

20th Century

**A RESEARCH PROGRAMME IN DUTCH ARCHIVES ON THE INDO-
NESIAN REVOLUTION**

The years of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia are now sufficiently remote for some people in Britain to express surprise when I mentioned that I was planning a research trip of five months to the Netherlands to gather material for my work as a post-graduate in History at SOAS in London on Jakarta's role in the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949). In fact there are probably few research topics relating to Indonesia from 1600 to 1949 which would not benefit to some degree from a visit to Dutch archives or libraries, and the increasing accessibility of the material, of which the new archive building is one aspect, will probably encourage greater use of the material there.

In general, archive material less than fifty years old is not open to the public. Unlike the thirty-year rule in British archives, however, this limit is flexible and permission to use the material can be obtained either from the archives or, in some cases, from the particular government department still in charge of the collection. One of the conditions of this permission is that any work intended for publication using archive material be submitted to the archives or relevant department before publication. In the case of the departmentally controlled archives there is a ban on direct quotation from the documents.

Before I came to the Netherlands I had consulted Yong Mun Cheong's short article, 'The Dutch archives as a source for the study of the Indonesian revolution (1945-1949) at regional level', in *Itinerario* 1978/2, pp. 53-55, and Frits Jaquet's extensive *Gids van in Nederland aanwezige bronnen betreffende de geschiedenis van Azië en Oceanië 1796-1949, Afllevering V* (Leiden: Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, 1971), as well as talking with historians who had already used the archives. These sources gave me basic information on the information I would be using, which turned out to be seven separate collections, spread between three different archives.

Most important were the two series held in the Algemeen Rijksarchief. The files of the Algemene Secretarie (2e zending) and the Procureur-Generaal bij het Hooggerechtshof van Nederlands-Indië deal largely, though not exclusively, with the period from the First Police (or Military) Action in July 1947 until the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. Both consist largely of subject files, folders of greatly varying thickness into which all kinds of material relating to a particular topic were gathered. The material itself ranges from correspondence, telegrams and typed

and mimeographed reports to such things as newspaper cuttings, passports, cards from index files, photographs of captured Indonesian Republican documents, and the odd hand-drawn and hand-coloured facsimile of a lurid Indonesian propaganda poster. One of the few things that nearly all the documents (except the last) have in common is that they are typed or printed, making them much easier on the eyes than the hand-written documents of earlier days. There is considerable duplication to be found in the two series. Documents tended to be filed under several headings and there are also many files containing half a dozen or more spare copies of the same document.

Bound inventories are available for both collections, though in the case of the *Algemene Secretarie* this does not give a very satisfactory indication of the contents of the files. Fortunately, however, Mr. M.G.H.A. de Graaff of the archive staff has prepared a card index to the series which gives much better access to the material. While indexing he has also re-organized the series to an extent and the vast majority of files now have new numbers, a fact researchers will need to bear in mind if using older references to *Algemene Secretarie* material.

A third, much smaller series in the ARA is that of the *Ministerie van Kolonien, Supplement*. This collection requires no permission before consultation or publication, since it is largely translations or abstracts in Dutch of articles in the Indonesian, Chinese, and occasionally Dutch press 1942-1952 which were thought at the time to have political or economic significance. The main value of the material is perhaps the assistance it gives in tracking down specific newspaper reports which would otherwise need to be found by laboriously leafing through the pages, or rolling on the film of the newspaper itself.

The ARA, then, is the main repository for documents of the Dutch civil administration in Indonesia, 1945-1949. This will be even more the case when the 1e zending of the *Algemene Secretarie* is transferred there from its present home, the *Subbureau Semistatische Archieven Overzeese Rijksdelen*, of the *Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken*, Leeghwaterstraat 125. Leeghwaterstraat, on the southern side of *Hollands Spoor Station*, is in an unprepossessing area of warehouses and workshops, and sometimes has a slight Oriental air, thanks to a factory across the road which prepares Chinese food.

