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FOREWORD

On 17 August 1945, after more than three centuries of colonial domination, Indonesia declared itself a free nation. It was the start of a revolution, a struggle for independence that would last four and a half years and determine the fate of the country and its inhabitants. The exhibition in the Rijksmuseum and this book centre on people in the *revolusi*: fighters, artists, diplomats, children, politicians, journalists and others. Their lives tell the history of the independence struggle, through their experiences, via objects and eyewitness reports. Indonesia was one of the trailblazers on the road to independence after the Second World War. Many countries would follow in the next two decades. With this, Indonesia takes on a crucial role in the history of the twentieth century.

A team of Indonesian and Dutch researchers has been working intensively on this project in Indonesia and the Netherlands since 2019. Research and exhibitions in the Netherlands often focus on the Netherlands' role in this period and its consequences here, but with this exhibition we aim instead to provide an international perspective. Historical research, the search for stories never told before, and sources never shown before, form the basis for this. This work included discussions and intellectual exchanges with people within the museum, but above all outside it. The process of listening *beyond* the walls of the Rijksmuseum – the conversations with descendants of the people who went through the Indonesian revolution, and with historians and researchers in the Netherlands and Indonesia – brings the various points of view together. We are conscious that the eyewitnesses in the exhibition and this book cannot represent all the lives of the time, but we hope that *Revolusi!* will provide an impetus to enrich the nation's gaze on the past with more personal experiences. These also include the stories of people in the national histories of the Netherlands and Indonesia that were previously denied proper attention, a silence that is painful for many to this day.

We are grateful to all the institutions and individuals, in Indonesia and in the Netherlands, who by lending their objects, telling their stories and making pictorial material available contributed to the exhibition and this book. The Rijksmuseum also thanks all benefactors for their contribution. The appointment of the Indonesian curators Amir Sidharta and Bonnie Triyana has been made possible by the Johan Huizinga Fund/ Rijksmuseum Fund. The additional programme accompanying the exhibition with room for dialogue has been made possible in part by vfonds and DutchCulture.

Revolusi! is not the end of the line. In the future we would like to build on the good (inter)national working relationships that developed over the course of this project. The Rijksmuseum aims to contribute to a broader history of the Netherlands, to mutual understanding and connection among the numerous groups in Dutch society upon whom the Indonesian revolution has had a significant and lasting influence, such as the Indo-Dutch, the Chinese community with roots in Indonesia, the Moluccan and the Papuan communities.

Taco Dibbits
General Director, Rijksmuseum

FACES OF THE REVOLUTION

**PERSONAL TESTIMONIES AND
COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES**

HARM STEVENS

REVOLUS!!

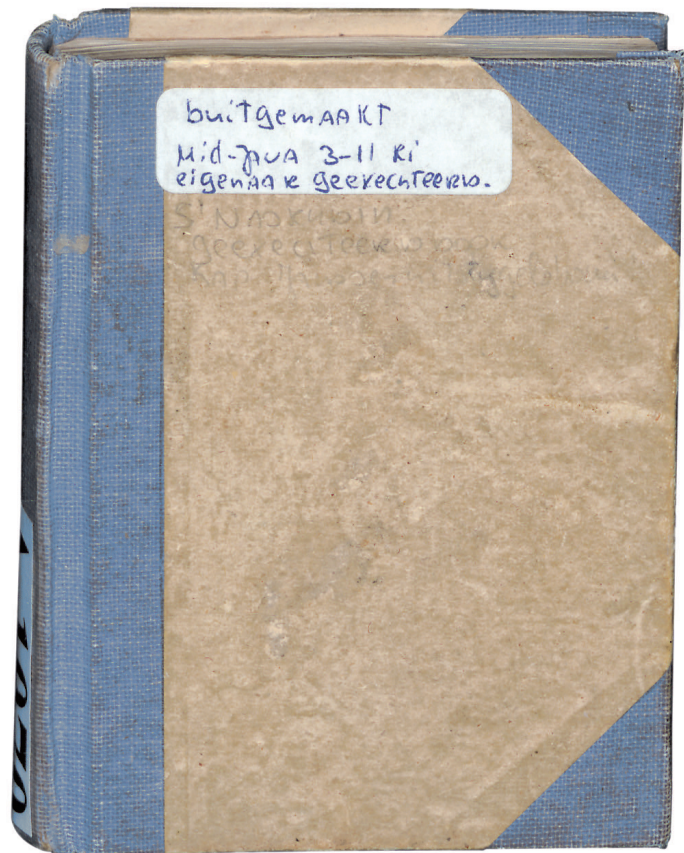
Our brain as camera. There's always something left out of the picture.
—Merapi Obermayer

