On 'Extreme Violence' and 'Impunity'

SUSIE PROTSCHKY AND PEPIJN BRANDON

A key element of the conclusions of the large-scale ODGOI project was the frequent and structural usage by Dutch armed forces of 'extreme violence'. This extreme violence was enabled by the climate of impunity created by politicians, civil servants, judges, and others in authority positions. The choice not to describe such violence as 'war crimes' led to a storm of criticism. This essay rather focuses on the concepts of 'extreme violence' and 'impunity' themselves. It argues that these terms remain undertheorised, tend to obscure important differences between the violence of the coloniser and the violence of the colonised, and provide limited guidance in addressing questions of historic responsibility and implication.

Een belangrijk onderdeel van de conclusies van het grootschalige ODGOI project was de frequente en structurele inzet door Nederlandse troepen van 'extreem geweld'. Dit extreme geweld werd mogelijk gemaakt door een klimaat van straffeloosheid, gecreëerd door politici, ambtenaren, rechters en anderen in machtsposities. De keuze om dergelijk geweld niet aan te merken als 'oorlogsmisdaden' leidde tot een storm van kritiek. Dit essay richt zich juist op de concepten 'extreem geweld' en 'straffeloosheid' zelf. Het betoogt dat deze termen te weinig theoretisch onderbouwd blijven, dat ze belangrijke verschillen tussen het geweld van de kolonisator en de gekoloniseerden onzichtbaar maken, en dat ze onvoldoende houvast bieden in de discussie over historische verantwoordelijkheid en implicatie.

The violence meted out by the Dutch state to suppress Indonesian independence forms the core subject of ODGOI's multiple studies. The findings will undoubtedly shape Dutch historiography for decades to come. Whether the same will be true of the project's conceptual framework remains to be

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seen. Substantial criticism of the conceptual choices made by the ODGOI team emerged immediately after the publication of the project conclusions, especially on the question of whether or not certain actions by the Dutch colonial army should have been characterised as war crimes. This essay adds to that line of inquiry by critically examining two of the project's key explanatory tools: 'extreme violence' and 'impunity'.

Extreme violence: A Dutch concern?

According to the definition employed by the project leaders Gert Oostindie, Ben Schoenmaker and Frank van Vree in *Beyond the Pale* (*Over de grens*), in which the project's overall findings are presented, 'extreme violence' largely denotes violence employed outside or in the margins of regular military operations, directed towards civilians or captured enemy fighters, and without military justification or clearly delineated military goals. The term serves a descriptive aim, but according to the researchers also opens up possibilities for considering the impact of violence on victims, and its political and moral dimensions.[1] However, can such an intuitive, generic and undertheorised concept as 'extreme violence' actually carry all this weight? How applicable is this concept outside of the confines of a contemporary Dutch political debate about responsibility and historical reckoning? Does it align with approaches used by international scholars when examining colonial violence in a wider comparative framework?

The editors of *Beyond the Pale* largely avoid such fundamental questions. The most obvious consequence of their definition is the creation of a single container term for the multidimensional violence of the coloniser and the colonised, quarantined from more nuanced discussions of the origins, context, and aims of violence. In the style of traditional military history, the ODGOI project took for granted the norms of modern war. This might serve researchers well at the purely empirical level of cataloguing atrocities within a context that is nothing but violent, but such an approach seems to fare less well when trying to explain the dynamics of (extreme) violence, let alone its moral implications. After all, as ODGOI's authors frequently remind the readers through an aphorism of former Dutch minister Ben Bot, Dutch extreme violence was only one part of a war in which the Netherlands stood 'on the wrong side of history'.[2] This statement has serious implications for the status of *all* violence employed by the Dutch, not just 'extreme' military violence. However, these implications actually become more difficult to

1 Gert Oostindie, Ben Schoenmaker and Frank van Vree, 'Conclusions', in: Idem (eds.), *Beyond the Pale: Dutch Extreme Violence in the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2022) 439-470, 441.

