

Jeffry Pondaag: "The Netherlands never has good intentions; they just continued with all their knowledge about Jan Pieterszoon Coen - van Heutsz - Daendels - Colijn who became Prime Minister - Colonialism - Slavery - Robbery - Japanese and German occupation - Holocaust - Anne Frank - between 1945 and 1949 they waged another colonial war while Rotterdam was still ruined [after Nazi-Germany bombed the city in 1940]. "



Report with questions and remarks regarding the Round Table Discussion, January 31, 2019

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The report is sent to both the Dutch and Indonesian government and press

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Introduction

On Thursday, January 31, a round table discussion took place between researchers and research directors of the study "Independence, decolonization, violence and war in Indonesia 1945-1950" and the initiators and some of the signers of the open letter criticizing the study. Critics of the study were welcomed at the offices of the Dutch Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD), located in a building paid for with colonial slave labor. The founder of the Deli Company had the building on the Herengracht constructed in 1880. This was eight years after the Dutch colonial regime on Sumatra instated the so called "coolie ordinance" (we acknowledge the word "coolie" as a racial slur; for example, in South Africa the word constitutes hate speech).

Those present on behalf of the critics:

2 initiators of the open letter: Francisca Pattipilohy, Jeffry Pondaag (K.U.K.B. Foundation)

10 of the 137 signatories:

Armando Ello, Patty Gomes, Arthur Graaff, Perez Jong Loy, Sasha Mahe, Ethan Mark, Rogier Meijerink, Lara Nuberg, Marjolein van Pagee, Michael van Zeijl

2 Indonesian (PhD) students: Yance Arizona, Hadi Purnama,

Those present on behalf of the research program:

3 directors: Gert Oostindie (KITLV), Ben Schoenmaker (NIMH), Frank van Vree, (NIOD),

7 researchers: Esther Captain (KITLV), Ireen Hoogenboom (KITLV) Rémy Limpach, (NIMH), Peter Romijn (NIOD), Fridus Steijlen (KITLV) Marjon van der Veen (NIOD), Mariëtte Wolf (NIOD)

1. Focus of the Research

350 years of colonial oppression

Francisca Pattipilohy was wondering why 350 years of colonial exploitation was not the point of departure of the research. Esther Captain answered as follows: we pay attention to the period before 1945 through the use of literature. What this means: the focus is 1945-1950 but we keep the colonial period in the back of our minds. This does not suffice. What matters is that 350 years of colonial oppression is not named in the research design and questions. This is then not an answer to one of the most important questions of the open letter: the fact that the problem of colonialism is not central to the research. Since the various sub-studies do not mention this central problem, or only mention it as a side note, reference to existing literature is not adequately reassuring. We are concerned how the sub-studies and research questions were chosen that do not make colonialism central to the study. We would at the very least have expected an answer to that concern.

NIOD-director Van Vree said: "we focus on 1945-1950 because that period was denied for 60 years," but that too is not a convincing argument, as denial and collective forgetting applies to the entire colonial period.

350 years of colonialism should be the central point of analysis for those who want to understand the physical violence of 1945-1950. As Francisca Pattipilohy said in her video message of September 13th, 2018: "The research considers colonialism as a given. The illegality of the Dutch occupation (the core problem) is not being investigated."¹ It is important to emphasize that the main motivation to colonize is economic gain. Violence, in that sense, is only a way to enforce access to valuable resources. As Michael van Zeijl cited the Dutch credo: "Losing the Indies, brings disaster." It is not just an interesting side note that Van Zeijl revealed that Indonesia paid a large part of the 4.5 billion between 1950-1956 and even paid for the costs of the colonial war that was launched against them. These payments of the oppressed to the oppressors illustrate the core problem: The Dutch economic dependence on the colony was the main motivation to send troops and use violence. The point is that the original research outline does not mention the economic aspect of (de-) colonization as essential part. Only after Van Zeijl raised this issue during the meeting, the research team admitted that the payments from Indonesia to the Netherlands were important, only after that they promised to include this as topic of research.

Therefore, what does it say about the competence of the Dutch researchers when they cannot answer the simple question whether Indonesia had paid or not. The Indonesian payments to the Netherlands are not a complicated issue. It seems that this issue is deliberately kept vague, among others by historians who assist in defending the interests of

¹ See video message by Francisca Pattipilohy, September 13th, 2019: <https://youtu.be/yIJJqeWS5NM>

the Dutch state.² Michael van Zeijl, who is not trained as a professional historian, found compelling evidence in the Dutch archives. He discovered that it is much worse than previously thought. Namely, Indonesia (without them knowing) partly paid the costs of the so-called 'police actions.' Only after the Indonesian government discovered this in 1956, they stopped the payments. The Dutch source that Van Zeijl found links the latter discovery to the Indonesian decision to nationalize all Dutch companies. It is quite telling that in all these years Dutch historians have not succeeded in revealing and highlighting the truth about the payments. This is not a matter of conflicting opinions. Indonesia paid or not, it cannot be both. Needless to say that it is in the interest of the Dutch state that the Indonesian payments from the 1950s remain vague and unclear.

