

Images of the Indonesian War of Independence

Perang Kemerdekaan Indonesia dalam Gambar

BEELDEN VAN DE INDONESISCHE
ONAFHANKELIJKHEIDSOORLOG

1945-1949



LEIDEN PUBLICATIONS

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1945-1949

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About the cover

MUHAMMAD YUANDA ZARA

This image is a representation of a *jinn* (genie) from the story in *A Thousand and One Nights* in which Aladdin obtains a lamp containing a genie who fulfils all the wishes of the Arab prince. In the poster, the genie is represented as a means to achieve Dutch imperial domination, as indicated by the Dutch flag. The person in green clothes who rides the genie represents the Dutch capitalists who benefited from Indonesian plantations. At first sight, the hat the Dutch planter is wearing seems like a military helmet, but a closer look shows that it can be identified as a *topi mandor*, an overseer's hat. This headgear was usually worn by native foremen who supervised native workers on European plantations, and who could punish them at will. The green colour of the hat is intended to signal the desire of the Dutch capitalists and the Dutch army to jointly regain control of Indonesia, if necessary by the use of violence and terror.



‘Flying Dutchman’. One of a set of 13 sheets of original Indonesian drawings used as designs for propaganda posters. C.1947. Watercolour on stiff paper. Or. 27.649.

Preface

This catalogue was published to accompany the exhibition *Images of the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-1949* in Leiden University Library. This exhibition displays a selection of the material in the library's Special Collections, including a large number of objects from the collections of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV-KNAW). The exhibition features a diverse range of sources, from posters and drawings to photographs, and from first-hand personal accounts on paper or in recorded interviews to documents with a more official status produced by the belligerent parties. The exhibition is divided into six themes. Exceptional examples of the various sources have been selected for each theme. Together, they form an impression of that theme from a range of perspectives.

KITLV and Leiden University Library came up with the idea for the exhibition, in part to tie in with the publication of the results of the study 'Independence, Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945-1950' (<https://www.ind45-50.org/en>). This research programme was funded by the Dutch government and carried out by KITLV, the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH) and NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

The research for the exhibition itself was carried out by three Master's students – Sander van der Horst, Linde Lammers and Melle van Maanen – all three interns at KITLV who were seconded to the library. They were supervised by Gert Oostindie (KITLV) and Doris Jedamski, Anouk Mansfeld and Jef Schaepe (Leiden University Library). Unless specified otherwise, all the texts in this catalogue were written by them. A significant addition to the team in a later stage of the research was Muhammad Yuanda Zara. He is an alumnus of Leiden University (MA) and the University of Amsterdam (PhD) and now works at Yogyakarta State University as a historian. He is responsible for the introduction and the texts describing the Indonesian-language pamphlets. We also thank Esther Captain, Marije Plomp and Fridus Steijlen for their gentle advice.

- ★ The reader should note that the Dutch and Indonesian quotes were transcribed (before translation) from the original documents without alterations, aside from occasional changes in punctuation, the use of capitals and obvious typographical errors. Elsewhere, the modern Indonesian spelling has been used for the names of people and geographical locations.

Images of the Indonesian War of Independence, 1945-1949

GERT OOSTINDIE

On 17 August 1945, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia. On 27 December 1949, the Netherlands handed over sovereignty. These two events were separated by more than four years of extremely difficult negotiations and bitter warfare. In Indonesia, this period is known as the Indonesian Revolution, a time in which the country's independence was defended against the former colonial power and a new state was created. In the Netherlands, the former colonial power in question, the whole period was for a long time referred to using the euphemism 'police actions'. In recent years, it has been termed a 'war': the Dutch government spoke in 2005 of a "war on the wrong side of history". There is no question that it was a war, with a huge disparity in the numbers of victims on the two sides. The Indonesians suffered more than 100,000 fatalities, both combatants and civilians, while the Dutch army lost about 5,000, roughly one third of whom were Indonesian troops.

Not only were there big differences in casualty numbers, but there was also a sharp contrast in opinions on the legitimacy of the Proclamation (*Proklamasi*) on that day in August and the return of the Dutch after the Japanese occupation of more than three years. Fundamentally opposing views were accompanied by conflicting images of 'the enemy' and its intentions, reliability and methods, whether in battle or at the negotiating table. Of course there were also instances of mutual understanding and regret and gestures of reconciliation, both during the war and, even more so, after it ended. But much of the framing during the war (which in turn built on a long history of colonialism) still lives on today.

One reason for this is the nature of the sources that were produced during the war. Sources are never neutral. They are the product of people's actions and therefore reflect what the people who created those sources thought

was important, what they said and left unsaid, what they did or did not feel and understand, and how they judged matters. The challenge for us today in understanding those sources from the period 1945 to 1949 is to study a sufficiently broad range of sources and take nothing in them for granted. This exercise can help make the war less incomprehensible. It can also create the space to appreciate how different people's views were, even back then, on what was happening and who was responsible.

Archives and libraries have formed the traditional habitat of the historian, but modern historical research also encompasses sources in other kinds of collections and environments. Moreover, new sources are being created with oral history. The Special Collections department of Leiden University Library has an extensive collection of unique sources dealing with Dutch colonialism, collected in part by the KITLV. This exhibition shows a selection of that material covering the war years in Indonesia, 1945-1949. The material not only gives an impression of the war but also shows how divergent people's perspectives were at the time. This modest exhibition is therefore also an invitation to everyone to reflect on the limitations of their own frame.

