

Framing the Opponent

Framing the opponent negatively is a key aspect of any war. The opponent is demonized in order to legitimize the struggle and motivate the ranks. By ‘framing’ we mean the way something or someone is presented. This can refer to the rhetoric or the visual imagery and the associations it evokes. This image is the focus of this theme: how was ‘the Other’ presented and what message was being conveyed?

On the Dutch side, every effort was made to paint the Republic of Indonesia as a continuation of Japanese fascism. This served to undermine its legitimacy. Indonesian combatants were generally dismissed as ‘extremists’ or ‘terrorists’, which indirectly helped to justify a merciless response. The Republic of Indonesia in turn framed the struggle in terms of the international right to self-determination. Its propaganda was aimed in part at calling on the international community to support the Republic in its fight for independence and thus take a stand against the Dutch colonial reflex. To lend force to this message, the visual imagery demonized the Dutch, who were portrayed as cruel, rapacious imperialists.

2.1 Under the Red and White Flag

For a long time, the Republic of Indonesia was framed in the Netherlands as a creation of Japanese fascism. It was claimed that the Republic did not enjoy support among the Indonesian people and that independence had been proclaimed by a small group of fanatics who were collaborating with the Japanese. That is why Sukarno was described as the ‘Indonesian Mussert’, after the man who founded a Nazi party in the Netherlands in the 1930s.

The East Indies Emergency foundation (*Stichting ‘Indië in Nood’*) was fiercely opposed to Indonesian independence. The continued use of the name ‘Indië’ (East Indies) rather than ‘Indonesia’ in the foundation’s name also says a lot. The foundation deployed propaganda to call for the restoration of Dutch authority as soon as possible. The Japanese dragon and Indonesian fighter, united under the Indonesian flag, attack an Indonesian woman with her baby, illustrating the explosion of violence – symbolized by the volcano – that would overwhelm Indonesia unless the Netherlands took action. As the text at the top says, “Terror and poverty under the Red and White flag”. Only under the Dutch flag would there be order and prosperity (“*Orde en Welvaart*”), as portrayed by the peaceful scene with hardworking people in the paddy field.



‘Onder de Rood-Witte vlag Terreur en Armoede – Onder het Rood-Wit-Blauw Orde en Welvaart’. Poster. Publisher: Stichting ‘Indië in Nood’, c. 1945. Or. 27.011-4.

2.2 Information Costs Lives

The struggle in Indonesia turned into a guerrilla war that many civilians became caught up in, whether as active participants or as more or less unintended spectators or victims. For the Dutch military, it was often unclear who was on their side and who was an enemy. Hence this instructional poster warning Dutch soldiers not to talk about war matters (“Zwijg!” means ‘Keep silent!’). The message of this poster is that anyone could be the enemy, danger lurks everywhere and therefore you can never speak freely. This is emphasized by the palm tree and the kampong (Indonesian village) house that are ‘listening’ in on the Dutch soldiers’ conversation. The same message was conveyed in field security service posters that showed a large ear in the bush eavesdropping. This was a reference to the fact that the opponent was much more familiar with the tropical surroundings and could therefore come up close without being noticed.



'Zwijg!' and 'Gegevens kosten levens' (see page 44). Two instructional posters produced by the Veldveiligheidsdienst, 1948-1949. H 1878-9.

2.3 Something Great was Destroyed There

“They chose too... And something great was destroyed there”. This caption is a variant on the famous phrase “Something great was achieved there” by the seventeenth-century governor of the Dutch East Indies Jan Pieterszoon Coen. It is used here to garner support in the Netherlands for the colonial project. The poster was produced by the National Committee for the Maintenance of the Empire (*Nationaal Comité Handhaving Rijkseenheid*), a fierce advocate for keeping the Dutch East Indies. The poster makes clear where the committee stands on the topic. Not only are the Indonesian leaders Sukarno and Hatta labelled Japanese “accomplices” – a common narrative at the time – but there is also criticism of the Dutch politician Schermerhorn, the “governor” Van Mook and the British mediator Lord Killearn. The three are painted as just as much of an adversary as the Indonesians themselves, which shows the extent of the internal divisions within the Netherlands concerning the ‘Indies question’.



