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ten Dolle, E.

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Morality is another story

Esther ten Dolle

Abstract. This paper investigates why the debate in the Netherlands about the decolonisation of the Dutch East Indies (1945–1949) is marked by disunity and division and is notable for the peculiar circumstance that all the points of discussion seem to have been repeated endlessly and all arguments essentially worn out, while at the same time the last words have not yet been spoken. As an example, this paper looks more closely at the discussion between the sociologist and historian Jaques van Doorn (1925) and the novelist Graa Boomsma (1953). Van Doorn, who was a soldier in Indonesia, is the co-author of a standard work about the war in Indonesia *Ontsporing van geweld* (1970, 'Excess of violence'). Boomsma made his debut in 1986 with the novel *De idioot van de geschiedenis* ('The idiot of history'), which he rewrote in 1992 as *De laatste tyfoon* ('The last typhoon'). The war of decolonisation is the backdrop to both novels. Because in an interview Boomsma compared the actions of the Dutch troops in Indonesia with those of the SS, he was prosecuted for slander in 1994, but cleared on appeal. This paper focuses on two points in the discussion between Van Doorn and Boomsma: the trustworthiness of fiction, and the relation between morality and the writing of Dutch colonial history.

Anyone who delves into the history and interpretation of the decolonisation of the Dutch East Indies will land sooner or later in a public debate that is a mixture between a heated discussion and an ordinary quarrel. The most diverse people take part in this debate: politicians, war veterans and former internees of the Japanese camps; historians, journalists and writers; sociologists, philosophers and psychologists; people with Dutch, Indo, Indische or Indonesian backgrounds, from both the older and the younger generation. The debate resembles an ordinary quarrel, because it is marked by disunity and division, sometimes even by hate and rancour, with all the chaos that can result. The debate is, moreover, notable for the peculiar circumstance that all the points of discussion seem to have been repeated endlessly and all arguments essentially worn out, while at the same time the last words have not yet been spoken.

What is the debate about? About a war in Indonesia which was not then allowed to be called a war, but which may now be called that. About the writing of history. About war crimes that were mildly called 'police actions' or 'excesses'. About things that remained unsaid or hidden – about forbidden metaphors, language and words. About facts and fictions.

What has the debate led to? Has any consensus been reached? Or is there no need to reach a consensus? What is the goal of the debate? Is it to be able to come to terms with the Dutch colonial past and the resultant so called 'colonial trauma'? To what degree have the Netherlands got over this trauma? May we actually call it a 'trauma'?

These questions are not easy to answer. For the decolonisation-debate is a complex and confusing subject, as is shown, for example, by the excellent book of interviews *Oostindisch doof. Het Nederlandse debat over de dekolonisatie van Indonesië*, compiled by the journalist Remco Meijer in 1995.¹ With the title² Meijer refers not only to the silence, lasting for years, around the issue of the decolonisation – the war in Indonesia in which nearly two hundred thousand Indonesians and six thousand Dutch soldiers died – but he also refers to the apparent deafness of the participants in the public debate to each other and to each other's arguments.

Remco Meijer spoke with the various participants. He let them talk to, about and past each other, without bringing them into actual conversation with each other. Thus in *Oostindisch doof* various duos are created on paper, among them the writers Rudy Kousbroek and Jeroen Brouwers, who argue about the so-called 'Oostindisch camp syndrome' ('*Oostindisch kampsyndroom*').³ Kousbroek also debates the Dutch 'cover-up mentality' ('*doofpotmentaliteit*') with the historian Cees Fasseur, who in his turn accuses the sociologist Jan Breman of partisanship and a failure to put the Dutch colonial past into a historical perspective.

