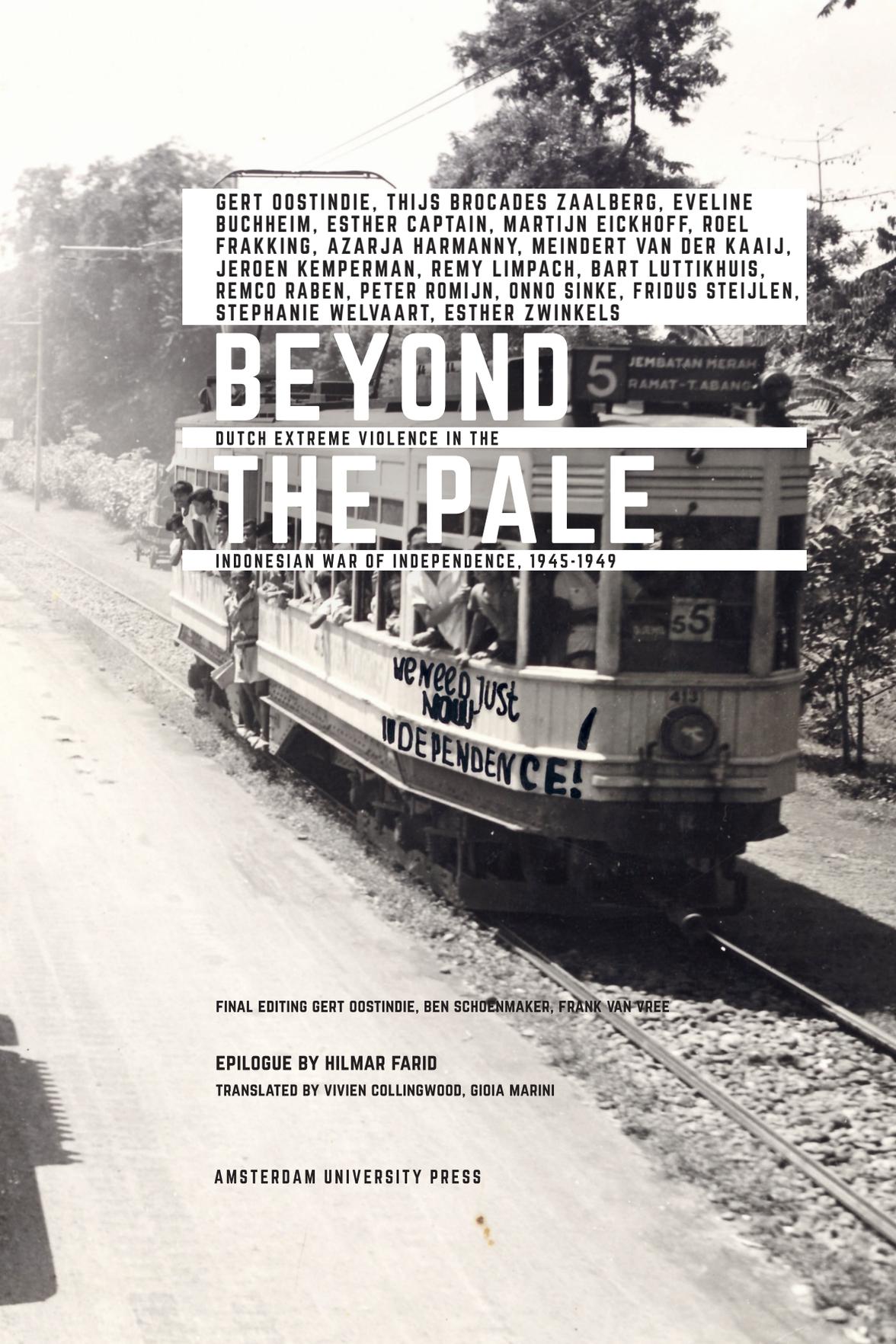


**BEYOND
THE PALE**



INDEPENDENCE, DECOLONIZATION,
VIOLENCE AND WAR IN
INDONESIA



GERT OOSTINDIE, THIJS BROCADES ZAALBERG, EVELINE
BUCHHEIM, ESTHER CAPTAIN, MARTIJN EICKHOFF, ROEL
FRAKKING, AZARJA HARMANNY, MEINDERT VAN DER KAAIJ,
JEROEN KEMPERMAN, REMY LIMPACH, BART LUTTIKHUIS,
REMCO RABEN, PETER ROMIJN, ONNO SINKE, FRIDUS STEIJLEN,
STEPHANIE WELVAART, ESTHER ZWINKELS

BEYOND

DUTCH EXTREME VIOLENCE IN THE

THE PALE

INDONESIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1945-1949

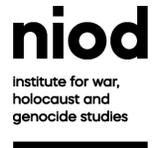
FINAL EDITING GERT OOSTINDIE, BEN SCHOENMAKER, FRANK VAN VREE

EPILOGUE BY HILMAR FARID

TRANSLATED BY VIVIEN COLLINGWOOD, GIOIA MARINI

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Cover image: *Wayang Perjuangan* or *Wayang Revolusi*, a variant of shadow play (*Wayang Kulit*), was used between 1946 and 1949 in a call to the people to defend Indonesian independence. In the image on the cover of this book, on the left we see General Simon Spoor, the commander of the Dutch land forces, and on the right we see Sukarno, the president of the Republic. In the *wayang* tradition, the figure on the left depicts the bad, losing party, and the figure on the right the good, victorious party. The *wayang* figures on the cover were created by Ki Ledjar Soebroto (1938-2017), a renowned *wayang* player and maker of *wayang* puppets. These puppets form part of the larger collection that he created for the exhibition *Wayang Revolusi* in Museum Bronbeek (2009).