2 'De verkeerde kant van de geschiedenis', *Volkskrant*, 16 August 2005.

explore once the highly subjective distinction between 'extreme' and an unidentified converse (not extreme? normative? permissible?) stands for the supreme moral and political measure. For precisely this reason, a long line of political theorising going back at least to Frantz Fanon has examined and roundly rejected the notion that the violence of anticolonial uprisings can or should be approached with the same intellectual tools as that employed by the colonial powers.[3]

In Dutch public debate, criticism has focused mostly on what the term 'extreme violence' potentially excludes, concentrating particularly on whether or not 'war crimes' would have been a more appropriate designation for at least some of the actions by Dutch political and military authorities and Dutch armed forces. Years before he joined the ODGOI project, Bart Luttikhuis had already commented that Dutch concerns with legalistic framings tend to overshadow larger moral questions of responsibility in grappling with colonial history.[4] Notwithstanding that individual historians from the ODGOI project in fact *do* use the phrase 'war crimes' now and then[5] – even though it was excluded as an official term of reference – debates on concepts and definitions have not formed a substantial part of the outcomes of the project. Only in the edited volume *Empire's Violent End: Comparing Dutch, British, and French Wars of Decolonization, 1945-1962* (2022) did ODGOI scholars explicitly address some theories of violence to justify the terms 'extreme violence' and 'impunity'.[6] In the end, Bart Luttikhuis and Thijs Brocades Zaalberg settled on soldiers' 'commonsense' understandings of 'crossing a line' in wartime.[7] This point of view of course avoids the question of how norms around what constitutes 'acceptable' violence in a 'peacetime' colonial setting developed historically and became discursively naturalised and legally justified.[8]

3 As famously introduced in the chapter 'De la violence', in: Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* (Librairie François Maspero 1961).

4 Bart Luttikhuis, 'Juridisch afgedwongen excuses. Rawagedeh, Zuid-Celebes en de Nederlandse terughoudendheid', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 129:2 (2014) 92-105. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.9863.

5 As already noted in Susie Protschky, 'Beyond Guilt-Ranking, Beyond the Pale, and the Netherlands' Current Reckoning with "Difficult Histories"', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 136:4 (2023) 372-375, 375. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5117/TvG2023.4.006.PROT.

6 Thijs Brocades Zaalberg and Bart Luttikhuis, 'Introduction: Beyond the League Table of Barbarity: Comparing Extreme Violence during the Wars of Decolonization', in: Idem (eds.), *Empire's Violent End: Comparing Dutch, British, and French Wars of Decolonization, 1945-1962* (Cornell University Press 2022) 1-24, especially 7-19.

7 Brocades Zaalberg and Luttikhuis, 'Introduction', 9.

8 Susie Protschky, 'Rethinking Histories of Military Atrocity, Ethnic Violence and Photography, from the Aceh War to the Indonesian National Revolution', in: Katharine McGregor, Ken Setiawan, Sadiah Boonstra and Abdul Wahid (eds.), *Rethinking Histories of Indonesia: Experiencing, Resisting and Renegotiating Coloniality* (ANU Press, forthcoming 2025).

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Figure 1. This picture demonstrates forms of everyday violence in colonial Sumatra. Throughout the entire period of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia, repressive, unfree labour regimes upheld colonial authority, particularly in plantations and in the burgeoning mining sector. The judiciary and ethnically stratified legal system supported corporal, capital and prison labour punishments for Indonesian and 'Foreign Oriental' people in 'peacetime'. Stafhell & Kleingrothe, 'Execution on a Deli plantation', Sumatra, c. 1880–1901. © Leiden University Library, Geoffrey Allan Edwards Collection, Or. 27.389, 44.

When faced with the task of analysing violence during the Indonesian Revolution and the Dutch war of reconquest, ODGOI researchers do at times opt for explanations that, implicitly or explicitly, unsettle the framework of extreme violence. For example, in making international comparisons of insurgent and counter-insurgent violence, Roel Frakking and Martin Thomas note that 'the supposed extreme nature of violence we have considered can be understood as a series of logical, if troubling, choices.'[9] The careful attention to differences in circumstances, motives and patterns of violent acts in the volume dedicated to the local dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution, edited by Bambang Purwanto et al., similarly challenges the homogenising tendencies in the term 'extreme violence'.[10]

In the volume *Onze Revolutie. Bloemlezing uit de Indonesische geschiedschrijving over de strijd voor de onafhankelijkheid, 1945-1949* (Our Revolution: An Anthology of Indonesian Historiography on the Struggle for Independence, 1945-1949), editors Abdul Wahid and Yulanti Yulianti present a select Indonesian historiography that does not feature the term 'extreme violence' at all, except in the introduction that relates the anthology to the ODGOI research.[11] Neither does the question of whether the Dutch were culpable for extreme violence during the Indonesian war of independence play a major role in present-day Indonesian scholarly or public debate. After all, the rejection and final overthrow of a Dutch colonial regime that was violent in its ordinary, unexceptional actions formed the basis for the establishment of an independent state (Figure 1).

