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BIJDRAGEN TOT DE TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE 173 (2017) 559–579

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Debate

Rémy Limpach

De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor. Amsterdam: Boom, 2016, 920 pp.

What Makes Violence Extreme, and Who Is Responsible?

Rémy Limpach has done us a great service by writing *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*. The book is a demanding but highly rewarding read. It heralds a new phase in the discussion about the nature and extent of Dutch military violence in the decolonization war in Indonesia (1945–1949). *De brandende kampongs* is the first book to have assembled an overwhelming amount of empirical material, thus offering us new ammunition to reconsider the central question of whether the violence was incidental or structural, and to contemplate the causes of, and responsibilities for, the violence.

For his painstaking and detailed source study, one can only praise Limpach. I would like to use this forum to discuss with the author the conceptual framing of his research, and to pose some questions about his conclusions regarding the structural nature of, and the responsibilities for, the Dutch violence in Indonesia.

Limpach explains (pp. 44–5) that the object of his research is 'mass violence' and/or 'extreme violence'—two terms with slightly different connotations, although they are mostly used interchangeably throughout the book. In choosing these concepts, the author explicitly rejects the use of two other concepts that have taken centre stage in previous historiographical debates: 'war crimes' and '(violent) excesses' or 'excessive violence'. Limpach claims that the term 'excesses' has acquired too euphemistic a connotation over the years, because it suggests that such violence was incidental in nature rather than structural. The phrase 'war crimes', meanwhile, is seen by the author as a 'polarizing and legal term' (p. 45) that historians should avoid as it places us in the judge's seat. Moreover, speaking about 'war crimes' in some cases leads to applying norms retroactively that were not legally clear at the time.

The wish to avoid these loaded terms is understandable, as they can easily drag one into an unproductive political debate. (Although I do not fully agree with Limpach's reasoning: why is it problematic for historians to use

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legal concepts in their studies?) But Limpach's terms of choice, 'mass violence' and 'extreme violence', are equally unsatisfying. The problem is that the author remains vague on exactly where he draws the line between 'ordinary' (acceptable?) violence and 'extreme' violence. Under what conditions does violence become his object of study, and when is it simply 'normal' war-time violence? Both 'excessive violence' and 'war crimes' are more explicit on this point: violence is 'excessive' or a 'war crime' if it breaks certain (legal or social) norms, either norms already established at the time, or retroactively applied by the historian. By contrast, violence can be seen as 'extreme' even if it is considered legally and/or socially acceptable.

Incidentally, the cases of 'extreme violence' described in *De brandende kampongs* do tend to follow the same definitions of 'excesses' or 'war crimes' used in much of the previous historiography, if only because of the constraints of the source material. The most striking deviation from the historiography in this regard is Limpach's interest in so-called 'technological violence': artillery, air raids, tank raids, and the like. As Limpach explains, because of its indiscriminate nature, technological violence in all likelihood caused larger numbers of (civilian) casualties overall than the various forms of contact violence that are more often studied. But these victims were rarely registered in the sources—hence their absence from much of the historiography.

Although Limpach is right to say that a study of technological violence is long overdue, it is precisely on this topic that the disadvantage of his concept of 'extreme violence' becomes apparent. Technological violence indeed causes large numbers of casualties, including among civilians, but does that mere fact alone make it 'extreme violence'? If not, how much technological violence would be acceptable before it becomes 'extreme violence'? The problem is especially dicey because the established norms on the question of how much violence is 'proportionate', and therefore acceptable, have significantly shifted over the decades since the war in Indonesia. One wonders, therefore, whether Limpach's definition of extreme violence includes all technological violence that is disproportionate (excessive?) according to our present-day norms, or only the violence that was disproportionate according to norms already established at the time of the war.

This definitional vagueness is not an innocent, scholastic problem. It impacts on one of the central issues in Limpach's study: the question of who was responsible for the use of 'extreme violence' in the Dutch–Indonesian war. After all, if Limpach includes in his definition of 'extreme violence' instances of technological violence that were within the accepted norms at the time, then that would imply that such violence was systematic. If this was the case, then those setting the norms for acceptable violence (that is, the army leadership)

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were directly responsible. If, on the other hand, the violence that Limpach studied was also illegitimate according to the accepted norms at the time of the conflict (but occurred regularly nevertheless), then the responsibility of the leadership should be assessed differently: namely, as at most an indirect responsibility as the result of a lack of oversight or prevention. In short, *De brandende kampongs* sometimes seems to conflate the various forms of responsibility—direct or indirect—on the part of the higher authorities, by blaming the violence on relatively indiscriminate 'broad coalitions of perpetrators' (p. 740).

The same problem of conflating various responsibilities becomes apparent in Limpach's conclusion that the use of extreme violence by Dutch troops in Indonesia was a 'structural' phenomenon. If we simply define 'structural' in a quantitative way (that is, it happened more often than just incidentally) this conclusion is hardly controversial. Limpach goes one step further. 'Structural' in his definition entails an assessment of political and military responsibilities: extreme violence was structural, because it 'was a continually recurring phenomenon, resulting from structural violence-promoting factors within the Dutch military' (p. 738). Therefore, the political and military leadership bear the brunt of the responsibility for the violence.