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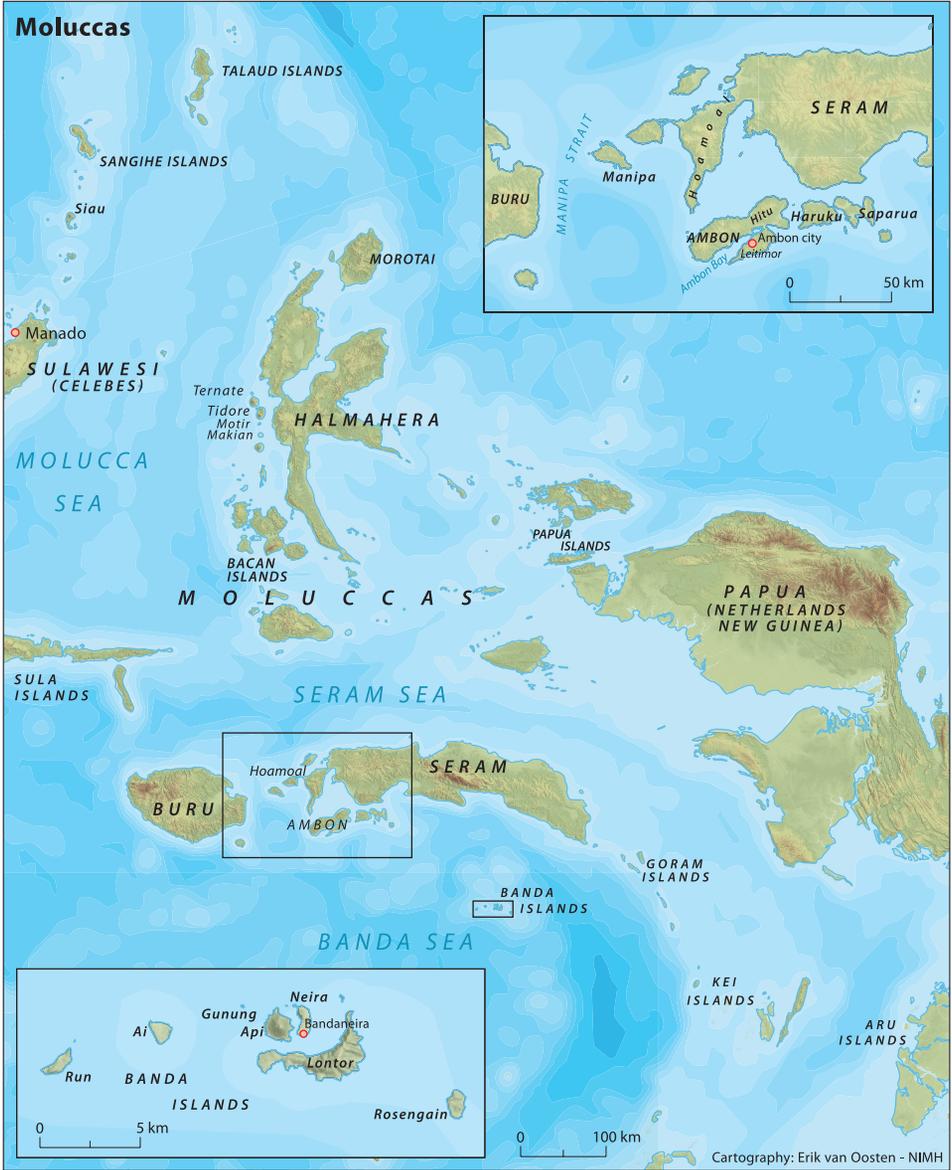
Map 1



Overview Map of Indonesia

Cartography: Erik van Oosten - NIMH

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I.

INTRODUCTION



I.

Background, guiding principles and methodology

GERT OOSTINDIE

Between 1945 and 1949, Indonesia defended its recently declared independence, and the Netherlands waged its last major colonial war.¹ Much is now known about this war, but a great deal has also remained unclear or contested. At the end of 2016, the second Rutte cabinet decided to finance a broad-based study – conducted by the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD² – on the Dutch military conduct during this conflict.³ This book presents the conclusions of that study. In this chapter, the background, guiding principles and methodology of the study will be explained.

THE WAR AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THE NETHERLANDS

On 17 August 1945, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia. Their proclamation of independence came two days after the Japanese capitulation, which had brought an end to the Second World War and paved the way for the departure of the Japanese occupation forces from Indonesia. The Japanese occupation, which had lasted three and a half years, had effectively brought an end to the Dutch East Indies in 1942. The Dutch government refused to accept Sukarno and Hatta's proclamation of

independence and initially sought to recolonize the archipelago – that is, to restore its colonial authority. From 1946, Dutch policy was geared towards a process of decolonization under the auspices of the Dutch government. This was made conditional upon a restoration of ‘calm and order’ – or, as a later wording put it, ‘order and peace’ – that had to be enforced by military means. It was for this reason that this process – which from the Dutch perspective was concluded on 27 December 1949 with the transfer of sovereignty – was characterized by not only protracted negotiations, but also bitter warfare. The war took a very unequal toll, as demonstrated by the fatalities documented by the Dutch armed forces: approximately 5,300 deaths on the Dutch side, of which half were the result of accidents or disease, compared to possibly 100,000 soldiers and civilians killed on the Indonesian side as a result of Dutch violence.⁴

The Dutch authorities justified the war as necessary for restoring calm and order. Hidden behind this justification were economic and geopolitical interests as well as a colonial sense of obligation to help the colony in its development. More specifically, the Republic was portrayed as nothing more than a Japanese fabrication, while the restoration of order was allegedly focused primarily on protecting the European population – and other groups affiliated with the colonial regime – from the revolutionary violence. By contrast, the Indonesian nationalists saw the return of the Dutch military and colonial administration as an act of aggression and an attempt to restore the colonial order. This remains the leading view in Indonesia, a view that comes in many variations. This period is seen by Indonesians as a Dutch attempt to ‘reoccupy’ and ‘recolonize’ the archipelago, and by the same token as the ‘defence of our independence’.

The Dutch government’s standpoint has since evolved from one of justifying its own policy to that of concluding that the Netherlands had stood ‘on the wrong side of history’ during these war years. With this statement, pronounced in 2005 by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot, the Dutch government ‘generously’ accepted the legitimacy of the proclamation of independence both ‘politically and morally’, reaffirming ‘earlier expressions of regret’. In his speech, Minister Bot described the entire history as ‘extremely bitter for everyone involved: for the Indo-Dutch community, for the Dutch soldiers, but first and foremost for the Indonesian population itself’. In doing so, he made a statement about the appropriateness – and implicitly also the legitimacy – of the Dutch decision to deploy military resources on a large scale.⁵

Bot was less explicit about the way in which the Dutch military had waged this war, even though he did say that ‘the separation of Indonesia from the Netherlands took longer and was accompanied by more military violence than was necessary’. In 2020 in Indonesia, King Willem-Alexander unequivocally offered excuses for the ‘excessive violence on the part of the Dutch’. He did not, however, make clear whether these excesses had been incidental or more structural in nature. The idea that these excesses were ‘merely’ incidents has been questioned for some time. Nonetheless, the government stance formulated in 1969 by Prime Minister Piet de Jong – which states that while regrettable ‘excesses’ did occur, ‘the armed forces as a whole acted correctly in Indonesia’ – to this day remains unrevised.⁶

The De Jong cabinet made this assessment on the basis of the ‘Memorandum on excesses’ (*Excessennota*), a government-commissioned survey of cases of excessive violence documented in the available archives — a survey that was not considered complete even by the government researchers who had worked on it. The memorandum had been written in much haste in reaction to revelations by war veteran Joop Hueting about crimes committed by Dutch soldiers – revelations that had caused considerable public and political commotion. Although new disclosures have since been made on a fairly regular basis and renewed publicity has been given to well-known cases, successive governments have never reconsidered this 1969 stance. Neither did these revelations lead to the prosecution of perpetrators of individual or collective acts of violence generally referred to as ‘excesses’ and ‘excessive violence’. Indeed, in 1971 the government even deliberately pressed for a statute of limitations for war crimes committed by its own armed forces in Indonesia.⁷ It was not until 2011 that a start was made on offering the victims serious reparations.

