



## Research Report

## History in Cultural Studies. War Excesses in the Former Dutch Indies

Rodney Westerlaken\*

Stenden University, Netherlands

### Article Info

## Article History:

Dikirim 11 Oktober 2016

Direvisi 18 Oktober 2016

Diterima 9 November 2016

## Kata Kunci:

The Netherlands

Rawagede

Excessennota

War crimes

History

### Abstract

Currently the excesses of the colonial war between The Netherlands and Indonesia in the former Dutch Indies are being re-evaluated and interpreted in The Netherlands. More and more reports, photos and confessions appear showing a different truth than the one that is generally accepted in The Netherlands. Marx said that people make history, but never in conditions of their own making. This essay evaluates the perspective of cultural studies in a historical context.

© 2017 Komunitas Studi Kultural Indonesia. Published by An1image. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

On August 17, 1945, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Dutch was confronted with the independence declaration by Sukarno and Hatta.



Figure 1: Sukarno declares the independence of Indonesia on the 17th of August 1945<sup>1</sup>.

In September 1945, the British landed on Java and Sumatra to disarm the Japanese forces and to reinforce the Dutch governance in the colony. In independent Indonesia revolutionary forces stood up and wanted to defend their recently gained independence. After a battle by Surabaya (Java) between the British and the Indonesian revolutionary forces the British decided to accept the existence of the Republik Indonesia and to cooperate with its government [1,2,3,4,5].

The Dutch government decided to form an army to restore order and peace in Nederlandsch Indië. Since autumn 1944, when the south of the Netherlands was liberated from the Germans, soldiers were recruited to free *Nederlandsch Indië* from the Japanese and to restore order, and to impose another progressive form of decolonization [1,3,5,6,7].

When the Dutch soldiers arrived in Indonesia, a political solution seemed to be close. Under British pressure and mediating, an agreement (the agreement of Linggadjati) was signed between delegations of the Republic of Indonesia and the Kingdom of the Netherlands for a gradual independence of Indonesia [1,8].

After a disagreement with the Dutch government about the implications of the agreement, it was terminated in July 1947. This resulted in a war. In the terminology of the Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger (KNIL) these were political actions. [6,7,8].



Figure 2: Signing of the agreement of Linggadjati, on the photo Sutan Sjahrir (left) and W. Schermerhorn.<sup>2</sup>

\* Peneliti koresponden: Stenden University, Netherlands. Email: rodneywesterlaken@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> [http://gratisia.co.cc/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/proklamasi\\_indonesia.jpg](http://gratisia.co.cc/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/proklamasi_indonesia.jpg)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.geschiedenis.nl/art/uploads/image/st/scherm1.JPG>

Units of the royal navy and the Dutch Royal land forces, together with thousands of volunteers and ten thousand of conscripts of the Dutch started fighting against the army of the Republic Indonesia and other operating Indonesian forces.

The actions led to a guerrilla war wherein Indonesian forces were helped by the sympathizing civilians to create a situation that made it difficult to impossible to control the area by the Dutch army. This situation caused war excesses on both sides [1,6].

Dutch soldiers were already mentioning the guerrilla war in the letters that they send to their family and friends in the Netherlands, which led to the first debates in the Dutch parliament about war excesses in Indonesia [1,3]. In 1949, the Dutch military leadership started to recognize that this guerrilla war was impossible to win. On December 27, 1949, the sovereignty declaration was signed and Indonesia became independent (see figure 3).

One of the parts of the sovereignty declaration was that there would be a mutual amnesty for all of those who committed war crimes [1,3,4].



Figure 3: Signing of the sovereignty declaration.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Research

After the return of the soldiers from Indonesia, almost nobody spoke about the war crimes committed by the Dutch in Indonesia until January 17, 1969. Psychologist and physiologist Dr. J.E. Hueting gave an interview in an opinion programme on television about torture of Indonesian citizens, murders of war prisoners and committed violence against the civilian population. Hueting was a conscript soldier send to Indonesia in 1947 [1,6,9,10,11].