Poster for the Nationaal Comité Handhaving Rijkseenheid. Two fonts. Netherlands, 1948. Publisher: Nationaal Comité Handhaving Rijkseenheid. D Or. 704, number 29.

2.4 ‘Peloppers’ and ‘Extremists’

“Captured extremists” (*Gevangen extrimisten*) wrote the Dutch soldier Piet Groot on this photo that he stuck in his album. Indonesian soldiers were seen by the Dutch military as ‘extremists’ and were often called ‘terrorists’ as well. The idea behind the use of this terminology by the Dutch was to legitimize the fight against the adversary in Indonesia. The word “peloppers” has been written under the second photo. This Indonesian word comes from the Dutch *voorloper*, meaning ‘pioneer’. The Indonesian army called a soldier on their own side who fought in areas under Dutch control a *pelopor*. Many Dutch people did not know about that distinction between these soldiers fighting at the front and other Indonesian troops, so the term was often incorrectly used for all Indonesian combatants, with a negative undertone.



Captured Indonesian soldiers. Java, c. 1947. Photograph taken by W.M. van der Leeuw. Or. 27764, album 2, page 16.



Captured Indonesian soldiers. Java, c. 1947. Photograph taken by Piet Groot. Or. 28.046, page 32.

2.5 Enemy from Above

This poster depicts a Dutch aircraft, the Warhawk P-40, which Indonesians labelled “musuh” (enemy), because of the many casualties it inflicted. One of the damaging attacks involving this aircraft occurred on 29 July 1947, about a week after the Dutch started their First Military Aggression. On that day, an Indonesian plane transporting medicine was shot down by such a Dutch P-40 plane. Several key Indonesian leaders on board died. The Indonesian government protested the shooting incident because the Dakota plane was only carrying medicine, and the Dutch had been informed of this. This event was remembered by Indonesians long after the war: important airports in Java were named after the Indonesian airmen who died in the attack. This poster aims to warn Indonesian fighters of the physical danger brought by this aircraft, but also reminds them of the struggle for Indonesian independence.



‘Musuh!’. One of a set of thirteen sheets of original Indonesian drawings used as designs for propaganda posters. c. 1947. Watercolour on stiff paper. Or. 27.649.

2.6 350 Years of Oppression

This poster depicts an Indonesian man with a black cap (*peci*), with the Indonesian flag behind him. He points towards the man with the label “NICA” (Netherlands Indies Civil Administration) on his shoulder, recognizable as the Lieutenant Governor General of the Indies, H.J. van Mook. This image shows the animosity of Indonesian fighters towards Van Mook, who is considered partly to blame for their plight. The caption reads “350 taheen ditindes” (350 years of oppression). Below, three very thin and exhausted Indonesians are depicted, with a Japanese soldier in front of them. This caption reads “3 1/2 taheen diperas” (3.5 years of exploitation), symbolizing the impact of Japan’s occupation of Indonesia. The message of this poster is clear: the suffering, hunger, backwardness and grief that the Indonesian people experienced were caused by the oppression by the Dutch and the Japanese.



'350 years of oppression, 3.5 years of exploitation'. Photo of a propaganda poster of the Republic of Indonesia. Indonesia, c. 1949. Photographer unknown. KITLV 41416.

2.7 A Hammer Blow

This poster portrays a well-dressed man – indicating his wealth – being hit with a hammer on which the Indonesian flag is depicted. The text on the left reads: “*La busett...enakk banget ja!*” (Damn it, I’m really enjoying this immensely!). It seems that the word in red, “*Daulat*” (sovereignty), was added later. The person mocked by the hammer blow represents both the Dutch and the Indonesians taking advantage of the war. The following text reads: “*Nah ini lu rasain djuga ja*” (Well, here you go, you must take the consequences). This is to show that Indonesian fighters will punish anyone who makes money during the war at the expense of the Indonesian people. The depicted man smokes pliers (*tang* or *catut* in Indonesian), a symbol referring to someone who makes money by selling at black-market prices during wartime.