In the decades following 1969, the debate in the Netherlands was cursory, with short episodes of publicity in between long periods in which there was little public interest in the matter. One such episode of public attention occurred when the Dutch East Indies sections of Loe de Jong’s scholarly tome *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* [The Kingdom of the Netherlands during the Second World War] was published. De Jong, who was highly critical in his assessment of Dutch political and military policy, only agreed *not* to use the term ‘war crimes’ after coming under considerable pressure from veterans of the Indonesian war and their sympathizers. In 1995, Queen Beatrix’s state visit to Indonesia generated a new wave

of discussions. The visit prompted much publicity, including a startling TV documentary about Dutch atrocities in Rawagede. Well in advance of the state visit, Lower House Speaker Wim Deetman had called for a debate on the Dutch military action during the war against the Republic of Indonesia. His call fell on deaf ears, however, and once again there was silence. This silence was maintained until the second Balkenende cabinet made the aforementioned statements— through the mouthpiece of Bot — on the eve of the sixtieth anniversary of the 17th of August, Indonesia’s proclamation of independence.

The public silence was once again broken in 2011 when a ground-breaking court ruling was issued in response to civil claims over the massacre in Rawagede. The claims were submitted by Liesbeth Zegveld, a lawyer, on behalf of the Committee of Dutch Debts of Honour (*Stichting Comité Nederlandse Ereschulden*, which goes by the Indonesian acronym KUKB) chaired by Jeffry Pondaag. Although the State had initially invoked the statute of limitations, the district court of The Hague ruled in favour of the claimants, eight surviving relatives. The State subsequently decided to settle with the plaintiffs. The position taken by the State marked a break from the line it had previously taken, which essentially involved turning a blind eye or, when this was no longer possible, delaying or categorically denying the claims. In its response to the court’s verdict, the government openly apologized for several specific cases of extreme violence. From 2013, the State again paid reparations to Indonesian widows. These new claims — several dozen — dealt with the massacre perpetrated by the commandos under Captain Raymond Westerling in South Sulawesi with the support of other soldiers of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, KNIL) in late 1946 and early 1947. The State established a scheme to deal with similar cases of ‘summary executions’. These court cases ran into some snags, however, mostly due to the difficulty of the burden of proof laid upon the claimants so long after the event. Nonetheless, the State was no longer contesting the principle of liability for the crimes committed by Dutch soldiers between 1945 and 1949 in Indonesia. In 2015, the court ruled that this liability could be extended to the cases of the children of unlawfully executed Indonesian men. This ruling was not without consequences: since then, a civil-law arrangement for these children has also come into force. In addition, the KUKB has expanded its lawsuits — with some success — to cover other forms of extreme violence such as torture and rape.

These lawsuits have received much publicity. Moreover, the Dutch media have come forward with new revelations as well as more reporting on familiar cases. Journalists and documentary makers have played an important role in setting the agenda, which in turn has helped to prepare the ground within society for a broader study of this period in Dutch history. The academic world also began to contribute to the public debate on extreme violence in the war against the Republic; barring a few exceptions, this occurred remarkably late, as historian Stef Scagliola has noted.⁸ In the research and in the public debates, the emphasis has increasingly come to lie on questions regarding the nature and the frequency of — as well as the explanations for — actions that had previously been identified as ‘excesses’. More generally, the issue was raised of how to characterize a period that had long been referred to in the Netherlands as a period of ‘police actions’, but which was increasingly coming to be called a ‘war’.

It was in this context that the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD made their plea in mid-2012 for a study of the Dutch military action. The first Rutte cabinet refused to finance this study, a decision that the second Rutte cabinet initially upheld, reminding the institutes that they were free to conduct the study using their own resources. At the end of 2016, the government nevertheless indicated that it was willing to finance this research after all, referring to the recently published study *De brandende kampongs van generaal Spoor* [The Burning Kampongs of General Spoor] and its author Rémy Limpach’s harsh conclusions about the Dutch use of extreme violence.⁹ In September 2017, the four-year research programme *Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950* was launched, the main findings and conclusions of which are presented in this book. A series of books on the topics examined under this programme is being published at the same time.

FROM THE PLEA IN 2012 TO THE RESEARCH DESIGN IN 2017

On 19 June 2012, the directors of the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD wrote a plea published in the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant* advocating a study of the Dutch military violence in Indonesia.¹⁰ They argued that the study was necessary given the controversies and emotions evoked by the memories and interpretations of the violence of war – making the case for ‘the will to know’ (facts, insights, explanations) – and steered clear of making moral judgments within the ongoing debates. They maintained that a scholarly

analysis would lead to a better understanding of collective and individual conduct. At the same time, the institutes took pains not to create the illusion that such a comprehensive research project, to be conducted together with Indonesian historians, would offer the last word on the matter: 'This is, after all, historiography.'

While the plea was taken up by the media and the academic world, it gave rise to mixed reactions among Dutch politicians and was thereupon rejected by the government, as mentioned earlier. The three institutes nonetheless turned their plea into an initial research proposal that was sent to the relevant members of government, the chairpersons of the upper and lower houses of parliament and all the political parties represented in parliament.¹¹ Much of the contents of this first research proposal eventually found its way into the research design for which the second Rutte cabinet awarded funding at the beginning of 2017.¹²

The 2012 proposal contained four sub-projects, the largest of which was described as an 'empirical study to establish and analyse the use of force by Dutch troops in the years 1945 to 1950, understood in the broader context of the Indonesian Revolution from the proclamation and *bersiap* to the transfer of sovereignty and the dissolution of the KNIL'. A second project was to investigate 'whether and how violence subsequently led to investigations by the military, judicial and/or official bodies to establish facts and to interpret events', while a third project was to offer an explanation for the violence at the micro-level and in 'the broader context of the use of force in post-war decolonization processes in Asia'. A final project would address 'the public response to the Dutch military conduct in the period 1945-1950, both in the Netherlands and in Indonesia'. If we compare this first proposal with the research design approved by the government in February 2017 for which funding was obtained, it is clear that while the later design is more elaborate and has a broader scope, the central questions are essentially the same.