The question then remains: why is colonialism not the overarching and recurring theme in all sub-studies and research questions. Why is there no separate research project devoted to the historical background of colonialism? Meindert van der Kaaij addresses the societal aftermath in the Netherlands in his research. Why then no similar treatment of the prior history?

Likewise, it did not become clear during the round table discussion how colonialism is defined. What definition is used and which place does this definition receive in the current research? During the discussion KITLV director Gert Oostindie said that none of them thinks that the Netherlands had the right to colonize, however, the notion that the Dutch East Indies was illegal is nowhere to be found on the website or in the research design. According to Oostindie it is unnecessary to make the illegality explicit because it is so obvious. But is that really the case? We argue that Dutch society as a whole hardly has any idea what took place in Asia and elsewhere in the world, during all those centuries, let alone that there is an understanding that the Dutch wealth is based on robbery, slavery and oppression. Many people (and also historians) still speak about the VOC as if it was a regular trading company. The research questions and the focus of this study seem to take the existence of the colony as a given. The way researchers talk about the colonial war suggests that the only thing that the Netherlands can be blamed for is the violence that was used to recolonize.

The participating researchers talk as if everything would have been fine if the Netherlands had acknowledged earlier that the time of colonization was over. This way of thinking suggests that the colonial occupation was legitimate before 1945. It is therefore not a solution when, as a way to respond to our criticism, a disclaimer is going to be put on the website to state that the colony was not legitimate. The problem is the general point of departure, not naming the core problem. The current design leaves the impression that the

² See for example the Dutch government report "To forget the past in favor of a promise for the future" (2004), which has been written by historian J.J.P. De Jong. In this report it remains unclear whether Indonesia has paid the 4.5 billion guilders or not. Instead, the report highlights the second payments of 689 million guilders in 1966, which was based on an agreement between the Dutch government and Soeharto. The first (RTC) agreement of 1949 was about the colonial debts (including the costs of the colonial war) while the second agreement was about compensation for the nationalization of Dutch companies. See: <https://historibersama.com/dutch-government-report/>

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researchers only find it problematic that Dutch soldiers committed war crimes between 1945-1950.

In short: our biggest concern is that the research program nowhere makes it clear that the entire colonial period is an essential part of the theoretical framework. In fact, it is completely unclear what kind of theoretical framework is being used. The lack of this is unacceptable for academic standards. We expect that the research program will formulate the following question clearly and transparently: What is the academic, conceptual structure of the research from which the sub-studies depart?

Bersiap as point of departure

Our issue with 1945 as a point of departure relates to the way in which the anti-colonial violence is used to derail with the frame of "where two fight, two are guilty." The Dutch liberal party 'VVD' only wanted to finance the research under the condition that the Indonesian violence would be investigated as well, clearly with the intention to alleviate the Dutch responsibility.³ In this context KITLV director Gert Oostindie often talks about the 'foundation myth' of the Republic: the Bersiap as a sensitive issue of which most Indonesians do not want to know about because it would undermine the Indonesian national narrative.⁴ Apart from the question how Oostindie knows this (since he does not speak or read Indonesian), he seems to think that the relation between oppressor and oppressed becomes vague, or even disappears, when anti-colonial violence is included as topic of research. In February 9, 2017 Van Vree wrote in a letter to the Dutch House of Representatives that the Bersiap research serves the purpose of:

Mapping the psychological consequences for Dutch soldiers and citizens, and as an inquiry into the meaning of the Bersiap as an important factor in subsequent warfare.

