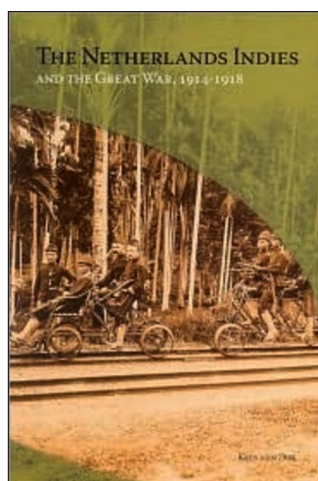
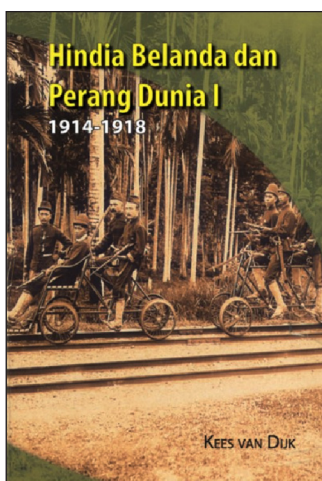


Book reviews

Kees van Dijk, *Hindia Belanda dan Perang Dunia I, 1914-1918*. Translated by Damming Tyas Wulandari, Ninus D. Andarnuswari, and Noor Cholis, Jakarta: Banana, KITLV-Jakarta, 2013, xii + 723 pp., ISBN: 978-979-1079-34-1. Price: IDR 212,500 (soft cover).

Kees van Dijk, *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914-1918*. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007, xiii + 674 pp., ISBN: 978-90-6718-308-6. Price: USD 47.50 (soft cover).



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28 July 2014. Exactly one century ago, the big war that was later called the First World War broke out. The assassination of the Austrian Crown Prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, in Sarajevo, opened up the slightly covered sources of major conflicts among the European powers. In the process, millions of people lost their lives, a number of big and small towns were destroyed and three empires – Austria-Hungary, Russian, and Ottoman – became history to ponder. The three empires ceased to exist, and the War had ended up with

dramatic changes in the political map of the world.

Though it managed to remain neutral, the Netherlands, a small European kingdom with a large and rich colonial possession, could not entirely escape from the impacts – direct and indirect – of the big war that had ransacked the neighbouring countries. How should the Netherlands have dealt with the situation? How should it have protected its huge colony across the ocean? Hardly any historical study has ever dealt exclusively with these questions. Yet, it is exactly to these and other related questions that Kees van Dijk's *The Netherlands Indies and the Great War, 1914-1918* addresses itself.

"What I wanted to map out was simple", the author says in his introduction, "what developments in the colony were effectuated, stimulated, curbed or halted by war which was being fought in faraway Europe" (p. vii; the page numbers in this review refer to the pages in the English version). In order to answer such seemingly unsophisticated questions, the author had to investigate contemporary news in the Dutch and Malay language newspapers published in the Netherlands and particularly in its former colony – then called the Netherlands Indies, government's political and economic reports, and other archival materials. In addition, the author also consulted a long list of secondary historical sources. As a result, he managed to write a well-balanced historical reconstruction in a historical text about seven-hundred-page long, which is divided into twenty-two chapters.

The big war broke out at a time when the rulers of the Dutch East Indies were already worried about the emergence of Japan as a big power. The victory of Japan against Russia in 1904 had made Japan a kind of unannounced "foreign enemy" to the Netherlands Indies. There were rumours that the Japanese might try to take over Java and Sumatra. Now that Spain had also been ousted from the Philippines, the USA, a much stronger as well as a potential imperialist country, had emerged as a competitor. The outbreak of the Chinese Revolution of 1912 had also directly given its impacts on Java – disturbances in the Chinese communities broke out in Batavia and Surabaya. The involvement of the Ottoman Empire that claimed to be the real Islamic *Khilafat* created another problem for the Netherlands as a colonial ruler. Pan-Islamism was still a very attractive ideology to a great number of Muslims under the Western colonial rule. The pro-Turkish Indian Muslims of the British army staged a short-lived rebellion in Singapore. Being a neutral country in the big war had indeed created enormous problems for the Netherlands.