But Limpach's definition entails a circular argument: violence was structural because there were structural, violence-promoting factors. Similarly, saying that the political and military leadership bore the ultimate responsibility for all the violence is a truism, but teaches us little about what that responsibility entailed. At least for army commander Spoor (and, to a lesser extent, also for Governor General Van Mook) it has been known for a while that he was intimately aware of the violence being perpetrated by his subordinates, and unwilling to curtail it. But am I right in thinking that Limpach wants to suggest a more direct responsibility, because these men were instrumental in creating and perpetuating some of the above-mentioned 'violence-promoting factors'? If so, I would be interested in hearing his thoughts on the varying forms and degrees of responsibility. Is there no difference between those executing the violence, those consciously ordering the use of 'extreme violence', and those who were aware of the violence but did (too) little to stop it? Does it not matter whether people like army commander General Spoor actively decreed the use of such violence, or were 'merely' unable or unwilling to stop violence initiated by others? And if it does matter, where along that scale does Limpach place the four main actors that he singles out as ultimately responsible: General Spoor, Governor General Van Mook, Attorney General Felderhof, and the government in The Hague?

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Some Notes on Rémy Limpach's *De Brandende Kampongs van Generaal Spoor*

De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor is definitely a highly important contribution to the ongoing debates in the Netherlands about the Dutch military operation in Indonesia in the period of 1945–1950. In this book, Rémy Limpach presents a thorough analysis about what he calls 'extreme and mass violence' committed particularly by the Dutch military, but also by Indonesians, in various regions in Indonesia. The violence altogether took the lifes of thousands of military officers, militia, and civilians from both sides. In this ambitious book, Limpach spends almost 900 pages analysing the level, motive, punishment, covering, uncovering, control, prevention, opposition, and causes of the Dutch extreme violence during the Indonesian Independence War. By investigating the issues, Limpach in particular intends to evaluate whether the use of extreme violence by the Dutch was incidental in nature, as suggested by the *Excessennota*, or structural and systematic (p. 38).

Limpach starts his book with a discussion of the 'anatomy' of the Indonesian Independence War, which he dubs as a 'hybrid war' with different forms of multi-faceted armed conflict between the Dutch and the Indonesians, the British/Allied Forces and the Indonesians, and various internal groups of Indonesian militias, which lasted in four stages from August 1945 until December 1949.

Limpach argues that the three parties were involved in different degrees of mass violence, particularly during what he calls the first stream of extreme violence in 1945–1946. Indonesians committed mass violence against Dutch, Indo-European, Chinese, and Ambonese civilians in a series of violent incidents during what became known as the Bersiap period (often referred to as 'Bersiap violence'), which took place in several regions, including Jakarta, Bogor, Bandung, Surabaya, and Semarang, and in the so-called 'Berdaulat action'. Similarly, the Dutch troops were implicated in mass violence when they launched a colonial restoration effort, countered the Bersiap violence, and sought to control the colonial camps. Incidentally, Limpach reveals that the Dutch also committed violence against the Allied Forces and Chinese civilians. By the same token, the British, who were supposed to be neutral, were also far from innocent, as they were involved in some mass violence, for example in Bekasi, Cibadak, and Sumatra, including the torture and murder of Indonesian prisoners (Chapter 4).

As he focuses on the Dutch 'extreme violence', Limpach provides some case studies, including Westerling's notorious massacre in South Sulawesi, the Rawagede case, the Bali 'Puputan War', and large-scale violence in Malang,

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Cilacap, and Kendal. With these selected cases Limpach provides an in-depth analysis on the extreme mass violence perpetrated by the Dutch. Limpach classifies extreme violence into six categories: technological (weaponry) violence; violence during the plundering; burning-destroying-'purification' actions; violence against prisoners at the front; violence against prisoners in jail; and violence against women and children. Limpach argues that these instances of 'technological violence', and particularly the violence against women and children, are a lacuna that is relatively unexplored in the existing literature (Chapter 5).

Based on his thorough evaluation of several cases of Dutch extreme violence during the decolonization of Indonesia, Limpach comes up with some thought-provoking conclusions. First of all, he asserts that mass violence was an integral component of the Dutch colonial policy. The coalition of high-ranking officers within the *Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger* (KNIL, Royal Netherlands Indies Army), *Koninklijke Landmacht* (KL, Royal Netherlands Army), and Marine brigades profited from this mass violence, which in fact strengthened their cooperation and solidarity. Therefore, Limpach further concludes that the Dutch extreme violence toward Indonesians (military, militias, and civilians) was systematic—as in the use of the '*speciale troepen*' (special forces)—and structural in nature. Those responsible for the extreme violence and these 'war crimes' were not only the military officers on the spot, but also the entire civilian institutions in command of those military operations, including such high-profile figures as chief commander General Simon Spoor, Governor General Huib van Mook, and Attorney General Henk Felderhof.

This is perhaps the strongest point of Limpach's conclusion. He directly challenges the official version of the war that was previously held by the Dutch government, presented by the *Excessennota* in 1969, that the instances of extreme violence—in total around 110 cases—were excesses, perpetrated by individuals, and were not part of the Dutch military's strategic operations. Limpach goes even further by explicitly mentioning 'the war criminals' responsible for the Dutch wrongdoing in Indonesia. As a matter of fact, Limpach's conclusion provides not only critical insights on the earlier notion that the Dutch were 'on the wrong side of history', but gives new 'fuel' to advancing the already intense debate and public discourse about the wider implications of the Dutch military operations in Indonesia in 1945–1949.