A good way to get to know the faces of the Indonesian revolution (1945–1949) is to open this pocket-sized photo book, seized during the revolution, and leaf through it carefully [1]. On the third page, the original owner of this book of friends gazes at you out of the corner of his eyes. ‘S. Nasrudin (Sutarso)’ is written in pencil under the small snapshot [2]. Nasrudin was part of the Siliwangi Division of the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, Indonesian National Armed Forces), which fought for an independent Indonesia from 1945 to 1949. This much can be learned from the text written on the first few pages. Later on in the little book, Nasrudin’s comrades pass before your eyes: young men proudly posing in a photo studio somewhere in Java, alone or in a group [3]. In another photo, three women stand behind two small boys sitting in a chair, two of them wearing a *selandang* (head covering) [4]. Might they be relatives of Nasrudin? Two pages later, a placard at the feet of soldiers in a group portrait bears the words (in Indonesian): ‘In honour of the hari raya holiday [the Islamic breaking of the Ramadan fast] we are united on 26-8-48 in our struggle for the fatherland’ [5].¹

Less than two months after this holiday, Nasrudin made a note elsewhere in the book. It would be the last. The note concerned the suppression of a communist uprising in the city of Madiun in East Java by troops loyal to Sukarno in September 1948. Nasrudin, presumably in agreement, quoted a newspaper in which the communists in Madiun were labelled collaborators: ‘*Sadar* newspaper of 9 October 1948: Indonesians who worked with the Dutch: 1: Muso. 2: Amir and co., working with van Muk [Mook]. 3: Djokosajano. 4: Setyadjit Sugondo. 5: Wikana.’² The note is dated 20 October 1948. Not long afterwards, Sutarso Nasrudin was probably taken prisoner by the Dutch military, somewhere in Central Java.

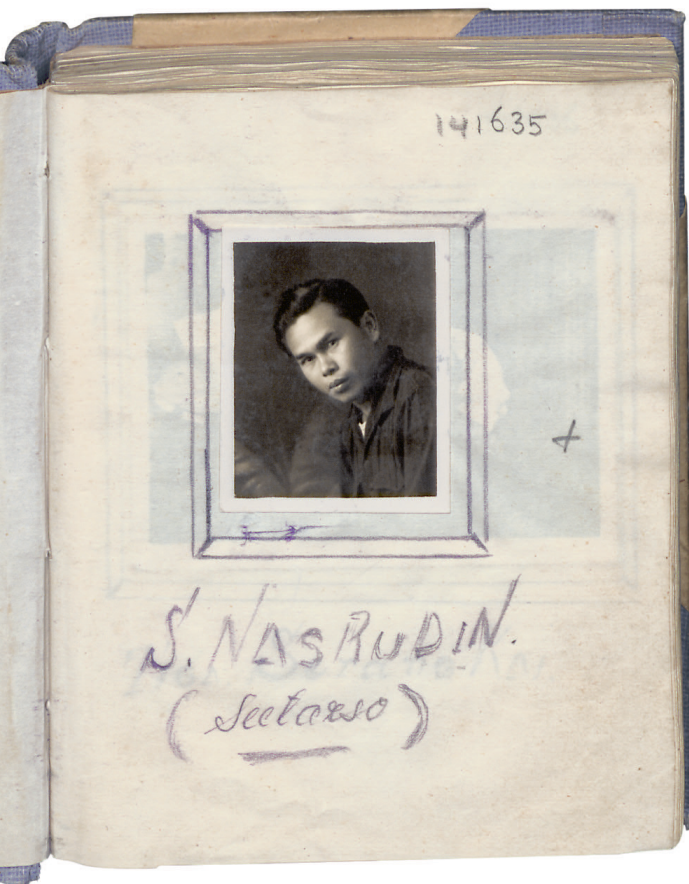
At that moment this highly personal pocket-sized book became a source of information. The confiscated album, upon Nasrudin’s arrest, most likely came into the possession of an intelligence unit attached to the Dutch military. Nasrudin seems to have been conscious of the risk that the book and the identity of his friends might fall into the hands of the enemy, for the word *Pembakaran* (burn) is written on one of the last pages. This was most likely an instruction to family and friends to destroy the book if it was in danger of falling into enemy hands.³ The agents of the intelligence service left their mark on various pages in the book: here and there a few words in Dutch or the addition of a name and sometimes an ominous question mark by a portrait of one of Nasrudin’s friends [6]. Whether this meticulous intelligence work led to the arrest of the comrades of Nasrudin gathered in the book is unknown, but the possibility cannot be excluded.