Another 'conversation-pair' consists of the sociologist and historian Jacques van Doorn and the novelist Graa Boomsma. When he was a student, Van Doorn (1925) was sent to Indonesia as a conscripted soldier. Together with Dr. Wim Hendrix he wrote what has become a standard work, *Ontsporing van geweld* (1970).⁴ Boomsma (1953) made his debut in 1986 with the novel *De idioot van de geschiedenis*,⁵ which he rewrote in 1992 as *De laatste tyfoon*.⁶ The war in Indonesia is the backdrop to both novels. Because in an interview about *De laatste tyfoon*, Boomsma made controversial remarks about the war crimes committed by Dutch soldiers in Indonesia, he was prosecuted for slander in 1994. The author was cleared on appeal.

The case against Graa Boomsma attracted a lot of attention in the Dutch media. Besides a discussion about freedom of speech, it provoked a debate about the

interpretation of Dutch war crimes, or 'excesses', in Indonesia. Once more the discussion was heated and confusing and one wonders why. To investigate this question and to illustrate why discussions about the history and interpretation of the decolonisation of the Dutch East Indies often remain mired in differences of opinion and squabbling, I want to take a closer look at the debate between Boomsma and Van Doorn as it took place in Remco Meijer's *Oostindisch doof* and elsewhere. The two most important points of their discussion concern the trustworthiness of fiction, and the relation between morality and the writing of Dutch colonial history.

Fiction and historical truth

'Art is not about the simple division of the sheep from the goats. Pointing to and describing the guilty? There are other media for that,' says Boomsma in the afterword to his play *De witte berg*,⁷ which is about two war-veterans named Poncke and Eric, or, rather about Poncke Princen, who in 1948 deserted from the Dutch army to the Indonesian side, and about the man who, as a representative of the Dutch army, hunted for Poncke during the so-called 'Action Finale', Henk Ulrici.

De witte berg, which was written in 1995 for the Festival Indië/Indonesië, describes five hypothetical dramatic meetings, or, rather, confrontations between the two, by now elderly men, who, as Boomsma writes, 'are condemned to be like Siamese twins to each other. Grown together, wandering around together in a confusing wayang-play full of role-reversals. On the left the good puppets, on the right the bad ones?'.⁸

One of the confrontations, in the third act of the play, takes place in a courtroom. Both Poncke and Eric are clad in judicial robes. They are 'two plaintiffs in one courtroom',⁹ and each is at the same time both plaintiff and accused. While death is hanging like a shadow over their heads, the men are occupied with their closing speeches, which consist of a last attempt to shut each other's mouths forever.

But the complaints of both are unheard and in vain. For it is not them but the Dutch state, which should be sitting in the dock, concludes Poncke. These words agree with those with which Boomsma defended himself in 1994 in court in Groningen, when he was prosecuted for slander after a complaint made by veteran Lodewijk Buma. Boomsma's statement was: 'I should not be sitting here in the dock, but the State of the Netherlands.'¹⁰

Boomsma was in court because he was said in an interview to have compared the actions of Dutch soldiers in Indonesia (the so called 'police actions') with those of the Nazi SS. It was to the following statement that Buma objected: 'Shortly after

the war the communists wrote: "Don't make our boys into SS". I think that that mirrors what was happening. They were no SS, no, although they could certainly be compared to them because of what they did.¹¹

The passage was in an interview in the regional Dutch newspaper *Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* of March 6, 1992. The journalist Eddy Schaafsma, who wrote the article and used the controversial statement as the headline, was also taken to court. Completely unjustly, according to Boomsma, because the interview and the statements that he made in it, could not be judged separately from his novel *De laatste tyfoon*, in which he actually claims to be standing up for veterans such as Lodewijk Buma and Boomsma's own father, who was a soldier in Indonesia too.

