

CHAPTER I

Our colonial soil

Having spent myself the greatest and the best part of my life in the Dutch colonial service and having pawned my heart to the welfare of the Dutch East Indies and the people over there . . .

Former Governor General Jonkheer Mr A. C. D. de Graeff¹

Before 1945 there was no Indonesia, but rather a collection of islands spread across the equator that the Dutch made into the Netherlands East Indies. In 1898 a new queen, Wilhelmina, ascended the throne of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Wilhelmina's tropical empire, known simply as the Indies, numbered more than 28 million subjects on the prime island of Java and some 7 million others on what were referred to as the Outer Islands, although not all of these as yet were under Dutch rule.² Although she ruled for the rest of the colonial period, Wilhelmina never visited her colony. She never experienced the sudden monsoonal downpours, the green landscapes dominated by volcanoes or the spicy heat, but every year her birthday was celebrated there, with night markets and festive arches.

What was it like for the Dutch, ruling that vast archipelago of Indonesia? The Dutch made up a special, upper social class of the Indies – soldiers, administrators, managers, teachers, pioneers. They lived linked to, and yet separate from, their native subjects. From 1900 to 1942 these colonial rulers worked to make the islands a single, prosperous colony, and for that they expected gratitude. In 1945, when the Pacific War ended and the Dutch attempted to reassert their control over the islands of Indonesia, they were genuinely shocked that some of the peoples of their islands would fight to the death to keep them out. There was a vast gap between Dutch perceptions of their rule and the views of their Indonesian subjects, but it is important to understand the Dutch views, because they have shaped modern Indonesia.

CONQUERING THE INDIES

To create a modern colony Wilhelmina's loyal subjects had to complete a takeover begun when their ancestors founded the port city of Batavia – now Jakarta—on the northwest coast of the island of Java in 1619. It was significant for Indonesia's creation as an unplanned colony that it was founded on business, not Dutch national expansionism. These seventeenth-century Dutchmen set up this colony as investors in the world's first great multinational company, the United East India Company. Batavia became the centre of its Asian trading network.

Over the next 200 years, the Company acquired additional ports as trading bases and safeguarded its interests by gradually taking over surrounding territory. By 1800 the Company had been closed down, but the Dutch had achieved control over most of Java, parts of the larger island of Sumatra, the fabled eastern spice islands of Maluku (the Moluccas) and the hinterlands of various ports where they had established bases for themselves, such as Makasar on the island of Sulawesi (Celebes) and Kupang on the island of Timor.

By the end of the nineteenth century, steamships and the new Suez Canal made for shorter journey times from Europe and new attitudes towards expansion. Tiny Holland, nostalgic for its seventeenth-century greatness as a world trading power, joined in the competition for empire that had overtaken the mentality of Europe. Despite claims that the Dutch government had no policy of aggression, only one of 'reluctant imperialism',³ from the 1870s onwards the Dutch fought a series of wars to enlarge and consolidate their possessions.

The Dutch venture into full-blown empire-building began with the strong and independent Muslim Sultanate of Aceh. Aceh, on the vast and promising island of Sumatra, was known until recently as a centre of bitter conflict and rebellion. Its name also dripped blood in the nineteenth century. The French, British and Dutch were all trying to consolidate their holdings in Southeast Asia and were interested in the natural wealth that Aceh had to offer, particularly pepper and oil. In 1873 the Dutch invaded Aceh, little realising that it would take thirty years to complete the takeover.

For a Dutch soldier watching the lush green shoreline as he sailed towards Aceh, it must have seemed as though the pending task was going to be very easy. Standing with him on the ship were troops from all over Europe whom the Dutch had signed up, men down on their luck or getting away from their pasts. In separate quarters on board were local soldiers from Java

and from Ambon, in the spice islands of Maluku. The colonial army had the latest repeating rifles and heavy artillery, while the Acehnese merely had spears and knives.

Despite the confidence of the Dutch invaders, the Acehnese almost won. Indies warfare was a nightmare. The Dutch were faced with resistance from local guerrilla fighters whom they could not distinguish from the rest of the Acehnese population. Acehnese guerrilla tactics involved setting traps, laying ambushes and launching surprise attacks near the barracks on soldiers who wandered off on their own. Every village harboured potential death. The ordinary European soldiers lived in fear and hatred, and they were reduced to levelling villages and killing women and children in an attempt to undermine an invisible enemy.

The generals running the campaign were heavily criticised by the Dutch public – the war was going on too long, was costing too much, and stories leaked out about the execution of prisoners and innocent civilians alike. Forced labour, torture and sadism were commonplace Dutch tactics. One set of photographs from the war showed colonial troops, dressed in black, standing amid villages where the Acehnese corpses formed a tightly packed, bloody carpet on the ground, interrupted by a single surviving child, crying. Dutch political cartoonists picked up this theme, commenting on the blind and immoral adherence to the colonial policy of successive political leaders (Figure 1.1). The Dutch government hid behind official denials and the fog of war propaganda.

A victory in the battle for public support came in 1894. On Lombok, the island to the east of Bali, reports emerged that Lombok's Hindu Balinese rulers were oppressing the local Muslim Sasak people. Sasak leaders appealed to the Dutch for help. The Dutch army moved in and, with relative ease, killed or captured most of the Balinese rulers, allowing the campaign to be presented to the public as a success. Lombok showed politicians and critics that there would be no repeat of the debacle that had seen the Dutch nearly defeated in Aceh. The resulting enthusiasm for conflict was echoed in one of the soldiers' songs:

And to Lombok off we go
And we are bored with peace
So we'll shoot with powder and lead
Those Balinesers dead.