After the rejection of funding by the Rutte cabinet in 2012, the three institutes each continued with the research independently while also forming an informal lobby in The Hague. Then, in the first half of 2016, the political tide turned. It was in this context that the three institutes decided to revise and elaborate the 2012 research proposal. This led to an extensive research proposal that was shared with a consultation group of various government ministries. In the meantime, Foreign Minister Affairs Bert Koenders indicated that he wanted to revisit the initial rejection of the 2012 request. The

government's reaction to this new research proposal was positive. There were requests to clarify some points, which led to an expansion of the passages about the 'bersiap period' and the collaboration with Indonesian scientists, but the content was not changed in any substantial way.

In the ensuing months, the research proposal was further developed. The proposed collaboration with Indonesian colleagues took shape in a separate project called *Regional Studies*. At the request of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (vws), an extra project called *Witnesses & Contemporaries* was added in order to give those directly involved a voice with respect to the topic of the study. The arrangement between the government and the three institutes is explicitly not a commission but rather a co-financing arrangement.¹³ This means that, in accordance with the principles for independent research specified by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, KNAW), the public funding body neither interferes with the content nor is responsible for the execution and results of the research, while the researchers are bound only by procedural and financial accountability to the grant provider. Throughout the research project, this relationship was never called into question.

While gradual additions were thus made to the final research design, one element of the original research design was relegated to the background: the pursuit of 'an explanation of the violence at the micro-level', which at the time was thought to require a behavioural science approach, also with a view to ongoing and future military missions.¹⁴ Although this element of drawing lessons for the future remains relevant, we lacked the capacity and the expertise to explore this specific theme.

As mentioned above, this study aims to provide a descriptive analysis and explanation of Dutch military conduct in Indonesia, with considerable attention given to the historical, political and international context as well as to the aftermath of the war. More specifically, we consider the question whether the extreme violence of the Dutch armed forces was structural in nature and if so, why this occurred, who was responsible, and the extent to which people were held accountable for this violence at the time and later.

This line of questioning builds on previous research. In the years before 2012, and certainly in the ensuing years, an increasing number of studies were published – written, among others, by historians associated with the three institutes – that questioned the earlier views and especially the government position of 1969 regarding the incidental character of the 'exces-

sive force' used by the Dutch military on the basis of new research into the source material. Based on this historiography, a research plan was designed that included a series of studies aiming to explore key issues and address some important gaps in the existing knowledge:

- *Bersiap*: researched within the broader context of the dynamics of violence in the early days of the Indonesian Revolution.
- *Political-administrative context*: focused in particular on the question of how politics and government administration in the Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies/Indonesia dealt with information about the high level of violence during the war.
- *International political context*: what role did other countries play with respect to Dutch diplomatic and military policies and how did this affect the dynamics of the war?
- *Comparative research on decolonization wars*, with the aim of identifying similarities and unique characteristics.
- *Asymmetric warfare*: focused on the Dutch armed forces and the dynamics between these armed forces and the Indonesian army and other combat groups; divided into three sub-investigations: the Dutch intelligence and security services in the field; 'technical violence' (artillery and air forces); and military justice.
- *Regional studies*: a joint Indonesian-Dutch study of the context of the dynamics of violence in a number of selected Indonesian regions.
- *Societal aftermath*: the public and political processing of the war in the Netherlands to date.
- *Witnesses & Contemporaries*: This part of the research programme fulfils a different, more societal role. It is primarily designed to collect testimonies and egodocuments and thus to give more 'colour' and layering to the experiences and memories of those involved both then and now.

This book summarizes the most important results of the research. Part I outlines in three chapters and an interim conclusion the context in which the rest of the book can be understood; it is based on the historiography and therefore is a collation of mostly existing knowledge and insights. This is followed by an intermezzo that is based on the *Witnesses & Contemporaries* project, in which multiple perspectives are highlighted. In the second part, the results of the research programme are presented per project. In the final conclusion, the findings of the entire programme are brought together and

the main question is answered. The book concludes with an epilogue by the Indonesian historian Hilmar Farid.

ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

The research programme began on 1 September 2017. In the Netherlands, the research team consisted of researchers from the three institutes as well as a number of employees hired specifically for this programme.¹⁵ For the *Comparative Research* project, carried out in collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS-KNAW), six researchers (mostly foreign) were hired for a short period of time. The projects were divided among the institutes on the basis of their expertise. The entire research team came together regularly in a Programme Council. The three directors of the institutes were in charge of the research programme, supported by a coordinator. NIOD acted as the lead institute, and the director of NIOD was the chairman of the Programme Council.¹⁶

The Scientific Advisory Board and the Social Resonance Group ('Maatschappelijke Klankbordgroep') were regularly consulted. The committee scientifically assessed the research plan and results, providing particularly valuable comments on two draft versions of this final work.¹⁷ And we had intensive discussions with the Social Resonance Group about the expectations surrounding our research and the possible impact it would have on the groups most involved in this topic, such as the veterans of the Indonesian war and the Indo-Dutch and Moluccan communities. The public was periodically informed about the research design and about developments within the research through public forums – before the COVID crisis, that is – as well as via the programme website and a newsletter.

The plea in *de Volkskrant* in June 2012 stemmed from a conviction shared by the three institutes that thorough research was necessary to give Dutch society more clarity about the nature of the war, about extreme Dutch violence and about the actions of those involved, both during and after the war. Implicitly, the directors of the institutes were referring to a strongly felt need for a re-evaluation of the government position of 1969, but also more broadly for more critical reflection about the colonial past. Since then, this debate has not ceased. Our research programme made a modest contribution to that debate, but also became the object of it.

In 2012, bringing together these three institutes seemed the most suitable and promising way to spur the government into action. The KITLV

has a long tradition of conducting research on the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia, and NIOD of researching wars and mass violence in general but also specifically in Indonesia. Both institutes are part of the KNAW. The NIMH has a long track record of covering Dutch military history, including warfare in the colonies. The institute falls under the Ministry of Defence but operates under guarantees of scientific independence. The idea in 2012 was that this combination of three scientific institutes would carry sufficient weight in the societal debate and ultimately also among Dutch politicians.