Boomsma said in his 'last words' in court in Groningen: 'The book is not only an homage to my father but to all those soldiers who, having scarcely recovered from German round-ups or forced labour, knew nothing and in 1946 were shipped to Indonesia in their tens of thousands and ended up in a dirty colonial war, in an endless chain reaction of terror and counter-terror.'¹²

Boomsma's father died, aged 52, on July 21, 1977. That was precisely thirty years after the start of the first Dutch police action (21 July 1947), in which he took part as a soldier of the Tiger Brigade. In 1995 Boomsma wrote about the death of his father in the story 'De Atjeh-knoop' (in *De geest van lavendel*).¹³ The title ('The Atjeh-knot') refers to a technique with which Indonesian prisoners during the Atjeh-war (1873–1903) and also during the police actions were tied up by Dutch soldiers. 'Escape impossible [...] no one came out alive', explains the father in 'De Atjeh-knoop' to his son.¹⁴

Boomsma's father had an 'Atjeh-knot' in his head. He was suffering from colonial trauma and *tropenkolder* (tropical brain fever) and died from it, at least if we may believe Boomsma's story. In 'De Atjeh-knoop' the mother of Boomsma is made to say:

On 21 July, my boy, that date rushed into my head when uncle Nico started talking about the unusually hot summer of 1947 and your father said that he had missed that Dutch heat and precisely then was overcome by tropical brain fever. No one responded to that. What is there to say? On the 21st of July 1947 the first police action started. And precisely thirty years later he is dead. Is that a coincidence?¹⁵

In *De laatste tyfoon*, which is the double tale of a father in wartime and a son who is investigating his father's past, we read how the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia are attacked by tropical madness when they are forced to commit crimes that do not square with their Dutch characters and morality. The greatest struggle that they

wage is the struggle against the evil in themselves and their biggest fear is to become like the Nazi SS. The way that Boomsma in *De laatste tyfoon* describes this struggle, against the backdrop of a tropical jungle in which other laws and rules, norms and values reign, reminds us every now and then of Jan de Hartog's novel from the 1940's, *God's geuzen*,¹⁶ which resembles a boy's adventure story, in which the young Dutch doctor Anton Zorgdrager, in the primeval forest of New Guinea, fights a somewhat over the top battle against black magic and tropical madness and ultimately changes into a monster with no real concept of good or evil.

By making this comparison, I am not trying to argue that *De laatste tyfoon* is an adventure story, full of fantasies that should not be taken seriously. But there have been readers who found Boomsma's novel to be 'unbelievable' or 'untruthful', precisely because of the – in those people's opinions – 'overblown character' of the book. One of those readers is Jacques van Doorn, who in 1994 in the Dutch magazine *HP/De Tijd* wrote a rather sarcastic article about *De laatste tyfoon* and who brought it up again during the interview with Remco Meijer, in which he accuses Boomsma of pretentious seeking after effect:

Of the three epigraphs to the novel, one is borrowed from Multatuli and contains the suggestion that Boomsma is involved in a similar undertaking as the writer of the *Havelaar*, and the other is taken from the famous *Vloekzang* of Roorda van Eysinga, complete with "the steam of the blood" and the "death rattle" as "last Dutch farewell" to the Javanese.¹⁷

Van Doorn blames Boomsma even more for using passages from his own (Van Doorn's) work *Ontsporing van geweld* and from A. Alberts' short story collection *Namen noemen* (1962),¹⁸ without giving the sources and moreover for making things out to be worse than they were. Van Doorn illustrates his argument with the following example. On page 87 and the following pages of *De laatste tyfoon*, Boomsma describes how his father as a soldier takes part in a patrol, which spots a suspiciously lit *kampong* house, which then forces its way in and shoots the Indonesians there. The incident strongly affects Boomsma's father. Van Doorn comments:

The story is a rewriting of a patrol-report which is quoted in the book *Ontsporing van geweld* by W.J. Hendrix and me on page 218: When we, after analysing it, come to the conclusion: "Violence defends itself", Boomsma writes true-heartedly: "Violence defends itself on this tropical island". The most striking difference from the original is that Boomsma's father turns up in the patrol while it is proven that he was not there. This mixture of fact and fiction makes the reader suspicious.¹⁹