There is no uncertainty about the fate of the book’s owner: Sutarso Nasrudin was executed by Dutch troops. The book’s cover bears a sticker, probably added years later, with the words ‘owner executed’. Some words in pencil are still just visible under the sticker: ‘S Nasrudin, executed by Capt. Janssen v E[...]’. The name is barely legible after the ‘E’.⁴



[1]

Cover of Sutarso Nasrudin's book of friends, c. 1948. Sticker added later with the words 'owner executed'



[2]

Sutarso Nasrudin, portrait from his book of friends, c. 1948

141637



S. MUNIF

[3]

S. Munif, portrait from Sutarso Nasrudin's book of friends, c. 1948



141650

[4]

Three women and two boys, portrait from Sutarso Nasrudin's book of friends, c. 1948



*Sr. Soedjijjo -
26-8-48.*

141651

[5]

Group of soldiers, portrait from Sutarso Nasrudin's book of friends, 26 August 1948. Left to right, standing: Nasrudin, Soedjijjo, Boedikadjo, Oemar; seated: Sugianto and Ichsan



*Djoedin
Soehali en ?*

141654

[6]

Three men, portrait from Sutarso Nasrudin's book of friends, c. 1948. Annotated by the Dutch intelligence service with names and a question mark

The album must have been brought to the Netherlands in 1949 or shortly after the end of the war in Indonesia, probably by a Dutch soldier. After various peregrinations, Nasrudin's book of friends was acquired in 2004 for the photo collection of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV). Since 2014 it has been held in the Special Collections of the Leiden University Libraries (UBL), as part of an extensive loan from the KITLV.⁵

The book of friends shows that the patrimony of the Indonesian revolution in Dutch public collections (archives, libraries and museums) can come from a murky source and as a result elicit great unease. An unease that has more recently been fed by public discussions about looted art and the restitution of colonial collections, and the attention devoted to this in the media.⁶ From private album to instrument of intelligence work to public asset: these are steps that are far too jarring. Is such a personal object, once secured in an acid-proof box in the Special Collections and labelled with a sticker bearing the library's logo, neutralized into patrimony? The answer to this question is of course no. The conscientious way in which Anouk Mansfeld, curator of photography, has written about this sensitive document shows that both the UBL and the KITLV recognize the problem of this possession. 'From a desire to redress past injustice', Mansfeld writes, 'the present owner of the friends book, the KITLV Association, is conscious of the need for expert and independent provenance research, so that it can be determined in what way Nasrudin's photo album might be eligible for restitution'.⁷

