Dutch c164

The Indonesian Connection:
Dutch (Post)colonial History and Culture in Southeast Asia

Fall 2022 | Tu, Th 3:30-5pm | 4 units | Prof. Jeroen Dewulf

This course focuses on literature and film about the Dutch colonial history of Indonesia, the former Dutch East Indies. We will cover five novels – all of them landmarks in Dutch literature (in English translation) – in their historical and cultural context. After a general introduction on the Dutch colonial policy in the context of the East India Company, we begin the course with Multatuli’s Max Havelaar (1860), a novel in which the author accuses his own country of being a “pirate-state, oppressing the Javanese people”. Other novels are Louis Couperus’ The Hidden Force (1900), a remarkable record of Javanese resistance to colonial oppression in the form of magical intimidation and Hella Haasse’s Forever a Stranger (1948), an impressive account of the widespread disillusionment among Dutch residents in the Indies when facing the impossibility of Dutch-Indonesian coexistence after independence. We will continue with Jeroen Brouwers, who experienced life in an internment camp during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia in the Second World War and reproduced those horrors in Sunken Red (1981). We end with My Father’s War (1994), a moving account by Adriaan van Dis of the difficult integration in the Netherlands of Dutch colonials who returned “home” after Indonesia’s independence.

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