

6

Daily Life

The images traditionally associated with war are of fierce battles, bombardments and troops marching. While the Indonesian war of independence was very much that kind of a war, after a while people resumed their daily lives and focused on the future, albeit an uncertain one. That applied to both Indonesian and Dutch soldiers and civilians. They went to work or school, held parties, fell in love and got married. They did their shopping in the *pasar* (markets) and prayed in the mosque, temple or church. Christmas, Saint Nicholas and Ramadan continued to be celebrated.

Even so, the war was never far away. The need to maintain morale was a constant throughout the war. However, as this selection makes clear, the approach taken differed. People varied too in their views on the future of Indonesia. While the Netherlands tried to maintain some kind of colonial or postcolonial relationship any way it could, a new era started for Indonesia that was geared to independence.

The focus in this theme is on everyday life during the war. The selection shows what this meant in practice for freedom fighters, schoolchildren, government officials, nurses and soldiers, and how they experienced the war when away from the fighting. These sources show that war and life are two sides of the same coin, certainly in 1945–1949.

6.1 Our Hearts are With Them

The National Effort for Welfare in the East Indies (*Nationale Inspanning Welzijnsverzorging Indië*, NIWIN) was a charity for the welfare of the Dutch troops in Indonesia. With its slogan ‘Our hearts are with them’, the organization offered the soldiers moral support, for example by sending Christmas packages with luxury items such as cigarettes and chocolate. It was expensive sending such packages given the shortages and austerity of the post-war period, so donations were needed. The packages were intended to boost the morale of the Dutch troops stationed so far from home and give them a touch of the Netherlands. Pre-addressed cards were sent with the packages so that the soldiers could thank the home front personally.



‘Aan onze mannen en vrouwen in Indië’. Poster for the Christmas package campaign of Nationale Inspanning Welzijnsverzorging Indië (NIWIN). c. 1946. Printer: Intenso, Amsterdam. Dimensions: 75.5 x 107.5 cm. Or. 27.433.

6.2 Invisible Danger

This army information service (*Legervoorlichtingsdienst*) poster illustrates the risks that Dutch soldiers encountered in the tropics. It was not just the war that presented a danger but also the unfamiliar surroundings and the tropical climate. In addition to instructions on hygiene and warnings about sexually transmitted diseases, the information service also called attention to protection against disease. The dark-blue background in this poster promoting vaccination suggests the night with all the invisible dangers it brings. A large mosquito is portrayed prominently, representing the risk of malaria, a dangerous disease that could be fatal.



'Ziekten maken meer slachtoffers dan kogels, bescherm uzelf door inenting'.
Poster for the Legervoorlichtingsdienst, The Hague. c. 1946. Design: Art Studio.
Dimensions: 55 x 80 cm. Or. 27.011-24.

6.3 Colonial Tourism

W.M. van der Leeuw was captain of the Infantry of Special Forces. In 1947, he took part in the *Agresi Militer Belanda II*, the military campaign known in the Netherlands as the Second Military Action. In between the skirmishes, there was time for everyday activities. That included visits to Indonesia's tourist attractions. Here, we see Van der Leeuw in the final year of the war at Borobudur (Central Java), the largest Buddhist temple in the world. The soldiers are posing next to centuries-old statues. They are clearly enjoying themselves: the caption under one of the photos says "Beer!" (Bier!).



Dutch soldiers visiting the Borobudur. Central Java, June 1949. Photographs taken by W.M. van der Leeuw. Or. 27.764, album 4, page 21, 24 and 25.

6.4 Wartime Romance

The Dutch East Indies had a long history of intimate relations between Dutch men and Indonesian women. Relatively little is known about the role of women in the Indonesian war of independence. However, Indonesian women and girls certainly played an important part in the daily lives of Dutch soldiers. They were often employed cleaning and doing the washing in and around barracks, as a *baboe* (maidservant) or *kokkie* (cook). Most Dutch soldiers first came into contact with the local Indonesian women in this domestic context. The result was mixed-ethnic relationships but also an increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and sexual violence.



A.J. Bos, a soldier in the Dutch army, with an Indonesian woman in the camp at Banjar in Ciamis. West Java, 1948-1949. Photograph taken by A.J. Bos. KITLV A1179, KITLV 401970.

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Joop Krijnen, a soldier in the Dutch army, with an Indonesian woman in the camp in the barracks in Bandung. West Java, 1949. Photograph taken by A.J. Bos. KITLV A1180, KITLV 402096.

6.5 Unity in Struggle

This drawing conveys the message that all members of Indonesian society can contribute to the struggle for freedom. The text “*Marilah mendjamin makanan Pahlawan² kita*” (Let’s guarantee the availability of food for our heroes) is a call to Indonesian families to provide food to Indonesian fighters, who are portrayed as disciplined and having a clear combat strategy. The message of this poster is: do help Indonesian soldiers to carry out their duty to protect Indonesia. Indonesian families are encouraged to contribute to the Indonesian fight for independence by providing food and other necessities. The smiling Indonesian soldier symbolizes the unity between the people and the army – between the backline and the frontline.



‘Marilah mendjamin makanan Pahlawan² kita’. Indonesian propaganda poster, signed in print by So[e]pon, distributed by S.M.N.U.P., bag. c. 1945-1947. Kesenian [art section]. Or. 27.740-5.