The archive shares its building with the *Rijks Computer Centrum*, of which the researcher sees nothing. The genealogists who add so much to the bustle in the ARA are missing and the small reading room is generally more than adequate for the small number of researchers using the collections. The state of the *Algemene Secretarie* (1e zending) is perhaps an indication of that of the 2e zending before its reorganization. The contrast is striking. The material is of the same sort, but the original hand-written indexes are still in use and tend to be somewhat ambiguous

about the character of the material. Moreover, the bundles contain not one but several subjects within one cover, making swift use of the material more difficult. In all cases, however, it must be said that there are limits to what an index can be expected to describe, and quite unpromising index entries have sometimes yielded valuable material.

The original massive hand-written indexes of the archives of the *Ministerie van Kolonien* (later *Ministerie van Overzeese Rijksdelen*) are also still in use. These are equipped with a well-composed subject index, so that access to the relevant entries is somewhat easier than is the case with the *Algemene Secretarie* (1e zending). Unfortunately the index lists much material no longer in the collection; time and time again, documents turn out to have been destroyed or transferred to the archives of the NEFIS (Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service), which are still closed to all researchers. The remaining files, moreover, turn out to be very thin in comparison with those of other archives, sometimes no more than a few pages. Using the series, therefore, can be a slow process.

A third useful series in Leeghwaterstraat is the *Rapportage* Indonesia. Unlike the series previously described, this consists almost entirely of mimeographed serial publications in chronological order from such organizations as the NEFIS (later the *Centrale Militaire Inlichtingen Dienst*), the KNIL and the RVD (*Regerings Voorlichtings Dienst*). Many of these documents are to be found individually in the files of the *Algemene Secretarie* and *Procureur-Generaal*; the value of the *Rapportage* is that they are gathered together and the researcher can be sure of seeing them all. On the other hand, their use is more limited, since the *Rapportage*, being under the control of the *Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken*, may not be quoted from.

The main disadvantage of Leeghwaterstraat is its inaccessibility: it is open only from 10.30 to 3.30, Monday to Friday. The foreign (or native) researcher with limited time is faced with either working a maximum 25 hour week or else trying to commute to the ARA, for an extra hour of work at each end of the day. In the absence of a direct public transport link, and with the ARA a good forty minutes walk away, I chose to cycle and so arrived at the ARA in time to make the journey worthwhile.

A possibility which may be open to some researchers is to work at either end of the day in the archive of the *Ministerie van Defensie*, five minutes walk away in 2e van de Kunstraat and open 8.30 to 5.00. Even less frequented by researchers than Leeghwaterstraat and with an even smaller reading room, the Defence Ministry archive is especially quiet and friendly. I was not given access to the indexes there; instead Mr. Simon Martijn of the archive staff produced various bundles of documents in response to my explanation of my topic and my areas of interest. The material here, largely in series, consisted almost entirely of

intelligence reports and translations of captured Indonesian documents (the CMI Vertaling series). The number of documents translated runs well into the thousands and includes many pieces from the so-called 'Yogya archives', material captured in Yogyakarta in 1948 in the Second Police (or Military) Action and since returned to Indonesia, where it is presently unavailable for research.

The majority of the documents are fairly staid and unemotional. There was, it is true, the colonial official who would not countenance the return of a certain leftist Indonesian to the country 'except to Boven Digoel' (the Dutch detention camp in the jungles of West New Guinea), but such flashes are rare. In most cases the only emotion to occur regularly is indignation, and the reader has to make his own amusement from such matters as the guerrilla leader who called himself Phantom Bomb. Perhaps a better knowledge of Dutch on my part would have revealed more subtle humour in the texts; perhaps the Dutch, having so much to lose in Indonesia, found less to laugh about. In any event the highly formal language of the reports had its effects on my own tentatively formed speaking habits in Dutch and for quite some time I spoke with what I was told was a quaint official vocabulary.

The Dutch archives offer a great store of material for the study of the Indonesian Revolution, material which will become relatively more important as the opportunities for interview work in Indonesia, inevitably, diminish. In the interests of these new researchers I should perhaps express one of the very few complaints to be made about the new ARA: at 70 c per cup (half a cup if you choose espresso) the price of coffee is exorbitant. The ARA could well learn something from Leegwaterstraat, where the price is a more civilized 35 c. Better still would be to emulate the Ministerie van Defensie, where coffee and tea come with the compliments of the house.

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