However, the long-term results were not so good for the Sasaks. The Dutch forced the exportation of their rice, while taxing them heavily. After a few

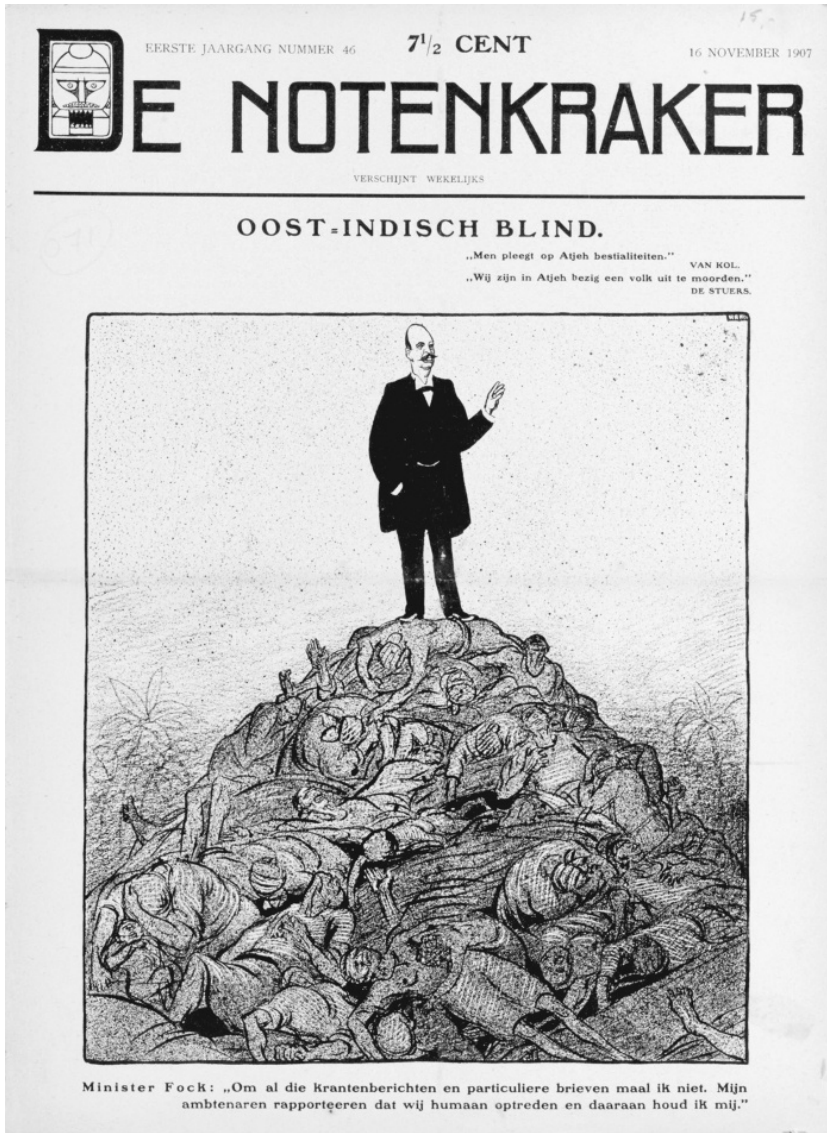


Figure 1.1 ‘East Indies Blind’. Minister (of the colonies) Fock: ‘I have no time for all these newspapers and private correspondence. My officials report that we act humanely, and I’ll stick to that.’ *Nutcracker*, 1 (16 November 1907), commenting on the Aceh situation. Courtesy Leo Haks.

decades of Dutch rule, Lombok went from being a wealthy rice bowl to an impoverished and semi-desert island.⁴

The warrior General J. B. van Heutsz (1851–1924) finally solved the problem of Aceh. During a frustrating tour of duty there he met Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936), an academic who made a career of studying Islam. As his first major colonial assignment Snouck, a man who radiated presence and authority, was charged with obtaining inside information on the activities of Muslims from the Indies who lived in the Middle East or travelled there to undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca. When his investigations revealed that Aceh was becoming an international rallying point for Muslims opposed to European colonialism, Snouck's response was to try to understand the social basis of Acehnese resistance. He discovered that the religious leaders played the key role in heading the Acehnese struggle and that there was a growing tension between these Muslim heads and the traditional Acehnese aristocracy. Snouck correctly advised the Dutch government to capitalise on this divergence by doing more to win over the Acehnese nobles.

Appointed chief-of-staff in Aceh in 1898, van Heutsz followed Snouck's advice: 'When one wishes to rule a country, to have one's will respected there, then one must establish oneself in that country.'⁵ In this approach, respect was won by separating the Acehnese resistance fighters from their bases in the countryside and by strengthening the authority of the Acehnese rulers. At the suggestion of an Acehnese aristocrat, van Heutsz adopted some of the guerrilla tactics of the enemy by creating highly mobile units in the Dutch army. He combined their use with the superior firepower of the new repeating carbines until he had created a deadly scorched earth policy that saw 10,000 Acehnese flee to Malaya. As a result, the resistance lost its local supplies and support, and van Heutsz was made governor of an Aceh declared pacified in 1903. To give the appearance of peace, the European troops were kept to a minimal level of 12,000, but continuing popular resistance meant that 23,000 Indonesian soldiers, mainly from Java, Ambon and Manado in Sulawesi, over half of the entire colonial army, had to be in Aceh. The total cost of the war was f400 million (US\$160 million, equivalent to more than US\$10 billion in present-day terms), 37,000 troops killed on the Dutch side and 60,000–70,000 Acehnese lives lost.

General van Heutsz's success in Aceh made him a popular hero of expansion, and his supporters were able to silence the voices of doubt and criticism in the Dutch parliament and newspapers. Van Heutsz's achievement was further recognised in 1904 by his elevation as Wilhelmina's governor general in the Indies. Monuments were later erected to him in Aceh, Batavia

and Amsterdam in the 1920s and 1930s, and a boulevard in Batavia was named after him.

Politicians and military leaders were able to claim they had a moral duty to free common people from oppression or backwardness. They said they had to punish or modernise independent indigenous rulers who practised slavery, ruled unjustly and did not respect international law. So the colonial army rolled through sultanates and small kingdoms in Sumatra, Maluku, Borneo, the Southeast Islands and Sulawesi between 1901 and 1910. Some rulers, such as the sultans of Tidore (Maluku), Pontianak (Kalimantan) and Palembang (Sumatra), wisely asked for Dutch protection from independent neighbours to avoid military conquest. By doing this they could negotiate better rights and conditions when they came within the colonial system.

Two expeditions were sent to conquer the rulers of South Bali. When one of the South Balinese kings let his subjects claim the contents of a ship under Dutch jurisdiction wrecked on his shores, the Dutch argued that international shipping rights had not been protected and consequently launched an invasion in 1906. The justification for a second action in 1908 was that Bali had become a major centre of opium smuggling. In both cases the results were appallingly spectacular. Rather than surrender their independence, the Balinese kings, queens, princes, princesses and their followers armed themselves with swords and spears to face the Dutch forces. Dressed in ceremonial white, they marched into a barrage of Dutch bullets and cannons where death was bloody, brutal and certain. More than 1,300 members of the ruling class and their servants died during these invasions, which the Balinese still speak about today.