6.6 A Thousand Books and Grenades (interview)

During the colonial period, Mr Sosrosuwarno attended a Dutch Native School (*Hollands Inlandse School*, HIS). But it was at home where he learned about the distinction between *Indisch* history – which focused on the Netherlands – and Indonesian history. He was also a keen reader from a young age of the works of Multatuli, a famous Dutch author of the nineteenth century who criticized Dutch colonialism. The capitulation of the Dutch East Indies after the Japanese invasion made a deep impression on Mr Sosrosuwarno. It seemed the Dutch were not as invincible as the schoolbooks said. He galvanized young people for the independence cause by pointing them to the work of Indonesian intellectuals such as Sukarno and Sjahrir. During the war of independence, Sosrosuwarno started his studies at a recently founded Indonesian university. He also joined *Laskar Kere*, the student troops of the Republic of Indonesia. Armed with Japanese weapons, they fought the British army's Gurkha troops between Solo and Semarang. Mr Sosrosuwarno talks about how he combined fighting and his university studies.



Group portrait of Indonesian freedom fighters. Java, 1948-49. Photographer unknown. KITLV 14040.

TRANSCRIPTION

I: "You must pretty much have stopped going to school?"

S: "Well, after we fought at the front we went back to school. We got the lesson material we had to catch up with from our classmates. When we were at the front, we took our books with us to study. You had to make the best of a bad job! When I was wounded, I got a hero's welcome. I began to write with my left hand: I thought perhaps I'd lose my right hand."

I: "How did you get involved in that fighting?"

S: "*Laskar Kere* was in Salatiga and I went there. I wanted to join the fighting. One of our teachers spent the whole night trying to persuade me not to. 'Don't join the fighting, young man, carry on with your studies. Because you're our country's future.' But I was determined to join the fighting. So then I got a lift with a truck to Salatiga and I joined *Laskar Kere*. I'd never fired a shot with a gun in my life before. I shot at Gurkhas for the first time in one of the battles there – in Tuntang. Over time, I got better and better and better at it."

| Interview with Mr S. (Suhendro) Sosrosuwarno. SMGI 1466.2 (4). Hilversum, 1999.

6.7 Red, White and Blue? (interview)

The dividing lines in the colonial hierarchy were based not just on ethnicity, class, gender and rank but also religion. Like the Moluccas, Papua and the Sunda Islands, North Sulawesi had been converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century as part of the civilizing offensive. Thanks to the work of the missionaries, a relatively large proportion of the population in Manado in North Sulawesi felt an affinity with the Netherlands. The mother of Mrs Fransz-Rompis, from Manado, secretly kept the Dutch tricolour during the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies. Like her mother, Mrs Fransz-Rompis felt no bond with the Indonesian fight for freedom that flared up after the occupation. Her father, on the other hand, was a convinced nationalist. During the war of independence, she worked as a nurse in a military hospital near Manado. That was where she met her husband, an *Indisch*-European man serving as a conscript in the Dutch army. She talks about their wedding day, which was during the final phase in the decolonization of Indonesia.



‘Groet uit Menado’. Sulawesi, c. 1900. Publisher: K.D Que, Manado. Postcard. KITLV 1403508.

TRANSCRIPTION

F-R: "We defended our tricolour so hard when the Japs were there during the Second World War; we shed tears when we heard the *Wilhelmus* [Dutch national anthem]. We would only bow to that [Dutch] flag."

I: "Did you feel an affinity with that?"

F-R: "Involved, yes. Yes. I had – and I'm sorry to my Indonesian family to have to say this – I didn't have any nationalistic feelings. No *merah-putih* [red and white] feeling.

When we got married, our tent was pelted by *merah-putih* fanatics. They didn't want that Indo, that *Belanda* in their village. They were basically rabble-rousers. They wanted nothing to do with my husband. Could that be why he became an even more enthusiastic supporter of the Dutch regime? It's possible. I just want to mention that it was still so heated then. It was 1948. If the Indonesian national anthem was played, he would shut himself away. It meant nothing to me. But it didn't affect me either. Dutch? Yes, he was an *Indisch* Dutchman. But so loyal to the flag. That's why we opted for repatriation. If you can call it that. It was repatriation for him, even if we didn't know the country [the Netherlands]."

6.8 Postcolonial Outsider (interview)

Mr A.'s grandparents on his mother's side had African fathers. Mr A.'s mother died shortly after the war of independence broke out, and his uncle became his guardian. This uncle worked for a Dutch forestry company in Balikpapan until 1949, and that was where Mr A. went to school. He was in a class with Javanese children whose parents worked for the Anglo-Dutch oil company Royal Dutch Shell. His classmates wanted to know what 'side' Mr A., who was not much interested in politics, stood on. This meant that the war of independence crept into the classroom even though Balikpapan was not the scene of any fighting at that point. After the handover of sovereignty, the whole family was 'repatriated' to the Netherlands. Mr A. and his family settled in Het Gooi where once again he was confronted with his background as a *Belanda Hitam* or 'black Dutchman'. Mr A. went on to become a teacher.



People waving goodbye on the quayside, probably in the port of Balikpapan. Kalimantan, c. 1935. Photographer unknown. KITLV 172834.

TRANSCRIPTION

I: "Did you see anything of the police actions?"

A: "We were in Balikpapan when it got nasty. We noticed it a lot with the Indonesian boys at our school. They were basically already nationalists. Then you get them asking me again and again, 'What are you actually? You're a black Dutch boy, you don't belong anywhere.' That's what those young men, those communist youths said. They were very bright lads, you know, at our school, Javanese boys. It was a repetition of what I went through years ago. And I didn't like it actually, because it made me confused again. Because I couldn't discuss it with anyone. I wasn't the kind of person to talk easily to others about what I was going through. That wasn't normal back then. I found it very difficult. Then I came to the Netherlands and I got to hear the same story all over again. That 'Weird, you people coming here' response."

I: "You never really belonged?"

A: "Exactly. I had that feeling for a very long time. I still have it now. But now I think: let them talk. Whatever. I just go my own way. I've already proved myself."

| Anonymized interview with Mr A. SMGI 1140.1 (9), 1997.