While careful not to phrase this quite so explicitly, both Grace Leksana and Farabi Fakih in this forum note the extent to which the project's framing was driven by Dutch concerns.[12] In his important and unsparing epilogue to *Beyond the Pale*, prominent Indonesian historian Hilmar Farid states: 'As the research questions, the conceptual framework and the methodology were defined in these debates [Dutch debates on the violence perpetrated by the Dutch army, SP and PB], the relevance of this book will be appreciated more in the Netherlands than in Indonesia.'[13] That is not to say that the ODGOI

9 Roel Frakking and Martin Thomas, 'Windows onto the Microdynamics of Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence: Evidence from Late Colonial Southeast Asia and Africa Compared', in: Brocades Zaalberg and Luttikhuis (eds.), *Empire's Violent End*, 49-70, 68.

10 Bambang Purwanto et al. (eds.), *Revolutionary Worlds: Local Perspectives and Dynamics during the Indonesian Independence War, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2023).

11 Abdul Wahid and Yulianti (eds.), *Onze revolutie. Bloemlezing uit de Indonesische geschiedschrijving over de strijd voor de onafhankelijkheid, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2023).

12 Leksana, 'Reconsidering Revolutionary "Heroes" and Histories of Violence in Indonesia'. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19565; Fakih, 'Decolonial Dialogue and the Intricacies of Revolutionary Violence'. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.19568.

13 Hilmar Farid, 'Dealing with the legacies of a violent past', in: Oostindie, Schoenmaker and Van Vree, *Beyond the Pale*, 473-486, 473.

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Figure 2. Only a few decades before the Revolution, photographs of the aftermath of KNIL massacres like this were published for a Dutch audience not as evidence of atrocities, but as images celebrating victory in the Aceh War. C.B. Nieuwenhuis' usual job was commercial photography. His account of the 'Samalanga expedition' was endorsed by General Van Heutsz himself. C.B. Nieuwenhuis, Aftermath of the KNIL massacre at Batu Iliq, Samalanga (Aceh), 3 February 1901. Leiden University Library, Special Collections, KITLV 27179.

research has nothing substantial to offer to scholars outside the Netherlands. Its findings on the dynamics of interethnic, religious and political violence committed during the course of the civil war and social revolutions in Indonesia will certainly stoke historical debates. However, these findings will not, in all likelihood, affect the basic parameters from which the legitimacy of the Revolution or the violence employed against it will be judged in Indonesia. For the Netherlands, where separating extreme or exceptional violence from regular violence has always played a highly problematic role in debates about the legitimacy of Dutch military actions, the unwillingness to engage on a more conceptual level with the question of violence presents a missed opportunity.

Although ODGOI's conclusions are important for destroying the notion that Dutch atrocities were mere 'excesses', the concept of 'extreme violence' still rests on the basis of a separation between the regular and non-regular that is itself entangled with colonial assumptions (Figure 2). The introduction and conclusion of *Beyond the Pale* address criticisms raised from within and outside the project team, but never reflect on how different methodological choices – for example, making a clearer distinction between the violence of the coloniser and the violence of the colonised – might have led to different emphases or outcomes.

Implicated subjects

A second concept central to the project's conclusions, yet given little serious reflection, is that of 'impunity'. The ODGOI project's official conclusion that extreme violence was caused by the impunity of military offenders commits the fallacy of circular argumentation. Impunity is not so much an *explanation* for structural violence as part of its *description*. That the notion of 'impunity' adds nothing substantial to the historical understandings of the *structural* aspects of Dutch military violence in Indonesia, and in fact only leads to ambiguity and confusion, is demonstrated by some of its perverse outcomes. One example is that vociferous critics of ODGOI among Dutch veterans and their political allies often oppose the project's findings with the argument that Dutch military and political authorities were in fact to blame for the actions of 'rogue' soldiers like the notorious Captain Raymond Westerling. The ODGOI conclusion of 'impunity', and Prime Minister Rutte's apology, which excluded veterans from responsibility, has done nothing to displace that contention. Debate in the Netherlands consequently stalls at a bizarre junction: whether Westerling was a hero, a war criminal, or an ordinary soldier carrying out orders. The bigger issue in defining 'structural' violence – the deeper roots of Dutch colonial violence that precede and transcend the governing structures of the 1940s[14] – has been left to future historians to address.