Despite its wealth of information and its fresh analysis, which contributes to the existing literature on Indonesian decolonization and on global decolonization in general, some important questions and doubts about Limpach's book should be noted. The most notable one is the fact that Limpach solely relies on Dutch official and non-official sources, and 'abandons' Indonesian

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archival sources to the extent that his discussion suffers from the lack of an Indonesian perspective to complement the Dutch perspective. Perhaps, one can argue, this does not matter, because his focus is so much on the Dutch military side. However, I would argue that also for this type of study the absence of Indonesian sources, and hence Indonesian perspectives, constitutes a serious methodological weakness, which might have had certain impacts on his final findings.

For example, Limpach himself argues that 'the personal background and mentality of the perpetrators and their superiors played an important role in every single instance of extreme violence, but these factors mattered only in combination with certain "conditional factors", notably the violence by Indonesians and the context of guerrilla wars in which both parties engaged in "grey areas" of hostilities' (p. 24). Admitting the importance of conditional factors and contexts of extreme violence, Limpach seems to realize that local sources are indispensable. By incorporating Indonesian sources or perspectives, Limpach might have been able to produce a better, more nuanced narrative. Limpach admits that Indonesia had a long history of violence and socio-cultural values that might have been crucial in creating a 'situation' or 'condition' conducive for violent actions. Burning villages or kampongs, for example, was also part of the scorched-earth strategy deployed by Indonesian guerrilla fighters aiming to prevent the Dutch military occupation.

Secondly, Limpach also seems to overlook the importance of colonial legacies, which had contributed in a fundamental way to shaping the socio-political conditions and mental attitudes of Indonesians towards the Dutch in the immediate post-colonial period. Limpach indeed mentions Dutch colonial racism, but does not sufficiently discuss how this racism contributed to the violent actions committed by the Dutch troops. As a matter of fact, ample literature exists on this issue. Similarly, the Japanese colonial legacies are only mentioned briefly in Limpach's book, whereas existing literature has shown that the Japanese period was very crucial in cultivating Indonesian nationalism, providing military training to the youth, and opening up mass political participation among Indonesians. These legacies were essential to shaping the socio-political situation in Indonesia and the way Indonesians perceived the Dutch colonial power when the Dutch reappeared in the country.

Thirdly, Limpach's book could be stronger if it had presented a comparative analysis, for example, by putting what happened in Indonesia into the wider regional and international context. In the first chapter the author briefly discusses the European context that preceded the Dutch military operations in Indonesia, but he does not continue to reflect on the Dutch experience in the context of the global decolonization war or with reference to the discourse of

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colonial-insurgency wars, two increasingly popular topics in historical studies. Lastly, and connected to my previous point, Limpach's book really should be published in English to make it accessible to a wider international audience. Up to this point, the ongoing discourse on the Dutch–Indonesian decolonization war has been lingering only among a relatively limited circle of scholars, notably the Dutch and a few Indonesian and other scholars. This could perhaps change if Limpach's book, important as it is, is made available to a wider international audience. From an Indonesian perspective, an Indonesian translation of this book is indispensable to attract and stimulate Indonesian historians to be engaged in the ongoing debate on one of the most important episodes of their national history.

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Margins of Extreme Violence

There is no country in the world that does not struggle when research reveals that its soldiers have committed war crimes. No wonder, then, that Remy Limpach's uncompromising book on the use of systematic violence by Dutch and Netherlands Indies' troops in Indonesia during the War of Independence (1945–1949) has been unsettling for Dutch society.

A brutal margin of extreme violence in the Dutch campaign has long been acknowledged. The harsh counter-insurgency measures of troops under Captain R.P.P. 'Turk' Westerling, especially in South Sulawesi, were reported, even at the time, as resembling Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe.[1] Westerling's activities, however, were treated as part of a shadow world of 'black ops' that was practically and conceptually separate from the routine operations of the Dutch forces. This treatment preserved an image of basically decent Dutch recruits sent to fight a mistaken war which they were bound to lose. Recognition of Westerling's atrocities served to confirm the essential decency of other Dutch soldiers.

This quarantining of war criminality from routine Dutch military operations in Indonesia eroded significantly after 1969, when a veteran revealed a broader range of stories of Dutch military atrocities, leading to an official review known

1 'Lidice-methodes van Kapitein W.', *De Waarheid*, 4-7-1947, p. 1.

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as the *Excessennota*. Other atrocities subsequently came to light, partly in the context of court cases brought against the Dutch state by the relatives of Indonesian victims.

Limpach's book, however, pushes our knowledge of Dutch post-war violence in Indonesia much further in two ways. First, he identifies a larger number of atrocities committed against civilians and against disarmed independence fighters than has previously been recognized. He emphasizes two characteristic forms of violence: the burning of hostile villages (the *brandende kampongs* of the title) and the shooting of disarmed combatants. He is careful to state that a 'majority' of Dutch officers and soldiers behaved 'correctly' in their dealings with Indonesians, but he stresses that the scale of the violence went beyond a few unfortunate aberrations and beyond the operations of special forces. Second, he shows that Dutch military and political leaders supported and encouraged such violence, recklessly placing soldiers in situations where violence was likely. Those authorities declined to take steps to prevent or punish atrocities, effectively giving impunity to the perpetrators. There was, Limpach says, a 'broad coalition of perpetrators' in the Dutch military who sustained extreme violence and who blocked restraining measures. He identifies, however, some brave and principled figures within the colonial and metropolitan administrations who expressed dismay at the atrocities and sought to have them dealt with properly. Limpach's book is harshly worded, but it is specific in its targets.