'Pipa baru?'. One of a set of six Indonesian designs for propaganda posters. c. 1946/47. Hand coloured. Likely to originate from the Indonesian propaganda centre Poesat Propaganda (PESINDO). Or. 27.011-14.

2.8 The Dutch Way of Fighting

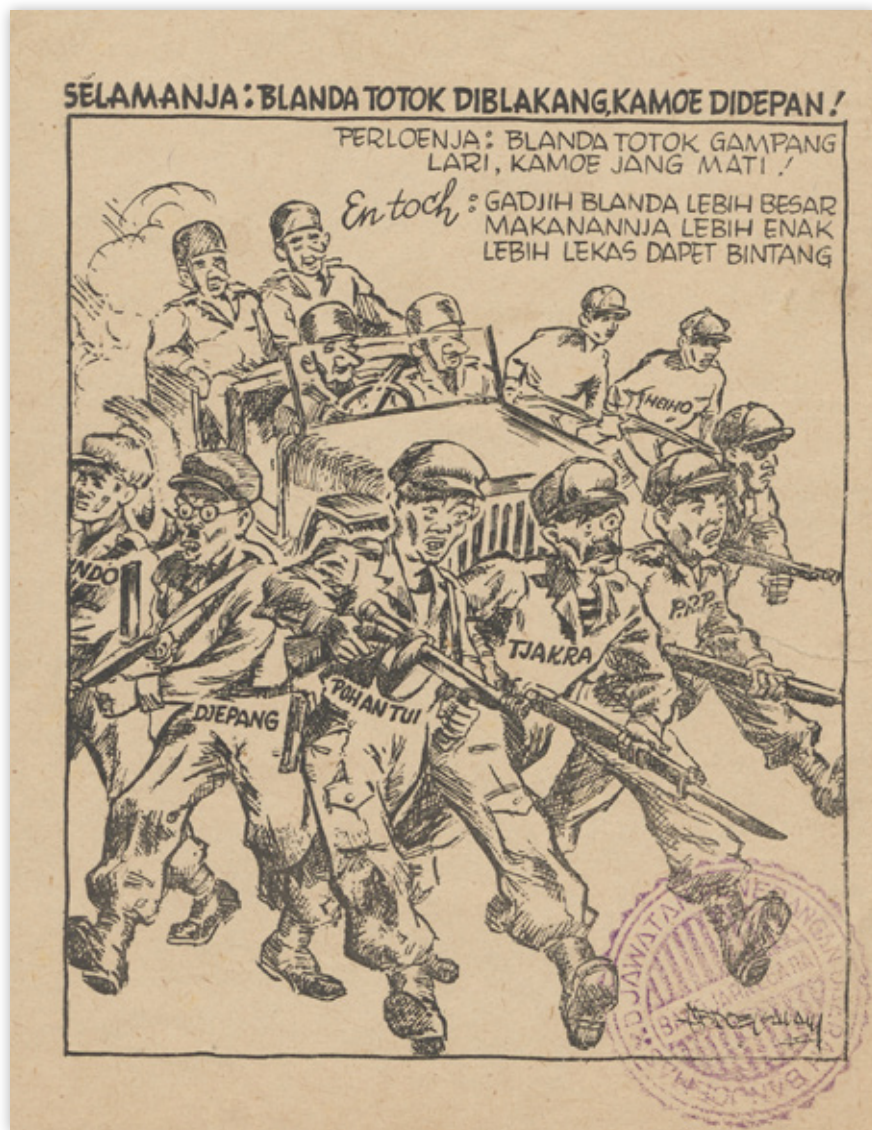
The text reads “*Tjara Belanda berperang*” (The Dutch way of fighting a war). The person on the left represents a colonial official (wearing clothes in the Dutch flag colours of red, white and blue). He represents the Dutch politicians, officials and financiers accused of being the masterminds behind the recolonization of Indonesia after 1945. They did not dare to fight directly themselves, but cowardly used Dutch soldiers and Indonesians in the Dutch colonial army. The person in army uniform might represent either Dutch soldiers, whose skin grew tanned from fighting in the tropics, or indigenous soldiers in the KNIL. The poster accuses the soldiers of being manipulated by Dutch officials into fighting the Indonesians for a meagre wage, as shown with the sack marked with a guilders symbol (“f...”) that is held out by the Dutch official.