But once the government decided to fund the research, the institutes faced criticism from several quarters. Part of that criticism entailed such questions as ‘Why is this only now being done?’. In a way, this criticism is justified. It is true that these institutes were also party to what is sometimes referred to as the tradition of remaining silent. This theme will be discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book.

The scientific independence, integrity and expertise of the three institutes and the research group have also been called into question. Generally speaking, it is difficult to respond to such accusations in a way that would satisfy everyone. We would merely point out that we work under the rules of scientific integrity as formulated by the KNAW. That is why it was contractually stipulated – and put into practice – that the government, as the funder, would have no influence on the content. As far as the expertise of the research team is concerned, we expect our publications to dispel those doubts. Regarding the composition of the team, it has been noted that the proportion of Indonesian researchers was small. While this is true, it does make sense given that the programme mainly asked questions about the Dutch role in the war.

A recurring reproach, made in particular by the KUKB, concerns the position of the NIMH.¹⁸ The claim that this institute, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Defence, is by definition unable to write critically about colonial warfare can easily be refuted: the NIMH, after all, was at the forefront of critical studies on the 1945-1949 war, even before 2017.¹⁹ Another objection is that the NIMH is playing incompatible roles by cooperating both in this research and in the investigation assessing the plausibility of claims by Indonesian victims of Dutch violence and their relatives. According to this accusation, the NIMH purports in its first role to contribute to impartial scientific research, while in its second role it ‘helps’ the government to refute the claims of the victims. This is simply not the case. The NIMH is

carrying out the historical verification investigation at the request of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence, based on its military-historical expertise. That investigation is conducted independently and in accordance with scientific standards. The researchers consult the relevant archives and literature available in the Netherlands and report on what can be found in those sources about the specific events mentioned in the claims and what other relevant background information those sources contain – nothing more than that. The findings are meant to inform all the parties involved as well as the court, which ultimately issues a ruling on the claims. Some of the submitted claims have in fact been granted partly on the basis of the results of this investigation.

The KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD are *Dutch* institutes. Although Indonesian and Dutch scholars have for decades been cooperating regularly and with often fruitful results, there has been no strong shared tradition of researching the history of the Indonesian Revolution and the war years of 1945 to 1949. After the fall of President Suharto in 1998, the scope for such cooperation grew, helped by the fact that researchers from both countries began meeting each other in wider international networks. This increased cooperation was evident in the NIOD programme *From the Indies to Indonesia* (2002-2008), in the KITLV's intensive contact with a large number of Indonesian academic institutions, and also in the successful collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch heritage institutions. On the basis of these experiences, therefore, the plea in *de Volkskrant* and the first research proposal from 2012 already included optimistic words about the importance of – and opportunities for – intensive bilateral cooperation.

The research design produced by the KITLV, the NIMH and NIOD envisaged the use of 'mirrored research' in which historians from both countries would study the same regions and episodes of the war from their own perspectives and on the basis of an exchange of sources in order to conduct a comparative analysis of the results. This was to be done in particular for the 'Bersiap' and 'Regional Studies' projects, and it was expected to lead to the 'co-creation' of new insights in which the usually separate national historiographies would come together.

However, discussions with the envisaged Indonesian parties about the effect of such an approach quickly led to a different direction being taken. The Indonesian researchers indicated that they wanted to pursue their own priorities and did not want to be guided solely by questions arising from the

Dutch perspective. Their questions were not primarily focused on Dutch violence itself but on various dimensions of the Indonesian Revolution, in particular its social impact. This research proved to be invaluable for a better understanding of the Indonesian experience of the Dutch military conduct. The Dutch researchers understood and appreciated their Indonesian colleagues' wish to pursue different paths. The collaboration thus led not only to a better understanding of the diversity of perspectives and priorities but also to a broadening of the content of the study, although the focus remained on the Dutch war violence.

One complicating factor was that reports in the Indonesian press and social media – fuelled in part by critics in the Netherlands – began to cast the research programme in an unfavourable light by depicting it as an attempt by the Dutch to cleanse their record. This led to opposition to the project within political and military circles.²⁰ It is possible that this was one of the reasons the Indonesian archives have remained largely closed to Dutch researchers. The wary attitude of the Indonesian authorities did not come as a complete surprise to us. In the run-up to the start of this study, and until shortly before the Rutte cabinet decided to finance the research, Indonesian diplomats had made clear to both the Dutch government and the three institutes that they had serious reservations in view of the possible strains the research could put on bilateral relations. Be that as it may, as a result of these limitations and the other priorities of our Indonesian colleagues, we have not conducted the research in the way we had planned. We have uncovered fewer sources on the dynamics of violence than originally envisaged, leaving questions unanswered – questions about Indonesian perceptions of Dutch war violence and their impact on Indonesians, as well as the dynamics of violence on the Indonesian side.

Another development played a role in all of this: the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This ongoing crisis not only meant that the archives in the Netherlands and Indonesia were closed for shorter or longer periods, bringing additional delays, but also that travel became virtually impossible. Visits to Indonesian archives, interviews, workshops and field research became practically impossible from March 2020. Thus, it was often a matter of seeking ways around problems, calling on local assistance and relying on digital consultation.

All this did not prevent the very diverse (in more ways than one) Indonesian and Dutch research groups from maintaining an intensive and cordial collaboration, as evidenced by the joint workshops and discussions and,

of course, the joint publications. The leading partner in Indonesia was the history programme at the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, and the research leader was Bambang Purwanto. The UGM subsequently involved historians from a number of other Indonesian universities in the research. The collaboration between Indonesian and Dutch researchers took shape mainly in the *Regional Studies* and *Witnesses & Contemporaries* projects, but there was also contact with researchers from other projects and various joint discussions about perspectives and terminology. The Indonesian-Dutch collaboration has led to joint English-language publications, but also publications released exclusively in Indonesian.

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE STUDY

Scientific research benefits from the greatest possible transparency and freedom, starting with the design of the research and the formulation of the leading questions. For this reason, considerable attention is paid, both in this introduction and on the programme website, to the history of how this study came about. What is of crucial importance here is that the content has always been under the control of the institutes and their scientific independence has been sufficiently guaranteed. The researchers wanted to be able to understand history untethered by the government's standpoint or other views within society. This is by no means to say that each individual researcher as well as the researchers as a group are completely free of blind spots and preconceptions.

