach’s dissertation was taken as an important foundation. Although his PhD was certainly impactful, he did not point a scholarly way forward when it came to tapping into more multivocal methodologies.²⁶ A too narrow focus on Dutch archives leads to blind spots in research and gives an incomplete picture of what actually transpired.²⁷

Skewed power relations

It took two years of internal struggle before the project leadership changed the single authorship of *Beyond the Pale*.²⁸ Although the leadership emphasised the importance of internal criticism, this elongated and time-consuming process proved a stunted way of dealing with critical feedback and was partly a result of the skewed power relations within the project.²⁹

The fact that three male institutional directors were leading the research team contributed to these inequalities. The uneven gender balance of the ODGOI team is also visible in the fact that only four out of twenty authors and editors of *Beyond the Pale* were women. Authors of colour were vastly underrepresented. In addition, almost half of the female researchers in the Dutch ODGOI team were PhD candidates, and had limited authority as such. Among the eight professors, not one of them was female.

26 Limpach’s dissertation led to a response by the Dutch House of Representatives: https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2016Z23003&did=2016D47038.

27 In my PhD thesis I argue that Limpach’s overly heavy reliance on Dutch written sources and the absence of field research and oral history have led to blind spots in his presentation of the Revolution on Bali. See my PhD introduction, pp. 16–17, [https://www.academia.edu/114940145/De_strijd_om_Bali_Geweld_verzet_en_koloniale_staatsvorming_1846_1950_The_](https://www.academia.edu/114940145/De_strijd_om_Bali_Geweld_verzet_en_koloniale_staatsvorming_1846_1950_The_Battle_for_Bali_Violence_resistance_colonial_statemaking_1846_1950)

[Battle_for_Bali_Violence_resistance_colonial_statemaking_1846_1950](https://www.academia.edu/114940145/De_strijd_om_Bali_Geweld_verzet_en_koloniale_staatsvorming_1846_1950_The_Battle_for_Bali_Violence_resistance_colonial_statemaking_1846_1950).

28 The newly installed editorial board would write the book together with Oostindie and would be edited by the project leadership. The earlier request by a group of researchers to establish an international editorial board was not met, and the exact influence that the participating researchers would have on the concluding parts remained unclear at that time.

29 This was also experienced when some researchers made critical remarks in public: Niels Mathijssen, ‘Heeft een gedicht niet ook gewicht?’, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 17 April 2019.

ODGOI employed PhD candidates and researchers on temporary contracts from outside the participating research institutes. There was no reflexive discussion within the project planning about how the precarious position of PhD candidates and external researchers would be protected. They were not only dependent on their supervisors, but also on scholarly networks within academia. There was no ethics committee and no conscious attention was paid to the well-being and safety of researchers working on difficult and sensitive histories.

The political framing of an investigation

When the ODGOI results were published in February 2022, it was rather peculiar that the main conclusion merely reconfirmed the findings of Limpach's thesis, which had already made the headlines in *NRC* in 2015: 'Dutch soldiers structurally and on a large scale used extreme violence against Indonesians in the period 1945-50', the abuses were systematically covered up, and Dutch authorities looked the other way.³⁰ It seems that the Dutch government's apology, which followed within hours after the public presentation of the ODGOI results, could also have been made prior to the project based on the court cases, new facts from investigative journalism and Limpach's dissertation. With an apology beforehand, political conditions and its possible consequences could potentially have played a smaller role.

It was primarily the political translation of the ODGOI results in the State's apology that diverted the attention in the Dutch public debate to the omission of the term war crimes in the project's conclusions. The question whether or not the Dutch acts of violence should be characterised as war crimes had dominated the public debate since the startling testimony of the Dutch war veteran Joop Hueting in 1969 on national television. He even had to go into hiding afterwards. In the 1980s, Loe de Jong was not able to use the term in his *magnum opus* due to pressure from veteran groups. And the term war crimes was still not used in the conclusions of *Beyond the Pale* because the project leadership wanted to stay away from moral, judicial and political judgements (p. 445). This position again ties in with the longing for a certain 'neutrality'. But naming and qualifying violence is *always* eminently political. As Trouillot says: naming is power. The decision *not* to address past crimes in a concluding report of such a large-scale research has an important moral dimension with political-legal implications as well, as the use of specific terminology frames the research in a political sense.