14 See, for example, Bauke Geersing, *Kapitein Raymond Westerling en de Zuid-Celebes-affaire (1946-1947). Mythe en werkelijkheid* (Aspekt 2021) especially 264-266, 345-350, 379-380, 393.

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Figure 3. Paternalistic views like this are common in the ego documents of former Dutch soldiers who were deployed to Indonesia during the Revolution: idealised notions of peace and co-operation that were predicated on maintaining a hierarchical relationship between Dutch master and Indonesian servant. Indonesian workers having their own Indonesian names erased from Dutch records is commonplace in Dutch colonial archives from 'peacetime'. A.J. Kuijk, 'The Netherlands and the Indies together in the photo. Our kitchen-hand Jacob.' East Java, mid-1949. © The Netherlands Institute for Military History (NIMH), Sweep. Egodocuments, 545, inv. nr. 73.

What undergirds the impunity with which Dutch governing and military authorities acted during the Revolution to sweep evidence of war crimes under the carpet and leave perpetrators unpunished? Getting historians to agree, so the saying goes, is like herding cats, and so it is completely standard that the ODGOI researchers answer this question in different ways. Remco Raben and Peter Romijn are quite clear on the deep-seated, chauvinistic colonial mentalities that justified the Dutch launching a war of reconquest and its framing as lawful and necessary.[15] In their introduction to the edited volume *Empire's Violent End*, on the other hand, Brocades Zaalberg and Luttikhuis point to the nature of warfare itself. Comparative research on decolonisation in the French and British empires shows the Dutch were not alone in practicing violence with impunity, and they question whether there is anything distinctive about the violence of colonial (or anti-colonial) warfare.[16] Their focus on military-historical views of wartime violence arguably blurs the wider social, political, cultural and economic landscape in which the norms of empire were globally and locally negotiated and contested. It also crops out the deep-rooted, epistemic nature of racial capitalism on which Dutch colonialism had been founded since the seventeenth century.

Other ODGOI outcomes document 'impunity' by examining how Dutch governments of the 1940s and later decades used propaganda to actively cover up military scandals from the Revolution.[17] But how surprising is it really that Dutch authorities lied to conscripted soldiers and civilian voters with the 'police action' myth? Wartime censorship and propaganda are well-established phenomena in democracies and totalitarian regimes alike. That the government and military of the day 'sold a colonial war' to domestic and international stakeholders in the conflict in Indonesia is a necessary but insufficient condition for explaining the resilience of pro-colonial narratives.[18] After all, the view from the top does nothing to show the widespread everyday buy-in to colonialism that was standard in the Netherlands for centuries and certainly in the 1940s – with exceptions

15 Remco Raben and Peter Romijn, 'Silence, information and deception in the Indonesian War of Independence', in: Oostindie, Schoenmaker and Van Vree, *Beyond the Pale*, 311-350, especially 312-315; Remco Raben and Peter Romijn, *Talen van geweld. Stilte, informatie en misleiding in de Indonesische onafhankelijkheidsoorlog, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam University Press 2023) 19-36.

16 Brocades Zaalberg and Luttikhuis, 'Introduction', 18-19.

17 Meindert van der Kaaij, *Een kwaad geweten. De worsteling met de Indonesische onafhankelijkheidsoorlog vanaf 1950* (Amsterdam University Press 2022); Raben and Romijn, *Talen van geweld*.

18 As per the title of a recent documentary, In-Soo Radstake (dir.), *Selling a Colonial War* (2023), which targets Dutch media and government 'framing' but fails to interrogate the implication of all Dutch veterans, not to mention most civilian members of Dutch society, in supporting colonialism in principle.

among anti-colonial activists from Indonesia and the Caribbean, card-carrying communists, some socialists and other radical critics of empire. And it remains deeply embedded in sections of contemporary Dutch society. To focus on authorities occludes how non-state stakeholders – like combatants who become veterans – co-created narratives of 'good soldiers' during the war in Indonesia and decades after it ended.[19]

There are significant recent studies of the memory politics of decolonisation in the Netherlands that have eroded the national myths that hide a long history of colonial violence.[20] Perhaps the most powerful explanatory framework, however, comes from Michael Rothberg's notion of the 'implicated subject', a figure who represents the 'distinct but intertwined histories that position subjects in relation to both victimisation and perpetration simultaneously.'[21] Rothberg's work prompts us to think 'beyond victims and perpetrators' and recognise situations where 'subjects can occupy multiple positions simultaneously or in succession' and 'different relations to past and present injustices' can coexist.[22]