This interview created a shock wave in the public opinion. Hueting was accused of lies by former comrades; other comrades confirmed his stories [1,12].

On the occasion of the interview with Hueting questions were asked in the Dutch Lower House by the leader of the opposition: J.M. den Uyl [14]. He asked for an overview of the government known facts of war crimes [1,6,14].

On January 21, 1969, the chairman of the Dutch Lower House send an letter to the Prime Minister de Jong of the Netherlands wherein he requested to present a nota to the

Lower House with all the known facts about possible misdeeds of Dutch soldiers in Indonesia [1,6,14].

On January 29, 1969, Prime Minister de Jong answered positively and stated that misdeeds done by Dutch soldiers before the sovereignty transfer should be made clear as much as possible [1,2].

The research was entrusted to a steering group of secretary-generals of the ministries of general affairs, defence, justice, foreign affairs, education and science and internal affairs. The President was Mr. A.J.M. van Nispen tot Pannerden, secretary-general of the ministry internal affairs. This steering group used the findings of an interdepartmental commission: the *Coördinatiegroep Indonesië 1945-1950*. President of this group was Mr. E.J. Korthals Altes; its secretary was a jurist and historian C. Fasseur [1,2].

In addition, the government asked Mr. N.S. Blom, former director of Justice in the Dutch Indies and former Secretary General of Foreign Affairs, to write a report about responsibilities and authority relationships. What orders did the military commanders gave, what was the view and attitude of the Dutch Indies government, what is reported to the government in The Hague, what were the indications of the government in The Hague to Batavia, and which orders were received by lower commanders was the thought behind this research [1,14].

The research was based on 49 official and private archives with an estimated length of 1814 meter. It was based on the departmental archives, court martial records, from private collections coming (in the State Archives) registered papers, press documentation, the archives of the board of mission of the Dutch Reformed Church, and information by individuals, in particular Dr. J.E. Hueting and Ds. H.A.C. Hilderling. The archives of the military auditions could not be used, as Dutch officials destroyed them before they left Indonesia.

Restricted collections with an individual embargo were considered not relevant for this research [1].

## 3. The *Excessen Nota*

For cases that proved to be important, a list was compiled. The list was divided in two groups: violence and looting. This list counted 500 á 600 cases. The other 10.000 investigated cases concern violations against discipline, traffic offenses, commune property offenses, so matters that are entirely outside the examination of the research. Save for a few exceptions the violence cases, 141 in total, were worse than the looting cases. On many occasions, which were leading to a verdict, the looting cases were, for example, taking an object with a small value, a piece of clothing or a small amount of money. Therefore, the cases of looting are not published in the *excessen nota* [1, 15].

<sup>3</sup> <http://deoorlog.nps.nl/upload/overdracht.jpg>  
Jurnal Studi Kultural Volume II No. 1 Januari 2017 www.an1mage.org

Doorn and Hendrix, state in their book *Het Nederlands / Indonesisch conflict, ontsporing van geweld* that a total of 110 cases are listed for assault, murder, manslaughter and severe or mild abuse. They exclude here on 19 sex crimes, 11 cases of robbery and 5 cases where its motives are unclear, and then they kept about 75 cases, apparently relating to the military function. Here are 54 cases of murder or manslaughter. Over this we isolate 9 cases with mixed or personal reasons, and then we have 45 cases (60%) of homicide, with evidence showing the existence of police actions [16].

There are six cases of deaths of prisoners due to a hearing. There are 12 cases of slain, and 3 cases of incitement of the slain, in all cases the violators were those who exercise direct power over their victims. In 8 cases prisoners were killed during monitoring. There are 9 cases where jurisdiction is unclear. Finally, there are 10 cases of deaths of civilians caused by 'trigger speed' or other weapon use.

In the case of abuse they conclude that 11 cases of abuse took place during interrogations, while in 7 cases suspected to occur are made. In 1 of the 7 cases we speak of abuse of power [16].