The comment exemplifies the omission of 350 years of colonial oppression. They reverse the situation, positioning anti-colonial violence first (as opposed to long, prior colonial violence) and then focusing on the effects of this violence on Dutch soldiers. The only answer to Mrs. Pattipilohy's question how the researchers see the Bersiap violence in relation to the preceding period was: "because the Bersiap was one of the periods to understand". Again, this is not really an answer to the question. Because, what does he think to understand of the Bersiap when he positions anti-colonial violence first, as being

³ "Hennis, the Dutch Minister of Defense, wants to avoid that Dutch veterans feel insulted by the investigation. Therefore, not only the actions of the Dutch will be examined, but the researchers will also examine the so-called 'Bersiap period'. This is a violent period in the Dutch East Indies [led] by Indonesian freedom fighters after the Japanese capitulated. The right-wing liberal VVD party insistently requested this to prevent that an investigation will not focus on Dutch violence only." See: <https://historibersama.com/new-research-rtl-nieuws/>

⁴ Oostindie: "Because the Indonesian government is not very willing to support investigation that can undermine their 'founding myth' of a heroic, united liberation struggle." See: Dirk Vlasblom 'Reizen met een steen in de schoen,' NRC (December 2, 2016). <https://historibersama.com/pebble-in-your-shoe-nrc/>

one of the triggers for the Dutch soldiers to commit war crimes? Further, Pattipilohy did not receive a reaction whatsoever to her comment that the Bersiap only developed after the British troops landed.

Besides that, who exactly is Van Vree referencing with the term "citizen"/"civilians"? Is he talking about those with European status only? Legally in the Netherlands, all people in the archipelago were colonial subjects until December 27, 1949. Whether in the meaning of "Dutch citizen" (in which case Van Vree furthers colonial apartheid by excluding the vast majority of colonial subjects in the archipelago) or in the meaning of all civilian human beings in the archipelago, the focal importance of Bersiap violence (rather than the violence of the colonial oppressor) does not hold for the vast majority of lives involved. The imprecision of these types of statements is troublesome and fosters a strong sense of exclusion. (See page 6 where we explain the consequences of legally acknowledging 1945.)

When it comes to the psychological effect on human beings, it is important that the impact of centuries of colonial oppression, exploitation, racism, sexism and the divide and rule tactics of the Dutch colonial regime on the local indigenous population is being investigated. It is precisely in the context of the Bersiap that the psychological impact of 350 years of colonial oppression cannot simply remain a side note. When President Sukarno proclaimed the independence in 1945, mutual solidarity was an important goal promoted by the new Republic as a way to deal with the disastrous impact of colonial divide and rule. For centuries the Dutch colonial regime pitted various indigenous groups against each other. The majority of the local population was forced to live in an apartheid system where they were classified at the bottom of the racist legal system on the basis of race and class. If this aspect is not explicitly studied and analyzed, the Dutch research team will never be able to understand the Bersiap. Certainly not as long as project leader and NIOD director Van Vree reverses the problem when he writes that the research on the Bersiap mainly serves to investigate the psychological effect on **Dutch** military and (presumably European) citizens.

Is the research team familiar with the official statement of 1945 in which the Indonesian government wrote that they did not harbor any hostilities towards Indo-Europeans, Moluccans or Menadonese, because they belonged to the Indonesian population as well? This is in stark contrast with the continuity of divide and rule that the Netherlands applied after 1945. During the Indonesian War of Independence, Dutch Governor General Van Mook used an active federalization policy in which he promised areas outside of Java independence, of course under the Dutch crown. It needs to be clear that the Netherlands was doing everything to break the unity of the Republic.

According to Esther Captain, the Bersiap is an important focus for people with Indo-European descent in the Netherlands. Does this mean that the Bersiap sub-study is specifically designed to facilitate this minority group? Judging by the composition of the Social Resonance Group, this seems to be the case, as it currently only consists of 'Dutch-Indies' and Dutch veteran organizations. It is also not clear why Esther Captain compared the violence during the Japanese occupation with the Indonesian Bersiap violence that she

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thought was much worse. What is the purpose of this comparison? The fact that violent outbursts are horrific and unwanted is evident, what matters is tracing the cause.

From our point of view the Netherlands is 100% responsible for the conflict, including the Bersiap, because they were the occupiers. As such the Bersiap victims are victims of Dutch colonialism as well. (Apart from the question about who the people were that used anti-colonial violence: were they 'Indonesians' or Dutch 'subjects', since the Dutch state does not legally recognize 17 August until today.) In any case, when anti-colonial violence is researched it should explicitly concern the following three factors:

- 1.) The influence of the period **prior to 1945**: 350 years of colonial exploitation and racism
- 2.) The influence that the development **of 1945** had: the Dutch refusal to take the proclamation seriously, the fact that the Bersiap violence broke out after British colonial troops had landed, the fact that the spiral of violence was not one-sided, think for example of the British bombing on Surabaya where tens of thousands of Indonesian civilians perished.
- 3.) Finally, the Bersiap was not merely about feelings of revenge; it was also about the realistic fear that the Netherlands would return as colonizer. This fear turned out to be correct. A study that aims to explain anti-colonial violence should also include 'realistic threat' as a reason for the violence committed. The Netherlands kept violating sovereignty **until 1949** after all.