By 1909 the Dutch had established an integrated territory. Many areas of the Indies were placed initially under military rule, which often amounted to establishing what one contemporary critic called dictatorships.⁶ The final tidying up of the map occurred in the 1920s when the Dutch took full control over part of the island of New Guinea against the threat of expanding Australian interests.

ADMINISTERING THE EMPIRE

Local lords who survived the takeovers served well as the vehicles for a policy known as indirect rule. Under this system, the Dutch saw themselves as preserving tradition by providing a layer of wise administrators above the natural native leaders of the people. Traditional rulers became regents; the indigenous aristocracy became an indigenous civil service. They were placed under the hierarchy of Dutch officials: residents, assistant residents

and district officers. This indirect rule would not disturb the traditional life of the peasantry, and besides, it was cheap, since the Dutch did not have to re-create a state from the bottom up. In 1900 Queen Wilhelmina needed only 250 European and 1,500 indigenous civil servants, and of course her army, to rule 35 million colonial subjects.

Snouck Hurgronje's earlier successes as a colonial adviser on native affairs meant that he was able to influence the administration. He and his followers saw expert knowledge as the best way of providing 'vigorous but righteous colonial government'.⁷ Snouck supported the development of Dutch bureaucrats expert in language, culture and local law, who, like him, would have special insights into the cultural motivations of local populations. After he left the Indies he went back to Leiden University, the colonial training centre, where he himself had been educated. Now, as a professor, he could lead the way in training his successors.

In the system Snouck supported, civil servants had to pass examinations, and fewer were promoted on the basis of family connections. Efficiency based on merit would make government run like a machine for the purpose of social engineering. Whereas colonial officials had once come exclusively from the aristocracy, by the early twentieth century they were increasingly from the upper bourgeoisie, and eventually from the middle and even working classes. During van Heutsz's period as governor general the first female colonial civil servant, Laura Ellinger, took her examination, although she never achieved high rank. The bureaucrats took their duty very seriously. They wanted to act on behalf of the peoples of the Indies, to protect them from the worst effects of modern life but, in contradictory fashion, to develop the Indies at the same time into a modern state.⁸

'Peace and order' was the stated aim of the administration, but it was an order obsessed with files and memos. Even Dutch observers thought this bureaucratic attitude extreme. One critic was the Netherlands' major novelist at the turn of the century, the flamboyant Louis Couperus (1863–1923). In his novel of colonial life, *The Hidden Force*, he used a fictional civil servant to satirise the fussy bureaucracy of the colonial period, while at the same time unconsciously highlighting the concepts of race that underpinned colonialism: 'The Secretary, Onno Eldersma, was a busy man. The daily mail brought an average of two hundred letters and documents to the residency office.' Eldersma 'worked morning, noon, and night. He allowed himself no siesta. He took a hurried lunch at four o'clock and then rested a little.' This fastidious obsessive could not delegate, since he felt that Europeans were better suited to this work than natives: 'he needed all his blood, all his muscles, all his nerves, for his work.' Whether it was

worth the effort or not, men like Eldersma left impressive sets of statistics that have aided historians in their efforts to understand the Indies.

As they professionalised themselves, Dutch officials moved to an uneasy relationship with the indigenous regents. In Dutch accounts the latter were strange and corrupt, but fascinating, despots. The ambivalent relationship between Dutch and indigenous rulers was a legacy of the nineteenth century, when Dutch administrators felt that they should adopt local customs such as large entourages of servants, including the potent symbol of a gold-painted ceremonial umbrella of office. Governor General van Heutsz had attempted reform in 1904 by banning the Dutch from using emblems like the umbrellas, but until the 1940s Dutch high officials encouraged regents to hold elaborate rituals, at the centre of which both parties to government would sit, with their wives and servants, on gold-painted chairs as their subjects turned out to make obeisance.⁹

ETHICAL PROGRESS

Queen Wilhelmina reigned in a time of new attitudes, of which a disposition towards bureaucracy was one. Aged only eighteen when made queen, she inherited a realm that was in poor economic shape. Her coronation came at the end of what had been the greatest economic depression in the modern world. In the late 1880s and early 1890s the commodity prices on which the colony had previously depended had collapsed. Wilhelmina sought advice from her parliamentarians in The Hague on how to manage the colony for the greatest good of all her subjects.

Throughout the nineteenth century a colonial surplus had been extracted each year as a payment into the Dutch treasury. Thanks in part to this payment, the Netherlands had modernised and built a thriving bourgeois society. Prior to the depression the Liberal Party had been the dominant voice in policy-making and politics in the Netherlands. Believing in the free market above all else, it instituted policies to expand the plantations in the Indies, not only causing an increase in agricultural production for export, but also focusing the colony's economy on the Netherlands. Liberals had promised that, as the economy expanded, the life of the natives would improve because local opportunities would increase as prosperity trickled down. The economic depression exposed this as an illusion. It became apparent to journalists and civil servants on the ground that the majority of the population of the Indies was as badly off under liberalism as under the regulated economy that had preceded it. While a few Dutch profited, tens of thousands of colonial subjects starved.

The worst results of the policy were clearest on the Outer Islands, the islands outside of Java, Madura and Bali, where frontier plantations of tobacco and rubber pushed back the jungle. Coolies from China, India and later Java, who were imported by the tens of thousands to work these plantations, were controlled by regular floggings and a regime that resulted in high death rates. Dutch who attempted to document abuses usually found themselves discredited and demoted when plantation company executives back home complained to friends in parliament, who in turn complained to their friends administering the Indies. Negative reports were buried in archives.¹⁰

One campaigner against the inequities of the colonial system was Piet Brooshooft (1845–1921), a plump, crusading journalist with a walrus moustache. From the time of his arrival in the Indies he began to write about the moral duty of the Dutch to give the Indies what the Indies was due. Brooshooft, encouraged by a small group of socialists and concerned middle-class Dutch in the colonies, campaigned against the colonial surplus as an unjust imposition on the Indies. In his view the ‘childlike’ peoples of the Indies needed assistance, not oppression.