To return to this chapter's opening sentence: to get to know the faces of the revolution, one must, in spite of all the issues involved, leaf through this album. In order to see the men, women, boys and girls who fought for the independence of their nation. In order to glimpse something of the spirit of the revolution and of the pride and conviction that Nasrudin and his friends exude in the snapshots in the album. However, it is also imperative not to become entirely enthralled by 'the blinding light' of the revolution and exclusively consider Indonesian experiences and faces.⁸ Alongside the Indonesian story (which consists of a myriad of individual stories), those who put together this book and the exhibition at the Rijksmuseum at the same time bring Dutch faces and points of view closer, and therefore also show the perspective of the Indo-Dutch, the diffuse group of Dutch citizens (often with Indonesian ancestors) who were born in the pre-war Dutch East Indies or in any case were closely tied to it, and who ended up between two fatherlands, as it were, after the Second World War. Other groups also come up. We focus our lens, for instance, on an Indonesian-Chinese family and show a fragment of their life in the extremely uncertain initial phase of the revolution in Jakarta.

A RANGE OF EXPERIENCES

Revolusi! presents a range of experiences, which are illustrated and told from multiple vantage points: from Indonesian and Dutch perspectives and those of the groups and individuals who fall between the two, with an eye towards the international power arena and foreign observers, and attention to personal testimonies and collective experiences. These

perspectives, testimonies and experiences diverge, contrast with and overlap one another. Together, all these stories form a fragmented and incomplete history of revolution and decolonization. The reader and visitor look through the eyes of the people who went through the revolution and are therefore invited to constantly move the markers.

Violence and the threat of violence are highly present in the personal histories recorded here, and become visible in a variety of ways, black on white in a typed list of the dead, or in the frayed shreds of a shirt shot to pieces. Amid this violence, a modern visual culture developed in the ranks of the young Republic of Indonesia, which encompassed propaganda posters, photography, film and painting. Until now these creations, aside from a few exceptions,⁹ have remained virtually entirely ignored in the Netherlands. The representation of the revolution by painters and other artists, as well as the course of their careers in the turbulent period between 1945 and 1949, are extensively examined in this book and the exhibition it accompanies. *Revolusi!* allows contemporary works of art, posters, objects, documents, photos and films to speak (and at times contradict one another).

The story of the revolution is also told by famous and less well known photographers who, camera at the ready, spread the news from Indonesia around the world. Often they were thoroughly infatuated with the looks and swagger of the young Indonesian revolutionaries in the streets, who exuded youthful idealism. In their photos we see how an (extremely photogenic) Indonesian revolutionary self-image developed [7].¹⁰

OUTSIDE THE PARAMETERS

Based on the idea that this revolution is world history, we have endeavoured to broaden the traditional gaze the Netherlands has cast on the colonial past until now, in which it is seldom Indonesia that is discussed, and mainly Dutch actions in Indonesia instead.¹¹ With allusions to the Dutch 'presence' in Asia, 'the Netherlands overseas' or the 'Dutch encounter with Asia', these actions have been rather eu-phemistically highlighted. The Rijksmuseum has traditionally also made use of this limited, unilateral approach.¹² Because this book and the exhibition concern revolution and decolonization, it is important to open our eyes to the Indonesian aspects of this history.¹³

The research for the exhibition and the book, which began in the spring of 2019, has been conducted from the outset by Indonesian and Dutch researchers. Art historian Amir Sidharta and historian Bonnie Triyana worked on the project in Indonesia, as well as during two working visits to the Netherlands. Marion Anker and Harm Stevens, both curators of history at the Rijksmuseum, did the same in the Netherlands. The curators were assisted by two consultants: historian Remco Raben and art historian Aminudin T.H. Siregar, each of whom made significant contributions to the exhibition and the book based on their own expertise. Yudhi Soerjoatmodjo wrote two chapters in this book, forming the opening and closing chords in our narrative of the Indonesian revolution. Anne-Lot Hoek contributed to the chapter 'Diplomasi and Agresi'. Extensive use was also made of expertise on specific sub-topics from



[7] Three young Indonesians on the street in Yogyakarta, photo by Hugo Wilmar, December 1947. The armed young men belong to the militia group Kebaktian Rakjat Indonesia Sulawesi (KRIS, Service of Indonesian People from Sulawesi)