2. Sovereignty and Restitution

Legal recognition 1945

During the roundtable discussion, both Rémy Limpach and Peter Romijn said that they see 1945 as an important 'historical fact'. However, this is not what the discussion is about. Even the Dutch state admits that 1945 is a historical fact. Naturally it is a historical fact that Sukarno declared the independence on 17 August 1945. No one can deny that. Yet the issue that we are raising relates to the refusal of the Dutch state to legally recognize 1945. From our view Dutch historians have the responsibility to explain that the law of 1949 has never changed. After 2005 when Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot attended the Indonesian Independence Day and spoke of 'regret', nothing changed. In the lawsuits that the K.U.K.B. foundation launched on behalf of Indonesian victims of Dutch war crimes, the court in The Hague also speaks about 'Dutch subjects.' In short: verbally acknowledging 1945 as a historical fact is superficial and ignores the reality, as Rogier Meijerink said during the roundtable discussion. As long as Dutch historians do not explain that their government still refers to 1949, they cannot use the term 'Indonesia' for the period 1945-1949, only out of political correct motivations. In our view if they speak of 'Indonesia' without explaining it, it is history falsification, a camouflage of reality. Yet, if the researchers **legally** recognize August 17, 1945 and explain everything, it is right that they use the term Indonesians. The consequence of this is, however, that the arrival of the British and later the Dutch Army in Indonesia must be regarded as an attack of a foreign nation on a sovereign state, which is a war crime. The legal consequences of this should be studied and included.

What is striking is that the Dutch researchers distance themselves from any legal and/or political consequences of their work as historians.⁵ This is an untenable position. The subject and results of this research *are* political and will be used as such. The Dutch government already uses the research program in its correspondence with K.U.K.B. to avoid questions. The Dutch state likes to uphold the impression that they took sufficient responsibility by funding this research. In several occasions the Dutch government states that only after four years it will be clear how to deal with this history. Meanwhile continuously rejecting legal claims brought in by elderly Indonesians victims of Dutch war crimes who may have passed away after four years.

Remarkably the Dutch researchers acknowledge the influence of political interests when it comes to the so-called 'List of Excesses' that was compiled in 1969. However, now they are themselves participating in a government-funded study, they simply 'do their job'

⁵ In this context Fridus Steijlen once wrote: "I do not see us, Dutch scholars, as representatives of the Dutch government. Me and my colleagues have acknowledged 17 August for a long time already as the date on which the Republik Indonesia was proclaimed. That the Dutch government funds our research does not change my reading of this historical date!" See: <https://www.ind45-50.org/en/meeting-ppi-belanda-report>

and claim that they have nothing to do with politics. In response to the questions from Arthur Graaff, Oostindie literally said: "We are not about Dutch law making." But is that so? If Dutch historians acknowledge the date of August 17, 1945, it means that they believe that the Netherlands has attacked a sovereign nation, which is a war crime. Subsequently it is up to them to explain that they, as historians, have a different opinion than the Dutch state and the Dutch court in The Hague, whose point of departure is that Indonesians were 'subjects' under Dutch authority until 1949. By keeping this issue vague, and meanwhile ignoring the discussion about **legal** recognition, the researchers actually facilitate the Dutch state's repeated framing of former Foreign Minister Ben Bot's presence at the Indonesian Independence Day in 2005 as the end of a discussion. Limpach and Romijn may see the proclamation of 1945 as an important historical fact, it remains unclear from what perspective they will describe the colonial war: was it an attack of a foreign power on a sovereign state or was it an attack of a colonial regime on people who the Dutch still regard as their 'subjects'? From an Indonesian perspective the Japanese occupation put an end to the Dutch domination anyway: as the Dutch colonial regime capitulated in March 1942. In any case we still expect a clear answer to the aforementioned questions regarding the legal recognition of 1945.

Restitutions

During the roundtable discussion, Jeffry Pondaag showed documents from the court cases in which the NIMH is mentioned twelve times. For his part NIMH director Ben Schoenmaker did not deny that his institute indeed supports the Dutch government in the court cases. However, he denied that this meant that his institute represents the perpetrators and not the victims, even though NIMH falls directly under the Ministry of Defense. Schoenmaker nevertheless claimed to be independent. It is generally known that the lawsuits are being filed by Indonesian relatives of victims of Dutch violence: which is now being investigated in this study of 4.1 million Euros. As such the NIMH plays a double role: it participates in the research on 1945-1950 but also assists the state in the historical verification of legal claims. Yet, NIMH only searches for evidence in the Dutch archives, in relation to the court cases they do not conduct any research in Indonesia. See for example the case of the beheading of the Indonesian resistance leader Andi Abubakar Lambogo, which is currently being handled by the court in The Hague.⁶