Conscripted Dutch veterans may indeed have been compelled by their government to fight in Indonesia on pain of imprisonment for conscientious objection.[23] However, some of these men also committed or were complicit in war crimes. For those who were not on the frontlines, there remains plenty of evidence in their ego documents, military publications and veterans' advocacy materials that many were representative of their milieu in accepting the righteousness of Dutch colonial reconquest following the Japanese occupation. Ordinary soldiers did more than passively absorb colonial propaganda. Many of them actively produced and maintained apologist narratives of the war and centred themselves, rather than the Indonesians,

19 Susie Protschky, 'Burdens of Proof: Photography and Evidence of Atrocity During the Dutch Military Actions in Indonesia (1945-50)', *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia / Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 176:2-3 (2020) 240-278. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-bja10015; Idem, 'Soldiers as Humanitarians: Photographing War in Indonesia 1945-49', in: Jane Lydon (eds.), *Visualising Human Rights* (UWA Publishing 2018) 39-62.

20 Stef Scagliola, *De last van de oorlog. De Nederlandse oorlogsmisdaden in Indonesië en hun verwerking* (Balans 2002); Paul Bijl, *Emerging Memory: Photographs of Colonial Atrocity in Dutch Cultural Remembrance* (Amsterdam University Press 2015); Paul Doolan, *Collective Memory and the Dutch East Indies: Unremembering Decolonization* (Amsterdam University Press 2021).

21 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford University Press 2019) 123.

22 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 8, 33, 41.

23 Formal rehabilitation procedures have now opened for conscientious objectors to conscription (and their families) who were sentenced for their opposition to service in Indonesia: Fitrya Jelita, 'Nabestaanden Indonesië-dienstweigeraars eisen nog altijd eerherstel', NOS, 5 June 2024, https://nos.nl/artikel/2523280-nabestaanden-indonesie-dienstweigeraars-eisen-nog-altijd-eerherstel. Accessed 2 September 2024.

as victims.[24] Around 1945, and long after, the notion was commonplace in the Netherlands that Indonesians were not ready for self-governance, but rather, in need of further guidance from a more 'civilised' power, and that the Revolution was the work of savages and terrorists rather than of a politically, morally and ideologically-driven population seeking self-determination (Figure 3). There is also copious historical evidence that Indo-Europeans with European-equivalent status (those who were *gelijkgesteld*) had enjoyed certain degrees of agency and status in colonial society. Importantly, they wielded power and precedence over Indonesians in ways that deeply implicated them in the benefits of colonialism before the Japanese occupation in 1942.[25] Following Rothberg, '[t]he experience of historical trauma does not inoculate subjects against implication in other regimes of power.' 'Complex' implication can 'attach to people who have had shattering experiences of trauma' 'with lines of direct or indirect connection to histories of both victimization and perpetration.'[26]

Rothberg's work on collective memories of trauma mobilised for political recognition of past injustices is also useful theory.[27] Competitive memories about experiences of slavery, colonialism and suffering and their legacies frequently play out between diaspora communities from the former Dutch empire in the Caribbean, Suriname and Indonesia, not to mention between victims of the Holocaust, the German occupation of the Netherlands and of the Japanese occupation in Southeast Asia.[28] Rothberg explains

24 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 2015); Gert Oostindie, *Serdadu Belanda di Indonesia 1945-1950: Kesaksian perang pada sisi sejarah yang salah* (KITLV Press 2016); Protschky, 'Burdens of proof'.

25 Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (University of California Press 2002); Susie Protschky, 'The Flavour of History: Food, Family and Subjectivity in two Indo-European Women's Memoirs', *Journal of the History of the Family* 14:4 (2009) 369-85. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hisfam.2009.08.006; Bart Luttikhuis, 'Beyond Race: Constructions of "Europeanness" in Late Colonial Legal Practice in the Dutch East Indies,' *European Review of History* 20:6 (2013) 539-558. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2013.768445; Susie Protschky, 'Slipping into Something More Exotic: Transgressive Dress in Early Twentieth Century Java', in: H. Hazel Hahn (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Exchange and the Colonial Imaginary: Global Encounters via Southeast Asia* (NUS Press 2019) 239-262.