Indonesian authors on colonialism commonly take Dutch cruelty (*keganasan Belanda*) for granted. Non-Dutch Western literature on the Dutch colonial project, too, is inclined to work from the caricature that Dutch colonialism was characterized by greed and brutality. The perception of the Netherlands as a 'good' colonial power is largely limited to the Netherlands itself. Limpach's book, thus, is above all a work of national self-criticism, comparable, for instance, to the somewhat earlier scholarship in Australia that demolished the comfortable myth that the displacement of Aboriginal Australians by white settlers was a largely peaceful process (Ryan 1981; Reynolds 1981). *De brandende kampongs* is a comparable landmark in the Netherlands' struggle to come to terms with its history.

Nonetheless, this self-critical focus means, perhaps inevitably, that the book does not fully address either the theoretical or the comparative dimensions of the issues it raises. Limpach briefly compares the Dutch record with the contemporaneous actions of British troops in Indonesia during the short, post-war occupation of Java and Sumatra, concluding that Dutch and British tactics had much in common, despite mutual recriminations over alleged provocations and excesses. He also alludes to a similar record of atrocity in colonial wars undertaken by the British, French, and Germans, and in the Vietnam War.

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He makes the comparison with Vietnam explicit by characterizing the 1947 Rawagede massacre as 'the Dutch My Lai', a reference to the 1968 massacre of Vietnamese women and children by US forces in the village of My Lai.

Even these brief, specific comparisons, however, call into question the appropriateness of the term 'extreme violence' (*extreem geweld*), with which Limpach characterizes the Dutch military atrocities in 1940s' Indonesia. Although he avoids the term 'war crimes' on the grounds that they can be determined only through a legal process, his definition of extreme violence is surprisingly legalistic: military violence becomes extreme when it lacks military necessity or a clear military goal (p. 45). This definition is problematic for two reasons.

First, there is the inconvenient fact that many of the atrocities described by Limpach were in fact based in military necessity. The uncomfortable reality is that destroying settlements and killing prisoners have been characteristic features of counter-guerrilla warfare at least since the term *guerrilla* was applied to the struggle of Spanish partisans against Napoleonic forces in Spain in the early nineteenth century (Esdaile 2003). These measures serve direct military purposes: to deprive guerrilla fighters of logistical support from villages and to spare government forces the inconvenience (and potential danger) of detaining POWs (Ferguson 2004). They are often intended to serve less direct military purposes: to intimidate civilians against joining or supporting the guerrillas. The argument of military necessity is not negated by the fact that burning villages and killing prisoners was politically counter-productive in 1940s' Indonesia (driving Indonesians into the arms of the Republic more effectively than they won supporters for the Dutch cause). Limpach's reliance on the criterion of military necessity brings the risk that his critics will remove many instances of Dutch military violence from consideration on the grounds of (perceived) military necessity. The passionate debate over whether the 1945 dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima was warranted by military necessity is an indication of the terrain that such discussion can lead to.[2]

Second, the term 'extreme violence' leaves us without a vocabulary for dealing with degrees of extremeness. Was Dutch military violence in the 1940s more or less extreme than British violence in Malaya or Kenya in the same era? How does it compare with Italian violence in Ethiopia a decade earlier? With the genocidal violence of the German forces in South West Africa? How, for that matter, does it compare with the violence of Axis and Allied armed forces during the Second World War? Or of the Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War? It is not impossible that Dutch military violence

2 For a recent account of the debate, see Kort 2007.

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in 1945–1949, although far more prevalent than previously recognized, is still a long way from matching the most extreme cases of violence of the twentieth century. For instance, the work of Gerlach (1999), similarly forensic and even more massive than Limpach's book, examining Belarus under German occupation during the Second World War, suggests a far greater scale of atrocity.

The core purpose of Limpach's book is to deliver an evidence-based moral rebuke to the political and military leaders who shaped the circumstances in which Dutch forces carried out extensive violence against unarmed and disarmed Indonesians, and then refused to act to rein in their subordinates. This rebuke extends more broadly to Dutch society, which must, in his view, understand what was done in its name, just as other countries have had to come to terms with dark aspects of their past. The inclusive term 'extreme violence' serves this purpose effectively, but for future research the way forward may be to focus on specific forms of violence. This approach has been followed productively when studying other instances of violence, such as aerial bombardment, and it also permits more precise comparisons with other cases (for instance, Tanaka and Young 2009). For 1940s' Indonesia, the most obvious forms of violence requiring attention are prisoner-killing and the destruction of villages, each of which sits within a tangle of military, political, legal, moral, and personal considerations.

Limpach's book paves the way for an exciting new phase in research on the history of the Indonesian revolution.

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Remarks on Rémy Limpach, *De Brandende Kampongs van Generaal Spoor*

Rémy Limpach has written the rare study that reaches beyond the circle of expert colleagues. Not only did the extensive press coverage involve a general audience, but even the Dutch government could not stick to its policy of evasive neutrality. Evidence of the excessive violence applied by the Dutch military during the Decolonization War (1945–1949), as painstakingly collected by Limpach and subsequently analysed and put in a broader perspective, made it impossible to stay aloof. Now, a broad research project on all aspects related to this violence is about to be launched officially, with the help of government funds, under the aegis of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (KITLV, Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies), the Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie (NIMH, Netherlands Institute of Military History), and the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies (NIOD, Institute for War, Holocaust, and Genocide Studies). Limpach may rightfully pride himself for having achieved this breakthrough in the research agenda on the Decolonization War. The last and definite word on an event of such magnitude will never be said, but the research project will make a serious effort to clarify a number of open questions. Limpach's research in that respect will serve as a guide.