The disclosure of the results of the research was questioned by the government. On one hand, a disclosure could give exposure for the positive actions of the Dutch forces and it will give a complete picture of the political relationships and responsibilities. The government preferred this, but the government also realised that this would cost years of meticulous historical research. The government decided that in the shortest period possible as much as closure should be given about possible war crimes [1].

#### 4. Results

The research team presented the result of their research on June 2, 1969 to the Dutch Lower House. Their nota came with 15 appendices, a newspaper research done by the *Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst*<sup>4</sup> and a reprint of a chronological overview of the development of the Indonesian issue in national and international political relationships in 1948 and 1949 [1]. After the excessennota was presented, it received three main points of critics:

- Dubiety about the completeness
- Discussion about the system of the violation excesses
- Applying of the concept war crimes

The gouvernement of Minister President de Jong made a statement about the incompleteness: *'uiteraard is het feitenmateriaal waarover thans nog kan worden beschikt onvolledig, doch een voldoende indruk over de aard en*

*omvang van de excessen kan er wel uit worden verkregen*<sup>5</sup> [1].

After the presentation of the excessen nota the Dutch government acknowledged that the Dutch military forces had surrendered themselves to violent excesses, but that those excesses should be understood in a situation of unregulated guerrilla, in which Indonesian ambushes and terror provoked acts of contra terror. The actions of the Dutch were sometimes degenerated, but there was no systematic campaign of violation excesses [1].

#### 5. Terminology

In the discussion after January 1969, different words were used to the behavior of the Dutch soldiers in the former Dutch Indies [1,13].

The confusion started already when the research was about to be started; what should be researched? The response of the Dutch Lower House was that the researchers should think in the broadest sense of the words misdeeds and excesses [1].

Huetting used the word *oorlogsmisdaden*, war crimes. The Prime Minister spoke about *excessen*, excesses, while the Chairman of the Lower House spoke about *wandaden*, misdeeds. L de Jong, a well-known historian and author of the series *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* spoke about *oorlogsmisdrijven*, which in English has the same meaning as war crimes [1,14].

Prime Minister de Jong choose not to use the term war crimes in the end version of the excessennota. He stated that the term war crimes were related to the systematic and over a broad front convicted war crimes by Germany and Japan and that it had a huge emotional load. If the term was used, de Jong stated, it will immediately raise the question whether those who convicted the war crimes were yet punished.

He chooses the word excess, because from his point of view, the war crimes were an exception to the rule of proper behaviour [1,14,17].

#### 6. Rawagede

On December 9, 1947, the Dutch forces established a massacre in Rawagede. Due to a recent claim for compensation from the villagers of Rawagede to the Dutch government, the Dutch media regularly pick up this case.

In the excessennota the case of Rawagede is just one of the cases. In appendices 5 it is stated that:  
December 9, 1947

<sup>5</sup> "Of course, the evidence which is currently available may be incomplete, but an adequate impression of the nature and extent of the excesses may well be derived from it"

Rawagede (regency Krawang, West Java)

Without any process executing 20 by the Dutch detained Indonesians.

Two archives are used to investigate this excess:

- Archive of the ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Archive Attorney General

After a complaint of the Republican state observers of the *Commissie van Goede Diensten* of the U.N. committed an on-site investigation. They came with a report on January 12, 1947 to the conclusion that in the area of Rawagede an underground movement was being established, with Rawagede as a center. The oriented action against Rawagede by the Dutch forces was called deliberate and ruthless in a report.

At first sight the Dutch denied the massacre, but during the investigation, it was admitted that some prisoners were executed without any interrogation or process. During and after the actions no weapons were found in the *kampong*. According to the Dutch there were 150 Indonesian casualties. On the Dutch side there were no casualties.

The Major, who had led the operation and enforcement of the execution, a total of twenty, was after consultations between the Army Commander and the Attorney General, not persecuted for reasons of expediency [1].

