



Bung Tomo: War criminal or Hero?
Dutch and Indonesian views on
the violence in Surabaya 1945

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Belanda: Indonesian word for Dutch

Bersiap: Indonesian word for “get ready”, or “be prepared”. In the Dutch historiography the term is used to describe the wave of Indonesian anti-colonial violence that occurred between October 1945 and the beginning of 1946.

BKR: *Badan Keamanan Rakjat*, People’s Security Corps

BPRI: *Barisan Pemberontakan Rakyat Indonesia*, Indonesian People’s Rebellion Force

Desa: Village

Domei: Japanese News Agency

IEV: *Indo-Europees Verbond*, Indo-European Alliance

Indië-herdenking: Literally “Indies commemoration,” which is about the Japanese capitulation of August 15, 1945 that is annually remembered in the Netherlands

Indische gemeenschap: Literally “Indies community”, diverse minority group of people in the Netherlands with a direct (family) connection to the former Dutch East Indies colony. Apart from ethnic Dutch, mostly Eurasian “Indo”, Indo-Chinese, Moluccan postcolonial migrants and their descendants.

Inlander: Dutch word for “native” referring to the Indonesian indigenous population

Kampung: Village, small urban community

Kempeitai: Japanese Police

KKS: *Komite Kontak Sosial*, Social Contact Committee

KNIL: *Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger*, Royal Netherlands Indies Army

Merdeka: Freedom, independence

NEFIS: Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service

New Priyayi: Diverse group of young, progressive Western educated Indonesians that challenged the authority and values of the traditional Javanese elite from early 20th century onwards

NICA: Netherlands Indies Civil Administration

ODO: *Opsporingsdienst Overledenen*, Dutch [Civilian] Deaths Investigation Service

Pemuda: Indonesian word for “youth”, “young men” or “Indonesian freedom fighter”

PETA: *Pembela Tanah Air*, [Japanese trained] Fatherland Defense Forces

Pesindo: *Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia*, Socialist Youth of Indonesia

PKI: *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, Indonesian Communist Party

PRI: *Pemuda Republik Indonesia*, Youth of the Indonesian Republic

Priyayi: Traditional Javanese Elite

Rakyat: People

Radio Pemberontakan: Rebellion Radio

RAPWI: Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees

Romusha: Forced laborers

RRI: Radio Republik Indonesia,

SI: *Sarekat Islam*

Sumpah Pemuda: Youth Pledge

TKR: *Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*, People's Security Force

TNI: *Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, Indonesian National Army

Totok: Dutch colonial term for white people

VOC: *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, United East India Company

Vreemde Oosterlingen: Foreign Orientals, Dutch colonial term referring to ethnic Chinese, Indians or Arabs

PREFACE

This thesis before you is more than the result of a two years study at Leiden University. It is the product of a decade-long search in the historical traces of the Indonesian war of independence (1945-1949). My journey started in 2009 when I found an old photo book of my grandfather Jan van Pagee. The album contained pictures of him as a soldier in Surabaya in the late 1940s. After he returned home in 1949 he never talked about his experiences and passed away in 2005. I was born and raised in the Netherlands where education about colonial history is lacking. I hardly knew anything about the context in which the pictures were taken. The silence of my grandfather in combination with the general lack of knowledge in the Netherlands piqued my curiosity. I discovered that he was a conscript who fought against the Indonesian Republic between 1947 and 1949. He was assigned at the Dutch Marines Brigade, based in Indonesia's second largest city Surabaya. The discovery of the old photos and my personal link to this history eventually brought me to Indonesia where I had the chance to interview and photograph dozens of Indonesian veterans and witnesses. I first came to Surabaya as photographer—I obtained my Bachelor in visual arts—and later as an independent journalist. Apart from several exhibitions I shared my findings in the Netherlands in newspaper articles and short radio documentaries.



Figure 1 Dutch and Indonesian veteran portraits © Marjolein van Pagee

Through the very intriguing conversations with Indonesian eyewitnesses and historians I began to see the errors in the Dutch-centered view on colonial history. This was

not about restoring “law and order” on Dutch-owned land—as soldiers like my grandfather were told—this was a struggle from a suppressed and colonized people that tried to break free from a foreign domination. I began to realize how much the national context in which I grew up had formed my worldview. Just as I was taught at school about the German occupation of the Netherlands in World War II, so too Indonesians are taught about the Dutch occupation of their country. My fascination for the differences in perspective and the notion that most Indonesians and Dutch do not speak each other’s language eventually inspired me to set up *Histori Bersama* in 2016. With this bilingual platform I aim to reveal in what way Dutch and Indonesian views differ. As such, perspectives became the main theme in my work. One of the lessons that I learned is that in some cases Indonesian and Dutch perspectives cannot exist along side each other, as they are too contradicting.

In spite of my acquaintance with the topic, I had no academic experience before I entered Leiden University in 2016. It therefore took me quite some time to complete this thesis. When I enrolled at the Master’s program Colonial and Global History I was not trained in academic writing. The several opinion articles that I previously published always firmly expressed my viewpoints. During the process of writing this thesis I often felt as if I had to suppress my own views and it was difficult to find the right tone. That this manuscript finally reached the current stage is due to the ongoing support of my supervisor Dr. Ethan Mark who taught me how to build up my arguments more carefully. I am grateful for the many discussions that we had. I am also thankful for the long-lasting friendship and close cooperation with Ady Setyawan, a Surabaya-based expert on the history of the revolution. The same counts for Osa Kurniawan, who was so kind to comment on my first drafts and correct my mistakes. Special thanks to Rintahani Johan Pradana, historian from Malang, who helped me to find Indonesian literature on Sutomo. Thank you Dhahana Adi for accompanying me on my research in Surabaya. Historian and writer Hendi Johari supported me during my stay in Jakarta. Together with our mutual friend Ronald Najoan (Larry) we had many interesting discussions about the differences between Indonesian and Dutch perspectives. Thanks to the financial support of the Leiden University Fund (LUF) I was able to conduct research in Indonesia. I am also grateful to Catherine van Ommeren and Carein van Beveren who were the first “non-expert” readers of my thesis. Last but not least, I want to thank archaeologist and art historian Toni Tack for reading the final draft and help me improving my English.

I will mostly use the modern Indonesian spelling. For example, “oe” in the old Dutch spelling became “u” in modern Indonesian. This often (not always) applies to the names of persons as well. Thus in the case of Sutomo, Dutch sources spell his name as “Soetomo” or “Boeng Tomo”, while Indonesians use “Sutomo” or “Bung Tomo”. The meaning of “Bung” is older brother. Since Sutomo is commonly referred to as Bung Tomo in Indonesia, I will use both names interchangeably. Another note to take into account is that most Indonesians do not have family names. Thus Sutomo is the only name that he was given, he has no surname.

INTRODUCTION

“He is our number-one national hero,” the taxi driver explains excitedly when he realizes that he just spoke on the phone to Bambang Sulistomo, the son of Sutomo. It is Monday, March 2017, and rush hour in the Indonesian capital. After receiving instructions by phone, the car is heading closer to the neighborhood where Sulistomo lives. “He was very brave in the battle of Surabaya,” the driver concludes. This is how many Indonesians still remember the man who played a decisive role in the revolution of 1945, which was the beginning of the Indonesian independence war that lasted until December 1949. The opening sentence of a recent edition of *Tempo*-magazine (2016), solely devoted to this number-one national hero, reads:

Sutomo (1920-1981) supported the struggle through agitation and propaganda. His speeches encouraged the youth all across Java to join the fighting in the streets of Surabaya.¹



Figure 2 Bambang Sulistomo, son of Sutomo, posing in front of his father's portrait in his house in Jakarta, March 2017. Photo: © Marjolein van Pagee

¹ "Bung Tomo. Surabaya di Tahun 45", *Tempo* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2016).

Meanwhile in the Netherlands, the way Sutomo is remembered could not be more different. The edit history of the English-language Wikipedia page reveals a severe argument between different contributors presumably Dutch versus Indonesian. One of them insisted on adding: “race-based execution of civilians” to the paragraph about his role during the battle of Surabaya.² Interestingly this sentence was removed right away but put back again by a third contributor, who argued that Sutomo, or Bung Tomo as he is called in Indonesia, was in fact responsible for atrocities. In the Netherlands Sutomo’s name is mentioned in the same breath with the so-called “*Bersiap*” period, the term referring to an outburst of Indonesian anti-colonial violence, shortly after the Japanese surrender, lasting from October 1945 to the beginning of 1946.³ When searching Google using keywords “Bersiap” and the Dutch spelling “Boeng Tomo” the blog “My Indo World” pops up as one of the first Google results describing him as an instigator of atrocities:

Boeng Tomo made sure that it was dangerous for women and children to leave the internment camps. The first Bersiap period led by ... General Soetomo had begun ... in a gruesome manner and on a large scale.⁴

Equally illustrative for common Dutch viewpoints is the documentary film *Archief van Tranen* (Archive of Tears) which portrays Sutomo as the evil spirit behind a series of brutal murders at the Simpang Club in Surabaya.⁵

This negative view is not only expressed in the popular media. Scholars such as Inez Hollander also portray Bung Tomo as a madman who realized the power of mass hysteria through his radio speeches: “His broadcasts of fury and hatred were paving the way for future massacres.”⁶ Another example is in the work of military historian Rémy Limpach:

² See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutomo>

³ Personally I encountered the negative connotation that his name evokes in the Netherlands. In 2014 I posed on a picture with an Indonesian actor who played the role of Bung Tomo during a reenactment in Surabaya. Dutch journalist Esther Wils published an article in which she wondered how I dared to pose on a picture with “war criminal Sutomo.” See: Esther Wils, “Atjeh door de transkoloniale bril”, *Athenaeum* (October 18, 2016) <http://www.athenaeum.nl/recensies/2016/atjeh-door-de-transkoloniale-bril/> For an Indonesian article about the reenactment see: Mahandis Y. Thamrin, “Timbang Hati Si Puan Pemberani”, *National Geographic Indonesia* (August 2015).

⁴ Ronny Geenen, “Boeng Tomo” (November 20, 2015): <http://myindoworld.com/tag/boeng-tomo/>

⁵ In colonial times the Simpang Club was an exclusive venue for the wealthy population of Surabaya, thus in the pre-war period this meant that indigenous people were not in a position to enter this building, except from the staff working there. In 1945 this Club became the temporary headquarters of the *Pemuda Republik Indonesia* (Youth of the Indonesian Republic, PRI). For Dutch eyewitness accounts see: Pia van der Molen and Michiel Praal, “Archief van Tranen” (TV MAX, 2012).

⁶ Inez Hollander, *Silenced voices. Uncovering a family’s colonial history in Indonesia* (Ohio: Ohio University, 2008) pp. 94.

alongside a portrait of Sutomo he bluntly states that his speeches encouraged atrocities.⁷ The most extreme accusation against Sutomo appears in the 1947 testimony of Ms. Sinsu-Andries collected by the *Opsporingsdienst Overledenen* (ODO [civilian] deaths investigation Service), a Dutch investigation team that was appointed to collect information about those who were lost or deceased during or right after World War II. Sinsu-Andries claimed that Sutomo led a horrifying massacre at the Simpang Club in Surabaya:

Behind the main building we were searched and interrogated by executioner Rustam (from Padang) and Sutomo, who is now the Propagandist of the Republicans and the PRI⁸ ... Before every execution Sutomo asked the audience as a form of entertainment what should be done with the enemy of the people. "Kill!" they shouted.⁹

This suggests that Sutomo was not only responsible for radio speeches but that he was even personally present at the murder site.

The depiction of Bung Tomo as perpetrator is in stark contrast with Indonesian eyewitness accounts that describe Sutomo as someone who was against brutal killings. For example Indonesian veteran Sifun wrote that when an Indonesian crowd was massacring Japanese soldiers, Bung Tomo came onto the scene to prevent further escalation: "If Bung Tomo had not interfered it would have turned into a real blood bath," he recalled.¹⁰

There is, in short, a fundamentally different pattern in Dutch and Indonesian perspectives. Of course, not to suggest that nationality is the only factor deciding how people view Sutomo. There are also dissident minority opinions to be found on both sides. Yet the general pattern calls for an analysis of the national divergence in the memory of Bung Tomo's role.

⁷ Rémy Limpach, *De Brandende Kampongs van Generaal Spoor* (Amsterdam: Boom Uitgevers, 2016) pp. 246.

⁸ Before Sutomo established his own organization on October 12, 1945, he worked as a journalist for the information section of the youth organization PRI.

⁹ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, *Ministerie van Defensie: Strijdkrachten in Nederlands-Indië*, no.: 2.13.132, inventory no. 1935.

¹⁰ Dewan Harian Daerah Angkatan '45 (DHD), Surabaya. Testimony no. 14, H. Moch. Sifun (1976).

Research question

This thesis will focus on Indonesian violence during the *Bersiap* and how Bung Tomo became the personification of these brutalities for the Dutch memory in particular. How does the latter relate to the Indonesian positive memory of him? This requires a critical analysis of both Dutch and Indonesian historiographies. Since there are two different claims, there are two sub-questions to answer. First: What historical evidence proves Bung Tomo's role in relation to the infamous murders in the Simpang Club in Surabaya, 1945? And secondly, in what way are his radio speeches linked to atrocities against minorities and those not supporting the Republic? In a larger context this touches upon the interpretation of the colonial war, and the place of the *Bersiap* within it.

Indonesian and Dutch national memory

The goal of this historical assessment of Bung Tomo's performance in that time and how he is remembered is mainly to overcome the nationalist blinders to better understand the dynamics— the interactive part of history that is not limited to country borders. The key to such a "transnational" approach of historical writing is to critically question each narrative. Therefore, first a brief description of social and political factors that explain more generally how differences could develop over the years. The first observation is that after 1949 Dutch and Indonesian historians were not in touch often. Partly due to the physical distance and the language barrier both countries dealt with the past in near total separation. An important factor that influenced the Indonesian historiography is that only fifteen years after the Dutch gave up colonial rule, an authoritarian (anti-communist) regime was established with Soeharto as Indonesia's second president. During the thirty-two years of the so-called New Order-regime the intellectual freedom of Indonesian historians and journalists was very much restricted. Naturally this curtailment of freedom of expression affected the Indonesian historiography. As the American historian William Frederick puts it:

The New Order reconstructed the Revolution's history in such a way as to "tame" or soften it, to blanch it of impurities and embarrassments.¹¹

¹¹ William H. Frederick, "Shadows of an unseen hand. Some patterns of violence in the Indonesian revolution, 1945-1949," in: Freek Colombijn and Thomas Lindblad, (ed.) *Roots of Violence in Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002) pp. 146.

At the same time Frederick also observes that:

Ironically, it is precisely in the New Order, beginning roughly in the early 1970s, that memoirs (written and oral recollections) and biographies, as well as numerous local and regional histories, do in fact make some mention of what we might call “politically incorrect revolutionary violence.”¹²

More controversial than discussing *Bersiap*-violence in Indonesia is acknowledging the leading role of politically leftist groups (or persons) who participated in the struggle for independence. In 1945 many Indonesian revolutionaries were communist or socialist oriented, however, after the leftist movement was totally wiped out in 1965, their contribution was erased from Indonesian history books as well.

After the collapse of the Soeharto-regime in 1998, progressive Indonesian intellectuals mainly focused on the deconstruction of the rigid, black and white nationalist ideology that had become deeply rooted in Indonesian society under the military regime of Soeharto. In his book *Seabad kontroversi Sejarah* (The century of controversial history, 2007) Indonesian historian Asvi Wardam Adam calls for the demilitarization of Indonesia’s historiography:

The discourse in Indonesian history is all about “unity.” In the attempt to unite the territory the Army appeared to be the sole power loyal to the government of Indonesia. ... It is necessary to “demilitarize the history of Indonesia.” Soldiers are an important component of the nation but not the only ones who were instrumental in defending the country.¹³

Asvi Warman Adam works for the Indonesian government institution *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* (Indonesian Institute of Science, LIPI) and is known for critically questioning the Indonesian concept of heroism. In Indonesia one can be appointed as national hero through an administrative, governmental procedure. Although Sutomo was very famous since 1945, the Indonesian authorities only recognized him as hero in 2007.¹⁴

¹² Frederick, “Shadows of an unseen hand.” (2002) pp. 146.

¹³ Asvi Warman Adam, *Seabad Kontroversi Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2007) pp. 118.

¹⁴ Dian Widiyanarko, “Pemerintah Didesak Beri Gelar Pahlawan pada Bung Tomo,” *Okezone* (November 9, 2007): <http://news.okezone.com/read/2007/11/09/1/59809/pemerintah-didesak-beri-gelar-pahlawan-pada-bung-tomo>

Asvi observes that due to the heavy focus on military achievements, the sacrifice of regular people is often ignored. In relation to the battle of Surabaya and the subsequent British bombing of November 10th 1945, he emphasizes that it was a people's movement:

In 1945 the people of Surabaya fearlessly opposed the Allied forces. The latter ordered them to surrender their weapons on November 10th, 1945. Yet, the ultimatum was rejected after which the Allied forces carried out attacks from air and land. Thousands of Surabaya citizens were victimized. However, people did not resist because the central government instructed them, they did because local leaders encouraged them to oppose the occupation.¹⁵

Part of the process of deconstructing the legacy of the New Order regime has been a critical reflection on the revolution by adding more realistic and sometimes ugly details to the existing clichés. This also includes a critical reflection on the *Bersiap*, sometimes by referring to Dutch claims. In an essay in *Tempo Magazine* (2016), Indonesian historian Abdul Wahid carefully introduced his readers to the Dutch perspective regarding Sutomo:

The figure of Bung Tomo is portrayed as one of the youth leaders who took the lead in, or at least allowed, a series of violent acts in mid-October 1945 which are considered to be one of the reasons for the Allied bombing of [Surabaya] on November 10th [1945]. ... The *Bersiap* is clearly unpopular and has no place in the Indonesian historiography, as it will “undermine” the nationalistic historical narrative promoted by the Indonesian government. However, the international community and Indonesian history experts agree [that the *Bersiap* took place and their views are] also widely circulating online... [Thus] whether we like it or not, agree or disagree, Indonesians will absorb these narratives too.¹⁶

Wahid has a point that Indonesians are currently more likely to “absorb” influences from outside. In this digital age it has become easier to discover different perspectives online. However, it does not mean that a virtual connection automatically leads to a critical dialogue across country borders. For many Indonesians the language barrier still stands in the way, not just in the sense of communicating with non-Indonesians but also in accessing

¹⁵ Asvi, *Seabad Kontroversi* (2007). pp. 129.

¹⁶ Abdul Wahid, “Bung Tomo dan pertempuran Surabaya,” in: *Bung Tomo. Pemberontak dari Kampung Blauran* (Jakarta, 2015) pp. 84, 100-101.

Dutch or English-written sources about their country's history. When interviewed in 2017 Wahid states that his motivation to teach about the *Bersiap* is mainly to add nuance to the one-sided and militarized version of history that the Indonesian state provides:

I really want my students to learn a different perspective on this period. I introduced the concept of *Bersiap* as an extreme example to break their frozen memory... to show: look this also happened, this is part of the story as well.¹⁷

Yet, adding nuance does not fundamentally change the main storyline of a suppressed people versus a Western colonial domination, as Wahid explains in an opinion article in the *Jakarta Post* (2013):

Undoubtedly, Indonesians suffered [the greatest] losses during the period as thousands of civilians died, families were disunited [and] displaced [while] properties and sources of income were gone. But, under the current historiographical mainstream, these losses have been simply classified under the term of "sacrifice" at the will of the people, without further explanation. Meanwhile, the losses of those considered "Dutch subjects" were completely ignored.¹⁸

Meanwhile in the Netherlands, the colonial war, and to a large degree colonial history as such, are not nationally remembered. This period is not an ingredient of nation-building as it is in Indonesia. On the contrary, on the Dutch side the colonial past is often forgotten and ignored, as seen for example in the absence of this period in school textbooks. In his article "Colonial memory and forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia", Dutch scholar Paul Bijl (2012) argues that the Netherlands suffers from "aphasia." It is not that historical evidence of colonial violence does not exist; rather, it is not part of a national framework of memory:

...Far from being made absent through cover-ups and conspiracies, Dutch colonialism and its violence sometimes appear as forgotten in the Netherlands because the victims of colonialism are not memorable within a national context and there is no language available to discuss them as a part of Dutch history. ... Briefly

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Abdul Wahid (April 3, 2017).

¹⁸ Abdul Wahid, "The untold story of the Surabaya Battle of 1945", *The Jakarta Post* (Leiden, November 12, 2013).

put: national history and colonial history are mostly kept apart.¹⁹

Thus notwithstanding the traces of colonial history in the Netherlands and the occasional attention, it nevertheless remains a marginal issue. The Indonesian war of independence (1945-1949) has only recently been rediscovered as topic of large-scale investigation.²⁰ Yet when this government-funded research project was launched in September 2017 it was not front-page news either. This explains why Indonesian revolutionaries like Bung Tomo are not commonly known and the *Bersiap* as part of the colonial war is not nationally remembered.

However, a minority of Dutch people with a direct (family) connection to the former colony – Eurasian “*Indo*”, Indo-Chinese, Moluccan and also ethnic Dutch postcolonial migrants and their descendants known together as the so-called “*Indische community*” – have not forgotten about what happened in 1945. For this diverse group of people, who have a history in the Dutch East Indies and mostly moved to the Netherlands after the colonial regime collapsed, the Indonesian revolution is in general a painful memory, full of suffering caused by cruel Indonesians, of whom Sutomo is seen as the most evil. However marginalized and fragmented this group of postcolonial migrants may be, the stories that they brought nevertheless influenced the Dutch general impression of what Dutch colonialism in Asia was about. Within the *Indische community* the colonial society before the war is often described in terms of “*tempo doeloe*” ([good old] colonial times), a peaceful setting that the Japanese invasion of 1942 tore asunder. This is followed in 1945 by the *Bersiap*-period, in which Indonesian revolutionaries began to scream for independence and ran amuck, seeking revenge against the Dutch and those associated with them. The sudden outbreak of violence was interpreted by the Dutch as proof that the new Republic was not able to control the masses and hence the need for the Dutch to “restore law and order.” As a consequence the postcolonial debate and collective memory in the Netherlands rarely links the *Bersiap* to the previous colonial oppression, as the dominant assumption was that the indigenous population appreciated Dutch rule. The latter insensitivity to the views of the

¹⁹ Paul Bijl, “Colonial memory and forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia”, in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14:3-4 (2012) pp. 441-461.

²⁰ The Dutch research “Decolonization, violence and war in Indonesia, 1945-1950” is a four-year research program carried out by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH) and the Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD): <https://www.ind45-50.org/en>

oppressed did not only blind the Dutch in the past, argues social and cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker in her book *White Innocence* (2016). She borrows Edward Said's concept of the "cultural archive" to analyze how the particular Dutch self-image has been fabricated. She interprets this concept as "a deep structure of inequality in thought ... based on race, installed in nineteenth-century European imperial populations." Wekker, who arrived in the Netherlands in the early fifties as a child of postcolonial migrants from the West Indies (Suriname) characterizes the Dutch self-image as follows:

Being a small, but just, ethical nation; color-blind, thus free of racism; as being inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light to other folks and nations. During the colonial era, the match of the Netherlands with the Dutch East Indies, its jewel in the crown, was in self-congratulatory fashion thought of like a match made in heaven...²¹

Illustrative is the annual "*Indië-herdenking*" (lit. "Indies commemoration," marking the Japanese capitulation on 15 August 1945) focusing solely on Dutch suffering during the Japanese occupation period, narrating it as an almost isolated event in time. Combined with stories about the *Bersiap* there is a tendency to emphasize Dutch suffering instead of addressing the continuity of the Dutch colonial occupation before and after.

The focus on suffering also relates to the normalization of colonialism in the Dutch context: both historically and currently. From a historical perspective the colony was seen as rightfully obtained "property" of the Netherlands. The reoccupation of the Indies was legitimized on economical grounds: the fear that the mother country in Europe would end up poor without colonial profits. This pure economic motive was mixed with the belief that they had the moral obligation to develop Indonesians, as they were generally not considered ready for self-rule. The Dutch public was told that the Japanese capitulation caused a power vacuum. The Indonesian proclamation was not taken seriously and merely framed as Japanese product with President Sukarno as collaborator. In this narrative Indonesians revolutionaries were portrayed as terrorists who were looting and raping, not only threatening Dutch nationals but also killing their own fellow countrymen. Many years afterwards the war is still referred to as "*politioenele acties*" (police actions.) Only in the past

²¹ Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016) pp. 2.



Figure 3 Example of Dutch propaganda in which Indonesian revolutionaries are depicted as savages, undated. Source: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag, file no.: KW 2281 A 337.

four or five years, this term is replaced by “decolonization war,” which is still different from the Indonesian term “*perang kemerdekaan*” (Independence war.)

Nowadays, most Dutch people realize that the slogan of restoring law and order was just propaganda and admit that Indonesia rightfully proclaimed the independence. However, when it comes to the interpretation of colonial history, still an often-heard argument is that colonialism may not be acceptable by the higher moral standards of today but that it was acceptable then.²² And because of that Dutch historians are expected to refer to the old line of thinking when they write about the colonial past.²³ It may explain why the Dutch East Indies is often referred to as a regular government (*Nederlands-Indische regering*) and not as a colonial apartheid regime. As a consequence of the latter normalization of colonialism, the violence used by the oppressor is often not differentiated from the violence used by the oppressed.

These are the various social and political factors that shaped the Indonesian and Dutch national memory and subsequently each historiography. This is the background against which the controversy of Sutomo needs to be seen. The main goal of this case study is to shed some light on the origins of where these different views of Sutomo and his times come from and how they have been reproduced in later years.

Hypothesis

This study departs from the hypothesis that the Dutch negative perception of Bung Tomo is linked to the interpretation of the *Bersiap* as such. For those convinced of the idea that most people had appreciated Dutch rule, the *Bersiap* came as a shock to begin with. From that viewpoint it is logical that people thought that all this violence would not have occurred if Indonesian leaders like Sutomo had not encouraged resistance. In that sense it is not impossible that an outspoken and influential figure as Bung Tomo was blamed for everything that went wrong. However, even if the latter hypothesis is true, it does not necessarily prove the Indonesian romanticized memory of Bung Tomo correct. Was he completely free of racism against minorities? How did he deal with massacres when they

²² Gert Oostindie, *Soldaat in Indonesië 1945-1950*, (Amsterdam, 2015) pp. 19-20 and 27-28.

²³ Remco Raben “On genocide and mass violence in colonial Indonesia”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14:3-4, (2012) pp. 488.

occurred? It seems that the mainstream Indonesian historiography not only glossed over the *Bersiap* as such, but also ignored Sutomo's shortcomings as a human being.

Relevance: "Decolonizing" *Bersiap*-research

From a broader perspective Sutomo's alleged complicity relates to the growing academic attention to the *Bersiap*, in which terminology (should we call it a genocide) and the possible trigger (why did it happen) are the main topics of discussion. In 1989 for example, Dutch historian Lou de Jong explained the *Bersiap* through the nature of the Javanese, known for their "smoldering aggressiveness" that could pop up unexpectedly.²⁴ This clear example of Dutch orientalism suggests a core essence in Indonesians that made them exceptionally violent. In his article "The brief genocide of Eurasians in Indonesia" (2008) Robert Cribb doubts whether three centuries of repressive Dutch colonial rule could explain the *Bersiap*. He argues that racial segregation was not as extreme in the Dutch East Indies as it was in the United States or South Africa:

One would not have expected such intense hostility to Eurasians in 1945/46 simply on the basis of racial prejudices simmering in the late colonial order. Prejudice did simmer, but there is no evidence of a vast reserve of animosity that might explain the genocide.²⁵

But if previous exploitation and discrimination are not sufficient answers for the explosion of violence against previous pro-colonial minorities, then what does explain it? In his article "On genocide and mass violence in colonial Indonesia" (2012) Dutch scholar Remco Raben argues that Cribb's phrase "brief genocide" is misleading, not for its use of the term genocide, but because it was not brief. He sees it rather as large-scale murder by the Indonesian *rakyat* (people) within the context of a power vacuum. According to him the brutal violence was "an extreme notion of self-determination," combined with the realization that regular people could take matters into their own hands.²⁶ Earlier in 2002,

²⁴ Lou de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog - Deel 12, Epiloog*, (Den Haag: Staatsdrukkerij en Uitgeverij, 1989) pp. 723.

²⁵ Robert Cribb, "The brief genocide of Eurasians in Indonesia, 1945/46", in: A. Dirk Moses (ed.) *Empire, Colony, Genocide. Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (Berghan Books, New York, 2008) pp. 424-439.

²⁶ Raben "On genocide", (2012) pp. 488.

Frederick argued in his article “Shadows of an Unseen Hand” that the reason why the *Bersiap* deserves more attention was to show that:

Indonesian society, even at the village level, was in some sense inherently violent or at least capable of enormous violence. Suggestions of this sort are not likely to make either Indonesian or foreign scholars, never mind the politically sensitive public, very happy. But they ought to be discussed and further investigated, both for what they may tell us about the Revolution and what insights they may give us into the origins of present-day violence in Indonesia.²⁷

Yet this was written only a few years after the Soeharto regime collapsed. Now twenty years later the *Bersiap* has a place in the Indonesian historiography, albeit as an inconvenient truth that can no longer be ignored. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands Frederick’s article “The killing of Dutch and Eurasians in Indonesia's national revolution (1945–49)” (2012)²⁸ caused the opposite reaction. Several Dutch media particularly highlighted his use of the term genocide, almost enthusiastically embracing it.²⁹ After that Frederick commented:

I am afraid things have gotten rather out of hand, with people interpreting my original article in their own way (perhaps without having read it), and misquoting me. I am disappointed that the matter has turned into a media circus rather than an opportunity to suggest further research.³⁰

In the dissertation *De republikeinse kampen in Nederlands-Indië* (The Republican camps in the Dutch East Indies, 2007) Dutch anthropologist Mary van Delden presents a slightly different view. She counters the idea (mainly circulating in the Netherlands) that all Indonesian freedom fighters joined in ruthless killings and argues instead that the Indonesian authorities at the height of the *Bersiap* set up protection camps to prevent further escalation. About 46,000 Dutch nationals were interned in Republican areas in the period 1945-1946:

²⁷ Frederick, “Shadows”, (2002) pp. 143-172.

²⁸ William H. Frederick, “The killing of Dutch and Eurasians in Indonesia's national revolution (1945–49): a ‘brief genocide’ reconsidered”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 14:3-4, (2012) pp. 359-380.

²⁹ Meindert van der Kaaij “De Bersiap: een vergeten golf van etnisch geweld”, *Trouw* (November 18, 2013) and: ANP “Moord op duizenden (Indische) Nederlanders was genocide”, *Volkskrant* (November 18, 2013)

³⁰ Max van der Werff “Bersiap = Genocide”, *7mei.nl* (November 27, 2013) <https://7mei.nl/2013/11/27/bersiap-genocide/>

The Indonesians called these places *kamp-kamp-perlindoengan* (protection camps) but the Dutch authorities considered the internees as hostages, as did many of the internees themselves. Scattered all over Java and Madura were approximately 400 camps, each with a number of internees ranging from ten to seven thousand (Malang). ... Apart from the fact that the internees had no freedom and often stayed in isolated, crowded and primitive camps, they lived at the same standard of living as the average Indonesian in the country. But as most Eurasian families in pre-war time and even during the war had been better off, many experienced this way of life as an ordeal.³¹

Dutch historian Herman Bussemaker, however, claimed that the circumstances in the camps were extremely bad, causing the deaths of thousands (Indo-)Europeans. In his book *Bersiap! Opstand in het Paradijs* (*Bersiap! Revolt in Paradise*, 2005) Bussemaker links Bung Tomo's radiobroadcasts to the escalation in Surabaya: "the consequences [of his radio speeches] were disastrous for the Dutch, from 14 October onwards they were no longer safe on the streets."³²

It must be noted that primary sources are in general scarce for the period under investigation, which makes a reliable historical reconstruction nearly impossible. This lack of sources is best illustrated by the uncertainty about the total death toll of the *Bersiap*. In his book *Macaber Soerabaja*³³ (*Macabre Surabaya*, 1990) Richard Klaessen refers only to a figure of 300 Dutch and 300 Chinese victims for Surabaya, whereas the total number for whole Indonesia was long estimated around 3,400 victims. However, recent publications (among others by Frederick) suggest a much higher figure of 20,000 – 30,000. The problem is that this increase in numbers seems rather a "gut feeling" than supported by new evidence. In his article "Bersiap, de werkelijke cijfers" (*Bersiap the real numbers*, 2014) Bert Immerzeel points out that the ODO interviews (an incomplete and fragmented collection

³¹ Mary C. van Delden, *De republikeinse kampen in Nederlands-Indië oktober 1945 – mei 1947. Orde in de Chaos?* (Kockengen, Van Delden, 2007) pp. 579-584. See also: Mary C. van Delden, "Deeply Rooted Former Views and the History of the Republican Camps and the POPDA" in: *International aspects of the struggle for Independence 1945-1949* (Jakarta: Department of Press and Cultural Affairs of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, 1997) pp. 8.

³² Herman T. Bussemaker, *Bersiap! Opstand in het Paradijs: De Bersiap-periode op Java en Sumatra 1945-1946* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2005) pp. 214-15, 260.

³³ Richard L. Klaessen, *Macaber Soerabaja 1945: De Werfstraatgevangenis. Relas van een reeks gebeurtenissen in Soerabaja in het najaar van 1945 met ingrijpende gevolgen*. (Den Haag: 1990) pp. 29.

used by Frederick) do not even make a distinction between victims of the *Bersiap* and those of the Japanese occupation.³⁴

Method

This thesis is divided in three sections of which the first section will provide a brief historical outline from the pre-war colonial situation to the Japanese occupation and finally the capitulation on August 15th, 1945. This, to give a clear understanding of the variety of social and political factors that led to the violent outburst of the *Bersiap*. The second section traces the basic history of Sutomo and his place in Surabaya and the first two months of the revolution in September and October 1945. This includes an analysis of the horrible events inside the Simpang Club. The third section pays attention to the period after he established his organization, when he became internationally known as radio-maker, actively countering Dutch propaganda. This section aims to explore the possibility of a Dutch slander campaign against him and the subsequent impact of that on the later historiography and memory. The conclusion will return to the main question on how to make sense of the conflicting memories of Bung Tomo. The conclusion will also touch upon the larger question regarding the responsibility for the *Bersiap* and whether the term genocide is appropriate in this case.

Sources

As noted above, a major challenge in studying the early days of the Indonesian revolution is that primary sources are not abundant. For local leaders and civilians in Surabaya it was a turbulent time, and most of the eyewitness accounts are from later years. For the Dutch it took until the beginning of 1946 before they were able to reassert their authority in Surabaya. This means that a regular stream of communication and reports at the local level only resumed from 1946 onwards. Yet the “Opsporingsdienst Overledenen” (ODO) did leave us some data about the *Bersiap*-time in Surabaya, including the aforementioned account of Ms. Sinsu-Andries, which was written more than two years after the event. Frederick’s 2012-article is partly based on these files and discusses the escalation

³⁴ Bert Immerzeel, “Bersiap de werkelijke cijfers”, *Java Post* (February 7, 2014): <https://javapost.nl/2014/02/07/bersiap-de-werkelijke-cijfers/>

inside the Simpang Club as well, providing a graphic description of the brutality of the killings that took place there. On the Dutch side most files about Bung Tomo or the *Bersiap* can be found at the National Archives (NL-HaNA) in The Hague, in particular the archives of the Dutch colonial Intelligence Service (NEFIS and CMI), which also include confiscated Indonesian materials.³⁵ Another archive that contains references to Surabaya in 1945 is that of the Attorney General of the High Court in the Dutch East Indies.³⁶ In the 1970s the Indonesian government institution Dewan Harian Daerah (DHD) compiled a collection of 127 veteran testimonies.³⁷ They seem nearly forgotten and have not been used in leading publications. What makes them particularly interesting is that the Indonesian veterans who submitted their testimonies were not high ranking military officers. Although the stories were written thirty years after the revolution, they nevertheless give some insight in the perspective of ordinary people, the so-called “*pemuda*” (Indonesian youth) of that time. They are bundled into thirteen books, each containing ten testimonies. It is worth mentioning that two of them seem to be lost. Fortunately however, in 1980 Dutch historian Harry Poeze copied the whole collection and this is now accessible in the Leiden University library. Yet since the testimonies were collected long after, details might be blurred. Not only this: as DHD falls under the supervision of the Indonesian government, it is necessary to take into account the influence of the New Order regime. Additionally, newspaper articles from that time are important primary sources to find out how Sutomo’s actions were framed by the media. In the dissertation *Indonesian Propaganda in the Struggle for Maintaining Independence 1945-1949* (2016) Indonesian historian Muhammad Yuanda Zara analyzed the emergence of the Indonesian press in which Bung Tomo played such a decisive role. For the Dutch part historian Louis Zweers analyzed the colonial press in his dissertation: *De gecensureerde oorlog. Militairen versus media in Nederlands-Indië 1945-1949* (The censored war. Soldiers versus media in the Dutch East Indies 1945-1949, 2013).³⁸ An important Dutch publication on Surabaya is Willy Meelhuijsen’s book *Revolutie in*

³⁵ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, *Netherland Forces Intelligence Service [NEFIS] en Centrale Militaire Inlichtingendienst [CMI] in Nederlands-Indië*, nummer toegang 2.10.62. Also: *Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS)*, no.: 2.10.37.02. Other files at the archives of the Ministry of Defense in The Hague: *Strijdkrachten in Nederlands-Indië*, no: 2.13.132.

³⁶ Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Procureur-Generaal bij het Hooggerichtshof van Nederlands-Indië, no.: 2.10.17

³⁷ In Indonesia: Dewan Harian Daerah Angkatan ’45 (DHD), Surabaya (collected in 1974-75.) In the Netherlands: Leiden University, Special Collections: Daftar riwayat hidup singkat pelaku pertempuran 10 Nopember 1945, OR’ 673.

³⁸ Louis Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog; Militairen versus media in Nederlands-Indië 1945-1949* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2013)

Soerabaja (Revolution in Surabaya, 2000), based on a variety of Dutch, Indonesian, British and even Japanese sources and publications.³⁹ There are countless Indonesian publications on the battle of Surabaya, for instance Barlan Setiadjaya's book *Merdeka atau mati di Surabaya 1945 (Freedom or death in Surabaya 1945, 1985.)*⁴⁰ Or *Pertempuran 10 November 1945: citra kepahlawanan bangsa Indonesia di Surabaya (The Battle of 10 November 1945: the image of Indonesian national heroes in Surabaya, 1986)*, written by several authors.⁴¹ In 1951 Bung Tomo published a book about his experiences as well: *10 November 1945. Kesaksian and Pengalaman seorang Aktor Sejarah (10 November 1945. The testimony and experience of an actor in history, 2008.)* Less known is the book of the leftist youth-leader Soemarsono: *Revolusi Agustus. Kesaksian seorang pelaku sejarah (August Revolution. The testimony of an actor in history, 2008.)*⁴² In addition, Indonesian veteran Suhario Padmodiwiryo, commonly known as Hario Kecik, left memoirs that also address the occurrence of ruthless killings in Surabaya 1945, including his critical view of Bung Tomo.⁴³ William Frederick's study *Visions and Heat - The Making of the Indonesian Revolution (1989)* provides one of the most extensive biographical portraits of Sutomo, partly based on personal interviews. Frederick states that he was indeed a radical type who encouraged resistance, but he does not mention his alleged complicity to atrocities. On the contrary:

The slaughter of Europeans at the Simpang Club was halted eventually by discreet interference on the part of several TKR⁴⁴ figures and Sutomo, who had broken with the PRI a few days earlier to form his own organization.⁴⁵

Thus in contrast to the OD-testimony of Sinsu-Andries, Frederick portrays Sutomo as the one calling a halt to the killings. Clearly the question of Sutomo's relation to the *Bersiap* deserves more attention. For Indonesia this may provide a more realistic, less romanticized

³⁹ Willy Meelhuijsen, *Revolutie in Soerabaja 17 augustus – 1 december 1945* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2000)

⁴⁰ Barlan Setiadjaya, *Merdeka atau Mati di Surabaya 1945*, (Jakarta: Widyaswara Kewiraan, 1985)

⁴¹ Aminuddin Kasdi, Suparto Brata (ed.), *Pertempuran 10 November 1945: citra kepahlawanan bangsa Indonesia di Surabaya* (Surabaya: Panitia Pelestarian Nilai-nilai Kepahlawanan 10 November 1945, 1986).

⁴² Soemarsono, *Revolusi Agustus; Kesaksian seorang pelaku sejarah* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2008).

⁴³ Suhario Padmodiwiryo, *Memoar Hario Kecik: Autobiografi Seorang Mahasiswa Prajurit, Volume 1*, (Jakarta: Obor, 1995) English translation by Frank Palmos: *Revolution in the City of Heroes: A Memoir of the Battle that Sparked Indonesia's National Revolution* (Singapore: Ridge Books, 2016). Personal interviews: Audio Collection Marjolein van Pagede (6 April 2014). See video Part I: <https://youtu.be/JnLHn59AkJI> and video Part II: <https://youtu.be/v13KNVcNQ8I>

⁴⁴ The TKR (*Tentara Keamanan Rakyat*, People's Security Force) was the predecessor of the regular Indonesian Army the TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, Indonesian National Army).

⁴⁵ Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 169-170 and 241-242.

image of him. Yet within the Dutch historiography the findings of this thesis may correct the criminalized memory of him. Was he the scapegoat for everything that went wrong?

1. Why origins matter: roots of racial animosities

The statement on the English-language Wikipedia page that Sutomo was responsible for “race-based execution of civilians,” asks for clarification on the particular role of racism within the colonial society. In contrast to Robert Cribb’s argument that the *Bersiap* cannot be explained by previous racial colonial prejudices, this first section departs from the opposite assumption that the intense hostilities of late 1945 cannot be disconnected from what went before. This section provides a brief historical outline from the pre-war colonial period up to the Japanese occupation and the capitulation of August 15th, 1945. Most importantly it reflects upon the way the Dutch minority ruled over the indigenous majority and how other ethnic groups were placed in between. There are four important factors that seem to have contributed to the violent escalation of 1945. The first factor concerns the destabilizing impact of centuries “divide and rule.” This classical political strategy makes opportunistic use of regional, ethnical or political differences to prevent local groups joining forces together. In the attempt to break this powerful formula the Indonesian independence movement chose the slogan of “unity in diversity.” The second aspect to take into account is the internalization of colonial racist ideas and inequality so typical for colonial empires. Whereas the white ruling class was convinced of its superiority, the subjugated masses were repeatedly confronted with ideas of essential inferiority. This is the second factor that seems to have contributed to the racial tensions that surfaced during the *Bersiap*. In colonial times institutional racism was supported by the Indies law system and naturally affected how racism worked on a daily basis. The third factor concerns the drastic change of the Japanese occupation that brought an end to centuries of Western domination and imprisoned the white ruling class. The fourth aspect is the ignorance and lack of knowledge on the side of the colonizers about the experience of the colonized. After the Japanese capitulation most Dutch citizens assumed that the colonial regime was going to be re-installed again.

Divide and rule

The political strategy of “divide et impera” (divide and rule) is as old as mankind. In essence it is about an alien minority that deliberately fragments local groups and leadership.

The strategy tries to avoid direct warfare, deriving greater influence by choosing sides in already existing rivalries. Divisions are supported (or deliberately fueled) in order to prevent local groups from joining forces together. All Western colonial empires were based upon this principle.⁴⁶ Under Dutch leadership indigenous men fought the series of colonial wars on the ground. They were used for the expansion of the Dutch colonial empire, subjugating other indigenous populations and regions.⁴⁷ This created the still prevailing cliché of Ambonese and Menadonese being loyal defenders of the Dutch crown.

From anti-colonial perspective an alliance between all the colonized areas was crucial to break the colonial dominance. Therefore, given the destabilizing impact of divide and rule, Indonesia's national principle of "unity in diversity" is more than a romantic nationalist slogan. It was not without reason that President Sukarno proclaimed independence from Sabang (most Northern point of Aceh) to Merauke (West-Papua). Already in 1928 a group of young Indonesian nationalists proclaimed three ideals: one motherland, one nation and one language, which is now remembered as the *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth Pledge). However difficult the challenge of unification, the unintended consequence of foreign rule was that it eventually brought together all these diverse islands and regions, connecting different languages and cultures. As such, Indonesia's current borders are the borders that the Dutch occupation left behind. In the context of the Indonesian Revolution Australian professor Merle C. Ricklefs states in his book *A History of Modern Indonesia* (2008) that there is no historical evidence for "the national myth of Indonesians standing shoulder to shoulder," as it was in fact "a bitter struggle among contending individuals and social forces."⁴⁸ Ricklefs notes that the greatest opposition against the proclaimed unity came from the Eastern islands and the Moluccas (Ambon) in particular. During the Independence war the Dutch continued the old strategy by promising areas outside Java sovereignty within a federal state under the Dutch crown. In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson explains this as follows:

⁴⁶ To read more about how the Dutch applied the "divide and rule" strategy during the 17th and 18th century on Java see: Heather Sutherland, *Pangreh Pradja. Java's Indigenous Administrative Corps and its Role in the Last Decades of Colonial Rule*. (New Haven: Yale University, 1973) pp. 36-54.

⁴⁷ Piet Hagen, *Koloniale Oorlogen in Indonesië. Vijf eeuwen verzet tegen vreemde overheersing* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij de Arbeiderspers, 2018) pp. 292-295.

⁴⁸ Merle C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) p. 248.

The so-called “federalist-policy” pursued between 1945 and 1948 by the formidable Lieutenant Governor-General Hubertus van Mook to outflank the infant Indonesian Republic attempted precisely to exploit such bitternesses.⁴⁹

Besides divisions between ethnic groups, differences in political orientations also emerged in the twentieth century. One of the first nationalist organizations was the *Sarekat Islam* (SI) that was founded in 1912, its goal was to support indigenous businessmen in order to break the Chinese economical dominance. The organization combined a mixture of religious and social-political aspirations and soon enjoyed an enormous popularity.⁵⁰ The introduction of communist ideas eventually polarized the Sarekat Islam from within. It was through the Dutch communist Henk Sneevliet that Indonesians learned about Marxism.⁵¹ The ideology found fertile ground among the peasants and workers of this segregated society where a few whites ruled the colored masses. In 1920 the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) was founded, expressing more radical anti-imperialist ideas. The revolts of 1926/27 that aimed to topple the colonial regime (and dramatically failed) were led by communist controlled trade unions. The Dutch regime responded harshly and arrested 13,000 people, imprisoning 4,500 people. “Red” became a curse and the PKI was officially banned and went underground only seven years after its foundation.⁵² If the Dutch colonial system had something in common with the Japanese fascist and Soeharto’s New Order regime later, it was the crusade against the left.

Racial segregated society

Yet the most distinctive aspect of Western colonial rule was racism: the constructed idea that ethnicities possess essential characteristics or qualities. As a way to justify the foreign presence, Western colonialism produced the belief that whites were superior to the variety of people that were subjugated. In the Indies the Dutch colonial law system legally classified people into three ethnic groups, each with different rights and privileges. The

⁴⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London, New York: Verso, 2000) pp. 132.

⁵⁰ Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 51.

⁵¹ George MacTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia* (Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, Ithaca, 2003) pp. 71.

⁵² *Ibid.* pp. 86.

following categories were used: Europeans on top of the hierarchy, enjoying the most favorable rights, *Vreemde Oosterlingen*” (Foreign Orientals) in the middle and the vast majority of “*Inlanders*” (Natives) on the bottom.⁵³ The Foreign Orientals were mainly from Chinese, Arab or Indian background, living in separate neighborhoods. In reality however, within this sharp legal classification racial boundaries were blurred. Occasionally Foreign Orientals were *gelijkgesteld* (assimilated, equated) as European. Japanese for example, were also classified as Europeans from the beginning of the 20th century following a diplomatic struggle.⁵⁴ In fact, three quarters of those legally classified European was non-white, as people with mixed ancestry could obtain European status as well. Until 1900 primarily European men traveled to the Indies where they lived with indigenous women. Their offspring is what is called “Indo,” “Indo-Dutch,” “Indo-European” or “Eurasian.” Their legal recognition depended on whether the father was willing to do so and whether the state agreed. It means that there were also countless Eurasians who never received the European status. They formed a large group of poor, uneducated paupers who shared the same rights with the majority of what the Dutch called “*inlanders*” (natives). Besides that there were also Indo-Chinese or Chinese-Dutch. Exemplary is the anecdote in *De tolk van Java* (The interpreter from Java, 2016), the bestselling novel by Alfred Birney, in which he described how his father served the Dutch Marines as an Indo-Chinese interpreter during the independence war. When his father was about to leave Indonesia in 1949 (because he actively fought in favor of the Dutch cause) he nevertheless could not obtain a Dutch passport from the colonial authorities in Surabaya.⁵⁵ As explored by Ann Stoler in 1992 in her essay on the social position of Eurasians in the Dutch East Indies, legal recognition was (apart from race) moreover related to class and gender.⁵⁶ This implied, for instance, that European classified Eurasian women lost their Dutch citizenship and became “*inlander*” when they married “native” men, due to the patriarchal lineage. In the beginning of the 20th century the Dutch colonial rulers became more hesitant to grant European status. This was basically rooted in the fear that many poor Eurasians had become too “Indisch,” that is too

⁵³ Cribb, “The brief genocide,” (2008) pp. 427.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 427.

⁵⁵ Thus even after serving the Dutch Marines, the Dutch colonial authorities only granted Alfredy Birney’s father the Chinese subject-status. See: Alfred Birney, *De tolk van Java* (Amsterdam: De Geus, 2016) pp. 37, 41-42, 467.

⁵⁶ Ann Stoler “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia,” in: *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 34, No. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) pp. 514-551

“native,” thus culturally not Dutch enough. Stoler highlights how the Dutch-Indies government in early 1900 studied the “Dutchness” of those legally classified as Europeans, concluding that 70 percent of them could not even speak the Dutch language— something that the colonial rulers saw as a worrisome development. As the European class was in reality a mixed, diverse group of people with various ethnic backgrounds, the term “*totok*” was used to differentiate the white Europeans from the colored majority. In his article “Koloniaal racisme in Indonesië” (Colonial racism in Indonesia, 1991) Dutch sociologist Willem Wertheim analyzed how discrimination worked on daily basis.⁵⁷ He argued that in reality unbridgeable social barriers existed that made the Dutch colony not any different from other colonial apartheid regimes. His first personal encounter with this “racial segregation” was upon his arrival in 1936 in South Sumatra where he observed the sharp social division between *totoks* and Eurasians:

The social status of an *Indo* (man or woman) was largely depending on physical features - the visible [part] of their Indonesian roots. Already in the nineteenth century there was a saying: "The more pigment, the less payment."⁵⁸

Ann Stoler similarly observed that: “the rejection of metis [Eurasian] as a distinct legal category only intensified how the politics of cultural difference were played out in other domains.”⁵⁹

From 1900 onwards more Europeans migrated to the colony from the Netherlands, including an increasing number of women. As a consequence mixed marriages became exceptional and were discouraged. Subsequently the ties with the Netherlands intensified. In 1900 only 91,000 people were legally classified as European, thirty years later this was 240,000.⁶⁰ Most of them lived in the cities in separate quarters, having their own social life, going to European schools, restaurants and clubs. Social interactions were very much dominated by the idea of white superiority. Clubs, swimming pools and hotels refused entry to indigenous people, Chinese and Arabs. Trains had a separate class for “*inlanders*”. At the department of Justice in Batavia, where Wertheim worked, native employees had to use

⁵⁷ Willem F. Wertheim, “Koloniaal racisme in Indonesië. Ons onverwerkt verleden?” *De Gids*, No. 154 (1991) pp. 367-383. See: http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_gid001199101_01/_gid001199101_01_0067.php

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 369.

⁵⁹ Stoler, “Sexual Affronts” (1992) pp. 516.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 515.

separate toilets.⁶¹ Even *totoks* who were raised and born in the Indies were considered too “*Indisch*” as if local cultures and habits harmed their Dutch identity. As a result the highest positions in companies were mostly appointed to European born *totoks*.

Another significant factor that shaped the relation between colonizers and colonized was the introduction of the “Ethical Policy” at the turn of the century. The growing awareness about the colonial injustice led to the belief that the colonial government had to give something in return. Those in favor of the policy argued that the indigenous population deserved basic education and health care.⁶² This was translated into a paternalistic way of governing in which the colonized people were often framed as children who needed the guidance and help of the civilized, superior Dutch. The ultraconservative part of the Dutch colonial elite fiercely resisted the implementation of this new policy. They could nevertheless not prevent that more schools and hospitals were built and that a few Indonesians entered the higher educational system. More Indo-Europeans managed to reach higher positions in this white-male dominated society. Yet the large group of poor Eurasians felt threatened by the emergence of a new class of Western-educated “natives.” Although still very exceptional, in the new situation one could climb up on the social ladder without European status or ancestry. That is why the poor Eurasians never really sympathized with the Indonesian nationalist movement, in which Western education played a major role. It was as if the European legal status or having Dutch roots, lost in meaning. As a response the *Indo-Europees Verbond* (IEV, Indo-European Alliance), founded in 1919, particularly aimed to support the cause of the Indo poor. It was a reaction against the increasing “Europeanization” of colonial society on one hand and the emancipation of local Indonesians on the other hand. Stoler explained that the problem was that they kept identifying themselves with the colonial elite “by invoking Eurasian racial superiority to *inlanders* while concurrently denying a racial criteria for judging their status vis-a-vis European-born Dutch.”⁶³ The tragedy of the “in-between” position of Eurasians is perhaps

⁶¹ Wertheim, “Kolonial racism” pp. 369.

⁶² Robert Cribb “Development policy in the early 20th century”, in: Jan-Paul Dirkse, Frans Hüsken and Mario Rutten, ed., *Development and social welfare: Indonesia’s experiences under the New Order* (Leiden: KITLV, 1993) pp. 225–245.

⁶³ Stoler, “Sexual Affronts” (1992) pp. 546.

that, although they experienced discrimination themselves, the white-dominant system pushed them to hold on to their “European roots” as special privilege.⁶⁴

In *Visions and Heat* Frederick introduced the term “new *priyayi*” to describe the new social class of educated progressive Indonesians that from early 20th century started to question the authority of the traditional Javanese *priyayi* elite.⁶⁵ Sutomo, for his part, was younger and less educated. He only finished primary education at a colonial governmental school, which was still exceptional compared to the majority of Indonesians that did not receive proper education under Dutch rule. Bung Tomo was born in a middle-class family in *kampung* Blauran, central Surabaya. Due to financial reasons he never completed secondary school. At some point he found himself delivering laundry and selling newspapers to make a living. His grandfather Notosudarmo (from mother’s side) seems to have been most influential politically, as he was an active member of the *Sarekat Islam*. Among others he encouraged his grandson to join the local scouting organization. When Sutomo was about sixteen years old he even became an Eagle Scout, the highest honor. Frederick concludes that among Surabaya’s educated young men, Sutomo was hardly unknown. Besides his interest in scouting he had a special talent for writing and soon earned a little bit of extra money by occasionally writing articles for local newspapers.⁶⁶

Japanese occupation

But powers were shifting, heralding drastic changes. The German occupation of the Netherlands cut off direct connections with Europe, weakening the position of the colonial regime and its poor defense system. Although the Dutch colonial rulers might have realized that Japan was a growing global power since the turn of the century, the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor still came as a huge shock for the majority. Many still underestimated the abilities of imperial Japan and were astonished by the speed of the subsequent expansions into Southeast Asia. Within three months the 16th Army conquered previously Western

⁶⁴ The Eurasian Ernest Douwes Dekker (1879-1950) is an important exception. He was the nephew of Eduard Douwes Dekker or Multatuli, the author of *Max Havelaar* (1860). In 1912 he was one of the founders of the *Nationale Indische Partij* (National Indies party) that was based upon Eurasian-Indonesian cooperation and advocated independence. The colonial regime dismantled the organization one year after its foundation and sent Douwes Dekker and his Javanese friends into exile. See: Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution* (2003) pp. 70-71.

⁶⁵ Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 34-35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* (1989) 244-247.

colonized areas from Hong-Kong, Indo-China, Philippines, Singapore up to the final conquest: the Indies. In March 1942 the once so powerful colonial regime collapsed, resistance was easily crushed. With the Japanese decision to intern the former colonial elite, life was going to be extremely different for the Dutch *totoks* in particular.

One of the first measures of the new regime was the internment of all KNIL military. Later the rest of the *totok* male population followed, of which many were sent to remote areas in Sumatra, or even abroad to Thailand and Japan where they had to conduct forced labor. Due to the harsh circumstances many of them died. Apart from the emotional impact, their internment had also a direct financial consequence for the families they left behind. Their source of income was gone. For those who previously enjoyed a luxurious lifestyle the sudden poverty was hard to process. Early 1943, nearly one year after the Japanese arrived, the European *totok* women and children in Surabaya were locked up in the European Darmo-quarter. In her dissertation *De republikeinse kampen in Nederlands-Indië* (The Republican camps in the Dutch East Indies, 2007) Mary van Delden explains how the Japanese gradually removed all *totoks* from public life.⁶⁷ The Japanese had, however, different plans for the Indo-Europeans. The latter were actively encouraged to become one with the “native” population. Unlike Dutch colonial law, Japanese identity cards distinguished *totok* from Indo-European. Eventually the majority of the Eurasians (about 170,000 – 200,000 in 1940) stayed outside the camps during the Japanese occupation. They were not only encouraged to mingle with the local population but were also forced to cooperate with the regime, Mary van Delden:

...But most of the Indo-Europeans, except a handful of people, were absolutely not willing to do so. The people who did support *Nippon* [Japan] were ordered to encourage other members of their group to cooperation. ... But the majority of Indo-Europeans exposed an openly anti-Japanese attitude.⁶⁸

Although Japan’s actual reason to occupy the Indies was motivated by the urgent need of resources and oil in particular, the Japanese Empire produced a rather romantic narrative justifying their presence. In contrast to the fierce Chinese resistance in the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) the Japanese were—in the beginning, relatively successful in

⁶⁷ Van Delden, *De republikeinse kampen* (2007) pp. 25-27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 28.

“winning the hearts and minds” of the Indonesian population. In his book *Japan’s Occupation of Java in the Second World War*⁶⁹ (2018) historian Ethan Mark speaks of a transnational intersection between Japanese imperialism and Asian anti-colonialism. In his study he unraveled the Indonesian and Japanese perspectives on this decisive period:

It brought an end to centuries of unbroken Western colonial domination, toppling the system of Western hegemony in Asia that Japanese and Indonesians alike blamed as the source of their modern troubles.⁷⁰

Their arrival was in stark contrast with their departure:

They left behind them societies ravaged, exploited, and brutalized, their economies and social fabrics in tatters, with populations for the most part happier to see the Japanese leave than they had been to see them arrive—even if the Japanese departure only meant a renewed, violent confrontation with Western imperialism.⁷¹

The devastating impact of Japanese rule may have overshadowed the initial hope and new opportunities the occupation presented for young Indonesian nationalists. The slogan “Asia for the Asians” promised the end of centuries of Western domination, with the Japanese as older brothers helping Indonesians on their path to reach independence. Whereas the Dutch (and other Western nations) merely saw the Japanese as uncivilized fascist aggressors, Indonesians saw their new rulers in a somewhat different light.

In the case of Sutomo the Japanese occupation meant new opportunities rather than a traumatizing experience. He got a job at the Japanese news agency *Domei* and managed to climb up to the position of second in charge. In the month before the Japanese capitulation of August 15th, 1945, he was selected (allegedly by Sukarno or Mohammad Hatta) to join the New People’s Movement and went to Jakarta to take part in discussions. Frederick: “Sutomo returned home with a greater reputation than when he had left.”⁷²

Despite the initial positive reaction of Indonesians on the arrival of Japan as older “Asian brother,” the Japanese imperial project soon turned out to be a great disappointment and humanitarian disaster for the local population. The Japanese did not only force

⁶⁹ Ethan Mark, *Japan’s Occupation of Java in the Second World War: A transnational history*. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2018).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 1.

⁷¹ Mark, *Japan’s Occupation* (2018) pp. 1

⁷² Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 169-170 and 244-246.

thousands of Indonesians to conduct slave labor as so-called “*romusha*,” the failing war efforts and food blockades led to severe famine costing the lives of an estimated three million people for Java alone.⁷³ Growing suspicion from within the Japanese leadership also resulted in the victimization of Indonesians who were considered communists. Until September 1944 the Japanese regime prohibited the Indonesian nationalists to use the red and white flag, neither did they allow them to sing the national anthem, nor could they use the word Indonesia.⁷⁴ The Japanese mobilized indigenous young men and gave them military training, which later proved to be useful in the fight against the Dutch. Yet the main motivation for the Japanese to set up an indigenous army was to strengthen the Japanese defense of the archipelago in case of an Allied attack.

In August 1945 it became clear that the Japanese were on the losing end. The Soviet Union declared war in the same week the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In his book *Indonesia towards democracy* (2009) historian Taufik Abdullah describes how Indonesian leaders Sukarno and Hatta were only then invited to meet Field Marshal Terauchi in Vietnam and discuss the transfer of sovereignty.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, one day after they returned home, the Japanese Emperor announced the unconditional surrender of Japan to the Allied Forces. Subsequently the Japanese leadership ordered to immediately dismantle and disarm the indigenous military groups they had trained.⁷⁶ The indecisiveness of Sukarno and Hatta during this process was in stark contrast with the *pemuda* (the radical youth) who realized that this was the moment to take action. For them it was clear that the Japanese authorities were no longer in the position to fulfill the promise to grant Indonesia independence. Because the two leaders were not convinced of the urgency to declare independence the *pemuda* kidnapped them and eventually managed to convince Sukarno and Hatta to declare the independence. The Japanese Rear Admiral Maeda, one of the individuals sympathizing with the Indonesian cause, was consulted too. He gave his blessing to the proclamation and made sure that the Japanese Army did not

⁷³ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Report of the Working Group for Asia and the Far East, Supp. 10. 1947 pp. 13–14.

⁷⁴ Mark, *Japan's Occupation* (2018) pp. 245-246.

⁷⁵ George Kanahale, *The Japanese occupation of Indonesia: prelude to independence*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967) pp. 75-76 and 286.

⁷⁶ Ken'ichi Goto, “Caught in the Middle: Japanese Attitudes toward Indonesian Independence in 1945”, in: *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 27, 1 (Singapore: National University of Singapore, March 1996) pp. 37-48.

intervene. The next day, August 17th, 1945, Sukarno and Hatta declared Indonesia an independent country on the veranda of Sukarno's house.⁷⁷

Dutch ignorance

Not far from Sukarno's house was the Japanese internment camp "Adek" where the wife of the aforementioned Dutch sociologist Wertheim was detained during the war. Hetty Wertheim noted in her diary:

In the evening a lot of noise outside the camp. As if there is a fun fair going on. Loud voices through loudspeakers. What is this about? "Oh, it is just a "native" party," my campmates say. ... In the evening I went to the *gedek* (the fence) and listened for a long time, but it was too far away, I could not hear what was said. But I am certain something special is going on.⁷⁸

The lack of information and ignorance on the side of the Dutch *totok* is another factor to take into account as possible trigger for the violent outburst of October. Two weeks later on August 31, Hetty Wertheim discovered that the "native party" was in fact about Indonesia's independence, she wrote:

We read in a Malay newspaper ... that Sukarno and Hatta declared the Indonesian Republic on August 17th. Most of us only become angry ... upon hearing this "ridiculous fuss": "Soon our men will put an end to this," they say. So that was the voice [I heard] through the loudspeakers on the evening of August 17th. That was the "native party" that was not given attention!⁷⁹

Most Dutch *totoks*, who had spent the Japanese occupation in internment camps, did not take the proclamation very seriously. The Dutch Lieutenant General Governor Van Mook stated that the new Republic was just a "puppet state government ... a Japanese creation that had not to be recognized in any way." In Dutch publications President Sukarno often appears as "collaborator", a traitor of his own people as he supported the "romusha"

⁷⁷ Taufik Abdullah, *Indonesia towards Democracy* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009) pp. 122-123.

⁷⁸ Anne-Ruth Wertheim, "Onverklaarbare geluiden drongen ons Jappenkamp binnen", *De Groene Amsterdammer* (August 18, 2017) <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/onverklaarbare-geluiden-drongen-ons-jappenkamp-binnen>

⁷⁹ Wertheim, "Onverklaarbare geluiden" (2017).

forced laborer-system.⁸⁰ The Dutch government and the Allied forces had very limited information about the situation on Java. Weeks after the proclamation (on September 13, 1945), Dutch journalist Jan Bower was the first to send a telegram to the United Press Association in New York.⁸¹ His analysis of the situation was published in US, British, Australian and Dutch newspapers. In the news outlet of the US Armed forces Bower's message appeared under the title "Jap-Led Java Guerrillas Plan to Resist Occupation" and read: "there are strong indications that something went on behind the scenes to back up the Jap promise of independence as a face saver."⁸²

In October 1945, when the *Bersiap*-violence occurred, most of the 70,000 Dutch were still inside the Japanese internment camps spread across the country.⁸³ Only several thousands of them arrived in Surabaya and other coastal cities such as Semarang and Jakarta. The Eurasians who had avoided the prison camps lived among the local population around the city, in contrast to most of the Chinese, Arabs and Ambonese who lived in segregated *kampongs*. It was in this setting that the 25-year old Sutomo was going to make his entrance.

⁸⁰ Hollander, *Silenced voices*. (2008) pp. 121.

⁸¹ John Bower, *Het vermoorde land* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 1988) pp. 400-401.

⁸² John S. Bower, 'Jap-led Java Guerrillas Plan to Resist Occupation,' *The Stars and Stripes* (United States Armed Forces, 17 September 1945).

⁸³ Limpach, *De brandende kampongs* (2016) pp. 52 and 784.

2. Sutomo's whereabouts amidst the making of a revolution

The following section introduces Sutomo, his social position and his whereabouts from the proclamation up to October 15th, the day that Dutch and Eurasian men were arrested and brought to the Simpang Club for questioning. In the Dutch historiography this day is remembered as "Bloody Monday" as the interrogations ended up in brutal killings. The date is significant because three days earlier, on October 12, Sutomo founded the *Barisan Pemberontakan Rakyat Indonesia* (Indonesian People's Rebellion Force, BPRI). As part of the BPRI he set up his own radio station named *Radio Pemberontakan* (Rebellion Radio.) Thus his first radio broadcasts coincided with the massacres in the Simpang Club. The building functioned as temporary headquarters of the youth organization *Pemuda Republik Indonesia* (Youth of the Indonesian Republic, PRI.) Sutomo was part of this group in the few weeks before he founded BPRI.

To establish whether there is a link between Bung Tomo's broadcasts and the *Bersiap* and whether he personally encouraged killings at the Simpang Club, this section first reflects on the events before the BPRI was founded. As early as September 19th a violent clash took place between Eurasian and Indonesian youth in Surabaya, which is commonly remembered as the flag incident. Two people died: the Indo-European lawyer Wim Ploegman and the Indonesian *pemuda* Sidik. This section will further describe the short time that Sutomo worked at the information section of the PRI, the role that he had in the weapon seizure at Don Bosco, his trip to Jakarta and finally the founding of BPRI on October 12. This section will also address some of the discrepancies that make the way people remember him so contradictory. Sutomo claimed that his former PRI-colleagues arrested him on "Bloody Monday" and brought him to their headquarters: the Simpang Club. It means that from his account of the events it appears that he was present at the murder site, however not as instigator but as prisoner.

First signs of independence

As a newsman Bung Tomo was one of the first Surabayans who heard about the proclamation and he forwarded the important news to the editors of newspaper *Soeara*

Asia who published it a few days afterwards.⁸⁴ In Surabaya the first visible sign of independence was the hoisting of red and white flags all over the town on August 22nd. Illustrative for the Dutch underestimation of the situation is that one week later leaflets were dropped with the image of Queen Wilhelmina announcing the return of the colonial government.⁸⁵

The expected arrival of the British led the Indonesian youth to organize large public meetings in which they discussed strategies how to defend their city against the reoccupation by foreign colonial powers.⁸⁶ At this point Sutomo was not yet active as agitator of the masses: he did not speak on the radio, he did not have his own organization: he was only part of the local news agency. Others instigated the youth to take action. Indonesian veteran Hario Kecik in his memoir (2009) recalled that Bung Tomo was not even present during the rallies and concluded: “the people of Surabaya did not act because Sutomo was inciting, he started inciting after the people already took action.”⁸⁷ Hario emphasized that the tone of the speeches was very radical, he remembered how one of the speakers bluffed: “If necessary, I will become a living bomb to destroy the enemy.” Another one firmly spoke: “Support our independence alive or dead! Dare to die for our freedom!”⁸⁸ Thus before Sutomo spoke on the radio, the ingredients for a violent confrontation were already there.

One of the youth-leaders behind the rallies was Soemarsono. Unlike Sutomo he openly affiliated himself with communism and was appointed as the leader of the newly founded *Pemuda Rakyat Indonesia* (Youth of the Indonesian People, PRI) of which the headquarters were located at the Simpang Club.⁸⁹ As the previous chapter pointed out, many of the pre-war anti-colonial uprisings were inspired by communist and socialist ideas. Both under Dutch and Japanese rule, communism was banned and labeled as dangerous ideology. But after the proclamation of August 17th the Indonesian communists reemerged again from the underground and became a powerful force in support of the independence

⁸⁴ Meelhuijsen, *Revolutie in Soerabaja* (2000) pp. 40.

⁸⁵ Barlan Setiadijaya, *Merdeka atau mati* (1985) pp. 101. See also: Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 195.

⁸⁶ Meelhuijsen, *Revolutie in Soerabaja* (2000) pp. 56-59.

⁸⁷ Suhario Padmodiwirio, *Pemikiran Militer 2: Sepanjang Masa Bangsa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Obor, 2009) pp. 14-16.

⁸⁸ Soemarsono, *Revolusi Agustus* (2008) pp. 37.

⁸⁹ Harsutejo, *Soemarsono; Pemimpin Perlawanan Rakyat Surabaya 1945 yang Dilupakan* (Jakarta, Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 2010) pp. 22.

movement.⁹⁰ The PRI-organization was in that regard leftist to the core. Later in November 1945 the name was changed into Pesindo: the Socialist Youth of Indonesia. Many of the PRI-members, including Soemarsono, became involved in the Madiun-Affair of 1948. During this event the regular Indonesian Army (TNI) killed many communists who were accused of preparing a coup against the Republican leadership. In his book *Verguisd en Vergeten* (Slandered and Forgotten, 2009) Dutch historian Harry Poeze explains how Sutomo was a remarkable exception. His ideas were maybe not that different from his PRI-peers, yet he always kept distance from a clear affiliation with socialist or communist groups.⁹¹

While the Indonesians were busy gathering and organizing themselves, the Dutch and British continued preparing their arrival without informing or contacting the Indonesian leadership. On September 18th, the first Dutch members of the RAPWI (Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) were parachuted, together with some British personnel and brought to the *Oranje* Hotel at Tunjungan Street.⁹²

The Flag Incident

The flag incident of September 19th is both in the Dutch and Indonesian historiography presented as the first, decisive clash of the revolution. One of the people involved was the Indo-European lawyer Wim Ploegman. Before the war he was known as an active member of the *Indo-Europeesch Verbond* (IEV). In the days prior to the event, he was busy establishing the *Komite Kontak Sosial* (Social Contact Committee, KKS), an organization that offered assistance to Dutch citizens returning home from the Japanese camps. According to Frederick (1989) the KKS ignored the Republican leadership and received a considerable amount of Japanese money.⁹³ Such Dutch-Japanese collaboration was, of course, threatening for the Indonesian *pemuda* who feared that the Japanese and British were both assisting the Dutch to return.

On the early morning of that faithful day, some Eurasian youth raised a small red-white and blue flag in front of the *Oranje* Hotel. After which another, larger flag was hoisted

⁹⁰ Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution* (2003) pp. 50-52.

⁹¹ Harry Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten. Tan Malaka, de linkse beweging en de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1949. Deel I* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2007) pp. 127.

⁹² Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, (1986) pp. 238.

⁹³ *Ibid.* pp. 195.

on the top of the building. The Indonesian youth noticed this and responded with outrage. Soon a crowd of *pemuda* gathered in front of the hotel screaming for the removal of the flag, which was refused.⁹⁴ In his book *10 November 1945 Gelora Kepahlawanan Indonesia* (1991) Indonesian historian Barlan Setiadijaya explains that apart from the flag it was also the arrogant attitude of the (Indo-) Dutch that the Indonesians considered provocative:

The Dutch who saw the support for the Republic increasing in Surabaya, started to worry. Their hope to return to the pre-war situation was under pressure. Therefore a demonstrative statement needed to be made. ... The [Indonesian] youth ... shouted that the flag had to be lowered. But the people's demand was completely ignored. On the contrary, their request met resistance, mocking and insults, creating anger and hatred. ... [The flag incident] is a prominent event in the context of the struggle for independence in Surabaya. ... Because a flag is not only a legality of a nation or state, but also a symbol of freedom and sovereignty.⁹⁵

The angry crowd started to throw stones, resulting in a fierce fight between them and the Eurasian youth. In his book about the *Bersiap* (2005) Dutch historian Herman Bussemaker describes the clash as follows:

It was obvious that the Republican government, with their calls to resist the Dutch return, had let the genie out of the bottle, they were no longer able to control it. How grim the situation had become proves the so-called flag incident in Surabaya on September 19th, 1945. Indonesian youth removed the Dutch flag from the flagpole at the top of Hotel Oranje in Tunjungan. After the blue part was removed it was hoisted again. Subsequently a fight started between [the Indonesians] and young (Indo-) Europeans. An older Indo-European man, who tried to intervene, was killed.⁹⁶

The latter paragraph presents the Indonesian proclamation, thus the rejection of colonial rule, as the reason for the violent clash. This is the problem in reverse. More accurately the situation had become so grim due to the Dutch refusal to recognize Indonesia's independence, which was illustrated by the hoisting of the flag. While Bussemaker vaguely

⁹⁴ Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, (1986) pp. 200.

⁹⁵ Barlan Setiadijaya, *10 November 1945 Gelora Kepahlawanan Indonesia* (Jakarta 1991) pp. 112-117.

⁹⁶ Bussemaker, *Bersiap!* (2005) pp. 41-42.

mentions the intervention of “an older Indo-European man” he does not explain how Ploegman exactly intervened.

In the Indonesian publication *Rakyat Jawa Timur mempertahankan kemerdekaan* (The People of East Java defending the independence, 1994) author Hadi Soewito explains that local Resident Sudirman, upon hearing about the Dutch flag, hurried to the hotel to persuade the Dutch to remove it. He further describes how Ploegman went inside the hotel to get a revolver after which he threatened Sudirman by saying: “Allied forces won the war and since the Netherlands is part of the Allies it is our right to restore the Dutch East Indies government.” And also: “The Republic of Indonesia? We do not know what that is!”⁹⁷ Upon hearing this insult an Indonesian *pemuda* named Sidik kicked Ploegman. The gun fell on the ground and severe fighting broke out. In the tumult some Indonesian *pemuda* managed to climb the building and tore off the blue part of the Dutch tricolor. In his memoir (2010) Police commander Mohammad Jasin confirms that the reason Ploegman got attacked was related to his arrogant attitude and the way he openly expressed his disdain. He was stabbed with a knife and died of his wounds a few days later in the hospital.⁹⁸ It is less known that the Indonesian *pemuda* Sidik also died.⁹⁹ According to the DHD-testimony by Sudi Soeyono (1976) he passed away a few days later at Simpang Hospital due to his injuries.¹⁰⁰

In his memoir (1951) Sutomo recalled that he went to Tunjungan Street only after hearing the tumult. From his account it seems that he arrived when the *pemuda* had already climbed the hotel to tear off the blue part. He allegedly tried to calm down the crowd by climbing the roof of his office and asked the people to sing the national anthem as a way to release the anger.¹⁰¹ Two DHD-testimonies (1976) confirm that this was the case and recall that most people went home afterwards.¹⁰²

From a larger perspective, the dispute about which national flag had to be respected touches upon the very essence of the conflict: Indonesia proclaimed to be independent while the Dutch did not take that seriously and intended to continue in the same way as they had done before 1942. The continuation of colonial ignorance combined with the racial

⁹⁷ Hadi Soewito, *Rakyat Jawa Timur mempertahankan kemerdekaan* (Grasindo, 1994) pp. 28.

⁹⁸ Mohammad Jasin, *Memoar Jasin sang polisi pejuang: meluruskan sejarah kelahiran polisi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2010) pp. 18.

⁹⁹ Aminuddin Kasdi, *Pertempuran 10 November 1945* (1986) pp. 119.

¹⁰⁰ Sudi Soeyono, DHD-testimony no. 49 (1976).

¹⁰¹ Sutomo, *10 November 1945* (2008) pp. 21.

¹⁰² Soemadji Adji Wongso Koesoemo, DHD-testimony no. 27 (1976). And: Sudi Soeyono, DHD-testimony no. 49 (1976).

legacy of the colonial period naturally fueled anti-Dutch sentiments. In fact Ploegman did not only underestimate the proclamation as such, he also expressed his disrespect for the Republic. A lot went wrong in that emotional argument, revealing the root of the trouble that intensified already existing animosities. From that perspective Ploegman was not a passive victim of blind anger as maintained by Bussemaker, but he was rather an actor himself.

Weapon take-over Don Bosco

In the weeks after the flag incident the suspicion of the Indonesians towards the Japanese was growing and along with that also the nerve to take action. Japanese guards and small units patrolling the city were forced to cede cars and weapons. Often regular kampong people took the initiative after which the newly founded resistance groups, such as the PRI, further handled the confiscation. These small successes were an encouragement to aim for the “top prize” waiting at Don Bosco, one of the biggest Japanese armory depots of South East Asia.

In the evening of September 29 it was already getting dark when hundreds of people gathered in front of the large complex of Don Bosco. Soon nearby PRI members also joined in, one of them Bung Tomo together with another man named Mohammad Mangoendiprodjo. The Japanese commander Hashimoto initially refused to give weapons and offered an amount of money instead. Both Bung Tomo and Mohammad preferred to carefully negotiate and agreed with Hashimoto that it was better to continue the discussion the next morning. This angered the crowd and they screamed: “We’ve talked enough, let’s attack!” Subsequently an older citizen interfered and convinced the people that it was better to take a rest first. That seemed to work out, although there was still some grumbling. In his book Bung Tomo noted that if the old man had not done that, the crowd would probably have turned against him, adding: “I really wanted to hug the old man: he saved dozens, or perhaps hundreds of ordinary people, from the Japanese machine guns.”¹⁰³ In his memoir (2009) Police commander Mohammad Jasin confirms that Sutomo’s

¹⁰³ Sutomo, *10 November 1945* (2008) pp. 33-42.

role during this event was calming down the people, not inciting them.¹⁰⁴

In the account of Hario Kecik Bung Tomo's approach is even framed as annoyingly cautious. He writes that some *pemuda* had already broken into the Don Bosco compound when he suddenly noticed two men "using a portable loudspeaker trying to prevent the crowd from breaking down the fence." In his eyes Mohammad and Bung Tomo were endangering the action: "urging us to hold back at a time when we desperately needed weapons!" Although Hario must have understood the risk of the Japanese opening fire at this poorly armed crowd, he nevertheless concludes that theirs was just a "cowardly stance" which could only be explained by their previous collaboration with the Japanese. Hario: "I was silently cursing Bung Tomo and Mohammad for demanding the crowd to withdraw."¹⁰⁵ The next morning the people returned and police commander Jasin received the formal handover of weapons. From now on the Surabayans had access to an enormous amount of weaponry, useful to prepare the city's self-defense against the expected arrival of the British forces.¹⁰⁶

After the success of Don Bosco, the Indonesians continued to occupy other key locations in the city, including radio stations, several warehouses, armories and a military hospital. By the end of September almost all strategic buildings were in Indonesian hands and the Japanese soldiers imprisoned.

This was the setting in which the first Dutch RAPWI organized transports arrived in Surabaya. When the trains entered Gubeng station, the Dutch ex-internees were shocked to observe that something had fundamentally changed compared to the pre-war situation.

According to a witness account of a Dutch woman named Eliza Thomson:

How could this happen? We were stormed by a group of natives. Aggressively they pointed their sharp bamboo spears at us. Enraged they screamed: "Merdeka! Merdeka! Merdeka!" They were dressed in rags. Their dark eyes had a wild and terrifying expression.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Mohammad Jasin, *Memoar Jasin* (2010) pp. 22-24.

¹⁰⁵ Although Hario admitted that Bung Tomo made up for this "serious mistake" by founding the Rebellion radio later. See: Hario Kecik, *Revolution in the City of Heroes* (2016) pp. 49-51. Also: Hario Kecik, *Pemikiran Militer 2* (2009) pp. 14-16.

¹⁰⁶ Jasin, *Ibid.* pp. 22-24.

¹⁰⁷ Meelhuijsen, *Revolutie in Soerabaja* (2000) pp. 70. And: Hollander, 'Silenced voices' (2008) pp. 188.

Attack of the Kempeitai

Although large parts of the city were now taken over by Indonesians there was still one strategic building to conquer. The much-hated and feared Japanese military police: the *Kempeitai*. The attack of October 2nd was the first bloody battle with dozens of deaths on both sides. The Japanese immediately opened fire at the masses when they saw the Indonesian youth approaching the huge fortified building. Hario described the mass actions as “a human wave that spilled over into the streets as water will do in floods.”¹⁰⁸

If Hario was part of this “human wave” pushing for action, this cannot be said about Bung Tomo, who was present at the site but did not fire a single shot. As a reporter and journalist this was not his job either, yet one wonders why exactly he became the “number one hero” in retrospect rather than someone like Hario, who appears to have been more daring. Hario later maintained that Bung Tomo did not know anything about military struggle or defense strategies. He was convinced that those who acknowledged him as hero of the battle of Surabaya had no idea what the struggle was like.¹⁰⁹

Sutomo did not join the attack but witnessed the event from a distance. In his memoir he recalled having seen the ruthless killing of an Indonesian policeman (a Timorese boy) who was accused of being a spy. This took place during the attack, not far from the *Kempeitai* building. The next paragraph, written by Bung Tomo himself, describes how he tried in vain to stop the killing of this young man:

Dozens of bamboo spears and other sharp weapons were pointing towards us. I started kicking left and right. ... The fury of the people was reaching a climax. So far I had managed to turn away all their attacks, they did not give up. Some of the police officers standing nearby just witnessed the incident open-mouthed, probably too astonished at what they saw. Suddenly some people jumped [on the truck] from behind. In a split-second their swords hit the flesh of the young policeman whose moans were heartbreaking. By the look on his face I knew that his moaning was not only caused by the pain, this was someone who felt falsely accused, a victim of slander ... A few more stabs and then the poor young man collapsed on the floor...¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Hario Kecik, *Revolution in the City of Heroes* (2016) pp. 68

¹⁰⁹ Hario Kecik, *Pemikiran Militer 2* (2009) pp. 14-16.

¹¹⁰ Sutomo, *10 November 1945* (2008) pp. 47-49.

Unfortunately there are no other sources confirming that this incident took place. In a very negative sense Sutomo could have made up the whole story to make himself look good when he wrote his book in 1951. It is also possible that only a few people witnessed it while most of the crowd paid attention to the large attack on the *Kempeitai* headquarters where many people were killed too. Another possibility is that the bystanders never wrote about this specific killing because so many killings were about to follow. Perhaps they did not recognize the man that defended the boy, since Bung Tomo was not too well known yet. Even if this specific story is accurate, people can change and it is not clear what Bung Tomo did to prevent massacres when he became more influential later. What it does indicate, however, is that he must have known how dangerous mob-actions could be.

All together, including the before-mentioned DHD-testimony of Sifun (the one who recalled that Bung Tomo stopped a mass killing of Japanese at Bubutan prison)¹¹¹ the question arises: if Bung Tomo was such a diplomat, a coward, a mediator, stopping killings on innocents then why is he commonly portrayed as an extremist?

Visit to Jakarta

One or two days after the attack of the *Kempeitai*, Sutomo traveled to Jakarta out of curiosity what was happening there. The insights that he got during this trip seem to have been crucial to him. He observed that the situation was totally different from Surabaya. He was shocked to find the Japanese still in arms and not imprisoned, the Dutch flag still flying as if no independence had been proclaimed, and independent units of the former Dutch colonial army were spreading terror while British-Indian troops patrolled the city.¹¹² Sutomo recalled how the Indonesian resistance in Jakarta, unlike that in Surabaya, was not armed and had to act very carefully, they did not manage to get access to Japanese armory depots, and only gathered underground while the leadership did not exercise real power. This cautious attitude upset Sutomo. In a personal meeting with President Sukarno he tried to convince him to follow the formula used in Surabaya. Bung Tomo's reasoning was two-fold: firstly, he was certain that the Dutch wanted to return and he believed that only strong

¹¹¹ This took place on October 16, two weeks after the attack on the *Kempeitai*. Upon hearing that the Japanese in Semarang killed many *pemuda*, an angry crowd went to Koblen prison in Surabaya and slaughtered Japanese prisoners in revenge. See: DHD-testimony no. 14, H. Moch. Sifun (1976). And: Sudi Soeyono, DHD-testimony no. 49 (1976).

¹¹² Limpach, *De brandende kampongs* (2016) pp. 183-184.

resistance could prevent this. Negotiations were useless as long as the Dutch did not agree with 100% independence. Secondly, he realized that ordinary people needed a visible sign that the Republican government did not just exist on paper. To realize the latter goal, he came up with the idea to set up a “Rebellion Radio”. But upon hearing his suggestions President Sukarno said he preferred to be more careful because the Japanese in most parts of the archipelago were still in arms. The President himself, pointed out that the Allied forces announced that they would take immediate action if Indonesians disturbed the peace.¹¹³

The Founding of the BPRI

With all these new insights Sutomo returned home on October 12, 1945. He went directly from the train station to the office of Radio Surabaya to update them about the situation in Jakarta. He said that he wanted to share his experience on the radio but the editors replied that he needed permission from the local authorities first. He further contacted his colleagues at the PRI and suggested to organize a mass rally in which he wanted to discuss his Jakarta-experience. But his PRI-colleagus refused cooperation after which Sutomo broke up with them. Only after that he set up his own organization the BPRI. That he resigned right away indicates that there was at least some friction.¹¹⁴ In an interview with Tempo-magazine (2015) former PRI-leader Soemarsono confirms that Sutomo's resignation in combination with the establishment of his own organization caused suspicion among the PRI: "some of us were of the opinion that he was dividing the youth power."¹¹⁵ When taken into account Hario Kecik's first impression of him as a coward, not truly revolutionary, not even present at the first rallies, it seems that Sutomo's sudden rise as new leader of the rebellion raised some eyebrows among his fellow *pemuda*.

In the dissertation *Indonesian Propaganda in the Struggle for Maintaining Independence 1945-1949* (2016) Indonesian historian Muhammad Yuanda Zara refers to an article in newspaper *Soeara Rakyat* that was published on October 13, in which the BPRI presented itself as:

¹¹³ Sutomo, *10 November 1945* (2008) pp. 55-61.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 75

¹¹⁵ Tempo, *Pemberontak* (2015) pp. 52.

An extreme organization, which, along with the common people, will provoke rebellion and draw blood if the sovereignty of the Republic is besmirched or if the honor of the leaders is threatened, who are negotiating [with the allies.]¹¹⁶

The fact that the BPRI called itself “extreme” indicates that Sutomo’s initial careful approach had changed. The organization’s preparedness to use violence as a way to resist colonial rule was in fact in line with the tone of the speeches at the previous mass rallies. Still, promoting violent resistance against a foreign invasion is not the same as provoking ruthless killings of innocents. Another article of October 15th read that the goal of the BPRI’s Rebellion Radio was:

To broadcast the Indonesian people’s demand, namely the establishment of world peace, which is now being disturbed by the NICA and their conspiracy.

In his study Yuanda Zara added that the first broadcasts of Sutomo mainly aimed to persuade those who had not decided their political stance yet, mostly: Indians, Ambonese, Menadonese, and Indo-Europeans. Besides that the Rebellion Radio also reached out to listeners outside Indonesia in the aim to gain international support for the Indonesian cause. That is why the BPRI-radio announced that they were searching for contributors “who have the spirit of rebellion and can speak foreign languages.”¹¹⁷ Whereas the PRI was a group of educated, non-military office youth, Sutomo’s BPRI created an opportunity for regular people to join the armed struggle whatever the age, job or education level. He saw all citizens as potential manpower that needed to be united in the defense of the newly proclaimed freedom.

Killings at the Simpang Club

Sutomo’s first broadcast coincided with the initiative of the PRI to imprison all Dutch and Eurasian men. Before imprisonment the PRI intelligence unit *Pasukan 10* interrogated them at the Simpang Club. This particular unit was led by Rustam Zain and searched for “the enemies of the revolution.” The fear was that among the population there were pro-Dutch

¹¹⁶ Muhammad Yuanda Zara, *Indonesian Propaganda in the Struggle for Maintaining Independence, 1945-1949* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam, 2016) pp. 69-70.

¹¹⁷ Zara, *Indonesian Propaganda* (2016). pp. 70.

spies active, secretly assisting the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA), the semi-military organization that was founded in Australia by the Dutch colonial government in exile busy preparing to restore the colonial regime. *Pasukan-10* tortured suspects on the spot and killed those who were found guilty of being NICA-henchmen. The rest was brought to Kalisosok prison. In the book *Pertempuran 10 November 1945* (The battle of 10 November 1945, 1986) it is written that even PRI-members themselves protested against the brutal interrogation methods used by *Pasukan 10*:

There was no strict regulation controlling this authority [the PRI] ... thus soon irregularities occurred. It was easy [for *pasukan 10* members] to interrogate, execute or severely persecute those who were considered enemies of the revolution. ... Often the actions of P.10 were nothing more than crimes against humanity. Without verification of their [alleged] wrongdoing many victims fell. This led to strong protests from PRI members themselves. Among others female members such as Lukitaningsih who could not stand to see the torture after which she decided to work outside the PRI Headquarters.¹¹⁸

The latter account touches upon an issue central to this thesis: did Bung Tomo join (or encourage) the interrogations that ended up in brutal killings? As he claimed that he was a prisoner himself and feared to be the next in line, this is in stark contrast with the ODO-account of the Indo-European woman Sinsu-Andries who recalled that Sutomo was inciting the murders.¹¹⁹



Figure 4 The Simpang Club, 1938. Photo: Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen, Leiden, file no.: TM-60034692

¹¹⁸ Aminuddin Kasdi, *Pertempuran 10 November 1945* (1986) pp. 87.

¹¹⁹ Sutomo, *10 November 1945* (2008) pp. 95-102. And: Meelhuijsen, *Revolutie in Soerabaja* (2000) pp. 127-134.

In his memoir (1951) Sutomo recalled that his former PRI-colleagues knocked on his door in the morning of October 15th and forced him to go to the Simpang Club. He replied that he already had plans for that day, but when the PRI-members warned him they would use force if he did not listen, he realized that this was not a request. It crossed his mind that he possibly risked the same fate as the Timorese boy.¹²⁰ Upon arrival he was brought to Rustam who explained that they had to wait for further instructions from military commander Mustopo. The whole experience must have frightened him as he also saw the brutal treatment of (Indo-) European prisoners. Sutomo claimed that he did not meet PRI-leader Soemarsono. The latter however told Tempo magazine in 2015 that he was there at the time of Sutomo's arrest. He recalled that he was surprised to find out that his men acted on their own initiative to take the founder of the BPRI in custody: "The next moment Sutomo entered the room. ... He squatted in front of me, begging to stay alive." Soemarsono maintained to have ordered his immediate release, as "he had not violated anything."¹²¹ This in contrast to Sutomo's story who stated that he was released only after the military staff from the regular Republican army told Rustam, the leader of PRI-unit *Pasukan 10*, that it was a misunderstanding. Sutomo explained that he went to the office of Mustopo and that they had dinner together afterwards. Unfortunately, he does not mention whether he told him about the brutal killings. Whereas in *Visions and Heat* (1989) Frederick claims that, among others, the BPRI-leader halted the killings.¹²²

Frederick in his 2012-article refers to the Simpang Club as the most brutal massacre in Surabaya, involving the greatest number of victims. From the estimated 1,500 people that the PRI arrested, he thinks that between 50 to 200 must have been murdered. Frederick's research (largely based on the 20 - 25 ODO interviews) reveals that most of the killings took place between 15 and 17 October and were committed in the following order:

Prisoners were commonly told to strip to their underwear, after which they were subjected to a humiliating process involving kicking, beating ... They were then held in small rooms until called by a tribunal of top PRI leaders. A few survivors report

¹²⁰ Sutomo, *10 November 1945* (2008) pp. 75

¹²¹ Tempo, *Pemberontak* (2015) pp. 52.

¹²² Unfortunately it is not clear on what sources Frederick based this as the footnote just reads: "interviews with several persons," and: "several Dutch accounts also indicate that this was the case." In the research conducted for this thesis there is no single Dutch document suggesting that it was Sutomo who halted the killings in the Simpang Club. Frederick's 2012-article only refers to him as detainee who disapproved the killings and "didn't have much faith in the PRI version of things." Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 241-242. And: Frederick, "The killing of Dutch and Eurasians", (2012) pp. 364.

having been allowed to go to the toilet or get drinks of water, during which time they saw scattered, bloody body parts strewn on the floor, or dead bodies hung from the ceiling or cast aside. In small groups, the prisoners were then brought out for an “official” examination, in which their names and addresses were noted and they were asked absurd questions by a panel of three or four examiners. Did they know Van der Plas (the much-feared former governor of East Java and head of NICA)? These mini-tribunals give every evidence of being carefully planned, and some, particularly the earlier ones, appear to have proceeded in a more-or-less orderly, but still deliberately violent, fashion.¹²³

Ms. Sinsu-Andries entered this horrifying setting as one of the suspects, recalling that Sutomo was complicit as well:

Behind the main building we were searched and interrogated by executioner Rustam (from Padang) and Sutomo, who is now the Propagandist of the Republicans and the PRI.¹²⁴

Unfortunately it is unclear how she knew the names of the two men who had interrogated her in October 1945. Although she might have recognized Sutomo from the pre-war period: Sinsu-Andries’ home address was located 500 meters from the neighborhood where he grew up. If she did not know him personally, it could also be that (after Sutomo gained more fame) it was afterwards that she started to believe it must have been him. Notably her interview was conducted two years later at a time he was much more famous (and hated by the Dutch) than when he just started. In the second half of October it was moreover his voice and not his face that was publicly known through his daily speeches, which just started a few days before Sinsu-Andries was arrested. The iconographic picture of him posing in front of an umbrella—which now became a “Che-Guevara-like” symbol for the battle of Surabaya—was also taken much later in 1947. Thus his face was not too well known at the time Sinsu-Andries was inside the Club. Sutomo’s wife Sulistina also said that when she met him for the first time in 1947 she did not realize that she was sitting next to the famous

¹²³ Frederick, “The killing of Dutch and Eurasians”, (2012) pp. 359 and 375-76.

¹²⁴ NL-HaNA, *Strijdkrachten Ned.-Indië*, 2.13.132, inv.no. 1935. (November 29, 1947).

BPRI-leader.¹²⁵ At least it seems not impossible that Sinsu-Andries linked Sutomo to her arrest after he became much more famous later.

Another confusing detail in Sinsu-Andries testimony is that she presented Sutomo as the propagandist of the PRI. Yet, as explained before, when the killings took place he already left the organization. In November 1947 when she told her story to ODO, the Dutch civilian deaths investigation service, he was known as the leader of the BPRI. In fact the PRI did not even exist anymore since it was renamed *Pesindo* in November 1945. Whatever the reason, the latter confusion appeared again in the aforementioned documentary film *Archief van Tranen* (Archive of Tears, 2012). Based on Sinsu-Andries's testimony the film presents Sutomo as the head of the PRI, wrongly claiming that he held office at the Simpang Club.¹²⁶

The motivation for the massacres seems to have been mainly two-fold: apart from defense (selecting Dutch colonial loyalists), feelings of revenge played a role as well. Sometimes overlapping. Sources show that the PRI-tribunal used a relatively orderly procedure to eliminate NICA-spies, although spontaneous acts occurred as well, victimizing random bystanders or not yet convicted suspects. As this ODO-testimony proves, quoted in Frederick's 2012 article:

One of the fanatical guards, when he saw the girl come in, fell on her in a fit of bloodthirstiness, took out a cobbler's knife, and in a few seconds performed the following before my very eyes. Ripping open her blouse with his left hand, he cut her breast off with a single swipe, and then with his free hand he ripped out what lay behind it—heart and so on—and fortunately for her that brought instant death.¹²⁷

About this second, more random type of brutality, Frederick assumes that there was no clear progression: the killings did not escalate after a relative orderly start but rather at “fluctuating levels of control and viciousness.”

Sinsu-Andries returned home safely after the PRI did not find anything suspicious, which indicates that, apart from the revengeful exceptions, *Pasukan-10* at least conducted some investigation before they proceeded to kill. Throughout her testimony Sinsu-Andries

¹²⁵ Sulistina Sutomo, *Bung Tomo Suamiku. Biar Rakyat yang Menilai Kepahlawanannya* (Jakarta: Visimedia, 2008) pp. 55-56.

¹²⁶ Pia van der Molen and Michiel Praal, “Archief van Tranen” (TV MAX, 2012).

¹²⁷ Frederick, “The killing of Dutch and Eurasians”, (2012) pp. 364.

recalls Sutomo's presence:

Sutomo asked me about my nationality after which I deliberately lied by claiming that I was Ambonese, although I am of Indo-European descendant. Sutomo responded to my answer by saying that there is no Ambonese or Menadonese, no Javanese etc. but solely Indonesians. I just decided to be pragmatic and wholeheartedly agreed that I was Indonesian.¹²⁸

The date of Sinsu-Andries' arrest, 22 October, is equally confusing as it is one week after Sutomo's alleged arrest on "Bloody Monday." Assuming both accounts are correct about the date, this means that he was first arrested, released and then went back again one week later, leaving the work at his own radio station behind to join the PRI again and shout orders to Rustam on who to kill. Although both organizations were indeed cooperating, it is a bit doubtful that Rustam was following orders from someone whom he had arrested and intimidated one week earlier.

Bersiap trials

Unique to Sinsu-Andries's testimony is that it ended up on the desk of Mr. Van Vredenburg, the Attorney General of the Dutch East Indies regime. In December 1947, one month after she told her story to the ODO-officer, he received the following letter:

Mr. Van Vredenburg, I would not draw your attention to this horrible story if it did not shine a very special light on the figure of Bung Tomo, almost identical to the person of Sutomo who is described here. I have the honor to forward you the testimony by Ms. L. Sinsu-Andries regarding her experience inside the Simpang Club Surabaya in October 1945. I want to ask your attention in particular to the role of Sutomo, apparently identical to the current Major General from the Republican Army.¹²⁹ I will send a copy of this report to the Prosecutor in Surabaya.¹³⁰

This suggests that Sutomo's alleged complicity in the killings in the Simpang Club was not generally known before December 1947. Otherwise, why would the Attorney General have

¹²⁸ NL-HaNA, *Strijdkrachten Ned.-Indië*, 2.13.132, inv.no. 1935. (November 29, 1947).

¹²⁹ In June 1947, President Sukarno inaugurated Sutomo as Major General.

¹³⁰ Letter to the Attorney General of the Dutch East Indies, Batavia December 23, 1947. See: NL-HaNA, Alg. Secretarie Ned.-Ind. Regering, 2.10.14, inv.no. 2678.

to be informed in a separate secret mailing? Combined with the fact that no other ODO-testimony mentions his presence at the club this is remarkable information. When taken into account the estimated 1,500 Dutch surviving the tribunal, it is surprising that Sutomo was not linked to the events at the Simpang Club earlier.

Even more fascinating is that one year after the Attorney general received Sinsu-Andries' testimony, a young *pemuda* Saimoen was standing trial in Surabaya on charges of complicity in the murders in the Simpang Club. One of the people testifying was Mr. Catoir, a witness who claimed to have seen Saimoen committing the atrocities. The fact that the Prosecutor of the Court in Surabaya had also received a copy of Sinsu-Andries testimony may explain why he specifically asked the witness whether he had seen Sutomo as well. Catoir replied that he did remember that Sutomo was screaming and inciting, thus confirming Sinsu-Andries' observation. About the fate of Saimoen, an article in the *Nieuwe Courant* (1948) stated:

[He] was exclusively filled with hate against Europeans. ... Without the slightest remorse and with the most sadistic nature... The military prosecutor could only demand the highest punishment: the death penalty.¹³¹

In March 1949 a small article in *Het Dagblad* wrote that: "the death sentence was carried out on Saimoen on Thursday."¹³²

Although it may be nearly impossible to say something about the extent to which Sinsu-Andries' account is true, the reason that precisely her file ended up on the desk of the Attorney General seems related to the fact that Sutomo was extremely famous by that time. In contrast, no one now remembers the name of Saimoen, who was sentenced to death for what he did in the Simpang Club. In conclusion it seems plausible that it was only from 1948 onwards—thus after the Attorney General received the testimony and after *Bersiap* court cases were launched—that Sutomo became the symbol of these gruesome *Bersiap* killings that Frederick and Cribb insisted on calling a "(brief) genocide."

¹³¹ "De moorden in de Simpang Club", *Nieuwe Courant* (October 23, 1948).

¹³² "Doodvonnis voltrokken", *Het Dagblad* (March 4, 1949).

3. A slander campaign?

This third section further analyses the impact of Sutomo's broadcasts from the second half of October when he became much more famous. As a propagandist who fought the war with words and not with weapons, the question remains whether his speeches encouraged hate-crimes against ethnic minorities. The previous section already pointed out the issues with Sutomo's alleged presence at the Simpang Club as being the leader of atrocities, yet the question to what extent his radio broadcasts contributed to the *Bersiap* still deserves more attention. Even though he may not have ordered the killings inside the Club, it is nevertheless possible that (through his radio speeches) he encouraged others to kill civilians and in particular ethnic groups suspected of not supporting the Republic.

There is general consensus, in both the Dutch and Indonesian historiography, about Sutomo's fierce opposition against the British arrival and the Dutch reoccupation. He was against negotiations as long the Netherlands did not accept 100% *Merdeka* (independence.) However, as explained before, many leading Dutch publications go much further and refer to him as the *pemuda*-leader who encouraged killings against (Indo-) European, Chinese and other pro-Dutch Indonesian civilians. In *Bersiap! Opstand in het Paradijs* (*Bersiap! Revolt in Paradise*, 2005) Herman Bussemaker writes that: "the consequences [of Sutomo's radio speeches] were disastrous for the Dutch, from 14 October onwards they were no longer safe on the streets."¹³³ On the English Wikipedia page it is written that Sutomo: "encouraged atrocities against Indonesians of mixed European-Asian ancestry."¹³⁴ The reference for the text on Wikipedia is the book publication *In Indië geworteld. De geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders*¹³⁵ (Rooted in the Indies; the history of the Indo-Dutch, 2004.) In this book Dutch historian Hans Meijer cites a newspaper article from the *Haagse Post* (1954.) Without further reference the anonymous writer of this piece claimed that Bung Tomo on November 24th, 1945 said:

The Indo-Dutch are bloodhounds, torture them to death, destroy these watchdogs from colonialism to the root. ... For three hundred years they exploited us to serve the treasury of a white queen. However Allah now proclaimed the hour of revenge!

¹³³ Bussemaker, *Bersiap!* (2005) pp. 214-15, 260.

¹³⁴ See: <<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutomo>>

¹³⁵ Hans Meijer, *In Indië geworteld; De Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2004) pp. 245.

Brave warriors from Indonesia! Countless generations of oppressed forefathers are watching you. Their immortal spirits claim revenge. Blood revenge!¹³⁶

This implies that Sutomo did not only oppose colonial reoccupation but that he also encouraged ethnic cleansings based upon feelings of revenge. The latter accusation will be the focus of this section.

Another scenario yet to be explored is the possibility that Bung Tomo was a victim of Dutch propaganda. Did he in 1945 literally say that the (Indo) Dutch were bloodhounds, that they should be tortured to death? Or were that perhaps rumors spread by his enemies to discredit him? At least it is remarkable that, although the source and the writer of the 1954-article are unknown, Hans Meijer uses this as his only reference to prove Sutomo's evil. In fact, despite the growing scholarly attention to the *Bersiap*, it is still a largely unstudied question to what extent the Dutch used the occurrence of anti-colonial violence to criminalize the independence movement. This is not insignificant as current interpretations of the *Bersiap* may still be influenced by the old propaganda. Therefore this section aims to explore the possibility of a slander campaign against Sutomo and the subsequent impact of that on the later historiography and collective memory.

The confrontation with the British

After the horrible events of "Bloody Monday", leaving the surviving Dutch and Eurasian men and boys imprisoned, it became relatively quiet again in Surabaya until the arrival of the British (Indian) troops on October 25. In contrast to the central government in Jakarta who gave the British permission to land, local leaders in Surabaya (including Sutomo) fiercely opposed this decision. One day before the landing Bung Tomo warned his fellow citizens to be aware of the colonial agenda of the Allied forces. In newspaper *Soeara Ra'jat* he wrote:

We extremists and the [Indonesian] masses now cannot trust in sweet talk. We distrust every movement [the foreigners make] as long as the independence of the Republic goes unrecognized! We will shoot to kill, we will spill blood of all who stand

¹³⁶ "Wie helpt nu onze eigen vluchtelingen? Amok van extremisten tegen Indische Nederlanders", *De Haagse Post* (December 4, 1954).

in our way! If we are not given complete independence, we will destroy the imperialists' buildings and factories with the hand grenades and dynamite we have, and we will give the signal to revolt, to tear the guts out of any living creature that tries to colonize us again! It is the masses in their thousands, starved, stripped and shamed by the colonialists, who will rise to carry out this revolt. We extremists, we who revolt with a full revolutionary spirit, together with the Indonesian masses, who have experienced the oppression of colonialism, would rather see Indonesia drowned in blood and sunk to the bottom of the sea than colonized once more! God will protect us! Merdeka!¹³⁷

The preparedness to use violence is remarkable. Earlier, during the weapon seizure at Don Bosco Sutomo still appeared hesitant, by now he had clearly changed his approach. The fierce resistance in Surabaya surprised the 49th Brigade of the British Colonial Army when they landed in Indonesia's second largest city, ill-informed as they were about the actual situation on the ground.¹³⁸ Several violent confrontations between Indonesians and British-Indian soldiers resulted in a bloody street battle in which, among others, the British General Mallaby died. This was the time that Sutomo became extremely famous. He did not actively join the street battle but spoke every night on the radio. On 9 November the British issued an ultimatum that insisted the Indonesians to surrender. Sutomo's speech of that evening became one of the most famous of which the complete recording is saved. After opening with the Islamic greeting "*Bismillahirrohmanirrohim*" (In the name of Allah the most gracious and most merciful) he first addressed several different ethnicities of the youth in Surabaya who originated from: Maluku, Sulawesi, Bali, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Tapanuli and Aceh. (Notably he did not mention ethnic Chinese, Eurasians or Dutch.) He then continued:

Hey British forces! You want us to carry a white flag and surrender to you. ... You ask us to hand over the weapons that we have seized from the Japanese. These demands show that you are threatening us again. You want to destroy us with all your available power. But this is our answer: as long as Indonesian bulls still have red blood that can make a piece of white fabric red and white we will not surrender to anyone. My brothers, the people of Surabaya: be prepared! This is an emergency situation! But let me remind you once again: do not fire until fired upon. Only when

¹³⁷ Frederick, *Visions and Heat* (1989) pp. 255

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 256.

they start the attack will we fight back and show them that we are really people who want independence.¹³⁹

When listening to the original audio file the fierceness of his voice is indeed striking: dedicated to only accept 100% *Merdeka* (freedom). Yet his advice “not to fire until fired upon” is nevertheless in stark contrast with the accusation that he encouraged his followers to kill civilians. Bung Tomo did not join the fights and was safely evacuated to Malang when the British started their bombing raid on Surabaya the other day. The British bombing caused more than ten thousand deaths and it would take the British Imperial Army until early December 1945 before they managed to get full control over empty Surabaya. Almost the entire population had fled the city that was heavily damaged. Many Dutch and Eurasian ex-internees were evacuated to areas outside Surabaya and put in Republican camps.

K'tut Tantri

Sutomo's Rebellion Radio posed quite an exceptional threat to the Dutch interests. He was not only hated for inciting his fellow countrymen to revolt but also for giving platform to the English broadcasts of a white European woman, reaching a non-Indonesian audience as well. His female companion was known under various names, among others: “K'tut Tantri,” but also “Miss Daventry” and after she joined Bung Tomo's movement she was nicknamed “Surabaya Sue.” She was born in Scotland as Mariel Stuart Walker and grew up in the United States, lived in the Dutch East Indies since the 1930's where she ended up on Bali as an artist. A local aristocrat family adopted her as their daughter and gave her the name “K'tut Tantri,” which means fourth child in Balinese language. In 1945 she chose the side of the new Republic and soon became the English broadcaster of Sutomo's radio. As such the Rebellion Radio actively countered Dutch propaganda in a foreign language. This also frustrated the British attempts to occupy the city of Surabaya. In an article published in April 1946, the Indonesian writer Idrus explained that the British Army even put a prize on the head of the BPRI-leader:

¹³⁹ Audio file from CD, additional to the book: Sutomo *10 November 1945* (2008). Or see transcription online: <https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/ini-pidato-bung-tomo-yang-membakar-semangat-rakyat-surabaya-10-november-1945.html>

Sutomo smiled sweetly upon hearing the British announcement. It never occurred to him that he had such a high value. He laughed and said to Miss Daventry [K'tut Tantri]: "I wish the British paid such a high price for every Indonesian."

About K'tut Tantri Idrus added:

Miss Daventry is an American female journalist. Even though she was a foreign woman, she was not afraid of Sutomo who said that the British were "criminals."¹⁴⁰

Notably, in a letter probably written in January 1946, K'tut Tantri informed Amir Syarifuddin, the Indonesian minister of Defense, about a Dutch slander campaign against the BPRI-leader. This suggests that two years before the Dutch Attorney General received Sinsu-Andries's ODO-testimony, Sutomo was already being portrayed negatively in the news. Thus the accusation of his complicity to the killings in the Simpang Club matched with the image that was already drawn of him.

In the dissertation *The Romance of K'tut Tantri and Indonesia* (1997) Australian researcher Timothy Lindsey unravels K'tut Tantri's account of the events and refers to Sutomo as well:

Just as [K'tut Tantri] was damned by association with Tokyo Rose when journalists named her "Surabaya Sue," so too was Sutomo demonized.¹⁴¹

Lindsay goes on to explain that the reason both propagandists were portrayed very negatively in Western media was related to the enormous success of the BPRI movement. Not only did Bung Tomo encourage the Indonesian masses to join the struggle, from that moment on foreigners could hear, in a language they understood, what was going on from an Indonesian point of view. In her speeches K'tut Tantri said things like:

There are no extremists in Indonesia. What the people really want is freedom. The British and [Dutch] NICA are the first-class extremists; they are crossing the line of humanity!¹⁴²

After November 10th, K'tut Tantri continued in drawing international attention to the

¹⁴⁰ Idrus, "Corat-Coret Revolusi", *Pantja Raja* (April 15, 1946).

¹⁴¹ Timothy Lindsey, *The Romance of K'tut Tantri and Indonesia* (Oxford University Press, 1997) pp. 150.

¹⁴² Mahandis Y. Thamrin, "Timbang Hati Si Puan Pemberani", *National Geographic Indonesia* (August 2015).

disastrous impact of the British bombing on Surabaya. By exposing this horrible war crime the Rebellion Radio posed a clear threat to the interests of the Allied forces, whose official statement was that they came to Indonesia in peace and only planned to evacuate the Dutch from the Japanese camps.

The work of Dutch war correspondent Alfred van Sprang is an early example of how negatively both Sutomo and K'tut Tantri were framed. Van Sprang stayed in Surabaya in September and October, recovering from the time he spent in a Japanese prison camp. He soon became one of the reporters for the American United Press agency and wrote in his book *Soekarno lacht* (Sukarno smiles, 1946):

K'tut Tantri is an ugly person, from inside and outside. ... Even if she were not mentally ill she surely suffers from hysteria. With her red hair, large glasses and pointy nose, she is a devoted friend of Sukarno. With her sharp tongue she is a grateful tool of Indonesian propaganda.¹⁴³

Another example is the Australian journalist Alan Dower who personally met Sutomo in late 1945 (or early 1946). In the following paragraph Dower tells his readers that he was meeting up with an Indonesian war criminal:

It was evident, the moment I met him in a hotel room in Soerakarta [Solo], that he despised all foreigners. I wondered then if he had come all that way from Sourabaya [Surabaya] district merely to oblige with the rare and extraordinary privilege of an interview, or whether he was taking time off from killing to study at close hand specimens of his own enemies.¹⁴⁴

Van Sprang, for his part, described the voice of the BPRI-leader as threatening, demanding and sentimental at times. Recalling that Sutomo once said:

Friends! Becak- and dokar-drivers and grass cutters, it is better when our country becomes a sea of fire than that it will be dominated again. I have instructed our friends to put dynamite under the radio of Batavia, which is occupied by the British, and from which lies are sent abroad. Don't trust the British. Hear the call of mother Indonesia. The British want to lead you back into slavery. Fight the British, the Ghurkas and the NICA. Hunt the NICA dogs, the British, who kill our children, who

¹⁴³ Alfred van Sprang, *En Soekarno lacht...!* (Den Haag: W. van Hoeve, 1946) pp. 69-71.

¹⁴⁴ Lindsey, *The Romance of K'tut Tantri* (1997) pp. 150-151.

dishonor our women. Friends, continue the struggle, as long as our freedom is under attack. Friends, from within you, liberation heroes will rise up. Do not listen to those who call themselves our leaders and who are only looking for a nice job for themselves.¹⁴⁵

Van Sprang confirmed that Sutomo was very popular among his people: “Sutomo is the uprising. The revolution. The instigator of the radicalized youth.” But again: instigating armed resistance against a foreign invasion is not the same as supporting and encouraging massacring civilians.

Slander campaign?

According to K'tut Tantri “soon malicious lies were spread,” in which Bung Tomo was portrayed as “the worst sort of fanatic,” accusing him of atrocities “that shocked his sensitive soul.”¹⁴⁶ The aforementioned letter of K'tut Tantri that was addressed to the Minister of Defense, Amir Syarifuddin, is saved in the Dutch archives (undated but probably written in January 1946). In this letter she informed him about her plan to speak on several radio stations to deny that Sutomo ever made threats over the radio on the life of Dutch women and children. She tried to convince Syarifuddin that Bung Tomo was only “a victim of the dirty Dutch propagandists.”¹⁴⁷ In his book *Soekarno lacht* (Sukarno smiles, 1946) Van Sprang added a transcription of one of these radio speeches in which she defended Sutomo:

The general impression of newspaper correspondents about Sutomo seems to be: a sort of monster, an unshaved exile or rebel leader with a red and white band around his head, a pair of revolvers tied around his waist, bringing a dagger and perhaps a few poisonous arrows on his back. Nothing is further from the truth. Sutomo is in fact a very kind person, not only in appearance, but also in his behavior. He can be described as a poet but absolutely not as a brute. As far as I personally know Sutomo, he could not even kill a fly, let alone allow the slaughter of thousands of women and children. Sutomo is the idol of the people. He has stolen the hearts of millions of people throughout Indonesia and that would not be possible (you know

¹⁴⁵ Van Sprang, *En Soekarno lacht...!* (1946) pp. 69-71.

¹⁴⁶ K'tut Tantri, *Revolt in Paradise* (2006) pp. 202

¹⁴⁷ The Dutch Army laid hands on this letter when they occupied Yogyakarta in 1949 and confiscated documents from the Indonesian Ministry of Defense, see: NL-HaNA, NEFIS en CMI, 2.10.62, inv.nr. 7044.

the character of the Indonesian people as well as I do) if he was a tyrant or brute, not to mention a human killer. He is loved for his gentleness, his kindness for the regular people and also because he is a great patriot, no sacrifice would be too much for him if it would free his people forever from foreign domination and NICA oppression.

Van Sprang interpreted her words as simplistic pro-Republican propaganda. In his view Sutomo was instigating brutal massacres that the “hysterical” K’tut Tantri defended.

An Indonesian article in newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakjat* (7 December 1946) suggested that the reason the Dutch portrayed Sutomo as a monster was related to the impact of his speeches:

All members of the Dutch community in Surabaya are afraid and become nervous when they hear Bung Tomo’s voice. No other Indonesian leader is being misused by the Dutch as much as Bung Tomo. The news in the [Dutch] *Nieuwe Courant* and *Pelita Rakyat* ... always refers to Bung Tomo his attitude and his actions. Clearly the Dutch do not understand what Bung Tomo means for our revolution. ... Dutch people ask why ... the Republican government does not hold Sutomo responsible for the death of thousands of youth and civilians. ... [They wonder:] Does the Republican government not understand that the international community dislikes Sutomo?¹⁴⁸

The anonymous author of this article concluded that the Dutch accusations were simply ridiculous.¹⁴⁹

How independent were Dutch journalists like Van Sprang? Would their work have been published if they had written positively about Indonesian resistance leaders? In her article “Terug naar Patria en de Bladen laten verreken” (Back to Patria and leave the papers behind, 2005), Dutch historian Angelie Sens points out that the first Dutch journalists active in the region stood under direct supervision of the colonial regime that was busy reinstalling itself. The first Dutch newspaper *Het Dagblad* was issued on October 23, 1945, handed out

¹⁴⁸ *Kedaulatan Rakjat* (7 December 1946).

¹⁴⁹ An interesting detail is that the author of the article in *Kedaulatan Rakjat* believed that all Sutomo’s speeches were recorded and/or transcribed and brought to Britain and the United States. Unfortunately it is unknown if this was the case and whether (or where) these recordings or transcriptions have been saved.

for free and completely government controlled.¹⁵⁰ How the censorship exactly worked has been analyzed in the study of Dutch historian Louis Zweers *De gecensureerde oorlog; Militairen versus media in Nederlands-Indië 1945-1949* (The censored war; Soldiers versus media in the Dutch East Indies 1945-1949), published in 2013. According to Zweers, most Dutch reporters rarely left their hotels. They just visited receptions and press conferences, getting information via diplomatic circuits and military and government information sources. Dutch journalists were frequently hindered in newsgathering and fact checking. He concludes that the journalistic output at that time was very much clouded by propaganda that legitimized Dutch military actions: “many Dutch journalists were docile ... and many national newspapers were just mouthpieces of political parties.”¹⁵¹ Unfortunately Zweers does not touch upon the controversy around Sutomo. He does not critically analyze the ongoing impact of the latter censorship and anti-Indonesian propaganda on the current Dutch memory of Sutomo and others.¹⁵² More generally Zweers states that:

The radical *pemuda* [youth] groups and their leaders, who wanted “100% merdeka” [freedom] and committed “unprecedented cruelties”, were framed in the Dutch (East Indies) press as hot-tempered and revengeful people. A clear image of the enemy arose, using the frame of civilization versus barbarism and reason versus resentment.¹⁵³

From British, Australian and American media coverage it appears that the Dutch slander campaign was effective. The famous American correspondent Martha Gellhorn, for instance, wrote that Bung Tomo was a loud “bloodthirsty rebel leader” and it is quite odd that she noted that: although his teeth were beautiful, his eyes were somewhat mad while having “claw-like hands.” From her view the Dutch internees, who were evacuated by Indonesian troops from Surabaya to Republican areas in the interior, were hostages and “neglected to death, ... not from cruelty but

¹⁵⁰ Angelie Sens, “Terug naar Patria en de Bladen laten verrekken,” in: Ulbe Bosma, Angelie Sens and Gerard Termorshuizen (ed.) *Journalistiek in de Tropen* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Aksant, 2005) pp. 69-70.

¹⁵¹ Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog* (2013) pp. 360.

¹⁵² In fact, Zweers is of the opinion that the Indonesian *Bersiap*-violence is totally forgotten about in the Netherlands and argues that this deserves more attention. See: Louis Zweers, “Een weggemoffelde massamoord in Indië”, *Volkskrant* (17 August 2015).

¹⁵³ Zweers, *De gecensureerde oorlog* (2013) pp. 32.

from inefficiency.”¹⁵⁴ A British headline in January 1946 read: “Java Rebels’ new Threat.” According to the article Bung Tomo warned the international community that he would murder Dutch women and children if the Allied forces did not leave.¹⁵⁵ Another American article further stated that Bung Tomo planned to poison the 40,000 Dutch soldiers that The Hague decided to send.¹⁵⁶ Another headline read: “Meek looking Guerrilla [Sutomo] screams death to the Dutch.”¹⁵⁷

With the lack of primary sources it is difficult to determine how deliberate and well-planned this “slander-campaign” was but it seems obvious that the Dutch policymakers made good use of the classical propaganda tool of demonizing the enemy. Needless to say that it was in the advantage of the Netherlands if the international community saw the most famous *pemuda*-leader as an evil psychopath that had no other goal than terrorizing the lives of innocents.

Indonesian critical views regarding Sutomo

Although the Dutch had a clear motivation to paint a very negative picture of an Indonesian revolutionary as Sutomo, it does not prove the accusations against him entirely untrue. His views regarding other ethnicities were presumably not free of prejudices either. His generation grew up within the racist reality of the Dutch East Indies and its unfair legal system. An illustrative example is Sutomo’s confrontation with Siauw Giok Tjhan, the leader of the pro-Republican Chinese movement in Surabaya. When the latter discovered that Sutomo’s first broadcasts contained some anti-Chinese comments he decided to confront the BPRI-leader. In the dissertation *Siauw Giok Tjhan dalam membangun nasion Indonesia* (Siauw Giok Tjhan and the building of the nation Indonesia, 2010) Siauw’s son Siauw Tiong Djin describes how his father arranged airtime for one of his men on the Rebellion Radio, just fifteen minutes before the BPRI-leader held his daily speech. In this broadcast, the latter representative of the Chinese pro-independence group emphasized that the enemy of the Indonesians were the Dutch and not the Chinese. He stressed that Dutch colonialism had

¹⁵⁴ Martha Gellhorn, *The Face of War*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994) pp. 197.

¹⁵⁵ “Java Rebels’ New Threat”, *Lancashire Daily Post* (January 1946).

¹⁵⁶ “See Occupation of Manchuria’s Cities By China”, *Anniston Star* (December 1945).

¹⁵⁷ “Meek looking Guerrilla screams death to the Dutch”, *Indiana Evening Gazette* (July 1947).

Boeng **T O M O**



„The Great Orator”

(Siasat No. 4 Tahun ke-1, 25 Januari 1947)

Figure 5 Illustration “Boeng Tomo. The Great Orator” in: Siasat, January 25, 1947

victimized the Chinese as well and that many of them did not want the Dutch to return either. Unfortunately, Siauw's attempt did not have immediate success. Although Bung Tomo was not against the Chinese support of the independence movement as such, he nevertheless continued being skeptical of the Chinese group as a whole, convinced that most of them were in fact pro-Dutch. Siauw thereupon requested a private meeting with Sutomo in a little town somewhere between Surabaya and Malang. During this talk he emphasized the importance of cooperation among different ethnic groups to stabilize the situation in East Java. Only after that did Sutomo change the tone of his speeches.¹⁵⁸ In the light of our main question (whether Sutomo literally called for bloody revenge against ethnic minorities) it is worth noting that Siauw only referred to anti-Chinese comments in some of his speeches, which is not the same as openly encouraging murder and revenge.

Clearly, not all independence leaders were charmed by Sutomo's approach. In a footnote of her letter K'tut Tanti referred to Vice-president Mohammad Hatta, who told foreign reporters that he distanced himself from Sutomo. Moderates such as Hatta and Sjahrir supported the negotiations with the Dutch and were therefore not happy with the rebellious stance of the BPRI-leader. However, this did not mean that Bung Tomo totally lacked government support.¹⁵⁹ In April 1946, for example, he was invited to take part in the *Dewan Penasehat Pucuk Pimpinan Tentara* (Advisory Board of Army Leaders) after which President Sukarno inaugurated him as a Major General in June 1947.¹⁶⁰

Thus Sutomo did receive criticism from his fellow Indonesians as well, however, for different reasons. In January 1947 for instance, the Indonesian journalist Aboe Bakar Loebis wrote a very critical article that caused quite a stir. His point of criticism was that, apart from inciting resistance against colonial reoccupation, Bung Tomo's speeches were rather empty. He did not have a clear political agenda, no vision for the future. Loebis nevertheless acknowledged his unique role as propagandist and pointed out the contradiction between Dutch and Indonesian views of him:

For the other side Sutomo was just an extremist and terrorist whereas for us he was

¹⁵⁸ Siauw Tiong Djin, *Siauw Giok Tjhan dalam membangun nasion Indonesia* (Jakarta: Lembaga Kajian Sinergi Indonesia, 2010) pp. 78-86.

¹⁵⁹ Zara, *Indonesian Propaganda* (2016) pp. 68-70.

¹⁶⁰ Poeze, *Tan Malaka 1945-1949*, (2007) pp. 342-343. Also: Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Kronik Revolusi Indonesia; Jilid III*, (Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, Jakarta, 2001) pp. 141.

a hero. He was a killer and tormentor for them but a warrior to us.¹⁶¹

Although perhaps exceptionally there were also Indonesians who seem to have been convinced that the Dutch allegations were true. In an Indonesian spoken radio program an unknown commentator argued that Sutomo was just a coward as he only encouraged others to fight, whereas he was never seen at the frontlines himself. The speech remarkably matches the rhetoric of the Dutch propaganda explaining that, due to the work of “Sutomo and his bandits,” the Indonesian revolution was a criminal affair. The broadcast, dated February 5, 1947, continued:

Pemudas, ignore Sutomo, join Sjahrir and cooperate with the Dutch! *Pemudas*, with all your resistance we are still not independent. Do not listen to Sutomo, neither you nor your Army is strong enough to face the Dutch. In the areas occupied by the Dutch Army the people are led to independence in a peaceful way.¹⁶²

This call to cooperation and trust in the good intentions of the Dutch sounds rather naïve when knowing the course of history.

In conclusion this section revealed the likelihood of a Dutch slander campaign that created the image of Sutomo as “bloodthirsty rebel.” The motivation for such a campaign is clear: from the end of October he became the most famous radio-voice of Indonesia that inspired thousands of *pemuda* to take up the weapons. Not only that, through K’tut Tantri’s English-spoken words the Rebellion Radio reached a non-Indonesian audience as well, actively countering Dutch propaganda. As such he posed a serious threat to the Dutch interests who wanted to recolonize Indonesia. But also to the British whom Sutomo portrayed as assistants of their Dutch allies. However, that alone does not answer the more complicated question whether his rebellious tone indirectly encouraged crimes against humanity. At least, Siauw Giok Tjhan’s intervention shows that it is too easy to dismiss all the above as Dutch propaganda. Still, in order to make sense of the contradictions it seems useful to carefully distinguish the different types of allegations. It is not impossible that Indonesians listening to the Rebellion Radio interpreted Sutomo’s words as legitimation to

¹⁶¹ Poeze, *Tan Malaka 1945-1949*, (2007) pp. 540-541. And: Aboe Bakar Loebis, “Boeng Tomo; The Great Orator,” *Siasat* (January 25, 1947) pp. 1 and 4.

¹⁶² Transcript of Indonesian radio speech, translated in Dutch and dated 5 February 1947. See: L-HaNA, Proc.-Gen. Hoogerechtshof Ned.-Ind., 2.10.17, inv.no. 849.

kill. However, this does not prove that he deliberately encouraged hate-crimes against minorities. This idea merely circulating in the Netherlands seems too extreme. From Siau's account it rather appears that, although his speeches were not free of racism, he was not aware of it. The fact that he changed his tone after Siau convinced him indicates that he was reasonable and not simply full of revenge. The latter might nevertheless be an inconvenient truth for Indonesians who believe in the heroic and romanticized memory of Bung Tomo. One could argue that Sutomo does not really deserve the "Che-Guevara-like status" that he now has. He was just a propagandist encouraging others to fight and never seen at the frontlines himself. The symbol of the battle of Surabaya was not in town when the British started their bombing raid on the city. This almost cowardly stance does not match the Dutch image of him as a madman seeking for blood revenge. If Sutomo really incited murders against the Chinese, an Indonesian-Chinese like Siau would presumably not have approached him as a serious conversation partner. The recorded 9-November speech of Sutomo, in which he instructed his followers: "not to fire until fired upon," also contrasts the image of him as ruthless killer.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps comparable to the ongoing impact of the anti-communist propaganda of the Soeharto-era on current Indonesian views, Dutch propaganda equally has an ongoing impact on the historiography and memory of today. Whereas in the Indonesian context Sutomo may be attributed military achievements that he did not accomplish (e.g. the battle of Surabaya), it seems that the Dutch historiography links him to massacres that he did not commit (the Simpang Club). For the Dutch colonialists of that time he was the perfect scapegoat for everything that went wrong. Due to the lack of independent news sources the Dutch policy makers were nearly unhindered in creating a negative image of the Indonesian independence movement. The likelihood of a Dutch slander campaign puts Bung Tomo's negative memory in the Netherlands in a questionable light. Especially when publications leave out significant information, without critically questioning the reliability of sources. Illustrated, for instance, by the book of military historian Rémy Limpach who, without further reference states that Sutomo's speeches encouraged atrocities.¹⁶³ In this sense it is quite telling that Sutomo's appeasing role—among others during the weapons seizure at Don Bosco and the flag incident of September 19—is mostly ignored on the Dutch side. The same counts for the recorded 9-November speech in which he told his followers not to fire until fired upon, as well as the story that PRI-members brought him to the Simpang Club for questioning. Even though it may be difficult to prove that he personally tried to prevent ruthless killings—such as that of the Timorese boy—accounts making reference of this cannot be excluded. When historians ignore the latter, meanwhile holding him responsible for the *Bersiap*, it poses questions regarding the larger national context in which these history productions are constructed.

In any case it is impossible to frame Sutomo's speeches as the root of the *Bersiap*. It is highly unlikely that there would have been no *Bersiap* without his incitements to resist. Against the background of the Dutch colonial apartheid-regime the racially motivated killings of the revolution cannot be disconnected from centuries of injustice. Massacres already occurred before Bung Tomo became famous. Notably, during the first confrontations in September and the first two weeks of October 1945 he was not yet

¹⁶³ Limpach, *De Brandende Kampongs* (2016) pp. 246.

inciting the masses to revolt. He was a journalist covering the news and did not even join the mass rallies organized by his fellow *pemuda*. Hario Kecik's remark best illustrates his initial hesitancy: "the people of Surabaya did not act because Sutomo was inciting, he started inciting after the people already took action."¹⁶⁴

The ODO-testimony of one woman seems to have been most influential in the Dutch image of Sutomo as the leader of the Simpang Club murders. This image is currently still being reproduced: for instance on the English Wikipedia page, in the book of historian Hans Meijer and the documentary *Archief van Tranen* (Archive of Tears, 2012). Yet Sinsu-Andries' claim, that she saw Sutomo screaming orders, is in stark contrast with several Indonesian sources that confirm that he was arrested himself. Not he but Soemarsono was the leader of the PRI, holding office in the Simpang Club.

From the moment Bung Tomo started to make radio broadcasts, Western media portrayed him (and K'tut Tantri) very negatively, consistently framing him as "bloodthirsty rebel." His alleged complicity to the killings in the Simpang Club only became publicly known much later, from 1948 onwards. None of the estimated 1,500 Dutch men that survived the PRI-tribunal recalled his presence before Sinsu-Andries mentioned it and before her ODO-file ended up on the desk of the highest legal authority of the colony. It is remarkable that there are no other primary sources, newspaper articles or ODO testimonies that refer to Sutomo as the leader of the massacre inside the Simpang Club. The fact that the Dutch colonial Attorney General had to be informed in a separate secret mailing shows that Sinsu-Andries' testimony was exceptional and that her allegation added to the very negative image that was already drawn of him. In this way her statement, perhaps unwittingly, had far-reaching consequences for present day memory.

The *Bersiap* genocide?

The introduction has already briefly analyzed the growing academic attention to the *Bersiap*, in which terminology (should it be called a genocide) and the possible trigger (why did it happen) are the main topics of discussion. Whereas the first section presented four

¹⁶⁴ Hario Kecik, *Pemikiran Militer 2* (2009) pp. 14-16.

factors explaining what might have triggered the sequence of violence, this last section aims to add some concluding notes regarding the discussion on the terminology.

In his article “The killing of Dutch and Eurasians in Indonesia's national revolution (1945–49)” (2012) William Frederick acknowledges that the *Bersiap* as a whole was not a genocide “from a “scientific” or legal perspective.” He insists, nevertheless, on using the term because it will draw attention to Indonesian violence as an unstudied topic. He concludes: “I am reluctant to quibble over or entirely release the term “genocide” in the present case, or to suggest that Indonesia offers a uniquely complex example.”¹⁶⁵ The horrific details in the ODO-testimonies are indeed generally unknown to Indonesia and (apart from the Netherlands) to the rest of the world. It is questionable, however, whether the sole aim of “drawing attention” justifies the use of such a heavy loaded term. That Frederick admits that there is no legal basis for the killings to be called “genocide” is meaningful. The publication *Genocide and Gross Human Rights Violations: In Comparative Perspective* (1998) lists four criteria for killings to be called “genocide.”¹⁶⁶ The first criterion concerns the systematic destruction of an entire race or class. However, Sinsu-Andries’ story and other ODO-testimonies do not indicate that the Indonesian *pemuda* had the intention to eliminate the entire colonial class, although in some occasions the *Bersiap* might have appeared as such. Many Dutch survived the PRI-tribunal in the Simpang Club. The second criterion for killings to be called “genocide” is that the murderousness threatens the physical survival of an ethnic group. Which was not the case regarding the victimization of the Dutch colonial elite and associates. The third criterion requires the aggression to be one-sided. Yet, during the *Bersiap*-time the Dutch, British and Japanese used violence against Indonesians as well. The fourth aspect justifying the term “genocide” is that the perpetrator represents a state or other form of collectivity.¹⁶⁷ In the example of the Simpang Club this would be the PRI as unofficial body representing the new independent state. But how could this newborn state (still suffering under foreign rule) be responsible for circumstances they had not created? Even if Sutomo’s speeches may have incited the *Bersiap* to some extent, he cannot be held accountable for unleashing the violence. The conflict was not a regular

¹⁶⁵ Frederick, “The killing of Dutch and Eurasians” (2012) pp. 376.

¹⁶⁶ Kurt Jonassohn, Karin Solveig Björnson, *Genocide and Gross Human Rights Violations: In Comparative Perspective* (New Brunswick: 1998) pp. 10-12, 132-134.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 10-12, 132-134.

war of two equal powers combatting each other: it was a colonial war in which the colonized people revolted against their oppression. As such the violence of resisting needs to be differentiated from the violence of oppressing. Therefore the classification of Indonesian brutalities in the *Bersiap*-time should be considered in another light than the prevailing attitude.

Furthermore, in terms of “decolonizing” history—in the sense of deconstructing dominant Eurocentric views—it is quite telling when Western scholars choose to classify the violence of the oppressed as “genocide,” meanwhile not applying the same standards to the violence used by the colonizers. There is, for instance, no Western scholar deliberately referring to the British bombing of Surabaya as “genocide” just to draw attention. Frederick may be right that Indonesia does not offer a unique complex example when compared to other colonial wars, however the use of the term “genocide” seems not right when no legal criteria matches the nature of the killings and when the term only serves to draw attention to Indonesian violence as unstudied topic.

The knowledge production on the *Bersiap* also has a transnational component: the interactive part of history that is not constrained within national borders. Nowadays historians in both Indonesia and the Netherlands have access to various publications on the *Bersiap*, such as the 2012-article of Frederick. In this digital era it is much easier to find other, contrasting narratives online. Dutch and Indonesians alike may end up at the English Wikipedia page that frames Sutomo as the perpetrator of race-based executions of civilians. However, given the different place the *Bersiap* has in each national context, the interpretation is not necessarily the same. When not critically examined, transnational exchanges of narratives involve the risk of reproducing old propaganda. Only after understanding the place of the *Bersiap* in each national context, it will be easier to comprehend the particular dynamics of Indonesian-Dutch exchanges on this topic, however distant, indirect and unintended these exchanges sometimes are. Whereas the *Bersiap* for Indonesia is moreover an inconvenient truth, most Indonesian historians that highlight the topic will be considered progressive, self-critical intellectuals by their scholarly peers for adding nuance to the one-sided and militarized version of national history. In the Dutch context, however, the attention to the *Bersiap* is often used to accuse the Indonesian freedom fighters of being equally responsible for the bloody escalation of the Independence war. The attention for the *Bersiap* in the Netherlands rather strengthens the conservative

colonial line of thinking in which all Indonesian *pemuda* were framed as “terrorists” and “extremists.”

In conclusion there is an ongoing impact of the Dutch propaganda on current views, which reaches historians in Indonesia as well. An illustrative example of the problem with an indirect “transnational exchange” is the thesis of Indonesian historian Petrik Matanasi *Ikut NICA dan berontak* (Join NICA and revolt!! 2014).¹⁶⁸ He refers to the book of Dutch historian Hans Meijer¹⁶⁹ and the quote of Sutomo in which he allegedly said that the Indo-Dutch are bloodhounds and should be tortured to death. In this way Meijer’s problematic use of the quote from the *Haagse Post* (1954) ends up as “proof” of Sutomo’s evilness in Matanasi’s thesis. The latter uses the quote to question the iconic image of national hero Bung Tomo in the Indonesian context. Presumably unaware of the issues with the source, Matanasi explains the lack of attention in Indonesia for Sutomo’s alleged participation in the *Bersiap* simply as: “an indication that there is no room to criticize national heroes as it may harm the society.”¹⁷⁰ However, this example rather seems to highlight the limits that one dominant narrative can provide to the other. When historiographies are so closely linked yet so contradictory and distant at the same time, there seems to be the risk of reproducing and “feeding” each other’s biases. The fact that an unverifiable source as the article in the *Haagse Post* ends up in an Indonesian thesis leads to the conclusion that, in terms of “transnational history writing,” both Indonesian and Dutch narratives need to be criticized. Otherwise the Dutch slander campaign against Sutomo will continue to have impact on our present day memory, even in Indonesia.

¹⁶⁸ Petrik Matanasi, *Ikut NICA dan Berontak!!* (Yogyakarta, Sibuku, 2014)

¹⁶⁹ Meijer, *In Indië geworteld*, pp. 245.

¹⁷⁰ Matanasi, *Ikut NICA* (2014) pp. 3.

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