Though the scope Limpach covers is astounding, it is, of course, not exhaustive, considering the wealth of archival material. His selection of cases looks balanced. I miss, however, the fate that befell Minister Soepeno of the Republican cabinet, after Yogyakarta was occupied by the Dutch in December 1948. Soepeno was among the four ministers who followed the army leadership in guerrilla. On 24 February 1949 he was apprehended in East Java by a unit of the notorious Korps Speciale Troepen (KST, Special Forces Unit) and summarily executed. He was the highest civil authority that fell 'in battle'. Were the KST aware of the ministerial rank of their prisoner? There seems to be no follow-up on Soepeno's death—no Dutch reporting or investigation. And in reports from after the Republik was restored in Yogyakarta, in July 1949, I have not come across any Republican effort to clarify the circumstances surrounding his death. Was it not deemed opportune to rake up this painful incident, for

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the sake of a smooth transfer of sovereignty? Soepeno's relatives had to wait until 1970 before, with his elevation to *pahlawan nasional* (national hero), his sacrifice was acknowledged.

Although Limpach's focus is on the Dutch side, he also looks at the Indonesian side. This is particularly true for the Bersiap period. In fifty pages a commendable overview of 'Indonesian mass violence' is given, on the basis of the existing literature.

Meagre in comparison is the attention given to the military opponent. Only six pages are devoted to the organization, tactics, and strategy of the Indonesian Ministry of Defence, military leadership, and the separate army units, with a varying—and sometimes considerable—degree of independence. Revealing in this respect is also the number of publications by Indonesian authors listed in Limpach's bibliography. Of all these 230 publications, only three have this provenance; moreover, none of these is in Indonesian. In comparison, Hugo Klooster's *Bibliography of the Indonesian revolution* of 1997 lists more than three thousand publications by Indonesian authors.

Limpach restricts himself to the translated selection of writings by Abdul Haris—not 'Harris', as Limpach writes—Nasution, *Fundamentals of guerrilla warfare*, which contains only a selection of Nasution's well-considered treatises on the strategy and tactics of the war. He soon realized that guerrilla warfare would be the only viable way to fight the Dutch. He was the mastermind behind the formulation of the theory of the specific guerrilla warfare that would become a guideline for the Republic's army. In the eleven (!) volumes of his history of the Decolonization War (*Sekitar perang kemerdekaan Indonesia*), Nasution wrote extensively on military theory and military operations, including on cases of Dutch extreme violence. In the first volumes (nos. 1, 2, 2A, and 2B) of his autobiography *Memenuhi panggilan tugas* he elaborates further on this.

Limpach also consulted T.B. Simatupang's memoirs, *Het laatste jaar van de Indonesische vrijheidsstrijd 1948–1949*, which related his experiences as chief of staff of the Indonesian army during 1948–1949, but finds them to be less relevant regarding military policies. These two prominent military officers were not the only ones who, in a time of crisis, found time to formulate guidelines for the military confrontation. From a range of individuals, from division commanders and special staff officers down to regional units, as well as the Ministry of Defence, a steady stream of instruction journals and orders emanated, for a substantial part sophisticated and to the point.

On a general level Mao Zedong's booklet on guerrilla warfare and Tan Malaka's brief exposition *Gerpolek* (*Gerilja-politik-ekonomi*) were influential. The Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS) collected quite a number of

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these theoretical treatises. However, not much seems to have been done with them. An exception is *Gerpolek*, which was translated into English and French, not to elucidate the theory of guerrilla warfare, but as proof of communist infiltration in the Republic. This neglect is probably a misjudgement on the Dutch side, as analysis of this material could have resulted in a better understanding of the Republic's military politics, and adjustment of the Dutch tactics. But, as Limpach shows, the prejudice of the Dutch army made an impartial analysis impossible. The Republican army, as well as the Republic itself, was viewed with contempt, and seen as unable to organize itself in a disciplined way and, respectively, rule a country. This traditional, colonial short-sightedness influenced military and political policies. It took the Dutch politicians three years to accept the new realities; the army leadership probably never did. The academically neglected military theory of the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, Indonesian National Armed Forces)—only Petra Groen in her *Marsroutes en dwaalsporen* discusses it at length—its lack of influence on Dutch tactics, and its relationship with excessive Dutch violence needs to be explored.

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Reply

To begin with, I would like to thank the *Bijdragen* for initiating the debate on *De brandende kampongs van Generaal Spoor*. A particular word of thanks goes out to Robert Cribb, Bart Luttikhuis, Harry Poeze, and Abdul Wahid for their balanced reviews. Their findings have led to new insights and have forced me to reconsider aspects of my research and certain choices I made during this process. Fortunately, their critique is mainly related to methodological matters, such as the use of certain terms or concepts, as well as a number of omissions on my part, rather than to fundamental criticism concerning the research.