### **7. Komite Utang Kehormatan Belanda**

*Komite Utang Kehormatan Belanda* was founded on May 5, 2005. K.U.K.B. exists in Indonesia and the Netherlands. On April 4, 2007, the committee became a foundation in the Netherlands. The foundation is non-subsidized and independent. K.U.K.B. represented the interests of the (Indonesian) civilian casualties under the Dutch colonial period, which have suffered the violence of war crimes committed by the Dutch military.

A recognition and apology from the Dutch government to the Indonesian victims, recognition of the war damage, looting, restitution and the suffering that the people of Indonesia have undergone is the target of the foundation.

The case of Rawagede has, as single massacre, a special section the website of K.U.K.B. In an article on their website facts are stated that can be compared with the facts in the *excessennota*.

The findings are mainly based on a former secret folder, named folder 1304, which can be found in National Dutch Archives. This folder was composed of the research for the *excessennota* in 1969. The massacre was perpetrated by conscripted foot soldiers. That was remarkable, because many other war crimes were the work of hardened professional soldiers of the Royal Dutch East Indies Army

(KNIL) and the special units. The divisions of conscripts were named *Tentara Susu*, "the soft army". They were friendly to the Indonesian people and more critical in relation to the colonial policy than other troops.

In the war diary of the unit, found in folder 1304, that cleared Rawagede the action is mentioned briefly. The company used a cleansing operation against Rawahgede.

On the enemy side were 150 deaths counted. 8 persons were imprisoned. It is said that the compound was found to be completely Republican, which turned out to red-white flags with which several houses were decorated and documents and articles found on the slain opponents.

A memorandum, found in folder 1304, prepared by an employee of the Attorney General to the Supreme Court in Batavia stated that the mission of the company was '*Ruim weerstand Rawagede op*'. It describes how the Dutch 8 or 9 times executed twelve men and just beyond the village another 7 to 10 persons. It is therefore 100 to 120 liquidations instead of 20 liquidations mentioned in the *excessennota*.

Is there a cover-up? K.U.B.K claims that, based on their research in folder 1304, the hedge immediately began. They claim that the message in the war diary of the unit was written long after the killings, and that it was most likely misleading.

A found document describes that the major who led the company was ordered from his commander to remain silent. He had to deny everything at an inquiry by the United Nations. The Netherlands denied the high death toll claimed by the Indonesians (more than 430 men) and stuck to his own 150 deaths.

That would have fallen by shootings, was the suggestion. The Netherlands finally admitted that there were four prisoners of war executed. The liquidation of another seven was denied. The UN report from 1948, calls the action nevertheless "deliberate and ruthless" as is also mentioned in the *excessennota*.

Harm Scholtens, the writer of a doctoral thesis at the University of Groningen about Rawagede claims that the number of 20 liquidations seems to be invented and that he does not know where this number comes from. His research emerges a picture of a cold mass extermination. Probably the unit was surprised by the finding of more than 100 men who they suspected that they were fighters who had thrown away their weapons.

To take the men with them was too dangerous: they were more numerous than the Dutch and ambushes threatened them everywhere. Let them go possibly meant that they soon would be back, armed and well. Liquidation seemed to be the

best option, the unit may have thought. This happened often, but it is not known at this scale [18].

The K.U.B.K. also claims, based on research on folder 1304, that there has been a correspondence between Army Commander Spoor, who was responsible for the prosecution of soldiers, and Attorney General Felderhof.

Spoor doubts in this letter whether he should prosecute the responsible major or not. Felderhof recommends to Spoor to dismiss the matter as "any foreign interference and interest is gone." The UN after writing their report, in which is spoken of only 4 executions no longer interested in the massacre.