As editor of the largest and liveliest of the Dutch-language Indies newspapers, *The Locomotive*, Brooshooft published works by Snouck Hurgronje about how to understand the natives and sent reporters out to all parts of the colony to dig into local developments. In the twenty-first century it is hard to remember how important newspapers were, but as the main medium of communication, they were the voice of the Indies, particularly in the absence of any bodies that allowed for political representation in the colony, or of the colony in the Dutch parliament. Brooshooft drew attention to the uncomfortable issues of colonialism, particularly what was euphemistically called ‘declining Native welfare’ – the grinding poverty, crop failure, famine and epidemics evident in 1900.¹¹

People of like mind gathered to Brooshooft because of the impact of his writings. They included lawyers and supportive politicians who were able to get the queen’s ear. They used Brooshooft’s campaign to promote the notion that the Netherlands owed the peoples of the Indies a ‘debt of honour’. Bad conscience was translated into a noble policy of improving their lives. The young Queen Wilhelmina, under advice from her prime minister of the Christian Anti-Revolutionary Party, proclaimed the new policy for the new century when in 1901 she formally inaugurated a benevolent ‘Ethical Policy’, intended to bring progress and prosperity to the natives, including the provision of education and other opportunities.

Because this aim was so vague, the Policy could be interpreted in different ways: as a beacon of economic progress, with which the liberals could identify; as a means of improving the welfare of the peasantry, which socialists advocated; as a force for Christianity, to please religious parties; or as a set of general guidelines to ease the local people into the modern world. Whatever form 'progress' took, the basis of the colony was still profit: 'The Liberals entered "Love for the Javanese" in their published accounts, but did not let it touch their pockets; and when the Ethical [Policy] leaders hauled down the Jolly Roger and hoisted the Cross, they did not change the sailing orders.'¹²

The Ethical Policy period actually depended on the concurrent military takeover, because only when the Indies were a single entity could the Policy's stated aim of modernisation be achieved. That is why, ironically, Governor General van Heutsz was one of the Policy's strongest supporters. Under the rule of this 'unifier of the Indies', railways were expanded over Java and Sumatra, ancient monuments such as the temple of Borobudur were restored and educational opportunities were expanded with great vigour.

A type of progress did occur under the Ethical Policy as the economy improved. Commodity prices recovered from the depression and resumed their upward climb, leading to substantial capital investment in the colony. The old standards of Indies trade had been sugar, tin, copra and the coffee Americans identified with Java. In the early decades of the twentieth century these were joined by rubber, tobacco, tea and oil as the principal exports of the Indies. Big multinationals came onto the scene: the British Billiton Tin Company moved into mining, Standard Oil from the US was attracted to oil-rich areas such as Aceh, while Royal Dutch Shell was established as a joint venture.

The plantations of the Outer Islands, especially the former Sultanate of Deli, part of the East Coast of Sumatra Residency, required a tough approach. Planters were an alienated foreign legion from all over Europe. These people, often escaping dubious pasts, endured the malarial conditions of the 'burning forest . . . the vibrating sky above the motionless smoke' and the smell of the rubber processing factory – 'like rotten eggs combined with Lysol' – in the hope of one day returning home with vast wealth. Some did, considering that during the boom time for rubber around 1925, supervisors earned bonuses of f 140,000 (US\$56,000, equivalent to millions of dollars in present-day terms) per year. They saw themselves as hard-working, although the job consisted mainly of walking around giving orders to coolies, a monotonous existence broken by the excesses of weekly drinking bouts, creating the masculine camaraderie of



Figure 1.2 One guilder: Dutch colonial banknote with a depiction of Borobudur temple statues.

a football club. Dutch, German, English, French and others built grand fantasy houses for themselves in attempts to create an imposing style of life.¹³

As one management manual of the time observed, industrial knowledge was not the major qualification for running a tobacco plantation: 'A man . . . might know everything on how to cultivate tobacco and care for it, but he will be useless in Deli if he does not know how to exact obedience.' These Europeans lived in an atmosphere of constant menace, regarding the coolie workers as less than human and liable to run amok. The threat of violence would be met by violence, and these labourers, perceived simultaneously as lazy and treacherous, would be forced to carry out their arduous work.

A typical incident was cited by Dutch authorities in support of a request for state-sanctioned force to be used in the area. An assistant, 'Heer O., when making his way at 5 in the morning to his work, encountered a group of coolies who assumed an unwilling posture.' Workers were expected to show subservience, but instead '[w]hile he was speaking to the men and giving them orders, he suddenly was dealt a hard blow with the shaft of a hoe, whereupon he fell into a ditch.' Luckily he was armed, 'and he shot his fierce opponent smack dead. Instead of being deterred, the rest of the band

assumed such a threatening stance that the assaulted assistant was forced to make use of his weapon again with the result that a second assailant lost his life and a third was seriously wounded.' The rest fled. Workers and managers were caught up in this cycle of antagonism and violence.

A manager had to be able to manipulate the coolie foremen through a combination of economic incentives and claims to represent legal authority in order to avoid such rebellion. Distance from the natives was all-important, even for Europeans lower in the hierarchy: 'The European employees . . . seldom spoke to them in anything other than a snarl in bad Malay, which is said to be necessary for their prestige!' Maintaining white status also meant that local people saw only what was an ideal white society – poor whites, let alone the disabled, should be invisible in the colony and were usually repatriated.¹⁴

The Dutch population in the Indies saw a rise in its general standard of living between 1902 and 1913. The Netherlands remained neutral in World War One, and initially Dutch investors at home and in the colony did well supplying raw materials to both sides. However, when the Germans employed submarines to attack shipping in 1917, trade between the Indies and Europe was cut off. Those Dutch businessmen who were able to hold on became rich after the Great War from speculating against internationally inflated prices for the kinds of raw materials the Indies supplied.

Despite an economic downturn in the early 1920s, a partnership was developing between Dutch political and business leaders to inject cash into the Indies. The partnership was instrumental in making the Indies a single economic unit.