The Indonesian Revolution: War Propaganda in Pamphlets

MUHAMMAD YUANDA ZARA

The proclamation of Indonesian independence on 17 August 1945 was just the beginning of an extremely tough struggle by the Indonesian fighters to prove that the new nation was worthy of existence and could be part of the post-war world community. For one thing, they had to knit unity among the country's people, who at that time numbered around 70 million and consisted of various ethnicities and religions spread across thousands of islands. But the Indonesian government also had to fight foreign enemies: first Japanese troops, then Allied forces, followed by the bloodiest war of all, which lasted over four years, namely the war against the Dutch, Indonesia's former colonizer who wished to restore the colonial order.

Propaganda played a vital role in the Indonesian resistance to the Dutch. In contrast to Dutch propaganda, which was supported by adequate funds, personnel and facilities, Indonesian propaganda was carried out under very restrictive conditions. Indonesian propaganda was conducted by the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Information, and by non-state actors, including artists. They were united by the same ideal: defending Indonesian independence from Dutch encroachment.

Indonesian visual propaganda, as portrayed in posters, caricatures and other media, greatly helped the Indonesian government in fostering support among the Indonesian people for the fight against the Dutch. These images promote many things, ranging from legitimizing Indonesia's right to independence, calling upon the Indonesian people to unite behind the government, framing the Dutch as a ruthless colonial force, persuading the youth to take up arms against the Dutch, encouraging women to provide assistance in the form of clothing, food and medical support, and convincing the international community that Indonesia's existence is a political reality and contributes to post-war world peace.

As might be expected, most of the propaganda themes from the Dutch side were in stark contrast to the Indonesian ones. These included a call for support from the Dutch to save the Dutch East Indies (*Nederlands-Indië*, instead of 'Indonesia') from the grips of Japanese fascists and their Indonesian accomplices. Calls also included the recruitment of Dutch youth as war volunteers, appealing for moral support from the Netherlands for the Dutch soldiers who were sent to Indonesia and asking Dutch troops to be careful about the threat of mosquitoes in Indonesia. Although their propaganda themes are different, there are common elements in the approaches taken by Indonesia and the Netherlands. Both sides frame the 'Self' and the 'Other', for example by constructing a negative image of the enemy, thereby legitimizing the use of violence. The goal of each side is clear: to win the war.

This exhibition is a visual tour of politically motivated artistic works created by Indonesian fighters and their enemy, the Dutch. It is an extraordinary opportunity to scrutinize these images, which can still be found in outstanding condition after they have survived the tough years of war and the intervening period of more than seven decades. This exhibition will be valuable as a source of learning and teaching, for researchers from diverse fields, as well as for members of the general public who are interested in the visual history of this war. This jointly curated exhibition helps to understand this complex history and it should inspire further study of neglected aspects of this Dutch-Indonesian conflict and the history of post-World War II Southeast Asia.

Collecting, viewing and telling

MARIEKE BLOEMBERGEN & ALICIA SCHRIKKER

What do we see and what don't we see? That is the question. This catalogue of propaganda posters, photos, drawings and personal memories gives impressions of the Indonesian war of independence from various perspectives. Such sources typically incorporate a self-image – the friendly, valiant Indonesian soldier or the powerful bona fide colonizer for instance – while simultaneously presenting a picture of the Other – the murderous, underhand enemy. The propaganda posters and drawings do this explicitly. They show the war from the outside, whereas the photos take us inside. We see a group portrait of Indonesian soldiers, Royal Dutch Indies Army soldiers drinking beer at the temple of Borobudur, the corpse of an Indonesian man, shot dead in the middle of the street. What self-image did that photographer have when he took that picture? What does that beer at Borobudur say about the everyday practice and experience of violence? We can no longer ask these photographers or the people in their photos, but that *was* possible in other cases. Oral records of people's memories show us their doubts and ambiguity when looking back at the war. "Then you ask yourself if you really went through that and it makes you feel guilty. You took part in something that you didn't want."

But what don't we see and hear? It is not just the war that links these photographs, posters and interviews. They are also connected by the fact that they are all kept in the Indonesian collection of Leiden University Library. Previously, these materials were split across two separate collections, belonging to the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV). These two institutes were set up in colonial times to increase Dutch knowledge about its colonies and facilitate the (violent) colonial occupation. After decolonization, all three institutions continued building up

knowledge and collecting material, including from postcolonial, modern-day Indonesia. The oral history collection is a good example.

The question is how, when and under what circumstances the collecting organizations acquired these objects. We get a glimpse of this sometimes, for example in the information about the *Pusat Propaganda* posters, but often we have nothing to go on. Yet it is still important to ask this question. The history of a collection is an influential part of the bigger story and the personal histories that this exhibition aims to recount. How the value attached to these photos, posters and diaries changed in the past has an impact on how we view the past and determines what we see and don't see.

Many of the photo albums were donated by the owners' descendants for use in future research. The contradictions between what the photographers wanted to say with their albums, what the families knew about that and what the collectors saw in them can not only be part of processing the war but can also point to a blind spot. Sometimes the contradictions are obvious. One example is the Nasrudin photo album: it was not donated but taken during a military operation – as was also the case for the Indonesian propaganda material – and possibly used for identifying other Indonesian soldiers. It is right to ask whether that album really belongs in Leiden.

Digitalization and international collaboration have substantially improved Indonesia's access to the collections in the Netherlands. The fact that this exhibition is also being displayed in Indonesia in digital form is therefore highly symbolic. These developments only make the need to have a good picture of the history of colonial and postcolonial collections all the more urgent. We need to know not just what we are looking at but why we are looking at these particular artefacts and what it is we are not seeing.