'Tjara Belanda berperang'. 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.

2.9 Mocking Colonial Hierarchies

Issued by the Banjarnegara Information Bureau of Central Java, this poster depicts *totok* (white) Dutch soldiers riding safely in a military jeep. They are protected by soldiers of various ethnicities. Indonesian propagandists mocked the racial hierarchy in the Dutch army, where *totok* Dutch were privileged over others. The Dutch army enlisted Indonesians from all ethnic groups. This poster tries to make non-Dutch soldiers aware of the discrimination they were subjected to. As such, the poster implies that the Indonesian Republic and its army oppose the racist hierarchy that exists in the Dutch colonial army.



'Selamanja: Blanda Totok dibelakang, kamoe didepan!'. One a set of seven Indonesian flyers. Or. 27.740-2.

2.10 Bamboo Spear Diplomacy

This poster depicts a white dove with the Union Jack – symbolizing Great Britain – and a crow that represents the Netherlands. In Indonesia, the crow is often associated with a bad omen; here it suggests that the Dutch will bring terror to Indonesia. The crow distributes pamphlets containing the Dutch promises to Indonesia after the Second World War: that Indonesia will be given the power to govern itself within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This was stated by Queen Wilhelmina in her speech of 7 December 1942. The image of the bamboo spear tells us that the Indonesian people strongly opposed that proposal. The text “Diplomasi bambu runtjing” (diplomacy of the bamboo spear) suggests that Indonesia in fact will never agree to any proposal that defines Indonesia as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



'Diplomasi bambu runtjing'. One of a set of thirteen sheets of original Indonesian drawings used as designs for propaganda posters. c. 1947. Watercolour on stiff paper. Or. 27.649.

2.11. Rebel!

This poster depicts an Indonesian soldier and his two nemeses, a Dutchman and his Indonesian accomplice who have both profited from the war efforts. The word “*berontak*” (rebel) is therefore written above these enemies of Indonesian independence. It sends a message that the Indonesian army will punish anyone who fishes in troubled waters. The soldier’s beret has been torn, then patched so that it can still be worn. At the time, the Indonesian government had difficulty providing uniforms to Indonesian soldiers so some Indonesian soldiers wore clothes that were torn and patched. The stitch marks in this picture symbolize the contrast with the wealth of the Dutch and their Indonesian accomplices, and frames Indonesia’s enemies as deserving harsh punishment.



'Berontak!'. One of a set of six Indonesian designs for propaganda posters. c. 1946/47. Manually coloured. Likely to originate from the Indonesian propaganda centre Poesat Propaganda (PESINDO). Or. 27.011-14.

2.12 The Right to Freedom

This poster appears to have been produced and distributed shortly after Indonesian independence was declared, as can be gathered from its use of English. Hence it was intended to attract the attention and sympathy of the Allied forces. The word “right” in this poster is a key word, because it reflects the main message of the Indonesian nationalists: Indonesian independence was not a Japanese gift but the right of the Indonesian people. As such, it countered Dutch accusations that Indonesian nationalist leaders, including Sukarno, were Japanese accomplices. In this way, the poster serves to build legitimacy for the existence of an independent Indonesian state by emphasizing that independence is a basic human right for every nation.



'We don't ask for freedom, we've got the right to it!'. One of a set of thirteen sheets of original Indonesian drawings that were used as designs for propaganda posters. c. 1947. Watercolour on stiff paper. Or. 27.649.