Van Doorn continues:

One of the most dramatic incidents in the book is the situation in which the father-figure is forced by his patrol commander to execute an Indonesian. He initially does not want to do it but he is made to do it, with a gun at his head. It is a highly improbable scene, so that we would like to know whether Boomsma has heard this from his father, or has simply invented a shocking story. This question forces itself to the surface, also because the writer claims in an interview that the "atrocities" that he exhibits "are only a fraction of what his father has experienced". Boomsma himself says, that in his book he has "restrained" himself.²⁰

Van Doorn calls Boomsma's novel a 'libel' ('*schotschrift*'). But is it? Why is the scene which Boomsma describes in *De laatste tyfoon* 'highly improbable' to Van Doorn? This is something Van Doorn does not explain. How far, in Van Doorn's opinion, may a novelist go in mixing historical facts with fiction, or fiction with facts? Again, Van Doorn does not give an answer. Where does he draw the border between fiction and lie?

Boomsma, in return, considers his 'technique of the quotation-method' ('*citaat-procédé*'), as he calls it, completely defensible. He argues:

If I had to add a list of books which I have drawn on, then my novel would turn into a pedantic display of wide reading. I almost never quote completely literally, but do something with a text. It is a form of stylised appropriation. The quotation takes a different colour. Only people who do not know or want to understand what fiction is, will demonstrate such a pious indignation about it.²¹

Boomsma says nothing in his own defence about why he uses the *citaatprocédé*, this 'form of stylised appropriation'. Why does the novelist use the particular passages from *Onstporing van geweld* instead of fictionalising his father's own experiences – he had, after all, plenty of material, as appears from his remark that 'the atrocities described are only a fraction of what his father has experienced'.

Boomsma's comeback to Van Doorn's comments is not a defence, but a counter-attack. Instead of addressing Van Doorn's questions and critique, the novelist throws out the proposition that 'only people who do not know or want to understand what fiction is, will demonstrate such a pious indignation about it'. But what is fiction then, according to Boomsma? And in what degree may fiction change the historical truth, change it or turn it around? Boomsma does not clarify these dilemmas. Instead he says: 'The task of a writer is to be the memory of a people'.²² At the same time the narrator in *De laatste tyfoon*, who is writing up the account of his father's experiences during the war in Indonesia, is afraid that the past will slip away from him and will become a fantasy: 'a representation of something that has never existed'.²³

One could ask how it actually is possible for a past in which a person took no part 'to slip away from him'. But that is not the issue here. The issue is that Boomsma, via his narrator, poses the same question as Van Doorn does when criticising Boomsma's novel: whether or not his fictional account is, or should be, truthful to the historical facts. Yet, the problem is – and this is where the debate between Van Doorn and Boomsma is bogged down in a confusing quarrel – that the two men speak at cross purposes instead of exploring the point that is at the centre of this debate: the role of fiction in the coming to terms with the controversial Dutch colonial past.

Morality is another story

Another point of discussion that creates confusion between Boomsma and Van Doorn – a point of discussion which, when you look more closely, might not even be a point of discussion – is, as Van Doorn calls it, the tendency in the Netherlands to 'moralise' when talking or writing about the Dutch colonial past. In his spring lecture of 2000 for the Netherlands' Organization for Scientific Research, entitled *Belast verleden*,²⁴ the sociologist explains what he means by this: 'The stubborn tendency, right up to today, to link all kinds of behaviour and events back to the darkest episode in the history of the twentieth century' (by which he means the Second World War).²⁵

Why does Van Doorn find this problematic? As an illustration he refers to Boomsma's comparison between the Dutch soldiers in Indonesia and the SS:

The shadow which the Second World War has thrown across the Indisch drama seems still, after half a century, not to have disappeared. The Indië-soldiers had the misfortune of being part of an overseas war which the Netherlands would prefer to forget but which was waged immediately after a world war which the Netherlands cannot forget. Anyone who wants to attack them [the Indië-soldiers] can without difficulty dig up a whole arsenal of incriminating concepts and images, against which little or no resistance is possible. They [the veterans who fought in Indonesia] are weak because they know – and in their own circles admit – that many things went wrong at that time, but at the same time realise that this is not the whole story, not the whole truth. They would like to save their past but again and again they are forced to discover that it has been stolen from them.²⁶

Van Doorn reprimands Boomsma for having worsened the tendency to moralise in the debate about the decolonisation-war. Moreover the novelist is accused of 'attacking' the men who fought in Indonesia and, simultaneously, although indirectly, of increasing their colonial traumas, by contesting, misrepresenting and even 'stealing' their memories of the past.

What is Boomsma's answer to this? Surprisingly enough, although he was not reacting specifically to the accusations of Van Doorn, he addresses similar concerns as Van Doorn in statements made in the same period. In the afterword to the play *De witte berg*, he writes: 'Art does not exist in order to blame or to praise. Art and idolatry do not go together. Morality is another story.'²⁷

Boomsma does not get involved with morality, he says. Yet he starts his novel *De laatste tyfoon* with the following epigraph from the *Max Havelaar* by Multatuli, alias Eduard Douwes Dekker (who arguably was one of the greatest moral crusaders in Dutch history): 'The book is chaotic...disjointed...striving for effect...the style is bad...the writer lacks skill...no talent...no method... Right, Right...All right! But...the Javanese is maltreated!'²⁸ However, about this – in my view – very moralistic epigraph the novelist has nothing further to say.

How do we square the reproaches of Van Doorn with the statements of Boomsma? Where morality is concerned, despite what they say, the two seem to be more in agreement with each other than divided. Or is this simply the deceptiveness of the language they use?

What about Van Doorn's claim that Boomsma attacks the Dutch war-veterans? According to the novelist the offended Lodewijk Buma, and with Buma the whole Dutch state, ought to have read *De laatste tyfoon*, in order to understand that he actually supports the ex-soldiers in their cries of grief over misunderstanding and the colonial trauma. For what did Boomsma want to say in writing *De laatste tyfoon* and his other two works on the war in Indonesia, *De witte berg* and the libretto for the chamber opera *Westerling* (1995)? In the interview with Remco Meijer he explains:

My authorship has a function of conscience. I have a socially aware vision of art, which comes out in the use of sharp metaphors. Someone who has read a book of mine will have to look at reality differently afterwards. [...] If I had to sum it up in three words, my theme is: why people forget. To make clear for what bizarre reason that happens, that is, I think, the essence.²⁹

When writing, Boomsma wants to combat the forgetfulness surrounding the history of the decolonisation of the Dutch East Indies by using knife-sharp metaphors, to put forward a 'socially aware vision of art', yet at the same time apparently avoiding a moralistic standpoint. Van Doorn, in his turn, argues that the past of veterans like Buma is being stolen, precisely because of the moralistic discourse of people like Boomsma. End of discussion?

Conclusion

In their debate, Boomsma and Van Doorn talk past each other, like Eric and Poncke in Boomsma's play *De witte berg*, acting simultaneously as both plaintiff and accused, being opponents of each other (possibly partly because of the generation gap) and yet condemned to be joined together as victims of a war in Indonesia, which was not allowed to be called a war, but which in fact was.

The discussion between the sociologist and the novelist concentrates on two major issues: the relation between fact and fiction and the relation between history, literature and morality. What do Van Doorn and Boomsma say about these issues and what important questions remain unanswered, or even unquestioned?

Van Doorn claims that Boomsma's mixture of fiction and fact makes readers suspicious, especially because Boomsma 'invents highly improbable scenes'. As mentioned before, Van Doorn does not explain why Boomsma's inventions are improbable.

