

BOOK REVIEW



***Di Belanda Tak Seorangpun Mempercayai Saya:
Korban Metode Westerling di Sulawesi Selatan 1946-1947***

Author: Maarten Hidskes
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Supposition and assumption are considered to be "taboo" in the study of history. As a discipline that studies past, the study of history considers that anything in past has happened thus nothing could alter it. Apart from its unchanging characteristic, it is also innately unique or in other words; unrepeatable. Supposition (usually comes with "what-if" question) and other forms of imagination can't change the course of history. Using both in the study of history can be considered as a form of deviation towards abovementioned principles.

Departing from this argument, Maarten Hidskes' piece with the original title of *Thuis Geloof Niemand Mij: Zuid-Celebes 1946-1947* stands in a three-way junction of biography, military history, and historical novel. The plot of his book flows in a way biography recounts the story of individuals which in this case is Piet Hidskes, author's father. Emphasis is given towards two episodes of Piet's life; before his deployment to South Sulawesi and the aftermath. Through this periodization, one can see that author positions his father's twelve weeks in Sulawesi as a life-changing event. Prior to his tour of duty to South Sulawesi, Piet lived like a normal man who craves for challenge and adventure. He involved in a juvenile movement that launched "hit-and-run" attacks against Nazi occupation soldiers. When he turned 27, he voluntarily enlisted to the military that would be deployed to Netherland East Indies. Piet even challenged himself to participate in special force training. Something that later will put him under command of another central figure in this book; Captain Raymond "Turk" Westerling.

The second episode is the aftermath which left wounds in his memory. Something that "usually" occurs in the life of veterans. The quotation mark is given in the word "usually" because what Piet and Dutch Commando

or the DST (Depot Speciale Troepen) did in South Sulawesi was more like a massacre than calculated use of violence. Twelve weeks in South Sulawesi made Piet an awkward person in front of his violent past. The author recalled that his father could show him how to point a gun towards an alleged insurgent. But when an elaborative question is raised, such as the author's question whether his father has killed someone, he likely to change the topic.

The author does not only observe Piet as a father but also a commando within a small yet special group. In this aspect, this book adopts humanist and critical approach towards military history. Humanist because the author does not position violence (even within war context) as a justified action. Critical is due to the author's successful attempts to raise a forever soldier's dilemma; to obey orders or follow their sense of humanity.

As other military history works, the author exposes the commander: Captain Raymond Westerling as an individual that determined the course of action. He is positioned in a similar way the Dutch people judged him after General Spoor dismissed him from his position due to the massacre. The author accommodated anonymous opinion that perceived Westerling as a "gentleman" but also a sense of disgust that labels him as a despicable cold-blooded killer.

As the first paragraph has slightly touched, this book is unique (if not improper) study of history due to the use of imagination as the main framework. The author repeatedly fills the gap of facts with supposition and assumption that departed from his interview with other commandos in Piet's unit. If archives, literature, and his father's ego-documents didn't recount anything about a specific period, the author supposes that Piet would do

and even feel the same way as his comrades-in-arms. However, this method could be understood since the DST was a small unit that operates with similar staffing composition.

Strong supposition in this book also reveals the author's position on the writing. The author who's a journalist by background only wanted to stand on a shoe of Piet's son. In some parts of this book, the author involved strong emotional dynamics on the way he uncovers and perceives his dad's personal history. In some episodes of his preliminary research, the author tried his best to deny the fact that his lovely father engaged in an inhumane action that kills around 40.000 people. He even explicitly expressed that in one point of time he hoped that he made mistake; Piet who stood in execution scene and unable to stop it was not his father. The author also felt angry about what his father did and his inability to tell the truth. His denial and acceptance, to a certain extent, proves his commitment to writing the story as Piet's son that innately involves father and son's bond.

The historical context of the book is nothing different from other literature that recounts similar topic namely Geert Oostindie's book "Serdadu Belanda di Indonesia 1945-1950" and Marjolein Van Pagee's project on "Pemoeda's En Belanda: Nederlandsche en Indonesische herinneringen aan 1945-1949". All of these projects, including Maarten's book, accentuate broken expectations of individual soldiers as soon as they arrived in Indonesia. Prior to their deployment, many of the soldier (and not unique to this context) took government's propaganda as gospel. Among others, the propaganda dictated them that their tour of duty was a noble mission to detach "terrorists" and "rioters" from 90% of the society. In fact, they could not tell which one which and must encounter a situation where no one was sincerely want to cooperate with them.

What makes Piet's case distinct to at least other two similar pieces is his status as a volunteer. This status subsequently eliminates narrative of state compulsion that is against one's own will. Piet was also a commando who went through harsh and ultra-selective training who admitted that his action in South Sulawesi was "solely" an "implementation of exercise". As in other militaries, commando has always been a unit that acts as a last resort; they uphold the most-violent doctrine and possessed the "best killing instinct" compared to regular soldiers. In other words, Piet's background positions him not as "innocent" as other soldiers. Although, as a way to reconcile himself with his past, Piet never justify his action in South Sulawesi and continuously cover it until his departure.

Maarten Hidskes' piece definitely contributes a humanist and critical way to cover the period of 1945-1950. Since this period involved ex-colonizer and ex-colony in the same setting; narrative contestation in almost every aspect seems to be unending. The humanity that seems to be universal and impartial in this context is definitely one way to approach the period. Although it ideally comes with some notes; empathy and sympathy shouldn't constrain the writer to reveal facts.

This piece also doesn't take violence as a normal phenomenon yet also argues that individual might be trapped in a situation that constrains them to follow their humanity. In contrast, an individual also has a possibility to manifest their violent side if a group allowed them to do so. Detail attention towards actors' psychology in front of violence indeed provides another alternative towards domination of heroic or patriotic enmity towards the enemy when it comes to the period of revolution.

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