2.13 A Young Revolution

From 1943 onwards, young people joined various Japanese or Indonesian military and paramilitary organizations in large numbers. These teenagers and people in their twenties were the ones who went on to fight for a free Indonesia in the war of independence. There were more than two million of them. In the Netherlands, the young revolutionaries were notorious for their role in the *Bersiap* (Indonesian for ‘be prepared’) that lasted from October 1945 to early 1946, one of the most violent periods in the war.

The fighters called themselves *pemuda*, after *Pemuda Indonesia*, a nationalist youth organization founded in the 1920s. These photos show how the young independence fighters saw themselves: they present themselves in these portraits as fearless. Such a self-presentation of Indonesians is rarely seen in Dutch collections. Indeed, it is unclear how these images ended up in a Dutch soldier’s photo album.



Pemuda soldiers. Java, c. 1945. Photographer unknown. KITLV A216, KITLV 14044, 14048 and 14050.

2.14 Trap (interview)

There were major differences between the Dutch armed forces and the Indonesian fighting forces. The Dutch army was better trained and equipped than the Indonesians and it had far more heavy weaponry. However, the Indonesian army had a numerical advantage. This imbalance between the two sides pushed the Republican side into a guerrilla war. They fought back against the Dutch military with lightning-quick attacks and ambushes. Mr H.J., who had both Dutch and Javanese forebears, joined a *laskar pemuda*, an army unit for young men. Together with his father, he marched into the mountains with the Republican troops, staying ahead of the Dutch army. He talks about their guerrilla tactics. When he and his uncle trapped two Dutch conscripts in an ambush, captured them and interrogated them, he got a glimpse of the Dutch perspective on the war in Indonesia.



Group of young revolutionaries next to an artillery gun. Java, c. 1945-1949.
Photographer unknown. KITLV 14047.

TRANSCRIPTION

HJ: "It wasn't a real war on West Java. A real war is like what happened with [the Dutch military officer] Westerling in Sulawesi [Celebes]. The Dutch did the shooting as they had the weapons and munitions. We would make a *bom batok*, a roadside bomb that explodes with a big bang when a military vehicle goes by on the road. Or stretch a liana vine across a road. I saw first-hand how one of my uncles did that. Then you could capture a Dutch motorbike rider.

Two [Dutch] conscripts were caught. They were dragged to the kampongs straight away. We had a quiet chat with those two. They said they were military conscripts. If they had refused, they would have been put in prison. I was amazed to hear them say that. Because how were they prepared for being sent to Indonesia?

'Well, there's a group that goes around that they call *rampokkers* [robbers] or *pemudas* endangering the lives of the Dutch. We've come to liberate the country.' They used the word 'extremists' a lot too. 'Right, but what do they look like, how do I recognize them?' I believe in the end we swapped those two." [laughs hard]

I: "Were they exchanged for Indonesian prisoners?"

HJ: "Well yes, two Dutchmen for twenty or forty Indonesians!" [laughs hard]

De T.N.I. bracht de nacht bij ons door. Lukman
heeft die lt. behonlijk de waarheid gezegd.
over het samenwerken. Iedere ochtend kwam
er lui van de D.I. op de paas ingesien
deen en inlichtingen halen, ze dachten niet
dat er T.N.I. zat. Waren eerder in kampen
gewest en waren wapens gaan halen.
Vender staan in heel west huisen van
D.I. en in bekenning. Patrouille geden
naar P.O. geen nieuws. Bat. en Tjipari
waren ook beschoten.

Vrijdag 23 Dec.

Gaan vandaag verhuizen, mocht echter
eerst op dokter wanden, voor ingesien bij
gast. Hebben bekenning om het huis
van Kapl. van D.I. af te houden. Na de
maaltijd de ingesien en toen gesamenlijk
het huis verhuist. De dokter was ook
van de partij en gooitte brachtte in
het dok. We wilden kijken of hij bang was
een van de jongens going. Maar brachtte in
schot, de dokter liep echter niet achter
hem en wong of er wat aanstelde.
Tot 4 uur op V.B. de ablen zitten wanden
en bekenning gingen niet. Het D.N.I. bleef
ochter. De T.N.I. lijk een eind met

[3:7]