Supporting the unification of the colonial economy was the new shipping line, the KPM, or Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, founded in 1888. In this instance, government and industry worked together to push other shipping lines out of the Indies, although they were not entirely successful. Still, the KPM served to integrate a whole range of economic activities under Dutch domination, by setting up a network of ports that was centred on Tanjung Priok, Batavia's new harbour. Islands that had previously been linked to Singapore or the Malay Peninsula now focused their economic activities on Java. Thus, through the KPM the centre of political power became the centre of the colony's economy. When Batavia became Jakarta in 1950 that central role was passed over to independent Indonesia.¹⁵

Even with sharp fluctuations, the growth rate of the colonial era averaged 2 per cent per annum between 1901 and 1929, and although plantations

took a leading role in this expansion, manufacturing, construction, transport, wholesale and retail trade and the government sector all increased rapidly. By 1929 capital investment had grown to US\$1,600 million (over \$50 billion in present-day terms). The government provided infrastructure for business such as the laying of 7,425 kilometres of rail and tram tracks by 1930. In turn business invested heavily in the latest technology, for example installing 6,472 boilers in plantation factories in 1930. Although they were dependent on the British for big capital, politicians did everything they could to encourage Dutch-owned or jointly owned business, so that, for example, the majority of the colony's US\$76 million worth of petroleum exports in 1930 belonged to Royal Dutch Shell. The sign of the success of government and business was that in 1929 the value of exports was in excess of US\$433 million. At the peak of its trade in the 1930s, the Indies produced 37 per cent of world rubber, dominated the smaller trade in pepper (exporting 86 per cent of the spice) and was a significant player in markets such as sugar and copra.

The Great Depression that transpired at the end of 1929 was a major setback to business, and many of those who had profited earlier went bankrupt. The Dutch government had done almost nothing to encourage the development of the colony's economic independence and provided only minimal protection for local manufacturing through the introduction of tariffs in 1933. Dutch politicians were not interested in allowing the Indies to stand on its own feet. Profits went to big business rather than being invested in the colony. Between 1935 and 1939 – even after the impact of the Great Depression – the Indies still provided 14 to 17 per cent of the Netherlands' national income.¹⁶

Because Dutch politicians did not want to lose control, the Indies remained an appendage of the Netherlands throughout the colonial period. However, government advisers from Snouck onwards argued that there should be greater autonomy for the colony and won a concession to autonomy in the form of a policy of decentralisation, initiated in 1903. But this resulted in separation in appearance only.

Decentralisation led to increased local authority through the establishment of city and regency councils. In 1918 a People's Council was set up for the whole colony, a progressive move compared with the policies of other colonial regimes. This body had been a long time in planning, but its establishment was hastened by the growth of Communism in both the Netherlands and the Indies. However, the potential for establishing democracy through these institutions was undermined by a combination

of Dutch fascination with indigenous aristocracy and an unwillingness to give up real power.

Setting up the regency councils strengthened the aristocracy. In Bali, as in a number of other areas, heads of royal families previously exiled because they had stood up to Dutch invasions were now reinstated and made regents who served as heads of councils in each of the island's former kingdoms.

In the slightly more democratic city councils, suffrage was severely limited. Dutch positions were guaranteed, and the highest ones (such as that of mayor) were always appointments, as was the case in the Netherlands itself. The prerequisites for franchise on city councils were literacy and a tax payment of more than *f*300 per annum (US\$120). While a Dutch resident earned what was considered a modest sum by the standards of his equivalents in other colonial systems – *f*13,500 per annum (US\$5,400) – the highest-paid coolies would have needed to work day and night for a year to earn *f*300 in total, let alone pay tax on it. More than 80 per cent of the taxpayers of Java and Madura earned less than this. In theory the vote was given to women after a long struggle, but as a result of official stalling they never actually got to exercise that right, mainly because they did not pay tax. However, they were allowed to stand for office, and in the 1930s four Javanese women were members of municipal councils, mainly by direct appointment.

Government policies placed great emphasis on education as the path to native progress, at the same time trying to keep the native population from assuming too great a role in the colony. Colonial adviser Snouck Hurgronje expounded the view that 'our rule will have to justify itself on the basis of lifting the natives up to a higher level of civilization in line with their innate capacities.' This was the basis of Snouck's policy of 'association', since it was association with Europeans that would 'lift up' the natives. Snouck's test of the theory was to see if an elite of educated natives could absorb Western knowledge to the point where it improved their 'inner character'. If this occurred, they could be elevated to 'help' govern the Indies, a view that was controversial amongst colonials who refused to believe there could be equality between rulers and ruled. In pursuing his theory, Snouck became the patron of a carefully selected group of Sumatran and Javanese aristocrats, collaborators who could be paraded as examples of success in colonial policy.¹⁷

For some Dutch advocates, educational expansion was an opportunity to open up the Outer Islands to missionary activities. It was a way of

bringing people the Light without the government making major investments in building schools and providing teachers, instead providing only subsidies, as it did to church schools in the Netherlands. So areas with existing Christian populations, such as Ambon (Maluku), Manado (North Sulawesi) and Flores, were joined by new mission fields in the Toraja highlands of Central Sulawesi, the Batak highlands of Sumatra and West New Guinea. The missionaries, arriving in remote mountain regions after weeks of arduous trekking, needed the strongest of faiths to persevere. They had to spend years learning the local languages and were continually worried that their converts might slip back into local spiritualism or animism.

While religious politicians were all in favour of expanding missionary activities, rationalist planners, including Snouck, saw such moves as an unhelpful provocation to Islam. The planners succeeded in curbing the missions and banning them entirely from some areas.

Some Dutch took to heart Snouck's views on improving the natives. Socialist and Communist teachers helped the peoples of the Indies by bringing them notions of freedom and equality. A group of these teachers set up an Indies Party and spread the idea that the natives should do more than just help rule. These radicals called for an Indies ruled by a coalition of Dutch born in the Indies, those of mixed descent and, most shockingly, natives. A teacher of German in a Surabaya high school inspired one young native man to read Karl Marx and introduced the student to politicians who treated their native friends as equals. This was an important lesson that the student, Sukarno, was to carry into his career as political leader and Indonesia's first president. When identified, subversive teachers were expelled from the colony.¹⁸

In 1927 a reform of the People's Council saw the number of elected members (thirty-eight) outweigh appointments (twenty-two), and by 1929 thirty of the sixty members were natives, mainly from the aristocracy. The number of native seats mattered little, however, since this body never had real legislative power. The Council's only gesture towards voicing the desire for an independent Indies was a mild petition to the queen requesting a conference to discuss self-government. This resulted in a furious exchange of letters among Dutch officials. The governor general at the time was embarrassed, and his recommendation to the minister for the colonies was a masterpiece of bureaucratic stonewalling that dismissed the petition as unconstitutional and undesirable.¹⁹