Historical research does not take place in a social and political vacuum. Especially when a theme is perceived by society as being fraught, the writing of history requires critical reflection on the guiding principles and working methods of the researchers.²¹ Historians rarely promise to write 'the last word' or 'the truth' on a particular issue. This is not only due to the limited nature of available sources; it is because they realize that, over time, new interpretations of the past are constantly being developed – 'each generation writes its own history' – but also that these interpretations partly depend on the backgrounds and often very different perspectives of those who look at a certain facet of history, whether they are professional historians or not. In this sense, too, history is, in Pieter Geyl's famous words, a 'discussion without end'. None of which is to say that anything goes. The historian strives to create plausible interpretations of historical events – as open-mindedly as possible and on the basis of sound empirical research and a careful consideration of the arguments. Multiperspectivity and mul-

tiple voices are indispensable tools in this respect, because differences of opinion can shed light on clashing interests and on the conduct of historical figures.²²

To underline the importance of this, this book contains two contributions that challenge the reader to think about the diversity of perspectives. We asked Hilmar Farid, a respected Indonesian historian who had no involvement whatsoever with the programme, to reflect in an Epilogue on this primarily Dutch research and the resulting book. And the chapter that emerged from the *Witnesses & Contemporaries* project gives the reader a compelling picture of the diversity of perspectives.

As said earlier, recognition of this complexity does not absolve us of the duty to strive for objectivity by way of method. Historical research should be based on knowledge of the historiography and the careful use of sources, including in our case in-depth reflection on the limitations of – and ‘gaps’ in – the colonial source material. Such research should rest on a balanced processing of this source material, but it should also make explicit the historians’ own presuppositions and reasoning and do justice to all findings, even if new information conflicts with the researchers’ own assumptions and arguments. This also requires transparency with regard to the use of terminology, because interpretations are often already implied in the decision to use certain terms.

In recent years, a number of veterans of the Indonesian war and the very diverse Indo-Dutch community have criticized the alleged one-sidedness of this study, which they claim is manifested in an emphasis on a priori assumptions made about structurally excessive violence on the Dutch side as well the overlooking or condoning of Indonesian violence, in particular during the ‘bersiap period’. Conversely, there have been reproaches from other groups within society that too little attention has been paid to the inherently reprehensible and structurally violent nature of Dutch colonialism over the centuries, meaning that the study assumes a legitimizing tone rather than a critical one while also offering the Dutch government an excuse to withhold reparations to Indonesian victims. And finally, there was criticism about the ambitions and the reality of the Dutch-Indonesian collaboration within the study.

This criticism has been discussed both within the research group itself and with the Scientific Advisory Board, the Social Resonance Group, and a diverse group of external critics. This led to a deepening, clarification or reformulation of the study’s guiding principles in a number of areas. It turned

out that there were also differences of opinion within the research group itself. This is not surprising given the size and diversity of the team of researchers: about 25 in the Netherlands affiliated with three institutes with different traditions, another twelve in Indonesia spread over the archipelago, the six researchers from the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS), and finally at least a dozen temporary assistants. In short, it is inherent to such a large scientific study that different perspectives and priorities emerge. These differences cannot simply be identified as Indonesian versus Dutch: there were also differences in approach within the Dutch team, partly fuelled by the 'postcolonial debate' about colonialism within the Netherlands and abroad. Internal discussions forced all of us involved to critically examine our own working methods; they also helped us to make space for multiple perspectives and reminded us of the need to choose concepts and words carefully.

Below we discuss the most important conceptual issues, beginning with the question of when the Republic of Indonesia became a fact and the consequences this has for the classification of the period 1945-1949 and for the legitimization of Dutch warfare. Next, we consider what terminology is most suitable for analysing the nature of the war and in particular the Dutch military conduct. Finally, we discuss how we approached the set of terms commonly used in the Netherlands at the time.

LEGITIMIZATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE WAR

In both the historiography and the political and social debate, the Dutch return to the Indonesian archipelago after the Japanese capitulation and the legitimacy and nature of the Dutch military conduct have been judged in different ways. Indonesian historians – like many of their Dutch colleagues – reject the legality of pre-war colonialism and underline the legitimacy of Indonesians' independence from Dutch colonial rule and their struggle to defend it. They therefore qualify the actions of the Dutch from 1945 onwards as a 'reoccupation', a 'recolonization' and as 'aggression.' Nor is there room in this view for the term 'decolonization' as a description of the events of 1945-1949, because it suggests that the initiative lay with the colonizer to hand over sovereignty. As far as Indonesia is concerned, there is a broad consensus in this respect not only among historians but in the whole of Indonesian society and politics, even though different conclusions may be drawn on issues such as the

main driving forces in the process (the importance of armed struggle versus negotiations), the role of internal contradictions (regional, political, religious) and the significance of the first years of the war for the later development of the republic. This also explains the great interest in regional histories of the revolution.

On the Dutch side, there were – and still are – major differences in the interpretation of the war. These differences stem from changes in the way the Dutch look at their own colonial history in a broader sense.²³ During the colonial period, the legitimacy of the colonial system was only questioned by a small minority. It therefore comes as no surprise that between 1945 and 1949 the aim of restoring Dutch authority – including the deployment of military violence for that purpose – was regarded as legitimate, initially as an end in itself but gradually as a means to ensure that a decolonization process took place under Dutch auspices. It was only 60 years later, in 2005 – with Minister Bot's statement that the Netherlands had been 'on the wrong side of history' due to its large-scale deployment of military force – that the Dutch government for the first time explicitly sought to align itself with the Indonesian position regarding the legitimacy of the struggle for independence, a position that retroactively characterized the Dutch military actions as unjust. As mentioned, Bot spoke only in general terms about the way in which the Dutch armed forces had waged the war and did not go into the legitimacy of the colonialism that had preceded it.

A brief remark regarding the legitimacy of colonialism is needed here. In the immense literature on European colonialism, widely differing views about colonialism's intentions, function and effects have been defended. Historians have also paid much attention to differences between and within empires and between different periods. What is less controversial, however, is the assessment that colonialism was primarily driven by economic and geopolitical self-interest, that it was generally racist and paternalistic in nature – even in the later phase of 'ethical' policies in the Dutch East Indies – and that political repression and the exercise of violence were inherent to the colonial state. One of the guiding principles of this study is that the same holds true for Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. The Dutch colonial period, which in effect ended in 1942 with the Japanese occupation, is not the subject of this study, but this interpretation of colonialism did play an important role in our interpretation of Indonesian nationalism and the Dutch attempt after 1945 to reimpose their authority over the entire archipelago.