First, I will explain my decision to use, interchangeably, the terms 'mass violence' and 'extreme violence', as both Cribb and Luttikhuis raised critical questions in this regard. Needless to say that I also considered using the term 'war crimes'. Ultimately, I chose to largely avoid using this term, not least because 'war crimes' is a legal term that would to a certain extent restrict a researcher to a judicial approach and to a legal framing of his work. In my opinion, it is not the task of the historian, barring exceptions, to take on the role of judge. Another reason to refrain from using the term 'war crimes' is that the legal evaluation of the Indonesian War of Independence as such remains contested—and thus the question whether the (written) international law of war applies to this colonial conflict. Another contributing factor to this decision is that my book contains numerous accounts of Dutch mass violence. These accounts are not in all cases documented well enough to be admissible as evidence from a legal point of view, although some are certainly war crimes in a more general sense of the meaning. Given that, I considered it to be inappropriate to label all of these acts of (extreme) violence as war crimes. Furthermore, I deemed the term undesirable because of the polarizing effect its use has on the general public. I preferred to focus on the causes and dynamics that lay at the root of extreme violence, as I consider these aspects to be far more important than steering the debate further on an emotional and political course by using controversial terms. However, I did not avoid inconvenient analyses. My conclusions regarding Dutch mass violence are hard-hitting and are as clear as day.

My search for suitable terms quickly led me to 'mass violence' and 'extreme violence'. These are non-legal, analytically applicable, practical, and general catch-all terms that are becoming increasingly established in the field of international and comparative research on violence. These overall catch-all terms refer to murder, torture, rape, arson, looting, and other extreme or disproportionate forms of violence. A fairly precise and workable definition is included

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in the introduction of my book.[3] In places where specific accounts of extreme violence are discussed, such as torture or rape, I have generally opted to use the corresponding, explicit term. In Cribb's view, the term 'extreme violence' (and, for Luttikhuis, the term 'mass violence' as well) is perhaps too vague, yet the diversity of the various atrocities makes it hard to utilize one all-encompassing, more specific term. Luttikhuis's critique is that 'the line between ordinary and extreme violence' remains vague. I struggle, however, to follow his reasoning that the terms 'excessive violence' or 'war crimes' 'would be more explicit on this point', as these concepts are equally problematic when it comes to establishing this line between ordinary and extreme, and are not without their own set of objections either. Besides, there are also obvious grey areas. Cribb goes on to state that 'the term "extreme violence" leaves us without vocabulary for dealing with degrees of extremeness'. I do not consider this phrase to be lacking in this respect, particularly as this is a catch-all term, somewhat comparable to an overall term such as 'genocide'. Furthermore, comparative assessments can still be made, for instance, along the lines of 'the extreme violence perpetrated by the French in the Algerian War was institutionalized or systematic to a greater extent than that perpetrated by the Dutch'. In addition, there is still the possibility of explicitly describing or comparing specific forms of extreme violence without using this catch-all term.

This said, I understand the criticism voiced by Cribb and Luttikhuis regarding the terms 'mass violence' and 'extreme violence'. After all, I myself spent a considerable amount of time contemplating these terminological decisions. In the end, I came to the conclusion that a crystal-clear and entirely undisputed term simply does not (yet) exist. My use of these terms was, therefore, partly for lack of a better word. This is also implicitly confirmed by Cribb and Luttikhuis, as they do not provide convincing alternative terminological suggestions. Use of the term 'excesses'—and, by extension, 'excessive violence'—was, by the way, not an option, as these terms are too closely associated with the official *Excessennota* dating from 1969. This euphemistic and now outdated official report concluded that, overall, the Dutch army had behaved correctly, with the exception of a few incidental 'excesses' at most. In hindsight, however, I agree

3 'In this book, mass violence and extreme violence are defined as the use of physical violence that was used, predominantly outside of regular combat situations, against non-combatants (civilians) or combatants (military personnel or militia) who had been disarmed following their capture. Generally speaking, this extreme violence took place without immediate military necessity or a clearly defined military objective.' The definition as given in *Brandende kampongs* is broader and includes additional forms of violence (including non-physical varieties); see p. 45.

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with Cribb that I should perhaps have embedded the terms 'mass violence' and 'extreme violence' further in academic theory.

In this respect, my decision to discuss technological (or mechanical) violence in Chapter 5 ('Forms of extreme violence'), a chapter that includes the discussion of more clearly defined acts of extreme violence, such as killings of prisoners of war, women, and children, was perhaps somewhat unfortunate. For the purpose of clarity, I should have titled this 20-page subsection 'extreme technological violence', rather than simply 'technological violence'. The disproportionate use of heavy weapons described in these pages, such as an air strike on the market place of Bandar Buat (Padang, Sumatra) in 1947, can be classed as war crimes, even by the standards of that time.

Luttikhuis remarks that the subject of technological violence illustrates the drawbacks of the use of the concept of extreme violence. In my opinion, it is not the concept of extreme violence as such that is problematic, rather than the assessment of technological violence. Not only is it in practice difficult to draw the boundary between what can be seen as proportionate and disproportionate, but the assessment by various actors of the extent of military necessity remains subjective. Let it be clear that the Dutch armed forces with their superior weaponry also constantly applied 'normal', or legitimate, technological violence. To put it differently: certainly not all technological violence that was applied as part of, for instance, artillery fire, can be categorized as extreme violence or mass violence, even if this violence did result in high numbers of casualties.