Dutch contemporaries, such as the acerbic novelist Louis Couperus, knew that at the heart of administration was an attitude meant to impress

other Westerners: 'The European . . . rules arrogantly . . . amidst all the intricate machinery of his authority . . . [which] he slips into gear with the certainty of clockwork, controlling its every movement.' This was a system of rule that appeared as 'a masterpiece, a world created'.²⁰

Part of the creation of this 'masterpiece' had been the establishment in 1916 of a body to spy on the population, the Political Intelligence Service (PID). PID spies were recruited from all levels of indigenous society, since the pay was good, and there were many opportunities to prove one's loyalty and avenge one's enemies. The reports that PID members compiled emphasised the strength of Communists and other subversives, mostly in order to justify continued employment. The secret police magnified government paranoia that the natives were getting too much education without showing due appreciation of Dutch benevolence.²¹

Peace and order often meant arbitrary rule amounting to dictatorial power. On PID advice, the governor general and those immediately below him could gaol or exile to remote islands those deemed to be a political threat, without having to provide detailed justification. The PID's major effect was to undermine local trust in government, so that its spy networks corrupted social relationships. The almost simultaneous establishment of the People's Council with its opposite, a secretive security body, is an indication of the impossible contradictions that tore the Ethical Policy to shreds.

PUBLIC WELFARE

The social results of the Ethical Policy and decentralisation were best seen in the new neat public space of cities. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Department of Public Works sponsored the construction of major public buildings and introduced city planning, embodied in the work of the Indies' leading architect and town planner, Thomas Karsten (1884–1945). He developed predecessors' ideas of incorporating indigenous elements – the spirit of the Indies – into a rational European structure. On arrival in the Indies in 1914, Karsten started working in Java's third major city, Semarang. He was later involved in urban extension and rebuilding in almost every city in Sumatra and Java. For leading Dutch citizens he designed solidly monumental two-storey houses, the roofs of which were in the high-pitched colonial style; for royalty he designed new pavilions that were simultaneously modern European and traditional Javanese; to organise the small traders of the central Javanese cities of Yogyakarta and Surakarta he planned public market buildings; for major firms he created

splendid headquarters; and for the new suburbs in Batavia he produced master plans, including those for the central square of the city. Still, in 1930 the cities were for Europeans. The majority of natives (over 90 per cent) lived in the country, while the majority of Europeans (over 75 per cent) lived in the cities.²²

The basis of Karsten's cities was order, and bringing hygiene to native quarters was an important part of that. Besides expertise in language, law and culture, the Dutch promoted new kinds of knowledge of medicine and public health. In the nineteenth century there had been a government preoccupation with venereal disease amongst soldiers. By the twentieth century concern about sexual health was extended to the general population, which meant government officials spent much of their time attempting to monitor prostitutes.

In the nineteenth century Dutch officials had also been concerned about smallpox, and large-scale vaccination programmes were well under way by the 1850s. This concern was extended to examining the sources of other diseases, especially plague, which arrived in Sumatra in 1905 and Java around 1910. Dysentery remained a major killer during the Dutch period, and it was not until the advent of antibiotics in the second half of the twentieth century that many of the intestinal diseases could be brought under control.

Public health programmes, promoting clean water and better living conditions, were the only means of controlling many diseases. By the 1930s, public health was being taught in the Indies by people such as J. H. de Haas. Dr de Haas was a pioneer of infant nutrition and a radical socialist who, distressed by infant mortality rates of up to 300 per 1,000, tried to ensure basic nutrition. He supervised programmes in which condensed and evaporated milk, as well as sour milk, were dispensed to mothers, and he and his colleagues introduced the innovation of soya milk as an alternative source of vitamins.

Malaria remained a problem for Dutch and natives alike, although quinine brought a major breakthrough in the battle against it. Programmes to clean up native housing areas were aimed at getting rid of the breeding grounds for mosquitoes in order to reduce malaria and dengue fever. Other programmes also attempted to get rid of the rats that were major disease carriers, but with little success – rats that would outweigh cats are still a familiar sight in Indonesian cities. Government efforts to get involved in all aspects of daily life for the good health of the natives were not that successful. The native sections of the cities remained wild areas resistant to official campaigns.

De Haas was unusual in the health bureaucracy, which saw its aims as researching health issues and making policy, not actually treating the sick. Health expenditure was never more than 5 per cent of the budget for the Indies, sometimes as low as 2.5 per cent, half of what was spent on education, one-fifth to one-ninth of what was spent on the military.²³

MAINTAINING DUTCH SOCIETY

When Wilhelmina became queen, only 76,000 Europeans were living in the Indies. Policing and policy could do only so much in enabling a small foreign group to rule over a massive population. The colonial rulers needed to be able to keep social groups apart, keep them from conceiving of a common interest and make the European presence seem somehow natural. The main mechanism by which the Dutch achieved this was the institutionalisation of concepts of race that were common throughout all colonial societies at the time. These ideas produced a version of what would later be referred to in South Africa as apartheid.

Colonial race-based societies are hierarchical – whiteness puts you at the top. In the Netherlands East Indies this was never straightforward, however, since the boundaries and definition of who was white were contested. As colonial authorities attempted to legislate boundaries, contradictions became apparent. In particular there was a split between the groups Dutch referred to respectively as ‘stayers’ and ‘pures’.

‘Stayers’ were the successors of the original employees of the United East India Company. Company colonialism created a culture in the Indies quite different from that of the constrained Protestant society of the Netherlands. The Company’s legacy produced sarong- and sandal-wearing Dutchmen who ate rice, spoke a version of Malay and took local women as concubines. Their twentieth-century successors were often born in the Indies and strove to create something that tied them to the place.

They wanted to live in an Indies society that was a ‘higher synthesis between east and west’. One of them, Rob Nieuwenhuys, looking back, expressed it this way: ‘Culturally I am a European . . . but emotionally many parts of my person lie in Indonesia.’ Being brought up by a Javanese maid and living in the colony during the formative years of his life made the Indies part of his character (Figure 1.3).²⁴

The stayers were cosmopolitan. They imported English, French and German magazines from neighbouring colonies rather than Dutch magazines from the Netherlands. Their language was smattered with indigenous words, mostly for communication with servants or workers – *nasi goreng*



Figure 1.3 Dutch cartoonist Menno: a Dutchman in the East, newly arrived and thirty years later. From *Herinneringen aan Java* (Soerabaja: Nijland, 1915). Courtesy Leo Haks.