Finally, the K.U.B.K. states on her website that more evidence of a cover-up is, that the document on executions is based on an entire file on Rawagede that was sent by Army Commander Spoor to Attorney General Felderhof. That file is gone. Harm Scholtens searched many archives, indexes, even in the personal archives of the Army Commander Spoor. The K.U.B.K. Asks herself on its website: *Is the (short) paper on the executions in folder 1304 overlooked in the destruction of evidence?*

## 8. Recent Developments

In 1995 a documentary was broadcasted about Rawagede. The documentary makers spoke with survivors and relatives in the village of Rawagede. Especially the testimony of an old woman went through the bone. In a trembling voice she tells how she found her husband and son among the corpses and took them back. According to the documentary makers 431 men, from young to old, summarily were executed.

There were questions in the Dutch Lower House by Blaauw (VVD), Hillen (CDA), Dijksma (PvdA) en Roethof (D66), because what about those 20 liquidations in the excessennota? Was that the truth? At the request of the Minister of Justice Winnie Sorgdrager the prosecutor in Arnhem did a preliminary investigation.

According to the prosecution there were simply different interpretations of the events in Rawagede. Moreover, the perpetrators are not to be prosecuted, said the minister. War crimes do not expire, but the parliament made an exception for the Dutch troops in Indonesia between 1945 and 1950 [19].

As said before the case of Rawagede is covered in several articles in the media recently. Most articles bring the story of the massacre, which is similar to the history as covered by foundation K.U.K.B. The reason for the renewed attention for Rawagede is the claim from the survivors for recognition, an apology and financial compensation from the Dutch state. The plaintiffs are seven widows, among them the daughter of one victim and the foundation K.U.K.B. who is protecting their interests.

The tenth plaintiff, Sakam Bin Saih, was still a young man at the time of the massacre. He hid for the Dutch soldiers, but was found and transported and, with other men, lined up and shot from behind. Sakam were seriously injured, his father and brother were killed.

The lawyer representing the relatives, Mr. Liesbeth Zegveld, says that the claim is not only about compensation. They want above all that the Netherlands will take responsibility for their suffering.

On November 24, 2008 it came clear that the Dutch government is not willing to pay compensation to the plaintiffs. According to the Dutch state advocate the issue is barred. This appears from a letter from the state advocate to the lawyers of nine survivors and a survivor.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot and the Dutch ambassador van Dam expressed deep regret on behalf of the government about the painful and violent way in Indonesia's struggle for independence.

Het Parool stated on September 8, 2008, that because both the Indonesian and Dutch government argued that a discussion of compensation is not an issue. It was arranged earlier in 1966 in the Financial Agreement. This was the settlement of disputes over the separation of the Netherlands and Indonesia [20].

Finally, on December 5, 2011 the Dutch government decided to give formal excuses and a compensation of 20.000 euro per person to the victims of Rawagede [21].



Figure 4: Rawagede.<sup>6</sup>

## 9. The Perception of Cultural Studies

The interpretation of historical facts in wartime is ambiguous. There are definitely two sides of a story, such as in the above described case of Rawagede. Survivors of war crimes in the former Dutch Indies want recognition, apology and financial compensation, as war crimes never expire.

Marx said that people make history, but never in conditions of their own making. He meant that the ability to create new stories, and with that to remake the world is always constrained and enabled by the specific political, economic, historic circumstances in which we were born [22].

Grossberg says that the beginnings of the stories we tell are

always the endings of other stories that we have not bothered to tell. We always enter the conservation in mid-sentence [22].

Jrank.org says 'if people make history—but within conditions not of their own devising—cultural studies explores the ways this process is enacted with and through cultural practices, and studies the place of such practices within specific historical formations. Cultural studies explore the historical possibilities of transforming people's lives by trying to understand the relationships of power within which individual realities are constructed. That is, it seeks to understand not only the organizations of power, but also the possibilities of survival, struggle, resistance, and change. It takes contestation for granted, not as a reality in every instance, but as an assumption necessary for the existence of critical work, political opposition, and even historical change' [23].

Micheal Pickering argues that historical science and cultural studies should complement each other and that engaging with history should be a key aspect of doing cultural studies, and vice versa [24].