Colonial rule was considered legitimate by the Western states concerned as well as in the world order they dominated. Although in the interwar period and during the Second World War the relevant European states and certainly also the United States became somewhat more receptive to the resistance movements against the colonial order, and even though plans were devised for future decolonization, the premise continued to be that the colonial powers should determine the direction and pace of this process. This was no different for the Dutch position toward the Dutch East Indies, which is why Dutch politicians and large parts of the Dutch population considered a 'restoration' of the colonial order to be self-evident, whether or not as a 'phase' on the way to decolonization. What was overlooked or dismissed was that, since the 1920s, a nationalist movement had developed that had gained a massive following by 1945, despite all attempts to repress it. The underestimation and rejection of this Indonesian quest for independence proved to be a divisive issue in post-war Dutch politics – and also had the effect of hijacking the discussion about the level of violence during the war, long after 1949.

During the war and for many years afterwards, the dominant Indonesian and Dutch perspectives on this history differed significantly. This was most apparent in the discussions about dates and definitions. From the Indonesian perspective, the Dutch colonial period had already come to an end on 9 March 1942 with its capitulation to Japan, and the independent Republic of Indonesia was a *fait accompli* on 17 August 1945.²⁴ The return of the Dutch colonial administration and military was, from this point of view, an unlawful attempt to reoccupy or recolonize the archipelago, and the war was thus a conflict between two states in which the Netherlands acted as an aggressor on Indonesian territory. This perspective was accordingly made explicit in the title of our research programme by the addition of the term 'independence' – *Independence, Decolonization, War and Violence in Indonesia, 1945-1950* – at the suggestion of our Indonesian researchers.

Within Dutch politics, the opposite perspective was dominant: the Netherlands had not only the right but also the duty to restore 'order and peace' in the archipelago with the aim of reaching a new arrangement under Dutch auspices. From this perspective, 27 December 1949 was the decisive moment in the decolonization process because it was the day on which the Kingdom of the Netherlands transferred sovereignty over the entire archipelago – with the exception of West New Guinea – to the United States of Indonesia, which needed to remain tied to the Kingdom of the Netherlands through a Union.²⁵

In recent decades, the Dutch political position has gradually shifted in the direction of the official Indonesian narrative. The categorical rejection of the *proklamasi* of 17 August has reluctantly been turned into an effective recognition – known in the jargon as a *de facto* recognition – of that date as the founding date of the Republic. The Dutch government has always argued that a formal legal – i.e., *de jure* – recognition is not possible on a retroactive basis or that it would in any case be an anachronism. By this reasoning, what the Dutch government can do is recognize that the proclamation and thus the ambitions of 17 August *should* have been recognized, but it cannot undo the fact that this did not happen at the time.

In summary, the Indonesian and Dutch views on the legitimacy of the war were diametrically opposed to each other. The choice to designate 17 August 1945 or 27 December 1949 as the day that Indonesia became independent was at the time, therefore, one that was heavily politically charged, with immediate repercussions for the characterization of the war. In the case of 17 August 1945, a war took place on Indonesian territory between two sovereign states whereby the Netherlands was the aggressor. In the case of 27 December 1949, one could describe the conflict as police actions against an armed rebellion or as a traditional colonial war such as had frequently been waged in the past in the Dutch East Indies, but this time on a larger scale and with a different outcome. As historians, we do not make a choice between the two views. What is relevant for us is the knowledge that 17 August 1945 was the starting shot for two partly opposing processes of state formation in the archipelago, with the Republic seeking to construct an independent unitary state and the Dutch and Dutch East Indies governments pursuing a federal state with strong ties to the Netherlands – all of which resulted in a bloody war.

The *de facto* Dutch recognition of 17 August 1945 implied a break with the framing of the war in terms of ‘police actions’ undertaken in its own colonial territory. This point of view invoked an international legal order that at the time was still mainly dominated by the Western – generally colonial – countries. At the same time, the Dutch view was already contested during the war, not only by the Republic but also by other countries, including some in the Security Council of the United Nations. Nonetheless, the vast majority of states did not recognize Indonesia until after 27 December 1949, while its accession to the United Nations came only on 28 September 1950.

Indonesians usually refer to this period in history simply as the *Revolusi Nasional*, which implies a struggle against the Netherlands in defence of the independence already achieved on 17 August 1945. The two so called ‘police actions’ are consequently referred to as *Agresi Militer Belanda 1* and *Agresi Militer Belanda 2*. In the recent Dutch historiography, the misleading term ‘police actions’ to designate the years 1945-1949 has been replaced by the term ‘war’, used in compound phrases such as ‘war of independence’, ‘decolonization war’, ‘colonial war’ as well as ‘Indonesian war’ and ‘Dutch-Indonesian war’. There is something to be said for all these terms. When one speaks of a ‘decolonization war’, the emphasis is more on the struggle as part of a process that also includes the political negotiations concluded at the end of 1949, or one is referring to international debates where the term is commonly used. In choosing to use the term ‘war of independence’ – also referred to in Indonesian as ‘freedom war’ in addition to ‘national revolution’ – the emphasis is placed more on ‘1945’ and the Indonesian war of defence against the Dutch ‘recolonization’ in the ensuing years. There are good arguments for both choices, and they do not necessarily contradict each other. Our preference for the term ‘war of independence’ does justice to the Indonesian perspective and is in line with the broader use of this term for similar historical events – for example, in relation to both the American and the Dutch wars of independence.

ANALYTICAL TERMS AND (COLONIAL) LANGUAGE

In terms of the nature of the Dutch military conduct, the government’s position from 1969 officially still stands, namely that the armed forces as a rule behaved ‘correctly’ and that although there were regrettable ‘excesses’ – incidents, in other words – there was ‘no question of systematic cruelty’. On the basis of research that has since been carried out into the nature and extent of the Dutch violence, this position is rarely endorsed by historians anymore. More and more evidence has been documented that the extreme Dutch violence was widespread and was of a structural and/or systematic nature. That the Dutch government now sees cause to reconsider this, too, is evident from its decision to fund this research project and from its explanation for that decision, which alluded to the firm conclusions reached by Limpach about the extreme violence perpetrated by the Dutch.