Nonetheless, the prevalent assumption is that a substantial part of this technological violence was disproportionate. On the one hand, the standards of acceptable violence that the army leadership and commanders in the field were expected to abide by were recorded in international law, which was considered an important norm and existed alongside military penal code, military disciplinary law, and regulations such as the Voorschrift voor de Uitoefening van de Politiek Politionele Taak van het Leger (VPTL, regulation for the exercise of the political-police task of the army). The commanders in the field, with their moral compass to a greater or lesser degree intact, also played a vital role.

On the other hand, both the army leadership and the commanders in the field relied on their personal judgement as a guiding principle in achieving their objectives. For instance, in order to avoid risks (and limit own casualties), many commanders deemed necessary the shelling by heavy weapons of villages that they suspected were harbouring insurgents. In case of internal or external criticism, they would justify the high number of civilian casualties with this actual or alleged necessity. If the Dutch side was aware beforehand that a large

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number of civilians were present at the non-military or military target, and if the commanders consciously accepted the risk of a high number of civilian casualties, thus ignoring the principle of proportionality, I consider this to be an act of extreme violence (see the definition given on p. 389).

The difficulty, or perhaps even impossibility, of drawing a clear line between proportionate and disproportionate violence is also related to the available source material, which often offers too little information to come to an adequate assessment of a situation. Furthermore, even the discussion of the use of technological violence in modern-day missions shows that, despite the presence of stricter guidelines, the question of whether this use of violence is justified often still results in conflicting opinions. Researchers are eager to clearly define this boundary, and the further search for satisfying definitions continues to be indispensable. Up to now, however, within military practice virtually all forms of violence have contained a grey area.

Let it be clear that I attempted, using partially inadequate source materials, to come to assessments that are as satisfying as possible regarding the use of violence, and that the concept of extreme (technological) violence involves the application of a combination of military, legal, and moral norms. The close relationship between the concept of extreme violence and that of war crimes did not go unnoticed by Cribb either, who described my definition as 'surprisingly legalistic'. Cribb finds this definition problematic and reasons that 'many of the atrocities described by Limpach were […] based in military necessity'. The question arises as to how we should define military necessity. Whereas Cribb seemingly approaches this from a pure military point of view, my own particular approach was based on a broader perspective—something I did not explicitly state in my research. When it comes to the survival of a soldier or unit, or achieving local objectives, there is (generally speaking) no urgent and immediate necessity to torture and/or kill prisoners, plunder and burn down villages, fire at farmers, rape women, or to riddle houses with bullets or grenades. Such extreme methods are not only politically counter-productive (as Cribb rightly remarks), but in the long term also counter-productive from a military perspective, even within own ranks (decline of discipline and, in certain cases, moral). Furthermore, higher goals such as winning the war and minimizing own casualties do not justify the use of any alleged necessary means available (including mass violence), despite this being the presumption upon which many Dutch commanders based their actions. But, of course, military necessity is assessed differently by, for instance, commanders in the field, ethicists, legal experts or historians (the latter three profiting from the benefit of hindsight). These are the perspectives, however, to which I wanted to give just as much weight as to the military reasoning.

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Luttikhuis also mentions that he would have appreciated a more precise apportionment of liability for the Dutch mass violence. The purpose of my research, however, was to provide an explanation for the use of extreme violence and an insight into its dynamics, not to produce a legal treatise or even reckoning. I did, however, repeatedly focus on the responsibilities of the various officials from top to bottom, both in the military and the political sphere. As a result, I point out numerous names of actors, units, and institutions involved. I thereby go much further than any previous studies on this topic have done. Besides, apart from the legal concept of 'command responsibility' it is not clear to me how the level of responsibility can be measured, all the more so because the degree of involvement in mass violence varies from case to case and the responsibility of the higher level of command is often unclear or impossible to uncover. Even within the command and execution chains themselves, major differences and gradations exist, as demonstrated by varying degrees of involvement of servicemen, NCOs, as well as the commanders of companies, battalions, and brigades up to the general staff. In some cases of extreme violence, such as the events that took place in early 1949 in Malang, the brigade commander gave explicit orders for an (unauthorized) series of killings of Indonesian prisoners. By doing so, this particular brigade commander was clearly chiefly responsible for, in this case, 16 murders. In other cases, however, senior commanders had a far less clear-cut, and more indirect, responsibility (for their subordinates), as they created regulations and (at times purposely vague) objectives that fuelled extreme violence. On a number of occasions, this led to subordinates taking the law into their own hands, claiming that—if they ever had to justify their actions—they had acted in the spirit of their superiors. These aspects alone already show the enormous complexity of the question of responsibility. It is not an exact science, that much is certain.

All in all, perhaps this was the reason why I reached the 'relatively indiscriminate' (Luttikhuis), but at least generally valid, conclusion that a broad coalition of perpetrators was in most cases responsible for the Dutch mass violence. This also corresponds with the fact that mass violence cannot arise and persist without broad support from various circles of perpetrators and other actors involved. Luttikhuis goes on to refer to my definition of structural (extreme) violence as a circular argument. In my opinion, however, 'structural violence-promoting factors' within an army do not necessarily result in 'structural extreme violence'—for instance, when sufficient checks and balances, prevention measures, punishments, or means of opposition exist. Moreover, I certainly do substantiate my view that the political and military leaders were primarily responsible (whether referred to as direct or indirect responsibility). I also provide, without claiming to be comprehensive in this approach, harsh

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criticisms of both the political decision-makers in The Hague and the key Dutch players in the archipelago: General Spoor, Attorney General Felderhof and Governor General Van Mook. In addition, I discuss the responsibilities of senior commanders and the lower ranks in various extensive case studies and numerous shorter extracts. I describe the perpetration of mass violence as a process in which a number of actors from different levels or institutions were involved—actors that held various, fluid degrees of responsibility, that were often difficult to accurately quantify.