Boomsma in his defence says that his *citaatprocédé* is simply a form of 'stylised appropriation'. Moreover he claims that the atrocities he exhibits are 'only a fraction of the truth'. What his father did experience during the war in Indonesia remains unsaid. Instead Boomsma argues that 'only people who do not understand what fiction is' demonstrate Van Doorn's kind of 'pious indignation'.

The main questions here, which both Van Doorn and Boomsma leave undiscussed and unanswered – and yet which I think are crucial, not only to this debate, but to the decolonisation-debate as a whole – are: 1) How far can or may a writer actually go in mixing fact with fiction or fiction with fact when writing about a controversial past? 2) To what extent may fiction change the historical truth, change it or turn it around? 3) What is the role of fiction, Dutch fiction in this case, in the coming to terms with the contested historical facts – and fictions – about the war in Indonesia and the war crimes committed by Dutch soldiers? Here, it is worth mentioning that in Remco Meijer's *Oostindisch doof* not less than 6 of 18 interviewees are Dutch novelists and literary commentators (Hella S. Haasse, A. Alberts, Willem Frederik Hermans, Graa Boomsma, Jeroen Brouwers and Rudy Kousbroek).

Van Doorn speaks about the shadow which the Second World War has thrown across the war in Indonesia. He concludes that this 'moral framework' cannot and should not be used in the debate about the history and interpretation of the decolonisation of the Dutch East Indies. However, that is not the issue here. The fact is that the Second World War is used as a framework and that we need to investigate why.

Boomsma says: 'morality is another story'. But the debate around his novel and the trial against him show that morality is not another story, at least not in his case.

It is the relation between history, literature and morality which lies at the heart of this discussion between Van Doorn and Boomsma and which raises philosophical questions which the sociologist and novelist do not explore. So, this is certainly not the end of the debate. It is only a beginning.

University College London

Notes

1. Meijer, Remco (1995), *Oostindisch doof. Het Nederlandse debat over de dekolonisatie van Nederlands-Indië*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
2. 'Oostindisch doof zijn' = 'to play deaf'.
3. See also: Kousbroek, Rudy (1992), *Het Oostindisch kampsyndroom*, Amsterdam: Meulenhoff. Chapters: 'Het tomatenketchup-Tjideng van Jeroen Brouwers' (p. 445–452), 'Last tango in Shanghai' (p. 453–467), 'Acht jaar maagpijn' (p. 468–486).
4. Doorn, J.A.A. van and Hendrix, W.J. (1970), *Ontsporing van geweld. Over het Nederlands/Indisch/Indonesisch conflict*. Rotterdam: Universitaire Pers Rotterdam.
5. Boomsma, Graa (1986), *De idioot van de geschiedenis*, Haarlem: In de Knipscheer.
6. Boomsma, Graa (1992), *De laatste tyfoon*, Amsterdam: Ooievaar Pockethouse.
7. 'In de kunst gaat het niet om het al te gemakkelijke scheiden van bokken en schapen. Schuldigen aanwijzen en beschrijven? Daar zijn andere media voor', In: Boomsma, Graa (1995), *De witte berg*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 69.
8. 'Tot elkaar veroordeeld, als een Siamese tweeling. Vergroeid, samen ronddwalend in een verwarrend wayangspel vol rolverwisselingen. Links de goede poppen, rechts de kwade?', In: Boomsma, Graa (1995), *De witte berg*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 19.
9. 'Twee aanklagers in één rechtszaal', In: Boomsma, Graa (1995), *De witte berg*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 36.
10. 'Niet ik zou hier in de beklaagdenbank moeten zitten maar de Staat der Nederlanden', In: 'Het verleden blijft actief, het woekert door, barst naar buiten' (Boomsma's 'Last words'), In: *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 May 1994.
11. 'Kort na de oorlog schreven de communisten: "Maak van onze jongens geen SS-ers". Ik denk dat dat weerspiegelt wat er aan de hand was. Ze waren geen SS-ers, nee, ook al konden ze door de dingen die ze deden er wel degelijk mee worden vergeleken', In: *Nieuwsblad van het noorden*, 6 March 1992.
12. 'Het boek is niet alleen een hommage aan mijn vader, maar aan al die soldaten die, nog nauwelijks bekomen van Duitse razzia's of tewerkstelling, van niets wisten en in 1946 met tienduizenden tegelijk naar Indonesië werden verscheept en daar in een