The issue of the double role of NIMH is in line with the question posed by Hadi Purnama, which Peter Romijn misinterpreted.⁷ Following what Pondaag said about the consequences of not recognizing 1945, Hadi Purnama added that international law is, to begin with, rooted in colonialism. He stated that the outcome of the investigation will have

⁶ Marjolein van Pagee, 'Malik wants apologies for the beheading of his father,' NRC (May 21 2016). See: <https://historibersama.com/apologies-beheading-1947-nrc/>

⁷ See Presentation of Hadi Purnama: <https://youtu.be/2AdS09FI2SI>

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legal consequences when it comes to compensation. Even if the researchers stick to 1949, just as the state does, it means that Indonesians can claim their right through a Dutch court. Peter Romijn, on the other hand, thought that Purnama spoke about a changing world order that the Netherlands ignored at the time. Romijn said he would like to sit down with Hadi Purnama to talk more about this. Our question is whether the researchers, in line with this discussion, would like to respond to the subject that Purnama was talking about: the possibility of restitutions and the position of the researchers to facilitate this. Since NIMH director Schoenmaker claimed that the three institutions do not necessarily represent the state and that they are independent as academics.

The latter question also ties in with Annemarie Toebosch's proposal as expressed in her video message. She suggested that the researchers should sit down together with Jeffry Pondaag and lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld and discuss the inclusion of all the important court documents in the research. After that we received the following written response:

Our researchers consult all possible relevant archives, including these lawsuits and - more importantly - the underlying documentation. We are therefore pleased that the K.U.K.B. has promised us that we may view these documents.

However, it is a misunderstanding that K.U.K.B. is giving the researchers permission to use his archive. Toebosch explicitly urged NIOD to sit down with Pondaag and Zegveld first. That means communication, a serious conversation, which requires trust. Since the open letter made clear how little confidence Pondaag has in the current research design, it should be obvious that he will not share his archive as long as nothing is done with his serious objections.

Unfortunately this is not the first time that a misunderstanding occurs related to Jeffry Pondaag's archive. Earlier in May 2017 (thus even before the project officially started) Fridus Steijlen visited Jeffry Pondaag at home, when he showed interest in his archive as well. Steijlen later wrote in a blog post on the website of the research project that: "I would like to have stated that we, coordinators of the witness project, already in May 2017, contacted the chairperson of the K.U.K.B. inviting him to cooperate."⁸ Apparently Steijlen understands 'cooperation' as sharing documents with researchers participating in a study that Pondaag did not trust to begin with. In fact, Pondaag does not remember that Steijlen used the word 'cooperation'.

⁸ See: <https://www.ind45-50.org/en/meeting-ppi-belanda-report>

3. Apartheid

Color-erasing racism

We expect centers of colonial studies and genocide studies to be places where scholarship on race and racism takes place, and where people are acutely aware of the different shapes racism takes, then and now. The fact that the racist underpinnings of colonial oppression are not a central part to the sub-studies and research questions is mind-boggling. We already mentioned this in point 9 of the attachment of the open letter, on which we have not yet received a response.

In relation to the Dutch violence between 1945-1949 Van Vree expressed an interest in the epistemology of denial (the Dutch denial of 1945-1949), meanwhile we observe another example of denial in relation to racism. During the discussion it became clear that the researchers involved are totally unaware of their own racial-social position. Van Vree and the other researchers did not demonstrate recognition of racist situations. We will call this racist phenomenon 'color erasing' (commonly referred to with the ableist term of 'colorblindness'). We observe this both in the outline of the study itself, and on the part of the research team on January 31. We will give some examples of the color-erasing racism that we experienced and witnessed.

First back to our introduction, there was the lack of awareness, or at least a silence, about the colonial space that post-colonial people were brought into at NIOD. With full knowledge about the space, there was no acknowledgment of any sensitivities until a person of color brought it up, at which point there was a tone of an 'interesting discussion'. The NIOD space was not interesting to the people of color there. It was painful. This is color-erasing racism.

Second, the comment about the personal psychological aftermath of colonial racism as expressed by Fia Hamid-Walker, a brown woman, was fully ignored, and her comment about the possible power differential between the Indonesian and Dutch teams was judgmentally dismissed. Both are examples of color-erasing racism. Those educated in issues of racism know that the classic statement of "we don't see race", or "race is not an issue", or "race dynamics and inequality are not an issue" are the clarion call of racism.