The remark that my conclusion that the use of extreme violence by Dutch troops was a structural phenomenon was 'hardly controversial' (Luttikhuis) is certainly true—at least, from the perspective of a specialist such as Luttikhuis. I did, however, document this conclusion in much greater detail than had ever been done previously in other studies. Moreover, if the conclusions had actually been so uncontroversial, also among non-specialists, my study would not have received the media attention it did in the Netherlands and would not have generated the political and legal follow-ups that it has.

Wahid remarks that racism as a colonial inheritance is insufficiently discussed in the book, even though I devoted five pages to the topic of racism in Chapter 10 alone (and more attention was given elsewhere). The exact influence of this phenomenon cannot be precisely determined, but I do stress that racism is one of the (many) violence-promoting factors on the Dutch side, which I illustrate with a number of examples. Wahid is, however, correct in stating that I only briefly describe the colonial heritage of the Japanese occupation. My decision to do so was based on the knowledge that the period of Japanese occupation (1942–1945) has already been quite extensively researched. I also completely agree with Wahid and Cribb on the point that the international comparative dimension is limited. For this reason, I included this point as a vital subject for the further research I suggest at the end of my book.

Wahid claims that my research 'solely relies on Dutch official and non-official sources'. A fair point, but not one that I entirely agree with, as I also consulted partly British sources and, albeit in (too) limited quantities, also international and Indonesian literature. In addition, considering my focus on Dutch mass violence, it is the most obvious choice to analyse Dutch sources in particular. Moreover, in my opinion the large number of Dutch sources, the majority of which had not yet, or hardly, been consulted before, provide a bounty of information for researchers. This is particularly the case if the researcher examines unofficial personal documents (letters, diaries, oral-history interviews, memoires) side-by-side with, and complementary to, official sources. Even official documents, whether from a military or a civilian source, entail a wealth of information, either read along or against the archival grain. The military-

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judicial sources in particular (and, to a lesser extent, those of the civil colonial government) often also grant an insight into Indonesian perspectives via the reports of interrogations of accused individuals, witnesses, or prisoners and by accusations that have been preserved. The archive of the two extraordinarily critical civilian jurists Van Rij and Stam, which had up until this point been untapped, was perhaps my most valuable source, providing information that allows researchers to come to unprecedented, in-depth analyses of certain Dutch acts of violence. Van Rij and Stam themselves also questioned Indonesians on numerous occasions. All in all, it thus is not necessarily the case that researchers who base their work primarily on Dutch sources are incapable of describing Indonesian perspectives, or that historians who mainly work with Dutch sources are automatically 'embedded' (in other words, one-sided and/or uncritical), as Luttikhuis and Christiaan Harinck (2017:75) recently claimed in an article on the use of Indonesian sources. At the same time I am aware that—as Luttikhuis and Harinck, but also Wahid and Poeze argue—an assessment of Indonesian sources could adjust the Dutch view, as the Dutch sources are, of course, not unbiased.

Wahid and Poeze mention that, besides a greater use of Indonesian sources and monographs, they had hoped for a greater focus on the violent interactions between the two (main) parties—a valid point with which I agree. All I can say in my defence is that I was aware of these omissions, as demonstrated by the recommendations for further research I made at the end of the book. At least the instances of (extreme) violence between the fighting parties, is repeatedly described, albeit of course not comprehensively. A further description of the violent interactions would require a complex approach and an in-depth understanding of the Indonesian perspective. The same limiting factors were also the reason why I chose to refrain from discussing the Soepeno case, as brought forward by Poeze, as well as many other acts of extreme violence that I came across in the archives.

Like Wahid and Poeze, I am convinced that by conducting (further) research on the violent interactions and placing an increased focus on the Indonesian perspective and Indonesian victims, greater insight into the extreme violence perpetrated in 1945–1949 could and should be gained. This definitely also has my personal interest. It was simply unachievable, however, to include all aspects of this incredibly complex, four-year long, dirty and bloody Dutch–Indonesian war within the scope of a single doctoral study. Yet, to some extent I take it as a compliment that certain people seemingly expected me to do so. My decision to focus mainly on Dutch mass violence and Dutch sources was based primarily on the fact that there had been very little research carried out on this specific topic up until this point. Taking into account my lim-

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ited capabilities, I considered it a logical first step to clearly define my area of research—believing that, as a nation, the Dutch should first consider their own (violent) behaviour before widening their perspective. Furthermore, a significant amount of Dutch extreme violence was not related to Indonesian violence. This first step, however, should of course now be followed by further steps and a broadening of the research perspective. In this respect, I have great expectations for the large-scale 'Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945–1950' inquiry launched in September 2017, which is funded by the Dutch government. It seems that my book and the (political) momentum that its publication triggered were the last push needed to get this ball rolling. The inquiry will be conducted by KITLV, NIMH, and NIOD, in cooperation with international (including Indonesian) historians.[4] Fortunately, this inquiry will include an international comparative dimension, as well as other aspects that several reviewers considered omissions. I look forward to the findings.

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Reference

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4 For more information, see http://www.ind45-50.org.

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