We saw this stance mirrored in the apology expressed by Prime Minister Mark Rutte on 17 February 2022, which did not mention war crimes or crimes against humanity, but used 'extreme violence', a rather vague

30 See note 7 and Limpach, *De brandende kampongs*.

term that does not refer to the criminality of the violence. This political route reconfirms the government's apparent position that internationally recognised crimes cannot be committed by European countries in colonial contexts. In the Dutch House of Representatives, Oostindie referred to the advice of legal experts to explain why the term war crimes was missing from the ODGOI conclusions.³¹ These legal advisors argued that terms such as war crimes and crimes against humanity were largely unusable in the context of this war, since the associated laws were under development during this period. Other legal experts, however, did find the terminology applicable, even based on national law.³² It is also striking that during that same period of war (1946–1949), the Dutch East Indies authorities were prosecuting 1,038 Japanese for war crimes committed during the Second World War in large tribunals, of whom 236 were sentenced to death.³³ Oostindie seems to agree with both legal visions, since he himself has referred to war crimes in his own work both prior and during the project but refrained from using it in the conclusions of *Beyond the Pale*.³⁴ It was also peculiar that Frank van Vree, one of the other project leaders, stated days after ODGOI's presentation of the results that the term war crimes actually should have been used in the conclusions.³⁵

The ODGOI legacy

Despite all criticisms, ODGOI as a whole forms a comprehensive and detailed reference work for future generations on Dutch military violence during the

31 'Technische briefing Tweede Kamer over resultaten Indië-onderzoek', 9 March 2022, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg8jtJON_Vg (on 1.14, question by Ruben Brekelmans (VVD), response by Van Vree and Oostindie).

32 Stan Meeuwse, Jurjen Pen and Theo de Roos, 'Toepasselijkheid van het oorlogsrecht in de Nederlands-Indonesische oorlog', *Nederlands Juristenblad* 96:31 (17 September 2021); Maurice Swirc, *De Indische Doofpot. Waarom Nederlandse oorlogsmisdaden in Indonesië nooit zijn vervolgd* (Arbeiderspers 2022). See also: Boyd van Dijk, 'Nederland en het oorlogsrecht. De normen van toen', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 6 April 2022.

33 Hoek, *De strijd om Bali*, 506–507.

34 Gert Oostindie, Ireen Hooogenboom and Jonathan Verwey, 'The Decolonization War in Indonesia,

1945–1949: War Crimes in Dutch Veterans' Egodocuments', *War in History* 25:2 (2018) 254–276. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344517696525>.

35 Van Vree made this statement on the Dutch radio show OVT (NPO1), in which the ODGOI results were discussed with Feba Sukmana, Maurice Swirc and myself: OVT, 'OVT special over onafhankelijkheidsoorlog Indonesië 1945–1950', 30 January 2022, <https://www.vpro.nl/programmas/ovt/luister/afleveringen/2022/20-02-2022.html>; Van Vree's statement was broadcast on the Dutch news as well: NOS Nieuws, 'Indonesië-onderzoeksleider: "We hadden moeten spreken van oorlogsmisdaden"', 20 February 2022, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2418199-indonesie-onderzoeksleider-we-hadden-moeten-spreken-van-oorlogsmisdaden>.

Indonesian War of Independence. Having contributed to the Indonesian-Dutch 'Regional Studies' subproject, I am convinced that, considering the challenges these researchers were confronted with, they achieved the best possible outcomes and genuine connections between Dutch and Indonesian researchers were established.

Moreover, ODGOI contributed to the fact that Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised for the committed Dutch atrocities, just like the King of the Netherlands had done during his 2020 visit to Indonesia. Rutte also apologised for previous cabinets that had consistently turned a blind eye to the structural and widespread violence. Notably, the significance of this apology seems rather limited, as the entire colonial era was left out and no excuses were made for the commitment of crimes or for the onset of war after 17 August 1945.

However, Rutte's apology on behalf of the Dutch government does have importance for the Dutch public debate, as there are still many conservative and radical/extreme right forces in Dutch society who want to gloss over this violent history. Those voices are pushed further into the background by the apology and the weight of the ODGOI research.

On an additional note: new forms of cooperation, connection and exchange between Indonesian and Dutch academics and others are continuing to take shape. Also, there are increasingly more young and diverse authorities at the helm of the Dutch academic world. The joint accomplishments by a coalition of activists, research journalists, authors, academics, lawyers and politicians to change the Dutch narrative on the colonial history in Indonesia have made significant progress over the course of the past decade. It will hopefully continue to do so, and lead to more genuine Dutch interest in Indonesian perspectives.

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