Tom van den Berge

H.J. van Mook, 1894–1965. Een vrij en gelukkig Indonesië. Bussum: Thoth, 2014, 415 pp. ISBN: 9789068686265. Price: EUR 29.00 (hardback).

On the dust jacket, in a sepia-soft photograph suggesting the old Indies, the lieutenant general sits at a low table about to sign the famous treaty. Only if one looks very closely one can see, on the wall above Van Mook, blurred, as if behind a veil, an oil painting, a portrait of Fatmawati, the beloved wife of Soekarno. In Van den Berge's book Soekarno likewise appears (along with his co-fighters, Hatta and Sjahrir, not to mention Tan Malaka, Moeso, and Sardjono) as if behind a veil. They are visible only if one looks very closely, and sometimes not even then. Pro-Indonesian writers and scholars such as Wertheim, Benda, and Kahin, and not to mention Anderson are also obscured as if behind a veil, the same veil in fact. For someone like me, breastfed at Cornell, this calls for police action.

Nevertheless, after a deep breath, one should acknowledge that this is a useful book; in fact, the book is badly needed. George Kahin's *Nationalism and Revolution*, Ben Anderson's *Java in a Time of Revolution*, and Wim Wertheim's articles and lectures have inspired generations, kept alive an awareness of national freedom, social justice, and a need for struggle. In those authors, van Mook and his co-fighters, for a change, appeared, too, as if behind a veil, and it was not always a sepia-soft picture. With Van den Berge's book we can at least, at last, try to steal the book on the Indonesian history bookshelf somewhere among Kahin's, Wertheim's and Anderson's. The veils probably would not go down, though perhaps the shelf would tilt less to one side.

The book (how otherwise, a Leiden book!) is based on impressive research in colonial, national, military, and private archives. Of course, sadly, not many of Huib's contemporaries were still alive to be interviewed, but remaining family had clearly been charmed, and Van den Berge gained unprecedented access to all kinds of private collections. Surviving relatives spoke to him at length and quite openly.

In spite of its bulkiness, the book was a pleasure to read, all of it. The arguments are fresh, the stories full of colour, and, through Van Mook and beyond Van Mook, there is much to be learned—about Malang of the hero's childhood; Soerabaja of his *HBS*; Delft, Leiden, and Amsterdam of the drunken *lustrums* (Van Mook looks sober in the picture); his student politics, his student theatre, and his marriage; his time in the Indies as an ambitious *ambtenaar*; Semarang, Jogjakarta of the nineteen-thirties; and finally Batavia, where Van Mook had risen to the top of the Indies hierarchy, *Toean naik pangkat*, as the family *baboe* commented.

The middle parts of the book were to me the most dramatic: a harrowing evacuation to Australia, in London during wartime with his family left behind in the Japanese camps. And the final chapters are equally absorbing. With the Cold War the (sepia-soft) ideals of *vrij en gelukkig Indonesië* stiffen and fade away almost completely. There is not much hope in the new world either. The section on Berkeley is depressing; the academia we find is so American and so unappealing (yes, there is Cornell, too, and without Kahin!).

In the end, Van Mook winds up in neither the Indies, the motherland, nor Holland, the fatherland, but in *douce* France. It is to all appearances an exile, a farmhouse that he buys for his retirement, his efforts to stay relevant by agreeing to serve on irrelevant missions to Kuwait, to Turkey. These are the twilight years, in quiet l'Isle sur-la-Sorgue, which the Indonesian Wikipedia in its entry on Van Mook misspells as "l'Illa de *Sorga*," but perhaps that's appropriate. From l'Isle sur-la-Sorgue Van Mook writes to his daughter to bring him *sambal brandal* and *ketjap* when she comes to visit. And when she is there, he likes nothing better than sitting with her at *soré*, watching the Provencal sunset, and comparing it with Malang.

Van den Berge could not have chosen a better subject for a good humanities history of the end of the Dutch Indies empire. The policies and the moods of Van Mook mirrored the policies and moods of the empire as no one else's. In this *Van Mook*, the man and the empire come alive; posthumously, of course—in Van Mook and Van Vollenhoven and Snouck Hurgronje, Van Mook's mentors; in Van Mook and Logemann and Van der Plas, Van Mook's lifelong *Stuw* friends; in Van Mook and Drees and Sitsen, Van Mook's life-long non-friends; and MacArthur, an ally (for a short while); and Gerretsen, the nemesis (until the end).

This is a book I would certainly assign to my students in Ann Arbor, in Prague or wherever—assuming, of course, they could read Dutch.

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