Third, Mariette Wolff commented that the exclusion of Pondaag at the exploratory meeting was because the meeting was only for "Dutch" umbrella organizations. This comment is upsetting enough for a study that claims inclusivity as well as equality of the Indonesian research team. It also betrays an unawareness of how this is experienced in terms of racism.

The exclusion of an influential Indonesian like Jeffry Pondaag does not match the claim that Indonesian perspectives are involved. The researchers cannot deny that the only organization based in the Netherlands that is representing Indonesian victims of war crimes,

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was not asked to take part in the Social Resonance Group. Pondaag as the chairman of K.U.K.B. was not invited to speak at the kick-off event of the research. This cannot be changed anymore. Various researchers may claim (in several opinion articles) to listen to 'the Indonesians', the program leaders may say that they see the Indonesian historians as equal partners, it is all meaningless as long as no one sees how racist it is that Jeffry Pondaag was ignored from the very first moment. Not seeing the problem of excluding Pondaag is another example of color-erasing racism. Nothing, not "we have non white researchers", or "we understand that colonialism was racist", or "we included Pondaag later" stands in defense of this. Involving a number of Indonesian researchers in sub-studies (whose names are still publicly unknown and who are not openly critical) cannot be an excuse for excluding a critical Indonesian voice such as Pondaag. Apart from the fact that Mrs. Pattipilohy has also been ignored so far, and often not addressed in the correspondence with the researchers as co-initiator of the open letter. That Pondaag during the second public meeting, after a long, difficult e-mail exchange, was given ten minutes time to talk cannot serve as an excuse for the fact that he was first excluded.

Finally, the researchers did not seem to be aware of the fact that the most important critics who sat at the table were non-white people, in contrast to themselves. Mrs. Pattipilohy was even present as the only Indonesian eyewitness of the period under investigation. Given the unequal relation in terms of representation, it should be unthinkable that the written response focuses on a 7-minute video of a white academic. This, too, is an example of not understanding, or not seeing, color-erasing racism. The extensive attention paid to the criticism of a white person is in stark contrast to the very short written response of the serious demands by Michael van Zeijl (De Grauwe Eeuw). For their part De Grauwe Eeuw contacted Van Vree and asked him for a more serious response. In fact the researchers in their written response only stated that Van Zeijl asked important questions "that will be treated in the research program." With this, his demands were not only reduced to suggestions, it is also incorrect. The topic that he addressed is not included in the research design and questions. In any case, ignoring his input as a non-white person (in contrast to the extensive reply of the questions that were asked by a white person) is an example of color-erasing racism. The same counts for not replying the video message of Fia Hamid-Walker, as well as the misinterpretation of Hadi Purnama's questions. We expect that all questions submitted by non-white persons will receive equal treatment.

Sexism

We have noticed that gender is not mentioned in the research design. (KNIL) soldiers were men, but that does not mean that women did not play a role when it comes to war and violence. Racism and sexism are closely related. Rape is a form of violence against women that often occurs during military actions. Further, the concepts of 'comfort women' and 'nyai's' were present in colonial society as well. Indonesian women also played an

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important role in the struggle for independence. If the research is really 'inclusive', including the Indonesian perspective, it is important to explicitly mention the fate and the role of women.

Unfortunately, on the basis of these examples, we must conclude that we have no confidence in the knowledge and skills of this research team when it comes to race, racism and related sexism.

Indonesian research team

In her video message Fia Hamid-Walker asked attention for the continuity in colonial attitudes and explained that many Indonesians are still inclined to look up to white people as a result of ages of colonialism. She called the Indonesian researchers "the brown faces with white masks," referring to Frantz Fanon.⁹ It was painful to see that Van Vree, a white man, was not able to show any kind of self-reflection, instead he judged her remark as derogatory to the Indonesian researchers. This indicates that Van Vree either does not understand the problem she was talking about or that he does not take the problem seriously. In fact, his reaction illustrates how 'divide and rule' works, whether he is aware of it or not. As a white man, he presents himself as the neutral center. Apparently he values the opinion of participating non-white researchers more than the opinion of the same people of color who have the courage to go against the dominant white vision. Van Vree seems to forget that his position is a dominant one, not in the last place because he has 4.1 million euros research money to spend. In this way he uses the differences among Indonesians to justify the research project.

In this context we would like to remind the researchers once again that no Indonesian was present during the kick-off of the research. Even the audience in the room noticed that it was strange that someone like Jeffry Pondaag (given his pioneering role) was not one of the speakers. Indonesians could not participate in the discussion to begin with because of the language barrier, the event was entirely in Dutch. Why was this reality denied during the roundtable discussion? Oostindie reversed the problem by saying that it took him one and a half year to get us around the table. The truth is that he deliberately chose to ignore Pondaag at the time. It is irreversible and undeniable that the research outline was realized without Indonesian input, the Indonesian researchers were only approached at a later stage. They are currently only involved in sub-studies. When we presented the open letter one month later Oostindie said that our objections were "too bizarre for words". He never made the effort to get in touch with us afterwards. The only reason that we were sitting around the table on January 31 was the long, difficult e-mail exchange between Jeffry Pondaag and Fridus Steijlen. (Note that only after a comment from

⁹ Video message Fia Hamid-Walker: <https://youtu.be/AvEekqynnZI>

Jeffry Pondaag: "The Netherlands never has good intentions; they just continued with all their knowledge about Jan Pieterszoon Coen - van Heutsz - Daendels - Colijn who became Prime Minister - Colonialism - Slavery - Robbery - Japanese and German occupation - Holocaust - Anne Frank - between 1945 and 1949 they waged another colonial war while Rotterdam was still ruined [after Nazi-Germany bombed the city in 1940]. "

Pondaag that Fridus Steijlen is not the project leader, Van Vree contacted him after which project coordinator Mariëtte Wolf took over the communication.)

Until today the precise nature of the cooperation between Dutch and Indonesian researchers is unclear. During the kick-off event the Dutch team framed the cooperation with the Indonesian historians as a very close one. A Dutch delegation of researchers, including Oostindie, traveled on several occasions to Yogyakarta to meet up with the Indonesian team. However, the Indonesian professor Bambang Purwanto in fact demanded an independent separate, Indonesian team. This is very confusing, because, what is it: A close cooperation or two completely separate projects? This is the contradiction of how the cooperation is being presented. On one hand the Indonesian team claims to be completely independent, while on the other hand the Dutch researchers talk about an exchange and the intention to publish joint articles. During the roundtable discussion Ireen Hoogenboom announced that the Indonesian researchers are currently working on their own website, which will be online soon, while the written response to the question from Lara Nuberg reads:

By organizing joint workshops the projects can inform each other, exchange sources, perspectives and ideas, discuss about sources, historiography and terminology. The Regional Studies group and the Indonesian project will publish an edited volume together. This volume will be published in Indonesian, English and Dutch. The Indonesian project will separately publish an Indonesian edited volume that we aim to translate too.

What is it? A cooperation or not? Further, we would like to know how the results of the Indonesian historians are going to be compared with the Dutch results, since perspectives may be different.

Subsequently, do the Dutch researchers have any idea why Bambang Purwanto demanded a separate, independent team? Is it possible that he did not fully agree with the Dutch research questions? And if so, on which points does he differ? What does he find relevant to investigate? And what does this say about the Eurocentric starting point of the research? It is quite telling that both Indonesian project leaders were not present during the kick-off event of the research. It is important to understand the hesitation on the side of the Indonesian researchers and where it comes from, what is behind it?

During the roundtable discussion, Jeffry Pondaag asked how much money the Indonesian team receives from the Netherlands. The written response only states that four PhD researchers will be paid according to Indonesian standards for three years. How much money is that exactly? Since the 4,1 million budget concerns taxpayer's money, it is important that there is clarity about this. Once again, we request that you reveal the names of the Indonesian historians and their universities, as well as the exact budget that has been given to them.

Including Indonesian perspectives

Van Vree says that he totally agrees with Michael Van Zeijl when he said that the Indonesian perspective deserves attention and that this perspective has been ignored in the Netherlands all this time. As proof that the researchers find the Indonesian perspective very important, Van Vree refers to the sub-study 'Regional Studies.' Remarkably, the argument 'listen to the Indonesians' often appears in opinion articles by participating researchers such as Anne-Lot Hoek, Martijn Eijckhoff¹⁰ and Remco Raben. The problem, however, is that the research design shows that the Dutch researchers did not listen to the Indonesians. The outline and research questions shows that the perspective of the oppressed is not the leading perspective. If the word victim is used, it is always to refer to the Dutch (-Indies) victims of the Bersiap, while the Indonesian victims are only called 'witnesses'.¹¹ Apart from the fact that the ignorance of critical Indonesian voices (such as those of Pondaag and Pattipilohy) shows that the Dutch team is not very open to Indonesian views in case they are opposing their views.