The author has asked the right questions when he began to conduct the research for his book. After all there are only two or three historical events or series of events that took place during the First World War that are well remembered and quite often discussed in the history books on the twentieth century Indonesia. Students of history may have read about the dynamic of the problems of the *Indie Weerbaar* – the defence of the Indies – the early phase of socialist movement and the beginning of the politicization and ideologization of Islam and, of course, the so-called "November promises" – major political reforms that never took place. Needless to add, by reconstructing other events

that took place in the first and second decades of the twentieth century, the book has not only given an overall picture of the colony and its relations with the Netherlands but also touches upon the events that took place in the neighbouring colonial territories.

“When the war was discussed in the Dutch parliament it seemed as if the Netherlands Indies did not exist” (p. 133), however as the events unfolded themselves the central government had no other choice but to deal directly with its relations with the colony – ranging from postal communication, shipping transportation, to the questions of the market. Although the marketing of some commodities produced in the colony suffered but in the process, the war brought economic benefit to the colony. A number of products were no longer sold in the commodity market in the Netherlands but in the newly established markets in Batavia (Jakarta). The war also brought about the end of Dutch international shipping trade.

Although only seven to eight of its chapters deal directly with the political situation in the Netherlands Indies, the book throws light on the historical impacts of the First World War on the process of ideological maturity of the new colonial elite, the people who were alive in the period of modern print-culture. Directly or indirectly, the war made them more aware of the significance of their situation as the people under the rule of a foreign country. That was also the time when the Sarekat Islam became politically more assertive and the *Indische Partij* (Indies Party) demonstratively showed that the “Indies” was indeed nothing but a colony of the Dutch. The period of the ideologically conscious political activities of the colony had begun.

From the perspective of the national political history, the last three chapters of the book are undoubtedly the most interesting. Following the previous chapters that describe the attempts of Abdul Moeis from the Sarekat Islam and his colleagues from the Boedi Oetomo to promote the idea of the so-called *Indie Weerbaar*, and the adventure of Douwes Dekker, who had been exiled from the Netherlands Indies, the three chapters deal with some crucial events in the history of the nationalist movement. After touching upon the unfulfilled promises of major political reforms in the colony – “the orgy of promises” – the book describes the activities of Sneevliet and Baars, the two Dutch socialists, in spreading their social and political ideologies and the well-known internal conflict of the Sarekat Islam they had directly and indirectly caused. It was also the time when some section of the politically conscious public established the so-called *Comite Memoeliakan Radja* (Committee for the Glorification of the Queen) (p. 603). Whatever the case, the fact is that by the end of the First World War the seeds of the ideologically conscious Indonesian nationalist movement had been planted. The colony was also about to enter its “decade of ideologies”, a time when Islamism, nationalism, socialism, communism, and other ideological orientations made their appearances and began to engage themselves in various types of collaborations, controversies and even conflicts. But let other history books tell the continuing dynamics of the course of events.

Kees van Dijk, the author of this book, has indeed fulfilled his promise to fill the gaps of knowledge in the historical events in the then Netherlands Indies, shortly before and during the First World War. Van Dijk, however, is only interested in the events that may have directly or indirectly connected with the big war. Who would then be surprised to learn that he apparently simply ignores the events that might have taken place in the same period in the areas outside Java?

Whatever the case, Kees van Dijk should be complimented for writing such an excellent, massive volume. He may not have tried to give any bold theoretical historical reconstruction on the significance of the big war, he has nonetheless not only filled some important gaps in the knowledge of the past but also gives, indirectly, perhaps, new insight in the historical process of the national formation of Indonesia.

Dewi Anggreini, *Tragedi Mei 1998 dan lahirnya Komnas Perempuan*. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2014, 214 pp. ISBN: 978-979-709-809-4. Price: IDR 63,000 (soft cover).



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Dewi Anggreini's book reads like a diary: the reader is drawn back to the chaotic months surrounding President Suharto's fall in May 1998. The book is a stark reminder that to this day, victims of the riots that set a number of Indonesia's city ablaze during that time have yet to receive any form of justice.

Seasoned journalist and writer Anggreini follows the experience of 14 women – academics and activists – who became closely involved with the riots' rape victims. A number of them would later become part of the National Commission on Violence against Women, or Komnas Perempuan.

Jakarta, May 1998. The city had become the stage for mass student demonstrations, reflecting the nation's political discontent towards Suharto's regime, and intensified by a spiralling financial crisis. Violence erupted following shooting by security forces that left four Trisakti University students dead on 12 May. The trepidation of Myra Diarsi, founder of women's rights organization Kalyanamitra, grew as she started seeing mobs looting stores and buildings set ablaze. This turned into horror when people started speaking of