The current debate therefore focuses mainly on the question of whether this violence should be labelled as structural and/or systematic – instead of

incidental – and why it happened. We agree with the way in which these terms are used in the historiography in the sense that the difference between structural and systematic is not a question of quantity or frequency but rather a question of intention. The systematic deployment of extreme violence occurs intentionally – that is, by order or with the approval of the senior military and political leadership – while the structural use of extreme violence involves (tacit) tolerance or indifference. In Chapter 3, we consider this historiography in further detail. In the interim conclusions included at the end of Part I, we recap how we define a number of key concepts, explain the focus of the sub-projects, and outline how we use the term ‘extreme violence’ in this study.

The question of *how* the Netherlands waged the war can be decoupled from the question of the legitimacy of the war. Looking back, experts also reach different conclusions on the question of which legal rules and norms should be applied to the war. In the lawsuit filed against the Dutch state by the KUKB, the claimants use the legal framework derived from the Dutch standpoint, in which the Dutch armed forces perpetrated violence against Dutch subjects and not against the citizens of a sovereign state of Indonesia. The question of the applicability of international humanitarian law is not easy to answer, given the different viewpoints concerning the characterization of the war, and also because it was precisely this area of law that was very much in development during this period. There are, however, powerful arguments for the view that the core rules of international humanitarian law were already applicable during the conflict – or in any case were declared applicable by the Netherlands²⁶ – and that many of the actions that we, following the lead of many scholars, categorize as ‘extreme violence’ were at odds with these rules, just as much of the extreme violence was in conflict with national law. Taking a legal-theoretical approach to the question of the nature of the violence is not the most obvious course for a historical study. What is more important to us is to establish what normative and legal framework the Dutch political and military authorities themselves used in the period 1945-1949 to assess what forms of violence were permissible or not. What rules of conduct did they impose on the soldiers? And to what extent were these rules upheld? Another question that we encountered in the course of the research is how individual soldiers reflected on their own sense of justice about the use of violence and in particular the extreme forms of violence. Did they feel there was a clear threshold between what was and was not acceptable?²⁷

It is not only words such as ‘war’ and ‘police actions’ that are loaded with often implicit meanings; this holds true for many terms — especially in relation to the colonial past. Terminology matters. This study tries to distance itself from the often-implicit assumptions and judgments embedded in the word usage of the past, because these words were steeped in a specific colonial perspective and lay at the root of a one-sided framing. Dutch-language sources often barely distinguish between different groups of adversaries. In addition to quite neutral terms such as ‘the enemy’ and ‘freedom fighters’, the Dutch documents primarily use characterizations such as ‘terrorists’, ‘extremists’, ‘bandits’, *rampokkers* and ‘gangs’, thus essentially disqualifying every incidence of armed resistance as criminal and depicting enemy forces in such a way as to encourage the use of violence against them. This study avoids loaded descriptions such as these, but does so without lapsing into disingenuous language as regards Indonesian acts of violence.

The misleading term ‘police actions’ is only used as a historical term for the two specific military operations (Operation Product and Operation Kraai) and is mirrored by the use of the terms *Agresi Militer Belanda 1* and *2*. And in referring to the Indonesian archipelago, we generally use the term ‘Indonesia’, certainly when referring to the period after the capitulation of Japan. From a strictly legal perspective, this is an anachronism. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that this term had been widely used since the late nineteenth century and that even the Dutch authorities had begun to use it from 1948, for example in their aim to bring about a United States of Indonesia and in their changing of the ‘I’ in KNIL from ‘Indies’ to ‘Indonesian’.

The designation and spelling of Indonesian names and locations are not neutral, either. We chose to use the contemporary Indonesian designations and spelling instead of the colonial terms, except in the obvious case of citations. Terms such as ‘Batavia’ or ‘the East Indies government’ are only used to indicate the colonial context.

THE INDONESIAN VIOLENCE AND BERSIAP

This study focuses on questions concerning *Dutch* violence and not Indonesian violence. The intra-Indonesian violence that was an inherent part of the process of state-building during the Indonesian Revolution is discussed only briefly, while in the Dutch source material it is referred to frequently, partly as a trigger and sometimes an excuse for Dutch violence.

In the Indonesian historiography and above all in public perception

(schoolbooks, museums, media), the armed struggle against the Netherlands – and also against the Japanese and British troops – is characterized as justified, collective and also often as heroic. At the national level, little attention is given to Indonesian victimhood. The entire period is often simply referred to as the Indonesian Revolution, which both emphasizes that independence was a historical fact on 17 August 1945 and evokes an image of social transformation. The fact that extreme violence also occurred on the Indonesian side is not denied, but this has thus far not played a major role in the Indonesian historiography. The emphasis lies on the legitimate nature of the struggle against what is described as Dutch aggression. This emphasis is reflected in the way that not only the guerrilla war but also the battles such as in Surabaya, Semarang and Ambarawa are showcased. Themes such as violence against the (Indo-)Europeans, the Chinese and other communities and individuals suspected of collaborating with the Dutch did not play a major role in the official narrative. The same holds for a theme such as *bersiap*, which has only recently begun to receive explicit attention.²⁸

In the Dutch government's letter informing the lower house of its intention to finance this research study, explicit reference was made to the Indonesian violence that was a part of 'the difficult context in which Dutch soldiers had to operate'. In this context, the government also pointed to 'the suffering of the victims of "*bersiap*" as well as their families'.²⁹ The violence during *bersiap* has been described by previous researchers and also in the memoirs of those who were involved, and we have continued this research. This is significant because during this violent period, thousands of – primarily (Indies) Dutch and Chinese people became the victims of extreme violence and because it was an episode that had long-lasting repercussions that received little attention for a long time, including in the Netherlands. This research is important also because the impact of this period may have influenced the way in which the Dutch armed forces perceived and fought against the opponent. In our research on *bersiap*, we have explicitly sought to take a broader perspective and to encompass all the victims of the 'spiral of violence', focusing on a comprehensive analysis of culpability and motives. We have also explored the significance given to this violence from the Dutch perspective, both at the time and later.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

From the very beginning, the three institutes have indicated that the research seeks to understand, analyse and explain the Dutch war violence in

a broader context. The goal is not to deliver political, moral or legal judgments. It was our implicit intention to contribute to not only the scholarly debates, but also to the reflection taking place within society on this dramatic episode in Dutch colonial history.

The conclusions of this research support the views that have been articulated in recent years by an increasing number of historians, namely that the Dutch armed forces resorted to extreme violence not on an incidental basis, but rather on a structural basis. The official line of 1969 does not square with what we now know. This immediately raises questions about the responsibility of the military command and more importantly about political responsibility – prior to and during the war but also in the period thereafter when, as will become clear, the policies adopted were seldom aimed at ‘establishing the truth’. We return to this point in Part III and in the Conclusions of this book.