We do not understand what the three institutes want to do with 'the Indonesian perspective'. We argue that the victim perspective cannot exist alongside the perpetrator's perspective as if both are legitimate. Or, as Esther Captain suggested, that the roles are diffuse and interchangeable, sometimes victim, sometimes perpetrator. The Dutch colonial perspective needs to be removed. The Indonesian perspective as an additional 'extra' is impossible. In the written response on Annemarie Toebosch's questions, the researchers deny that they are 'leveling' Dutch and Indonesian violence. Yet, terms as 'multi-vocality' and 'multi-perspectivity' leave the impression that for the Dutch researchers all perspectives are equal and that different views may exist side by side. In our previous analysis of the Bersiap we have already explained in what way we think that the Dutch research team is guilty of 'leveling' when it comes to comparing colonial and anti-colonial violence. A simple denial of this is not a very convincing answer on the question about how the perspectives of the oppressed are valued. Esther Captain said that the history is not that black and white. This is a cliché. Asking for nuance is a typical colonial reflex and an example of 'leveling'. There is always a leading narrative in which perpetrator / victim roles can be clearly defined.

¹⁰ See: <https://historibersama.com/listen-to-the-indonesian-voices-nrc/>

¹¹ See, for example, the radio interview (Radio Een Vandaag, April 18, 2017) with Fridus Steijlen, the coordinator of the 'Witnesses and Contemporaries' sub-project and Dutch lawyer Liesbeth Zegveld. The latter finds it problematic when the Dutch research only refers to Indonesian victims as 'witnesses'. Steijlen replied: "this project is focusing on witnesses, there are also victims, but we want to hear the people that were involved as soldiers as well, which is another category, that is why we use a somewhat neutral term." After which Zegveld replied: "the term 'victims' does appear in the research, namely where it concerns the Bersiap period, thus where it concerns 'us' as Dutch, then the research uses the term 'victims', but when it concerns indigenous Indonesian people, they suddenly use 'witness'." <https://www.nporadio1.nl/radio-eenvandaag/onderwerpen/404822-onderzoek-dekolonisatie-nederlands-indie>

4. Alternative writer team synthesis

We demand that Gert Oostindie will be replaced. He is not qualified to write the synthesis. In point 3 of the attachment of the open letter we thoroughly listed the reasons for this. Below, briefly summarized, once again the most important reasons:

- He does not recognize the problematic outline of the research, he simply rejects our criticism as 'too bizarre for words';
- He does not speak Indonesian;
- He is not an Indonesian expert;
- He does not see the colonial tradition of violence as something that is part of the national history of the Netherlands. In his book 'Soldier in Indonesia' he writes that the Netherlands does not have a strong military culture and argues that from the beginning of the 20th century the Dutch were a neutral power;
- He makes (public) irresponsible statements such as: 'I just accidentally got involved in the subject,' 'there are bad but also good sides of colonialism,' 'Dutch war crimes must be understood in the context of that time: protecting the population, restoring order and peace', 'historians should not moralize', 'fortunately the Netherlands has not developed a tradition of postcolonial studies'.
- He has an outdated, positivistic view of history and denies his own subjectivity;

In short, we think that someone who does not understand how racism works, who 'levels' colonialism and slavery and who does not know what kind of responsibilities his privileges entail, is not qualified to write the summary of a study on colonial violence. We propose that an independent research team is going to write the synthesis, consisting of Dutch but mainly Indonesian researchers whose point of departure is a decolonial perspective. We are thinking of researchers like Rushdy Hoesein, Fia Hamid-Walker, Ady Setyawan, Yongky Gigih Prasisko, Jan Breman, Ewald van Vugt and Sandew Hira. The exact composition of the writing team is not fixed, yet it must be clear that those participating in the research cannot write the synthesis.

Jeffry Pondaag: "The Netherlands never has good intentions; they just continued with all their knowledge about Jan Pieterszoon Coen - van Heutsz - Daendels - Colijn who became Prime Minister - Colonialism - Slavery - Robbery - Japanese and German occupation - Holocaust - Anne Frank - between 1945 and 1949 they waged another colonial war while Rotterdam was still ruined [after Nazi-Germany bombed the city in 1940]. "

Conclusion

To conclude, we want to ask what the Dutch research team is going to do with our objections. The open letter was already sent in November 2017, but a year and a half later colonialism is still not the departing point of the research outline. Further, we would like to remind you that several questions from the open letter remain unanswered; they were also not addressed during the roundtable discussion. For example point 10 of the attachment regarding our suggestions for comparative research, point 12 that deals with the Dutch law of 1971, point 13 that raises the issue of the more than three thousand Dutch conscripts that refused military order and were put in jail. Let alone our serious objections against former lieutenant general M. de Kruif who is taking part in the Scientific Advisory Board. We will only be satisfied when the structure of this study is going to change. That is why we expect a clear answer to the question: is our criticism taken seriously and will 350 years of colonial exploitation get a prominent place in the research from now on?