The case of Rawagede describes the historical possibilities that transformed people's lives. Due to a very small male population in the village the villagers remained poor till recent days. Of course the horror of the war crimes in the village has left its trails. The relationships of power are changing, which makes this case very interesting in the perspective of cultural studies.

The realm of power changed after the Dutch government finally agreed to pay war reparations and with that possibly made a precedent to other villages or persons affected by war crimes in Indonesia. We can conclude from what's written above that the excessennota is far from complete and that unexpected claims might come up. The case of Rawagede might change history and raise awareness in The Netherlands as well in Indonesia for a history rewritten.

It is needed that, while eyewitnesses are still alive, further research is done the soonest, so history can be altered and can be done justice.

## References

- [1] Bank, Jan. 1995. *De Excessennota*, SDU uitgeverij. Den Haag
- [2] Glissenaar, Jan. 1992. *Terug naar Java, in het spoor van de politieke acties*. Dabar / Boekmakerij Luijten, Aalsmeer
- [3] Groen, P.M.H. 1991. Marsroutes en dwaalsporen. Dissertation
- [4] Loebis, Aboe Bakar. 1995. *Agresi Militer Belanda*. Pusat Dokumentasi Politik. Jakarta.
- [5] Teitler G., Hoffenaar J. 1998. *De Politieke Acties, De Bataafsche Leeuw*. Amsterdam/Dieren
- [6] Liempt, van A. 2003. *Andere tijden, nieuwe inzichten in oude kwesties*, Uitgeverij L.J. van Veen, Amsterdam/Antwerpen
- [7] Teitler G., Hoffenaar J. 1998. *De Politieke Acties, afwikkeling en verwerking*, De Bataafsche Leeuw, Amsterdam/Dieren
- [8] Oostindie G., Klinkers I. 2001. *Knellende Koninkrijksbanden: Het Nederlandse dekolonisatiebeleid*. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam
- [9] Doel vd H.W. 1996. *Het rijk van Insulinde*. Uitgeverij Promotheus, Amsterdam.
- [10] Gouda F. 1995. *Dutch cultures overseas: praktijk kolonial di Hindia Belanda, 1900-1942*. Dabar / Boekmakerij Luijten, Aalsmeer
- [11] Malcontent P.A.M. 1998. *Op kruistocht in de derde wereld, de reacties van de Nederlandse regering op ernstige en stelselmatige schendingen van mensenrechten in ontwikkelingslanden 1973-1982*. Uitgeverij Verloren, Hilversum
- [12] Knigge, V., Frei N., Schweitzer A. 2002. *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*. Beck, München
- [13] Born, vd Karin, et al. 2002. *De excessennota, in: Andere tijden, nieuwe inzichten in oude kwesties*. Veen, Amsterdam.
- [14] Jong, de Louis. 1991. *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* SDU uitgeverij. Den Haag.
- [15] Colombijn, F. and Lindblad, J.T. 2002. *Roots of violence in Indonesia: contemporary violence in historical perspective*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. Leiden.
- [16] Doorn, van JAA and Hendrix W.J. 1985. *Het Nederlands / Indonesisch conflict, ontsparing van geweld*. De Bataafsche Leeuw, Amsterdam/Dieren
- [17] <http://www.volkskrant.nl>
- [18] Scholten, H.H. 2007. Rawahgede, 9 December 1947. *Een nieuwe Nederlandse versie?* Published under own administration.
- [19] <http://www.kukb.nl/new/detail.php?id=44>
- [20] <http://www.parool.nl/>
- [21] <http://nos.nl/artikel/319419-excuses-en-schadevergoeding-rawagede.html>
- [22] Partner, N and Foot, S. 2013. *The SAGE handbook of Historical Theory*. Sage publishing, London
- [23] <http://science.jrank.org/pages/8911/Cultural-Studies-Formations-Cultural-Studies.html#ixzz4MkRhPxRg>
- [24] Pickering, M. 2008. *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh