



*Hoe Nederland Indië leest. Hella S. Haasse, Tjalie Robinson, Pramoedya
Ananta Toer en de politiek van de herinnering*
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Summary

How the Netherlands Read the Indies. Hella S. Haasse, Tjalie Robinson, Pramoedya Ananta Toer and the Politics of Memory.

Introduction

The Dutch East Indies (Dutch colonial Indonesia) is a place and a time in one, a country impossible to return to. Nevertheless, the former Dutch colony did not disappear: it is continuously brought back to life – not only in personal stories and histories, but even more so in cultural artifacts such as literature and shared (national) histories. This memory is not static and uniform, but dynamic and multifaceted. Affects such as nostalgia exist alongside shame, guilt and anger. *How the Netherlands Read the Indies* examines this multifaceted character in literary culture and investigates the politics of cultural memory of the Dutch East Indies. Which stories are read over and over again and which are marginalized? What perspectives on history are put forward? How are memories employed to construct identities? Who appropriates literature and which different meanings are assigned to texts?

The central thesis of this dissertation is that the memory of the Dutch East Indies is compartmentalized. This means that various perspectives on colonial history are scarcely understood as an integrated whole, but are rather placed into separate compartments. As a result, white Dutch perspectives, Dutch perspectives of color (or Indo-European perspective) and Indonesian perspectives on colonial history are considered to be part of Dutch cultural memory to different extents. In this thesis, I examine the process of compartmentalization analyzing several case studies of the reception of the authors Hella S. Haasse, Tjalie Robinson and Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

Each of these authors started writing around the time Indonesia gained independence and reached a certain critical recognition. The white Dutch Haasse (1918-2011) came to be known as the 'grande dame' of Dutch literature whose work was concerned with (her youth in) the Dutch East Indies. Tjallingii (pseudonym of Jan Boon, 1911-1974) was considered to be the front man of the 'Indische' community, who, with his magazine, stories and cultural activities, made an important contribution to the construction of an Indo-European identity. The Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006) gained international recognition as a great Indonesian author and as a political prisoner of president Suharto's regime. His work was translated into different languages, including Dutch. All three of these authors addressed Dutch colonialism in Indonesia in their work, which was widely read, adapted and interpreted. How that happened, however, widely differs.

In this dissertation, not only the literary text is an object of study, but also authorial figures. I am concerned with the 'social life' of literature and the analyses focus for an important part on meaning making processes in the the packaging, circulation and reception of literature itself and of the authors.

The politics of memory and the politics of belonging

This study consists of a short introduction, a theoretical section, three sections with case studies and a section with concluding remarks. In section I, I set out the conceptual framework of this study. The two most important concepts I use are cultural memory and race, which I discuss by integrating insights from the fields of colonial studies, postcolonial studies and critical race studies. I address cultural memory as a 'politics of cultural memory' and race as a 'politics of belonging'. Together, these concepts serve to examine how certain perspectives on history gained dominance and others were marginalized.

The concept of cultural memory does not attend to personal memory, but to memory as it is constructed through shared frameworks and mediated by, for example, literature. Cultural memory constitutes an important foundation for the construction of shared identities on different levels, such as a nation or a diaspora. The cultural memory of the

past is not fixed, but has a dynamic character, since it is affected by changing social circumstances. Literature can be understood as a medium for cultural memory, but can also become an object of memory when it is ascribed with new meanings, for instance in reviews and film adaptations.

The 'politics of memory' are tightly interwoven with the 'politics of belonging', which determine and guard the borders of imagined communities. I consider race to be an important factor in these politics, both during colonial and postcolonial times. During the nineteenth century, scientific ideas about race were developed that formulated race as a biological factor creating hierarchies between different groups of people. The perceived purity of race was considered to be endangered by 'racial mixture', or miscegenation. Race was, however, never apprehended solely in biological terms, but always in relation to culture. In the Dutch East Indies, following the work of anthropologist Ann Stoler, race was a complex constellation in which race, class and gender constantly overlapped and merged.

Even though these biological ideas about race were considered taboo in the postwar Netherlands, race still played a key role in determining who was perceived 'self' and who was deemed 'other' – in spite of a progressive, and in the words of Gloria Wekker, innocent, Dutch self-image. After decolonization, this was not only noticeable in the difficulties some repatriates from the Dutch East Indies faced while accommodating in Dutch society, but also later, in the articulation of the concept of multiculturalism, which gained influence from the 70s onwards and reduced identities to essences. Critiques of multicultural society, which surged in the beginning of the twenty first century, displayed a desire to strengthen a national identity in which race was strongly implicated. In this dissertation, it becomes apparent that cultural memory of the Dutch East Indies and thinking in terms of multiculturalism are interconnected in sometimes surprising ways.

Critical race studies in the postcolonial Netherlands

Different scholars have noted that the Netherlands lacks an adequate postcolonial discussion about the nature and the long term effects of colonialism, both in the public sphere as well as in literary studies. In section I, I argue that this does not entail that critical thinking about race, which could fuel such a discussion, is entirely absent from the Dutch context.

Such homegrown thinking about race does in fact exist, but has been marginalized and has had a fairly limited effect on memory culture regarding the Dutch East Indies. In my discussion I harken back to the work of, among others, the sociologist W.F. Wertheim who wrote critically about race already in the 40s and 50s, identifying race as a myth or social construction and analyzing social hierarchies in Dutch East Indies society. Also people like Philomena Essed and Gloria Wekker play an important role with their critical evaluations of everyday racism and of the white self-image of the Netherlands, departing from an antiracist perspective. I do not only consider their thinking as a useful heuristic tool, but also as an intervention in memory culture that has been marginalized for a long time and is currently experiences a revival.

Hella S. Haasse, Tjalie Robinson and Pramoedya Ananta Toer

Haasse, Robinson and Pramoedya, being, respectively, a white Dutch, an *Indische* (Indo-European) and Indonesian author, offered different kinds of stories about the Dutch East Indies and my research demonstrates that their reception in the Netherlands varied widely. The core of this dissertation consists of three sections that each focus on one of these authors. Every section contains a short introduction, a chapter with relevant contexts and concepts and several chapters with analyses that are centered around different authorial figures.

In section II, 'Hella S. Haasse. Whiteness and the (post)colonial space', I examine the reception and appropriation of Haasse's work. Her novella *Oeroeg* (1948) and novel *Heren van de thee* [The Tea Lords] (1993) are the primary case studies in this part. The concepts and contexts chapter sketches the emergence of the *Indische* community and continues to discuss multiculturalism as a new and postcolonial way of thinking about identity. The following authorial figures are discussed: '(No) Indisch girl' (concerning the discussion about Haasse's *Indische* identity), 'Friend' (assessing the friendship metaphor in *Oeroeg* and its afterlives), 'Historian' (about the reception of *Heren van de thee*) and 'Travel guide' (examining the trips to Indonesia that were undertaken on the occasion of Haasse's work).

This section examines how whiteness is either addressed or left implicit and undiscussed in both interpretations of Haasse's work and disputes

about her *Indische* identity. It argues that Haasse's work and authorial figure have, on the one hand, been used to negotiate the meaning of colonialism and its legacy and critically evaluate the problematic position of the white subject within the colonial system. On the other hand, however, her work has been deployed to continuously accommodate the white subject, exactly by leaving whiteness unaddressed. Haasse's work has been circulated widely and became a central part of Dutch cultural memory.

Section III, 'Tjalie Robinson. The struggle for a mixed identity', demonstrates how Robinson rose to fame as a social and political figure, rather than as a literary author. The question what constitutes an 'Indische' (more specifically Indo-European) identity runs through is a central concern in this section. The context chapter sketches the history of Indo-European people and illustrates how they were constructed as a racial category. The rest of the section continues discussing the authorial figures 'Indo' (about Robinson's own conception of *Indische* identity), the development from 'Folk Dancer to Indische Nescio' (concerning the evolution in the reception of Robinson's literary work as Vincent Mahieu), 'Champion' (examining the appropriation and criticism of Robinson as a front man and 'champion' of the Indo community) and 'Multiculturalist' (about the framing of Robinson as a proto multiculturalist).

The different case studies illustrate Robinson's complex relationship with colonial discourses about race. On the one hand, he resisted these discourses by making a case for an Indo-European identity that was not inferior to a white Dutch identity, while on the other hand he adopted certain aspects of colonial discourses about race and identity. Robinson himself was confronted with exoticizing readings of his work, albeit they sometimes followed from admiration. Furthermore, this section shows how Robinson, by adopting different heteronyms, could at some point break out of the compartment of *Indische* literature, only to be absorbed by it later.

Section IV, 'Pramoedya Ananta Toer. (De)politicization of the Dutch East Indies' examines the Dutch reception of Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Four authorial figures guide this part, which are each discussed in a separate chapter: 'Formerly colonized' (about Pramoedya's visit to the Netherlands in 1953 on the invitation of Sticusa), 'Symbol of human rights' (on discussions about Pramoedya's political imprisonment and his leftist political orientation), 'Third world author' (discussing the publication of Pramoedya in the Third Speaker Series) and 'Historian'

(on the reception of *Guerilla Family* and its adaptation by a Moluccan Dutch theatre company). The contexts and concepts chapter evaluates conceptual discussions about postcoloniality in Indonesian literature and Indonesian disputes about the political nature of art and literature.

The analyses in this section identify how colonial and orientalist patterns are perpetuated in the reception of Pramoedya. Furthermore, the study finds a constant tension between politicization and depoliticization in Pramoedya's reception. On the one hand, Pramoedya was politicized by prioritizing his status as a dissident and Third World author. Whereas, on the other hand, Pramoedya's critical perspective on Dutch colonialism was confined in the framing and interpretation of his work, causing a strong depoliticization. Also the strong emphasis on the 'universal humanistic' character of his work contributed to its depoliticization. As a result, Pramoedya was never strongly embedded in Dutch cultural memory of the East Indies, in spite of a broad circulation and reception of his work. The interpretation of Pramoedya's work as a rewriting of colonial archives, which has often been articulated in international studies of his work, has only been partially activated in the Dutch context.

Compartmentalization

In the last part, 'Concluding remarks', I review my central thesis that cultural memory of the Dutch East Indies is compartmentalized. I illustrate this thesis once again by discussing two smaller case studies: firstly, the recent reception of two canonical works about the Dutch East Indies, Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (1860) and Louis Couperus's *De stille kracht* [*The Silent Force*] (1900), and secondly, the use of metaphors in the demarcation of the corpus of *Indische* literature.

One of the main conclusions is that the compartmentalization of colonial memory of the Dutch East Indies is, for an important part, organized around race. White perspectives on colonial history, such as Haassee's, take a central position in cultural memory. Nonwhite perspectives that question the Eurocentric perspective of white memory, on the other hand, are placed into a separate compartment with a different readership and less cultural capital. Literature from an Indo-Dutch perspective, such as Robinson's, is thus mostly compartmentalized as '*Indische* literature',

whereas literature by Indonesians has been left out of Dutch literary history completely and has, furthermore, seldom been read as postcolonial or seen as a contribution to cultural memory. Instead, this literature, when it even reached a Dutch context, was considered third world literature.

The multifaceted memory of the Dutch East Indies is therefore not to be understood simply as a colorful spectrum in which different memories are combined into a coherent whole, but rather as an unlevel playing field in which a constant negotiation over the meaning of colonial times is taking place.