International cooperation between politics and practice: how Dutch Indonesian cooperation changed remarkably little after a diplomatic rupture

Vos, M.L.

Citation for published version (APA):
Vos, M. L. (2001). International cooperation between politics and practice: how Dutch Indonesian cooperation changed remarkably little after a diplomatic rupture
Preface

The pace of change in Indonesia was much faster than the writing of this thesis. When I started this study in July 1995, Soeharto was halfway his sixth term as president and in 1998 he embarked on his seventh term. I believed my research was going to be an analysis of contemporary events, but on the 21st of May 1998 I realised that the empirical part of the study was going to be a historical account of Dutch-Indonesian relations during Indonesia’s New Order era. Suddenly an important figure in one of the case studies became president, though not for long. Interim president Habibie paved the way for the first democratic elections in Indonesia and Abdurrahman Wahid succeeded him, but the question at the turn of the century is once again, for how long? What Habibie also did was granting East Timor independence after a referendum on its future status. East Timor was the province that was the last straw in the diplomatic conflict between the Netherlands and Indonesia, of which the aftermath is the topic of this book.

Nevertheless, this study is not primarily about Indonesia. This study is first and foremost about bilateral policy making, in particular about foreign aid policy and the practice of peoples of two nations trying to cooperate towards shared objectives. That topic does not become outdated quickly, since it is about people relating. Social scientist still find reasons to keep studying human relations, be it in the context of society, family or politics.

My MA-thesis ended with the words of The Preacher: ‘All is vanity and nothing is new. … Too many books have been written already and too much reading gives you a headache’. If the preacher was right in his time, some three thousand years before the invention of desktop publishing and the internet, so much more do his words ring true in 2000. If the preacher were my guru now I would not have bothered writing the thesis. Evidently, I follow the academic rules of behaviour by going for a PhD degree and humbly participate in the rite de passage of defending this thesis. If a guru had to be named, it would have been Thomas Kuhn, who so kindly encouraged scientists to continue inventing new paradigms. This book must be read as an attempt to make a contribution to the new thinking on state-society relations and other ways of conceptualising the policy process.

Working on this thesis was a wonderful experience. The people who contributed the most to the great experience and the fact that this book was finished at all are John Grin and Henk van de Graaf. John encouraged, thought with me and read my scribblings with genuine attention. I would wish that every PhD student had such a great advisor. We had a lot of fun and coffee as well. Henk has played a crucial role in
both this thesis as well as in my career. He was of the opinion that my very premature idea about ‘something about 1992’ could very well become a PhD research. In the process he saw red threads that I could not find anymore in the web of details, facts and stories. In the past years he has also stimulated me to explore other corners of academic life. I hope we will work together on our wild new plan for quite some time! Rob Hoppe and Nico Schulte Nordholt did wonders for this book as well. Rob’s interjections with fascinating developments in political science and Nico’s vast knowledge on Indonesia have definitely done the scope and quality of the study well.

I am very grateful to the interviewees who generously took their time to tell me their points of view. Doing interviews in Indonesia is a particularly pleasant experience: the interviews often ended in multiple-coursed meals and senang times of ngobrol on veranda’s or in air-conditioned mansions. Radius Prawiro and his family have been very hospitable and made me feel a member of the extended family. The staff of the Council of Legal Cooperation in Leiden offered me lengthy looks into their archives and made my first case study proceed faster than anyone could have expected. The employees of the kitlv and the Department of Foreign Affairs have also been most kind in helping me out in the archives. The Dutch Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO) subsidised this research, for which I am very grateful. The University of Amsterdam provided in the office-space and facilities so dearly needed when one is trying to concentrate. My colleagues at the Department of Political Science have patiently listened me out when I was trying to explain what I was doing and have given the necessary encouragement and advise: thank you Anne, Marja, Jan, Herman, Martin, Peter, Marijke and Maarten. My brother Nathan and friends Aukje, Francine and Sander meticulously checked whether my writings were understandable for normal intelligent people. Readers, be grateful to them!

Thanks be finally to Kells, who taught me how to write in English, but most of all, whose backrubs make me forget all the sorrows of academic life. Distraction is an often neglected, yet essential ingredient in academic life.