26 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject*, 163, 200, 202.

27 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonisation* (Stanford University Press 2009) 2.

28 See, for example, disputes in the Netherlands over whether monuments to commemorate slavery in the Caribbean colonies and Indonesia should be shared or separate: 'Herdenkingsmonument in Den Haag voor trans-Atlantisch slavernijverleden', *NOS*, 23 March 2023, https://nos.nl/artikel/2468619-herdenkingsmonument-in-den-haag-voor-trans-atlantisch-slavernijverleden; Guno Jones, 'The Shadows of (Public) Recognition: Transatlantic Slavery and Indian Ocean Slavery in Dutch Historiography and Public Culture', in: Alicia

how stakeholders in difficult histories frequently identify and mobilise multidirectional memories to select creatively from the resonances between these past injustices.[29] These concepts do more than give a politics to what Paul Bijl and others have termed 'colonial aphasia' (partial forgetting).[30] They identify the mechanisms for contemporary alliances between decolonial activists in the Netherlands and Indonesia, but equally for those between conservative veterans, *Indisch* and Indo-Dutch lobby groups and far-right politicians in the Netherlands.[31]

Conclusions

This essay has not focused so much on ODGOI's empirical findings, but on key concepts employed to achieve the project's overriding explanatory aims. However, as most historians will admit, concepts and findings cannot so easily be separated. Prioritising 'extreme violence' used by all sides in the conflict over the regular, everyday, normalised violence of colonial oppression fits a long tradition in Dutch historiography, but much less so the Indonesian and international historiography of decolonisation. In this sense, it could be said to reflect the inward-looking struggles in a former colonising country to come to terms with its own historic defeat. A more fine-grained approach to the dynamics of violence that allows for differentiating between the (extreme or otherwise) violence of colonisers and colonised could have helped situate the significant findings presented across the ODGOI volumes into the dynamics of revolution, inter-ethnic strife and colonial brutality more firmly within international debates on colonialism, decolonisation and their legacies. The

Schrikker and Nira Wickramasinghe (eds.), *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (Leiden University Press 2020) 269-293; Vincent Houben, 'A Torn Soul: The Dutch Public Discussion on the Colonial Past in 1995', *Indonesia* 63 (1997) 47-66; Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, 'Van Indonesische urn tot Indisch monument. Vijftig jaar Nederlandse herinnering aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Azië', BMGN – *Low Countries Historical Review* 114:2 (1999) 192-222. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgn-lchr.4948.

29 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 16-19.

30 The genealogy of the concept is discussed in Paul Bijl, *Emerging Memory*, 34-38. Remco Raben and Peter Romijn's formulation of 'colonial dissociation' is similar, but with connotations of pathological 'disorder' that leads to a failure of moral empathy, rather than the socio-medical (neuro-)disability connoted by 'aphasia': Raben and Romijn, 'Silence, information and deception', 315-316.

31 See, for example, the invitation extended by Indisch Platform 2.0 to Raymond Westerling's daughter, Palmyra Westerling, to speak at the 2023 Indiëherdenking in Amsterdam, the commemoration of the Japanese capitulation and the end of the war in the Pacific on 15 August 1945, in order to plead for his 'rehabilitation'. See: Interview with Peggy Stein, President of Indisch Platform 2.0, on *Nieuwsuur*, 9 August 2023, https://tvblik.nl/nieuwsuur/9-augustus-2023.

potential of such an approach is indeed illustrated at several instances where individual authors chose to employ a more layered conceptual apparatus to understand revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, colonising and decolonising violence, as for example in the project's volumes on local dynamics of the revolution and on Indonesian decolonisation in comparative perspectives. Such findings could have been the basis for a more thorough reflection on theory and concepts in *Beyond the Pale* and as part of the project conclusions. However, such a reflection would also inevitably have brought into question the wish of the Dutch government to give an important place to Indonesian violence against the Dutch in framing the project.

Likewise, the project's emphasis on 'impunity' does little to sketch out the historical structures that permitted a Dutch war of reconquest in the late 1940s, the last of many over centuries of Dutch colonialism, and one framed as a restoration of law and order in a land of subjects deemed unfit for sovereignty and self-rule. Finding evidence that Dutch perpetrators of violence against Indonesians went unpunished in such a war simply describes the epistemic violence that underpinned all the everyday forms of violence governing colonial life before the Revolution began.

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