(fried rice), *babu* (maid), *tong-tong* (the time bell on a plantation). Writers contributed to the sense of an Indies society of stayers with its own distinctive cultural identity and established new local publications on everything from tourism to literature. Artists' organisations – Art Circles – were established by stayers in all the major cities of the colony. Painters from these circles depicted an Indies of palm trees and peasants in paddy fields, a peaceful green world.²⁵

The distinctive cultural identity of stayers was passed on through subsequent generations. For many Dutch the Indies meant family mementos such as *batik* textiles or *wayang* puppet figures, or even 'buffalo horns, a wild panther hide' hanging on their walls back home. Looking back at the end of the twentieth century, the Netherlands' leading novelist, Hella Haasse, herself one of those who lived in the Indies, evokes the colonial emotional pull in her semi-factual book *Lords of the Tea*. For her main character, the founder of tea estates in Sunda (West Java), 'Java was a constant in the life of his family. His parents had themselves previously

resided there for two years, since in the passage of two decades many relatives had gone before them.' From trips with his grandfather he acquired an interest in 'colonists': 'They looked up to the viewer in the Netherlands from photographs in prominently displayed albums, posed against the background of a veranda with white pillars, or of avenues surrounded by exotic trees.'²⁶ These distant family members were constantly recalled at gatherings, their long letters home creating a desire for the warm tropical promise of the Indies far away from the cold, wintry Netherlands.

By the end of the nineteenth century the second group of Dutch, the 'pures', had grown in number to become the dominant group. They usually had little or no emotional attachment to the Indies, and were there just to make money and go home as soon as possible. As Europeans started to assert imperial ambitions, their sense of being European increased. Cartoonists produced satirical images of the stayer as fat, gin-sodden and self-important. If the Dutch became 'too Indies' they were in danger of 'disappearing into the *kampung* [native quarter]' – the term for going native.

Dutchmen's whiteness started to solidify. Many who grew up in the cities of the early-twentieth-century Indies remember having very little indigenous contact; those who were 'too Indies' received lesser wages. Pures started to keep stayers out, as one woman recalled of her stayer father in Sumatra. Even though he was on a Dutch soccer team, when playing away he had to sleep in downmarket hotels apart from his teammates. Whiteness even had to be worn, in the form of the white colonial suit (sometimes complete with pith helmet), an import from neighbouring British colonies. In colonial images the Dutch civil servant or plantation manager in his glaring white outfit stands out above the crouching coolies or peasants.²⁷

The push for separateness was a consequence of the fact that many Dutch leaders considered Snouck's association policy to have failed, since rather than producing pro-Dutch intellectuals, it produced Indonesian nationalists. Thus the advocates of 'whiteness' become more actively political. A Fatherland Club was established by pures in 1929 as a way of ensuring that patriotism was centred on the Netherlands. Its ideology was fostered by conservative elements at home and in the colonies, and by the late 1930s had merged into a form of National Socialism – the Netherlands had proportionally one of the largest Nazi parties in Europe. In 1935 the head of the Dutch National Socialist (Nazi) Party visited the Indies and was twice received by the governor general. J. B. van Heutsz, Jr, son of the great governor general, was the highest-ranking Dutch officer in the armed wing of the Nazi Party, the *Waffen-SS*.²⁸

Institutionally, separateness was most apparent in law, as with other colonial systems. Law was a matter of race, race a matter of separate law, separate taxation and separate ways of being treated by state authorities. European law overrode all other forms. Native law was religious or traditional law. Chinese and others not classified as Native (known generally as Foreign Orientals) occupied an intermediate position. This did not mean that the Chinese were well regarded – Dutch accounts portray them as sneaky and inscrutable. Proposals made in the early twentieth century to give Chinese the same status as Europeans were strongly resisted on all sides. Those called Indos (Eurasians) could be reclassified, living some parts of their lives as Dutch and other parts as Native. Their status depended mainly on whether their fathers recognised them in law. The government operated on the principle that ‘racial consciousness is the lifeblood of colonial society’. Most aspects of life were racially distinguished, from train tickets to toilets, with a strong convergence of racial and class differences.²⁹

Men dominated the public image of the Indies; women occupied difficult positions on the fault lines of Dutch–Indonesian relations. More and more white women arrived in the colony once transport became quicker – by 1930 approximately 113,000 of the 240,000 Europeans were women. They had to manage complicated households, maintain as European a lifestyle as possible and be symbols of their husbands’ status. This was never going to be easy. Ice chests struggled to keep the beer cold, and the cheese and butter from going off. On arrival women found that they already had servants, at the minimum a houseboy (who could be a man older than the new lady of the house), gardener, cook and, for the children, a nursemaid-cum-housemaid. A woman had to have a seamstress, who unlike the others did not live in the Dutch compound. A driver and a washerwoman made up the set of servants, and the size of one’s household indicated one’s status in the Dutch pecking order. To be poor was to have only one servant. Houseboys and drivers were dressed in special livery selected by the lady of the house.³⁰

To teach colonial hierarchy, ladies’ manuals for the Indies, books of etiquette, were produced in the early twentieth century. The Colonial School for Girls and Women, teaching domestic science and other practical things, was set up in The Hague in 1920. In 1930 the Association for Housewives in the Indies was established in Batavia and then expanded to teach indigenous servants how to prepare proper European food. The Dutch were getting sick of eating the array of local dishes served up at the feasts called ‘rice table’.³¹

The arrival of Dutch women increased anxiety about the proximity of Dutch men and Indonesian women, since men had come to regard servants as sexual property. The reverse situation – liaisons between Dutch women and native men – were regarded as scandalous, even when the men involved were princes, as happened on a number of occasions.