- smerige koloniale oorlog terechtkwamen, in een eindeloze kettingreactie van terreur en contra-terreur', In: 'Het verleden blijft actief, het woekert door, barst naar buiten' (Boomsma's 'Last words'), In: *NRC Handelsblad*, 26 May 1994.
13. Boomsma, Graa (1995), 'De Atjeh-knoop', In: *De geest van lavendel*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 115-135.
  14. 'Ontsnapping onmogelijk [...] daar kwam niemand levend uit', In: 'De Atjeh-knoop', In: *De geest van lavendel*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 128.
  15. 'Op 21 juli, jongen. Die datum schoot door mijn hoofd toen oom Nico over de uitzonderlijk warme zomer van 1947 begon en je vader zei dat hij die Hollandse hitte gemist had en toen de tropenkolder in z'n kop kreeg. Niemand reageerde daarop. Wat moet je ook zeggen? Op 21 juli 1947 begon de eerste politionele actie. En precies dertig jaar later is hij dood. Zou dat toeval zijn?', In: 'De Atjeh-knoop', In: *De geest van lavendel*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 124.
  16. Hartog, Jan de (1947-1949), *Gods geuzen - Roman in drie delen*, Amsterdam-Brussel: Elsevier.
  17. 'Van de drie motto's is er één aan Multatuli ontleend en bevat de suggestie dat Boomsma met een soortgelijke onderneming bezig is als de schrijver van de Havelaar, en is het andere genomen uit de befaamde *Vloekzang* van Roorda van Eysinga, compleet met "de damp van het bloed" en "het doodsgerochel" als "laatste Hollandse afscheidsgroet" aan de Javaan', In: Doorn, J.A.A. (1994), 'Graa Dreyfus', In: *HP/De Tijd*, 17 June 1994, p. 18.
  18. Alberts, A. (1962), *Namen noemen*, Amsterdam: G.A. van Oorschot.
  19. 'Als wij na analyse tot de conclusie komen: "Geweld verdedigt zichzelf", dan schrijft Boomsma trouwhartig: "Geweld verdedigt zichzelf op dit tropische eiland". Het meest opvallende verschil met het oorspronkelijke relaas bestaat hierin dat bij Boomsma zijn vader in de patrouille opduikt hoewel het vaststaat dat hij er niet bij was', In: Doorn, J.A.A. van (1994), 'Graa Dreyfus', In: *HP/De Tijd*, 17 June 1994, p. 19.
  20. 'Een van de meest dramatische voorvallen in het boek is de situatie waarin de vaderfiguur door zijn patrouillecommandant gedwongen wordt een Indonesiër te executeren. Hij wil aanvankelijk niet maar wordt er met een pistool op zijn slaap toe gebracht. Het is een hoogst onwaarschijnlijke scène, zodat we zouden willen weten of Boomsma dit van zijn vader heeft vernomen, of alleen een schokkend verhaal heeft bedacht. Die vraag dringt zich óók op omdat de schrijver in een interview beweert dat de "gruwelijkheden" die hij etaleert, "maar een fractie zijn van wat zijn vader heeft meegemaakt". Boomsma zegt zich in zijn boek te hebben "ingehouden", In: Doorn, J.A.A. van (1994), 'Graa Dreyfus', In: *HP/De Tijd*, 17 June 1994, p. 19.
  21. 'Als ik een lijst met boeken zou moeten toevoegen waaruit ik heb geput, dan zou dat een pedante etalage worden van belezenheid. Ik citeer bijna nooit helemaal letterlijk, maar ik doe iets met een tekst. Een vorm van gestileerde toeëigening. Het citaat krijgt een andere kleur. Alleen mensen die niet weten of willen begrijpen wat fictie is, kunnen daarover zo'n heilige verontwaardiging tonen', In: Meijer, Remco (1995), *Oost Indisch doof. Het Nederlandse debat over de dekolonisatie van Nederlands-Indië*,

- Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, p. 179.
22. In: Doyle, Leonard (1994), 'Colonial atrocities explode myth of Dutch tolerance', In: *Independent on Sunday*, 29 May 1994.
  23. 'Een verbeelding van iets dat nooit bestaan heeft', In: Boomsma, Graa (1992), *De laatste tyfoon*, Amsterdam: Ooievaar Pockethouse, p. 12.
  24. Doorn, J.A.A. van (2000), *Belast verleden. Over de historisering van de publieke moraal*, NWO/OKW-voorjaarslezing, Amsterdam, 18 May 2000.
  25. 'De hardnekkige neiging, tot op de dag van vandaag, bij de beoordeling van allerlei gedragingen en gebeurtenissen terug te grijpen op de donkerste episode in de geschiedenis van de twintigste eeuw', In: Doorn, J.A.A. van (2000), *Belast verleden. Over de historisering van de publieke moraal*, NWO/OKW-voorjaarslezing, Amsterdam, 18 May 2000, p. 6.
  26. 'De schaduw die de Tweede Wereldoorlog over het Indische drama heeft geworpen, blijkt ook na een halve eeuw niet verdwenen. De Indië militairen hebben het ongeluk gehad betrokken te zijn geweest bij een overzeese oorlog die Nederland liefst wil vergeten maar die werd gevoerd onmiddellijk na een wereldoorlog die Nederland niet kan vergeten. Wie hen wil aanvallen, kan moeiteloos putten uit een heel arsenaal van criminaliserende begrippen en beelden waartegen weinig of geen verweer valt te voeren. Ze staan zwak omdat ze weten – en in eigen kring erkennen – dat er destijds van alles is misgegaan, maar tegelijk beseffen dat dit niet het hele verhaal is, niet de volle waarheid. Ze zouden hun verleden willen redden maar ze moeten keer op keer ondervinden dat het hen is ontstolen', In: Doorn, J.A.A. van (2000), *Belast verleden. Over de historisering van de publieke moraal*, NWO/OKW-voorjaarslezing, Amsterdam, 18 May 2000, p. 7–8.
  27. 'Kunst – in dit geval toneelkunst – is er niet om te verguizen of te prijzen. Kunst en idolatrie verdragen elkaar niet. De moraal is een ander verhaal', In: Boomsma, Graa (1995), *De witte berg*, Amsterdam: Prometheus, p. 68–69.
  28. 'Het boek is bont...er is geen geleidelijkheid in...jacht op effect...de stijl is slecht...de schrijver is onbedreven...geen talent...geen methode...Goed, Goed, alles goed! Maar...De Javaan wordt mishandeld!', In: Multatuli (1860), *Max Havelaar, of de koffy-veilingen der Nederlandsche Handel-maatschappij*.
  29. 'Ik heb een betrokken opvatting over kunst, die tot uiting komt in het gebruik van scherpe metaforen. Iemand die een boek van mij gelezen heeft moet daarna anders naar de werkelijkheid kijken. [...] Als ik het in drie woorden zou moeten zeggen, dan is mijn thema: waarom mensen vergeten. Duidelijk maken om welke bizarre redenen dat gebeurt, dat is denk ik de essentie', In: Meijer, Remco (1995), *Oost Indisch doof. Het Nederlandse debat over de dekolonisatie van Nederlands-Indië*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, p.177.