By the Great Depression, Dutch social patterns had become dominated by enclaves. The stayers expressed pangs of regret, but the pures were keen to take advantage of new ways of organising their lives. Dutch modernity, in the forms of electricity, piped water and sewerage, enabled the building of estates designed by top architects, as in the case of the Comal sugar estate near Java's north coast, designed by the famous Karsten. The Comal estate included a major symbol of separation, a 'hygienic' whites-only swimming pool. Its lawns and herbaceous borders and special clubhouse were all set away from the native quarters. The clubhouse was the ultimate 'pure' institution, the acme of clubs being the Harmonie in Batavia. Dutch social activities, such as jazz dancing and tennis at the club, did not include natives.³²

Even after the Great Depression, many Europeans in the Indies could still maintain a luxurious lifestyle. Besides the soldiers, civil servants, businessmen and planters, the idyll of the Indies attracted those in search of an artistic lifestyle: painters, photographers, beachcombers. The cooler hill stations of Java, such as Garut, were principal destinations. The lifestyles of those days were beautifully captured by the growing number of professional photographers who have left a splendid record of ideal life as seen through Dutch eyes. Their work was already material for colonial nostalgia before colonialism ended.

A network of hotels grew up, Batavia's Hotel des Indies premier among them, along with a new tourism industry. The novelist Louis Couperus was one of those who enjoyed the colonial lifestyle of the Indies. He might have given a jaundiced view of the Indies in his novel *The Hidden Force*, but when commissioned to write a travel book encouraging tourists from the Netherlands, Europe and America to experience the Indies, Couperus was lavish in his praise for the cool hill stations, the delights of the ancient Borobudur and Prambanan temples of Central Java and new opportunities to view the temples and rituals on the island of Bali.

END OF THE IDYLL

The idea that colonial life was some kind of Eden was undermined at the end of Dutch rule. As war loomed late in 1938, the Dutch attempted

to assert their moral supremacy in the Indies. The rawest example of the sexual exploitation that had been an undercurrent of Dutch rule was an aggressive sex industry that had flourished by selling teenagers and young boys. Suddenly it became the subject of police raids and intense public scrutiny. In 1938 and 1939, a total of 223 men from all over the Indies, European, Eurasians, Chinese and Indonesians, were prosecuted for having sex with boys below the age of consent. At least seventy were convicted; two committed suicide. The sexual partners of many of those convicted were often between sixteen and twenty, but some cases involved children as young as nine. Artists, school principals, district officers, linguists, journalists and retired planters all found themselves subject to the same colonial law, and in the same gaols, but the heaviest penalties, up to three years' imprisonment, went to Indonesians, Chinese and an Armenian, despite the fact that the majority of those convicted were Dutch.³³

The paedophilia scandal was forgotten as World War Two cut off contact between colony and home country, and there was a brief period of enforced autonomy. In 1942 the Dutch government surrendered to the advancing Japanese with a rapidity that shocked its subjects. For most of the Dutch who lived under Japanese rule, the main memory is one of privation and suffering in internment camps, women and children in places like Ambarawa on Java, men on the Burma Railway. The architect Thomas Karsten and the nutritionist J. H. de Haas were imprisoned together at Cimalin concentration camp near Bandung, where Karsten died in 1945.

Some of those Dutch who survived the war later moved to Australia rather than go back to the Netherlands. Those who chose to remain in the Indies at the end of the war faced a hostile reception from Indonesian nationalists who wanted independence. Typical of the reversal of roles experienced by the Dutch was a miserable encounter of one former prisoner of war, forced to let her one-time gardener sexually molest her in return for a supply of rice for her children, payback for his life of subservience. Those who chose to stay in the colony now lived in fear of rape and murder by Indonesian freedom fighters.³⁴

In 1948, her jubilee year, Queen Wilhelmina abdicated in favour of her daughter, Juliana, just over a year before Indonesia gained its full independence. A small number of Dutch became Indonesian citizens, but most of those who stayed beyond the period of the Revolution and Indonesian independence were eventually expelled when the new Republic of Indonesia nationalised Dutch assets in 1957 and 1958. Such experiences made the time before 1939 seem doubly golden in Dutch memories.

The conflicts brought out by World War Two were symptomatic of the deep unease within colonialism. The Dutch felt disquiet about how to rule and how to relate to those whom they ruled. The image of control was always an illusion, but one to which the Dutch held strongly. The wartime prime minister of the Netherlands, looking back on the colonial period, saw it in the patronising terms shared by so many colonialists, as a period in which natives happily paid tribute to the Dutch, who in turn devoted themselves selflessly to native welfare: 'The Netherlands Indies was a Free State, an evolutionary product of history, attached by indissoluble political and economic bonds to the Netherlands. Whites and coloured lived in harmony beneath a cloak which sheltered all, to the most humble.' This devotion to native welfare was what enabled former Governor General de Graeff to say that he had 'pawned his heart' to the natives of the Indies. However, Louis Couperus, in his great novel of the Indies, saw the project of colonialism as an exercise in futility:

The mysticism of concrete things on that island of mystery called Java. . . . Outwardly, a docile colony with a subject race. . . . But, down in its soul, it had never been conquered, though smiling in proud contemptuous resignation and bowing submissively beneath its fate. . . . it lived in freedom its own mysterious life, hidden from Western eyes, however these might seek to fathom the secret. . . . deep within itself divinely certain of its own views and so far removed from all its rulers' ideals of civilization that no fraternization between master and servant will ever take place, because the difference that ferments in soul and blood remains insuperable.³⁵

Despite the way the Dutch had created the institutional and economic bases on which a state could be built, the Indies was still a colonial extension of the Netherlands. It was not an entity that was entirely known, let alone completely governed, by the Dutch. Attempts to create an 'Indies' society were always going to founder against the need to be separate in order to rule. Couperus showed that some Dutch realised there was something rotten underpinning colonial rule. To understand how those who would become Indonesians viewed that rule, we have to turn to their experiences of modern life in the early part of the twentieth century.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, looking back on the colonial era in which he was born, attempted to understand the effect of Dutch attitudes on his fellow Indonesians. When he wrote the series of novels *This Earth of Mankind*, he used the model of one young Javanese man, Raden Tirto Adhi Suryo, to explore the lure of the modern world that Western rule promised, as well as the contradictions between these attractions of modernity and the deep

discrimination and suffering that resulted from colonialism. Pramoedya must also have been thinking about the experiences of his father, who was born just before Wilhelmina ascended the Dutch throne, and used his father's experiences of life in the little Javanese town of Blora, the same town from which Tirto came, to reflect on the wider colonial picture.